

Annual Report 2022

FOUNDATION CONSERVATION CARPATHIA

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Foreword

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



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2022 will remain in our common memory as a turning point in time, when decades of peace in Europe ended abruptly with Russia's unjustified invasion into Ukraine. After 24th February, we imagined Russian troops would arrive at the Romanian border within days and the question was rather, what would happen next. Where we had seen the timber mafia as the main obstacle for our attempts to create the Făgăraș National Park, we were suddenly caught in major international politics and wondered whether we would have to abandon everything within days. Thanks to the bravery of the Ukrainian people this scenario hasn't come true and we feel proud that, together with Frankfurt Zoological Society and our generous network of donors, we could at least help hundreds and thousands of refugees, who sought shelter in the National Parks, with food, clothing, equipment and a safe roof over their heads. It was an important sign to realise once again that National Parks are not just important for biodiversity, but that people also consider places of pristine nature as oases of shelter and security. Over the next pages

you will read about a number of important achievements which we made in 2022: a record number of trees planted in a single year, the take-over of a new hunting concession in the south-central Făgăraș Mountains, 2,000 media appearances about our activities in national and international media, the arrival of the first bison in the Nucșoara area, or the registration of TravelCarpathia as our new tourism company. Next to these, the development of a relationship with Bavarian Forest National Park was definitely one of the highlights of 2022. In late March, we invited 15 mayors and local councillors to a study trip into this oldest and largest German National Park, with the goal to see first-hand how a National Park with adequate infrastructure and international standards can help in protecting biodiversity and, at the same time, become the driver for sustainable development in the villages around. In a round of discussion after a week of inspiration, we asked the mayors and councillors what they thought of the experience. Their unanimous response was: "If this is what a National Park means, we definitely want to have a National

Park in the Făgăraș Mountains." The story didn't end here, the leading team of the Bavarian Forest National Park administration came to visit us in June and after touring through the southeastern Făgăraș Mountains they couldn't understand how such a stunning area is not yet a National Park. In October, during a second visit with a group of Romanian journalists, we signed a collaboration agreement between our Foundation and the National Park administration. What an honour for us, who are 'just' an initiative, a project, or a vision, to be recognised as a partner by the oldest, largest, and probably best-known National Park of Germany. In 2023, this new partnership will be filled with life with a good handful of mutual visits of technical staff to learn from each other, with mayors from the Bavarian Forest visiting the Făgăraș Mountains, or with the first group of school kids from the villages around the Făgăraș Mountains spending a couple of days in the wilderness camp at Falkenstein.

Barbara Promberger-Fuerpass

Executive Director

Christoph Promberger

Executive Director



Conservation

Introduction

LIFE CARPATHIA/Endangered Landscapes Programme

CARPATHIA Forest Carbon Project

Forest watch and management

Leaota

Introduction

2021-2030 has been proclaimed the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration – the decade that has been identified by scientists as the last chance to prevent catastrophic climate change if we take action to halt degradation and restore ecosystems. In December 2022, representatives from 188 governments gathered in Montreal, Canada, at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15) to determine a global biodiversity framework as a global strategy for jointly safeguarding nature and securing our common future. After long negotiations, the conference ended with what is considered to be a landmark agreement: with concrete measures to halt biodiversity loss and clear targets to restore ecosystems, including the protection

of 30 percent of the planet by 2030 (which is very much in line with the EU's Biodiversity Strategy as well). The framework also contains for the first time proposals for unlocking financing for nature-based solutions and adequately increasing financial support from developed to developing countries. While this is fantastic news, it is way too early to cheer. Looking back over the past 20 years, despite an increase in policies and agreements, biodiversity further declined and most targets have not been fulfilled. Implementation is now key, more than ever. Governments and ministries will need to take urgent actions across all sectors, but it will be up to all of us from the civil society to corporates, financiers, researchers and local communities

to implement nature-based solutions and to put nature at the core of all decision-making, globally. At Foundation Conservation Carpathia we continue to take this responsibility seriously, as a restoration and rewilding flagship, hoping to make this change in one of Europe's most outstanding mountain landscapes, the Făgăraș Mountains.

We cannot live without nature and biodiversity. Nature provides the very essence of life. Technology cannot replace the trees, the soil, the water, and the species that teem in them. We have no other world to flee to. When the web of life falls, we fall with it.

Inger Anderson, Under-Secretary-General of the UN and Executive Director of UNEP

LIFE CARPATHIA/ Endangered Landscapes Programme

 © Mihai Zotta



As we wrap up year four of the Endangered Landscapes Programme (ELP) project and year three of the LIFE project funded by the European Commission, we're proud to report that we've made significant progress towards our masterplan goals. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the geopolitical situation at the borders, our team has emerged stronger and more motivated than ever.

Our efforts to **protect forests and pastures** have continued unabated, with the purchase of more land for restoration and full protection. But perhaps our most exciting achievement this year was the restoration of clear-cut areas, where we have restored 174 hectares of degraded areas to their full capacity and we exceeded our ELP project target of 350 hectares. We also restored the forest floor along over 5 km of logging tracks by filling up ravines with wooden debris, gravel and soil from the embankments along the tracks.

In addition, we've been hard at work **replanting in artificial spruce forests** to convert these artificial

monocultures slowly back to a mixed and healthy mountain forest. Our restoration teams converted 116 hectares this year, bringing the total to 236 hectares, by creating pockets of light and planting deciduous species in these areas to restore the natural, strong and biodiverse mixed forest. It's an ongoing effort, but we're determined to return these forests to their natural state.

Another activity in which we invest a lot of work and effort is the **restoration of the alluvial forests** along the mountain streams with their original alder vegetation in the southern Făgăraș Mountains, and while removing invasive alien species from the valley vegetation. It's a challenging task, but we're committed to doing it every year along 40 km of the mountain streams. And we're proud to say that we've kept our word since 2020.

Our **rapid intervention** teams have been responding day and night to wildlife emergencies whenever called by locals. We're glad that people in local communities turn to us for help with electric fences or Carpathian Shepherd dogs and don't put themselves in danger by making their own decisions to chase the wildlife away.



 © Dan Dinu

And our efforts in **wildlife reintroduction** are paying off. In the acclimatisation areas of Rucăr, Lerești, and Nucșoara, we welcomed not just four new bison but also six adorable cubs. At the same time, our colleagues managed to capture 22 beavers from the upper Olt basin and relocate them to the north of Argeș county. These two species represent a significant step toward restoring the natural richness of the Făgăraș Mountains.

But our mission goes beyond protecting wildlife. We're committed to building a sustainable, green economy that benefits both the environment and local communities.

The support we have given to **local communities** over the past year has taken many forms. Whether we are talking about assistance to entrepreneurs to develop their green businesses (like Local Gastronomic Points) or to start a new business based on conservation, or whether our activities use local labour, products and services, it is our conviction that the Făgăraș Mountains can generate a 'green' economy while preserving their natural values.



LIFE CARPATHIA/Endangered Landscapes Programme

Continued



© George Soare



We're proud to be a part of the life of the localities we serve, contributing to the **Development Strategy** of three communes and investing in local labour, products and services. We have invested time and effort in organising a new edition of the annual **Făgăraș Fest**, where we showcase local traditions and customs in a modern setting. This year 24 producers participated and 2,500 people visited us.

We have organised and accompanied representatives of local authorities on study trips to national parks in Europe, such as the Bavarian Forests in Germany or Hohe Tauern in Austria, to learn about the benefits and challenges of a model national park.

Through our project partner we continued the **educational programme** with 543 children from nine schools in Sibiu County and trained teachers in biodiversity conservation. We have already exceeded the number of pupils proposed in the project, but the increased interest of the children makes us continue.

Our work hasn't gone unnoticed, either. We've been **transparent and communicative** about our activities, sharing updates through the national press and our Ambassadors, but also through the social accounts we manage: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn. And the response has been overwhelmingly positive, reminding us that we're on the right track.

So, as we look back on another year of hard work and progress, we're more committed than ever to our mission. With your support, we can continue to protect the natural beauty of the Făgăraș Mountains for generations to come.



© Călin Șerban



Semi-virgin forest in Bunea Valley © Daniel Ungureanu



CARPATHIA Forest Carbon Project

According to an assessment, the full protection of CARPATHIA's forests is responsible for a total of over 50,000 tonnes of CO₂ per year that are stored in addition to those stored in a scenario in which the legally allowed annual harvest rate would be logged. This additional amount of carbon can be accredited and traded on the international voluntary carbon market to provide conservation funding. Together with our consulting partner Forliance, we have developed throughout 2022 the CARPATHIA Forest Carbon Project to obtain such tradeable carbon credits through the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS), the world's most widely used greenhouse gas (GHG) crediting programme. Developing such a project is a long and time-consuming process, especially since we are aiming to also obtain Climate, Community and Biodiversity (CCB) Standard accreditation, an assurance that a given project is delivering tangible climate, community and biodiversity benefits.

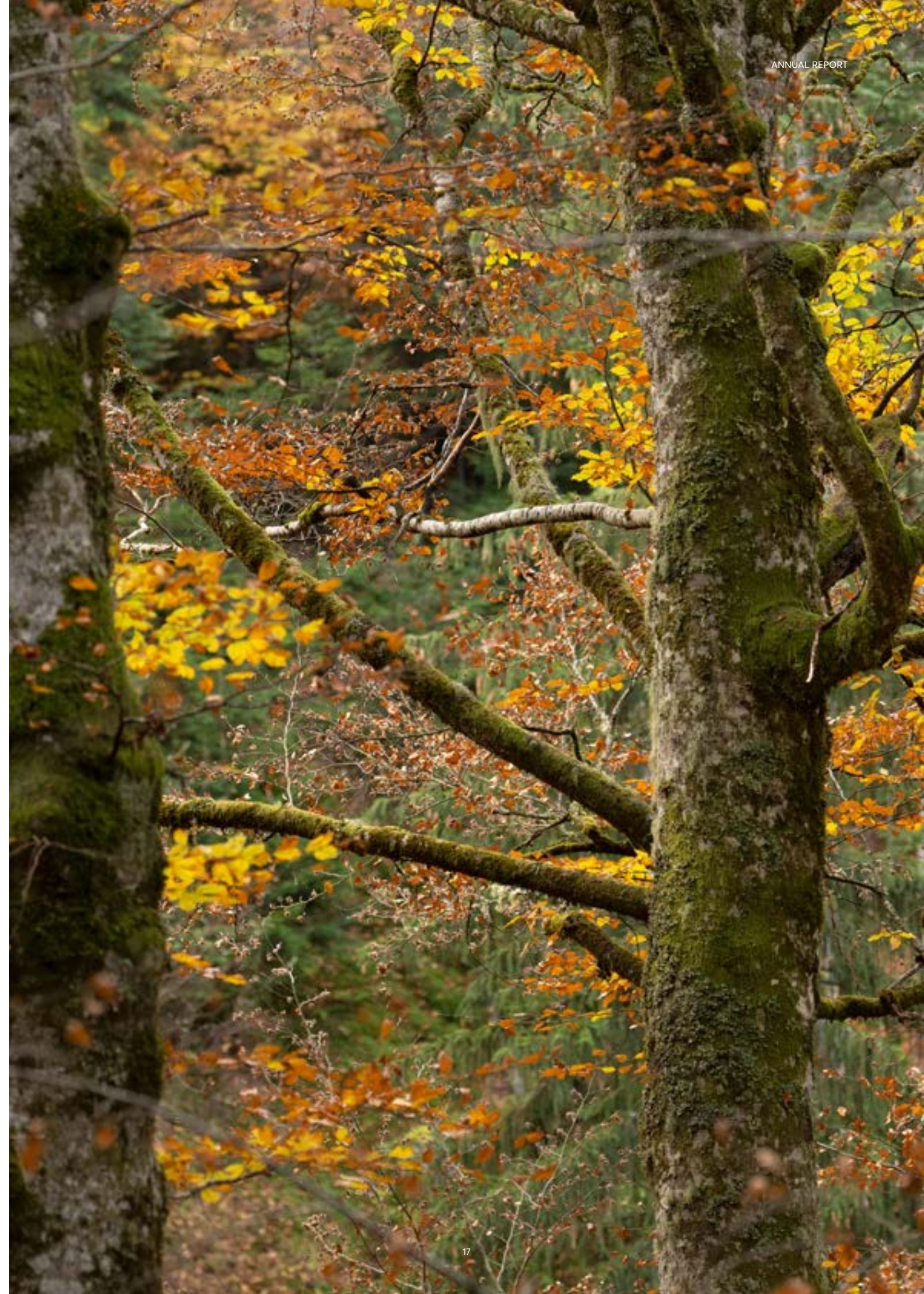
Standards verify that the emission reductions generated by the projects

are actually occurring and therefore have developed a set of rules, requirements and administrative systems for accounting, quantifying, monitoring, reporting, verifying, certifying and registering carbon projects. This provides sellers of credits with quality assurance certification and offset buyers with greater transparency and confidence in the credibility and integrity of certified projects. In 2022, we have prepared all the necessary documentation for validation and verification and the project is now registered and listed. We have worked on our long-term monitoring plans, including carbon stocks, biodiversity, economic and social indicators, as this is a commitment for the next 40 years. During the final stage we are awaiting the independent audit which has to precede the final accreditation and issuance of the carbon credits. According to our timeline, we will be able to trade the first CARPATHIA carbon credits on the voluntary market in the second half of 2023.

While the fact that allowing these forests to grow to their full ecological and carbon storing potential and as such acting as the most immediate and cost-effective nature-based solutions to fight climate change and the loss of biodiversity is reason enough, we would like to demonstrate with this forest carbon project that the protection of nature and forests specifically, can also generate finance. Carbon credits have a huge potential as a viable alternative income source for private forest owners, local communities and landowners' associations while at the same time protecting valuable forest habitat.



 Current page: Arefu commune, foothills of the Făgăraș Mountains ©Dan Dinu; Opposite page: © Zoltán Nagy



 Virgin forest © Daniel Ungureanu

QUICK FACTS

- Carbon Storage: full protection of CARPATHIA's forests results in an additional storage of over 50,000 tonnes of CO₂ annually compared to the legally allowed annual harvest rate scenario.
- Tradeable Carbon Credits: tradeable carbon credits through the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS), the world's most widely used greenhouse gas crediting programme.
- Long-Term Monitoring: comprehensive monitoring plans in place to track carbon stocks, biodiversity, economic and social indicators over the next 40 years.
- Timeline: CARPATHIA carbon credits are expected to be available for trading on the voluntary market in the second half of 2023.
- Nature-Based Solutions: protecting forests offers immediate and cost-effective nature-based solutions to combat climate change and biodiversity loss.
- Alternative Income Source: carbon credits provide potential financial benefits for private forest owners, local communities and landowners' associations, while preserving valuable forest habitat.

Forest watch and management

At the Carpathia Forestry Association (our private Forest Service), we are proud to manage a total of 24,485 hectares of forests, spread across 15 forest districts, ranging in size from 330 to 2,529 hectares. Our team of 15 dedicated rangers work tirelessly to protect and preserve these valuable forests for generations to come.

Some of the land areas present higher risks of wood theft than others, and we have designated four of our districts as high-risk areas for wood theft. Despite our best efforts, 39 cubic metres of illegal felling occurred in 2022, with 28 cubic metres being reported as illegal and 3 cubic metres being found at the scene. Unfortunately, 8 cubic metres were not discovered in time by our rangers. However, we remain committed to protecting our forests and have been monitoring each forestry district twice a year. Two of our rangers have even been appointed as zonal coordinators, while another oversees general coordination for forest protection and health monitoring activities. Compared to previous years, the level of illegal logging is clearly declining, from a maximum of about 250-300 m³ 5-6 years ago to 39 m³ in 2022, even though the area

under our watch has increased. Our commitment to sustainability also extends to phytosanitary protection and compliance with the latest legislation. In 2022, we carried out a minimum of non-invasive preventive actions required by the law to ensure the health and longevity of our forests. From this point of view, we are still monitoring the areas where the principle of non-intervention was applied and no windthrown trees were extracted in 2020 and 2021.

We are also proud to have completed four forest management plans in 2022, covering a surface of over 8,000 hectares.



QUICK FACTS

- Forest watch: 24,485 hectares managed across 15 forest districts.
- Rangers: a team of 15 dedicated forest rangers.
- High-Risk areas: four districts designated as high-risk for wood theft.
- Monitoring: forest districts are monitored on a daily basis.
- Progress: the level of illegal logging has decreased, from 250 - 300 cubic metres to 39 cubic metres, even the area under our watch has increased.



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 Foundation Conservation Carpathia according to the CARPATHIA Masterplan, vision/mission and main objectives.

Leaota Mountain is a rather lesser-known mountain range to the southeast of the Făgăraș Mountains, with lower altitudes (up to 2,133 m), but an amazing biodiversity: several studies executed by expert teams show that Leaota is actually by no means inferior from a conservation point of view to neighbouring Piatra Craiului National Park with its abundance of autochthonous (endemic) species.

Since 2012, we have purchased, through our partner organisations Wildland and Romfor, 8,600 ha of forests and alpine grasslands for full protection and with the goal of creating a Leaota National Park.

We joined a team of scientists in the field from Pitești University and Argeș County Museum, focused on the

study and monitoring of birds. 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 Foundation Conservation Carpathia according to the CARPATHIA Masterplan, vision/mission and main objectives.

We continued the survey and removal of invasive alien plant species. The survey confirmed the presence of four IAS (Invasive Alien Plant Species) in alder corridors, various riparian (riverbank) habitat types and forest edges: Daisy Fleabane (*Erigeron annuus ssp. strigosus*), Canadian Horseweed (*Conyza canadensis*) and Spiny Cocklebur (*Xanthium orientale ssp. italicum*). During the summer, we removed the invasive alien plant species along 2 km of the Bădenilor Valley, manually or with the help of mechanical tools such as a hoe, either by uprooting or by cutting them.

In 2022, we continued the long-term monitoring scheme of large carnivore populations by collecting non-invasive sampling for genetic analyses and camera traps.

We continued the reintroduction programme of beavers (*Castor fiber*) to the western side of Leaota to accelerate re-wilding processes in the area. This year, we released four groups of beavers in the Tinișoare and Coman Valleys.

We continued to monitor the water parameters, along two rivers suitable for beavers: Tinișoare, Coman and Chiliei valleys. For each sampling station we measured the pH, oxygen, conductivity and temperature in the field. We collected water and

sediment samples for chemistry analyses, environmental DNA for molecular taxonomy, diatoms and macroinvertebrates for further identification. The aim of the monitoring is to identify the dynamics of the selected parameters and bioindicators in order to assess the ecological status of the rivers and to identify the changes that may occur after the beavers' reintroduction.

We continued the official partnerships, signed in the previous year, between Foundation Conservation Carpathia and the village halls of Moroieni, Runcu and Stoenеști. We focused on improving of the quality of life of the local people through the environmental and economic benefits that will be generated by the protection of nature in the Leaota Mountains area.

This year we started the renovation of the Leaota Mountain Chalet. The purpose of the renovation is to make the chalet functional, but also to maintain the traditional local architectural style and to promote the use of traditional materials. Traditional-style and old mountain chalets, shelters and sheepfolds are part of the national heritage only in the minds and hearts of the mountain lovers. Otherwise, we do not find them on any list of historical monuments and many of these historical buildings are abandoned or modified beyond recognition. There is no protection system for historic lodges at the national level. In order to renovate the Leaota Chalet, preserving all the traditional features, we started a collaboration with the 'Ambulance for monuments' initiative, a project initiated by the Monumentum Association and supported by The Prince's Foundation, an organisation chaired

by His Majesty King Charles III.

In 2022, we started to repair the roof. The original covering system was restored under the supervision of an architect who guided the team during the three weeks on the site. In addition to the basic operations, the decorative metal sheet elements were recovered and re-fitted to the corners of the roof. Also, the wooden support of these sheet metal elements was replaced, and was carved according to the original design. A survey of the façades and the cladding was also carried out by an architect. We carried the construction materials up with two tractors, which barely managed to climb the bumpy and flooded dirt road.

We called on three carpenters in the area, specialized in making traditional wooden tiles, who agreed to isolate themselves with us for three weeks to finalise the roof renovation. In addition to the Foundation Conservation Carpathia team, more than 30 volunteers attended to this activity (students from the Faculty of Architecture or regular people passionate about mountains and the restoration of monuments).

In 2022, we were able to support the community in continuing local traditional events; providing educational programmes in the Richita Field Education Centre (more than 150 children from Runcu, Stoenеști, Moroieni and Cetățeni villages attended free wilderness education camps at Richita Field Education Centre) and promoting this area for the general public through our social media activity and attending various events.







© Liviu Ungureanu

QUICK FACTS

- Land acquisition: 8,600 hectares of forests and alpine meadows purchased for full protection in Leaota.
- Conservation activities: enforced conservation activities according to the conservation and restoration plan.
- Bird and plant monitoring: working with scientists to study and monitor protected bird and plant species.
- Invasive alien plant species: surveyed and removed invasive species along 2 km of the Bădenilor Valley.
- Large carnivore monitoring: conducted long-term monitoring of large carnivore populations using genetic analysis and camera traps.
- Beaver reintroduction: releasing 4 groups of beavers in the Tinișoare and Coman valleys to accelerate the rewilding process.
- Water monitoring: monitored water parameters in rivers suitable for beavers to assess ecological status and changes.
- Partnerships: creating partnerships with local village town-halls to improve quality of life and environmental benefits.
- Chalet renovation: start the renovation of Leoata Mountain Chalet, preserving the traditional architectural style.
- Local communities: supporting local traditional events, providing educational programmes and promoting the area through social media.

Ecological restoration

Objectives and philosophy of FCC's restoration programme

Tree nurseries and greenhouses

Restoration of clear-cuts

Restoration of logging tracks

Spruce monocultures conversion

Alpine pasture restoration

Removing the invasive alien plant species along river valleys

Monitoring of the impact of the habitats restoration

Monitoring of impact of European bison on vegetation structure

Objectives and philosophy of FCC's restoration programme

Following the ecological restoration work we have been doing for several years, we have drawn some conclusions, beyond the fact that the replanting of logged areas is the legal obligation of forest owners.

We are not, and will never be, better specialists than nature itself; ecological restoration work must imitate as closely as possible the structure, natural processes and evolutionary trends of natural habitats.

Whether we are talking about forests on mountainsides, riverbank alder galleries or the restoration of alpine shrub habitats, the objectives are the same, namely to contribute to and speed up the return of the natural habitats that existed in these areas or to create habitats identical to natural ones.

Restoration of forest or sub-alpine habitats is only necessary where human interventions have led to severe changes in seasonal conditions, in conjunction with changes in microclimate and water regime accentuated by the general climate change we are currently experiencing.



Tree nurseries and greenhouses

We have had a productive year in our nurseries, with a continuous stream of activities resulting in the production of 276,110 forest saplings for use in our reforestation programme. Our team of four dedicated workers, supplemented by day labourers from local communities during peak periods, has worked tirelessly to make this possible.

The distribution of saplings produced by species is illustrated in the graph below:



 Distribution of saplings produced

We have:

Established new plantations in the nurseries during both spring and autumn, covering

3,500 square metres

through a combination of transplanting saplings produced in the greenhouses and direct seeding.

As a result, we anticipate that the newly cultivated area will yield a total of

222,000 saplings

suitable for planting in 2-3 years, including species such as spruce, mountain ash, beech, juniper, and fir

Additionally, we are proud to have cultivated

15,000 fir saplings

despite it being the slowest growing species, which will be ready for planting in 5 years' time.

The proportion of species from the tree nurseries in 2022 is illustrated below:



© Viorel Ganci

Restoration of clear-cuts

Our restoration efforts in 2022 proved a tremendous success, with a total of 168.22 hectares of land planted in a restored area of over 200 hectares. This area had an average altitude of more than 1,500 meters and a maximum altitude of 1,750 meters.

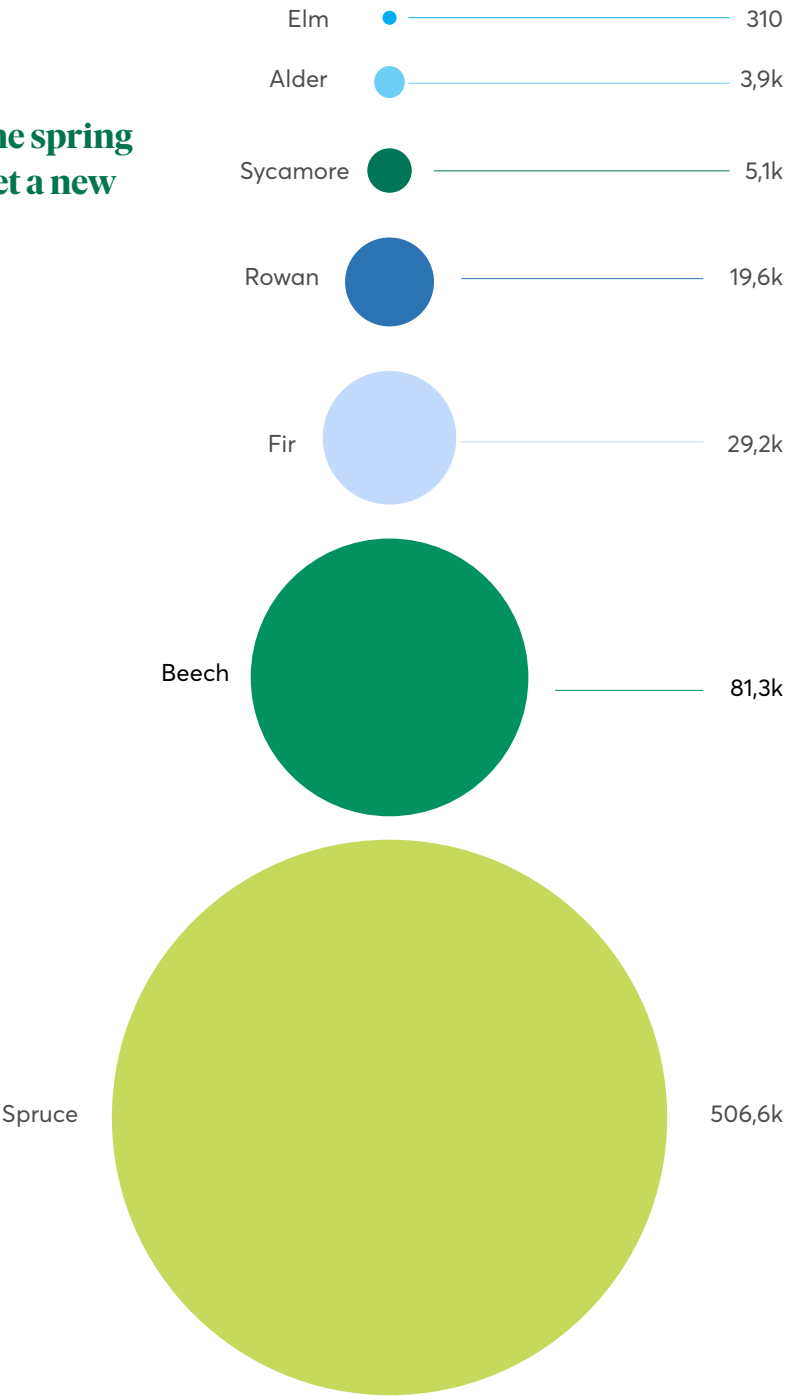
The planting of 118 hectares in the spring and 50 hectares in the autumn set a new record for Carpathia.

Our team, consisting of over 60 workers, a local specialist company, Carpathia staff, rangers, and technical personnel, worked tirelessly to ensure this achievement.

The planting process began in mid-April, with favourable spring conditions facilitating replanting until late May in five restoration sites. Additionally, the autumn season proved to be a pleasant surprise, enabling us to plant an additional 50 hectares at six different sites.

The distribution of planted saplings is illustrated in the following graph:

 **Distribution of planted saplings**



Restoration of logging tracks

In 2022, our focus was on addressing the erosion and degradation caused by logging tracks, which pose a significant threat to the fragile ecosystem. Our comprehensive assessment in 2020 revealed erosion along 32 km of logging tracks. The severity varied, with average ditch depths ranging from 0.7 to 2 metres.

We successfully covered and levelled a significant section of 4.78 km of eroded logging tracks with our mini excavators.



 © Angela Boghiu





We have made significant strides in our mission to restore and rehabilitate the ecological integrity of the Făgăraș Mountains. We are delighted to share that, to date, we have successfully repaired an impressive total of 34.26 km of former logging roads. This remarkable achievement spans across eight ecological restoration sites within the region.

Our dedicated team has worked tirelessly to reverse the adverse impacts caused by the presence of these roads, diligently repairing and revitalizing the affected areas. In the coming years, we will continue our work to restore the remaining eroded tracks.

Spruce monocultures conversion

The conversion of spruce monocultures to more natural mixed forests is an important component of our restoration activities.

In 2022, we made significant progress in restoring the natural forest type in a 45-year-old spruce plantation. We intervened across 20 hectares of the area. Our efforts included removing spruce trees and create canopy openings to let in light and plant deciduous species, to bring back the mixed forest, characteristic of the natural forest type. We planted native species that existed before the monoculture: fir, beech and sycamore.

Pasture restoration

We extended our work of the conversion of spruce monocultures to three mountain pastures that were once used for sheep grazing.

We removed invasive spruce seedlings that were threatening to reduce the biodiversity of the pastures. Here, the spruce seedlings had overtaken a wide range of herbaceous plants. They were disappearing and the area was being transformed into dense spruce forests. We cleared a total of 11 hectares on Foundation land and a further 15 hectares on Wildland land.

The survival of these grasslands for herbivorous wildlife, including the recent arrival of bison, was crucial. Such small interventions are necessary to restore the balance between the biodiverse forest and grassland and the biodiverse lowland, which has been disturbed by human activity, until this balance is restored on an evolutionary basis.

Alpine pasture restoration

Our efforts to restore alpine shrubs in 2022 have included a revised plan that aims to reduce the impact on traditional pastures. We focused on restoring shrub habitats in areas where the natural evolutionary path was already moving in this direction. This was due to land abandonment and the reduction of grazing animals.

To achieve this goal, we planted a first batch of 1,000 juniper seedlings in the Zârna area. This area is located at an altitude of about 1,900 metres. This was done using our own resources, including our team of rangers. At the same time, we have taken steps to preserve the traditional Zârna sheepfold. We

plan to use it as accommodation for workers and later as a tourist attraction.

In the autumn of 2022, we harvested 50 kg of pinecones and 1.2 kg of seeds were processed and used in our greenhouses. These efforts represent a significant achievement in restoring the alpine shrubs while ensuring sustainable land use practices.



Removing the invasive alien plant species along river valleys

In 2022, we continued our efforts to eradicate invasive plant species along the main tributaries of the Dâmbovița and Argeș rivers. From May to September, we removed invasive species along 31.5 km manually or with mechanical tools. This activity involved a high number of people (FCC employees and volunteers). This year, our focus was on eradicating annual or biannual alien species, such as daisy fleabane (*Erigeron annuus ssp. strigosus*) and Canadian horsetweed (*Conyza canadensis*) and preventing the expansion of Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*). This is one of the most dangerous alien invasive species, which must not be allowed

to extend up the river valleys. To monitor our progress, we used fixed-point photography and vegetation surveys at 52 monitoring points, located both in the restoration areas and in IAS-free reference areas. We're happy to report a significant decrease in invasive species abundance and cover in the monitoring plots.



Monitoring the impact of habitats restoration

Landscape restoration is a long-term process, but we're tracking it with indicators that detect changes and responses to our measures. We focus on understory vegetation, specialist bird species, and terrestrial arthropods, as they indicate the recovery of degraded forest habitats. In 2021, we finalized the baseline survey of these indicators, and in 2022, we conducted the first monitoring activity along permanent transects or on sample plots. The first monitoring aimed to identify early modifications in understory vegetation and terrestrial arthropods. Preliminary data analysis already showed the beneficial effect of habitat restoration on these indicators.

Monitoring the impact of European bison on vegetation structure

In 2022, we conducted a vegetation survey within the Nucșoara bison acclimatisation enclosure to monitor the impact of reintroduced bison on vegetation. We documented the current vegetation composition and established 12 monitoring plots in different habitats. To create bison free zones as control sites, we built fenced areas in each habitat type. The aim of the monitoring is to assess how the bison reintroduction affects the ecological integrity and diversity of the area. It will also help mitigate fears of potential damage to forests and property. The survey conducted outside the enclosure showed only minor evidence of browsing and debarked trees.

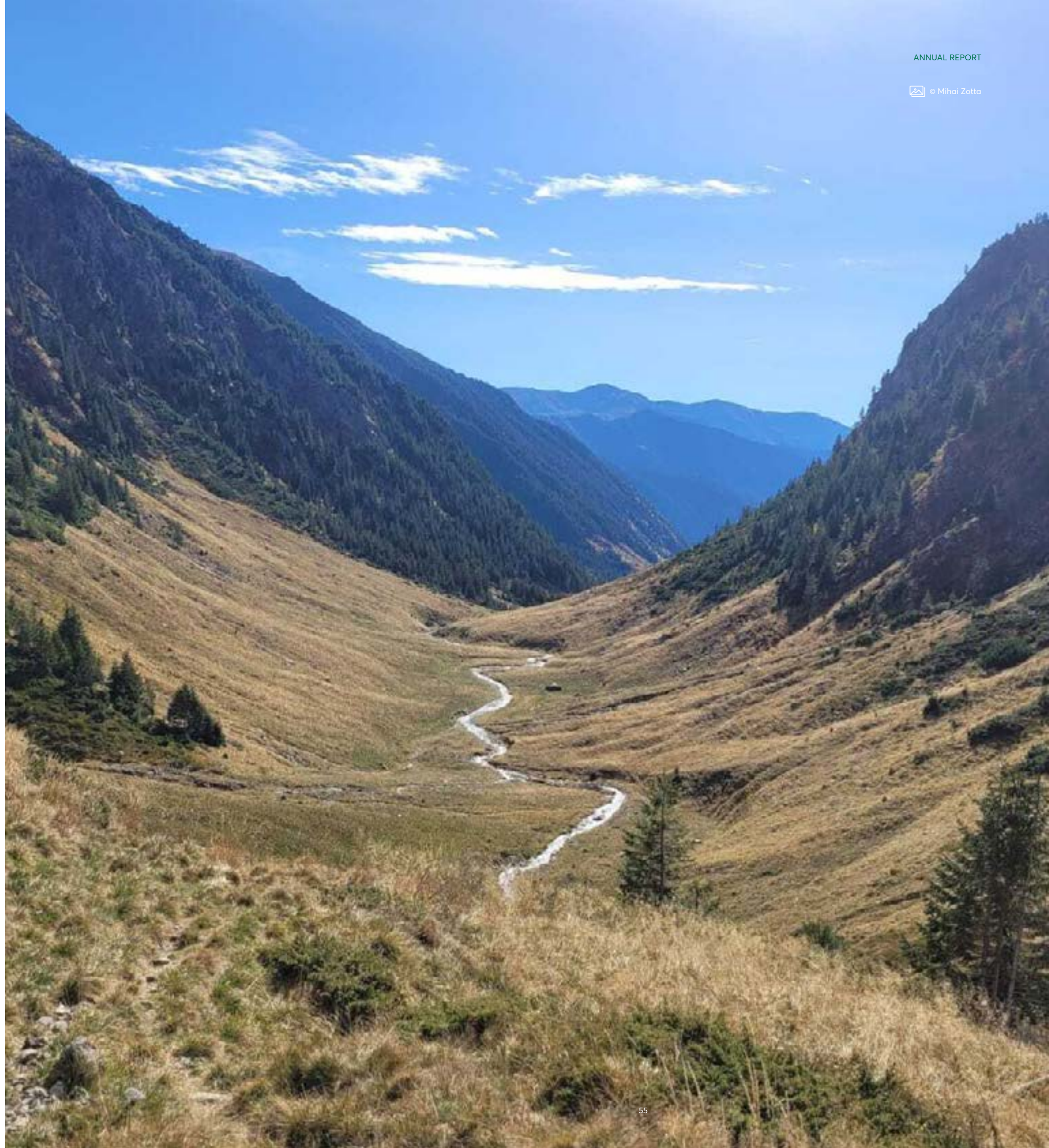


Enhance the FCC-owned pastures' biodiversity and economic value

Some of the Foundation Conservation Carpathia -owned pastures, located in the high-mountain and subalpine areas are used for grazing, for benefit of the local communities.

The study we conducted back in 2020 revealed very poor pasture quality due to overgrazing, represented by an invasion of harmful species like mat grass (*Nardus stricta*) and tufted hair grass (*Deschampsia caespitosa*).

In 2022, we continued the measures to enhance the pastures' biodiversity and economic value. From May to July, we mowed a few hectares in the Găinațu Mare and Dracsin pastures. Thus, we reduced the cover of invasive tufted **hair grass** (*Deschampsia caespitosa*) and **mat grass** (*Nardus stricta*) allowing the native grass to grow. This activity involved the FCC's rangers and the coordinating biologist. Improved pastures can potentially double livestock production and reduce grazing pressure on forests, while also providing social benefits.





© Liviu Ungureanu

QUICK FACTS

Tree nurseries and green houses:

- Sapling production: 276,110 forest saplings produced for restoration sites in 2022.
- Locals which make a living from the CARPATHIA project: a dedicated team of four workers, supplemented by local community day labourers during peak periods.
- New plantations: 3,500 square metres of new plantations in the tree nurseries.
- Species cultivated: spruce, sycamore, silver fir, mountain ash, elm, beech, juniper, fir, rowan.
- Fir saplings: 15,000 fir saplings from our nurseries have been successfully grown and will be ready for planting in five years, despite being the slowest of species to grow.

Restoration of logging tracks:

- 4.78 kilometres of eroded logging tracks

Spruce monocultures conversion:

- Restoring the natural forest type in a 45-year-old spruce plantation on a 20-hectare area.
- Creation of small areas of light within the forest where native species were planted.
- Planting of fir, beech, and sycamore trees in spruce forests where previous tree removal interventions took place.
- Extended work to three mountain pastures to remove invasive spruce seedlings threatening biodiversity.

Alpine pasture restoration:

- Juniper saplings planting: 1,000 juniper seedlings planted in the Zârna area at an altitude of about 1,900 metres.
- Pine cones: 50kg of pine cones harvested in the autumn of 2022.
- Processed seeds: 1.2kg of seeds processed from the pine cones harvested.

Removing the invasive alien plant species along river valleys:

- Invasive plant species removed along 31.5 km of the main tributaries of Dâmbovița and Argeș rivers.
- Timeframe of removal: activities conducted from May to September in 2022.
- Removal methods: manual removal and use of mechanical tools employed for eradicating invasive species.
- Targeted species: focus on eradicating annual or biannual alien species, such as *Erigeron annuus* and *Conyza canadensis*, and preventing the expansion of Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*).
- Monitoring approach: fixed-point photography and vegetation surveys at 52 monitoring points in restoration areas and IAS-free reference areas.
- Progress: significant decrease in invasive species abundance and cover observed in the monitoring plots.

 Stag © Robert Bulgaru

Wildlife & Fish

Bison reintroduction

Beaver reintroduction

Fish in the Făgăraș Mountains rivers

Wildlife management

Overall activities and results of the wildlife management concessions

Bison reintroduction

As a keystone species, the bison play a crucial role in maintaining the balance of the natural environment, contributing to the conservation of biodiversity and promoting ecotourism. The reintroduction of the bison to the Făgăraș Mountains becomes a major conservation success story, with benefits for both the ecosystem and local communities.

2022 was a busy year for our team as we invested a lot of time in continuing the reintroduction of bison in the Făgăraș Mountains. We were determined to complete our objective of rebuilding the acclimatisation enclosure in the Nucșoara area, and we did so with precision and on time.

released in 2020-2022 in the Bunea and Lerești areas, where we had 36 bison forming three groups. We observed these groups roaming over 20,000 hectares of land and exploring different habitats. The bison also reproduced well, with six calves born in the wild in 2022. We used a variety of monitoring methods, including GPS collars, camera monitoring and direct observation.

In October, our whole bison reintroduction team had the opportunity to visit the Bieszczady Mountains to learn about the management of the free-ranging bison population. This provided us with valuable insights and knowledge for our future efforts.

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 Făgăraș Mountains.

Looking ahead, we plan to continue our efforts to reintroduce new bison and are excited to see what the future holds for the conservation of this magnificent species. According to our feasibility study, 100 bison are needed to ensure the success of reintroducing such a vulnerable species, so they can survive and multiply.

We then turned our attention to the transport of the bison and managed to organise eight transfers, bringing a total of 31 bison from Sweden, Slovakia and Germany to the three reintroduction sites. But our work didn't stop there. We also spent time monitoring the groups of bison





Beaver reintroduction

Our beaver reintroduction programme in the southern part of the Făgăraş Mountains is thriving, thanks to the successful capture and release of 22 beavers from the Olt River basin in 2022. But our efforts didn't stop there. To better understand the impact of the beavers on their new ecosystem, some were fitted with transmitters for ongoing monitoring. We also used a range of other monitoring techniques such as cameras, direct and indirect observation. As a result, we've been able to track the movements and behaviour of the beavers in their new environment and observe how they've affected the physical, chemical and biological parameters of their habitat. The results so far have been remarkable and we're looking forward to continuing to capture, translocate and monitor these incredible creatures as they adapt and thrive in their new environment.

The story of the European beaver (*Castor fiber*) is one of loss and hope.

Once hunted to near extinction in the early 19th century for its prized fur, meat and even its valuable castoreum secretion, this strictly protected species disappeared not only from Romania but also from the rest of Europe. As a keystone species, the beaver plays a crucial role in shaping its environment through its behaviour, creating a positive impact that is felt throughout its ecosystem.



Fish in the Făgăraș Mountains rivers

Aqua Crisius Association is working hand-in-hand with the CARPATHIA Forest District to preserve and protect river courses in the Făgăraș Mountains. Their latest efforts have been focused on reintroducing grayling (*Thymallus thymallus*) to two rivers at the foot of the Făgăraș Mountains that had lost the species due to the construction of dams. For the third year in a row, the team has successfully replenished the rivers with an impressive 1500 grayling, a protected species that is required to be released when fishing.

The results have been truly remarkable, with numerous catches and releases by reputable anglers confirming the grayling's thriving population. Aqua Crisius Association expects the reintroduced grayling from 2020-2021 to reach maturity and reproduce naturally this year, thanks to the high-quality fish management system implemented by the team.

In 2022, the team stocked a mountain lake with an astonishing 110,000 juveniles of native trout (*Salmo trutta*), a historic result that will be repeated in 2023.

Furthermore, Aqua Crisius Association has been actively hatching native trout eggs, with 50,000 hatched in the rivers at the foot of the Făgăraș Mountains. Despite a capricious winter, the

team's choice of suitable locations for hatching systems proved effective, resulting in a high hatching rate. But Aqua Crisius Association's dedication to conservation doesn't end there. Three of its members were part of the team conducted by the Alex Găvan Foundation that studied the asprete (*Romanichthys valsanicola*), one of the rarest fish in Europe, possibly even in the world. Fully protected by law, this critically endangered species is a living fossil that has been around for over 65 million years. The team's efforts to study the asprete paid off when they identified no less than 58 specimens along at least 15 km of the Vâlsan River, with the Aqua Crisius Association team extending the current confirmed habitat of the species by about 5 km.

Aqua Crisius Association also organised an exciting summer flyfishing camp at the Richita Education Centre, where 14 local children living near the Făgăraș Mountains had the chance to learn the art of flyfishing. During the camp, the children successfully acquired the skills to fish with artificial flies, while a few even managed to outsmart trout and the reintroduced grayling with their own hand-tied flies.





Wildlife management

Introduction

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. Our wildlife management decisions are therefore based on the principles of Prevention – Intervention – Compensation, 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 aim to target all available tools and measures – old, local traditions and new, smart technologies – towards resolving conflicts with human interests and to include community representatives into basic management decisions.

Interventions

During 2022, the CARPATHIA rapid intervention Teams, supported by the Romanian Gendarmerie within the LIFE project, responded to

103 incidents

of which

79 bear conflicts

While wolf depredation seems to play a minor role in the entire area – only eight attacks were recorded – conflicts with bears and wild boar were numerous.

Our intervention team has been actively working to protect small farmers and prevent wildlife conflicts in the Făgăraș Mountains. This year, we installed 24 electric fences in conflict areas and purchased a pair of specialized dogs to aid our intervention teams. Our teams conducted damage prevention activities, wildlife damage assessment and monitoring, and compensated farmers for losses. To deter repeated attacks, our rapid intervention team utilized noise and rubber bullets, but in some cases, lethal removal was necessary. With approval from the Ministry of Environment, one bear was removed from the Rucăr commune. Due to persisting problems, we decided

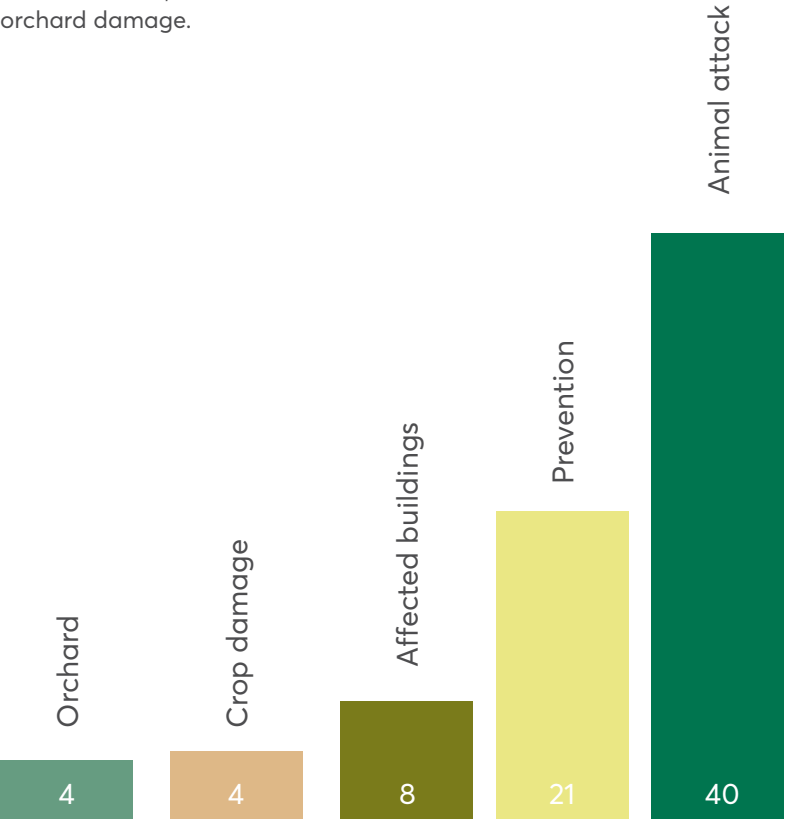
to ask for a derogation from the Ministry of Environment for lethal removal of one bear and approval was granted. This bear had been known to damage livestock as early as 2021 and was removed on 31 August 2022when it attempted to attack another household, ending a long string of sleepless nights for locals but also for our colleagues in the intervention team. Tissue samples from the shot bear confirmed its history as a problem bear and the frequency of attacks in the area decreased significantly after its removal.



Species that caused conflicts



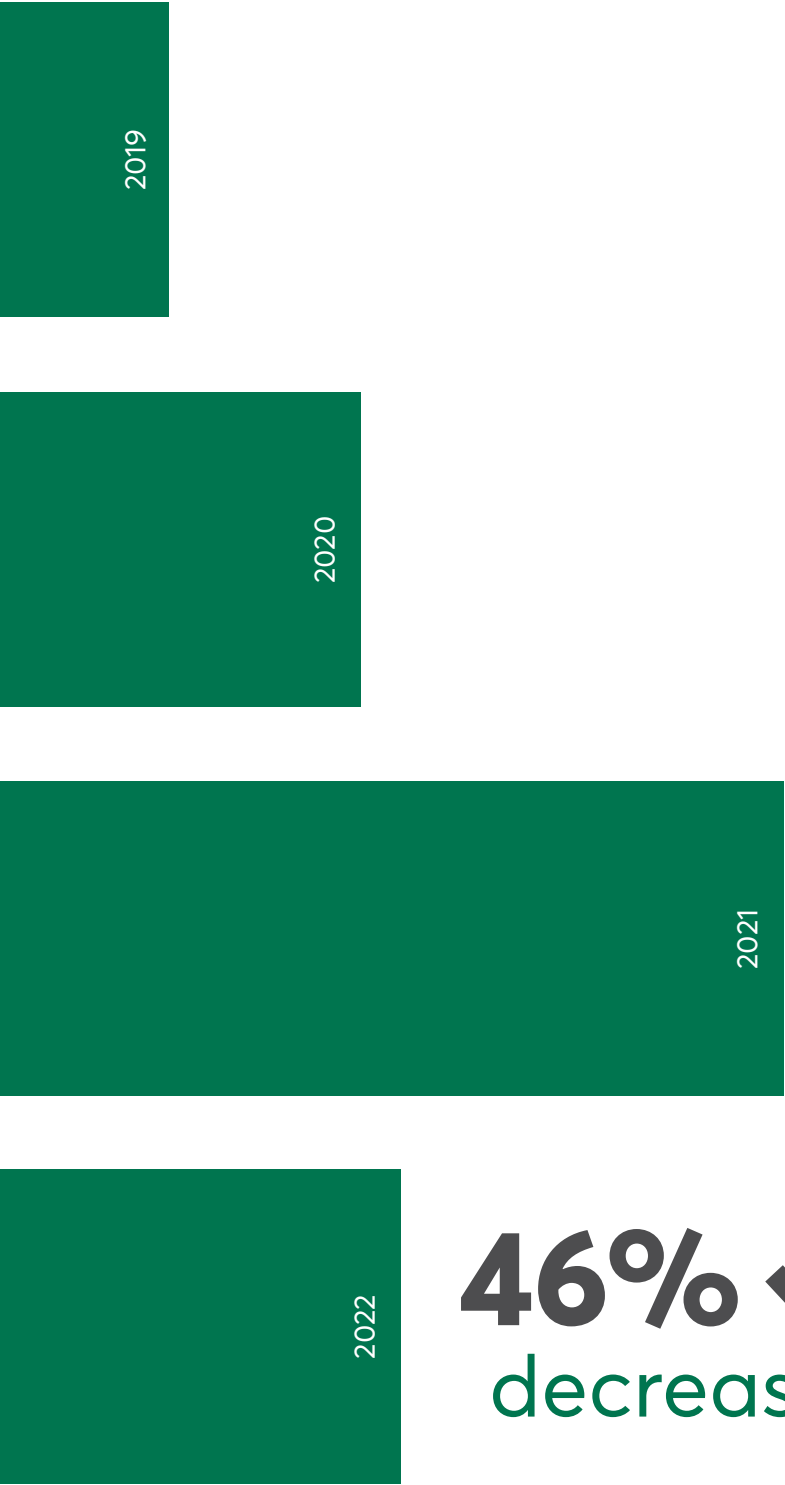
The table below shows the nature of specific incidents and actions: our intervention teams carried out a total of 21 specific prevention and snare release actions, responding to five cases of crop damage, 40 domestic animal attacks, and four cases of orchard damage.



 Specific incidents and actions

The compensation measures applied by the CARPATHIA Intervention Teams include the payment of minimum financial compensation for damage caused by wild boar, wolves and bears in 30 cases, the replacement of the animals killed with 11 cows and 19 sheep from the Carpathian farm created for this purpose. Preventive measures also include the donation of Carpathian Shepherd dogs to farmers who raise their animals in the Făgăraș Mountains, as protection against carnivorous attacks, but also to encourage the growth of this local breed.

The number of conflicts has decreased compared to previous years, which can be attributed to the intensive work of our intervention teams and the abundance of beech nuts in the forests during 2022.



 Number of conflicts

Wildlife management board

The Regional Committee for the Prevention and Management of Large Carnivore Conflicts has been actively working to address the sensitive issue of human-large carnivore conflicts in the communes of Rucăr, Valea Mare Pravăț, Lerești, Stoenesti and Dragoslavele. Since its formation in October 2020, the committee has been instrumental in involving different actors and stakeholders in the decision-making process. Recognizing that providing means of prevention without the proactive involvement of local communities is not a sustainable solution, the committee works to eliminate the root causes of wildlife attacks. Through these efforts, the committee strives to ensure the safety and well-being of both local communities and wildlife.



Overall activities and results of the wildlife management concessions



© Daniel Mîrlea

In 2022, we expanded our wildlife management concessions to a total of five, including the newly acquired '8 Jepi' Wildlife Management Unit in Argeş County, increasing the total area of wildlife management concessions from 67,630 to 79,200 hectares. However, the new concession faced a challenge with lower-than-expected populations of species due to intensive hunting in the past. The population figures estimated by the previous managers were very high, especially for bear, red deer, chamois, wild boar, roe deer and capercaillie, with a total of more than 600 animals of 'hunting interest'. In reality, according to our initial field checks, the population figures are much lower and seem to be lower than those of the other CARPATHIA management

concessions. The exception was the bear and capercaillie populations, which were similar to those managed by CARPATHIA. It is clear that this is a wildlife population that has been intensively hunted in the past. In addition, the wild boar population has been reduced to just a few individuals due to the feeding conditions in the area and probably as a result of the African swine fever that was present over the last few years.

In the wildlife management units '22 Rucăr', '20 Stoenestî' and '18 Râul Târgului', which we have been managing for a long time, the wild boar populations were lower than previously found. However, the populations are now recovering thanks to the abundance of natural food in the autumn of 2022, which allowed a large number of piglets to survive. On the other hand, **red deer and roe deer populations**

are increasing. Unfortunately, the **chamois population** in the alpine area has not shown any significant growth in recent years. Nevertheless, a substantial group of about 20 chamois has been thriving and expanding in the '20 Stoenestî, Leaota' wildlife management unit, and is adapted to living mainly in the forest.



© Calin Serban

QUICK FACTS

Bison reintroduction

- The acclimatisation enclosure in the Nucșoara area was successfully built, meeting the team's objective for the year.
- Bison transfers: eight transfers were organized, bringing a total of 31 bison from Sweden, Slovakia, and Germany to the three reintroduction sites in the Făgăraș Mountains.
- Monitoring released bison: groups of bison released between 2020 and 2022 were monitored in the Bunea and Lerești areas. Three groups consisting of 36 bison were observed roaming over 20,000 hectares of land and exploring different habitats.
- Reproduction success: six bison calves were born in the wild in 2022, indicating successful reproduction of the reintroduced bison population.
- Monitoring methods: various monitoring methods, including GPS collars, camera monitoring and direct observation were utilized to track and study the behaviour and movements of the reintroduced bison.
- Learning from the Bieszczady Mountains: the entire bison reintroduction team had the opportunity to visit the Bieszczady Mountains to gain insights and knowledge on managing free-ranging bison populations, contributing to their expertise and future efforts.
- Future plans: reintroducing new bison, 100 bison are needed for the successful reintroduction of this vulnerable species in the Făgăraș Mountains.

Beaver reintroduction

- 22 beavers were successfully captured from the Olt River basin and reintroduced in the southern part of the Făgăraș Mountains.
- Monitoring techniques: some of the beavers were fitted with transmitters for ongoing monitoring. Additionally, monitoring techniques such as cameras, direct observation, and indirect observation were used to track their movements and behaviour.
- Habitat impact: the beavers' presence has influenced the physical, chemical, and biological parameters of their habitat. Their role as a keystone species has positive effects on the ecosystem.

Fish in the Făgăraș Mountains rivers

- Grayling reintroduction: successfully reintroducing 1500 grayling (*Thymallus thymallus*) into two rivers at the foot of the Făgăraș Mountains. These rivers had lost this species due to the construction of dams.
- The stocking of native trout: a mountain lake was stocked with an impressive 110,000 juvenile native trout (*Salmo trutta*). This historic achievement will be repeated in 2023.

- Native trout hatching: The Aqua Crisius Association hatched 50,000 native trout eggs in the rivers at the foot of the Făgăraș Mountains.
- Asprete study: Three members of the Aqua Crisius Association were part of a team studying the asprete (*Romanichthys valsanicola*), one of the rarest fish species in Europe. They identified 58 specimens along at least 15 km of the Vâlsan River, extending the confirmed habitat of the species by about 5 km.
- A flyfishing camp organised at the Richita Education Centre for 14 local children near the Făgăraș Mountains.

Wildlife management

- Total incidents: the CARPATHIA Rapid Intervention Teams, supported by the Romanian Gendarmerie within the LIFE project, responded to 103 incidents related to wildlife conflicts.
- Bear conflicts: 79.
- Prevention measures: the intervention team installed 24 electric fences in conflict areas, acquired specialized dogs to aid intervention teams, and carried out various damage prevention activities.
- Specific incidents and actions: the intervention teams conducted a total of 21 specific prevention and trap release actions, addressing five cases of crop damage, 40 domestic animal attacks, and four cases of orchard damage. Donating Carpathian shepherd dogs to farmers in the Făgăraș Mountains, both as protection and to support the growth of this local breed.
- Progress in preventing wildlife conflicts: the number of conflicts decreased compared to previous years, most likely due to the intensive work of the intervention teams and the availability of beech nuts in the forests during 2022.
- Compensation measures: providing minimum financial compensation for damage caused by wild boar, wolves, and bears in 30 cases. Replacing the animals killed with 11 cows and 19 sheep from the Carpathian farm established for this purpose.

Overall activities and results of the wildlife management concessions

- Expansion to a total of five wildlife management concessions: increased surface from 67,630 to 79,200 hectares, with the addition of the '8 Jepi' Wildlife Management Unit in Argeș County.
- Recovery of the wild boar population: in the Wildlife Management Units '22 Rucăr', '20 Stoenești' and '18 Râul Târgului', the wild boar population initially decreased, but is now recovering due to abundant natural food resources in the autumn, resulting in increased survival of piglets.
- Increasing red deer and roe deer populations: red deer and roe deer populations are showing signs of growth in our managed areas.
- Chamois population: the chamois population in the alpine area has not increased significantly in recent years, except for a thriving and expanding group of about 20 chamois in the Wildlife Management Unit '20 Stoenești, Leaota', which are well adapted to forest habitats.



Wildlife monitoring

Introduction

Brown bear

Wolf and Eurasian lynx

Red deer

Golden eagle monitoring programme

The capercaillie

The marmot





Introduction



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Over the last 10 years there have been significant changes in wildlife management both nationally and in our project area. At the national level, trophy hunting of large carnivores has been banned, but the question remains whether this decision has led to an increase in populations or, on the contrary, to a deterioration in the perception of rural people, resulting in an increase in illegal mortality of large carnivores. In our project area, efforts to restore degraded ecosystems have increased in recent years, as have efforts to ensure human-wildlife coexistence, which should help maintain stable populations of these species. In 2022, our wildlife monitoring project entered its second

phase to assess population trends over time. After 5-6 years of baseline surveys from the first censuses we conducted on bear, wolf, lynx and deer, we returned to the field in 2022 to conduct these surveys again.

We surveyed the same area, with the same people, using the same methods, so that the data collected over the years will be comparable.

Brown bear

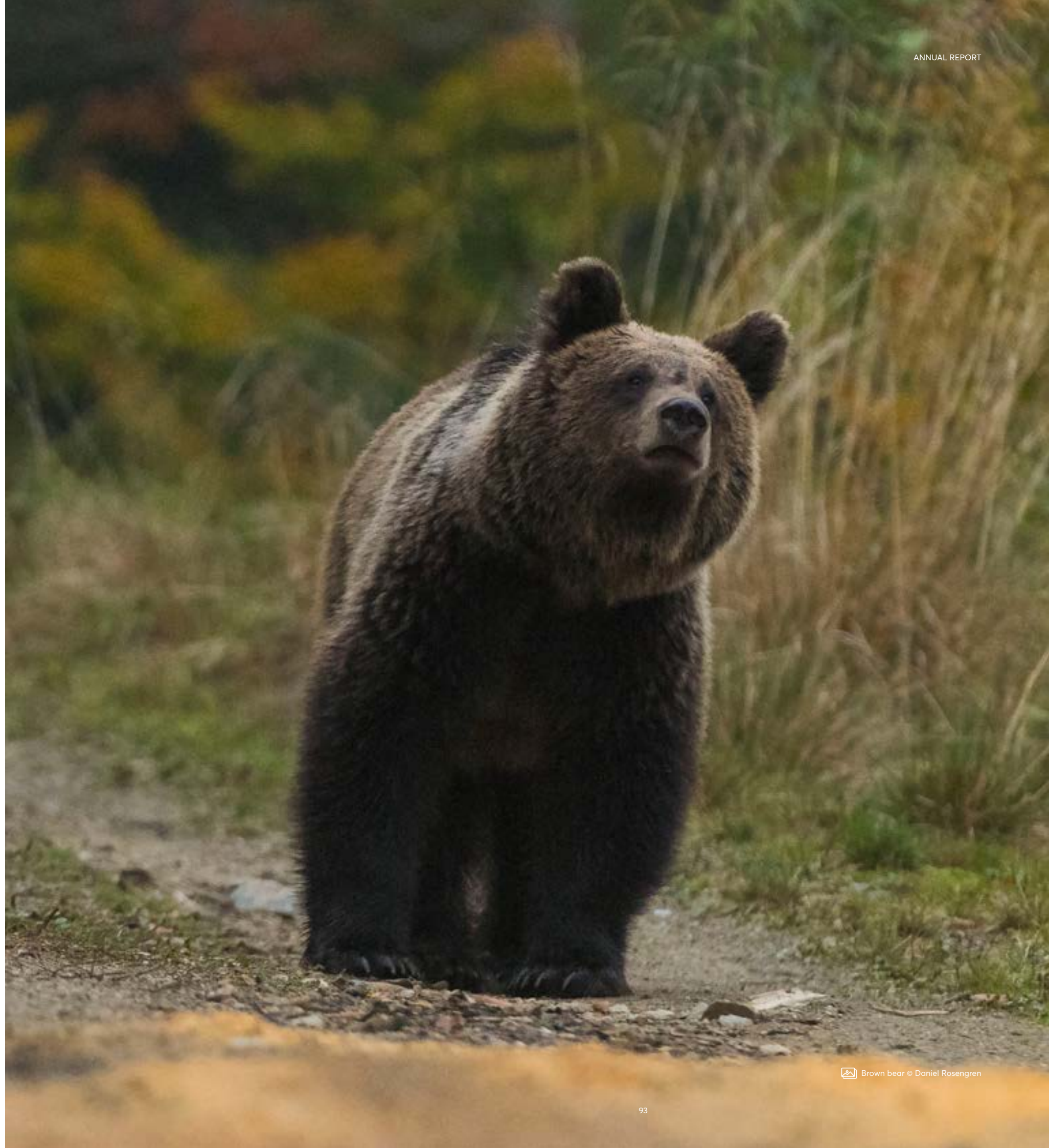
The first part of 2022 was a period of intense preparation for us. We updated the laboratory genetics protocols and the field data collection apps on mobile phones. In early summer, just before we started the bear genetics study, we trained our field staff and collaborators.

Effective bear sampling began in August. We got off to a slow start, finding little bear scat in the first month, despite good fruit production from raspberry and blueberry bushes. From September, however, the number of samples increased day by day due to very good beech nuts production. By the end of November, we had collected 970 bear samples, our record to date. The training and the efforts of our colleagues and partners were rewarded, as rangers from the Carpathia Forestry Association, Piatra Craiului National Park and colleagues from the Bârsa-Șercăița and GTS – Păpușa Leaota Hunting Associations made great efforts to collect bear samples with us. We have mainly collected samples from scat with beech nuts, which is known from previous years to have a high DNA extraction success. This is due to the undigested skins of beech nuts, which remove a significantly higher amount of bear DNA than, for example, forest fruits.

Towards the end of the year, we received a preliminary estimate of the DNA extraction success rate from colleagues in the Slovenian laboratory, which was close to 80%. A success rate of 80% is exceptional for such a study and significantly higher than in 2017-2018 (around 60%). The final results will be available in 2023, when we will know whether our bear population has increased or decreased, i.e., how many of the bears from 5 years ago are still living in the study area. Unfortunately, this year, in addition to the general bear census, we had to monitor problem bears, those that cause damage to livestock and

homes. We took 13 samples from bear attacks. Of these, 10 were from attacks on livestock, all from the same male bear (CC04EP).

This bear was known to have damaged livestock as early as 2021 and was shot while attempting to attack another household, ending a long series of sleepless nights for local people and hunting association colleagues. Tissue samples from the shot bear confirmed its history as a problem bear and the frequency of attacks in the area decreased significantly after its removal. The other three samples were taken from damage to cabins and all belong to another male bear (CC023F) which we will continue to monitor until we are able to remove it.



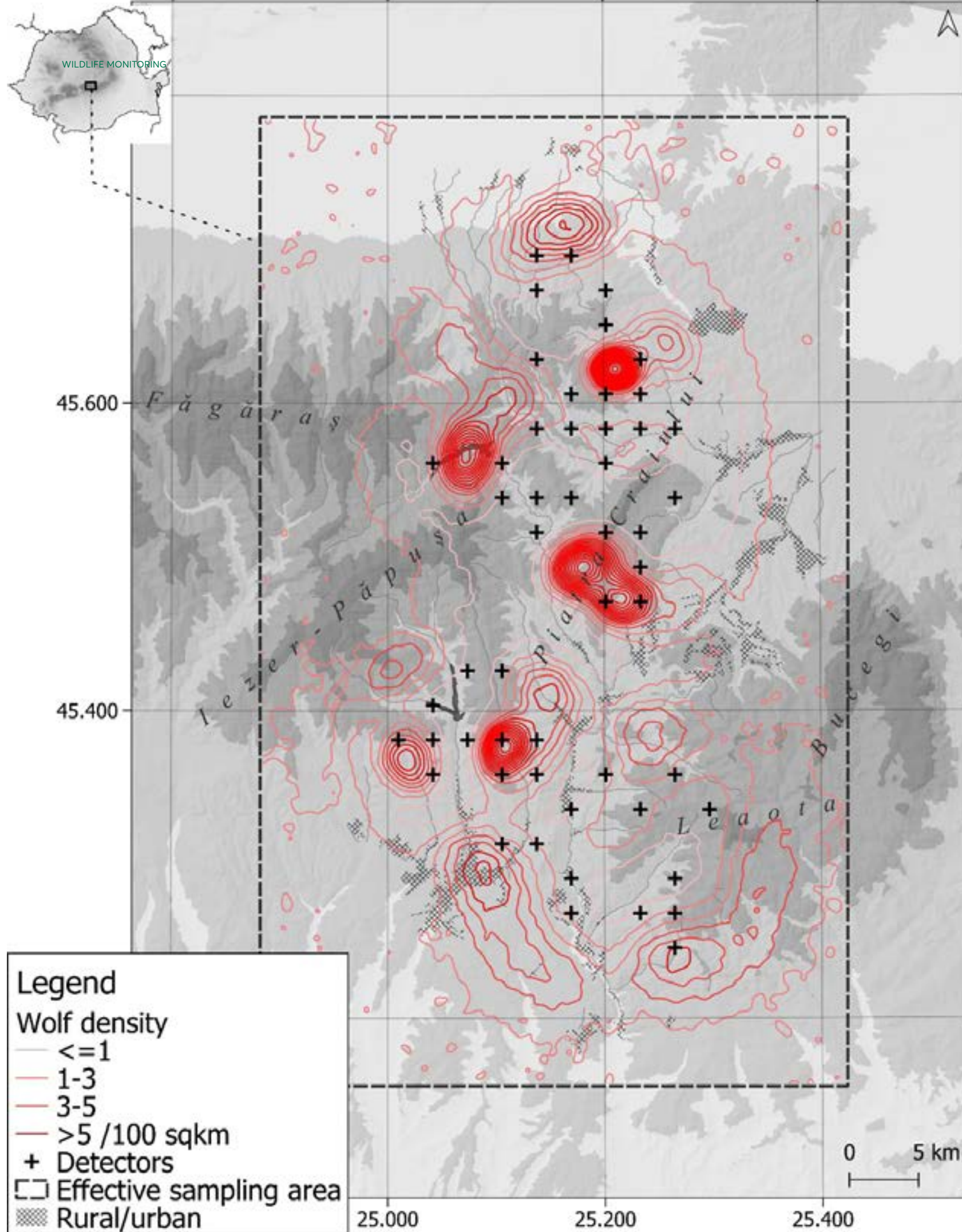


Wolf and Eurasian lynx

After four years of collecting samples from wolves in the field, 2022 was spent analysing the data statistically, mapping the packs identified and identifying genetic relationships between individuals. During the year we wrote our first study on this species. At the end of 2022, the study is at the proofreading stage. The study will be made available to the public during the first half of 2023 and will show important results, a wolf population comparable to other populations in Europe, but also uncertainties related to pack mortality.

For the lynx species, 2022 was a year of organising the data collected with cameras in previous years. With the help of volunteers, we processed 30,000 camera images, extracted 1,800 photos of lynx and started to identify lynx based on the unique patterns on their fur. Lynx identification is an ongoing process that will continue into the first half of 2023.

After four years in the field collecting wolf samples, we have been able to obtain important data for the conservation of this species. Pack structure varied significantly from year to year with changes in breeding pairs. This may be due to high anthropogenic mortality, and it remains unclear what is causing these changes. The average density, calculated on the basis of genetic evidence, is 2.3 wolves/100 km² and varies spatially, with higher densities in the areas of Pecineagu, Piatra Craiului, Râuşor and Bârsa.





Red deer

In 2021, we showed that there are uncertainties associated with the genetic monitoring of red deer. With large numbers of deer, the number of samples to be collected is even greater and logistically more difficult. Therefore, in 2023 we will explore the possibility of studying this species with cameras and DNA samples in parallel. The motion sensing cameras will be used to get a relative measure of deer density in hard-to-reach mountain areas, and the DNA samples will be used to get an accurate sex ratio, a minimum number of individuals, and to validate the camera results. By the end of 2022, we will have drawn up a monitoring plan for 2023, when we will attempt this complex monitoring using cameras and DNA samples for the first time. We will try to put a dot on the map in a wildlife research and monitoring partnership with national parks in Germany, Poland and Albania.



Golden eagle monitoring programme

As we soar into the future, we continue to be inspired by the mighty golden eagle. Together with our partner, Milvus Group – Bird and Nature Protection Association, we have been hard at work in the field, conducting ground-breaking research and conservation efforts to protect this magnificent bird of prey.

Our monitoring programme has allowed us to gain new insights into the golden eagle's behaviour, habitat, and migration patterns, helping us to better understand and safeguard this iconic species. Together, we can ensure that the golden eagle remains

a symbol of strength and freedom for generations to come.

During the first part of the year, we carried out golden eagle nest searches. As a result of previous years' monitoring, 11 possible golden eagle territories were identified in the Făgăraş Mountains where nest searches were carried out. These territories are: Curpănu Valley, Şaua Apa Cumpănită, Ciortea, Vârful Cornul Căltunului, Transfăgărăşan, Piciorul Podragului, Valea Rea, Geamăna de Sus Lake, Damboviţa, Comisului Peak, Colţii Cremenii. Two inactive nests and one active

nest were identified on a specimen of juniper (*Pinus cembra*). Although the female was observed several times at the nest, nesting was not successful this year. In the second half of the year, work focused on capturing at least one eagle for GPS tagging. Suitable feeding sites were identified, and attempts were made to lure the eagle to a specific location. In Valdului Valley, a feeding platform more than 2 metres high and protected by an electric fence was installed, as the food placed on the ground was quickly consumed by the carnivores in the area. No golden eagle has been caught so

far. At the same time our colleagues from Milvus Group – Bird and Nature Protection Association conducted an inventory of capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*) and marmot (*Marmota marmota*) population, these two species being the main prey of the golden eagle.

This type of activity is very difficult to achieve over such a large and inaccessible area.

The capercaillie

From June to November, our colleagues from the Milvus Group team conducted an inventory to cover as many potential habitats as possible, using a sample of 120 monitoring units. As of now, they have covered 92 monitoring units and recorded 309 observations of the species, including 171 droppings, 109 feathers, 14 specimens, and other evidence like footprints and eggshells.



The marmot

The marmot inventory was completed this year by our partners, the Milvus Group team, covering 87 monitoring plots of 2 x 2 km each and recording 454 observations. Of these observations, 65% were burrows, 21% were individuals seen, 12% were individuals heard, and 2% were latrines. This means that the species is distributed almost all over the massif along the main ridge of the Făgăraș Mountains, but it also descends on the more important ridges on the southern side of the massif, such as Mesteacănu, Coastele Mari, Scărișoara and Mușetescu. Based on the location of observations of individuals and burrows, at least 111 family groups (colonies) could be separated. Based on the estimated minimum number of colonies and habitats with potential colonies, or

on the estimated average number of individuals, these values could be extrapolated to 592 individuals (considering only known colonies) or 1034 individuals (with potential colonies), excluding satellite individuals (those not belonging to any colony).

This valuable information will help us better understand and manage the marmot population in the future.

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QUICK FACTS

Brown Bear:

- Bear genetics study: field staff and collaborators were trained.
- Bear sampling: by the end of November, a record number of 970 bear samples had been collected.
- DNA extraction success: preliminary estimates indicate a DNA extraction success rate of around 80%, higher than previous years (around 60%).
- Monitoring of problem bears: 13 samples were taken from bear attacks, including 10 from attacks on livestock.

Wolf and Eurasian Lynx:

- Wolf study: after four years of sample collection, 2022 focused on analyzing the data and preparing a study on wolves, which will be made available to the public in the first half of 2023.
- Six wolf packs were identified with varying pack sizes and changes in breeding pairs.
- Lynx data processing: 2022 was a year of organising the data collected with cameras in previous years. With the help of volunteers, we processed 30,000 camera images, extracted 1,800 photos of lynx and started to identify lynx based on unique patterns on their fur.

Red Deer:

- Monitoring Plan: by the end of 2022, a monitoring plan for 2023 was developed, combining camera-based density measurements and DNA samples to determine sex ratio, minimum number of individuals, and validate camera results.
- Wildlife Research Partnership: Collaboration in wildlife research and monitoring with national parks in Germany, Poland, and Albania was established.

Golden eagle monitoring:

- Golden Eagle territories: through nest searches, 11 possible Golden Eagle territories were identified in the Făgăraș Mountains, including locations such as Curpănu Valley, Șaua Apa Cumpănită, Ciortea, Cornul Căltunului Peak, Transfăgărășan, Piciorul Podragului, Valea Rea, Geamăna de Sus Lake, Dâmbovița, Comisului Peak, and Colții Cremenii.
- GPS tagging efforts: the focus shifted to capturing at least one golden eagle for GPS tagging. Feeding sites were identified, and attempts were made to attract the eagle to a specific location. A feeding platform was installed in Vladului Valley, protected by an electric fence. However, no golden eagle has been caught thus far.
- Capercaillie inventory: 309 observations of capercaillie, including 171 droppings, 109 feathers, 14 specimens, footprints, and eggshells.
- Marmot inventory: the marmot inventory was completed, covering 87 monitoring plots of 2x2 km each. A total of 454 observations were recorded, with 65% being burrows, 21% individuals seen, 12% individuals heard, and 2% latrines.



Outreach and Communication

Introduction

Doing good is contagious in the Făgăraș Mountains

A glimpse of events, visits and initiatives during the past year

Community outreach

Bavarian Forest National Park partnership

Carpathia Nature Education Programme

Friends of the project, ambassadors for the Făgăraș Mountains

Volunteering programme

Visits to CARPATHIA

Introduction

Nature conservation is a complex team project that should involve a balance between specialists, people from the communities close to the project, public authorities and civil society. "Why do we do what we do? For whom do we do it? Where do we want to go? What do we have that is so valuable in the Făgăraș Mountains?" were the thoughts that were reflected in all the projects we developed. We have often reached our limits, we have often arrived at the end of the day with empty batteries, we have felt that we can't do it anymore, but we have always found energy in the thought that we are leaving something behind, that the projects we are doing are helping the local communities, that the scholarships we are offering will open opportunities for some children, that we have managed to make some people understand why it is important to maintain healthy ecosystems and why the Făgăraș Mountains are so valuable in terms of biodiversity.

What was it like?

Hard.

How will it be?

Beautiful.



Doing good is contagious in the Făgăraş Mountains



Conservation work in the Făgăraş Mountains means not only protecting the natural environment, but also supporting local communities. We believe that social programmes play a vital role in improving the quality of life of the people in the areas where we work. We are proud to work with Casa Bună Association, one of the best social problem solvers in Romania, and look forward to continuing our partnership to support local communities in the years to come.

Hot meals for children

In Nucşoara, Casa Bună Association provided 106 beneficiaries with hot meals in 2022, focusing on the wellbeing of children.

Online education for children

In 2022, in Nucşoara commune, 73 children aged between six and 14 years received weekly one-to-one online lessons. These children received 3356 hours of lessons from 130 volunteers during the year. Similarly, in Lereşti, 117 children aged between six and 14 participated in weekly online lessons. The Casa Bună Association provided a total of 5022 hours of online lessons.

Tutoring Programme for 8th Grade,

a programme that helps children prepare for their national exams in Romanian language and mathematics: in Nucşoara, eight children started their preparation by attending weekly tutoring sessions, both online and offline, and in Lereşti, six children participated in these sessions. In total, 158 attendances were registered in 2022. The tutoring started in September 2022 and continues at present.

Corbu Camp

Casa Bună's programmes also included educational and fun activities for children. In July, they organised the Corbu Camp, where six children aged between nine and 12 had the opportunity to see the sea for the first time. The children spent four days on the beach, playing and taking part in daily educational activities. Similarly, six children from the commune of Lereşti attended the Corbu Camp in August.

School supplies and winter clothing

In Nucşoara, 79 children received backpacks with school supplies for their age and grade level at the beginning of the school year. In Lereşti, 115 children received similar support. In November, we also provided winter kits, consisting of new winter clothes and shoes (thermal layers, gloves, scarf, cap, fleece, winter jacket, socks), to 64 children in Nucşoara and 69 children in Lereşti.

Christmas gifts

In Nucşoara, 67 children between the ages of three and 14 received personalised and age-appropriate gifts. In Lereşti, 100 children received similar support. This year, Christmas was more special for these children. In addition to gifts, the volunteers from Casa Bună made ornaments with the children, watched a film and made a Christmas tree.

Paediatric check-ups

In Nucşoara, 80 children aged between two and 16 had their annual medical check-up in August. This medical check-up involved taking samples on the first visit and interpreting the results along with a general paediatric examination on the second visit. This was our first such initiative in Nucşoara. We also took the opportunity to dispel some myths about needles and blood. As a consequence of the results, parents are now taking their children to the big cities for regular check-ups. Similarly, in Lereşti, 85 children between the ages of two and 18 had blood tests and medical check-ups in early 2023.

Learning and exploring nature in the Făgăraş Mountains at Richita Field Education Center

17 children (11-12 years old), who had achieved good results in the online learning programme and homework coordinated by the Casa Bună Association, participated in the Richita Field Education Centre camp, coming from the local communities in the Făgăraş Mountains area. We would like to offer this educational opportunity to as many children as possible from disadvantaged communities.

We are grateful for our partnership with the Casa Bună Association, which has helped us to provide significant support to the local communities.





Doing good continues to be contagious!

© Casa Bună

A glimpse of events, visits and initiatives during the past year

In 2022, we continued to bring nature closer to people and people closer to nature with every project message, event and communication campaign. Although the beginning of the year announced a return to normality after two years of pandemic, the outbreak of war in Ukraine proved that this was not the case. Because we care about people as much as we care about nature, we joined forces with the Frankfurt Zoological Society and other partners to help protected areas face the new reality. Through our team, five convoys carrying around 26.3 tonnes of supplies reached people who had sought refuge in protected areas in Ukraine.

2022

And because nature is also the place where we can relax, with the arrival of spring **we have "opened" access to the Făgăraș Mountains through a virtual gallery** dedicated to them. The project is an invitation to a unique journey through the forests, pastures, peaks, fauna, flora and communities of the Făgăraș Mountains.

In June, we organised the **Carpathia Bike Tour**, Cobor edition, a cycling event where more than 100 cyclists from all over the country cycled 80 km through the Transylvanian hills, an experience that combines biodiversity and sports. There was a brunch stop at the Cobor Biodiversity Farm, where they also visited the Transylvanian Grey cattle and the Carpathian Shepherd Dog kennels.

The **Făgăraș Fest** was seen, heard and experienced from the Avrig Valley from 5th to 7th August. This year's festival once again included many nature activities, guided tours, workshops, outdoor films, a special screening of Wild Romania, as well as concerts by The Mono Jacks, Tariful de la Vărbilău and local community ensembles. Everyone left dancing in bare feet and with lots of questions about 'when is the next one?'

In September, we organised **"Open Day to the Transylvanian Grey cattle"** at the Cobor Biodiversity Farm, where participants learned about the Transylvanian Grey cattle, once the autochthonous breed of Transylvania, the history of the old Transylvanian village of Cobor and the development opportunities we are creating through the Cobor project.

In the October colours of the Făgăraș Mountains, **the cello of musician Radu Croitoru** could be heard in the communities around the Făgăraș Mountains. The cellist gave concerts in unusual places in the villages, offering people the music of the cello in exchange for a local craft.

Culture is an excellent vehicle for spreading the message about nature, which is why in 2022 we were present at the **Cannes Film Festival in Bucharest, One World Romania, Alpin Film Festival**. At the same time, the exhibition dedicated to the Făgăraș Mountains, with images from the **CARPATHIA Photo Camp**, could be visited at the AFI Brasov, at the Reduta Cultural Centre and at the Făgăraș Fest.

We were also active in the area of sporting events, with our colleagues participating in the **DHL Marathon, Bikeathon and Pro Park Family Adventure**.

More than 1700 appearances in the national and international press with stories about Foundation Conservation Carpathia and its projects were recorded in 2022. We talked about beavers, the study of wolves in the Făgăraș Mountains, reforestation campaigns, bison, events, producers in the Roadele Munților Food hub, local gastronomic points, ecological restoration, conflicts between humans and wild animals, etc.

The bison in the Făgăraș Mountains made the front page of The Guardian, in a report picked up by the national press. Also last year, the bison were the stars of the Euronews network in an excellent report on our project in the Făgăraș Mountains.

We organised **five media trips in the project area** in 2022 as part of the LIFE project. To these we added **the final conference of the POIM** (Operational Programme for Large Infrastructure) project and the launch conference of the Virtual Gallery.

14 journalists from the national and local media (Republica.ro, Euronews, Radio Romania Actualități, Antena 3, Decât o Revistă, Muscelul TV, Jurnalul de Argeș, Clar TV, etc.) visited the Bavarian Forest National Park in Germany from 24th to 28th October, where they learned about the impact of a national park on communities, its organisation and functioning.

Community outreach

A patch of trees that has grown alongside the village for centuries is a patch of trees and that's it. They may disappear one day, leaving only stubs and an empty spot, their memory lost to the village elders. An entire ecosystem will be lost, as well as a source of oxygen for those of us who spend summer in crowded cities. But fortunately, in Nucșoara, a village at the foot of the Făgăraș Mountains known for its anti-communist resistance, such trees have a chance to become a landmark, preserving both the history of the place and its people. And why? Because, together

We have also supported other communities, helping them to organise events with a local impact (Runcu Sheep Festival, Egg Pretzel Festival, Muscel Brunch), as well as social and educational projects.

with the mayor, we have launched a project to preserve 2,544 old beech trees and are working on an adoption campaign.

We believe that a clean environment is a healthy environment, and that sport is not only about performance but also about education through exercise. We supported the participation of ACS Lerești Champions – Karate Club in the World Traditional Karate Championship in Poland, from which the club's athletes returned with medals.



© Mihail Donea

Together with a group of mayors and local councillors from the south of the Făgăraș Mountains, we had a visit to the Bavarian Forests National Park as part of an exchange of experiences. During the visit, the local authorities were able to see what a national park created for the benefit of people and nature looks like, how its infrastructure is designed, how educational programmes are integrated, what the logistics of such a national park mean, what job opportunities it offers and how people get involved in the park's volunteer programmes. Everyone came away with a lot to learn, but also with concrete examples showing that the presence of a national park can bring more than 50 million euros to the local community from tourism alone.

In October, 18 representatives of the communities of Arpașu de Jos, Avrig, Porumbacu de Jos, Racovița, Sibiu and Turnu Roșu, at the foot of the Făgăraș Mountains, took part in a study trip to the Hohe Tauern National Park, Austria's largest national park. This was set up on the initiative of local people, as a relevant case study to generate ideas for sustainable development and education programmes for younger generations.



© Asociația Club Sportiv Campionii Lerești



© Mihail Donea



© Mihail Donea



Together with the City Hall of Nucșoara, we have continued to work for the protection of the most spectacular ancient beech trees located in the Nucșoara area. Starting in 2021, we selected 2,544 trees, representing the altitude of the highest peak in Romania, Moldoveanu. Each tree was included in a map with GPS coordinates, photographed and given a number plate. In 2023, we will complete this project and launch a major national and international campaign to protect some of the most spectacular ancient beech trees in Europe and contribute to the development of tourism in this area. The ancient beech trees in Nucșoara are located on land owned by the local town hall, but due to a lack of funds they have not been included in any tourist circuit and are currently unprotected.

Bavarian Forest National Park partnership

Until the 1970s, the Bavarian Forest was Germany's poorhouse due to its location close to the Iron Curtain, its lack of infrastructure, and its geomorphological situation. For this reason, the Bavarian government decided in 1970 to establish the first German National Park, by then more as a tool to attract visitors to the area rather than to protect nature and biodiversity. With significant investments into the visitor infrastructure for the National Park, an extension in the early 1990s to almost double its size, and the establishment of neighbouring Sumava National Park on the Czech side of the border, the Bavarian Forest National Park has developed to be an international model for combining nature conservation and sustainable economic development for the rural communities around the National Parks. Lots to learn for our initiative! With a first visit of a group of local politicians and administrators in October 2021 we established a relationship with the park administration. In March 2022, we revisited with a group of 15 mayors and local communities from the southeastern Făgăraș Mountains, and later in the year, we took another group of 15 journalists to Bavaria. The leading team of the Bavarian Forest National Park administration visited the Făgăraș Mountains in return, and from these ongoing discussions, we concluded a cooperation agreement, which was officially signed in October 2022. During winter 2022/23, we planned a variety of mutual exchange visits and in 2023, the partnership will come to life.



Carpathia Nature Education Programme

Bringing together more than 500 children from different communities around the Făgăraş Mountains and all over the country, the Carpathia Nature Education Programme has been a huge success in 2022. Our team of seven dedicated and enthusiastic educators led the way in this adventure, taking the children on hikes, telling nature stories and engaging them in fun and educational activities. We have added new options to our programmes, including a one-day 'Ranger-for-a-Day' programme, which gives children the opportunity to learn the secrets of being a ranger, and a three- or five-day program for those who want to dive deeper into the natural world.

We have also launched the Carpathia Scholarships as part of the Carpathia Fund for Education

and Nature. This programme aims to increase interest in nature conservation and improve the quality of life for members of communities in the northern Făgăraş Mountains. Our aim is to support sustainable and prosperous communities, helping young people and children to fulfil their potential and develop in the spirit of conservation.

Our hope is to create a community of nature-loving young people and children who are actively involved in solving nature-related problems and making decisions in support of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in their area. Join us in our mission to inspire the next generation of nature lovers and conservationists.

Through the Carpathia Scholarships, we support ten exceptional students from communities in the region who have demonstrated academic excellence and an interest in fields related to biodiversity conservation and ecology.







Friends of the project, ambassadors for the Făgăraș Mountains

As part of the EU LIFE CARPATHIA project, our CARPATHIA Ambassador Programme, in collaboration with our partner Rogalski Damaschin Agency, continues to gain ground. Our Ambassadors are an essential part of our project and we are delighted to welcome the latest members who have joined our cause. They are public figures who use their influence to promote conservation and support the future Făgăraș National Park. These individuals are passionate about preserving the region's biodiversity and are willing to advocate for it in front of Romanian civil society.

We would like to thank all our Ambassadors for their support and commitment to the creation of Europe's most iconic national park. In 2023, we hope to welcome at least ten new nature-loving personalities to our Ambassador Programme, who will continue to raise awareness and promote conservation efforts in the Făgăraș Mountains.

We are delighted to introduce our new 2022 Ambassadors, including

- **Octavian Berceanu, activist for the environment;**
- **Dr. Andreea Căpâlnă, Primary epidemiologist, former Secretary of State, WHO consultant;**
- **Alex Ciocan, President of the Romanian Cycling Federation;**
- **Dan Dinu, President of FORONA (Romanian Nature Photographers' Organisation) and Co-director of România Sălbatică;**
- **Cosmin Dumitrache, Co-director of România Sălbatică;**
- **Amalia Enache, journalist and news presenter at PRO TV, a wonderful friend of our project.**
- **Lucian Mîndruță, radio and television journalist;**
- **Horea Popescu, managing partner of CMS Bucharest and head of the firm's corporate M&A practice in CEE and Bucharest;**
- **Petronela Rotar, writer and journalist.**



Volunteering programme

The Cobor Biodiversity Farm volunteers did a great job helping with the Carpathian shepherd dogs breeding programme, the horse livery and other farming and hospitality

To all our volunteers, whether you have been with us for a short time or have been a part of our team for years, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Your dedication to conservation inspires us. We hope to welcome new volunteers in the future who share our passion and commitment to nature conservation.

activities: **Markus Junge, Emanuela Dimitriu, Marian-Gabriel Fuzi, Izabela-Alexandra Gal and Dumitru-Sebastian Babeş.**

We are grateful to **Chase Anthony Cessna, Patrick James Free, Anat Evivo, Amber Olivia Evelyn Chapman, and Daniela-Cătălina Cărlan, Freya Luise Charlotte Hiemenz, Laurine Barachin, Guillaume Alexis Fruquiere.**

who have volunteered their time and expertise assisting the field team, collecting data about wildlife and providing a great help.

Andra Ganci was a big help with the greenhouses and tree nurseries in Leaota.

Teodora Tănase was a great help to us in the communications team, with a lot of organisation and commitment.

George Soare is a constant, close friend of our project and helps our communication with amazing photos.

We would also like to give a special shout-out to **all the volunteers who helped make Făgăraş Fest a successful event.** We are grateful for the joy and excitement you brought to our community.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to **Dr. Ruth Rusby** for her help in making our writing, including this annual report, sound like English and not "Romglish.". Your contribution has been invaluable, and we appreciate your hard work and dedication.





Visits to CARPATHIA

In total, we hosted 105 visitors in 2022, all of whom gained a deeper understanding of the vital role of conservation efforts in preserving the Făgăraș Mountains.

In 2022, Carpathia welcomed visitors from all over the world who came to experience the natural beauty and our conservation efforts in the Făgăraș Mountains. **The visitors represented a wide range of organisations, including the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt from Germany, Rewilding Argentina from Argentina, representatives from the Bavarian Forest National Park from Germany, the ELP Knowledge Transfer Visit, the LIFE Programme Visit, the Gesellschaft zum Schutz der Wölfe from Germany, the ALV Foundation from Germany, the University of Eberswalde from Germany, and an international group of rangers from the European Ranger Federation.**

During their visits, we engaged these organisations in a range of activities highlighting the importance of conservation, including forest exploration, wildlife observation, community engagement, conservation entrepreneurship, and restoration and reintroduction.





© Dan Dinu

QUICK FACTS

- We continued to work with Casa Bună Association to improve the quality of life for people in the areas where we work. In 2022, Casa Bună Association provided hot meals, weekly online lessons, tutoring sessions to prepare for national exams, school supplies and winter clothes, Christmas gifts, paediatric check-ups and organised summer camps for children around the Făgăraș Mountains.
- We collaborated with the Frankfurt Zoological Society and partners to support protected areas in Ukraine. Our team delivered 26.3 tonnes of supplies in five convoys to people reached people who had sought refuge in protected areas in Ukraine.
- In 2022, we organised 5 national events to present our work and promote the Făgăraș Mountains to the national and international public.
- We were present at 5 different national events organised at national level for spreading the message about the importance of having a National Park in the Făgăraș Mountains.

- As part of the LIFE project, we organised five media trips to the project area in 2022. In addition, we attended the final conference of the POIM project (Operational Programme for Large Infrastructure) and the launch conference of the Virtual Gallery.
- We organised a study trip for 14 journalists from national and local media to the Bavarian Forest National Park in Germany to learn about the impact of a national park on communities, its organisation and functioning.
- We supported the local communities by helping them to organise events with local impact (Runcu Sheep Festival, Egg Pretzel Festival, Muscel Brunch) as well as social and educational projects.
- We organised an exchange of experiences with a group of mayors and local councillors from the southern side of the Făgăraș Mountains, who visited the Bavarian Forest National Park.
- We organised a study trip to the Hohe Tauern National Park, Austria's largest national park, with 18 representatives of the communities from the northern side of the Făgăraș Mountains.
- In October 2022, we officially signed a cooperation agreement with the Bavarian Forest National Park, an international model for combining nature conservation and sustainable economic development for rural communities around national parks.
- The Carpathia Nature Education Programme was a great success in 2022, bringing together over 500 children from different communities in the Făgăraș Mountains and across the country.
- We launched the Carpathia Scholarships as part of the Carpathia Fund for Education and Nature.
- In 2022, our cause welcomed nine new ambassadors.
- Special recognition goes to all the volunteers who have contributed to the success of all our work in the Făgăraș Mountains.
- In 2022, we welcomed 105 visitors, all of whom gained a deeper understanding of the vital role of conservation efforts in preserving the Făgăraș Mountains.



Conservation Enterprise Programme

Introduction

Bunea & Comisu Wildlife Hides

Wilderness camps

Cobor Biodiversity Farm

Roadele Munților Food Hub

Introduction

The Conservation Enterprise Programme is dedicated to promoting sustainable economic development in the Făgăraş Mountains area. In 2022, we continued our efforts to foster strong

In 2022, we provided more than 200 hours of consultancy to local entrepreneurs and coordinated the provision of complementary tourist services in the Richita Field Education Center and Poiana Tămaş.

relationships with local entrepreneurs and develop new opportunities for them to thrive.

Our consultancy and technical assistance programme focused on supporting suppliers in the Roadele Munţilor Făgăraş food hub, helping them to establish and license local food businesses based on nature and natural resources, without having a negative impact on the environment.

One of our main goals is to encourage the development of ecotourism activities and businesses that use local natural resources, such as fruits and vegetables, to provide consumers with healthy, sustainable products. To this end, **we organised training sessions for 14 entrepreneurs to discuss conservation enterprises and nature-based business opportunities.**

In addition to our technical assistance activities, we coordinated **the approval of a local gastronomic point in Podul Dâmboviţei, the**

licensing of a kitchen in the village of Măgura, and a partnership with DSVSA Argeş to launch a campaign for the establishment and approval of local gastronomic points in the southern Făgăraş Mountains.

We believe that sustainable economic development is crucial for the long-term conservation of the Făgăraş Mountains. By working with local entrepreneurs to promote conservation enterprise opportunities, we hope to create a thriving local economy that benefits both people and nature.



Bunea & Comisu Wildlife Hides

We celebrated two birthdays together with our guests and presented the lucky ones with cakes that had been carefully prepared in the local community of the Rucăr commune. We also had a special birthday party for a couple at 1599 metres at the Comisu Observatory.



Current page: © Alex Popa; Opposite page: © Alex Popa

The spring of 2022 brought big changes to our tourism department. A new lease of life and a larger team of guides were the basic ingredients for a successful tourist season.

The hides in the Făgăraş Mountains were, after a year of transition, the main attraction for the guests who came to visit us. Together with our

team of nine guides, 96 Romanian tourists and 161 from all over the world enjoyed 465 overnight stays in our million star locations. The skies weren't always clear, but the stories of the local guides, their experiences and the hikes during the tours brought smiles to the faces of the visitors.



Wilderness camps



Situated at an altitude of 1465 metres above sea level, our tent camp, set up next to the old building of a traditional sheepfold, was another highlight of the Dâmbovița Valley area.

More than 200 participants, accompanied by our guides and colleagues in the field, travelled dozens of kilometres in the area, learning fascinating facts about bison, bears, wolves, lynx, checking wildlife monitoring cameras, collecting biological samples and capturing unique moments in Europe. Thanks to the Foundation Conservation Carpathia's efforts to reintroduce the bison and to protect nature, the Făgăraș Mountains and the communities at its foot will continue to be a destination with great tourist potential, especially for those who unfortunately no longer have the opportunity to see wild animals in the countries they come from.

We would like to thank our partners and collaborators: Jack Wolfskin, Bavarian Forests National Park,

Together with our partners, tour operators, universities or institutions in the field of ecology and environment, we organised team building, nature camps, hikes and activities specific to each group.

ASI Reisen, FRAM Science & Travel, European Ranger Federation, Eberswalde University in Germany, Aenova, Society for the Protection of Wolves, Journeys with Purpose, MC Transilvania, Romanian Friend, NeoTour Brasov, DiscoveRomania, Responsible Travel, Active Holidays, Europe Active, ProPark, Rogalski & Damaschin etc.

Last but not least, we would like to thank the local producers gathered under the food-hub 'Fruits of the Mountains/Roadle Munților Făgăraș', but also to our colleagues in the organisation who helped us whenever we asked for help, either in the office or at the heart of the future Făgăraș Mountains National Park.



© Liviu Ungureanu

QUICK FACTS

- We provided over 200 hours of consultancy to support the local entrepreneurs:.
- We organised Training sessions for 14 entrepreneurs to explore conservation enterprises and nature-based business opportunities.
- Coordination of the approval of a local gastronomic point in Podul Dâmboviței, the licensing of a kitchen in the village of Măgura and the development of the partnership with DSVSA Argeș for the establishment and approval of local gastronomic points in the southern Făgăraș Mountains.
- Bunea & Comisu Wildlife Hides: together with our team of nine guides, 96 Romanian tourists and 161 from all over the world enjoyed 465 overnight stays in our million star locations.
- Wilderness Camps: more than 200 participants, accompanied by our guides and local colleagues, travelled dozens of kilometres in the area, learning fascinating facts about bison, bears, wolves and lynx.

Cobor Biodiversity Farm

2022 means continuing to adapt to unforeseen circumstances and developing the activities of the Cobor Biodiversity Farm. The outbreak of the war in Ukraine and the ongoing energy crisis have put particular pressure on small and medium-sized farms and end consumers. However, our farm persevered by adapting to unforeseen circumstances and continuing to develop its activities. This past year has further emphasized the importance of adaptability, re-evaluation, and optimization as essential elements for success in a volatile environment.

Throughout the year, the Cobor Biodiversity Farm remained dedicated to its core activities, including the horse livery and rehabilitation centre, the breeding of Carpathian Shepherd dogs, and the Transylvanian Grey cattle breeding. These endeavours not only contributed to our conservation goals but also served as a stable

source of employment for community workers and a reliable partnership for suppliers. We firmly believe that the success of the Cobor Biodiversity Farm would not have been possible without the close cooperation of the Cobor community.

The Transylvanian Grey cattle herd has reached nearly 200 head, presenting a new opportunity for farm development. In 2022, we successfully obtained the ANSVSA authorization for the on-farm slaughterhouse, enabling us to meet the legal requirements for slaughtering and marketing Transylvanian Grey Cattle meat. This achievement allows us to provide consumers with clean, healthy beef from our cattle, which are raised in the ecologically valuable Transylvanian hills, fed with traditional fodder and without the use of compound feed. Our commitment to producing high-quality meat while prioritizing



© Alexandru R. Crețu

© George Soare



The restoration of the oak pastures at Cobor Biodiversity Farm has been a long-standing project for us, and in 2022, we were proud to continue this effort alongside our new partner, the Transylmagica Association. Together, we have been working to revive the traditional pastoral lands in the area, which have been an integral part of the landscape around the village of Cobor for centuries.

the welfare of our farm animals addresses the growing demand for families to have access to such products.

In 2022, we continued the process of obtaining organic certification for the farm. This certification journey will ensure that our products to be marketed in the coming years are eco-certified, further enhancing their value and appeal to consumers.

The horse livery and Carpathian Shepherd dog kennel remained popular attractions for tourists staying in our guesthouses. More than 600 tourists had the opportunity to experience the farm tours conducted by our colleagues

from the Tourism Department. Additionally, the Cobor Biodiversity Farm became a sought-after destination for school visits during the Green Week programme, with over 100 children exploring our farm in 2022.

Last year marked the debut of two significant events, the Carpathia Bike Tour and the Open Day of the Transylvanian Grey cattle. These events proved successful and will be repeated in 2023, allowing us to further engage with the local community and visitors.

During the past year, we have planted an additional 309 oak saplings with the utmost care,

building upon the progress made in previous seasons. We have also closely monitored all of the planted areas to ensure the success of our work and the future of these vital pastures. The success of our efforts has been further amplified by the support of our donors, such as the cyclists who participated in the 2022 Țara Făgărașului Bikeathon event for our project, the Call of the Oak. With their help, we have been able to continue this project.



Cobor Biodiversity Farm

Continued

These pastures, scattered with ancient oak stands, are among the most valuable natural pastures left in Europe. Romania's five largest oak wood pastures, some of which exceed 1,000 hectares, are all located within a 20 km radius of Cobor village. These areas are home to a variety of species typical for pastureland and species that depend on old trees, such as the stag or the rhinoceros beetle. By continuing our work, we hope to maintain the beauty and biodiversity of these precious pastures for many years to come.

To support our future plans, particular attention has been given to strengthening the farm's administrative and management team within the Conservation Enterprises department. As a result, we have welcomed two assistant farm managers who have seamlessly integrated into our management team. Furthermore, we have expanded and improved the teams responsible for the care of our cows and horses. A stable and dedicated workforce at the farm level is crucial for realising any future development objectives. 2022 was a year of adaptation, growth and notable achievements for the Cobor Biodiversity Farm. Despite the challenges we faced, we remained committed to our conservation goals, fostered partnerships with the local community, and continued to provide unique experiences for visitors. Looking ahead, we are excited to pursue further development, expand our organic certification, and build upon the success of our activities in the coming years.

 Hungarian Grey Cattle © George Soare







 © George Costan

QUICK FACTS

- Transylvanian Grey Cattle herd: nearly 200 Transylvanian Grey Cattle roam free on the pastures. The farm has obtained ANSVSA approval for an on-farm slaughterhouse, allowing it to meet the legal requirements for slaughtering and marketing Transylvanian Grey Cattle meat.
- Organic certification: The farm continued the process of obtaining organic certification, ensuring that its products will be eco-certified in the future, further enhancing their value and appeal to consumers.
- Over 600 tourists experienced the farm tours and stayed in our guesthouses.
- The horse livery and the Carpathian Shepherd Dog kennel remained popular attractions for tourists staying in our guesthouses.
- The farm hosted over 100 school visits as part of the Green Week programme.
- Ancient Oak pasture restoration: restoration of traditional pasture and planting of 309 oak saplings in 2022. The project aims to revive high nature value pastures that support a variety of species and maintain their beauty and biodiversity.
- Farm management: the farm has strengthened its administrative and management team, recruiting two assistant farm managers and expanding the teams responsible for the care of the cows and horses.

Roadele Munților Food Hub

selected products harvested from the Făgăraș Mountains

Roadele Munților Food Hub had an exciting year in 2022. We collaborated with 23 local producers in the Făgăraș Mountains region, offering over 80 products in our portfolio, including seven under the Roadele Munților brand. Although only one producer is certified organic, we are committed to working with more producers who prioritise sustainable and environmentally friendly practices.

To develop our business, we have established two important partnerships with the online shop www.freshul.ro and the company Sameday, which help us to deliver our products to the Freshul warehouse near Bucharest. We also became the main supplier of food for the Richita Field Education Centre, providing food for the reforestation teams in the project area.

Our products were enjoyed by a wide range of customers, including nine

guides, 96 Romanian tourists and 161 tourists from all over the world, who tasted and consumed our offerings. We also organised more than 15 tastings for various groups of visitors, including participants in the SUPERB project, Carpathian ambassadors and Romanian officials.

In addition to offering our products at the Roadele Munților Food Hub, we set up two stands at the Cobor Biodiversity Farm and the Rucăr headquarters, giving visitors and tourists the opportunity to purchase our products for home consumption. For those who cannot visit our physical locations, individual consumers can order specially designed packages directly from us, combining different types of products in one shopping basket.



© Foundation Conservation Carpathia

In 2022, we sold a total of 12,723 jars of jams and jellies and 1,267 kg of dairy products. We look forward to continuing to work with local producers and expanding our market in the years to come.





Financial report

Income sources

Expenses

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. We continue to have a diversified revenue structure – from grants, philanthropic donations and sponsorships, as well as earned income.

Our public and private donors, foundations, corporations and major donors are not only vital to our work, they also give us the confidence that

our work is recognised as essential for environmental conservation. CARPATHIA's success wouldn't be possible without all these contributions. We are deeply grateful to all our supporters and partners for your involvement.

A significant part of the income was received at the end of 2021 (EU LIFE18, OAK, SUPERB), the amounts will be spent and reported in 2022 and 2023.

Private trusts and Foundations	
Endangered Landscapes Programme	
OAK Foundation	
Frankfurt Zoological Society	
The European Nature Trust	
One Tree Planted	
Mossy Earth	
Pancivis	
Forests Without Frontiers	
Lawson Family Trust	
Temperatio Foundation	
National Geographic Society	
Total donations	€ 2,093,065

Public funding	
EU LIFE18 NAT/RO/001082 (2019-2024)	
EU SUPERB H2020 Systematic solutions for the urgent extension of ecosystem restoration for forest-related biodiversity and ecosystem services	
Compensation payments for protected forests	€ 832,238
Total funds	€ 832,238
Individuals and other private donations	
Other private donations (Dante - Online Donation Button, Frankfurt Zoological Society-Us Inc)	€ 1,758,727
Total donations	€ 1,758,727

Corporations	
Ing Bank	€ 53,735
Multiple	€ 48,703
Zentiva Sa	€ 49,471
Ascendis Consulting Srl	€ 16,222
B.Braun Medical Srl	€ 20,278
Ursus Breweries Sa	€ 119,662
Swisscaps Romania Srl	€ 30,417
Dennemeyer Associates Srl	€ 29,149
Jack Wolfskin	€ 50,000
Total donations	€ 367,636

Other income	
Income from pasture rent, agro subsidies, timber sale, land rent, forest guarding fees etc.	
Total income	€ 507,030

Total income sources	€ 5,558,696
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Income vs. expenses

Chart 8



Expenses



Investments	
Renovating the Vladului and Draxin Valley Cabins, Rucăr Logistic Centre, Rucăr Info Centre, Maintenance the Hides	€ 275,189
Infrastructure and Field equipment	€ 109,766
Car fleet	€ 165,700
Land purchase	
Land purchase	€ 629,003
Operational costs	
Programme costs (includes funds spent for activities directly linked to our mission: wildlife monitoring, forest restoration, field consumables, sociological research studies etc.)	€ 1,625,697
Salaries (includes the employer's contribution to the State budget)	€ 2,650,240
General and administrative costs ((includes financial, administrative, legal, consulting, IT, HR, audit and other costs needed for organizational development)	€ 604,160
Non-operational costs (includes various taxes and fees)	€ 152,674
Total expenses	
€ 6,212,429	



Plans for 2023

Next steps

Ways to become involved and support us

Next steps

With the review of the Masterplan by the end of 2022, we also aligned our activities for 2023. Most of the conservation activities will move on in the same rhythm of the past years. However, we will see after the peak in 2022 a considerable decrease in replanting illegal clear-cut sites. This is actually a good sign because the largest part of the job is done and no more new clear-cuts have occurred.

An exciting new initiative will be the elaboration of a **feasibility study** for the reintroduction of three vulture species into the Făgăraș Mountains in partnership with our partners from Milvus Group and, if things go well, a consequent reintroduction project for griffon, cinereous and bearded vultures starting in 2024.

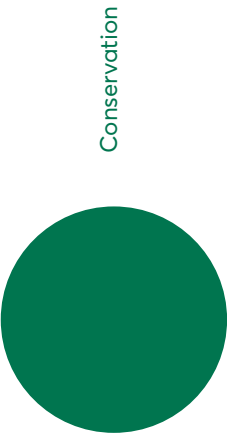
We know, the Făgăraș National Park is a long-term project and will not be coming over night. But seeing the development over the past years, we feel the initiative gains more and more momentum and we look forward to doing the next important steps in 2023.

We also believe that after a year of almost no forest acquisitions, **we will purchase again a significant amount of forests in 2023** and are confident to sign off the first compensation programme with a private land owner. We are also excited to receive carbon credits for the protection of our forests, which will be the first significant project in Romania representing a financial alternative for forest owners to cutting trees.

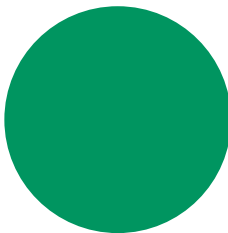
In respect to conservation enterprise development, we will lay the ground for **implementing our new eco-tourism development strategy** with significant investments into training, infrastructure and marketing, and will help several local entrepreneurs to open a Local Gastronomic Point as an easy alternative to restaurants, which require high investments and a constant visitor flow.

With an **increase of capacity in our outreach and communication department** we will also be able to support the local communities even more than we did in the past years and will develop more partnerships on the North side of the Fagaras Mountains. We will also create a new CARPATHIA Community Fund as a financial mechanism to support sustainable development projects and rapid and unbureaucratic assistance for local people in difficult situations.

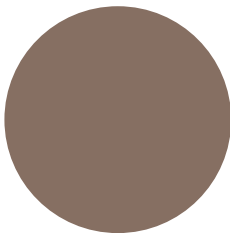
Our pillars



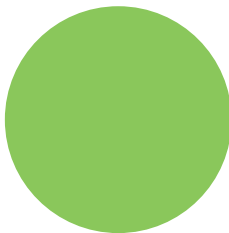
Conservation



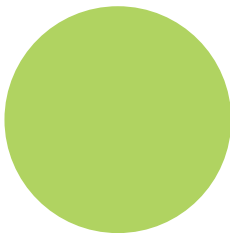
Restoration



Wildlife



Communities



Conservation enterprises

Ways to become involved and support us

Our work is possible only with the help of our supporters and partners. There are various ways to contribute to fulfilling our mission:

- **Become a strategic partner:** join us as an organization, institution, foundation, or business entity to contribute to our mission across our pillars of activity.
- **Become a corporate partner:** engage with us as part of your CSR program or to reduce your environmental footprint. We welcome in-kind, advisory, and financial contributions, with Romanian resident companies eligible for a tax reduction.
- **Become a major donor:** make a substantial contribution to support our work and specific projects.
- **Become a private donor:** make a one-time or recurring financial contribution to support our work.
- **Make occasion-related donations:** ask for donations from peers, family, and friends for a project close to your heart in lieu of gifts.

Your contribution, no matter how big or small, can help us make a difference in conservation and community outreach efforts.

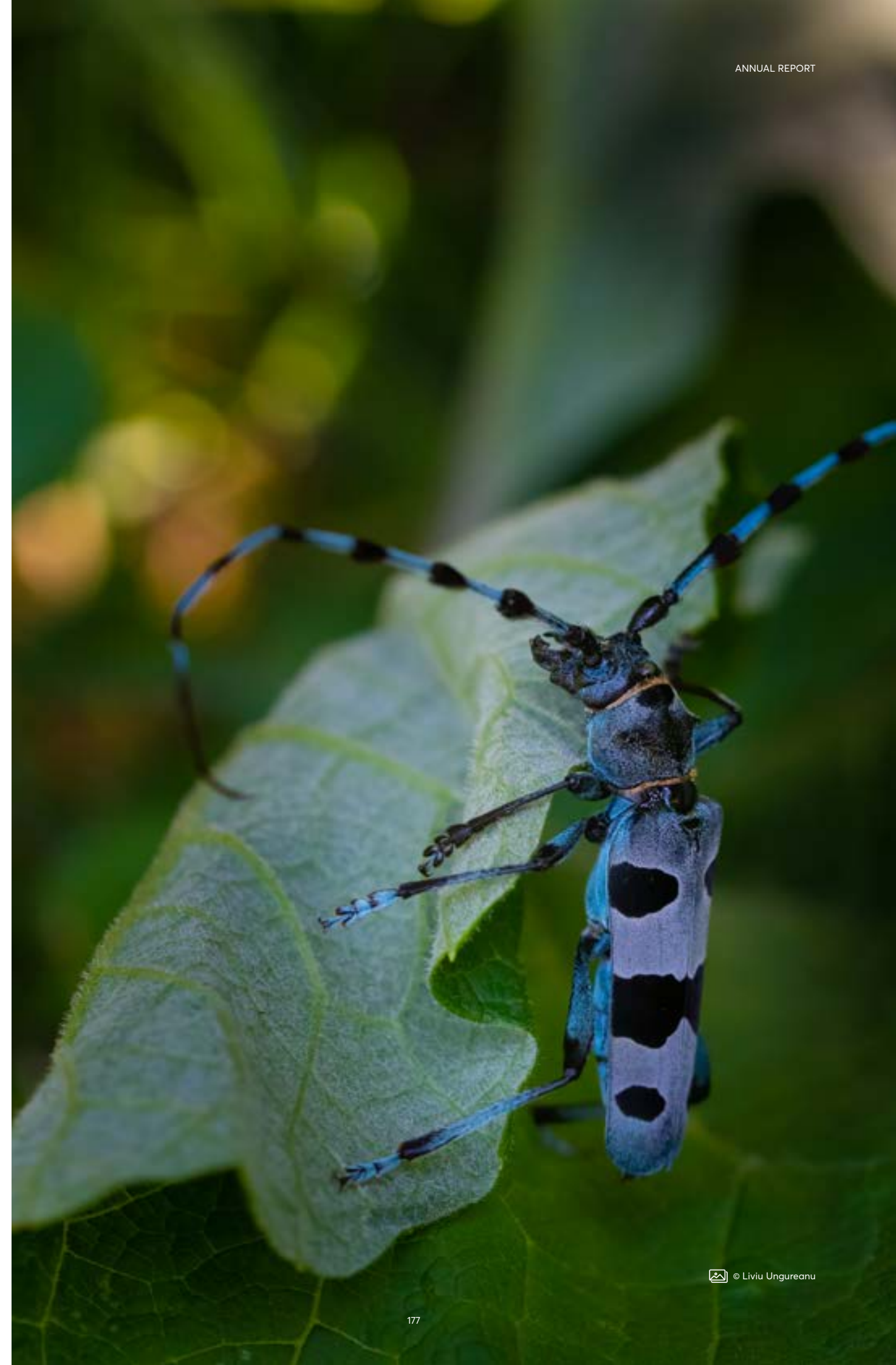
For further information on how to get involved, please contact us at info@carpathia and together we will find meaningful ways for you to engage in our work.

<https://www.carpathia.org/donations/>

DONATION ACCOUNT IBAN EUR account:

RO86RNCB0061114278450049

WE THANK ALL PARTNERS, SPONSORS AND FRIENDS OF THE CARPATHIA PROJECT WHO SUPPORTED OUR WORK IN 2022.





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