

# Rewilding Europe

A new beginning. For wildlife. For us.

*Bringing the variety of life back to Europe's abandoned lands*



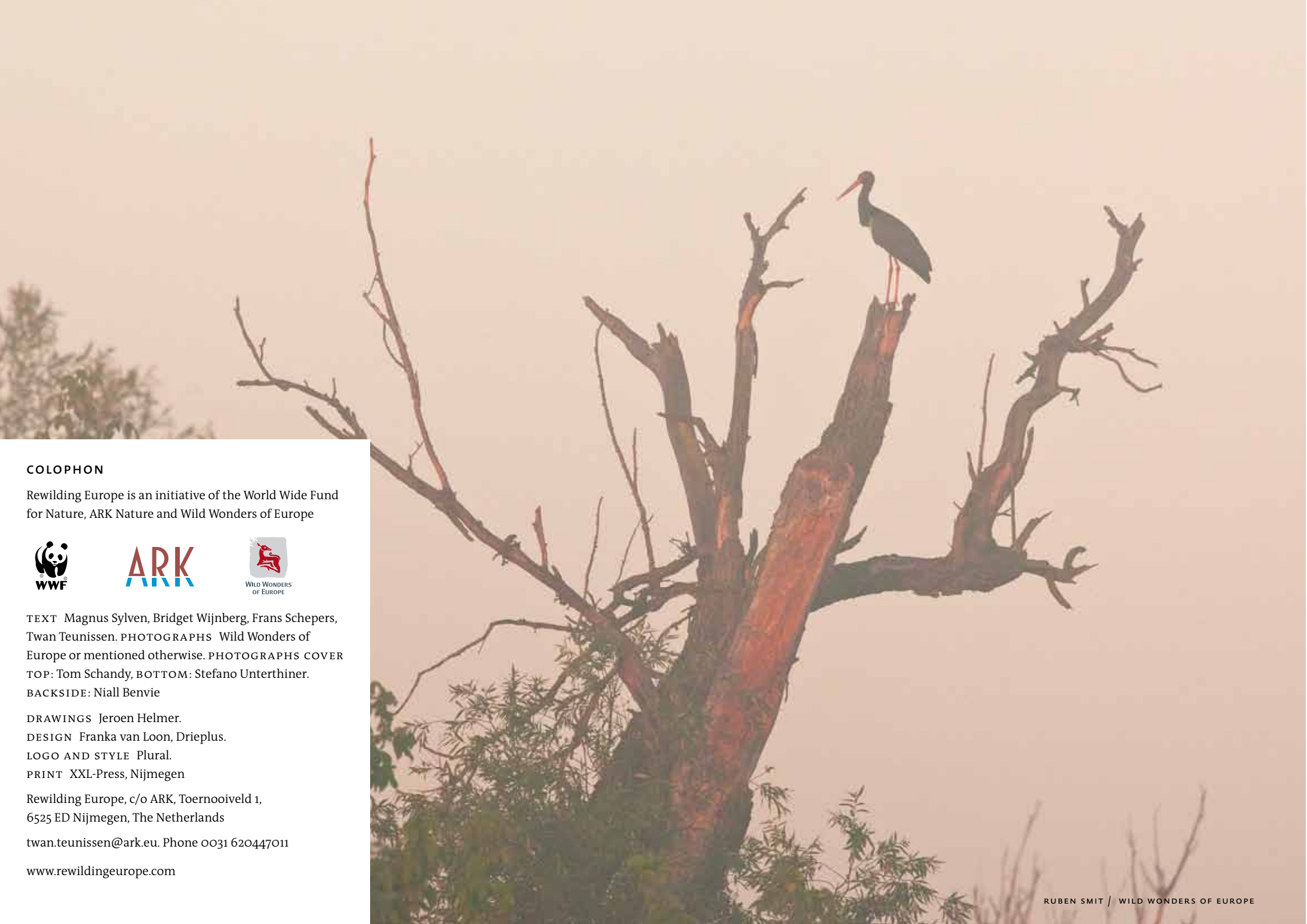


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## COLOPHON

Rewilding Europe is an initiative of the World Wide Fund for Nature, ARK Nature and Wild Wonders of Europe



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# Rewilding Europe: What are we waiting for?

Rewilding Europe is an ambitious, new initiative which aims to turn a unique historical situation into an opportunity – the urbanisation and depopulation of rural areas and the resultant large-scale land abandonment in the European countryside. Instead of being perceived as a problem, this creates an unprecedented opportunity for the return of wild nature on one of the most crowded continents in the world. An opportunity that could provide the basis for a new economy in Europe, for those people who still live in these areas and for those who want to enjoy new landscapes, with abundant wildlife, attractive sceneries – never experienced before by any modern person.

To grasp the opportunities, a change in mind-set and perspective is required. And a recognition that the way we have often managed nature across most of the continent is no longer sustainable, nor economically viable. It is in recognition that wild nature is something genuinely European, intimately linked to our history, culture – to the whole society.

The Rewilding Europe initiative was launched in 2010 to explore these new opportunities, selecting five project areas from 20 nominations across Europe to create the first trial areas for this new approach: the DANUBE DELTA (Romania/Ukraine), the EASTERN CARPATHIANS (Poland/Slovakia/Ukraine), the SOUTHERN

CARPATHIANS (Romania), VELEBIT (Croatia) and WESTERN IBERIA (Portugal/Spain).

Outlined within this document, we have set ourselves an ambitious vision, clear goal and concrete milestones to be reached by the year 2020. The focus will be on the creation of at least 1 million hectares of new wildlands across Europe by 2020 as a baseline. However, the ambition is to stimulate similar projects in other parts of the continent, shifting the land use of 10 million hectares towards wild nature. By doing so, we hope to inspire a new sense of 'pride in the wild' amongst the wider European audience.

You are invited to join us. To explore new avenues for the future that will benefit both nature and the citizens of Europe. Welcome to a 21st century Europe!



**Princess Laurentien of The Netherlands  
Senior Advisor WWF**

*'I believe in Rewilding Europe because it is about turning a problem into opportunities, by putting abandoned land to good use. By revealing Europe's shared natural heritage, the initiative serves the interest of all of us across Europe, both economically and aesthetically. So everyone can be a winner: European citizens, nature and the economy. What are we waiting for?'*



STEFANO UNTERTHINER / WILD WONDERS OF EUROPE



# Europe is changing

## A SHORT HISTORY OF EUROPEAN NATURE

It is only relatively recently that the European landscape began to change dramatically. Up until 1700, the world population only amounted to about 600 million and there was still a lot of nature present in Europe. But around this time, a new perspective took root, which began to change the landscape and our relationship with nature. Illustrating the attitude of the day, in 1637, René Descartes – one of the most influential thinkers in the western world – stated that humans are 'lords and masters of nature'.

Subsequently, the Industrial Revolution which occurred between the late 18th to the 19th century resulted in major changes to agriculture, manufacturing, mining, transport, and technology having a profound effect on the socio-economic and cultural conditions of society. This marked a major turning point in human history; almost every aspect of daily life was influenced in some way. Most notably, average income and population began to exhibit unprecedented growth. And with that the natural landscapes started to change dramatically.

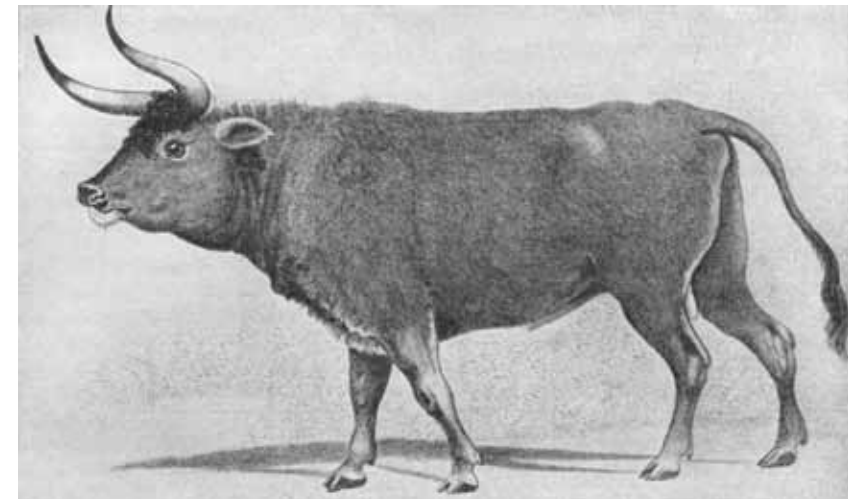
A roll call of extinctions includes the Aurochs (Jaktorów Forest, Poland in 1627), Europe's wild horse – the Tarpan (Russia, 1909) – and the European bison (exterminated in the wild in 1919 in Poland and in the Caucasus in 1927, but surviving

in captivity, just). Not to mention the successful campaigns against Europe's wolves, brown bears, lynx, deer, ibex and chamois.

Many people believe that the open landscapes that occur in Europe first appeared with the introduction of agriculture, but in fact most of these habitats have ancient origins alongside the original wild grazers. 'Real' European wilderness is often associated with vast forests, which is not surprising considering that many wild herbivores became extinct a long time ago, and with them, our extensive natural steppes and other (semi-) open landscapes. Gradually domestic cattle and horses did however replace the wild animals and in part maintained some of the same natural functions.

## NOTICED AND UNNOTICED CHANGES

Every period in time brings with it opportunities and challenges. The 21st century Europe is no different. In our daily lives we are exposed to economic downturn, job uncertainty, health deterioration, etc. Through the media we are bombarded with emerging threats – the crumbling economy, population growth, famine, war, and natural catastrophes, such as hurricanes and flooding, nowadays increasingly associated with climate change. Sometimes even the on-going loss of global biodiversity reaches the headlines.





But other aspects and changes pass by less noticed. One is the urbanization of the world. Europe is one of the continents where this phenomenon is particularly prominent. During the last 50 years, the cities of Europe have expanded on average by 78%, whereas the overall population has grown by only 33%. By 2020, it is estimated that four out of five European citizens will live in urban areas. With the depopulation of the countryside and an ageing rural society, more land has been taken out of agricultural production. Between 1960 and 2000, the European countryside experienced a dramatic change in land use. Some regions were more affected than others, especially those of less importance for agricultural production: the Alps, Pyrenees, Portugal, central Spain, Sardinia, former East Germany, the Baltic States, Carpathians, Poland, and the Balkans. No precise figures exist for the amount of land abandoned, but in some countries – like Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia- between 10 and 21% of the farmland was lost within ten years. In the period 1960 to 1990, the percentage of grasslands across the 27 EU countries decreased from 19% to 7%.

#### THE THREAT

Projections for the future speak the same language with a continuation of current trends. Although there is some uncertainty in the different scenarios at the European level, the trend of further land abandonment is evident. According to the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP), widespread land abandonment is

forecasted to continue until 2030, particularly in Spain, Portugal, parts of Finland and Sweden, highland area of France, Italy, central Europe, Romania, Bulgaria and the UK, and parts of Greece. Estimates indicate a total decline of agriculture, grasslands and semi-natural habitats of more than 30 million hectares and a subsequent increase of forest areas across the EU.

Present market conditions underline the future vulnerability and fragility of low-intensity grazing livestock systems in many parts of the EU and especially small, semi-subsistence farms – further increasing the risk of abandonment on land unsuited to other systems of production. The biofuel market will grow, but only in a few EU states (France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania and United Kingdom), and if nothing else, it will only serve to put pressure on grasslands in the more fertile areas. The biggest ‘threat’ to the conservation values in the semi-natural landscape may come from afforestation of farmland and forest expansion may occur opportunistically as result of the abandonment of marginal farmland or deliberately as result of specific, public funding schemes.

The EU Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) has played an important role in shaping the agricultural landscape in Europe since it was introduced in 1958. Until now, however, the main beneficiaries have been those farmers located on the most fertile soils – not the ones trying to survive in the more marginal areas. A new reform of CAP is in making, scheduled for 2013. In the future, the most likely scenario is that the current trends of





CORNELIA DÖRR / WILD WONDERS OF EUROPE



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shifting the production away from the less productive areas to the more fertile will continue:

- The restructuring of the dairy sector will continue towards fewer, larger production units
- Low-intensity grazing systems for cattle, sheep and goats together with mountain dairy systems will become even less viable, leading to significant declines in the livestock numbers
- Environmentally important systems will often not survive without significant long-term public funding, which is of questionable sustainability

Many of the marginal farming areas serve as one of the strongholds of Europe's biological

wealth – often associated with the traditionally used landscapes. However, with the custodians of some of these treasures – the small-scale, traditional farmers – leaving, the conservation of the European natural heritage is subsequently facing a tremendous challenge. Once abandoned, the semi-open landscape is quickly changing with shrubs and young trees invading the open patches, and species that are adapted specifically to this landscape becoming isolated and trapped.

If nothing is done, we risk ending up with a 'digital' Europe – intensive farming on fertile soils or forests dominating the less productive regions. And with that we will face an almost irreversible decline of a significant number of

our animals and plants. This would be a new face for Europe never experienced before in human history.

#### THE OPPORTUNITY

But could the depopulation of the European countryside at the same time provide a solution? Could those areas taken out of farming be returned to naturally functioning areas with all the important species and processes once again shaping the landscapes? Could the 'rewilding' of nature lay the foundation for a socially and economically sustainable rural Europe in certain regions? Could this even help combat the impact of climate change?





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### THE WILDLIFE COMEBACK IN EUROPE

Surprisingly enough, the last 30-40 years has been an era of significant wildlife comeback in Europe. According to the 2010 'Living Planet Report', the period 1970 to 2007 saw an average increase of animal populations of 43% in Europe. Better 'environmental protection' is claimed to be a major contributing factor, but recent changes in land use with abandonment of farmland, reduced hunting pressure, and higher productivity of many ecosystems due to more nutritional input from human activities (eutrophication of lakes and coastal areas, nitrogen deposition from air, etc.) probably also played an important role. Land seems to have benefitted more than the sea – many marine species still

struggle, often associated with the escalating overharvest of diminishing fish resources.

The wildlife come back encompasses a long list of species, particularly mammals and birds. In today's Europe there are probably larger populations of certain species than we have had for many centuries, such as roe deer, moose, wild boar, chamois, ibex, cormorant, greylag goose, barnacle goose, mute swan, common crane, black stork, and white-tailed eagle. With active protection and re-introductions, other species have also benefitted including ibex, beaver, otter, eagle owl, peregrine, bearded and black vulture. And even the Iberian lynx has started to recover marginally from the worst situation.

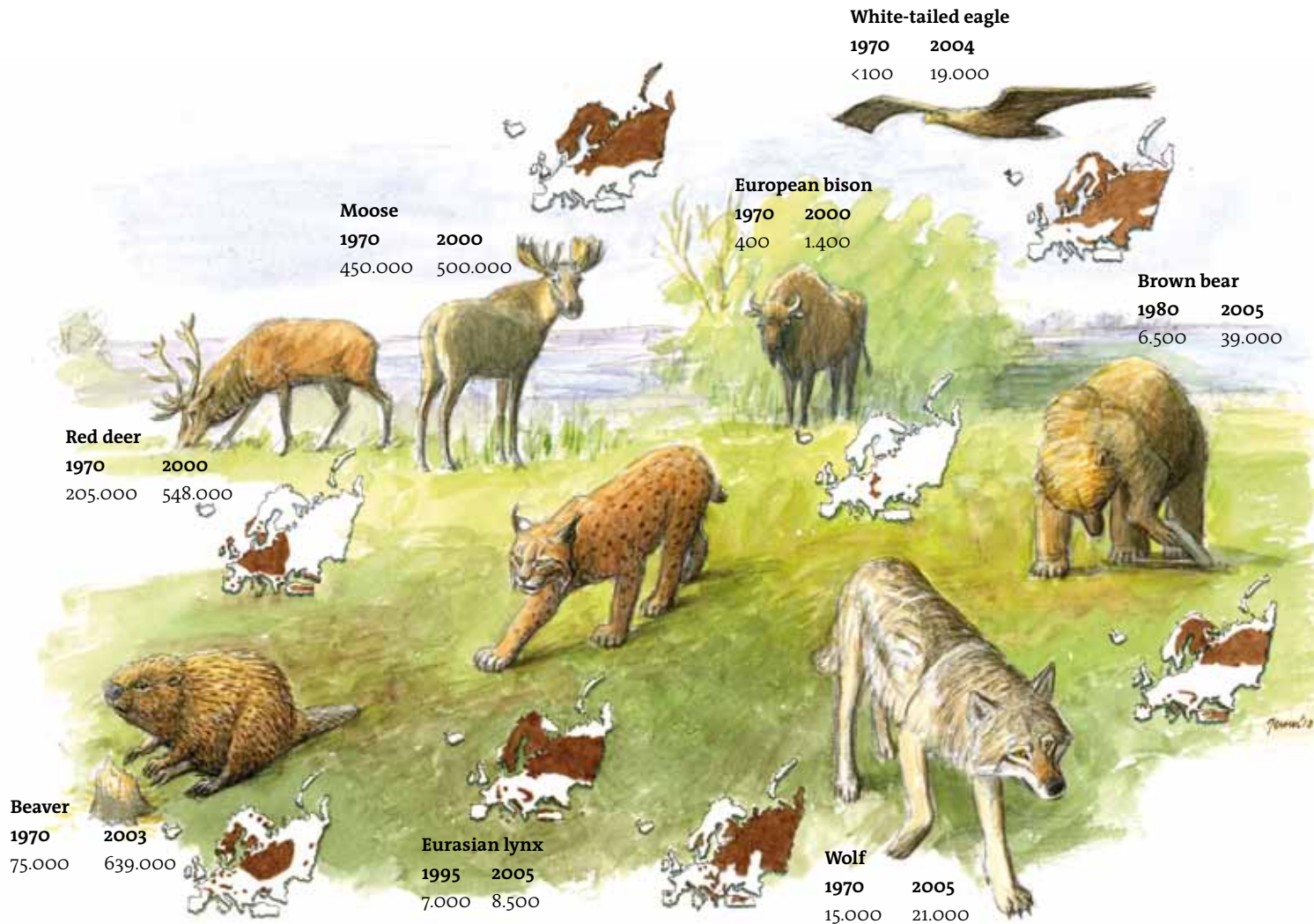
The large carnivores are also doing better. From previous bastions in Eastern Europe in particular, wolves and brown bears are re-colonising all corners of the continent: Scandinavia, Germany, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, France, Spain and Portugal, and it will not be long before the first wolves turn up in the most crowded country of the continent – The Netherlands. This success has been both natural and as a consequence of dedicated conservationists and hunting organisations, which assisted the Eurasian lynx and the brown bear in particular to reoccupy lost territories.

### THREE KEY SPECIES TO REVITALIZE ECOSYSTEM FUNCTIONING

The significant come back of several species provides a very important foundation for a successful 'rewilding' of the European continent. However, the lack of wild living, large grazing herbivores – bison, bovines and horses – is a critical gap in the function of most European ecosystems. As key species, significant resurgence in their population numbers is vital to create a solid foundation for the successful 'rewilding' of many parts of Europe.

Since returning to former agricultural practices is no longer a realistic option, a new appreciation of the original role that these great grazers once served must be introduced. Their return to Europe's most important nature areas is the best guarantee for the sustainable survival of a significant part of Europe's natural heritage. In many areas of the continent we can no longer continue with the subsidized management system of nature, which prevailed until today.

The starting point for bringing back historically lost wild species can, consequently, focus on three, namely the Aurochs, Tarpan and European Bison. The bison already live in wild populations. For the other two, rewilded primitive forms of cattle and horses could in the interim play the ecological functions of their ancestors. Practical experiences have shown that such substitutes function well under natural conditions with predators such as wolves and bears, that social structures shown in wild animals quickly establish, and a process of de-domestication starts.



European wildlife comeback





FLORIAN MÖLLERS / WILD WONDERS OF EUROPE

With these in place, re-introduction of locally lost species could be considered, such as Brown bear, Eurasian lynx, Iberian lynx, Red/Fallow deer, Ibex, and Chamois. For the wolf, with the ability to re-colonise areas on its own, the main focus should be to promote its natural comeback by preparing the human ground such as negative stigmas attached to the species.

#### **WILDERNESS ON THE EUROPEAN AGENDA**

Another important and recent development is that the concept of wilderness has gained a lot of interest in Europe. A political milestone was the adoption of the 'European Parliament Resolution on Wilderness in Europe' in February 2009, which calls on the European Commission to:

1. DEVELOP a clear definition of wilderness,
2. MANDATE the European Environment Agency to map existing wilderness areas in Europe,
3. UNDERTAKE a study on the values and benefits of wilderness,
4. DEVELOP a EU wilderness strategy,
5. PROMOTE the development of new wilderness areas ('rewilding'), and
6. PROMOTE the values of wilderness together with NGOs & local communities.

The EU Member States were invited to exchange 'best practices' of managing wilderness, develop a code of conduct for tourism in wilderness areas, and to ensure the best protection of wilderness areas, reducing their threats. Particular emphasis was given to how to best integrate the wilderness

concept into the Birds and Habitats Directives, especially through the Natura 2000 Network with wilderness areas having 'a central place'.

In 2009, the European Parliament also welcomed the establishment of the Wild Europe Initiative (WEI) – a collaborative effort to promote the wilderness concept amongst several European nature conservation organizations, such as PAN Parks, EUROPARC, WWF, BirdLife, IUCN, Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP), and European Centre for Nature Conservation (ECNC).

In May 2009, more than 230 representatives from governments, conservation agencies, NGOs and academic institutions met in Prague at the 'Conference on Wilderness and Large Natural Habitat Areas' hosted by the Czech European Union Presidency and the European Commission. A key outcome was the development of the 'Message ('Poselství') from Prague', which contained 24 recommendations from the participants on policy, research, awareness raising, and partnerships. That re-affirmed the role of the WEI, and a working group – The Wild Europe Partnership – was set up under the Chairmanship of Ladislav Miko, Director of Nature, European Commission – Environment, with the aim of ensuring adequate follow-up of the 'Message from Prague'.

These developments provide an invaluable basis for the future work of Rewilding Europe – whilst the Wild Europe Initiative focuses on developing a pro-active policy agenda for wilderness in Europe, Rewilding Europe can put the emphasis on the field activities of rebuilding the natural wildlife base of the continent.







# 'Rewilding Europe' – the initiative

## A 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY VISION FOR EUROPE

By changing our perspective from traditional nature conservation towards a more development oriented approach, the reference point for European nature changes too. With a reference

point that is no longer based in the past but in the future, towards landscapes that are governed by essential natural processes, which create the necessary space for all of our original animals and plants, including man. With species that sur-

vived in agricultural landscapes, reclaiming their place in a natural setting.

So how could these new natural areas look like? Here are some examples



*Open, broadleaved forests where bison, deer, wild horses and bovines exist alongside wolves, lynx and bears and where most of the original plants and animals of lowland Europe thrive*



*Mystical, old-growth forests with woodpeckers, mosses, lichens, mushrooms and where the voices of the Capercaillie and owls resound at the dawn of spring*



*Extensive grass steppes and shallow lakes where the ground trembles under the hooves of thousands of horses and bovines, with a myriad of cranes, waders, ducks and other wetland associated species living or resting during migration*



*Mountain cliffs alive with ibex and chamois as vultures, eagles and other raptors soar in the thermal uplifts*



*Winding, free-flowing rivers cascading down from the mountains to the lowlands where the water is allowed to spread out beyond former dykes, where salmon can once again migrate freely from the ocean to their spawning ground*



*River deltas with large numbers of pelicans breeding side by side with herons, cormorants, sea eagles and where several species of sturgeons – some of the oldest and largest fishes still alive – once again migrate between the rivers and the oceans*



*Seas and coastal areas rich in life and inhabited by herds of seals and more than twenty-five species of whales and dolphins providing first class entertainment and inspiration for people*



*Spectacular landscapes with abundant wildlife, which attract visitors from all sectors of society and the whole world*





*Past, present and future of European nature*



Images as described above can become reality. Even within our lifetime. In a Europe experiencing fewer and fewer borders, both for nature and people. The choice is ours.

Such areas could provide the basis for a new economy in Europe:

- Where the areas becoming available through rural exodus develop new uses for land and sea that survive without artificial economic subsidies – a wilderness-based economy
- With wild areas providing new experiences for visitors, as well as sources of inspiration and income for people living nearby and far away
- With wild areas helping us to protect our drinking water, provide buffers against floods, adapt to the impacts of inevitable climate change, protect against forest fires – in short, providing essential services to society
- Where wildlife watching and wild natural lands serve as magnets for visitors from the whole world
- Where the restoration of certain ecosystems – such a riverine forelands – can even provide short-term opportunities for certain industrial activities, such as mineral extraction

This is the 21st century continent where wildness provides an important pillar for a modern society. Where wildness is firmly anchored in a development perspective. With a vision that builds on opportunity, prosperity and hope for European nature and the society depending on it.

#### PUTTING THE VISION INTO PRACTICE

With the vision as the foundation, our long-term goal is:

*‘Wild nature is recognised as an important and inherent aspect of Europe’s natural and cultural heritage and is an essential element of a modern, prosperous, and healthy European society in the 21st century’*

The basis for a 21st century vision of Europe is a network of large natural areas, which together represents a large part of the European natural heritage and promotes the development of new wilderness-based economies in these ecological ‘hotspots’. The starting point of the programme is in nature – to rewild, at least, one million hectares of Europe by 2020 consisting of 10 areas, each of at least 100,000 ha. The field work will build on three guiding principles:

- Every area should host complete and naturally functional ecosystems specific to the region
- The areas should be embedded in the social and cultural fabric of their respective region
- The new land use should be economically viable and competitive with other alternatives

Through the guiding principles, the programme subscribes to the three ‘PPP’ pillars of sustainability: Planet, People & Profit.

These 10 areas should serve as inspiration for others to follow. Scaling up the impacts and magnifying the investments are essential aspects, and the programme has therefore selected a set of ‘milestones’ to be reached by 2020:

- A total of 1 million ha (10,000 km<sup>2</sup>) ‘rewilded’ across 10 places by the programme and its partners, covering different regions of Europe, including areas of both land and sea







- Substantial wildlife comeback in the 10 places, supported by re-introductions where appropriate/necessary, serving as the starting point for complete, functional ecosystems
- Magnification of success: Up to 100 other 'rewilding' initiatives launched across Europe affecting 10 million ha (100,000 km<sup>2</sup>)
- Sufficient 'in-situ' breeding facilities for wildlife established in each of the 10 project areas.
- European wildlife has a 'market value', providing new business opportunities – for partners, land owners, hunters and farmers
- Competitive forms of land and sea use together with economic success stories established in each of the 10 project locations
- 'Wild nature & natural processes' accepted as

one of the main management principles for nature conservation in Europe

- A sense of pride in the wild is created among the wider European audience
  - A science-based monitoring system is established to oversee nature developments in pilot areas
- Until 2013, the following targets have been set:
- The first five pilot projects are sustainably funded and have started implementation
  - These five areas are visible and demonstrate how the vision is being put into practice
  - Another five project areas have been identified and will be started as of 2013 (coinciding with Wild 10 Conference in Spain)

- A new conservation vision for Europe is endorsed by major stakeholders (also outside the traditional conservation sector)
- The importance of wild nature for society and development has been recognized by at least five funding/investment institutions
- Through Wild Wonders of Europe, the concept of the Joy of the Wild and Rewilding Europe has reached out to a 100 million European citizens

#### PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT & PROJECT SUPPORT

To facilitate programme development, a new Rewilding Europe organization will be founded by the ARK Foundation, WWF-Netherlands, and Wild Wonders of Europe. The following operating principles will apply:

- Small, effective & efficient team (director, operations, communications & programme)
- Catalytic approach
- Working with business principles, accountable
- Communicable (connecting, reporting back, etc.)
- Fundraising, door-opener (for partners)
- Providing the 'glue', connecting the 'dots'
- Back-stopping, providing strategic guidance to partners.
- Support and help with activity implementation

A small team of approximately four senior staff will support the projects and is responsible for the overall management of the programme.

Activities will take place at three levels, all with their own roles and responsibilities:

#### 1. OVERALL MANAGEMENT OF REWILDING EUROPE:

Selection and screening of potential projects, technical support and providing the backbone for the project, fundraising and overall reporting to donors, development of strategic partnerships, organisation and mediation with regard to co-financing, implementation support (e.g. natural grazing, natural forestry, marketing of green tourism), support to local communication and outreach, ensuring exchanges and lessons learned between projects, harmonisation with other European programmes and initiatives, communication at the European level, lobbying efforts with and through the Wild Europe Initiative, up-scaling (magnification) to other areas in Europe.

#### 2. MANAGEMENT AT THE PILOT PROJECT LEVEL:

Management of the project implementation will be the responsibility of the local partners, such as establishing and formalizing local partnerships, planning, financial management, local communication work, reporting to Rewilding Europe team, etc.

#### 3. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES:

The pilot area partners will also oversee all technical work that needs to be done on the ground, such as land acquisition (if applicable), management of wilderness areas and restoration measures, re-introduction of missing species, in-situ breeding projects, development of green tourism facilities, visitor centres, infrastructure, lodges and campsites, joint

projects with local stakeholders, production of communication materials, etc.

### FUNDING AND FUNDRAISING STRATEGY

For the initial phase, the five pilot sites have identified their financial needs, which range between € 2 and 11 million over a five year period. The higher costs are associated with land purchase for securing necessary core areas. An important principle is to attract new participants who are interested in joining new entrepreneurial activities. Ultimately all field projects should become financially self-sustaining. This means that over time, the projects can do without funding support by the initiative.

At this early stage it is almost impossible to present an overall figure for the financial requirements, but a 'qualified' estimate is that the ten pilot projects would need on average € 5 million during the first 5 years to get started.

To provide the overall 'glue' and ensure successful scaling-up to meet the aspiration set out by the programme, the central functions of the Rewilding Europe initiative cost approximately half a million € annually.

Rewilding Europe has a bottom-up approach. Fundraising is primarily carried out based on appealing projects in the selected pilot areas. Process costs of Rewilding Europe management and local partners form a standard part of the project costs. The financial principle is that expenditures will be allocated according to a 10%/10%/80%

rule to the levels 1, 2 and 3 as described above. This means that 90% of funding generated at the programme level will be spent locally. In addition, the implementing local partners will be doing their own, direct fundraising.

### STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS ARE KEY TO SUCCESS

For Rewilding Europe, it is of key importance to establish partnerships at a generic and local level to be able to achieve our goal and objectives. When the initiative was formed, FREE Nature ([www.freenature.eu](http://www.freenature.eu)) and Eurosite ([www.eurosite.org](http://www.eurosite.org)) played an active part and they will remain implementing partners. At the European level, a close cooperation with the Wild Europe Initiative (<http://wildeurope.org>) will be instrumental as well as with several of its partner organizations individually, such as PAN Parks ([www.panparks.org](http://www.panparks.org)) and the Large Herbivore Network/European Centre for Nature Conservation ([www.large-herbivore.org](http://www.large-herbivore.org)). At the project level, the choice of partners will depend on who the local stakeholders are.

When the actual field work starts, many new partners need to get involved. New and large-scale aspirations require new, non-traditional partners. Banks are required for investing in the wilderness-based economy and the urban society together with the tourism sector are crucial partners. To build-up vast numbers of wildlife, the projects need to liaise with foresters, farmers, game keepers and hunting interests. And a key success factor is entrepreneurship at all levels.





- **Danube Delta**  
(Romania, Ukraine)
- **Eastern Carpathians**  
(Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine)
- **Southern Carpathians**  
(Romania)
- **Velebit**  
(Croatia) and
- **Western Iberia**  
(Portugal, Spain)



## The first five pilot areas

At the ‘Conference on Wilderness and Large Natural Habitat Areas’ hosted by the Czech European Union Presidency and the European Commission in May 2009 the participants were invited to submit nominations for joining the initiative (initially referred to as Wild Europe Field Programme). Based on an initial screening of twenty

applications from all over Europe submitted by a variety of organisations, it was decided to undertake detailed feasibility studies in six of the areas. The subsequent field visits assessed the current protection status, land ownership, human settlement, threats, land abandonment, tourism, other relevant business initiatives, ecological/wildlife status, and the institutional situation. From these studies, five areas have now been selected to serve as the first model projects.

The areas span different regions of Europe, but so far with an emphasis on the eastern parts of the continent. More than 30 different organisations in seven countries have joined – including national parks, nature parks, geoparks, archaeological parks, UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, universities, foundations, local communities, and NGOs.

Here follows a brief introduction to each of the five areas.

## DANUBE DELTA – Europe's Unrivalled Wetland



### Conservation setting

The Danube Delta on the border between Romania and Ukraine is outstanding in Europe – due to its size (more than 600,000 ha), intact river dynamics, unexploited coastline shaped by the Danube River and the Black Sea, open horizons, large-scale landscapes without significant infrastructure, largest reed beds worldwide, in addition to millions of nesting and migrating birds, some of them rare or endangered globally. The unique Letea Forest, situated in the Romanian section, is the only 'primeval' forest of the country with trees up to 700 years old. Through the designation as UNESCO Biosphere Reserves by both the Romanian and Ukrainian governments with strictly protected core areas, the delta enjoys a high level of protection. Buffer and economic zones also provide opportunities for local developments without jeopardizing the natural values.

### Local situation

As in so many other areas of Europe, traditional farming based on livestock has become unprofitable and the local communities are looking for new, alternative sources of income. Tourism is already quite well developed in the delta, with many tour operators, growing capacity and infrastructure located in the regional hub Tulcea, and with good standards of accommodation increasingly provided within and on the periphery of the delta. With a very rich history from ancient times to present day, the delta and its surroundings offer a multitude of historical remains from Roman, Greek, Byzantine and Ottoman periods. The 'wilderness' concept has an interesting potential of further profiling the Danube Delta both domestically and abroad. But there is a need to involve the rural population better in the business developments.



*Paula Adina Capota, Oameni Pentru Delta NGO ('People of the Delta'), Sfântu Gheorghe, Romania*

'The communities in the Danube Delta are facing hard times. With the declining income from livestock breeding and fishing, tourism is becoming increasingly important. With help of the Rewilding Europe initiative, we are looking forward to participate in creating new values and attractions that could extend the season for visitors from currently two months per year to up to six.'





### Organisations

An interesting set of partners are prepared to work together on the project: WWF (coordination & facilitation), Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (public body for the management of the area), Danube Delta National Institute (research on conservation & natural resource management), Tulcea Forestry District, the Communities of C.A Rosetti & Sfântu Gheorghe, and several local NGOs (e.g. 'People for the Delta' and 'Ecoponica').

### Planned work & vision

Initially, the focus will be on the outer, maritime delta with sand dunes, untamed river arms, meadows, lakes, reed beds, salt marshes, and woodlands. Two 'core' areas have been identified around the two villages of C.A. Rosetti and Sfântu Gheorghe, where natural grazing will be promoted using already semi-wild/feral herds of cattle and horses as the starting point. If the structure and functions of the delta habitats allow, missing elements, such the Red and Fallow

deer, will be re-introduced. Other species which previously occurred in the area, like the beaver and bison, are also important. With the presence of the wolf not far from the delta, a natural come-back would be desirable, based on the local acceptance of the species.

The first steps in the project include (1) development and promotion of pilot projects on natural grazing, (2) assessments of the feasibility of re-introducing missing species and the natural come-back of others, (3) capacity building of eco-tourism tour operators (including setting up a communications platform), and (4) local awareness raising on the potential of the 'rewilding' concept. These activities build on previous development of multi-stakeholder visions and activities in the Danube Delta. During the first years, transboundary activities with the Ukrainian side of the delta should also commence.

With 'rewilding' of the Danube Delta, an even more important and attractive wetland area will be created in Europe, providing new economic opportunities for the people living there, and serving as an outstanding example of how natural processes once again shape living landscapes across the borders of two countries.



## EASTERN CARPATHIANS – Old & New Wildlands in a Tri-national Context



### Conservation setting

Eastern Carpathians – the triangle area between Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine – is one of the wildest corners of Europe: vast, extensive forests with untamed rivers, low undulating mountains with scattered alpine meadows, and pockets of old-growth forests. Here Europe's largest wild living population of bison lives side by side with wolves, bears, lynx, beavers, otters and deer. Few other regions of the continent are also covered with more protected areas (in total around half a million ha) – national parks, biosphere reserves, landscape parks, nature parks, Natura 2000 sites – than the Eastern Carpathians.

### Local situation

Some of the areas that are richest in wildlife, such as the Bieszczady in Poland, have only

recently converted from farmland to wilderness; abandonment of previous farmland within a 60 year time frame combined with concerted conservation measures have created one of the best places to experience wildlife in central Europe. This, in turn, has served as basis for a thriving tourism industry, especially in Poland. The national parks and landscape parks, with their well developed infrastructure (information centres, hiking trails, information panels, etc.), act as magnets for between 1 and 1,5 million visitors annually, mostly of domestic origin. The bison and bear in particular have been used as 'flagship' species for attracting visitors. However, in contrast to the Polish part, the tourism development on the Slovak side is still in its infancy.

But the area is undergoing changes: continued depopulation, plummeting livestock numbers, farmland abandonment, logging of mountainous old-growth forests, and new roads. With dwindling livestock numbers, young forests are rapidly expanding, creating a more monotonous landscape with less space for sun loving animals and plants to thrive and a general decline of biological diversity. Open areas are artificially maintained through mowing, which – however – is entirely dependent on external, financial subsidies and with an uncertain future. So, the landscape in the Eastern Carpathians – like in so many other similar areas of Europe – is at a critical cross-roads. To stem the negative tide, large-scale natural grazing systems with wild living horses and bovines need to be installed and the remaining, few old-growth forests protected.



### Organisations

Two organizations decided to turn the negative trend into a positive: Lesoochranárske zoskupenie VLK ('Wolf') – the most famous environmental NGO in Slovakia & Fundacja Bieszczadzka – a Polish Foundation specialized in eco-tourism development working in partnership with several local communities, such as the Slovakian State Forestry Service, and the Poloniny National Park. Partnerships are also required with additional communities, regional authorities, hunting and forestry entities, the Bieszczady National Park, etc. In the future, collaboration with Ukraine is also essential.

### Planned work & vision

Among the first steps are the (1) establishment of a natural grazing regime with wild living horses in three valleys, (2) development of eco-tourism on the Slovak side, (3) protection of one of the largest remaining old-growth forests left in the area, (4) mapping of important wildland in all three countries, (5) support for the establishment of a new, modern eco-hostel in Poland, (6)



support for the management planning of the Bieszczady Natura 2000 area, and (7) production of a promotional film 'Wilderness in the Eastern Carpathians'.

The ultimate vision for the area is to create a European 'Yellowstone' wilderness in the centre of the continent with large herds of bison, bovines, horses and deer that maintain an open, diverse landscape and which are hunted by wolves, lynx and bears. All remaining old-growth forests should be protected and new areas set aside for free development. The Eastern Carpathians wilderness area should provide a new economy for people living in all three countries.



*Erik Baláz, Lesoochranárske zoskupenie VLK ('Wolf'), Slovakia*  
'Europe needs more wilderness areas since there are so few left. For me personally, the inspirations that a bear or a thousand year old tree provide are essential in life. This is something I wish other people to also experience. The Ticha Valley in the Tatra Mountains in Slovakia shows that rewilding is possible in a short period of time. Rewilding Europe has the potential of creating a new conservation movement, with Ticha Valley and Eastern Carpathians as inspirational building blocks.'





## SOUTHERN CARPATHIANS

### *A Wilderness Arch in the Heart of Europe*



#### Conservation setting

Like a huge green crescent, the Carpathians arch over an area of more than 20 million hectares, from the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Hungary and Poland in the north to northwest, via Ukraine in the northeast, to Romania in the southeast and Serbia in southwest. At the southern end of the mountains in Romania, an initiative is underway to create one of Europe's largest wilderness landscapes south of the Arctic Circle. With a backbone of more than 1 million hectares of protected areas already in place, abundant wildlife, large intact forests, a high concentration

of biodiversity, un-fragmented landscapes, wild rivers, and large mosaic landscapes shaped by sustainable farming practices, there is a unique opportunity of realising this vision.

The starting point is in three areas – the Tarcu Mountains Natura 2000 Site, the Domogled-Valea Cernei National Park, and the Mehedinti Plateau Geopark – which together cover around 225,000 ha. Ranging from the 2196 m peak of Mount Tarcu in the north to Danube River at 150 m in the south, the area covers a wide variety of ecosystems – alpine meadows and grasslands, old beech and fir forests, steep cliff formations, and undulating mosaic landscapes with open grasslands intersected by woodlands (with a mixture of deciduous tree species, including oak) closer to the Danube. With dramatic, steep cliffs, deep canyons, waterfalls and untamed smaller rivers, it is a very attractive part of Romania and the Carpathians.

#### Local situation

Although the region already hosts a rich variety of wildlife (Wolf, Eurasian lynx, Brown bear, Red deer, Roe deer, Chamois, etc.), with the on-going, large-scale abandonment of traditional farmland, an urgent need has emerged to re-introduce lost wild living species that can maintain the diversity of landscapes rich in animal and plant species. Therefore, the vision for the area would also include having herds of wild bovine, horses, European bison and Red deer once again shaping the landscape. This, in turn, will provide the basis for bringing back species such as the Griffon vulture. The European beaver also has an old home



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*Erika Stanciu, President of EUROPARC Federation & WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme, Romania*

in the mountain rivers – although it has been locally extinct for centuries.

With the conservation measures and the ‘rewilding’ of the region, new economic opportunities will appear. In combination with some of the world’s most famous caves, spectacular sceneries (like the Danube Iron Gate), and a famous health resort (Baile Herculane), the region has the potential of becoming a first class destination for both domestic and foreign visitors. Right now, it is an almost ‘forgotten’ corner of Romania.

### Organisations

The project includes an interesting set of local institutions: WWF (coordination/facilitation), Altitude NGO (responsible for the management of the Tarcu Mountain Natura 2000 Site), managers of the Mehedinti Plateau Geopark and the Domogled-Valea Cernei National Park, and several local communities. Other important actors to

be included are the private sector, the Romanian Government, and academic institutions.

### Planned work & vision

The first steps in the project include (1) the development of a multi-stakeholder Vision for the region, (2) a land use/land ownership survey, (3) feasibility study on the return of the European bison, beaver & Griffon vulture, (4) establishment of natural grazing pilot projects with free living herds of bovine and horses, (5) support to the development and harmonization of management plans for Mehedinti Plateau Geopark and the Tarcu Mountains Natura 2000 Site, (6) sustainable management systems for wild herbivores and carnivores, (7) school programmes on wilderness experience, (8) capacity building of ecotourism network, and (9) the establishment of the South-Western Carpathians Wilderness Council.

The overall Vision for the Southern Carpathians is to maintain and enhance the rich and spectacular landscape by connecting natural sites and securing and creating wilderness areas intersected with small scale development in harmony with nature. Active rewilding should be dictated by important natural processes to be restored. The creation of a huge, wild arch of natural areas in the Southern Carpathians is within reach – providing new economic opportunities for the people living there and offering tranquillity and inspiration for those who want to visit.



‘Land abandonment is such a key issue for the European countryside and nature conservation in a crowded continent. We must not waste this opportunity by taking short-term, accidental decisions regarding the future of these lands. I welcome therefore the Vision and the longer-term, strategic approach of the Rewilding Europe initiative for restoring the natural heritage of Europe.



## VELEBIT – A European ‘Wild West’



### Conservation setting

On the Adriatic coast of Croatia, the Velebit, one of the most important natural areas of Europe and the Balkans is situated. From the crystal waters of the Adriatic in the west, the 145 km limestone Velebit mountain chain rapidly rises to more than 1700 metres to phase out into a higher level plateau in the east. The area hosts an extraordinary diversity of different habitats, from Mediterranean landscapes at sea level to almost



boreal systems at higher altitudes. This has led to the establishment of the two Paklenica & Northern Velebit National Parks and the Velebit Nature Park – all three very well set up and managed. Together the three areas occupy more than 220,000 ha. The area has also been declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and has been included in the UNESCO Tentative List of World Heritage Sites.

In a ‘nutshell’, Velebit is a climbing paradise, home to spectacular caves and breath-taking sceneries, and is visited by an increasing number of people every year. Most popular is the coastal Paklenica National Park with more than 100,000 visitors annually whilst the more remote inlands receive less attention. The tourism infrastructure is also very well developed with hiking trails, smaller overnight cabins, larger dormitories, and professional visitor centres & information panels. The dramatic coastal landscape with steep, barren cliffs, deep canyons, waterfalls, and open, uninhabited plains has also an interesting link to contemporary European film history. In the 1960s, the famous ‘Winnetou’ movies were

produced in and around Velebit, which provided ideal landscapes for battling Indians and white settlers.

### Local situation

The human settlement has undergone dramatic changes during the last 50 years. The level of land abandonment is significant. After the E65 road was built in the 1960s, people in the coastal villages were no longer isolated and gradually abandoned their traditional lifestyle – like bringing livestock to the mountains in the summer time – and started to focus their attention on the new economic opportunities generated, especially associated with tourism development along the coast. The Balkan war 1991-95 also brought a lot of change. The eastern slopes of the Velebit Mountains was the frontline between the Croatian and Serbian troops and many houses were vacated including their land. Today still larger areas of minefields are found north-east and east of the Paklenica National Park as well as inland towards the eastern border of the Nature Park. Today most villages are home to an ageing population, many houses stand empty and are in ruins, and livestock numbers are dwindling.

The recent changes in land use have brought both challenges and opportunities for nature conservation. The expanding shrub lands and young forests could be seen as a blessing for some of the barren coastal areas, which previously suffered from heavy overgrazing by sheep and goats. But in many areas, the landscape diversity – and hence biodiversity – is suffering. To maintain and even enhance the conservation values in the

region, the parks want to promote the re-establishment of natural grazing systems. Hunters are seen as a non-traditional ally in such efforts. In the past they were responsible for re-introducing lost species such as the chamois and fallow deer.

### Organisations

The three parks – Northern Velebit National Park, Paklenica National Parks & Velebit Nature Park -have joined forces with WWF in Croatia to develop a large-scale 'rewilding' initiative in Velebit.

### Planned work & vision

Amongst identified activities are (1) the re-establishment of natural grazing regimes, (2) promotion of the wilderness concept amongst the inhabitants and visitors, (3) facilitating the natural return of lost species, such as the Griffon and Black vultures, (4) setting up concrete eco-tourist facilities based on wildlife viewing, and (4) promotion of the wilderness concept – including natural grazing – into national policies and legislation (e.g. forestry regulations).

The longer-term vision is a large wilderness area shaped by natural processes, with abundant wildlife, and which provides an attraction for visitors from across Europe. In the future Velebit has the opportunity to become part of a continental network of wilderness areas – a European 'Wild West'.



*Gordan Lukač, Paklenica National Park, Velebit, Croatia*

'I welcome this new initiative. The large-scale approach brings together the three existing protected areas in Velebit, working together on a common agenda for 'rewilding'. This also requires the involvement of new, non-traditional actors like hunters and local entrepreneurs. I find it challenging but exciting.'







Carlos Sanchez, *Fundación Naturaleza Y Hombre (FNYH), Spain*

'Rewilding will promote the come-back of species, many of which have either been lost or are rare, such as Black Vulture, Black Stork and the globally threatened Iberian Lynx. An important aspect is to scale-up our impact. We will therefore use our work in 'Campanarios de Azaba' as a model, which can be replicated by private and public landowners across both Spain and Portugal.'

## WESTERN IBERIA – *Epic Landscapes in an Ancient Cultural & Natural Setting*



### Conservation setting

The Iberian Peninsula, with one of the oldest human settlements in Europe, is home to some of the most ancient natural landscapes of the continent. One typical example is the Spanish 'Dehesas' or Portuguese 'Montados', traditional wood pastures with its origins back to, at least, the middle ages. The savannah-like appearance shaped by large grazers – especially cattle – is today home to some of the rarest animal species of Europe, such as the Spanish Imperial Eagle and the globally endangered Iberian Lynx. These areas are also famous for their ham – Jamon

Iberico and Jamon Serrano in Spain – produced from pigs feeding on acorns from Holm Oaks in the Dehesas.

### Local situation

As in so many other areas of Europe, the traditional land management, however, will soon only be history. Rural depopulation with ageing inhabitants and declining livestock numbers is leading to rapid changes of the landscapes. This, in turn, is creating both an opportunity and a challenge for nature conservation. The less intensive land use offers the development of a more natural tree composition with shrubs, but there is also a risk that huge areas will evolve into very dense scrub with much less diversity and more vulnerable to forest fires. There is also a temptation to plant exotic tree species – like eucalyptus – on the abandoned land with disastrous consequences for the natural fauna and flora.

Western Iberia is currently a region without many economic prospects. With a lack of major industries and dwindling agricultural production the regional governments are already investing in a new economy based on culture, nature and attractive landscapes. The recreation of more natural, wilder landscapes with bountiful wildlife could serve as a vital component in creating a new identity and a better economic basis for the future.

### Organisations

Two organizations – *Fundación Naturaleza Y Hombre (FNYH)* in Spain and *Associação Transumância e Natureza (ATN)* in Portugal – have



António Monteiro, Associação Transumância e Natureza (ATN), Portugal

decided to join forces across the borders. Both of them already work with a long list of other organisations both nationally and internationally. In Portugal, the Centro de Biologia Ambiental (CBA), Duro International Nature Park (ICNB), and Parque Arqueológico do Vale de Côa already expressed an interest to participate. On the Spanish side, Universidad de Salamanca and several others are also interested.

### Planned work & vision

The two have identified a large-scale opportunity of 'rewilding' the Dehesas/Montados and other habitats in the border areas of western Spain and north-eastern Portugal. More than 1.3 million hectares of land have been set aside for conservation in the form of Natura 2000 areas with a very interesting mixture of natural/semi-natural habitats. Side by side with Dehesas and Montados are mountain ranges – 'sierras' – with cliff loving animals like vultures, eagles and Iberian (or Spanish) Ibex together with river valleys with otters and turtles. On the poorer soils on granite rocks the landscape is dominated by small hold-

ings with cultivations based on olives, almonds, and cereals – also mostly abandoned. The region boasts the largest open air site Palaeolithic art in Europe, if not in the world, designated as UNESCO World Heritage Site. The themes of the earliest engravings (Upper Palaeolithic Era, 40,000 – 10,000 BC) are mostly mountain goats (Ibex), wild horses, aurochs and deer, which indicate the crucial importance of such animals in shaping the natural heritage of today's landscapes.

The approach of both organizations is to build attractive 'models' of how such wild areas could function – 'Campanarios de Azaba' for FNYH in Spain and 'Faia Brava' for ATN in Portugal. The approach is very similar: (1) purchasing important core areas, (2) reintroducing missing species for creating natural grazing systems, (3) promotion of the natural return of iconic and ecologically important species, (4) enhancing the conditions for the rabbit – a key element in the ecological systems, (5) eco-tourism promotion, and (6) education and communications. With such

models in place, efforts will be made to inspire other land owners – both private and public – to follow suit.

Western Iberia has the opportunity of rewilding a very large area to serve as an attraction for domestic and global visitors. Few areas in Europe can offer such a combination of cultural and natural values!



'Rural depopulation and land abandonment is offering space for the comeback of wild nature, filling a gap in a sustainable countryside without causing too many economic sacrifices. The development of wild nature is an opportunity for a new economy at the same time as it enriches the ecological base and provides new ethical and educational values.'



## ABOUT WWF



WWF, the World Wide Fund for Nature, is one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organizations. It was conceived on the 29th April 1961.

WWF is a global organization acting locally through a network of over 90 offices in over 40 countries around the world. On-the-ground conservation projects managed by these offices are active in more than 100 countries.

The central secretariat for the network (called WWF International) is located in Gland, Switzerland.

WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by:

- Conserving the world's biological diversity
- Ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable
- Promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

WWF focuses its work around the magnificent diversity of life on this planet, the extraordinary places they live in, and while trying to reduce humanity's impact on this life and these places.

Since 1985, WWF has invested over US\$1,300 million in more than 11,000 projects in more than 100 countries. WWF runs about 1,300 projects at any one time. WWF has over 5 million supporters worldwide. In Europe, WWF has a number of offices that are involved in implementation work both at the policy and the field level. WWF Netherlands has taken a lead role over the past 10 years in supporting conservation initiatives all over Europe. The Dutch chapter of WWF is based in Zeist, the Netherlands. [www.wnf.nl](http://www.wnf.nl)

## ABOUT ARK NATURE



ARK Nature is an innovative, Dutch nature organisation founded in 1989, working to realize robust, spontaneous nature. In our view, societal changes invariably lead to new opportunities for nature and landscape. We encourage people to seize these opportunities, in the conviction that more room for nature will improve the quality of life. For people and for nature.

### Unprecedented richness

ARK stands for vast, robust and dynamic nature areas where natural processes can go their own way. If interconnected, it results in an unprecedented richness in landscapes and accompanying flora and fauna.

### Green gold

Nature needs to be socially and economically embedded. Projects like mineral extraction, water management, urban development and health care, will be better off with nature development. Recreation, tourism and a favourable climate for establishing business or new construction projects will bring strong local economies.

### Pleasure and health

Authentic nature is powerful. It offers plenty of prospects for activities outdoors and contributes to good health. Millions of people live, work or find leisure in and around nature areas and are aware of the economic and societal value of nature.

[www.ark.eu](http://www.ark.eu)

## ABOUT WILD WONDERS OF EUROPE



Wild Wonders of Europe is a pan-European conservation photography initiative working to inspire the widest possible audience with an appreciation and understanding of Europe's biodiversity and the need for its protection.

Wild Wonders of Europe is a celebration of the joy of the wild and of the unknown wildlife comeback, whilst at the same time highlighting the serious challenges ahead. An illustration that conservation works, we just need much more of it.

69 of Europe's most respected nature photographers were commissioned to complete 125 photo missions across all 48 countries, to document Europe's Unseen, Unexpected and Unforgettable wildlife and landscape. An enormous task that took over 15 months and 1000 days in the field, covering more than 50 national parks and 1000 species.

This impressive photographic document of Europe's most charismatic wildlife and landscapes created a digital library of 200,000 images, a stunning and unique portfolio with which to inspire millions. It is with this portfolio that Europe's Crown Jewels will be showcased to the World through multiple forms of media including a flagship outdoor Exhibition, books, DVDs and more.

Peter Cairns, Florian Möllers, Staffan Widstrand and Bridget Wijnberg

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