

Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation

Annual report 2011

Sofia, December 2011



**BULGARIAN
BIODIVERSITY
FOUNDATION**

As a nongovernmental organization, registered with the public benefit, every year BBF presented in the Ministry of Justice a report for its activities and financial situation. Now we are introducing you the Annual report for 2011. The opposite side of the book presented the report in Bulgarian language.

The preparation and printing of the Annual report is in the frame of BBF project "Cooperation for biodiversity conservation and sustainable local development in the Strandja Mountain", which is implementing with the financial support of Norway, Island and Lichtenstein through the Financial mechanism of the European Economic Area.





I. THE CONTEXT

In 2011 Bulgaria continues to be considered the most corrupt European country, according to the Transparency International report.

The year started with the eavesdropping scandal involving the Prime Minister and high-level government officials protecting the operations of certain companies.

A new election code aiming to introduce uniform strict election rules in Bulgaria was adopted as a result of the lack of capacity, legislative gaps and vote purchasing. The presidential elections and the local authority elections in October were qualified as the most manipulated elections since 1990.

Despite these findings, the election results have improved substantially the situation in some of the BBF areas of operation. There is a new Mayor in the town of Tsarevo whom we know well from his work as an official of the forestry system and as a WWF volunteer. Malko Tarnovo also has a new Mayor who 'extended' a hand to the Strandja NPD during the very first week in an effort to start work-style changing talks. Alas, this is not the situation with the new Mayor of Bansko, whose pre-election statements make him a firm supporter of continued building in the Pirin National Park. The Mayor of Petrich, a former supporter of the Belasitsa Nature Park, was elected for a third time. The Mayor of Kyustendil was elected for a second term. The Mayor of Kavarna, however, will be in office for a third term.

Following the signals sent by the BBF and by the 'Let Nature Remain in Bulgaria' coalition of more than year ago, the Minister of Environment and Water declared for the first time the results from the investigation of the actual area used by the Bansko Skiing Zone concessionaire in the Pirin National Park. The results have confirmed our concerns that 65 ha are used in addition to the 95 ha submitted by concession to the company of Yulen AD. The practice of various state subsidies being provided for the development of ski sports in breach of the objectives of protection of this UNESCO world heritage site is still under way.

A new Forestry Act was adopted during the International Forest Year regulating the use of the forests and the economic benefits for their owners which are the state, municipalities, natural persons or legal entities. This Act is the result of active discussions and text-writing work by the Government, the MPs and the non-governmental organizations. Mr. Georgi Kostov, acting as a Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Foods, demanding actively cooperation with non-government organisations, is

particularly deserving of praise for the preparation and adoption of this Act. The activities and campaigning of the 'Let Nature Remain in Bulgaria' coalition and, in particular, the BBF, resulted in the removal of all debatable provisions for construction in the exchanged forest areas, was removed from the draft Act. The examples of examples of state forests replacement transactions in the past and the subsequent signals of penalty risks have shown that good management of the forestry sector is a matter of political will.



In a complete contrast with the above, and under pressure by monopoly interests, the Council of Ministers approved a draft Act on the amendments of the Forestry Act alleviating the construction in forests for the skiing industry without change of the purpose of the lands, even those in protected areas such as the Vitosha Nature Park. The legislative changes provide also for increased logging and change of the hunting periods by the Minister of Agriculture and Forests alone. The proposed amendments in the Act were adopted by the Council of Ministers without compliance with the public hearing deadline requirements during the celebrations between Christmas and New Year. Despite the impossibly short deadlines, the BBF and its coalition partners organised a press-conference and sent their opinions on the Draft Act. The Ministry of Agriculture and Foods started a process to remove certain nature park directors without explicit provision for such a procedure in the law.

Amendments of the Hunting Act of 2010 allowed the Executive Forestry Agency to lease state game breeding sections, including those in protected areas, to private companies and users in 2011, which has given rise to a series of problems of biodiversity conservation and tourism development in these regions and presents

dangers such as use of poisons against predators, closing of roads, intensified use, threatened security of tourists and restriction of their access. This is especially true of the Strandja Nature Park.



In reaction to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Strandja, the Government decided to construct a new border facility along the entire boundary between Bulgaria and Turkey - 270 km in total. This project, if implemented, will amount to the construction of a new 'iron curtain' in the region and will be a barrier not only to wild animals but also to the local people. Also, enormous areas of the Strandja Nature Park and other protected areas and Natura 2000 sites will be destroyed.

In January, the BBF received officially the decision of the MOEW to update the Strandja Nature Park Management

Plan, which is yet another demonstration of the desire of the Ministry's leadership to finalize the adoption of this key document.

The tender procedures and provision by the Government of multiple permits for exploration of oil and gas deposits in the aquatic area along the Southern Black Sea coastline and in Northern Bulgaria without environmental assessment and assessment of the compatibility with the objectives of Natura 2000 were the cause of significant public interest. Such permits have been issued to the Leberdel company for exploration in the Black Sea opposite the Irakli and Strandja areas, and to Chevron for exploration of the shale gas deposits. Mass public opposition grew into regular public protests and processions. The BBF and other non-governmental organizations took measures to appeal, through the courts, against the Council of Ministers' decisions issued without the procedures required by the environmental legislation.

National mapping of the Natura 2000 zones was started in 2011 under a project of the Ministry of Environment and Water. The study involved almost the entire scientific potential of Bulgaria. The insufficient capacity and short implementation deadlines mean that the results may be incomplete and insufficient which will threaten any further effective management of the Natura 2000 network.

II. THE BBF IN 2011

This year has been good, but also difficult for the BBF - two new babies and several new members have joined the Foundation team, but the difficulties in project management and adequate financing have increased as well.

One very important theme for the BBF, which was also part of the public and media agenda, was Pirin. Dissolution of the Bansko skiing area concession agreement, rehabilitation of the illegally used areas and seeking of criminal responsibility of the guilty parties. These are some of the demands of the eco-organisations raising their voice against the Bansko skiing area concession, which has been illegally expanded by 65 ha. This has incurred losses for the state of BGN 22 million.

Another hot topic which we worked on during this year was the intention to extract shale gas in the sea and in Dobrudja. Ever since the beginning of 2011, the BBF has been involved in the campaign jointly with the Tsarevo Municipality and with other sea-side municipalities opposing the Government in its decision to allow extraction of shale gas because of the enormous risks of destruction of sea-side tourism and pollution of the drinking water of Dobrudja - the only water source in the area, pollution of fertile soils and endangering of human health.

The biodiversity and protected areas coordinator of the Foundation, Stefan Avramov, has become known for his demand for verification of the lawfulness of the financing, and of its origins, of President





Parvanov's hunting hobby. Avramov requested inspection of whether the hunting is paid for from the president's budget intended for financing of his activities as head of state, or is not paid at all. These demands received wide media coverage, the President commented many times that there is nothing illegal in his activities, and the Minister of Agriculture and Foods, Miroslav Naidenov, started a lightning-fast counter initiative that Bulgaria's President and Prime Minister should be allowed free hunting quotas since hunting is part of the protocol.

BBF was also a partner of BlueLink and of the German Institute of Regional Geography in organising of the National Conference of Environmental Organisations in Bulgaria on May 13-14. For the first time since 2003, the Conference convened the nature conservation stakeholders and allowed them to discuss Bulgaria's most important and hot environmental problems in several working groups.

BBF has been very active at the regional level as well, especially in the Burgas and the Belasitsa areas. We have two large projects under way in the Burgas area (Strandja and the Burgas lakes) and we have a very successful partnership with the Strandja Nature Park Directorate, with the BSPB and with the Burgas Municipality. Regarding the Belasitsa area, we are developing our portal, Belasitsa.com and are partners of the Belasitsa Nature Park Directorate.



Our foundation is an active participant in the European Green Belt international initiative and was represented at a regional meeting in Montenegro in November organised by the German partner foundation of EURONATURE. A representative of the foundation was invited to participate in a working group for the planning of the organizational structure and joint activities at the Pan-European level. The BBF continues to provide active support for the implementation of the Green Belt in Bulgaria and in the neighbouring countries, in the border areas of the Strandja, the Rhodopes and the Osogovo mountains, jointly with our partners from Turkey, Greece and Macedonia. In September we organized joint work meeting with our Macedonian partners for planning of future activities of the "Osogovo in the Green Belt" project. The team of BBF took part in the meeting and became familiar with the project's achievements as well as participated in the suppression of fires in the area of Osogovo Monastery "St.Yoakim Osogovski".

The successful financing, implementation and reporting of the projects implemented with EU support via national operational programs have been particularly difficult. The main obstacle for the efficient use of European financing is still the insufficient or non-existing initial advance payment under the programs.

III. REVIEW OF THE OPERATIONS OF THE BBF EXECUTIVE BUREAU (EB)

This last year was full of challenges for the good and efficient functioning of the EB. In fact, the Bureau is operating at half capacity - two of its members have been officially on maternity leave during the entire year. Latinka Topalova was also not participating actively in the Bureau (also owing to a leave for caring of a child and to commitments external to the BBF).

However, the foundations for proper operation of the EB have been laid last year - its members have acquired good experience of joint decision making. The difficulties EU project implementation (re-financing of activities for large amounts for long periods of time) have made it necessary to establish a system of year-end decision making, or the so-called 'currency board'.

The EB had at least once meeting each month. All more important decisions, such as the decision to apply for projects, have been entered in minutes. Some efforts are still required for certain EB operations, such as increasing the efficiency during the meetings, allocation of obligations between the EB members, communication with the Managing Board during the year, and communication between the EB and the BBF team of experts.

IV. REVIEW OF THE REGULAR OPERATIONS OF THE BBF

Public relations

The Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation and the Biosphere Association dedicated the year 2011 to the capercaillie, which is the glory of Bulgaria's high-mountain forests, because its survival depends on our will to change our idea about the significance of each species, from the most

- We have published a calendar dedicated to the capercaillie, to its neighbours and habitats, with financing by the Small Projects Program of the Global Environmental Facility for Bulgaria. Photographs taken by Norwegian photographers were also used in the calendar.
- We have published a series of stickers for the Year of the Capercaillie, the bear and the chamois.
- **"Bears, capercaillies and chamois - increasingly rare inhabitants of our forests"** - a new interactive travelling exhibition dedicated to the Year of the Capercaillie was prepared by Andriana Andreeva during the project on "Encouraging for environmentally sound forest management, development of business partnerships and sustainable hunting for conservation and efficient management of the globally significant biological diversity in the boreal forests of the Rhodopides" financed by the Small Projects Program of the Global Environmental Facility and implemented in partnership with the Biosphere Nature Conservation Society, the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation, the Devin Hunting and Fishing association, and the Rila National Park Directorate.



- The exhibition was shown for the first time at the **UzanaPolyanaFest** on July 16 and 17, where all visitors went to see the stand of the BBF and of the Biosphere society which was the co-organiser of the exhibition. The exhibition visited the Begika Fest in August. Its presentation in the Plovdiv and in the Burgas museums of natural sciences is forthcoming. We have received requests for the exhibition from some visitor centres in the parks as well.

- Participation of the BBF in the **Begika Fest** 19-21.08.2011 - this year our participation was far more representative than in the last year. This was mainly the result of the two exhibitions - the Belasitsa exhibition and the interactive exhibition about the chamois, the bear and the capercaillie. These exhibitions and the large posters made our stand and tent visible from afar. Three presentations of ours about Belasitsa and about the chamois, capercaillie and bear attracted scores of people (one had to be presented twice). As a whole, the Begika Fest has been becoming more and more music oriented and people are attracted by performers, side attractions and workshops (kneading of full-grain bread, wearing of Indian clothes, stories about trips in India), rather than by nature conservation presentations and stands. As the co-organiser, the BBF will lobby for reinstating of the nature-conservation ideas at the festival.



- We organised and conducted with great success the **FIRST BURGAS GREEN FESTIVAL** in the Sea Garden of the town, jointly with the Burgas Municipality, the Strandja NDP and the BSPB. For details, see the Strandja Branch Report.
- We became involved in the **Green days** (June 1-6) and in the **Ecology week** in Burgas (September 19-30) and carried out two green public discussions - "What is Green Living" and "Moving Green Green in Town and in Nature".





The BBF organised two bicycle trips during these events (for details, see the Strandja branch report).

- The Foundation experts conducted a number of **media events** during the year in national and regional electronic and printed media.
- **The Atanasovsko Lake Photo Exhibition** was opened in Burgas on January 18. It was organised by the BSPB in partnership with the BBF during the Life for the Burgas Lakes project. Photographs of the reserve by Burgas photographers were presented. The exhibition was opened on the day of St. Atanas and a large audience convened in the hall in the Count Androvanti St.
- The National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) and the BBF dedicated the month of April to the newest nature park of Belasitsa. A range of events was organised in the NMNH - an exhibition, acquaintance with the thematic trail 'Life of the Chestnut', presentation of books about the mountain, and presentations. The successful partnership of these two organisations has led by the end of the year to the publication of the new 2012 calendar of the BBF dedicated to butterflies. The official opening of the **"Belasitsa – the Bulgaria's Newest Nature Park"** exhibition took place in the lobby of the museum on March 25, 2011. All photographs included in the exhibition were made by Peter Zhezhiha. The event involved the presentation of the photographic field guide titled 'Interesting Plants in Belasitsa' which was met with considerable interest and with the taste of chestnut honey.

- **"For one Burgas pelican"** - the BBF and the BSPB started their campaign to make a sculpture of a pelican with a charity sale of photographs of birds in Burgas. In two weeks alone the Burgas office collected BGN 1,000 for the Dalmatian pelican which should be the distinguishing mark or sign of Burgas. The first supporters of this idea were the photographers Ivaylo Zafirov, Bogdan Boev, Stevan Avramov and the resident of Burgas Zhecho Planinski, who donated their photographs for the cause. 35 of their unique photographs of birds from the Burgas lakes have already found their owners and now adorn their homes or workplaces, and one photograph is already in the office of the Mayor of Burgas, Dimitar Nikolov.



- We decided to designate the year 2012 as the **Year of Butterflies**. We have prepared a beautiful calendar with the cooperation of Stoyan Beshkov from the NMNH at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the Dutch Butterfly Protection Society and colleagues who provided their photographs to us.
- The BBF presented its interactive **exhibition of mushrooms** before a new and interesting audience – the team of Danone in Sofia. All of the company's officials, who were interested, could become better acquainted with the realm of mushrooms and could also hear the voices of Bulgaria's most popular frogs between December 5 and 9, 2011 during the Biodiversity Month organised by Danone in the lobby of its administrative offices.
- The BBF promoted the wildlife photo-safari opportunities in the town of Devin. We organised visits by four photographers to present the possibilities to photograph capercaillies, chamoises, bears and other rare species. Materials from the expedition can be seen at <http://birdsphotographer.com/?p=4285>

The promotion of the wildlife photo-safari opportunities in Devin led to the visits by two French TV journalists who filmed chamoises and bears in the Devin area.

- The BBF did not fail to visit the **most significant exhibitions** in Bulgaria during this year. In April, the BBF and the Strandja NPD presented an exciting program at the Green Days fair organised by BAAT in Sofia. Our traditional participation in the Beglika Fest event and our participation in the first Uzana Polyana Fest are described above.

Education

- **The biodiversity course** for undergraduates in the Sofia University is still under way. As of the new 2011/2012 study year, it is being organised by the BBF alone again. We have a new person in charge – Elitsa Ivanova. She has replaced Yana Gocheva (who is now in charge of education for a Burgas Lake project). This course is intended for all those who wish to learn more about the conservation of various species, sites and habitats in Bulgaria. A list of presentation topics and presenters of these topics in the Biology Department:

Date	Topic	Presenter
19.10	The Snow Leopards	Tsvetomira Yotsova
26.11	The secret life of the badger	Venislava Racheva
2.11	Photographic techniques	Dimitar Gradinarov
9.11	Explorer	Boris Nikolov
16.11	Herbs	Aneli Nedelcheva
23.11	Captive animals	Al. Rucroft, Dave Fagan and Steve Martin
14.12	The Antarctic - life among the ice	Professor Nesho Chipev
21.12	Who woke up the bats?	Antonia Hubancheva

- We organised a study trip for undergraduates to the Kerkin National Park in Greece (December 17-19). It was organised for a fourth consecutive year. More than 60 persons took part.
- On May 11, 2011, we organised a presentation about 'Bats in the Strandja Nature Park' in the 'Sea Casino' Culture Centre in Burgas. The presentation was made by Stoyan Yordanov, a former fauna expert in the Park Directorate who had worked for 3 years studying and preserving bats in Strandja jointly with experts from the German Non-Governmental Organisations of Noktalis. The visitors learned about the life of the bats, the caves they inhabit, current studies of bats and other interesting details about these secretive mammals.
- On July 28, 2011, the documentary titled Vanishing of the Bees, gained extreme popularity and causing discussions throughout the world, was shown, again, in the Sea Casino Culture Centre. The presentation of the film was organised by the Strandja Branch of the BBF and was a part of the information campaign dedicated to the issue of high bee mortality and organised by the Credo Bonum Foundation under the title of 'For the Bees and the People'.
- A detailed presentation was made of the BBF operations in Strandja to the volunteers participating in the traditional Atanasovsko lake volunteers camp organised this year by the BSPB under the 'Life for the Burgas Lakes' project of the LIFE+ program where the BBF is a partner. An interesting discussion followed and the many questions showed the interest of the young people toward the topics and problems under discussion (August 24, 2011). A presentation about Strandja to biology class students of the Nature and Mathematics High School in Burgas was made on September 27, 2011.
- On November 23 we, and the Sofia Zoo, organised a presentation of three globally renowned specialists in captive breeding of exotic animal species Alan Ruckroft, Dr. Dave Fagan and Steve Martin.
- In December, the BBF carried out successful partnership with the company of Danone when the officials of the Danone company spent a week enjoying our interactive exhibition about mushrooms and frogs.

Protection of the species

In 2011, the BBF continued its traditional conservation efforts dedicated to rare species of importance for biodiversity conservation, by creating a transboundary protected area in Osogovo, between Bulgaria and Macedonia, aiming to protect the Lynx and to ensure sustainable management of forests in the region. Working on the chamois conservation project was continued (for details, see Section VI. Projects).



Protected Areas and Natura 2000 Sites

Designation of new protected areas has become increasingly difficult during the recent years. Many proposals have been deposited with the MOEW and are awaiting approval or opinion. For this reason, the BBF and other organisations have been preparing a list of proposed but not processed documents for designation of protected areas in Bulgaria, in order to make the list public in Bulgaria and, through our European partners, in Europe and to urge the MOEW to undertake further designation activities.

Despite the difficulties, the BBF followed this objective in 2011 and proposed to the MOEW to initiate the designation of a Batashka Mountain Biosphere Park.

The official nomination for designation of the Strandja Biosphere Park is also under way, carried out by the BBF under its Norwegian Strandja project. This will be Bulgaria's first nomination of a biosphere park.

A similar process, the preparation for proposing of a nature/biosphere park is under way in the Osogovo region as well.

BBF participated in a round table in the MOEW to discuss the orders for designation of protected areas under the Habitats Directive, and in a series of meetings to discuss the boundaries of the Pirin and Rila-Buffer draft protected areas. We participate in the project for monitoring of the National Mapping of Natura 2000 Zones.

We participated in a meeting of the European Commission jointly with representatives of the Bulgarian environmental non-governmental organizations.

Policies and Legislation

- A BBF representative was selected to represent the NGO sector in the Interagency Biodiversity Group.
- BBF experts represent the NGO community in the monitoring committees of the Bulgaria-Macedonia and Bulgaria-Greece transboundary cooperation programs.
- BBF representatives participate in the working groups in the Ministry of Agriculture and Foods under the Rural Development Program.
- The BBF participates also in the NGO Coalition for monitoring of financing from the European Funds and of the planning of Bulgaria's financing for the 2014_ period.
- BBF and the Coalition 'In Order that Nature Remains in Bulgaria' participated in the drafting of the Forestry Act and its secondary legislation.



V. BBF BRANCH OPERATIONS

The Belasitsa Branch

- We maintain and develop an Internet portal for Belasitsa www.belasitsa.com. The portal was translated in the English language by more than 20 volunteers (more than 200 pages). Its English language version will be released and the region of Greece added soon.
- An exhibition dedicated to Belasitsa was presented in the National Museum of Natural History in May and April. Around 60 persons were present at the opening and the book titled The Interesting Plants of Belasitsa was presented.
- We presented Belasitsa on the UzanaPolyanaFest 2011 and managed to attract more than 300 visitors with games for children at our stand with information and presentations;
- We participated also in the Beglika Fest 2011 with presentations about Belasitsa and with a stand with information materials (leaflets, map, books);
- The BBF has stated officially its being a stakeholder in the project for construction of a wind power plant in Belasitsa (a wind farm of 21 generators positioned along the crest of the Belasitsa mountain). The BBF has mobilised its resources and is looking for supporters (NGOs, consultants, scientists) in order to monitor the development of this procedure and to oppose the construction of the wind farm which would endanger the natural habitats in the sub-Alpine zone.
- The preparation of the tourist guide for the mountain (for Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece) is complete. Its printing is impending.

The Strandja Branch

- This year, the branch has won its first independent project financed by the EcoCommunity Foundation to organise the 'Be Green in Burgas' regional campaign (for details, see the projects).
- The branch is very active and has solidified its partnership with the Burgas Municipality where we enjoy very good standing, and with other regional NGOs who look for us for joint events, protests etc. The presence of an office and of a small but very active team, of good contacts and frequent visits to regional media, and the intensive work in Strandja, have placed us in a very good position in the region.
- The team of the branch assists the teams of other BBF projects in their work and trips in the region of Burgas and Strandja, and work actively and as partners of the BSPB in the Life for the Burgas Lakes project.

The Kaliakra Branch

- The Foundation supports the Kaliakra Information Centre in the village of Balgarevo and its functioning during the active tourist season between June and September, by providing payment to a manager of the centre. A total of 3,000 visitors have used the services of the centre and have become familiar with the exhibits presented in it.



- The REEFS project was defended by involving external experts in partnership with organisations from Romania, Ukraine, Georgia and Turkey. The project implementation contract is expected to be signed in early 2012. The project will be implemented during the next two years and will ensure the operation of the Kaliakra Centre.



VI. BBF PROJECTS IN 2011

In 2011, the BBF operated mainly on 9 projects in its four main themes – 'Protected Areas and Species', 'Natura 2000 and Green Belt', 'Coalitions', 'Public Relations and Education Programs'.

1. "COOPERATION FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE STRANDJA MOUNTAIN"

Donor: Financial mechanism of the European Economic Space (Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway) – EEA Grants

Partners: The Strandja Nature Park Directorate, the Bulgarian National Committee for the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Program, and the Nature Management Directorate of the Norwegian Ministry of Environment.

Total: 519,780 EUR

Financing for 2011: appr. EUR 200,000

The BBF Team: Radostina Tsenova, Andriana Andreeva, Petko Tsvetkov, Desislava Zhivkova

In 2011, we received a permission to extend the project, which allowed us to carry out all planned activities and to achieve the expected results. The support provided by our partners from the Nature Park Directorate and the Nature Management Directorate was very important.

The maternity leave of the Project Manager, Rumiana Ivanova, necessitated a change of the team and the regional coordinator, Radostina Tsenova, took this function as well.

The project operating unit functioned very well and the team continued to be motivated to complete the activities and to achieve results, irrespective of the financial difficulties until we received the funds from the second intermediate report. The Norwegian partner continued to finance fully its participation in the project. Also, co-financing was provided by our other partner – the Man and Biosphere National Committee via the UNESCO office in Venice. This allowed for the organisation of an international seminar in Tsarevo promoting the principles of biosphere reserves and parks.

A big challenge for the BBF was the handling of various procedures in accordance with Ordinance of the Council of Ministers No. 55, which caused many difficulties.

The regional office in Burgas continued to play an important role in the implementation of the activities and is a significant local player among the institutions and non-government organisations in the region.

Scores of meetings were held with different partners, stakeholders and target groups. In February, the project was selected randomly for monitoring from the Brussels office. The Slovenian consulting company of Pitia sent its expert who visited the project site and became familiar with the results achieved in Brashlyan, Malko Tarnovo and Burgas, and met representatives of the Executive Agency and of the National Coordination Unit in Sofia.

The new programming period of the EEA Grants and the possibility for our participation with a new project while retaining our Norwegian partner, the Nature Management Directorate, is of interest for the BBF. New ideas have already been discussed with them.

Unfortunately, the extension of the project required implementation of the activities but did not provide for coverage of the administrative costs and salaries of the team, which has created many difficulties. Following April, we had serious difficulties in paying remunerations for the BBF team working on the project. Different solutions have been considered.



The project activities concern the following issues:

Creation of GIS and Monitoring Systems

The main part in implementing this activity involved the initiation and conducting of tendering procedures for the elaboration of individual parts of a Geographic Information System (GIS) with a database, a biodiversity monitoring system, and a socio-economic characterisation of the region. Also, there was a tendering procedure for purchasing of satellite photographs.

Elaboration and implementation of a communication strategy

The work for development and implementation of the Communication Strategy, prepared in close cooperation with the Norwegian partner, was more than successful and was met with great interest by the partners and the local people.

Most planned **training events, seminars and information meetings** were carried out as part of the Training Program of the project, involving local stakeholders.

The following were organised:

- **An international seminar on the subject of Good Practices of Sustainable Use and Conservation of Biodiversity in the Protected Areas in Accordance with the Concept of Biosphere Parks.** It was held in Tsarevo between March 13 and 17, 2011, with the support of the UNESCO office in Venice, and with more than 70 participating representatives of institutions concerned with the management of the Strandja Nature Park, local authorities, local people, media etc. Presenters from the UNESCO central office, Turkey, Greece, Austria, Slovenia, Germany and Bulgaria made presentations during the seminar of confirmed and well-working model biosphere parks in Europe and parks in the process of designation, showing the challenges faced by these parks and caused mainly by the neighbouring countries. Upon completion of the seminar, the officials visited the Regional Governor of Burgas, Mr. Konstantin Grebenarov, who expressed his support for this initiative.
- **Series of training sessions** for the local people in **support of environmentally sound businesses** which may be developed in the park, with our Norwegian partner, Born Arne Ness from the Nature Management Directorate, as the main presenter:



How to make soap with flavours from Strandja, chocolate pralines with a filling of honey and brandy, sugar candy etc., which may be offered to tourists. The seminar was met with great interest by the local people - 35 participants mainly from the town of Malko Tarnovo but also from Brushlian, Tzarevo, Sinemorets and Zvezdez. The training was practice-oriented - different sustainable uses were shown of natural materials and of materials from the garden for use in the soaps, scrubs and masks, chocolate pralines with honey, nuts, brandy, sugar candy etc. (March 19-20).

Hospitality training in Brashlyan involving the local guest-house owners. The discussions covered topics such as attracting more visitors to the houses by organising small practical courses/seminars for the tourists where they could be trained to cook local food (pastries, appetizers, pickles, jams, juices, see how brandy is distilled etc.), combined with outings and telling of interesting stories, sustainable gathering of herbs and mushrooms, picking of fruits and vegetables from the gardens for subsequent use in food preparation etc. (March 20).

Making biological (compost) toilets. The training in the village of Stoilovo caused great interest because the village has no sewerage system and this subject is very important. The people in Malko Tarnovo were mainly interested in building such toilet facilities in their summer houses outside the town. (September 29)



- **Series of meetings in various settlements to provide information about various topics:**

Meeting with local fishermen from Ahtopol, Tzarevo and Sinemorets – at this meeting, our Norway partner, Bjorn Arne Ness, presented the fishing and fish-farming traditions in Norway, the most typical fish species and the numbers of their populations, traditional Scandinavian techniques for catching, processing and storage of the fish,



legislative requirements etc. A descendant of a family of fishermen, the Norwegian expert told about fishing during the time of the Vikings until the present day, and showed interesting old and new photographs. The issue of fishing licenses and permits and comparison to Bulgaria caused an interesting discussion. (May 16)

Training of agricultural producers from the Strandja Region about applying for payments for Natura 2000 agricultural lands, organised jointly with the Burgas Regional Directorate of Agriculture. The training took place in the town of Tzarevo and involved farmers from Tzarevo, Rezovo, Ahtopol, Malko Tarnovo, Kovach etc., with the main objective of familiarization mainly with Measure 213 for payments related to Natura 2000,

and with the conditions for application and receiving of compensation, provided that they maintain their lands in good agricultural and environmental condition. Also, the possibility to provide compensation to farmers from Measure 214 'Agroenvironmental Payments' of the Rural Development Program was presented and discussed. This was presented by the BSBP Agroenvironment expert Dimitar Plachiski. (May 4)

Workshop to discuss the issues of sports fishing in the rivers in the Strandja NP in Malko Tarnovo – following a field study along the Veleka and Rezovska Rivers, the Norwegian expert Od Terie Sanlun from the Nature Studies Institute (NINA) presented before the meeting the diversity of fish in Strandja, the problems of fish migration, the barriers and fish passes, and the artificial facilities. The discussion covered also the possibilities for improvement of the organisation of sports fishing by the local people, the tourists and the guests of the park. (September 15)

Information meetings in urban centres along the coastline of the park presenting and promoting the **Strandja regional brand** – the 4 meetings in Ahtopol, Varvara, Rezovo and Sinemorets, involving owners of small family hotels and guest houses, were conducted to promote the measure and to find new followers who meet the criteria and could, subsequently, be certified. Establishing contacts and cooperation with them would contribute to increased visits of the tourist sites and attractions in the park and, in particular, the possibilities for day trips for sea-side holiday visitors during the summer. The measure was presented by Radostina Tsenova from the BBF, while Maria Patronova from the Nature Park Directorate presented the possibilities for partnership with the Park Directorate. (September 29–30)

- **Study trips and field studies for students residing in the park:**

Field study with school children from Tzarevo for cleaning of the emblematic protected area 'Veleka River Estuary' – the event was organised as part of our education program and following a signal from us to the Tzarevo municipality about polluted terrains. Apart from the cleaning, this was also a good educational event - the Park Director made a presentation about nature in the park and its conservation, about shale gas issues etc., and the BBF team had prepared information about the benefits of separate collection of waste and the resulting savings of energy and natural resources. The knowledge was solidified and the school children were entertained by means of interesting interactive games. The municipal administration of Tzarevo removed the bags with litter. (April 16)



Study trips for all participants from grades 1 to 8 studyin in the Strandja park - the objective was for each school child to become familiar with the Strandja park, with the settlements in the mountain and along the sea coast, and with some of the most beautiful natural landmarks. The trips for the children from the St. st. Kiril i Metodi school in the town fo Ahtopol (157 in total) were carried out during October 1 and 2, and the children were entertained by the interactive exhibition in the new visitor centre of the park in Gramatikovo, they went up to 'The Stone' (a natural landmark called 'Kamenska barchina') and went through the hole of the stone 'mushroom' in order to be strong and healthy. Most of the



children had never visited the inner parts of Strandja and the visit to Malko Tarnovo, to the park information centre, and eating by the Dokuzak waterfall near the village of Stoilovo were interesting to them. Their participation in the village gathering in the village of Brashlyan, where the interesting discussion and familiarisation with local traditions were accompanied by including the children in the Strandja songs and in the dances next to the grannies from the local folk lore group.

On October 24 and 29, 177 children from grades 1 to 8 from the Vasil Levski general education school in the town of Malko Tarnovo started along the opposite route - in the park, again, but this time in the direction of the sea. It turned out that some children had not seen the sea. Logically, the first stop was in the centre in Gramatikovo and the next stop was in Rezovo, which is Bulgaria's southernmost urban centre, where the children observed cormorants through binoculars, saw the estuary of the Rezovska River and met the border guards who told them about their work in the region. The Veleka River near the Sinemorets bridge and its estuary on the Black Sea fascinated the children. In Ahtopol, the children walked along the pier in order to see the light and the boats, but the biggest attraction was the surprise awaiting them in Tzarevo - a visit of a real fishing boat at the Tzarevo port. In small groups aided by the fishermen, all the children went onto the boat 'Friend' and listened with interest to the captain's stories about fishing in the Black Sea, about the species caught and about the dangers faced by the fishermen.

We hope that these study trips will help the children to learn more about the Strandja park and will make them more concerned about its conservation because only when you get to know something is when you feel close to it and love it. We believe that we will provoke the schoolchildren's interest to visit more often various parts of Strandja with their parents, friends, and teachers and that we will apply at least some of the experience of our Norwegian partners who say that children in Norway are among nature all of the time. Our Norwegian colleague also took part in the trips and told the school children about Norway and about the connection between children and nature there.





- As part of the promotion of scientific research of nature in the Strandja NPD, we took part in the publishing of Diko Patronov's book **The Great Strandja Wilderness** published jointly with the Strandja NPD and with sponsorship by the company of Kronospan. The book contains detailed information about the use of the forests, about the problems in Strandja and about interesting tourism hikes in the mountain, on the other side of the border, etc. The book was printed at the height of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, when the issue of border fences was raised in earnest. On January 24, we organised presentation of the book in Burgas and, subsequently, in Malko Tarnovo and in Tzarevo.



- **The interest of the media in the project-related work and the good media coverage** are largely due to the Regional Office of the BBF in Burgas, established specifically for the project, and to the active work of its staff. The BBF had not had a permanent office in Burgas since 2003, which had an effect on its presence in the public space in the Burgas region, but owing to this project, the BBF is once again among the most respected organisations sought for opinion or partnership in many initiatives of non-governmental nature-conservation organizations in Burgas and in the region.

Development of the Regional Strandja Brand

Following in-depth discussions about the brand with the tourism expert in the Strandja NPD, **we hired lawyers specialising in patent law**, in order to meet the new requirements of the Patents Agency. The lawyers prepared and deposited rules for use of the certified Strandja brand. The categories eligible for certification were identified. In November, we received an official answer from the Patents Agency, that the brand has been registered. Unfortunately, several houses have decided to discontinue offering accommodation because of high local fees, taxes and insurance payments paid annually irrespective of bed occupation (registered overnight accommodations) during the year. By late 2011, we started the development of a **Catalogue** of the sites and attractions certified to carry the regional brand, and development of the book on 'How to Make Business in Strandja'.

We participated for a second time in the national **Green Days** initiative organised by BAAT in Sofia but the Ninth **Periwinkle Festival** was canceled in order to prevent and restrict the distribution of foot and mouth disease. To compensate for the canceled Periwinkle Festival, the First Burgas Green Festival took place on June 4 and 5 (for details see the Regional Campaign Be Green In Burgas project report) in partnership with the Burgas Municipality.

In July, we announced a tender for **photographing and preparation of clips and banners presenting the Strandja Regional Brand** and the facilities and attractions in the nature park certified to carry the brand. Few people were brave enough to take up the challenge and to immerse themselves in the mystique of Strandja, to taste its meals, to feel its fragrance, to walk its paths and see them with the eye of the tourist and, also, with the eye of the author who should present the mountain with sufficient attractiveness in order to bring new friends to Strandja.





The videoclip competition involved nine proposals. Unfortunately, most authors had put the natural features and the beautiful nature of Strandja before the ecotourism possibilities on offer. The images of those, who had presented tourist attractions, however, did not have sufficient quality, although creativity was not lacking. Following serious debate about the quality of proposed videoclips and mainly the extent to which they meet the

TOR and the terms of the competition, the jury decided to award one second and two third prizes. The second place and the amount of BGN 1,000 was won by Sergei Panayotov from Varna. The third place was shared by Lyubomir Minchev from Sofia and Stanislav Kamburov from Burgas, who received BGN 500 each. The jury allowed the three awarded authors the opportunity to win an additional encouraging award by developing further their videoclips during a three-day program in the Strandja Nature Park paid by the organisers, involving meetings with experts from the Park Directorate and the chance to film additional material in Strandja with guides, which the authors accepted.

All the clips participating in the competition can be seen via the facebook profiles and on the web sites of the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation and the Strandja Nature Park Directorate, or via the YouTube profile of the BBF - bbfbulgaria.



Creation of a Joint Management Structure

This activity is directly related to the BBF campaign to designate Strandja a modern biosphere park. Part of the nomination process involves the establishing of such a joint management structure. The first discussions of this subject were held during UNESCO supported international forum in Tzarevo where many international UNESCO experts were present (For details see above.)

In November, Mr. Pierre Galand from Switzerland, a UNESCO expert, took part in the project and, during a dedicated mission in Sofia, familiarised himself with the project and with the activities envisaged for the creation of the Strandja biosphere park. The discussions in with the BBF and NPD teams were particularly useful, as were the meetings with the MAB committee and

MOEW, the Bulgarian Park Association etc. An action plan was prepared and the nomination form to be filled out by the BBF and by MAB experts was discussed in detail.

Implementation of the model projects

Restoration of a model forest-habitat type

Working for this activity was the continuation of the process started in 2010 when habitats artificially forested with Austrian pine were selected for gradual replacement with native vegetation, according to the experts involved in the management planning for the Strandja Nature Park. Following consultation with representatives of the Strandja NPD and of the State Forestry Department in Kosti on the subject of restoration, the selected habitats were Strandja [*Quercus polycarpa*] forests and Euxino-Thracian *Quercus frainetto*-*Quercus cerris* forests. This method is more sustainable and it produces better results, since it resembles the natural processes.





At this phase, the ponics develop well in all selected lots. The field work was carried out by the local people and by foresters.

Rehabilitation of river ecosystems and fish migration

Two site visits were carried out with experts from the NPD for reviewing of the current status of the identified dams across the river and other obstacles to fish migration along the Veleka River.

A work visit was made in September by the Norwegian expert in rivers and fish migration Od Taria Sanlund from the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA). He and the project's expert in biodiversity, Petko Tsvetkov, carried out field studies along the Veleka and Rezovska rivers and presented in a working meeting with the Nature Park Directorate the diversity of fish, the problems of fish migration, the barriers and the fish passes, as well as the artificial facilities. The discussion covered also the possibilities for sports fishing by the local people, the tourists and the guests of the park.

2. "OSOGOVO IN THE GREEN BELT"

Donor: The Frankfurt Zoological Society of Germany, Pro Natura of Switzerland.

Partners: The Macedonian Ecological Society

Total value/value for 2011: BGN 39,800

The BBF Team: Petko Tsvetkov, Peter Todorov

2011 coincided with the finalizing of the 5 year period of financing by the Frankfurt Zoological Society of Germany and with the conclusion of the second phase of the project by Pro Natura of Switzerland.

The preparation of the transboundary protected area in the Osogovo region between Bulgaria and Macedonia is still under way. Additional information about groups of organisms of significance for nature conservation such as dragon flies, fish and mushrooms was collected and the studies of large predators such as lynxes and wolves continued. Photo traps were used to confirm the permanent habitation of the region by the European lynx, with many videos and photographs.

Two key meetings were held in May to summarize the activities during the past years and to determine and plan the future project development.

The first meeting took place on May 9 and 10 in the town of Kyustendil and the experts from Bulgaria and Macedonia who were present at the meeting had participated in biodiversity studies in Osogovo, as were representatives of Bulgarian biodiversity conservation non-governmental organizations and officials of the Pernik RIEW, the Osogovo State Hunting Enterprise, the Nevestino State Forestry Board, and the Kyustendil Municipality. Similar to the meeting of experts in Macedonia, the focus of this meeting was on the determining of areas in Osogovo whose priority conservation is of significance for the preservation of biodiversity in the mountain. Also, a discussion was made of the species and habitat management issues, the

recommended solutions and the need for further protection of the Osogovo mountain by the creation of new protected areas.

The GIS methods and the data from expert studies allowed for comparison of the existing system of protected areas in the Osogovo mountain to the areas of priority for conservation. The zoning of the mountain proposed by the Bulgarian party was combined with the existing Macedonian map and the overall potential image of Osogovo as a future protected area with clearly defined priority conservation zones and zones for sustainable development of the mountain was presented.

The second meeting of significance for the future of the project took place on 16-17 May in the St. Yoakim of Osogovo Monastery in Kriva palanka, Macedonia. The





meeting was announced as a Transboundary Forum for Osogovo in the Green belt. The participants in the forum were from the Bulgarian and the Macedonian ministries of environment, experts from the Kyustendil Regional Administration, mayors of municipalities from the Osogovo mountain area and from the Kyustendil municipal council, representatives of the Pernik RIEW, of UNESCO, of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and of the leading organizations and partners in the project.

The objective of the forum was to familiarize the participants with the results from the five-year period of successful implementation of the 'Osogovo in the Green Belt' transboundary project. Beside sharing of the project achievements, the forum served as a field for discussion by the participants of the future possibilities for transboundary cooperation for biodiversity conservation, protected area management and sustainable development of the local communities.

Part of the forum agenda involved presentations on

the subject of 'National and International Significance of Osogovo - Legislation and Initiatives', the 'Benefit of Transboundary Biodiversity Conservation and the Contribution of the International Union for Conservation of Nature for Biodiversity Conservation in Southeastern Europe', the 'UNESCO Biodiversity Reserves - Principles, Benefits and Examples of Europe', and a discussion on the 'Possibilities to Create a Transboundary Protected Area in Osogovo'.

During the forum, the Macedonian party expressed its clear intent to take steps to establish a nature park in accordance with the Macedonian legal system, for the purposes of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development of the Macedonian part of the Osogovo mountain. In order to provide the same for the Bulgarian side, a discussion was made of the steps to create a similar protected area in Bulgaria. Simultaneously, the UNESCO representative defended the proposal for a unilateral process for nomination of the entire Osogovo mountain as a modern biosphere reserve.

The two meetings resulted in a concept for future development of the Bulgarian part of the project, which may be expressed most generally as continued implementation of the principles of biosphere reserves in the project area and use of the Osogovo area as a model area proving the applicability, the advantages and the benefits from the creation of a modern type of a transboundary protected area. The implementation of this concept required meetings with stakeholders from the region during the entire year. Also, the tradition of involving school children and teachers from Osogovo in the project through trips for education and environmental training of teachers from the Kyustendil municipality continues.

3. THE PROJECT STRATEGY: ELABORATION OF A LONG-TERM STRATEGY AND NETWORKS FOR PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF AN 'IRON CURTAIN ROUTE' IN THE BALKANS

Donor: Co-financed by the European Commission via the Directorate General 'Enterprise and Industry'.

Leading organization: The Bulgarian Association of Alternative Tourism (BAAT)

Partners: BBF, the EcoCommunity Foundation, the Ministry of Economy and Energy and Tourism, the Romanian Bicycle Association Bike Attack, and the Greek municipality of Thassos.

Total: EUR 22,636 (this is the BBF participation in the entire project budget)

BBF Team: Martina Koleva, Peter Todorov, Radostina Tasheva, Rosen Vasilev

This project created a framework for the construction of the southern stretch of the European Bicycle Route 'The Iron Curtain Trail' (Euro bike 13). An integrated study by BAAT and its partners were used as the basis for creation and promotion of the final stretch of the approximately 2100 km long trail crossing the boundaries of Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Greece and Turkey, and ending on the Black Sea.



A network of stakeholders participating in the elaboration of the trail was created, to form long-term strategies for the construction, promotion and use of the trail for alternative tourism in the border areas.

The terrain and the infrastructure were studied and meetings with representatives of national, regional and local institutions, non-governmental organizations, business representatives and other stakeholders were conducted.

Six workshops were carried out during the project allowing stakeholders to discuss the possibilities of having the trail passing through their municipalities.

The study was used to determine the backbone of the trail through Bulgaria and through the neighbouring countries, and an analysis was made of the potential for development of the trail with its tourism potential and local offering of tourism services, and the cultural, historical and natural resources of the region.

MEET issued a leaflet within the project for distribution at international exchanges and fairs.

The project financed the publication of Guidelines for development of the Balkan-Peninsula section of the Iron Curtain Trail, intended for institutions, non-governmental organizations, business representatives, researchers and experts at the European, national, regional and local levels, and is aimed to assist their bicycle development efforts.



4. "CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KARST COMPLEX IN THE DRAGOMAN LAKE IN BULGARIA"

Donor: The German Federal Environmental Federation (DBU)

Leading organization: The Balkans Wildlife Association

Partners: Euronatur, the Balkans Wildlife and the BBF

Total: 25,910 EUR

Financing for 2011: BGN 15,000

BBF Team: Rossen Vassilev

In 2011, the BBF project coordinator continued to work for the implementation of the activities provided for in the partnership project. Regular communication with our colleagues from EuroNatur and the Balkans Wildlife was maintained, and the foreign experts were accompanied in their missions in the project area.

A meeting with the German ambassador to Bulgaria, Mr. Matthias Høpfner, was conducted on May 16 to present the goals and results of the project.

The coordinator took part in the preparation and conducting of a filming trip with a French TV team of Ushuaia TV in the Dragoman area.

Elaboration of a Wet Meadow Management Plan for the Dragoman Area

A team of the following experts was involved: Ivan Hristov as the leading planning expert, Raina Nacheva as a GIS specialist, and Dr. Rosen Tsonev as a flora expert. Studies and field trips were carried out. The work continues according to plan.

Advisory process with local stakeholders

This activity was envisaged as co-financing from BBF. The co-financing could not be secured this year.

Restoration of the weather fish (*Misgurnus fossilis*)

The expert, Dr. Tihomir Stefanov, conducted studies of weather fish populations in the Danube and in the

Chokyovo marsh in order to establish the most suitable material for reintroduction of the species. This activity will be completed in 2012.

Maintenance of grass communities with *Fritillaria meleagroides* and *Viola pumila*

The author of the management plans for the two species, Dr Iva Apostolova, was consulted. Dr. Desislava Sopotlieva was hired to conduct monitoring of the populations of these species in the Tsraklevtsi meadow area and in the Aldomirovsko marsh. Experts from the Institute for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, provided assistance for experimental in vitro breeding of the fritillary in order to help its populations in its natural range.

5. "LIFE FOR THE BURGAS LAKES"

Donor: The EU LIFE+ Program

Leading organization: BSPB

Partners: BBF, the UK Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB), the Burgas Municipality, and Black Sea Saltfactory Ltd.

Financing for 2011 (for BBF) BGN 31,000

The BBF Team: Radostina Tsenova, Andriana Andreeva, Rossen Vasilev

Elaboration of a Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy

This activity was envisaged as co-financing from BBF. The co-financing could not be secured this year.

Purchasing of lands in the wet meadows in the Dragoman area

The negotiations with owners of parts of the meadow in the lands of the villages of Buchin prohod, Drenovo and Ponor continued without success in 2011. The BBF needs to propose in early 2012 other suitable uses of the funds planned for this activity.



The BBF, working within the BSPB project, carries out three activities and renders full cooperation for the implementation of the project, and provides consultation and participates in many of the other activities.

Updating of the National Plan for Conservation of Bulgaria's Most Significant Wetlands

Intensive talks were held in 2011 with experts in various biological sciences and involvement in the project of the Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research at the BAS as the provider of the necessary information and consultation related to Bulgaria's wetlands was discussed.

A meeting of experts and representatives of scientific and non-governmental organizations was conducted and Irina Mateeva presented the BSPB project for 'GIS database of wetlands', and the database was submitted for use by the team involved in the updating of the National Plan. Nevena Kamburova of the Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research presented the results from the Bulgarian wetland inventorying project. The product of the project - a book with a CD, was purchased for use. At the workshop, the experts discussed also the criteria for inclusion of wetlands

in the Plan and the approach for creation of zone-related characteristics and maps.

The planning work was distributed between the experts as follows: Ventsislav Vasilev – general characteristics, Yordan Uzunov – benthic invertebrate fauna (macrozoobenthos), Nevena Kamburova – birds, Georgi Popgeorgiev – amphibians, reptiles and GIS, Lachezar Pehlivanov – fish, Boiko Georgiev – other groups. The large volume of bird-related information required additional involvement of Mr. Peter Yankov.

The involvement of most experts in the Natura 2000 mapping work means that the updating of the wetlands plan will continue in 2012.

The list of wetlands for detailed presentation in the updated plan, enhanced with the seaside areas, such as river estuaries (of the Veleka and Silistar rivers), and mountain lakes (the Seven lakes, the Smolyan lakes) was discussed during a second meeting.

A draft of the updated National Plan for Conservation of Bulgaria's Most Significant Wetlands was prepared and proposed for discussion in December.



Design and installation in key locations of boards with information about priority species

This activity has not been implemented as yet because of the decision early in the year to prepare a general tourist trail for the Burgas lakes with an overall vision, and with a logo, including most of the sites and locations intended for visiting within the project. The boards will be constructed once the trail is specified and agreed upon.

Raising of the awareness about priority species among stakeholders, fishermen, hunters etc., through seminars, information meetings and training.

A procedure was held in January and a subcontractor was selected for organizing of the meetings. The following activities were implemented by the end of the year:

- Information meeting regarding the potential for application under measure 214 'Agro-environmental payments', Measure 213 'Natura 2000 payments and payments related to Directive 2000/60/EC' for agricultural lands from axis 2 of the Rural development program; national standards - conditions for maintenance of land in a good agricultural and ecological status intended for farmers in Natura 2000 areas in Burgas. Dimitar Plachiski was presenter. (April)
- It was planned during the project to allocate several places suitable for birdwatching and to place there suitable information infrastructure. Following discussions with the English partners from the Royal Society for Protection of Birds, the team was of the opinion that it would be far more beneficial for Burgas to designate more such places suitable not only for birdwatching, but also for pleasant rest, picnicking, sports, walks or simply closer contact with nature, and for visits to cultural, historical and archaeological sites of whose

relation to the lake only few people are aware. The BBF conducted a study by means of 15 meetings and interviews with almost all stakeholders concerned with the conservation and management of the Burgas lakes - central and local government institutions, NGOs, experts and citizens. Suitable information was collected and summarized, concerning past and future projects and intentions, recommendations, proposals etc. This was the basis for a report with an analysis of the existing situation which has been translated and submitted to the English consultants and to all stakeholders and organisations involved in the study.

- This report was presented and discussed during a special workshop in the Regional Governor's office in June with the organisations and institutions of Burgas and the region, concerned with the conservation and management of the Burgas lakes. Experts from the RIEW, the Ecology and Eurointegration Department of the Burgas Municipality, the regional government, the Black Sea Saltworks Ltd., the Burgas Regional Museum, the Burgas Tourist Information Centre, members of various ecological and hunting associations and citizens participated in the meeting.
- A special study was organised during the first Burgas green festival among the citizens and guests of the town, as was the festival for selection of the most suitable locations for inclusion in a route with sites to be visited, and with sites for recreation and tourism. One of the festival tents provided opportunities for each visitor to become familiar with the sites, to read about them, to look at photographs, to verify their location on the specially prepared and printed large map, to rate the site along the trail, and to share his or her opinion.



6. "BE GREEN IN BURGAS" REGIONAL CAMPAIGN

Donor: The Charles Stewart Mott foundation via the Bulgarian Environmental Partnership Foundation (Ekoobstnost)

Leading organization: The Strandja branch of the BBF

Partners: BSPB, the Burgas Municipality, the Strandja NPD

Total: BGN 10,762 (BGN 6,412 from the donor)

The BBF Team: Radostina Tsenova, Andriana Andreeva

This project was prepared and implemented in the period between February and September. The main objective was to promote the 'green' idea among the residents and visitors to Burgas, in order to reach out to the maximum number of people of different ages and to provoke these people to change their attitude toward the green way of life created by consuming organic food, by sustainable use of resources, by close contact with nature and by reduction of pollution at the expense of consumer-oriented and commercial supply of 'fast' food and products.

The high point of the program was the long-awaited **FIRST GREEN FESTIVAL IN BURGAS**. It comprised a showing of growers of bio and organically farmed products, owners of guest houses, organisations offering ecotourisms etc. During the two days of the fair, the visitors could buy from the tents in one of the central alleys in the Sea garden in Burgas tasty honey from the Tsarevo area, strawberries from the village of Gramatikovo, woolen knit-works made by the master ladies from the Golden Fleece society in Zvezdez, to receive information about where to get accommodation in Strandja and which tourist trails could be followed, where birds could be watched around Burgas and the lakes, and where rest and recreation are possible around these lakes. Leaflets with useful information and green advice were handed out to the visitors and passers-by. The Strandja folklore music and dance teams made colourful and memorable performances during the concert in the first day of the festival - the Tsarevo male choir of 'Georgi Kondolov', the female folklore formation from Brushlyan, and the children from the Thracian society. The second day of the festival will be remembered for the colourful children's Biodiversity carnival dedicated to the World Environment Day of June 5. More than 100 children from 10 kinder gartens marched past in ingenious costumes resembling Bulgarian plants and animals, and were having fun on the 'Snail' summer stage in Burgas.

The second part of the project took place in September and was related to the organising of two green discussions



Our partnership with the Burgas municipality has led us to the idea to organise the **Green Days in Burgas** between June 1 and 6.

The first event in the campaign was the bicycle activity 'From the Snail to the Pelicans', which was publicised widely on the web sites of the BBF and its partners, and by means of posters, on Facebook etc. The bicycle event was organised in order to promote the use of bicycles as an alternative/green transport in the town of Burgas and, also, the new bicycle alleys leading from the town to the shore of the Atanasovsko lake, where the Burgas RIEW shelter can be used for watching of pelicans, avocets, terns and sea gulls. The Mayor of Burgas, Mr. Dimitar Nikolov, arrived for the event on his bicycle to lead the column of enthusiastic young bicycle riders.





- round tables where the 'green' theme could be entered into the agenda of the Burgas community again. The first discussion was dedicated to the meaning of living 'green', to whether it is only a passing fashion, to eating 'green' or organic, etc. The presenters were Natalia Zhivkova and Kamen Krastanov from Sofia. The topic of the second round table was 'Bicycling in town and in nature', and the most interesting presentations were those made by Martina Koleva who told about the bicycle movement and bicycling as a way of life, and by our Norwegian colleague Bjorn Arne Ness who presented the green way of life in Norway.

The regional campaign "Be green in Burgas" of the Strandja branch of the BBF continued by open meetings with citizens and representatives of institutions and organisations.

We hope that the **campaign and the first green festival of Burgas** have succeeded in provoking the people of Burgas and in 'igniting' them toward the green idea, and it was the desire of all participants to make a tradition out of the festival and, where possible, to organise the festivities during the spring and the autumn.



7. CONSERVATION OF CHAMOIS AND BROWN BEARS IN BULGARIA (OUTSIDE THE NATIONAL AND NATURE PARKS AND THE RESERVES AND MAINTAINED RESERVES) BY IMPLEMENTING OF SOME COMPONENTS OF THE CHAMOIS AND BEAR ACTION PLANS IN BULGARIA

Donor: The 2007-2011 Environment Operating Program

Leading organization: BBF

Partners: The Balkani Wildlife Association, RIEW Pazardjik, the Devin Hunting and Fishing association

Project cost: BGN 578,832

The BBF Team: Stefan Avramov, Katerina Angelova, Desislava Zhivkova, Petya Sheremetova and many volunteers.

The overall objective of the project is the restoration of the chamois and the bear in Bulgaria.

The specific goals are:

- coordination of the efforts of the broadest possible range of institutions and organizations working toward the conservation of the chamois and the bear and their habitats in Bulgaria;
- radical decrease in poaching and of its effect on the chamois and on the bear by strengthened guarding and clarification of the 'weak points' in the distribution of both species;
- a clear vision about the possibilities for re-introduction of the chamois in Bulgaria and for increasing of its population by occupation of new habitats;
- a clear vision about the potential for hunting in accordance with the exceptions provided for by the Biodiversity Act as a means to involve the hunting community in the conservation of these two species (the so-called community based conservation);
- Increased public awareness about the chamois and bear conservation issues, poaching control and involvement of the local communities in the conservation of the species;
- coordination of the activities for conservation of the transboundary chamois and bear populations;
- reduction of the Man - Bear conflicts;
- improvement of the capacity for long-term conservation of the two species.

The main activities within the project are:

- provision of support for the work of the interagency chamois and bear group in the MOEW;
- coordination of the operation of the institutions concerned with chamois and bear conservation;
- prevention of poaching;
- studying of the chamois migration and of the corridors between individual populations in order to clarify the 'weaknesses' in its distribution;
- Evaluation of the potential for reintroduction;
- Evaluation of the effect of uses on the population;
- A GIS model of distribution, problems and potential re-introduction sites;
- Studying of illegal shooting of animals around national parks and reserves;
- Coordination of monitoring between Greek and Bulgarian institutions;

- Information campaign concerning the action plan;
- Evaluation of the effects of diseases on the chamois;
- Exchange of experience with French colleagues working on identical issues;
- Measures to mitigate the man-bear conflicts;
- Analysis of fragmentation and bear corridors;
- Promotion of the project and of its results.



8. CROSS BORDER ENVIRONMENTAL CELL AWARENESS IN DOXATO AND BANITE MUNICIPALITIES WITH BULGARIAN'S BIODIVERSITY FOUNDATION CONTRIBUTION

Donor: the European Territorial Cooperation Programme "Greece-Bulgaria 2007-2013"

Leading organization: The Doxato Municipality (Greece)

Partners: The Banite Municipality (Bulgaria) and BBF

Total: 352,102 EUR

The BBF Team: Latinka Topalova - Zhezhiha

The main objective of the project is to increase the empathy of the people for conservation of the natural heritage through the use of innovative IT technologies.

The project activities are as follows:

- Establishing of three ecological information 'cells' in the Doxato municipality, in the Banite municipality and in the town of Blagoevgrad. This includes creation of 3 augmented reality rooms, 3 information centres and an interactive Internet portal.
- Organising of seminars for drawing of attention to issues of importance for environment protection and exchange of good practices.
- Creation and printing of a 'Green Business' guidebook to attract and inform investors about the vast 'green' economy and green business development potential.

- Organising of a concluding conference for the project in support of the promotion of the project results.

The year 2011 saw the beginning of the preparation of WP 2 (publicity) and WP 3 (Augmented Reality Room) documents, and the preparation of the technical specifications and documents related to the procedures. Data about the interactive information portal were collected – environmental issues/questions and relevant solutions, local natural resources (flora and fauna), good practices, 360° panoramic photographs. The elaboration of the education scenario titled 'Brown Bear - the Enchanting Giant' was initiated. Two working meetings with project partners were organised.



9. THE ECO-NETWORK PROJECT, BULGARIA

The Full Name of the Project: Nature conservation through networking and communication of issues such as protected area conservation, harmful emissions and urban waste.

Donor: The German Federal Environmental Federation (DBU)

Leading organization: The Leibniz Institute of Regional Geography (IfL - Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde)

Partners: The Leibniz Institute of Regional Geography (IfL - Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde), the Blue Link information network, BBF

Total draft budget: 207,000 EUR

Financing for BBF for 2011: 7,592 EU

The BBF Team: Petko Tsvetkov, Petya Sheremetova

A national conference of environmental NGOs in Bulgaria – the BBF supported the main organiser, BlueLink, with coordination and logistics for the conference conducted on May 13 and 24, where approximately 200 representatives of nature conservation NGOs, NGOs from other sectors, business representatives etc. had gathered. The conference was shown on-line by a live streaming technology for the first time. Following the forum, the BBF took part in the preparation and in the creation of a final document entitled 'Summary and recommendations from the National Conference of Environmental NGOs'.

Building of an eco-network of experts – in 2011, during the project, BBF financed the elaboration of expert evaluations on problematic cases related to:

- construction of regional landfill in the lands of the town of Samokov;
- prospecting for oil and gas abstraction in the Southern Black Sea area;
- prospecting for shale gas abstraction in the Dobrudja region;
- approval of the Pastrina Wind Farm in the Pastrina protected area;
- investment proposal for 'Construction of Low-Level Summer Houses for Seasonal Use and for Personal Use in a Personally Owned Land Property in the Village of Varvara, Tsarevo Municipality', etc.;

- drawing up of an opinion about the environmental consequences from gold mining in Krumovgrad and provision of advice to the Breznik initiative committee;
- expert statement regarding the shale gas abstraction process.

Public hearings of projects and problems of high public and nature-conservation significance - BBF supported and coordinated the participation of NGO representatives for 3 public hearings and regional meetings for: public discussion of the problems leading to the submission of 8 complaints by different institutions and organisations concerning the granting of the rights to prospect for oil and gas in the Southern Black sea region (April 29); a round table on the issues of shale gas exploration and abstraction, etc. (July 19); a regional meeting to discuss the possibilities for sustainable development of the Burgas region and of the Strandja Nature Park (December 7).

Cross-sector meetings of NGOs – BBF supported and coordinated the protesting citizen groups and movements against the shale gas extraction process by organising a meeting of initiative committee representatives (December 29).



VII. PROJECT PROPOSALS DEVELOPED IN 2011

- A study and restoration of marine filters, REEFS, proposed for financing and approved by the Joint Operating Program Black Sea 2007-2013 as early as 2010 but still in the process of budget revision. It is expected that the implementation contract will be signed in early 2012.
- Sustainable use of natural resources in the Belasitsa region - transboundary cooperation along the Balkan Green Belt (Donor: DBU; partners: EuroNature (Germany), BBF, the Belasitsa Nature Park Directorate (Bulgaria), the management authority of the Kerkin National Park (Greece), and Planetum-Strumitsa (Macedonia). The concept of the project was submitted to DBU in August. We received positive response about the concept of the project in December.
- Improvement of the joint management for conservation of the NATURA 2000 areas in Greece and in Bulgaria: PROTECT-NATURA, PROTECT NATURE (Donor: the program for 'European Territorial Cooperation between Greece and Bulgaria 2007-2013' Partners - EKBY (Greece), the Belasitsa Nature Park Directorate (Bulgaria), BBF - the Belasitsa branch, the 4 Greek national parks - the Kerkin lake management authority, the management authority of the Koronia and Volvi lakes, the Rodopi Nature Park management authority, the management authority of the Nestos Delta at the Vistonika lake. The project proposal passed the first evaluation but has not been financed (having received 48 points, while projects with more than 51 points receive financing).
- Preparation of a project concept "America for Bulgaria" (the project concept is under preparation and will be presented early next year).
- Preparation of a project within the Grundtvig programme. The name of the project is 'Multiplication Academy' (a working title) and will be presented to the European Commission on February 2, 2012, within the 'Lifetime Learning / Grundtvig' programme. The project preparation meeting took place on December 8-9 in Vienna. Project Partners: WWF Austria, BBF, the EcoCommunity Foundation (the Czech Republic), the Green Association for Nature Conservation and Environment Protection (Osiec, Hungary), ProPark - a protected area foundation of Rumania.
- Osogovo in the Green Belt - application of the principles of biosphere parks in Bulgaria, proposed for financing under the Small Projects Programme of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), the Frankfurt Zoological Society for a period of two years at a total cost of: BGN 171,495
- Preparation and deposition of a large project within the LIFE+ program, titled "Urgent Measures for Restoration and Long-Term Conservation of the Atanasovsko Lake Coastal Lagoon", for EUR 2,824,077 in total; co-financing by the BBF - EUR 30,000; Black Sea Saltfactory Ltd. - EUR 645,000, BSPB - EUR 15,000. The project was presented on July 18 in the MOEW and we are still waiting for the EC evaluation.





VIII. 2011 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

DRAFT	DONOR	ANNUAL BUDGET
Cooperation for biodiversity conservation and sustainable local development in the Strandja mountain	Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein through the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area	225,000
Conservation of the chamois and bear outside protected areas.	Operational Program Environment	155,000
Conservation and sustainable development of the Karst complex in the Dragoman lake in Bulgaria	The German Federal Environmental Federation (DBU)	25,300
Osogovo in the Green Belt	The Frankfurt Zoological Society	46,000
European bicycle route No.13 The Iron Curtain Route – BBF is a partner	European Commission	12,800
Life for the Burgas Lakes - BBF is a partner	LIFE +	31,000
"Be Green in Burgas" Regional campaign	The Charles Stewart Mott foundation via BEPF	6,400
The Eco-Network Project, Bulgaria	The German Federal Environmental Federation (DBU)	9,700

A total of BGN **617 463,28** have been deposited in the BBF's accounts. Of these, BGN **455 232,54** are intended for project-related activities, BGN **6 796,30** come from economic activities and BGN **16 454,28** come from donations.

The expenses made are BGN **475 331,89**. Of these BGN **455 354,03** are project-related expenses, with BGN **19 977,86** for administration expenses, amounting to 4.17 % of the overall revenue.

The remaining un-expended project-related funds amount to BGN **138 980,16**.

The amounts in BBF's bank accounts at December 31, 2011 are BGN **63 316,36**.



THE BBF ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE IN 2011

