Project Update: August 2016

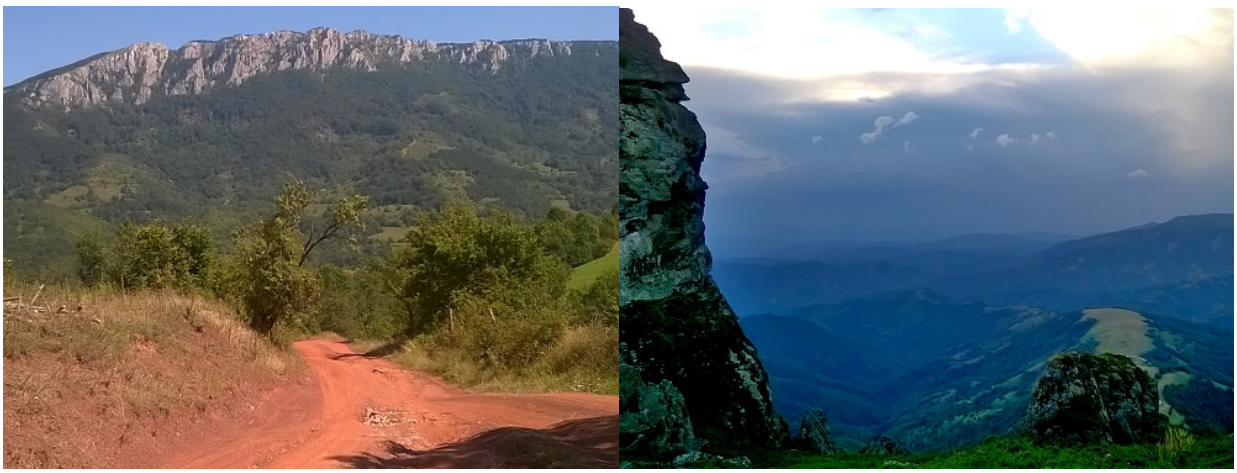
During August 2016, we visited the last three sampling locations (Kopaonik, Suva Planina and Stara Planina mountains).

Kopaonik (2017 m), our third research site, has a well known ski resort, with also a very unique national park that is characterised by a large number of autochtonous plant and invertebrate species. Unfortunately, forests and meadows in the higher altitudes of the mountain are to a large degree damaged, because of numerous ski tracks all over the natural habitat.

Suva planina (1810 m) is at the moment undergoing a process of declaration of a special nature reserve. Total of 128 endemic plant species are recorded in this area. The name Suva Planina translated into English means “The dry mountain”, because of only few springs in the whole mountain, which soon disappear under the red and dry soil. Due to aridity of the terrain, the aphid colonies are scarce and small, thus we also expect low parasitism rate from this sampling location.

The last collection site was Stara Planina (2169 m), part of a large Balkan mountain range (560 km) that stretches all the way to the Black Sea in Bulgaria. It is home to several endemic and very unique plant species which are parasitized by specialist aphids. The forests and plains are very humid with dense and rich vegetation. On this location we collected many different and rare samples of plants that were infested with dense aphid colonies.

At the moment, we finished with separation of parasitoids from the boxes in which they were reared, and starting species determination under stereomicroscope. When we finish determination, we plan to present our results to the public and scientific communities, and construct the conservation plan for future.



Left: Arid Land of Suva Planina Mountain. Right: Beautiful view from Stara Planina Mountain.

Left to right (top to bottom): Kopaonik Mountain; Vegetation destroyed for purpose of ski tracks; Waterfall Tupavica, in the middle of Stara Mountain forest & Ladybug, indicator of aphid presence.