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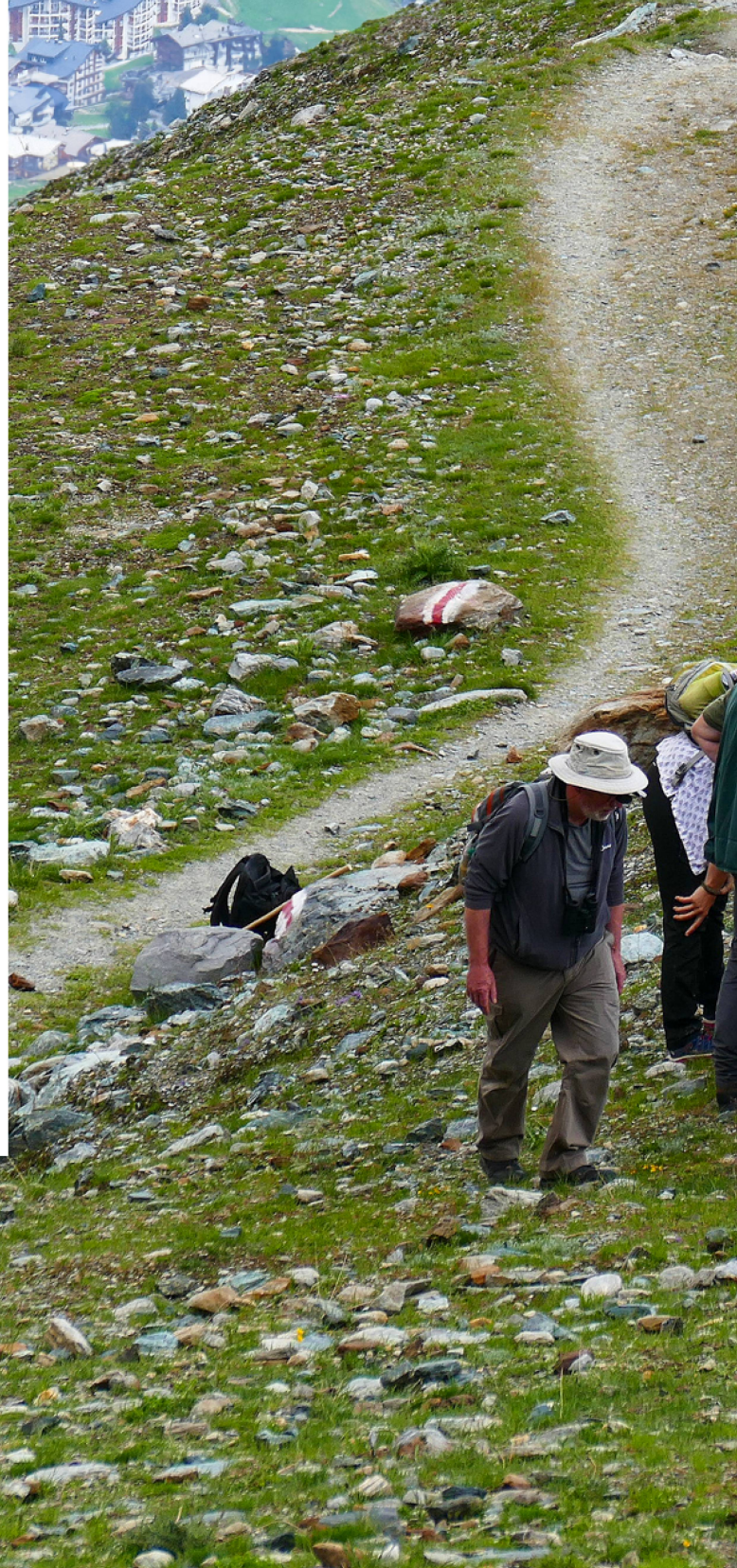


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# *Excursion* European Fern Meeting in Valais, 2-6 August 2024

For many years, Ronnie Viane, Michel Boudrie, and many others had organized annual meetings of the «Group of European Pteridologists (GEP)» across Europe. The last such meeting took place in 2015, and later the covid pandemic further restricted travel. It was thus in 2022, in conversations with Michel Boudrie, that the idea arose to again organize such a meeting. In 2023, Michael Kessler scouted several potential excursion sites in Grisons and Valais, coming up with a program for a meeting in Valais in 2024. We sent out invitations to our society members and many pteridologists across Europe, and in total 46 people from nine countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland, United Kingdom) registered for the meeting.





## 2 August

Most of us stayed at the very friendly and convenient Hotel Schönstatt in Brig, where after a long travel day we met for the first of many fine dinners. Some of the people had already participated in earlier GEP meetings and were happy to meet their friends, whereas other, including some students studying ferns, participated for the first time. At 20:00, we started the meeting proper with a general introduction. This was followed by a great talk by Vinciane Mossion, who presented her doctoral research on moonworts (*Botrychium*). Her study shows that what was long known as the Common Moonwort (*Botrychium lunaria*) actually includes about a dozen cryptic species, six of which occur in Switzerland, and five of which we would be searching for the next day.

## 3 August

Moonwort day! After breakfast, we drove to Saas-Fee, where we met on the little hill just next to the parking area to find our first moonworts. This site holds a small population of what Vinciane and Michael call the Slender Moonwort (*Botrychium onondagense*), one of the species split from the Common Moonwort (*Botrychium lunaria*). As this was the first species we saw, most participants were understandably uncertain as to how to evaluate the subtle characters distinguishing the species. Accordingly, we spent a lot of time photographing and discussing the specimens. At the end, we even found a few different looking plants that we first were uncertain of, but which later turned out to be one of the undescribed species that we call the Swiss Moonwort (*Botrychium* aff. *lunaria*).

We then continued to the cable car and took the ride up to Spielboden (2450 m ü. M.) where we not only met many other visitors looking for and feeding the tame marmots that inhabit the area, but also thousands of moonworts right below the restaurant. Again, it took a long time to sort out the species, but eventually we agreed that there were many Slender Moonworts (*B. onondagense*), some true Common Moonworts (*B. lunaria*), and a few Swiss Moonworts (*B. aff. lunaria*), although the latter were not typically developed.

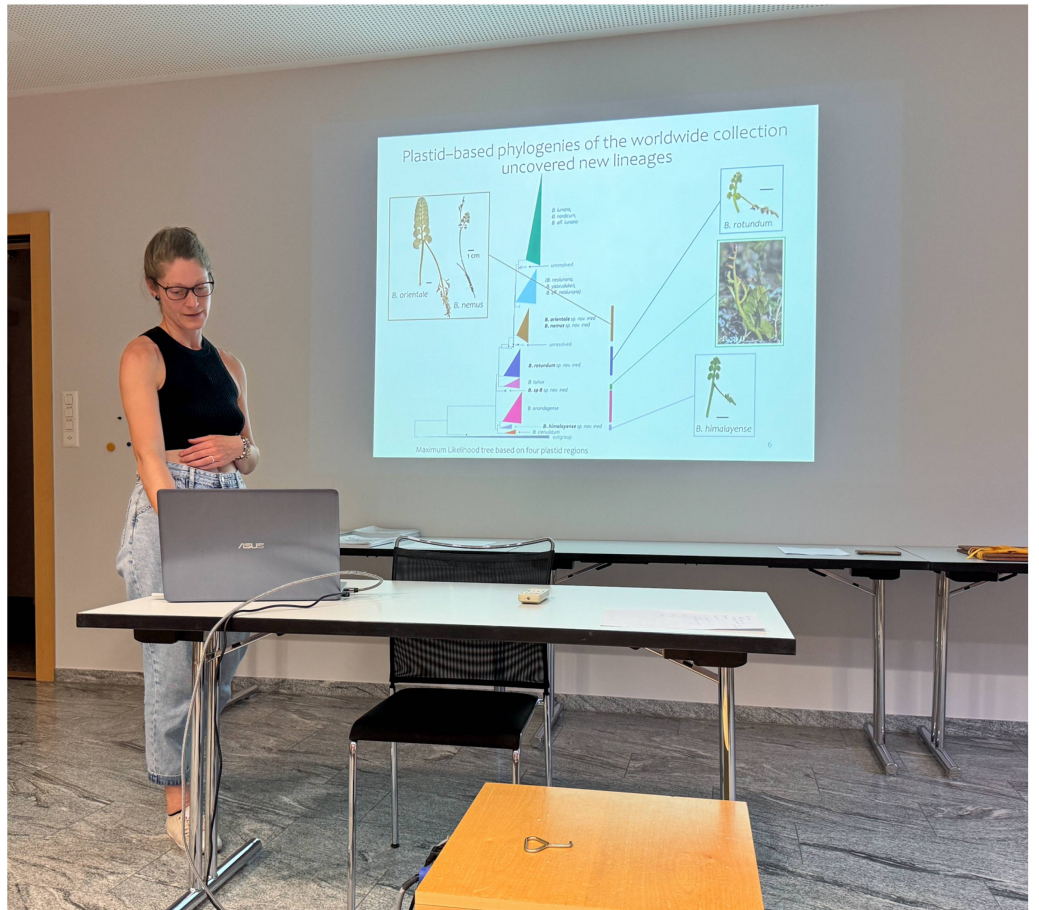


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(mk)↓

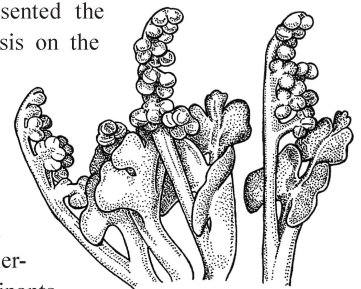


(fr)↓

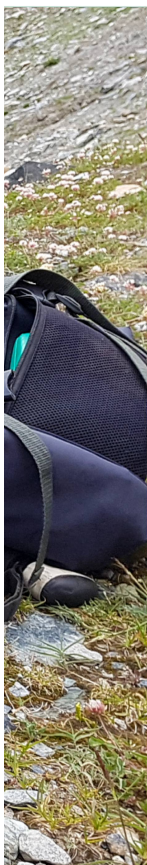
It was time for lunch and we dispersed on a slope close to the station with our picknick lunches to talk in small groups. With our energy renewed, we then climbed 150 m further upslope to reach the sparse alpine vegetation of a ridge, where we found dozens of tiny moonworts only 1–4 cm tall. It took some time to tease them apart, but eventually we found typical specimens of both the Dwarf Moonwort (*Botrychium tunux*) and yet another undescribed taxon that we call the Roundleaved Moonwort (*Botrychium* sp. A). While crawling around on our knees and elbows, we noticed that 50 m away a group of ibex (*Capra ibex*) was watching us, and for some time they received more attention than the moonworts. Some of us also explored the nearby rock walls, finding Brittle Bladder-fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*), Green Spleenwort (*Asplenium viride*), and Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*).

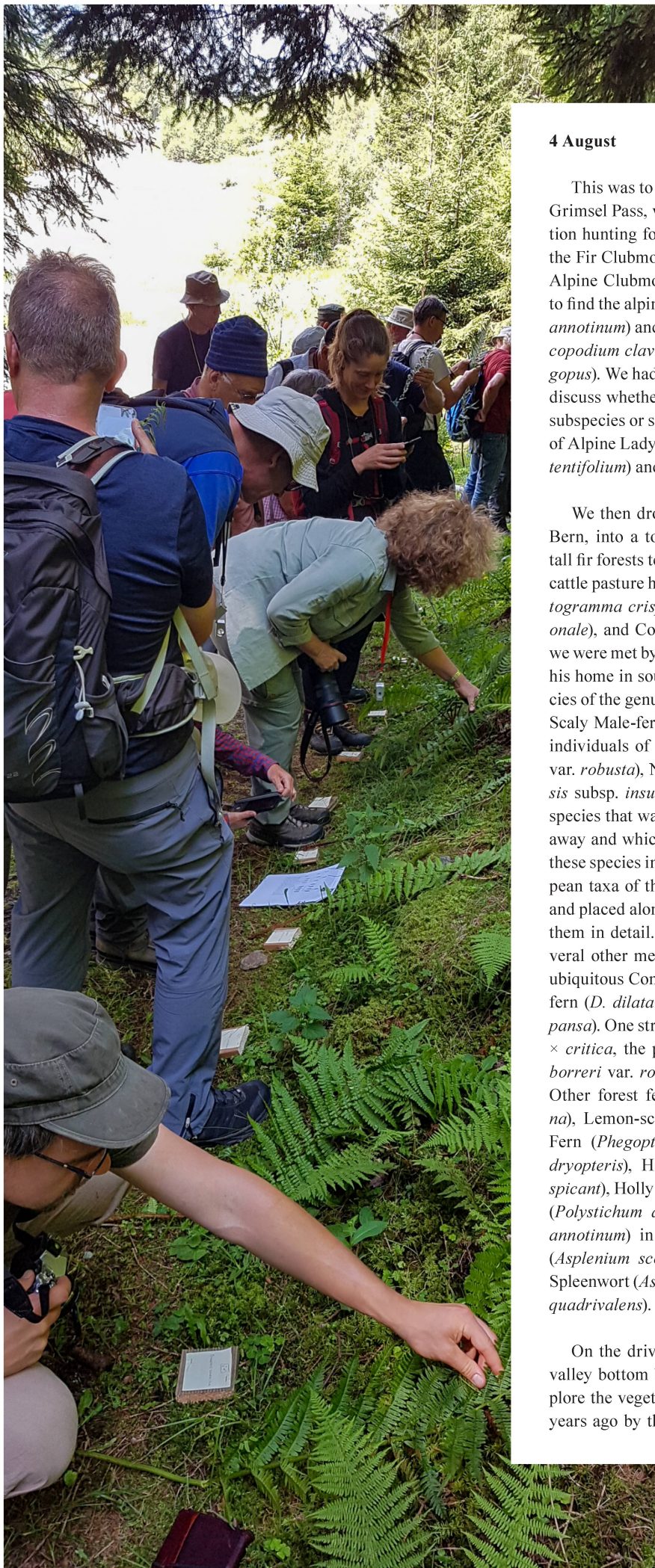
After climbing down, we took the cable car to an intermediate station at Bifig. By now, it was hot and the climb to our last site was devoid of ferns. Even worse, we failed to relocate the small population of the Roundleaved Moonwort (*Botrychium* sp. A) that Michael had found there three years ago. We then slowly wandered back to Saas-Fee, where some took the time to enjoy the beautiful town and drink a coffee before returning to the hotel.

After dinner, we had a great talk, this time by Katerina Vejvodová, who presented the provisional results of her PhD thesis on the Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*), which includes five ploidy levels, but where species delimitation appears to be even more difficult than in moonworts. This was followed by some conversations in smaller groups, partly identifying herbarium specimens that some participants had brought.



(jr)↑





#### 4 August

This was to be a day of much driving. Our first stop was at Grimsel Pass, where we walked over the open, alpine vegetation hunting for various clubmosses. The most common was the Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*), but we also found many Alpine Clubmosses (*Diphasiastrum alpinum*). It took longer to find the alpine form of the Interrupted Clubmoss (*Spinulum annotinum*) and especially the rare Hare's-foot Clubmoss (*Lycopodium clavatum* subsp. *monostachyum* = *Lycopodium lagopus*). We had plenty of time to photograph these taxa and to discuss whether they are distinct enough to be recognized at subspecies or species level. The area also held nice specimens of Alpine Lady-fern (*Pseudathyrium alpestre* = *Athyrium distentifolium*) and Northern Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris expansa*).

We then drove down towards Guttannen in the canton of Bern, into a totally different habitat dominated by wet and tall fir forests teeming with ferns. Even our picnic spot on a cattle pasture held beautiful specimens of Parsley Fern (*Cryptogramma crispa*), Forked Spleenwort (*Asplenium septentrionale*), and Common Polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*). Here, we were met by Jens Freigang, who had driven 3 ½ hours from his home in southern Germany to introduce us to the intricacies of the genus *Dryopteris* and in particular the group of the Scaly Male-ferns (*Dryopteris affinis*). The forests held many individuals of Borrer's Scaly Male-fern (*Dryopteris borrieri* var. *robusta*), Narrow Scaly Male-fern (*Dryopteris cambrensis* subsp. *insubrica*), and especially *Dryopteris lacunosa*, a species that was described in 2011 from a locality only 8 km away and which is not recognized by many botanists. To put these species into context, Jens had brought leaves of 15 European taxa of the *Dryopteris affinis* group, which he labelled and placed along the track, giving us the opportunity to study them in detail. Besides this special focus, we also found several other members of the genus *Dryopteris*, including the ubiquitous Common Male-fern (*D. filix-mas*), Broad Buckler-fern (*D. dilatata*), and a few Northern Buckler-ferns (*D. expansa*). One strange-looking plant turned out to be *Dryopteris* × *critica*, the pentaploid hybrid between Borrer's Scaly (*D. borrieri* var. *robusta*) and Common Male-fern (*D. filix-mas*). Other forest ferns included Lady-fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*), Lemon-scented Fern (*Oreopteris limbosperma*), Beech Fern (*Phegopteris connectilis*), Oak Fern (*Gymnocarpium dryopteris*), Hard-fern (*Struthiopteris spicant* = *Blechnum spicant*), Holly Fern (*Polystichum lonchitis*), Hard Shield-fern (*Polystichum aculeatum*), Interrupted Clubmoss (*Spinulum annotinum*) in its more typical forest form, Hart's-tongue (*Asplenium scolopendrium*), and the tetraploid Maidenhair Spleenwort (*Asplenium quadrivalens* = *A. trichomanes* subsp. *quadrivalens*).

On the drive back, many of us stopped at Gletsch in the valley bottom between the Grimsel and Furka passes, to explore the vegetated glacier forefield left several thousands of years ago by the retreating Rhone glacier. We found a large



(mk)↑



(mk)↓



(mk)



(le)↓

(fir)↓



population of Marsh Clubmoss (*Lycopodiella inundata*), a rare species in Switzerland, and some small populations of moonworts, including Common (*Botrychium lunaria*), Swiss (*B. aff. lunaria*), and Slender Moonwort (*B. onondagense*).

The evening meeting mainly consisted of various small groups meeting, either identifying plants or «just» talking.

5 August

On our last full day of excursions, we first drove a short distance to a site with a small population of bracken (*Pteridium*). A heated debate ensued about the identity of these plants: are they just small Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) or a variant of the Pinewood Bracken (*Pteridium pinetorum*)? Only more research will be able to resolve the taxonomy of the European bracken taxa. Besides the bracken, this rather dry area held few other ferns, although we found Forked Spleenwort (*Asplenium septentrionale*) and a Maidenhair Spleenwort (*Asplenium trichomanes*) that was later confirmed to be diploid based on spore measurements. We also visited a rocky area where in spring small Adder's-tongues (*Ophioglossum*) of unclear taxonomic status may be found.

Unfortunately, the last planned stop for the meeting, a site with tetra-, hexa- and octoploid Brittle-ferns (*Cystopteris*) with spiny and wrinkly spores all growing together, had been destroyed by the severe rains and floods that had plagued Valais several weeks prior to the meeting. As an alternative, we went to the Simplon pass area, where we first visited a site with many moonworts. After some searching, we found typical individuals of the undescribed Roundleaved Moonwort (*Botrychium* sp. A), a species we had not seen well so far, along with many Slender Moonworts (*B. onondagense*), and some Swiss (*B. aff. lunaria*) and Common Moonworts (*B. lunaria*). It was encouraging to see that after several days of looking at moonworts, many participants had started to get a feeling for the taxa and were able to correctly assign them to species. On the other hand, as is often the case in moonwort populations, we also encountered a few mystery plants that did not fit into any known species.

After our picknick lunch, we explored another part of the Simplon area, where in more humid vegetation next to a small lake we encountered a rich fern flora. There were not many new species, but we found a nice selection of horsetails, including the ubiquitous Field Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) along with Marsh Horsetail (*E. palustre*), Rough Horsetail (*E. hyemale*), and Variegated Horsetail (*E. variegatum*).

The sun burned hot and after three days of excursions we all felt rather tired. We therefore retired early to the hotel, where after a break we gathered at 17:30 in the meeting room for some final discussions about how to deal with the constant changes in fern taxonomy. We then officially closed the meeting, but many smaller groups continued to work on specific topics.

In total, we recorded 42 fern taxa over the three days of excursions. This is not an exceptionally high number, but the focus was on little known taxa, of which we saw many interesting species. Add to that the spectacular and varied scenery of the Swiss Alps, and of course the great group of people with so varied backgrounds, and this was a thoroughly enjoyable and successful meeting.



(mk)↑

(as)↓





(as)↓

(fr)↓



**6 August**

This was the departure day, with most of us leaving early for their long trips home. Over the days of the meeting, many new friendships had developed, and saying goodbye took a long time. Many of us expressed the wish to held similar meetings in the future and we hope that somebody will feel inspired to offer the next one soon.



(ae)↑

(mk)↓



(mk)↓



(mk)↓



(mk)↑

(ab)↓



(mk)↓



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(rn)↓



(fr)↓



(ca)↓



(as)↓





(le)↑

(mk)↓



DE

## Europäisches Farnreffen im Wallis, 2.-6. August 2024

In der Tradition der Treffen der «Group of European Pteridologists (GEP)», die 2015 ausgesetzt wurden, haben wir nach zweijähriger Planung ein Treffen mit 46 Farnfreunden aus neun europäischen Ländern im Wallis organisiert. Der erste Tag führte uns nach Saas-Fee, wo wir zwischen dem Dorf und dem Hang oberhalb der Seilbahnstation Spielboden fünf verschiedene Vertreter der Gruppe der Echten Mondraute (*Botrychium lunaria*) fanden. Am zweiten Tag besuchten wir zuerst den Grimselpass, wo wir verschiedene Bärlappe entdeckten, insbesondere die alpine Form des Keulen-Bärlapps (*Lycopodium clavatum* subsp. *monostachyum* = *Lycopodium lagopus*). Anschliessend ging es weiter in die montanen Wälder bei Guttannen (BE), wo uns Jens Freigang in die Komplexität der Gattung *Dryopteris* einführte, mit Schwerpunkt auf die wenig bekannte Art *Dryopteris lacunosa*. Auf dem Rückweg hielten viele bei Gletsch an, wo wir neben dem Moor-Bärlapp (*Lycopodiella inundata*) auch viele Mondrauten fanden. Am letzten Tag besuchten wir eine Population von Adlerfarnen (*Pteridium*) bei Naters (VS), bevor wir den Simplon-Pass, wiederum mit vielen Mondrauten, erkundeten. Insgesamt wurden 42 Farnarten gesehen, mit einem Schwerpunkt auf wenig bekannte Taxa. Zudem gab es abends Vorträge, Gesprächsrunden sowie Bestimmungsarbeit, wobei es viel Zeit für Austausch gab. Und wenn man noch die herrliche Kulisse der Walliser Alpen hinzunimmt, war dies ein wunderbares und erfolgreiches Treffen. Hoffentlich gibt es demnächst wieder ein Farn-Treffen in einem weiteren Land.

IT

## Incontro europeo delle felci nel Vallese, 2.-6. Agosto 2024

Nella tradizione degli incontri del «Group of European Pteridologist (GEP)» abbiamo organizzato un ritrovo in Vallese, la cui pianificazione è durata due anni, ma ci ha ripagato con ben 46 amici delle felci provenienti da nove differenti Paesi europei. Il primo giorno ci siamo recati a Saas-Fee trovando, tra il villaggio e la stazione di Spielboden, ben cinque diversi membri del gruppo di *Botrychium lunaria*. Il giorno seguente abbiamo visitato il Grimsel Pass, scoprendo diverse specie di *Lycopodium* ed in particolare *Lycopodium clavatum* subsp. *monostachyum* (= *Lycopodium lagopus*). Proseguendo verso le foreste montane nei dintorni di Guttannen (BE), Jens Freigang ci ha presentato la complessità del genere *Dryopteris* ed in particolare concentrandosi su *Dryopteris lacunosa*, specie poco conosciuta. Alla fine di questa giornata, sulla via del ritorno, molti di noi si sono soffermati a Gletsch ritrovando numerosi *Botrychium* e *Lycopodiella inundata*. Infine, l'ultimo giorno, ci ha permesso di visitare prima una popolazione di felce aquilina vicino a Naters (VS) e poi il passo del Simplone. In totale 42 specie di felci sono state osservate, con un'attenzione particolare ai taxa meno noti. Queste giornate sono state anche caratterizzate da conferenze serali, momenti

di discussione, determinazione e socializzazione; il tutto immerso incorniciato dal meraviglioso scenario delle Alpi vallesane. Speriamo che vi possa essere presto, in un altro paese, un altro incontro sulle felci.

## **FR** Rencontre européenne de fougère en Valais, 2ème-6ème août 2024

Dans la tradition des réunions du « Group of European Pteridologist (GEP) », nous avons organisé une rencontre dans le Valais, dont la planification a pris deux ans, mais qui a porté ses fruits avec pas moins de 46 amis fougères venant de neuf pays européens différents. Le premier jour, nous nous sommes rendus à Saas-Fee et avons trouvé pas moins de cinq membres différents du groupe *Botrychium lunaria* entre le village et la station de Spielboden. Le lendemain, nous avons visité le col du Grimsel, où nous avons découvert plusieurs espèces de *Lycopodium* et en particulier *Lycopodium clavatum* subsp. *monostachyum* (= *Lycopodium lagopus*). En continuant vers les forêts de montagne autour de Guttannen (BE), Jens Freigang nous a fait découvrir la complexité du genre *Dryopteris* et en particulier *Dryopteris lacunosa*, une espèce peu connue. A la fin de cette journée, sur le chemin du retour, beaucoup d'entre nous se sont arrêtés à Gletsch et ont trouvé de nombreux *Botrychium* et *Lycopodiella inundata*. Enfin, le dernier jour nous a permis de visiter d'abord une population de fougères aigle près de Naters (VS) et ensuite le col du Simplon. Au total, 42 espèces de fougères ont été observées, avec une attention particulière pour les taxons moins connus. Ces journées ont également été caractérisées par des conférences en soirée, des discussions, de la détermination et de la convivialité, le tout encadré par les magnifiques paysages des Alpes valaisannes. Nous espérons qu'une autre rencontre sur les fougères aura lieu prochainement dans un autre pays.



(mk)↑



(ab)↑



(mk)↑

(cb)↓

