

## Project Update: October 2005

### Monitoring

The team observes monthly souslik's model colonies. We try to estimate the habitat preferences, human impact and predator-prey interactions. The team have registered the following birds of prey: Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) – 10 individuals, including 4 breeding pairs, Long-legged buzzard (*B. rufinus*) – 2 breeding pairs, Lesser Spotted Eagle (*Aquila pomarina*) – 2 individuals, Sparrow hawks (*Accipiter nisus*), Kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*) and Short-toed eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*). The predator mammals in model colonies are represented by Pine martens (*Matres martes*), Stone martens (*Martes foina*), Western polecats (*Mustela putorius*), Red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*), Golden jackals (*Canis aureus*) and Domestic dogs (*Canis familiaris*).

#### •Survey

The team experts analysed the predator's pellets and scats. The greatest part of the diet included small mammals especially the European souslik. In the spring when the food resources are scarce, the predators feed mainly young sousliks, which appear all together in May and become an easy prey.

#### •Natural calamity

During the period 4 – 6 August 2005 in the region of rivers Topolnitsa and Luda Yana there were such pelting rainfalls as were never observed before. Several dam lakes and rivers overflowed and many souslik colonies were flooded, including some of our model colonies. The floods are considered to be one of the main causes for European souslik's mortality.

#### •Poster publishing

In July the team prepared and published a poster dedicated to the conservation of both the European souslik and the predators feeding on it. One of the main aims of this poster was to explain the principal factors threatening the sousliks in the region and to present to the children this animal and the predators connected with it.

#### •Coming activities

Some souslik colonies situated in the studied area are expected to be included in the European network of protected areas NATURA 2000. Public lectures representing the project activities and explaining the main factors that threaten the souslik will be carried out.

