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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

34th meeting
Strasbourg, 2-5 December 2014

Other complaints

**PRESUMED DESTRUCTION OF BIRDS' AND BATS'
HABITATS DUE TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENTS IN
UKRAINIAN NATURAL RESERVES (UKRAINE)**

REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT

*Document prepared by
the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine*



UKRAINE
MINISTRY OF ECOLOGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES OF UKRAINE
DEPARTMENT OF PROTECTED AREAS

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Kyiv, 13rd March, 2014

9-01/213-14

Ms. Ivana d'Alessandro
Secretary of the Bern Convention

Subject: Reporting on Complaint No. 2013/9: Presumed destruction of birds' and bats' habitats due to tourism developments in Ukrainian Natural Reserves (Opuk and Karadag)

Dear Ms. Ivanna d'Alessandro,

Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine carefully considered your letter of the 20th of January, 2014, on the complaint of non-governmental Nature Protection Squad "Green Future".

The above mentioned complaint deals with possible violations of the provisions of the Bern Convention for the environmental regimes of wild birds and mammals within the territory of the Karadag Nature Reserve and the Opuk Nature Reserve, in particular: *Peregrine, Saker, Shag, Rosy-coloured Starling and some species of bats*.

To provide a comprehensive and unbiased investigation of such a potential problem the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine has organized involvement in the process of all relevant stakeholders, such as managers and researches of the Karadag Nature Reserve and the Opuk Nature Reserve, scientists, wider public and NGOs, experts of the ministry.

Finally the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine has prepared summarized information taking into account next sources: letters concerning consideration of queries from the Karadag and the Opuk Nature Reserves, results of consideration of request during the workshop at the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine held on 20th of February, 2014. The workshop was participated with official persons of (some of the persons in distant conference mode) the Institute of Zoology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Prof. I.A.Akimov, Director of the institute; Corresponding Member of the NAS of Ukraine, Dr. V.A.Kharchenko, Deputy Director of the institute), the Karadag Nature Reserve of the NAS of Ukraine (Dr. A.L.Morozova, Director; Dr. V.I.Maltsev, Senior Researcher), the Opuk Nature Reserve (Mr. Igor Sikorsky, Senior Researcher); representatives of public organizations: Mr. Oleksii Vasylyuk, Deputy Chair of the National Ecological Centre of Ukraine, Mr. Andrii Plyga, Head, Nature Protection Squad "Green Future".

Author of the appeal Mr. Ivan Parnicoza was also invited to participate in the workshop discussion but he has not given any feedback information from his

own. According to the information of the Head of the Nature Protection Squad "Green Future" Mr. Andrii Plyga Mr. Ivan Parnicoza was expelled from the NGO before submission of the complaint to the Secretariat of the Bern Convention. Therefore, complaint of non-governmental public environmental group "Green Future", signed by Mr. Ivan Parnicoza was not official. Besides, he has never visited Karadag Reserve as representative of the NGO, never communicated with its administration, managers and and scientists, not met with ministerial officials.

Upon review of the above mentioned complaint the ministry kindly provide enclosed detailed information on the state of conservation of species of wild flora in the Karadag Nature Reserve and the Opuk Nature Reserve. In general, - statement on considerable human impact on the above mentioned protected areas and substantial decline in numbers of protected species were not proven and did not correspond to the reality. According to the opinion of famous Ukrainian scientists, minor changes in numbers of some mentioned species are within its natural short term fluctuations with general trend for increasing number.

Appendix: above mentioned on 8 pages.

Sincerely,

Director



Viktor Kantsurak

**Information of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine regarding
Complaint No. 2013/9: Presumed destruction of birds' and bats' habitats due to tourism
developments in Karadag Nature Reserves and Opuk Nature Reserves submitted by the
Nature Protection Squad "Green Future"**

Thesis 1. *"Breach by Ukraine, in the person of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine, of Article 6 of the Bern Convention, the breach consisting in the destruction, as a result of large-scale visits by tourists, of the habitats of bats and rare bird species – the European shag (Phalacrocorax aristotelis), the peregrine falcon (Falco peregrinus Tunstall), the saker falcon (Falco cherrug Gray), and the rosy starling (Sturnus roseus) – which are specified in Appendix II to the Bern Convention. Each year the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine issues to the Opuk and Karadag Natural Reserves permits (so-called "ceiling limits") for the boating of tourists and for the walking tours of caves inhabited by bats and the above-mentioned bird species. As a result of stress caused by the tourists visiting the habitats, many bats die and birds abandon nests with eggs and squabs."*

Objective 1. In Ukraine visiting reserves takes place according to acting Ukrainian legislation on protected areas strictly for scientific and ecological education purposes. It is regulated by special limits, permissions and scientific substantiations to avoid negative influence on the state of bio- and landscape diversity. Such visits may take place by special groups headed by PA guides along certain predefined routes. For the last years protective measures concerning endangered plant and animal species and their habitats became substantially stronger. That improvement is also caused by prohibition of mooring of tourist ships to the coast of the Karadag Nature Reserve and establishment of twenty-four-hour control of the entrance to the Opuk Nature Reserve.

At the same time, some minor violations of the nature protection regime took place: such as illegal penetration of visitors into stone quarries at the territory of the Opuk Nature Reserve, approaching of marine vessels close to the shore etc.. However facts of concrete influence to the rare fauna, in particular elimination of birds, creation of unfavorable conditions for hatching etc. are absent.

Now some certain problems for the protection of the territory of reserves could occur, especially at the territory of Opuk Nature Reserve, during soldiery manoeuvres of separate subdivisions of the Black Sea fleet of Russian Federation.

Thesis 2. *In the Opuk Natural Reserve, a colony consisting of up to 8,000 bats living in the local quarry caves is potentially affected; in the Karadag Natural Preserve, a colony consisting of up to 2,000 bats living in the seaside cliff caverns is endangered. Moreover, in the Opuk Reserve, an Opuk Mountain colony of rosy starlings consisting of up to 3,000 birds is affected; in the Karadag Reserve, a colony of shags consisting of up to 300 pairs living on the cliffs by the shore as well as 5 – 10 nests of Peregrine and Saker also located on the seaside cliffs are endangered.*

A sharp decrease in the number of bats in bat colonies and of birds in colonies of rosy starlings and shags and total disappearance of Peregrine and Saker.

Objective 2. The Karadag Nature Reserve was created in 1979 on a base of the T.I. Vyasemsky Karadag Biological Research Station (since 1914) on the Black Sea coast of Crimea (Crimean Peninsula) at the place of the extinct volcano of Jurassic period (over 120 million years ago). Area of the reserve is 2874 hectare, including 809 hectare of the off-shore aquatorium of the Black Sea.

Territory of the reserve includes mountain ranges (up to 577 m above sea level), plateaus covered by deciduous forests with dominating of pubescent oak, hornbeam, ash; motley grassland with stipa

and cereal grass; juniper, pistachio-tree and oak forests; 8 kilometers of winding coastline with rocks, conglomerations of stones, canyons, grottoes and small bays, and 1 kilometer off-shore stripe.

Amount of visitors-sightseers by the pedestrian ecological path is 20 thousand persons during a season, and by marine ecological path along the coast at the distance of 300 m from the shore there are 105 voyages during a year with 10-15 sightseers on board.

Data on habitats of certain species:

European shag (Shag) (Phalacrocorax aristotelis (Linnaeus, 1761) builds its nests along a coastline. Population of this species increased from 60 to about 200 couples of birds during the last 20 years.

Dynamics of change of European shag number is shown at Fig. 1.

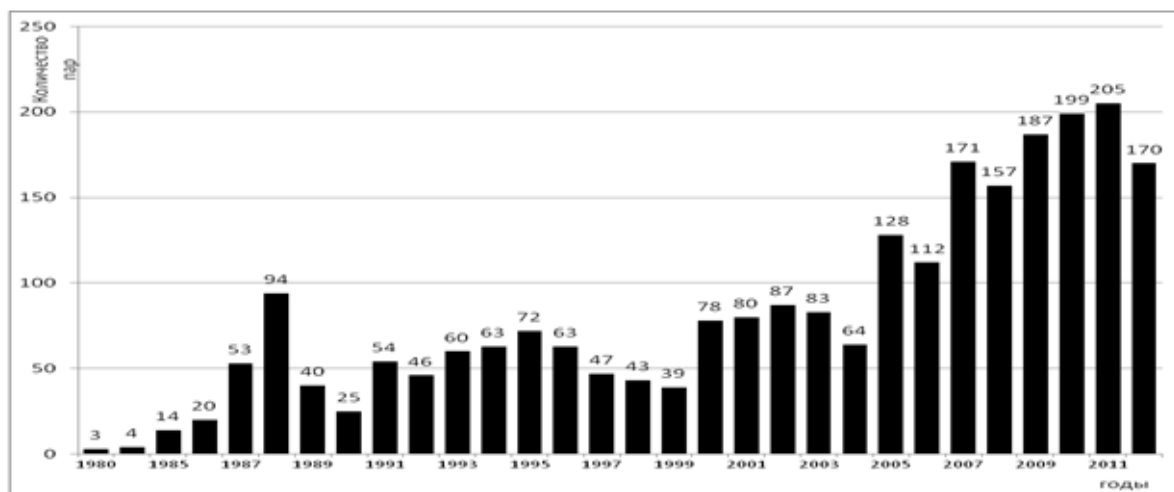


Fig. 1. Dynamics of nest number (couples) of European shag at the Karadag Nature Reserve (by Dr. М.М. Бескаравайный - М.М.Beskaravayny, Senior Researcher of the Laboratory of Zoology, Karadag Nature Reserve)

Peregrine (Falco peregrines Tunstall, 1771) builds its nests every year, 2-4 couples.

Saker (Falco cherrug Gray, 1834) builds its nests every year, 2-4 couples.

Bats

At seashore part of the Karadag Nature Reserve along a coastline the located majority from the main habitats of cheiroptera at this territory. Seashore grottoes, caves and rocky cracks are here on steep slopes, as well as off-shore conglomeration of stones etc. The biggest cluster of cheiroptera are inherent exactly for grottoes, where in the middle of 20th century tens of thousands of bats of various species inhabited.

A few not numerous colonies of Lesser Mouse-eared Bat *Myotis blythii* (up to one hundred individuals) still exist today, but Common Bent-wing Bat *Miniopterus schreibersii* is totally disappeared in the middle of 20th century (Кукушкин - Kukushkin, 2011).

The Opuk Nature Reserve

The reserve was created in 1998 at the Black Sea coast in Crimea.

Total area of the reserve – 1592.3 ha including 62 ha of the Black Sea aquatory with Ship-Cliffs.

Reserve territory includes Opuk cape, salt Koyash Lake, Opuk (185 м) and Pryozerna (44 м) mountains with emptinesses – quarries inside, seashore sandy spits, off-shore aquatoria, marine grottoes and Ship-Cliffs distanced for 4 kilometres at-sea.

Number of visitors/sightseers visiting reserve by the eco-trail is 2150 persons per year (visit in grottoes and quarries is forbidden).

Eco-trail "Urochishche Opuk" (Stow Opuk) does not lie through the place of concentration of rare birds nesting here; they can be also seen near entrance to the territory of reserve. Rosy starlings also nest in colonies out of the reserve, in numbers that far exceed their number in the Opuk Reserve population.

Data on habitats of certain species:

European shag (Shag) (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis* (Linnaeus, 1761) builds its nests mainly on the open sea on Ship-Cliffs, as well as on offshore cliffs (Cormorant Bay) – up to 65 couples of birds.

Peregrine (Falco peregrines Tunstall, 1771) – there is no information concerning presence of this species at the territory of the reserve last 10 years.

Saker (Falco cherrug Gray, 1834) builds its nests every year (1-2 couples or more).

Rosy-coloured Starling (*Sturnus roseus*) - builds its nests at the reserve not every year (up to 2 thousand couples in 2012 and 1 thousand couples in 2013).

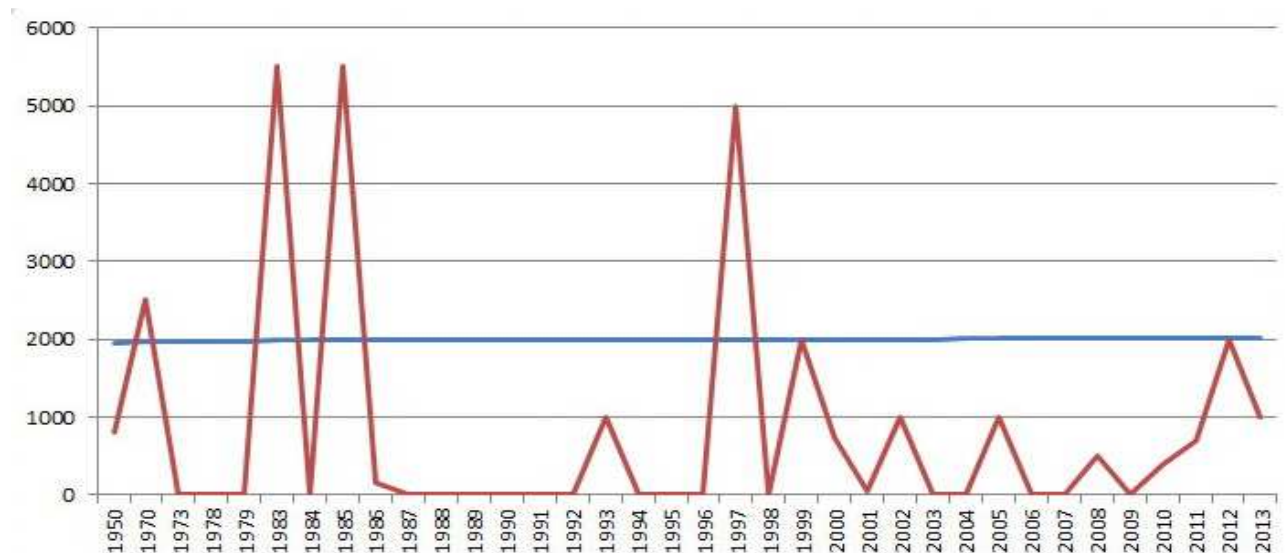


Fig. 2. Dynamics of nest number (couples) of Rosy-coloured Starling (*Sturnus roseus*) at the territory of the Opuk

Bats

Greater Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum* (Schreber, 1774) – since 2011 not permanent population of about 100 individuals dwell here.

Data on Greater Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*) number at the territory of the Opuk Nature Reserve is shown on Fig. 3.

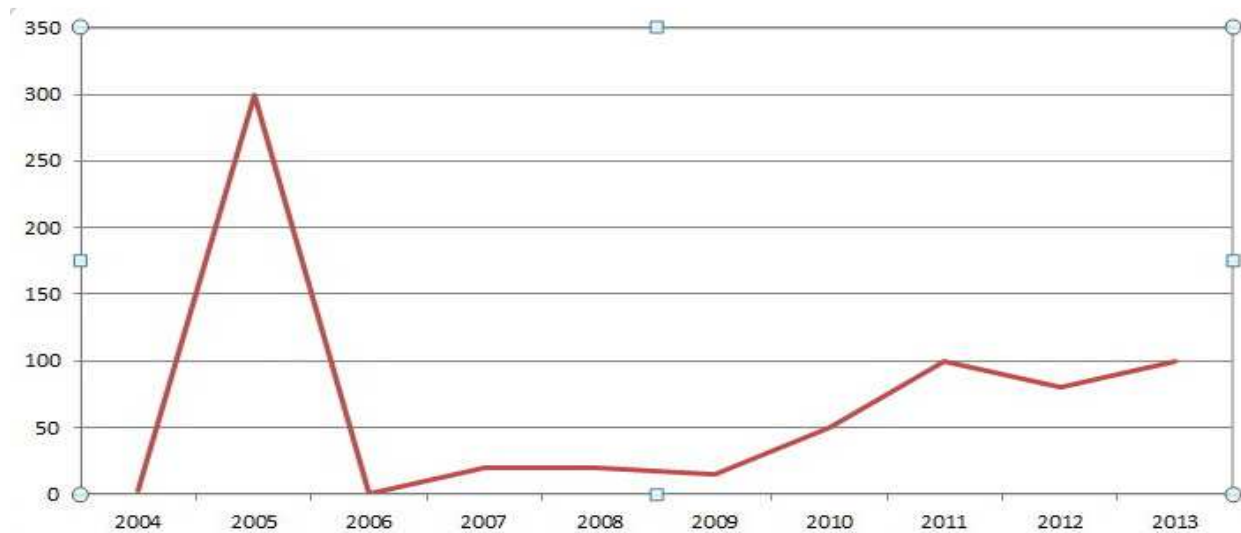


Fig. 3. Greater Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*) number dynamics at the territory of the Opuk Nature Reserve since 2004

The Lesser Mouse-eared Bat (*Myotis blythii* (Tomes, 1857) forms the colony of many thousands in summer in Opuk stone quarries: in 1960th – about 3 thousand adult females, in 2004 – about 1 thousand females together with young individuals, in 2007 – about 4 thousand females together with young individuals, in 2010-2013 - 2-8 thousand females.

Data on the Lesser Mouse-eared Bat (*Myotis blythii*) number at the territory of Opuk Nature Reserve since 2004 is shown on Fig 4.

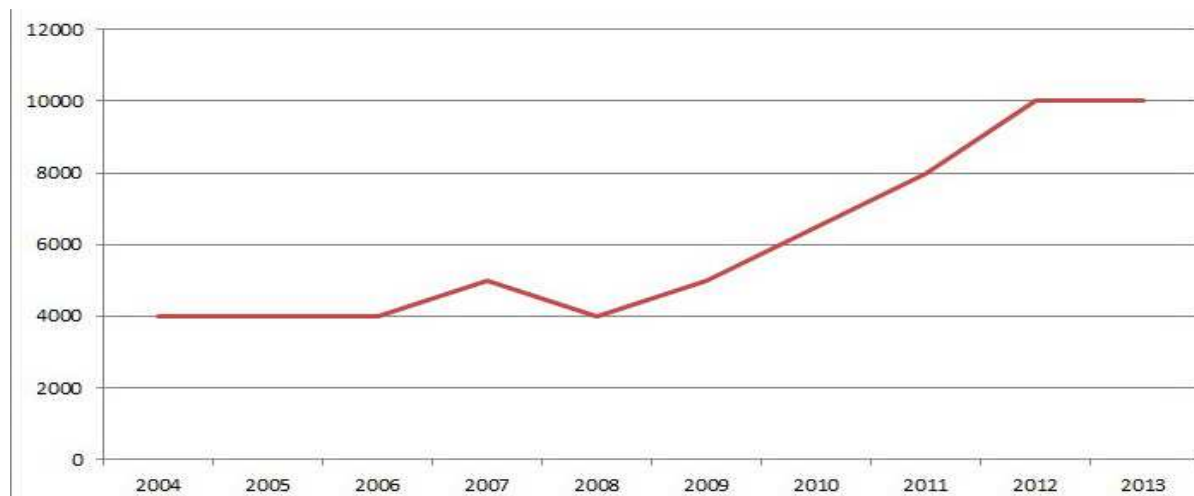


Fig. 4. Lesser Mouse-eared Bat (*Myotis blythii*) number dynamics at the territory of the Opuk Nature Reserve since 2004

In general, - statement on considerable human impact on the above mentioned protected areas and substantial decline in numbers of protected species were not proven and did not correspond to the reality. According to the opinion of famous Ukrainian scientists, minor changes in numbers of some mentioned species are within its natural short term fluctuations with general trend for increasing number.

According to the opinion of famous Ukrainian scientists, changes of numbers of the mentioned species do not exceed long-term fluctuations. Visits to Karadag and Opuk Nature Reserves take place in accordance with limits and regulations approved by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources on the base of results of scientific researches and monitoring supervisions.

This information was prepared by the the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine taking into account next sources: letters concerning consideration of queries from the Karadag and the Opuk Nature Reserves, results of consideration of request during the workshop at the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine held on 20th of February, 2014. The workshop was participated with official persons of (some of the persons in distant conference mode) the Institute of Zoology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Prof. I.A.Akimov, Director of the institute; Corresponding Member of the NAS of Ukraine, Dr. V.A.Kharchenko, Deputy Director of the institute), the Karadag Nature Reserve of the NAS of Ukraine (Dr. A.L.Morozova, Director; Dr. V.I.Maltsev, Senior Researcher), the Opuk Nature Reserve (Mr. Igor Sikorsky, Senior Researcher); representatives of public organizations: Mr. Oleksii Vasylyuk, Deputy Chair of the National Ecological Centre of Ukraine, Mr. Andrii Plyga, Head, Nature Protection Squad "Green Future".

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Meeting Conclusions:

Taking into account all mentioned above, it is possible to conclude that the sizes of populations and number of European Shag (*Phalacrocorax of aristotelis*), Peregrine (*Falco peregrines*), Saker (*Falco cherrug*), and Rosy-coloured Starling (*Sturnus roseus*) has no dependence from influence of limited amount of official visitors, but reflects natural biology of the species, general ecological conditions (especially feed base) etc.

At the same time, the Karadag and the Opuk Nature Reserves have good potential for improvement of protection of rare species of wild flora and fauna and have to focus special attention on implementation of following recommendations:

1. To plan additional conservation measures for rare animal species by the Karadag and the Opuk Nature Reserves.
2. To provide strict protective measures by warden services of the Karadag and the Opuk Nature Reserves at the spots where rare animal species build nests and feed as well as underground stone quarries, canyons and grottoes.
3. To thoroughly control nesting and shelter places (refuges) of rare animal species, as well as optimize the routes of eco-trails if necessary.
4. To reconsidered terms, location and regime of marine eco-trail visiting at the Karadag Nature Reserve based upon scientific research of 2014 year.
5. To inform general public concerning necessity of protection of rare species by mass medias, during public campaigns, by means of ecological advertisement.

Scientific information on species:

**Peculiarities of biology and distributions of species,
that are subject of special protection**

European shag (Shag) (*Phalacrocorax of aristotelis* (Linnaeus, 1761)) nests within Ukraine only on the Black Sea coast of Crimea exceptionally on cliffs, coastal precipices, and capes. This species is not fearful, it can allow people to approach even up to 6-7 m. It dives to a depth up to 4 m. Common fodder is benthic and off-shore fishes: gobies, lesser sand eel, picarel, wrasses, red mullet; a second-rate role in feed is played by the pelagic shoal fishes: anchovy, tyulka, and horse-mackerel (only 3-6 % in samples). Total number is about 900 couples, 60% of them form the Tarkhancut peninsula population (Бескаравайный - Beskaravayny, 2004, 2012).

Saker (*Falco cherrug* Gray, 1834) is widespread in steppe and forest-steppe zones of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In Crimea it nests on rocky and clay precipices, sometimes - on electric power transmission pylons. Birds are on nests from February to early June. Common fodder is ground squirrel, sometimes: young hare, hamsters, and mouse; also birds: partridges, pigeons, larks, starlings etc. Reasons of decline of number: depletion of feed base, illegal fowl for sale, disturbance.

Peregrine (*Falco peregrines* Tunstall, 1771) is widespread at both hemispheres. During last century number of peregrine falcon in Crimea is increased from a few to 100 couples. It nests in niches and on the prominences of rocks, ground precipices and on houses and television towers. It feeds as fowler. Main reason of decline of number is contamination with pesticides.

Bats

All Chiroptera species of Ukrainian fauna are night hunters on insects (Abelentsev and others, 1956). Their diet consists of 120 species of invertebrates; 57% of them are plant pests of forests and agricultural cultures (Kurskov, 1978; Tishchenko, 2011).

Bats are very sensible to the changes of environment because the slow rates of reproduction, difficult thermoregulation, and, in this connection, by the necessity of change of summer and winter places of stay (seasonal migrations). They settle at natural and anthropogenic shelters: in hollows and cracks of old trees, in caves, in garrets and in basements etc.

Everywhere main reason of reduction of number of bats is the combined effect of disturbing and destruction of habitats of these animals.

One of factors of disturbing for bats is noise: it is proved that the closeness to motor-car highways negatively influences efficiency of bat hunting, their social behavior and even results their death (Arlettaz *et al.*, 2001; Chan and Blumstein, 2012; Jones, 2008; Schaub *et al.*, 2008; Siemers and Schaub, 2012). So territories where the large settlements of bats are found must be confined this negative factor, especially in night time, when bats hunt.

Time of reproduction and being of Chiroptera within the reserves: from the beginning of April to early October.

Rosy-coloured starling (*Sturnus roseus*) has 4 sites of nesting on the coastal precipices of Crimea (3 at the Kerch peninsula: north coast and Opuk mountain and 1 - at the Tarkhancut peninsula) – up to 4-5 thousand couples. Common fodders: insects, first of all locusts.

In 90th of past century colonies of 1.5 thousand individuals existed in many parts of Crimea. Main reason of decline of number in Crimea: plugging of steppes and disturbance (Бескаравайный - Beskaravayny, 2012).

Kyiv, 12th of March, 2014