

Wilderness in the heart of Tatra Mountains, Slovakia, Europe

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Speaker introduction: Vlado Vancura



Graduate in Forest and Natural Resources Management at University in Zvolen, Slovakia.

30 years of Nature - and Wilderness related experience in many different countries. Among others: US National Park Service, Parks Canada and Manager in Tatra National Park in Slovakia.

Now: vice-chairman of the European Wilderness Society, based in Slovakia. As a Wilderness expert, he plays a crucial role in designating Wilderness in Europe.



Wilderness in Europe



- Wilderness in Europe
- Wilderness in Carpathian Mountains
- Wilderness in Slovakia
- Wilderness in Tatra Mountains
- Sucha Valley Wilderness



Wilderness in Europe



In Europe, due to history and human impact only small fragments of Wilderness survived

Wilderness in Europe has a long tradition in Europe...

...however, the word “Wilderness” has not always been used



Wilderness in Europe



Since humans occupied Europe the Wilderness has dramatically decreased

... it survived only in remote corners such as mountains, remote rivers or inaccessible land

...therefore, Wilderness restoration has become a particularly important and attractive issue



Wilderness in Europe



Let's visit some well protected areas in Europe...

.... withspontaneous Wilderness self-restoration processes.

First we will focus on the Carpathian mountains!



Wilderness in Carpathian Mountains



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Wilderness in Carpathian Mountains



The Carpathian Mountains are a mountain range forming an arc stretching throughout **Central and Eastern Europe**

Roughly **1 500 km** long, it is the third-longest European mountain range



Wilderness in Carpathian Mountains



It stretches over **seven countries...**

... Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia

Large fragments of wild and less developed land survived to the present days because of its remoteness and less intensive economical development



Wilderness in Carpathian Mountains



The Carpathians provide habitat for the largest European populations of:

- Herbivores: roe and red deer, chamois, etc.
- Carnivores: brown bears, wolves and lynxes



Wilderness in Carpathian Mountains



Wilderness has been protected on purpose for more than 100 years (as a refuge or as a example of wild land)

Thanks to this, large fragments of Wilderness can be found in many corners of these mountains...



Wilderness in Carpathian Mountains



... the famous large Wilderness in Romania is located in the **Retezat National Park**

It is remote, difficult to access, wild terrain with minimum infrastructure, such as trails, gravel roads or simple tourist shelters for visitors



Wilderness in Carpathian Mountains



Already internationally recognized is the Wilderness in the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve, **Gorgany Reserve or Synevyr National Nature Park**, Ukraine.



Wilderness in Carpathian Mountains



Fragments of Wilderness, fitting to the European Wilderness Quality Standard

...are also scattered in Poland or Czech Republic



Wilderness in Slovakia



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Wilderness in Slovakia



“We must keep at least 5% of Slovakia without human intervention...”, is a slogan in the country for several years now

The objective of this process is to protect the last fragments of Wilderness in Slovakia. A significant part of this territory is located in Carpathian Mountains.



Wilderness in Slovakia



The **largest piece** of Wilderness in Central Europe can be found in Slovakian part of Carpathians, in **Tatra National Park**

Ticha (Silent) and Koprova Valley (ca 8 000 ha) have been protected since the Second World War

Bears, lynx and wolves live there amongst other endangered species of fauna and flora



Wilderness in Slovakia



Attractive fragments of Wilderness can also be found in the Low Tatra National Park

The size of proposed Skalka Wilderness is ca. 2 500 ha, with the potential to expand another 300 ha

The proposal aims to protect a rare fragment of wild nature with many **spontaneous rewilding processes**.



Wilderness in Slovakia

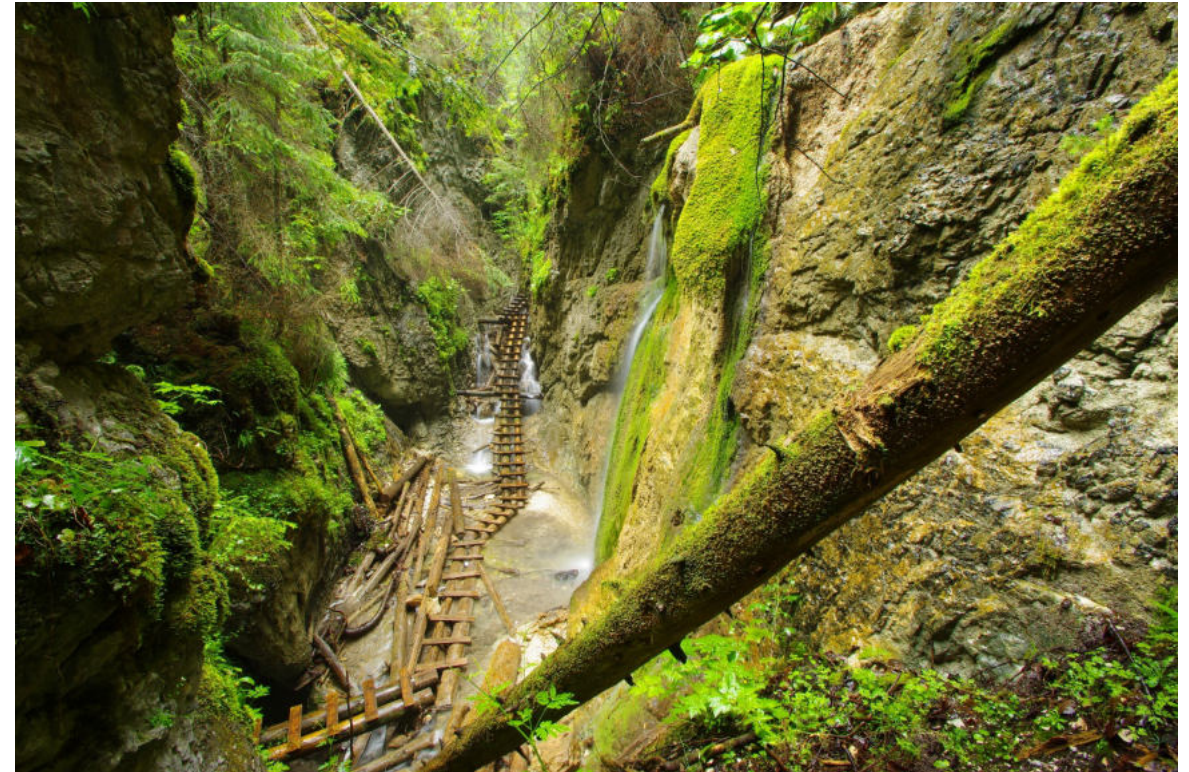


Slovak Paradise National Park is situated in the middle of Slovakia and protects a unique network of canyons and gorges carved in the limestone plateau

Challenge: complex mandate structure

New management plan and park zoning, in coordination with requirements of the local stakeholders and land owners, to effectively protect its:

- Rich biodiversity
- Rare karst phenomena
- Remnants of Wilderness



Wilderness in Slovakia



Besides large fragments of Wilderness, Slovakia still has a number of smaller areas with potential Wilderness...

...where spontaneous natural processes are already occurring for several decades



Wilderness in Tatra Mountains



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Wilderness in Tatra Mountains



This protected area consists of several very important Wilderness areas

Besides Ticha (Silent) and Koprova Valley, other places with active Wilderness management can be found

The big wind storm ca. 20 years ago triggered the awareness that Wilderness is a fundamental part of this park



Wilderness in Tatra Mountains



Public protests stopped loggers that were prepared to invade these strictly protected areas to clean several thousands hectares of forest impacted by strong wind and bark beetles



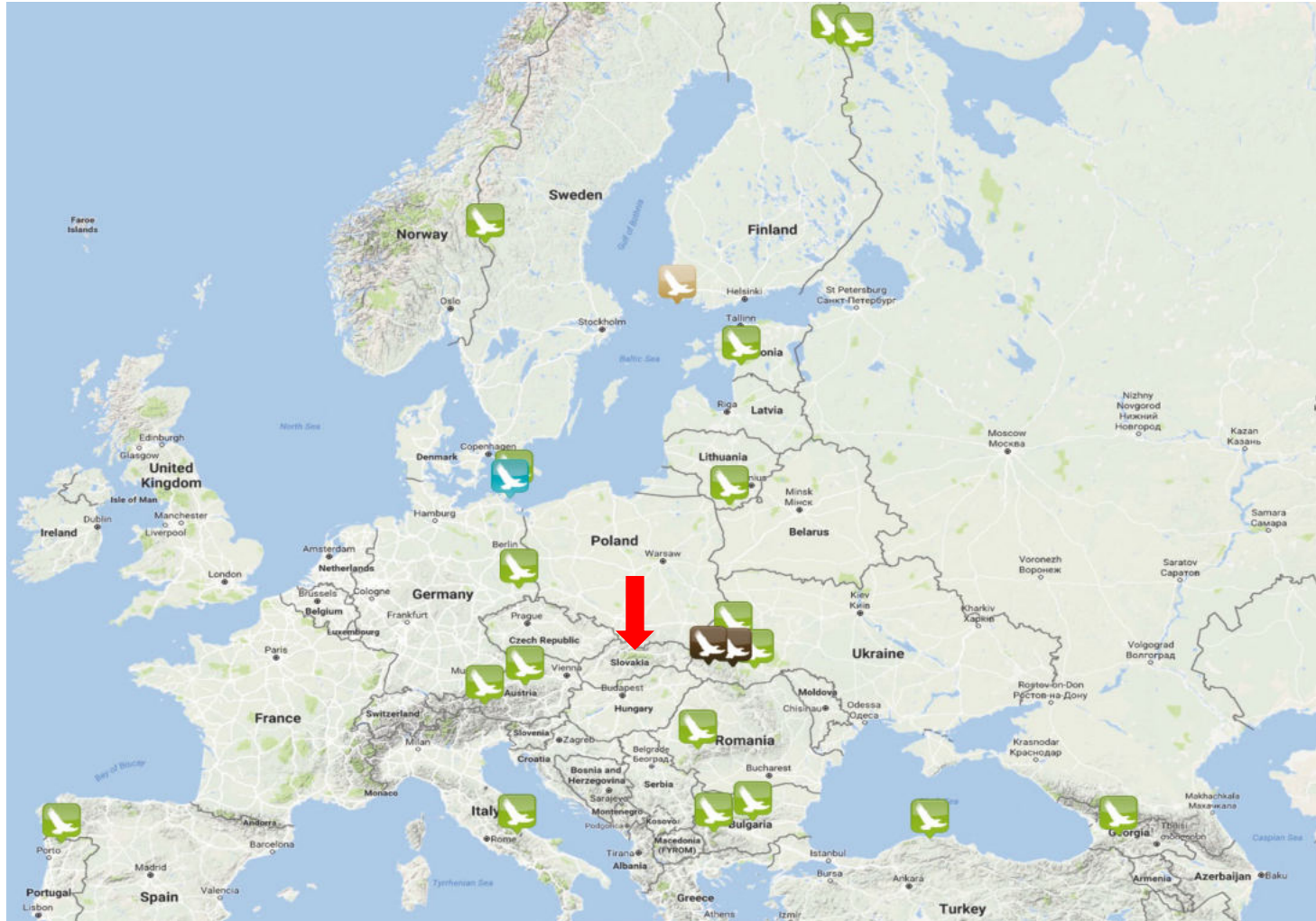
Sucha Valley Wilderness



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Sucha Valley Wilderness



Sucha Valley Wilderness



Sucha Valley Wilderness is located in the western corner of the Tatra National Park

The area is strictly protected since 1993

Ca. 1 600 ha of mostly undisturbed land with a rich diversity of species typical for the Carpathian flora and fauna

This area provides an excellent example of **spontaneous rewilding**



Sucha Valley Wilderness



Sucha Valley Wilderness

- Is located in the limestone part of Tatra NP with many karstic features
- Most famous: the Bear Cave with signs of bear occupation
- Densely and diversely forested
- Higher elevations: spruce mountain ash and dwarf pine predominate
- Lower elevations: mixed stands with beeches, firs, maples, birches and lindens.
- Rare yews (*Taxus baccata*) reaching an age of over 500 years



Sucha Valley Wilderness



The quiet and uninhabited area is home to bears, lynx, wolves and other game

It is possible to hear rare birds like the capercaillie or the hooting of long-tailed owl



Sucha Valley Wilderness



Wilderness is accessible only along the northern and eastern boundary using official public tourist trails...

...but there are no tourist trails that lead into the Wilderness



Sucha Valley Wilderness



History

- For centuries, the whole territory of Wilderness has been owned by local landowner associations
- Owners strongly influenced the vast majority of Wilderness forests by grazing and logging
- Fragments of the mixed forests with a natural species structure and composition have been preserved only in the remote corners



Sucha Valley Wilderness



- Due to intensive logging and grazing in the past most stands lack old-growth forest and trees
- Amount of dead wood significantly increased only in the last decades



Sucha Valley Wilderness



Threat of extractive use:

- 20 years ago (7 years after Wilderness was declared), sanitary logging was proposed despite of strict legal conservation
- 160 ha of Wilderness forest became threatened
- The logging in Wilderness was prevented only thanks to the agreement achieved between landowners and a local NGO



Sucha Valley Wilderness



- The NGO leased threatened land (ca. 160 ha) for 40 years and payed ca. 120.000€ during 5 following years
- This deal satisfied requirements of the landowners...
- ... and logging did not happen in this unique area



Sucha Valley Wilderness



Thanks to this effort of a local NGO:

- Today the entire territory is subject to strict protection
- Dead and fallen trees are left to natural development without human intervention



Sucha Valley Wilderness



Enlargement of Sucha Valley Wilderness

There is great potential for enlargement of this Wilderness...

- The whole nearby Bobrovecka Valley, on the east side, ca. 2 000 ha of additional land
- It is owned by 3 landowners association



Sucha Valley Wilderness



- An old forest road at the bottom of Bobrovecka Valley was flashed out by a flood ca. 45 years ago
- Since then, no mechanical vehicles such as cars, tractors or motorcycles passed the valley
- Land spontaneously re-wilded and is only accessible for hikers today
- **Very promising!**



More Information



More information on...

- European Wilderness news
<https://wilderness-society.org/>
- European Wilderness Network
<https://european-wilderness.network>
- Wilderness Trainings and Wilderness Academy
<https://wilderness.academy/>
- Youth education
<https://lets-get-wild.org/>
- Livestock protection
<https://herdenschutz.info/>
<https://livestockprotect.info>
- European Wilderness Society Volunteering
<https://wilderness-diary.info/>

