

Information Report of the “Biodiversity Picnic” devoted to the “International Biodiversity Protection” and the “Earth Day”.



Baku - 2008

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The “Biodiversity Picnic” has been implemented at the initiative of the “Sustainable Development” Society together with the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan Republic and with support of the “CEE WEB”.

The "Pan-European Biodiversity Picnic" is a multi-stakeholder initiative, which aims to contribute to raising awareness of biodiversity and strengthening commitment to its conservation through regular events every year on International Biodiversity Day.

The "Pan-European Biodiversity Picnic" is launched at the Biodiversity Stakeholders' Roundtable organized jointly by the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy and European ECO Forum within the Belgrade Conference in October 2007.

The main objective of the "Pan-European Biodiversity Picnic" is attraction of attention of all interested groups of the civil society to solution of problem of the natural biodiversity preservation and informing of the general public about the following issues:

***Biodiversity** means the diversity of life on Earth. It does not only include diversity of genes, species and ecosystems, but also the variety of relationships among living entities. The complexity comprising this diversity is a main characteristic of ecosystems and their functioning, a characteristic that we can never explore and understand in its entirety. At the same time, however, we do not have any doubts about the crucial role of ecosystem services, i.e. those ecosystem functions, which are beneficial for the society and vitally contribute to human well being.*

Biodiversity and ecosystem services essentially contribute to human life and wellbeing in numerous different ways. However, in order to save this biodiversity for our future benefit, real commitment is needed from all decision makers and the public.

***Human well-being** derives from ecosystem services and thus biodiversity in numerous different ways. The food we eat, the water we drink, a stable climate, timber, fiber and natural medicines are all presents from nature, which we take away or benefit from for our own well being. If the ecosystems surrounding us cannot function properly any more, there will be no such services available either. Therefore maintaining the healthy functioning of ecosystems, which at the same time is built upon the diversity of all life forms in the course of billions of years, is not a luxury, but rather a matter of social welfare.*

***International agreements** and national policies are intended to ensure the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable use of its components. European governments have made strong commitments, namely to halt the loss of biodiversity at the Pan-European level by 2010. However, efforts have not been enough. As the Belgrade Assessment reveals, biodiversity decline is continuing in the region, and unprecedented efforts would be needed to reverse it. The lack of true sectoral integration and commitment from the public threaten not only biodiversity, but also the flow of these ecosystem services for our own well being. The Pan-European Biodiversity Picnic aims to contribute to building up this commitment of all stakeholders in society.*

For joining of Azerbaijan to the Pan-European Initiative of “Biodiversity Picnic” there have been carried out consultations with representatives of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources on the basis of which the location, program and the delegates list have been identified.

Hirkan National Park which is located in the southern part of Azerbaijan has been chosen for organization of the “Picnic” (See the information on national park).

***Hirkan National Park** was established by decree # 81 of the President of Azerbaijan Republic on 9th February, 2004. The National Park is located in the south-east of Azerbaijan on the area of 21435 hectares of Lenkoran and Astara administrative districts. The National Park consists of natural region of*

Talysh Mountains characterized with their unique natural complex.

The main purpose of establishment of the National Park is complex preservation of nature of this area, protection of relict and endemic plants of Tertiary period and characteristic flora and fauna types, included into the Red Book of Azerbaijan Republic, monitoring of environment, awareness of the public and also creation of favorable conditions for researches, tourism and recreation. Hirkan National Park mainly consists of forests and chain of mountains from the north-west till the south-east.

The area has mainly lukewarm and arid climate in summer, humid in autumn and moderate in winter.

Although the territory of Hirkan National Park is not high in vertical zone (up to 1 000 meters), change of forests in the mountains from the south to the west can be observed: forests with mainly chestnut leave oak, demiragaj (ferrous tree), hornbeam, Silk Acacia, Caucasus palm-tree, Hirkan pear-tree, Caucasus date-palm are located in the lowland. In the mountainous landscape mainly such trees as demiragaj and partially chestnut leave oak get thin and replaced by beech (Fagus) forests.

Such trees as fern, Hirkan broom, Hirkan box tree (Buxus), holly and different lianas are wide spread in the forests of the National Park. The majority of these plants are included into the Red Book of Azerbaijan.

One of the main characteristics of subtropical forests of Lenkoran zone where Hirkan National Park is located is well preservation of Hirkan type forests and wide spread of many endemic, rare trees and bushes here.

Entomofauna of the National Park is rich with endemic animals, particularly, among the representatives of ground mollusks and non-flying insects. Among the species included into the Red Book are dark red Talysh longicom, Talysh rhizophagous, three-wing Talysh runner, Talysh bramea, grapevine ground beetle (Carabus), Oxim goldish butterfly, Alexandra silverspot, Talysh velvet butterfly, etc.

Among limnetic type of animals in the area there is common newt, crested newt, Syrian garlic smell frog, Caucasus garden spider, common ground toad.

Among reptiles in the area of the National Park are Mediterranean turtle, striped lizard, round-headed wormwood lizard, ruin pangolin, Aesculapian snake, etc.

Avifauna of Hirkan National Park is represented by black stork, gravestone eagle, lumpsucker pelican, partridge, Talysh pheasant, Hirkan tomtit, hawk, etc., which are included into the Red Book of Azerbaijan.

As a whole, wealth of flora of the area created favorable conditions for habitation of many animals here. Fauna of the park is very rich. Among mammals there are such animals as the leopard, sika deer, lynx, badger, wild boar, roe, raccoon, etc.

Hirkan National Park is also famous with its rare natural monuments where more than 100 natural and cultural monuments exist. One of the most well-known natural forest monuments is located near Zungulesh village of Astara district. Proximity of the Caspian Sea, diversity of the nature creates favorable conditions for the development of ecotourism in the region and investigation of the environment.

For the purpose of including the Hirkan forests into UNESCO's World Natural and Cultural heritage List, documents substantiated from the scientific point of view have been prepared and introduced to the UNESCO Secretariat.

For participation in the “Picnic” information booklets have been prepared and distributed and also this event has been advertised on the web site of the “Sustainable Development” Society together with the application form.

Hirkan National Park is located at the distance of 280 km from Baku city. In order to ensure traffic safety there has been made decision to use rail transport to Lenkoran and bus from Lenkoran to the National Park.

Delegates’ departure was appointed at 23.30 on 31st May and return at 7.30 on 2nd June, 2008 (see the Picnic program).



Photo. Departure to Lankaran by train.

Sixty representatives of the following organizations took participation in the meeting:

- The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources;
- Hirkan National Park;
- 14 NGOs;
- The Ministry of Education;
- The Center of Ecology and Experiments of the Ministry of Education;
- The Center of Creativity Development of the Ministry of Education;
- Baku State University;
- The National Academy of Sciences;
- The Commission of Ecology and Energetic of the Parliament;
- The Agriculture Ministry;
- Consulting companies;
- Local communities;
- Mass media (list of delegates is attached).

Employees of National Park together with organizers of the Picnic have prepared the necessary equipment and materials in advance for the improvement works in the territory. Therefore, right after a breakfast, the meeting participants have started the improvement works of a new tourist path.



Photo. Works on drawing the direction signs of a tourist path.



Photo. Drawing of signs of rare types of vegetation.



Photo. Equipping of a footpath.



Photo. Improvement of the observation deck.

The exhibition of a biological diversity of agriculture has been arranged for participants after completion of the improvement works. More than twenty kinds of fruits, vegetables and the berries which have been grown up in this area have been presented at the showcase. The subject information on interrelation of a natural and agricultural biodiversity has been presented to the participants.



Photo. Biodiversity on an example of the various kinds of fruits, vegetables and berries grown up in Azerbaijan.

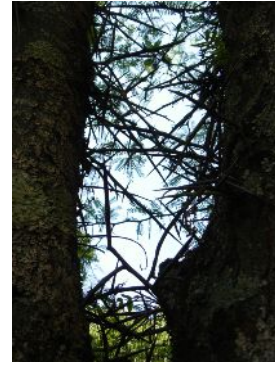


Photo. Biodiversity of plants.

There has been organized the round table in a conference hall of the Hirkan National Park Department where the problems of preservation of a biological diversity in Azerbaijan Republic have been discussed.

Representatives of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources informed participants on works realized in the country and activities in the field of preservation of the environment and the biodiversity.

The Deputy Director of the National Park, G.Safarov has told about the history of establishment and a unique natural complex of the park, about the development program and activities directed on preservation of natural ecosystems.



Foto. In time of talking of Q. Səfərov about history of National Park.

The special attention has been given to the work of the Ministry of the Ecology directed on inclusion of the territory of Hirkan Park in the UNESCO's World Natural and Cultural heritage List. The spoken representatives of the Academy of Sciences (P.Muradov), Baku State University (S.Goychayev, T.Halilov), the Ministry of Education (A.Ibrahimov, L.Dadashova, S.Askerova,) nongovernmental organizations (T.Ramazanov, J.Valuyev, A.Agaev, L.Bayramova, etc.) informed participants of a round table on their activity in the field of informing the public, preservation of a natural heritage and cooperation with the state structures. Information on the development of extreme tourism which is new for Azerbaijan has been met with special attention.

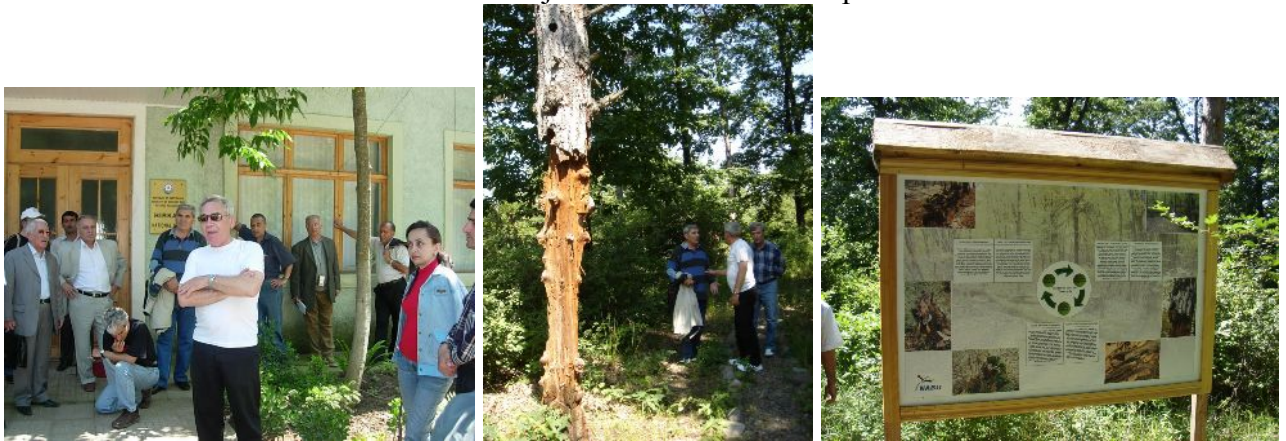


Photo. In time of excursion.



Photo. The round table participants.



Photo. During discussion.

Speakers have noted that establishment of the national parks is significant step in propagation and informing of the public.

National parks create base for the development of both ecological and educational, recreational tourism.

At the same time, it has been noted that creation of an infrastructure, necessary for the development of tourism happens slowly and there are many unresolved problems, insufficient participation of public organizations and local communities in this process.

It has been mentioned that one of the important elements of the ecotourism development is preparation of the tourist routes including both elements of the natural ecosystems, aesthetically significant natural objects and the historical and cultural heritage.

The question of satisfaction of demand for ecologically pure food products and elements of national tradition and cuisine is also priority.

In this meaning Azerbaijan is still behindhand the modern requirements and it is necessary to accelerate the development of organic agriculture and the process of certification of ecologically pure production.

It has also been noted that Azerbaijan has great potential for the development of these types of activity.

Besides, it has been underlined that the organic agriculture, development of rural and ecological tourism is a basis for reorientation of economic activities of local communities on nature conservation and protection activity.

Representatives of the scientific and educational agencies have especially noted the necessity of expansion of the educational research programs ensuring the sustainable development of the National parks activity, providing the social and economic development of local communities.



Photo. During discussion.

During wide discussions the participants of a round table accepted the appeal to the state and international structures with recommendations on increase of the cooperation efficiency in issues of preservation of a biodiversity and the environment.

Lenkoran

1st June, 2008

The appeal of the “Biodiversity Picnic” participants to the state and international structures

Participants of a round table organized within the frame of Pan-European Biodiversity Picnic expressed their approval and support to the programs and projects realized by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources and directed on protection of the environment and preservation of the biodiversity.

Expansion of the network and the area of specially protected territories, introduction of structure of the National Parks which is new for Azerbaijan is a significant achievement in the activity of the Ministry of Ecology and creates the real base for guaranteeing of preservation of the natural environment and biological diversity.

Yet the meeting participants noted that realization of the strategy and policy of the National Parks development is fulfilled not rapidly enough due to objective and subjective reasons, insufficient attention is given to the issues of reorientation of local economical activity of population to the nature conservation, partial load, environmentally meaningful one, directed at output of local, pollution-free products and national useful arts.

Formation of ecological and rural tourism which is base for functioning of the national parks occurs slowly. Participation of scientific and non-governmental organizations which has significant experience is still insufficient and their potential is used inefficiently in the process of realization.

By holding wide discussion and reviewing the situation the meeting participants consider necessary to attract attention of the state and international organizations to the solution of the following issues:

In order to ensure preservation of unique natural environment of the Hirkan National Park presented by relict Hirkan fauna complex of Tertiary period it is necessary to speed up the process of inclusion of this territory into UNESCO's World Natural and Cultural heritage List.

With a view of acceleration of realization of strategy and policy of the structure development of especially protected territories – National Parks which is new for Azerbaijan, to develop and approve the State development program of the National Parks, aimed on the solution of following issues:

- Intensification and increase of effective inter-sectoral cooperation, consolidation of efforts of all groups of a civil society on protection of the environment and preservation of a biodiversity;
- Reorientation of local economic activities on the nature conservation technologies and first of all, on the development of organic agriculture, manufacture of pollution-free production and traditional national crafts;
- The development and expansion of the list of services in the field of education, recreation and ecological tourism, given by corresponding structures of the National parks. Creation and improvement of tourist routes, observation decks, the recreation zones corresponding to the modern international requirements;
- Development and introductions of standards and methods of development of the rural tourism directed on steady development of local communities and development of traditional methods of managing;

- Development and introduction of standards and methods of the rural tourism development directed on sustainable development of local communities and the development of traditional methods of economic management;
- Development and introduction of the norms and methods of development of extreme tourism providing preservation and protection of unique natural complexes of the wild nature;
- Increase of comprehensive awareness and knowledge in issues of preservation of a biodiversity of all social strata;

Maintenance of development and expansion of the international cooperation in issues of protection of the environment and preservation of a biodiversity.