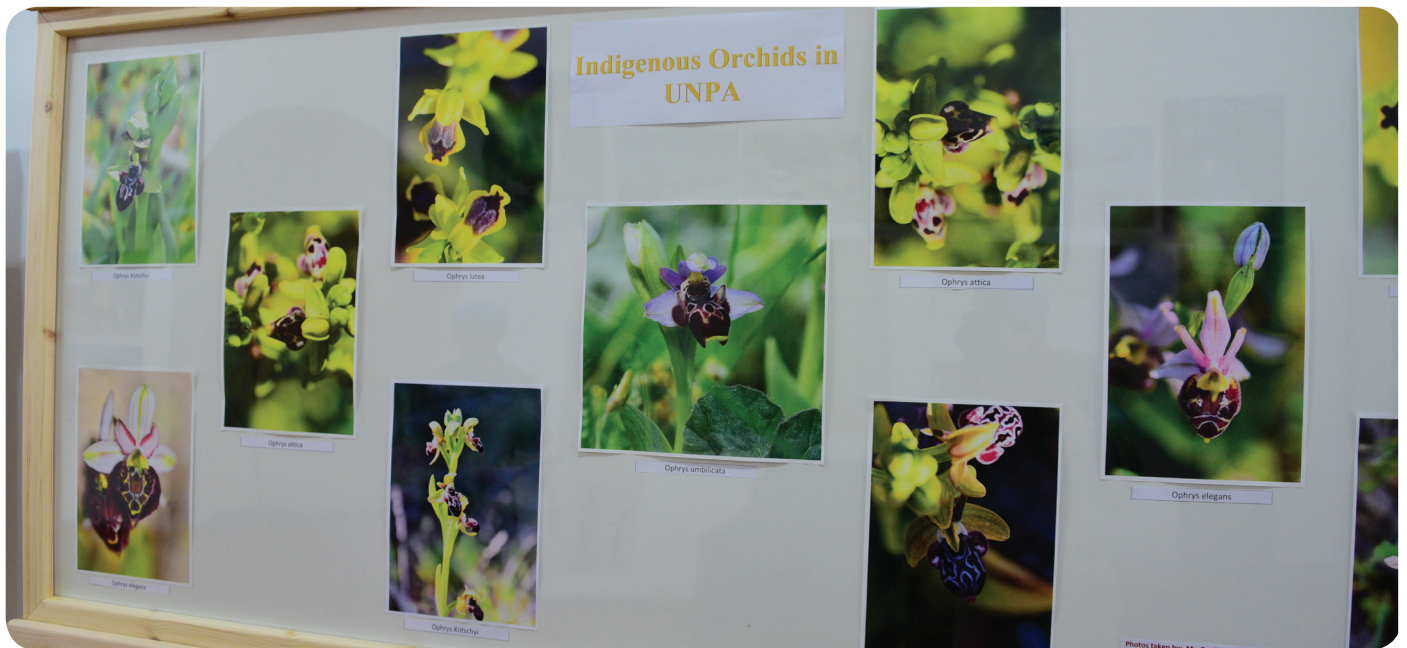


BLUE BERET



Untouched buffer zone bursting with biodiversity

UNFICYP personnel have the experience of working daily in the UN buffer zone in Cyprus, but not many of us are aware of the unique aspects of our area of operation; for example, did you know that there are 358 plant species in the buffer zone, 13 of which are endemic to Cyprus?

Did you know that there are 18 species of Mammals – the island boasts 36 species – and significant populations of vulnerable bird species facing habitat loss?

Many areas of the buffer zone have become a de facto nature reserve because of the limited human activity there. For many years, the status of the ecosystems within this narrow strip of land was mostly unknown, but a series of bi-communal biodiversity surveys funded by UNDP-ACT have provided a wealth of information as to the flora and fauna of the “Green Line”.

While these surveys did reveal the presence of several rare and endemic species, they also highlighted the role of the buffer zone as a reservoir for diseases and pests, as well as invasive species. The surveys also raised concerns about illegal activities in the buffer zone, such as illegal hunting, trapping and rubbish dumping, all of which threaten the delicate ecological balance of the island.

UNFICYP's Environmental Committee organized a presentation for staff on biodiversity in the buffer zone on 31 March, with Nicolas Jarraud, the scientific coordinator at the Cyprus Institute, giving the keynote address.

"It's not that we find radically different species in the buffer zone than in the rest of Cyprus, it's just that the populations in the buffer zone in many cases are more robust, because there is less pressure from human activity and habitat loss", he said. Asked about future ideas for the buffer zone, he said: "I would

say that what is essential is to start from now a participatory bi-communal dialogue on a buffer zone “master plan” for the sustainable development of the area in the event of a settlement, and the sustainable management of the area in case the status quo continues. It is essential that this is a bottom-up process, involving all the communities who either used to live or still live within the buffer zone and its surroundings”.

Regarding the role of UNFICYP Environmental Committee, Paulos Demissie, Chief Engineer at UNFICYP and chairperson of the committee said: “The UNFICYP Environmental Committee is constituted to advise and support UNFICYP Senior Leadership and all Mission Components in undertaking tasks and activities in accordance with the DFS Environmental Strategy, which includes but is not limited to: Monitoring environmental compliance at all UNFICYP sites, assessing environmental risks from UNFICYP operations and providing guidance on the required preventive/remedial actions; and develop Environmental Action Plan for the Mission to address the main environmental issues related to its operation”.

UNFICYP, through the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations and its Department of Field Support, is an active member of a UN-wide working group on sustainability management, promoting 'Greening the Blue', the official UN campaign to make a more sustainable United Nations. The Mission is conducting activities to ensure the sustainability of its areas of operation – these include tree planting, as well as plans to achieve progress across five key pillars: energy, water and wastewater, solid waste, wider impact and environmental management system.



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