

Contents

VOICE FROM THE WILD	2
BCC-WHO ARE WE??	3
PROTECTED SREAS	
LEADERS OF RUSSIA'S PROTECTED AREAS TAKE DESPERATE MEASURES IN A DESPERATE SITUATION	3
THE MINISTRY IS READY TO SUPPRESS THE OPPOSITION	4
SPORTS IN CONSERVATION NEWS	5
CRISIS IN ONE OF RUSSIA'S NATURE RESERVES	6
LETOPIS PRIRODI: CHRONICLES OF NATURE RECORDED IN RUSSIA'S NATURE RESERVES	7
NATIONAL PARKS IN THE NEWS	9
VODLOZERSKI NATIONAL PARK - LEADING THE WAY IN RANGER TRAINING	10
STUDENT INTERNSHIP IN ETHNOGRAPHY, ECOLOGY, AND HISTORY IN A RUSSIAN NATIONAL PARK	11
CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND CONSERVATION	
THE PEIPSI (CHUDSKOYE) LAKE PROJECT, SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF A CONFLICTOLOGIST	12
THE ARCTIC - ONCE A CHALLENGE TO CONQUER, NOW A CHALLENGE TO CONSERVE	13
USAID'S RUSSIAN FAR EAST SUSTAINABLE NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PROJECT	14
FAR EASTERN FOREST FOCUS	14
EVOLVING CONCERNS OF RUSSIAN ENVIRONMENTALISTS	16
UNDERLYING THREATS	18
RARE AND ENDANGERED SPECIES:	
THE ARCTIC FOXES OF MEDNYI (COPPER) ISLAND	19
CONSERVATION LEGISLATION	20
CONSERVATION NGO'S	
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATORS POOL RESOURCES, SHARE IDEAS	22
NATURE SHOULD HAVE HER OWN PEOPLE	23
WWF IN RUSSIA - WORLD WILD FUND FOR NATURE	24
ECOLOGICAL TRADITIONS OF THE KOLA POMORI PEOPLE	25
RUSSIAN "CONSERVATION TRAINING TEAM" TAKES TO THE ROADIN THE USA WITH TNC	25
RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT TAKES UP DIALOGUE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	27
CONSERVATION CONTACTS	28
CONSERVATION CONFERENCE CALENDAR	28

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VOICE FROM THE WILD

(A Letter from the Editors)

In our second issue of Russian Conservation News, we have some urgent issues to share with our colleagues around the world. One of these is a plan for "sustainable" development in the Russian Far East — one of the largest, most biologically diverse, intact greater ecosystems remaining in this vast country. In addition to our apprehensions about the actual substance of the project, we are deeply concerned about the process (or lack thereof) of information sharing between the western aid agencies and consulting firms, and the conservation community. (See our "Far East Forest Focus" inside this issue).

The second issue about which we are alarmed is the state of virtual collapse in Russia's system of strict nature reserves. No other country in the world has a system as old and large as Russia's *Zapovedniki*. Russia's *Zapovedniki* protect fresh water seals in Lake Baikal, bison in the Caucasus, tigers in the Far East, polar bears in the Arctic, and habitat for hundreds of other rare and endemic species. They have also been the research grounds for hundreds of scientists in zoology, biology, botany, and other natural sciences. These nature reserves are of no less importance than the tropical rain forests of Central and South America. We feel certain that if immediate measures are not taken to save this system, the entire world will suffer an irretrievable loss of biological archives. Many dedicated nature reserve managers are working hard to help their reserves survive the hardships of a transitional economy, but more than dedication is needed to save these natural treasures.

We urge you to rise to the challenge which stands before us all. Throughout our articles, we try to suggest ways in which you could effectively, and positively change the situation. We believe that solving these problems depends on our ability to work together with our western colleagues. Please write letters to the Russian Ministry, to your Congress, and aid-giving organizations, especially where we have provided addresses and names, and please send copies to us, so that we know our efforts are working!

We are here to connect you with the many achievements as well as problems and needs of conservationists in Russia and the former Soviet Union. We hope to establish a dialogue between them and western colleagues — dialogue that is crucial for all of us to make gains in conservation. After reading *Russian Conservation News*, we hope you will let us know what you like, and what you would like to read more about. Please send us your comments, questions, and suggestions, articles, photographs, and let us know if your contacts and programs in Russia have been assisted by our informational service.

On the cover: Arctic Fox, drawing by V.Smirin

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