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RESEARCH IN THE NATIONAL PARKS – FROM THE EDITORS

This volume of KOSMOS "Research in national parks" is the result of the conference that was organized in Białowieża to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the foundation of Białowieski National Park, in March 2002, the year announced to be the "Year of Białowieża Primeval Forest". This event attracted more than 250 scientists from Poland. Several dozens of speeches were delivered, more than 100 posters exhibited. This volume presents only few examples of research that is conducted in Polish national parks by scientists from different Universities and Polish Academy of Sciences, often with a significant contribution from scientists employed in national parks.

Research in national parks should focus on the inventory of their resources and on description of specificity of the protected areas. The longer these investigations are continued, the greater value their gain. Other studies that do not require such a testing-ground, relatively unchanged by human activity, should be run elsewhere, out of the borders of national parks.

We selected the group of papers that jointly give a review of typical research conducted in national parks. We proposed their sequence, from the research of abiotic environment, through the trophic chain of a typical ecosystem, from primary producers to the top predators. This sequence is preceded by the preamble by Prof. Ewa Symonides, the chef nature conservator and vice-minister in the Ministry of Environment in Poland, on the research in national parks, and by the outlines of the activity of two scientific laboratories that function in Białowieski and Tatrzański national parks.

The need of scientific exploration of the protected areas is unquestionable, and we witness the growing interest of many scientific institutions and individual scientists in the research on protected areas. However, the inventory research as well as nature monitoring somehow do not belong to the main scopes financed by the most powerful sponsors. Not in all parks there are scientific laboratories, that could serve both, visiting scientists and local staff, and not in all parks scientists are employed. The future of science and research in national parks calls for serious debate and urgent decisions. The employed scientists are working in isolation from the core of the scientific environment, and do not enjoy easy access to libraries or to the internet resources. The conference in Białowieża created a platform for the exchange of knowledge, approaches and ideas between park and not-park scientists. Such a platform did not earlier exist. Science in Poland suffers from the inadequate financing, and the lack of funds for participation in conferences is one of its obvious consequences. In

our "park volume" of KOSMOS the share of papers authored by park employees is very small. By editing this volume, we intended to focus the attention of potential readers on the needs of research and scientists in national parks. Science in protected areas is needed, and urgently needed is the cooperation and exchange between basic and applied orientations, and between scientists representing different approaches. Due to dispersion of park laboratories and scientists, and the lack of tradition and models of cooperation, the function of initiating and coordination of research should be fulfilled by the Board of Polish National Parks. This volume is the result of cooperation, not at all frequent, between national parks, Polish Academy of Sciences and The Board of Polish National Parks. We wish that this cooperation of three editors from three different institutions would serve in future as the "best practice example" for others.