

Danubeparks Newsletter 06.05.2014

Black Poplars - flagship species analysed all along the Danube River

A cross-sectorial Forest Conference on April 24th-25th in Novi Sad brought together Protected Areas, Forest Companies, and numerous other stakeholders. The event, organized by Vojvodinašume Public Enterprise, discussed recent findings of the DANUBE PARKS Network on the status of Black Poplars along the Danube. With 130 participants, big interest from the press and numerous results to build on in the future, the conference was a big success.

Indicating a range of nature protection issues

Andrej Pilipovic (Institute for Lowland Forestry and Environment at the University of Novi Sad) opened the issue with an overview on basic characteristics of Black Poplar. Fulfilling multiple tasks in a floodplain and indicating various conservation issues, the Black Poplar is a perfect flagship species for floodplain forests.



As a pioneer plant, it populates open areas like sand and gravel banks that evolve from dynamic river processes, and prepares them for the settling of other plant species later on. When they have grown old and die, they serve e.g. as breeding tree for nests of large birds like White-tailed Eagle, and give home to uncountable insects, worms, bugs, and the like.



With these functions, it also indicates the existence or loss of river dynamics as well as the loss of typical habitats for floodplain species. Additionally, Black Poplars were increasingly hybridized from hybrid poplar plantations, resulting in a different gene pool that is less resilient to ecological changes and less adapted to the local situation.

DANUBE PARKS Poplars

For all of the above reasons, the Black Poplar was selected as a flagship species in the DANUBE PARKS STEP 2.0 project. Radmila Šakic Peuraca and Georg Frank gave an overview on all activities related to Black Poplar within the project. These include a genetic and morphological study based on the mapping of the trees in a Black Poplar cadastre. Additionally, cross-sectorial work is encouraged with the Forest Conference in Serbia and a follow-up study visit in Austria. Public outreach is ensured by the labelling of Black Poplars in the field, and giving mobile information to visitors via a QR code.

Genetic variations along the Danube



The genetic study tested the populations from 12 Protected Areas in 8 countries. Branislav Šiler and Mihajlo Jelic (Institute for Biological research and Faculty of Biology of the Belgrade University) presented and interpreted the results. The genetic variability is high, which means a sound basis for conservation and reforestation exists in the Protected Areas. The study suggests to put an emphasis on habitat conservation and restoration to support natural rejuvenation. For reforestation, the Black Poplars from the closest possible area should be taken as basis, because genetic differences rise with geographical distance.



The morphological study as well as the online [Black Poplar cadastre](#) were presented by Branislav Kovacevic (Institute for Lowland Forestry and Environment in Novi Sad) respectively Bojan Tubic (Vojvodinašume). Ivana Vasic (Vojvodinašume) had the pleasure to show the [summary publication](#) of all those studies, which arrived freshly printed at the conference.

Exchange with experts



On top of the activities within the DANUBEPARKS STEP 2.0 project, external experts shared their experiences: Milan Medarevic (Dean of the Faculty of Forestry from Belgrade University) and Vladimir Kušan (OIKON Ltd. Institute for Applied Ecology) presented management practices of lowland forests in general and Black Poplar in particular, in both Serbia and Croatia.

Concrete implementation



Protected Area representatives from Duna-Ipoly National Park in Hungary, Dunajské luhý Landscape Protected Area in Slovakia, and Rusenski lom Nature Park in Bulgaria (all members of DANUBEPARKS), gave an insight into concrete pilot projects: The detailed genetic analysis of Black Poplar in Hungary was one example, reforestation activities in Slovakia and Bulgaria, financed by the ETC-SEE programme, were a second one.

Next steps ensured



The discussions at the Conference ([see presentations](#)) are an important step towards better cross-sectorial understanding and coherent forest management approaches on a Danube-wide scale. The next chance to meet will be a cross-sectorial study visit in Donau-Auen National Park (Austria), where first-hand experience during extended field trips will provide room for practical discussions.

Updates from project activities

DANUBEPARKS and the European Union



On February 19th, representatives of the Protected Areas met with Members of the European Parliament and Commission officials in Brussels. The presented project activities gained a lot of interest from their side, as they fit well with several on-going nature protection initiatives (e.g. the Communication on Green Infrastructure).



This day in Brussels was also linked to a half-day training on EU advocacy work given by employees of the EEB (European Environmental Bureau), and a conference organized by the ETC-SEE project Green Mountain the next day. Numerous nature protection projects from the SEE area participated there, as a result of the capitalization process that is led by DANUBEPARKS. Watch the [video from our presentation](#) there!

Additional project: Cross-border nature tourism offers

Long-term capitalization is a main issue within DANUBEPARKS STEP 2.0, which is why follow-up projects are currently being developed. In tourism we are one step ahead, and started

already in November 2013 with a small additional project, financed by the GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) via the DCC (Danube Competence Center).



In this project, the DANUBEPARKS Network cooperates with the tourism industry in four pilot regions. The goal is to promote the Danube as a nature tourism destination, and to make sure the implementation of tours in the Protected Area regions is done sustainably. After a product development training in December, four representatives of the Network visited ITB Berlin on March 5th-7th, to meet both incoming agencies and outbound tour-operators.

New publications online

We have finished several of our transnational activities by now, and uploaded those results on the website. Here is an overview of what is available so far:

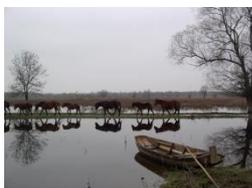
[Environmental Education: Assessment Tour Report and Quality Guidelines](#)

[Analysis of Organizational Structures of the Protected Area Administrations](#)

[Enlargement Strategy of the DANUBEPARKS Network](#)

[Black Poplar Monography, including genetic & morphological analysis](#)

Journey along the Danube: Lonjsko Polje Nature Park (Croatia)



This nature park is located in the Central Sava River Basin, close to the Croatian border with Bosnia & Herzegovina. Its main characteristic is the sustainable use of the permanently changing floodplain ecosystem and the resulting living natural and cultural landscape. Pasturing with a traditional animal husbandry system and indigenous breeds of horse, cattle, pig and goose plays an important role here not only for the economy, but also for nature protection.



Visitors find a tranquil landscape along meandering rivers, which can perfectly be discovered by bike: The Sava River cycling trail runs through the park and a good map is available. Accommodation is provided in numerous private guesthouses, all of them in traditional wooden architectural style that were renovated over the last years. Lonjsko Polje Nature Park offers educational trails to be visited independently, but also has knowledgeable guides and offers walking, cycling, or boating excursions. For sure you'll get a deep insight into the natural processes and cultural identity of the area!

Upcoming Events

International Danube Festival: Backi Monostor, August 8-9

In summer, DANUBEPARKS joins the Bodrog Festival in Vojvodina/Serbia. At the well-visited Festival, we present our areas, provide children's programmes, and inform about excursions for visitors. The festival itself is very popular for its traditional and contemporary music programme, and offers a fish-soup cooking competition this year.

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