

NATURAL TREASURES OF THE CSÍK BASIN (DEPRESIUNEA CIUCULUI) AND GYIMES(GHIMEȘ)

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The Csík Basin (Depresiunea Ciucului) and Gyimes (Ghimeș, the upper catchment area of the Trotuș river) are two geographically, geologically and ethnographically distinct areas of the Eastern Carpathians with a total area of more than 2000 km². The first is a tectonic mountain basin and the second is part of the flisch zone of the Eastern Carpathians. The Csík Basin has a bottom altitude of about 650 m, gentle slopes and a wide, almost treeless landscape. The lowest altitude of the Csík Mountains in the studied area is about 680 m, while highest peaks are above 1400 m. It has steep slopes, narrow valleys and a patchwork of forests and secondary grasslands.

Settlements in the basin form compact large villages while those in the mountains are loosely structured along the valleys. The Csík Basin is rich in carbonated mineral waters and wetlands, with fens and shallow ponds on alluvial fans. The presence of these wetlands, combined with the cold climate of the basin enhanced by thermal inversions was favorable for the long-term survival of boreal species, presumably since the last Ice Age. These are generally called glacial relics, and are nationally protected, furthermore, three of them: the Marsh Saxifrage (*Saxifraga hirculus*), the Arctic Dwarf Birch (*Betula humilis*), the Dwarf Spindletree (*Euonymus nana*) reach their southern global limit in this area.

Other glacial relics include Siberian Leopard Plant (*Ligularia sibirica*), Jacob's Ladder (*Polemonium coeruleum*), Moor-king (*Pedicularis sceptrum-carolinum*), Long-leafed Sundew (*Drosera anglica*), Tufted Loosestrife (*Lysimachia thyrsoflora*). Other typical plants include Snake's Head Fritillary (*Fritillaria meleagris*), Siberian Iris (*Iris sibirica*), Globeflower (*Trollius europaeus*), Marsh Gentian (*Gentiana pneumonanthe*) on peaty soil and hay meadows, and Bladderwort (*Utricularia vulgaris*) in deeper ponds. Temporary ponds are inhabited by the spectacular large branchiopods, a 'living fossil' crustacean group that includes the fairy shrimp (*Anostraca*). The wet meadows and shallow waters of the basin are good habitats for amphibians of which Pool Frog (*Rana temporaria*) and Moor Frog (*R. arvalis*) are typical, and feeding and nesting habitats for birds like the Corncrake (*Crex crex*), White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*), Lesser Spotted Eagle (*Aquila pomarina*), Short-toed Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*), Woodlark (*Lullula arborea*).

One of the nicest natural features of the Csík Mountains are its species-rich meadows maintained by mowing. Flowers here include *Dactylorhiza sambucina*, *Anemone narcissifolia*, *Nigritella rubra*, *Primula leucophylla*, *Gentiana acaulis*, *G. verna*, *Laserpitium latifolium*. A big rarity is Eastern Pasqueflower (*Pulsatilla patens*). False Tamarisk (*Myricaria germanica*) occurs on the fresh sediment of larger streams.

Typical fauna elements include a species rich mammal community, including large carnivores as Grey Wolf (*Canis lupus*) and Carpathian Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*) and a Carpathian endemic newt, *Triturus montandoni*. While the unique landscape and the traditional land use created a specific flora and fauna, these are under threat by the recent changes in land use and the overall infrastructural development.