

## Interview with the HABIT-CHANGE project manager Dr. Marco Neubert

The project **HABIT-CHANGE** focuses on adaptive management measures for habitats in protected areas of Central and Eastern Europe that may be affected by climate change. Main aims of the project are to evaluate, enhance and adapt existing management and conservation strategies in protected areas so they can pro-actively respond on likely impacts of climate change which threaten habitat integrity and diversity.

**Dr. Marco Neubert** graduated in Geography (Landscape Ecology, Geoinformatics) at the Technical University of Dresden in 2000 with an ensuing PhD thesis in the field of remote sensing. Since 2000 he is a staff member of IOER and currently he is responsible for the project HABIT-CHANGE as a project manager.

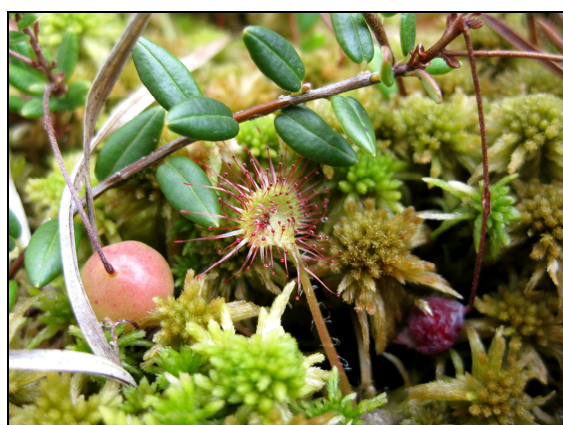


Photo 1: Plants of sphagnum swamp, Ukraine (CASRE)

What is the idea behind HABIT-CHANGE and how did it come to be implemented?

“The idea behind HABIT-CHANGE is to investigate the impact of climate change

on nature protection sites supported by a remote sensing based monitoring tool. This idea was further developed during several meetings with a growing group of interested partners in Vienna and Berlin. The CENTRAL EUROPE programme INTERREG IV B funded our project for its entire duration from 2010 to 2013. The Leibniz Institute of Ecological and Regional Development (IOER) became the lead partner of the project because it is well experienced in leading large European cooperation projects.”

Which criteria were used to select the investigation areas?

“In HABIT-CHANGE we focus on those habitats, which are mainly affected by climate change. Thus, we chose protected sites of the type wetlands, grasslands, forests and alpine areas located in Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, it was a very interesting investigation area. Amongst others, the Biebrza National Park in North-Eastern Poland, the Danube Delta in Romania and the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park in Slovenia are part of HABIT-CHANGE. The administrations of these as well as other suitable national parks, biosphere reserves, and natural parks cooperate as project partners or support our work as associated institutions.

The direction of future changes in regional climate and their effects on management measures are still unclear. At site-level precipitation as one of the main climatic drivers might de- or increase and shift its seasonality. This will result in different preconditions for the remaining natural habitats and change species composition, especially in water-based ecosystems such as wetlands and rivers but also in forests

and natural grasslands.”

**Why did you choose partners from Central and Eastern Europe?**

“Since climate change is a world-wide phenomenon it will not stop at national borders and should thus be investigated on transnational level. The same is true for the affected habitats. The region of Central and Eastern Europe was chosen because this area is projected to be especially affected by climate change impacts. The investigation areas cover the entire region and stretch from the North of Poland to the Adriatic Sea and from South Tirol to the Black Sea. It is a big advantage that HABIT-CHANGE project partners are bridging long distances and can jointly discuss about measures for adaptation to comparable climate impacts and develop common strategies.”

**What were the main goals of the project?**

The most important objective is to provide knowledge and to raise awareness about climate change and its impacts to habitats to the administrations of protected areas and further stakeholders (e.g. land owners, national and European institutions) as well as to the public. These target groups will be provided with possible measures to adapt to the projected climate impacts.

**What are the results of the project?**

A large variety of outputs is produced:

- Scientific background information on climate projections and potential impacts for the management of protected areas

- Concepts, indicators and techniques to monitor climate related changes for site managers
- Climate Change adapted management plans for selected investigation areas as well as a management handbook for other areas
- Dissemination materials and events for awareness raising for local stakeholder and the general public
- Legal advice for local, national and European authorities



Photo 2. Wetland in Biebrza National Park, Poland (G. & T. Klosowscy)

**What has to change in order to protect the national parks from climate change?**

The site management has to get prepared for the projected climate impacts. Detailed knowledge regarding sensitivity and risks of habitats as well as regarding indicators, monitoring techniques and measures to counteract to the expected impacts is needed. In addition, all stakeholders (including the public as well as European authorities) need to be addressed to raise awareness for this problem. Last but not least everybody can help to minimise climate impacts by adapting his or her

habits – as the project acronym implies.

What will happen to HABIT-CHANGE and your results after the project is finished?

After the project ends the results will still be available online; both, at the CENTRAL EUROPE output library as well as at the project website ([www.habit-change.eu](http://www.habit-change.eu)). A book with the most important findings will be available at the end of the project. But most importantly, the project started an extensive dialogue with stakeholders on several levels (local to European). We hope that this discussion will be continued and that our results will be the basis for future projects.

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