

Additional Material

Ecological features

The peatbog on the Peštersko polje is one of the largest and most preserved peatbogs in Serbia, along with the peatbogs in the area of Vlasina and the Divčibare. It is significant first of all for its size, since large peatbogs are rare in this climate. It is a mesophilous peatbog (TEŠIĆ *et al.*, 1979). Waters that in the past ran into this bog carried a large quantity of mineral salts, which had influence on vegetation as well. In the vegetation structure of those times, significant roles were played by reed, species of genera *Carex*, *Equisetum* etc.

It is necessary to emphasize that, in the wider area of Peštersko polje, trees or even shrubs are almost completely absent, except for the inhabited places.

Present ecological conditions are predominantly influenced by human activities. Peštersko polje with its surroundings lays in a forest belt, but of old coniferous forests of spruce, fir and pines, today only very small fragments remained. This region has always been known for cattle breeding and grazing, which gives the appearance of a mountainous steppe to the whole landscape. Extensive amelioration activities in 1972 greatly degraded and modified the composition and physiognomy of plant and animal communities. The character, structure and arrangement of the recent vegetation of Peštersko polje are determined by local hydrological features. The richness and diversity of microecological features generated an extensive patchiness of plant communities. A detailed study of LAZAREVIĆ (2000-2005) revealed a large number of plant communities, out of which the following are dominating:

Class: *Potamogetonetea* Klika ap. Nowak & Klika 1941

Order: *Potamogetonetalia* W. Koch 1926

Alliance: *Potamion eurosibiricum* Koch 1926.

Ass.: *Potamogetonetea natans* prov.

Ass.: *Potamogetonetea fluitans* prov.

Class: *Phragmitetea* Tx. et Preising 1942

Order: *Phragmietalia communis* Koch 1962

Alliance: *Phragmition communis* Koch 1926

Ass.: *Scirpetum lacustris* Schmale 1939

Ass.: *Typhetum latifoliae* G. Lang 1973

Ass.: *Typhetum angustifoliae* Pign. 1953

Class: *Phragmitetea* Tx. et Preising 1942

Order: *Magnocaricetalia* Pign. 1953

Alliance: *Magnocaricion* Koch 1926

Suballiance: *Caricion gracilis* (Neuhäusl 1959) Oberd. et al. 1967

Ass.: *Caricetum vesicariae* Br.-Bl. et Denis 1926

Ass.: *Caricetum gracilis* (Graebn. et Hueck 1931) Tx. 1937

Class: *Molinio-Arrhenatheretea* R. Tx. 1937

Order: *Molinietalia* W. Koch 1926

Alliance: *Molinion caeruleae* W. Koch 1926

Ass.: *Lathyrato-Molinietum caeruleae* Tatić, Veljović, Petković, Stefanović,

Radotić 1987 (1988)

Class: *Nardo-Callunetea* Preisg. 1949

Order: *Nardetalia strictae* Preisg. 1949

Alliance: *Nardion strictae* Br.-Bl. 1926

Ass.: *Nardetum strictae* Greb. 1950

Class: *Scheuchzerio-Caricetea fuscae* (Nordhagen 1936) R. Tx. 1937 Order:
Scheuchzerietalia palustris Nordhag. 1937
Alliance: *Salici-Betulion pubescentis* V. Rand. 1994 Ass.: *Salicetum
rosmarinifoliae* prov.

Class: *Salicetea purpureae* Moor (1958) 1960
Order: *Salicetalia purpureae* Moor (1958) 1960
Alliance: *Salicion triandrae* Malc. 1929, Müll. et Görs 1958 (Br. – Bl. 1956) Ass.: *Salicetum
purpureae* Wend. - Zel. 1952

Class: *Festucetea vaginatae* Soó 1968 emend. Vicherek 1972 Order:
Halacsyetalia sendtneri H. Ritter-Studnička 1970 Alliance: *Centaureo-Bromion
fibrosi* Blečić et al. 1960
Ass.: *Poo molinieri-Plantaginetum holostei* Z. Pavlović 1951

Aquatic vegetation is developed in the newly formed lake, as well as in channels and watercourses, and the fossil riverbed of the Boroštica River has a particular significance, with parts that are covered with water throughout the year. They are characterised with communities of the alliance *Potamion eurosibiricum* with submersed and rooted plant species: *Potamogeton fluitans*, *Potamogeton natans*, *Potamogeton crispus* and others. Shallower pools, channels and smaller stagnant tributaries of the former riverbed of the Boroštica River, are characterised with the presence of submersed and floatant vegetation, with *Myriophyllum spicatum*, *Lemna minor*, *Callitriche palustris*, *Ranunculus circinatus*, *Chara contraria* and others. The presence in Serbia of the community of a rare carnivorous yellow bladderwort *Utricularia australis* should be particularly emphasized, as well as the presence of a small population of white lily *Nymphaea alba*. According to the classification of habitats of Serbia, harmonised with international standards (LAKUŠIĆ *et al.*, 2005), these are habitats: C1.2

– Permanent mesotrophic lakes, ponds and pools.

Emergent vegetation is developed in the coastal area of the lake and along channels, levees, water pools and similar structures. Most frequent among them are communities of the alliance *Phragmition communis* with edificator species *Scirpus lacustris*, *Typha latifolia*, *Typha angustifolia*, of a very uniform and poor floristic composition. Such habitats are often inhabited by *Equisetum ramosissimum*, *Alisma plantago-aquatica*, and *Callitriche palustris*. Distribution of these communities is to a great extent determined by water level fluctuation and trophic regime. It is interesting that reed is nowadays rare, although it has been found in the peat (TEŠIĆ *et al.*, 1979). Such type of vegetation is developed in habitats classified as: C3.2 – Water-fringing reedbeds and tall helophytes other than canes.

A particular feature of Peštersko polje is a huge peatbog area, nowadays probably the greatest in Serbia. The wettest parts of water pools, old riverbeds and channels with fluctuating water level and often dried out during the summer, are covered with communities of the alliance *Magnocaricion*, with edificator species: *Carex gracilis*, *Carex vesicaria*, *Eryophorum angustifolium* and other. This type of habitat is marked as: D2.3 – Transition mires and quaking bogs. The largest areas of Peštersko polje are covered with the vegetation of wet meadows from the alliance *Molinion caeruleae* and *Nardion stricta*. They are characterised with species: *Molinia caerulea*, *Deschampsia caespitosa*, and *Nardus stricta*. They have a rich and diverse floristic composition, with a large number of boreal plant taxa that on the Balkan Peninsula reach the southernmost parts of their range in Europe. Today, these significant plant species are very rare and endangered in Serbia. The habitats are classified as: E3.4 – Moist or wet eutrophic and mesotrophic grassland.

The forest vegetation has been generally removed and devastated from Pešter. Populations of a willow species *Salix rosmarinifolia*, rare in Serbia, can be found in Peštersko polje. The scrub vegetation from the alliance *Salicion triandrae* is developed in the old riverbed of the Boroštica River, with edificator species *Salix purpurea* and *Salix cinerea*. Such types of habitats are classified as: F9.25 – Mountain boggy willows with *Salix rosmarinifolia* and F9.1 – Riverine and lakeshore *Salix* scrub.

Contrary to the dominant wet and aquatic habitats, the dry and rocky hill Trojan dominates the north-eastern part of Peštersko polje, made of serpentinite. It is inhabited with a specific vegetation of the order *Halacxyetalia sendtneri* with edificator species *Halacxya sendtneri* and *Plantago carinata*, with a larger number of characteristic endemic taxa. Such types of habitats are classified as: E1.2B – Serpentine steppes.

Around rural farms, on access roads and levees, ruderal communities are sporadically developed. Confined agricultural areas under potato cultures represent one of the hazardous factors for peatbogs in Pešter, classified as: I1.13 – Small-scale intensive unmixed crops (<1ha). In immediate vicinity of the village of Karajukića bunari there is a small artificial stand of Scots pine and black pine, with the habitat type: G5.4 – Small coniferous anthropogenic woodlands.

Noteworthy fauna

Diversity of the fauna is one of the most distinctive features of the area of Peštersko polje.

Fishes: A rich fish fauna can be found on the Sjenica-Pešter Plateau. Significant representatives are brown trout (*Salmo trutta*), huchen (*Hucho hucho*), grayling (*Thymallus thymallus*), nase (*Chondrostoma nasus*) and chub (*Leuciscus cephalus*). The fish fauna of the Boroštica River and the lake is rather diverse and rich. The major fish species in this area are chub (*Leuciscus cephalus*), goldfish (*Carassius auratus*), nase (*Chondrostoma nasus*), (*Gobio gobio*), wels catfish (*Silurus glanis*), which was introduced in 2004, and carp (*Cyprinus carpio*). The specimens of chub, one of the most important fish species, reach the weight of up to 2,5 kg.

Amphibians and reptiles: The peatbog Karajukića bunari, which by itself represents a relict biotope, is a specific habitat for several representatives of reptiles (KRIZMANIĆ *in* NIKOLIĆ *et al.*, 1995). Apart from this, it also represents a significant diversity and distribution centre of amphibians. One species from the order *Caudata* was recorded, smooth newt (*Triturus vulgaris*), and two species from the order *Anura*, marsh frog (*Rana ridibunda*) and common tree frog (*Hyla arborea*). The last one, common tree frog, is present in large numbers.

Birds: In the narrow zone of Peštersko polje, around the peatbog, 80 species of birds were recorded. The list is not final for this significant ornithological area. Additional research is necessary for a number of found species, in order to determine the final nesting status and population size.

Birds of prey, nesting in surrounding mountain areas, are feeding at this locality: short-toed eagle (*Circus gallicus*), Eurasian hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) and peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*).

Peštersko polje is a nesting area of the following species: water rail (*Rallus aquaticus*), lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*), redshank (*Tringa totanus*), whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*), yellow wagtail (*Motacilla flava*), and skylark (*Alauda arvensis*).

Peštersko polje is also a significant habitat for the migration of the following species: little grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), great crested grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*), squacco heron (*Ardeola ralloides*), purple heron (*Ardea purpurea*), spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*), green-winged teal (*Anas crecca*), garganey (*Anas querquedula*), red-footed falcon (*Falco vespertinus*), spotted crake (*Porzana porzana*), common moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*), ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) and common tern (*Sterna hirundo*).

Particularly significant as rare species of the mountain region of Serbia and Montenegro are: long-legged buzzard (*Buteo rufinus*), common snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*), short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*), Savi's warbler (*Locustella luscinioides*), sedge warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*) and marsh warbler (*A. palustris*). Some of these species are, however, probably present only during the summer dispersion and at the beginning of migration, hence they can not be regarded as nesting species. Nevertheless, the data on their presence during the summer period on this mountain plateau (1150-1200 m), at the farthest south-western part of Serbia, are very significant. For most of the species this is a completely new region of their summer presence, in comparison to their previously known distribution. It seems that Peštersko polje represents a new nesting place for short-eared owl, the only one south of the Sava and the Danube in Serbia, and the southernmost known on the Balkan Peninsula (GLUE & KÖRPIMAKI, 1997), as far as 400 km distant from its formerly known southern nesting border in Serbia and Montenegro. However, it is more a periodical than regular nesting place.

For long-legged buzzard, this is also a completely new and isolated area of summer residence, around 200 km distant from the closest known nesting areas in Serbia (GRUBAČ & RAŠAJSKI, 2000). Regarding the species of warblers, it is important to emphasize that these are the potential nesting places with certainly highest altitudes in

Serbia and the Balkan Peninsula. For Europe, FLADE (1997) cites that Savi's warbler (*Locustella luscinioides*) enters hilly areas with altitudes not higher than 500-630 m AMSL during the nesting period.

In any case, for some of the mentioned species of warblers, Peštersko polje is one of the new potential nesting areas, special for their altitudes on the Balkans and in Europe. The presence of ruddy turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) in migration should also be mentioned, which, regarding the region of western Serbia, has been recorded only here.

The results of the bird fauna research in Peštersko polje confirm the special significance of this area. Taking into account the particularly negative influence of man which can be seen through more and more intensive exploitation of the peat and water withdrawal, it is necessary to protect this area without delay, as a nature asset of national and international interest.

Mammals: Lesser mole rat (*Spalax leucodon*) is of particular value for the mammal fauna, and it can be found on meadows between the villages of Karajukića bunari and Ugao. Lesser mole rat was found also on pastures throughout Pešter, which is significant faunal asset for the area of this plateau, since this species is a nature rarity of Serbia, and species from the Red List of Globally Threatened Species. Otter (*Lutra lutra*) is also one of the significant species.

Ecosystem services

Social values

The entire existence of the Pešter local population is based on traditional cattle breeding, due to the natural characteristics of this area. The best pastures and mown meadows can be found in Peštersko polje, the waters of which determine the productivity of pastures in wider hinterland area. The local culture of the Sjenica-Pešter Plateau is determined by several principal characteristics. These characteristics are isolation, economy based on cattle breeding, and Islam and Christianity as two dominant confessions.

The area is mainly populated with members of the Moslem community, but regions with members of the Orthodox community also exist, as well as regions populated with Albanians of the Catholic confession. During the last decades of the 20th century, a large number of inhabitants, particularly younger ones, migrated to cities or abroad. It is estimated that approx. 10,000 persons has moved out of the region just during the last decade. The total number of inhabitants in Pešter is several thousands.

In the past period, the farming industry "Pešter", built by state authorities during 1980's, was active in the village of Karajukića bunari, with the purpose of sheep raising and dairy, meat and wool production. Several thousand sheep were once present at the farm. The sheep farm should have been a reproductive centre that would intensify sheep breeding industry. Furthermore, in the same time a textile factory "Vesna" was also built, which is nowadays completely neglected and out of order. Once 150 women from Pešter were employed in this factory.

Several centuries long sheep breeding in this area produced a sheep breed "pramenka" – Sjenica- Pešter type, which used to be preserved during 1950's in several villages in Pešter (Buđevo, Dolići and Boroštica). An autochthonous cattle breed "buša" was also present in this area until recent times. These cattle were raised mostly for their great working capacities, while their fertility and productivity were small. They can be still seen today in this area, and they are used for draughting, since there are not enough roads, as well as for land cultivation.

Flocks of sheep and herds of cattle, a mountain horse with saddlebags on his back here and there, and unique in the world shepherds' summer huts ("katuni") can be seen on green pastures. The "katun" is a hut made of woodsticks, sealed with mud and covered with grass, in which shepherd live. Shepherds leave their villages in spring, together with sheep and cattle, and move to the shepherds' settlements, where they stay until the late autumn. "Katuni" are situated on pastures where it is easy to organise life both of men and animals. Shepherds are built in close vicinity of these summer huts, in which milkmen prepare the famous "Sjencički" cheese. The life in shepherds' settlements is very interesting, and it could represent a genuine tourist attraction.

Villages are various, some are situated in valleys, and some in the karst terrains. Villages in valleys are more numerous. There are not many new houses in Pešter. The houses are mostly single story and modest, just like the life itself on

this harsh plateau. Different types of houses exist in villages: log cabins, "baskijara", wattle and daub houses, but also modern houses built of solid material that can offer good comfort even to the choosiest tourist. There are many buildings with different purposes in the village courtyards like dairy stores, corn cribs, stables, chicken coops, vegetable pits and others. The ways of agricultural production on the Pešter Plateau and conditions for its functioning provide safe food of the highest quality. These products are used for preparing various culinary specialities in a traditional way, first of all specialities made of milk, such as various sorts of cheese, cream, "jardum" (salted lamb-milk), paprika stuffed with cream and cheese, butterfat etc. One of the most famous sorts of cheese is the Pešter "feta", and this is the only place where one can taste a Turkish speciality "jardum". Many types of pies, or pitas, prepared by village housewives, are also very famous, such as dock pie "zeljanica", cheese pie "gibanica" or "sirnica", cabbage pie "kupušnjak", potato pie "krompiruša", and zucchini pie "tikvenjak". A pie made of cheese, cream and onions is prepared for the fest of Ramadan and for weddings in the Moslem population. Pies are particularly tasty if made of home-made layers of dough, and the village housewives are true masters in preparing them. Delicious pies "obaruše na jufke" are made of buckwheat flour. People of the Sjenica-Pešter Plateau eat meat and dishes made of it from old times, once even more than today. The most frequent sorts of meat are mutton and beef, and roast lamb from Sjenica is very famous. Dishes prepared with boiled meat today are the so-called "pirjana tepsija", as well as cabbage and sauerkraut. Smoked meat is also known and used a lot in these areas. Smoked ham from Sjenica is far and wide appreciated.

Historical circumstances on the Sjenica-Pešter Plateau greatly contributed to the image of clothing. In spite of the acceptance of the European fashion, the national component remained in some form even to modern days. The Sjenica-Pešter region is known for its folk creativity, particularly for its exquisite carpets, quilts, fabrics used for making costumes and clothing, as well as for its ornamental embroidery.

Wedding customs on the Sjenica-Pešter Plateau are full of symbolism in all aspects, whether it is a question of songs, dances, clothing, gifts or woman-man relationship. According to traditional beliefs, marriage is not allowed between blood relatives up to the 9th degree of kinship, and between "milk kin" up to 7th degree of kinship, while marriage between godfathers/godchildren or wedding witnesses is allowed, but it is still not willingly accepted. Any premarital sexual relation, according to traditional ethics, is inadmissible. To pay for the bride was a common practice in previous times, as well as matchmaking.

The musician had a special status in traditional cultures. Most often a man, the musician is the carrier of music life of the community and representative of its traditional values. In the culture of the shepherds from Pešter, shepherds' music marks the identity of a person who performs it in many ways. It is performed predominantly by male players, old enough to watch over the sheep on their own. The art of playing is in most cases hand down through a patrilineage, from father or other male relatives. The boy starts to learn from the moment he has grown enough to go with an older person who watches over the flock, and eventually he "goes after the sheep" by himself. Transfer of the knowledge is not carried out by musical education, but through listening and repetition – rehearsal.

Current scientific research and facilities:

During 2005, a research of nature rarities of the Pešter Plateau was realised, with participation of experts from the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia, in cooperation with ornithologists from leading ornithological associations of Serbia. Main activities were aimed at bird fauna: 1) An inventory of nesting bird fauna of Tresava and Peštersko polje, with a special accent given to species that comply with the criteria for the nomination to Ramsar and IBA; 2) A detailed mapping of nesting sites of all rare and threatened species (ducks, sandpipers, bird of prey, white stork, songbirds, etc.), with a precise determination of the number of nesting pairs and their distribution; 3) Determination of basic characteristics of the nesting bird fauna and their factors of threat, with the recognition of necessary protection measures.

Identification and valorisation of nature assets of the area in scope of their protection were also completed: 1) Identification and mapping of the remaining significant aquatic (wet) habitats in Peštersko polje, primarily in the zone of Tresava; 2) Identification and mapping of other natural habitats of special significance for the conservation of the unique flora and fauna, with a special review of flora and herpetofauna; 3) Valorisation of basic nature assets of Peštersko polje, with a proposal for area protection and for improvement of the resource management and usage programme.

The Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia included this area within its first Action Plan for Protection of the Biodiversity of Serbia (for the period 1995-2000). The process of formation of the boggy vegetation on the peatbog of Karajukića bunari was reduced to the overgrowing process of the former aquatic biotope. Since the

number of peatbogs in the world is decreasing, and considering that they represent centres of a specific biodiversity, they are being in focus of action themes of international strategy for nature protection from two aspects, as wet (boggy and aquatic) ecosystems and as mountain ecosystems. Landscape protection is also suggested in international documents (Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy, 1995). Peatbogs are supporting structures for survival of the specific fauna, particularly ornithofauna that is nesting here, or has a migrating station or a feeding base.

Organisations involved in research of the mineral resources are also active in the field, as well as those involved in research of agricultural and aquatic potentials of the area.

Current communications, education and public awareness (CEPA) activities related to or benefiting the site:

Concrete and organised programmes of ecological education of the population about the environment or the necessities for its adequate protection have not been yet carried on in the area of the Pešter Plateau. One of the reasons that no urgent ecological problems, which would require educational programmes, ever appeared, is a specific state of conservation of the area, infrastructural confinement, a small number of inhabitants living in this region, and traditional ways of living in closed communities "in harmony with nature". However, in most recent times, trends of infrastructural improvement are present in this area, as well as trends of commercial usage of nature resources, primarily of the peat. For this reason, it is necessary to launch adequate educational programmes, as well as programmes for raising public awareness of the necessity to protect unique nature assets.

Current recreational and tourism:

Sjenica-Pešter Plateau offers exquisite opportunities for development of the rural tourism. This area is specific and unique in Serbia and Montenegro for many of its characteristics. It is distinguished with preserved, pristine nature, unpolluted environment, production of safe food, and with specific climate. But, in spite of that, the rural tourism on the Sjenica-Pešter Plateau is not developed. Little has been done on education of the rural population and promotion of natural beauties of this plateau to tourists. Once this is achieved, the perspectives for the development of rural tourism will become certain, which will lead to improvement of the villages and to cessation of emigration of inhabitants from this region. The promotion of possibilities for rural tourism in the Sjenica-Pešter Plateau should be one of the most important goals in the future.

Preserved nature, unpolluted environment, traditional ways of healthy food production and preparation, specific climate conditions and friendly people are the main tourist attractions in this area. The history of this area will become more familiar and understandable for tourists through the promotion of historic and cultural monuments. The traffic network along central routes is good and enables a relatively easy access to this plateau. Furthermore, there is an airport in vicinity of Sjenica, which could be used for transportation of tourists in the future. If there is a place where time has slightly stopped and where only the nicest things from wealthy history are kept, then it is the Sjenica-Pešter Plateau, which is unique and exceptional.

In the future, tourist could be engaged in routine farm activities, particularly in guarding sheep and cattle, their milking, and traditional cheese making. One day spent in a shepherd's hut ("katun"), being involved in these activities, would represent an unforgettable memory for many tourists. Some of them would be interested in meadow mowing, hay raking and stacking, or potato digging. Small mountain riding horses are kept in villages, and they can be used for recreational horse riding. Village women are very skilled in wool spinning, knitting, and most of all, in rug weaving. Wool was once indeed very much used for making a variety of artefacts, as it is still used in the present times. First carpet factory was open in Sjenica in 1908, and it greatly influenced the development of carpet industry in this area. For carpets of the Sjenica region one can say that they are yard goods of the past, the present and the future, and they are considered to be one of the most beautiful in our country.

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