

WCPA - IUCN CAVES and KARST SPECIALIST GROUP NEWS

Jay Anderson - Caves and Karst Specialist Group

A few people have asked how things are going with the Caves and Karst Specialist Group – well, things are ticking along with the usual Invitations to attend meetings and several requests for support from our International cave and karst management colleagues.

I have been invited to the World Commission on Protected Areas Steering Committee Annual Meeting, which is being held in Senegal, Africa during February. I would love to attend, however, as a volunteer, cannot afford the travel costs associated with attending the special annual meeting. As part of my role I will submit a report for this annual meeting.

Later in the year (September) is the IUCN World Conservation Congress, being held in Korea. With the support of a number of other karst colleagues around the world, I had put together two proposals for karst management related workshops at the Congress.

“How resilient are karst systems as protectors of water resources and biodiversity?”

“Karst Ecosystem Management – best methods and practices”.

I was also approached by Fauna & Flora International to partner with them in the development and presentation of their proposed workshop, which was an excellent initiative. This was in relation to “Reducing the impact of industry on karst”, and focussed on the Asian cement and karst quarry industry and impacts on karst biodiversity.

Unfortunately, none of our 3 karst related workshop proposals were accepted for the Congress Program. We were informed that the Technical Review Panel of the IUCN World Conservation Congress was pleased to receive more than 800 session proposals. And, that given the high quality of the proposals, the task of identifying those which will collectively deliver the most interesting Congress was challenging. So, our sessions were not chosen to go into the program. I had been optimistic that someone would see the importance of karst and the Congress would have presented an excellent opportunity to engage with many people.

I was also contacted in relation to a European disaster. This involved the shooting of the Hollywood production *Expendables 2* in Devetashkata Cave, northern Bulgaria. The movie production led to a dramatic disturbance of big bat colonies, which hibernate in this cave. Under the provisions of the national Biodiversity Act, all bat species in the country are strictly protected!

The cave is one of the top three most significant underground habitats of bats in Europe and a very

significant bat hibernacula in Bulgaria, where colonies of up to 60,000 bats roost in winter. From the information I have read, there are around 13 species of bats, which either use or hibernate in this cave. I was informed that this cave is a Protected Natural Landmark designated under the national Protected Areas Act (European Union Habitats Directive). It is included within two sites of the NATURA 2000 European environmental network. According to the latest assessments of bat populations in Bulgaria, the Devetashkata Cave is a roost of international importance, covering all criteria set for this category by the EUROBATS Agreement.

During November, a huge decline of the *Miniopterus* colony was observed. From about 35,000 bats, there was only about 8,600 left in the cave. The noise disturbance due to construction, is reported to be so great that while standing under the colony you can hardly hear a normally talking man. It seems that the disturbance was for around 6 weeks, involving over 100 people and much machinery (Alexey Zhalov pers comm).

Go to [http://greenbalkans.org/show.php?language=en_EN&id=1270&cat_id=35-11th Nov 2011](http://greenbalkans.org/show.php?language=en_EN&id=1270&cat_id=35-11th%20Nov%202011) for more information. Of particular concern, is that the resulting human disturbance meant that the bats are not in torpor and many were observed flying around in the cave. The weather is too cold and there are almost no insects flying at night, which has led to the death of a significant number of bats in this cave. It is so hard to believe that this situation was able to occur!

Well, I hope that everyone had an excellent Christmas. Here's wishing all who read our ACKMA Journal, a very “Happy New Year”. I'm looking forward to another busy year.



Infrastructure being erected in Devetashkata Cave, Bulgaria. Photo: www.greenbalkans.org