

The European Conservation Action Network was established in 2007 by The Kingcombe Trust, a charity based at The Kingcombe Centre in west Dorset, dedicated to conservation and environmental education (Reg. Charity no. 1054758), in association with the Dorset Branch of Butterfly Conservation. The project is funded through the Leonardo da Vinci section of the European Union Lifelong Learning Programme and has partners in France, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Poland and Romania. Further information can be obtained from www.kingcombecentre.org.uk or from Nigel Spring (tel: 0044.1963.23559/mobile: 0044.7981.776767.Email: nigelspring@yahoo.co.uk).

The EuCAN Travellers Guide to the Czech Republic

By Lauren Clarke

The Czech Republic is renowned for once being run as a communist state, changing its name from Czechoslovakia to Czech Republic in 1993 and its inexpensive pivo (beer) and vino (wine). If you are lucky enough to be part of the annual EuCAN trip to this spectacular country, read on and discover the future delights and surprises you will experience.

Ždánice, Butterfly Valley and the Surrounding Area

Throughout your stay in the Czech Republic you will dwell in the small town of Ždánice located in the southeast of Czech in the Hodonín District of the South Moravian Region. The town comprises an outdoor swimming pool which isn't heated, although it makes up for this with its wave-machine, water slides and fountain, so do not forget to pack your swimming costume and a towel! There are a number of local shops and supermarkets, which are ideal for buying snacks to nibble on in between meals. For instance, I'd recommend the paprika and ham flavored Czech crisps, they are delicious. They come in a large bag, much like Sensations, so you can even share them with fellow EuCANers in a get to know one another session. There is also a cake shop which sells the prettiest little cakes and ice-creams. After indulging yourself on sweet cakes you can even take a trip next-door and get yourself a wacky haircut, that's if you fancy yourself a mullet or multi-coloured hair! Yes, it's pretty much the only two hair styles the Czech's know. But rest assure, you can drown your sorrows and new hairstyle in the two "pubs" in the town, the Muskateer, a quaint restaurant and pub serving more than reasonably priced meals and "The Dive" as I nick-named it serving cheap drinks, you will soon understand the reason for this nick-name.

Your bed and the majority of your food will be provided by the one and only hotel in the town, the Rádlovec Hotel. It is by no means a 5* hotel, but provides a self contained apartment with twin and triple rooms with a wardrobe leading off a long corridor. The hotel also has a roof terrace, ideal for drinking your pivo while watching the sun set, socialising and chatting to fellow EuCANers and general chilling during your spare time. The rooms are not en-suite (except for Nigel and Kathy's), but shared newly upgraded and modernised showers and toilets are available. Let's hope they've finished fitting the ladies showers by the time you visit. The Rádlovec Hotel has a large dining room where all main meals are served and a bar which serves all your alcoholic needs. The hotel also has two permanent residents which you'll get to know extremely well; Stuart the goat and Stuart's girlfriend

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Matilda (her equivalent English name), you'll hear Stuart's distinctive call and smell his unique goaty odour when you get close to him, but don't be fooled by Stuart's charm, he can bully his girlfriend on some occasions.

The area in which you will be working in is called Butterfly Valley, it is approximately a mile away from the hotel and only takes 15 minutes to walk to through the typically Czech streets or a 5 minute drive in the minibus. In order to gain access to the main work area a short walk (which feels like a lifetime walking with a brushcutter in torrential rain with slippery wet sandy soil underneath your feet) along a sandy path will need to be endured. The valley itself comprises of several terraces, some wooded and others grassed. Some land is privately owned and other areas are owned by the local council. The valley is rich in wildlife with dozens of butterfly and moth species, flora and other invertebrates. You'll have the time to wander through the valley at your own leisure (if you're really lucky and Nigel's back is turned) and investigate and discover the wonderful wildlife this beautiful and most interesting valley has to offer. For all EuCANers the valley will also be your bedroom for the night, with camping under the stars and camp fires galore. You will be personal bodyguards to the valley's grazing goats and sheep, making sure they have plenty of water and generally that they are all fit and healthy.

In close proximity to Žďánice are the towns and cities of Kyjov, Dubňany, Bučovice, Čejkovice, Slavkov and Brno. Each has its own individual charm, but ask your tour guide Nigel nicely and day trips and lunches to these towns can be arranged for specific days.



EuCANers outside Žďánice Town Hall



View over Žďánice on the way to Butterfly Valley's wood



2010 EuCANers outside the Rádlovec Hotel

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Practical Conservation, Wildlife and Ecological Training

One of the main aims of the EuCAN trip is to conserve areas of high ecological importance in European countries and provide practical conservational management through us, the EuCAN volunteers. As described before, the area for this conservational work in Ždánice is Butterfly Valley. The main purpose is to clear encroaching and invasive scrub, the most dominant invasive species in the valley being robinia (*Robinia pseudacacia*), goldenrod (*Solidago virgaurea*) and Canadian goldenrod (*Solidago Canadensis*). A normal working day starts at 8.30am with tasks such as brushcutting, clearing up after the brushcutter, bow sawing and lopping and lighting fires shared out amongst the team. Don't worry, you are not expected to carryout this task all day until 5 o'clock. The working day normally finishes at 2-2.30pm, earlier if it is raining heavily with a break at 11ish for tea and cakes and then another break at 1ish for water and fruit. Throughout the course of the two weeks a number of Czech volunteers from Česká Spořitelna Bank and the Ždánice majorettes help out too, with all of this help and depending on the extent of the invasive scrub, clearing two terraces is probably ample within the two weeks.



The camp site and base in Butterfly Valley



Nigel and Laurie butterfly netting in a field full of Canadian goldenrod

Do not worry, it is not all work, work, work in Butterfly Valley, there are also ecological training days built into the itinerary too to improve your botany and bird identification skills. One of the first trips is to Mutěnice fish ponds with Karel Šimeček. Karel Šimeček's friend George Candle is normally on guard with his mist net catching many cute and truly amazing birds as they fly into the net. Some EuCANers maybe fortunate to hold a couple of birds as Karel and George show you the birds caught. There are dozens of individual ponds throughout the site and upon walking through them many interesting birds fly past and sit on the calm water. However, there are more than just birds in the Mutěnice fish ponds, the whole place is brimming with water snakes, frogs, dragonflies and not forgetting botany, from common toadflax (*Linaria vulgaris*), trifid bur-marigold (*Bidens*

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tripartita) and welshed thistle (*Carduus acanthoides*). It maybe a hot walk around the ponds, but you will be in for a surprise with the wildlife it has to offer.

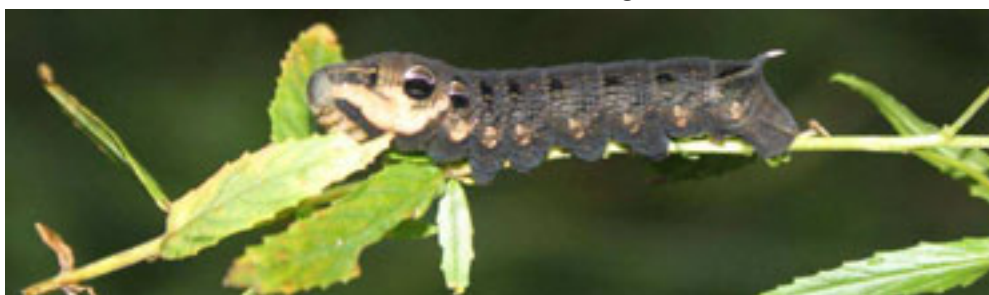
One of the most breath taking adventures throughout the trip for all botanists is the trip to Na Adamcích accompanied by Onyx, Zuzka's botanist friend. Na Adamcích is a nature reserve on a gentle slope with the most attractive, colourful and interesting plants in one area, it is almost indescribable. Plant species that can be seen here are large selfheal (*Prunella grandiflora*), kidney vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), betony (*Stachys officinalis*), forking larkspur (*Consolida regalis*), anemones, salvias, carthusian pink (*Dianthus carthusianorum*) and much, much more. You have to go there to experience it!!



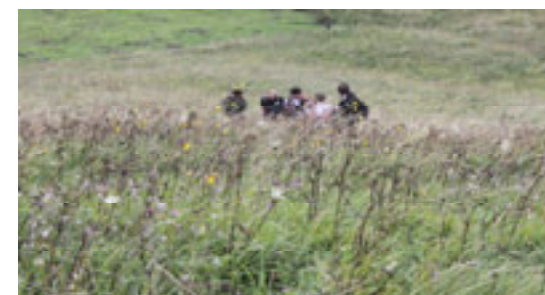
In Butterfly Valley itself you can experience a wealth of botany when you are not chopping it down. There's scabious' (*Scabiosa* spp.), meadow vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*) and plenty more to discover under the overgrown grass. Nigel will also have you wondering through the mass Canadian goldenrod filled fields chasing butterflies with a butterfly net in a bid to capture and identify them, in order for him to add them to his butterfly list. There is also a chance to see the delights and extent of Butterfly Valley one evening on a wild fungi hunt and walk, in order to harvest wild mushrooms for a little feast. Behind the valley is woodland capsulated with beech and in the dusky evening sun a carpet of velvet textured grass. In every direction fairy rings pop up around dead decaying wood and dozens of wildlife dart and dive through the wood. On some occasions hawk moth larval, wood vetch (*Vicia sylvatica*) and strange wasp like larva can be seen, even when the temperature has dropped and the sun is setting. An evening walk in this wood is surely a must to see its magical appearance come to life in the dusky sunset.



Allium spp., betony and large selfheal



Hawk moth larva



The array of flora at Na Adamcích

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Culture

It's not all work, work, work on a EuCAN conservation trip. Nigel, Kathy, Zuzka and David organise various day trips to nearby towns and local events for the weekends, afternoons and rainy days.

The first event you will experience is the Histopedal. An annual day and night event held in Ždánice's local park with traditional bicycles and dress, including the penny-farthing. Locals cycle round the park in the category they have entered into and a prize is given to... well, actually I don't know how they judge it. The event runs from 9am in the morning, yes 9am, they don't hang around the Czech's, until 1, 2 or even 3am the next day. During the day the "cycling round the park" and prize giving takes place, while there are stalls selling hats, general knick-knacks, food and drink (yes even pivo in the morning is sold!!) are scattered around the park too. In the evening a party takes place, with locals performing rehearsed dances and general dancing takes place to the cheesy pop music playing. But trust me; you won't even give the awful music a second thought once you've had several drinks inside you, whether it's local pivo, vino or even vodka from the local teenagers in the town. Depending on how much you've drunk and what time it is, you might even be persuaded to venture to the local pub "The Dive" by David afterwards, but bearing in mind if it is open.



Penny-farthings and other bicycles in the Histopedal ready to cycle around the park

If you're tremendously lucky for Nigel to say it is too wet to work today, you may be in for a treat and take a visit to the Punkva Caves and Macocha Abyss of the Moravian Karst. This is a fair distance drive from Ždánice (bearing in mind we got lost on the way there). Once there, you will observe a blue lagoon encased at the bottom of a gorge, which is the deepest in the Czech Republic and Central Europe. You can gaze down into the gorge from the very top platform or even walk a little way through the woods to the second platform. If you're feeling extremely energetic and wonder down through the wood, along a windy, downwards, rocky path and along the valley floor this will lead you the entrance of the Punkva Caves, which are very much like Wookey Hole and Cheddar Caves. The caves consist of various channels and chambers, with

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stories told over the overhead microphone. There are some distinctive stalagmites that have their own unique quirks and look like lions and various other creatures. It's not all walk, walk, walk through the caves, there is also a boat trip taking you through the tunnels with only head height distance from you and the roof of the tunnel. If you still have some energy left in you, you can hike back up to the top of the Macocha Abyss to return to the minibus, but don't worry if you don't have the energy, you can always get a cable car back up and experience the view over the woods.

Hmm... cellars, cellars, cellars. Well, one would say if you haven't ever been in one then you can tick it off your to-do-list once you've been to the Czech Republic. During your stay you will be invited to the Mayor of Ždánice's wine cellar situated in close proximity to the park. A feast of delicious food is laid on, with plenty of wine. However, be aware of how much you drink and who tops you up, as the vino is home brewed by the Mayor and perhaps one would say a little strong. Singing, dancing and general drinking takes place and Suzka even dresses up in her traditional Czech dress. If you are also fortunate enough, the Mayor may even take you on a trip of the remaining un-restored chambers where his home brewing takes place. On the more commercial side, a trip and guided tour to the Knights Templar vino cellar in Čejkovice will give you more of a flavor about how bigger scale the wine industry was/is. The wine cellar was built by the Templars in the 13th Century and a large majority of the tunnels and chambers still store vino in wooden vino barrels, but if you have in mind tiny little barrels that are smaller than the average woman, then think again. There is one monstrosity of a barrel that holds 20,450 litres of vino. That's 27,267 bottles of your average 0.75 litre bottle of vino!!! If the coldness, dampness and the doom and gloom of the cellar doesn't do it for you, then don't worry, you can experience the delights of the Knights Templar Cellar while having lunch in the Templars' Cellar converted into a restaurant. This cellar is magnificent, with tunnels leading off one another, this way and that way. Each dead-end tunnel has tables slotted in with mood lighting. The restaurant cellar is surely a must for any visitor to the Czech Republic!



Zuzka in her traditional Czech dress



The Knights Templar vino barrel holding 20,450 litres of vino

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Language and History Lessons

If you do not speak a word of Czech, do not despair. Two language lessons are organised for the course of your stay. Lessons are held in the local primary school and are taught by Nast'a, a local language teacher. Do not panic about how little Czech you know, Nast'a will take you through the basic Czech words covered in the language software programme you will receive from Nigel. Much of the lesson will cover how to order in a pub, restaurant and shop, greetings, numbers and feminine and masculine words such as pivo and piva. The lesson and learning is taught by Nast'a saying a word, the class repeats the word, and subsequently individuals may be picked to repeat the word. Work sheets are also used to provide a visual representation of the word, the differences between feminine and masculine words and phrases. Do not worry if you can not remember every word and phrase you learn, as along as you can say a few words, I'm sure you will be able to get by in Ždánice.

There is only one lesson given on the history of the Czech Republic, this is once again taught by Nast'a, however it is normally held in the hotel's dining room and usually occurs in the second week of the trip. Nast'a explains the basics of the Czech history, as the lesson is only an hour and a half in length. One of the most interesting and memorable pieces of information is the changing of the Czech Republic's name over several decades, why this happened and the communist era. By having this history lesson, you soon understand the reasons why the Czech Republic looks and feels like it does with its communist built blocks of flats.

Food

Hmm... What to say about the food? If you're vegan you probably won't survive the trip and if you're vegetarian, well, be prepared for some odd looking dishes. During your stay your breakfast, the majority of your dinners and several lunches will be provided by the Rádlovec Hotel. The breakfast takes a little getting use to. The usual bread with butter, jam etc is served with orange juice, fruit and cereal but then your given a warm breakfast. Being in England it'll be the English Breakfast, toast etc, but not in the Czech Republic or actually not by the hotel chef's standards; try three frankfurters with mustard or a weirdly cooked scramble egg kind of thing with cooked pig fat, we nick-named it "salty eggs". If you're not overly keen on eggs or frankfurters, I'd advise you to top up on the bread, fruit and the delicious nutty muesli type cereal, umm umm... or if not you can always wait until mid-morning break and eat the wide variety of scrumptious cream, chocolate and doughnut cakes that Kathy and Nigel buy from the local supermarket. The lunches are split between having them at the Rádlovec Hotel, the Muskateer and various restaurants when out and about on day trips. Czech's tend to have their lunch later than us English people, at about 3 o'clock and this is the main meal of the day. When eating at the Muskateer the bulk of the lunches consist of a couple slabs of pork in a horseradish or onion and apple sauce

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served with five dumplings. Dumplings will become a major part of your diet out in Czech, but they're not the type of dumpling as you and I would know them as. They basically look like soaked bread without the crust. One massive carbohydrate intake!! It's a tradition to serve five dumplings on a plate, but don't worry you're not expected to eat them all (like myself and a few others did). Czech's are normally surprised if you eat all of them. Another thing about Czech meals is meat is served as the main part of every meal, and there are very rare occasions where vegetables are served with the meal too. If you are very fortunate there will be a couple of thinly sliced red pepper pieces. It's not all doom and gloom, though. The majority of the meals are very tasty, especially the meal at the Knights Templar Restaurant, soup as usual for starters followed by rabbit and ice-cream pancakes. The rabbit dish is seriously to die for; the meat is so tender and literally melts in your mouth and this is from someone who had never eaten rabbit before.



Knights Templar Rabbit with a side helping of raw vegetables



Knights Templar ice-cream pancakes

Drink/Alcohol

You can't visit the Czech Republic without having a pivo or two, after all at 80p a pint it is one of the many things Czech is famous for. On our 2010 trip we were given 250 or so bottles of pivo and 250 bottles of non-alcoholic pivo free of charge from a Butterfly Valley sponsor who happened to be a pivo company. Needless to say that the non-alcoholic pivos were hardly touched! So, basically during the free time you have,

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you'll probably have a pivo or two in your hand. Something which is a little different, but you'll be addicted to in order to rehydrate yourself after a hard morning of work is Kofola. It resembles Coca-Cola, but it tastes sweeter and is less fizzy. Personally, I think Kofola is a lot nicer than Coca-Cola, however here is a word of warning, you'll be craving Kofola once back in England, go on give it a try!

As mentioned before "The Dive". I'm sure you will become well accustomed with this pub during your trip, if David has anything to do with it. It's located down the road from the hotel, so it's an easy stumble back to the hotel late at night. It's pretty dark and smoky inside, but they play a few awesome tunes, and yes they're even in English! However, the "order a drink and pay for it straight away" rule is frowned upon in Czech. The way is to keep on ordering and drinking and pay for your drinks when you leave- a sort of tab system. The only problem with this is having too many and not being able to remember how many drinks you've drunk, or even remembering to pay when you leave the pub. You will learn a few nifty tricks during your drinking and socialising time, especially from David, for instance how many beer mats you can flip and catch off the table and how do you transfer water into an upside-down pint glass using an ashtray of water, a pint glass and matches. There are also a few rounds and shots involved in the process, you'll be introduced to the Czech drink Becherovka, a "herby bitter" drink, but to tell you the truth, you won't even notice the herbiness, as David introduces it in a shot glass. No matter how smoky the pub is or what music they play, you will always have a fabulous time in "The Dive" and no doubt wander back drunk to the hotel when the front doors are locked, you haven't got your key and take it from me the key attached to the machinery ornament at the front of the hotel is not the key to the hotel door, even though it looks like it is!

Summary

From reading the above, I'm sure it has given you a little flavour of what to expect from a EuCAN conservational trip to the Czech Republic. No matter what you do in the Czech Republic, you will also have a fabulous time and have fond memories after returning to England. To any future EuCANer happy travelling and cherish the memories!

All the Best

Lauren Clarke