



NEW VISITOR CENTRE

With financial support from Horizon Foundation, our restoration team from Malancrav built an innovative log cabin with a green roof, to serve as information centre for visitors and shelter for the guards. The cabin has a floor area of 50 sqm, two rooms, a compost toilet, and an open terrace. Water for the toilet & basin is collected from rainfall. The whole structure is built entirely with natural materials – stone, wood and clay – using traditional masonry and joinery techniques. Information boards for visitors will be displayed in the open terrace area.

AWARD

The initiative to restore the wetlands of the Breite reserve, supported by Manfred Hermsen Stiftung from Germany, won first prize in the “Protection of the Environment” category of the Romanian Civil Society Gala 2008. The project was part of the Breite management plan under the joint custody of the MET and the Sighisoara Local Council. The jury of the competition noted the fact that this habitat management intervention was accompanied by educational activities with pupils from Sighisoara. The first results of the intervention are already visible. For a full report please see the nature section of the Breite reserve website, www.breite.ro

EDUCATION



Ecological education activities with more than 100 school children from Sighisoara continued under the supervision of Tibi Hartel.

MANAGEMENT

❖ Our team of local biologists led by project manager Cosmin Ioan Moga implemented a number of conservation measures on the Breite plateau, stipulated in our five-year management plan.



❖ Taking into account the traditional character of the Breite plateau, controlled cattle grazing with small herds was introduced experimentally in zone A (the northern side). The plant diversity in this area is reduced, making it suitable for grazing. Initial observations reveal that the cattle grazed selectively leaving the clumps of *Deschampsia coespitosa* (invasive weed) untouched and favouring fresh grasses. Moreover, a slight expansion of weeds (nitrophile species) was recorded in the grazed areas probably because of cow manure. To obtain scientifically viable results, grazing needs to continue in larger herds (50-100 cattle) on the same areas, and its effects must be continuously monitored.

❖ This autumn we started the experimental scything of certain areas of high biodiversity value grasslands on the plateau, a measure which will help us improve the conservation situation of plant species of special interest such as the Marsh Gentian



(*Gentiana pneumonanthe*) and the Great Burnet (*Sanguisorba officinalis*). Both species are threatened locally by the expansion of the Tufted Hair Grass (*Deschampsia coespitosa*), caused by the desiccation of the plateau as a result of the artificial drainage ditches dug in the 1970s. After the target flowers dropped their seeds, our local workers cut the grass in 4m wide and 200m long strips, leaving 4m wide un-scythed strips in between as control plots. This alternation will allow us to monitor and evaluate the success of this management intervention in the future.

INFORMATION BOARD

A notice board was placed on the plateau, containing a map and a summary of the most important Protection Rules of the reserve. This way we hope visitors will be more aware of the valuable status of this protected area and ensure their impact on the habitat and its biodiversity is minimum. The strictly protected areas at the southern end of the plateau are now clearly marked.

RESEARCH

❖ A group of teachers from the Alexandru Papiu Ilarian National College of Targu Mures, coordinated by Dr. Petru Istrate, proposed a research project on “Ancient trees and their saproxylic fauna in the Transylvanian deciduous forests - Romania”, with funding from the People’s Trust for Endangered Species UK. From their point of view, the Breite plateau near Sighisoara is an area of remarkable interest: the centuries-old hollow trees shelter a diverse fauna of saproxylic coleopters, with many rare species living in the decaying wood that have not yet been studied in Romania. The discovery of these bio-indicative species confirms the Breite’s value as a natural ecosystem with low human impact levels. The project runs until December 2008.



❖ In October, two students from Germany accompanied by forestry expert Rainer Barthel studied the condition of the forest-meadow ecotone of the Breite reserve, as part of a research programme funded by NABU – Naturschutzbund Deutschland. The study’s results will help us understand the factors that cause excessive hornbeam growth in certain areas as well as those that lead to a low or high viability of naturally seeded oak saplings. The German researchers donated a bat detector to the MET's conservation and ecological education team.



PROTECTION

In May a third guard was hired, ensuring that the reserve is permanently protected. We obtained a £5000 grant to organise a training course for our rangers and improve visitor management.

PROMOTING BREITE AS A DESTINATION FOR ECO-TOURISM

In April the MET launched the Saxon Greenway project, with financial support from the Foundation for Partnership and Vodafone. Its goal is to promote sustainable tourism by including Sighisoara, the Breite reserve and the Saxon villages in the European Greenways network, which encourages non-motorised tourist trails. The project was launched with a thematic trip for Sighisoara pupils along the first section of the proposed route, including a walk through the medieval citadel and nature orientation exercises on the Breite plateau.

