

European Champion Tree Forum

3rd meeting

Bialowieza, Poland, 14th to 16th June 2013

Report and Minutes (edited by Gordon)

Following the successful meetings of European big tree enthusiasts in Wespelaar, Belgium in 2010 and in Bonn, Germany in 2011 Polish friends offered to host a third meeting in Bialowieza. The village is just on the edge of the Bialowieza National Park, one of the last natural forests in Central Europe. It is in the easternmost parts of Poland close to the border with Belarus.



Photo: Krzysztof Borkowski

We had a number of new participants, especially and for the first time from the Czech Republic: Dr Jaromír Dreslerová and Dr Luboš Úradníček of the Mendel University in Brno; Hana Rambousková of the project "Strom roku, European Tree of the Year". There was a reinforced delegation from Spain: Susana of "Bosques sin fronteras" who was already present in Bonn plus newcomers Bernabé Moya and José Moya of the Fundación Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente and César-Javier Palacios, "Trees4Life". The German Champion Tree Initiative was represented by Dr Ralf Tegeler who had also attended the Wespelaar meeting and Andreas Gomolka who just recently joined the group.

The other participants were: Piotr Krasiński, Krzysztof Borkowski and Piotr Grach (Poland), Aubrey Fennell (Ireland), György Posfái and Miklos Kovács (Hungary), Marc Meyer and Roel Jacobs (Belgium), Rob McBride (United Kingdom), all of whom had already been to one or

both of the first two meetings. Kathrin Thies (Germany) very kindly supported the Secretary's work.

The group gathered in Warsaw and set off to Bialowieza in the afternoon by rented coach. Traffic was heavy and it took a while to leave the city behind. The eastern Polish landscape was just beautiful in the setting sun and the further we went the more "Russian" elements appeared – like colourful wooden houses.

Next morning the sessions were started with Marc being first and reporting on his work in France with big sequoias. He has now some 10,000 trees in his database, including a giant 58.1 m tall. He reports that the response and the support from local people are enormous. Marc is also attached to the Arboretum Tervuren, a splendid 100 ha big park with all different kinds of plant societies. Each of them is growing in its own little grove and the groves are separated by meadows. This gives a very fine overview over forest types of the world. On the downside, the Tervuren arboretum faces some problems concerning financing.

<http://www.sequoias.eu/>

<http://www.arboretum-tervuren.be/>

Roel speaks on behalf of the Belgian Dendrological Society about the continuing work of collecting data and keeping the tree inventory and its database BELTREES up-to-date. Since the meeting in Bonn 2405 items have been changed in the database (mostly new measurements). He also explains a huge project to introduce big trees into cities. He is not shy of having roads rerouted to make space for future monumental trees. Also, Roel is very strongly supporting the view that old trees should have the same protection as old buildings: You don't treat an old church with a bulldozer the way old trees are treated with a chainsaw.

<http://www.dendrologie.be/>

<http://www.roeljacobs.be/>

After some changes within the German Champion Tree Initiative last year Andreas joined the group just recently. But he is measuring trees for years and runs his own website. The official website will be renovated soon. It currently has 1239 trees, all of them being national champions or champion in one of the German states. Ralf adds that in the future the database will include other remarkable trees too, not necessarily being champions. The "Champion Tree of the Year" is a means to honour a single tree and thus raising in the local communities awareness for the value of old trees.

<http://www.championtrees.de/>

György runs his well-known website Dendromania with great success. The homepage is particular attractive being very clear, easy to navigate and offering a set of useful tools such as giving the geographical coordinates and linking them to a map / aerial photography. He is especially proud of the number of big black poplars he finds in the Danube floodplains. The question arises as to whether or not the black poplars are "real" black poplars and not hybrids. He answers that the trees he found are so old that they germinated before the introduction of hybrids.

<http://dendromania.hu/>

In Poland the website of the Dendrological Society, Krzysztof says, offers four sections, the champions of the country, famous trees (e.g. for historical value), avenues and "strange"

trees. One example are a number of pines bending low above the ground before growing straight up. Krzysztof thinks the trees were trained this way to make them useful for certain products in which wood shaped in this way is useful. For him, it is important that trees are connected to people, their lives and their stories. He finally gives us some characteristics of the Bialowieza forest warning us not to expect big trees by girth but tall trees.

<http://www.ptd.pl/>

Susana reports on her work for "Bosques sin fronteras" ("trees without borders"). The first and most famous project was "Arboles – Leyendas vivas" ("Trees – Living Legends"). There were more than 1000 contributors from all over Spain who sent in information about trees. Currently, the database has some 4,000 records. Education is a big issue for Susana and a number of books are published by "Bosques sin fronteras". The aim is to teach the young the value of trees and forests in stories suitable for children. The books for various age groups are on sale during the meeting.

<http://www.bosquessinfronteras.org/>

The session was closed and everybody got prepared for a long walk in the woods. Under the expert guidance of Artur "Arek" Szymura we had a good six hours hike through the National Park seeing nature getting its way as it should: There is a large variety of tree species (dominated by oak, ash, hornbeam, pine), they come in all shapes and sizes, dying trees are left alone to be colonised by fungi and lichens, toppled trunks are just moved from the trails only. The Bialowieza forest is not a virgin forest, it was managed for centuries for timber production and as a hunting ground. But when it became a National Park in 1923 all management was stopped and 90 years of nature's regime turned the forest into woodland as natural as you can get in Central Europe. Trees within the National Park tend to be rather tall then big (by girth) with spruces easily reaching 50 m. A separate list of all measurements is attached.

Critical remarks on the Bialowieza National Park are included in the "Bialowieza Notes" sent around with the invitation.

A second round of presentations was held in the afternoon.

Piotr (Gach) starts giving us an overview over the state of the website of the Polish Dendrological Society which he currently constructing. It comes in two parts, one offers information for the general public, like a database of champion trees, the other is for members only.

Afterwards Rob informs us on his work in Shropshire where he recorded notable trees. Being also an ardent photographer, his talk is accompanied by splendid pictures. Rob has excellent media contacts and appears regularly in national tv programs. For example, he had to measure a cliff hanger pine abseiling from a rocky plateau. Finally we get an impression of Offa's Dyke, an early medieval wall separating England from Wales. It can be seen as a linear nature reserve which needs protection. A video is shown featuring an old lady protesting the removal of hedgerows in Shropshire.

<http://www.treehunter.co.uk/>

Luboš gives us a presentation on the Czech memorial trees website. It was established in 2006 and now contains some 26,000 trees. Most of them are lime trees, some of them being 1,000 years old. In the records the tree are not only measured but also their current condition is assessed. In distribution maps Luboš shows us who the trees documented quite often occur in cities and in their surroundings. Many monumental trees in the Czech Republic are protected by a law since 1992. Finally, a computer tool to produce 3-dimensional pictures of trees is demonstrated. The results are stunning.

<http://drusop.nature.cz/ost/chrobjekty/pstromy/index.php?frame>



Photo: G. M.

Hana's main project is the "European Tree of the Year" contest. It aims at linking local communities to their trees, thus enhancing their protection. For example, after protests a road was rerouted to avoid felling an old pear tree. There are a number of – sometimes emotional – stories all proving how deep the relationship between man and tree can be. A number of European countries already participate in the "European Tree of the Year" contest, mainly in the Southeast and the West. There are still many "white" countries and Hana is eager to help fill the gaps.

www.treeoftheyear.org

César introduces us to the Fundación Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente. There is a wide range of activities covered by the foundation, ranging from organic food to fire fighting. "BigTrees4Life" is a project which deals with monumental trees. It aims at improving the conservation of big trees and mature forests which are seen as umbrellas under which other organisms like fungi, lichens, insects and mammals can live. Then José continues, pointing

out how important good legal advice is for the protection of trees. He ends showing us the wide array of books the foundation has published on a number of various issues.

www.felixrodriguezdelafuente.com

www.imelsa.es

After a long day out in the woods we had a rustic dinner in a nearby open air museum. Food and drink were nice. A lot of conversation was going on and some lasted as long as 3 o'clock in the morning.

The next session was titled "Decision Making".

The first discussion is about possible EU-funding for tree projects. Ralf points out that there are – at least – three fundamental requirements for funding: A detailed programme, a project leader and co-financing. After making sure that there is genuine interest in going forward with EU-funding ($\frac{3}{4}$ of those present vote "yes") a working group is put up consisting of

- Hana,
- Luboš,
- Marc,
- Ralf,
- Rob,
- Roel and
- Susana.

At present, there will be no spokesperson. The group will communicate directly and not necessarily via the Secretary (CCs are welcome, of course).

Hopefully, a proposal will be drafted within the next 12 months so that at the next meeting in autumn 2014 in Spain the final decision can be made.

The question arises how all the presentations and papers are made available to ECTF members. "Drop box" is one idea but it doesn't find many friends, Gmail is another option. Meanwhile, Piotr (Gach) has established a Google Drive folder for us. He writes (email 19th June 2013):

I've created a Google Drive folder for us - the common place to store ECTF files like .doc, .xml, .ppt, .txt files and so on; here's the link: https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0Bx5o_8dyCzGZeHFsdXBHQ0hBOXc&usp=sharing. To view, download and upload files from / to this folder, you need to have a Google Account. If you have one, please send me the GMail address - I will add it to the access list. For test purpose, I've put two sample (dummy) files into the folder.

Without much discussion Gordon is asked to continue to act as ECTF Secretary.

Eike Jablonski (member of the Deutsche Dendrologische Gesellschaft and the International Dendrology Society) proposes to establish an ECTF library. He wrote (email, 5th April 2013):

I like to bring up again an idea which I brought up already at the Bonn meeting: the establishing of an ECTF library. It was discussed in a small group but further

attempts have not been done so far. Already spoken to Philippe de Spoelberch, this library could be very well located at Arboretum Wespelaar, Belgium.

Koen Camelbeke of the Wespelaar Arboretum answered (2nd May):

IF the ECTF is interested in having a library with their books (own books, gifts from individuals and organisations, etc) and IF the ECTF is searching for a location then we would be happy to host this collection.

Those present at the meeting agree that a separate library is not really necessary. We want to ask the Wespelaar library if they can arrange for a shelf "monumental trees" in which to put books which are given to us in official functions and where ECTF members can send copies of their own writings to. Since the library is open to every tree-lover anyway, no extra arrangements are needed (perhaps the books can be stamped: Gift from the ECTF). Gordon proposes:

*With Compliments
from The European Champion Tree Forum
2013*

After an exchange of more emails between Koen, Eike and me we agree to proceed as described. Books, especially those which were given to us in ECTF functions should be sent to Wespelaar. There, they become part of the regular library. Both, in the books and in the library catalogue a note will be saying that the book comes from us.

The address is:

*Foundation Arboretum Wespelaar
attn.: Mr Koen Camelbeke
Grote Baan 63
B - 3150 Haacht-Wespelaar, Belgium
Tel.: +32 (0)16 60 86 41, Fax: +32 (0)16 60 13 53
mail: info@arboretumwespelaar.be
website: <http://www.arboretumwespelaar.be/>.*

In this context Luboš offers to scan books if digital availability is wanted. Contact should be made with him directly.

The next ECTF meeting will be held in Spain, most likely in Valsaín near Segovia, in the autumn of 2014. It will be again a three day venture, Friday to Sunday, probably 17th to 19th October. Susana volunteers to organise the meeting with the help of some of her Spanish colleagues plus the ECTF Secretary and some other members.

The session ends with a huge applause for Piotr (Krasiński) for his exceptional organisational skills and his contagious good humour.

On the way back to Warsaw we are introduced to a giant pine by Krzysztof. But then it is time to go. Warsaw is reached by mid-afternoon giving everybody good time to travel on or to enjoy the pleasant summer evening. Some of us go to Rogów Arboretum the next day, Monday, and after that the 3rd ECTF meeting in Poland is finally closed.
