

November 2006

Editorial

The work of private landowners is by its very nature multifunctional and they are called upon to supply many unpaid services to society which remains blissfully unaware. As soon as there is a problem our leaders all too often plump for costly solutions consisting in entrusting the management of a given set of circumstances to this or that structure. By doing so they neglect the fact that they are depriving themselves of the voluntary and often free contribution of many citizens, or they simply forget to give them the chance to get involved with society which would give them a sense of belonging. This silent majority is, par excellence, always willing to act, especially if it feels appreciated. We therefore need to reinvent social relations.

In the new member states such as the Czech Republic, their role in stimulating and injecting new life into an often flagging local economy in the countryside is too often ignored, whether this be in the area of conservation of private heritage sites or in business development. There is no point in launching new initiatives if they are not based on the stakeholders who bring them to life.

What shall we say of the role of landowners, the managers of riverbanks, lakes, ponds and marshes? The quality of the water that fauna and flora depend on hinges on how these areas are managed. Those responsible have an important social and economic role to play monitoring water resources – what the pre-Colombian peoples called the source of life. They clearly recognise that well-managed good quality water is a major source of income such as fishing or hunting rights or simply irrigation water or water destined for public distribution networks as is the case in Scandinavia. The presence of fish such as the shad or salmon are indicators of the quality of aquatic biodiversity. High quality resources give rise to a win-win situation, which increases the value of property and at the same time benefits the whole of civil society.

Thierry de l'ESCAILLE

Habitat conservation of migratory species in the Mediterranean

La Tour du Valat – 1st and 2nd September 2006



Some ten years ago the shad was still relatively unknown to the public and rarely studied by scientists. A migratory fish with a spindle-shaped body and flat, silvery sides, it was only appreciated by a few gourmets in the Gironde basin and on the banks of the Rhone in France or on Lake Como in Italy, and by a handful of enthusiastic anglers. Although its economic value remains marginal and varies greatly from one region to another, the species is attracting increasing interest in the sector because of its size – up to 50cm or even 70cm and 4kg - and because of its fighting spirit. ▶

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The seminar organized with the support of the European Commission Directorate General on Fisheries was held in Camargue at the Biological Research Station of La Tour du Valat. It was part of a broader European programme created by the European Landowners Organisation, the European Anglers' Alliance, Fauna and Sustainable Development and the Office for the Management of Salmon Fishing on the River Dee. The organizers intentionally focused on the Mediterranean varieties of *Alosa fallax*, i.e. *Alosa fallax rhodanensis*, *Alosa fallax nilotica* and *Alosa fallax lacustris* which have become sedentary in the glacial lakes of the north of the Italian peninsula.

However, the growing interest of public opinion in the protection of habitats, the need for land planners to accommodate growing environmental constraints and the passion of anglers for a highly sporting species has favoured the launch of a research programme and the necessary adjustments to facilitate the migration of the shad. An anadromous migrant, it used to swim up the Rhone and its tributaries to Lake Bourget and all along the course of the Po. Due to pollution and dams the population has fallen throughout the Mediterranean.

Environmentally speaking the shad is an important fish because if it succeeds in completing its

“The role of anglers and land managers in the conservation of the habitats of migratory species.”

This programme has been created by the European Landowners' Organization, Fauna and Sustainable Development - Fisheries, the European Anglers' Associations and the Office for the Management of Salmon Fishing on the River Dee, with the support of the European Commission DG Fisheries, and is intended to raise awareness of the management of aquatic habitats. It includes:

- Survey of anglers and managers in order to understand their expectations and fears concerning environmental policies.
- Three regional seminars, in the Baltic (22.6.06), Mediterranean (1-2.9.06) and the Atlantic (16-17.10.06) focusing respectively on the lamprey, the shad and salmon which are the migratory species protected by the Habitats Directive.
- A European conference in Brussels (20-21.11.06) to sum up the work done during the 6 months of the programme.
- A communication campaign in the European specialist press and the creation of a website (www.fdd.fr/eufish).

Its purpose is to allow anglers' representatives to participate in the debates on conservation and protection of resources and also to play a role in the discussions on fishing policy.

The protection of fish resources goes hand in hand with the preservation of water quality and habitats. Land managers and anglers want to contribute together to their sustainable management. This initiative is a first step in this direction and contributes to increased ties between stakeholders, as well as publicizing action already taken.

migration other species, essentially the lamprey and the eel, can also cross the obstacles in their way. Since 1993 the National Company of the Rhone and the Rhone Mediterranean Migrant Fish Association have been implementing a 'return to the source' plan for *Alosa fallax rhodanensis*. The crossing thresholds are adapted to the fish wherever possible and with the help of water course managers, fish passes have been set up on the thresholds of the Rhone tributaries and the coastal rivers; the locks on the Rhone are also being redesigned to allow fish to pass. This is obviously a successful exercise because these fish have reclaimed a 100km stretch upstream in a little over ten years.

At the same time there has been a renewal in shad fishing, which was a tradition all along the Rhone. Three shad fishing competitions are now organized every year. In Aude, the Fauna and Sustainable Development Association, which works for ethical tourism based on angling, sees this species as an interesting alternative to trout fishing. This trend is not limited to France because in Italy the Anglers' Association is also promoting the renewal of the tradition on the Po and on Lakes Garda and Como etc in the north of the peninsula.

Anglers' federations are closely involved and play a decisive role in the new environmental awareness. Generally speaking, from Spain to Greece and Cyprus as well as Slovenia, their action and experience contributes to the maintenance and even enhancement of the environmental quality of our aquatic heritage. As they are on the



spot, they are the first witnesses of any disturbance in fresh water and at sea. They often make up for the inability of the public authorities to be everywhere at once, and especially in fishing areas. The associations make great efforts to make angling an environmentally-friendly sustainable activity with positive socio-environmental spin-offs. This work must be recognized not only by the authorities but also by other stakeholders.

In an increasingly urban society, they have an essential educational and information role to play, as well as keeping an eye on the sites. It is no longer possible to ask states undergoing major reforms with less and less of a 'welfare' slant to take on the tasks that intermediaries are now capable of doing.

Finally, the meeting provided more information about the situation in Cyprus. Although the shad does not swim up the country's few rivers, it is present in the coastal waters of the island. Its geography has only a few surface water reserves. The construction of more than twenty reservoirs has created new biotopes and enriched the island's biodiversity. The endemic aquatic

species, the eel and the fresh water crab, are still present and under surveillance and the number of fish which are now acclimatized has increased. The Cypriot Fresh Water Angling Federation, created in 2005, is particularly keen on maintaining the ecological balance while promoting dynamic angling activity.

Main points:

- The shad as an ecological marker
- Possibility of upgrading shad angling
- The positive socio-economic impact this form of fishing can have in rural zones
- Angler associations' contribution to habitat conservation
- Their fieldwork complementing that of the authorities who cannot be ubiquitous
- Anglers' role in explaining the countryside to an urban society.
- The educational and information role they play for their members and the public
- Anglers in Cyprus actively contribute to enhancing the environment.

■ Ronan GIRARD



EUROPEAN HISTORIC HOUSES ASSOCIATIONS (UEHHA)

General Assembly of UEHHA in Czech Republic

On 15 September in Boskovice the European Union of Historic Houses Associations (UEHHA) and the Czech Association of Owners of Castles and Manors organized a conference on the conservation and transmission of historic houses in the presence of His Excellency Vassilios IKOSSIPENTARCHOS, Ambassador of Greece, Mrs Ina TRUXOVA, engineer for Czech Historic Monuments and over 60 European representatives.



Castles, manors and listed houses are the symbols of a common history, a shared culture, a collective identity. They are the focus for our dreams, remind us of the past and enrich our present. Without them and the rich heritage they conceal our landscapes would have no story to tell.

They are the geographical, cultural and historic landmarks which contribute to making a country, a region or a town attractive. They are part of the economic strength and the cultural influence of our states. Also venues for festivals and cultural events, these houses and their gardens, which are mainly in the hands of private owners, offer unique services to our communities.

These services are recognized by certain European governments which have created the means to preserve this private heritage which can generate so much public wealth. UEHHA highlighted the most favourable transmission and conservation practices and stressed the remaining sticking points.

Rie SØGAARD of the Danish Heritage Conservation Association which is part of UEHHA, presented a comparative analysis of the conservation and transmission models for private heritage sites in eight European countries (Denmark, Sweden, Latvia, France, Belgium, Netherlands, UK and Italy) and underlined the efficient solutions adopted in Denmark and the Netherlands.

Vicky van ASH van WIJCK recalled provisions of the Dutch law of 1928 which allows certain buildings to be listed, and authorizes their owners to benefit from tax transparency at the time they are inherited. This mechanism is essential for a piece of heritage to be transferred in one piece; it does not cripple it with inheritance tax and protects an instrument of local economic vitality for generations.

Estonia has just granted its owners of castles and manors a part of the European budget earmarked for rural development for 2007-2013. Imre SOOÄÄR, member of the Estonian Parliament, described the historic and cultural importance of manors. Until the end of the First World War

they provided the territory with structure. They are still very much present in the collective Estonian memory and the government intends to provide those entrepreneurs willing to embark on the adventure of restoring them with the necessary tools for success.

The HKO (Heike Kammerlingh Onnes) prize was awarded by Count Adolf van RECHTEREN LIMPURG and the Chairman of UEHHA, Count Ghislain d'URSEL, in the presence of Mrs Nina BUHNE to Mrs Gabriela HAMACHEROVA for her exceptional work restoring the family castle of Mladejoc (CZ). Many countries such as the Czech Republic still underestimate the role played by private owners of historic houses, a piece of heritage which boosts and colours the often drab local economy in the countryside. Ignoring their contribution is tantamount to depriving society of services which are indispensable in order to preserve living memory and vital for the economic success of our businesses.

■ Ronan GIRARD

Management and maintenance of ponds and water features

Water in a park or garden is an undeniable attraction. To maintain the subtle balance created by a pond, moat, canal or any other water feature it is essential to use increasingly specialist technical knowledge.

For private landowners, the application of the concept of sustainable development involves a financial commitment with nothing but meagre subsidies in return. Environmental legislation is strict and the presence of water imposes restrictions on the use of herbicides and other pesticides. Replacing chemical treatments by mechanical procedures requires physical labour. It is the price to be paid for preserving a fragile ecosystem. The following is drawn from advice given by Bernard TEILHARD de CHARDIN, former research engineer at INRA and Gilles ANDRIEUX, businessman, in the French journal, 'Demeure Historique'.

Water maintenance

To keep water features clean, an abundant supply of high quality water is necessary. Depth is important, as above 50cm horsetail and reeds abound and floating weeds find no roots below one metre. Some aquatic plants can be pulled out when they overgrow on small surfaces, but others require the use of chemicals. Only certain products are authorized for aquatic use. Swans are an efficient herbivorous bird and the Chinese carp is an interesting back-up.

Bank maintenance

Herbaceous vegetation must be mown down twice a year to avoid the development of ligneous vegetation. Trees and shrubs can be highly decorative around

a pond but care must be taken to avoid the development of large branches, which are dangerous to fell and difficult to pull onto the bank. Too many fallen leaves can be a major factor in eutrophication and silting up.

Embankment maintenance

The most vulnerable part of a pond is the embankment which must be fully waterproof to keep the water in. The slightest leak can only get worse. A simple earth embankment is sufficient to retain the water in a shallow pond if it has a clay core. A good pond embankment must be six metres wide and the shore should be shallow - two to three metres wide for a height of one metre. Trees with roots liable to cause leakage are best removed from an embankment. Leaks can however be repaired using plastic clay. A stone wall can strengthen the embankment and rockfill can protect from erosion but this does not make it waterproof.

The worst enemy of embankments are muskrats and coypus which undermine them with their deep tunnels. By varying the height of the pond water by more or less 50cm, they can be driven away by switching on and off drainage valves at the tunnel entrances to empty the pond and flood the chambers. A pipe and a valve at the lowest point in the pond allow it to be drained, while the right sized overflow drains off freak flooding without breaking the banks.

Pond drainage

Pond drainage is strictly regulated and generates little income, which is why it is practised so little. It is however advised every three years to avoid silting up and to regulate the fish population. Although handling the fish is the main difficulty, in discarding water and silt one must respect precise standards. A settling basin dug upstream of the fish weir may be an economical solution. Suction dredges are spectacular but prohibitive in cost. One way of cutting cost is to allow the silt to dry out, which reduces the volume and tonnage to be transported. Choosing a spreading area close-by also reduces transport costs. A meadow is ideal and can be resown manually as soon as the surface crust can bear the sower's weight. A few more months are necessary to use agricultural machinery. It is also possible to spread silt on the forest floor at no risk, but only following clear-felling.

■ Donatienne de SÉJOURNET

IN BRIEF

The Soil Strategy

On 22 September the European Commission proposed the last of the 7 Thematic Strategies. Its intention is to preserve healthy soils in Europe which can support human activity and ecosystems.

Good quality soil is a *sine qua non* for our economic activity because they supply us not just with food and drinking water but are also an important source of renewable energy due to biomass and raw materials. Stavros DIMAS, Commissioner for the Environment, stated, "Soils are an excellent example of the need for comprehensive thinking and local action. This is why we are proposing a common framework in the EU, fixing equivalent conditions for all by seeking the same degree of soil protection for the whole Union. We want to ensure that today and tomorrow's citizens can use soils capable of fulfilling a large range of functions and provide us with all the services we need."

Soil is therefore a resource of common interest to the EU and if it is not protected by the Community, its long-term sustainability and competitiveness will be severely compromised in Europe. Different Community policies are already contributing to the protection of soils, in particular as part of good agricultural and environmental conditions

which are part of the eco-conditionality measures and the different directives (Nitrates, Water), but until now there was no unified policy. Only nine member states have specific legislation in the area of soil protection, often linked to a specific risk, in particular pollution.

The strategy is made up of 3 parts:

A communication (COM (2006) 231) which stipulates the policy's objectives for soil, i.e. the protection of the functions of soil in the EU. It is also intended to boost soil research, raising awareness about these issues and promoting public participation in the preparation and study of the programmes adopted by the member states.

A proposal for a Framework Directive (COM (2006) 232) which establishes principles, actions and common objectives for the member states. They are asked to list zones where there are possible threats.

7 threats have been identified and split into 3 categories: soil sealing – an urban issue - 'agricultural' threats (erosion, depletion of organic matter, compacting, salinization and landslides) and pollution (taking 'orphan sites' into account).

The member states must fix goals for risk reduction for these zones and set up programmes to achieve them. They must also avoid any further pollution, draw

up an inventory of polluted sites on their territory, and create national rehabilitation strategies.

However, the deterioration of the state of soils varies greatly in Europe (there are 320 major types of soil). The directive authorizes a certain amount of flexibility so that it is up to the member states to define their degree of ambition in this area – specific objectives and the measures to attain them.

An impact study (SEC (2006) 1165 and SEC (2006) 620) contains an analysis of the environmental and socio-economic impact of the different options taken into account during the strategy's preparatory phase and of the measures adopted by the Commission. For example, the cost of soil deterioration has been estimated at 38 billion a year in the EU of 25.

Further stages:

Transmission to the other European institutions (European Parliament, Council, Economic and Social Committee, Committee of the Regions),

Beginning of the co-decision procedure for the proposal for a framework directive on soil.

For more information:
<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/soil/index.htm> .

■ Cécile BONINO



THE INSTITUTIONAL ECHO

The new European Fisheries Fund was finally adopted at the Council of Ministers of 27th July under the written procedure. A political agreement was reached between the member states under the Austrian presidency although Belgium and Poland abstained.

It will replace the current Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG) which applies to the 2000-2006 planning period. The new instrument will manage financial aid to the fisheries industry for the 2007-2013 period. Despite the formal character of its adoption, the EFF regulation does not cover motorization aid. The new rules stipulate that it will be possible to replace one engine per boat if it is accompanied by a 20% power reduction for all units over 12m. During the discussion in Coreper it was agreed that the criteria regarding the way in which this reduction shall be applied to a group of boats will be drafted by the Commission in due course, as there was no consensus on previous suggestions.

In a declaration attached to the regulation the Commission states that these rules remain to be clarified but that they would apply to 'coherent groups of boats of a limited and controllable size'. It is also clear that units scrapped using public aid cannot be counted as part of the power reduction in a group of boats, which is one of the reasons why the Belgian delegation voted against the presidency's compromise proposed in May 2006.

THE ENLARGED EUROPE

Rural landowners and anglers watching over the decline of the lamprey in the Baltic

On 22nd June this year in Copenhagen the first seminar took place of a programme drawn up by the European Landowners' Organisation (ELO), with the Commission's support, in partnership with the European Anglers Alliance (EAA), the European Fauna and Sustainable Development Association (FSD) and the Management Office for Salmon Fishing on the River Dee (Scotland). It brought together rural landowners, anglers and representatives from the world of science from the 8 countries bordering on the Baltic.



The main objective of this seminar hosted by the International Convention for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) was to get the different stakeholders of the aquatic territories to work together.

The environment and users of natural areas

European environmental policy, which by definition is horizontal, is now fully a part of the Commission's sectoral policies: the policy on fisheries is no exception. This is why the users of aquatic areas wanted to work together in order to publicize their contribution to sustainably managing these territories.

The members of ELO are indeed the managers and businesses of rural areas covering rivers, lakes, ponds and marshes. The management of these fragile areas is inextricably linked to the quality of the water, on which the abundance of aquatic fauna and flora depends. It also has an economic character since fishing rights generate major income in certain regions of Scotland, Ireland, Scandinavia and Finland. The access to fishing zones is also an important social factor in rural and coastal areas.

However, ELO would not have been credible going it alone, hence its desire to get together with three other associations for which fishing and conservation



THE ENLARGED EUROPE

are closely linked. The EAA represents anglers' federations of some 17 European countries, keen on conservation of fishing stocks at sea and in freshwater alike. They are also aware that conservation goes beyond simply protecting the species fished and requires a good deal of work with the other users of aquatic territories. The EAA therefore wished to include ELO in an information programme supported by DG Fisheries.

FSD's mission is to contribute to the economic and social development of rural zones in difficulty while respecting the environment. Many European regions are in agricultural decline. Both European private and legal persons are members of FSD, which promotes alternative activities such as tourism, fishing, hunting and crafts which enhance local expertise and natural heritage. Finally the Management Office for Salmon Fishing on the River Dee in Scotland sustainably manages salmon stocks on this water course. This helps develop angling tourism and its related investments. There is a seminar on salmonids in the



programme and this organisation felt it important to contribute.

It was therefore in this context of concerted action, bringing together for the first time managers, scientists and anglers from every country in Europe, that the seminar on the protection of the lamprey in the Baltic opened on 22 June this year.

The lamprey, the weak link in the chain of anadromous species

The choice of this species was no accident. The lamprey – or rather lampreys as there are four different species in the Baltic and water courses of the region – has limited commercial importance, is almost unknown to anglers and therefore not widely studied by science. However all the members of this family are in annex 2 of the Habitats Directive. They should therefore be subject to specific protection measures.

Although the guests at the seminar were aware of the lamprey's existence, knowledge about its stocks, method of reproduction and the quality of its environment was at best scanty. It is however clear that all of the countries in the Baltic have the three representative species, and it is equally certain that the lamprey is of major ecological importance. Professor JEPSEN dubbed the

lamprey the 'weak link in the chain of anadromous species'. It is a survivor of the Cambrian era whose cartilaginous structure has evolved little since. It has been called a living fossil and its particular morphology means it is not as well adapted to swimming as fish. Migration to spawning grounds is therefore difficult. Consequently the arrangements placed in estuaries and water courses to allow salmonids to get through artificial dams are often insufficient for the lamprey. The adults rarely if at all reach the spawning areas, and due to the obstacles in their way the larva have just as much difficulty migrating back downstream.

'The decline in the lamprey population in Poland is the consequence of an impoverishment of the ecosystems and rivers. Research has shown that there are anthropological reasons for the negative developments in Polish ichthyofauna,' remarked Doctor Bronislaw SZELWICKI of Wroclaw University. Egbert KORTE reported that in Germany the marine and river lamprey have been listed as 'endangered' and 'vulnerable'. And in Finland where it is commercially caught, Professor Hannu LEHTONEN of Helsinki University, also a member of the Anglers' Association, reported that although the fishing effort has increased, catches have sunk from 3 million in the seventies to 1 million in

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THE ENLARGED EUROPE

2004. The lamprey's biotopes have been affected by building work and the eutrophication of water courses which leads to a reduction of the water's oxygen content.

Only Sweden seems to still have stable populations in spite of commercial fishing. "However, knowledge remains incomplete in the south of the country where there are no fishing areas," admits Nils LJUNGGREN from Gotland University which is doing a specific study on river lamprey on Gotland Island.

An indicator of the quality of river ecosystems

Because of its fragile nature 'the lamprey can be used as an environmental indicator' proposed Dr SZELWICKI. If it can reproduce and maintain its population over the long term it is probable that the other anadromous species can too. Although the concept of the environmental indicator is not new, its application to the aquatic environment is as yet untried. Dr Adi KELLERMAN, head of research at ICES, recalled that there are currently projects supported by DG Environment which use birds as environmental indicators for managing forests. However the Water

Framework Directive did not include the possibility of using certain aquatic species as indicators. The directive is now in its application phase and in the medium term it is unlikely that the text can be altered.

The lamprey is however still an interesting species for the managers of water courses and anglers. Its presence in particular illustrates that the structure of the river is favourable to the migration of species upstream and downstream. There are many adjustment and re-naturalisation programmes for water courses intended to preserve migratory species. These projects rarely focus on the lamprey but rather on better known species such as salmon, sea trout, alewife and eels. The measures taken combat pollution in particular but although the adjustments are sufficient for the species concerned, they are not always what the lamprey needs. 'Conservation plans for the lamprey are still insufficient,' recalled Nils LJUNGGREN.

There is also little coordination between countries, as pointed out by Endrik TONBERG, representing the Estonian anglers, who for the first time was meeting his opposite numbers Janis STIKUTS

from Latvia, Tomas KOLESINSKAS from Lithuania and Mindaugas KUKLIERIUS from the Lithuanian Association of Rural Landowners.

It would be an illusion to believe that holding this meeting could solve all of the problems of protecting the lamprey in the Baltic, but I would like to underline the important topics which were tackled by all the associations present, sometimes indirectly:

- The importance of the lamprey as an environmental indicator, including for anglers, from an ecological point of view.
- The need to work with all stakeholders in order to rethink the lay-out of estuaries and rivers.
- The need to renew the relationship between commercial fishing and angling which must be complementary.
- Finally the need for mutual recognition of the rights and duties of anglers and rural landowners regarding access to fishing grounds.

To my knowledge, it is the first time that these different stakeholders met in the presence of scientific experts to begin a dialogue on their role in managing stocks and the environment. The seminar is of course just the first exercise in a programme which includes three more, plus a study being carried out with the different associations in order to find out more about their commitment to the environment.

■ Ronan GIRARD



YOUNG FRIENDS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

Being the "Next Generation"

Being the next generation on the family farm is not an easy job. My generation is slowly taking over the family farms here in Denmark, and we are all asking ourselves how we wish to continue managing the business.



We all, for one, want to do better than the previous generation, just like our parents' generation when they took over. We want to expand our business and be able to withstand the growing economic burden, which is a consequence of living in a listed house and in the meantime dealing with higher costs and static prices. On top of this, we have the whole problem regarding the increased control and restriction on how we manage our own land.

Many young landowners feel that the economical burden as well as the restrictions, call for a diversity of our core business. Producing grain, grass seed and sugar might not be enough in a few years time. The basic crop production is moving east to better soil, lower costs and bigger units. We can either move with that trend, and invest in the east, or stay and diversify our main production. The latter is what I have in mind. Educated as a farmer however, marketing and public relations are not my strong side. None the less that is the way we are moving our family business, which is just as interesting and rewarding as the basic farming concept.

Being able to produce beer instead of malting barley, or bread instead of flour, gives a whole new dimension to being a farmer. We know that we can make the basic ingredients and make them well. But it's getting the finished product out on the shelf which is the new challenge. It must be very satisfying to see one's own product on the shelves in farm shops or even in the supermarket.

As a primary product producer we will be able to meet the consumers directly, and the feedback will hopefully help us to get the completely right angle into a fast expanding market. This also works the other way around. The consumers will have the possibility to see where their products are grown, and learn more about the modern farming process. Maybe it will even help the general public to understand the workings of a modern farming business, and not alienate the farmers as a polluting factor that damages the environment.

Our basis for existence is the ecosystem and the environment, so we are not at all interested in damaging it. This is a very important message to get across to the consumers if we are to brand our products successfully in

the future. The link between farmer and consumer should be based on trust and open communication, and the direct sale and diversification of our main products should help this connection.

The diversification of our products will hopefully help us get to our main goal, to be able to pass the business down to the next generation who in turn will have a whole new set of problems and challenges to overcome.

■ Patrick REVENTLOW GRINLING



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YOUNG FRIENDS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

Fishing in Wallonia

Some 70,000 enthusiasts make up the angling community in Wallonia. This estimate is based on the sale of fishing permits issued by the Wallonian administration in 2005. But the sector is not doing well. Certain Wallonian rivers are deteriorating. However, although the number of anglers has halved in the past ten years, there are also other reasons to explain this phenomenon: lack of fish in water courses and lack of interest in the sport compared to other 'trendier' pastimes. This apparent drop conceals a well-established fact: many Wallonian anglers pursue their passion on private ponds not requiring regional permits, and are therefore not included in the statistics.

The decrease in the number of anglers primarily concerns so-called bank fishing, which it would appear is considered too 'static' for the general public. This can be contrasted with mobile fishing in search of carnivorous fish (pike and perch) or running water species (trout, grayling), which has taken off in recent years.

Moreover, as these ten to fifteen thousand Wallonian anglers go mainly for trout on non-navigable waters, demand is higher than what the biotope can offer, and it is therefore necessary to restock the pond to boost fish density levels.

Some are slowly realizing the need for better management of fishing resources, which is leading them to manage their activity as a part of their heritage. Some of these management methods may include raising fish in a hatchery for stocking dwindling populations in their favourite spots. These interesting initiatives deserve scientific monitoring. In the same way initiatives such as angling schools should be encouraged because children,



© Photo : Sébastien DEN DONCKER

although they need the odd shove to get their feet wet, are clearly tomorrow's experts.

Efforts being made to improve water quality through implementing the Water Framework Directive are of course promising. Anglers obviously need fish, and so conservation of habitats such as spawning grounds and fish hide-outs contributes to boosting Wallonia's fishing potential. Some of these efforts have attracted salmon back to Wallonian water – a real victory, although ideally this should be verified every year.

These few breakthroughs should not however hide the fact that Wallonia is making little progress in the search for better fishing

management. Social and economic factors must also be taken into account. The angler's satisfaction must be part and parcel of fishing management, and experience from abroad should not be disregarded! After all, our angling tourism is certainly one of the least developed in Europe, and it is a lot more than a pastime; it represents a wide range of jobs, an entire sector which is often neglected: fish farms, fishing tackle shops, fishing ponds etc. We must capitalize on this economic component rather than neglecting it. What could be more pleasant after all than a breath of fresh air in a remote place far away from the daily stress of our society?

■ Sébastien DEN DONCKER

Diary Dates 2006

6-7 NOVEMBER, BERLIN - ELO General Assembly

21-22 NOVEMBER, BRUSSELS - ELO European Conference

"Conservation of aquatic habitats in Europe", to synthesize a 6 months programme, co-organised with the support of the DG Fisheries

27 NOVEMBER, BERLIN - Seminar on "Bioenergy", organised by

Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Grundbesitzerverbände

www.grundbesitzerberbaende.de

1 DECEMBER, BRUSSELS - "Adaptation to Climate Change : the European Dimension", conference organised by the European

Commission <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/climat/eccp.htm>

NATURA 2000: an opportunity and not a constraint

The concept developed by the founding fathers of Natura 2000 contains many shades of meaning which are not always easy to grasp.

Its authors probably could not have predicted that it would be used to try and confiscate property in certain European countries. But the objective of Natura 2000 is to raise awareness in our society of the value of biodiversity – of the need to protect it, maintain it and even restore it wherever necessary. Certain stakeholders were in too much of a hurry to use this network to impose excessive bans and restrictions on use while failing to account for pre-existing socio-economic factors.

The difficulty in implementing Natura 2000 which cuts across many existing pieces of legislation consists in bringing together all the sectoral policies relevant to this area. This blanket analysis has led some people to adopt extremely tough positions likely to produce legal and local management inconsistencies.

Many nature-lovers, be they anglers, hunters, foresters or other outdoor enthusiasts and lovers of the countryside, are now afraid that their pastimes and passions are at risk because of the setting up of the Natura 2000 network. This will not happen as long as the project truly respects the aspirations of its European progenitors. – to provide a harmonious framework permitting the maintenance or even restoration of those species identified as needing conservation, as well as protection and improvement to the quality of the environment, including the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.

Two pillars, one on habitats, the other on protected species in the Birds (1979) and Habitats

Directives (1992), recognize that the environment is the child of a union between human intelligence and Nature. To eliminate the human factor from the European environment would be to refuse access to those who currently manage it and participate in its conservation. It would endorse the criticism voiced by a major American weekly which stated that European environmental policy would prefer to promote the return of wolves and bears to the detriment of rural populations, whose only remaining fate would be to turn themselves into a museum.

To put it bluntly, the originality of the Natura 2000 approach is its spirit of participation and cooperation. It encourages a diversity of stakeholders and has no intention of ignoring the experience and commitment of those responsible for managing the land – rural landowners, foresters, land managers, farmers or active users such as anglers. Soil, water and air are the very basis for their activities; they more than anyone are interested in a healthy environment and it is therefore only natural that they should be the first to be consulted and involved in the project.

Natura 2000, while penalizing destruction, cannot be dismissed as an exercise in coercion, nor accused of turning areas into sanctified ground or species into sacred cows. Human activity is not 'endangered' by the network at a time when the European Union is inviting member states to adopt an integrated approach to social, economic and environmental aspects. These activities can be modified while respecting the principle of

proportionality and scientific criteria. Angling for example, contrary to what some people believe, is not going to be banned overnight. However, the anglers in a basin or a river may be involved in a project to regenerate their fishing area in order to improve the quality of water and its host environment for the fish which could potentially inhabit it.

Who would not be pleased at seeing their role as an environmental stakeholder recognized? What angler would not delight in seeing his favourite spot cared for in order to better practise his sport afterwards? Before casting for that coveted pike the banks need maintaining and lakes and rivers restocking – i.e. we need to manage and protect the environment first. Angling federations are developing this approach in Belgium as is the case everywhere else in Europe.

The member states and regions which have to implement Natura 2000 must take responsibility for bringing together all those with a keen interest - whatever their pastimes or approach to nature - rather than dividing them by favouring only certain pursuits. This will allow the network to be put in place with the support of all for the good of all. Natura 2000 invites our authorities to recognize the active contribution of our anglers to the preservation of our aquatic heritage.

No one with an ounce of sense would dare to imagine the Limbourg ponds without the carp and pike enthusiasts, or the rivers of Condroz without the fly-fishing fanatics!

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