

## Comprehensive inventory of the biodiversity of the central

### Balkan National Park

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2000

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Keywords: mountains, biodiversity, protected areas, National Parks, Bulgaria.

For almost seventy years now Bulgaria develops its protected area system. During the period 1990-1996 the largest Bulgarian parks were declared - Rila, Central Balkan and Strandja, and some of the mountain natural reserves were enlarged. Thus, to the 1.5% of the Bulgarian territory, which was protected at that time, another 3% were added and at present the system covers 4.5% of the country's territory and aquatory. It is worth noting that the Bulgarian protected area model, where 80% of the total area is occupied by representative ecosystems, preserved in spacious parks and reserves with strict nature protection regime, is being cited as a model example in Europe.

One of the key elements of the Bulgarian protected areas network is the Central Balkan National Park (IUCN Category II), preserving about 50% of the Bulgarian vascular flora and the same percentage of the vertebrates. Located at 42o 41" northern latitude and 24o 44" eastern longitude, it lies at the highest part of the central Stara Planina Mountain, which separates the Northern and Southern Bulgaria. The park was declared in 1991: "...for the purpose of protecting forever and to the benefit of the society complexes of self-regulating ecosystems and their inherent diversity of species, the habitats of rare and endangered species and communities, typical and remarkable landscapes and physical features, of global significance for science and culture...".

The Park covers a territory of more than 720 km<sup>2</sup> and includes 9 natural reserves (IUCN Category I) with a total area of 200 km<sup>2</sup>. The forests, included in the National Park, occupy an area of about 440 km<sup>2</sup>, and the high-mountain treeless zone covers about 280 km<sup>2</sup>.

The Park itself and eight of the nature reserves are included in the United Nations List of National Parks and Protected Areas. Besides, four of the reserves are declared Biosphere Reserves within the Man and Biosphere Program (MAB): Boatin, Tsarichina, Steneto, Dzhendema<sup>1</sup>.

*<sup>1</sup>Since they are under a strict protection regime and all activities are prohibited within them, for the exception of limited research work, they do*

*not meet exactly the criteria of MAB Program, which was specifically elaborated to demonstrate the interaction between conservation of nature and use of resources, as well as to provide opportunities for education and information. Biosphere reserves differ from other internationally recognized types of areas - World Heritage Site or Ramsar Site - because they are not exclusively designated for preservation of unique territories, but also allow for the implementation of a number of activities, including research, monitoring, education, and demonstration of the relation between conservation and environmentally sound use. In most cases, the human component is crucial for the functioning of biosphere reserves.*

From physical and geographic point of view Stara Planina is divided into two parts: Main Ridge and Fore-Balkan. The Central Balkan National Park is located within the narrowest and most massive part of the main ridge, which stretches from west to east. Two differentiated sections can be clearly distinguished - the Zlatishko Tetevenska Mountain, with the highest peak of Vezhen (2,198 m) and the Troyansko-Kaloferska Mountain, with the highest peak in the Stara Planina Mountain - the peak of Botev (2,376 m). The total length of the Park along the ridge is about 80 km. The southern slopes are very steep, and the northern ones are less inclined and are relatively steep only in their higher parts, up to the level of side ridges, connecting the Main Ridge and the Fore-Balkan. The Park altitude varies from 600 to 2,376 m, and the average altitude is 961 m.

In the last years significant efforts have been made to study and preserve the exceptional biodiversity of the National Park. The Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation funded a Programme for biodiversity conservation, one of the major projects of which was the Management Plan for the Highland Treeless Zone of the Central Balkan National Park. Its objective was to contribute to the conservation of the region's rich natural heritage, which is also related to the preservation of traditions and customs of the local population and the spirit of Central Stara Planina Mountain. The project, as its title suggests, was focused upon the highland part of the park, covering nearly 280 km<sup>2</sup> above the upper tree line. Within the three-year period of work (1995-1997), the biological diversity had to be inventoried in this territory, the economic value of the mountain pastures had to be estimated and recommendations for their management had to be prescribed. The result of this project is the first comprehensive inventory and mapping of the vegetation in such an extensive territory, as well as a thorough study of model groups of invertebrates. Original methodology for comparing the biodiversity of given territories was elaborated. All findings have been published in the recently issued volume "High mountain treeless zone of the Central Balkan National Park. Biological diversity and problems of its conservation". Electronic version of the publication on a CD, including the maps of the vegetation, areas of conservation importance and the recommended regime has also been elaborated. The publication and the CD are available from The Bulgarian-Swiss

Biodiversity Conservation Programme, 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria, 38B, Graf Ignatiev Str., Phone: (+359 2) 989 76 01; 980 41 31, e-mail: bsbcp@inet.bg.

Another project that studied the National Park was The GEF Biodiversity Conservation Project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Details of these studies have been published in the volume "Biological diversity of the Central Balkan National Park". The publication is available from ARD, Inc., 159 Bank St., Burlington, VT 05401, USA, Phone: (+802) 658 38 90, e-mail: ard@ardinc.com.

Based on the findings of the two projects an overall Management Plan for Central Balkan NP is being prepared.

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### Notes to readers

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