



FOREST CAPERS

#7 JANUARY, 2008

BirdLife European Forest Task Force

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FTF Annual Workshop 2007

Birds are easy to census and proved to be a good indicator of the farmland environment quality. However, complex ecosystems such as forests require more cautious interpretation of bird population trends and 'calibration' with other sensitive taxa.

Forests—a hot topic at the CBD meeting in Bonn

The CBD is the only document addressing forest biological diversity at global level. Results from an independent review on the implementation of the CBD Forest Programme run by Global Forest Coalition will be presented in Bonn in May. Lack of official commitment by responsible institutions and prevalent economic interests are determining poor implementation of the programme.

Forests in Slovakia closed for recreation

Changes of the Forest Act of Slovakia adopted in 2007 prohibited the use of forest roads by cyclists and horse riders. The new ban is seen by ENGOs as likely to increase the possibility of uncontrolled logging.

An OTOP's volunteer shares national experience

A volunteer for OTOP's Oldwood Project sees climate change as the most relevant forest topic at the moment in Germany. The diversity of aspects to be considered when applying forest management today in order to maintain forest functions in future has grown greatly.

Forest resources of Bulgaria stretched to the limit

Deep reform in the forest sector is to be realized in 2008. There is a lot of skepticism, however, that it will bring about any improvements. On the contrary—opportunities for more intensive exploitation and obliteration of forest would be at hand.

English language editor: Hilary Wardle

How do we know that a forest is doing FINE? FTF Annual Workshop 2007



In October 2007 BirdLife's European Forest Task Force held its 6th annual meeting in Białowieża, Poland. The meeting began with international seminar and workshops, which this year were devoted to various aspects of forest ecological indicators. The subject has attracted a multinational selection of experts representing BirdLife's partner organizations, the Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme, Universities and the European Environmental Agency.

Finding a single, universal indicator that is capable of promptly responding to habitat changes, represents a wide spectrum of forest components, has a strong scientific footing, is easy to use and sends a convincing message to the target audience is a real challenge for complex ecosystems such as forests.

Birds are relatively easy to census, ubiquitous and regularly monitored by a pool of hundreds of skilled voluntary and professional observers throughout Europe. The Common Bird Index (CBI), proved to be an efficient indicator of the farmland environment quality. Analogous index should be developed for forests. However, due to the complexity and fragmentation of the forest habitat in Europe, the new indicator must be tested for ecological robustness. For example, the transformation of a large semi-natural forest ecosystem to a mosaic of monoculture plantations with some residues of old growth will result in the decrease of hole-breeding Crested Tits and increase of ground breeding Tree Pipit. Therefore, the proper interpretation of trends in forest bird populations will depend on adequate species selection and "calibration" with more sensitive taxa in regard to bioregional differences. The pilot phase of the "OldWood" project attempts to do exactly this—find relationships between birds and other indicatory taxa. The project assessed data on structural characteristics related to forest biodiversity (e.g. dead wood, veteran trees, hollow and cavity trees, old growth phase of stands) in four Polish forest types. Furthering "OldWood" to new regions and development of additional monitoring components should be another step towards an integrated system of forest indicators. Workshop presentations can be found at

http://www.birdlife.org/action/change/europe/forest_task_force/FTF_annual_workshop_2007.html





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Forest biodiversity will be a hot topic in Bonn 2008

Although the problem of deforestation has been perceived as a major issue in international forest policy for a long time, up to now no effective strategies for its solution have been developed. Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, all efforts to establish a globally binding forest convention for conservation and responsible management of the world's forests have failed.

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The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the only global framework addressing forest biological diversity and genetic resources, their conservation and sustainable use. The issue of forest biological diversity gained momentum at the CBD COP-4, in 1998, where the parties adopted a work programme on forest biological diversity (Decision IV-7). An Expanded Programme of Work on Forest Biodiversity (further called CBD POW) was adopted on COP-6 in 2002 (Decision VI-22).

Forest ecosystems will also be a key topic at the next CBD COP-9 meeting in 2008 in Bonn which will be holding an in-depth review of the Expanded Programme of Work on Forest Biological Diversity. An Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) on the Review of the Implementation of the CBD POW was established in 2002 in order to identify how the programme has helped in addressing the three objectives of the Convention. The latest AHTEG review of the CBD POW was submitted and COP-9 will be invited to consider recommendations on the future implementation of the CBD POW.

Apart from this review an independent review process on the realization of the CBD POW was launched at the beginning of 2007 by the Global Forest Coalition. It has been carried out in 20 countries, one of which is Bulgaria. The methodology of the research is based on a holistic and participatory approach that requires consultation and input from all stakeholders. The methodology consists of four main elements: desktop review of main strategic documents that concern forest ecosystems and their biological diversity, a questionnaire on the implementation of the CBD POW, a national workshop and interviews with key stakeholders and experts. The outcome of the review will be presented at COP-9 in order to provide input to the long-term development of the CBD POW and the commitments taken up by countries for national level implementation.

Independent monitoring process on implementation of the CBD POW in Bulgaria

Although there are a number of strategic documents in Bulgaria addressing biodiversity, there is no common strategic

approach for forest biodiversity conservation. The information is scattered among the other documents and it is difficult to use it and to gain an overall idea of the situation. The review of Bulgarian sectoral policy documents also confirmed the lack of incorporation of forest biodiversity concerns in sectoral policies. The issue has only been partly addressed by the National Rural Development Programme, which includes conservation activities for private forests within the Natura 2000 network. CBD POW has not been officially implemented in Bulgaria. However, there has been progress with some of its objectives through certain processes and mechanisms, e.g. the establishment of the Natura 2000 network and also forest certification.

The findings show that the CBD POW is very relevant to the country's existing conditions because of the many threats to forest biological diversity and the opportunity that the programme give to overcome them. The main identified causes of forest biodiversity loss and degradation in Bulgaria are all political and socio-economic rather than ecological. This includes forest fires and in particular human induced, illegal and unsustainable use and overexploitation of forest resources, lack of governmental policy, lack of control over illegal forest activities, weak legislation penalties for forest crimes, corruption and grey economy in the forest sector, prevalent economic interests, lack of public awareness and understanding on the value of forests and forest biological diversity, change of purpose/function of lands that were previously forests (especially protected forests), a constant trend in losing traditions on conservation and sustainable use of forest and its biodiversity.

A lack of information about the CBD POW at a regional and local level and the lack of official commitment to this programme by the responsible institutions are the main obstacles for the effective implementation of the CBD POW in Bulgaria. The implementation of the CBD POW is hardly possible at the moment because economic interests are determining the forests-related policy and the awareness of the broad public on the value of forest biological diversity is very low. The CBD POW implementation is on voluntary basis and therefore is not a priority issue for the government. Also due to other different

reasons e.g. lack of resources, other more important tasks to be implemented in connection to the Bulgarian accession to EU) the CBD POW is not included in the immediate tasks of the state institutions. This explains why the CBD POW is not popular in Bulgaria and why the stakeholders at a regional and local level are not aware of its existence. No official process for its implementation is in place and no public consultations on it have been carried out.

The independent monitoring process conducted on the implementation of the CBD POW in Bulgaria provided a valuable platform for discussion about the programme. The interest of the stakeholders consulted proved that there is an urgent need to discuss forest biodiversity issues and to find appropriate solutions for conservation and sustainable use of the Bulgarian forest biodiversity. Many of the stakeholders expressed hopes that the planned amendments to the Bulgarian Law on Forests and the restructuring of the forest sector will contrib-

ute greatly to this.

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Forest in Slovakia closed for recreation!



In the Summer of 2007, several Members of Parliament proposed a controversial revision of the Forest Act in Slovakia, the most controversial aspect of which appeared to be a ban on cyclist and horse riders using forest paths and roads narrower than 4 m.

Not only were cyclists in Slovakia outraged by the proposed changes, but the Czech Association of Cyclists joined the protest too. Even the Director of the International Mountain Bike Association Mr. Mike Van Abel sent a letter to the Slovak president pointing out that the revision of the Forest Act compromises the commitment made by the Slovak Republic in its own National Forest programme. Namely, that forest management must fulfill economic as well as social functions, one of which is recreational use by the public. Peter Dvorak, a very famous historian also sent a letter to the president. He wrote: *"in the middle ages even peasants could go into the forest with their horses. It is unbelievable that several centuries' tradition, which was respected by feudal sovereigns, would be canceled by representatives elected by the public"*.

By the following week, more than 17 thousand people had signed a petition against the proposed changes to the Forest Act. Complaints were also submitted

by people working in agro tourism. Strangely, one very strong dissenting voice came from the Gemic Regional Association of Non-state Forest Owners. This association is certified according to the national FSC standard where one of the components is maintaining conditions for public use of the forest. But their support was based on the assumption that they would get compensated by cyclists using their forest only if the ban is not enforced.

The only group that agreed with the revision was composed exclusively of foresters.

After the ratification of the revision by the parliament, the only remaining person who can veto the process is the President. However, the President of the Slovak Republic did not respect the complaints and approved the revision of Forest Act which came in force on 1st of September 2007.

The ban in Slovakia inspired a discussion of potential revision of Czech Forest Act. Mr. Vašíček - Director of The Forest Management Institute in the Czech Republic - gave a presentation on the National Forest Programme II during a press conference, mentioning that there is a need for regulation of cyclist activity in forests. He later specified that he had not considered



a restriction on cycling in the forests.

The introduction of this ban is rather unusual, because it is unlikely that anyone would respect it. Also, the Forest Protection Service does not have the capacity to oversee the implementation of the ban. Furthermore, it is not clearly evident which of the forest roads are forbidden.

Although cycling in the forest is potentially damaging for forest itself, nobody seems willing to explain why it should be forbidden on forest paths and roads. Slovak forest environments suffer much greater damage by harvesters and forest tractors. The new ban is seen by ENGOs as likely to increase the possibility of uncontrolled logging. Their fear seems justified: a couple of new forest management plans have envisaged increasing their harvesting volume to two or three times the current level, and none of them exclude logging in nature reserves.

Pavol Polak, BirdLife Slovakia

Juliane Geyer, a German volunteer for BirdLife Poland's Oldwood project shares national experience



I am a Master student of International Nature Conservation in Göttingen. I carried out my undergraduate studies in the field of International Forest Ecosystem Management and Conservation and my speciality is in forests of the temperate and boreal zones. As a practical part of my studies I took part in the OTOP – BirdLife Poland's Oldwood project where I got to see many different kinds of forests all over Poland and learned about Polish forestry and conservation, inventory methods and "dead wood". Currently I am preparing for my Master thesis and planning to finish my studies in September.

Germany, much like the rest of the world, is currently obsessed with the idea of climate change mitigation. How does this affect the issues of German forest management? There are several aspects to be considered. First, climatic changes might induce new forest conditions, causing the decline of some species and creating new chances for others. In Brandenburg, Eastern Germany for example, foresters have to juggle with decisions how to treat the forest now, which tree species to support and which compositions to favour in order to minimise economic losses, protect the ecosystem services they fulfil and guarantee proper functioning of the forests in future. The challenge foresters are facing is to consider all eventualities and possibilities without knowing anything for sure. In Northern Brandenburg the distribution limit of *Fagus sylvatica* is determined by the 500mm precipitation line. If rainfalls decrease or their distribution throughout the year changes, one of our most valuable forest trees *Fagus sylvatica* may disappear from Brandenburg. In the same context the immigration of non-native species, especially insects and fungi is also broadly discussed. Foresters in Germany fear the invasion of insects like the Pine Procession Moth; individual incidences have been recorded in the Southern parts of Germany already. Outbreaks of insect calamities are expected more often and could cause a lot of damage to near-nature forests.

Foresters are already looking for alternatives and discussing which course of action or non-action to pursue. The opinions differ strongly especially between foresters and conservationists. The arguments are varied and range from species protection over guaranteeing current ecosystem functioning to letting ongoing processes to determine natural succession, and all the possibilities in between.

Embedded in the topic of climate change are energy plantations - fast growing short-rotation tree plantations which are supposed to function as energy sources and carbon sinks at the same time in some cases replacing existing, mature for-

ests, something which seems disconnected from the initial idea.

Nowadays, ecologically compatible forest management plays an important role in German forests. Conservation in forests is generally broadly understood and pursued with the objectives of abolishing monoculture plantations and non-native tree species in favour of slowly transforming them back into native, mostly mixed deciduous forests. The topic "wilderness" receives a lot of attention. Many protected areas are now set aside for the protection of natural processes ("Prozessschutz"). For example NABU Foundation Natural Heritage and similar institutions currently purchase forest areas all over Germany to guarantee their full protection and exclude them from any kind of utilisation or active management. Also some former open cast mining sites are being considered in that context and closed for further development to ensure a natural succession and to initiate a new generation of "natural" forests.

There is a lot of discussion about the re-introduction and re-immigration of large mammals like the wolf or lynx. However, these plans are hampered by a lack of connectivity between large forest areas, high density of human settlements and the "bad reputation" of wolves, as well as rather conservative standpoints of hunters which all serves to complicate the matter by far. However progress is already slightly visible and our four-legged cohabitants are much more welcome now than they were just a few years ago.

The opinion about forests and their development has changed over the years and a lot of people realise their importance and value for human and non-human beings. The understanding and awareness of forest and conservation issues is growing and I am quite optimistic that despite the high level of human development in Germany, actions concerning forests are going in the right direction.

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Forest resources of Bulgaria stretched to the limit



Bulgarian forest legislation is regularly the subject of political attention. Around two amendment packages per year are being submitted to the Parliament, depending on prevailing political power and interest. However, the Agriculture Committee rarely reach an agreement on the proposed changes and so in the past these reforms, both good and bad alike, have remained unrealized.

However, in Summer 2007 the forest sector separated from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests to become a State Agency, which means that reform is more likely this time round. During unofficial negotiations two political parties divided the Ministry – one was given the control of the huge fund for Agriculture, the other one took on the management of state forests. Accompanying the division was a new proposal for sweeping changes to the Forest Act. The restructuring of the forest sector in 1997 did not succeed in separating economic from controlling functions and neither did the long-planned development of the forest sector in the beginning of the 2000s. The latter produced two strategic documents and was planning the establishment of a Forest Company with a huge loan from the World Bank, however this consumed a lot of resources and time and the project left behind the conviction that business interests are much more powerful than public ones.

The new amendments envision the current forest departments becoming state enterprises. Thus they will have their own economic activity and would be motivated to make more profit as those who fail to do so will be closed down. With the main part of the profit coming from wood harvesting, this is clearly a strong incentive for raising cutting rates. The changes make a provision for the revival of the "Bulgarian Forest Fund" which will collect the revenue and allow part of it back into the forest in the form of investments, for exam-

ple for afforestation and road building. At the moment all income goes to the state budget from where it is allocated to different spheres. This causes a permanent deficit in the forest sector even for such vital activities as forest fire prevention.

A degree of skepticism darkens the new changes. Deals based on direct negotiation between state enterprise and buyers, lacking any transparency and publicity, are still possible and there are no provisions for more transparent ways for wood tendering. The changes also do not envisage more effective measures against illegal logging.

The majority of the criticism was reserved for the so called exchange of forest lots – a mechanism which allows the exchange of a private forest lot for forest from the state forest fund. In principle, state forest land cannot be sold. Thanks to this "exchange" mechanism it can be swapped for a similar sized, or bigger tract of forested land anywhere in the country, which is a very convenient way for private persons and businesses to acquire state forest along the sea coast and close to big mountain resorts. Investors are even allowed to clear the land of vegetation as long as they compensate for this by afforesting the same amount of land elsewhere within the same county. Tens of hundreds of such deals were concluded in the last couple of years under the guise that the state got better forest massifs that helped forest consolidation and allowed its better management.

The exchanges were not excluded from the new project law as hoped. On the contrary – they were made wider in scope offering more possibilities instead.

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