

AROUND SLOVAKIA

compiled by Zuzana Viliková from press reports



American turtles love Slovakia

1 TURTLES of the red-eared slider species (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) have been found living around Lake Baňa near Michalovce, east of Košice, even though this species is originally from the Americas. It seems that living in the area is quite conducive for the turtles and they are even able to spend winter in the wild there.

Zuzana Argalášová, a zoologist from the protected area known as the Vihorlat Landscape Park, told the TASR newswire that the red-eared sliders living near the lake were in all probability let loose by people who had originally bred the turtles at home.

"In the 1980s, these turtles were sold in the size of a ten-crown banknote. But they gradually grew and owners failed to accommodate their needs as it was necessary to change their water daily and to feed them regularly," Argalášová explained, adding that some of these owners or breeders got rid of their turtles by releasing them to the nearest river or lake.

Because sliders are very vigorous and have no natural predators they can survive in the wild without much trouble, Argalášová said, noting they have documented a colony of seven turtles living near Michalovce.

"Since April 2007, a ban on importing and breeding several species of exotic animals has been in effect and this includes the red-eared sliders. However, the ban does not apply to animals that had been previously registered – people can continue to breed those," Argalášová told TASR.

She noted that pet shops can only currently sell species of water turtles that cannot survive in the wild.

The zoologist reported that the exotic American turtles can be seen in spring sunbathing on the banks of the Baňa after having wintered by the lake.

Because this species is not indigenous to Slovakia they are moved to the zoo at Bojnice if they are captured.

"This species has no place in our fauna," Argalášová stated, noting that the only indigenous species of turtle in Slovakia is the European pond turtle (*Emys orbicularis*).



Students removing trash from the Mlynská dolina area of Bratislava.

Photo: TASR

Thousands help to clean up litter from natural areas

THE 2012 edition of Let us Clean Up Slovakia (*Vyčistíme si Slovensko*) attracted students from hundreds of schools as well as volunteers from local governments, civic associations and hobby groups, according to Beatrice Hudáková, the Environment Ministry's former spokesperson, who told the SITA newswire that 2,041 organisations participated this year, 500 more than last year.

"When we announced the first year of this event, I feared whether there would be at least 150 groups interested in participating. Last year's number of 1,500 seemed like something not likely to be

repeated so this year's number of more than 2,000 is a wonderful farewell for me," said József Nagy, the environment minister who recently left office.

Hudáková told the media that the Green Patrol (*Zelená hliadka*) association organised a clean-up effort along the floodplains of the Danube in the Petržalka area of Bratislava. The group is also cooperating with the capital's Biking Coalition to promote the idea of urban cycling.

Students at the Vendelín Javorka elementary school in Žilina helped make their environment greener by cleaning pavements in the Hliny

housing complex. The town of Horný Bar near Dunajská Streda welcomed spring by tidying up its surroundings, including a channel flowing from the Gabčíkovo dam and a local pond.

The Environment Ministry organised the event for Earth Day, April 22, and called on its employees, representatives of non-profit and non-governmental organisations, schools and private sector companies to pitch in.

Hudáková explained that the day focuses on collecting garbage and waste, sprucing up natural areas and raising the environmental consciousness of Slovaks.

Concrete replicas

3 THE OBSERVATORY in Partizánske now houses replicas of two concrete observatory towers that were built in 1911 by Milan Rastislav Štefánik, the Slovak statesman, astronomer and world traveller, to observe a total eclipse of the sun on April 28 of that year on the Pacific island of Vava'u.

František Kele, head of last year's expedition that tracked Štefánik's activities as an astronomer on Pacific islands, was able to find the original towers on Vava'u and documents about their construction. He told the TASR newswire that the observatory towers are a unique part of the cultural heritage of Slovakia.

"I came to the conclusion in 2009 that it would be great to bring the towers back to Slovakia; this site is the only palpable evidence of Štefánik's activities in the southern hemisphere," Kele stated. Later he was advised by a friend and several astronomers that the original towers should stay where they were "born" and he decided to make replicas.

Several Slovak expat associations from Australia are interested in taking care of the original towers in coming years. The idea to place the replicas in the Partizánske observatory was supported by the very active branch of the Association of M. R. Štefánik in this town in western Slovakia

World Touring Car Championship races at Slovakia Ring

BY DUŠAN DUDÍK
Special to the Spectator

2 ALMOST 60 million spectators across the world had Slovakia in their sights on April 28-29 because Slovakia Ring, the country's main motorsport track, hosted races for the 2012 season of the World Touring Car Championship (WTCC). A big question hung in the air at the track just 36 kilometres from Bratislava. Could the venue, which is now in only its third season, successfully host a WTCC event? The verdict seems to have been a resounding 'yes'.

Four races were held at the relatively new race track, the 3rd and 4th rounds of the

European Touring Car Cup (ETCC) and the 7th and 8th rounds of the WTCC. The ETCC races were especially interesting for Slovaks because two local drivers lined up at the start: Matej Homola driving a BMW 320si and Patrik Nemeč in a SEAT León Cóna. Homola finished in 5th position in both races but took 3rd position in the provisional classification of his group, S2000. Nemeč finished 6th in the first race and 8th in the second.

"I see it very positively; we have met all the resolutions we made," Nemeč told The Slovak Spectator.

After the ETCC races, the spectators' attention focused on the next set of speedy cars and drivers competing for WTCC points. Even though pole position in the first race belonged to Norbert Michelisz from Hungary driving a BMW

320 TC, Gabriele Tarquini from the Lukoil Racing team of Russia was the first to cross the finish line, followed by his teammate Aleksei Dudukalo, each driving a SEAT León. Alain Menu from Switzerland, driving a Chevrolet Cruze 1.6T for Team Chevrolet, finished third. The Russian team's drivers said they were pleased with the characteristics of the track.

"It is very similar to the circuit in Russia, so for me it is a little bit easy," Dudukalo told The Slovak Spectator, adding that a previous race in Marrakech was very difficult for him and Slovakia Ring was much better.

The victors in the second WTCC race were Robert Huff from the United Kingdom, who finished first, and Yvan Muller from France in second, each driving a Chevrolet

Cruze for Team Chevrolet. Tarquini finished third in the second race.

"Honestly, I did not expect us to be this good as far as the tempo is concerned," Michelisz told The Slovak Spectator. "I am very glad that I managed to get the first pole position and that the best lap in the first race was also mine. Of course I regret that I didn't win the race, but for me it is important that I felt competitive this weekend."

The event attracted around 41,000 visitors cheering for their favourite teams or drivers. A large number of visitors came from Hungary.

"It was especially a good feeling, just like competing at home," said Gábor Wéber, a driver for Zengő Motorsport in Hungary.

Homola told The Slovak Spectator that the Slovak

drivers were also pleased with the support they received from local fans.

"This event should not be viewed solely as one of the 12 WTCC rounds that are held throughout the world; it

really is a historic milestone in the history of motor sport in Slovakia and of course a historic milestone in the life of our circuit," Tomáš Vranka, CEO of Slovakia Ring, told a press conference.



Homola at the track.

Photo: Courtesy of autosportfoto.sk