

A growing network

During the first years of the Danube River Network of Protected Areas, it was important to build up a stable and trustful cooperation with numerous concrete benefits for all partners. In this phase, growing slowly was a conscious choice: It enabled us to build up close relations among each other and thus build a good basis for integrating more partners at a later date.



Despite not working actively on the enlargement, these start-up years already showed the good reputation of the Network as new Protected Areas joined on their own initiative, such as Djerdap National Park in Serbia or Fertő-Hanság National Park in Hungary. In this way, the DANUBEPARKS Network **grew from 8 partner areas in the beginning to currently 15.**



The Danube River is 2,857 km long and along the biggest part of its shores protected under European legislation. These areas make up a total of 230 Natura2000 sites. The number 15 sounds small in comparison, though it needs to be considered that many of those areas do not have their own administration body. DANUBEPARKS is a network of administrative bodies of Protected Areas however, contributing to making these bodies more effective and work in a coherent way along the whole river.

Still, we realize that several **important dots in the Danube lifeline are still missing** in the DANUBEPARKS Network. Now that the Network is implementing DANUBEPARKS STEP 2.0 and preparing for a long-lasting joint future, the time has come to actively **work on strategic enlargement** with Protected Area Administrations along the Danube River and its biggest tributaries, such as Tisza, Sava, Drava, and Prut Rivers. The bigger group we aim for will enable the DANUBEPARKS Network to become more effective in its work, especially considering the aim of contributing to a more coherent management and habitat corridors: This is obviously only possible by cooperation with all important players and areas along the whole river. Additionally, the enlarged Network will reinforce our joint voice on political level and towards other stakeholders.



Already during the first months of DANUBEPARKS STEP 2.0, **results can be seen:** The involvement of partners from non-EU-countries is now quite strong with four partners from Croatia and Serbia - definitely an added value in comparison to the first phase of DANUBEPARKS, where these Protected Areas could participate only partly due to limited funds.

During the last tourism workshop, representatives of the observer partner Iron Gates Natural Park in Romania attended a project meeting for the first time – and will continue to contribute actively, e.g. with their participation in the Danube-wide Monitoring of Little-ringed Plover and Sand Martin this spring. The other two observer partners, representing Romanian and Moldovan Protected Areas along

the Lower Prut River, will do the same, adding even a new country to the partnership. New partners are approaching us every now and then as well – in January 2013, stakeholders from the Upper Danube in Germany came to Austria for a study visit in the Lead Partners area.



We are also inviting all other interested Protected Area administrations to participate in the White-tailed Eagle winter count, the analysis of Black Poplar phenotypes, the Danube-wide Monitoring of indicator species for river dynamics, or the assessment tour for environmental education offers related to the Danube:

To **start collaboration actively** on a priority topic, providing immediate and concrete benefits both for the new partner and the Network, has proven a successful strategy in the past and should be kept for the future!



In order to officially integrate new partners in the Network, we would like to use the DANUBEPARKS STEP 2.0 **Steering Committee Meetings**: On August 30th-31st 2013, the meeting in Tulcea (Romania) will be the best occasion for new partners from Ukraine, Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria to present themselves to the current Network partners.

Right before the next Danube Festival in 2014 (August 9th-10th) in Backi Monostor (Serbia), the same invitation goes to future partners from Serbia and Croatia. Last but not least, a good moment for Protected Area administrations from Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Hungary will be at the Final Conference of the DANUBEPARKS STEP 2.0 project in Budapest, planned for September 2014.

We look forward to welcome new partners step by step over the next two years, and to jointly continue our common work for the Danube's nature with our transnational databases and position papers, active experience-exchange and coordinated communication actions!

Task Force Meetings: Morphology and Tourism



During a Workshop in January in Bratislava, the activities regarding **morphology** were discussed: The Danube-wide Monitoring of Little-ringed Plover and Sand Martin in May/June this year was planned in its final details, and discussions on an Action Plan for River Morphology started.

In a world café, ideas for conservation of valuable habitats – especially islands close to wilderness status, for restoration of damaged habitats, and for improving sediment balance were brought up. A wide range of ideas, local knowledge and activity options is now being sorted to work with it!



The **tourism** workshop in Djerdap National Park in March also laid down detailed responsibilities for a Danube-wide activity: The assessment tour of environmental education offers along the Danube River. In small groups, first ideas on what quality means in this field were discussed – they should lead to generally agreed quality guidelines for our own educational offers.

Additionally, a hands-on activity in its purest sense was brought a step further: Digital info corners (touch screens), which will be set up in the visitor centres of all Protected Areas, should show the connection between us and enable a view to the whole Danube for our visitors. The most important agreements on content and general style of the presentation was reached in our meeting.

Project Managers Training

In both workshops mentioned above, project managers spent an additional third day in the area to receive trainings on presentation and moderation skills, and to discuss general project implementation and internal communication issues.



The trainings enable the whole team to distribute more widely the task of representation of the DANUBEPARKS STEP 2.0 project in external conferences, and to **share the responsibility** of workshop moderation. As nearly all project partners also lead one or even more activities, everyone will be able to use the enhanced skills.

Taking into account the enlargement of the network, presentation and moderation skills will become even more important in the future, as handling the larger group becomes more challenging. Last but not least: A broad team of skilled project managers will help us to **sustain our work in the future**, after the implementation period of DANUBEPARKS STEP 2.0!

Journey along the Danube: Kalimok-Brushlen and Rusenski lom (Bulgaria)



The Lower Danube floodplains are characterized among others by extended marshlands - Kalimok-Brushlen Protected Site in the surroundings of the fishermen's village of Tutrakan in Bulgaria is one of the best-known ones. After restoration of Kalimok marshes, the area is again a valuable spawning ground for wild carp and sterlet.

The diversity and **abundance of fish** (over 60 species) has also left its traces on human culture – in Tutrakan visitors find an Ethnographical museum “Danube fishery and boat-building”.



The Kalimok-Brushlen Protected Site is now managed by the Rusenski lom Nature Park Directorate. This Protected Area along the Rusenski Lom River valley, the last right-side tributary of the Danube, is famous for its fascinating **rock-dwelling fauna**, such as the Egyptian vulture or 26 different species of bats.

The steep rock slopes of the canyon gave home not only to animals however, but also to people in the past: The significant **archaeological sites** in the park area such as the Ivanovo rock churches, relicts of those times, are a major attraction for visitors nowadays.

www.kalimok.eu, <http://lomea.org>

Upcoming Events

September 1st, Tulcea (RO): International Danube Festival

The Protected Areas will once again gather to celebrate the natural and cultural diversity along the whole Danube. Visiting this festival, you will receive personal information about all Danube Protected Areas within our Network, be able to try local products, and listen to local music! For children, games will be available to experience the Danube River in a playful way. Additionally, this year the festival will be coordinated with the RowMania Festival, showcasing rowing traditions of the region and including some competitions. We are looking forward to your visit!

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