

**WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
AND COEXISTENCE:**



WWF

20 ANI 
ÎN ROMÂNIA

20 YEARS OF IMPACT IN ROMANIA





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For the past 20 years, WWF-Romania has had the privilege of working alongside communities, researchers, authorities, and partners to protect some of Europe’s most valuable wildlife and natural landscapes. It has been a fruitful journey, one about safeguarding the delicate balance between people and nature and proving that a viable coexistence is possible. Romania holds an extraordinary natural heritage. From the forests of the Carpathians to the waters of the Danube, our country remains the green heart of Europe, hosting species such as the brown bear, wolf, lynx, European bison, and Danube sturgeons. These species are essential parts of healthy ecosystems that sustain life, resilience, and human well-being.

Yet over the past decades, wildlife and habitats have come under growing pressure. Fragmented landscapes, unsustainable development, illegal activities, and increasing human-wildlife interactions have challenged both ecosystems and communities. In this context, conservation can no longer rely on isolated protection measures alone. The future depends on building systems where nature and people can thrive together.

At WWF-Romania, this belief has guided our work from the very beginning. Over two decades, we have contributed to bringing back species once lost from Romania, strengthening protections for endangered wildlife, reducing conflicts between people and large carnivores, and improving policies and conservation practices at national and European level. Just as importantly, we have worked to build trust, local ownership, and practical solutions that make coexistence possible in everyday life.

What gives us hope is that Romania has the potential to become a model for modern conservation in Europe - a place where science, communities, institutions, and nature work together. The lessons learned here are increasingly relevant far beyond our borders.



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The road ahead remains challenging. Conservation is not a finished mission, but a long-term commitment that requires courage, collaboration, and vision. As climate change and human pressures intensify, our responsibility grows even greater.

Still, after 20 years, one thing is clear: coexistence is achievable when people are empowered, ecosystems are connected, and nature is recognized as part of our collective future. a landscape where solutions are developed, tested, and shared.



Orieta Hulea
CEO, WWF Romania

Romania hosts some of Europe's most iconic wildlife populations, including of large carnivores such as brown bears, grey wolves and Eurasian lynx, as well as the largest terrestrial mammal, the European bison, and the critically endangered Danube sturgeons. From the Carpathian Mountains to the Danube Delta, this exceptional biodiversity makes Romania a key stronghold for biodiversity at European level.



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However, over the past decades, wildlife has faced increasing pressure. Habitat loss and fragmentation, infrastructure development, unsustainable resource use, illegal killing and growing human-wildlife conflicts have put biodiversity under pressure. At the same time, conservation approaches have often focused on protection in isolation, without fully addressing the need for coexistence with local communities.

For WWF-Romania, wildlife conservation has therefore evolved into an integrated approach, restoring populations, reconnecting habitats, and building practical models where people and wildlife can coexist and thrive together. Over the past 20 years, this work has not only contributed to conserving biodiversity nationally but has also positioned Romania as an emerging reference for wildlife conservation in Europe, a landscape where solutions are developed, tested, and shared.



WWF'S ROLE IN THIS JOURNEY

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Over the past 20 years, WWF-Romania has played a key role in shifting wildlife conservation from reactive interventions to proactive, science-based and community-led or supported approaches.

WWF's contribution has focused on:

- bringing back species that disappeared from Romania, namely the European bison;
- improving the conservation status of threatened species like sturgeons;
- reducing human–wildlife conflicts through practical solutions;
- strengthening policies, monitoring systems and enforcement mechanisms;
- building public support and local ownership for wildlife conservation.

This work has helped position Romania as a key country for biodiversity conservation in Europe, while also highlighting the importance of balancing ecological goals with social realities.

HOW WE ACT

WWF-Romania's wildlife work combines multiple approaches:

SPECIES RECOVERY AND REINTRODUCTION

Restoring populations of locally extinct or threatened species, such as the European bison.

COMBATING ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES AND UNSUSTAINABLE USE

Through advocacy, monitoring, and cooperation with authorities, particularly for high-value species like sturgeons.

REDUCING HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT

By testing and scaling practical solutions that protect both livelihoods and wildlife.

IMPROVING GOVERNANCE AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS


By contributing to national and EU-level policies, management plans, and enforcement systems.

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES AND BUILDING SUPPORT

Ensuring that conservation delivers tangible benefits and is understood and accepted locally.



MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS



The following achievements illustrate how WWF's long-term work has contributed not only to protecting wildlife, but also to positioning Romania as a source of practical conservation solutions at European level.

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1 EUROPEAN BISON RETURNED TO ROMANIA AFTER NEARLY TWO CENTURIES

Reintroduction and recovery of a free-ranging population in the Țarcu Mountains

1.A SITUATION 20 YEARS AGO

The European bison had disappeared from Romania in the 19th century, following habitat loss and overexploitation. For nearly 200 years, the species was absent from the country's ecosystems, surviving globally only through captive breeding, with today's population descending from just 12 founding individuals.

At the same time, the landscape to which the species would return had changed significantly, becoming more fragmented and increasingly influenced by human activities, making natural recovery impossible without active intervention.

20 years ago, Vanatori Neamt Nature Park Administration started the reintroduction of the bison in Romania with a few individuals. 8 years after, WWF-Romania started the largest initiative to date to contribute to the recovery of the species in Romania.

1.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

WWF-Romania, together with partners such as Rewilding Europe and local communities, initiated a long-term reintroduction programme in the Țarcu Mountains.

The approach focused on:

- Careful habitat assessment and selection, including food availability and ecological suitability
- Ensuring genetic viability through controlled translocations
- Gradual reintroduction through multiple translocations
- Continuous scientific monitoring (movement, ecology, behavior, genetics)
- Strong engagement with local communities to support coexistence
- Creating opportunities for nature-based economic development, especially ecotourism.
- Procesul a început cu un studiu de fezabilitate realizat în 2012, urmat de primul transport de zimbri în 2014, și continuă și astăzi.

The process started with a feasibility study in 2012, followed by the first transport in 2014, and continues today.



1.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

Today, approximately 250 individuals roam freely in the Țarcu Mountains, forming one of the largest free-roaming populations in Eastern Europe.

- 10 translocations carried out
- 130 bison translocated to the Natura 2000 site Țarcu Mountains
- Population now naturally expanding.

Following a comprehensive genetic study conducted in 2024–2025, the population is estimated at around 250 individuals.

The impact of this initiative is multi-dimensional:

- **ECOLOGICAL IMPACT** – Often referred to as the “forest architect,” the European bison plays a vital role in maintaining ecosystem balance. Through grazing and movement, it supports forest and grassland regeneration, enhancing biodiversity.
- **GENETIC AND SCIENTIFIC IMPACT** – Ongoing monitoring provides valuable data that contributes to long-term conservation at European level and supports evidence-based management and research.
- **SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT** – The return of the bison has stimulated ecotourism and created new opportunities for local communities.
- **SYMBOLIC IMPACT** – The European bison has become a living symbol of Romania’s wild nature and of nature’s capacity to recover when given the chance.

WWF-Romania and its partners have successfully established a viable, free-roaming population, demonstrating that the reintroduction of an extinct-in-the-wild species is possible through collaboration, long-term commitment, and science-based action. Through close collaboration with local communities, WWF initiatives have helped unlock pathways for sustainable economic development, while also contributing to a growing sense of local pride and ownership.

At the same time, the project contributes to international conservation efforts, serving as a model for similar reintroduction initiatives across Europe.



1.D NEXT STEPS



The return of the European bison marks an important milestone, but it is only the beginning of a long-term process.

Looking ahead, the focus is on securing a resilient, connected, and self-sustaining population of European bison across the Carpathian landscape. This includes strengthening ecological corridors to enable movement between subpopulations, ensuring genetic diversity, and expanding suitable habitats.

A key priority remains deepening coexistence between people and wildlife. Continued investment in prevention measures, fair compensation systems, and community engagement will be essential to maintaining local support and building lasting partnerships. Empowering local communities through nature-based economic opportunities, such as ecotourism, remains central to this vision.

To support long-term coexistence, WWF contributes to:

- Developing effective systems for damage prevention and compensation
- Creating local economic opportunities linked to the presence of bison
- Fostering a sense of pride among local communities for their role in conserving this iconic species and promoting harmonious coexistence with nature.

WWF is also actively involved in developing a national strategic framework for the conservation and long-term management of European bison populations, including a dedicated national action plan.

Science and monitoring will continue to guide every step, ensuring that conservation remains adaptive, evidence-based, and effective.

Ultimately, the vision is clear: a thriving population of European bison, fully integrated into a dynamic landscape, where nature and people coexist.

2 ROMANIA'S FIRST BEAR-SMART COMMUNITY WAS CREATED

Improving human–bear coexistence through integrated, community-based solutions

2.A SITUATION 20 YEARS AGO

Romania hosts one of the largest brown bear populations in Europe but lacks a consistent long-term vision and strategic approach for their management and conservation. Over time, management practices have shifted frequently, influenced by changing policies, institutional fragmentation, and competing interests.

Following the transition from a centralized system after 1990, wildlife management became fragmented, with multiple actors involved but limited coordination and capacity to address the complex challenges of large carnivore conservation. The management of the species started to be ensured by individual hunting associations, initiating the farming type of management through massive supplementary feeding, which led to an increase in the size of the bear population.

At the same time, increasing habitat fragmentation, poor waste and generally attractants management, coupled with human expansion into natural areas, led to a rise in human–bear interactions. In the absence of effective prevention measures and clear intervention systems, conflicts escalated, often resulting in safety risks for communities and reactive measures that did not address root causes.

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2.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

In response, WWF-Romania developed a transdisciplinary approach to human–bear coexistence, combining field interventions, scientific research, community engagement, and policy advocacy.

A key initiative was launched in 2022 in Băile Tușnad, aiming at creating Romania's first bear-smart community.

The approach focused on:

- Improving waste management to eliminate/limit food attractants
- Improving the capacity of the intervention team
- Developing clear intervention and response protocols
- Strengthening monitoring and scientific understanding of bear behavior, including habituation
- Engaging and educating local communities to change behaviors and perceptions
- Promoting responsible tourism practices
- Facilitating collaboration between local authorities, environmental agencies, experts, and other stakeholders
- Promoting the visibility of the initiative at international level to foster experience exchanges with other communities.

This initiative aimed to shift from reactive, crisis-driven responses to a preventive, science-based and integrated model of coexistence.



2.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED



With WWF’s support, Băile Tușnad became the first bear-smart community in Romania, implementing a coordinated set of measures to reduce human–bear conflicts and improve coexistence.

The results have been significant:

- Bear-related damages decreased from 41 cases in 2021 to zero already in 2023
- Emergency calls related to bear presence dropped by 96%
- Waste management improvements significantly reduced attractants
- Local stakeholders now operate under clearer coordination and response mechanisms
- Inhabitants and tourists can safely walk in the evenings on the streets.

These changes have contributed to safer living conditions for both people and bears, while reducing the need for emergency interventions.

At the same time, the initiative has improved community awareness and perceptions, demonstrating that coexistence with large carnivores is possible when practical, locally adapted solutions are implemented in a coordinated way.

Băile Tușnad now serves as a national reference model for managing human–wildlife interactions and reducing conflicts through prevention-based approaches.

2.D NEXT STEPS

Building on the success of Băile Tuşnad, the priority is to replicate and scale the bear-smart model to other communities facing similar challenges across Romania.

This includes:

- Expanding prevention-based measures in high-conflict areas
- Strengthening institutional coordination and capacity
- Improving monitoring systems and data transparency
- Integrating coexistence principles into local development and tourism strategies
- Creating a National Bear-Smart Platform, to serve as an information and experience exchange place for communities interested in improving coexistence with bears.

To support long-term coexistence, WWF contributes to:

- Developing effective systems for damage prevention and compensation
- Supporting local authorities in implementing practical, science-based solutions
- Promoting responsible behavior among residents and visitors
- Fostering a sense of ownership and pride within communities for conserving this iconic species
- Promoting transdisciplinary stakeholder engagement to improve coexistence under different contexts.

WWF is also actively involved in improving the broader policy framework for brown bear management, advocating for:

- Science-based decision-making
- Better regulation of intervention measures
- Integration of prevention and coexistence measures into national policies.

While important progress has been made, challenges remain, particularly related to bear habituation, habitat fragmentation, inconsistent policy approaches, and the need for long-term, coordinated action across institutions.

The long-term vision is to enable safe and sustainable coexistence between people and large carnivores, with the bear-smart community model serving as a scalable solution at national level.

3 DANUBE STURGEON POPULATIONS REBUILT THROUGH LARGE-SCALE RESTOCKING EFFORTS

Over 60,000 young sturgeons released

3.A SITUATION 20 YEARS AGO

Sturgeons, often called “living fossils,” have inhabited the Danube River for millions of years. Romania hosts the last viable populations of wild sturgeons in the European Union, making the country critically important for their survival.

However, over the past decades, these species have faced dramatic declines due to overfishing, poaching, habitat degradation, and river fragmentation caused by dams that block migration routes. By the early 2000s, several sturgeon species in the Danube were on the brink of extinction.

Although Romania introduced a ban on commercial sturgeon fishing in 2006, illegal fishing and trade continued to threaten the remaining populations, while natural reproduction remained extremely limited.

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3.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

WWF-Romania, together with regional and international partners, adopted a comprehensive approach to sturgeon conservation, combining policy advocacy, enforcement support, scientific research, and direct conservation actions.

A key component of this effort has been restocking programs, aimed at supporting population recovery by releasing juvenile sturgeons into the Danube.

These actions were complemented by:

- Strengthening anti-poaching measures and supporting enforcement authorities
- Promoting regional cooperation across Danube countries
- Supporting scientific monitoring and genetic research
- Raising awareness among local communities and fishermen
- Advocating for long-term protection measures at national and EU level

This integrated approach aimed not only to prevent extinction, but to create conditions for long-term recovery.



3.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED



Thanks to WWF's work and strong regional cooperation, over 60,000 young sturgeons have been released into the Danube, marking a significant step toward rebuilding populations once on the edge of extinction.

These restocking efforts contribute to:

- Supporting the recovery of critically endangered species such as beluga, Russian sturgeon, and stellate sturgeon
- Strengthening genetic diversity and population resilience
- Complementing natural reproduction in a highly altered river system

At the same time, WWF's broader efforts have helped keep sturgeon conservation high on the public and policy agenda, reinforcing the importance of the Lower Danube as a last refuge for these species.

While population recovery remains a long-term process, these actions represent concrete progress toward preventing the disappearance of sturgeons from the region.

3.D NEXT STEPS

Ensuring the long-term survival of Danube sturgeons requires sustained and coordinated action at regional level.

Key priorities include:

- Continuing restocking programs based on scientific guidance
- Strengthening enforcement to combat illegal fishing and trade
- Restoring river connectivity to enable natural migration and reproduction
- Expanding monitoring and research to track population recovery
- Enhancing cross-border cooperation among Danube countries.

At the same time, WWF continues to advocate for stronger policy frameworks and investment in nature-based solutions that support both biodiversity and river health.

The long-term vision is to restore self-sustaining sturgeon populations in the Danube, ensuring that these iconic species remain part of Europe's natural heritage.



4 ROMANIA'S FIRST REPORTING SYSTEM FOR ACCIDENTAL STURGEON CATCHES ESTABLISHED

Strengthening cooperation with fishing communities to improve knowledge and protection of critically endangered sturgeons

4.A SITUATION 20 YEARS AGO

Sturgeons in the Danube have faced severe decline over the past decades due to overfishing, habitat fragmentation, and illegal trade. Although fishing bans were introduced, one of the least visible but persistent threats remained accidental bycatch, where sturgeons are unintentionally caught during legal fishing activities.

At the same time, there was no functional system in place to record or monitor accidental catches, resulting in major gaps in data. This limited the capacity of authorities and researchers to understand population trends and design effective conservation measures.

Equally important, fishermen, whose livelihoods are closely connected to the river, were rarely engaged as partners in conservation, and reporting bycatch was often avoided due to lack of trust, unclear rules, or fear of sanctions.

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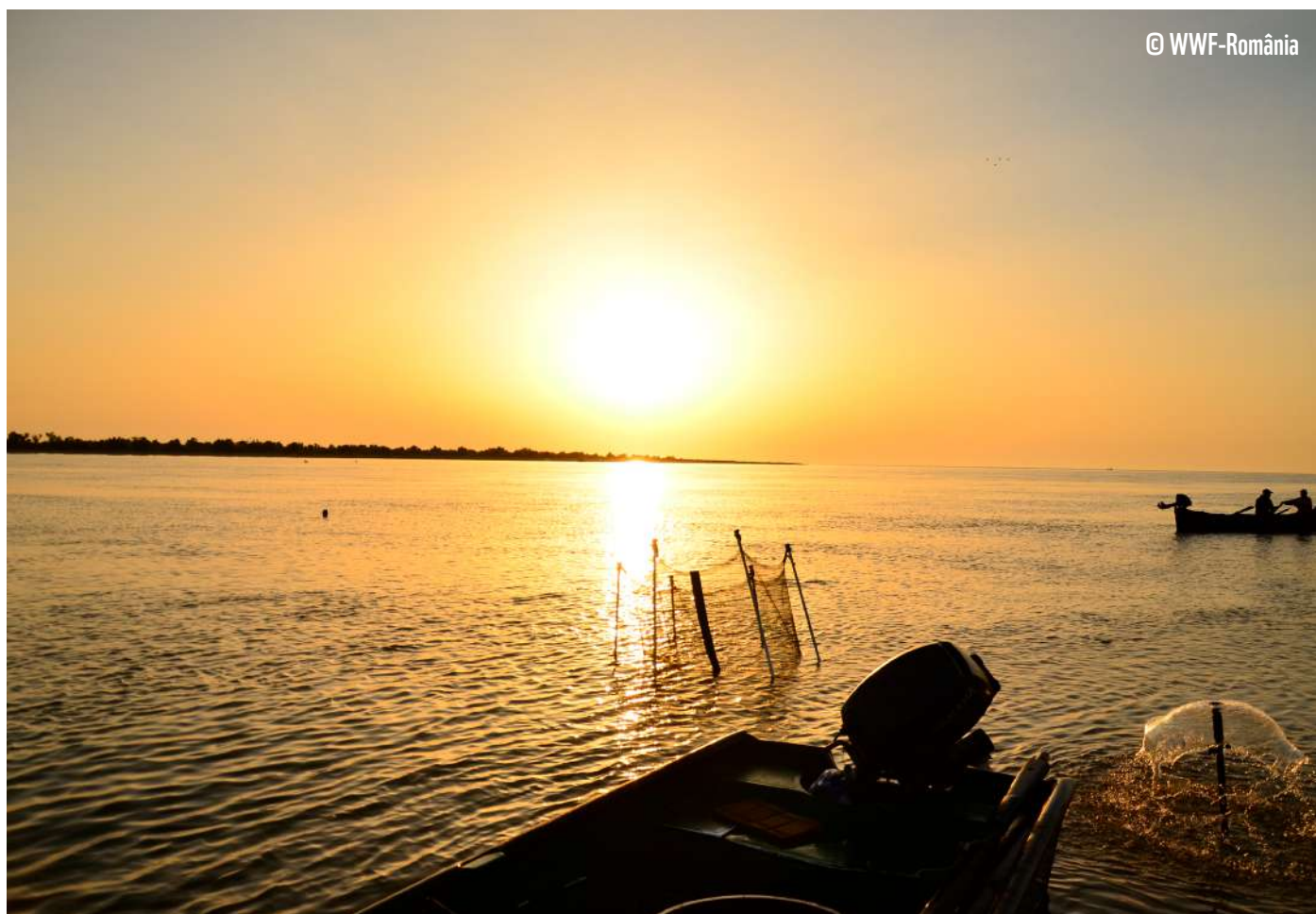


4.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

WWF-Romania focused on improving the knowledge base and strengthening cooperation with fishing communities, recognizing that long-term conservation depends on both ecological and social solutions.

Key actions included:

- Developing and piloting a reporting system for accidental sturgeon bycatch, co-designed with fishermen, authorities, and researchers
- Testing the system in Danube Delta and Lower Danube communities, ensuring it reflects real fishing practices and constraints
- Building long-term relationships with fishermen, creating trust and open communication
- Introducing a Social Recognition Scheme, rewarding fishermen who report bycatch and encouraging voluntary participation
- Supporting alternative livelihood initiatives, helping reduce pressure on endangered species while maintaining local economic stability.



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4.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

WWF successfully established Romania's first functional system for reporting accidental sturgeon catches, filling a key gap in conservation efforts.

This system strengthens the conditions needed for recovery by improving transparency, knowledge, and stakeholder engagement.

Key results include

- Over 350 bycatch reports collected, generating data which previously was almost inexistent
- Increased participation and openness among fishermen, who are becoming active contributors to conservation
- Improved collaboration between fishermen, researchers, and authorities
- Better understanding of sturgeon distribution, risks, and human threats and pressures.

The most significant outcome is the shift in relationships: from limited interaction and low trust to active cooperation, where fishers are recognized as partners in protecting species that are also part of their cultural and economic reality.

Following successful testing in pilot areas, the system has been progressively expanded to additional communities, strengthening monitoring efforts at a broader scale.



4.D NEXT STEPS

The next phase focuses on consolidating this collaborative model and embedding it into long-term conservation systems.

Key priorities include:

- Expanding the reporting system to more fishing communities along the Danube
- Integrating collected data into national monitoring and policy frameworks
- Strengthening incentives and recognition mechanisms for responsible fishing practices
- Continuing to support alternative livelihoods, reducing dependency on vulnerable species
- Deepening trust and cooperation between stakeholders.

This approach helps create the social and institutional conditions necessary for sturgeon populations to recover sustainably.

The long-term vision is a co-management model, where conservation is shared between authorities, scientists, and local communities, ensuring that both biodiversity and livelihoods are sustained over time.



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5 ECOLOGICAL CORRIDORS FOR LARGE CARNIVORES IDENTIFIED IN ROMANIA

First national corridor network recognized as European best practice

5.A SITUATION 20 YEARS AGO

Twenty years ago, Romania still hosted some of Europe's most important populations of large carnivores (bears, wolves, and lynx) across the Carpathian Mountains. However, despite this strong ecological foundation, increasing fragmentation of habitats was already emerging as a major threat.

Post-1990 land-use changes, infrastructure expansion, deforestation, and uncoordinated spatial planning led to the gradual isolation of habitats. While protected areas existed, they were often treated as isolated islands, with limited consideration for the ecological connections between them.

At the same time, conservation policies focused primarily on species protection within designated areas, with little emphasis on maintaining landscape connectivity, a critical factor for ensuring long-term population viability, and genetic exchange.



5.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

WWF-Romania, including key contributions from experts such as Cristian-Remus Papp, played a pioneering role in introducing and advancing the concept of ecological connectivity in the Carpathians.

Through a combination of scientific research, policy engagement, and regional cooperation, WWF:

- Developed one of the first large-scale ecological connectivity assessments in the whole Carpathian ecoregion, identifying priority corridors for large carnivores based on habitat suitability and movement patterns
- Contributed to the creation of the first three ecodeucts in Romania, along the Deva-Lugoj highway to facilitate the movement of large carnivores between the Apuseni and Southern Carpathians, as part of an interdisciplinary approach and collaboration with the Infrastructure and Ecology Network Europe
- Mapped and validated Romania's national network of ecological corridors, identifying core habitats across the mountain range
- Promoted the integration of connectivity into national spatial planning, forestry, and infrastructure policies, informing highway planning to include green infrastructure elements in sensitive areas from ecological connectivity point of view
- Facilitated cooperation between Carpathian countries, positioning connectivity as a shared regional priority, including for the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention.

This work contributed to shifting conservation thinking from isolated protected areas toward a landscape-scale approach, where ecological processes and species movement are maintained across borders.



5.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

WWF's efforts resulted in the identification and recognition of Romania's first national ecological corridor network for large carnivores, providing a scientific and policy foundation for connectivity conservation.

Key achievements include:

- Establishing a coherent, science-based network of ecological corridors for bears, wolves, and lynx
- Securing recognition at European level, with the initiative highlighted by the European Commission as a best practice for ecological connectivity
- Contributing to the development of the International Action Plan for the Conservation of Large Carnivores and Ensuring Ecological Connectivity in the Carpathians, adopted under the Carpathian Convention.

This marked a significant shift from fragmented conservation efforts toward coordinated, transboundary approaches at landscape scale.

WWF Romania's long-term work on connectivity has also influenced broader policy discussions and laid the groundwork for integrating ecological corridors into infrastructure planning and biodiversity strategies.



5.D NEXT STEPS

The next phase focuses on translating mapping and policy recognition into effective implementation on the ground.

Key priorities include:

- Integrating ecological corridors into spatial planning and infrastructure development, ensuring that new projects avoid or mitigate fragmentation
- Securing legal recognition and protection for priority corridors at national level
- Promoting wildlife-friendly infrastructure solutions, such as ecological passages and crossings
- Strengthening cross-border coordination to maintain connectivity across the entire Carpathian region
- Continuing monitoring and research, building on WWF's scientific work to ensure corridors remain functional over time.

Ensuring ecological connectivity is essential not only for large carnivores, but for the resilience of entire ecosystems.

The long-term vision is a connected Carpathian landscape, where wildlife can move freely, ecosystems remain functional, and conservation efforts are coordinated across countries and sectors.



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6 PROTECTED AREAS EXPANDED AND STRENGTHENED TO SUPPORT WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Extensive Natura 2000 network designated, and management improved for key species and habitats

2.A SITUATION 20 YEARS AGO

Twenty years ago, Romania's natural landscapes still hosted some of Europe's most important wildlife populations, including large carnivores and rare and endemic species dependent on intact habitats. However, many of these areas lacked formal protection or effective management.

The Natura 2000 network was only beginning to be developed, and conservation efforts were often fragmented, with limited coordination between institutions, scientists, and local stakeholders. Many ecologically valuable areas were exposed to increasing pressures such as habitat loss and fragmentation, unsustainable resource use, and infrastructure development.

At the same time, systemic challenges, including weak institutional coordination, inconsistent political commitment, limited scientific data, and increasing habitat fragmentation, reduced the effectiveness of early conservation efforts and slowed the transition toward a coherent national approach to biodiversity protection.

The absence of clear management frameworks meant that even protected areas lacked concrete guidance on how to balance conservation objectives with human activities.



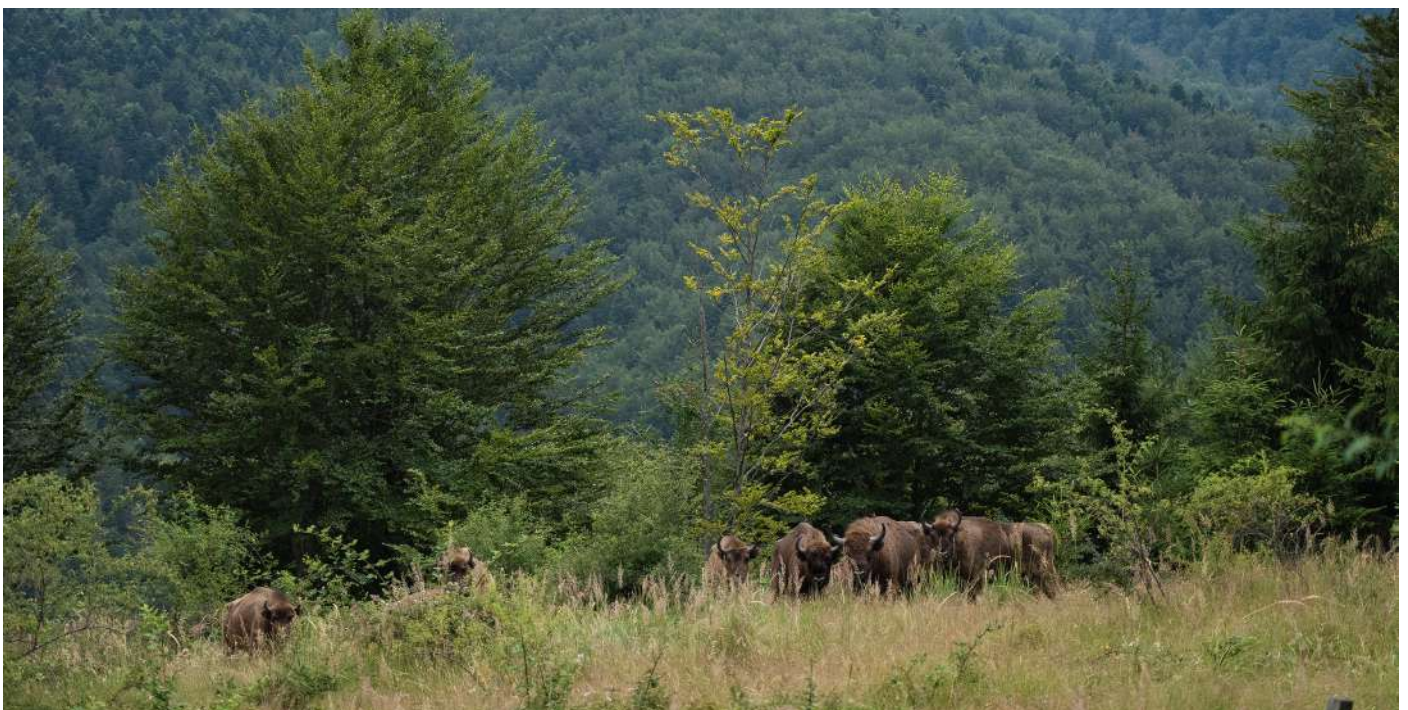
6.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

WWF-Romania played a key role in both expanding the protected area network and improving how these areas are managed, with a strong focus on safeguarding wildlife and their habitats.

Through a combination of scientific research, policy advocacy, and field-based conservation, WWF:

- Supported the designation and expansion of Natura 2000 sites, ensuring protection for critical habitats and species
- Contributed to the development of management plans, defining conservation measures, permitted activities, and long-term objectives
- Promoted the integration of wildlife conservation needs into land-use planning and protected area governance
- Developed a management effectiveness assessment tool to track the progress in individual protected areas
- Brought together civil society organizations through the Natura 2000 Coalition, strengthening advocacy and oversight for biodiversity protection
- Supported local initiatives that link conservation with sustainable livelihoods, including ecotourism and nature-based businesses.

This approach positioned protected areas not only as zones of restriction, but also as functional landscapes supporting both wildlife and people.



6.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

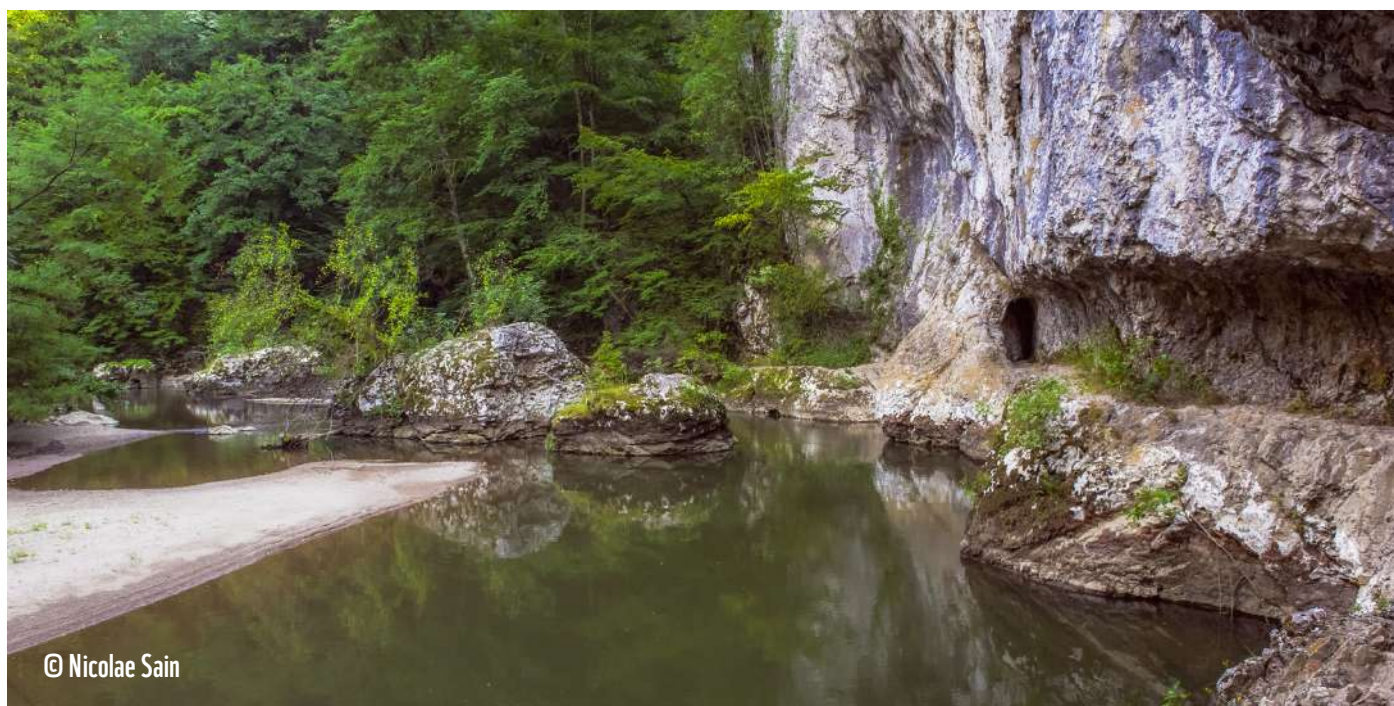
WWF's work contributed to the expansion and strengthening of Romania's protected area network, including a significant number of Natura 2000 sites that now safeguard key ecosystems across the country.

Key results include:

- Improved protection for habitats essential to large carnivores and other species of high conservation value
- Developed management plans for Podisul Hartibaciului, Codrii seculari Strâmbu-Băiuț, Parcul Național Cheile Nerei - Beușnița, and multiple Danube floodplain areas
- Supported the development of the management plans of the Maramureș Mountains Nature Park and Apuseni Nature Park
- Strengthened legal and institutional frameworks supporting biodiversity conservation
- Establishment of the Natura 2000 Coalition, enabling civil society to actively contribute to conservation governance.

These efforts have helped maintain and restore habitats critical for wildlife movement, feeding, and reproduction, while also supporting ecosystem services and local economies.

At the same time, WWF Romania contributed to improving the methodology for identifying strictly protected areas, supporting the science-based designation aligned with the EU objective of conserving 10% of land under strict protection.



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6.D NEXT STEPS

While significant progress has been made, ensuring that protected areas effectively support wildlife conservation remains an ongoing priority.

Several key challenges continue to limit the full impact of protected areas: some Natura 2000 sites still lack management plans, many lack proper administration, implementation is often delayed, and funding remains insufficient, including limited compensation mechanisms for landowners

Key directions include:

- Strengthening the administration and implementation of management plans across Natura 2000 sites
- Securing sustainable funding mechanisms and fair compensation systems for landowners and local communities
- Improving coordination between institutions and ensuring long-term political commitment
- Expanding scientific monitoring and data collection to support evidence-based management
- Addressing ongoing pressures such as habitat fragmentation, illegal logging, and infrastructure development

Looking ahead, WWF aims to further integrate protected areas into a nature-positive economy, where conservation supports resilient ecosystems, thriving wildlife populations, and sustainable livelihoods.

The long-term vision is a coherent and effectively managed network of protected areas, functioning as the backbone of biodiversity conservation in Romania and ensuring that wildlife can continue to thrive in a rapidly changing landscape.





SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES AHEAD

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Despite progress, wildlife conservation in Romania still faces important structural challenges and barriers that limit effectiveness and long-term impact.

HABITAT FRAGMENTATION AND LOSS OF CONNECTIVITY

Infrastructure development and land-use change continue to disrupt ecological corridors and river connectivity, limiting species movement and weakening ecosystem function across terrestrial and freshwater systems

INCREASING HUMAN-WILDLIFE INTERACTIONS

Rising interactions, particularly with large carnivores, are driven by habituation processes, habitat pressures, limited prevention systems, and uneven local capacity, leading to tensions and reactive responses

LIMITED CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES

Gaps in tools, resources, and coordination affect the ability to manage human–wildlife interactions, enforce regulations, and support recovery efforts

FRAGMENTED GOVERNANCE AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Responsibilities are split across sectors, with limited coordination, inconsistent implementation, and gaps between national policies and local realities

GAPS IN COORDINATION AND USE OF MONITORING DATA

Data on species, human–wildlife interactions, and management interventions is improving, but remains fragmented and unevenly integrated into decision-making processes

MISALIGNED INCENTIVES AND LIMITED INVESTMENT IN COEXISTENCE AND CONSERVATION

Financial and policy incentives do not yet sufficiently support prevention, coexistence, and the maintenance of functional ecosystems

LIMITED STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION ACROSS RELEVANT SECTORS

For complex conservation issues, such as human-wildlife interactions or protected area management, stakeholder participation processes should be improved. Not only should the environmental sector contribute, but also sectors such as agriculture, forestry, transport, water management, tourism, development and public works, research and education, finance, etc. True transdisciplinary approaches are needed.

LIMITED UNDERSTANDING OF WILDLIFE’S ROLE IN ECOSYSTEM FUNCTIONING AND HUMAN WELL-BEING

Public and policy narratives often focus on risks and conflicts, with insufficient recognition of the role of wildlife in sustaining healthy landscapes and river systems, and the benefits these provide to people



These challenges show that wildlife conservation is not only about protecting species. It depends on how ecosystems are managed, how decisions are made, and how well the role of nature is understood within systems that support people and communities.

LOOKING AHEAD

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The next phase of WWF-Romania's wildlife work will focus on strengthening the systems that enable effective conservation and long-term coexistence between people and wildlife.



Key priorities include:

STRENGTHENING ECOLOGICAL CONNECTIVITY ACROSS LANDSCAPES AND RIVER SYSTEMS

Identifying, securing, and integrating ecological corridors into spatial planning and infrastructure to support species movement, including migration routes for sturgeons and large-scale connectivity in the Carpathians

ADVANCING LOCALLY LED COEXISTENCE APPROACHES

Supporting practical, wildlife-smart solutions that reduce risks, improve safety, and strengthen the capacity of communities and authorities to manage interactions proactively

STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF COMMUNITIES IN CONSERVATION SYSTEMS

Supporting approaches that connect conservation with local realities, including nature-positive livelihoods and increased local ownership of conservation outcomes

IMPROVING SCIENCE, MONITORING, AND DATA SYSTEMS

Strengthening data collection and integration for priority species such as large carnivores, bison, and sturgeons to support adaptive management and informed decision-making

IMPROVING GOVERNANCE AND POLICY COHERENCE AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

Advancing coordinated, science-based, and participatory frameworks that better align national policies with implementation on the ground and with EU standards

ALIGNING INCENTIVES AND INVESTMENT WITH CONSERVATION OUTCOMES

Promoting financial mechanisms and policy incentives that support coexistence, ecosystem functionality, and long-term conservation outcomes

SUPPORTING SPECIES RECOVERY AND FUNCTIONAL ECOSYSTEMS

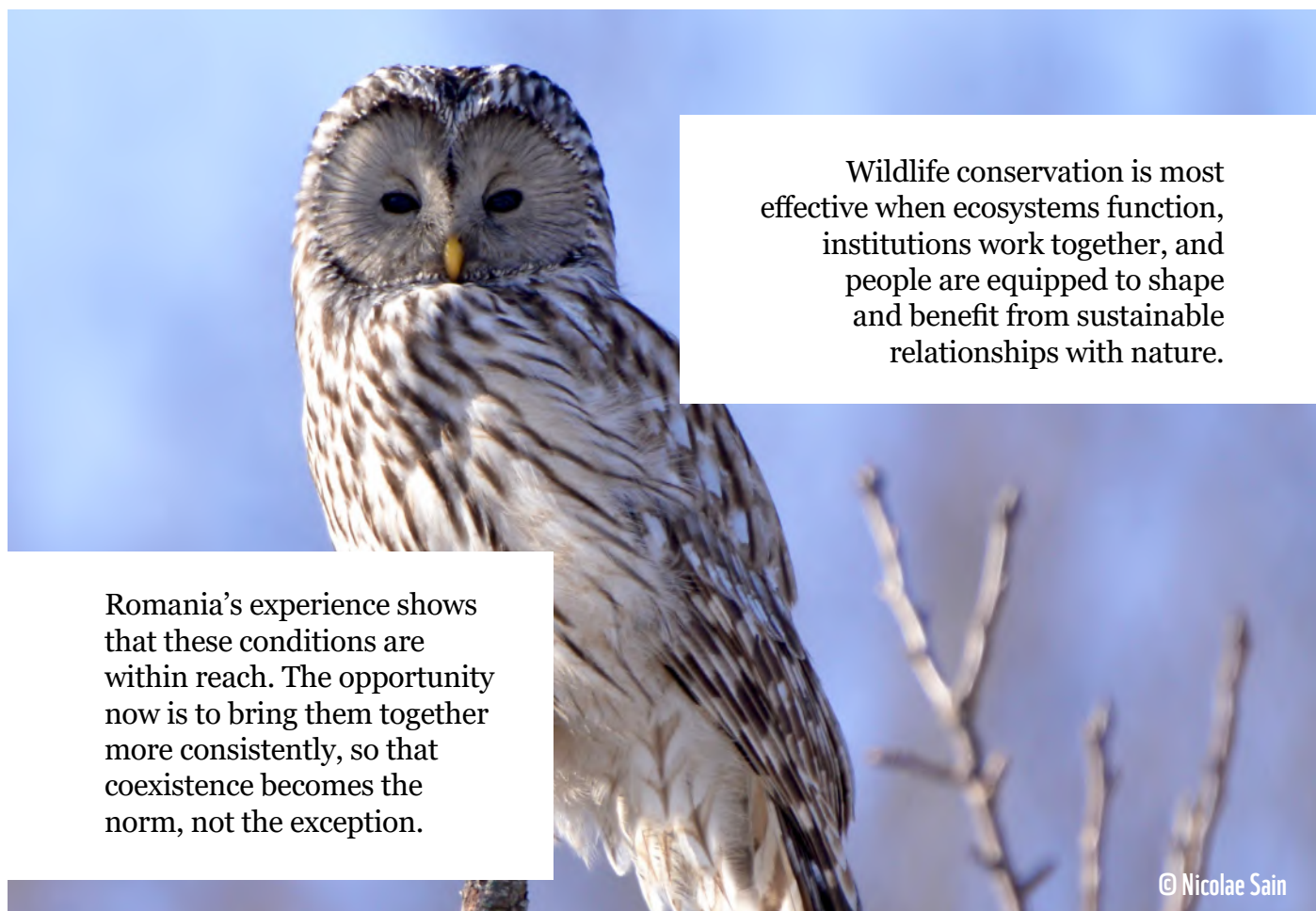
Advancing conservation actions for priority species while ensuring the ecological conditions, such as connectivity and habitat quality, needed for their recovery

ADVANCING INNOVATION IN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Innovative solutions can improve and ease wildlife conservation and management. AI-driven tools can reduce conservation efforts and improve the efficiency of e.g., intervention teams.

SUPPORTING SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

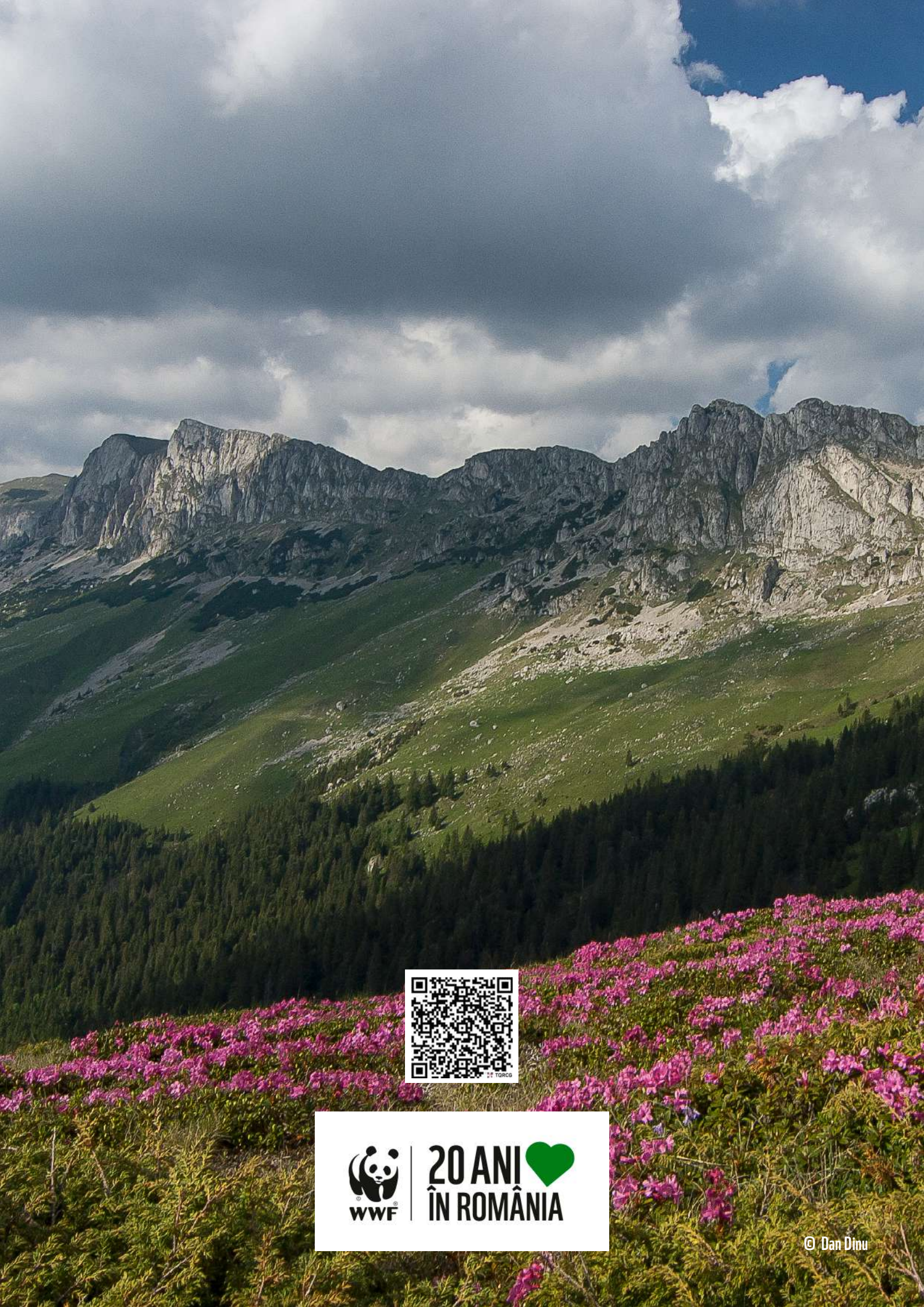
Scientific research is essential for informed decision making. WWF-Romania is committed to continue to contribute to practical research together with key partners from academia and relevant institutions.



Wildlife conservation is most effective when ecosystems function, institutions work together, and people are equipped to shape and benefit from sustainable relationships with nature.

Romania's experience shows that these conditions are within reach. The opportunity now is to bring them together more consistently, so that coexistence becomes the norm, not the exception.

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