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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Group of Experts on
Protected Areas and Ecological Networks**

4th meeting
18-19 September 2012
Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France

**Draft Minutes of the second Emerald biogeographical seminar
for six West Balkan countries**

**2-4 November 2011
Hotel Princess, Bar, Montenegro**

*Document established
by the European Topic Centre for Biological Diversity*

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The seminar was chaired and opened by *Jan Plesnik*, Chair of the Bern Convention Standing Committee, with a welcoming speech by *Lidija Šcepahovic*, Environment Protection Agency of Montenegro.

Opening session

On behalf of the whole audience, *Jan Plesnik* expressed his warm thanks to *Lidija Šcepahovic*, *Vladan Bozovic* and *Vesna Novakovic* from the Environment Protection Agency of Monte Negro for kindly hosting the meeting in Bar and addressed apologies from *Elvana Ramaj* (representative of the Albanian Ministry of the Environment who had to cancel her participation at the very last minute) and from the representative of the European Land Owner Association. He mentioned the participation of two independent experts, (namely *Nikola Tvrkovic* and *Panayotis Dimopoulos*) and, later on, of a representative from Birdlife International (*Ian Burfield*) as well as from the European Commission (*Frank Vassen*). He explained the context of the seminar, stressing its importance as a milestone in the Emerald process in the West Balkans and a major step in the building of a comprehensive pan-European network of protected areas based on the same principles. In no way the assessment exercise should be considered as a punishment exercise but rather as a collaborative process to improve biodiversity knowledge for further action and nor should the seminar discussions lead to geopolitical considerations but strictly to scientific assessments. He acknowledged the fruitful partnership set up between the Council of Europe and the European Environment Agency and its European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity to support the Emerald process. He invited participants to the meeting to a tour de table for mutual introduction.

Iva Obretenova, Emerald project manager at the Council of Europe and Secretary of the Bern Convention Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Network, presented the broader Emerald context in which the seminar takes place. She mentioned different on-going processes which contribute to increased harmonisation between the Emerald and the Natura 2000 processes, such as:

- an harmonisation between the list of species included in Resolution 6 of the Bern Convention Stranding Committee and Annexes I to the Birds Directive and II to the Habitats Directive. A revised list has been prepared by the ETC/BD and will be presented for adoption at the next Standing Committee to the Bern Convention in early December. A similar exercise is planned for 2012, to ensure the harmonisation between the list of habitats in Resolution 4 of the Bern Convention and Annex I of the Habitats Directive.
- Following the request from some countries, an official “candidate Emerald site” status - for sites identified during the various Emerald projects and proposed to join the Network - has been decided upon by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention. A draft list of sites to become the official candidate Emerald sites should therefore be adopted by the Standing Committee at its forthcoming meeting in early December. In addition, a draft Recommendation on the protection of the official “candidate Emerald sites” will be also submitted to the Standing Committee.

She also informed on the progress in setting up the Emerald network in Switzerland, Norway and in seven Eastern European and Caucasus countries.

Dominique Richard, Manager of the ETC/BD stressed the importance of the seminar as including a genuine Emerald assessment exercise, following the preparatory one held in Paris. She explained the broader context of the European Environment Agency activities a part of which the West Balkan Emerald process is: the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) budget, which has been used to prepare and organise the two biogeographic seminars, aims at strengthening the European Environmental Information and Observation Network (EIONET) in the West Balkan countries also including reporting under the EEA core set of indicators. For biodiversity, protected areas are considered as the subject of priority indicators and a report on protected areas, based on these indicators, will be published by the EEA in 2012 as a contribution to the Rio + 20 process. The

Emerald activities in the West Balkans thus not only contributes to the building of a network of protected areas in compliance with the provisions of the Bern Convention but also to the further development of important biodiversity related reporting and indicators.

D. Richard indicated that she would probably participate in the West Balkans regional workshop to take place also in Bar on 28-29 November 2011, between EEA representatives and EIONET representatives of the West Balkan countries. The purpose of the meeting is to take stock of progress by the West Balkan countries under each activity funded by the IPA budget and to discuss priorities for the future two years. She will report on progress under the Emerald process in these countries and address needs for the future.

Introduction to the seminar

Otars Opermanis, Natura 2000 Senior Officer, explained the general organisation of the seminar, stressing the fact that probably not all species and habitats would be assessed due to lack of time and that in the case of bird taxa, this would be the first assessment of this type ever carried out by the ETC/BD. He addressed difficulties encountered by the ETC/BD in carrying out the background assessments caused by still remaining errors and inconsistencies in the databases delivered by countries.

On behalf of the European Habitats Forum, *Ildiko Arany* from CEEweb for Biodiversity addressed a message from NGOs (See in Annex I).

Assessment process

The discussion on sufficiency of representation of species and habitats in proposed ASCIs was then carried out species by species and habitat by habitat in each West Balkan country and in each biogeographic region (Alpine, Continental, Mediterranean and Pannonic), as follows:

- Proposals for **81 habitats were assessed, resulting in 985 assessments** (discussion led by *Doug Evans*). Assessments remain to be done for 26 habitat-types (all forests).
- All proposals for **fish (39 species, 514 assessments), reptiles and amphibians (19 species, 288 assessments), mammals (24 species, 359 assessments)** as well as **plants (31 species, 459 assessments)** were considered (discussion led by *Zelmira Sipkova*).
- Among invertebrates, only proposals for **butterflies (8 species, 121 assessments)** were considered (discussion led by *Zelmira Sipkova*). Assessments for 17 species remain to be done.
- All proposals for **birds were assessed (88 species, 539 assessments)** except Picidae, Passerines as well as a few other bird species (discussion led by *Otars Opermanis*). Therefore assessments for 36 species would remain to be done.

As an introduction to the assessment on birds, *Otars Opermanis* mentioned the note produced by the ETC/BD explaining how the assessment process builds upon the Important Birds Areas, although taking a species per species approach. *Ian Burfield* briefly explained the background on the Important Bird Areas programme and its use by the European Commission to assess progress in Member States' designation of Special Protection Areas under the Birds Directive. He also mentioned the launch of Birds in Europe 3 and stressed the opportunity provided for a broad participation from ornithologists across Europe in this process.

Conclusions of the assessments were compiled by *Marc Roekaerts*, consultant to ECNC, as a partner of ETC/BD. They are presented in excel tables attached to these minutes. An access version of the conclusions has also been prepared. Examples of assessments for habitats and for species are included in Annex IIa and IIb.

Overall **3 265 assessments were made** during the three-days meeting.

The details of the assessments are available at:

http://bd.eionet.europa.eu/file_exchange/Emerald_Nov2011_meeting

Conclusions of the seminar: next steps

Dominique Richard, Manager of the ETC/BD appreciated the well-prepared and enthusiastic involvement of the national teams during the three seminar days, as well as the very positive cooperation between national authorities and national NGOs which was witnessed. She further thanked the staff members of the ETC/BD core team and partners for their hard work to prepare the Seminar and for their excellent achievements during the past three days.

Concerning the immediate follow-up steps to the Seminar, *Dominique Richard* explained that:

- Country delegations are going to receive the final conclusions from the evaluation in the two weeks to come and feedback/comments from national delegations, if any, are welcome before the Christmas break.
- In terms of plans for the future, the most relevant step will be to leave some time to national authorities to work on the conclusions from the current seminar and to prepare new databases and identify new sites. A follow-up biogeographic Seminar could be envisaged in 2014.
- In terms of the habitats and species which were not covered by the seminar, she requested the national teams to complete the reference list for what was unfortunately not covered, due to lack of time. For the purpose the ETC/BD will send all delegations a table document to be filled in, together with the conclusions of the meeting
- National delegations are welcome to contact *Otars Opermanis* for any scientific questions which may arise and *Iva Obretenova* for any questions on legal and administrative issues.

Dominique Richard further urged the national representatives to contact their EEA National Focal Points in order to inform them on the positive outcomes of the Emerald biogeographical process, as well as on the need for the national teams to continue to work on the identification of new Emerald sites and most importantly on data gathering. She advised them to insist on the fact that the Emerald network constitution process in general and its biogeographic process in particular, are greatly facilitating and preparing the conditions for the implementation of Natura 2000 in EU Accession countries.

Concerning the future priority topics on the agenda of the EEA for the Balkans' region, D. Richard reminded again the participants about the meeting to take place in Bar (28-29 November 2011), gathering EEA representatives and EIONET representatives from the West Balkan countries. She further informed on her plans to present the work under the Emerald sites assessment at this meeting and to insist on the necessity that funds are dedicated for further data gathering and site identification at national level.

In conclusion, D. Richard reminded the national teams on the possibility to ask funding for their work on Emerald through the IPA financial mechanism and urged the countries to check the possibilities there, as the end of November appears as a deadline for requesting funds in that frame for the next two years.

Iva Obretenova, Bern Convention Secretariat, also thanked the participants for their hard work before and during the Seminar as well as all the efforts and support from the ETC/BD and its staff to the Emerald Network constitution process. She informed again about the important strategic development currently taking place regarding the harmonisation of the Emerald and Natura 2000 networks. She reminded on the fact that the sites proposals from the countries targeted in the seminar, are expected to be officially nominated as 'candidate Emerald sites' in early December by the forthcoming Standing Committee to the Bern Convention meeting.

Concerning the management of the future Emerald sites, I. Obretenova informed that 2012 will be dedicated to work on the guidelines on management and contributions from the countries to this exercise are welcome and expected by the Bern Convention Secretariat. She concluded by urging the national authorities to dedicate funds to the follow-up work of the national Emerald teams on the identification of possible new Emerald sites (according to the conclusions on the sufficiency of the current proposals) and to use the financial instruments offered by the European Union in particular. She informed the participants about the offer for technical and scientific support to national authorities, received from the NGO Oceana. The NGO works on the establishment of a Network of marine protected areas in the Mediterranean and expressed its will to contribute to the development of the marine part of the Emerald Network, by supporting national authorities.

In conclusion, Mr *Jan Plesnik*, Chair of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention, thanked all participants for their hard work, as well as the Agency of Environmental Protection of Montenegro for hosting the meeting and organising the short excursion in Petrovač. On behalf of the Bern Convention Standing Committee, he further expressed the deep gratitude to the ETC/BD and the EEA, for their long-term support to the Emerald Network constitution process, which is vital for the success of the Network setting-up.

Closing of the seminar

The meeting was closed at 17.45 on Friday 4 November.

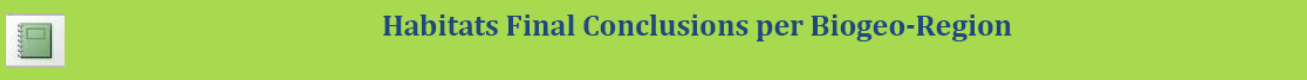
Annex I

Message from European Habitats Forum

"The Emerald Network started as a pilot exercise with pilot sites and the approach was at the beginning very different than now. Being aware that available scientific data are often scattered and old, and governments' capacities and financial resources have been and are low, NGOs have offered their partnership for governments and the ETC during future process. They are ready to contribute with collecting available information, gathering new information and help in establishment, management and monitoring of the Emerald network."

Annex IIa

Example of assessments made for habitats

																
CODE	Title	AL ALP	AL MED	BA ALP	BA CON	BA MED	HR ALP	HR CON	HR MED	ME ALP	ME MED	MK ALP	MK CON	RS ALP	RS CON	RS PAN
A1-141	Association with [Lithophyllum byssoides]		IN MAJ			A			SUF		IN MAJ					
A1-44	Communities of littoral caves and overhangs		IN MAJ			A			SUF		IN MAJ					
A2.61	Seagrass beds on littoral sediments		CD													
A2-5	Coastal saltmarshes and saline reedbeds		IN MOD			SR Ref			SUF		SR		CD			
A2-621	[Eleocharis] beds		IN MIN			A			A		SR					
A3	Infralittoral rock and other hard substrata		CD & SR			SR Ref			SUF		IN MAJ					
A4	Circalittoral rock and other hard substrata		IN MAJ			SR Ref			SR		SR					
A5	Sublittoral sediment		IN MAJ			SR			SR		IN MIN					
A6-911	Seeps in the deep-sea bed		A			A			A		SR Ref					
B1-3	Shifting coastal dunes		SUF			A			SUF		SUF					
B1-4	Coastal stable dune grassland (grey dunes)		SR Ref			A			A		IN MAJ					
B1-6	Coastal dune scrub		IN MAJ			A			A		SR Ref					
B1-8	Moist and wet dune slacks		SR Ref			A			A		SR Ref					
C1-1	Permanent oligotrophic lakes, ponds and pools	IN MIN	SR	IN MAJ	SR Ref	IN MAJ	A	A	A	IN MAJ	SR	IN MAJ	A	IN MIN	IN MIN	A
C1-222	Floating [Hydrocharis morsus-ranae] rafts	SR Ref	IN MIN	A	IN MAJ	A	A	A	A	A	SUF	SUF	IN MAJ	A	SR	SR

Annex IIb

Example of assessments made for species

Amphibians and Reptiles Conclusions per Country																	
Code	Species Name	AL ALP	AL MED	BA ALP	BA CON	BA MED	HR ALP	HR CON	HR MED	ME ALP	ME MED	ME NoR	MK ALP	MK CON	RS ALP	RS CON	RS PAN
1166	<i>Triturus cristatus</i>	CD	CD	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	IN MOD	IN MOD
1167	<i>Triturus carnifex</i>	SUF & CD	SUF & CD	IN MOD	IN MAJ	A	SUF	SUF	SUF	IN MOD	SUF		SUF	SR Ref	SUF	IN MOD	A
1169	<i>Salamandra salamandra aurorae</i>	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A		A	A	A	A	A
1171	<i>Triturus karelinii</i>	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A		A	SR	SR Ref	IN MOD	A
1186	<i>Proteus anguinus</i>	A	A	IN MAJ	IN MAJ	IN MOD	SUF	A	SUF	A	SR Ref		A	A	A	A	A
1188	<i>Bombina bombina</i>	A	A	A	IN MAJ	A	A	SUF	A	A	A		A	A	A	SUF	IN MOD
1193	<i>Bombina variegata</i>	IN MOD	IN MOD	IN MOD	IN MOD	IN MOD	SUF	IN MIN	SUF	IN MOD	IN MOD		SUF	IN MOD	SUF	IN MOD	SUF
1215	<i>Rana latastei</i>	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	SUF	A	A		A	A	A	A	A
1217	<i>Testudo hermanni</i>	SUF	SUF	SUF	A	IN MOD	A	A	IN MIN	CD	CD		IN MOD	IN MOD	SUF	IN MOD	A
1218	<i>Testudo marginata</i>	A	SR	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
1219	<i>Testudo graeca</i>	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A		SR Ref	IN MOD	A	SUF	A
1220	<i>Emys orbicularis</i>	IN MOD	IN MOD	IN MOD	IN MOD	IN MOD	A	IN MIN	SUF	CD	CD		SUF	IN MOD	IN MIN	IN MOD	IN MOD
1222	<i>Mauremys caspica</i>	A	IN MIN	A	A	A	A	A	SUF	A	CD		A	SR Ref	A	A	A
1224	<i>Caretta caretta</i>	A	IN MOD	A	A	A	A	A	SR Ref	A	CD		A	A	A	A	A