

FOREST CAPERS

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BirdLife European Forest Task Force

In this issue:

Forestry megatrends

The official optimism about forest biodiversity trends is sadly out of touch with the biological reality out in the field despite all the existing systems and concepts aimed at protecting forests.

Harapan forest

Indonesia has one of the highest rates of deforestation in the world. An initiative of BirdLife International can break the negative tendency and give hope for Indonesian's forest and its enormous biodiversity.

Strandja Nature Park

Investors' interests challenge the existence of the largest protected area in Bulgaria. An example how man's short-sighted greed can turn tourism development in a process threatening to destroy the premise for its own existence.

Forests in the climate change mitigation raises concerns

In future Europe will increasingly rely on resources coming from our own forests in order to hold on to the emission reduction targets. This will likely lead to even more plantation-style forestry of the most intensive kind and higher exploitation of natural forests.

Bulgarian – Romanian Forest Mapping Project launched

At the end of March at a meeting in Romania a new project to identify the forest holding high values for biodiversity in Bulgaria and Romania was launched.

HOW TO KNOW A FOREST IS DOING FINE?

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Forestry megatrends 2010: new and old challenges for conservation

Marcus Walsh

The European Union has made a commitment to halt biodiversity loss by 2010, a target it will not reach in forest environments despite Natura 2000, Woodland Key Habitat programmes and widespread forest certification. Where have we failed? What are the long term forestry megatrends inhibiting progress to the target?

Protected areas aren't. Over 10 per cent of Europe's forests is supposedly "protected". In fact very little of this is managed for biodiversity and non-timber products only¹⁾. The majority sees "sustainable logging" of varying intensity, removal of decaying and fallen timber, "sanitary cutting" of conifers, and suppression of forest fires. Protected areas are often isolated geographically, or situated in climatically harsh areas where few species can survive.

All this means that the EU's own European Environment Agency's official optimism about forest biodiversity trends²⁾ is sadly out of touch with the biological reality out in the field. A proper ecological evaluation of the Natura 2000 network's and other forest protected areas' capacity to preserve biodiversity in the long term is sorely needed.

A lost sense of wilderness.

In conservation and wilderness, size matters. With so little natural forest left, many

a nature tourist treks through degraded habitat relying on the clients' inability to demand anything better. Yet the potential for developing magnificent EU cross-boarder wilderness areas exists: stretching N-S from the Arctic Ocean to the Balkans, and E-W from eastern Slovakia into the

French Alps are the lines of Europe's greatest forest corridors. Collectively developed and protected they could one day



be "must see" places as famous as Yellowstone or the Great Barrier Reef.

Forest certification is substituting for conservation.

Forest certification schemes, especially the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) continue grow in influence and market value, not least because environmental non-governmental organisations support them. However, even the FSC continues to certify sites that should not be logged at all. Certification organisations require no overall evaluation of the biodiversity conservation situation of any region they certify, nor take such issues properly into account when giving out certificates. Certification schemes claim creation of larger protected areas are political decisions

outside the scope of certification but fail to see or admit their own role in legitimising the destruction or gradual degradation of sites that cannot tolerate widespread logging.

A wood energy boom could finish off forest biodiversity. Trees being slow growers, any sudden large scale timber harvesting for fuel will look to existing sources. In e.g. N Europe increasing harvesting of all logging residues for heating, even digging up stumps, is increasingly widespread. It raises concerns of nutrient loss from soils as well as biodiversity losses on a hitherto unimagined scale. Since

fuel timber has few quality requirements, high demand is also likely to lead to even more plantation-style forestry of the most intensive kind, rather than the mimicking of natural processes that could bring forestry, landscape management and biodiversity conservation closer together.

1) http://www.birdlife.org/action/change/europe/forest_task_force/forest_conservation.pdf

2) http://reports.eea.eu.int/environmental_assessment_report_2002_9/en/signals2002-chap14.pdf

HARAPAN FOREST

A ground-breaking initiative gives hope for an Indonesian forest and its enormous biodiversity



Marco Lambertini

Large areas of Harapan Rainforest retain a close canopy



BirdLife International/Marco Lambertini
Work on the initiative by the BirdLife Partnership successfully halted logging in the northern section of the Harapan rainforest in August 2006.

After a five year struggle, a BirdLife coalition of Partners including Burung Indonesia, the RSPB (BirdLife Partner in the UK), and BirdLife's Secretariat have succeeded in promoting a major change in Indonesian law. This will bring forward a ground-breaking initiative to protect and restore an area of Sumatra's remaining dry lowland rainforest.

The law permits a new type of forestry concession - the "forest ecosystem restoration concession" - which will allow 101,000 ha of Sumatran lowland forest to be managed for conservation.

Sumatra's rainforests are among the most biodiverse areas on Earth. Indonesia, which covers only 1% of the Earth's land surface, supports one sixth of the world's avian diversity. The region hosts 600 bird species and a number of threatened mammals, among them the Critically Endangered Sumatran Tiger (100-300 individuals remaining in wild), the Sun Bear, and Asian Elephant.

As well as having importance for plants and animals, the central part of Sumatra is also home to semi-nomadic indigenous people, many of whom will now have the option of maintaining their traditional lifestyles in what is a dramatically shrinking forest landscape.

What happened to Indonesia's forest?

Indonesia is one of the biggest palm oil producers in the world. Its production has tripled in the last 20 years. As well as being used in both the food and cosmetic industries, refined palm oil is increasingly being grown for so-called "green cars". As a result, palm oil demand is expected to double by the year 2020, with much of this new demand being met by the establishment of new palm oil plantations, mainly on the islands of Borneo, New Guinea and Sumatra.

Of the sixteen million hectares of Sumatra's original forest landscape, only 500-600,000 - less than 4% - remain today. With their easy access and commercial viability, Sumatra's lowland forests have suffered incredibly: the island has the highest proportion of Indonesia's palm oil plantations.

What remains is highly vulnerable to further investments in palm oil or pulp plantations. But the change in the law will allow for restoration of so-called 'production forest' - potentially great news for a host of threatened species. The change paves the way for many more of these rehabilitation concessions to be established.

In Indonesia forested land belongs to the state; one can acquire only management rights over it. Not only did the BirdLife-led coalition have to change forestry law in the country, they were also required to raise funds to buy the management rights. Major support came from the EU, from BirdLife Partners, Conservation International, and a charity event hosted by HRH Prince Charles.

There are a lot of management challenges ahead: keeping illegal loggers away and maintaining sustainable use of forest products by people living in the vicinities of the forest border. But in all the Harapan Rainforest Initiative should be highly rewarding, providing an exciting, encouraging chapter in efforts to conserve this, Sumatra's most threatened ecosystem.



Dave Gandy

Storm's Stork: Harapan Rainforest's most threatened bird.



Dave Watts

Sumatran Tiger: only 100-300 left in the wild.



Pictures: John Taylor Fox, Spas Uzunov



Strandja Nature Park in Bulgaria

*The place where nature
has found peace in the
centuries-old impene-
trable forests*

The breakneck speed of resort development in Bulgaria outpaces tourism growth and indeed threatens to destroy the very beauty of the country which in the long term provides one of its great assets. The high level of investment has led to the building of some 3000 hotels in recent years. Investments worth 2 billion, some of them with unclear origin, have converted many of nature's masterpieces into fields of concrete - a clear expression of man's short-sighted greed. Illegal building in protected areas is not a single case any more - it is becoming the standard of the day.

One of the worst affected areas, the Strandja Nature Park, covers an area of 1116 km² and is the largest protected area in Bulgaria. It was designated in 1995 to preserve a great richness of 121 habitats. The proximity of the Black and the Mediterranean seas as well as Asia Minor has specific influence on the continental climate and together with the diverse relief produces a huge variety of habitats and species - for example 1700 plant and 29 bat species have been recorded in the park. Not less important are the birds - white-backed woodpecker, semi-colored flycatcher, black stork, owls and birds of prey. The parks is an important stopover point for birds using the second biggest migration route in Europe, the Via Pontica. The park was a refugium for many species widespread in the Tertiary. It is unique in Europe in the combination of deciduous forests and ever-green understory bushes. In the dawn of Bulgarian nature conservation - in 1933 - the first reserve was established here.

However, the threats to Strandja's beauties are multitudinous: inappropriate forest management practices, poaching,

pollution, wind and mini-hydro power generators and, last but not least, excessive and unregulated building on the coast - one of the fastest growing holiday hotspots in Europe. Local municipalities are swayed by the strong building lobby into neglecting environmental regulations. According to one mayor in a couple of years the whole place should become "a five-star resort with modern yacht ports, luxury hotels, one-family houses, expensive restaurants, golf fields, swimming pools and tennis courts as well as private beaches". Does this ring a bell? Like Spain now, one day Bulgaria will regret the headlong rush of thoughtless development of a once beautiful coastline.

The case of the Golden Pearl resort is particularly outrageous, not only because the construction continues in defiance of all authority but because the challenge to Strandja's protection status threatens to undermine efforts to conserve biodiversity generally. Construction of this resort was carried out without a proper Environmental Impact Assessment or regional planning process, and continues in spite of a High Court ruling that it should cease. In their last desperate moves to legitimise their investment, the developer with the backing of the local mayor are questioning the very existence of the Nature Park, and trying to overturn the protected status of the area in a case to be heard in June.

Should this process succeed it will be a terrible setback for conservation in Bulgaria, especially after last year's Court decision to abolish another protected site at the Black sea after an appeal from the investor. Abrogation of the protections status will not only turn the coastline into a concrete desert, it will devastate the whole protected area forested to the very rim of the beach and destroy a fragile protected areas network, only 5% of the country's territory, with Strandja accounting for 1/5 of this.

The outcome of the case will reveal whether Bulgaria is to repeat the mistakes of Western Europe by rushing blindly into developments which destroy the magnificent wild heritage, or can demonstrate that creation of wealth can go hand-in-hand with nature protection.

If you wish to sign the petition for Strandja Nature Park protection go to <http://www.bgpetition.com/strandja/sign.html> (the petition exists only in Bulgarian).

Forests and the climate change mitigation

The world's forest and forest soils store twice the carbon in the atmosphere. Retaining it there would be a big step towards keeping climate change under control, since e.g. tropical deforestation accounts for 25% of the global carbon emissions. However, the idea of using carbon trading to slow the speed of deforestation has been strongly opposed for several reasons: rich nations might simply buy their way out instead making substantial emission reduction; there is the "leakage effect" – even if a forest is protected, forest destruction would move to other areas; and then the fear of developing nations, in particular Brazil, for their own sovereignty – that funds for keeping forests intact would hinder the economic development of



Andrzej Bobiec
The amount of dead wood in the European forests is likely to decrease further for its use as fuelwood

These factors resulted in one of the most promising options for saving forest and atmosphere dropping from the Kyoto Protocol for the first commitment period. Yet improved anti-deforestation measures in the protocol could function well for emission reductions, bring economic benefits to rural areas in the forested-saving country, prevent floods, and preserve biodiversity. Kyoto provisions currently contain no other market mechanisms or economic incentives at a global scale to prevent deforestation.

Things may yet improve. At the recent UN Conference on Climate Change (UNCCC) in Recently Montreal, a coalition of rainforest nations gave the anti-deforestation proposals a new chance and have put it in the agenda for the next commitment period. Unfortunately these will only take effect after 2012.

To implement its Kyoto commitments the EU in 2005 put in place an emission trading scheme (ETS). This allows companies to buy and sell emissions in accordance to EU Member States' National Allocation Plans, which specify caps for individual facilities. However, last year the annual allowances for the national industries allocated by the

MSs were too generous to bring any reduction in emissions produced, which resulted in slump of carbon trading prices. Land based carbon sinks such as forests are therefore of small importance at the moment in the ETS, and until the system is tightened the introduction of new liquidities would only cause more problems with it. Ultimately, the Commission intends that the post-2012 ETS will include all greenhouse gases and all sectors, including aviation, maritime transport and forestry.

Carbon trading is not the only EU instrument for reducing carbon emissions. For direct emission reductions the Commission is working in three main fields – electricity, transport, and heating / cooling. In March this year new binding targets were agreed for these: by 2020, the share of renewable energies in the overall EU energy consumption is to reach 20%, with a minimum of 10% in transport fuels. The targets mean tripling the electricity coming from biomass, a 14-fold increase for biofuels, and doubling it for heating / cooling.

There has been an obvious increase of the share of renewable sources in transport and electricity production, but the heating and cooling sector lags

behind, mostly because of a lack of Community legislation covering this sector. To correct this and update legislation to newly established targets the Commission is proposing a new directive to incorporate all sectors and targets. The general framework for sustainable biomass use will be given by the Commission, but it will be up to the MSs to design and implement the detailed systems.

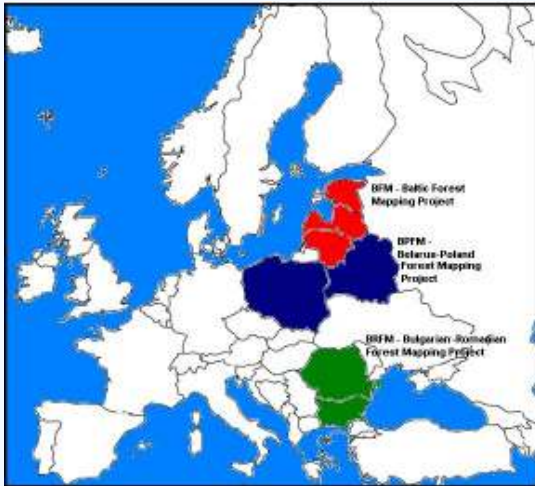
Public consultations on heating and cooling from RES, on biofuels, and renewable energies in energy generation have already been conducted. For the most controversial biofuel issues another consultation is ongoing, as the production of plant oils for first generation biofuels has a tremendous negative effect in the tropics. A second generation of biofuels is still on the rise and needs more time to become commercially available. These will in time affect also wood demand and forests in Europe. Second generation products include ethanol from plant cellulose, which although requiring large capital investment could become widespread in 7-8 years. Second generation systems promise well also in that they will avoid the fierce competition for land with food production, and are seen by many as a stepping stone that may get us on the right track.

If we want to satisfy the energy consumption of Europe with biomass and reach the EU's targets, we will need further inventions in wood mobilization of resources coming from pruning, complementary fellings, and logging residues. Using the annual increment

of commercial forests that is currently not harvested is limited to commercial species and in commercial areas. Higher exploitation in protected and protective forests as well as of non-commercial species, collecting dead wood and branches, uprooting stumps,

or investing in large-scale fast-growing monocultures are all likely to have a negative environmental impact both in terms of landscape and biodiversity. Such plans will likely surface disguised as greenhouse gas emission reduction objectives.

Bulgarian - Romanian Forest Mapping Project



At the end of March at a meeting in Romania a new project to identify the forest holding high values for biodiversity in Bulgaria and Romania was launched by the BirdLife Forest Task Force. It will be carried out in co-operation with the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BirdLife Bulgaria) and the Romanian Ornithological Society (BirdLife Romania). Bulgaria and Romania are the next two countries after Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland and Belarus that join the BirdLife's forest mapping initiative. High Conservation Value Forests (HCVF) is an objective category, based on ecological criteria, such as biodiversity in forests, the role of a forest ecosystem in preserving threatened species, maintaining primal relationships, interactions and behaviours of various elements of such ecosystems, as well as the critical role of forests in maintaining protected areas (buffering forests and critical ecological corridors).



Veronika Ferdinandova

The mapping will be based on existing data and information, primarily the forestry inventory database, potential Sites of Community Interest (pSCIs) and potential Special Areas of Conservation (pSACs), locations of Capercaillie leks and long-lasting raptor nests, topographic maps etc. Forest stands will be selected according to ecological criteria elaborated for the project and particular to each forest habitat type. Field checks will be made for assessing data accuracy.

The project will produce a detailed map and database of biologically currently and potentially valuable forests in Bulgaria

and Romania, which will help to locate gaps in the current networks of forest protected areas, and in systematic planning of national forest protected area networks. Further on, the results of the BRFM project will support the development of the national Natura 2000 network and define priorities for management plans in pilot Natura 2000 sites. The results will also be applicable in the process FSC certification where HCVFs are required to be maintained or enhanced during forestry operations. The results will be actively communicated to all the central stakeholders including authorities responsible for forest protection and management, forest industries, and nature conservation organisations. Based on experience from the previous projects it is intended to also present model forests where management considering particularly biodiversity conservation will be demonstrated in cooperation with local forest administrations.



Oak forests on sand dunes is a unique forest type in the Danube Delta



HOW TO KNOW A FOREST IS DOING FINE?

25-26 October 2007 Białowieża, Poland

This year's annual meeting of the European Forest Task Force, BirdLife, will be accompanied by a seminar on **F**orest ecological **I**ndicators in **E**urope (FINE). The event is being organised by the Polish BirdLife's partner, Polish Society for the Protection of Birds (OTOP, www.otop.org.pl) in co-operation with Białowieża National Park (BNP, www.bpn.com.pl).

We hope the seminar will help to put things in order and provide a basis for a consistent system of indicators.

BirdLife has already provided the EU with a headline biodiversity indicator for farmland habitats. Forests are next.

Several key-note lectures and following workshops will discuss:

- presenting the state-of-the art of the knowledge about indicators of the forest habitat quality as a result of external driving factors;
- identifying strengths and pitfalls of the use of forest indicators;
- defining the role of forest indicators in EU and national policies;

The programme and registration form can be downloaded at: http://www.birdlife.org/action/change/europe/forest_task_force/FTF_annual_workshop_2007.html

PLEASE REGISTER NO LATER THAN END OF JULY!

FTF welcomes the new members of its team:

Diyana Kostovska—Manager of the Bulgarian—Romanian Forest Mapping Project and the new head of the FTF HCVF Working group. Before, she worked as a specialist in tourism and recreation at the Central Balkan National Park in Bulgaria and as an assistant in research projects in Munich. Diyana graduated Forestry University and the Technical University in Munich, MSc Programme in Sustainable Resource Management

Boris Barov, formerly Director of BSPB, has joined BirdLife's European Division Office in Brussels as their new Conservation Manager and will be the FTF Secretariat support in future

Vanya Ratarova—BSPB's forest conservation and advocacy officer. She worked as a tourism expert at Vitosha Nature Park. In 2006 she spent eight months as a trainee at the institute of Forestry Economics in Freiburg and NABU Headquarter in Bonn researching the ENGO's role in the FSC forest certification. MSc in Sustainable Forestry and Plant Use Management, Freiburg, Germany.

Critian Domsa—member of the SOR's staff for years. Before Cristi joined the FTF team he had worked for Important Bird Areas identification and Common Bird Monitoring scheme

Indicator species reveal trends in the ecosystem and help in evaluating the impact of external factors on forests and other habitats. Knowing the requirements of indicator species in decline suggest countermeasures necessary to restore habitat quality, and monitor their effect. But how do we know which species to choose? How do we define Habitat Quality? Is "ecosystem health" equitable with its biodiversity? Is forest cover by itself a sufficient biodiversity indicator or we need something more? Do we just follow changes in common species' populations or also consider how the species reflect changes in their environment? Can species indicators measure the effectiveness of environmental policies? What is "sustainable forest management" to different groups of society? - Can they find common ground?

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