

Protection of the White-tailed Eagle in the Danube Valley

International DANUBEPARKS White-tailed Eagle Conference
Szeksard, 17th-18th October, 2011



Illustration: Martin Weixelbraun

Protection of the White-tailed Eagle in the Danube Valley

**International DANUBEPARKS White-tailed Eagle Conference
Szeksard, 17th-18th October, 2011**

1. White-tailed Eagle as flagship species – background for the conference

The Danube river is the backbone for the White-tailed Eagle population in South-East Europe. More than one third of the South-Eastern population (approximately 550 breeding pairs) is ecologically related to the Danube floodplains.

This spectacular bird of prey serves as flagship species for habitat protection as well as for transnational conservation activities. DANUBEPARKS – The Danube River Network of Protected Areas to builds up its Danube wide activities on the positive recovery of this species. Following the outcomes of the Illmitz conference, in 2009 DANUBEPARKS established a Task Force Birds, including experts from the Danube Protected Areas, all of them active for the conservation of the White-tailed Eagle, as well as external experts. In serial workshops, conservation actions were coordinated, a joint database and – as a milestone – the Danube wide Action Plan has been jointly elaborated.

The presentation of the joint transnational efforts and conservation activities, the update on the know-how of the White-tailed Eagle population and the introduction of milestones like the International Database and the Action Plan qualifies the International Conference 2011 in the heart of the South-Eastern Europe White-tailed Eagle population as the new reference for White-tailed Eagle conservation in South-East Europe.

The relevance of this conference has been underlined by the official opening by Érdiné Dr. Szekeres Rozália, Head of the Department for Nature Conservation and official representative of the Hungarian Ministry for Regional Development.



The White-tailed Eagle – a flagship species for nature conservation along the Danube river

2. Presentations and work in content

Numerous experts from Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia and Romania presented the latest result on White-tailed Eagle from their countries. The following summary should bring together the key messages from all presentations. For more details, please have a look on <http://www.danubeparks.org/> where all presentations are available as downloads.

2.1. Population status, breeding distribution and trends

Most presentations focused on distribution, breeding population, habitat use and threats on national level. David Horal, Remo Probst, Mira Ruda, Ákos Gáborik, Bratislav Grubac and Dan Bandacu presented the new and updated figures and trends for their regions and countries.

Basically, the positive recovery of the last years continues in South-East Europe. These latest information given by the local experts contributed significantly to raise the know-how transfer between the Danube countries and to increase the better understanding of habitat use and conservation priorities for the White-tailed Eagle in this region. Some presentations reflect the new level of conservation activities, some enabled by DANUBEPARKS, like intensive monitoring and telemetry in the Danube Delta/Romania or (pers. Comment) the first ringing of White-tailed Eagle in Bulgaria.

2.2. Habitat modelling

Based on the actual breeding distribution, habitat analyzes were made to elaborate a habitat model for Austria. Zsófia Krasznai presented this interesting approach, which finally illustrates the possible future development of the breeding distribution and gives estimations for the population trends. As the speaker highlights, this model could be used to support proactive planning of conservation activities in advance.

The new Danube wide White-tailed Eagle Database could provide data for similar models for other Danube countries and regions. Of special interest for this approach could be the Lower Danube (Bulgaria, Romania) with relative low breeding abundance but most probably a much higher habitat potential (see “Outputs and future Perspectives”).

2.3. Threats, presented exemplary for Forestry, Poisoning and Lead Poisoning

The Action Plan for the Conservation of the White-tailed Eagle along the Danube includes a compilation of the threats for the White-tailed Eagle population in this region. Additionally, nearly all presentations gave a summary on threats for White-tailed Eagle on local or national level, including disturbance, electrocution, collision etc. Specific presentations focused on poisoning, lead poisoning and the influence of forestry.

Forestry

Especially the presentations from the Middle Danube had a focus on forestry, which is identified in the Action Plan as highly relevant all along the Danube.

For Serbia, problems on nesting sites as well as good examples for the protection of nesting zones and approaches for wise use from the perspective of forestry were presented by Marko Tucakov and Radmilla Sakic-Hám.

Tibor Mikuska presented the negative influence of forestry on the breeding of White-tailed Eagle in Croatia and illustrated these statement by analyzes on the breeding success. Protected Areas seem to be a suitable tool to support successful breeding. Based on examples of protection of nesting zones, sometimes not successful on the long-term of view, the speaker included an appeal for natural like forestry which found great interest in the discussions.

All these presentations highlighted the role of White-tailed Eagle as flagship species for habitat protection.

Poisoning

Christian Pichler presented the “poison beware” campaign by WWF Austria. Illegal poisoning activities by Carbofuran and other toxin substances is a relevant negative impact on raptor populations, especially in the Upper Danube countries. The speaker presented the cooperation of different stakeholders in the frame of this campaign as key factor and assumed the positive influence of this campaign on the slow reduction of poisoning cases in the last years.

At the conference in Illmitz 2007, a transfer of the know-how on illegal poisoning had been assumed. Therefore, this presentation can be considered as positive contribution to raise also the know-how exchange between the stakeholders being active to eliminate these illegal activities.

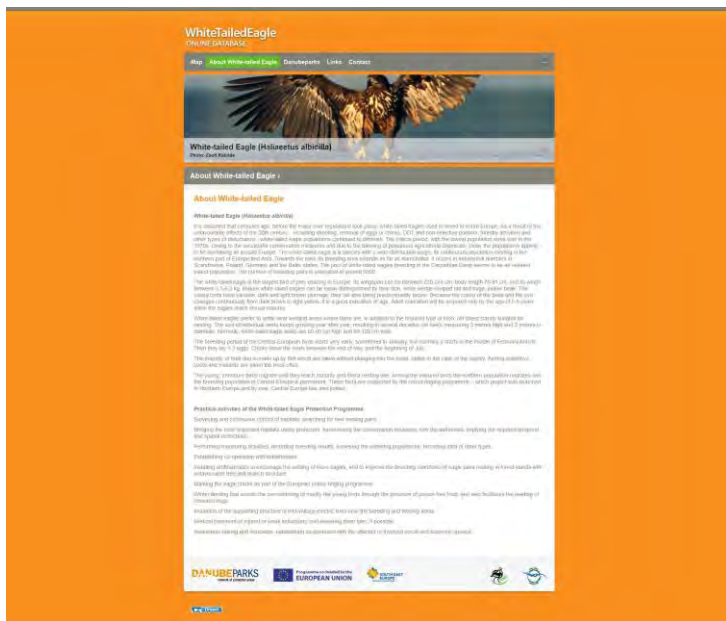
Lead intoxication

An intoxicating presentation by Oliver Krone on the significant negative impact by lead intoxication found great response in the auditorium. The international expert on this field presented lead ammunition as the most important anthropological cause for dead of White-tailed Eagle in Germany. The presentation stressed the high relevance of a ban of lead ammunition and showed alternatives by using lead free ammunition. The speaker highlighted, that the ban of lead ammunition is not only an important step for the conservation of the White-tailed Eagle, rather it has to be seen as necessary contribution to avoid negative impact on human health.

Based on a map showing cases of investigations for lead intoxication and a big “white area” in South-East Europe, Oliver Krone assumed a lack of awareness about lead intoxication in the Danube region. To raise the awareness and bring this discussion on a data-based level also in South-East Europe, the speaker invited all participants to take samples of death found birds and to send them to “his” institute. Oliver Krone offers analyzes to identify ultimate and proximate facts resulting in the death of the bird fress of charges and costs. Guidelines for taking the sample as well as the contact address of Oliver Krone, in particular the Leibnitz Institute for Zoo- and Wildlife Research, you can [download here](#). You are invited to follow this invitation. Hopefully, this procedure will consider coming closer to a ban of lead ammunition, especially in key areas for White-tailed Eagle and humans settlements like the Danube region.

3. International Database

The conference in Illmitz 2007 has stressed the need of an International database. In the frame of the DANUBEPARKS network, the Duna-Drava National Park in cooperation with MME /BirdLife Hungary has established this database for South-East and Central Europe. Zsolt Nagy presented this tool and the actual status (e.g. more than 1400 breeding records are included so far). Many thanks to all data providers for their enthusiastic field work and for their cooperation! The speaker highlighted the intended purposes, presented the easy handling and invited all interested people to feed the database with their information. The online database can be found on <http://whitetailedeagle.mme.hu/> and will be embedded in the DANUBEPARKS project website www.danubeparks.org very soon.



Action Plan for the conservation of the White-tailed Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) along the Danube



Remo Probst & Ákos Gaborik



The International Database and the White-tailed Eagle Action Plan – two milestones for the future conservation activities for this species.

4. Action Plan for the Conservation of the White-tailed Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) along the Danube

In a joint and integrative approach the DANUBEPARKS network, in cooperation with numerous external experts, has elaborated the Action Plan for the White-tailed Eagle conservation along the Danube. Georg Frank presented the 3 years elaboration process and gave a first introduction into the document, including the actual status and trends of the White-tailed Eagle in the Danube region and the first distribution map of White-tailed Eagle in the Danube region, produced based on the online database. Based on analyzes of the threats, the editors of the document, Remo Probst and Ákos Gaborik, defined 37 concrete actions under 8 headers to reach the objectives of this Action Plan. The speaker highlighted the support for this document on transnational level, including BirdLife International and WWF International – Danube Carpathian Programme. Furthermore, the project team is invited by the Council of Europe to present the Action Plan to the Standing Committee which intends to give support to the Action Plan on political level.

5. Outputs and future perspectives

This newsletter is to make the outputs of the conference and the numerous discussions in its frame more sustainable and to contribute the main future perspectives also to all experts and the wider public who were not personally present at the conference:

5.1. Perspectives for the Action Plan and its implementation

- Final working draft of the Action Plan has been presented and provided in digital version to all participants; feedback on the document is welcome and can be considered until beginning of November at the very latest, best direct to the main editor Remo Probst remo.probst@gmx.at
- After the (short) public consultation process, the final version of the Action Plan will be published on the DANUBEPARKS website for download
- The Action Plan will be presented by the project team on November 29th to the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention/Council of Europe in Strasbourg
- It is intended to publish the Action Plan in the official publication series of the Council of Europe “Nature and Environment” – the publication is expected for January 2012 at the latest
- The Danube River Network of Protected Areas applies for a DANUBEPARKS follow-up project in the ETC programme for South-East Europe (ETC-SEE), again including the White-tailed Eagle as flagship species (deadline for submission of the project application: 25th November 2011)
- The Danube Protected Areas expressed their intention to elaborate a Danube wide conservation project (probably in the LIFE+ programme) as important step towards the implementation of the Action Plan; the elaboration process should be done in the frame of the DANUBEPARKS follow-up project by involving a wide range of stakeholders
- a follow-up workshop – focused on the identification of main activities for the Danube wide conservation project – is planned in the frame of the DANUBEPARKS follow-up for October 2012, presupposed an approval of the DANUBEPARKS application; invitation will be spread in due time, have a permanent look on www.danubeparks.org

5.2. Perspective for the International Database

- Database will be embedded on the DANUBEPARKS website www.danubeparks.org
- a year by year update of the breeding sites is inevitable
- therefore, for each Danube country one national coordinator has already been defined or will be defined very soon to keep the breeding data up to date and completed at the end of the year
- Further steps will be taken to invite also the wider public to contribute their observations to the database
- The international database could be used as base for large scale analyzes, e.g. habitat models as presented for Austria could be of high interest for the Lower Danube

5.3. Lead intoxication

- Oliver Krone offered free analyzes for samples from South-East Europe at the Leibnitz Institute for Zoo- and Wildlife Research
- please read the [guidelines for taking the samples](#) carefully

- please take use of this opportunity and send samples whenever necessary – this could help to close the gap in knowledge on this problem in the Danube region

5.4. Presentations and Publications

- all presentations are available as pdf-files on www.danubeparks.org
- all speakers are invited to send the article on the presentation to the organizers parrag.tibor@freemail.hu of the conference; deadline: end of November 2011
- the organizers will publish this articles as online conference proceedings
- the organizers try to find an opportunity for a printed paper version of the conference proceedings but it cannot be guaranteed yet
- an interesting compilation of the conference can be found on the website of europeanraptors.org; many thanks to Markus Jais for his efforts – please have a look on <http://europeanraptors.org/conservation/the-white-tailed-eagle-as-a-flagship-species-for-conservation-along-the-danube-river/>
- press articles in Hungary and Austria reflect the interest of the wide public on our conservation work
- brochures and flyers about the conservation activities in Slovakia and Hungary were presented at the conference – they are available [as download on the DANUBEPARKS website](#), paper versions can be ordered free of charge

Final conclusions and acknowledgement

The participants agreed, that this International White-tailed Eagle Conference in Szekszard 2011 was a milestone in the transnational cooperation for the conservation of the White-tailed Eagle.

The perfect organisation by the Duna-Drava National Park prepared the frame for interesting presentations and fruitful discussions.

During the field trip, 60 participants had the chance to see the habitat for one of the highest abundances of White-tailed Eagle in Europe. The framework programme, especially the tasting of the famous Szekszard wines in the romantic wine cellar and the excellent local food, in combination with the concrete outputs and results made this conference to an event which motivates us to intensify our joint work for the conservation of this fascinating species.

**Thank you to all colleagues in the Duna-Drava National Park for the organization and for hosting us! Thank you to all experts for their active participation!
See you soon in the follow-up process towards the implementation of the White-tailed Eagle Action Plan!**

Contact:

Georg Frank
DANUBEPARKS project manager
Email: g.frank@donauauen.at
Phone: 0043/67684223528