



EUROPARC CONFERENCE 2012

22-25 OCTOBER
GENK - BELGIUM



EUROPARC GENK - BELGIUM
CONFERENCE.12



OPENING CEREMONY

(RE)CONNECTING SOCIETY WITH BIODIVERSITY

20TH ANNIVERSARY OF NATURA 2000 & LIFE PROGRAMME





PROLOGUE

The annual EUROPARC Conference 2012 is held in C-mine, a former coal mine site turned into a flourishing cultural centre in Genk, Belgium.

Genk is situated in the heart of the only Flemish National Park Hoge Kempen, where the Regional Landscape Kempen & Maasland has elaborated an innovative model of creating and funding the National Park.

The core of this (re)connection model, integrating biodiversity and nature in society, is the main theme of the EUROPARC Conference 2012:

- (Re)Connecting people with nature
- (Re)Connecting nature with nature
- (Re)Connecting business with biodiversity
- (Re)Connecting policy with practice

PROUD TO BE IN A ROOM WITH SO MANY HEROES WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE PROTECTION OF 20% OF EUROPE FROM MANKIND.

IGNACE SCHOPS, COUNSELOR EUROPARC, DIRECTOR REGIONAL LANDSCAPE KEMPEN & MAASLAND

How strong a theme can be is immediately demonstrated by EUROPARC president Thomas Hansson. As the largest nature conservation network in Europe with over 450 member organisations in 37 countries, EUROPARC has decided to form a new network of protected areas together with Eurosite and to build a closer collaboration in the future. Theo Wams, representative of Eurosite, confirms that a strategy paper called 'Networking for nature' has been discussed during the annual meeting of both Europarc and Eurosite and will be further elaborated over the next few months to create a new network that is positioned to protect nature and manage nature sites. (Re) Connecting people with people is of course one of the main goals - already achieved - of the European conference.

The EUROPARC Conference 2012 is at the same time a festive occasion to celebrate 20 years of Natura 2000 and the Life programme. The conference focuses on those two indispensable instruments for European biodiversity, nature and landscapes as a positive proof of how essential cooperation is for protecting nature and sustainable development. The EUROPARC Conference 2012 awaits more than 600 participants from 31 EU countries and 8 non-EU countries.







(RE)CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH NATURE

(Re)Connecting is more than a model invented by the Regional Landscape Kempen & Maasland. It is a philosophy of life for this NGO to work on the natural and cultural heritage with the involvement of all stakeholders.

A bottom-up, integral and multi-stakeholder approach creates a solid base for a strong collaboration with nature conservation organisations, politicians, hunters, farmers, tourism organisations etc. As an organisation the Regional Landscape invests in the natural heritage; with partners they develop cycling networks and hiking paths, dig ponds, plant hedges, restore castle parks and develop boundless parks. For every project the right partners are brought together to assure their support for sustainable green investments which create the foundation for regional economic development.

The Regional Landscape Kempen & Maasland has succeeded in reconnecting people with nature. The amount of hikers in the region is increasing and the tourism sector is fast growing in this province, largely built on the beautiful landscapes and the fantastic natural heritage. Meanwhile the reconnection model has proven its return on investment. The recent report of the economics of the Hoge Kempen National Park stated an annual turnover of 191 million euros with 5,000 jobs involved. The proof of the pudding is in the eating: green growth and sustainable development is possible.

IT IS POSSIBLE TO PROTECT BIODIVERSITY AND LANDSCAPES DIRECTLY CONNECTED WITH OUR SOCIETY, TO CREATE AWARENESS AND PROVE THAT BIODIVERSITY IS ALSO A TOOL FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

HERMAN REYNDERS, GOVERNOR OF THE PROVINCE OF LIMBURG

THE (RE)CONNECTION MODEL OF RLKM IS INTERNATIONALLY SEEN AS ONE OF THE BEST PRACTICES. IN SEVERAL PARTS OF THE WORLD THEY ARE INTERESTED TO WORK WITH IT. THE (RE)CONNECTION MODEL IS OUR NEW EXPORT-PRODUCT.

FRANK SMEETS, DEPUTY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, PROVINCE OF LIMBURG AND PRESIDENT OF REGIONAL LANDSCAPE KEMPEN & MAASLAND





FROM FLEMISH POLICY TO PRACTICE

Cooperation for better nature, forests and green spaces in the middle of society is the central vision of the Flemish environmental policy.

Reconnecting people with nature is one of the pillars for the implementation of this policy. Nature oriented management of parks and green spaces in and around cities is an opportunity for many citizens to reconnect with nature. Furthermore the Flemish Government invests in making nature and forest areas more accessible for recreation. Several projects in Limburg, involving local or provincial authorities, concentrate on improving visitor infrastructure and educational tracks to invite people to enjoy natural beauty but also to learn to reconnect with nature.

IF PEOPLE NEVER EXPERIENCE NATURE AND HAVE LITTLE UNDERSTANDING OF THE SERVICES THAT NATURE PROVIDES, IT IS INDEED UNLIKELY THAT THEY WILL SUPPORT ITS CONSERVATION.

JOKE SCHAUVLIEGE, FLEMISH MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT

Special partnerships have also been established with the private sector, e.g. with the sand extraction company Sibelco, to redevelop and manage natural values of their company grounds. Also forest owners are supported to integrate biodiversity protection in their forest management plans. The Flemish Government also collaborates with the (Belgian) ministry of defence for the restoration and management of nature and forest in the large

Natura 2000 areas on the military domains. The efforts to integrate military functions and nature conservation have received a boost from the Life project Danah, which resulted in real ‘forces for nature’.

The Flemish implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directive is based on a two track approach, one based on science and the other on participation. Participation consists in an intensive consultation process at regional and site level. All administrations, local authorities, land owners and the private sector have been actively involved in the development of conservation objectives. Meanwhile every step in this process is based on detailed scientific reports. With the high pressure on open spaces in this highly urbanised region it was certainly not easy to agree on quantified conservation objectives. Based on the principle ‘no efforts without consultation and no consultation without efforts’ the Flemish Government is working with the relevant administrations, authorities, land owners and users to develop partnership agreements with concrete commitments for implementation. The most crucial challenge is now to mobilise the financial resources. Access to EU funds is therefore very important. It also stimulates investments by private owners as shown in the Life project ‘3Waters’ in Limburg, where land owners are restoring one of Belgium’s largest Natura 2000 pond complexes and promoting synergy between ecology, education and economy. This example demonstrates once again the importance of (re)connecting: building networks of all kinds to achieve results on the ground for a better environment.





CONNECTING BUSINESS WITH BIODIVERSITY

The venue of the EUROPARC conference 2012, C-Mine in Genk, is a beautiful example of how to redevelop old industrial sites into new meeting centres with respect for the past, but especially also with respect for the landscape and the way it is positioned into nature and into the city.

Genk is the third largest industrial city in Flanders, but parts of the National Park Hoge Kempen and of the pond complex the Wijers are situated in Genk. Business and nature have not always been allies, but Genk aims to strike a balance between industry and nature and stresses the importance of corporate social responsibility. The city tries to ensure that all companies collaborate with the municipality and even stimulates projects on biodiversity in industrial estates. Together with Natuurpunt (Flemish nature organisation) companies that install new plants in Genk try to make the connection with nature and biodiversity on their grounds.

WE HAVE A DREAM TO BE AN INDUSTRIAL CITY WHICH CAN CONNECT NATURE AND BIODIVERSITY TO INDUSTRY. IF WE CAN MAKE SURE THAT NATURE AND INDUSTRY GO HAND IN HAND, GENK WILL BE AN EXAMPLE FOR WESTERN EUROPE.

WIM DRIES, MAYOR OF GENK

Wim Dries was also one of the first mayors to sign the Covenant of Mayors to fight climate change. Wim Dries: “Local communities can also play their part in global challenges. As head and representative of a city that thinks globally and acts locally, it is important to set an example for the community. Genk wants to be a carbon neutral city, we want to be sustainable, because it’s the only way forward, the only way to keep our prosperity.’

Herman Reynders, governor of the province of Limburg, has witnessed some positive changes towards nature and biodiversity. Although it is the greenest province of Flanders, not everybody in Limburg used to consider this green identity as an advantage. Many people saw it as a disadvantage because it did not work out too well for economic development. Today many entrepreneurs in Limburg are convinced that nature and this green identity bring a lot of advantages. Especially in tourism, a lot of companies are convinced that sustainability is an absolute necessity.

This attitude change is largely due to the efforts of Ignace Schops and his team of the Regional Landscape Kempen & Maasland. His reconnection model - for which he was awarded the Goldman Prize in 2008 - aims to involve all necessary stakeholders in local nature and biodiversity projects. Ignace Schops tried to translate biodiversity into a language that people can understand and make nature sexy for all stakeholders, businesses, the public and politicians. The model is basically very simple: reconnect nature with nature, reconnect people with nature, reconnect business with nature and reconnect policy with practice.





(RE)CONNECTING NATURE WITH THE BIG TABLE

The EUROPARC 2012 Conference is a major cause for celebration: 20 years of the Habitats Directive and Life programme have provided a solid foundation for conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity over the past two decades and have been a key instrument in achieving remarkable results.

Europe has managed to create Natura 2000, the largest co-ordinated network of protected areas in the world, embracing our 26,000 protected sites that cover almost a fifth of our land territory. As a result of Life projects, approximately 322,000 hectares in Natura 2000 sites have been restored and 150,000 hectares have been acquired across the European Union for habitats and species conservation. Life has started with 400 species and half of them have actually achieved, thanks to Life, the favourable conservation status required by the Habitats Directive.

WE CANNOT IGNORE THE ECONOMIC SITUATION AROUND US. BUT I CAN EASILY ADD TO THAT: IT IS EASIER TO FIX BUDGETS THAN IT WILL BE TO FIX SOME OF THE DISAPPEARING ECOSYSTEMS OR DISAPPEARING BIODIVERSITY.

EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR ENVIRONMENT JANEZ POTOČNIK

Nevertheless, Commissioner Potočnik stresses that despite the many successes, we still have a long way to go. Effective management of Natura 2000 will require a very substantial investment of resources. Therefore it is important that the investments provide many benefits, vital services such as carbon storage, flood resilience and water quality maintenance which are estimated to be worth around 200 or 300 billion per year, many times more than the cost of managing the Natura 2000 network. To be sure we will get there we

will need to concentrate our efforts, especially in these times of economic austerity. We will need the commitment of all stakeholders, local authorities, land owners and users, developers, conservation NGOs, scientific experts, local communities and private individuals. By joining efforts we will not only meet our biodiversity objectives but we will also contribute to the European Union's resource efficiency goals by ensuring that Europe's natural capital is managed sustainably. And we will contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation targets by improving the resilience of ecosystems and the services they provide and ultimately we will also contribute to our economic growth agenda.

Commissioner Potočnik firmly believes that long term, environmentally orientated policies are absolutely necessary to address the major issues in the proper way. Therefore it is important to reach global commitments as well as to convince national governments not only to sign global conventions but also to implement biodiversity and climate strategies into their national policies. He emphasises that biodiversity and climate change have to break through to the big table of decision makers, in other words biodiversity and climate change have to become the centre of attention. Therefore other sectors have to be involved: biodiversity and nature have to be integrated in other policies and funds, such as the common agricultural policy, fishery and cohesion policy funds. Another option is bringing in biodiversity and climate questions through the back doors, e.g. through reworking labour taxes more to the environmental taxes, or through removing environmentally harmful subsidies.

(Re)connecting nature and biodiversity to major social and economic issues is definitely the challenge for the (near) future.

happy birthday Natura 2000 & Life





CELEBRATION OF 20 YEARS OF HABITATS DIRECTIVE AND LIFE PROGRAMME

Stanley Johnson and Hemmo Muntingh look back on the early years of nature conservation in the European Union, the launch of the Habitat Directive and the start of the Life programme. The story goes that an old Amstrad computer saved the Habitat Directive, that we owe the resolution on European zoos to a linguistic misunderstanding and that the postponing of a late night vote saved the Iberian wolf. Lively anecdotes initiate a festive night of celebrating 20 years of successful nature conservation.

The tone is set for a well-deserved party: to the tune of Greensleaves a huge birthday cake is brought onto the stage. Commissioner Potočník closes the ceremony, stressing the importance of every tree hugger and congratulating and thanking all the participants on behalf of someone who is speechless, that is to say our nature.

IT WAS AN UPHILL BATTLE, BUT OUT OF TINY ACORNS MIGHTY OAK TREES GROW.

HEMMO MUNTINGH AND STANLEY JOHNSON, FOUNGING FATHERS OF THE BIRDS AND HABITAT DIRECTIVES



2ND CONFERENCE DAY - KEY NOTES

(RE)CONNECTING SOCIETY WITH BIODIVERSITY



RE-CONNECTING BIODIVERSITY AND PEOPLE: BACK FROM NEVER BEEN AWAY

PROF. DR. HANS VAN DYCK



Hans Van Dyck evokes a critical setting to open the EUROPARC conference. Over the past 20 years conservationists have achieved impressive results, but as we still have a long way to go to tackle the challenges ahead of us; we have to critically rethink the approaches, methods and conservation strategies used so far.

Biodiversity is about life, about living organisms and species and cannot be disconnected from our own human species. Moreover we have to be aware that we use our brain in a very typical way. To illustrate this, Hans Van Dyck uses the metaphor of a famous Belgian painting by René Magritte, *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, to indicate that what we see is not always what we or other organisms get. Perception is therefore very important for conservation strategies and also for the way we communicate about them.

(RE)CONNECTING BIODIVERSITY WITH BIODIVERSITY

When we consider biodiversity or nature conservation, we think about ecological networks: National Parks, Natura 2000, Life projects. But we often look at these protected areas from a static point of view and can forget about the functional aspects. Just because we have installed even a large nature

reserve, it will not necessarily function for all the organisms inside. But if the environment changes, would it still be functional for these organisms? What about humans? Will it be functional if people want to come for recreation? Or other activities? We have to switch from these static views to more functional and dynamic views. Therefore we have to take into account the old concept of 'Umwelt', the very specific part of the environment that is meaningful for a particular species. The needs of a butterfly or a lizard or a tourist in the same natural park will be different for each and every one of them and they will respond to different (conservation) issues. If we restore habitats it is extremely important to know what we are really changing and what the needs are for the different organisms. And details do matter!

JUST BECAUSE I HAVE TREES BETWEEN TWO FORESTS, OTHER ORGANISMS WILL NOT NECESSARILY THINK THAT THIS IS A GREEN WAY.

PROF. DR. HANS VAN DYCK



(RE)CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH BIODIVERSITY

Being sensitive to details, to look literally from the other point of view can be a very rich exercise that will help you in conservation and restoration strategies and particularly in communication with other stakeholders. The main goal is to reach out to and touch the different target groups within the heart of their interests. For a couple of years now, ecosystem functioning has been becoming more and more popular, especially to policy makers who have discovered the economic value of ecosystem services. Another hot topic in the years to come will be the link between nature and human health and wellbeing. More and more studies show the direct and indirect role of biodiversity and natural areas on human health. This kind of old type knowledge is nowadays much more developed in scientific research, meaning that the 'crazy societies' we have now could really benefit from integrating conservation strategies into their health policy strategies. These two examples show that society offers a lot of opportunities for passing on the biodiversity message and for reconnecting people with nature.

(RE)CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH PEOPLE

If we want to reconnect people with nature, we have to be aware of the different perceptions that people have about nature. A conservation biologist may be convinced of the enormous value of a certain area, whereas other people may see it from a completely different angle. In communicating with stakeholders it is important to keep in mind that just because you are sending information the other person will not necessarily receive the very same message. And again, we have to find the trick to trigger: translate nature into a language stakeholders, the public and policy makers can understand. We do not have to make biologists of all the visitors to a National Park, just being there and having the emotional feeling of experiencing something very particular can create a heart for nature. The more people live in urban areas, the more this is an important aspect to take into account.



REWILDING EUROPE

FRANS SCHEPERS

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

All over the world urbanisation is a fast growing process. The expectation is that in 2020 4 out of 5 Europeans will live in urban areas. Huge areas of land are being abandoned, villages run empty and traditional cultural values are disappearing. Based on a study by the Institute for European Environmental Policy in 2010, the expectation is that another 12 to 18 million hectares will be abandoned in Europe in the coming years. In terms of biodiversity there are two major issues at stake. On the one hand people are leaving the small scale agricultural landscape which signifies that also millions of livestock that used to graze in these areas are leaving as well. Open and half open landscapes are quickly turning into a young forest. So what happens with all the species that live in these habitats? On the other hand we see wildlife returning in many areas. Many species that we once feared would die out by the millennium, are coming back in impressive numbers. Moreover there is a rising demand from people in urban areas to see live animals and experience nature and wildlife. Last but not least wilderness is one of the biodiversity strategies on the agenda in Europe, but in these difficult financial times, funding is a major challenge.

LET'S MAKE EUROPE A WILDER PLACE!

Considering these challenges and opportunities a new initiative has seen daylight in 2009: Rewilding Europe. The objective is to rewild 1 million hectares of land by 2020, where man does not interfere with nature and where natural processes can shape the landscape. Grazing is considered as a key ecological process to keep open landscapes. Therefore a number of scientists all over Europe discuss the sensitive matter of breeding back an animal that could have the same ecological role and looks genetically, in behaviour, shape and morphology as the wild aurochs.

Europe has many iconic species which can compete on a world scale, but for the time being the density of wildlife is too low. We need areas in Europe on a scale where wildlife can grow and die and survive and have the natural population dynamics we can see in other parts of the world. As such rewilding could become a key motivation tool for Europe's rich biodiversity. Five rewilding pilot initiatives have been selected throughout Europe: Western Iberia, Danube delta, Eastern Karpathians, Southern Karpathians and Velebit (Croatian coast).





CONNECTING WILDLIFE WITH PEOPLE

Of course we will not generate support for rewilding Europe if we don't communicate on a very large scale and at all levels. Partner organisation Wild Wonders of Europe organises large outdoor exhibitions in cities to show what Europe still has to offer. Renowned magazines such as National Geographic have covered the initiative and several TV channels all over Europe are interested in bringing rewilding Europe to the small screen.

THERE IS A HUGE OPPORTUNITY FOR WILDLIFE WATCHING IN EUROPE AND IT MAKES PEOPLE HAVE AN OUTSTANDING WILDLIFE EXPERIENCE. THE QUESTION IS: WHAT COULD BE THE EUROPEAN GORILLA?

FRANS SCHEPERS

CONNECTING WILDLIFE WITH ECONOMY

The question we asked ourselves is how rewilding can generate income and how investments can promote rewilding. Various local business opportunities have been identified, of which wildlife watching is one of the most important. Examples from Africa show that people pay 450 euros for one hour with mountain gorillas and that wildlife watching in the USA raises 24 billion dollars in revenue a year. There already are some examples in Europe, such as bear watching in Finland where companies already generate millions through bear watching. Wildlife starts generating its own income and creating new rural communities. Where we move from a low productive subsidised agricultural system to a more servicing economy based on wildlife and wild values, it could be an interesting opportunity for a number of abandoned rural areas in Europe.



PUTTING PRIVATE LAND MANAGERS IN THE RIGHT CONDITIONS TO ACT FOR NATURE

THIERRY DE L'ESCAILLE



As an association of landowners, land managers and farmers all over Europe ELO provides information, education and initiatives. The ELO mission is to promote the livelihood of the countryside, the role of private initiative, landownership and family businesses. Because a large part of the Natura 2000 areas are under private landownership, ELO stimulates landowners to enhance natural resources, to secure the good condition of land and to create added value for the natural and cultural heritage.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

ELO stresses that landowners are often willing and prepared to improve nature and biodiversity. To do this however some key conditions have to be taken into account. Landowners work based on a long-term commitment and in an intergenerational perspective. They prefer to work with scientifically based measures or regulations. A very important principle is their personal involvement and voluntary participation: if the landowner is convinced that he has a role to play, he will easily collaborate. Environmentalists also have to be aware that a landowner is bound, like Gulliver at Lilliput, by a lot of small restrictions. Each restriction taken separately is a non-issue, but the net of restrictions makes it impossible for him to do anything and to be a partner. A

good consultation between landowners, policy makers and implementation is of major importance and will make Natura 2000 and biodiversity measures acceptable: in other words, connecting people with people. ELO also pleads for a holistic approach between the different European DGs, to avoid conflicting policies as they sometimes exist now.

SUCCESSFUL PILOT PROJECTS

Several successful projects illustrate the involvement of landowners in nature and biodiversity initiatives. In the 3Water project in the province of Limburg (Belgium) the Bittern and the tree frog are symbolic target species to bring together public and private bodies in a challenge to halt the loss of biodiversity and implement the Natura 2000 goals while developing ecosystem services.

The Pollinator Network Initiative stimulates farmers and landowners to grow pollinator strips, spaces for biodiversity in function of pollinators. The minor loss of land to grow these strips is more than outweighed by the improved yields. Due to a growing loss of insects, pollination is a major issue: estimates are that pollination by native bees and other pollination insects is worth about 5 billion euros for European farmers and that the global value of pollinator services is about 150 billion



euros. With the support of a sponsor offering the seeds and the sowing of 10,000 hectares of pollinator strips in 16 countries, all with local seeds to respect the biodiversity of each region. Research on these strips has already shown the benefits for nature and farming, now there is a need to promote and explain the advantages to the farmers.

The Wildlife Estate Initiative stimulates voluntary commitment to reconnect land management with hunting and fishing activities. By upholding the Natura 2000 management principles, landowners can obtain an accreditation or label to reward them for their efforts. It is a public-private partnership with an international jury for 17 involved countries. Today 400,000 hectares are labelled and about 3 million hectares are under the accreditation.

Two interesting cases of (re)connecting landowners with nature and biodiversity are La Cassinazza di Baselica in Italy and Herdade da Raposa in Portugal. Like the other projects, they confirm that a strong collaboration between private owners and public bodies can increase the results for nature and biodiversity. Last but not least there is an urgent need for more interaction between scientists and private initiatives.

**THIS IS REALLY MORE THAN
RECONNECTING PEOPLE WITH
PEOPLE, IT IS ALSO ABOUT
CONNECTING AGRICULTURE WITH
NATURE.**

THIERRY DE L'ESCAILLE



NATURA 2000, EUROPE'S KEY TOOL TO CONNECT SOCIETY WITH NATURE

KARL FALKENBERG



20 years of nature legislation in Europe is a great occasion to celebrate. In 20 years we have moved from the designation to the management of nature sites and we have some 26,000 nature and Natura 2000 sites in Europe. But despite collective target setting and efforts Europe and the world are still losing biodiversity at a rhythm that is unsustainable. So if we want to make sure that we stop this further continued loss of biodiversity, then we have to set a number of conventions, directives or a regulatory framework.

BENEFITS FOR NATURE AND SOCIETY

20 years of nature legislation is now starting to pay off and beginning to deliver. A number of species are coming back, but we still need knowledge about what works, how it works, why it works and what doesn't work. We also have to understand that there is an inter-relationship between nature and us. So we both need to learn, nature has to learn the way back into the European continent, but we individuals have to learn that, if we want a wilder Europe, then we have to learn how to live in a wilder Europe. And this is a process which will take time, but it is a process that will give us the benefits of biodiversity and ecosystem services which are more and more generally recognised.

If these benefits want to be taken seriously, they have to be monitored and measured, so they can count as real economic assets. This requires us to work together and to mainstream nature legislation. But despite the European Natura 2000 legislation, each of the 27 Member States also has its own national nature regulations. But nature is too stupid to understand all our manmade, administrative and linguistic national borders. So if we want to work with nature, if we want to make sure that nature can develop and play the role we want nature to play, then for once we have to adjust to nature's demands, and they are more global than our present administrative national boundaries. So there is everything going for setting the targets and frameworks on a European level.

GHANDI ONCE SAID THAT THIS PLANET HAS ENOUGH RESOURCES FOR EVERY MAN'S NEED, BUT NOT FOR EVERY MAN'S GREED. EVERY NOW AND THEN WE SHOULD REMEMBER THIS AND THINK ABOUT HOW WE ORGANISE OURSELVES AS SOCIETIES.

KARL FALKENBERG



MORE ENTHUSIASM NEEDED

But nature protection and Natura 2000 should be made much more visible and we should stimulate more enthusiasm into actually developing Natura sites. The French Government have set a good example: there are so many Natura sites in France that it was useful to hand out an award for the best sites and to come together to celebrate. Another example is the video clip the European Commission made for the year of biodiversity, telling a ‘murder story’ by circling with a white line the victim birds, frogs, trees and finally a young couple lying in a park. A strong message ‘we either survive on this planet, together with nature, or we don’t’, can raise awareness and make people stop and think. This kind of initiatives can clearly stimulate and raise enthusiasm among all actors involved and can make people understand that we all need to walk in the same direction.

A second direction in which we have to develop is quite clearly connecting those 26,000 islands of nature protection that we have in the European territory. Nature is not designed

to live in specifically identified zoos or islands or sites. We need to make sure that there is connectivity and therefore we must think beyond national borders.

The instrument that finances to a large extent our nature legislation is Life. We are looking for some increase in the direct amounts available for these Life projects, but we are also counting very much on mainstreaming into the agricultural budget and into the regional cooperation budget, so that we really can multiply the efforts that we can finance out of DG Environment. A big challenge in today’s Europe is to convince the Member States that, instead of predetermining how much money is going back to their national territories, we should be spending the scarce budget according to quality and needs of nature that we want to restore throughout the European continent. So there are still many open issues, a lot more remains to be done, working with people, explaining what we do. But 20 years of European nature legislation has been successful and deserves a good celebration.

SURPRISE INTERMEZZO

The European Environment Agency has just published a report on many aspects of protected areas in Europe. The report describes the historical and environmental context and gives an overview of the diversity and differences in scale of the protected areas in Europe. The report also dives into marine protected areas, which constitute only 4% of the European sea territory as opposed to 25% of the land territory. The report concludes that protected areas are an ancient but still valid instrument for nature conservation, but that the role of protected areas has shifted from a static preservation function to a more dynamic provider of ecosystem services. Another important conclusion is that protected areas are necessary but not sufficient and that we need other instruments to complement the important role of protected areas.

Download the report at www.eea.europa.eu/publications/protected-areas-in-europe-2012



SCIENCE UNDERPINNING NATURE 2000 IN FLANDERS

JURGEN TACK



Natura 2000 is an EU regulation and a network of European protected areas and sites. The EU Birds Directive (1979) and the Habitat Directive (1992) focus on maintaining species and habitat types and restoring them in a favourable conservation status. This is a situation where a habitat type or species is prospering (in both quality and extent and population) and with good prospects to do so in the future as well.

FIELD ANALYSIS

The process of implementing Natura 2000 in Flanders started with an analysis of the annexes of the Directives to determine the habitats and species present in Flanders. This was no problem for species, but for the habitats an interpretation of the Habitat Directive was needed. The results were included in Flemish legislation. In a second step the Natura 2000 network was finally delineated and the individual sites were described.

In 2007 Flanders and all the EU Member States had to make a first report for the European Commission on the conservation status of 59 Natura 2000 species and 47 habitat types of the Atlantic Region of Belgium. The conclusion was that only 27% of the species at that time were in favourable conservation status while 56% were in unfavourable, inadequate to bad

condition. Only 4% of the habitat types were in favourable condition, 94% in unfavourable, inadequate to bad condition. The 2007 report formed the basis for setting the goals, making choices on a scientific basis and taking into account environmental conditions and natural processes. From 2013 onwards, the Agency for Nature and Forest in Flanders starts with the implementation of the conservation goals, taking measures and developing and adapting management plans. INBO, as a research institute, is supporting this scientifically.

IT IS VERY NICE TO HAVE A THEORETICAL APPROACH ON NATURA 2000 AND HOW TO REACH THESE LOCAL CONSERVATION GOALS, BUT WE HAVE TO DO IT IN PRACTICE. WITHOUT AN INTENSIVE CONSULTATION OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS THERE WOULD PERHAPS BE NO IMPLEMENTATION.

JURGEN TACK



REPORTING ON NATURA 2000

To report on the conservation goals and measures a clear dataset was needed to start out from. Several questions arose:

- Where are those habitat types? What is their area and their degree of development at regional, site and local level?
- Where are the annexe species and their habitats? What is their population at regional and site level? What is the amount and quality of their habitats?
- What are the pressures and threats at regional, site and local level?

Intensive (high cost) surveys and monitoring was set up, of which the results were added to a very valuable instrument, the Biological Valuation Map, a uniform field driven land cover map, including vegetation types, on a scale of 1/10,000, composed during a period of 30 years and available for the whole of Flanders. This presented a good knowledge of the actual distribution, but there was also a need for instruments to determine the local conservation status and the potential distribution.

EVALUATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

The next challenge for Natura 2000 in Flanders is an evaluation of the implementation of goals and measures. Therefore monitoring programmes for all species and habitat types must be launched, which means a shift to mapping with an even higher repeatability than today and more structured data collection for many species.

Important in the whole Flemish process on Natura 2000 implementation is the involvement of stakeholders from the very first minute. On a scientific basis data and general ecological principles were delivered, all starting out from environmental possibilities, but the only way to success was to take into account socio-economic aspects. Therefore a structured dialogue was set up between scientists, governmental administrations and the ministry for nature conservation, NGOs and other stakeholders from agriculture, small enterprises, employers, landowners and hunting and forestry organisations. This was exactly the place where science meets policy and policy meets society.



THE NATURAL PARK OF SOMIEDO: A GOOD EXAMPLE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

BELARMINO FERNANDEZ FERVIENZA



The Natural Park of Somiedo, situated in the province of Asturias in the north of Spain, has a mountainous territory with heights from of 400 to 2,200 metres. The village of Somiedo belongs entirely to the Natural Park, and has around 1,500 inhabitants spread over 38 small hamlets.

Until 1988, at the designation of the Natural Park, Somiedo lived entirely on livestock. About 350 farmers had on average 12 cows each, which means the economic level of the village was quite low. An aging population, emigration and infrastructure deficit were threatening.

A NATURAL PARK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

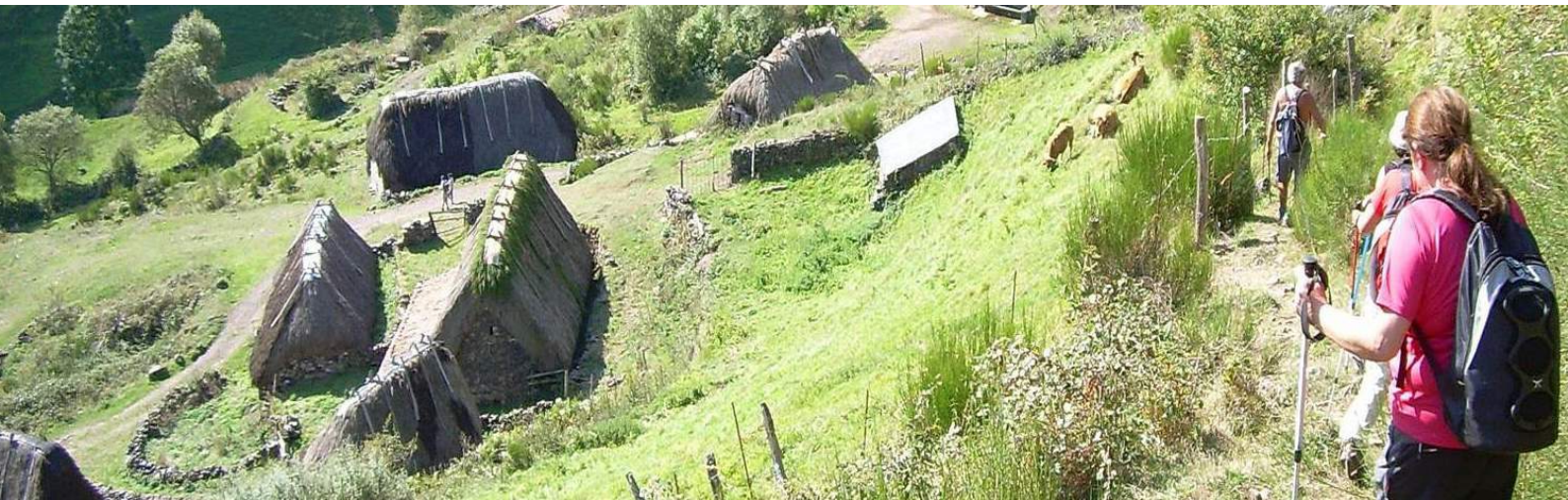
Aware of the natural beauties and the marvelous heritage of the area, the municipality of Somiedo also realized that the livestock and pasturage had formed the key factors of the (ecological) conservation level thus far. If Somiedo was going on the same trail as so many other rural areas in Spain where villages are almost completely abandoned, the livestock would also disappear which would create an ecological disaster. Therefore the municipality took the initiative of installing the Natural Park, based on natural and geographical values, but emphasizing the sustainable

development of the village, maintaining the traditional activities and the ethnographic heritage.

The livestock being the major asset for Somiedo, the village invested in two main axes: the quality of the livestock and the transhumance. Today the quality of the livestock of Somiedo is guaranteed by 8,000 Asturian red cows, a typical race of the high mountains, known for its good meat production and for good meadow maintenance. Somiedo also evolves to a more extensive and sustainable livestock. The second pillar is to maintain the traditional way of pasture and the transhumance. This is the seasonal movement of (people with their) livestock between summer and winter pastures. The richness of Somiedo lies in the fact that the pastures are public. Farmers have the right to let their cattle graze there and thanks to the transhumance all meadows high in the mountains and in the lower valleys are maintained.

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

Besides the improvement of the livestock, Somiedo has also developed an important service economy, largely concentrated on rural tourism. As there was no tourist activity before the start of the Natural Park, tourism has been developed under strict conditions.



40% of the Somiedo territory is out of bounds for tourist activities, building and infrastructure are only allowed in the villages and urban regulations stipulate that hotels can have at the most 36 seats (18 bedrooms). About 90 small tourist businesses, operated by local inhabitants have emerged since the start of the Natural Park 25 years ago. Also the public use of the park has been strictly determined: no motorised sports (such as paragliding or quad) are allowed, but the possibilities for hiking, cycling, horseback riding or mountaineering are unlimited.

25 YEARS OF SOMIEDO NATURAL PARK HAVE LARGELY CONTRIBUTED TO ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION AND RURAL TOURISM.

BELARMINO FERNANDEZ FERVIENZA

Somiedo area also has a large and well preserved woodland because no trains or roads permitted easy access to the area. The Natural Park decided that no economic forestry activities are allowed, only for proper use by the inhabitants.

But even though Somiedo has discovered the opportunities of economic diversification, the livestock will remain the most important activity in the area. Even in difficult financial times as now seen in Spain, rural areas such as Somiedo seem to be less affected than other regions. Maybe the current crisis could be an opportunity for rural areas to invest in sustainable development and to value traditional activities once more.

SURPRISE INTERMEZZO

In Flanders media man Nic Balthazar started with a positive, dynamic protest action to raise awareness for climate change. In 2008 he made a short film with 6,000 people on a beach where every dot of the prolific sentence was made by one of these 6,000 people. The short film was spread over the Internet and released on the digital streets of Facebook and Twitter where it achieved incredible success. A new model of event was born.

Just before the 2009 Copenhagen summit on climate, the action was magnified and 12,000 people were dancing for the climate on U2's Magnificent. The clip again showed how this could be a real media weapon in the search to raise awareness and activate people in a positive and more dynamic way.

In 2012 'Sing for the Climate' has overthrown every imagination. In 180 Belgian cities and villages 80,000 people have been filmed singing the climate song (based on the Italian folk song 'Bella ciao'), 250,000 youngsters have been singing together and the concept is wildly spread over different organisations. Even the participants of the EUROPARC Conference sing together for the climate.

Nic Balthazar aims to take the successful and easy concept of singing for the climate outside the Belgian borders. Already people in Canada, the Netherlands, Spain and Lebanon are joining in. Help Nic in reaching his ambitious dream of creating an ecological hymn for the 21st century and organise a 'Sing for the Climate' event in your country. All information and materials are available at www.singfortheclimate.com.



SELLING NATURE: IMAGES AND WORDS THAT WORK

NIAL BENVIE

With Niall Benvie we ask ourselves if our efforts to communicate this passion we all have about the natural world are having any effect. We must be aware that more and more people are becoming alienated from the natural world and that most people are not really interested in the stakes of the natural world and their relationship with it. Naturalists on the other hand are completely immersed in the subject, are passionate about it, live and breathe the issues every day. We begin to lose sight of what it is like not to know why these things matter. Therefore we have to find simple ways to communicate complex ideas. It is also very unlikely that people - even nature lovers - are prepared to cut back their standard of living to rescue nature.

NATURE SMART

To illustrate that some people think entirely differently about nature and biodiversity issues from how we do, Niall Benvie uses Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory. The theory states that there are all different ways in which people have different strengths: some people are music smart, others are sports smart and there are even people who are nature smart. Nature smart people don't need to be encouraged to go out into nature, they have a natural affinity and desire to be

out there looking, cataloguing and differentiating, it is their life. And although the nature smart are the most convincing advocates for the natural world, they are still the ones who are often not as effective as they might be.

A second group are the conscientious, people who are susceptible to some of the messages that the conservation community sends out and who show a real concern about environment, even if they don't have great in-depth knowledge. A last group, the majority, are the inaccessible, people who are immune to the nature message. The best group to focus on initially is the conscientious and within this group we should mainly focus on children, who are most naturally drawn to nature and from whom opportunities for first-hand engagement with the natural world have often disappeared and been taken away.

Most important though is that we have to recognise that the way in which we disseminate our message should be changing dramatically, making use of inbound marketing strategies and integrating the most modern means, such as social media etc. The nature smart are the people who should be blogging and tweeting, because we have the authority of that first-hand knowledge and excitement.





MEET YOUR NEIGHBOURS

We also need to look at how we use imagery in a more intelligent way. The 'Meet your neighbours' media project is an original and nice concept to create great remarkable content people want to look at and share. The focus is on local accessible species to stimulate a first-hand contact, so people can see what it is you ask them to be interested in. The project uses a particular photographic style, photographing things on pure white backgrounds, backlit, soft light from the front, very detailed images which when they are magnified have an astonishing level of detail which fascinates people. The subjects are presented as individuals, they are given a celebrity treatment in the way they are

photographed and presented as characters in their own right. The amazing pictures are put in the streets and in public places for random people to see and admire them. The project also encourages people to participate and learn the techniques for how to make their own amazing photographs.

Good imagery is not just decoration, it carries a message, gives a context to words and sometimes even makes people smile. Because unfortunately, one of the biggest drawbacks is that nature is generally not awfully funny. And there's no doubt that if people can be made to laugh along the way, they will remember your story much more effectively.

**WE HEAR A SYMPHONY WHEREAS
MOST PEOPLE ONLY HEAR THE
TAPPING.
WE UNDERSTAND THE ISSUES, BUT
TO MOST PEOPLE IT'S JUST NOISE.**

NIALL BENVIE



3RD CONFERENCE DAY - WORKSHOPS

(RE)CONNECTING SOCIETY WITH BIODIVERSITY

WORKSHOP 1

THE ROCKY SIDE OF NATURE

What is the importance of geology for biodiversity? It is no surprise that important Natura 2000 areas coincide with exceptional geological phenomena.

It is no surprise that important Natura 2000 areas coincide with exceptional geological phenomena.

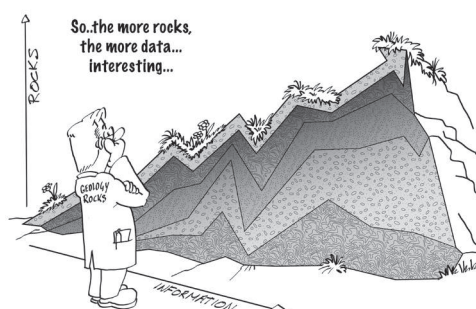
Abiotic factors such as soil components, the undulating nature of the land or its substrate do, to a large extent, determine which plant life and animal life will be present. Certain unusual geological predispositions are linked to special habitats and a specific biodiversity. Despite these assets, geology is not always at the centre of attention with regard to protection, management and communication about nature parks.

8 people participated in this workshop and made some important considerations concerning the management of geological sites: restoring quarries needs careful thinking and levelling may destroy geo- and biodiversity. Moreover, biodiversity anomalies are often related to disturbed substrates. On the other hand biodiversity can be more sustainable with the help of geology.

Geology should play a more important role in sustainable tourism and therefore we should promote local but extraordinary geological features, which show that geology is 'cool'. A promotional theme could be that geology is the foundation stone of life and society. To make geology attractive, communication at all levels should be kept simple, understandable, creative and less academic. It might be an idea to link art and literature to geological features.

A special emphasis was placed on thinking and acting locally: our own immediate environment is as good as any to learn and understand about geological features. This should also be the starting point for educating (young) people in geology, from primary schools on.

Other ideas involve the launch of a 'Wild geology of Europe' photo library, powerful images to promote geology, a task to be taken up by European & Global Geoparks.



WORKSHOP 2

VIPS – VOLUNTEERS IN PARKS

What are the most common issues when working with volunteers?

Organisations across Europe invest a lot of energy in recruiting and training new volunteers. These volunteers are then deployed on various activities: as guides, in reception areas in visitor centres, to assist at large events etc. During the time they work for a certain organisation their skills improve and they become of greater value to their organisation. It is quite a hard job keeping volunteers motivated and ensuring they remain active. This involves a lot more than just showing your respect for their work now and again.

The 17 participants of the workshop stressed that a key factor in volunteer management is finding the right balance between the needs and motives of both protected areas and volunteers. Also offering a real experience of

nature in the protected areas is very valuable to reconnect people with biodiversity. This is important to spread enthusiasm and ‘infect’ each other (‘nature is contagious’). Volunteers can be motivated to collect a lot of data or to monitor protected areas, reconnecting people and nature to nature. This can lead to a very interesting win-win situation.

An important closing remark is that investing in volunteer management guarantees benefits on a European level.



WORKSHOP 3

CHILD MEETS WILD

How do we reconnect young people with nature?

The vast majority of children in our society have plenty of opportunities to develop themselves. There are plenty of youth organisations that allow children to get to know nature. However this does not always happen. Both mother and father work nowadays and they have less time to spend exploring nature with their children. Children and youths from disadvantaged families have even more difficulties as they do not have the financial means to experience a carefree childhood. Due to these factors the link between children and nature is often a tenuous one. A great many initiatives are aimed at this specific group. These initiatives try to reinstate contact between children of all social backgrounds and nature.

The 17 participants of this workshop concluded that new technologies could draw the attention of youngsters to nature: using technical devices and new media such as GPS, geocach, cameras or phones could help child-

ren create their own experience and share it on the web, e.g. by putting in on Facebook where friends can 'like' their results and spread them organically.

It is also important to listen to stakeholders, anyone who can be affected by or who can affect a project, and to involve them in the decisions regarding the initiative. To get people involved, we need different offerings for different audiences. But any kind of nature, anywhere, can be used to attract people and a direct contact with nature is necessary to learn to appreciate nature. Besides, experiencing nature is vital to the development of one and all. Experiences can also be stimulated by group activities, team building and games in nature areas.

Last but not least, a general conclusion pleaded to go back to nature as a setting or a catalyst for many human activities.



WORKSHOP 4

MINDING NATURE'S BUSINESS

How can a corporation help out with the maintenance of a natural area?

With the reduction of the overall government budget the subsidies for preserving nature have come under increasing pressure. In order to maintain and bolster the necessary exertions to preserve biodiversity, additional methods of funding will need to be developed. One possibility in this respect is to increase the financial involvement of commercial enterprises. From the increasing sense of corporate responsibility a great deal of experience has been accrued with regard to sponsoring, adoption and attracting funds.

In this workshop, the 23 participants were convinced that first of all, nature organisations should be innovative and offer added value to catch the attention of the corporate

sector. To reach out to companies we need to translate biodiversity into a language that corporations can understand. Many companies nowadays are interested in investing in local projects situated in a more global strategy. To build a successful and sustainable relationship with the corporate sector it is of major importance to share mutual benefits and try to create a win-win situation. A good suggestion is to include fun or even emotional proposals if you work together with corporations. Of course, a mutual respect for their ideas forms the basis for a strong collaboration.

A strong partnership with the corporate sector is a main challenge, because it can help and stimulate sustainable development.



WORKSHOP 5

PARKS AND PROFESSORS

How can we create a relationship between nature conservation and nature research?

Invasive species, climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental pollution are global issues that concern many people - scientists, nature conservationists, policy makers and nature lovers in general.

Establishing a Field Research Centre in a national park, where questions dealing with the above issues can be investigated in situ and in controlled environments, while simultaneously collaborating with nature conservationists will facilitate and enhance the communication on these issues to the general public.

Academics are often not the best communicators of their own knowledge and findings to the general public. On the other hand nature interpreters and communicators need correct and up-to-date scientific background information. A strong collaboration between universities and nature areas will enable and facilitate the exchange of knowledge, expertise and experience regarding biodiversity, nature conservation and management between scientists, local experts, nature conservationists and volunteers.

11 people attended this workshop and stated that a good collaboration between nature conservationists and researchers can stimulate a dynamic long-term strategy for monitoring and research in protected areas. This can identify the relevant research questions per protected area, starting from its socio-economic and ecological complexity.

Even more results can be achieved when a collaborative research project includes different knowledge sources (scientific, local and traditional). It is again important to include all stakeholders (managers, researchers, land users, public, policy makers) in a communication and information platform to stimulate and facilitate data exchange, data harmonisation and citizen science.

There is a strong wish that EUROPARC should discuss and highlight the importance of research for protected areas and prepare recommendations for the EU.



WORKSHOP 6

WANTED: CEO FOR NATURE

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) has responsibilities as a communicator, decision maker, leader, manager and executor. In other words: the CEO is the key adaptation manager. To effectively implement adaptive management, it is required that the organisation has access to adaptive management planning strategies and tools.

This workshop aimed to raise awareness about issues involved in developing and implementing an adaptive management approach at different levels: in doing so, we aim to enable more organisations to become aware of adaptive management as an approach, why (in particular) climate change and invasive species require increasingly adaptive management, to increase knowledge about tools that are available, and the integral role of monitoring in the adaptive management process.

9 participants discussed these issues and concluded that adaptive Management can help to connect site managers to share and exchange information for the benefit of N Zero Management (through online open connection).

It enables site managers to connect to new developments and insights such as climate change or invasive species.

The EU facilitates adaptive management, e.g. through climate change funding, which should definitely be continued. Adaptive management is a perfect opportunity to achieve consistency between countries in Natura 2000 management and to build a 'collective memory'. The suggestion was made to establish an international working group on management planning to support practice and improve management planning for the benefit of Natura 2000.



WORKSHOP 7

MY PARK IS YOUR PARK

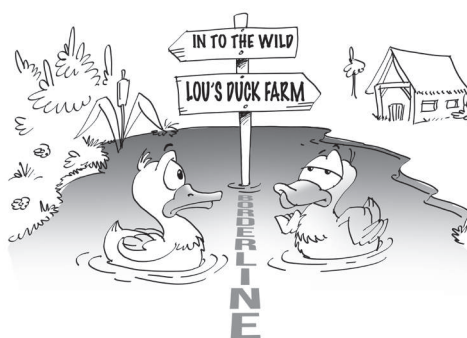
What are the benefits of working transboundary?

Cross-border cooperation has been heavily promoted by all sorts of European funds. The aim of this cooperation is to bring about more liaison and cohesion across national borders. However these cooperative ventures are made difficult in practice due to widely differing legislative and cultural disparities and (procedural) barriers between Member States. Nevertheless there are quite a number of success factors which, despite the differences, result in a fruitful and inspiring cooperation. Finally, it is vital that we exchange experience concerning the question of efficiency.

A group of 21 participants stressed the importance of finding common goals to achieve suc-

cessful transboundary cooperation. Working together on common objectives and actions gives more visibility, which can create more awareness and enhance an empowerment of local stakeholders. A good example of how to create a bond between the partners is to try to find the main corporate identity and create a coalition of the willing at both sides of the boundaries. Moreover transboundary work offers better funding opportunities to bring people together and exchange experiences.

To reach a larger audience it might be a good idea to install multilingual and multicultural visitor centres as a meeting place.



WORKSHOP 8

OCEANS OF LIFE

What is the importance of marine conservation for biodiversity?

The marine environment is subject to multiple policies transcending fisheries, sustainable energy, maritime transport and Natura 2000. Often, just as in the terrestrial environment, competing priorities can present major practical problems for Natura 2000 site managers who are more often involved in the coastal environment.

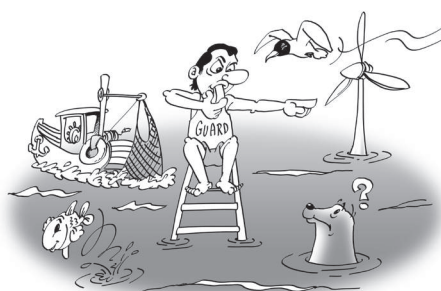
The EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive 2008/56/EC, the Birds and Habitats Directives, are now entering their implementation phase in the marine environment. As protected areas are extending from coastal areas to the high seas, site management organisations are bound to fulfil new roles.

The 12 participants of this workshop agreed that it is very important for marine protected areas to not just be words on paper, and to ensure that some key examples of efficient small scale 'Marine Parks' are developed.

Therefore the necessary funding should be secured, including seed funding to start small scale marine protected areas. Europe can also play an important role in pioneering large scale marine protected areas in European waters.

It is necessary to promote a network of Marine protected areas and stimulate the exchange between their managers, spread out over different regional seas. As in other protected areas the benefits of protecting marine life should be communicated and demonstrated to different types of public.

Marine protected areas are an important tool to maintain the resilience of marine ecosystems in a changing environment and are a long-term insurance policy. Designation of marine protected areas should be considered as a dynamic process and a long-term commitment to protect them.



WORKSHOP 9

DESTINATION NATURE

How can sustainable tourism create a future for nature parks and help (re)connect biodiversity and nature?

Tourism has long been viewed as sustainable provided it does not affect nature and natural resources.

More recently tourism has also been seen to contribute to the local economy, to involve local people in the decision-making processes and to keep resources in local areas whilst also contributing to nature conservation.

Current concerns are about reducing energy consumption and carbon footprint, whereas protected areas must remain accessible to people, most of them living in urban areas. Sustainability now also implies accessibility and alternative mobility, such as cycling and/or public transport as far as the gate to protected areas. The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism aims to cover all those aspects in an on-going process, first for the protected area itself, in partnership with the local tourism businesses, and later for tourist operators proposing the area as a sustainable destination.

24 people discussed sustainable tourism in this workshop and added that visiting nature is all about emotions and should be an emotional experience. Telling a story can help to call up emotions for nature and therefore 'ambassadors of nature' such as professional guides, volunteers, junior rangers, businesses and farmers can provide visitors with unique stories about their territory.

Sustainable tourism is also about sustainable travelling, and this at all levels. There is a need to prolong stays, diminish travel and increase business income. Sustainable tourism can incorporate less favoured publics and is an opportunity for public health.

Whereas biodiversity is a bad word for marketing nature, it does represent good numbers for sustainable tourism, which can influence politicians. We must increase the awareness that sustainable tourism has a positive effect on biodiversity as well as on economics.



WORKSHOP 10

E-PARK

How can digital visitor payback systems be used to support nature conservation?

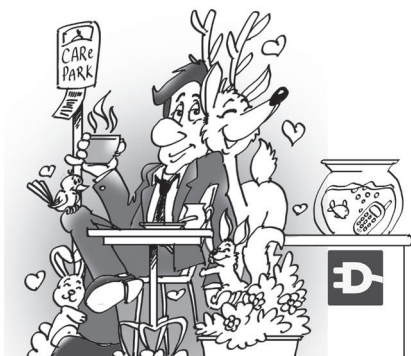
There is a whole array of payback concepts that can be used to create a revenue stream from a payback strategy. The question is how you can convince visitors to make a voluntary financial contribution for nature projects that they visit or have visited. Hoge Kempen National Park has worked out two universal concepts. Also digital communication specialist Boondoggle has produced an inspirational little book filled with digital visitor payback concepts.

The 17 participants of this workshop emphasise that digital media can create a new,

sexy image for nature. The content is easy to share and has a viral marketing effect. Digital means are a good tool for communication and motivation and are a great way to extend the visit (before or after the actual physical visit).

Digital media also allow us to reach out to new target groups, especially youngsters, but also disabled persons who don't have physical access to certain protected areas.

Digital is creative, a new way of thinking to intervene in daily life in a surprising manner, thinking outside the box.



WORKSHOP 1 1

IN THE HOTHOUSE

What can we do to counter the effects of climate change?

Climate change is no longer a vague term but a problem that we are confronted with on a daily basis. Plant life and animals also have to battle against the consequences of climate change. Our nature areas, farmlands, water courses, etc. can be managed so that we can cope with these changes or at least soften their impact. Measures should be taken to retain water during wet spells in preparation for dry spells or droughts. Interventions are necessary to ensure vegetation and animal life have the opportunity to seek out new habitats if climate zones shift.

The 12 participants of these workshops underline that climate change is not a problem only to be tackled from a global point of view. Especially at a local level adaptation measures are necessary in which nature can play an

important role. Particularly wetland protection and rewetting initiatives can create win-win situations for water management, nature development and CO benefits. Therefore synergy between adaptation and integration is necessary.

There is a lot to be done to raise awareness and get acceptance on the problem of climate change. A good communication and marketing strategy should involve convincing storytelling based on reliable figures. Local companies could be persuaded to participate in climate actions (e.g. by selling CO² certificates) if they are aware of the co-benefits of climate measures for water, soil, socio-economic or even biodiversity improvements. For this reason, a thorough monitoring and verification is necessary but expensive.



WORKSHOP 12

PRACTICING NATURA 2000

How can we translate the European policy on nature conservation into practice?

Natura 2000 is the centrepiece of EU nature & biodiversity policy. It is a EU-wide network of nature protection areas established under the 1992 Habitats Directive. The aim of the network is to assure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats. It is comprised of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated by the Member States under the Habitats Directive and also incorporates Special Protection Areas (SPAs) which they designate under the 1979 Birds Directive. One of the outcomes of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, COP 10) was to tackle the biodiversity loss by integrating policies and implementing solutions.

The 13 workshop members consider management plans to be essential for the favourable

conservation status of Nature 2000 sites. Therefore national rural development plans should be implemented on regional and local levels.

The preparation process of a management plan should however be open and must include all stakeholder groups from the very beginning. It is also pointed out that the necessary budget should be available to set up the plans. That is why protected area managers should try to 'sell' their areas very well when applying for contracts or subsidies in agri- and forestry environmental schemes.

A last remark is that EUROPARC sections and members should be encouraged to connect practice to national policies.



WORKSHOP 13

SIDE BY SIDE AGRICULTURE

How can you combine the needs of nature conservation with those of agriculture?

15% of Europe's surface area is part of the Natura 2000 network and a large proportion of this area is designated as being on farming land. The current large scale farming practices are difficult to combine with natural aims. Agricultural land must produce the largest possible harvest, while on the other hand nature organisations are encouraged to preserve and restore various species and habitats.

The 18 participants of the workshop are confident that a compromise between these conflicting interests should surely be possible. Farmers would be able to offer more opportunities for nature by using amended farming methods and even arrange and maintain (part of) their fields in an ecological way.

Nature organisations should understand that farming is not a job, but a way of life. The dialogue with all stakeholders is important and agri-environmental measures should be discussed with agriculture professionals. We have to be aware that farming is a reality in our protected areas and we have to overcome our merge plans with simple and realistic environmental measures. A good suggestion was to start collaborating with farmers who volunteer and others will join later if you can show some good experiences.

Europe must play a big role in inventing new agricultural policies that link traditional practices and organic ideas.



WORKSHOP 14

WHERE WILD THINGS SHOULD BE

What is the importance of wilderness and wild places in Europe?

For centuries Europeans have believed that wild areas of nature should be tamed, but in the present day we realize that wilderness can also be a source of inspiration. Wilderness is by definition an area where nature can function as a complete and robust system where flora and fauna can develop with minimal human intervention. Importantly, Europe holds a vast store of wild areas, which continue to contribute to our need to connect to nature. These are our top areas in the European Natura 2000 network.

In addition, these areas could contribute to the economic health in the future. A wilderness economy can become a form of sustainable tourism in Europe and can compensate for the traditional countryside economies that make up large sections of Europe.

The workshop, with 12 participants, starts by adopting the definition of Wilderness developed by the Wild Europe Wilderness Working Group to promote wilderness protection and restoration in Europe. EUROPARC and Eurosite members who work and care for wilderness should be reconnected and contribute to a joint communication strategy on wilderness. Therefore they should work together with other relevant organisations (PAN Parks, WILD Europe, Rewilding Europe) and develop a 'Communication and Engagement Database' consisting of useful case studies and best practices as a guidance and facilitation for efficient communication on wilderness. The aim is to increase acceptance and support of the public.

In the short term the working group will try to organise a joint input for WILD10 and support for the 2013 International Year of Wilderness.



WORKSHOP 15

LIFE IS LIFE

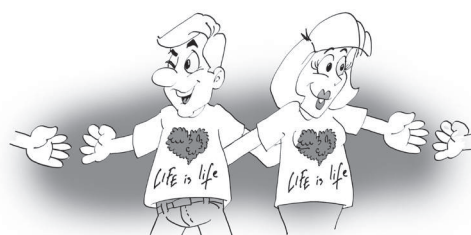
How do you create a successful LIFE project?

In order to ensure that the framework of the Bird and Habitat Directives was not just a static, purely protective instrument, the European co-financing programme Life+ was brought into being. Since then more than 2,500 European projects have been authorised and more than 1.35 billion euros have been granted in order to provide a contribution to the effective preservation and restoration of this network. This Life fund will remain a vital instrument in the future.

The 14 workshop participants are aware of the fact that writing a successful project proposal requires insight into threats, problems and potentials. Indispensable ingredients of a strong project proposal are certainly clear

objectives which are closely related to Natura 2000 issues. It is important to involve partners and stakeholders and to integrate multiple aspects such as tourism, forest management, fisheries, climate change and socio-economic benefits (ecosystem services).

The organisation structure should clearly highlight a large participation of different audiences, e.g. through awareness-raising activities and educational projects. The exchange of knowledge with other projects or sites is also a strong asset and monitoring or evaluation processes should be integrated. Last but not least, the 'after-Life' consolidation, or looking beyond the time spectrum of the Life project, is a major condition.



WORKSHOP 16

NATURE ON YOUR MIND

How can nature be beneficial to our mental wellbeing?

It cannot be denied that nature has an effect on our state of mind and mood. A lot of research has been carried out into the extent to which nature plays a role in our health. Several studies on the subject have been published in scientific journals and environmental psychology is becoming a hot topic.

The workshop, in which 19 participants took part, pointed out that implementing nature in healthcare can help to break down barriers between societal factors and nature. 'Nature on your Mind' can provide a new context for the experience and enjoyment of nature in

a way that traditional conservation cannot. Integrating nature into health policies can act as a vehicle to explain what nature needs and what nature can provide. This is an important issue in educating about nature, because once you get to know something, you are less likely to kill it.

The participants also indicated that, when nature becomes useful in healthcare, we can better overcome social inequality, because it helps us focus less on the differences between people (nationality, class etc.) and more on what they have in common.



WORKSHOP 17

NATURE'S CALLING

Does it make sense to use digital communication for nature conservation?

Nature organisations have to free up a considerable amount of time and resources for digital communication. Normally this means a member of staff has to take on extra duties and this person may not have sufficient knowledge to make optimal use of the facilities. The question is whether it is worth the effort and how to use these new methods efficiently.

The 19 participants in this workshop look at digital media, apps, mobile devices and e-games as a real asset for future communication. Especially for reconnecting selected target groups such as children or young adults with nature, digital communication could reach out to these audiences. But as in traditional communication it is still very important to choose the appropriate means for the correct target group. Moreover it is a challenge to

‘control’ the messages distributed via digital or social media.

To reconnect business with biodiversity it has been suggested that we should create and offer clever or fun donation schemes and raise awareness with possible sponsors and other related businesses. Thinking outside the box might be useful, also for team building activities or transboundary and multicultural park projects.

Protected areas must adopt a proactive multi-stakeholder approach to raise awareness and could use digital media to do so. But digital media are not the first means to go for; face-to-face personal contact is still considered more valuable.





SYMPOSIUM

RIVERPARK MAASVALLEI

What is the public relevance of large-scale river restoration?

The river Meuse rises in the Langres plateau in France and has travelled 950 kilometres before it flows into the Dutch North Sea at Rotterdam. For a distance of 45 km the river forms the border between the Netherlands and Belgium (Flanders). Along this section of the river, the Meuse is a broad and non-channelled waterway, which is quite unusual for a lowland river of this size. This segment of the Meuse has great ecological and tourist potential. Through a variety of partnerships and over a number of years measures have been implemented to build a river ecosystem with an international asset, unique in Flanders. Numerous efforts are also being made to provide a more expansive valley landscape. Taking care of heritage, spatial quality and experiential value are of crucial importance.

New opportunities are created to improve the recovery and extension of the river and to stimulate young dynamic river nature at the top level. Combined with various forms of nature focused tourism, these assets ensure the necessary quality impulse and the greater international appeal of the area. All of these ambitions require an integrated approach and are bundled in the development of the “Meuse Valley Cross Border River Park”.

GO WITH THE FLOW

Lambert Schoenmaekers, project leader at Regional Landscape Kempen & Maasland, stresses that the development of the River Park Meuse Valley is a long-term ambition. It is mostly a process in which many (smaller)

project components form a greater whole. More than merely a nature or landscape project, it is an integrating process to develop a region or an area based on its intrinsically distinguishing physical features. Not only the lowland river is taken into account in the process, but also the string of villages which has risen up on both sides of the river. The integrating process aims at combining ecological (biodiversity, landscape), social and economic interests in a harmonious synergy. This synergy, more than a compromise, is the real challenge and added value of the process.

An international promotion and marketing of this quality region is again crucial to reach the overall goal of an ‘ecological landscape’. The economical assets of the region are illustrated in a win-win collaboration between gravel extraction and tourism and, if even possible, with multifunctional agriculture or flanking agricultural measures.

The social added value lies in the high quality environment realized within the River Park. It creates an asset for all inhabitants or visitors who can enjoy pleasant surroundings in which to live, work or start a hospitality business such as restaurants or hotels.

Both these sustainability pillars are enforced by a third sustainable component, which is the conservation and increasing of biodiversity and the biotic landscape values in the area.

HAPPY BIRDS

The landscape in the Meuse Valley has changed drastically over the past half century due to the intensification of agriculture and large scale gravel extraction in the summer and the winter bed of the river. These changes are well represented by a change in avifauna. Ornithologist Jan Gabriëls confirms that the River Park's sustainable approach is a real asset for birdlife in the Meuse Valley. In a gripping presentation he illustrated the evolution of avifauna in the River Park. Counts and observations of specialists in the region have indicated that many bird species benefit from the increasing river dynamics and the expanded nature area.

The gravel pits have become large areas of water, which have made the Meuse Valley the furthest inland wintering area for wild geese and the largest area in Limburg for water birds. Nature-oriented measures were needed to ensure the maintenance and adequate management of the remaining original landscape. Large scale works for the refurbishment of the gravel pits were the basis of the nature restoration in the Meuse Valley. Recently over 100 species of breeding birds and over 100 species of non-breeding birds - including water birds - have been counted in the area.

Moreover, the Meuse Valley could be an ideal location for spontaneous nature development and space for rewilding. Wouter Helmer, director of the Dutch Foundation Ark was convinced that the approach for rewilding is highly compatible with the expansion of the river for flood security, mineral extraction and tourism.

Natura 2000 and dynamic river processes Frank Vassen, Policy Officer Natura 2000 at the European Commission explained that even within the European Natura 2000 legislation there are broad possibilities for a flexible management of an area such as the Meuse Valley. Out of the 231 Annex I habitat types, 9 are river habitats, but many more habitats rely on natural river and floodplain dynamics for their favourable conservation status (i.e. alluvial forest, inland dunes, etc.). In ad-

dition, numerous species of mammals, birds, fish, dragonflies and molluscs of Community interest directly depend on dynamic river and floodplain habitats for their favourable conservation status.

According to Frank Vassen, river restoration has to be considered as a potential for quick wins. The meeting of conservation targets does not necessarily call for a strictly fragmented management by area, but in the case of the Meuse Valley it is more advisable to reach the European targets at the level of the whole valley, starting out from a system management approach. Important in this methodology are the dynamic river processes and the use of large grazers. If necessary, more conventional nature management interventions such as mowing and cutting can add to the process.

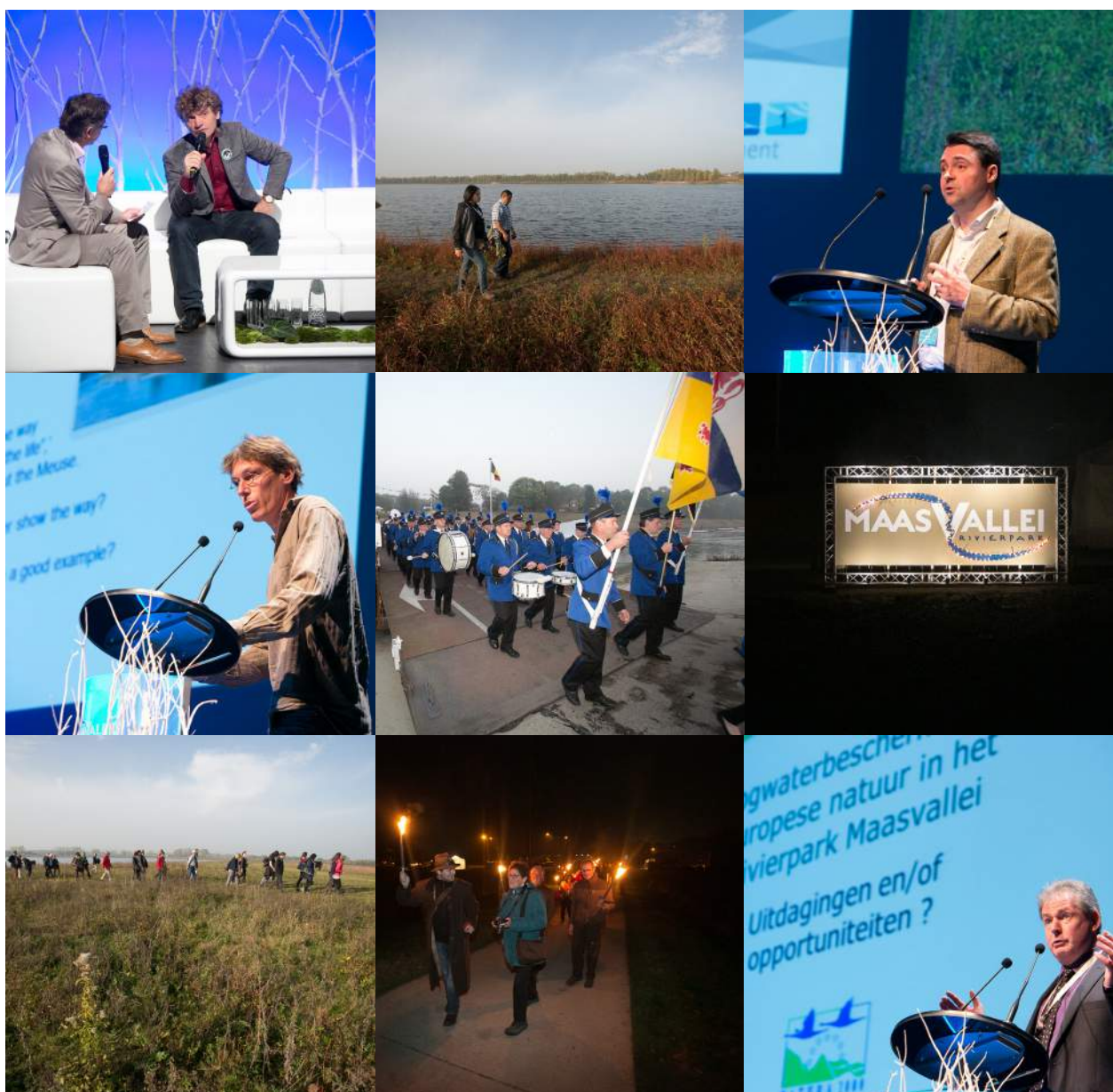
AN EXEMPLARY APPROACH

Kris Van Looy of the River Hydro-Ecology Unit of Irstea (France) presented a worldwide synopsis of the best examples of large river restoration projects. He analysed the projects from an ecological and societal perspective, weighing up the costs and benefits. The Meuse river restoration was mentioned among the best practices, integrating societal demands such as flood protection, gravel mining and gravel pit restoration, but also taking into account the natural and scenic quality, and regional development with recreation and ecotourism spin-offs. The balance between the societal and ecological gains and the economic costs of the river restoration was considered very successful.

In the River Park Meuse Valley, the Meuse Valley municipalities, the Flemish and Dutch governments, nature organisations and the tourism sector all work together to achieve a sustainable and future-focused (tourist) economy for the region. The results of avifauna monitoring, the numbers of tourists and the possibilities for mining activities have clearly shown that an integrated approach of tourism, excavation, ecology and economy is the way to go.

CELEBRATION TIME!

The 2012 EUROPARC conference launched the opening campaign of the Meuse Valley River Park. In addition to an informal meeting, participants experienced the River Park in one of the recently restored nature areas along the river bank. All conference participants attended an atmospheric and inspiring opening ceremony on the banks of the river and joined in a lively evening walk before enjoying a celebratory meal in the Leut Castle on the outer edges of the Meuse.





4TH CONFERENCE DAY - SITE VISITS

(RE)CONNECTING SOCIETY WITH BIODIVERSITY



HOGHE KEMPEN, THE FIRST AND ONLY BELGIAN NATIONAL PARK

A first excursion took 38 participants to some of the 'Gateways' of the Hoge Kempen National Park, a new and unique way to manage visitors and provide regulation in this densely populated region. The participants learned about the beneficial economic effects and consequently improved long term protection and maintenance of biodiversity. The Hoge Kempen National Park, covering an area of 60 square kilometres, has also been designated as a Specially Protected Area within the framework of the Bird Directive and Habitat Directive and is managed by the Nature and Forestry Agency of the Flemish Government. 25 participants found out how the European conservation objectives are being implemented in this area. Another excursion led to the site of the Kempen-Broek Border Park, where 23 participants focused on three marshland recovery projects, each with their own history and approach. The three areas visited are all part of the borderlands of the Natura 2000 network.

FROM BROOKS, LAKES AND RIVER-BANKS

10 participants discovered the cross-border Maas valley, where large scale works are carried out to create 2,500 hectares of typically associated river flora in the bed of the river during winter on both the Belgian and Dutch banks. More wet nature was found in the Wijers Lake Complex in Limburg; a historical, open landscaped fish hatchery turned into a multi-use wooded environment where nature, soft recreation and commercial fisheries exist side by side. 10 participants were immersed in the Life project '3Waters', which hopes to improve conditions for marshland birds and tree frogs as well as the vegetation in food-poor static waters, by carrying out structural improvements. The Zwarte beek valley (Black Brook valley) is an excellent example of reconnecting partners to cooperate for the benefits of nature. Land management association Natuurpunt explained to 12 participants how they cooperate with the Nature and Forestry Agency of the Flemish Government and the military authority, in order to preserve and restore vital aspects of European nature in the valley, in the wetlands and dry heaths of the area.



The venue of C-Mine in Genk is an excellent starting point from which the participants of the conference can discover the best practices for implementing the reconnection model and can admire some successful Life projects.

CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION FOR NATURE

The Hoge Venen covers 6,000 hectares and is a nature reserve of marshland and heath. It is approximately 600 metres above sea level. The nature reserve is located in the Ardennes massif in the south of Belgium and along with the Eifel National Park in Germany forms a cross-border nature reserve. 20 participants discovered this beautiful area. 31 participants went wildlife watching in the HABITAT Euregion and the Tri-Nations-Point. There are certain special animal species that are found here, such as the wild cat, the beaver, the badger, the wild boar and the red deer. The area is encircled by four different national parks and nature areas (Hoge Kempen, Eifel, Hoge Venen and Meinweg), and the various species migrate freely from one area to another thanks to the many valleys, rivers, forests and old cultural landscapes that link these areas to one another. Also the Dutch/German Maas-Swalm-Nette nature park is an example of cross-border cooperation at its very best. 15 participants watched forest and heath lands alternate with the cultural landscape in the tributary valleys and the Meinweg National Park.

WHERE MAN MEETS NATURE

20 participants discovered the rich area of Haspengouw, where the land use is more intensive with agricultural farming, cattle rearing and fruit production. The result is a cultural landscape of vast variety, sunken roads and blooming orchards. And even the European Capital Brussels has plenty of green spaces and impressive nature reserves. 21 participants visited some outstanding nature parks, where, using an interactive approach, old and new residents have been involved in the setting up of these facilities.



CLOSING CEREMONY

(RE)CONNECTING SOCIETY WITH BIODIVERSITY



THE CHARTER FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN PROTECTED AREAS



Carol Ritchie and Frederico Minozzi have the honour of closing the EUROPARC 2012 Conference on (Re)Connecting society with biodiversity. This last reconnection moment is dedicated to the presentation of the Awards for the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. This innovative tool was created from a LIFE project in 1995 by a group of pioneer parks and is a voluntary certification process based on 10 principles for sustainability, and centred on the active involvement of local communities.

The aim was to develop a process, a methodology whereby partnerships can be formed between tourism businesses and protected areas, to agree on common sustainable tourism goals and to manage their territories as sustainable tourism destinations. They were seeking to create a plan to manage these areas and these destinations in a way that was good for business and good for biodiversity.

People are the key to the success of the Charter of sustainable tourism in protected areas. Some magic numbers illustrate that success. There are 56 million people living within one hour of our charter parks. 4 million people live inside the Charter Parks. That is a fantastic number of ambassadors for biodiversity and sustainable tourism. 73 million people

visit Charter Parks every year and there are 3,206 organisations involved in these Charter forums, made up of our stakeholders. The stakeholders come from all types of players in the local territory: tourism businesses, municipalities and others. A good example is the Biesbosch National Park in the Netherlands, where the stakeholders all worked together to arrive at a good sustainable tourism programme, which not only preserves but also develops the Biesbosch.

The implementation of the Charter is not an easy process: it requires a lot of effort and surely also requires a lot of money. And in a time of difficulties we have seen that protected areas have been able to raise from various sources a sum of over 441 million euros to implement the Charter. This is a very good achievement for the promotion of sustainable development in protected areas.

Moreover there is quite a substantial amount of land that is being managed by Charter Parks in a sustainable way. 14 million hectares are covered by Charter Park areas, of which 7 million hectares are Natura 2000 sites. Charter Parks are doing a fantastic job in bringing together businesses and biodiversity under the umbrella of sustainable tourism.



THE AWARDEES 2012

The Koli National Park in Finland received the first award because the Charter was very well accepted and recognized among the local communities and businesses. Also in the Adamello Brenta National Park the evaluation committee observed a well-established culture of working together with local stakeholders.

A very interesting experience of two parks that have worked for a long time was found on the French-Italian border. The French Mercantour National Park has incorporated the Charter in the Charte du Parc, the wider plan. The Park is making every effort to make this location an eco-tourist destination, which is the reason they created the Mercantour Ecotourism Association. They are working together with the Italian Alpi Marittime Nature Park, one of the first initiators of the Charter.

The Parc Naturel Régional de l'Avenois (France) has conducted an interesting experiment on the promotion of local products and support to farmers and producers. From the park's perspective the Charter has been seen as an opportunity to better structure the cooperation between public and private businesses.

In the Cevennes National Park (France), the evaluation committee noticed the excellent participative process for the Charter's new work plan. Also here the Park created an association for tourism businesses.

The Charter evaluation committee commended the Biesbosch National Park in the Netherlands for its innovative schemes, particularly the Eco-boat schemes and the real sense of belonging to the territory.

Right in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, in the Azores, the Sao Miguel Natural Park has shown a great example of business and biodiversity working together in the Park and it has been particularly commended for its efforts in protecting the bullfinch species.

Over the last few years, EUROPARC has collaborated with partners in the Baltic Sea region to bring about a project called 'Parks and Benefits'. From that project many parks became interested in the Charter and are now winning their first awards. The first to come out of that project is a biosphere reserve in the north of Germany. In the Sude-Ost Rugen Biosphere Reserve, the evaluation committee noted the enthusiasm that the Charter principles embraced in the Biosphere Reserve.



Another park from the 'Parks and Benefits' project is the first Charter Park in Denmark, the Maribosøerne Nature Park. Again the committee noted its very positive attitude and the commitment of all the partners and stakeholders in the process.

From that same project a first Charter park emerged in Latvia. In the Kemeru National Park the Charter process has helped to develop some mutual respect between the different players in the region, which might help to overcome some previous tensions that existed around the National Park. Kemeru National Park is convinced that the process has given them a much better knowledge of their territory; it has improved the quality of information to visitors, its tourists are more satisfied and the economic benefits and image have spread around.

The Meinweg National Park in the Netherlands has just started on its journey to sustainable tourism. Again the evaluation committee noted a strong enthusiasm for the process.

The Charter and the sustainable tourism principles are moving eastward and the first park from Central-Eastern Europe to win the Charter Award is the Muranska Planina National Park in Slovakia.

Several more parks in France have won the Charter Award. In the Parc Naturel Régional Haut-Languedoc, the Charter really gave the opportunity to work with partners and discover the expectations. Also in the Parc Naturel Régional des Grands Causses the committee noted the effectiveness of the consultative process and the enthusiastic partnership that was built in the charter process. In the Parc Naturel Régional du Vexin français the Charter was truly integrated into the regional tourism context.

Moving south, we reach Italy, where the Dune Costiere, a small park, has managed to include a much larger area in its sustainable tourism plan. It is involving a lot of local producers, particularly in the agri-tourism schemes. Also in Italy, the province of Lecce has brought together six parks in the Sistema dei Parchi di Salento. Although having six individual parks may at first have seemed a weakness, in fact of having the Charter really brought them together in a combined way and gave them more strength and trust in the process. In the Parco Regionale dei Colli Euganei, the committee noticed a very good groundwork established in the area. The process has really been embraced by private tourism businesses and the parks themselves. And last but not least, the Reserva Naturale di Monte Rufeno is the 100th Charter park to win an





award due to its well-managed reserve which has established truly cooperative relationships with the local area.

This journey to the awarded Charter parks has virtually taken us throughout Europe. But most importantly, all these protected areas can be visited and we must do it NOW, NOW, NOW!

FROM BELGIUM TO HUNGARY

Thomas Hansson closes the ceremony by expressing his gratitude towards the EU Commission, funders and sponsors and the host of the conference 2012, Regional Landscape Kempen & Maasland. It is time for Ignace Schops, director, and his team to hand over the EUROPARC flag to the organiser of next year's conference, the Hortobagy National Park in Hungary. Again, the 2013 EUROPARC Conference will be a cause for celebration, because the Federation and the hosting park will blow out 40 candles on this occasion. It will also be a great opportunity to look to the future, to the next 40 years and at what is in front and ahead of us. A question will be raised in relation to managing protected areas and Natura 2000 sites within the new European protected area organisation. The conference will create the setting for colleagues and friends to share their experiences and knowledge regarding the practical management of protected areas and sites. Together with about 100,000 common cranes, which are yearly October guests in Hortobagy National Park, EUROPARC awaits your attendance at Debrecen, Hungary, on 9 October 2013.



A FESTIVE GALA WITH MORE AWARDS

ALFRED TOEPFER NATURAL HERITAGE SCHOLARSHIPS

In cooperation with the Alfred Toepfer Foundation F.V.S., the EUROPARC Federation has awarded three Alfred Toepfer Natural Heritage Scholarships to promising young conservationists with practical experience in the field of conservation and in the work of protected areas. At EUROPARC 2012 this year's winners received their scholarship certificate during the Grand Gala Dinner on 25 October in Genk, Belgium.

David Bogyo of Hungary will focus his research on "Observation of wetland habitat restoration in Finland". Tilen Genov from Slovenia will study "Capacity building for effective Marine Protected Area Management in Ireland and the UK". And Willem Laermans from Belgium will find out "What can we learn from wilderness to restore wild nature? In Bosnia Herzegovina, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary".





ALFRED TOEPFER MEDAL

The Alfred Toepfer Medal, named after the founder of the EUROPARC Federation, Dr h.c. Alfred Toepfer (1894-1993) was also handed out during the Conference Gala Dinner. This medal is annually awarded in recognition of a particular individual who has made a significant contribution to nature protection in Europe.

The 2012 Alfred Toepfer Medal was awarded to Dr Arthur Mitchell, honouring his long-term commitment, participatory approach and success in the conservation of protected areas. At the heart of Dr Mitchell's mission lies local ownership. Peoples' participation is the core of the community networks he initiated to protect and enhance natural landscapes, with income generating opportunities through sustainable tourism and other activities. It was his unstinting commitment and dedicated approach that many consider as examples of best practice. Now, as an Alfred Toepfer Medal holder, Arthur Mitchell's strategy will reach out to even more people who combine nature conservation and landscape-based sustainable development.

As a General Medical Practitioner in one of Europe's most beautiful areas, the Mourne Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Dr Mitchell's empathy for the local population and his awareness of the connection between people and the landscape has led him to be a tireless campaigner for his beloved Mournes. In an exemplary way he has brought together many different stakeholders from the public and private sphere using his European connections and contacts to foster advocacy for designated areas in his home country.

Dr Mitchell: 'However we try to do something for our planet, it has to be enjoyable. Let's put on a fridge magnet: Save the planet, it's the only place with chocolate'. If ever people need to be reconnected to nature and biodiversity, this statement might drive the point home.

THANK YOU !

PARTNERS



Vlaamse overheid



provincie limburg



Gemeente Stein





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