

Public monitoring within the 'GREEN CORRIDOR' Project

INTRODUCTION

The involvement of the society in observation of a process and data collection is called public monitoring (public surveillance, control, supervision). Observations can be made by anyone who is interested in these issues. Observation and description include both tree avenues, and venerable trees, and air and water quality, white storks, corn crakes, beavers, hogweed and other nature-research topics. Observations can make everyone: young, middle-aged people and seniors. It is a great pleasure that young people are interested in nature conservation. In general, there are 19 observation programmes developed.

People, engaging in the public monitoring, start



Photo - S. Ikaunieca

to observe and estimate nature's values and begin to protect and manage them. Understanding the value of the studied objects or the value of territories, people, gradually, regardless of legal protection, start to take care of this part of nature – to protect, and often, also to manage it, for example, to mow or pasture an "orchid" meadow, etc.. Here works the principle - I can protect what I understand and evaluate.

HISTORY



Photo - S. Ikaunieca

The beginnings of the public monitoring in Latvia are connected with the Northern Vidzeme (Ziemeļvidzeme) Biosphere Reserve (ZBR). The starting point lies in 2005, when a group of nature specialists began to write simplified observation records (protocols) suitable for a wide range of people. At the same time, educational materials were developed. They contained three parts: description of the species or objects, information how to conduct a research and about the necessary equipment, as well as a record to reflect the data acquired during the research.

Later more people joined to do public monitoring observations; the records of the previous researches were improved, as well as the data acquired during the research was processed. Gradually, 19 observation guides were developed, covering both elements of non-living and living nature, and elements of culture-historical nature. Gradually, increased also the interest about the public monitoring and in 2008 already more than 400 people carried out nature observations, and we received 827 observation records, too.

GREEN CORRIDOR



Photo - S. Ikaunieca

The good experience and observations made it possible, since April 2010, to introduce public monitoring programme in the whole territory of Latvia. We based it on the public monitoring programmes developed in the Northern Vidzeme (Ziemeļvidzeme) Biosphere Reserve and summarized in the "Public Monitoring Manual"

(http://www.daba.gov.lv/public/lat/sabiedribas_lidzdaliba/sabiedriskais_monitorings/).

In 2012 and 2013, within the framework of the Latvian-Estonian cross-border project "Green Corridor", we introduced the residents of the Latvia borderland of former Valka and Alūksne districts with this programme and the necessary observations. Training workshops with practical sessions were organised in the municipalities, home to "Natura 2000" areas. The aim was to familiarise local people with nature's values, which they can benefit from locally, as well as to involve local citizens in public monitoring. We placed the biggest emphasis on training in schools as experience shows that schoolchildren are more active than adults. Students can apply school observations - in scientific works, research, environmental projects - to their relationship with nature.

In less than a year roughly thirty participants have submitted public monitoring observations. The results are comparatively the same as those achieved when we began public monitoring in the Northern Vidzeme (Ziemeļvidzeme) Biosphere Reserve, which is home to a significantly larger population and area.

Particularly, the teacher of Vijciems Elementary School, Anita Vilgute, and the schoolchildren must be praised for their enthusiastic records of old trees and their observations of hogweed and white storks.

We also wish to thank Jaunlaicene Elementary School and Ape Secondary School for their venerable tree survey. Schoolchildren and teachers have acquired the first independent

skills to carry out observations. Hopefully, that interest will not weaken, and the number of observations and nature observers will increase, especially in the sections that do not require much effort and can be carried without help.



Photo - S. Ikaunieca

OBSERVATION

The simplest observations can be carried without help. For example, white storks nest records or determination of "Sosnovsky" hogweed growths. It does not require special preparation or training.



Internet resources

During autumns, the bats that are hibernating here choose their over-wintering sites. One of the most popular places for hibernating is the house's basements. The data on the flying mammal number and area of distribution is very necessary for the bat researchers. Usually, going to the cellar for products, one can look at the ceiling or the wall crack and watch, whether a small bat is sleeping there. Usually two species of bats hibernate here – northern bat and the long-eared bat. These two species are easily to identify since they differ in colour and size. Also, this observation can be done without assistance.



Internet resources

During winter, on Saturdays and Sundays one can observe what birds fly to the bird feeders by the house. Just remember, that if you start to feed the birds in the winter, you must feed them continuously. They must not run out of feed because otherwise they will not survive. The process of observation is particularly interesting because it reveals the individual characteristics of each bird and interrelationships in the crowd. Rural residents easily determine bird species, and if a lesser known bird appears, one can always look for answers on the Internet or at the library, in the bird guide.

A more complicated process is to take measurements. For example, for determining the girth of an old tree or the length of a beaver dam or a line of trees, it is very convenient to work in pairs - if one holds the end of the measuring tape while the other determines measurements. In order to complete such measurements, it is better if a team of two or more enthusiasts works together.



Photo - S. Ikauniece

The programmes described above are simple and have the largest number of participants. Knowledge is not compulsory and programmes are easy to complete. Some practical lessons and a dose of enthusiasm are enough for anyone who cares about the natural surroundings and is interested in continuous observations in nature, to complete them.

WHY PARTICIPATE?

Why should one participate in the public monitoring? Otars Opermanis, one of the initiators of this programme, has already given the answer in the introduction of the "Public Monitoring Manual": 'The worry is growing around the world as people observe the deterioration of the environment. No one can be confident that their children or grandchildren will be able to enjoy the same views of nature, clean water, and species of wildlife that we see and enjoy now. Politicians often do not pay much attention to these issues; they consider the concerns of our nature friends are exaggerated, and that the natural resources will renew in one or another way. If there is no monitoring data to show the evidence that nature's values will disappear, it is difficult for scientists to justify the amendments in legislation to restrict human activities which are causing the extinction of species.

Therefore, the so-called "EcoWatch" movement or volunteer monitoring of biodiversity, has derived, which carries out the enthusiasts who want to do something useful in their free time. Their main goal is to obtain



Sosnowsky Hogweed, photo - J. Alps

objective data about the conditions of different natural objects (for example: birds, frogs, water, trees). Each



Beaver dam, photo - S. Ikaunieca

participant can find themselves the most pleasant and most appropriate objects of observation in difficulty level. However, it should be remembered that the success lies in the mass and long-term movement. It is not sufficient if one makes observations for just one year. Many of the observations must be taken to detect changes. However, observations can be made from domestic property, beside a small river or forest next-door, and thus, a better understanding of the nature around us can be enjoyed.

Thus, as the participants of public monitoring, we can observe what changes occur around us. If sufficient data is handed over to researchers the data could be collected, changes determined and the state of the environment gauged. The lengthier the observations, the more valuable they are as the saying goes, "at the value of gold".

Of course, the like-minded can become friends while making observations and form activist groups. They can impact on local governments, so that the governments take them into account, for example, when municipal programmes and regional planning are under development.

Unquestionably, youth has an important role in public monitoring. They may learn about their parish, the nature of their district and about historical heritage, as well as the skills to carry out observational studies without assistance.



Photo - S. Ikaunieca

How to make observations? Search for the web page www.daba.gov.lv on the Internet. Under the "Public participation" section, you will find the pointer: "Public monitoring". There you will also find the public monitoring manual. Completed forms may also be sent electronically to the e-mail: inta.soma@daba.gov.lv.

One will always face unexpected situations while making observations in nature, sometimes big surprises. Let us say you meet with a herd of wild boar or moose, or on the North Latvian side, a bear, who often wanders there. Sometimes you will discover an unknown species or rare natural object, and then you cannot go further without the assistance of researchers.

EXPERIENCE

Public monitoring performers from the Northern Vidzeme (Ziemeļvidzeme) Biosphere Reserve, where the monitoring has already begun, and residents of former Valka and Alūksne districts by the Estonian border line, school pupils share their experiences. Here's an insight into some impressions about the public monitoring.

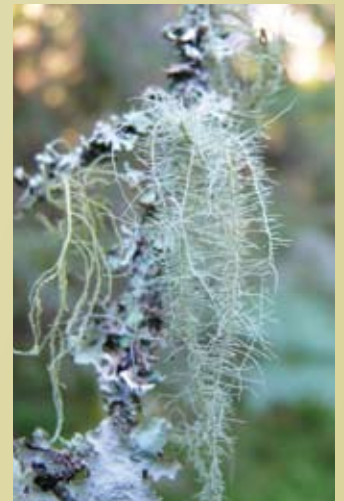


Photo - S. Ikaunieca

old trees. It is more interesting if a group of about five or six people come together, and if somebody present can talk about ancient history. It is interesting, and sometimes very funny. To find the ancient trees, one must examine the older maps where one can find an old farm or manor. Ancient parks are also interesting. There, one will find a Latvia-scale old tree. Of course, if you are surveying your parish area in that way, you will learn things both new and unknown, as well as explore the history of your parish. I advise you to go on foot or by bicycle because that is the best way to notice and observe everything, and also because there are no travel expenses."

RAIVO AND GINTS

One former and the other a current pupil of the Jeru Elementary School: "We so actively started to engage with public monitoring in an environmental hobby group, also during an environmental camp. There we examined lichen on the deciduous trees. Using the five indicator species, we determined that the camping area has a clean air because we found vertically-hanging lichen - bryorias. Since we live in the countryside and own a farm, we started



Hanging zicher (*Usnea sp.*), photo - S. Ikaunieca

KLĀVS

A student at the Cēsis Vocational Secondary School, who carries public monitoring already for a long time: "I started with the research of tree alleys because there is an oak alley just by my house, which ends at the old manor house. Afterwards, I continued with records of

to feed forest birds, when frost started. Using a bird guide, we found out that during the winter period the area around our house is responsible for feeding 17 different bird species. Late January is the busiest time of the year with more than 100 birds, including sparrows and other birds, feeding within the area. We collected the acquired data and presented in our research at the district competition under the title "Schoolchildren Make Experiments and Observe". Our work competed in the final course in Riga and managed to win the jury's sympathy prize."



Photo - S. Ikauniece

ANITA

A teacher at Vijciems Elementary School, the initiator of public monitoring in Vijciems notes: "During the summer, schoolchildren observed white storks and hogweed stands, and measured the old trees growing in the parish. This is just the beginning and I hope that interest will increase and more participants will take part."

EVITA

A student at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, noted: "We always have an interesting time together with friends! Especially fascinating are the moments with a binocular, studying the caves of the common kingfisher and sand martin, which are located on the banks of the Salaca. It is also so exciting to use a small



Photo - J. Alps



Photo - J. Alps

net in the summer and explore the diversity of aquatic animals in the Salaca River. Of course, the three days that we spend on the water, jointly overcoming the long way from Mazsalaca to Salacgrīva, were unforgettable. It is always surprising and mind-blowing to avoid the stones that are hiding in the small rapids because the main idea is not to overturn the boat. Cooking dinner and playing games together binds us together even tighter and makes us feel like one big family."

KITJA

A schoolgirl at the Jeru Elementary School, says: "I am the one of those who loves to learn and explore. I love the exploration of birds. Every year, I observe the



Photo - S. Ikauniece

same white storks' nests, acquiring new data which I gather and afterwards create my own stork's nest records. I've also created a presentation about the white stork and participated with it at the district's contest, "Schoolchildren Make Experiments and Observe". I have measured venerable trees, too. Of course, I also count migratory birds in spring and gather data about them."

BIRUTA

A teacher at the Jaunlaicene Elementary School notes: "Jaunlaicenes Park near our school is where several ancient trees of state importance are growing. We found them during the workshops, and the students measured them once more afterwards. At the pupils' home are the white stork nests. They made records of the nesting stork young. I would like that pupils participated more actively in public monitoring than they do now."



Photo - S. Ikauniece

THE CONCLUSION

Let us seat ourselves in our car or bicycles and go on the curving country roads. Let us stop for a while by an old park and see whether an old tree is not hiding there. Maybe in your favourite mushroom place you will find a larger in-size stone that deserves attention. The best way to remove the daily tension and stress is to walk outdoors. If there is a small river, and the first snow has fallen down, you can go on foot expeditions. Maybe you will be lucky to find a herd of deer or a fox who is hunting for mice, or maybe you will see a beaver and his dam. In spring, storks will come flying and nest the young ones on the roof of ridges. The small land of Latvia is beautiful. Let us participate in the identification of its natural wealth and riches.

Look, see, remember!



Photo - S. Ikauniece



Not all people have the opportunity to go for hikes in nature, frequently watching the birds or animals. As the role of different internet technologies in everyday life increases, the possibility to observe nature through the eye of an on-line web camera is normalized. We install the camera outdoors, most commonly at a bird nest, and may watch the continuously broadcast image on the Internet. In this way, it is possible to follow events taking place at the white storks' habitat, find out what the lesser spotted eagle has brought for its chicks and observe how the young osprey chicks are hatching. Enthusiasts can exchange impressions and cheer on the birds whilst conducting on-line records (monitoring). The gathered information must be useful not only for scientists, but also for everyone who follows natural events with the help of a webcam, thus, expanding knowledge and understanding.

Within the framework of the project "Green Corridor", we placed an online webcam in the osprey's nest, and it was possible to observe how the birds return and prepare to nest.

Project

Project: **"Tuned Nature Management in the Transboundary area of Estonia and Latvia"**

(„Saskaņota dabas teritoriju apsaimniekošana Igaunijas un Latvijas pierobežā”).

Abbreviation: **"Green Corridor"** or **„Zaļais koridors"**.

Partners:

Nature Conservation Agency,

Vidzeme Regional Administration

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