

**EUROPARC 12<sup>th</sup> International Junior  
Ranger Camp  
Bavarian Forest National Park, July 2013**

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## CAMP DESCRIPTION, EVALUATION & REPORT

### 1/ Camp site and Accommodation

The camp took place in the Wildnis Camp education centre of the Bavarian Forest National Park, from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 2013. Just at the edge of the forest, the education centre is very well equipped to host groups of youth: a perfect location with very good facilities to organise such events. Participants were accommodated in different nature-thematic huts, while a main big building with kitchen, meeting rooms, shower and toilets ensured the necessary logistic support for the daily management of the camp.

The outside area with meadows, forest, fire places, and an open theatre offered the opportunity to organise plenty of outdoor activities and games, and the chance for the youth to really feel and enjoy being in nature. Moreover the camp site was very well located, nearby the park core area, and with several paths for nice excursions.

### 2/ Participants

There were 46 participants present all the time, coming from 11 European countries and representing 15 different protected areas:

- Romania, Tarcu Mountains N2000 Site: 4
- UK, Scotland, Cairngorms National Park: 3
- Netherlands, Weerribben-Wieden National Park: 3
- Netherlands, Drents-Friese Wold National Park: 3
- Estonia, Lahemaa National Park, Vilsandi National Park: 3
- Spain, Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park: 3
- Germany, Bavarian Forest National Park: 4
- Germany, National Park Vorpommersche Boddenlandschaft: 3
- Czech Republic, Protected Landscape Area Ceske Stredohori : 2
- Latvia, Gauja National Park: 3
- Czech Republic, Krkonošsky National Park: 3
- Serbia, Djerdap National Park: 3
- Italy, Prealpi Giulie Natural Park: 3
- Slovenia, Triglav National Park: 3

Among the participants there were 29 JRs and 14 mentors and rangers. There were also 2 members of the EUROPARC Federation staff and one volunteer Ranger from Australia who were leading the camp with the great support of 4 other Rangers of the Bavarian Forest National Park and the help for some of the activities of 6 “senior Junior Rangers” of the park. This brings the total of participants in some moment up to 56: surely the biggest JR camp we have ever had.

The Junior Rangers were between 13 and 17 years old, and there was a perfect balance of gender at the camp, with almost 50% each.

### 3/ Objective and Theme

The core theme of the camp was “Parks in Europe: discover how they work” with the objective to help youth to better understand what is the role of protected areas and N2000 sites in Europe and how they are managed. The functions and missions of different protected areas in Europe were the focus of the camp. Four main areas of work, in order for the Junior Rangers to experience protected area management in a practical way, were selected: Ranger functions, Communication, Nature Conservation and Visitor Management. All those were investigated during the camp with thematic and practical activities, with games, discussions and a final evaluation at the end.

### 4/ Programme and activities

The programme has been structured around the four above mentioned missions to create a sort of park directorate managed by Junior Rangers at the camp. Four thematic related activities were chosen, in which the JRs have been actively involved: Communication - produce the newspaper of the camp and update the Junior Ranger Facebook page; Visitor Management - build a new path for visitors in a wild area of the national park; Nature Conservation - recreate the natural condition in a meadow after big tracks passage; Ranger functions - follow a Ranger in its daily mission

Following the suggestion of the 2012 JR Camp, a 2hs workshop session was also organised by the participating rangers, where each of them presented and shared with the JRs a different nature activity. The programme included also: daily presentations by the JRs of the different protected areas represented at the camp; outdoor games and evening camp fires; excursions to discover the park; a visit to a glass factory and to the town of Zwiesel, and much more with plenty of opportunities to socialise and exchange ideas and experiences.

The programme included a session addressed exclusively to the adult Rangers and mentors, where we discussed about the future development of the Junior Ranger programme, looking at the need and interest for some to promote a new specific programme for the Junior Rangers over 18 years. The meeting has been an opportunity to share experiences and good practices between more and less experienced, present youth environmental education programmes in protected areas of Australia, and to introduce a Master thesis being prepared by one of the mentors on the impact of the Junior Ranger programme. During the meeting the newly published Junior Ranger guidance publication was presented and distributed. This new brochure will also help raising the importance of young people being actively involved in protected areas.

The full programme is in the annex.

## **5/ Camp preparation**

The camp was for the first year directly coordinated and managed by the EUROPARC team, in agreement and with the support of the hosting park. This has been quite demanding but very successful, as it gave the opportunity to structure the programme using the experience gained during the previous camps.

Before the camp the Junior Ranger Facebook page has been a useful focal point to present the camp, distribute information, and to facilitate the first interactions among the participants. Some pre-camp work has been asked to the JRs and to the Rangers in order to get them involved with active contribution to the camp programme. Specific invitations have been sent respectively to the JRs and to the Rangers.

At the end of the camp an evaluation meeting was held: one for the Rangers and mentors and one for the youth. Ideas for improvements were collected and then shared. Further comments and feedbacks have been collected at the end of the camp via email and Facebook.

## **6/ Budget**

As said before, in the history of the International Junior Ranger Camp 2013, this camp was the first to be directly coordinated and managed by the EUROPARC team. That meant that finding the resources to organise and host the camp was also EUROPARC's responsibility.

Bavarian Forest National Park kindly supported the financing of the camp. Sparkasse Freyung-Grafenau, dm Drogeriemarkt Cham and Junior Ranger Verein Nationalpark Bayerischer Wald e.V. sponsored the camp.

## **Rangers and Mentors evaluation**

The general feedback from all Rangers and Mentors, was really positive. They all enjoyed the camp and said it was very well organised and managed, with good contents and interesting activities. Some of the most

experienced Rangers said it was the best International Junior Ranger camp they have ever attended. All Rangers and mentors noticed and appreciated the hard work made to prepare the camp.

The less experienced appreciated very much the opportunity to exchange ideas with their colleagues, and to collect good practices to improve the Junior Ranger programme in their home protected areas. Main expectations were to discover a new park, exchange with other rangers and mentors, discover how JR programme is managed in other parks, and collect inputs for activities to be done at home with JR... For many it was good to see they are not alone in their difficulties/challenges.

No main remarks on the accommodation and facilities: perfect location, easy access to nature and to visit the surroundings. Super service and food. Good to have lunch packed, but better to have some variation every day. Good to have a Ranger Meeting Room.

Timing was great, and the programme included a good variety of activities, with good equilibrium between demanding and relaxing... It was interesting and useful to have group activities. This gave the chance for youth and rangers to know better each other and to have easier interaction.

Concerning the activities all were very interesting and the four missions have been very effective and successful. It's always nice to build or leave something that the JR have done for the hosting park and for nature conservation. It was also good to have the JRs involved in the daily management of the camp site with groups for the different duties every day. The fact of having a similar programme structure for each day was appreciated and helped to give a good rhythm to the camp.

Was good to meet and have during the camp the support and active involvement of other park rangers! Positive to have good ice breaking games on the first two days: it helped to create a good and positive atmosphere.

JR presentations about their home protected areas were good, but maybe we should try to focus them a bit more, with a section dedicated to the Junior Ranger programme and a section dedicated to the park description. Was good to have youth involved in the preparation of the posters before the camps. Some suggest to schedule in advance the timetable of presentations, during the week and to have also PPT that could facilitate the understanding for the participants. .

Information, documents and pre-camp organisation, registration process were very clear, made on time and useful. Someone suggested that it might be good to recommend to have one boy and one girl from each park next year...

### Junior Rangers Feedback

The Junior Rangers were really enthusiastic of the camp, and their main expectations have been met: meeting new and old friends, discover the Bavarian Forest National Park, learn about protected areas in Europe,

In general the feedback was very positive, and expectations were satisfied! They had a very good time. Several said they didn't want to leave because at home it will be boring and they will miss their new friends.

No major remarks on the facilities. The youth enjoyed sleeping in the thematic huts at the Wildnis Camp. They did understand that in order to have a good atmosphere in the camp, rules had to be followed and the camp had to be kept clean.

It turned out that the practical outdoor missions were more interesting and of course physically demanding than the Communication mission. The more action, the better. Therefore bog restoration (Nature Conservation) and building the hiking trail (Visitor Management) were the favourite missions. They appreciated it to be in smaller groups and for all four missions with the same people. That gave them the chance to get to know each other better. They mentioned they were proud to be part of a team, e.g. the

four groups they formed. The activities were explained well to them as they did say in the feedback, that they understood not only the duties of a protected area but also why they are necessary.

The Junior Rangers appreciated the possibility to make new friends and improve their English. They mentioned that now they think differently about other cultures and people. The camp helps to overcome cultural bias. They are curious about the other protected areas that they've got to know and want to visit them.

The camp strengthened their selfconfidence. They said they were proud to represent and introduce their protected area to others and therewith also show what they've learned all ready about their home protected area. They learned to appreciate the uniqueness of protected areas and realised that despite differences in landscape and heritage, all protected areas have similar issues and challenges to deal with.

They appreciated learning new things about protected areas in Europe, getting to know other protected areas then their own, discover new species and were looking forward to share their newly acquired knowledge with their fellow Junior Rangers back home.

#### EUROPARC Team comments and feedbacks

The agreement with the Bavarian Forest National Park was made in the second half of 2012 and the first arrangements were made before the end of the year. Registrations started on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March and were closed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May. A big effort has been made to accept all the registrations that have been submitted to EUROPARC: it was the biggest camp ever EUROPARC has organised.

A day meeting at the camp site was set at the end of May, to check the logistics and to agree the camp objectives and main line of the programme. That was very useful as it gave the opportunity to agree on the camp objectives and to structure the main headline of the camp.

The active and personal involvement of the Head of the Ranger service of the park has been very much appreciated and helpful. A second meeting was set the day before the camp start to revise the programme and to finalise the last details, and an evaluation was made after the camp in a meeting at the camp site and with further email exchanges after the end of the camp.

The camp was in general very well organised, good timing and camp preparation well managed. The National Park has been of great support with the logistics, with the precious help of their Ranger team, and with the management of the three outdoor missions which were introduced and presented by the park director.

As reported by the JRs and the mentors, the objectives initially set were successfully reached with the activities proposed. The camp has effectively offered a chance to the Junior Rangers to better understand and to experience directly what are the missions of protected areas in Europe and to discover how similar protected areas can be, even if set in different countries and landscapes. The camp is surely a good way for youth to understand the role of protected areas and N2000 sites in Europe.

The creation of tasks and missions has been very valuable, and there has been a good distribution of activities across the week. Start slow and get more intense in the second part of the camp. JR Presentations in the morning every day was a good solution.

The coordination and lead of the camp was clear and well managed! Rules clear and simple.

Location in the building was even too perfect. No logistic issue to deal with: cookers and cleaner and host were taking very good care of all... This makes obviously easier life in such camps.

Daily short functional meetings and two more formal meetings with Rangers and mentors were organised, with good participation and involvement from their side. However differences in the level of involvement and motivation of the accompanying rangers were noticeable.

Activities were nicely presented and introduced, with the support of the park rangers and of the senior junior ranger team: that was very helpful and helped to get a good involvement of the JRs. The involvement of older Junior Rangers in some tasks of the camp seems a reasonable function for them in the future.

We should improve the evaluation activity with JR and with Rangers

Feedbacks from the BW National Park:

very good organized, with a really good programme: good action (the games, the group-games - building a team), good feeling to work with the group, to speak with them. We have been able to put in place a wonderful environmental-education-programme - to say or to do "the right thing on the right place at the right time" in a effective way

it was a very good idea to work with "duties" ... to give them a mission!!

A very good platform, also for the future ...

#### Suggestions/Ideas for future camp

Develop a specific programme for 18+ Junior Rangers / Young volunteer Rangers... Still several aspects to be considered... A few weeks after the camp the Bavarian Forest National Park is already undertaking first steps to develop a strategy for the "Junior Ranger+" or "Volunteer Ranger" as they would like to call them. In training designed as a modular system the older Junior Rangers should develop their leadership and organisational skills. They can then support the local rangers in the organisation of Junior Ranger activities.

Was great to involve the accompanying Rangers in the camp programme. A day could be directly managed by the rangers, organising and managing specific activities prepared at home. Some of the rangers showed more commitment than others. Highly motivated and interested rangers sure intensify the experience for the kids.

It would be interesting to do a research with the junior rangers who have attended the camps in previous years: what are they doing now? Did the experience as JR influenced their study/work choice? Are they still in touch with Parks? ...

From previous years: Rangers don't feel the need of specific training to support their work. They would like more support from their parks for managing the activities during the year. We need to work to persuade the Park managers on the benefits that the JR programme can provide for PAs. One of the difficulties is that frequently Rangers are more in charge of surveillance and nature management rather than education !!! Rangers mention that in times of tight budgets, the education work in the parks gets usually limited very fast by the park directorates.

Rangers and mentors need a support (at least from my point of view) to improve their ability to plan activities and build socio-educational process, where the nature and the specific activity are not the ultimate goal, but always a tool to reach a wider objective: a contribution to the educational process of youth.

Involve JRs in the European Day of Parks