

Project on the Reintroduction of the Common Tree Frog (*Hyla arborea arborea*) on the Territory of Russia

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РЕЗЮМЕ: Проект по реинтродукции номинативного подвида обыкновенной квакши (*Hyla arborea arborea*) на территории России. М.В. Пестов, А.А. Лебединский, В.М. Ануфриев, М.В. Мокроусов, О.В. Янчуревич. В 2002 г. в Нижегородской области по инициативе общества охраны амфибий и рептилий при экоцентре "Дронт" и при финансовой поддержке Международной группы МСОП по сокращающимся популяциям амфибий IUCN/Declining Amphibian Populations Task Force (DAPTF) начата реализация международного проекта по реинтродукции номинативного подвида обыкновенной квакши в России. В настоящее время мы располагаем 16 экземплярами квакш, привезенными с южного берега Крыма (Украина). В ближайшем будущем надеемся получить потомство от этих животных и в случае успеха планируем выпуск сеголеток в подходящих биотопах Нижегородской области и юго-западных регионах России.

ABSTRACT: In 2002, the Society for Protection of Amphibians and Reptiles in the Ecocentre "Dront" (NSPAR), Nizhgorodskaya Province, Russia initiated an international project for the reintroduction of the nominative subspecies of the Common Tree Frog (*Hyla arborea arborea*). We have 16 tree frogs, and we plan to breed them and release the progeny into the natural environment in Nizhegorodskaya Province and southwestern regions of Russia.

Reintroductions of *H. arborea* in Latvia (Zvirgzds et al., 1994) have been successful, and a project initiated by the Society for Protection of Amphibians and Reptiles in the Ecocenter "Dront" (NSPAR) and supported by the Declining Amphibian Populations Task Force (DAPTF) was started in 2002. The Common Tree Frog is a European species presented in the IUCN Red List in the category LR:nt (Lower Risk: near threatened). Two of the four subspecies are found within the former Soviet Union, and *Hyla arborea arborea*, occurring in the northern and eastern limits of the range (Kuzmin, 1999), is the most vulnerable. Based on information published in the 18th-19th centuries, *H. arborea* was widely distributed and is believed to have occurred in the Urals. In the first half of the 20th century it was common in the southwestern provinces of Russia (Garanin, 1983), but the nominative subspecies currently is extremely rare or absent from major parts of its range in Rus-

sia. The probable cause of its demise is the loss of habitat caused by general aridization of the climate and human impacts (e.g., logging and draining of lakes).

We do not have reliable data on the presence of this species in Nizhegorodskaya Province in the observable past, but we believe that there are favorable habitats in the southern part of the region. Ichalkovskii Forest, an island-like portion of the old-age mixed forest in a floodplain, currently has the status of a state monument of nature. The karst relief of this plot, which is characterized by many rocks protrusions and depressions, creates a special microclimate and hibernation sites for *Hyla*. Also, we are sure that a successful introduction of this vulnerable species would not negatively influence the aboriginal species of amphibians and the ecosystem as a whole.

In May 2002, we organized an expedition to Grodno Province, Republic of Belarus. We planned to catch 3000 tadpoles of *H. arborea*, and all documents for export of the tree frog larvae from Belarus and import to Russia were in order. A special, 600-liter aquaterrarium was constructed, but we did not find tadpoles or adults because the breeding site was dry.

In July 2002, we organized an expedition to the southern coast of Crimea. After intensive searching near Alushta Town, we caught 25 young-of-the-year individuals and transported them to Nizhny Novgorod City, the center of Nizhegorodskaya Province. By November, some of the 16 remaining frogs were near adult size, and the males started to call.

In the spring of 2003, we plan to use methods from colleagues at Riga to attempt to breed the *H. arborea*, and procurement of frogs from Belarus is anticipated. If we are successful, tadpoles and young frogs will be released in Ichalkovskii Forest. Also, we are looking for partners in southwestern Russia where *H. arborea* was known to occur recently and where we plan future reintroductions.

During the course of the project we started to make a video film on tree frogs that will be used for environmental education purposes and for making amphibians more popular. Such materials should help overcome the traditionally negative reactions of the majority of the population to these animals. Also, we made 2000 copies of pocket-sized calendars with photos of *H. arborea* and logos of DAPTF and NSPAR. We hope that successful implementation of the project will promote the biodiversity conservation in amphibians.

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