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Introduction

Upper Silesia is still perceived in Poland and beyond as an environmental disaster area. However, data collected by research units, local authorities and nature lovers supports the view that nature in the Silesian Voivodship, including that within the most urbanised part – the so-called Katowice conurbation (the Upper Silesian Industrial Region – USIR) – is still rich in the diversity and abundance of its flora and fauna.

Most areas featuring the highest values in terms of nature have been protected by law and the creation of new protected areas is still advocated. Although the areas differ in their size, rank and resources, they all play significant ecological roles. The most interesting areas of the Silesian Voivodship include: the Cracow-Czestochowa Upland (Wyżyna Krakowsko-Częstochowska) – the so called Jurassic Upland situated in the north-east of the voivodship; the foothills and mountains of the Silesian Beskidy Mts. (Beskid Śląski); and the river valleys of the Vistula (Wista), Oder (Odra) and Mała Panew (Mała Panew).

Even the most urbanised and industrialised areas of the central part of the Silesian conurbation hide enclaves of wildlife within its compact and dense development. The specific nature of these areas, connected with their history and cultural heritage, results not only in the need to preserve them, but also those areas, that due to their natu-



The landscape of the Silesian Upland with "Dorotka" Hill in the background.

ral, cultural and educational values, have been altered or created by human activity.

The Silesian Voivodship is one of 16 voivodships (administrative units) in Poland, covering an area of more than 12 000 km² and population reaching some 5 million.

It is located in southern Poland, on the Upper Vistula, Oder and Warta Rivers and borders the Czech Republic and Slovakia to the south. Geographically, the following regions are located here: the Silesian Upland (Wyżyna Śląska), the Cracow-Czestochowa Upland, the Oświęcim Basin (Kotlina Oświęcimska), the Głubczyce Plateau (Płaskowyz Głubczycki), the Silesian Beskid Mts., the Żywiecki Beskid Mts. (Beskid Żywiecki), the Little Beskid Mts. (Beskid Mały) and the Żywiec Basin (Kotlina Żywiecka). The Silesian Upland is the most industrialised Polish region. It is caused by the

The Jurassic Upland is an extraordinarily picturesque region of Poland





An old beech tree growing in the "Murckowski Forest" nature reserve in Katowice

occurrence of mineral resources, primarily hard coal. The highest number of mines occurs in the Upper Silesian conurbation (USIR), the largest industrialised area in Poland consisting of 14 big

cities and the surrounding industrialised areas. In the Silesian Voivodship, there are 68 towns of which 22 can be described as big. Katowice is the capital of the region. The geographical and natural diversification of the voivodship, including the mountainous ranges, uplands and lowlands have contributed to the immense riches of the abiotic and living elements of nature in this region.

The most precious areas in the Silesian Voivodship are legally protected and they belong to the Landscape Park Complex of the Silesian Voivodship¹. The complex consists of 8 landscape parks²: three parks were established in the most precious natural areas in the Beskidy Mts.: the Żywiecki Landscape Park in 1986; the Beskid Śląski Landscape Park in 1998; two landscape parks – the Eagles' nests ("Orlich Gniazd") Landscape Park and the Stawki Landscape Park – both located in Cracow-Czestochowa Upland and belonging to the Complex of Jurassic Landscape Parks were also established, along with the Cistercian Landscape Compositions in Rudy Wielkie Park (Cysterskie Kompozycje Krajobrazowe Rud Wielkich), the Forests of Upper Liswarta Landscape Park (Lasy nad Górną Liswartą) and a part of the Załęczański Landscape Park where the forested areas of the Upper



Beech forest during autumn. Nature reserve "Murckowski Forest"

Liswarta river, and meander of the Warta river in the Działoszyn area are protected.

In the Silesian Voivodship there are 61 natural reserves³ with a total area of 3634.64 hectares, including, amongst others, forest and open water habitats, peat bogs and swamps as well as abiotic components of nature. Reserves have been established to protect various type of woodlands, such as riparian, beech, oak-hornbeam, pine, and spruce forests. In the Silesian Voivodship, in addition to the nature reserves and landscape parks there are 11 protected landscape areas⁴, 13 nature-landscape complexes⁵, 55 areas of ecological importance⁶, 1313 monuments of nature⁷ 3 documentation sites⁸, and one "Natura 2000" area: "the Upper Vistula Valley". Amongst the monuments of nature, the massive trees merit special attention: the 720-year old pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* (diameter trunk – 600cm) growing in Poręba near Zawiercie, the 620 –year old pedunculate oak in the "Łęczczok" nature reserve near Racibórz (trunk diameter – 690cm) and the yews *Taxus baccata* in Bystra, that are more than 500 years old.

Despite centuries of human activity impacting on the natural environment in this area, the flora of the Silesian Voivodship is represented by more than 1500 species of vascular plants, amounting to nearly a half of all Poland's flora. In the Silesian Voivodship, the distribution limits of many species can be found; they do not occur outside these boundaries, and species rare and threatened in Poland are equally numerous here. In addition to the native species, there is a considerable proportion of alien species from various parts of the



Pine forest of the Cracow–Czestochowa Upland

world, which were introduced to the flora either intentionally (as cultivated plants) or accidentally. The fauna in this voivodship consists of 63 mammal species, 362 terrestrial bird species, 6 reptiles, 17 amphibians, several fish species and numerous invertebrates. Amongst the mammals the bison *Bison bonasus*, bred in the "Żubrowisko" reserve near Pszczyna is of particular interest.

More than four thousand historic and cultural objects located in the Silesian Voivodship are entered into the "register of monuments". These are mostly architectural landmarks: castles, palaces, mansions, churches, chapels, the urban arrangements of specific towns, cemeteries and historical parks.

Barbara Tokarska-Guzik

Regional nature conservation strategy

Preservation of the nature and landscape of the Silesian Voivodship requires application by local authorities of a consistent policy compliant with the concept of sustainable development throughout the region. The development and consistent implementation of 'the nature conservation strategy' is one of the top priorities in environmental protection, both at the voivodship and municipal levels.

The following goals are of the particular significance:

- maintenance and extension of the basic network of open spaces and their interconnections;



Spring in oak-hornbeam forest. "Łęczczok" nature reserve