

Newsletter

Hot in this issue: Caucasian salamander

July-September 2008

Quarterly newsletter for WWF Caucasus and CEPF mutual effort for biodiversity conservation in the Caucasus

In this issue:

- Transboundary Study of the Western Lesser Caucasus Endemic species
- Sustainable forestry and introduction of alternative energy sources
- Update to the red lists of Armenia and IUCN
- Escaping in the mountains: Armenian mouflon and Bezoar goat
- Conservation of the Mediterranean Tortoise



View to Vashlovani National Park - Georgia. Photo © Amiran Kodiashvili.

Transboundary Conservation-Oriented Study of the Western Lesser Caucasus Endemic Species - Caucasian salamander in the focus



Caucasian salamander found at Goderdzi pass - Georgia. Photo by D. Tarkhivshvili.

Caucasian Endemics Research Center is conducting a study of endemic species in the Western Lesser Caucasus. One of these species - the Caucasian salamander (*Mertensiella caucasica*) is a flagship amphibian species of the Caucasus Ecoregion and is included in the IUCN Red List (2008) under the category VU (vulnerable), as a declining species with small and fragmented range.

The Project scope is compilation and completion of background information necessary for the implementation of a conservation strategy and action plan for the Caucasian salamander, as well as promoting the necessity of this species' conservation in the governmental institutions and in wide public, and creating an effective system of monitoring

throughout the distribution range.

One urgent need for developing an effective conservation strategy for this species is a satisfactory knowledge of its range, including the area of occupancy, degree of fragmentation, spatial position of the population sources, and the number of spatially isolated geographic populations from Borjomi to Trabzon area. The Project has the following objectives:

- Apply suitable habitat modeling methods for the precise estimation of the total area of occupancy and the number of isolated fragments within the salamander's range, and identification of the areas with the highest concentration of suitable habitats;
- Draw out clear borders between the two reciprocally isolated evolutionary species of the salamander in Georgia and Turkey;
- Compare historical findings of the salamander with its current distribution, in order to estimate the population loss since the beginning of XX century;
- Provide a rough estimate of the salamander population throughout the range, by multiplying of mean population estimates on the predicted number of the local populations;
- Attract public attention to the species through disseminating popular articles on the Caucasian salamander, conduct talks with schoolchildren, compile posters and calendars;
- Create a transboundary initiative group of support of the Caucasian salamander in Georgia and Turkey.
- To prepare the conservation strategy / action plan for Caucasian salamander throughout its range and to implement urgent measures for the conservation, if necessary.

A website dedicated to conservation of Caucasian salamander is being developed. Printing of popular and scientific publications is also planned.



Caucasian salamander found in Ordu - Turkey. Photo by D. Tarkhivshvili.

Sustainable forestry and introduction of alternative energy sources



The briquetting system at a glance. Photo by WWF.

Through the support of CEPF the Sumgayit Center for Environmental Rehabilitation is conducting a project which directly deals with preventing degradation of forests, mainly utilized as fuelwood, in Azerbaijan through promoting sustainable forestry and engagement in utilization of alternative energy sources. Actually a valuable product, sawdust, is considered locally as just garbage and is either burned or thrown into the rivers, thus polluting the environment and creating danger to river fauna (piles of waste are simply dumped into rivers polluting freshwater ecosystems and killing fish in large numbers). At the same time worldwide practice shows that sawdust may be a very attractive

alternative to fuel-wood having much more energy outcome per volume entity.

The project is aimed at:

- Preventing pollution of freshwater ecosystems;
- Offering local population alternative energy sources;
- Generating income for local communities in order to make them less dependent on natural resources.

The project contributed to establishing a co-operative by joining efforts of four families in Khachmaz-Gishlag village of Oguz district. This small enterprise produces briquettes for utilizing them as a very effective fuel-wood and thus generates income which will be mostly reinvested back in the enterprise. In addition a lot of local businessmen are already interested in starting this business themselves in case the project will show good results.



Ready product - a better alternative to fuel-wood. Photo by WWF.

Update to the red lists of Armenia and IUCN

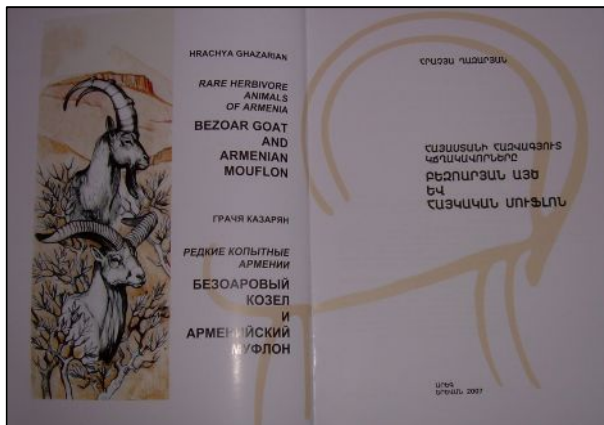


*Vipera sp. found in northern Armenia.
Photo by WWF*

The Institute of Zoology of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia conducted a project that covered creation of database of rare species and those facing extinction in order to include them in the Red Book of Armenia. The grantee updated the situation of amphibians and reptiles based on recent scientific researches. A special brochure with a list of species and short information was published for all interested parties. One of the important achievements is harmonization of local red book data with that of IUCN, which will give possibility to work on red lists on various levels.

In the final phase of the project the results of necessary changes to the red lists will be presented to the Species Survival Commission of IUCN.

Escaping in the mountains: Armenian mouflon and Bezoar goat



Charitable Fund for Protection of Nature and Culture Value in the Nature Reserves of Armenia has received a grant from CEPF for producing book-album and short video film dedicated to Armenian mouflon and Bezoar goat. The book-album contains 250 high quality illustrations and photos and will be available to the general public, as well as school pupils. It will help in raising awareness of population in importance of conservation of these species in order to save them from further extinction. The video film will be used in various mass-media means.

Determination of Conservation Status and Conservation of the Mediterranean Tortoise



Common tortoise – rare species in the Caucasus.

Fund - “Aquamedia” carried out a project dedicated to conserve common tortoise (*Testudo graeca*) in southern Caucasus. The following objectives were achieved: evaluation of number and spreading area of tortoise populations; revealing of main factors influencing number of populations in order to work out measures for territorial protection; and compilation of a database on common tortoise.

Various visual materials were produced and distributed widely to the public during project implementation.

Several papers were published in mass media regarding project achievements' and future perspectives of tortoise conservation in the southern Caucasus.



Bird dwelling place in Ag-Gel National Park, Azerbaijan. © Hartmut Müller.

How to Contact Us

WWF Caucasus PO
11, M. Aleksidze Str.
Tbilisi 0193 Georgia
Tel.: + 995 32 330154/55
Fax: + 995 32 330190

Nugzar Zazanashvili
Conservation Director,
Regional Coordinator
nzazanashvili@wwfcaucasus.ge

Maka Bitsadze
National Coordinator for Georgia
mbitsadze@wwfcaucasus.ge
Tel.: + 995 32 330154/55

Karen Manvelyan
National Coordinator for Armenia
kmanvelyn@wwfcaucasus.am
Tel.: + 3741 0 260224

Elshad Askerov
National Coordinator for Azerbaijan
easkerov@wwfcaucasus.az
Tel.: + 994 12 974973

Basak Avcioglu
National Coordinator for Turkey
bavcioglu@wwf.org.tr
Tel.: + 90 312 3103303

Vladimir Krever
National Coordinator for Russia
vkrever@wwf.ru
Tel.: +70957270938

Tamaz Gamkrelidze
Communications Officer
tgamkrelidze@wwfcaucasus.ge
Tel.: + 995 32 330154/55

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan, the MacArthur Foundation and the World Bank. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation.

www.panda.org/caucasus/cepf/