

# Newsletter

*Hot in this issue: Black Sea Sturgeon*

*October-December 2008*

Quarterly Newsletter for WWF Caucasus and CEPF – jointly supporting  
biodiversity conservation in the Caucasus

## Highlighted in issue:

- Conservation Status of Georgian Sturgeon Species
- 7<sup>th</sup> CBC Regional Meeting
- Economics of Beekeeping in Azerbaijan
- Establishing GIS-based Habitat Modeling for *Capra* and *Argali* species
- Developing a Community-based Ecotourism Industry in Azerbaijan



*View to Mountain Gochalo in Lagodekhi reserve - Georgia. Photo © Sh. Eriashvili.*

## Conservation Status of Endangered Georgian Sturgeon Species



*Black Sea sturgeon.. Photo by Black Sea Eco Academy.*

One of the essential goals of CEPF in the Caucasus is to strengthen existing mechanisms that will ensure the conservation and sustainability of the diverse biodiversity of environmental hotspots. Special emphasis is placed on guaranteeing the integrity of animal, plant, and fish species – and that the overall sustainability of environmental corridors and critical ecosystems be preserved.

The Black Sea Eco Academy has supported a variety of

initiatives in the implementation of project that will ensure the survival of sturgeon in Georgia. One subspecies of *Acipenseridae* family has suffered from acute anthropogenic degradation in recent decades; this has been particularly recognized in the Black Sea. Stocks have dropped significantly and many species are now included in the Redbook in a number of littoral countries. The Georgian Black Sea coast is considered by experts as an important naturally occurring habitat for the *Acipenseridae* (sturgeon) species, which includes the following: Beluga, Russian Sturgeon, Ship Sturgeon, Star Sturgeon and the Atlantic Sturgeon. However, as a result in the dramatic decline in the population of the *Acipenseridae* species, stocks are under threat of extinction in their naturally occurring habitat. Other littoral states have noted this in the listing in the Redbook for several species but Georgia has only included one species in its Redbook. It is clear that no effective measures are being taken toward the recovery of stocks. The project is now focused on conducting an inventory in order to fully understand the population status of *Acipenseridae* species at critical sites so to further refine their conservation status as part of the effort to establish a National Conservation Action Plan. Several organizations are collaborating in the project.

The project's main outcomes include but are not limited to:

- Training of local community representatives and volunteers for involvement in the project implementation;
- Collecting essential data on species of sturgeon and their habitats and creating a GIS database;
- Assessing the impact of poaching on the sturgeon species at risk and sharing the research findings and recommendations to responsible governmental bodies;
- Capacity building with governmental representatives in strengthening monitoring activities and halting overfishing and poaching of the *Acipenseridae* species;
- Publication of appropriate material to raise public awareness regarding the importance and need to conserve a number of highly-endangered sturgeon species;
- Compose a National Conservation Action Plan for endangered sturgeon species and its habitat.



*Government representatives trained in Batumi, City in West Georgia. Photo Courtesy of Black Sea Eco*

## 7<sup>th</sup> CBC Regional Meeting

The 7<sup>th</sup> CBC meeting was held during February 2008 in Tbilisi, Georgia. Members of the council - representatives of Government and NGO community of Caucasus hotspot countries and invited representatives from the scientific community, gathered once again to work on strengthening transboundary cooperation and coordination in the field of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in the Caucasus, also to help build regional partnerships among representatives of governmental, nongovernmental and scientific sectors. CBC is financially supported by CEPF as it is very important for the development of regional and transboundary cooperation.

Moreover, CBC plays a significant role in addressing environmental problems in the Ecoregion. In addition to usual activities the CBC 2006 Annual Report was discussed at this meeting.



*Debating and discussing - a working environment. Photo by WWF.*

## Beekeeping-based Economy in Zakatala Region, Azerbaijan



*Working on beehive. Photo by WWF.*

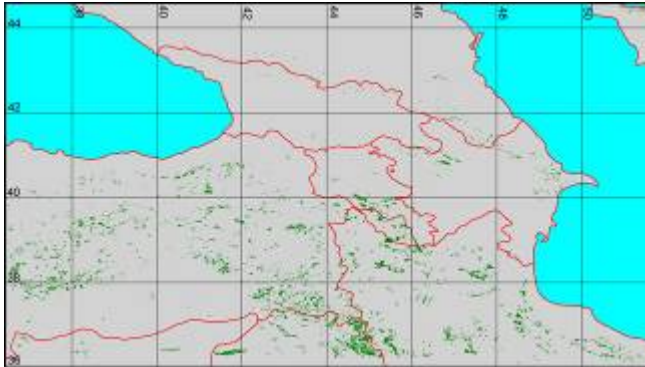
The Centre for Protection of Natural and Cultural Heritage is implementing a regional beekeeping/breeding project. Its purpose is to develop healthy bee hives, which are considered an important and a sustainable natural resource. Honey bees provide much needed income for rural communities. Honey and horticultural crops are the main income for the inhabitants of the Zakatali region. The Caucasian mountain grey bees are hardy and essential for plant pollination, which is necessary for a local fruit and vegetable-based economy.

The project provides healthy breeding colonies and “queen bees” along with hives for local collaborators.

The Caucasian mountain grey bee is the species of primary economic importance for the local honey industry. On-going and timely training is provided to beekeepers, which includes the craft of harvesting queen bees, removing honey, processing it for market, and maintaining healthy and productive bee colonies.

This beekeeping project has many value-added benefits. It provides much needed economic support to local beekeepers and related businesses. Not only those economic activities related to the honey business benefit from the support of the beekeepers since bees are essential in assuring sustainable agriculture production and in maintaining normal harvests of fruits and vegetables, especially in an ever-changing and challenging economic environment.

## GIS-based Habitat Modeling of *Capra* Goats and *Argali* Sheep.



GIS map of East Caucasian Tur distribution. Map by GCCW.

The Georgian Center for the Conservation of Wildlife (GCCW) conducted a project using GIS-based habitat modeling of the *Capra* goat and *Argali* sheep in one of the Caucasus environmentally sensitive regions. The project involved grid-based standardized analyses of the habitat requirements of West Caucasian Tur (*Capra caucasica*), East Caucasian Tur (*Capra cylindricornis*), Bezoar goat (*Capra aegagrus*), and Argali sheep (*Ovis ammon*).

GCCW contacted experts all over the Caucasus to construct a GIS database of

habitat variables regarding the presence of the species, employing species habitat modeling. These models can be applied to the Caucasus to predict the overall occurrence of these species in locations of interest. The models will be used in defining the areas most likely to respond to conservation efforts. Moreover, of the conservations efforts are aimed at providing protection for the species and to further clarify which variables should be included in the “best-fit” habitat models.

## Community Based Ecotourism Development in Azerbaijan



NGO "Agro-Meslehet" implemented a project in the Azeri section of the Hyrcan corridor of the Caucasus Ecoregion, which was dedicated to the development of ecotourism that was participatory with local community and stakeholder involvement. The project supported rural communities in terms of capacity building and developing professional skills to needed to develop ecotourism as an alternative income generation source. The project was designed to ensure the rational and sustainable use of natural resources. Various training sessions were conducted for local communities. Appropriate training materials and printed brochures “Community-based Ecotourism” and “Local sights guide book” were distributed to high school students. These materials explained ecotourism and its connection with environmental protection, biodiversity and the overall impact on sustainable social-economic development.



*Khosrov state reserve, Armenia. © WWF Armenia.*

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*The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund is 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. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation.*

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