

the east and an upward trajectory in the west. The first results from RADseq-based conservation genomic research in February 2024 identified that the Danube, the largest river in the Pannonian Basin, has shaped the current regional genetic structure. Of even greater concern was the discovery of alarmingly low levels of genetic diversity, potentially lower than those observed in the rarest mammals.

These findings shed light on the discord between existing legislation and the population trends of the hamster in Hungary. Although data on crop losses as a result of hamster population increases are scarce, the absence of significant reports from farmers suggests losses may not be as substantial as perceived. The future of the Pannonian hamster depends on collaboration between conservationists and farmers to balance conservation with agricultural interests.

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### Benefits of restoring a daya in arid Algeria: the reappearance of *Teucrium campanulatum* after 168 years

The bell-shaped germander *Teucrium campanulatum* L. (family Lamiaceae) is a perennial herbaceous plant occurring in the western Mediterranean (Algeria, Balears, France, Italy, Libya, Morocco, Sicilia, Spain and Tunisia). Like all members of the genus *Teucrium*, this species is known for its medicinal properties and ornamental potential. Although *T. campanulatum* has not yet been assessed for the IUCN Red List, it is considered rare in Algeria, France, Italy and Spain. In Morocco, it is categorized as Endangered (Fennane, 2018, *Tela-Botanica*, Fascicule 7, Fagaceae–Lythraceae).

In March 2024, during a floristic exploration of the degraded steppe rangelands north of the Aïn Sefra region in Naâma, Algeria, near the village of Mékalis, I observed plants with a particular appearance, forming more or less compact tufts. They were growing in a small, fenced but abandoned daya (a shallow depression where water from adjacent land accumulates temporarily) at 1,250 m altitude. I identified the plant as *T. campanulatum*. This was the first record of the species in Naâma for 168 years. This new location is c. 80 km south of Taoussera Foukani near Aïn Benkheilil, where Cosson (1856, *Bulletin de la Société Botanique de France*, 3, 559–565) first recorded it in



*Teucrium campanulatum* in Mékalis, Naâma: (a) habit and (b) inflorescence. Photo: Belkacem Gordo.

Algeria. The reappearance of this species underlines the importance of protecting steppe environments, including daya, which are becoming degraded, leading to a reduction in plant cover and the disappearance of food plants important for grazing animals and pastoralism.

My preliminary assessment suggests *T. campanulatum* should be categorized nationally in Algeria as Critically Endangered based on IUCN Red List criteria B1ab(v) (i.e. the extent of occurrence is < 100 km<sup>2</sup>, the population is severely fragmented or occurs in only a single location and there is a continuing decline in area and number of mature individuals). Further field studies are required to facilitate a comprehensive national Red List assessment of this species.

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### First record of the spotted pond turtle *Geoclemys hamiltonii* in Shuklaphanta National Park, Nepal

Eleven species of turtles of the family Geomydidae are known from Nepal (Rai et al., 2022, *Arco-Nepal Newsletter*, 3–23), including the spotted pond turtle *Geoclemys*





Spotted pond turtle *Geoclemys hamiltonii* from the Bahuni river, Shuklaphanta National Park, Nepal. Photo: Kavi Raj Bohara.

*hamiltonii*, which also occurs in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, and is categorized as Endangered on the IUCN Red List. In the most recent list of the herpetofauna of Shuklaphanta National Park in Sudoorpaschim Province, four species of Geomydidae were documented (Rawat et al., 2020, *Journal of Threatened Taxa*, 12, 15587–15611), not including the spotted pond turtle. The spotted pond turtle is heavily traded, and illegal trafficking is the greatest threat to

its existence. The seizure of more than 10,000 illegally traded individuals during 2014–2016 (Leupen, 2018, *Black Spotted Turtle in Asia II: A Seizure Analysis (2014–2016)*, TRAFFIC) indicates the severity of this threat.

The spotted pond turtle is easily recognized by the white spots on its black neck, its black carapace with three prominent keels, and yellow spots on the iris. It inhabits both rivers and lakes. On 30 October 2023, a single spotted pond turtle was observed by author KRB during an anti-poaching patrol in the National Park, near the Bahuni river. It was not captured or otherwise disturbed, and photographs were taken from a distance. This observation highlights the importance of regular monitoring and improved reporting among stakeholders, given the illegal trade of the species. We also recommend public outreach for its conservation and targeted species conservation actions, to inform management interventions and mitigate illegal trade threat challenges.

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