

## World Wetland Day 2010 in the Lower Volga

The most downstream section of the great Volga river – commonly indicated as the Lower Volga – is home to a designated Ramsar site “Volga Delta”.

Since 2007 the WWD is yearly celebrated throughout the Lower Volga, with the strong support of the UNDP/GEF project “Conservation of wetland biodiversity in the Lower Volga”. Key organizations for the celebration are the State Protected Areas located in the Lower Volga region – the Astrakhan State Nature Biosphere Zapovednik of the federal level (strict nature reserve), the State Nature Park of the regional level “Volga-Akhtuba Floodplain”, the State Nature Park of the Republic of Kalmykia, and the State Nature Zakaznik of the regional level “Ilmenno-Bugrovoy”. Throughout the years the initiative was also supported by a variety of regional and local authorities, NGOs as well as the business community.

The main purpose to celebrate the WWD in the Lower Volga is to attract community attention to the importance and values of the regional wetlands, as well as problems of wetland biodiversity conservation. The key target group for the awareness raising on wetlands was assessed as being school children.

The WWD 2010 was celebrated at three locations in the Lower Volga: in the Volga Delta and in the northern section of the Volga-Akhtuba floodplain, and in the central part of the Volga-Akhtuba floodplain.

In the **Northern Volga-Akhtuba floodplain**, the event was hosted by the Directorate of the State Nature Park of the regional level “Volga-Akhtuba Floodplain”, with much valued support from the Departments for Education of the Leninsk and Srednaya Akhtuba District Authorities.

Over two days – 4 & 5 February – the festivities took place in the Leninsk Municipal District and the Srednaya Akhtuba Municipal Districts. In total 14 municipal educational institutions participated in the festivities, 7 from the Leninsk District, 5 from the Srednaya Akhtuba District, and 1 from the city of Volzhskiy. The total 120 school children participated in the activities, supported by 20 teachers.

Three main activities were organized: the “Wall News Paper - Wetland Kingdom”, the knowledge competition “Know your Nature” and “Ecological Theatre”. As a warming up all participants listened to the presentation “World Wetland Day: problems and conservation”, which served as the basis for the knowledge competition.

The knowledge competition in the Leninsk District was won by School No.2 from Leninsk, in the Srednaya Akhtuba District by School No. 3 named after Gorky from Srednaya Akhtuba.

For the Wall News Paper competition the participants presented their individual projects to a jury. The jury named as winners School No.2 from Leninsk and School No. 3 named after Gorky from Srednaya Akhtuba. A special public prize was awarded to the Krasnosadskaya School for its project “Decrees of the Princess Frog”.

The Ecological Theatre competition was won by School No.1 from Leninsk and School No.1 from Srednaya Akhtuba, respectively.

In addition, all participants were awarded with Certificates and individual commemorations, while all schools were handed a note of thanks for their active support of the events. Prizes were provided by the UNDP/GEF project “Conservation of wetland biodiversity in the Lower Volga”.



In the **Volga Delta**, the 2010 WWD was organized by the Astrakhan State Nature Biosphere Zapovednik of the federal level and the State Nature Zakaznik of the regional level "Ilmenno-Bugrovoy" with the support of the Committee for Education & Science of the city of Astrakhan.

On February, 2, 150 young ecologists in the classes 8 and 9 (12-13 years) from 25 Astrakhan educational institutions gathered together with 30 teachers to participate in the Youth Knowledge Marathon "Know and Love Regional Nature".

The Marathon was opened by the Head of the Department of Scientific Methodologies, Committee for Education & Science of the city of Astrakhan, Ms Valentina Romanchizhina, who introduced the partner organizations and the guests as well as the jury. She also explained the goals and rules of the marathon. A word of welcome was also spoken by Ms Tatiana Gavrilova from the Astrakhan State Biosphere Reserve and the host School No. 48 of Astrakhan.

The marathon was divided in 5 sections – flora, fauna, regional environment, ecology & life, and nature conservation. The sections were prepared and guided by staff of the Astrakhan State Biosphere Reserve.

For teachers a separate event was hosted by MS Svetlana Dadonkina, staff member of the UNDP/GEF project "Conservation of wetland biodiversity in the Lower Volga". She told the audience about awareness raising activities of the project and presented the brochure "We are the Lower Volga". Mr. Rinat Suleymanov, Director of the State Nature Zakaznik of the regional level "Ilmenno-Bugrovoy" informed the teachers about activities on this Zakaznik. Participants showed special interest in the presentation of Ms Starikova and Mr. Zaichenko from the "House for Child Creativity" of the Ikryannoe District, who showed art objects made of natural materials by adults and children in their region.

The Director of the Museum of "Gazprom Exploitation Astrakhan", Ms Elena Kazakova, informed the audience on the company's awareness raising activities on patriotic and environmental education for school children. She presented the "Living Planet" ecological educational project, a joint initiative by "Gazprom Exploitation Astrakhan", schools, the Astrakhan Art Gallery and the Museum of the Astrakhan State Nature Biosphere Zapovednik, aimed at providing children in the junior classes with knowledge on the sustainable use of natural resources.

In each section of the marathon the jury awarded the winners with prizes and Certificates, provided by the UNDP/GEF project. The overall winners were determined as well, being the team "Caspian Rose" of Gymnasium No.4, the team "Nature Lovers" of the School No. 55, and the team "Junior Ecologists" from the School No. 39. All participants and visitors received information materials from the UNDP/GEF project "Conservation of wetland biodiversity in the Lower Volga".



In the **central part of the Volga-Akhtuba floodplain** the State Nature Park of the Republic of Kalmykia hosted the 2010 WWD festivities on 10 February in Tsagan Aman, happily supported by staff of the Youth Centre "Bogdo".

Seventy school children and 10 teachers from 5 schools in the Yustinskiy District gathered to commemorate the importance of the Volga wetlands for man and nature in steppe and semi-desert surrounding. The children participated in knowledge trivia games and competitions, testing and widening their knowledge on the importance and values of wetlands, problems of biodiversity conservation in their region, as well as alternatives for people to help conserve wetlands.

According to the jury, the Tsagan Aman Gymnasium No.1 was the overall winner of the competitive festivities. But besides the winning team, all participating teams were awarded with prizes and Certificates to thank them for their active participation. Further also presents and souvenirs were distributed, made available by the UNDP/GEF project "Conservation of wetland biodiversity in the Lower Volga".

