

## **Project Update: February 2016**

As planned with the project, transects were established at three mountains: Manjača, Uzlomac and Čemernica. On the mountain of Manjača five transects were established, on Uzlomac three and Čemernica three transects. Photo traps were set on transects, faecal samples were collected, and all traces of the bear were documented. Collecting data on the number of bears on localities is very helpful and counting from hunting watchtower, which was performed twice a year (one day in the spring and one in autumn) by hunting associations. This method will be classified as mandatory, because it provides realistic information on the actual number of bears at a particular locality, at a certain time. Together, with other data, give an excellent insight into the number of bears at locality.

Bears are documented on all three locations, a total of 15 individuals:

1. Locality Mountain of Manjača - six individuals: three adults (one older male, one younger male and one female) and three cubs (all individuals are registered and recognized on picture from photo traps, measuring traces and seen from hunting watchtower);
2. Locality Mountain of Uzlomac - six individuals: four adults (one older male, two younger individuals and one female) and two cubs (all individuals are registered and recognized on picture from photo traps, measuring traces and seen from hunting watchtower);
3. Locality Mountain of Čemernica - three individuals: one adult male, one adult female and one cub (on this locality have not yet completed the research, the end of research is planned in April 2016); (male was seen from hunting watchtower, female and young are registered on photographs from photo traps and measurements of trace).

In addition to these data, we find out the locations of other bears (three individuals), which inhabited the hill areas around the city of Banja Luka. So, in total we registered 18 individuals of the brown bear.

Sightings of bears in peripheral settlements of the city and in the city of Banja Luka occurred three times in a little more than 1 month (4th October, 10th November and 18th November 2015)! In the area of Banja Luka (N 44°46'9.61", E 17°10' 5.67" - settlement Pobrđe), by night, on 4th October 2015, the female bear came and left her young (male). The young bear was kept there until morning, the female immediately left. Local police chased the bear back into the forest with the help of hunters on the morning of 5th October. It was a natural separation of a young bear from the mother. Following these traces we localised both the female (N 44°41'59.08", E 17°3' 0.15" - Mountain Vodički vrh) and the young abandoned bear (N 44°48'13.75", E 17°0' 24.01" - outskirts Bronzani Majdan).

The bear who passed through the peripheral settlements of the city on 10th November 2015, was chased by hunters and local police which lasted for 2 days, and was finally banished to the forest of the National Park "Kozara" (N 44°59'36.54", E 16°57' 58.08"), and stayed there.

The biggest problem was with a female bear that walked into the urban zone of the city of Banja Luka (N 44°47'40.63", E 17°12' 1.77") and hid there in a grove of trees in the morning on November 18th 2015, but it was only 25 m far from inhabited houses and about 350 m from an elementary school. In this part of town the bear caused panic among townspeople. The animal behaved extremely strange, showed no signs of aggression (which was strange behaviour for an animal that was not supposed to be accustomed to the presence of people) and did not react to dogs barking and people screaming. The ministry in charge of wildlife management (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management) decided, in consultation with hunters and police, to kill the animal. It should be said that there was no realistic possibility that the animal could be put asleep (lack of tranquilizer gun), or to banish it back into its habitat. On the contrary, larger damaged may have been done. Culling was completed at 2:45 p.m. The public did not approve of the killing of these individual and started a big media campaign against the government and hunters. I used this situation and jointly in cooperation with the NGO "Centre for Environment" I arranged a meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management. It was agreed to invite local and regional experts and to hold a workshop in order to determine the need to develop Bear Management Plan (one of the most important goals of this project). The workshop was held on 18th and 19th February 2016, in Banja Luka, and received a certificate of the competent ministry that will ask the Government of the Republic of Srpska to enter the procedure of making a Bear Management Plan.

