



REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
Government Administration for Nature and Environment Protection



Nature Park Kopački Rit

PROPOSAL FOR THE REGISTRATION INTO THE WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE LIST



Zagreb, March 1999.

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and Environment Protection

CONTENTS

1.	IDENTIFICATION	4
2.	EXPOSITION OF REGISTRATION	6
3.	DESCRIPTION	12
4.	ADMINISTRATION	25
5.	INFLUENCES ON THE COMPLEX	30
6.	MONITORING	35
7.	DOCUMENTATION	38
	- AUTHORISATION	40
8.	SIGNATURE OF THE MEMBER COUNTRY	43
9.	CREDITS	45
9.	APPENDIX A	46
10.	APPENDIX B	70



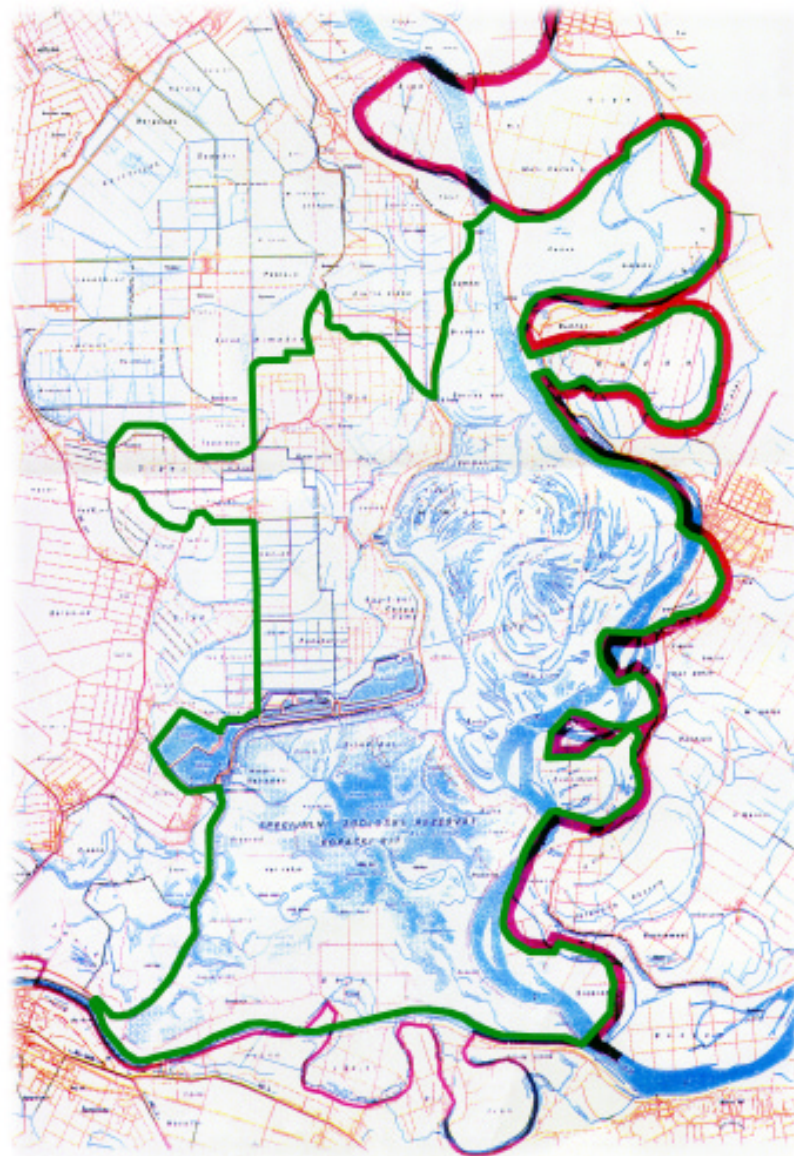
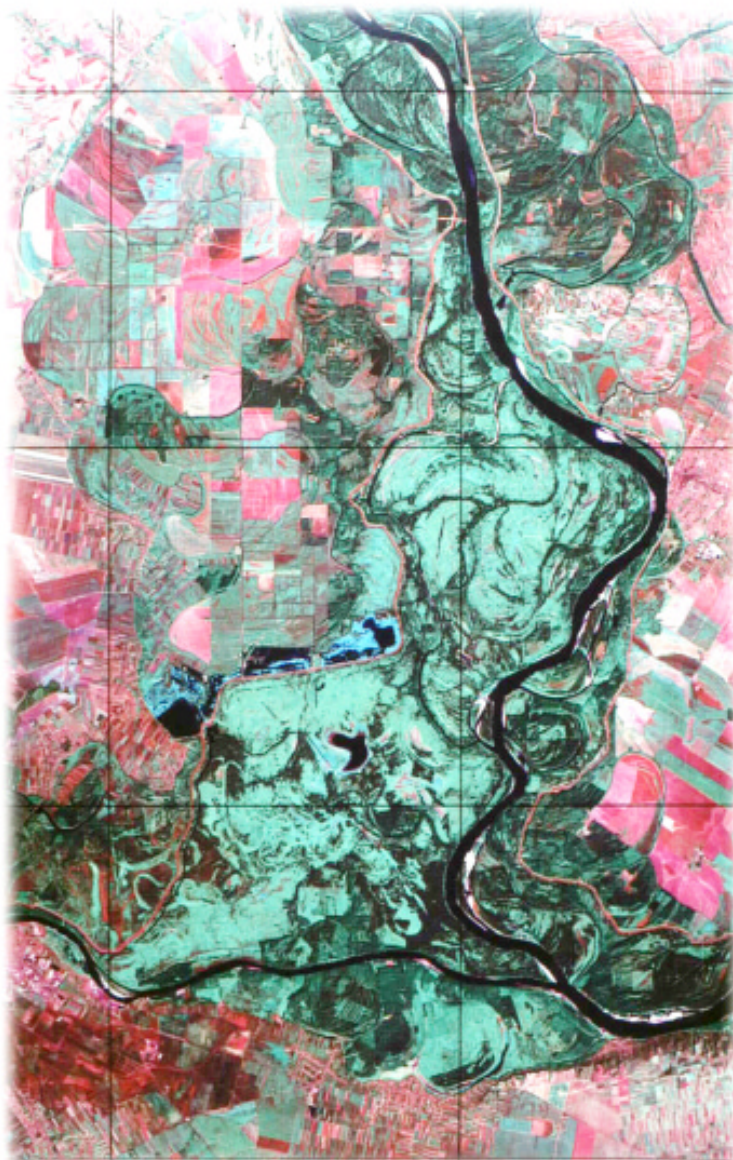
PROPOSAL FOR THE REGISTRATION INTO THE WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE LIST

2



MAP I & II

PROPOSAL FOR THE REGISTRATION INTO THE WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE LIST



I. IDENTIFICATION

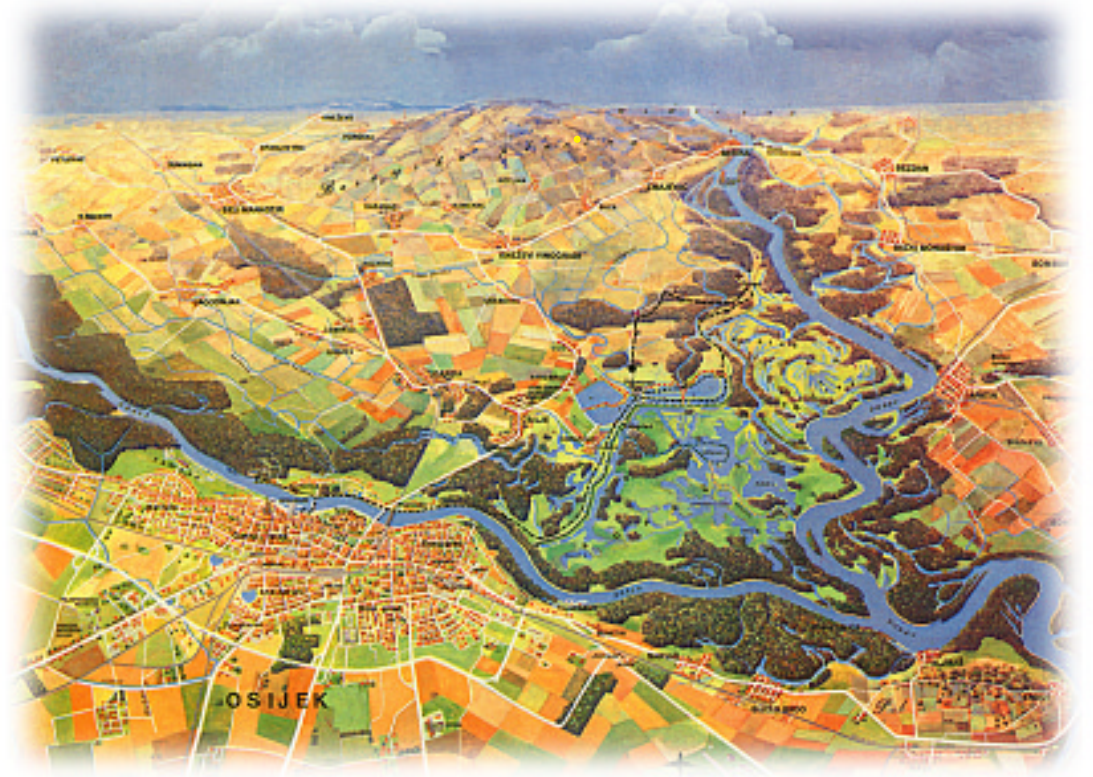
I. IDENTIFICATION

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PROPOSAL FOR THE REGISTRATION INTO THE WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE LIST

5

- Ia** COUNTRY
The Republic of Croatia
- Ib** STATE, PROVINCE, REGION
Baranja, Osijek-Baranja county
- Ic** NAME OF PROPERTY
Kopački rit
- Id** EXACT LOCATION ON MAP AND INDICATION OF GEOGRAFICAL CO-ORDINATES
Kopački rit is situated in the most south-eastern part of Baranja, Croatia, between latitudes of 45°38' N and 45°50' N, and longitudes of 18°40' E and 19°00' E, in the corner formed by the Drava and Danube rivers (Map III).
- Ie** MAPS AND/OR PLANS
Boundaries are shown on Map II (page 3).
- If** THE SURFACE OF THE AREA PROPOSED FOR REGISTRATION (ha) AND PROPOSED BUFFER ZONE (ha)
Kopački rit core area covers approximately 17,770 hectares, and the suggested buffer zone would cover approximately 30,000 hectares.



MAP III



2. EXPOSITION OF REGISTRATION

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PROPOSAL FOR THE REGISTRATION INTO THE WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE LIST

2a STATEMENT OF IMPORTANCE

Kopački Rit is:

- the outstanding example of current ecological processes in the formation and evolution of wetland ecosystems and plant and animal species;
- the area rich in remarkable natural phenomena and sites of extraordinary natural beauty and aesthetic value;
- the most important wetland of the Danube river basin in central Europe, with the most important wetland habitats for preservation of biological diversity *in situ*.

Because of its significance, Kopački Rit was designated as Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar Site) and Important Bird Area (IBA).

2b POSSIBLE COMPARATIVE DIVISION INTO SECTIONS

Due to human influence, especially after the industrial revolution, wetlands, throughout Europe have been considerably destroyed, or the quality of their habitats have been altered. Although not the biggest, Kopački rit is the best preserved and most important wetland site of the Danube river basin in Central Europe. More than 14,000 ha are still regularly flooded by the Danube, which makes Kopački Rit an extraordinary example of current ecological processes in formation and evolution of wetland ecosystems. Moreover, it is a site supporting exceptional biodiversity of species living in wetland ecosystems, especially vertebrates. There are 285 bird species, 55 species of mammals, 44 fish species, 11 species of amphibians and 10 reptile species recorded in the



Aerial view on the lower part

7



2. EXPOSITION OF REGISTRATION

PROPOSAL FOR THE REGISTRATION INTO THE WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE LIST

area so far.

Since many of those species are endangered, either globally or regionally, Kopački rit plays a significant role in the preservation of their European populations.

2c AUTHENTICITY / INTEGRITY

Despite numerous human activities in the Kopački rit area - from irrigation to hunting and fishing – one part has remained virtually intact, so the ecological and scenic values of the wetland and forest ecosystems have remained unchanged. As an example of negative antropogenic influence, we could mention the replacement of the natural forest species by plantations of Euro-American Poplar.

2d CRITERIA ACCORDING TO WHICH THE REGISTRATION IS SUGGESTED

(and the explanation of registration congruently with them)
The Kopački rit area should be listed on the World Heritage List because of following criteria and facts:

Criterion 1)

The area contains all linking and dependant elements that comprise wetland ecosystems:

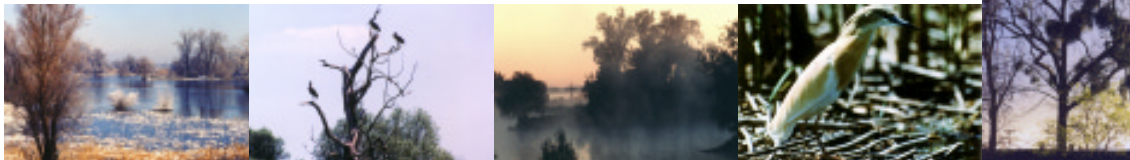
- due to the fact that marshes and forests can be found in close proximity, there is a host of different plant species, from phytoplankton, to White water-lilies, Common Reed, Giant



Blue-tailed Damselfly
(*Ischnura elegans*)



Rutilus pigus virgo



2. EXPOSITION OF REGISTRATION

PROPOSAL FOR THE REGISTRATION INTO THE WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE LIST

Reed, Willow, Poplar and Oak forests, as well as a large number of animal species.

- since this area is flooded for about three months a year, and it is dry for the remaining nine months, very interesting ecological processes occur, and there is a great competition between aquatic and terrestrial species.
- because of hydrological conditions the bio-productivity is twofold in this area, the first part includes aquatic organisms, such as fish, and the second part terrestrial organisms, such as Deer, Wild Boar, etc.
- this area has a rich and diverse flora and fauna, i.e. great and valuable biodiversity. More than 400 vertebrate species and 400 vascular plant species were recorded so far.

Criterion 2)

The area is big enough and it contains basic elements of all the processes that are necessary for long-term conservation of wetland ecosystems:

- Kopački rit is the centre of the central European population of the White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*). About 20 pairs of those eagles regularly nest in this relatively small area.
- this area is the biggest natural spawning ground for Danube fish in central Europe, with 44 freshwater fish species registered so far.



White-tailed Eagle
(*Haliaeetus albicilla*)



2. EXPOSITION OF REGISTRATION

PROPOSAL FOR THE REGISTRATION INTO THE WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE LIST

Criterion 3)

The area contains habitats that enable the existence of a large number of plants and species:

- Kopački rit supports prime habitats for Red Deer (*Cervus elaphus*) population, which have worldwide known strong and well-developed antlers.
- this area supports habitats for rare or endangered species of mammals, such as the Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*), Stoat (*Mustela erminea*), or Whiskered and Natterer's Bats (*Myotis mystacinus*, *Myotis natter*). Here is also the eastern border of the Field Vole (*Microtus agrestis*) distribution.
- Kopački rit has an extremely rich bird fauna, with 285 species registered so far.
- this area is the only nesting site for the Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*) in Croatia.
- in this area there are situated the largest colonies of the Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) and Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) in Croatia. During 1998, 994 pairs of Grey Herons and 1624 pairs of Cormorants nested in Kopački rit.
- during autumn migrations, the largest concentrations of the Black Storks (*Ciconia nigra*) and Spoonbills (*Platalea leucorodia*) in central Europe can be observed in Kopački rit.
- during winter period, the largest concentrations of the White-fronted, Bean and the Greylag Geese (*Anser albifrons*, *A. fabalis*, *A. anser*) and ducks (*Anatidae*) in Croatia gather in this area. In January 1999, 14,000 geese and 12,000 ducks



Red deer in Kopački rit
(*Cervus elaphus*)



Wild cat on ice
(*Felis silvestris*)



2. EXPOSITION OF REGISTRATION

PROPOSAL FOR THE REGISTRATION INTO THE WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE LIST

were counted.

- the new species of Hymenoptera, *Cephalonomia nidicola* (Szelényi, 1944) was described in Kopački rit.
- the new species of blue-green algae, *Rhabdoderma bellyense* (Hortobágyi, 1944) and a new variety of the algae *Anabaema scheremetievi* Elenk var. *hungarica* (Hortobágyi, 1994) were also described in Kopački rit.
- a special form of shellfish *Unio tumidus kopacensis* (Tadić, 1962), lives in Kopački rit.

Criterion 4)

Spatial plan and management plans are being drawn up and they will be implemented within a year. Funds for the elaboration of these plans are secured.

Criterion 5)

The area has been under legal protection since 1967. The more effective protection was ensured by the establishment of the Management Office that manages the Nature Park, and the implementation of some normative acts, such as the Regulations on the Internal Order in the Kopački rit Nature Park (attached).



White fronted geese
(*Anser albifrons*)



Aspro streber



3. DESCRIPTION

3. DESCRIPTION

3. DESCRIPTION

Criterion 6)

The area is one of the most important sites for the preservation of biodiversity of the Danube basin in central Europe. Therefore it was designated as Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar Site) and an Important Bird Area (IBA).

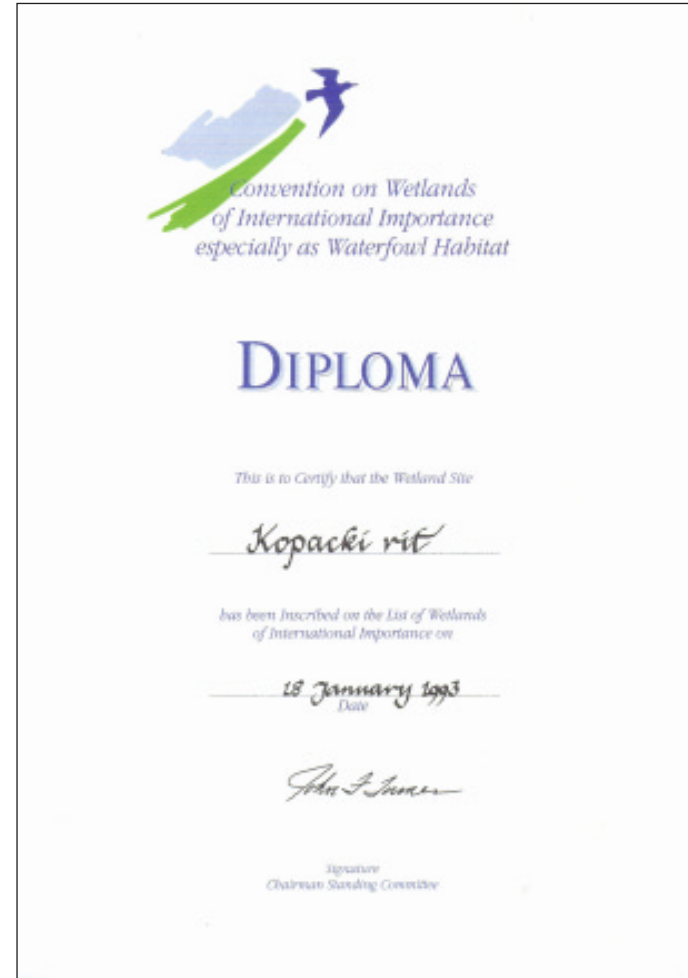
3a

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

Kopački rit is situated in the Baranja region, Osijek-Baranja county, in the corner formed by the Danube and Drava rivers. Kopački rit is actually a floodplain between the two big rivers. The area is covered with extensive reedbeds, Willow, Poplar and Oak forests and streaked with ridges, ponds, shallow lakes and marshes.

Specific water regime

The entire area is at 80-86 m above the sea level, which means that the major part of the Reserve is under the influence of the middle regime of the Danube waters. However, Kopački Rit depends on the specific water regimes of both the Danube and Drava rivers. Great amounts of snow and ice start melting in the Alps in the spring, causing an increase of the water level of both rivers. Since the Drava has a shorter and straighter stream, its excess water comes as a water wave to the mouth, where the Danube can still take it. In the same time, the Danube meanders in central Europe, and when its water wave comes to the mouth, it



Kopački rit is a Ramsar site



3. DESCRIPTION

meets the obstacle created by the excess Drava water. The Danube river bed cannot take the excess water, so it flows out through a system of canals and floods Kopački rit. By flooding and receding from the wetland, the water forms a specific profile that has not been researched enough so far. In a relatively small area we can find ponds and ridges next to each other. Therefore, ten different habitats can be found in that small area – from open water, reedbeds and poplar forest, up to oak forests. The diversity of plant communities is favourable for the rich and varied animal life. Floods usually last 99 days a year, out of which the major part of the protected area is flooded for at least 32 days (Mikuska, 1979). The high water levels are usually recorded from February to July, and the dry season lasts from August to January the following year.

During extensive floods, the large area covered with shallow and warm water, as well as the abundance of food and under water vegetation are ideal for fish spawning, which makes Kopački rit, together with the delta of Danube, the most important spawning ground of this river. The abundance of fish attracts a large number of birds, especially wading birds that nest in this area in great numbers.

At the end of the summer when the water recedes into the Danube, vegetation that provides food for big ruminants like Red Deer (*Cervus elaphus*) and Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*), starts to grow rapidly. At that time, Kopački rit is an important station for migratory waterfowls, that use the area for resting and feeding.



PROPOSAL FOR THE REGISTRATION INTO THE WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE LIST



Unique relief formed by the water



3. DESCRIPTION

Vegetation

Intermittent flooding of the area affects the development and spreading of vegetation. Areas of deeper water are covered in the European White water lilies (*Nymphaea alba*), Yellow water lilies (*Nymphaea luteum*) or *Nymphaoides peltata*. In shallower ponds and marshes, the dominant components are Duckweed (*Lemna minor*, *L. trisulca*) and *Spirodela polyrrhiza*. Temporary flooded areas contain big complexes of the Reeds (*Phragmites australis*) and Common and Narrow-leaf Cattail (*Typha latifolia*, *T. angustifolia*), and recently *Typha minor*. The major part of the wetland is dominated by the White Willow (*Salix alba*) forests, whereas at higher elevations there are forests of Black and White Poplar (*Populus nigra*, *P. alba*). The highest grounds, usually not reached by frequent floods, are covered by Oak forests (*Quercus robur*) (Topić and Panjković 1991).

Fauna

Because of its habitat diversity, Kopački rit has the abundance and richness of animal species. The fauna of the Danube and Drava wetlands has been relatively well studied. The research on particular animal group depended on the enthusiasm of individual scientists, as well as economic activities that were dominant in the area (such as fishing and hunting). Out of different groups of invertebrates, 39 round worms species (*NEMATODA*), 62 species of *ROTATORIA*, 16 leech species (*HIRUNDINEA*), 28 snail species (*MOLLUSCA*) (Gec and Mikulić 1992; Mikuska 1982)



White water lily
(*Nymphaea alba*)



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3. DESCRIPTION

have been registered so far in Kopački rit. Insect fauna includes 60 butterfly species (*LEPIDOPTERA*) (Merdić et al. 1991), 7 mosquito species (*CUCULIDAĚ*) (Merdić 1991), as well as 30 species of horseflies (*TABANIDAĚ*). Compared to the invertebrates fauna, the fauna of vertebrates has been extensively studied. 44 fish species (*PISCES*), 11 species of amphibians (*AMPHIBIA*), 10 species of reptiles (*REPTILIA*), 285 bird species (*AVES*) and 54 species of mammals (*MAMMALIA*) (Mikuska 1979, 1998) have been registered so far.

Kopački Rit is of great importance for the fish stock of the Danube river. Namely, this area is the biggest and the most significant spawning ground for the Danube fish in the Pannonian plain. In spring, all fish species of the Danube and Drava rivers spawn, feed and grow in the wetland. As the flood waters retreat, most of them return to the rivers out of necessity, where they wait for the next flood to enter the wetland again.

Since birds are the most numerous and the best studied animals in the area, they are the best examples of the values of these ecosystems. Particularly interesting are colonial waterbirds. The most famous colony is the site called 'Banja', where there has been a mixed colony of Grey Herons (*Ardea cinerea*), Purple Herons (*Ardea purpurea*), Little Egrets (*Egretta garzetta*), Squacco Herons (*Ardeola ralloides*) and Black-crowned Night-herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) for twenty years now. There were also nesting attempts by the Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) and the European Spoonbill



Colony of cormorants from above



3. DESCRIPTION

(*Platalea leucorodia*).

Twenty pairs of White-tailed Eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) nest in Kopački Rit and surrounding areas. Those magnificent big birds nest on old Black Poplar trees at the height of 20-30 meters and there is one pair per 3,000 ha of the wetland. Other endangered European bird species that are breeding in Kopački Rit include 10 pairs of Black Storks (*Ciconia nigra*), 4-5 pairs of Sacer Falcons (*Falco cherrug*), 40 pairs of Little Egrets (*Egretta garzetta*) and 100 pairs of Greylag Geese (*Anser anser*). Kopački Rit is a "heaven" for Black Storks. During the migration period, hundreds of them can be seen and Kopački Rit is one of the most important sites for the preservation of the Black Stork in Europe. 90% of the former common nesting species - Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*) population - has disappeared in Europe. Therefore it is classified as globally threatened species and it is the focal point for many ornithological conservation projects. In Kopački Rit, however, several hundred pairs are regularly nesting. Kopački Rit is also famous for large nesting colonies of several hundreds of Black-headed Gulls (*Larus ridibundus*), Whiskered Terns (*Chlidonias hybrida*), Black Terns (*Chlidonias nigra*) and Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*). A big colony of 1,000-2,000 nests of Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) is the largest in this region. During spring and autumn migrations, this area is an important resting site for many other wading birds. For example, every autumn more than 1000 European Spoonbills (*Platalea leucorodia*), about 500 Great White Egrets (*Egretta alba*),

PROPOSAL FOR THE REGISTRATION INTO THE WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE LIST



Grey Heron
(*Ardea cinerea*)



Proterorhinus marmoratus



3. DESCRIPTION

many species of Sandpipers (*Tringa sp.*), Lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*), etc. could be seen on the shores of Kopačko Lake. During winter migrations, Waterfowl (*ANSERIFORMES*), usually visit the Park in great numbers, and it is not unusual to see 30 to 50 thousand birds in one location. Less numerous, but still regular, migratory birds are species such as the Caspian Tern (*Sterna caspia*), Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*), the Curlews (*Numenius arquata*) and many others. A few Spotted Eagles (*Aquila clanga*), regularly winters in the wetland.

The remarkable value of Kopački Rit is further increased by the presence of rare and very rare bird species, including the following that were once or more than once observed in the Park: Great Northern Diver (*Gavia immer*), Slavonian Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*), Dalmatian and White Pelicans (*Pelecanus crispus*, *P. onocrotalus*), Lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*), Barheaded Goose (*Anser indicus*), Red-breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*), Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*), Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*), Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*), Common Scooter (*Melanitta nigra*), Velvet Scooter (*Melanitta fusca*), Dotterel (*Eudromias morinellus*), Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*), Bartailed Godwit (*Limosa laponica*), Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*), Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*), Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*), Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*), Gull-billed Tern (*Sterna nilotica*), Rose-coloured Starling (*Sturnus roseus*), Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*), and Snow bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*).

PROPOSAL FOR THE REGISTRATION INTO THE WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE LIST

18



Huso huso



3. DESCRIPTION

The influence of Kopački Rit on birds can be proven by the fact that sometimes there are rather unusual guests, such as the following species that were observed at given dates: Wallcreeper (*Tichodroma muraria*) – observed on 26 October 1982 and on 26 March 1984; Nutcracker (*Nucifraga caryocatactes*) – caught on 20 October 1899; Ring Ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*) – observed on 4 April 1889 and on 22 March 1975; Rock Thrush (*Monticola saxalitis*) – observed on 4 September 1889; and Alpine Accentor (*Prunella collaris*) – observed on 21 October 1987. All the above mentioned species belong to mountain or high-altitude fauna.

When it comes to mammals (*MAMMALIA*), it must be pointed out that deers that live in the area are famous for their strong and well-formed antlers. In hunting circles this deers are known as the “Belje stags” whose antlers are highly prized international exhibitions. One of the trophies even have held the world champion title for many years. Populations of the European Otter (*Lutra lutra*) – the species that is a symbol of the endangered fauna in Europe, and Wild Cat (*Felis silvestris*) are also significant in the area. Other mammal species include Stoat (*Mustela erminea*), Pine Marten (*Martes martes*), many bat and rodent species, including the Fat Dormouse (*Glis glis*).

3b HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

Based on the written document from 1212 by which king Andrija II granted the northern part of Kopački Rit to Poth



Kopački rit on the old map



3. DESCRIPTION

and that describes the boundaries and names of different parts of the wetland, it can be concluded that this area has changed very little in the past 780 years.

The first recorded research was conducted between 1684 and 1699, when the Italian count Marsillia studied the bird fauna of the area. The abundance of animal and plant species has attracted many famous biologists, like Heckel - the curator of the Vienna Museum, Zelborn, Brehm, Homeyer, Hodek, Mojsisovics – the ichthyologist and ornithologist of the Ornithological Centre in Budapest, Hermann, Szikla, Custo, etc. The renowned biologist Heckel conducted research on fish and fisheries in Kopački Rit. In 1878, acting on a suggestion by Zelborn and Hodek, the famous Brehm, accompanying prince Rudolf, son of Franz Joseph, visited the area of Baranja and Kopački Rit. The university professor Mojsisovics of Graz, was conducting research on birds and other vertebrates of this area from 1882 to 1895, resulting in publication of a dozen papers.

The protection of the area was mentioned for the first time between the two world wars. In 1943, the biological station "Albertina" was founded within the Budapest National Museum and the journal under the same name was published. The most famous biologists were involved in its work:

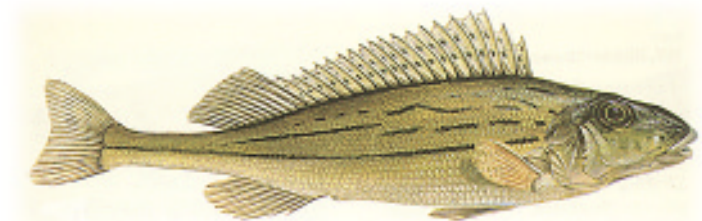
Hommonay, Hórvath, Hortobágyi, Pongrácz, Wagner, as well as the world-famous hunter Széchenyi. Hortobágyi described the new species of blue-green algae

PROPOSAL FOR THE REGISTRATION INTO THE WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE LIST

20



Wild Boar
(*Sus scrofa*)



Acerina schraetzer



3. DESCRIPTION

Rhabdoderma bellyeense found in the Bilje Lake (Hortobágyi 1944). Szelényi described a new species of *Hymenoptera Cephalonomia nidicola*, (Szelényi 1944).

The initiative to designate Kopački Rit a national park was first taken in that period.

After World War II, Kopački Rit was going through different phases of research, from unorganised and sporadic ones, to organised research within the Operative and Scientific Institute "Ilija Đuričić" (1964-1971), or the Scientific Commission of the Federal Republic of Croatia.

Bognar studied the geomorphology of Baranja. Numerous studies of physicochemical quality of water have been conducted by several authors. Phytoplankton, flora and plant species have also been studied. Special attention was paid to the study of vertebrates, birds, but also of mammals, amphibians, reptiles and fish. The fauna of invertebrates was less studied. Wagner noted that snails and shells in Kopački Rit are of big dimensions. Tadić described a new form of the shell species *Unio tumidus kopacensis* from Kopačko Lake. Due to a remarkable diversity of flora and fauna, a limited area of Kopački Rit (6,234 ha) was designated a Managed Nature Area in 1967, and in 1976, a Special Zoological Reserve. The wider area of Kopački Rit (10,770 ha) was designated a Nature Park. The Kopački Rit Nature Park management office was founded by the decision of the Government of the Republic of Croatia on 11 September 1997, with the aim of conservation, preservation and management of the area (The Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia, 96/1997).

PROPOSAL FOR THE REGISTRATION INTO THE WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE LIST

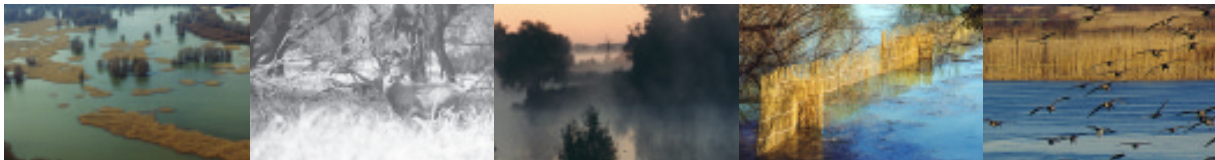
21



Tree frog
(*Hyla arborea*)



Threatened bird species in Kopački rit:
Red-breasted Goose
(*Branta ruficollis*)



3. DESCRIPTION

3c THE FORM AND THE DATE OF THE MOST RECENT DOCUMENTS ON THE COMPLEX

The latest ownership documents are stored in the Cadastral and Geodetic Office in Beli Manastir. At the moment, the entire area of the Nature Park is owned by the Republic of Croatia. Only a small part of arable land is temporarily assigned to local population.

3d THE PRESENT CONDITION OF PRESERVATION

In 1998, after the Republic of Croatia had successfully reintegrated the area of the Nature Park, the following state was found:

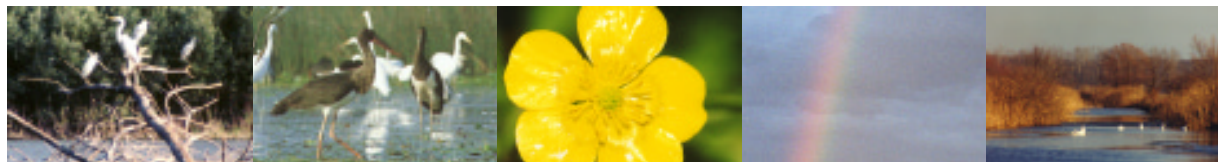
Despite the negative influence of war, lack of understanding of some parties that work and use natural resources of the Park, illegal sport anglers and poachers, or other individuals causing fires by burning reed, the state of the Special Zoological Reserve and Nature Park Kopački Rit can be considered good, or even very good.

The Park has a viable population of Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*), and the number of Red Deer (*Cervus elaphus*) is rising. The Pine Martens (*Martes martes*), Eurasian Badgers (*Meles meles*), Wild Cats (*Felis silvestris*) and, of course, the Red Foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) have been observed many times. The tracks of the European Common Otters (*Lutra lutra*) have been regularly seen.

One of the main natural richnesses of this area is a great abundance of birds, especially of rare and endangered bird species. White-tailed Eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) have been



Fish ponds and Kopački rit are natural complements



3. DESCRIPTION

seen throughout a year. Even though, the exact number of their nests could not be determined due to inaccessibility of the ground, according to the visits to some of the nests and the observation frequency, it can still be concluded that their population has not changed since before the war. The same can be concluded about the Black Stork population (*Ciconia nigra*). Nesting of about 900 pairs of Grey Herons (*Ardea cinerea*) and 1,624 pairs of Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) has been recorded during 1998., these being their biggest colonies in Croatia. Kopački Rit is also the only nesting site for Greylag Geese (*Anser anser*), who also had a successful nesting season. The nesting of the Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*) has been recorded for the first time in this area. The Sacer Falcon (*Falco cherrug*) and the globally endangered species Pygmy Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pygmaeus*) have been observed several times. However, nesting of some wading birds, especially gulls and terns, did not take place due to an extremely dry season and low water level in spring and early summer.

There were no dramatic changes when it comes to other bird species. Quite on the contrary, a large number of birds seem to be returning to now quiet and peaceful area of the Nature Park, especially to the Special Zoological Reserve and fish ponds "Podunavlje". The flocks of several hundreds of Great White Egrets (*Egretta alba*) and about 200 European Spoonbills (*Platalea leucorodia*) could regularly be seen in the Park throughout the whole year. As usual, Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*) spend the winter in the area. Species rare to



Siberian Iris
(*Iris sibirica*)



Misgurnus fossilis

