



Rázvan Zinică



# MILVUS GROUP'S ANNUAL REPORT 2017

Laki Zoltán

Papp Gábor



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## COOPERATORS

**Photos:** the unlabeled photos were taken by Milvus Group

**Graphics and editing:** Orbán Tibor

**Editor:** Kelemen Katalin

## MEANING OF SYMBOLS



own resources  
donations sustained  
programme



tender  
financed  
programme



done by  
employees



done by  
volunteers



## THE MISSION OF MILVUS GROUP

Our desire is to live in a world where people live in real harmony with nature, without exploiting it, where nature is one of the highest values and everyone behaves accordingly.

We work to preserve our natural heritage every day. We do this by raising the awareness of people, by protecting endangered species, by enforcing laws while influencing policies regarding nature.

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## OUR VALUES

Professionalism, reliability – we are professionals in nature conservation, we do not just speak about it, but we also practise it in such a manner, that every decision is made on the basis of our field experiences.

## FOREWORD



Dear nature lovers, sympathizers, and those interested!

The year 2017 was not the year of great breakthroughs as far as nature conservation is concerned. Unfortunately we couldn't witness those significant changes, which the world would desperately need in policies regarding environment protection. We still just talk about the stopping of biodiversity loss, about the fact that humans are causing the sixth mass extinction in earth history, but we don't actually do too much to remediate the situation. The European Union realises every ten years (next time in 2020), that they couldn't achieve the strategic goal they set and couldn't stop the loss of biodiversity in the EU. Why? Because these are only declared goals, but there is no real intention. The loss of biodiversity resembles climate changes – until we feel its consequences on our own skin, we will only talk about it in politics and won't actually do anything about it. When we start feeling its consequences, it might be too late to reverse the process.

Narrowing the circle, we couldn't witness breakthroughs in Romania either, despite the fact that many significant changes would be absolutely necessary. Romania continues to ignore the necessity of resources for the management of protected areas. Numerous official touristic ads point out natural riches of Romania (Explore the garden of the Carpathians), but at the same time the government does not try to protect these riches in any way. In this general situation, against the trends, we tried to do everything in our power to protect our natural heritage.

We have dedicated special attention to certain bird species in the past few years and fortunately, the results are visible. The year 2017 was a record year for the **Saker**, which had returned to the Western Plains of Romania, due to our conservation actions; 17 pairs have raised chicks and the species has spread to Bihor County as well.

This year was beneficial for the **Roller** as well. We installed 165 nest boxes in addition to the existing 294. There was breeding in 52 of them, and similarly to the Saker, the species has conquered new areas. We also made efforts to influence the construction plans of the Târgu-Mureş - Iaşi motorway, in order to minimize the impact on nature during the construction and usage, and the road would be "permeable" for wild animals.

It is utterly important for us that every decision and suggestion we make stands on scientific grounds, therefore we conducted a variety of **monitoring programs** this year, as this is the only way we could get a realistic picture of the state of the populations. The results of these was also fed to our accessible and open data base which contains more than half a million data at the moment.

In the past years we worked out several **agri-environmental** packages for the Ministry of Agriculture and this year we succeeded in implementing two of our packages. They will promote suitable agricultural practices for the preservation of the Lesser Spotted Eagle and the Great Bustard and in return will provide significant support to farmers.

The ringing camp from Chituc sandbank worked for three months this year, we ringed more than ten thousand birds and we enriched the Romanian fauna with a new species.

Our rehabilitation centre has worked at full torque this year too and we managed to save more than one hundred injured birds. Starting from the year 2017 we have been managing twenty protected areas, in many cases in cooperation with our partners, this represents a huge responsibility for our association.

Our educational activities have targeted more than one thousand children this year.

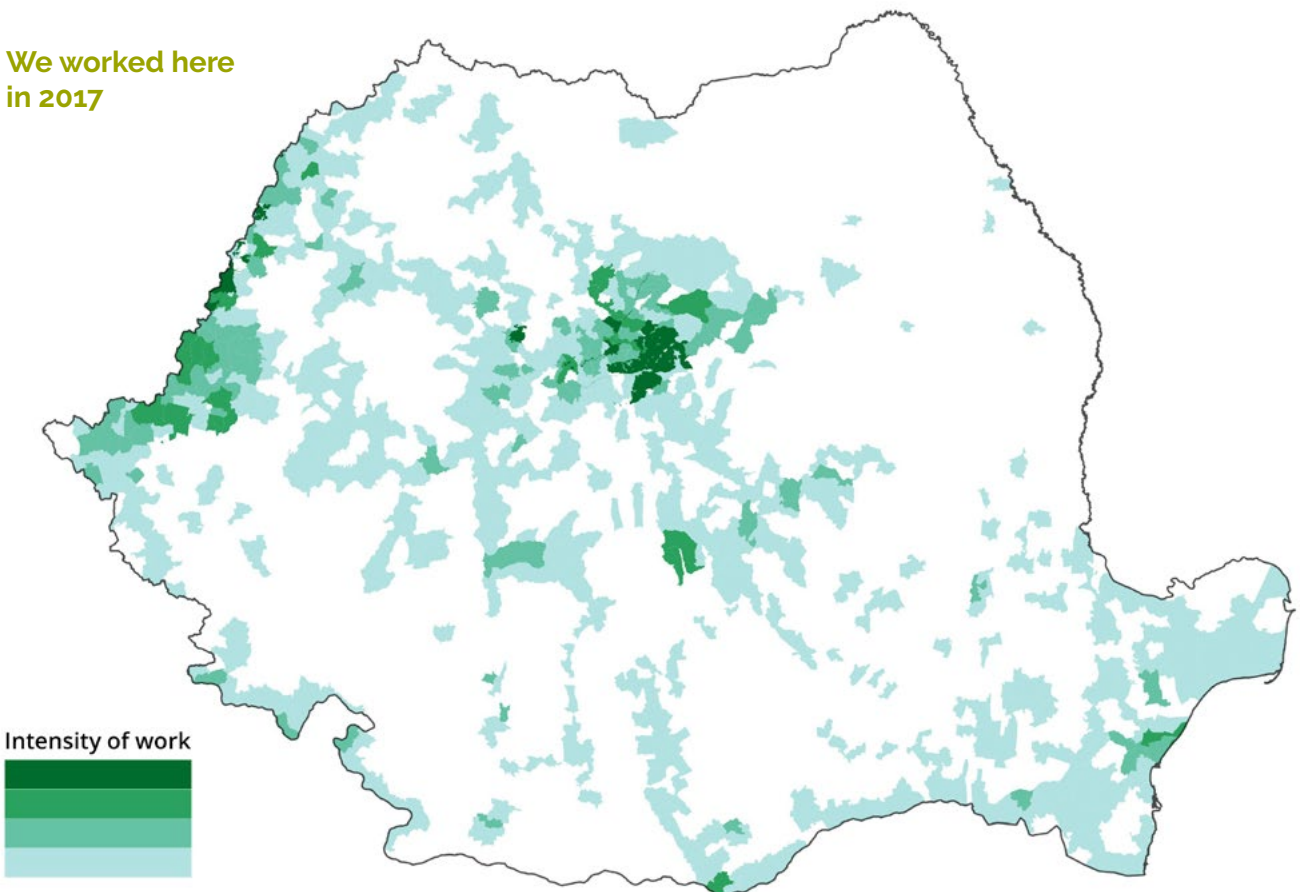
**The Nature Photography Contest** has reached its ninth season.

Our accomplishments do not end here. Further you can find details among others about European Ground Squirrel repatriation, the protection of the Red-footed Falcon and Brown Bear, about ecosystem services and many more.

*Papp Tamás*  
President



**We worked here in 2017**



## RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION OF SPECIES

In the past decade there have been significant changes in the habitats of wild species and as a result the breeding areas of many animals have drastically decreased. Unfortunately it is not possible to draw up only one plan which embraces all the endangered species, therefore specialists have to prioritise.

Due to this situation, in most countries, among which Romania, the globally endangered or strictly protected animal species are the main focus of conservation activities.

Their protection can only be achieved by firstly protecting their habitats. In such a way we can ensure the conservation of many other species which live in the same area besides the target species. That is the reason why these are called umbrella species, because their conservation offers protection to other species living in the same area. For these species requiring urgent conservation action, it is absolutely necessary to work out various protection activities. Our aim is the elaboration of action plans for the conservation of target species and the implementation of concrete activities.

We took part in many international programs aimed at the conservation of species and we endeavoured to ensure continuity in all the similar activities and projects we had started in previous years.









Răzvan Zinică

## RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION OF THE ROLLER



Our Roller conservation programme in the western part of the country has reached a higher level in the past few years. Owing to the "Conservation of the Roller in the Carpathian Basin"<sup>1</sup> project, we managed to ensure the financing of the programme for the period between 2014 and 2020. The main aim of the project is strengthening the Roller population in the Carpathian Basin and ensuring its long-term protection.

-  The number of nest boxes we have installed is over four hundred, ensuring ideal nesting sites for the species.
-  This year we have selected more than 1,200 medium-voltage pylons, which we will try to insulate next year, in order to reduce mortality caused by electrocution.
-  This year we tried to identify the migration routes of the Roller and the exact location of the wintering sites, by fitting 25 geolocators and 6 satellite transmitters on birds, this knowledge is indispensable in the development of a long-term conservation strategy. The movement of birds with satellite transmitters can be followed by the general public as well.
-  We checked the previously installed 459 nest boxes and we found 52 with Rollers breeding in them.
-  In 2017 we ringed 202 Rollers in total, (166 chicks and 36 adult birds), each bird getting a colour ring combination.
-  We made a short documentary with the aim of presenting the species and our research and conservation activities within the framework of the project.

<sup>1</sup>ROLLERLIFE, reference number: LIFE13 NAT/HU/000081



- *This is the first time that satellite transmitters (6 pcs) and geolocators (25 pcs) have been fitted on Rollers in Romania*
- *The Roller population from Bihor County started to expand towards the north, due to the nest boxes we installed.*

52

pairs of Rollers  
used our  
nest boxes

459

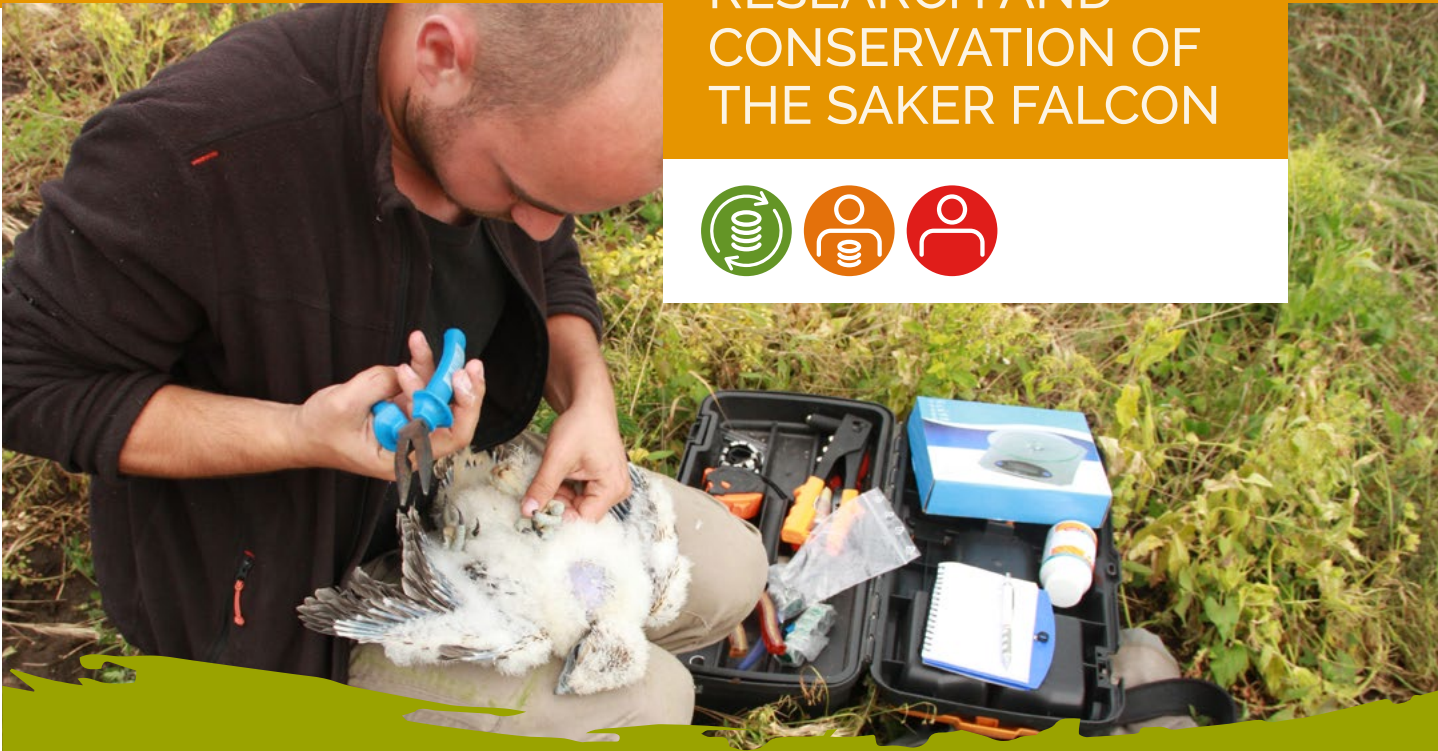
installed nest boxes  
throughout the  
project

202

ringed  
Rollers




## RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION OF THE SAKER FALCON




Due to conservation activities of the past years, the Romanian breeding population of the Saker Falcon has multiplied. This is the result of the artificial nesting platforms that have been installed. However, the long-term conservation of the species depends on various aspects, one of them being the ensuring of suitable food sources.

Within the project entitled "[Securing prey sources for endangered Falco cherrug and Aquila heliaca population in the Carpathian Basin](#)"<sup>1</sup> we conducted several activities which had this aim.

 As previously we did not have reliable data about the extent to which Saker Falcons from the Western Plains feed on ground squirrels and hamsters, in the spring of 2017, we monitored Saker Falcon pairs in seven nest boxes we had installed on high voltage pylons, using motion sensor cameras. The main aim of this procedure was to identify the prey species the falcons carry in the nest. The pylons with the artificial nests can be found in the lowlands of Arad, Timiș and Bihor counties. After the chicks left the nest

we took the cameras off and our colleagues from Hungary have analysed the nearly 200 thousand photos we recorded.

 We also installed satellite transmitters on 3 falcons (2 chicks and 1 adult male), one of the objectives being to gather information about their feeding grounds. The movement of the birds can be followed on [www.satellitetracking.eu](http://www.satellitetracking.eu); since 2017 this webpage is available also in Romanian.

**17 PAIRS**  
of Saker Falcons bred successfully, Romanian record

- *Due to the large number of artificial nests and the good feeding grounds, in the year 2017 we witnessed a record in the number of successfully breeding Saker Falcons (17 pairs) in the Western Plains of Romania. In 2011 we knew about one single breeding pair.*
- *This is the first year when 7 photo traps have been installed on Saker Falcon nests and have recorded 200 thousand valuable pictures about the falcons' prey.*


<sup>1</sup> LIFE13 NAT/HU/000183


## RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION OF THE RED-FOOTED FALCON



The main objective of the programme is to ensure the favourable conservation status of the Romanian Red-footed Falcon breeding population, contributing this way to the long-term conservation of the East-Central European population. Moreover, it is our priority to provide suitable conditions for the migratory Red-footed Falcons crossing or gathering in our country in autumn, Romania being a globally important gathering area and migratory bottleneck for the species.

The species conservation programme for the Red-footed Falcon is being financed from Milvus Group's own resources at the moment. In 2017, external funds were provided only for the population genetic sampling processes. 6 employees and 3 volunteers took part in our activities this year.

 We analysed the quality of 139 nest boxes in two artificial breeding colonies, fixing or replacing 73 pieces.

 We ringed 133 Red-footed Falcons in seven breeding sites, of which 127 young birds and 6 mature individuals. Each Red-footed Falcon got a unique colour ring combination.

✦ This year we continued the sampling processes necessary for a population genetic analysis done in cooperation with [MME](#) (BirdLife Hungary), within the framework of a Hungarian-Slovakian LIFE project aiming at the conservation of the Red-footed Falcon. It was easy to obtain the thirty samples we needed along the western border. We took blood samples from 30 chicks from different nests in three breeding sites. Outside the Carpathian Basin (Romanian lowlands and Dobrogea) this was more difficult, as we could access only 14 nests in four nesting sites.

✦ A new international LIFE project for conservation of the Red-footed Falcon has been submitted for approval, which involves seven organizations from four different countries. In case it is approved, the financing of our conservation programme for the Red-footed Falcon will be ensured for six years. The Romanian partner of Milvus Group is ENEL Distribution Banat, which is an electricity supply and distribution company. According to the plan, the company would contribute with 600 thousand Euros to the remediation of medium voltage powerlines in Arad and Timiș counties, so that the electrocution of Red-footed Falcons and other wild birds could be avoided.



133

Red-footed Falcons  
were ringed

- *We finished the necessary sampling for our population genetic analysis*
- *This is the first time we have succeeded in involving an electricity supplier company in a bird conservation project.*
- *We improved the state of nest boxes in seven artificial nesting sites.*

## RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION OF THE GREAT BUSTARD



Motkó Béla



The Great Bustard is the largest volant bird in Europe and it is endangered in the entire world. Its Romanian population has practically disappeared in the past two centuries, the Great Bustard thus being on the verge of extinction in our country. The only viable bustard population from Romania can be found in Bihor County, in the surroundings of Salonta. This population consists of only 40-50 individuals, thus its conservation is a number one priority.

These birds are using both the Romanian (the surroundings of Salonta) and Hungarian (the region of Mezőgyán) habitats, therefore the conservation of the population can be achieved only by an international cooperation. Milvus Group has been providing funds for the Great Bustard conservation programme for years. In 2017, seven employees and 4 volunteers contributed to the achievement of our goals.



In 2017 we observed 86 birds, during 6 expeditions, the highest number being observed on the 10th of December (29 individuals).



We attended the international conference of the LIFE project for the conservation of the Great Bustard, we joined in the international synchronized census of Great Bustards, and we also took part in the annual meeting of the Hungarian National Great Bustard Conservation Team.



At the initiative of the local administration of Salonta, we compiled and submitted the documentation for an international bustard conservation project in cooperation with our partners. Its aim is to obtain financing for the conservation project within the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme. In case the project is approved, its implementation will start in 2018.



We reached an agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture, and as a result the agri-environmental programme we have prepared for the conservation of Great Bustard will be accessible in the framework of the PNDR – the Romanian National Rural Development Programme starting from the year 2018.



We provided important data and information for the national report, preceding the fourth meeting of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of the Central European Population of the Great Bustard within the framework of the Bonn Convention. The meeting of the parties will take place in 2018 and they will decide whether the action plan for the conservation of the Great Bustard will be a priority in the next few years. Among others, the decisions will be made based on data provided by member states.



- *Our Great Bustard conservation and agri-environment programme was implemented*
- *We are delighted that the local authorities of Salonta realised how important it is to preserve the last Great Bustard population in Romania and they participate actively in the species conservation programme.*

## RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION OF THE LESSER SPOTTED EAGLE



For almost twenty years we have dedicated special attention to this species, which played a key role in the designation of the special protected areas covered by the Natura 2000 network. We have conducted a successful four-year-long LIFE project (2010-2013) targeting the conservation of the species, due to which the general public of Romania has become more aware of the Lesser Spotted Eagle and its importance.

During the project we worked out a national action plan for the conservation of this species and we initiated the update of the European conservation action plan for the Lesser Spotted Eagle. Furthermore, we elaborated an agri-environmental package aimed at the protection of the species, which was submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture. In the past years we have been trying to sustain our activities from our own resources, primarily in the Natura 2000 areas along the Niraj and Târnavă Mică rivers.



This year, after successful lobbying, the Ministry of Agriculture accepted the agri-environmental package aimed at the protection of the Lesser Spotted Eagle, which we've compiled five years ago. From the year 2018 farmers can request the package in the designated areas.



We installed motion sensor cameras at two nests which we used to collect data about the prey species, to determine the time when the chicks leave the nest and the possible threats.



We checked 18 nests, in 5 there was successful breeding and in four nests we ringed the chicks with colour rings.



This year 6 birds were identified, which we have ringed with colour rings in the past few years. Four were seen in Africa and Israel and two in Transylvania.



We sustained a presentation at an international conference about the conservation of the species, which was organised in Burgas (Bulgaria).


# RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION OF THE BROWN BEAR





This year our bear conservation program was financed by [Bears in Mind](#) (the Netherlands), the [Bernd Thies Foundation](#) (Switzerland), and [Columbus ZOO & Aquarium](#) (USA). The initiative aims to contribute to the conservation of the Romanian Brown Bear population through the creation of a model area in the sense of practical bear conservation and conservation oriented scientific research, demonstrating good practices applicable elsewhere too in Romania.



## RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

 During 2017 we have captured 6 bears (4 males, 2 females), which were fitted with **tracking** systems (GPS-GSM collars). Based on the telemetry data received from collared animals, we will be able to analyse habitat use, to identify important ecological corridors, feeding and wintering areas, and to observe how bears cope with human presence.


 This year we have identified 14 new **bear dens** and one open nest, concluding our field work regarding bear denning. We started this activity back in 2008 with the aim to learn more about bear hibernation, den site selection and the physical characteristics of bear dens. In total, we have collected data about 115 dens and 8 open nests.

 In the summer of 2017, we installed **baited hair traps** along the future Târgu-Mureş - Iaşi highway. This activity was repeated for the second time in 2017, the first phase being undertaken in 2014, while the third and last survey is scheduled for the year 2020. The 68 hair traps were installed in pairs, on both sides of the planned highway route, in the same locations as in 2014.

Every hair trap was active for 17 days, resulting in a total of 1156 trapping days. The aim of this study is the identification of crucial ecological corridors (through the genetic analysis of the collected hair samples), which need to be conserved, also during highway construction and operation. We intend to achieve this through the implementation of various technical solutions (e.g. targeted wildlife crossing structures).


## BEAR RESCUES



 We have saved two adult bears from snares set by poachers and rescued four orphaned cubs. For the success of such rescue operations, we rely on cooperation with numerous partners, such as national park rangers, gamekeepers, foresters and last, but not least, the assistance of veterinarians from the [Vets4Wild](#) association. Later on, continuous care for the orphaned bear cubs is provided by the Orphan Bear Cub Rehabilitation Centre in Bălan, where they will spend approximately two years, after which they will be reintroduced into the wild.

## POPULAR SCIENCE





 Despite the fact that the Brown Bear is a globally threatened species, we can affirm that in Romania it has become the symbol of the conflict between people and nature. Therefore we put a lot of effort in providing science-based information for decision makers and for the general public, so as to preserve the species' conservation status and to promote its co-existence with humans. To achieve this, we continuously inform the mass-media, participate in the large carnivore working group set up by the ministry and we attend a number of forums of interest.

## OBSERVATION OF FEEDING HABITS OF BEARS ALONG THE UPPER COURSE OF THE MUREȘ RIVER



This analysis was conducted by a separate team of specialists, in another research area, along the upper course of the Mureș river. In order to obtain a clear picture about the dietary preferences of brown bears, we analysed the available vegetal food supply in three sample areas. We do this analysis without external funding, only from our own resources.

 We worked on three hill and foothill sampling areas (Brâncovenești, Deda Bistra, and between Aluniș Mureș and Ideciu) along 84,1 km long transects.

 The most common components of the collected excrements were nubbin, apple, plum, acorn, fruits and various herbaceous plant, whereas in those found in August, besides fruits, we also found corn, wheat and oat.



8

bears with collars  
have sent us data  
this year

115

bear dens  
were identified

- *Unfortunately in Romania the political perspective still dominates over expert opinion.*
- *This year we published our second peer-reviewed academic paper, about the endoparasites of bears.*



## RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION OF THE EUROPEAN GROUND SQUIRREL AND THE COMMON HAMSTER



The beneficiaries of the project entitled the „Securing prey sources for endangered *Falco cherrug* and *Aquila heliaca* population in the Carpathian Basin”<sup>1</sup>, namely the Direction of Fertő-Hanság National Park, together with ten Hungarian and two Romanian partners are working to preserve and strengthen the population of two protected rodent species – the European Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilus citellus*) and the Common Hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*), two important prey species for the endangered Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*) and the Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*).

### GROUND SQUIRREL MONITORING



Continuing the monitoring of ground squirrel populations started in previous years, in 2017 we surveyed the ground squirrel populations of nine target areas, in more than 24 separate grassland habitats. Our findings offer data about the size of certain populations and changes that have occurred in them. For instance, in the course of 2017, compared to previous years, we found a higher density of burrows in several grasslands. This lets us conclude that this year the successful reproduction of ground squirrels was ensured by suitable weather conditions and food supplies. At the same time, however, we could identify such constructions and infrastructural investments which endanger the habitats of ground squirrels or have already destroyed them partially.

### HAMSTER MONITORING



This year we witnessed a significant population outbreak of a hamster population in an agricultural area of Arad County. This ensured a primary food source for young Imperial Eagles as suggested by regular observations of eagles hunting in that area. We tried to make this population growth measurable, by assessing the burrow densities along transects with defined lengths in different habitats (mainly stubbles and alfalfa plots).

<sup>1</sup>RAPTORSPREYLIFE, reference number: LIFE13 NAT/HU/000183

## GENETIC AND COPROLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF GROUND SQUIRRELS



In the spring we managed to perform the genetic and stress hormone sampling (83 samples) of four populations (in Satu Mare, Bihor, Arad and Timiș counties) with the help of our Hungarian partners.

One of the aims of the analysis was the definition of interrelatedness between different ground squirrel populations. We also wanted to gather information about parasites and to define the level of human induced stress in animals.



## RECONSTRUCTION OF HABITATS ON GROUND SQUIRREL POPULATED PASTURES



On one of the grasslands from Ier Valley (a region of Satu Mare and Bihor counties) inhabited by ground squirrels, we performed works of habitat rehabilitation. To achieve this, we mowed the shrubbery and overgrown weeds in two separate spots on the grassland.

Grazing, which will become much easier this way, will not allow the overgrowth of weeds in the future.

## REPATRIATION OF GROUND SQUIRRELS



In the summer we restocked a protected grassland in Arad County with 38 individuals. The restocking served two goals: on the one hand we wanted to strengthen the local ground squirrel population, thus complementing the food supply of Saker Falcons nesting nearby, while on the other hand we wanted to save the ground squirrels from an area near Arad, which was under construction.

The action was successful, but its long-term effects will only be measurable after several years of careful and regular monitoring.



## GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING GRASSLANDS INHABITED BY GROUND SQUIRRELS



Based on our experiences acquired throughout the project, we made a guide-book for authorities and farmers, aiming at a better management of ground squirrel habitats.



## AWARENESS-RAISING



In 2017 we distributed posters and handed out leaflets about the target species and the activities of our project in settlements from four counties.

In the course of our field work we regularly spread these awareness-raising materials among local farmers, mainly shepherds.



24

grasslands have  
been monitored for  
ground squirrels


- *This is the first time we have collected genetic, parasitological and stress hormone samples from Romanian ground squirrels*
- *This is the first time we have performed mowing works for the restoration of the habitats of ground squirrels*
- *We successfully introduced ground squirrels in a protected area*


## FAUNISTIC AND GENETIC ANALYSIS OF THE STEPPE POLECAT




The Steppe Polecat (*Mustela eversmanni*) is one of the rarest and least studied mammalian carnivores in Europe. While a protected species in the European Union, our knowledge about its habitats and conservation status is still insufficient.

We continued the data collection this year, in order to acquire a more exact knowledge about the occurrence of the species in Romania. Only in the past decade have we managed to prove the existence of this small carnivore in the Western Plains, Moldavia and the Romanian Plains. For a better knowledge about the occurrence of the species we actively search for road-killed individuals on public roads. We take tissue sample from them for subsequent genetic analyses.

 We searched for polecat individuals run over by vehicles, along approximately 120 km transects in Timiș and Arad counties, in the same time collecting data about other road-killed small carnivores in almost all the Pannonian region of Romania. We managed to take genetic samples from seven animals hit by cars.

 We also took part in the elaboration of an action plan for the [conservation of the species in Hungary](#).

 We wished to communicate the collected data referring to the occurrence of these animals in the Pannonian region, in the form of a scientific publication. We submitted a manuscript to the editing committee of the Hungarian Yearbook of Mammalogy, which is still under revision.



## RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION OF BLIND MOLE RATS



Our blind mole rat conservation activities were financed from our own resources this year and were conducted on two levels: on the one hand we continued the analysis of the habitats and populations of the endemic Méhely's Blind Mole Rat (*Spalax antiquus*), on the other hand we endeavoured to contribute to the conservation of this species on an international scale.

We continued our cooperation with the [Hungarian Natural History Museum](#), the [mammal conservation group of MME/BirdLife Hungary](#) and the blind mole rat and ground squirrel conservation specialist group of the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture, in the framework of our data collection activities for the conservation of the blind mole rats in the Carpathian Basin.



In 2017 we walked through approximately 20 km<sup>2</sup> of habitat and we discovered 9 new locations of Méhely's Blind Mole Rat.



## RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION OF FISH



In 2017 we tried to sustain our fish conservation activities with the help of volunteers, solely relying on our own funds. We dedicated special attention to the protection of the Danube Salmon (*Hucho hucho*) in the Mureș Gorge in their reproductive period. We searched for their reproduction sites and observed them regularly. On the other hand, our ichthyologist colleague has been conducting faunistic surveys, primarily in Transylvania.

Here are some interesting facts about the results of our research:

-  We found the Common Dace (*Leuciscus leuciscus*) in the White and Black Criș, and the Teuz river. This is a critically important information, as at the beginning of the 90s it was thought that this species has disappeared from Romania. Since then it has been found in several rivers of the country.
-  We collected data about the fish population of Transylvanian rivers (Barcău, Someșul Mare, Crișul Mare, Olt).
-  We managed to prove the presence of the Streber and the Common Zingel (*Zingel streber* and *Zingel zingel*) in the Romanian course of the Someș. The last published data about these species in the region dates back before 1964. We have proved the existence of these two protected fish species in the Mureș River as well.

■ *We managed to prove the presence of the Common Dace in Romanian rivers, a species once considered extremely rare.*

## RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION OF AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES



The conservation of amphibians and reptiles is done by our volunteering colleagues, because it is utterly important to deal with the conservation of these two less popular animal groups as well.

-  In 2017 we continued to monitor the habitats and threats of the Hungarian Meadow Viper (*Vipera ursinii rakosiensis*).
  -  We collected new data about the occurrence of reptile and amphibian species in Romania from different parts of the country.
  -  Our research focused on many species like populations of the Sand Lizard (*Lacerta agilis*) in Târgu Mureş and the Black Sea coast, the Aesculapian Snake (*Zamenis longissimus*) from Praid and the Smooth Snake (*Coronella austriaca*), Javelin Sand Boa (*Eryx jaculus turcicus*) from Teleorman County, the Horned Viper (*Vipera ammodytes ammodytes*) from Deva,, etc..
  -  We provided pictures for the handbook of Romanian amphibians and reptiles, which is in course of publication. Besides the Romanian species and subspecies we also targeted the presentation of frequent variations.
  -  We constantly provide information about amphibians and reptiles, along with our own findings in the Facebook groups managed by us ([Herping Romania](#), [Trachemys Adoption - Romanian Coalition](#)).
- *We published our first paper about the illegal online trade of indigenous turtles in Romania.*

## BIRD MONITORING PROGRAMS

All the changes which have occurred in agriculture, forestry, infrastructural and touristic developments and climate conditions may have a significant impact on wildlife and consequently on birds as well. That is why it is vital to monitor the changes that occur in the populations of nesting, migratory and wintering birds. This allows us to assess the changes in populations and to elaborate the necessary conservation measures at an early stage.

The aim of the monitoring and survey programs is to collect representative data from the entire territory of Romania about certain species, or about the occurrence of localized species, the size of their habitats and the changes they witness in time. In 2017 we launched a new monitoring program besides the existing ones, which is aimed at the observation of changes in the populations of nesting birds of prey. This work is done by volunteers. It is an extremely significant achievement that we managed to finish the data processing for the publication of the "Romanian Breeding Bird Atlas", a program developed in cooperation with the Romanian Ornithological Society (*Societatea Ornitologică Română* - SOR). This involved a lot of work this year and due to our joint efforts the publication will soon be released. In 2017 we coordinated and took part in the following monitoring programs and surveys.





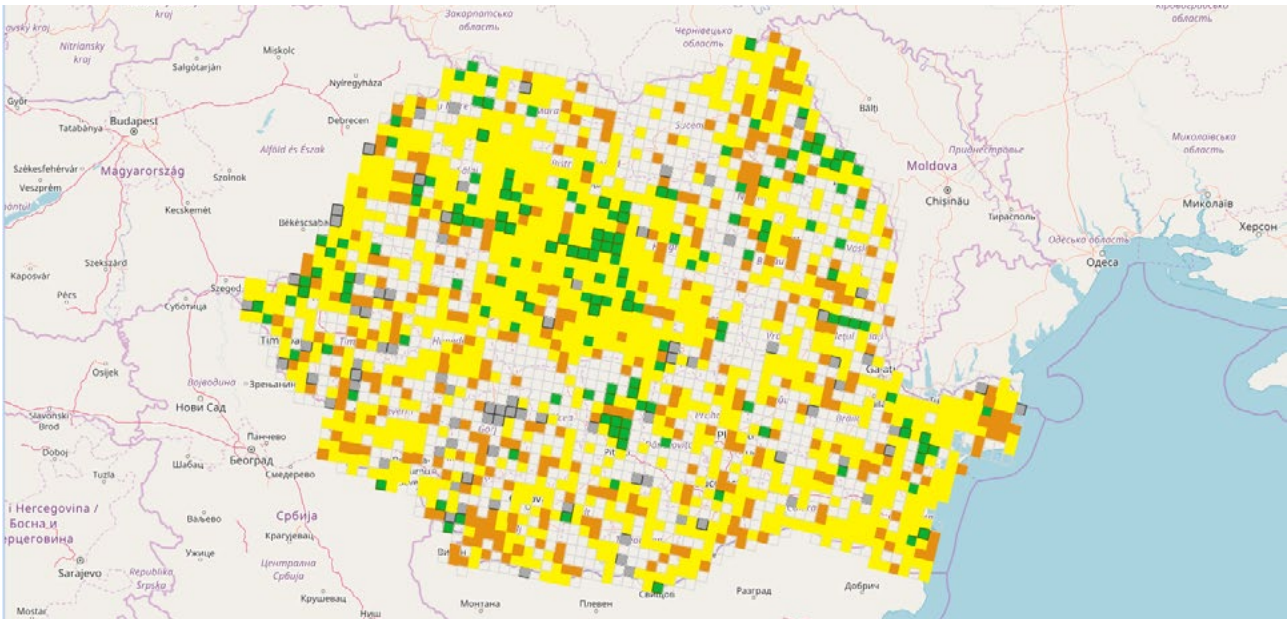
There are more than 200 breeding bird species in Romania. In the past few years our volunteer bird observers and professional ornithologists have carried out hundreds of thousands of bird observations.

## THE ROMANIAN AND EUROPEAN BREEDING BIRD ATLASES



According to the plans of the two organisations, Milvus Group and [SOR](#), which started the program, a detailed "Romanian Breeding Bird Atlas" will be published with the use of the data collected between 2006 and 2017. The purpose of the atlas is to map the distribution of bird species that nest in Romania. Parallely, by using these observations, we contributed to the program entitled "2nd European Breeding Bird Atlas" coordinated by the ([European Bird Census Council](#) - EBCC). The program is financed partly by the EBCC through the Swiss Ornithological Institute, and partly running on the expenses of the two national organisations.

- In 2017 volunteers of the two organizations surveyed 75 individual 10x10 km squares.
- We organised field works for the clarification of the distribution and abundance of certain data-deficient species.
- Office work made up the most significant part of this year's activities, which included the quality assessment and processing of previously collected data (making distribution maps, and distribution models).



■ Romania is one of the few countries in Europe where no atlas of nesting birds (based on field observations) has been published yet. Hence, this achievement can be regarded as a milestone in Romanian ornithological research.

## MONITORING OF NOCTURNAL BIRDS IN OPEN AND SEMI-OPEN HABITATS



Mircea Radu Achim

The Monitoring of Open and Semi-Open Habitat Dwelling Nocturnal Bird Species is one of the two programs coordinated in 2017 by Milvus Group, in cooperation with SOR (Romanian Ornithological Society), which consist of nocturnal observations. The program started in 2014 and its primary aim is to survey the distribution, abundance and long-term population changes of the **Corn Crake** (*Crex crex*), the **Eurasian Scops Owl** (*Otus scops*) and the **European Nightjar** (*Caprimulgus europaeus*).

- In 2017 the program was financed from our own funds and the field observations were carried out by volunteers.
- This year, the 44 volunteers who took part in the program, carried out observations in 32 10x10 km squares in 18 counties.



- *The Corn Crake is one of the species which suffered great losses due to the intensification of agriculture in Western Europe and its populations have decreased significantly in many countries. Therefore, we consider that it is a great achievement that we managed to organise the monitoring of the Romanian population, which represents a very important part of the European Corn Crake population.*

## MONITORING PROGRAM OF ROMANIAN BREEDING BIRDS OF PREY



We started the monitoring program this year with the aim of proving and following possible changes in the populations of birds of prey both on a regional and national level.

We organized the program using our own resources, while the field surveys were carried out by external volunteers. The results of the first experimental year are the following:

- Eleven volunteers from nine counties joined in the program.
- We covered 1600 km<sup>2</sup> of land in six counties, which – according to our expectations – will grow significantly in the next years.
- We managed to finish the fine tuning of the methodology. In 2018 the program will actually start, based on a clear, updated methodology.



- *It gives us great pleasure – after long years of surveys and methodological work – that we managed to start the monitoring of nesting birds of prey in Romania. This program might acquire great importance in ornithology, because the possible changes in the population of predatory birds may be a sign of other environmental problems as well.*

## MONITORING OF WINTERING BIRDS OF PREY



Most of the previous researches birds targeted the nesting or transiting populations, whereas there is little information about wintering bird populations in Romania. That is the reason why Milvus Group started the "Monitoring of wintering birds of prey" program, which has been running on a national level since 2006.

The aim of the program is the long-term analysis of the distribution, abundance and changes in populations of wintering birds of prey in Romania. The program is run and financed by Milvus Group, the data collection being done by volunteers.

- In the winter of 2016/2017 we covered 62 survey transects in 12 counties with the participation of 53 volunteers, 47 of them taking part in both surveying periods. The total length of the covered routes was 1062 km.
- During our field works we managed to observe 2298 individuals from 12 raptor species.

■ *The "Monitoring of wintering birds of prey" program is one of the very first bird monitoring programs in Romania and it is the first national monitoring program coordinated by Milvus Group.*

53

volunteers

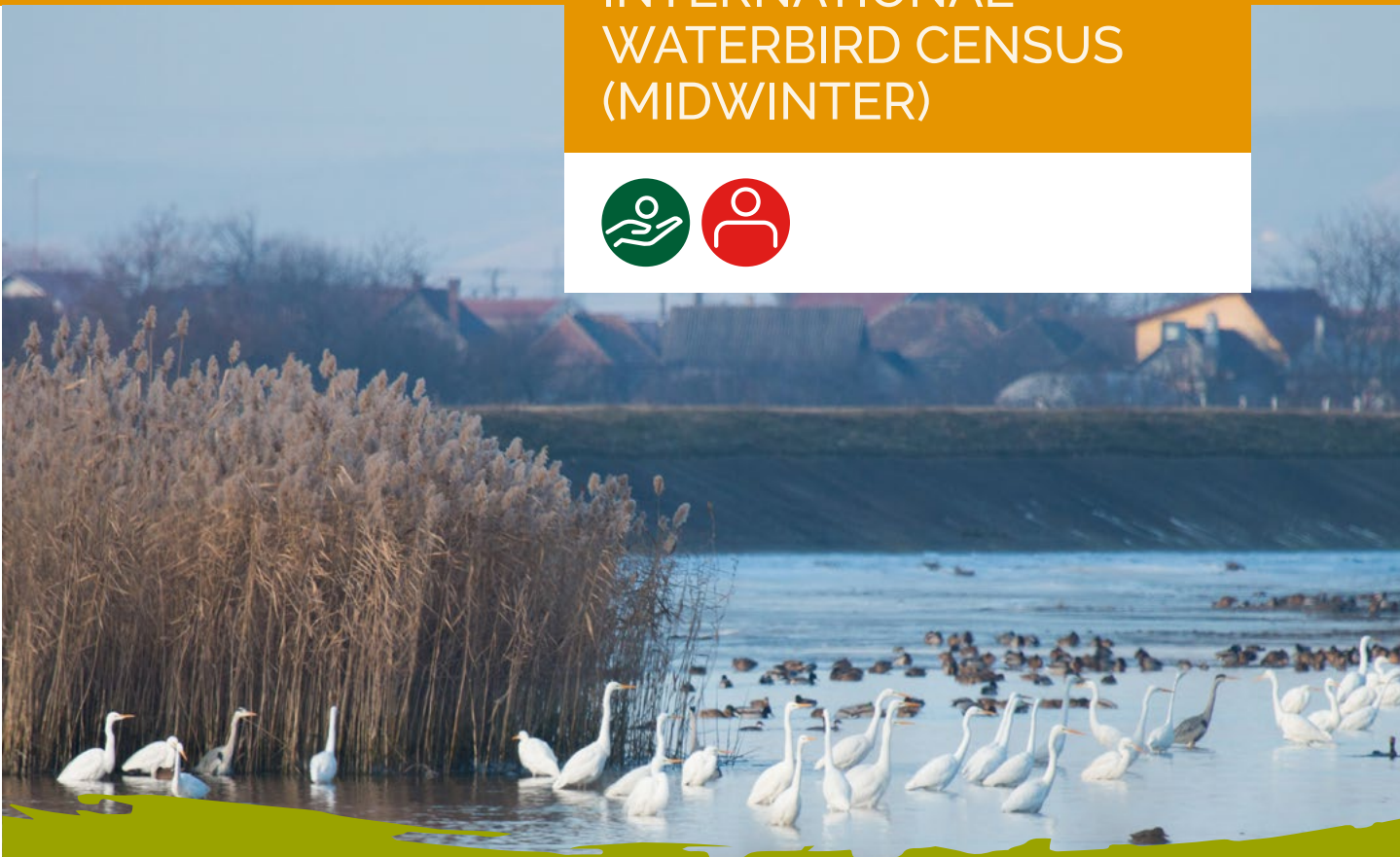
1062

km transects covered

2298

observed predatory birds

## INTERNATIONAL WATERBIRD CENSUS (MIDWINTER)

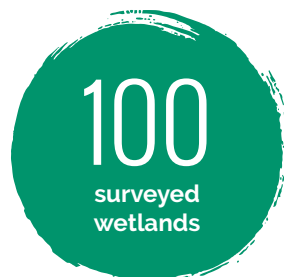


Milvus Group has been an active participant in the International Waterbird Census for almost two decades; the program is coordinated by [Wetlands International](#) all over the world.

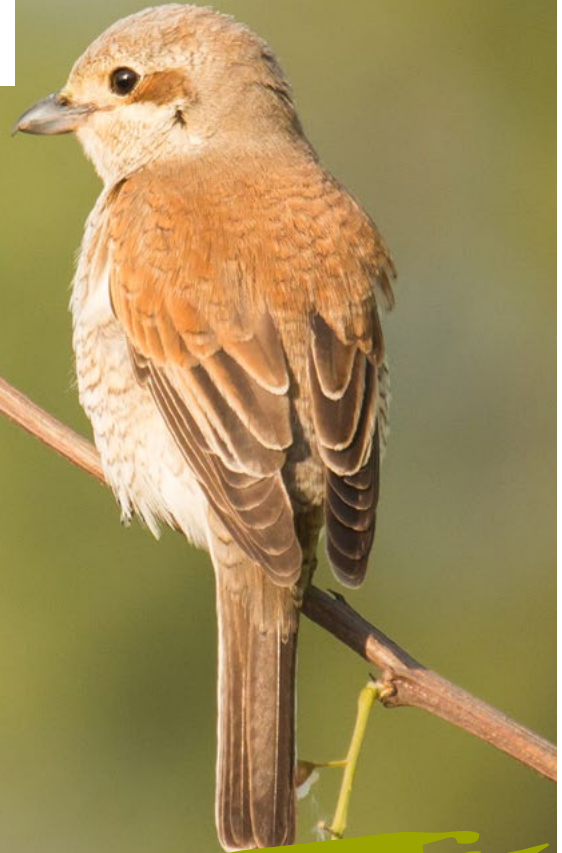
The aim of the program is to gain information about the quantity and species composition of wintering waterfowl in Romania, paying special attention to changes, thus detecting the possible decrease in their populations at an early stage. Our association cooperates with the [SOR](#) in the nationally synchronized census.

- The surveys were carried out between 10-20 January, by eleven members and twelve volunteers of Milvus Group.
- We collected data from almost one hundred wetlands of twenty counties.
- In 2017 our birdwatchers observed 110 thousand birds in total, half of which were waterbirds. Most of the birds were found along the Danube between Baziş and Orşova.

■ *Besides its scientific value, it is always a pleasure to repeatedly see large flocks of birds which spend the winter in our country.*



## MONITORING OF COMMON BIRDS IN ROMANIA



The presence and abundance of common bird populations is an important sign of the state of our environment, therefore it is essential to follow the distribution and changes in the population of certain species.

SOR launched this program because of the above-mentioned reason and Milvus Group has joined in since 2007 as a partner. Volunteers engaged in this scheme carry out point-counts in the vicinity of their residence, and in some years we also surveyed further and larger areas which hadn't been explored from an ornithological perspective before.

- In 2017 ten volunteers of Milvus Group carried out observations on 11 pcs of 2x2 km squares.

10

volunteers

44

km<sup>2</sup> area  
monitored

- *This program is suitable for the monitoring of a significant part of common nesting bird populations in Romania, therefore we consider that participation in the program is extremely important.*

## RED-FOOTED FALCON MONITORING



The main aim of the program is the assessment of changes occurring in the Red-footed Falcon populations breeding in the Western Plains, as well as the monitoring of the dynamics of those populations which gather here before the autumn migration.

- In 2017 we monitored the ratio of nest occupation and breeding in three artificial nesting colonies, both by Red-footed Falcons and other associated species (Common Kestrel, Jackdaw and Long-eared Owl). On three sites we checked 182 artificial nest boxes, where at least 19 pairs of Red-footed Falcons, 63 pairs of Common Kestrels, 42 pairs of Jackdaws and 4 pairs of Long-eared Owl nested.
- We continued to monitor the Red-footed Falcons preparing for the autumn migration on their gathering sites in the western regions of the country. We conducted the survey on five gathering sites for seven consecutive weeks, in cooperation with the Hungarian, Serbian and Slovakian partner organisations. We counted 11878 Red-footed Falcons in total, which may be considered an average number compared to previous years; we had similar results in the autumn of 2016 too. However, these results are way behind the maximum numbers counted in the years 2012 and 2014, when we observed more than 18 thousand and 22 thousand Red-footed Falcons, respectively, in the Western Plains.
- At present this program hasn't got any external funding. In 2017 seven employees and three volunteers contributed to its execution.



- *In the process of our surveys, besides the possible changes occurring in the populations of Red-footed Falcons in certain regions, we also monitored the impacts and positive results of certain conservation activities.*

## MONITORING THE BREEDING OF THE SAKER FALCON



The Saker Falcon is one of the rarest birds of prey in our country. In the beginning of the last century, it was more common in certain regions of Romania, although it has never been a common species anywhere. Until 2012 the national population had decreased to a single known breeding pair.

Within the "[Conservation of the Saker Falcon in North-East Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia](#)" LIFE project (LIFE09 NAT/HU/000384) we installed 94 nest boxes and wooden trays in the western part of the country. Since the program ended, the employees and volunteers of Milvus Group have been checking the nesting places annually, in order to assess the breeding success and detect possible changes in the Saker population.



In 2017 we checked 87 nest boxes in the Western Plains, and we identified 20 nesting Saker Falcon pairs. From these 17 pairs have bred successfully and fledged a total of 63 chicks. We ringed 45 chicks from 13 nests, 43 of them getting colour rings too. The average number of chicks per nest was 3.7, which is an exceptionally high value in the Carpathian Basin according to recent surveys.

- *We managed to ring the highest number of Saker Falcon chicks in Romania in one season. It is safe to say that 2017 was the year with the highest number of breeding Saker Falcons.*
- *In western Romania the nesting success was 3.7 chicks/nest, which, according to our knowledge, is the highest recorded value in the Carpathian Basin.*



Lucian Macaveiu


## MONITORING THE BREEDING OF THE GOLDEN EAGLE



The Golden Eagle is one of the least abundant birds of prey in Romania. At the beginning of the 2000s, besides some traditional nesting sites, there was only a small amount of accessible information about the occurrence of the species in the country, and the population was estimated at 20-25 breeding pairs. According to our surveys, we estimate that there are 80-150 pairs at present.

Our activities involving this species started in 2001 in the Trascău Mountains. Since then we have performed annual assessments on the population changes, breeding success and threatening factors of the species in the Apuseni Mountains and some regions of the Eastern Carpathians.

 In 2017 the program was financed from Milvus Group's own resources. The field work was carried out by employees of Milvus Group and the volunteers of [CETM Albamont](#).

 This year we visited 25 Golden Eagle territories in the Apuseni Mountains and the Eastern Carpathians. Some nesting sites were visited more than once during the spring. In 2017 the ratio of successful breeding was significantly lower than usual, only 7 pairs being able to raise chicks.

**25**  
Golden Eagle  
breeding sites  
were checked

- *As the Golden Eagle is one of the rarest breeding birds of prey in Romania, we consider that it is vital to follow the changes in its population. This guarantees the possibility to predict or remediate any threats it might face.*

## MONITORING THE BREEDING OF THE LESSER SPOTTED EAGLE



The Romanian population of the Lesser Spotted Eagle is one of the most significant ones in Europe. Ten years ago, when we performed a national population census, we proved that the Romanian population is exactly ten times bigger than previously thought.

We took on an important role in the conservation of this globally endangered species. Therefore we are trying to maintain this monitoring program from our own funds in smaller sample areas.



In 2017 we monitored the breeding of the Lesser Spotted Eagle in the Natura 2000 sites along the Târnavă Mică and Niraj rivers. We found successful breeding in five nests out of 18 checked.



Ioan Petrea

## MONITORING OF FOREST BIRDS IN THE UPPER DÂMBOVIȚA VALLEY



Milvus Group has been a subcontractor in this activity since 2014 in the framework of the project entitled "The Ecological Restoration of Woodland and Water Habitats in the Făgărași Mountains and the Superior Dâmbovița Valley" <sup>1</sup> coordinated by Conservation Carpathia Foundation.

The aim of this activity is the monitoring of three indicator bird species : the White-backed Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos leucotos*), the Three-toed Woodpecker (*Picoides tridactylus*), and the Red-breasted Flycatcher (*Ficedula parva*), as well as other forest birds in woodlands where habitat restoration works are being performed as part of the project.



In 2017, we conducted surveys on 148 points similarly to the previous three years.



This year we finished the final report after processing the data we collected during the four years.

■ *The sample area of our surveys will never be exploited industrially according to the plans, thus it will be an extremely interesting site for long-term monitoring.*

<sup>1</sup> LIFE11/NAT/RO/823

## MONITORING THE DIPPER IN THE UPPER MUREŞ GORGE





Kerekes István



The Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*) lives only in the very clear waters of mountain rivers, therefore the changes that might occur in a certain population can be a good indicator of long-term environmental changes.

The monitoring of Dipper populations in the Upper Mureş Gorge is one of the first monitoring activities conducted by Milvus Group (1993), being driven not only by professional interests but by emotional bonds too. This survey is conducted every January, when the Dippers in the region move from the frozen mountain streams to the Mureş River.

 In 2017 we announced this program as a public one, thus attracting 18 volunteers in our activities.

 This year we counted 170 Dippers, a result which is assonant with the findings from previous years and as far as its size is concerned, it is only half of what we registered at the beginning of the program, more than 20 years ago.

18

volunteers

170

Dippers on a 48 km  
section along  
the Mureş

Kerekes István

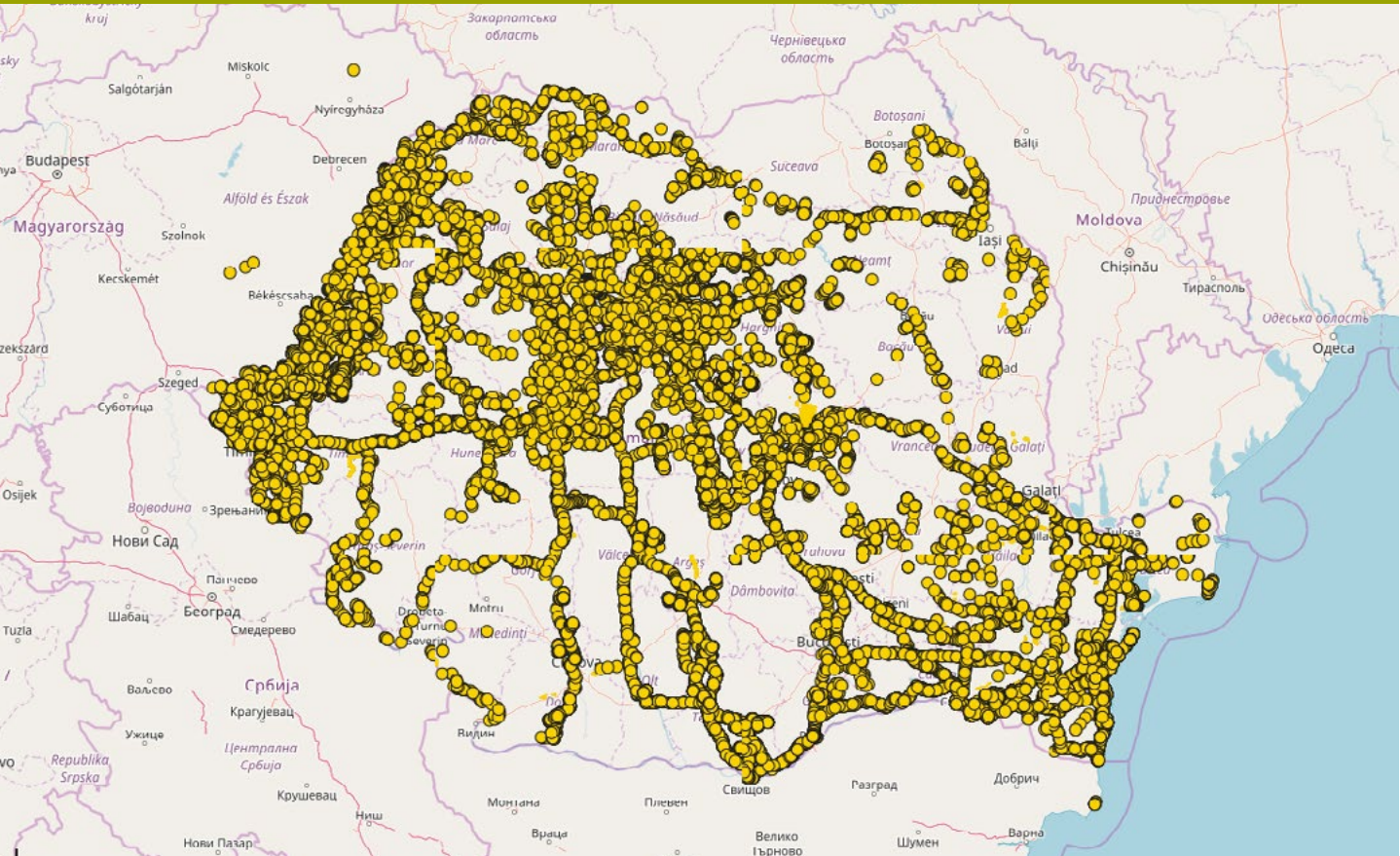
## OPERATION OF A PUBLIC BIOLOGICAL DATABASE



# OPENBIRDMAPS, AN OPEN-ACCESS, ONLINE DATABASE



The [OpenBirdMaps](#), operated by Milvus Group is an online open-access database, with the aim to collect information about the distribution of wild birds in Romania both in time and space, and making these data freely accessible.



**In 2017, data from all over the country were introduced in the database.**



We aim to offer access to a huge amount of data, by publishing the data collected by amateur and professional ornithologists, thus making possible their use for environmental, educational, scientific or other, non-commercial purposes.

- The first version of OpenBirdMaps became accessible in 2016, but it had a lot of deficiencies. In 2017 the OpenBioMaps software which served as the basis of our database, has been updated significantly. Consequently, until the end of the year we managed to adapt OpenBirdMaps to this renewed system. Therefore it became possible to attach photos, sound recordings or other types of media contents to observations. Accessing data has become a lot easier, the presentation of the accessed data was completed with new elements and the access network has also been improved.
- The system hasn't got an application for mobile phones yet, but many of its users also use the ObsMapp application for data collecting with mobile phones as well as the Observation.org database. Taking all these into consideration, we found a solution for the simple importation of observations into OpenBirdMaps exported from Observation.org

- There has been an important breakthrough in the use of observations found in OpenBirdMaps. Our database joined [EuroBirdPortal](#) whose goal is to process the timely changes of bird populations on a European scale, mostly based on observations, carried out by volunteering ornithologists.
- In 2017, 39 users uploaded 102 254 observations. Together with these we have got 565 301 observations in our database.

- *We think it is important to be open to both amateur and professional followers, and we offer access to a modern, dynamically developing online database platform to everybody who is interested.*
- *Milvus Group has the biggest database about the nesting, transiting and wintering birds in the country and we consider the accessibility of these data our priority.*

**102 254**  
new observations were  
included in the  
database this year



## DATA COLLECTION FOR THE "ATLAS OF EUROPEAN MAMMALS"



Sebastian Mastahac



In 2016 a movement was initiated, which targeted the renewal and publishing of "The Atlas of European Mammals" (1999) covering all Europe.

Sebastian Mastahac

This involves a huge amount of work and separate coordination for each country, for the atlas to be compiled by 2025, as planned. Experts of Milvus Group took on the Romanian part of this work.

Further information about the program can be found on the site of ["The European Mammal Society"](#).





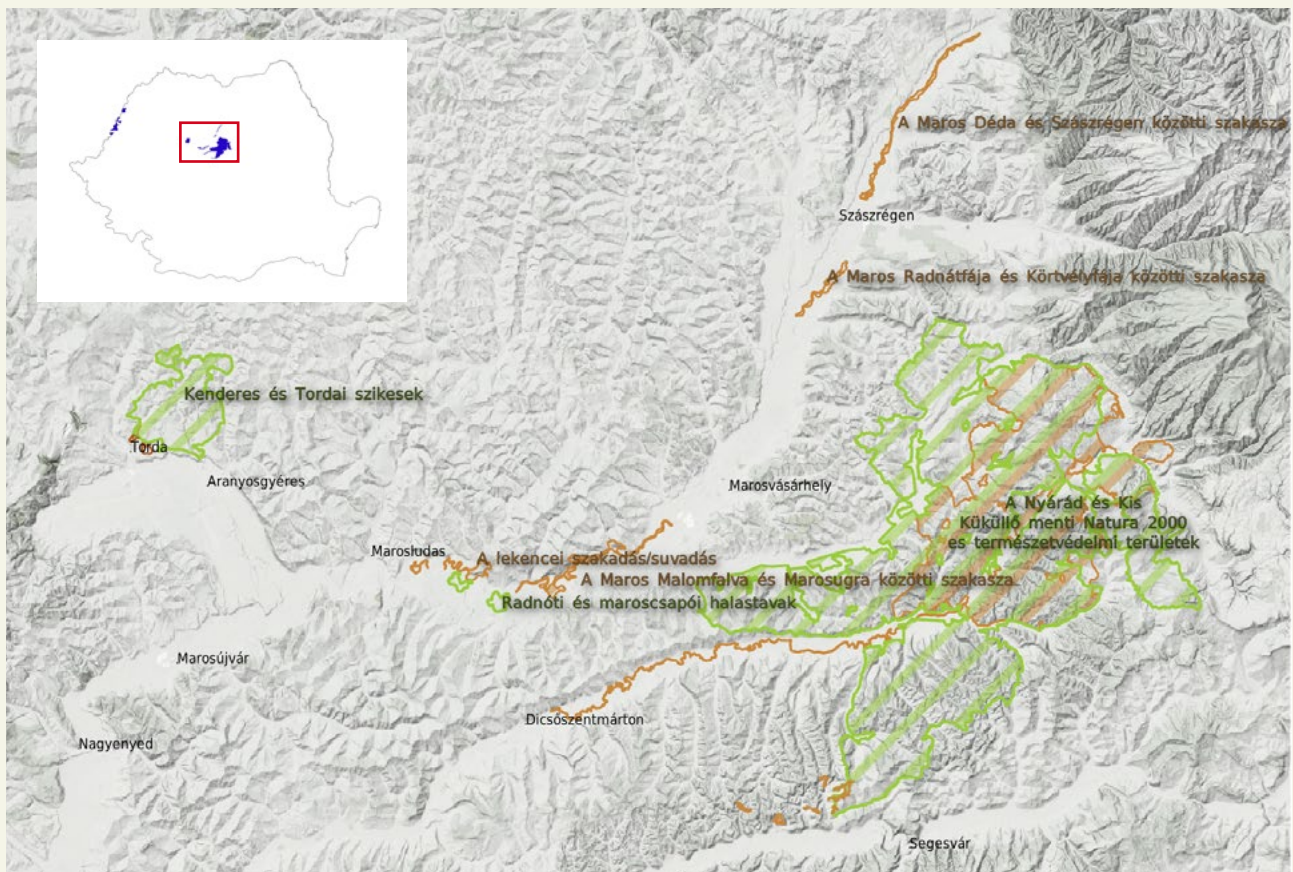
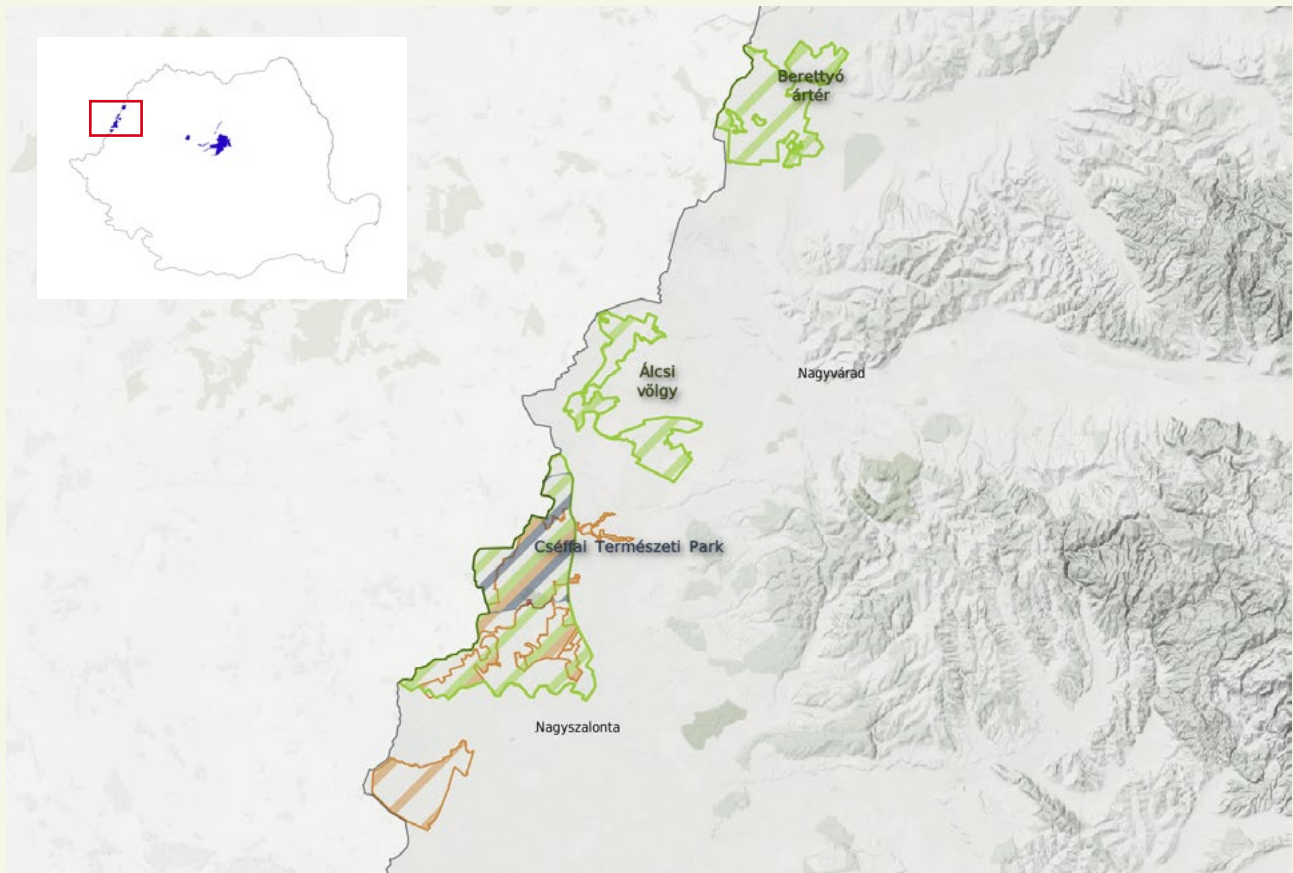
## MANAGEMENT OF PROTECTED AREAS



After our extensive contribution to the designation of the Natura 2000 network, we have actively taken part in the management of these areas since 2010. In Romania, non-governmental organizations can also manage protected areas, thus fulfilling the duties of authorities. There are no normative state funds for this work but it involves a great responsibility and a lot of potential conflicts. However, we consider that it is utterly important to take part in the management of protected areas, because we would like to make sure that these protected areas evolve in a way that benefits both nature and local communities .

- In 2017, 81 requests have been submitted targeting the twenty areas we manage, for various investments and the authorisation of different works. We rejected two of these requests and authorised the rest of them. When we considered that natural values might be compromised, we set up special conditions which had to be respected, so that nature does not suffer any significant damage.
- At present we are financing the management of all the protected areas from own funds. We will continue to apply for funds.

## Our protected areas



■ SPA - Special Protection Area

■ SCI - Site of Community Importance

■ Nature Reserve

■ Natural Park

We took part in the management of the following protected areas:

Nr.	Natura 2000 code	Official name	English translation	Since	Custodian
1	ROSPA0041	Eleșteiele Iernut-Cipău	Fish lakes in Iernut-Cipău	2010	Milvus Group
2	ROSPA0067	Lunca Barcăului	Barcău Floodplain	2010	Milvus Group
3	ROSPA0103	Valea Alceului fără suprafața care se suprapune peste ROSCI 0104 Lunca Inferioară a Crișului Repede	Alceu Valley	2010	Milvus Group
4	ROSCI0368	Râul Mureș între Deda și Reghin	The Mures River between Reghin-Deda	2016	Milvus Group
5	ROSCI0369	Râul Mureș între Ierlăuțeni și Periș	The Mures River between Ierlăuțeni and Periș	2016	Milvus Group
6	ROSCI0367	Râul Mureș între Morești și Ogra	The Mures River between Morești and Ogra	2016	Milvus Group
7	ROSCI0210	Râpa Lechința	The Lechința Slip	2016	Milvus Group
8	ROSPA0113	Cânepiști	The Ocna Veche Lick	2016	Milvus Group SC Greenviro SRL
9	ROSCI0223	Sărăturile și Ocna Veche			
10	RONPA0360	Rezervația 2.343. Sărăturile și Ocna Veche			
11		Suprafața din ROSCI0238 care se suprapune peste ROSPA0113 Cânepiști			
12	ROSPA0028	Dealurile Târnavelor – Valea Nirajului	The Natura 2000 sites in the Niraj and Târnavă Mică region	2011	Kis-Küküllő Regional Society Balavásár-Szováta Nyárádmente Kistérségi Társulás Milvus Group
13	ROSCI0297	Dealurile Târnavei-Mici – Bicheș			
14	ROSCI0384	Râul Târnavă Mică			
15	ROSCI0186	Pădurile de stejar pufos de pe Târnavă Mare			
16	RONPA0967	Parcul Natural Cefa	Cefa Natural Park	2017	Asociația Pescarilor Sportivi Aqua Crisisus Asociația Agenția de Management al Destinației Bihor Milvus Group
17	ROSCI0025	Cefa			
18	ROSCI0387	Salonta			
19	ROSPA0097	Pescăria Cefa – Pădurea Rădvani			
20	RONPA0211	Rezervația naturală 2194 Colonia de Păsări de la Pădurea Rădvani			



- We took over the management of a protected area complex – jointly with two other associations – consisting of the Cefa Natural Park, several Natura 2000 sites and one nature reserve. This is the first time that we can take part in the management of a Natural Park.

## RINGING ACTIVITIES. RINGING CAMP ON THE CHITUC SANDBANK.



The most important **scientific** ringing activity of Milvus Group is organised on the **Chituc** sandbank in Dobrogea, one of the easternmost continental areas of Romania. Being embraced by two water bodies (Sinoe Lake and the Black Sea) it serves as a real bottleneck for migrating songbirds.

We organised ringing camps here in 1996-1997 to survey the intensity and dynamics of songbird migration. After a long break, in 2014 we restarted the operation of the camp. Since then, including this year, we ringed a total of 57 080 birds.

The Chituc Ringing Camp is financed from our own resources and with the help of sponsors.



- In 2017 we ringed 10 547 individuals belonging to 87 bird species.
- We also captured a new species for Romania the Red-flanked Bluetail (*Tarsiger cyanurus*). This is the first proven occurrence of this species in the country.

Besides the ringing camps, members of our association with ringing authorisations ring birds within **species conservation programs** as well as on other occasions. The main international colour-ringing programs of Milvus Group focus on the Red-footed Falcon, the Saker Falcon, the White Stork, the Common Kestrel and the Roller, along with smaller colour-ringing programs.



Ringing within species protection programs:

- We ringed 45 Saker Falcon chicks in Romania (the highest number in a single year).
- 133 Red-footed Falcons were ringed on seven nesting sites (127 young and 6 adult individuals).
- 202 Rollers were ringed this year (166 chicks in the nest boxes we installed and 36 adult individuals). Every bird got a colour ring combination.

Besides the ringing activities with scientific purpose, we organise **presentations of bird ringing** annually, especially for educational purposes.

These presentations are organized within children camps, forest school programs or local events.

- *The Chituc Ringing Camp is the most important site for the survey of migrating songbirds in Romania.*



new species  
for the fauna  
**RED-FLANKED  
BLUETAIL**

**150**  
volunteers

**10 547**  
ringed birds on  
Chituc this year

## 9<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL "MILVUS" NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST



We organised our nature photography contest in 2009 for the first time, with the aim to raise awareness about natural beauties among people who tend to ignore them.

We also intended to promote nature photography in Romania.

Since then, we have been receiving hundreds of photos every year, both from the country and from abroad. In the past years the nature photography contest organised by Milvus Group has become the most prestigious and oldest of all the nature photography competitions in Romania.



This year 693 creations were sent in by 138 photographers from 13 countries, in one of the three categories below:

- Nature (landscape, plants, fungi, NO animals)
- Wild animals
- Romanian Nature. This category is dedicated exclusively to photographers from Romania. Only pictures (of plants, fungi, animals or landscapes) taken in Romania could be submitted.

It is always a great challenge for the three jury members (András Tamás, AFIAP – president of the jury, István Kerekes, EFIAP/d2 and Dan Dinu, AFIAP), to choose the winning photographs. They have been the jury of this contest since the beginning, and they judge photos taking into consideration both natural and artistic criteria.

Szabó Irma – Each in turn



- *Opinion of Dan Dinu, member of the jury:  
The International "Milvus" Nature Photography Contest contributes to the improvement of national nature photography standards, because participation in the contest serves as a good opportunity to compare national standards to international ones, thus showing the directions for necessary improvement on a national scale.*





Laurențiu Pavel - Flying over the dry ocean

138  
photographers  
from  
**13**  
countries  
took part

**693**  
submitted photos

This year  
for the first time  
Separate category for  
**ROMANIAN  
PHOTOGRAPHERS**



Csaba Tökölyi - Reynisdrangar

# WILDLIFE REHABILITATION CENTRE



Our association has been offering care and rehabilitation for injured, wild birds since it was established because during our activities we have often met injured, ill or confiscated and illegally detained animals, oftentimes rare, protected species.

Our wildlife rehabilitation programs would not be possible at this level without the help of [Vets4Wild](#) association, as the vets, who work there provide the medical treatment for the wild animals brought in to our centre. So that an emergency medical care could be possible all over the country, we established a national network of vets who cooperate with us in cases of emergency.

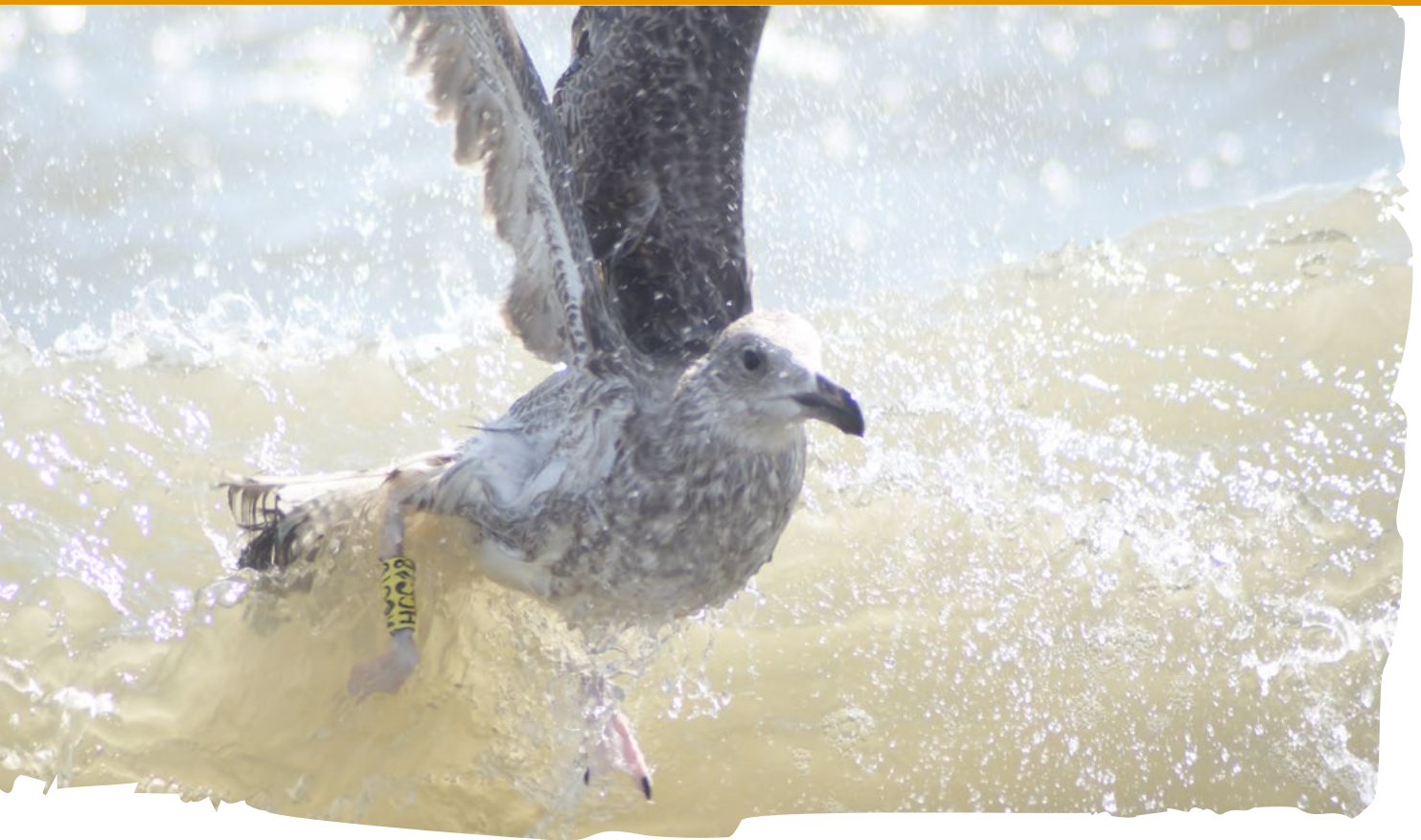
Thanks to many enthusiastic people and the redirected calls from the emergency number 112, injured wild animals are brought to our centre from all over the country. After they are provided with the medical care they need, the birds will follow a rehabilitation program which targets regaining their good physical condition and the ability to fly. For this we need big aviaries, where the muscles of the bird can strengthen in a protected environment. It is only after this process that they can be released back in their natural habitat and become independent.





Our centre is managed using own funds and the support of sponsors. We wish to thank our sponsors for their trust and financial support.

- In 2017 we provided rehabilitation for 187 birds, 24 mammals and 3 amphibians.
- We received 434 emergency calls from 37 counties about injured animals and we offered our services via telephone.
- From the 208 animals brought in our centre, 32 individuals were subject to surgeries, 45 animals got medical treatment with medicine, while the others needed only strengthening. We could release 72 animals back into their natural habitat safely.
- It is telling that 1 ton of chicken necks was fed to the animals under our care in 2017.
- Due to donations a new aviary was built, which can be compartmented, and which was painted with camouflage patterns by the students of the Târgu Mureş Art High School, so it resembles the natural environment. Now we have got 19 aviaries and one enclosure for tortoises.



- *The case of the seagull which was released three times:  
 A young, weakened Yellow-legged Gull was brought to our centre from Cluj Napoca. As we couldn't detect any injuries or illnesses, we only strengthened it. During the next two months we tried to release it twice in Târgu Mureş on the bank of the Mureş River, but without any success. Two months after it came to our centre, our colleagues took it to the Black Sea and released it successfully. We hope that it is enjoying freedom in its natural habitat now.*



187

birds were brought  
to our centre

1 TON

of chicken necks was  
consumed by the  
birds in a year

NEW  
AVIARY

in our centre

## SURVEY OF ECOSYSTEM SERVICES



We have become engaged in ecosystem services in the past few years, because we are convinced that this kind of perspective is much more attractive for those who are otherwise less preoccupied by nature protection. This is due to the fact that by this approach it is possible to express various natural values in money and it offers a clear view on the economic importance of natural resources in a certain region.

- We finished a two-year research project this year, which focused on the survey of the [ecosystem services of Natura 2000 sites in the Niraj and Târnavă Mică region](#). This research was conducted in cooperation with two Hungarian partners: the [Centre for Ecological Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences](#) and the [CEEweb for Biodiversity](#) network. The project was financed by the [EEA Norway Grants](#).
- On a European scale, the outcomes of the project will contribute to the process called [Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services](#) (MAES) which is one of the objectives of the EU Biodiversity strategy.
- Our regional survey on ecosystem services in Romania involved methodological innovations as well.
- With this project we would like to make local authorities take into consideration all the natural resources in their decision-making procedures.



*This is how the project affected the local community:*

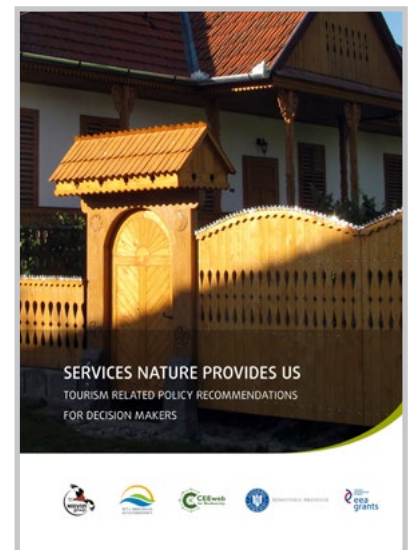
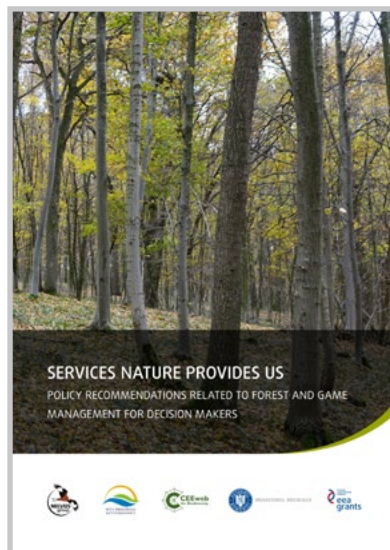
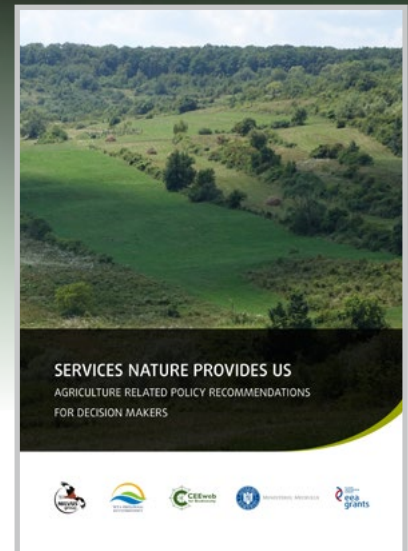
- *"The research was about us, we got to know the real problems and we got the chance for a change in perspective about the future."*
- *"We became aware of some values we have not noticed so far. It would be good if our politicians recognised them as well."*
- *"It was good that many local inhabitants with different levels of knowledge were involved (different social groups, different ages)."*
- *"Due to my participation I got more involved in this topic and I had such experiences which strengthened my belief that not all is lost."*

The surveyed six ecosystem services contributed to the economy of the Niraj and Târnavă Mică region by 57 million RON annually

We prepared a map with the potentials of the surveyed ecosystem services

1050  
people were personally involved in the research

# Our Publications within the Project



# GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING



Since 2017 Milvus Group has taken part in the TRANSGREEN project of Central-East European interest (Integrated Transport and Green Infrastructure Planning in the Danube-Carpathian Region for the Benefit of People and Nature), which embraces organisations and institutions which are responsible for the development of linear infrastructure like roads and highways, and others which are responsible for nature protection. The declared common goal of the partners is to make the infrastructure of the Carpathian Basin safer and environmentally friendly.

These organizations together have all the necessary knowledge, authority, capacity and experience, to find such solutions which could lower the negative impact of the construction of roads on the environment.

The TRANSGREEN project<sup>1</sup> is co-funded by the European Union through the Interreg Danube Transnational Programme (DTP). One of the key elements of the project is the establishment of ecological corridors which can ensure the free movement of species, including the most vulnerable ones. Such species are large carnivores (brown bear, wolf, lynx) and certain herbivore species (red deer, wild boar).



<sup>1</sup> DTP1-187-3.1-TRANSGREEN



- In the first year of the project we organised two stakeholder meetings for the interested parties. The representatives of those communities which would be affected by the construction of the Târgu-Mureş-Iaşi motorway took part on the meeting, together with the relevant planning and engineering companies and the decision-making authorities from Bucharest. The final goal is the identification of such elements of green infrastructure (e.g. wildlife crossings) which would ensure the permeability of motorways for the local fauna.
- Within the project, we established a working group in Bucharest, which was meant to promote a long-term cooperation between the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Environment and the associations involved.
- We are ensuring the continuous data collection regarding target species, using camera traps installed along the path of the future motorway.
  - We installed 36 motion activated cameras on a 34 km long route in the target area, which recorded 15 thousand hours of material.
  - During one month the cameras recorded more than 200 movements of transiting animals trough the surveyed area, like brown bears, wolves, lynxes, several ungulates and small carnivores, the movements of which would be limited by the construction of a deficiently planned motorway.



- *We managed to get in touch with parties highly interested in the construction of the motorway (ministries, CNAIR - National Company of Road Infrastructure Administration, architects, construction companies, mayor's offices etc.). Hopefully, our recommendations will be taken into consideration in the future too.*



## EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES



We consider that promoting environment-awareness and environment-friendly attitudes among youngsters is very important. We organise our educational activities mainly from our own funds and resources. However, in 2017 we managed to ensure external funding from a smaller project and a work we performed on a contractual basis.

- We started our educational program in the Natura 2000 areas along the Niraj and Târnavă Mică in September. In the framework of this educational program we had monthly interactive activities in 21 classes of 12 localities, with the aim of familiarising children with the natural values which surround them. At the same time we presented the possibilities of conserving these values in the future. With the help of local adults we are also mapping the natural values and the touristic potential that certain villages have. The project is funded by the International Investment Bank.
- We take part in the project entitled [LEHUA - Let's learn humanity from animals](#) financed by Erasmus+, in which our partners are the [Rogers Foundation for Person-centered Education](#), the [Budapest Zoo and Botanical Garden](#), as well as the [Szlovakian Tandem n.o.](#). The goal of the program is the elaboration of a training program for the development of self-reflexion, based on our knowledge about animals and nature.
- In 2017 we continued our traditional programs in schools and kindergartens from own funds, where we organised playful educational activities mainly about birds. In the summer, our environmental camp moved to Mitrești, where children traditionally are accommodated in yurts. The attraction of the new campsite is the neighbouring Niraj River.

**This year we organised more than 70 activities involving 21 institutions. More than 1000 children and almost one hundred adults took part in these activities.**



**1026**  
children took part in our programs

**21**  
institutions were involved in our activities

# MILVUS SCHOLARSHIP



In 2017 we launched the Milvus scholarship for the sixth time aiming to help young biologists in their individual or group research, as well as in the accomplishment of their environmental projects.



- From the 20 submitted applications 10 received financing this year; their total value reached 16657 lei.
- Most projects had scientific and/or environmental topics and targeted the mapping of the distribution of certain rare or little known species. Such projects were, for instance the modelling of the possible distribution of the Hungarian Meadow Viper or the population surveys of the Eurasian Pygmy Owl and the Boreal Owl in the Pălteniș region.
- Several projects which aimed at the morphological, taxonomic and genetic analysis of certain species received funding, like for instance the ecological, molecular and taxonomic analysis of the Carpathian Scorpion or the morphological and genetic analysis of Sand Lizard subspecies.
- Funds for this scholarship are entirely covered by Milvus Group's own resources.



- *This program is utterly important for us because this way we can contribute to the acquisition of new work force in our association. Some of the winners of previous years are already working for Milvus Group at present.*

## ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION AND LOBBYING

Specific conservation measures alone are not sufficient in the remediation of nature conservation problems and the preservation of our living heritage. It may sound as a cliché, but the prevention of problems is much more desirable and effective than ulterior correction of the problems.

The most important tool in the prevention of environmental problems is a suitable legislation and its correct and effective implementation. Many times the solution of local issues depends on successful lobbying or on the effective implementation of environmental legislation.

On a larger scale, like on a regional, national or community level, this is exponentially true. That is exactly the reason why, for all the achievements we have had, Milvus Group has to do such work as well, which is mostly invisible but truly essential. Here are some of the topics we dealt with this year:



## NATURE PROTECTION AND AGRICULTURAL POLICY



In Europe, the intensification of agriculture has probably the greatest impact on biodiversity. Unfortunately, this impact is mostly negative. Therefore, the populations of certain animal species, which depend on these agricultural lands, are continuously decreasing.

While everybody mourns for forests (not without a reason, of course), **agricultural areas** (grasslands and arable lands) **have suffered much more damage in the past 10-20 years from a nature conservation point of view, than forests**. The ploughing of a grassland or the transformation of a small-plot agricultural landscape into a mechanised monoculture might not be as spectacular as a deforested slope, but it is at least as worrying as the other. Besides its environmental importance, this topic is utterly significant for us because we would like to help local farmers and provide them with extra income while motivating them to apply nature-friendly farming methods in their work.

It is obvious that results can be obtained only on a higher level in this matter. Among other reasons that is why we are members of the [CEEweb](#), which is a network of environmental NGOs in the Central-East European region. Together with the other organisations, through the powerful Brussels representation of Ceeweb, we are trying to influence the Common Agricultural Policy in such a direction that it has positive environmental outcomes. Due to our determination, in the year 2017, we could give an account of many achievements, at least on a national level.

- The Ministry of Agriculture accepted **two agri-environmental packages** we contributed to at a great extent – the packages targeting the Lesser Spotted Eagle and the Great Bustard. These subsidiary packages will be available from 2018, and they will be beneficial both for birds and for farmers working in the target region.
- The Lesser Spotted Eagle conservation package will be accessible mostly in Transylvania, for those farmers who work parcels smaller than 4 hectares. We hope that this scheme will contribute to the sustainability of small and medium-sized farmlands, which are characteristic to Transylvania, maintaining a traditional landscape and a rich wildlife due to extensive, nature-friendly farming methods.
- The Great Bustard conservation package will be accessible in the western parts of the country, along the border, where the last Romanian population of this extremely rare species lives.

*■ The Ministry has finally accepted our Lesser Spotted Eagle agri-environmental (AKG) package and the Great Bustard conservation package, which we submitted five years ago. These have been accepted in Brussels as well.*

## LEGISLATION CONCERNING LARGE CARNIVORES



In Romania, large carnivores, especially brown bears have become the emblematic protagonist of the conflict between people and nature. We have been dealing with this topic for more than a decade.

Our goal is to use our expertise to influence decision making regarding large carnivores. Relevant decisions should be scientifically informed and should consider the needs of the local communities from large carnivore ranges.

- In 2017 we have played an important role in the National Working Group on the Conservation of Large Carnivores (*Grupul de Lucru Carnivore Mari*, the advisory of the Romanian Ministry of Environment on large carnivores). Due to the interference of the ministry, in spring 2017, the Working Group was extended to include the representatives of supposedly relevant institutions. For these new members, the filter of the minimum set of requirements (mandatory for all other members) was not applied. After the extension, the group has lost its environmental/conservation majority and those members who were openly lobbying for hunting became the absolute majority. During a meeting organised in spring, the renewed Working Group voted that the trophy hunting of bears should be resumed. In the end, in 2017 only an emergency intervention quota was issued, specifically for problem individuals (habituated bears, 'repeated offenders' or bears that have either caused exceptional damages or attacked people).
- At the same time, in 2017 we repeatedly sent open letters to the Ministry of Environment, in cooperation with other environmental organisations, in which we warned that conflicts regarding large carnivores cannot be solved only by the means of hunting. These repeated interventions consisted of a series of recommendations, including: improvement of the effectiveness of compensation systems, payment of subsidies for the installation of damage prevention systems, payment of subsidies for wildlife managers, implementation of educational and informational programs in high risk areas, and more. Most of these recommendations have been ignored so far..



## GUIDELINES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF GRASSLANDS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE GROUND SQUIRREL



We use the results of our species conservation projects in such a manner that our experiences reach certain decision-making organisations and social groups.

- Based on our experience acquired in the [RAPTORSPREYLIFE](#) project we drew up a guide-book for the suitable management of grasslands inhabited by European Ground Squirrels (*Spermophilus citellus*) in the past year. The primary aim of the document is offering information to those people and organisations who are using the grasslands inhabited by ground squirrels, about the habitats of this protected rodent and its needs, about the legal protection of the ground squirrel habitats, the species conservation methods in the management of grasslands, referring also to possible subsidies.
- This guide-book offers details about the legal obligations farmers have in and outside protected areas, recommendations about legal grazing methods (e.g. the maximum number of grazing animals) and other actions which need to be taken on grasslands inhabited by ground squirrels as well as on neighbouring arable lands.
- We have sent the document to environmental agencies and the agriculture departments working in the target region of the project, but in the future we intend to make it accessible to every interested party.

## NATURA 2000 COALITION



The [Natura 2000 Coalition](#) was established by Romanian nature conservation organisations 15 years ago. Milvus Group is one of the establishing members and is still represented in the board of the Coalition.

The main goal of the Coalition is the improvement of environmental laws, the supervision of their implementation and enforcement of legal provisions in case of offences within these protected areas.

- 2017 was the year of great losses for nature conservation. Among others, important regulations regarding forest protection have suffered disadvantageous changes or they have simply lost validity. The Coalition manifested its opposition in this matter, but unfortunately with no success.
- On the other hand, the temporary suspension of the Jiu Valley Hydroelectric Power Station may be considered a real accomplishment.





## ORIENTATION AND COMMUNICATION

We provide information about our activity on our Organization's official [website](#), on our [Facebook](#) page and on our [Youtube](#) channel which are followed by nature lovers from all over the world.

We constantly keep in touch with the local and national media by means of press conferences, press releases and interviews.



Besides online and audiovisual communication via media channels, we are trying to reach many people personally. We organise educational activities both for children and adults. We hold scientific and informational presentations to experts and interested people.

We emphasized the online and direct communication towards the population and professional organisations:

- Similarly to previous years, in 2017 our most popular online content was the stork webcam from Dumbrăvioara, which offered the possibility for everyone to observe closely the events from the nest. This year 34 977 individual users followed the camera on 230 489 occasions.
- It is also very popular to [follow online](#), the autumn and spring migration of the birds which we equipped with satellite transmitters, and voting on [Facebook](#) the Public award of the International "Milvus" Nature Photography Contest.
- We held 32 presentations in 25 locations in the country and abroad, in cafés and universities, where we reached 1127 people. The audience received information about our Rehabilitation Centre, the impact of the motorway on wild animals, our ecosystem services, touristic programs based on natural values and about different nature conservation problems.
- We tried to attend public events too. This year the most successful one was our participation on the "Forgatag" in Târgu Mureş, where we involved 400 children and adults in our activities.
- We had 360 written and audiovisual appearances.
- Our [Facebook](#) profile is followed by more than five thousand people.
- 65 videos were uploaded on our [Youtube](#) channel this year.

- *The local and national media have contacted us more often lately, so we believe that more and more people manifest their interest towards nature conservation issues.*



# PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCES

## SCIENTIFIC ARTICLES



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## PUBLICATIONS



**Érintett elemzés** - összefoglaló tanulmány az „Ökoszisztéma szolgáltatások felmérése és térképezése a Nyárad és KisKüküllő menti Natura 2000 területeken” c. projekt keretében készült kvalitatív adatgyűjtés eredményeiről



**Összefoglaló tanulmány fényképes preferencia értékelés eredményeiről** - „Ökoszisztéma szolgáltatások felmérése és értékelése a Nyárad és Kis-Küküllő menti Natura 2000-es területeken” projekt



**MERRE ELŐRE? Jövőképek a Nyárad és Kis-Küküllő Mente ökoszisztéma szolgáltatásainak tükrében** - „Ökoszisztéma szolgáltatások felmérése és értékelése a Nyárad és Kis-Küküllő menti Natura 2000-es területeken” projekt



**MENNYIT ÉRNEK A TERMÉSZET AJÁNDÉKAI? A Nyárad és Kis-Küküllő menti Natura 2000 területek ökoszisztéma szolgáltatás kutatásának összefoglaló tanulmánya** - „Ökoszisztéma szolgáltatások felmérése és értékelése a Nyárad és Kis-Küküllő menti Natura 2000-es területeken” projekt



**MILYEN SZOLGÁLTATÁSOKAT NYÚJT SZÁMUNKRA A TERMÉSZET? - Mezőgazdasággal kapcsolatos ajánlások döntéshozóknak** - „Ökoszisztéma szolgáltatások felmérése és értékelése a Nyárad és Kis-Küküllő menti Natura 2000-es területeken” projekt



**MILYEN SZOLGÁLTATÁSOKAT NYÚJT SZÁMUNKRA A TERMÉSZET? - Vízgazdálkodással kapcsolatos ajánlások döntéshozóknak** - „Ökoszisztéma szolgáltatások felmérése és értékelése a Nyárad és Kis-Küküllő menti Natura 2000-es területeken” projekt



**MILYEN SZOLGÁLTATÁSOKAT NYÚJT SZÁMUNKRA A TERMÉSZET? - Erdő és vadgazdálkodással kapcsolatos ajánlások döntéshozóknak** - „Ökoszisztéma szolgáltatások felmérése és értékelése a Nyárad és Kis-Küküllő menti Natura 2000-es területeken” projekt



**MILYEN SZOLGÁLTATÁSOKAT NYÚJT SZÁMUNKRA A TERMÉSZET? - Turizmussal kapcsolatos ajánlások döntéshozóknak** - „Ökoszisztéma szolgáltatások felmérése és értékelése a Nyárad és Kis-Küküllő menti Natura 2000-es területeken” projekt



**Projekt jelentés - összefoglaló tanulmány szakemberek számára** - „Ökoszisztéma szolgáltatások felmérése és értékelése a Nyárad és Kis-Küküllő menti Natura 2000-es területeken” projekt



**Intergrált közlekedés és zöld infrastruktúra tervezés a Kárpát-medencében a természet és az ember javára** - „Intergrált közlekedés és zöld infrastruktúra tervezés a Kárpát-medencében a természet és az ember javára” projekt.

## SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS



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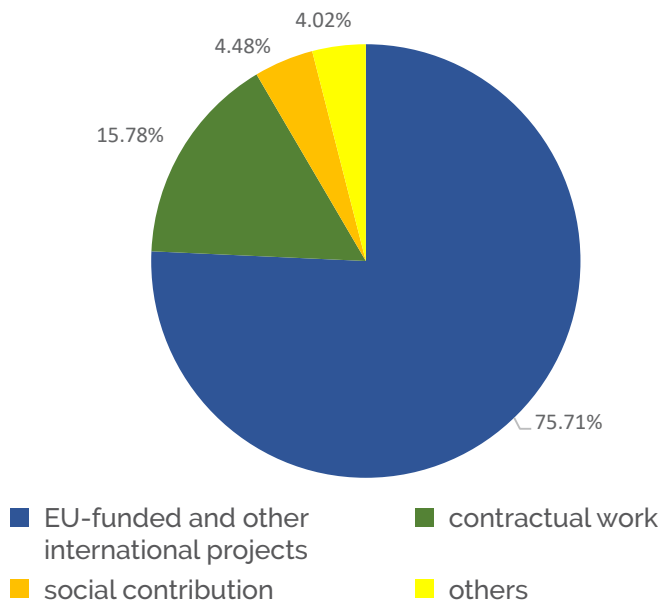
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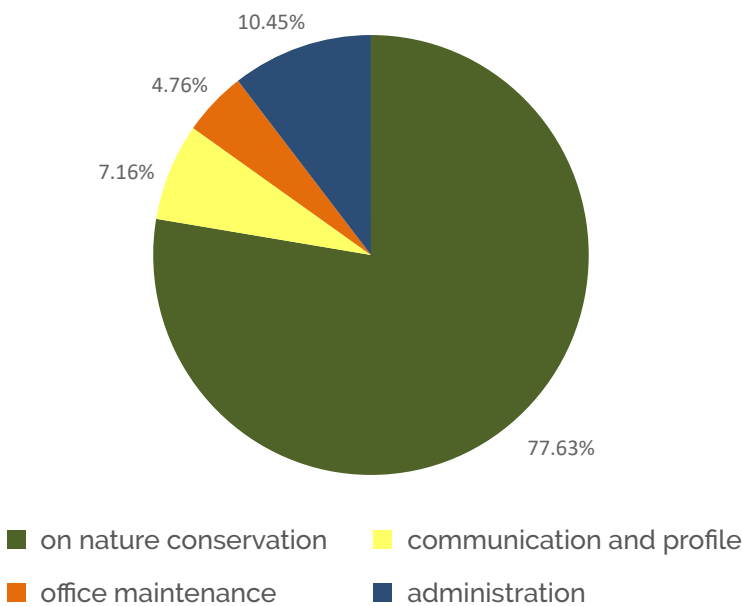


# ECONOMIC REPORT

Our income in 2017



Expenditure in 2017



Similarly to previous years, this year, the activities of our association still rely mostly on EU-funded and other international projects, which are becoming more and more difficult to apply for. Despite that, we can safely say that this year was successful due to our credibility and popularity on an international level.

We also had a significant amount of income from contractual works, these being those resources of the association which do not depend on projects. Without the different forms of social contribution (sponsoring from companies, donations from people, the 2% of people's income tax, membership fee) we get, many of our environmentally and socially important programmes could not be carried out.

In 2017 the total income of our association was 1 028 198 lei and our expenses ran up to 1 917 372 lei. The greatest part of our losses are due to the fact that most EU projects involve post financing, which means that we will get these sums only after the finalisation of the project.

This year we had 25 full-time and part-time employees. Keeping our colleagues meant a great financial challenge. The 25 employees were helped by 229 volunteers, who's daily allowance could often not be covered and it was difficult to cover their expenses as well. Despite these difficulties they continue to help us in the accomplishment of our scientific and environmental programs. We are grateful for their unconditioned support!

## Our Projects and Contractual Works in 2017:

1	<p><b>Projects financed by LIFE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <a href="#">Conservation of the European Roller in the Carpathian Basin</a> (LIFE13/NAT/HU/000081)</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Securing prey sources for endangered Falco cherrug and Aquila heliaca population in the Carpathian basin</a> (LIFE13 NAT/HU/000183)</li> </ul>
2	<p><b>Interreg Danube and transnational Programme:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <a href="#">TRANSGREEN</a> (DTP1-187-3.1-TRANSGREEN)</li> </ul>
3	<p><b>EEA Norway Grants:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <a href="#">Assessment of Ecosystem Services in Natura 2000 sites of the Niraj and Târnava Mică Region</a></li> </ul>
4	<p><b>MAVA Swiss Ornithological Institute:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Atlas of Romanian and European Nesting Birds</li> </ul>
5	<p><b>ERASMUS+ Programme of the European Union:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <a href="#">Learning Humanity from Animals</a></li> </ul>
6	<p><b>Bears in Mind; Bernd Thies Foundation; Columbus ZOO &amp; Aquarium:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Research project on the conservation of bears</li> </ul>
7	<p><b>Contractual works:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <a href="#">Conservation Carpathia Foundation</a>: Monitoring Transylvanian bird species in the Dâmbovița valley.</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">International Investment Bank</a>: Educational programs on the Natura 2000 sites of the Niraj and Târnava Mică Region</li> </ul>

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We are grateful to those who donated the 2% of their income tax to us, and we are looking forward to their support next year too.

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