

Wildlife management and hunting in the past and present in the Great Milic

The North Hungarian Mountains are located within the Carpathian Basin. The *Tokaj-Eperjes (Prešov) mountain range* consisting of three mountain units with its 150 km long ridge is located on the eastern side of the region. The middle part is the region of Szalánci Hills (Slanské or Slanec Hills), with its northern part situated in Slovakia and the southern part belonging to Hungary. The Great Milic mountain range, which stretches down to

Hegyköz Basin like a North Carpathian “island”, is Hungary’s only Carpathian natural habitat. After the Turkish Wars and Rákóczi’s War of Independence, two dominant landowning families of the Milic region, the Forgách family in the north and the Károlyi family in the south determined the wildlife management and hunting culture of the region.

The Great Milic has always been a deer rut site in the popular knowledge

Trophy of a red deer culled on September 30, 1932 on Orita Plateau, antler weight: 7 kg, even ten, typical at Milic, front cup in the prestigious, renovated castle at Lászlótanya.

and practices of local hunters. It is no mere chance that the Károlyi family (Count László Károlyi), once landowners in the southern part of the region, established a stone-built hunting castle at Lászlótanya at the end of the 19th century in order to make their hunter camp (that had previously included only blockhouses) more extended and convenient. In addition to the hunting castle, hunting lodges were also built for temporary stay, e.g. the hunting lodge in the region of Oláh-rét on the Hungarian side or the hunting lodge in Karolka on the Slovakian side, which derive from that period.

The trophies caught by the Károlyi family, which all have an ink inscription on the skull including the place and time of the culling as well as the weight of the trophy, prove that the same deer rut sites have been known for several decades and are still listed as the best deer rut sites in today’s hunting



and wildlife management practice (e.g. Oláh Meadow and Orita Plateau).

Károlyi László's son, István was also devoted to the passion of hunting and took part in several hunting adventures abroad with his friend, Zsigmond Széchenyi. The regular hunts and his new zoo, established in Fót, proved to be very expensive pastime activities. In order to balance the expenses, the mostly unutilized castle in Füzérradvány was converted into a luxury hotel in 1936-37. The electricity as well as cold and hot water were introduced and major internal transformations were carried out. The building and its neighbourhood got equipped with every possible comfort. The established facilities included swimming pool, tennis court, golf course, sledge and ski runs. The guests had the opportunity to go fishing, boating, horse and carriage riding as well. The Castle Hotel opened on May 8, 1938 and gained as much popularity as the Palace Hotel in Lillafüred, a popular castle hotel of Hungary before 1945⁴.



Sledding in winter by the Castle Hotel in Füzérradvány

HERBERT NADLER zoologist, writer on hunting, manager of the Budapest Zoo and Botanical Garden described his experiences with the Castle Hotel as follows: "*It is a real luxury for hunters! It is even more prominent than the Grand Hotel in Ótátrafüred.*

Old furniture and fireplaces filled with glowing pieces of wood in large and high rooms, decorated with magnificent Hungarian and African hunting trophies... full of comfort and convenience"⁵



Foyer of the Castle Hotel

Of course, wildlife management was not only relevant for presenting the trophy achieved at that time either. The Károlyi manor needed the income from organising hunts in addition and as a complement to providing accommodation and elite tourism. The Castle Hotel became the central place of accommodation for hunting guests arriving in Hegyköz, it was an ideal base for hunting enthusiasts to reach the region

⁴ PILLÉR T; KÁRÁSZI; GYÖRYJ. (1989): *Zempléni-hegység [Zemplén Mountains]*; in: RAKONCZAY Z. (ed.): *Ipolytarnóciól – Füzérradványig, Észak-Magyarország természeti értékei [From Ipolytarnóc to Füzérradvány, Natural values of North-Hungary]*; Mezőgazdasági Kiadó, Budapest (in Hungarian).

⁵ NADLER H. (1943): *Vadásznapló 1943 [Hunting diary of 1943]*; *Erdészettörténeti Közlemények XL, Országos Erdészeti Egyesület Erdészettörténeti Szakosztály, Budapest, 1999 (in Hungarian)..*

of Central Zemplén and the Milic Mountains. The devoted work of forestry and hunting professionals was required for wildlife management, hunting and organising hunts; as ISTVÁN PARTY, manorial hunt master reported in the thirties and forties of the last century.

As one of the leaders of the professional staff of the Károlyi manor, his writings do not display a kind of hunting romantics, but describe the experience of the wildlife manager and provide guidance instead: the wildlife management of Károlyi lands in Zemplén was renowned throughout Europe at that time.

In connection with feeding the deer population, it was recognised already at that time that the use of artificial fodder to feed deer in winter results in the loss of weak and stunted specimens only. Incomplete and poor feeding results in the death of a large number of animals, while the death of strong stags implies significant negligence. In connection with feeding, one should take into consideration the feasibility and time of logging works because bud fodder always substitutes for the necessity of putting out grain.⁶

“Then a group of loggers came in the valley to continue their work: to fell and log the old nurse trees left during logging. The deer now visit in groups for the buds of the felled beech trees at night, that’s why we have come here to shoot hind at dawn.” writes HERBERT NADLER in his Hunter Diary, remembering his hunting adventures in Hegyköz in December 1943.

Count Forgách is said to have introduced 9 specimens of red deer to the region of Milic in the 50s of the nineteenth century from Máramaros



“A” type Carpathian red deer trophy: larger beam length and thickness, proportional shape, nice colour and pearling, strong, multi-tine cup.

(Maramures) county, while the counts of the Károlyi family introduced a stock of 15 specimens from their wildlife park in Transdanubia; which were of smaller stature and were different from the specimens from Máramaros in colour. This Transdanubian bloodline interbred with the Carpathian one, and the present deer type of the Milic region developed by the First World War.

It should be noted that the influence of the Carpathian type has continued to prevail owing to the dominance of

⁶ PARTY I. (1940): *Az 1940. évi tél után [After the winter of 1940]; Nimród Vadászlap, 1940. május 1; p. 212-214 (in Hungarian).*

migration routes. Recollections point out that by the end of the nineteenth century the red deer population had increased in number to an extent that Count Károlyi enclosed his forests in order to prevent agricultural and forestry damage. This fencing was in use until the end of the Second World War.

The former owner of the other estate, István Forgách also enclosed almost 3000 acres of forest in order to prevent damage caused by game. The love of forests and affection for hunting of the Forgách family is demonstrated by the fact that István Forgách, who died in 1916, was buried in the family tomb near his favourite hunting castle in Kerekhegy (Okrúhly vrch).

The hunting area of Milic is predominantly characterised by large game species. Frequent and dominant ones are red deer, roe deer and wild boar; the mouflon introduced by the Károlyi family to the Hegyköz region is no longer present in the Milic Mountains; in the Zemplén region it typically occurs in Central Zemplén. The Carpathian red deer in the Milic region is characterised by the dark colour of the coat and the antlers of stags, the lack of bay tine, the intensive pearling, the strong tray, which often extends up to the bottom part of the cup as well as the robust, often double-tine cup. Among the types migrating to the region, it is worth mentioning the "A" type red deer specimens that have a strong, multi-tine cup.

The roe population of the Zemplén and Milic region can be classified according to its quality into the group of trophies weighing up to 150-350 g (max. 400 g). The beautiful, mature, old roebuck trophies are of precious value for all hunters, regardless of their weight. The number of roe deer has decreased due to the fact that the grasslands have become more weedy and bushy and the small forest meadows have become woodier. This is due to the fact that the roe deer is a wild species that selects the most delicious ones of grasses too; the hunting literature thus calls them "the most choosy" ruminants.

The autumn and winter wild boar hunts have always made the heart of all visiting foreign and domestic hunters flutter. It was never the rife bags (50-100) that were typical but only the 10-20 bags. Of course, the experience of the landscape and the panorama, the mood of hunting with hounds and last



Stag culled in the autumn of 1969 in Great Milic. Left side of the picture: German guest hunters, right side of the picture: Jenő Horváth, main hunter, leader of stalking.



but not least the precise organisation are considered additional values. Large wild boar males always occur in the region, they can be characterised by more than 20 cm long tusks. These tusks are circular in shape, broad and intact – a broken tusk is rare. Male boars having more than 20 cm long tusks are usually medallist.



The popularity of hunting tourism is unwavering in this region. Füzérkomlós has become the centre of the region's hunting tourism on the Hungarian side from the mid-90s. Due to the poor quality (6-8 AK/ha quality on average) of the soil in Hegyköz, afforestation, wildlife breeding, establishment of wildlife parks, keeping livestock, hunting and hiking tourism are the only breakthrough points and at

the same time the only employment opportunities for the people living here. This aim inspired the establishment of the Szonta Szafari Wildlife Park on the border of Füzérkomlós, on the southern side of Great Milic Nature Park.

As wildlife managers of Great Milic, we are proud of the fact that the damage to the big game population of the region is so slight that it is possible to apply the natural "Pro Silva" methods, affecting smaller areas, which can be used in regions of Western Europe that are poorer in game.

Our mission is the preservation of all wildlife management and hunting traditions that are rooted in the hunting culture of the Károlyi and Forgách Manors and have greatly contributed to the fact that the Carpathian red deer genome in Milic has been preserved with its exceptional trophy and habit characteristics.

On the basis of these management attitudes, we seek cooperation with the forestry management giving the functional backbone of the region and the increasingly typical ecotourism as well.

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