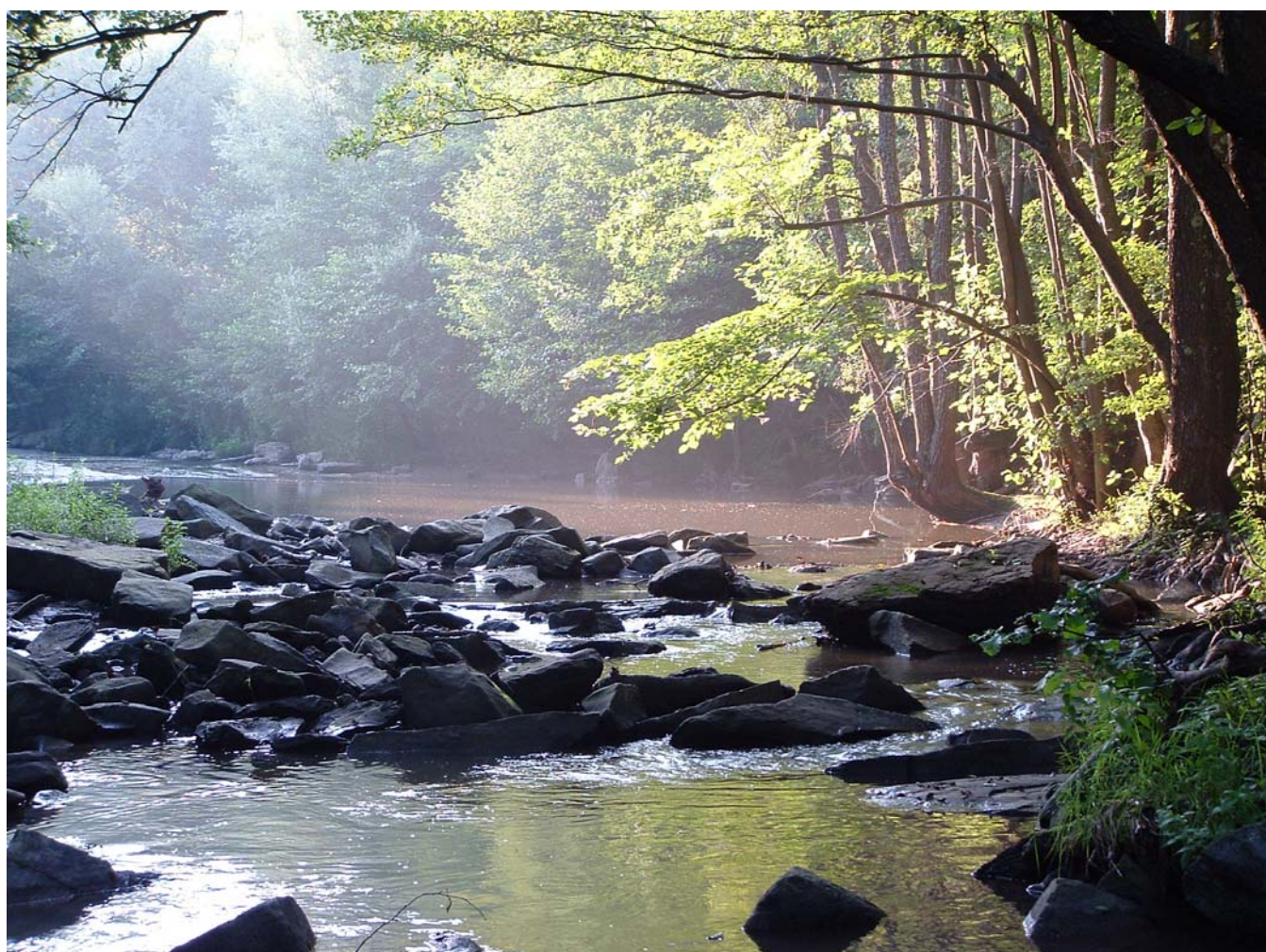




# ANNUAL REPORT 2006



Kotel Mountain, Bulgaria (Photo: archive of Fund for the Wild FLORA & FAUNA)

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## The EECONET Action Fund in summary

The EECONET Action Fund (EAF) operates as an independent fund for urgent conservation actions under the umbrella of NatureNet Europe. It is a joint fund of EUCC - The Coastal Union, EUROSITE (European union of site management organisations), Euronatur (European Natural Heritage Fund) and the ECNC (European Centre for Nature Conservation). The EAF is governed by a Board consisting of board members representing EUCC, EUROSITE, Euronatur, ECNC and an independent President. The EAF Secretariat is hosted and supported by EUCC - The Coastal Union in Leiden, the Netherlands.

*The Board of Directors are :*

President: Mr. Wolfgang Fremuth (Frankfurt Zoological Society),

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*The Secretariat* is represented by Dr Alan Pickaver and Ms Daniela van Elburg (EUCC-The Coastal Union)

*Observer:* Mr. Marc Hoogeslag (Dutch Committee of IUCN)

The goal of the EAF is to fund third parties (semi-state governmental organisations e.g. National Parks, and non-governmental organisations) to buy or lease important natural sites in Central and Eastern Europe as a means of securing biodiversity and landscape protection in order to contribute to the Pan European Ecological Network.

***To date, 158,993 hectares of land  
have been protected in 15 countries  
through 84 projects.***

Since its establishing in 1995, the Fund has been supported throughout by the Dutch government, the Dutch Committee of IUCN (NC-IUCN), the Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) and occasionally by the Dutch Stichting DOEN, the German government and the WWF.

**If you wish to apply for support to the EAF, please find the application details at [www.eeconet.org](http://www.eeconet.org)**



A grassland with *Linum hirsutum* population at Beckovske Skalice, Slovakia. (Photo: archive Pre Prirodu)

## Project cases

### The Conservation of Thermophilous Habitats at Tematínske Hills in Slovakia.

*The project is implemented by Association For Nature (OZ Pre Prirodu)*

#### Project Background

Tematínske Hills (approx. 2500 ha) are part of the Carpathian mountain ridge Považský Inovec Mountains. The southern part of Tematínske Hills faces the Pannonic lowland. The rich biodiversity of the area is influenced by mixing of Pannonic and Carpathian elements. It is an area with outstanding natural values and is included in EECNET as a core area of European importance, and during the implementation of the project, the whole area has been assigned as Natura 2000.

There are three nature reserves in the area: NNR Tematínska lesostep, NNR Javorník and NR Káživrch. Object of this project, are steppe and semi-steppe xerophilous and thermophilous grasslands and open forest habitats (non-productive forest land), which are of European importance. Some of the habitats are natural and have come into existence in the ice periods, some are semi-natural, influenced by human activities as clearing of forests and grazing. These habitats are extremely rich in plant and animal species of Mediterranean origin which survive on the northern most edge of their area in Europe. They are refuges for endangered, threatened and rare species of European and national importance; e.g. plant species: *Dianthus Lumnitzerii*, *Pulsatilla grandis*; *Dictamnus albus*, *Daphne cneorum*, *Stipa* sp., *Draba lasiocarpa*, *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, etc.; Mediterranean invertebrates: *Saga pedo*, *Tibicen heamatodes*, *Mantis religiosa*; snakes *Coronella austriaca*, *Elaphe longissima*; birds *Aquila heliaca* (Imperial eagle), etc. In the last decades there has been significant decline of habitats because of negative human impact and secondary succession. About forty years ago the forest management in the area carried out a project of anti-erosion measures. Plantations of non-native wood species, as pine (*Pinus nigra*) and ash (*Fraxinus*

*ornus*) were planted on many of these species rich grasslands. At that time conservation efforts in the area were weak and could not prevent the afforestation. Since the afforestation, some localities were overgrown by pines and became lost. The rest of these habitats are more or less threatened by succession towards forest communities caused by aggressive non-native species (mainly *Pinus nigra*). Loss of open habitats causes an irreversible loss of populations of rare plants and invertebrates and threatens the existence of these „islands of biodiversity“.

Beckovské Skalice area (30 ha) is located at the northwestern edge of Tematínske Hills. It is characterised with an outstanding diversity of species and habitats. Examples of rare plant and animal species include: *Adonis vernalis*, *Stipa* sp., *Linum hirsutum*, orchids species e.g. *Orchis militaris*, *O. tridentata*, *O. purpurea*; Mediterranean invertebrates e.g. *Belomicrus italicus*, butterflies of European importance, e.g. *Colias myrmedone* (extremely endangered). In the past, a half of the area was extensively farmed, but during the last decades the area became abandoned. Due to secondary succession the open parts (meadows, pastures) became overgrown by bushes and non-native locust trees (*Robinia pseudoaccacia*) and populations of rare species, for example orchids were decreasing. Attempts to protect the area by designating it as state nature reserve and introduce conservation management to halt secondary succession in 1980s were unsuccessful due to lack of interest, funding and capacity.

The aim of the project was conservation of species rich dry grasslands at Tematínske Hills and Beckovské Skalice areas by means of leasing and purchasing of land, implementation of urgent conservation measures and further ensuring of regular conservation management.

### Implementation

The project was implemented in the period 2000-2006. At both project sites, Tematínske Hills and Beckovské Skalice were acquainted different land lots, representing most valuable dry grasslands as well as lands strategically important for the implementation of conservation measures. Among the acquainted plots are: grasslands with the richest orchid populations, including an acidic grassland rich of the rare Green-winged orchid (*Orchis morio*); woodlands with Downy oak (*Quercus pubescens*) and populations of rare species as Pheasant's eye (*Adonis vernalis*), orchids and invertebrates; meadows providing habitats for rare butterflies; a quarry, which is important nesting place of owls and birds of prey; dry karsts grassland and terrace above the quarry, being of the most valuable parts of the area with *Stipa* grass, Pheasant's eye (*Adonis vernalis*) and Three-toothed orchid (*Orchis tridentata*), and others. At Tematínske Hills were leased for long term 40,63 ha in total; at Beckovské Skalice were leased for long term 18,18 ha in total and purchased 2,62 ha.

Management plans were developed for all areas leased and purchased. At Beckovské Skalice was managed the total area of 30 ha and not only the leased & purchased plots. The implementation of urgent conservation measures and management of the areas took place in close cooperation with the State Nature Conservancy, local conservation NGOs and the Agricultural Cooperative Beckov. Consent of private landowners was achieved, which was inevitable for implementation of measures. Continuous communication with landowners was maintained during the whole project: to inform them about the progress of area management and the conservation results.



Tematínske Hills: removing of cut pines from non-productive land lots. (Photo: archives Pre Prirodu)

Urgent conservation measures were implemented with co-funding from *Tenfornature* project financed by Stichting DOEN and from the State Nature Conservancy. These measures included removal of non-native vegetation - *Pinus nigra* and *Fraxinus ornus* at Tematínske Hills, and *Robinia pseudoaccacia* at Beckovské Skalice. Further, at Beckovské Skalice took place clearing of secondary succession bushes, removing of suckers every other year, mowing, raking and haymaking. In the orchard at Beckovské Skalice were also implemented measures as pruning, planting seedlings and grafting in order to promote presence of traditional fruit varieties. Monitoring of the effects of conservation measures was started at Tematínske Hills, in cooperation with students of ecology and the State Nature Conservancy.

Other important result of the project was the achieving of conservation status for Beckovské Skalice: the area was designated as Nature Reserve in December 2003. The official opening of NR Beckovské Skalice and the publicity actions were co-funded by *Tenfornature* project of Stichting DOEN and by Matra Knip.



Beckovské Skalice: one of the lots where planting of traditional fruit varieties is planned. *Sorbus domestica* in the middle. (Photo: archive Pre Prirodu)

### **Viability of the project**

At Tematínske Hills, the removal of overgrown pine trees has been one-off action that does not have to be repeated. The state of cleared lots must be further monitored. Other conservation measures, as mowing, hay-making and extensive grazing are unnecessary in the area: thin layer of soil, low biomass production and dryness cause that dead biomass is not cumulated on habitats and secondary succession does not advance there. In forests there is a need to work with foresters to influence composition of forest stands (preference of native species).

At Beckovské Skalice is necessary to repeat conservation measures in order to keep the state, which was reached by the project activities. Timing and scale of measures is tailored to particular species of rare plants and animals, e.g. autumn mowing of certain microhabitats to let seeds ripen and butterflies finish their life cycle. Future plans include the introducing of grazing with the involvement of locals and volunteers.

Funds to continue conservation management of the project areas will come from contracts with the State Nature Conservancy, government subsidies for farming, grants and individual donations.

### **Spin off effects**

Among the most important spin offs of the project are the designation of Beckovské Skalice as Nature Reserve and the inclusion of Tematínske Hills in Natura 2000 network. The EAF funding for land acquisition and urgent management initialized the processes of attraction of further donors as well as improving the cooperation between Pre Prirodu NGO and governmental bodies, which resulted in the implementation of conservation at a bigger scale and the ensuring of a protection status of the areas.

The acquisition of land has been extremely important for the implementation of conservation measures in the area: it has helped to achieve the consent of landowners that is inevitable for implementation of measures. Besides, the process of land lease and purchase helped to attract the attention of landowners and local population and ease their resistance to conservation measures.

### **Land purchase on the area of Special Nature Reserve *Slano Kopovo* in Serbia**

***The project is implemented by the local manager of Slano Kopovo Special Nature Reserve, the Hunting Association Novi Becej and the Institute for Nature Conservation***

### **Project Background**

Special Nature Reserve Slano Kopovo is an area with significant national and international importance. It contains one of the latest preserved ponds on salina ground in Serbia: salty lakes within paleomeanders, and types of salty habitats, that worldwide are endangered to disappear. The site has very rich biodiversity and is one of the most important wildlife center in the region of Voivodina. A special feature of Slano Kopovo is the dominant halophyte (salina) vegetation and an unusual association, which is specific for solonchaks: *Salicornia europaea* and *Suaeda maritima* make an association, which is not found elsewhere worldwide. The area is a unique migration and breeding point for birds and is an Important Bird Area (IBA) and a Ramsar site. Accordingly to the last investigations, on the area are recorded 203 bird species, of which 73 are nesting ones. Slano Kopovo is especially suitable for cranes, ducks, geese and shorebirds.

This unique, but very sensitive ecosystem of Slano Kopovo is slowly being destroyed by many human impacts and natural processes. The most threatened habitats are salty swamps, wet meadows and pastures. These are imperiled by inadequate usage of the area, disturbance of the water regime and natural succession. The Special Nature Reserve Slano Kopovo includes two water basins: Slano Kopovo and Poština Kopov . The lands between those two water basins are used for agriculture and are in private property. The agricultural use of these lands brings many negative effects on the Reserve: as destruction of autohtonic habitats by ploughing up of pastures and uncultivated lands & meadows, throwing of litter, disturbed hydrological regime of the area, destruction of reed lands by burning and hewing down, disturbance of birds. Practices as uncontrolled usage of artificial compost, usage of chemical poisons and of other chemicals during elimination of agricultural pests and weed, throwing off of utilized ambalage of chemicals, usage of seeds threated by chemical poisons, burning stubles and rests of biomas and usage of mowing-machines and combines without sprayer are leading to poisoning and destroying the unique birdlife and vegetation in the Reserve.

The proposed action include creation of a core zone of 500 ha, where still 70 ha of private land have to be purchased to complete the protection scheme . The private properties are consisting of small parcels: mostly agricultural land, partly of high quality. The project goal is to recover these areas into their originally state: meadows, pastures and reed-lands, and to restore the water balance in the site through a new canal from the Thisza canal, which will insure the survival of the salty lake.

### **Implementation**

The project started in May 2005. By the end of 2006, the organisation Novi Becej succeeded to buy 52 ha of private land within the Reserve; and is planning to buy another 22 ha within the next project phase. Control by a guardian of the Reserve area and also bird monitoring have been ensured via the project.

With the co-funding from other donors have been started the restoration works for recovering of the water balance in the site through a new canal from the Danube-Thisza-Danube canal. Within the mainframe of this project will also be introduced Ramsar site standards for managing of the area, accordingly to the newly elaborated Five Year Managing Programme (2008-2012) for Slano Kopovo .

### **New project funded in 2006.**

In 2006, EAF funded the project ***Long Term Management of Pastoral Grasslands, Meadows and Freshwater Ecosystems in Kotel Mountain, Bulgaria.*** The financial support has been provided via the NC-IUCN Programme for Small Purchase of Nature (SPN). Implementing organisation is the Bulgarian NGO *Fund for the Wild FLORA & FAUNA (FWFF)*. The project budget is 70.000 euro.



Kotel Mountain (Photo: archive of Fund for the Wild FLORA & FAUNA)

Kotel mountain is situated in Eastern Bulgaria not far from the Black Sea coast. It is a low mountain region and is a part of Stara Planina mountain chain. The Kotel Mountain is an Important Bird Area. The project focuses on meadows, fresh water and grassland ecosystems. There are very well preserved large oak and beech forests, with open spaces between them being meadows. Plenty of small sized rivers are crossing the mountain. Perfect river conditions give home for very stable populations of Noble crayfish, Stone crayfish, Otter, European Pond Turtle, Balkan Salmon and other fish species. The meadows contain rich variety of plant species, including eleven species of orchids. Endangered bird species as Corncrake, Rock Bunting and Rock Thrush are common here. Limestone grasslands which are well managed by optimal grazing of livestock host rich biodiversity. Some threatened species represented here are European Soudan and Lesser Mole Rat, main prey source for endangered Saker Falcon, Imperial Eagle etc. Typical species of the forest in the region include Honey Buzzard, Tawny Owl, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Booted Eagle, Black Stork, Woodpecker species etc. Some of the mammalian residents are Wolf, Golden Jackal, Pine Marten, many species of bats.

The natural values of the region are threatened by land abandonment from one side and by economical developments from other side. After the restitution of land to small private owners, which are not able or not interested to manage the land, many meadows and pastures have become abundant, hence succession largely appears. On the other side economical changes will negatively affect the natural areas. For the meadows in the project area, the biggest threat presently are new agricultural activities. Ploughing of meadows and in this way obtaining EU subsidy for farmers is one of the immediate threats. The problem is that some agricultural activities are much more difficult than the others but the finding is the same. For instance maintaining of meadows is more complicated (land owner have to have cattle etc.), than to plough the meadow. Ploughing of meadows represents direct threat also for damaging the fresh water ecosystems, because of the potential use of fertilisers and pesticides. Another direct threat is the development of wind energy parks. This region is specially attractive for placing of wind energy parks, because of the strong blowing of the so

cold “bora” wind. There are already a dozen wind parks built nearby the local town Kotel and that is a big threat for bird and bat species.



Kotel Mountain (Photo: archive of Fund for the Wild FLORA & FAUNA)

In Kotel Mountain there are now four protected areas, namely *Beli Bryag*, *Ardachlaka*, *Zlosten*, *Yurushki Rocks*, and in the nearby situated Slivenska Mountain is located *Sinite Kamani* Nature Park. All these areas include some very specific biotopes and are declared for protected areas without paying attention to the relationship of these areas with the nearby and in-between situated grassland areas (pastures and meadows) and the small rivers and related freshwater ecosystems.

The current project aims at purchasing the most important for nature conservation big meadows and pastures. 100 ha in total are planned to be purchased or leased for a long term. The project target area is situated between three protected areas: the objective is the realisation of ecological corridors and common management of the wider area. The implementing organisation, FWFF aims to further propose Kotel Mountain as UNESCO Man & Biosphere Reserve. To do this, FWFF plans to provide long-term management of the target area through nature- friendly agriculture practices: especially extensive breeding of traditional breed of sheep and grow of eco-agricultural products. Raising of public awareness will be another important activity to rich the above aims.

## The EAF Project Sites

The following map shows the EAF projects that have all been supported by the EAF and will form an important contribution to those core areas and stepping stones which will form the Pan-European Ecological Network. A complete overview of the EAF projects is available at [www.eeconet.org](http://www.eeconet.org)

