

# HABITUATED BEARS IN ROMANIA – A CHALLENGE FOR ROMANIAN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

## FINAL PROJECT REPORT

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### I. TECHNICAL REPORT.

The reporting of activities carried out in the frame of the above mentioned project is done based on the structure included in the project proposal.

The **Habituated Bears Study** started in June 2005 with monitoring activities of the habituated bears from Brasov area. This monitoring was done by a team formed by three persons (George Predoiu – senior wildlife researcher, Ramon Jurj – wildlife researcher and Catalin Mirica – wildlife student). The collected data is related to the general situation and historical evolution of the bears habituation in the surroundings of Brasov, identification of bears that fed on garbage containers in the area, identification of main routes used by bears in the surrounded forests, identification of bears resting areas, monitoring of the bears behaviour and, also of human behaviour related to habituated bears.

The area of Racadau became part of Brasov town in the last 25 years. During communist period, here were build blocks of flats in a valley surrounded by forests that are suitable habitats for many wildlife species, including bears. Beside of the fact that about 50 ha. of natural habitats were replaced by urban constructions, also, the recreation area had suffered. Thus, in the close vicinity of forests are located 16 garbage containers platforms that became a source of food for bears.

The number of bears that started to visit and fed on garbage containers had increased year by year and due to lack of involvement of responsible institutions and low awareness of local people, the risk of incidents also increased. This situation became a concerning problem both for authorities and local non-governmental organization. Also, the national and international mass media is very interesting in the situation of Racadau bears, most of

the news targeting only the sensational and conflicts between these bears and local people.



***Location of garbage containers visited by bears in Racadau area.***

Between June 2005 – August 2006, there were 282 days of monitoring in the area, including day time and, especially, night time periods. The monitoring results were a surprise even for our team, formed by wildlife technicians and researchers that know the situation since several years.

When dust was coming, especially in late spring, summer and autumn, the Jepilor street from Racadau area starts to become busy. Many tourists, Romanians and foreigners came to see, make photos and admire the bears that fed on the garbage platforms. By the firsts come the sub adult bears (2-3 years old) that open the containers and start to search the food with curiosity and high interest. Some of them are going inside the containers and, sometimes, their head appear in order to check if something dangerous is happening. This danger could come from people or from other bears, especially when a bigger bear is coming from the forests. The neighbourhood is full of noises coming from tourists or from bears moving the containers on the streets. The show is very intense when some containers are turned over by the bears in order to find something tastier. Then, the blitz and video cameras are in charge for capturing as much as possible images. Sometimes bears and humans come very close to each other but fear and danger is flooding in the air. When female bears with cubs come to the garbage containers, the spectators are going backwards but the taxi drivers are driving the tourists to the bears. There are people that start to take pictures from a distance of about 6 - 8 m and in those moments they feed also

the bears. After midnight, the people are leaving the area and bears feel free to visit all the garbage containers.

This situation started at the beginning of nineties, when a dozen of bears started to visit the area of garbage containers. Without any prevention measures implemented on the ground, the number of bears increased and in 2003 there were observed in one night about 24 bears (including females with cubs). In 2005 we have observed a female with 5 cubs – very rare in natural conditions, and, also, several females with 3 and 4 cubs.



***Female with cubs visiting the containers – garbage outside the containers***

A very interesting conclusion of our monitoring activities was that in the area are coming only females with cubs, yearlings and sub adult bears. It seems that adult males are not visiting the area, probably because of their defined role in the natural ecosystems. The high number of cubs and the increased number of bears that came to the garbage containers have certain reasons such as:

- food availability due to a “relaxed” waste management in the area
- behaviour deviation – cubs learn from their mothers that there is plenty of food close to human settlements
- more safe feeding conditions for female with cubs (in the natural ecosystems, the adult males try to kill the cubs in order to mate with mother females).
- low level of intervention from hunting areas administrators and local authorities that did not take specific measures since early times.

Regarding bear routes and resting places in the forest, our monitoring results confirmed the assumption that these bears are using forests only for sleeping. There is not so much to say about bear routes and resting places, because, during day light, these bears are not going far away from the area and as resting place they use the forests from around. The distance of dispersion during day is about 5 km and there are resting places that are located in close vicinity of the city (several hundred of meters). This fact is creating a new problem – high density bear areas, where, in a surface of 3000 ha you can find about 30 bears. Of course, in such situations, the role of the bear in the natural ecosystems is very limited and, in fact, the natural forests are not used by these bears.

In such high bear densities that are located in urban areas of about 300 000 habitants, there is a high chance of incidents. Most common scenarios are involving people with dogs that are walking in the forests and meet females with cubs. In these circumstances, dogs are attacking the bear cubs, females are defending the cubs and attack the dogs, which are going backwards to the people and suddenly the people came into a conflict with a bear female. Another classic case is involving sub adult bears that are curious and fearless, going close to human houses in searching for food. Sometimes they destroy fences and annexes of the houses located in close vicinity of the forest and the owners try to defend their properties. In such a situation, the conflict between bear and human is open. The number of conclusion that this habituation is dangerous both for people and for bears.

Based on all these facts and results of the monitoring activities, the project team has concluded that there is a strong need of specific actions in the area. One of the main issues identified was that the institutions are acting independently and there is no coordination of activities implemented on the ground. Thus, a strong campaign of stakeholders consultations was launched and there were organized direct meetings with all the relevant institutions from the area: Brasov Town Hall, Community Police, URBAN – waste management company, Hunters Association – the wildlife administrator of the area, ICAS – Forest Research and Management Institute, LEPA – Local Environment Protection Agency, NGOs (CPNT, Floare de Colt, etc.) and schools from the area.

During autumn and winter 2005, all these institutions were consulted in order to gain the inputs from their activities carried out in the area, institutional capacity and communication,

strategy and planning for the next period. As a result of this consultation process, we have conclude that there is a need to organize a workshop that aim to create the synergy and to enhance the role of each institution involved in an Action Plan for the Habituated Bears in Brasov, as a model for other areas in Romania. In March 2006, at the University of Transylvania Brasov, was organized the workshop related to these issues. The workshop was attended by all the representative institutions involved in the area, being the first time when all these institutions were sitting together and work on a comprehensive set of measures. The participants were organized in three working groups:

- waste management working group – moderator George Predoiu
- bear management working group – moderator Ovidiu Ionescu
- public awareness and education working group – moderator Georgeta Ionescu.

Each working group was formed of about 8 persons that worked together on a set of actions to be implemented in the next period. Thus, the institutions agreed upon a set of measures that aim to solve in the next years the problem of habituated bears in Racadau area. After the workshop, in cooperation with WSPA project that aim to continue the efforts of the RSG project, we have started to implement these actions and to monitor the results.



***Action Plan Workshop held in March 2006***



***Bear Management Working Group***



***Waste Management***



***Working Group Public Awareness Working Group***

The institutions involved in the waste management working group agreed that garbage management and the attitude of local people towards this issue should be improved considerably. In this respect, the new waste management company URBAN became a very close partner of the project, acting very fast and deeply understanding the situation. Together with them was edited and distributed a leaflet that informs the local population about the changes in waste management and asking for the support of local community.

The main changes for waste management in the area of Racadau are:

- emptying the garbage containers three times per day, last time when dark is coming,
- cleaning the area of garbage platform by using sanitary methods,
- promote the idea of a new system of waste management, by using containers located under the ground level (less smell and no possibility for bears to reach the garbage),
- monitor the area each night and update the program according to the new developments.

The Town Hall had issued a local regulations that foreseen the interdiction of leaving the garbage around the containers. Furthermore, local people are not allowed are empty during night.

The Community Police has set up 2 mobile patrols in the area. Through a partnership between Carpati Foundation, CPNT and Community Police, there were established patrols of volunteers in the area. These volunteers are supported by the WSPA project and are formed by students from Brasov area. Their main role is to monitor the local regulations implementation and to inform the police about the illegal activities related to habituated bears and garbage management.

The results of the actions implemented by the waste management working group are:

- The waste management in the area is considerably improved.

- There is still a need to continue and to monitor the garbage collection.
- The number of tourists that came into contact with bears significantly decreased.
- The local people obey the regulations concerning garbage management but monitoring is still needed.
- The local authorities have now a much better cooperation and there is a real exchange of information and coordination of activities related to waste management between Police, Local Town Hall, URBAN company and NGOs.

Working on habituated bears has proven to be very challenging and the developments of the situations were very fast. In autumn 2005, a female bear died because of internal digestive problems. Thus, four cubs became orphans and they found a den in the close vicinity of the town, being close supervised by the project team. In January 2006, the local people discovered the den area and they started to feed the bears with fruits and other food. This situation developed fast and day by day there were more and more people feeding and playing with these orphan bears in the forest, close to the den. In these circumstances, we have decided to act and we captured all the orphan bears and moved them to the bear relocation centre of the Vier Pfofen Foundation in Harghita county, Romania. Nowadays, after several months of a specific program, these orphan bears are ready to be released in the wilderness.



***Locals feeding the orphan bear***



***Orphan bear ready for transport and relocation***

The bear management actions continued with an intensive monitor of the situation and with a problem bear relocation campaign that was carried out by the Carpati Foundation and Hunters Association (the local wildlife management responsible institution). The campaign is supported by the WSPA project and as a result, 25 bears were relocated.

Some of these bears are radio collared and monitored in partnership by Fundatia Carpati and ICAS – Forest Research and Management Institute, in the frame of WSPA project.

The conclusions of the bear management activities implemented up to now are:

- Some of the female bears with cubs relocated are coming back in the area even if they are relocated at more than 60 km distances.
- Sub adults and females without cubs are not coming back to the area.
- Activities of relocation should target mainly sub adult individuals, which have a high chance to be rehabilitated in the nature.
- Females with cubs should be relocated in enclosed areas or in remote areas.
- Aversive methods should be used for the new bears that visit the area in order to keep them away from garbage containers.
- High bear densities led to a high number of human-bear conflicts
- Prevention methods should be more intensively used.

People and bears are the main targets of the project. The public awareness and education working group established a program for presentations and information campaign in the schools from the area. These were supported by informative materials edited and distributed by the project (1000 brochures and 500 impact posters). The focal point of this campaign was to underline that people are very important in relation with these habituated bears and people attitude could change the situation.



*The impact poster printed and distributed “The brown bear wants to return back home... Lost between block of flats and garbage containers, the brown bear cannot be integrated in the urban world. Help him to return back in nature”.*





***The brochure printed and distributed Bears from Brasov – between nature and people...***

Another part of the campaign was represented by the work together with mass media on habituated bear's issues. During this period, George Predoiu, Ramon Jurj and Ovidiu Ionescu participated in live discussions and interviews on local and national level. The WSPA project is also supporting this mass media work and actions initiated by the RSG project are now continued by the above mentioned project.

The information campaign will continue with materials from WSPA project and with support of several local channels (ProTv, RTT, Antena 1, Mix Tv, etc.).

All the above mentioned activities involved considerable amount of time and human resources. But we are proud, that, supported by RSG program, we can have an active role in the situation of habituated bears in Brasov area and, based on our working results, we can implement a set of actions for solving such problems in other parts of Romania. The enthusiasm of the project team and the team spirit contribute to the initiation of a synergy between different institutions involved in the area, as a first step for solving the problem.

The evaluation of the situation related to habituated bears in Brasov area is showing that the RSG project is a solid basement for further actions and all the activities initiated by the project are continued in the frame of the WSPA project and of other local initiatives. All the people and institutions involved in this project agreed that the project actions should continue on a period of several years and we strongly believe that a further application for a second RSG project will contribute decisively to the success of our initiatives.

## 2. FINANCIAL REPORT

The financial reporting of project costs is referring to the period June 2005 – August 2006. By analyzing the project costs on categories of expenditures we can conclude that travel, field consumables and workshop costs were underestimated in the project proposal but this was compensated by the lower costs for editing, printing and distribution of the brochure and impact poster. Also, we would like to mention that there were no field equipments purchased by the project. Thus, for monitoring activities and other actions related to project implementation there were used personal equipments (cars and field equipments) and existing equipments from Carpati Foundation (computers, printer, telephone, off road car, binoculars, night vision, etc.).

Category of expenditures	Allocated Budget - GBP -	Budget spent - GBP -
Project staff costs (4 experts)	2,180.00	2,183.39
Travel costs for actions implementation	300.00	429.28
1000 brochures + 500 impact posters costs	1,550.00	1,153.86
Office and fieldwork consumables	200.00	350.29
Workshop organizational costs (rooms, transport, snacks, meals)	750.00	869.49
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4980.00</b>	<b>4986.32</b>

In these circumstances, we consider that thanks to support received by RSG and from our own efforts; the financial activities carried out during project implementation were done according to the project budget and on lower costs possible. A detailed project expenditures report is prepared by the project manager – George Predoiu and could be sent by request. All the original documents are kept by the Carpati Foundation accountant and reported according to Romanian financial regulations.

Brasov,  
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