

Grass Cuttings

Conserving Croatia's Grasslands



British conservationists begin collaborative project with the Žumberak-Samoborsko gorje Nature Park.

HELLO AND WELCOME to the first issue of our project newsletter, *Grass Cuttings*. This biannual newsletter will allow you to follow the progress of our Darwin Initiative project “Developing a model for the conservation of Croatia’s grassland biodiversity”. This three year project is based upon a collaborative partnership between Fauna & Flora International, UK (FFI), Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research, UK (IGER) and the Žumberak-Samoborsko gorje Nature Park, Croatia (ŽSGNP), made possible through funding from the Darwin Initiative, a UK government small grants programme.

The full global significance of the Balkans as a biodiversity hotspot has only recently been recognised, with Croatia’s grasslands being acknowledged as a national and European priority for conservation. These grasslands support a wealth of biological diversity, including rare and threatened orchids, birds and butterflies (including the globally threatened butterfly genus *Maculinea*). However, Croatia’s grasslands are severely threatened due to a rapid decline in traditional agricultural activities such as hay making and livestock grazing.

Sub-alpine meadows and pastures cover over 20% of the ŽSGNP (situated in north-west Croatia and bordering Slovenia) giving the region its characteristic mosaic landscape; open panoramas and hill top hamlets interspersed between beech

woodland. The project aims to develop the ŽSGNP as a model for Croatia, demonstrating the sustainable management and conservation of wildlife rich grasslands. Components of the project include capacity building, training and support in the development of management plans for the ŽSGNP and Učka Nature Park. In addition, there will be a series of training workshops for protected areas in the surveying, management and monitoring of grassland biodiversity.

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DEVELOPMENT OF GRASSLAND SURVEY FORMS

Preliminary surveys of the Park's grasslands and past/present management practices have led to the development of a grassland survey form and farmer questionnaires. These will be put to the test in the spring of 2005 by the Darwin scholar and the ŽSNGP rangers.



Ms Zrinka Mesić, the Darwin scholar, discusses the difference between grasses and sedges with Nikica Radić, one of the Park rangers.

UK partners visit Žumberak-Samoborsko gorje Nature Park

THIS SUMMER Dr Abigail Entwistle (Project leader, FFI), Dr Antonia Eastwood (Project manager, FFI) and Mr Jerry Tallowin (Scientific adviser, IGER) visited the Park for an induction trip and to conduct preliminary biodiversity surveys.

Project launch

THE PROJECT was launched at the Ministry of Culture on the 16 July 2004 by the assistant Minister. Over forty invited guests attended including representatives from local and national government, non-governmental organisations,

research institutions, protected areas and conservation agencies. The success of the launch led to interviews on Croatia's popular TV programme *Good Morning Croatia* and on Radio Croatia both of which were broadcast in August.

THE DARWIN SCHOLAR - ZRINKA MESIĆ

In July 2004 Zrinka Mesić joined the team as the Croatia Project officer, and Darwin scholar. As a biologist, Zrinka has a passion for nature conservation and in the past has worked for the Lonjsko Polje Nature Park and ŽSNGP as an education officer. As part of her training Zrinka will go on a study trip to IGER and attend a series of workshops and conferences. In October 2004 Zrinka attended a three day workshop in the Peak District in Grazing Management for Wildlife.

"Not many places in Europe compare to this."

Jerry Tallowin, Senior Scientist, IGER

A naturalist's treasure trove

Zrinka Mesić, the Darwin scholar, asks Jerry Tallowin of IGER about his first impressions of the Park. "One of my first impressions was the warmth of my welcome and the hospitality that I received from the Park. Second of all has to be the biodiversity – truly memorable. The meadows and pastures are incredibly species-rich and a real treasure trove to delight any naturalist.

The sight of bright green preying mantis stalking through grassland and the myriads of grasshoppers disturbed by every step were testament to the rich invertebrate fauna of the Park's grasslands."





Planning for the Park's Future

THE MAIN FOCUS of the project since it started has been the development of the ŽSGNP's first management plan. The management plan is being developed in a participatory way, that is, it integrates stakeholders into its development by engaging them fully in the planning process.

Stakeholder participation: *So how have we been doing this?*

SINCE SEPTEMBER the project has been interviewing a wide range of stakeholders to gather information and opinions on the Park and its future management. So far the project has interviewed over 60 stakeholders including local farmers, small businesses, scientists, local

and national government representatives, county tourist boards and NGOs. In addition, the project organised a two day stakeholder workshop in Sošice (Žumberak) and has held village meetings in Stojdraga, Jarušje and Gornja Vas. You can find out more about the stakeholder workshop below.

Wildlife rich meadows and traditional buildings are just some of the things the Park would like to conserve for the future.

Stakeholder workshop in Sošice, Žumberak



Željko Pajić, a local priest, discusses the restoration of churches at the stakeholder workshop.

Workshop participants discussing how to conserve the Park's natural heritage.

IN LATE OCTOBER a workshop was held for stakeholders of the ŽSGNP. The main aim of the workshop was to gather the viewpoints and opinions on the values, threats and future management of the Park. In addition, the workshop provided an opportunity for the Park to inform the participants of its work and the management planning process. Ms Biljana Janev Hutinec, the Park's conservation manager, facilitated the workshop with guidance from Mr Paul Hotham, a management planning expert from FFI.

representatives from the local community, hunting societies, small businesses, ministries and local government. By the end of the two days the participants had produced mini-management plans for cultural heritage, natural heritage, supporting the local community/economy and tourism. All of the viewpoints, ideas, problems and possible solutions expressed at the workshop, and from the ongoing consultations will be reviewed and discussed by Park staff. This will help shape the development of the first management plan for ŽSGNP.

Some interesting results from the Workshop:
Participants considered **Man and Diversity of Plants and Animals** to be the most valuable attributes of the Park.
Participants considered **Depopulation** as the greatest threat to the Park.

The 22 invited participants included

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Planning for the Park's Future (continued)



Park staff working hard to come up with a vision for the Park's future.

The project would like to thank Mr Milan Radić, director of Pliješ Ltd., a local textile firm, for hosting both the workshops and for his hospitality.

Management planning workshop

FOLLOWING ON from the successful stakeholder workshop in October the project held a four day management planning workshop for Park staff in November. The workshop was led and facilitated by Mr

Paul Hotham, FFI's management planning expert. Great progress was made towards the development of a management plan including the establishment of the Park's main vision for the next 10 years, its themes and objectives.

The next steps...

A SECOND MANAGEMENT PLANNING workshop for the ŽSGNP, again facilitated by FFI, is planned for February 2005 where the main focus will be on developing management actions to achieve the Park's objectives set out in November.

The project will also continue its stakeholder consultations through interviews and village meetings in 2005. The results will be summarised and fed back into the management planning process, thus ensuring a more informed and sustainable plan.

PROJECT PARTNERS



Fauna & Flora International

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) acts to conserve threatened species and ecosystems world-wide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science, and take into account human needs. Founded in 1903, FFI is the longest established international conservation group, and is currently supporting conservation in over 45 countries.
www.fauna-flora.org



The Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research

The Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research (IGER) is the largest centre in the UK for independent research on grassland based livestock agriculture and agri-environment relationships.
www.iger.bbsrc.ac.uk



Žumberak-Samoborsko gorje Nature Park

The Žumberak-Samoborsko gorje Nature Park was declared a protected area in 1999 due to its distinctive landscape; a product of the interaction of man and nature over the centuries, rich in both natural and cultural heritage.
www.ppzsg.org



Darwin Initiative

The Darwin Initiative, funded by the British government, draws on British expertise in biodiversity conservation to work with local partners in host countries to protect and enhance their biodiversity. Since the Darwin Initiative was set up in 1992 more than 350 biodiversity projects have been funded in 100 countries.
www.darwin.gov.uk



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