

Darkness at the other end of the (toad) tunnel?

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The international amphibian protection camp that *Circalytes* 3 (4) also announced was held at Parassapuszta, Hungary between 3/30 and 4/8 1990. Altogether 37 people from 8 countries (Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, U. K., and Hungary) participated in it. In spite of some technical difficulties, i. e. shortage of tap water because of drought, the camp was successful. Participants visited the site of the stopped Nagymaros dam, places with historical interest, Visegrád, the king's castle and the ruins of a fortress from the Middle Ages, Drégelypalánk. Numerous excursions completed the programme. During 8 days 24 lectures were held. The focus was on amphibians but lectures also included alternative agriculture, the green movement provided a broader overview.

1990 was exceptional because the lack of snow and rain resulting in an extremely low water table. All the traditional amphibian breeding sites were dry. Only a larger permanent pond remained in the area, which had not been used by too many animals to breed in.

This spring amphibians should have coped with more threats than usually. Besides road crashes (Parassapuszta is on an international road leading to Czechoslovakia between the Börzsöny Mountains and the floodplain of the river Ipoly), meteorological conditions were unfavourable. Moisture reached 90% only three times before 15th April which is usually the end of the migration of *Bufo bufo*. Another factor with a much longer time effect is habitat destruction. A drain was created in the middle of the breeding season through the breeding area making the soil even drier. Reed burning also occurred. Only 1/10-1/5 part of the total populations migrated and these animals had no other choice than to breed in the usually neglected pond or lay eggs onto the bare bottom of the drain. The quality of the pond water was different from last year, i. e. the concentration of the measured elements which could have considerable effects on the tadpole development. Probably the number of offsprings will be smallest as to compare with the 4 previous years.

During the camp there was only one night when more than 1,000 animals were rescued because of meteorological conditions. In spite of this, a first record of *Triturus cristatus* in the area was made. The species found are: *Triturus vulgaris*, *T. cristatus*, *Bufo bufo*, *B. viridis*, *Bombina bombina*, *Hyla arborea*, *Pelobates fuscus*, *Rana dalmatina*, *R. temporaria*, *R. esculenta* complex. (In a stream flowing to the floodplain under the road roughly 800-1,000 m away, *Salamandra salamandra* was also found in 1989). Their number meant a pressure great enough to enforce the construction of the first - and only - permanent technical solution to stop road killings of amphibians in Hungary, a ditch -culvert- tunnel system. The investigations of the Toad Action Group (TAG) also proved that Parassapuszta is a site worth to protect, the leech *Hirudo medicinalis*, a red data book species lives here as well, partly on amphibians.

Unfortunately the drain running through the area causes the disappearance of practically all water bodies which had been used to breed in even if the weather is suitable. The reason of this construction was to get arable fields. This process can be stopped and reversed, and as the loss would be considerably greater than the gain if this important piece of wetland disappear it is the aim of the Toad Action Group. We do need everybody's help. Please write to the Minister for the Environment!

We would suggest the following letter:

Dear Sir,

The organization / person suggests you to protect the amphibian breeding site at Parassapuszta because of its international importance both from herpetological and other aspects. This aim can easily be reached by the protection of a relatively small piece of land. I hope you help to conserve the natural richness of Hungary.

Yours sincerely

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Naturally any other letters are welcome. Please, send a copy to the Toad Action Group, too. The address is: Ministry for the Environment, Ministry for the Environment and Water Management Budapest I. kerület Fő utca 44-50, 1011 HUNGARY

CIRCALYTES

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