

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

Expedition/Project/ Conference Title:	Operation Wallacea, Transylvania
Travel Dates:	15 th July – 13 th August 2014
Location:	Transylvania, Romania. (Crit, Daia, Malancrav & Apold)
Group member(s):	Christopher Long
Aims:	Species diversity and thier interactions with agriculture and rural villages by annual biodiversity surveys of the region in order to Assess the effectiveness of maintaining the traditional farming practices in protecting the Natura 2000 region.

OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

The trip with Operation Wallacea collected data regarding; Butterflies, Botany, Farm composition and practices, Small mammals, Large mammals, Bats, Birds and Social attitude towards farming methods and their sustainability.

All of these areas gathered a great deal of valuable and important information that can be used to demonstrate the importance of the sustainable agricultural practices and the extremely high biodiversity it promotes. Examples of this are the camera traps used on the Large Mammal surveys which recorded videos of boar, pine and stone martins, bears, roe and red deer in abundance and many other species. The bat surveys also showed a wide diversity of species including grey long eared bats, lesser horse-shoe bats, ceratines, noctules and pipistrelles in number that would not be seen in the UK.

Not only will this data be used by Fundatia Adept, a local NGO (Non-governmental organisation) to help preserve traditional practices and the high nature value areas within the Natura 2000 region in Tarnava Mare, it will also be written up in a report by the leading scientist to further show the incredible and valuable diversity of the region.

The farm surveys collected information about the size of farms, the intensity at which they farm (mechanised milking, tractors e.c.t) and their experience and attitude to potential threats to livestock like bears or wolves. This last point reflected the general attitude of much of the rural population in the area; people are not afraid or bothered by the presence of bears or wolves in the region although some cattle or sheep are occasionally taken and killed, the animals in the region have just as much right to live as they do and farmers are prepared to live alongside large predators.

Butterfly and Botany surveys showed that areas designated as HNV (High Nature Value) had a large number of indicator species and a wide variety of plant and butterfly species, medium and low nature value areas were also established and used to gather data. The low nature value areas still proved to be very diverse in comparison to more industrialised areas such as the UK, where the LNV areas in Transylvania might be considered a HNV in a different (British) location.

Small mammal data gathering was done by traps with bait in overnight and collected five different species: Wood mice, Yellow-striped mice, shrews and two species of voles. The numbers of these small mammals were high, at some sites catching >20 out of 60 traps. The numbers of recaptures were too low to establish estimations of population sizes.

Bird point counts and bird mist-netting yielded a wide variety of different species, many of which are shared with the UK but are scarce or occasional visitors. For example, Blue tit

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numbers appear to be much higher than great tit population sizes in Transylvania, which is the converse in the UK.

The relationship between the Operation Wallacea volunteers and the locals of each villages was developed and improved with positive interaction such as playing football with local children some afternoons and generally being polite, friendly and enthusiastic to learn about their way of life and traditions.

On a personal level I gained a great appreciation of the value of the sustainable farming methods and how the rural populations manage the great wildlife rather than suppress it. I learnt many skills that can be used during university and in careers such as how to correctly collect measurements and data from small mammals and how to trap, remove them from the trap and hold them. I also learnt how to measure bird wing length, how to weigh them and how to hold them in the ringer's grip. I am able to identify numerous types of butterflies, plants and large mammals as well as large mammal tracks, scat and other signs. I was also taught about Species Accumulation Curves and learnt a great deal about the Roma, Saxon and other Romanian ethnic and cultural groups.