



Festival aims to attract attention towards Yelnya marshes' uniqueness, developing ecotourism in the region

Cranes, geese and cranberry pies

Cranes and Cranberries of the Miory District Ecological Festival held in Vitebsk Region's Miory District

By Andrey Afanasiev

The event comprised two parts: a holiday of gathering cranberries and the observation of migrating birds. A free bus took guests to a picturesque site where cranes and wild geese could be observed. Around a thousand cranes 'posed' for those equipped with binoculars and, the day before, almost 4,000 were seen on Yelnya upland marsh, having migrated from Scandinavia and Russia.

Simultaneously, travellers to the semi-peninsula annexed to Miory were able to enjoy folk performances and an exhibition of hand-made articles. The vegetable souvenirs aroused the greatest stir, while everyone enjoyed tasting delicious pancakes and cranberry pies. Representatives of the Ministry for Natural Resources and Environ-



Cranberry trade promoted at *Cranes and Cranberries of the Miory District Festival*

mental Protection attended the event, as did those from the Ministry for Sports and Tourism. They were joined by members of the UN/UNDP, diplomatic missions and public associations.

The UN/UNDP Representative in Belarus, Antonius Broek, noted that, every year, the Miory District welcomes over 4,000 cranes and more than 10,000 geese. Migrating birds stop at the Yelnya upland marsh to rest and prepare themselves for the onward journey, allowing bird watchers the chance to observe and photograph these noble birds in their natural habitat.

Local authorities hope to attract Belarusian and foreign tourists, with an ecological festival planned annually to coincide with the wonderful event. As the Chairman of the Miory District Executive Committee, Igor Kuznetsov, notes, everything has met organisers' expectations this year. He smiles, "I hope to see an increasing number of nature lovers come to Belarus every year for this holiday."

APB-BirdLife Belarus Public Association conducted a poll of local residents, asking whether they would prefer to see the Miory District's marshes restored or dried. Most support restoration. Yelnya marshes (part of a hydrological reserve of the same name) are vital for migrating birds, which need a place to safely restore their strength. It would certainly

be difficult for them to fly further.

The Yelnya Hydrological Reserve (of Republican significance) was set up 1968 and, in 1981, its borders were expanded. The reserve is located across the Vitebsk Region's Miory and Sharkovshchina districts and remains almost untouched since post-glacial times. This truly unique marsh environment is home to rare and endangered plants and animals. It plays an important role in preserving the Belarusian and European landscape and biological diversity. Since 2002, Yelnya has been a water-marsh territory of international significance.

The Cranes and Cranberries of the Miory District Ecological Festival was organised by local authorities, Republican state organs, international organisations and local residents.

Paying online benefits

Belarusian Railways allows passengers electronic registration

The service is to be piloted on train #106/105 between Brest and Minsk and on #117/118 between Vitebsk and Minsk, with passengers allowed to pay for tickets online with credit cards. After payment, passengers will be able to board by presenting ID and data from the electronic ticket. Belarusian Railways also recommends printing the online receipt

bearing trip details. Online payment may be made up to one hour before departure from the first station of the route.

If successful, online payment will be launched more widely, on local and international routes, bringing convenience and improving the quality of passenger service. Naturally, online payment saves time through queuing and completely excludes the possibility of loss or damage of your ticket. The advantages are obvious.

Mystery soon relieved

Literary treasure of Belarus returns to National Library

"Next month, another treasured edition of Belarus will return to our library," Roman Motulsky, Director of the National Library of Belarus, has told journalists. He is yet to reveal the title of the book, not wishing to jeopardise the deal by attracting competitors. Conservation of historical and

cultural heritage is being conducted by the National Library in several directions but the most important and difficult is the purchasing of books. It has been reproducing some original editions and creating electronic copies. Meanwhile, it is launching a new exhibition to honour the publications of Frantsisk Skorina — on loan from Germany for the first time.

Comfort and affordability

By Olga Popova

Shchors Street's Comfort apart-hotel opens its doors to those seeking mid-range accommodation and flexibility

The new complex combines three-star hotel facilities and the flexibility of renting a flat, explains its director, Anatoly Anisko. The project cost \$35.8 billion and is a completely new idea for Belarus — despite being quite common in Europe. The nine-story building has four entrances and houses 135 apartments. Some of the flats have more rooms than others, to cater for greater numbers of guests, or to provide more space. Popular abroad, it can be a cheap option for larger groups, since the price does not alter with the number of guests and longer stays invite a reduced cost per night. The ho-



Hotel Comfort

tel offers breakfast but each flat is also equipped with a kitchen, to support those wishing to cater

for themselves.

The Chairman of the Supervisory Council of Lada-OMC Energo, Alexey Vaganov, notes that the idea was born in 2009 and that a two-roomed flat offers everything to make you feel at home: a fully equipped kitchen (with tableware, tea and coffee) plus a separate bathroom and toilet. All the furniture is made domestically and a cafe is soon to open inside the hotel. Already, over 40 percent of the rooms are occupied.

According to the Mayor of Minsk, Nikolai Ladutko, it's a great addition. He tells us, "Eleven hotels are being built in the capital at present, with another ten planned. The apart-hotel is in demand worldwide, being so affordable." Minsk City Executive Committee has already received new applications for similar projects.