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NATURAL HABITATS (CDPE)

Committee of Experts - Protected Areas

ON-THE-SPOT APPRAISAL AT THE
GORGE OF SAMARIA NATIONAL PARK
(Greece)

by

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1. Introduction

The European Diploma was first awarded to the Samaria National Park in 1979. This is therefore the second on-the-spot appraisal of the Park.

Before our visit to the Park from 21 to 24 June 1987, we received the following documentation:

- Resolution (85) 9 concerning the renewal of the European Diploma awarded to the Gorge of Samaria National Park (Greece);
- Mr Ribaut's report (SN-ZP (83) 35);
- Mr Plattner's report (SN-ZP (83) 36);
- the Park's annual report for 1986 (SN-ZP (87) 18);
- Regulations, Resolution (73) 4.

The consultant was accompanied by Mr Eladio Fernandez-Galiano of the Environment Conservation and Management Division at the Council of Europe; during the visit he met:

- Mr Costas Kassioumis, Head of the National Parks Section at the Ministry of Agriculture in Athens;
- Mr Basilis Kasiotakis, Head of the Forest Directorate of Hania;
- Mr Thomas Roussos, from the Forest Inspectorate of Crete at Iraklion;
- Mr George Tzitimakis, Mayor of Agia Roumeli;
- Mr Manolis Manolidakis, Head of Park staff;
- Mr Michtalis Morakis, guard at the village of Samaria;
- Miss Smaragda Adamandiadou, specialist at the Information Centre;
- Mr Mikos Katsicas, specialist at the Information Centre;
- Mrs Helene Jannopoulou-Akyla, specialist at the Information Centre.

As the Park's natural features and general management are described in previous reports and Council of Europe booklet no. 19 on the award of the Diploma, we shall not reiterate them here, but shall confine ourselves to comments prompted by the appraisal. We would nevertheless mention the hitherto unrecorded presence of the bearded vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*); there are an estimated 12-15 pairs still nesting on Crete, of which 2 are in the Park. In European terms this is of great importance, and Crete would appear to be one of the last major refuges of the species in Europe.

2. Result of the appraisal

We shall refer principally to Resolution (85) 9 concerning the renewal of the award.

2.1 Compiling a management plan

Mr Kassioumis said a management plan had been drafted in 1986. It took account of local natural conditions, sought to answer the main questions raised, and included a medium-term programme. Efforts were to be concentrated on setting up an Information Centre. The plan had not yet been approved and we were not given further details. One of the measures currently under consideration is for the Park's administration to remain within the Forest Directorate as at present, but for it to form an independent section. It would then be possible to recruit staff with training in natural sciences. The management plan would also lay down clear guidelines on the demarcation of a core area and a buffer area and on the protection measures to be applied in them; it would also describe the possibility of extending the core area.

2.2 Information policy

At present there is a brief introduction to the natural features of the Park near the main entrance. In several places inside the Park there are information boards displaying the regulations and giving a history of Samaria. Visitors are also given a copy of the regulations. The educational trail called for along the path through the gorge has not yet been created, although it is fully justified by the increasing number of visitors. We saw the future Information Centre, which is currently under construction and will probably be open to the public in 1988. The building is close to the Park entrance. The biologists in charge of the project accompanied us on our visit and we had many discussions.

When the Information Centre is open it will be possible to distribute or sell documentation to visitors. The booklets currently available are printed privately. To judge by the comments we heard and saw in the Park's visitor's book, most visitors are German-speaking tourists. This will have to be taken into account in equipping the Centre and compiling information material. We suggest that such material should be printed in Greek, English and German. Care will have to be taken that the information provided at the Centre and on site is complementary, eg signs in situ giving the names of the main species of tree and bush, putting up information boards concerning geology, chapels, etc in appropriate places. It is intended to charge between US\$ 1. and US\$1.50. This would appear justified in view of local conditions, as long as the proceeds are used to improve facilities at the Park, particularly as regards information.

2.3 The wild goat problem

During our visit, at dusk, when the visitors had left, we observed two female goats, each with a kid. One of the goats was of the domestic black variety. There are at present some 400 wild goats. We cannot gauge the danger of cross-breeding. In order to prevent it by inhibiting contact with domestic goats, a long fence has been erected in the upper part of the Park, but not in the lower part, where the danger is equally great. The wild goats are probably the most distinctive feature of the Park, apart from its scenic beauty. A proper study must be made of them and appropriate conclusions drawn.

2.4 Research programme on the Park

The national and local authorities responsible for national parks in Greece are short of staff trained in the natural sciences. It is therefore difficult to gather the basic documentation needed to shape nature conservation measures. As this shortcoming can scarcely be made good in the short term, we suggest finding other solutions for carrying out research. A pragmatic approach might be to co-operate with Greek or foreign universities, which as part of their courses could compile and regularly update detailed inventories and propose practical conservation action where it was deemed necessary and beneficial. This might be particularly attractive to universities in central or northern Europe. It would not involve a great deal of expense for the Park.

2.5 Other comments on management of the Park

The people we spoke to, and we ourselves, believe that the present Park regulations and statutory provisions are sufficient, as is the Park's appropriation, which at present amounts to 20 million drachma a year, excluding the salaries of the 4 permanent wardens (the 1987 appropriation amounts to 40 million drachma because of building the Information Centre). Relations with local institutions are good.

The number of visitors is almost a quarter of a million a year. During the main tourist season, there are almost 2000 visitors to the Park each day. The Park and its facilities do not seem to be suffering; visitors hardly ever stray from the marked path, along which the wardens are posted. The Park is clean both inside and out. Visitors are disciplined, but nevertheless some 300kg of rubbish have to be removed by donkey each day. At a later stage, would it not be a good idea for visitors to take their rubbish back to the entrance themselves?

All the Park's fittings are well integrated (signs, buildings, rubbish bins, etc). The overhead telephone line and the Agios Roumeli drinking water main, which in the lower part of the Park consists of 4 exposed tubes, are rather obtrusive; if a better solution were suggested, it would have to be submitted to the local authorities for their approval.

A further point is that private developers want to build hotels close to the upper entrance of the Park. The authorities would be well advised to set such schemes in the context of a regional development plan. The renovation work planned inside the Park is a praiseworthy initiative; the main feature is the restoration of an old water-driven mill and other buildings at Samaria for use as a museum of old farming methods.

3. Conclusions

We note that there has been no deterioration since the last report in 1983; indeed the building of the Information Centre and other projects are signs of positive development. There is also a feeling that the local forestry service actively supports its Park. I therefore have no hesitation in recommending that the Diploma be renewed for a further five years.

The following recommendations reflect the high standard desirable for all parks to which the Diploma is awarded:

- It would be preferable to draw up a plan for the conservation, use, maintenance and equipping of the Samaria National Park which includes clear short-, medium- and long-term guidelines on the research programme, the demarcation of the protected area, the status of the various areas, administration, fittings, and information policy.
- Implementation of an integrated information policy at the Information Centre and along the path, in the form of an educational trail and booklets printed in the main visitor languages.