

FOR NATURE, FOR COMMUNITIES



Annual Report 2024

FOUNDATION CONSERVATION CARPATHIA



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Foreword

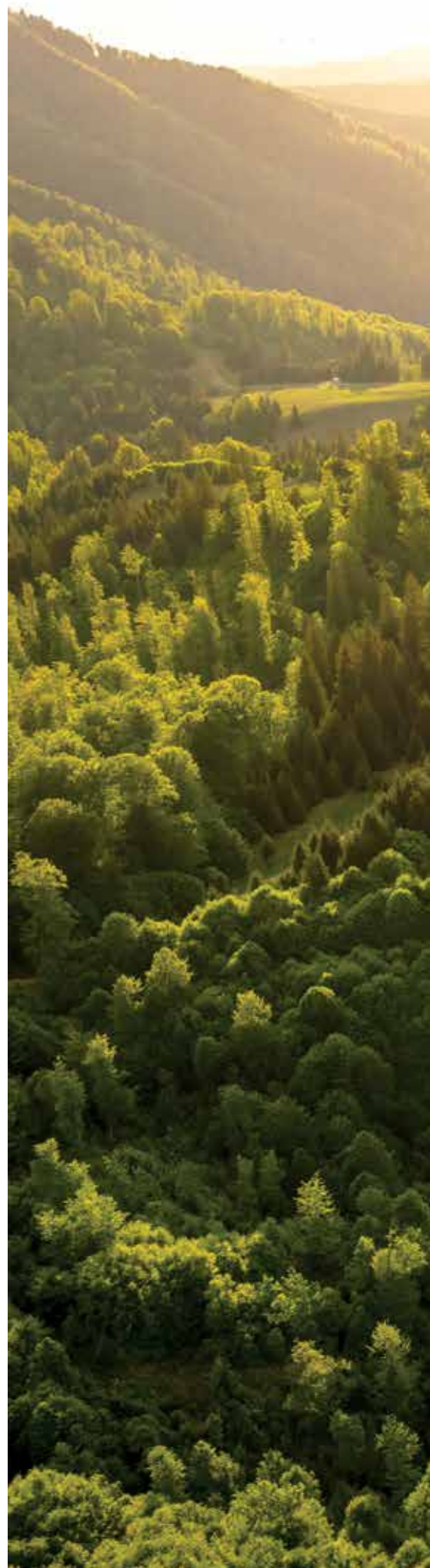
2024 was marked by significant global challenges. It was the warmest year on record, causing extreme heatwaves and wildfires in some parts of the world and catastrophic flooding in others. It was also a year of significant political shifts and escalating conflicts. For many of us, maintaining a positive attitude became increasingly difficult and it required a re-focus on those things that could be directly influenced by our work.

It was also the year in which the Foundation lost one of its pillars. On 19th July, we were struck by a sudden and tragic event: our legal director, Ioana Savulescu, and her husband perished in a car accident. Ioana had been with us from the beginning. For her, Carpathia was more than just a workplace; it was a place where she was involved wholeheartedly and permanently. A close friend to most of us, Ioana is irreplaceable and her relentless devotion to our mission will remain a constant source of motivation to accomplish what we set out to do.

Upon revisiting the 2024 outlook chapter of our 2023 report, we found that we had expressed concern that the Făgăraș Mountains National Park would become a major populist issue during the election campaign. We were right. In many communes, it seemed that opposing a National Park was a more important topic than to have access to proper healthcare, education, or housing services. It was interesting to see that the opposition was not at all party bound: wherever a local mayor collaborated with our Foundation, the opposition attacked this collaboration. We found that we were supported by one party's representatives in one village and totally opposed by the same party in the neighbouring village. Somehow, it seemed to us all parties were both with us and against us, always depending on who was in power in a particular commune. However, all mayors who collaborated with us, were re-elected by a large

majority, and being anti-National Park did not win any election campaign. This is a good sign. As predicted, after the end of the elections, the situation not only returned back to normal, but more communes came and asked us to increase our presence and activities. We hope that, over the next four years, the situation will remain positive so that we can focus again on working for nature and for people.

One highlight worth mentioning is the opening of the Rucăr Visitor Centre, Beaver House, our first public infrastructure project. The logistics centre in Rucăr has also made great progress. The administration centre will not only be a next step in developing the National Park infrastructure but will also be a milestone in architecture and building. Thanks to the vision of our architect, Jan Hülsemann, the organisational performance of our infrastructure department, and the skills of our local teams of builders, we are creating a building unlike anything seen in Romania before: a mixture of traditional and high-tech with all-natural materials. To put it in the words of our trustee Toby Aykroyd: **You start to hear the heartbeat of the National Park.**







Conservation

Introduction

LIFE Carpathia / ELSP (Endangered Landscapes and Seascapes Programme)

LIFE project

Carbon credits

Forest watch and management

Forest health

Introduction

The narrative of our project to develop the Făgăraș Mountains National Park has changed over the years. For the first five years, we were a pure land acquisition project, trying to purchase as many forests as possible to prevent logging. In 2012, we added an important pillar of nature restoration work to our activities: we started to purchase clear-cuts in order to rebuild a healthy ecosystem, restored riparian forests along the creeks and rivers, and began to reintroduce missing tree species into artificial spruce monocultures.

Then, from 2020 onwards, our focus shifted more and more towards assisting local communities to develop a green economy and helping them realise that their hinterland is not just a natural jewel, but that this jewel can be used economically much better through conservation than through the more classical, extractive ways of exploiting it.

We are now supporting disadvantaged parts of the society and sport clubs, we are building administrative and public visitor infrastructure, we put an emphasis on bringing nature close to the younger generation, and we produce movies to dismantle the myths about various wildlife species. If you read through our reports, you might get the feeling we have turned

into a social or rural development organisation. However, these activities are all additional activities: conservation remains at the core of our DNA and, in 2024, we have spent more money than ever on conservation. Even though our communication nowadays goes more towards making the National Park, the underlying importance to protect the natural value of the Făgăraș Mountains and to improve habitat conditions over degraded areas is still an extremely important part of our work.

On the following pages you will read about the amazing work of our colleagues who have made it their mission to safeguard nature in the Făgăraș Mountains.

We support social initiatives and sports clubs, build administrative and visitor infrastructure, and develop projects that bring nature closer to the younger generation.



LIFE Carpathia / ELSP (Endangered Landscapes and Seascapes Programme)

The year 2024 was also a year of stocktaking for us. Our project funded through the Endangered Landscapes and Seascapes Programme (ELSP) has come to an end. The LIFE project ends in 2025.

now exploring opportunities for collaboration with Sibiu County Council. The ongoing Junior Rangers programme, the conservation camps in our Richita educational centre, events such as Făgăraș Fest, all contribute to this.

- 1,814 students and 69 teachers participated in educational programmes.
- Over US \$750,000 was raised through the Carpathia Fund to support environmentally responsible local projects.

Project contributions to the sustainable development of the area around the Făgăraș Mountains

- The reintroduction of the bison and beavers has initiated new natural ecological processes. It contributed to increased biodiversity and created new tourist attractions. The local football team in Lerești changed its name and logo to A.C.S. Zimbrii Lerești, a sign of local pride.
- Reviewing wildlife management practices. We shifted wildlife management from sport and trophy hunting to resolving human-wildlife conflicts, focusing more on prevention and understanding animal behaviour. Local authorities now see us as partners in solving these problems.
- Improving the local economy through sustainable entrepreneurship. Travel Carpathia, Roadele Munților Făgăraș, the Carpathia Fund programme are just some of the initiatives that fall under this umbrella.
- We build trust and help communities realise the importance of nature conservation. We have developed positive relationships with local communities and are

Significant results of the ELSP project after 5 years

- 85,000 hectares of forest and grassland protected. We have protected a large area of forest and grassland by acquiring land and obtaining hunting rights over this vast territory.
- 1,168 hectares of 'healed' nature. We initiated ecosystem restoration in clear-cut areas, spruce monocultures and alpine areas. We used more than 2.5 million seedlings produced in our nurseries and repaired 18 km of logging tracks by restoring fertile soil and planting seedlings.
- 152 km of river courses were cleared of invasive alien plants.
- More than 40 electric fences were provided and installed free of charge in households to prevent conflicts with bears, and 48 farmers were compensated for damage caused by wild animals.
- 33 farmers received free Carpathian Shepherd dogs to protect their herds.
- 25 bison and 62 beavers were reintroduced in the southern Făgăraș Mountains.
- Over 30 local producers now sell their products through the Roadele Munților Făgăraș initiative.
- We built the Beaver House Visitor Centre in Rucăr, a striking tourist attraction that also provides a learning experience for tourists.

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152 km
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1
visitor centre





LIFE project

Forests are very important for climate change mitigation. In 2024 we acquired another ~100 ha of forest to protect it and enable it to fulfil its ecological role.

This year, we have also started ecological reconstruction over another 182 ha by planting seedlings in clear-cut forest areas, degraded alpine areas and making interventions in artificial spruce forests to restore them to their original natural composition. We used over 384,000 saplings for these activities.

We have made a consistent effort over the years to eliminate alien invasive plant species that do not belong to the Romanian flora. This year we made interventions along more than 152 km of the valleys in the southern Făgăraş Mountains.

We have been actively involved in wildlife management and have acted responsibly for the integrity of people and property in the five game reserves we manage, where hunting for trophies is prohibited. In addition, we donated to affected farmers 33 sheep and 15 cows to replace domestic animals attacked by bears and installed electric fencing to protect the herds more effectively. In total, between 2020 and 2024, we donated 44 cows and 138 sheep to 48 community farmers.

We have finalised the work of bison reintroduction. In the Făgăraş Mountains we have released a total of 81 individuals. The free-ranging herds have given birth to 25 calves, who are growing and living in their natural environment.

Our colleagues from the reintroduction department have also managed to capture 20 beavers from the upper Olt River basin and its tributaries and relocated them to the north of Argeş county. We now have a total of 62 reintroduced beavers in this area.

We have made great progress in the construction of the two information centres located in the communes of Rucăr and Lereşti. The first one is dedicated to the beaver and was inaugurated in July, and the second one is about the mighty bison. The information centre dedicated to the bison is due to be inaugurated in spring 2025 and its aim is to inspire a love of nature and explain the importance of the bison in the Romanian ecosystems.

We have been supporting the communities in the Făgăraş Mountains through several types of projects. We refer here to the nature and local culture festival Făgăraş Fest, to the education and entrepreneurial support programmes within the sustainable entrepreneurship programmes and to the educational programme in which children from Vâlcea county participated.

We have organised a new working visit for local authorities and other stakeholders to the Hohe Tauern National Park in Austria, to help us learn about other ways of sustainable development based on protected natural areas.

Of course, there was no shortage of challenges, but our experience and expertise helped us to overcome obstacles. For example, the lack of snow resulted in a low collection of wolf biological samples for easy wolf monitoring, but we compensated during the rest of the year and collected enough samples to get scientifically accurate results. The fickle spring weather also brought a higher risk for the success of the planting activities.



Carbon credits

Forestry projects capture and store carbon dioxide through activities such as reforestation, afforestation, and – as in our case – full protection of existing forests. Carbon offsetting (balancing out greenhouse gas emissions by funding projects that reduce an equivalent amount of carbon from the atmosphere) is one measure for companies and also individuals to effectively complement their greenhouse gas emissions reduction strategies.

Within the CARPATHIA Forest Carbon Project we allow forests to grow to their full ecological and carbon storing potential. Thanks to this, their contribution is the most immediate and cost-effective nature-based solution to counteract climate change. These efforts can be quantified by the number of tonnes of carbon stored additionally per year compared to a scenario in which the legally allowed annual harvest rate would be logged.

We are now in the final stages of verification and expect to issue the first 140,901 VCUs (Verified Carbon Units, each unit representing 1 ton of CO₂ reduction) in early 2025. Trading the first CARPATHIA carbon credits on the voluntary market will be an exciting moment, as we will be able to demonstrate to forest owners in our neighbourhood that protecting nature can also generate income as an activity in itself.

We have been developing this project for three years, during which time we have gone through the whole process:

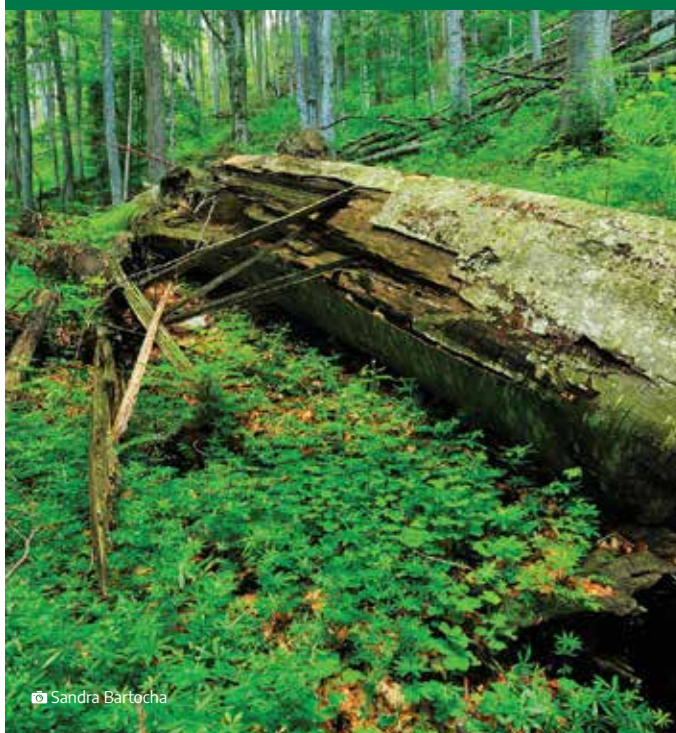
measuring the amount of carbon stored



demonstrating community and biodiversity benefits



auditing and accreditation by reputable third parties with international standards



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Forest watch and management

During 2024, we continued our responsible forest guarding activities over an area of about 25,056 hectares. These are organised into 16 forest cantons; each is under the guard of a ranger. There have been small problems related to the neighbourhoods of Carpathia properties in the context of the general cadastral surveying work in the communities on whose administrative territory we own forest areas. Now the boundaries are clearly established, well known and understood by the neighbours.

In the year 2024, the total amount of damage from illegal logging on Carpathia partners' properties, as found in the spring and fall inspections, was about 400 Euro. A total of 31 cubic metres of timber was illegally felled.

In relation to the total area of forest managed by the Carpathia Forestry Association, the damage from illegal logging amounts to 0.0012 cubic metres per hectare. The illegally felled trees were mostly small trees in areas adjacent to the communities of Cetățeni, Stoenest, Pojorâta, Moroieni.

In the first part of August 2024, a fire broke out in a plantation owned by Carpathia, in the Tămaș area, at about 1,650 metres altitude, in the administrative area of Rucăr commune. Our colleagues immediately reported the incident and mobilised swiftly, allowing us to locate and extinguish the fire during the first night of action. The reappearance of small outbreaks prolonged the guarding and extinguishing activities for another three days. If the fire had spread to neighbouring spruce forests the consequences would have been severe. We managed to limit the area effectively affected to about 3,000 square metres.



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Forest health

The Carpathia Forest District Association provides management services for an area of 25,110 hectares of forest land, within the counties of Argeş and Dâmboviţa.

Compared to 2023, we noted a decrease in the areas affected by Ipidae (the family of insects to which the bark beetle, a frequent pest of spruce forests, belongs) in the Runcu-Raciu canton. In young plantations, attacks by Hylobius abietis (large pine beetle), a pest specific to this type of plantation, were reported, the infested area being 1 ha, with a low intensity of attack.

In 2024, we took measures to prevent and control Ipidae (bark beetle) attacks

by installing on the managed areas 334 wing-type pheromone traps, primed with Atratyp pheromones, and 27 classic trap trees.

The results of the beetle larvae surveys show a low infestation.

The monitoring of areas affected by insect attacks was carried out large-scale, using professional drones and GIS image classification software. We superimposed the results of flights from different years, which led to an automatic identification of dry trees.



Intensity of attack

We detected attacks caused by insects that act between the bark and the wood in coniferous stands, showing varying intensity levels.

● ○ ○ ○ very weak ● ● ○ ○ weak ● ● ● ○ moderate ● ● ● ● strong

In **Argeş**, the infested area was 60 ha, with intensities as follows:

- ○ ○ ○ over 4 ha
- ● ○ ○ over 31 ha
- ● ● ○ over 24 ha
- ● ● ● over 1 ha

In **Dâmboviţa**, the infested area was 28 ha, and the attack intensity was:

- ● ○ ○ over 9 ha
- ● ● ○ over 18 ha
- ● ● ● over 1 ha









Ecological reconstruction

Objectives and philosophy

Tree nurseries and greenhouses

Restoration of clear-cuts

Leaota

Restoration of logging tracks

Conversion of spruce monocultures

Removal of invasive alien plants

Monitoring impacts of ecological reconstruction

**Monitoring of impact of European bison on
vegetation structure**

**Enhance the pastures' biodiversity
and economic value**

Objectives and philosophy

We are slowly approaching the finalisation of the process of restoring natural areas affected by past clear-cutting. This year we have also been replacing those saplings, among those planted in previous years, that have withered or disappeared for various reasons.

Although, normally, nature ‘decides’ best by evolutionary means how much natural regeneration and from which species to install on the sites of natural accidents, we decided to support this evolution in the right direction for two reasons:

- the accidents that led to the stripping of the slopes were not natural but were uncontrolled felling. As a result, the fertile soil was washed away for years; abusive grazing was then practiced and the local microclimate was brutally changed, phenomena that make it very difficult for natural regeneration to return.
- As the new owners of the cleared land, we are required by law to install forest vegetation of the ‘main’ species in legally regulated proportions and densities.

We continued during the fall of 2024 to plant Swiss mountain pine, juniper, Swiss stone pine and spruce in the alpine gap in the Zârna Area, to restore fragments of the historic shrub and tree vegetation belts that protect alpine valley habitats.

We are preparing and planning to sow seeds by drone in hard-to-reach areas de-forested by uncontrolled logging in the past. Another innovation will be to introduce, along with the forest seedlings, the fungi with which they form specific mycorrhizae (symbioses). In this way we copy a natural process and can increase the success rate of planting.

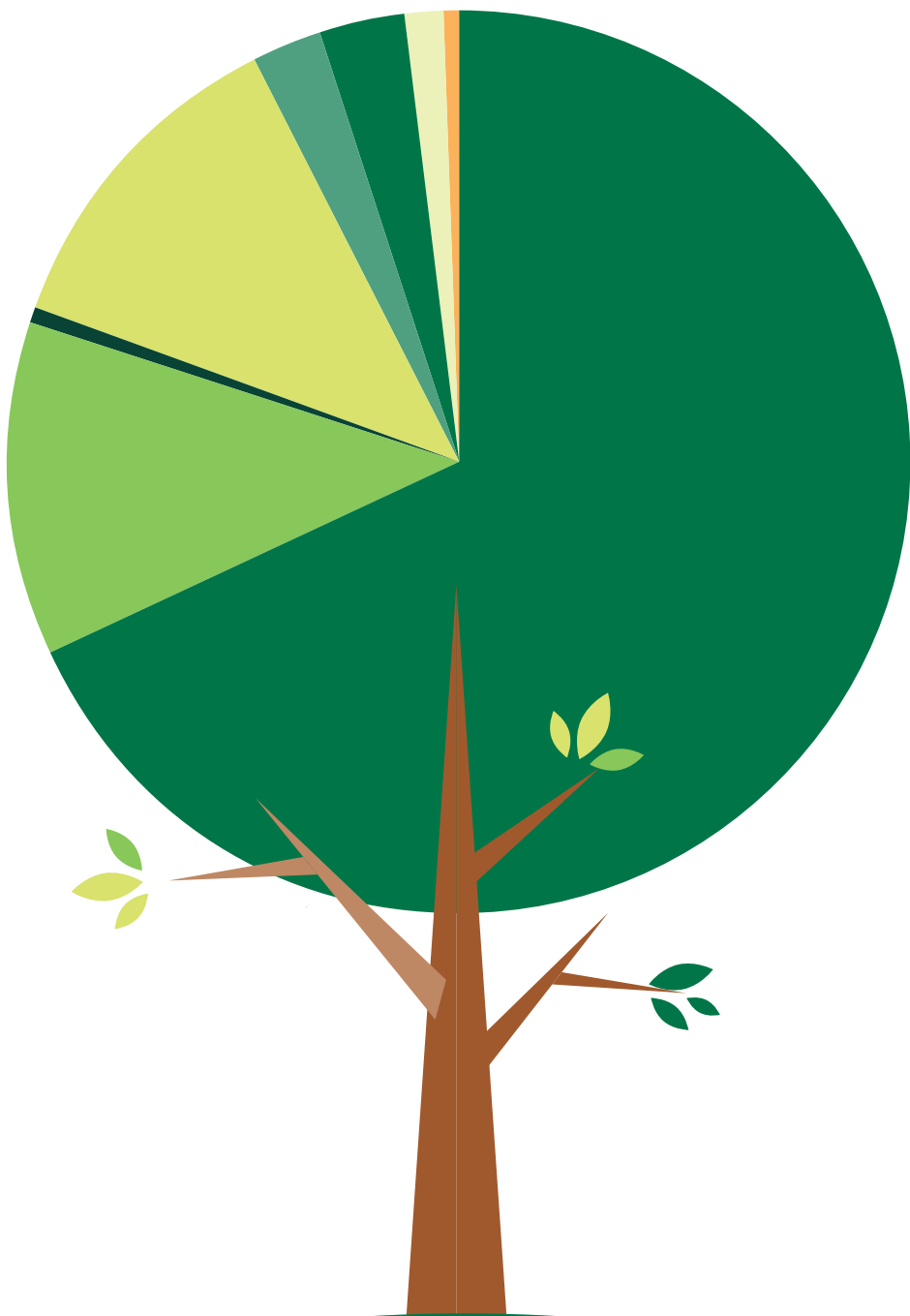




Tree nurseries and greenhouses

In 2024 we produced 208,375 forest seedlings in Carpathia’s nurseries and used them for afforestation work.

Species distribution of seedlings produced:



In 2024, we planted 17.2 hectares of new crops in the nurseries.

We moved 115,000 spruce seedlings from the greenhouses to the nurseries. In the fall we harvested more maple and ash seeds and planted:

- one acre with maple seeds (estimated production 10,000 maple seedlings)
- two acres with mountain ash seeds (estimated production 20,000 mountain ash seedlings)

	Spruce	142,050
	Fir	25,000
	Swiss Pine	900
	Rowan	24,900
	Maple	5,150
	Mountain pine	6,775
	Ash	3,000
	Juniper	600

At the end of 2024 the total area cultivated in tree nurseries is 63.5 acres, distributed as follows:



	Spruce	32.5
	Fir	10.5
	Beech	4.0
	Rowan	4.2
	Maple	1.0
	Frasin	1.0
	Mountain pine	10.3

The work in the nurseries was carried out with the support of three permanently employed, specialised colleagues with whom we have been collaborating for several years. Day labourers were also involved during peak periods, helping us with activities such as: soil preparation, removing seedlings from the plot and repotting them, and crop maintenance.

Restoration of clear-cuts

This year we restored more than 100 hectares that had been clear-cut in the past, as in previous years.

Thus, in the Făgăraş Mountains, 75.5 hectares were planted in areas affected by windthrow (due to storms) or illegal logging. We managed to achieve our objectives thanks to the LIFE and ELSP projects, SUPERB (part of the HORIZON 2020 programme), but also

with the support of private funders such as: One Tree Planted, Zentiva, Forests Without Frontiers.

We have also planted Swiss mountain pine, juniper and Swiss stone pine saplings over an area of four hectares in the alpine meadow in the Zârna area.

In addition, we planted 85,600 seedlings to replace those dried out in previous plantings over an area of 21.4 hectares.



	Spruce	294.7k
	Beech	34.6k
	Rowan	24.3k
	Fir	12k
	Mountain Pine	7.3k
	Maple	3.6k
	Alder	2.7k
	Juniper	2.6k
	Swiss Pine	2.5k

Plantings were carried out in two stages: 79.3 hectares in spring and 21.6 hectares in autumn.

The areas where planting was carried out were mainly the large reconstruction sites at Groapele, Dobroneagu, Valea Zârna, Valea Dâmboviței, but also isolated small areas where we had to intervene in accordance with the provisions of the forestry planning.

The proportion of forest species planted was influenced both by the altitude (in all areas we planted at over 1,550 metres) and by their specificity (in the Zârna Valley, for example, a narrow glacial valley, there is not a single beech sapling in natural regeneration, the dominant natural species being

Leaota

For the first time, we also planted an area of 7.8 hectares in the Leaota Mountains, with a total of about 31,560 saplings of spruce, fir, beech and maple species. The work was funded through the National Reconstruction and Resilience Programme (NRRP European funding) and was on privately owned land. We noticed there are bureaucratic difficulties in carrying out this type of project.

We also experimentally planted 10,000 beech seedlings in the Leaota Mountains in areas affected by windthrow from which no timber was extracted, to support the return of multi-species (natural mixed type) forest to the area.

In order to have an appropriate success rate in plantations, in 2024 in the Făgăraş Mountains we carried out plantation clearing (cutting of weeds and other plant categories around the seedlings) over an area of about 289 hectares, through LIFE, ELSP and SUPERB projects (under the HORIZON 2020 programme), but also with the support of private funders such as One Tree Planted, Zentiva, Forests Without Frontiers.

Separately in the Leaota Mountains, weed pulling was carried out in the 7.8 hectare plantation realised within the framework of the NRRP project with European funds.

Monitoring of the plantations was carried out using drones. They captured images of dozens of sample areas of 1 hectare each, and the images were then analysed. The results were used to calculate the need for completions in 2025.





Restoration of logging tracks

In the year 2024, the restoration of the former logging roads in all the Carpathia reconstruction areas was virtually completed. We were able to accomplish this task with excavators owned by Foundation Conservation Carpathia and with the help of specialist operators employed by the Carpathia Forest Association.

In total we restored about 1.9 kilometres of road on the steep mountain slopes in the Valea Rea area, in the administrative territory of the Nucşoara commune. This is the location of a former windthrow that occurred in

2022 in a spruce monoculture.

The restoration of these illegal logging roads in 2024 created additional habitat with good soil for new plantings over an area of about 10-11 hectares.



Conversion of spruce monocultures

This year we continued the interventions in the spruce monocultures within the LIFE project, interventions that took place both in areas where the first spruce removal was carried out (the Sătic area in the administrative territory of the municipality of Rucăr) and in areas where the second intervention in monocultures was carried out, after six years, to restore light in the forest (the Tămaș area in the administrative territory of Rucăr). In the case of the interventions in the Tămaș area, we left the resulting wood as dead wood in the forest (very valuable for insects and other small organisms), after which we carried out planting activities:

In the Cuca area (on the administrative territory of Lerești commune): 2,000 beech saplings, 1,000 fir saplings, 500 maple saplings and 100 elm saplings.

In the Tămaș area: 2,000 beech, 1,000 fir, 500 plane, 200 ash and 100 elm saplings.

In the Tămaș area, 1,650 alder saplings were planted to restore alder galleries and to replenish dry saplings from previous afforestation.





Removal of invasive alien plants

In 2024, Foundation Conservation Carpathia continued the implementation of the Action Plan for the monitoring, control and eradication of invasive alien plant species (IAS) on the main tributaries of the Dâmbovița and Argeș rivers in the southern sector of the Făgăraș Mountains. We carried out an impact assessment on the conservation status of natural habitats, which will continue in the coming years.

The initial objective of the project – to eliminate 50% of invasive alien plants along 40 km of rivers – was significantly exceeded. We have achieved a total of 152.19 km managed between 2021-2024 (on most stretches we have intervened repeatedly to ensure success):

- **37 km in 2021**
- **31.5 km in 2022**
- **107.35 km in 2023**
- **149 km in 2024**

We removed the IAS manually, or with the help of mechanical tools such as a hoe, either by uprooting or by cutting them. This activity involved a high number of people (FCC employees and volunteers). This year we focused on the entire length of the targeted river valleys, invaded by annual or biannual alien species: *Erigeron annuus*, *Conyza canadensis*, *Impatiens parviflora* or *Xanthium orientale ssp. italicum*. We were trying also to stop expansion of Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*) upstream, in the project area. This is one of the most dangerous alien invasive species, which must not be allowed to extend up the river valleys.

In order to assess the success of our activities in controlling the expansion of alien invasive plant species, from 2020-2021 we conducted a botanical assessment over 57 monitoring plots in (39 in restoration areas previously invaded by IAS and 19 in IAS-free reference areas), correlated with fixed point photography for landscape changes.

The results of the vegetation monitoring showed an overall decrease of the IAS cover correlated with an increase of the native species cover in the monitoring plots as a consequence of our activities. There are obvious changes in the cover of alien invasive plant species along the years, following their removal, especially for annual species: *Erigeron annuus*, *Conyza canadensis*, *Impatiens parviflora*, *Impatiens glandulifera*, *Xanthium orientale* ssp. *italicum*. Thus we record an average decrease in cover of these species from 50–70% in 2020 to 1–5% in 2023. For the perennial *Reynoutria japonica* (Japanese knotweed), the decrease in cover is insignificant following its removal by yearly cutting.





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Monitoring impacts of ecological reconstruction

Between 2019 and 2024, our team monitored the condition of the restored habitats using biological indicators such as understory vegetation, bird species of conservation concern, and soil arthropods (spiders). The aim? To see if restoration measures are working and how nature changes over time.

Because real changes in forests take place slowly, over decades, we chose indicators that can track these processes over the long term, but also react to our direct interventions.

The monitoring has shown that degraded forests and habitats are starting to recover: specific understory plants are re-emerging, fauna is diversifying and forests are becoming more connected. In total, we monitored vegetation in 150 permanent areas and terrestrial arthropods at 88 points, both in restored areas and in well-preserved forests or degraded habitats left intentionally unaltered.

In 2024, we completed the last monitoring phase of the LIFE and ELSP projects, analysing all the data collected over these five years. The conclusion is clear: restoration is working and nature is responding positively.

In this respect, at the beginning of the project (2019 and 2020), we collected and analysed baseline vegetation data over 210 sample plots and ground arthropods data from over 100 sample plots. Based on the results obtained in the following years (2021-2024) we monitored these indicators on permanent transects or in sample plots on FCC properties. These were in degraded habitats to be restored (clear-cut forests, spruce monocultures, degraded alluvial forests, subalpine dwarf shrubs), in well-preserved forests and on degraded habitats that will remain untouched. We

monitored 150 permanent sample plots for understory vegetation and 88 permanent sample plots for the terrestrial arthropods communities' composition and structure.

The final data analysis showed the beneficial effects of habitat restoration on the selected indicators (understory vegetation and terrestrial arthropods) correlated with a recover of structure and function of the restored forest, meadows and riparian habitats.

Monitoring of impact of European bison on vegetation structure

In 2024 we finalised our five-year research on the impact of the reintroduced bison on the habitats within the acclimatisation enclosures. The study aimed to address a knowledge gap by investigating the effect of reintroduced bison on forest understory vegetation. From this year onwards we will monitor the impact of the released bison in the wild on the habitats in the Făgăraş Mountains.

Understanding the impact of European bison on the vegetation will help to

highlight its importance for naturally functioning ecosystem processes and will also help when it comes to mitigating fears of landowners regarding possible damage to forests. We conducted this study in the southern sector of Făgăraş Mountains, where 81 bison have been reintroduced since 2019, in three acclimatisation enclosures, located from 1,037 to 1,667 m in altitude in a habitat mosaic.

Our hypothesis was that the presence

of bison, compared to fenced control sites, would decrease overall cover of herbaceous species but increase plant species richness, while also increasing the abundance of woody seedlings.

We found the presence of bison had significant effects on clear-cut forests and riparian habitats, but not on mixed forests, beech forests, spruce monocultures or meadow habitats. These early results suggest that the temporary presence of bison can speed up natural regeneration in clear-cut

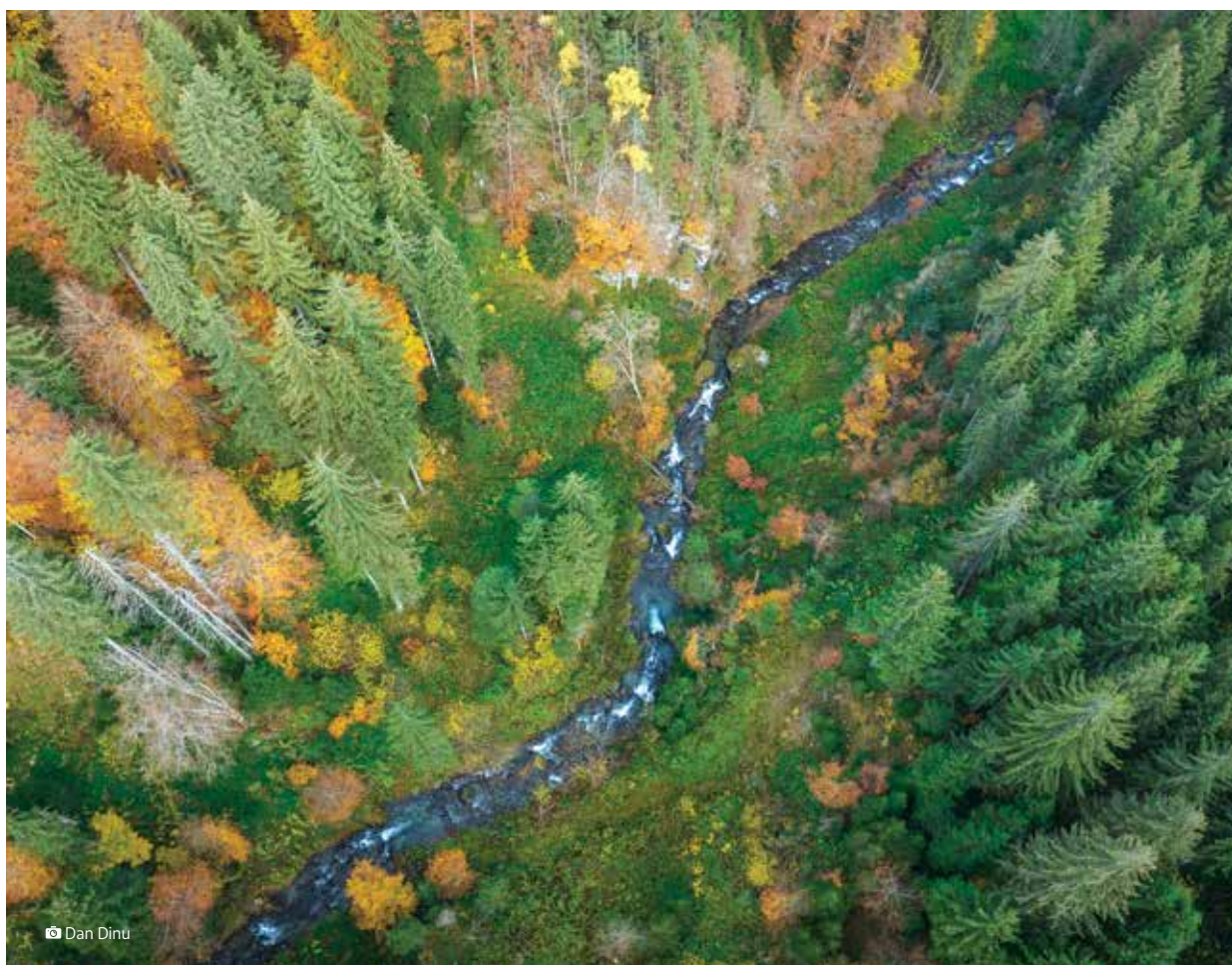


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forests in the grazed sample plots. We can suppose that this favourable impact, linked with bison preferences for feeding in open habitats more than in forests, will be maintained on all the clear-cut areas in the release zone, the bison having a high mobility and their density being far below the carrying capacity. The bison had a significant impact on the riparian habitat. In the grazed areas, even if in the first phase the impact of the bison on the vegetation was destructive, after the grazing was stopped following bison release into the wild, the impact was favourable by stimulating the regeneration of characteristic vegetation. Here, the bison had a favourable impact on the population increase of *Tozzia carpathica* – a species of conservation importance, included in the EU Habitats Directive.

Our results proved that incorporating European bison into forest management plans and conservation strategies on the Făgăraș Mountains can be a valuable tool for restoring natural ecological processes and achieving rewilding goals.

Here, the bison had a favourable impact on the population increase of *Tozzia carpathica* – a species of conservation importance, included in the EU Habitats Directive.



© Dan Dinu





Enhance the pastures' biodiversity and economic value

In 2024, we continued measures to improve the biodiversity and economic value of pastures. Between May and July, we mowed more than six hectares in the Găinațu Mare and Dracsin pastures. This reduced the cover of invasive species such as Tufted hair grass (*Deschampsia caespitosa*) and Mat grass (*Nardus stricta*), allowing native grass vegetation to develop. Our rangers and coordinating biologist participated in this activity.

Some of the pastures owned by Foundation Conservation Carpathia, located in the high and sub-alpine mountain area, are used for grazing by local communities. Pasture improvement will lead to a potential more than two-fold increase in livestock numbers, depending on the natural biomass production of well-conserved pastures. Managing grazing resources to increase the quality and quantity of pasture forage will have a high social value and also reduce grazing pressure on forests.







Wildlife and fish management

Introduction

Reintroduction of the bison

Beaver reintroduction

Fish in the Făgăraș Mountains rivers

Wildlife management

Measures taken to reduce conflicts in 2024



Introduction

Our wildlife management activities are an important pillar of our efforts to protect and enhance all native species in the Făgăraș Mountains whilst also protecting local communities from frequent conflicts with wildlife, particularly bears and wild boar. Public authorities require us to eliminate a certain number of wild boars and bears. However, our policy has always been to avoid interfering with wildlife in their natural habitats, but to focus all our efforts on reducing conflicts.

Unlike our neighbouring hunting areas, we do not engage in any sport or trophy hunting. Instead, we use the allotted hunting quotas exclusively to reduce the presence of wild boar on the agricultural land around the villages, and to eliminate those bears which regularly enter villages and damage livestock.

The wildlife at their home in the mountains must be protected. However, the people living in the villages must be protected, too. Finding the balance between both demands remains a challenge for our colleagues, who patrol the boundaries of the villages almost every night.



Reintroduction of the bison

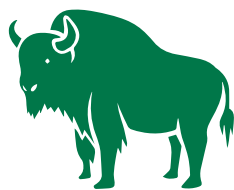
In the spring of 2024, we released the last of the remaining bison in this reintroduction project, a group of four in Lerești and another group of 20 in Nucșoara. By releasing them, we have achieved the project’s objective of releasing a minimum of 75 bison in three reintroduction areas.

During the monitoring activities of the groups already released, we found the presence of 12 calves born in the wild in 2024, but we also had three losses.

With the increase in the herds, there have also been cases where the bison have approached areas where local people produce fodder for their domestic animals. Although these were two isolated cases, the rangers of Foundation Conservation Carpathia have scared them away from sensitive areas. When the bison were reported on hunting grounds (territories) neighbouring those managed by the Foundation entities, the removal actions were carried out with the support of the technical staff of the respective managers.

In one case, the removal of a bison located in an area with orchards in Nucșoara required its relocation.

In the spring of 2024, we released the last of the remaining bison in this reintroduction project



81 bison

Total number of bison reintroduced between 2020 and 2024



12 calves

Born in the wild in 2024



Nucșoara

Lerești

Released in 2024



Beaver reintroduction

In 2024, we released 20 beavers, which were captured and relocated from the counties of Braşov and Sibiu. As we are talking about a species protected by law, in order to capture them we first went through the legislative steps necessary to obtain the derogation and environmental authorisations.

We constantly monitored beaver families to see how they adapted to the new habitat conditions and to prevent possible conflicts.

In two cases, we had to install water level regulators in the dams built by the friendly engineers to avoid flooding some land. The beavers went about their business unhindered.



© Cosmin Dumitrache



Fish in the Făgăraș Mountains rivers

Many thanks to the partners of Aqua Crisius! Thanks to them, in 2024 we achieved a series of remarkable results in biodiversity in the waters of the Făgăraș Mountains.

For the fifth year in a row, we reintroduced 1,000 graylings (*Thymallus thymallus*) in two rivers in

the foothills of the Făgăraș Mountains, where the species had disappeared because of dams. In one of them we have confirmation that the species is now reproducing naturally: we have identified juveniles from a previous laying of roe. The programme will be evaluated in 2025.

We also re-stocked native trout (*Salmo trutta*) populations in mountain rivers and lakes with:

200 kg
of pre-reared fish fry

Over 1 ton
of adult-size fish

100,000
embryonated eggs

We obtained funding for the project 'Removal of an obsolete timber dam...' through the Open Rivers programme, for the studies needed to remove an old dam in the southern Făgăraș Mountains.



Wildlife management

Prevention

In 2024, intervention activities for the prevention and mitigation of conflicts between humans and wild animals took place over the 78,000 ha of game reserves managed by Carpathia, but also in the wider area represented by the administrative territories of the seven municipalities with which we have concluded permanent contracts. The territories are illustrated in the image below.

Carpathia's intervention teams are composed of 13 rangers and specialists who act directly in the field, available day and night, to prevent and reduce human-wildlife conflicts.

Around 70% of conflict interventions take place at night, in difficult and demanding conditions. During the peak season, May-October, some

communities have as many as 2-3 alerts per night. The Carpathia intervention teams, together with representatives of the Gendarmerie, municipalities and accompanied by veterinarians respond to all these requests.

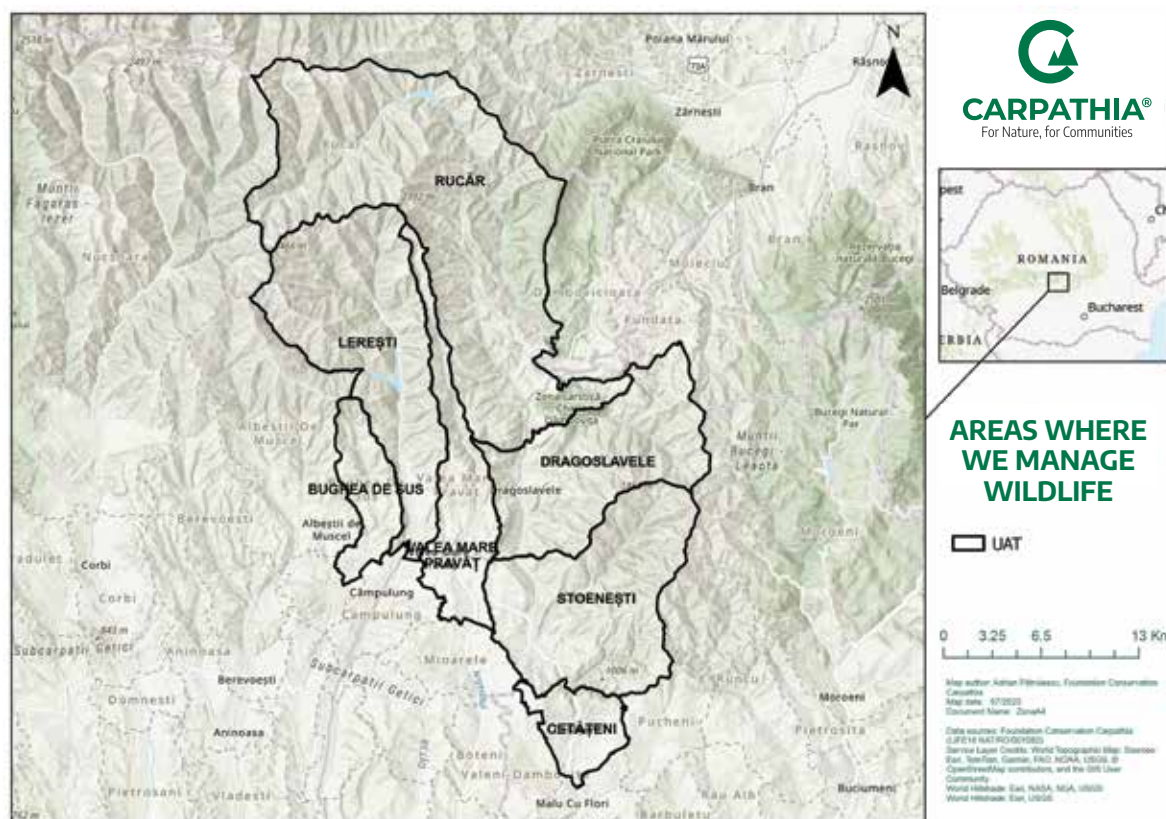
In the year 2024, 125 wildlife incidents were reported in the areas we manage.

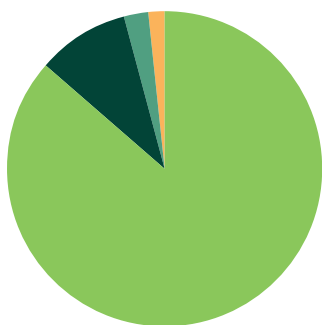
In order of frequency, conflicts occurred mainly in the communes of Rucăr, Lerești, Stoenesti, Dragoslavele, Valea Mare Pravăț, Cetățeni.

Incidents were mainly caused by bears (108 cases) and wild boars (12 cases); wolves (three cases) were much less reported.

Main sources of attraction for wild animals:

- meadows and pastures (attracted wild boar and bears);
- slaughterhouse waste generated by individual farmers (attracts bears, which have a highly developed sense of smell);
- domestic animals kept by farmers in the absence of effective protection measures (bears);
- abandoned or insufficiently protected orchards (bears, wild boar, deer);
- food sources in permanently unoccupied buildings or facilities (bears).





■ Bears:	108 cazuri
■ Wild boar:	12 cazuri
■ Wolf:	3 cazuri
■ Unknown:	2 cazuri

In the seven communities in which we manage human-bear conflicts, we have genetically identified a total of 15 problem bears this year. Of all the damage caused by these bears, most are attacks on domestic animals, attacks that remain the main problem of human-bear coexistence in our project area.

Bears that attack domestic livestock are almost exclusively male (of the 13 bears involved in livestock attacks in 2024, 12 were male). The majority of identified problem bears record low numbers of damage, often sporadic, but we note that there are cases where some bears are responsible for a lot of damage (e.g. CC04EP and CC00F1). In 2024 we had to remove two problem bears that were making recurring attacks on domestic livestock.

Categories of bear incidents:

18

attacks on domestic animals

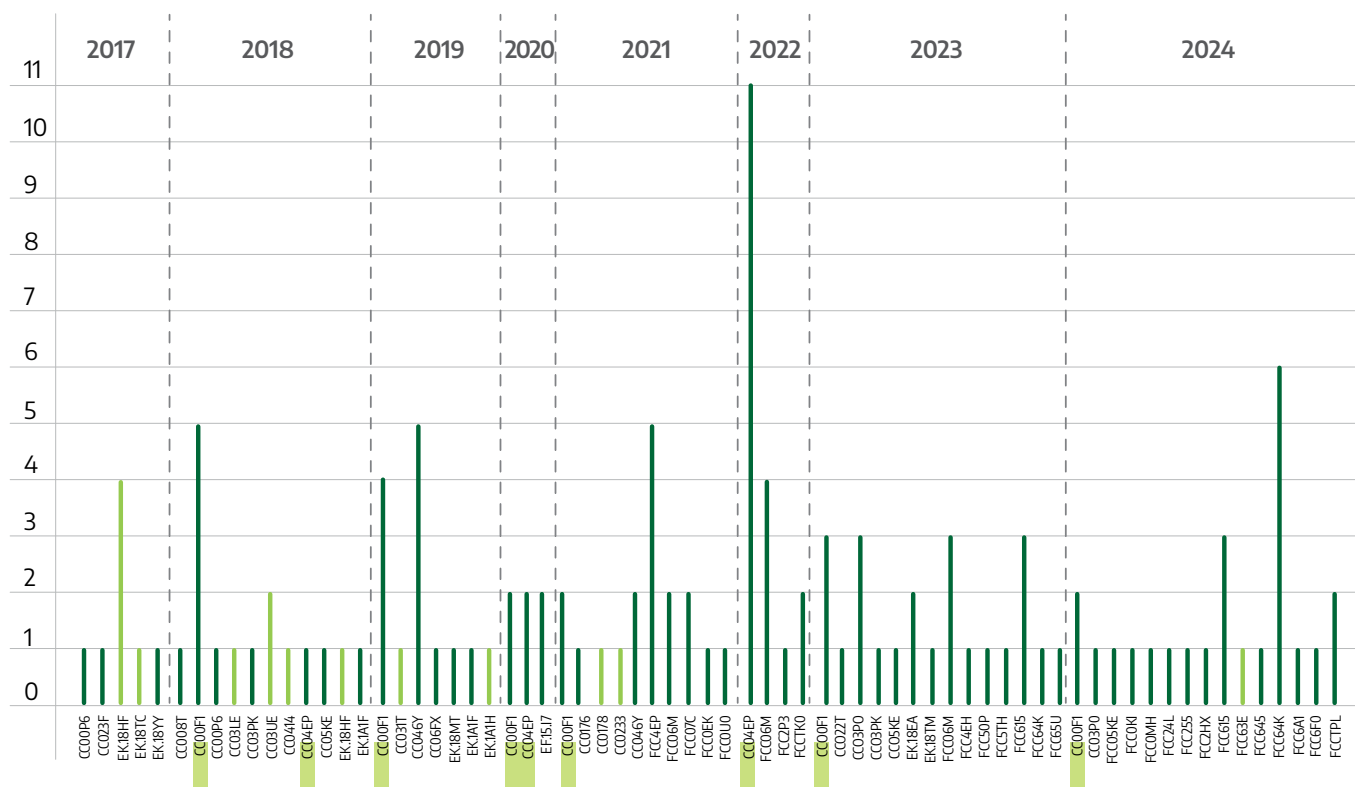
1

significant damage in orchards

5

- cases of repeated presence inside villages

Compared to 2023, in 2024 the number of conflicts within localities was lower.



Frequency of conflicts caused by genetically identified bears over time. Male CC04EP, which had become very aggressive and habituated to pigs in local households, was successfully extracted on 08/31/2022, stopping the recurrence of his attacks. The male CC00F1 on the other hand, has been known as problem bear since 2018 and continues to make recurrent attacks until today, after which it disappears for a while from our project area, hampering our management measures.

Measures taken to reduce conflicts in 2024

- Installed/reinstalled 118 electric fences; provided ongoing counselling and support to farmers;
- We collected, transported and incinerated over 30 tons of slaughterhouse waste;
- Provided livestock from Carpathia Farm as compensation for bear damage;
- Members of the intervention teams acted on all community alarms with measures such as: chasing, installation of cages to capture bears or even eliminations; for the night period we used professional thermo-vision drones;
- Effective cooperation with representatives of the Romanian Gendarmerie;
- We monitored one bear with a GPS collar over a 12-month period from September 2023 to September 2024.

Private compensation

- In 2024, we continued our private compensation programme in support of people who have been harmed by large carnivores (bears and wolves).
- We donated 14 cows and 43 sheep to 48 farmers.



185 days



16.5 km

min 2°C, max 35°C



247 days


284.04 km

zZz
69 days



Wildlife monitoring

Introduction

Brown bears

Wolves and lynx

Deer



Introduction

Over the last 10 years, wildlife management has undergone important changes, both nationally and in our project area.

At the national level, trophy brown bear hunting was banned in 2016 and then abruptly reopened in 2024. This decision was based on a chain of tragic events culminating in a fatal bear attack on a young girl in the Bucegi Mountains. We noted, however, a lack of scientific rationale behind the decision to reopen hunting in its commercial form, and little effort at national level to manage truly habituated bears near human settlements.

In our project area, efforts to restore degraded ecosystems have continued, and in 2024, the bison and beavers have returned and are already contributing to the resilience of ecosystems in the Făgăraș Mountains.

Human-wildlife coexistence efforts have also continued, and prevention efforts are reflected in a decrease in the number of incidents. This should help to maintain stable populations of large carnivores with increasing human acceptance.

In 2024, our wildlife monitoring project reached its seventh year, which allowed us to assess trends in bear, wolf, and lynx populations compared to the 2017-2019 baseline surveys. In brown bears we saw increases in population size, in wolves we were unable to estimate density again due to lack of snow, and in lynx we saw a surprising decrease in numbers.

From next year we are preparing for the next stage of this long-term monitoring scheme, unique for Romania and this part of Europe: repeating the surveys 10 years after the baseline surveys. Our results support the relationship and communication with the authorities, with game managers, with farmers in local communities. By knowing the number of large carnivores, the magnitude of those causing damage, we can calibrate management measures for local particularities. These data also help us to communicate the main changes to the general public, the press, visitors and students around the Făgăraș Mountains, in order to inform based on science, combat misinformation and increase people's tolerance towards these symbolic species.

Brown bears

The results of monitoring the bear population in our project area at three different points in time (2017, 2018 and 2022) highlight a large bear population dynamic in a relatively short time: the bear density of 18 bears/100 km² in 2017 decreased to 13 bears/100 km² in 2019 and climbed again, to 22 bears/100 km² in 2022. We suspect these fluctuations are driven by food availability in the wild. We are therefore determined to continue to clarify the unknowns in the complex problem of coexistence with this species. In addition to the prospective assessment of the bear population trend in 2027, exactly 10 years after the baseline study, it is now necessary to understand and measure how the natural ecosystems of the Carpathians contribute, through natural food resources, to: 1. the fluctuation of the bear population and 2. the frequency and nature of human-bear conflicts.

To be able to answer these questions we have planned a study of bear diet during 2024, which we aim to implement from 2025. This study will involve using a method of sequencing DNA from bear droppings to identify consumed food categories (DNA metabarcoding). While traditional methods of analysis, using the microscope, could determine percentages of each type of food consumed, we would not be able to accurately determine whether traces of meat, for example, would come from domesticated animals or wild herbivores. The genetic fingerprinting of each food source allows us to know exactly what the bears ate. We will conduct the study by focusing on two areas: one near human settlements, made up of a patchwork of natural habitats, orchards and gardens, and another far from human-produced food sources, in the heart of the natural habitat. By collecting samples from spring to late fall, we will be able to build up a picture of diet seasonality (how food sources change with season and availability).

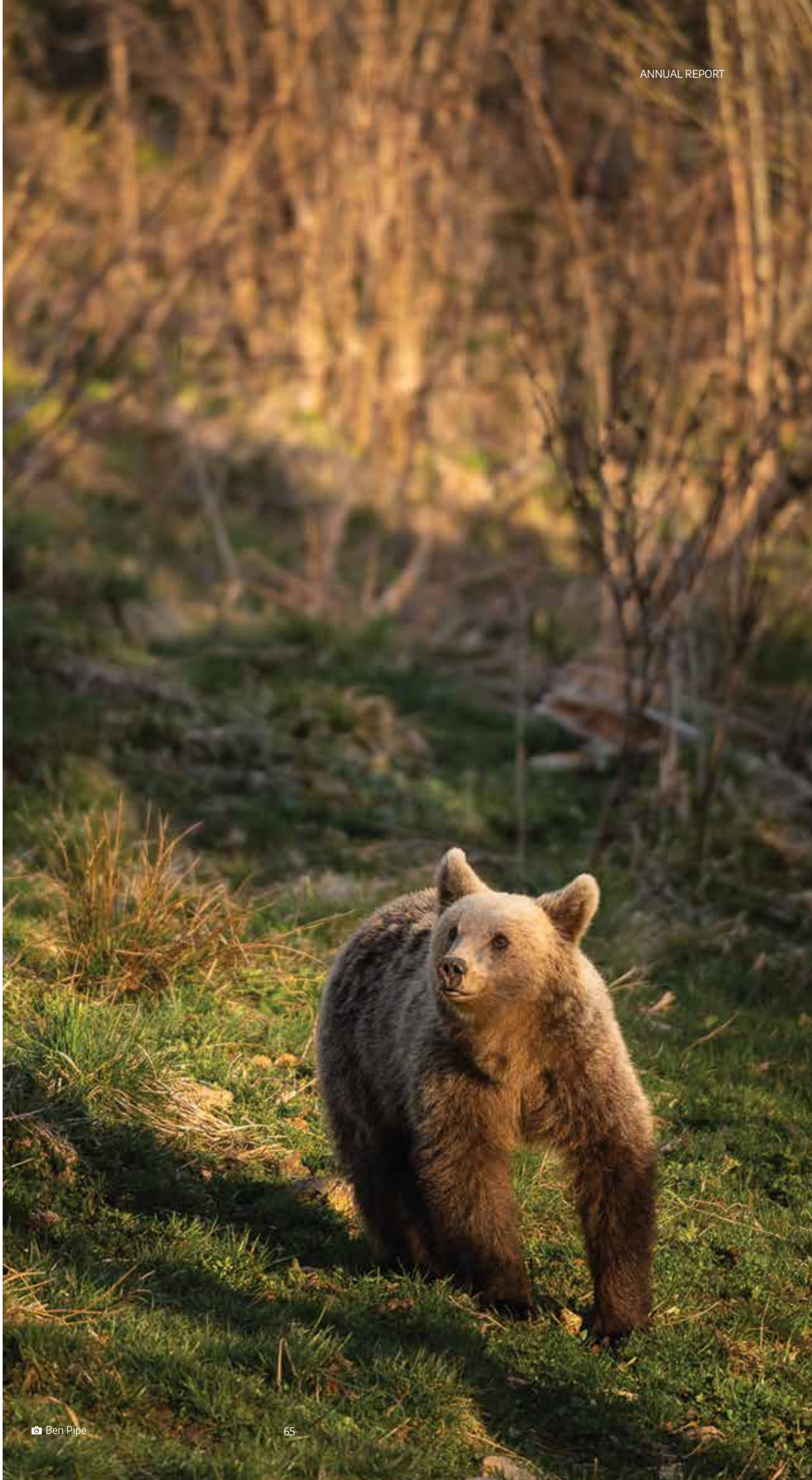
Another necessary step will be to measure the main food sources. Planning these measurements has been very challenging given the complexity of brown bear diets. We are in the process of establishing a network of permanent points to measure the production of beech nuts, for example, an important source in the bear's autumn-winter diet, using seed traps.



Ionuț Crețu



Daniel Mirlea



Wolves and lynx

For the wolf study, 2024 was the year we analysed data collected from the winter of 2017-2018 through the winter of 2022-2023 and moved forward with publication. We prepared intensively to return to the field from November 2024, to continue monitoring wolf packs seven years after the baseline study.

Our wolf genetic fingerprint set, through its continuity, is unique for Romania and this part of Europe. This dataset helps us to follow the dynamics within wolf packs, changes in breeding pairs, connectivity between packs and even the formation of new packs through dispersal and mating of pups in the first years of monitoring. Analysing the parental relationships between new wolves over several years brings interesting news and highlights quite high pack dynamics, typical of landscapes where humans are expanding.

For example, on the southern part of the project area, the 'Târgului River' pack in the first year consisted of six individuals: the breeding pair, their three cubs and one more genetically unrelated but accepted female within the pack. A similar pack composition is maintained in the second year. In the third year of monitoring, we find four more wolves from the original family in the area, all four of which are pups of the original pair – that disappears from our radar. In addition, at least three genetically unrelated individuals appear, suggesting an as yet un-elucidated dynamic in the area. In the fifth and sixth years of our monitoring, things become much clearer: from the initial pack, a new pack is formed in the Rucăr-Dragoslavele area, which grows from four to seven individuals; on the Râu Târgului a family of three-four individuals remains and a third pack of two individuals disperses to the north-east and fills a missing site created by the dissolution of an old pack in Piatra Craiului.

In 2024 our wolf monitoring scheme was improved and validated by publishing the results in the scientific journal *Ecology and Evolution*. The paper will be available to the public and specialists in early 2025.

In early November we returned to the field to continue genetic monitoring of wolves. The winter season got off to a promising start with early snow, so by the end of the year we had already managed to collect 60 samples. This year, for the first time, we are enjoying the benefits of a technological innovation to help us during winters when the snow cover disappears very quickly. This is the collection and extraction of wolf DNA from the environment, i.e., the identification of the genetic fingerprint from wolf trails left in the snow. We hope to test this new method successfully, so that from 2025 our success in monitoring this species will increase and the associated costs will decrease.



Zsolt, wildlife monitoring specialist at Foundation Conservation Carpathia, collects wolf DNA from the environment for the first time. Collecting wolf DNA from the environment, i.e., detecting the genetic fingerprint from wolf tracks in the snow, is a technological innovation that we tested for the first time towards the end of this year. This innovation can help us in increasing our sample collection success as snow periods are getting shorter.

In 2024, we again installed 150 motion sensor cameras at the same locations as in 2018-2020 to monitor streams. Over 190 days these cameras recorded 605 pictures of lynx, and our catalogue grew to 3,766 images. With these new photos we increased the number of lynx identified in our project area to 67.

We estimated local population density as follows:

1,60 lynx / 100 km²
(±0.39)

in winter 2018-2019, a value that remains almost unchanged the next year

1,73 lynx / 100 km²
(±0.38)

in autumn-winter 2019-2020, a value that decreased significantly over the next four years

0,86 lynx / 100 km²
(±0.23)

in autumn-winter 2023-2024

To us this decrease is surprising in a species whose food resources do not appear to have declined. Human activities have not put increased pressure on the lynx species, which is why we plan to come back with a new monitoring session in two or three years to see if this downward trend continues.



Deer

While in 2021 we had logistical difficulties with genetic monitoring of deer, in 2024 we returned to the field with an improved methodology. The goal was to make sure that the genetic method for estimating the number of animals gave us relevant results. If these methodological improvements also fail to bear fruit, we will stick with the motion-sensor camera survey to define a long-term monitoring scheme, as for the other species.

Between June and September 2024, we made the effort to increase collection, compared to the baseline study, and collected over 500 DNA samples from deer droppings in a single session. In feeding areas where deer frequently come, we placed a collection filter in the field, so that we minimise detecting the same animal in the same location. The samples are now in the laboratory, and by 2025 we expect the data to clarify the minimum number of deer on each hunting ground and to allow us to estimate their density.



Alex, wildlife monitoring ranger at Foundation Conservation Carpathia, collects a non-invasive DNA sample from a deer dropping in the summer of 2024.





The second approach to this species, motion sensor camera monitoring, begun in April 2023, continued in the field through June 2024. The 127 cameras were continuously monitored throughout this time. The study generated 1,842,283 photos, of which more than 40,000 are deer photos – as estimated by an artificial intelligence algorithm. Validation of this huge dataset will take several more months, after which statistical analysis of the data will follow. We expect the first estimates of the number of individuals and their density in the analysed territory to be ready by the end of 2025. In parallel, with the help of colleagues and collaborators, we have assessed the potential impacts of tourism, domestic livestock grazing and logging for the same area and time frame as we have been monitoring the deer population with cameras. These indicators of human-induced interventions will be used to explain where deer congregate in large numbers and where deer prefer to avoid. The study will help us to understand potential threats to the mountain deer population and to calibrate habitat management measures for the species, e.g., through ecological reconstruction activities.



Communication and communities

Introduction

Media exposure

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Projects and campaigns

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Community relations

Nature education programmes

Partnership with Casa Bună Association

Visits and exchanges

Volunteering programme

Partnerships with other national parks around the world

Partners

Communication – the bridge between facts and change

In 2025, we continued to spread the word about the Foundation's activities to the widest possible audience in a variety of ways: from visits for journalists and content creators, to events and campaigns for education, advocacy and fundraising, film screenings, online communication, but also education, social engagement and sports projects. We like to think that we have succeeded in raising the visibility of the Foundation's activities and arousing curiosity where it can ignite the spark of involvement and even change.

We communicate constantly and transparently because we believe that this is the key to building community trust, reinforcing a broad public's love of nature in the Făgăraș Mountains and turning this excitement into action. For us, communication is a form of care and responsibility for what matters. Words and deeds together inform, shape, provoke, can soften the reluctance of the unwary and can set in motion gestures that, when taken together, bring about transformation.

Media exposure

In 2024, our activities enjoyed generous exposure on national and international channels – a result of the efforts and good reputation we have been steadily building. Over 2,300 appearances, articles, reports, and news stories reflected our work.

We issued 29 press releases and news about us was read 25 million times by the Romanian public. We organised three field visits for Romanian journalists and hosted seven teams of journalists from abroad.

We welcome the interest of foreign media in nature conservation efforts in Romania. Materials such as the editorial in the prestigious publication National Geographic or the article in the New York Times are an encouragement and recognition of our work. Beyond the recognition, we hope they will bring even more supporters to the mission of creating a National Park in the Făgăraș Mountains.



PRO TV - Barbara & Christoph Promberger



DIGI Animal Word - Liviu Ungureanu



Green Report - Articol Făgăraș Fest

Events

For our team, and our supporters, events always bring an infusion of excitement. In 2024, we continued to create the right setting for people to discover and love the nature of the Făgăraş Mountains in a relaxed way, through experiences in which local communities and entrepreneurs played the leading role.

Carpathia Bike Tour reached its third edition in 2024. This leisurely bike tour brought together 150 participants who enjoyed the gentle hills of Transylvania and had lunch at the Cobor Biodiversity Farm. The event was not just about nature and movement, but also about the culture and traditions of the places included in the itinerary, which included stops at King Charles' House in Viscri, a unique tulnic concert on the hillside and even a tour of the Rupea Fortress. Demand was high: places sold out as early as February.

Cobor between the Oaks, 2nd edition, took the 700 participants on guided tours of the fauna and flora around the village of Cobor, as well as through the village's historic sites. The artists Ana Coman, Taraful Caliu, Moonlight Breakfast and Hanul cu Bragă made the atmosphere even more welcoming, and the folk craftsmen coloured the space with their products and stories.

Făgăraş Fest reached, in 2024, its 5th edition and a real record of participation: 7000 nature lovers enjoyed a memorable weekend on the Moașei Valley, in Sebeșu de Sus, Racovița commune, Sibiu county. Among the activities we are proud of: 20 guided tours, 1000 participants in workshops, four debates under the Carpathia Talks umbrella, concerts with Lupii lui Calancea and the Osoianu Sisters, Coma, Dan Amariei and folklore ensembles from the community. Also, for the first time, the festival has integrated a manifest interactive installation dedicated to the Făgăraş

Mountains, built only from natural materials. The installation, called It's oh so quiet, was realised by the architectural studio VRAC following a design competition launched earlier this year.

The **Goulash Competition** is a gentle event, dedicated to those who appreciate the warmth of a traditional village and the flavour of local ingredients. More than 300 participants came to the Cobor Biodiversity Farm to taste the goulash made from the Transylvanian Grey cattle and enjoy the rural atmosphere. On the programme there were cooking workshops using Transylvanian Grey beef and a children's competition with challenges specific to country life. Enthusiasm was so high that even the rain did not deter those present.

Alongside the events we are the main organisers of, we have also partnered on a number of occasions with events created by friendly organisations. We supported the second **Lynx Festival** – the nature film festival in Brașov, the **'Planeta Nucșoara'** festival (a meeting between communities, a tribute to nature and the people who live in harmony with it, but also a celebration of the good done together) and the **Casa Bună Sânpetru Marathon** – dedicated to raising funds for the Casa Bună Association. A team from the Foundation promoted our mission, the creation of the Făgăraş Mountains National Park, by running at the **Brașov Running Festival** and the **Bucharest International Marathon**.





Projects and campaigns

Certain topics and projects require special attention. For them we have developed communication and public relations campaigns dedicated especially to the communities in the project area. The topics have taken the form of public messages, exhibitions, radio spots, radio and TV interviews, events. We are pleased that these topics have reached a wide audience:

- The beaver communication campaign – aimed to demystify some misconceptions about the cute animal. We tried to explain that nature's engineer is neither harmful, carnivorous nor dangerous.
- The invasive plant campaign – designed to help identify invasive plants and stop their spread – tackled the danger they pose to local biodiversity in a fun but explicit way.
- With the help of photographers and remarkable people from the community we put together the photo and story album Encounters through the Făgăraș Mountains. For it we organised a launch event at the 'Dimitrie Gusti' Village Museum in Bucharest, as well as two special launches, accompanied by exhibitions, in Avrig and Nucșora.
- We have dressed the monthly field report in new clothes. From September 2024 it will be called 'Stories from the Făgăraș Mountains' and gather the most sympathetic photos and news from the field for readers around the world.
- We were present at the Timișoara Architecture Biennale – BETA with an interactive installation, created by Ecou architecture studio.
- We launched the documentary 'Nature's Architects', which tells the story of the reintroduction of the bison and beavers, premiered at the Lynx Festival in Brașov. We were encouraged by the warm welcome and organised screenings in Bucharest, at the Cinema of the Romanian Peasant Museum, at the Cartfest festival in Cristian, and at the 'Cobor between the Oaks' festival. Some of these activities were made possible thanks to the support of the LIFE programme.



Roald Aron

New ambassadors of Foundation Conservation Carpathia

The ambassadors of the nature conservation mission in the Făgăraș Mountains have an essential role: they inspire concrete actions and carry forward a vision that belongs not only to specialists, but to each one of us. In 2024 they joined us:

- **Simona and Alex Stănescu**, travel bloggers and content creators
- **Rareș Beșliu**, photographer
- **Subcarpați**, the artists bringing Romanian folk, hip-hop and electro sounds together
- **Mihaela Niță**, digital creator specialised in sustainable travel
- **Roxana Monica Cârceag**, content creator
- **Ana Rubeli**, content creator specialised in cultural heritage
- **Adi Bulboacă**, photographer and ultra-marathon runner
- **Adriana Matei**, style coach specialised in sustainable fashion and digital creator
- **Daniel Opaț**, local guide from Avrig, north of the Făgăraș Mountains, and nature photographer
- **Daniel Stoia**, content creator, physiotherapist and mountain enthusiast



Community relations

Every year we develop new projects that demonstrate the huge potential of nature as a driver of social and economic development. The projects started in previous years are already showing results and demonstrating a positive impact both locally and nationally, which motivates us to continue them.

‘Forest of Immortal Stories’, the Nucșoara ancient beech tree adoption

project started in 2023, has enjoyed public attention in 2024. We lent a helping hand: we installed totems and signposts, dedicated an interactive installation to the project at Făgăraș Fest and the Planeta Nucșoara festival, tested the trails and created digital tracks that can be visualized on Google Maps, told the story of the project in a television report and took journalists, photographers, ambassadors and partners interested in the legends and

nature of the place onto the land. In 2024, 142 of the beech trees on www.arboricupovesti.ro were adopted.

We continued to work closely with the County Public Service Salvamont Salvaspeo Argeș. We engaged with them on mountain safety projects. We supported the installation of information panels in the area of Stâna lui Burnei (one of the most popular starting points on the route leading to Moldoveanu Peak), we sponsored the assistance dogs and we supported the renovation of the Salvamont Brustureț point. It's a huge satisfaction to see how these projects are making it easier and safer to go mountain hiking.

Sport provides people in communities with healthy role models for success, the motivation to grow up disciplined and to get out in nature as often as possible. Projects such as ‘Learn to Play with Class Table Tennis’ for children from several communities in Argeș County, the Lerești Karate Club championship and support for the Zimbrii Lerești soccer team carry the passion for movement and active living forward.

In 2024, we continued the community grants programme implemented in the northern area of the Făgăraș Mountains with the Community Foundation ‘Țara Făgărașului’. Five projects developed by local organisations have received funding, and by implementing them we have laid another foundation stone to increase the knowledge about nature, its protection and conservation.



Andrei Iosivoiu



Roak Aron

Nature education programmes

We believe education is essential if we are to protect nature in the long term and make a real difference in the lives of communities. That's why not only have we continued our education projects, but the involvement and enthusiasm of our beneficiaries has confirmed that we are on the right track.

Junior Rangers is the programme through which we offer nature education to children with a lot of potential in the villages of Făgăraş Mountains. 40 children participated in the 2024 edition. They went on five-day camps at the Richita Centre for Nature Activities and Exploration, went in the field with our rangers and went through real 'apprenticeship' sessions, and some of them visited the Retezat National Park in an exchange full of enthusiasm and learning. We are happy to lend a helping hand in training future leaders in nature conservation!

The **Adopt a Corner of Nature** competition for 13-17 year-olds continued in 2024. Of the 40 applicants, 15 developed projects relevant to nature in their community, so we rewarded them with: a trip to the Bavarian Forest National Park, a photography workshop, an introduction to social media course.

Carpathia Scholarships support seventh graders interested in the natural sciences in communities in the Făgăraş Mountains area. In 2024 we received 56 applications and spent two days of nature activities with all applicants. As a result, we selected 20 children who now receive financial support. In addition, in 2024 we became an Award Centre in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award young people's personal development programme, and the students receive mentoring

from the Conservation Carpathia team as they work their way through the programme.

The Nature in the Classroom

Caravan reached 41 schools around the Făgăraş Mountains in 2024. We built interactive nature meetings with pupils in years 5-8, telling them about the Foundation's mission and vision, watching an episode of Wild Romania, inspiring them (hopefully!) and inviting them to the Adopt a Nature Corner competition. We were happy to see that this has increased young people's interest and involvement in protecting the environment.

Partnerships for education programmes were diverse and covered a significant audience. The main objective has been to reach as many children and young people as possible, as well as trainers across the country. We want to make nature conservation a way of life, not just a talking point. We supported the Casa Bună Association; we were present with a workshop for teachers at the 'Culmea' film festival in Braşov; we became part of the Europarc network; we organised meetings with teachers, school directors and education NGOs in the Făgăraş Mountains area and we held a workshop on 'Good Manners in Nature' in five schools in Bucharest.

Also, in 2024 we started producing free materials to support parents, educators and teachers. On carpathia.org, two games and a study and birdwatching notebook can be accessed for free, which can be used to engage children in an attractive way.



George Soare



Tudor Botezatu



Tudor Botezatu

Partnership with Casa Bună Association

In the communities around the Făgăraș Mountains we encounter situations of major social risk. It is difficult to ask people whose basic needs are not covered to learn about nature. That's why, through our long-standing collaboration with Casa Bună Association, we are effectively involved where social problems are pressing. Together we have developed programmes that aim, in the medium and long term, to change local people's perspective on nature: from exploitation to protection and conservation.

Among the successful 2024 projects are:

Nucșoara and Lerești Saturday kindergarten: 29 kindergarten meetings and 58 hours of education and play with 42 children from Nucșoara and Lerești.

Off-line lessons: 33 days spent in Nucșoara and Lerești, with 64 meetings dedicated to educational activities (approximately 128 hours of activities) attended by 178 children.

Preparation for exams: 55 teenagers from Nucșoara and Lerești took part in tutoring for the national assessment or baccalaureate. They accumulated 1898 hours of tutoring.

Camps in Richita: 23 children from Nucșoara, Lerești and Ferentari spent eight days in two camps in Richita.

Camp on Moldoveanu summit: five children from Nucșoara and three from Lerești participated in their first expedition to climb Moldoveanu. For five days, they slept, ate and hiked on the mountain, conquering the highest peak in Romania together with a team of adventurous volunteers.

Medical check-up: At the end of 2024, we had the opportunity to implement a telemedicine project for the first time in the community of Nucșoara. Since 15th November, the DirectDoc team has

successfully mediated 70 online medical consultations between families in the community and doctors with various specialties, including family medicine, dentistry, psychology, neurology and rheumatology.

Ophthalmology Caravan: The Ophthalmology Caravan visited three communities in Argeș: Nucșoara, Lerești, and Conțești. In Nucșoara, 33 children were consulted and six received glasses; in Lerești, 46 children were consulted and 10 received glasses, and in Conțești, 102 children were consulted and 18 received free glasses.

Sewing workshops: 60 children (10-14 years old) from Nucșoara and Lerești, took part in 324 hours of sewing machine practice which took place in 27 sewing workshops in the two communities.

Distribution of food and hygiene products: We had 16 food distributions in Nucșoara and seven in Lerești in 2024. About 95 children from 65 families directly benefited in Nucșoara and about 90 children from 75 families in Lerești. In total, we provided around 22,500 kg of food (meat, dairy products, fruits and vegetables, flour, oil, pasta, rice, sugar, soap, shampoo, laundry detergent, etc).

School supplies: 216 children aged between four and 18 received school bags full of school supplies.

Winter clothes and shoes: 224 children from Lerești and Nucșoara received winter clothes and shoes. Each child received a kit consisting of: jacket, fleece/ anorak, gloves, hat, boots, sweater and thermal tights = 1568 items in total distributed.

Santa Claus: we prepared 224 presents for the children of Nucșoara and Lerești.



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Visits and exchanges

We are sure of one thing: for our work to have real and lasting results, we need to keep learning. Our specialists visit National Parks around the world to find best practices, approaches that can work in Romania. At the same time, interest in conservation

brings us guests eager to discover the biodiversity of the Făgăraș Mountains and learn from the methods we use to protect it.



In 2024 we visited:

- **Yellowstone National Park and Grand Teton National Park in the USA;**
 - **Tatra Mountains National Park, Poland;**
 - **Gran Paradiso National Park in northern Italy;**
 - **Patagonia National Park, Ibera National Park, El Impenetrable, Patagonia Azul created in Argentina by Tompkins Conservation Foundation and Rewilding Argentina.**
-

We have participated in international events with conservation themes:

- **SERE 2024 - European Conference on Ecological Reconstruction, in Tartu, Estonia;**
 - **Interpret Europe international conference in Koper, Slovenia;**
 - **Carpathian Convention - dedicated to sustainable development in the Carpathian Mountains - in Košice, Slovakia.**
-

We have also been present at national events on various themes that have nature conservation in common:

- **Job Fair at the Faculty of Biology in Bucharest;**
 - **Food & Beverages Innovation Camp;**
 - **National Fundraising Conference;**
 - **Climate Change Summit.**
-

We enjoyed receiving the prestigious visitors who came to admire nature and the achievements of the Carpathia project:

- **Their Excellencies, Mrs. Kathleen Kavalec, Ambassador of the United States of America in Romania;**
- **Mr. Giles Portman, British Ambassador to Romania;**
- **Mr. Peer Gebauer, German Ambassador to Romania;**
- **Mr. Gavin Buchan, Canadian Ambassador to Romania;**
- **Representatives of the Bavarian Forest National Park Association from Germany;**
- **A delegation from Šumava National Park in the Czech Republic.**



Volunteering programme

Volunteering means involvement, energy and the desire to do good. Thank you sincerely for your time and for bringing hope where it is most needed!



In the wildlife monitoring department, our colleagues received help from: Cristina Băncilă, Sandor Marton, Ahrum Hyung, Carla Sainz, Thibaud Frament, Jared Zev Kannel, Andrew Calfa, Codruț Oncioiu, Leander Mölgg, Nils Pithan, Marlene Gauter and Maia Lemarignier.

For his colleagues in species reintroduction, Victor Gan made an important contribution.

In the department of ecological reconstruction, we welcomed some enthusiastic young people: Michael Kinkelbur, Maartje Eiljander, Laura Grages and Lucie Leclere.

At Equus Silvania we enjoyed the dedicated presence of Hannah Höltermann.



All our English materials pass under the watchful eye of Dr. Ruth Rusby, who makes sure that we use the language in a correct and expressive way. It is with deep gratitude that we thank for her help, promptness and infusion of passion!

Partnerships with other national parks around the world

In 2024, our partnership with the Bavarian Forest National Park entered a new phase when the park changed its leadership in 2023. Dr. Franz Leibl, a close friend of the Făgăraș Mountains, retired, and Ursula Schuster was appointed to be the new director. In spring 2024, we visited Ms. Schuster to learn about her plans for the National Park and her vision for our collaboration. We were happy to hear that her passion for nature matched Dr. Leibl's and that she was eager to continue our cooperation. Understandably, her focus throughout the first year was on the Bavarian Forest, but we look forward to resuming our exchange visits in 2025.

In October, we received a visit of representatives from the Šumava National Park, the largest National Park of the Czech Republic. Together with the Bavarian Forest National Park, this forms the largest protected forested wilderness in Central Europe. Director Pavel Hubený and Vice-director Martin Starý spent a few days with us and were mesmerised by the beauty of the Făgăraș Mountains and by our activities. The visit resulted in an agreement to extend our cooperation also to the Šumava National Park and we look forward to signing an agreement in 2025.



Partners

Ursus Breweries continues to support our conservation efforts for the 3rd consecutive year by donating 1% of all URSUS Premium sales from November through December 2024. This donation aims to protect the natural bear habitat and support local communities in the Făgăraș Mountains.

For the sixth consecutive year, **Zentiva Group**, our reforestation partner, has contributed to the rehabilitation of areas affected by illegal logging in the Făgăraș Mountains. They have planted 47,619 trees in the Zârna and Groapele areas, covering about 12 hectares.

We thank our partners at **ING Bank** for supporting our efforts to create a complete and sustainable ecosystem in the Făgăraș Mountains. Thanks to them, we were able to start the project to reintroduce vultures into the area, an essential link for biodiversity in the mountains in the heart of Romania.

BCR, our strategic partner for education projects, in 2024 supported environmental and financial education initiatives for the development of communities in the Făgăraș Mountains area. As part of the partnership, BCR supports the access of children from the communities to the educational programmes run at the Richita Nature Activities and Exploration Centre. At the same time, BCR customers have the opportunity to donate to Foundation Conservation Carpathia through the George digital banking platform.

Alongside us for many years, **Jack Wolfskin** continues to help us with the

necessary equipment as well as with a contribution that allows us to continue our reforestation activities.

We are grateful to **Alpha Bank**, a member of UniCredit Group, for the vision and financial support that has enabled us to continue the beautiful tradition of events at the foot of the Făgăraș Mountains. The festivals 'Cobor between the Oaks', Făgăraș Fest, as well as the Carpathia Bike Tour were organised with their support. Our partners understood that these events represent the ideal opportunity to build a solid bridge between the general public and the mission of the National Park.





Conservation Enterprise Programme

Introduction

Travel Carpathia

Roadele Munților Făgăraș

Cobor Biodiversity Farm

Green Business for Entrepreneurs Programme

Introduction

In 2024, Foundation Conservation Carpathia continued to develop its sustainable tourism and local economic development initiatives in the Făgăraş Mountains area. The ecotourism operator Travel Carpathia experienced significant growth, both by expanding the team and by attracting over 2,000 individual tourists who visited one or more of our locations, led by guides specialising in local nature and wildlife.

The Travel Carpathia team has grown significantly, and new roles – such as tour manager, development coordinator and booking specialists – have strengthened our operational capacity. Also, this year, Equus Silvania Equestrian Centre joined our portfolio. Travel Carpathia has thus expanded its offer with unique experiences for tourists to explore the wilderness while horse riding.

The increase in ecotourism activities has naturally brought growth also for Roadele Munților Făgăraş – the integrator of products and services at the foot of the Făgăraş Mountains. It has become the main supplier for the dishes served on the tours; in this way we have created a constant link between small producers and nature tourists. We have also strengthened the Cobor Biodiversity Farm, which offers organic Transylvanian Grey meat and authentic nature experiences, but also hosts popular summer events.

2024 also marked the launch of the first grant programme for local

entrepreneurs – the Carpathia Fund – through which we supported six local businesses in their start-up. This progress confirms that we made the right decision when we decided to support building nature-based local economy models and green initiatives around the Făgăraş Mountains.

The increase in ecotourism activities has naturally brought growth also for Roadele Munților Făgăraş – the integrator of products and services at the foot of the Făgăraş Mountains





Travel Carpathia

During 2024 Travel Carpathia has been continuously developing. We have made important steps both in terms of the team and in diversifying the ecotourism offer.

Bigger team, more ideas

Our team in Braşov has grown from five to nine colleagues. We received fresh forces in the reservations and sales departments, we have a new tourism manager and a coordinator for product and offer development. Also, this year, the Equus Silvania Equestrian Centre joined the locations managed by Travel Carpathia, enriching the experiences on offer with horse riding tours and new guided nature tours.

More tourists, more experiences

Around 2,000 tourists chose one or more of our destinations in 2024. With the support of 20 guides specialised in nature and wildlife interpretation, visitors enjoyed memorable and educational holidays. From their messages we realise that the Făgăraş Mountains now have a special place in their hearts.

Tourism that educates

We continued our collaboration with leading universities – Eberswalde in Germany and Northeastern, MA, in the USA – to offer students interactive programmes on topics such as wildlife monitoring, the reintroduction of bison and beavers, restoration of damaged habitats and sustainable agriculture.

The Făgăraş Mountains increasingly visible to the world

To promote this spectacular area internationally, we organised three press trips for major German publications and started collaborations with travel agencies in England and the Netherlands. In addition, we launched a new website www.travelcarpathia.com, available in English and German, to provide easier access and a clear picture of what Travel Carpathia is all about.

Investing in infrastructure

We renovated an old inactive sheepfold in the Comisu area in a traditional style and turned it into a wildlife observatory for eight people – the perfect place for nature lovers and an important addition to our 2025 travel offers.





Roadele Munților Făgăraș

In 2024, Roadele Munților Făgăraș continued to support local producers and develop its network of gastronomic outlets, strengthening its position. At the end of 2024, the number of producers in the network reached almost 40. We contributed to the opening of two new local gastronomic points: **Casa de Oaspeți Caezu** in Nucșoara and **Casa Tanti Maria in Stoenești**.

The physical sales network was expanded with the Beaver House **Visitor Centre in Rucăr**, open permanently from 2024, and the **Cobor Biodiversity Farm** outlet, active only seasonally. Promotional activities were supported by participation in major festivals and fairs, such as **Făgăraș Fest, Cobor between the Oaks, the Carpathia Bike Tour, Goulash Competition and the Nod Makerspace fair** in Bucharest.

We were delighted to be invited by Orange Romania to cater for an event with 400 people. This experience marked a significant moment of the year and inspired us to include the development of catering services in our 2025 strategy. It's a new way to bring the taste of products made by small producers closer to consumers in big cities.

Total sales in 2024: almost 100,000 Euro, a remarkable result that reflects the continued success of our initiatives, but also the interest of consumers in the food produced responsibly around the Făgăraș Mountains.

Also in 2024, with the help of ING Bank Romania, we were able to purchase a refrigerated vehicle with which we ensure the optimal transportation of products. At the same time, we started a rebranding process for the product and service integrator, and in the first quarter of 2025 the new labels and website will be publicly launched.





Diana Bobeș



Travel Carpathia



Diana Bobeș

Cobor Biodiversity Farm – a year of evolution and initiatives

As of summer 2024, Cobor Biodiversity Farm is officially a certified organic farm. We have also started the certification process for the slaughtering of the Transylvanian Grey cattle in order to be able to market 100% organic, controlled-source meat. This marks the completion of a three-year process of conversion to organic farming, which involved careful management of high nature value grassland according to EU standards.

In 2024, our beef cattle farm of the Transylvanian Grey breed benefited from a modernised approach: we introduced a gestation calendar for better calving planning in 2025. More than 15 animals were processed at the farm's slaughtering point, and the resulting meat was used to prepare meals for the almost 2,000 tourists who visited the Travel Carpathia locations.

One of our missions is to make the Transylvanian Grey cattle a widespread presence in Romania. We took another step in 2024, when we sold over 60 cows to a partner farmer who will run a certified farm for the breed. We hope this is the beginning of a long-term partnership and a sustainable network of responsible breeders.

Our horse sanctuary operated in 2024 with over 30 horses and we aim to increase that number next year. We have launched a promotional campaign to attract support and create interest around this project.

Climate change is becoming more and more pressing – summers are getting drier in the Cobor area too, directly affecting the ability of local farmers to support their livestock. It's a serious challenge for the whole community.

Nonetheless, we remain the most stable employer in the locality and in 2024, we provided jobs for 10 permanent employees and nearly 10 day-labourers.

The farm has hosted three major events: in June the "Carpathia Bike Tour" and the second annual "Cobor between the Oaks", and in October the Goulash Competition, where over 10 teams and 150 participants celebrated local cuisine. These events complement our family farm holiday offers for Romanian and international tourists.

In 2024, the farm received the Velo Popas certification. We offer cyclists exploring the beauty of the area a place to rest, a hearty meal and the opportunity to repair and maintain their bicycles. We have identified four cycle routes around the farm, which will add to the attractiveness of our tourist offer.



We provided|
jobs for

10
permanent
employees

10
day-
labourers



Travel Carpathia



Alexandru Popa











Green Business for Entrepreneurs Programme

We organised visits to successful small businesses in the region to better understand their challenges and support them in their next steps of development. We also facilitated two experience exchanges: one in Sibiu, for producers from the **Rodele Munților Făgăraș** network, and another in Vama Buzăului, for those interested in opening local gastronomic outlets in Racovița.

We coordinated the work of Travel Carpathia (our tour operator), the Rodele Munților Făgăraș initiative and the Cobor Biodiversity Farm. Together they have provided employment for around 50 people and worked with 20 local guides for tourism activities.

Together with Conservation Capital, an international funding project for nature-friendly businesses, we managed a small grants programme under the umbrella of the Carpathia Fund. Our call received 15 applications and following the selection we supported six projects with a total funding of 30,000 Euro – a concrete step towards encouraging local initiatives.

Through our advisory activities, we have also supported the establishment of two new ecotourism associations – in Nucșoara and in the Rucăr-Valea Dâmboviței area – which will contribute to the sustainable development and promotion of responsible tourism in the Făgăraș Mountains.

In 2024, we focused on two important directions: supporting local entrepreneurs and technical advice for new business development in the Făgăraș Mountains area.



Financial report

Sources of income

Purchases

Sources of income

All income represents funds received as general or project-specific support to support the mission and conservation activities of Foundation Conservation Carpathia, in benefit of nature and people.

Our supporters, public and private donors, foundations, corporations and individuals make our work possible. All the results in this report would not be possible without them, we are grateful to them that we share the same dream!

Revenues

A significant part of the income has been received before the end of 2023 (EU LIFE18, SUPERB), the amounts will be spent and reported in 2024 and 2025.

Private Entities and Foundations	
WYSS Foundation	
Endangered Landscapes & Seascapes rogramme	
UBS Optimus Foundation	
Temperatio Foundation	
One Tree Planted	
ALV Foundation	
Frankfurt Zoological Society-DE	
Lawson Family Trust	
Stichting Forestpeace	
Pancivis Foundation	
Jack Wolfskin	
Journeys With Purpose Limited	
OAK Foundation	
Forests Without Frontiers	
Wilsdorf Mettler Future Foundation	
The European Nature Trust	
Stichting Tanka Foundation Prinse	
Young Ventures AG	
Friends of Conservation Carpathia	
Total donations	€ 1,808,289

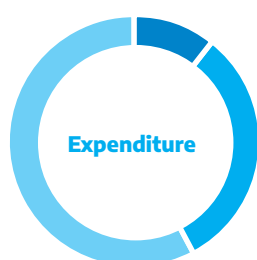
Public Funds	
EU LIFE18 NAT/RO/001082 (2019-2024) Creation of a wild nature area in Făgăraș Mountains Romania'	
EU SUPERB H2020 Systematic solutions for scaling up urgent ecosystem restoration for biodiversity and forest-related ecosystem services	€ 116,377
Compensatory payments for protected forests	€ 353,992
Total funds	€ 470,369
Individuals and other private donations	
Other private donations (UBS Optimus Foundation, Friends of Conservation Carpathia, ING Bank - Online Donation Button)	
Total	€ 1,088,848
Corporations	
Alpha Bank	
B.Braun Medical SRL	
Banca Comercială Română	
Bebe Tei SRL	
Coriolan Aur Smarald SRL	
Farmacia Tei SRL	
ING Bank	
Jack Wolfskin	
Olmix Eco SRL	
Aenova Group	
Ursus Breweries SA	
Zentiva SA	
Other donations	
Total donations	€ 961,391
Other receipts	
Receipts from pasture rents, agricultural subsidies, land rents, forest payment levies, etc.	
Total	€ 204,536
Total receipts	€ 4,533,433

Purchases

Investments		
Renovation and construction: Rucăr Administrative Centre, Beaver House Visitor Centre, Lerești Bison House Visitor Centre, Nucșoara thematic trail, Comisu Statue, Tămaș Statue, Observatories maintenance		€ 769,739
Infrastructure and field equipment		€ 122,503
Car fleet		€ 123,552
Total investments		€ 1,015,794
Land purchases		
Land		€ 2,959,494
Total land purchases		€ 2,959,494
Operational costs		
Costs including funds spent for activities directly related to our mission, wildlife monitoring, ecological reconstruction, field consumables, sociological research studies, etc.		3,060,773 €
Salaries (including employer's contribution to the state budget)		1,717,770 €
General and administrative costs (includes financial, administrative, legal, IT consultancy, HR, audit and other costs necessary for organizational development)		551,310 €
Non-operating costs (includes various taxes and duties)		84,113 €
Total operational costs		€ 5,413,965
Total Purchases		€ 9,389,252



Private Entities and Foundations	40%
Individuals and other private donations	24%
Corporations	21%
Public Funds	10%
Other Receipts	5%



Investments	5,413,96 €
Operating costs	1,015,79 €
Land	2,959,494 €



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Plans for 2025

Next steps

How you can get involved and support us



Next steps

Romania is, like most of the Western world, a country divided between rural and urban populations, as well as between those with higher and lower education and income levels. The economic boom of the last decades has not benefitted all parts of the Romanian society equally and many have not experienced an improvement in their lives. The growing mistrust in Western values and democracy among rural populations is the consequence, and the sense of being left behind also threatens the creation of a new National Park. Ultimately, even those who vote for right-wing populists in Romania do not necessarily support a right-wing agenda; they use their vote to express their frustration with their situation.

With this in mind, building systems of support for local communities is key to our initiative to create the National Park. In 2025, we will increase our efforts to develop true eco-tourism, which leaves significant amount of money in the communities, we will continue to build an adequate infrastructure, we will support start-up conservation enterprises, and overall, we will increase our presence in the communes and our cooperation with local authorities.

And, something which is as important for us – we will see the return of the griffon vulture to the Carpathian Mountains. After an absence of a century, we will bring the first birds back to Romania as a sign of hope and healing. And, we will do this together with local communities, for the benefit of nature and humans.

How you can get involved and support us

If you've read this far, you know exactly how we care for the nature of the Făgăraș Mountains and the communities at their foot. You have seen that it takes hard, constant, day-to-day work and resources that are not easy to access.

We also need you to continue our work. Planting, scientific studies, invasive plant removal, educational projects and all the other things we do need constant support.

- **Become a strategic partner:** If you are an organisation, public or private institution, foundation or commercial entity, we invite you to join our project as a strategic partner. Our strategic partners believe in our mission, are involved in several of our pillars of activity, and their support contributes significantly to the success of our work. As a strategic partner, you can also choose to support a specific project, work with us on social responsibility campaigns or integrate nature into your brand strategy. Together we can define the most appropriate form your contribution can take.
- **Become a corporate partner:** Corporate support helps us grow and build on solid foundations. One of the easiest and most effective ways to get involved is by diverting 20% of your corporate tax or income – at no extra cost to the company. We are open to flexible partnerships built on shared values and real impact.
- **Become a major donor:** Foundation Conservation Carpathia's major donors are individuals or private foundations. Your contribution can be general, which gives us flexibility in resource allocation, or targeted to a specific project that inspires you. Consistent support from major donors gives us stability and confidence in long-term planning – we know what funds we have available and can focus on impact.
- **Become an individual supporter:** Every gesture counts. You can make a one-off or monthly donation, directed towards our general work or a project that inspires you. You can also choose to divert 3.5% of your income tax – a simple but extremely valuable form of support. Many of our supporters turn life's milestones – birthdays, sporting challenges or trips – into opportunities to raise funds for nature. Thank you for every gesture!

For more information, please contact us at a.atonoaie@carpathia.org. Together we will find ways for you to get involved.

www.carpathia.org/donations/

EURO donation account:

IBAN: RO86RNCB0061114278450049

Donation account RON:

IBAN: RO16RNCB0061114278450048

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