

2025.

ANNUAL REPORT FOR SZÉNÁS HILLS PROTECTED AREA



EUROPEAN DIPLOMA HOLDING SITE

1995

CATEGORY A

2025.

Annual report for the year 2025



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 (5 years)	
Central authority concerned:	
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Authority responsible for its management:	
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Volunteer rangers help the staff of Szénás Hills PA with conservation tasks and guarding



Mayor of Pilisszentiván speaking on the Celebration of the 30th anniversary of Szénás Hills winning the award

1. 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 2026.

2. 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 Szénás 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, a new LIFE project "Conservation of endemic species and dry grassland habitats in the contact zone of Pannonian and Alpine bioregions" (LIFE endemic PANALP) has 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 this recommendation's deadline to 2027.

The most important activities are as follows.

- *The Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) for the conservation of *Linum dolomiticum* (see annual Report 2022) has a meeting once a year and gives recommendations on research and interventions we need to do to conserve *Linum dolomiticum*. This year, in line with the previous recommendations, new samples have been collected for the genetic and mycological (mycorrhizal) studies and the cenological investigation has been continued.*
This year's SAC meeting will take place on 18th December, where researchers will report on their studies and we are going to prepare a scientific volume to be published in 2026.
- *Dolomite flax monitoring*
Since 2001, we have been monitoring dolomite flax annually. Its population has been decreasing since 2010, unfortunately. This year's monitoring evaluation is still in progress, so we will be able to report on it next year.
- *Pollination test*
*According to the SAC's assumption, the most likely reason of the decline in dolomite flax is a secondary effect of climate change. One possible explanation is the collapse of pollination. As a solution, we contracted a beekeeper and put bee hives into the dolomite flax habitat. We attached pollen traps on to the hives to research if European honey bee (*Apis mellifera*) collect the pollens of dolomite flax. At the same time, we also observed pollinating insects appearing on the flowers. The work was carried out in collaboration with the University of Budapest (ELTE). Unfortunately, the result of the investigation was negative: Unfortunately, domestic bees do not contribute to the pollination of flax.*

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 Szénás Hills PA is the Pilis Biosphere Reserve, designated as part of the UNESCO MAB programme. On 25 September 2024, we submitted an application to UNESCO for the extension of the Pilis Biosphere Reserve. We are very pleased that the official announcement took place on 27th of September 2025. As a result of the expansion, Szénás Hills PA is now directly adjacent to Pilis Biosphere Reserve. The official press conference was held on November 11, where we presented the certificates to the 21 municipalities involved. We are cooperating with Piliscsaba and Pilisszentiván in relation to both the biosphere reserve and the European Diploma.. This decision significantly strengthens cooperation with both municipalities and contributes to the fulfilment of the recommendation.*
- *Results of the trilateral agreement of co-operation between the Danube–Ipoly National Park Directorate, the Pilis Forest Company and the local governments:*

Last year we extended the co-operation agreement with Nagykovácsi and Piliscsaba, which were signed by directors of the Danube–Ipoly National Park Directorate and the Pilis State Forest Company and the mayors of the municipalities. This year, we signed a renewed agreement with Pilisszentiván.

The trilateral agreements include the following:

- *Cooperation on public information. We can promote the values and management of the Szénás Hills in local newspapers and websites.*
- *We organise joint actions to preserve the area. Municipalities provide wildlife cameras for this purpose. We try to prevent together the dumping of green waste in the strictly protected area.*
- *We are working with local communities to eradicate the tree of heaven (Ailanthus altissima) both on populated areas and on the European Diploma Area.*
- *Municipalities provide financial support for environmental education. DINPD gives discounts to local schoolchildren to participate in its programmes.*
- *The Pilis Forest Company provides professional assistance on forestry issues.*
- *The most dangerous invasive alien species on the area is the Tree of heaven (Ailanthus altissima). This tree is spreading in the settlements and infesting the protected area from there. With the aim to reduce it, the national park directorate has started an Ailanthus-replacement programme in partnership with all the local governments. As the first step, we have assessed all the Ailanthus trees in the villages, involving university students into this work. After the assessment we inject and remove several trees, especially those that are producing seeds. In place of the removed Ailanthus trees we plant native trees or fruit trees.*
- *On 14/10/2025 the Pilis Forest Company organized a complex field demonstration for foresters and national park workers themed on horse logging and timber slide technology (photos attached)*

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). It includes several habitat reconstruction interventions, restorations and research.

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).*

- *Maintenance of the fence surrounding the protected area is carried out continuously by DINPI staff and volunteers. In the frame of the LIFE project (see above) we organised three volunteering days with a total of 55 participants. Pilis Forest Company is also providing 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;

- *The LIFE project includes the removal of additional stands of black pine in the Buda Hills, in the habitat of two endemic species, Vincetoxicum panonicum and Linum dolomiticum, on a total area of 171 ha. This work began this year.*

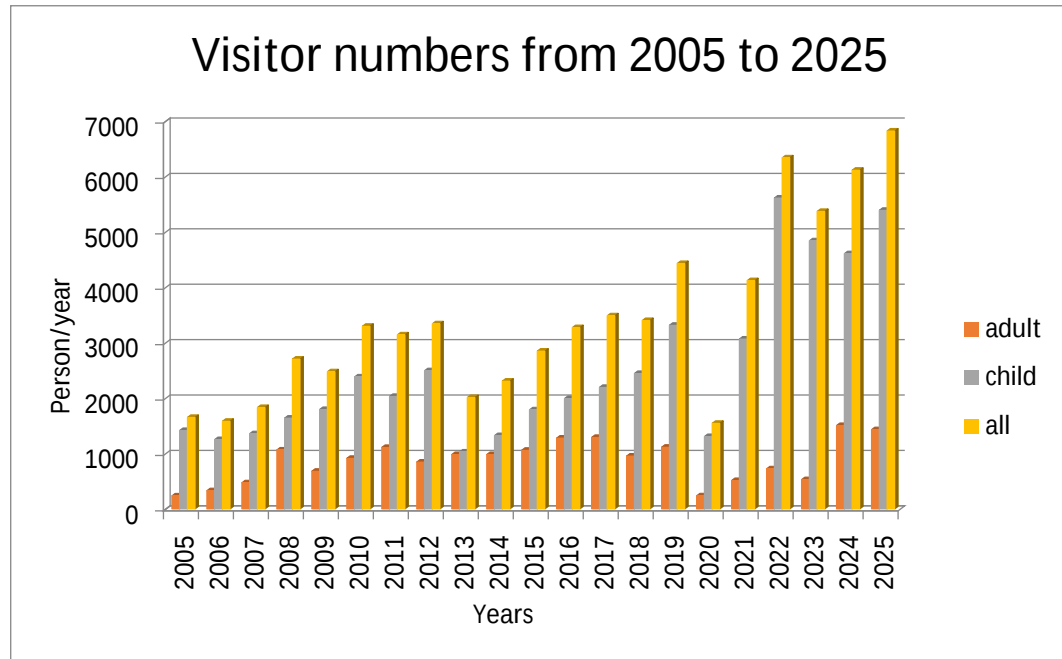
7. enhance the effectiveness of the buffer areas by the inclusion of appropriate regulations in land-use plans to limit inappropriate development; and investigate the practicality of regulating other activities (for example, fly tipping or the introduction of non-native species) in these areas;

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.

- *There are 2 nature trails in the protected area. Both are being renovated in the frame of the LIFE project. We also organised a volunteer day for the trail renovation.*
- *We held many programmes: family events, summer camp for children, nature birthday parties, 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)*
 - *Bird-watching and -ringing programmes regularly*
- *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).*
- *We joined several international actions: Sustainability Week (5 actions from 07/04/2025 to 11/04/2025, International Day of Birds and Trees (10/05/2025), International Bird Watching Day (04/10/2025), The European Week for Waste Reduction (25/11/2025)*
- *This year, we expanded the World Water Day and ‘Treasures of the autumn forest’ day to a themed week, because the interest has been huge for years.*
- *The escape room in the exhibition works successfully, which was created last year.*
- *One colleague participated in a training of the Hungarian forest school system organised by the Ministry of Agriculture.*
- *Field exercises were held for university students (several weeks).*
- *We held a forest school programme and an orientation day for secondary school students.*
- *We have completed the programs undertaken in the LIFE project. We held 4 guided tours on Nagy-Szénás Nature Trail and 4 project days in Nagykovácsi.*
- *In August a field exercise was held for university students.*
- *We held two trainings (31/03/2025; 20/10/2025) for teachers based on BISEL (Biotic Index at Secondary Education Level)*
- *One of our colleagues is a member of the Hungarian BISEL Committee. She has been involved in compiling and improving competition tasks for years.*

- A long-term increase is observed in the number of visitors (see 1. diagram). Between 01/01/2025 – 30/11/2025 : adults 1432, children 5391, altogether 6823.



1. diagram: Visitor numbers from 2005 to 2025

3. 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

- Details of the ongoing LIFE project see above.

4. 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

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

- This year we celebrated two important anniversaries: the 60th anniversary of the Europe Diploma and the 30th anniversary of Szénások winning the award.

Two of our colleagues represented the Szénás Hills at the ceremony in Granada, where they gave a presentation on the management of the Szénások.

We celebrated the 30th anniversary on 9th May in the Dolomite Flax Visitor Center. This is where we signed the trilateral agreement. As part of the celebration, our colleague Dr. Pál Kézdy received the "Linum dolomiticum Award" from the mayor of Pilisszentiván.

- One form of volunteering for local residents is to become a volunteer ranger. We held a course for them. Six people passed the exam and help the work of the official rangers.
- In 2025, we have completed the full recording of a Natura 2000 trigger species (*Seseli leucospermum*) in the area.
- We have organized volunteer nature conservation work both for students and companies several times. A total of 146 people participated on six occasions.
- We have promoted the area and the European Diploma several times in Hungarian public media and other local media.
- We prepared a student for the Hungarian Károly Kaán scientific competition. We are proud that the student won the competition. She observed the pollinators of the *Linum dolomiticum*. Result of the observation: the selected individuals were visited by solitary bees and not by European honey bees.