



The Danube WILDIsland Habitat Corridor as best practice for river restoration and preservation

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3,000 river kilometres, 9 Danube countries, 900 islands:
WILDIslands as stepping stones crossing all borders

BACKGROUND

The Danube is an ecological corridor of outstanding relevance for Europe, connecting more bio-geographic regions than any other European river, and hosting extremely rich biodiversity.

The riparian habitats host some 2,000 vascular plants and more than 5,000 animal species, including over 40 mammals, about 180 breeding birds and 100 fish species, 12 reptiles and amphibians.

The river and its riparian zones form the backbone of a bio-corridor, which links more bio-geographic regions than any other natural object in Europe. Islands are core components of a vital river ecosystem. Due to their near-natural state, they often are the only remaining sanctuaries for characteristic species of dynamic floodplains.

The non-profit DANUBEPARKS Association was founded in 2014, currently uniting 21 national and nature parks, biosphere and nature reserves from nearly all the Danube countries as a clear signal of our long-term and shared commitment to the Danube's natural heritage.

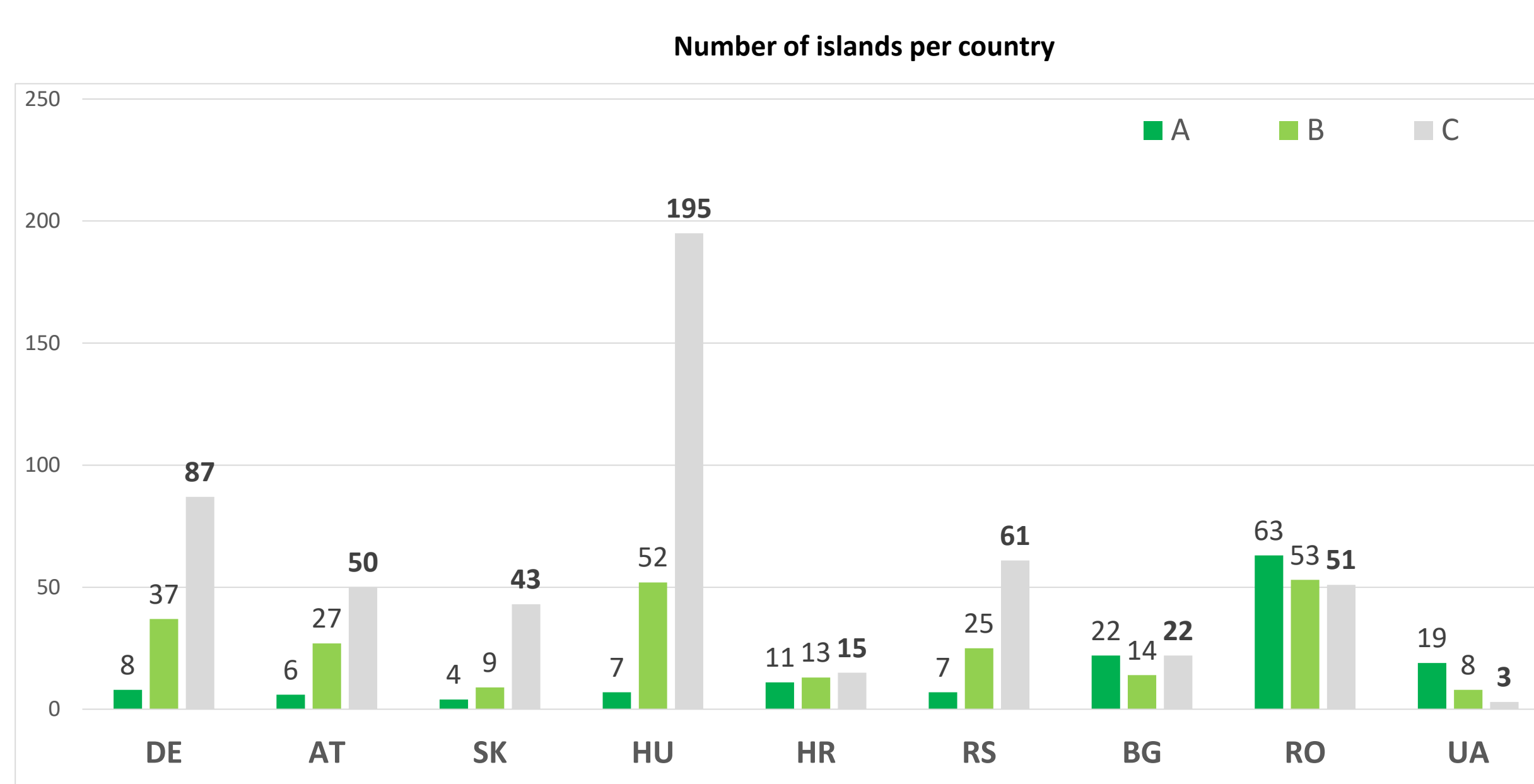
WILD ISLANDS

The DANUBEPARKS Association initiated a Danube-wide monitoring expeditions carried out in 2021 and 2014 stressed the outstanding value of Danube islands for characteristic biodiversity.

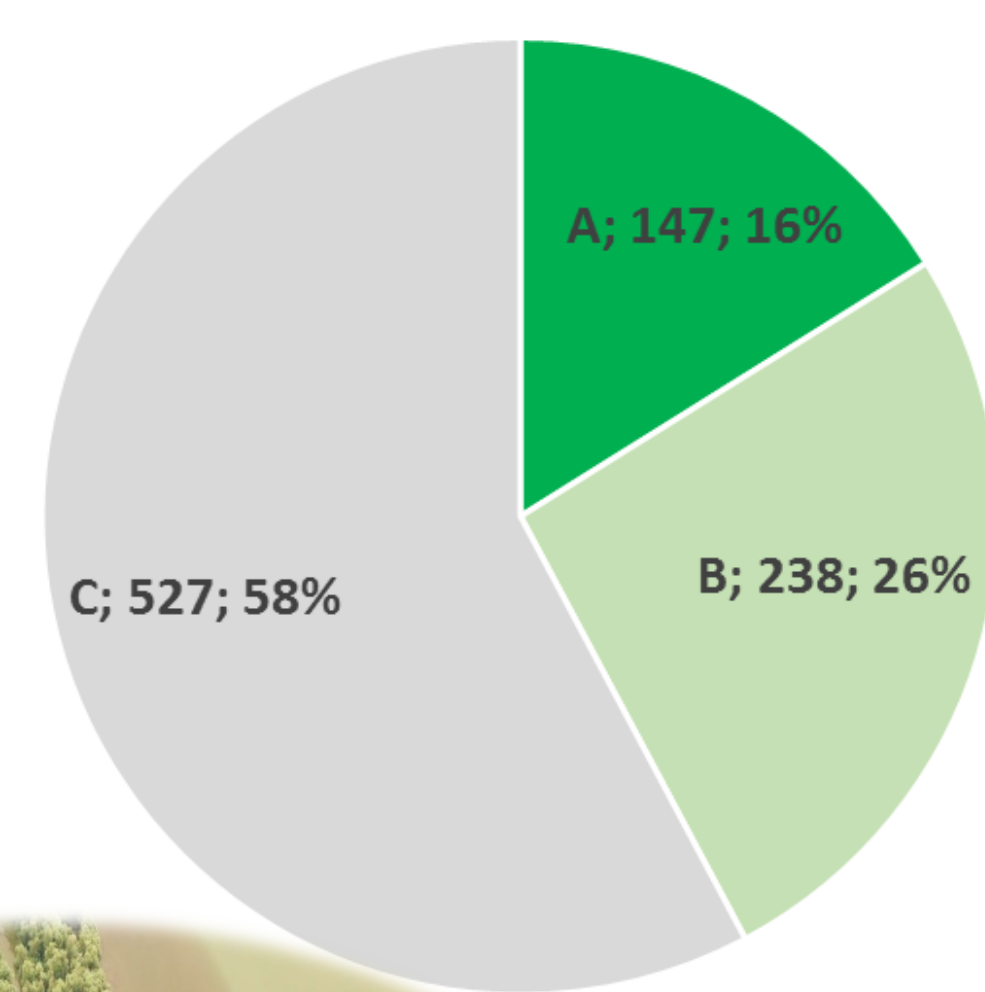
As a follow-up, the first ever inventory of all Danube islands, showed that the Danube Wild Island Habitat Corridor comprises about 900 islands with an area of more than 138,000 ha; 385 islands can be characterized as "near-natural", of which 147 islands (14,000 ha) are still largely pristine. These islands represent unique sites in river ecosystems, stand for intact river dynamics and sediment regime, preserve valuable habitats with characteristic fauna and flora and demonstrate the original beauty of natural rivers.

The survey inspired the Danube WILDIsland Habitat Corridor initiative, which aims to strengthen the ecological connectivity along the Danube river; preserve the natural wilderness in the heart of Europe; promote river dynamics as the key driver for undisturbed nature and demonstrate good practice for cross-sector and cross-border cooperation.

Photo credit: Ivanov/Persina NP; BROZ; Ingo Bäuerlein, Fa. FrankenAir



Category A = WILDIslands (natural islands)
Category B = near natural islands (with potential for restoration)
Category C = other islands



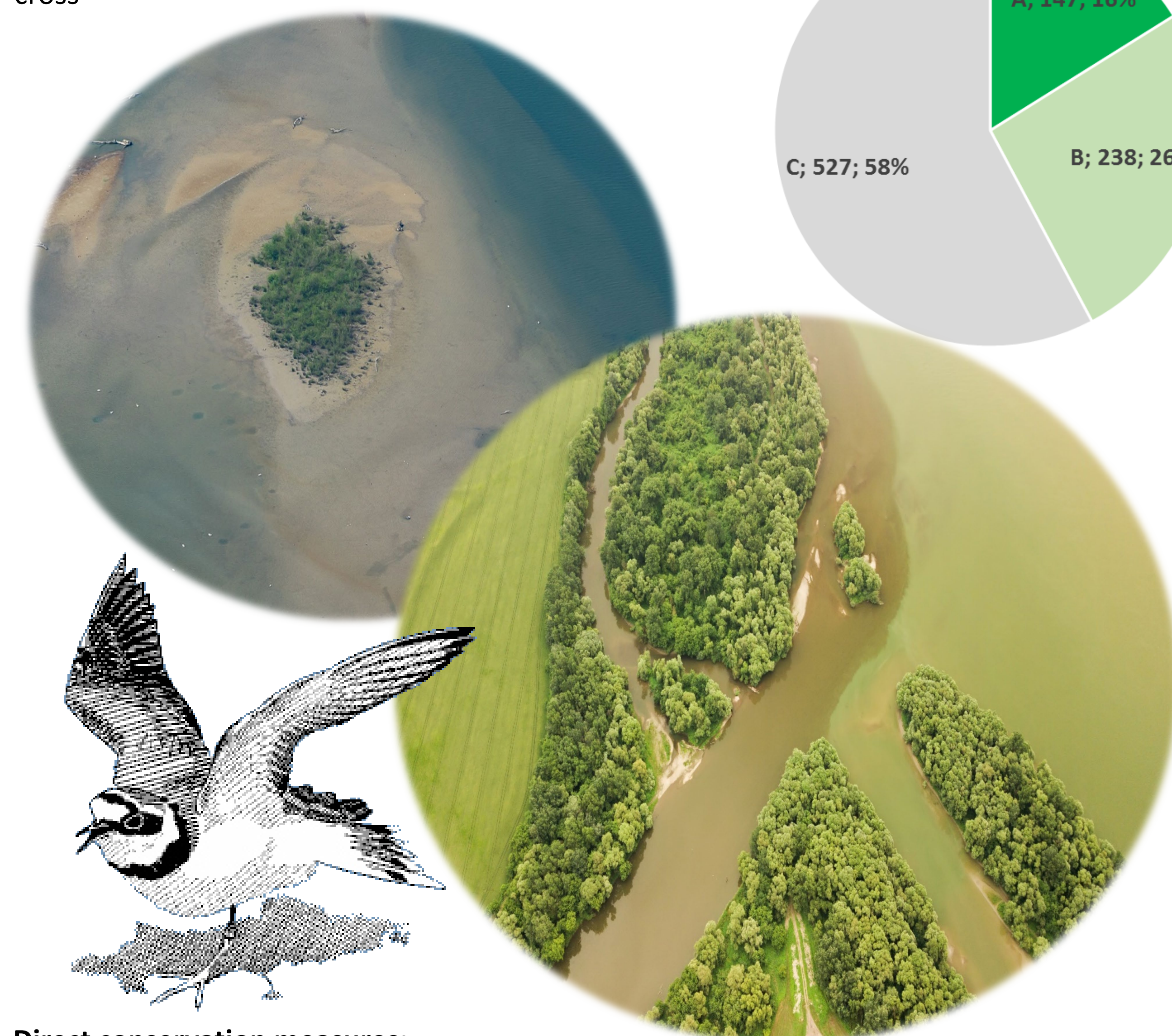
WILDIsland Concept

The WILDIslands - The Danube Wild Island Habitat Corridor concept was developed to:

- strengthen the ecological connectivity along the Danube river;
- preserve the natural wilderness in the heart of Europe;
- promote river dynamics as the key driver for undisturbed nature;
- demonstrate good practice for cross-sector and cross-border cooperation;
- ensure long-term preservation and non-intervention management;

CONSERVATION MEASURES

The concept came to LIFE with the LIFE WILDIsland project, joining the efforts of 15 partners from 8 countries with pilot actions in the Middle, Upper and Lower Danube, united to restore and conserve a total of 34 islands all the way from Germany to Romania:



Direct conservation measures:

- Restore 91E0* alluvial forests on 102 ha through the implementation of three island restoration measures in Upper Danube sections heavily impacted by hydropower;
- Implement five ecological engineering projects and optimize Grey Infrastructure (navigation), resulting in the revitalization of river dynamics and restoration of the hydrological regime for 91E0* alluvial forests of 437 ha in close cooperation with waterway administrations;
- Restore 6 islands and habitats of 91E0* on 376 ha in the Middle and Lower Danube through sediment management.
- Restore 351,9 ha of 91E0* alluvial forests through transformation of hybrid poplar plantations, reforestation, and invasive alien species management in cooperation with the forestry sector;

Policy and awareness:

- Develop the conservation strategy and prepare the multilateral Danube WILDIsland Ramsar Regional Initiative for the WILDIsland habitat corridor;
- Deliver best-practice example for transnational cooperation;
- Help provide better protection for some 900 islands across more than 138,000 ha;
- Raise awareness for pristine nature in Europe

LIFE WILDIsland Project
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