

Belarus and Polish NGOs Share Experience in Wild Salmon Protection

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CCB Atlantic salmon Protection in Belarus rivers



A team of five, Yuri Boltuts, Dmitri Lesnov, Pavel Dzhezhora, Alexander Deshkovets and Nina Palutskaya of the Neman Environment Group NGO (a part of Ecohome) visited Polish colleagues at the NGO Friends of the rivers Ina and Govenitsa headed by Arthur Furdyna in Szczecin region, Poland. The trip was organized under the CCB Salmon Project Belarus.

Poland and the north-west of Belarus have a lot in common. They are both in the Baltic Sea basin. Their rivers and landscapes as well as the peoples' perception of the environment and the salmon protection problem are very similar. Therefore it was very important for us to establish closer collaboration with the Polish colleagues and to learn from their experience.

There are no direct transport connections between Minsk and Szczecin. The train journey took about 18 long hours with one change in Warsaw. Arthur met us from the train in Szczecin and brought us to the little town of Stepnitsa on the coast of the Szczecin harbor where we enjoyed overnight stay in a nice hotel. Next morning Arthurs and the colleague of his Grzegorz Drazkoviak took us on the field trip to the river Govenitsa, a beautiful small river – Sea Trout and Salmon good spawning site.

Hydroelectric dams and poachers are the main threat to salmons. Although fish ladders are now being constructed, unfortunately it does not help much. This is because fish ladders don't receive enough water most of which is channeled to run electricity generators. It is very difficult to reduce poaching because poachers are very well equipped and informed and using hit and run tactics. During the spawning season (from the end of October to the end of November) Arthur's NGO joins efforts with water inspectors and militaries to prevent poaching. There are plans to install surveillance web-cameras on the most important spawning sites. Our experience with this has so far been not very successful. Last year we installed a web-camera on the river Tartak, but could not quite make it properly hidden or provide necessary power supply.

The next site visit was to the small river Vishnevka, which is very similar to the Belarusian river Tartak. There are about 35 salmon and trout spawning nests in the 500 m long river stretch. On the high river bank Arthur's NGO made the ecological path overlooking the river meander.



Several posters along the path provide information about the river ecology. The site is popular among the school children who often come for a visit. The river Vishnevka spawning grounds have been enlarged recently using gravel and pebbles put in appropriate places on the river bed. We found this particular experience very interesting and applicable for our river Tartak. We also liked the idea of an ecological path along the river.

The most interesting was perhaps the site visit to the Slupia River Valley Park. The central part of it the river Slupia – an important salmon river. There are two dams with fish ladders,



both equipped with under water video cameras two monitor the number of fish going through the ladders. Over the years of monitoring important information has been collected about the migrating salmon and other fish in the Slupia river, which provide detailed and diverse picture. For example, according to Martin Miller of the Slupia River Valley Park, the salmon migration pattern is not always straightforward, sometimes after having done quite a distance upstream some of the salmons return to spawn in the downstream stretches of the river.



Although Poland is an EU Member State and thus implementing EU environmental Directives, not all decision makers in Poland well understand the importance of it. There are, for example, problems with the implementation of the Water Framework Directives related to the building and construction of hydroelectric dams on the small rivers which make an adverse effect on the river ecology. Another example is related to the growing number of salmon and trout breeding farms. Although it may help to increase the fish numbers in the short term, artificially bread salmons undermine the wild salmon populations. A more sustainable way would be to put more effort in the conservation and restoration of wild salmon habitats. According to Arthur Furdyna this is the view which is shared by most Polish NGOs. And in this respect we can't agree more with our Polish colleagues. That is why the CCB Salmon Projects in Belarus are focused on conservation, restoration and enhancement of wild salmon habitats in Belarus rivers.

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