

Education of school children in special nature reserve “Gornje Podunavlje” (Serbia)

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Protected areas are an important tool for the conservation of nature. They provide economic benefits to local communities and municipalities as a whole, they are places for education, and they promote recreation and the health of the population.

Recreational opportunities in protected areas include hiking, skiing, swimming and canoeing, which help to improve the physical fitness of the population. This is especially important for school children. Interpretive programs (mixture of education and recreation) in parks teach visitors about nature and history of the environment and provide valuable experiential learning opportunities for children and students.

Special nature reserve "Gornje Podunavlje" is one of finest pearls placed along the course of Danube in Vojvodina and Serbia. This reserve comprises remains of former vast inundated Danube areas. The reserve represents a complex mosaic of water and land ecosystems. The greater part of the reserve is covered by marshy, inundated forest complexes. This type of preserved indigenous biotopes is very rare both in our country and Europe.

The course of Danube, together with its backwaters called 'Dunavci' and inundated areas, left its imprint on the area of Gornje Podunavlje. Its slow and winding course creates backwaters, meanders and stills. Its floods created marshes, ponds and swamps. SNR 'Gornje Podunavlje' is an important center of biodiversity. The wealth of this biodiversity is reflected in a great number of vegetation types comprising 156 different syntaxonomic units in 14 classes, 18 orders, 32 alliances and 51 plant communities with over 1,000 species of plants. This wealth is also shown by the presence of 55 species of fish, 11 species of amphibians, 9 species of reptiles, 230 species of birds and 51 species of mammals as well as numerous invertebrates, especially butterflies with over 60 species of daytime butterflies.

Owing to its exceptional natural values Gornje Podunavlje was designated as an Ramsar Site (2007), Important Bird Area in 1989 (IBA) and it is also an integral part of potential Biosphere Reserve Drava-Mura.

Public enterprise "Vojvodinasume" as a management authority of Special nature reserve "Gornje Podunavlje", initiated activity of education and recreation of school children in nature and the promotion of nature conservation among them. The initiative is entitled as "Every child should see Gornje Podunavlje" and the basic project idea is to bring nature and its beauties closer to the children and to introduce them with the Reserve. Education of school children is a primary issue in the creation of ecologically aware and responsible citizens. For that reason public enterprise "Vojvodinasume", as a manager of this protected area, pay a lot of attention to this problemacy. Based on a common agreement, SNR "Gornje Podunavlje" is a destination that is inserted into the spring excursion program of all primary schools of Sombor city and Apatin city.

This activity also has a promotional character, so entrance fees and guiding services in period spring/summer 2010 are free of charge. Depending on the age, children will be guided on educational trail "Karapandza", with info boards, along which interchange several types of ecosystems (pond, swamp, meadows, forests). Children are getting introduced with flora fauna by photography of Reserve, movies, audio record, touchable introducing (of horns, furs, feathers, marks, etc.). In this way they learn about importance of nature conservation and the beauties of this area.

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Beside the educational aspect, visiting the Reserve also includes a recreational one. Namely, in cooperation with local environmental nongovernment organisations, whilst learning, children can experience hiking, cycling, boating, canoeing, etc. For this purpose all necessary facilities are set.

This initiative is also supported by local municipality and communities which will provide a “green bus” that will be painted and exclusively used for children transportation to the Reserve. This initiative is also accompanied by different media.