

1 Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve 2 Lower Prut Nature Reserve 3 Lower Prut Floodplain Natural Park 4 Small Wetlands of Braila 5 Kalimok-Brushlen Protected Site
6 Rusenski Lom Nature Park 7 Persina Nature Park 8 Iron Gates Natural Park 9 Đerdap National Park 10 Lonjsko Polje Nature Park 11 Kopački rit Nature Park
12 Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve 13 Duna-Dráva National Park 14 Duna-Ipoly National Park 15 Fertő-Hátság National Park 16 Dunajské Luhy Protected Landscape Area
17 Záhorie Protected Landscape Area 18 Donau-Auen National Park 19 Narrow Valley of the Danube in Passau district 20 Donauauwald Neuburg-Ingolstadt

DANUBE PARKS STEP 2.0

PROJECT REPORT

2012 – 2014



Programme co-funded by the
EUROPEAN UNION



SOUTH EAST
EUROPE
Transnational Cooperation Programme

DANUBE PARKS 2.0
network of protected areas STEP



DANUBE PARKS 20

network of protected areas STEP

c/o Donau-Auen National Park

Schloss Orth, 2304 Orth an der Donau, Austria

Project Manager: Georg Frank

Phone: +43/2212/3450-28, Fax: +43/2212/3450-17

g.frank@danubeparks.org

www.danubeparks.org

Photos: Baumgartner, Bosnar, BROZ, Bucevic, Buchner, Costea, Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority, Direktor, Donau-Auen National Park, Duna-Dráva National Park, Duna-Ipoly National Park, EU Strategy for the Danube Region, Fehrer, Frank, Frötscher, Goriup, Ionita, Ivanov, Kalotas, Kern, Koev, Koritar, Kovacs, Kreinz, Kutsarov, Manzano, Morocz, Nature Park Obere Donau, Pap, Parrag, Persina Nature Park, Popp, Roland, Schmidt, Schneider, Wagner, Weixelbraun, Wosch

Layout: Michael Kalb, www.michaelkalb.at

Printed by Druckerei Janetschek

Print run of 8,000. © August 2014. Produced using environmentally-friendly technologies and materials. Errors and omissions excepted.

Imprint



Kick-off conference (October 2012, Neuburg/Germany)

The DANUBEPARKS Network

EU-funding programme: European Territorial Cooperation in South East Europe (ETC-SEE)

Project Title: DANUBEPARKS STEP 2.0

Term: October 2012 – September 2014

Project budget: EUR 2.2 million

Partnership: 14 project partners, 17 observers

EU-Financing

The Danube River hosts immense natural values. Protected Areas are responsible for the conservation of biodiversity hotspots along the river. Since the accession of many Danube countries to the EU in 2004 and 2007, they not only share the same challenges: EU legislation like the Fauna-Flora Habitat Directive and strategies like the EU Strategy for the Danube Region now form a common framework for nature protection in the region. The natural treasures of the Danube are interlinked all along the river. Nature does not recognize state borders – therefore, nature protection needs to work across borders too! The cornerstone for transnational cooperation in the Protected Areas along the Danube was laid in 2007 in Tulcea. Through the signing of the Declaration of Vienna in 2009, DANUBEPARKS – the Danube River Network of Protected Areas – was officially

founded. Since then, much has been achieved. Robust and amicable cooperation has arisen within the framework of two ETC-SEE projects. Exchange of experience and know-how has led to coordinated strategies for select issues in nature conservation, with Danube-wide monitoring, joint public relations, and pilot projects of transnational significance on the agenda.

Integrative approach

DANUBEPARKS has become a widely recognized nature conservation network. International bodies such as the ICPDR (International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River) are among our permanent partners, and the EUSDR (EU Strategy for the Danube Region) has labelled DANUBEPARKS as “flagship project”. Economic sectors on the river also play an important role. Cooperation with NEWADA Duo, the Network of Danube Waterway Administrations, with forestry companies of the Danube countries, as well

as the tourism industry through DCC (Danube Competence Centre), is a daily matter. In this way, we work towards integrative and sustainable development along our common river. The growth of the network itself is proof of our success: in the past 7 years, the original 8 founders have been joined by 12 others. DANUBEPARKS now boasts 20 Protected Areas in 9 countries.

DANUBEPARKS STEP 2.0

Our second joint project, DANUBEPARKS STEP 2.0, again involves topics of transnational relevance:

- Protection of Black Poplar and White-tailed Eagle as flagship species
- Preservation and restoration of natural river dynamics
- Improvement of nature tourism and environmental education offers
- Organisational development

DANUBEPARKS – flagship project of the EUSDR



Danube Protected Areas - all in one boat



Strengthening Long-term Cooperation

Institutionalization Process

DANUBEPARKS has become a platform for lively cooperation among the Danube Protected Areas.

Voices

"The Danube is our joint international natural heritage. We all share the responsibility for its protection. As it passes ten countries, transnational cooperation is needed for wise river management."



The Austrian Federal Ministry welcomes the coordinating role of the Donau-Auen National Park for DANUBEPARKS and supports the initiatives for the long-term anchoring of the Danube River Network of Protected Areas."

Andr   Rupprecht, Federal Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, Austria



DANUBEPARKS meeting at the EU Commission



Headquarter Persina Nature Park

The exchange of experience has led to expanded horizons on a local level. Danube-wide strategies are drafted, and concrete protective measures have been implemented. Yet there is still much to be done. For this reason, the DANUBEPARKS association was founded in September 2014. In future, the association will be the voice of the Danube Protected Areas, promoting our agenda in the political arena and constituting an ongoing framework for cooperation to expand our project-based collaboration. In this way we can ensure that DANUBEPARKS will continue to have a positive impact on sustainable development in the Danube region.

Forward Looking Organisational Development

In our reflections on the organisation of DANUBEPARKS, we have also taken a closer look at the individual administrations of the Protected Areas. We evaluated topics like tasks

and functions, public responsibilities, economic activities and funding of administrations, and property ownership issues. The analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of various structures should support Protected Area administrators in future organisational transformations. We can learn so much from one another – not only about nature conservation, but about organisational development as well!

- **Founding of the DANUBEPARKS Association**
- **Project Managers Trainings on Presentation, Moderation, Leadership, EU Funding and Applications, and EU Policy Work**
- **Study on organisational structures of Protected Area Administrations**
- **Directors' workshop on organisational development**
- **DANUBEPARKS Enlargement Strategy**
- **Integration of 5 new Protected Areas into the Network**
- **Intense collaboration with ICPDR and EUSDR**
- **Meetings with EU Parliament and EU Commission**
- **Exchange of experience with the Alpine and Carpathian Networks of Protected Areas**
- **Exchange of experience with the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region**
- **Leading the ETC-SEE capitalization process for nature protection projects**

Actions

Enriching diversity in the partnership, reflected by diverse Protected Areas' headquarters





Narrow Valley of the Danube in Passau district



Lower Prut Floodplain Natural Park

New Partners on Board!

Enlargement of the Network

Active and dedicated partners are the foundation of successful cooperation in the DANUBEPARKS network. Following the development of an expansion strategy for the network, several new partners have joined.

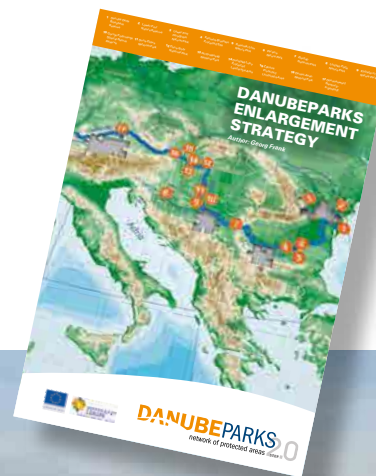
Lower Prut Floodplain Natural Park, Romania: the meandering flow of the Lower Prut River is an important natural heritage on the Prut tributary, the last before the Danube Delta. This park took part in the Danube-wide monitoring of indicator species and joined the network in September 2013.

Lower Prut Nature Reserve, Moldova: located on the Moldovan side, this reserve was created to protect the river as well as Lake Beleu, whose water levels are dependent on the Prut and the Danube. Having joined the network in May 2013, this reserve participated in the Danube-wide winter count of the White-tailed Eagle.

Small Wetlands of Braila, Romania: just before the final bend of the Danube towards the east, the river branches out into several arms which embrace the expansive and wild Braila Islands. This partner supported the development of follow-up projects and joined the network in September 2013.

Iron Gates Natural Park, Romania: at the Iron Gates, where the Danube parts the Carpathians, this park protects the Romanian side of the Danube. Having participated in several workshops during the project, it joined the network in September 2013.

Narrow Valley of the Danube in Passau district, Germany: the regional government of Passau protects and manages river habitats and islands together with the slope forests and dry meadows along the Danube. Having supported the environmental education assessment tour, the Protected Area joined the network in August 2014.



Small Wetlands of Braila



Lower Prut Nature Reserve



Iron Gates Natural Park



Voices

"The last years' intensive and fruitful cooperation within



DANUBEPARKS resulted in a strong and trustworthy partnership. Danube Protected Areas differ in protection status, organizational structures and morphological frame conditions, but share common challenges and visions. Representing the Upper, Middle and Lower Danube, we express commitment to further intensify our cooperation for our joint Danube natural heritage and to integrate all relevant Protected Areas at our joint river."

Eszter Buchert, Grigore Baboianu, Carl Manzano, DANUBEPARKS Spokespersons

River Dynamics



Learning about river morphology, protecting river dynamics

6

Voices

"The ICPDR's Joint Danube Survey or JDS3 was the world's largest river expedition in 2014. Its findings are essential for understanding the Danube River and developing measures that will improve its water quality in both chemical and ecological terms. DANUBEPARKS contributed to JDS3 through a study on river dynamics and morphology – key aspects for vital river ecosystems. As a valuable partner at the interface of nature and society, DANUBEPARKS also helped us to increase public awareness and spread information on JDS3 beyond the scientific community."



Ivan Zavadsky,
ICPDR Executive Secretary

The Beating Heart of a Riverine Ecosystem

The only constant in a riverine ecosystem is change. Rising and falling water levels and the permanent shift of sand and gravel are characteristic of natural rivers, allowing the emergence of steep banks or sand and gravel islands which come and go. Home to a variety of native flora and fauna, these vital ecosystems have been brought to the brink of extinction across Europe by intervention in the form of damming, straightening and river regulation. DANUBEPARKS puts the protection of river dynamics at the heart of our work, because this is the only way to ensure the long-term preservation of a biodiverse and vital riverine environment. Little Ringed Plover and Sand Martin are ideal indicators of an intact river morphology. In 2011 they were the subject of a Danube-wide monitoring project which has now been expanded to include the Drava, Sava and Prut tributaries.

Joint Danube Survey

In 2013 this study was repeated as part of the ICPDR Joint Danube Survey, which investigates water quality, chemical substances, fish population, and many other areas. Our indicator species ultimately helped focus attention on morphological changes. DANUBEPARKS monitoring confirms that only those sections of the Danube which are only slightly modified are suitable habitats for characteristic animal species. Cooperation within the framework of the ICPDR Joint Danube Survey should lead to enhanced awareness on a political level for the significance of river dynamics and the need for protection and restoration.

- **Danube-wide monitoring, including several tributaries, of the Little Ringed Plover and Sand Martin as part of the JDS3**
- **Awareness building through extended boat trips, topical presentations, and specialized excursions**
- **Planning of pilot projects focusing on sediment balance and restoration**
- **Concept for a habitat corridor based on dynamic Danube islands**
- **Cross-sector workshops with NEWADA Duo, the Network of Danube Waterway Administrations**
- **Drafting of a river morphology action plan**

Actions

Sand Martin and Little Ringed Plover - indicator species for river dynamics





Steep river banks as breeding sites for Sand Martin

Danube-wide monitoring: 56 experts from 13 Protected Areas assessing more than 4,000 river-km



DANUBE PARKS in the ICPDR Joint Danube Survey – integrating science, public awareness and policy

Islands – key habitats for Little Ringed Plover





Workshop with Danube waterway administrations

Preserving dynamics

Although the Little Ringed Plover and the Sand Martin may at first look appear insignificant, the task which has emerged from the Danube-wide survey is indeed far reaching:

1. Protection of near-natural river sections on the Danube and its tributaries; the Lower and Middle Danube in particular are still monumental natural gems.
2. Revitalisation of areas which have already been massively changed: here, ambitious projects can show us the way!
3. Efforts to maintain an intact sediment balance, because only when a river can shift and store sufficient gravel and sand is it an intact river.
4. Finally: stimulating enthusiasm on the part of the public for river dynamics. River dynamics create gorgeous recreational spaces and are a necessity for sustainable flood protection. Rivers cannot be completely tamed!



Longitudinal river continuity – gravel at the Upper Danube, fine gravel at the Middle Danube and sand at the Lower Danube

Wild Island Habitat Corridor

In its WILDisLAND initiative DANUBEPARKS focusses on protection of the natural Danube islands. These gravel and sand banks are of extreme importance and require special protection. Allowing Mother Nature to do her work means more wilderness, and this is the motto of the initiative to establish a Danube Wild Island habitat corridor. The concept drafted under the leadership of Persina Nature Park, which protects some of the largest Danube islands, calls for cooperation

with waterways authorities, navigation and other land users in follow-up projects and will be implemented step by step.

Pilot projects: Sediments and Restoration

The Hungarian Duna-Dráva National Park has been able to focus interest on a section of the Drava thanks to its revitalisation concept of a tributary. The plan offers a good foundation for concrete steps leading to the improvement of the habitat.

The Duna-Ipoly National Park designed a pilot study in which sediment took centre stage, asking: how can river engineering infrastructure on the riverbed (e.g. groynes to facilitate navigation) be designed to ensure as little disturbance as possible to the sediment balance? Is it possible to optimise planning in such a way as to create a win-win situation?

Stakeholder Integration

People interested in knowing more about research into riverine landscapes and experiencing the fascination of dynamic rivers at first hand had a lively programme to choose from: a three-day rubber dinghy wilderness tour in Austria; a special excursion which also included topical presentations at a festival in Hungary; and work carried out together with a youth nature protection group in Bulgaria were all able to stimulate enthusiasm for a lively river.

Rivers in general, and the Danube in particular, are where many diverging interests and claims often collide. In order to obtain whenever possible the best balance of interests, avoid conflicts, and produce win-win situations in river management, DANUBEPARKS has teamed up with NEWADA Duo, the Network of Danube Waterway Administrations. More joint activities are planned.

9

Voices

“The Danube River is a backbone for biodiversity in South-East Europe. Danube Protected Areas manage and protect the most valuable sites and habitats. The aim of DANUBEPARKS to foster a coherent management practice, and initiatives like the Wild Island Habitat Corridor contribute significantly to develop the Danube as a large-scale ecological corridor.”



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

Sharing experiences, visiting river restoration projects



Flagship Species

White-tailed eagle



The Danube river, backbone for White-tailed Eagle in South-East Europe

Voices

"The White-tailed Eagle is an excellent flagship species for transnational biodiversity conservation in the Danube region. Protected Areas play a pivotal role for the conservation of this magnificent bird. The fruitful cooperation among DANUBEPARKS and NGOs like the WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme contributes significantly to preserving the Danube's rich natural values."



Andreas Beckmann, Director of the WWF Danube Carpathian Program

10

Counters: 300 – Eagles: 750

The White-tailed Eagle needs large natural spaces and undisturbed areas for breeding. The complex demands this bird places on its habitat makes it a

flagship species for wetland forests. The "Action Plan for the Conservation of the White-tailed Eagle along the Danube" developed in the first DANUBEPARKS project forms the foundation for the conservation activities implemented in 2013 and 2014.

In January 2014, the Protected Areas joined up with experts from BirdLife, WWF and other NGOs to organise the first Danube-wide winter count of the White-tailed Eagle. Around 3000 kilometres, 300 mainly volunteer counters, and 3000 hours spent braving wind and cold – but the effort was worth it: the Danube is an important winter habitat for 750 eagles! As the first ever Danube-wide report on the over-wintering areas of the species, it is an essential instrument in planning future protection measures. Results have also been published in the White-tailed Eagle database set up by DANUBEPARKS in 2011.

Public Participation

An invitation was extended to the general public in many Protected Areas to "look over the shoulders" of nature experts by way of special excursions and events, all of which help focus eyes on these "Kings of the Skies."

A Eurovision Song Contest-like excitement was in the air at the well-attended evening event organised at the Donau-Auen National Park, where transnational monitoring results were collected. Live hook-ups to White-tailed Eagle experts in all the Danube countries truly brought the Danube-wide cooperation to life. Excellent media coverage underscored the significance of transnational cooperation for the protection of this species.

- **Organization of the first Danube-wide White-tailed Eagle winter count**
- **Public participation events in several countries**
- **Drafting of an implementation plan for White-tailed Eagle conservation in the Protected Areas**
- **Promotion of the White-tailed Eagle database**
- **Collaboration with nature protection NGOs**

Actions

White-tailed Eagle, the largest bird of prey in the region





1st Danube-wide White-tailed Eagle winter census: 3000 river-km, 300 experts, 3000 hours in the field



Open events fascinate and inspire the public

DANUBEPARKS teams up with experts and NGOs



Flagship Species

Black Poplar



DANUBE PARKS GIANTS' labelling

Restoring rejuvenation habitats

DANUBE PARKS Poplars

The Black Poplar is THE giant of the Danube river ecosystem. These powerful and gnarled trees give the landscape personality and provide shelter, nesting places and nourishment for many other animal species. Yet these softwood riparian trees have lost a dramatic amount of territory in the past 100 years throughout Europe. Intensive forestry practices, the loss of suitable and natural regeneration areas, and hybridisation with poplars from forestry plantations have continued to beset the Black Poplar.

Danube-wide Cadastre

Black Poplars were counted in all the Danube Protected Areas, and the cadastre has now been published online at the DANUBE PARKS website. What is more, 30 trees in each Protected Area were genetically and morphologically tested. The final report on the Black Poplar underlines the

necessity of active intervention in every Protected Area in order to preserve the genetic variability of the Black Poplar. In the Slovakian Danube wetlands and the Bulgarian Rusenski Lom Nature Park, reforestation measures have already been undertaken with local Black Poplar seedlings. These activities should reverse the trend by enabling wetland forests to reconquer the space they originally inhabited along the Danube.

International Forest Conference

The Black Poplar conference held in April 2014 in Novi Sad, Serbia, was the ideal opportunity for experience exchange, with the presentation of results from mapping and genetic analysis, conclusions obtained in pilot projects, and ideas for increasing awareness. Forestry and Protected Area managers as well as representatives from NGOs from the entire

Danube region attended. The conference thus laid the foundation for enhanced cooperation between nature conservation and forestry on a Danube-wide level. In order to promote protection of the powerful and impressive Black Poplar, selected trees have been designated as "DANUBE PARKS Giants." A sign to this effect should direct visitor attention to these prime specimens; by way of a QR code, additional information will be offered at the DANUBE PARKS website.

- *Danube-wide mapping of Black Poplars*
- *Genetic and morphological testing of the Black Poplar in 8 countries*
- *Publication on the genetic variability of the Black Poplar on the Danube*
- *Black Poplar conference for the promotion of cooperation between nature conservation and forestry*
- *Reforestation activities for the Black Poplar in Slovakia and Bulgaria*
- *Designation of outstanding Black Poplar specimens as "DANUBE PARKS Giants"*
- *Design of mobile information on the Black Poplar via QR code*
- *Presentation of the Black Poplar cadastre at the DANUBE PARKS website*

Actions

Flagship species Black poplar: forest conference and monograph





Tourism and Education



Exploratory tour all the way to KM Zero



Environmental Education helps people value natural diversity

Monitoring Awareness Building

The Protected Areas play a special role in creating awareness of environmental issues, particularly

Voices

"The EU Strategy for the Danube Region is based on the idea that common challenges -whether environmental, economic or security related- are best tackled in cooperation.

DANUBE PARKS is an excellent example of an integrated approach to deal with biodiversity and sustainable tourism in the Danube, also contributing to the promotion of the beauty and benefits of cooperation to the wider public."



Anna Repullo-Grau,
European Commission,
DG Regional and Urban Policy

among local populations and tourists. Programmes of high quality are essential in order to reach these educational goals. Taking all Danube-wide activities into account, efforts should be made to promote one another and to offer complementary programmes in terms of content.

The goal of an assessment tour to organisations along the Danube offering environmental education was to prepare future cooperation projects and learn from the various organisers. More than 40 organisations were visited in only three weeks, with tours of facilities and interviews with the respective directors. Based on these insights, quality guidelines were developed for environmental education programmes in the Danube Protected Areas. The results have been published in "Environmental Education in Protected Areas along the Danube - Report on the Assessment Tour and Quality Guidelines for Environmental Education." The map to the

right also offers best-practice examples and an overview of the sites visited.

Future joint projects should heed these quality guidelines and work pro-actively to achieve them, step by step.

- **Concept development of a common DANUBE PARKS visitor centre**
- **Programming and installation of digital "Info Corners" in existing visitor centres**
- **Carrying out of exploratory assessment tour**
- **Drafting of quality guidelines**
- **Development of nature tourism programmes for people with disabilities (Germany)**
- **Gathering of good-practice examples of nature tourism for people with disabilities and first actual experience with the topic (Hungary)**
- **Analysis of carrying capacities in the Protected Areas (Germany, Romania)**
- **Creation of database sensitive species and corresponding visitor management**
- **Active membership in the Danube Competence Centre**

Actions: Nature Tourism

Be it simple, playful, technical or culinary - diversity in educational methods is the key to success





1 Nature Park Train in the Nature Park Obere Donau



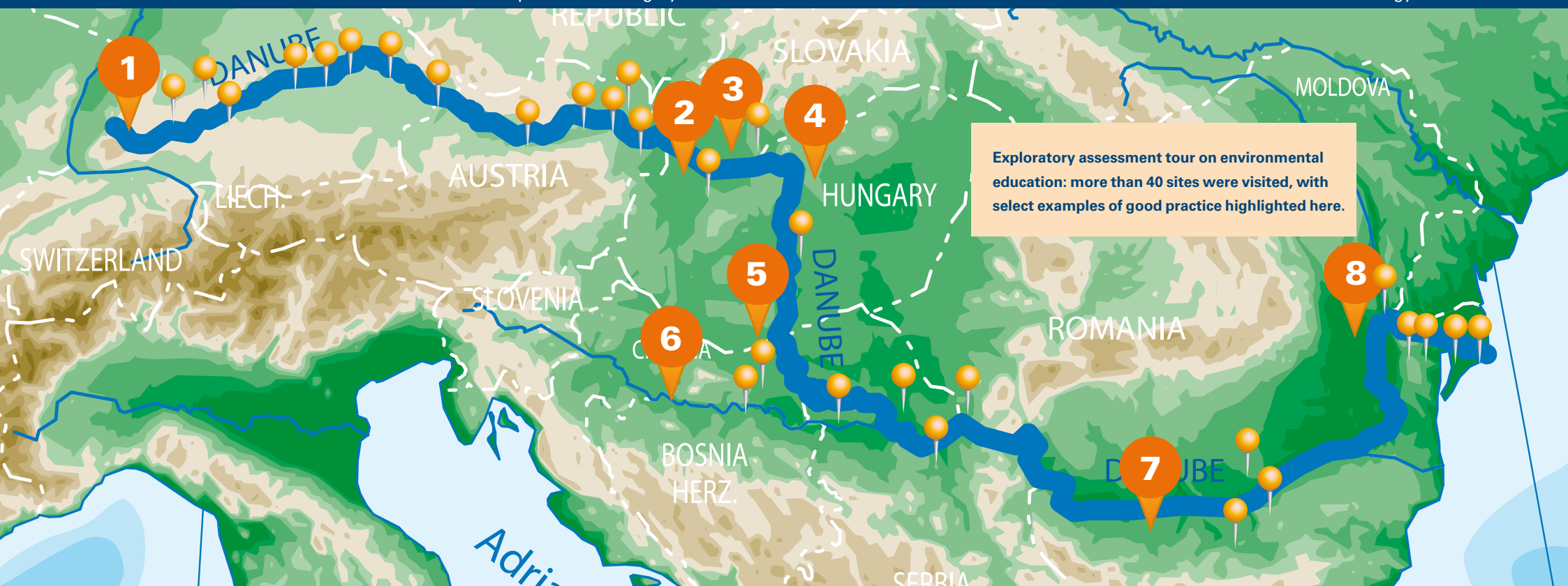
2 National Park brand promotes local products in Hungary



3 Participatory events for the locals in the Slovakian Danube wetlands



4 Training teachers as guides in Futura Mosonmagyaróvár



5 Innovative outdoor fishery exhibition in Duna-Dráva National Park

6 Integration of architectural heritage in Lonsjko Polje Nature Park

7 Fibreglass models instead of stuffed animals in Persina Nature Park

8 Working with children and NGOs in Lower Prut Floodplain Natural Reserve





Experiencing nature with all different senses

One Centre for All

The Danube Bend, located north of Budapest, is one of the most important tourist destinations on the river and the planned site of the future DANUBEPARKS visitor centre. An exhibit will underscore the Danube's significance as a shared, interconnected habitat for all the Danube countries. An outdoor nature path will mirror the Danube's course and allow visitors to "walk" all the different Danube Protected Areas. As coordinator, the Duna-Ipoly National Park is playing a lead role in realising this ambitious project.

In order to show the interconnectedness of the Danube Protected Areas at present, the Djerdap National Park headed up a project to develop digital "Info Corners" for existing visitor centres. These touchscreen exhibits offer information about DANUBEPARKS and the individual Protected Areas.

Future exhibition at the Danube Bend



Carrying capacities – respecting nature's limits

How Many People Can Nature Bear?

The idea that there are limits to carrying capacity plays a major role when it comes to nature-friendly tourism activities. How many visitors can visit a Protected Area without endangering the very things it is meant to protect? How can we channel visitors towards those activities that ensure an enjoyable experience of nature without any negative impact on our natural treasures?

The Danube Riparian Forest Neuburg-Ingolstadt and the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve served as pilot areas in a project aimed at finding preliminary answers on how to address this complex issue. Insights gained in the project were conveyed to partners by way of workshops, and a database now contains learning experiences and points to possible solutions which minimise the conflict between sensitive species and tourism.

European Pond Turtle – sensitive species



Learning from people with disabilities

Accessible Nature for All

A change of perspective is required when it comes to making nature tourism and environmental education programmes accessible to people with disabilities. Only after actually working together with people with physical, mental and/or cognitive disabilities can we know how best to accommodate their particular requirements and adapt our visitor offers accordingly.

At Danube Riparian Forest Neuburg-Ingolstadt, a week-long camp was organised for persons with disabilities along with staff of an association for disabled persons in order to develop programmes together. At the Duna-Dráva National Park, an event devoted to illuminating good-practice examples in this area was organised.

The newly-developed programmes were subsequently tested with the association for disabled persons as well as with the responsible persons in the Protected Areas. May these efforts lead to nature being accessible to all!



Public relations in the field



"A Chance for the Blue Danube" in Brussels

Communication

Actions

- **Kick-Off Meeting in Ingolstadt**
- **Final Conference in Budapest**
- **Drafting of a communication plan**
- **Ongoing PR, monitoring of press clippings**
- **Publication of Danube Inside Magazine**
- **Development of an online photo archive**
- **Organisation of the transnational Chance for the Blue Danube art competition and travelling exhibition**
- **Organisation of Danube Festivals in Tulcea and Backi Monostor**
- **Production of promotional giveaways such as bags, shirts, pens, pins, maps and more**
- **Study visits and staff exchanges among the Protected Areas and for external experts**
- **Presentation of the project at numerous external conferences**
- **Permanent updating of website and map with information about new partners**
- **Creation of a DANUBE PARKS book and photo exhibition**
- **Publication of a DANUBE PARKS calendar**
- **Distribution of six external newsletters**
- **Monthly internal newsletters**

Using the Power of Persuasion

The natural treasures of the Danube belong to us all! DANUBE PARKS continues to stimulate enthusiasm for the sheer magnificence of nature as well as understanding of the more "hidden" gems to be found along the Danube.

Annual highlights in this regard were again the Danube Festivals. The 2013 festival in Tulcea took place in cooperation with RowMania, with Delta native and canoe legend Ivan Patzaichin assuming the role of champion and sponsor. The information stands and programmes offered by the Protected Areas were eagerly received by local and international visitors.

In Backi Monostor, Serbia, the 2014 Danube Festival was held jointly with the Bodrog Festival, a transnational event known and loved far beyond the country's borders. The importance of preserving nature along the Danube and the necessity of cooperation were the focus of the event.

Art for Nature

The painting competition "A Chance for the Blue Danube" was again carried out with international participation. The exhibit travelled in the summer of 2013 through six Danube countries. For its

15-year anniversary in 2014, the best works of recent years were presented at the European Commission in Brussels; Romanian Rural Development Commissioner Dacian Ciolos gave the opening speech.

Publications

DANUBE PARKS can also be experienced in both black and white and stunning colour: *Nature's Heavens on the Danube* presents the full glory of the Danube Protected Areas. This illustrated book will not only promote awareness of the many natural gems to be found along the Danube, but also encourage readers to actually visit them.

Yet time never stands still. The DANUBE PARKS calendar for January 2014 - June 2015 has already been distributed to partners and stakeholders in the Protected Areas. Thus visitors and policy makers will be reminded of DANUBE PARKS projects for a long time.

Danube Festivals are annual highlights



Partnership is the key to successful work



A network consists not only of organisations, but above all of people. These last two pages are dedicated to all those whose active and productive contributions support this working partnership.

Two-thirds of the Danube Delta lies in Romania. The **Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve** protects the largest wetlands of the Danube, one of Europe's most important. With a survey and transferable methodology on limits to carrying capacity, the reserve has taken a significant step in uniting nature conservation and tourism throughout the entire network.

Located on the tributary Rusenski Lom, the **Rusenski Lom Nature Park** protects a scenic canyon, a habitat for many cliff-breeding birds and bats. The park is also in charge of the protected site Kalimok-Brushlen, where a Black Poplar reforestation project has been implemented – an important showcase project for the entire Danube region.

The islands of the Bulgarian Danube are especially important stepping stones in the ecological corridor of the Danube. **Persina Nature Park**, where some of these islands may be found, has undertaken a detailed planning for the conservation of islands both inside and outside the park's borders as part of an action plan on river morphology.

The impressive Djerdap Gorge lies where the Danube parts the Carpathians. Together with Romanian partners, the **Djerdap National Park** works to protect native species. As an important tourist destination, the park has led the way in developing digital "Info Corners" for the Protected Areas along the entire Danube.

The **Lonjsko Polje Nature Park** lies on the Sava in Croatia and is characterised by a meandering and natural lowlands river landscape. Use of the land in the surrounding areas has been adapted to the natural conditions of wetlands. Thanks to

the park's efforts, the Danube-wide monitoring of the Little Ringed Plover and Sand Martin could be carried out on the Sava for the first time.

The **Gornje Podunavlje Nature Reserve** is found in the triangle formed by Hungary, Croatia and Serbia; this Serbian reserve is maintained by the provincial forestry administration of Vojvodinašume. Black Storks and numerous other birds nest here thanks to the area's expansive forests. The reserve's competence in matters of forestry management was of significance to DANUBEPARKS in the Danube-wide evaluation of the Black Poplar population and the organisation of a forestry management conference.

Another triangle partner, **Kopački-rit Nature Park**, protects the expansive wetlands where the Drava meets the Danube. This area is of particular importance for the White-tailed Eagle, and it is here where the highest density of nesting pairs may be found. Thus it is natural that Kopački-





rit assumed a lead role in the winter count of the species; they also organised a preparatory workshop in tandem with their Hungarian partners.

The Hungarian **Duna-Dráva National Park** also lies on the confluence of the Danube and the Drava, which forms the natural boundary to Croatia. Thanks to its many years of experience in river morphology and revitalisation, this park was the one to submit a revitalisation plan for a sidearm of the Drava as part of the river morphology action plan; it also expanded the Danube-wide monitoring of the Little Ringed Plover and the Sand Martin on the Drava.

Located in Hungary, the **Duna-Ipoly National Park** is the second in the network to unite the Danube with the Carpathians and thus protects very unique habitats. As an important tourist destination, this park has developed a concept for a common DANUBEPARKS visitor centre that is to be built here at the Danube Bend; the centre

will showcase the ecology of all Danube Protected Areas.

Fertő-Hanság National Park is responsible for the administration of the Szigetköz Landscape Protection Area along the border of Hungary/Slovakia which protects the last remaining and once largest inland delta of the Danube. Through the integration of this Protected Area, all Danube-wide activities can now be implemented on a transnational basis in this region as well, meaning an important gap has now been closed.

The Slovakian NGO BROZ has dedicated itself to the revitalisation and conservation of **Dunajské luhy** (Slovak Danube floodplains) and **Záhorie Landscape Protection Areas** on the banks of the Morava. BROZ has carried out another successful model project entailing reforestation measures with Black Poplars and other native tree species.

Extending from Vienna to Bratislava, the Austrian **Donau-Auen National Park** protects one of the

last free-flowing sections of the Upper Danube. As lead partner, it is responsible for coordinating the activities of all project partners. Thanks to many years of experience in river revitalisation in collaboration with waterways authorities, the park plays a major role in cross-sector cooperation with navigation stakeholders.

The **Danube Riparian Forest Neuburg-Ingolstadt** bordering the Ingolstadt dam has been the subject of a complex revitalisation by a network including the administrative district of Neuburg-Schrobenhausen and the city of Ingolstadt. In addition to organising an assessment trip to facilities for environmental education, the area developed a tourism offer for people with disabilities.



- 1 Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve
- 2 Lower Prut Nature Reserve
- 3 Lower Prut Floodplain Natural Park
- 4 Small Wetlands of Braila
- 5 Kalimok-Brushlen Protected Site
- 6 Rusenski Lom Nature Park
- 7 Persina Nature Park
- 8 Iron Gates Natural Park
- 9 Đerdap National Park
- 10 Lonjsko Polje Nature Park
- 11 Kopački rit Nature Park
- 12 Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve
- 13 Duna-Dráva National Park
- 14 Duna-Ipoly National Park
- 15 Fertő-Hátság National Park
- 16 Dunajské Luhy Protected Landscape Area
- 17 Záhorie Protected Landscape Area
- 18 Donau-Auen National Park
- 19 Narrow Valley of the Danube in Passau district
- 20 Donauauwald Neuburg-Ingolstadt



c/o Donau-Auen National Park

Schloss Orth, 2304 Orth an der Donau, Austria

g.frank@danubeparks.org, www.danubeparks.org

DANUBEPARKS 2.0
network of protected areas STEP