



Research Paper

Biodiversity and Anthropogenic Impact in Dobrogea, Romania - Case Study: Conacu – Negrești Valley

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Abstract: Conacu-Negrești Valley is located in the center of Cobadin Plateau, subunit of Negru Vodă Plateau, South Dobrogea, Romania. Its landscape consists predominantly of Cretaceous and Sarmatian limestone, placed on a Precambrian background and covered by a thick blanket of 40 m of Quaternary loess. The valley is characterized by an extremely rich and diverse biodiversity with many rare and endemic species of wildlife Dobrogea and Romania, too. But, it is seriously threatened by the human factors. The paper is intended to be an overview of valley biodiversity, highlighting the serious problems due to the anthropogenic factor, too. The data represent the results of the research activities developed within the framework of our scientific and educational program on the Conacu- Negrești Valley from 2002 until now.

Keywords: Plants and animals diversity, Rare and endemic species, Conservation

status, Anthropogenic threats, Conacu-Negrești Valley, Dobrogea - Romania

INTRODUCTION

Conacu-Negrești Valley is defined by geographical coordinates: parallel 44°23' N and by the meridian of 28°29' E. This explains position in the world in temperate climate zone. It is located in the extreme south-eastern of the Romania, thus justifying excessive continental climate characteristics with environmental influences in all components.

The region studied has an old Proterozoic foundation, composed of crystalline and one sedimentary supra-structure, which is characterized by the existence of two types of Paleozoic-Mesozoic and Neozoic formations (Al-Azki, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2010-2011a, b).

According to Iana (1970), in terms of landscape, the valley is in the form of keys with limestone walls with limestone to date,

between them forming Conacu-Negrești Lake, canyons, ravines, xerophyte steppe grasslands, grassy hills and bushes (Brezeanu, 1997; Coteț, 1969).

The lake is of recent geological time, being formed by natural damming. Through the 60 years due to catastrophic flooding after heavy rains, water from Plopeni Lake located in the south and at an altitude higher than Conacu-Negrești Valley, poured over it, flooding it. Limestone structure of the valley, alluvium deposited after the flood, the ground water from groundwater sources in the valley, rainwater falling in the area led to the formation and maintenance of the lake today (Basarabeanu, 1969; Gâțescu and Breier, 1969; Godeanu, 2002).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

By 2003, the valley was known only geographically. In 2003, we started a comprehensive long-term program of scientific research and educational activities of the valley. Since then and until now, we carry on scientific research of the valley – in geological, paleontological, biodiversity terms, and of conservation of its geobiodiversity.

In terms of biodiversity and its conservation research, have established different observation, identification and sampling stations both the water basin and the valley.

10 stations were established at different points in the lake, taken differently depending on the nature of the substrate, lake depth, the existence of marsh, aquatic vegetation. From these stations were taken monthly samples. All samples were taken from the coastal area of the lake.

On the land, were established 12 stations depending on the type of existing habitat in the valley: limestone walls with rocks to date, grassy hills, canyons, plateaus, ravines, debris walls, limestone walls with fossil mollusks.

For species identification, it was widely used field observations and photographs made monthly by the team, along with field trips. Some species of plants required the collection and subsequent determination based on herbarium prepared. Subsequently, all samples have been transported, stored and examined / studied in our laboratories.

The nomenclature of taxa and data processing is according to data from literature as well as national and international legislation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The biodiversity of Conacu-Negrești Valley.

Dobrogea is distinguished by its special features from the rest of the country. Geographical position, near the Black Sea, soil structure, climate, land history of Dobrogea, made this region to show a characteristic fauna and flora, one mixture of southern, Ponto-Caspian, Black Sea, European, Eurasian elements, etc. (Axini and Tofan, 2009; Axini, 2011c).

Conacu-Negrești Valley, part of South Dobrogea (Figure 1 A, B, C), is distinguished by a special landscape beauty and is characterized by an extremely rich and diverse biodiversity, with many rare or endemic species specific to the Dobrogea Province. Its significance comes from geological, geomorphological and paleontological elements, too (Al-Azki, 2012a, b; Axini *et al.*, 2010).

By Axini (2009), it was previously dominated by a dense forest of pubescent oak whose traces can be seen on the lake bottom. Its existence is proved by the limestone walls tilt and the existing of herbaceous and shrub plant species in the canyons of the south-west of the valley or on the grassy hills and limestone walls.

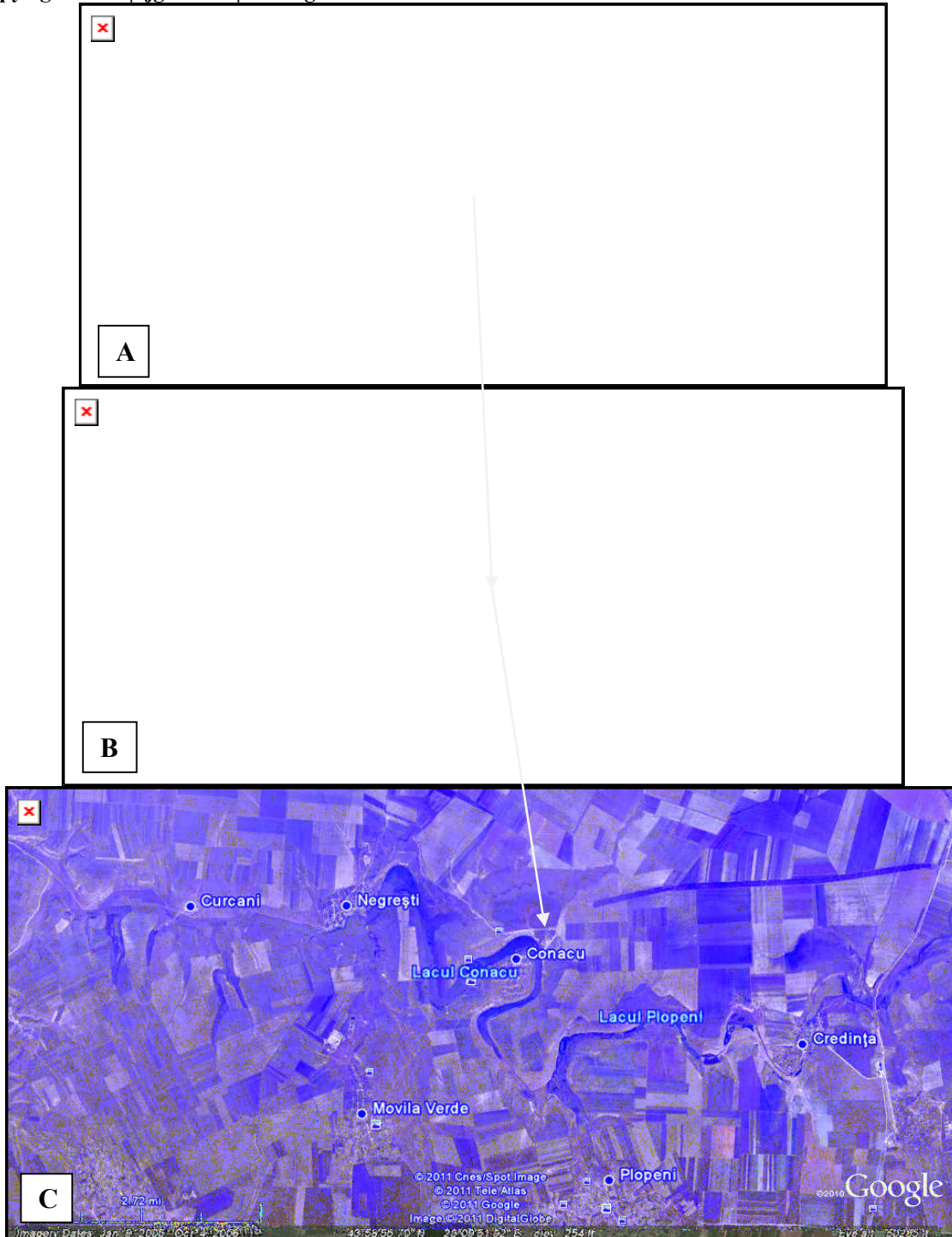


Figure 1: A - Map of Europe emphasizing the position of Dobrogea and Conacu – Negrești Valley in Europe; B - Geographical position of Conacu - Negrești Valley in Dobrogea Region; C - Conacu - Negrești Valley (processing by Google Earth, accessed January 12, 2017)

So far have been identified, collected and determined a total of 239 plant species, belonging to 32 orders and 62 families (Andrei, 2003; Axini, 2009; Ciocârlan, 2000; Cristureanu and Litescu, 2002a, b; Morariu and Todor, 1972; Prodan, 1935, 1936a, b; Prodan and Buia, 1966; Săvulescu, 1952-1976; Todor, 1968; Tutin *et al.*, 1964-1980).

In numerical order, the families represented the largest number of species are: *Compositae* - 35 taxa, *Labiatae* - 19 taxa, *Graminaceae* - 18 taxa, *Caryophyllaceae* - 14 taxa, *Cruciferae* - 13 taxa and *Rosaceae* - 11 taxa.

List of rare and endemic species found in the valley including the following: *Satureja coerulea* Janka (Fam. Labiatae Juss.) - vulnerable species, Scythian-Thracian-Anatolian element, only on limestone wall with southern exposition, *Minuartia bilykiana* Klokov in Kotov - European endemit, Scythian element, on limestone wall with southern exposition and in a small canyon (43°59'33,34''N, 28°10'53,02''E) and *Dianthus pseudoarmeria* M. B. (Fam. Caryophyllaceae Juss.) - in the large canyon

from the south-west part of the valley (43°57'58,97''N, 28°10'14,88''E), *Parietaria lusitanica* L. subsp. *serbica* (Pančić) P. W. Ball. (Fam. Urticaceae Endl.) - endangered species, endemic in Europe, Dacian-Mesic-Dobrogean element, located on a limestone wall with the east exhibition and in a small canyon, *Jasminum fruticans* L. (Fam. Oleaceae Lindl.) - Mediterranean element, on limestone wall with southern exposition, *Centaurea napulifera* Rochel - endemic species in Europe, Dobrogean-Balkan element, identified on the limestone walls with southern exposition (44°00'20,83''N, 28°08'32,99''E) and *Achillea clypeolata* Sibth. et Sm (Fam. Compositae Adans.) - European endemit, Balkan element, on an limestone wall with southern exposition, *Ornithogalum oreoides* Zahar. (Fam. Liliaceae DC.) - endemic plant in Europe, Scythian element, on an limestone wall with southern exposition (Axini, 2011b, 2012c, 2012d; Dihoru Ghe. and Dihoru Al., 1993-1994; Dihoru and Negrean, 2009; Făgăraș *et al.*, 2010; Olteanu *et al.*, 1994).

Table 1: The Taxonomic Analysis of Identified Invertebrate Species (original)

Orders	Families	Number of species
Gastropoda		
Mesogastropoda	<i>Thiaridae</i>	2
	<i>Valvatidae</i>	1
	<i>Bithynidae</i>	2
Basomatophora	<i>Physidae</i>	2
	<i>Planorbiiidae</i>	2
	<i>Lymneidae</i>	4
Stylommatophora	<i>Enidae</i>	3
	<i>Helicidae</i>	4
	<i>Limacidae</i>	2
Aranea		
Araneae	<i>Thomisidae</i>	1
	<i>Araneidae</i>	3
	<i>Eresidae</i>	2

Acarina		
Prostigmata	<i>Eriophyidae</i>	1
Crustacea		
Isopoda	<i>Asellidae</i>	1
	<i>Porcellionidae</i>	1
Insecta		
Thysanura	<i>Lepismatidae</i>	1
	<i>Ateluridae</i>	1
Ephemeroptera	<i>Baetidae</i>	1
Odonata	<i>Agrionidae</i>	1
	<i>Aeschnidae</i>	2
	<i>Libellulidae</i>	5
Blattodea	<i>Blattidae</i>	1
	<i>Blattellidae</i>	1
Orthoptera	<i>Acrididae</i>	3
	<i>Gryllotalpidae</i>	2
	<i>Tettigoniidae</i>	1
Heteroptera	<i>Corixidae</i>	4
	<i>Pleidae</i>	1
	<i>Naucoridae</i>	1
	<i>Notonectidae</i>	1
	<i>Nepidae</i>	1
	<i>Hebridae</i>	1
	<i>Gerridae</i>	1
Neuroptera	<i>Myrmeleontidae</i>	1
Coleoptera	<i>Dytiscidae</i>	5
	<i>Hydraenidae</i>	1
	<i>Hydrophilidae</i>	1
	<i>Dryopidae</i>	2
	<i>Cerambycidae</i>	1
	<i>Silphidae</i>	1
Lepidoptera	<i>Crambidae</i>	1
	<i>Pieridae</i>	2
	<i>Nymphalidae</i>	3
	<i>Satyrinae</i>	1
Diptera	<i>Empididae</i>	1
	<i>Tipulidae</i>	2
	<i>Culicidae</i>	3
	<i>Chironomidae</i>	1
	<i>Tabanidae</i>	2
	<i>Sarcophagidae</i>	1
	<i>Bombyliidae</i>	2
	<i>Syrphidae</i>	1
<i>Ephydriidae</i>	1	

Himenoptera	<i>Apidae</i>	4
	<i>Vespidae</i>	1
	<i>Scoliidae</i>	1
	<i>Cynipidae</i>	2

Conacu-Negrești Valley hosts many species of invertebrate animals, of which so far identified a total of 101 terrestrial and aquatic species, belonging to 17 orders and 57 families (Table 1). Of these, insects dominate with 70 taxa, followed by gastropods with 22 taxa (Axini, 2012a, b; Axini and Al-Azki, 2012; 2014; 2016; Axini and Skolka, 2010a, b; Chiriac and Udrescu, 1965; Cioboiu, 1998, 2002; Gomoiu and Skolka, 2001; Grossu, 1986, 1987; Hubenov, 2007; Müller, 2002a, b; Müller and Tomescu, 2002; Negrea, 2002; Skolka, 2002b; Zoltán *et al.*, 2004).

Among arthropods, the spiders are present on the grassy or limestone slopes or on the plates. This is remarkable, in many specimens, of species *Misumena vatia* Clerck (the crab or flower spider) (Fam. Thomisidae) (Roberts, 1996; Sterghiu, 2002) that lives on Asteraceae species (*Carduus* sp.) from sunny hills with Sarmatian limestone up to date (44°00'20,83''N, 28°08'32,99''E).

Of all groups of insects identified, the dominant order is Diptera - 9 families, followed by the orders Heteroptera - 7 families and Coleoptera - 6 families. Orders Lepidoptera and Himenoptera each have 4 families (Skolka, 2002a, 2008; Skolka *et al.*, 2005).

Although specific species for well-oxygenated flowing water, in areas with submerged vegetation well-developed were identified larvae of Ephemeroptera *Cloeon dipterum* Linnaeus (Fam. Baetidae) (Găldean, 2002; Țigănuș and Samargiu, 2003).

Dragonflies are large predatory insects, best fly as adults and aquatic as larvae (Bulimar, 2002; Căndei and Bulimar, 1965). In Conacu-Negrești Valley, they meet

frequently as adults near the lake, and in arid areas, as well as carnivorous larvae in the water mass. 8 species were identified belonging to 3 families.

Grasshoppers are species that inhabit the areas covered by vegetation, especially. So far, six species were identified belonging to three families. Of these, on the walls of limestone rocks to date with southern exhibition and in canyons, in sandy areas, have been identified *Acrida hungarica* Herbst - African-Mediterranean element, *Oedipoda germanica* Linnaeus and *Oedipoda caerulea* Linnaeus (Fam. Acrididae) – Palearctic elements (Baur *et al.*, 2006).

Among Heteroptera, have been studied so far only aquatic species. On list of species identified until now, is *Hebrus pusillus* Fallen (Fam. Hebridae) – rare species, so far only identified in the Danube Delta (Kiss, 2002).

Coleoptera group is quite well represented in Dobrogea fauna, with adjustments in both terrestrial and aquatic environment. In terms of species from Conacu-Negrești Valley, they are little known to date - 11 species belonging to 6 families. Among the identified species, 4 species are important: *Platambus maculatus* Linnaeus - Euro-Central Asian element, *Hydroporus dobrogeanus* Ienișteea - endemic species to Dobrogea and *Cybister lateralimarginalis* De Geer - Euro-Siberian element, (all three species of the Dytiscidae family), *Cerambyx cerdo* L. (Fam. Cerambycidae) – endangered and rare species, characteristic of wooded areas (Axini, 2011a, d, e; Cojocaru and Popescu, 2004; Nițu and Decu, 2002; Panin, 1955a, b, 1957; Panin and Săvulescu, 1957). Lepidoptera shows numerous species in Dobrogea fauna, but also less studied in the

Conacu-Negrești Valley – 7 species belonging to 4 families. It was identified a species whose larvae shows adaptations to the aquatic environment - *Parapoynx stratiotata* L. (Fam. Crambidae). It was identified only in the Danube Delta. Its presence in the lake shows that the valley is a former arm of the Danube, demonstrated by field observations - shape and orientation of the valley and canyons and geological data (Căpușe, 1968; Ruști, 2002).

On the whole valley, the specific diversity of Diptera is considerable - 14 taxa identified, compared with Himenoptera which holds

only 8 taxa identified (Constantineanu, 1959, 1965; Constantineanu and Piscică, 1977; Cure, 2002; Dinulescu C., 1958; Dinulescu Ghe., 1966; Dinulescu P., 1961). Hymenoptera parasitoid species are well represented which inhabit areas with bushes present in the canyons of the south-west of the valley and on the grassy hills of lake tail. Data collected from fishermen and the owner of the leased area, as well as observations from the field and processing samples of zoobenthos, led to the conclusion that 13 species of fish live in the lake (Table 2) (Bănărescu, 2002, 2005; Cărăușu, 1952).

Table 2: The Taxonomic Analysis of Identified Fish Species (original)

Orders	Families	Number of species
Gasterosteiformes	<i>Gasterosteidae</i>	1
Perciformes	<i>Percidae</i>	3
	<i>Gobiidae</i>	2
Cypriniformes	<i>Cyprinidae</i>	7

By Axini and Al-Azki (2012), have signaled the introduction of the lease area of the two species of Asian cyprinids: *Ctenopharingodon idella* Valenciennes and *Hypophthalmichthys molitris* Valenciennes (Fam. Cyprinidae). If the latter is phytoplankton species, feeding on algae in the water column, thereby reducing the eutrophication of water bodies, the first species is truly phytophagous. The introduction of this species in the lake has led to lower stretch with aquatic vegetation, with indirect consequences on populations of invertebrates and vertebrates, which are linked by their life cycle or behavior from them.

Have been counted a total of 7 species of amphibians and 12 species of reptiles, belonging to 4 and 5 families (Table 3) (Bud, 2000; Cogălniceanu *et al.*, 2000, 2008; Iftime, 2001, 2005a, b; Iordache, 1996; Meșter, 2002a, b; Nicoară, 2004; Torok, 1997).

It is known that populations of amphibians are sensitive to anthropogenic pressure factor that leads to destruction and degradation of habitats, especially breeding places. Although during 2003-2005, the populations of amphibians in Conacu-Negrești Valley were well represented with numerous specimens, are seriously endangered today, especially populations of *Rana* sp. (Fam. Ranidae Bonaparte) and *Bombina* sp. (Fam. Bufonidae Hogg).

Among reptiles, have been identified: *Lacerta (Podarcis) taurica* Pallas – in numerous specimens that can be seen everywhere, on the walls of limestone cliffs in the day, on plates or in the canyons of the south-west of the valley, *Lacerta trilineata dobrogica* Fuhn et Mertens - species characteristic of Dobrogea, rare and localized, *Lacerta (Podarcis) muralis* subsp. *maculiventris* - rare and localized species (Fam. Lacertidae), *Testudo graeca ibera* Linnaeus (Fam. Testudinidae Gray) –

identified on the limestone walls with clams or limestone to date.

Table 3: The Taxonomic Analysis of Identified Amphibians and Reptiles Species (original)

Orders	Families	Number of species
Amphibia		
Anura (Ecaudata)	<i>Discoglossidae</i>	1
	<i>Pelobatidae</i>	2
	<i>Bufo</i>	2
	<i>Ranidae</i>	2
Reptilia		
Testudines (Cryptodira)	<i>Emydidae</i>	1
	<i>Testudinidae</i>	1
Squamata	<i>Lacertidae</i>	6
	<i>Anguillidae</i>	1
	<i>Colubridae</i>	3

Podarcis muralis subsp. *maculiventris* was quoted far only wooded areas and with rocky walls in southern and northern Dobrogea. In Conacu-Negrești Valley, was located one family (a female chicken) on the limestone wall with eastern exhibition.

Testudo graeca iberica, Dobrogean turtle, natural monument, is found in many specimens on plateaus, but also in the canyons. Cannot say the same about *Emys orbicularis*, water turtle, which is in numerical decline due to the anthropogenic factor.

Dobrogean horned viper, *Vipera ammodytes montandoni* Boulenger, has not yet been identified, although habitats that are in the area allow her to live.

Qualitative study of birds observed revealed the presence of a number of 94 species belonging to 14 orders and 32 families (Table 4) (Feneru *et al.*, 2002; Gache, 2004; Gava and Mestecăneanu, 2002; Munteanu, 2002; Nonev, 2008; Onea, 2000). Of these, are a number of 43 species of summer guests, 13 winter guests, 13 birds of passage and 19 sedentary species. Most are

migratory species, water-loving, whose presence even in some small specimens, is determined by the presence of food and climatic conditions.

Larks are species more or less sedentary, migrating only very cold winters. In populations with numerous specimens, larks from Conacu-Negrești Valley are in numerical decline due to the same anthropogenic factor.

By Birds Directive 79/409 EEC (accessed 1/15/2017), among the species found in the Birds Directive, European Council Directive 79/409 EEC and identified in the valley include: *Ardeola ralloides* Scopoli, *Ixobrychus minutus* Linnaeus (Fam. Ardeidae Gray), *Ciconia ciconia* Linnaeus (Fam. Ciconidae Brisson), *Burhinus oedipnemus* Linnaeus (Fam. Burhinidae Illiger), *Sterna hirundo* Linnaeus (Fam. Sternidae Wagler), *Melanocorypha calandria* Linnaeus (Fam. Alaudidae Swainson), *Lanius minor* Gmelin (Fam. Laniidae), *Dendrocopos syriacus balcanicus* Hemprich et Bibr. (Fam. Picidae Gray) (Bănică, 2008; Flocea, 2004; Munteanu, 2005).

Table 4: The Taxonomic Analysis of Identified Bird Species (original)

Orders	Families	Number of species
Gaviiformes	<i>Gaviidae</i>	1
Podicipediformes	<i>Podicipedidae</i>	3
Ciconiiformes	<i>Ardeidae</i>	4
	<i>Ciconidae</i>	1
	<i>Threskiornitidae</i>	2
Anseriformes	<i>Anatidae</i>	15
Falconiformes	<i>Accipitridae</i>	6
	<i>Falconidae</i>	2
Gruiformes	<i>Rallidae</i>	5
Charadriiformes	<i>Burhinidae</i>	1
	<i>Charadriidae</i>	9
	<i>Sternidae</i>	2
	<i>Laridae</i>	2
Columbiformes	<i>Columbidae</i>	3
Cuculiformes	<i>Cuculidae</i>	1
Apodiformes	<i>Apodidae</i>	1
Piciformes	<i>Picidae</i>	3
Coraciiformes	<i>Upupidae</i>	1
Passeriformes	<i>Alaudidae</i>	4
	<i>Hirundinidae</i>	2
	<i>Oriolidae</i>	1
	<i>Corvidae</i>	2
	<i>Paridae</i>	1
	<i>Aegithalidae</i>	2
	<i>Sylviidae</i>	3
	<i>Turdidae</i>	3
	<i>Motacillidae</i>	1
	<i>Laniidae</i>	2
	<i>Sturnidae</i>	2
	<i>Emberidae</i>	3
	<i>Fringillidae</i>	1
	<i>Ploceidae</i>	3

Among mammals, have been identified 24 species of mammals, both terrestrial and aquatic, belonging to 4 orders and 11 families (Cuzic, 2004; Iana, 1973; Ionescu, 1968; Meşter, 2002c) (Table 5). Some of them were well-represented populations such as *Rattus norvegicus* Erxlb (Fam. Muridae Gray), while others are rare, limited

to aquatic habitats like species of the genus *Arvicola* or terrestrial habitats like *Scista subtilis nordmanni* Key et Blas (Fam. Dipodidae Coues).

List of species identified includes ground squirrel, *Citellus citellus* Pallas (Fam. Sciuridae Gray) - endemic species in Europe, whose habitat is the steppe

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 grasslands, unfortunately in decline due to expansion of agricultural ecosystems. In valley, it was until recently a large population. Currently it is in numerical decline due to the popularity of the area. It is a species of community interest requiring strict protection - Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, Annex 2, 4 (accessed 1/15/2017) and Natura 2000. The same applies to the *Talpa europaea*, the mole (Iordache *et al.*, 2004; Murariu, 2005).

Among carnivorous mammals, foxes *Vulpes* sp. is more common, which manages to survive human impact in the area. Their burrows were found in sandy canyon walls. Instead, the wolf, *Canis lupus* Linnaeus, is in numerical decline throughout southern Dobrogea, due to intense deforestation actions. But, in the past, Cobadin has a wooded area with forests of oak, so that the wolf was a large population. It was recorded in the presence of *Canis aureus*, which enters from Bulgaria.

Table 5: The Taxonomic Analysis of Identified Mammals Species (original)

Orders	Families	Number of species
Insectivora	<i>Erinaceidae</i>	1
	<i>Talpidae</i>	1
	<i>Soricidae</i>	3
Lagomorpha	<i>Leporidae</i>	1
Rodentia	<i>Sciuridae</i>	1
	<i>Muridae</i>	3
	<i>Microtidae</i>	4
	<i>Spalacidae</i>	1
	<i>Dipodidae</i>	1
Fissipedia	<i>Canidae</i>	4
	<i>Mustelidae</i>	6

Issues facing the Conacu-Negrești Valley.

Because of the existence of the Negrești and Conacu Villages in the valley, on shores of lake and water are discharged waste water and domestic waste, from households in the area.

The leasing of part of the body of lake and populating it with Asian cyprinids led in time to reduce aquatic vegetation. This has led to the endangerment of populations of amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals more or less related to the aquatic environment.

Also, the introduction of fish in the lake led to the popularization of the valley and the increasing number of fishermen and tourists who come here on weekends, holidays, etc.

All this led in time to degradation of valley habitats, endangering the existence of the plants and animals species, many rare and endemic.

Cobadin Village and its component villages are located in a heavily agrarian region. And now, some areas in the hills of the valley are used for agriculture. Their position towards the lake determine rainwater loaded with fertilizer to drain in lake water.

Presence of limestone quarries in the southwest of the valley, the herds of cattle, goats and sheep, buildings erected on the waterfront and exploitation of groundwater sources are examples of other anthropogenic factors affecting the valley.

In future, local authorities want to build a hotel in the area. Traffic and noise of equipment and workers, pollution-induced, are factors that will determine the serious problems, if this cannot be stopped (Axini and Alexandrov, 2011).

Conclusions Until 2003, this valley was known only from the geographical field studies and research on the Negru-Vodă Plateau, Dobrogea, In the biodiversity plan, our unique field and laboratory researches from 2003 to present led to the conclusion that the Conacu-Negrești Valley is characterized by a rich and diverse flora and fauna with rare and endemic species for Romania and Dobrogea, who require preservation status. In the future, they will be upgraded with new data and research of laboratory and field.

By 2003, there was no literature in the field regarding this valley. Our research on the valley are singular.

Today, the valley does not have any conservation status. A part of the lake water surface is leased and managed as a fish farm.

Habitat degradation led to the endangerment or extinction of some aquatic or terrestrial plants and animals species, many species important to science and human well-being, some of which have not been described yet. Therefore, urgent measures should be taken that will lead to biodiversity conservation and landscape protection in this valley.

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