



2023 Activity Report

BR6Z
conservation association

Dear friends of the environment,

In 2023 we once again implemented many important conservation projects and other activities throughout Slovakia. Indeed, being called the "Bratislava and Regional Conservation Association" had seemed too small for us for some time.

After twenty-six years, it was therefore time to rebrand and refresh our visual identity and logo. We are leaving behind the "Bratislava and Regional" part of the name, and from now on we are simply "BROZ – Conservation Association". You will read more about this in the following pages.

Conservation became an election issue in 2023. But not in the way we imagined

it. Our amazing nature, plants, and animals have the potential to bring people together. Unfortunately, some politicians have used this for their own recognition and for gaining popularity through accusations and by spreading false information. After the 2023 parliamentary elections, we experienced for the first time intense attacks on conservation and on NGOs directly from the leadership of the Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic and other top-level political actors. On a positive note, the European ground squirrel became a well-known animal, and many people for the first time found out that turtles actually live in Slovakia as well.

Our comprehensive projects take more than one election cycle, and what you see in this report has been years in the

making. The further co-financing of LIFE projects from the Slovak state budget is currently less than certain. After all, it is true that "conservation without money is only conversation": i.e. without money, nature cannot be conserved. The future of such projects in Slovakia is threatened.

The financial situation of BROZ and other green NGOs is very difficult. But we will never give up! We are not going to stop our activity. We will not pack our bags and let the state have sole charge of nature conservation. We must look for other sources of funding in order to ensure greater independence and freedom, and to continue to deliver on our project commitments. After all, in the support of over one thousand donors to our wetland fundraiser, we can see that society is changing in a

positive way. We feel the genuine support of many individual donors, supporters, corporate donors, and foundations, for which we are very grateful.

BROZ has existed for twenty-seven years, and we believe that this seven, as a lucky number, will help us overcome the current threats and challenges so that we can continue to fulfil our mission of protecting and restoring the natural environment of Slovakia and Central Europe. We would love you to become part of it.



Tomáš Kušík,
BROZ Chairman



**What we achieved
in 2023**



Rebranding

Sometimes one needs to rebrand and freshen up one's identity and logo. Ours was twenty-six years old and less usable and memorable as a visual identity in today's world.

It was also time to change our name. We left behind the idea of just being a Bratislava- or regionally-based organization. We are a conservation association that protects nature all over Slovakia. After all, we have grazing zones as far away as in Kráľovský Chlmec.

From now on we are simply
"BROZ – Conservation
Association"

The cormorant which was in our logo at the beginning of BROZ serves as a memory of the Danube Cormorant Island nature reserve, which was cut down during the construction of the Gabčíkovo hydropower plant and then flooded by the waters of the Hrušovská zdrž reservoir. At that time, the Danube was full of fish that could sustain large colonies of cormorants and waterfowl. The cormorant serves as a memento and an aim to have such a Danube again.

We would like to thank the graphic designer **Michal Slovák** for the new logo and the visual identity.

Water



In the Danube floodplains, water is an essential component of the ecosystem. Only thanks to the river and its wetlands was a huge diversity of life created here. Since the entire ecosystem is profoundly linked to water, the ecosystem rapidly degrades and disappears without it. If we want to protect and restore the natural environment of the Danube floodplains, the first thing to focus on is water itself, its reintroduction into the precious wetlands, its protection, and the restoration of a dynamic environment. This is a major part of our long-term activity.

The Vojčianske river branch

The restoration of the lower Vojčianske river branch is the biggest revitalization we have done so far in the inland Danube delta.

There were almost six months of restorative work, consisting of reworking barriers and restoring parts of the riverbed over a 3.7 km stretch of the water flow. Several places where the Danube had originally flowed had been buried as a part of water management modifications.



During the work on restoring the branch, up to 980 metres of the original riverbed were re-excavated. As a part of the revitalization, we improved two sections where the river branch crossed a road. In these sections, the water in the arm had been transferred through inadequate pipes which we replaced with frame culverts. Enlarging and modifying these sections will help fish migration and improve water currents by allowing higher flows to

pass safely through without any clogging.

These activities make the most sense, especially if there continue to be simulated floods in the area in the required volume. The newly excavated branches are designed for higher flows that will encroach on land during such floods. (More about the topic of simulated floods can be found on page 20.)



The branch revitalization will undoubtedly have a positive effect on the ecosystem of the floodplain forest; the flow branch creates suitable habitats for endangered rheophilic (current-affinity) fish as well as for fish living near the gravel bottom, whose population in the Danube has decreased over the last fifty years by 70 percent. With the increased flows, steep riverbanks will be created that shall serve as a nesting habitat for endangered bird species such as the common kingfisher and the sand martin. Flowing water, which washes away sediments and exposes the gravel bottom, better infiltrates into the subsoil and feeds groundwater sources. Besides that, dredging and riverbed extension will slow down the outflow of water from the land. **These key activities will improve the ecological condition of the Danube and help fulfil obligations arising from the Water Framework Directive, which is binding for Slovakia as an EU**

member state. These are some of the most important measures we can implement during the biodiversity and climate crisis.

"The restoration of natural river processes and the revitalization of river dynamics should be the goal of every successful river revitalization. The Vojčianske river branch is an example of this, and we hope that this result will be further supported by a greater water allocation to the river branch system."



Andrej Devečka,
Project manager

The revitalization was financially supported by WWF Slovakia through the Living Danube Partnership and the Coca-Cola Foundation.





We saved the wetland

Thanks to 1066 donors, we managed to collect the target amount for the preservation of the wetlands in Čiližská Radvaň.

We are very glad that in just ten months we managed to raise up to 100 thousand euros for the purpose of nature conservation and specifically for the preservation of wetlands in agricultural landscapes. We launched the campaign in December 2022, and in October 2023 we could declare it to be successfully completed. According to available information, this is the biggest one-off fundraising campaign aimed at

the protection of a natural site that was announced and successfully collected in Slovakia. This confirmed to us that the public are aware of the importance of protecting wetlands and that they are even willing to contribute financially and take real steps to save them.

At the same time, it shows that people trust our work and know that the steps we take for nature are taken seriously and are always completed. We greatly appreciate this trust.

Taking an owner's position, we asked the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic to include this area in the Natura 2000 network during the campaign in order to extend the Special area of conservation of these wetlands.



By contributing to the wetlands, donors supported 42 hectares:

- successful and undisturbed nesting sites of rare bird species (e.g. several pairs of northern lapwings this season)
- a water retention measure that holds up to 70 million litres of water at once
- a site for the biodiversity of water and soil invertebrates, amphibians, and pollinators
- a natural climate cooler (a place where life is buzzing, even in summer at 34 °C)
- sites where the protection of such elements will be of the highest importance during the biodiversity and climate crisis



In the fundraising campaign to save the wetland, we raised 107 437 euros. With these additional funds, we purchased an additional 1.6 hectares of wet fields adjacent to our wetland on the other side and included it in the protected area. In total, we managed to restore 43.6 hectares of original wetlands to their natural state, which until recently had been fields which had been ploughed and drained. They were greatly needed in the desolate agricultural landscape of southern Slovakia. That is why we are helping nature to restore them. We are very grateful to everyone who supported us in this effort!

You can find information about the collection on the [campaign website](#).





We restored wetlands in the Dedinské Ostrovy area

In the spring we **restored eight hectares of wetlands** in Dedinské Ostrovy, which is located behind a dam in the inland Danube delta. The wetlands are located in a low-lying area within the remains of a former arm of the river. The work for the wetland restoration involved digging a 100-metre-long connection channel. We brought water from a nearby seepage channel to then flood the Istragov area. Digging



a canal, restoring the wetlands, and improving the water environment in the Dedinské Ostrovy area took about a month. Preparatory work, drafting the study, and securing permits preceded this and took much longer.

The arm was cut off from the river branch system in the 1950s by the construction of a dam. Since the construction of the Gabčíkovo hydropower plant, no water

had seeped into it anymore and it had dried up completely.

Dedinské Ostrovy serves as an important bio-corridor between the southern part of the Istragov and Velký háj areas. We restored the wetlands as part of the LIFE Microtus II project for the protection of the Pannonian root vole in order to connect two places inhabited by this rare endemic species.

Inland delta simulated flooding occurred for the first time at a volume of 120 m³/s

In July, the largest flow in the last nineteen years reached the inland Danube delta at 120 m³/s. We requested such a flow in a petition in 2020 for saving the delta and at every subsequent meeting with water managers from the Vodohospodárska výstavba state enterprise and the Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic.

More water for this valuable area was requested by us as well as by experts

from the Water Research Institute and the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic. Larger flows were promised several times in this area, which was the most affected by the construction of the Gabčíkovo hydropower plant, but it was only during the summer simulated flood of 2023 that they became a reality. It took time for everyone involved (paradoxically, all of them departmental organizations of the Ministry of the Environment) to agree that this would happen. Previously there had only been floods in the area with a flow rate of 90 m³/s.

The inland Danube delta is a territory that was highly affected by the construction of the Gabčíkovo hydropower plant, and its ecosystems have been insufficiently supplied with water for a long time. This rich network of river arms and wetlands no longer communicates with the original Danube riverbed, since most of its water was redirected to the hydropower plant. What was left for nature is not sufficient for the floodplain forest ecosystem. It is important to therefore simulate floods for





the survival of this valuable area. The use of simulated floods has nonetheless been a long struggle between the energy sector and nature conservationists, and nature has been getting the short end of the stick. This time, at least, and for the first time in a long while, it seems that we are moving in the right direction.

An overflow of 120 m³/s was released into the area for exactly three days. When it decreased, the dams in the river branches were closed and the water was used to flood the floodplain forests.

We will keep fighting for overflows of such a scale to be performed not only

as a test but also for their establishment within the binding handling regulations of the Gabčíkovo hydropower plant so that they are permitted to take place every year.

The inland delta is the largest system of wetlands in Slovakia, and it needs such intervention. It is a vast natural area with enormous biodiversity and water-holding capacity, which nature designed itself, and which we need to be functional, healthy, and brimming with life during the climate crisis.

"We welcome the simulated floods, but we must not forget that this is only the most necessary compensation for isolating this area from natural water flows and the opportunity for it to be naturally flooded. At a time of climate and biodiversity crisis, this rare area should be given water regularly and in sufficient volumes, and there should be no need to fight repeatedly for this."



Karolína Sobeková,
Project manager





We have launched the largest river protection project in Slovakia

In January, we held the opening conference for LIFE Living Rivers, which is the largest project we are a part of. It is an integrated LIFE project which includes ten partners from the Czech Republic and Slovakia, including six government organizations, three non-governmental organizations, and one university.

The Living Rivers project is focused on the implementation of the Slovak Water Plan in the Danube, Ipeľ, Hron, and Belá river basins.



The goal is to ensure a good ecological status for the selected rivers and to improve the 344 km of water courses through the implementation of hydromorphological measures, appropriate care of protected areas in the vicinity of water bodies, access to forest management, and the removal of barriers to migrating fish (e.g. sturgeon at the Gabčíkovo hydropower plant).

We are excited about this major project, where big measures are going to be

taken, and this is exactly what our rivers need in times of climate change and biodiversity crisis.

The partners of the LIFE Living Rivers project are the Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic; the Water Research Institute; Slovak Water Management Enterprise; the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic; WWF Slovakia; Catch Me if You Can; the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovicé; the Tatra National Park; Vodohospodárska výstavba, š.p.; and BROZ.

Protecting endangered species



We focus on the protection of endangered species across all our projects, primarily through the care of their habitats. This is done through the revitalization of riverbanks, river side arms and river branches, wetlands, meadows, and pastures. We also do these activities for the animals and plants dependent on them and for biodiversity itself. We have several activities focused directly on the protection of endangered species, improving the genetics of their populations, and the protection of individual animals, especially for species that are in some areas threatened with extinction. Such threatened species include the European pond turtle, the Pannonian root vole, and the European ground squirrel.



Up to 20 000 young sturgeon were released into the Danube

Big things happened in June. The population of native Danube sturgeon – specifically the small sturgeon – was strengthened by the release of 20 thousand young sturgeon.

As part of the LIFE Living Rivers project, we organized a large release event that was taken care of by our Czech project partner – The Faculty of Fisheries and Protection of Water of the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovicé.

On the morning of 14 June at 6 am, the sturgeon set off from Pohořelice in the Czech Republic, where the University of South Bohemia has its special small sturgeon breeding programme. They



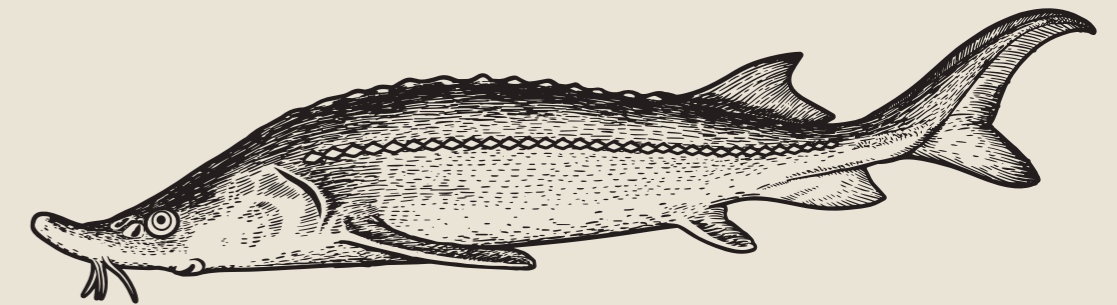
are human-bred but genetically pure Danube sturgeon, with the breeding stock having been caught directly in the river. Throughout the day, sturgeon were gradually released at three locations – near Čunovo, in Sap, and on Velký Lél island.

It was a successful event, interesting for the media, aimed at strengthening the population of this native species. This species had gradually disappeared from rivers due to bad ecological conditions as a result of the construction of migration barriers, the sedimentation of

the gravel bottom, and the hunting of sturgeon for caviar. This also concerns other members of the sturgeon family.

We have several activities planned as part of the Living Rivers project. We will be releasing sturgeon every other year.

We will also try to restore our rivers to a state closer to nature so that sturgeon can thrive here without the need for labour-intensive supplementation in the future.





Rescue trapping of European ground squirrels

The rescue trapping of European ground squirrels took place in the spring and summer months at locations with high numbers in order to replenish genetically poor populations and establish new ones. This activity is implemented every year as a part of the LIFE Sysel' project. Thanks to this, we have been able to expand European ground squirrels within the country and stabilize populations that were on the verge of extinction.

In 2023 we caught and relocated a total of 997 European ground squirrels from three main and three

smaller source locations. We released them into fourteen locations and two zoos – National Zoo Bojnice and Bratislava Zoo.

European ground squirrels are caught in live traps and then transported to the target locations as quickly as possible.

One capture in the summer of 2023 was really special. European ground squirrels from the large area near Bratislava airport had expanded into the surrounding grassy areas between the logistic centres. About five hundred European ground squirrels lived in one



of these areas, and in the winter the developer decided to build there.

At that time, all the European ground squirrels were in hibernation. If heavy machinery had driven in there and started excavation work, it is not difficult to imagine how things could have ended.

The developer was required to have the construction proposal assessed through the EIA, which included an evaluation of the occurrence of protected species (especially European ground squirrels). After some less than smooth communication, there was eventually an agreement that required the developer to implement and partially pay for the trapping and the removal (translocation) of the European ground squirrels.

As part of the LIFE Sysel project, we also met some costs (particularly involving trapping and transport). The captured European ground squirrels were moved to nine locations in western Slovakia, where there were small European ground squirrel colonies that needed to be replenished or where the squirrels had disappeared. (In those cases, we established new ground squirrel localities.) It was a logistically demanding endeavour, with the whole operation taking place in July and in extremely hot weather. The captured squirrels could not be kept in transport containers for long and had to be moved to new locations as quickly as possible. The operation was supervised by a large team led by the most respected ground squirrel expert in Slovakia and our colleague, Ervín Hapl. He cooperated with project partners from Alka Wildlife, National Zoo Bojnice, and the Faculty of

Natural Sciences at Comenius University.

The trappers prepared apples, set the traps, fed the ground squirrels with sunflower seeds, observed the traps with binoculars, took the ground squirrels away, prepared new areas, and brought the squirrels to them.

The trappers, who were determined to persevere until the last ground squirrel was captured, managed to catch 532 squirrels.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the operation. It truly took determination and enthusiasm to work there in the 30-degree heat.





Restoring ground squirrels in new locations

Of the fourteen locations where we strengthened the ground squirrel population in 2023, three were newly established locations within the project areas (in the Kamenínske slaniská and Marcelovské piesky areas of European significance and in the Little Carpathians protected bird area). These are locations where ground squirrels once lived in numerous colonies, and they are selected so that no immediate threats resulting from unsuitable conditions are registered. These are locations where there is extensive grazing which will ensure a suitable habitat and enough

food options for ground squirrels. The monitoring results from the year showed that the selected areas were appropriate and that the reintroduced ground squirrels were doing well. We wish them all the best.

"In 2023, the number of ground squirrels in Slovakia reached 38 thousand. In 2020, when the LIFE Sysel project started, there were only 20 thousand of them; however, the most important thing is that the number of small colonies (that were previously nearing extinction) is now rising."



Ervín Hapl,
Field manager





Turtles from protected nests have successfully hatched

In 2023 almost all of Slovakia found out about the existence of European pond turtles when some political nominees built their campaigns on the budget of the project aimed to protect them. They tried to question the legitimacy of the expenditure, and they spread false information that the project budget was ten times higher than it was in reality. This populist move ended up bringing

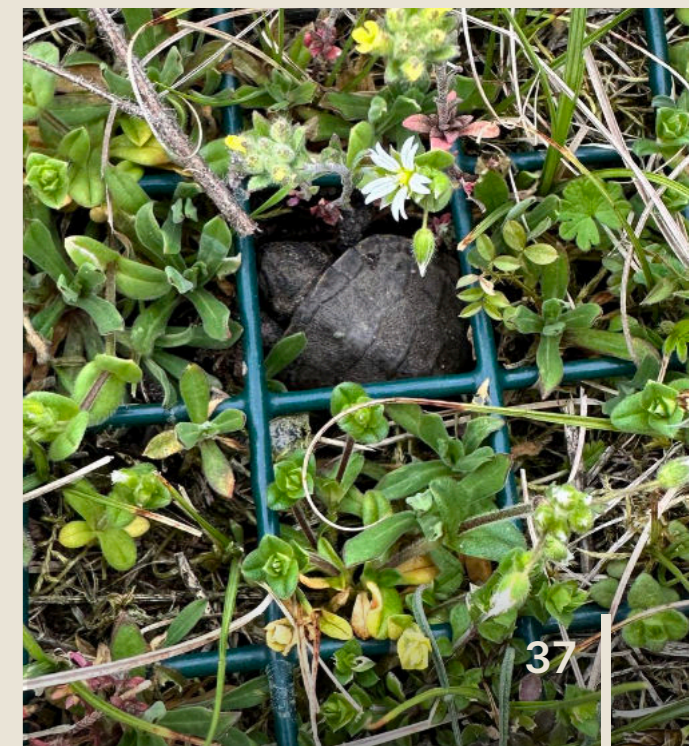
quite a lot of publicity for the turtle, which was featured in many newspapers and magazines. We were constantly providing information about it and about the project to protect it. Slovaks had a chance to learn almost everything about its life. We hope that people really learned something and remembered at least that the pond turtle is critically endangered and requires specific conditions for its survival. It needs wetlands and sandy soil for laying its eggs. This is what we worked on and secured in 2023.

In the spring, we were very pleased when our colleagues caught the exact moment when pond turtles hatched during their visit of their location. These

were nests protected by special mesh. This mesh was installed by the dog handler Petra after her dog Rex sniffed out where the eggs were after the turtles had laid them. This mesh protected them from predators.

In the spring of 2023, more than two hundred turtles potentially hatched from these protected nests established in 2022.

Subsequently, during the laying season in the summer, we continued the activity of egg protection with mesh. **This year we managed to find and protect twenty-six nests (each containing up to twenty eggs).**





Monitoring fish in our project areas showed improvement

Monitoring is regularly conducted by ichthyologists from the Faculty of Natural Sciences at Comenius University. This happened in 2023 in the inland Danube delta at Istragov and other locations, at the Karloveské rameno side arm in Bratislava, and at the Veľký Lél arm.

Daniel Grul'a, an ichthyologist from the implementation team, wrote to us about the monitoring of the Veľký Lél arm (revitalized since 2013):

"The important thing is that juveniles of species of European importance such as pintails, scallops, and shiny roach were found in the arm, which means that they reproduce there. Other species of European importance there included the predatory bream, the northern barbel, and the white-finned grouper. Juveniles of rheophilic, such as

the northern barbel and northern pike, were also found mainly in the flowing sections in the inflow part, where they have better conditions and flowing water."

The monitoring of the revitalized arms clearly shows that restoring the river channels is beneficial for fish populations. In addition to common species, rare species are appearing (especially with young individual fish) which indicates the vitality of the population.



Monitoring pollinators in restored meadows and pastures

The number of populations at these sites is growing

The entomologist Marek Semelbauer from the Slovak Academy of Sciences monitored insects from 2020 to 2023 at four locations (Apalský ostrov, Bodíky, Čičov, and Veľký Lél) where we restored a grazing environment and implemented other measures to support biodiversity. He recorded three groups of pollinators: butterflies, bees, and dipterans (e.g. hoverflies and greater bee flies). During the entire period, he monitored almost eight thousand insects and classified them into over

two hundred species, three of which were new to Slovakia (*Conops insignis*, *Scolia galbula*, and *Tolmerus cowini*).

Our interventions as managers included cutting down non-native maples, trimming head willows, restoring grazing with livestock (cows), and sometimes mowing. So what do pollinators think about this?

The monitoring results clearly show that there has almost always been an increase in the number of pollinators. This growth was confirmed by statistical tests. **Thanks to our activities, we have more butterflies, bees, and hoverflies, which is far from a trivial matter.** The previous year saw a visible increase in only two locations, whereas this year saw a noticeable increase in all of them. Nature requires time.

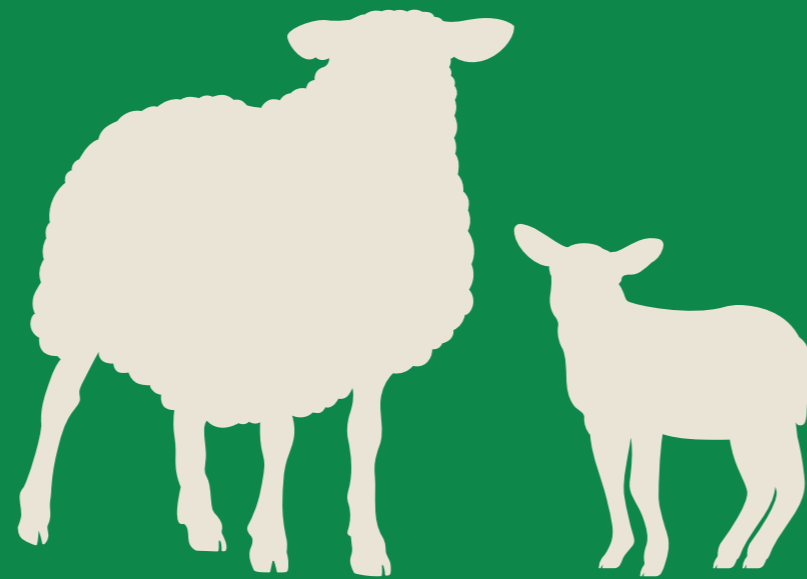
The monitoring of pollinators took place within the LIFE Restoration and



management of Danube floodplain habitats project.

We thank Marek for this positive news. We anticipated an increase in pollinators, but having the scientific evidence to confirm this is always good to see.

Grazing



Another big area of our work and focus is the biodiversity of meadows and pastures. They have a vast number of different kinds of plants and animals attached to them. Grazing animals used to be common in the country. Today, unfortunately, it is different. Farm animals are often locked up in barns, and the wealth of the pastures is lost in the shadows of shrubs and overgrown trees. This is why we decided to promote grazing for the plants and animals that were once common in the countryside but which are now rare. These include different types of orchids, pasqueflowers, solitary bees, butterflies, and species such as the European ground squirrel. Thanks to cooperation with local farmers, we are restoring grazing at more than one hundred locations throughout Slovakia.

Restoring grazing in protected areas

Restoring grazing in protected areas is a key activity, and things were no different in 2023. We managed to restore or expand this traditional land management method in twenty-seven locations throughout Slovakia. **Thanks to successful collaboration with local farmers and the operation of three of our own farms (so far), it has been possible to return grazing to more than two thousand hectares of meadows and pastures; there are 107 locations located in fifty protected areas stretching from Bratislava to Kráľovský Chlmec.**

In 2023 we managed to achieve almost half of the grazing successes thanks to



the LIFE Panalp project. In the Strážovské vrchy mountains, we removed invasive trees and built a 41-hectare fence in Zliechov. Thanks to this, a local landowner now grazes a herd of Pinzgauer cattle, which help maintain the habitat for rare plant and butterfly species. It is a similar case in Závada near Topoľčany, where we successfully experimented with the winter grazing of goats and sheep with farmers. As expected, this practice proved to be a very effective tool for suppressing invasive woody plants. After years of successful cooperation in grazing animals in the courtyard of Devín Castle in Bratislava, we extended goat grazing to the adjacent castle rock, which is the only locality in Slovakia where one can find Austrian wormwood.

As part of the LIFE Sub-Pannonic project, we continued to restore pastures in southern Slovakia. We are gradually expanding grazing in the

Biskupické floodplains on areas known for the presence of rare orchids. In cooperation with a local farmer from the Cerová highlands, we managed to return a flock of sheep to over twenty hectares in Dechtárske Vinice, which is a protected area of European significance. Similarly, we expanded pastures in the Slovak Karst by more than sixteen hectares in the Horný vrch SAC - special area of conservation near Hačava.

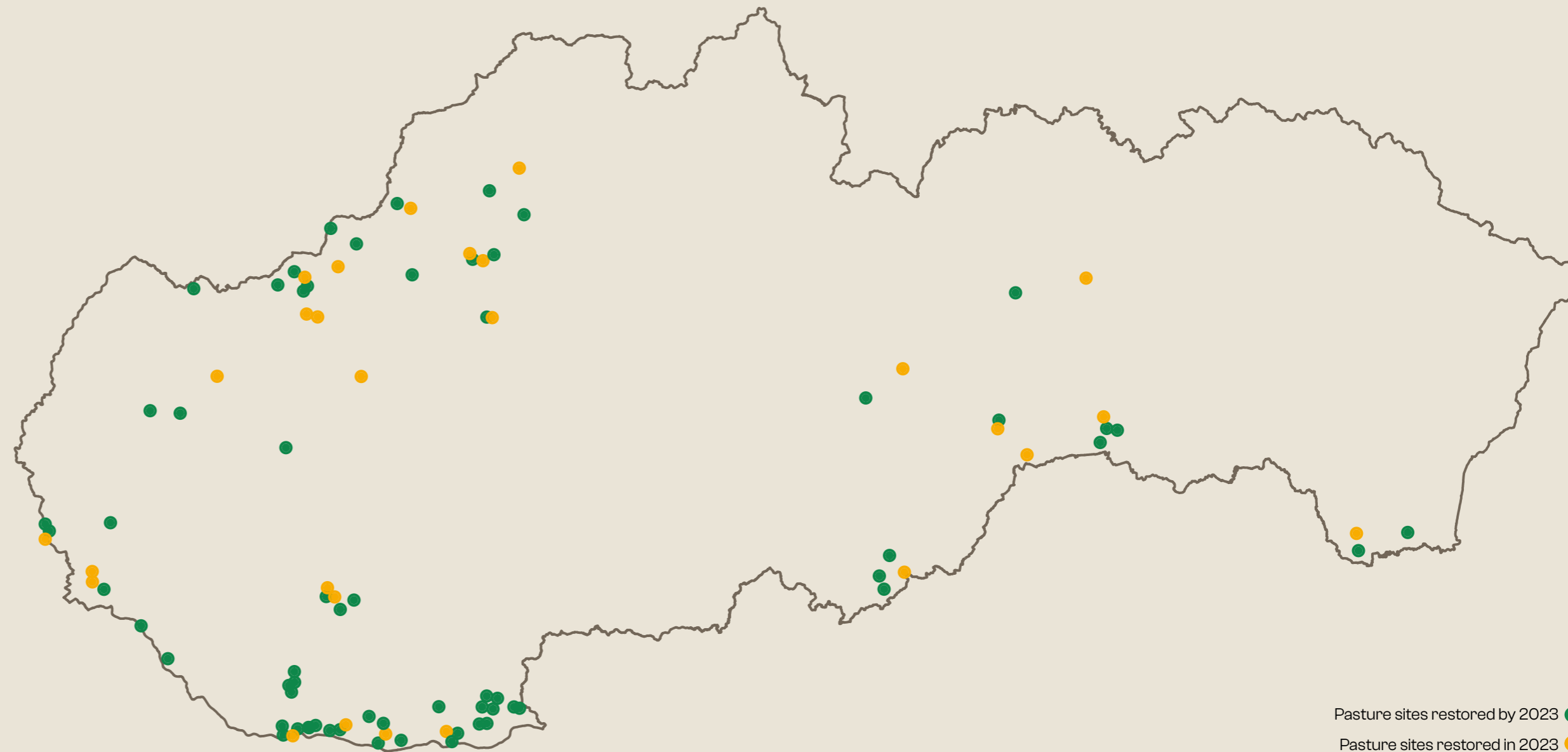
The LIFE Juh project brought an expansion of grazing at the location of Panské lúky near Tvrdošovce. This is one of the most precious salt marshes in Slovakia, and in 2023 the grazing area was significantly expanded by sixty hectares. Cows graze there and are managed by a local farmer. We had notable success at the Čenkov site, where grazing was expanded to 165 hectares. Traditional grazing will be maintained here with the introduction of

the Hungarian Grey Cattle, which is native to the Danubian Lowland.

Within the LIFE Metamorphosis project, we cleared and fenced off a significant portion of the Beckovské Skalice nature reserve. In the spring, the area abounds with pheasant's eye and orchids. During the summer, there are cross gentians, which attracts the rare mountain Alcon blue butterfly. All these precious inhabitants of the reserve will benefit from the grazing of sheep and goats that we started here in cooperation with a local farm.

In 2023 we restored and enlarged the pastures to save endangered plants and butterflies as well as our beloved turtles and ground squirrels. The completion of three years of work aimed at

preserving the turtles was completed at one of the top turtle habitats in the Danube area. Our water buffaloes liked the wetland we restored here, and, thanks to this, the location became more suitable for the life of turtles as well. Within the LIFE Sysel' project, we managed to expand the pasture at the favourite ground squirrel locality near Muráň from four to twelve hectares. We also completed a beautiful story of cooperation between conservationists, the municipality, and the Spiš diocese in Spišské Podhradie. Thanks to this effort, the city's flock of native Wallachian sheep now grazes at the Pažica hill meadow. This is a UNESCO World Heritage site, **so the sheep help maintain the population of ground squirrels as well as our cultural heritage.**





Pasture for ground squirrels in Spišské Podhradie

In collaboration with the local municipality, we started sheep grazing in Spišské Podhradie.

Sheep grazing is a traditional activity in the Spiš region, and its restoration on the meadows in Spišské Podhradie was possible through the collaboration of several entities: BROZ, the Slovak

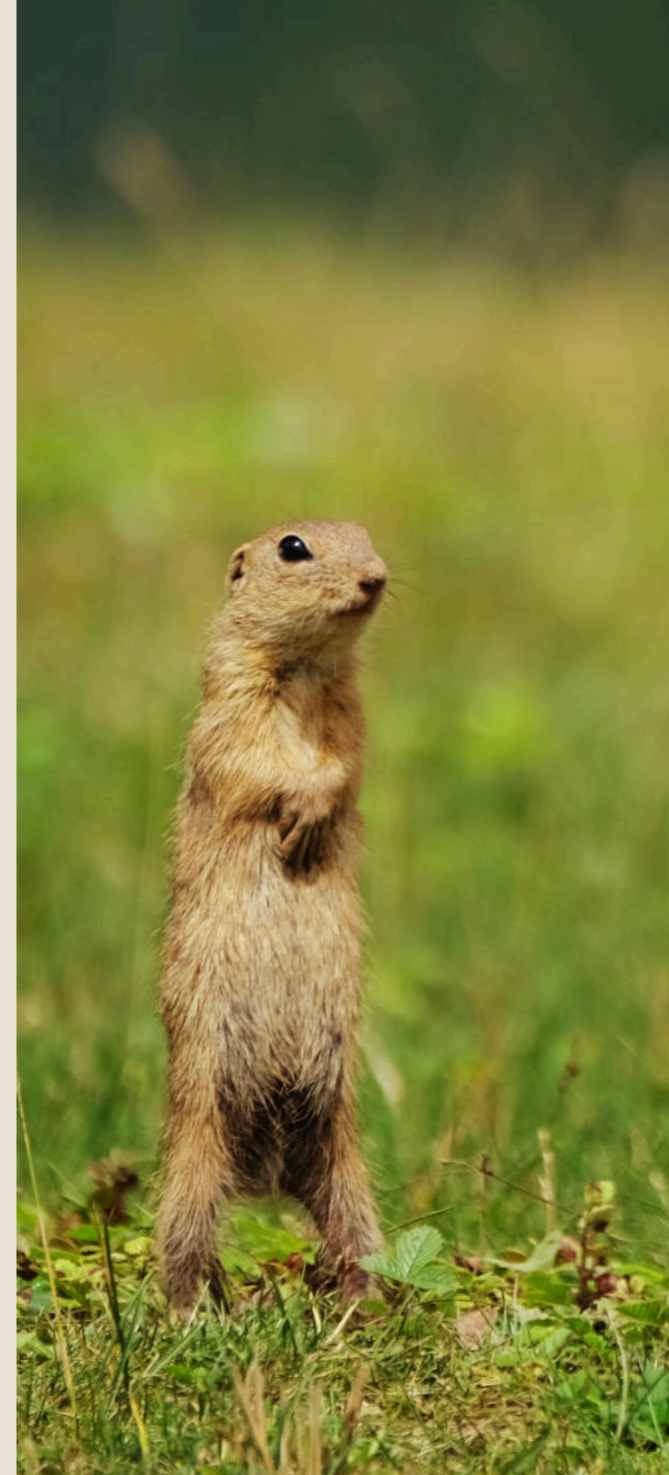
Paradise National Park, the municipality of Spišské Podhradie, and the Spiš diocese located in Spišské Podhradie.

After several years of preparation, we started sheep grazing in May on eighteen hectares of meadow between Spišské Podhradie and Sivá Brada.

“Sheep grazing has a long tradition in Spiš, and we are happy that this collaboration was successful and that we will graze here again. It is a popular tourist location and a cultural monument. This resulted in restrictions for livestock farming, and we struggled to find a farmer who would graze on the site for a long time; therefore, the town

decided to take action by becoming a registered sheep breeder and employing a young shepherd called “juhás“, who together with his father looks after the sheep in the meadows,” said the mayor of Spišské Podhradie, Michal Kapusta.

In the past when grazing was practised in Spišské Podhradie, thousands of ground squirrels lived in these meadows. Unfortunately, before last year's grazing season, only a small colony of approximately eighty squirrels remained. Sheep grazing is starting to bring the numbers back. Ground squirrels require good outlook, and pastureland is ideal for them to live on.



Grazing also increases the species diversity of the plants and insects they feed on. The ground squirrel is a critically endangered species whose population has dropped from the millions to just a few thousand.

„Thanks to cooperation with the municipality, the national park, and the diocese, it was possible to bring grazing back to the Pažica site after many years. Since this is both a ground squirrel pasture site and a site of UNESCO cultural heritage, the sheep shelter was designed in a traditional style so that it would fit into the character of the area. We also chose Slovakia's national sheep breed, the Native Wallachian sheep, to graze here.”



Katarína Tuhárska,
Project manager

The land is owned by the Spiš diocese in Spišské Podhradie, which agreed to the grazing and enabled the protection of this rare site, which is part of a protected area in the Natura 2000 network. The Slovak Paradise National Park Administration, which initiated the restoration of grazing, has explained that such land management is ideal for ground squirrels as well as for plants and insects in endangered dry grassland habitats, which are also protected in this area.





Grazing has been successfully restored on Apály Island

After several years of trying, negotiating with farmers, obtaining permits, building fences, and securing a water supply for the animals, we finally managed to bring cows to Apály Island at the confluence of the Váh and Stará Nitra rivers.

The island is a national nature reserve, which consists of floodplain forests and

meadows, where people from the local cooperative used to graze animals.

As a part of the LIFE Danube Floodplains project, we had previously pollarded willows in this location, mowed areas designated for grazing, and removed invasive tree species originally from North America (ash-leaved maple and red ash).

Regular grazing will help to open meadows now that they have been cleared of overgrowth.

This is why, in collaboration with the local farming cooperative at Vrbová nad Váhom, we released twenty cows onto

the island so that they would graze on the vegetation and keep these damp meadows in good condition.

Initially we placed the animals in an area of seven hectares, and we plan to add an area of nineteen hectares at the back of the island. Grazing as a type of meadow management is highly significant for pollinators, flowers, insects, and birds – and for the biodiversity of the site as a whole.

As we always say – grazing is amazing!

We also graze for rare plants in eastern Slovakia

The **Ladmovské vápence** SAC - special area of conservation is located in the Zemplín region in eastern Slovakia.

The natural values of this location – primarily rare plant species such as the pasqueflower, pheasant's eye, some orchids, and *Onosma tornensis* – have gradually disappeared. As is usually the case, the area becomes overgrown due to the abandonment of sheep grazing.

Some Ladmovce village residents still remember the traditional pasturelands. People used to go to the pastures above the village to enjoy the view.



Several years of effort within the LIFE Sub-Pannonic project has resulted in the total rental of 135 hectares within SACs from the Kašvár land community and the church.

Before we started removing invasive tree species (mainly blackthorns and dog roses), we agreed on grazing with local farmers. For a long time, we were looking for farmers who would not be afraid of the challenge to return the pasture to Ladmovce. Today we collaborate with our ambitious partners Maroš and Natália from Mudrovice; they have a very nice farm, and they breed cows and horses and rehabilitate racehorses. And right in Ladmovce we have a local shepherd who has worked with animals all his life and who takes care of the flock.

In the first years, there will be a high proportion of goats in the flock to help suppress regrowth after the removal of

dispersed woody plant seeds. In the following years, the ratio of animals in the herd will gradually shift towards a dominance of sheep. **Currently, more than three hundred animals graze on approximately forty-five hectares!**

After clearing the area of invasive plant species, it was clear that a lot of rubbish had been discarded there. Together with the Latorica Protected Landscape Area administration, we organized volunteer clean ups. The local community, led by the mayor, have been actively involved and they even provided a tractor for waste removal.

Tourists can look forward to the installation of an information panel and other elements of tourism infrastructure. We will also try to support eco-tourism in this beautiful area.



We expanded grazing at Panské lúky near Tvrdošovce

In 2023 we managed to expand grazing in the Panské lúky meadows near Tvrdošovce (Nové Zámky district). This is where the second most valuable salt marsh in Slovakia is located. You can find several rare halophyte species here.

The expansion of grazing was the result of negotiations between landowners, users, and local farmers that lasted for many years. The result was worth it: by expanding grazing to sixty hectares, we managed to restore almost all of it across the entire area. The impact of grazing on plants and soil will be studied by experts from the Slovak Academy of Sciences. It can already be seen that grazing helps rare species here, as birds such as the northern lapwing and the redshank have nested in the grazing areas.

We have expanded grazing at the Čenkov site by 165 hectares

Čenkov is the most valuable location of Pannonian drifting sands in Slovakia. It is only here that you can find rare plants like *Colchicum arenarium*, *Ephedra distachya*, the alkane, and the sand iris. It is also the only place in Slovakia where there is a special Pannonian poplar forest habitat with junipers.

The condition of this area has not been ideal for a long time. In addition to the dense shading by trees, it is threatened by the rapid spread of invasive plants. This is why we have been working on restoring this area for several years.

In 2023 we achieved an important milestone; we expanded the pastureland at this location by more than 165 hectares.

Hungarian grey cattle will graze here – they are iconic animals of the Danubian Lowland. Although this location still has a long way to go, and a lot of work needs to be done, the restoration of grazing is a very important step.



„Animal grazing has shaped our landscape for a long time. It is a part of our tradition and identity. I am very happy that in 2023 we increased the number of locations where we restored grazing to more than one hundred. With this we help the natural environment as well as farmers in the regions of Slovakia.”



Pavol Littera,
BROZ Vice-Chairman

We successfully restored grazing in Zliechov with local farmers

Our LIFE Panalp project is approaching its halfway point, and we are very happy that we are succeeding in fulfilling one of its main goals – the restoration of traditional grazing on rare dry grassland habitats in the Little Carpathians, White Carpathians, and Strážovské vrchy mountains. One of the most important project locations is in the village of Zliechov. After decades of overgrowth, we've returned pasture to the first two large areas in cooperation with local farmers. We are already preparing more for next year.



The first of the restored pastures lies directly below the highest peak of the Strážovské vrchy mountains, the majestic Strážov, in the vicinity of which there sprawl vast primeval forests and overgrown meadows. Thanks to funds from the project, we managed to create a seventeen-hectare pasture with a high-quality and durable electric fence where a local farmer keeps a mixed flock of sheep and goats. We gradually removed invasive trees from this area, in a very sensitive way, in order to restore the traditional character of the landscape, with shelterbelts, juniper stands and old solitary trees. It is also important to preserve the sparse hazel stands, in the undergrowth of which there are a lot of *Corydalis cava* and nutritious plants of the rare clouded Apollo butterfly (*Parnassius mnemosyne*).



On the opposite side of the Zliechov valley, in the area of Pod Draštinou, lies another pasture. Here, in cooperation with another local farmer, we managed to return pastureland to up to forty-one hectares of meadow. Just a few years ago, these local abandoned pastures with juniper trees were lost in the shade of the pines, and the other part of the area was without regular management. Today, however, the junipers are enjoying the sunshine again, and so are many rare species of plants and animals, such as the large blue butterfly (*Maculinea arion*). Fortunately, they had been able to survive the inhospitable times when there was no farming, and today they are coming back to the areas

now grazed by the herd of Pinzgauer cattle. The grazing of cows suppresses expansive grasses (e.g. *Calamagrostis epigejos*) and allows flowering herbs to thrive, which gives the biotope a more varied structure that is optimally utilized for agriculture.

Other locations can be seen from the pastures below Strážov and Draština, where we are working on the restoration of overgrown areas and the return of traditional farming. Biodiversity will benefit from this, as will the local farmers who welcome our activities. That is exactly what our intention is.





We cleared the pastures and started to restore a habitat for butterflies

The restoration of suitable habitats for target butterfly species, involving the thinning of forests, the clearing of abandoned pastures, and subsequent grazing in forests, started immediately under the LIFE Metamorphosis butterfly conservation project over an area of 42.05 hectares. Grazing in 2023 took place in the Beckovské Skalice nature reserve over an area of 8.2 hectares, in the Holubyho Kopanice nature reserve over an area of 20.97 hectares, on Krasín hill over an area of 4.7 hectares, and in the Strážovské vrchy mountains over an area of 8.18 hectares. Herds of

goats, sheep, and cows were used for grazing, being owned either by BROZ or by the local farmers we work with.

We also cleared 2.8 km of wide margins between woodland and grassland, which is a very important habitat for butterfly life in addition to the pastureland itself.

The change of land use from being intensive (from mulched or intensively mown meadows) to extensive (grazing or delayed mosaic mowing) has been implemented so far on 44.95 hectares in the Holubyho Kopanice nature reserve.





The Krajina živá programme

One of the main activities of the Krajina živá (Living landscape) programme is to reward the best nature-based practices and farms. **In 2023, we visited seven farms with a committee of experts and presented them with the “Farma živá – We Farm in Harmony with Nature” award.** They can present the award on their farms, websites, or products. We have also been promoting the work of award-winning farms for a long time through our portal and in social networks and cooperating media. Farma živá is the

new name of the category in which we classify the most exemplary farms after a visit with experts. All of the selected farms showed us that their operations have positive impacts on the landscape in addition to their production side and can serve as examples for other farmers. The composition of the seven farms awarded in the first official year of our programme reflects the diversity at the level of natural features and in farming as a whole. **The selection takes into account the management measures implemented to promote biodiversity, the condition of the soil and water, the presence of non-productive landscape features, the diversity of crops, and the alignment of production with the benefits to the landscape.**



The smallest enterprises among the award winners were represented by the Dream Farm micro-farm from Rye Island (Žitný ostrov), where Michal and Eliška successfully started the intensive cultivation of organic vegetables on a thirty-acre garden behind their family house. Small family businesses were represented by the Vlčí vrch goat farm in Horná Súča and the Pod Čerešňou farm in Pliešovce. The fourth family business to get an award hails from the town of Svätý Jur. Here, Michal Bažalík devotes himself to winemaking. The other three award-winning farms can be classified as medium-sized enterprises, but all of them have a family tradition. Johann Moscon brought his business to the village of Libichava north of Nitra from the Italian part of the Tyrol. The Kořínek family came to the village of Beckov in western Slovakia from

Moravia. They took over a classic village cooperative and gradually transformed it into an exemplary eco-farm. The last award-winning farm is located in the picturesque town of Tisovec, where the Agrospol Hradová family business was taken over from his grandfather by local Denis Komjaty. The business focuses mainly on the pastoral breeding of cattle, donkeys, horses, and sheep. Their milk is used for the production of traditional Slovak cheeses. In cooperation with conservationists, Denis has also returned critically endangered ground squirrels to local pastures, earning him a special commendation from our side.

In addition to valuing and raising the profile of nature-friendly farmers in the eyes of consumers, we aim to connect and educate farmers with a similar



worldview. In May 2023, we organized a seminar on the gentle deworming of livestock. We can prevent biodiversity from being adversely affected by using an appropriate combination of less harmful antiparasitic treatments. During the first weekend in September, we went to the Hont region with farmers and stakeholders for inspiration. During a two-day workshop focused on

sustainable tourism, we visited the Black Mulberry Festival and the Gazdovský trh marketplace in the village of Bátorce together with interested citizens from the Zemplín, Gemer, Middle Váh region, and Bratislava regions. The Krajina živá project is financially supported by VÚB bank.

Trees and forests



The floodplain forests around the Danube are another component of the ecosystem that we focus on protecting and restoring. These are very valuable stands of soft and hard wood forest stands directly linked to a regime of periodic flooding and water dynamics. The river's movements shape and expose the banks where a very dynamic floodplain forest can grow. By changing the river's dynamics and enclosing the river in dams, we greatly impacted the riparian landscape and the ability of floodplain forests to grow and rejuvenate. This is why it is important to help floodplain forests and actively restore them. We do this every year by planting native tree species and protecting valuable old forest stands. Trees in the open countryside are also important because they provide shelter and food for many species, while also preventing wind erosion and providing important shade.

Tree planting

The year 2023 was rich in tree planting within the floodplain forests, and we also planted in the open countryside. We enhanced the Danube floodplains with tens of thousands of new additions of native tree species. In 2023 we continued the restoration of the natural floodplain forests in the Danube floodplains (the Danube floodplains, Čičovské luhy, and Velký Lél island special areas of conservation). **We planted white poplars, black poplars, grey poplars, white willows, and brittle willows (softwoods) as well as English oak and European ash (hardwoods). In addition to this, we planted several hundred fruit trees. In total, we planted almost thirty-three thousand trees.**



Soft floodplain forests are a rare and endangered biotope that can no longer rejuvenate naturally due to changes in river dynamics in most parts of the Danube. Its natural rejuvenation in regulated river landscapes is best achieved in river sections and arms that have been restored, stripped of bank fortification, or reconnected back to a natural source of flowing water. In short, we need to bring the river back to its natural state.

By implementing these measures aimed at improving the water regime, in combination with the direct planting of native species of riparian trees, we can achieve the effect of restoring these precious ecosystems more efficiently and more quickly, which is essential in times of climate crisis.

The need for further tree planting in the open countryside was primarily due to the European ground squirrel and the expansion of their food base as well as to the many other animals that benefit from fruit trees. We planted early summer varieties to give the ground squirrels time to feed before they went into hibernation. We managed to plant 160 fruit trees (apple, mulberry, plum, and pear trees). We planted in five locations: in the Muránská planina national park; the Tisovský kras, Holubyho Kopanice, and Spišskopodhradské travertíny nature reserves; and in the village of Jesenské. In addition, we grafted approximately one hundred pieces of wild fruit trees at the project locations.

Land for nature conservation

Land purchases for nature conservation are a standard activity of conservation organizations around the world. This benefits both the landowners and nature. Nature conservation does not restrict landowners. In countries where society development has been more continuous than in Slovakia, the government has been addressing the issue within protected areas, with support from nature conservancy associations, civic associations and funds, for decades.

We do not have such a long-term tradition in Slovakia, and the state is

lagging behind in this area as well. It may seem strange to some that land purchases are being handled by conservation associations at all. For us, however, it is a meaningful and important part of what we do. We devote a lot of energy and financial resources to it because it makes sense and allows us to effectively implement ambitious conservation measures and guarantee their sustainability in the future. This is a standard practice with functioning nature conservation.

Thanks to the ownership or lease of land, we are restoring things such as the wetlands and floodplain forests of Istragov near the town of Gabčíkovo, we are irrigating and grassing arable land in the village of Čiližská Radvaň, and we

have been taking care of Veľký Lél island for eighteen years.

Come and check it out for yourself!

Ownership and the use of land gives us opportunities to be involved in many administrative procedures and processes. There is one striking case: the process of simulated flooding in the Danube inland delta and the update to the handling regulations of the Gabčíkovo hydropower plant. We are one of the largest non-state forest managers, which is why we have a strong voice on this issue.

In 2023, we acquired the ownership of seventy-three hectares of land in our target locations – mainly in the Danube area and in the Little Carpathians. In





practice, this meant signing forty-one purchase contracts with fifty-five owners and a lot of communication and administrative work. But it was definitely worth it.

We have also dealt with the property arrangements in protected areas in the form of exchange contracts. In 2023 there were six of them with eight owners. We thank both smaller farmers

and larger agricultural businesses for meeting our requirements. Good relationships with neighbours and local farmers are important to us. Cooperation with local partners is crucial for long-term conservation.

We are also pleased that we have the trust of landowners, who sometimes contact us with offers to sell their land. The financial reward is not the only

motivation. Many owners will no longer farm the land themselves, or they may live in other parts of the country and have other jobs. They nonetheless appreciate that the land and forests of their ancestors will be in good hands and preserved for future generations.

Communication



Communicating our conservation activities to the public is very important to us. This could be the pre-communication of revitalization activities on the ground – where people may encounter, for example, a dredger in the river, which could potentially frighten them. Or it could be communication in the media and on social networks. Through articles, videos, and press releases, we strive to translate conservation and science into human language and communicate to the public that nature can be both protected and repaired. Collaborating with artists, writers, photographers, and marketers is very important to us because they help make our messages even more attractive to the public and advance their understanding.

We promoted and communicated our projects and activities

Young reporters on Veľký Lél island

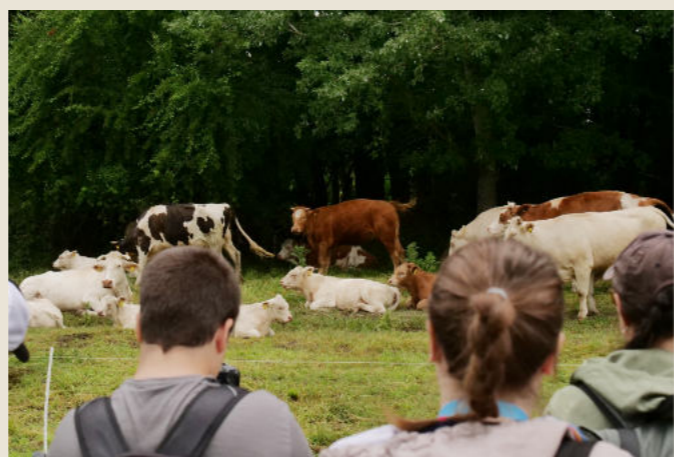
In June 2023, we accompanied the Young Reporters for the Environment on a fieldtrip in the Danube region on the topic of biodiversity. Articles and video outputs addressed topics such as biodiversity, sustainable management, agricultural landscapes, wetlands, and eco-farms.

In Slovakia, we need skilled journalists who are dedicated to environmental

issues and who can communicate them well. We were delighted to take the time to support this much needed activity and workshop from our Climate Game on Slovakia project.

In the meantime, you can see the 2023 edition results [here](#).

Thank you, YRE!



Artist Ján Skaličan presented the Danube in a nomination for the important Oskar Čepán Award

At an exhibition entitled "Call Me if You Need Me", which was part of the nominations for the prestigious Oskar Čepán Award, Ján Skaličan presented a series of photographs and a video installation where he addressed the issue of the inland Danube delta, the insufficient flooding of this area, and its overall undersized water endowment. He spent several days with us in the field,

where we revealed to him the whole situation and showed him visually interesting locations.

"In my research, I seek to develop investigative practices that frame a view of the climate crisis. In the context of the crisis, I think about the possibilities of photographic representation and its overlap into a spatial installation using sound and objects. We need to face up to and confront the problems we have caused. At a time when the words of climatologists and scientists about the



current state of affairs are not enough, visual art can be an important 'accomplice', an autonomous mediator of the broader context. I am increasingly aware of the need for broader interdisciplinary collaboration that leads to meaningful outcomes," Skaličan said of his work.

We are glad that he has helped to bring these topics and us as participants to a wider audience.



The photographer Diana Takáčsová photographed our activities and locations for a world-famous exhibition

In June 2023, an exhibition entitled "Visualizing the Climate Crisis" was held in Bratislava and it took place in many cities around Europe. This exhibition featured photographs by eleven photographers from Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, who, under the guidance of Noor Images, and the renowned Dutch photographer Kadir van Lohuizen,

worked on the theme of the climate crisis in central Europe.

The exhibition included photographs from Velký Lél island and the Istragov nature reserve thanks to Slovak photographer Diana Takáčsová, who has been following our work for a long time and who chose the locations where we have been restoring nature for years. We are very pleased that this is also a way to bring our work to a much wider circle of people in Slovakia as well as internationally.





“Wild Slovakia” by Nigel Marven featured our conservation of the ground squirrel and pond turtle

Nigel Marven, the great British nature documentary filmmaker, made a film about Slovak nature and its richness. He collaborated with a great team of filmmakers, cameramen, and naturalists from Slovakia. He also worked with Milan Kányo, who was responsible for several key activities in our pond turtle conservation project. Thanks to him, the pond turtles made it into the film. Nigel was also filming in the locality with the

most frequent occurrence of ground squirrels in Slovakia (Biele Vody) where he was accompanied by our colleague, Ervín Hapl, from the Conservation of the European Ground Squirrel project. Nigel was interested not only in natural richness but also in conservation context and efforts. We are delighted that these species made it into the film and that they will promote our projects to a wider audience.

Have you seen the film? If not, we highly recommend it.

Mossy Earth once again published great videos of our collaboration

Mossy Earth is an organization that has helped us fund some of our conservation activities for several years. The most important one of them is the restoration of the Istragov nature reserve, where we jointly returned water thirty years after the construction of the Gabčíkovo hydropower plant; the trapping of ground squirrels; and the protection of butterflies. Mossy Earth are a group of marketers and biologists who raise funds from individual donors. They show what their contributions have achieved through engaging videos.

Some of the videos, especially those from Istragov, are among their most popular and have millions of views on

YouTube. The videos of trapping ground squirrels are among the very popular with hundreds of thousands of views.

We invite you to check them out. It's truly an experience.

[What Happened to the Forest We Flooded?](#)

[We've released 803 squirrels at an airport - here's why](#)

[One year ago we flooded a forest - the results are insane](#)

If you'd like to support more projects around the world (not just ours), you can become a Mossy Earth member and help nature in this way as well. In the videos, you will learn how to do it.





We had hats made from Bratislava wool that were in great demand

We have long been concerned about the fate of the wool we produce on our pastures, and of wool in general. Since there is no market for this precious raw material, we tried to find someone who processed wool. One day we got a call from Anka from the Vlnka organization, asking us what we were doing with the

wool from the pastures. And so our cooperation began. Anka took the wool, had it washed and spun, and she knitted us hats from it.

All of us “hipsters” and “soy latte drinkers” even have our woolly hats from Bratislava (and other) pastures, where sheep graze the grasslands so that orchids may bloom. It couldn't be more local and sustainable. We are

happy that there was a great interest in the hats among our supporters.

If you would like such a warm Bratislava woolly hat, do not hesitate to contact us. It will serve you for more than the Bratislava winter.

By buying it, you will also support conservation, us, and locally-made goods, which will give you an even warmer feeling.



Cooperation with the Doma v záhrade magazine

In 2023 we succeeded in spreading awareness of nature-friendly solutions among gardeners thanks to our intensive cooperation with the Doma v záhrade magazine. It has a monthly circulation of more than 15 thousand copies and is mainly read by hobby farmers, gardeners, and nature lovers. Last year we published several articles

there. In January there was an article about the large international volunteer event to save the Apollo butterfly, and in July we had an article on the restoration of grazing in locations that are linked by the protection of natural and cultural heritage. In the September issue, we presented our guide to the gentle deworming of livestock, which may also inspire small breeders reading the magazine. Of course, there were also stories of farms awarded in our Krajina

živá programme. At the end of the year, we expanded our successful cooperation, resulting in the publication of two special supplements to the magazine (our leaflets on the importance of grazing and the pruning of pollard willows).

We are glad that Doma v záhrade has become an eminent magazine for conservation topics.

Cooperation and funding



Cooperation at different levels and securing stable sources of funding for conservation activities are some of the most important areas of our work. We have built our organization and our approach to nature conservation upon the principle of cooperation instead of conflict and exclusion. We communicate with state institutions, municipalities, foresters, hunters, and water managers, and we try to find joint solutions for nature protection. Funding and fundraising make up an equally important challenge. Large revitalizations, such as the ones we carry out, are costly. In addition to European and state resources, we also need to involve the private sector and individual donors if we are to continue to scale up. This was a challenge in 2023 and will continue to be in the period ahead.

Volunteering for BROZ

There was no shortage of volunteer events in 2023. Individual volunteers and companies were always willing to work for nature conservation when we needed a hand in the field.

We held more than sixty volunteer events in 2023. Volunteers helped us with a variety of things from the classic and highly popular tree planting events to various other activities such as clearing pastures of overgrown shrubs, taking care of grazing infrastructure, mowing and raking meadows, picking up litter, and cutting out old forestry

mesh so that it does not form an obstacle in the landscape.

Thank you to the corporate volunteers from Dell, KPMG, IBM, UniCredit, Toyota, Lenovo, Iron Mountain, ING Hubs Slovakia, P-MAT, Terabio, and Bloomreach.

Special thanks go to the geocachers from the Permoníci civic association, who worked hundreds of volunteer hours for us in a wide variety of conditions and terrains.



The BROZ Board of Trustees was established

The last year was also the right time to move BROZ towards the changes within the organization structure. As we cooperate with many international partners and have received support from several organizations and foundations from abroad, we felt the need to move formally towards European standardization. We have always had a clear mission and vision for the organization that has driven us forward and guided us in our conservation activities. In 2023, we defined this more clearly for our growing team. In addition, the need for the establishment of the BROZ Board of Trustees also arose.

The board consists of **water and river experts: Georg Frank** (our experienced long-term partner within the Danubeparks Network) and **Professor Vladimír Kováč** (an expert in river revitalization, a specialist in aquatic ecology, and an ichthyologist).

It also has **experts on species, habitats, and biodiversity: Dr Dušan Žitňan** (a renowned scientist and zoologist at the Slovak Academy of Sciences); **Dr Daniel Dítě** (a researcher at the Plant Science and Biodiversity Centre, Institute of Botany at the Slovak Academy of Sciences); **Dr Lukáš Čížek** (an expert in insect ecology at the Czech Academy of Sciences); **Nat Page**

(the President of Fundatia Adept in Romania); and **Martin Škorpík** (a director of the Department of Special Nature Conservation and Strategic Planning, Management of Podyjí National Park in the Czech Republic).

There is also **the eco-tourism expert Fúzfa Zoltán** (the President of the Pisztráng Kör organization in Hungary).

The BROZ Board of Trustees will participate in the formulation of goals and visions, evaluate the results of conservation activity, and provide feedback to the BROZ leadership and members in order to improve activities and operations.



Mag. Georg Frank



RNDr. Dušan Žitňan, Dr.Sc.



Mgr. Lukáš Čížek, PhD.



Ing. Martin Škorpík



Prof. RNDr Vladimír Kováč, CSc.



RNDr. Daniel Dítě, PhD.



Nat Page



Fúzfa Zoltán

We have become a proud member of the Eurosite network

The Eurosite network connects nature conservation organizations at a European level. It provides networking, capacity building, training, information, advocacy, and awareness-raising services for conservation professionals across Europe. In 2023 we became



members of this international network and attended a members' meeting, where we had the opportunity to present our projects and current fundraising campaigns, address current challenges in nature conservation in Slovakia, and compare them with the

experience of organizations from other countries. It was interesting and beneficial to meet at a pan-European level and exchange know-how.

We look forward to being a part of it in the future!

We are part of the Danubeparks Network Board of Directors

It is our honour to be a part of the new Board of Directors of the Danubeparks Network of Protected Areas through our chairman, Tomáš Kušík.

We are delighted to be represented in the leadership of this active network, which we have long been a part of, alongside the administrations of the national parks and protected areas of all the countries along the Danube river.



International partnerships

The last year brought us a number of new and less traditional contacts and opportunities for cooperation. We value all these opportunities immensely because they show us new perspectives and bring a new impetus to our work.

One interesting experience was the cooperation with **KÖME – Association of Cultural Heritage Managers**, a Hungarian organization focused on



cultural heritage. Indeed, cultural and natural richness are more closely connected than we would expect.

We have also been able to develop longer lasting contacts to project partners. We were very pleased that 2023 brought us the official confirmation of our long-standing communication with the

Fertő-Hanság National Park in Hungary in the form of two joint projects.

Another important milestone in international cooperation was the approval of our membership in the **CEEweb international network**. Our executive director Miriam Miláčková became a member of the board.



A professional excursion

In cooperation with project partners from the **Donau-Auen National Park, Via Donau, and WWF Austria**, we organized a very inspiring professional excursion in the autumn entitled “Examples of Revitalization Measures in Austria – Spittelauer Arm”. The excursion included participants from departmental organizations of the Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic and experts from the non-governmental sector.

"Partnerships at the national and international level are key for our organization. For us, stable partnerships guarantee the long-term sustainability of the organization and bring us new opportunities, joy, and motivation for further work."



Miriam Miláčková,
BROZ Executive Director



Co-funded by
the European Union



MINISTRY
OF ENVIRONMENT
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC



Project financing

The largest source of funding for our ecosystem restoration projects and activities is the **LIFE programme**. This is a **European Union grant programme** dedicated to supporting species and habitats of European importance and improving the ecological status of the Natura 2000 network. This is a pan-European project competition with an annual opportunity to participate and submit a grant application. We are one of the most successful organizations in Slovakia in the preparation of such applications, and among applicants in general, mainly thanks to our long-term work and the know-how that we have gradually acquired when preparing projects.

Projects submitted within this programme are always multiannual, focusing on field-based conservation of target species and habitats. Their impact on nature is regularly monitored by biodiversity experts. Our partners in the projects are state and scientific institutions, universities, and professional organizations from Slovakia and abroad. All projects are subject to regular scrutiny, be it expert-focused in checking the impact on nature, or of financial (European and national) or administrative importance.

Another complementary source of funding for these activities is the Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic, which co-finances

these conservation activities. As a rule, financial support is at the level of 35 percent of the total project budget. Until now, when a project has been supported by the European Commission and the beneficiary has received 60 percent or more for the protection of the Slovak environment from European sources, co-financing of the project from the state budget has been the rule. This is very beneficial for Slovakia, because the state is also obliged by European legislation to protect and care for valuable habitats and species and to improve their ecological status. Thanks to the successful applicants of LIFE projects, this is easier and cheaper.

As a non-profit organization, we have to raise 5 percent of the funds of the total budget ourselves under any circumstances, which is why it is very important to cooperate with private and corporate donors.

Support from private and corporate donors is very important to us. It allows us to stand on our own feet in the long term and to be independent of politicians' decisions. Thanks to these contributions, we are able to implement large-scale projects to help nature and people. Ensuring adequate levels of co-financing is a key area for the sustainability of our work.

Significant support from the Sigrid Rausing Trust

In 2023 we were approached by representatives of the Sigrid Rausing Trust, a foundation that supports organizations running projects in a number of areas around the world. They support human rights, justice, the free speech of organizations, independent media, environmental organizations, and many other entities. They provide significant financial support to organizations primarily for their development and their wider societal and systemic embedding, with an emphasis on the long-term sustainability of activities and internal processes.



BROZ was an organization that the trust had had in its sights for a long time, not only because of the number of our conservation activities but especially because of our intensive networking with stakeholders, which guarantees a broader context and greater sustainability in the future.

The trust's internal support approval process was not straightforward. We had to go through multiple financial and organizational checks during the evaluation phase regarding our funding, operations, management, and the wider social embeddedness of the organization. Following this process, Rob Shore, who was responsible within

the trust for conservation, came for a field visit. We accompanied him around our project sites for several days, had multiple meetings with stakeholders, and spent intensive time together.

The result was that we succeeded. The Sigrid Rausing Trust provided us with a grant for a two-year period. These funds and the purpose of their use, as well as our joint meetings and recommendations from the trust, are of great benefit to us and move us forward in many ways, both from an organizational point of view and in terms of our vision for future development. Thank you very much!



Corporate donors

On the occasion of its twentieth anniversary, the VÚB Foundation supported several organizations. We were one of them

The VÚB Foundation celebrated its twentieth anniversary in December, and on that occasion they supported several organizations and activities. They chose us for nature protection and donated twenty thousand euros, for which we

are very grateful. We are investing in the co-financing of the restoration of the Karloveské rameno arm on the Danube river. We are already in the process of obtaining permits for the prepared project documentation. Thanks to external resources, we will be able to implement this project within the planned amount.

As the CEO of VÚB Bank said, they do not want to invest in lavish celebrations.

They rather decided to support non-profit organizations with up to 400 thousand euros in total. They chose several meaningful projects for natural, social, and cultural conservation.

We thank VÚB very much for their support and trust, and we look forward to the fulfilment of the supported activity.



The ESET Foundation supported us on Giving Tuesday

On a Tuesday in November, known as Giving Tuesday, ESET decided to support two organizations, and we were one of them.

As part of Giving Tuesday, we presented our activities to save the European ground squirrel, which ESET employees could contribute to with their donations. ESET then matched this support, with each donation made during the three weeks being doubled. We managed to raise more than 7000 euros.

Thank you for your support, ESET Slovakia! In these times, when non-profits are out of favour, we appreciate it even more.

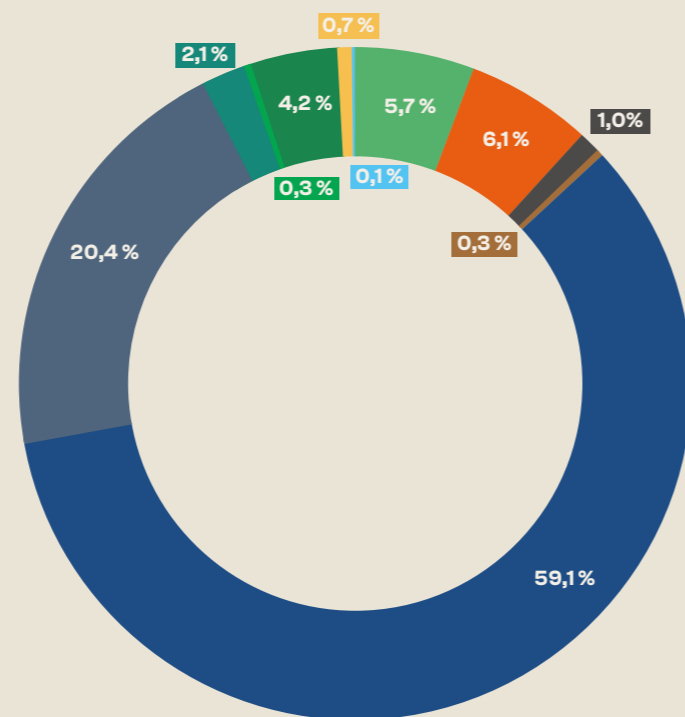


Funding in 2023

Sources of funding for activities

5 157 827,94 € 100 %

Income from operating activities	294 683,68	5,7 %
Contributions received from corporate body grants and donations	312 711,19	6,1 %
Contributions received from donations from physical persons	51 680,82	1,0 %
Contributions from the 2 percent share of tax paid	16 163,87	0,3 %
LIFE Grant Programme – EC*	3 047 168,33	59,1 %
LIFE Grant Programme – the Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic	1 050 199,41	20,4 %
DEAR Grant Programme	109 953,95	2,1 %
Interreg SK-AT Grant Programme	17 084,92	0,3 %
OPKŽP Grant Programme	214 825,79	4,2 %
NFM Grant Programme	35 975,98	0,7 %
Horizon Grant Programme	7 380,00	0,1 %

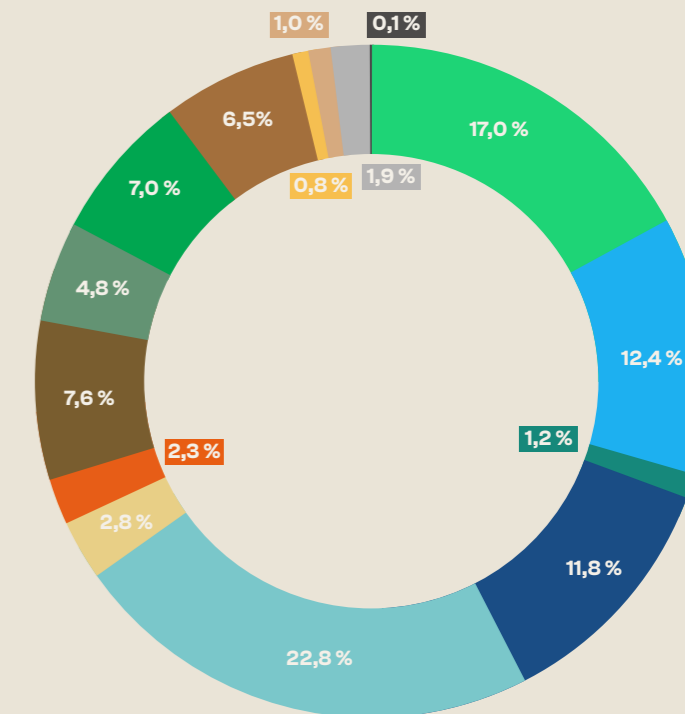


*We secure LIFE project funding in an EU-wide competition from among hundreds of applicants across the EU. This money is not earmarked or claimable for specific countries. It is only awarded to the best performers based on an independent scoring system. Approximately 20 percent of applications submitted are approved. If our projects were not successful, this money would be spent in other member countries and not in Slovakia.

Expenditure by activity

5 157 807,07 € 100 %

Grazing – the preparation of locations, fencing, feed, animal care, and veterinary services	879 870,53 €	17,0 %
Restoration of wetlands and water revisions – Rudava river, Šulian arm, Istragov, and others	640 464,36 €	12,4 %
Floodplain forests restoration – purchase, planting, and care of seedlings	60 326,30 €	1,2 %
EC contributions to partner organizations in LIFE projects	608 165,19 €	11,8 %
Staff and external collaborators – seventy-nine people	1 174 177,23 €	22,8 %
External consultants, experts, forest management, surveyors, legal services, translations, and interpreting	145 914,15 €	2,8 %
Education and communication, volunteer events, and stakeholder meetings	116 591,28 €	2,3 %
Purchase and lease of land for nature conservation	392 785,00 €	7,6 %
Travel allowances, petrol consumption, machine repairs, and spare parts	248 437,81 €	4,8 %
Organizational overheads	361 085,79 €	7,0 %
Depreciation of assets – e.g. machinery, vehicles, stables, and animals	335 183,86 €	6,5 %
Other services – energy, software support, transport, and postage	39 967,30 €	0,8 %
Consumables	55 237,02 €	1,0 %
Bank and administrative fees, property insurance, and exchange rate losses	96 601,25 €	1,9 %
Audit projects	3 000,00 €	0,1 %



Our projects



Project acronym

[Dunajske luhy](#)

Full name of the project

Restoration and management of Danube floodplain habitats LIFE14 NAT/SK/001306

Duration of the project

1.8.2015 - 31.1.2024

BROZ 2023 Budget

784 751,20

Status of BROZ

coordinating beneficiary

Project partners

VÚVH - Water research institute (Slovakia)
 VVB - Vodohodpodárska výstavba, š.p. (Slovakia)
 NLC - National Forestry Centre (Slovakia)
 DINPD - Duna-Ipoly Nemzeti Park Igazgatóság - Directorate of the Danube-IpeI National Park (Hungary)



[Deliver](#)

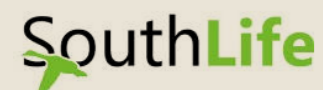
Human settlements as living places resilient to climate change

15.6.2018 - 31.12.2023

86 479,18

project partner, coordinating beneficiary – Karlova Ves municipal district (Slovakia)

CDI - Carpathian Development Institute (Slovakia)
 CI2, o.p.s. (Czechia)
 IEPD - Institute for Passive Houses (Slovakia)



[CZ-SK SOUTH LIFE](#)

Optimization of Natura 2000 sites management delivery in the South Bohemia Region and the territory of South Slovakia

1.9.2017 - 30.6.2024

204 865,54

project partner, coordinating beneficiary – South Bohemia region (Czechia)

ZO ČSOP ONYX (Czechia)
 Regional school management office (Czechia)
 State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic (Slovakia)



[SubPannonic](#)

Conservation of subpannonic dry grassland habitats and species

1.9.2018 - 31.12.2024

340 970,16

coordinating beneficiary

ZO ČSOP ONYX (Czechia)
 State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic (Slovakia)



Microtus II



Project acronym

Full name of the project

Duration of the project

BROZ 2023 Budget

Status of BROZ

Partneri projektu

[Microtus II](#)

Restoration of habitats for root vole *Microtus oeconomus mehelyi

1. 9. 2018 - 31. 8. 2025

294 109,62

coordinating beneficiary

VÚVH - Water research institute (Slovakia)
Comenius University in Bratislava (Slovakia)
State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic (Slovakia)
EDUVIZIG-Észak-dunántúli Vízügyi Igazgatóság - North-Transdanubian Water Directorate (Hungary)
Pisztráng Kör Waldorf Természetvédő és Természejáró Egyesület - Trout Circle Association (Hungary)
Nationalparkgesellschaft Neusiedler See - Seewinkel - National park Neusiedler See - Seewinkel (Austria)

[DLLD](#)

Dynamic LIFE Lines Danube

15. 7. 2019 - 30. 6. 2026

144 368,41

project partner, coordinating beneficiary - Via Donau - Österreichische Wasserstraßen - Gesellschaft GmbH (Austria)

National park Donau Auen (Austria)
WWF Austria (Austria)
NLC - National Forestry Centre (Slovakia)
PriFUK - Faculty of Natural Sciences, Comenius University (Slovakia)

[Panalp](#)

Conservation of endemic species and dry grassland habitats in the contact zone of Pannonian and Alpine bioregions

1. 9. 2020 - 28. 2. 2027

406 226,75

coordinating beneficiary

DINPD = Duna-Ipoly Nemzeti Park Igazgatóság - Duna-Ipoly National Park Directorate (Hungary)
PP - Pilisi Parkerdő Zártkörűen Működő Részvénytársaság) - Pilis Park Forestry Company (Hungary)
State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic (Slovakia)

[Sysel'](#)

Conservation of European Ground Squirrel

1. 9. 2020 - 31. 12. 2027

388 277,19

coordinating beneficiary

ALKA Wildlife, o.p.s. (Czechia)
Polskie Towarzystwo Ochrony Przyrody "Salamandra" (Poland)
State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic (Slovakia)
National Zoo Bojnice (Slovakia)
PriFUK - Faculty of Natural Sciences, Comenius University (Slovakia)



LIFE 4 STEPPE BIRDS

Project acronym

[WildIsland](#)

Full name of the project

WILDIsland – Danube Wild Island Habitat Corridor

Duration of the project

1. 9. 2021 - 31. 8. 2027

BROZ 2023 Budget

57 167,28

Status of BROZ

project partner, coordinating beneficiary – Nationalpark Donau-Auen GmbH (Austria)

Partneri projektu

Alsó-Duna-völgyi Vízügyi Igazgatóság (Lower Danube Valley Water Directorate) (Hungary)
 Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority (Romania)
 Duna-Dráva Nemzeti Park Igazgatóság (Hungary)
 Duna-Ipoly Nemzeti Park Igazgatóság (Hungary)
 Fertő Hanság Nemzeti Park Igazgatóság (Hungary)
 Hrvatske šume limited liability company, Croatian Forests ltd. (Croatia)
 Javna ustanova „Park prirode Kopački rit“ (Croatia)
 Persina Nature Park Directorate (Bulgaria)
 REGIA NAȚIONALĂ A PADURILOR ROMSILVA RA – SUCURSALA DIRECȚIA SILVICĂ TULCEA (Romania)
 Uniper Kraftwerke GmbH (Germany)
 VERBUND Hydro Power GmbH (Austria)
 Javno Preduzeće „Vojvodinašume“ (Serbia)
 Via donau – Österreichische Wasserstraßen-Gesellschaft mbH (Austria)

[Metamorphosis](#)

Developing best practices in butterfly conservation in Central and Eastern Europe

1. 9. 2022 - 31. 3. 2029

600 132,80

coordinating beneficiary

Fundatia ADEPT Transilvania (Romania)
 Őrségi Nemzeti Park (Hungary)
 Institute of Zoology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (Slovakia)

[4 Steppe Birds](#)

Conservation and return of steppe birds to lowlands of Slovakia

1. 12. 2022 - 30. 11. 2028

93 271,82

project partner, coordinating beneficiary – SOS/Birdlife Slovakia – Slovak Ornithological Society (Slovakia)

SOS/Birdlife Slovakia – Slovak Ornithological Society (Slovakia)



Project acronym

Full name of the project

Duration of the project

BROZ 2023 Budget

Status of BROZ

Partneri projektu

[IP Living Rivers](#)

Implementation of the river basin management plan in selected river sub-basins in Slovakia

1.1.2023 - 31.12.2032

243 225,17

project partner, coordinating beneficiary – VÚVH - Water research institute (Slovakia)

Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic (Slovakia)
SVP - Slovak Water Management Enterprise (Slovakia)
State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic (Slovakia)
WWF - WWF Slovakia (Slovakia)
CM - Catch Me If You Can (Slovakia)
University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (Czechia)
TANAP - Administration of the Tatra National Park (Slovakia)
VVB - Vodohospodárska výstavba, š.p. (Slovakia)

[Game On](#)

Game On! Don't let climate change end the game!

1.11.2019 - 31.10.2023

118 235,66

project partner, coordinating beneficiary – CEEweb for Biodiversity (Hungary)

Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation (Bulgaria)
Latvijas Dabas fonds (Lithuania)
Lithuanian Fund for Nature (Latvia)
Milvus Group (Romania)
Na mysli (Czechia)
National Society of Conservationists - MTVSZ (Hungary)
PersonaR (Hungary)
Romero Initiative (Germany)

[Korytnačka](#)

Protection of the European pond turtle (*Emys orbicularis*) in selected localities of southern Slovakia

15.3.2020 - 31.12.2023

226 132,41

BROZ project

-

[Nórsky fond Warrior](#)

Wetlands for life and prosperity

1.2.2022 - 22.6.2024

38 723,11

project partner, coordinating beneficiary – Green Foundation (Slovakia)

NINA = Norsk Institutt for naturforskning (Norway)

[Restore4Life](#)

Restoration of wetland complexes as life supporting systems in the Danube Basin

1.6.2023 - 30.6.2027

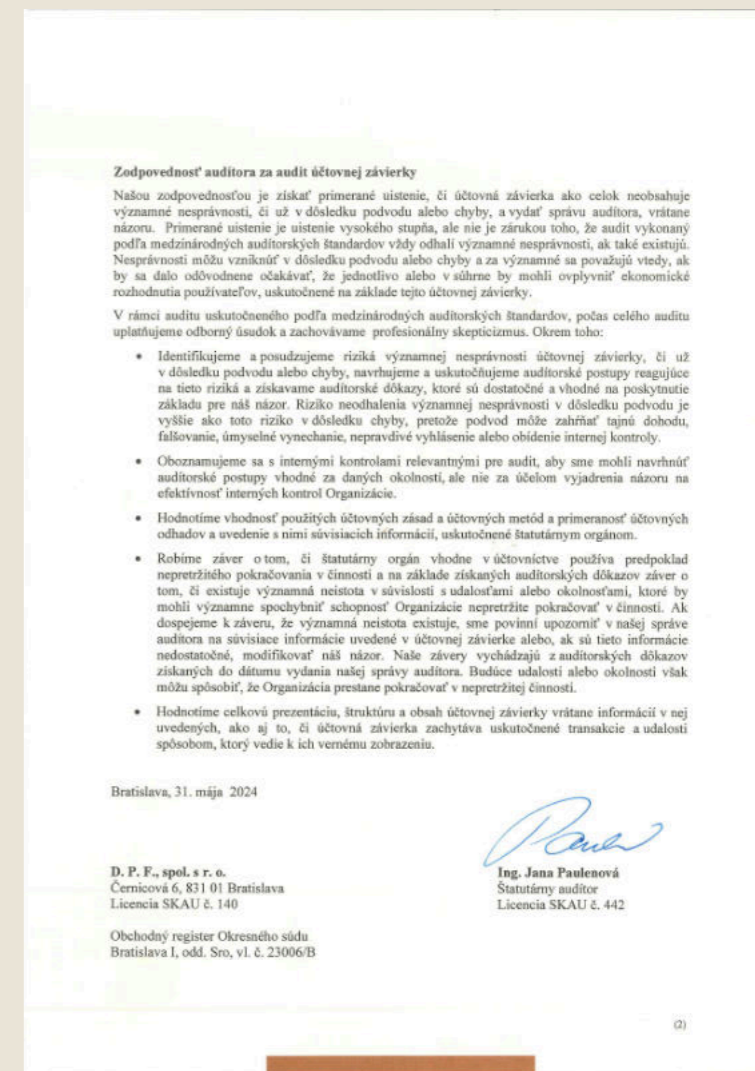
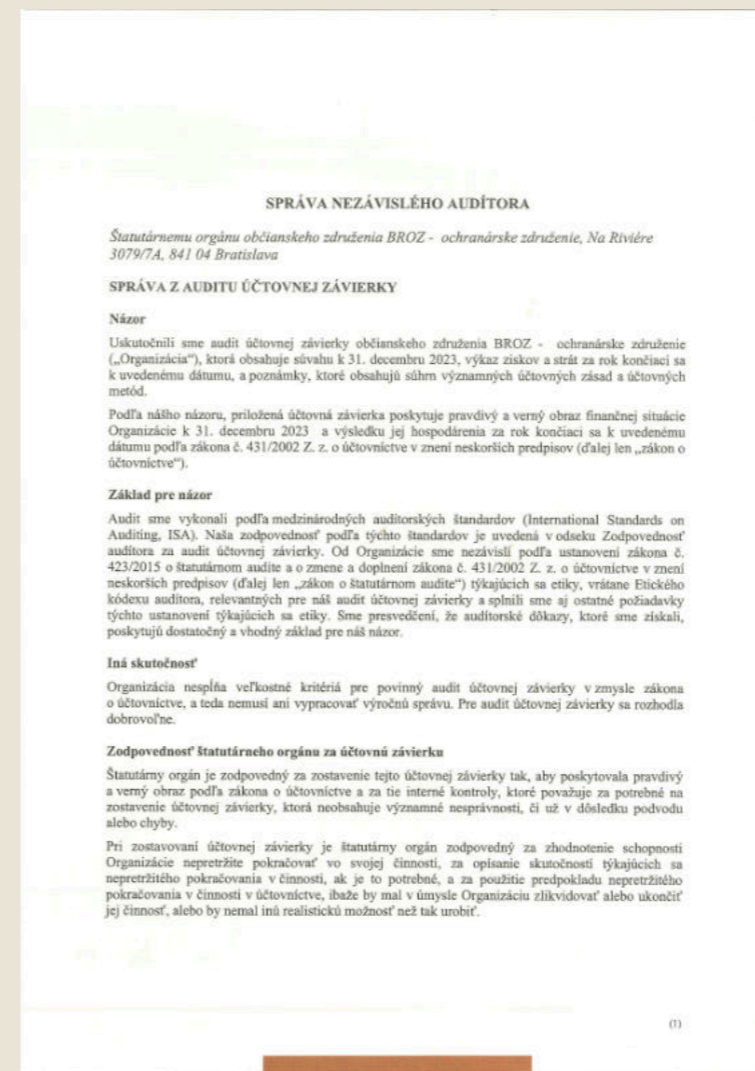
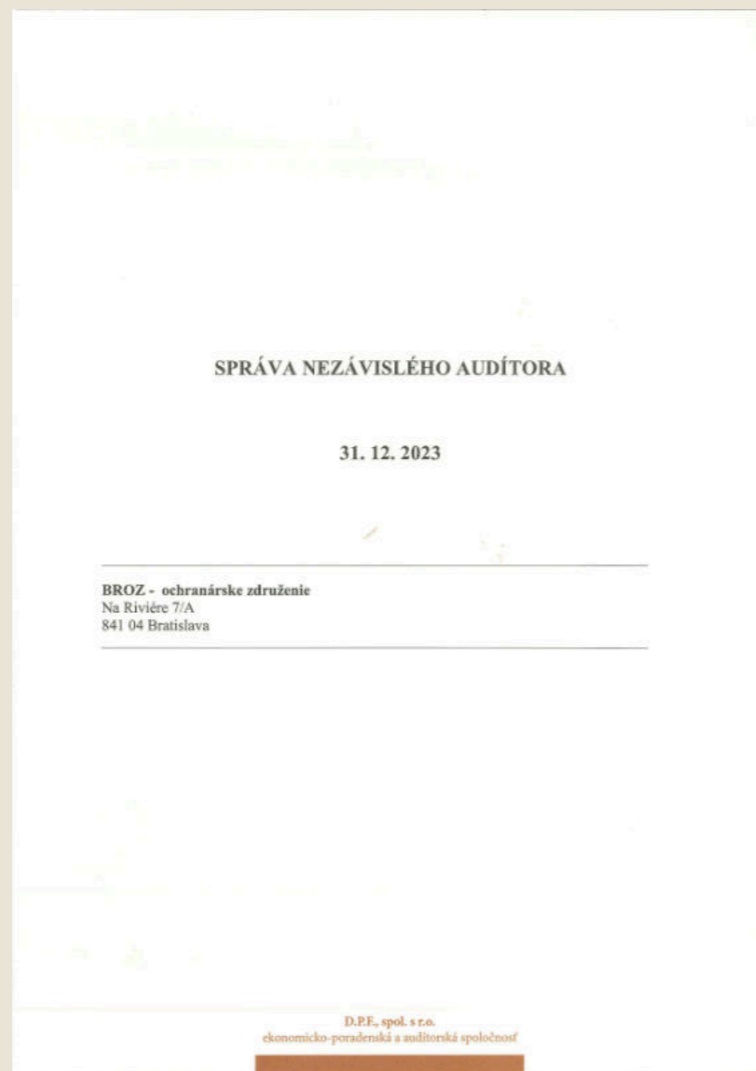
7 380,00

project partner, coordinating beneficiary – University of Bucharest (Romania)

30 partners

Independent auditor's report

The annual accounts for 2023 were published in accordance with the Accounting Act on 1 April 2024.



We thank our partners for their cooperation:

Vúvh Výskumný ústav
vodného
hospodárstva



**Vodohospodárska
výstavba**



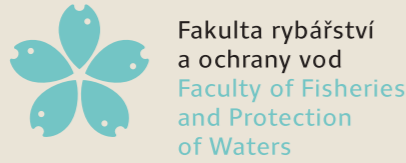
PRÍRODOVEDECKÁ FAKULTA
Univerzita Komenského
v Bratislave



DANUBE PARKS
network of protected areas

viadonau





Verbund



PERSONAR

We thank our donors for their financial support:



Your BROZ team



2023 Activity Report

BROZ – Conservation Association

Photo: BROZ Archive
Text compiled by Andrea Froncová
Graphic design: Patrik Gažo



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