

Project Update: July 2020

Educational activities

We planned to organise several lectures in March-April 2020. On March 3rd 2020, we organised only one lecture at the Educational and Scientific Center "Institute of Biology and Medicine", Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Kyiv, Ukraine). The lecture was attended by more than 20 people.



Lecture at the ESC "Institute of Biology and Medicine", Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

We could not organise other lectures due to the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine in Ukraine. Lectures were cancelled. But we continued our educational activities through social networks (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube). We published various posts on the topic of reptiles. We also started creating short videos (#herpetologist notes) where we talk about different species of reptiles, their conservation and the about important habitats for reptiles. The video can be found on the organisation's (Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group – UNCG) [YouTube channel](#) and [UNCG Facebook page](#). We decided to write an article about the importance of snakes in the ecosystem in the spring (during high activity of snakes in Ukraine). The article was published in < 10 local newspapers. The aim was to draw the attention of the local population to the correct behavior during the meeting with the snake.

In May 2020, we started creating a video that should draw public attention to the problem of killing snakes by humans. The main heroine of the video is a snake (the dice snake *Natrix tessellata*). But no animals were injured during the filming process. Hundreds of snakes are killed in Ukraine every year. They do not threaten people in any way. Some of them are rare species. They are included in conservation lists and are protected by the state. Unfortunately, in the 21st century, many people are ready to kill in the event of an unexpected encounter with a snake. But all snakes, like other animals, are important links in the food chains of many ecosystems. The video was created by [KORA Film Production](#). Video [link](#). As of 16.07.2020, the number of video views is 128 500 and 509 reposts on Facebook; 652 views of videos on YouTube and 296 on Instagram. Also, we often commented on the situation with snakes in Ukraine on TV, where our video was also shown. Both our video and the topic of snakes were discussed on the radio.



The process of creating a video

Also, on July 6th 2020, we celebrated Nature Protection Day in Ukraine. On this day, Buzy Gard National Park organised a conference where we actively participated. We presented our project and presented a video about killing snakes at this conference. We gave t-shirts, booklets and stickers from our project to the park staff and all conference participants.

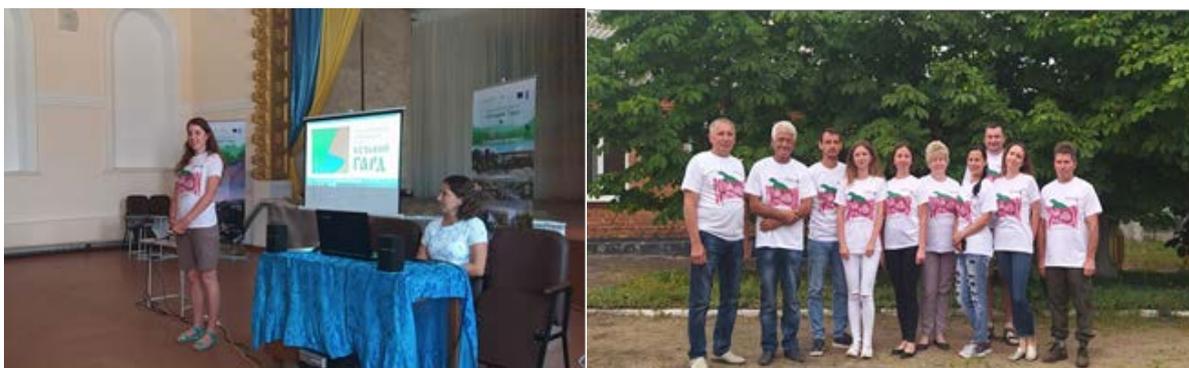


Photo from the conference in Buzy Gard National Park

Research activities

From April to July 2020 we organised 4 expeditions. We focused most of our attention on the areas after Oleksandrivka village, where there are huge floodplains begin to stretch for several kilometers, up to the city of Mykolaiv. These areas have little data on the distribution of reptiles. But also, we organized several expeditions in the Busy Gard National Park. To date, we have collected <500 reptile points in the territories of the Southern Bug river eco-corridor of the steppe zone.



Photos during the expeditions from April to July 2020

This spring we took part in the Ukrainian scientific-practical conference "Monitoring and protection of biodiversity in Ukraine" which was organised by the Charitable Foundation "Biodiversity Protection Fund of Ukraine". We published some of our results within the project in theses: Oskyrko O. (2020): The Southern Bug river of the steppe zone (Ukraine) as a prospective territory for Conservation reptiles // Monitoring and protection of biodiversity in Ukraine / Series: "Conservation Biology in Ukraine". – 16(2) - P. 163–165.

Also, our short note will be published soon (Oskyrko, O. & D. Jablonski. 2020. Swimming behavior in a Caspian Whipsnake, *Dolichophis caspius* (Gmelin, 1789). IRCF Reptiles & Amphibians: accepted). This short note reported on swimming behavior in a Caspian whipsnake On 29 April 2019 in the Southern Bug River (= Pivdennyi Buh) at Grushivka Village, Pervomaisky District, Mykolaiv Region, Ukraine, we observed an adult Caspian Whipsnake swimming from open water 3–4 m from the bank toward the shore. Swimming by this typically terrestrial snake is an unusual behavior that, to the best of our knowledge, has never been reported until now.