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DANUBEPARKS

PROJECT REPORT

2009 – 2012



Programme co-funded by the
EUROPEAN UNION



SOUTH EAST
EUROPE
Transnational Cooperation Programme

DANUBEPARKS

network of protected areas

DANUBE PARKS

network of protected areas

c/o Donau-Auen National Park
Schloss Orth, 2304 Orth an der Donau, Austria
Project Manager: Georg Frank
Phone: +43/2212/3450-19, Fax: +43/2212/3450-17
g.frank@danubeparks.org
www.danubeparks.org

Photos: Daniel Petrescu, Rosenberger, Kovacs, Frank, Leona Valeriu, Baumgartner, Wagner, Manzano, Zinke, Bandacu, Hafner, Hoyer, Nagy, Kern, Suci, Schmidt, Buchner/Bird-Life, Fiala, Zwefo, Bruck, Kracher, Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, Srebarna Nature Reserve, Kalimok-Brushlen Protected Site, Rusenski Lom Nature Park, Persina Nature Park, Djerdap National Park, Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve, Kopački-rit Nature Park, Lonjsko Polje Nature Park, Duna-Dráva National Park, Duna-Ipoly National Park, BROZ, Donau-Auen Nationalpark, Donauauwald Neuburg Ingolstadt, ICPDR, Ballnus, Alessandro, Pala, Lebensministerium

Layout: Michael Kalb, www.michaelkalb.at
Printed by Donau Forum Druck
Print run of 1,000. © January 2012. Produced using environmentally-friendly technologies and materials. Errors and omissions excepted.

Imprint



Introduction

The Danube River – An Interrelated Ecosystem

Passing through ten countries, the Danube is the world's most international river. With its diverse habitats, the Danube River forms the backbone of biodiversity for Europe, emphasised by numerous NATURA 2000 sites along its course. Protected Areas preserve the most valuable sites and play key roles in the long-term conservation of the natural heritage. Despite varying conditions, all Protected Areas face similar challenges – many can only be efficiently tackled through transnational cooperation. This need for cooperation is also

highlighted by the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, where Priority Area 6 (Biodiversity) calls for a Danube-wide approach to nature conservation.

After the foundation of numerous Protected Areas in the 1990s, bilateral and cross-border cooperation soon began. The opening of the iron curtain and the enlargement of the European Union led to new dimensions of this cooperation. The positive experiences of past cooperation inspired the Danube Protected Areas to take on a leading role for Danube-wide nature conservation.

DANUBE PARKS – The Network of Danube River Protected Areas

The "Declaration of Tulcea", signed by eight Protected Areas, called for closer cooperation, and initiated first steps in 2007. In 2009, funding by the ETC-SEE programme enabled the establishment of DANUBE PARKS, bringing together 12 partners from 8 Danube countries in the initial phase.

Under the slogan "Jointly for our common future" the EU Programme for European Territorial Cooperation for South-East Europe (ETC-SEE) aims to develop transnational partnerships which foster the territorial, economic and social cohesion by their strategic activities. Out of 800 applications in the first call for projects, DANUBE PARKS was one of 40 projects approved. In addition to the Priority Area covered by DANUBE PARKS, "Protection and improvement of the environment", the ETC-SEE programme also focuses on "Facilitation of innovation and entrepreneurship", "Improvement of accessibility" and "Development of transnational synergies for sustainable growth areas".

Website: www.southeast-europe.net

ETC-SEE Programme 2007-2013

Voices

"The ICPDR has supported the establishment of DANUBE PARKS from the very beginning. In the field of river morphology, the DANUBE PARKS monitoring programme for indicator species has significantly illustrated the high relevance of river dynamics for this ecosystem. Cooperation between the ICPDR and numerous stakeholders will develop and implement solutions in this field. DANUBE PARKS actions are important contributions and will be increasingly taken into consideration, as emphasised by including this monitoring aspect in the Joint Danube Survey 2013."

Philip Weller, Executive Secretary of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR)



DANUBEPARKS Project Structure



Internal Communication

Thematic Work Packages

From 2009 – 2010 Danube River Network of Protected Areas systematically tackled common challenges for the first time on a Danube-wide scale, promoting intense exchange of experience, elaborating transnational strategies and implementing demonstrative pilot projects.

River dynamics being the basis for habitat health, one focus of DANUBEPARKS is on **river morphology and river restoration**. Another important field is a strengthened **habitat network** with focus on management of forests and grasslands.

Conservation of flagship species, in our case Sturgeons and White-tailed Eagle, is most illustrative of the need for a transnational approach in nature protection.

Large parts of the Danube have been designated **NATURA 2000** sites. DANUBEPARKS contributed to their management by establishing Danube-wide **monitoring** systems.

Nature education and nature tourism is vital for efficient long-term preservation of natural assets, which is why joint capacity-building and branding were started.

Three-step approach

All these work packages build on coordinated project management linked with intense internal communication to also increase **knowledge and experience exchange** within the partnership. Built on broadened horizons, DANUBEPARKS has developed **strategic documents of Danube-wide relevance**. Finally, **pilot conservation projects** have been implemented to illustrate the practical relevance of our work and to make the output concrete and visible for the public, supported by a wide range of various communication activities.

The final aim of this three-step approach is to raise the local capacities, build up a common understanding on transnational aspects, and strengthen the joint voice towards external stakeholders.

DANUBEPARKS - Danube River Network of Protected Areas – Development and Implementation of Transnational Strategies for the Conservation of the Natural Heritage at the Danube River (SEE/A/064/2.3/X)

Budget: € 2,720,950

Project Duration: March 2009 – February 2012

Priority Axis 2: Protection and Improvement of the Environment

Area of Intervention 2.3.: Promote Cooperation in Management of Natural Assets and Protected Areas

By signing the “Declaration of Vienna” the basic goals of DANUBEPARKS have been defined:

Establishment of a network as a long-term platform for knowledge and experience transfer

Elaboration and implementation of joint Danube-wide strategies and concepts

Optimising the coherent management of the Danube natural heritage

Strengthening each Protected Area at the local level through the development of a strong, joint voice for nature conservation on a Danube-wide scale

DANUBEPARKS

The internal communication activities within the project did not only serve to steer the project actions themselves, but also to form a long-lasting network of Protected Areas.

For strategic decisions, the Steering Committee at the Directors’ level was formed. For work in specific areas, DANUBEPARKS Task Forces for River Morphology, Birds, Fish, Habitat Management and Tourism were established. During project implementation, the following internal communication tools have ensured continuity in cooperation:

- Kick-off Conference in September 2009
- Communication Plan
- Task Force Meetings
- Steering Committee Meetings
- Intranet
- Internal Newsletters
- Staff Exchange
- Study Visits

The internal communication of DANUBEPARKS was evaluated in 2010 by the Bristol Business School, giving indications of the value of each tool and affirming the strategy of DANUBEPARKS to focus on personal meetings and study visits.

8-9 June 2009: Steering Committee Meeting and Kick-off Conference
(Donau-Auen National Park)

7-8 December 2009: Task Force Meeting Fish
(Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority)

14-15 January 2010: Task Force Meetings Birds & Tourism
(Duna-Dráva National Park and Kopacki-rit Nature Park)

27-28 January 2010: Task Force Meeting River Morphology & Habitat Management (BROZ)

2-3 June 2010: Task Force Meeting Monitoring
(Duna-Ipoly National Park)

2 July 2010: Task Force Meeting Tourism and Steering Committee Meeting and Danube Festival
(Duna-Dráva National Park)

18-20 October 2010: Task Force Meeting Tourism with Expert Workshop
(Donau-Auen National Park)

29-30 November 2010: Task Force Meeting River Morphology
(City of Ingolstadt)

6-7 December 2010: Task Force Meeting Fish - Sturgeon Workshop
(Donau-Auen National Park)

22-23 March 2011: Task Force Meeting Birds
(Persina Nature Park)

30 March - 1 April 2011: International Sturgeon Conference and Workshop
(Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority)

5-7 April 2011: Task Force Meeting Tourism - Boat Workshop
(Duna-Ipoly National Park)

9-11 May 2011: Task Force Meeting Tourism - Boat Workshop
(Persina Nature Park)

26-27 May 2011: International Workshop River Morphology
(Donau-Auen National Park)

2-3 September 2011: Steering Committee Meeting and Danube Festival
(Donau-Auen National Park)

16 October 2011: Follow-up Project Development Workshop
(Duna-Ipoly National Park)

17-18 October 2011: International White-tailed Eagle Conference
(Duna-Dráva National Park)

8-9 November 2011: International Tourism Conference and Workshop
(Donau-Auen National Park)

1 February 2012: Task Force Meeting Monitoring & Habitat Management
(Landkreis Neuburg-Schrobenhausen)

27-28 February 2012: Steering Committee Meeting and Closing Conference
(Donau-Auen National Park)

Meetings

5



River Morphology, Restoration and Habitat Management



1 Side arm restoration: concepts and implementation

2 Revitalisation of Danube river banks

3 Restoration of riparian forest

4 Management and Conservation Concept for Danube Islands

River Morphology and Restoration

The Danube River and its water regime is the key factor for management of riverine habitats. Hydro-morphological alterations of the past have caused negative impacts to habitats in Protected Areas. Therefore, river restoration tops the agenda for all Danube Protected Areas to restore the hydrological situation, to initiate natural processes and to bring characteristic habitats back to a good status.

restoration actions can make future planning and implementation more efficient.

Sharing experiences has resulted in a compilation of restoration projects which have already been implemented, and in the publication of **“Danube River’s Morphology and Revitalisation”**. This compilation of past projects, elaborated by the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority, serves as one common scientific basis for future actions in the field of river restoration.

temporary water bodies. The ecological adaption of groynes has raised the habitat status of valuable island structures in the Hungarian Danube section. The restoration of the embankment in the Dunajské luhy Protected Landscape Area has been implemented to create natural riverbanks and also serves as a demonstration site for the implementation of the DANUBEPARKS monitoring results by creating suitable habitats for Sand Martin populations. All river restoration projects have been implemented in close cooperation with the water management authorities highlighting the cross-sectorial approach of Protected Areas in management.

Also in habitat management, the joint strategic work resulted in demonstrative pilot project: The purchase and management of grasslands in the cross-border area of Austria and Slovakia by BROZ, the reforestation with native trees instead of hybrid poplar plantations in Slovakia as well as the grassland restoration on six hectares in Duna-Dráva National Park underline the active role of DANUBEPARKS toward a Danube-wide habitat corridor.

From strategy to implementation

A cornerstone of the DANUBEPARKS approach is the immediate implementation of strategies on the local level, to demonstrate the benefit of the joint approach and experience exchange.

The removal of transverse artificial structures in the secondary side arm systems in Duna-Dráva National Park and the Slovakian floodplains has improved the water regime in these small,

6

River Restoration

The DANUBEPARKS workshops and study visits have enabled experts from Protected Areas to visit numerous restoration sites, to learn about innovative approaches and to return with new inspiration. Looking over the border often makes possible new dimensions of river restoration, which previously seemed to be illusions. Learning from the early steps and failures of



5 Reconstruction of groynes for revitalisation of Danube Island

6 Restoration of grassland

7 Feasibility study for hydrological restoration of Srebarna Nature Reserve

8 Habitat networks and cross-border conservation concepts



River Morphology, Restoration and Habitat Management



River Morphology, Restoration and Habitat Management

Strategy on Conservation and Navigation

8 While DANUBEPARKS develops strategies to restore river habitats, reduce the impact of hydro-morphological alterations and take steps to re-dynamise the river, the aim of Trans-European Networks for Inland Waterway Transport is to improve the conditions for navigation. These are potentially conflicting interests; however an integrative approach has the possibility to deliver win-win results. Based on the “ICPDR Joint Statement” and the “PLATINA” project as well as intensive discussions during several workshops and field trips in the DANUBEPARKS project, the Network has defined the joint position of the Danube Protected Areas, resulting in the **“DANUBEPARKS Strategy on Conservation and Navigation”**.

This strategic paper establishes the cornerstones of nature conservation positions and identifies possible synergies in joint processes of navigation and conservation, but it also underlines potential conflicts.

The document should strengthen each Protected Area’s position in negotiations with their water management and navigation authorities, as well as the reputation of the DANUBEPARKS Network as a constructive contributor to international discussions in the field of river morphology.

The inclusive process itself – exchanging experience on Inland Waterway Projects and discussing potential risks and positive perspectives towards the realisation of river restoration, as well as cooperation with water management authorities – has raised the capacity of all DANUBEPARKS partners in this area.

Voices

“DANUBEPARKS is an excellent example for the implementation of the Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) through the cooperation of committed people along the Danube River. By the effective and cooperative management of protected areas, the project made a direct and valuable contribution to Priority Area 6 of the EUSDR.”



DANUBEPARKS successfully established a transnational network of protected areas alongside the Danube River, which provides an excellent basis for further activities in the fields of biodiversity, networking of habitats and public awareness on the natural heritage of the Danube Region, which is of European importance and accordingly highlighted in the EUSDR.”

Florian Ballnus, Coordinator of the Priority Area 6 (Biodiversity) of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

Habitat Management and Habitat Networks

With its wide range of valuable habitats and fascinating landscapes, the Danube forms an inspiring lifeline in South East Europe. The Danube Protected Areas preserve the most valuable natural areas and are therefore key players in the protection of habitats and biodiversity.

Building on the intense transfer of knowledge, joint elaboration of conservation concepts and cross-border management plans were the first steps toward coherent and efficient management practices, serving a transnationally connected network of valuable natural habitats.

Perspectives for Danube Floodplain Forests

Floodplain forests along the Danube and its tributaries have been reduced by nearly 90%. Furthermore, their multifunctional role has worsened the pressure on the last riparian woodlands. The remaining forests are vital for Europe and in many cases are protected by the Fauna-Flora Habitat Directive. Considering the potential negative impact of intensive forestry on habitat quality, DANUBEPARKS has worked together to develop **“Perspectives for Danube Floodplain Forests”**.

This publication identifies the key demands of Protected Areas and should contribute to better protection of floodplain forests in and outside Protected Areas. It will also serve as the basis for future implementation actions as planned for DANUBEPARKS STEP 2.0 (submitted in the ETC-SEE programme) for the conservation of black poplar as a flagship species in floodplain forests.

Cross-border Conservation Concepts – First steps towards transnational lifeline

The Danube is an interrelated ecosystem, and each Danube Protected Area is a stepping stone to building a coherent habitat network and migration corridor. To achieve this, DANUBEPARKS has initiated cross-border conservation concepts and management plans. Cooperation without borders is essential for the most international river in the world, and necessary as the Protected Areas are located mostly in border regions.

For the following cross-border regions and valuable stepping stones, **management plans** were developed:

- Hungary-Croatia, Ostrávací sidearm (trans-boundary management concept)
- Hungary and Serbia, Beda-Karapancs (trans-boundary management concept)
- Austrian and Slovakian Border Region (cross-border conservation concept)
- Romania-Ukraine, Danube Delta (cross-border restoration concept)
- Romania, Danube Delta (reconsideration of zoning of strictly protected areas)
- Duna-Ipoly National Park (management plan for Danube Islands)



Flagship Species

White-tailed Eagle



1 Installation of artificial nests

2 Concept for protection of nesting sites including road closures

3 Purchase of land to protect White-tailed Eagle habitats

4 Conventional telemetry

The Danube region is a hotspot for biodiversity, and the Protected Areas play a key role in its conservation. Most species cannot be protected in only one Protected Area or by a single country – coordinated transnational actions are needed. Furthermore, the limited financial resources in the field of nature conservation make it necessary to focus on “flagship species”. Conserving these species will have a positive impact on a wide range of further organisms and species, due to the complex and wide range of habitats required by flagship species.

White-tailed Eagle – Transnational cooperation and national action

The White-tailed Eagle is one of the most well known and impressive birds in the Danube region. As top predator, it indicates the habitat health of riverine ecosystems, and Protected Areas have the urgent responsibility for the conservation of the Danube population. Furthermore, the large home ranges and its migration behaviour qualifies the White-tailed Eagle as “flagship” for transnational cooperation in biodiversity conservation.

their experience in conservation and monitoring. The Danube-wide online database accessible at www.danubeparks.org has increased data transfer in this region and significantly improved data on distribution and population trends. This has allowed for analysis of man-made threats: forestry and human disturbance have a highly relevant negative impact in all Danube countries, illegal shooting is a critical factor in some regions and lead poisoning is an underestimated threat in several countries.

DANUBEPARKS has developed the “**Action Plan for the Conservation of the White-tailed Sea Eagle along the Danube**” as a tool to secure a viable Danube population of this species. The positive recovery of this species is a best practice example for Danube-wide nature conservation through the protection of habitats and the elimination of man-made threats. This Action Plan has been developed by experts from the Danube Protected Areas, bringing together all

Voices

“The political support given by the Bern Convention’s Contracting Parties to the remarkable work carried out by DANUBEPARKS in the preparation of the Action Plan for the conservation of the White-tailed Sea Eagle is another example of the positive cooperation between NGOs and policy-makers under the Council of Europe. The Action Plan produced by DANUBEPARKS is a strong, consistent document which will be a very useful tool to redress the situation of this threatened species, and which therefore perfectly fits within the goals and objectives of the Bern Convention.”



Ivana d’Alessandro,
Secretary of the Bern Convention

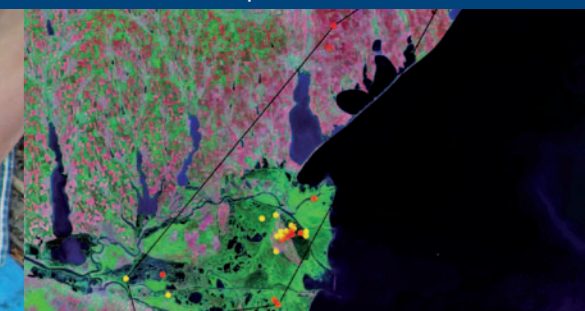


5 Monitoring and protection of nesting sites

6 International White-tailed Eagle conference

7 First ringing of White-tailed Eagle in Bulgaria

8 Satellite telemetry in the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve



Flagship Species

Pilot actions



Flagship Species

Danube Sturgeons

White-tailed Eagle Online Database

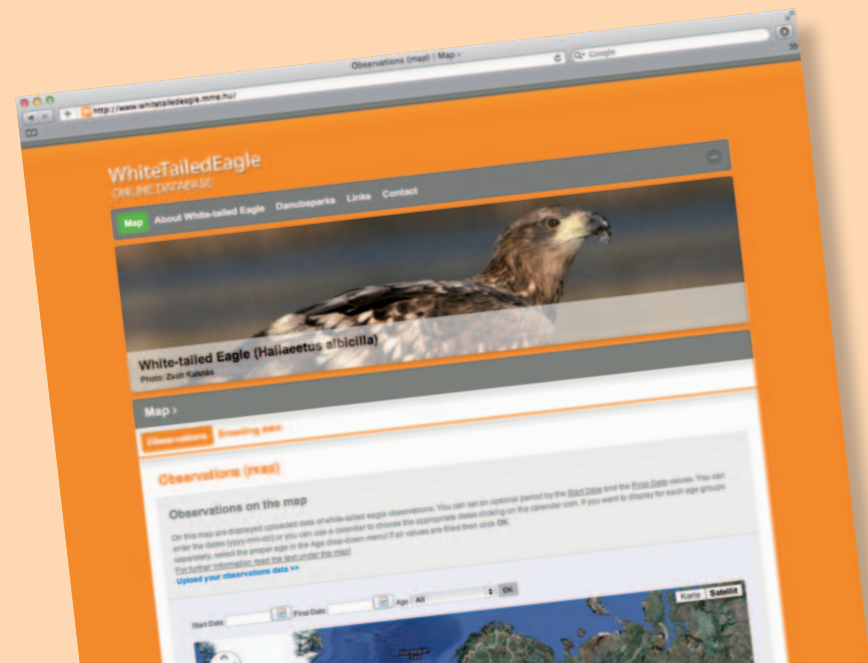
Cooperation is the basis for Danube-wide actions. Therefore, sharing experiences and improving the transfer of knowledge between the Danube Protected Areas is an important aspect of the DANUBEPARKS Network.

The joint approach for the conservation of White-tailed Eagle serves as best practice: Based on the results of local experts' enthusiastic field work, an online database has been established in the framework of DANUBEPARKS, compiling all breeding data of the Danube countries.

This tool was an important basis for the elaboration of the Action Plan and will be used to plan Danube-wide conservation actions in the future.

Take part in this process by providing your observations of White-tailed Eagle!

Visit the DANUBEPARKS website www.danubeparks.org to learn more about the breeding distribution of White-tailed Eagle along the Danube and fill in the observation data you have gathered along the Danube.



Finally, the Action Plan defines 37 actions in eight areas of intervention. In the framework of DANUBEPARKS, first steps towards its implementation were done by protection of nesting sites, land purchase to secure Eagle habitats, installation of artificial nests and various monitoring activities to raise the understanding of the behavior.

Support from BirdLife International and WWF Danube Carpathian Programme, as well as the adoption of the Action Plan by the Council of Europe/Bern Convention make it a suitable tool to develop the Danube as the backbone for the South East European eagle population as well as a wintering site of European relevance for eagles from the north east. With their Letter of Commitment, DANUBEPARKS Directors have expressed their willingness to take on a leading role in the implementation of this Action Plan.

The International White-tailed Eagle Conference, which took place in the Duna-Dráva National Park (Szekszard, December 2011), was a milestone for the new level of cooperation among experts in the Danube region. The conference not only provided the opportunity to present the Action Plan and the online database to the public, but it also served to highlight the wide range of DANUBEPARKS activities for the conservation of this species.

Danube Sturgeons – Conservation of the Danube's dinosaurs

Six different species of sturgeon can be found in the Danube and its tributaries, and they are the symbols of the need for a Danube-wide approach in the field of nature protection. Their migration behaviour, which brings them from the Black Sea upstream to their spawning areas, as well as the complex threats including migration barriers, habitat loss and illegal harvesting and trade of caviar mean that transnational coordinated steps and conservation actions are needed.

DANUBEPARKS has brought together experts from Protected Areas and sturgeon research and reproduction institutions to define concrete steps for the preservation of these highly endangered species.

The platform for the project development process was based on several workshops, which resulted in the submission of the transnational LIFE+ proposal **"Linking transnational strategy and action to protect and restore Danube Sturgeons"**. Implementing this LIFE+ project

will contribute to preserve the dinosaur of the Danube – a species which is present only in a few remaining specimens.

The DANUBEPARKS International Sturgeon Conference in March 2011 in the Danube Delta was a milestone for Danube-wide cooperation for this species and a visible sign of the significant importance of joint conservation actions.



- **Three workshops organised, bringing together international experts**
- **Development and submission of the LIFE+ project proposal**
- **Folder on the Danube Sturgeons produced**
- **Visible landmark installed in two Protected Areas**
- **Organisation of the "International Conference on Conservation, Recovery and Sustainable Use of Danube River Sturgeons" (30 March-1 April 2011, Tulcea, Romania)**

Monitoring and NATURA 2000



Wise use and efficient management of natural resources requires a detailed understanding of the ecosystem. DANUBEPARKS has increased knowledge in this area with one joint monitoring programme each for selected bird species, fish and exemplary mammals. Implementing transnational monitoring programmes has created a Danube-wide picture offering new perspectives and knowledge for conservation actions.

Along the Danube, 230 NATURA 2000 areas make up a network of the most valuable habitats. Protected Areas can act as best practice sites to successfully implement the EU Birds and Habitats Directive, and DANUBEPARKS has played a key role in working towards coherent management practices in this field.

Little-ringed Plover & Sand Martin

Hydro-morphological processes are the heartbeat of a natural river. Therefore, erosion and

sedimentation processes have to be seriously considered in the management of the Danube. The resulting structures serve as habitats for characteristic species like Sand Martin and Little-ringed Plover, inhabiting steep river slopes and large gravel and sand banks.

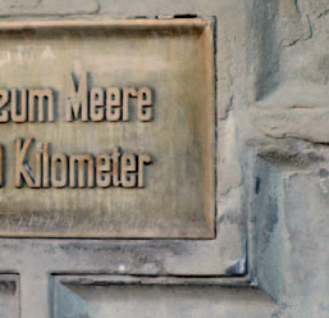
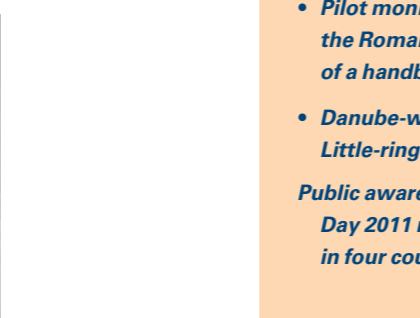
In 2011, DANUBEPARKS implemented a Danube-wide monitoring of indicator species for natural river banks. Nine expert groups from seven Danube countries monitored the breeding population of these two species along the whole course of the river - the results are clear and illustrative: both species are extinct in the Upper Danube due to dams and river regulation; only few sections still offer adequate habitat quality. The monitoring calls for river restoration and for conservation of these last remaining un-dammed sections. In contrast, un-regulated riverbanks still exist on a large scale in the Lower Danube. Here, the conservation of river dynamics and characteristic habitats are stressed by the DANUBEPARKS survey.

To bring these results to the policy level, the DANUBEPARKS survey is planned to be repeated under the framework of the ICPDR Joint Danube Survey 2013.

- Numerous study visits to share experiences in the management of NATURA 2000 areas
- Study published of the "Development of the Joint Monitoring Concept of species and habitats included in the DANUBEPARKS project that have been designated Natura 2000 sites"
- Establishment of a Danube-wide online fish database
- Implementation of a pilot fish monitoring project in Persina Nature Park
- Elaboration of a handbook for the management of beavers in Slovakia
- Study on experiences reintroducing beavers in Hungary
- Pilot monitoring project for European mink in the Romanian Danube Delta and elaboration of a handbook for its management
- Danube-wide monitoring of Sand Martin and Little-ringed Plover

Public awareness-raising actions on Danube Day 2011 regarding river dynamics online and in four countries

Actions



Danube Nature Tourism



Danube Nature Tourism

Protected Areas have the essential task to preserve natural heritage not only for ecological reasons, but also to provide these areas to people for leisure activities. Additionally, they aim to inform and educate their visitors on the value of intact natural systems. Environmental education is an integral part of nature conservation activities and contributes to broader support of nature protection programmes. At the same time, they are additional tourist attractions, increasing the popularity of a destination and providing additional income opportunities to the local population.

The DANUBEPARKS project has focused on product development regarding boat excursions, joint capacity-building activities and international marketing efforts.

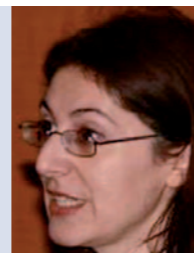
The **Joint Ranger Training** was implemented twice in 2010 (once by Donau-Auen National Park along the Upper Danube and once by the Danube

Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority at the Lower Danube). It consisted of two courses: In the first part, participants were trained in English to guide international groups. The main topic of the second part was the importance and interpretation of transnational cooperation in nature protection. The training consisted of four day-long workshops, followed by three to five days of field trips in other Protected Areas. In total, 60 participants improved their skills in nature interpretation and will be perfectly prepared to spread the messages of the DANUBEPARKS project during guided nature excursions in the Protected Areas.

With this training, as well as other **capacity-building measures**, the DANUBEPARKS network has exchanged experience and improved the quality of tourist attractions in all its partner areas, which is the basis for transnational product development and marketing.

Voices

"DANUBEPARKS has been one of the two projects on nature protection approved under the SEE first call for proposals and the only one covering the protected areas along the Danube. The SEE Programme had great expectations for DANUBEPARKS, considering the peculiarity of the programme area: rich biodiversity and large number of rivers as environmental assets coupled with inadequate management and lack of preservation enhancement of natural assets, and lack of cooperation between decision makers due also to interests from different levels.



DANUBEPARKS has taken a big step in addressing the situation of Protected Areas along the Danube by developing and implementing joint conservation strategies and strong management practices which are believed to be an important added value for the SEE Programme.

The relevant results achieved, the smooth implementation of the project, the efficient management, the outstanding communication, the impressive visibility reached are the main features that make DANUBEPARKS one of the most important projects for the SEE Programme."

Alessandra Pala,
Project Manager Joint Technical Secretariat
ETC-SEE Programme

Actions

Joint transnational strategy development:

- Elaboration of a DANUBEPARKS strategic positioning and action plan on tourism and environmental education

Joint transnational marketing actions:

- Production of a DANUBEPARKS tourism brochure
- Organisation of the Danube Nature & Culture Tourism Conference together with the Danube Tourist Commission
- Establishment of an online tourism platform, integrated into the project website

Joint transnational capacity-building actions:

- Joint Ranger Training
- Expert Workshop on visitor centre design and new technology in visitor information
- Expert Workshop on cooperation between Protected Areas and the tourism industry
- Staff exchange

Pilot actions for product development, marketing and regional cooperation:

- Purchase of boats and/or bikes by four partners in Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania
- Development of new boat tour routes by Duna-Ipoly National Park and Persina Nature Park



- Testing of new pilot tour offers by partnership in Hungary and Bulgaria
- Implementation of a boat guide training
- Production of marketing materials for new routes by Duna-Ipoly National Park
- Establishment of six new nature trails by two partners in Slovakia and Hungary
- Experience exchange on nature trails
- Production of marketing materials for new nature trails and the region by BROZ
- Production of new visitor guide for the Danube Delta
- Workshop with regional partners on sustainable tourism development by BROZ
- Experience exchange with Upper Danube regions on the involvement of regional stakeholders in Protected Area tourism activities by Duna-Dráva National Park

The main activity regarding marketing was the re-design of the **project website** in the beginning of 2012, to present all the project outputs properly and promote the tourist attractions of the Protected Areas.

The tourism section of the website now provides detailed information about attractions in the regions, as well as transport and accommodation possibilities. However, the main focus is on opportunities in the partner areas, including festivals, guided boating trips, biking and hiking excursions or visitor centres. These opportunities can also be accessed by a search engine that is displayed on the start page, thus reaching every person using the website.

The website, together with the **tourism brochure**, will be the main long-term communication materials regarding tourism and environmental education used by all partners in the network.



Communication and Dissemination



Communication and Dissemination

Dissemination of results is an obligatory part of projects; for DANUBEPARKS however, communication means even more. It is vital to reach important stakeholders that influence the future of the Protected Areas along the Danube; on the other hand we also aim to involve the regional population around our areas and encourage them to understand and support transnational cooperation in nature protection.

International Danube Festivals have become the yearly focal point of all communication. Visiting a different Protected Area each year, all partners come together to celebrate the joint natural heritage of one spot, involving and inspiring the local population of the region. The first of these festivals was held in Duna-Dráva National Park (Hungary) in 2010, and celebrated small groups of Croatian and German populations living in the area.

The festival included exhibitions partly focused on the international spirit of these cultures, as well as the “Washing in the Danube” tradition, and of course food, music and dance.

All the Protected Areas participated with information booths and children’s programmes, making the local population aware of the existence of other such areas, their necessary cooperation and tourism opportunities throughout the region.

In 2011, the **International Danube Festival** took place in Donau-Auen National Park (Austria) during the Romanian Year in the Visitor Centre, thus highlighting Romanian music and dance at this special event.

For education and cuisine however, the sources were wide-spread: Six different fish soups let visitors taste the connections and at the same time variety of the Danube regions, and information booths informed visitors about nature protection and tourism along the whole Danube.

Another transnational awareness-raising campaign which focuses on young people from all around the Danube is the art competition **“A Chance for the Blue Danube”**. A traditional campaign by the Danube Delta, it gained international attention through the DANUBEPARKS project. Young people between the ages of 15 and 18 are invited to send in artwork reflecting the protection of the Danube natural heritage. The most outstanding paintings were shown in a travelling exhibition in the visitor centres of Protected Areas along the whole Danube.

In 2010, the exhibition travelled to Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Slovakia, while in 2011 it opened in the Danube Delta and then went straight upstream to be shown in Austria and Germany

Actions

Dissemination of project results:

- Project website: www.danubeparks.org
- Facebook page
- Youtube channel
- Project flyer (eight languages)
- Project brochure (six languages)
- Project final brochure
- More than 70 press releases in total
- More than 300 press articles in total
- Three press conferences (depending on final events!) in total
- Three thematic and scientific conferences (see other chapters)
- Final project event

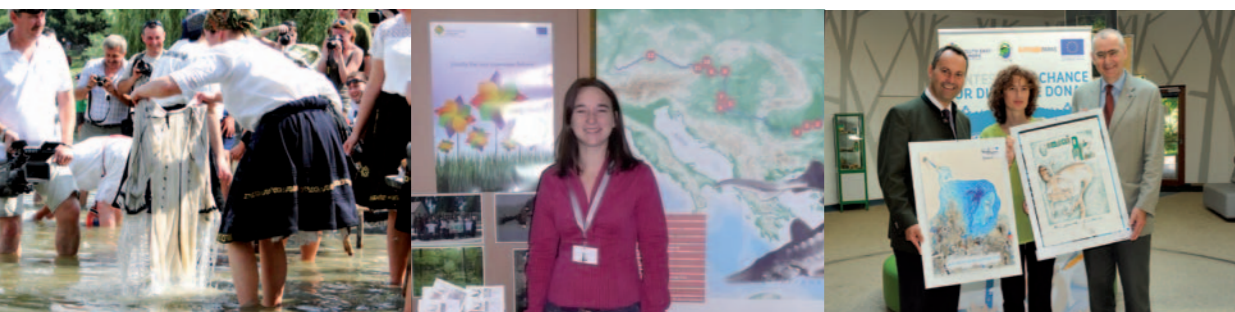
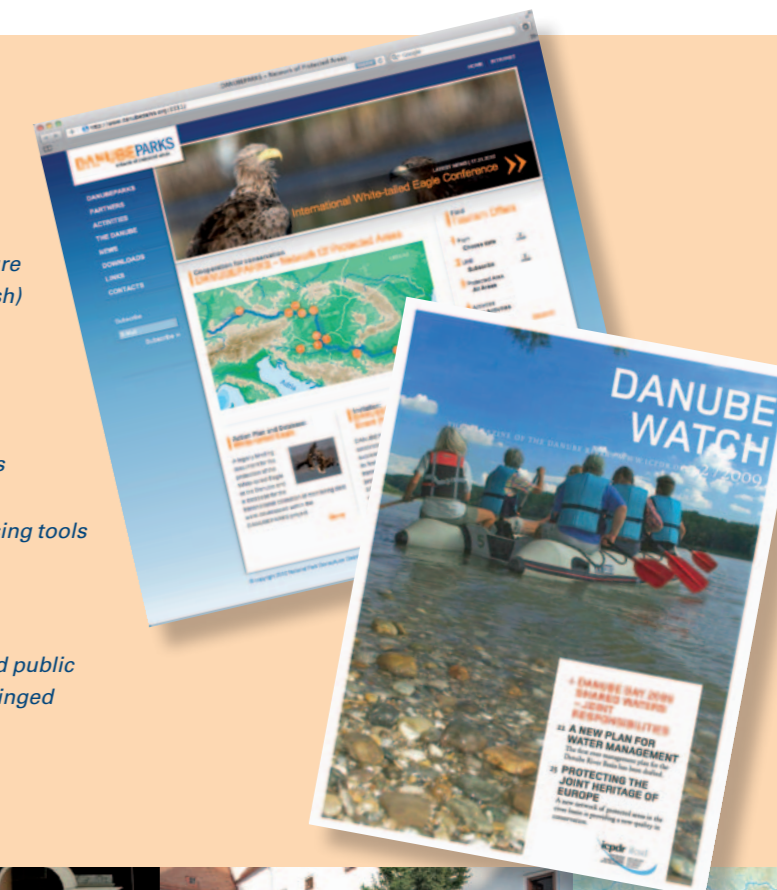
Exhibitions and cultural events:

- Two Danube Festivals in Hungary and Austria
- Two editions of the travelling exhibition “A Chance for the Blue Danube”
- Display of the exhibition “A Sound Map of the Danube” by Annea Lockwood in three visitor centres
- Production of a travelling exhibition “The protected areas of the Danube” by Duna-Dráva National Park
- Display of exhibitions by BROZ in visitor centres of Donau-Auen and Duna-Ipoly National Park

- Participation in Danube Day events coordinated by the ICPDR and several other partners

Awareness-raising for flagship species:

- Production of a White-tailed Eagle brochure and folder for Hungary (Hungarian, English)
- Production of a White-tailed Eagle folder for Slovakia (Slovak, English)
- Production of a sturgeon folder (Romanian, English)
- Production of a folder on indicator species for river dynamics
- Production of two life-size awareness-raising tools on sturgeons (DDBRA, NPDA)
- Online game for Little-ringed Plover on the project website
- Special excursion to involve the interested public in the monitoring programmes for Little-ringed Plover and Sand Martin, as well as for the White-tailed Eagle winter counts



Future Perspectives for DANUBEPARKS



Future Perspectives for DANUBEPARKS

The Danube River Network of Protected Areas was created as a long-term cooperation platform for nature conservation on a Danube-wide scale. Protected Areas and their managing bodies play a key role in managing and preserving natural assets along the river Danube.

This project and its activities, implemented under the framework of the European Territorial Cooperation for South-East Europe (ETC-SEE), were only the first steps, however. Follow-up work is required to anchor DANUBEPARKS and its goals on a strategic level.

During project implementation, the **EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)** was adopted by the EU Commission in 2010 and endorsed by the European Council in 2011. In the frame of this strategy the Danube River is to be the focal point of identity for a newly defined Macro-Region. To serve as truly inspiring lifeline for the Macro-Region the rich natural heritage of the river and the adjacent floodplains have to be preserved, wisely managed and wherever possible restored.

Dynamic economic development - as promoted by the strategy - has to be balanced by effective and coherent preservation of landscapes, habitats and biodiversity and efficient management of Natura 2000 sites.

The strategy highlights the importance of transnational partnerships. DANUBEPARKS is mentioned as a **"flagship project"** in Priority Area 6 (Biodiversity), meaning that the network is expected to contribute to the implementation of the EUSDR.

Facing these expectations the Danube River Network of Protected Areas intends to initiate further **projects and activities**

- to anchor Danube River Network of Protected Areas on European and national political level in compliance with the EU Danube Region Strategy
- to establish a sustainable organisational structure for the Network in close cooperation with Danube stakeholders

Voices

"Implementing DANUBE-PARKS project since 2009, Protected Areas Managers from eight Danube countries have developed a strong and enriching partnership. For the first time we have systematically tackled common challenges and problems on a Danube wide scale, setting up transnational thematic task forces, promoting intensive exchange of experience, elaborating transnational strategies and implementing pilot projects of transnational importance. Successful cooperation has shown that this partnership suits a real need. We all share a common and coherent ecosystem and will not be successful by standing alone. We are willing to continue, deepen and enlarge this transnational approach in Protected Area Management along the Danube River."



Carl Manzano,
DANUBEPARKS Spokesman
Director of the Donau-Auen National Park

Voices

"The Danube connects cultures and offers a living environment for 81 million people. The sustainable protection of the Danube and of the catchment area of the Danube constitutes, in spite of the successes of the past few years, a great challenge. All the more important is the cooperation of the individual Danube countries and the creation of a network of the various protection projects."



Austria currently holds the Presidency of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River. It is especially important for us to make the river fit to cope with the explosive issues of the future. But only jointly can we succeed in further advancing and finding good solutions for problems like climate change, flood control, and the further reduction of pollutants and nutrients. Only with a holistic understanding for the living environment Danube and the interlinkage between society and nature will we be able to meet these challenges."

Niki Berlakovich,
Agriculture, Forestry, Environment
and Water Management
Minister, Austria

- to strengthen the Network as joint voice for Danube's natural heritage on international and European level
- to enlarge Network Membership to cover up all relevant parts of the Danube Rivers natural heritage, enabling Protected Areas with weaker organisational structure to take part in transnational activities
- to implement transnational conservation strategies elaborated in the DANUBEPARKS project 2009 - 2012
- to better anchor transnational activities and perspectives within the Protected Areas administrations by training international project managers and raising the capacity of Protected Areas staff to operate transnational projects
- to contribute to the coherent implementation of EU Birds Directive by realizing transnational actions for flagship species as outlined in the White-tailed Eagle Action Plan

- to promote the conservation of the Danube sturgeons
- to establish new flagship species for conservation of riverine forests and nature friendly floodplain forestry
- to raise Danube wide awareness for the strategic importance of dynamic river morphology
- to build a better basis for promoting the Danube River and its hinterland as a transnational destination for nature tourism
- to promote a cross-sectoral and integrative management approach
- to give example for transnational cooperation along other European river ecosystems
- to raise the competence and capacity in the management of Protected Areas on local level thus contributing to more coherence in the management of Natura 2000 sites



Partnership as the key for successful work



Partnership as the key for successful work

The results of DANUBEPARKS could have only been achieved by a close, efficient and trusting cooperation of the Protected Area administrations. The growing number of partners has emphasised the increasing relevance of the DANUBEPARKS network. Further enlargement in follow-up projects is foreseen to make the DANUBEPARKS' voice even stronger. Each Protected Area has contributed to and benefitted from the DANUBEPARKS project in a unique way, illustrated by the following examples:

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The **Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority** protects one of Europe's largest and most valuable wetlands. Within DANUBEPARKS, this Romanian Protected Area administration coordinated the submission of the LIFE+ project for sturgeons and organised the International Sturgeon Conference. The Authority has significantly increased its competence in NATURA 2000 management and protection of flagship species.

Persina is the largest island at the Bulgarian Danube and is protected by the only **Nature Park** in Bulgaria located directly at the Danube. The Nature Park has done a remarkable job in bringing the results of the transnational work to the local population (e.g. Danube Festival dedicated to river dynamics), many data gaps were filled through monitoring activities important for planning local as well as transnational conservation actions.

Rusenski Lom Nature Park, protecting the valley of a Danube tributary in Bulgaria, joined the network in 2011. The Nature Park also took on responsibility for the management of the **Kalimok-Brushlen Protected Site** and implemented a feasibility study for the hydrological restoration of **Srebarna Nature Reserve**. Therefore, Rusenski Lom Nature Park significantly strengthened the partnership in Bulgaria, which is crucial for the network due to its high biodiversity value.

Djerdap National Park is located in Serbia at the Iron Gates, the scenic break-through of the Danube through the Carpathians. The park joined the network in 2011, establishing a natural link between the Danube and Carpathian Protected Areas and enlarging the scope of influence of DANUBEPARKS. Being a fascinating tourism destination, it enhances the field by sharing experiences with network members.

Lonjsko Polje Nature Park at the Sava River in Croatia establishes a connection from DANUBEPARKS to the planned Sava River Network of Protected Areas, broadening the target groups for dissemination, and bringing in experiences in sustainable regional development.

Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve forms one part of the floodplain area in the triangle cross-border region in Hungary-Croatia-Serbia. The Serbian partners, Vojvodinasume Public Enterprise and the Institute for Nature Conservation for the Vojvodina Province, played an important role in the conservation actions for the White-tailed Eagle and

in the definition of conservation actions for black poplar, for which follow up projects have been planned.

Kopacki-rit Nature Park is a protected area of a large inland delta at the confluence of Dráva and Danube in Croatia. With the organisation of the first task force meetings for birds and tourism (together with Duna-Dráva National Park) they initiated the internal communication process. Hosting the highest breeding density of the White-tailed Eagle, Kopački rit contributed its extensive experience to the elaboration of the White-tailed Eagle Action Plan.

Duna-Dráva National Park in Hungary covers large floodplain areas at the Danube and the Dráva. Leading the development of the White-tailed Eagle Action Plan and organising the International White-tailed Eagle Conference, they have made major contributions to one of the most influential activities. Intensified cooperation with Serbian and Croatian stakeholders enforced the idea of habitat networks.

The **Duna-Ipoly National Park** preserves not only the Danube floodplains but also hinterlands with mountains, forests, as well as the Ipoly River. The National Park has been remarkable in the preparation, organisation and dissemination of results for Danube-wide monitoring, where they played an active and coordinating role. Through their participation in capacity-building events, they benefitted from increased competence in tourism and education especially.

BROZ, a Slovak Nature Conservation NGO, and the State Nature Conservancy for the Slovak Republic are managing large parts of the inland delta area of **Dunajske Lúhy Protected Landscape Area** as well as the **Záhorie Protected Landscape Area**. BROZ played a leading role in the development of the "Forestry Guidelines" and implementation of river restoration pilot projects. Facing the unique conditions in the Twin City region of Bratislava and Vienna, the Slovak partners strengthened the habitat corridor by various actions.

The **Donau-Auen National Park** is located between Vienna and Bratislava and protects one of the last dynamic sections of the Upper Danube. As DANUBEPARKS Lead Partner, this Protected Area has been responsible for the general project communication and coordination, which has significantly increased its capacity for transnational project coordination, thus strengthening the shared voice for nature conservation along the Danube.

The **Riparian Forest Neuburg-Ingolstadt** is represented by the City of Ingolstadt and Landkreis Neuburg-Schrobenhausen. Although not funded by the ETC-SEE programme, the German partners took part in the project from the beginning, organised two Task Force Meetings and showed exhibitions coming from DANUBEPARKS partners in their visitor centres. All of this proves this Protected Area to be a key partner in the network for follow-up projects.

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- 1 Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve 2 Srebrna Nature Reserve 3 Kalimok-Brushlen Protected Site 4 Rusenski Lom Nature Park 5 Persina Nature Park 6 Djerdap National Park
 7 Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve 8 Kopački rit Nature Park 9 Lonjsko Polje Nature Park 10 Duna-Dráva National Park 11 Duna-Ipoly National Park
 12 Dunajské luhy Protected Landscape Area 13 Záhorie Protected Landscape Area 14 Donau-Auen National Park 15 Donauauwald Neuburg Ingolstadt



c/o Donau-Auen National Park
 Schloss Orth, 2304 Orth an der Donau, Austria
 g.frank@danubeparks.org, www.danubeparks.org

DANUBE PARKS
 network of protected areas