Ecophysiological studies on photosynthesis and respiration of some plant species in meadow ecosystem

Part 1

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Little is known on the intensity of photosynthesis and respiration of meadow plants. The course of these physiological processes is somewhat different from the courses in plants of other ecosystems e.g. forests. This is due to the relatively high intensity of light, different thermal conditions corresponding to an open territory and to the relatively high humidity of the meadow ecosystem.

The present work is a continuation of research on the photosynthetic production of plants growing in natural ecosystems. The aim of this work was the determination of:

1) the rate of the assimilates' consumption in respiration process,

2) the compensation and light saturation points in relation to light and thermal conditions,

3) the maximum photosynthetic production under optimum light and thermal conditions.

On the basis of these data and of microclimatic measurements performed in the meadow ecosystem in the Ojców National Park, it became possible to establish the dynamics of assimilates accumulation during the growing season of 1965.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The material for investigations was collected in the experimental plots of the Ojców National Park. The experiments were carried out on three plants characteristic of the investigated ecosystem, viz. Plantago lanceolata, Rumex acetosa and Dactylis glomerata. Measurements of the intensities of photosynthesis and respiration were performed at the beginning of every month during the whole growing season. The collected leaves were placed in large Petri dishes on filter paper moistened with water and transported to the laboratory. Two hours before proceeding with the measurements, discs (4 mm in diameter) were cut out of the middle part of the leaf blade between the larger veins. In order to prevent their drying the discs were placed on the bottom of a weighing bottle on moistened filter paper (Starzecki 1961).

For determination of the photosynthesis and respiration rates, the microrespirometric method was adopted (Zurzycki 1955, Starzecki 1961). This method enables us to determine the intensity of photosynthesis and respiration in dependence on the light intensity, thermal conditions and adequate CO₂ concentration.

Measurements were performed during 20 min. at 5 min. intervals at 10, 15, 20 and 25°C and light intensities of 2100, 10 400, 31 800 and 64 000 ergs/cm²·sec (about 460, 2 300, 7 000 and 14 000 lux respectively). The above mentioned light intensities refer to photosynthetically active radiation (PAR) and were measured in absolute units (ergs/cm²·sec) by means of a Kipp and Zonen thermopile and a Kipp galvanometer (type A—7, Delft, Holland). A special filter (RG-8) was used to measure infrared radiation. A projection lamp 250 W, 220 V was used as the light source. Infrared radiation was absorbed by a 5-cm liquid filter obtained by dissolving 140 g of ferrous ammonium sulphate in 2% sulphuric acid (Withrow and Price 1953). The temperatures were maintained at a constant level by means of a Hoepler’s ultrathermostat (±0.2°C).

The concentration of carbon dioxide in the gas phase in the micro-chambers of the microrespirometer was about 0.5% (volume percent) at 20°C when using Warburg’s carbonate buffer No. 10. The details of the measurement technique were described in previous papers (Czopek 1964, 1967b).

The rates of photosynthesis and respiration were expressed either in microlitres (µl) of oxygen produced or consumed or in milligrams (mg) of hexose produced or consumed by 1 dm² of leaves during 1 hour.

RESULTS

The course of photosynthesis and respiration during the growing season does not only depend on the conditions prevailing in the investigated ecosystem, but equally on the plant species. Because of specific differences the results of experiments will be presented separately for Plantago lanceolata and Rumex acetosa on the one hand and for the grass Dactylis glomerata, on the other.

Plantago lanceolata and Rumex acetosa

Microrespirometric measurements have established that the course of photosynthesis and respiration is dependent not only on light and thermal conditions but also on the growing season. The curves representing the course of photosynthesis in relation to light intensity are undeniably of Blackman’s type; they show however, variations depending on the season. They are more pronounced at the beginning and the end of the growing season. In May the intensity of photosynthesis is much higher than in October (at the same temperature), although the light saturation point has a similar value (Figs. 1 and 2).
Fig. 1. Intensity of photosynthesis in leaves of *Plantago lanceolata* as a function of light intensity for various temperatures.

Abscissa — light intensity \( \times 10^3 \text{ ergs/cm}^2 \text{ sec} \), ordinates — intensity of photosynthesis in \( \mu \text{O}_2/\text{cm}^2 \text{ hr} \). The figures on curves denote temperature. Solid line — true photosynthesis in May, broken line — true photosynthesis in November.

Fig. 2. Intensity of photosynthesis in leaves of *Rumex acetosa* as a function of light intensity for various temperatures. For explanations see Fig. 1.
The intensity of respiration attains the highest value at the beginning of the growing season; this is a consequence of the intensive growth of leaves in this period. A decrease in the respiratory rates is observed in June. In the following months this rate either remains at a steady level till the end of the growing season (Rumex) or is followed by an insignificant increase in September (Plantago) and a further fall. It appears from table 1 that the compensation points show some variations depending on the species and the developmental stage of the plant during the growing season. The light intensity required to compensate the respiratory process attains the highest values at the beginning of the season (May) viz. 7 500 ergs/cm²/sec for Plantago and 8 500 ergs/cm²/sec for Rumex. In the following months a decrease and a stabilization of the respiration rate occur especially for Rumex, followed by an insignificant increase (Table 1).

Table 1

Compensation (c.p.) and light saturation (s.p.) points in the meadow plants under investigation at 20°C in dependence on the growing season. The values are expressed in ergs/cm² sec (upper figures) and in lux (lower figures).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plant species</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>VI</th>
<th>VII</th>
<th>VIII</th>
<th>IX</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>XI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plantago lanceolata</strong></td>
<td>c.p.</td>
<td>7 500</td>
<td>5 000</td>
<td>4 700</td>
<td>2 000</td>
<td>3 600</td>
<td>2 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>s.p.</td>
<td>1 630</td>
<td>1 090</td>
<td>1 020</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rumex acetosa</strong></td>
<td>c.p.</td>
<td>32 000</td>
<td>32 000</td>
<td>40 000</td>
<td>30 000</td>
<td>28 000</td>
<td>32 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>s.p.</td>
<td>7 000</td>
<td>7 000</td>
<td>8 700</td>
<td>6 500</td>
<td>6 100</td>
<td>7 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dactylis glomerata</strong></td>
<td>c.p.</td>
<td>8 500</td>
<td>8 500</td>
<td>4 300</td>
<td>2 000</td>
<td>2 000</td>
<td>2 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>s.p.</td>
<td>1 850</td>
<td>1 850</td>
<td>940</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the growing season the light intensity of the saturation point shows also fluctuations (with the exception of Dactylis). It attains a maximum value in July for Plantago and Rumex, about 40 000 — 42 000 ergs/cm²/sec, and afterwards decreases to 27 000 — 28 000 ergs/cm²/sec until the end of the growing season. For Dactylis the light saturation point remains at a constant level during this period (Table 1).

The evaluation of the photosynthetic production during the growing season was based on the apparent photosynthesis (Figs. 3 and 4). It appears that at its beginning (May) the apparent photosynthesis attains the highest rate. In June there is a rapid fall of these rates which, however, is followed by a slight increase. Since September (Plantago) or October (Rumex) the photosynthetic rate begins to decline visibly.
Fig. 3. Course of photosynthesis and respiration intensity in leaves of *Plantago lanceolata* during the growing season for various temperatures at the light saturation point.

Abscissae — months, ordinates — intensity of photosynthesis and respiration in μl O₂/dcm² hr. The figures on curves denote temperature. True photosynthesis — solid line, apparent photosynthesis — broken line.

Fig. 4. Course of photosynthesis and respiration intensity in leaves of *Rumex acetosa* during the growing season for various temperatures at the light saturation point. For explanation see Fig. 3.
Fig. 5. Intensity of photosynthesis in leaves of *Dactylis glomerata* as a function of light intensity for various months at 20°C.

Abscissae — light intensity \( \times 10^5 \text{ ergs/cm}^2\text{ sec} \), ordinates — intensity of true photosynthesis in \( \mu \text{lO}_2/\text{cm}^2\text{ hr} \). The figures on curves denote months.

Fig. 6. Course of photosynthesis and respiration intensity in leaves of *Dactylis glomerata* during the growing season for various temperatures at the light saturation point.

For explanation see Fig. 3.
True photosynthesis attains maximum values (similarly as apparent photosynthesis) in May, subsequently it decreases and either remains at an almost constant level (Rumex) or attains a second maximum in September (Plantago), which however is much lower than the maximum in May.

When the vegetative growth of leaves was over (July) measurements of the leaf areas and the dry weights were performed. A photographic and planimetric method was used for the measurement of the leaf area. The dry weights of 1 dem² of leaves were 361 and 203 mg for Plantago and Rumex respectively. These values are the means of measurements on 20 leaves of average size.

Dactylis glomerata

During the growing season the intensity of photosynthesis in relation to light intensity shows some variations (see Fig. 5 for the temperature of 20°C). It is interesting that the respiration rate of Dactylis glomerata at the beginning of the growing season in spite of the rapid growth of leaves, is not low in comparison with that in the other investigated plants. This rate remains at a constant level, while in September the respiration shows a tendency to rise and then returns to the previous level (Fig. 6).

The relatively low rate of respiration in this period may be attributed to the fact that the discs used in the experiments were cut out not from the base, but from the middle parts of the leaf blade, on both sides of the midrib (it is well known that the base of a grass leaf is the zone of the most intensive growth and respiration).

During the growing season the value of the compensation point changes. In May it attains 4 800 ergs/cm²/sec, in June and July it increases almost to 8 000 ergs/cm²/sec, and then decreases with insignificant fluctuations.

On the contrary the light saturation point is relatively high (64 000 ergs/cm² sec) and remains at a constant level during the growing season. This probably is related to the type of structure shown by the assimilatory tissue of Dactylis leaves, which requires a notable amount of radiation energy for ensuring light saturation.

The course of photosynthesis during the growing season presents some interesting features. The maximum rate of photosynthesis is attained in spring and decreases in June and July (Fig. 6). Then follows an new increase leading to a second maximum which is significantly higher than that in spring. Since September there is at first a slow and then a more rapid fall of photosynthesis until the end of the growing season.

The notable decrease of the rates of photosynthesis in June and July may be attributed to a partial and transitory inactivation of the assimilatory apparatus caused by the intensive sunlight on the open territory of the investigated ecosystem. In the later months as if a regeneration of the assimilatory apparatus is observed reflected in the rise of the photosynthetic rates.

The decrease observed in autumn may be ascribed to the waning thermal and light conditions prevailing then in environment and to the age of the plant.

The dry weight per unit area of Dactylis glomerata leaves is relatively high; it amounts to 452 mg for 1 dem².
DISCUSSION

The values of the compensation and light saturation points depend on the plant species and developmental conditions; for this reason these points can be used to characterise the ecological type of plants. A detailed analysis of this problem was made by Rabinowitz (1951), Starzecki (1958, 1959), Mooney and Billings (1961), Hadley and Bliss (1964) and Czopek (1967a). In the investigated meadow plants (Plantago and Rumex) the compensation and light saturation points change more or less during the growing season. The compensation point show a certain tendency to decrease. The light saturation intensity for Dactylis glomerata is relatively high (64 000 ergs/cm²·sec) and hardly changes steady during the whole growing season. The leaves of this grass required higher light intensities for saturation of the photosynthetic apparatus independently of the developmental stage.

Table 2

Measurements of sunlight intensity performed in the middle of March 1966 from 12 noon to 1 p.m. in Cracow (50° 04' northern latitude). 1 impulse for PAR = 0.12 cal/cm²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weather conditions</th>
<th>Solar radiation</th>
<th>Photosynthetically active radiation</th>
<th>Time interval between two impulses of integrator in sec.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cal/cm² min</td>
<td>lux (measured)</td>
<td>cal/cm² min lux (calculated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear cloudless sky</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>60 000</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun hardly visible through the clouds</td>
<td>0.685</td>
<td>28 500</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rainclouds</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>3 100</td>
<td>0.033</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In June and July the intensity of photosynthesis showed a distinct fall, which was most marked for Dactylis glomerata. In this period the rapid development of grasses in the meadow causes a partial shading of the leaves of Plantago and Rumex. On the contrary the leaves of Dactylis were all the time exposed to intensive insolation. It is known, that excessive light energy can lead to a transitory or even irreversible inactivation of chloroplasts (Johansson 1923; Schoder 1932; Emerson 1935; Gessner 1940; Steemann Nielsen 1949, 1952; Zurzycki 1957; Sironval and Kandler 1958). In our opinion the decrease of the intensity of photosynthesis observed in the following months is ascribable to a transitory inactivation of the assimilatory apparatus.

The following discussion concentrates on the evaluation of photosynthetic and respiration rates on the basis of microclimatic conditions in the Ojców National Park. On this account it is necessary to give a short characteristic of these conditions prevailing in the investigated ecosystem.
A. Light conditions. An electronic integrator was used to measure the photosynthetically active radiation, in the spectral range 350—750 nm; the range of equal sensitivity being 400—700 nm (Kubin and Hladek 1963, Šetlik 1965). The radiation energy was expressed in cal/cm²·min. The integrator was calibrated by means of a thermopile and a galvanometer (see methods) for various illumination of sunlight conditions. The results of measuring light during calibration of the integrator are presented in Table 2. On the average one impulse of the integrator i.e. one unit of the counter corresponds to 0,12 cal/cm² for the photosynthetically active radiation (PAR). The time elapsing between two successive impulses depends on the light intensity.

"Luminous efficiency may be expressed in various units, but those commonly used are lumens per watt (radiated watts, not electrical) and lux or foot-candles per calorie per minute per square centimeter. The foot-candle per cal min⁻¹cm⁻², also referred to as the illumination equivalent of 1 cal min⁻¹cm⁻², has been used by the Weather Bureau for the evaluation of solar energy (Klimball 1924, cit. acc. to Withrow and Withrow 1956). Solar radiant flux has a luminous efficiency of
about 100 lumens w⁻¹, or 6500 ft-c per cal min⁻¹ cm⁻². The maximum solar visible irradiance is then about 10 000 ft-c" (Withrow and Withrow 1956) i.e. 108 000 lux. Thus supposing that 1 cal/cm² min of visible irradiance corresponds to 108 000 lux it is easy to express the energy units PAR in photometric units. Table 2 shows that the intensities of sunlight measured with a luxmeter differ only slightly from the theoretical values.

In spite of the differences occurring in the spectral sensitivity and the spectral regions of the integrator and the luxmeter the measurements of the photosynthetically active radiation falling on an open surface presented only slight differences.

It follows from the measurements that the photosynthetically active radiation involves 38 to 58 percent of total irradiance. This percent depends upon the

![Graph](image)

Fig. 8. Approximative course of the rates of photosynthetic production and respiration during the growing season for *Plantago lanceolata.*

Abscissae – months, ordinates – photosynthetic and respiratory rates in mg of hexose/dem² hr. True photosynthesis – solid line, apparent photosynthesis – broken line.

absorption of the near infrared radiation by the water vapour and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and therefore depends on the weather conditions (Table 2).

The reading of the integrator-counter was performed thrice a day. The number of impulses was expressed as the average intensity of light per day or per month. The average day lengths for the particular months were taken from climatologic data (Klein 1965). Fig. 7 shows the intensities of photosynthetically active radiation during the growing season. The mean daily total radiant energy falling on a horizontal area in the Ojców National Park (50°12′ northern latitude) during the summer months varies between 260 and 400 cal/cm² day, depending upon climatic conditions. The daily mean corresponding to the photosynthetically active radia-
tion vary from 120 to 200 cal/cm² day. The global energy PAR during the growing season of 1965 (May – November) amounts to about 35 000 cal/cm² season.

Since in laboratory measurements the light intensities (PAR) were expressed in ergs/cm² sec, it became necessary to express them in cal/cm² min.

\[
\begin{align*}
1 \text{ erg/cm}^2 \text{sec} &= 1.43 \times 10^{-6} \text{ cal/cm}^2 \text{min} \\
1 \text{ cal/cm}^2 \text{min} &= 6.98 \times 10^5 \text{ ergs/cm}^2 \text{sec}
\end{align*}
\]

Thus the light intensities used in the microrespirometric measurements, viz. 2 100, 10 400, 31 800 and 64 000 ergs/cm² sec correspond to 0.0030, 0.0149, 0.0455 and 0.0915 cal/cm² min, respectively.

Fig. 9. Approximative course of the rates of photosynthetic production and respiration during the growing season for *Rumex acetosa*. For explanations see Fig. 8.

Fig. 10. Approximative course of the rates of photosynthetic production and respiration during the growing season for *Dactylis glomerata*. For explanations see Fig. 8.
B. The thermal conditions were calculated from microclimatic data (Klein 1965). The average monthly temperature in the meadow ecosystem (20 cm above the ground level) attained the highest values in June and July (Fig. 7). Some climatic data for Ojców and Cracow for the year 1963 were published by Rajchel (1965).

C. The relatively high humidity of the meadow ecosystem was accepted as optimum value for the physiological processes.

Table 3
Maximum photosynthetic production under optimum conditions based on experimental data (Ph. op.) and approximate rate of photosynthetic production based on microclimatic data (Ph. mc.) expressed in mg C\(_6\)H\(_{12}\)O\(_6\)/dcm\(^2\)hr.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plant species</th>
<th>Months</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td>VII</td>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>IX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plantago lanceolata</strong></td>
<td>Ph. op.</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ph. mc.</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rumex acetosa</strong></td>
<td>Ph. op.</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>3.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ph. mc.</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dactylis glomerata</strong></td>
<td>Ph. op.</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ph. mc.</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Basing on the results of measurements performed in laboratory conditions and on the microclimatic data for the Ojców National Park, the author calculated approximately the mean rates of photosynthetic production and respiration for the investigated plant species during the growing season. The results of calculation were expressed in milligrams of hexose produced or consumed by 1 dcm\(^2\) leaf area during 1 hour (1 μl O\(_2\) corresponds to 0.001356 mg hexose, Czopek 1967a). The results of the calculations are presented in Table 3 and Fig. 8 — 10.

These results do not give the global production of organic matter (as hexose); on the contrary they present the rates of photosynthetic hexose accumulation and its consumption in dissimilation processes occurring in leaves during the growing season.

SUMMARY

This work is a continuation of research on the photosynthetic production of plants growing in natural ecosystems.

1. Three plant species were investigated in a meadow ecosystem of the Ojców National Park, viz. Plantago lanceolata, Rumex acetosa and Dactylis glomerata.

2. The object of the studies was the intensity of photosynthesis and respiration in relation to light and thermal conditions.

3. The compensation and light saturation points were determined. Their values change depending on the species and developmental stage of the plant during the growing season.

4. Maximum photosynthetic production under optimum light and thermal conditions was determined (Table 3).
5. The highest respiration rates were observed in spring. They are connected with the intensive growth of leaves.

6. The intensity of photosynthesis shows variations during the growing season. The decrease of its rates observed in June may be ascribed to a transitory inactivation of the assimilation apparatus.

7. On the basis of the results of microrespirometric measurements and of microclimatic data for the Ojców National Park the rates of photosynthetic production and respiration for three plant species growing in the meadow ecosystem during the growing season of 1965 were approximatively determined.

The author wishes to express his most sincere thanks to Prof. dr F. Górski and Prof. dr J. Żurzycki for their valuable advice in the course of this work.

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REFERENCES


Ekofizjologiczne badania nad fotosyntezą i oddychaniem niektórych gatunków roślin ekosystemu łąkowego

Część I

Streszczenie

Powyższa praca stanowi kontynuację badań nad produkcją fotosyntetyczną roślin rosnących w naturalnych ekosystemach.

1. Przedmiotem badań były liście trzech gatunków roślin ekosystemu łąkowego w Ojcowskim Parku Narodowym jak: Plantago lanceolata, Rumex acetosa i Dactylis glomerata.

2. U powyższych gatunków przebadano intensywność fotosyntez i oddychania w zależności od warunków termicznych i światłowych.

3. Wyniki doświadczeń wykazują, że punkt kompensacyjny i punkt wysycenia światłowego zmieniają się zależnie od gatunku i etapu rozwojowego roślin w ciągu sezonu wegetacyjnego.

4. Określono maksymalną produkcję fotosyntetyczną w optymalnych warunkach (tabela 3).

5. Najwyższa wartość oddychania w okresie wiosny była związana z intensywnym wzrostem liści.


7. Opierając się na wynikach pomiarów mikrospirometrycznych i danych mikroklimatycznych Ojcowskiego Parku Narodowego, określono przybliżony przebieg produkcji fotosyntetycznej i wartości oddychania dla trzech gatunków roślin ekosystemu łąkowego podczas okresu wegetacyjnego w 1965 r.