



European Stork Villages

New directions in the protection of the white stork

In many European countries, the white stork is considered to bring good luck. In spite of this, in a lot of parts of the continent, the bringer of children is extinct, or greatly reduced in numbers. All the good will for it has not managed to stop its habitats being reduced in many of the river basins of Europe. The award of the title of *European Stork Village* then is going new ways. In every country in which the stork lives, one place is given the title as an encouragement to others. The campaign has shown that, with the involvement of the inhabitants, even today it is possible to preserve the habitats of the white stork.

Up to six young

A stork census in the Croatian village of Čigoć in 1986 showed the remarkable result that 40 pairs had 158 young. This amounts on average to practically four per nest. This was quite amazing, because at the same time many reports in the scientific press were being published about the difficulties experienced by white storks in the wintering places. Although the Čigoć storks flew to Africa for the winter together with the white storks from Western Europe, their nesting successes were far greater. That year, two pairs managed to raise six young. This meant that the parents had to catch about four kilograms of frogs, tadpoles, grasshoppers, bjelouski and other food a day.

The example of Čigoć was conclusive: for the survival of the white heron, what was crucial was that the feeding areas be in the immediate vicinity of the nesting places.

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For while the mature birds are feeding their young, they have to move only a few kilometres from the nests. The war slowed down the establishment of a protective zone around the village. The award of the title *European Stork Village* to the place that was so important for the protection of the white stork meant a sudden change in the situation. Since 1994, Čigoć has been a *European Stork Village*. The Lonjsko Polje Nature Park once again became a priority in nature conservation work in Croatia, Čigoć, a small village on an old oxbow of the Sava, became a nature and culture monument of the country. Since this time the place has celebrated *Stork Day* every year, and several thousand people are gladdened by the little wooden houses with their storks' nests. Only 124 people live in Čigoć in the summer, sharing the space with about 300 storks.

Stork Village – model for habitat protection

The bulls in Extremadura, horses along the Sava, pigs in the course of the brook in front of the Romanian village of Andrid are signs of the great pasturelands, a feature of traditional agriculture that offers the white stork good conditions for life, but only in a few places in Europe any more. The meadows producing the hay necessary for winter fodder are alive with grasshoppers and other little creatures. The white stork follows the labourers who disturb the denizens of the grass as they mow, clearing the stork's path to mice and frogs. This is just what the parent storks need, for they have to supply the nest with several kilograms of food a day.

Storks – good indicators of the cultural landscape

Storks are a good indicator of the state of health of the cultural landscape. Where there are storks, then agriculture is sustainable enough to support many animal and plant species. If the habitat is favourable, a stork pair will defend their nest and feeding grounds in the area of the village. However, in optimum areas, storks will create colonies. In Čigoć, for example, the storks are spoiled for choice, since there are about 5,000 hectares of meadow and pastureland around the little place. Fifty two pairs occupy the roofs and look together for their sustenance on the spacious riparian region. Other villages, like Polana on the Mura, also have extensive meadowlands around them.

White stork colonies – features of a rich cultural landscape

In other countries too there are concentrations of storks such as to indicate a highly qualitative landscape. Thus, in 1994, EURONATUR decided to give one village or commune the title of *European Stork Village*. The purpose of the campaign is to show communes in what way they can best protect the nature in their region. In this, the stork is a bridge between landscape and village – the storks build their nests on house, and fly for food to the agricultural areas in the neighbourhood. While they are timid outside, and do not allow people to come near them, they will still stay on the roofs while, as in Rühstadt, 10,000 or more people will gather to celebrate them. Not one great bird lives so close to humankind, or is so deeply embedded in our way of thinking, as the stork.

Stork days

EURONATUR has so far awarded the title *European Stork Village* to six villages or communes. In all the villages, celebrations are held, and the people express their gladness that the stork lives among them. The celebrations are linked with many initiatives and good ideas that arise in the collaboration among the heads of local government, conservation workers, schools, ordinary people, and associations. Among the many activities linked with the celebration of stork day, there are youth work, cultural programmes, cooperation with schools, exhibitions and decorations given to highly deserving conservation workers. Small villages like Andrid in Romania and Čigoć in Croatia thus become a cynosure for the whole nation. Every years, Malpartida de Caceres holds an international photographic competition and the best photographs of the white stork are selected. In Rühstadt, where the celebration of Stork Day has been being held for more than ten years, the whole region takes part. In Polana the street is closed to traffic, and people dance. During the celebration of Stork Day, the distinctive features of the region are put on display. In Hungary, Nagybaom shows with its ecological partnership with the town of Schortens in Lower Saxony that cultural exchange can get an interesting incentive, for example, by the building of biological devices for effluent treatment or through work in the regional environmental protection centre.

Nature Protection

Involving the stork in the life of the commune necessarily means the maintenance of marsh, meadow and pasture areas important for the feeding of the bird. European stork villages are taking the lead with their good examples. Malpartida, Nagybaom, Polana and Andrid have set up newly protected areas or are at work on the proclamation of protected areas. Rühstadt is the centre of the Brandenburg nature park called Eibtalau. In the area of Čigoć there never were any enclosures, so that the meadows close to the village have been preserved. Further steps that need to be taken for the survival of the white stork are the reconstruction of the marsh areas and the building of information centres. This already exists in Čigoć and in Rühstadt (Nature Park, associations).

Public relations

The award of titles for the first six stork villages has shown that through these model communes important experience about nature protection can be exchanged. That is why it is worth giving the titles to communes in other countries as well, to build up a network connecting the habitats of the white stork in Europe. Commune authorities, citizens and organisations who have worked excellently together in each stork village have already won plaudits. They have to be enabled to have cooperation with other communes. Small communes, such as Andrid and Čigoć, also have to get in addition support for their nature protection work and to encourage public participation. Environmental protection and getting young people in touch with nature in their own village and in the whole of Europe can be done ideally through the stork.

Next steps: A Network of Stork Villages

2000, during the 6th anniversary, the European Stork Village Čigoć and the Nature Park Lonjsko Polje initiated a *STORKNET-INITIATIVE*. Four European Villages Stork were present and the representatives agreed that that conservation of the White Stork will be successful only through sustainable management of its habitat and with awareness rising. Therefor they alerted governments and European institutions, in order

- to support politically and financially our efforts,
- to enable sustainable management activities in important stork areas,
- to share an European wide habitat understanding.

Although some villages did receive funds and projects have been implemented during the last years, a special program for the network of stork villages has not been obtained. Malpartida and Rühstädt have made the most promising steps. Both stork villages applied to the LEADER program of the EU and started a new attempt to intensify the cooperation and promote the stork areas in Europe. EURONATUR is supporting this new initiative.

1. EUROPSKO SELO RODA ČIGOĆ

<i>Village:</i>	Čigoć
<i>Number of inhabitants:</i>	124
<i>Region:</i>	Sisak and Moslavina County
<i>State:</i>	Croatia
<i>Number of pairs of storks:</i>	1968 – 31, 1974 - 39, 1984 – 38, 1987 – 41, 1990 – 51, 1991 – 51, 1996 - 56, 2000 - 52

Nature protection

Čigoć lies in the Lonjsko Polje Nature Park. The enclosures and consolidations of the end of the eighties did not touch surrounds of the village. Scientific research has shown that Čigoć is actually an ideal space for the survival for the white stork in Central Europe. For example, in 1987, nesting success for 40 pairs was an average of 3.88 young per nest. Two pairs had six young each. The storks have at their disposal 5,000 hectares of pastureland and meadows, the optimum feeding grounds.

Distinctive features

The traditional appearance of the village with its houses made of oak is a highly distinctive feature. The award of the title *European Stork Village* and cooperation with the Agency for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage first led to the value of this heritage actually being properly appreciated.

There is a rich cultural life in the houses as well. The costumes and other handicrafts are still made to some extent. Several households have a rich collection of items assembled over several generations. In this way the household implements and agricultural tools from the rural day to day life have been preserved.

The great pasturelands are a unique cultural and natural heritage in Europe. The old breeds of traditional animals, like the Posavina horse and the Turopolje hog are still kept in the traditional manner. Since 1995, the government of Croatia has subsidized the keeping of these old breeds. Each year, the celebration of Stork Day is held in June.

Additional Information

Schneider Jacoby, M. Ph.D. thesis: *Birds – indicators of the ecological potentials of the wetlands of the Sava.*

Euronatur: Project description, Annual Report.

2. HAZAI EURÓPAI GÓLYÁSFALUBAN NAGYBAJOM

<i>Village:</i>	Nagybajom
<i>Number of inhabitants:</i>	3500
<i>Commune:</i>	Nagybajom
<i>Region:</i>	Komitat Somogy
<i>State:</i>	Hungary
<i>Number of pairs of storks:</i>	1958 – 4, 1963 - 7, 1979 – 6, 1984 – 11, 1992 – 18, 1996 – 25, 1998 - 33

Nature protection

To the south, the commune borders with the protected area of Boronka, 7,933 hectares in area (forest, fishponds, prairies). The commune, forestry authority and agricultural coop take part in the association called *Green Bridge Balaton – Drava*. The association is charged with preserving the habitats (pastures, forests, fishponds) and the ecological corridor between Balaton and the Drava National Park. Alongside the white stork, here there are 15 pairs of sea eagles and quite a lot of otters. A protection order was placed on 400 acres of pasture in 1996.

Distinctive features

Artificial nests, or platforms for nests on electricity posts, were put up throughout Hungary from the seventies on. This led to a growth of from 4005 to 4774 pairs of storks between 1974 and 1979. Since then the number of white storks in Hungary has been almost constant. This campaign was implemented by the Hungarian Electricity Board and the Hungarian Bird and Nature Protection Society.

Since 1993 there has been an active ecological partnership between Lower Saxony's Schortens and Nagybaom. Since then the commune days have been celebrated. Important campaigns have included the building of a biological device for effluent treatment in Nagybaom, the arrangement of pools for amphibians, and the maintenance of the meadows in Schortens, and, since 1996, the maintenance of pastures. There have been very good cultural stimuli as well – the teaching of German in the school in Nagybaom, an adult education course in Hungarian in Schortens, and regular exchanges between youth groups. The holding of German-Hungarian ecology weeks should be particularly stressed.

Additional information:

Schneider-Jacboy, M. Guide to the Nature of the Drava-Mura, Jurgen Resch, 1996.
Euronature: Description of the Drava Boronka project. Annual reports.

3. EUROPEAN STORK VILLAGE RÜHSTÄDT

<i>Village:</i>	Rühstädt
<i>Number of inhabitants:</i>	250
<i>Commune:</i>	Rühstädt
<i>Region:</i>	Brandenburg
<i>State:</i>	Germany
<i>Number of pairs of storks:</i>	
	1958 – 4, 1960 – 3, then with a growth up to 1996 – 43 pairs with 73 young.
	Commune of Perleberg 147 pairs with 306 young

Nature Protection

The Brandenburger Elbtalau Nature Park: an area of 56,000 hectares, the administration centre lying in Ruhstadt. A measure of protected areas in a Biosphere Reserve called *Elbe River Landscape* is planned, an area of 380,000, stretching through five länder and involving 380 km of the course of the river.

Distinctive features

Rühstadt is, with the moist plans of the Elbe, the most important stork area in Germany, and has a very good nest record. The Stork Friends' Club, involving local inhabitants, takes visitors around and looks after the nests. Since 1986, each year in July, Stork Day has been celebrated.

Rühstadt is a shining example of how nature protection can be successfully carried out in a commune. At the same time, in the past five years the village and the 600 year old church have been renovated.

Additional information

Periodical: Elbtalau aktuell unter Adebar

Königstedt, D. et al.: Wet lowlands of the Elbe, Nature Conservation Federation of Germany, Lower Saxony, 1992

Neuschulz F. et al.: The Wet Lowlands of the Elbe a guide to nature through the future national park of the wet lowland, Jürgen Resch, 1993.

Euronatur project description.

4. PUEBLO EUROPEO DE LA CIGÜEÑA

Village: Malpartida de Cáceres

Number of inhabitants: 4500

Commune: Malpartida de Cáceres

Region: Extremadura

State: Spain

Number of pairs of storks:

Number of nests with young:

- core village: 1988 – 24, 1989 – 29, 1990 - 33, 1991 - 39, 1992 - 47, 1993 - 59, 1997 - 80

- Barruecos nature monument: 1991 - 20, 1992 - 31, 1993 - 31, 1997 - 40

Nature protection

Malpartida de Cáceres lies within the cultured steppes area that stretches from Cáceres westward to the Portuguese border. The economy of the area is characterized by extensive arable farming and stock raising. The existence of fish ponds, pools and small reservoirs there for the purpose of drinking water, watering places and fisheries is of great importance for the white stork, but for other kinds of water fowl as well, such as the small gnjurac, the cubasti gnjurac, various kinds of duck, and the small white egret and the grey egret.

Barruecos, some 200 hectares in area, featuring lagoons and vast granite monoliths right by the village was proclaimed a Natural Monument in 1996.

Distinctive features

Barruecos provides the habitats for an impressive stork colony. In this bizarre landscape, mankind was at work 3,000 years ago, as shown by the numerous archaeological sites.

Apart from that, there is a shearing station and wool washing facility that has been restored, and is today a museum for the works of the German artist Vostell.

The extensive pastures in the area are used by the old breeds of domestic animals, such as the Aviljena cow and the Merino sheep.

Since 1991 Malpartida has celebrated Stork Days every spring. This is organised by the commune together with nature protection organisations and the state school for the training of apprentices. This school records the numbers of the storks from time to time, making teaching material for the children and encouraging other stork-related activities.

Additional information

Hampe, Arndt: Guide to the Nature of Extremadura, Jürgen Resch, 1998.

Euronatur: Project description, annual reports.

5. SATUL EUROPEAN AL BERZEI ANDRID

<i>Village:</i>	Andrid
<i>Number of inhabitants:</i>	1258 houses
<i>Commune:</i>	Andrid (consists of three villages - Andrid, Dindesti, Irina)
<i>Region:</i>	Satu Mare
<i>State:</i>	Romania
<i>Number of storks:</i>	
Number of nests: 1968 - 35, 1975 - 38, 1984 - 17, 1996 - 33, 29 nests with an average of 3.13 young per nest.	
Number of young per pair: 1997 - 37, 22 nests and 57 young, 15 pairs with no young	

Nature protection

In the village and around it 35 platforms for nesting have been put up. The campaign will continue. The commune spreads over 1,083 hectares, 70% of it grassland, which serves as a retention area for the Er River. The head of the commune has promised that the area will be placed under protection.

Distinctive features

The title of European Stork Village was made use of by the Ornithological Society of Romania for a campaign to protect the white stork throughout the country. 1997 was made white stork year. Many radio and television programmes and newspaper articles had features about the award of the title of Stork Village to Andrid and about stork protection. The commune organised a very nice festival for Stork Day at which the whole region – one of the richest in white storks in the whole of the country – took part with traditional culture programmes and a football tournament.

Additional information

Partner, Ornithological Society of Romania, independently supported the campaign with additional contributions, with financing from the Regional Centre for Environmental Protection of Central and South East Europe (REC).

In 1998 additional nesting platforms were built, and the plan for flooding some of the grasslands was put into action.

A large part of the previous wetland area was reclaimed during 1972 to 1978. Andrid is the commune with the largest remains of the one time inundated areas. The sudden drop in the population of white stork was caused by the reclamation works. However, since 1994, a growth in the population has been noted.

6. EVROPSKA VAS ŠTORKELJ MALA IN VELIKA POLANA

Village: Mala and Velika Poana

Number of inhabitants: 1420; 360 dwellings

Commune:

Region: Pomurje

State: Slovenia

Number of pairs of storks:

Nine pairs in two villages, 35 in the whole region.

Nature Protection

The meadows and lowlands around this village are the last ecologically preserved system of green areas in Slovenia east of Ljubljana. This wetland complex embraces 3,500 ha, and in it 23 endangered birds species live. Apart from the 35 pairs of white heron, the prdavac, black stork and otter are important indicators of an unspoiled landscape in the Mura lowlands. The meadows are rich in orchids and other flowers.

Distinctive features

The numbers of the white stork in Polana are the greatest in Slovenia. The white stork is the symbol of the whole region. The meadows between the two regions have been proclaimed an Important Bird Area – Mur and Crni log – and this is one of the largest uninterrupted complex of wet alder forests. According to the decision of the Slovene government, in the wet lowland areas of the Mura, a large regional park will be set up, covering 7,800 ha. The meadows with the inundated areas of the Mura and the alder marsh forest form an ecological unity that covers 6,600 ha of precious living space. That is why Euronatur and DOPPS-Birdlife have proposed to Slovenia to link them within the frame of an international rserve with the lowlands of the Mura into a single protected area. The national Ramsar Commission of Slovenia has already moved that the whole region be pronounced an Internationally Important Wetland Area.

Additional information

A stork festival is held the first weekend in July. The commune authorities put a lot of energy into showing off this European Stork Village. They put up new artificial nests and promote the protection of the white stork. DOPPS issues publications about the village and has a Slovenia-wide promotion campaign. The *Drava and Mura – Life in the Dynamics of the River* nature guide is a good review of the whole region. Additional information can be found on www.geocities.com/SouthBeach/Gulf/2692/.

7. EUROPEJSKA WIES BOCIANIA – PENTOWO K. TYKOCINA

<i>Village:</i>	Pentowo - Tykocin
<i>Number of inhabitants:</i>	6.860
<i>Commune:</i>	farm Pentowo
<i>Region:</i>	Podlasie
<i>State:</i>	Poland
<i>Number of pairs of storks:</i>	23 (2000: 51 young), 21 (2001: 27 young), 22 (2002: 29 young), 17 (2003: 39 young), 19 (2004: 56 young).

Nature Protection

The Pentowo near Tykocin is only one farm, situated outside the village directly at the flood plain in the Narew River Valley. It lies between two national parks: the Narew and the Biebrza National Parks. The area is a part of the unique lowland ecosystem in Northeast Poland. The Stork village is an important link between both parks and the nearest point to the regional capital Białystok.

The grassland near the farm and along the Narew River is used extensive as meadow and pasture. Restoring about 1,000 meters of old riverbed and building 7 dams on the melioration ditches restored the water level. Local extensive farming is supported by purchasing traditional Polish red cows, Polish horses, and farming equipment and leasing them to local farmers who cooperate with PTOB (Northern Podlasie Society for Bird Protection). Pasturing and cutting prevent the natural succession of reeds and willow, which is very important for the wellbeing of storks and their habitat

Distinctive features

Poland, and in particular the Podlasie region, is a true haven for the white stork. Almost 25% of the world's population of this species lives in Poland and about 1/3 of them lives in the northeastern part of Poland (Podlasie). Pentowo near Tykocin is the biggest breeding stork colony in Podlasie Region. Stork's nests are built on trees, roofs, special posts and electricity posts.

Additional information

The farm is offering rooms for holidays and horseback riding. Two special towers have been built to observe the storks in the nests and to have a good view on the wetlands. In 2004, PTOB opened "The Stork Gallery" in Pentowo. From April to September last year about 11 thousand tourists from Poland, Germany, the United States, Japan, Holland, and other countries visited Pentowo.

8. EUROPÄISCHES STORCHENDORF MARCHEGG

<i>Town:</i>	Marchegg
<i>Number of inhabitants:</i>	3000
<i>Commune:</i>	Marchegg
<i>Region:</i>	Niederösterreich
<i>State:</i>	Austria
<i>Number of pairs of storks:</i>	1970: 20 pairs, 1987: 29, 1990: 33, 1992: 40, 1994: 53, 1996: 60, 1999: 57, 2001: 52 on old Oak Trees

Nature Protection

The 38.500 ha large Ramsar site “Donau-March-Thayaauen”, an alluvial wetland at the border to Slovakia is the ideal habitat for many endangered species. The stork colony, a 1.150 large virgin forest consisting of old oak trees, is protected as WWF-reserve. Prominent birds species here are Black Stork, White-tailed Eagle, Eagle Owl, Red und Black Kite. Transboundary protection is a basis for the survival of the stork colony, as the White Storks feed partly in the meadows on the Slovak side of the river. New pastures in Austria do improve the feeding habitats for the White Stork near the colony.

Distinctive features

Marchegg is part of a regional programme “Auenland” offering guests from Vienna, only 45 km away, a great countryside for holidays. The small old town has a nice castle directly at the floodplain. The offers include a trail to the alluvial wetlands and an observation point in front of the colony.

Additional information

Marchegg is celebrating a stork festival every summer (<http://www.marchegg.at/>).

9. BELOZEM

<i>Town:</i>	Belozem
<i>Number of inhabitants:</i>	5000
<i>Commune:</i>	Belozem
<i>Region:</i>	Maritsa-Flood-Plain, near Plovdiv, in the south of Bulgaria
<i>State:</i>	Bulgaria
<i>Number of pairs of storks:</i>	23 pairs (2005) thereof 14 pairs nested on the school roof

Nature Protection

Belozem is part of the Maritsa-Flood-Plain, where the White Stork and other species find a high value habitat. The European Stork Village 2005 is surrounded by vast marsh areas, meadows and rice fields. About 700 hectares of rice field in the direct neighbourhood of Belozem provide excellent foraging grounds.

More than half of this area is potential Natura 2000 site. 23 pairs, bred successfully in Belozem in 2005. 59 chicks were raised.

Distinctive features

Every year 14 pairs are breeding on the school roof in Belozem. The Bulgarian Environmental NGO Green Balkans, is cooperating with the local authorities of Belozem. It is planned to set up protection schemes for 5 potential Natura2000-sites (together 350 ha).

Additional information

Belozem celebrated its first stork festival in April 2006 (<http://www.greenbalkans.org>).

Overview of the European Stork Villages

	Čigoć	Nagybajom	Rühstädt	Malpartida de Cáceres	Andrid
title awarded	1994	1998	1996	1997	1998
stork pairs	44-56	27	44	90	33
location of nests	wooden houses	electricity posts	stone houses	granite stones, houses, churches	electrical posts
state	Croatia	Hungary	Germany	Spain	Romania
region	Posavina	Somogy	Brandenburg	Extremadura	Satu Mare
name of conservation area	Lonjsko Polje Nature Park	Boronka Green Bridge	Eibtalau Nature Park	Los Barruecos	/
area of conservation area	50.600 ha	9.000 ha 400 ha pastures	/	Los Barruecos 200 ha	750 ha pastures
Stork Day	end of June	beginning of June	end of July	first week of June	beginning of July
conservation measures	preservation of vernacular breeds of animal	nest platforms built	artificial nests	nest protection	nest platforms built
features	1987 breeding success, 4 young per pair	ecological partnership with Saxony's Schortens	Nature Park HQ, Stork Club, nest tables	youth work, photo contests, prizes	active youth group
partners	Nature Park, Environment Ministry	Somogy Natural Heritage Foundation	Biosphere Reserve Elbtalau	Torrejon Nature Conservation Centre	Romanian Ornithological Society

	Velika and Mala Polana	Tykocin	Marchegg	Belozem
title awarded	1999	2001	2002	2005
stork pairs	9 (region: 35)	40	52	23
location of nests	electrical posts	Electrical posts, trees and houses	Old oak trees	Belozem
state	Slovenia	Poland	Austria	Bulgaria
region	Prekmurje	Narew Region		Maritsa-Flood-Plain
name of conservation area	Regional Park	Narew Nature park	Ramsar protection area of "Donau-March-Thaya Floodplain"	/
area of conservation area	7.880 ha 3.000 ha proposed for meadows		38.500 ha (1.150 ha managed by WWF)	350 ha
Stork Day	beginning of July	Beginning of June	20. June	April / May
conservation measures	nest platforms built	Nest platforms built, extensive farming,	Extensive pastures, protection of nests	Protection of 5 potential Natura2000-Sites is planned
features	cooperation with school and forestry commission	The colony is in the yard of the family farm "Pentowo"	Excellent trails through the wetlands, nice old town with castel	14 pairs are nesting on the school roof
partners	Association, DOPPS - Birdlife/Slovenija	PTOP	WWF -Austria	Green Balkans