

ANNUAL REPORT FOR NATIONAL PARK POLONINY 2013¹,

State: **The Slovak Republic**
Name of the area: **National Park POLONINY (the “Poloniny NP”)**

Central authority concerned:

Name: Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic (the “Ministry”)
Division of Nature Protection and Landscape Development
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Authority responsible for its management:

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Natural heritage (general abiotic description: geomorphology, geology and hydrogeology, habitats, flora, fauna, landscape) — State of conservation

1.1. *Environment: changes or deterioration in the environment, of natural or anthropic origin, accidental or permanent, actual or anticipated*

There were no new significant changes or deterioration in the environment during the referred period.

1.2. *Flora and vegetation: changes in the plant population and in the vegetation cover:*

No significant changes.

1.3. *Fauna: changes in the sedentary or migratory populations, congregating and breeding places.*

No significant changes. In the referred period the **monitoring of the selected species populations** further continued. One example is the **project on inventory of selected bird species** (*Crex crex*, *Aquila pomarina*, *Alcedo atthis*, *Strix uralensis*, *Picus canus*, *Dendrocopos leucotos*, *Ficedula parva*, *Lanius excubitor*, *Bonasa bonasia*, *Caprimulgus europaeus*) within the Special Protected Areas to define the favourable conservation status of these species as a basis for development of SPAs management plans, identification of the current state and trends of their populations/habitats and verification and update of long-term monitoring methodology. In the referred period the coordinates of already existing monitoring transects were specified as well as new monitoring transects, monitoring results were processed and *Alcedo atthis* was mapped (all including the Bukovské vrchy SPA=Poloniny NP).

Within the **project on reintroduction of the European Bison to the Poloniny NP** bison were monitored using GPS collars with respect to the spatial activities (seasonal and daily mobility, location of their occurrence in connection with habitat types) as well as food composition and range size. Research activities on the European Bison were made also in cooperation with researchers from Italian universities and research institutions. Three calves were born in 2013, it is estimated there were 21 individuals in total.

¹ Reporting period is from September 1st, 2012 to August 31st, 2013

On occasion of the 50th anniversary of releasing the European Bison in neighbouring Bieszczady region the Polish Association for Development and Promotion of the Transcarpathian region "PRO CARPATHIA" started with implementation of a project "**Following a Track of the Carpathian European Bison**". The aim of this project is variety of informative-educational activities related to occurrence of the European Bison in the Carpathians. The Poloniny National Park Administration cooperated in this project.

3. Education and scientific interest

3.1.1 Arrangements for receiving and informing the public (building, booklets, maps, cards, etc.)

The existing visitor services - the Interpretation Centre Nova Sedlica, a network of tourist trails within the Poloniny NP, information boards in the main entrances to the NP and in the NP centre (Jalova - crossroad, Topola - crossroad, Ulic, Nova Sedlica, Osadne-Balnica, Ruske sedlo) **were continually used** in the referred period.

From many **environmental education activities** realized during the referred period we could mention:

- February 2013 – Forum with pupils of elementary schools on occasion of the **World Wetlands Day**.
- April - May 2013 – Competition and Exposition „**Following a track of mammals in forests of Poloniny**“ in the “House of Matica slovenská” in Snina for pupils of schools in Snina District and also for wide public.
- April 2013 - on occasion of the **Earth Day** – cultural and educational programme in Cultural Centre of Snina for pupils of elementary schools of Snina District, announcing of the results of competition „Following a track of mammals in forests of Poloniny“.
- May 2013 - **Day of Carpathian Parks** in village Ulič, which was connected with opening of summer tourist season and with **opening of Educational hiking trip Across Park of Dark Sky in Nová Sedlica**.
- June 2013 – Two days ~~lasting~~ **stay in the Information Centre Nová Sedlica** for 20 pupils accompanied by their teachers from two winning schools in the frame of the Competition “Following a track of mammals in forests of Poloniny”.
- June 2013 - Knowledge competition for pupils of elementary schools in District of Snina “**Poloniny NP in 101 questions and answers**“ was organized in cooperation with Leisure Centre in Snina, Association Čemerica Stakčín at Information Centre in Nová Sedlica. The aim was to deepen knowledge about nature, history and culture of the Poloniny NP. Competition is writing, verbal (source - brochure about National Park edited in own overhead by Administration of Poloniny NP for elementary schools in District of Snina) and practical (marked line in terrain with recognition of the wildlife species).
- June 2013 – **Bird’s Garden**, eco-programme for Elementary school Ubl’a aimed at cognition of life of birds, connected with games, competitions, showing of natural samples.
- July 2013 - Festival under Kremenec in Nová Sedlica enriched by eco-games and competitions for children, showing of natural samples.
- August 2013 - Two day **course for pedagogues** in Information Centre Nová Sedlica to programme „Aquawis“ - International environmental-education project of University Duisburg-Essen, Essen, and Natural Sciences faculty of Comenius University in Bratislava;
- **several lectures and guided tours in the Poloniny NP for elementary schools** of the Snina district.

3.1.2 Frequentation by visitors and behaviour (number, distribution in time and space)

No significant changes – it is estimated that about 30 000 people visited the area in the reporting period. Most of visitors came from Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic and visitation was concentrated over the summer season and in the Villages of Nová Sedlica and Ulič.

3.1.3 Special visits (distinguished persons, groups, etc.)

In October 2012 **Mr. Hervé Lethier, an independent expert of the Council of Europe**, visited the Poloniny National Park. This extraordinary mission was to evaluate the fulfilment of conditions and recommendations given by the Resolution No 2008/3.

3.2. Scientific research

3.2.1 Current or completed research (observation, experimentation, identification or inventory of the species listed in the appendices to the Bern Convention...)

Both elementary and applied research continued although less intensively:

- Monitoring of **meadow ecosystems** and of **invertebrates** (spiders, beetles, etc.) by the Institute of Landscape Ecology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences;
- Mapping of occurrence of **protected butterflies** *Maculinea* (*M. alcon*, *M. arion*, *M. rebeli*, etc.);
- Entomo-faunistic research of **butterflies** done by the Association for Understanding and Protection of Entomofauna;
- Research of **macrozoobentos** in catchment of the Stuzica River realized by the Comenius University in Bratislava – Faculty of Natural Sciences;
- Entomo-faunistic research of some **orders of insects** like beetles (*Coleoptera*), flies (*Diptera*), butterflies (*Lepidoptera*) and *Hymenoptera* done by the Slovak Entomological Association;
- Research aimed at protection of environment from **parasitooonoses** under the influence of climatic and social changes conducted by Institute of Parasitology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (collecting of ticks and pickup of excrement samples of large animals);
- Research of **ectoparasites on lizards** as the transmitters of naturally focal diseases done in cadastral area Kolonica by Institute of Parasitology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences;
- Mapping of the **otter** (*Lutra lutra*);
- Research and protection of **bats** by Association for Protection of Bats;
- Research of **parasitofauna on population of birds** by the University of Veterinary Medicine and Pharmacy in Kosice;
- Monitoring of **birds**;
- Monitoring of **large carnivores**;
- Research of **European bison** realised in cooperation with Italian researchers from University of Perugia, Udine and Parco Natura Viva;
- Study on regional development opportunities by the Institute of High Mountain Biology of Zilina University.

A **new research started on butterflies** (*Lepidoptera*) in unprotected landscape of District of Snina and in the Poloniny National Park, mainly in Natural Reserves Gazdoraň and Bzaná.

3.2.2 Scientific publications

J. Štofík, J. Bučko, M. Gič, M. Saniga, 2013: Time and spatial trends in the **brown bear** *Ursus arctos* population in Slovakia (1900-2010), in Folia oecologica, vol. 40, no. 1 (2013).

J. Štofík, J. Merganič, K. Merganičová, M. Saniga, 2013: Seasonal changes in food composition of the **brown bear** (*Ursus arctos*) from the edge of its occurrence – Eastern Carpathians (Slovakia), in Folia Zoologica – 62(3): 222-231.

M. Straka, J. Štofík, L. Paule, 2013: Inventory of **brown bears** in the Poloniny National Park (Slovakia) by combination of snow tracking and genetic identification of individuals, in Roczniki Biieszczadzkie 21 (2013), p. 234-247.

4. Site description (vulnerability, protection status, ownership, documentation)

4.1. Changes in legislation or regulations

Key legal norms in nature protection and hunting were subject to negotiation during the referred period, **leading to their adoption with validity in 2014²**. With respect to full wolf protection - kindly see recommendation No. 4 bellow.

5. Site management (management plans, budget and personnel)

² Namely: **amendment of the Act No 543/2002** Coll on Nature and Landscape Protection valid since January 2014, **amendment of Order No 344/2009** Coll. on Hunting valid since January 2014, **new Government Regulation No 7/2014** Coll. on Details and Content of the Application for Financial Compensation, on Way of Calculation of Financial Compensation and on Way of Determination of Rent and of Revenge for Contractual Management with respect to Restriction of Common Use of Land

Annual plans of the State Nature Conservancy of SR (the Poloniny NP is an organizational unit thereof are approved by the Ministry of Environment of SR). Kindly see below the condition No. 1 and recommendation No. 3, respectively.

II. INFLUENCE OF THE AWARD THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA OF PROTECTED AREAS

The European Diploma is important for the Poloniny NP to increase the status of the area.

III. CONDITIONS AND/OR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AWARD OR RENEWAL

5 conditions stated in the Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)3 on the renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas awarded to the Poloniny National Park (Slovakia):

Condition No. 1: Finalise and adopt the management plan for the park within two years of the renewal.

As agreed after the extraordinary mission of the Council of Europe in October 2012 the **preparation of a pilot project started** "to identify main priorities to solve crucial problems, to negotiate them at national and local levels and to prepare the action plan for the Poloniny National Park". The "action plan" would be the non-legal advisory document, until the new nature protection act and new "legal" management plan for the Poloniny National Park will be adopted. The log-frame of the pilot project was prepared by the State Nature Conservancy of SR and discussed/agreed with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of SR. On July 4th, 2013 the log-frame of the pilot project was submitted to the Council of Europe for the approval and on September 2013 presented during the 1st meeting of the Joint Management Committee. Details are given in the Annex I.

Condition No. 2: Start work on devising a new blueprint for forestry and hunting management in the diploma-holding area, taking greater account of the biological imperatives dictated by its European significance, within one year of the renewal. The national authorities shall supply a strategic plan for the sustainable development of the woodland during the next period of validity of the diploma and inform the Group of Specialists on the Diploma each year of the progress made. This blueprint shall include revision of the current hunting allocation in the diploma-holding area, ensuring that the functional units each cover a surface area of 3 000 to 4 000 hectares, consistent with the biology of large herbivores.

Forestry issues:

In the previous reports information was given on the **Swiss/Slovak-project "Development of nature conservation and protected areas in the Slovak Carpathians"** implemented by the State Nature Conservancy of SR. The Poloniny NP is a pilot area. The activities relevant to **forestry** are: to map natural forests, to propose their reclassification and to elaborate and issue the guidance on management of natural forests. Due to long-lasting public tender these activities have been delayed (they did not started in the referred period).

The Poloniny NP is "divided" mainly into 5 forestry units: Starina, Nižná Jablonka, Ulič, Topoľa and Zboj. The sixth **Snina** forestry unit is represented only by a small part (3,55 ha, not significantly relevant for the Poloniny NP).

In 2012 a renewal of forest care program for the **Nižná Jablonka forestry unit was approved** (valid for planning period 2012-2021). This unit represents ca 5 % (1 400 ha) of the area of the Poloniny NP. With respect to the **Starina forestry unit** (nearly half of surface area of the Poloniny NP) the renewal of forest care program was adopted in 2010 (valid for decennium 2010-2019). Details were given in the previous annual reports.

For the remaining 3 **forestry units - Ulič, Topoľa and Zboj** (which together represent approximately half of the forested area of the Poloniny NP) the renewal of the forest care program started for decennium 2014-2023) but it had not been finished yet. So it is not possible to quote exact figures concerning forest management like the decennial felling area, prescribed yield, and so on.

From the available data the following may be summarized:

1. Categorization of forests and the associated functional orientation of area. The National Forestry Centre proposed that a part of protective forests becomes the productive forests because of their new revision in the

process of preparing forest care programs. This change was also due to splitting of basic forest units (so called “JPRL”) caused by changed ownership. Comparison of forest categories within the Ulič, Topoľa and Zboj forestry units (within the Poloniny NP) between 2 decennia is given in the table below:

Category of forest	Previous decennium 2004 - 2013	Upcoming decennium 2014 – 2023	Difference	Change within the category of forest
	Surface area in ha			%
Productive forests	13 529,69	13 657,31	+127,62	+ 0,943 % increase
Forests of special purpose	872,85	861,53	-11,32	- 1,297 % decrease
Protective forests	1 304,94	1 188,64	-116,30	- 8,912 % decrease
Total:	15 707,48	15 707,48		

2. Applied silvicultural systems. According to the framework internal rules it is proposed in large part of the forestry units to shorten “rotation period”. This proposal is based on determination of exploitable age for beech forest taking into consideration current age composition of forest stands as well as process of forming of so called false tree hearth (causing hearth decay typical for the old beech trees).

3. The changed concept how to use the “succession” forests that during the previous period were not planned to be managed and they evolved naturally.

4. These factors significantly influence **the intensity of logging**. The forest care program is approved usually during the first year of its validity (e.g. in 2014). To get over the period from the beginning of year till time when this program is adopted there is a practice to approve the plan of management measures for the first year of validity respectively for this period. By a proposal of this plan there should be logged together nearly 135.000 m³ of wood in these three forestry units Ulič, Topoľa and Zboj first year. The decennial prescribed yield for the previous decennium 2004-2013 was to cut 376.500 m³ of wood. According to the Act No 326/2005 Coll. on Forestry as amended the volume of cutting stated in the forest care program is not of binding character (it is as recommendation and the actual decision is up to the competent forest manager). The same applies for the other aspects of implementing of the prescribed measures of the forest care program.

Game management:

The minimum acreage of a hunting ground for red deer game according to the hunting law (the Act No. 274/2009 Coll. on game management and the related ordinance of the Ministry of Agriculture SR No. 344/2009 Coll.) is 2 000 ha. But the hunting planning is provided for the whole Poloniny NP which belongs to the hunting region JXXIV. Poloninské Karpaty. Then the hunting plans are prescribed for hunting region. The hunting region has its regional advisory board on game management dealing with all relevant issues (planning for each game species and instructions for hunting associations). The Administration of the Poloniny NP participates in the newly established advisory board on game management. The hunting region is divided into 19 hunting grounds (hunting is subject to 10 year agreements with individual hunting associations who rented hunting right for land owners).

Condition No. 3: Create a functional network of protected areas during the next period of validity, meeting international standards in this area and complying with the national Law on Nature and Landscape Protection (notably sections 28 and 30).

As already explained in the previous report —the **process on establishing of 3 new nature reserves**³ (following the obligations from the European Diploma and the World Heritage Site) started (being undertaken by the Regional Environmental Office in Prešov in 2011), but was **stopped** due to strong opposition of stakeholders until finding a consensus. In addition (in 2012) NGO WOLF Forest Association submitted its own project aimed to establish protected area Mountains of Wolves and asked to abolish site from the list of the European Diploma (as well as of the UNESCO World Heritage List). Initiatives of new protected areas led to official letters of local stakeholders to the Council of Europe and the Minister of the Environment.

³ Borsukov vrch (499.1755 ha), Černiny (386.3699 ha) and Pramenisko Cirochy (279.9984 ha)

The Ministry **intensified negotiations to amend nature protection law** that introduced new economic instruments for stakeholders: The actual legal changes⁴, however happened after the referred period as well as the agreement with stakeholders to create coherent “without intervention” belt of forests at the border with Poland. Details are given in the Annex I.

Condition No. 4: Pursue the steps taken to purchase private forests and draw up a future purchasing plan with specific objectives, indicating the funding to be assigned to this purpose each year.

As mentioned in the above paragraph, new economic instruments and additional negotiations with land owners/users/leasers were introduced to the amendment of the nature protection law (adopted after the referred period). These created basis for possible action. Details are given in the Annex I

Condition No. 5: Set up a scientific programme inventorying and monitoring the large carnivore populations in the diploma-holding area; the national authorities shall submit the scientific protocol for that programme for opinion to the Group of Specialists on the Diploma within one year of the renewal.

The Project of the State Nature Conservancy of SR „**Research and monitoring of population of large carnivores and of the wildcat in Slovakia**“, supported by the EU structural funds (started in 2010, prolonged by 2014) **continued in the referred period**. In the reported period mainly monitoring of carnivores was undertaken and entrapping one bear to equip it with telemetry collar with possibility to collect GPS coordinates and to transmit them by GSM network. Gathered DNA samples were transported to the Technical University in Zvolen (to be analysed in 2014).

The specific research of a ranger within his work on dissertation **continued** with the **research of brown bear**. The aim is to gain more exact information on brown bear population in the Poloniny NP (numbers, structure) and its bionomics (spatial activity, feeding behaviour, etc.). Simultaneously **parasitological research** is done within this dissertation. Results are available at http://www.alparc.org/content/download/22130/209430/version/1/file/04_Stofik.pdf and also in published articles mentioned above in chapter 3.2.2.

Work of **expert group on management of large carnivores** (under the Ministry of the Environment of SR) **continued** tackling specifically issue of wolf. Details were provided in the last annual report.

7 recommendations stated in the Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)3

Recommendation No. 1: Give the management of the diploma-holding area greater responsibility for forestry and hunting matters and involve it in the corresponding decision-making process

Responsibilities of the State Nature Conservancy of SR are given by the law, the Administration of the Poloniny NP is one of its 25 units. The Administration of the Poloniny NP is not an actual manager of land - it is an expert body that provides written opinion for the decision making including the forestry/hunting and at present involved in several projects.

Recommendation No. 2: Consider the signature of a simplified agreement between the bodies directly responsible for managing the protected areas on the borders of the three neighbouring countries (Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine), based on the programming of joint activities;

In 2011 the bilateral agreement at the nature protection bodies was signed only with Ukraine (2011, the bilateral agreement between the State Nature Conservancy of SR and the Uzhansky NNP). Despite missing formal agreement with the Polish partner, the cooperation such as within established cross-border bilateral commissions continued.

There are also regular **meetings of commissions established within the official bilateral governmental**

⁴ **amendment of the Act No 543/2002 Coll on Nature and Landscape Protection** valid since January 2014 and **new Government Regulation No 7/2014 Coll. on Details and content of the Application for Financial Compensation, on Way of Calculation of Financial Compensation and on Way of Determination of Rent and of Revenge for Contractual Management** with respect to Restriction of Common Use of Land

agreements on environmental cooperation (in 1994 Slovak Government signed a bilateral agreement with the Government of Ukraine as well as the bilateral agreement with Poland respectively). State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic takes part to the meetings. Signature of a trilateral agreement on the management of the Východné Karpaty Trilateral Biosphere Reserve among Ukraine, Poland and Slovakia was prepared⁵, which includes cooperation on activities related also to the European diploma.

In addition there was an intensive **trilateral cooperation with respect to the UNESCO site** (Slovak Republic, Ukraine, Germany), communication mainly during trilateral meetings between 2007 and 2012, summarized (during meeting in November 2013, Germany) into the joint declaration of intent.

Recommendation No. 3: pursue efforts to upgrade human resources, in particular by taking on more technical staff and wardens, and very substantially step up funding, at least doubling the annual ratio per hectare for the period of validity of the diploma.

Budget provided to the Poloniny NP in 2013 was 227 782,77 EUR (financial sources including operating expenses and wages) and 4 514,73 EUR (financial sources only from projects without operating expenses and wages). **The number of staff members in 2013 was 12 persons.**

Recommendation No. 4: Give full protection to wolves and ban shooting them throughout the area of the national park.

Thanks to the intensive communication between the Ministry of the Environment of SR and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of SR **it was agreed to use the process of amendment of hunting legislation to give full protection to wolves in the Poloniny NP.** These changes happened after the referred period⁶. Details are given in the Annex I

In the referred period 3 wolves were shot⁷ in area of the Poloniny NP (in 1998 and 1999 – 0, 2000 – 4, 2001 – 2, 2002 – 0, 2003 – 4, 2004 – 3, 2005 – 3, 2006 – 7, 2007 – 6, 2008 – 5, 2009 – 8, 2010 – 3, 2011 – 3, 2012 – 3).

Recommendation No. 5: Strongly consider the designation of a hunting district within the park as a strict cynegetic reserve.

Hunting generally is **not allowed on ca 7 %** of the Poloniny NP, **“common hunting” is prohibited within the whole national park**, wolf was agreed to be a fully protected species (with perspective to better control condition of the species that are subject to wolf predation). More information on hunting is given above under condition No 2. Without fulfilling the condition No 2 the strict cynegetic reserve is not realistic. In this respect actual enforcement of the hunting regulations of the high importance as prohibition of hunting along the national park is not seen as the realistic solution by the bodies in charge of hunting.

Recommendation No. 6: Pursue the efforts to restore buildings in the traditional regional style; the park might devise a charter of architectural rules for local authorities.

In the frame of the above mentioned on-going Swiss/Slovak project financed from the Swiss financial mechanism the State Nature Conservancy of the SR **prepared the small-scale grants** aimed to support both natural and cultural heritage and soft-tourism. The grant was open in summer 2013, official results made public after the referred period⁸. Details are given in the Annex III.

The Ministry of the Environment of SR allocated funds to the competition “Village of the Year”, unfortunately no project from the Poloniny NP was submitted.

⁵ Signed on November 15th, 2013

⁶ Ordinance of the Ministry of Land Use SR No 344/2009 Coll. was amended on December 2013 with validity since January 2014 (giving full year protection to wolf within the Poloniny NP, its protective zone as well as to the adjacent Východné Karpaty Protected Landscape Area) based on this in no wolf was shot in 2013

⁷ None in 2013.

⁸ In September 2013 the results were made public on www.sopssr.sk – from 20 proposals for the Poloniny NP 10 were adopted and 10 refused. Details will be provided in the next annual report.

Recommendation No. 7: Start experimenting with the selective felling of beech forest in a state-owned woodland unit; the national authorities shall inform the Group of Specialists on the Diploma each year of the progress made.

This recommendation closely relates to the condition No. 2 and it is connected to the delayed activities of the Swiss/Slovak project. The communication with main forestry stakeholders has been intensified, concrete results would depend on cost-benefit analysis (considering income from forestry along with the other possible sources of local income).

February, 2014,

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