

Romania's Forests Under threat

Update briefing #1 April 2021

Say my name: Bârnova-Repedea

The name Bârnova-Repedea may not be familiar to you, but hopefully, from now on, it will be...

Back in 2016, the word Białowieża became a household name to nature lovers all over Europe. Protests by Polish environmentalists, scientists and civil society against the planned logging in Białowieża's precious lowland old-growth forests spread quickly across the entire country. Poland was wrapped over the knuckles by the World Heritage Committee at its meeting in July 2017 and then the Polish government was thrust into the political spotlight when the European Court of Justice found the logging to be illegal and ordered it to be stopped. Now, Białowieża will never be forgotten as one of those places that is simply too precious to lose.

Six hundred kilometres to the south of Białowieża, in the far east of Romania, lies another forest that is also difficult to pronounce. It's tricky to get your tongue around, but it, too, should be known to us all:

Bârnova-Repedea. Repeat. Bârnova-Repedea.

The forests of Bârnova-Repedea on the Moldovan Central Plateau in eastern Romania are a precious component of Europe's natural crown jewels: our last ancient forests. Listed in both the Birds and Habitats Directives (the flagship nature protection regime of the EU), the forests of Bârnova-Repedea are a precious intact, island sanctuary in the otherwise highly modified and fragmented landscape of eastern Romania. Here, extensive stands of ancient beech and oak forests are found, important sensitive and fragile natural habits endure and a vast number of protected European plant and animal species including some that are endangered, rare and vulnerable, find their home. In a highly modified landscape, the forests of Bârnova-Repedea are critical in providing clean air and water to local communities. Protecting such intact forests is also non-negotiable in our shared challenge of avoiding the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

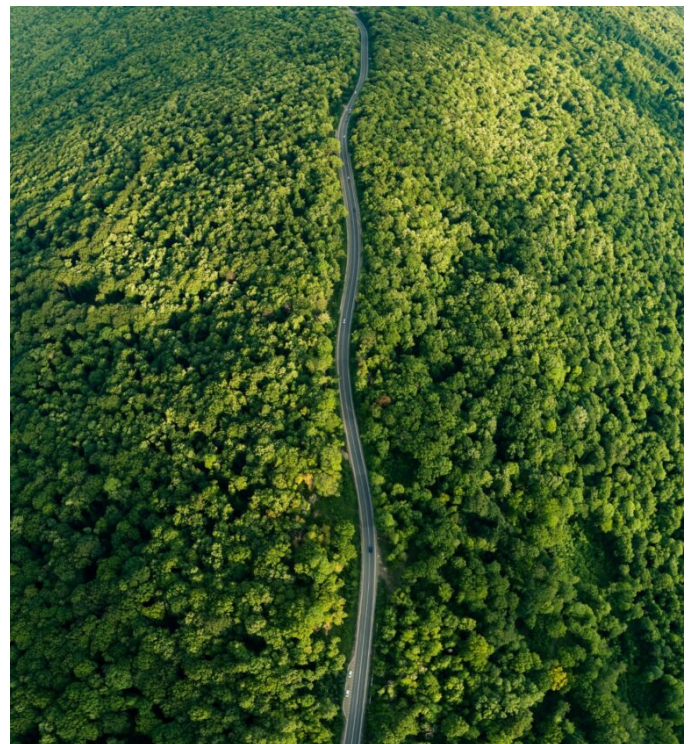
Sadly, none of this matters to the current Romanian government. The forests of Bârnova-Repedea are under siege.

Despite its clear value as a supposedly protected forest landscape, only 1% of the forest is actually off limits to logging. The remaining forests are on the chopping block.

The Romanian government's forestry administration, Romsilva, has authorised the logging and destruction of these forests to produce approximately 750,000 cubic metres of wood over the coming 10 years. Logging has recently accelerated in the area and at least 4 new logging roads have started to be cut through the area's ancient forests. This is happening despite the legality of the logging being challenged in Romania's courts by environmental organisations.

A few of those pesky technical details:

- The site is home to not less than 116 of birds, including species that are of rare, vulnerable or endangered.



Above: Think forests like this don't exist in Europe? Bârnova-Repedea is home to ancient forests but it is under siege from logging. Photos: Vali Turcuman



The forests of Bârnova-Repedea continue to be lost despite the peaceful protests from locals that began last year, triggered by active logging operations.

In September 2020, the citizens of Iasi had had enough. With the help of Agent Green and seven other local NGOs, 200 locals – young families with their small children, grandparents, joggers, photographers, scientists, biologists, shop keepers – came together in the forests to say enough is enough. In single file, they walked as one to the heart of the forest. They stopped when they came to the killing site – a recently clear-cut site of scarred earth – and some of them were brought to tears.

- Despite 13 years having passed since the area was listed under the Birds Directive (site ROSPA90092), the site does not yet have a management plan or a set of minimum conservation measures or objectives. Hence, the needs of these special bird species have not been taken into consideration whilst logging takes place. Forest management plans allowing logging have thus been implemented without regard for environmental assessments required by law.
- Despite the legal requirement under the Habitats Directive for the site to be designated a Special Area of Conservation within 6 years of its original listing in 2007 (site ROSCI0135), this has not yet happened. As such the European Commission opened another infringement against Romania in July 2020: "Romania has so far not designated Special Areas of Conservation and, it has generally and persistently failed to set site-specific detailed conservation objectives and measures."
- In addition to supposed protection as a Natura 2000 site, Romanian authorities provided further protection to the forests under national law when they declared the area a site of community importance back in 2007. Apparently, this has been conveniently forgotten by current Romanian authorities.

They were furious. A lone voice could spontaneously be heard: "Protect the forest! Do not cut it!". The single call became infectious. "PROTECT THE FOREST! DO NOT CUT IT". Others joined in and the call became a chant. The chant became a deafening scream and the peaceful forest protectors could be heard from afar. The people had spoken. It is time the Romanian government does what a government deserving of its role should do: Listen to its people.

Above: Logging in Bârnova-Repedea forest

Below: Local protest demanding protection of Bârnova-Repedea forests, Sept, 2020. Photos: Agent Green



For more information:

www.euronatur.org

www.agentgreen.ro

www.saveparadiseforests.eu



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