



Kristina conducting vegetation surveys in Movile / Hundertbücheln (4×4 m quadrat)

News and updates

Bird Race and Open Museums Night at CasApold

On 15–16th May, we celebrated the fifth consecutive year of collaboration between our organisation and CasApold as part of the annual 'Countryside Open Museums Night'. The event once again brought together nature, culture, and community engagement, with visitors enjoying exhibitions, live music, local food and drinks, and the unique atmosphere of the fortified church in Apold / Trappold. As part of this year's programme, we contributed an exhibition raising awareness about the ongoing deforestation of forests in the region and its impact on local landscapes and biodiversity. The main element of our collaboration was the fifth edition of the 'Hârtibaciu Highlands

Bird Race', during which registered teams competed to identify as many bird species as possible within 24 hours across the Hârtibaciu Highlands protected area. The competition continues to grow each year, attracting participants from increasingly diverse regions and fostering a vibrant community of bird enthusiasts. This year, the winning team recorded an impressive 118 species, while all participating teams collectively documented 148 bird species. The event concluded with an award ceremony at the fortified church, where participants gathered to celebrate their achievements and enjoy the exhibitions and cultural programme. We are delighted that this successful partnership with CasApold continues to thrive and that the number of Bird Race participants and teams continues to increase year after year.

Biodiversity mapping in Movile reveals hidden natural treasures

Field mapping activities in the Movile / Hundertbücheln area continued throughout May, with Kristina and Csaba, carrying out several survey visits and recording a wide range of interesting species and habitats. Despite a cooler-than-average spring, which resulted in lower butterfly activity than usual, a total of 39 butterfly species were documented by mid-May. Among these were two protected species: the Fenton's Wood White (*Leptidea morsei*), listed under the EU Habitats Directive, and the Common Glider (*Neptis sappho*), which is protected at the national level in Romania. Both species are associated with forest-edge habitats and depend on *Lathyrus* species as larval host plants.



Highlights from the annual Bird Race





Great Crested Newt



Protected butterfly (Neptis sappho)

The botanical surveys also produced impressive results. In one 4 × 4 metre vegetation plot, Kristina recorded as many as 70 plant species, highlighting the exceptional diversity of the areas grasslands. During the surveys, the team also succeeded in locating the legendary 'Narcissus Hill', a place frequently mentioned by local elders as once being covered in daffodils. Although the daffodil population is no longer as abundant as described in local memories, finding this long-sought after location was a particularly rewarding moment. In addition, four orchid species were observed in flower: *Anacamptis morio*, *Orchis militaris*, *Orchis purpurea*, and *Neotinea tridentata*. Another highlight was the visit of amphibian and reptile specialist Tibor Sos, who joined the team to survey the wetlands within the area. His expertise helped document several notable species, including the European tree frog (*Hyla arborea*), the great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*), and the yellow-bellied toad (*Bombina variegata*). These findings further underline the ecological importance of the Movile / Hundertbücheln landscape and demonstrate the remarkable biodiversity that continues to be revealed through our ongoing mapping efforts.

International attention for Transylvania's grasslands

In May, we welcomed renowned wildlife filmmakers Jan and Melanie Haft and their film crew to Movile / Hundertbücheln for a day of filming for an upcoming documentary on grasslands around the world. The film aims to showcase the exceptional biodiversity and ecological value of grassland ecosystems, from the African savannas and the Eurasian steppes of central Asia to the traditionally managed



Interview with Melanie and Jan Haft's film crew in Movile / Hundertbücheln

meadows and pastures of Transylvania. During their visit, the team accompanied us on biodiversity surveys and habitat mapping activities, documenting our work and conducting an interview about our efforts to preserve the unique landscape of the Hârtibaciu Highlands. We were pleased to contribute to a project that highlights the global importance of species-rich grasslands and places Transylvania alongside some of the world's most remarkable open landscapes. At the same time, we are delighted that another nature documentary featuring our region has recently been completed. In his new film, *Transylvania – Journey into the Nature of the Middle Ages*, filmmaker Tobias Mennle explores the unique relationship between traditional farming practices and biodiversity in Transylvania, while also addressing the growing pressures posed by agricultural intensification.

Watch the documentary here: [Transylvania – Journey into the Nature of the Middle Ages](#)

We are encouraged by the increasing interest that internationally recognised filmmakers are showing in our region and its natural heritage. We hope that these productions will help bring wider recognition to the ecological importance of Transylvania's cultural landscapes and inspire greater appreciation and support for their conservation in the years to come.

Exchange with architecture students from Aachen

We welcomed a group of architecture students from Aachen University as part of an excursion exploring the intersections of cultural heritage, biodiversity, land use, and local civic engagement in Transylvania. The programme focused on bottom-up initiatives working to preserve regional building culture, fortified churches, and species-rich agricultural landscapes, while examining how local action can shape and transform places over time. The students first visited us in Hosman / Holzmengen, where we introduced our work and discussed the challenges and opportunities facing rural landscapes in the Hârtibaciu Valley. We then spent a day together in Movile / Hundertbücheln, exploring the

relationship between traditional land use, biodiversity conservation, and the impacts of industrial farming. The exchange also offered space to discuss broader European perspectives on rural development, including economic pressures and investment patterns, as well as the role of grassroots initiatives in shaping long-term landscape stewardship. While the programme was intensive, we appreciated the students' curiosity, thoughtful questions, and genuine interest in Transylvania's cultural landscapes. Such exchanges provide valuable opportunities for mutual learning and help strengthen connections between future professionals and local initiatives working towards more sustainable rural futures.

Update on forest mapping

We have recently received six wildlife acoustic recorders, which our biologists have started deploying in the field after a short testing phase. These devices are now being installed across the study area to capture continuous acoustic data on forest biodiversity. In parallel, Joe continues his field-based mapping of birds and mammals, steadily expanding our species records through systematic surveys. We are excited to see what insights will emerge from the combination of passive acoustic monitoring and traditional field surveys, and how these complementary approaches will deepen our understanding of forest biodiversity in the area.