UNCG
Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group

ANNUAL REPORT

Our work in 2025

NGO Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group (UNCG)

01

About us

The NGO Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group (UNCG, EDRPOU code 42003795) is a community of biologists that has been working since 2014 to protect biodiversity and develop Ukraine's Nature Reserve Fund (NRF). We are the authors and initiators of 75% of the protected areas designated in Ukraine over the past ten years.

Mission

Protecting biodiversity, preserving and expanding the Nature Reserve Fund, and implementing international nature conservation law in Ukraine.

Areas of work

Protected areas, forest protection, steppes and grasslands, wetlands, environmental impact assessment (EIA), biodiversity and the Emerald Network.

Representation. We are members of two working groups under the Ministry of Economy and Environment of Ukraine: one reviewing proposals to change the boundaries or category of NRF sites, or to revoke their status, and one reviewing limits for the special use of natural resources within NRF sites. Our representatives also sit on the scientific and technical councils of 16 NRF institutions and on river basin councils.

Law-making. We work with Members of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and submit proposals and comments on draft laws to the Parliament. Proposals on other draft regulations are submitted to the relevant executive authorities.

02

Key results of 2025

In 2025 we submitted 58 proposals to establish new protected sites covering a total of 72,400 ha and secured the creation of 18 protection zones. Through environmental impact assessment procedures, we ensured that 31 harmful projects were refused or made subject to significant restrictions. We published more than 250,000 biodiversity records on GBIF and, at the international level, initiated the text of an IUCN resolution. All of this took place against the backdrop of the worst year for protected area designation in Ukraine in a decade.

58 proposals for new sites, 72,400 ha across 11 oblasts	**18** protection zones, 240.4 ha in 8 oblasts	**31** harmful projects refused or significantly restricted (EIA)	**252,412** biodiversity records on GBIF
570 ha created or expanded on our proposals	**14** approvals from communities and foresters, about 2,500 ha	**105,000** BioBlitz 2025 observations, 5,279 species	**131,000** records rescued from war-affected areas

In total, only 48 new NRF sites covering over 1,785 ha were created in Ukraine in 2025 (compared with 88 in 2024). Our share is around a third of the new protected area, including the regional landscape park expansion. We also analysed 1,216 notifications and 1,045 EIA reports and initiated the text of IUCN resolution WCC-2025-Res-064.

03

Protected areas

The main results of the year were the Hariachkivka Landscape Reserve in Vinnytsia Oblast (182 ha), the Stepovyi Klyn Botanical Reserve in Mykolaiv Oblast (127.6 ha) and the expansion of the Studenykivskyi Regional Landscape Park in Kyiv Oblast (261 ha). The rest of our work consisted of proposals and approvals that will bear fruit in the coming years.

Date	Event	Details
25.12.2025	Stepovyi Klyn Reserve created	Mykolaiv Regional Council, 127 ha of steppe,

		Prybuzhanivka hromada
17.12.2025	Studenykivskyi Regional Landscape Park expanded	over 260 ha, a community initiative with our support
14.10.2025	Community approves Zaichivska Balka Reserve	steppe with Red Data Book and Bern Convention species
06.10.2025	Two reserves approved in Volyn	Kovel and Lutsk districts
29.09.2025	Hariachkivka Reserve created	the first of seven planned in Vinnytsia Oblast; European ground squirrel colonies
11.09.2025	New protection zones created	Bern Convention habitats
28.08.2025	Irdyn Bog National Nature Park	proposal for almost 25,000 ha approved by the Ministry of Environment; opposed by SE Forests of Ukraine
25.08.2025	Request for protection zones around Yelanetskyi Step	after two years of work on expanding the nature reserve
15.07.2025	Protection zones for interrupted clubmoss	15.7 ha of forest in Rivne Oblast protected from clear-felling
09.07.2025	Proposals for reserves in Luhansk Oblast	the first five reserves with habitats listed in Resolution No. 4 of the Bern Convention
27.05.2025	115 ha of steppe saved from afforestation	Mykolaiv Oblast, in cooperation with foresters
26.04.2025	Moshny hromada approves Borovychok Reserve	85 ha in Cherkasy Oblast, approved by the community on our proposal
18.04.2025	Six reserves in Kharkiv Oblast	a comprehensive proposal for Emerald Network sites

A separate strand of our work was preparing for the Natura 2000 network under the project "Preserving Natural Heritage for LIFE in Ukraine": we assessed the Emerald Network's compliance and prepared translations of monitoring and reporting methodologies (most of these publications came out in early 2026).

We took an active part in meetings with local self-government bodies and state authorities and raised the creation of new protected areas at every available forum.

Two national parks a century in the making

Chornyi Lis (Black Forest) National Nature Park. We are the authors and developers of the proposal to establish the Chornyi Lis National Nature Park, the first national nature park in Kirovohrad Oblast. Together with the All-Ukrainian Ecological League,

we prepared and submitted the final park proposal to the Ministry of Economy and Environment of Ukraine. To this end, we took part in meetings and discussions with the ministry, the State Forest Resources Agency and SE Forests of Ukraine, and organised site visits.

Irdyn Bog National Nature Park. We are the authors of the proposal and scientific justification for a park of almost 25,000 ha in Cherkasy Oblast; we organised visits to the area and held meetings with the authorities. The proposal was approved by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine.

The history of both parks spans more than 100 years: the first ideas for protecting these areas date back to the 1920s.

04

Impact of the war on nature

In 2025 we continued to study the consequences of Russian aggression for Ukraine's protected areas and biodiversity. In our spatial analysis of damage to the Nature Reserve Fund, we distinguished direct destruction from loss of management, mining and restricted access. Under the House of Europe programme, together with 12 researchers from occupied or destroyed institutions, we digitised and published 131,000 observations on GBIF, most of them from Kherson and Kharkiv oblasts, which might otherwise have been lost. We also documented how the occupation authorities announce the "creation" of existing Ukrainian nature reserves in Crimea in an attempt to legitimise the occupation.

Velykyi Luh, the area of the former Kakhovka Reservoir, remained one of our priorities. Our expeditions documented the recovery of vegetation and the emergence of young floodplain forests after the dam was destroyed. We prepared the books "Destruction of the Kakhovka Reservoir: Environmental Consequences" and "Velykyi Luh or the Kakhovka Reservoir: A Modern Vision", as well as English-language publications for an international audience, including "Protected Areas Network of Ukraine: Consequences of russia's Military Aggression against Ukraine". Our aim is for decisions on the future of this area to be based on scientific evidence and to preserve the largest regenerating floodplain forest in Europe.

05

Public oversight: EIA, the Carpathians, forests, rivers

As members of the public, we take part in environmental impact assessment procedures. In 2025 we analysed 1,216 notifications of planned activities and 1,045 EIA reports. We submitted proposals on the scope of future reports in 136 cases and comments on published reports in 71 cases (684 pages of comments in total). In 31 cases we ensured that harmful activities would not go ahead: they were prohibited, a repeat EIA was ordered, a conclusion was refused, or restrictions were imposed that virtually eliminated the threat. In a further 17 cases the activity was permitted, but with our requirements taken into account, which substantially reduced the risk. Most of these cases involved sand and other mineral extraction, wind farms on natural sites, hydropower plants on mountain rivers and the drainage of river valleys. Notably, for the second time we secured a refusal of an EIA conclusion on raising the water level of the Oleksandrivka Reservoir, which threatened Buzkyi Hard.

Beyond EIA procedures, we responded to the ploughing of steppes, illegal logging and breaches of environmental law. Throughout the year we recorded the construction of a wind farm on the Runa polonyna (mountain meadow) without an EIA and warned of the threat to other Carpathian polonynas; we presented a study of old-growth forest felling and uncovered illegal logging in the Tsuman Forest. In the Kosiv district, after the environmental prosecutor's office intervened, illegal gravel extraction in the Cheremosh riverbed was halted, and in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, following our appeal, 16 ha of land in the Stepovyi Kanion Reserve were returned to the community. For the first time, StateGeoCadastre recognised illegal ploughing in response to our complaint, and in Mykolaiv Oblast a working group with the regional state administration and foresters helped save more than 1,000 ha of steppe from ploughing and afforestation.

06

Advocacy and public policy

The main challenge of 2025 was the reorganisation of environmental governance. We opposed the abolition of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources and of the State Agency of Water Resources, warning that transferring their functions to the Ministry of Economy and Environment of Ukraine would weaken the protection of nature already damaged by the war. We also criticised government Draft

Law No. 13554, which, in the name of deregulation, abolishes dozens of environmental permits, and opposed attempts to remove EIA requirements for logging (Draft Law No. 13227-d). Our position on logging was confirmed by the European Commission's report, which calls for the EIA procedure for logging to be retained.

We defended existing nature protection rules: we opposed the Zakarpattia Regional State Administration's proposal to repeal the resolution protecting Red Data Book species in forests, and monitored compliance with the ban on off-road driving within NRF sites. In support of European integration, we signed a statement against the law restricting anti-corruption bodies. To advocate in the Verkhovna Rada, we joined the Recharge the Country platform, and in October we launched a monthly newsletter to keep the public informed about threats to nature and relevant decisions.

07

Research, education and publishing

In 2025 we became Ukraine's leading publisher of open biodiversity data. Under our own name we published 252,412 species occurrence records on GBIF, and a further 80,900 records were published by other data publishers thanks to our projects. The data came from field surveys, historical natural history publications and museum collections. Our total contribution to GBIF has now exceeded 1.1 million records. The highlight of the year was the First All-Ukrainian BioBlitz on iNaturalist (19 May – 8 June): 731 observers and 1,595 expert identifiers collected around 105,000 observations of 5,279 species, including more than 500 confirmed records of 36 protected species.

Together with the Ukrainian Ecostation Network, we continued long-term biodiversity monitoring in the Rzhyshchiv hromada at the Hlyboki Balyky station; in 2025, 46 specialists from 27 institutions took part. We ran the Young Conservationist School, seminars for communities and researchers, a webinar series on citizen science and an international online conference on wetland restoration. Over the year we published around ten books and collections, including the second edition of the book on Mykola Sharleman, the collections "Steppe: Conservation Experience" and "Current Research on Rare Biodiversity in Ukraine", and a translation of a practical guide to peatland rewetting. Also in 2025 we founded the Ukrainian Nature Conservation Journal, the first specialist nature conservation journal in Ukraine in over a decade, open access and free of charge for authors.

08

International activities

We are one of two Ukrainian NGOs that are members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN); Ukraine itself is not a State Member. In October 2025 our representatives attended the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi. We initiated the text of resolution WCC-2025-Res-064, "Establishing mechanisms for engagement with IUCN Members involved in armed conflict", which was adopted by the Members' Assembly. It requests the IUCN Council to develop a policy for engaging with Members involved in armed conflict and occupation. In this way, an issue we raised on the basis of the Russian-Ukrainian war has, for the first time, become part of the policy of the world's largest conservation union. At the Congress we also countered attempts by Russian representatives to ease the restrictions on their participation in the Union's work.

We consistently oppose the use of international databases to legitimise occupation. Following our appeal to UNEP-WCMC, records of 130 protected areas in Crimea listed as Russian were removed from the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA). In February 2025 we made a working visit to the Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic to exchange experience in implementing European standards, and together with our Czech colleagues held a series of webinars on citizen science.