



Hour of Garden Birds in Georgia - A birdwatching campaign for pupils

Background

“The Hour of Garden Birds” is a bird watching campaign that is designed to be carried out in secondary schools throughout Georgia. It is taking place yearly on the 22nd of May that is at the same time the International Day of Biological Diversity. “The Hour of Garden Birds” is an initiative of the Georgian Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources. It is implemented in the context of the German-Georgian Technical Cooperation project “Sustainable Management of Biodiversity” (GTZ) and supported by a German Integrated Expert (CIM) working for the Biodiversity Protection Service of the Ministry. At regional level the imple-



mentation of the campaign is supported by the regional branches of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources.

“I felt great delight while watching and listening to birds. I thought to myself, how wonderful the world is with its nature and birds, and how pale it would be without them.”
Natia Msuknishvili, pupil, Tsinandali public school. 2009.

Objectives

The “Hour of Garden Birds” aims to increase the environmental awareness of school children and to strengthen their understanding of the close linkage between the quality of nature and the well-being of people. The campaign is concentrating on common garden birds as their existence and frequency is a good indicator to assess the state and the quality of the nature. Further objectives of the campaign are as follows:

- Increasing the knowledge about Common Garden Birds of Georgia
- Encouraging youth to find out

more about the local fauna and in this way bringing them close to the nature

- Promoting bird watching in Georgia
- Obtaining information about the distribution patterns and abundance of the given bird species based on the participants records

“The event aroused interest among the pupils. We have decided to organise such bird count again in future.” Tsitsino Siradze, biology teacher, Chokhatauri #1 secondary school, 2009.

Implementation of the campaign

The preparation and the implementation of the campaign are coordinated by teachers who are provided with trainings well in advance before the event. They are also given teaching materials (brochures, posters, etc.) for distribution in classes. Teachers are responsible for explaining the main features of the garden birds to the



school children, who are the virtual target group of the campaign. Finally the pupils should be capable to identify the birds and successfully join the campaign. On the 22nd of May the bird counting is taking place. After the counting is completed the counting sheets are sent to the Ministry for further processing. This data gives rough information about abundance of the garden birds and their appearance throughout the country. In this sense the campaign is foreseen to contribute to the biodiversity monitoring system of Georgia by providing information about the distribution of bird species.

“Each pupil participated in the campaign with great pleasure. While preparing for the main event day, the pupils showed profound interest towards the birds distributed around their living areas. Events like this will ensure pupils’ fondness for birds, inspire them to learn about the bird diversity of their areas and make them good friends of birds. Taking care of our environment, diversity of birds, should be the everyday business not only of school pupils but also each of us. This should be proved not by simply talking purposelessly, but with action.” Lamara Mirtskhulava, Abkhazia #12 public school, 2009.

Results of the bird observation are published and distributed in secondary schools. Having feedback in the form of published results keeps the pupils motivated for participation in the campaign. Moreover, the publication can encourage other schools and make them willing to participate in the “Hour of Garden Birds” in future.

Campaign in 2009

The “Hour of Garden Birds” was first launched in spring 2009. Representatives of the Biodiversity Protection Service of the Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources of Georgia and the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ/CIM) organised trainings for secondary school teachers. Overall, more than 180 secondary schools were involved throughout the country. The local organisational and logistical arrangements were ensured by the regional branches of the Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources and the educational resource-centres of the Ministry of Education and Science.

Results of the campaign for 2009 demonstrated that around 3000 participants counted more than 138000 garden birds. The most frequently counted birds in 2009

were a house sparrow (22.271), a house martin (19.132) and a black-bird (11.767) while the bottom three ones were a common kestrel (311), a great black-headed gull (376) and a hawfinch (650).

“The pupils approached the task with delight and a sense of responsibility. Similar events will inevitably deepen their interest and affection to the nature.” Tsira Berekashvili, biology teacher, Tskaltubo school “Otsneba”, 2009.

The “Hour of Garden Birds” has definitely fuelled participants’ motivation to learn about the surrounding environment. Their feedback reflects the inspiration for getting closer to the nature and discovering more about it. The Georgian Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources will continue to implement the “Hour of Garden Birds” and is preparing for additional events in the Year of Biodiversity 2010.

