

**Interim Report - I (18 October 2018 – 22 February 2019)**

**Prepared by PhD Okan URKER**

**Reviving Oriental (Anatolian) Sweetgum Forest in Southwestern Turkey**

**Project ID: 26671-B**

**February 2019**

**Ankara-TURKEY**

***Bird Researches: Birds can be a good reflector on the habitat fragmentation and used as indicators during the creation of new forests in following the succession periods. This activity aims to research the ecological parameters of Birds of Anatolian Sweetgum Forests. The three days surveys will be repeated in January, April, Early June, Late September.***



The primer surveys of this activity has been done with the support of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East (OSME) and The Rufford Foundation. And the findings of the study has been submitted to Sandgrouse (is the journal of OSME). 76 bird species had been recorded in all study sites. 14 of them recorded as breeding species in the areas, while 34 of them are may breed but no physical evidence founded. The rest recorded as passage or wintering species. We've selected two bird species (Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*) and vulnerable species Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*)) as trigger for the sweetgum forests. During the rest of our Rufford Booster Grant Project, we will monitor to those trigger species.

***Bat Researches: In forests two essential resources are available for the bats next to each other: roost sites and feeding grounds. One has to closely examine the habits and demands of bat species to understand the requirements that must be met by a forest in order to be a "bat forest". To understand the importance of sweetgum forests for the bats we will research the ecological parameters of the Forest Bats and the situation of the species, threat status, activity patterns, usages of the forest etc. This activity will be taken 12 months. But, the monitoring of the bat houses will be so longer for years until the bat houses are broken.***



Within this activity; the sweetgum forest bats of southwestern Anatolia have been started to study with the partnerships of Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Çankırı Karatekin University and General Directorate of Forestry (Department of Köyceğiz District).

In those studies, it is aimed to emphasize the importance of the forests for bats and the conservation suggestions regarding the challenges that forests pose for bats. Until today, 18 bat boxes had been placed to the 8 different sweetgum forest parts. In the scope of the study of the habitat preferences of bats, we determined that different bats started to settle in bat boxes placed in sweetgum forests for the first time in Turkey.

Monitoring in the region will be continued for the next 2 years after the project is done, so that the activation status of bats in forest ecosystems will be examined in more detail and their activities in combating forest pests will also be evaluated.



**Forest Spiders' Researches: OUR ARACHNOLOGY TEAM HAS JUST STARTED TO THE SURVEYS INSIDE THE SWEETGUM FORESTS**



Spiders are prominent due to ease of their taxon identifications, one of the easiest among the megadiverse arthropod taxa. Their use as indicators of anthropogenic land use patterns or habitat types has been pronounced for multiple times in the literature. There was no previous report on spiders from the unique *Liquidambar orientalis* forest habitat in Turkey, which is also true for any terrestrial invertebrate taxa. Pitfall traps will be active every four seasons for each 1 month. The team will also try to catch the spiders that use the sweetgum trees as roosting, feeding or breeding habitat with canvas clothes wrapped on tree trunks. The project will be carried out and coordinated with the expertise of Arachnologist Kadir Boğaç Kunt and Arachnologist PhD Mert Elverici.

***Sweetgum Afforestation Events: Until today we have planted nearly 5000 sweetgum saplings in the previous Rufford Projects. We will continue to this activity during the year randomly but define dates as are; 21 March World Forestry Day, last week of the August (We will organize Sweetgum Forest School activity in that week), second week of November (it is common afforestation season by the Chef of Koycegiz Forestry).***

These events have not started yet. But the organizations are still going on.

***Sweetgum Forest School (SFS) + International Bat Night (IBN) Events: One of our main problems is new generation from the locals has so weak knowledge about the sweetgum forests. To sustain our conservation management in a long future we want to create networks within the youths in the project region by organizing Sweetgum Forest Schools. IBN has taken place every year since 1997 in more than 30 countries on the last full weekend of August by giving information to the public about the way bats live and their needs with presentations, exhibitions and bat walks, listen to bat sounds etc. We want to bring together both events of SFS and IBT. SFS will be in between 28-31 August and IBT will be the last night event of the SFS as closing ceremony.***

These events have not started yet. But as the closest event, SFS will be planned to do in April 2019 with the participation of the students of Koycegiz Vocational School's Forestry Department and Fethiye Vocational School's Environmental Protection Department (Mugla Sitki Kocman University).

The event will be taken 2 days hosted by Koycegiz Vocational School of Mugla Sitki Kocman University. First day, theoretical presentations will be given by the project team related with each of their speciality, importance of the forest, conservation strategies etc. There will be field study during the second day. The project team shows to the students their working strategies, methodologies, technics etc. in the sweetgum forests. The rest of the second day, Koycegiz Forestry Department will do a sweetgum plantation activity. They will show to the students how the plantation issues (planting, nursery, conservation, protection, management of the forest etc.) are going on in the field.

***The Private Property Acquisition Campaign: NATURA's main aim to creating proprietary in sweetgum forest conservation. In this edition of the Rufford Project we will focus to short term strategies such as reaching to International Funds and Private Sector donations via lobby and seek for international donations to reach the budget of 3 hectares land purchasing.***

To stop the high fragmentation due to the sweetgum forest occupations (especially citrus and pomegranate plantations), We've started to create the private sweetgum reserves by purchasing of those occupied lands within this Project. We've also announced to our land purchasing programme that aims to collect the donations from the corporations (the programme basically contains to take donation/sponsorship from a corporation 50.000 Turkish Liras for buying a 1000 m<sup>2</sup> (about a quarter of acre) occupied land as minimum level. We co-work with Doğa Koruma Merkezi (DKM-Nature Conservation Centre Foundation) as partner organization in Turkey such to help fund land purchase and create nature reserves to protect threatened habitats and wildlife of the sweetgum forests. By now, we have agreed to purchase an 1,5 acre occupied land with DKM. Next March, we will announce to this purchasing activity and start to reforestation issues on the occupied land that will be purchased.



### *Sweetgum Action Plan (2019-2024)*



According to the current IUCN Red List assessments (Ver. 2018.2); the oriental sweetgum species (*Liquidambar orientalis* Miller) has upgraded from VU (Vulnerable) to EN (Endangered) category due to the heavy habitat fragmentations, land occupations, illegal sweetgum oil producing, overgrazing and tourism activities etc. Today, the species is becoming extinction.

In order to stop this extinction and to raise awareness of the local people who have developed a special way of life with these forests, a comprehensive action plan has been implemented in cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders from the public to the private sector, universities and civil society organizations which includes NATURA as major institution.

The 5-year Action Plan (between 2019-2024), which has been prepared with the utmost care for the last 2 years under the coordination of the Sweetgum Working Group (which NATURA has also pioneered the establishment of it), aims to implement 19 different activities in different sectors from research to conservation, education and tourism etc.



The launch of the action plan had been done within a special art exhibition related with the sweetgum forests in November 2018 in Marmaris.

Some activities in the action plan have already been started. The Sweetgum Action Plan is being revealed to revive the anatolian (oriental) sweetgum forests.

The dominant stakeholders of the action plan may be summarized as the Marmaris City Council, NATURA, TEMA, Muğla Regional Directorate of Forestry, Marmaris National Parks Directorate, Aegean Forestry Research Institute, 21st Regional Directorate of Water Affairs, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Muğla Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry, Muğla Provincial Directorate of Environment and Urbanization.

The Sweetgum Working Group will monitor the activities within the plan independently and transparently for 5 years as the responsible unit for the main monitoring and coordination of the action plan and will consult with the institutions which are responsible for the related activities.

NATURA is directly responsible for activities and 13 sub-activities of the action plan. Moreover, NATURA determines its work strategy by taking this action plan into consideration, while at the same time using its results to improve this plan.

During our Rufford Booster Grant Project, we will be working on the different 7 sub-activities of this Action Plan.

The oriental sweetgum forests may return from the threshold of extinction with the help of this action plan. Click this link to download Sweetgum Action Plan (2019-2024) in Turkish: <https://naturader.org/sweetgumactionplan/>

***Lastly and happily, we are so glad to announce that our website currently has been published. The website will support our conservation efforts long lasting and sustainably.***

[www.naturader.org](http://www.naturader.org)

