

## GSN Best Practice Competition: Communication Initiative of the Year Award

### Fairy-tale Writing Competition and Biodiversity Weekend

An ambitious Hungarian initiative with the aim of raising awareness on biodiversity has won this year's 'Communication Initiative of the Year Award', launched in 2006 by the [Green Spider Network \(GSN\)](#) as an annual best practice competition. All GSN members were invited to present their best examples of environmental communication. The prize was handed over during the [Annual Meeting of the Green Spiders](#) in Bucharest.



The project recognised with the award was established by the Hungarian Ministry of Environment and Water in 2004 and has involved since then a big annual thematic event on International Biodiversity Day (please see box at the bottom of the next page for more information), as well as a related competition. This year's initiative, dedicated to agro-biodiversity (please see adjacent box) comprised a nation-wide fairy-tale writing competition and a 3-day biodiversity weekend.

One particularly successful event organised as part of the biodiversity weekend was a Parliamentary Open Day at the Parliament of the Republic of Hungary focusing on agro-biodiversity, and specifically on the conservation of local varieties and the diversity of national crop and livestock genetic resources. Around 500 participants – including representatives from the state administration as well as Members of Parliament, scientific and research institutions as well as NGOs – attended the event and had fruitful discussions and exchanges on this issue of particular importance. *"The maintenance of our diverse genetic resources is important to ensure nutritional and food security and also to expand rural employment and market opportunities"*, highlights Ditta Greguss, Counsellor at the Biodiversity Unit of the Hungarian Ministry of Environment and Water. The outcome of the Parliamentary Open Day was the adoption of recommendations on how to conserve Hungary's genetic diversity, namely through the renewal of the legal and institutional framework of this issue.

#### Agro-biodiversity

Agro-biodiversity is a sub-set of biodiversity. It designates the variety and variability of animals, plants and micro-organisms used directly or indirectly for food and agriculture, including crops, livestock, forestry and fisheries. It includes the diversity of genetic resources and species used for food, fodder, fibre, fuel and pharmaceuticals. It also comprises non-harvested species that support production (e.g. soil micro-organisms) and those in the wider environment that support agro-ecosystems, as well as the diversity of the agro-ecosystems.

Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations ([www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org))

*"It is our joint task and responsibility to conserve the diversity of our genetic resources."*

**Ditta Greguss**, Counsellor at the Hungarian Ministry of Environment and Water



Memory-Game of Hungarian bean varieties



Exhibition of field crop varieties during the biodiversity weekend

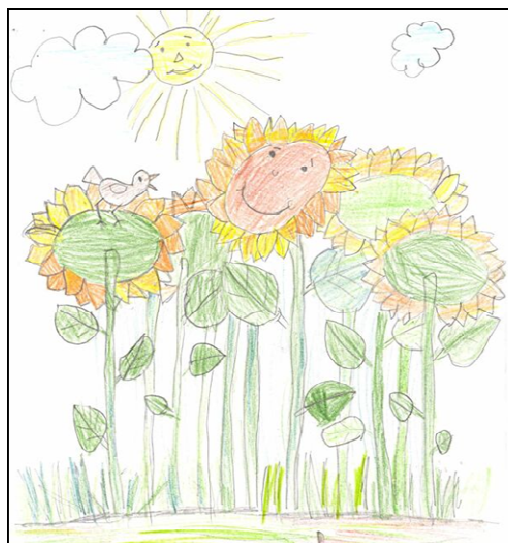


The biodiversity weekend also provided a family day with various programmes that made agro-biodiversity 'touchable': exhibitions of traditional plant varieties, joint baking of home-made bread, painting with organic materials, folk games related to field crops, story-telling, folk dances etc.

## 'Are there still any sky-high bean stalks in your village?'

The activities of the family day were preceded by the award ceremony for the fairy-tale writing competition. This was the main event of the biodiversity weekend, entitled 'Are there still any sky-high bean stalks in your village?' The competition was announced in 2008 in several magazines, daily newspapers, on web-based news sites and several radio channels, as well as via schools, libraries and municipalities. It invited children and adults to write a tale or a short story related to crop, vegetable or fruit varieties. The enthusiasm of participants largely exceeded the expectations of the organisers – 1000 stories were received, some written by the entire family. "Many said that they have not turned on TV for weeks because the whole family was collecting information on their local vegetable varieties about which they finally drafted the story. By developing their own stories they realised how important these varieties and the connected traditional knowledge are," tells Ditta Greguss and tries to explain the huge interest in the competition: "Fairy-tales amuse and charm all generations. A grandfather told us that he was delighted to work on a story together with his grandson about the secrets of his kitchen garden. The competition really activated the imagination of children and adults, and joyfully encouraged them to work together within the family or school groups."

The best written and illustrated stories were published in a very colourful two-volume fairy tale book - one volume for younger readers, the other for older readers. It is available in libraries, certain schools and bookstores and can be ordered through the internet.



## Continuous awareness-raising on biodiversity

This year's initiative was not a single campaign but is part of on-going awareness-raising activity in which the organisers come up with new ideas every year to maintain public interest in biodiversity. In recent years, training has for instance been organised for journalism students, introducing them to biodiversity, followed by the publication of their articles on biodiversity in newspapers and magazines. Next year's initiative will consist of a postcard design competition entitled 'Send a message to the world to conserve biodiversity' for the International Year of Biodiversity. The contributions will be used as official postcards of the Ministry of Environment and Water.

Ditta Greguss is pleased about the fact that all these efforts are demonstrating results – namely a growing awareness of biodiversity issues that can be observed among the general public. This new awareness can however also be attributed to people's 'self-discovery', she admits: "People are usually confronted with this issue when they go to the supermarkets and realise that they can only choose between no-name red and yellow apples. I think that people start to realise how important it is for them to be able to buy fruit or vegetable varieties which they used to eat in their granny's garden" and sees in this a duty for us all: "It is our joint task and responsibility to conserve the diversity of our genetic resources".



Drawings illustrating fairy-tales submitted for the competition

This newsflash is issued by the EECN which is DG Environment's support structure for European Environmental Communication Networks.

Visit the website of the EECN on:

[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/networks/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/networks/index_en.htm) to learn more about the activities of the networks and read newsflashes previously released.

## International Day for Biological Diversity

The International Day for Biological Diversity, currently held on May 22, was chosen by the United Nations for the promotion of biodiversity issues, in particular to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity.

After a focus on 'Invasive Alien Species' in 2009, the coming International Days for Biological Diversity will deal with 'Biodiversity for Development' (in 2010) and 'Biodiversity and Forests' (in 2011).

Watch out for our Newsflash in December on biodiversity communication, giving an outlook on the approaching International Year of Biodiversity in 2010!