THANK YOU,

for supporting us in 2023

WHAT WE ACHIEVED

We saved the wetland! Thank you!

We consider this one of the biggest communication and conservation successes of 2023; in approximately 10 months, we managed to raise over 100 000 euros for nature protection - the rescue of a wetland in agricultural land.

In addition to the joy of saving this area, we are delighted that the public is not only aware of the importance of wetland conservation but also willing to contribute financially and take real steps for its protection.

At the same time, this fundraising effort has shown us people's trust in the actions we, as BROZ, take for nature conservation. It reassures us that they believe we are serious about our efforts and follow through with them to the end, and we sincerely appreciate that.

We made sure not to idle during the fundraising process, and we requested the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic to include this area in the Natura 2000 protected areas network to expand the territory of the European significance of the Čiližské močiare wetlands.

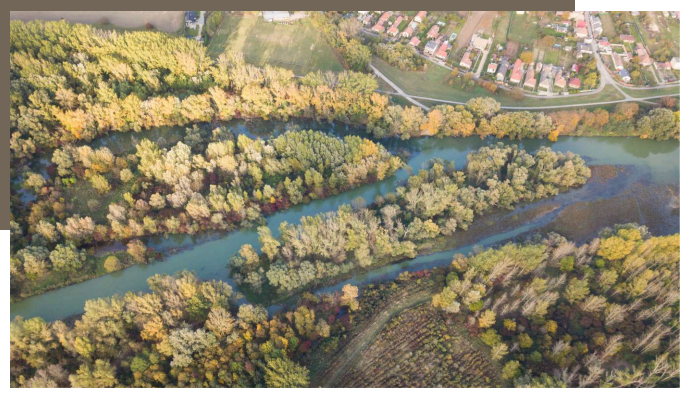
If you contributed or shared the fundraising campaign, a big thank you! Your support played a key role in ensuring the safeguarding of a location that holds significant importance in protecting biodiversity and the climate amid the ongoing crises, benefiting its wider environment.

We've launched the Living Rivers project and delved into it right away

It is currently the largest river protection project in which we are involved, along with 9 partners. The project's main partner is the Water Research Institute, and other relevant state institutions such as the Ministry of Environment, the Slovak Water Management state enterprise, and other governmental and non-governmental organizations are also involved.

The goal of the project is to improve the ecological status of the Danube, Hron, Ipeľ, and Belá rivers over the next 10 years, covering a total of 344 km of these watercourses. The objectives are ambitious – one of them, for example, is facilitating fish migration at the Gabčíkovo Dam for large sturgeons, among many other revitalization measures, with BROZ being responsible for some of them.

We are excited to contribute our know-how to the implementation of this project, during which the rivers will come to life in front of our eyes.



Up to 20 000 sturgeons swam into the Danube river

In June, significant events unfolded as the population of native Danube sturgeon, specifically small sturgeon, was bolstered by up to 20 000 young sturgeons.

As part of the LIFE Living Rivers project, we organized a large release event overseen by our Czech project partner, the Faculty of Fisheries and Protection of Waters at the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice. Released were Danube sturgeons bred by humans but genetically pure, using so-called generational individuals captured directly from the Danube. The releases took place at three locations - Čunovo, Sapa, and a beach on Veľkolélsky ostrov island.

Within the Living Rivers project framework, several such actions are planned, with sturgeon releases scheduled every other year. Simultaneously, we aim to restore our rivers to a more natural state, allowing sturgeons to flourish without the necessity of extensive human interventions in the future, even enabling them to migrate in the Danube, as mentioned earlier.

The third batch of turtles, protected by our project, has hatched.

The European pond turtle is most vulnerable in the egg stage, which lasts up to 10 months. Turtles lay their eggs in the ground, close to the wetlands where they live. The eggs are at risk of being dug up or predated upon. Therefore, it is crucial to protect the nests of this critically endangered species. Before you can protect them, it's essential to locate them. This task is not as simple as it may sound - we needed a trained dog for it. A small corgi named Rex has been safeguarding the eggs of European pond turtles by locating and signaling their presence in the field. Subsequently, it was easy to secure the eggs with mesh.

We secured the first such nests last summer so the little turtles could hatch safely this spring without the risk of predation or being harmed by passing cars or agricultural machinery.

Thanks to nest protection efforts, 38 nests were secured, each containing an average of 13 eggs. In an ideal scenario, this amounts to 494 hatched turtles.

For the first time in 19 years, the desired amount of water flowed into the inland delta.

In July, a flow of 120 m3/s entered the inland delta of the Danube during a simulated summer flood – the highest flow in the last 19 years. We have been advocating for such a flow since our petition to preserve the Inland Delta of the Danube in 2020, consistently raising the issue in discussions with water management authorities and the Ministry of Environment.

Together with experts from the Water Research Institute and the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic, we had been requesting increased water flows for this precious area and higher flows had been promised several times in the past. However, it is only now that they have become a reality. It took time for all involved parties (ironically, all departmental organizations of the Ministry of Environment) to agree on this decision. We are pleased that it was achieved during the tenure of the interim Minister of the Environment, Milan Chrenko.

This flow and the water dynamics were utilized to flush sediments from the upper part of the area. Later, when the flow decreased, the barriers in the river branches were removed, and the location of riparian forests was flooded.

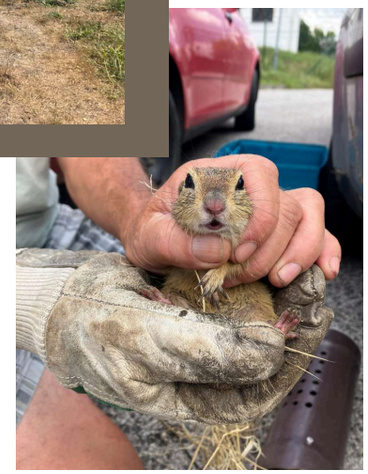
The inland delta of the Danube river is an area most affected by the construction of the Gabčíkovo Waterworks, and its ecosystems have long been undersupplied with water.

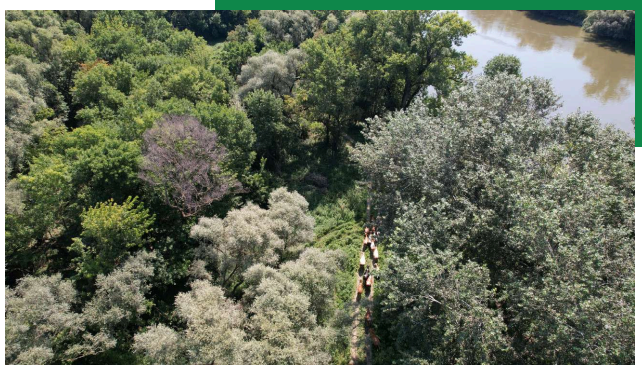
We believe that flows of this magnitude should not be merely experimental but will be incorporated into the Operational Rules of the Gabčíkovo Waterworks and released into the area annually. We will continue to advocate for this!

We dealt with a major rescue capture of ground squirrels

You may be aware that Bratislava Airport is home to the largest population of ground squirrels in Slovakia. If you didn't know, now you do. These ground squirrels gradually expand and settle in grassy areas around the airport and logistics centers. Sometimes developers decide to build something there, as was the case this year, and the ground squirrels needed to be captured from the site to rescue them and transport them to nine other ground squirrel locations where populations are weak.

So, we kept a close eye on them, lurking and catching them in traps. Using apples, sunflower seeds, and a bit of cunning, we occasionally had to outsmart them. And it worked. The captured ground squirrels were immediately relocated. **It was a logistically demanding operation, which our colleagues, along with project partners from organizations such as Alka Wildlife, ZOO BOJNICE, and the Faculty of Natural Sciences, managed and persisted in the summer heat until the last ground squirrel. The seven hundred and third.**





We launched grazing activities in Apálsky ostrov

After several years of effort, negotiations with farmers, obtaining permits, building fences, and addressing water sources, we finally managed to bring cows to Apálsky island in August, located at the confluence of the Váh and Stará Nitra rivers.

The island is a national nature reserve consisting of floodplain forest areas and meadows where, in the past, local cooperative members used to graze animals. Over time, these areas were neglected and overgrown with invasive species.

Working hand in hand with the Vrbová nad Váhom local cooperative, we introduced 20 cows to the island. They promptly embarked on their task of grazing vegetation, effectively preserving the wet meadows and ensuring optimal conditions.

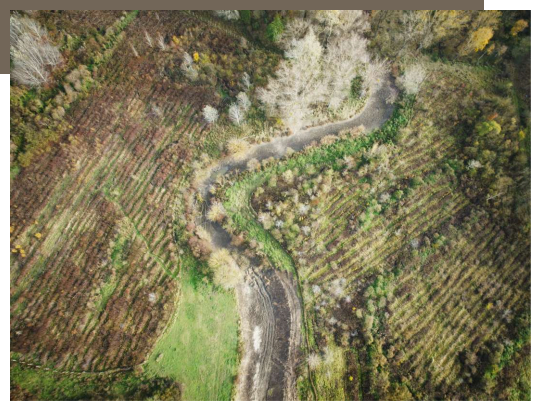
In the initial phase, the animals were placed on the front 7-hectare meadow, and in the fall, an additional 19-hectare area in the rear part of the island was added. Such care for the meadows is crucial for pollinators, flowers, insects, and birds—enhancing the overall biodiversity of the area. As we always emphasize, grazing is amazing!

We are dredging the Vojčianske branch and adjusting its dimensions to accommodate increased water flow

The dredging of the lower Vojčianske branch represents the largest river channel restoration project undertaken in the inland delta of the Danube river.

We are restoring its lower section over a length of 3.7 km, physically dredging 980 meters. Additionally, we are replacing the pipe culverts beneath the forest road with frame structures, more suitable for fish and conducive to restoring the maximum possible river dynamics that remain in the altered inland delta of the Danube river, after the construction of the Gabčíkovo Waterworks. The channel will be dimensioned to withstand simulated floods.

We look forward to the water flowing through the restored section in January!



Our "Krajina živá" project has been helping farmers for the second season

This year, within the framework of the "Krajina živá" project, we visited seven farms that are actively engaging in agriculture with a biodiversity focus. This way, we highlight their contributions, promote them to the public and their customers, and serve as examples for other farmers. **Regenerative agriculture is not always the easier path, but it is achievable, and we are more than happy to help these farms gain visibility.**

The "Krajina živá" project has also received recognition from the VÚB Foundation, which has decided to provide financial support.

We organized an international climate camp

At the Veľkolélsky island, we welcomed nearly **30 volunteers from 8 EU countries** to the Climate Camp organized in the last year of the Game On project. Young people from Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Germany, Bulgaria, and Romania explored the issue of climate change through the lenses of biodiversity and the ecosystems of the Danube floodplain.

At the island, we introduced them to active nature conservation methods such as restoring watercourses, pasture restoration, protecting old forests, and planting native tree species. In addition to learning, they also engaged in hands-on work during the camp and **restored a nesting wall for sand martins and kingfishers directly on the banks of the Danube river.**

We changed the name, logo, and visual identity

Sometimes, it's time to rebrand. Refresh the visual identity and logo that have been around for 26 years, moving forward with a new name. We left behind the association with Bratislava and the region, as we are no longer just a conservation association for Bratislava or the region. We now protect nature throughout Slovakia, including grazing areas around Kráľovský Chlmec. So, from now on, we are **BROZ - conservation association.**

We have initiated grazing at several locations - in Spišské Podhradie and also in the Strážov Mountains

We have introduced grazing at multiple sites in Slovakia in collaboration with local farmers and breeders. In Spišské Podhradie, we collaborated with the city, the diocese, and the Slovak Paradise National Park administration to assist the ground squirrel species.

In Zliechov, we started cooperation with a local farmer to help rare plants, and we are extending this effort to other locations throughout Slovakia. In each case, we also aid numerous other meadow species and pollinators. Because **grazing is amazing!**

A multitude of individual donors, companies, and foundations have financially supported us. Thank you for your trust!

We appreciate the financial support in 2023, whether it be from individuals or companies. Both are equally important to us, and we highly appreciate them. More than 1000 individual donors supported us this year! Regarding corporate support, we would like to mention these companies, foundations, and organizations: Ekofond SPP, VÚB Foundation, Telekom Foundation Fund, Aevis Foundation, Slovak Gas Industry, ZSE Foundation, Západoslovenská distribučná, a. s., Sigrid Rausing Trust, Mossy Earth, PIXEL Federation, and ESET Foundation.

The year 2023 certainly was not one of the easiest, especially towards its end. The changes that occurred will impact nature conservation in the coming years. However, we strive not to give up and to move forward.

In these times, we are acutely aware of how crucial public support is, whether in shaping public opinion in favor of non-governmental organizations or through direct, verbal, or financial support. We will be grateful if you continue to support us. In the coming years, it may be existential. There are several ways to do so - through discussions, directly or on social networks; financially - by purchasing a shirt, book, or other products; or through a **donation portal**. Support from businesses is also highly beneficial; please do not hesitate to contact us at broz@broz.sk.

Your support helps us implement significant restoration measures.

We won't give up!

We are moving forward into 2024! We look forward to having you with us!

RNDr. Tomáš Kušík, PhD.
Chairman of BROZ

BROZ
ochranárske združenie