Rediscovered Steppes of the Louny region

project LIFE+ PDB470003

In the beginning of the project three major goals were set. **First,** we needed to explain conservation actions in the SCIs so that local people and visitors fully understand it. This also ought to alleviate tension among some interest groups, especially hunters. **Second** aim was to improve public attitudes towards conservation and thus increase support for its funding, with special attention to local communities. **Third**, we aimed to support local stakeholders and land owners in actions towards submitting the land in SCIs in the agroenvironmental schemes so that a desirable long-term management of eligible land is in progress by the end of the project. To complete these goals the information on the SCIs (flora, fauna, climate, conservation, history etc.) as well as sustainable management practise and funding options were communicated on different stakeholders` levels.
We really appreciate help of our partners, without their help we could not realize activities in such amount and quality.



LOCATION

LOUNY REGION, CZECH REPUBLIC

Hilly islands of nature in a flat farmland of Louny region, North Bohemia, namely SCI Raná-Hrádek and SCI Oblík-Srdov-Brník, SCI Hořenec-Číčov, SCI Křížové vršky-Malý vrch-Šibeník, SCI Všechlapy-Kamýk, SCI Sinutec-Dlouhý kopec, SCI Vrch Milá, SCI Třtěnské stráně.

Promotion of nature and its protection in eight Sites of Community Importance (SCIs) with dry grassland habitats.

OUTCOMES/RESULTS

1 School children

Presentations at schools and field trips to the SCIs were organised. An art competition with nature theme has been organised for last four years (e.g. over 30 schools and out-of-school clubs took part in 2013 and over 400 drawings was received). The best valued drawings were used for postcards or card game "Černý Petr". Around 30 pictures are used as decoration in Litoměřice hospital.

2 General public

The biggest event which takes place every year is the "Celebration of Steppes"in May in SCI Raná-Hrádek. At least one thousand people come every year and over one thousand and two hundred people visited the event to spend a day outdoors exploring the site and its nature in 2015.

KEYWORDS

SITES OF COMMUNITY IMPORTANCE
GRASSLAND HABITATS
PROMOTION OF NATURE
LIFE+

LIFE+ INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION PROJECT
EFFICIENT MANAGERS FOR EFFICIENT NATURA 2000 NETWORK

The event usually include several field excursions, a project exhibition, sheep herding competition, sheep shaving show and rich programme for children -this year 12 theme points were situated. Local train known as "švestková dráha" was put in to operation ss an attraction. This local train is operational only on weekends during the summer holiday. Furhermore there are excursions to various Natura 2000 sites (usually weekends) and the annual insect trapping night called "Who hides in the darkness?". We also made a special edition of geocaching coins and a new geocache with information on the site is ready to be launched in spring 2014 in SCI Oblík-Srdov-Brník.



3 Local communities and Municipal Councils

Cooperation with local Municipal Councils and Mayors has improved greatly since the project started. This is mainly thanks to their participation in a three-day excursion to similar SCIs in Moravia and Slovakia where we learned about best practise followed by many discussions and negotiations. We also strongly encourage direct involvement of the Municipalities in the management actions on the sites where they often own the land. Thanks to good relationships we have been able to approach local people and inform about current issues in local SCIs through village newsletter. PLA Administration České středohoří has helped as a mediator between farmers and municipalities within the frame/scope of key land lease.
A portable exhibition on the sites (info-panels on steppes, invertebrates, the Ground Squirrel, pasture, conservation etc.) completed with stuffed steppe birds and mammals has been visiting local villages.

4 Stakeholders, involved members of public and experts

The greatest response received the seminar „Pasture as traditional management of steppes"that brought together all different involved parties. Practical issues were addressed to support this recently receding farming practise.



5 All levels

The project runs an up-to-date web page and a Facebook page which is established under name "Stepi Lounského středohoří - Projekt LIFE+". We also cooperate with widely visited website **www.ceskestredohori.cz**. Information boards were installed at access roads to the sites. We produced information and promotion materials at different levels and distribute them through local information centre, a restaurant, a regional train operator and at various public events where we personally present the sites and their conservation (such as the Earth day, Day with the Forests, Ranger's day, Bat Night etc.).
The two brochures (first one is devoted to ground squirrel and the second one is covering the whole steppe problematic and it also exists in English) and five leaflets can be downloaded from **here**). Professionals can download management plans for specially protected areas as well as management plans for target species here.



There are also educational materials and the Ground Squirrel comic book, that was made to introduce Spermophilus citellus (Habitats Directive, Annex II) to be downloaded in the section „Pro děti". The comic book has had a huge success therefore another one is being made. This time it is about ladybird spider. Colouring books were also created and small visitors really enjoyed them a lot. Interest in both comics and colouring books was so big that they had to be reprinted. Furthermore stickers with pictures of steppes species were made and sachets of seeds of wild flowers for butterflies were also spread between children.

There is a huge difference between the current situation and the situation before policy development. Job opportunities have been created and huge amount of connections have been made.

Because of the lasting contact with people (mainly stakeholders) and our patient approach we received trust of the people and the cooperation is much easier now. The contacts what we made will last even after the end of the project, because of that following protection of nature will be easier. As mentioned above thanks to this trust we are even able to assist as a mediator if necessary.

The project was founded from European funds of the LIFE + project.
We were always trying to approach general public. We reached the mature public by already mentioned brochures and leaflets and the smaller ones with games, comic books or colouring books. Communication with local communities, municipal councils, farmers, involved members of public and experts is whole different story. With these stakeholders we especially head for personal approach.

We receive a very positive feedback on the new educational and promotional programme and the project was awarded by Natura 2000 Award in the category "Communication" in 2014.

LESSONS LEARNED

1 Good communication with stakeholders is crucial for effective conservation of nature.

2 Good relations with stakeholders and public.

3 Involvement of local community and local people - for locals it is very important to have positive relation to the area (region).

4 Support of local economy - self sufficiency of farmers, economical viability

5 Promotion of region (tourism)

6 Cooperation of state administration, self administration, private organisations and NDO is crucial.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The adress of the already mentioned website is and facebook page.

Download of leaflets, bruchures, management plans, even games can be done here.

contact details:

Jindriska Jelinkova
jindriska.jelinkova@nature.cz
www.ochranaprirody.cz
NCACR, Kaplanova 1931/1, 148 00
Prague 4 , Czech Republic

Funded by the European Union.
The production of this publication has been supported financially in the framework of the European Commission's (Directorates General Environment and Climate Action). LIFE + funding programme of operating grants for European Environmental NGOs. The content of this publication does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in the publication lies entirely with the authors.