

Transcript

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Living in a Biosphere Reserve

Clip 1

In today's programme we'll hear from the people of the Danube Delta about how they make ends meet and how they relate to the outside world beyond the Delta and how the outside world is affecting their lives. When it comes to outside influences, the Danube Delta has certainly had its share. There have been years of industrial pollution and exploitation under the Ceausescu regime. Most recently in an attempt to reverse the damage, the Danube Delta has been the focus of national and international efforts to protect its rich animal and plant life and their unique wetland habitats. The Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve was set up in 1990.

(Sound effects of bird life)

The Delta is thinly populated by groups of people who came here as refugees from other areas. They include white Russians whose ancestors escaped from religious persecution in Russia two hundred years ago and Ukrainian Kosaks who were exiled here when the area was controlled by the Turks. Over the centuries both groups have found a hiding place and safety among the wilderness of winding water ways, reeds and forests. They've made a living here by being expert fishermen and fish is mainly what they eat and depend on

... Anna and Trian Gerasine, who live with their four year old son and Anna's elderly parents, have a pretty typical 'gosperear' or 'household'. Though Anna tells us that in fact each household is a bit different, everybody relies like Anna and Trian on fishing and most people have a garden like Anna on a strip of land reachable only by boat.

Clip 2

Now it doesn't require too much expert knowledge to conclude that if you are dependent on fish for a living, and you happen to live in an area where wildlife is protected, there might be conflict. There are closed seasons, when fishing is forbidden, locally referred to as the 'Prohibition Period' when the fish breed. Trian?

He thinks it's a good thing for the Danube Delta to have a biosphere reservation, but the ecologist must understand that the local inhabitants are dependent on the fish and if they don't fish they don't have enough to eat.

While the human inhabitants of the Delta are not allowed to fish during these 'Prohibition Periods', the multitudes of birds are not restricted in their fishing. Traditionally the people of the Delta also hunt the birds adding another twist to the already complex livelihood patterns that exist here.

Clip 3

So what lessons can we draw from this picture of life in the Danube Delta? People are technically poor and the environment in which they live are fragile and in need of protection, but they have worked out a way of surviving and balancing their way of life with the natural world around them. In a development context, what is the best way to proceed? ...

... But complexity and strength of the way of life in the Delta has meant that it is still a place of refuge, wildlife and people. Today it's most likely to be young families who can no longer find work in Romania's towns and cities. They return to the Delta where at least they can be sure of getting fish to feed their families. But many of the people living here are concerned that they do not have a legal right to the land they live and farm on. They fear one day they may be asked to move. Although there aren't any stated plans to depopulate the Delta, there is no doubt that there is often tension between local peoples' livelihoods and the plans of environmentalists.