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BPA "Ecological
Initiative"

REPORT
**on the implementation of the CoE/EU Joint Programme "Emerald
Network of Nature Protection Sites, Phase II" in Belarus in 2013**

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The implementation of the Joint Programme between the European Union and the Council of Europe for the Preparation of the Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites, Phase II (further – Joint Programme “Emerald Network”) was undertaken in the framework of Administrative arrangement between the Council of Europe and the Belarusian Public Association “Ecological Initiative signed on April 12, 2013. It is important to underline that the strong institutional mechanisms have been used to fulfill the programme’s activities in the most effective way.

In particular, the Belarusian Public Association (BPA) “Ecological Initiative” implemented the Joint Programme “Emerald Network” in close cooperation with the Department of Biological and Landscape Diversity of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus (MNREP). Two persons from this Department – Ms. Tatsiana Trafimovich, Consultant, and Ms. Natalia Minchenko, a Head of the Department – actively participated in implementation of the programme and performed the monitoring of its progress on weekly basis.

The overall supervision of the progress in implementation of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network” at the national level was done by Mr. Igor Kachanovsky, the Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus. Such a high level of the MNREP’s involvement helped to coordinate the efforts of all stakeholders and to reach the profound and prompt performance of all Emerald activities planned for implementation in 2013.

The implementation of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network” also relied on such organizations as:

- Institute of Botany of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus;
- Institute of Botany of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus;
- Belarusian Research Center “Ecology” under the aegis of the MNREP;
- Research republican unitary enterprise on land management, geodesy and cartography “BelNITSzem”;
- Management units of the proposed Emerald sites; local authorities of the relevant districts and partner ecological NGOs.

The following activities on implementation of the Joint Programme were undertaken in 2013:

1. Activity 1: Organisation of a technical meeting between the project Emerald team and the Joint Programme Manager and scientific coordinator

In May, 2013 a national workshop for the implementation of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network” was held. The workshop was attended by the representatives of EU (Ms. Elena Rakova), European Council (Consultant Mark Roekaerts), the NGO implementing the project – “Ecological Initiative”, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus, National Academy of Science of Belarus, other research organizations and environmental NGOs. The event was publicized in mass media, too, due to participation of the news reporters from the most prominent news agency of Belarus (Belta), a popular republican newspaper – “Respublika”, first channel of the Belarusian National Radio.

The agenda of the workshop covered such issues as overview of the results and achievements of the first stage of the Emerald Programme, priorities of the second stage, analysis of the country report, and discussion on the *Interpretation manual for new version of Resolution 4* and the *Draft Guidelines for the Management of Emerald sites*.

The working part of the agenda began with the analysis of Belarus’ results of the first phase of the Emerald project. The outcome of the overview of reports submitted by Belarus at the first stage of the reporting was that there are some technical inconsistencies in the reporting materials, which can be easily corrected. Anyway a decision was made to verify the database and separately submitted reference tables with habitats and species using the cross-check methods.

The International Scientific Coordinator of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network”, Mr. Roekaerts dwelt on further developments of the Emerald network and particular tasks issued for the participating countries

as well as on expected changes in reporting materials presentation. The consultant also urged that all potential Emerald sites be identified by the end of 2013.

In relation to the discussion of the *Interpretation manual for new version of Resolution 4*, this topic raised a particular interest among the participants of the workshop. As far as not all the stakeholders were able to study the documents proposed for discussion and commenting (the *Interpretation manual for new version of Resolution 4 and the Draft Guidelines for the Management of Emerald sites*) it was decided at the meeting to have them translated into Russian for wider involvement of all the stakeholders in their discussion and commenting. The certain deadline for presentation of such comments was established.

During the final workshop's discussion took part on May 24, 2013, the following additional potential Emerald sites – Republican landscape reserve “Sinsha”, Republican hydrological reserve “Svakshty”, Republican landscape reserve “Krasny Bor”, Republican landscape reserve “Lipichanskaya Puscha” – were identified for collection and uploading to the Emerald Sites Database in 2013 of all data as defined in the Standard Data Form, including their digital boundaries.

The National workshop became a starting point in the launch of Phase II of the Emerald Programme in Belarus, set forth definite tasks and terms of their implementation. Due to the mass media participation in the workshop the general public was informed of the start of the second phase of the project.

To duly organize the workshop the funds of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network” covered the following expenses:

- a. Catering for the participants (lunch, coffee-breaks);
- b. Interpretation (from/ to English);
- c. Procurement of stationery for the participants;
- d. Transport rent (to organize the visit of the national and international experts of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network” of the Belarusian protected areas).

2. Activity 2: Sites database for additional Emerald sites with all data as defined in the Standard Data Form, including their digital boundaries.

In the framework of this activity the work was organized in the following way: Based on the recommendations of the National Scientific Coordinator the relevant consultants and experts were chosen and hired. Most of the selected and contracted experts came from the above – mentioned organizations: the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, the Belarusian Research Center “Ecology”, the Research republican unitary enterprise on land management, geodesy and cartography “BelNITSzem”, etc. They verified the previously submitted database that had included 12 proposed Emerald sites from Belarus. The criteria for verification were developed on the basis of the reports of the International Expert – Scientific coordinator of the Programme on verification of the reports of the countries (mainly, Summary Quality Check report for Belarus) and Recommendations and decisions made at the Kick-off meeting of the EU/CoE Joint Programme Emerald Network Phase II held in Kiev on April 24-26, 2013.

As a result of this verification work the revised reference lists for habitats and species were prepared; based on these reference lists relevant corrections were made to the database.

As a result of this review:

- Habitats reference list (Resolution 4) -
 - 7 habitats were excluded
 - 8 habitats included
 - 24 remained the same
- 3 species were excluded from the fauna lists, the evidence for which has not appeared for the last 10 years:
 - (Desman) *Desmana moschata*
 - (European mink) *Mustela lutreola*
 - (Bustard) *Otus tarda*

28 fauna species were added to the reference lists:

- 13 bird species

Reason: publications of new evidence of bird species for the period of 2009-2012 as well as the migratory bird species, which use the territory of Belarus for staging.

- 3 fish species

Reason: publications on new evidence of fish species for the period of 2009-2012

- 10 insect species

Reason: in 2011-2012 a web-site Insects of Belarus was developed, which allowed for clarification of the species list. (<http://insecta-g2n.weebly>)

- 2 shellfish species

Reason: in 2011-2012 a web-site Mollusks of Belarus was developed. It contains the most ample data on mollusks of Belarus. <http://mollusca-g2n.weebly.com>

Apart from that, coding for the habitats included in the database was changed to the EUNIS classification. The indication of the bio-geographical regions were checked and corrected where necessary. The expert on GIS data verified the digital boundaries of the sites.

In total, 47 species and 20 habitats were mapped

- Plants – 7
- Birds – 22
- Mammals – 6
- Amphibians – 2
- Reptiles – 1
- Fishes – 3
- Invertebrates – 6
- Habitats – 20

When the verification of the previously submitted data was completed the experts collected and submitted the data on the 4 new suggested Emerald sites for the input into the database. The above data is based on the information collected during the field trips of experts to the new potential Emerald sites and submitted by management units of the above sites.

Sites database for additional Emerald sites – Republican landscape reserve “Sinsha”, Republican hydrological reserve “Svakshty”, Republican landscape reserve “Krasny Bor”, Republican landscape reserve “Lipichanskaya Puscha” – was filled with all data as defined in the Standard Data Form, including their digital boundaries.

3. Activity 3: Contribution to the consultations on the guidelines on Emerald Network sites’ management, reporting and monitoring mechanisms.

To implement this activity the representatives of the Belarus’ Emerald team including a representative of the Ministry of Environment took part in the regional workshop in Kiev on 24-26 April 2013 and contributed to the overall discussions of the new suggested documents. Besides, comments of the Belarusian experts to the Interpretation Manual on Habitats of Resolution No. 4 (1996), Version 2010 were also sent to the Programme Manager (the text of the suggestions is annexed to this report).

4. Activity 4: Final Emerald sites database completed and delivered to the Council of Europe through the EIONET CDR, including corrections of data.

Final Emerald sites database completed was delivered through the EIONET CDR on December 2, 2013 in the required format. The data include:

- Finalisation of the distribution per biogeographical region and populations in each country of all species and habitats of Resolutions Nos. 4 and 6 of the Bern Convention and Annex I of the Habitats Directive;
- Validation of distribution GIS maps of species and habitats already delivered through the 1st Joint Programme (2009 -2011) and creation of additional maps for a new selection of species and habitats;
- Finalisation of sites database for all the sites with all data filled in, as defined in the Emerald Network Standard Data Form;
- Finalisation of digital boundaries for all sites in GIS.

In the framework of implementation of the above activities the services of the local experts and consultants were paid from the funds of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network”.

5. Activity 5: Improving the national capacity to implement the Emerald Network

In order to review the results achieved in 2013 and to plan the work in 2014, technical meetings and round tables were held on July 2, December 3, 4 and 10, 2013. The technical meeting and round table on July 2, 2013 were dedicated to entry into force for the Republic of Belarus of the Bern Convention.

During this event the meeting of the representatives of the Council of Europe and Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus was held. In the framework of the meeting the practical issues on implementation of the provisions of the Bern Convention in Belarus were discussed, including the development of the appropriate national legislation base, strengthening of the institutional capacity and further expanding of territory of the Nature Protected Areas in Belarus.

In round table session participated the experts of the Joint Programme Emerald Network, representatives of the MNREP, Ministry of Forestry, National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, administrations of the sites, mass – media and other stakeholders.

An important note at the event was that the implementation of the first phase of the Emerald Programme in Belarus contributed to the sooner accession of the country to the Bern Convention. Special thanks to the Council of Europe and EU for the support of the “Emerald” Programme and Belarus’ accession to the convention were expressed by the Head of the Department of Biological and Landscape Diversity of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus Ms. Natalia Minchenko.

In the framework of the round table the practical approaches on strengthening of the legislative and institutional capacity in implementation of the provisions of the Bern Convention and the Joint Programme “Emerald Network” were discussed. In particular, the draft new edition of the “Law on Environment Protection” and a methodological guidance «Rare and Typical habitats of Belarus» were presented and widely discussed. Due to the mass media participation in the round table the public awareness on implementation of the Bern Convention and the Joint Programme “Emerald Network” in Belarus was raised.

The technical meetings and round tables on December 3, 4 and 10, 2013 on finalisation of the implementation the Joint Programme “Emerald Network” in Belarus in 2013 were organised. During the technical meeting held on December 3, 2013, the results of the programme’s implementation in 2013 were discussed in the MNREP. In order to improve the realisation of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network” in future, the main difficulties faced during the implementation of the programme in 2013 were analysed and relevant decisions were made. In particular, the Ministry of Environment made a decision to plan the additional financial resources from the state budget in 2014 – 2015 on scientific work related to identifying possible presence of species and habitats included in

the Bern Convention in Mogilev region where the experts faced a lack of data needed for implementation of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network”.

On the round table organised on December 4, 2013, the achievements of the implementation of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network” in Belarus in 2013 were presented to all stakeholders. In round table session participated the experts of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network”, representatives of the MNREP, National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, regional authorities, administrations of the sites and mass media.

Special attention was paid to the invitation of the representatives of ecological NGOs working on issues of biodiversity conservation in order to inform them about the progress of the Joint Programme’s implementation. The representatives of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus presented a recently published book on the rare habitats of Belarus, which includes the habitats listed in Resolution No. 4 of the Bern Convention classified by different classification types. Thanks to the round table organisation the awareness of civil society about the achievements of implementation of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network” in Belarus was raised.

During the technical meeting on December 10, 2013, the draft national legislative and technical documents to be approved in the framework of the implementation of the Bern Convention were discussed. In the above technical meeting participated the representatives of the MNREP, Ministry of Forestry, National Academy of Sciences of Belarus as well as experts of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network”.

The following important documents as Rules for protection of wild animals, ranged to species, included in the Red Book of the Republic of Belarus, and for their habitat locations; Rules for protection of wild plants ranged to species, included in the Red Book of the Republic of Belarus, and for their growth locations; methodological guidance «Rare and Typical habitats of Belarus» were reviewed.

The expenses on accommodation and catering of the participants as well as the rent hall costs for holding of the mentioned technical meetings and round tables were covered from the funds of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network”.

To build the required technical capacity for the efficient realization of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network” in 2013 the BPA “Ecological Initiative” financed the premises and travel expenses, communications, translation, postal expenses and other related services from the proceeds of the grant.

6. Methodological aspects of implementation of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network” in Belarus

To present the most accurate and up-to-date information for the database of the proposed Emerald sites the following approaches were used:

- 1) The experts reviewed the existing reports and documented descriptions and evidence on the species and habitats present on the selected sites, for example such sources as the new edition of the Red Book of Belarus; the 2013 book on the Rare Habitats of Belarus (which includes all habitats listed in the Belarus Reference list for Resolution 4 of the Bern Convention); most recent reports of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus on the research works implemented on the relevant sites were used for preliminary collection of information.
- 2) Criteria used for identification of potential Emerald Sites in Belarus:
 - a. Presence of species and habitats of Resolutions Nos. 4 and 6 of the Bern Convention and Annex I of the Habitats Directive on sites proposed for including in the Emerald Network
 - b. Protection status of the nominated areas according to the international and national law (Ramsar Sites, Reserves, National Parks, etc)
 - c. Biodiversity conservation on the species and habitat level
- 3) Estimation of the gaps in the sufficiency of the sites:
 - a. Gaps at the initial stage:
 - b. specific national approach to identification of habitats (habitats classification) not in conformity with the Bern Convention

- c. Some of the territories of the country are less studied some difficulties in identifying possible presence of certain species and habitats in those areas (Mogilev region)
- 4) Overcoming the gaps and regulatory and research obstacles:
 - a. Improvement of the national regulatory framework, mainly :
 - i. Accession to the Bern Convention (President’s Decree No. 70 of 7 Feb. 2013);
 - ii. A new edition of the “Law on Environment Protection” (of 22 November 2013 No. 18-3)
 - iii. For the first time the law was amended with such a notion as “rare and typical habitats and natural landscapes” as the territories for which a special regime of protection and economic use
 - iv. Currently 38 habitats are identified on the territory of Belarus out of the 182 ones defined in Annex 1 of the Habitats Directive
 - v. In the framework of the GEF/UNDP project «Mainstreaming Biodiversity Conservation into Territorial Planning Policies and Practices» a methodological guidance «Rare and Typical habitats of Belarus» was developed
 - vi. Classification of typical and rare habitats in the guidance (Book – Rare Habitats of Belarus- 2013)
 - vii. In the framework of the EU/UNDP project «Support to the development of a comprehensive framework for international environmental cooperation in the Republic of Belarus» the draft of the technical legal act defining the requirements to protection of typical and rare habitats, typical and rare landscapes was prepared
 - viii. Adoption of the Rules for protection of wild animals, ranged to species, included in the Red Book of the Republic of Belarus, and for their habitat locations
 - ix. Rules for protection of wild plants ranged to species, included in the Red Book of the Republic of Belarus, and for their growth locations
- 5) In addition to the work with documented evidence the experts went on field trips to the selected sites to verify the information and add to it.
- 6) The Belarusian Research Center “Ecology” under the aegis of the Ministry of Environment hosts a number of databases and registers related to environment management and protection. These existing resources were also involved in the compilation of the final version of Belarus Emerald sites database.
- 7) To prepare the GIS data the input of the experts from the Research republican unitary enterprise on land management, geodesy and cartography "BelNITSzem" was resorted to – this ensured the presentation of the data in the agreed format (50X50 km grid) as well as its accuracy and up-to-date quality.

The wholesome approach to the implementation of the Terms of reference of the project allowed collecting ample information in the relatively short period of time and ensuring its accuracy, relevance and professional quality. Close cooperation with all the stakeholders allowed not only implementing the Programme tasks for the year 2013 but also develop regulatory framework required due to the accession of the country to the Bern Convention, ensure synergy with other relevant projects and research works undertaken in Belarus in parallel with the Programme.