

Newsletter
September 2025

Mammal
Conservation
Europe

is a network of
organisations
working to the
increase our
knowledge and
improve the
conservation of the
European mammals

MAMMAL

CONSERVATION EUROPE

Protecting Europe's Mammals: Challenges and Progress

Dear Readers,

Welcome to third edition of the Mammal Conservation Europe newsletter. This month, we cover crucial developments in mammal species protection done by MCE members, habitat restoration, and key policy updates affecting Europe's mammals.

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Species conservation

New homes for bats in Eastern Europe

Back to the forest – holistic conservation of bat breeding habitats

In Central and Eastern Europe, some bat species listed in the Annexes of the EU Habitats Directive are threatened by deteriorating environmental conditions. The availability of roosts is decreasing, and the distances between roosts and feeding grounds are increasing. Fragmentation of the landscape and disappearance of tree and shrub lines, which create commuting routes, limit possibilities of safe movement.



Artificial lighting from street lamps and spotlights interferes with a safe flight from shelters, as well as adversely affects food availability. Additionally, human presence causes disturbance in underground sites such as caves, which bats use for both breeding and winter hibernation.

With the cross-border LIFE+ PODKOWIEC TOWERS project (LIFE20NAT/PL/001427) Poland, Slovakia, Romania and the Czech Republic are joining efforts to support the bat species occurring there. They will improve maternity and hibernation roosts and foraging areas, and will reduce conflicts between humans and bats in 18 Natura 2000 sites in four countries.

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The **Centre for Bat Research and Conservation (CBRC)** in Romania is nearing completion of its final major intervention at a key cave site in the Domogled – Valea Cernei National Park.

What's been done in Romania?

- Conservation measures implemented at **10 important bat roosts** (9 caves, 1 mine) in **two major protected areas** in south-western Romania.
- These sites support large breeding colonies of **Annex II bat species**, listed in the EU's Habitats Directive.

Key interventions included:

- Bat-friendly cave closures to prevent human disturbance
- Structural consolidation of a vulnerable mine entrance
- Riverbed deepening to prevent flooding or predator access
- Blocking sensitive cave access points
- Waste removal to restore clean subterranean environments
- Installation of **information and warning boards** at every site to raise local awareness

This project stands as a model for **science-based, hands-on conservation** in challenging karst ecosystems. CBRC's work reinforces the need for international collaboration and site-specific solutions.

Read more about this and other CBRC projects: www.batconservation.ro/projects

Translocations of threatened species of Blind Mole Rats in Hungary

Challenges and opportunities in the translocation of grassland-dwelling subterranean mammals: the case of blind mole rats

The Vojvodina Blind mole-rat (Nannospalax montanosyrmienensis) captured at a newly discovered site. Photo: Dušan Jelić.



Grasslands have been transformed into anthropogenic habitats worldwide and consequently have lost many species, including their ecosystem engineer species. European blind mole rats (Rodentia: Spalacidae) are an important biological component of grassland ecosystems, as their digging creates mounds of bare soil surfaces available for plant colonisation, they maintain soil structure and provide a subterranean niche for other animals. Blind mole rats have long been persecuted, and many species are threatened by extinction as they only exist in a few small and isolated populations. The translocation of individuals for reintroduction or establishment of new populations is a promising tool for the conservation of rare and endangered species. As data regarding the translocation of blind mole rats or other strictly subterranean mammals has not yet been published, here we discuss the proposed methods and evaluate the results of seven translocation projects in Hungary between 2013 and 2024. We found that these projects varied greatly in their efficacy, and that habitat quality, the number and sex ratio of translocated animals, as well as survival during the first winter, were the decisive factors for success and failure. Translocations require the strict application of a detailed protocol, which covers the thorough assessment of the soil and vegetation quality of the target habitats, careful selection of source populations and individuals, timing of the capture and release, and the regular monitoring of translocation success. We developed recommendations for future translocation projects of subterranean mammals, a guild which is present in all open grassland ecosystems and is often threatened globally, and will apply these principals when rescuing the newly discovered blind mole-rat populations in Croatia reported in the last newsletter

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The return of the Mediterranean Monk Seal in the Adriatic

Protecting the Mediterranean Monk Seal (Monachus monachus)

The Mediterranean monk seal is one of the most endangered marine mammals in the world, with fewer than 1,000 individuals left. Once found throughout the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, and parts of the Atlantic Ocean, today the monk seal is mainly seen in Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Madeira (Portugal), and Cabo Blanco (Mauritania). In recent years, there have also been sightings in Albania, Montenegro, Croatia, and southern Italy, offering hope for their return. Today, they mostly hide in caves, but some are starting to return to quiet, safe beaches. Unfortunately, they face many threats as overfishing, accidental capture in fishing gear, illegal fishing methods like using explosives, pollution, loss of natural habitats due to construction, and disturbances from boats and tourists.

Mother Mediterranean Monk Seal (Monachus monachus) with pup. During the nursing period of about six to seven weeks, the mother typically does not eat.

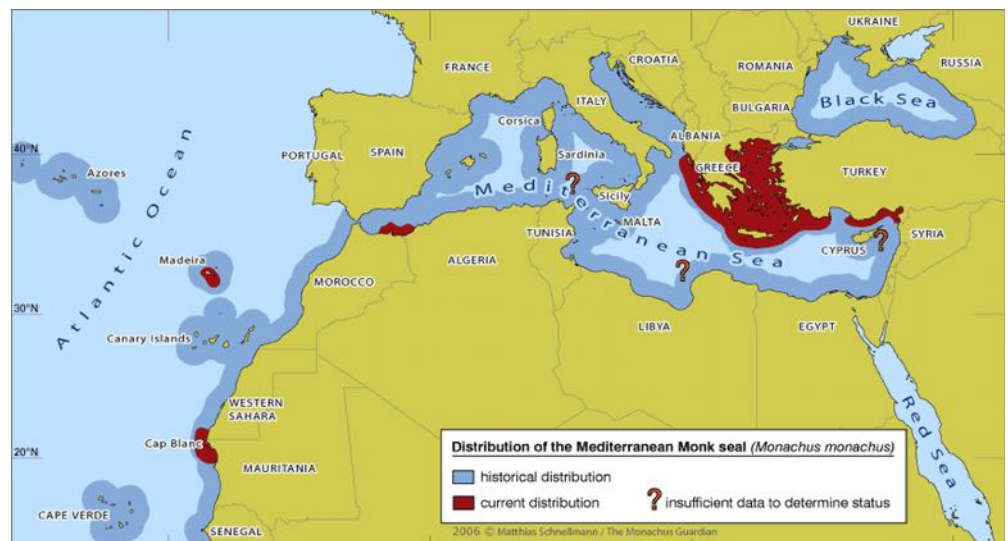
Photo: A. Karamanlidis, MOM



PPNEA (Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania), in collaboration with regional partners including Flag Pine, CZIP, BIOM, MedCem, and Italian Archipelagos, is implementing Phase II of the Adriatic Monk Seal Transboundary Project, under the coordination of the EuroNatur Foundation.

The goal of the current project is to protect the habitats where monk seals live, to monitor their population, to reduce threats caused by human activities, also to build capacities of local and regional organizations, enhancing knowledge of seal presence and distribution, raise awareness among local communities to protect these animals and their environment.

Current distribution of the Mediterranean Monk Seal



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For the first time in the world

Restocking of Doubruja / Roumanian golden hamsters in Bulgaria

In a historic conservation effort, **Doubruja hamsters** (*Mesocricetus newtoni*) have been [successfully reintroduced into the wild in Bulgaria](#) for the first time. Once thought to be nearly extinct in the region, this restocking project marks a crucial step toward restoring the species' presence in its native grasslands. The release is part of a broader effort to recover declining farmland biodiversity across Eastern Europe.

*Doubruja / Roumanian golden hamster
(Mesocricetus newtoni) Photo: Bram Conings*



At the beginning of June 2025, a team from IBER-BAS, led by Assoc. Prof. Yordan Koshev and Yassen Gensuzov, released the first 12 young hamsters into the wild near the village of Sveshtari, Bulgaria, where the last recorded presence of the species was over 40 years ago.

After specially preparing the release site – including creating artificial burrows, placing cages to protect against predators whilst the animals habituated to their new environment, and supplementary feeding with vegetables and grains - the young animals were released into freedom.



Assoc. Prof. Yordan Koshev and Yassen Gensuzov placing the hamsters in the prepared burrows, together with the farmer in whose land these were released. Photo: Svetlana Miteva

Policy

We are celebrating the passage of the **EU Nature Restoration Law**, which requires member states to begin restoring **at least 20% of degraded ecosystems** by 2030, including forests, wetlands, and key mammal habitats.

This legal breakthrough is a turning point for mammal species that depend on healthy landscapes to thrive.

The next step: ensuring that member states translate commitments into effective local action.

Read more on [EU Nature Restoration Law](#)

Upcoming

European Mammal Atlas

The *Atlas of European Mammals* is currently with the publisher (Taylor & Francis/CRC Press) and it is expected to be ready in the autumn of this year. It will contain distribution information on 245 species of mammals. The data analyses show that the most widely distributed species in Europe is the Red fox, which has been recorded from almost every atlas cell. This is closely followed by the Roe deer, Badger, Otter and Red squirrel. The species with the most limited occurrence are the Egyptian fruit bat and Tristram's jird, which each occur in only one cell. Read more on the site of the [European Mammal Foundation](#)

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Get involved

Mammal Field Study Camp of the Dutch Mammal Society

The Field Study Group, part of the Dutch Mammal Society, organises every year a Summer Mammal Study Camp somewhere in Europe.

This year it was in Shebjenik, Albania. [Get into the mood of mammal research.](#) Follow [this link](#) to check and take part in the next Mammal Study Camp.

Join Mammal Conservation Europe

Mammal Conservation Europe has the bold goal of uniting efforts, knowledge and resources to achieve thriving native mammal populations across the continent.

Although mammals are very diverse, many share similar threats, such as habitat destruction, pollution, and conflicts with humans and/or invasive species. By acting together, we will provide robust evidence, be in a better position to apply for substantive funding, and act as effective advocates for a sustainable future for Europe's mammals.

MCE includes organisations from UK, The Netherlands, Italy, Albania, Spain, Germany, Hungary, Greece, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland, Romania, and Portugal, together with organisations that work across national borders.

Join us to:

- Support conservation organizations through donations or volunteering.
- Advocate for science-based policies in wildlife management.
- Promote coexistence strategies in your community to reduce human-wildlife conflicts.

In addition, individuals and organisations can support our work by [making a donation](#).

The [MCE website](#) is currently in update. Soon to be ready. Apologies for the inconvenience.

Sent us an email if you like to join Mammal conservation Europe on: mammalseu@gmail.com , or info@mammals.eu, or secretary@mammals.eu

We will be happy to have you in the family of Mammal Conservation Europe.



Fiona Mathews presenting Mammal Conservation Europe at the European congress of Mammalogy 2025 in Patras, Greece.