



NEWSLETTER

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Planned Pshav-Khevsureti Protected Areas

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# CAUCASUS ECOREGION NEWSLETTER

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## Young female leopard spotted in Azerbaijan

Leopard is the flagship species of the Caucasus Ecoregion and at the same time globally priority species for WWF. Over the past 10 years, WWF in partnership with IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group, together with National Governments, NGOs and experts from the region, has undertaken considerable efforts to assess the status of the Caucasian (Persian) Leopard and develop approaches for its conservation. During initial phase of the project implementation important positive results on the ground were achieved. Recently, National Action Plans for Leopard conservation were adopted by local governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia based on Regional Strategy developed earlier, elevating leopard protection to the national priority level.

This big cat, being one of the rarest species of the region, has been recently spotted by WWF's camera traps in the Zangezur National Park in Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan. Monitoring of this species is part of the National Action Plan for Leopard Conservation, implemented by WWF in cooperation with the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan. WWF monitoring process (especially camera-trapping of the leopard and hundreds of its prey and competitive species) was made possible through the support and active involvement of scientists from the Institute of Bioresources of Nakhchivan Branch of National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan under the supervision of professor Tariel Talibov.

For many years this beautiful animal has not been seen in the area, making this fact a local sensation. The spotted young female seems to be bound to this region, leaving strong hopes that, with a bit of luck, the population of the Leopard will gradually re-populate Caucasus "governing" the place, as it was many years ago.

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## Transboundary protected areas under focus

Recently WWF Caucasus, with financial support from German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and WWF Germany, started a new project to increase biodiversity in priority transboundary protected area in the Iori Mingeaur Region between Georgia and Azerbaijan. The project, spanning from 2012 to 2015, aims at improving ecosystem biodiversity through floodplain forest rehabilitation, improved Protected Area- and rangeland-management and reintroduction of the locally extinct Goitered Gazelle (*Gazella subgutturosa*).

The Protected Areas to be effectively protected in this Priority Conservation Area include: In Georgia - (i) Chachuna Sanctuary; (ii) Vashlovani Paa. In Azerbaijan - (iii) Akhar-Bakhar Nature Reserve; (iv) Gakh Sanctuary/ Ajinour Steppe; (v) Korchay Reserve.

Around 2,000 ha of the degraded floodplain forest will be transformed into close-to-nature condition; the number of individuals of Goitered gazelle will reach the minimum starting size of 100 for the establishment of a viable population. The improvement of local socio-economic situation will be also considered under this initiative.

The planned objectives will be fulfilled through the following measures:

- a) Rehabilitation of the floodplain forest in Chachuna Sanctuary through planting, seedling, natural regeneration, fencing (to protect from grazing by domestic animals, mainly sheep) and periodic artificial flooding from the local dam;
- b) Improved infrastructure and monitoring, initiation of the establishment of a new Protected Area (the Gakh-Turyanchay Corridor Reserve in Azerbaijan) and intensified transboundary cooperation to enhance existing PA network;
- c) Sustainable pasture management will be achieved through improved policies and legislation, development of management plans and their implementation on a pilot basis;
- d) The gazelles will be released directly into the wild in Azerbaijan and Georgia.

We hope this project will become an example of successful transboundary work between neighboring countries and stimulate development of the same approach in other transboundary areas in the Caucasus.

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## Population of the European bison in the Caucasus increased

Ten bison arrived to Tseysky nature sanctuary in North Ossetia, and eight bison were brought to the Teberdinsky reserve in the Karachay-Cherkessia. The journey of the bison to the Caucasus became possible thanks to the cooperation between the Government of North Ossetia – Alania, WWF and OJSC “Northern Caucasus Resorts”. In October, 2012 eight bison arrived in four wooden cages to the Teberdinsky reserve having travelled more than 1500 kilometers from the Oksky reserve in the Ryazan region. Despite the long way, bison quickly left the cages, ran deep into the enclosure and began to eat the succulent Caucasus grass. The veterinary and sanitary standards required that during one month bison stayed in the enclosure. In November, they were released into the wild nature to graze in the Caucasus Mountains. One female bison was provided with a satellite collar so that WWF can track the herd location. Before the arrival of these animals, only 13 bison inhabited the Teberdinsky reserve. The group is depressed and is in need of gene refreshments because new animals haven't been brought to the sanctuary for over 40 years.

Also in October, ten bison arrived to Tseysky nature sanctuary in North Ossetia from Prioksko-Terrasny nature reserve near Moscow. There are already more than 40 bison in the sanctuary, but for the long-term bison conservation it is necessary to refresh the gene pool of this group and include new animals in the reproduction process.

The bison is now listed in the Red Book of Russia as a species threatened with extinction. Since 1996, WWF-Russia with support from WWF-Germany has been implementing a program to create a population of wild bison in the forests of the European Russia. With the help of this program, by 2008, the number of bison in Orlov, Bryansk, Kaluga and Vladimir regions of Russia exceeded 150. This size is enough for the population to reproduce itself independently in the wild. After that, in 2009, WWF started to restore the European bison populations in the Caucasus mountains in the southwest of Russia.

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## Lake Arpi National Park gets new infrastructure

In October 2012 the Ministry of Nature Protection of the Republic of Armenia and WWF-Armenia organized an opening ceremony of the main infrastructure of the newly established Lake Arpi National Park.

The ceremony started in newly constructed visitor center building of Lake Arpi NP located in Ghazanchi Community, Shirak Province. The center is also a branch of State Museum of Nature of the Republic of Armenia. "Starting from historical monuments, natural monuments to biodiversity, everything associated with Shirak Province that could be interesting to visitors is available here" says Ruzanna Zubaburyan, the deputy director of the State Museum of Nature.

The event continued in the newly constructed headquarters of the national park, a guesthouse, garages and a guardhouse located in Berdashen community. At the end of the ceremony the tree-planting was organized in the area of the headquarters building.

Lake Arpi national park was established within the project "Establishment of protected areas in the Armenia's Javakhq (Ashotsk) region", implemented by the Ministry of Nature Protection of Armenia and WWF and financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

The program aims to conserve Armenia's Shirak Plateau biodiversity and to promote sustainable community development in Shirak Province through the establishment of Lake Arpi NP and the implementation of the community development programs in support zone. In the framework of this project "Lake Arpi Beekeepers Association" has been established to promote beekeeping in this area. There have been established community development and educational centers in Sizavet, Garnarich and Berdashen communities and a Tourism Center in Mets Sepsar.

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## Establishment of protected areas in Pshav-Khevsureti region

WWF recently started project on enhancing the landscape and ecological integrity of the Greater Caucasus Corridor through establishment of Pshav-Khevsureti Protected Area to be completed by the end of 2013. The project is being implemented with financial support of Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund (CEPF - a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan, the MacArthur Foundation and the World Bank) and in cooperation with Agency of Protected Areas of the Ministry of Environment of Georgia.

The project is focused on Pshav-Khevsureti planning territory with the approximate area of 117,000 ha. The target area is rich in biodiversity with around 1200 species of flora and over 170 species of fauna. It is a home for many globally and nationally threatened flora and fauna species listed in the National and Global Red Lists. Moreover, flora of this mountainous area is characterized with high rate of various level of endemism - local, national and regional. From 1200 plant species 260 (about 22%) represent regional, national or local endemic species.

Furthermore, seven endemic genera are found within the planning Pshav-Khevsureti area out of existing 17 endemic genera of the Caucasus Flora. Apart from biodiversity, this region is distinguished by unique ethnographical history going back to ancient times.

Main aim of the project is to fill an existing spatial gap between Tusheti and Kazbegi national parks and significantly contribute to enhancing the landscape and ecological integrity within the East Greater Caucasus large conservation landscape covering almost half of the Greater Caucasus Corridor.



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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](http://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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