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Committee of Ministers
Comité des Ministres

2023.

ANNUAL REPORT FOR SZÉNÁS HILLS PROTECTED AREA



EUROPEAN DIPLOMA HOLDING SITE

1995

CATEGORY A

2023.



State: Hungary	
Name of the area: Szénás Hills Protected Area	
Year and number of years since the award or renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas: 2020-2030	
Central authority concerned:	
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Authority responsible for its management:	
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CONDITIONS:

By 2022, replace the current five-year management plan (expired 2018) with a new and approved five-year plan

We reviewed and modified the current conservation management plan. After that, we have to ask for the opinion of the competent authorities, municipalities, owners, asset managers, farmers, and civil organizations. First of all, we need to consult with Pilis Forest Company, which manages the assets of the state forests. If these consultations are successful, we will send the plan to the minister responsible for nature conservation. Finally, legislation will appear on the new management plan. We are going to continue this process in 2024.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. develop a long-term twenty-five-year management strategy by 2023, including the following aspects:

a. objectives for the relative cover of grasslands and woodlands, their ecotones and connectivity between them, and the natural ecological processes and other management measures required to meet them; this should be based on sound evidence of the ecological value of these broad habitats and the ecological requirements of their characteristic species;

b. enhanced understanding of the ecological requirements for particularly rare and endangered species; with strategies for appropriate species recovery programmes where necessary;

c. an assessment of the potential impact of climate change on priority habitats, species and related ecological processes, together with an adaptation plan where necessary;

d. an assessment of future land-use pressures, especially from recreation, tourism and urban development, and potential strategies for mitigating the negative impacts of these;

e. the need to determine and implement the range of management options and nature-based solutions necessary to meet the long-term challenges of maintaining the ecological interest of the Szénás Hills Protected Area, especially with regard to long-term ecological trends, including climate change;

*The most important conservation problem in the Szenas Hills PA is the drastic decline of dolomite flax (*Linum dolomiticum*), which is an endemic species, found only here in the whole world. In 2020, the new LIFE project "Conservation of endemic species and dry grassland habitats in the contact zone of Pannonian and Alpine bioregions" (LIFE endemic PANALP) have been started. The expected end date of the project is 28/02/2027. The Szénás Hills PA - especially the habitat of the dolomite flax - is one of the project sites.*

In the framework of the LIFE project, several activities are ongoing, the results of which are needed to prepare a long-term management plan, and therefore we request an extension of these recommendation's deadline til 2026 for.

The most important activities are as follows.

- *In 2021 we set up a Scientific Advisor Committee (SAC) for the conversation of *Linum dolomiticum* (see annual Report 2022).*

*On the 11th of May 2023, members of the SAC visited the habitat of *Linum dolomiticum*.*

In the Annual Report 2022, we presented the recommendations of the SAC in relation to the research of the dolomite flax. The recommendations included the preparation of a LIDAR map and the implementation of four different surveys. In 2023, the LIDAR map was completed and two studies (cenology and genetics) were contracted.

- *Dolomite flax monitoring*

Since 2001, we have been monitoring dolomite flax annually. Its population has been decreasing since 2010, unfortunately. This year we carried out three types of tests.

1. Demographic surveys

A total of 20 sample squares (2x2 m) were examined. The recordings of the demographic sample squares showed a drastic decrease in the number of individuals, as well as a significant decrease in the proportion of young and flourishing individuals. This unusual decrease can presumably be traced back to the severe drought of 2022.

2. Data of the in situ planting squares

We have been conducting in situ planting experiments since 2017. Based on the data, closed dolomite grasses are mainly suitable for planting the species. This is in line with the experience that even in natural occurrences in closed grasslands, the species has substantial renewal.

3. Examination of the planting material

In 2023, the number of seeds in the crops was lower compared to the 2022 data.

- The researchers carried on the comprehensive in-situ conservation experiment of *Linum dolomiticum* (started in 2017). The seeding experiment proves that open dolomite grassland spot's microclimate has unfavourable effects for *Linum dolomiticum*. The researchers try to revive old former habitat of the *Linum dolomiticum* (in situ conservation) with sowing and new sample squares were designated.

2. continue the close co-operation by the Danube-Ipoly National Park Directorate, the Pilis Forest Company and the municipality of Pilisszentiván in the management of the protected area; ensure that nature conservation is the primary consideration in decisions affecting the protected area; and enhance co-operation between the managing authorities and the local municipalities by:

a. establishing equivalent trilateral agreements of co-operation with Nagykovácsi and Piliscsaba;

b. establishing more regular local forum meetings of officers and also the public;

- North of the Szenas Hills PA is the Pilis Biosphere Reserve, designated as part of the UNESCO MAB programme. This year it was decided to expand the area of the biosphere reserve. The extension will include the settlements of Piliscsaba and Pilisszentiván, so that part of the European Diploma area will also be included in the biosphere reserve. The proposal was voted in favour by the representative bodies of both municipalities. The proposal will be submitted to UNESCO in 2024. This decision significantly strengthens cooperation with both municipalities and contributes to the fulfilment of the recommendation
- Results of the annual agreement of cooperation between the Danube-Ipoly National Park Directorate, the Pilis Forest Company and the Local Government of Pilisszentiván:
 - We have continued the monitoring of habitats where we removed Black pine stands.
 - We have continued the monitoring of the effect of large game species, comparing the vegetation of 6 fenced and 6 control quadrats;
 - The municipality of Pilisszentiván gave financial support to our work in the visitor centre again;
- We have prepared a detailed cooperation agreement with both Nagykovácsi and Piliscsaba, which will be signed by directors of Danube-Ipoly National Park Directorate, Pilis Forest Company and the mayors in spring 2024.

3. continue to pursue European Union funding to meet management objectives; ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of project delivery by including the employment costs of the appropriate project staff in the project bids and subsequent budgets;

- The LIFE project will supplement our (Danube-Ipoly National Park Directorate) resources for a few years as long as it lasts (until 28/02/2027).
- The tender will cover several habitat reconstruction interventions, restorations and research.
- In 2023 we continued the renovation of the Nagy-Szénás educational trail in Nagykovácsi.

4. where short-term European Union funding is supporting longer-term needs, secure an appropriate, predictable and sustainable budget to ensure stability of funding;

- As mentioned, a European Union funding (LIFE) is providing resources for managing the area until 2027. The continuation of this is ensured by agreements with the Pilis Forest Company and the local municipalities.

5. continue effective game management in line with previous commitments, to reduce populations of non-native mouflon and fallow deer to zero; establish a time line, funding and appropriate methods to achieve this eradication within ten years; and continue to manage native large mammal populations, based on effective monitoring by the Pilis Forest Company. Game management can be effective only with the continuous maintenance of the fence around the area and with a combination of control methods (for example, big game drives, shooting, trapping);

- *The management and monitoring of large game population and the maintenance of the fence around the area is part of the agreement of cooperation between the Danube–Ipoly National Park Directorate and the Pilis Forest Company (Agreement).*
- *The ASF (African Swine Fever) causing serious problems in the area as due to this disease all the driven hunt was cancelled again in the hunter season 2022-2023. At the same time, we can keep the populations of the two invasive species, the mouflon and the fallow deer, at low levels through individual hunting.*
- *Maintenance of the fence surrounding the protected area is carried out continuously by DINPI staff and volunteers. Pilis Forest Company provides financial support for this work, which is part of the Agreement. This work is very important in order to prevent the technical sporting activities and to ensure the effectiveness of wildlife control.*

6. continue the eradication of non-native tree species, especially the black pine and black locust; especially for the black pine, establish a time line to complete the clearance programme, with funding and appropriate methods to achieve the objective within ten years; and investigate with forest authorities where and how, in appropriate locations, black pine stands as well as other woodland areas might be restored to open grassland, considering appropriate techniques, costs and opportunities, and addressing the regulations which govern such open habitat restoration;

- *In the frame of the LIFE project (see above) we organised two volunteering days with 40 participants for the removal of black pine and black locust.*
- *The LIFE project includes the removal of additional stands of black pine in the Buda Hills, in the habitat of two endemic species, Vincetoxicum pannonicum and Linum dolomiticum, on a total area of 171 ha. This work is planned to start in 2024..*

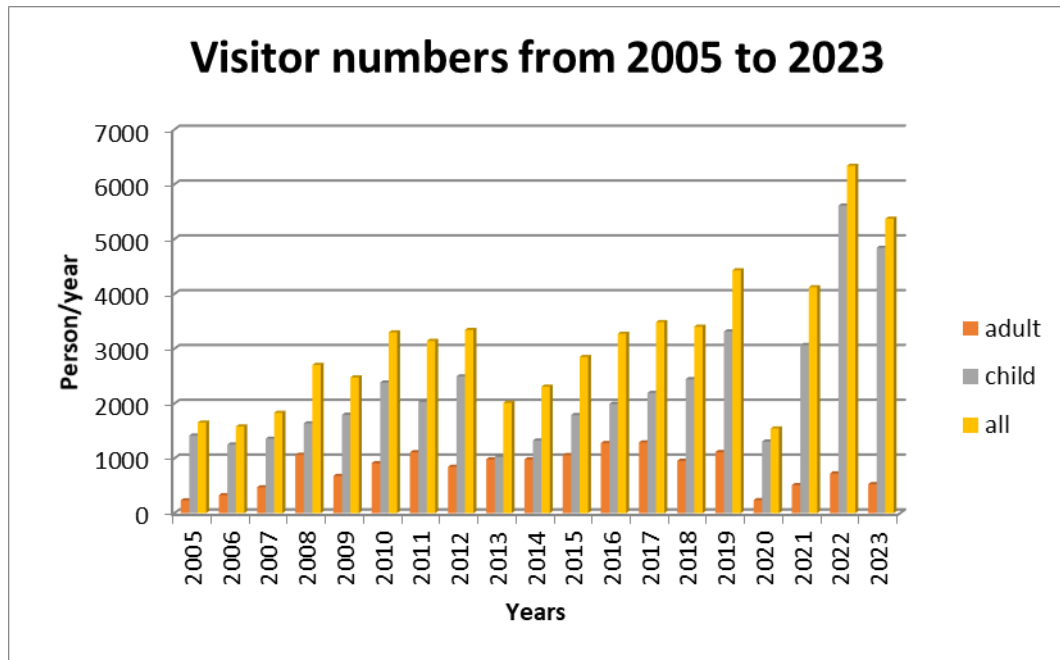
7. enhance the effectiveness of the buffer areas by the inclusion of appropriate regulations in land-use plans to limit inappropriate development; and investigate the practicality of regulating other activities (for example, fly tipping or the introduction of non-native species) in these areas;

No changes

8. continue the effective management of visitor access for a range of user groups, including enhancing provision away from sensitive areas, such as horse-riding trails and mountain bike routes, where this can relieve pressure on the protected area.

- *No new provision has been introduced for visitor management. Instead, visitor pressure has been diverted from the most sensitive areas by organising events.*
- *We held many new programmes: family events, summer camp for children, nature birthday party, etc. We were very popular with school groups, too. We organized outdoor programmes and series of lectures for the local children (primary school, nursery school. Some of the programs are as follows:*
 - *“Dolomite flax tours” in April and May - guided tours to the habitat of Linum dolomiticum,*
 - *Night Forest event in June*
 - *Summer camps for children (2 weeks)*
 - *‘Bug tours’ in September - guided tours to the habitat of bush-cricket (Saga pedo)*
 - *bird banding programmes regularly*
 - *Treasures of the autumn forest’ (13/10/2022) event.*
- *However, when the dolomite flax was in bloom, the rangers closed the area. Only the guided tour members were allowed to enter. This measure was necessary because of the increasing vulnerability of dolomite flax (see above).*
- *There are 2 nature trails in the protected area. Both are being renovated in the frame of the LIFE project.*
- *We joined the International Day of Birds and Trees (13/05/2023) and the International Bird Watching Day (30/09/2022).*

- We created a modern escape room in the exhibition.
- An English- and German-language guide sheet has been prepared for the exhibition.
- A new Hungarian forest school rating system has been introduced in the Hungarian national parks, in which the visitor center participates as a training place. This is a whole new opportunity for us.
- Field exercises were held for university students (several weeks).
- We held combined programmes with the 2 local exhibitions in Pilisszentiván (archeology, mining).
- In August a field exercise was held for university students.
- A long-term increase (with a minimal decrease in the last year) is observed in the number of visitors (see 1. diagram). Between 01/01/2023 – 30/11/2023 : adults 530, children 4841, all 5371.



1. diagram: Visitor numbers from 2005 to 2023

e. **Site Management:** List here any changes to the European Diploma holding site management, in relation to both terrestrial and aquatic environments (as appropriate), and in relation to staff and finances, since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

Details of the ongoing LIFE project see above.

f. **Boundaries:** Give details of any changes to the boundaries of the European Diploma holding site since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. If there are any changes, please attach an appropriate map to this report. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

No changes

g. **Other information:** List here any other information about the European Diploma holding site which you consider should be provided to the Council of Europe.

- We organized more team building days (mainly for company groups) in the zone C. In these occasions cutting of Black pine (see point 6), planting of deciduous tree plants, maintenance of the fence and the wooden equipment of the nature trails was accomplished.
- The local NGO-s help our works (regular patrolling, habitat reconstruction works). The New Acropolis Association (NAA) and the Forest Guards Foundation (FGF) were the most active partners. The NNA members help in the habitat reconstruction work, regularly. The FGF placed nest-boxes and bird feeders into the forest (next to our nature trail).
- Every year, we have university field trainings and also some volunteers are helping us regularly. It's a good opportunity for them to learn, but at the same time, they help our work, too.
- We have promoted the area and the European Diploma several times in Hungarian public media and other local media.