

New UNESCO biosphere reserves approved

In June 2019, the 31st Meeting of the International Coordinating Council of the UNESCO MAB Programme took place in Paris. A total of 18 new biosphere reserves (BR) were approved within the framework of this conference of the 34 country steering committee of the MAB programme:

- Lubombo (Eswatini)
- Isle of Wight (Great Britain)
- Saleh-Moyo-Tambora "SAMOTA" (Indonesia)
- Togean Tojo Una-Una (Indonesia)
- Julian Alps (Italy)
- Po Grande (Italy)
- Kobushi (Japan)
- Nordhordland (Norway)
- Roztocze (Poland)
- Lake Elton (Russia)
- Vindelälven-Juhtatdahka (Sweden)
- Voxnadalen (Sweden)
- Alto Turia (Spain)
- La Siberia (Spain)
- Valle del Cabriel (Spain)
- Gangwon Eco-Peace (South Korea)
- Yeoncheon Imjin River (South Korea)
- Unteres Murtal (Austria)

The World BR Network now consists of 701 BRs in 124 countries!

Of the BRs newly included in the World BR Network, the Austrian BR *Unteres Murtal* is of particular interest. The Lower Murtal region covers more than 13000 hectares in the south of Austria and borders Slovenia. Austria has thus not only received a fourth BR, but has also contributed the last piece for the world's first BR consisting of five states (Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia, Austria) in the Mura-Drava-Danube corridor.

The region Lower Murtal, in which the Mur forms the common border with Slovenia over a length of almost 40 km, is a representative example of a continental lowland plain with a rich biodiversity of European importance and comprises the second largest floodplain forests in Austria. The Mur Valley is characterised by a mosaic of outstanding habitats and land use systems. The hydrological conditions in the vicinity of the river lead to various forms of valuable inland waters, floodplain forests, wetlands and grasslands. In addition to agriculture and small businesses, *soft* tourism plays an important role.

In fact, the recognition of the Austrian BR *Unteres Murtal* is an important breakthrough for nature conservation and a great opportunity for the population of the entire Mura-Drava-Danube region. The recognition paves the way for the development of a Central European model region under UNESCO patronage, in which nature conservation and sustainable regional development should go hand in hand. The three rivers Mur, Drava and Danube are still largely ecologically intact by European standards and offer a multitude of endangered animal and plant species habitats which the rivers themselves constantly recreate through their dynamics. The protection of this unique river landscape can only be protected by jointly coordinated efforts of the 5 participating countries. The recognition of the Austrian BR on the Mur, which flows into the Drava on the Croatian-Hungarian border and later into the Danube, is thus the starting signal for the submission of the five-country BR *Mura-Drava-Danube* or the so-called *Amazon of Europe*. The river basins of Croatia and Hungary already received BR status in 2012, followed by Serbia (2017) and Slovenia (2018). Following the recognition of the Lower Murtal region, the next step is for all five countries to submit a joint application to the UNESCO for recognition as a five-country BR.

As part of the Interreg project *Transboundary Management Programme for the planned 5-country BR Mura-Drava-Danube*, common management guidelines for all five countries have already been developed in a first step in cooperation with stakeholders from all five neighbouring countries. This catalogue of guidelines is a first step towards harmonised protected area management and a common basis for river management, forest management, agriculture, hunting, fishing, tourism, spatial planning and sustainability. In the event of any national adjustments to guidelines, laws or management plans, as well as the development of follow-up projects, the institutions involved intend to orient themselves to the jointly drawn up management guidelines.

Günter Köck

IUCN World Conservation Congress, Marseille, France, 11–19 June 2020

The IUCN World Conservation Congress sets priorities and drive conservation and sustainable development action. The event has three main components: The Members' Assembly, where IUCN Members vote on priority actions; the Forum, a global marketplace of conservation science and innovation; and the Exhibition, where exhibitors can showcase their work to Congress participants and the public. For more information, see www.iucncongress2020.org

Position paper on "Tourism in Austria's National Parks – Sustainability as an Opportunity for Successful Nature Conservation and Regional Development"

The paper is addressed to those responsible for tourism and the tourism industry. The national parks in Austria describe how they feel about tourism, how they envisage cooperation, where they see borders and where they see development potential. The position paper was prepared by the national parks and adopted by the advisory board of the Austrian national parks. For more information, see www.nationalparksaustria.at

2nd Swiss Landscape Congress, 19–20 October 2020, Lausanne – Dialogue across borders Call for conference contributions

The 2nd Swiss Landscape Congress proposes to build bridges across borders both on the ground and in people's minds. The dialogue across borders aims to inspire future collaborations for the joint development of landscapes. We are looking for controversial and stimulating contributions, presented by teams of two or more people from different fields in policy, practice, research, and teaching who strive to cross disciplinary borders and think outside the box. Are you an experienced team or a group of controversial adversaries with a propensity for intense debates? We invite you to submit your proposition until 31 January 2020. Detailed information on the call for contributions are published on our website: www.landschaftskongress.ch

The 2nd Swiss Landscape Congress is organized by the Forum Landscape, Alps, Parks of the Swiss Academy of Natural Sciences (SCNAT) together with a broad range of sponsoring and partner organisations.

Danilo Re Memorial, 16–19 January 2020, Mittersill, Hohe Tauern National Park, Austria

All ALPARC members are invited to join for a sports competition, a thematic seminar for protected area staff, the ALPARC General Assembly and friendly exchanges between participants. For more information, see www.alparc.org/danilore/index.php/en/

Parks discussed in this issue

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