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**Ukraine War
Environmental
Consequences
Work Group**

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Dear Friends!

2026 is fast approaching, but despite the “peace talks”, the war is far from over. The real end to the war, one which has been ongoing in Ukraine since 2014, will be the creation of conditions to prevent its resumption. Today, however, we see that the conflict is spreading beyond just Ukraine and Russia.

This trend is also evident in the field of environmental protection. The recent arrest of Ukrainian scientist Leonid Pshenychnov in Crimea showed that Russia continues to use the war to pursue its geopolitical ambitions around the world. Read our latest Review column to learn more about how Russia is using the war in Ukraine to add to its influence in the Arctic, the consequences of February’s drone attack on the protective sarcophagus at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and Ukrainian demands for compensation for climate damage resulting from the full-scale invasion:

- [Environmental consequences of the war in Ukraine. October-November 2025](#)

Withdrawals by Russia and Belarus from international conventions highlights the use of international environmental and ecological institutions by authoritarian regimes for their own political purposes. When the standing committees of the Berne, Ramsar, and other conventions have condemned full-scale invasion or Russian repression, their frameworks automatically become “undesirable”. Eugene Simonov and Angelina Davydova explore the ways in which Belarus and Russia are abandoning international environmental standards:

- [Between war and nature conservation: Who wins when aggressor countries withdraw from environmental agreements?](#)

Meanwhile, the Russian occupiers are also engaged outright in nature trafficking. Such activities were clearly revealed thanks to an investigation by Ukraine’s URSA.Media. Their team contacted representatives of the Askania-Nova occupation administration and was able to negotiate the purchase of rare Chapman’s zebras for 1 million Russian rubles (about US\$13,000). Investigator Olha Tkach reveals how rare animals from Askania-Nova Nature Reserve are being sold and other challenges facing the reserve under occupation:

- [Russia selling off rare animals from Ukraine’s Askania-Nova nature reserve](#)

The geopolitical consequences of the war are visible throughout the region and are often manifested by increasingly authoritarian regimes. This is being seen in Georgia, a country facing a power monopoly by the ruling party after parliamentary elections in 2024. Read about how that country is abandoning its course to Europe and how environmental organizations and initiatives are trying to continue their work during that political crisis, the third article in our “Environmental Activists and War” series:

- [Environmental and Climate Activism in the time of invasion: Georgia](#)



The confrontation between Ukraine and Russia continues at international meetings as well, including those devoted to environmental issues. At the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) recent Congress, Russia made another attempt to block a resolution condemning the invasion of Ukraine. However, the Ukrainian organizations Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group and Environment People Law were able to defend the IUCN's decision. UWEC expert Oleksiy Vasilyuk reports on how the congress went for Ukraine:

- [**Ukraine scores decisive victory at World Conservation Congress**](#)

Against the backdrop of the ongoing war in Ukraine, people are contemplating its consequences. October saw the release of three films reflecting on the war and its impact on nature: "No Shade in the Forest", "Animals in War" and "Natural Border". They tell the stories of how nature is changing in the war zone, the lives of animals (and people) during the war, and how wetlands are used as natural fortifications. UWEC contributor Inha Pavliy reviews the movies:

- [**Nature through the lens: Three films about the environmental impacts of the war in Ukraine**](#)



Let me wish us all a Happy New Year with our families, enveloped by the support, attention, respect, and love that we all need in these difficult times. As one wise man said, we are not given trials that we cannot overcome. While it is always darkest before dawn, let us believe that dawn is near.

Lastly, we need your support to continue our high-quality work. Please consider a one-time or recurring donation to UWEC Work Group.

[*Support UWEC Work Group*](#)

You can read more about the environmental consequences of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on our [website](#), [Twitter \(X\)](#), [Facebook](#), [Telegram](#) and [Bluesky](#).

We wish you strength, peace and good news!
Alexej Ovchinnikov, editor in chief, UWEC Work Group



Environmental consequences of the war in Ukraine. October-November 2025

Alexej Ovchinnikov

Each month, the UWEC editorial team shares highlights of recent media coverage and analysis of the Ukraine war's environmental consequences with our readers. As always, we welcome reader feedback, which you can leave by commenting on articles, writing to us (editor@uwecworkgroup.info) or contacting us via social networks.

Russia continues to use repressive and military methods to expand its influence in the world. Scientist Leonid Pshenychnov was prevented from attending a recent

conference on Antarctic biodiversity in Hobart, Australia following his arrest by Russia, and at that same conference Russia and China refused to take any steps to save the Antarctic's ecosystems. Meanwhile, Ukraine continues to collect data on the war's environmental and climate impacts. In particular, Ukraine took advantage of the COP 30 climate conference in Brazil to again demand compensation for climate losses caused by the aggressor country. Read more in our review.



“Antarctica’s first political prisoner”: Russia arrests researcher, accusing him of treason and collaborating with Ukraine

A well-known researcher, **Leonid Pshenychnov** was arrested in September 2025 in Kerch. He stands [accused](#) of “treason” for his collaboration with Ukrainian scientific institutes and advocating for the development of marine protected areas in Antarctica, which Russia calls a “threat to security”.

The arrest [took place](#) immediately before the start of a Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) meeting at which Leonid Pshenychnov was not only supposed to represent Ukraine, but planned to actively participate in the discussion of issues related to nature conservation.

Ukrainian ambassador to Australia **Viktor Miroshnychenko** [said](#) that Russian authorities informed his lawyers of the charges, accusing him of being a “Russian citizen-defector to Ukraine” for his participation in the work of CCAMLR on behalf of Ukraine. Pshenychnov is also accused of using his research to undermine Russia’s krill fishing in Arctic waters, characterized as a “threat to national security”. CCAMLR did indeed promote a position on tightening krill fishing requirements, but it was blocked by Russia and China.

Leonid Pshenychnov is a Ukrainian scientist who has been researching Antarctica for over 40 years. His first expedition to Antarctica on the Sea of Cosmonauts took place in 1983. In total, he has gone on 21 expeditions to Antarctica, working on Soviet, Ukrainian, Australian and German research vessels, including the famous Polarstern. From 1996-2025, he served as technical coordinator of a Ukrainian scientific observation program under the CCAMLR. His work was recognized in official materials marking the CCAMLR’s 40th anniversary in 2021. Pshenychnov lived in Crimea and did not leave after Russia occupied the peninsula in 2014. Like many other Ukrainian citizens who decided to remain in the occupied territories, he was forced to obtain Russian citizenship.

The scientist’s arrest is politically motivated, as confirmed by the charges brought by the Russian prosecutor’s office. In particular, they [note](#) that his activities in support of the creation of nature reserves in Antarctica “promoted the interests of the Anglo-Saxon bloc” and thus in opposition to Russia’s interests in developing industrial fishing and the hydrocarbon resource extraction on the Arctic shelf. By this logic any environmental initiative could be seen as contrary to the interests of the Russian state.

The emergence of Antarctica’s “first political prisoner” clearly demonstrates the politicization of environment, nature



conservation and climate activities. Any independent position that prioritizes the interests of nature and the environment can be misinterpreted and portrayed as “treason” or “collaboration with the enemy”. This makes the work of scientists and activists even more dangerous.

Russia exploitation of polar resources in the context of its war in Ukraine

ABC News (Australia) and other media outlets have [reported](#) that one reason for Leonid Pshenychnov’s arrest may be Russia’s desire to seize hydrocarbon deposits in the Antarctic and Arctic. A document revealing the possible reasons for the arrest mentions that the creation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) proposed by CCAMLR “will result in Russia losing the opportunity to develop hydrocarbon resources on the Antarctic continental shelf”. According to the article, the Russian Embassy in Australia declined to comment, but Australian officials noted that all countries must comply with the requirements of the 1998 [Madrid Protocol](#). Paragraph 7 of the protocol states that “Any activity relating to mineral resources, other than scientific research, shall be prohibited [in Australia].”

At the CCAMLR conference in Hobart, Russia and China [blocked](#) all proposals to preserve marine life in Antarctica, underscoring their desire to exploit Antarctica. As a result, the conference ended in failure and was even seen by

participants as a step backward in efforts to preserve biodiversity and ecosystems at the South Pole. Russia and China vetoed all proposals. Executive director of the Coalition for the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Claire Christian noted, “*Not only did they fail to adopt any new fishery management measures or new marine protected areas, but they couldn’t reach consensus to renew a key krill fisheries management measure that has been in place for many years.*”

The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) was established in 1982 and comprises 26 countries, each of which has veto power. Russia and China exercised this power at the recent conference, continuing to view Antarctica as their resource base.

Ukraine is also a member of the commission thanks to its Vernadsky Research Station on Galindez Island in the Argentine archipelago near the Antarctic Peninsula. The Ukrainian Academy of Sciences research center was established there in 1996, when the British Antarctic Survey transferred its Faraday station to Ukraine for a symbolic sum of £1. Work at the station continues even during Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

In the north, Russia also considers a significant part of the Arctic as its territory and is [seeking permission](#) from the UN (primarily from member states Canada and Denmark) to extend its “continental shelf” northward in order to gain exclusive rights to access resources. With glaciers



melting due to climate change, the Arctic Ocean is becoming more accessible and is now seen by Russia as an “internal sea” to be used as a trade route and resource base. This can be not only seen to “strengthen” Russia, but also poses a danger to all of humanity. Uncontrolled extraction of resources in the Arctic and Antarctic only accelerates climate change, polar ice melt, and sea level rise, and will lead to catastrophic consequences.

Greenpeace’s third expedition to the Chernobyl zone since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion

The Chernobyl nuclear power plant and the surrounding radiation contamination zone were initially occupied at the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion. In 2023, the territory was liberated by Ukrainian troops, but military impacts on the radiation safety facility did not stop there. The sarcophagus covering the damaged reactor caught fire as a result of a [drone attack](#) in February 2025.

The goal of Greenpeace’s [third expedition](#) (since February 2022) was to support Ukrainian scientists studying radioactive contamination and to assess the damage caused by the February attack by Russian drones on the [New Safe Confinement](#) structure.

Today, scientists are primarily focused on studying the radioactive materials remaining after the 1986 Chernobyl accident. For example, there is ongoing

research on the cooling pond built in the 1970s to cool the four reactors at the power plant. It still contains particles of radioactive fuel left over from the disaster. Understanding how these particles behave in water and sediment is important for predicting long-term radiation and environmental safety.

The expedition also monitored the consequences of the drone strike on the roof of the new sarcophagus, built for the containment of radioactive particles. The drone attack caused serious damage to the building’s structure—breaking through the roof and causing a fire that lasted three weeks and disabled key safety systems. Temporary repairs have been carried out, but restoring the protective shell will require more time and resources, with costs potentially running into hundreds of millions of dollars.

Greenpeace will continue to investigate Russia’s war crimes against Ukraine’s nuclear infrastructure. It should be noted that the Zaporozhzhia Nuclear Power Plant is also under Russian occupation. An IAEA report dated November 19 noted that currently operating nuclear power plants—the South Ukraine, Khmelnytsky, and Rivne stations—are also facing disruptions due to power outages. This not only poses a threat to nuclear safety but reduces electricity generation.

“Ukraine’s nuclear sites must stop being targets in Russia’s war. The international community must act to protect them—and to hold Russia accountable for its deliberate



nuclear threats,” says Shaun Burnie, senior nuclear specialist at Greenpeace Ukraine.

In a statement [issued](#) on December 5 following an International Atomic Energy Agency monitoring mission, the IAEA announced their finding that the Chornobyl reactor’s sarcophagus could no longer perform its protective isolation functions, which could lead to future radiation leaks. For this reason, independent monitoring in the Chornobyl zone is becoming ever more relevant.

Ukraine demands compensation from Russia at COP 30 climate summit

This demand was [announced](#) on November 18 at the COP summit in Brazil by Ukrainian Minister of Economy, Environment, and Agricultural Policy Pavel Kartashov. Compensation funds will be spent on the country’s ecological restoration after the war ends. In the near future, Ukraine plans to submit an application for climate compensation to the Register of Damage for Ukraine.

“In many ways, Russia is waging a dirty war, and the climate has also fallen victim to that war. Huge amounts of fuel burned, forests scorched, buildings destroyed – all this is a carbon footprint caused by the war, and it has a significant climate price to pay,” said Pavel Kartashov. “The climatic consequences of this aggression are being felt far beyond the borders of our state and will continue to be felt for decades to come.” Ukrainian environmental

organization Ekodiya [reported](#) on Kartashov’s comments during the COP 30 summit.

Today, in an updated assessment based on the War Greenhouse Gas Accounting Initiative prepared with the support of Ecodiya and in partnership with the Ministry of Economy, Environment, and Agriculture of Ukraine, the report estimates the climate damage caused by three years of full-scale invasion at \$43 million. Emissions caused by the fighting during this period are estimated at 237 million tons of CO₂. This is equal to the total annual emissions of Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia combined.

“Careful documentation of emissions from the Russian invasion will form the basis of Ukraine’s compensation claim. The mechanism for submitting it is provided for by international law. Ukraine may become the first country to seek compensation for climate emissions caused by war,” said Lennard de Klerk, lead author of the Initiative.

Climate compensation could also become a mechanism for Ukraine to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. The plan is to use the funds to create low-carbon infrastructure, restore soil productivity and forests destroyed by the war, and finance national projects for climate change adaptation.

Note: On November 14, 2022, the UN General Assembly adopted [Resolution A/RES/ES-11/5](#) “Furtherance of remedy and



reparation for aggression against Ukraine,” which stipulates the need to hold Russia accountable for violating international law in Ukraine and to create abovementioned international damage registry that was subsequently developed under the auspices of the Council of Europe. •

*Translated by Jennifer Castner
Main image: On the Day of Dignity and Freedom, members of the 30th Ukrainian Antarctic Expedition remind the world – Crimea, Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions are Ukraine Source: National Antarctic Scientific Center of Ukraine*



Between war and nature conservation: Who wins when aggressor countries withdraw from environmental agreements?

Eugene Simonov, Angelina Davydova

In the first year of the war, the Ukrainian [Ministry of Foreign Affairs and civil society](#) organizations persistently proposed to expel countries that had launched military invasions from any (multilateral) international treaties, including environmental and climate agreements. UWEC authors have repeatedly [attempted](#) to analyze the consequences of possible expulsions. Now, as the number of precedents for countries withdrawing from

conventions continues to grow (including on the initiative of the aggressor countries themselves), it is time to analyze the causes and consequences of such steps, including for the environment and international cooperation as a whole.

As of the beginning of 2022, both the Russian Federation and the Republic Belarus were parties to most international environmental agreements



and mechanisms, both regional and global. In addition to obvious benefits for participating governments, these mechanisms often provided civil society organizations with additional opportunities for nature conservation under Russia's and Belarus's repressive political conditions, as well as important channels for international cooperation.

Starting in 2022, the participation of Belarus and Russia in certain international environmental agreements and mechanisms was restricted or suspended by the other parties to these treaties due to the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine. However, Belarus and Russia withdrew from most of the denounced conventions and agreements on their own initiative, demonstrating their "resentment" toward the international community.

Precedent in Belarus

It was precisely because of the war in Ukraine that Belarus withdrew from the 1979 Council of Europe Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (further, Bern Convention). In early March 2022, the Council of Europe condemned Belarus' active participation in Russia's aggression against Ukraine and called on the Secretary General to take measures. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe appealed to the bodies established on the basis of the conventions in which Belarus participates, proposing to review

the modalities of Belarus' engagement therein. In November 2022, at the [42nd session of the Standing Committee](#) of the Bern Convention, it was decided by a majority vote to restrict the rights of Belarusian representatives to be elected to a Convention Bureau, to serve as chair of any Group of Experts, or otherwise act on behalf of the Standing Committee.

In response, official representatives of the country [stated](#) that such a decision contradicted both the Bern Convention itself and the Committee's rules of procedure, but the Committee was unmoved. The next step was Belarus' [denunciation](#) of the convention in August 2023. This move is similar to Belarus' earlier withdrawal in July 2022 from the [Aarhus Convention](#) on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.

Read more:

- [Belarus eliminates independent environmental organizations and exits the Aarhus Convention](#)

According to **Irina Sukhy**, the co-founder of the Belarusian environmental organization [Ecohome](#), the difference between the two withdrawal precedents is that the decision to withdraw from the Aarhus Convention was made by the country in response to measures intended to compel Belarus to comply with that Convention's provisions. However, the



country chose to denounce the convention in order to avoid fulfilling its obligations. In contrast, the withdrawal from the Bern Convention was a consequence of the Council of Europe restricting the rights of aggressor countries within the framework of all conventions and mechanisms that it coordinates. *“The Bern Convention Committee has only taken general, symbolic steps, declaring the unacceptability of actions that unleash war and limiting the aggressor country’s ability to act on behalf of all countries within the convention,”* Sukhy stated.

Environmentalists [surveyed](#) by Ecohome fear that withdrawal from the convention could see the resurrection of cruel methods in animal hunting and the resumption of hunting large predators that are protected in Europe. It could also put an end to the [Emerald Network’s](#) development. Indeed, hunting for [bears](#) and [lynxes](#) has recently been permitted in Belarus. The most significant consequence of Belarus’s withdrawal from the agreement is that it deprives civil society of the ability to file complaints about anti-environmental actions taken by the authorities with the Convention’s bodies.

Agreements abandoned by Russia

After its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russia found its ability to cooperate under many agreements restricted and also unilaterally chose to denounce some of them.

In May 2022, Russia announced its withdrawal from the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), accusing its members of “politicizing its activities” after the Council [suspended](#) Russia’s membership (as well as Belarus’ observer status) in the organization on March 3, 2022, due to the attack on Ukraine. The Council was formed in 1992 by all countries in the Baltic Sea region to establish cooperation after the end of the Cold War.

Daria Akhutina, Director General of the Nordic Center for Sustainable Development, stated in a [review](#) of the Baltic regional policy published by the Russian pro-government think tank RIAC (Russian International Affairs Council) in June 2025 that *“until recently, Russia’s membership in the Council was considered its strength and competitive advantage over other regional cooperation formats, such as the Nordic Council of Ministers.... Currently, the consolidating factor for the CBSS member states remains their confrontation with Russia and their comprehensive support for Ukraine.”*

Russia’s participation in the [Joint Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea](#) established by the governments of Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Romania, Turkey, and Ukraine in 2019 was also [suspended](#) by a decision of partner members in response to the full-scale invasion.

The Russian Federation [withdrew](#) from the [Barents/Euro-Arctic Council](#) (BEAC) on September 18, 2023, due to other



partners' refusal to cooperate with it. The current members of this organization are Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Finland, and Sweden. In April 2025, Russia also [withdrew](#) from a 2008 agreement among BEAC countries on cooperation in the field of emergency prevention, preparedness and response.

On March 30, 2022, the participation of Russian representatives in the activities of the Convention on the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) [was suspended](#) by the Council. In March 2024, Russia announced it had begun a procedure for withdrawing from the convention. On October 29, 2024, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law denouncing the convention, an agreement which had been in force since 1964.

In June 2024, Russia withdrew from the [1979 Protocol](#) to the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution, administered by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. The protocol was signed in Geneva in 1984. Its purpose is to finance the Cooperative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Long-range Transmission of Air Pollutants in Europe (EMEP). Three international scientific centers were established with the Convention's financial support. In December 2023, on the initiative of Ukraine and with the support of all European delegations, the parties to the Agreement decided to close the Vostok Meteorological Synthesis

Center in Moscow and relocate it to Slovenia.

On December 28, 2024, the President of Russia signed a law denouncing the [Framework Agreement](#) on a Multilateral Nuclear Environmental Program in the Russian Federation and the Protocol on Claims, Legal Proceedings, and Indemnification from Financial Liability to that agreement (signed in 2003). This agreement with European governments and banks provided financing and technical assistance for projects to eliminate sources of radioactive contamination, such as old nuclear submarines in the northern seas of the Russian Federation.

In an interview with Vazhnye Istории ("Important Stories"), Bellona expert **Alexander Nikitin** [commented](#): *"If the Russian Federation does not complete projects already underway – in Andreeva Guba, Gremikha or on the seafloor in Arctic waters to raise sunken and submerged nuclear and radiation-hazardous objects – radiation risks in the Arctic will increase for fishermen and ships on the Northern Sea Route... If the Russian Federation resumes accumulating radioactive and nuclear waste, as it did in the Soviet era, then "things will return to square one – before international projects to clean up the Soviet Union's nuclear legacy began."*

In July 2025, Russia [denounced](#) the Ramsar [Convention](#) on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, adopted in 1971. In August, the Russian president issued [instructions](#) to fulfill this convention's



objectives on the territory of Russia, providing for the creation of its own wetlands protection legislation and a system of bilateral agreements on the protection of migratory birds.

Read more:

- [The Ramsar split – was it inevitable, and what should be done next?](#)

On September 1, 2025, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin signed [an order to canceling](#) payment of Russia's membership fees to the Nuclear Energy Agency of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (NEA OECD). Three and a half years ago, the OECD [suspended](#) Russia's membership in the Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) effective May 11, 2022. Russia became a member of the Agency – created in 1958 and currently with 34 member countries – in 2013. The Agency's main task is to assist member countries in maintaining and developing the scientific, technological and legal foundations for the safe, environmentally sound and economically efficient use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

Russia chooses where to leave and where to stay

Despite restrictions imposed on its participation due to the war, it is important to note that Russia has not definitively left a number of other international environmental agreements that it

considers important. These agreements are mainly key regional mechanisms that support international efforts to protect transboundary seas and their coastlines.

[The Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution](#) implements the [Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea from Pollution](#) (Bucharest Convention), its protocols, and the Strategic Action Plan for the Restoration and Protection of the Black Sea. The convention was signed in 1992 by representatives of Bulgaria, Georgia, Russia, Turkey, Romania and Ukraine. In October 2024, Ukraine [blocked](#) the transfer of the chairmanship of the convention's secretariat to the Russian Federation. In January 2025, Russia successfully thwarted [attempts by Ukraine](#) to urge the Commission to take effective measures in connection with an unprecedented oil spill in the Kerch Strait.

Read more:

- [International reaction to the Kerch Strait oil spill](#)

Russia's participation in the [Helsinki Commission for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea](#) (HELCOM) was also de facto suspended on March 4, 2022 following a unanimous decision by all other members to suspend official HELCOM meetings and working group activities involving Russia. This [“strategic pause”](#) did not prevent the other members from cooperating with



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is welcomed to the Arctic Council meeting in Iceland in 2021. Source: Arctic Council Archive

each other in the “X-9” format. Russia has not yet denounced the [1974 Helsinki Convention](#), signed by the USSR, for the implementation of which HELCOM was created.

Similar to HELCOM, the Arctic Council suspended political-level meetings in 2022 in order to freeze contacts with Russia during its chairmanship. In May 2023, the Russian representative to the Arctic Council announced the possible withdrawal of the Russian Federation from the organization if it was not invited to events, and in February 2024, Russia suspended its payment of annual contributions until the resumption of practical work with the [participation](#) of all member countries. In 2025, a Russian

diplomat participated in the 14th session of the Council via videoconference, but the work of the Arctic Council Senior Officials Committee remains [frozen](#). On the same day, Russia [participated](#) in joint virtual exercises to prevent oil spills off the coast of Norway. Formally, the country also continues to chair the Council’s working group on migratory birds.

In a May 2025 [public statement](#), outgoing chair of the Arctic Council, Espen Barth Eide—Minister of Foreign Affairs for Norway—noted the significance that the Arctic Council “remains united,” and added that “*it is particularly important to maintain a forum for all Arctic States and the Indigenous Peoples in the region.*”



Given that approximately half of the Arctic belongs to Russia, international Arctic agreements and projects often lack meaning without that nation's participation. Arctic countries also fear that Russia, China and other "non-Western" countries will [create alternative mechanisms](#) for Arctic cooperation. In response, other Arctic countries are searching for a politically-acceptable format for cooperation, primarily on environmental and climate issues.

Margaret Williams, Senior Fellow, Arctic Initiative, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, noted that many advances in Arctic wildlife research over the last 30 years have been achieved as a result of cooperation between Western and Russian scientists. For example, population estimates and seasonal distributions of the Pacific walrus population and the Alaska Chukotka polar bear population were possible only because American and Russian scientists worked together on both sides of the Bering Strait. Since 2022, virtually all of this joint field work has ceased.

Although the Arctic Council's effectiveness has been weakened by interruptions stemming from the "double whammy" of the pandemic and then Russia's war on Ukraine, Russia's continuing engagement in the

Arctic Council makes it an important and unique forum.

Read more:

- [What does Russia's war in Ukraine mean for global biodiversity conservation efforts?](#)

The [Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement](#) (CAOFA) is an interesting example of a regional environmental convention that has not been "frozen" due to the war in Ukraine. This agreement, which came into force in 2021, introduced a 16-year ban on commercial fishing in the CAO, giving participating countries time to better study the region's biodiversity and fishery potential in order to avoid future depletion of marine biological resources. The parties to the agreement are the EU, Denmark (as representative of Greenland), the US, Russia, Japan, Korea, Canada, China, Norway and Iceland. All four [annual meetings](#) of the parties have been held since the start of the war, with representatives from Russia participating in all of them, while also continuing to work in the coordinating scientific committee and other working bodies under the convention. Despite the fact that the parties to the agreement are divided by the war in Ukraine, trade wars and a host of other conflicts, they continue to try to work together on the development of a new environmental convention.



Is the policy of isolation working?

Political scientist **Alexei Uvarov**, in an interview with Riddle, [says](#) that excluding a country from the international mechanism often serves a symbolic function: it reflects already established international isolation rather than being its cause. He notes that *“exclusion can play a significant reputational role, and in certain areas – such as technological exchange, science, or economic cooperation – these measures can have tangible effects. However, their impact remains limited and rarely becomes a decisive factor in altering a state’s foreign policy strategy. This raises questions about the effectiveness of such measures as tools for preventing wars and ensuring international security.”*

The examples of Russia and Belarus withdrawing from conventions show that there can be varying reasons for such decisions. The most common scenario is when the participation of aggressor countries in cooperation mechanisms has been severely restricted by partners, allowing these countries to justify their withdrawal by arguing that further nominal participation without the possibility of actual cooperation was useless. In the context of international conventions, it was not participation per se that was restricted, but the right to hold leadership positions or represent all members of the convention bodies, which allowed Russia and Belarus, in

particular, to claim “discrimination”. It is worth noting that official delegations from the Russian Federation often act very selectively. For example, despite suspending funding for projects on its territory, Russia did not withdraw from membership on the boards of directors at international development banks.

Experts UWEC spoke with have not yet identified a single case where restricting Russia’s participation in an international environmental mechanism was dictated by real security threats in wartime or that such restrictions reduced the likelihood of aggressive actions in the future. Excluding a country from environmental agreements or restricting its participation in them often reduces that nation’s compliance with international environmental obligations. In other words, ultimately, this is more detrimental to the international community than to the aggressor state. However, it is important to note that mechanisms such as the Arctic Council, CBSS and BEAC involve a wide range of interactions that go far beyond environmental and climate issues.

UNESCO offers an alternative approach to “educating the aggressor”. Although international condemnation of the aggression and sanctions led to the cancellation of the 2022 World Heritage Committee session in Kazan and [to Russia’s refusal to chair](#) the



Committee, no one has “put Russia’s membership in the organization on strategic hold.” Nevertheless, the governing bodies of conventions and mechanisms coordinated by UNESCO regularly attempt to [take](#) measures to counter Russian aggression. At the same time, representatives of the Russian Foreign Ministry are, in a sense, “forced” to participate in the meetings, which, according to experts, has a greater moral impact on the Russian delegation than if the discussions were held without the Russian delegation (in the event that the country withdrew from UNESCO).

Read more:

- [Ukraine’s UNESCO World Heritage sites at risk as war goes on](#)

Whether it is useful to restrict the participation of aggressor countries in international environmental and climate agreements is a complex ethical and political question. Even while such a measure is inevitable in the course of political confrontation, ultimately its utility is not clear and the costs are very high.

The withdrawal of countries from international environmental agreements generally weakens the international system of environmental and climate governance/regulation as well as significantly complicating the

work of environmental organizations and civil society activists within these countries. The withdrawal of an aggressor-country from regional agreements is the most painful for potential environmental protection and monitoring in a particular region, be it the Arctic, Europe, or the Black Sea.

Oleksii Vasyliuk, chair of the [Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group \(UNCG\)](#), is convinced that when aggressor countries withdraw from conventions, the mechanisms that hold them accountable to the international community and civil society are destroyed. “Contrary to initial impressions, denunciation is not a ‘victory over the aggressor’.

On the contrary,” he continues, “it means withdrawal from international obligations. Not being a participant in an agreement means not being a violator. Mechanisms for public participation in the work of conventions made it possible to share information about problems outside the aggressor countries and to facilitate external influence on them. Now, NGOs (including activists from countries that have initiated military conflicts) are losing important channels through which they can monitor performance and influence the environmental policies of these countries. This means that NGOs can no longer help the international community to compel authoritarian regimes to comply with international law.” Earlier, UNCG [published a statement](#) calling to expel



Russia from the governing bodies of conventions but not from their membership in those conventions.

Conversely, the world's attention is now focused on the dismantling of international environmental agreements initiated by the new US administration, which was, until 2025, the largest financial contributor to many agreements and conventions. Against this backdrop, turmoil in international environmental cooperation caused by the war in Ukraine is gradually becoming less visible and less significant for the international community. Ultimately, however, it will also contribute to the collapse of modern international environmental law.

The evolution of the international environmental law system and the mechanisms that ensure its implementation is inevitable. Moreover, such changes will be very painful in a world already torn by contradictions. Therefore, the challenge of interaction with aggressor countries within the framework of international environmental agreements requires joint discussion and analysis, balanced collective decisions and consistent implementation in the practical mechanisms of international politics. •

Main image: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov assumes Arctic Council Chairmanship in 2021, Reykjavik, Iceland.

Source: [Arctic Council Archive](#)



Russia selling off rare animals from Ukraine's Askania-Nova nature reserve

Olha Tkach

A new investigation shows that Russian-installed authorities in southeastern Ukraine have been illegally removing animals from one of the country's oldest and most important steppeland reserves, including rare species such as Chapman's zebra.

An [investigation](#) by a Ukrainian environmental media outlet has revealed that Russia is using Ukraine's Askania-Nova Biosphere Reserve, Europe's

largest [steppeland conservation area](#), as a hub for illegal transfers and sales of animals, including rare and protected species.

One of the most important centers of the European steppe ecosystem, Askania-Nova is located in the south of the Kherson region, an area which was swiftly overrun by invading Russian troops in early 2022 and has been [under occupation](#) ever since.



Source: [URSA.MEDIA](https://www.ursa.media)

URSA.MEDIA's investigation team corresponded (via Telegram and email) with the reserve's Russian-installed management and discussed the sale of animals with potential buyers, including rare [Chapman's zebras](#). In one particular exchange, the occupation administration asked for about one million Russian rubles (around \$12,000) per animal.

"Askania-Nova has lost ten Chapman's zebras – nearly one-third of the entire herd once kept at the reserve," **Viktor Shapoval**, the reserve's director, [told](#) URSA.MEDIA. "What actually interests those who are removing the animals? They're rare and exotic species. So it's not surprising that zebras are in demand."

As he explained, the removal of animals from the reserve took several forms, ranging from public events to

covert operations. The first documented cases of illegal animal transfers date to late 2023; at least 20 such incidents have been recorded to date.

"Sometimes the removals were carried out with great publicity, as in the case involving Oleg Zubkov, the director of the Yalta Zoo," said Shapoval. "But that wasn't always the case. Very often, transfers were arranged quietly, especially when animals were being moved into the territory of the Russian Federation."

One such incident involved the transfer of [Przewalski's horses](#) to Russia's Rostov region. This species is listed in the Red Book of Ukraine and also included in the appendices of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).



The convention—also ratified by Russia—establishes strict regulations on the movement of such species and requires official authorization from competent authorities. These requirements have been completely disregarded by the occupation administration.

Journalists have also discovered listings on the Russian classifieds website Avito advertising animals from Askania-Nova for sale. According to the investigation, private zoo and park owners in Crimea and Krasnodar Territory were involved in these illegal transfers.

Over 125 years of conservation history

Spanning more than 33,000 hectares of virgin steppe, the Askania-Nova Biosphere Reserve dates back to 1898, making it Ukraine's first nature reserve. It was established on the privately held lands of Friedrich Falz-Fein, a descendant of German colonists.

Askania-Nova is home to more than 2,500 plant species and around 2,200 animal species, over 300 of which are protected species listed in Ukraine's Red Data Book. The reserve lies on a major migratory corridor, with up to 800,000 birds crossing its territory annually.

Officially designated a biosphere reserve in 1919, today Askania-Nova is a significant research center and a member of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere program. It plays a vital role

in the preservation and restoration of rare wild species.

"Askania's animal population is unique. Its history spans not decades but centuries. A distinct genotype has evolved within this reserve—animals adapted to the steppe environment of Ukraine, and therefore clearly different from their counterparts in natural ranges," said Viktor Shapoval.

After Russian-installed authorities took control of Askania-Nova in spring 2023, its Ukrainian management effectively lost access to the reserve, meaning they are now reliant primarily upon Russian media and social platforms for information about conditions inside Askania-Nova.

Headlines such as "Animals from Askania Transferred as Part of Exchanges to Krasnodar Territory, Crimea, Rostov-on-Don, Ryazan" or "Askania Steppes on Fire" provide only fragmented glimpses of the devastation unfolding within the reserve.

Covering their tracks

According to Shapoval, much of the information about these incidents was deliberately suppressed. Public statements from the occupation administration often mentioned only the "arrival" of new animals, while the details of their illegal removal were omitted.

"It doesn't matter what exactly is being removed—even if it's ordinary livestock.



Source: [URSA.MEDIA](#)

The issue is that all of this is being done in violation of both national legislation and international law," he said.

"There were cases where such criminal actions were carried out entirely behind the scenes, and no mention of them appeared at all on occupation-controlled platforms."

Shapoval added that, as a result of neglect under occupation, the reserve's collection of [African Cape buffalo](#) (*Syncerus caffer caffer*) has been virtually wiped out.

"It's obvious that a buffalo native to Africa cannot tolerate open steppe conditions in December – these are warm-climate animals, not adapted to low temperatures," he lamented, adding that four buffalo had died

as a result of negligence by the occupation authorities. "Three died of hypothermia," he explained, "and another broke its neck after striking a tractor during forced herding."

Too much fire, not enough water

According to Shapoval, the situation in the reserve has been further aggravated by [large-scale fires](#) that have destroyed thousands of hectares of steppe. These fires are not always of natural origin: since 2023 Russian military units within Askania-Nova have triggered a number of blazes.

The most recent major fire, which began on July 1, 2025 and burned for several days, was directly linked to military activity –



including the operation of Russian air-defense systems. Shapoval warns that the occupiers' military presence poses an acute threat to both the reserve's natural ecosystems and its collections, which are of global significance.

A tragic example of this is the fate of Askania-Nova's [saiga antelopes](#) (*Saiga tatarica*). At the beginning of 2023, the reserve's saiga population numbered 564 individuals, but after a fire triggered by the operation of Russian air-defense systems, more than 200 animals perished—nearly one-third of the total population. “After the August 2023 fire, we found hundreds of burned saiga carcasses,” said Shapoval. This has been one of the most devastating consequences of the Russian occupation for the reserve.

The water supply situation at Askania-Nova remains extremely precarious. As Shapoval explains, the reserve's artificial collections—the zoo and the dendrological park—depend entirely on water drawn from artesian wells powered by electric pumps. When electricity is cut off, the pumps stop, irrigation ceases, and the dendrological park faces collapse. Stagnant water exposed to summer heat promotes bacterial growth, further threatening the health of the collections.

Shapoval also described a severe shortage of feed, which endangers the survival of the reserve's animals. Russian delegations periodically stage photographs at the zoo gates, cynically posing with crates of cabbages and apples

that are supposedly “humanitarian aid.” In reality, these gestures bear no relation to the reserve's actual needs.

According to Shapoval, the ungulate collection at Askania-Nova numbers over 1,500 individuals and requires up to 10 metric tons of grain feed per month during peak seasons. In this context, symbolic vegetable parcels amount to little more than propaganda theater, creating an illusion of care while the animals continue to suffer from hunger and neglect.

Occupation or not, work goes on

The Ukrainian prosecutor general's office estimates that losses from the illegal removal of animals run into hundreds of thousands of dollars. Several Ukrainian citizens are under investigation for collaboration in the scheme.

Shapoval complained that while international conservation treaties set procedures prohibiting the export of protected species, they lack effective enforcement when a state itself becomes the aggressor and violates the agreements.

“These documents were developed under entirely different circumstances,” he said. “No one could have imagined that a state party to international conventions might act as a terrorist and endanger the survival of protected natural areas.”

Despite the extremely difficult conditions, the Ukrainian Askania-Nova team continues to work and collect material documenting the crimes committed by



the Russian occupiers. This evidence, intended to form the basis for future legal proceedings, is being submitted to the State Environmental Inspectorate, the Specialized Environmental Prosecutor's Office and the Kherson Regional Military Administration's Commission for Assessing Environmental Damage.

Shapoval was at pains to point out that even under current conditions, the reserve continues to function as a research institution.

"We must understand that Askania-Nova remains a scientific center," he said. "Even if we have temporarily lost direct access to the site, our staff continue their work. We're conducting research in related biotopes and carrying out field expeditions".

He added that his team continues to publish the scientific journal [Askania-Nova Biosphere Reserve Reports](#), first established in 1921. The publication features research articles on the reserve's flora and fauna.

Askania-Nova needs Ukrainian victory

Today, Askania-Nova stands not only as a symbol of resilience but also

as a tragic example of how the Russian occupation is devastating natural ecosystems and unique collections of international significance.

Animal theft, steppe fires, the loss of species and the destruction of infrastructure are all direct consequences of the occupiers' actions. Russia must be held accountable for violating international norms and committing war crimes on the reserve's territory.

Restoring Askania-Nova will require long-term, interdisciplinary work and substantial support—both from the Ukrainian state and from international partners committed to preserving its unique genetic heritage. Meanwhile, the reserve's team must continue their scientific activities and systematically document every environmental crime committed by the occupation authorities.

Ultimately, all these efforts will have practical meaning only in the event of Ukrainian victory and the liberation of Askania-Nova from Russian occupation. Only then will it be possible to begin restoring Europe's largest steppe reserve. •

Translated by Alastair Gill



Environmental and Climate Activism in the time of invasion: Georgia

Alexej Ovchinnikov

In the first part of this series we reported on the persecution and pressure that environmental activists have faced in Belarus since 2020 and which have only increased since the full-scale invasion. In part two, we look at the situation in Georgia, a country that is also currently mired in political crisis.

With the world distracted by the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and Israel's bombardment of Gaza, media have paid only sporadic attention to the ongoing

political crisis in Georgia, which began when the opposition accused the ruling party Georgian Dream of electoral fraud during parliamentary elections in 2024 in which it tightened its 12-year grip on power.

Meanwhile, the country is suffering significantly from climate and environmental problems – issues that are only intensifying. The year 2025 has been marked by both abnormal drought and abnormal precipitation, and Georgia's



A Georgian Dream propaganda poster juxtaposes a photograph of a destroyed Ukrainian city with an image of Tbilisi. Source: Info 9

glaciers continue to melt, which could lead to a repeat of the [tragedy in the mountain resort of Shovi](#) in 2023, where a landslide killed at least 32.

Political crisis in Georgia. A page out of the Russian playbook

In April 2024, large-scale street protests broke out in Georgia after the government pushed through a bill to introduce a “foreign agent” law similar to that in force in Russia, despite widespread criticism from the Georgian public, NGOs and representatives of Western democracies. Protesters and civil society groups had previously forced the government to back down in 2023 when it first attempted to pass the legislation.

Under the law, any legal entity or individual in Georgia receiving funding

from abroad can be designated a “foreign agent.” The legislation mandates that all non-governmental organizations and initiatives undergo a complex registration process, during which they are not only required to disclose information about their work (especially dangerous when it involves working with vulnerable and sensitive groups of people who would prefer information about them not be made public), but also be stigmatized with the label of “foreign agent.”

After the parliamentary elections of October 2024 sparked further protests, Georgian Dream, now enjoying a practical monopoly on power, turned to the use of strongarm tactics, using security forces to brutally suppress dissent. The opposition, along with President Salome Zurbishvili, decided



to boycott parliament, labeling it illegitimate. However, this attempt to change the government failed. On the contrary, as the only party represented in parliament, Georgian Dream now had the ability to pass the laws it wanted. One such example was a law banning so-called “LGBT+ propaganda,” making life dangerous for the country’s LGBT+ activists. Pressure continued to build on organizations that refused to register as “foreign agents.” There is now talk of criminal prosecution for failing to register. Some activists have decided to leave Georgia.

The “foreign agents” bill was later revised and amended, supposedly to bring it into alignment with the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) in the U.S., which is intended to counter foreign organizations that engage in political activity. It’s worth noting, however, that most public programs in Georgia run on international aid. Virtually every school, organization and village receives support from “foreign agents.” For example, the country’s oldest national park, Lagodekhi, was largely financed by foreign funds. The same applies to most environmental projects in Georgia, from recycling to environmental protection.

This situation is having a direct impact on the work of both NGOs and environmental activists. Georgian Dream has consistently resorted to conspiracy theories in an attempt to tarnish the image of protesters and members of

the opposition, claiming civil society activists are agents of a “deep state” and a “shadow government.”

Many of Georgia’s environmental organizations refused to register as “foreign agents,” which resulted in their activities being frozen. A good example is the largest Georgian environmental organization, [Green Alternative](#), which appears to have ceased operations—at least, its website and social media have not been updated since February-March 2025.

Georgia Dream turns its back on Ukraine

Georgian Dream justifies its increasingly repressive measures, among other things, by citing its reluctance to be drawn into a war with Russia. In the lead-up to both the 2024 parliamentary elections and the 2025 municipal elections, the party’s campaign posters featured photographs of devastated Ukrainian cities, which were set alongside pictures of “prosperous” Georgia. [Critics questioned](#) the morality of such a propagandistic approach.

It was all a stark contrast to the staunch support shown for Ukraine during the first months of the full-scale invasion, when every Georgian city was adorned with Ukrainian flags. This is hardly surprising—parts of Georgian territory (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) are still considered to be under indirect Russian occupation. The governments of these



self-proclaimed breakaway republics are backed by Moscow, and Georgia fought a brief war with Russia over South Ossetia in 2008.

It is clear that the repression and rollback of democracy in Georgia, as well as the reversal of Tbilisi's trajectory toward European integration, are having a direct impact upon environmental activists in the country. A lack of financial support (following the adoption of the "foreign agent" law, foundations are unable to work with Georgian organizations on a full basis), the drawn-out political crisis, the stigmatization of activism and the polarization of society—all of this is hampering the work of organizations and projects, and they are facing challenges they had not encountered prior to 2024.

Creating safe spaces for activists

Nini Khuroshvili is one of the co-founders of [Ecovillage Georgia](#), a project that is not only an experiment in creating an environmentally friendly, sustainable settlement in the country, but also aims to serve as a "safe space" for activists.

An environmental and climate activist whose background is originally in the arts, Khuroshvili first became inspired by the idea of creating an environmentally friendly, egalitarian form of human coexistence after volunteering in an ecovillage in Western Europe eight or nine years ago.

"I lived in different places and learned more about sustainable living, not just in theory but also in practice, as part of everyday life. I learned about how to self-organize as a community, about teamwork, how to develop permaculture and sustainable farming, environmental infrastructure and much more," Khuroshvili told UWEC Work Group.

As a result, she was inspired to create an ecovillage in Georgia, an idea which she developed with friends and other activists. The long process of forming the community began. This would become the core and foundation of the ecovillage, which they envisioned as a settlement where people united by a common idea would build homes and live permanently. It took about five years to organize the community structure, develop a decision-making methodology and search for a suitable plot. In December 2023, they finally purchased a piece of land in the Lagodekhi district, and the project began to take shape.

"I work in activism, not just environmental activism but also queer activism, feminism, and ecofeminism in Georgia. So when we created the Ecovillage project, the plan from the start was to organize it so that it could accommodate people. For example, if they needed time to recharge their batteries, we'd be able to organize retreats for different groups. Because we have a lot of land and ample benefits to share. We have a stream and a small forest. People can relax here, feel safe, and discuss important topics in a safe



environment, which is especially important in the current political situation.”

The country’s lurch into political crisis in 2024 brought challenges to Ecovillage Georgia, as it did to other environmental initiatives. It proved virtually impossible to obtain new grants, having a serious impact on planning and financial support for the project. It also affected the participants themselves, who experienced – and continue to experience psychological pressure. Many plans for 2024-2025 had to be postponed and adapted to the current circumstances. However, the project has increasingly become able to play the role of a “safe space.”

Khuroshvili explains that another side-effect of the country’s ongoing political crisis is that environmental and climate change issues, which have become increasingly common in Georgia in recent years, have vanished from the agenda. Not that the problems have gone away, of course; they are clearly visible and are the subject of frequent discussion by those living in rural areas, who are more exposed to the consequences of climate change than city dwellers.

A good example of this is the extreme snowfalls in the Guria and Adjara regions in February 2025, which left settlements completely cut off. With no government response, volunteers stepped in to help stranded residents in the worst-hit areas, though they were unable to prevent a number of fatalities.

Snow is not the only problem. Every June, Georgia suffers from severe hail and rain, which destroy crops. On August 3, 2023, a mudflow caused by melting glaciers in the Racha region killed 18 people, with another 18 never found. August 2025, however, was unusually hot, resulting in water shortages in some regions. In the eastern region of Kakheti, one of Georgia’s largest agricultural regions, entire rivers dried up.

Climate issues slip out of sight

Neither the government in Tbilisi nor the country’s municipal authorities, however, appear to have any desire to openly address the consequences of climate-induced extreme weather events, which are becoming increasingly common in Georgia.

“There’s no climate adaptation and mitigation plan, which Georgia should have implemented long ago. And while three years ago the government at least declared its intention to work in this area as part of its European integration plans, it’s all changed recently. Today, I have the feeling that the climate agenda is no longer being discussed,” says Khuroshvili.

One relatively positive development is that some villages have begun to revive since the COVID-19 pandemic – many city dwellers took the decision to move out to the countryside, even if only for the summer. After the protests petered out, the desire to escape the stress of city life



only intensified. In view of the ongoing outflow of rural populations to cities, this was a welcome sign. Furthermore, these newcomers bring with them a modern approach to agriculture, green practices and an interest in organic produce.

But with civil society initiatives closing down and disappearing, this is clearly not enough. More worryingly, the suspension of activist work primarily affects small groups, remote regions, and those spaces and communities that were already deprived of government support and relied on NGOs. Now that they have been designated “foreign agents,” these NGOs are facing not only difficulties in finding funding but also coming under political pressure.

“We don’t need government support; we can handle this ourselves,” says Khuroshvili. *“But don’t put pressure on us. Don’t arrest our friends. Don’t make us experience additional stress or force us to navigate the complexities of new laws. As a group, we can cope with this, but leave us alone,”* she explains, adding that even given the war in Ukraine and the economic and political crisis in Georgia, Ecovillage can become a sustainable project and a safe space for others.

“Maybe we can find solutions to environmental and climate problems for the local population. But if we want to achieve this, we shouldn’t create additional difficulties. Yes, we need financial support and additional resources, but I think we can find these if the situation around us becomes more stable.”

“It’s also crucial today for environmental and climate initiatives – not only in Georgia but throughout the Caucasus – to set up cooperation, form networks and share their experiences, energy and resources. This will not only preserve projects but also gives them a chance of developing.”

When asked what keeps her focused and motivated to work during challenging times, when environmental and climate activism is under pressure not only in the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) region but also globally, Khuroshvili says that above all she is driven by people’s faith in what she and her colleagues are doing.

“It’s also important to understand that whatever you do, it has meaning,” she explains. *“As I continue working on the project, I hope that it will be beneficial and that it’s important. And these feelings are reinforced when I see the reactions of those who come to Ecovillage Georgia, work the land, cook for each other, prune trees and bring their ideas to life.”*

“I see how diverse the people who come to us are, and yet we manage to create harmony through relationships with each other and with nature. Both we and they are grateful for this opportunity and this experience. And this is what drives me. It’s very important to me. Through this gratitude, you feel a connection with the land.”

Eco-communities and ecovillages are increasingly being presented as both a gathering place for activists and a networking space. This not only goes for



Georgia but is also the case in Ukraine, where ecovillages like Tepla Hora have played a key role in hosting migrants and rehabilitating soldiers and other affected people affected by the all-out Russian invasion. In the next and final article in this series, we will look at how environmental organizations and initiatives in Ukraine have coped with this immense challenge in the last few years. •

Translated by Alastair Gill
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this series [here](#).

Main image source: AP Photo/Pavel
Bednyakov



IUCN
World
Conservation
Congress
Abu Dhabi 2025



Ukraine scores decisive victory at World Conservation Congress

Oleksii Vasyliuk, Viktoriya Hubareva

In October 2025, as the full-scale war raged on, for the first time Ukraine joined the world's most important nature conservation body, the International Union for Conservation of Nature. This year's World Conservation Congress was a test of the global conservation community's readiness to speak about the war in terms of a threat to biodiversity. And the efforts of the Kyiv delegation showed that Ukraine is now a global player on the conservation scene.

The 2025 IUCN ([International Union for Conservation of Nature](#)) World Conservation Congress was

a real breakthrough for Ukrainian environmental organizations. The delegation from Kyiv managed to push through a resolution on the mechanisms for working with IUCN members involved in armed conflicts, blocked an attempt by Russia to use the forum to ease sanctions, brought home international awards for its parks and partners, and also opened the path toward the creation of an IUCN Green List in Ukraine.

Held from October 9-15, 2025 in Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates), the



The auditorium at the 2025 IUCN World Congress in Abu Dhabi. Source: Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group

congress was attended by around 10,000 participants, with many more joining remotely using a virtual platform provided by the organizers.

The world's largest forum for environmental issues, the IUCN World Conservation Congress is a key global event for defenders of nature, scientists, government officials, civil society and business. It is a platform where the biggest questions concerning the protection of species and ecosystems are discussed.

At state level, Ukraine is not yet a member of the IUCN. It was represented at the congress by two public organizations: the Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group ([a IUCN member since 2023](#)) and Environment People Law (a IUCN member since 2005). At this year's congress, the two member organizations were joined by representatives of the Nature Fund of

Ukraine, the [Tuzly Estuaries National Park](#) and the [Frankfurt Zoological Society in Ukraine \(FZS Ukraine\)](#).

Founded in 1948, the IUCN is one of the world's largest conservation unions, with over 1,400 members from more than 170 countries. These include government agencies, scientific institutes, public organizations and representatives of indigenous peoples. The union coordinates global efforts aimed at preserving biodiversity, developing a network of nature conservation areas, counteracting climate change and developing international environmental policies. The IUCN is the founder of the Red List of Threatened Species.

IUCN and the war in Ukraine: No more easy rides for aggressors

Before every IUCN World Congress, its members have the right to put



Presentation of motions at the 2025 IUCN World Congress. Source: Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group

forward official motions, which form the union's global nature protection policy. After adoption, they become IUCN resolutions or recommendations, which determine the organization's work agenda for the next four years and beyond.

This year was the first time that the issue of the environmental consequences of the war in Ukraine was raised at the IUCN World Congress. Backed by the Nature Fund of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group initiated Motion [065, "Establishing Mechanisms for Interaction with IUCN Members Involved in Armed Conflicts"](#), which was [adopted](#) in an electronic vote and became an IUCN resolution. It was joined by Environment People Law, [Georgia's Caucasus Environmental NGO](#) Network and three US groups:

the [Center for Large Landscape Conservation](#), the [Earth Law Center](#) and the [Center for Environmental Ethics and Law](#).

What does this resolution provide? From now on, the IUCN is obligated to develop special conditions that place limits on participation for aggressor nations and organizations registered in these countries. It will also introduce other potential resolutions on armed conflicts, wars and nature protection.

Russia fails in attempt to avoid sanctions

The Russian participants of the congress—including at state level—tried to use the event for their political goals. One of the goals of the Russian delegation was to convince the congress to adopt a resolution that would amend



*Notice of the appointment of Diana Garlytska to the post of IUCN Regional Councillor.
Source: Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group*

the wording of the IUCN Charter—the organization’s main document. If adopted, this resolution would have meant that the member countries and organizations of the IUCN consider the international sanctions against Russia unjust discrimination. Additionally, they sought to cancel membership fees for Russian organizations that had “suffered” as a result of the introduction of international sanctions against the Russian Federation. These lobbying efforts were financially supported by the Russian state nuclear agency Rosatom.

Despite the fact that Russia was represented by a rather large delegation headed by a representative of the corresponding ministry, the Ukrainian team was able to convince the international community not to vote for the adoption of this resolution.

By speaking out and taking a tough position during the negotiation process, they consigned the overtly pro-Russian resolution to oblivion. Excerpts from the two-day struggle (the presentations by the Ukrainian and Russian sides) can be viewed [here](#).

Ukrainian representative elected to IUCN executive role

Ukrainian citizen [Diana Garlytska](#) was [elected](#) IUCN Regional Councillor for Eastern Europe, North and Central Asia.

This is in recognition of her longstanding activity in climate and environmental youth diplomacy, as well as her work in the education sphere, aimed at strengthening the region’s role in the global processes



of environmental protection and sustainable development.

Diana Garlytska is the founder of the Vilnius-based public organization [Sustainability Narrative Institute](#), which works on advocacy and communication issues in the sustainable development field. She is also conducting research into green finance as part of her PhD. Her election to the IUCN Council opens up new opportunities to represent the interests of Ukraine and the countries of Eastern Europe, North Asia, and Central Asia at the international level and will contribute to strengthening cooperation on conservation.

Awards for Ukrainian national park staff and conservation leaders

The IUCN World Congress also saw a number of the Ukrainian representatives receive awards recognizing their contributions to conservation. The IUCN presented its World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) International Ranger Award to the team from Ukraine's Tuzly Estuaries National Nature Park for its effective protection of the Black Sea's coastal ecosystems, its fight against poaching and its organization of educational activities.

This distinction, which highlights the global importance of rangers in preserving biodiversity, is annually awarded by the IUCN WCPA for exceptional dedication to the cause

of nature conservation. The team was nominated prior to the congress by the Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group, with the support of the Nature Fund of Ukraine. **Iryna Vikhrystiuk**, director of the Tuzly Estuaries National Nature Park, was on hand to [receive](#) the award.

[The 2025 award was given](#) to 13 rangers and teams (six teams and seven personal distinctions) from different countries for their courage, perseverance and hard work on the frontlines of environmental protection. Award winners receive financial support of \$5,000-\$25,000 for continuing their conservation work.

There was also an award for **Michael Brombacher**, director of FZS Ukraine. The IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (IUCN WCPA) [presented](#) him with its Fred Packard Award—one of the most prestigious international nature conservation honors. This award recognizes his longstanding dedication and personal contribution to the development and protection of nature conservation territories around the world.

During the ceremony, Brombacher talked about the role of Ukrainian national parks during the war. He underlined that the war has given the parks a new significance—they have become a space of solidarity and support. *"This award is for all the brave people who are protecting Ukraine's nature in spite of the war,"* he said in his [acceptance](#) speech.



Michael Brombacher (right) accepts the Fred Packer Award. Source: Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group

Ukrainian conservation groups step up to shape dialogue

Away from the awards, a team from the Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group and the Nature Fund of Ukraine organized a number of events at the congress, including a session dedicated to the “Role of Youth Engagement and Intergenerational Dialogue in Conservation in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations.”

This event was aimed at discussing the role of youth in conservation activities during and after the war, as well as finding a way to establish effective intergenerational dialogue between young leaders, scientists, human rights activists and administrators of protected areas. The session was held in the form of a reflective dialogue, which allowed

the participants to share their personal experience and views on the subject of the importance of intergenerational dialogue and youth leadership, especially in the context of the war and post-war recovery. The session was moderated by **Anna Kovbasniuk, Anastasiia Drapaliuk** and **Hryhoriy Kolomitsev**

Elsewhere, the session “Scaling Conflict-Sensitive Conservation for Nature, People, and Peace: Understanding the Challenges” was devoted to how wars affect nature conservation, and how conservation activity can facilitate peace. The participants discussed legal and political instruments for protecting the environment during armed conflicts, as well as ways of scaling “conflict-sensitive protection of nature” – an approach taking into account the risks of



Participants in discussion during the 'Role of Youth Engagement and Intergenerational Dialogue in Conservation in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations' session. Source: Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group

violence, instability and social tension.

Representing Ukraine in this session were **Hryhoriy Kolomitsev** and **Anastasiia Drapaliuk**. Kolomitsev [spoke](#) about the scale of destruction of Ukraine's protected areas as a result of Russian aggression, while [Drapaliuk](#)—the wartime realities of life for Ukrainian conservation bodies and the necessity of expelling Russia from international conservation organizations.

The question of the consequences of Russian aggression for nature was echoed in other sessions. During the session "Protecting Nature in Times of Conflict: Ensuring Environmental Justice and Sustainability," the speaker, Dr. **Matrah Al-Mutairi** (Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research), noted that the war in Ukraine is one of the three most

destructive armed conflicts for the environment of the 21st century. In her talk she looked at the environmental consequences of wars in the context of international humanitarian law and environmental justice, citing examples from the Persian Gulf, Vietnam and Ukraine.

Ukrainian national parks and reserves to get camera traps

The congress also produced some immediate practical benefits for Ukraine's conservation areas. The Nature Fund of Ukraine signed an agreement with the US organization [Wildlife Protection Solutions](#) to supply camera traps for the study of nature in national parks and reserves in



Participants in the “Scaling Conflict-Sensitive Conservation for Nature, People, and Peace: Understanding the Challenges” session. Source: Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group

Ukraine. A trial shipment of camera traps has already been sent. Apart from equipment, the American partners have also undertaken to organize training for the state security service for protected areas.

Piloting a standard for the IUCN Green List

Finally, the Nature Fund of Ukraine has held talks on the introduction of a [IUCN Green List](#) pilot standard.

This is an instrument that gives the opportunity to evaluate the quality of the management of a conservation zone in accordance with IUCN standards and give recommendations on improvements that can be made in order to reach these standards. As of today, these standards have already been introduced in over 600 conservation areas in 60 countries. •

*Translated by Alastair Gill
Main image source: IUCN*



Nature through the lens: Three films about the environmental impacts of the war in Ukraine

Inha Paolyi

Several films were released in October in Ukraine. They show how Russia's full-scale invasion has affected the environment. The films "No Shade in the Forest" and "Animals in War" were screened at the Odesa International Film Festival at Oscar Cinema in Kyiv. A pre-premiere screening of the film "Natural Border" by Public Broadcasting took place at the House of Cinema.

"No shade in the forest"

A series of premiere documentaries about war and nature began with the film "[No Shade in the Forest](#)", directed by Volodymyr Tykhyy and produced by Bella Terzi. The film stars eco-journalist [Viktoriya Hubareva](#), who embarks on a journey through Ukraine's national parks and nature reserves to document the impacts of Russia's full-scale invasion.



Participants in the “Scaling Conflict-Sensitive Conservation for Nature, People, and Peace: Understanding the Challenges” session. Source: Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group

The film crew visited the Chernobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve (Kyiv region), the Danube Biosphere Reserve (Odesa region), the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve (Zakarpattia region), the Tuzlovski Limany National Park (Odesa region), the Podilski Tovtry National Park (Khmelnyskyi region), the Holy Mountains National Park (Donetsk region), and the shores of the former Kakhovka Reservoir (Kherson region).

“In Ukraine, the focus is currently on people and cities. And it’s understandable why. Every day, our people experience grief. But there are topics that people neglect. I’m talking about our environment. I want to

focus attention on it because few people talk about it. After the disaster at the Kakhovka Reservoir, the impact of the war on the environment was a hot topic, like other high-profile media topics. But no one talks about bats and the impact explosions have on them, no one talks about war-damaged chalk pines, no one talks about the extensive mine fields in our national parks. When I talked to foreigners and started telling them about it, they said they hadn’t even thought about it. Nature remains in the background. And that’s why we wanted to show how the war has affected our nature, what it is like now,” Terzi said.

One of the film’s highlights is that Hubareva and her team record the



During the premiere. Photo source: PSB films

audio ambience of national parks using professional equipment. Thanks to this, viewers not only see nature, but also hear it, allowing the filmmakers to better illustrate the harsh reality. In parks just beyond the front line, you can hear the rustling of leaves on trees, birds singing, wings fluttering and water splashing. But in the areas that have been burned by shelling and fighting, there is no sound – only complete silence. Here, the trees are charred leafless trunks with no sign of life around them. There is not even shade in such forests.

“The idea of incorporating sound emerged as the story progressed. There are certain moments that can be conveyed not only through images but also through sound. Take, for example, the Chornobyl Reserve.

When you walk through the area where the fire occurred, the temperature and air are different. Everything weighs on you, and you feel the heat more intensely. Walk 50 meters to the side where no fire burned, and there is shade, coolness and a breeze. We wanted to show this difference,” says the film’s director Volodymyr Tykhyy.

Hubareva met Tykhyy in Holosiivskyi Park in Kyiv at an annual bat release event organized by the [Ukrainian Center for Bat Rehabilitation](#). Later, Tykhyy told her of his idea to make a film about the impact of war on the environment. She immediately agreed.

The first day of filming took place in 2024, across the planet in Chile. Hubareva had been invited to World Freedom Press Day 2024 in Santiago,



Viktoriya Hubareva. Photo source: PSB films

where she spoke on two panels about the challenges Ukrainian journalists face when covering environmental issues and biosphere reserves during wartime. Filming then continued in Ukraine.

“I am glad that more people are learning about the impact of war on the environment. As it turns out, few people outside my ‘bubble’ think about this,” said Hubareva. “On the other hand, not everyone understood the idea of soundscapes. For me, for example, the difference between how burned forest and living forest “sound” is enormous. In a living forest, you can hear birds and insects, and if you watch patiently and carefully, you can even see wild animals. In a forest that has recently been burned or destroyed by another force (for example, logging), it is much quieter.”

Hubareva asked those who had seen the film whether this idea was clear to them. *“For many it was not as obvious as it was to me, which was upsetting. I would like people to be more aware of nature. I am talking not only about conscious consumption and use of resources, but also about the realization that there is much more life around us than we usually notice. As Irina Vykhrystyuk, director of the Tuzlovski Limany National Park and also a character in this film, said during the first screening: ‘The forest is never empty’,”* Hubareva concluded.

The eco-journalist notes that fires, mining, soil and water pollution and loss of biodiversity are among the most common consequences of war in nature. Of course, each case is unique



and depends on the area. In the Black Sea, dolphins are dying from marine mines and acoustic trauma and oil is spilling, while in eastern Ukraine, forests are being cut down and burned. In the Chernobyl exclusion zone, radiation levels are increasing due to disturbance caused by the construction of fortifications. Shelling cities generates tremendous waste that is then sent to already overflowing landfills. The number of invasive flora and fauna species is increasing where local species have been destroyed.

“Everywhere we went, our experts told us: there are consequences, but nature will recover. Yes, it will take many years, and in some places, things will never be the same again. Some unique places have been destroyed forever. But nature adapts. It’s like with the Kakhovka Reservoir – at first, as soon as the water receded, we [expected](#) the worst – a huge desert poisoned by the reservoir’s sediments. But now there is a willow forest there, [known as](#) the “Green Sea”. Nature always finds its way, and if we don’t interfere or, in some cases, if we can help in a scientifically sound way, it will recover. Of course, this assumes that there is proper institutional management. This adds a little optimism,” notes Hubareva.

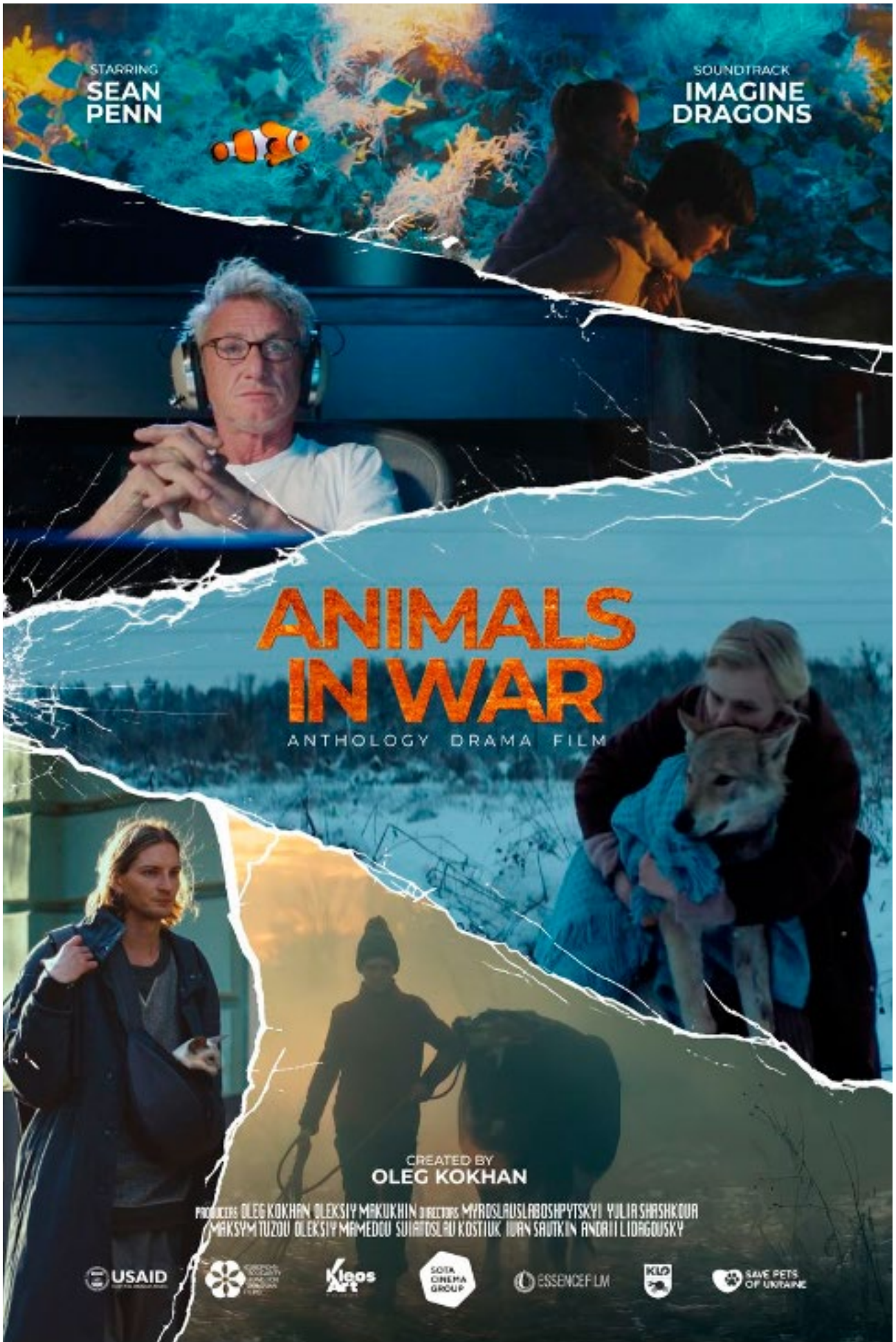
The film premiered on October 4 at the Oscar Cinema in Kyiv as part of the Odesa International Film Festival. The film will be shown at various Ukrainian and international festivals, and next

fall it is scheduled to be released in Ukrainian theaters and on streaming platforms. “No Shade in the Forest” will be available for all to watch.

The film resonated with viewers who attended the premiere. After the screening, visitor Vladislav shared his impressions:

“It’s a very impressive film that demonstrates the impact of Russia’s war on Ukraine, on the Ukrainian environment, and on nature. The cinematography and imagery are stunning. I liked the comparison of the soundtracks before and after the full-scale invasion,” Vladislav noted. *“How quiet and empty, how crippled our land is now. I really remember those sound effects, as well as the shots with flamingos and the fact that the war has caused the flamingos to leave their longtime homes.”*

Viewer Andriy says that he liked the footage of the bat rescue the most. *“My colleagues from Bats Ukraine made it. I also remember footage from the Holy Mountains National Park in the Donetsk region – a unique place that has now been virtually destroyed. After watching it, I realized that it would be difficult to overcome these consequences.”* He continued, *“But I am glad that scientists and environmentalists are already trying to act, documenting the consequences and telling their foreign colleagues so that the whole world knows about our tragedy. I will definitely recommend the film to my friends, colleagues and acquaintances. As many people as possible need to see it.”*





“Animals in War”

A pre-premiere screening of the film [“Animals in War”](#) also took place during the Odesa International Film Festival. This is not simply a movie, but a feature film anthology of seven short stories based on real events. Oleh Kokhan was the creator and producer. Film project partners include the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Solidarity Fund for Ukrainian Films (ESFUF), and the Save Pets of Ukraine initiative.

The main goal of the film anthology was to draw attention to the war in Ukraine and how animals are suffering as a result. In an interview, **Oleh Kokhan** [shared](#) his horror upon learning about the number of animals that had died since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion, *“It’s at least 400,000 cows and millions of birds. For me, the film was an opportunity to draw the world’s attention to both the fate of animals and the war in Ukraine.”*

The anthology consists of seven short stories, each of which centers on the story of an animal and the people around it. In the short story “The Eagle”, sound engineers (one of whom, incidentally, is played by the actor Sean Penn) record the voices of rare birds, including an eagle, in the Chernobyl Reserve. The viewer is transported to the night of February 23-24, 2022. Gradually, a young Ukrainian sound engineer begins to hear the sounds of heavy machinery

rather than animals. At first, he does not understand what it is. But the first sounds of explosions force him to face a new, cruel reality.

“Sonny” highlights the weight of a mother’s grief. A young woman has lost her son in the war. But during a forced stop in the forest, she finds him, her “little boy” – frightened and wounded. The woman takes her “boy” to a children’s hospital, begging for them to help him. But the doctor asks her to accept reality: her “son” is a young wolf cub. The cub needed veterinary care and protection, and the woman was looking for a place to direct her maternal feelings. Thus, two souls, victims of war, meet.

“Cow in the Fog” tells the story of a 12-year-old boy whose village was bombed at the start of the full-scale invasion. Fleeing the explosions and military occupation alone, he encounters a cow lost in the fog. Together, they search for a way out.

The short story “The White Rabbit, or There and Back Again” reveals the story of a rabbit and its owner and how they experienced the first day of Russia’s full-scale invasion. In “Underwater Incident”, the viewer sees how the silence and tranquility of a fish tank is interrupted by a series of explosions and shelling. “Everything Is Fine” tells the story of a Kyiv man who wants to move



A shot from the "Torpedo" story. Source: SOTA Cinema Group

abroad after the start of the full-scale invasion. But he cannot take his beloved cat with him and takes her to a shelter. There the cat runs away, and he searches for her through a neighborhood. After finding his beloved pet at last, he reevaluates his priorities in life.

"Torpedo" tells the poignant story of a grandmother living in a village occupied by the Russians in southern Ukraine. She gives the coordinates of enemy equipment to Ukrainian artillerymen. When she learns that the occupiers know the truth, she makes a final call to her grandson, who serves in the Ukrainian Armed Forces, and asks him to fire a shell at her house when the enemy soldiers arrive. Next to her is her beloved goat Torpedo, raised by

her from a young age. Both souls accept their fate.

The film is significant in that it clearly demonstrates that animals are always close to us. Not only pets, but also livestock and wild animals. And when war comes to our homes, it affects absolutely everyone.

It is difficult to assess the role of animals during full-scale warfare. Some people find them psychologically helpful. Thousands of animals serve in the State Emergency Service (SES), the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and the National Police. They save human lives, assist in psychological rehabilitation, and perform real combat tasks.

The stories resonated with viewers. Oleh Vikoviy shared his thoughts after



A still from the film. Source: SOTA Cinema Group

the premiere, saying *“Each story was touching in its own way and some more than others.”* He noted that it is very difficult to comprehend how many animals have died, been injured or abandoned due to the full-scale war. *“In our country, there is a belief, especially among the older generation, that animals are secondary and not family members. The younger generation already has a different attitude towards this, which is very encouraging.”*

He added, *“I saw this in today’s films. This film is another reminder for me that animals are always around us, that we can help them, and they can help us. I would like as many people as possible to see this film so that they realize that it is not only us who suffer during war, but also our animals.”*

At the same time, while watching this anthology, this author could not shake the feeling that what was missing was precisely the “perception of war through the eyes of animals”. Each story was centered on humans, with animals as background. The viewer is primarily shown the emotions and experiences of the human characters. For example, “Everything Is Fine” shows the experiences of a guy who lost his cat, but does not show the cat’s journey, nor its experiences when it got lost. In “The Eagle”, the creators convey the noises accompanying the unexpected start of the war in the Chernobyl Reserve through two sound engineers, rather than through the experience of the eagle that is being recorded.



Movie poster. Source: Suspylne

It's possible that conveying circumstances through an animal's eyes is technically a more difficult undertaking. But this was really missing when watching the film.

Each story is unique in its plot and the creator's idea has the right to be realized. At the same time, there are stories from our lives that are much harsher than those shown. For example, how does a dog feel when it is left tied up in a village near the front line? What does a cat feel when its owners leave it behind when evacuating, thinking they were leaving for two or three days, but only returning months later. What happened to animals under fire in besieged Mariupol when they were wounded and sought people out in basements, knowing that it was

safe there. People ate pigeons because there was no food left in the city. Dogs and cats ate the bodies of the dead to feed themselves.

The director probably deliberately chose less violent stories. Most of the short stories in the film end on a fairly optimistic note, giving hope for the future. It is quite possible that this is exactly what Ukrainian viewers need right now.

"Animals in War" was released in Ukrainian theaters on November 6.

"Natural border"

Our review of nature through the lens concludes with the documentary film "[Natural Border](#)" about Ukrainian peat bogs, shot and presented by



Olesia Morgunets-Isaenko during the filming of the movie. Source: Suspylne

Public Broadcasting. The pre-premiere screening took place on October 9 at the House of Cinema in Kyiv and drew a full house. Olesya Morgunets-Isaenko is the director and creative producer of the film.

What do we know about wetlands? They are waterlogged areas that can drown people or animals. But they are also a vast world of biodiversity that is central to environmental conservation.

The film tells viewers about peat bogs in Ukraine's northern Polesie region, wetlands that have been repeatedly drained for over a century, destroying unique nature. Peat bogs are not only a unique ecosystem with their own biodiversity, but also a source of clean water, a natural carbon sink,

and an important resource for local communities.

As it turns out, they have another function—a defensive one. The film recalls the Soviet era, when peat bogs were a “natural border” in confrontation with the “enemy”. More recently, they were useful in [blocking the attack](#) on Kyiv during Russia's full-scale invasion.

The issues raised in the film resonated with viewers. Yulia Markhel, leader of Let's Do It, Ukraine, shared her impressions: “The film turned out to be very powerful and important. Shot in a “National Geographic” style, it is interesting and easy to watch. I would like the whole world to see it, because wetlands are important.

Markhel said, “*This story is not about*



Roman Synchuk, director and cameraman of the film during the shooting. Source: Suspylne

one year, but about decades, hundreds of years. It is about our safety, health and our ecosystem. I want the younger generation to see and remember the importance of wetlands. And when they come to power, in business, in the media, they will be able to make use of this information. I believe that we in Ukraine must find resources to restore wetlands and, perhaps, even increase their size."

[Valeria Kolodezhna](#), a representative of the Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group, also enjoyed the film. This is not the first she has heard about Ukrainian wetlands; she previously researched them as part of a project for National Geographic.

Kolodezhna shared, *"Working in an environmental organization and having*

experience as a teacher, I have personally encountered a lack of public knowledge about wetlands. It is interesting that even biologists focused on their own interests may not know much about wetlands, let alone ordinary citizens. That is why my project was aimed at spreading knowledge about wetlands among teachers, who could then pass it on to their students."

Kolodezhna herself comes from Polesie and grew up near local wetlands. She recalls that as a child she mainly heard calls for wetlands to be drained and developed and almost nothing about their beneficial properties. She learned a lot from watching the documentary.

"I come from those parts, so it was very personal for me. And from an expert point of view, I was very happy



to see the visual scale of the preserved wetlands that were filmed from above. What a huge area it is! I have been to natural areas around the world and I know that very few such untouched places remain. Seeing this beauty from a drone and feeling the scale – the heart of a scientist, biologist, geographer expert leaps with joy.”

On October 16, the film “Natural Border” had its German premiere as part of Intercultural Week. The Ukrainian

premiere of the film will take place on December 3 at 10 p.m. on Channel One Suspilne.

In October Ukraine enjoyed a series of pre-release screenings of films about that country’s unique nature and how it survives in wartime. It is encouraging that all of the films will soon be available to watch in cinemas or on digital platforms. •

Main image source: SOTA Cinema Group



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