

## Experts Build Up Population of Fallow Deer in Eastern Rhodopes

**Sofia** - Experts under a Bulgarian-Dutch project, New Thracian Gold (NTG), are building up the population of fallow deer in the Eastern Rhodopes, the project said in a press release on Monday.

The first five fallow deer of a total of 30 have been recently introduced around the village of Tintyava, Krumovgrad Municipality, in the Eastern Rhodopes. The deer were taken from the Studen Kladenets game farm, where there are nearly 1,500 animals. In the beginning, the animals will be housed in a temporary enclosure and in spring they will be released into the wild.

Fallow deer disappeared from the region of Tintyava one thousand years ago. The reintroduction project is a joint effort of NTG, Krumovgrad's hunting society Sokol and Tintyava's hunting group.

Among the important roles of fallow deer in nature is maintaining the mosaic landscape of the Eastern Rhodopes. Fallow deer contribute to a more attractive landscape, which attracts tourists and boosts the income of the local population.

The reintroduction of fallow deer in the Eastern Rhodopes is part of a larger program of the New Thracian Gold project to increase the numbers of large herbivores in the region such as the Rhodopi shorthorn cattle, tarpans, red deer and fallow deer. □



*South African Ambassador to Bulgaria Sheila Camerer handed over to the Bulgarian government the commission papers of the newly appointed Honorary Consul of her country in Varna, Roumen Ganchev. Ambassador Camerer said Ganchev will have responsibilities towards South Africans visiting the coastal city. It remains to be decided whether South Africa will have another honorary consul in Bourgas (also on the Bulgarian coast, south of Varna), or whether Ganchev's powers will be expanded to include that area as well. In the field of tourism, South Africans are interested in Bulgaria's golf and ski destinations, the diplomat said*

*BTA Photo*

## Judges in Southern Bulgaria Found to Only Technically Comply with Anti-Conflict-of-Interest Standards

**Sofia** - Judges in Southern Bulgaria comply with anti-conflict-of-interest standards, but their compliance is technical rather than substantive, according to a report by the National NGO Network for Civil Watch over the Courts.

The study shows that in their conflict-of-interest statements, judges in the south of the country provide only partial and insufficient information. It seems that they try to hide the facts rather than shed light on them, the Network says.

There is also a problem with the random assignment of cases to judges. It is necessary to use a single software product for random case assignment across the whole country, because some software programs create opportunities for manipulation, the report says. The Network recommends to the Supreme Judicial Council to commission an independent expert examination of the software product Lawchoice and

all other programs used in the judicial system.

The study also found that current case assignment practice only takes into account the number of cases, and not their factual and legal complexity.

The random case assignment principle can be violated not only by tampering with the electronic system. People can also get around it by using loopholes which allow a panel of judges competent to try a given case to be reduced to include only specific names, who will be, indeed, randomly assigned to try the case.

On the upside, the study acknowledges the development of the policies of transparency and publicity in the judicial system. The courts aspire to provide more complete and more varied information to the public about the services they offer, the activities of judicial offices and the work of judicial authorities. The Supreme Judicial Council needs to improve its policy in the public sphere in order to

make the people feel the progress achieved in the judicial system.

The Network further acknowledges the introduction of online judicial services as a positive development. It notes, however, that legal fees cannot yet be paid via electronic channels.

The courts have also made headway with regard to public access to judicial services. Tangible improvements have been observed in public information services provided in court buildings, the report says.

The study shows that child protection cases are handled promptly while recognizing the complexity of the matter. In all courts covered by the review, judges act with responsibility, caution and care when it comes to the protection and the rights of children. The executive and judicial branches of government should draw up a joint programme to create proper conditions for litigation involving children, the Network recommends. □