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"The Vulnerable Bison: Practices and Meanings of Rewilding in the Romanian Carpathians"

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This paper discusses new conservation practices in the Romanian Carpathians, focusing on the recent reintroduction of bison in the framework of larger rewilding initiatives. It reveals the complexities of rewilding on the ground, through an empirical study that captures different local narratives, reflecting on how they emerge relationally, articulated within larger social dynamics and structures of feeling. I draw on empirical data, surveys and interviews that I collected in 2016 in two communities, one where bison were reintroduced in 2014 and one where they will be reintroduced at a later point. In the Carpathian Mountains the bison is well known among locals and its charisma works to the advantage of the rewilding project. Yet, the study reveals how rewilding raises a series of unresolved tensions, between wild and domestic, between natural selection and care, between uncertainty and security. It finds different local meanings at play around bison rewilding processes, and more broadly around wildlife conservation practices, which can be grouped into three major narratives—1) wildlife tourism narrative; 2) intrinsic value of nature narrative; 3) bio-threat narrative. The study argues that such narratives, while questioning the possibility of co-existence of humans and animals, suggest a shared vulnerability of bison and rural communities. (Text from author's abstract)

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