

Photocolumn



Larva of Night Butterfly

Triglav National Park can boast a uniquely diverse range of flora and fauna. The number of species is estimated to be as high as 5,500 - ranging from small insects invisible to the naked eye to large carnivores such as bear and lynx. The photo of this bright yellow larva was taken near a forests edge in the village of Čadrg (700 m), in the buffer zone of the park.

Gorazd Kutin
Triglav National Park

PAN Parks Courier

Combining nature conservation and sustainable tourism in Europe's protected areas

Summer 2004



PAN Parks partnerships
Retezat: ready for verification
Swedish-Hungarian co-operation

Wilderness in focus



PAN Parks Courier

PAN Parks Courier is the voice of the PAN (Protected Area Network) Parks Foundation. The Courier aims to inform all interested parties about PAN Parks. The project, as a joint initiative of WWF and Molecaten, is financed by WWF Netherlands.



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De Volkskrant, the Netherlands

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PAN Park höjer Fulu fjällets status

Fulu fjällets nationalpark är en PAN Park. Det är naturområdet i Europa, där naturskydd, turism och lokal tillväxt gynnas och samarbetar. Vid tiden för grundandet i Melland står läskom. Task vare statusen som PAN Park byggs nu en exklusiv stugby i Mörne till nationalparken.

Stugbyn gör möjligheter för omvandling av ett område som varit ett naturreservat i många år. Det är ett område som har varit ett naturreservat i många år. Det är ett område som har varit ett naturreservat i många år. Det är ett område som har varit ett naturreservat i många år.



Folk som kommer till Fulu fjället till... FOTO: Nisse Schmidt

www.wwfchina.org, China

Look for the logos

Below is a sampling of logos that indicate a tourism provider has been eco-certified. Check out the Web sites for details on what each certification covers, and for listings of certified eco-tourism providers within their geographic range.



Blue Flag (global) www.blueflag.org



Green Globe 21 (global) www.greenglobe21.com



Horizons Accreditation Program (Saskatchewan) www.ecotourism.sk.ca



Eco-Certified Sustainable Travel (US) www.sustainabletravelinternational.org



PAN Parks (Europe) www.panparks.org



Nature Canada, Canada



Ecotopia, Greece



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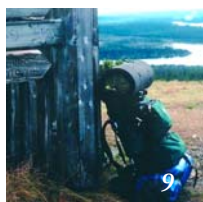
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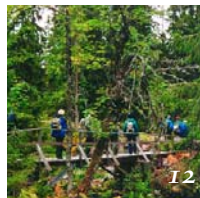
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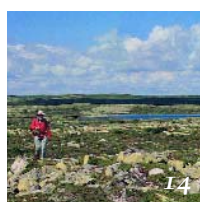
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Wilderness in Europe has always been a bone of contention. In past years, where problems with agriculture were often associated with food shortages and starvation, there is little wonder that areas of uncultivated land evoked negative feelings in the mind of our ancestors. Somewhat surprising then is the fact that even once famine had virtually disappeared from Europe, the negative image of wilderness still seemed to be ingrained on our minds. It would seem that such thinking has transgressed into us as Europeans being almost fearful of true wilderness, preferring to keep an element of human control over much of our natural heritage. For a long time, European politicians and even conservationists were reluctant to challenge this European 'tradition.' Since its beginnings, the conservationist movement has treated the term 'wilderness' with caution and seems unwilling to adopt it as part and parcel of their conservation strategies.



Editorial

Edit Borza

A double-edged legacy

Fortunately, in recent years there has been a gradual shift in conservation policies towards a conscious support of wilderness. Conservationist movements are, nevertheless, powerless without public support. To achieve a lasting result, it is essential to revisit the concept of wilderness and highlight the economic, cultural and human costs of its continued destruction.

Since its birth, PAN Parks has been striving for this change of attitude. One of our goals is to demonstrate to people that these remaining small 'kingdoms'

of wilderness are part and parcel of our common European heritage and that we should be proud of them, just as we are proud of our cultural heritage. The destruction of these areas would mean not 'only' the loss of beauty but also an irretrievable natural and economic loss the scales of which are described in one of the leading articles of our present issue, *For a wilder Europe: The concept of wilderness*, on pages 10-11. The title of our annual conference - *European Wilderness Days* - is also a conscious attempt to remind Europe of its wilderness and bring the term back into the public and political discourse. We should enjoy and more importantly work to protect the remaining areas of European wilderness - before it is too late.

Write to the Editor at:
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Announcements

New partnership structure

From the end of May 2004 there will be a change in the protected area partnership structure: in order to make our organisation more transparent the term Candidate PAN Park will be abolished. We now have four Certified PAN Parks, whilst candidate parks have been asked to develop a PAN Parks Action Plan. Those parks who have fulfilled this request will remain our co-operating partners. You will find a current list of protected area partners - both PAN Parks and committed parks - on page 15. If your park is interested in becoming a PAN Park or if you quite simply have further questions regarding verification, then please contact Vladivoj Vancura, Conservation Manager. All European protected areas are invited to join us in working towards PAN Parks certification.

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Improving the visitor experience

PAN Parks has recently commissioned a study entitled *Managing the visitor experience within Europe's protected areas*. The study sets out to examine how different protected areas attempt to ensure that visitors are both satisfied with their experience and that their visit does not have negative impact on the environmental, socio-cultural and economic sustainability of the area. In total 12 protected areas will be included in the study, with an equal geographical spread between the different regions of Europe and an equal representation of parks which are PAN Parks, EUROPARC Charter parks and parks which are neither. It is hoped that the results will provide valuable lessons, comparisons, and examples of best practice so as parks can improve their approach to managing the visitor experience. Moreover, the PAN Parks Foundation could also make use of the results in improving its Principles & Criteria. The main findings of the study will be presented at the annual PAN Parks conference that will be held this year in the Italian Monti Sibillini National Park.

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Welcome to Europe's Wilderness

The PAN Parks Foundation is glad to invite you to participate in *Europe's Wilderness Days*. The annual PAN Parks conference - similarly entitled as last year's event - will take place in Norcia, Italy between 7-11 October. The conference is a unique event that brings together conservation professionals and committed businessmen to learn about sustainable tourism in protected areas.

The host and co-organiser of the event is Monti Sibillini National Park. The park provides for a beautiful setting and an expression of the PAN Parks ideal with its rich wildlife including the wolf, the golden eagle, the peregrine, and a number of endemic species, along with the charm of the abbeys and the medieval historic centres nestled at the foot of the mountains.

The goal of the conference is threefold:

- discussion on the linking of conservation and the corporate sector for the benefit of Europe's protected areas,
- provide training for participants on visitors' management,
- exchanging of experiences and sharing of ideas.

The sub-title of the conference, *Welcome to Europe's Wilderness*, refers to its main theme, which is how to adequately manage for visitor experience regarding nature-based tourism. Although Monti Sibillini National Park will be used as a case study area, each participant will be able to take home a number of vital lessons and experiences that will be specifically relevant to visitor management in his/her own work. The training will be based on the results of the training needs assessment carried out by Glion Institute of Higher Education (see page 7). Also used will be a piece of research conducted by the PAN Parks Foundation (see Announcements).

We expect the number of participants to be around 100-120, with individuals coming from all over Europe. The choice of location is also an attempt to attract Mediterranean protected areas to our concept.

To download the programme and the registration form go to www.panparks.org/conference2004

For further information:
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Enjoy the silence of nature

The first PAN Parks Accommodation in Mörkret, Sweden will be officially opened on 24 September this year. The opening is celebrated together with the second anniversary of Fulufjället National Park.

PAN Parks Accommodation is an independent limited liability company offering corporate and private investors the opportunity to help protect and develop Europe's wilderness areas. PAN Parks Accommodation, which is a financial mechanism for the PAN Parks Foundation, has signed a licensing agreement with the Foundation. It will only become involved once both the park and the Foundation have jointly agreed that this type of accommodation is beneficial for the progress of the local community and the park administration.



Photo: Edit Borza

The Mörkret park is composed of 12 houses and 16 apartments, giving it a capacity to accommodate 136 individuals. The entire park is built from FSC wood with the architectural style based on local Swedish housing. All of the houses offer high standards of home comfort and a beautiful view over the Fulufjället National Park. The park will be available to guests from mid October.

The activity programme for guests of the PAN Parks Accommodation is organised in co-operation with businesses located in the area of Fulufjället National Park. These select businesses will be allowed to use the PAN Parks logo, based on the fact that they operate according to a number of sustainability principles. A wide range of activities will be offered throughout both the summer and winter. But of course if one prefers, they can always choose to enjoy the silence and tranquility of nature with a glass of wine on the cottage terrace. The main objective is to provide an enjoyable high quality tourism product in a manner that is not to the detriment of the surrounding environment.

For further information:
www.panparksaccommodation.com
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Communication of national parks:

The Italian experience

Italian national parks place a great deal of effort in communicating environmental aspects to visitors. Despite this it would seem that they could do much more in providing information to foreign visitors. These are the conclusions of Wouter Bauman from Wageningen University (the Netherlands), in his study on Communicating Sustainable Tourism in National Parks - Exploring Transfer Methods of Environmental Aspects to Visitors.

Bauman studied communication tools and strategies used by national parks to transfer ecological information in the National Parks of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise, and Monti Sibillini. The methodology was based on a combination of in-depth interviews with managers, communication specialists and visitors, inventories and Internet research. The latter was carried out to study the provision of information on the Internet and to compare this information with websites of other national parks. Bauman found that both parks offered a diverse range of communication tools for visitors but they failed to address maintenance and enhancement issues. There were also a number of differences in utilising strategies. While Abruzzo organised more excursions, Monti Sibillini was stronger in mass communication strategies such as the Internet and information boards.

On the basis of his findings, Bauman raised two major recommendations. First, he argued that both parks should increase their efforts in addressing a wider range of issues and to target individuals, which have different levels of knowledge. Secondly, he found that the criteria for good information provision such as availability, clear and adequate dosage levels were not applicable to foreign visitors who did not speak Italian. He therefore concluded that the management of the parks did not fully succeed in providing adequate information to foreign visitors.

The author strongly believes that it is important to use a range of communication tools, and in order to appeal to as wide an audience as possible these should be provided in a number of different languages. Clear interpretation is particularly important within the setting of a national park and it can play a vital role in increasing awareness of conservation issues.

For information on downloading the report go to
www.panparks.org/Projects/Research

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Support for parks: PAN Parks Research Network

At the Europe's Wilderness Days conference of October 2003, the PAN Parks Foundation approved a concept to develop a PAN Park Research Network. Initiated by Zoltán Kun, PAN Parks Director and Dr. Stuart Cottrell from Wageningen University, in the Netherlands, the purpose of the Network is to conduct and promote state of the art social and natural science related research, which is relevant to the mission of PAN Parks and WWF.

The network involves researchers from different institutions: Stu Cottrell (Wageningen University, NL), Sue Clark and Julian Hoseason (Glion Institute for Higher Education, Switzerland), Niek Beunders (NHTV, NL), Richard Tapper (Environmental Business & Development Group Plc, UK) and Xavier Font (Leeds Metropolitan University, UK).

The research must be in a format that is usable for protected area managers, local communities and the general public. The management of newly verified parks requires a continuous set of decisions, which affect many people including visitors, employees, concessionaires, nearby communities, and protected area partners. An accurate understanding of the relationship between people, parks and tourism is critical to both protecting resources and providing for public enjoyment.

The prism of sustainability framework adapted from the Wuppertal Institute,

Germany, is the theoretical lens from which to co-ordinate the research needs of the various PAN Park locations. The prism includes four dimensions of sustainability: institutional, social-cultural, economic and environmental. It provides a holistic framework for our researchers to examine and monitor the relationship between sustainable tourism and nature conservation.

To distribute the information (the findings) on how to reduce tourism's impact on nature, the Network will rely on PAN Parks experts and park personnel. We intend to make use of both quantitative and qualitative methods including desktop research of policy and related park documents; surveys among stakeholders, park personnel, local communities, and tourists; assessments of ecological integrity and quality of biodiversity; and, the measurement of land use by local communities.

Photo: Edit Borza





Out of our research goals the most important are the improvement of the PAN Parks Tourism Manual, the establishment of a research agenda for the protection of Europe's wilderness and a Training Needs Analysis (as described in the box below). Expected outcomes include the monitoring and development of recommendations for park management, the improvement of sustainable tourism and improved co-operation with the local community. More specific outcomes are to provide technical support to parks and regional offices, create a network of research institutions in Eastern Europe, and provide leadership and direction to the social science activities of protected areas. We intend to lay an emphasis on the institutional and social context of decision-making. The mechanisms of decision-making are to integrate people's wishes and activities. This way, the acceptance of and identification with political decisions become broader while democracy is strengthened.

For info on an overview of past and present researches go to:
www.panparks.org/Projects/Research

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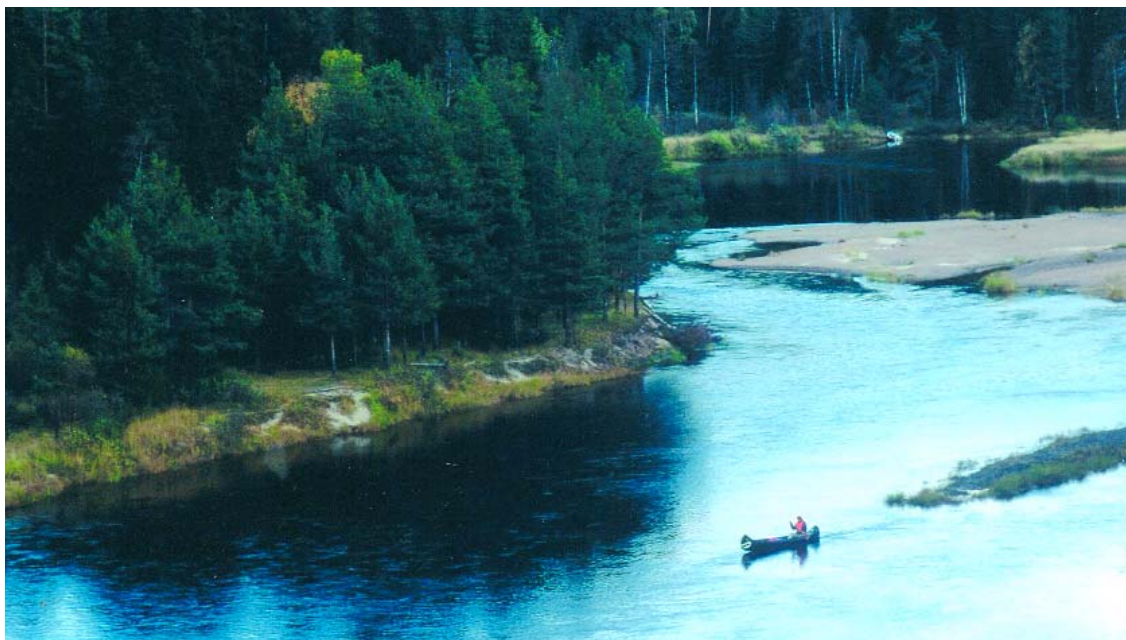


Photo: Michael Hennemann

Training Needs Analysis for PAN Parks

Glion Institute of Higher Education (GIHE) is based in Switzerland and is an international institution specializing in hospitality and tourism studies. GIHE has allocated funds from its research budget to undertake a Training Needs Analysis on behalf of PAN Parks. The purpose of the analysis is to discover from the member parks and local partners what they consider to be their priorities for training so that they can optimize their benefits from tourism.

A team of 4 people from GIHE will be involved, all experts in sustainable tourism projects. Members of the research team are: Julian Hoseason, Sue Clark, Paul Fynn and Dimitrios Diamantis. The team will visit all verified parks in the summer and autumn of 2004. Meetings with all the key players involved will be arranged so that all who are concerned can add their voice to any future training programme undertaken by PAN Parks.

The initial results of the analysis will be presented at the PAN Parks conference at Monti Sibillini in October. Two days of the conference, including the field trip will be training days where some of the needs established in the course of the assessment will be addressed under the banner of *Managing the Visitor Experience*. The results of the analysis will be used by PAN Parks to seek external funding for the implementation of a training programme that benefits PAN Parks' members and local business partners.

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PAN Parks holidays available: How partnerships work

The first PAN Parks partnership contracts with international and local business partners have been signed. SNP and Trailfinders, both Dutch tourism companies, formally committed themselves to the PAN Parks project and are selling PAN Parks trips. The first PAN Parks local partners operate in the Fulufjället area. The below article provides an overview of these partnerships and the structure of business partnerships with PAN Parks.

PAN Parks strives to find a harmonious balance between the interests of nature conservation and the tourism sector. Such an approach has the potential to encourage local people to be more responsive to conservation objectives. If they can see that there are economic benefits to be gained from approaching tourism in a sustainable way and that conservation is a vital component to its success then they are clearly more likely to be willing partners.

To help achieve this goal, the PAN Parks Foundation is in the process of creating a network of protected areas, which are verified against high international environmental standards. One of the criteria for the protected areas is to provide for local business partners that guarantee high standards of services while maintaining a strong commitment to ecotourism. Small-scale enterprises such as guesthouses, guides, or adventure companies can express this commitment with the help of the PAN Parks logo that they receive after verification. On 5 June eleven small-scale businesses have become PAN Parks partners in the Fulufjället area. They support the goals of the national park and PAN Parks. They will participate in the implementation of the Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy



Gert Nieuwboer (SNP) and Zoltán Kun (PAN Parks) after signing the contract

and improve the quality of their services. The various tourism facilities and services of the region are offered in packages to the international business partners. In this way PAN Parks enables small-scale local business partners to gain access to the international market.

This, of course, necessitates a close co-operation with international partners, which take an interest in quality tourism. Thus far PAN Parks has two official international partnerships, one with SNP Nature Travels, the other with Trailfinders Horse Trekking (both of which are tour operators). SNP is a Dutch tour operator specialising in active vacations, both in Europe and outside. Trailfinders organises riders' vacations that are not tied to the company's own accommodation. SNP also supports the activities of WWF through annual donations.

Benefits for the international partners include reliable and immediate information on the services provided by the PAN Parks region, a guarantee of high quality and the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to ecotourism to their partners and customers. One of the best manifestations of the partnership is the

PAN Parks vacation tours offered to all nature-loving people. The first tours were presented to the public during the recent Dutch Op Pad outdoor life exhibition. The destinations are Fulufjället in Sweden and Oulanka in Finland. The tours, arranged by SNP and Trailfinders, will appeal to lovers of wilderness where peace and tranquillity are

the norm and the scenery is still considered untouched by man. During these trips guests can immerse themselves in the great wealth of plant and animal species. Trailfinders travellers can also experience the unique destinations of Bieszczady, Fulufjället and Oulanka, but this time trips will be on horseback with guests accompanied by expert guides. Both vacations guarantee a 100% nature experience, devoted to seeing and experiencing the full majesty of the areas.

As experience shows, the value of the logo grows with the reputation and recognition given by the public. PAN Parks remains open to any tourist company that takes an interest in the initiative and would like to test the value of our logo.

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Links:

www.panparks.org/Network/Partners

www.snp.nl (in Dutch)

www.trailfinders.nl (in Dutch)



Nature-based tourism in Kuusamo: The experience of Kuusamo (Part 2)

In our previous issue we gave an overview of the history of tourism in the Finnish Kuusamo region and the role of the national park in the area under development. This time we focus on Oulanka National Park's approach in implementing and promoting nature-friendly tourism strategies and how these efforts facilitated the development of quality tourism in the area. This case study can help other PAN Parks to improve their tourist strategies.

License for environmental operators

There is a strong interest amongst local businesses and service providers to use the facilities of the park for their own activities.

provided and undertake an educational course run by the park. So far five operators have signed up to this scheme and more are likely to join once they see the competitive advantages.

Environmental consideration throughout

There are numerous development schemes that extend beyond the scope of the national park. That the love of nature can bring together people from very different backgrounds is best demonstrated by the joint construction scheme with the municipality and the state forestry board, which had the impressive result of more than 2000 km of new trails.

that they provide a wide range of services (from accommodation and food to equipment and guided excursions) to small groups of tourists - usually not consisting of more than 10 individuals. These personalized packages continue to attract evermore visitors, not only because many nature activities require local knowledge, but also because visitors can gain an insight into the everyday life of the local people. A number of businesses have found this to be an ideal set-up in which to run business incentive tours. Here the emphasis is on facing challenges, developing leadership skills and teambuilding. An overnight camping trip to the Russian frontier by snowmobile certainly helps to foster a sense of adventure and team spirit.

Branding

As the marketing research revealed, the strength of Kuusamo is that it has four very distinct seasons, each of which has a different appeal to tourists. Taking the two extremes of summer (perpetual sun) and winter (perpetual night) a brand was developed around this contrast. For winter the already famous Ruka ski resort was used, whilst for summer the Kuusamo wilderness with a particular focus on Oulanka National Park was used. This message is intended to encourage people who enjoyed their stay during one of the seasons to come back at another time of the year when they are promised an altogether different but equally rewarding experience.

To read the full study, visit http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/services/tourism/index_en.htm under Studies

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© European Communities, 2002
- based on the study undertaken by Ecosystems Ltd. - Brussels



Photo: Michael Hennemann



However, to be effective and durable it has to work both ways - the park helps to increase the profitability of local tourism businesses and in turn the businesses must then also help the park in its conservation efforts. With this in mind the Park Authorities introduced a license system for businesses that intend to operate in the park. Thus, the businesses are asked to declare their activities, the locations of where they would like to operate, report on the number of tourists and services

The partnership approach is further demonstrated by the commitment of all three interest groups to pay a share of the costs to maintain the trails. Maintenance will be conducted by an independent local association, which will in turn help in the process of local job creation.

Small group adventures

The service providers play an important role in the development of sustainable tourism in the area. Their speciality is

For a wilder Europe: *The concept of wilderness*

Wilderness - a concept well known throughout the globe, almost unknown in Europe. Most Europeans do not know that they can still find remnants of wilderness in their continent. To see primeval forest or mountains where wolf, lynx, or brown bear still roam freely we do not need to travel to very distant places - yet. It is enough to visit one of the Certified PAN Parks. In the following article Vladivoj Vancura, PAN Parks Conservation Manager gives his overview of the concept of wilderness in Europe and this will be followed up by a description of the PAN Parks wilderness in the next issue.

A term of content

The term 'wilderness' generally evokes defensive feelings in the European mind. The idea to leave some land untouched was often labelled as anti-human and unfeasible in the densely populated

continent. There are some European countries where the term is misinterpreted, or poorly understood while in others 'wilderness' has no equivalent in the national languages. Wilderness is still understood as a thrilling holiday experience, but for which one has to travel to lands far beyond the European continent. Due to such perceptions the concept receives insufficient political and professional support.

'Sustainable development' is a much younger but more widespread term, which indicates an acceptable activity and has been adopted quickly by the public. One way to promote wilderness is to build on this acceptance by arguing that in some areas wilderness protection is the best way to achieve 'sustainable use.' Over the last several years we can observe a gradual shift in the attitudes of both governments and people towards wilderness. There is an increasing

number of European countries taking an interest in wilderness protection. This is particularly being promoted through national parks and their core zones where human activities are no longer permitted or are strictly controlled. PAN Parks efforts have long been directed at changing the mentality of Europe's citizens so as to contribute towards popularising the term 'wilderness.'

Wilderness worldwide

Recent worldwide wilderness assessments (1987 - 2002) demonstrate that between 25 - 50% of the Earth's land surface remains wild. The assessment carried out by Conservation International in 2002 was based on three criteria:

1. the size (the threshold was set at 1 million ha)
2. intactness (the area has 70% of its habitat intact) and
3. population (less than 5 people/km²).

Photo: Maciej Grzegorzek





Based on these criteria, the study found that 46% of the planet consists of what can be termed ‘wilderness areas.’

Europe’s share of wilderness is, of course, much smaller. Europeans do not have an ambition to create wilderness areas but - as the example of the US shows where the smallest wilderness area covers 2.5 ha - size cannot be used as an excuse to avoid protection. Europe should adapt the concept of wilderness to its multicultural protection framework. Equally important is the understanding that wilderness is important to us Europeans, not only because we all need clean water and air but also because nature is part of our forgotten ‘common European heritage.’

European perspectives

The perception that Europe has no potential for wilderness protection is entirely false. To protect wilderness is much more a matter of will than that of the size of a wild area. The problem is that many Europeans even today believe that

we have a right and duty to modify, influence and (mis)use nature in the same way as it was done in the past. But simultaneously with this ‘tradition’ we desperately need areas where we can enjoy the last remnants of European wilderness. If we look hard, we can find numerous areas scattered throughout the continent, some of them already protected but under different names, some forgotten, and others lacking support and needing improvement. With a bit more effort and will, we could designate the prime ‘European wilderness network’ to unite conservation efforts at the national and local levels.

What is the benefit of preserving the wild?

It is quite clear that wilderness provides us with a number of vital environmental services (e.g. clean water and air, carbon sequestration, nutrient cycling) and that these services have an economical value that can be estimated. As a recent study entitled *Economic Reasons for*

Conserving Wild Nature revealed, a global system of protected areas pays for itself 100 times over. This is based on the idea that if these protected areas were not in existence then in economic terms it would cost us 100 times more to pay for the same environmental services that these areas currently provide for almost free. Even the purely economic costs render the conservation of intact habitats a compelling case. To save the last wild places in Europe, we need to go beyond the old model of intensively managed, small parks and provide for the conservation of large areas of intact nature.

by Vladivoj Vancura

See our autumn issue for the second part.

Material used: “Souls of the wilderness” by Cyril Kormos and Vance G. Martin, *International Journal of Wilderness*, August 2003, Volume 9, Number 2

Northern Region

Swedish-Hungarian co-operation

Fulufjället National Park



Photo: Edit Borza



The Swedish government has taken the step of allocating 640,000 Euro to a special promotion in Hungary in 2004. The project, entitled *Swedish-Hungarian meetings in 2004*, primarily aims to increase the political dialogue between Sweden and Hungary. Another objective is to investigate the market potential of Hungary for Swedish businesses. Around 110,000 Euro will go towards supporting the establishment of a Swedish-Hungarian network at a municipal or regional level, and to encourage increased co-operation between governmental and non-governmental organisations and companies.

Fulufjället National Park has received a grant of 8,150 Euro to organise two seminars, which aim to exchange experience between PAN Park Fulufjället and Duna-Dráva National Park, Hungary. The project intends to facilitate communication between Swedish and Hungarian nature conservationists

and decision-makers at national and regional levels by using Fulufjället and Duna-Dráva National Parks as case study areas.

The seminar in Hungary addresses the role of the ranger service in the management of protected areas with a special focus on visitor management. The second event, which is linked to the opening of PAN Parks Accommodation in Mörkret, deals with the role of zoning in wilderness management. The project, which is jointly financed by the Swedish government, Dalarna county and PAN Parks Foundation will result in a report that can be further used to lobby for the improvement of park management in both countries. It is expected that the event will strengthen Swedish-Hungarian contacts and bring the two countries closer together.

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Eastern Region

A jewel of the Balkan

Rila National Park



Photo: RNP



With a total area of 81,046 hectares, Rila National Park is the largest protected area in Bulgaria and is close to being one of the largest parks in the whole of Europe. It was established in 1992 in order to conserve the areas natural ecosystems, the high biodiversity, the splendid landscape and a number of unique geologic formations. The Park encompasses around 30% of the picturesque Rila Mountain with around two-thirds being covered by prime forest.

There are over 100 mountain peaks which rise above 2,000 metres within Rila National Park. Amongst them we can find the Mussala, the highest mountain peak in Bulgaria and the entire Balkan Peninsula.

A splendid multitude of glacial lakes adds to the unique

natural features of the area and the charm of the park. Rila National Park is one of the most significant and largest sanctuaries of mountain wildlife in Europe. Besides the numerous vertebrate, bird and fish species it supports, the park shelters the largest populations of Balkan chamois and hamster in Bulgaria. In recent years much has been done to improve information and tourist facilities. The first Botanical trail in Bulgaria - Friends of plants - was established in Rila National Park, and a Visitors' Center was opened at the Resort Complex of Panichishte. Much effort has also been put into preserving the traditional crafts that are characteristic of the area. Rila National Park signed a letter of intent with the PAN Parks Foundation and is preparing for verification in 2007.

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Ready for verification

Eastern Region

After 4 years of hard work Retezat National Park is ready to begin PAN Parks verification. Three independent verifiers will undertake the field verification in the third week of September.

Four years of close co-operation between the Foundation and Retezat has meant that all of the main PAN Parks requirements have been met with each being incorporated into the park's regular documentation. It has to be said that the management of Retezat have demonstrated a strong willingness to be part of the concept. Thus, preparation for the verification was facilitated by the fact that all of our conditions such as the management plan, the creation of a strictly protected core/wilderness zone, the visitor management plan, the organisation of educational and interpretative programs, and the involvement of local stakeholders, had been taken into account since the beginning. This is not to say that there were no difficulties.

We had a long struggle for the creation of the core zone and the development of a new, comprehensive management plan. The resources made available through international partners such as the Biodiversity Conservation Management Project and Flora & Fauna International, would have been rendered worthless without the enthusiasm and hard work of the park management and the regional and central authorities involved in the project. Special thanks must go to all individuals who assisted the park in reaching an agreement with the local land users concerning grazing rights, and the establishment of the PAN Park core/wilderness zone. Retezat is an excellent example for how a committed park can benefit from the PAN Parks process.

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Retezat National Park



Photo: Vladivoj Vancura

80 years of the national park (1924 - 2004)

Western Region

This year we celebrate the 80th anniversary of Triglav National Park, the only Slovenian national park. Thanks to the joint effort of the Department for Natural and Heritage Conservation and the Slovenian Alpine Association, in 1924 the Triglav Lakes Valley was declared "Alpine Protected Park" (Alpski varstveni park). This was the birth of the Triglav National Park. Nowadays the national park covers 83,807 hectares, 4% of the entire land surface of Slovenia.

To celebrate the anniversary, the Park Authorities are preparing several activities that will run from May till September. The most important event took place on 24 May, the European day of parks. Visitors and guests gathered in one of the most beautiful valleys, the Trenta, where you can find the oldest natural trail of the park. The Soča trail is named after the river Soča because they

run side by side. There are at least two things that you cannot miss about Soča: its unbelievably turquoise colour and the narrow bridges that recall historic times. On this special day the Slovenian Minister of Environment and the President of the Hessen-Slovenian Association opened a new bridge and Triglav National Park was awarded the European Diploma for the year 2004. The Diploma granted by the Council of Europe is a great honour for the park, but it is also a commitment and a duty to preserve the areas unique natural heritage for all future Europeans.

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Triglav National Park



Photo: TNP

Fulufjället National Park



This section is devoted to the experiences and adventures of visitors in the PAN Parks. In the present issue reporter Rutger van den Hoofdakker, who visited the area on request of WWF Netherlands to write for the Dutch Panda magazine, tells about his visit in the Fulufjället National Park, which gave him "an impression of a bewitching landscape."

We drive to Fulufjället by car. On the way, Staffan Ericsson, visitors' centre manager, points out places where elk can often be seen. Lynx also live here and sometimes a wolf is spotted passing through. The Fulufjället mountain range comes into view with its steep slopes rising about 400 meters over the valley. There are no sharp peaks; the mountaintop is an impressive plateau, 35 km long and 15 km wide. In the valley Staffan shows me a tree: "This is a remembrance tree", he explains. "It used to be a custom to carve a tree to commemorate a person or an event. A father carved this tree in 1725 after his son had waded unharmed through high water. You can still see the carving."

We stop in the visitors' centre car park. Sandstone is used here for all types of construction, such as the paths. It doesn't have to come far because the mountain - 'fjäll' in Swedish - in Fulufjället is entirely sandstone, which marks it out from other mountains in Sweden. Inside the visitors' centre, Staffan explains further, "Another unique thing about Fulufjället is that the mountains are covered with thick layers of moss. That's because the area hasn't been grazed by reindeer for the last 150 years.

And we've got brown bears and elk. It's no wonder that this beautiful area has been chosen as a PAN Park."

Fulufjället is not overwhelmed by tourists and the park's managers want to keep it that way. "The idea isn't to have hundreds of groups trekking through the wilderness every day," says Staffan, "So the travel companies are tied to limits and it's prohibited to fly over the area in a helicopter. We want to have quiet here." This makes Fulufjället an ideal holiday location for lovers of quiet and unspoiled nature.

I can soon get a personal experience of what this quiet and peace means. I walk in the direction of Njupeskjär, the highest waterfall in Sweden, dropping 96 meters. My eyes take in small, crystal clear lakes and centuries' old pine trees. Suddenly I'm face to face with the waterfall, plunging down with immense force from the steep rocks. Curious about the view from the plateau, I climb the trail.

The higher I go, the more beautiful the view becomes. The valley lies far beneath me, the forest I was so lyrical about just now, with another mountain range on the horizon. On top I am alone, surrounded by rocks and vast, green carpets of moss that feels unbelievably soft to the touch.

On my last day in Fulufjället I visit the forest museum. This is an open-air museum that houses the old cabins in which the lumberjacks of days gone by ate and slept. After 1960 the axe was replaced by the chainsaw and now local people are busy making the switch from hunting, fishing and logging tradition to nature conservation and sustainable tourism. I recall the words of Staffan Ericsson: "Now that nature takes care of extra income, most of the locals are enthusiastic. So are the visitors."

*Based on an article by
Rutger van den Hoofdakker.
r.hoofdakker@bccnet.nl*

Photo: Vladivoj Vancura





PAN Parks

Name of area: Fulufjället National Park
Country: Sweden
Area (ha): 38 483
Number of visitors per year: 40 000
Contact: Staffan Ericsson
e-mail: staffan.ericsson@w.lst.se

Name of area: Oulanka National Park
Country: Finland
Area (ha): 27 500
Number of visitors per year: 150 000
Contact: Matti Tapaninen
e-mail: matti.tapaninen@metsa.fi



Name of area: Bieszczady National Park
Country: Poland
Area (ha): 29 200
Number of visitors per year: 250 000
Contact: Grzegorz Sitko
e-mail: gregsit@pro.onet.pl

Name of area: Central Balkan National Park
Country: Bulgaria
Area (ha): 71 669
Number of visitors per year: 25 000
Contact: Svetoslav Todorov
e-mail: svtodorov@centralbalkan.bg

Other co-operating partners

These areas are working for PAN Parks verification. In brackets are the expected dates of verification.

Abruzzo National Park (2005)
Retezat Natinal Park (2004)
Rila National Park (2007)
Slovensky Raj National Park (2006)
Triglav National Park (2005)

Join PAN Parks!

If you would like to see your park on the PAN Parks map, please contact Vladivoj Vancura, Conservation Manager at vwancura@panparks.org about the verification process.

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