

Project Update: August 2003

All our proposed objectives were achieved in the first stage of the project. After preliminary discussions with the Caras-Severin Environmental Protection Inspectorate representatives and after studying the papers and cartographic materials that they allowed us to consult, we were able to have a larger view of the Semenic, Caras Gorges National Park and identified some smaller key protected areas within.

The discussions were followed by two field survey stages (10 days each). First survey stage took place in April, in the middle of the reptiles mating season, when they are most active. The second one took place in July, in order to identify pregnant females and newborn or new-hatched babies. We always had contact with the local people and discussed the “*Vipera ammodytes* problem”. It was revealed that the local people are not the main threat to the species, but the unauthorized breeders that have so called “farms” for collecting venom.

The exemplars were measured and the gathered data will be used for statistics. Lots of pictures were taken. Between the reptile species, we identified the *Vipera ammodytes*, *Coronella austriaca*, *Natrix natrix*, *Natrix tessellata*, *Elaphe longissima*, *Lacerta agilis*, *Lacerta vivipara*, *Lacerta viridis*. Beside the reptile species, the amphibians were also identified and photographed. A spatial distribution pattern of the reptile species is already visible, as the habitats where we identified them are strongly different between the East and West side of the National Park. The habitats are diverse, from rocky surfaces to shrubs, meadows and wooden land.

The raising awareness campaign that will be conducted mainly in schools, the educational and informational materials are almost done (a poster with the endangered reptile species and a written material about the importance of the protecting the wildlife in the Semenic – Caras Gorges National Park). We anticipate beginning raising awareness in September, October when the school year begins. We are also in touch with another environmental NGO, Exploratorii Resita, which have nature-related activities in the Caras Gorges area.

In October a new field stage must be undertaken, to observe the reptiles before entering hibernation.