

Dear Reader,

The book you are keeping in your hands is the result of a work carried out with great enthusiasm by a consortium of non-governmental organizations. Tisza Klub initiated the process as early as in 1996, with the aim of bringing together people who know and love their own environment, in this particular case River Tisa.

First, the aim was to compile a study which can serve as a firm base for the establishment of a protected area in the Upper Tisa catchment, crossing borders and linking regions. This part of the work was supported financially by the Regional Environmental Centre. After an intensive period of work, people concerned came together to discuss the results achieved and further tasks. During the consultations it was realized that the most convenient tool facilitating the establishment of the desired protected area would be the Ramsar Convention, namely the designation of a transboundary Ramsar site.

All governments concerned were approached and each of them reacted positively and supported the idea. This gave a new momentum to the process because the consortium realized that it could produce a unique product. This uniqueness has two major features, one is that it involves a long stretch of a river (400 km) together with its floodplains, the second is that it will be a quadrilateral transboundary site (involving Romania, Ukraine, Slovakia and Hungary). No other similar Ramsar site has been established recently.

At the same time the Wise Use concept of the Ramsar Convention have perfectly served the aims of the consortium, because beyond the establishment of the protected area (Ramsar site), through their studies they wanted also to introduce to the area the idea of sustainable use of the river and its catchment. On the other hand, the consortium keeping an eye on recent European developments within nature conservation, especially on ecological networks, supplemented the original idea with such further goals that will end in a design of a complex riverine ecological corridor.

After winning the support from each concerned government, the consortium prepared an application to Ramsar Small Grants Fund in order to receive further funds allowing the finalization of the work which, at that stage, already appeared much more complex than had been planned at the beginnings. The application was successful and the work was continued. Not only those surveys were carried out that were demanded by the Ramsar Information Sheet, but a series of additional research, too. Consultation with people living in the area has been continuous and the final product will serve also the needs of domestic information.

The book you are keeping in your hands is not only a proposal for a transboundary Ramsar site, containing all the necessary elements, but is also a huge source of information related to the Upper Tisa region. The end-product will be useful not only for the governmental sphere which, based on it, can start the official procedure of establishment, but also for all those who have an interest in the region, concerning its nature conservation, sustainable use, ecological corridor function and cultural heritage.

I hope that everybody who in the near future or later will deal with this fantastic area will use this reference book as one of the most important references and will show enthusiasm similar to what has been shown by the contributors of this project.

Mihály Vég
wetland expert