V.TusnadEcoBear conf

Book of Abstracts

20-23 October 2026
Băile Tușnad
Romania

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Event Venues:
Conference Hall of Hotel O3zone
(Aleea Sfânta Ana 2, Băile Tușnad, Romania):
Conference sessions on 20-22 October 2026

Tulip Restaurant and Event Hall (Tulipán/Laleaua)
(Aleea Sfânta Ana, Băile Tușnad, Romania):
All activities and gala dinner on 23 October 2026

Welcome Address

A conference about people and bears, about coexistence.

The aim of the conference is to bring together a variety of views, competences and experiences from various experts from Europe and beyond, on the topic of human-large carnivore coexistence. The discussions shall foster the generation of practical and viable solutions for reducing human-wildlife conflicts in human dominated landscapes. The conference seeks to identify the current level of knowledge regarding the management of brown bear populations across Europe, as well as best and negative practices. The interaction between key international experts and young participants is highly encouraged in order to build capacity in terms of coping with future challenges, including the ones derived from climate change.

Respectfully,
TusnadEcoBear Team

Monday

19 October 2026 – Hotel O3Zone, "Ion Creangă" conference room

18:00 Reception Icebreaker - Wine and cheese selection (Hotel O3Zone - "Ion Creangă" conference room)

Tuesday

20 October 2026 – Hotel O3Zone, "Mihai Eminescu" conference room

08:00 Registration (Hotel O3Zone)

09:00 **Conference opening and welcome speeches (EN/RO)**

09:30 **KEYNOTE · MANAGEMENT OF LARGE CARNIVORES**
Nuria Selva (Spain)
Associate Professor at Estación Biológica de Doñana (Spanish National Research Council) and Institute of Nature Conservation (Polish Academy of Sciences)
Rethinking bear management under global change – a step beyond numbers

10:20 **Ion Copoeru** (Romania)
Managing the dissensus regarding the management of bear population in Romania

10:40 **Oana Mihaela Stoleriu** (Romania)
Understanding visitor experiences at the Zărnești Bear Sanctuary, Romania: analysis of online reviews

11:00 **Michal Haring** (Slovakia)
Brown bears in Slovakia: one year later

11:20 **Alessandra Cuya** (Spain)
Across the coexistence gradient: rural perspectives of living with bears in Spain

11:40 **Roman Cherepanyn** (Ukraine, ONLINE)
Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) monitoring in Uzhanskyi National Nature Park (Ukraine) within the LECA project

12:00 Coffee Break

12:20 **KEYNOTE · BEST PRACTICES AND TECHNOLOGY**
Carsten Nowak (Germany)
Head of Centre for Wildlife Genetics, Senckenberg Nature Research, Frankfurt
Current status and future of genetic wildlife monitoring in Europe

13:10 **Nikola Doykin** (Bulgaria)
Creating a bear "museum" to educate the younger generation to better understand nature and the benefits of living with large carnivores

13:30 **Zoltán D. Szabó** (Romania)
An integrated monitoring and AI-based early warning system for large carnivores in Maramureș, Romania

13:50 Lunch break (Hotel O3Zone)

15:00 **PROJECT SESSION**
WWF
"Mihai Eminescu" conference room
From bear management to coexistence governance: designing a local coexistence system (WWF-Romania)

PROJECT SESSION
IntraBear
"Petőfi Sándor" Conference Room
Mechanisms driving brown bear presence near human settlements (Centre for Environmental Research and Impact Studies (CCMESI), University of Bucharest)

17:00 **Coffee break / field trip: ICDCRM visit / free time in Băile Tușnad**

20:00 **Dinner - "Mihai Eminescu" conference room**

Wednesday

21 October 2026 – Hotel O3Zone, "Mihai Eminescu" conference room

08:00 Registration (Hotel O3Zone)

09:00 **KEYNOTE · POLICIES AND LAW**
Arie Trouwborst (Netherlands)
Tilburg University & North-West University
Bears, humans and the evolving European legal framework for human-wildlife coexistence and its moral underpinnings

09:50 **Michael Bird** (Romania)
Traffic of large carnivores in Romania: threats to society

10:10 **George Iordachescu** (Netherlands)
What does green criminology have to say about human-bear interactions in conservation frontiers? Adopting a harms-based approach to think about 'problematic' bears

10:30 **Claudiu Olenici** (Romania)
Missed opportunities in human–bear conflict documentation: from fragmented emergency reports to traceable wildlife interventions

10:50 **Diana Franț** (Netherlands)
The legal conservation status of brown bears in Romania

11:10 Coffee Break

11:30 **PROJECT SESSION**
CoCo and Han Somsen
Risks and benefits for pastoralists of downlisting the wolf and the brown bear from strictly protected to protected status.

13:30 Lunch break (Hotel O3Zone)

14:30 **Field trip: Saint Anne lake / free time in Băile Tușnad**

14:30 **PROJECT SESSION**
Sustainable Scale-Up Foundation
Wildlife Forensic Toolkit 2.0: Hands-on Tools for Frontline Wildlife Protection

17:30 **KEYNOTE · YOUTH VOICES & YOUTH PRACTICES: STUDENT SESSION 1**
Alexandra Sallay (Germany)
Institute of Wildlife Biology and Game Management, BOKU University, Vienna, Austria
When does adaptation stop being coexistence? – Hidden ecological costs of wildlife living alongside humans

18:00 **Evanthia Tsimpouropoulou** (Greece)
Temporal activity segregation of European brown bears in relation to anthropogenic disturbance: an analysis using a camera trap network in northern Greece

18:15 **Andreea Ocrain** (Romania)
Traditional, indigenous and local ecological knowledge in human-large carnivore coexistence: a systematic review

18:30 **Danita Nikolova** (Bulgaria)
Den use of the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) in captivity

19:30 **Dinner - "Mihai Eminescu" conference room**

Thursday

22 October 2026 – Hotel O3Zone, "Mihai Eminescu" conference room

08:00 Registration (Hotel O3Zone)

09:00 **KEYNOTE · COEXISTENCE WITH LARGE CARNIVORES**
Christian-Radu Chereji (Romania)
Associate-Dean, FSPAC, and Director, Conflict Studies Center, Babeș-Bolyai University
The invisible architecture of coexistence with large carnivores

09:50 **Eleni Chatzi** (Greece)
Growing up in a human-dominated landscape: the case of Martha, the bear, in Greece

10:10 **José Vicente López-Bao** (Spain)
Effectiveness of using visual and acoustic deterrents to deter bears from fruiting trees

10:30 **Andreea Rechițean** (Romania)
Mapping human–brown bear interactions in Europe: a systematic review and case study application in the Făgăraș Mountains

10:50 **Teodora Sin** (Romania)
Spatiotemporal responses of a mammal community to human disturbance in the Romanian Carpathians

11:10 **Gergő Varga** (Romania)
Local perceptions of human-brown bear coexistence in Covasna County

11:30 **Michal Haring** (Slovakia)
Human–bear conflicts in Slovakia: prevention in practice

11:50 **Kirill Petianov** (Germany)
Beyond wolf presence: understanding human perceptions and acceptance of wolves in Germany

12:10 **COFFEE BREAK & POSTER SESSION [5 MINUTES EACH FOR PRESENTERS]**
Marina Gaona Calderón (Spain): To what extent do local economies depend on the Cantabrian brown bears?

12:30 **KEYNOTE · YOUTH VOICES & YOUTH PRACTICES: STUDENT SESSION 2**
Tibor Hartel (Romania)
Faculty of Environmental Science and Engineering, Babeș-Bolyai University
Bears as co-authors of coexistence: a more-than-human agency perspective

13:00 **Anna Tousidou** (Greece)
Human-large carnivore coexistence: a review of conflict management strategies

13:15 **George Monaghan** (Greece)
Density estimates and landscape associations of brown bears and grey wolves in a human-modified landscape of northwestern Greece

Thursday (continued)

22 October 2026 – Hotel O3Zone, "Mihai Eminescu" conference room

13:30 **Oliver Hooper** (Greece / United Kingdom)
Examining spatial and temporal activity patterns in northern Greece: understanding predator abundance and predator-prey overlap

13:45 Lunch break (Hotel O3Zone)

14:45 **PROJECT SESSION**
SESCARNIVORE
Participatory Workshop: Mapping the Social-Ecological Dimensions of Human–Large Carnivore Coexistence (Faculty of Environmental Science and Engineering, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania)

16:15 **COFFEE BREAK & POSTER SESSION [5 MINUTES EACH FOR PRESENTERS]**
Ioana Alexia Piciu (Romania): Garbage as a source of conflict: Low-cost solutions for bear-resistant bins

16:35 **Field trip: Băile Bálványos**
(in parallel with the presentations below, until 18:20)

16:35 **KEYNOTE · YOUTH VOICES & YOUTH PRACTICES: STUDENT SESSION 3**
Mihai I. Pop (Romania)
Research Fellow at Research and Development Institute for Wildlife and Mountain Resources & Association for the Conservation of Biological Diversity (ACDB)
Looking to the future through the lens of the past

17:05 **Kinga Gergely** (Romania)
Between danger and identity: the social value of brown bears in Băile Tușnad

17:20 **Ábel Orbán** (Romania)
Between fear and attraction: different perceptions of human–bear coexistence in Băile Tușnad

17:35 **Rita Darvas** (Romania)
The role of non-formal environmental education in schoolchildren's knowledge and community decision-making: the TusnadEcoBear Mobile Cave initiative

17:50 **Anna Boglárka Lukács** (Romania)
Dialogue or Panic? – Professional perspectives on human–bear coexistence in Harghita County

18:05 **Eleonora Ivanova** (Bulgaria)
Spatial use and social interactions in wolves raised in semi-natural conditions

19:30 **Gala dinner (Laleaua/Tulip Restaurant)**

Friday

23 October 2026 – Laleaua/Tulip Restaurant

08:00 Registration

09:00 **KEYNOTE · SCIENCE FOR COMMUNICATION**
Anne Broeksma (Netherlands)
Nature journalist
Stories gone wild: the case of problem wolf Bram

10:00 **Nicholas Pokorny** (Romania)
An analysis in Hungarian news media framing in Romania concerning human-bear conflicts and information dissemination

10:20 **Alexander Georgiev** (Bulgaria)
Role-playing simulation of human-bear coexistence for youth engagement

10:40 **Adam Wajrak** (Poland)
Large carnivores in the world of fake news

11:00 **Coffee break / Gastro Day - lunch break - Selected products from local farmers and producers / Room setup change**

11:00 **"Forona" photo exhibition, presented by photographer Dan Dinu – Friday only, at the venue (Laleaua/Tulip Restaurant)**

14:00 **Panel: Seeing coexistence differently: Art, film & ecology in conversation**
Artists, filmmakers and biodiversity specialists explore how creative practices can change the way we see, understand and communicate human–wildlife coexistence.

15:30 **Workshop with invited participants: From reflection to action: Co-creating ideas for coexistence**
An interactive workshop inviting participants to reflect, exchange perspectives and develop ideas for bringing art and culture into local approaches to coexistence.

17:00 **Film screening & filmmaker talk: Backyard bears of Transylvania**
Documentary screening followed by a conversation with filmmaker Dan Dinu and audience Q&A.

18:15 **Film screening & filmmaker talk: Animal hustlers**
Documentary screening followed by a conversation with filmmakers Michael Bird and Ovidiu Stancu, and audience Q&A.

Tuesday-Friday

20-23 October 2026 – The central park in front of Hotel O3Zone

"Living with Predators" photo exhibition by the TransNatura Nature Photography Club

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Project sessions

Project Session 1

20 Oct 2026 15:00

From bear management to coexistence governance: designing a local coexistence system

Scenario-based participatory workshop

What does a municipality facing recurring large-carnivore incidents need beyond bins, fences and wildlife interventions? This workshop explores how practical measures can be embedded in a local system of cooperation, trusted rules and credible response.

Organised within the WWF-Romania project *The Invisible Architecture of Coexistence with Large Carnivores*, the session draws on Băile Tușnad as an analytical case. Participants will design solutions for a fictional mountain town, identifying principles that other municipalities can adapt to their own conditions.

What to expect

After short introductions to the tools and the Băile Tușnad case, mixed professional groups will receive the same challenge: design a local coexistence system for two years within a realistic budget. Participants will:

- Use BIND – Boundaries, Interdependence, Norms and Deterrence – to define preventive measures, cooperation, responsibilities and responses to repeated boundary crossings.
- Test their designs using GLiMSS – Gatekeepers, Legitimizers, Mobilizers, Spoilers and Silent stakeholders – to identify influential actors, potential opposition and overlooked costs.
- Present their proposals, review another group's design and identify common principles in a plenary discussion.

The workshop aims to produce alternative system designs and 6–8 Design Principles for Local Large-Carnivore Coexistence Systems. A synthesis note will be circulated to participants and will inform subsequent research on coexistence governance.

Who can participate?

The session welcomes 25–50 participants with practical or research experience in human–wildlife coexistence, local governance or natural-resource management. Relevant backgrounds include local authorities, wildlife specialists, intervention teams, conservation NGOs, hunting, tourism, agriculture and social sciences.

No prior knowledge of BIND or GLiMSS is needed. All working materials will be provided on paper; no equipment is required.

Practical information

Duration: 120 minutes, without a break.
Language: English, with English–Romanian–Hungarian interpretation provided by the conference organisers.
Lead facilitator: Christian Chereji, Babeș-Bolyai University (UBB)
Additional facilitator: Cristian-Remus Papp, WWF-Romania
Contact: cchereji@gmail.com; cpapp@wwf.ro

Participation is voluntary and follows the Chatham House Rule. Group outputs will be documented without names through written notes and photographs of the working materials. No audio or video recording is planned. Consent will be requested at the start, and participants may withdraw their contributions until the synthesis note is circulated.

Project Session 2

20 Oct 2026 15:00

Mechanisms driving brown bear presence near human settlements

Structured expert elicitation

Why are juveniles and females with cubs repeatedly recorded near settlements in the Romanian Carpathians? Different ecological mechanisms may produce similar spatial patterns, yet call for different management measures. This session explores the explanations held by researchers and practitioners and the evidence needed to distinguish between them.

Organised within the IntraBear project by the Centre for Environmental Research and Impact Studies (CCMESI), University of Bucharest, the session asks participants to generate explanations themselves, without a predefined list. The aim is to document expert disagreement and how it might be resolved, rather than to reach consensus.

What to expect

The session uses the nominal group technique and includes no presentations. Following a short introduction, participants will:

- Read a standardised case and independently write possible explanations, stating what they would expect to observe if each were true.
- Share and clarify explanations in plenary, merging those that predict the same observations into a list of no more than 7–8 explanations.
- Individually rate each explanation's plausibility from 0 to 10, then work in professionally diverse groups of 4–5 to identify discriminating observations and explanations that cannot currently be tested.
- Discuss group findings in plenary and independently rate the explanations again, showing where opinions changed and where disagreement remains.

Anonymous response sheets and group worksheets will document the explanations, both rounds of individual judgements and knowledge gaps. Findings will be analysed within IntraBear and may inform research reports, presentations and scientific publications.

Who can participate?

The exercise is designed for 20 participants from research, environmental administration, wildlife and game management, conservation NGOs and doctoral research. Professional diversity is essential to the method. Other conference attendees may also enter the room without registering for the session.

No preparation is required: participants should not study the case in advance, so that initial judgements remain independent. All materials will be provided during the session.

Practical information

Duration: 2 hours.
Language: English plenary with English–Romanian–Hungarian interpretation. The case is available in all three languages, and responses may be written in any of them.
Lead facilitator: Mihai Pop, IntraBear project, CCMESI, University of Bucharest
Contact: mihai.pop@drd.unibuc.ro
Project website: ccmesi.ro/?page_id=2803

Participation is voluntary and informed consent will be requested. Random codes link the two evaluations without recording names. Participants keep their code and may use it to withdraw their responses until 31 December 2026. Ethical approval is provided by the ICDCRM Ethics Committee.

IntraBear – Intraspecific interactions shaping human–brown bear conflicts in the Romanian Carpathians. This work was supported by a grant of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, CNCS - UEFISCDI, project number PN-IV-P2-2.1-TE-2023-0999, within PNCDI IV.

Demographic bias in brown bear emergency interventions in Romania

20 Oct 2026 15:00

Mihai I. Pop [1, 2*]

[1] Research and Development Institute for Wildlife and Mountain, Wildlife Department, 35/B Progresului Street, Miercurea Ciuc, Romania

[2] Centre for Environmental Research and Impact Studies (CCMESI), 1 Nicolae Bălcescu Boulevard, Sector 1, 010041 Bucharest, Romania

[*] *e-mail: minelpop@yahoo.com*

Human-bear interactions in settlements in the Romanian Carpathians receive high media attention and political pressure, leading to the adoption in 2021 of a legislative framework enabling emergency interventions on brown bears. However, the sex- and age-class composition of bears involved in these events, and which demographic segments are most likely to be lethally removed, remain poorly understood, fueling debates on the management of human-bear interactions and altering tolerance towards the species. We quantified (1) which sex/age categories of bears are targeted by authorities' interventions and (2) the probability that the intervention sequence ends in a lethal outcome. We analyzed the National Register of Bear Emergency Interventions for the period September 2021-October 2025. From a total of 2,758 entries containing a short description of the authorities' intervention we retained 1,595 (58%) usable entries with sex and age class information (manually validated). We aggregated sequences of interventions into cases based on the combination of municipality, potential sex, potential age and chronology that can be attributed to the same bear unit. A case was considered closed when a lethal intervention occurred and any subsequent intervention with the same unit profile generates a new case. Through this procedure, we identified 614 cases out of the 1,595 interventions. The results show a pronounced heterogeneity between the groups. Females with cubs (127 cases) and adult males (52 cases) had the highest intervention intensity (mean interventions per case: 4.1 and 3.8 respectively). Lethal outcomes were most frequent for females without cubs (47.0%) and males (42.2%), and substantially lower for females with cubs (17.7%). These preliminary results suggest that current emergency intervention practices disproportionately affect specific demographic segments, with potential implications for population structure. They also have implications for the design of more targeted, evidence-based conflict management policies.

Project Session 3

21 Oct 2026 11:30

Risks and benefits for pastoralists of downlisting the wolf and the brown bear from strictly protected to protected status

Participatory workshop (CoCo and Han Somsen)

What would changes in large-carnivore protection mean for mountain pastoralists? This workshop explores experiences and expectations surrounding wolf downlisting and the potential implications of a similar change for brown bears in the Carpathians. It examines how implementation could affect livestock damage, tolerance and coexistence, recognising differences in species ecology and regional governance.

The session is organised within CoCo, a European project integrating wildlife and livestock into sustainable multi-functional landscapes, with the Research and Development Institute for Wildlife and Mountain Resources (ICDCRM), Miercurea Ciuc, as its Romanian partner.

What to expect

Following an introduction to relevant CoCo results, Prof. Han Somsen (Tilburg University) will discuss possible brown bear downlisting from a wildlife law perspective. Facilitated focus groups will then explore:

- What has changed, or is expected to change, for livestock breeders following wolf downlisting.
- The potential risks and benefits of brown bear downlisting for pastoralist communities in the Carpathians.
- Different stakeholder perspectives, possible conflicts and gaps in knowledge about the practical consequences of changes in protection status.

Groups will share their findings in plenary. The discussions will inform CoCo policy recommendations and research, with a short report shared with participants, and support future cooperation between researchers, wildlife managers and livestock breeders.

Who can participate?

The workshop welcomes 15–40 participants with experience in human–large carnivore coexistence, wildlife management, conservation, forestry, protected areas or rural development. Livestock breeders, shepherds and breeders' associations are particularly encouraged to attend. A short registration form will be used; if capacity is exceeded, selection will balance stakeholder groups and prioritise livestock breeders.

No advance preparation is required. All necessary materials will be provided.

Practical information

Duration: 2 hours.
Language: English presentations and plenary with English–Romanian–Hungarian interpretation. Focus groups will work at separate English-, Romanian- and Hungarian-speaking tables.
Lead facilitator: Mihai Pop, Research Fellow, ICDCRM
Facilitation team: Agota Abran and Ruben Iosif, ICDCRM
Invited speaker: Prof. Han Somsen, Tilburg University (abstract on the next page)
Contact: popmihai@icdcrm.ro
Project website: cocoproject.eu/en/home

Participation is voluntary. Participants may decline questions or withdraw at any time. Informed verbal consent and separate consent for audio recording will be requested. Discussions and facilitator notes will be anonymised for CoCo research and may contribute to reports, presentations and publications. The research has received ethical approval from the ICDCRM Ethics Committee.

CoCo is funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe – Research and Innovation programme (grant agreement No. 101181958). The project, started in November 2024, has a duration of three years. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Downlisting the bear: A general contextual legal critique

21 Oct
2026
11:30

Han Somsen [1*]

[1] Tilburg University, PLG, 2 Warandelaan, 5037 AB Tilburg, the Netherlands

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This presentation critically interrogates prospects of downlisting bears and other large carnivorous species protected by EU wildlife law.

Although I deploy an EU law lens, the analysis is general in that it also considers pertinent benchmarks and principles derived from outside EU wildlife law. Contextuality, in the abstract, refers to the claim that meanings and impacts of law vary depending on the regulatory environment in which it operates. Besides the legal system, a regulatory environment is made up of dynamic social, economic and technological realities. In that vein, I contextualize the applicable wildlife law in a contemporary technological context marked by wide availability of data, AI, surveillance technologies and genetics.

Project Session 4

21 Oct 2026 14:30

Wildlife forensic toolkit 2.0: hands-on tools for frontline wildlife protection

Hands-on workshop | Sustainable Scale-Up Foundation

This interactive workshop introduces participants to version 2.0 of the Wildlife Forensic Toolkit, specifically designed for rangers, first responders, police officers and environmental officers working on the frontlines of wildlife protection. Originating from the European Nature-FIRST programme, the first version of this toolkit was developed and field-tested by rangers in Bulgaria. Based on their feedback, version 2.0 is a modular, upgraded kit tailored for bears and other large mammals.

This session goes beyond a standard presentation; it offers a hands-on format aimed at mutual learning. Participants will:

- Discover the origins of the toolkit and why this second, improved round was developed.
- Watch a live demonstration of the specific forensic tools used at a wildlife crime scene (e.g. trace collection, trauma analysis, and detecting poison or snares).
- Engage in tool-by-tool discussions about their own practical field experience with similar tools.
- Help shape version 3.0 through the practical feedback and experiences shared by end-users.

Session structure

- **Part 1 – Presentation & context:** how the toolkit evolved from Nature-FIRST (v1.0 in Bulgaria) to version 2.0 (focused on bears and large mammals).
- **Part 2 – Live demonstration:** a practical demo showing how specific forensic tools are used at a simulated wildlife crime scene.
- **Part 3 – Breakout groups & toolkit rotation:** the audience is split into smaller breakout groups, rotating the 5 physical toolkits among them, with every participant given 15–20 minutes to physically inspect, handle and evaluate the tools up close.
- **Part 4 – Feedback & co-creation discussion:** gathering structured feedback from each group on how these tools fit into their daily field reality, to directly shape version 3.0.

Who can participate?

The workshop is specifically designed for rangers, first responders, police officers and environmental officers working on the frontlines of wildlife protection.

Practical information

Duration: 2 hours.
Language: English; translation is not provided.
Participation: Free.
Organiser: Sustainable Scale-Up Foundation (sustainablescale-up.com/about-us)

Project Session 5

22 Oct 2026 14:45

Mapping the social-ecological dimensions of human–large carnivore coexistence

Participatory workshop | SESCARNIVORE

What makes coexistence between people and large carnivores possible, and how do these conditions differ across regions? This participatory workshop invites participants to share experiences and explore the social, institutional and ecological factors that shape coexistence.

Organised within the SESCARNIVORE project by the Faculty of Environmental Science and Engineering at Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, the workshop will bring together perspectives from different professional and geographical backgrounds. Together, participants will identify common and context-specific challenges, discuss existing practices, and consider whether approaches that work in one setting could be applied elsewhere.

What to expect

Following a brief introduction to the project, participants will take part in structured exercises combining individual reflection and facilitated group discussion. The workshop will explore:

- Key challenges and opportunities for human–large carnivore coexistence.
- Social, institutional and ecological conditions that support coexistence.
- Practical experiences and the transferability of existing approaches across regions.

The observations and perspectives gathered will contribute to research within SESCARNIVORE, helping develop a broader understanding of coexistence across different contexts.

Who can participate?

The workshop is open to all interested conference participants, particularly those working in wildlife management, conservation, human–wildlife conflict, forestry, protected areas and rural development. Diverse professional and geographical perspectives are welcome.

No advance preparation is required. All workshop materials will be provided. A short registration form will help the team organise the session.

Practical information

Duration: 90 minutes.
Language: English, with English–Romanian–Hungarian interpretation available through the conference organisers.
Lead facilitator: Andreea Ocrain, PhD student, Babeș-Bolyai University
Facilitation team: Tibor Hartel and Vlad Măcicășan
Contact: andreea.ocrain@ubbcluj.ro
Project website: sescarnivore.ro

Participation is voluntary. Contributions will be treated confidentially and reported in anonymised or aggregated form for research purposes. Informed consent will be requested, with separate consent for audio recording. Participants who decline recording may still participate.

SESCARNIVORE – Developing a Social-Ecological Niche Theory to Leverage Human–Large Carnivore Coexistence – is funded by the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research through UEFISCDI under the Exploratory Research Projects Program. Grant number: PN-IV-P1-PCE-2023-0225.

Tuesday 20 October 2026
Management of large carnivores

Rethinking bear management under global change – a step beyond numbers

20 Oct 2026 09:30

Nuria Selva [1*]

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Bear management remains largely rooted in traditional game management approaches and has changed relatively little over the past decades. It has traditionally focused on population numbers, with culling or hunting often regarded as primary management tools, sometimes accompanied by artificial feeding. However, large carnivores, including bears, are strongly affected by global change, as are the ecosystems they inhabit. Lethal management measures are increasingly questioned in terms of their effectiveness and are not widely accepted by civil society, highlighting the limitations of this management paradigm. The current global environmental crisis, including climate change, human population growth and expansion, the increasing availability of artificial food resources to wildlife and unsecured anthropogenic food waste, urban expansion into bear habitat, the growth of road networks and other linear infrastructures, as well as increasing human presence and outdoor recreation, may act as important correlates or amplifiers of conflict. Studies indicate that successful management of conflicts is complex and needs to address also ecological, environmental, and social factors. I provide an overview of the current situation, identify new elements of the conflict in the Anthropocene, such as artificial feeding, and overproduction of unsecured anthropogenic food waste. Other elements, like urban sprawl into bear habitat, road development and increasing outdoor recreation may act as important correlates or amplifiers of conflict. Finally, I also discuss the role of personalities and individual bear behaviour, as well as human behaviour. We need to move beyond bear numbers towards a more holistic approach to bear management that accounts for ongoing environmental changes.

Managing the dissensus regarding the management of bear population in Romania

20 Oct 2026 10:20

Ion Copoeru [1*]

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Wildlife management entails balancing multiple demands within a shared landscape. The greatest challenge currently facing decision-makers in the management of wildlife, especially bears, is the lack of a largely accepted and ethically acceptable framework for the coexistence between wildlife and the numerous human interests. This presentation is a conceptual analysis of the theoretical frameworks and practical proposals aiming to provide an inclusive framework for the ethical management of wildlife, especially of the bear population, in Romania. The presentation will discuss the possible ways of converging between anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric policies and management plans. The compromise (for example, the "reflective anthropocentrism") is achieved by excluding "animal ethics" on the grounds that it is an extreme point of view. The outcome will be the exclusion of a category of people who feel and reason in terms of compassion and care. Why would we exclude compassion and care from wildlife management? Integrative wildlife management should take into account moral (and aesthetic) considerations and be based on a rigorous, well-developed concept of experience. Also, the paper will clarify the theoretical and empirical conditions/requirements of applicability of the (philosophical) theory to the field of wildlife management. The paper addresses the challenge of balancing ecological needs with diverse social values, while giving prominence to the ethical values.

Understanding visitor experiences at the Zărnești Bear Sanctuary, Romania: analysis of online reviews

20 Oct 2026 10:40

Oana Mihaela Stoleriu [1*], Teodora-Georgiana Mihaila [1], Cristian Constantin Stoleriu [1]

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Animal sanctuaries differ from traditional animal-based attractions, such as zoos or wildlife parks, by prioritizing animal welfare, rehabilitation, and conservation over tourism and entertainment. As rescue-oriented, non-profit institutions, they align with the principles of ethical and sustainable tourism through compassionate conservation, environmental education, and minimal human interference with wildlife. In the context of growing concerns regarding sustainable tourism, animal welfare, biodiversity conservation, and environmental ethics, sanctuaries have become increasingly important as destinations that integrate conservation with visitor education. This study investigates visitor experiences at the Zărnești Bear Sanctuary, Romania, one of the largest brown bear sanctuaries in Europe and the country's leading rehabilitation center for rescued bears. Established in 2005 and opened to visitors in 2008, the sanctuary combines wildlife conservation with educational tourism through guided visits focused on animal welfare, bear ecology, ethical tourism, and conservation. The research aims to identify the principal dimensions of visitor experiences through the analysis of online reviews posted on TripAdvisor, one of the most popular travel platforms. A dataset of 800 visitor reviews published on TripAdvisor between 2011 and 2026 was analyzed using Leximancer software, enabling the identification of the dominant concepts and thematic patterns characterizing visitors' perceptions and experiences. The findings indicate that bears constitute the central element of the visitor experience, while themes related to tour organization, accessibility, safety, and guided interpretation also play significant roles. Families with children represent an important visitor segment. Emotional engagement is fostered through narratives of rescued bears, their rehabilitation, and the sanctuary's atmosphere, whereas the quality of interpretation provided by guides strongly influences visitor satisfaction. These findings are consistent with previous research on dimensions of visitor experience in wildlife tourism. Given the growing impact of online reviews on travel decisions and destination management, the findings provide valuable insights into the factors shaping positive visitor experiences in animal sanctuaries. They highlight the key success factors and best practices that can support the development of ethical, educational, and sustainable wildlife tourism in similar conservation-oriented attractions.

Brown bears in Slovakia: one year later

20 Oct 2026 11:00

Michal Haring [1*]

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Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) management in Slovakia has continued rapid and significant changes over the past year. The issue has become increasingly connected with public safety, conservation policy, legislation, and political and media debate. The overview focuses on the current situation of brown bears in Slovakia and the main developments over the past year. It covers legislative and policy changes affecting bear management, as well as related court cases and legal disputes. Particular attention is given to the scale and implementation of lethal removals. Human–bear conflicts and attacks are also considered as an important part of the current situation. Finally, the overview examines the continuing role of media coverage and public discourse in shaping perceptions of bears and their management. The past year has brought major changes in the way brown bears are managed in Slovakia, including extensive lethal removals and changes in the legal framework. At the same time, management decisions have increasingly become the subject of court cases and public controversy. Human–bear conflicts and attacks have continued, accompanied by intense media and political attention. Slovakia remains a particularly dynamic example of human–bear coexistence, where developments are shaped by wildlife management, public safety, conservation, law, politics, and media. The situation demonstrates that human–bear conflicts cannot be understood solely through interactions between people and bears in the field.

Across the coexistence gradient: rural perspectives of living with bears in Spain

20 Oct 2026 11:20

Jenny Anne Glikman [1*], Alessandra Cuya [1], Maria G. Granados [2], Maria Martinez-Jauregui [2], Miguel Delibes-Mateos [1]

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As large carnivores recover across Europe, understanding how human communities coexist with them has become a conservation challenge. This study examines rural residents' perceptions of sharing landscapes with brown bears across a coexistence gradient in Spain: historic areas (continuous presence), intermediate areas (recolonized 15–20 years ago), and recent areas (occasional presence without established populations). The main aim was to understand how experience with large carnivores shapes social acceptance by exploring attitudes toward bears, perceived risks, costs and benefits, and management preferences. The project focuses on ten Spanish Autonomous Communities – Andalucía, Aragón, Asturias, Castilla y León, Castilla-La Mancha, Cataluña, Extremadura, Galicia, La Rioja, and Murcia – chosen to represent different stages of coexistence with three large carnivores (bear, wolf, lynx): long-term presence (> 30 years), recent recolonization (< 30 years or breeding pairs), and imminent return (sporadic sightings, no breeding yet). Within these regions, provinces with overlapping carnivore presence were prioritized for comparison. For bears, data were collected in Asturias, Cantabria, Huesca, León, Lleida, Lugo, Navarra, Ourense, Palencia, and Zamora, with a final sample of 719 telephone interviews. Overall attitudes toward bears were positive across all contexts, but varied significantly between groups. Support was highest in intermediate areas (75%), followed by historic areas (69%), while recent areas displayed lower yet still majority-positive attitudes (62%). Risk perception revealed clearer contrasts: although attacks on people were considered unlikely, concerns about economic impacts were widespread. Historic areas reported stronger concern about livestock damage, reflecting long-term coexistence with conflict. In contrast, recent areas showed higher concern about attacks on pets and were more likely to perceive impacts negatively. Perceived risks to apiculture were high across all contexts. The most pronounced difference involved cost–benefit perceptions ($\chi^2 = 17.70$, $p = 0.001$): respondents in recent areas were more likely to state that bears bring more harms than benefits, whereas historic and intermediate areas presented more balanced or positive assessments. Despite these differences, acceptance of local bear presence and support for compensation and preventive actions remained consistently high. Coexistence history primarily shaped cost–benefit perceptions, underscoring the importance of targeted mitigation and communication strategies in regions experiencing recent bear expansion.

Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) monitoring in Uzhanskyi National Nature Park (Ukraine) within the LECA project

20 Oct 2026 11:40

Roman Cherepanyn [1, 2*], Ihor Dykyy [2, 3], Nelia Koval [4], Vasyl Sheveria [4]

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The LECA project sought to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of large carnivore conservation and management in the Carpathian region. It focused on coordinated monitoring carried out in cooperation with local stakeholders and international partners. Synchronised transboundary monitoring in the East Carpathians Biosphere Reserve (Uzhanskyi National Nature Park on the Ukrainian side) provided up-to-date information on the Eurasian lynx population in the model area. For the first time, deterministic monitoring of the Eurasian lynx was conducted in Uzhanskyi National Nature Park from December 2024 to March 2025, simultaneously with colleagues from the East Carpathians Transboundary Biosphere Reserve, specifically Bieszczady National Park (Poland) and Poloniny National Park (Slovakia). The monitoring was carried out within the international LECA (Supporting the coexistence and conservation of Carpathian Large Carnivores) project. Before the monitoring, a map of camera-trap locations was developed and refined in consultation with international colleagues, using a 2.5 × 2.5 km grid for deterministic monitoring. Two camera traps were installed at each of 30 locations throughout the national park, covering both the border zone and the central areas of the park. In total, 60 camera traps were used for deterministic monitoring. Preliminary monitoring conducted in Uzhanskyi National Nature Park from 2017 to 2025, based on signs of lynx activity and photographic records, indicated the presence of 6–13 Eurasian lynx individuals within the park, which covers an area of up to 600 km^2. However, analysis of photographic records based on individual coat patterns confirmed the presence of only seven distinct lynx individuals in Uzhanskyi National Nature Park, including four males. Overall, during the study period, 38 lynx photo/video records were obtained from eight camera traps located at seven sites. Synchronous transboundary monitoring provided comprehensive data on lynx populations in the Uzhanskyi National Nature Park and the East Carpathians Biosphere Reserve. This can form a foundation for developing evidence-based strategies to manage lynx populations across the Carpathian region.

Tuesday 20 October 2026
Best practices and technology

Current status and future of genetic wildlife monitoring in Europe

20 Oct 2026 12:20

Carsten Nowak [1*]

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The presentation summarises the current state of wildlife genetics in Europe, highlighting recent advances in analytical tools for assessing relatedness, population structure, genetic diversity, and hybridization. The overarching goal of this work is to support evidence-based wildlife management by integrating genome-wide measures. Such approaches can inform reintroduction strategies, enhance habitat connectivity, and better link ex situ and in situ conservation efforts, ultimately contributing to the maintenance of genetically viable wildlife populations within Europe's highly fragmented, human-dominated landscapes. The focus is placed on the increasing use of whole-genome data in genetic wildlife monitoring, which allows reconstruction of population histories, identification of adaptive introgression, and estimation of inbreeding-related genetic load. Case studies across wolves, bears, lynx, wildcats, bison, hamsters, and bustards demonstrate the power and applied relevance of modern molecular approaches. I show that modern genome-wide technologies find widespread genetic erosion and inbreeding in European wildlife driven by long-term anthropogenic pressure. The use of High Throughput Sequencing-based marker panels and whole genome sequencing allows for method standardisation and comparability among data sets generated in different laboratories and regions. The increasing application of genome-wide sequencing technologies now allows for high-quality and in-depth genetic analyses across Europe, opening new opportunities for the generation of solid molecular data to support wildlife monitoring and management.

Creating a bear "museum" to educate the younger generation to better understand nature and the benefits of living with large carnivores

20 Oct 2026 13:10

Nikola Doykin [1*]

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Environmental education can play an important role in improving public understanding of large carnivores and supporting long-term coexistence between people and wildlife. Engaging younger generations is particularly important, as educational experiences can contribute to the development of knowledge, awareness and responsible attitudes towards nature. The Bear Museum, established by the Vitosha Nature Park Directorate within Vitosha Nature Park, Bulgaria, was created as an educational tool to introduce visitors to bears, their ecology, their role in ecosystems, and the challenges associated with human–large carnivore coexistence. The aim of this contribution is to present the Bear Museum as a case study in environmental education, describe its educational approach and accumulated experience, and discuss lessons that may be relevant for similar large-carnivore education initiatives. The Bear Museum is located within Vitosha Nature Park, close to Sofia, Bulgaria. Due to its proximity to the capital, a substantial proportion of its visitors come from Sofia and the surrounding area. The museum primarily targets organised groups from kindergartens, primary, middle and high schools, as well as general visitors from Sofia and the surrounding region. Its educational activities and interpretation include a small exhibition with bear models and information panels on all aspects of a bear's lifecycle - anatomy, diet, reproduction, habitat, main threats, coexistence with people. There is an exhibition of the skulls and snouts of the most common mammals found in the forests in Vitosha mountain, as well as two life-sized sculptures of a brown bear and a grizzly bear. There is also a makeshift bear den, as well as tables and spaces for relaxation and picnics. During educational presentations, guides draw on their knowledge to interpret the information and convey it effectively to the visitors, depending on their level of understanding and on their interests. The museum is located in the forest in the mountain, which amplifies the feeling of entering into the bear's home. Between 2013 and 2025, the museum received approximately 10 000 visitors, 60% of which were children/young people or organised educational groups. Over approximately twelve years of operation, the Bear Museum has received 10 000 visitors and has provided environmental education activities for more than 6000 children and school students. The experience of the Bear Museum demonstrates the potential of dedicated environmental-education facilities to create opportunities for dialogue about bears, ecosystems and human–large carnivore coexistence, especially with children and young school students. Based on more than 12 years of implementation and 10 000 visitors, the main lessons learned are that there remains a significant interest in education on the wild inhabitants of the forest, especially in the form of organised school/kindergarten tourism, as well as a significant lack of public knowledge regarding bear behaviour, safety protocols during encounters, and the potential for harmonious coexistence between humans and large carnivores. The experience may be transferable to other protected areas and regions facing human–large carnivore coexistence challenges, particularly through sharing ideas for interactive displays and engaging educational approaches, which target the curiosity and wonder of children and the main findings related to the interests of young visitors in establishments similar to the bear museum in Vitosha Nature Park.

An integrated monitoring and AI-based early warning system for large carnivores in Maramureș, Romania

20 Oct 2026 13:30

Zoltán D. Szabó [1*]

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Large carnivores are recovering across many parts of Europe, increasing the need for effective monitoring systems that support both conservation and human-wildlife conflict prevention. Within the COOP4SAFE transboundary project, we developed an integrated monitoring and early warning framework for large carnivores in Maramureș, Romania, in collaboration with partners from Ukraine and Slovakia. The framework combines standardized wildlife monitoring with artificial intelligence to improve detection, risk assessment, and response capacity. The study was conducted in Maramureș, northern Romania, a region characterized by extensive forest ecosystems, ecological corridors, and areas affected by human-wildlife conflicts. The monitoring protocol targets brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), wolf (*Canis lupus*), lynx (*Lynx lynx*), mesopredators, and large herbivores. Using a 10×10 km ETRS grid, the system relies primarily on motion-triggered camera traps, complemented by winter track surveys, opportunistic observations, and cross-border data sharing. Cameras are strategically deployed in ecologically relevant and high-risk locations in cooperation with local hunting associations, including feeding sites, livestock grazing areas, forest roads, settlement edges, and known conflict hotspots. Data are collected during two annual monitoring sessions, in spring and autumn, to capture seasonal variation in carnivore activity, reproduction, and pre-hibernation behaviour. Standardized protocols ensure consistent camera maintenance, data extraction, and image classification. A subset of the camera network is equipped with a real-time AI-based early warning system that automatically analyzes images, detects brown bears, and sends alerts to intervention teams and other relevant stakeholders. The collected data are also used to support predictive modelling and the development of spatial risk maps. The first dataset generated through this framework provides standardized information on the distribution and activity of large carnivores and other wildlife across the study area. Preliminary results indicate that the AI-based system is capable of reliably detecting brown bears and generating timely alerts. By harmonizing monitoring methodologies across borders and combining wildlife monitoring with AI-assisted detection, the framework strengthens evidence-based conservation and conflict prevention. The approach improves response capacity, supports long-term human-carnivore coexistence, and offers a model that can be replicated in other regions facing similar challenges.

Wednesday 21 October 2026
Policies and law

Bears, humans and the evolving European legal framework for human-wildlife coexistence and its moral underpinnings

21 Oct 2026 09:00

Arie Trouwborst [1*]

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This keynote addresses the topic of human-bear coexistence in Europe within the bigger picture of international wildlife law and policy. International agreements on biodiversity conservation exist, in part, to ensure that national policies and local decisions take due account of the interests of wildlife in addition to those of humans. These agreements include the global Biodiversity Convention, the Bern Convention on wildlife conservation in Europe, and the EU Habitats Directive. They contain commitments for countries concerning protected areas, protected species, ecosystem restoration, and the need to move from human-wildlife conflict to coexistence. As the keynote will illustrate, many of these are highly relevant for European brown bears, including by providing legally binding outer limits which must be respected by national policymakers and local decision-takers. In contemporary discussions on human-bear conflict and coexistence, these commitments and legal limits are regularly questioned. Therefore, the main focus of this keynote is not on the legal detail of the obligations in question but on their conceptual foundations. These underpinnings include important premises of a moral nature. The keynote zooms in on two of them and applies them to the context of human-bear coexistence. The first of these is the so-called intrinsic value of wildlife. That is, the conviction that flora, fauna, and ecosystems have a value in and of themselves and deserve human respect and care, regardless of any benefits or harm they may bring to humans. The current understanding of the dimensions and weight of this intrinsic value is undergoing rapid change, especially in light of increasing scientific insights into the ways of being of non-human creatures. After centuries of denial, it is again dawning on Western societies that non-human animals are not insensitive robots but beings with thoughts, emotions, social lives, individual characters and cultures, memories and plans, and a desire to prosper, and to avoid suffering and death. Bears seem to be a case in point. The second foundational notion is the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. According to this principle, the richest countries in the Global North have the greatest responsibilities when it comes to conserving, restoring, and coexisting with wildlife, for two reasons: (i) they have caused the greatest wildlife losses in the past, and (ii) they currently have the economic and other resources needed to turn this around. In other words, the richer a society, the stronger the moral and legal demand for a generous attitude towards wildlife, including animals which pose a risk to human interests and indeed human lives. The practice of human-bear conflict and coexistence is likely to remain a complex and sometimes messy one, involving tricky trade-offs. There does not seem to be an easy and uniform recipe for translating the notions of intrinsic value and common but differentiated responsibilities into this practice. However, it does seem important – whether contemplating concrete problem situations or the potential downlisting of bears under European law – not to lose sight of the bigger picture represented by these two fundamental notions.

Traffic of large carnivores in Romania: threats to society

21 Oct
2026
09:50

Michael Bird [1*], Ovidiu Stancu [1]

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The illicit trade, captive breeding and private ownership of large carnivores remain poorly documented in Romania and neighbouring countries. 'Animal Hustlers' is an undercover investigative documentary revealing how large carnivores such as tigers and lions are bred and trafficked in Romania and Albania, as well as the supply chains that include the Czech Republic and Bulgaria. At the heart of the story is a zoo in Suceava, Romania where big cats are on sale for prices between 2,500 and 50,000 euro. This exploitation of animals is the opposite of human-large carnivore coexistence, as wild animals are traded as products, and not as living and independent beings. 'Animal Hustlers' focused on the people behind this form of exploitation and the methods they use to circumvent laws protecting animals, which are often vague and open to interpretation, and identified legal reforms through which such activities could be more effectively prevented and prosecuted as environmental crimes. The result was a 35-minute documentary focusing on Romania and Albania, which is linked below. The investigation demonstrates that weaknesses in legislation, enforcement and oversight enable the continued commercial exploitation of captive wild animals. Since the documentary was aired, a campaign has begun to gather support to push for legislative change, which will enable the police and the Environmental Guard in Romania to have greater clarity on who is allowed to breed, keep and trade wild animals. So far the campaign has gathered 5000 signatures, and further lobbying will take place to instigate change to ensure large carnivores are no longer mistreated in captivity, and those responsible for animal trafficking and cruelty are brought to justice.

https://youtu.be/QYaDzWGwxM8?is=2qp3xTft93G1wO5c

What does green criminology have to say about human-bear interactions in conservation frontiers? Adopting a harms-based approach to think about 'problematic' bears

21 Oct 2026 10:10

George Iordachescu [1*]

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This intervention draws on green criminology approaches to understand the role of legitimate business in driving or sustaining human-brown bear conflicts on the Carpathian conservation frontier. The overarching question it aims to answer is: are human-bear conflicts connected to other types of environmental crimes and harms? To answer it, the paper analyzes how harms are produced in the context of uncertain scientific knowledge, global capitalism, unequal power relations and interconnected global crises. The research was primarily done in areas of high conflict in Slovakia and Romania, but it also included stakeholders and actors working at regional (EU) or international levels. Methodologically, the data collection spanned from 2021 to 2024, and the design involved ethnographic fieldwork, environmental history and follow-the-policy methods to understand the development of green-collar crime over a period of intense changes in policy and legal frameworks. The proposed harms-based approach builds on current justice perspectives within green criminology that emphasize anthropocentric, biocentric, and ecocentric concepts of justice to expand concepts of victimhood and harm. Whilst an anthropocentric position can help to tease out the social and political complexities that are creating conflicts between humans and brown bears, a biocentric perspective encourages a deeper reflection on the individual victimhood of these bears and the speciesist narratives that allow bears to be simultaneously protected by law and persecuted as 'problematic' bears. For example, while brown bears are granted stricter legal protection in several Eastern European countries, legal frameworks have failed to effectively address emerging human-bear conflicts, thereby pushing some people towards seeking their own ways to respond to what is perceived as an injustice perpetrated by the state. The paper argues that a green criminology approach can illuminate how harms to animals, in this case bears, and to humans, are inseparably linked within a socio-political context tainted by uncertain scientific knowledge, low public trust and politicization of human-wildlife interactions.

Missed opportunities in human–bear conflict documentation: from fragmented emergency reports to traceable wildlife interventions

21 Oct 2026 10:30

Claudiu Olenici [1*]

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Wildlife incidents in Romania are frequently reported under conditions of fear and urgency, causing crucial data to be fragmented or lost across multiple communication channels. Consequently, interventions executed under emergency frameworks, such as GEO 81/2021, often fail to generate traceable, research-ready records. This underscores a critical need to transition from disconnected emergency alerts to accountable, evidence-based wildlife management practices. To illustrate the administrative consequences of fragmented reporting, we examined a documented intervention involving brown bear cubs (*Ursus arctos*) in Cavnic, Maramureș County. We analyzed the trajectory of data and operational decisions from the initial emergency alert to the final biological outcome. Additionally, we assessed practical data aggregated through the AnimAlert initiative, comparing standard citizen-science reporting against high-stress human–wildlife conflict scenarios. Our methodology evaluated the limitations of traditional digital forms during active crises, where users typically demand immediate telephonic resolution rather than structured data entry. We reviewed the current incident types reported via AnimAlert to identify gaps in large carnivore documentation. By auditing the Cavnic case study against the protocols of GEO 81/2021, we mapped the systemic disconnect between rapid administrative interventions and necessary biological traceability. Our analysis of the Cavnic case reveals that relocations executed without systematic data collection result in a complete lack of verifiable information regarding veterinary assessments, release sites, and post-relocation survival. Furthermore, we found that traditional citizen-science tools struggle during high-stress encounters, as users prioritize immediate safety over accurate biodiversity reporting. This demonstrates that strict legal compliance with emergency intervention protocols remains ecologically insufficient if the biological outcome cannot be scientifically reconstructed. To bridge the data gap in emergency wildlife interventions, we propose a hybrid documentation model that combines low-friction public reporting with professional post-intervention validation. By implementing a standardized minimum dataset within the AnimAlert infrastructure, disconnected emergency communications can be converted into traceable data that improves operational accountability.

The legal conservation status of brown bears in Romania

21 Oct 2026 10:50

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As Romania hosts the largest population of brown bears in the European Union, the recent shift toward more and more lethal management strategies through fixed hunting quotas has raised ethical, ecological, and legal concerns. My research addresses this urgent issue by critically evaluating how EU legal frameworks for brown bear conservation are implemented in Romania, assessing whether this lethal management fully complies with EU obligations. This study represents an extensive analysis of the reality from a legal, socio-political and ecological perspective which emphasizes the necessity of sustainable coexistence in all manners. This research adopts a mix of qualitative and quantitative research design, focusing on the national legislative level and regional implementations across ten key counties with the most significant brown bear populations. To analyze the legal alignment, my study conducts a systematic mapping of the EU Habitats Directive and Bern Convention against all Romanian in-force relevant legal frameworks. This has been done utilizing a color-coded thematic "legal puzzle". For regional implementation, I evaluated over 60 official documents from local stakeholders obtained via Law no. 544/2001. Additionally, I statistically analyzed human-bear conflict intervention data from the Gendarmerie and ISU spanning 2021 to 2025 and examined the socio-political narratives using the DPSIR model. My analysis reveals that Romania's current governance model directly breaches several critical aspects of the EU Habitats Directive. Specifically, Law 242/2024 violates Article 16 by implementing fixed hunting quotas as a primary intervention rather than a last resort, and it directly disregards Article 12 by creating legal pathways for the possession and commercial valuation of bear trophies, thus allowing trophy hunting. Furthermore, our national legislation translates ambiguously Article 18 regarding scientific research transparency, Article 22(c) regarding public education, and Article 11 concerning monitoring accountability. Empirically, my statistical data proves there is no clear national correlation between increased preventive hunting quotas and a decrease in human-bear conflicts; as most interventions occur in built-up areas involving habituated bears, whereas preventive quotas majorly target wild specimens from the forest. I conclude that Romania's current bear management policies and laws are driven more by political interest and sensationalist socio-political narratives than by scientific evidence, leading to a breach of several EU obligations. To achieve a favorable conservation status, Romania must shift the narrative away from lethal quotas and prioritize independent scientific monitoring alongside sustainable, non-lethal coexistence measures that address the anthropogenic root causes of these conflicts.

Wednesday 21 October 2026
"Youth voices & youth practices": student session 1

When does adaptation stop being coexistence? – Hidden ecological costs of wildlife living alongside humans

21 Oct 2026 17:30

Alexandra Sallay [1*]

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Human–wildlife coexistence is predominantly evaluated from the human side of the fence: through wildlife presence, population trends, damage records, conflict statistics, attitudes and tolerance. Yet these indicators tell us surprisingly little about the conditions under which animals persist alongside us. This keynote reverses the axis of evaluation and asks what coexistence looks like and what it costs from the animal's side. Behavioural flexibility allows wildlife to persist in increasingly human-dominated landscapes and is often interpreted as evidence that coexistence works. Building on the concept of co-adaptation, this keynote asks when such flexibility remains a viable response and when it becomes compensation for constraints imposed by us. It distinguishes two sources of hidden ecological cost for the animal: costs associated with adaptation itself and costs generated by management measures intended to facilitate coexistence. Drawing on two decades of wildlife work in the Carpathians and examples from bears, wolves, jackals and reintroduced European bison, the keynote explores different pathways through which these costs may emerge. Spatial and temporal accommodation can enable wildlife to share densely used landscapes with people; human presence can alter risk perception and interactions between species; adaptive strategies may increase exposure to conflict and management intervention; and measures such as supplementary feeding can alter movement, aggregation and disease dynamics. Apparently successful persistence may therefore conceal profound changes in behaviour, habitat use and ecological function. These effects can extend beyond individual animals. If management decisions ignore the existing burden of adaptation, additional disturbance or mortality may exceed a population's capacity to compensate, while conventional monitoring detects the consequences only later. The keynote argues that coexistence should therefore be evaluated not only by whether wildlife persists, but by the ecological costs required for that persistence and by how those costs are distributed between humans and wildlife.

Temporal activity segregation of European brown bears in relation to anthropogenic disturbance: an analysis using a camera trap network in northern Greece

21 Oct
2026
18:00

Evanthia Tsimpouropoulou [1*], Styliani Nouvaki [1], Kyriaki Chantzidou [1], Iraklis Giannakopoulos [2]

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Human disturbance is increasingly recognized as an important factor influencing wildlife behaviour, often leading animals to modify their temporal activity patterns to reduce encounters with people. Understanding these behavioural responses is essential for the conservation and management of large carnivores, particularly in human-dominated landscapes. This study aims to investigate whether anthropogenic disturbance affects the temporal activity of European brown bears in Northern Greece. The study was conducted in Northern Greece using camera trap data collected by the ARCTUROS monitoring network between 2021 and 2026. Human disturbance was quantified using detections of domestic dogs, livestock, and other indicators of human presence recorded by camera traps. Temporal activity patterns of the European brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) were analysed and compared between disturbance categories, and activity overlap was assessed. The same analytical approach was applied to examine temporal overlap between the European brown bear and other large mammal species. The analyses reveal differences in the temporal activity of European brown bears between areas with different levels of human disturbance. Activity overlap varies between disturbance categories and among sympatric large mammal species, indicating differences in temporal niche use. These patterns provide insights into the behavioural responses of wildlife to anthropogenic influence. Human disturbance influences the temporal activity of European brown bears and shapes their interactions with other large mammals. These findings contribute to a better understanding of behavioural adaptations in human-dominated landscapes and support evidence-based wildlife conservation and management.

Traditional, indigenous and local ecological knowledge in human-large carnivore coexistence: a systematic review

21 Oct 2026 18:15

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People living alongside large carnivores often develop detailed knowledge about their behaviour, ecology and presence in the landscape. Such knowledge may influence how carnivores are perceived, how people respond to them, and how coexistence is approached in general. This review explores how traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and local ecological knowledge (LEK), including Indigenous knowledge systems, may influence human-large carnivore relationships through six predefined mechanisms. A systematic literature search was conducted to identify empirical studies on traditional, Indigenous or local ecological knowledge in relation to large carnivores. After screening with a predefined decision tree, 40 articles were included in the review and analysed using six mechanisms: interpretation of carnivore behaviour and risk (M1), practical know-how for encounter management (M2), norms legitimising responses (M3), local identity and symbolic meaning (M4), perceived contributions, costs and burden distribution (M5), and orientation toward lethal or non-lethal control (M6). Relevant passages were extracted through parallel manual and AI-assisted coding, then compared and reconciled into a final evidence set. The evidence for each mechanism was rated as Strong, Moderate, Weak or Not coded. We then examined how frequently each mechanism occurred and whether multiple mechanisms co-occurred within the same study. Preliminary results show that interpretation of carnivore behaviour and risk (M1) is the most common mechanism, occurring in approximately 97% of the studies analysed so far, with Strong evidence identified in 81% of the articles. Perceived contributions, costs and burden distribution (M5) are also common, with Strong or Moderate evidence in approximately 90% of studies. Several mechanisms often appear together within the same study, with at least five of the six mechanisms represented in approximately 84% of the papers. The synthesis also identified an additional emergent mechanism related to the contribution of TEK/LEK to carnivore population monitoring (M7). The findings suggest that TEK/LEK is a multidimensional and rich source of place-based knowledge that extends beyond ecological information alone. When combined with scientific knowledge and institutional support, it may contribute to locally grounded approaches to human-large carnivore coexistence.

Den use of the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) in captivity

21 Oct
2026
18:30

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Studying captive brown bear behavior provides valuable insights into this elusive species that are difficult to gather in the wild. Because little is known about how brown bears use dens during the hibernation period, this research aims to examine their den-use behavior during hibernation in captivity. The findings enhance our understanding of brown bear behavior and hibernation while helping improve the welfare of captive individuals. The present study was conducted at the Zoo Centre in Dobrich City, Bulgaria. The subjects of the research are the bears Berna and Kostadin. They live in the largest zoo bear enclosure on the Balkan Peninsula, covering a total area of over five decares, which includes three lakes and a bunker where they can hibernate. Nevertheless, they dig their own dens where they hibernate. The observation of the two bears was carried out from November to March 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 using two camera traps. Spromise S68, 24 Mpx camera traps were placed in elevated positions with a clear view of the bears' two dens. The camera traps were set to motion-detection mode, recording 30-second videos. The videos were processed using the free software application Timelapse v. 2.3.0.8. This software allows for the extraction of video metadata, such as time and date, as well as the creation of custom data fields. In this study, the parameters recorded for each clip included temperature, moon phase, the identity of the individual captured, and the behavior displayed. Statistical analyses were performed using the open-access statistical software Social Science Statistics. Throughout both study years, the bears were least active during December and January, showing predominantly diurnal activity that peaked in February. While the pair was never observed together during hibernation months, they exhibited various behaviors when active, including locomotion, exploration, feeding, and comfort behavior. Sex differences were evident near the dens, as the female primarily entered and exited – always scanning her surroundings – while the male spent more time sniffing the entrance and resting nearby. During social interactions, which ranged from friendly to aggressive, the male frequently followed the female, whereas the female was more likely to initiate attacks, preceded by vocalizations from the male. The study demonstrated that December and January are the main hibernation months – during which the bears rarely leave their dens, refrain from interacting, and maintain a primarily diurnal pattern. These findings emphasize the necessity of providing multiple suitable den options in captivity, ultimately broadening our understanding of denning behavior and supporting brown bear welfare.

Thursday 22 October 2026
Coexistence with large carnivores

The invisible architecture of coexistence with large carnivores

22 Oct 2026 09:00

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This research challenges the conventional idea of "human–bear conflict" by distinguishing risky interactions between people and bears from the underlying conflicts among communities, authorities, NGOs, scientists, and other stakeholders over responsibility, acceptable risk, and management decisions. Using the disagreement–dispute–conflict emergence model and the BIND containment framework, it examines the invisible social and institutional architecture that allows coexistence to function. The Băile Tușnad experience is important because it shows that restoring boundaries, cooperation, trusted norms, and credible deterrence can sharply reduce damage without eliminating bears from the landscape. The primary study area is Băile Tușnad, a Romanian mountain town located within an important brown-bear corridor, where a coordinated local management system reduced reported damage from 41 cases to zero and bear-related alerts from 237 to seven between 2021 and 2025. The research uses a qualitative comparative case-study design, combining local incident records, policy and project documents, public communications, published scientific literature, and accounts of the prevention and intervention measures introduced by the municipality and its partners. The material is analysed through the disagreement–dispute–conflict emergence model to identify how differences over risk, responsibility, evidence, and legitimate intervention become organized disputes and potentially escalate into open conflict among human stakeholders. The BIND framework (Boundaries, Interdependence, Norms, and Deterrence) is then used to examine whether coexistence systems provide effective including waste management, preventive infrastructure, cooperation among institutions, rules for reporting incidents, rapid response, and proportionate intervention. The Romanian case is compared with pastoral and conservation landscapes in Kenya, particularly Amboseli and northern Kenya, where lion coexistence depends on spatial separation, seasonal land-use practices, local monitoring, livestock protection, and the incorporation of traditional community roles into conservation programmes such as Warrior Watch. A second comparison is made with communities surrounding Uganda's Queen Elizabeth National Park, where coexistence with lions, elephants, hippopotamuses, and other large animals has involved trenches, beehive barriers, chilli-based deterrents, livestock-loss compensation, tourism benefits, and community participation. Across the three settings, the analysis focuses not only on animal behaviour and physical risk, but on informal governance, local legitimacy, benefit sharing, institutional trust, and the capacity of stakeholders to establish workable rules. This comparative approach allows the Băile Tușnad model to be assessed not as a universal technical formula, but as one locally adapted example of the wider social architecture required for coexistence with large carnivores. [1]: "Coexistence of African lions, livestock, and people in a landscape with variable human land use and seasonal movements" [2]: "Assessment of human-wildlife co-existence strategies adopted by communities living in and around Queen Elizabeth National Park".

The analysis indicates that what is commonly described as "human–bear conflict" is primarily a conflict among human stakeholders over risk, responsibility, authority, and acceptable forms of intervention.

The Băile Tușnad case shows that coexistence improves when boundaries are reinforced, institutions and communities cooperate, rules are clear and trusted, and deterrence is rapid, proportionate, and targeted; under this system, reported damage fell from 41 cases to zero and alerts from 237 to seven. Comparisons with African coexistence settings suggest that technical measures succeed only when they are embedded in legitimate local institutions, informal governance systems, and credible benefit- and responsibility-sharing arrangements. The central result is that coexistence with large carnivores is not produced by a single intervention, but by an integrated social architecture that prevents disagreement from escalating into dispute and conflict. Coexistence with large carnivores depends less on eliminating animals than on building legitimate systems of boundaries, cooperation, shared norms, and proportionate deterrence among the people and institutions responsible for managing risk. The Băile Tușnad experience shows that, when this invisible architecture is restored, disagreements can be contained before they become disputes and open conflicts, while both community safety and wildlife conservation are strengthened.

Growing up in a human-dominated landscape: the case of Martha, the bear, in Greece

22 Oct 2026 09:50

Konstantinos Stefanidis [1], Panos Stefanou[2], Eleni Chatzi [3*], Zoe Skalkos[3], Eleni Iliadou[3], Alexandros Karamanlidis[3]

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Rehabilitation and release programmes for orphaned brown bear cubs constitute an important conservation tool, yet information on the post-release behaviour and adaptation of rehabilitated individuals remains scarce. Recent advances in animal-borne technologies provide unprecedented opportunities to directly observe free-ranging bears and evaluate rehabilitation outcomes. Here, we present the first use of an integrated GPS-camera collar on a rehabilitated brown bear in Greece to investigate its movements, activity patterns and behavioural adaptation following release into a human-dominated landscape. A female brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) cub admitted to the ARCTUROS Wildlife Rehabilitation and Sanctuary Centre was rehabilitated for approximately one year before being released into a suitable habitat in northern Greece. To monitor its post-release ecology, the bear was equipped with a VECTRONIC Aerospace camera collar programmed to acquire GPS locations every hour and record 30-second video clips every hour between 10:00 and 20:00. GPS data were used to quantify home range size, daily movements and activity patterns, while video footage provided direct observations of behaviour, feeding ecology and interactions with the environment. The combination of spatial and visual information enabled a detailed assessment of the bear's adaptation following release. Particular attention was given to identifying behavioural patterns associated with independent survival in a landscape characterised by a mosaic of natural habitats and human land uses. This study represents the first application of animal-borne video technology to a rehabilitated brown bear in Greece. The bear successfully survived independently following release, demonstrating the effectiveness of the rehabilitation process. Video recordings revealed intensive feeding on ants and insect larvae during the initial post-release period, followed later in the season by increased use of cultivated crops, particularly maize. The camera collar also documented unexpected behaviours, including marking on a power pole and an apparent association with a conspecific, likely another young female. Combined GPS and video data further provided detailed information on home range establishment, movement patterns and daily activity rhythms, illustrating the capacity of a very young rehabilitated bear to adapt and persist in a human-dominated environment. The successful independent survival of this young bear provides further evidence that rehabilitation can contribute to brown bear conservation, even in human-dominated landscapes. Integrated GPS and camera collar technologies provide a powerful framework for assessing rehabilitation outcomes and generating novel insights into the behavioural ecology and coexistence of large carnivores in increasingly human-dominated landscapes.

Effectiveness of using visual and acoustic deterrents to deter bears from fruiting trees

22 Oct 2026 10:10

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Fruit trees within and around villages are a source of potential conflicts with bears that poses significant management challenges that must be addressed from different dimensions, as there is probably no single solution to this conflict. Among different challenges, available evidence on the effectiveness of interventions to deter bears from fruiting trees is limited. Preliminary results suggest that bears reduced the probability of visiting fruiting trees in the Treatment sites, compared to Control sites. Light and sound deterrents can be a particularly useful tool, given their low cost and ease of installation, for reducing bear activity around fruiting trees.

Mapping human–brown bear interactions in Europe: a systematic review and case study application in the Făgăraș Mountains

22 Oct 2026 10:30

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Human–wildlife interactions (HWI) are becoming increasingly frequent due to greater spatial overlap driven by land-use changes associated with human activities and climate change–induced shifts in species distribution. Shaped by various socio-ecological factors, HWI are complex and are often documented as conflicts, while the conflict–coexistence continuum highlights a broader spectrum ranging from negative to positive interactions. Although brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) populations have re-established their presence following historical declines across much of their European range, their conservation continues to face challenges arising from the ecological, social, and political frictions that emerge when bears and humans share landscapes. This study aims to map how human–brown bear interactions are conceptualized in European research and to test the bidimensional conceptual framework proposed by Marchini et al. (2021) for classifying human–wildlife interactions in a local study in Făgăraș Mountains, Romania. A systematic literature review following PRISMA 2020 guidelines searched Web of Science with predefined Boolean strategies and eligibility criteria. Performed screening yielded 19 eligible empirical studies from an initial pool of 80. From each study, descriptive and conceptual information was extracted regarding definitions, classifications, spatial context, types of interactions, social dimensions, and management recommendations. The case study dataset comprised 599 out of 688 eligible records on human–bear events collected between 2019 and 2025 from hunting grounds administered by the Conservation Carpathia Foundation. Interaction types identified in both the literature review and the case study were classified using a standardized correspondence grid operationalizing the bidimensional framework proposed by Marchini et al. (2021). The data was analysed through descriptive statistics and spatial analyses performed in QGIS 3.44.8. The reviewed studies span 26 European countries and include analyses conducted at both local and regional scales, mostly in mixed landscapes. Human–bear interactions were conceptualized and categorized variably across studies, with conflictual interactions being the most commonly reported, whereas positive interaction types were not identified across the reviewed literature. Approximately half of the studies incorporated social science components, primarily addressing perception and tolerance, while management recommendations centred on species monitoring rather than planning or regulation. When applying the conceptual framework, more interaction types are identified at the European level compared to the case study, with conflict and damage categories dominating at the European scale, while damage-related interactions dominate at the local scale, and coexistence remains the least represented category in both contexts. Reviewed studies show inconsistent definitions and heterogeneous integration of human dimensions, despite predominant use of bidirectional frameworks. The Marchini et al. (2021) framework encountered practical limitations when applied locally, contributing to systemic underreporting of coexistence, highlighting the need for future iterations to integrate wildlife welfare and environmental justice dimensions that can address these gaps.

Spatiotemporal responses of a mammal community to human disturbance in the Romanian Carpathians

22 Oct 2026 10:50

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Human activities increasingly shape wildlife populations and communities worldwide. Understanding community-level responses to human disturbance provides insights that extend beyond individual species, informing conservation and management of whole ecological communities. This study investigates the spatiotemporal responses of a mammal community to human disturbance in the Romanian Carpathians, one of Europe's most important strongholds for large carnivores. The study was conducted in the Putna–Vrancea Natural Park, a Natura 2000 protected area in the Romanian Carpathians characterized by extensive forests and intact populations of large carnivores. Wildlife and human activity were monitored using a grid of 43 camera traps deployed from December 2020 to August 2022. We analyzed detections of 12 medium and large-sized mammal species during summer and winter seasons. We used Bayesian community occupancy models to evaluate how logging intensity, road density, forest edges, and human activity influenced mammal space use while accounting for imperfect detection. We also quantified diel activity overlap between mammals and humans in summer and winter. Together, these complementary spatial and temporal analyses allowed us to evaluate both community-wide and species-specific responses to human disturbance. Logging intensity was consistently associated with reduced mammal community space use in both summer and winter, with several species exhibiting strong negative responses. In contrast, road density had limited effects on community space use, while mammal detections generally increased farther from roads or after periods of reduced human activity. Carnivores consistently showed lower temporal overlap with humans than herbivores in both seasons, indicating lower temporal overlap with human activity. Human disturbance shapes mammal communities in the Romanian Carpathians through both spatial and temporal responses, with logging reducing community space use and carnivores showing greater temporal avoidance of humans than herbivores. These findings highlight the value of community-level approaches for informing conservation and human–wildlife coexistence.

Local perceptions of human-brown bear coexistence in Covasna County

22 Oct
2026
11:10

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Human activities and brown bear habitats increasingly overlap in the Eastern Carpathians, making shared landscape use unavoidable. Covasna County is particularly relevant for studying coexistence because bear encounters near settlements, forests and agricultural areas are part of everyday local life. The study was conducted in seven settlements in Covasna County, Romania. Data were collected in spring 2025 through 32 paper-based, semi-structured interviews containing 16 open-ended questions. The purposive sample was non-representative, and each complete interview was treated as one unit of analysis. The interviews were analysed using the Framework Method developed by Ritchie and Spencer and operationalised by Gale and colleagues. Mixed deductive-inductive coding was used to identify recurring themes and compare responses across interviews. Most participants perceived an increase in bear presence near settlements and associated encounters with changes in both bear behaviour and human landscape use. Bear presence affected feelings of safety and the use of forests, although fear often coexisted with respect, curiosity and cultural attachment. Participants proposed regulation, population management, education and preventive measures, while expectations for future coexistence remained largely uncertain. Local perceptions of bears are complex and cannot be described as simply positive or negative. Effective coexistence strategies should combine human safety and bear conservation with prevention, education, institutional responsibility and local experience.

Human–bear conflicts in Slovakia: prevention in practice

22 Oct 2026 11:30

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Effective prevention of human–bear conflicts requires reducing bears' access to anthropogenic food sources and adapting measures to local conditions. In Slovakia, however, significant gaps in systematic state-led prevention remain. The case study focuses on the village of Bukovina, Slovakia, where practical preventive measures are being implemented through cooperation between NGOs and the local community. The approach includes identifying attractants and conflict hotspots, selecting appropriate preventive measures, and monitoring their effectiveness. Community involvement is an important part of the process. Particular attention is given to testing new bear-resistant waste containers under local conditions. The Bukovina case demonstrates how locally initiated prevention can address specific sources of human–bear conflicts. Practical interventions target attractants and locations associated with repeated bear occurrence. Testing of bear-resistant waste containers also provides experience relevant to their potential wider use. Local, practical prevention can play an important role where systematic state-led measures are insufficient. The Bukovina case provides a model that could be adapted and expanded to other areas with regular bear occurrence.

Beyond wolf presence: understanding human perceptions and acceptance of wolves in Germany

22 Oct 2026 11:50

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The return and continued expansion of wolves in Germany has generated diverse perceptions and interactions among people living and working in wild-inhabited landscapes. Understanding why people differ in their attitudes towards wolves requires considering not only demographic and knowledge-related factors, but also personal experience and perceived ecological impacts. This research therefore examines the drivers of wolf acceptance among the German public and of perceived and assessed wolf impacts among hunters in Lower Saxony. Both studies were conducted in Lower Saxony, a large federal state in north-western Germany that is predominantly human-dominated and has an expanding wolf population. For the hunter-based study, we used data from the Wildlife Tracking Survey (WTS), an annual monitoring programme established by the Hunting Association of Lower Saxony in 1991. Of the WTE surveys conducted between 2022 and 2024, we retained data from 5,772 hunting grounds that participated in all three years. This yielded 17,316 hunting-ground records on roe deer, red deer and fallow deer, including hunters' assessments of wolf occurrence, predation and perceived impacts on ungulates. Perceived wolf impacts were analysed using cumulative link models to identify ecological and experiential predictors, as well as to test for differences between direct predation and indirect disturbance. For the public-attitude study, an online questionnaire conducted between March and October 2025 yielded 2,309 completed responses from Lower Saxony residents. The questionnaire assessed socio-demographic characteristics, wolf-related knowledge, personal experiences with wolves, stakeholder background, wolf acceptance, and attitudes towards wolf management. Wolf acceptance was quantified using a composite index based on four five-point Likert scale statements, while experience of wolves included observations, damage caused by wolves and threatening or other direct encounters. Multiple regression and binomial logistic regression models were employed to disentangle the effects of knowledge and experience on wolf acceptance, as well as to examine the relationship between acceptance and support for lethal wolf management. Across both studies, wolf-related perceptions and acceptance were shaped more strongly by personal and contextual experience than by wolf presence or factual knowledge alone. In the WTE study, hunters' perceived wolf impacts increased with local wolf occurrence and reported wolf kills, with indirect disturbance consistently perceived as stronger than direct predation; stronger perceived impacts were in turn associated with more negative assessments. In the public survey, wolf acceptance was positively associated with wolf-related knowledge but was more strongly related to group identity and direct negative experiences with wolves. All in all, the findings suggest that understanding personal experience and local context is crucial for explaining attitudes towards wolves and developing effective strategies for human-wolf coexistence. Taken together, the findings show that perceptions and acceptance of wolves are shaped by the interaction of ecological context, personal experience and individual background, rather than by factual knowledge or wolf presence alone. Effective long-term coexistence therefore requires management and communication strategies that address locally experienced impacts, the concerns of affected groups and trust, alongside efforts to provide sound information about wolf ecology and behaviour.

Thursday 22 October 2026
Poster session

To what extent do local economies depend on the Cantabrian brown bears?

22 Oct 2026 12:10

Laura García de la Fuente [1*], Raúl García de Vega Yáñez [2], Javier Blanco González [1], Ana Belén Ramos Guajardo [1], Miguel Joaquín Abella de Bascarán [2], Marina Gaona Calderón [3], Guillermo Palomero Garcia [4]

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Measuring the economic dependence of rural and mountain businesses on brown bears helps to understand the extent to which the species has become part of the natural capital of local communities. This is especially relevant in areas that have actively committed to brown bear conservation and coexistence. This research quantifies the direct economic contribution of Cantabrian brown bears to local economies and their potential to support employment. The study was carried out across most of the Cantabrian brown bear distribution area in northwestern Spain. The analysis considers that the economic influence of the species goes beyond bear-watching tourism. In 2018, a socioeconomic stratified random sampling was conducted with 198 businesses located in 32 municipalities. In 2025, the data collection process involved 220 businesses across 28 municipalities that had already been sampled in 2018. These municipalities formed a panel to monitor changes over time. In addition, 40 municipalities with more recent brown bear presence were included in the 2025 survey. This allowed comparisons between territories with different levels and durations of bear presence. Businesses were analysed according to their perceived dependence on the presence of brown bears in terms of turnover and clientele. In 2025, 30% of the sampled businesses perceived that their turnover and clientele depended on the presence of the brown bear. Among these businesses, an average of 37% of annual income was linked to bears. The most dependent activities were services related to nature tourism and ecotourism, as well as active tourism and accommodation. The highest economic dependence was found in the central-western bear sector, where 39% of businesses were dependent on bears and 40% of their turnover was linked to the species. The research confirms that economic dependence on brown bears increased between 2018 and 2025 in the monitored municipalities. These findings show that the Cantabrian brown bear has become an important endogenous resource for local economies, particularly in areas where coexistence and conservation have been promoted as part of the territorial identity.

Thursday 22 October 2026
"Youth voices & youth practices": student session 2

Bears as co-authors of coexistence: a more-than-human agency perspective

22 Oct 2026 12:30

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Human–large-carnivore coexistence is usually presented as a human achievement: communities tolerate carnivores, institutions protect or regulate them, and bears appear primarily as risks to be managed. This framing overlooks an important point: bears also contribute to coexistence. Through adaptive, context-dependent behaviour, they influence when, where and how encounters occur, and whether sharing a landscape results in avoidance, accommodation or confrontation. Drawing on more-than-human and animal-agency perspectives, this keynote approaches bears as knowing and responsive participants in shared landscapes. Such agency does not imply human-like intentions, benevolence or conscious agreement. It is expressed through behavioural consequences: bears learn about human routines, adjust their activity and participate in the continuous organisation of shared space and time. People, in turn, interpret bear presence and adapt their own behaviour, although this mutual learning unfolds within unequal relations of power. Recognising bears as co-authors of coexistence changes how we understand, monitor and support it. It directs attention beyond population numbers and human attitudes towards the behavioural, ecological and institutional conditions that allow people and bears to accommodate one another, without diminishing the distinctive responsibility of human institutions to reduce risks and the social costs of coexistence.

Human-large carnivore coexistence: a review of conflict management strategies

22 Oct 2026 13:00

Anna Tousidou [1], Kyriaki Chantzidou [1*], Evanthia Tsimpouropoulou [2], Styliani Nouvaki [2], Iraklis Giannakopoulos [3]

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Large carnivores play a crucial role in maintaining ecosystem balance, yet their coexistence with humans remains one of the most significant challenges in wildlife conservation. As human activities increasingly overlap with carnivore habitats, conflicts involving livestock, property damage, and public safety concerns have become more frequent. The study examines the main strategies that promote human–large carnivore coexistence, highlighting their effectiveness and emphasizing the importance of sustainable conflict management for both biodiversity conservation and human livelihoods. Information was gathered from scientific articles and reports found in academic databases to provide an overview of human–large carnivore coexistence and conflict management. The reviewed studies show that successful coexistence between humans and large carnivores is possible when effective conflict management strategies are applied. Non-lethal measures, such as livestock guarding dogs, electric fences, and public awareness, are reported to reduce conflicts and support wildlife conservation. Human–large carnivore coexistence depends on the use of effective management strategies and cooperation between local communities, researchers, and authorities. The findings highlight that combining preventive measures with conservation efforts supports both biodiversity and human livelihoods.

Density estimates and landscape associations of brown bears and grey wolves in a human-modified landscape of northwestern Greece

22 Oct 2026 13:15

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Understanding the abundance of large terrestrial carnivores is fundamental for effective conservation, yet remains challenging due to their low population densities and extensive ranges. Camera trapping is a common approach for estimating large carnivore densities, with random encounter models (REMs) increasingly used to combat the costs of genetic analysis and the difficulties associated with individual identification on certain species. In this study (April 2025 – August 2025), a REM was used to estimate population densities of Eurasian brown bears (*Ursus arctos*) and Eurasian grey wolves (*Canis lupus*) in the Vitsi Mountain Range (VMR), in Northwestern Greece, using a pre-established grid of 37 camera traps. A correction factor was applied to reduce the bias of the camera traps being placed along trails. Random Forest Regression (RFR) models were also used to examine associations between relative abundance indices (RAI) and environmental and anthropogenic variables. Brown bear and Grey wolf relative densities were estimated, and precision tests were applied. The RFR models ranked the environmental and anthropogenic variables for both species' RAI. These results provide a current spring–summer baseline for brown bears and grey wolves in the VMR and identify local landscape variables associated with their camera-trap detection rates, while highlighting the need for cautious interpretation and further validation.

Examining spatial and temporal activity patterns in northern Greece: understanding predator abundance and predator-prey overlap

22 Oct 2026 13:30

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Large predators play a fundamental role in structuring terrestrial ecosystems, yet the factors moderating their abundance and temporal activity within diverse predator communities remain poorly understood. This study used camera trap data from 26 trapping stations in the Florina region of Northern Greece over 4,826 active trap-days, to investigate the relative abundance and temporal activity patterns of two apex predators – the Eurasian grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) and the Eurasian brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – alongside five mesopredator and four prey species. Relative abundance indices revealed roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) as the most frequently detected species, whilst grey wolf was one of the lowest. Most mesopredators displayed strongly nocturnal activity patterns, whilst wolf activity was predominantly diurnal, and bear showed a bimodal pattern. This suggested that temporal partitioning was a key mechanism of predator coexistence. Linear regression revealed that wolf activity was significantly associated with mountain hare and wild boar, whilst bears only showed a significant association with wild boar. These findings are consistent with their contrasting dietary strategies as obligate carnivores and omnivores respectively. Neither apex predator showed a significant temporal association with either deer species despite the high deer abundance recorded, a pattern reflecting a latitudinal shift in wolf prey preference in Southern European populations. These findings highlight the importance of dietary strategy in shaping predator-prey temporal associations. Supporting temporal niche partitioning as a key mechanism in structuring this predator community and demonstrating the value of combining RAI with temporal overlap analysis in multi-species camera trapping research.

Thursday 22 October 2026
Poster session

Garbage as a source of conflict: Low-cost solutions for bear-resistant bins

22 Oct 2026 16:15

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Romania has one of the largest brown bear populations in Europe, and in recent years the conflicts between bears and people living in mountain areas have become more frequent. One of the main reasons is that household waste is not properly secured, so bears learn that villages and small towns are an easy source of food. Once a bear gets used to finding garbage near houses, it keeps coming back, and this raises the risk of property damage and even dangerous encounters with people. Since most mountain communities do not have the budget for expensive waste infrastructure, this paper looks at low-cost measures that could still make a real difference: bins that bears cannot open, composting done at community level, and a collection schedule adapted so that garbage does not sit outside for long periods of time. This paper looks at mountain communities in Romania that are located inside or near brown bear habitat, and uses information from projects that are already running in the country. The bear-resistant containers installed in Putna-Vrancea Natural Park (documented by the Association for the Conservation of Biological Diversity) and the Bear Smart pilot program carried out by WWF-Romania in Băile Tușnad were used as the main reference cases. Three directions were followed: first, simple and cheap mechanical solutions such as metal cages or reinforced frames that stop bears from opening bins; second, community composting, based on guides from Ecompostare and Academia de Compost, meant to keep food waste away from regular bins so it does not attract bears; and third, changing the garbage collection calendar so bins are picked up faster, supported by local council rules that already exist in some areas banning the disposal of waste during the night. Based on the pilot programs analyzed, securing bins mechanically led to fewer bear visits in the areas where it was applied, which suggests that even simple physical barriers can work if installed correctly. Community composting also seemed to help, mainly because it removes a large part of the food waste that would otherwise end up in open containers and attract animals. Adjusting the collection calendar, together with local rules against putting out garbage overnight, reduced the amount of time bins were left exposed. According to the Ministry of Environment, Romania's brown bear population is currently estimated at somewhere between 10,400 and almost 13,000 individuals, which shows why even small improvements in how waste is managed can matter at a national scale. None of these three measures is enough by itself, but used together, bear-resistant bins, community composting and a better collection schedule can offer mountain communities in Romania a way to reduce conflicts with bears without needing large amounts of money or complicated infrastructure. Since the pilot projects already show promising results, this kind of approach could probably be extended to other bear-affected regions of the country as well.

Thursday 22 October 2026
"Youth voices & youth practices": student session 3

Looking to the future through the lens of the past

22 Oct 2026 16:35

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Brown bears have remained a defining presence in Romania's Carpathian landscapes, while the political regimes, institutions, management objectives and information systems surrounding them have changed repeatedly. Contemporary debate often presents human–bear interactions as a recent and unprecedented crisis. Looking through the lens of the past reveals a longer and more complex trajectory. This keynote examines how narratives, evidence and management of brown bears have evolved from the early 1950s to the present. It draws on historical population estimates and legislation, management plans, archival records, published analyses of media coverage, administrative records of emergency interventions and the recent national genetic assessment. During these seven decades, the bear has been framed as a dangerous animal, state-managed game, an elite trophy, an economically valuable resource, a species of European conservation concern and, increasingly, a threat to public safety and a political symbol. These framings did not disappear when new ones emerged. They accumulated and continue to compete within the current management system. Records from 1987, 2005 and 2023 show that livestock losses, attacks on people and requests to remove individual bears predate the contemporary crisis narrative. The major transformation lies in how such events become visible and meaningful. Centralised field reports and controlled public communication were gradually replaced by fragmented institutional reporting, online media, social platforms, emergency alerts, intervention databases and estimates derived from DNA. The quantity and resolution of information increased, while comparability across periods and institutional memory remained limited. The Romanian trajectory shows that management decisions can leave ecological, behavioural and institutional legacies long after their original rationale disappears. Designing the future of coexistence therefore requires more than an improved population estimate. It requires a learning system capable of linking ecological conditions, human behaviour, local experience, management actions and institutional responses across time. Turning seventy years of fragmented experience into institutional memory can provide the foundation for adaptive, evidence-informed and locally legitimate brown bear management.

Between danger and identity: the social value of brown bears in Băile Tușnad

22 Oct 2026 17:05

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Romania is home to one of Europe's largest populations of large carnivores. In the context of human-wildlife interactions, the brown bear receives particular attention. Public perceptions are divided: some view the species primarily as a source of danger, while others see it as an attraction. This contrast is particularly evident in Băile Tușnad (in the Eastern Carpathians) where human-bear interactions have become a recurrent part of everyday life. This study examines how these perceptions differ between local residents and tourists and how they relate to the main sources of information about bears. The study was conducted in Băile Tușnad, Romania, among local residents and tourists. Respondents completed questionnaires assessing their perceptions of bears, sources of information, and sociodemographic characteristics. Attitudes towards bears were analysed using principal component analysis (PCA). For both residents and tourists, two main attitudinal axes were identified, contrasting perceptions of bears as a problem and a potential danger with perceptions of bears as an important element of local identity, economy, and conservation. Information sources were also analysed using PCA. A Bear Value Index (BVI) was calculated from three Likert-scale items measuring the perceived importance of bears for local identity, the local economy, and bear protection. The relationship between attitude and information-source loadings was assessed using correlation analysis. Among local residents, 79 respondents were characterised by the perception of bears as a problem or threat, while 60 associated bears with local identity, the economy, and conservation. A similar pattern was found among tourists (36 vs. 21 respondents). Residents relying mainly on TV, radio, and newspapers tended to associate bears more strongly with local value and identity, whereas social media, personal experiences, and others' accounts were associated with more negative perceptions. The BVI indicated mildly positive perceptions in both groups (residents: 2.299; tourists: 2.116), with no significant difference between groups or among residents according to length of residence. Perceptions of bears in Băile Tușnad are not uniform, with both value-oriented and risk-oriented attitudes present among residents and tourists. Information sources appear to be associated with these contrasting perceptions, although the overall perceived social value of bears remains mildly positive in both groups. This study highlights that understanding the attitudes of local communities and visitors is essential for developing sustainable coexistence strategies and targeted conflict management measures.

Between fear and attraction: different perceptions of human–bear coexistence in Băile Tușnad

22 Oct 2026 17:20

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The aim of the research was to examine the perceptions of tourists and local residents regarding the presence of bears. This is important because bears may simultaneously represent an attraction for tourists while also constituting a safety concern for both tourists and local residents, as well as posing a potential threat to their personal safety and property. The research was conducted between 22 and 25 June 2026 in Băile Tușnad, Harghita County, where students from the Sociology programme of Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania conducted face-to-face questionnaire surveys with 302 local residents, with one respondent per household, and 106 tourists, resulting in a total sample of 408 respondents. The local resident sample was constructed through a combination of systematic sampling and quota sampling based on gender and age group. The questionnaire administered to local residents consisted of 25 questions, while the tourist questionnaire contained 26 questions. The questionnaires examined demographic characteristics, personal experiences related to bears, attitudes and perceptions, as well as respondents' opinions regarding the management of the bear population. The final open-ended questions focused on the personal significance of the local presence of bears (N=103), their greatest perceived advantage (N=97), and the most significant problems associated with their presence (N=105). Responses were coded into thematic categories based on the content of the answers, and the frequency of each category was calculated as a percentage of valid responses. The presence of this large carnivore was predominantly perceived negatively by the majority of local respondents: although 23.3% consider the presence of bears to be a neutral issue, 56.6% overall associate it with danger, fear, or problems affecting their everyday lives. Among the problems associated with bears, factors affecting the sense of security were mentioned more frequently, particularly fear of bear attacks (26.7%), than concerns related to the size of the bear population (12.4%). The perception of bears among tourists is also divided, as almost equal proportions regarded them as a source of danger (fear, anxiety; negative factor; danger; 42.8%) or referred to them as a tourist attraction or an interesting experience (natural value; tourist attraction; point of interest, experience; 34.1%). Regarding the problems associated with bears, tourists also reported a considerably higher perception of danger (39%) than concerns about overpopulation (12.4%), which also suggests that tourists perceive bears as both a potential safety risk and a tourist attraction. Based on the survey, the majority of the 106 tourists were from Romania, and they perceive bears simultaneously as a tourist attraction and a potential source of danger. However, according to the responses, more than half (56.6%) of the household members surveyed believe that living alongside bears was predominantly perceived negatively on their daily lives.

The role of non-formal environmental education in schoolchildren's knowledge and community decision-making: the TusnadEcoBear Mobile Cave initiative

22 Oct 2026 17:35

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The TusnadEcoBear Mobile Cave educational initiative aims to increase knowledge about brown bears and human–bear conviviality among schoolchildren through interactive, non-formal educational methods. Since 2025, sessions have been delivered in 12 schools in Harghita County. Participants completed an anonymous 14-question questionnaire before and after the sessions. The first 13 questions assessed knowledge related to brown bears and human–bear conviviality; responses were scored and summed to calculate an overall knowledge score. The final question assessed willingness to engage in community-level decision-making through a potential Youth Forum. A total of 1,098 responses were analysed. Overall knowledge scores were significantly higher after the TusnadEcoBear Mobile Cave sessions than before them, although the magnitude of change varied among individual questions. Knowledge scores were also significantly associated with responses to the community participation question. Respondents with lower scores were more likely to leave this question unanswered, whereas those with higher scores were more likely to express a definite position, either positive or negative. Significant differences in knowledge scores were observed between non-respondents and both response groups, as well as between positive and negative responses following the educational sessions. The findings indicate that interactive, non-formal environmental education can effectively facilitate knowledge transfer about brown bears and human–bear conviviality and suggest an association between higher topic-specific knowledge and a greater willingness to take a clear position on community participation. However, different age groups require adapted levels of engagement and methodological approaches. In regions where human–bear interactions are part of everyday life, such initiatives may contribute not only to environmental knowledge but also to engagement with community issues. Building on the TusnadEcoBear Mobile Cave experience, a new Erasmus+ funded educational initiative has been launched to further expand youth and community involvement.

Dialogue or Panic? – Professional perspectives on human–bear coexistence in Harghita County

22 Oct 2026 17:50

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The brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) is a defining element of Romania's biodiversity and natural and cultural heritage. Human–bear coexistence affects numerous social groups and raises complex social, communication-related, and institutional issues that require an understanding of the perspectives of different stakeholders, the management of conflicts arising from coexistence with large carnivores, effective communication, and a scientifically grounded approach. In my research, I sought to explore how the professionals from Harghita County whom I interviewed and who are involved in bear-related issues perceive the challenges and opportunities of human–bear coexistence, as well as the role of communication and cooperation. Within Romania, the study focuses on Harghita County, which is one of the country's most significant regions in terms of its brown bear population. Using qualitative research, data are being collected through semi-structured interviews, between May and October 2026, with approximately 7-8 interviews anticipated in total. As this is an ongoing study, the number of interviewees may increase as data collection continues. The interviews were structured around five main topics: professional background, perceptions of bears, the local population, communication, and future perspectives, thereby exploring human–bear coexistence, conflict management, communication related to bear-related issues, and potential opportunities. The aim of the interviews was to identify different professional perspectives, emerging problems, and possible directions for cooperation and solutions. Due to its complexity, the human–bear issue cannot be explained by a single factor. The size of the bear population, human-derived food sources, habitat fragmentation, infrastructure development, and habituation to humans may all contribute to the emergence of conflicts. A common theme emerging from the interviews is the need for a broader and more coordinated approach to conflict management, combining workable legal frameworks, preventive measures and cooperation among the different stakeholders and/or institutions. While interviewees broadly agreed that the current situation requires intervention, some perspectives reflected different approaches, and participants' opinions differed regarding the importance attributed to these factors and their views on which of these management measures should be prioritised. These preliminary findings reflect the perspectives of the professionals interviewed and are not intended to represent Harghita County as a whole. Human–bear coexistence is a complex social and ecological issue for which there is no single solution applicable to every situation. More effective and sustainable outcomes require the integration of scientific knowledge, local experience, preventive measures, and communication within a common framework. In the long term, such an approach may contribute to more sustainable human–bear coexistence.

Spatial use and social interactions in wolves raised in semi-natural conditions

22 Oct 2026 18:05

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The wolf (*Canis lupus*) is an important part of Europe's biodiversity and natural heritage. The study of the species' behavior and social relationships enriches our knowledge about it and provides important information needed for better conservation of wolves in the wild. The species is also bred in Bulgarian zoos, often under suboptimal conditions. As part of the Large Carnivore Center, located in the Pirin Mountains, two wolves, a male and a female, reside in an enclosure that includes part of the species' natural habitat. Studying the behavior of individuals raised in semi-natural conditions can provide valuable information for improving the way of raising the species in captivity and the results obtained in such a study can have practical application in zoological work. The study was conducted in Vlahi village, located at the foot of the Pirin Mountains. The region has rich biodiversity at the faunal and floristic level, featuring the typical species that are present in wolf territories in the country. Additionally, shepherd dogs that guard livestock in the vicinity, are present. The objects of the study are two wolves, male (2-3 years old) and female (11-12 years old), raised at the Large Carnivore Center. The enclosure, in which the wolves are raised is located on the outskirts of the village, on a southern slope, at an altitude of 590 m. The area of the entire enclosure is about 0.15 ha and the projected coverage for the entire area inside is about 30% rock formations, the rest is grassland, shrub, and woody vegetation. The wolves were raised and socialized with people according to a system developed by the International Wolf Center, Ely, Minnesota, and regular contacts with humans are continuing. Data collection was carried out using the camera trap method, where a total of 6 devices with different viewing angles – 3 looking outwards and 3 looking inwards into the enclosure were installed, with five of them set to record 15-second video and one to take 3 consecutive photos. The devices were placed on 23.10.2025 for a period of 6 months. Over 33,000 captured frames, approximately 5,000 photos and 28,000 videos, were reviewed, from which 15,242 files, or 541 photos and 14,701 clips, were analyzed and conclusions were drawn based on them. The frames were processed using Timelapse processing software version 2.5.0.4 and exported to Excel for further processing. The hourly activity of the wolves and other recorded species in and around the enclosure was analyzed using freely available kernel estimation software, while the frequency of individual behaviors was compared using the 2 test, with $p<0.05$ being considered statistically significant. According to the registrations by the available camera traps, the results for the spatial use of the enclosure show that the wolves spend about 84% of their time in only one area. Their activity was diurnal, with peaks at noon and dusk, with individual differences between the male and the female. Both wolves exhibited a wide variety of behaviors in different ratios, with resting, locomotion and exploratory being the most frequently exhibited by the two of them. Interestingly, there was no registration of play between them, except when there was a caregiver present inside with them. Different interspecific interactions, namely with foxes, acting as scavengers of wolves' prey even in this setting, and shepherd dogs, engaging with the wolves in several ways, including even amicable interactions, were registered. Despite the incomplete coverage of the area with camera traps, the available data indicate that the enclosure is fully utilized, with one section having an increased presence by the wolves. The semi-natural conditions in which the individuals are raised suggest the manifestation of a diverse set of behaviors, some of which are similar to those of wild wolves (exploratory, marking territory, and interactions with other species). The fact that they are only a pair, but not a group, and the big difference in their age are probably prerequisites for the lack of play behavior between them. Having the opportunity to interact with different wild animals is a stimulus for them to display behaviors such as exploratory and therefore, such interactions help enrich their environment.

Friday 23 October 2026
Science for communication

Stories gone wild: the case of problem wolf Bram

23 Oct 2026 09:00

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How communication surrounding a Dutch 'problem wolf' named Bram has further polarized public opinion on wolves in the Netherlands (and what scientists and journalists can learn from this). I am working on a book about coexisting with large carnivores (wolves, bears, lynxes, and wolverines) in Europe, and specifically for this lecture, I am now turning my attention to my own country. National and local reporting on a series of biting incidents in 2024 and 2025 involving a Dutch 'problem wolf' - named Bram in the media - set me thinking. What role can both scientists and journalists play in preventing further polarization surrounding large carnivores? In the span of two years, 'wolf Bram' - who lived in a forest where I regularly walk myself - has grown into an absolute villain for many farmers, proving that there is no place for wolves in the Netherlands. For many animal rights activists, however, Bram is a kind of national hero onto whom all kinds of ecological grief are projected. How do you, as a journalist or scientist, keep your distance from these strong emotions and still be heard by a broad audience? I think there is an opportunity for both scientists and journalists to tell a better story about Bram (and thus about other animals perceived as 'problem animals'). A more complex story in which Bram is neither a villain nor a hero, and in which the worlds of wolves and humans converge and constantly interact.

An analysis in Hungarian news media framing in Romania concerning human-bear conflicts and information dissemination

23 Oct 2026 10:00

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Already, an analysis has been conducted on a selection of Romanian news sources about the ways in which human-bear conflicts have been presented, but no research has been conducted on Hungarian news sources within Romania. This research looks into three news sources (Hargita Népe, Székelyhon, and Maszol) to see how they present these conflicts and explain the causes (if any). The current research focuses on news framing, scapegoat narrative, the use of charged words, and big-picture narrative construction, in order to understand how the bear is represented. Starting from 2007 (when Romania joined the EU and Directive 92/43/EEC - Ordonanței de urgență 57/2007 was put in place), articles published online were analysed according to: Frames & Causes, Mean World, Felt Presence, and Scapegoating in Media. When it comes to why an analysis of this facet of media is important, two roles of media are explained: Information Dissemination & Education. Three research questions were asked in this research: RQ #1 - What framing techniques were used in the media in their representation of the bear? RQ #2 - To what extent did Hargita Népe, Székelyhon, and Maszol present their article with a positive, neutral, or negative attitudinal expression? RQ #3 - To what extent have the media institutions consulted with experts (conservationist, hunter, specialist) in their respective fields to explain the situation? 3,810 articles were collected, of which 813 were disqualified, leaving 2,997 articles qualified for analysis: Hargita Népe - 396 articles, Székelyhon - 1,370 articles, Maszol - 1,231 articles. The data shows that local and regional Hungarian media tends to report more negatively on human-bear events. This trend differs from that of previous research, which showed that 53% of Romanian articles analyzed were negative. However, Informația Harghitei & Ziarul Argesul showed strong consonance with this study: 65% negative from Hargita Népe, 84% from Székelyhon & 73% from Maszol (77% overall). The results show that publications very rarely (3.3%) cited an expert when reporting on human-bear events about the possible causes. The conclusion is that Hungarian media in Romania paints a bleak picture of reality, without considering the impacts it has on the influencing of the public in relation to coexistence with bears. Coexistence is possible, but it needs to be presented as a possibility to the public. Showing only the negative sides of events without giving possible solutions is telling only half the story.

Role-playing simulation of human-bear coexistence for youth engagement

23 Oct 2026 10:20

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The presentation will showcase a newly developed role-playing simulation for youth between 14 and 25 on the topic of decision-making in areas with human-bear conflict. The simulation puts young people into the shoes of the affected parties and the decision-makers so that they can experience first-hand how complex navigating coexistence can be, what are the different interests affecting conflict mitigation and management, and ultimately how best practices can be incorporated despite the difficult decision-making process. The simulation is being developed by WWF Bulgaria in collaboration with Project Bag and ARCTUROS as part of the YEAH project funded through the Erasmus+ program of the European Commission. It is an adaptation of a previous educational product of WWF Bulgaria - a simplified simulation of the UN ECOSOC for young people to experience complex decision-making processes with multiple stakeholders with different interests and needs. The coexistence simulation targets youth with limited knowledge on human-bear conflicts and aims to both teach the scientific basis, which WWF Bulgaria uses to suggest and implement best practices in areas affected by human-bear conflicts in Bulgaria, to showcase the stakeholders participating in the management of these conflicts and to let participants experience how difficult it is to reach a common understanding between all of the parties involved. The contents of the game were developed by the Youth Engagement, Education and Innovations team at WWF Bulgaria with the expert support of Dara Ivanova from the Wildlife team at WWF Bulgaria. The simulation is currently still in development. However, by the time of the conference a complete set of the materials and initial results from play-testing will be available to showcase.

Large carnivores in the world of fake news

23 Oct
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10:40

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One of the important elements of nature conservation is the narrative and the stories we tell, which can change society's attitude towards a particular species. Stories published in traditional media, but above all through algorithm-driven media, can either reinforce or undermine efforts to protect a species and secure its social acceptance. Large carnivores are a group of animals that are particularly vulnerable to such influences. First, because we have an evolutionarily ingrained strong fear of predators. Second, because predators such as wolves and, to a lesser extent, bears were systematically exterminated for many years, and every extermination requires not only tools and perpetrators, but also a narrative. Today, that narrative is deeply reflected in our culture and is, in a sense, embedded in each of us. Third, large predators are returning to many parts of Europe, which means they are perceived as something new. These three factors make them an ideal target for populists and fake news. Counteracting these trends may be just as important for protecting these species as preventing real conflicts. Counteracting negative trends in the narrative surrounding large predators is possible, but it requires decisive action.

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CoCo Co-creating Coexistence

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BEARS in MIND

MATE HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES Institute for Aquaculture and Environmental Safety

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The conference is organised as part of the project "Youth – Empowerment, Actions and Harmony for human-wildlife coexistence" (KA220-YOU – Cooperation partnerships in youth, project code: 2025-1-RO01-KA220-YOU-000359714), funded by the European Union and implemented with the support of WWF Bulgaria and ARCTUROS (ΑΡΚΤΟΥΡΟΣ), Greece.

The event is also co-funded by the **Administration of the National Cultural Fund (AFCN)**, as part of the cultural project **"Landscapes of Coexistence – Cultural Activation and Interdisciplinary Dialogue on the Human–Nature Relationship"**, implemented by **Project Bag Association**.

The conference is also supported by:

- the "TusnadEcoBear: Connect & Conserve" project, which receives funding from Bears in Mind foundation;
- the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Institute of Aquaculture and Environmental Safety;
- the Harghita County Council through the Csomád-Bálványos Intercommunity Development Association.

The event is **co-funded by the European Union through the Erasmus+ Programme**, within the project **"Youth – Empowerment, Actions and Harmony for Human-Wildlife Coexistence" (YEAH for Human-Wildlife Harmony)**, implemented by **Project Bag Association (Romania)** in partnership with **WWF Bulgaria** and **ARCTUROS (Greece)**.

The YEAH for Human-Wildlife Harmony project aims to strengthen the role of young people in promoting sustainable human-wildlife coexistence in Romania, Bulgaria and Greece. Through innovative non-formal education, the project engages young people aged 14–25 in environmental protection, wildlife conservation, ecosystem management, climate change, citizen science and active citizenship. It seeks to equip young people with the knowledge, practical skills and confidence to participate in decision-making, engage with their communities, initiate local actions and contribute to solutions for human-wildlife interactions and conflicts.

The V. TusnadEcoBear conference provides a dedicated space for youth empowerment, networking and knowledge exchange. The youth event brings together young people from Romania, Bulgaria and Greece with researchers, conservation professionals and other stakeholders, creating opportunities to present research and experiences, exchange perspectives and explore practical approaches to meaningful youth involvement in wildlife conservation.

The programme includes **"Youth Voices"**, sessions where young people aged 19–25 present their research, perspectives and experiences to an international audience, and **"Youth Practices"**, focusing on methods and approaches for involving youth in conservation, citizen science and community-based initiatives. Through these activities, the event supports the development of young participants' leadership, communication, collaboration, advocacy and participatory decision-making skills, while strengthening connections between young people and the wider conservation community.

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the National Agency for Community Programs in the Field of Education and Vocational Training (ANPCDEFP). Neither the European Union nor ANPCDEFP shall be held responsible for them.

The event is co-funded by the **Administration of the National Cultural Fund (AFCN)**, as part of the cultural project **"Landscapes of Coexistence – Cultural Activation and Interdisciplinary Dialogue on the Human–Nature Relationship"**, implemented by **Project Bag Association**.

The project proposes a participatory contemporary community art intervention in Băile Tușnad, Romania, exploring the relationship between local communities and the brown bear within the broader context of human–nature coexistence. Through participatory visual art, non-formal ecological education and public cultural activities, it brings together students, artists, educators, biodiversity experts, researchers, cultural organizations and members of the local community, creating opportunities for cultural reflection and community dialogue.

As part of the project, the **programme on 23 October 2026**, organised within the **V. TusnadEcoBear Conference**, brings together artistic, cultural, scientific and community perspectives on human–wildlife coexistence. **All activities included in the AFCN-funded programme on 23 October are open to the public and free of charge, with no conference participation fee required**.

The project does not necessarily represent the official position of the Administration of the National Cultural Fund. AFCN shall not be held liable for the project's content or any use to which the project outcome might be put. These are the sole responsibility of the beneficiary of the funding.

V.TusnadEcoBear

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