



Project newsletter, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, 10 January, 2012

## **PARKS & BENEFITS: a successful project is approaching the end**

Dear partners and friends of the Parks & Benefits project,

I am looking back to our successful final event on 10 October 2011 in Sellin / Rügen (DE) and the following last meeting of all project partners from 11 – 14 October 2011 in Lauterbach /Rügen (DE).

My overall understanding from the reflection of partners and from stakeholders outside the project is, that we did a great job and that the Parks & Benefits project did not only bring added value to those targets set within the project's agenda, but even beyond that. And the results are well communicated by our publication "guide to sustainable tourism in protected areas", by our article in the PARLIAMENT's special issue of September 2011 and by contributions to various conferences, i.e. EUROPARC's annual conference in September 2011 in Bad Urach (GER) and the EcoRegion-Conference in Gdynia (PL).

Therefore I have to express my special thanks to all, partners and supporters, who contributed to the project's success. This includes as well my thanks to our project coordinator, information manager and financial manager!

There are just some weeks to go but still some tasks to finalise until the project officially ends on 24 January 2012. So let's keep on going! My best wishes to you for the New Year 2012 – may this year be blessed with health, happiness & wonderful new experiences!

Olaf Ostermann





## 1. PROJECT INTERNAL

### 1.1 Review of the Parks & Benefits Final Event in Sellin & 7<sup>th</sup> project meeting in Lauterbach, isle of Rügen, GER

After three years of continuous commitment to the enhancement of international cooperation in all aspects of protected area management the “Parks & Benefits” project will end on 24 January 2012.



For this reason a Final Event bringing together project partners, stakeholders and representatives from nature conservation and tourism organisations as well as administrations was organised on 10 October 2011 in Sellin, Germany. The event being hosted by the Biosphere Reserve Southeast-Rügen marks the conclusion of a successful project, which set new impulses in linking nature conservation and sensitive development of tourism activities in protected areas of the Baltic Sea Region.

Major achievements of the project such as the continuous implementation of the European Charter of Sustainable Tourism in the Baltic Sea Region, the analysis and exchange of carrying capacity results as well as new visitor management approaches have been presented and discussed in the audience highlighting also the significance of EU projects for the tourism development in the BSR. Further the Müritznational Park has been awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism being the second out of 7 Parks & Benefits parks to receive the certificate. The afternoon session focussed in 3 workshops on topics like accessibility & transport, how regions benefit from protected areas and marketing strategies in nature tourism illustrating best practices and providing a more detailed view on the project results.

The following partner meeting was held in Lauterbach from 11 – 14 October 2011 in the beautiful setting of the Biosphere Reserve Southeast Rügen and with direct view on the small island of Vilm. It offered the opportunity to all project partners to present their last significant outputs and results gained during project lifetime. Not all activities could be finalised until October 2011, but the partners are eager to implement the activities in due time, among them the benefit monitor, the action programme on “low impact” transport system networks and the guideline on public-private partnership among stakeholders and protected areas.





However, in September 2011 the Charter Part II-methodology for EUROPARC's Nordic Baltic Section has been accepted by the EUROPARC Federation and is now in place now for the Section's members and thus for a major part of the Baltic Sea Region. Also, two more park partners – Kemer National Park (LV) and Nature Park Maribo Lakes (DK) – have submitted their application for the European Charter. Zemaitija National Park (LT), Kurtuvenai Regional Park (LT) and the Biosphere Reserve Southeast-Rügen (GER) planned to submit the relevant documents before Christmas 2011. New visitor monitoring systems have already been implemented in Matsalu National Park (EE), Nature Park Maribo Lakes (DK) and Zemaitija National Park (LT). A GPS guide was furthermore implemented and tested in Müritzer National Park.

Please visit our website at [www.parksandbenefits.net](http://www.parksandbenefits.net) for further information.

## 1.2 Kemer National Park – one more step towards the Charter (Kemer National Park, LV)

After two years of hard work, long discussions with all parties involved and even longer hours at the computer putting everything together, the Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy and Action Plan for Kemer National Park for the next five years was finally finished in June 2011 and submitted to EUROPARC Federation.

On September 11-14, 2011 Kemer National Park was visited by the verifier of the European Charter of Sustainable Tourism in Protected Nature Areas to get to know the situation on the spot and make sure about the compliance of all the activities included into the action plan with the real circumstances.



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During the visit representatives of the area such as staff of Nature Conservation Agency did their best to provide a profound picture of the territory – its natural and cultural values, main tourist attractions, local people and businesses, administration system etc. covering the Charter Principles one by one. Besides round table discussions with local stakeholders and administration officials, there was a lot of outdoor experience present, i.e. getting hands dirty by probably the main peculiarity and treasure of the area – curative mud and sulfurous mineral waters in one of the sanatoriums; struggling through the reed-beds of one of Latvian Ramsar sites – Kaņieris Lake; trying to catch a good shot of wild cattle and horses in Dunduru fields etc..

The visit provided a unique chance to look at the local circumstances from a different perspective. All verifier's comments, remarks and proposed discussions were appreciated very highly by the representatives of Kemer National Park who realized that the conclusions of those discussions are going to be of great help in the implementation process of the strategy and the action plan.

The verification visit concluded on a very positive note for all involved. Let's hope that the decision of the Charter Evaluation Committee – expected some time next year – will be the same as well!



### 1.3 Investments of the project in place in Ķemeri National Park (Ķemeri National Park, LV)

To improve performance of Ķemeri National Park in one of the Charter Principles – visitor monitoring – the respective equipment was purchased and partly installed in Ķemeri National Park in autumn 2011. As part of “Parks & Benefits” pilot investment programme, 3 step pressure pad counters and 2 radio beam people counters, as well as 2 cameras were bought. With the help of these devices it will now be possible to get reliable data on visitor numbers at various spots in Ķemeri National Park which often serve as basis for future planning of sustainable tourism development as well as attracting funds for this purpose. Cameras will be used to calibrate the counters and also for monitoring visitors’ behavior, hopefully helping to reduce acts of vandalism and other wrong - doings in the territory.

## 2. PARTNER NEWS

### 2.1 Guidebook “National Parks in Latvia” published (Lauku Celotajs, LV)



“Lauku celotajs” has finished the guidebook “National Parks in Latvia” on December 8, 2011 and presented its Latvian and English versions for public discussion in the Ministry of Regional Development and Environment Protection. With this guidebook we promote national parks as visitor friendly areas changing the current popular view in Latvia that national parks are sort of closed areas designated with lots of restrictions for visitors as well as for local residents. In the project, the Association developed a number of touring routes and worked together with the Ķemeri National Park administration to really achieve involvement of the local community in development of tourist services. This experience and approach spreads to other national parks in Latvia – Slītere, Gauja and Rāzna. Nature conservation through positive communication, increased visitor awareness, positive attitude and responsibility should substitute the previous practice of restrictions and penalties.

The guidebook addresses people who like to observe wild nature, learn about local culture and history, or be active tourists who will visit national parks on foot, on a bicycle, by boat or on skis. We have not forgotten about those who want to drive a car, either. The guidebook offers information about the most important environmental, cultural and historical values of Latvia’s four national parks, also listing the most interesting tourist destinations. Maps are included, and GPS co-ordinates are offered for the most attractive objects. Each of the national parks – Slītere, Gauja, Rāzna, Ķemeri - protects different unique nature values and can offer different experiences to visitors.

For public discussion, we have invited administrations of protected areas, municipalities, tourism businesses, active local representatives and others who are interested to discuss the benefits tourism brings to protected areas as well as existing problems (133 participants).





The participants were addressed by Jānis Strautnieks, the director general of the Latvian Nature Conservation Agency supervising the protected nature areas in Latvia. Discussion will continue to provoke all stakeholders to give their opinions, reveal problems and offer solutions regarding what should be done in the national parks to maintain the balance between nature conservation needs, economic activities and visitor interests.

## **2.2 “How many roads...?” (German Association for Sustainable Mobility, DE & University of Roskilde, DK)**

This well known question will not be answered in the upcoming publication of Roskilde University (DK) and the Association for sustainable mobility (DE). Instead of only focusing on this philosophical question, it takes a closer look on how they could be travelled, their accessibility and what they are influenced by. The publication covers more concrete issues like the public transport networks, the accessibility for all and the carrying capacity as well as visitor management and the infrastructure of local stakeholders within the protected areas of the Parks & Benefits project.

Divided in two parts, the first will cover improvements and further possibilities not only in terms of public transport and the modal split between the means of transport. Further there will be reflections on barrier free accessibility of visitor attractions in nature, the possibilities of renting bikes as well as on hiking and biking routes within the protected areas. This will be followed by an introduction to analytical tools such as the zoning of parks, their carrying capacity and visitor monitoring and management. The second part of the publication provides a closer look on the regional and local settings of each of the eight parks involved in the Parks & Benefits project including analyses of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT-analysis) for each partner park. The brochure will be published on the Parks & Benefits website ([www.parksandbenefits.net](http://www.parksandbenefits.net)) in early 2012.

## **2.3 Improvement of access for all at the Nature School Nature Park Maribo Lakes (Lolland Municipality, DK)**

The Nature School being used primarily by public schools for accommodation and nature education throughout the year is located directly by the lake ‘Søndersø’ in the Nature Park Maribo Lakes. There are also facilities for horse riding and shelter for people hiking and cycling around the lakes. A part of the job of the local ranger Uffe Nielsen is to teach and offer guiding tours at the nature school. The school is connected to the town Maribo by a nature path.

Next to the nature school is a parking space which is accessible from public road making it easy for all guests including disabled people to visit the school and the beautiful surroundings. Several institutions for people having both physical and mental handicaps visited the areas around the school. On rainy days the view can be enjoyed from a covered space.

In April 2010 proposals for changes at the nature school were presented at a meeting with the committees for disabled in both Guldborgsund and Lolland Municipalities. Better possibilities to enjoy the view from a wheelchair and to be able to use a public toilet facility were highly appreciated.





In Guldborgsund Municipality a parking space, toilet, a path and a platform at the southernmost lake in the Nature Park Maribo Lakes: Røgbølle Sø was requested. The project at Røgbølle sø is almost finished.



Handicap committees were invited to a meeting at the nature school providing advice and input to the final project. The project has now been carried out according to the ideas of the handicap committees. From the parking space you can now easily use the handicap toilet in a wheelchair and furthermore enjoy the observation platform in front of the nature school. The table / bench set are specifically designed for disabled and this applies also to the grill and waste basket.

The municipalities have invited the handicap committee to hold their next meeting at the nature school and test the facilities.

We know that many people in the coming years will enjoy these facilities. We also hope to find new funding for further improvement for disabled people. A great desire is the possibility to ride the wheelchair via the path from Maribo to the Nature School.

## 2.4 Ties that bond – benefits for neighbouring parks (Kemer National Park, LV & Kurtuvėnai Regional Park, LT)

“Parks and Benefits” has seen several good things implemented, having all the potential of sustaining well beyond the project lifetime and developing into new partnerships and projects. These definitely include new contacts and working relationships established – one of them being the cooperation between Latvian and Lithuanian project partners representing protected nature territories – Kemer National Park in Latvia and Kurtuvėnai Regional Park and Žemaitija National Park in Lithuania. In 2011, there were two very successful exchange trips organized.



In early July 2011 a team from Kurtuvėnai Regional Park visited Kemer National Park in the context of the study trip “Tourism Products revealing the uniqueness of Kemer National Park”. The acquaintance with the park started in Kemer town, famous of its mineral waters springs and sanatoriums. The attention was attracted by the park and old hospital buildings - discussions about opportunities for tourism started almost immediately. All of the participants of the study trip, but especially the ecologists, were interested in nature management projects. In Dunduru fields the Lithuanian group observed the natural stream riverbed restoration, the natural meadows, grazed by wild horses and cattle.

The colleagues’ experience was interesting as they will have the same project in meadows of Dubysa valley. Other valuable experience was gained from a raised bog with sulfur springs – a nature trail once open for general public but now available only for guided tours –being a good example of visitors’ impact and the complexity of preparing a nature object for visitation. As all participants work in the same area it



was interesting to learn more about Latvia's protected area system and to compare it with the Lithuanian system. We also shared experience of everyday tasks and problems – communication with local municipalities and inhabitants, involving them into tourism developments and solving conflicts.

The Latvian colleagues paid significant attention to the work of rangers and nature education, so it was interesting to participate in an education program on seaside, to learn about dune plants and sea birds. Other highlights were a boat trip at Kaņieris Lake, around reed islands watching birds and water plants and the fishing museum offering an insight into the traditional life of fishermen. We are grateful to the entire Ķemeri National Park team for memorable experiences, warm welcome and frank presentation of their country. Implemented tourism and nature management projects in Ķemeri encouraged us to compare our work challenges and see them in a new light.



The return visit of Latvians took place in October 2011 when 9 rangers from the managing institution of Ķemeri National Park – Nature Conservation Agency – went to explore Kurtuvėnai Regional Park and Žemaitija National Park in Lithuania. In professional yet joyful guidance of Kurtuvėnai Regional Park team we got to know local nature values, tested our skills in cycling and horseback riding and had an unforgettable chance of becoming part of the live and roaming ethnic environment by putting our hearts into trying out and learning Lithuanian folk songs and dances. In Žemaitija, a real adventure was the trip to the Cold War Museum situated in the former Soviet military base.

We also witnessed real pieces of art in the Mask Museum devoted to the traditional *Užgavėnės* festival, and were invited as VIP guests to have a look at the core zone of the national park. The experience we gained throughout the Lithuanian visit raised a doubtful question whether in our care for nature values we are sometimes not forgetting about our cultural heritage which is often there in great abundance, including Ķemeri National Park. We had to admit that traditional lifestyle, cultural history values and maintenance of live ethnic environment plays a much greater role in management of nature territories in Lithuania than it does in Latvia. If we balanced both – the nature and the culture – in a better way, it would be possible to considerably increase the range of activities offered in the territory, in the same time taking some pressure off sensitive nature values, and also add new colours and dimensions to nature education classes.

The ties established, the experiences and ideas expressed during both exchange trips will serve as strong encouragement for seeking future cooperation opportunities in other projects. Still, the main lesson learned was very simple – the basic key to success is having your heart in the thing you are doing. The rest can be developed along the way...

## 2.5 The exhibition “Living Parks” at Nature Park Maribo Lakes from 8 November 2011 to 1 December 2011 (Lolland Municipality, DK)

The Nature Park Maribo Lakes is a member of the EUROPARC Federation since 2004. During the Parks & Benefits project lifetime there has been a growing public interest in nature in general and possibilities



for outdoor activities and local sustainable development in particular. The park has applied for the European Charter for Sustainable Development and we hope to be awarded the certificate in autumn 2012.

Two municipalities in Denmark - Guldborgsund and Lolland Municipality - manage the nature park in cooperation with the associated supportive user group. For both municipalities it was a very welcome opportunity to host the exhibition "Living Parks" to highlight the importance of the nature park to the public.



The exhibition was presented by the Maribo Tourist Office in the lobby of the former town hall in Maribo located at the town square and close to the Maribo lakes. The exhibition was opened by the chairman of the user group Mr. Frederik Cordes and the head of the tourist office in Maribo Ms. Karen Albrechtsen.

The opening was announced in the local media and was covered in the local press under the headline: "The Island Lolland has a piece of nature to be proud of."

Many of the visitors of the exhibition came to visit the Tourist office and some came too see the amazing photos and read about nature parks all over Europe. However, we can conclude that the exhibition created a greater public awareness of the treasures of nature that we have in Europe.

### 3. PROJECT RELATED NEWS

#### 3.1 Sustainable practices create added value for businesses and visitors in protected natural areas

STEPPA, funded through the EU grant scheme Knowledge networks for the competitiveness and sustainability of European Tourism, ran from June 2010 until December 2011. The project involved ten partners from seven European countries including the EUROPARC Federation, Leeds Metropolitan University and the lead partner the University of Eastern Finland. The project specifically examined the added value of sustainable tourism in protected natural areas for local businesses using EUROPARC's European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (ECST) as the basis for the research.

Research done by Leeds Metropolitan University on nearly 900 tourism and hospitality businesses from 59 European protected areas showed that sustainability and business performance have a positive impact on each other. The main reasons for acting sustainably are altruistic ones, with savings, marketing benefits, and customer demand making lower. Unfortunately businesses that claim to undertake a large number of sustainability actions often find it hard to implement specific examples. In general businesses that carry out more sustainability measures believe they have benefitted from them and are more satisfied with their financial performance. Finally green businesses do not communicate this effectively.







A second survey was carried out by the University of Eastern Finland on 1300 visitors in protected natural areas across Europe. The aim was to find out visitors' views on sustainability and whether sustainable tourism schemes give added value to their trip. The results showed that there is a definite added value for visitors. In addition, tourists in protected areas are willing to participate in sustainable activities whilst travelling and they have positive opinions on eco-labels. Unfortunately green certificates or eco-labels are not very recognisable to these tourists.

Other project results included a literature review of sustainable practices within the ECST and a document proposing a revised and updated methodology for the ECST with regards to the businesses in the parks participating in the ECST. A summary of each of the research reports are available in English, French, German, Italian and Spanish, and the comprehensive reports in English from [www.europarc.org/what-we-do/steppa](http://www.europarc.org/what-we-do/steppa).

### 3.2 Calling all communication managers and event organisers in the network,

The **European Day of Parks 2012** will take place on **24 May**. This year events during the Day of Parks will address the issue of the growing distance between people and nature. We call on all protected areas, NGO's and public agencies managing our green gems to get involved by organising events on and around this date under the title:

***See the sky. Touch a tree. Feel the air. Find yourself!***



#### **What is the European Day of Parks?**

The European Day of Parks was launched by the **EUROPARC Federation** with the aim of **raising the profile of Europe's protected areas and generating public support for their aims and work**. It was first held in 1999 and a broad variety of events in and about protected areas highlighting the need to protect these have been organised. In 2011 over 500 events were registered by 185 protected areas in 17 countries

#### **What do you need to do to take part?**

Organise an event in your region or protected area for the local population, stakeholders, politicians and press using the title above. The event can be anything from a guided tour, to a volunteering activity. The aim this year is to (re)connect these people with nature and to **show them how fun and awe-inspiring nature can be**. Then register your events with us so that we can showcase them. Every registered event will receive a European Day of Parks to help them advertise the event including digital posters, branding, pens and more to use.

You are already organising an event for a big nature event in your park 'the day of biodiversity', 'invite nature', 'fete du parc' etc? Why not use the title above and **join the Day of Parks movement?!**

#### **Why become part of the movement?**

**The more events organised, the stronger the message!** This is a wonderful way to promote your protected area and the great work you do on a regional level but with an international twist. What could be more effective than hundreds of protected areas around Europe celebrating the wonders of our natural heritage at the same time?





If you need any more information please visit the [European Day of Parks webpage](#) or contact [Morwenna Parkyn](#) with any questions you might have.

PARKS & BENEFITS project management  
Sandra Fieber

c/o animare projectmanagement  
Rosa-Luxemburg-Straße 14  
D – 18055 Rostock

Tel: 0381/440 49 50  
Fax: 0381/440 49 49  
Email: [sandra.fieber@animare.net](mailto:sandra.fieber@animare.net)  
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