

PROJECT PROGRESS UPDATE (December 2008)

Demonstration Project: Biharugra Fishponds, Hungary

Prepared by the WOW Project Coordination Unit (PCU)
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The project team implementing the demonstration project in the Biharugra Fishponds in Hungary kicked off their activities with work on a feasibility study to assess the technical and economic options of introducing a viable fishpond management system within the context of nature conservation.

The outcome of the research has been a comprehensive technical report suggesting a range of technical and practical measures for the local fish farming industry on how to manage the fishpond system at Biharugra and the surrounding area. Local fish farming enterprises are already incorporating recommendations, including feeding techniques, as normal practice within their operations. The feasibility study also assessed measures to promote ecotourism, making the report an essential tool for future conservation planning.

A shortened and regionally relevant version of the original feasibility study is nearly complete which will include examples of best practice, experiences and case studies. This text is being published as an information handbook that can be disseminated widely among fish farmers and nature conservationists.

To better engage relevant stakeholders, a regional workshop was held this past summer to discuss current issues related to fish farming in protected areas. The event was very well attended with more than 100 curious professional fish farmers, conservationists, scientists and site managers from across Hungary and Romania participating. People are already looking forward to exchanging their ideas and information at the next event planned in 2009.

To improve habitat conditions for the threatened waterbirds in the Biharugra Fishponds, almost all of the infrequently used ponds were flooded, providing excellent habitat for many key species in the area. Strategically placed artificial islands are now providing a suitable breeding place for terns and gulls. In the not so distant future these beautiful birds can be viewed from one of the 4 observation towers that are being constructed as part of a new circular ecotourism route to familiarize visitors with key sites of the protected area, while enabling the generation of additional income for local businesses and nature protection.

Information boards and publications will be strategically placed throughout the route to add to the overall visitor experience, providing them with detailed information on key waterbird species, the habitat and their migration routes. In addition to information on the wildlife of the fishponds, visitors will also learn about the need for cooperation between nature conservation and fish farming.

Through good practice and demonstrating the value of nature-friendly fish farming, it is anticipated that the Biharugra Fishponds will be a model within the region on how the private sector can thrive in partnership with nature conservation. The project team is already looking at ways to sustain activities beyond the life of the demonstration project and build on the many successes of this initiative.

This report was prepared by the WOW Project Coordination Unit (PCU) and is based on project reporting documentation and personal accounts made during visits to the WOW Demonstration Site.

For more information please visit the Wings Over Wetlands (WOW) Project Website:
www.wingsoverwetlands.org

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