

Project information release

A project restoring biodiversity in Slovensky Raj National Park underway

National Park Slovensky Raj (Slovak Paradise) in Eastern Slovakia is famous for its spectacular canyons and gorges in the limestone rock formed by the river Hornad and its tributaries. Less known to its thousands of visitors is the fact that the park is a hotspot for Carpathian biodiversity. Due to its specific location, altitude and climate, it is a cross-roads of species distribution. In particular, its mountain meadows are of high value with 74 species of higher plants recorded per square metre.

Unfortunately, in recent decades this diversity started to diminish due to decline of haymaking and small-scale livestock husbandry. As the changes in society led to an end of typical livelihoods of people involved in family farming using local resources, many meadows began to give way to forest. In order not to lose this diversity, a new approach is needed.

An international environmental NGO (Machaon International) has joined forces with municipality of Vernar and local agricultural co-operative (PD Hranovica) to restore gradually species-rich meadows in Vernar area (Western part of the national park). Thanks to the support from UNDP/GEF Small Grant Programme and the national park administration, a process of converting overgrown meadows to their former glory has begun and will continue during the whole year 2013. About 100 ha of meadows are to be restored and put in long-term suitable agricultural use.

The project is cleverly designed to incorporate climate change mitigation efforts as wood and chips obtained from clearing the meadows will be used and sold as an alternative fuel for local municipality and community at large. The whole process (sale of wood) generates revenue to be reinvested to further clear other meadows (up to 600 ha) after the end of the project and at the same time reducing the impact of burning fossil fuels (mostly coal) in the village instead.

An integral part of the project is monitoring and research of meadow biodiversity. The national park administration will test various approaches of meadow management in order to achieve long-term effectiveness and conservation. **Any interest to co-operate (for example from researchers and university students) is welcome.** More information about the project and local biodiversity near Vernar can be obtained by contacting the project manager Dr. Jozef Bednar at zapovedniks@gmail.com.

