

Biodiversity and Natural Resources Management Project in Camili Basin

Background

Located within the municipal borders of Borçka District in the Province of Artvin and declared as a first biosphere reserve of Turkey, the Camili basin is an ecological and cultural treasure which is hidden in Karçal Mountains for centuries. The basin, which from green valleys to high alpine meadows, has not been much impacted by human activities. With large natural ecosystems, old growth forests and humid climate the Camili basin has a temperate rain forests characteristics.



Photo: S.Eraydın



Natural and Cultural Values

Camili basin contains a wide variety of species and natural ecosystems linked across a considerable range of altitudes (350m-3500m).

The particular values for conservation objectives are old growth forests and temperate rain mixed forests like Caucasian spruce (*Picea orientalis*), Oriental beech (*Fagus orientalis*), Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), and Caucasian lime (*Tilia rubra* ssp. *caucasica*), alpine and subalpine ecosystems and aquatic communities. There are 990 flora species which 23 of them are endemics.



Photo: S.Eraydın

Camili basin hosts a near intact diversity of fauna typical of the area. The particular values as conservation priorities are genetically pure Caucasian Honey Bee Race, Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*), Chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*), Caucasian Black Grouse (*Tetrao mlokosiewiczi*), Caucasian Viper (*Vipera kaznakovi*), Caucasian Salamander (*Mertensiella caucasica*), Big Spotted Trout (*Salmo trutta macrostigma*) and migratory raptors.



Photo: S.Eraydın

The Camili area has been governed at various times by the Byzantine Empire, the Seljuk Empire, Mongols, the Ottoman Empire, Russians and Georgians . Notable archaeological and historical features in the Camili basin include the Kemer bridge at the entrance of Efeler village, the Iremi mosque in Maral village, the church in Uğur village, Tamara's bridge and two old prisons. Due to their isolation, the villagers have retained many old traditions, reflected in their livelihoods, in the design of houses and farmsteads, in the tools and materials they make and use. Traditional dances and old folk music culture still survive in the area; the villagers have recently formed a Polyphonic Elders' Chorus with a view to preserve traditional songs for future generations.



Photo:H.Baykal

The Camili Basin and the Project

Camili basin was one of the pilot regions of the Biological Diversity and Natural Resource Management Project, executed by the former Ministry of Environment and Forestry (later renamed as Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs) between 2000-2008, in collaboration with the World Bank and with the support of the United Nations Global Environment Facility. Also known as the “GEF Project”, the “Biological Diversity and Natural Resource Management Project” included many components from policy development to planning and from implementation to monitoring at local and national levels. At the national level, the project aimed to review and rationalize the legislation on the preservation of biological diversity and the sustainable management of natural resources, to reform the current management planning process for conservation areas by adopting globally accepted participative management planning processes, to improve organizational capacity, and to raise public awareness about biological diversity and the use of natural resources.

The project aimed to create models that would implement effective and participative management of conservation areas and sustainable use of natural resources at the area level, models that could be adopted by other conservation areas as well. As part of this project, a participatory Management Plan was initiated in the region in 2003. This management plan was shared at each step with interest groups and the residents of the villages in the basin. Separate meetings were held with women in the region to ensure their participation. At each village and in different neighborhoods of the larger villages, information events were held about the conservation goals, vision and regional mapping of the management plan. These events were also used to collect the views, recommendations and reactions of the local communities. Implementing the principle of governance, beekeeping, ecotourism, and agriculture and livestock committees were formed, which were in compliance with the conservation goals of the plan. These committees included elected representatives from each village, aiming to ensure the participatory implementation of the management plan. The management plan prepared in 2007 had a detailed program and a vision seeking to strike a balance between the old and the new, between global diversity and local development, and between respected traditions and inevitable change.

To achieve participatory management of biological diversity in the region and sustainable use of its natural resources, scientific studies were conducted and a series of events involving the local communities were held as part of the project. Beekeeping, honey production and ecotourism (hostels, guiding services) projects prepared by the people and civil society organizations of the region were selectively supported to encourage nature friendly economic activities. Technical and financial support provided by the small



Photo:S.Eraydın

grants program of the GEF Project helped improve the number and the quality of the family hostels in the region. Family hostels consist of traditional wooden structure houses with local architectural elements. Traditional houses were transformed into family hostels after minor restoration and repair. In addition to accommodation in clean rooms with great views, these hostels provide their guests with a warm and hospitable family environment. Residents of the basin are well aware of the importance of nature and nature conservation. Family hostels serve their guests rich menus consisting of local products. Most of the local food served in these hostels is either produced by the family itself or bought from neighbors, creating an economic flow benefiting everyone in the community. Traditional wooden houses are furnished to accommodate visitors to the basin. A survey conducted in the region showed that 99% of the visitors wanted to stay in traditional wooden houses. Reasons cited include warm environment, hospitality, getting to know traditional life and culture, clean rooms, and of course local foods.

Beekeeping has been a staple of the local economy in Camili basin for centuries. Prior to research and development activities led by TEMA, The Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosion, for Reforestation and the Protection of Natural Habitats, beekeeping was done using traditional methods and for honey production only. Following these research and development projects, it was found that bees in this region were Caucasian bees, one of the three important bee races in the world with a high honey yield.

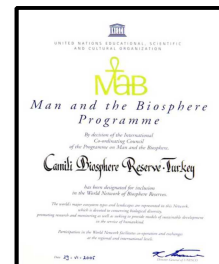
In addition, studies conducted showed that the genetic structure of the bees in this region had remained pure because foreign bees were not able to enter the area. The Caucasian bee species is important from a biological diversity viewpoint because it lives only in the Camili region in Turkey and because it is genetically pure.



Photo: F. Gumustekin

This potential of the basin resulted in the GEF Project paying special attention to the issue, and a beekeeping committee was established within the *Camili Environmental Protection and Development Association* with representatives from each village and bringing producers in the region together. In addition, many honey producers were supported via the small grants program of the project.

Following collaborative work by the former Ministry of Environment and Forestry(later renamed as Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs) and Turkish National Commission for UNESCO, a 27,152 hectares area of the Camili Basin was declared, because of its biological diversity, natural resources, and cultural and historical treasures, a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO on June 29, 2005 and included in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, and as the first biosphere reserve of Turkey.



There is real potential to increase honey production within limits of sustainability, and to use the Camili brand in the marketing of honey and other natural products. An important development in this regard was UNESCO's patenting and certifying of the organic honey and Caucasian queen bee products of the region in 2010. In addition, the name and the logo of the "Camili Biosphere Reserve" were registered by the Turkish Patent Institute under the name of the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, and the Ministry transferred the rights related to the use of this name and logo to producers in the basin. Production of queen bees has become an important source of livelihood in the basin.



There are many nature-friendly economic activities that support sustainable development in the region, such as the production of queen bees, organic honey and hazelnuts, hostel keeping, and providing guiding services, and the number of such activities is on the rise. With the increase in the importance of these activities, more and more people hailing from the region but residing elsewhere return to the

basin, especially during the summer. These activities constitute an important source of income for people residing year-round in the basin.

Camili Biosphere Reserve is also a tourist destination, both domestic and international, with its biological diversity and natural treasures, and the traditional way of life, hospitality, and accommodation it provides its visitors. Visited by thousands of domestic and international visitors, Camili Biosphere Reserve is a rare and successful example of how to combine preservation of cultural values with biological diversity, with a wide range of economic activities from hostel keeping to guiding services, and from producing queen bees to honey production.

Designation of Camili basin as a biosphere reserve contributed both to the preservation of the biological and cultural values of the basin at the national and international levels, and to the sustainable development of the region.

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