

CLP Project ID & Title: F0502510-Community Based Conservation of Lake Kuyucuk RAMSAR site

Host country, site location and the dates in the field: Turkey, (43°27' N 40°45' E), 15.04.2010 – 30.06.2011

Institutions involved in organizing the project or participating: KuzeyDoga Society, HasNa Foundation, Symbiosis Society, Turkish Ministry of Environment & Forestry, Department of Nature Conservation & National Parks, Directorate of Highways

Project Objective: To ensure the protection of Lake Kuyucuk ecology and wildlife species by preparing a long-term management plan for the Lake Kuyucuk Ramsar Site that will enable wildlife conservation, research, monitoring and collaboration with local people.

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1. Summary:

We have achieved five of our six objectives in this project period. In December 2010 The National Wetland Commission approved our completed management plan of Lake Kuyucuk. The ministry of environment & forestry also allocated money for the implementation of the plan and main activities began spring 2011. The management plan recommends a visitor center for the public, enforcement of the protection ecological sensitive areas, management of livestock grazing, improvement of facilities for scientific research and monitoring, improvement for visitor management, improvement for community based nature tourism at surrounding villages, establishment of hide-outs and bird watching towers by the lake, and improvement of sign creation and placement, establishment of trails, and employing local villagers. The management plan also offers avoiding any threats due to road construction by the lake.

2. Introduction:

Our work has demonstrated that the conservation of Lake Kuyucuk RAMSAR site is vital for the bird life in the region because the lake hosts over 220 species of birds throughout the year. When we began monitoring Lake Kuyucuk in 2004, we only knew that 136 bird species were visiting Lake Kuyucuk. However our committed and continuing research has revealed that Lake Kuyucuk hosts more bird species and biodiversity than was previously recorded. The bird banding studies we completed also illustrated that Lake Kuyucuk is located on a very important bird fly-way between Africa & Eurasia. The two flamingos we recorded in December 2010 proved how Lake Kuyucuk is important for migrating birds to stop-over, feed, and continue on their migratory journey. During our initial research at the lake, we identified some issues such as overgrazing, wildlife disturbances, and possible road construction near the lake. Our proposed project and management plan for Lake Kuyucuk offered solutions to overcome these issues and successfully initiated Lake Kuyucuk as Turkey's 13th RAMSAR destination site. To achieve this recognition, we worked with the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Kars Governship, local environment and forestry and local tourism and culture departments in Kars, and local people from surrounding villages. With the ministry of environment's designation of Kuyucuk Lake as Turkey's RAMSAR site, they have allocated money for organizing the management plan process and the plan's implementation. The local department of the ministry of the environment worked with KuzeyDoga Society to prepare the management plan over an eight-month period. The Kars Governship managed the process and led the local wetland commission to assist in quick decision-making. The local department of culture and tourism improved the promotion of Lake Kuyucuk Ramsar site by constructing road signs across the province that communicates information and directions regarding the site. Our main stakeholders were local people of surrounding villages who attended all stakeholder meetings and contributed to the preparation of the management plan by inputting their concerns and feedback regarding the site.

Map of the site:



3. Project Members

3.1. Project Leader

Name: Onder CIRIK (31)

Team Role: Project Manager

Oncer Cirik received his bachelor degree in business and economics. He has three years of fieldwork experience from volunteering for Birdlife Turkey, and he has six years of professional work experience in nature conservation in Turkey, in particular with project management, evaluation, reporting and proposal writing. He communicates with advanced fluency in both English and Turkish languages. He is an expert in web-design, has extensive computer skills in multimedia data processing, and has high comfort as a presenter and educator. He is an experienced birdwatcher and fieldworker since 1999. He has gained international experience in conservation work as an intern at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Pennsylvania, USA in the spring of 2004, and as a US State Alumni of the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) on biodiversity, national park management, and conservation in 2011.

3.2. Science Coordinator

Name: Emrah COBAN (26)

Team Role: Science Coordinator

Emrah Coban earned his master degree in biology. He has three years of professional experience in nature conservation, and two years of fieldwork experience for bird, large carnivore, and ethnobotany research. He has high computer skills. He has good relations and a larger network including all local administrators in the Kars area. He completed his master thesis on breeding birds of Lake Kuyucuk with the Kafkas University biology department. Specifically, his master thesis works to identify the breeding birds of Lake Kuyucuk and their distribution within the lake area. His thesis contributes to the research component of our project that works to build fencing for the protection of local bird nesting sites.

3.3. Bird Ringing (Banding) Specialist

Name: Sedat INAK (30)

Team Role: Bird ringing (banding) and data analyst specialist

Sedat Inak earned his master's degree in biology from the Kafkas University biology department. He is one of the eight licensed bird-banding specialists in Turkey. He has experience in training new ringers and expertise in bird identification and surveying methods. He has plant and animal illustration skills and is the author of several scientific articles. He speaks intermediate in English. His master thesis was on the identification of migration route choices of Passerines migrating through the Aras Valley. His work in the Aras Valley is separate than from KuzeyDoga Society's research conducted in the Aras Valley.

3.4. Field Biologist

Name: Yakup SASMAZ (26)

Team Role: Field Biologist

Yakup Sasmaz is a master student in biology at the Kafkas University biology department. He has four years of bird ringing (banding) experience at Aras and Kuyucuk bird banding stations, and he has fieldwork management and logistic skills. His master thesis focuses on parasites on migrating birds.

3.5. Field Assistant

Name: Umit DURDU

Team Role: Field Assistant & Public Relations officer

Umit received her bachelor's degree in biology, and she is currently pursuing her master's degree in biology from the Kafkas University biology department. She is a bird-banding trainee. She has studied butterflies and carried out ethnobotany studies in Kars. She has taken plant illustration courses, gaining expertise in plant & butterfly illustrations. She also works with local community relations, collaborating closely with village women for their project participation. For her master's thesis, she intends to study on conservation genetics.

4. Aims and Objectives

To ensure the long-term conservation of Lake Kuyucuk RAMSAR site, we focused on the preparation and implementation of the management plan and identified the following objectives:

- To prepare the management plan of the site.

- To build fences that minimizes ecological impact and designates strict protection zones of the lake that exclude cattle grazing
- To convince the central government to shift the highway at least 500 m northwards in order to avoid wildlife disturbance in case of an eventual border opening with Armenia.
- To make Lake Kuyucuk a demonstration site in Turkey for scientific research, environmental education, wetland restoration, and community-based work.
- To encourage the local government to establish a visitor and education center at village Kuyucuk.
- Encourage local administrations to establish a union to sustain the financial protection of the lake.

Thus far, we have achieved five out of the six objectives.

5. Methodology

We applied our methodology under 4 actions:

For **research & monitoring** our team conducted field work such as monthly bird surveys, breeding bird atlas, bird ringing studies in the spring and the autumn of 2010, and ecological restoration work in our experimental enclosures to analyze the impact of grazing, water quality measurements, and water line mappings. The number of bird species identified at Lake Kuyucuk was 207 when we finished our first CLP project, but as of spring 2011, the number of identified species has reached to 220. We identified that flamingos use Lake Kuyucuk as a stopover site during their fall migration from Caspian basin to Mediterranean basin. As of the spring and the autumn of 2010, the total number of birds ringed at Kuyucuk Bird Banding Station totaled approximately 2,317 birds. Of this number, 1,108 of the birds were ringed in the spring and 1209 of them were ringed in the autumn. The bird ringing (banding) studies took 92 days in the field, with the contribution of 36 volunteers from five different countries. These countries were the Netherlands, Turkey, the UK, the USA and Spain. All data we collected about the lake's bird diversity was used in the management plan process to determine what decisions were necessary to sustain this diversity. As in previous years, we conducted ecological restoration surveys in our exclosure cages with Dr. Sean Anderson from California State University and collected third year data of our study including biomass, bird nesting behavior, insect and frog diversity. We also studied the water quality, collected samples from different parts of the lake, and monitored the changes in the island that we constructed in 2009. Many biology students from national universities attended this wetland restoration studies.

For **lobbying**, our team took action both in Ankara and in Kars to start the management plan process of the lake. We worked with the management plan company and the ministry of environment and forestry in coordination to obtain an effective and fruitful management plan. We shared our data and knowledge about the diversity of the lake. We also conducted meetings with local communities to maintain a healthy management plan process that considered the contributions of every stakeholder. We conducted meetings, briefings, and site visits with the representatives of the ministry of culture and tourism to designate the lake as a "European Destination of Excellence (EDEN)." Through gaining this title, we were able to improve the promotion of Lake Kuyucuk through increased placement of road, direction and information signs. We also represented Lake Kuyucuk in the annual EDEN meetings in Brussels, Belgium in September 2010 and in Mellieha, Malta in April 2011 where all EDEN destinations meet from all over Europe. We also lobbied the directorate of high ways and about the consequences of a road construction by the lake. We petitioned them to change the route of the planned road and we worked with the staff of the directorate to shift the road to avoid wildlife

disturbances. Our efforts were successful as the local government updated their master plan in case of a road construction by the lake. The local administration in Kars also employed a warden from the Kuyucuk village to oversee the lake as a result of our lobbying.

For **promotion & raising awareness**, we have used local and national media efficiently through writing regular press releases, TV programs, and radio interviews. Lake Kuyucuk RAMSAR site is widely known all over Turkey as a result of our efforts. A few successful promotional outcomes include increased tourism, improved global knowledge about Lake Kuyucuk, and meaningful community events. Where previously Lake Kuyucuk was relatively unheard of, now local and national tour companies visit Lake Kuyucuk in their package tours. The number of videos in our Kuyucuk bilingual project has reached 19 languages (which can be visited here: <http://tinyurl.com/3olro77>). Kuyucuk villagers organized the third annual Kuyucuk Nature Festival in June 2010 unlike the previous years when KuzeyDoga handled all logistics.

Provided below is a list of media coverage of our work. Press cuts and radio interviews are also accessible at <http://tinyurl.com/42eurco> and videos at: <http://tinyurl.com/3el4mzv>

	Local	National	International	TV	Radio
2010	23	26	8	4	2
2011	16	22	10	3	4
Total	39	48	18	7	6

For community-based work, we have carried out several trainings for capacity development of local villagers, esp. women entrepreneurs who would like to establish village pensions. We recently completed a training program with HasNa Foundation, a NGO mainly working with women issues in Turkey. The training lasted three days including education on nature based tourism and communication and conflict resolution. Professor Berkes from Manitoba University, Canada, also held a one-day workshop with women on nature tourism development. We also conducted a training program with the Symbiosis Society from Istanbul, whose members are mostly American Hospital Doctors. There has been health screening for local people in four different villages around Lake Kuyucuk, and a patchwork course was held for the young girls. The society also organized a campaign for elementary school children, donating books, stationery, clothing and shoes for these four villages. Young women began developing cultural tourism products from learning how to embroider Ruddy Shelduck, the symbol waterfowl of Lake Kuyucuk RAMSAR site, onto goose feather pillows. Lake Kuyucuk has also become a primary site for visiting school children and students, even those coming from Istanbul. The local school kids celebrated world wetlands day, world migratory bird day, world biodiversity day, world environment day and world birdwatching day at the lake, thus participating in our events and programs. The Istanbul International Community School flew to Kars and had an excursion for three days at Lake Kuyucuk to learn about bird banding, ecological restoration, and conservation on site. French tourists also have begun to visit and camp at Lake Kuyucuk for a few nights in summer. These school and tourist groups contribute to the local economy, mainly for accommodation and food service.

6. Outputs & Results

Below is a summary of our outputs and results during the last fiscal year:

- The regular monitoring of the lake increased the number of bird species checklist from 207 to 220 in one year (see appendix 11.1).

- In the spring and the autumn of 2010 the total number of birds ringed at Kuyucuk Bird Banding Station was 2317. Of this number, 1108 were ringed in the spring, and 1209 of them were ringed in the autumn (see appendix 11.2).
- We learned that Lake Kuyucuk is also important as a resting stop for flamingos migrating from Caspian basin to Mediterranean basin in the autumn migration (see appendix 11.3).
- The bird ringing (banding) studies took 92 days in the field with the contribution of 36 volunteers from five different countries. These countries are Netherlands, Turkey, UK, USA and Spain (see appendix 11.4).
- All data we collected regarding Kuyucuk Lake's bird diversity was used in the management plan process and the subsequent decisions for sustaining the lake's biodiversity. As in previous years, we completed ecological restoration surveys of our enclosure cages with Dr. Sean Anderson from California State University, and collected third year data of our study including biomass, bird nesting behavior, insect, and frog diversity (see appendix 11.5).
- The management plan was completed and approved for its application (see appendix 11.6 – in Turkish).
- The Directorate of highways and the Ministry of Tourism & Culture improved the signage and promotion of Lake Kuyucuk (see appendix 11.7).
- In 2010 and 2011, Lake Kuyucuk was covered 39 times at local press, 48 times in national press, 18 times in international press, seven times in television programming, and six times in the radio, totaling 118 media pieces (see appendix 11.8).
- Two trainings and one workshop on nature based tourism development, conflict resolution, and patchwork have been organized for mainly village women to improve nature-based tourism at Lake Kuyucuk; 18 women and men attended these trainings (see appendix 11.9).
- More than 200 local school children, 11 high school students from Istanbul International Community School and 40 university students have participated in our environmental education programs at Lake Kuyucuk on special occasions such as World Wetland Day, World Migratory Bird Day, World Biodiversity Day, World Environment Day and World Birdwatching Day.

7. Achievements and Impacts

- The management plan of the lake has been completed, and the central government will be able to allocate financial resources for the protection and promotion of the lake.
- The ecological sensitive areas of the lake have been secured by fencing in the management plan.
- The construction of the education and visitor center has been included in the management plan.
- Through our lobbying efforts, the reconstruction of the road by the lake has been canceled, and the directorate of highways has identified a new route in order to eliminate the possible disturbance to Lake Kuyucuk RAMSAR site.

- Our team and society has become a member of the local wetland commission.
- The Ministry of Environment and Forestry honored our organization as the most active NGO for the protection of wetlands in 2011.
- Donor agencies such as Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline Company Environmental Investment Program, Serhat Development Agency or UNDP Small Grants Program have begun to approach us to support our work at Lake Kuyucuk.
- The quick and concrete success and achievements of our team at Lake Kuyucuk have been appreciated by many other nature conservation NGOs in Turkey and declared as a case study for wetland conservation in Turkey in a nature conservation panel in February 2011 in Turkey.
- We started to transfer our experience that we gained at Lake Kuyucuk for other wetlands in northeastern Turkey such as Lake Aktas, Lake Putka, Lake Cali, Lake Cildir and Aralik marshes. A road construction threat at Lake Aktas has been avoided as a result of our lobby to the central government and directorate of highways. The technical team of national wetland commission identified the protection boundaries of Lake Putka and petitioned for its management plan. The other wetlands have been listed by the ministry of environment and forestry for the identification of protection boundaries and management plans.
- Our experience with Lake Kuyucuk has improved our relations with many other departments of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry. When we commenced the CLP leadership project in 2008, we only worked with the Directorate of Wetlands. However due to the scope of our work, we have begun working with the Department of Nature Conservation and National Parks, the Department of Hunting and Wildlife Conservation, the Directorate of Forestry and the Directorate of Reforestation. Lake Kuyucuk has become an important indicator of what we are capable of, and with this project as reference, we have been able to improve multiple other projects with other departments of the ministry; including conflict between humans and large carnivores at Sarikamis-Allahuekber Mountains National Park, and establishing wildlife corridor between Sarikamis and lesser Caucasus mountains.
- One of the villagers from Kuyucuk village was hired by local administration as a warden and he generates income through protecting the lake.

8. Conclusion

After completing our studies and committed community work, we have been able to prove the biological and ecological value of the Lake Kuyucuk Ramsar Site. Our work has drawn the attention of national and international organizations and media contributors. Our next course of action is to administer and complete the implementation of the management plan, and continue working with the local community to protect the lake while promoting community benefit. The experience we have had and our lessons learned can guide many other conservationists in Turkey for the designation, protection, promotion and management of new natural sites. For this reason, moving forward we would like to compile and assess the lessons learned from our work over the past four years at Lake Kuyucuk. Once we successfully implement the management plan, then we can establish a model for the long-term conservation of Lake Kuyucuk Ramsar Site, setting an example of thorough conservation work that others in Turkey can follow.

9. Problems Encountered and Lessons Learned

- Over this past fiscal year, we learned that many problems that can be easily solved at local level could be solved by maintain positive relations with central directors of the related ministry in Ankara, and the central government. Continual feedback and updates are important for addressing and solving problems.
- The cooperation and collaboration with other NGOs is highly influential in developing a positive impression in the eyes of local people. For example the health screening of local villagers with Symbiosis Society, or the women capacity development projects with HasNa Foundation raised our profile among locals and increased villagers' respect for our work.
- The concrete success and achievements such as Whitley Gold Awards, Ramsar status, or the construction of the bird haven island at Lake Kuyucuk attract donors and other organizations for support and collaborations.
- The power of media should not be underestimated. One of the press releases we wrote about Lake Kuyucuk was read by an engaged citizen named Metin Boyacioglu in Istanbul. As a responsible citizen, he petitioned the president of Turkey for the conservation of Lake Kuyucuk and a preservation of the birds' species that use the lake. The petition was accepted by the presidential staff, and they demanded the Ministry of Environment and Forestry to take further conservation actions for the protection of the lake. Through this approach, we were able to easily convince the Directorate of Highways to change the route of the planned road bisecting lake's northern edge, which would have possibly created a high level of disturbance for birds at Lake Kuyucuk.

10. Future Plans

For the future, we aim to implement the management plan successfully, establish the visitor center, and build a fenced area at the lake so that we can secure the protection of wildlife habitats and diverse species. We will be focus more on community-based work by using different grants to improve nature-based tourism. We will also be focus on promotion and environmental education to improve not only nature tourism but also volunteerism. The quality of facilities should be improved for tourists and visitors so that we can work with local people on increased capacity building.

11. Appendices

11.1 Lake Kuyucuk Ramsar Site Bird Species Check List

11.2 The 2010 list of birds' species and numbers ringed (banded) at Kuyucuk Bird Research & Education Center

11.3 The pictures of flamingos' resting at Lake Kuyucuk during their fall migration

11.4 The list of volunteers who contributed of our research work at Lake Kuyucuk in 2010

11.5 The data collected for Lake Kuyucuk enclosure experiment in 2010

11.6 Lake Kuyucuk Ramsar Site Management Plan (in Turkish)

11.7 The pictures of Lake Kuyucuk direction and information signs made by the ministry of culture & tourism

11.8 Media coverage of Lake Kuyucuk Ramsar site in 2010 including press cuts, videos and radio programs

11.9 The report of Sustainable Tourism Training for Kuyucuk villagers

12. Address list and web links

www.kuyucuk.org

www.kuzeydoga.org

www.facebook.com/kuzeydoga

www.twitter.com/kuzeydoga

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/tourism/eden/themes-destinations/countries/turkey/kars-kuyucuk/index_en.htm

<http://ramsar.wetlands.org/Database/Searchforsites/tabid/765/Default.aspx>

<http://www.whitleyaward.org/display.php?id=133>

<http://www.undp.org.tr/Gozlem2.aspx?WebSayfaNo=1487>

13. Distribution list