



Photo: István Nagy

The plantations of the alien locust and pine will be converted into woods of indigenous tree species

Habitat reconstruction: The invasive plants (black locust, tree of heaven, black cherry, common milkweed) that spread aggressively in the steppe oak wood, supplanting other species, will be removed and replaced by saplings of native species (pedunculate oak, pubescent oak, white and grey poplar).

Game exclusion experiment: Healthy young oaks are almost entirely missing from the Nagykőrös woods. In parts of the project area that will be fenced to keep out game, we will examine whether the difficulties of natural regeneration of oaks are solely due to decreased ground water level, or the mitigation of damage caused by game can help to solve this problem.

Monitoring: We monitor the impact of every nature conservation activity and observe the changes in the biological state of the territory. The results of the research will be published on our homepage, in our publications and at conferences.

Outdoor educational centre: The day-boarder camp in the Pálfája wood will be refurbished and converted into an environmental educational centre where 'Train the trainer' education programmes, outdoor school classes, family programmes and summer camps will be organised. The programmes of the Pálfája Educational Centre are open to every inquirer.



Photo: Réka Menráth

The Pálfája Educational Centre looks forward to receiving groups from the autumn of 2008

Nature trail: The oak wood near Nagykőrös is one of the most beautiful hiking places in the region. A nature trail will be built in the Pálfája wood that, together with a guide booklet, will introduce the wildlife of the steppe oak woods so as to familiarise tourists with the values of the area.

Natura 2000 management plan: Based on previous research and the results of the LIFE project, we will develop a long-term Natura 2000 management plan for the "Steppe oak woods of Nagykőrös" site, which can be of help in the protection of other similar habitats.

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Life on sand

Steppe oak woods of Nagykőrös
LIFE-Nature project on the Great Hungarian Plain

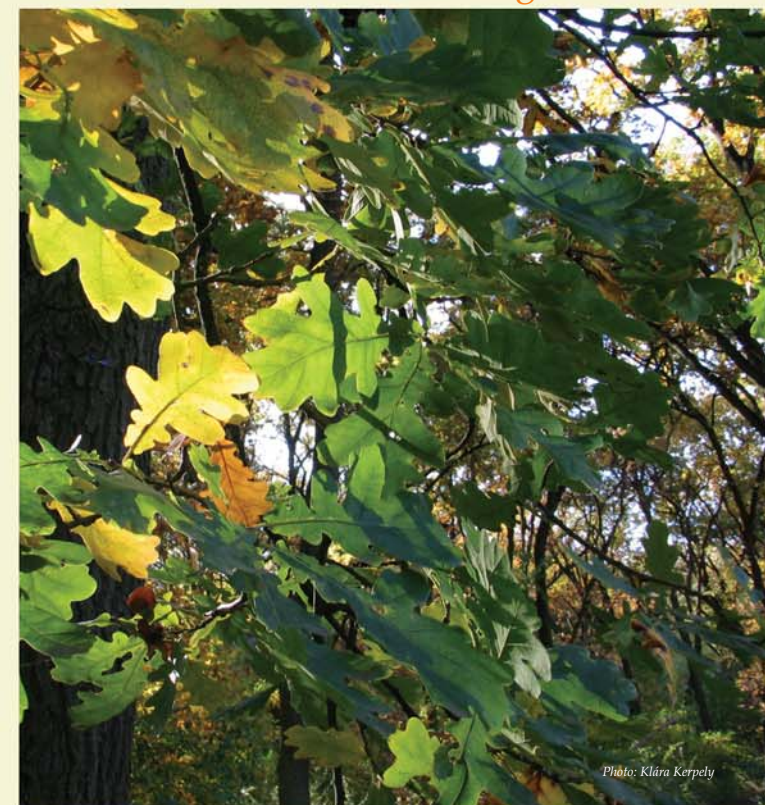


Photo: Klára Kerpely

More information about the steppe woodland of Nagykőrös and about the LIFE-Nature project is available at www.pusztaitolgyesek.hu.



Nagykőrös



WWF



Photo: Zsolt Baranyai

Thousands-year-old landscape: steppe oak woods near Nagykőrös

The long-passed wealth of the Great Hungarian Plain

Travelling around and seeing the present landscape of the Great Hungarian Plain, one would not think that it once was covered by vast forests and grasslands with scattered woods (the steppe woods or wooded steppe). This landscape captured the imagination of our ancestors when they arrived to the Carpathian Basin, and this has been shaped by our history for more than a thousand years.

As a consequence of river regulations, drainage and the increases in intensive forestry and arable farming, there are only a few small areas left where the original vegetation, unique in Europe, still remains.



Photo: Béla Matkó

The main threats to the European roller are the loss of its habitat and the diminishing of the insects that provide its food



Photo: István Nagy

'Pálfája': 400-500 year-old trees can be found in the woods near Nagykőrös

The steppe woodlands of the Hungarian Plain provide home for more than a hundred protected species, including the strictly protected *Colchicum arenarium*, *Dianthus diutinus* and European roller (*Coracias garrulus*).

The last remains of the steppe woods

The mosaic of oak forests and sand steppes located near the town of Nagykőrös is the largest steppe woodland in the 'Duna-Tisza köze' (the region between the Danube and Tisza rivers), remaining in its most natural state. Local people are deservedly proud of this heritage.

However, present intensive forest management, the spread of invasive plants and an excess of game stock threaten the last remains of steppe oak woods, which are vulnerable anyway, due to the decreased ground water level.

How can we preserve this unique landscape for our grandchildren?

The Duna-Ipoly National Park Directorate, the Local Government of the Town of Nagykőrös and WWF



Natura 2000 and LIFE-Nature programme: European-level protection of threatened species and habitats

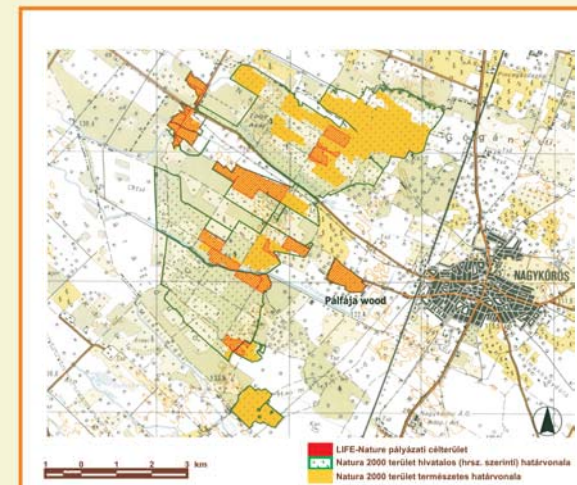


All member states of the European Union nominated particularly valuable habitats to be qualified as Natura 2000 areas. Additionally, the EU provides financial resources for preservation of natural values from its LIFE-Nature funds. The 'Steppe oak woods of Nagykőrös' site is part of the Natura 2000 network, this is why it was possible for us to submit a proposal for its conservation.

Hungary developed a five-year project for conservation of the steppe oak woods of Nagykőrös, the refuge of many rare species. Subsidies from LIFE-Nature funds will enable implementation of the project between 2006 and 2011.

Activities of the 'Steppe oak woods of Nagykőrös' LIFE project

Everlasting forest: Based on our contract with the private forest owners, in the steppe woods areas that are in the best condition only nature conservation activities will be practised for a period of 90 years. Thus, they will be protected from clear cutting forest management for nearly a century and instead they will serve solely conservation and welfare purposes.



Nagykőrös is easily accessible by train and road; the Pálfája wood is less than 4 km from the centre of town