



17. International Junior Ranger Camp 2018



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1 Introduction

The slogan of this year's International Junior Ranger Camp, which took place in the Müritz National Park from July 9th – July 15th 2018, was „Discover Europe's Wild Heritage". In the first place, it refers to the UNESCO World Heritage Natural Site of "Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe", a transboundary Natural Heritage site that stretches over 12 European Countries. One of the five German old-growth beech forest areas of this Natural Heritage site is located in the Serrahn part of the Müritz National Park.

Moreover, wilderness becomes an issue more and more important particularly in the German context because the German national strategy for biological diversity aims to set aside 2 % of the surface area for wilderness development without human influence by 2020. As of 2018, the Müritz National Park contributes to areas of wilderness development on 78 % of its surface area since the management of forests with coniferous trees from anthropogenic origin was terminated and other habitats are highly protected.

2 Objective of the camp

Participating in the 17th International Junior Ranger Camp generally pursues several objectives. On the one hand, it gives the opportunity for adolescents who are active in their Junior Ranger program at home to gain experience in European exchange, interaction with other youngsters in regard to nature conservation and get to know protected areas across Europe. On the other hand, the same is true for the adult and professional Rangers (mentors) who get the opportunity during the camp to exchange and share information, experiences and approaches to solve problems.

The 2018 International Junior Ranger Camp in particular aimed at providing a good mix of recreation, scientific research, visits of natural monuments, environmental education and practical work for nature conservation, all in the light of the Müritz National Park's guiding principle of "letting nature being nature".

3 Camp Site and Accommodation

Very close to the UNESCO World Heritage Site we find the Müritz National Park's Youth Education Centre in a very natural setting, the Jugendwaldheim Steinmühle. The over 100 years old house is located remotely on the brink of Lake Grünower See.

This extraordinary facility provides room and board for up to 41 guests and is equipped with high-level accommodation as well as kitchen facilities and outdoor and sports equipment. Moreover, it provides all sorts of equipment for environmental education on land and on water and its staff is very experienced with groups of all ages.

4 Participants

In total, 51 persons participated in the camp as guests coming from 12 different countries representing 16 different protected areas across Europe.

- Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici NP - Spain
- Cairngorms National Park - Scotland
- Ente aree Protette Alpi Marittime - Italy
- Kemer National Park & Gauja National Park - Latvia
- Kullabergs Naturreservat - Sweden
- Müritz National Park - Germany
- Nationalpark Bayerischer Wald - Germany
- Naturpark Niederlausitzer Landruecken Naturwacht - Germany
- Naturpark Stechlin Ruppiner Land - Germany
- Naturschutzgebiet Pfäffikersee - Switzerland
- Parco naturale delle Prealpi Giulie - Italy
- Ramat Handiv Nature Park - Israel
- SIT NATURA 2000 MUNTII TARCU - Romania
- Vilsandi National Park and Soomaa National Park - Estonia
- Triglav National Park - Slovenia
- Weerribben-Wieden National Park - Netherlands

Among the participants, there were 34 Junior Rangers and 15 mentors and rangers and one staff member of EUROPARC Federation. The Junior Rangers were between 12 and 18 years old, and there was a good balance between the genders with slightly more girls (59 %) than boys (41 %).

Besides the permanent staff of the Youth Educational Centre of 6 persons (including the author) who were permanently in action, another 14 staff members from the Müritz National Park from all management levels as well as eight persons from other institutions were part of the team. Those were active on at least one or several days during the week of the camp. The other institutions were of very different forms from private person to staff members of adjacent Nature Parks, the Forest Authority, EUROPARC Germany, the GFZ Research Centre for Geosciences or an association for nature conservation (GNL Kratzeburg). The willingness to support the camp was exceptionally high from all sides and many have worked overtime with pleasure.

4 Program and activities

The active program of the camp started on 9th July 16:00 with an official greeting by the Minister of Environmental Affairs (Dr. Backhaus), a representative of the regional government (Mr. Seiferth) and the Head of the National Park (Mr. Meßner). The camp was closed with an evaluation and hand out of Certificates on the 15th.

The slogan for the 2018 International Junior Ranger Camp was “Discover Europe’s Wild Heritage” and was the leading principle around which the daily activities were organized. It was the goal to have a good mix of recreation, science, visits of natural monuments, environmental education and practical work for nature conservation and at the same time provide enough space and time for the Junior Rangers to present their protected areas in a short presentation as well as some time for free movement and communication. Almost all activities were located inside or adjacent to the Müritz National Park, only the visit of the first National Monument in Germany, the ancient Oaks of Ivenack with a tree top walk, was farther away. The transport was organized by minivans, bicycle or by foot to the closer activities. For three days, a bus was chartered to transport the whole group to destinations that were farther away. As it was not possible that all camp participants could attend all the same activity, on three out of six days the group was separated into smaller groups (2-4) all with different activities. Reasons for separating the group were either of logistic or financial nature.

The recreation part has also included cultural or handcraft aspects from the region. There were two days and other moments in between including paddling and canoeing, hiking as well as bathing, ice cream from a local producer, visit to a local fishery and a

local traditional dancing group at the camp site where all guests participated (to the surprise of the dancing group leader!).

The science part should (not only) teach the Junior Rangers about natural phenomena in the region but more importantly inspire and raise appreciation for scientific approaches. One activity in the field of science was the visit of an observatory station for hydrological research in the context of a bigger project concerning the exploration of the effects of global environmental change (TERENO) close to the campsite. One smaller group also had the chance to become active in fresh water research on the shore of Germany's largest inland lake, the Müritz.

The whole group was visiting the National Natural Monument of the ancient Oak Trees of Ivenack, the first of this category in Germany. The visit there was coherent with a tree top walk with environmental educational qualities. The visit of the Nature Discovery Centre Müritzeum in the city of Waren (Müritz) with the whole group was planned spontaneously due to rainy weather but was very interesting for many Junior Rangers as it has a very well designed exhibition about the Müritz Lake, its history and its surrounding nature. Especially the over 25 aquaria are an eye-catcher.

For the practical work, the group was separated in four different groups. It was the only group separation that was discussed with the mentors in advance because the work intensity had to be matched with the abilities of the Junior Rangers. The work activities ranged from pruning willow trees, mowing and removing the grass off an orchid habitat, redirecting a hiking trail for the protection of an aerie of osprey to the rehabilitation of clay seals to support peat bog restoration in a forest area. Working with smaller groups from six to 24 persons also made it easier for the leading mentors to implement the work activity in the field.

The camp also included a ceremony of graduation for the local Junior Rangers of Müritz National Park. This come-together and the following joined international buffet were a good opportunity for the local groups to meet the international guests and vice versa.

The detailed program was not given to the Junior Rangers in advance to sustain curiosity and suspense for the camp. However, the program was handed out to the mentors including some instructions for the week and a board in the central area of the campsite gave instructions for everybody what was roughly happening each day, when it started and what is to be carried. Another board in the food area of the campsite was

titled “everybody loves to help” and showed a schedule with instructions of when which group had to help in the kitchen with cleaning the dishes and tableware. Showing those boards in the instruction during the first day resulted in a well working system.

The program included one session only for the adult Rangers and mentors for an informal training and learning exchange giving room for discussion of several topics concerning the Junior Ranger program across Europe.

5 Camp preparation

The preparation of the camp started roughly in November 2017 and was continued from then on individually but also in workshop meetings together with all staff members of the Müritz National Park who are active in the Junior Ranger program or employed at the Jugendwaldheim Steinmühle. The author of this report took over the camp preparation, the detailed organization of the program and the staff involved and the financing from April 2018. The biggest challenge was the simultaneous management of the campsite, the Jugendwaldheim Steinmühle, in regular operation with visiting groups and other activities of environmental education during the whole summer. Two staff members of the Müritz National Park (including the author) were the head leaders of the preparation team assigned with all formal and financial issues as well as the relations to the press and the public. Further, seven members of the staff were supporting the work effort in different areas and the two main staff of the kitchen organized and prepared the supply and provision with food. Four members of the Jugendwaldheim staff then worked in shifts to prepare a rich breakfast buffet and a warm dinner every day. Two different sponsors provided special drinks such as bottled mineral water and lemonade in large amounts.

The preparation was also supported substantially by two staff members of EUROPARC Federation and one of EUROPARC Germany based on the letter of agreement between the three parties. Very helpful was that EUROPARC Federation implemented the complete registration process of the participants and the communication with them. All three colleagues from EUROPARC were always able to support the Müritz team quickly and in all questions regarding the preparation and realization of the camp.

Just before the camp, one of the older Junior Rangers of the Müritz National Park helped with the preparation of the informational boards and decoration of the campsite.

Furthermore, the municipality of Carpin provided tables and benches that were needed for the central food area outside the main building at the camp. A family from the close neighborhood in Grünow, the Kösters, provided a covered wagon as an additional room for sleeping.

6 Budget

The first calculation of the total costs was estimated early in 2018 in order to apply for funding from the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment of the federal state Mecklenburg-West Pomerania. There is a fund designated especially for international projects and applications have to reach the Ministry at least six months before implementation. The total amount provided from there was 8.000,00 €. Besides, funding was applied for from EUROPARC Germany which assured 2.000,00 € for merchandise such as t-shirts, bags as well as the renting fees for canoes, all from a fund called “Marktplatz Natur”. Furthermore, EUROPARC Germany assured the financing of two of the four German groups in the total amount of 962,00 €. The administration of the Müritz National Park provided around 1.100,00 € from its budgets for environmental education and maintenance of the Youth Education Centre. Through active fundraising the total of 800,00 € was collected from the association of the Friends of the Müritz National Park, a local savings bank and a local entrepreneur. The provision of drinks from two companies decreased the costs for food significantly. Müritz National Park wants to express its gratitude for the support and wants to thank all sponsors that made this camp possible (see Annex).

The estimated total amount of the costs changed throughout the preparation process due to changing proposals or false estimations of costs. In the end, the total costs of around 13.000,00 € had to be financed. The main matters of expenses were the costs for the accommodation and food with the total sum in the end of around 8.000,00 €. Then, the camp T-shirt and the bus transfers were around 1.500,00 € and 1.400,00 €, respectively. The service of professional lifeguards at the point of swimming and canoeing was around 350,00 € for one day. The remaining costs with smaller amounts for entrance fees or expenses for services among others summed up to around 1.150,00 € in total.

7 Evaluation

Rangers and Mentors

All Rangers and mentors expressed very positive feedbacks on the camp, for its organization, program, structure, logistics and general management. In the following the thoughts of the Rangers/Mentors are presented.

They appreciated the idea to have a day for learning exchange at the camp, only among rangers and mentors. They suggest replicating this and have focused presentations by all rangers on specific questions, which are sent in advance. It might be better if such meeting doesn't take place right at the beginning of the camp because the Junior Ranger (JR) are then separated very early from their mentors.

All rangers were impressed by the quality and the level of the presentations made by the JR at the camp. It might be nice to have an award for the best presentation, to be voted by Rangers and mentors at the camp.

It would be good to provide a draft overview program to rangers and mentors in advance, so they can answer question by the parents at home. It was good to have the daily program on a poster in the main room, and info on roles and responsibilities day by day. Consider that for many JR the camp is quite a stress in terms of travel, meeting new people, speaking a different language etc. To have some information in advance and do some activities in small groups can help reduce pressure.

To facilitate the exchange among JR it is important to always propose some activities for small groups and to organize more games to learn the names at the beginning of the camp. The activity with the identity cards made by participants was very nice and useful to get know each other.

Mix also participants from different countries when setting the rooms. Do not increase the number of participants from same country (2 teams per country maximum). It is important to be clear in advance on what it is expected from the rangers and mentors during the camp so they know how and when to step in: i.e. organize games, lead sessions, activities, support for specific things.

Ensure that every evening there is a conclusion of the day, and to provide info on next day activities.

The camp should be an opportunity to involve stakeholders and give visibility of the work the park does for environmental education.

It is important that participants also feel useful, doing some practical nature conservation activities; important to provide explanations on nature context: what, why, etc.

Also, it is important to introduce the whole team supporting and managing the camp at beginning, also those helping on the background, like kitchen etc.

Junior Rangers

Junior Rangers have assessed the camp in small teams. From their drawing and key words, it became clear that the camp was amazing, it was a very positive experience, and well managed to create a good atmosphere among the kids. They appreciated the balance between activities and free time to spend together, e.g. the opportunities for learning exchanges with presentations, singing and playing guitar, playing and doing sports together, working together outdoors for nature conservation. They all learned and discovered new habitats and species, having also the opportunity to see them (bats, osprey aerie, fishes etc.). Some activities were inspiring and gave them ideas for nature management and conservation to be developed at home, i.e. fences around old trees, peat bog conservation. They also got motivation to do research in nature and got ideas for outdoor activities. They are willing to promote the idea of national or local summer camps. They all learned more about parks in Europe - differences and similarities with home parks – and improved their language skills, learning words in different languages and practicing English.

EUROPARC Team

Two members of the EUROPARC team have been involved in the organization and management of the camp. EUROPARC took care of the promotional activities with the network; managed the registrations of participants; contributed to the organization of the camp program providing inputs and guidelines; attended the camp supporting the leading team of the park and ensured the dissemination of results after the camp.

The presence of the Ministry of the Environment at the opening, together with the active involvement of the Park Director during the course of the camp, showed the attention and commitment of the Regional authorities and park management to the JR program, and has been much appreciated. The active contribution and involvement of many rangers from the park, was also of high value. We also had the perception that the camp has been well valued to strengthen cooperation and to build on with existing external park partners/stakeholders.

The camp has been managed by the Müritz National Park at very high standards, with very good planning and organization. The work of Johannes Herweg has been exceptional.

The location was great and the logistics all very good (e.g. facilities at the camp, food, accommodation, space, toilets, space for outdoor games and meetings inside). The program was rich of different activities and gave the chance to participants to discover the park, learn a lot about its habitats, species, history, management and to undertake some practical nature conservation activities. Adequate time was left for JR to enjoy the camp together and create a very nice group.

All comments collected both from JR and Rangers/Mentors were very positive with really minor suggestions for improvement.

Müritz National Park

Speaking for the staff members of the Müritz National Park who were involved in the preparation and realization of the International Junior Ranger Camp 2018, everybody agrees that the camp was very successful and that it was an exhausting but joyful experience. The group of the many Junior Rangers from different countries was very friendly, interested and respectful to one another as well as to the rangers and mentors. The atmosphere and the spirit was quite positive throughout and the Junior Rangers were working together very well. This was very important for the camp to be successful. There was no point during the week on which the camp was stagnating or becoming boring.

Using workshops with our staff to prepare the program for the camp was helpful to find a good mixture of all sorts of interests and fields of activities. The implementation of all the different activities was working out very well as all staff members involved were taking their responsibility serious and doing a very good job. The help we received from outside the National Park from other institutions, public authorities, private persons, associations and the dedication from the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment was exceptional. In addition, the support from the international rangers and mentors but especially from Federico Minozzi from EUROPARC Federation during the camp was very helpful because he got involved as the group leader.

Although I was in frequent exchange with EUROPARC Federation, I would suggest that the person supporting the entire week of the camp travels to the location one day

before the others to agree on the program, to get to know the camp site better and to get involved even more in the course of each day. Further, the visiting mentors could get involved more in the interaction between the groups with short games of sportive or educational character. This needs to be communicated with them in advance. The only bigger problem that I have noticed for the staff of the Müritz National Park was the language barrier. Many of them do not have a sufficient level or no experience in communication in the English language. Further training in English should be considered for Ranger education.

Regarding the program, the visit of the ancient oak trees, the canoeing and the scientific research exercises were pointed out by the Junior Rangers in their evaluation and had an exceptional standing. But also, group activities that evolved in the spare time such as sports and singing were highlighted.

8 Conclusion

The overall perception of the camp is very positive from all sides and in all levels of the Müritz National Park administration as well as from EUROPARC Federation. The feedback on the program and the activities was very positive as well, from the rangers, mentors and other staff but most important from the Junior Rangers.

The main challenge for the organizing team was the international character of the camp, which was new to the Müritz National Park staff. Of course, many camps have been organized and were held at the Jugendwaldheim Steinmühle or at other locations in the National Park but none of them was as large and comprehensive as the International Camp 2018.

Regarding the support for the camp from the outside of Müritz National Park and taking into account the positive feedback from all sides, it strengthens my believe in the positive effect the International Junior Ranger Camp, and the Junior Ranger program in particular, has for the Müritz National Park and the Jugendwaldheim Steinmühle.

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