

ESUG Portal developments 2015-2017

At the meeting in Vienna, members recommended a strategy of finding projects which could be supported online by our multilingual portal system. It was felt that this could give material specifically on conservation through use to be signposted through a website network for local authorities. Consequently, effort focussed on seeing if such projects could be developed, and perhaps themselves provide funding for ESUG. After all, ESUG was already benefiting from contracts to develop the Sakernet portal.

At the launch of Sakernet in April 2015, a meeting of the Biodiversity working group of the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey considered the scope for a similar multilingual portal for restoring agricultural ecosystems to benefit the Grey Partridge, as a flagship species for many interests. This was further discussed at the IAF GM during 7-9 August in Argentina, where readiness to support a project, which became Perdixnet, was expressed. A meeting on portal development involving Jennifer Ailloud, Eduard Arraut, Julie Ewald and Robert Kenward (RK) at Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust on 25 August paved the way for further planning by ESUG Committee, meeting in November 2015.

Following this, meetings were attended in Finland in December 2015 which considered building a portal system for Community Management of Ungulates. There has been liaison with a Red Squirrel project in UK on community cooperation for eradicating grey squirrels, and with Riccardo Simmoncini (later also Frank Vorhies and Stratos Arampatzis) about a possible project on ecosystem services. A project on 'anglers-assessing-aquatic-ecosystems' is foreseen with Viktor Šegrt after a meeting in Croatia early in 2016. Go to http://esug.sycl.net/regular_events.aspx and visit local sites in the middle paragraph to note how 'Nature Action' signposts our work on their menus (as on our own site).

Sakernet's success in attracting twice the initial target of 1000 visitors in the first year (now some 4,600 in two years), was achieved in parallel with the build of Perdixnet, which has three important new features: (i) language-specific diagrams (i.e. with labels in each language); (ii) language-specific links (to national-language sites of the System for Community Liaison); and (iii) manager-controlled publication from staging to live at any time via a single button.

Perdixnet was completed in summer 2016, after which a launch in Brussels was set for spring 2017. The aim was to get about 10 languages translated and 2-3 national sites live by then. It goes live with 17 languages and 4 national sites live (DE, UK) or in preparation (PL, SL). In 5 years life of the naturalliance portal, our message of conservation through use has also been available to some 35,000 visitors (this continues at ca 100/week). ESUG is reaching out globally through IUCN-SUME, with meetings during 2017 in Central Asia to take forward planning for a second stage of Sakernet, aiming to enhance conservation benefits from wildlife trade, and in South America to investigate Perdixnet-like projects there.

ESUG has gained a great deal of knowledge during this process about how to build teams to create content and translate it for multilingual sites. This learning on social requirements informs improvements to adapt the software better for its purpose. The next challenges of this socio-technological process are to train other organisations to use the approach (at national to local levels) and to link with governments (at all levels) to encourage adaptive governance for enhancing the other adaptations to our changing world.

However, we are still early travellers on this journey. The journey started 15 years ago, with proposals for software to help local managers of land and wild resources. It has advanced through projects showing the importance of adaptive management and knowledge leadership for conservation at local level. It has now produced networking software to encourage that approach. However, the travel towards tools to support adaptive management decisions, for conserving wildlife through sustainable use, has a long way still to run. Continuing the journey is only possible thanks to organisations, like the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey, who wish to build conservation through their sustainable use.

Robert Kenward on 9 May 2017.