Diversity Newsletter of the Central and East European Working Group for the Enhancement of Biodiversity · CEEWEB


Dynamiting Trees for More Biodiversity
Are we expecting the impossible and how to make it happen.
Starts on page 3

Surprise surprise!
Natura 2000 is a big catch

Saving Nature in the Court
An NGO wins a case for protecting a Natura 2000 site.
Starts on page 8

Dynamiting Trees for More Biodiversity
Are we expecting the impossible and how to make it happen.
Starts on page 3

EU Investments: Nature Loses, Who Wins?
CEEWEB reveals serious threats to conservation of biodiversity.
Starts on page 24
Dynamiting Trees for More Biodiversity

A variety of approaches on nature conservation - are we expecting the impossible?

Saving Nature in the Court

An NGO won a case in the European Court of Justice for protecting a Natura 2000 site.

The Lack of a Unified System

The implementation report of the Birds and Habitats Directive is problematic.

Ecosystem Services

How you can explain to a stranger what nature conservation is all about.

NGOs Managing Protected Areas

Tangible results of NGO actions in the field in Obesdka Bara (Serbia), Tardona Fen (Hungary) and Varghis Gorge (Romania).

Hard Work and Fun: Our Days and Nights

Read about the CEEWEB Annual Meeting 2006.

Natura 2000 Site Management in the 2006 Academy

Success story of the third CEEWEB Academy.

New Faces in CEEWEB

New members were accepted to the CEEWEB network by the Annual Meeting.

EU Investments: Nature Loses, Who Wins?

A critical assessment of the development plans of CEE countries for the use of EU money reveals significant threats to nature and biodiversity.

If we look at the facts about forests in the field, only a few percent of woodland in Europe outside Russia (and this includes Scandinavia!) has not been influenced by human activities during the last few centuries. So the logical goal for conservation that first and spontaneously springs to mind is to leave as much forest as feasible over to natural processes. Indeed, this is being done – in the EU 15 many projects and programmes, both inside and outside a Natura 2000 context, are investing large sums to buy up woodland and leave it to natural processes. This is the kind of conservation our opponents often attack: nature from which people are excluded.

A bit less conservation but much more acceptance

However, strictly leaving things to nature can create problems. The Große Arber is the heart of the Bavarian Forest National Park, on the border with the Czech Republic, and here the forests taken out of use and set aside to natural processes included large spruce monocultures. When a bark beetle (Ips typographus) outbreak began some years ago, the policy of the national park was to do nothing and let nature take its course. Vast areas of spruce died, which led to negative comments from the tourists, while the owners and users of woodland outside the park protested violently, fearing bark beetles spreading to their production forest. The media jumped on the issue, and the national park received very controversial...
coverage for months. The same practice is carried out on the Czech side of the forest. Leaving it all to nature can thus provoke a social backlash against conservation.

The idea in the Kuusamo district of north-eastern Finland was also to take a forest with important old growth patches out of production. However, because of opposition from the local community which complained about the loss of jobs, part of the 14,000 ha boreal forest was ‘sacrificed’: trails were laid out, a visitor centre built, ski routes added. The idea was to develop outdoor recreation and nature tourism as an alternative economic activity for the community. We see the conservationists themselves realised that leaving 100 percent of area to nature can be socially problematic.

The question of the baseline

Restoring forests, which semantically implies returning ‘degraded’ forests to a more ‘pristine’ or ‘natural’ state, is another widespread practice in EU 15. Particularly in countries where – after centuries of intense human use and dense population – a very small amount of more or less natural forest cover remains, there is often a tendency to call for a return to a hypothetical ‘original’, ‘ancient’ or ‘primeval’ forest, whatever that means. After all, since the Ice Age we have seen quite a few forest types come and go through the boreal, atlantic, subboreal and other climatic phases of the past ten thousand years. Whether or not the goal is clear, forest restoration is established practice in the conservation world. In tangible terms, it translates into work to remove ‘exotic’ or ‘allochthonous’ trees, plant ‘native’ or ‘autochthonous’ trees (I have personally more than once heard non-conservationists make unpleasant comments about the political connotations of this terminology!), modify the structure (tree density, age cohorts) of the forest, close trails and roads and much else besides. As noted above, this kind of work is not always understood or appreciated by outsiders.

In Finland a project near Kuopio began using controlled fires late in the 1990s as a tool to increase the biodiversity of its boreal forests. Such interventions were based on the observation that the best quality of boreal forest with herb-rich ground layer was associated with areas where the traditional slash-and-burn farming was once practised. Using fire in management is now spreading in Finland, but the Kuopio project was also remarkable for using explosives to blow up trees, imitating the creation of dead wood by storms. This certainly raised some eyebrows – the main project cofinancer was even worried about negative press (‘greenies dynamiting trees’). Yet these drastic interventions are not without logic. In a natural forest, even a climax forest, there is dynamism too – storms, fires, collapse of old trees, all of which open up space for the flowering herbs and young trees.

Or is dynamiting trees better?

There is thus a case to be made that biodiversity in general, is higher in woods which are used in ‘traditional’ low-key ways than in woods which have reached a climax state. This would be because the forests have a diversity of structure.

Should we leave it like it is?

Another tendency is to consider ‘undisturbedness’ in the sense of freedom from human activities and intervention as an equivalent to high biodiversity. Yet an undisturbed forest which evolves to its climax may well be less diverse in terms of species, habitats and structure than a mosaic of woodlands which are managed by people in different ways.

For instance, certain Annex II Habitats Directive or Birds Directive species decline if forestry is not practiced. Capercaillie (Tetrao urogallus) population in the Black Forest is a good example. Forest agencies in Baden-Württemberg, the Black Forest region, have in recent years been reducing interventions in the public forests and giving more room to natural succession. Such practice is seen as better for forest ecology, but this is also done because the finance ministry is trying to reduce costs of public services, and doing less in the woods is one way of cutting costs. Grouse, according to research by the local Forest Research Institute (FVA), need a structurally rich forest with open clearings, dense young stands, etc. As succession progresses and canopies close, they will be driven out and one of the most important populations in central Europe will disappear. Therefore, to save the Black Forest grouse, foresters must thin stands, clear-cut patches, plant dense young stands, etc. A series of interconnected grouse projects in the Black Forest are now actively intervening in the woods. They go against the overall policy of achieving more natural forests by reducing forestry work.

In Finland a project near Kuopio began using controlled fires late in the 1990s as a tool to increase the biodiversity of its boreal forests. Such interventions were based on the observation that the best quality of boreal forest with herb-rich ground layer was associated with areas where the traditional slash-and-burn farming was once practised. Using fire in management is now spreading in Finland, but the Kuopio project was also remarkable for using explosives to blow up trees, imitating the creation of dead wood by storms. This certainly raised some eyebrows – the main project cofinancer was even worried about negative press (‘greenies dynamiting trees’). Yet these drastic interventions are not without logic. In a natural forest, even a climax forest, there is dynamism too – storms, fires, collapse of old trees, all of which open up space for the flowering herbs and young trees.

However, most forests are managed to immediately negate the effects of catastrophes (fallen timber is cleared after storms and there is immediate replanting with saplings, fires are prevented, and trees are harvested before they are old enough to start to decay). So until we have large areas of natural forests that have been left untouched long enough to allow all the natural catastrophic events to play their part, it seems that conservationists will have to work together with foresters if they want maximum biodiversity.

If the objective is to raise biodiversity by having forests constantly used in a particular way, the real problem is how to get the forest owners to do that. Wherever the traditional woodlandship was replaced by intensive forestry, it happened because the former was no longer the best economic and technical option. If it had been, it would still be applied spontaneously! Seen from this point of view, conservation is trying to get foresters go against the signals from the market and...
Revert to what are more labour-intensive, less cost-efficient and less productive methods. In this way, conservation is politically conservative (or even reactionary) by trying to revive the past.

The case of grasslands

Most, if not nearly all, European grassland habitats west of the Dnepr are semi-natural habitats created and maintained by farming. Currently, higher productivity and animals kept indoors mean that less land is needed. Marginal grazing and mowing land is thus abandoned or converted to other uses. As soon as mowing or grazing is stopped, grasslands fall prey to succession – woody plants appear and proliferate. Eventually we get forest.

So when conservation wants to preserve and restore grasslands with rich biodiversity and return to the nineteenth century, it is asking farmers to turn their backs on technical progress and economic viability.

To give a fish or to teach how to fish?

The central problem in European grassland conservation is how to ensure that farmers use existing grasslands in a low-key manner, relatively close to traditional forms, and restore abandoned grasslands. This may be quite costly as for example shrubs and trees should be cut. Financial incentives – compensation given for the extra work or loss of income – have been used for a long time, beginning with national programmes in the UK and Germany in the 1980s. So-called agri-environment subsidies, paid to farmers who sign contracts (usually five or seven years long) to use grasslands in ways which benefit biodiversity (no inputs, no ploughing, late mowing, low-density grazing, etc.) have since 1992 been part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) second pillar, financed through the Rural Development Programme (RDP). There are certain areas in Europe where the mowing or grazing of species-rich grasslands has been continuously subsidised through the EU for nearly 15 years now.

The CAP second pillar is seen as the backbone for ensuring optimal management of Annex I grasslands in Natura 2000 sites. Nevertheless, the cuts in the budget for the second pillar (RDP) for the period 2007-2013 show that sustaining a form of land use with publicly funded subsidies is shaky and dependent on the political climate. It would be far better if the farmer had a real economic incentive, if the product from conservation-oriented land use was desired by consumers and they were willing to pay enough to cover the costs.

The problem is that in the past communities managed their land in certain ways that were for them economically rewarding at that time, or, more cynically, that were the only option available to them in a certain technological and socio-economic historical context. At the same time, this land use produced and maintained semi-natural habitats with a significant biodiversity. Now conservation wants to keep, or revive, these old-fashioned land uses for the sake of these semi-natural habitats.

The big “yes”

Is conservation futuristic after all? Is it looking beyond today’s intensive and environmentally unsustainable, and therefore economically unsustainable (because of rising energy and input costs, stricter regulations, eco-taxes and carbon taxes) monocultural farming and forestry? Or is it just dreaming about an environment-friendlier land use which combines the best of the past and present? Are its supporters, and the minority of consumers who will pay more for ‘nature-friendly products’, merely nostalgics and eccentrics, or are they forward-looking citizens acutely aware that patterns of consumption will have to change sooner rather than later for all of us if we want to keep a comfortable lifestyle?

I leave the questions open. However, those who say ‘yes’ in agreement about the benefits of conservation might profit from putting this message across more forcefully in the public arena. Like animal welfare, conservation has long been dogged by a ‘thou shalt not’, people-hating image, so any message that gives positive reasons for supporting conservation can’t be but good.
Saving Nature in the Court

An environmental NGO Bund Naturschutz in Bayern e.V. from the federal county Bavaria of Germany was among those who prevented building of a highway through a shadow-listed Natura 2000 area. The NGO used support of professional lawyers to win the court process. Dr. Ulrich Kaltenegger, lawyer and a committed member of Bund Naturschutz in Bayern e.V. answers our questions about the case.

What resources and experience does an NGO need to be able to submit a complaint to the European Court of Justice (ECJ)? Is this the first case Bund Naturschutz in Bayern e.V. submitted to the ECJ?

There is no direct way for NGO cases to the ECJ. Complaints must be submitted to national courts, but the accuser can refer to incompliance with EU environmental legislation. If the national court finds it is necessary to get clarification about a piece of EU legislation, it will interrupt the case at national level and forwards the question to the ECJ.

This was not the first case of Bund Naturschutz in Bayern e.V. that was forwarded to the ECJ. We had a case against the re-building of a highway already at the beginning of the nineties. At the time we claimed that the transposition of the Directive on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in German law was late and therefore it was injustice that an EIA was not carried out. The ECJ decided we were right and the national court had to accept our claim.

Why was this judgment so significant? Could you please explain what future consequences this decision will have?

With the judgment of 14. 09. 2006 the ECJ decided that not only Natura 2000 sites already included in the final list of sites by the European Commission are under special protection. Furthermore, the ECJ clarified that member states must “take all the measures necessary to avoid interventions which incur the risk of seriously compromising the ecological characteristics of the sites”. Therefore, if the accuser demonstrates in an ongoing case with environmental relevance that a project could have serious consequences for such a site, the accuser will win the case. This is especially important for sites that haven’t been discussed by the member states as possible Natura 2000 sites and haven’t been suggested to the European Commission yet. Besides these “potential” sites, the decision is also valid for sites that already have been proposed to the EU, but haven’t been officially included in the official list of sites by the EU.

Do you think this decision is especially important for the future of the Natura 2000 network?

Yes, I think it is. It enables environmental organisations to prohibit interventions in sites which they consider an essential part of the network. Bund Naturschutz in Bayern eV. maintained a so called “shadow list” of sites for whole Bavaria including areas recommended as Natura 2000 sites. Most of these sites have already been included in the official governmental list.

Does the case have a special relevance for the new member states and accession countries?

I think it does. As long as a new member state hasn’t submitted a full list of Natura 2000 sites to the European Commission it is advisable for local NGOs to prepare a “shadow list”, as Bund Naturschutz in Bayern did. Until this list hasn’t been taken over by the member state and has hasn’t been reported to the EU one can also refer to this “shadow list” in the court.

Are you involved in other legal cases in a Natura 2000 case in the moment?

At the moment I am involved in a number of legal processes which are against the building of new highways and where the question of Natura 2000 and the protection of sites is playing an essential role.
How many years did the process take?
The process leading to the 14. 09. 2006. decision of the ECJ had been running for about four years.

Do you think only the legal way is appropriate to solve problems or do you know about good examples where a solution was found outside the court?

Bund Naturschutz in Bayern e.V. is an acknowledged environmental organisation. We are invited to participate in the process foregoing the issuing of the building permission by the competent authorities in a number of major projects. During this process we can often achieve an enhancement of the planning from the environmental perspective. After the building permission is issued there is only the legal way left. Therefore I think the legal way is indeed good to prevent environmentally harmful projects or at least to optimise them.

Do you think the implementation of the Habitats Directive will lead to a high number of legal cases in the future?
The implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives will allow legal cases in the future with an important bearing on the decision.

Can you imagine an NGO to win a case without professional help (without a lawyer)?

In most of the environmentally relevant cases you must have a lawyer according to German law. Environmental organisations cannot begin and also cannot win a case without a lawyer. In smaller cases a lawyer in not mandatory, but actually quite necessary.

What are the most important partners to support an NGO complaint? Whom can you ask to support your case?

Environmental organisations have to organise this by themselves in Germany. It is possible to make the European Commission start a complaint against a member state, for example when important Natura 2000 sites haven’t been reported. If a case goes to the ECJ, the Commission comes out with its own statement about it. This statement does not necessarily go as far as the argumentation of the environmental organisation.

Can you imagine this decision to strengthen the contradictions between the advocates of conservation and economic development?
The decision is certainly important from the point of view of conflicts between conservation and economic development, but we think that these two things don’t necessarily have to be contradictory. Bavaria is densely populated and industrialised. The infrastructural net (roads, rail, airports) is fully developed. In my opinion there are no projects in Bavaria which would need to be realised for economic reasons in a way which is seriously compromising environmental interests.

Interview

Carpathian Convention for Sustainable Tourism

On 11-13 December 2006, in Kyiv, the First Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention decided to establish a Working Group on sustainable tourism. The working group will develop a strategy and a protocol to help the development of sustainable tourism in the Carpathians. CEEWEB and its member organisation ETE support the working group through INTERREG IIIB CADSES Carpathian Project.

For outcomes of the first meeting of the working group check <www.ceeweb.org/workingareas/conventions/carpathianproject>. For more information contact Kristina Vilimaite via <kvilimaite@ceeweb.org>.

The Birds and Habitats Directive of the EU declares that the member states have monitoring and reporting obligations with a detailed and systematic survey of the Habitats Directive’s habitats and species. The next implementation report which the Member States have to prepare according to Article 17 of the Habitats Directive is due in June 2007. But are the member states really prepared for this exercise? How will the EU-25, and especially the new member states deal with the task? What will happen with the results of the reports in the future? This article looks at the problems of a Europe-wide monitoring exercise and discusses possible solutions elaborated by European institutions and NGOs.

Insight

For the 2007 report, obligation of the countries’ monitoring is to collect the “best available information”. Information must be submitted about all habitats and species of the annexes within the state territory and per biogeographic region (not just about the designated Natura 2000 sites).

Because a unified and official EU recommendation about monitoring methods doesn’t exist and is not expected in the near future, the main focus at the moment needs to be on the comparability of the data, not the data collection methods.
Ten steps towards effective biodiversity monitoring

1. Streamline monitoring requirements for various EU policies (nature conservation, water management, rural development)

2. Fully integrate the civil society in the monitoring process to allow timely and adequate input

3. Pay special attention to the evaluation of the countries’ reports when setting Favourable Reference Values

4. Integrate the NGO’s recommendations for setting Favourable Reference Values

5. Integrate biogeographic implications (connectivity and trans-boundary perspectives, etc.)

6. Assess the contribution of management measures adopted for the Natura 2000 network

7. Improve the data before the next reporting exercise

8. Establish adequate monitoring procedures for marine habitats and species

9. Conduct biogeographic monitoring seminars

10. Establish a similar procedure for the Bern Convention

Therefore the Habitats Committee accepted a reporting form about the monitoring of both habitats and species in 2005. Nevertheless, the form and the terms used needed to be clarified further and completed. Hence in 2006 first the European Topic Centre on Biodiversity, then the European Habitat Forum published detailed guidelines to the forms to assist monitoring authorities with detailed explanation and examples.

The guidance provided could help the member states to prepare the reports. However, there are still numerous questions because of the definitions that are not entirely obvious and measurable in the case of each species. Countries may face difficulties because of the massive quantity of information that needs to be submitted. Presumably the majority of the EU countries will face serious problems to fulfill the monitoring requirements. For the EU-10, the designation process is still going on. Therefore the main focus will most likely be on the categorization of the available data according to the standardized report form and the understanding of it.

Also, if we look beyond 2007, the reports could have important effects in the future. After the Member States submitted the reports, the European Commission will prepare a consolidated scientific assessment towards the end of 2008 based on them. “We will then be in a position to engage in detailed discussions as to whether the existing instruments are delivering our political objectives, and look at what steps may need to improve them.” (Stavros Dimas, Environment Commissioner, 25 August 2006). Hence, the outcome of the composite EU-wide report will be instrumental for the evaluation of the European Union’s effort and success in meeting its overall biodiversity goal, i.e. halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010.

By Klára Hajdu

Ecosystem Services

Environmentalists say it is worth protecting the nature for a variety of reasons. For example because disappearance of one species may cause damage to another. But how to explain it to a “normal” person?

A nice guy moves into the apartment next to yours, and the first time you meet, he asks you about your occupation. After a short chat about your work, while you are enthusiastically speaking about rupicolous panonic steppes, and bitterly complain about the conflict with the local authority that plans to classify an important patch (not protected) as inner city to construct a new residential community, he challenges you with a perplexed look in his eyes:

"Is it really such a tragedy if that small area of the steppe... eeer...what was its name...is lost??? You should take it easy, man, and rather enjoy life, while you can still do that!"

What is your answer?

- Start a monologue about our moral obligations to conserve all species on earth?
- Point out the millions of years of evolution, when those species comprising that particular panonic steppe association evolved and developed those complex interactions among them beyond any human knowledge?
- Try to explain how this small area integrates into the landscape and interacts with other ecosystems through material and energy exchange, species interactions, and thus it is important for their survival?

- Argue that this small area is very important for conserving biodiversity on a larger scale, which is a commitment of our own government?
- Enthusiastically talk about its beauty and show some photographs?

However well explained and well substantiated arguments you give, there is a risk that the nice guy from the next apartment will only understand that this is something very important for you. And not for him.

And you possibly encounter an even greater lack of comprehension if you talk to the mayor and members of the city council, who will ultimately decide about the future of the area.

But everybody needs it!

Of course the most effective way of winning people over for nature conservation would be to prove that this is not only important for conservationists, for the Ministry of Environment, and the millions of organisms living in nature but it is also important for people.

Continued on page 26
Obedska Bara is an oxbow lake formed from the meanders of the River Sava in Vojvodina, Serbia. It represents one of six Serbia’s Ramsar sites, and is one of the oddest legally protected areas in the world (protected since 1874). It has a status of an Important Bird Area and Special Nature Reserve. A natural complex of stagnant tributaries, marshes, pits, water meadows and oak forests habitats, the reserve has a total surface of 10 ha and the buffer zone covering another 20 ha.

As the Sava River does not supply the wetland with permanent water flow in the summer period, the open water surface is shrinking and wet meadows are overgrown with herbaceous and woody vegetation. The exceptionality rich diversity of species found in the site is endangered by fast eutrophication. The forestry has reduced autochthonous forests of ancient mixed woodland intending to enlarge plantations of Euro-American Poplar (Populus x euroamericana).

Obedska Bara, Serbia

Volunteers from all over the world help the Young Researchers of Serbia in managing negative human impacts on Obedska Bara lake.

Hard work in the field and measurable success as a result

As early as 1992, Young Researchers of Serbia started scientific research on the wetland to analyze the negative impacts leading to biodiversity decline. Building on the results, a project was started with the participation of the local forestry company, the experts from the Institute for Protection of Nature of Serbia and the enterprise “Vojvodinasmue”. In the framework of the project, Young Researchers of Serbia regularly organises international work camps at Obedska Bara, where volunteers from all over the world help decrease the negative effects of overgrowing. Through the massive removal of biomass the open water surface has increased again.

The project has measurable results. The numbers of herons and egrets in the colony of Obedska Bara stopped decreasing. The heron and cormorant colonies increased from three species and 250 breeding pairs in 1996 to eight species and 650 breeding pairs in 2006. Rare and endangered bird species, like the Glossy Ibis (Plegadis falcinellus) and Pygmy Cormorant (Phalacrocorax pygmeus) returned to the reserve. The new wet meadows are again a good place for reproduction of fish, amphibians and reptiles, and herbaceous plants.

To involve local people better in the management of the site a large campaign on a World Wetlands Day is organized every year. The project results and future plans are presented for local stakeholders, including state institutions, experts, authorities of protected areas and local schoolchildren.

The project yielded measurable results. For example, the population of Broad-leaved Cottongrass (Eriophorum latifolium) has doubled.

NGOs Managing Protected Areas

A number of CEEWEB member organizations are active in the field of protected area management. The knowledge and experience of these organizations were presented on the 2006 CEEWEB Academy. The members shared their views on management of different habitats, management planning and tourism as a tool of management. Some outstanding achievements of CEEWEB members in the field of protected area management are introduced in this article.

Protecting fens in the middle of a corn fields and human settlements

Tardona Fen, Hungary

The area of fens and marshlands declined considerably during the last decades in Hungary. The 1998 fen registration showed that from the former four fens only one remained in the Tardona region. Tardona fen is situated in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county, North-East Hungary. The protected area and the buffer zone covers almost 14 hectares.

To save this last remaining fen, the local National Park Directorate bought the land in 2001 and began with the management actions. In the following years the resources of the directorate for this type of actions were reduced and they delegated...
It is only way to neutralise the impact of eutrophication is by regular mowing and removal of the biomass from the territory of the fen. Because the area is wet most of the year the use of heavy machinery could lead to the degradation of soil. Therefore only hand-mowing is permitted. Mowing only takes place before or after the reproduction period of protected species.

The project yielded measurable results. Continuous management has led to the rehabilitation of the fen and the increase of biodiversity. The population of Broad-leaved Cottongrass (*Eriophorum latifolium*) has doubled. In 2005 the Early Marsh-Orchid (*Dactylorhiza incarnata*) has returned to the site with four specimens. In 2006 this number has increased to 16 specimens. The strictly protected corncrake (*Crex crex*) was also observed. Today the most threatening factor for the fen is eutrophication because of leaching fertilizers from the agricultural fields.

The protected area is on the border of a settlement and surrounded by agricultural land used for potato and corn production. Today the most threatening factor for the fen is eutrophication because of leaching fertilizers from the agricultural fields. The protected area is on the border of a settlement and surrounded by agricultural land used for potato and corn production.

Conserving nature and the local communities

Varghis Gorge, Romania

By Pál Péter

The Varghis Gorge protected area is situated in the Eastern Carpathians, Harghita county, in the middle of Romania. With almost 1,000 hectares, Varghis Gorge is one of the largest protected areas in the country. The AGORA Working Group for Sustainable Development started its activities in the Gorge area in 2003, in cooperation with other conservation NGOs, local authorities and farmers. The administration of the protected area was taken on by a local NGO, Lost World Association, in 2004.

The results of the research can be used as a basis for the rural development subsidies.

Today, the main goal of the NGOs in the area is the involvement of land owners and farmers in the practical conservation work. After the scientific analysis of the flora and fauna and pressure factors a draft management plan was elaborated in 2003. Three main groups of environmental problems were identified. First, these are problems due to economical activities, for example tree cutting, lime burning, illegal hunting and fishing, and uncontrolled grazing. Second, damage is caused by intentional tourism – souvenir (for example dripstone and fossil) collection from the caves. Third, there are damages caused by ignorance or negligence.

The NGOs try to solve these problems in cooperation with the local authorities and land owners. Campsites are limited to the southern part of the reserve, on a specially assigned glade. A ranger patrols the area every weekend when tourist flow to the area increases. He gives guided tours as well. Functional zones in the area were marked and elaborated with the help of GIS mapping.

In 2005 AGORA made a sociological research related to farming, nature conservation and rural tourism in the Meresti community. As the main result of this survey we began to involve the local community based organizations into the programs of the NGO. Land abandonment is a major problem in the protected area and the region. Young people leave the villages and traditional agricultural practices are going to disappear in a couple of years. Together with the Rika micro-regional association AGORA tries to help farmers in various ways to alternative incomes. The NGO is introducing eco-tourism, biological milk production and processing of local row products because farmers’ income depend mainly on milk and other agricultural products at the moment. As the NGO believes, long-time protection of Varghis Gorge can only be ensured if local communities are interested in preserving the natural assets. Local people have to be able to make income from selling local products and services which contribute to the sustainable management of the natural values.

A few months ago the NGO opened an information centre in Meresti, with a full time employee from the village. She is the manager of the tourist information centre and of a guest house financed by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and the local council. She also helps in organizing different meetings and other actions in Meresti. This autumn AGORA started a GEF funded eco-tourism course for local farmers, mainly women. The course is accredited by the Ministry of Tourism. After this course farmers can start a family business and sell their very delicious, traditional products to the tourists.

The NGO tries to communicate its efforts to the local audience through the local radio and cable TV. We organised several information campaigns on rural development funds which people can access after Romania’s accession to the EU.

AGORA also takes part in the scientific research in the area. A complex research project is under way in collaboration with Sapientia University. Land owners and farmers are involved in the research through evaluation of traditional and actual land use and planning a sustainable land use model. The main goal is the maintenance and revitalization of traditional agricultural practices at least in the protected area to ensure the conservation of the agro-biodiversity. The results of the research can be used as a basis for the rural development subsidies in the 2007-2013 period (agri-environmental payments).
Hard Work and Fun: Our Days and Nights

The Annual Meeting gathered the members of the CEEWEB network to learn, exchange ideas, and decide on issues important for effective cooperation. The meeting in Budapest took place between 27 September and 1 October 2006.

On the international lobby seminar Making a Change by Talking on September 27, experienced NGOs talked about tools, techniques and rules that they hold as key to the success of an NGO lobby campaign. During the working group session the participants could utilise at once what they heard, as they had a chance to outline a lobby campaign for real life situations: for a stronger biodiversity protocol to the Carpathian Convention, for the CAP review in 2008, and for the 13th meeting of the COP of CITES.

The traditional cultural evening continued late into the night with national drinks and national food shared by the CEEWEB members and with atmosphere heightened by national music. The work continued next morning, when the CEEWEB working groups, the implementation task forces within the Network, had their meetings. The outcome of these meetings was fed into the discussions on the CEEWEB work programme for 2007 on Friday. The elaboration and approval of the work programme was probably the most demanding task for the assembly, which continued well into the evening under the efficient and strict guidance of the Vice Chair of CEEWEB, Michael Meyer from Ecological Tourism in Europe. The results were worth the efforts – CEEWEB has a challenging and comprehensive work programme for this year developed by the members of the network.

The network will function better

The official part of the CEEWEB Annual Meeting on September 30 brought some important decisions about the functioning of the network. In the spirit of the 21st century the possibility of “virtual Annual Meetings” was introduced, when the members can vote about the proposals in an electronic way without the convocation of costly and time consuming meetings. However, this does not substitute the regular Annual Meeting, which still has to be convened once a year.

The structure of the Board was transformed due to the changed legal environment in Hungary based on which foreign citizens can not be members of the leading body of the organisation. According to the new structure the three member Board is supported by an Advisory Committee (AC), which consists of three members and the Chairs of the Working Groups. The Board and the AC shall have meetings together and the AC shall comment all proposals for decision by the Board. The new provisions of the Articles of Association are still to be endorsed by the Hungarian court. Anna Iványi from Nimfea and László Stoll from Holocén were elected as the Members of the Board. Iván Gyulai remained the President of the Board. They will be supported with advice and recommendations by the Advisory Committee: Michael Meyer from Ecological Tourism in Europe, Andrzej Kepel from Salamandra and Petra Djuric from Green Action, Croatia, as well as the Chairs of the four CEEWEB working groups.

Additionally, the Annual Meeting decided that work should be started on a long-term CEEWEB strategy that lays solid foundations for future activities of the network.

Entertainment again!

After the long days of the meeting, a farewell party gave a real opportunity for relaxing. Possibly many participants will remember the hilarious games that they played for their own and others’ great entertainment.

The venturesome participants went for an excursion in the Buda Hills on Sunday, October 1, where not only the natural environment and the weather were nice, but the excursion ended with a typical Hungarian lunch (“lecsó”) prepared in a kettle on an open fire. The excursion was guided by the employees of the Duna-Ipoly National Park.

For more information check <www.ceeweb.org/aboutCEEWEB/annualmeetings>.
The Third CEEWEB Academy took place on 24-29 August 2006 in Kiten, Bulgaria. The theme of the event was Strengthening Civil Participation in the Implementation of EU Nature Conservation Directives through the Experiences Gained by the 10 new Member States.

Proper management of protected areas and Natura 2000 sites may assure better preservation of natural values, as well as acceptance by the local population, and income to nearby communities. As in most countries of the region the site designation is nearly over, more attention is given now to the management of the sites. The 2006 CEEWEB Academy was organised to enhance the understanding on the topic and facilitate professional cooperation among the members.

The Academy dealt with two priority topics: management of protected areas, and Natura 2000. Under the first topic the possibilities of management planning, tourism as a management tool and sustainable land management were discussed. Under the second topic, Natura 2000, the participants discussed their experiences in the creation of the Natura 2000 network, and such issues as Natura 2000 management, financing and impact assessment. Romanian, Bulgarian and Croatian participants presented the state of play in the accession countries and the preparation for the introduction of the Natura 2000 network.

Besides external experts most of the lecturers were themselves members of the Natura 2000 Working Group and other working groups of CEEWEB. The lectures and the participants’ experiences inspired a discussion on the best possible implementation of Natura 2000, focusing on NGO involvement. Several new ideas emerged and possible ways for better cooperation were discussed. This provided a basis for the CEEWEB work programme for 2007.

The event took place in an incredibly picturesque place at the Black Sea coast. The seminars were completed with excellent field trips in the surrounding national parks and nature reserves where the participants could admire some of Bulgaria’s unspoilt nature spots. After long seminar days and discussions in the evenings the team recreated swimming in the Black Sea or chilled out in one of the numerous pubs of the town.

The training was organised by the Green Balkans from Bulgaria and supported by the Soros Foundation.

For more information check <www.ceeweb.org/members/capacity/academy_III_N2>.

Anton Gazenbeek, CEEWEB supporting member

Having participated in the CEEWEB Academy on Management of Protected Areas and Natura 2000 as a guest, I am very much impressed by its networking between conservation bodies from the new EU Member States, the accession countries and the candidate and potential candidate countries in South Eastern Europe. The exchange of experience and information, discussion on common strategies and reflection on strategic and theoretical issues in conservation and land use, which CEEWEB was promoting at the Academy, are excellent initiatives.

From my base in Belgium and using my professional experience of 13 years’ work on Natura 2000 and the LIFE–Nature instrument, I shall support the CEEWEB work by providing information and contacts from within EU 15 wherever that may be useful, and facilitating communication with the EU Institutions whenever desired.
**Association for Nature, Environment and Sustainable Development SUNCE (Croatia)**

“We strongly believe that our organization can contribute to the work of the CEEWEB Network, as well as the participation in the network can improve efficiency of SUNCE in achieving of our goals.”

The Association SUNCE was founded in 1998 in Split, Croatia. Today it is the largest environmental association in the Dalmatia region. Main goals of the association are the conservation of nature and protection of the environment as basic society values and the management of natural resources through the implementation of sustainable development.

Through partnerships with other organizations and institutions, SUNCE is active locally, nationally and internationally. SUNCE has participated in the work of the Green Forum (GF), a network of environmental organizations in Croatia, as a member of the coordinating team. Since February 2006 SUNCE has taken the Secretariat of the GF. As a part of the GF, SUNCE has implemented the campaign for the protection of the Adriatic Sea against oil transport.

SUNCE has been working on the Green Phone project since 1999 as a part of the Green Phone Network of the Republic of Croatia. The aim of this project is to involve the public in solving local environmental problems simply by reporting environmental problems via telephone.

SUNCE has been working on the Green Phone project since 1999 as a part of the Green Phone Network of the Republic of Croatia. The aim of this project is to involve the public in solving local environmental problems simply by reporting environmental problems via telephone.

The Waste programme of SUNCE includes different projects, educational and other activities related to the promotion of sustainable waste management.

The main goal of SUNCE’s Protection and Conservation of Nature programme is the preservation of biological diversity of Dalmatia through sustainable use of its natural resources. Through lobbying and advocacy the organisation tries to achieve better nature conservation on the local as well as on the national level. Some of the projects are related to collecting and processing data on sea and land biodiversity.

Through its Knowledge Centre programme SUNCE conducts education of its own members as well as education of the public through the workshops, lectures and public forums, photo exhibitions, projections, direct actions, celebration of the Earth Day, Biodiversity Day, Car Free Day, etc.

Since SUNCE has been actively involved in Natura 2000 implementation in Croatia, the organisation plans to participate in the Natura 2000 working group activities.

**Contact:**

Association for Nature, Environment and Sustainable Development SUNCE

Obala hrvatskog narodnog preporoda 7
21 000 Split
Croatia

Tel/fax: +385 21 360 779
E-mail: info@sunce-st.org

www.sunce-st.org

---

**HOLOCÉN Nature Protection Organisation (Hungary)**

“HOLOCEN is one of the hundreds of environmental NGOs active in the region. We all see that the time of Don Quijotes’ has ended and it is advantageous to live in a family, and find our roles in that family. We believe that the concentrated power that CEEWEB has will help us to achieve our goals.”

Holocene (HOLOCEN in Hungarian) is the name given to the last 12,000 years of the Earth’s history. The period has started after the last major glacial epoch or “ice age”. During this geological period the face of the Earth has greatly changed. It is also the age when humans began oversusing the planet and destroying it by inducing irreversible processes. The need to save the remaining values is urgent; therefore nature conservation and environmental protection became one of the most important issues of the last decades.

In the nature conservation field the organisation is focusing on such actions as the initiation of procedures for declaring areas protected and their rehabilitation programs, preparation of publications of landscape, natural and cultural values of micro-regions, and compilation of the cadastre of Special Landscape Values.

The organisation constructs nature trails and publishes the related tour guides as it perceives sustainable tourism to be a good opportunity for sustainable development in the disadvantaged, peripheral northern border-line area of Hungary where HOLOCEN is working. HOLOCEN plans to be active in the Sustainable Tourism Working Group of CEEWEB.

In the field of environmental protection rural development activities on the micro-region level in Hungary, environmental education and public awareness rising are among the activities of HOLOCEN. It runs a program to determine the ways of rehabilitation of disadvantaged, mining-affected areas and takes part in the International River Coalition program by widening public participation in the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

HOLOCEN participates in regional, national and international processes, and pursues lobbying actions. For example, the organisation facilitates public access to environmental information in the framework of the Aarhus Convention, and represents the civil society and environmental NGOs in a number of institutions. On the international level HOLOCEN takes part in the Public Participation Expert Group of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube.

The association is a funding member of the National Society of Conservationists (Friends of the Earth Hungary) and the Galyaság Village Association, and is a full member of the Danube Environmental Forum.

**Contact:**

Holocén Természetvédelmi Egyesület
H-3525 Miskolc, Kossuth u. 13
Tel: +36 46 508 944
Fax: +36 46 505 768
E-mail: holocen@holocen.hu
www.holocen.hu
EU Investments: Nature Loses, Who Wins?

A critical assessment of the development plans of CEE countries for the use of EU money reveals inconsistency of the documents with the EU environmental protection objectives and significant threats to nature and biodiversity.

The CEEWEB Natura 2000 Working Group scrutinized the National Strategic Reference Frameworks and other planning documents (Operational Programs, Rural Development Plans and Regional Operational Programs) of seven CEE countries with regard to biodiversity and Natura 2000. Special focus was given to the integration of EU conservation objectives.

The contributors involved in the project were provided with a strategic assessment methodology, which builds upon a questionnaire with different topics (situation analysis, nature conservation, agriculture, forestry, etc.). Scoring enabled the comparability among the different countries and written comments provided explanation for the scores. In addition, the evaluators highlighted the main threats to biodiversity and Natura 2000 in their country.

No lessons learned

Though the assessments showed that Natura 2000 has high priority in the conservation policy of the new member countries and accession countries, it also became clear that biodiversity objectives do not have a high priority in national development planning in general, and conservation is not integrated into the planning of other sectors.

The assessment concludes that conservation and environmental protection is still not considered as a horizontal issue, but rather as a separate objective. However, it is beyond question that conservation cannot be successful with this approach. Quite sadly, this conclusion is very similar to the message of the comparable CEEWEB report from 2003, which covered the respective documents for the 2004-2006 period in the same region.

Inconsistency with the EU objectives

Despite the European Council adopted in 2001 the target to halt biodiversity loss by 2010, which became part of the 6th Environmental Action Programme and the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, this target has not been integrated into the National Development Plans. It is considered and mentioned in only one of the assessed plans. In some countries the Water Framework Directive objectives are clearly not integrated into development planning either. In addition, when considering fisheries and marine areas, the plans do not deal with marine Natura 2000.

This on one hand proves the overshadowing of nature conservation by economic interests, and on the other hand highlights how difficult it is for national development planners to oversee and meet the vast body of EU policy and legislation.

Pressure from various sectors continues to be a be major threat

Sectoral integration remains a lip service in the documents, as real integration is missing from the more detailed, operational parts of plans. Ecological factors are hardly included in the investment evaluation and selection criteria.

Despite the threats that exist for the Natura 2000 areas themselves, the assessments clearly show the huge threat for Natura 2000 species and habitats outside the network. Because these areas are not protected by law, intensification of economic activities, such as large-scale tourism development projects in areas with high biodiversity values, biomass production in large monocultural plantations, development of road infrastructure and the use of environmentally harmful hydrological methods for flood prevention will probably lead to the decrease of biodiversity in these areas. Preventing the above threats from happening would require high environmental awareness among public and private partners, effective stakeholder involvement, as well as efficient and strong institutional system in these countries. Regrettably however, these problems are not tackled sufficiently in the documents.

The CEEWEB sent the report to the responsible desk officers at the European Commission and takes care that the recommendations of the assessment are followed up.

The report is available for download from <www.ceeweb.org/workinggroups/natura2000/activities>.
Which is of course true. We simply cannot live without nature. We cannot eat, cannot drink, cannot feel safe from natural hazards like floods or storms, cannot enjoy life, we would feel too cold or too hot, we would get sick without a heal, so all in all, we would feel terribly bad (as long as we could still survive) if nature does not give us all it is giving to us now as a “present” for free.

**Presents of nature**

Basically this is contained in the concept of ecosystem services. They are defined as those functions of ecosystems that directly or indirectly support human welfare.

Of course we, conservationists, can keep in mind that these “presents” of nature are not only provided to us, but all life on earth benefit from them. The supporting and regulating services that regulate our climate, purify the waters, pollinate plants, cycle and reuse nutrients and form and retain soil are just as important for other species. The diversity of species and landscapes, which is important for provisioning services like getting mushroom or herbs from the forests, or for cultural services, like an aesthetic landscape benefiting recreation support other species, too. Clearly conserving the ecological processes necessary for the integrity of ecosystems which ultimately provide ecosystem services are not only important for humans, but for the whole biosphere.

Taking much more away from nature (i.e. overusing some services like cutting down forests for more timber, doing intensive agriculture for more food) will have its consequences, and other services will decline. In our current society these service declines (like decline of pollination, changing climate regulation, destroyed landscape, reduced genetic diversity of crops and reduced habitat function) are, however, not adequately recognised, acknowledged and thus taken into account in making decisions.

**Wellbeing of people is often at stake**

In many cases people are not even aware of the trade-off relationships which will ultimately impact their own welfare in a much more complex way than they would think, through the decline of some other “presents” of nature. Building a highway for instance will not only enable them to reach a place in a shorter time on the new highway, but may also lead to the loss of an excursion destination, impair the water purification capacity of a reduced wetland, fragment and threaten pollinator populations and impact the production of orchards, increase the disturbance of the locals through the changed micro-climate, noise, view, etc.). So the message is that not only nature is at stake, but also human wellbeing.

The ecosystem services concept has also penetrated virtually all EU biodiversity policy documents by now. The Communication of the European Commission (May 2006) about the 2010 target to halt biodiversity loss is entitled *Halting the Loss of Biodiversity by 2010 and Beyond - Sustaining ecosystem services for human well-being*. The annexed EU Action Plan to 2010 and Beyond sets the objectives to conserve and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services in the wider EU countryside and marine environment (e.g. Objectives 2 and 3). In action B2.1.2 it requires to „strengthen understanding and communication of the values of natural capital and of ecosystem services, and the taking into account of these values in the policy framework, expand incentives for people to safeguard biodiversity“.

**Ecosystem services of Natura 2000 and protected areas**

Natura 2000 and protected areas benefit society through the provision of a wide range of ecosystem services. While greatly transformed landscapes and ecosystems (like monocultural fields) are changed by humans with the aim to provide the highest possible amount of one particular service (like food in the form of corn), these ecosystems are not able to give us other benefits any more. Natura 2000 and protected areas thus contribute to human wellbeing in more diverse forms that should be taken into account by decision makers and land users.

The *Diversity* is a bi-annual newsletter of the Central and East European Working Group for the Enhancement of Biodiversity (CEEWEB).

Available online at www.ceeweb.org/publications/newsletters

Owner/Publisher: András Krolopp, General Secretary, CEEWEB Policy Office

Editing and layout: Kristina Vilimaite, CEEWEB, design concept by Angela Nyíri

Cover photo by Juha Blomberg, back cover photos by János Röfler and Jay Simons.

The publication of the newsletter is supported by the European Commission.

The views and opinions expressed in the Diversity do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the CEEWEB. The donors are not liable for any use of the information contained herein.
CEEWEB is an international network of non-governmental organizations in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The mission of the network is the conservation of the biodiversity through the promotion of sustainable development.

More than 70 organisations from 17 countries are members of CEEWEB. Four working groups are the main driving forces of the network.

The Rural Development Working Group promotes the integration of conservation principles into agriculture and strives to improve the quality of life in the countryside.

The CITES Working Group is devoted to the implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora in CEE.

The Natura 2000 Working Group helps the Natura 2000 network to be established and to function properly in CEE countries.

The Sustainable Tourism Working Group supports the members of the network in making tourism in CEE countries sustainable through joint activities, such as information exchange, promoting good practices, training and education, policy-making, pilot projects and lobbying.