

Network update

A warm welcome to this winter edition of the British Russian Eco-cultural Network Newsletter. We hope you find it both interesting and enjoyable. This edition highlights some of the key events in which BREN members and associates have been involved in Britain and the Russian Federation during the past year.

First, there is a report about BREN's largest project in 2002 - the visit to the UK by Andrey Zakharenkov, Director of the Russian Far East Association of Non-Timber Forest Products. Complementary to this is Emma Wilson's article on a project in which she has been directly involved on the Kamchatka Peninsula and Sakhalin Island. Cathy Williamson

of the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society has contributed a very interesting article on orcas. As well as an update on the Maria's Children Project in St Petersburg (see BREN Issue 1), there is news of an exciting joint exhibition by Bristol-based Swedish artist, Monica Sjoo, and St Petersburg artist, Margarita Dobravolsky.

The current international political climate is demonstrating clearly the need for co-operation, understanding and the establishment of friendship between different countries on this earth.

In times like these it is important that networks such as BREN continue to develop and expand relationships based on open communication. BREN aims to

be a dynamic network acting as a platform for exchange and a catalyst for change.

We have a number of exciting projects in the pipeline for the coming year about which you can find out more in future issues of the newsletter. If you are involved in ecological and/or cultural projects, please do let us know.

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Maria's Children in profile

In the last issue of the BREN Newsletter Nick Hackney wrote about his experiences in Russia with the organisation Maria's Children. Here he outlines the aims and the work of the project.

Our centre for Russian orphans and other children with special needs began as the result of the vision and work of Moscow artist, Maria Yeliseeva, and other volunteers. We are now an officially registered organisation, one of the goals of which is to create a warm atmosphere in our studio, in order to expose the children to models of family life which they would not otherwise see.

This model helps children develop skills and in some cases assists with their psychological rehabilitation. In the mist of a warm, loving atmosphere the children study art composition, crafts, English,

computer skills, drama and music. We also have a psychologist who helps the children as needed. Currently we have more than 200 children from different Moscow orphanages and 50 children with cerebral palsy and other developmental disabilities.

Within our centre we have a special transitional programme for children who



are leaving the orphanages. The goal is to help them find a place for themselves in society by breaking the model of limited opportunities usually set for orphans. Currently we are painting murals in a baby orphanage and taking care of the babies there. Also we are working with Moscow's largest cancer centre and visit children from hospice families.

Every summer we have an arts camp for orphans on the Volga River. During the two weeks on the boat they learn about art, clowning, drama, music and dance. They also visit children's hospitals and orphanages in towns along the way and clown with the children there.

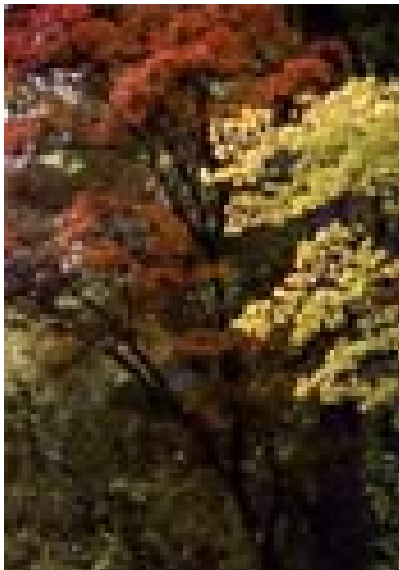
To find out more:

Visit the Maria's Children website at www.mariaschildren.org

From the Far East to the West

Andrey Zakharenkov is Director of the Russian Far East Association of Non-Timber Forest Products and BREN was delighted to host him on a week long visit to the UK. Andrey had a fairly hectic schedule: after flying to London he travelled to Littlehampton for a meeting with representatives of the Body Shop who outlined their fair trade policy. In the evening he returned to London for an open lecture/meeting with invited press and relevant organisations at University College.

The following day he went to Bristol where he gave a presentation at the Timber Products Conference at the CREATE Centre. While in Bristol he had a meeting with representatives of the Soil Association and also met Andrew Simons of Tree-harvest. Andrey then travelled to Edinburgh, stopping in Gateshead for a meeting with the Traidcraft management at which a representative of the Village Bakery was also present. In Edinburgh he gave another public lecture at the Centre for Human Ecology before spending the weekend on a field trip in the Scottish Highlands organised by Mandy Haggith and Bill Ritchie.



Andrey has written to us with some of his own impressions from the visit.

This was a highly successful trip. As a result of my comparatively brief visit to the UK, I was able to identify the main trends of the European (especially UK) NTFP market and to develop a more complete understanding of the problems for the possible export of NTFPs to the UK. It also gave me the opportunity to review the different proposed certification schemes which relate to NTFPs, such as fair trade, organic food and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

My meetings with different businesses allowed several products to be identified which seem to have good export potential. For example, the Body Shop was interested in ingredients for cosmetics, such as schizandra oil, snowberry and wolf berry extracts. Tree-harvest was

interested in birch sap, herbal teas, essential oil (fir oil) and other products. Traidcraft expressed interest in berry syrups and the Village Bakery in some ingredients for bread (nuts and dried berries).

All the meetings were very thought-provoking and produced useful outputs. I came to understand better the complicated procedures involved in exporting NTFPs to the UK, because the products must meet conditions of good quality, competitive pricing and some kind of certification (such as organic, fair trade or FSC). These are very difficult to achieve without support. Therefore it is crucially important to identify partners in the UK so we can work together. Such contacts were made both before and during this trip, thanks to BREN.

It was also very important to raise public awareness of the significance of NTFP resources and fair trade development between the Russian Far East and the UK, in order to support local people's livelihoods and to protect the Far Eastern forests. The public lectures organised during this trip were the first such experiences for me and they seemed quite successful. They also helped to attract new people who are interested in supporting our efforts.

Since returning to Khabarovsk, Andrey has sent the following update.

One of our companies, which produces limonnic oil, is in negotiations with the Body Shop. They have sent samples and are now preparing the full specification required by the Body Shop. A key point was a Community Trade form, which was a difficult hurdle for this company to overcome.

There is another contact which is continuing to develop relating to the organic food certification standard, which I was given by the Soil Association. We developed a special project and have almost got a grant for implementation of this project. In September I participated in the Healthy Ingredients international trade show held in Paris. I made several contacts with potential consumers from Europe, including the UK, who are interested in sourcing organic certified NTFPs, one of which is The Organic Herb Trading Company. We are now in negotiations with them.

I now understand better the complicated procedures involved in exporting NTFPs to the UK

As you see, there are no quick results, but there are some continuing processes. We recently had a meeting of the Association board and decided to create a special trade organisation responsible for international trade. This decision should allow us to improve our targeting of the international market. We'll just have to wait and see!

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Our thanks to the Co-op, Tree-harvest, the Bristol Create Centre and the Body Shop for their generous support.

Building partnerships

In February 2001, IUCN - The World Conservation Union - and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) launched a new joint Russian-Canadian project, 'Building Partnerships for Forest Conservation and Management in Russia'. The project consists of three interconnected components: public involvement in decision-making (federal level); assessing the management effectiveness of protected areas (regional level); and building community capacity for sustainable non-timber forest product (NTFP) harvesting, monitoring and marketing (local level).

The NTFP component started up on the Kamchatka Peninsula (the Russian Far East) in 2001 and on Sakhalin Island (also Russian Far East) in 2002. I have been involved in the NTFP component since its initial development stages, working with local scientists and indigenous activists from Kamchatka. I got involved in the region via English teaching in Japan and a period working in the Russian Far East with Friends of the Earth Japan. Part of the motivation for the NTFP project was the Volcanoes of Kamchatka World Heritage designation (1996) and the need for local communities living within Bystrinsky Nature Park to find sustainable economic alternatives to gold mining.

The NTFP project is managed from the Moscow IUCN office by Nikolay

Shmatkov. A major aspect of the project is business training to assist local indigenous (and some non-indigenous) entrepreneurs to develop sustainable NTFP businesses. This training is led by Canadian NTFP business expert, Tim Brigham. I have been responsible for community liaison and local co-ordination.

The Kamchatka partners have decided to focus on herbal teas and traditional packaging. This year there was a seminar on birch bark weaving, a traditional craft that is sadly being lost. Research is being carried out into other aspects of traditional knowledge, with the aim of developing educational materials for schools. We also organised working group meetings for local native representatives and other local residents to meet with resource use regulators and local administrators to resolve land-use issues in the area. A successful aspect of the project was the setting up of a Herbal Teas Club, led by local native activist Vera Gurkina. The Herbal Teas Club encourages local people to meet regularly to test out their herbal tea recipes and discuss the uses of herbs and berries. It has become a new social focus of the community. Now Kamchatka Herbal Tea is a registered business, meeting its first orders for herbal teas in traditional birch bark souvenir containers to Alaska and Canada this autumn. New NTFP business opportunities, such as

dwarf Siberian pine syrup and fresh wild berries, are actively being researched by local communities with the help of the newly organised Bystrinski Informational Center. The local project co-ordinators have also held herbal tea tasting at local festivals. Vera Gurkina and the original project co-ordinator, Taisiya Solodikova, visited Sakhalin Island in May 2002 to start up the Sakhalin component of the project, which is currently being co-ordinated by Maria Denisova. Sakhalin project participants (Alexei Zhukov and Efrosinija Shkalygina) impressed everybody at the latest NTFP Festival on Kamchatka with their original herbal teas.

Andrei Zakharenkov has advised the project on several occasions and with his many successes in the sphere of NTFP business development, he provides an inspiration for people in other regions seeking to do the same.

Emma Wilson is social-environmental consultant to IUCN - The World Conservation Union. More information can be found at: www.iucn-cis.org. The project team can be contacted by email: info@iucn-cis.org. Emma Wilson can be contacted at: emma_c_wilson@hotmail.com

Windows to other worlds

First met artists Margarita and Alexandr (Sasha) Dobrovolsky in September 2000 when I was in Russia to attend the Living with the Taiga conference. I loved the beautiful, large and luminous floor-to-ceiling artwork that Margarita produces, using textiles and fibres. They are like modern-day icons and are profoundly mystical. Margarita also liked my work which she saw when I did a slide show one evening. We talked vaguely about exhibiting together but couldn't see how it could happen, as there is no money for exhibitions in Russia.

Back in the UK, I contacted Susan Morland to see if she might be interested. Susan and I had already participated in three women's art shows together and had been discussing exhibiting in Russia even before I went there and met Margarita. Here was the opportunity we had been dreaming of! Susan loves the Russian

women poets whose work has inspired her paintings and I come from the north of Sweden, grew up with the taiga there and had a Russian stepfather who introduced me to Russian culture.

There followed a complicated process to realise our dream. Susan and her partner, Hugh Scott, travelled to St Petersburg to meet Margarita. After lengthy e-mail correspondence with Dr Igor Tikhonov of St Petersburg State University and Museum, where there is a gallery for exhibitions overlooking a large conference hall, it was agreed we would have a show there called 'Windows to other worlds - peace through art', from 1 to 28 November 2002.

In the meantime our applications for funding were sadly unsuccessful, which meant we couldn't send any work to Russia but had to bring smaller works with us on the plane. Worst of all, Margarita's

beloved artist husband, Sasha, died during the summer. A memorial exhibition of his work opened in the middle of November in St Petersburg.

Our three women's exhibition opened on 1 November. It was a success, looked very beautiful and was well thought of by the many visitors. Our work may be exhibited again during the next international Women and Earth conference, planned for spring or summer 2003 in St Petersburg. The organisers will be Tatiana Mamonova, who is based in the USA, and Margarita. Plans are also going ahead for the exhibition to be shown in the UK in 2004. We are hoping to get funding this time and for Margarita to come over here.

Monica Sjöo is a Swedish artist based in Bristol

Russian whales under threat

WDCS, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, is the global voice for the protection of cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) and their environment. WDCS aims to reduce and ultimately eliminate the continuing threats to cetaceans and their habitats and to raise awareness of these wonderful animals and the need to protect them in their natural environment.

WDCS co-funds and manages the Far East Russia Orca project and urgently needs funds to support its work so that more can be learnt about the orcas in Far East Russian waters and calls for their protection can be supported with hard scientific facts. To learn more about our work and to join WDCS visit www.wdcs.org or call 0870 870 0027 (from the UK) or + 44 1249 449 500 (from outside the UK). We would also welcome additional Russian media contacts to help raise the profile of this issue within Russia.

The days of freedom for the first wild killer whales, or orcas, to be studied in Russia may be numbered. WDCS, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, has recently heard that the Russian Government has given permission for the capture of up to ten live orcas in its waters.

The populations of orcas found in Russian waters are little known. Only one population, in eastern Russia, is being studied. Since 1999, the Far East Russia Orca Project, a joint, long-term Russian-Japanese-British initiative co-funded by WDCS, has collaborated with five Russian biologists, several of whom are graduate students, in a pioneer orca study, which has simultaneously investigated the potential for local marine tourism.

Orcas are the largest dolphin, found mainly in colder waters of the world's oceans. As top predators in every ecosystem, they are intensely social and live in small, tightly-bonded family groups, or pods, which stay together for life. The peculiar biology and uncertain status of orcas provide strong arguments against undertaking captures anywhere in the world. All populations of orcas exist in relatively low numbers and have a low reproductive rate. In addition, some are carrying heavy contaminant loads, while others may be suffering the lingering effects of live captures, culls or whaling.

Since 1961, 134 orcas have been captured alive from the wild. 110 of these animals are now dead, having lived an average of only six years in captivity. In comparison, in the wild male orcas live an average of 29.2 years (maximum 50-60 years) and females 50.2 years (maximum 80-90 years). There are currently 48 orcas held captive around the world.

In an effort to replace losses from their captive stocks, the captivity industry has searched worldwide for new locations and populations of orcas to target. Countries such as Iceland, Argentina and Norway have refused to provide further capture permits for animals in their waters.

WDCS is alarmed that orcas may soon be captured in Russian waters for public display. Any animals targeted are likely to

suffer from stress and potential harm through capture and long distance transportation to a display location. Capture methods for these animals can also be lethal.

Orcas are inherently unsuited to a life in captivity and are seriously compromised (both psychologically and physiologically) by confinement. It is unlikely that captures would end with a few individuals taken. The long-term danger is that Russian waters will become a regular source of orcas for the captivity industry, with disastrous consequences for the populations targeted. It is estimated that the current sale price could be as high as US \$1million.

Meanwhile, many countries around the world are developing whale-watching enterprises focusing on wild orcas, rather than turning orcas into circus performers. In US and Canadian north-west coast waters, approximately 400,000 people a year watch orcas from boats or shore-based parks, spending US \$75 million in total revenues. WDCS has assisted in the sensible development of whale watching in Iceland, the Caribbean and other countries and has even offered to send a special delegation to Russia to help develop Russia's vast potential for marine tourism.

Cathy Williamson is Captivity Campaigner for WDCS.



How to join BREN

Join BREN to receive this newsletter regularly and support the activities of our members.

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Subscription costs just £5 per year for individuals, £30 for organisations.

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We look forward to sharing your Russian passion!