

Library on wheels brings books and pleasure to village residents

It's always a pleasure to thumb a volume by your favourite writer, to find an interesting story or 'discover' a new author. However, it's harder to gain access to books when you live in a small village, without a library or bookshop. Accordingly, mobile libraries are now operational in most districts, bringing reading to even the smallest settlements. But are they in demand?

By Irina Kosenkova

To see how well the system is working, we joined the library bus on its journey through the Brest Region's Malorita District. The 'house-reading hall' — as some call it — has been operational for nearly two years, serving almost 300 villagers. The bus covers ten routes, involving 21 villages.

"District residents know all about us, eagerly anticipating the arrival of new books, following the bus schedule," notes the Director of the Centralised Library System in the Malorita District, Nadezhda Kurdyuk. "We were cautious at first, visiting people's houses with local librarians to chat about books but also to create a rapport of trust; some simply want someone to listen and offer support."

The mobile library visits each village once a month but comes to Nikolskoe and Sushitnitsa twice monthly — at the request of residents, carrying 2,000 books. Our first stop is Sushitnitsa, where around 400 people live. Around 20 percent borrow books regularly. As we enter, new brick houses are evident, alongside clean streets and yards. Nothing looks dilapi-

dated. The bus stops by the local shop, where people are already waiting for our arrival. Librarian Yulia Kuchina takes out the most popular books: detective and love stories, children's books and Orthodox literature.

"Books for children are expensive but

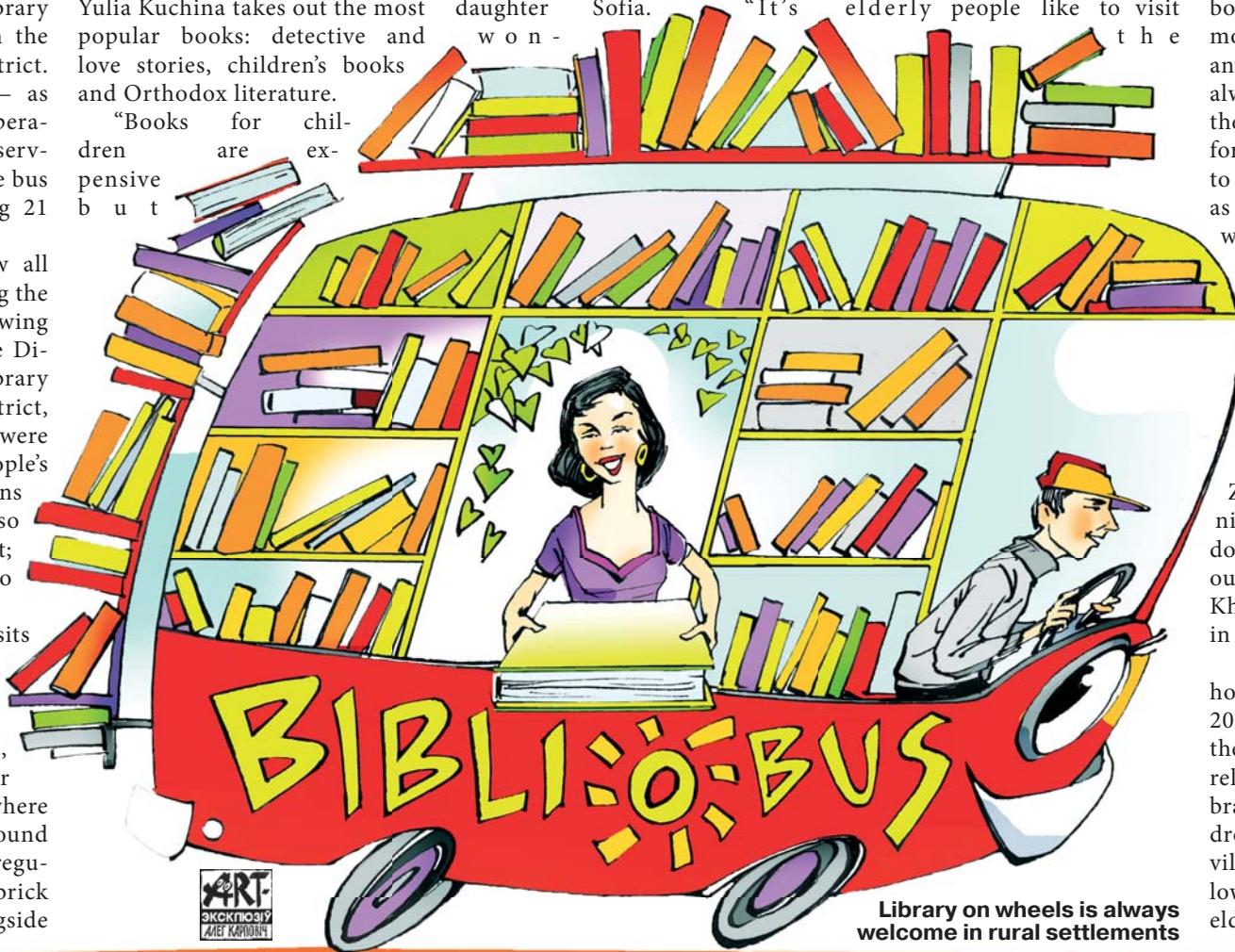
they are always seeking new stories," smiles Tatiana Demchuk, choosing books jointly with her daughter Sofia. "It's wonderful to have the chance to borrow books for a while."

Alongside young readers, elderly people like to visit

mobile library. Konstantin Goloviychuk is around 70 but is a regular reader. He has a list of books today, telling us, "I've read more books from the bus than anyone else. Of course, I can't always find a book I'm after but the librarians then try to find it for me for their next visit. I love to re-read old Soviet literature, as well as books on the theme of war or politics. I also like detective stories. I'll take a couple of new books now, to read in the evening."

"I've been coming here since the bus first began — choosing interesting fairytales and magazines for myself and my brother," says Kristina Zakharchuk, 8, with pride. "It's nice to have this library, as we don't always borrow books from our school, in neighbouring Khotislav. It would be too boring in summer without books."

The bus spends just over an hour in the village, welcoming 20 people — mostly children and the elderly. Some take books for relatives while others let the librarians know who else is due to drop in that day. As it leaves the village, the bus stops twice, to allow the librarians to visit some elderly residents at home. Truly, the Malorita librarians take care of their readers.



Library on wheels is always welcome in rural settlements

Brown bears to return to Belovezhskaya Pushcha

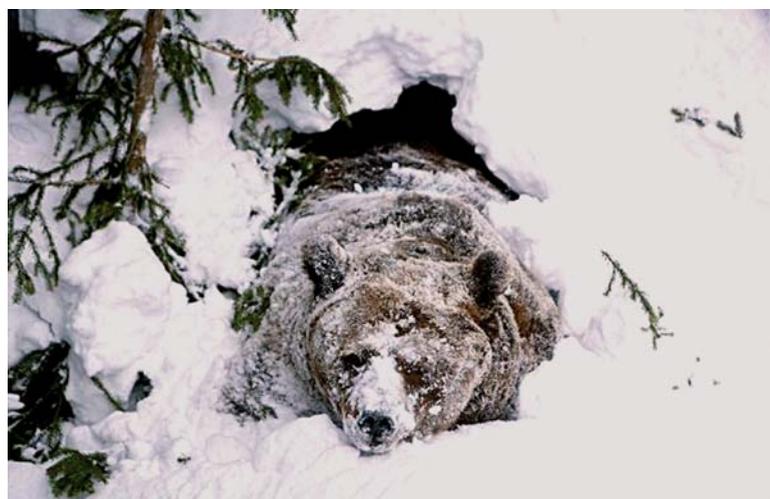
By Yulia Vasilieva

Around 80 brown bears live in Belarusian forests but the figure was 3.5-fold greater just a decade ago

Brown bears are registered in the Red Book, being vulnerable to deforestation and disturbance from hunting. In the 19th century, the Belovezhskaya Pushcha was known for its bears but now has none at all in permanent residence.

The National Academy of Sciences is working with the reserve to repopulate the forest, with the Frankfurt Zoological Society — the initiator of the idea — offering financial assistance.

Similar programmes have proven successful in relocating bears from Romania and Slovenia to Italy and France, Spain and Norway. According to Vadim Sidorovich, a senior research officer at the National Academy of Sciences' Scientific and Practical Centre for Bioresources, the ma-



They feel comfortable in forests even in winter

ajor goal is environmental. He tells us, "Brown bears do spend winter in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha, as the Ruzhanskaya Pushcha and the Vygonoshchansky reserve are located nearby. Accordingly, they could also settle there. However, we can't just release 20 bears and hope for the best. We need to take it slowly, perhaps bringing in eight animals

a year, introduced as couples in four locations. They'd have radio collars, allowing us to monitor their movements. We could then introduce phase two of our repopulation programme."

The National Park, nearby forestries and rural residents are keen on the idea, so splayfooted bears are likely to be brought from Russia.

Interactive pocket guide to eco-awareness

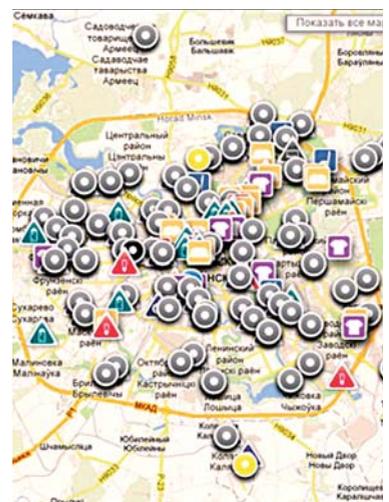
By Yevgeny Togulev

Green Map for mobile phones

"The Green Map project was launched by the Centre for Environmental Solutions several months ago, aiming to promote recycling and safe disposal of waste," notes Sergey Sadovnikov, who helped design the application.

"The project is on going, but has just launched a mobile application: a map showing locations of recycling points, for phones using an Android operating system."

The guide can now be always to hand, in your pocket. "We hope that the new mobile service will raise awareness and encourage more people to recycle their waste sensibly, including the disposal of toxic items," explains the Deputy Director for Programming at the Centre for Environmental Solutions, Yevgeny Lobanov.



Minsk Green Map

The application for mobile phones can be downloaded free of charge from Greenmap. by online. Although maps have only been created for Minsk and Grodno so far, plans are afoot to include Gomel, Brest and Baranovichi very soon.