

Nature Conservation in Europe: Approaches and Lessons

Annex RO.2. Initiatives to Increase the Coherence of Protected Areas and Ecological Networks

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There have been several conservation initiatives that have aimed to improve the coherence of the broader range of protected areas in some parts of Romania and the wider region. In the Carpathian region, most of the initiatives have addressed large carnivore habitat connectivity in both the eastern Romanian Carpathians (project WOLFLIFE¹ - Implement best practices for *in situ* conservation of the species *Canis lupus* in the Eastern Carpathians) and in the Western Carpathians (ConnectGreen Project - Connect Carpathians – Enhancing landscape connectivity for Brown Bear and Wolf through a regional network of NATURA 2000 sites in Romania²). While the WOLFLIFE project dealt with the relevance of the protected areas for the Wolf and its prey species, the LIFE Connect Carpathians project examined possibilities for enhancing landscape connectivity by defining and managing an important ecological corridor in western Romania. Another key initiative is the Lower Danube Green Corridor (LDGC), which is coordinating national efforts and cross-border cooperation among the Lower Danube countries for the protection and restoration of wetlands and floodplain habitats. The governments of Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Moldova agreed in 2000 to establish a large-scale ecological corridor of up to 1 million ha of existing and new protected areas, with 223 608 ha of the area proposed for restoration of natural floodplains (Trinomics *et al.*, 2016). A current multinational ConnectGreen project has the aim of maintaining and improving ecological connectivity between natural habitats, especially between Natura 2000 sites and other protected areas of transnational relevance in the Carpathian ecoregion (i.e. the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Serbia and Ukraine).

Maintaining or improving the connectivity of habitats for mammal species has also been a popular topic for research. A study conducted by the Centre for Environmental Research and Impact Studies of Bucharest University shows that protected forest patches are well connected for large mammals, while for small and intermediate mammals habitat connectivity is lower (Niculae *et al.*, 2016). The results show that critical areas for connectivity still need to be identified, included inside protected areas, and adequately managed. New areas of forest habitats may also need to be created, including small patches that can function as stepping stones. With support from an EEA Grant (financed by Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway), another project, COREHABS³ - Ecological corridor for habitats and species in Romania, has developed methods for identifying, establishing and monitoring ecological corridors, and critical areas in Romania. However, the results have had a limited impact on conservation practices.

As part of the ConnectGreen project an expert group is developing a proposal for the Strategy and Action Plan for the designation and mapping of ecological corridors for the Romanian Natura 2000 sites according to legal provisions from the Protected Area Law, with the expectation that it will then be approved by the government. The Action Plan will include specific measures and estimated funding needs for its implementation.

References

- Niculae, M. I., Nita, M. R., Vanau, G. O. and Patroescu, M. (2016) Evaluating the Functional Connectivity of Natura 2000 Forest Patch for Mammals in Romania. *Procedia Environmental Sciences*, **32**, 28-37.
- Trinomics, Alterra, Arcadis, RPA, REC and Stella Consulting (2016) *Supporting the Implementation of Green Infrastructure*. Final report to the European Commission, DG Environment.

¹ LIFE13NAT/RO/000205

² LIFE12 NAT/UK/001068

³ www.corehabs.ro/en/

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