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(Safeguard for Agricultural Varieties in Europe)



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Buffalo are not Cattle! **A Network for Buffalo Conservation in South Eastern Europe**



The Workshop "Conservation of Autochthonous Buffalo in Southeast Europe" took place 6-7 May 2011 in Sighisoara, Romania and was organised by SAVE Foundation and Fundatia ADEPT. It was an event to meet together with buffalo experts and stakeholders from South-eastern Europe with the aim of creating a network for the conservation of water buffalo in the area.

On a global scale, Water Buffalo are a very popular species. They can be used for milk, meat and traction. In 2000, the FAO estimated that there were approximately 158 million water Buffalo in the world, and that 97% of them (approximately 153 million animals) were in Asia. Although buffalo are a bovine species, they are very different from the cattle more commonly kept in Europe. In South Eastern Europe buffalo have been an important addition to farms, especially in subsistence and semi-subsistence agriculture. Buffalo are experiencing a renaissance in Italy, where mozzarella production demands vast quantities of high quality milk. These buffalo farms are large-scale, intensive operations that are established with the aims of obtaining as much milk as possible.

Buffalo were once numerous and popular within the region of South East Europe. Despite the fact that the origins of buffalo in the area are unclear, it is sure that they were introduced about 1000 years ago - by perhaps the Crusaders or the Islamic invaders. The buffalo found in the north of the Carpathians were, possibly, introduced 500 years earlier by the Avars. However, genetic testing is required to find out whether the northern and southern populations are separate or not. Even though the origins are not yet clear, it is possible to see that the buffalo have adapted to their local environment: the Carpathian and Transylvanian types have hard hooves for moving over stones and have a thick

winter coat. Wherever the buffalo live, this riverine type loves to swim, which is the first clear indication that buffalo are very different to cattle! Various traditional products were made with their milk, meat and skins. Their muscle power was used on the farm as traction. Buffalo were valued for their frugality, longevity and triple-use. The negative side of the buffalo is, perhaps, part of the key to its downfall: the cows often only let down their milk for one person – usually the man of the family – they can also be aggressive and are extremely wilful and stubborn. These factors, along with the increased use of tractors and the promotion of high-yield cows led to the buffalo being replaced. Numbers in the last 20 years have decreased from tens of thousands down to, in some countries, too few to make breeding viable without blood refreshing from neighbouring stock.

The goals of the workshop were varied – from assessing stakeholder motivation for forming a network through to agreeing upon a conservation strategy through identifying further priorities and planning future actions. Participants contributed with presentations of the situation in their area (<http://www.save-foundation.net/Conferences/Sighisoara.htm>) The Workshop was completed with an excursion to a large buffalo farm.

Numerical data shows that large populations exist where there are many products on the market and the animals are essential for local economic structures (see: http://www.save-foundation.net/Conferences/Sigishoara/Bufalo_Market_Europe.pdf).

Selection (using milk recording), animal recording, and also creating a market for products is important for both conservation breeding and also for the survival of the buffalo as a species of domesticated animals in Europe. However, market demand cannot always be met due to low population numbers. In some countries it is not even possible to produce enough for a niche market – Buffalos are kept in a semi-subsistence situation. Difficulties in buffalo husbandry (e.g. their preference to always be milked by the same person) add to the economic constraints, which make buffalo less attractive for new owners. A coherent strategy for addressing this problem needs to be developed.



Subsidies can be useful to increase stock numbers but, as participants emphasised, buffalo are farm animals not zoo animals, they should be utilised within agricultural production. Subsidies are not a long-term, sustainable solution for conservation of the species. Policy changes can lead to immediate decrease in numbers as subsidies are cut or the focus of them merely changes. Connecting with nature conservation in protected areas (e.g. grazing) provides a cost-effective eco-management system whereby buffalo can obtain a monetary value without requiring a commercial activity. This, in turn, can be coupled with agri-tourism activities, use within extensive production systems and linked to local traditions and ethnic minorities. Breeding associations provide essential services – herdbooks, monitoring, farm visits, information dissemination and networking of breeders. These activities are the basis for successful conservation.

Often, attention gets paid to specific species and/or systems when action from outsiders occurs. In many cases, buffalo-keeping becomes more attractive as soon as outsiders (from other countries or regions within the country) become involved. These interests, when applied sensitively, can provide a catalyst for change in perception of an animal or product and also for the promotion of ideas, organisation of production etc.

That there is an urgent need for action is clear. Conservation activities should preserve the full range of buffalo type to ensure a large gene pool. Selection for better production can take place within the conservation activities. Markets for buffalo products exist, improvements need to be made in production, distribution channels and raising awareness of the unique nature of buffalo products.

Registration and recording is poor to very poor in all countries. Some form of payment or benefit in order to motivate animal owners to register their animals is required.

Genotyping of the buffalo found in each country in South East Europe is an expensive but necessary measure that should be conducted as soon as possible. It was suggested that samples are also collected in Georgia and Turkey in order to complete the picture.

Exchange of knowledge within the network is very important. This exchange ranges from practical aspects such as discussion of nutrition and monitoring to the more theoretical ideas for conservation strategies.

Immediately after the Workshop, a Roundtable meeting was held for Romanian stakeholders. Buffalo in Romania are rapidly decreasing in number. Although there are still an estimated 20'000-30'000 animals still existing, the lack of conservation strategy means that stock numbers are in free-fall. Buffalo that die due to old age or that are slaughtered are often not replaced. Unless urgent action is taken, the buffalo in Romania – which have been a traditional part of the agricultural landscape and the lives of the people for many centuries – will be lost forever. Romania was once an important exporter of buffalo stock. Today is considered to import breeding stock from Italy to improve performance, although the own breeding basis for selection would still exist. This trend needs to be reversed in order to give buffalo a chance of survival in Romania. The 22 participants at the meetings agreed to address the above listed needs and to participate in a network for the conservation of buffalo in South East Europe.

The work in Romania and for the water buffalo are kindly supported by Fondation Assistance, Liechtenstein, and Graf Fabrice, von Gundlach and Payne-Smith-Stiftung, Chur, Switzerland.

ProSpecieRara Ram Centres – a refuge for sheep



In Switzerland there are at present 15 different sheep breeds, only nine of which count as autochthonous. Four of these breeds: Walliser Landschaf, Bündner Oberländer Schaf, Spiegelschaf and the Engadiner Schaf are classed as endangered, according to the FAO Guidelines. These sheep are for extensive use due to their adaptation to the climatic and topographic characteristics of the country, as opposed to the currently widespread high-performance breeds. As traditional and local breeds, they are characterised by unproblematic births and by their robust nature, and are therefore very valuable in niche areas such as alpine meadows and difficult mountain terrains. In comparison with

modern, more sensitive high-performance breeds, they can keep up, but unfortunately their stock numbers are so small that conservation breeding is essential.

In conservation breeding the small population size is the biggest challenge to meet. In particular, a sufficient range of adult, male animals is often not available within the endangered sheep breed. Due to cost and husbandry reasons plus lack of infrastructure, the rams are often slaughtered early. The selection is therefore made at a time in which the males are not yet fully developed. As a result there are too few and not always optimal breeding rams available.

To tackle this problem Pro Specie Rara launched the project "Ram Centres" in 2009, which offers an efficient and elegant solution to the problem.

Concept and aims of the project

In two, geographically separate farms, valuable males of four endangered Swiss sheep breeds are bred and kept. The animals remain in the possession of the breeder or the associations, but the care of the rams is carried out at the centres, the costs of labour and material (keeping, veterinary, medication, food etc) is compensated by the owner.

The two ram centres serve as a hub for dedicated breeders and keepers. Here rare breeding lines can be bred, ewes served and rams bought or borrowed. A broad genetic base of breeding animals is thus maintained and thus a new future for endangered sheep breeds in Switzerland has been created.

The project began in 2009 and was popular from the start. In 2010, a total of over 100 rams of all four sheep breeds have been in the ram centres and many of them could be used for breeding. Without the ram centres they would have been slaughtered whilst still young with no contribution to the conservation of the genetic basis.

Naturally, the running of a ram centre requires skill in management of this particular type of herd. Only through strict sanitary measures can a healthy population be guaranteed. Meticulous inspection of incomers, including foot baths and vaccination is a central theme, as is proper quarantine of any incomers as well as upon return from a mating. In the latter case the quarantine is for the protection of the returnee, as he now smells of his last conquest, this can lead to difficulties and within an all male herd!

Uses and success of the Ram Centres

Farmers with small numbers of livestock have a strong demand for rams. Both these breeders and also new breeders value the technical exchange of information with the experts at the ram centres, which comes with every entry and exit of animals. The advisory function of the managers has increased rapidly since the beginning. The Associations consider the ram centres as a valuable service to their members, because the breeding of endangered breeds requires not only the genetic advantages of the ram (broad genetic base), but also the exchange of know-how. The ram centres will, in the long term, develop into "centres of expertise".

In this context, an annual joint "new breeder" course has been offered since March 2011, in which the keeping and care of the sheep are discussed with special focus on the four rare breeds. The first course had many participants and extremely positive feedback. The project "ram centres" has, therefore, already led to fruitful future projects.

The new conservation project "ram centre" has developed, therefore, extremely well and is on track to a successful future.

Positive side effects

During the summer months a herd of rams grazes in Burgdorf. The local people, particularly the non-farmers, have a great interest in the colourful mixture of rams from the rare breeds. Numerous questions and interesting discussions arise from these encounters, the ram centres are therefore not only enjoyed by the breeders, but also increase the public awareness and popularity of the rare and valuable sheep breeds considerably.

This project is carried out with the collaboration of:

- Stiftung ProSpecieRara (PSR)
- Schweizerischer Engadinerschaf-Zuchtverein (SEZ),
- Spiegelschaf-Zuchtverein (SSZ)
- Verein zur Erhaltung des Bündner Oberländer Schafes (VEB)
- Zuchtverein Walliser Landschaft (WLS)
- Widderzentrum Freudigen und Widderzentrum Hallwil

The Federal Office for Agriculture offered financial support.

Erwin Kump, ProSpecieRara, May 2011

“Variety-Savers” available as a pilot version!

The publicly accessible Ark centres in the European Ark-Network “Arca-Net” fulfil the function of providing the general public with the opportunity to experience endangered livestock breeds and cultivated plants and thus raise awareness for the value of agrobiodiversity. However, conservation depends on the many thousands of breeders and keepers who with a high level of, often unrecognised, engagement carry out the difficult task of keeping the breeds and varieties alive. In order to provide these people with a platform that will enable them to network internationally and across language barriers, it was decided at the 4th European Seminar on Agrobiodiversity last year to develop a multi-lingual network. Now the pilot version is available: <http://variety-savers.net>

The network is still being built up and it still has many steps to take before it is fully functional. However, interested people are requested to join the network and to send their comments and suggestions on how the website can be improved. In order to prevent the network being filled with spam, registration for the network is necessary. For the initial application as “not yet a member”, click on the top right box, fill it out and wait for email confirmation. You will be asked to provide some basic information and, on the basis of this, your membership will be confirmed. Confirmation will take place within office hours, so be patient if you sign up in the evening or at the weekend! You will enter a password that you choose to make changes and add to your profile. The use of this website is free.



So that Variety-Savers is available for networking with conservation colleagues across language barriers, the service “Google Translate” has been built in. However, in order to search for a breed or variety in a different language, one must still use the correct name in the other language in order to find it. Once found, the profile of this Variety-Saver can be translated using the Google function. The result is not always perfect but enough for understanding. Over time, the “help” and “FAQ” pages will be updated to include answers to the problems that arise.

=> and now you should go and register to take part in this unique network!

The Monitoring Institute has been integrated within the SAVE Foundation.

Between 1992-94 the Swiss foundation ProSpecieRara studied, at the suggestion of CIPRA, the International Commission to protect the Alps, and with support from the Bristol Stiftung, Zurich, the "Agricultural Genetic Resources of the Alps" - from the French Sea-Alps in the West to Slovenia in the East. The 544-page report was published in 1995 (ISBN 3-905209-03-9). The study should be seen as pioneering in that there has never before been such an intense collaboration, especially over the language borders. The



work showed that, especially in the often neglected border-areas, traditional breeds and varieties were still kept and were often in evidence on both sides of the border. In the four-country-borderland of Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Italy a sheep breed was found that was known by five different names, according to the region: Engadinerschaf (Engadine Sheep), Besch-da-Pader, Paterschaf, Ultnerschaf (Val Ultimo) or braunes Bergschaf (Brown Mountain Sheep) (see photo). The "Strahlenziege", a black and white Alpine goat from the Grisons endangered by inbreeding, is another case in point: just over the border in Valtellina, a blossoming population of "Frisa Valtellinese" exists that could be called upon to help. Unfortunately, looking over the border does not often happen and cross-border collaboration even less so. Therefore, as the quintessence of this study was a requirement that in the future the situation of endangered breeds and varieties should increasingly be clarified and observed across borders. An "international monitoring" should be established.



The above study was well received, even outside of the, then small, group of experts. Hape Grunenfelder (photo), the founder and longstanding managing director of ProSpecieRara, who managed the Alpine-study project was awarded the Chorafas-Prize of the Swiss Academy of Natural Sciences in 1995. The substantial prize money was invested immediately into the creation of the **"Monitoring Institute for Rare Breeds and Seeds in Europe"**, which was given three tasks:

- Recording and documentation of endangered breeds of farm animals and varieties of cultivated plants by studying old agricultural and veterinary publications and by searching in a specific area or in a promising area (**mapping**)
- Permanent survey of the situation and call for action, if necessary, as well as judgment of the measures being taken (**watching**)
- Raising awareness, both of the wider public and of decision makers. Regular assessment of a possible need for action, alarming of responsible institutions and organizations (**alarming**)

Generous contributions were also given to start-up the Monitoring Institute by the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment, from the WWF-Switzerland and the Migros-Cooperative. Hape Grunenfelder took on the directorship of the Institute and positioned it at the side of the SAVE Foundation, the European umbrella organisation that had been

founded three years earlier. The Institute served the SAVE-Network from then on as a scientific unit. The work of the Institute led to the creation and expansion of extensive databases, which are for the use of all who are interested. Parts of these databases have been published online, such as for example, the Breed Atlas' for the Balkans and Greece and the European Fruit-Net.

The area monitoring was taken up especially in those areas where a manifold agrobiodiversity has emerged and, for topographic reasons could be kept for longest namely, in the richly chambered areas of the Carpathians, the Balkans, in Greece and Italy. Also in the Alpine region, the situation was monitored through repeated research. The results of this work were published in books (Alpine, Carpathian and Italian) or were made available online (Balkan, Greece). On the website www.agrobiodiversity.net most of the results can be found. The book publications will also be available in electronic versions soon.

The monitoring was not only done regionally, species monitoring was also undertaken. This resulted in, for example, a study of the level of endangerment of donkey breeds in Europe, a Historical Inventory of Cultivated Plants (pilot project using the example of Switzerland), or the "NGO-Zoom Fruits", a catalogue and portrait of fruit conserving organisations in Europe, this later laid the foundations for Fruit-Net, the first internet portal of the SAVE Foundation (www.fruit-net.info).

The rediscovery of breeds that had been forgotten or were believed to be extinct became a speciality of the Monitoring Institute. Through ethnographic and ethnozoological research coupled with specific searching in the field - sometimes looking in each valley or barn where the animals had been known to be or in neighbouring areas – remnant populations could be found and secured that had long been declared extinct by scientists. Finding such remnant populations is, for the seeker every time, of course, a real satisfaction!

Within the framework of this monitoring, the local stakeholders could be brought together and joined in a network. This gave the impetus for national organisations, such as for example, the Associazione RARE in Italy or Amaltheia in Greece. In the Balkans a cross-border network was built up that works over and above the ethnic differences to secure the exchange of information and experience. Precisely such experiences, even if only a side-effect of the monitoring task, belong to some of the most valuable and sustainable results!

Due to the decision by Hape Grunenfelder (director of Monitoring Institute and Executive Vice Chairman SAVE Foundation) to gradually withdraw from the world of work into retirement, a meeting was held last year to discuss the structures of and around the SAVE Foundation and to plan for the future. From this resulted the decision to integrate the Monitoring Institute within the SAVE Foundation. This took place at the beginning of 2011. The Institute was integrated in its entirety, including the budget and the staff, within the SAVE Project Office (photo Waltraud Kugler, Co-Director Monitoring Institute, now Head of SAVE Project Office). With this, the knowledge built up during 15 intensive years is secured for the future for the use by the SAVE-Network. This is, of course, totally in keeping with the last project of the Monitoring Institute "Conservation and Use of Traditional Knowledge" (see SAVE eNews 1/2011).



“Arca-Net” – ready for the holiday season 2011

Arca-Net is ready in an updated version in time for the outings and holiday season. The European Ark network is made up of publically accessible Ark farms, open air museums, variety gardens and arboreta that show the diversity of traditional livestock breeds and cultivated plants in a way that is of interest to the public. Some of them also offer other services (cafes or restaurants, riding or rooms) or products in a farm shop. The Ark owners have recently updated their information for 2011 and many new centres have been added in the last year, especially variety gardens and centres in southern European countries. Many of the centres have also taken advantage of the opportunity to add a product page to their Arca-Net web-pages.

You can search for Ark centres in your vicinity or near your holiday place. You can find them all at www.arca-net.info. Why not visit this website and take a look at what is on offer. You can search using either the map or the text search functions. Have fun!



The Annual European Agrobiodiversity Day (EAD) 29th September 2011:

This year the subject chosen is Agrobiodiversity and Climate Change. Under the title “Preservation or Adaptation? – Conservation in the face of a changing environment” the aim is to celebrate agrobiodiversity and the work of the stakeholders.



Public awareness is important! There is still very little awareness of the enormous diversity of breeds and varieties found in European agriculture or the needs for conservation – public awareness of our subject helps on all levels: it helps producers of traditional produce find a market for their products or, it reminds our politicians about their international obligations to create strategies to protect the national agrobiodiversity. More info on: => http://www.save-foundation.net/EAD/EAD_en.htm

Don't forget to promote the date **29th September – European Agrobiodiversity Day!**

Annual Meeting of SAVE Foundation and the SAVE Network 22nd -25th September 2011, in Dimitrovgrad, Serbia

As was announced in the last eNews, this year the SAVE Annual Meeting will take place in Dimitrovgrad in Serbia. The International Seminar on Agrobiodiversity will be on the subject of "Preservation or Adaptation? – Conservation in the face of a changing environment". Further information on the Meeting (provisional programme, how to get there) are now available online. Registration forms should be sent by **26th June 2011** to the SAVE office. We look forward to meeting you in Serbia! => See www.save-foundation.net/PDF/SAVE_2011.pdf.



Newsflash

25th Anniversary of VEN in Germany



For 25 years, VEN, the association for the conservation of crop diversity in Germany has worked for the conservation of crop diversity, particularly vegetables. In addition to the conservation of old vegetables one focus of VEN is it to promote neglected and

forgotten species. Public Relations e.g. the "Crop Day" established in 1998 and regular seminars on cultivation and maintenance of various species and varieties are an integrated part of this national association (www.nutzpflanzenvielfalt.de). On 26th June VEN celebrates its 25th anniversary in Witzenhausen with a festival in which lectures will be given, a Roundtable discussion and many other activities will take place. We congratulate and wish the VEN a diverse and successful future.

Consultation on reform of EU legislation on seed-marketing



The EU legislation on seeds and propagating material is based on the two pillars of

registration and certification. In 12 Council Directives, including the Common Catalogue of varieties of agricultural plant species, the different types of seed and propagating material are covered. This legislation is very complex and fragmented. Furthermore, the link of agriculture to sustainable development needs to be reflected more strongly, to better cover of the current needs of society. Against this background, the Directorate General Health and Consumers (DG SANCO) has listed and analyzed several options for a reform of the seed legislation. Up to 30th May there was an opportunity to respond to a questionnaire on this analysis. 5 different scenarios for a change of legislation were discussed. After this consultation the DG SANCO will compose an Impact Assessment report for a reform of the seed law. SAVE Foundation has participated in this survey and will continue to monitor the process carefully. More details on this subject (in English): http://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/propagation/evaluation/index_en.htm. Among other organisations dealing with seed and propagating material the seed campaign has also articulated intensively the comparison of options: <http://www.saatkutkampagne.org/>

Important dates (extract)

14-16 June: Workshop "In Vivo Conservation of Farm Animal Genetic Resources" at Wageningen, the Netherlands. Web: www.rfp-europe.org/index.php?id=532

20-22 June: OECD Workshop on Evaluating Agri-Environmental Policies, Braunschweig, Germany. Contact: dimitris.diakosavvas@oecd.org

24-26 June: International Pomology Meeting on Sweet Cherry. Bistrita, Romania. Contact: bilegan.mihai@bilcop.ro

15-17 July: ICCPC-Week Discover healthy Polish peasant foods and farming. Potocek, Poland. Contact: biuro@icppc.pl, Web: <http://icppc.pl/eko-cel/eng/index.php?id=creative>

11-14 Aug: IV. Hungarikum Festival at Szeged, Hungary. Contact: palmareklam@palmareklam.hu Web: <http://www.hungarikum-fesztival.hu>

28 August: 15th Rare Breeds Expo in the "Living Heritage Park" in the Provincial Domain Puyenbroeck in Wachtebeke, Belgium. All Belgian rare breeds will be present. Contact: staf.vandenbergh@skynet.be, Web: <http://www.sle.be>

29 August - 1 September: 62nd EAAP Annual Meeting, Stavanger, Norway. Contact: eaap2011@umb.no, Web: <http://www.eaap2011.com/>

4-7 September: Second Balkan Symposium on Fruit Growing; Pitesti, Romania. Web: <http://bsfg2011.icdp.ro/?target=home>

6-9 September: Regional Forum of the IUCN Pan-European Region. Bonn, Germany. Contact: susanna.soderstrom@iucn.org.

7-8 Sept.: Workshop on the "Socio-economic and Cultural Values of Farm Animal Breeds", Reykjavik, Iceland. Web: <http://nordgen.org/index.php/en/content/view/full/63/>

8-11 September: 23rd International Exhibition of Natural Products, Bologna, Italy. Contact: sana@bolognafiere.it, Web: <http://www.sana.it>

16-18 September: International Conference "Organic Agriculture and Agro-Eco Tourism in the Mediterranean". Zakynthos, Greece. Contact: abm.conference.2011@gmail.com

22-23 September: International Conference on Orchards in Austria-Hungary-Slovenia on Castle Tabor, Neuhaus am Klausenbach, Austria. Contact: info@arge-streuobst.at

22-25 September: 5th European Seminar on Agrobiodiversity. Annual Meeting of SAVE Foundation & the European SAVE Network in Stara-Planina Nature Park, Dimitrovgrad, Serbia. Web: www.save-foundation.net/PDF/SAVE_2011.pdf

23 September: Regional Fair of Balkan Agrobiodiversity (Rare Breeds Exhibition). Dimitrovgrad, Serbia. Contact: balkanika@ptt.rs

24-25 September: Allitalian Organic Fair "Piante e Animali Perduti" (lost crops and livestock) at Guastalla, Italy. Web: <http://www.pianteeanimaliperduti.it>

29 September: European Agrobiodiversity Day (EAD); Topic 2011: "Agrobiodiversity and Climate Change". PR event for Agrobiodiversity with various activities of all kind of stakeholders in their respective countries. www.save-foundation.net/EAD/EAD_en.htm

=> Further dates see: <http://www.save-foundation.net/english/actual.htm>