



After-LIFE Conservation Plan

for the Eastern Imperial Eagle

in the Pannonian Region

between 2023 and 2027

Prepared for „Conservation of the eastern imperial eagle by decreasing human-caused mortality in the Pannonian Region (LIFE15/NAT/HU/000902)” project

Budapest, 2023



Ministry of the Environment
of the Czech Republic





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PannonEagle LIFE project details

Title:	Conservation of the eastern imperial eagle by decreasing human-caused mortality in the Pannonian Region
ID:	LIFE15 NAT/HU/000902
Period:	01/10/2016 – 31/01/2023
Total budget:	3,583,577 Euro
Financed by the European Union:	2,682,771 Euro (74.86%)
Coordinating beneficiary:	MME BirdLife Hungary
Associated beneficiaries:	Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia (Društvo za zaštitu i proučavanje ptic abSrbije) BirdLife Österreich Česká společnost ornitologická Hortobágy National Park Directorate Institute for Nature Conservation of Vojvodina Province Kiskunság National Park Directorate Ministerstvo životního prostředí (Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic) Raptor Protection of Slovakia Vychodoslovenska distribucna, a.s. Umweltverband WWF Österreich / WWF Austria
Co-financiers:	Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture Slovakian Ministry of the Environment
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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	
BPSSS	Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia (Društvo za zaštitu i proučavanje ptic ab Srbije)
BL AT	BirdLife Österreich
CSO	Česká společnost ornitologická (BirdLife Czech Republic)
HNPĐ	Hortobágy National Park Directorate
INCVP	Institute for Nature Conservation of Vojvodina Province
KNPD	Kiskunság National Park Directorate
MZP	Ministerstvo životního prostředí (Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic)
RPS	Raptor Protection of Slovakia
VSD	Vychodoslovenska distribucna, a.s.
WWF AT	Umweltverband WWF Österreich / WWF Austria
MAFEW AT	Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management
MA HU	Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture

Project background

The Eastern Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*) and other protected raptor species like the Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*), are prominently exposed to the effects of bird persecution incidents, especially poisoning, due to the species' feeding and nesting habits. The Brown Hare (*Lepus europaeus*) and the Common Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) are the most important small game species, and these species are found among the key prey species of the Imperial Eagle as well, therefore gamekeepers and hunters frequently see competitors in eagles. The main prey of Saker Falcons are Feral Pigeons (*Columba livia f. domestica*), therefore the species could also directly face the antipathy of pigeon-keepers in some regions.

Numerous poisoning cases have been reported in the countries of the Pannonian region before the project started, and the numbers of undetected cases were undoubtedly much higher. Besides illegal poisoning incidents several other illegal activities, including shooting, logging of nesting trees and even nest robbing, were reported to affect imperial eagles and other strictly protected raptor species. However, bird crime incidents were rarely detected and investigated by relevant authorities and the police for various reasons, including capacity constraints. Moreover, court procedures involving bird crime, if any, did not result in discouraging precedent judgments in most of the countries.

At the same time, illegal poisoning used to be the main threat for the Imperial Eagle in the Pannonian region, representing more than 30% of known mortality causes and significantly contributing to the species population decline during the 20th century. The same threats are also affecting other protected raptor species like the Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*), which was therefore the secondary target species of the project, as all measures against such bird crimes were directly beneficial for this species as well.

The main objective of the project PannonEagle LIFE was to increase the population of the Eastern Imperial Eagle in the Pannonian Region through significantly decreasing the non-natural mortality caused by persecution incidents.

According to the threats identified in the background of the problem, the following concrete objectives have been targeted by the project to handle the increasing prevalence of human-eagle conflicts in the region:

1. Decrease the direct adverse effects of persecution incidents on the Pannonian imperial eagle population.
2. Increase the chance of detecting illegal activities and imposing precedent judgments in the case of bird persecution incidents.
3. Increase stakeholder awareness about the overestimated effect of raptor species on game populations and about alternative eagle-friendly game management methods.
4. Increase public awareness about the conservational importance of imperial eagles and about the possible consequences of persecution incidents.

The Project was implemented in five countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia) and included 20 Special Protection Areas of the EU and 5 internationally recognised Important Bird Areas in Serbia.

Project results

Result 1 - Steadily increasing number of the Eastern Imperial Eagle population

In the course of the project, the Eastern Imperial Eagle population increased in all participating countries. Since 2016, the Pannonian stock increased from then known 270 pairs to 482 pairs in 2022, while breeding success (the average number of chicks), also increased slightly.

Based on all of this, the population may still be far from the upper limit of natural capacity and clearly illustrates that with the radical reduction of illegal activities how fast natural balance could be restored.

Result 2 - Reduction of the non-natural mortality

In the first three years of the project, thanks to the detection work of the search dog units, birds of prey that died as a result of poisoning were found in a higher proportion than ever before, including Eastern Imperial Eagles. Despite all of this, the number of Eastern Imperial Eagles that died as a result of poisoning shows a decreasing trend over the entire project period.

Unfortunately, poisoning and shooting cases still occur in small numbers, but fortunately they no longer have a population-level impact on the Eastern Imperial Eagle in the Pannonian region.

Result 3. – Successful investigation - Offenders at court.

During the PannonEagle LIFE Project, six exemplary criminal cases reached the court phase where the key evidence was discovered with the direct help of field detection by search dog units and police house searches. In the Czech Republic, the first two court cases of historical significance in cases of wildlife poisoning took place, while in Austria, during a house search, to which the search dog unit of the MME joined, poisoned bird carcasses and the poison itself were seized. In Hungary, it was possible to reach the court stage in two cases involving birds of prey, one with involving a GPS tagged cinereous vulture and one where the perpetrator was illegally trapping dozens on raptors.

- August 2020, Austria - carbofuran and destruction of highly protected species - suspended prison sentence and fine
- June 2020, Slovakia - possession of carbofuran - fine
- 2021, Czech Republic - suspended prison sentence for illegal poisoning
- 2022, Czech Republic - suspended prison sentence for illegal poisoning
- December 2022, Hungary - vulture shooting - suspended prison sentence
- January 2023 - Hungary - trapping raptors - fine sentence



Result 4. – PannonEagle LIFE and Policy

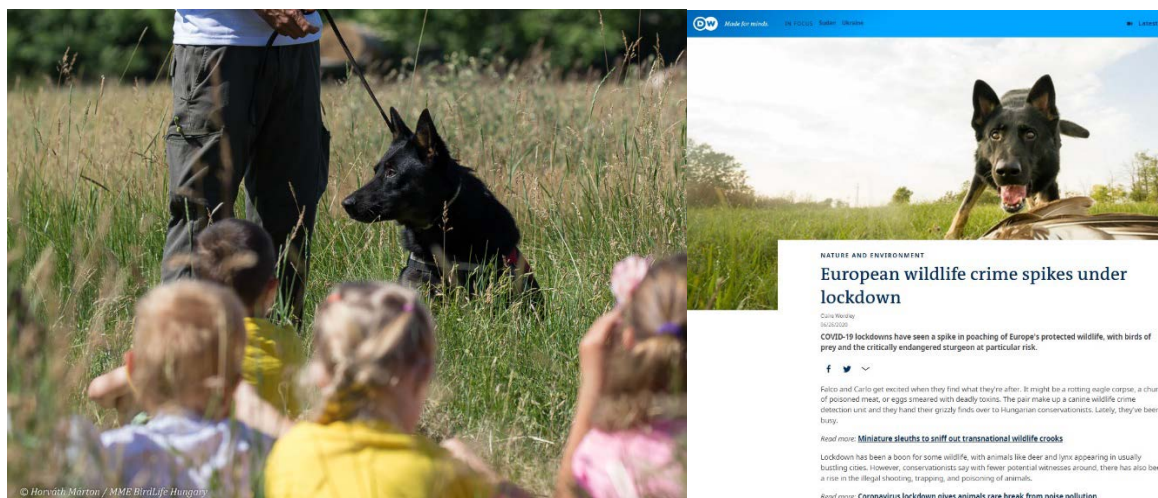
- In Hungary, the public outrage following the Tura poisoning case in 2021 and the press releases of MME Birdlife Hungary. After an amendment request from January 2022, the criminal code of animal cruelty and natural damage was amended by the classified case of poisoning, and the preparation of poisoning was also sanctioned.
- In Austria, Birdlife Austria developed a guideline based on which the criminal threshold was introduced, which has since been used by the police and the courts.
- In Slovakia, during a review of the conservation value of protected birds, the value of the Eastern Imperial Eagle and the Saker Falcon rose to 40,000 and 50,000 euros, respectively.
- In the Czech Republic, the Ministry of Environmental Protection proposed the elevation of the Eastern Imperial Eagle to an enhanced protected status.

Result 5. – Bird Crime database

With the cooperation of the partner organizations, a regional database was compiled that summarizes the registered cases of poisoning and hunting birds of prey in the Pannonian region. The database contains data on 2,600 individuals or decoys, two-thirds of which are related to proven poisoning, 10% to suspected poisoning, and 5% to shooting crimes. The data records contain the location, time, type, toxicology test results, investigation phase and many other useful information

Result 6. - Awareness raising in the online world

On the project website (www.imperialeagle.eu) all important information about Eastern Imperial Eagles, poisonings or the project is available and downloadable. The news is available in 5 languages. The PannonEagle Facebook page has 6,500 followers and posts peaking ten thousands of reach. The project team regularly reported on the events related to the project in a unique number of nearly 137 website news and more than 170 Facebook posts. It was on the online interfaces created by the project that 97,000 people were reached by one piece of news.



After-LIFE Conservation Plan objectives and methodology

The purpose of this After-LIFE Conservation Plan is to set out how conservation activities are planned to continue and to develop after the end of the PannonEagle LIFE project, and how the achieved results can be maintained in the mid- and long-term. Information is provided on the proposed prioritization, implementation and monitoring of the actions identified through the project.

The After-LIFE Conservation Plan was prepared in the cooperation of all beneficiaries of the project. It details what further actions and when shall be carried out after the project to maintain its results, who will be responsible for the implementation and how the future activities will be funded.

In the following two chapters we analyse the recent situation by a SWOT analysis and give details for the needed continuation of each specific action of the project.

SWOT analyses:

	Positive	Negative
Internal	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harmonised national protocols for investigation of bird crime cases • Existing equipment, knowledge capital, experience and networks of governmental institutions concerned with nature protection, wildlife management, and investigation, as well as nongovernmental organizations • Existing well experienced dog detection units • Legal framework for protection of the Imperial Eagle and the Saker Falcon • National bird crime reporting systems • Bird crime database for the Pannonian region • Profound knowledge of the Imperial Eagle and the Saker Falcon populations in the Pannonian Region • New habitats representing hunting grounds for raptors created 	<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low rate of successful investigation against offenders • National Laboratories sometimes slow with the sample testing • Long court proceedings • Restricted access to information from the police investigation by nature conservation organisations • Decreased flexibility of certain government institutions caused by absence of work-on-call outside of working hours

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased awareness and knowledge about bird crime and its consequences among public • Increased awareness and knowledge about bird crime and its consequences among hunters • Better cooperation and communication with hunters in prevention of the bird crime • Diverse use of communication tools. 	
External	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active participation of different stakeholder groups in prevention of the bird crime • Willingness of authorities to apply the project results • Better dialogue and understanding among different interest groups • Legislative changes which will be better reflecting significance of raptors in natural ecosystems • Bird crime is getting more and more interest from the media and general public. • Synergies with the other LIFE projects (large carnivores, vultures, governance wildlife crime projects) • Exchange of experience and international transfer of knowledge and good practices among groups, experts and authorities involved in prevention and investigation of bird crime cases • Farmers strictly observing best agriculture practice • Agricultural Payment Agency applies restrictions on CAP payments in cases of misapplication of agricultural chemicals by farmers • Increasing interest and involvement of public 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persisting negative attitudes towards raptors of some members of the stakeholder groups (hunters, pigeon-keepers) • Misapplication of rodenticides in agricultural practice (Brodifacoum, Bromadiolone, Zink Phosphide) • Access of perpetrators to chemicals used in poisoning and forbidden in EU in non-EU countries • Restructuring of government agencies involved in investigation of bird crimes resulting in decrease in capacities • Decline of media interest for conservation topics • Unfavorable socio-economic trends and resulting decline of the public interest for conservation topics

After-LIFE Conservation Plan by project actions

The following categories were applied for priorities, costs, funding and responsible:

Column	Applied categories				
Priority (Degree of importance)	*** Must do (critical for success)	** Should do (increase scope and effectiveness)	* Could do (additional activity if funds available)	M Maintenance of the elaborated system	0 Implementation of action is not needed anymore
Costs (Approximate evaluation of the costs needed for the next 5 years)	€ < 5000 €	€€ 5 000 to 10 000 €	€€€ 10 000 to 50 000 €	€€€€ 50 000 to 100 000 €	€€€€€ > 100 000 €
Funding (Possible funding sources for the next 5 years)	PP Project partners	NGO Other NGOs	GO Other governmental organizations	EU Other EU funding	NI Funding not identified yet
Responsible (Main actors responsible – actual or foreseen)	PP Project partners	NGO Other NGOs	GO Other governmental organizations		

Code	Action / Task name	Priority	Costs	Funding	Responsible	Approach
A.1	Establish project team	0	na	na	na	na
A.2	Establish dog unit					
	Deployment of the detection dog in Slovakia in the Police Force of the Slovak Republic	***	€€	GO (The Police Force of the Slovak Republic)	PP/RPS	Deployment of the detection dog in the Police Force of the Slovak Republic based on the leasing agreement between RPS and the Police for the period 2023 -2027
	Maintenance of existing dog units	***	€€	GO, PP	PP / MME, KNPĐ, RPS, CSO	The dog units established in the frame of the project will be maintained at least until the dogs are not retired. Possibilities for creating the recruitment of retired dogs will be actively searched.
	Training of new detection dogs	**	€€	GO (Police SK, SNC SK)	GO, PP	Training of dog(s) for detecting poisonous chemical substances and/or carcasses. Possibilities for creating new dog units in the Pannonian region will be actively searched.
A.3	Establish stakeholder network					
	Keeping established database and networks for addressing the bird crime on national and Pannonian Region levels	***	€€	PP, GO, NGO	PP, GO, NGO	Deployment of the detection dog in the Police Force of the Slovak Republic based on the leasing agreement between RPS and the Police_SK for the period 2023 -2027
	Update existing national protocols	**	€	GP, PP	PP	The elaborated national field, veterinarian and police protocols will be evaluated and updated 5 years after the project finalization (2028).

A.4	Reaching adequate conservation status in the Czech Republic					
	Strictly protected status of imperial eagles in the Czech Republic	***	€	GO	MZP	Ministry of Environment of Czechia will work to reach the strictly protected conservation status of the Eastern Imperial Eagle in the after-life period.
C.1	Detect and investigate raptor persecution					
	Implementation of preventive bird crime surveys on regular basis and investigation of suspected cases of the bird crime according to the protocols developed within the PannonEagle LIFE project	***	€€€	PP, GO, NGO	PP, GO, NGO	PP will continue with regular preventive bird crime surveys, including with detection dogs, and will keep a close cooperation in this respect with GO, the Police and prosecutors in particular.
C.2	Compensate human-caused mortality					
	Maintenance of artificial nests and rescue station	**	€€	GO, PP	PP (KNPD, RPS, BPSSS)	Artificial nests will be checked and renovated in every 5 years after the project by KNPD (Hungary), BPSSS (Serbia) and RPS (Slovakia). Ratnovce Rescue Station will be maintained by RPS.
C.3	Habitat management					
	Maintenance of hare roads at Jászság SPA	**	€€	GO	PP (HNPD)	HNPD will carry out annual check of hare-roads and maintain habitat margins.
	Regular management of	***	€€€	PP (VSD)	PP (VSD)	VSD will be contracting land owners or service providers

	the habitats restored on 11 sites in the power lines corridors					to sustain 29 ha of habitats restored in the power lines corridors in Eastern Slovakia.
D.1	Monitoring					
	Monitoring and evaluation of the conservation status of the Imperial Eagle and the Saker Falcon	***	€€€	PP, EU	PP, GO	PP will continue regular population monitoring of the Imperial Eagle and the Saker Falcon and assessing its conservation status on regular basis in cooperation with concerned GO.
D.2	Socio-economic and ecosystem function impacts	0	na	na	na	na
E.1	Raising stakeholder awareness					
	Keeping a dialogue and cooperation with stakeholders perceiving raptors conflicting with their interests.	***	€€€	PP, EU	PP	PP will continue regular dialogue with stakeholders that have main impact on the conservation status of the Imperial Eagle and the Saker Falcon. MME Birdlife Hungary will attend annual meetings of the Environmental Crime Task Force.
E.2	Raising public awareness					
	Implementation of the awareness raising activities targeting the public and focused on the importance of conservation of the Imperial Eagle and the Saker Falcon and preventing the bird crime, online	***	€	PP	PP (MME, RPS)	Project website will be maintained (MME). News about the imperial eagle and after-life activities will be communicated via the Facebook site of the project (PP). Project movie The Eagle Odyssey will be repeatedly broadcasted on the national TV in Slovakia, based on the Agreement between RPS and the RTVS (premiere scheduled on 27/05/2023)

	and by other means.					
F.1	Project management	0	na	na	na	na
F.2	Complete the indicator tables	*	€	PP (MME)	PP (MME)	MME will update the indicator tables in consultation with other PPs, when it is required by the EU (presumably at 2028).