

SOCIOLOGIC STUDY SUMMARY

Local perceptions and attitudes
on the bison rewilding project
in the South-Western Carpathians

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Summary of the sociological report for the project
"Urgent actions for the recovery of the
European bison populations in Romania".
LIFE14 NAT/NL/000987 LIFE RE - Bison

EXECUTIVE MINDS, 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of the report is to gain a better understanding of how the local communities perceive and evaluate the project for the reintroduction of the European bison in the South-Western Carpathians, namely in the two targeted locations, Armeniș and Densuș-Poieni, by presenting the results of a survey based on a questionnaire and a series of qualitative assessments.



The study examines changes in community perceptions and attitudes compared to 2016, when a similar survey was conducted. In addition, the report briefly quantifies general attitudes towards wildlife, nature conservation and sustainable use of forest resources.

The survey comprised a total of 156 completed questionnaires, of which 44 (28%) from the Densuș area and 112 (72%) from the Armeniș area.

The reintroduction of the bison in the Southern Carpathians is carried out in the framework of the LIFE RE-Bison project, "Urgent actions for the recovery of bison populations in Romania", implemented by WWF Romania and Rewilding Europe, with financial support from the European Union through the LIFE Programme and together with local communities.



RESULTS

At both sites, the data shows a strong appreciation of the bison, its charisma and its suitability to the local landscape.

In Armeniș much more than in Densuș-Poieni, people express an understanding of the non-intervention policy so that the bison is not dependent on humans.

In Armeniș the majority of the community strongly appreciates the actions and efforts of the project team, while in Densuș-Poieni inadequate management is indicated.

The study shows that these communities support and appreciate conservation initiatives and understand the plight of endangered species.



Summary for the Armeniș rewilding area

“
“The project doesn't bother us. It brings tourists.
I have some land near the bison, they ate my
orchard, but anyway I wish them good luck and to
take care to keep the bison under control.”
(male, 71 years old)
”

The perceptions of the local community in Armeniș on this project for the rewilding of the bison are positive on most of the dimensions investigated.

The vast majority of the population think highly of the bison, the project staff, especially the local rangers. The majority of the respondent population considers the project successful. A large majority consider the benefits of the project to be high - both for the community and for nature and species conservation. A small percentage of the surveyed population - mainly households that have suffered damage caused by the bison - do not fully support the project, a result that guides us in the future to be even more focused on prevention methods and better inform the community about living in harmony with these animals that are so important for the health of the environment as well as our own health.

The local authorities show a balanced attitude and express mostly appreciation, with the exception of the hunting association, which expresses mostly a critical attitude. We will continue to work closely with hunters to ensure that we have biodiversity in the area.

THE BISON

95% consider the bison a beautiful animal

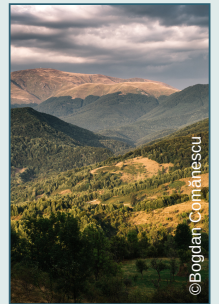
80% feel sympathy for the bison

33% are afraid of the bison



THE AREA

86% believe that the reintroduced bison have adapted well to the area and believe that they are beneficial to the natural balance of the landscape



THE LIFE RE-BISON PROJECT

90% say they agree and strongly agree with the project (5% increase from 2016)

91% consider the project a success



THE TEAM

77% consider that the project team informed citizens sufficiently and correctly

93% consider that the project staff had a professional attitude



THE COMMUNITY

53%, consider the bison to be a source of income or a source of local employment

73% of the population perceive that the project attracts more tourists to the area



MONITORING

92% consider that monitoring was well carried out

79% agree that the measures to avoid conflicts between humans and bison were sufficient



QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

How to we care for bison in the wild?

We want the animals to regain their wild instincts, so we monitor them remotely and intervene with extra food or medicine only in extreme conditions (i.e. harsh winter, sick animals).

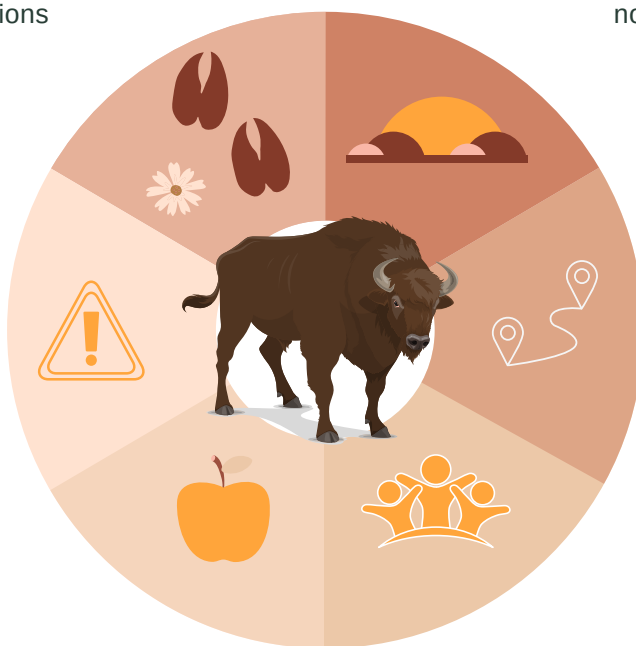
Why are they reintroduced here?

The bison lived here 200 years ago. Following a feasibility study, the area was designated suitable and now the bison reproduce in the wild and roam free in the Tarcu Mountains Natura 2000 site.

How to react near bison?

Bison do not present an imminent danger, but direct contact with them is contraindicated, precisely to avoid forming a dependency on humans which can lead to conflict.

- Keep a distance of >100m
- Remain calm and retreat slowly
- Report the presence of the bison to rangers, foresters or hunters



Monitoring bison?

Rangers collect information in the field about the behaviour and impact of the bison on the landscape. We also use camera traps and collect samples for genetic and health analysis. GPS collars that tell us their location and help us prevent possible damage.

Who do you report damages to?

According to the provisions of Law no. 407/2006 on hunting and protection of hunting grounds, as amended, the bison is a strictly protected species, being included in Annex 2. According to Art 13 (1), compensation is granted for damage caused to agricultural and forestry crops and domestic animals by specimens of wildlife species of hunting interest included in Annexes 1 and 2. In accordance with Article 13(4), compensation for damage caused by the bison shall be paid by the central public authority for environmental protection from the budget approved for that purpose.

Benefits for the community?

The Bison Hillock is now home to the largest population of free-ranging bison in Romania, a reason to be proud! This legendary animal has brought here a huge opportunity to develop local services and products under the bison symbol and brand. Since 2016 more than 30 households in the area have benefited from ecotourism, and 100+ tourists have visited the Bison Hillock.