

Project Update: May 2005

The project started with purchase of equipment to be use in the project. We bought GPS GARMIN Geko 301, 2 binoculars Olympus 10x50 DPS R, photo films, maps and etc. After Sousliks' winter hibernation and the end of the migration of the birds of prey, a team of field zoologists mapped the Souslik's colonies in the area between the rivers Topolnitsa and Luda Yana. In this area more than 30 settlements were visited and some 250 local people - enquired. Initial results of this inquiry show that the Souslik's population declines progressively during the last 15 years. The density of the birds of prey seems to have decreased too. Probable causes for this negative tendency could be:

- -Agricultural intensification and introduction of monocultures, changing the suitable habitats for Souslik.
- -Strong decrease of the areas used as pastures by the livestock.
- -Destruction of habitats in general (in the region of the Sredna Gora Mountains many Souslik colonies were destroyed after the appearance of mines and pits).

17 actual Souslik colonies and more than 20 abandoned ones were mapped by GPS. Four model colonies (by Tserovo, Zvanichevo, Popintsi and Tsar Assen) were chosen for monitoring twice a month.

Recently two teams, comprising ornithologists and NGO volunteers, observe the model colonies, trying to investigate them and establish potential threats. The monitoring concerns: interactions between predators and Sousliks, research of the predator's diet, studying the anthropogenic pressure etc.

As a forthcoming activity a reading of lectures and performing educational talks is planned in the region. Brochure about the sousliks/habitat/predators interaction is to be printed soon.

