

Uniting the Efforts of Romanian Bat Conservation

Transfer project in the framework of the Klaus Toepfer Fellowship Programme

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Executive Summary

Romania is home to some of Europe's largest and most diverse bat populations. Despite legislation and a great number of conservation projects (often including public awareness activities), bat conservation still faces the classical challenges. Habitat fragmentation, roost destruction, pesticide use, intensive tourism endanger local colonies. But what also needs to be recognized is that these challenges cannot be addressed in a systemic manner without a united and vibrant bat research community. Communication is slim to non-existent inside our community, with sporadic meetings, a long overdue national bat conference, and negligible online presence. The leading figure of non-governmental bat conservation, the Romanian Bat Protection Association (RBPA), has neglected this role for years. We also lack guidelines for ethical bat research.

The current project's goal has been to strengthen conservation efforts for the Romanian bat fauna. We set out to establish communication elements that would revitalize professional discussions inside the professional community, and that would enable us to start unifying approaches to bat research and conservation. Initially, objectives included standardization of bat monitoring, but this was later deemed unfeasible. The modified project objectives were finalized and met by January 2017: (1) bat researchers from Romania agree on standard and ethically correct bat research protocols and public recommendations; (2) a complex online portal is activated to aid the Romanian bat research community and public visibility.

The project started with informing the Romanian bat research community about the project, and by highlighting the need of professional input. The project also initiated an intensive crowdfunding and sponsoring campaign, yielding 2,500+ EUR in donations. This sum represented only 60% of the planned budget, but enabled us to successfully implement the project. By consulting European protocols (especially EUROBATS resolutions), and by periodical reviews made by the bat research community, we have created the guidelines for ethical bat research, and the recommendation list for the public. A professional programmer was hired to create the online bat portal, under the guidance of the KTF Fellow. In October 2016, after a ten year intermission, we organized the 2nd National Bat Research Conference. During and after the conference, intensive talks took place among local bat researchers, and new communication channels have been established and used (Google Group, Facebook Group). The bat portal at www.lilieci.ro was launched in December 2016, representing by far the most complex and diverse online resource about Romanian bats. It also represents a diverse and modern way in which bat researchers can share their results with the public, bringing the two sides closer together.

Communication is essential for effective conservation, and the project was successful in resurrecting talks inside the Romanian bat conservation. Ethical guidelines in Romanian bat research are now available to all local and European bat researchers (through EUROBATS). The bat portal will continue to function, representing a significant link between the bat research community and the public, and also being important for the research community *per se*. Future challenges remain (e. g. standardization of the national bat monitoring system and of ringing activities), but these will be gradually addressed, through the input of seasoned bat experts.