

Restitution of the European ground squirrel (*Spermophilus citellus*) in the Slovak Republic

Department of Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Constantine the Philosopher University, Tr. A. Hlinku 1, SK-949 74 Nitra, Slovakia, e-mail: ibalaz@ukf.sk

State Nature Protection SR, Ponitrie Protected Landscape Area Administration, Samova 3, SK-949 01 Nitra, Slovakia, e-mail: ambros@soprs.sk

Ivan Baláž, Michal Ambros

Our report brings the data about the new populations of the European ground squirrel (*Spermophilus citellus*) created on restitution localities in western and eastern Slovakia. The aim of the restitution is to form stable and reproductive populations of ground squirrel.

Caught individuals of the European ground squirrel for restitution come from the M. R. Štefánik Airport in Bratislava and from the Košice Airport or from localities where the sanitation of the animals was needed.

The high population density of ground squirrel at the airports is the result of food plenitude, absence of noticeable antropic influence, regular grass mowing and no chemical treatment, ample space for young population settlement before hibernation, and the regulation of predator pressure.

Individuals of ground squirrel are caught in snares and into live traps. The stake with a snare and live traps are close to used burrow.

In connection with the graduated decrease of natural ground squirrel localities we carry out the preservation scheme – restitution. Current ambition of the State Nature Protection SR is to reconstitute the European ground squirrel to original localities of its occurrence.

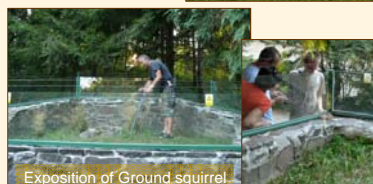
1. First transfer of ground squirrels in Slovakia was carried out in 1992–1993 from the locality Grajciar to three localities with existing ground squirrel settlement in the Košická Kotlina basin.
2. Restitution of *Spermophilus citellus* to the locality Breziny in Tribeč Mountains in 2003 and 2006 is unsuccessful till present days. The reasons are saturation with low number of individuals and vague monitoring of launched animals (47 individuals).
3. In the same way the restitution of ground squirrel on the locality Jakub in Nízke Tatry Mountains was unsuccessful in 2005 and 2006 (74 launched animals) due to the lack of locality preparation and territory management.
4. The successful restitution of ground squirrel carried out during the period of 2000-2007 to the locality Biele Vody in Muránska Planina Mountains, where 773 individuals were set free and there is stable and reproductive population of ground squirrel at present.
5. The restitution of ground squirrel was pursued on the localities in Slovenský Kras Mountains in existing colonies in order to vitalize their populations.
5. The successful restitution of ground squirrel is recorded on the locality Kuchyňa in Malé Karpaty (Borská Nížina lowland), where 520 individuals were set free during years 2004–2007, creating the stable population nowadays.

Captive breeding of *Spermophilus citellus* in ZOO Bojnice



Ground squirrel nursery

The captive breeding of *Spermophilus citellus* in ZOO Bojnice in 2007 was established. The base of population is formed by 15 individuals. In spring 2008 was observed the successful reproduction. Exposition of ground squirrel was created in summer 2008 from 3 individuals.



Exposition of Ground squirrel

Till present days there is the successful ground squirrel restitution on two localities in Slovakia (Kuchyňa and Biele Vody). Fundamental prerequisites of successful restitution are setting free of a high number of individuals (about 500) during several continuing years (average 5 years) in an adequate habitat and continual monitoring and protection of ground squirrel population.



Foto: Igor Chavko



LIFE-Nature in Slovakia

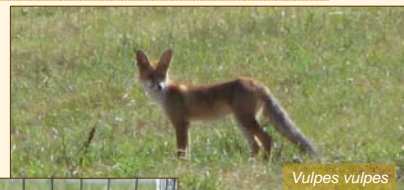


Foto: Tomáš Hlaváček

Conservation of *Aquila heliaca* in the Carpathian basin - (LIFE03 NAT/SK/000098)
Conservation of Saker (*Falco cherrug*) in the Carpathian Basin (LIFE06 NAT/HU/000096)

The ground squirrel (*Spermophilus citellus*) is the eagle's and saker's main prey. The ground squirrel is to be re-introduced to selected areas to improve living conditions for the raptors.

Predators of ground squirrel



Vulpes vulpes



Mustela nivalis



Mustela eversmanni



Mustela putorius