



NEWSLETTER

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Kavkazski Nature Reserve. © A. Perevozov

CAUCASUS ECOREGION NEWSLETTER

News from the Caucasus - Issue 2, 2012

Undiscovered “Serengeti” in the South Caucasus

Ajinour steppe is located on the left bank of Mingechaur water reservoir, between Akhar-Bakhar and Dashuz ridges – foothills of the Greater Caucasus, in the heart of arid landscapes of South Caucasus. It is typical semi-desert in combination with steppes, dry hills with heavily “cross-stitched” relief.

The rich biodiversity of Ajinour Steppe and surrounding arid landscapes stimulated Azerbaijan government to establish Protected Areas - an open museum of herpetofauna. Surrounding juniper and pistachio forests and cliffs are nesting sites for most threatened bird species such as Griffon vultures (*Gyps fulvus*), Snake eagles (*Circaetus gallicus*), Peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) etc. In the western part of Ajinour steppe bordering Alazani River in flood-plain forests other endangered species - Imperial eagles (*Aquila heliaca*) and Black stocks (*Ciconia nigra*) are nesting on high trees.

This small span of land area harbors about 15 species of Carnivores: Grey wolf, Golden jackal, Red fox, Weasel, Marbled Polecat, Stone marten, Common otter, Badger, Brown bear, Stripped hyena, Raccoon, Wildcat, Jungle cat, Lynx, Caucasian (Persian) Leopard, etc. Such concentration of different competing species could be found nowhere else in the Caucasus.

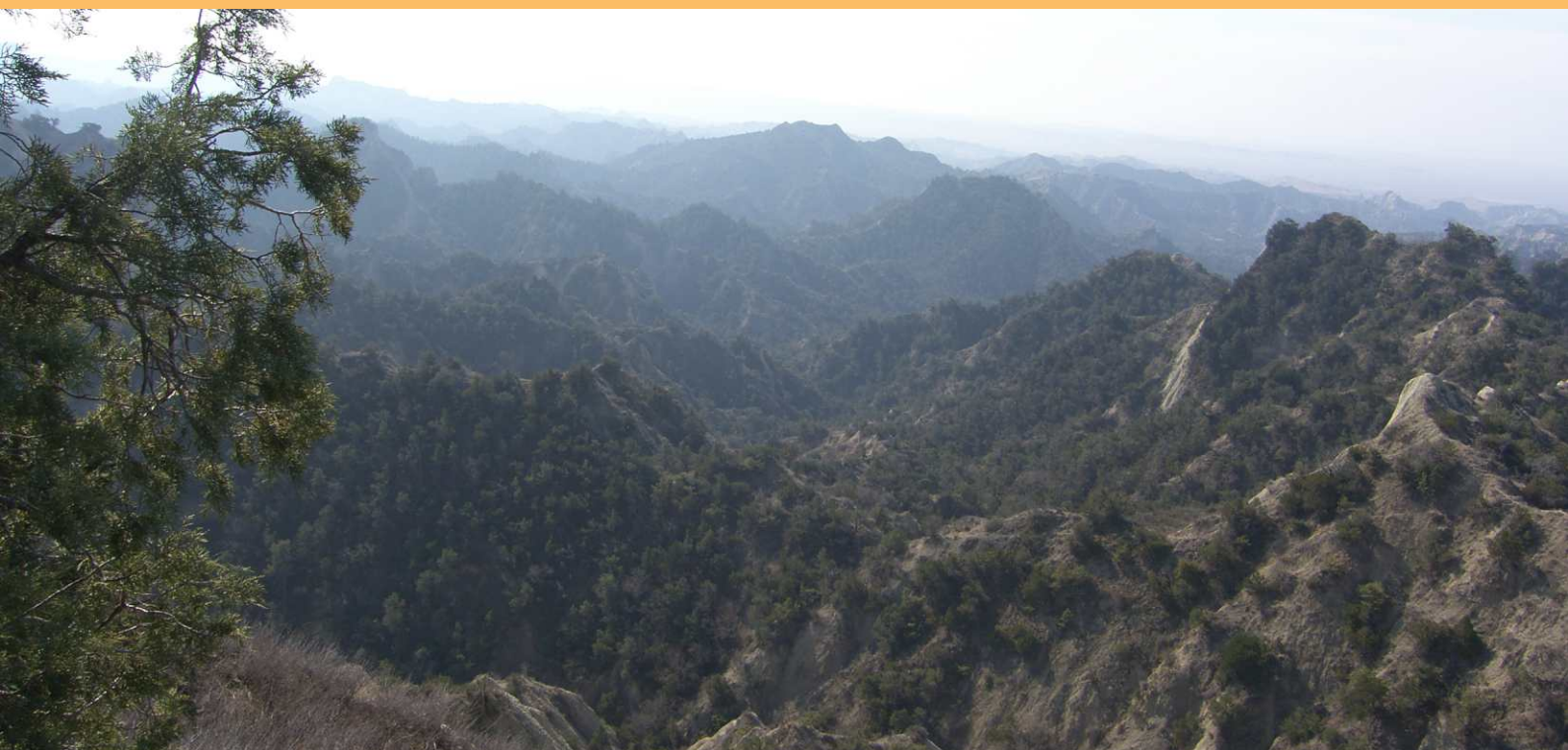
Recently the government of Azerbaijan started reintroduction of Goitered gazelles (*Gazella subgutturosa*) to their historical range. Ajinour steppe, according to the research of scientists, is the most favorable site for reintroduction of these charismatic animals, which disappeared in this area about 50 years ago. Last year WWF supported the government of Azerbaijan in starting the reintroduction process and 24 animals from Shirvan National Park have been translocated to Ajinour steppe.



Aditiopnally, WWF supported local PAs in development of infrastructure - two ranger stations have been constructed on the crossroads to prevent poaching. During 2012 WWF will initiate new large project for reintroduction of large herds of gazelles to Ajinour steppe and Vashlovani National Park in Georgia.

We can now imagine and dream about arid landscapes of South Caucasus full of gazelles as it was in the first half of XX century. Together with gazelles, carnivore species (leopard, hyena, etc.) also will come back to the area. I believe that in the nearest future we do not have to go to Africa's savannas to enjoy the fascinating scenes of carnivore-prey relations. All these we shall be able to see in our undiscovered “Serengeti”.

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Russia welcomes new arrivals from Iran and Turkmenistan

In February the WWF Russia and the Ministry of Natural Resources of Russian Federation launched a live video from the Centre for Breeding and Rehabilitation of the persian leopard.

Four leopards living in the open-air cages of the Sochi National Park, came to Russia from Iran and Turkmenistan. Their descendants will give birth to a new population of leopards in the North Caucasus. Follow the link www.leopard.ru to view videos and photos about the life of leopards both live and archives.

Specialized Centre for Breeding and Rehabilitation of large predators is the first in Russia. The release of the leopards' born kittens will take several years: young animals should learn how to live independently in the wild.

WWF is now looking for new partners and resources for both the delivery of new animals to increase the breeding stock in the Centre, and for creation of a large adaptative open-air cage in the Caucasus Nature Reserve. The cage will be populated with deer and wild boars to simplify the successful adaptation process for leopards to natural conditions of the Caucasus.

New National Park in Daghestan



© WWF Russia

On May, 14th the Government of the Republic of Dagestan signed the direction on creating The Natural Park Itsari in Dahadaevskiy region of the republic. Park was created through the combined efforts of the local administration, Ministry of Natural Resources of Dagestan, WWF Russia and the scientific community. Financing of the works was carried out within the project MAVA "2012 Protected Areas Project - Caucasus Ecoregion".

Natural Park "Itsari" now provides protection to 227 species of higher plants, including five species listed in Red Data Book of Russia and Dagestan, 163 species of vertebrate animals, of which 16 species listed in Red Data Book of Russia and Dagestan, including the Caucasian black grouse, bearded vulture, griffon vulture, golden eagle, peregrine falcon. The Persian leopard was noticed in the Park territory. The park includes a unique natural complex as well as cultural-historical monuments. One of the most famous attractions in Itsari is a defensive tower of the XIV century, the largest surviving in the North Caucasus.

New National Park in Georgia

IWWF assisted relevant GOs of Georgia for establishment of Machakhela National Park since 2007 with support of the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) and MAVA Foundation: biological and socioeconomic assessments and planning exercise has been completed with involvement of local population, draft law has been prepared and recently ratified by the Parliament of Georgia.

The new National Park is part of the West Lesser Caucasus Corridor and covers about 9,000 ha area, which accommodates 477 species belonging to 284 genera and 100 families in the Machakhela PA. The Endemism ratio in this area is 27 species (5,7 %), Caucasian-6, Georgian -3, Colchic -13, Ajarian-1, Adjara-Lazetian-4. Five species are listed in the IUCN Red List, nine species - in the Red List of Georgia; eight species are recommended for the "Red List" of Caucasus.

According to assessments fauna is represented by 200 species on the natural-landscape territory. 29 species are included in the Red List of Georgia, 11 species are in the International IUCN Red List as globally threatened; *Lynx* and chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*) are included in the Red List of Georgia with the highest status (CR); Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), chamois, White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), Clarks' Lizard (*Darevskia clarkorum*), Caucasian viper (*Vipera kaznakovi*), Black Sea trout (*Salmo trutta labrax*), and some species of insects have also high (EN) statuses, others - statuses of vulnerable species.

Currently, main focus now is on precise demarcation of National Park's border and smaller-scale projects supporting local population: e.g. development of bee-keeping activities (the region is known with local Caucasian subspecies of bee), arranging small family hotels and alternative energy sources, etc.

In the nearest future the development of transboundary cooperation with Jamili National Park in Turkey, which locates in upper stream of Machakhela river, establishing joint visitor, capacity building and monitoring programs will guarantee better protection on landscape level, more income for local population and create the first precedent of joint management of transboundary protected area in the Caucasus.



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Küre Mountains: Turkey's first PAN Park

Küre Mountains, identified by WWF as a forest hot spot in Turkey, has become the first PAN Park of the country as a result of efforts invested in effective protected area management and nature-based tourism since the establishment of the Küre Mountains National Park in "PAN Parks, the European wilderness protection organisation, worked over several years with UNDP and WWF-Turkey to enhance the management practice of Küre Mountains National Park. Turkey has several key biodiversity areas, but Küre Mountains has its special position within the network of protected areas. It is a place where the protection of wilderness for future generations is combined with the wish to raise awareness about the natural values and beauties. This is done through careful visitor management. The PAN Parks Certificate confirms that Küre Mountains National Park is not only part of the few remaining pieces of Europe's wilderness, but its management has reached a high level of excellence." Zoltan Kun, Executive Director of the PAN Parks Foundation

"The inclusion of Küre Mountains National Park in the PAN Parks network is a significant achievement in the history of nature conservation in Turkey. This wouldn't have been possible without the collaboration of Park management throughout the process and the enthusiasm and commitment of local stakeholders towards PAN Parks goals. The presence of wilderness areas like Küre Mountains is not only important for the protection of biodiversity but also for humanity by increasing the resilience of ecosystems to climate change. The PAN Parks status will link Küre Mountains National Park to Europe through a network of well managed protected areas". Dr. Sedat Kalem, Conservation Director, WWF-Turkey

PAN Parks: www.panparks.org Küre Mountains National Park: www.kdmp.gov.tr skalem@wwf.org.tr

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Mountain sports supplier VAUDE supports WWF Caucasus Ecoregion Program



Since 2011 the German mountain sports supplier VAUDE supports WWF Germany's nature conservation program.

In February this year a presentation was given to VAUDE about the wide portfolio of Caucasus Ecoregion conservation program. Thanks to VAUDE's decision, this year the contribution will also reach the work of WWF in the Caucasus Ecoregion. Different conservation projects, such as Caucasus Leopard Conservation Project, Forest Restoration and Biodiversity Protection Project funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ) and WWF in the transboundary area of Azerbaijan and Georgia, will benefit from this support.

On the ground activities such as harmonized regional leopard monitoring, the rehabilitation of 2,000 ha disturbed floodplain forests and the reintroduction of the Goitered Gazelle in a transboundary protected area will be co-financed.

Additionally VAUDE donated field equipment, such as tents, sleeping bags and backpacks to the field staff of WWF and its partners in Protected Areas of the Southern Caucasus.



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Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

www.panda.org/caucasus

Regional projects in Turkish and Russian parts of the Caucasus are coordinated and implemented accordingly by WWF-Turkey and WWF-Russia in close cooperation with WWF Caucasus PO under one vision of Ecoregion Conservation Plan.

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