

Photo Story

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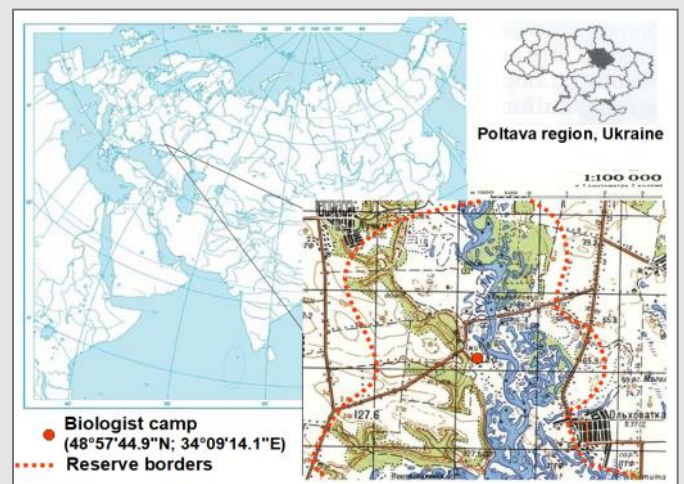
Visit to the Vorskla River in May

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During May 1-3, 2014 we visited Luchkovsky nature reserve (Ukraine), 20 years after the early studies. In 1996 the reserve was established in the Lower Vorskla River flow to protect natural complexes. Since 2002, the Luchkovsky nature reserve has been part of the Regional Landscape Park "Nizhnevorsklyansky". The total length of the Vorskla is 464 km. The territory of the reserve is located at the northern border of the Steppe zone, and 15 kilometers from where the Vorskla flows into the Dnieper. Here, the river is adorably beautiful. It splits into many branches, alternating with islands and reed thickets. On the right bank of the Vorskla River, ravine oak forests have been preserved in combination with steppe meadows (Stecuk et al. 2002).



Location of the Luchkovsky nature reserve.



Panorama from the right bank to the main watercourse of the Vorskla River (48°57'25.5\"N 34°09'40.2\"E). In the foreground there is a ravine forest and a steppe meadow.



Panorama from the right bank to the Vorskla River mouth. The riverside is indented by picturesque ravines and often includes clay cliffs up to 20 m high. In these clay cliffs European Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*), Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), Sand Martin (*Riparia riparia*) burrow for nesting. Common Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*), Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) and Great Tit (*Parus major*) settle in old burrows.



On the left side of the Vorskla river are steppe and wet meadows. Small trees of *Elaeagnus commutata* and *Pyrus communis* grow in these meadows (48°58'17.3"N 34°09'42.1"E).



We came to study the avifauna to discover if the species composition of birds has changed over 20 years. Mosaic landscape and absence of civilization, creates comfortable conditions for nesting birds. As before (in 1996 and 1997), we were made very welcome and settled at the camp in the same house as 20 years ago. In the evening we met here a mouse and a robin (*Erithacus rubecula*) and got to work at dawn.





The dawn pleased with the beauty of the sunrise, the dew adorned the plants. Dew condensed on the spider's web and made the work of the spider conspicuous for photos. There are about 850 species of higher plants in the flora of the reserve, two of which are included in the European Red List (Natural Reserve Fund of Ukraine 2009).



Representatives of the flora in the reserve: *Equisetum* sp., *Pulsatilla* sp., *Ornithogalum boucheanum*, *Anemone nemorosa*, *Viola* sp. and *Myosotis* sp.



When the sun rose and the dew has dried the insects became active. *Xylocopa violacea* is a rare species of bee that lives in xerophytic woodlands and steppe cliff. *Meloe proscarabaeus* is a rare beetle that parasitizes bees. *Melolontha melolontha* and *Cordulia aenea* are widely distributed species.



Common Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) freshly hatched from its egg.



A group of Tree Sparrows (*Passer montanus*) settled in the nest of a White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*). This is common as small birds are well protected from predators next to a large and strong bird.



The most interesting ornithological encounter: European nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*) hiding for a day's rest in the thickets of shrub. Here it is protected. Its coloration and body shape are similar to a tree bough. At dusk, it will go hunting for insects. Soon the Nightjar will nest on the ground in a meadow.

Today, 88 species of 15 orders nest in the Luchkovsky reserve, which represent 11 faunogenetic complexes (Shupova & Chaplygina 2016). Due to the presence of woody vegetation, 54 species of bird nest in the meadows (ground-nesting and tree-nesting).

Further reading

Stecuk, N.O., Kushnir, L.L. & Kushnir, L.M. 2002. Antropogenous transformation, the lower reaches. Vorskla in connection with

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Natural Reserve Fund of Ukraine. Kyiv. «Center for Environmental Education and Information», 2009. (in Ukrainian).