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**Group of Specialists on the  
European Diploma for Protected Areas**

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20-21 February 2024

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**APPRAISAL REPORT  
RENEWAL 2024**

**THE KUŞCENNETİ NATIONAL PARK  
(TÜRKİYE)**

**Appraisal report for the renewal of the European Diploma  
4-7 October 2023**

Expert report by  
Mr Peter Skoberne (Slovenia)  
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## 1. Introduction

The European Diploma for Protected Areas was awarded to the Kuşçenneti National Park in 1976<sup>1</sup> and renewed in 1981<sup>2</sup>, 1986<sup>3</sup>, 1991<sup>4</sup>, 1996<sup>5</sup>, (suspended 2001 – 2004), 2004<sup>6</sup>, 2007<sup>7</sup>, 2011<sup>8</sup>. The last renewal should have expired on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2021, but the validity of the Diploma was extended<sup>9</sup>, on an

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<sup>1</sup>Resolution Res(76)15 awarding the European Diploma to the Kuscenneti National Park (Turkey) - <https://rm.coe.int/native/090000168050c301>

<sup>2</sup> Resolution Res(81)15 26/05/1981 concerning the renewal of the European Diploma awarded to the Kuscenneti National Park (Turkey) - <https://rm.coe.int/native/09000016804c4b2e>

<sup>3</sup> Resolution Res(86)11 on the renewal of the European Diploma awarded to the Kuscenneti National Park (Turkey) - <https://rm.coe.int/native/0900001680508424>

<sup>4</sup> Resolution Res(91)14 on the renewal of the European Diploma awarded to the Kuscenneti National Park (Turkey) - <https://rm.coe.int/native/09000016804e0f40>

<sup>5</sup> Resolution Res(96)27 on the renewal of the European Diploma awarded to the Kuscenneti National Park (Turkey) - <https://rm.coe.int/native/09000016804d1d0a>

<sup>6</sup> Resolution ResDip(2004)1 on the renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas awarded to the Kuşçenneti national park (Turkey) - <https://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/kuscenneti>

<sup>7</sup> Resolution CM/ResDip(2007)4 on the renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas awarded to the Kuşçenneti National Park (Turkey) - <http://rm.coe.int/native/09000016805d4bef>

<sup>8</sup> Resolution CM/ResDip(2011)6 on the renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas awarded to the Kuşçenneti National Park (Turkey) - <http://rm.coe.int/native/09000016805cc5b6>

<sup>9</sup> Resolution CM/ResDip(2021)3 on the extension of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve (Belgium), Ekenäs Archipelago National Park (Tammisaari) (Finland), Seitsemien National Park (Finland), Camargue National Reserve (France), Vanoise National Park (France), Bayerischer Wald National Park (Germany), Siebengebirge Nature Reserve (Germany), Gran Paradiso National

exceptional basis (Covid-19), till 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024. To assess the opportunity to renew the Diploma an on-the-spot appraisal visit was undertaken in 2023.

The Secretariat of the Bern Convention organised the on-the-spot appraisal with two experts: Peter Skoberne with a confirmed experience with the European Diploma and a less experienced expert, Luc Hoogenstein. The main purpose of this approach is to transfer the spirit and tradition of the European Diploma to new experts in practice.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023: on-the-spot visit to the Kuşçenneti National Park

##### 5<sup>th</sup> October 2023: meetings and field trips:

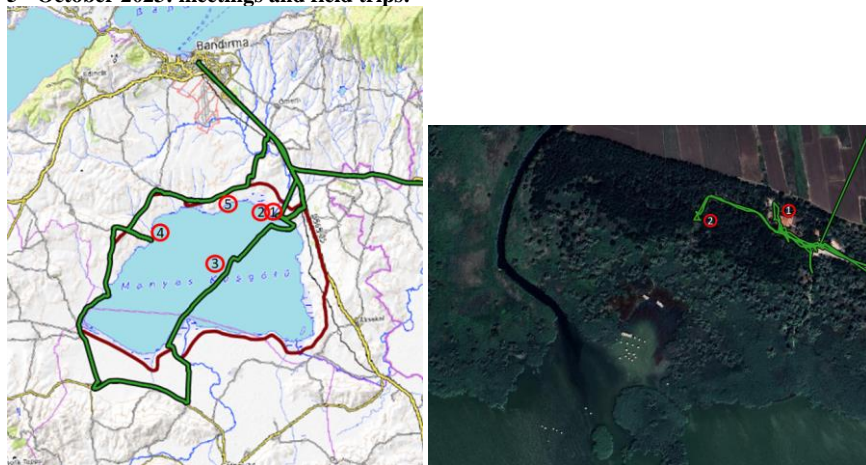


Figure 1: Meetings and field trip on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2023. The Ramsar area (red line) is in some places larger than the National Park. On the right picture platforms for Pelican breeding can be seen. 1 – Visitor center, 2 – Watch tower. (Source: World Database on Protected Areas, 2023; OpenStreetMap, Google Satellite)

- 1 – Kuşçenneti National Park Headquarters and visitor center, meeting with park staff, NGO representatives and representatives of the Ministry and Regional Directorate;
- 2 – educational trail with view tower;
- 3 – boat trip from Kuşçenneti to the delta of Kocaçay river;
- 4 – counting place for winter water birds (IWBR) at the NW shore of the lake;
- 5 – viewpoint: shore habitats;
- 1 – Kuşçenneti National Park visitor center: meeting with scientists.

##### 6<sup>th</sup> October 2023 meetings



Figure 2: Meetings on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2023.

- 1 – visit to the Mayor of Bandırma (Mr Tolga Tosun);
- 2 – visit to the Bandırma District Council (Mr Engin Aksakal);
- 3 – visit of the Bandırma Museum (archeological works, historical story of the Kuşçenneti wetland);
- 4 – Kuşçenneti National Park visitor center: meeting with local communities (not on the map);
- 5 – Kuşçenneti National Park visitor center: final discussion and conclusions (not on the map).

**List of people we met during our visit:**

*General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks:* Zerrin KARAARSLAN ÜNVER (Department of National Parks), Aybars ALTINPARMAK (Department of Nature Conservation), Aytaç ERGENE (Department of National Parks, Manager of Etude and Inventory Division), Serhan ÇAĞIRANKAYA (Department of Sensitive Areas, Manager of Wetlands Division), Dr. Burak TATAR (Department of Wildlife, Bern Convention National Focal Point).

*2<sup>nd</sup> Regional Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks:* Ali BOZKURT (Regional Director), Yunus AYDEMİR (Deputy Regional Director), Abdulkadir İNCİ (Manager of Wetlands Division), Zeynep Nur SEZER (Manager of National Parks Division).

*9<sup>th</sup> Regional Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks:* Dr Hatice YURTTAŞ ÇELİK (Biologist).

*Balıkesir Provincial Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks:* İlker BALDAN (Balıkesir Provincial Manager).

*Kuşçenneti National Park:* Ayşegül Coşkun AKPULAT (Manager of the National Park), Fulya ÖZEN (Forest Engineer, Mustafa HALİS (Technician), Zeynep BAKAL (Chemist), Perver ÇELİK (Environmental Engineer), Emine AKBAYIR DÜZMEKİK (Environmental Engineer).

*Balıkesir University, Department of Biology:* Associate Prof. Dr Dilek TÜRKER, Prof. Dr. Kemal ÇELİK.  
*Bandırma ONYEDİ Eylül University Department of Geography:* Prof. Dr Yılmaz ARI.

*Nature Research Association (NGO):* Dr İlker ÖZBAHAR.

The 2022<sup>10</sup> and 2023<sup>11</sup> annual reports, the last appraisal report<sup>12</sup> and publications as well as documents provided by the organisers of the visit were used as basic source of information.

**Acknowledgement:**

I would like to thank the organisers of the visit, in particular Ms Zerrin Karaarslan Ünver and her team, the National Park staff, as well as all others we met for the helpful, competent, enthusiastic, warm and very open assistance during our assessment mission.

## 2. General description, legal protection status and history



Logo of the National Park

The Kuşçenneti National Park is located south of the Bandırma in the North-west part of Türkiye. The main purpose of the park is to preserve and manage the lake Manyas and its ecosystems. Lake Manyas is a shallow (3 – 5 m), eutrophic lake of tectonic origin. It covers 16,40 ha. At northern shores and round the delta of Kocaçay river there are willow tress (*Salix alba*) stands, which are very suitable habitats for different animals, in particular birds. Additionally, there is a regular oscillation of water level. Floods in spring are important to prevent predators of nesting birds, whereas in summer water level is low.

Because of this specific natural conditions and geographical position, lake Manyas is an exceptional ornithological locality. It is important for arboreal nesting large waterfowl birds: e. g. the Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*), the Pygmy Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pygmaeus*), the Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*), and the Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*). Arboreal nesting locations for the Dalmatian Pelicans are scarce. To help them, a number of platforms have been raised a few meters above water level on the northern shore, which have proven to be successful. Other important breeding bird species in the park are the Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) and the Spur-winged Plover (*Vanellus spinosus*). The national park is located on the bird migration routes between Asia, Europe and Africa, so extremely important as a stopover for migratory birds. At this time at least 239 bird species have been recorded within the borders of the park which makes it one of the most important bird areas in Türkiye.

The ornithological value of the site was recognised in 1939 by a German zoologist, Curt Kosswig (1903–1982) and his wife Leonore. They set a biological station and started to study the area. They regarded the lake Manyas as a bird paradise, so the expression lake “Kuş Cenneti” (‘bird paradise’) was gradually introduced.

In 1959, 52 ha of the northern coast were declared as a National Park, called Bird Paradise National Park (Kuşçenneti National Park).

<sup>10</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/15-turkiye-kuscenneti-national-park/1680a9c5f8>

<sup>11</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/15-turkiye-kuscenneti-national-park-2781-0981-8889-1/1680ae2057>

<sup>12</sup> Sultana, J., 2010: Kuşçenneti National Park (Turkey), Renewal Expert Report, Council of Europe, doc. T-PVS/DE (2011) 3 - <https://rm.coe.int/convention-on-the-conservation-of-european-wildlife-and-natural-habita/16807462d7>



In 1975 and in 2005 the area of the National Park was enlarged gradually, and in 1994 listed as a Ramsar Convention wetland of international importance<sup>13</sup>.

The last enlargement of the protected area (17.058 ha) was in 2005 when the National Wetlands Commission approved Lake Kuş as Wetland Protection Area<sup>14</sup>. Additionally, since 1981 the lake and its immediate surroundings were granted First Degree Natural Protected Area Status<sup>14</sup>.

The Kuşçenneti National Park is important for cultural heritage, as well. In the Bandırma area there are archeological sites where artefacts from Old Bronze Age until recent times were found. The most important archeological site within the protected area are remainders of city Dascyleum, a satrapal center built after the Persian invasion of Anatolia.

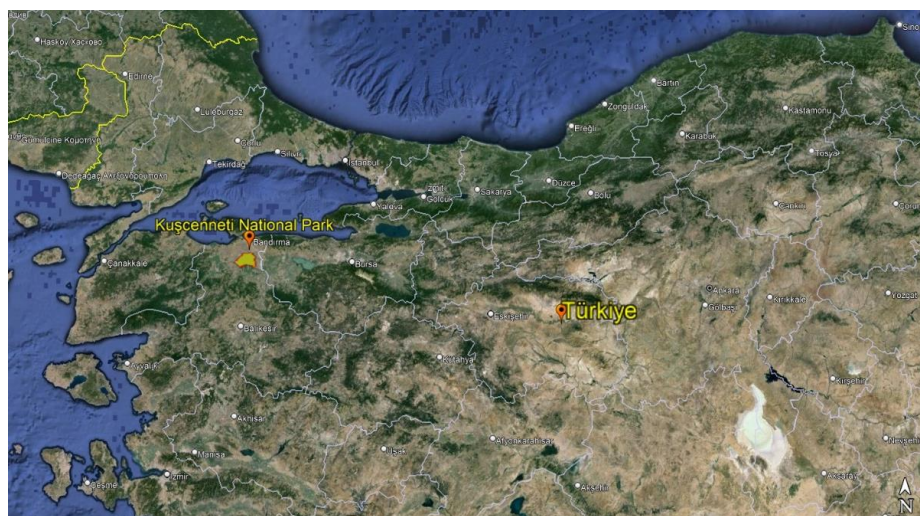


Figure 3: General situation of the Kuşçenneti National Park.

### 3. European interest and legal integrity

The Kuşçenneti National Park is an exceptional ornithological site, very important breeding area for Dalmatian Pelican, Eurasian Spoonbill and lots of other species which are rare or threatened within Europe and have been placed on the IUCN Red List for threatened species. The area is very important as a stopover site during bird migration for a large number of birds. A variety of waterfowl species winter on the lake. International importance is additionally proved by the designation of the lake Manyas (Lake Kuş) as a Ramsar site.

The National Park is protected under the Wetland law which is transposing obligations of the Ramsar Convention. There are 5 conservation zones with different protection regimes and a buffer zone spreading 2,5 km from the lake coast. In this way water dependant activities are under control, and the complete coastal area is protected. Activities in the buffer zone are strictly controlled.

In 2001 the European Diploma was suspended and in 2004 renewed under several conditions. The situation has improved since then. The legal status of the area and the situation in the field are satisfactory.

#### Conclusion:

<sup>13</sup> <https://rsis Ramsar.org/ris/660>

<sup>14</sup> <https://bolge2.tarimorman.gov.tr/Link/14/Milli-Parklarimiz>

**The Kuşçenneti National Park is of exceptional international significance and importance for the conservation of biological diversity in the North-western part of Türkiye. It is outstanding as a key breeding area for birds and an important site on a bird migration route.**

**Existing legal regulations are considered as a solid basis for the future conservation of the Diploma holding area.**

#### 4. Management

##### **Institutional arrangements**

The administration is organised at national, regional, district and local level by the government. There is a very efficient vertical organisation. The National Park administration is closely connected with the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks in Ankara and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regional Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks in Bursa.

There is an excellent cooperation at district level, as well. Bandırma District is aware of the importance and natural assets of the Kuşçenneti National Park. Since 1987 a yearly Bandırma Kuşçenneti Festival is organised making publicity for the National Park. Bandırma District is financially supporting part of the National Park staff.

Even more tight connections exist at local level. There is a high acceptance of the National Park within the local community. They are conscious of their dependence on nature for living: mostly fishery and crops. As they are living from the resources of the lake, they want it protected. Besides that, thanks to the National Park they have some additional income (marketing their home products, guided field tours on the lake, working for the Park in different activities or as staff members).

In the National Park administration there are 16 employees (6 of them are supported by the Bandırma District).

At the moment financial support is adequate and stable.

##### **Main management challenges**

The basic long-term documents for the management of the National Park are the Kuşçenneti National Park Long-Term Development Plan and the Wetland Management Plan (approved in 2019). They are updated every 10 years. 5-year action plans provide guidance for annual work plans.

The management plan is very detailed and is addressing all main challenges. The key challenges are:

##### Maintaining habitats for bird breeding colonies

This is the main task, closely related to all other topics such as water regime and quality, control of visits and human activities at the lake and near the lake.

Special focus is given to nesting and breeding bird colonies. At the Sığircı Delta several platforms to support breeding of Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) were built. The results are promising. Building on the experience, they plan to improve the platforms to become more suitable for breeding, better adjustable to the changes of water level and easier to maintain.

##### Water regime

Natural seasonal fluctuation (3 m difference) is a key phenomenon, crucial for nesting, as is the high water level best prevents from predators.

The General Directorate of State Hydraulic Works is regularly monitoring the water level. In case that there are deviations from natural patterns, they can regulate the water level through the dams on the tributaries.

In the future we can expect more disturbances in the water regime caused by climate change (less precipitations, seasonal changes) and increase of water demand for agriculture. This should be taken into account when updating management plans.

##### Quality of the water

The General Directorate of State Hydraulic Works is regularly monitoring the water quality in line with the management plan. As the lake is shallow and eutrophic it is important to further monitor above all nitrogen and heavy metals. Next to that, the visibility in the water is highly influenced by the Prussian carp



(*Carassius gibelio*). Prussian carps are mainly benthivorous and seek their food mainly in or near the water soil. This leads to clouding of the water column, preventing sunlight from penetrating too deeply into the water. This has a direct negative effect on the possibilities for the development of water vegetation. It is important as well to monitor water temperatures following relation to climate change and its effects on the lake ecosystem.

#### Invasive alien species

The main challenge concerning invasive species is the Prussian carp (*Carassius gibelio*). There is no way for eradicating it from the lake, the only way is to actively control the population. The species is well adapted to low water levels in summertime and can survive at low oxygen levels. Many natural predators such as Dalmatian Pelican, herons and both Cormorant species forage on the Prussian carps but have no effect on the abundance of the carps. The situation is regularly monitored by the District Agricultural Directorate. There is an agreement with local fishermen to fish deliberately this species.

#### Human activities on the lake

At the lake no recreational activities are allowed (boating, sailing, fishing, bathing, etc.). The only exception are local fishermen and monitoring activities. Fishermen are allowed to use boats and to fish but are not allowed to enter near the sensitive ornithological areas like the Dalmatian Pelican breeding sites. This is a good approach. Local fishermen are carrying out some management measures (e. g. removal of invasive alien species) and continue their traditional life style, which is of great importance for the acceptance of the National Park.

#### Surveillance

The National Park staff is carrying out surveillance, as well. There are two forest guards specially assigned to that task. Access to the lake in the area of both deltas is rather difficult and not attractive for usual visitors. The main problem could be people specially interested in birds (either photographing or some criminal motivations – eggs removal). They are seldom problems with illegal fishing or disturbing the ornithological areas. At the Sığircı Delta the surveillance is easier because of the vicinity of the Headquarters.

The surveillance at the Kocaçay Delta is more problematic. It has been solved with a camera system. This solution is generally used for the surveillance of the whole lake.

#### Research

This area is very interesting for science, so there is a lot of research from universities and institutes in Türkiye and abroad. Details are presented in the last annual report (2023).

#### Camera system

A very efficient camera system was installed in the Visitor Centre of the National Park. Currently there are 8 cameras in the field. They are energetically autonomous (solar panels and wind turbine for dark periods), with great resolution (4 megapixel) and with 32x optical zoom. They cover 360 degrees and can be fully operated from the Headquarters.



Figure 4: Locations of cameras, operated from the Headquarters (Kuşçenneti National Park, 2023).

It is a marvelous achievement for the work of the National Park staff and can be recommended for other protected areas.

Beside surveillance, it is a very non-aggressive tool for bird watching. It can be used for monitoring in a very systematic way (need for monitoring protocols).

Another effective use is in awareness raising and education. Visitors can experience the 'big picture', watch birds and the habitat from the watch tower and then experience in great detail live pictures in the Visitor Center.

#### Visitors' management and education

Visits are limited to the Visitor Centre and a short nature trail. In this way there is practical no disturbance to the natural systems of the lake. Despite this fact, visitors can experience all the main characteristics of the area and learn a lot about biodiversity. The combination of the visit of the watch tower and the camera system is convincing and astonishing. During the breeding season, the watch tower is closed for visitors. Visitors are mostly Turkish people, whether from nearby towns or tourists which stop on their way during the travel. The National Park staff is systematically working with schools. School groups are regularly visiting the area and staff is trained to deliver adequate information about nature, importance of biodiversity and nature conservation.

Number of visitors has been raising till the Covid-19 pandemic. Today the number of visitors is gradually recovering.

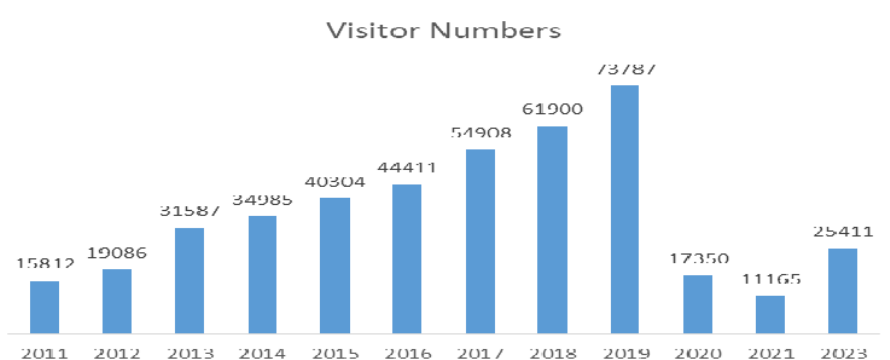


Figure 5: Number of visitors in the period 2011 – 2023 (Annual report, 2023).

**Conclusion:**

**Management is in place and is operational.**

**5. Review of the conditions and recommendations of the Resolution CM/ResDip(2011)6 on the renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas awarded to the Kuşçenneti National Park (Türkiye)**

**Condition 1: finalise the revised management plan within one year and commence implementation of all actions and conditions found therein.**

In 2019, the Kuşçenneti National Park Long-Term Development Plan and Wetland Management Plan were approved and main activities implemented within the time plan. A revision of the plan is scheduled for 2028. Concrete activities are defined by the Action Plan which should be revised by the end of 2024 for next five years.

The condition is fulfilled and should be replaced by a recommendation regarding the action plan.

**Condition 2: submit any development project regarding the lake, its shores and tributaries, or concerning agricultural or industrial facilities, to a rigorous environmental impact study, the conclusions of which should be communicated to the Council of Europe.**

The existing legal status of the National Park prohibits any agricultural or industrial facilities within the core zone. In the buffer zone all facilities are permitted according to the Regulation on Conservation of Wetlands and Kuşçenneti National Park Long Term Development Plan and Wetland Management Plan. New applications for high-capacity stock farming (e. g. poultry) are not allowed.

In light of the existing legal status, the condition can be dropped.

**Condition 3: regularly monitor the breeding bird population of the park, and carry out research on the dynamics of these populations particularly at Sığircı Delta and Kocaçay Delta.**

Since 2010 a systematic monitoring of birds is established. They are 12 observation points around the lake, with a special emphasize on the Sığircı Delta and Kocaçay Delta. There are other monitoring activities like International Waterbird Census (Wetlands International). Through an IPA project some action plans for particular birds will be prepared and monitoring introduced in a more systematic way.

**Condition 4: continue efforts to control pollution caused by poultry and livestock farming and monitor continually the water quality of the lake and of the streams flowing into it.**

The water quality control of Sığircı, Kocaçay and Karadere Rivers are monitored by the General Directorate of State Hydraulic Works according to the management plan. There are no farming facilities

within the core National Park area. Existing facilities within the buffer zone are operating under the conditions in the management plan and no new facilities are allowed to be built. The condition can be dropped, but the monitoring of water quality should continue.

#### Recommendations:

##### **Recommendation 1: increase the number of staff to meet the increased workload due to the park's enlargement.**

The number of park staff raised (currently 16). No urgent need for further increase, however, we can anticipate that numerous activities in the management plan will trigger some needs in future.

##### **Recommendation 2: ensure the natural fluctuations in the lake's water level, including spring flooding and the drying up of the shoreline in summer.**

This is a permanent recommendation, as natural fluctuation is the key driver for maintaining the special conditions of the delta ecosystem. It is likely that this could be influenced by climate change or demands from the agriculture. At a smaller scale, it could be compensated by water control at dams on tributaries.

##### **Recommendation 3: set up a small wardening unit on the southern shore of the lake (in the Kocaçay Delta area) to guarantee the protection of the area.**

With the introduction of the camera system there is no need for establishment of the dislocated wardening unit.

#### Issues not covered by previous recommendations

##### **Climate change**

Recommendation No. 206 (2019) of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention, adopted on 6 December 2019, on nature-based solutions and management of protected areas in the face of climate change, is addressing the European Diploma, as following:

- Ensure adaptive management in the context of climate change is included, as appropriate, in Resolutions for the award or renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas (EDPA);
- Support the involvement of Emerald Network and EDPA sites in testing ways of scaling up and transferring nature-based solutions, as a response to climate change and for the prevention of natural disasters.

Managing authorities are aware of possible effects of climate change on the lake ecosystem. The lake is shallow and there is a large seasonal oscillation of water level. Irregularities in precipitation (longer dry periods, less rain and higher temperature can influence the fragile water ecosystem.

They are regularly and carefully monitoring the parameters of the lake ecosystem, such as the water level, temperature, oxygen, nitrates, heavy metals. At the moment the only possibility is to regulate the water flow of the tributaries.

Commented [HM1]: What do you mean? Can you please rephrase?

##### **European Diploma visibility**

We regularly pay attention to the visibility of the European Diploma on the spot. The European Diploma is regularly mentioned, but instead of the European Diploma logo, the logo of the Council of Europe is used. Gradually, the logo should be changed.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

*We therefore recommend to the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas and to the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention to renew the European Diploma of the Kuşçenneti National Park for the next 10 years.*

In addition, the following **recommendations** should be attached to the renewal:

**Recommendations:**

1. Adopt as soon as possible the action plan and secure financial means for its implementation;
2. Monitor the effects of climate change on species and habitats and ensure findings are considered in the management of the area;
3. Maintain and strengthen the good relations with the local and the district authorities;
4. Further ensure the natural fluctuations in the lake's water level, including spring flooding and the drying up of the shoreline in summer;
5. Continue monitoring the water quality and activities around the lake which could have an influence on the water quality;
6. Further develop the camera system, establish monitoring schemes using cameras, enhance their role in educational and visitors programmes;
7. Gradually replace the Council of Europe logo with the European Diploma logo in all information material and brochures, and explain the relevance of the Diploma wherever appropriate, in particular on the website, in the visitors' centre, and on information boards in the National Park.