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EU/COE Joint Programme  
for the preparation of the Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites, Phase II

## **NARRATIVE REPORT**

### **Development of Emerald Network in Georgia in 2013**

Prepared by  
**Centre for Biodiversity Conservation and Research – NACRES, January 2014**

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## **1. Introduction**

The development of the Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites is an important international tool for the implementation of the Bern Convention (Convention on the conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats, 1979). According to the Convention, Contracting Parties (including Georgia which joined the Convention in 2009) have significant obligations aimed at the preservation of wildlife species and habitats.

The first phase of the development of the Emerald Network in Georgia began in 2009 and lasted until the end of 2011. The Centre for Biodiversity Conservation and Research - NACRES was responsible for technical implementation of the project. In this regard NACRES closely cooperated with the Georgian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources as well as the National Agency of Protected Areas (APA).

The following results were achieved during Phase I:

- Fifteen habitats identified in Georgia from those listed in Resolution No. 4 of the Bern Convention were analyzed. The analysis and identification process was based on a total of 117 species found in Georgia from the species included in the Bern Convention Resolution No. 6. The study also involved population estimate and distribution according to the biogeographical regions of Georgia for all species and habitats of Resolutions No. 4 (1996) and Resolution No. 6 (1998) of the Bern Convention and Annex I of the Habitats Directive;
- Distribution GIS maps were created for each of the identified habitats (15 in total);
- Out of the identified 117 species, 83 species were selected for mapping and relevant GIS distribution maps were created;
- 20 Emerald Network candidate sites or Areas of Special Conservation Interest (ASCI), were identified throughout the country. These sites were agreed with the Georgian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources. Using Emerald Standard Data Form (SDF) and Software, the required data were collected. A corresponding database was compiled and presented to the Council of Europe;
- A List of proposed species and habitats to be added to the respective resolutions of the Bern Convention was compiled.

## **2. Implementation**

### **2.1 Action objectives for the reporting period**

The following activities were planned for the reported period (2013):

1. Finalization and validation of the distribution per biogeographical region and populations in Georgia of all species and habitats of resolutions No. 4 and 6 of the Bern Convention and Annex I of the Habitats Directive;
2. Verification of Habitat maps according to EUNIS :

3. Validation of distribution maps of species already delivered through the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of the Action and the selection of new species and habitats to be mapped in 2013 and their mapping:
4. Finalization of sites database for all sites:
5. Identification of new potential sites.

## **2.2 Main outcomes**

### **2.2.1 Finalization and validation of the distribution per biogeographical region and populations in Georgia of all species and habitats of resolutions No. 4 and 6 of the Bern Convention and Annex I of the Habitats Directive**

In the first phase of the development of the Emerald Network, NACRES formed a team of experts - the national Emerald Team (see Appendix 1) comprised of highly qualified specialists fully adequate to the action objectives. The purpose of that team was to analyze all existing scientific data and to collect and compile all new information in accordance with the required format. We continued working with this team of experts throughout 2013 too. In the beginning of the current reporting period training was delivered to the team members with the aim to introduce/remind about the relevant guidelines, practices and provisions of the Council of Europe and the European Union.

During 2009-2011 the national Emerald Team members collected data on the species of Resolution #6 of the Bern Convention that were found in Georgia. Information was also collected on the habitats listed in Resolution #4 of the Bern Convention. However, a significant portion of these data came from previous studies many of which were conducted during the soviet period i.e. 20 years ago.

In spring 2013, as Phase II of the project began, a series of meetings were held with the members of the Georgian Emerald Team, representatives of Georgian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources and other stakeholders. We discussed the overall goal and objectives of Phase II of the project, analyzed the results of Phase I and critically evaluated the collected data and materials. The review and critical assessment of the data compiled by the project so far was considered as a necessary step since the quality and trustfulness of that information would be essential for the effective establishment of the Emerald Network in Georgia.

The Emerald Team members and other stakeholders agreed that it was necessary to verify some of the data and for this purpose additional field studies would be concluded where necessary. Thus, during the current reporting period NACRES implemented activities in two directions: (i) verification of data on the ground through field surveys to the extent possible within the available time and resources of the project and (ii) carrying out desktop studies to collect any new data from recent studies. All new information was then integrated into the Emerald Network database.

#### *Data verification through field surveys:*

In order to accomplish this objective, field surveys were conducted in the following candidate sites: Vashlovani, Tusheti, Khevsureti, Kolkheti, Mtirala and Kintrishi.

A total of 14 field trips were carried out with the purpose to assess the populations of the target species including wolf, brown bear, Eurasian lynx and river otter. The assessments involved field methods such as rapid assessment techniques e.g. tracking as well as more rigorous methods such as radio tracking and photo trapping. In addition, the population of the bezoar goat (*Capra aegagrus*) was assessed in Tusheti and for the first time also in Khevsureti.

Through the joint surveys with the project „First National otter survey, conducted according to standard otter survey method, suggested by IUCN/SSC Otter Specialists Group“, the national population of the otter (*Lutra lutra*) was assessed for the first time.

*Data collection from recent studies and updating the Emerald Network database:*

The members of the Georgian Emerald Team conducted extensive desktop studies to reveal and review any relevant information and any new data obtained through recent studies that would help update the existing Emerald Network database. Among the recent important studies were the ongoing research conducted by Ilia State University on the Black Sea marine mammals, and the research activities implemented by the Institute of Botany that were focused on the vegetation cover of Georgia.

Consequently, the data compiled during 2009-2011 were updated with new information on species numbers and their distribution.

Reference Data file “Reference201401-GE.mdb” was uploaded to CDR and is available at <http://cdr.eionet.europa.eu/>

### **2.2.2 Verification of habitat maps according to EUNIS**

At the first stage of the project, a series of working sessions were organised with the National Emerald Team members and a list of habitats for which distribution maps would be delivered was compiled. The list included 15 habitats.

As mentioned above, most of the data (including that on habitats) compiled during the previous phase came from existing information and older studies. In order to verify and ensure that all candidate sites met the requirements of the Bern Convention and would qualify as Emerald sites, it was necessary to further verify the distributions of the habitats referred to in Resolution #4. In addition, it was important to consider the amendments made in 2010 by the Bern Convention Standing Committee and adopted reference tables for habitats (Resolution # 4).

The National Emerald Team therefore carried out additional desktop and field studies involving the use of satellite imagery.

As a result, the following 8 habitat maps were reviewed and edited (habitat names as per EUNIS classification):

D4.2 - Basic mountain flushes and streamsides, with a rich arctic-montane flora  
E1.2 – Perennial calcareous grassland and basic steppes  
E3.4 – Moist or wet eutrophic and mesotrophic grassland  
E3.5 - Moist or wet oligotrophic grassland  
F7.4 – Hedgehog-heaths  
F7.3 – East Mediterranean phrygana  
F9.1 - Riverine scrub  
G1.6 - Fagus woodland

Output: the following required downloadable GIS maps and relevant data folders were uploaded to CDR and are available at <http://cdr.eionet.europa.eu/>

### **2.2.3 Validation of distribution GIS maps of species already delivered through the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of project and creation of distribution GIS maps for the new set of species.**

In the first phase of the project i.e. by 2011, we selected 86 species from Resolution #6 of the Bern Convention and prepared distribution maps for them.

In the beginning of the current phase, a new list of species was compiled for which distribution maps would be delivered. The initial list included 36 bird species. However it was unfortunately impossible to create GIS distribution maps for all 36 species due to the delay in the launching of the project. We were able to deliver 20 new distribution maps by the end of the project (see Annex 4). In addition, new data were collected and analysed for the mammal species and their GIS distribution maps were accordingly updated. Both new and updated GIS distribution maps were submitted to the donor.

Output: the following required downloadable GIS maps and relevant data folders were uploaded to CDR and are available at <http://cdr.eionet.europa.eu/>

### **2.2.4 Finalization of sites database for all the sites**

During Phase I of the Emerald Network Development Project, a total of 20 ASCI's were selected for Georgia (See Appendix 2) and data were collected for the species and habitat covered by the Bern Convention.

A National Workshop was held in Tbilisi on the 11<sup>th</sup> June 2013 with the participation of the National Emerald Team, representatives of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, National Agency of Protected Areas, relevant research institutes, international and local environmental organizations and other stakeholders (See Appendix 3). The workshop was attended and presentations were made by the project's international expert Mr. Marc Roekaerts (Council of Europe) who reviewed the current situation and made relevant comments and recommendations. Information on the selected Georgian candidate sites was also presented and a relevant discussion was held in which the participants presented their views and comments. It was agreed that the existing database needed updating taking into account comments and recommendations expressed at the workshop.

Based on the results of the national workshop, other meetings of the national Emerald Team as well as new data obtained through field surveys, the Emerald Team verified the current data and updated the existing database. The updated data base was then submitted to the donor.

Sites Data Base file (CNTRYGE.mdb) is available at <http://cdr.eionet.europa.eu/>:

### **2.2.5 Identification of new potential ASCI's**

The National Emerald Team conducted a review of the existing information to identify new potential ASCI's. It was proposed that the Askhi massif situated in the western Great Caucasus was likely a suitable new potential site. Special meetings of the National Emerald Team members and invited experts were held in summer 2013 in order to further explore the issue and evaluate the feasibility of selecting the Askhi massif as a new potential site. The experts agreed that this massif would qualify for potential ASCI and preliminary boundaries were also proposed.

It became evident that detailed survey of the Askhi massif was needed. However the high elevation of the site only makes it accessible during the summer months. Because this period was already booked for field surveys to other high altitude sites, it was impossible to organise a field trip to the Askhi massif in summer 2013. Therefore only a short scoping trip was made to the site in 2013 to further refine the preliminary boundaries, while a more detailed survey was postponed until 2014. In addition all existing literature was also reviewed. As a result the possible boundaries of the Askhi massif - a new ASCI site were drafted.

Site GIS map (all sites in one layer with attribute "sitecode" as in the sites data base) have been uploaded to CDR and are available at <http://cdr.eionet.europa.eu/>

## **3. Promotion of the Emerald Network in Georgia**

The promotion of the Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites as an important tool for the implementation of the Bern Convention and for the conservation of species and habitats was one of the ongoing activities of the project and the National Emerald Team. The purpose of this activity was not only to promote the idea of the Emerald Network but also to ensure that its requirements and practices be adequately integrated into any relevant national strategy and policy. In addition, the National Team members made special efforts to disseminate EU approaches and methodologies among the relevant scientific circles.

State agencies and specialist circles were primary targets of the promotion activities whose aim it was to inform/update them about the goals and objectives of the Emerald Network and its role. Governmental agencies were also informed about the procedures for the establishment of the network, required management of its sites and arising obligations. All of this was conducted in order to facilitate the recognition of the importance of the Emerald Network among key stakeholders especially in the light of the preparation process of Association Agreement between Georgia and the EU.

It is important to note that the initialled EU-Georgia Association Agreement obliges Georgia to develop its Emerald Network (Appendix XXVI, Article 306) through the following steps: identification

of sites of special conservation interest (ASCI), their further designation and sustainable management.

The process of updating of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) for Georgia is currently at its final stages. The process has been led by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and NACRES as well as many of the members of the National Emerald Team have been fully involved in drafting certain sections of the document including those dealing with species and habitats conservation. Consequently, the development of the Emerald Network and the conservation and sustainable management of species and habitats covered by the Bern Convention have become an integral part of the current final draft NBSAP. The new NBSAP is expected to be officially adopted soon.

NACRES also ensured that the final draft of the NBSAP mentions the need of classification of the country's habitats according to EUNIS. This was considered as a necessary step for modernising the approaches in habitat classification in Georgia where until present time more outdated approaches and methodologies prevail. It is expected that this effort will facilitate the development of the Emerald Network in Georgia.

As part of the preparation of the new NBSAP, the NACRES team of experts jointly with the members of the National Emerald Team identified 28 priority habitats which included all 15 habitats covered by the Bern Convention.

NACRES is currently engaged in talks with the Ministry of Environmental Protection for conducting studies for the Emerald habitat validation in the Kolkheti ASCI. There is already a preliminary agreement and the Kolkheti Protected Areas Development Fund intends to finance these activities.

The site data base developed by the Emerald Network project is the first and only one of its kind in Georgia. Thus it may be extremely useful for other conservation programmes in the country. Therefore further promotion and dissemination of the results of this project is highly recommended.



## **4. Appendixes**

### **4.1 Appendix 1**

Emerald Team and other contributing experts

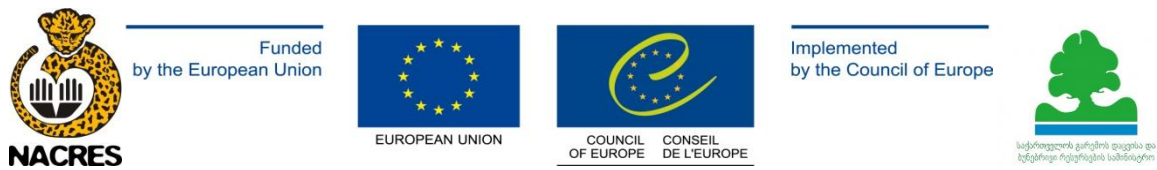
1. Dr. David Tarkhnishvili, Dean, Faculty of Life Sciences, I. Chavchavadze University
2. Dr. George Nakhutsrishvili, Professor of I. Chavchavadze University, Faculty of Life Sciences
3. Dr. Kakha Artsivadze, NACRES
4. Dr. Ketevan Batsatsashvili, I. Chavchavadze University, Faculty of Life Sciences
5. Dr. Othar Abdaladze, Tbilisi Institute of Botany; Professor of I. Chavchavadze University, Faculty of Life Sciences
6. Dr. Zurab Gurielidze, Tbilisi Zoological Garden and Professor of I. Chavchavadze University, Faculty of Life Sciences
7. Dr. Zurab Javakhishvili Ilia State University
8. Dr. Irakli Macharashvili. Green Alternative Georgia
9. Mr. Bejan Lortkipanidze, NACRES
10. Mr. Giorgi Darchiashvili, Tbilisi Zoological Garden
11. Mr. Giorgi Gorgadze, NACRES
12. Mr. Giorgi Mikeladze, GIS-Lab Ltd
13. Mrs. Nutsa Megvinetukhutsesi, GIS-Lab Ltd
14. Mr. Ioseb Natradze, NGO CAMPESTER
15. Mr. Irakli Shavgulidze, NACRES
16. Dr. Ilia Osefashvili, WWF Caucasus
17. Mr. Levan Butkhuzi, National Geographic Georgia

## 4.2 Appendix 2

Emerald Network candidate sites - Areas of Special Conservation Interest (ASCI)

<b>Name of the site</b>	<b>Site Code</b>
Lagodekhi	GE 0000001
Arkhoti	GE 0000002
Chachuna	GE 0000003
Madatapha	GE 0000004
Bugdasheni	GE 0000005
Kolkheti	GE 0000006
Vashlovani	GE 0000007
Tusheti	GE 0000008
Kazbegi	GE 0000009
Borjomi-Kharagauli	GE 0000010
Ratcha	GE 0000011
Svaneti	GE 0000012
Algeti	GE 0000013
Kintrishi	GE 0000014
Batsara	GE 0000015
Mtirala	GE 0000016
Khanchali	GE 0000017
Ajameti	GE 0000018
Gardabani	GE 0000019
Mariamjvari	GE 0000020
Askhi	GE 0000021

### 4.3 Appendix 3



## Joint Programme between the European Union and the Council of Europe for the Preparation of the Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites, Phase II.

National Workshop for the implementation of the  
European Union/ Council of Europe Joint Programme  
“Emerald Network, Phase II” in Georgia

11 June 2013

Hotel Vere Palace  
22-24 Kuchishvili str.  
Tbilisi, Georgia

## Short Report

The National Workshop for the implementation of the European Union/ Council of Europe Joint Programme “Emerald Network, Phase II in Georgia” was held in Tbilisi on June 11, 2013.

The main aim of the workshop was to introduce the audience with the key issues related to the development of “The Emerald Network” in Georgia.

The participants of the workshop were the members of “The Emerald Team” in Georgia, as well as invited representatives of Georgian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, Agency of Protected Areas and international organizations in Georgia.

Based on the workshop agenda, the introductory speeches were given by NACRES member Bezhan Lortkipanidze and representative of the Biodiversity Agency of Georgian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources – Nona Khelaia. They underlined the importance of the Emerald Network for Georgia. Representative of Georgian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Teona Karchava noted that Georgian government attaches great importance to the processes of Georgia’s integration into the European Union, hence, the development of The Emerald Network in Georgia is a significant step forward. This project enables Georgia to acquire European experience with regard to the development of networks, data collection and elaboration of databases.

Kakha Artsivadze, Coordinator of the Emerald Team, briefly informed the audience about the history of development of the Emerald Network in Georgia. He made a report on the activities implemented in 2009-2011.

Mr. Mark Rockets told the audience about the activities planned for the year 2013. His presentation also covered the data and activities implemented in the previous years. Mr. Rockets made comments and remarks aimed at the updating of current data and filling of the existing gaps. After the presentations, the working groups analyzed and discussed the presented materials and worked out an action plan. The plan is aimed at further processing of the existing data and implementation of future field-work.

Kakha Artsivadze talked about the opportunity of selecting an additional Emerald site on the territory of Western Georgia. He said that, based on the data collected in the years 2009-2012, the Emerald Network Team analyzed the dissemination of species and habitats under Bern Convention. The analysis revealed that there is a territory in Western Georgia that should meet the requirements of the Emerald Network. Kakha Artsivadze noted that certain field work is to be carried out on this territory. Besides, the existing literature should be analyzed in order to work out a corresponding document to be submitted to the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources.

After the presentations, a discussion was dedicated to the issue of biodiversity monitoring and collection of the necessary data. NACRES representative Bezhan Lortkipanidze noted

that the materials collected within the framework of the Emerald Project form a significant basis for the methodology of biodiversity monitoring in Georgia: information has been collected on certain species and habitats and corresponding database has been compiled. Apart from this, the project embraces numerous important species and a major portion of priority habitats of Georgia. Bezhan Lortkipanidze also remarked that in the process of updating the Georgian NBSAP, 27 priority habitats were selected, out of which data has been collected with regard to 14 habitats within the framework of the Emerald Project.

Kakha Artsivadze also noted that the process of development of the Emerald Network involved selection of 20 sites which in fact embrace all the important protected areas of Georgia. He also said that the compiled database actually represents the database of Georgia's protected areas. There are certain exceptions with regard to important species that are not included in the Appendices of Bern Convention. Updating of the above-mentioned database and addition of important species will yield a significant basis for the monitoring of biodiversity in Georgia.

The participant experts noted that the materials collected within the framework of the Emerald Project should be available to the public at large and thus used for the planning of the monitoring process in Georgia. Mr. Mark Rockets said that the collected materials are uploaded to a special server, although until the termination of the project the usage of the server is limited. He gave the example of the Norwegian information server and noted that after the termination of the project Georgia will have an opportunity to offer similar services.



The issue of classification of habitats was also discussed. Dr. Natia Kobakhidze from German Development Agency GIZ raised the issue of NATURA 2000 and EUNES classifications and their use in Georgia. She said that in the previous years the process of classification of habitats in Georgia was financed by GIZ, and the basis for the classification was the one offered by NATURA 2000. Mr. Mark Rockets noted that

palaearctic i.e. CORIN classification has been used for many years, although currently it is mentioned only in the first Appendix of the Bern Convention. Besides, the above-mentioned classification does not allow any amendments or addition of habitats. He also remarked that currently the process of transfer to EUNES classification is under way. Therefore, it is highly desirable that Georgia makes use of this new classification, which is also used by the Emerald Network. Mr. Rockets also noted that certain amendments and additions may be made in the manual on habitats. With this aim, Georgian colleagues should work out and submit a corresponding proposal. Mr. Rockets spoke about the procedure in detail and his speech was followed by a discussion of the given issue.

On June 12 a field visit was organized to Khevsureti Site. Apart from being a site of the Emerald Network, this territory is planned as a protected area. It should be mentioned that, in cooperation with WWF, NACRES elaborated a management plan for this territory. The on-spot visit also involved discussion of important issues regarding the management of this protected area and Emerald Site e.g. zoning, planning and management of conservation activities. The habitats included in the Appendices of the Bern Convention were observed on spot and the issue of their conservation was discussed.