

Hello, friends!

Here is the information bulletin for April – the Month of the Earth. We start it with two reservations – the bulletin does not pretend for comprehensiveness and detailed observation of the hundreds of actions, initiated by members of the Coalition, volunteers and partners. And second – it is quite long, please forgive us! :)

**“FOR THE NATURE” COALITION
INFORMATION NEWSLETTER
APRIL 2009**



This newsletter is supported by a grant from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA Financial Mechanism under the project “Let nature remain”.



We begin the summary with the last events first, but having in mind the exceptional news from the last couple of hours we believe it is worth.

BEAR ON THE EDGE OF VITOSHA NATURE PARK



A two-year-old bear was caught in immediate vicinity to the borders of Vitosha Nature Park on April 30, 2009. A GPS-collar was placed on the bear Damyan for tracing out his exact location at any time. Interesting and important information about the bear's life will be obtained soon.

The brown bear is an endangered animal species in Europe. Bulgaria is **one of the few countries** in Europe where the brown bears are still not fully exterminated by people and **Sofia is the only European capital** which can offer living conditions for this species in such immediate proximity to the big city. The availability of bears in the Nature Park proves that it has preserved nature. This is why the Park's protection is very important for Damyan and his relatives.

**NEWS CONCERNING THE PROTECTION
OF THE NATURE PARKS**

There was another public action in the beginning of the month in support of the directors of the nature parks: <http://forthenature.org/news/685/>. Since then, there has been a lull regarding this problem. Probably because of the public pressure and the absence of adequate accusations, Mr Yurukov gave up his attempts to remove the inconvenient directors. We however would like to direct your attention to the fact that during the last year and a half the cases of discharges or pressure over state employees in the field of nature protection (in the Ministry of Environment and Waters, its regional inspectorates, the State Forestry Agency, and others), who do their job and prevent investment plans that are potentially damaging to the environment,

have become more and more frequent. This is a very worrying and intolerable fact and together with investigating journalists we work on revealing and documenting this kind of governmental policy.



Meanwhile some organizations – Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism, Bulgarian Climbing and Mountaineering Federation, Bulgarian Extreme and Free Skiing Association, circulated to the public their clear and definite position against the plans for expanding the ski zone in Vitosha and expressed their support for the management of the Park and the director's attempts to ensure compliance with the laws. The full text of the position: <http://forthenature.org/upload/attitudes/2009/04/Stanovishte-Vitosha.pdf>.

AN OLD REFRAIN: FOREST SWAPS KEPT ON AFTER THEY WERE OUTLAWED

Another problematic sphere on which we work is forest swaps. Although we managed to stop the vicious practice with many efforts, we have information for its continuing with back date: <http://forthenature.org/news/687/>. One more initiative in that

connection: the Internet portal for environment Bluelink started an online system for signals for violations in the forests. The project will help for the timely and thorough collection of information about arsons, illegal logging and cases of corruption in the forestry system: <http://forthenature.org/news/654/>.

APRIL FORESTATIONS AND CLEAN-UP ACTIONS

Leaving aside the topic about the state's incompetence and inadequacy, we would like to point out that the civil initiatives during the Month of the Earth were numerous and inspiring. A blog for civil initiatives and care about the Earth was started (<http://mesecnazemiata.blogspot.com/>) where everyone could share their ideas and intentions so that others could join in. True to our motto that each month is a Month of the Earth, we encourage you to keep using the blog for organizing civil initiatives in May, June, July, August, September...!

Photos from clean-ups and forestations in the university city in Sofia, behind the National Library in Sofia, and near Slivnitsa.



A couple of forestation actions took place: the Christmas trees were planted in Vitosha Nature Park (<http://forthenature.org/actions/188/>) and volunteers planted 1500 saplings of European black pine near Slivnitsa (<http://forthenature.org/gallery/137/>).

A practical training on correct forestation was carried out for students from New Bulgarian University and Sofia University (<http://placeforfuture.org/archives/1698> and <http://placeforfuture.org/archives/1749>).

On April 25, more than 20 enthusiastic volunteers in Plovdiv realized their idea to clean up the platanus trees on one of the city's main streets from drawing pins, obituary notices, advertisements and all other cover materials that are untypical for the bark of a tree. About 5-6 kg of drawing pins, nails and clamps were cleaned up for 4 hours. Some of the citizens suggested to make an artistic drawing "Protect the tree!" with the collected drawing pins. If we start from the smallest things – gathering one piece of litter at the bus stop, in front of our home, or on the street, that will be of help to everyone (<http://www.marica.bg/shoutbox.php?act=show-news&id=13>).

The initiators of the civil movement in support of Natura 2000 in Bulgaria, who made more than 30 artistic public actions in 2007 to remind our ministers that they have to approve all proposed protected zones and ensure the preservation of Bulgarian nature, replanted a tree on April 29. The young sycamore lived in a pot for almost two years waiting for the entire range of the network to be approved by the Bulgarian ministers but as this did not happen so far, the concerns for its comfort in the pot grew larger and the environmentalists decided to gift it as a mascot to the European Commission Representation office in Bulgaria. With choosing this place as the permanent home for the sycamore the nature protectionists wanted to express their appreciation for the European institutions that exert the necessary outside pressure to ensure the existence of normal and working environmental legislation in Bulgaria: <http://en.forthenature.org/news/733/>.

And, of course, April 22 itself – the International Earth Day was celebrated with due attention in Bulgaria in many cities. This was possible with the help and initiative of citizens, volunteers, partners and friends of the "For the Nature" Coalition. Look at the pictures and read the stories on the following links:

In Veliko Tarnovo: <http://forthenature.org/actions/198/>, <http://forthenature.org/gallery/146/>

In Stara Zagora: <http://forthenature.org/gallery/147/>

In Plovdiv: <http://forthenature.org/gallery/145/>

In Kardzhali: <http://forthenature.org/gallery/140/>

In Sliven: <http://forthenature.org/actions/194/>



And the big party in Sofia: <http://forthenature.org/gallery/142/>, <http://forthenature.org/gallery/143/>. It all began at 7 am with the display of five huge vinyl banners with messages for nature protection from the facades of large buildings in Sofia's downtown: <http://forthenature.org/gallery/139/>. The lovely photo-exhibition of Photosynthesis was opened in the garden of the National Assembly. Over 30 photos, showing the beauty of Bulgarian nature, were exhibited on bamboo postures: <http://forthenature.org/gallery/142/>.

After the wet "horo" (traditional Bulgarian dance) the concert continued with the performances of Elitsa and Stundzhi, devoted to the Earth Day, followed by the reggae rhythms of "Merudia", the authentic folklore of "Leb i Vino" and the dances of Tedi Kazarova. Finally "Wikedra" blasted the audience with newly-arranged songs dedicated to endangered wild places. Iskren Petsov, the host for the concert, also greeted the "earthlings" with a song for preserving the beaches on the Black Sea coast. All people on the stage received a cup of tea (to warm up as the temperatures were unusually low) and cloth shopping bags as gifts. The events in cele-



bration of the International Earth Day were visited by thousands of people. We want to say "Thank you!" one more time to our partners from Photosynthesis, the sound-makers from Silvia Music, the musicians, Iskren Petsov, the countries and organizations from the Financial mechanism of EEA that support financially our project "Let nature remain" and most of all the hundreds of volunteers, who dedicated one month to this feast! Next year – a three-day festival! <http://forthenature.org/news/724/>.

But this is not all in this loaded with events Month of the Earth:

CIVIL ACTIONS AND PROTESTS

On April 3, there was a flash mob in front of the building of the Directorate for National Control on Construction (DNCC), which issued the final permit for putting the ski lift to the Seven Rila Lakes in exploitation: <http://forthenature.org/actions/187/>. The message of the flash mob was: „The sick carries the healthy” – the lift is illegal and dangerous for all who use it since its bottom station is built upon a landslide.



Just a day later the illegal ski lift, part of the unapproved project Super Panichishte, was officially inaugurated on the muddy construction site. Quickly convened priests from Dupnitsa blessed the facility with an Orthodox Christian ritual and hopped on it for a ride in their church attire. The locals from Sapareva Banya, also quickly convened on the previous day, were entertained with "kebapcheta" (a typical Bulgarian minced meat specialty with very typical smell) and meat balls. The mayor of Sapareva banya and "all the King's men" from *Rila Sport AD* were also there for the moment of their triumph. The official launch took place only three days after the investors got hold of the yearned piece of paper – the permit for using the ski lift from DNCC. To their great chagrin, this permit will become invalid due to the fact that the facility is illegal and this dangerous lift will be removed sooner or later.

A few days later there were public actions for Rila in Varna, Plovdiv, Veliko Tarnovo and Stara Zagora: <http://forthenature.org/actions/189/>. The tireless *Citizens for Rila* initiated a new open letter and petition to the Prime Minister Stanishev and the Petitions Committee of the European Parliament with a demand for the removal of the lift and the recultivation of the terrain at the expense of the investor. More than 500 letters were signed for a few hours by citizens. You can join the petition online here: <http://forthenature.org/petitions/10/>. The petition has already been sent to the European Parliament but new signatures will be constantly added to it as they arrive.

The citizens of Pomorie protested in front of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, where a meeting of the Supreme Ecological Expert Council took place to discuss the pipeline Burgas-Alexandropolis: <http://forthenature.org/actions/195/>.

After more than a year of absence from the square in front of the Bulgarian Council of Ministers the citizens who support the Natura 2000 network in Bulgaria decided to knock on the doors of The Realm Of Unrestricted Power and to remind that the problems surrounding the implementation of the European environmental network in Bulgaria are not only unsolved but become even worse. As they were not allowed to protest in front of the Council of Ministers, the citizens did not unfold any posters but only played their last waltz in front of the cameras and microphones of the media letting them know what this circus was all about. Unfortunately, no ministers entered the building through the main entrance during their presence. The citizens were also very curious about why the ministers are trying to ban such peaceful events to happen in front of their sight with the new project of the Law on the public meetings and protests, that will restrict any protests in the range of the buildings of the state administration and on the national roads: <http://en.forthenature.org/news/737/> and <http://forthenature.org/gallery/148/>.

During this month, more than 29 applications for access to public information, positions, and complaints on the priority cases for the Coalition were prepared and deposited at the relevant institutions. Regarding the cases of Vitosha, Strandzha, Rila, and Irakli we would like to ask – when will the court system and the machinery of the state administration start to work and sanction and punish the investors who violated many laws and caused irretrievable damage to these regions?

We will leave that rhetorical question as “food for thought” in your free time and will continue to fight for rule of law and harmonious coexistence with nature during the next month :) We count on your help and cooperation. Smile more often! And let every month be month of the Earth!



The defenders of Natura 2000 danced a symbolic last waltz in front of the Council of Ministers to remind that the problems surrounding the network in Bulgaria have not been solved yet.

HOPEFUL NEWS FROM THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

We returned hopeful from the participation of the Coalition at the last meeting of the Petitions Committee of the European Parliament before the new elections. Responding to the many petitions from citizens, concerning the protection of Bulgarian nature, the Committee dedicated 1/3 of its meeting to hear the petitioners from Bulgaria. The Coalition emphasized on six of the most important and urgent cases at the moment – Strandzha, Irakli, Kamchian Sands, Kaliakra, Rila, and Pirin. The MEPs were astonished by the slow reaction of the European Commission and the protraction of the NGOs complaints at the Infringement Unit of DG Environment. They decided to write an urgent letter to the European Commissioner Dimas insisting that the Commission start reviewing the complaints immediately and open infringement procedures. They also decided to approach the European ombudsman, because of the bad administration in the European Commission (<http://forthenature.org/news/739>).

The travel expenses of three members of the Coalition to Brussels were financed by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA Financial Mechanism under the project "Let nature remain".



Some of the banners that were hung by volunteers at the facades of buildings in downtown Sofia on Earth Day.