



FOR COMMUNITIES  
FOR NATURE



# Annual Report 2023

FOUNDATION CONSERVATION CARPATHIA





# Contents

Foreword	6
----------	---

---

## Conservation

Introduction	10
--------------	----

---

LIFE CARPATHIA/Endangered Landscapes and Seascapes Programme	11
--	----

---

CARPATHIA Forest Carbon Project	16
---------------------------------	----

---

Forest watch and management	18
-----------------------------	----

---

Leaota	20
--------	----

## Ecological restoration

Objectives and philosophy of the ecosystem restoration programme	28
--	----

---

Tree nurseries and greenhouses	30
--------------------------------	----

---

Replanting clear-cuts	31
-----------------------	----

---

Restoration of logging tracks	32
-------------------------------	----

---

Conversion of spruce monocultures	33
-----------------------------------	----

---

Restoration of transitional scrub habitats above the forest line	37
--	----

---

Removing the invasive alien plant species along river valleys	40
---	----

---

Monitoring the impact of habitat restoration	43
--	----

---

Monitoring the impact of European bison on vegetation structure	44
---	----

---

Enhance the FCC-owned pastures' biodiversity and economic value	46
---	----

## Wildlife & Fish

Wildlife programme – an introduction	53
--------------------------------------	----

---

Bison reintroduction	54
----------------------	----

---

Beaver reintroduction	56
-----------------------	----

---

Golden eagle monitoring programme	59
-----------------------------------	----

---

Trout and other fish in the Făgăraş Mountains rivers	60
--	----

---

Wildlife management	62
---------------------	----

---

Introduction	62
--------------	----

---

Prevention	63
------------	----

---

Mediating human-wildlife conflicts	65
------------------------------------	----

## Wildlife monitoring

<b>Introduction</b>	71
<b>Brown bears</b>	72
<b>Wolves and Eurasian Lynx</b>	74
<b>Red deer</b>	76
<b>Chamois and wild boar</b>	78

## Outreach and Communication

<b>Introduction</b>	84
<b>Events</b>	86
<b>Media exposure</b>	87
<b>Ambassador programme</b>	88
<b>Community outreach</b>	89
<b>Awards</b>	90
<b>Doing good is contagious in the Făgăraş Mountains</b>	91
<b>Carpathia Nature Education Programmes</b>	95
<b>Bavarian Forest National Park Partnership</b>	96
<b>A glimpse of visits and exchanges throughout the year</b>	98
<b>Volunteering Programme</b>	100
<b>Corporate partnerships</b>	102

## Conservation Enterprise Programme

<b>Introduction</b>	108
<b>Ecotourism: Wildlife hides, wilderness camps, results, stories</b>	110
<b>Cobor Biodiversity Farm</b>	114
<b>Conservation Enterprise Programme for entrepreneurs</b>	120
<b>Roadele Munților / Fruits of the Mountains</b>	125

## Financial report

<b>Income sources</b>	130
<b>Expenses</b>	132

## Outlook for 2024

<b>Next steps</b>	137
<b>Ways to become involved and support us</b>	138

# Foreword

---

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

At the end of every year, we ask ourselves whether the year was good or bad. In times of accelerating climate change with summer droughts and an increasing absence of winters, a war in our neighbourhood, and a general political trend against conservation, it is sometimes hard to remain optimistic: the overall situation is not favourable for a new National Park. However, if we look into the details, things are different. In 2023, we had over 2,500 media appearances, out of which 98% were positive. International newspapers like The Guardian, Spiegel, and the New York Times picked up the story of the Făgăraş National Park as a spark of hope in these difficult times. Over 7,500 visitors came to the various events organised by the Foundation, more than twice that of the previous year. The economic impact of our activities upon local communities has increased tremendously. We have now over 75 free-ranging bison in the Făgăraş Mountains. In particular, the fact that we found some very powerful funding partners for our conservation enterprise programme gives us confidence that we can improve local livelihoods for local communities through conservation and thus demonstrate an alternative to the

extractive use of natural resources.

It has also been a good year for our organisation, we grew to almost 140 staff with many new and very enthusiastic young people, who want to get involved and do something good for their country. There is a rapidly growing community of Romanians, who don't want to accept that nature is being left behind and who realise, what natural value Romania can bring to the European family.

With this, we believe it was overall a very good year, we just need to be patient with respect to creating the Făgăraş National Park. Good things take time.

**Barbara & Christoph Promberger**

Executive Directors









# Conservation

**Introduction**

---

**LIFE CARPATHIA/  
Endangered Landscapes and Seascapes Programme**

---

**CARPATHIA Forest Carbon Project**

---

**Forest watch and management**

---

**Leaota**

# Introduction

---

There is no doubt that 2023 was characterised by a simmering rejection of green politics across the continent. While global strategies (such as COP15 in Montreal) have been determined for safeguarding nature and securing our common future with clear targets to restore and protect 30% of the planet by 2030, conservative and right-wing politicians are still fighting fiercely to dilute and contest important pillars of the European Green Deal based on spreading misinformation and fear, and contradicting science and facts. So, it was only after long and tough negotiations, when the European Parliament finally passed the Nature Restoration Law on Wednesday, 12<sup>th</sup> July with binding targets to restore degraded ecosystems for ‘the people, the climate, and the planet’. Despite the fact that the law is stripped down to less than what is needed according to scientists, it is the first ever piece of legislation to protect Europe’s biodiversity and therefore offers a glimpse of hope! With over 80% of Europe’s habitats in poor shape, the restoration law could be a game-changer and will not only help to increase biodiversity, but also to build up Europe’s resilience towards strategic autonomy, natural disasters, and the risks of food security.

Throughout the past year, we have all heard so often that Europe cannot afford to protect nature in the face of all the arising challenges, while in fact nature restoration is essential to improve food production and to secure clean water and air. It even makes perfect sense from an economical point of view: The European Commission estimates that every Euro spent in land restoration brings an economic return of €8 to €38.

**At CARPATHIA we continue to do what we do best: taking on responsibility and engaging in every aspect of making Europe’s most outstanding mountain landscapes, the Făgăraş Mountains, a thriving place for nature and communities.**

*“This Nature Restoration Law is not about restoring nature for the sake of nature. It is about ensuring a habitable environment where the well-being of current and future generations is ensured, and where the land and seas continue having the capacity to provide us the goods and services that our lives and economies fully depend on,”* Virginijus Sinkevičius, Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, at the European Commission.

# LIFE CARPATHIA and Endangered Landscapes and Seascapes Programme

Many of our activities are financed by the European Commission's LIFE Programme (LIFE CARPATHIA) and the Endangered Landscapes and Seascapes Programme, funded by Arcadia, a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin. In 2023, we have made great progress with the activities and have achieved a number of good results. While the activities are ongoing, the emerging outcomes confirm that we are on track towards our masterplan goals, successfully overcoming the challenges of inflation, economic crises and turbulent international contexts.

To make sure that we get useful and relevant results and that we meet our targets, the projects have been extended by one year. Both projects are built on the five main pillars that guide all our activities, enhancing and complementing our conservation efforts.

Progress:

- More than 90% in the ELSP project
- More than 80% for the LIFE project

**Budget execution: 88%**

90%

80%



## LIFE CARPATHIA/Endangered Landscapes and Seascapes Programme

Continued

Some of the accomplishments that made us proud in 2023:

- **Forest and alpine pasture conservation** remains the centre of our mission. We continue to buy available land, and in 2023 we managed to add **373 hectares** to the territory we are already protecting.
- The data we process helped protect **300 hectares more** by including them in The National Catalogue of Virgin and Quasi-Virgin Forests.
- **Ecologic restoration** covered an extra **104 hectares** – land where we planted saplings in old clear-cuts, or we created pockets of light in the spruce monocultures to support the conversion to mixed and healthy mountain forests. In total, we planted more than **500,000** young trees and we restored the forest floor along more than **4.8 km of areas affected by the construction of logging roads** by filling up ravines with wooden debris, gravel and soil from the embankments along the tracks.
- We continue to eliminate **invasive plants**. In 2023, we covered **107 km** along the valleys in the south of the Făgăraş Mountains
- We are actively involved in **wildlife management**. Hunting for trophies is forbidden in the five hunting concessions that we lease. Moreover, we have donated **12 Carpathian shepherd dogs** to the local shepherds and installed **27 electric fences** that will help better protect the flocks. The losses of domestic animals have been replaced with sheep and cows from our own herd, which we keep for damage compensation.
- Bison reintroduction has been finalised. In 2023, we brought **34 more specimens** to the Făgăraş Mountains, so the herd now comprises a total of 80 members. The freed individuals gave birth to 12 calves who are now thriving in the Carpathian ecosystem.
- We captured **18 beavers** and moved them to the north of Argeş County.
- There was great progress in building the **two tourist information centres** in the communes of Rucăr and Lereşti. The first one explains the particularities and the contribution of beavers, while the second one is bison-themed. Openings are scheduled for 2024.
- We have **supported the communities** around the Făgăraş Mountains through several types of projects. From the nature and local cultural festival Făgăraş Fest, with a record number of 6,000 participants, to the entrepreneurship grants and the educational projects that reached 585 children in Vâlcea County, we stayed in close connection with the locals.
- We organised a working visit for representatives of local authorities and other decision-makers to the National Park Hohe Tauern in Austria, that deepened their understanding of the benefits a National Park can bring.
- **The Communication** team applied creativity to weave relevant data and emotion into words and visuals that reached millions.
- There were **challenges**, but our experience and expertise helped us overcome obstacles. To give but one small example, lack of snow resulted in a low collection of wolf biological samples, but we mobilised for the rest of the year and collected enough samples to get good scientific results.



 © Liviu Ungureanu





# CARPATHIA

## Forest Carbon Project

---

Carbon offsetting (balancing out greenhouse gas emissions by funding projects that remove an equivalent amount of carbon from the atmosphere) is widely seen as a useful measure for companies and individuals who want to reduce their carbon footprint. With the full protection of CARPATHIA's forests we allow these forests to grow to their full ecological and carbon storing potential and in this way contribute to 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 for timber – in our case this accrues to 225,896 tCO<sub>2</sub> for our first five-year monitoring period (August 2017 - August 2022).

Developing such a project, which means going through the entire process from measuring the amount of carbon stored and also demonstrating also the community and biodiversity benefits, to getting audited and accredited by reputable third parties

and international Standards, is a long and time-consuming process. Longer than we anticipated, and certainly a process in which we have learned a lot about the carbon market throughout the past year.

While we have managed to finalise all documentation as well as the independent audit and on-site visit in autumn 2023, we are still awaiting final accreditation and issuance of the carbon credits through the VCS (Verified Carbon) Standard. We expect this to happen by mid-2024 after which we will be able to trade the first CARPATHIA carbon credits on the voluntary market and demonstrate to other forest owners in our vicinity that the protection of forests can also generate income.





# Forest watch and management

---

Carpathia Forest Association (our private Forestry Service) manages a total of 27,434 hectares of forests. Our team of rangers is dedicated to protecting them and preserving their biodiversity and health.

**Guarding the forest is not a walk in the park, but years of experience and a deep knowledge of the places and local residents guided us. We can say there was no particular difficulty in our forest watch activities.**



- Our rangers have been patrolling and making sure everything is in order.
- About 42 cubic metres of wood were stolen by illegal loggers. We reported them to the authorities. We were notified that those who cut down the timber had been identified concerning a damage of 38 cubic metres.
- The total damage represents 0.0017 cubic metres/ha from the total of 27,434 hectares of forest that Carpathia Forest Association manages. That is a very low rate, which means our consistent effort is paying off.
- We are happy to see how the rate of illegal felling decreases with each year. Beyond the numbers, we are honoured by the trust communities put in our project.



## Leaota

---

Forest watch in Leaota is a work in progress, and we are happy to see progress. For example, out of the 13.67 cubic metres of wood cut illegally here, complaints were recorded for 13.43, showing an encouraging desire to do things properly.

Due to climate change with hotter and drier summers, bark beetles generally seem to impact more and more trees, especially in areas where incorrect forest management in the past has left us with spruce plantations at lower elevations, where the species doesn't occur naturally. This puts us in a dilemma: to follow our principle of non-intervention, but at the same time we have the obligation to protect neighbouring forests. For this reason, we implemented forest protection measures to prevent the spreading of the bark beetle on neighbouring forests (pheromonal traps, trap trees).

We decided to overfly the forest with drones and gather data that would help us identify the trend of the bark beetle bugs evolution. In the planning

phase we determined the trajectory of drone flights in order to create 'georeferenced snapshots' – images with precise GPS coordinates that afterwards are put together to create a high-resolution aerial view.

After some initial experimental flights, in September we flew over more than 800 hectares of spruce forests and took more than 3,000 images, then collated them into orthophoto plans.

We processed the resulting images into polygons that will be used to compare the trends in the forests in 2024.

We studied the effects of bark beetles in our forests and compared the results with traditionally managed forests. The preliminary data shows the same damage whether affected trees are cut and cleared or not.

**The main forest conservation concern was the evolution of the spruce forests affected by the storms of 2020. The focus area is spread over 48 hectares.**





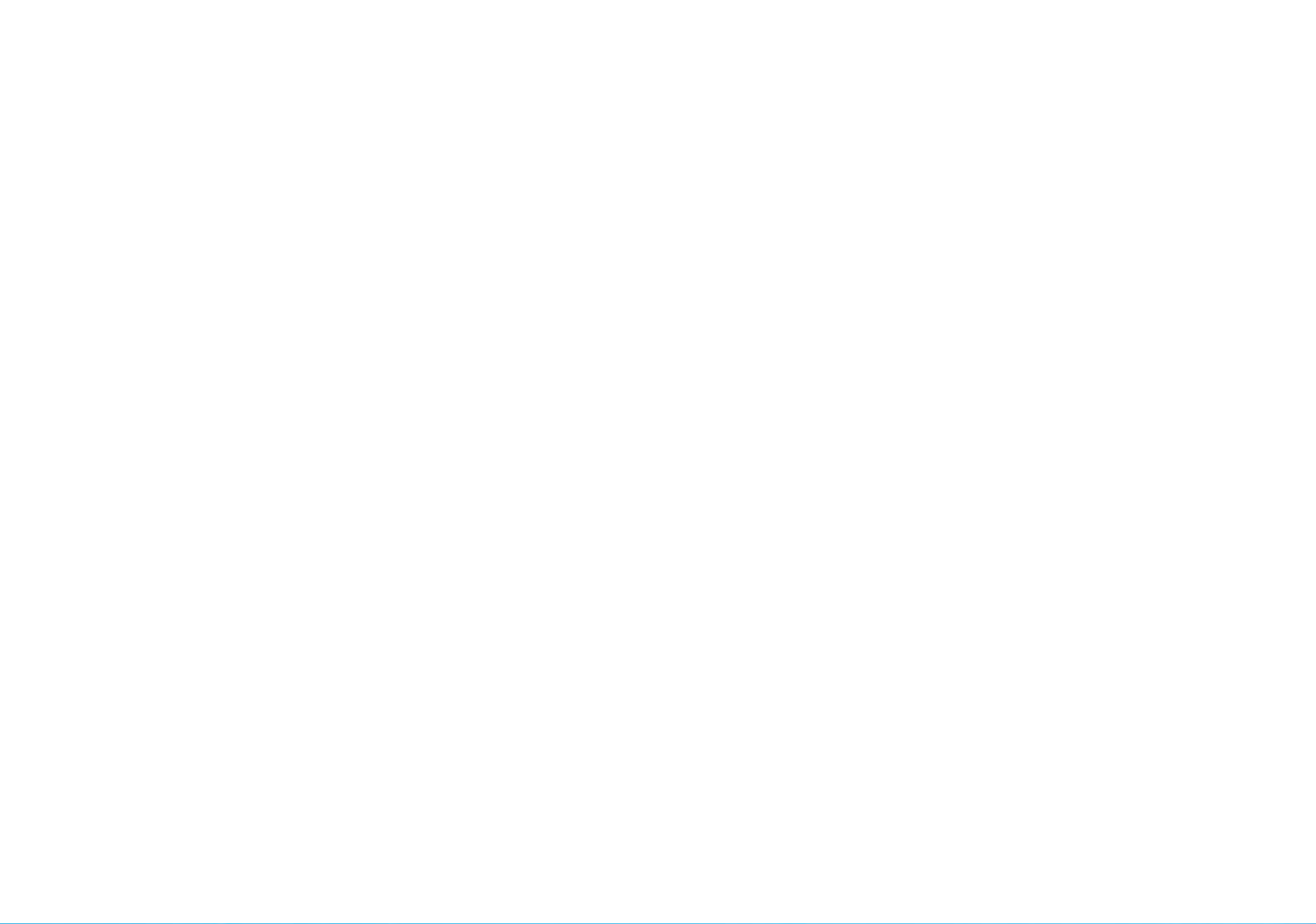


# QUICK FACTS

- LIFE programme and ELSP, European funding instruments for the environment and climate action, are two important income lines for our activities and we rigorously track progress to make sure we are reaching the set targets. Sometimes we have to make adjustments, but in 2023 we could see we are on track in all areas funded through these programmes.
- The audit and accreditation process for Carbon Credits has proven to be longer than we expected. Yet, we have managed to finalise all documentation as well as the independent audit and on-site visit in autumn 2023. Final accreditation and issuance of the carbon credits through the VCS Standard is estimated to take place mid-2024.
- Carpathia Forest Association (our private Forestry Service) manages a total of 27,434 hectares for full protection.
- We lost 42 cubic metres of wood due to fraud. This represents 0.0017 cubic metres/ha from the total wood mass that we manage in the Făgăraş Mountains. We are happy that the percentage is so low, it means our work is paying off.
- In Leaota Mountains our focus in 2023 was the evolution of the bark beetle in spruce forests affected by storms in 2020 over an area of 48 hectares.









# Ecological restoration

**Objectives and philosophy of FCC's restoration programme**

---

**Tree nurseries and greenhouses**

---

**Restoration of clear-cuts**

---

**Restoration of logging tracks**

---

**Conversion of spruce monocultures**

---

**Restoration of transitional scrub habitats  
above the forest line**

---

**Removing the invasive alien plant species along river valleys**

---

**Monitoring the impact of the habitat restoration**

---

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

---

**Enhance the FCC-owned pastures' biodiversity and  
economic value**

# Objectives and philosophy of FCC's restoration programme

---

We continue to pursue our long-term objective: to restore the areas affected by human activities which often happened outside the law. In 2023, we advanced one step further, approaching the border areas between forest and alpine grasslands.

These underbrush habitats made of dwarf pine, juniper, rhododendron or a combination of the three tend to be very fragile from an ecological point of view. They influence the spruce and stone pine forests below, as well as the alpine pastures above, with all the plants and animals that live there. A few places in the Făgăraş Mountains have clearings in the forest, underbrush and rare tree areas which make the transition to alpine pastures. These protected habitats have a great ecologic importance.

That is why we made an effort to restore these transition habitats. We started replanting stone pines, dwarf pines and juniper in two pilot areas situated at altitudes higher than 1800 m.



# Tree nurseries and greenhouses

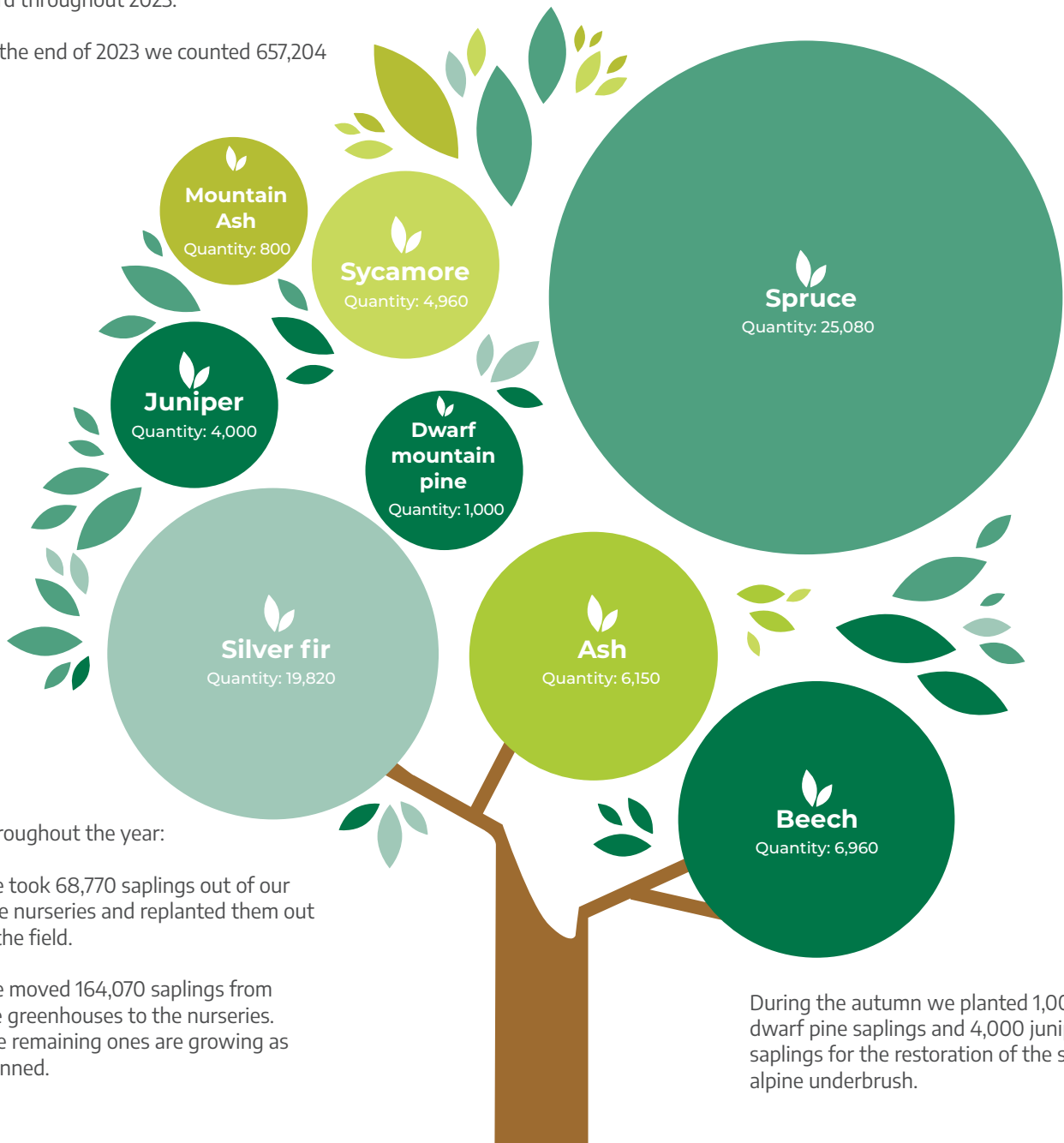
We maintained the dynamic rhythm of our activity in nurseries and greenhouses. Our workforce, consisting of three seasonal workers and 22 day-labourers, dedicated their energy to the planting and maintenance tasks.

saplings: 493,134 in nurseries and 164,070 in greenhouses.

**100,836 were prepared for replanting in the spring of 2024.**

Our two greenhouses and nine tree nurseries have a total area of 18,500 square metres. We used more than a third throughout 2023.

At the end of 2023 we counted 657,204



Throughout the year:

We took 68,770 saplings out of our tree nurseries and replanted them out in the field.

We moved 164,070 saplings from the greenhouses to the nurseries. The remaining ones are growing as planned.

During the autumn we planted 1,000 dwarf pine saplings and 4,000 juniper saplings for the restoration of the sub-alpine underbrush.

## Replanting clear-cuts

We are happy to have reached our target of restoring at least 100 hectares of old clear-cuts per year.

Thanks to the LIFE and ELSP projects, and supported by partners such as One Tree Planted, Zentriva, and Forests Without Frontiers, in 2023 we managed to restore 102.5 hectares more in the clear-cut areas. Moreover, 20,000 saplings were planted over the equivalent of a five-hectare area, to replace the ones that had dried out.

Seasonal split of the works:

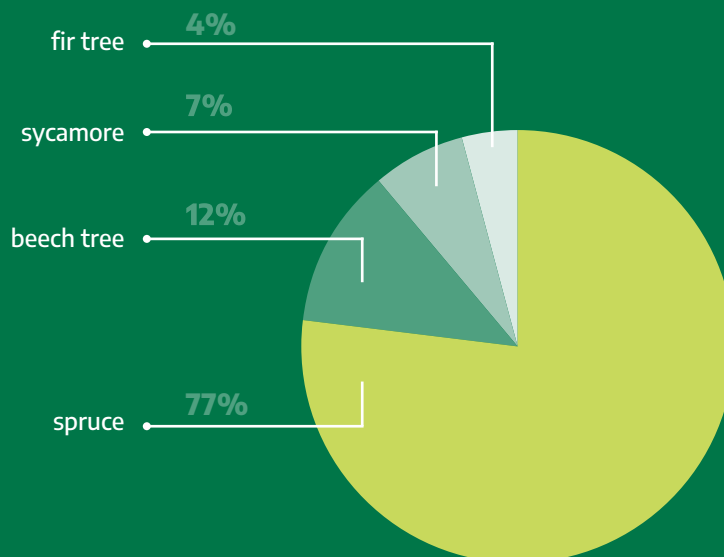
- 87 ha in spring
- 15.5 ha in the autumn

Locations:

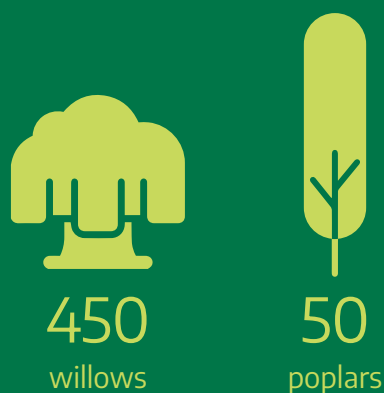
- The great restoration areas in Groapele and Dobroneagu
- The new areas of Pojarna and Zârna Valley

Our restoration efforts include riparian habitats – the vegetation that grows in the proximity of a river, stabilising soil and providing shelter to a variety of insects and animals. Where needed, we included alder trees among the species we planted. We reconstructed 1.9 km of riverbanks in the Valea Doamnei area (northern Făgăraş Mountains) using 1,700 alder saplings.

Sapling distribution overall in reconstruction sites:



When replanting native species, we didn't stop at the forest. In order to supplement the available food for beavers, we planted poplars (*Populus L.*) and willows (*Salix L.*) along 300 m of riverbanks. Downstream from the Pecineagu dam, on the Dâmbovița River, we planted 500 saplings:



# Restoration of logging tracks

---

Logging tracks cause erosion and degradation, which pose a significant threat to the fragile ecosystem. In 2023, we covered and levelled the tracks we had previously mapped in the Groapele area.

For this we used two mini excavators, owned by Foundation Conservation Carpathia, and specialised operators, employees of Carpathia Forest Association. In total, we restored 4.8 km of tracks and ravines on steep slopes, ending the erosion combat operations necessary in the Groapele area.

The complete works necessary in this site lasted three full seasons. Through removing the tractor tracks, we recreated a further three hectares, which we replanted and gave back to a forest ecosystem. We will develop a pilot-project which involves spreading the seeds from an automated drone.





## Conversion of spruce monocultures

We continue to monitor and maintain spruce monocultures, supporting their conversion to healthier, mixed forests which are better adapted to climate change. Our interventions included:

- Extracting sufficient spruce to make it possible for more light to reach the forest soil. This enables natural forest regeneration and the survival of missing species which we planted there.
- A second intervention after six years since the first spruce removal.

One of the projects that help us and enable our ecological reconstruction activities is SUPERB, created by the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under the EU Green Deal, with the objective to restore thousands of hectares of forest landscape across Europe. Its long-term vision is creating transformative change towards large-scale restoration. We bring our contribution by measuring and monitoring restoration work on a pilot area, where we deploy specific activities. For example, we created canopies over around 78 hectares and prepared 20 more for future works. We extracted the resulting wood just from a 20-hectare area, where public access was easy and where we may have been vulnerable to theft.

Under the LIFE project, co-financed by ELSP, About 16,5 hectares, out of the 55 managed, received works funded through the LIFE project.

**Our restoration and conservation activities are possible thanks to European funding programmes: LIFE, EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action, and Endangered Landscapes and Seascapes Programme.**







## Restoration of transitional scrub habitats above the forest line

In the autumn of 2023, we began to restore subalpine scrub habitat and rare spruce (*Picea abies*)-Swiss pine (*Pinus cembra*) shrubs.

These vegetation floors have suffered for centuries due to top-down burning activities of woody vegetation in alpine grasslands and have suffered in the last 15-20 years due to illegal clear-cutting of bottom-up, altitudinal boundary forests.

Within the framework of the SUPERB project financed by the European Commission under the HORIZON 2020 program, 400 Swiss pine (*Pinus cembra*) saplings, 1,500 juniper (*Juniperus communis*) saplings and 500 dwarf mountain pine (*Pinus mugo*) saplings were planted in the Berivoiu area. Here we faced particular problems in the transportation of the saplings, which were carried by donkeys up to the planting site, at 1,800-1,900 m altitude.

In Zârna Valley we approached each altitudinal level differently, according to their particularities.

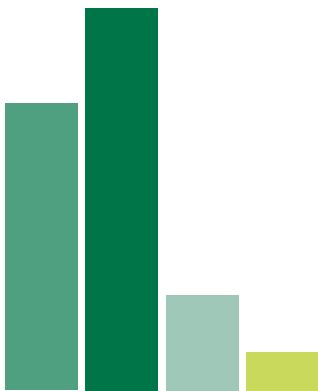
Above 1,700 m, in order to respect the natural species configuration, we planted stone pine, juniper, dwarf pine, and spruce in a healthy ratio. 1,500 saplings of Swiss pine (*Pinus cembra*), 2,000 saplings of juniper (*Juniperus communis*), 500 saplings of dwarf mountain pine (*Pinus mugo*), and 200 saplings of spruce (*Picea abies*) were planted in groups over an area of about nine hectares. The action was very challenging, in particular because of the difficult conditions for transporting the saplings.







## Restoration of transitional scrub habitats above the forest line

Continued

**In Zârna Valley, sapling transportation was a difficult task because of the site's natural geomorphology. We planted the saplings in bunches, over a surface of nine hectares:**



-  1500 stone pine (*Pinus cembra*) saplings
-  2000 juniper (*Juniperus communis*) saplings
-  500 dwarf pine (*Pinus mugo*) saplings
-  200 spruce (*Picea abies*) saplings





# Removing the invasive alien plant species along river valleys

**Invasive alien species (IAS) are plants that are introduced accidentally into a natural environment where they are not normally found, with serious negative consequences. They reproduce aggressively, occupying space and resources used by native species, replacing them and disturbing the trophic chain and ecological balance.**

In 2023, our team continued the enforcement of the Action Plan for the monitoring, control and eradication of invasive alien plant species (IAS). We designed this plan back in 2020, based on the results of a detailed survey of invasive alien plant species (IAS). We started the management of IAS in 2021, and we have conducted it every year since.

From May to September 2023, we checked over 100 km of riverbanks and we removed the identified invasive alien plant species along the main tributaries of the Dâmbovița and Argeș rivers, from the southern sector of the Făgăraș Mountains.

We removed the IAS manually or with the help of mechanical tools such as

hoes, 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 upper as well as on the lower part of the valleys invaded by annual or biannual alien species: *Erigeron annuus* (daisy fleabane), *Conyza canadensis* (horseweed), *Himalayan balsam* (small-flowered balsam) or *Xanthium orientale ssp. Italicum* (common cocklebur). We were also trying to stop the expansion of Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*) upstream, in the project area. This is one of the most dangerous invasive alien species, which must not be allowed to extend further up the river valleys.

In order to document our results of IAS management in riparian areas, we used two combined methods: fixed-point photography (FPP), and, in addition, a vegetation survey focused on the coverage of invasive alien species at 58 permanent monitoring points. The monitoring sample plots are located both in the restoration areas and in IAS-free reference areas.

Following three years of vegetation monitoring on the permanent monitoring points we recorded a significant decrease of IAS cover from 50% (in 2020) to 1% (in 2023) or from 70% (in 2020) to 5% (in 2023), as a consequence of our IAS management activities in the previous years. This is a big success for us, proving that we were able, through our activity, to stop the spreading of the IAS danger upstream, in the well-preserved natural areas along the streams.









## Monitoring the impact of the habitat restoration

Landscape restoration is a long-term process. Most of its effects and benefits will be clearly visible only after decades. Therefore we chose indicators that are capable of tracking these changes over an extended period of time and also detect responses to out specific measures:

- Understory vegetation
- Specialist bird species
- Terrestrial arthropods

Restoration of degraded patches of forest habitats should lead to the reestablishment of the characteristic understory vegetation followed by a recovery of the associated fauna (invertebrates and vertebrates) and an increased connectivity of different forest types/habitats.

In 2021 we finalised the baseline survey of these indicators. In 2022 and 2023 we monitored these indicators as follows:

- along transects (straight lines that cut through a natural landscape so that standardised observations and measurements can be made) or in sample plots on Foundation Conservation Carpathia properties
- 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.

The aim of the monitoring activities was to identify the early modifications in the characteristic understory vegetation (150 permanent sample plots monitored), and in the terrestrial arthropod communities' composition and structure (88 permanent sample plots).

In 2023, we finalised the monitoring of the terrestrial arthropod (invertebrates such as insects, spiders etc.) indicators. We are working now on the data analysis and interpretation. Preliminary data analysis already showed the beneficial effects of habitat restoration on the selected indicators (understory vegetation and terrestrial arthropods).

The understory vegetation monitoring will continue in 2024, bringing a better understanding of the ecological processes following the forest habitat restoration.

# Monitoring the impact of European bison on vegetation structure

In 2023, we continued the vegetation monitoring of the permanent monitoring plots located in the three acclimatisation enclosures. We conducted the first monitoring activity of 12 monitoring plots in the Nușoara-Dobroneagu bison acclimatisation enclosure and the last vegetation monitoring session on the Bunea acclimatisation enclosure (20 monitoring sample plots) and the Lerești-Portăreasa Valley acclimatisation enclosure (12 monitoring plots).

The aim of the study is to monitor the impact of reintroduced bison on vegetation. In each location, we built fenced areas in each identified

habitat type (1 ha in size) to create bison-free zones as control sites, while enclosures have been widely used as a control to monitor ungulate effects on vegetation.

We already documented a favourable impact of the reintroduced bison on the regeneration of the forest species in the clear-cut areas and the regeneration of the herbaceous vegetation layer in the spruce monocultures, under normal grazing conditions. We are working now on the data analysis and interpretation.



 © Mihai Zotta

**The vegetation survey that we conducted in early 2023 outside the acclimatisation enclosure, showed only rare evidence of understory vegetation browsing and some debarked trees, the territory being very large compared with the small number of grazing bison.**



## Enhance the FCC-owned pastures' biodiversity and economic value

---

In 2023, we continued the measures to enhance the pastures' biodiversity and economic value. From May to July, we mowed a few hectares in the Găinațu Mare and Dracsin pastures. Thus, we reduced the cover of invasive Tufted hair grass (*Deschampsia caespitosa*) and Mat grass (*Nardus stricta*) allowing the native grass growth.

A big portion of some of our own pastures located in the high-mountain and subalpine levels are rented for local livestock owners to continue their traditional way of life. The study we conducted back in 2020 showed the very poor quality of the pastures, in correlation with the invasion of the harmful species following the past overgrazing and soil enrichment, like mat grass (*Nardus stricta*) and tufted hair grass (*Deschampsia caespitosa*).

The qualitative improvement of the grasslands will not only improve biodiversity but will also more than double the production of food for livestock (and wildlife). The management of pastoral resources towards enhancing the quality and quantity of forage supply from pastures will have a high social value and, in addition, will lower the grazing pressure on forests.







© Daniel Mirlea

## QUICK FACTS

### **Tree nurseries and greenhouses:**

- Total number of saplings at the end of 2023: 493,134 in nurseries and 164,070 in green houses.
- Saplings replanted in the field: 68,770.
- Total area of the two green houses and nine nurseries: 18,500 m<sup>2</sup>.
- Stable workforce: three seasonal workers and 22 day-labourers.
- Species cultivated: spruce, silver fir, beech, mountain ash, sycamore, dwarf mountain pine, ash, juniper, willow, poplar.
- Spruce destinations: Groapele, Dobroneagu, Pojarna, Zârna Valley.

### **Replanting clear-cuts**

- In 2023 we restored 102.5 hectares of clearcuts.
- Aside from the main restoration works, we planted 20,000 saplings over the equivalent of a five hectare area to replace the ones that had dried out from plantings in previous years.



- Sapling distribution overall in reconstruction sites: 77% spruce, 12% beech tree, 7% sycamore, 4% fir tree.
- In our effort to restore ecosystems along riverbanks and support animals that inhabit them, such as beavers, we planted 50 poplars and 450 willow trees on the Dâmbovița River and 1700 alder saplings along the Doamnei River.

### **Restoration of logging tracks:**

- 4.8 km of tracks and ravines restored.
- Three hectares of new habitat resulted, where a pilot project of drone-throwing seeds will be implemented.

### **Conversion of spruce monocultures:**

- Two types of interventions: creating canopy openings for the first time and the second intervention, in monocultures previously approached.
- 55 hectares of monocultures received interventions.

### **Restoration of transitional scrub habitats above forest line**

- Zârna Valley, situated at an altitude of 1,550-1,680 m was the most challenging restoration site. Here the sapling density did not exceed 3000/ha.
- In the Berivoiu area we transported the saplings with donkeys.
- Total number of saplings used for restoration: 6,600.
- Species planted: stone pine, juniper, dwarf pine, spruce.

### **Removing the invasive alien plants along river valleys:**

- We removed the invasive alien plant species from over 100 km of riverbanks.
- Our vegetation monitoring shows a significant decrease of IAS cover, proving that our intervention stops the spreading of these plants.

### **The impact of habitat restoration**

- Preliminary analysis of understory vegetation and terrestrial arthropods shows the beneficial effect of habitat restoration.

### **The impact of the European bison on vegetation structure**

- 12 monitoring plots in Nucșoara-Dobroneagu, 20 monitoring plots in Bunea and 12 in Lerești – Portăreasa Valley.
- Bison seem to support the regeneration of forest species in old clear-cuts.
- Grazing bison had a negligible impact on understory vegetation.

### **FCC-owned pastures' biodiversity and economic value**

- With the growth of the native grass, the quality of the pastures improved. The natural biomass production is higher.
- The livestock increase has the potential to double, proving that pasture biodiversity has economic benefits for cattle owners.



# Wildlife and fish management

**Bison reintroduction**

---

**Beaver reintroduction**

---

**Fish in the Făgăraș Mountains rivers**

---

**Wildlife management**

---

**Overall activities and results of the wildlife management concessions**



## Introduction

---

Since 2011, CARPATHIA is leasing and has leased several hunting concessions in the core of the project area, by now covering a total area of 78,000 hectares – the best (and only) way to protect, reintroduce, and manage the magnificent wildlife of the Făgăraș Mountains whilst managing conflicts with livestock for the benefit of local communities. While it is a pleasure to see that deer and large carnivores are recovering and bison and beavers are doing well in their new homes, we are also confronted with a variety of challenges. Changes in land use practices, global warming and their impact on the wildlife population dynamics influence conflict situations with humans and demand new approaches.

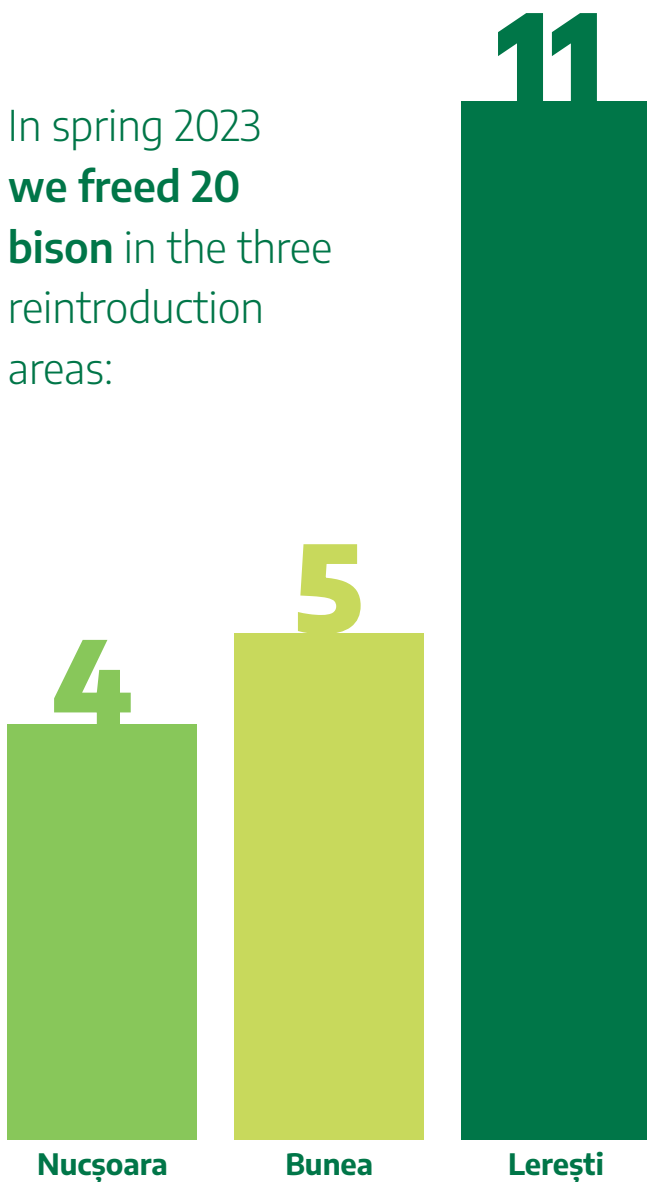
# Bison reintroduction

Bison is a keystone species that plays a crucial role in the conservation of biodiversity. Our bison reintroduction programme is a success story that continues to unfold. We are going to continue monitoring bison to make sure they are thriving, while following key indicators for their impact on vegetation.

In our monitoring activities we used various methods: direct observation, GPS collars, camera traps.

Through these methods we collected useful data about their behaviour in the wild and their capacity to adapt to the new habitat.

In spring 2023 we freed 20 bison in the three reintroduction areas:



55 bisons

the total number of reintroduced bison between 2020 and 2023



7 calves

born in the bison herd in 2023

**In 2023, we focused on forming a new group of bison in the Nucșoara area. We brought twenty bison there, and four more in Lerești. We planned to free them in the spring of 2024.**

Bison sources: Germany, Sweden, Italy, Hungary, Switzerland, Poland.

## Beaver reintroduction

---

In 2023, we captured 18 beavers that were dwelling in the Olt river system and freed them in the proximity of rivers in the south of the Făgăraș Mountains: Dâmbovița, Argeșel and Râul Târgului. Until now we have relocated a total of 42 beavers.

We monitor the relocated beavers and their habitats periodically. The first four cubs born in the project area are a success sign that we are enthusiastically watching.

The capturing and relocating actions will go on, as well as monitoring the freed beavers.









## Golden eagle monitoring programme

---



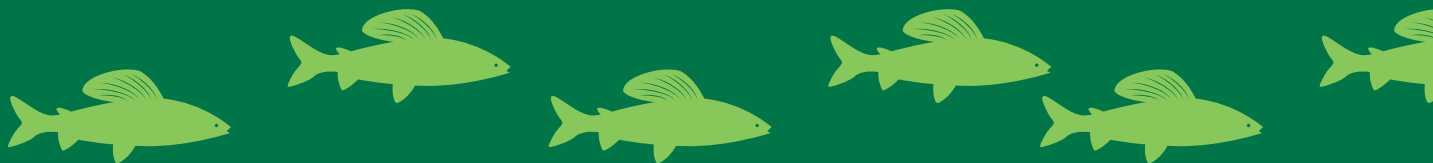
It takes a lot of stamina, skill, and experience to study the King of the Carpathian skies, the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), in the inaccessible and rugged Făgăraş Mountains. Together with our partner, Milvus Group – Bird and Nature Protection Association, we have started to monitor these iconic birds and identified in previous years 11-12 possible golden eagle territories in the Făgăraş Mountains. Last year, the study focused on the feeding habits of the golden eagles by examining three occupied nests more closely and collecting and identifying samples of prey remains.

Marmots and capercaillie, which are often considered very important prey for eagles and have also been targeted in our surveys, were identified only once and twice, respectively. Instead, the team found a broad variety of species of which six mammals, 15 birds and one reptile species; from blackbirds to chamois and squirrel to hares, nothing seems to be off limits for the eagles. Interestingly, a high proportion of birds of prey and owls fell victim to the eagles, such as common buzzards, kestrels, Ural or boreal owls to name just a few. Although this study is not representative, it gives us a first insight into the hidden life of these magnificent birds in the Făgăraş Mountains, and we hope to continue this work to better understand and safeguard this species.

# Trout and other fish in the Făgăraș Mountains rivers

---

Aqua Crisius Association is working hand-in-hand with the CARPATHIA Forest Association to preserve and protect river courses in the Făgăraș Mountains. Their enduring focus on reintroducing grayling (*Thymallus thymallus*) to two rivers at the foot of the Făgăraș Mountains is starting to bear results. For the fourth year in a row, the team has successfully replenished the rivers with an impressive 1500 grayling, a protected species that the law requires to be released when fishing.



## In 2023:

- We added 1500 more grayling (*Thymallus thymallus*) individuals in two rivers of the Făgăraș Mountains.
- Furthermore, one of the two rivers received an additional 1200 fish of the same species, mostly adults.

Grayling (*Thymallus thymallus*)  
reintroduction programme is set to  
finish in

**2024**

when the results will be analysed.



Sătic Lake, situated at the border of Piatra Craiului National Park, hosted a regional phase of the fishing championship organised by the Romanian Artificial Flyfishing Association, and the event was highly appreciated by the locals. In preparation, the indigenous trout (*Salmo trutta*) population of the lake was supplemented by 110,000 juveniles – a historical repopulation, supported by Bilka Steel, sponsor of Aqua Crisisus.

We support the fishing activities in Satic Lake to create an attraction for sport fishing but at the same time to decrease the fishing pressure on other waters further upstream.

Five youths from the Făgăraş Mountains communities participated in an exciting flyfishing initiation camp that took place in the Apuseni Mountains.

Three members of the Aqua Crisisus Association continued to research the asprete (*Romanichthys valsanicola*), as part of the research team of Alex Găvan Association. In 2023, the number of identified fish went beyond all expectations. The story of the endemic fish in the south of the Făgăraş Mountains reached the European Ichthyology Society, where the asprete caught the attention of the audience. The public expressed their sympathy and optimism regarding the future of this legendary fish.

# Wildlife management

---

## Introduction

Forests can't be healthy if their wildlife isn't thriving. While we focus on protecting all wildlife from sport and trophy hunting, interactions between humans and forest animals cannot be ignored, as there is potential danger and significant damage can ensue. In this context, full protection of species is a topic of constant debate.

Our decisions follow the principles of Prevention – Intervention – Compensation, always keeping the safety of people as the highest priority. We make sure that damages are avoided or reduced to a minimum. People from the communities of the Făgăraș Mountains have co-existed with wild animals for a very long time, so their acceptance is relatively high. The challenge is to maintain a balanced relationship, and we employ a creative range of measures to prevent escalation of conflict: smart technologies, waste management, involving local communities in the decision-making process.





© Cristina Antonescu

## Prevention

Even though the intervention area grew constantly, the number of conflicts did not increase proportionally beyond the period of the beech nuts fructification in the forests. We can see that the prevention measures we have been applying since 2019 have an effect on the dynamic of the conflicts.

In 2023, one of the most important prevention measures was the implementation, in cooperation with the Rucăr city hall, of a system for collection, transportation and incineration of the slaughter waste generated by the farmers in Rucăr. More than 15 tonnes of slaughter waste were incinerated. The costs for transportation and incineration of the waste were supported by the Foundation, which raises the question of finding financial solutions to continue doing that. In the past, all that slaughter waste was simply abandoned by the farmers in the vicinity of the village boundaries, becoming an irresistible attraction for the bears.

In 2023, we used Artificial Intelligence for the first time to create alerts when bears were entering the Rucăr commune. As a result, sound alarms were triggered in each of these events. The system was based on 11 camera traps installed at key points, which sent alarms to rangers only when bears appeared in their field of view. Furthermore, the alarms triggered, via a special server and LoRaWAN radio transmission, loudspeakers installed in the field. The system will be further improved in 2024 along with other semi-automated activities based on thermal drones.





## Mediating human-wildlife conflicts

Interventions to prevent and mediate human-wildlife conflicts increased in 2023, as a natural consequence of the growth of the managed area: from 58,621 to 78,746 ha. This expansion was a result of the contracts we signed with the city halls of Valea Mare Pravăț, Dragoslavele and Cetățeni, in response to their request. We now support seven local communities with the prevention and management of human-wildlife conflicts.

The busiest period of 2023 was between June and September, demanding a lot of energy and diplomacy for finding successful solutions.

We continued to support farmers in the game reserve areas of Rucăr, Stoenesti and Râul Târgului to prevent conflicts with wild animals. We will continue to donate animals, compensating for damage caused by carnivores on the game parks we manage.

**This is how our efforts to peacefully mediate human-wildlife conflicts have evolved in the past 4 years:**

Items/activities	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of communes where we are responsible for human-wildlife conflict management	2	4	4	7
Area (hectares)	42,503	58,621	58,621	78,746
Total number of electric fences installed	11	22	24	27
Number of Carpathian shepherd dogs donated to local farmers	18	15	4	9
<b>Number of anti-poaching patrols in total</b>	175	178	175	173
Total emergency calls	-	38	46	57
Human-wildlife conflicts with actual damage of livestock	22	46	40	28
Direct interventions	159	208	105	112
Days of direct interventions	159	208	105	112
<b>Number of organised hunts with local hunters in nearby villages</b>	75	75	61	61
Problem bears killed	1	1	1	2
Wild boar killed by hunters in conflict areas	74	55	34	14
Wild boar killed by Carpathia staff for conflict resolution	23	19	6	3
<b>Cattle compensated</b>	4	5	11	9
<b>Sheep compensated</b>	6	24	26	48
Payments for damages caused by wild boar, pigs killed by bear and other damages (in RON, Romanian currency)	15,520	6,680	1,000	13,800

# QUICK FACTS

## Bison reintroduction

- We reintroduced 55 bison between 2020 and 2023.
- We freed 20 bison from the acclimatisation enclosures.
- Seven calves were born in the bison flock.
- Monitoring methods: direct observation, GPS collars, camera traps.
- Reintroduced bison come from Germany, Sweden, Italy, Hungary, Switzerland, Poland.

## Beaver reintroduction

- 18 beavers captured for relocation.
- Total number of relocated beavers until the end of 2023: 42.
- Rivers where beavers were reintroduced: Dâmbovița, Argeșel and Râul Târgului.
- We had the first success signs: four kits born in the project area.

## Golden eagle monitoring programme

- Feeding habits of golden eagle has been our focus in 2023.
- We were surprised by unusual animals in the menu of the monitored birds, from blackbird and chamois to squirrel and hare. They also prey on other birds, such as owl and buzzard.

## Trout and other fish in the Făgăraș Mountains rivers

- Grayling reintroduction programme has reached its fourth year in 2023. It is set to finish in 2024.
- The grayling reintroduction programme starts to bring results.
- We added a total of 2,700 grayling in two rivers of the Făgăraș Mountains.
- Sătic Lake received, for the second year in a row, 110,000 trout (*Salmo trutta*) juveniles, an indigenous species.
- Asprete study: one of the rarest fish species in Europe, this living fossil is studied by a team of researchers – among them, three members of the Aqua Crisius Association. In 2023, the number of identified members of the species went beyond all expectations. The research project was received with a lot of interest at the European Ichthyology Society, where the public expressed their sympathy and optimism regarding the future of this legendary fish.
- Five youths from the Făgăraș Mountains communities went to a flyfishing initiation camp in the Apuseni Mountains.

## Wildlife management

- In an effort to prevent human-wildlife conflicts we implemented methods such as: management of slaughter waste, electric fences, sound alarms aimed at chasing away bears. They led to a significant decrease of incidents.
- Our intervention area grew, as three more communes asked us to take over the conflict management on their territories. We now support seven communities.
- Busiest period was between June and September when the number of conflicts was highest.





# Wildlife monitoring

**Introduction**

---

**Brown bears**

---

**Woves and Eurasian Lynx**

---

**Red deer**

---

**Chamois and wild boar**



## Introduction

Over the last decade wildlife management has undergone significant changes, both nationally and in our project area. It is not clear how the national ban on trophy hunting of large carnivores has affected the general perception. Did it lead to an increase in populations, or, on the contrary, to a degradation in the perception of rural people, who have consequently increased illegal killing of large carnivores? In our project area, efforts to restore degraded ecosystems have increased in recent years, as have efforts to ensure coexistence between humans and wildlife, which should help maintain stable populations for these species.

The year 2023 is the year in which our wildlife monitoring project continued with Phase 2, which assesses population trends over time. After 5-6 years of baseline surveys, from the first censuses we conducted on bears, wolves, lynx and deer, in 2023 we returned to the field to continue these surveys. We surveyed the same area, with the same people and the same methods, ensuring that the data collected over the years would be comparable.

# Brown bears

---

After six years of collecting DNA samples left behind by bears in the forest, during which we collected 3,161 samples, in 2023 we completed the laboratory stages and statistical analysis of the data. For the first time in Romania, we now have a picture of the bear population dynamics six years apart, by comparing results from 2017 to 2022.

We successfully sequenced the DNA and reconstructed unique genetic fingerprints from 67% of the collected samples. The data show a lower detectability of females and a difference in movement patterns between sexes, with females tending to travel shorter distances than males. The statistical analysis of the genetic fingerprints highlighted interesting variations and useful indicators for coexistence policies. These indicators include bear population abundance, density, sex ratio, and the magnitude of problematic bears.

The statistical models helped us quantify the dynamics of the bear population:

- The estimated abundance of the population in our project area was 168 bears in 2017 (165-197) and 215 in 2022 (200-285).
- Population density increased from 18.66 individuals/100 km<sup>2</sup> in 2017 (18.39-21.94) to 23.88 individuals/100 km<sup>2</sup> in 2022 (22.32-31.72).
- The sex ratio shifted from female-dominated in 2017 (61% female vs. 39% male) to a more balanced ratio in 2022 (52% female vs. 48% male).
- Only 20% of the bears detected in 2022 were already known from 2017, with the rest being new animals. This result suggests a high multiannual dynamic in the structure (and possibly also in the size) of the bear population we studied.





The number of genetically identified 'problem bears' causing damage in villages in the project area varied significantly from year to year:



In 2023, we recorded 41 bear-related damages to livestock or orchards, similar to 2022 when we recorded 49 such incidents. We were not able to collect DNA samples from all events to detect the genetic fingerprint of each individual. However, from those where we managed identification, a significantly higher proportion of males were found to be causing problems.

The results clarify current unknowns in brown bear management, quantify medium-term population dynamics, and the magnitude of bears attacking villages or livestock up in mountain pastures. At the same time, challenges emerge, both in terms of knowledge and coexistence in the context of environmental, social, and management changes. For the next year, we aim to open new research directions, especially regarding food availability and its impact on the number of bears and conflicts.

# Wolves and Eurasian Lynx

---

Wolves are, by far, the most difficult species to monitor. We have put together six DNA sampling seasons, from winter 2017-2018 to winter 2022-2023. During this time, we collected 764 non-invasive DNA samples from droppings and urine on snow.

Among the most common challenges:

- Lack of snow makes it extremely difficult to find wolf tracks.
- Distinguishing wolf droppings from dog droppings is a challenge.
- When foxes mark over the wolf track, that sample cannot be used.

For all these reasons, the overall DNA amplification success in our samples in the last year was 71%, but the actual success after eliminating mixed samples or samples belonging to other species dropped significantly to 54%.

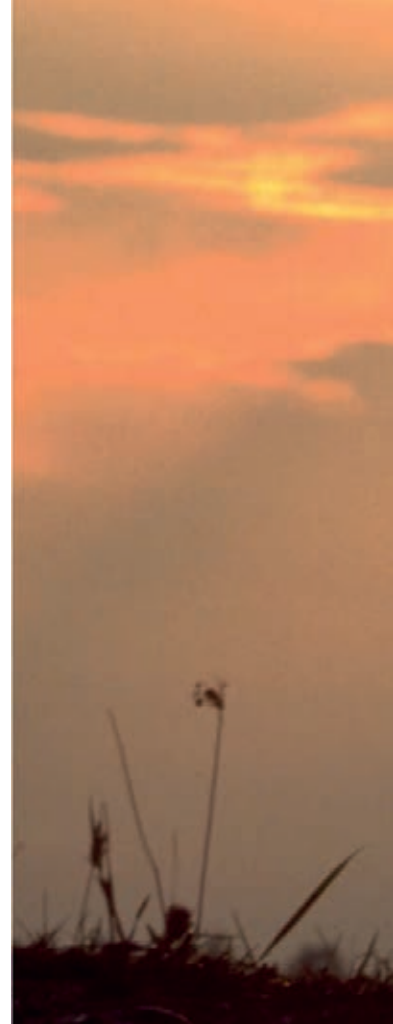
The year 2023 brought interesting news from the northern part of the study area. One of the packs there fragmented into two different territories, in Izvoarele Dâmboviței only four wolves remained, in the Bârsa area one individual is left. The northern Șercăița pack also seems to have reorganised with only three individuals.

On the southern side things remain relatively stable, the wolf-dog hybrid we had identified in the previous year is still part of the pack, but no new hybrids have appeared. One dog that had been noticed as part of a pack has meanwhile been removed.

At the end of 2023 we published our first wolf study, the second such study in the country. It shows the dynamics

of the six packs we monitored with genetics over three consecutive years and can be found at [carpathia.org](http://carpathia.org).

For the lynx species, in 2023 we prepared and started the second phase of monitoring, five years after the first phase. In this stage we tried to assess whether the size and structure of our lynx population has changed over time. The installation of the cameras began in September and we scheduled them to remain in the field until early April 2024. We installed 150 motion sensor cameras at 75 locations uniformly covering our 1,200 km<sup>2</sup> study area. Sorting the data is one of the most difficult parts of the task: by the end of 2023 we had collected 100,000 photos of which only 300 are of lynx. Fortunately, we have thus created the basis for a robust estimate of our lynx population size for the first half of 2024.





© B&C Promberger



© Liviu Ungureanu

## Red deer

---

After showing the logistical difficulties related to genetic monitoring in deer in 2021, we put together a protocol for monitoring this species using motion sensor cameras.

In 2023 we carried out the field phase of this study in the upper basin of the Dâmbovița River, over an area of 250 km<sup>2</sup>. Our study is part of a wildlife research and monitoring partnership with national parks in Germany, Poland and Albania.

In April 2023 we started the installation of cameras in the field. This took two months so that on June 1st we managed to synchronise 127 cameras that we will check periodically until June 2024. By the end of 2023 the 127 cameras had recorded a total of 1,103,215 pictures, promising data to calculate the deer population density for the first time. The next stage of the study involves using artificial intelligence software to automatically identify deer and calculate the distance between them and the camera that caught the image. In this way we will estimate, through mathematical modelling, the deer population density and sex ratio.

Being the first study of this kind and scale in Romania, we hope that over 2024 we will obtain robust estimates and be able to provide recommendations for such monitoring schemes for other pilot areas in Romania. At the local level, this study will help us in calibrating habitat management measures for the species. We will be able to understand how it impacts ecological reconstruction, for example, and potential threats to the viability of the high mountain deer population.





## Chamois and wild boar


---

After a notable decrease in 2022, the wild boar population has come back, at least partially, in 2023. In the mountain areas African swine fever did not terminate the whole boar population, probably because there is less physical exchange between different boar groups from different valleys.

The population level of chamois in our concession areas remains low; no significant increase in the alpine areas was recorded. We were happy to notice some positive aspects, like an increased number of newly born chamois and, on a very interesting note, the continuous growth of the chamois population living mainly in the forests of the northwestern Leota Mountains.





 © Gabriel Șerban

# QUICK FACTS

## **Brown bear**

- Our six-year study reached the final phase, and we could draw some conclusions.
- Local population density increased from 17.7 bears/100 km<sup>2</sup> in 2018 (15.4-25.7) to 22.6 bears/100 km<sup>2</sup> in 2022 (21.6-28.9). Only 20% of the bears detected in 2022 were already known from 2017, the rest were new animals.
- We noted a significantly higher proportion of males among the problem bears.

## **Wolf and Eurasian Lynx**

- Overall proportion of viable DNA samples for wolves since winter 2017, when we started to monitor them, is 54%.
- The packs from the northern part of the study area fragmented into two different territories.
- In 2023 we published our first scientific wolf study – in Romania, it is the second publication of this size, on the topic of wolves.
- Lynx study is planned to finish in April 2024.





 © Daniel Mirlea

## Red deer

- We installed 127 camera traps which recorded a total of 1,103,215 pictures.
- In the analysis phase we will involve artificial intelligence software to help us identify the deer and estimate the population density and sex ratio.
- The conclusions will help us understand the red deer population's impact on ecological reconstruction and which are the best habitat management measures.

## Chamois and wild boar

- In 2023, the wild boar population began to increase again after a sharp drop in the previous years due to the African Swine Fever.
- Chamois population in the alpine areas didn't show any significant increase.
- The 'forest chamois' population we monitor in the Stoenești area (Leaota mountains) grew continuously. We will study it further to understand the reasons of this phenomenon.



# Outreach and Communication

**Introduction**

---

**Events**

---

**Ambassador programme**

---

**Community outreach**

---

**Awards**

---

**Doing good is contagious in the Făgăraş Mountains**

---

**Carpathia Nature Education Programmes**

---

**Bavarian Forest National Park Partnership**

---

**A glimpse of visits and exchanges throughout the year**

---

**Volunteering Programme**

---

**Corporate partnerships**

# Introduction

---

Conservation work would not be possible without a constant, strategic effort in communication. The more we get communities and decision factors involved, the more we need to talk about what we do, but also to listen carefully to their concerns and needs. As our projects mature and bear fruit, as we are taking steps towards creating the National Park, the need for communication increases.

From community education initiatives to press trips and exchanges with peer organisations, we felt like we were constantly on the road.

The feedback we received fuels us. With every award, with every starry-eyed child who dreams of becoming a ranger and every community that feels the improvement in its livelihood we know that we are on track. We know that the biodiversity and the beauty of the Făgăraş Mountains are gaining the recognition they deserve.



This is why  
**in 2023** our  
calendar was  
**beyond full.**



# Events

Consolidation and innovation are the concepts that speak best about the events we have organised in 2023. Făgăraş Fest, festival of the Făgăraş Mountains; Carpathia Bike Tour – these are happenings that have taken root and grown nicely, becoming reference names to those looking for that something different in a festival or a sports event. New events such as ‘Cobor between the Oaks’ festival and ‘Întrecerea Gulaşurilor’/‘Goulash Competition’ have shown us that we can develop new festival experiences through creativity, rigour and work directed towards a clear vision.

The events are a great way to connect and reconnect people with nature, traditions and places around the Făgăraş Mountains, while also being a source of income for local communities. And this income comes from accommodation in the community, local food, services, local people engaged in various activities, because yes, the more than 7,000 participants in the events organised by Foundation Conservation Carpathia in 2023 had a positive impact on the communities. The events also had a positive impact on the participants: when, at the end, people write to you to say that they really enjoyed it and can’t wait to come back for the next edition, you know you’ve done something right.

Looking back, the calendar of events we organised was full and included:

**‘Cobor between the Oaks’** festival, organised on 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> June at the Cobor Biodiversity Farm, brought over 1,000 participants to one of the oldest Transylvanian villages, Cobor. The festival, organised for the first time with financial support of the OAK Foundation, aimed to highlight the meadows with centuries-old oaks around the village of Cobor and our efforts to restore such a wood pastures. Festival participants enjoyed guided hikes, village tours, farm tours, local food, but also artistic moments, and concerts in unconventional spaces.

**Carpathia Bike Tour**, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, took place on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, World Bike Day. The event brought together more than 150 participants from all over the country, over a route of about 70 km that started from Rupea Fortress, through old Transylvanian villages, through the forest and the Transylvanian Hills, rich in plants and wildlife. Cobor Biodiversity Farm hosted the cyclists for lunch, offering them goulash and local goodies. Tickets for the event sold out a month in advance, making the Carpathia Bike Tour a landmark event among bike lovers.

**Făgăraş Fest**, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, took place between 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> July in Porumbacu de Sus, Sibiu County. More than 6,000 participants experienced the festival, taking part in guided tours, educational activities, concerts and the screening of the film Lynx. In 2023, the festival came with new elements, such as:

- debates on environmental themes - Carpathia Talks
- guided tours about bats, pollinators
- sports activities for children
- the adventure competition Făgăraş Adventure.

Zdob și Zdub, Nico de Transylvania, and Ovidiu Lipan Țândărică and Fanfara 10 Prăjini were the artists responsible for the dancing on the grass and the good mood. Over 30 local producers were able to sell their products at the festival, offering participants local food cooked on the spot.

We enjoyed the support of the Porumbacu Municipality, but also of the people from the community who got involved in welcoming us to their village with a festival to remember.

The event was organised together with Pro Park, the Protected Areas Foundation, with the support of the Arcadia Foundation through the Endangered Landscapes & Seascapes

Programme and from the European Commission through the LIFE programme.

**Goulash Contest**, 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Cobor Biodiversity Farm. The gastronomic event brought together more than 400 participants and eight teams who entered the race to prepare the tastiest goulash. The basic ingredient of the goulash stews was the high-quality Sura de Stepă beef, a product of the farm. The goulash came bundled with a full autumn experience in nature: farm tour, family activities, children and walks in the mild October sunshine. The event ended harmoniously, with music by the band ‘Trei Parale’.

We keep the tradition of supporting other local events, events that promote nature, conservation, local culture, and in 2023 we were partners in six such events.

- ‘Lynx Festival’, 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> June, Brasov, the first festival dedicated to nature photography and documentary film
- ‘Livada cu stele’ / ‘The Orchard with Stars’, 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> September, Nucșoara, Argeș County, an event offering guided tours for participants, a series of environmental education activities and an exhibition about the ancient beech trees of Nucșoara
- ‘Alpin Film Festival’ - 4<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> September, Brașov, a festival of mountain film and culture, where Foundation Conservation Carpathia sponsored the Carpathia Trophy for the best film promoting the Carpathians
- ‘Cucuteni-5000 Redivivus’: Exact and less exact sciences, 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> September, Dragoslavele and Rucăr communes
- ‘Culmea Festival’, 6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> September, Brasov, film and education festival for the whole family.

## Media exposure

We talk about what we do because it is important for Romanians to know the nature of their country, the projects we are carrying out for it, the conclusions we reach through studies, but also why a National Park in the Făgăraș Mountains is essential.

**Four press events were organised in 2023**, part of the LIFE project supported by the European Commission.

**44 journalists participated** in the press events in the Foundation Conservation Carpathia project area.

The topics most covered were:

- Launch of the third bison reintroduction point in the Făgăraș Mountains and the ecological reconstruction works
- ‘The Forest of Immortal Stories’ and the benefits a community can gain from a conservation project
- Făgăraș Fest and how a festival highlighting nature can create opportunities for the community
- Wolf census results.

2,357\* appearances on Foundation Conservation Carpathia’s work were in the media in 2023 (\*Data according to Media Trust. Most likely, the actual figure is higher, as the monitoring agency does not audit local radio and TV).

The Green Journal of the Făgăraș Mountains, the newspaper through which we inform communities about our activities, had two new editions, in July and December. It is distributed in a circulation of 4,250 copies in the villages, communes and towns of the project area.

## International press

We also talk about Romania’s nature beyond its borders, so that our country’s nature becomes a country brand, and attracts foreign tourists passionate about eco-tourism experiences. We were happy to host more than 15 journalists, photographers and documentary makers from abroad. Romania, in the context of the work of Foundation Conservation Carpathia, has been featured in publications such as National Geographic UK, The Telegraph, The Guardian, Der Spiegel, as well as on tv stations like ZDF, ARTE France and Germany and BBC Earth.



# Ambassador programme

We are happy to have nine more friends and ambassadors of the Făgăraş Mountains with us. They are personalities passionate about nature, sports, photography and sustainability, who support our cause and have chosen to be with us in our endeavour to create a National Park.



- **Alex Damian**, photographer and content creator
- **Andreea Irimia**, content creator, Think Healthy
- **Carmen Dima**, content creator, sacalatorim.ro
- **Cătălin Cotinghiu**, content creator at Podu Stricat, passionate about photography, mountain lover
- **Daniel Giurgi**, content creator at Podu' Stricat, volunteer at Râşnov Mountain Rescue
- **Raluca Chirişescu**, doctor, mountain enthusiast, content creator at Simple Living
- **Roxana Puris**, architect, content creator, owner of a sustainable clothing brand
- **Sonia Argint Ionescu**, TV presenter, content creator
- **Vlad Eftenie**, photographer, architect, content creator



# Community outreach

Conservation can be a generator of wealth, and the community of Nucșoara, those with whom we launched The Forest of Immortal Stories, can confirm this. The project, initiated by the Municipality of Nucșoara in Argeș County, with our support, aims to protect some of the most spectacular ancient beech trees in Europe and contribute to the tourism development of the area. Thus, from 19<sup>th</sup> May 2023 we launched [arboricupovesti.ro](http://arboricupovesti.ro), a platform where 2,544 ancient beech trees can be adopted from any corner of the world, for a fee of 700 lei. In the project the community takes on the role of preserving these beech trees, and the money from the donations will be used by the town hall to develop the infrastructure for visiting the area.

The project benefited from a sustained communication campaign, and at the launch we had public personalities who agreed to get involved pro-bono. Together with Jack Wolfskin and WaterBear we created a documentary called 'Spirit of the Forest', which tells the story of the relationship between the local people and the ancient beech trees of Nucșoara.

By December 2023, more than 150 century-old beech trees had been adopted within the project.

The **reintroduced bison** in Lerești have inspired the community and the local football team we support has officially changed its name to ACS Zimbrii Lerești (Lerești Bison) from Muscelul Club Lerești. Moreover, the players have taken on some of the determination typical of the bison and have topped the standings in the 4th Argeș league, with nine wins and one draw. Lerești Bison are a phenomenon in Lerești, representing the community with honour.

**Sport** is an essential element in the

development of children and in raising future generations. In October 2023, we launched 'Learn to play TABLE TENNIS with class' programme for students from the communes of Rucăr, Lerești, Stoenesti, Valea Mare Pravăț and Nucșoara. More than 150 children play table tennis, under the guidance of the sports teacher, in this project supported by Foundation Conservation Carpathia.

**We encourage initiatives and projects that want to bring change in the community**, which is why,

together with the Țara Făgărașului Community Foundation, we launched the Carpathia Grants Programme. The four winning projects that aim to have a positive impact on nature and to contribute to improving the quality of life for the members of the communities in Țara Făgărașului, received a total funding of 65,000 lei.

Through the Community Fund we also supported local events, such as the Lerești Egg Bagel Festival, as well as specific community development projects of the Runcu and Albești Municipalities.



© Călin Serban

# Awards

---

Our work has been rewarded with national and international recognition, and this helps us move forward with energy and confidence.

- **Bambi Award, Germany**  
for Foundation Conservation Carpathia project, developed by Barbara and Christoph Promberger, 'Our Earth' category
- **PR Awards 2023, Romania**  
'The Forest of Immortal Stories' project:
  - Golden Award for Excellence in the Media Relations & Influencer Relation category
  - Silver Award for Excellence in the Public Relations category
- **Royal House of Romania**  
Honorary Diploma in the category of Citizenship through innovative educational and cultural acts for 'social responsibility, sustainability, identity values'.
- **Culture Awards of the Year in Braşov**  
Festival 'Cobor between the Oaks', 'Debut' category  
Silver Award in the category Social Goods - Brands, 'Ursus steps up for good' campaign
- **Romanian CSR Awards** - First Prize, 'Listen to the bear in you and do good' campaign

# Doing good is contagious in the Făgăraș Mountains

Casa Bună Association is one of the best social problem solvers in Romania. Shoulder to shoulder with them we were able to continue developing social programmes for the communities in the Făgăraș Mountains. They play a vital role in improving the quality of life for people in the area, as support and education are two key factors in successfully changing the locals' perspective on their relationship with nature.

Our interventions vary, covering areas such as: providing essential food to the underprivileged; early education and scholarships; sports programmes; professional development workshops for youth and more. Such an encompassing approach is meant to maximize the effects and actually make a difference in the future of the community.



© Conservation Carpathia

**Food** is a subject we pay continuous attention to. In short:

- 92 children in 61 families benefitted from basic food supplies
- In Nucșoara alone, there were 13 food distribution actions
- Total quantity of basic food supplies (meat, dairy, fruits and vegetables) in Nucșoara: 19,500 kg



© Conservation Carpathia



© Conservation Carpathia

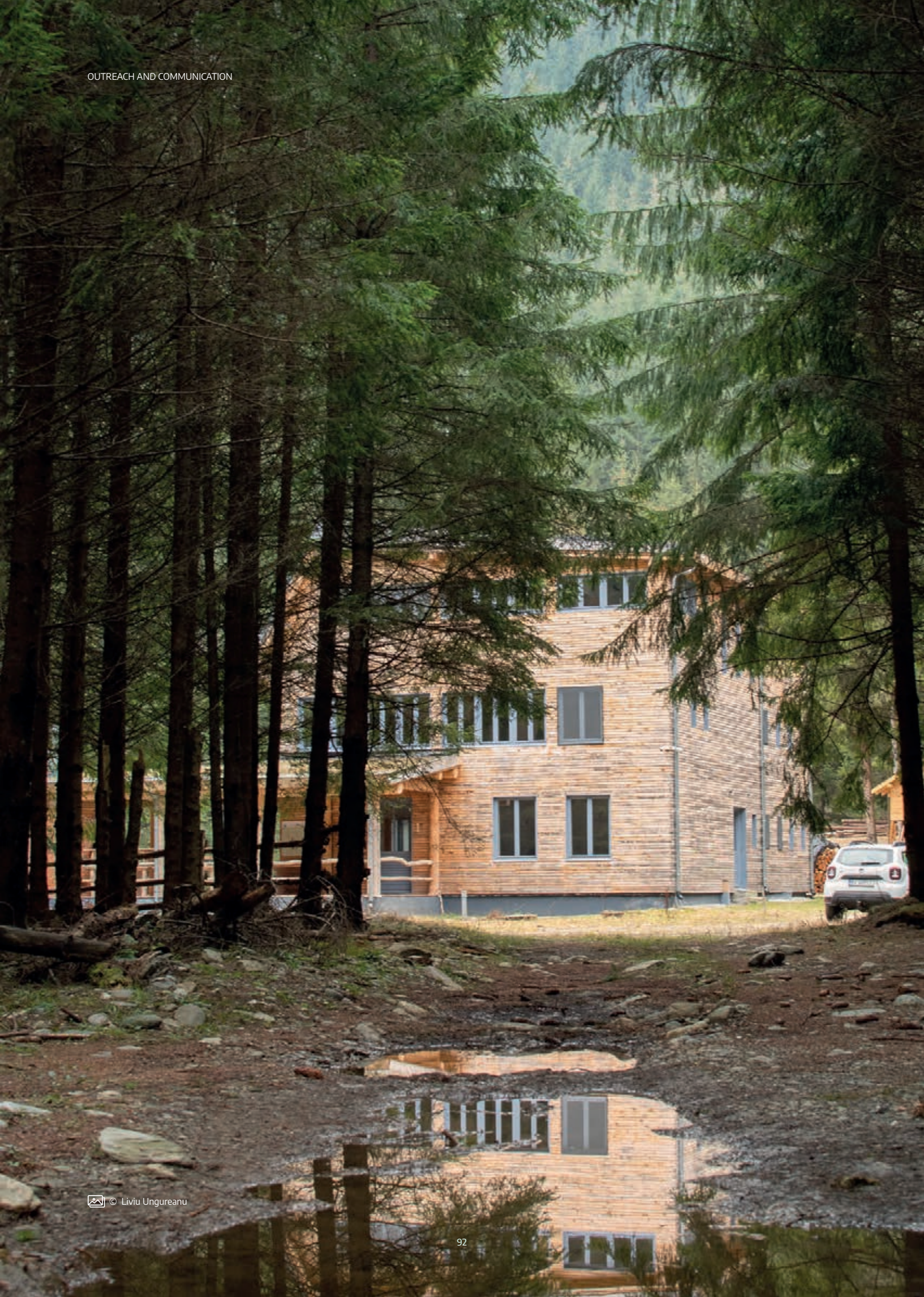
**Clothing and school supplies** are essential for children's development. Our contribution consisted of:

- Fully equipped backpacks for 200 children aged 4-16
- Complete winter clothing and footwear for 184 children in Lerești and Nucșoara, each kit contained: winter jacket, fleece, scarf, hat, boots, thermal leggings and shirt. They amounted to 1472 articles distributed.
- Christmas gifts for 208 children in Nucșoara and Lerești

**Saturday kindergarten in Nucșoara and Lerești** is a project that reached a total of 44 children, through 13 meetings and more than 26 hours of education and play.

**Online 1-on-1 tutoring with children in the Făgăraș Mountains:** an activity that benefitted 197 kids aged 6-16. Summed up, it meant 9,078 hours of Zoom or Skype lessons, that involved 140 volunteers.

**Offline tutoring and lessons:** the total number of tutoring hours for children in Lerești and Nucșoara is equivalent to 52 days.



**Nature camps:** at our Centre for Activities and Nature Exploration in Richita welcomed 13 children from Nucșoara and Lerești. They spent around 288 hours in nature. 13 more children attended survival camps, which brought them the first nights they had ever spent in a tent.

We organised **paediatric medical exams** that benefited 85 children from the Lerești-Câmpulung area.

Thanks to Dona Iordan from Titu Maiorescu Dentistry College, 22 physicians volunteered their time and helped us screen 80 children from Nucșoara for **dental emergencies**. Essential treatments are offered by Victoria Clinic in Pitești, run by Cristi Dragomir.

We organised classes and workshops in a **vocational school** setting to teach teenagers professional skills that might allow them to support themselves sooner rather than later. In Nucșoara and Lerești 10 teenagers attended eight workshops, totalling 40 hours dedicated to learning.

The **sewing classes** reached 40 children aged 10-14 from both Nucșoara and Lerești. 24 workshops took place in total, offering 96 hours of sewing machine practice. At the end the students completed 83 products that they took home and used afterwards.

**Digital workshops** helped children develop their computer skills. In Nucșoara 46 children participated in 12 classes, meaning they were present, in total, 98 times and studied for 24 hours. In Lerești, 57 children attended 12 digital classes, accumulating 24 hours of study and a total of 103 attendances.

**'Livada cu stele' ('The Orchard with Stars')** is the festival that Casa Bună Association organised from scratch in Nucșoara to spread the word about the plan to build a social kindergarten. It turned out well thanks to all the partners, artists and more than 100 volunteers who got involved. We are proud to have been a part of it!

We feel honoured to have Casa Bună Association as our partner. They help us meet the needs of the communities around the Făgăraș Mountains in a consistent and significant way, while continuously emphasizing the values of biodiversity and sustainability.



## Carpathia Nature Education Programmes

**Junior Ranger programme** provided nature education to selected children from the communities around the Făgăraş Mountains. More than one hundred children applied; thirty-eight of them were selected and took part in camps at the Richita Nature Education and Visiting Centre. After the two camps they remained in contact with rangers and educators, attending monthly activities that taught them about a ranger's work and involvement in protecting the forest. Moreover, ten children went to a camp in Retezat National Park. All these children are true junior rangers, and we trust that they will grow to be nature leaders!

**Adopt a nature corner** is a contest that invited children aged 13-17 to identify a nature corner in their community, adopt it and promote it in social media, using compelling photos and descriptions. We awarded the students with the best applications with an intensive training programme, which included a photography workshop, a social media introduction class and a trip to the Bavarian Forest National Park. Out of the 29 applicants, 15 were selected and took part in the trip and the workshops.

**Carpathia scholarships** support the 7<sup>th</sup> grade students who are most motivated and interested in nature matters from the Făgăraş Mountains communities. In 2023, fifteen children received this type of support – a financial aid and the participation in a nature camp in Richita centre.

**Nature in the Classroom** is a programme focused on creating awareness about Foundation Conservation Carpathia's values and activity. Aimed at students in the communities from the project areas, the caravan became an extensive project, planned to be implemented in the beginning of 2024.



# Bavarian Forest National Park Partnership

---

The Bavarian Forest National Park is the largest and oldest of all German National Parks and is considered by many one of Europe's best managed and most successful National Parks. In 2022, Foundation Conservation Carpathia and the Bavarian Forest National Park official signed a partnership agreement and we were happy to develop this partnership throughout 2023. We visited the Bavarian Forest with a larger team of wildlife specialists and a group of children from the villages around the Făgăraș Mountains, the German park administration visited with the park director and local mayors and thereafter sent their wildlife managers to learn about how we deal with large carnivores.

In August, Dr. Leibl, director of the Bavarian National Park retired, and we were happy to agree on a visit in October with the new park director Ursula Schuster to continue the

cooperation in the years to come.







## A glimpse of visits and exchanges throughout the year

---

Guests who are impressed and inspired by the nature in the Făgăraș Mountains and by our activity are crucial, especially when they have experience and expertise in nature protection and conservation. Their fresh perspectives help us discover things we might otherwise miss, and their contribution infuses us with enthusiasm and motivation to keep going.

Visiting peer organisations is another valuable tool in growing our skills and our network. They allow us to share our knowledge and success stories, learn from other experiences and discover new models that we can apply in our work.



In 2023, we hosted a significant number of guests:

- **Three guests from the Bavarian Forest National Park**
- **Two guests from National Geographic Magazine**
- **Four guests from Berchtesgaden National Park**
- **Representatives from LIFE and ELSP programmes**
- **Two representatives of the International Vulture Foundation and Green Balkans**
- **Six representatives from the American Prairie Reserve**

In order to enrich our view, we visited key-places and attended nature-themed events created by peer organisations:

- **Akdeniz Koruma Derneği in Turkey**
- **Tyresta National Park in Sweden**
- **Tiveden National Park in Sweden**
- **Visitor centre in Hornborgsjön, Sweden**
- **Visitor centre in Lacko Slott, Sweden**
- **COA Festival by Rewilding Portugal, in Portugal**
- **TUD Winter School on Non-Timber Forest Products**



# Volunteering Programme

---

A deep thank you from the bottom of our hearts to all our volunteers. Your dedication to conservation inspires us. Our doors remain open to welcome new volunteers in the future.

At Cobor Biodiversity Farm we were happy to receive their contributions of Alex Dill, Carolin Grothaus and Farkas Levente.

Special thanks to all the volunteers who make Făgăraş Fest and Cobor between the Oaks not only possible, but also successful and joyful events.

Our deepest thank you goes to our grammar and spelling hero, Dr Ruth Rusby, who makes sure that our documents sound natural and correct in English. Your dedication and promptness are essential, and your help is absolutely priceless.

**We are very grateful for the contribution of each and every volunteer, whether you have been with us for a short time or have been a part of our team for years.**

Wildlife monitoring activities benefitted from the volunteer contribution of: Anastasia Ragu, Louisa Klüßendorf, Martin Vollmer, Lucy Holland, Eriku Goto, Viorel Nicolae Rădescu and Melitini Damigou.

We are grateful to: Victor Gan, Sylvie More, Rebecca Langer, Maartje Eiljander, Michael Kinkelbur, Tobias Janczik.



# Corporate partnerships

---

For the fifth consecutive year, **Zentiva Group**, one of our most important partners for reforestation, contributed to the restoration of clear-cuts. They supported us in planting 65,600 saplings on an area of about 16.4 ha.

**Ursus Breweries** has once again pledged its support for our conservation efforts by donating 1% of all URSUS Premium sales from November to December 2023. This donation will be used to protect the natural habitat of bears and to support the local communities in the Făgăraș Mountains. Additionally, Ursus Breweries has collaborated with the Digi24 team and Foundation Conservation Carpathia specialists to create a series of informative materials about living with bears.

**BCR** and Foundation Conservation Carpathia have joined forces in a strategic partnership to promote the growth of communities in the Făgăraș Mountains region through environmental and financial education initiatives. As part of this collaboration,

BCR supports the Richita Nature Exploration and Activity Centre to provide free access to educational programs for children in the area. Additionally, BCR customers can donate to Conservation Carpathia through the George digital banking platform.

For the third year, **ING Bank** supports Foundation Conservation Carpathia in establishing the Făgăraș National Park. In 2023, ING supported the development of the Roadele Munților food hub and entrepreneurship in the area. Additionally, ING customers were given the opportunity to donate to Conservation Carpathia through the Home'Bank Donations Hub.

As our long-term partner, **Jack Wolfskin** continues to support us with necessary equipment as well as a contribution that enables us to continue our reforestation programmes.

We are grateful for **Alpha Bank's** vision and financial support, that allowed us to organise the events which brought so many people in the Făgăraș Mountains area. They understood that by feeling the joy of life in a local community the larger public will resonate deeply with our mission.





## QUICK FACTS

- Our own events are becoming a much appreciated pillar in our work. The public enjoyed our festivals in record numbers: over 1,000 participants were present at 'Cobor between the Oaks', more than 6,000 attended Făgăraș Fest and the Goulash Competition attracted over 400 participants. For them, nature tours and activities are one of the main attractions.
- We were happy to support and be a partner in more nature-oriented events: Lynx Festival, The Orchard with Stars, Alpin Film Festival, Cucuteni-5000 Redivivus, Culmea Festival – local festivals that give us hope that the interest in nature protection and appreciation is on a growth curve.
- Under the LIFE project we organised four press trips. 44 local journalists participated and then published content about our conservation efforts.
- There were more than 2,357 appearances of our work in the media in 2023.
- More than 15 foreign journalists visited us and then published content about Romania's nature and the eco-tourism opportunities.
- Nine more friends joined the team of ambassadors of the Făgăraș Mountains.
- Our project, 'The Forest of Immortal Stories', put the commune of Nucșoara on the tourism map. It allows the public to adopt from afar one of the ancient beech trees in the nearby forest. The place also raised the interest of a video team, who created a documentary called 'Spirit of the Forest' to tell the story of the relationship between the local people and the ancient beech trees of Nucșoara.



- The local football team in Lerești, inspired by the reintroduced bison, changed their name to 'ACS Zimbrii Lerești' and proceeded to top the standings in the 4<sup>th</sup> Argeș league. Go-o-o-o, bison!
- Our sports programme, 'Learn to play TABLE TENNIS with class', is motivating students from the communities around the Făgăraș Mountains to practice and strive to become professional athletes.
- CARPATHIA Fund is a programme we are implementing together with Țara Făgărașului Community Foundation. We created a project competition and awarded the 4 winning projects with a total of 65,000 lei, that will allow them to implement projects that change the community for the better, in the spirit of nature conservation.
- Our communication campaigns and our festivals were acknowledged and awarded, locally and nationally.
- Our collaboration with Casa Bună Association brought more joy to the children and youth in Nucșoara and Lerești, in the shape of food supplies, equipment, nature camps, vocational education, digital workshops and more. It is a partnership that continues to amaze us with the degree of involvement and results.
- Our Nature Education Programmes are reaching an increasing number of children, teaching them about the importance of nature protection in a practical way. Junior Rangers and Adopt a Nature Corner are just a few of our recurring programmes, aimed at children from the communities around the Făgăraș Mountains.
- Our partnership with the Bavarian Forest National Park allowed us to grow our expertise and share our knowledge through a series of fruitful exchanges.
- We received guests and we were also guests. Members of our team participated in a significant number of events where we could learn new things and improve our way of working. As hosts, we also welcomed people who wanted to know more about the impressive nature and biodiversity of the Făgăraș Mountains.
- We are more than grateful to every volunteer who contributes to our programmes.
- Proud of the partners who support us year after year: Zentiva, Ursus Breweries, BCR, ING Bank, Jack Wolfskin, Alpha Bank, and many others. Thanks to them we can go on with the restoration and conservation work.



# Conservation Enterprise Programme

**Introduction**

---

**Bunea & Comisu Wildlife Hides**

---

**Wilderness camps**

---

**Cobor Biodiversity Farm**

---

**Roadele Munților Food Hub**

# Introduction

---

Foundation Conservation Carpathia's commitment to a new approach to tourism and the promotion of new models of economic development continued in 2023.

**If, at the end of 2022, the support team of TravelCarpathia counted two people, in 2023 the number of team members grew to five. The new positions were dedicated to marketing activities, reservations and the development of the Guiding Academy.**

Expanding the coordination of economic activities through TravelCarpathia has provided an opportunity to improve interaction with tourists, increase the number of bookings and, not least, to clarify the direction of development for these activities.

In parallel with the strengthening of the organisational capacity of TravelCarpathia, in 2023 we completed the branding process and started an extensive strategic planning process, which aimed to attract 5000 tourists to our eco-tourism programmes in the Făgăraş Mountains area by 2028.

The development of ecotourism activities entailed the development of the food hub 'Roadele Munților' / 'Fruits of the Mountains' Carpathia, which in 2023 became the main supplier for these activities. A notable addition to the portfolio of Roadele Munților is the Carpathia beer, a certified organic product which is produced by a local brewery from Lerești.

While we are on the subject of team building, it's worth noting that Cobor Biodiversity Farm went through some interesting processes too:

- It has been expanding its management team
- It hosted two big successful events: Cobor among the Oaks and the first ever Goulash Contest, a cooking competition with over 400 participants and eight competing teams

Since the second half of last year, we have been developing the entrepreneurs' component of the Carpathia Fund programme, which is scheduled to be launched in the spring of 2024.

The focus for 2023 was on strengthening the teams and increasing organisational capacity. This allowed us to develop and clarify ambitious strategies, set in different areas. Now that directions are defined and the team is in place, we are set on transforming our big plans into reality.



© Claudiu Postelnicu

# Ecotourism: Wildlife hides, wilderness camps, results, stories

The tour operator TravelCarpathia became operational in January 2023. Its role is to develop ecotourism destinations in and around the Făgăraş Mountains and provide guided tours, wildlife observation, cultural and gastronomic tours. From 2023 onwards ecotourism activities are carried out under this entity.

This offered us the possibility to develop an integrated ecotourism programme, which includes different locations such as: Cobor Biodiversity Farm, Bunea and Comisu Wildlife Observatories, Vlad Valley Hut and the Wilderness Camp in Poiana Tămaş. In this way we managed two wildlife observatories, a hut and the camp in Poiana Tămaş. Beyond this, TravelCarpathia works with a fair number of local businesses.

In 2023, the TravelCarpathia team in Braşov grew to five people, including two people on reservations, one person on marketing, one person on Guide Academy development and, last but not least, a manager. The team of guides extended to 12 people, who offered guided tours in the Făgăraş Mountains area. In addition to the team in Braşov, in 2023 the TravelCarpathia team included the two hospitality coordinators and the kitchen team in Cobor.

The development of the Guide Academy included organising three workshops on guided tours, welcoming and introducing tourists, a cooking workshop at the observatories and the creation of a strong community of guides who are dedicated to the Carpathia principles and TravelCarpathia's vision of ecotourism.

The 2023 integrated approach through TravelCarpathia has helped double the number of tourists and overnight stays in the Dâmboviţa Valley. We had



© Ben Pipe

over 80 students from Eberswalde University and Fram Student as guests and organised three press trips for renowned European publications. In 2023, at the Cobor Biodiversity Farm Guest House 680 tourists spent 1285 nights, representing a 20% increase compared to 2022.

In the second half of the year, a

comprehensive branding process began. At the end we had defined the updated visual identity of TravelCarpathia.

Along with the rebranding we went through a strategic planning process with the facilitation of Ovid Jacota, our German consultant and mapped out

the objectives for the next five years. Based on the development strategy, we started working on a new website which embeds a booking engine, that is planned to become operational in the first half of 2024.





## QUICK FACTS

- Travel Carpathia tour operator became operational in January 2023, allowing us to expand and diversify our offers and services.
- Guests could enjoy guided tours, wildlife observation, cultural and gastronomic tours. We are planning on including horse riding tours in 2024.
- The TravelCarpathia team grew from two to five people.
- Guiding Academy is the programme we created to teach enthusiastic guides and help them include more nature among the experiences offered to tourists. The attendants were exposed to topics like guided tours, welcoming and introducing tourists, participated in a cooking workshop at the observatories and the creation of a strong community of guides.
- The number of tourists and overnight stays in the Dâmbovița Valley doubled. We also hosted 80 students from Eberswalde University and Fram Student, a student exchange network.
- We went through an extensive branding and strategy process, that helped us clarify our identity and map our objectives for the next five years.





# Cobor Biodiversity Farm

Medium-sized farms, such as the Cobor Biodiversity Farm, are exposed to constant challenges in terms of legislation, access to funding sources, development of marketing and distribution capacities for farm products. We strived to continue developing towards our goals while finding solutions to underlying requirements.

We are deeply content for having achieved, in 2023, the goal of maintaining the activities of the horse sanctuary and the horse livery yard, the Carpathian Shepherd dogs breeding kennel and the consolidation of the herd of Transylvanian Grey cattle. All activities are carried out with respect to the farm's values, which aim to maintain biodiversity, raise animals in welfare conditions and provide clean and healthy food to tourists staying on the farm.

In the beginning of May we found the right person for the farm management position and completed the management team, right on time for the new farming season.

The organic certification process has reached the second year of conversion and the inspection carried out has confirmed compliance with the rules and requirements. From 2025 onwards, Cobor Biodiversity Farm will officially be a certified organic farm.

In 2023, the Transylvanian Grey cattle herd recorded the birth of 50 calves, which means that at the end of the year we counted a total of 250 head of cattle. Feeding of this herd was achieved by mowing an area of about 100 ha, resulting in over 350 tonnes of hay. The slaughtering point authorised in 2022 started to operate too, and we slaughtered eight animals, resulting in

1270 kg of carcasses used by the local gastronomic point, which operates within the farm.

In the Carpathian Shepherd dogs kennel, we registered 20 shepherd pups, which were donated to farmers and owners of various agricultural activities to help manage conflicts between large carnivores and farmers without negative impact on wildlife.

In an area with quite high economic problems, the farm is one of the representative employers, having 10 permanent employees and five dayworkers in the community, contributing to the welfare of more than 10 families out of the less than 100 families that live in the village.

The land management in the farm's portfolio emphasises rotational grazing without extensive grazing, which has a long-term negative impact on both soil quality and biodiversity in the area. We also continued the restoration of the dry grasslands at the Cobor Biodiversity Farm together with our partner, Transylmagica Association.

The Cobor Biodiversity Farm is the ideal place for families who want a farm holiday experience. Nearly 700 tourists experienced the location, enjoyed the tasty food and toured the farm, learning about the various ways in which we maintain biodiversity and a harmonious relation with nature.

The location is ideal for offering nature-based experiences and attracting different age groups to the hills around the village of Cobor.





**We feel that in 2023 we put Cobor Biodiversity Farm on the map of tourist destinations where families, bike lovers and nature and local gastronomy enthusiasts can enjoy unforgettable experiences.**







## QUICK FACTS

- We are grateful to have been able to maintain the horse sanctuary, the horse livery yard, the Carpathian Shepherd dogs breeding kennel and the consolidation of the herd of Transylvanian Grey cattle in 2023. All these aim to maintain biodiversity, offer good welfare conditions to animals and benefit tourists.
- A new manager joined the team in May and completed the management team.
- The organic certification process entered the second year. In 2025 we will officially be a certified organic farm.
- 50 calves were born in the Transylvanian Grey Cattle herd. We reached a total of 250 animals in 2023.
- 20 new pups were trained and donated to farmers and agricultural business owners, to help prevent conflicts with large carnivores.
- The farm is a representative employer in the area, providing jobs for 10 permanent employees and five day-labourers.
- Nearly 700 tourists experienced the location in 2023, enjoyed the food and toured the farm, learning about how we maintain the harmony with nature.



 © Daniel Rosengren

- We hosted two successful events: ‘Cobor among the Oaks’ festival, which included Carpathia Bike Tour, and ‘The Goulash Contest’, which attracted food and culture lovers. Both were good opportunities for tourists to enjoy the fabulous nature and learn about the principles of biodiversity and conservation that we apply in all our activities.

# Conservation Enterprise Programme for entrepreneurs

---

In 2023, the activities planned under the Conservation Enterprise Programme had two clear directions: consultancy and technical assistance for entrepreneurs in the Făgăraş Mountains area. Our activities involved field visits, meetings with local entrepreneurs, workshops and the development of partnerships.

The objective of the Conservation Enterprise Programme is to create a network of local gastronomic points around the Făgăraş Mountains, where visitors can enjoy traditional dishes and local hospitality.

We continued our work to support the licensing of three local gastronomic points – in the village of Lăicăi, Cetățeni commune, the village of Rucăr and in Fundata. During the last months of 2023, we supported the steps for the authorisation of two other local gastronomic points, which were programmed to be completed in 2024. The total number of households we visited and advised, as they intended to set up local gastronomic points, is around 20.

In 2023 we provided support for the organic certification process of the Pardon brewery in Lerești. Now the brewery is producing and marketing the first certified organic beer in Romania.

The technical assistance also covered the mountain product certification of seven products in the portfolio of the Poiana Fermecată producer.

In May we organised an infotrip for Romanian influencers, together with the communication department. On top of that, we were involved in more than three press trips organised for journalists from England and Germany.

The establishment of the Carpathia Fund for entrepreneurs has taken important steps by signing a partnership with the UBS Optimus Foundation from Switzerland Switzerland, which will allow us to start the micro-grant programme for entrepreneurs in the project area.

The Conservation Enterprise team coordinated the work of the Roadele Munților/Fruits of the Mountains food hub, the tour operator TravelCarpathia and the Cobor Biodiversity Farm. The projection for 2023 was that the department coordinated 32 people directly involved in green business development.

In 2023, not only have we strengthened the department's role as coordinator of existing economic activities, but we also offered support to entrepreneurs in the Făgăraş Mountains area.










## QUICK FACTS

- We organised meetings and workshops with local entrepreneurs, offered consultancy and technical assistance.
- We supported the licensing of three local gastronomic points in Cetățeni, Rucăr and Fundata. Two more are planned to be licensed in 2024. The total number of households we offered consultancy to is 20.
- With the partnership of Pardon brewery in Lerești we started producing the first certified organic beer in Romania, Carpathia beer.
- We supported the certification of seven new products in the portfolio of Poiana Fermecată, a local producer.
- The managing team for Conservation Enterprise Programme is projected to coordinate the operations of Roadele Munților/Fruits of the Mountain, TravelCarpathia and Cobor Biodiversity Farm, which total 32 people.
- We signed a partnership with UBS Optimus Foundation, a multinational financial company based in Switzerland, which will allow us to start the micro-grant programme for entrepreneurs.



 © Raluca Vieru



## Roadele Munților / Fruits of the Mountains

---

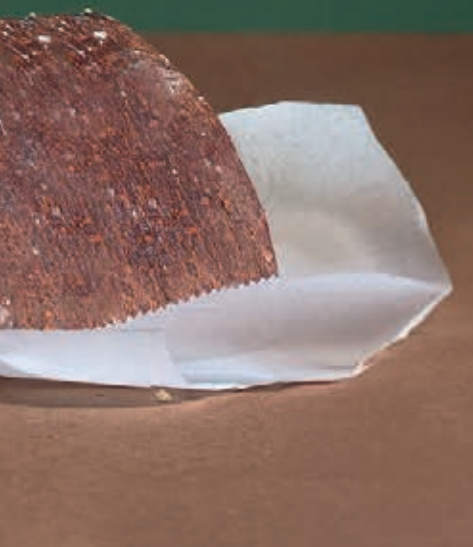
The results of Roadele Munților / Fruits of the Mountains food hub were remarkable. If in 2022 it had sold 12,723 products and 1,267 kg of dairy products, in 2023 it sold 16,500 individual products and 2,000 kg of dairy products. During last year, a portfolio of 153 authorised products from small producers were sold by the food hub.

This growth of a nature-based enterprise proves that the nature-based business model can provide steady income for families in the area. It is sustained by the constant collaboration between the Conservation Enterprise team and local producers. Every jar of zacuscă, bottle of syrup or jam sold is a vibrant contribution to the local economic life.

To support and professionalise this model, in 2023 we started to work with a development consultant from the retail and food sector. He helped us initiate a strategic planning process and sketch the roadmap for our development in the next five years. One of the first steps was the launch, in December 2023, of the webshop [www.roadelemuntilor.ro](http://www.roadelemuntilor.ro), which brings producers from the Făgăraș Mountains just a click away from the Romanian consumers' table.

The products of the food hub have also reached abroad, being presented at the Winter School in Dresden on the theme of non-timber forest products. We took the opportunity and offered participants a taste of Făgăraș.

In 2023 Roadele Munților became a supplier and partner in the events organised by the Cobor Biodiversity Farm. This strengthened the position of internal supplier and partner for the projects run by Foundation Conservation Carpathia, assuming the role of aggregator and intermediary to small producers in the area.





## QUICK FACTS

- The volume of products sold grew by approximately 30%, compared to 2022.
- We worked with a development consultant from the retail sector, who helped us initiate a strategic planning process. One of the first outcomes was the webshop [www.roadelemuntilor.ro](http://www.roadelemuntilor.ro), which brings local products from the Făgăraș Mountains just a click away from the Romanian consumer's table.
- Products from the food hub were presented at the Winter School in Dresden on the theme of non-timber forest products.
- Roadele Munților / Fruits of the Mountain became a supplier and partner in the events organised at Cobor Biodiversity Farm. It strengthens its position as aggregator of small producers in the area.







# Financial report

**Income sources**

---

**Expenses**

# Income sources

All income represents funds received as general support or for a specific project, to support CARPATHIA's mission and its activities for nature and people. We continue to have a diversified revenue structure – from grants, philanthropic donations and sponsorships, as well as earned income. Our public and private donors, foundations, corporations and major donors are not only vital to our work, they also give us the confidence that our work is recognised as essential for environmental

conservation. CARPATHIA's success wouldn't be possible without all these contributions. We are deeply grateful to all our supporters and partners.

A significant part of our income was received at the end of 2023 (EU LIFE18, OAK, SUPERB) and those sums will be spent and reported in 2023 and 2024.

Private trusts and Foundations	
WYSS Foundation	
Endangered Landscapes & Seascapes Programme	
UBS Optimus Foundation	
Temperatio Foundation	
One Tree Planted	
ALV Foundation	
Frankfurt Zoological Society-DE	
Mossy Earth	
Lawson Family Trust	
Stichting Forestpeace	
Pancivis Foundation	
Jack Wolfskin	
Journeys With Purpose Limited	
OAK Foundation	
Forests Without Frontiers	
The DS Smith Charitable Foundation	
The European Nature Trust	
<b>Total donations</b>	<b>€ 10,569,813</b>

Public funding	
EU LIFE18 NAT/RO/001082 (2019-2024) "Creating a wilderness reserve in Făgăraș Mountains, Romania"	
EU SUPERB H2020 Systematic solutions for the urgent extension of ecosystem restoration for forest-related biodiversity and ecosystem services	
Compensation payments for protected forests	€ 104,476
<b>Total funds</b>	<b>€ 104,476</b>
Individuals and other private donations	
Other private donations (UBS Optimus Foundation, ING Bank – Online Donation Button, Frankfurt Zoological Society – U.S. Inc)	
	€ 1,298,492
<b>Total donations</b>	<b>€ 1,298,492</b>
Corporations	
Banca Comerciala Romana	
Alpha Bank	
Ursus Breweries SA	
Zentiva SA	
ING Bank	
Jack Wolfskin	
Ascendis Consulting SRL	
B.Braun Medical SRL	
Journeys With Purpose Limited	
Swisscaps Romania SRL	
Bebe Tei SRL	
Coriolan Aur Smarald SRL	
Dennemeyer Associates SRL	
Multiple	
<b>Total donations</b>	<b>€ 765,665</b>
Other income	
Income from pasture rent, agro subsidies, timber sale, land rent, forest guarding fees etc.	
<b>Total income</b>	<b>€ 147,077</b>
<b>Total income sources</b>	<b>€ 12,885,522</b>

# Expenses

---

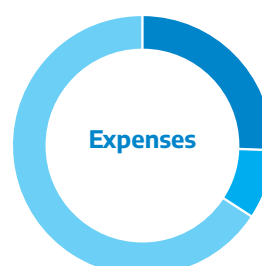
Investments	
<b>Renovating the Valea Vladului and Draxin Cabins, Rucăr Logistic Centre, Rucăr Info Centre, Lerești Info Centre, Nucșoara Info Centre, maintenance of the hides</b>	€ 985,354
<b>Infrastructure and Field equipment</b>	€ 179,707
<b>Car fleet</b>	€ 610,180
<b>Total investments</b>	<b>€ 1,775,241</b>
Land purchase	
<b>Land purchase</b>	€ 610,180
<b>Total purchases</b>	<b>€ 610,180</b>
Operational costs	
<b>Programme costs</b> (includes funds spent for activities directly linked to our mission: wildlife monitoring, forest restoration, field consumables, sociological research studies etc.)	€ 2,619,000
<b>Salaries</b> (includes the employer's contribution to the State budget)	€ 1,381,838
<b>General and administrative costs</b> (includes financial, administrative, legal, consulting, IT, HR, audit and other costs needed for organizational development)	€ 483,306
<b>Non-operational costs</b> (includes various taxes and fees)	€ 71,445
<b>Total operational costs</b>	<b>€ 4,555,589</b>
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>€ 6,941,010</b>



## Income vs. expenses



Private trusts and Foundation	10,569,813 €	
Individuals and other private donations	1,298,492 €	
Corporations	765,665 €	
Other income	147,077 €	
Public funding	104,476 €	



Operational costs	4,555,589 €	
Investments	1,775,241 €	
Land	610,180 €	

\* By the end of 2023 we received larger payments, meant to cover expenses which will occur in 2024, therefore the apparent income surplus, when compared to expenses.



# Outlook for 2024

**Next steps**

---

**Ways to become involved and support us**





## Next steps

---

2024 is an important year in Romania with local, parliament, European, and presidential elections. With this, there will be election campaigns throughout most of the year and we assume that all kind of populists will position themselves against a possible National Park to demonstrate their 'fight to defend Romania against foreign interests'. However, as the dust settles with the end of every stage of the electoral year, we are positive that we can return to sensible and fact-oriented work.

We expect that 2024 will be the breakthrough for our Conservation Enterprise Development Programme, and that our new Carpathia Fund will prove a powerful funding instrument to help local communities. 2024 will hopefully also represent the start of a vulture reintroduction project. Vultures are the last group of species which are missing in the southern Carpathians, and we are looking forward to seeing the first common vultures soaring again in the skies over the Făgăraş Mountains.

**But most of all, we hope that 2024 will bring conservation back onto the political agenda.**

# Ways to become involved and support us

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

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

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

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

Companies in Romania can allocate up to 20% of their corporate income through the tax & fiscal mechanism 177. People working and paying taxes in Romania can redirect 3.5% of their income through form 230.

Another way of helping us is through sharing our content on social and professional networks (Facebook, LinkedIn etc.)

[www.carpathia.org/donations/](http://www.carpathia.org/donations/)

## EUR DONATION ACCOUNT

IBAN: RO86RNCB0061114278450049

**THANK YOU TO ALL PARTNERS, SPONSORS AND FRIENDS OF THE CARPATHIA PROJECT WHO SUPPORTED OUR WORK IN 2023.**







## **CONTRIBUTORS**

### **CONTENT**

Adrian Aldea

Ana Maria Atonoaie

Georgiana Andreea Andrei

Daniel Bucur

Rosana Cozma

Victoria Donos

Ioana Duică

Ruben Iosif

Robert Lazăr

Oliviu Pop

Barbara Promberger-Fuerpass

Christoph Promberger

Roxana Elena Sava

Istvan Szabo

Georgia Tarnea

Liviu Ungureanu

Mihai Zotta

Casa Bună Association

Aqua Crisius Association

Milvus Group – Bird and Nature  
Protection Association

Costin Enache

### **EDITOR**

Roxana Elena Sava

### **PROOF READING**

Ruth Rusby

### **GIS MAPS**

Adrian Pătrulescu

### **GRAPHIC DESIGN**

Tudor Botezatu

Diana Bobeș



**FOUNDATION  
CONSERVATION CARPATHIA**

Braşov – Romania

info@carpathia.org  
[www.carpathia.org](http://www.carpathia.org)

**COBOR  
BIODIVERSITY FARM**

reservation@cobor-farm.ro  
[www.cobor-farm.ro](http://www.cobor-farm.ro)

**TRAVEL  
CARPATHIA**

reservation@travelcarpathia.com  
[www.travelcarpathia.com](http://www.travelcarpathia.com)

**ROADELE  
MUNȚILOR**

comenzi@roadelemuntilor.ro  
[www.roadelemuntilor.ro](http://www.roadelemuntilor.ro)

**Follow Foundation Conservation  
Carpathia on social media:**

 conservationcarpathia

 conservation\_carpathia

 Conservation Carpathia