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Abstract

This paper gives a briefly overview on the distribution, history, management and conservation status of Hungarian beech forests, mentions some research activities focusing on the comparison of natural reference and managed beech stands and emphasizes some potential threats of beech forests in Hungary. The forest cover is 20% in Hungary, the proportion of beech is 6% in Hungarian forests. As a result of long history of forest use in Hungary, we have practically no virgin forest remnants, however the still existing forests in the beech zone can be characterised by almost unbroken forest continuity. The beech forests are managed mainly by state owned companies using a shelterwood management system.

The stand structure is more heterogeneous, and the amount of dead wood is higher in natural reference stands than managed ones. The pattern (beta) diversity of herb layer is more sensitive to stand structural differences than its species richness. The distribution of plant traits also differed between natural and managed stands. In case of birds both abundance, species richness and the proportion of hole nesting species were higher in natural reserves. Both in fungi and bryophyte assemblages quantity and quality of dead wood is a key of biodiversity, resulting considerable differences between reserves and managed sites. Assessments of stand scale forest naturalness showed proved that beech forests are the least transformed in the country, but also showed that conservation measure are insufficient in creating protected forests with higher naturalness values than those of production forests.

Nowadays the major threats of Hungarian beech forest are the climatic changes, the high density of games, and the increasing demand for wood as biomass.

biodiversity: higher plants

forest management

forest structure: stand

forest history

nature conservation

Notes

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