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ADEPT ANGOFA VALLEY PROJECT

Newsletter

November 2020

Below, we report on the Aberdeen Angus herd, and also put it into the broader context of our other work in the Angofa valley. This shows how the benefits of the herd are even greater when linked to the former school building and the farmhouse, as well as their positive impact on the farmland.



Angofa Valley showing Wildlife centre and farm in middle distance

ADEPT was fortunate to receive support from private donors and a number of UK NGOs to develop the potential of this valley.

The grants and loans you generously made in 2017 to buy the herd of Aberdeen Angus cattle were needed to restore the mixed use (meadow and pasture) landscape, and also provide an income for ADEPT to continue its work in the valley and more widely.

Thank you. This has succeeded. The Aberdeen Angus herd is now established, healthy, breeding well, well set in its management regime without winter housing, bringing the grassland back into a good state, and profitable.

This has linked in with other support we received:

- A grant from Fauna & Flora International and Arcadia Fund enabled ADEPT to buy 200 ha of the Angofa valley. ADEPT has been able to bring the valley back under traditional management, using cattle and reviving proper management of haymeadows. In just a few years this has significantly increased the health of the grassland and the variety and numbers of wildflowers.
- UK-based NGO Rainforest Concern funded grassland restoration, clearing scrub on 20 ha of deteriorated haymeadow.

- The Marcela Trust, an English charity established by Romanian businessman Octav Botnar in memory of his daughter, funded the restoration of the abandoned schoolhouse. The former schoolhouse in now the Angofa Wildlife Centre, which offers unique opportunities for nature tourism and conservation internships.
- The British conservation education organisation Operation Wallacea entered into partnership with ADEPT to develop residential courses and activities for visitors (both local and foreign) to the Angofa Wildlife Centre, which will add knowledge about the area, especially about how land management and biodiversity interact, as well as bringing people together, and also earning an income to support its continued activities. Many rare birds have been recorded, bears are regularly seen not far from the centre.
- ADEPT won a grant from the UK-based European Outdoor Conservation Association, to equip the schoolhouse for visitors (both local and foreign), and for research into farmland biodiversity, bringing people together and also bringing an income to support its continued activities. The EOCA grant also linked the Angofa Wildlife Centre to Sighisoara by mountain bike trail.

Results

- ADEPT's model farm shows neighbouring villages how to increase their profits from continued sustainable farming.
- The Angofa Wildlife Centre, the valley and the model farm together represent an asset perhaps unique in Europe.

The role of the Aberdeen Angus in restoring the farmed landscape

Since 2018 ADEPT have built a new hay barn, dug a well to assure supply of water summer and winter, and erected electric fences to allow controlled rotational grazing and protection of haymeadows.

The herd now stands at 56 cows, all with calves at foot, plus one bull. We have culled 5 few cows less desirable for breeding, and sold all the calves this year at good prices. From 2021, we will keep a few heifers every year in order to keep the herd number at about 60, which is a good stocking number for the land we manage.

Land management has returned to traditional haymeadows and rotational grazing. The herd is managed on controlled rotational grazing, and is a commercial success as well as improving the species diversity and general health of the grassland.



ADEPT haymeadow, June 2020 with hay-rattle, scabious and oxeye daisy.



Cattle contentedly grazing, Angofa, July 2020



Hay for the winter. 1,150 bales from ADEPT haymeadows. Angofa July 2020.



Late summer hay meadow Angofa, August 2020. A wide range of meadow grasses with oxeye daisy and buttercups; a haven for insects.

Former School House, now Angofa Wildlife Centre

The restoration and equipping of the former school house was completed in August 2020, and in close partnership with Operation Wallacea has become operational as the Angofa Wildlife Centre. It now offers quality facilities for visitors arriving by bike, foot or by vehicle, and local farmers and schoolchildren; informing them of the importance of the area, and providing meals and accommodation in order to increase attraction to visitors/numbers of visitors, and to create income for the centre so that it becomes self-supporting covering maintenance costs.

A British biologist was resident in the summer, and worked with a Romanian colleague conducting courses and carrying out a wildlife inventory. He has seen 108 bird, 25 mammal, 11 reptile/amphibian, and 60 insect (butterfly/moth/cricket) species. A botanist has identified over 240 wildflower species and over 40 other species (grasses etc.).

8 local schools are interested to use the Angofa Wildlife Centre for their outdoor nature-class activities: this will strengthen the links between the centre and local communities.



Angofa Wildlife Centre in its surrounding landscape






The building work is completed and the centre has hosted groups this summer in spite of covid limitations

The mountain bike trail

Also in August 2020, the spur of the mountain bike trail was built, linking the Angofa Wildlife Centre to Sighisoara, and to the 100 km trail between the villages. This will increase the number of visitors to the valley, and reduce the need to use cars or buses. We are cooperating with the responsible tourism company The Slow Cyclist, who help to publicise and bring visitors to our mountain bike trails, and also support the costs of maintenance of the trails.




Biodiversity in the farmed landscape

We have had some exciting sightings of increasing wildlife in the area, including many sightings of bear, usually at night (using night cameras), but sometimes in daytime. See photo below.



A female brown bear photographed on Angofa haymeadow, June 2020. In the meadow can be seen the cream, yellow and purple flowers of dropwort, hay-rattle and tassel-hyacinth.

Our resident biologist carried out bird recording including building up a photo library, and ringing. The Wildlife Centre will become a research base and regional data collection point for fauna and flora linked to agricultural landscapes.



Male red-backed shrike. Angofa July 2020.



Male common redstart. Angofa July 2020.



Yellow-browed warbler, a very rare visitor to Romania. Angofa October 2020.

Profitability of the herd

The Angofa Farm is now also providing an income in three ways:

1. EU subsidy for High Nature Value farm grassland and for Corncrake-friendly land management;
2. headage payments for cattle;
3. calf sales.

This is crucial because, for Angofa to work as a model farm, it must demonstrate that it can make an income as well as promote sustainable farming and biodiversity.

THE FUTURE

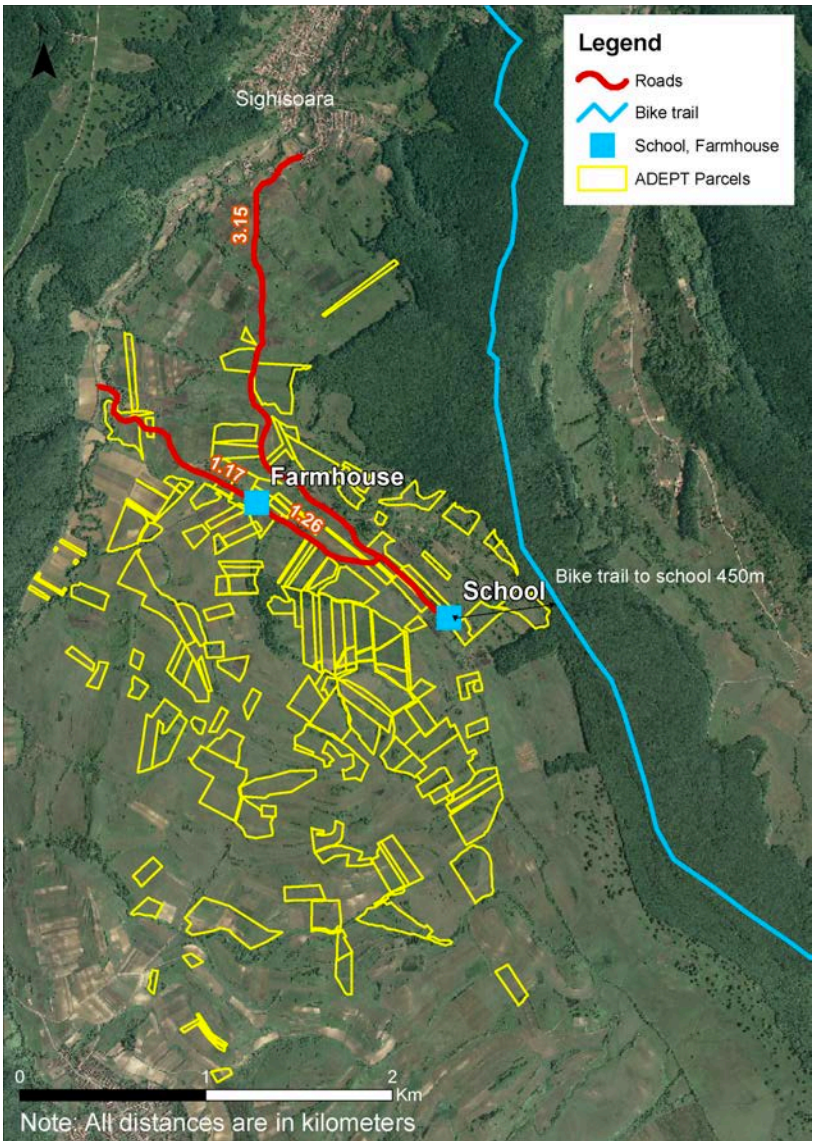
Farmhouse. One element of the Angofa Valley integrated project that remains to be done is the restoration of the farmhouse complex. The farmhouse and other farm buildings are the only other buildings in the valley, about 1 km from the Angofa Wildlife Centre.



The restored farm complex would be an important addition to the model farm, as it would enable a farm manager to live on site, and would also demonstrate how traditional farm buildings can be adapted for higher animal welfare, machinery access where needed, and higher efficiency.

The farm buildings and surrounding land will show farmers and policy makers how low-input small-scale farming can still be economically viable. The restored barn will be fitted with photovoltaic and hot water panels on the roof, so that the farm is energy-neutral in summer.

Under the proposed restoration, the farm house and yard buildings will all be restored, and the surplus barn will be converted for visitor accommodation and a hall for farming courses linked to the practical demonstrations in the surrounding fields.



Left: map of the Angofa Valley, showing how the 'School' (now Angofa Wildlife Centre), farmhouse, mountain bike trail fit into the surrounding landscape.

As can be seen, the valley is only a few kilometres from Sighișoara, one of the most visited tourist destinations in Romania.

The restored farmhouse and buildings would be an added destination for interested visitors, as well as a providing farm training and demonstration facilities, which we hope will influence policy makers as well as farmers and general public.

We wish to thank the donors and lenders who have supported the Angofa valley project.

We also wish to thank the donors who have made this integrated project possible, creating a valley dedicated to nature, farming, training, education and adventure that is perhaps unique in Europe: Fauna & Flora International, Halcyon Foundation, Grass Valley Trust, Rainforest Concern, Marcela Trust, European Outdoor Conservation Association, Tedworth Trust, Gerald Micklem Charitable Trust, The Slow Cyclist, and the private donors and lenders for the cattle herd.