

## **Research in protected areas: still challenging**

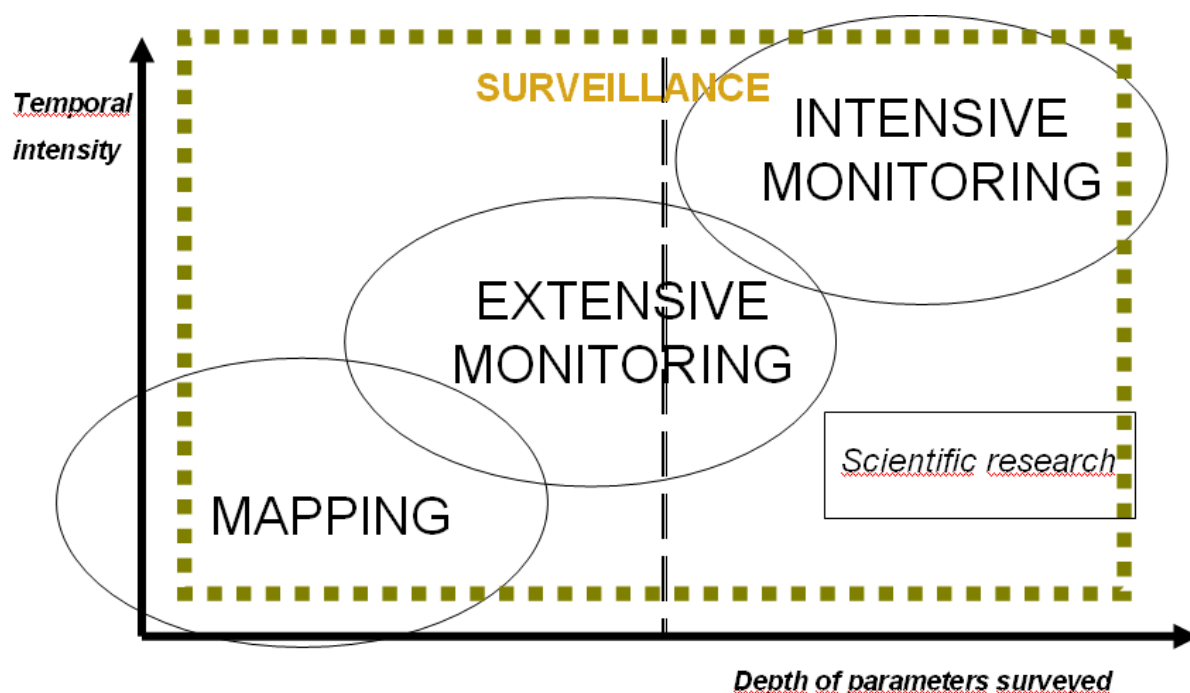
by Michael Hosek

At the last Annual conference of the EUROPARC Federation I joined a workshop focused on biodiversity and nature policy (especially role of protected areas in such a policy). Attendances were asked if such a long term policy is necessary in relation to protected areas. Surprisingly, my colleague had answered 'No!' and then explained understandable national experience leading to his position. Why I have opened an article about research by this story? If we do not agree on basic issues, could we expect be in alignment about research as quite difficult one? If there is something still quite fuzzy at general level (e.g. research in nature conservation), we can go deeper and think at regional or local level (research in particular protected area); then it is much clearer. At that level we are able to set goals, methods, and conduct some studies to get appropriate information about delineated plot or area. It is useful for individual protected areas, nonetheless is it sufficient nowadays?

My article produces a lot of questions more than to be answering to them. It is a purpose I would like to say. My intention is to stimulate thinking about the issue more than to persuade us that all is right and functional. Regardless the fact the situation in research has improved significantly; there is still not a space to rest on one's laurels.

I do believe that research in protected areas is an issue covering not these areas only, but biodiversity as whole. Biodiversity is strongly connected and protected areas are islands in landscape helping us to protect selected conservation objectives. It is e.g. a case of Natura 2000 network: its goal is to help in protection of phenomena of Community interest with no intention to be the only tool for safeguarding these habitats and species. Therefore for proper maintenance (or restoration) of the conservation objectives we should know of a state of the entire country / Europe and also have some tools protecting selected phenomena in (let say) free landscape. Protected areas are maybe the most important, but the only one of tools in our portfolio. So, we could have a well prepared and done research in our protected areas and we could then appropriately set conservation measures how to manage all important aspects of biodiversity inside. Regardless this fact, we should not forget that biodiversity does not ending at the borderline of our area. And this is certainly followed by another need that is to have a strategy not only at area level but also at national or European level. Research in our areas would also serve to wider needs to be complementary with other activities in other places or surrounding landscape.

Research in biodiversity is in the most cases dependent on long term monitoring. We need to now development in time, thresholds, etc. But if we think about what we want to survey, we recognize that we would use a wide range of methods how to monitor or survey (see the picture). Monitoring or surveillance is definitely basis for research, and in biodiversity it also can be a research itself.



Picture 1) **Monitoring or Surveillance?** Biodiversity has different levels. Therefore also methods we use for getting information about state or development are various. In some cases mapping is enough and we are happy to see a range of occurrence, in other cases we have to conduct intensive monitoring coming near to research.

It is also a topic of cooperation between nature conservation and academic sphere. We often used to be thinking about research as an activity provided by researches mainly. Sometimes nature conservation is contracting authority, sometimes not for academics. The aims of research projects are various and it is understandable that for researches working at universities it is sometimes more important to conduct research without intention to also serve to the nature conservation. It is not easy to say that such activities are useless, but it could cause a lost of effort, if these are not a part of strategy how to protect the sites in which research is conducted. And, of course, it also does not help to improve cooperation between workers in field and researches.

And, as it is a crosscutting issue between us and academics, it is also financially supported from very different sources. The main current approach is to have funds for particular short term projects. There are only a few examples of long term conceptual financial support. And, as I think, it is the most challenging point in research. We are able to get money for different projects and provide them particularly, but it is sometimes difficult to put them together to get a comprehensive result. Fundraisers are therefore a necessary part of our teams also for these activities.

The main original purpose to research in nature conservation was to better understand what biodiversity is and also what is needed to protect its particular pieces. Nevertheless ideas in society have been changed quickly and a number of reasons for conducting research have even risen. One of these is how to use results in communication with society. The deeper knowledge we have, the less comprehensible we, in general, are in communication with layman. I think it is nowadays one of the biggest problems we have in nature conservation. Having results from research we often forgot that the protection of sites is strongly dependent on priorities of society. It is a customer in this case. And for agreement with the goal to protect nature we have to be able clearly explain what a matter is and why it is important. We know a lot and in many cases we have very detailed information. So, the question is if we can to translate them easily to layman who loves the nature and catch him more

than bore or overload by pointless information. It took a time to be expert in our science, and after a long years of education, it sometimes takes a huge effort to learn back how to communicate with society ☺.

I could show a lot of good examples in research in this article (they exist!). It is what we usually do with intention to make sure that it is sufficiently developed and working. Beside this, this approach also gives us a better feeling of security in our professional carriers. But undoubtedly in a time of economic crisis, a pressure to the nature conservation is growing. Therefore research has become much more challenging issue nowadays than it was and we should revise if we have clear and common ideas and we agree on how to provide research in up-to-date conditions. The EUROPARC Federation is not only a team of representatives of protected areas. It is primarily expert body with ability to asses biodiversity and needs in nature conservation in wider range. So, take advantage of this.

### **About the Author**

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