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The international work of NABU,
and NABU International – Foundation for Nature

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**Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union
(NABU e. V.)**
Charitéstraße 3
10117 Berlin
Germany

Phone +49 (0)30.28 49 84-0
Fax +49 (0)30.28 49 84-20 00
NABU@NABU.de
www.NABU.de/international

NABU International Foundation
Charitéstraße 3
10117 Berlin
Germany

Phone +49 (0)30.28 49 84-17 20
Fax +49 (0)30.28 49 84-37 20
info@NABU-International.de
www.NABU-international.de

Editors: Britta Hennigs, Agatha Kuchler,
Laura-Sophia Schulz, Bernd Pieper,
Elizabeth Ball

Translation: Andrea von Kameke,
Nicola Barfoot

Layout: Sigi Reiss, Darmstadt,
Bär-Medien, Großostheim

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Images

Title: Ingela Jansson

Page 4: Bruno D'Amicis

Page 5: Hoffotografen

Page 6/7: Bruno D'Amicis, Abdurazak Sahile/NABU

Page 8/9: Angelika Berndt, Abdurazak Sahile/NABU, Mathias Putze

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Thomas Tennhardt
NABU Vice President, Head of the International Department,
and President of NABU International – Foundation for Nature

Dear friends and supporters of our international work, dear NABU activists,

Europe is experiencing a dramatic loss of species and habitats. This is mainly due to the EU's misguided Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and its indiscriminate distribution of subsidies – which, at around 58 billion euros per year, make up about 40 per cent of the total EU budget. Offering flat rate area payments without demanding any specific environmental commitments in return encourages farmers to extract all they can from their soil and animals.

Over ten years of NABU in Ethiopia

Biodiversity is at risk, not only in Europe but all over the world, and with it our quality of life – because nature is the basis for food, clean water and energy. An alarming development, which was emphasised by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) in March 2018. This trend is especially evident in Africa, which many people still see as an ideal of untamed nature. Unfortunately, the reality is different, which is why NABU is particularly active on the African continent. For example in Ethiopia, where NABU is now involved in the management of all four biosphere reserves. In this brochure the head of NABU's Africa programme, Svane Bender-Kaphengst, tells the story of NABU's work in Ethiopia, stretching back over more than ten years. Other focal points of our current involvement in Africa are in Kenya, Tanzania, and West Africa, where we are working with local conservationists in the AfriBiRds project to develop an effective method for monitoring migratory birds in African biosphere reserves.

20 years of NABU in Kyrgyzstan

For around 20 years NABU has been working to protect the threatened snow leopard and its habitats in Kyrgyzstan. This work has now been extended to Tajikistan, Bhutan and Pakistan. In 2017, on NABU's initiative, representatives of the twelve snow leopard range states met in the Kyrgyz city of Bishkek for the second global snow leopard conference. The Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program (GSLEP) has been established to develop and implement strategies to save the snow leopard. We are halfway to the target to be achieved by 2020: the range countries have so far identified 23 snow leopard habitats over an area of just under 500,000 km².

25 years of NABU in the Caucasus

For 25 years NABU has been committed to protecting the Western Caucasus World Natural Heritage Site. We have achieved a great deal in this time, together with local authorities and local conservationists. Today there are once again over 1,200 Caucasian bison living in the Western Caucasus. Since 2012, however, the region has been suffering from a massive invasion of the box tree moth: in just three years, the caterpillars have destroyed nearly all the box trees over a 4000-hectare area. Partly thanks to NABU's efforts, it has so far been possible to preserve 4.2 hectares of the residual box tree population; the long-term plan is to increase this with restoration measures.

Ten years of NABU International - Foundation for Nature

Our foundation is now ten years old. At present our areas of work include the last lions in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, the fight against poaching in the Indian region Assam, and the rarest dolphins in the world. The foundation, which is closely allied with NABU and the NABU International Department are supported in their international work by the Voluntary Expert Groups, which focus their considerable expertise on biodiversity in Southeast Asia and Africa, the protection of migratory birds in Cyprus and Malta, and many other topics and regions. We would like to take this opportunity to thank them. We also wish to thank the many NABU activists who work with us, and last but not least our supporters and sponsors, without whom we would be unable to carry out many of our projects.

We hope you will find this newsletter an enjoyable and informative read, and will share it with others who may be interested in our work.

Kind regards,

Thomas Tennhardt

AFRICA



More than ten years of NABU in Ethiopia

In over ten years of NABU project work in Ethiopia, there have been fantastic partnerships, committed colleagues and inspiring successes, but also challenges, crises, and a lot of paperwork. We spoke to Svane Bender, head of NABU's Africa Programme.

Why Ethiopia?

In 2006, NABU was asked to get involved in a project to set up one of Ethiopia's first UNESCO biosphere reserves. In less than three years' time, we managed to achieve what had seemed impossible: the Kafa Biosphere Reserve became a reality! The project led to close partnerships with Ethiopian ministries, UNESCO and others for further projects. In our view, biosphere reserves are a sound concept and a good fit for Africa: human beings are meant to live in harmony with nature. We have already set up two biosphere reserves, in the Kafa region and at Lake Tana, together with the local population and the government. Today, NABU is known in the country as an organization actively involved in conservation and committed to biodiversity, forests, lakes and local communities.

How does NABU actually work in the field?

We ensure that degraded ecosystems are restored and that communities set up sustainable management systems for their natural resources, systems they can implement themselves. The aim is to reduce the effects of climate change and, above all, to create opportunities for environmentally friendly development. In 2006, we started with a single Ethiopian member of staff; today we have almost 40 staff members in six offices. Our colleagues implement the projects in the field, while we support them from our Head Office in the capital, Addis Ababa, and NABU Headquarters in Berlin. Since 2006, we have spent around 11 million EUR in Ethiopia.

What motivates you in your work?

The greatest motivation definitely comes from visible successes: a reforestation area that has grown to maturity, an animal or plant species that has returned, or people from local communities who are proud of their successes and prospects for the future. The many big and small projects show how diverse our work is and inspire many people: a medicinal plant garden, briquet production based on the invasive water hyacinth, honey cooperatives, herb and pottery production by women, and nature campsites. At the same time, many regions in Ethiopia are under huge pressure: population growth, climate change, but also unregulated use such as grazing, and industrial growth in agriculture and manufacturing generate waste, large-scale destruction of ecosystems, and water and soil pollution. We want to use modern concepts to address this, and are looking for motivated donors.



▲ Svane Bender in discussion with a project partner in Ethiopia.

“In more than ten years of project work in Ethiopia, we have become experts in biosphere reserves. We are working with local communities and government representatives to restore and conserve the last remaining valuable ecosystems in Ethiopia.”

Svane Bender

The interview was conducted by Britta Hennigs

Contact:

Svane Bender
Head of NABU's Africa Programme /
Deputy Head of the International
Department
Svane.Bender@NABU.de

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Nature conservation goes to school

For many of us, a freshly brewed coffee is vital for getting us up in the morning and keeping us going during the day. But where does Africa's "black gold" actually come from, and what journey has it been on before ending up in our coffee cup?

The celebrated Arabica coffee bean has its origins in south-west Ethiopia, in the Kafa Biosphere Reserve. This region, with its diverse landscapes of cloud forest, rainforest and bamboo forest, and extensive wetlands and floodplains, is home not only to the famous bean, but also to many other unique animal and plant species. To preserve its biodiversity, NABU has been working for nature conservation and regional development in the Kafa Biosphere Reserve for twelve years. The beginning of 2017 saw the start of a new project funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Previously, NABU's contribution has focused on close collaboration with the local population, encouraging locals to take responsibility for nature conservation. We are building on this in the current phase of the project, as well as investing special effort in the areas of biodiversity conservation and climate change, e.g. with participatory forest management, community-based wetland management, and the marketing of natural products from the region.

Environmental education also remains an important part of the project. Nature and species conservation has been added to the school curriculum to encourage children and young people to develop a fascination with the environment and its wealth of species, to learn to respect them, and to maintain ancient traditions.

Region:

Kafa Biosphere Reserve,
in south-west Ethiopia



Project duration:

1 January 2017 – 31 December 2019

Donor:

Federal Ministry for Economic Co-
operation and Development (BMZ)

Project partners:

- Regional and local ministries
- Local community-based organisations (CBOs)



◀ Paulos Ejeta (right) teaches his students about recycling.

Grivet monkeys live both in trees and on the ground.



NABU has been working with teachers from the local regions to develop teaching materials on biodiversity. Now the teachers are ready to share the information and values with their pupils on a day-to-day basis.

One of these teachers is Paulos Ejeta. Paulos has been teaching various subjects for five years. At present he teaches social studies at Meliyo Primary School in the Kafa Biosphere Reserve. The 24-year-old was trained by the local NABU team, along with many other teachers from the Kafa region, and he is now the focal person for nature conservation topics at his school. He has regular discussions with local NABU staff about progress, changes and possible problems within the subject.

Talking about his new role and his pupils' reactions, Paulos says: "Right from the start I had a lot of fun teaching the children about biodiversity. It's especially nice to see how quickly the new learning games inspire heated debates."

Paulos shares his knowledge with other teachers in similar subject areas, such as nature studies and biology. The teaching and learning materials are freely available to both pupils and teachers in the school library. Since the topic was introduced, there have been visible changes to school life outside the classroom: "Just a short time ago there were no clubs at our school focusing on biodiversity and the environment. Today 56 pupils aged eleven to sixteen are involved in our Biodiversity Club", says Paulos proudly. Pupils cultivate tree seedlings, which they plant on the school grounds a few months later. Another area of intervention is waste management and recycling. Organic waste is separated from plastic, and even the metal frames of old school desks are reused as fences for the school gardens – an idea that has also caught on in neighbouring schools. Paulos is delighted by his pupils' commitment, and now wants to introduce the successful measures to other schools.

Further areas of action:

- Adapting agriculture to climate change
- Participatory forest management
- Community-based wetland management
- Locally based biodiversity monitoring
- Marketing regional natural products
- Incorporating biodiversity issues into school curricula
- Supporting local biosphere reserve management

Author and contact:

Anja Teschner
Project Coordinator,
Kafa Biosphere Reserve
Anja.Teschner@NABU.de

More information:

www.kafa-climate-forest.com

Migratory bird research flies into the digital era



▲ The aim of the AfriBiRds monitoring scheme is to ensure more precise documentation and monitoring of migratory birds and their populations in their African wintering grounds in the future.

AfriBiRds stands for “African biosphere reserves as pilot areas for the monitoring and protection of migratory birds”, and is a joint project with BirdLife International and BirdLife partners in two African pilot areas. The project AfriBiRds is financed by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) with funds from the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMUB). NABU and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) supported the participation of experts from Benin, Côte d’Ivoire and Ethiopia in workshops.

Author:

Svane Bender
Head of NABU’s Africa Programme /
Deputy Head of the International
Department

Contact:

Samuel Fournet
Project Coordinator, AfriBiRds
Samuel.Fournet@NABU.de

More information:

www.NABU.de/afribirds

Numbers and population trends of migratory birds such as the barn swallow and the pied flycatcher are well known in their European breeding grounds. Every year, these and other migratory birds cover thousands of kilometres on their migrations between African overwintering areas and European breeding grounds. On their journey, they are often exposed to extreme conditions. In recent decades there has been evidence of an alarmingly steep decline in migratory landbirds. NABU launched the Afri-BiRds project in December 2016 to establish effective bird monitoring for African biosphere reserves and to work more closely with African scientists and conservation authorities on migratory birds in the future.

With this project, we are intensifying the cooperation between African biosphere reserves – in accordance with UNESCO’s wishes – and building up vital capacity in bird monitoring. This is a central goal of the migratory landbirds action plan (AEMLAP) established at the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS).

The main focus is on Palaearctic migratory birds, i.e. birds found in Europe, Asia and North Africa. The main mission of the project is to work with international partners such as Observation International and Southern Bird Atlas Project to develop and test an easy-to-use, cost-effective and standardized methodology for recording bird populations in African biosphere reserves.

Within the framework of a study on existing bird monitoring programmes, 97 biosphere reserves in Africa were contacted in writing. On this basis, two biosphere reserves were selected as regions for the pilot implementation: the Comoé National Park in Côte d’Ivoire, and the Omo Forest Reserve in Nigeria.

At the beginning of 2018, training and methodology-testing workshops were held in the pilot biosphere reserves in Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire, with representatives of 15 conservation areas and seven African countries. The participants engaged enthusiastically with both theory and practice, and now want to introduce the monitoring scheme in additional conservation areas.

Now it’s time to put the theory into practice: the local project partners in the pilot areas, SOS Forêts in Côte d’Ivoire and the Nigerian Conservation Foundation in Nigeria, are carrying out the first annual surveys. The results will be fed into the digital database www.observation.org, allowing data to be exchanged quickly and easily between the biosphere reserves.

Nature's pharmacy and storehouse of traditional knowledge



“A lot of people peek over our fence in curiosity, and then at some point come and ask if they could possibly have some seedlings”, explains Asaye, as he guides us through NABU’s newly created medicinal garden. Asaye is NABU’s officer for natural resources and forest in the Project Office in Bonga, Ethiopia, and supported the selection of the species and the establishment of the garden.

The garden in Bonga, the regional capital in the Ethiopian Kafa Biosphere Reserve, is the only one of its kind and has been welcomed by the local population. Precious ancient knowledge about wild and medicinal herbs and their cultivation and use is gradually being lost with the older generation. NABU therefore decided to document the available knowledge and to establish a living herb garden at NABU’s project office in Bonga.

The garden is open to all those interested in wandering around it and studying the signs in various languages. A guidebook has been produced, giving information about the medicinal effects and applications of the different plants. Here we find not just familiar herbs such as thyme, peppermint and fennel, but also native plants and some that are only found in the region, such as Ethiopian cardamom.

Establishing the garden was not without challenges: support for the design came from Germany, seedlings or seed stores had to be painstakingly gathered, an irrigation system with a 2,000-litre rainwater tank had to be developed, and it was necessary to ensure that the garden would be tended at all times. As the herbs were planted, it quickly became clear that many things can only be learnt in practice: numerous plantlets died, and the “living” fence made of euphorbia stems had to be replanted after frequent visits from the neighbourhood cows.

Today, however, many of the initial difficulties have been overcome, and both visitors and the NABU team are full of enthusiasm for the treasure that has been created. Thanks to the tireless commitment of numerous supporters, hard physical work, and the willingness of spiritual leaders in the region to share their experiences, the medicinal garden has become a storehouse of knowledge, and a place of rest.

▲ The medicinal garden is part of NABU’s long-time involvement in the Kafa region. Numerous German and Swiss volunteers helped to record the traditional botanical knowledge. The project was supported by NABU International – Foundation for Nature.

Author and contact:

Svane Bender
Head of NABU’s Africa Programme /
Deputy Head of the International
Department
Svane.Bender@NABU.de

For more information and an opportunity to donate:

www.NABU.de/kafa-garten

Environmental education, Ethiopian-style

Lake Tana Biosphere Reserve Day is celebrated on 9th June in all 389 schools of the region and involves practical nature conservation activities.

Five volunteers from NAJU (NABU's youth organisation) worked with 23 teachers to develop inspiring activities on topics such as erosion, biodiversity and climate change.



Did you know?

Lake Tana – source of biodiversity

Lake Tana is Africa's highest and Ethiopia's largest lake. It is the most important African wintering area of the European crane and numerous other waterbirds and songbirds. The area is home to hippos, crocodiles, monitor lizards, pythons and 15 species of fish that are found nowhere else in the world. However, intensive agriculture, large irrigation projects and hydropower plants are increasingly becoming a threat to the "Riviera of Ethiopia" with its impressive waterfalls.

Authors:

Ronja Krebs, Manuel Tacke

Contacts:

Ronja Krebs (NABU)
Project Coordinator / Deputy Head of
NABU's Africa Programme
Ronja.Krebs@NABU.de

Manuel Tacke (NAJU)
Deputy Managing Director / Officer
for International Affairs
Manuel.Tacke@NABU.de

More information:

www.laketana-people-nature.com

The Lake Tana Biosphere Reserve in north-west Ethiopia was officially inaugurated in December 2015. However, the new protected area still faces many challenges on its way to becoming a model region for sustainable development. NABU's youth organization, NAJU, is now getting involved in the project.

At the end of May 2018, five NAJU members set out for Lake Tana. They won the hearts of NABU's Bahir Dar project team on the very first day, when they introduced them to their educational games in a park. A team exercise suddenly turned into an environmental education class for almost 100 visitors to the park, who looked at us Germans somewhat warily at first, but soon became eager participants. The Ethiopian team translated what was said into Amharic (the official language of Ethiopia) and shared information about biodiversity, especially bats and plants.

In a three-day workshop with 23 local teachers, we jointly identified the greatest problems at Lake Tana: erosion, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, water quality, invasive species. We also developed activities for children, to help them identify problems themselves, find solutions, and engage actively in nature conservation. The aim was to teach students about sustainable development, which is often far more difficult to implement under the given conditions in rural areas in Ethiopia than we would have imagined before. However, some games, experiments and ideas for trips evolved in the process, and will be included in the manual.

The ten nature rangers of the Lake Tana Biosphere Reserve also benefited from the NAJU group's visit. One morning, we all went on a bird-watching expedition at 5.30 a.m. This is still an unusual hobby for many Ethiopians, but the rangers have clearly come to appreciate it and showed a keen interest in animals such as darters and giant kingfishers. We organised a litter clean-up to draw attention to the increasing flood of plastic, and we observed for ourselves how the fertile soil goes "down the drain" as it is washed down the Blue Nile.

Finally, we presented the NABU/NAJU project and its achievements at the Ministry of Education and the German Embassy in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa. There is still a lot to be done to protect Lake Tana, of course, but soon NAJU's support will hopefully enable more than 280,000 children to learn more about their environment and to get involved in protecting the lake themselves.

A ranger reports



Since August 2017 Belay Mulu has been a ranger in the Lake Tana Biosphere Reserve, which was established with NABU's support. The young Ethiopian studied sustainable resource management, and is now employed by the regional environmental office.

I grew up here, and I love the lake and all its inhabitants. My favourite animal is the crane. As a child I used to see them flying over our village, and hear their calls.

I look after sixteen communities in my district, and visit them all regularly. Because the people here are poor, they use what nature offers them. But in doing so, they're destroying our last remaining forests and wetlands. Obsolete agricultural methods and rubbish are polluting our water and soils. Because we have no remaining forest, the rain washes fertile soil into the lake. This makes it increasingly rich in nutrients, allowing the spread of invasive species such as the water hyacinth. Many people have noticed that fish stocks are declining and that their harvests are shrinking, but they also fear that they'll suffer financial losses if, for example, they're no longer allowed to drive their cattle into the wetlands to feed.

To achieve a change, I need the trust of the farmers and fishermen. I talk to them a lot, and give tips on how they can get a better income for their families while helping to protect Lake Tana. If just one person in the village understands that establishing a "no-use" zone will help to increase yields again in one or two years, and can persuade friends and acquaintances, that's often enough.

NABU has been supporting the Lake Tana region in the areas of nature conservation and sustainable development since 2012. As a biosphere reserve, we want to be a model region, showing how humans and nature can live together in harmony. To combat poverty, we're encouraging small, eco-friendly tourism initiatives, such as campsites. NABU also launched the ranger programme, and trained my colleagues and me. Since then I've been able to identify bird species, and carry out biodiversity monitoring with my colleagues. I also support the other NABU activities. One is the Green Your Garden Campaign, in which 200,000 households are establishing agroforestry systems in their home gardens. Another is the restoration of over 100 erosion gullies – channels in the earth caused by soil degradation – with the help of thousands of volunteers.

I'm convinced that in nature conservation, much can be achieved with little effort if everyone works together. With good management and a well-informed population, we can reach our goal: a balance between nature conservation and resource use.

▲ Belay Mulu has been a Nature Ranger for more than a year at Lake Tana Biosphere Reserve.

Along with the endemic black crowned crane (picture), thousands of Eurasian cranes are spending the European winter at Lake Tana.

“I'm proud that my work is helping to protect Ethiopia's biggest lake, and I hope my grandchildren will be able to watch cranes here too.”

Belay Mulu, ranger in the Lake Tana Biosphere Reserve

The conversation with Belay Mulu was conducted by Ronja Krebs

Contact:

Ronja Krebs
Project Coordinator / Deputy Head of NABU's Africa Programme
Ronja.Krebs@NABU.de

More information:

www.laketana-people-nature.com

Somewhere between pepper and turmeric



Black pepper production as a means of income generation for the local community in the biosphere reserve.

A yellowish-brown root with multiple fingerlike outgrowths lies on the palm of Alemayehu, our NABU colleague at the Yayu Biosphere Reserve. I look at him in astonishment. So this is the main ingredient of the many different curry mixtures eaten all over the world, and the turmeric latte which is so fashionable nowadays?

Turmeric is just one of several spices from the selection of regional products with which we support smallholder farmers, especially women, in the Yayu and Sheka Biosphere Reserves in south-west Ethiopia.

Did you know?

In Ethiopia, NABU manages four out of five UNESCO biosphere reserves, including the two forest biosphere reserves in the south-west of the country, Yayu and Sheka. This is a joint project with UNIQUE forestry consultants GmbH, commissioned by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ).

Step by step, 450 farmers are being trained to grow turmeric roots, expensive black pepper, and tasty dwarf bananas. The idea is that the additional income from the sale of the products will improve their living conditions, while reducing their dependence on the threatened forest in the reserves. The forest is suffering from its constant use by humans for firewood and construction timber, and is also under pressure from the impacts of climate change, such as severe droughts and devastating fires.

The extensive, moist, Afromontane cloud forests were decisive for placing these areas under protection as UNESCO biosphere reserves. But since their designation little development has taken place in the areas, and the local people are waiting impatiently for the changes that the labelling was supposed to bring. We are therefore collaborating with many partners, not just to improve incomes, but also to set up plans and structures for the management of the area. In addition, we are demarcating the different zones in the field to show which zones are accessible for use, and which have absolute protection status.

The on-site work has not always been easy for our colleagues: for several months the areas were repeatedly affected by political unrest, and the security situation did not allow field visits. Fortunately tensions have now eased, so planned activities can go ahead. For example, there are plans for around 30 experts to carry out the first-ever survey of the flora and fauna in both areas. This will then provide the basis for the regular monitoring which is mandatory in biosphere reserves, but has not yet been established here. Alemayehu and his colleagues are looking forward to this: you can only effectively protect and preserve something you know! The survey promises to be exciting, too, with many new species likely to be discovered.

Author and contact:

Svane Bender
Head of NABU's Africa Programme /
Deputy Head of the International
Department
Svane.Bender@NABU.de

Protecting lions in Tanzania



The lions in Africa aren't doing well. They have already lost around 80 percent of their historic range and have become extinct in 26 African countries. Unless things change, this sorry trend will continue. The United Nations estimate that Africa's human population is set to grow from 1.2 billion today to 2.5 billion in 2050. For lions to have a future in Africa's last savannah habitats, we must identify innovative ways of ensuring their coexistence with humans. This is exactly what we are working on in Tanzania, one of the lion's few remaining strongholds.

In the past, the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) south-east of the Serengeti National Park was connected seamlessly to the world-famous national park as part of the Serengeti ecosystem. Since 1959, the number of Maasai that live in the NCA has increased tenfold to 80,000. As a result, Maasai and their herds of cattle densely populate the area, which has become an impenetrable barrier for roaming lions. The outcome is that the crater lions have been genetically isolated for decades. This in turn has led to increased susceptibility to diseases, poor fecundity and weakened numbers. As the Maasai's cattle increasingly displace natural prey, the lions are forced to feed on livestock. In the conflicts that ensue, the lions are always the losers.

In 2015, NABU International provided the seed capital for an ambitious new project to address the escalating conflicts between lions and people. Under the leadership of Swedish biologist Ingela Jansson and working closely with the Maasai, the project has become a resounding success, which greatly benefits lions and local communities alike.

Acting as scouts (or "Ilchokutis"), trained young Maasai warriors act as an early warning system for their villages, to prevent or at least mitigate potential conflicts before they arise. Each Ilchokuti is in charge of an area of 60 to 200 km². The team has also tracked down 8,398 lost cattle and returned them to their owners, provided veterinary treatment for 195 injured cattle, lion-proofed 137 night-time livestock enclosures, and persuaded five Maasai hunting parties not to kill lions. Defusing the situation has even allowed new lions to join the genetically impoverished crater population, whose number has grown to more than 80 individuals as a result.

▲ The population of African lions has decreased by more than 40 percent in the last 25 years. New solutions have to be found for humans and animals to live in harmony.

Did you know?

Lionesses raise their cubs collectively. Females tend to synchronise the timing of births and nurse each other's offspring. This behaviour is unique among cats. Females reach maturity at the age of 36-46 months, and give birth to 2-4 cubs after a gestation period of 100-119 days.

Author and contact:

Dr Barbara Maas
Head of Endangered Species
Conservation, NABU International –
Foundation for Nature
barbara.maas@nabu.de

More information:

www.NABU.de/loewen-ngorongoro



▲
A major breakthrough: farmers, tribal elders, village chiefs and foresters come together to sign the contract. From now on, the forest can also be used sustainably by its inhabitants.
(Historical photo from 1984)

Liberia – the long road to founding a community forest

All my life I have worked as a forester. In the early 1980s, I travelled to Liberia for the first time with my family, to work there as a development worker for three years. The aim was to create the foundation for preserving the rainforests. Back then, the forests in the sparsely populated, largely forested country almost invariably belonged to the state. The local population was not allowed to use the forests and therefore did not feel responsible for protecting them.

In the 1960s, the Liberian state began to grant concessions to international companies, who logged the most economically valuable trees, which were often very old, on a large scale. The newly built transport roads through the forest attracted hunters, farmers, and diamond and gold miners. The supervisory bodies were not able to cope with the situation. German foresters and botanists had already been mapping the forests for years to get an overview of their state. Now the goal was to save these unique rainforests. First of all we had to convince policymakers of the need for conservation measures, while bearing in mind and proving the economic benefits from the government's point of view.

Author and contact:

Dr Wulf Gatter
Member of NABU Voluntary
Expert Group Africa
wulfgatter@aol.com

In eastern Liberia, we established a sample plot system in the overused state forest. Every tree was measured, registered and identified. The aim was to analyse the overall situation of the forests, the numbers and the future of the young,



▲ The people in the villages of Liberia are dependent on nature. Here you can see the felling of a Dahoma tree to make a “dugout” canoe.
(Historical photo from 1981)



A life dedicated to nature conservation



Wulf Gatter is a forest ecologist, ornithologist, conservationist and founder of the migratory bird research station in Randecker Maar in southern Germany. Alongside other projects in Liberia, he has been working to preserve the rainforests since 1981. He is the author of the book “Birds of Liberia”. His unfailing commitment has earned him numerous awards, among them honorary doctorates in Germany and Liberia. In 2016, the president of Liberia admitted him to the “Order of the Star of Africa” and conferred the title of “Grand Commander” on him.

slow-growing mahogany trees, and options for cultivating and maintaining them. The alternative to the near-natural forest was forest plantations with fast-growing “industrial timber” or clearing for agricultural purposes. I also fought to stop the villagers from farming in the state forest in our project area, until I admitted to myself that something similar had happened in Germany centuries earlier. In the Swabian Alps in southern Germany, I had not only managed state forests, but had also worked with citizens to look after community forests. I was therefore familiar with the long process involved in developing them, which could take several generations.

In 1984, we celebrated the successful founding of the first community forest in the Grand Gedeh region in eastern Liberia. It had been preceded by a court hearing involving farmers, tribal elders, village chiefs and foresters in the region. New boundaries were negotiated. The result was that the most biodiverse forests, habitat of the endangered Jentink’s duiker and the rare pigmy hippo, remained part of the state forest. 800 hectares and the “sacred mountain” went to the village people – safe in the knowledge that they would preserve their “secret bush”. Its rocky crags are the breeding ground of the rare and legendary rockfowl (picathartes), a stilt-legged bird slightly smaller than a pigeon. It is said to have magical powers, because no one knows how it manages to stick its mud nests to overhanging rocks.

In 1989, civil war erupted in Liberia. It was to last for 14 years and in most cases meant the end of the government’s collaboration with Germany. During the war, which kept flaring up, NABU began to support the newly founded Liberian conservation organisations. Thanks to this support, the organisers who had not fled were able to survive. The idea of community forests lived on during this time. Today there are dozens of community forests in Liberia, with many more planned.

Village communities in Liberia are fighting for the preservation of the community forests and the animal species living there, and offer tours and accommodation for visitors. The villagers are proud of their chimpanzees, which they used to hunt and eat in the past, when they had no rights in the forest. In a country where animals were previously simply regarded as “small or big meat”, I hope that the new government will continue to support the idea of community forests, and that this will give rise to a broader awareness of conservation issues.

Tracking down Africa's vultures



▲
Koffi Kouadio (right) and Volker Salewski (left) work together to observe vultures in Comoé National Park.

A white-backed vulture at its nest.

Fewer and fewer vultures exist in Africa. There are multiple reasons for this decline. The Comoé National Park in Côte d'Ivoire is one of the last retreats of vultures in western Africa. Here Volker Salewski was able to regularly observe some of the most endangered vulture species and their offspring in 2015 and 2016.

Koffi Kouadio is standing underneath a huge kapok tree, pointing upwards. "There's a nest!" he says in French to Volker Salewski from NABU's Michael-Otto-Institut. The two conservationists are in Comoé National Park in north-eastern Côte d'Ivoire. As a look through their binoculars reveals, they have found the nest of a white-backed vulture. At the end of his six-week stay in Côte d'Ivoire in January and February 2018, Salewski will have registered a total of 27 nests belonging to three critically endangered vulture species. The good result encourages us in our ongoing work to protect African vultures.

For a long time, international bird conservation work did not focus on the situation of African vultures. This changed when ornithologist Darcy Ogada and her co-authors published a study in 2015, proving that the populations of seven species had declined by 80 % or more in the course of three vulture generations. The notion of an "African vulture crisis" coined in this study gets to the heart of the matter. Vultures are poisoned and hunted, so their body parts can be used for traditional medicinal purposes. They die in power lines and wind turbines, and suffer the effects of habitat destruction and shrinking food supply. The decline is particularly sharp in western Africa.

The vulture conservation project started at the end of 2016. The first objective was to gain an overview of the distribution of vultures. At the beginning of 2017 and 2018, Salewski walked a total of almost 1,000 kilometres in the park to register all vulture observations and record the coordinates of their nests. "The Comoé Park is one of the last retreats of vultures in western Africa", confirmed Salewski after completing his survey.

The project, which focuses on learning more about the distribution of different vulture species, is supported by the park administration, a research station of the University of Würzburg, Nangui Abrogoua University in Abidjan, and BirdLife International. Working with Nangui Abrogoua University, students from Côte d'Ivoire will investigate the reproductive behaviour of the vultures in the park and their role in local cultures, to find out more about the causes of the threats they face. NABU is planning to use GPS transmitters to examine how far the birds travel to find food and suitable breeding grounds. The aim of these endeavours is to have Comoé National Park designated as a "vulture safe zone".

The decline of African vulture species in numbers



Rueppell's vulture <i>(Gyps rueppellii)</i>	- 97 %
White-headed vulture <i>Trigonoceps occipitalis</i>	- 96 %
White-backed vulture <i>Gyps africanus</i>	- 90 %
Hooded vulture <i>Necrosyrtes monachus</i>	- 83 %
Egyptian vulture <i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	- 92 %
Cape vulture <i>Gyps coprotheres</i>	- 92 %
Nubian vulture <i>Torgos tracheliotus</i>	- 80 %

Author and contact:

Dr Volker Salewski
Michael-Otto-Institut, NABU
Volker.Salewski@NABU.de

The daily life of an ornithologist



Observing and counting: this is what ornithologist Volker Salewski from NABU's Michael-Otto-Institut is particularly skilled at. At the beginning of 2018, the vulture conservation project of NABU International – Foundation for Nature took him to Comoé National Park, where he taught the park rangers to count and identify waterbirds.

How did you come up with the idea of counting waterbirds with the park rangers?

It wasn't my idea at all. Colonel Amara, the rangers' supervisor, had heard an ornithologist was in the park and asked me to identify and count waterbirds with his colleagues. So the project was initiated by the local rangers.

What was the background of this initiative?

The organisation Wetlands International organises standardised waterbird counts across the globe. These include the African-Eurasian Waterbird Census. The counts in western Africa are coordinated by the Wetlands International office in Dakar in Senegal. The rangers in Comoé National Park wanted to contribute to this census. You need knowledge about identifying species to carry out the counts, and as an ornithologist, I was able to share this knowledge with the rangers.

How is a census like this conducted?

The rangers and I spent three days at the research station of the University of Würzburg in the National Park. We went to several places at the riverbank every day to observe waterbirds. We observed every bird in detail and discussed its characteristics. But of course we also counted the birds.

What specific bird species were you and the rangers able to observe, and what will happen with the results now?

We observed a total of 219 birds, which we were able to attribute to 27 species. What was special was that we saw a family of African fish eagles and their fledged offspring. We were also able to frequently observe the endangered woolly-necked stork. And we were particularly happy to spot a night heron in the dense riverbank vegetation. We have passed the results on to the national waterbird coordinator in Côte d'Ivoire and the various offices of Wetlands International.

What's the next step? Are the rangers planning other surveys in Comoé National Park?

The rangers were very motivated and would like to continue monitoring the waterbirds. The equipment poses a problem, though: there are hardly any binoculars available, and if there are, their quality is not sufficient. There's also a lack of identification books. I'm planning to work with an ornithologist from Côte d'Ivoire to publish an identification guide to the waterbirds in Comoé Park, to give to the rangers.

▲ The white-crowned lapwing is a waterbird species frequently found in the stony riverbank areas of the Comoé River. The spur at the leading edge of its wings is particularly noticeable.

Observing waterbirds at the Comoé River and discussing their species.

The interview with Dr Volker Salewski was conducted by Laura-Sophia Schulz

More information:

For the results of the waterbird observations in Comoé National Park see this link:

iwc.wetlands.org/index.php/nattotals

Scarce resources, great progress



▲
NABU Vice President Thomas Tennhardt (right) and the author in Arabuko Sokoke Forest.

Hiding in the thickets of the Arabuko Sokoke Forest: the endemic Sokoke scops owl.



NABU has been supporting the work of Nature Kenya and Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) in the Arabuko Sokoke Forest since 2000. When the new warden LK Lenguro started his work, some changes were made: three permanent ranger camps were set up in the forest, as a base for patrolling areas.

In Jilore, Lynn Njeri, a KWS researcher, introduces me to rangers and volunteer community scouts. The young woman is clearly in charge as she discusses upcoming assignments with the rangers. Mwalimu, one of the volunteer scouts, tells us about a poachers' trade route between Tsavo East and the coast near Malindi. A poacher he recently reported to KWS subsequently threatened him, but has now disappeared. He still feels uneasy, though. The young scouts are determined to protect "their" forest. As Arabuko Sokoke is becoming an attractive destination for tourists, they will soon be able to apply their local expertise and their knowledge about the forest by working as forest guides, or participating in scientific studies as field assistants.

Did you know?

Arabuko Sokoke

How have the flora and fauna changed in the past ten years? In autumn 2018, a biodiversity monitoring project is carried out to get an overview of biodiversity in the Arabuko Sokoke Forest. The data collected are crucial to effectively assess the Important Bird Area (IBA). One of the species to be monitored is the Sokoke scops owl.

The people committed to protecting the Arabuko Sokoke Forest have to live with a lack of resources. The electric fence surrounding the entire forest, built to mitigate conflicts between humans and wild animals, is over 20 years old and in urgent need of repair. Many of the fence posts have decayed due to termite infestation. Photovoltaic panels also have to be replaced. Of the roughly 64,000 euros needed to improve the situation, three quarters have not yet been found. Lynn's wishes are relatively modest in comparison: rechargeable batteries and solar chargers for the six camera traps she needs to study the elephant population in the forest.

In 2013, NABU funded the development of an elephant action plan. In order to implement it, it was important for the wildlife corridor leading from the Arabuko Sokoke Forest to Tsavo East to be included in the relevant Kenyan national plan. Nature Kenya successfully lobbied to achieve this. The aim of elephant or wildlife corridors between protected areas is to reduce human-wildlife conflict.

A great success for the protection of the forest was achieved in February 2018. Earlier, the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Adjacent Dwellers Association and the local Community Forest Associations, working with Nature Kenya, had initiated a "Year of forest activities" to get rid of foresters who were obviously involved in illegal activities. They demanded that the Kenya Forest Service dismiss corrupt officials. In the county assembly they approached politicians directly, drawing their attention to the problems. Numerous media outlets gave repeated coverage of the untenable situation. Due to the public pressure, the forest service eventually dismissed the head of the local forestry office and two other officials who had been convicted of corruption.

Author and contact:

Werner Schröder
Spokesman of NABU Voluntary
Expert Group Africa
werner.schroeder.calidris@t-online.de

More information:

www.NABU.de/arabuko

Dramatic decline of cranes



Many visitors to European zoos are familiar with the grey crowned crane and its impressive courtship dance and colourful plumage. This crane's natural habitat lies in the east and south of the African continent. In eastern Africa, the species breeds throughout the year, in particular during the dry season.

Since 2013, there has been conclusive evidence that the population of the grey crowned crane has decreased dramatically across its entire geographic range, with the exception of South Africa. From 2 to 13 December 2017, for the first time in 40 years, NABU monitored cranes across the country, working with experts from the Natural History Museum in Nairobi, Nature Kenya, and Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS).

Earlier, a high-profile international conference on cranes, initiated by NABU's Africa Working Group, had taken place in Nairobi. The aim was to compile existing knowledge about the grey crowned crane. George Muigai from Crane Conservation Volunteers told the conference participants about up to 800 crowned cranes at Lake Ol'Bolossat, the largest known roosting site of cranes in Kenya.

Good news? Not for Professor Nathan Gichuke, who has been studying cranes in Kenya for many years. Such large gatherings of cranes did not exist 30 years ago. He suspects that it might be because of shrinking habitats that cranes are increasingly coming together in the remaining intact areas. This becomes dangerous, however, when diseases spread or when they are hunted by humans.

The result of the twelve-day crane monitoring was disappointing. Only 1,234 grey crowned cranes were counted in the 43 areas visited. The proportion of young birds was just over three per cent. In the 1980s, up to 30,000 crowned cranes had been counted in the best-known habitats in and outside conservation areas.

As the breeding season started very late in 2017 due to a prolonged drought, many cranes were still sitting on their nests in December, protecting their offspring under their wings. During this time, the birds are very elusive and can easily be overlooked. A further difficulty was that no counting could be carried out in western Kenya due to political unrest. Another nationwide monitoring project is therefore planned for 2019. But if the decline observed in 2017 is confirmed, the situation of the crowned cranes in Kenya is very alarming indeed.

▲ Endangered species: as nationwide crane monitoring in Kenya showed, the population of grey crowned cranes has decreased across almost their entire range.

Did you know?

Transfer of knowledge

Six young birds were equipped with satellite transmitters during the crane monitoring. Now our Kenyan colleagues have also been introduced to this technology. In June 2018, a doctoral candidate from Nairobi University accepted NABU's invitation to take part in a two-week course on ringing birds and fitting them with transmitters, organized by Kranichschutz Deutschland, the German organization for crane protection.

Author and contact:

Werner Schröder
Spokesman of NABU Voluntary
Expert Group Africa
werner.schroeder.calidris@t-online.de

A perfect example of collaboration



▲
The population of the grey crowned crane – an elegant bird with a crest of golden feathers – is declining nearly everywhere in Africa.

The author (left in the picture on the right) visits Rwanda in 2017 to discuss conservation measures with partners.

*The East African grey crowned crane (*Balearica regulorum gibbericeps*) is endangered in large parts of its range, including East Africa. In Rwanda, for example, there are at most 200 breeding pairs living in the wild – not enough for a viable population. The main causes of this decline are the removal of birds from the wild to be kept in private and hotel gardens, and the illegal trade in crowned cranes. Another factor is that more and more of the birds' habitat is being lost.*

One of the main distribution areas of the grey crowned cranes still living in the wild in Rwanda is the Rugezi Marsh. Here the Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association (RWCA) runs educational activities and works with the local population on conservation projects and alternative sources of income. In 2014, with the support of the International Crane Foundation and the Endangered Wildlife Trust, the RWCA began to seize crowned cranes obtained or kept illegally.

At first the birds are placed in a provisional quarantine station in the capital, Kigali, where they receive veterinary care. The next step is to identify the individuals that can be returned to the wild. These animals are then moved to a pre-release enclosure in Akagera National Park, where they regain their ability to fly before being released in or around the national park.

To provide species-appropriate conditions for those cranes that are permanently unable to fly, a rescue and breeding station with a visitor centre is being established in or near Kigali. Potential breeding pairs can be kept in separate breeding enclosures. Their offspring could then help to stabilize a viable wild population in Rwanda. Remaining cranes, kept in near-natural viewing enclosures, will serve as ambassadors, bringing nature conservation education to life.

The conservationists in Rwanda have begun to receive support from Germany, with the zoo in Landau in der Pfalz and NABU's National Voluntary Expert Group on Africa providing specialist knowledge and funding. Werner Schröder, head of NABU's Voluntary Expert Group on Africa, and Dr Jens-Ove Heckel, director of the Landau zoo, visited Rwanda in January 2017 to consult with local partners about conservation measures. The Association pour la Conservation de la Nature au Rwanda (ACNR), BirdLife International partner in Rwanda, has considerable expertise in environmental education and nature conservation, and will work closely with the RWCA.

Did you know?

Cranes attract visitors

In the future rescue and breeding station and visitor centre, environmental education will also be a top priority. The focus will be on helping children and young people to understand the habitat of the grey crowned crane, an attractive species which will raise the profile of nature tourism – a growth area in Rwanda.

Author and contact:

Dr Jens-Ove Heckel
Director, Zoo Landau in der Pfalz
Jens-Ove.Heckel@landau.de

Two countries, ten days, and thousands of discoveries



NABU organises a south-south exchange: at first glance, a conservation area on the west coast of Madagascar has little in common with a biosphere reserve in the highlands of Ethiopia. But when seven members of the team from NABU's Lake Tana project in Ethiopia travelled to the NABU project in Madagascar, the participants soon realised that while the conditions are different, the work is not.

After almost three days of driving, the two teams finally arrive in the Mahavy-Kinkony Wetland Complex – a conservation area as large as Luxembourg. Our partner ASITY Madagascar has been working to preserve nature in this region for more than 20 years. Since 2015, this has been officially designated as a protected area, because something still exists here that is now rare in Madagascar: pristine tropical dry forest. From 1950 to 2000, nearly 50 per cent of the forest on the island was destroyed by slashing and burning and illegal deforestation. Since 2015 NABU has supported the work of ASITY in a joint project.

Over the next five days, the delegation is driven over bumpy tracks or travels by boat to ASITY's different project sites. Everyone realises that the problems are similar. The poverty of Madagascar's population leads to the over-exploitation of natural resources, thus destroying livelihoods – like the situation at Lake Tana. The people are now working with ASITY to produce and implement plans for sustainable use, set up conservation zones, and take responsibility for protecting nature. Similar management transfers are also a feature of NABU's conservation work in Ethiopia. One difference remains: the Malagasy state has virtually no local structures; there is, for example, only one policeman for the whole area. The Ethiopians are impressed by the initiative people show as a result of this. For example, they run a campsite for just three guests per year. They are convinced of the region's potential for tourism, and hope to have more visitors in the future. Between the teams, lively discussions are held about tree species for reforestation, and about sensible ways to combine nature conservation with sustainable development.

Before returning to the capital city of Madagascar, the Ethiopians are guests of honour at the opening of a new information centre. Jointly established by NABU and ASITY, the centre will in future allow inhabitants to learn more about their region. On the journey back, it becomes clear that both teams have learned a great deal, and have gained new ideas for their own work. Despite all the differences in the project regions of Ethiopia and Madagascar, the main goal is the same: to protect nature and ensure a future for the people who live here.

▲ Lively exchange on rice cultivation, regional products and nature conservation activities. The group of eight Ethiopians, two Germans and seven Madagascans learned a lot from each other.

Women weave beautiful carpets and other products from the native raffia palm to boost their income.

Mangroves, which will be replanted on a large scale in the project, protect the coasts and are important habitats for endemic species such as the Madagascar fish eagle.

From 1950 to 2000, almost 50 percent of Madagascar's forests were destroyed by slash-and-burn and illegal logging. In 2003, the Madagascar government announced that it would triple the size of its protected areas. The new category of "Nouvelle aire protégée" was created. These are protected areas with a low IUCN protection status in which people can also live. Furthermore, NGOs such as Asity, our BirdLife partner in Madagascar, manage the areas jointly with the population. Since 2015, NABU has supported the work of Asity in a joint project.

Author and contact:

Ronja Krebs
Project Coordinator / Deputy Head
of NABU's Africa Programme
Ronja.Krebs@NABU.de

ASIA



Rediscovered and protected



Striped hyenas are the punks of the hyena world. NABU has now been able to scientifically prove their existence in Tajikistan. One of our current projects involves working with the local population to reduce prejudices and develop protective measures.

Everything began with a video that appeared on the internet: it showed three striped hyenas, which had supposedly been killed by livestock guardian dogs. But what was truly remarkable was that it had obviously been made in Tajikistan, a country where there had not been any conclusive evidence of the existence of striped hyenas for decades. Some experts even believed that the species was extinct in Tajikistan. A man named Umed Karimov went looking for the place shown in the video, and was able to find it in the south-west of the country, on the edge of the Aktau Mountains.

Until the mid-20th century, striped hyenas (*Hyaena hyaena*) were widespread in southern Central Asia. But poaching, loss of habitat and the decline of its prey have seriously affected it. Now the striped hyena has disappeared from large parts of its range. NABU and the German-based Zoological Society for the Conservation of Species and Populations (ZGAP) have started a joint project to protect the striped hyena in the region where the video was made.

The aim is to first collect conclusive evidence of the species' presence in the region, and information on the threats it faces, in order to then be able to develop protective measures. To this end, conservationists have set up camera traps and have interviewed numerous herders and farmers. They have found out that there is, in fact, a reproducing population of striped hyenas in the area. The animals are regarded as a "pest", however, and even killed illegally, as they destroy melon fields and allegedly attack livestock. It is also reported that hyenas are frequently killed by herding dogs.

To save the rare striped hyenas, local residents, especially herders and hunters, have founded the conservation organisation Obi Safed (White Water), in collaboration with NABU, ZGAP and Tajik partners. The aim of the association is to establish a wildlife reserve to protect striped hyenas and their most important prey, the urial, from poaching. The project involves talking to the local population about preventing hyenas from causing damage, and ensuring that the herding dogs are kept under better control. It also involves offering guided tours for nature-loving tourists. Only when the population of wild sheep has recovered will hunters be allowed to hunt some wild sheep, in addition to the much more numerous wild boars. This is an incentive for the restoration and maintenance of a healthy wild sheep population, which will also benefit the hyenas.

If you look closely, you'll be able to spot a striped hyena in this camera trap photo, the first one ever taken in Tajikistan.



The proof

In December 2016, the attempt to use a camera trap to photograph a striped hyena in Tajikistan was successful. This picture is the scientific proof of the existence of striped hyenas in this area.



Author and contact:

Stefan Michel
Member of NABU Voluntary
Expert Group Eurasia
Stefan.Michel@NABU.de

More information:

www.NABU.de/Streifenhyaene

Mountains, pastures, yaks



▲ The author (right) visits Kohl's yak farm during his trip through Upper Bavaria.

Members of NABU's Business Initiative and Executive Board at the opening ceremony of the environmental education centre.

“A journey that introduced us to open-minded farmers and showed us many differences in the farming practices of the two countries, but also surprising parallels.”

Osgorusch Abykeev

Did you know?

In the middle of nowhere

The NABU environmental education centre, opened in June 2018, is located in the middle of the Kara-Kujur Valley in Kyrgyzstan. Here people from the region learn interesting facts about nature conservation in their home country. The environmental education centre also holds seminars on sustainable yak husbandry for herders. The centre was financed by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, as part of the Yak Project. The interior was funded by donations from NABU's Business Initiative. Thank you very much!

Author:

Osgorusch Abykeev

Contact:

Katja Kaupisch
Project Manager Yak Husbandry
in Kyrgyzstan
Katja.Kaupisch@NABU.de

Osgorusch Abykeev, livestock farmer and representative of a local pasture committee from Kyrgyzstan, embarks on a journey to Upper Bavaria, and experiences a Kyrgyz-German change of perspective:

It takes just under a day to travel from my country, Kyrgyzstan, to Germany. Our mountain valley, Kara-Kujur, is located in the Tien Shan, a massive mountain range on the borders of China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. For hundreds of years we've made a living from animal husbandry. Sheep, cattle, horses and yaks are our most important sources of income. Sometimes snow leopards, our neighbours in the Tien Shan, kill livestock. This leads to conflicts with the herders. Yaks, however, only very rarely fall victim to predators. Because of its close social bonds, a herd of yaks can defend itself against attackers, unlike smaller farm animals. So yak husbandry indirectly helps to preserve the habitat for snow leopards and their prey – especially ibexes and wild sheep.

The mighty yak – a type of highland cattle widespread in Central Asia – is also the reason for our adventurous journey to far-off Upper Bavaria. Along with nine other Kyrgyz herders and representatives of pasture committees, we are spending a week travelling around Germany, learning about German methods of organic animal husbandry, product refinement, and marketing. The trip is part of the NABU project “Sustainable yak husbandry in Kyrgyzstan”.

Many of our pastures are affected by land degradation, resulting from a sharp rise in livestock farming and overgrazing. Working with NABU, and with the support of the German and Kyrgyz governments, we want to look for new options for eco-friendly management. One of these is a shift to the philosophy of “quality over quantity”. To learn more about this, we meet the Erzeugergemeinschaft Traunstein, an association of beef cattle producers, during our visit. Hans Grabner, the chairman, explains the structure of the organisation to us. We discover the advantages a producer organisation can have, especially for marketing. Marketing is a problem in Kyrgyzstan, since yak meat is less popular, the prices are low, and the rest of the animal product often remains unused. But a consortium has greater bargaining power, and it reduces the costs for slaughter, transport and certification.

The highlight of the trip is Alfons Kohl's yak farm in Taufkirchen. 70 animals are grazing happily among blossoming apple trees. We talk about the size of the pasture areas and of the farm as a whole, and about yak husbandry and veterinary care. But we also discuss – while eating lunch together – how meat can be processed. This farm markets the meat as a delicacy. Demand is high, and the waiting list is long. Alfons Kohl even sells Lederhosen made of yak leather. After seven days, the cultural exchange ends with a visit to the Kyrgyz embassy in Berlin.



► Yaks are one of the most important sources of income for Kyrgyzstan's livestock herders. Because of their size and the social bonds within the herd, they seldom fall victim to predators such as snow leopards. This herd was photographed very close to the environmental education centre.

Overcoming boundaries

The border in the mountains between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan remains closed, but the closer links between the reserves will improve the situation of snow leopards, brown bears, lynxes and wild sheep in the northern Tian Shan.



Protected areas

- 1 Almatinsky Zapovednik (Kazakhstan)
- 2 Ile-Alatau National Park (Kazakhstan)
- 3 Kolsai-lakes National Park (Kazakhstan)
- 4 Chon-Keminsky National Park (Kyrgyzstan)

Did you know?

Home sweet home

The project region in the northern Tian-Shan was designated as a snow leopard landscape in the Bishkek Declaration of 2013 and is to offer the big cats a safe habitat and special protection until 2020.

Author and contact:

Ronja Krebs
Project Coordinator / Deputy Head
of NABU's Africa Programme
Ronja.Krebs@NABU.de

More information:

www.nabu.de/nord-tian-shan

Five years, four partners, one ambitious goal: laying the foundation for cross-border nature conservation in the northern Tian Shan. This is one of the snow leopard landscapes which are to be secured as safe habitats and areas of special protection for these cats by 2020, as agreed in the 2013 Bishkek Declaration. In 2013, NABU started a cross-border project in what is one of the most fascinating snow leopard areas of Central Asia, working with its partners NABU Kyrgyzstan, Rural Development Fund and Avalon.

Before the start of the project, the four reserves at the border between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan did not collaborate. Not only was the border between the two countries closed, but the working methods and the equipment were also too different to be compatible. There were plenty of common goals, however. These areas of extraordinary natural beauty were increasingly threatened by poachers and illegal logging, and the administrations of the reserves did not have sufficient resources to put a stop to this.

Since 2013, a lot has been achieved in all four reserves. After intensive training, and thanks to better equipment, such as camera traps, the administrations are now able to implement their new management and monitoring plans. The rangers have learnt how to use indicator species to assess ecosystem health, and are tackling their tasks with fresh enthusiasm. The project partners have also set up a compatible database, making it possible to exchange data on species occurrence across borders. This is the basis for a closer collaboration between the reserves, in cases of forest fires or poaching for instance.

The national park authorities are also working with hunters to fight illegal hunting. The livestock farmers monitor the condition of the pastures, and have developed 17 hectares of land for cultivating fodder on their own initiative. There are now more than 300 kilometres of digitally registered hiking trails, inviting tourists to admire the beauty of the region.

Protecting nature also benefits the local population. Today, more than 30 families offer hospitality to national and international tourists, be it overnight accommodation or a chance to try mare's milk, a popular health treatment in the region. New jobs have been created in guided tours and horse trekking. The local population now supports the reserve administration in its goal to preserve the wonderful "Celestial Mountains" of the Tian Shan.

Snow leopards and their wild neighbours



Snow leopards, lynxes and wolves caught on camera: camera trap photos provide important data. As part of a pilot project in the Zarafshan Range in northern Tajikistan, 13 camera traps were set up for a period of two months – one camera in each location. The latest results concerning the presence of snow leopards and their wild neighbours will be used to implement appropriate measures to protect them.

▲ Captured, but only on camera: wolf, lynx and ibex in Tajikistan.

These days there are no longer any blank spots on the map – or are there? Looking at the Zarafshan Range in northern Tajikistan makes us realize that we still do not know a lot about the animals dwelling in these mountains. The area has hardly been explored. And no adequate measures have been taken to protect the endangered snow leopard and its wild neighbours. The camera traps have been set up by NABU and its partner organisation Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union of Tajikistan (NBCUT) to provide a clearer picture of the situation. The devices have delivered their first results since they were set up in 2017: scientists have counted four snow leopards, identifiable by the individual pattern of their fur. They hope, however, that around ten snow leopards live in the surveyed area, which covers 440,000 hectares.

The number of lynxes in the Zarafshan Range is greater than expected. Like the snow leopards, they belong to the cat-like' carnivorans (*Feliformia*), and their behaviour is similar. But the lynx is not a competitor in the proper sense, because its preferred prey is smaller than that of the snow leopard. The camera traps have also taken a total of six photographs of wolves. These animals live in packs or roam their territory individually. They have the same natural prey as the snow leopard, e.g. ibexes and wild sheep. The evidence suggests, however, that these prey animals have become rare in northern Tajikistan, falling victim to poaching and competition for habitats. As the camera traps reveal, local herders' domestic goats are found at heights of up to 4,000 metres, overgrazing the landscape. This reduces the food resources available to the natural prey of the snow leopard – a vicious circle.

The data gained provide an insight into the complex ecosystem of the Central Asian high mountain range, and allow us to draw conclusions about the life of the snow leopard and its wild neighbours. But the data must be treated with caution. More surveys using camera traps are necessary to better estimate the number of snow leopards and their wild neighbours. Effective measures to protect them, such as better grazing management and collaboration with the local population, can only be implemented on the basis of clearer evidence. We need to fill in the blank spot on the map with scientifically proven data.

Snow leopards have mainly been found in the upper reaches of the Zarafshan Valley. This suggests that the lower part of the valley might be too densely populated and too heavily dominated by humans, forcing the snow leopards to withdraw. Besides the majestic snow leopards, we were able to prove the presence of many of its wild neighbours.

Author and contact:

Britta Hennigs
Team Leader,
Press and Public Relations
Britta.Hennigs@NABU.de

More information:

www.schneeopard.de



Map with international projects

AFRICA

Egypt

Protection of migratory birds

Ethiopia

6 NABU Project Offices
Poverty reduction
Promotion of medicinal plants
Lion conservation
NGO capacity building
Ecotourism
Establishment and management of protected areas
Support of rangers
Forest conservation
Energy generation / water hyacinth

Côte d'Ivoire

Protection of migratory birds
Vulture conservation
Establishment of protected areas

Djibouti

Environmental education

Ghana

Marine conservation
Environmental education

Cameroon

Combating illegal trade in great apes

Kenya

Poverty reduction
Elephant conservation
Ecotourism
Support of rangers
Bird conservation
Forest conservation
Combating poaching

Liberia

Monitoring
NGO capacity building
Environmental education
Protection of migratory birds

Madagascar

Poverty reduction
Forest conservation
Environmental education
Coastal and marine conservation

Nigeria

Protection of migratory birds
Establishment of protected areas

Rwanda

Crane conservation

Tanzania

Lion conservation

ASIA

Bhutan

Snow leopard monitoring

India

Tiger and rhino conservation
Support of rangers

Indonesia

Rainforest conservation
Species conservation
Marine conservation
Tarsier monitoring

Kazakhstan

Environmental education
Ecotourism
Saiga conservation
Establishment of protected areas

Kyrgyzstan

NABU Project Office
NABU Species Conservation Centre
NGO capacity building
Snow leopard conservation
Environmental education
Establishment of protected areas
Sustainable pasture management

Pakistan

Snow leopard conservation

Sri Lanka

Elephant conservation

Tajikistan

NGO capacity building
Striped hyena conservation
Snow leopard conservation

Uzbekistan

NGO capacity building

EUROPE

Estonia

Wetland conservation

Latvia

Wetland conservation

Lithuania

Wetland conservation

Malta

Protection of migratory birds

Poland

Wetland conservation

Russia

Environmental education
Bird conservation

Ukraine

Strengthening civil society

Cyprus

Protection of migratory birds

CAUCASUS

Armenia

NABU Project Office
Mouflon conservation
NGO capacity building
Ecotourism
Steppe lake conservation
Bird conservation
Bear conservation

Azerbaijan

Bird conservation

Russia

NABU Project Office
Ecotourism
Establishment of protected areas
Forest conservation
Wisent conservation

WELTWEIT

Cuba

Bird conservation
Snail conservation

New Zealand

Dolphin conservation
Coastal and marine conservation

Russia

Wetland conservation
Spoon-billed sandpiper conservation



▲ The target has been set. The aim is to identify and secure at least 20 habitats for snow leopards, across national borders, by 2020.

“ Snow leopards do not just stand for themselves; they have become symbols of the threatened high-mountain ecosystems of Asia, which are among the Earth’s greatest water reservoirs, and are also vital for human survival. ”

Cihan Sultanoğlu
United Nations (UNDP)

Did you know?

Conservation without borders

For nearly 20 years NABU has been working to protect snow leopards and their habitats in Kyrgyzstan. More recently it has extended its activities to Tajikistan, Bhutan and Pakistan.

The interview was conducted by Laura-Sophia Schulz

Contact:

Britta Hennigs
Team Leader,
Press and Public Relations
Britta.Hennigs@NABU.de

More information:

www.schnee leopard.de

Snow leopards don't roar, but we can still hear them

Snow leopards are among the most endangered big cats in the world. In August 2017, more than 250 scientists and conservationists, as well as representatives of all twelve snow leopard range countries, met in the Kyrgyz city of Bishkek for the second worldwide snow leopard conference. Britta Hennigs, head of international public relations in the NABU Federal Association, was one of the delegates.

What was the objective of the conference?

To develop global strategies to protect the last 4,000 to 6,400 snow leopards worldwide. The Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program (GSLEP) was already agreed on in the Bishkek Declaration on the Conservation of the Snow Leopard of 2013. Its aim is to identify and secure at least 20 habitats for snow leopards, across national boundaries, by 2020. But the declaration also encompasses many other measures, including protection from poaching, environmental education, and the preservation of prey animals. One of the topics of the 2017 forum was the status quo: the participants used the conference to see what had been achieved so far and how best to proceed.

What is the current state of snow leopard conservation?

The reasons why snow leopards are threatened have changed in recent years: today it is no longer poaching that tops the list of threats, but the destruction of habitats through overgrazing, pollution, mining, and especially climate change. According to the GSLEP Secretariat, we are “half way there”. The range countries have identified 23 snow leopard habitats over an area of just under 500,000 km². But now sponsors are urgently needed to fund the ongoing protection of the snow leopard. Hence a special focus of the 2017 Snow Leopard Forum was the topic of “green investment”.

What role did NABU play in the conference?

For a start, NABU initiated the world’s first Snow Leopard Forum in 2013, and has provided funding and active support to the GSLEP programme since then. In the run-up to this conference we combined forces with the Snow Leopard Trust and the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF), starting a petition to save the snow leopard and its habitat. We collected more than 200,000 signatures, including those of celebrities such as Leonardo DiCaprio. The Indian actress Diya Mirza handed the petition to the government representatives at the conference. We were also present as experts, meeting with the delegation from China alongside the conference to launch a new, transnational snow leopard conservation project with China, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

Taking responsibility



Community-based conservation of the saiga antelope. When humans began to settle the Ustyurt region in what is now western Kazakhstan, they discovered a landscape with numerous large mammals, like those found in Africa today. A “Central Asian Serengeti”, with wild horses and donkeys, camels, urials (a species of wild sheep), goitered gazelles and saiga antelopes, hunted by Asiatic cheetahs, striped hyenas and leopards.

Of this abundance of species in the Ustyurt region, the only ones left are the saiga antelope, the goitered gazelle and the urial, whose populations are small and threatened. The decline of the saiga antelope has been especially drastic: its population has fallen from over 250,000 animals to fewer than 3,000 today. This is entirely due to poaching, to exploit the animals' meat and horns. The latter are still used in traditional Chinese medicine, and fetch ever-higher prices.

Since 2015, NABU's Voluntary Expert Group on Eurasia has been working to protect the saiga antelope in the Ustyurt region. The local inhabitants follow traditional livestock farming practices, and are increasingly aware of the loss of the wildlife on the steppe. The Voluntary Expert Group on Eurasia has therefore begun to set up local groups to protect the wildlife, working with its Kazakh partners: Koldau Kazakhstan, EcoMuseum Karaganda and CINEST.

One such group is a small organisation called Dala Tabigaty (Kazakh for “nature of the steppe”), which was established in the villages of Diar and Oymaut in autumn 2017. Its members want to take responsibility for ensuring that future generations will also be able to see saiga antelopes living on the steppe. The aim is to train the herders who are already living in the steppe to be wildlife rangers. They will then enter into long-term leases of wildlife conservation areas on behalf of the Dala Tabigaty association. The concept is based on ancient Kazakh traditions: in historical times those who had the right to active and sustainable use of grazing grounds also had the right to use the wildlife living in them.

This value system is also reflected in the legislation of modern Kazakhstan. Even today, farmland can only be held on long-term leases, and it must be either used or transferred to new users. The same goes for the right to exploit wild animals. At present there is a moratorium on hunting the saiga antelope until 2030, and there can only be very long-term prospects of using this animal sustainably.

In future the aim is to establish more wildlife conservation organisations, to protect the whole habitat of the saiga in the Ustyurt region with community-based groups of wildlife rangers – the plan is to train and equip rangers in seven villages in the region. Our shared objective is to protect the saiga antelope from extinction in the new wildlife conservation areas.

▲ The unusual nose of the saiga antelope serves to protect it from airborne dust on the steppe, and to pre-warm the cold air in winter.

Did you know?

Double the luck

Normally saiga antelopes give birth to twins, but first-time pregnancies usually produce only one calf.

Author and contact:

Til Dieterich
Spokesman of NABU Voluntary
Expert Group Eurasia
Til.Dieterich@NABU.de

Stefan Michel
Member of NABU Voluntary
Expert Group Eurasia
Stefan.Michel@NABU.de

More information:

www.NABU.de/saiga-kasachstan



Cranes on a journey

In spring and autumn, tens of thousands of cranes stop to rest, mainly on the Baltic coast or the North German Plain. In many other parts of Germany they can be observed on their migration, flying in V-formations and calling loudly. The majority of the cranes that breed and rest in Germany overwinter in Western Europe. Other cranes spend the breeding season in the peat bogs and swamps of Eastern Europe, and overwinter in northern Israel.

Airborne trumpeters

Cranes are true world travellers. They fly from their breeding grounds in Germany or Scandinavia to the South of France, to Extremadura in Spain, or from Eastern Europe to the Hula Valley in Israel. NAJU, the youth division of NABU, has launched a German-Israeli education project, “The Crane’s Journey” (“Ein Kranich auf Reisen”). Its aim is to teach children and young people about this fascinating bird species and to strengthen the joint environmental work of the two countries.

Its characteristic trumpeting call is familiar in both Germany and Israel. It is one of Europe’s largest flying birds, and it is universally seen as bringing good luck. The crane is an animal that inspires the same fascination everywhere. But the conflicts with many farmers are also similar. In both Germany and Israel, the animals are particularly attracted to agricultural areas, because the seedlings – often maize in Germany, and mainly peanuts in Israel – are an energy-rich and easily accessible source of nutrition. As a result, conflicts are inevitable. This calls for good species protection management – and of course education programmes.

The NAJU project “The Crane’s Journey” ran from July 2016 to November 2018, and built on the long-standing collaboration between NAJU and the Israeli BirdLife partner, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI). The participants were ten volunteers from the two organisations, with expertise in education and cranes, who worked together to create environmental education programmes about the crane and test them in everyday situations. The result is a small multi-lingual brochure.

The project basically began in autumn 2016, when the German delegation travelled to Israel. The Hula Valley in northern Israel, partially restored by SPNI in the 1960s after many years of drainage, is now the most important resting place for cranes in the Middle East. More than 40,000 animals now spend the winter here. The sight of the birds taking off from their roost early in the morning is an extraordinary natural spectacle, and the air is filled with the trumpeting of tens of thousands of cranes. The Hula Valley was an inspiring place for NAJU and SPNI to begin their joint project, establishing the main priorities and the structure of the work.

This was followed by SPNI’s visit to Germany in September 2017. The highlight of the trip was the three-day expedition to the crane centre in Groß Mohrdorf near Stralsund. In the migration season, up to 70,000 cranes at a time rest here before setting off on their journey south – a fitting backdrop for the project participants to present the games and methods they had developed over the preceding months, and add the finishing touches.

The resulting brochure is available from NAJU both in printed form and as a download. It includes various games and methods for teaching children and young people about cranes. All the texts are being published in German and Hebrew. The brochure, designed to be used in educational programmes in both the partner countries, reflects the productive collaboration and the good friendship between SPNI and NAJU. And it will benefit not only the children and youth of Germany and Israel, but also – last but not least – the birds that symbolise happiness.



▲ In September 2017 volunteer nature conservationists from NAJU and SPNI visited the craneorama (“Kranorama”) at Günzer See, a crane observation station supervised by the NABU crane centre in Groß Mohrdorf.



The project is funded by the German Israeli Future Forum and ConAct, the Coordination Center for German-Israeli Youth Exchange.

Author and contact:

Manuel Tacke
NAJU Deputy Managing Director /
NAJU Officer for International Affairs
Manuel.Tacke@NABU.de

More information:

www.kraniche.de



Strengthening the economy and protecting elephants

“ Only when the situation of the people in the region has improved and they are financially independent will nature and species conservation stand a chance. ”

Stefanie Gendera

Chitwan National Park is relatively close to Nepal's capital, Kathmandu. The establishment of the national park and good management of the protected areas have had a positive impact on the region's economy, allowing nature and humans to coexist peacefully.

In the reserves further away from the tourist routes, however, the situation is different. One of these reserves, Bardia National Park, lies around 500 kilometres west of the capital on the Indian border. What is special about the border region between India and Nepal is that the processes of natural migration and genetic exchange of many endangered wild species, such as tigers, elephants and rhinos, are still intact there. But their migratory movements repeatedly lead to conflicts with the human population living along the park boundaries.

Rhinos and elephants enter the villages, posing a threat to the inhabitants. They also sometimes destroy gardens and fields, which can cause great financial damage. The local people, who initially accepted the reserves and the protection of endangered species, are becoming less willing to tolerate them every time crops are lost. We need to remedy this situation, reduce human-wildlife conflict,



- ◀ As every afternoon, the two young staff members of the elephant breeding station in the Nepalese village of Sauraha let their animals bathe in the river when the day's work is done. Since the mid-1980s, these domesticated elephants have been supporting the human population on the periphery of Chitwan National Park in the heart of Nepal in securing the park. They also enhance the small village as a welcome tourist attraction.

and systematically implement projects that will strengthen the economy in the region. In the future, NABU plans to work with IUCN Nepal and the textile manufacturer Brands Fashion, a NABU partner and a member of NABU's Business Initiative, in the region of Bardia National Park. The idea is to strengthen the economy and compensate for the lack of tourism by cultivating organic cotton.

In the 1970s, farmers grew cotton in Bardia National Park and the surrounding area. But political unrest (lasting until 2006) and the lack of a market for cotton meant that the families had to resort to cultivating other, less profitable crops. These were also much more attractive to wild herbivores such as elephants.

The pilot project involves cultivating cotton sustainably, initially on a 500-hectare area, at the edge of Bardia National Park. Brands Fashion will be involved as a reliable partner for both humans and nature. NABU's Voluntary Expert Group South/Southeast Asia has successfully initiated the first joint activities. In December 2017, the voluntary experts and IUCN Nepal exchanged ideas for the first time. And with financial support from Brands fashion, a feasibility study has been carried out for the pilot project. This study will serve as a basis for future activities.

Author and contact:

Stefanie Gendera
Member of NABU Voluntary
Expert Group South/South-East Asia
BAG-Sued-Suedostasien@NABU.de



Help us protect rhinos and tigers by sponsoring our anti-poaching dog unit!

The courageous men and dogs in our antipoaching team urgently need your support. By joining our new K9 Unit Adoption Programme, you will help to fund their training, supply much-needed field equipment to keep them safe, and help to feed and care for the dogs. You will receive regular news updates from the team throughout the year, a personalised adoption certificate, as well as a small gift as a thank you for your support.

Please act now and adopt our antipoaching dog team today!

For further information and ways to help please visit www.NABU.de/paten-hundestaffel

Four-legged assistants



In May 2017, some very special puppies were born in northeast India. Handpicked from two litters because of their temperament and personality, three tiny Belgian Malinois puppies were selected to become highly trained wildlife protection dogs in the Indian state of Assam, the heartland of the endangered Indian rhinos and tigers.

Dog or K9 units have become an increasingly important part of the fight against poaching. Our puppies' journey to becoming fully fledged antipoaching dogs began at the age of three months, when they moved from the care of their mothers into that of their handlers, who will be their lifelong companions. The dogs' training is based on playful encouragement and positive reinforcement of natural behaviours. Eighteen months on, our dogs have learned to effectively track wildlife poachers and apprehend them. They are also more than capable of protecting their human colleagues if necessary.

Dr Bibhab Talukdar, Chief Executive of our Indian partner organisation Aaranyak, also serves as Chair of the IUCN's Asian Rhino Specialist Group. He is only too familiar with the ever-present threat of poaching and illegal wildlife trafficking, and confronts it with his team each and every day.

In November 2017, Dr Barbara Maas, NABU International Foundation's Head of International Species Conservation, travelled to India with dog training expert Susen Baumbach to work with the human and canine partners of our dog unit. Susen and Barbara received a warm welcome and soon got down to business. Susen did a fantastic job of guiding both dogs and handlers to improve their skills. The handlers expressed their sincere determination to stop rhino poachers in their tracks and showed exceptional talent and enthusiasm, exceeding all expectations.

The dog teams will have to undergo a second intensive training course before they are fully qualified to begin their work in Assam's tiger and rhino areas. The dog team transport vehicle, which was funded through donations to NABU International, will have to cover far greater distances to deploy the teams to wherever they are needed to track down poachers.

While the dog unit is preparing for deployment in the field, our efforts in Assam have already been rewarded with significant successes. Three motorbikes donated to support the police outside Kaziranga National Park in their fight against wildlife crime were used to successfully pursue and arrest five rhino poachers. According to the most recent survey, Kaziranga's Indian rhino population has grown to at least 2413 individuals – the highest number of rhinos anywhere in Asia. Similarly, the rhino numbers in the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, which boasts the highest density of Indian wild rhinos in the world, rose from 93 to 102. The provision of field equipment, rain gear and torches to 125 rangers in the reserve provided a significant morale boost. Thanks to the dedication of Pobitora's frontline staff, there was not a single poaching incident in 2017!

▲ Following scents and tracking down people: not a problem for the wildlife protection dogs after training.

Did you know?

Dog school

Like learning any new skill, the key to successful training for dogs and handlers is practice, practice and more practice.

Author and contact:

Dr Barbara Maas
Head of Endangered Species
Conservation, NABU International –
Foundation for Nature
Barbara.Maas@NABU.de

More information:

www.NABU.de/paten-hundestaffel

EUROPE



Long live the land!



In 2021 a new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is planned to come into force in the EU. NABU and its European BirdLife partners have been campaigning for a drastic change of the CAP since 2017. We want it to be fair, environmentally sound, healthy and globally responsible. The successful LivingLand initiative marked the start of NABU's agricultural campaign, which will run until at least 2020. We talked to Konstantin Kreiser, Head of Global and EU Nature Conservation Policy in the NABU Federal Association.

What is wrong with the current EU agricultural policy, and what needs to change?

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is the main cause of decline for species and habitats in Europe, including Germany. To give just a few examples: the population of grey partridges, which are found mainly in agricultural landscapes, on open fields and fallow land, has fallen by 94 per cent in the last few decades in Germany. And the decline in insect populations is also seen as largely due to increasingly intensive farming. Our goal is to make the CAP funding system ecologically sustainable. At present nearly 40 per cent of the EU budget is spent on the CAP. That's 114 euros for every EU citizen – nearly 60 billion euros per year.

A lot of money, which could do a lot for nature.

Unfortunately, however, most of this money is being paid out indiscriminately to EU farmers, as flat-rate area payments, without requiring any specific commitments in return. Agricultural businesses receive subsidies per hectare. So for a large part of the subsidies it generally doesn't matter whether a farmer sprays the soil heavily, or farms organically – he receives an equally high, unconditional basic income from the state. For most farmers, their business is only profitable if they extract all they can from their land and animals. So they use much more slurry and glyphosate than nature can handle. Up till now there has been little incentive to farm in an ecologically sustainable way, to plant flower strips or to stop intensive grazing. This has to change as a matter of urgency.

LivingLand, in May 2017, was the prelude to NABU's agricultural campaign, which will run until the end of the CAP negotiations in 2020. What was LivingLand about?

In spring 2017, the European Commission carried out a 12-week survey to find out what citizens expected of the future CAP from 2021 to 2027. For us this was the right moment to start a movement that would go far beyond conservation organisations. What do we all – companies, scientists, private individuals – want from the agricultural reform? This led to a trans-European initiative, enabling us to send a strong message to the Commission: if we want to preserve rural life, we need a radically different agricultural policy! With 260,000 signatures, we had the second-highest level of participation ever achieved in an EU-led citizen survey in history – a huge success.

At present nearly 40 per cent of the EU budget is spent on the CAP: that's 114 euros for every EU citizen.

258,708 signatures and 600 logos from the LivingLand initiative were presented to the European Commissioner for Agriculture, Phil Hogan, in Brussels.



Keeping you up to date

For updates and explanations of the agricultural negotiations, see NABU's own CAP news ticker (in German): www.nabu.de/gap-ticker



The interview was conducted by Laura-Sophia Schulz

Contact:

Konstantin Kreiser
Head of EU Conservation Policy
Konstantin.Kreiser@NABU.de

More information:

www.NeueAgrarpolitik.eu



Smoking funnels

Many of today's ships, not just on the high seas, but far inland on rivers and lakes, seem like relics of a bygone era. While land-based sources of pollution, including power stations, industrial plants, cars and lorries, have had to be equipped with exhaust gas cleaning systems, most ships still burn their dirty fuels without any protective measures.

The growth of maritime traffic, the ever-increasing size of container ships, and the booming popularity of cruise holidays are leading to increasing air pollution at sea, along coasts and in ports. The huge ships usually run on highly toxic heavy fuel oil, which means not only air pollution but also the ever-present risk of a disastrous oil spill. For these reasons, NABU is campaigning in various international NGO networks for an immediate ban on heavy fuel oil in maritime transport – especially in ecologically sensitive regions such as the Arctic – and for a switch to higher-quality fuels such as liquefied natural gas (LNG) or marine diesel, with corresponding exhaust gas cleaning systems.

Inhabitants of the Mediterranean region are particularly badly affected by exposure to air pollutants such as black carbon, particulate matter, and sulphur and nitrogen oxides, since the busy shipping routes between Europe and Asia pass through the Mediterranean. The problem is exacerbated by the heavy ferry traffic between the numerous islands and the mainland, and a massive increase in cruise tourism, with its energy-guzzling floating hotels. Working with partner organisations, NABU is campaigning to have the Mediterranean declared an emission control area for sulphur and nitrogen oxides, and to have measures introduced to reduce particulate matter and black carbon. The campaign has had some initial success: the French government and the European Commission are considering establishing an emission control area, and have commissioned studies on its effectiveness.

It is not just policymakers who are acknowledging their responsibilities; shipowners are ordering ships which have cleaner drive technologies and so emit fewer air pollutants. Seventeen new cruise ships and at least nine container ships with LNG engines are due to come onto the market in the next few years, and for short journeys such as ferry crossings there is an increasing reliance on hybrid or purely electric engines.

But of course it is not just a matter of reducing air pollutants: the shipping industry must also contribute to international climate goals. In this area, NABU is working with the Clean Shipping Coalition and its umbrella organisation Transport & Environment to advance ideas about decarbonised shipping. This will be a long and hard task, however – representatives of the industry see 2075 as the target year for emissions-free shipping, which would not be compatible with the Paris Agreement. There's still a lot to be done!

International climate protection: the existing (voluntary) commitments of the shipping industry are still shamefully small, and do not fulfil international climate protection agreements.

Better together

NABU is campaigning for clean seas with its partner organisations:



- France Nature Environnement (FNE)
- the Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS)
- BirdLife Malta
- Ecologistas en Accion
- Cittadini per l'Aria

Author and contact:

Beate Klünder
Officer for Transport Policy
Beate.Kluender@NABU.de





A safe haven for migratory birds

For more than ten years, NABU has been supporting its project partner BirdLife Cyprus in the continued development and implementation of a nature conservation strategy. The tasks on the ground include patrols and operations against the illegal trapping or shooting of migratory birds. We talked to Christoph Hein, the spokesman of NABU Voluntary Expert Group “Migration Unlimited”, about education programmes, the social acceptance of bird-trapping methods, and strategies that can be used to combat them.

Illegal bird trapping has a long tradition on Cyprus and is still a major problem. What is the Voluntary Expert Group doing at present to curtail poaching?

The hunting of migratory birds is particularly prevalent in the south-east of Cyprus. Here poachers set up mist nets or lime sticks to trap passing birds, including rare and endangered species such as the hoopoe and the European bee-eater. These two methods are especially common here, and are also, unfortunately, socially accepted. In 2017, after intensive searching and much negotiation, BirdLife Cyprus and NABU were able to secure land in this region for the first time. Two plots covering a total area of 10 hectares were leased, with a view to establishing hunting-free zones.

What are you planning to do next?

Working with the department of environmental monitoring at the university of applied sciences HTW Berlin, NABU will be mapping the populations of animals and plants on these plots. The aim is to develop a plan for the management and maintenance of the land. What we hope to achieve here is an increase in biodiversity, to create attractive and structurally diverse areas where migratory birds can rest without being hunted or persecuted. Even if these first two plots of land will not be enough to solve the problem of illegal hunting of migratory birds, they are a small but important part of the overall strategy. For the first time, they allow BirdLife Cyprus to carry out activities on its own land. A major boost for nature conservation – and for our public relations work.

While we’re on the subject of public relations: like environmental education, it’s a crucial part of your work in Cyprus. What are you doing to make the population and especially young people more aware of the issue of bird hunting?

In autumn 2017 the four-part documentary Wings on the Wind was presented to the public by NABU and BirdLife. The 20-minute film shows the huge variety of resident and migratory birds on the island, and explains the problems that intensive farming, urbanisation, changes in energy generation and illegal hunting cause for migratory birds. NABU is also funding a current project of BirdLife Cyprus, in which staff of the project partner visit school classes with an interactive lecture package. A shortened version with German subtitles is available here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=9A1gOC0LeRE



▲ Together with BirdLife Cyprus, NABU was able to lease two areas in order to establish non-hunting zones and to plant bird-friendly species.

Did you know?

Environmental education and public relations go hand in hand

A presentation, two animated films and a newly developed board game are introducing children to the issues of migratory bird conservation on Cyprus. In 2017 the programme reached over 1300 school pupils.

The interview was conducted by Britta Hennigs

Contact:

Christoph Hein
Spokesman of NABU Voluntary Expert Group “Migration Unlimited”
heinchris@migration-unlimited.org



▲ Private land conservation: bringing new life to our landscapes.

Conservationists and landowners standing shoulder to shoulder



▲ Tilmann Disselhoff visiting a piece of land where nature conservation measures have been successfully implemented in collaboration with the owner and tenant farmer.

Tilmann Disselhoff is a man of many parts: campaign manager, caretaker, accountant and mediator. His role for NABU is to coordinate the EU-funded project “Development of a European Land Conservation Network (ELCN)”. How can we convince European landowners of the benefits of nature conservation measures, and work with them to implement such measures? How can we learn from one another? Tilmann Disselhoff talks to us about the cross-border network.

Europe is rich in cropland, farm roads, forests and lakes. But who are the owners of this land?

The crazy thing is that nobody knows. In Germany, for example, data protection is seen as so important that it’s not possible to compile any comprehensive statistics about land ownership. We don’t know how much land belongs to the state, companies, or individuals. If someone does happen to know this, I’d love to hear from them! But what we do know is that there are institutions such as the church or the German rail operator Deutsche Bahn, which own hundreds of thousands of hectares of land in Germany. Of course this makes them highly relevant for nature conservation.



It's the same situation in many other EU member states. And yet the question of land ownership has always been important for nature conservation. There is a basic legal principle in Germany that ownership comes with social responsibilities, but nevertheless many nature conservation measures can only be implemented if the landowner agrees.

This is the starting point for the trans-European project European Private Land Conservation Network, initiated by NABU in 2017. What exactly is it about?

Whether in Italy, Portugal or Germany, the idea is for private landowners to voluntarily allow nature conservation measures on their land, or implement them themselves, going beyond the statutory minimum. We are looking for economically intelligent ways for landowners and conservation organisations to work together in partnership. Voluntarily. At the end of the project two publications will be produced, documenting pilot measures from various EU member states, and hopefully inspiring others to follow their example. One of these manuals will be aimed at conservation organisations and landowners, the other will make recommendations on how European policymakers can facilitate and expand voluntary nature conservation on private property.

Could you give an example of what farmers can do with their land to help nature?

They can decide not to fertilise or spray alongside waterways on their land. They can also establish flower strips or small-scale fallows. Forest owners have the option of identifying particularly old trees on their land, so that they are saved from logging. These are just a few effective ways in which individuals, companies or institutions can take a more active approach to nature conservation on their land. Of course there's always the question of what such measures will cost. Here the project is looking for good examples – not just from Europe, but also from other regions of the world – of how to support landowners and land users, going beyond traditional payments from the Common Agricultural Policy.

Who is part of this network?

Our network consists of European nature conservation organisations, for example from Portugal, Ireland, Belgium, Italy, Romania, Germany, and Scandinavia, who are faced with similar challenges. But organisations representing the interests of landowners and land users are also part of the network. All of us are concerned with private land conservation. We exchange ideas and learn from each other.

Did you know?

On the ground

There are already a number of initiatives for private land conservation throughout Europe. We recorded the results of our 2017 census on a map. The locations presented do not necessarily reflect involvement in the ELCN project, but they show the broad spectrum of similar initiatives and projects throughout Europe. The map is available online at www.elcn.eu/on-the-ground.



The interview was conducted by Laura-Sophia Schulz

Contact:

Dr Tilmann Disselhoff
Project Coordinator, LIFE ELCN
Tilmann.Disselhoff@NABU.de

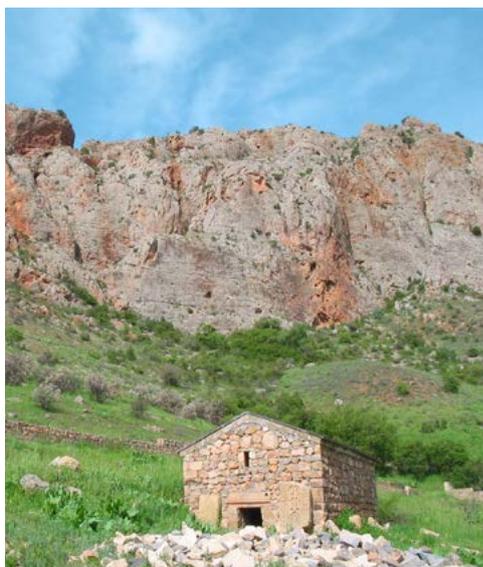
More information:

www.elcn.eu

CAUCASUS



Organic farming: keeping it real



Narek Grigoryan is the head of NABU's branch in Armenia, and coordinates a large organic farming project. We talked to him about wild herbal tea, production chains and organic certification.

So how common are organic products in Armenia?

In Armenia this is still a relatively new topic, but interest has grown a lot in the last three years, and the number of organic products is three to four times higher today. There are now a wide range of projects promoting organic farming. We are one of them. One of our priorities is the certification of wild herbs, which can be used in tea production, for example. Many Armenian food producers gather herbs in the mountains. We show them how to do this without harming the environment – how to avoid removing soil, for example.

How do farmers benefit from your organic farming project?

Certified organic food is healthier for humans and good for the environment, and there's a market for these products. At the same time, the Armenian food producers know that if they want to switch to organic farming, they can't use any pesticides or chemical agents. This change costs them a lot of money, but this is where we come in. Working with our project partner, the French bank ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK, NABU gives financial support for organic farming in Armenia. We also supply the farmers and food producers with the necessary know-how.

What do they have to consider if they want to get organic certification for a product?

You can get certification for the soil, the harvesting process, the machine processing, and the transport. However if you want the final product to be certified as organic, the whole production chain has to be organic. If you only get one area certified, the end product is not certified organic. For the certification we work with a partner in Armenia, Eco Globe Company.

So say I'm an Armenian food producer and I've obtained organic certification for my herbal tea. How do I now get my organic products on the market?

The networks between the European and Armenian markets are important. We create transnational partnerships between companies working in organic farming. The European entrepreneurs are interested in getting our Armenian organic products onto the European market. Armenian companies, often small agricultural enterprises, come to our workshops to learn better ways to market their organic products.

▲ In Armenia NABU supports farmers and food producers with seed capital and the necessary know-how. An opportunity for people and nature.

Did you know?

Armenia's wild bears

Brown bears are seen as the symbol of Armenia's nature, but their population is declining. Nobody knows exactly how many bears are left in the South Caucasus, but there are estimated to be only 600 of them.

The interview was conducted by Laura-Sophia Schulz

Contact:

Narek Grigoryan
Head of the Armenian
branch of NABU
Narek.Grigoryan@NABU.de

More information:

www.NABU.de/armenien



▲ Many years of nature conservation work in the Western Caucasus are paying off: the population of bison in the region has been restored to over 1,200.

Pictures that take your breath away – the rugged beauty of the Western Caucasus

NABU International is celebrating 25 years of working with the Kavkazkiy Nature Reserve for the protection of the world's natural heritage in the Western Caucasus. On NABU's initiative, this region was recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1999, an important step towards protecting this unique landscape. Now, in the photo exhibition "Natural treasures of the Western Caucasus", we are showing for the first time, what the region has to offer: fascinating wildlife and magnificent natural landscapes.

Sergei Trepetskiy is waiting. He's a nature photographer, and patience is part of his job. Then he sees, appearing as if from nowhere, a herd of Caucasian bison. The soft ground absorbs the sound of their hooves. Snow swirls up, and Sergei Trepetskiy presses the shutter release. The result is an impressive photo, and at the same time evidence of a threatened species in the Western Caucasus. The number of Caucasian bison declined due to poaching in the 1990s, from 1,500 to only 150 animals. The designation as a UNESCO World Heritage area was crucial for the protection of these animals. Since then the population has risen to over 1,200.



The majestic peaks of the Greater Caucasus in southern Russia are protected by their designation as the UNESCO Western Caucasus World Heritage area. For over 100 years this natural paradise has been under strict protection. It is the only example of a large high-mountain landscape in Europe and West Asia that has remained largely untouched. In the dense primary forests and colourful alpine meadows, the flora and fauna have been able to develop completely undisturbed over the last few centuries. However, the logging of primary forests and changes in the climate are harming animals and plants. Many species are vulnerable or critically endangered, and are therefore under international protection.

Since 1993, NABU has been implementing conservation measures to preserve the natural heritage of the Western Caucasus for the future. NABU played a crucial role in having the region recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1999. The area includes parts of the Greater Caucasus within Russia in the eastern Krasnodar Krai, the south of the Republic of Adygea, and a small part of the Karachay-Cherkess Republic. NABU's work with governmental and non-governmental partners focuses on the protection of biodiversity, the development of sustainable tourism, and environmental education. The living conditions of the Caucasian bison have also been improved by the protection of Nordmann fir forests and the deployment of anti-poaching units.

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of NABU's activities to protect the Western Caucasus World Heritage site, NABU is offering people in Germany and Russia a close encounter with the vast, rugged wilderness of this area. In breathtaking pictures, the photo exhibition "Natural Treasures of the Western Caucasus" shows the beauty and distinctiveness of the region.

The four photographers Dmitry Andreev, Alexei Bibin, Alexander Perevozov and Sergei Trepet paint a highly personal picture of the Western Caucasus. There are the bison, bursting with energy in the biting cold, running together into the wind. There are the graceful chamois, resting at dizzying heights on the steep mountain slope, half in shadow, half in sunlight. "The pictures are simply fascinating – they make you want to go there straight away", says a beaming visitor at the opening of the travelling exhibition at the Urania centre in Berlin. The exhibition "Natural Treasures of the Western Caucasus" is a photographic journey. It inspires a longing for faraway places – and a desire to support nature conservation in the Western Caucasus.

Did you know?

Look and be amazed

The NABU exhibition celebrating 25 years of conservation is travelling through Germany and Russia. www.NABU.de/kaukasus-ausstellung

Author:

Laura Meinecke

Contact:

Vitalij Kovalev
Head of Caucasus Programme
Vitalij.Kovalev@NABU.de

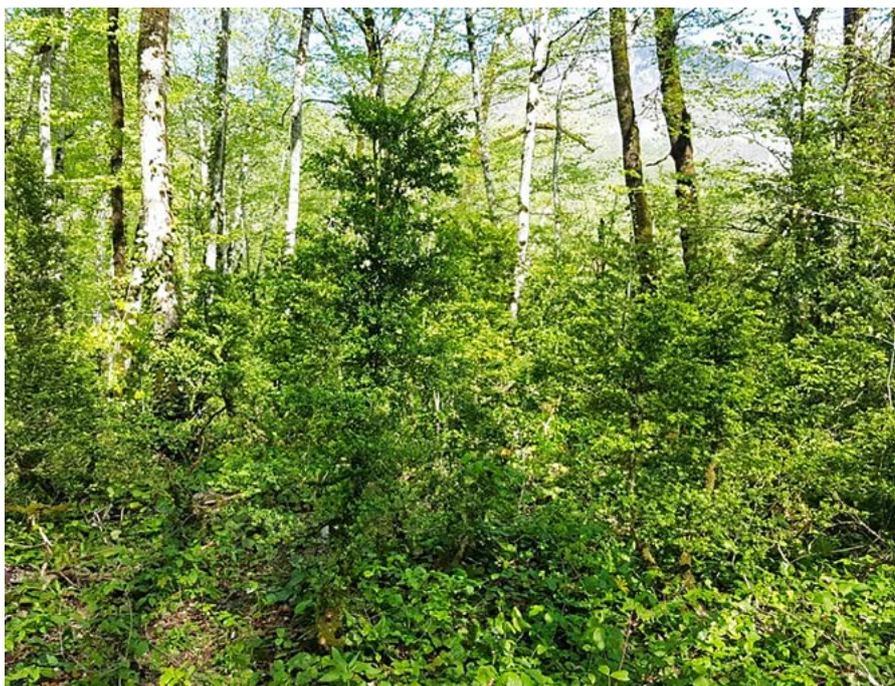


Drama in the forest

An ecological disaster is unfolding in the Caucasus. The invasive box tree moth, an innocuous-looking moth with grey wings, is attacking leaves and bark in the box tree forests of the Western Caucasus – an ancient relic of the last ice ages, and an irreplaceable ecosystem for the region. NABU's efforts on the ground are focused on biological pest control, tree planting campaigns, and environmental education.

It's ten degrees Celsius. It doesn't take long for the eggs under the leaves of the young box tree to hatch into little caterpillars. They're hungry, and start to eat their way through the last stands of evergreen box trees in the Western Caucasus. Once they're big, fat and strong, after a feeding phase of around four weeks, the yellow or dark green caterpillars spin a cocoon. After about a week, white moths with grey wings hatch from the cocoons. From this moment on, their days are numbered: they only live for eight days. When the eggs are laid, however, the cycle begins again – a serious problem for the box tree forests.

Once they've been stripped bare, the trees have little chance of regenerating. Any new leaves are eaten as soon as they appear, and eventually the trees die. And yet the box trees are of enormous ecological importance on the slopes of the Western Caucasus, as they maintain the hydrological balance and provide shade. They have allowed special ecosystems to develop in the Caucasus, with their own microclimate, in which animal and plant species coexist in the forest.



◀ One of the last natural boxwood forests in the Caucasus. Large parts were destroyed by the box tree moth.

Protecting the box trees is hugely important to NABU, and at the same time, it's a race against time. "Interconnected natural systems, with flora and fauna that are unique in the Caucasus, are in danger of disappearing", explains Vitalij Kovalev, head of NABU's Caucasus programme.

Since 2015, NABU has been working to preserve the last box tree forests in the Western Caucasus. In 2017 it started two major replanting campaigns, which were a great success. The campaigns were coordinated by NABU-Kavkaz, NABU's project partner in the Caucasus, in collaboration with the forest conservation centres in Adygea and local tree nurseries in the north-western part of the Western Caucasus. In 2017 and 2018, volunteers and staff of NABU-Kavkaz planted a total of 2000 box shrubs over a one-hectare area – an important step towards halting the extinction of the box tree.

Another focus of NABU's work on the ground is environmental education. In February 2017 NABU opened an advice centre for the Caucasus region, to inform the local population and other local stakeholders from business and politics about problems, and about the measures needed to protect the box trees. The advice centre is located in the NABU-Kavkaz office in Maykop in the Russian republic of Adygea. Since its opening NABU has organised events here, provided information material, and offered environmental consultations.

The invasive box tree moth infests leaves and bark in the ancient box tree forest. In favourable climatic conditions such as those in the Western Caucasus, it can produce several generations per year. The moth was accidentally introduced to Germany from China in 2007. Since then it has been spreading through Europe at a rate of around 1400 km per year. The caterpillars were accidentally brought to Sochi from Italy in a consignment of box shrubs during preparations for the Winter Olympics in 2012.

In the long term, NABU wants to put a stop to the invasive box tree moth. A working group is looking for ways to fight the pest with a biological preparation based on the *Bacillus thuringiensis* bacterium. It's a means to an end: NABU and its partners want to prevent the forests from dying off completely. The last thing we need is drama in the forest!



Small but mighty!



In Germany the box tree is not only grown in parks and gardens, but also occurs naturally. Its only natural range, however, is in a few places in the south near Grenzach (in the district of Lörrach, in the south German state of Baden-Württemberg), and on the Moselle. But here too, the introduced caterpillars have already stripped most of the trees bare.

Author:

Laura Meinecke

Contact:

Vitalij Kovalev
Head of Caucasus Programme
Vitalij.Kovalev@NABU.de

WORLDWIDE



Hope for the world's rarest dolphins



The New Zealand government has again been exposed to sharp criticism from the scientists of the International Whaling Commission's (IWC) Scientific Committee over its failure to act to protect New Zealand's critically endangered Maui dolphins. Despite extremely low population numbers of just 60 individuals, New Zealand refuses to put in place urgent measures to arrest the dolphins' decline towards extinction. Funding the necessary steps to save these small marine mammals would cost just 15 million euros – a veritable bargain compared to the cost of the country's referendum on the redesign of the national flag.

In May 2017, NABU International publicised a shocking video, which showed two fishermen pulling a dead Hector's dolphin onboard a commercial set net boat, disentangling it from the net, and dragging it across the deck before making it disappear overboard as if the incident had never happened. The footage had been released reluctantly by the New Zealand authorities and illustrates the grim reality of how fishing is driving Hector's and Maui dolphins towards extinction without making it into official bycatch statistics.

Prime minister Jacinda Ardern's announcement that New Zealand will put an end to offshore oil and gas exploration permits provided a much-welcomed milestone in the efforts to save Hector's and Maui dolphins. New Zealand will not authorise further seismic exploration once current licences have expired. The move provides a dramatic change in direction for New Zealand and raises hopes for a genuine commitment to climate protection. Seismic blasts can be harmful to marine life. Their absence will improve the chance of survival for a host of marine life, including Maui and Hector's dolphins and blue whales.

NABU International has campaigned for an end to offshore oil and gas exploration and extraction in New Zealand since 2009. The intense sound blasts associated with seismic exploration can persist for weeks or even months and have been associated with acute and chronic health problems in dolphins and whales. This adds to the increasingly hostile environment for these animals, who are already struggling with the deadly threats posed by fishing nets.

The world's smallest and rarest marine dolphins are still far from safe. However, the chances of achieving the protection they need have never been more promising. Prior to last year's general election, two of the three political parties that now make up New Zealand's coalition government had publicly committed to banning gillnets and trawl nets in the dolphins' habitat. Now it is time for them to honour their promise, before the brief window that's left to save the dolphins closes forever.

▲ It's time for the New Zealand government to act: in the run-up to the general election, the government party promised the implementation of much-needed measures to protect Maui and Hector's dolphins.

Berlin, February 2018 – NABU presented close to 151,000 signatures urging the dolphins' immediate protection from fishing to former New Zealand prime minister and government party representative, Helen Clark.



Author and contact:

Dr Barbara Maas
Head of Endangered Species
Conservation, NABU International –
Foundation for Nature
Barbara.Maas@NABU.de

More information:

www.nabu.de/maui-delfine



▲ Our author (right) with other conservationists in Cuba.

Wild Cuba

For NABU, 2017 began with an unusual request from Nautilusfilm. The production company from Dürfen in Bavaria wants to make a documentary about nature in Cuba, a kind of “Wild Cuba”. We immediately promised our support, and met the company in Cuba in April 2017 to introduce local helpers and the filming locations. We’re still waiting for the necessary permits, but we’re confident that filming will be able to start soon.

In 2017 we once again welcomed a Cuban student as an intern in Germany. Amalia Alcolea Portal completed her bird ringing training on the Greifswalder Oie, a small island nature reserve in the Baltic. After several weeks of training, she passed the final test. In future, to increase the effectiveness of the training, candidates for the internship will first participate in six ringing cycles at the bird ringing centre in Siboney in Cuba, to acquire a knowledge base and demonstrate their aptitude.

Our collaboration with the Universidad de Oriente in Santiago de Cuba has made steady progress. The scholarly exchange includes not only specialist journals, but also reference books and special instruments for taxidermy. The internet makes it easy for us to keep in contact with several lecturers and professors from the biology department.

Thanks to the support of NABU International – Foundation for Nature, we’ve been able to take 30 new ringing nets to Siboney. The combination of sun, high temperatures and cacti means that they wear out faster here than in Europe. By the end of 2018 we will have ringed around 11,000 birds. Since 2017, the four ringers working at BIOECO have received support from rangers in the areas of preparation, checking, and dismantling.

For 2018 we are planning to train two new BIOECO ringers in Germany. This will be necessary in order to begin operating a second ringing station in Maisi in 2019. It will be situated at the easternmost point in Cuba, and will be enormously important for tracking small-bird migration in the Caribbean.

A cooperation agreement has been signed with BIOECO, the conservation authority responsible for the four eastern provinces of Cuba. This allows NABU to work legally in Cuba, and also marks the beginning of “legal contact” for our Cuban colleagues. BIOECO and NABU plan to use this agreement to apply for funding and carry out joint projects.

The collaboration with the Alexander von Humboldt National Park in the east of Cuba began on 1 January 2018, after just one year of preparation. The first joint projects have focused on the conservation of the Cuban land snail (*Polymita picta*) and the almiqui, the only species of solenodon in Cuba. The experiences and results gained here will feed into proposals for future projects.

Did you know?

The Humboldt brothers

1799 was the year of Alexander von Humboldt’s first visit to the island of Cuba. The Alexander von Humboldt National Park in Cuba is named after this well-travelled naturalist, ethnologist and diarist. In 2019, NABU will hold an event to commemorate the 250th anniversary of his birth.

Author and contact:

Tino Sauer
Chairman of the local NABU group
in Großfahner, Germany
NABUgrossfahner@web.de

Colourful, valuable, and under threat



The Polymita snail or Cuban land snail (Polymita picta) lives in the Humboldt National Park in the east of the Caribbean island of Cuba. The snails are one of almost 2,000 endemic animal and plant species in the park, which is around 760 km² in size. The species is threatened with extinction.

Though the Humboldt National Park is under strict protection, it is not uninhabited. Nearly 2,000 people live and work within its boundaries, most of them farmers. Because of their close connection to the reserve, they preserve what constitutes their livelihood. *Polymita* snails also play an important role here. By cleaning algae from the leaves of coffee and cocoa plants, they contribute to a natural balance and a good harvest.

But the useful *Polymita* snails are highly endangered. The colour spectrum of their differently shaped shells offers all imaginable variations of yellow, orange, beige, violet and green, combined in the most unusual patterns and shades.

White or black lines in the grooves between the whorls emphasise the contrast. The beauty of the shells makes them highly desired. Collectors all over the world are willing to pay 1,000 dollars or more for particularly rare specimens – despite strict export regulations and severe penalties. The snails are illegally collected, killed, and sold to tourists as necklaces. If this trend continues, this splendidly colourful snail species will be extinct within a few decades.

In order to protect *Polymitas* and other endangered species that can only be found here, NABU has been active for two years in the Humboldt National Park, which has been listed by UNESCO as a World Natural Heritage Site since December 2001. In collaboration with the German Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety (BMU), NABU is supporting the work of scientists in the park by providing funding and urgently needed equipment. The first consignment of laptops, camera traps and cameras arrived in Baracoa at the beginning of 2018.

The BMU-funded research and conservation project focuses not exclusively on the *Polymita* snail, but also on the endemic almiqui or Cuban solenodon (*Solenodon cubanus*), of which only seven individuals were found in 2012. NABU, the BMU and the Humboldt National Park see this project as paving the way for future collaboration.

Valuable creatures: the *Polymita* snails clean algae infestations from the leaves of coffee and cocoa plants.

Did you know?

At a snail's pace ...

The Cuban *Polymita picta* is not just an eye-catcher, it also has a complex mating behaviour, like the Roman snail, involving so-called "love darts". A long-lasting mating ritual is characteristic of many terrestrial snails. Incidentally, the *Polymita picta* has a lot of stamina: it has the longest mating time of all *Polymita* species studied so far.

Author:

Werner Reinhardt

Contact:

Svane Bender
Head of NABU's Africa Programme /
Deputy Head of the International
Department
Svane.Bender@NABU.de



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Working for nature conservation – all over the world

Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU e.V.)

For almost 120 years NABU's genuine commitment and professional know-how have inspired people to act together for nature. One of the oldest and largest environmental associations in Germany, NABU has more than 700.000 members and supporters. In its international work, NABU focuses on Africa, Central Asia and the Caucasus. Its international activities include protecting habitats and biodiversity, climate protection, ecotourism and environmental education, as well as capacity building, poverty alleviation, and strengthening civil society.

NABU International – Foundation for Nature

In 2009, NABU established NABU International – Foundation for Nature. It supports international projects in two central fields of action, climate protection and biodiversity conservation. NABU International is mainly active in those regions of the earth where pristine natural and cultural landscapes are still intact, but exposed to increasing pressure. The Foundation both carries out its own projects in close cooperation with local partners, and supports NABU's international conservation projects.