

Annual Report 2019

FOUNDATION CONSERVATION CARPATHIA



2009-2019

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Foreword

by **Barbara & Christoph Promberger**
Executive Directors of FCC



© Enya Promberger

After an absence of more than two centuries, the first bison arrived back in the Făgăraș Mountains in November 2019: four animals were transported from a wildlife park in Germany and moved into our quarantine and acclimatisation enclosures in Dâmbovită Valley, followed by another seven bison from Poland. This is a monumental milestone in restoring the Făgăraș Mountains to their full ecological capacity and only the prelude to reintroductions in other parts of our project area. By the end of 2019 we had everything prepared to release the bison in May 2020 into the wild.

The European Union has a funding instrument called LIFE to implement conservation measures in Natura 2000 areas. FCC has

been already beneficiary of a LIFE project from 2012 - 2019 and in early 2019 submitted a second project. January was an intense period with finalising the proposal and the rest of the year was busy spent preparing for the start of the project. In November, all outstanding questions had been answered and we could sign the contract for the largest LIFE project in the history of the European Union. In parallel, we started implementation for the project financed by the Endangered Landscape Programme. With these two contracts (and dozens of additional supporting charities, private donors, and corporates), our project has now achieved financial stability for the next five years and can finance the majority of the conservation masterplan's activities.

FCC has grown organically as an organisation and we are now in a situation where we are earning the fruits of the hard work of the previous years: throughout 2019, we could rely on 23 different funding sources. This makes our situation very stable and we do not depend on the well-being of one or two individual donors or fear running into financial problems if one of our funding streams should end. At times, where most Romanian conservation NGOs struggle to survive, we are in an excellent position.

At the start of the ELP activities and first stakeholder meetings with local communities, we encountered a difficult situation with some of the local communities: some groups of people, who have economic or personal interests in opposing our National Park concept, started a campaign against FCC by spreading incorrect information and scaring local communities with erroneous rumours of restrictions of a National Park. This resulted in some of the mayors or presidents of land-owner associations, who had not yet met us, refusing to even talk to us. The good news, however, was that in those villages where we have been active for years and where people know us, these false rumours had little effect and these anti-groups weren't taken seriously. This highlights the trust we have built in recent years and the positive image FCC continues to gain through its work. But it also shows that there is still a lot of work to do and that we also need to develop activities in those communities where we are yet to be recognised.

Another issue which created challenges was the dramatic

increase in human - wildlife conflicts in parts of our hunting concessions; due to a combination of different factors including warmer winters and less snow, a lack of beech mast during the last years, and possibly other factors, wild boar numbers have soared and bear behaviour seems to have changed. This has led to a situation in which boars and bears increasingly showed up around the villages, destroyed pastureland, and killed livestock. Despite the establishment of our rapid intervention teams, damage on a local level became very frequent with consequent strong local opposition against wildlife in one of the communities. A local outbreak of the African Swine Fever didn't help much either and contributed to the negative attitude towards wildlife. Despite all that, however, a study by our Newfoundland colleague Prof. Dr. Alistair Bath showed that attitudes of local residents towards bison reintroduction are very positive with over 75% of the people welcoming the return of the bison. This suggests, that local people are generally positive towards wildlife, just want the problems to be resolved. We are positive that once our wildlife management is fully up and running and measures of prevention, damage control, and innovative compensation are taking effect, this area can develop into a model region for human - wildlife coexistence.

Another important milestone during the last year was the development of a much closer link to Romanian corporations. We have hired a corporate relations manager in April and the results of Cristina's work are stunning. This is not only positive with respect to a broader financial

basis, but involving the corporate companies means also involving all their employees, who become ambassadors for the National Park idea.

And last, but not least, the international political situation is also moving in a good direction: the new European Commission has announced the Green Deal, which will lead to political development coherent with FCC's proposals. We are convinced, that this will bring a lot of support for nature and forest conservation.

Thank you for supporting the work of FCC, enjoy reading through the chapters of our work in 2019!



 Valea Tâmpoșului, Făgăraș Mountains © Răzvan Rohan

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Introduction

Our activities throughout the entire CARPATHIA project have grown tremendously during the last two years and it has become a challenge to stay on course with all these new activities.

With the new activities we also developed a much larger team – more staff, more departments, and more external project partners, who then joined us in our initiative to create the European Yellowstone park. Consequently, we often had to sit down and re-analyse the situation in order not to lose focus and make sure the conservation of land and wildlife remains the core of our activities. And we believe we managed very well:

valleys to become active throughout the Făgăraș Mountains, which will put tens of thousands of hectares of additional land under protection.

In 2018 and 2019, we updated our conservation masterplan and now have a well-structured work plan for the next five years.

The most important element of this plan was that we enlarged the original core area of Piatra Craiului National Park and Iezer-Păpușa Mountains with their descending

Endangered Landscapes Programme/ EU-LIFE

In early 2019, we signed a five-year financing contract worth over US \$5m for the Endangered Landscapes Programme (ELP), a conservation programme administrated by the Cambridge Conservation Initiative and financed by Arcadia – a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin. This was an important step towards implementing our new masterplan, however the grant was not yet sufficient to cover all the planned activities over an area of 250,000 hectares.

As mentioned in our previous annual report, we have been planning from the beginning to complement the ELP grant with a second EU-LIFE project. Since there is no upper limit for a LIFE project, we decided to put all our eggs in one basket and developed an appropriate LIFE application, which would fully cover our revised masterplan. The necessary co-financing from our side (in a project of this magnitude we were told we would have to come up with over 60% co-funding) would consist of the ELP grant, funds available from the Wyss Foundation and other donors for land purchase, funds from a grant

of the Oak Foundation, and other existing funds. We joined forces with ProPark Foundation, Conservation Capital, and the Argeș County Gendarmerie to gain the expertise needed for the various activities. After we passed the first hurdle with our project concept in October 2018, we were invited to submit a full LIFE project proposal by the end of January. Given the complexity and size of the overall project, this was an extremely tight schedule and required the input of a large team. Some of the actions (out of a total of 43 proposed activities), such as the reintroduction of bison and beavers in three different localities, were considerably larger than other full LIFE projects elsewhere. On January 30th, 22 minutes prior to the final deadline, and after 28 uninterrupted, extremely intense days and nights in January alone, we pressed the button and uploaded the final version of the proposal.

In June, we received news from the Commission that the proposal needed some amendments and clarifications, but in principle it had been accepted. After several rounds of clarifications, explanations, and

changes, we were invited for the kick-off meeting in Brussels in early October, and finally signed the contract in December.

With a total amount of 27.6 million Euro and an EU contribution of 9.3 million Euro, this is one of the largest (if not the largest) LIFE project in the history of the European Union.

We are proud for Romania and we are proud for FCC!



Endangered Landscapes Programme/EU-LIFE

Continued



Create human-wildlife coexistence model

To create a model of human-wildlife coexistence over ca. 80,000 ha by replacing trophy hunting with a system of damage prevention, rapid intervention for direct conflict mitigation, and innovative compensation measures.

Accelerate rewilding

To accelerate re-wilding processes by purchasing and restoring 1,300 ha of degraded areas.

Principal project objectives are:

Save natural forests

To save >2,000 ha of natural forests in the Făgăraș Mountains by purchasing and protecting them.

Develop a new economy

To develop a new economy based on conservation, which combines local economic development and creation of jobs with the long-term conservation goals of the Făgăraș Mountains.

Active conservation

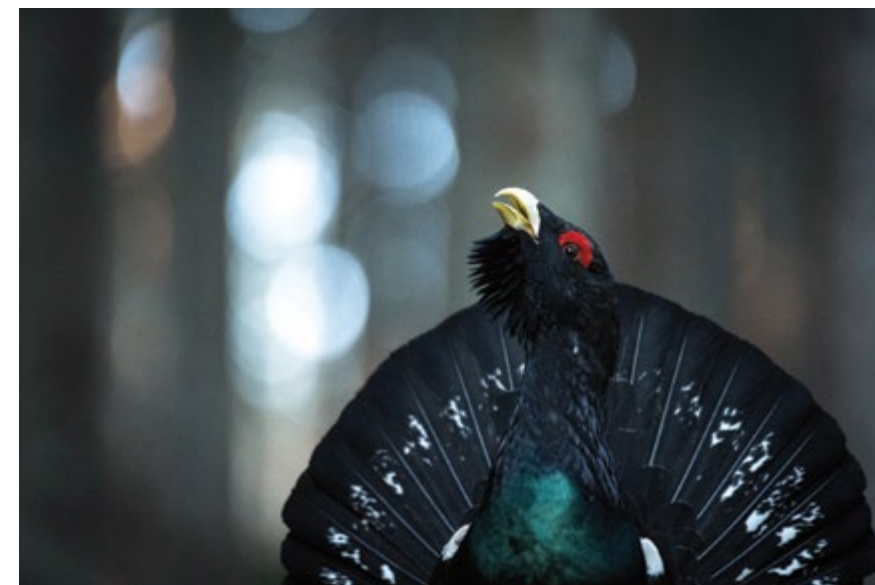
To execute active conservation measures for Golden Eagle and their prey species: marmots and capercaillie.

Foster ecological integrity

To foster the ecological integrity of the Făgăraș Mountains by removing at least 50% of all riparian invasive species from two mountain valleys.

Raise public awareness

To raise public awareness for conservation and to build positive relationships with local communities to achieve conservation through the existing Natura 2000 sites and a future national park.



Since the beginning of December, we have been working on implementing this project, which will keep us busy for the next five years.

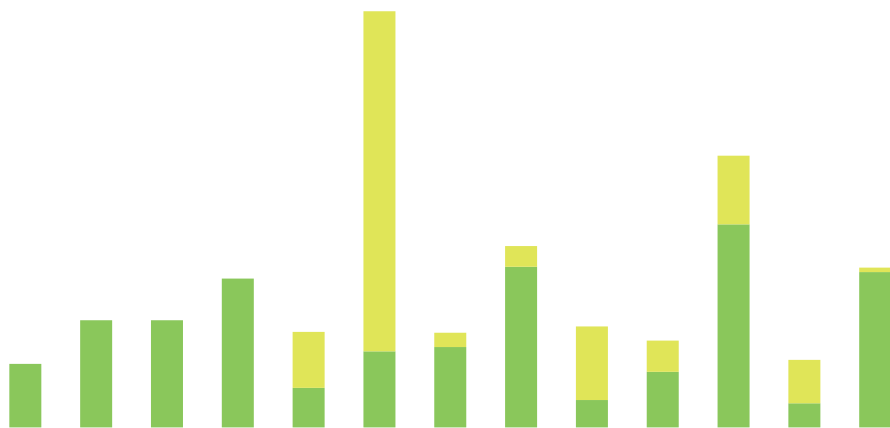
Opposite page: Dâmbovița Valley © George Soare; Current page: Capercaillie © Dan Dinu



Land purchase

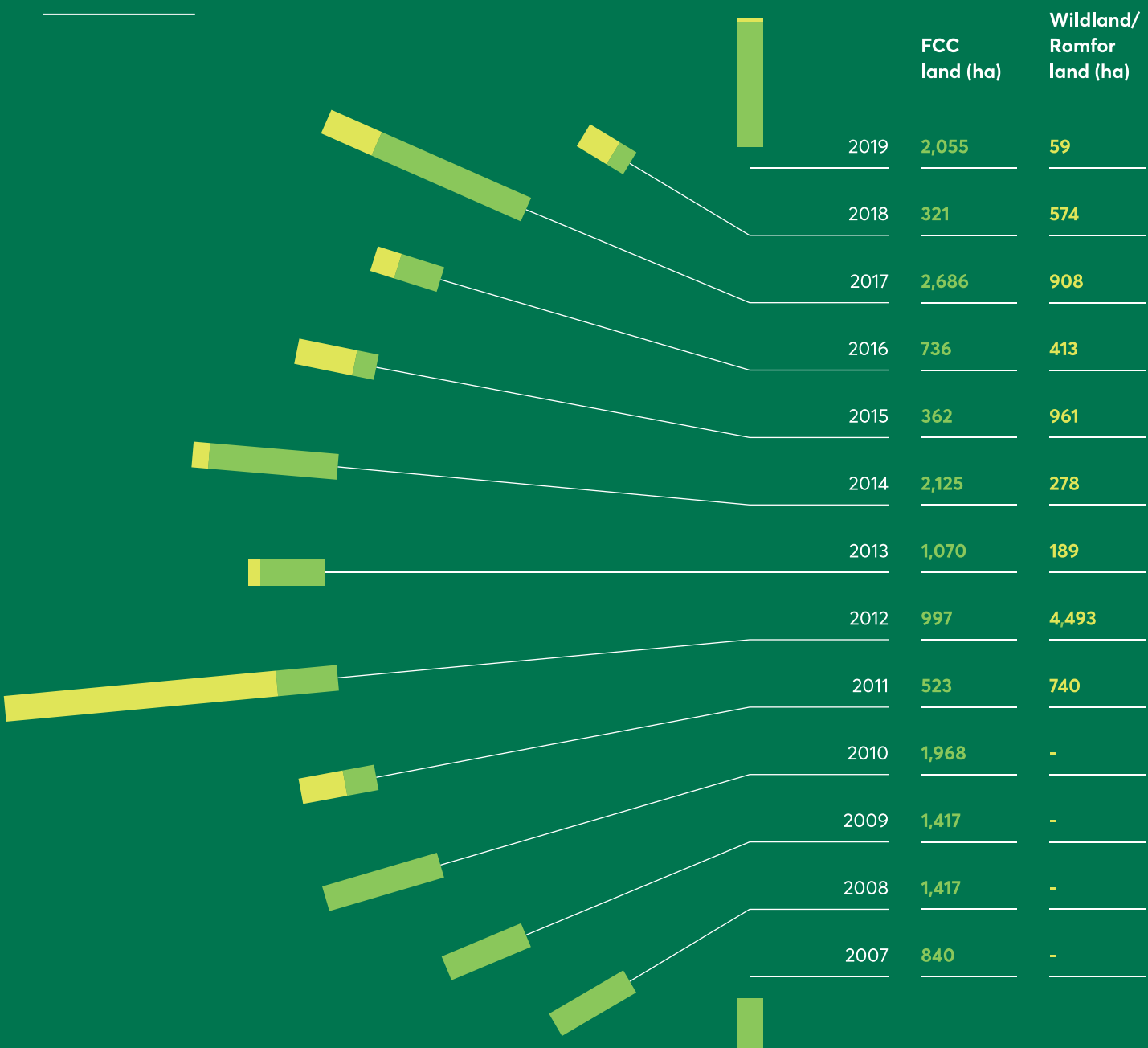
2019 was a very successful year with respect to land purchase: 2,055 hectares comprising 108 different parcels were purchased for conservation, which was the second-best year since we purchased the first properties in 2007.

This is mainly due to the fact that we enlarged our target area from Piatra Craiului, Dâmbovita Valley, Lerești Valley, and Iezer-Păpușa Mountains into the neighbouring communes to the west, Nucșoara and Arefu. Out of these 2,055 ha, ca. 10% were alpine grass and shrublands, 27% clear-cuts, and the rest managed and natural forests. We are confident we can purchase at least the same amount again in 2020.



00
Forests purchased
for full protection 2007-2019
Chart 1

Total surface
under permanent protection,
saved from logging:
25,132 ha



Conservation easements

Conservation easements is a term and concept which is widely used in North America but is not very well known here in Europe. The idea is that the state or a conservation organisation pays a certain amount of money to a landowner for full protection of the land with the idea of compensating him for the economic losses he experiences by protecting his property. FCC has started first negotiations in late 2019 with landowners in order to sign such contracts for conservation easements throughout 2020.



Current page: Spruce forest © FCC; Opposite page: Mountain community © Călin Șerban



Forest watch

One of the main tasks of our rangers still remains watching over the land - by the end of 2019 this comprised a total of 24,060 ha, of which 95% are forested.



Our CARPATHIA Forest Service has to follow the traditional Romanian organisational system of forestry. Each ranger has a specific forest area under his responsibility, which is on average around 1,500 hectares. The smallest safeguarded area, which is challenging due to its closeness to some very poor communities, is about 600 hectares in size, while the largest one has over 2,400 hectares, extending into some very remote areas.

Of the total amount of trees cut, 10% were left by the culprits in the forest. In previous years, the average annual amount of wood illegally cut from forests administrated by CARPATHIA was 200 cubic metres. Most likely, the rather mild winter and our policy to give firewood at very low prices to disadvantaged members of the communities helped in decreasing the theft of firewood from our forests. Considering the large area, the actual problems are insignificant.

According to the field monitoring carried out by the district chief rangers, less than 87 cubic metres of wood were illegally cut in the forests administrated by Carpathia throughout 2019.

About 60% of these illegal actions were discovered directly by the rangers and complaints were made to the Police, leading to 15 fines charged to illegal loggers amounting to 6,000 Euro.

The presence of our rangers in the area is crucial to protect the forests but it is often disapproved of by some neighbouring forest managers that fear irregularities may be observed. Thus, at the beginning of the year, we were confronted with an unsettling assault against one of our rangers, when a group of forestry workers attempted to pull him out of the car and verbally harass him. He and his family also received threats and the case is now under prosecutor's investigation, fully supported by FCC.



Leaota

We continued the implementation of the Conservation and Restoration Plan for the Leaota area, where forests and alpine pastures are purchased by Wildland Ltd and managed by FCC according to the CARPATHIA Masterplan, vision/mission and main objectives.



Conservation and restoration of habitats

While land purchase was limited this year to the acquisition of 60 ha of alpine pastures, we focused on increasing the protection status of the Wildland properties and the surrounding areas. The new forest management plans we drew up for over 2,000 ha in the core of the Wildland area were approved and will be enforced in the field starting in January 2020. Also, changing the human land-use practices (e.g. halting deforestation and grazing in forests) and the ongoing patrolling through our rangers contributed to a better conservation of the Leaota area.

On the restoration side, we continued to replant clear-cut forest stands and extended our capacity to obtain, over the long-term, about one third of the required saplings from our own tree nurseries, as well as one greenhouse.

Communication and public awareness

We have also progressed in engaging with the local communities, which are very important partners for the conservation area. As well as consultation meetings about common strategies for a future nature-based development of the area with the mayors of Stoenești, Cetățeni, Runcu and Moroieni communes, FCC participated in local events such as the Răvășitul Oilor (Sheep Descent) Festivity in Runcu commune in late September. While we contributed to these events mainly by providing informative activities related to the importance of conservation and increasing the awareness for the intrinsic values of nature, it also gave us the opportunity to engage with the local residents and to listen and learn about their views and needs, which made the events both memorable and successful.





Leaota wildlife

In spring this year, Wildland joined FCC in its endeavour to lease two additional hunting concessions, one of which is located in parts of Leaota. As in all the hunting areas managed by CARPATHIA, we stopped trophy hunting and focused instead on managing human - wildlife conflicts with the help of a rapid intervention team especially dedicated to the western Leaota Mountain area. In this respect, wild boar hunting concentrated on eliminating boars that damaged the pastures, orchards and gardens nearby or close to the main localities – Dragoslavele, Stoenesti, Bădeni and Cetățeni. On several nights, the team had to push bears out of the Dragoslavele commune and in one case a single bear attacked and killed livestock in the Stoenesti area.

Leaota is an important refuge for large carnivores and consequently also forms part of the study area of FCCs general wildlife monitoring programme. In particular, the camera traps installed for non-invasive monitoring of lynx delivered fascinating data on a variety of species, the most abundant being ungulates and wolves. The images also revealed the presence of a female black dog travelling with a pack of wolves and most likely some hybrid offspring, representing a conservation challenge of its own.



 Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) © BCP

Râul Târgului – Argeşel – Râuşor Natura 2000 site

The project "Elaboration of the management plan of the protected area ROSCI0381 River Târgului - Argeşel - Râuşor ", started in June 2017 and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund under the Large Infrastructure Operational Program 2014 - 2020, is slowly coming to an end.

We have completed all the field studies and the monitoring plan as well as the management plan, which have all been submitted to the authorities.

As an integrative part of the management plan, a database of species and habitats within the site and distribution maps have also been developed. During May and June, the management plan was subjected to public debates in the community of Lereşti, Argeş County. We had about 30 participants each time and some of them proposed modifications, which were included in the plan within the legal frame permitted. After completion, the management plan was submitted to the Argeş Environmental Protection Agency.

We have also finished the awareness campaigns, both among adults and students. Schools from the seven communes/villages were visited by our communication team which organised interactive workshops concerning the protected area: thematic games, videos about the habitats and wildlife, a useful area guide that students can continue to study in Geography or Natural Science classes, and a poster series. Also, they had informal meetings with the local residents and distributed communication materials regarding the importance of the area.

After the loss of custodianship, taken over by the National Agency for Protected Areas (ANANP), and despite some adverse legislative changes, the project continued and will be implemented until its end. Since the process was delayed by several factors, we have asked and obtained a postponement of the project until the autumn of 2020, when the results of the project will finally be transferred to ANANP, which is then supposed to take care of implementing all the activities.





Abusive clear-cut © Matej Buja

Ecological restoration

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Objectives and philosophy of FCC's restoration programme

Clear-cut areas

Mainly, the forest areas targeted by our restoration are:

Clear-cuts with almost no natural regeneration, and in some cases also affected by years of grazing with sheep and cows.

Spruce monocultures

Young stands of spruce monocultures from 5 to 70 years' old.

Riparian habitat

Degraded riparian habitat along the mountain rivers.

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The overall goal of the forest restoration activities is to bring back the natural forest composition in areas affected by almost a century of intensive forestry, forests that are much stronger in the face of storms, their resilience to climate change and with a higher degree of biodiversity.

We have:

Planted

**1.8 million
saplings**

on over 700 hectares of clear-cut areas.

Kick-started the conversion of spruce monocultures into more natural stands on over

450 hectares.

Restored riparian habitat along

17 kilometers

of mountain valleys.



 Riparian habitat © Sandra Bartocha

All our restoration activities are based on a thorough assessment of the present and the past. We gather all the available information on the natural types of forests in the targeted areas, using old forest management plans, satellite images, and the information from neighbouring old forest stands. We then do a full inventory of the existing species and their proportion and take into consideration adaptation to climate change when planning the right proportion of species to be replanted. Evidently, we try to ensure all activities are kept to the minimum invasiveness possible.



Ecological restoration facts 2019

Tree nurseries

The production of saplings in our tree nurseries was a challenging task during the past three to four years. At the start of 2016 we experienced a lack of viable seeds from the main species, most probably due to climate change. Also, the lack of snow in winter and big temperature differences during spring and summer are affecting the growth of saplings in the nurseries.

The total area effectively cultivated in our nurseries in 2019 amounted to about 3,400 m² over 14 different allotments, resulting in the creation of an estimated 250,000 saplings by the end of the production cycle.

Around 120,000 young spruce saplings are ready to be translocated from our greenhouse into the nurseries in spring 2020.

Replanting clear-cuts

During spring and autumn, we succeeded in replanting a total of 103 hectares of clear-felled forests, mainly in the Dâmbovița Valley at altitudes of between 1,250 and 1,650 metres

An extremely dedicated team of FCC rangers and more than 200 local residents worked together and managed to plant over 400,000 saplings (mainly beech, fir, spruce, and sycamore), kick-starting the return of majestic forests to the Făgăraș Mountains. In summer, the saplings needed further attention when the grass grew more than 1-metre high and we had to cut the grass around the saplings to avoid suffocation.

When restoring clear-cuts, we also repair the scars in the forest floor caused by tractors extracting logs, by filling up ravines with wooden debris, gravel, and soil from the ramparts along the tracks. As a final step, the tracks are replanted and as such we have managed to completely halt erosion along over 5 km of these logging tracks in the Făgăraș Mountains, mainly in the Vidraru area.

Spruce monocultures conversion

Many forests have been subject to forest management within the past 100 years and thousands of hectares of mixed forests have been transformed into spruce-dominated cultures with low biodiversity.

We also started cutting in some young spruce regeneration areas and plantations of around 20 hectares in order to diminish the proportion of the spruces in an area where the natural forest is mainly beech.

We are also trying to re-wild these areas by carefully opening up small pockets in the spruce canopy and replanting with beech, elm, sycamore, fir, and rowan.

We have continued to slowly convert the artificial monocultures back to a mixed and healthy mountain forest. The general plan is to intervene on 110 hectares of spruce monocultures and the trees proposed for extraction were marked. In 2019, we managed to create pockets of light on 28 hectares by cutting down young spruce, debarking it and leaving it in the forest as dead wood, so important for biodiversity. Beech, fir and sycamore saplings will be planted in autumn 2020 to complete the restoration process on those areas.









📷 Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) © Dan Dinu

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Introduction

Since the end of 2011, FCC has been leasing hunting concessions in the core of the project area to protect and manage wildlife populations, including Europe's most charismatic species such as bears, wolves, and lynx. With this fantastic opportunity we have also taken on a big responsibility to ensure that wildlife and people can co-exist and thrive. Protecting wildlife and at the same time reducing conflicts, based on scientific monitoring and involving local communities concerning management decisions, is our approach to ensure this unique fauna remains a visible and valued part of the system.





Wildlife conservation



New hunting concessions

Our project has leased wildlife management concessions '21 Izvoarele Dâmboviței' since 2011 and '22 Rucăr' since 2017. In spring 2019, we signed a collaboration agreement with the hunters' association GTS Păpușa Leaota, who are leaseholders of wildlife management concessions '18 Râul Târgului' (Lerești Valley) and '20 Stoenești' (Western Leaota), and took over responsibility for management of these two areas comprising 22,850 ha and 21,400 ha, respectively.

This enlargement has now resulted in a total of four hunting concessions in leasehold by the CARPATHIA project and we can implement a

ban on sport and trophy hunting on over 68,000 ha, and, instead, focus on resolution of conflicts between wildlife and humans in the rural villages. Together with neighbouring Piatra Craiului National Park, we have now created over 80,000 ha of the largest area in Romania free of any sport and trophy hunting. Given the measures we will take towards reducing human-livestock conflicts and involving local people in favour of wildlife management, this area could develop into a model area for a new wildlife management system for all of Romania.

Anti-poaching activities

To adequately watch over the much larger area, we have doubled the number of rangers last year and partnered with the Gendarmerie to run joint patrols in the area. One problem the teams encountered is an increasing pressure from off-road vehicle drivers trying to access the area on a multitude of tracks, even during the night. Due to several groups of wild boars showing up near settlements in different areas at the same time, it was also challenging at times to keep the response time low so poaching could be avoided.

In addition, according to rumours in the villages, poachers nowadays are very well equipped with efficient night vision devices. Despite the difficulties, only one case of poaching was recorded throughout 2019, in which a wild boar which was shot was identified. The case was reported and taken over by the Police. With funding from the new LIFE project, our anti-poaching team will be able to upgrade to the most recent technical solutions and will continue to efficiently combat poaching.



Reintroducing bison

Bringing the missing mammal species back to the Făgăraş Mountains is one of the goals of our wildlife programme.

Throughout the last centuries, European bison (*Bison bonasus*) have been hunted to extinction in the wild, with the last individual roaming the Transylvanian hills being shot in 1790. Only a few dozen survived in different zoos and all bison today go back to only 12 founder animals. Following two successful reintroduction initiatives in the country, we intend to release within the next five years a minimum of 75 bison to three different sites in the eastern Făgăraş Mountains.

In 2019, we were able to make the first steps by choosing a suitable reintroduction site in the Bunea-Comisu region, right in FCC's core area, which will expose the bison to a variety of habitats during their stay in an acclimatisation enclosure before being released into the wild.

After obtaining all the necessary permits, our dedicated team managed to build - with a significant effort that is not to be ignored - the quarantine compound and a 130ha acclimatisation enclosure, which also allows access to some alpine pastures. In November we finally received the first four bison from a reserve in Germany, two young males and two females. Another seven individuals (four females, three males) from Poland joined the group in December, including two females descendant from the free-roaming population of Bieszczady Mountains. The herd will spend their first winter in the Romanian Carpathians in the acclimatisation enclosure where our rangers can still keep a close eye on them and provide some supplementary food. If all goes well, their release into the wild is scheduled for May 2020, when we will finally open all the gates. Two individuals are equipped with a GPS collar, which will allow us to keep track of their movements in the critical period when the herd starts exploring its new home.

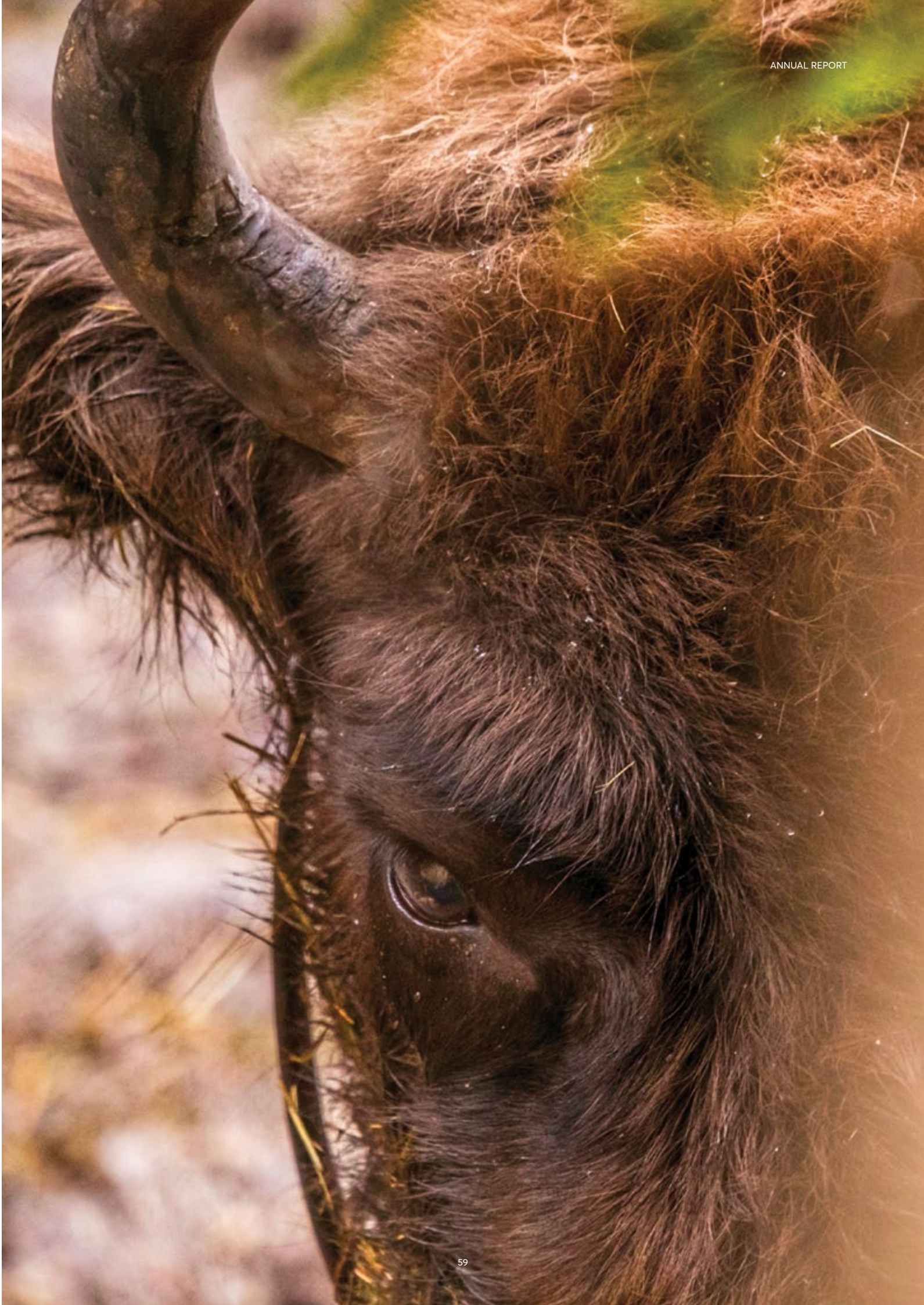
The bison is considered a keystone species for restoring and maintaining the integrity of ecosystems and increasing habitat heterogeneity of the area, benefitting a variety of other species.

We will closely monitor the impact of Europe's mega-herbivore and hope that we can contribute to re-establishing a viable population of this magnificent species in the Făgăraş Mountains.





 Current and opposite page: Bison © Daniel Mirlea



Wildlife management

Philosophy

Full protection of species that interact with humans or local communities and potentially cause damage to properties, livestock or even lives, can be very controversial. We have therefore elaborated a number of principles on which we base all our wildlife management decisions, always keeping the safety of people as one of the highest priorities. While protection of all wildlife from sport and trophy hunting is one of our main objectives, interactions between humans and wildlife are inevitable, and the core of our activities is to make sure damages are avoided or reduced to a minimum. People in the Carpathian Mountain regions have a long record of co-existing with

damaging and potentially dangerous animals and have comparably high wildlife acceptance levels. In a changing world, the challenge is to keep this balance for the benefit of both. Unlike traditional hunting management, we therefore encourage targeting all available tools and measures towards resolving conflicts with human interests and to include community representatives in basic management decisions. Prevention – Intervention – Compensation!

Prevention

In our conflict mitigation approach, the priority lies in trying to prevent damage and livestock depredation from the start by making use of the vast experience that already exists in a variety of projects and implementing those methods that have worked best considering the local conditions. Shepherd dogs have been used to effectively protect livestock in the mountains for centuries. To maintain or even improve their quality, we have started a breeding programme of Carpathian Shepherd dogs, also called Carpatin, at our Cobor Biodiversity Farm. This impressive livestock guarding dog is characterised by being very attentive and confident with large predators, but at the same by socialising well with livestock and being unaggressive with humans. Our four Carpatin females gave birth to no less than 22 gorgeous pups, some of which will also be the future guardians of the Cobor cattle and horses. But most of the livestock defenders to-be were delivered at the age of 8 to 10 weeks to their new workplaces – shepherd camps and farms around the Făgăraş Mountains, where they spent the first months socialising with their future protégés and learning from the elders. Throughout 2019 we distributed a total of 18 pups to seven different livestock owners and our team will monitor their development and performance until they are fully grown.

Another method proven to be very effective, both for minimising livestock depredation through large carnivores as well as protecting crops and agricultural areas from damage through wild boar, is the use of temporary electric fences.

While electric fences do keep away wildlife, the challenge is to install them before the damage happens. Wherever electric fences were set up after incidents with bears, the behaviour of these predators changed instantly, and no more problems occurred. Likewise, vulnerable farms where the team installed electric fences for reasons of precaution remained unharmed. With wild boar it is even harder to be one step ahead: being very clever and numerous, management of the conflicts with this species will always have to be a combination of different methods, including hunting, gustative and acoustic repellents and permanent electric fences in selected areas or certain seasons. With the new LIFE funding, we will be able to equip a much larger part of farms at risk with electric fences.



Wildlife management

Continued

Intervention teams

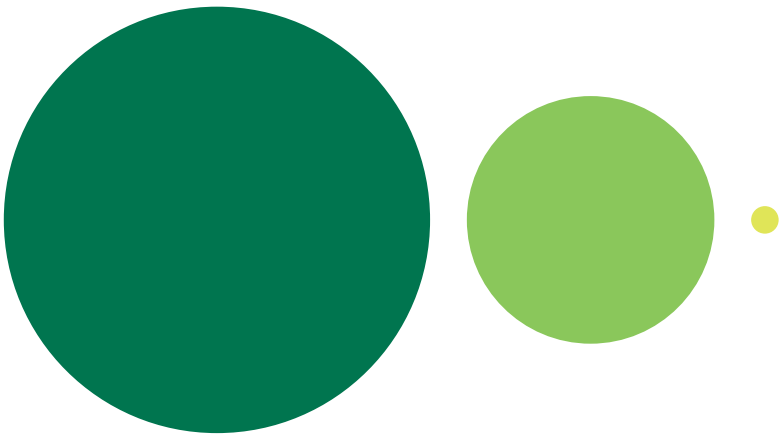
The year 2019 was certainly a rough one for our rapid intervention team and the local gendarmerie – as well as for the livestock owners and farmers in the region. We registered a total of 115 cases of wildlife conflict that included damage among livestock, crops or properties, the vast majority of them in the Rucăr community. While wolf depredation seems to play a minor role in the entire area – only two attacks on sheep were recorded – conflicts with bears and wild boar were numerous and persistent.

Also, the amount of livestock killed by bears has increased dramatically compared to that of previous years. No less than 36 sheep, 10 cows, 21 pigs, one donkey and 11 rabbits fell prey to bears, with a peak of the damage occurring in late autumn/early winter. Especially worrying was the fact that most of the incidents happened within or in the outskirts of villages and bears often forced their way into wooden shelters, stables and even vacant huts and houses. One can only speculate about the reasons for the increase in conflicts in recent years and most likely it is a combination of several factors. The extremely mild winters certainly contribute by shortening the hibernation period of bears and prolonging the den entry period, which has also been shown in other areas to be the highest risk period for bear conflicts.

The rapid intervention team always evaluated the damage and offered help by installing electric fences and trying to deter bears with noise and rubber bullets to avoid repeated attacks. Due to persisting problems, we decided to ask for a derogation from the Ministry of Environment

for lethal removal of one bear and approval was eventually granted. Consequently, our team killed one medium-sized four-year-old female bear, after the individual was observed right at the edge of the Rucăr commune. This case also confirms that traditional trophy hunting, which is aiming at shooting big, old trophy bears in remote corners of the forest, would not resolve human - wildlife conflicts, as often argued.

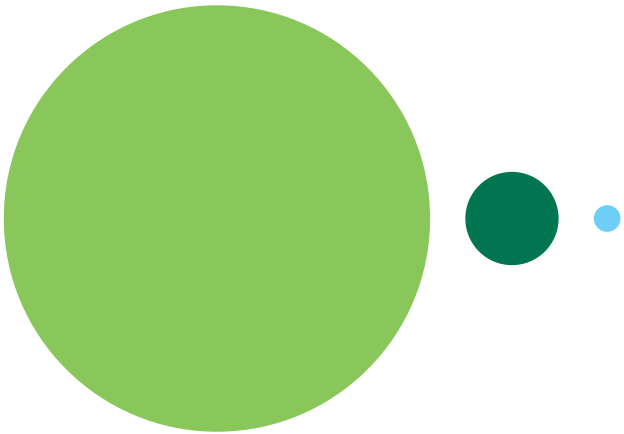
More numerous (71 cases), though less intimidating, were the interventions following herds of wild boar ploughing through people’s pastures and gardens. The rapid intervention team registered and evaluated a total of 71 ha of dug up soil, ranging from a few thousand square metres to over 10 ha per property – a significant part of the productive land in the case of some farms. With the increase in wild boar numbers in the past years, and the threat of the rapidly expanding African swine fever spilling over to domestic pigs, the state authorities demanded high hunting quotas from all the game managers. To fulfil these quotas and to reduce conflicts at the same time, FCC’s rapid intervention team organised hunts together with local hunters mainly in private orchards, gardens, and pastures in close vicinity to the most affected communities and as such hunted a total of 112 wild boars.



Overall incidents

Chart 2

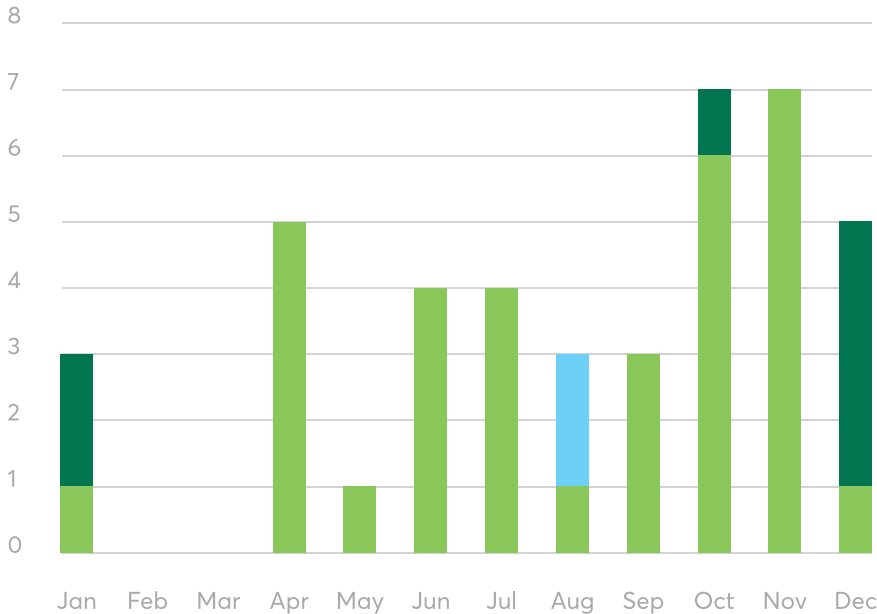
Wild boar	62%
Bears	36%
Wolves	2%



Bear incidents

Chart 3, 4

Livestock	32
Buildings	7
Orchards	2





Wildlife management

Continued

Damage compensation

FCC rangers are usually part of the Commission for damage evaluation and compensation, so affected farmers receive the official compensation payments foreseen by the state in cases of livestock damage, even though this process takes a long time. For damages on crops and agricultural fields caused by wild boar though, state compensation is irrelevant, and we therefore established a private compensation system through our hunting associations.

Therefore, in 2019 we compensated farmers up to a total amount of 30,480 lei/6,310 Euro, which also included some payments granted for damages on buildings caused by bears. In parallel, we try to link the compensation payments to the willingness of landowners to improve the fencing of their properties, especially in areas that are right at the edge of the forest.



Wildlife monitoring

Providing reliable population size and density estimates for large carnivores and possibly also their most important prey species has been an important aspect of FCC's wildlife programme for many years, to prove that a science-based monitoring programme can be established on a significantly large area and to demonstrate wildlife management decisions can and need to be taken based on objective data. In 2019 we focused our efforts mainly on lynx, for which we finished two camera trapping sessions, and on red deer, for which we collected non-invasive DNA samples with the goal of estimating population size for the first time based on genetics.



Stag © Daniel Mirlea

Eurasian lynx

For the lynx, the most elusive large carnivore, we used camera traps to detect individuals based on their unique coat pattern. In the first session (January-April), which also encompassed the mating season, we tried to maximize detection and to identify the best trap locations for long-term monitoring. With this knowledge, we ran the second session during October - December (pre-mating season) to capture solely the local population, and thus comply with the mark-recapture modelling rules for estimating robust population parameters. During each of these two sessions, two camera traps were installed at 59 and 76 locations respectively, covering an area of

about 120,000 ha and delivering thousands of wildlife images. In both periods, on around 150 occasions, lynx passed by our cameras and the improved image quality allowed identification of the lynx in over 80% of cases. Consequently, we created a catalogue consisting of 23 independent lynx, including several females with their offspring. Good recapture rates per individual allowed us to use powerful statistical models to obtain good approximations on real population sizes. While the scientific report on these results is work in progress for 2020, initial density estimates for the lynx population in our study area have been calculated and range between 1.6 and 1.7 individuals/100 square km.

Red deer

Firm data on population sizes for red deer are missing across all of Europe. Therefore, we tested to see if genotyping non-invasive DNA samples from faecal pellets is an efficient tool to evaluate population parameters for this species. Between June and September, we collected approx. 200 faecal pellets in a pilot area of 10,000 ha. The samples are currently being genotyped in a specialist genetic laboratory at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. In the optimistic case that we obtain a genotyping success rate of >60%, we will replicate the genetic survey in 2020 within an area of 45 000 ha, which is more representative for the movement capabilities of this species.

Wolf

Because the baseline survey from Winter 2017/2018 showed gaps in the distribution of the wolf packs (see here), we organised a second survey running from December 2019 to April 2020. We set a target of 300 samples to map the four packs identified during the baseline survey, and to assess if there are more packs at the edges of our study area. The lack of snow during this winter turned out to be a real challenge for snow tracking and slowed down sampling quite a bit, but we are optimistic in reaching the envisaged target by the end of the monitoring period. Prior to wolf monitoring, we also collected 30 dog reference samples from the study area to improve dog-wolf genotype assignment and to check for any hybridization patterns between them.







11/1/2019 10:46 AM CC016L



11/7/2019 2:50 PM CC06P6



10/16/2019 3:02 AM CC0146



10/21/2019 5:45 AM CC06P3



Outreach and Communication

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Introduction



Five pillars of activity and ten years of conservation!

What would all our results be without communication and without bonding people together?

Dialogue, transparency and many explanations about our project and our intentions are necessary. This is for two reasons: conservation is still not considered a priority for many Romanians, and people have been cheated again and again by investors, who told people that they will do something good for them, but actually just robbed them of their precious resources. It is understandable that many have a hard time believing that an organisation buys thousands of hectares of forests just for the sake of protecting them.

But times are changing. Humanity can no longer afford to do what we have done in the past and nature is starting to show us the yellow card. It is time to listen, to reflect, to understand and to find the best way to behave as a true part of nature.

We need a sustainable, circular economy and have to stop believing in the need for never-ending economic growth with ever-growing use of natural resources. We need to learn to trust, to associate, to work together for the greater good of a community, not just for individual benefit. And we need to become much more careful about the resources we consume and make sure we do not overuse them.

Fighting for conservation automatically implies fighting against those who do not care about sustainability, who do not care about community, who want to use the existing resources in the short term for their own personal gain. As a result of our activities, these individuals fight back, and as they do not have any hard arguments, they spread fake-news, rumours and lies. They try to influence local people and create fear of us. For this reason, the success of our work depends on working intensely with local communities, no matter whether they are convinced or sceptical about what we do. We just want to be judged by our results, not by rumours or myths. This report is the applied daily work of 79 permanent employees and hundreds of others.

Our outreach and communication plans include human dimensions research, a dialogue platform, organising local and national events, ecological education programmes, volunteering and ambassadors' programmes, job opportunities and, last, but not least, our day-to-day presence in the communities. Many of our team are part of these communities and by owning land in these communities, we also have a responsibility for these people.

Keep a close eye on our website, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn accounts, and if you want to see more, subscribe to our monthly field reports at info@carpathia.org.

Timber industry – NGO platform

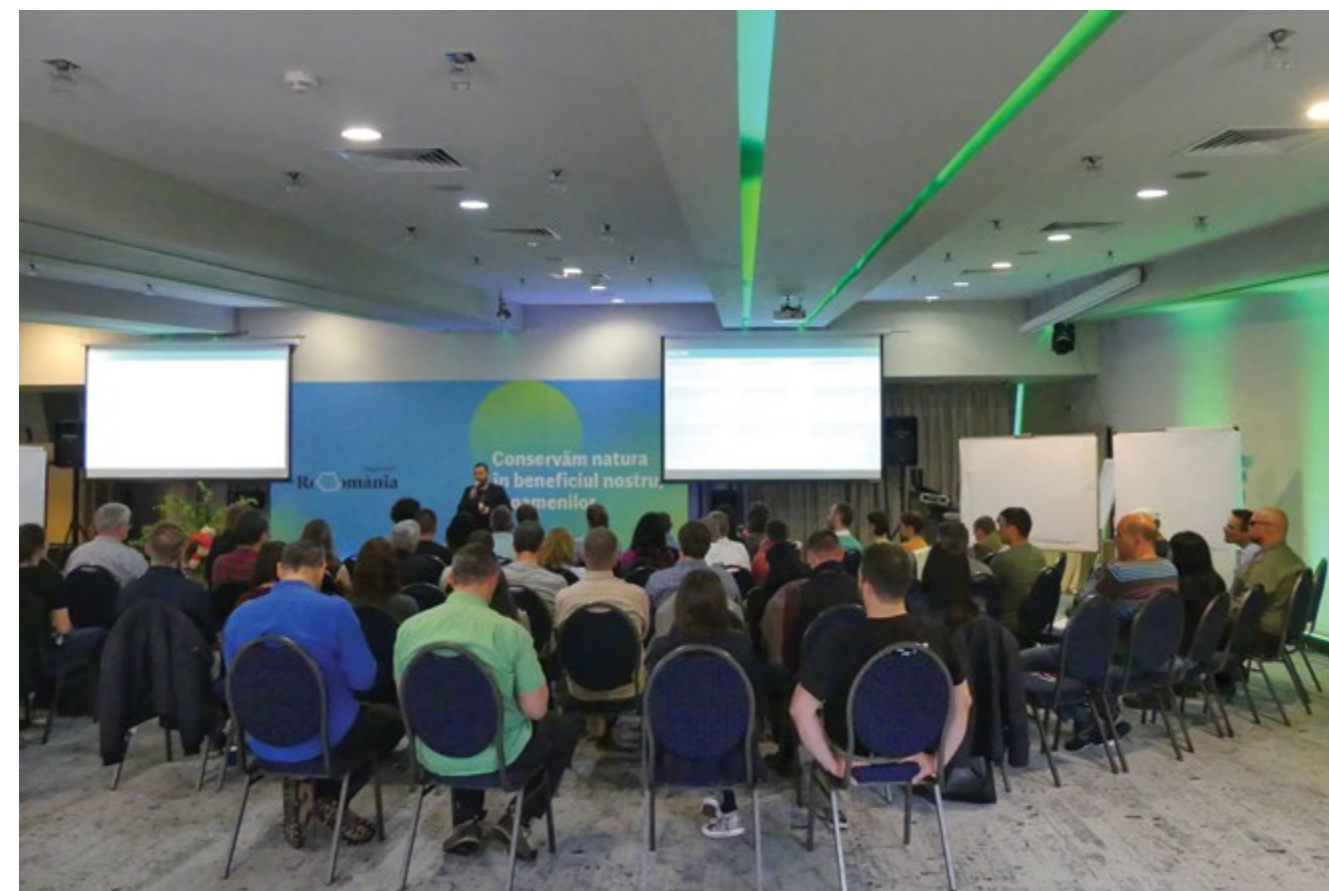
After initially getting off to a good start, the discussion platform of the timber industry and NGOs struggled to make progress at the beginning of 2019. During the meetings, all the participants felt the platform was important and needed further development, and the outcomes of the meetings were good; however, once everybody was back in their office, other priorities took over and whatever had been discussed in the group remained unacted upon until the next meeting. In order to overcome this roadblock and to move the programme forward, we decided to set up a small secretariat to organise meetings, follow up on them, consult with authorities and invite specialists to give their point of view. FCC took over this task and Nicoleta Dobre was appointed secretary of the platform, while ProPark Foundation helps with their expertise.

During the meeting in June, we decided on four thematic workshops - Forest Inventory, Forest Policy, Traceability, and Virgin Forests/ Forests in National Parks and protected areas. The first workshop concerning the forest inventory was held in October with the involvement of specialists from the team which had previously implemented the last and very controversial forest inventory. As a follow-up, the group requested a clear statement from the Ministry of Environment with respect to the inventory. A big thank you to our facilitator Alistair Bath, who continues to drive the group forward.



A glimpse of major events during the past year

January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Untamed Romania											
ALPIN FILM FESTIVAL: films, books, photography											



Opposite page: Walking tour in Dâmbovicioara (Electric camping) © George Soare; Current page: Regăsește România © Liviu Ungureanu



A glimpse of major events during the past year

Continued

JANUARY-FEBRUARY

Untamed Romania

"Untamed Romania", an award-winning film about the natural wonders of Romania, which was produced with the help of FCC, was presented to the students and teachers from Northeastern University, USA – thank you New England Romanian Association for the promotion of this project.

FEBRUARY-MARCH

ALPIN FILM FESTIVAL: films, books, photography

Alpin Film Festival is the first and largest event in Romania dedicated to mountain culture. Over 3,000 mountain lovers were present at the events organised in Braşov, Buşteni and Predeal within the festival, and several thousand others watched the live broadcasts distributed on the festival's Facebook page. The festival offered us a unique opportunity to talk to mountain lovers about our conservation project.

MARCH

"Regăseşte România" National Conference ("Re-discover Romania")

We were the partner of Regăseşte Romania National Conference, organised by ProPark Foundation for Protected Areas. This year's edition was an open invitation to the private sector to contribute with conservation leaders towards the change we want to see in protecting nature. The conference highlighted the importance of protected areas as a reference and a model for Romania's economic development and concluded that in order to manage the protected areas so as to bring the desired benefits to society, a public-private effort is needed to secure funds for conservation and real support for local economic growth.

Făgăraş County Experience auction

For the third year CARPATHIA has donated an interesting experience for the benefit of YouthBank Făgăraş, a fund that finances small projects of the community high school. The winners spent a lovely afternoon at Cobor, having a horse cart ride and a tasty, local meal. And the students used the money to implement local projects.

Highlights:

We have participated in 10 external events.

We have organised 2 events.

We have organised 2 events at our Cobor Biodiversity Farm.

Throughout 2019, we have attended and organised a myriad of local and national events, sports and cultural events, which involved the local community and aimed to promote fantastic nature experiences, the rural culture of the Făgăraş Mountains communities, and our conservation project.

The purpose:

Promote the project to all audiences.

Gain acceptance and public support for the future National Park.

Build trust and engage local communities.

Create sustainable economic opportunities for local communities.

As in previous years we were present in the local schools.

APRIL

The European Nature Trust visit

Duncan Grossart, Director of The European Nature Trust (TENT), a strategic partner to FCC, visited the project area and discussed with us ways in which TENT can focus on organizing high profile events to support our forest conservation project.

MAY

The presidents of FCC visit

The old and the new presidents of FCC, Hansjörg Wyss and Charlie Burrell, together with FCC’s co-founder Hedi Wyss, have visited our project to discuss general strategy and next steps.

Innovative wildlife management

FCC has established the first rapid intervention team to manage human – wildlife conflicts, in the southeast of the Făgăraș Mountains. At the end of May, over 20 specialists were trained to solve human - wildlife conflicts

Conferences

FCC presented the vision for protected areas of the Natura 2000 Coalition and the results of our forest conservation project at the roundtable “Future Solutions: Realities and Expectations for Environmental Policies in Europe”, organised in Brussels by Adina Vălean, member of the European Parliament and chair of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety.

We attended the Virgin forests conference in Sibiu. One conclusion was that all parties must cooperate in identifying old growth forests. Another important conclusion was that the Ministry of Forest and Waters must up-date the national catalogue with supplementary areas.

The round table discussions of the LIFE16 GIE/DE/000661 project “Improving coexistence between people and large carnivores in Europe, through communication and partnership” gave us the possibility to share the results of our DNA monitoring of bears.

JUNE

Braşov Heroes & Bikeathon Făgăraş

We were glad to be part of two amazing community charitable sports events dedicated to bikers and runners, who could participate if they volunteered to represent a cause. More than 120 people chose to run or cycle for a new forest in the Fagaraş Mountains. Funds raised by the participants covered the costs of planting 1350 saplings.

DHL Carpathian Marathon

We had the opportunity to promote our project and to meet new supporters at the Carpathian Marathon, a major national sports competition, a first-class mountain marathon experience and charity event that takes place every year in the heart of one of the last wild regions of Europe - this year in the Leaota region. Over 2,500 participants joined the event and we used the opportunity to promote our vision of creating a world-class wilderness reserve in the Southern Romanian Carpathians. The team supported by us finished on the podium and we were delighted for this victory and for the initiative of the whole event, including fundraising for the Romanian Paralympic Committee.

Lereşti Commune annual fest and the Egg Pretzel festival

We support local events in the communities and their sustainable development. We were pleased to be part of the Lereşti Commune annual fest and the Egg Pretzel festival, celebrating the traditions, people and beauty of the Făgăraş Mountains. We want to contribute to increasing the quality of life in every community where we operate. The event was a good opportunity for dialogue and to raise awareness the importance of conserving forests and wildlife, both for the forest itself and for the local community whose livelihood depends on this vital natural resource.

JULY

Natural disaster in Rucăr

The torrential rains in July showed us the direct consequences of the unsustainable forestry activities carried out in the last 15 years. Unfortunately, the victims of this disastrous event were the local people in Rucăr, who have usually not been involved in cutting down forests. FCC helped to clear up the mud with two excavators and offered affected families timber for the reconstruction of their homes.

Trofeul Munților (National Sport Tourism Championship)

Running, hiking and touching several peaks of Făgăraș Mountains in mid-July is something everyone should get to experience every year. We met the community of runners from the Mountain Clubs, NGO's and tourism associations competing in the Iezer-Păpușa Mountains and we spread the word about our future plans in the Southern Romanian Carpathians.

AUGUST

Carpathian MTB Bike

The Carpathian MTB Epic event is labelled as one of the most spectacular competitions in Europe, due to the special aura of the wild Carpathian Mountains. This event is dedicated to UCI (Union Cycliste Internationale) riders, both seasoned and also aspiring amateur riders.

This year Foundation Conservation Carpathia was present with a stand and informative flyers about the importance of forest, grassland and alpine meadow conservation.

Folk Rock Fest Piatra Craiului

The first edition of Folk Rock Fest Piatra Craiului was an opportunity for us to interact with the public and talk about the forests we protect in Piatra Craiului National Park and the general results of our 10 year forest conservation project in Făgăraș and the Leaota mountains. 7,000 people from all over the country joined the event, spending three days in the National Park with good music and interesting activities.

Electric Camping - full moon camping

This event was a great partnership between CARPATHIA and My Transylvania Association, My Secret Romania Association and the local community. We developed an innovative event concept in the area which included gastronomy, hiking and nature interpretation with local guides and local handicrafts. Electric camping gathered about 50 participants from Brașov, Pitești, Zărnești, Bucharest, Iași and even Spain. They enjoyed a wonderful experience in Dâmbovicioara - guided tours, local and tasty food, traditional songs by Hoinarii Band and electronic music mixed by DJ DEX & DJ MEET MTD, illuminated tent, starry sky. The event was promoted by various media channels and reached a very good national audience. We will continue these initiatives in other communes where the CARPATHIA project is present.

Medical centre for Moroieni

Our conservation partner Wildland has supported the Moroieni community and co-financed the development of a much-needed local health-care centre.

SEPTEMBER

Răvășitul oilor (Sheep Descent) at Runcu

We celebrated with the community of Runcu, Dâmbovița county, the end of the pastoral year, the traditions, the people, the Romanian village and the beauty of the surrounding nature, at the 28th edition of 'Răvășitul Oilor' (Sheep Descent). According to Runcu City Hall, more than 100 local producers and craftsmen participated in the event. It was a good opportunity to highlight the need of developing programmes that bring real benefits to both nature and the people in the area whilst respecting nature.

Făgăraș Fest

In September we hosted the first edition of Făgăraș Fest, a national event dedicated entirely to the uniqueness of this place and to the local communities living in the vicinity of the Făgăraș Mountains. The event was organised by ProPark – Foundation for Protected Areas, in partnership with Foundation Conservation Carpathia and the local community from Lerești commune, within the Endangered Landscape Programme. The participants were encouraged to discover the values and the surroundings of the festival, through guided tours in the forest, cart rides accompanied by a local guide, a fair with local products, an outdoor nature cinema or an adventure challenge. Over 1,000 people joined the event and 150 children participated in ecological education workshops within the festival. Various media partnerships, from national and local radio, newspapers to TV, online and social media campaign brought a total reach of 3 million people.

OCTOBER

Presenting CARPATHIA

Ascendis: Now/ Do Conference - Transform Knowing into Doing, was a good opportunity for Barbara & Christoph Promberger to present the CARPATHIA vision and to speak to an audience of over 800 business people.

We were happy to host the first annual meeting of beneficiaries of the Endangered Landscapes Programme: four days in the field, showing our results and the future objectives.

NOVEMBER

Bisons are back in the Făgăraș Mountains

After 200 years, the Făgăraș Mountains became HOME for the bison! We are positive the first group will adapt well and soon we will be able to supplement their number. We are encouraged in this direction by the results of the human dimensions study on attitudes of locals towards bison and beaver reintroduction, that stated these two species as being accepted.

International participation events

Barbara Promberger was speaking at the Explorers Symposium of the 2019 National Geographic Explorers Festival in Washington DC.

Barbara and Christoph Promberger have presented our project activities at the Conference on Wilderness and Old-Growth Forest in Europe, Bratislava, Slovakia within the presence of HE, Zuzanna Caputova, president of Slovakia.

Conference on Large Carnivore Monitoring and Conservation in the Carpathians, organised by WWF Romania, was held together with the 10th Meeting of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Biodiversity. Our wildlife researcher Ruben Iosif presented our results.

DECEMBER

New LIFE contract

We have signed a new LIFE contract with the European Commission, which covers conservation activities for the next five years. LIFE CARPATHIA is the largest LIFE project in the history of the European Union, we are honoured and proud for Romania!

Large carnivore conference

"Long term monitoring of the Carpathian large carnivores" event at the Natural Science Faculty, Constanta University, gave us the opportunity to share our study regarding bear DNA sampling.









Volunteers

Corporate

A

Environmental NGO Agent Green and their volunteers came to plant 7,300 saplings in the Southern Făgăraș Mountains.

Ascendis, one of the largest consultancy and training companies for corporate organizational development in Romania, for promoting our case to the business environment and for help in team-building.

M

MedLife for continuing their beautiful campaign for all the babies born in their clinics, so they will grow together with a new forest in the Făgăraș Mountains. During recent years we have planted around 40,000 saplings, and in 2019 they covered the costs for 15,000 more and came with a team of 50 medical volunteers, for planting a portion of these trees.

R

RTC Proffice joined us for the second year for a day of replanting: one hectare of clear-cut and 4,000 saplings will grow into a new forest in the Făgăraș Mountains!

S

S-KARP, the Romanian producer of outdoor shoes, organised in partnership with FCC a garbage clean-up on lake Satic in the Dâmbovița Valley.

U

Ursus Breweries, who came this year with 30 volunteers to help us with the final weeding of 8,000 saplings in one of our tree nurseries, before arrival of winter.

Individuals

B

Three-month-long volunteers, Bogdan Vasilescu and Maria Spătaru, for a great job helping our field team with camera trap monitoring and also with interpreting the collected data.

C

Cosmin Dumitrache for sharing moments of his amazing video work on Făgăraș Mountains that helped us promote the unicity of these mountains nationally and internationally.

D

Daniel Mîrlea for sharing his talent with us and helping with beautiful photos!

G

George Soare for being a close friend with a good camera and a talented eye for photography - thanks for letting us use these great pictures!

I

Ioana Radomir and Ioana Aldulea for participating repeatedly at events on behalf of CARPATHIA and for their friendship.

J

Jessica Brown a useful, joyful help at the Cobor biodiversity farm.

M

Marissa Dyck, or wildlife monitoring volunteer, who came from the USA for three months to help the team with collecting wildlife DNA samples and data processing.

N

As part of her "Forests without Frontiers" project, Nico de Transylvania (international DJ and cultural entrepreneur) and her volunteers assisted our team of locals in planting 15,000 saplings in a heavily degraded area in Nucșoara. They also assisted in planting 120 oak trees at the Cobor Biodiversity Farm.

Nicholas JR White for his amazing photography story telling project about our vision and mission!

R

Proofreading volunteers: Dr. Ruth Rusby - English and Sebastian Kortemeyer - German.

S

Simona Ciurea for her crazy campaign of loaning herself for one day and helping with organizing the photo database.

We would like to thank all of you who donated time, effort, talent or knowledge for conservation!

Education centre and activities

We continue to develop resources for education and focus on the rural communities in our project area, whilst being open to national and international students as well.

Thanks to Temperatio and Pancivis Foundations, our efforts in developing the necessary infrastructure are making good progress.

We have continued to convert an old forestry lodge into an environmental field educational centre in the Dâmbovița Valley, which will provide a basis for school and volunteer programmes. The most time-consuming part was to obtain all the approvals for the building, but we succeeded and started renovation in spring 2019!

The building is carbon-neutral and represents a combination of traditional building materials such as sand and lime for plastering, clay and straw for floor insulation, plus a green roof with native vegetation, and the latest technology in environmental construction, such as fibrous wood panels for thermal insulation, a small CHP (combined heat and power) plant based on vegetable oil, and 49 solar panels covering the whole southern side for electricity. The centre is planned to become functional in September 2020, it can accommodate up to 30 people, and is comprised of seven bedrooms, eight bathrooms, a seminar room, dining room, large veranda, kitchen, an instructor's office, three hallways and a technical room.

Whilst the new centre is being finished, we have continued our educational programmes:

School caravans

We ran several community and school caravans as part of the development of the Natura 2000 Râul Târgului – Argeșel – Râușor management plan. We have visited the schools in four communes and organised interactive environmental classes based on information about the protected area.

Visits to Dâmbovița Valley

We have organised visits to the Dâmbovița Valley for high school students from Pitesti and Ploiesti who joined our reconstruction work planting alder or simply visiting and understanding applied conservation.

Environmental sciences students visit

A group of environmental sciences students from Northeastern University/Boston, USA, came for a practice & study trip in our project area. For a week they were involved in our field work together with our biologists, wildlife experts, forest engineers, biodiversity farm & tourism team.

Invited speakers

We were invited as speakers to the German High School in Brașov for an Environmental workshop to present our forest conservation project.





Awards

Excellence Award

Careers Magazine Gala, December 2019, Excellence Award for Barbara and Christoph Promberger for their personal and professional involvement in the preservation of Romania's natural heritage.

Promoter of the natural environment

Cobor Biodiversity Farm has received, for the second time in a row, the award for "Promoter of the natural environment" at the Făgăraș Community Gala.

Winner

FCC was the winner of the Environment section at the Civil Society Gala for the results of our last two years on forest conservation, ecological restoration, wildlife protection, and environmental education.



Barbara Promberger being awarded the Excellence Award at Careers Magazine Gala © FCC



Dâmbovitza Valley © Jack Wolfskin

Conservation Enterprise Programme

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Introduction

Our proposal for a Făgăraş Mountains National Park represents a major change in the life of people who live in the surroundings of the mountains; it is a change of paradigm.

A large part of the forests would no longer be used as a source of timber, but as a source of clean air, clean water, as a destination for recreation and learning, and through better marketing of non-timber products.

At the moment, the majority of the people in the local communities don't get much money out of the forests in their backyard: most of it is owned by the state, logging companies often operate with workers from other parts of the country, livestock grazing in the alpine meadows with concurrent EU-subsidy payments is often controlled by just a few individuals etc. Nevertheless, locals are most likely to oppose the creation of a National Park unless their economic situation is set to improve from this change.

This, in principle, is common knowledge and nowadays any serious land conservation proposal addresses the development of alternative income streams. The reality, however, is often that one or two rather limited operations are developed, which often struggle to become economically viable beyond the project period, and the actual effect on the majority of local people is limited or even negligible.

For this reason, we felt we need to make this economic component a major part of our project, not just a fig leaf to cover the difficulties faced. Consequently, we got a powerful and knowledgeable partner on board: Conservation Capital has a track record of channelling investments of over US\$ 200m into conservation enterprise programmes around protected areas in over 20 countries.

Throughout the last few years, we have been scanning the situation for green business opportunities and have now started to develop the first business plans and business opportunities. For forest owners, carbon sequestration and ecosystem services could become alternative income streams; for the local non forest-owners, tourism, traditional agriculture and processing of forest fruits, sustainable energy production, forest restoration work, and local craftsmanship (mainly in construction businesses) were identified as the main job creators and income opportunities. Our analysis was based mainly on identifying activities:

- which would help many people,
- which have relatively low investments requirements (to be able to do as much as possible with the money needed), and
- where local knowledge already exists in order to support existing activities.

Elder woman, Nucușara – Argeș County © Georgiana Catlan



Food hub and other preparations

A food hub could address all these problems and thus could support hundreds of small family farms by collecting their products and selling them to the end producer either in specialised shops, with the help of large retailers, or through personalised food baskets delivered to the homes of the consumers.

Given the cultural roots of small-scale agriculture in the villages at the foot of the Făgăraş Mountains, with still thesedays several dozen farming families in every village, we felt that a food hub could be a great opportunity for the conservation enterprise programme.

As a first step, we hired a capable person from Rucăr, who's been working with the smallholders on a database, compiled a detailed analysis of available local produce, certification standards, and interested persons in the programme. In parallel, we reached an agreement with French retailer Auchan, who are willing to support this programme by providing a corner in their regional shops for the food hub to sell these products.

All this information went into a business plan and we hope we can receive funding in 2020 to start implementing this great project.



Current page: Mushrooms © Zahra Eskandari; Opposite page: Local produce from Cobor © Dan Dinu

Food hub is a concept originating from the US with the aim of helping small farms by offering a combination of production, distribution, and marketing services. In most villages within the project area, local small-scale farmers exist, but suffer from the economic environment they operate in, such as

competition through supermarkets, little or no access to the markets, difficulties in complying with certification processes, or a lack of marketing skills and opportunities.

Cobor Biodiversity Farm

Biodiversity as the main farm product sounds like a nice gimmick, but not something you can base a sustainable economy upon. After Markus Jebsen donated the land for the Cobor Biodiversity Farm to FCC, and Temperatio Foundation donated the necessary funds to develop the farm, the project has proven its viability. With its perfect blend of high nature value pasture, biodiversity conservation, organic farming, a country-cosy tourist and business destination, and charismatic Transylvanian Grey Cattle, the breeding facility for the Carpathian shepherd dogs, and the best place for livery horses, this form of biodiversity conservation is more than a gimmick.

Located in rural Transylvania, close to the Făgăraș Mountains, the farm aims to be a model of a self-sustainable green business, proving that agriculture done properly can support the conservation of biodiversity.

Together with lodging in beautifully restored old farmhouses, the farm offers healthy, organic meals with locally sourced ingredients, and outdoor activities exploring the stunning surrounding nature.

Holidays with us are not just a form of simple tourism but also contribute to keep the Transylvanian villages alive, the locals employed and the small producers happy in being able to share what Romania still has at its fullest: tradition, taste, simplicity and freedom.



Guesthouse no. 282, Cobor Biodiversity Farm © Jack Wolfskin

In 2019 we welcomed over 600 guests from all around the world.



Cobor Biodiversity Farm

Continued

Leisure

We hosted mostly families with children, from as far as Brazil or Australia, but also from Europe and Romania, people eager to escape the busy and noisy city life.

Education/study trips

Learning about the conservation efforts of Conservation Carpathia, about the balance between the biodiversity and the profitability of this conservation enterprise. Several groups have spent a few days in Cobor, involving themselves in the farm's activities: Students from Northeastern University Boston, USA; the Woodland Trust, assisted

by Babeş-Bolyai University ecologist, Tibor Hartel, with whom we have made plans to restore the oak wood-pastures in the area, which are quickly disappearing from the European landscapes. And the beneficiaries of the Endangered Landscape Programme funding who had their first study trip to Romania.

Personal development

Meditation programmes like "The Power Within", created by an Austrian coach, who took people out into nature, in order to (re)discover their true selves.

Media trips

We are glad that a farm that "produces" biodiversity is an interesting, different topic for the public. We hosted a crew from the Dutch travel show, "3 op Reis", that came to document the conservation and restoration work, both in the forest project area and in Cobor. IGLOO Media included us in the third edition of their album called "Conace si pensiuni din Transilvania" (Mansions and guest houses from Transylvania). And Mihai Stoica, co-founder of the environmental organization 2Celsius, together with Babeş-Bolyai University entomologist, Laszlo Rakosy, filmed a documentary about our activity.

Flavours & Sounds of Transylvania

We have continued our series of events, with the same philosophy of promoting the village, involving the villagers and creating a chain of village services, from which more local residents, in partnership with the environment, would benefit: from those who make the products, to those who cook the food, the hosts that receive guests and so on.

Organized in partnership with My Transylvania Association, this event allowed our guests to discover the beauty of Cobor village, to taste the traditional delicacies made by the people of Cobor, and listen to old Romanian folk music. Next to farm visits, participants had the opportunity to bake "lichiu", the old Transylvanian pie that accompanies the story of the Saxon villages.

4B: Bike & brunch with beavers and birds

Pastoral landscapes of high natural value featured alongside meadows and forests, Saxon villages and fortified churches, stunning birdlife, hardworking beavers, and a great range of biodiversity. These were the main ingredients for our event organised in partnership with Colinele Transilvaniei. The two guides specialized in cycling and birdwatching, who accompanied the group, talked about all these natural riches and turned the whole day into a substantial experience. Biking trails around Cobor Biodiversity Farm are easily accessible, making it ideal for families and children, although there are also circuits for those who would like something more demanding.



Willow tit © Georgiana Cațan

Transylvanian Grey cattle

The Grey cattle are not just a cultural heritage of Transylvania, the breed is also an important genetic resource for balanced, healthy, and robust cattle. In today's world, where quality is once again gaining a good market share, it can also provide the highest level of good pasture fed beef.

The stock at the Cobor Farm serves conservation purposes as well as contributing to the traditional gene bank. With their unique story, our Grey Cattle herd is the most interesting cattle breed in Europe. It has a high resistance to cattle diseases, excellent meat quality, is exceptional in calf rearing, favourable fertility, vitality and has a high aesthetic value. The significance of the species is increasing nowadays because landscape conservation and organic beef production are gaining importance.

In 2019, we increased our family by 26 more cattle, so we closed the year with a total number of 109, of which two are happy bulls.



The land of horses

In 2016 a horse livery and rehabilitation centre was opened, and in 2019 we had 45 horses roaming freely over 20 ha of securely fenced grassland. The farm provides a safe and healthy environment for our four-legged friends and we are proud of the stories of recovered horses and happy with all our permanent guests: stallions, mares, sports and retired horses.

We have spent the winter holidays with a reduced number of 24 horses, but we look forward to receiving new guests in 2020.



Carpathian shepherd dog breeding programme

We run a breeding programme for the "Carpatin" livestock guarding dogs (Carpathian shepherd), which are an efficient tool in defending livestock against carnivores. All year long, at the farm, you'll find a lot of pups, which are destined to be donated to livestock owners in the villages of the Făgăraş Mountains. Donating dogs is part of the foundation's strategy to prevent damage caused by large carnivores to livestock. The main reason why we chose this breed is to revitalise this native species, which has been increasingly replaced in recent years with dogs that are aggressive towards humans whilst less suitable in keeping bears or wolves at bay.

In 2019 we had a total of eight adult dogs with pedigrees, and 18 puppies were donated to farmers in our project area.



The recreation of ancient wood pastures

The Transylvanian hills had and still have, in many areas, some of the most important high nature value grasslands of Europe. Centuries of extensive, but multiple use of meadows and forests have created a system of wood pastures, which forms one of the richest ecosystems on the continent.

However, grasslands have been degraded due to decades of overgrazing and most of the ancient trees (oaks and high-stem fruit trees - the oldest have been identified as being 900 years old) have been destroyed, either by converting the land into arable land during the communist times, or to gain easy fire-wood. Throughout the last 300 years, almost no trees have been replaced, so these oak pastures have slowly died out. The important elements of the ecosystem still remain in corners and niches of the landscape, but the overall habitat quality has decreased substantially.

One focus of the farm is to recreate ancient wood pastures. In 2018,

the Grey Cattle were re-introduced to the farm and a biodiversity conservation and management plan was established. The first steps towards this objective were taken in April 2019, when we started searching for regeneration spots in the area with old oak trees and managed to take out 85 oak saplings from four spots and replant them on the Cobor pastures. Due to the very dry autumn, only about 20% survived up until early winter.

We also planted an additional 100 high stem local fruit trees on the horse pastures, fencing them off and protecting them with hawthorn and rosehips. The fruit trees all survived until early winter, so our effort was worth it!

Along the fences we planted additional 100 individual hawthorn and rosehip plants to complement the green fence we started in 2018. The survival rate is 90%, so we hope we will soon have a nice living fence all around the horse pasture.



Wildlife hides

2019 was a successful year for the FCC conservation enterprise programme, in general, and the wildlife hides network, in particular.

Our eco-friendly cabins located in the Făgăraş Mountains have hosted nature enthusiasts from around the world, including solo travellers, adventurous couples, families with children, environmentalists, student groups to business partners, journalists and filming crews. Our guests had the opportunity to see wild animals roaming around free in their natural habitat, understand the importance of human - wildlife coexistence and learn more about the Foundation's conservation projects.

The international exposure, the diversified ecotourism programmes, the launch of our new travel website Travel Carpathia, as well as the knowledge, care and passion of our wildlife-specialised guides, all culminated in an increase of nearly 500% in terms of guests hosted at our wildlife hides.

Wilderness camp

We decided to develop a wilderness camp on Poiana Tamas, a 27-hectare subalpine meadow between 1400 and 1600 m altitude in the Dâmbovită Valley. The place has an old, abandoned shepherd hut and could become an ideal place for nature and meditation retreats, which we want to develop and encourage in the years to come. The 2019 pilot programme "Presence in the wild" - in cooperation with Way of Nature (Austrian tour operator) - was created to connect people with nature and wildlife within the Făgăraş Mountains. For the next few years, we plan to develop a tented camp on Poiana Tamas and use it both as a corporate retreat and for individual stays.

Biosphere Expeditions

The citizen science travel programme organised by Biosphere Expeditions proved to be an exhausting, but interesting first experience for our team. 20 people from Europe and USA with no scientific environmental background in conservation came to experience conservation in action. Unfortunately, Biosphere Expeditions was not the organisation we had it expected to be and didn't pay us any of the costs incurred for the two groups, so we have discontinued the cooperation with them and will develop our own eco-volunteer programme.

Tourism fairs

As part of our main marketing strategy we aimed to promote our ecotourism programmes both on a national and international level.

Therefore, we participated in The Transylvanian Tourism Fair, which took place in Braşov. This was a good opportunity to address ourselves to the domestic tourism market and liaise with other incoming tour operators. In autumn, we were invited to Brussels to promote Foundation Conservation Carpathia and its conservation enterprise programme to the Romanian expats and Belgium residents, who showed a specific interest towards our "conservation journeys" vs. "mass-tourism offers".

New partnerships

Throughout 2019, we developed a new partnership with the outdoor equipment producer Jack Wolfskin and the largest German speaking hiking travel agency Alpenschule Innsbruck. This cooperation led to the creation of the "Wolftrail", a unique adventure tour, which has raised great interest amongst European travellers. The Wolftrail is based upon small groups of up to 6 persons with medium hiking experience, and will explore the wild forests and mountains of FCC's project area. These trips will be offered beginning in 2020 and the goal is to have 20 departures throughout the summer season.

By strengthening the relationships with the existing travel partners and identifying new cooperation opportunities, by constantly improving our ecotourism programmes and by working closely with the local communities (acquiring local products, using local services, etc.), we strive to create a sustainable green economy as a model not only for the Făgăraş Mountains but also for other parts of the country.





 Panoramic view of Iezer Mountains © Daniel Mirlea





 Panoramic view of Dâmbovița Valley © Georgiana Cațan





Forest moss © Jack Wolfskin

Financial report

Income sources
134

Expenses
136

Income sources

All income represents funds received as general support or for a specific project, to support Carpathia’s mission and its activities for nature and people.

Private trusts and Foundations	
Wyss Foundation	
Endangered Landscapes Programme	
Oak Foundation	
Frankfurt Zoological Society	
The European Nature Trust	
Foresta Futura Foundation	
Mossy Earth	
Forests Without Frontiers	
Total donations	8,716,351 €

Public funding	
EU LIFE11/NAT/RO/823 (2012-2018) “Ecological Restoration in Dâmbovița Valley, Făgăraș Mountains”	559,521 €
EU LIFE18 NAT/RO/001082 (2019 - 2024) “Creation of a Wilderness Reserve in the Southern Carpathian Mountains”	2,813,694 €
Compensation payments for protected forests	376,147 €
POIM (Management Plan for Natura 2000 site Râul Târgului - Argeșel - Râușor)	88,689 €
Total donations	3,838,051 €

Individuals and other private donations	
Montaigne Long Now Funding S.A.	
Other private donations (on-line donations, public sport events like Bikeathon Făgăraș, Brașov Heroes, etc)	
Total donations	164,535 €



Corporations	
Ursus Breweries	10,000 €
Jack Wolfskin	37,522 €
MedLife	16,749 €
Other corporate contributions (B&B Collection, Decorio Plus, RTC Proffice, Madex (Temad), Lisec, Schneider Electric, Servelect, etc.)	38,791 €
Total donations	103,062 €

Other income	
Income from pasture rent, agro subsidies, timber sale, land rent, forest guarding fees etc.	
Total income	618,123 €

Total income sources	13,440,122 €
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Income vs. expenses
Chart 5



Expenses

As a significant part of the income was received near the end of 2019 (such as EU LIFE18 and some part of funds for land purchase), the amounts will be spent and reported in the next year (2020).



Investments	
Renovation of Richita Cabin and development of an educational field centre	307,994 €
Field infrastructure and equipment	133,625 €
Car fleet	63,807 €
IT Infrastructure, office furniture & equipment	42,551 €
Land purchase	
Land purchase	6,281,443 €
Operational costs	
Programme costs (includes funds spent for activities directly linked to our mission (wildlife monitoring, forest restoration, field consumables, Human Dimensions research, etc.)	718,198 €
Salaries (includes the employer’s contribution to the State budget – approx. 580,000 €)	1,419,675 €
General and administrative costs (includes financial, administrative, legal, consulting, IT, HR, audit and other costs needed for organizational development)	254,575 €
Non-operational costs (includes various taxes and fees)	175,274 €
Partner Payment ELP and LIFE (share of expenses of partners for ELP and LIFE projects)	275,560 €
Total expenses	
9,672,702 €	

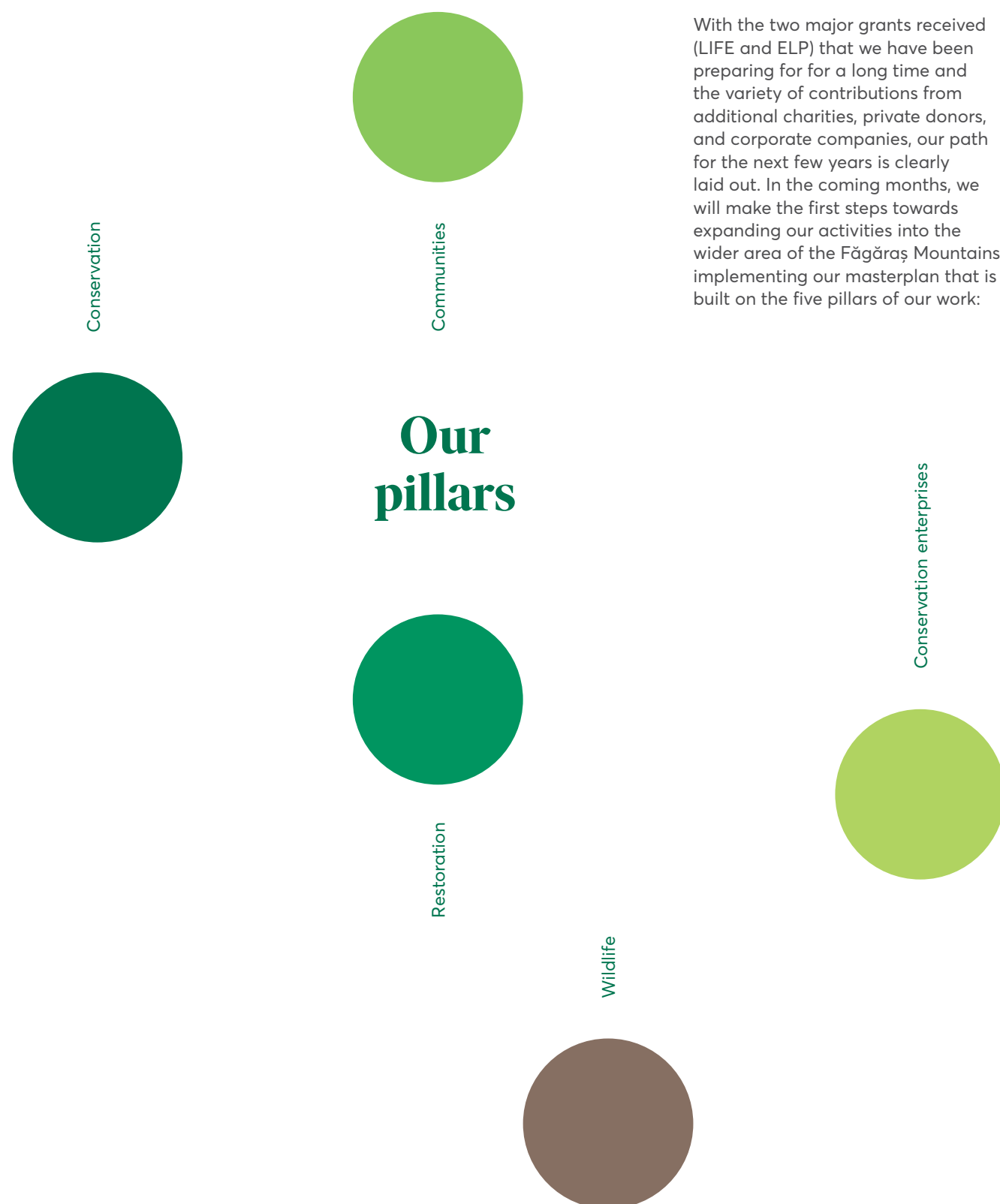
Plans for 2020

Next steps

140

Next steps

With the two major grants received (LIFE and ELP) that we have been preparing for for a long time and the variety of contributions from additional charities, private donors, and corporate companies, our path for the next few years is clearly laid out. In the coming months, we will make the first steps towards expanding our activities into the wider area of the Făgăraș Mountains, implementing our masterplan that is built on the five pillars of our work:



Land conservation

We will expand the land acquisition further to the west in the Făgăraș Mountains and, based on availability, are aiming to purchase 3-5,000 ha of forests and alpine pastures under private ownership. This year we will also launch the land compensation programme, a private scheme that will allow private land owners, who do not want to sell their forests, to become active players in conservation without experiencing economic losses. In the first phase we will showcase a couple of examples, such as how long-term financing contracts can work for owners that want to protect their forests with high nature value.

Restoration of degraded eco-systems

Within FCC we have obtained vast experience in habitat restoration over the past seven years and we will continue each year with the replanting of at least 100 ha of clear-cuts, the conversion of spruce monoculture into more natural and climate resilient stands, and the restoration of riparian forests so they can fulfil their multiple ecological functions. For the first time this year, we will also expand into the alpine areas to restore degraded natural shrublands.

Wildlife conservation and management

We are looking forward to a very exciting year for wildlife: with the release of the first bison into the wild and the come-back of beavers, two keystone species will return to the Southern Făgăraș Mountains and we will carefully monitor how they will impact the dynamics of the forests and water ecosystems for

the benefit of biodiversity. Together with specialists, we will also embark on improving the conditions for the majestic Golden Eagle, resident but scarce in the Făgăraș Mountains. Another novelty we strongly believe in is the establishment of a participatory Wildlife Management Board, with representatives from adjacent town halls, local farmers and landowners, to take part in wildlife management decisions that directly affect damage prevention, control and compensation.

Community outreach and communication

We will intensify our relation and cooperation with the local communities, including also the ones where we have not yet been active before, for example by organising cultural events like the Făgăraș Fest, and facilitating the exchange of experiences of community representatives with other protected areas. In the first months we will also launch a coffee table book about the natural and cultural richness of the Făgăraș Mountains and its surrounding villages. A new era in our education programme will start with the opening of the Richita Environmental Field Education Centre, which will soon host school classes, volunteers, and students interested in conservation.

Conservation enterprise development

Since we spent the last year preparing the grounds, we look forward to further develop the conservation enterprise programme, especially the launch of the first food hub in the area, a programme, which connects small local producers with local or regional buyers. We will further invest in building tourism

infrastructure, help entrepreneurs to start tourism business and increase programme offers targeting wildlife and nature experiences. The Cobor Biodiversity Farm will of course remain the figurehead of our programme and keep exploring new ideas, like the re-introduction of modern horse-drawn machinery for daily farm work.

**Now, these were our plans
until the COVID-19 pandemic hit the
entire world and left nobody unaffected.
At the moment, the whole dimension
of this crisis is hard to grasp, and it is
impossible to predict when everything
will go back to normal, or how this new
normality will look like.**

**What is certain though, is that nature and
the human health are strongly connected
and that protecting nature will be crucial
to prevent future crisis situations,
whether in the form of pandemics or
climate change.**



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