

# Developments in the Important Plant Areas (IPA) Project in Central & Eastern Europe

ANDERSON, S.; T. KUŠÍK & E. RADFORD

Plantlife International

Plantlife International is currently coordinating an Important Plant Areas (IPA) Project in Central & Eastern Europe with partner organisations in 7 countries. This project is being carried out with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature & Food Quality of the Netherlands through the PIN/MATRA funds of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The IPA Project is a contribution to Target 5 of the CBD Global Strategy for Plant Conservation and targets 1.4, 1.5 & 2.14 of the European Plant Conservation Strategy.

Plantlife International & IUCN are lead partners to facilitate Target 5 of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation.

## Aims & Methodology

The aims of the IPA project are to identify and protect a network of the best sites for plants and fungi in Europe using consistent criteria.

The 3 criteria for identifying IPAs are:

- Criterion A: Threatened Species
- Criterion B: Botanical Richness
- Criterion C: Threatened Habitats

The criteria were developed over 10 years through a lengthy consultation process, including the previous three Planta Europa Conferences. An IPA identification handbook is available for Europe (ANDERSON, 2002). Two reports from the national and regional workshops carried out in the course of this project are also available on the Plantlife website ([www.plantlife.org.uk](http://www.plantlife.org.uk)).

The process of identification must be transparent, and the reason that each IPA is identified, the qualifying features, must be made clear to all stakeholders. The IPA project is still in the first stage of identification but developing national & regional strategies for sustainable protection is a priority issue.

## IPAs & Conservation Programmes

The IPA project is completely aligned with the aims of the Conservation on Biological Diversity (CBD) and with the Global and European Strategies for Plant Conservation of the CBD. IPAs are not intended to compete with other conservation projects but are intended to support and underpin existing programmes such as the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the Habitats Directives & the Natura 2000 process, the EU Water Framework Directive, the Pan-European Biological & Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBDLS) and the Pan-European Ecological Network (PEEN), the Bern Convention & Emerald Network, the RAMSAR Convention and others. The IPA process is also closely aligned to the Important Bird Areas programme and other initiatives to identify Key Biodiversity Areas, such as Prime Butterfly Areas, Important Dragonfly & Herpetological Areas. The long term protection and management of IPAs will not be possible without active collaboration among scientists, national & local government, national & regional policy makers, protected areas managers, land owners and the support of the rest of society.

## Current Projects

There are 7 countries involved in this IPA project and each country has a coordinating organisation and a national team made up of different organisations and individuals. In each of these countries national teams have been established, IPA criteria lists agreed, data collation strategy for existing data and new fieldwork established, and the first phase of site selection is

being completed. Each of the 7 countries will produce a national IPA publication at the start of 2005.

**Belarus:** the national coordinating organisation in Belarus is the Institute of Experimental Botany Minsk, and the overall project including the development of the IPA programme in the CIS region is coordinated by the World Conservation Union (IUCN-CIS Moscow Office).

**Czech Republic:** the project is coordinated by the Agency for Nature Protection, Prague (AOPK CR).

**Estonia:** the project is coordinated by the Institute for Environmental Protection, Tartu.

**Poland:** the project is coordinated by the Institute of Botany, Krakow

**Romania:** the project is coordinated by the Association of Botanical Gardens of Romania (AGBR)

**Slovakia:** the project is coordinated by Daphne, Institute of Applied Ecology, Bratislava

**Slovenia:** the project is coordinated by the Botanical Society of Slovenia in collaboration with the Centre for Cartography of Flora & Fauna

### **Other projects in CEE Region**

The IPAs of Turkey was the first national IPA inventory completed in 2002 by DHKD, the University of Istanbul and Flora & Fauna International. Several countries in South East Europe have made preliminary IPA inventories as part of the REC 'Flowers Across the Boundaries' project, including Bulgaria, Croatia, FYR of Macedonia, and Montenegro. Serbia have also started their IPA identification process.

In November 2003 15 countries from the CEE region came to an IPA workshop in Bratislava to report on their progress with IPAs or to discuss how to initiate projects in their country. Hungary are no actively engaged in setting up an IPA project, and Lithuania and Ukraine have expressed an interest . The IUCN-CIS Moscow office are actively engaged in disseminating information of the European Strategy and the IPA project and are developing project proposals to expand the programme in the CIS Region.

There are also IPA projects in progress or beginning in other countries in Europe, including the UK, Finland, Spain, and the Mediterranean Region including the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. There are also several IPA projects beginning in other parts of the world including Southern Africa, South East Asia, and New Zealand.

### **IPA Database**

There is an online central database for partner organisations involved in the IPA programme, which is governed by data sharing agreements. The website is a secure data entry system which allows partners to enter and download their IPA data at any time. Data on these priority sites are easily accessible and can be used analysed to provide key conservation messages for reporting and decision makers. There are plans to develop the public access potential of parts of the IPA database, i.e. making IPA fact-sheets for sites & country information on criteria & the national team publicly available. This will be developed in consultation with partners.

#### **Outputs & Next Steps**

The outputs from this current project will be a list of priority sites for plant conservation in each of the 7 countries. Each country will produce an IPA publication in the national language and Plantlife will produce an overview of the results from this project.

The next steps are to ensure that the hard work in collating this information on the priority sites is used for maximum conservation benefit. One of the first steps is to ensure that the data on IPAs is disseminated to key stakeholders including national & local government, national & regional

decision makers, landowners, protected area managers, etc. The development of national and regional strategies to protect these priority sites is an essential part of the process, and of course the fundamental task of identifying the best sites for plants will need to continue.

## References

ANDERSON, S. -2002- Identifying Important Plant Areas: A Manual for Europe & a Guide for Other Regions of the World. Plantlife

ÖZHATAY, N.; BYFIELD, A. & Atay, S. -2003-. Türkiye'nin Önemli Bitki Alanlari (IPAs in Turkey). WWF Türkiye (Dogal Hayati Koruma Vakfi), Istanbul, Turkey. 88 pp plus CD. (In Turkish) Plantlife, 2003 A Technical Report from IPA national workshops in 7 countries in Central & Eastern Europe. (Plantlife website: [www.plantlife.org.uk](http://www.plantlife.org.uk))

PLANTLIFE, S. -2003- Important Plant Areas Central & East European Regional Workshop, November 2003 (Plantlife website: [www.plantlife.org.uk](http://www.plantlife.org.uk))