



Living Lakes Eastern Europe Network



Imprint



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Introduction

Background

The EU enlargement poses an enormous environmental challenge and will entail the largest environmental programme ever undertaken in Europe and, possibly worldwide. In order to cope with this task it is necessary to convince the people living in the old and the new EU member countries, of the importance of an undamaged environment. To achieve EU environmental standards in these countries, the encouragement of cooperation and an intensive exchange of know-how as well as financial investment will be required. Networks are an excellent platform to provide access to information, to raise awareness amongst the population on the protection of the environment and they offer the possibility of initiating constructive dialogues.

Wetlands and lakes are a precious part of our cultural and natural heritage, providing an extremely important resource for many human interests and activities, as well as habitats that support a rich diversity of animal and plant life. Wetlands and lakes are a source of renewable resources, such as reeds for construction, fish for human consumption and pasture for grazing livestock. They are also important for leisure and recreation. Since the beginning of the 20th century two-thirds of European wetlands and shallow lakes have been lost due to engineering construction works, draining and conversion to arable land, abstraction of groundwater and dumping of refuse. Furthermore, many have been degraded from nutrient enrichment, the main sources being sewage effluent and agricultural fertilisers.

Objectives

Partner NGOs from seven regions in five EU countries are involved in the project: Lake Balaton in Hungary, the Milicz Ponds in Poland, the Labonoras Nature Park in Lithuania, Lake Võrtsjärv and Lake Peipsi in Estonia and Lake Constance and the Müritz in Germany. The overall goal of the Living Lakes Eastern Europe Network is to promote target-oriented cooperation between NGOs and communities in the field of protection of lakes and sustainable development. The objectives will be achieved through networking and exchange of information, thematic workshops and conferences, as well as the implementation of concrete model projects in the respective regions.

Detailed Objectives:

- Long-term partnerships between NGOs and municipalities in the lake regions.
- Capacity building for NGOs in the new EU-member countries.
- Implementation of model projects in the field of sustainable tourism, land-use planning and fisheries.
- Improved level of information and awareness raising regarding environmental problems.
- Improved implementation of EU-Directives, such as the EU Water Framework Directive in the project regions.



Global Nature Fund



Description

The coordinator of the network is Global Nature Fund (GNF), an international non-governmental and non-profit organisation, registered and based in Germany. A principal task of GNF is to further and promote sustainable development objectives at the international level. GNF's approach is to support NGOs worldwide and cooperate with all relevant stakeholders involved in water and nature conservation issues. The role of GNF in the Eastern European Network is to facilitate the project and to organise specific seminars and excursions. GNF is also the focal point for the media and will be organising a conference in order to present the results of the network.

Living Lakes

In 1998, GNF launched Living Lakes, a worldwide lake partnership now comprising of more than 50 organisations and institutions from 45 lake regions striving for the protection and sustainable development of lakes and wetlands. The overall intent of Living Lakes is to prepare the ground for an on-going and sustainable international dialogue and cooperation between private and public stakeholders involved in water issues. The Lake Network supports campaigns and activities with financial support from international conservation programmes. GNF cooperates closely with international organisations, such as the secretariats of the UN Convention on Migratory Species (UNEP/CMS) and the "Ramsar Convention" on the conservation of wetlands. Partners of Living Lakes from the business sector are Unilever, DaimlerChrysler and the German airline, Lufthansa. Furthermore, Living Lakes is also supported by Ziemann, T-Mobile and the Swiss corporation Sika.

Living Lakes Partner Lakes



● Living Lakes Member & Candidate Lakes

● Living Lakes Associate Members

● Living Lakes Honorary Members



Lake Peipsi – Estonia

Lake Peipsi is a large shallow lake situated in North-Eastern Europe, belonging both to Republic of Estonia and Russian Federation. Being the largest trans-boundary water body and fourth largest lake in Europe, the Lake Peipsi area is 3,555 km². Lake Peipsi area is rich in fish, birds, beautiful landscapes and culture. The Lake is habitat for hundreds of millions of fish – a total 37 species are represented. The lake has been one of the richest fish resources in Europe and despite the decreasing trend, fishing is still a major income for people living there. Up to one million migratory birds use Lake Peipsi as a resting place every year, as Peipsi's water areas are as extensive as a sea, providing the birds with more options to nest, rest or fly. The landscape varies from sandy beaches to extensive wetlands. There are some cities in the basin, but a majority of the people live in small settlements. Approximately one million people, who live in the Lake Peipsi basin are diverse in origin and culture. Here live the Fedossejevtsy who have accepted today's lifestyle but are strict in their religious matters. As in the Southern part of the lake live a unique cultural community, called Setu, speaking a very characteristic dialect, who successfully have mixed ancient nature-related traditions and follow them still today. Situated in a rural setting, Peipsi is only mildly affected by tourism development. Nonetheless, the local population and the regional administrations are expecting new income from tourism, especially from nature tourism. Large amount of investments are planned to improve tourism infrastructure in the upcoming years. One hope is that tourism in connection with socio-economic development can help to solve the problems caused by the migration of younger generations into the cities. It is essential to provide efficient training and create tangible guidelines for quality tourism in close collaboration with the relevant local stakeholders.



Threats

The major threat to the lake is eutrophication caused by the high nutrient loads, caused mainly by the agriculture. In past years major improvements have been implemented in Estonian side of the lake in order to reduce water pollution. In addition Joint Lake Peipsi Basin Management Programme has been developed to address most important issues related to maintaining good quality of the lake. Despite the latest developments there is still need for investment, public awareness raising and cooperation of different stakeholders to ensure improvement of the lake's condition.

Partner at Lake Peipsi

Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation (CTC) originally started as the „Lake Peipsi Project“ in 1993 with a primary focus on research on environmental issues. The original focus of the project was later expanded in order to include social aspects and foster local and public participation. Eventually, the narrowly focused project developed into a broadly focused NGO with different programs targeting the entire Lake Peipsi watershed area. Peipsi CTC has developed a profound expertise in working with other non-profit organisations as well as local authorities and the

business sector and supporting cross-border cooperation in border regions of Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. Joint projects are being implemented in the fields of water management, community development, public participation and cross-border cooperation. Peipsi CTC organises capacity building events and training for various stakeholder groups on environmental education, fundraising, project management and public relations. CTC also initiates public dialogue and community events, such as roundtables and local environmental activities.

The main purposes of CTC in the Eastern Europe Network is to raise the environmental awareness of the people living in the Peipsi region and to promote and implement civil initiatives and participatory projects. Within these projects extensive training for nature tourism entrepreneurs and various information materials are being produced in order to raise awareness amongst people living and working in the regions as well as visitors.



Reedbeds at Lake Peipsi



Ice fishing on the lake



Spring Blossoms

Facts and Figures

- Lake Peipsi is called Chudskoe in Russian.
- Lake Peipsi is the fourth largest lake in Europe.
- Lake Peipsi is visited by more than one million migratory birds every year.
- Lake Peipsi is covered by ice 114 days per year on average.
- Lake Peipsi is an important resource for commercial fishing with an annual catch of up to 11,000 tons.
- Lake Peipsi has an average depth of seven metres.
- Lake Peipsi has a catchment area of 47,800 km².



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Lake Võrtsjärv – Estonia

Lake Võrtsjärv is located in the southern part of Estonia. With 270 square kilometres it is the largest domestic lake in Estonia. The Emajõgi river connects Lake Võrtsjärv with Lake Peipsi. The lake basin is of preglacial origin. Close to the shore at Tamme, is a famous prehistoric place where placoderm fish fossils may be found. Võrtsjärv has eighteen tributaries collecting water mainly from the cultivated catchment. The largest inflows are the rivers Väike-Emajõgi, Öhne and Tarvastu. The volume of the water rises three times the average at different periods of the year. Mean annual ice coverage of the lake is about 135 days during winter. The lake is also known as a significant habitat for nesting birds. The shores of Võrtsjärv are swampy in the southern part, and sandy in the northern part, but mostly shallow except for the eastern shore. On the western shore the reed belt is continuous and lush. White lilies, arrowhead, bulrush and other water plants fill the narrow southern end creating marvellous views.

Being beautiful and majestic, Võrtsjärv and its nature has always attracted visitors, writers, poets and scientists. However, centuries of such unmanaged activity has impaired the natural environment near the lake. With the rediscovery of Lake Võrtsjärv as a recreational magnet, the aim is to establish sustainable tourism. Nature education campaigns and introduction of the greater awareness of the cultural heritage are being extended so that the local population and the regional administrations can expect new income from tourism.



Threats

Lake Võrtsjärv is mainly used for industrial fishery, recreation and tourism. Unfortunately, non-purified or poorly treated wastewater still runs into the lake. The effect is that Võrtsjärv is highly eutrophic. Nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus from the surrounding arable lands, as well as sewage from several small towns and villages, flow into the lake. The fast expansion of reedbeds and the deterioration of biological diversity give clear evidence of the problematic eutrophication of the lake.

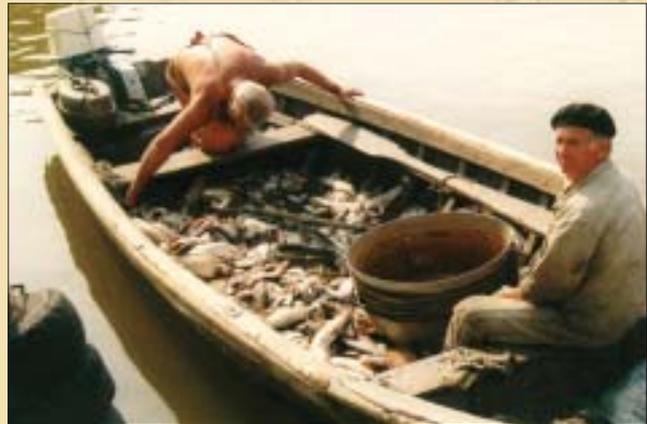
Partners at Lake Võrtsjärv

The Living Lakes Partner organisations at Lake Võrtsjärv are ELF (Estonian Fund for Nature) in cooperation with the Lake Võrtsjärv Foundation and the Institute of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences of the Estonian University of Life Sciences. ELF is a non-profit organisation founded in 1991 and has established the Soomaa and Karula national parks. ELF has also created comprehensive inventories of valuable habitats and participates in designing the Natura 2000 network of protected areas in Estonia. The Lake Võrtsjärv Foundation was established in 2000. Its aim is to conserve the rich natural diversity in Estonia through raising the awareness of the public as well as protecting Lake Võrtsjärv as a sensitive water-body. One main task is to

analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the lake region and to prepare guidelines for quality tourism development. Key objectives of the organisation include tourism training courses and study tours for local guides and tourism entrepreneurs around the lakes and wetland.



The harbour of the Limnological Station at Lake Võrtsjärv



Fishing provides important income for the local population

Facts and Figures

- Lake Võrtsjärv is the largest domestic water body in Estonia at 270 square kilometres.
- Lake Võrtsjärv has eighteen rivers and streams draining into the lake.
- Lake Võrtsjärv has a mean annual ice coverage of about 135 days.
- Lake Võrtsjärv is home to 35 fish species.



Contact and further information

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Milicz Ponds – Poland

The Milicz ponds are located not far from Wrocław in the Barycz Valley. In medieval times, monks excavated them and used them as carp ponds. Waters were funnelled from the Barycz, a tributary of the second largest river in Poland, with a total length of 133 kilometres. Nowadays, the more than 100 Milicz Ponds can hardly be distinguished from natural lakes and are among the most important resting places for migratory birds in western Poland. It is one of the „Important Bird Areas” in Europe designated by BirdLife International. Large flocks of migratory birds concentrate in the Barycz valley. 276 bird species have been recorded here, of which 170 are local nesters, such as the Ferruginous Duck, Black-tailed Godwit and Snipe. Fortunately the poor soil quality has limited agricultural exploitation. For this reason, forested areas have remained relatively abundant and traditional methods of farming are still practised, which create ideal living conditions for birds and other threatened species.



Threats

Grants available due to Poland’s EU membership threatened the Milicz paradise through intensification of agricultural use and the conversion of meadows to farmland. The biggest problem however is giving up the traditional forms of land use, such as pasturage, mowing, which leads to overgrowing of the open ecosystems. Up to now, pro Natura has purchased more than 200 hectares of land to ensure the extensive use of meadows. Water pollution caused by feed for fish and habitat destruction is still apparent. Another important threat is the loss of nesting places due to eutrophication which causes excessive reedbed growth. Communities in the Milicz area have intended to convert the ponds into recreational areas for swimming and sailing as well as building reservoirs for recreational purposes. This poses a particular danger, since currently the basin tends to dry out. Pro Natura’s interest is to find a solution to this conflict between environmentalists and local communities. There is a common understanding that controlled tourism development will benefit the region.

Partner at the Milicz Ponds

In the 1990s pro Natura initiated a range of actions which aimed to protect the natural and cultural resources of this area. Within the framework of the “Programme of Sustainable Development of the Barycz Valley” the organisation cooperates with national landscape parks, provincial administrations, companies, municipalities, and non-governmental organisations. Within this network programme, pro Natura aims to develop an eco-tourism programme covering a four-year period. This plan includes the design of eco-tourism products and services, as well as tourism zoning and visitor management guidelines. In addition, bicycle nature trails, bird

watching facilities and kayaking infrastructure on the river Barycz will be developed. Tourist service providers, local authorities and other stakeholders are intensively involved in the set-up of this tourism programme. Pro Natura works with a large number of partners, chiefly the Lower Silesian Development Foundation, the Association of Municipalities and Counties of the Barycz Valley, the administrative regions of Dolnośląskie and Wielkopolskie and the Ministries of Agriculture and of Environment.



Diverse landscape in the Barycz Valley



Bird habitats depend on fish farming



Greylag Geese breed on Milicz Ponds

Facts and Figures

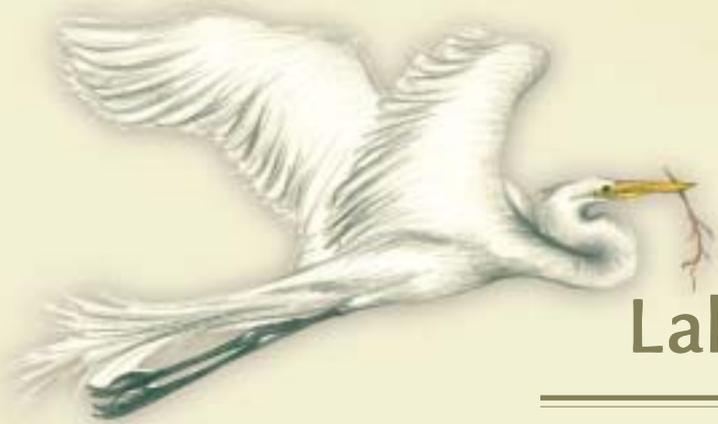
- The Milicz Ponds are one of 13 sites in Poland protected under the Ramsar Convention.
- The Milicz Ponds water surface covers 77 square kilometres.
- The Milicz Ponds are a paradise for bird watchers with a recorded 276 bird species. More than 50 White-tailed Eagle, and over 2000 Common Crane may be observed.
- The Milicz Ponds are home to more than 450 pairs of Greylag Geese, 40 pairs of Ferruginous Duck. There are some 60 male Bitterns.
- The Milicz Ponds are home to 13 amphibian and 44 mammal species.



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Lake Balaton – Hungary

With a surface area of 594 square kilometres, Lake Balaton is the largest freshwater lake in Central Europe. The Zala River is the main tributary and drains the western part of the lake catchment. The river has formed a large wetland called Kis-Balaton. The lake and its environment – as a result of continued efforts in nature conservation – still accommodate a rich and diverse flora and fauna. Strictly protected rare species, such as the Black Stork, Black Woodpecker and Otter can be found here. In 1997, the Balaton Uplands National Park was established. With an area of more than 600 square kilometres the National Park comprises most of the Northern watershed, as well as the Kis-Balaton wetland.

Lake Balaton is an important recreational area. Up to 18 million tourists visit the lake region each year. 10 million registered annual guest nights equal to an estimated value of 55 Million Euros. As a result, the Balaton region contributes significantly to the national income from tourism. Walkways, educational trails and environmental exhibitions highlight the rich nature of the area for visitors from all over the world.



Threats

Unfortunately, Balaton shares the fate of many other lakes in Europe which were faced with a serious deterioration of water quality in the 1970s, causing extreme algal blooms as well as a dramatic reduction of biodiversity. The nutrient pollution was caused by untreated domestic sewage, agriculture and industrial effluent. Growing tourism put additional stress on the sensitive ecosystem, resulting in a loss of natural habitats in the littoral zones, erosion and soil contamination. Reedbeds at the shoreline have been cleared for aquasport infrastructure. As a consequence, the lake surface area covered with reeds dropped by 40% between 1968 and 1999. The use of private motorboats is not allowed on Lake Balaton. Nonetheless, there is a long sailing tradition and most sailing boats are equipped with auxiliary engines. Further problems are caused by over-fishing and a decreasing water level due to climate change.

Partners at Lake Balaton

Two Hungarian partner organisations are involved in the project: the Lake Balaton Development Coordination Agency and the Association of Civil Organisations of Lake Balaton. The association represents the interests of the civil groups, mainly NGOs, operating in the Balaton region. 24 civil groups represent more than 10,000 active volunteers striving for a reversion of the deterioration of the Balaton environment and protection of the natural beauty of the lake. The Lake Balaton Development Coordination Agency in collaboration with the two municipalities Siófok and Balatonfüred aims at sustainable management systems. On the basis of experiences made in the ECOLUP-Project at Lake Constance and the EU-Directive on Sustainable Urban Management, a

management system for sustainable urban development at communal level will be implemented. In each municipality, an environmental team with representatives of all relevant departments is to be created. A central goal is to motivate the municipalities to conduct official certification schemes, such as EMAS or ISO 14001.



Sunset over Lake Balaton



White herons at Kis-Balaton



Lavender Fields of Tihany

Facts and Figures

- Lake Balaton has a catchment area 5,775 square kilometres.
- Lake Balaton has an average depth of 3.2 metres.
- Lake Balaton has a shoreline of 235 kilometres in length.
- Lake Balaton is protected under the Ramsar Convention.
- Lake Balaton is home to 41 indigenous fish species.
- Lake Balaton accommodates some 250 bird species of which 136 are protected.



Contact and further information

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Labanoras – Lithuania

The Labanoras Regional Park (LRP) is the largest regional park in Lithuania and is located 80 kilometres northeast of the capital Vilnius.

The park was established in 1992 and covers an area of 553

square kilometres. Three rivers flow through the park and about 260 small lakes, moors and wetlands can be found there. Mammals are represented by Beavers, Otters and Elks. Beaver are of particular ecological importance as they dam up drainage ditches and thereby create new wetlands. Among the nesting birds are Dunlin, Osprey, Cranes, Kingfishers, and Grouse. Nowhere else in Europe nest more couples of White Stork per square kilometre than in Lithuania. The plant species diversity in the Labanoras park is also very high. Botanists counted 120 different bushes of Swamp Willow, 300 flower stalks of Bog Gentian, 80,000 Common Spotted Orchid, 2,300 Water Lobelia and 200 Water-Lily blossoms.



Threats

The most significant problem derives from the lack of visitor management capacities for the 300,000 vacationers that regularly spend weekends and holidays in the area. A solution would be to direct visitors from the protected areas to the many lakes in the vicinity, which are not as sensitive and are unprotected. As many farmers abandon the cultivation of their fields and meadows, fallow land area increases and finally is transformed to woods by natural succession, consequently diminishing the population of White Storks and other species. The problem could be solved by extensive pasture management schemes with robust breeds of grazing cattle.

Partners at Labanoras

Partners in the Labanoras Regional Park are the Administration of the Park and ENOS (European Nature Conservation and Ornithology Station), a national NGO. ENOS supports the park administration in supervising and assisting the permanent staff with voluntary work. Young volunteers are engaged in observing the nature on the numerous lakes, particularly with looking after the species of the red list. Although the park is a designated a NATURA 2000 site it has no visitor management system so far. Therefore, one central objective of ENOS is to develop effective visitor-management and improve environmental and nature protection education. One of the activities of ENOS is the launch of a visitor information centre for active nature protection, the first of its kind in Lithuania. The centre will serve as an environmental education facility and a focal point for the coordination of scientific studies and meetings of decision-makers.

Detailed functions of the visitor information centre are:

- to highlight the outstanding natural beauty of the LRP.
- to show awarded nature documentaries.
- to highlight threats the area is exposed to and introduce sustainable approaches to overcome these problems.
- to explain the plans for overall land use planning including a long-term development of sustainable tourism.
- to develop a management plan for the LRP including sustainable tourism and land use and preservation measures in order to protect biodiversity.
- to transfer know-how from other areas with a longer conservation history (such as Lake Constance, Germany) to Lithuania.
- to develop general guidelines for similar projects in Lithuania with an appropriate media strategy.



Numerous lakes can be found in the Labanoras Park



Impressive exposure of Ospreys in 25 metres height

Facts and Figures

- Labanoras Regional Park was established in 1992.
- Labanoras Regional Park has an area of 553 square kilometres.
- Labanoras Regional Park is home to 54 mammal, 172 bird, 5 reptile and 11 amphibian species.



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Lake Constance – Germany

Similar in size to Lake Geneva and Lake Balaton, Lake Constance is the third largest freshwater lake in Central Europe with a water surface of about 535 square kilometres and a water volume of over 48 billion cubic metres. The lake is part of the course of the Rhine River, which enters in the southeast corner near the Austrian city, Bregenz, and leaves on the western side. The riparian countries Germany, Switzerland and Austria have not defined clear borders on the lake, a legal situation described as Condominium. Due to this, cross-border use and protection of the lake were always very important issues.

The lake and its catchment is an attractive habitat for plants and animals as well as for human beings. 2.2 Million people live and work in the core Lake Constance region. Over 4.5 Million people rely on drinking water pumped out of the lake and over 50,000 boats are registered here. Despite these human activities, the lake has preserved its natural landscape with a very rich biological diversity. In some seasons, over 250,000 water birds rest in the region. 80,000 Tufted Ducks, 50,000 Pochards and 7,000 Crested Grebes can be counted in winter. The biodiversity continues under water: 26 different fish species may be found.



Threats

Since the 1960s, a large number of sewage treatment plants have been built and this pollution control measure has successfully reduced the nutrient load of the lake. Nonetheless, even though the water quality has continuously improved since then, increasing traffic produces pollution; intensive agriculture threatens flora and fauna and harbours, marinas and jetties damage the shoreline and protected areas are under pressure due to increasing urbanisation of land.

Partners at Lake Constance

The Lake Constance Foundation (Bodensee-Stiftung) is an international foundation for nature and culture. Together with the Environmental Council Lake Constance (Umweltrat Bodensee), the Lake Constance Foundation provides a platform for all associations aiming at sustainable development for the region. The Council comprises about twenty nature protection associations from Switzerland, Austria and Germany. Main stress is put on sustainable tourism, organic farming, sustainable land use planning, environmental education and renewable energy, e.g. solar technology for water sport.

The role of the Lake Constance Foundation in the network is to give input and provide expertise to the partners since the foundation has a long history of implementing relevant activities in nature conservation. In the joint network, the Lake Constance Foundation is responsible for the transfer of lessons learned from specific model

projects in the field of eco-camping, environmental education programmes, ecological land-use-planning and environmentally sound agriculture with a focus on the use of organic and regional produce in catering. The Lake Constance Foundation will be organising training programmes including thematic excursions at Lake Constance destined for environmentalists, administrations, tourism entrepreneurs and institutions involved in the management of lakes and wetlands.



Leisure boats at Lake Constance



Crested Grebe



Orchards offer important habitats

Facts and Figures

- Lake Constance (Bodensee) provides drinking water for 4.5 million people every day.
- Lake Constance is the third largest freshwater lake in Central Europe.
- Lake Constance is visited by 8 million tourists each year.
- Lake Constance has more than 50,000 registered boats.
- Lake Constance has a population density in the lakeshore zone which is more than 500 inhabitants per square-kilometre.
- Lake Constance has a maximum depth of 252 metres.

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Milicz Ponds – Poland

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Environmental Partnership for Central Europe
Global Nature Fund (D)
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Foundation 5000xZukunft (D)
The Wildlife Trusts (UK)
Royal Netherlands Embassy in Poland (NL)
Matra Fund (NL)
Eurosite
and numerous individuals and institutions in
Poland and from abroad.

Lake Balaton – Hungary

Lake Balaton Development Council

Labanoras – Lithuania

Unilever
Kärcher

Lake Constance – Germany

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