

## Stop 4 ANIMALS AND BIRDS IN THE FOREST

We are the animals of the forest, the friends of the grey heron!

In the Zăval forest you can meet us, the wild animals, anytime: the wild boar, the wild cat, the marten, the polecat. And so many more!

Some are of hunting interest. Nearby you can see a hunting observatory where the hunters take shelter and follow the quarry, respectively they carry out organized activities according to the law.

**The Boar** (*Sus scrofa*) is an omnivorous, generally nocturnal, wild mammal. In Romania, it populated the forests, starting from the Danube Delta and the Danube Meadow, up to the Carpathian thickets. It has a black – brown colour. It makes sounds very similar to those of the domestic pigs. They roam in herds around the forests and the agricultural crops on their edge. It's hunted for his trophy and his meat. It can attack man, therefore the encounter with these animals should be avoided. The long snout can dig the hard ground. He is the ancestor of the domestic pig.



**Photo 4:** Wild boar in the forest

**The Wild Cat** (*Felis silvestris*) is a small feline native to Europe, western Asia and Africa. The species is carnivorous and feeds on small mammals such as rodents, birds and other animals of similar size. All domestic cats come from the North African subspecies - the African wild cat.

Wild individuals are grey or brown and have black stripes and prefer quiet forests, as wide as possible, with many old trees and/or thickets.

Its most developed senses are the hearing and the smell. As a nocturnal and twilight animal, it has eyes well adapted to night vision, but far from the performance of the lynx.



**Photo 5:** The Wild Cat

You, nature lovers, should know that in the reserve many species of protected birds, rarely found in our country, can be seen: the black stork – *Ciconia nigra*, the oak woodpecker – *Dendrocopos medius*, the forest lark – *Lullula arborea*, the collared flycatcher – *Ficedula albicollis* or the short-toed snake eagle – *Circaetus gallicus*.

### **The Black Stork** (*Ciconia Nigra*)

A solitary and shy bird, it has found favourable habitat in the Zával Forest.

*Ciconia Nigra* prefers forests and wetlands, less accessible to people, areas where the so-called gypsy storks fly at will, away from curious eyes. It is also known as the gypsy stork. Closely related to the white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*), the black stork is distinguished from the white stork by its black feathering (only the lower part is white), being of slightly smaller size, but also by its preference for secluded places, undisturbed by human presence.

This migratory species is very rare in our country. It is widespread in the lowland and hill forests located near waters.

The black stork is a large size bird, with black feathering and white on the lower part. It has long beak, neck and legs with a strong red-orange coloration. Young specimens have dark beaks and yellowish legs. It has no voice, it clatters by rhythmically opening and closing its beak. It reaches 95–100 cm in length and has a wingspan of 144–155 cm; it weighs around 3 kg.

It feeds on fish, but also on frogs, newts or large insects. It nests in tall trees and uses the nest for many years, repairing it year after year.



**Photo 6:** The black stork

### **The Oak Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos medius*)**

The woodpecker is a forest bird, whose name shows the habit of hitting the bark of trees. The woodpeckers climb the trees and, in a constant pursuit, hit the bark all day long with their strong beak, which resembles a chisel. Knock, knock, knock ...

The woodpecker finds insects on the bark, but especially under the bark of trees. It knocks on the bark of the trees until it “sounds hollow”. It knocks until it breaks the bark and the insects that hide here seek to get out. The woodpecker grabs them with its beak, one by one. For this reason, woodpeckers are very useful for forestry, destroying a large number of harmful insects and creating favourable conditions for the existence of other organisms. The woodpecker is a true “doctor” of the forests, also known as the “*tree doctor*”.

All day they fly from tree to tree – where they live almost all their lives, seldom descending to the ground. Some woodpeckers also land on the ground to feed on ants. They drill the formicaries with their beaks and then, with their tongues, they pull out the ants and eat them.

It is easy to identify, both by the sound it makes when it hits the trees with its beak and by the colourful patterning. Like most related species, the patterning is made up of an attractive combination of white, black, and red. Compared to its relatives, it has the smallest amount of black on its face, being sized between a sparrow and a crow. It is a small bird, its body length is of 19.5-22 cm and weighs 50-85 g. The wingspan is about 33-34 cm. The toes are of zygodactyl type, adapted to climbing on the trunk of trees.

It prefers old forests, formed of old, hollow trees, attacked by insects.

Often, in their efforts to search for food under the bark of trees, the woodpeckers dig galleries or hollows that are later on used by other birds in the forest for nesting. Sometimes, even small mammals take shelter in these holes, or create food deposits there.

It's a sedentary bird in our country, which means it stays here all year. They nest in the hollows and cavities that they dig in the trunk of the trees. The female typically lays 4-8 eggs (in April and May), which both parents sit on and will feed the chicks together until they can fly. The chicks begin to fly at 22-24 days, but remain around their parents for another 10 days.

If you reach the forest in early spring, in March you will notice that they chase each other and make a lot of noise, because they are very territorial. The oak woodpecker is a solitary species, which defends fixed territories that vary between 3 and 25 ha. After delimiting their territory, it is defended by both partners.



**Photo 7:** The oak woodpecker

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

- ... the woodpecker is equipped with a kind of protective helmet, a cartilage between the beak and the skull, which protects it from trauma caused by the shock of the repeated blows to the tree. Another curiosity is that it only opens its eyes between the blows. Studies by scientists have determined that the force with which it strikes the trees is so strong that, if it did not close its eyes, they would simply be pulled out.

### **ACTIVITY:**

- Watch the surrounding trees carefully. It is very possible to hear and see the small or large creatures of the forest. And, with your mobile phone, photograph or record the life of the forest. So that you have an unforgettable memory!

### **ROUTE DIRECTION**

Walk to the left on the path until you reach a rotten, dry oak-tree and there will be the next stop (Stop number 5).

