

Developing Nature-friendly Management of Grasslands in Órség National Park, Hungary, with the Participation of Farmers

Transfer project in the framework of the Klaus Toepfer Fellowship Programme

István Szentirmai

Órség National Park Directorate, Hungary

E-Mail: i.szentirmai@gmail.com

Executive Summary

Hay meadows and their endangered plant and butterfly species are one of the main conservation targets in Órség National Park. These habitats are the result of centuries long traditional management, and appropriate management is necessary for their preservation in the future. However, private owners are often reluctant to follow conservation prescriptions, which puts meadows and their wildlife under threat. In this project I attempted to tackle two of the main causes for inadequate meadow management in a pilot area of the national park, the village of Nagyrákos: (i) the attitude of farmers toward natural values and their conservation, and (ii) low profitability of nature-friendly management. I made farmers aware of the various ecosystem services provided by their meadows and the role of management practices in maintaining these services. Together with the farmers, we developed suitable and acceptable management prescriptions. I also drew the attention of the local government of the village to the importance of meadows and won them for their maintenance. Furthermore, I promoted meadows and their benefits for citizens and visitors of Nagyrákos on the internet. As a result of the project, farmers applied conservation measures on one of their meadows and consequently enhanced the abundance of butterflies. These measures can be incorporated into agri-environment schemes in the future, and contribute to the economic profitability of nature-friendly meadow management. The local government issued an official statement in which it acknowledged the benefits of meadows for the community, and committed itself to the maintenance of these habitats. The website of the village was complemented with the description of natural values and ecosystem services of meadows, which is expected to enhance meadows' valuation both among local citizens and visitors. I plan to gradually extend the project to the entire national park and try to raise the awareness of farmers and local communities for the importance of hay meadows. I will also work together with farmers on improving agri-environment schemes and developing alternative incentives to increase the profitability of nature-friendly meadow management. Though started on a very small scale, I expect that my project will significantly contribute to the preservation of the rich biodiversity of hay meadows in Órség National Park.