GLOBETROTTER'S

GUIDE TO GREENERY

BY DOUBLE PROFICIENCY

GRASSLANDS

TRAVELING THROUGH THE GRASSLANDS

SIGHT

• a green sea of grass reaching right to the horizon •
• long, narrow leaves, upright and blade-like • a solitary tree •
• pillows of flowering heather • a patch of low, thorny shrubs •
• a grazing herd of herbivores • flocks of birds circling above •
• a lone predator waiting in an ambush • dancing butterflies •
• wild animals taking a bath in the river •

SOUND

• birds calling out in alarm • rustling of the long grasses •
• small animals scurrying as you approach • hoofbeats •
• buzzing insects • croaking frogs •

SMELL

• campfr e smoke • fresh wind, carrying the grass pollen •
• sweet-scented wildflowers • wet earth • resinous shrubs •

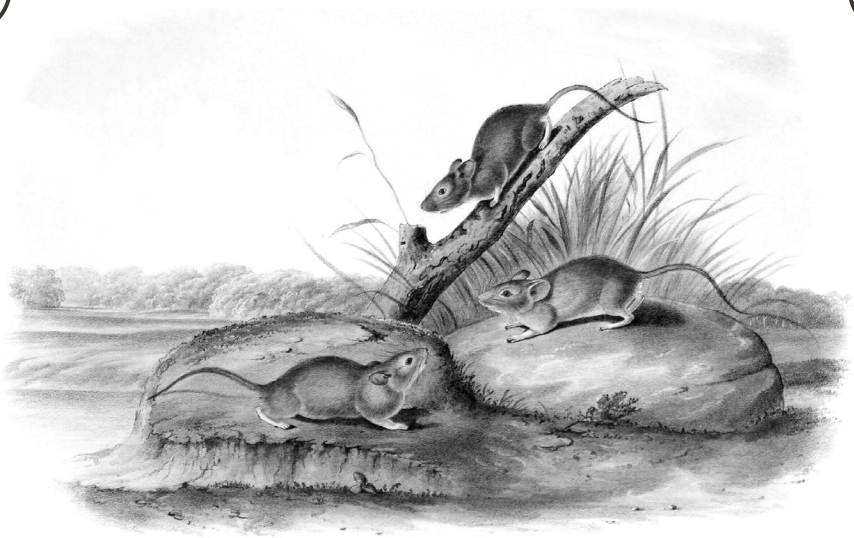
RED KANGAROO

TOUCH

• sticky plant sap • mosquito bites •
• soft, squishy ground of a wetland •
• sharp blades of grass, with toothed edges cutting your skin •
• delicate fur • bristly horse hair •
• hard ground under your back •

TASTE

• raised dust after a drought •
• green, bittersweet grass juice •
• stringy, tough venison •
• fermented mare milk • milky tea •



FIELD MICE FROLIC AMONG THE GRASS BY THE POND

GRASSLANDS

Grasslands stretch across multiple climate zones. From cold, dry reaches barely warmer than the taiga to tropical savannas, they are found on almost all continents, save for these covered in ice.

Their names vary depending on the culture. Whether they're known as meadows, prairies, steppes, velds, rangelands, pampas, shrublands, or savannas, grasslands have several common characteristics. The vegetation is dominated by grasses, sedges, legumes, and other herbaceous plants, with a much smaller percentage of shrubs and barely any trees. The annual rainfall is usually only enough to sustain the grassy vegetation.

Even though they may seem homogeneous from a distance, natural grasslands support a great diversity of plants, fungi, and animals, providing food and shelter to thousands of species. 'Improved' grasslands, such as pastures and heaths, are often the effect of replacing the original biodiversity with a sown monoculture of varieties of grasses and clovers. The natural grasslands are slowly disappearing, threatened by the human activity.

CLIMATE & SOIL

Grasslands are generally characterized by low precipitation and scarcity of water, but their exact climate is dictated by the climate zone they lie in.

Temperate grasslands, such as steppes, prairies, velds, and pampas, have cold winters and warm summers, with very little annual rainfall. The weather is often extreme, with harsh winds and f osts in the cold months and scorching heat in the warm ones. Dew and snow are often the main sources of water.

Some of the temperate grasslands lie on the border of arctic or alpine tundra in cold climates, and present a collection of unique challenges in even less welcoming circumstances.

Tropical grasslands, such as savannas, campos, and llanos, are warm throughout the year, with the precipitation varying between wet and dry seasons. The climate is much milder, sustaining a wide variety of animals, both predators and prey.

The grasses densely cover the ground and hold the soil fr mly in place, so the erosion is minimal. At the same time, the abundance of the nitrogen-rich plant matter keeps the soil fertilized, resulting in some of the richest soils on the planet. Grasslands usually feature mollisols: soils with a thick upper layer that is extremely fertile and perfect for agriculture. In the savanna, the soil contains more sand, which causes water to drain more quickly and the ground to dry up.

MONARCH BUTTERFLY

This fertile topsoil makes grasslands a prime space for agriculture. The vast swaths of land are often converted into fe lds for growing wheat, sugar beets, maize, and alfalfa. Under human care, the natural grasslands turn into pastures for sheep and cattle rearing.

Anatomy of the Biome

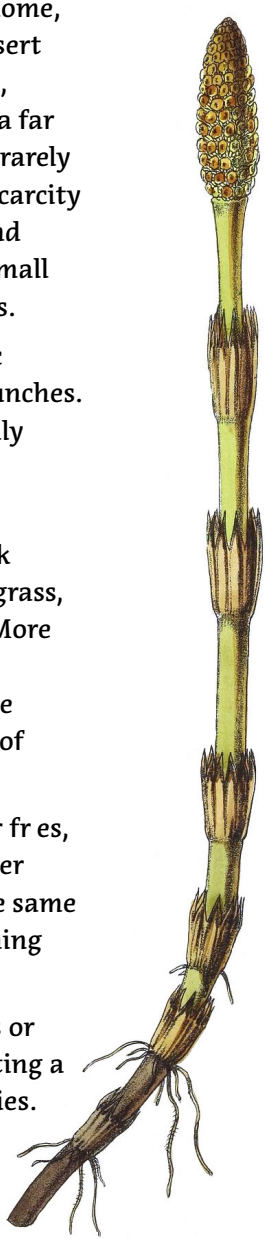
Grasslands are often called an intermediate biome, a border between forests on one side and a desert on the other. They cover predominantly plains, often stretching for kilometers and providing a far view of the horizon. A veritable sea of grass is rarely broken by tall trees and shrubs, as the water scarcity doesn't support the growth of bigger plants and forests. Drought-resistant grasses and other small herbaceous plants thrive in such environments.

Various species of grass create a characteristic 'lumpy' texture, as they grow in tussocks or bunches. Small hills—called pimples—are usually the only variation in the otherwise fa t, matted terrain trampled by giant herds of herbivores.

In regions of higher rainfall, the lumpy tussock grass gives way to taller, greener, and shinier grass, sometimes reaching human heights or more. More water also supports shrubs and trees, which—although never taking over the biome—provide nutrition, shade and shelter for many species of mammals, birds, and insects.

Repeated disturbance, such as f om grazing or fr es, prevents the accumulation of dead plant matter and stimulates growth of the new grass. At the same time, it prevents the woody plants f om becoming established.

Human-af ected grasslands, turned into fe lds or pastures, become more monocultural, supporting a very limited number of plant and animal species. Overgrazing and the limiting of natural animal habitats lead to a progressive destruction of the biome.



FIELD HORSETAIL

THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

Natural grasslands support great diversity of animal species, ranging f om the smallest insects and arachnids to the largest land dwellers. In fact, these seas of grass provide shelter to the greatest aggregations of large animals on the planet.

Giant herbivores live on those lands, congregating in large herds grazing on the grass. Elephants, giraf es, and rhinos roam the savanna together with zebras, warthogs, antelopes, gazelles, and wildebeests. In the temperate grasslands, bison, kangaroos, wild horses, and cattle fll a s imilar ecological niche.

The abundance of large prey attracts the predators, such as jaguars, wolves, tigers, lions, hyenas, and cheetahs. Smaller predators—foxes, coyotes, and wild dogs—leave the large herbivores in peace, preferring to hunt gerbils or birds. Some carnivorous species, like anteaters and aardwolves, eat insects and their larvae instead of hunting game.

Small mammals are often burrowing animals, such as prairie dogs, meerkats, marmots, badgers, and rabbits. Underground homes allow them to survive wildfr es which the larger animals are usually able to outrun.

BISON

The scarcity of water limits the number of amphibians, yet there are salamanders, f ogs, and toads to be found between the grasses, hunting for ants, spiders, slugs, snails, worms, young snakes, and newborn mice. The fertile soil is usually teeming with earthworms, mites, and fungi.

SEDGE WARBLER

Insects are represented in excess by ants, bees, termites, dung beetles, grasshoppers, mosquitoes, and butterfies. Termites build tall structures of dirt above their nests, by some called 'skyscrapers of the savanna.' Wherever large animals graze, fies also thrive, buzzing around their bodies flled with warm blood.

Birds take advantage of this excess—the grasslands support both the tiny sparrows, grass-babblers, warblers, larks, and quails as well as much larger ostriches, hornbills, bustards, vultures, grif ons, peafowls, and secretary birds. Many birds of prey hunt above the grass, diving at great speed to catch their next meal.

The human-caused changes in the grassland—turning them into farmland, pastures, or even af orestation—contribute to the loss of natural habitats and introduction of invasive species f om other biomes.

Illegal hunting severely harms many species, especially those considered valuable on the black market, like rhinos and elephants. Organized—and legal—culling lead to near extinction of bison and immeasurable harm to the environments and populations dependent on the herds for grazing, meat, and furs.

Environmental Threats & Challenges

Grasslands, even though they seem like a relatively safe and timid environment, come with an array of threats that can turn a simple trek through a meadow into a battle for your lives. Low precipitation results in common droughts. Water is scarce, and an unprepared traveler might have trouble fnding any water sources. If the situation lasts for a long time, devastating dust storms may appear, turning the land barren. Dry grass is also incredibly susceptible to wildfr es which can start naturally, without any campfr es involved.

On the fip side, during the wet season, the grassland may be instantly fo oded, turning into a treacherous, shallow wetland with ephemeral, quick-fo wing rivers.

In the temperate grasslands, extreme temperatures and strong winds will challenge the travelers constantly. The lack of trees and relative fa tness of the terrain makes fnding shelter—or even a windbreak—an additional trouble. The far, unobstructed view around you makes it easy to spot the campsite, especially if the fr e is burning, and might attract unwelcome visitors.

Conversely, in the less dry areas, the grass can grow way beyond human's height, covering the ground in a dense mat, completely reducing visibility. What hides in the tall grass, is anyone's guess.

Grasslands house giant herds of herbivores—often much bigger than a human—and while they are great hunting grounds for a traveling party, they are just that for many predators and poachers. Unlike a caravan, the predators and poachers are well used to living and hiding between the grasses, and once they may be seen, it's often already too late.

Lastly, a matter that is rarely considered: the near-invisible threat of overabundance of pollen. Flowering grasses and other plants can cause severe allergic reactions. Escaping the allergen might be an impossibility in the middle of a trip.

BAOBAB

A massive, solitary tree stands among the grass, somehow giving you the impression that it has been planted upside-down. The wide, branched crown carries oblong f uits between its bright, palmate leaves.

The legend says that the gods have punished the proud baobab tree by tossing it upside-down, and that everybody who picks up the sweet flowers will be eaten by a lion because of a curse. The nutritious fruits are free of such mystery, though.

CLOVER

Small, white flower heads reach above the low, dense covering of trifoliate leaves. Bees and bumblebees seem perfectly happy gathering the nectar from the elongated, sweet-scented flowers.

Clover is an important forage legume, which not only feeds the livestock (often mixed with ryegrass), but also improves the soil with its nitrogen-fixing nodules. Four-leaved variety, while rare, is said to bring luck to whoever finds it.

COTTONWOOD

A tall tree covered in silvery bark stands is a small copse in the mud on the riverbank. The ground near the tree is covered in soft seedhairs resembling cotton candy.

Cottonwoods grow exceptionally quickly, and are useful for timber after merely a decade. The wood is very porous, soft, and cheap, though, which rots easily and makes a poor fire.

COUCH GRASS

A herd of herbivorous mammals grazes on tall stands of grass, barely making space for birds trying to reach the seeds. The wide field of this grass seems not only endless, but also multiplying as you look at it.

Dried rhizomes of couch grass—also known as witchgrass—were used as incense in areas where resin incenses were unavailable. Its scent is said to remove fevers and douse fires.

GOLDENROD

Bright, golden-yellow flower head crowns the tall plant with narrow, toothed leaves. The pyramid-shaped inflorescence is heavy with nectar and often visited by bumblebees, wasps, beetles, butterflies, and honeybees.

The stems and leaves of goldenrod are traditionally used externally for healing wounds and internally to remove kidney stones. The plant contains alkaloids able to mask bitterness and can be used to improve or hide the flavor of various preparations.

RED OAT GRASS

Small, dense hills of grass are decorated with red fo wering spikelets on branched stems. The strong scent of the blooms strangely resembles lacquer. Butterfies , birds, lizards, and caterpillars seem right at home in the tall grass.

Known by the locals as 'kangaroo grass' or 'rooigras,' this plant has been used for millennia to make bread, craft fishing nets, and feed livestock. The hollow stems may be used for thatching roofs and even for paper pulp.

RYEGRASS

Dense tufts of brilliantly green grass reach way above your knees. The float, wide leaves are smooth and glossy on one side, but with prominent parallel vines on the other. Even trampled, the grass rises quickly and seems no worse for the wear.

Perennial ryegrass is often cultivated on a large scale, to create pastures, meadows, winter lawns, and sports pitches. It makes a great forage for herbivores, but it easily out-competes other species, becoming an invasive species.

SUGARBUSH

A multi-branched and gnarled shrub spreads on the rocky ground, covered in silvery-green oblong leaves and striking, crimson and cream hairy flowers at the end of the branches.

Sugarbush flowers have no scent, but produce an abundance of sweet nectar. It not only attracts many pollinators, but can also be used in treatment of cough and chest complaints.

SUNFLOWER

The tall flowers gently sway in the wind on stiff, hairy, somewhat sticky stems. Their yellow flowering heads resembling painted suns all face East, as if they were to welcome the morning sunlight.

Young sunflowers turn their heads to follow the sun; older plants just wait for the morning sun to warm them up. Sunflowers are often planted at the edges of fields, as they exude chemicals that stimulate growth of crops, such as maize. The seeds are a nutritious snack, full of antioxidants and vitamins.

SWEET ACACIA

A small tree with multiple trunks is covered in thorns. Yellow flowers growing between the leaves carry a sweet scent, attracting multiple insects that buzz happily.

Flowers of sweet acacia are valued in perfumery and used for scented ointments. The bark is great for tanning leather, and may be used in production of black dye and ink.

Curios & Findings

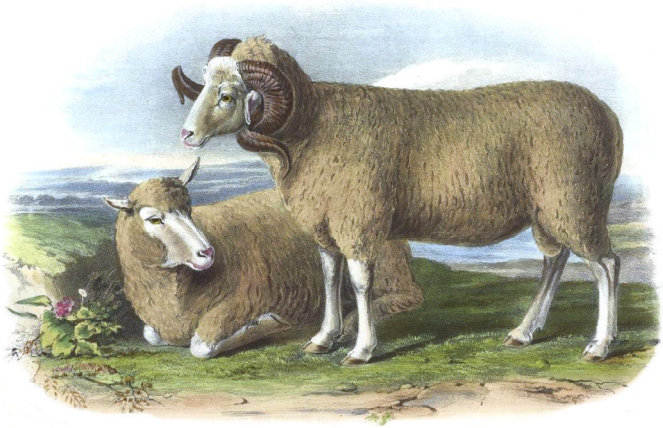
1. A single tree stands on a small hill, rising high above the grass. An alarmed call of a song bird perched on the branch rings in your ears, yet no danger is to be seen.

2. Warm scent of moist wool reaches your nose, and soon, you discover a herd of sheep grazing in a small valley. A shepherd is napping nearby, with a half-eaten lunch still in their hand.

3. The grasses rustle behind you and you could swear you've seen some movement there with the corner of your eye. Everything seems still now, but you feel the hair raising on the back of your neck.

4. A flock of butterflies dances in the air above a copse of red-blooming clover. The sweet scent makes you light-headed and you can't shake the feeling that the orange, yellow, and white wings try to convey a message.

5. A sudden inflow of water into your shoe is less than pleasant. You realize that what you considered a safe path is in fact leading through a treacherous wetland, crisscrossed with streams and ponds. This will not be an easy hike.



MERINO SHEEP

GLOBETROTTER'S GUIDE TO GREENERY

BY ANNA URBANEK AND JAKUB WISZ
| DOUBLE PROFICIENCY |

Globetrotter's Guide to Greenery is a series of guides to biomes, created as a resource for the writers and tabletop RPG game masters alike. Every issue includes information about a specific environment, threats and challenges, sensory prompts, interesting findings, and ten pieces of flora, each with a read-aloud physical description and a snippet of botanical lore. The cover of this booklet includes material useful for the game masters; it may be removed and the internal pages handed to the players as an in-game guide.

All illustrations used are in the Public Domain.
Special thanks to Biodiversity Heritage Library.

For more writing resources and tabletop RPG materials, visit Double Profc iency website:
https://doubleproficiency.com

WAYFARER'S DECK: THE SEA OF GRASS

An illustrated deck with encounters, wonders, mysteries, puzzles, and fnding s awaiting adventurers traveling though the tall grass.

From the prairie to the steppe to the savanna, put on your comfy shoes and prepare for a trek of a lifetime.

Just draw a card.