

Animation about ringing camp in Sfantu Gheorghe communal school

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Introduction

As many actions of protection of nature, the ringing camp which took place in Sfantu Gheorghe was an intense subject of discussion between the locals. What were we doing here? Why are we living in a protected area they are not allowed to cross? The ringing camp had been prepared in a scientific goal but the part of explanation and communication with the locals seemed to be a second concern. That is why when we came in October, the fourth month of 2008's ringing camp, we heard some amazing things about our job in the Delta from some fishermen's voice. They were convinced of us killing or bringing back their birds in France. As we (Cécile and Rémi) are specialised in nature communication, we decided to try to change Sfantu Gheorghe inhabitants' way of mind about us.

Material and method

Our first problem of communication with Roman was the tongue barrier. In this village there was only a few English speakers and our practice of Romanian was not enough good to make well understanding. Fortunately, children of Sfantu Gheorghe also learn French at school with their French teacher and School director, Adnana.

Children are a good public but they have their own advantages and drawbacks. Children are spontaneously interested by nature and have less prejudice than adults. They are always in a learning process and presenting them our work in their country during their school time seemed to be a good way to get their attention. Furthermore, they are the future Delta reserve neighbours, and get them informed of the importance and the frailness of their environment when they are young is the best way to make them responsible adults. Finally Children are more listened by their parents than strangers and so we could also indirectly inform them.

Our worst drawback was to make an animation disguised in a French lesson. We were constrained of using basic words and to not deepen our messages. Adnana helped us by translating unknown words and we used a lot of pictures and photographs to make our discourse more alive and interesting.



Cécile presenting key concept and relationship between organism to the children (photo Alexis Pochelon)

The development of this discourse took this form. First of all we focused the interest of children on the idea of ecosystem by asking them which animals they knew in the whole Romania and what they knew about their living places and needs to survive (Food, environment). Then we helped them to describe the special place they were living in and made them discover which animals really need this place to live too. We worked around all the links between men, animals and their environment and tried to make the children understand the significance of well knowing our environment to protect it.

The second part was more about birds. We showed them local species' photographs and they had to search the name in birds' guides. The animation continued with games about birds' claws, bills or feeding.

After that we introduced the role of ringing camp for well knowing and well protecting Danube's delta. Kids could handle rings and other tools we used and watch photographs of the camp. Finally some words game allowed to remind to everybody essential ideas developed by the animation.

This animation took place inside the school, in the computers room during one complete day with three class, children were around 8 to 12 years old. All materials needed was brought by Adnana unless for ringing tools and photographs.

Results

Children and Adnana were really enthusiastic after animation and consequences of our action didn't take longer to be seen. Every time someone of the camp get to the village, kids asked him on birds we caught and parent's were more friendly. Even if all the complexity of our mission was not understood, there was no more bad rumours about us.



Children was very interest and passionate by the workshop (photo Alexis Pochelon)

Discussion

This action seems to have been a real success; it cost nothing in money as in time. Only two volunteers were needed and every materials were disposable for free to get people well informed on our activities. The only mistake was to make it only one week before our departure. Communication is as important as ringing to protect Danube's delta. We spend only four month in the delta but Sfintu Gheorghe's inhabitants are here everyday, conservation of these unique ecosystem can't be done without them. Some people in the camp were waiting for Adnana coming with her classes, but we were strangers and nobody knew us really well, even the fishermen we met in the bar! The excuse was that parents didn't understand the interest for their children to learn about birds instead of mathematics or grammar. But it was fear. Fear for unknown people was stronger than curiosity. We had to make the first step to meet each other. The Danube's Delta is small world and if we want to participate on its conservation we have to involve people who lived here for ever. Of course it's difficult and takes a long time to build but it seems to be really important for everybody.