

Press Release No. 35/2008

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Biodiversity: creating a national park programme in Turkmenistan

Advising-assistance project will support the protection of biological diversity

In the run-up to the 9th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, to be held in Bonn from 19th to 30th May 2008, the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) is making its contribution to the preservation of biodiversity by means of a project in the central Asian Republic of Turkmenistan. In a joint endeavour there with the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN), UBA is overseeing the creation of a system of national parks. In cooperation with the Ministry of the Environment of Turkmenistan, the Michael Succow Foundation is creating model national parks out of the existing areas of nature protection "Sünt-Chasardag" and "Kopet-Dag". The project is being financed by the advising-assistance programme for environmental protection in the states of Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, which the Federal Ministry for the Environment (BMU) is using to further the establishment of higher standards of environmental protection. The negotiations on a worldwide network of protected areas will provide one of the focal points at the 9th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Bonn.

Turkmenistan has set itself the goal of extending its system of nature protection areas from the current 4% to 6% of its land area by 2009. This thinly-populated country enjoys incomparable natural and biological diversity as represented by more than 20,000 types of flora and fauna. However, Turkmenistan's biological diversity is particularly threatened by its overexploitation by hunters and poachers, as well as by the ongoing retreat of many species' natural habitats. It is for these reasons that the National Park initiative is of great importance. On the one hand, zones can thus be created to provide protection for ecosystems which can thrive untouched by economic pressures, human settlement activities and further development; on the other, areas can be opened up for tourism which will thus be protected from any excesses of economic exploitation.

Turkmenistan is a country of geographic contrasts: it is home to the remains of open woodlands in the Kopet-Dag Mountains on the Iranian border; to vestigial floodplain tugai forests on the Amudarya River; to foothill savannah on the Iran-Afghan border; and to isolated

multiform coastal ecosystems on the south-west coast of the Caspian Sea. Mountain ranges reach heights in some places of up to 3,000 metres, and the coast of Turkmenistan extends for some 1,800 kilometres along the Caspian Sea. The advising-assistance project is also supporting public relations work in the country itself, aiming to alert the population to the need to protect the diversity of Turkmenistan's natural landscapes.

The particular climatic conditions of the region mean that problems such as desertification may arise due to over-intensive agricultural activity on the steppes and the vagaries of climate change. Mountainous regions are seeing high levels of soil erosion due to forest clearance for firewood and grazing land. The protection of ecological systems in areas of natural protection under the auspices of the state can make a contribution to the minimisation of negative consequences and to the adaptation to climate change.

Dessau-Roßlau, 19 May 2008