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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES



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Select Committee of Experts - European Diploma

Kuşçenneti National Park
(Turkey)

On-the-spot appraisal

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1. Terms of reference

The committee of experts decided that an on-the-spot appraisal of the Kuşçenneti National Park should be made with a view to renewal of the European Diploma, first awarded to the park in 1976. I was asked to perform this appraisal and did so, with Mr Peter Baum, representing the Secretariat of the Council of Europe, on 13-15 June 1979.

2. Fulfilment of terms of reference

We landed at Istanbul on Tuesday 12 June and were met by Mr D Ozbaykal (Directorate of Forests, Ministry of Agriculture, Ankara), who stayed with us throughout our time in Turkey.

On 13 June, after spending the night in the foresters' shelter of the Forest of Belgrade, we went to Bandirma by boat, which took the entire morning; upon landing, a car and driver took us to Kuşçenneti where the park director and Mr T Güpınar, biologist, were awaiting us, among others. The afternoon was spent in discussion, inspection of the lake outlet, and a boat-tour of the park. That evening we were invited to dine with the Kaimakan, governor of Bandirma Province.

On 14 June we crossed Lake Manyas by boat to inspect the south shore towards the mouth of the Kocaçay, and this took the morning. After lunch, at the invitation of the town of Sigirci and Mr Metin Tunca, its mayor, we talked to the engineers who had come to tell us about the Kocaçay River dam scheme; this river is the lake's main affluent. We spent the end of the afternoon in the Kuşçenneti National Park.

On 15 June we were taken to Lake Apolyont to look at the north shore and a few of the islands (by boat). That evening a final tour around the park preceded our closing conversations.

On 16 June we were driven to the port of Yalova, which we reached around noon. From there we went to Istanbul by boat, and Mr D Ozbaykal left us. The next day, 17 June, we flew to Zurich.

Thanks to the facilities offered by the Turkish Government we were able to carry out our terms of reference in the best conditions. As in 1975, when the first on-the-spot appraisal was made, we were given a free rein to conduct our investigation and all needed transport was supplied. We were most considerately welcomed everywhere and the entire trip was well organised. We extend very warm thanks to all the people who took such trouble to make our stay pleasant as well as useful, and especially Mr D Ozbaykal and his colleagues.

3. Present situation of the Kuşçenneti National Park

I have not repeated the particulars given in the first report (1975), and mention only changes which have taken place in the intervening years.

3.1 Conservation situation: vegetation, fauna

Bearing in mind the very dry weather, the situation is on the whole as satisfactory as in 1975.

Vegetation: no special comment.

Fauna: The bird colonies are prospering, as indicated by counts taken and transmitted by Mr Tansu Gürpınar (I do not have figures for 1976).

(Pairs)	1977	1978	1979
Great crested grebe, <u>Podiceps cristatus</u>	4	15	4
Dalmatian pelican, <u>Pelecanus crispus</u>	50	55	51
Cormorant <u>Phalacrocorax carbo</u>	300	350	343
Pygmy cormorant <u>Phalacrocorax pygmaeus</u>	32	78	135
Grey heron <u>Ardea cinerea</u>	156	140	160
Purple heron <u>Ardea purpurea</u>	2	8	2
Little egret <u>Egretta garzetta</u>	68	176	317
Squacco heron <u>Ardeola ralloides</u>	101	100	115
Night heron <u>Nycticorax nycticorax</u>	210	138	294
Little bittern <u>Ixobrychus minutus</u>	1	6	3
Spoonbill <u>Platalea leucorodia</u>	301	430	304
Glossy ibis <u>Plegadis falcinellus</u>	485	404	379

Leaving aside the Anatidae and Rallidae (few in number and harder to count), populations may be seen to be holding their own, with fluctuations which are natural for this type of colony. It should be observed that beginning in 1977 the counts were no longer made by nest but by sector-by-sector estimates, including new colonies (previously inaccessible). Hence they are no longer fully comparable with those for 1968-75.

The park's value as a refuge and breeding-site for these birds has not lessened. Incidentally, a pair of storks, Ciconia ciconia, also nested in the park in 1978.

3.2 Legal and land status

Nothing to report.

3.3 Management

Kuşçenneti has an annual budget of 2,000,000 Turkish pounds for full- and part-time staff, which includes four wardens and two foresters. Expenditure on management and improvements amounts to about 365,000 pounds.

We were pleased to observe that Mr Ani Kizilay was able to return to his job as warden.

The buffer-zone in which shooting and boating are prohibited (it is clearly marked) continues to be effective.

3.4 Improvements

The information centre planned in 1975 could not be built for a number of reasons. Present plans call for a smaller building, with 100 m² of display space for birds and natural environments; but the financial arrangements have not been settled.

In the territory reserved to the birds, ponds have been dug near the spoonbill colonies and opposite the observation tower, and the spoil transported elsewhere. We advised the staff to remove a few cumbersome poplars and prune some other trees, to encourage the herons to move their nests closer to the tower again.

A fire barrier has been made along the north fence.

3.5 Public access and information

The annual number of visitors now stands at 30,000 and is rising by 10% every year, although access is strictly confined to the tower. Most visitors come in coaches although 15% are students; among foreign visitors, Germans predominate.

Information is provided by the little museum and the wardens, only one of whom speaks German. An illustrated folder in English is most useful.

Visitors are under close supervision. As they cannot go beyond the observation tower and as, owing to tree growth, the nesting colonies are tending to move away from it, those whose main interest is ornithology may be keenly disappointed. Some means should be found of satisfying their desires without disturbing nesting birds during the season; once it is over, more extensive tours could certainly be conducted even in boats (paying).

It should be observed that apart from the limited facilities available at Bandirma, Erdek and Söğüt there is no provision for overnight visitors in the region itself and tourists from outside it must stay at Bursa if they cannot camp.

3.6 Scientific research

Two young biologists have been assigned to study the birds, and a botanical study is being considered.

4. Outlying districts (bird feeding areas)

4.1 Lake Manyas (Kuş Gölü) - Kocaçay River dam scheme

The first expert's report (1975) spoke of the crucial importance for the Kuşçenneti colonies of the lake and its shores, and advocated a long-term conservation scheme for the entire ecosystem.

In June 1979 we observed that it had apparently suffered no change. In particular, fish seemed as abundant as before. Our informers told us that fishing was controlled by a co-operative union, which limited the number of fishing boats (87 active at this writing) and size of the catch (about 500 tons a year). It must be hoped that fishing will remain at this level and not be developed intensively eg by using smaller-mesh nets etc.

The most serious problem for the future is the plan to dam the Kocaçay, the lake's main affluent. This seems to have strong support in the region, which is anticipating economic advantages, and it is also supported by the national park authorities, who have been given assurances as to water levels after regulation.

According to the information given us by two engineers (with interpretation), the river will apparently be dammed about 25 km to the south, upstream of the lake. The dam will be 500 m wide, 79 m high and 10 m thick and will hold approximately 300 million cubic metres of water on average; the reservoir will have a surface of 30 km² and will cover 10-15 km of valley. Its objects are to supply electricity (? 100 million kw/h) and make possible the irrigation of 18,000 hectares by canal. A dike should be built behind the south shore (to replace defective former dikes) to prevent the periodic flooding of land and also to gain arable terrain. There is also a plan to pump lake-water for the irrigation of land to the north.

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Obviously, the carrying-out of this scheme would alter the present wholly-natural balance of Lake Manyas. It is hard to predict its effects upon the fauna and hence upon the Kuşçenneti colonies.

I can suggest the following chief dangers:

- Regulation of lake water-level. The authorities say that the lower and upper limits determined by those who know the park best will be respected at seasons important to the birds. As the imperatives of nature conservation are likely to yield to economic interests, I have misgivings as to the realism of such a long-term undertaking.
- Reduction of the surface area available to water birds on the south shore. By reducing the area previously subject to periodical flooding, the dike will assuredly have this effect.
- Increased disturbance in feeding areas caused by works and new roads. This might also affect nesting colonies in the regions.
- Return to the lake of part of the excess irrigation water, laden with fertilisers and pesticides. It would seem difficult to avoid this fresh source of pollution. Its effects upon the ecosystem of a naturally eutrophic lake may prove catastrophic in the long term for under-water plants and hence for the lake animal life, as well as for reproduction of birds at Kuşçenneti.
- Multiplication of high-voltage lines, which are both unsightly and dangerous to large birds in flight.

I do not think that these considerations have received sufficient attention in the planning of the dam. In any event, it would be most regrettable if Lake Manyas were to be subjected to the influence of artificial factors governed by uncontrollable economic interests (and political ones as well, no doubt).

A technical and ecological investigation by independent (non-Turkish) specialists would be advisable before any decision is taken.

4.2 Lake Apolyont

The inspection on 15 June was perforce superficial and limited. In particular, I am sorry not to have seen the south-west zone (Kemalpaşa delta). I was nevertheless able to appreciate not only the very great beauty of the lake but also its particular ecological character, also largely untouched for the present, and various aspects of its bird life. Unlike Lake Manyas, Lake Apolyont appears to have remained largely oligotrophic over most of its extent.

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5. Conclusion

As the Kuscenneti National Park has preserved its qualities and its management remains satisfactory, I propose that the award of the European Diploma be renewed for a further period.

I consider that the renewal should be accompanied by a recommendation relating to the Kocagay River dam scheme and expressing the committee's anxiety in regard to the repercussions on the ecosystem of Lake Manyas.