

ESENIAS-TOOLS: REGIONAL INITIATIVE TO CONSERVE BIODIVERSITY

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Back ground and aim

ESENIAS (East and South European Network for Invasive Alien Species) was established in 2011. One of the main activities of ESENIAS has been the organisation of yearly workshops (Zagreb 2010, Sofia 2011, Belgrade 2012, Çanakkale 2013, and Antalya 2014) aimed at facilitating the participation of invasive alien species (IAS) experts from the participating countries, as well as other practitioners. The objective of the workshops was the setting up of the network, the launch of the main activities, and the discussion of IAS issues of regional concern. As a key result, a number of initiatives have started, including the development of a database, needed to raise awareness and manage IAS in the region.

However, several issues that need to be addressed were detected:

- Fragmented or lack of information;
- Lack of common methodological approaches and guidelines;
- Low data harmonization, very difficult for comparison, e.g. cross-border issues are extremely difficult to tackle;
- No real region-wide information infrastructure;
- Not sufficiently developed cooperation between IAS experts at national and regional level;
- Low representation and integration of South East part of Europe in European and global IAS initiatives.

Furthermore, new introductions of organism, along with other drivers of biodiversity loss, at large the global change, will cause the appearance of new problems in managed and unmanaged areas.

In this respect networking and regional cooperation are crucial for management of alien species in South East Europe being a bridge between Central Europe Asia and Eastern Mediterranean.



The horse-chestnut leafminer *C. ohridella* is a species with confirmed negative ecological impact. The trees in Bulgarian natural stand of *Aesculus hippocastanum* – natural reserve “Dervisha” are heavy infested and a total defoliation in August, made by the second summer generation of the moth, occurs every four years. The reduced seed weight may severely impair growth and survival of horse chestnut seedlings. The long term natural succession in the forest may be altered by the moth, and may even lead to the replacement of *A. hippocastanum* in the last remaining endemic refuges of the species.

The Project

In this context, a new project has been just launched: “East and South European Network for Invasive Alien Species – a tool to support the management of alien species in Bulgaria (ESENIAS-TOOLS)”. This initiative, funded under the Programme BG03 “Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services” within the EEA FM (2009-2014), will result in networking and development of IAS tools within the framework of ESENIAS to support the management of alien species in Bulgaria and in the overall region. Eleven institutions from Bulgaria, Croatia, Iceland, Greece, R. Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Turkey will take part in the project. Ten working groups of the project is focused on different groups of alien organisms as well as dissemination etc. subjects. The main outcome from the partnership will be a regional network fully integrated in European research area.

Expected main outputs are:

- joint standardised and harmonised methodology for data collection, analysis, database use, dissemination;
- lists of alien species and priority species in the region;
- IAS expert and responsible institution register, lists of projects and publications;
- Analysis of IAS legislation and management practices.
- An early warning tool including species alerts will be developed in order to increase awareness of experts, public administration and managers and to facilitate the IAS early detection and rapid response.



The multi-coloured Asian lady beetle, or harlequin ladybird, *Harmonia axyridis* (Pallas, 1773) (Coleoptera: Coccinellidae) has spread in Europe at a very fast rate occupying different habitats and is regarded as species that may have strong negative effects on biodiversity.

Conclusions

- We expect this one-year project will contribute conserving biodiversity in the East and South European countries.
- The network will be also active in facilitating the implementation of regional activities on IAS in accordance to the provisions set by the new EU Regulation on IAS No. 1143/2014.
- The project will enhance regional cooperation for establishing a list of invasive alien plant species of regional concern to prevent their spread species into or within the ESENIAS region



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