

PROPOSAL FOR THE CREATION OF A NEW NATURA 2000 SITE IN THE CSÍK MOUNTAINS (MUNȚII CIUCULUI)

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The vegetation of the Csík Mountains consists mainly of a mosaic of spruce and mixed beech-spruce forests with hay meadows and pastures. Botanical data referring to this area are deficient, and detailed floristic or vegetation studies are very scarce.

Based on the available literature data and on surveys during the year 2009, we have completed the SCI proposal of Csík Mountains. The proposed site has an area of approximately 1400 km². Its boundaries are the Hasmás-Cheile Bicazului ROSCI0027, the eastern part of the Middle and Upper Csík basin higher than 700 m, it comprises an existing SPA Muntii si Depresiunea Ciucului ROSPA0034, the Casin basin on the south and the Uz valley-Palanca strait line on the east.

So far, we have identified 17 types of Natura 2000 habitats, of which the *Nardus* grasslands and mountain hay meadows are outstanding from the point of view of plant species richness and number of protected species. A quadrat of 4x4 m identified by Molnár Zs. on the western part of the Gyimes pass contained more than 80 vascular plant species, which is one of the most species rich plant communities at this scale in Europe. Among the species listed in the Annex II of Habitat Directive, four have populations in this area: *Ligularia sibirica*, *Pulsatilla patens*, *Cypripedium calceolus*, *Tozzia carpathica*. There is a handful of information related to the size and state of conservation of the first three taxa, whereas we possess only literature data about the last one. We identified a large number of nationally protected, endemic or glacial relict plant species (altogether 56 taxa) in the Csík Mountains, and the list will probably increase.

So far, we identified 32 animal species listed on Annex I of the Habitats Directive, of which three are large carnivores, three are amphibians and 22 birds.

We estimate that the proposed site is the largest mountain hay meadow area of the Eastern Carpathians. It is also important to note that hay meadows are part of a living rural landscape, where rural communities continue traditional semi-subsistence farming, and thus contribute to the maintenance of landscape structure and habitat management. At the same time, traditional agriculture declined heavily in the past few decades, meaning the decrease of managed hay meadows. Abandonment or conversion to grazing affect primarily meadows that are situated farther away from localities. Our hope is that the Natura 2000 status will contribute to the maintainance of the viability of local communities.