DEVELOPING A MINI-ZOO WITH WILD ANIMALS AT THE ENTRANCE TO AN AGRI-TOURISM FARM

ÎNFIINŢAREA DE MINI-GRĂDINI ZOOLOGICE CU PĂSĂRI ŞI ANIMALE SĂLBATICE LA INTRAREA ÎN FERMA AGROTURISTICĂ

CORNELIA SOUCA [1], I. PETROMAN[1], ANDREEA STAN [1], CORNELIA PETROMAN[1], DIANA MARIN[1] , A. DUMITRESCU[1], DELIA RAMONA GABRIS[2]

[1] Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Timişoara, Agricultural Management Faculty, Timisoara, Romania; laviniasouca@yahoo.com
[2]SC INTEROPTIK SRL

Abstract: *Wild birds and mammals have always stirred the interest of tourists and they have been always been an attraction for children. This is why we think it is good to develop a mini-zoo with wild animals at the entrance of an agri-tourism farm.*

Key words: *mini-zoo, wild birds, wild mammals, tourists, agri-tourism farm*

INTRODUCTION

A mini-zoo could contain the following wild birds and mammal species: *the **pheasant** (Phasianus colchicus), the **common snipe** (Gallinago gallinago),* the ***great spotted woodpecker*** *(Dendrocopos major),* the ***Eurasian magpie*** *(Pica pica),* the ***common starling*** *(Sturnus vulgaris),* the ***common wood pigeon*** *(Columba palumbus),* the ***European hare*** *(Lepus europaeus),* the ***red squirrel*** *(Sciurus vulgaris),* and the ***wild boar*** *(Sus scrofa).* A farmer should be well informed on each species presented to the tourists to supply them with information on the wild birds and mammals in his mini-zoo.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

In order to carry out his study, we have studied literature concerning wild birds and mammals, their features, their care, and the prevention of diseases that could be caught by tourists during their interaction with the animals because of certain pathogens.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The ***pheasant*** *(Phasianus colchicus)* is one of the most elegant birds of a mini-zoo. The colour of a pheasant's feathers is copper-red with black stripes, with green-bluish shades on the back and with bluish shades on the head and neck; its cheeks are vivid red, its tail is lighter in colour, with black perpendicular stripes, and bifurcated like a serpent's tongue. Females' feathers are creamy-greyish with dots on the head, back, and wings, and spotted with dark brown on the tail. A male can weigh up to 1.5 kg, while a female can weigh up to 1 kg. Body length is 50-90 cm, and wing span is 70-90 cm. pheasant is a polygamous bird (a male can have up to 5 or more females). In May, females lay 10 eggs each which they incubate for about 21 days.

The ***common snipe*** *(Gallinago gallinago)* is brownish-greyish, with yellow and brown stripes and spots. Its beak is extremely long compared to the body. It feeds on worms. Its weigh reaches 80-120 g, its length reaches 25-28 cm, and its wing span reaches 37-43 cm. its nest is built of grass in the close vicinity of feeding spots. Females lay 4 eggs each once and very rarely twice a year.

The ***great spotted woodpecker*** *(Dendrocopos major)* is the symbol of heavy work and of restlessness. Its breast is white with yellow-gold shades, its back is black, its head is black with a brown spot on the forehead; the male has a red cap on the head, white cheeks and neck separated from the rest by a black collar; on the shoulders, it has white spots, its wings are

black and white, its tail is black with some white stripes, and its under tail is vivid red. Its length reaches 25 cm. It is a vivid, daring bird, and it fights easily if another bird dears to come to its tree. Its tool is a long, strong, black beak with which it searches for larvae under the trees' bark. Its hearing is very good and helps it identify pests with great precision under the bark of the trees (larvae, pupae, adult insects). The great spotted woodpecker clings with its four claws on the tree trunk vertically, supporting the body on its tail. It makes its nest in the tree trunks. In May, females lay up to 7 eggs each, which are incubated by both females and males for 15 days.

The ***Eurasian magpie*** *(Pica pica)* is a medium-size bird of the crow family. It is smaller than a crow, but a little longer, reaching 48 cm due to its tail. The head, back, neck, wings, and tail are black-bluish, while the abdomen and the shoulders are white. The tail is long, with lateral feathers shorter than median ones. It weighs 200-250 g, and its wing span is 5-60 cm. in April, females lay up to 7 greenish eggs spotted with brown each, which they incubate for 18 days. The European magpie is a pest because it eats other birds' eggs: this is why the farmer should separate it from other birds in the mini-zoo.

The ***common starling*** *(Sturnus vulgaris)* has blackish feathers with green-purple shades; its body is spotted with white, while the tips of the wings and tail are dark brown. It often changes the colour of its feathers depending on season and age. Body length is about 20 cm, which makes is a rather small bird; wing span is 40 cm, and body weight is about 75-90 g. It is not a good nest builder, which makes it steal other birds' nests. Females lay up to 6 shiny, bluish eggs each, which they incubate for 14 days.

The ***common wood pigeon*** *(Columba palumbus)* is a very shy bird. Its outlook is specific to the pigeon family: the head and the upper half of the neck are bluish with metallic shades; on both sides of the neck it has the white spots characteristic to the species, as well as the white contour of the wings. The back and the wings are grey, with pink shades on the chest, while the beak and the legs are reddish. Its beak is 42 cm long, its wing span is up to 80cm, and its maximum weight is 550 g. Common wood pigeon

couples are the symbol of newly weds because they are monogamous and very devoted to each other. It builds its nest in trees rather rudimentarily; females lay 2 white eggs each two times a year, which they incubate together with their partners for 15 days. The little ones are blind at the beginning, and they are fed on some kind of milk from the parents' throats, and then with grains again from the same source.

The ***European hare*** *(Lepus europaeus)* is a wild animal easy to identify. It can reach up to 70 cm in length, and 5 kg in weight. Its back is yellow-brownish with black and grey shades; its sides are brown-yellowish, its abdomen is whitish, and its tail is dark brown upside and white downside. It is a very prolific animal; females give birth 4 times a year to 2-5 little ones from spring to fall, after a gestation of 42 days.

The ***red squirrel*** *(Sciurus vulgaris)* is a very vivid and intelligent rodent that captures everybody's attention. Its body is thin and lean, perfectly adapted to tree climbing; its ears are large and with tufts at the tips; its forelegs are shorter than its hind legs, but they all have strong claws. Its hind legs help it advance and its forelegs help it grasp nuts and cones which it feeds on. Its fur is nice and rich, brown-reddish, with black hairs. Its abdomen is white, its tail is fluffy and almost as long as the body, helping it to maintain direction and balance when jumping from one branch to another. It reaches almost 40 cm in length, half of which is represented by the tail. After a period of gestation of 6 weeks, females give birth to up to 7 little ones each, the latter reaching sexual maturity within a year.

The ***wild boar*** *(Sus scrofa)* looks very much like a domestic pig, but its aspect is fiercer. A wild boar can be 2 m long and 1 m in height. Some males can reach 250 kg in weight. Females are smaller and shorter. Its strength lies in its heat and snout; its snout is thick and good for foraging, while its head is strong and helps it protect itself. The tusks are large, long, and curved, reaching up to 30 cm. it feeds on nuts, roots, ages, insects, snakes, and mice. Its thick skin is another protection: it is hard to penetrate and it is covered with thick hairs. Wild boars are brown-greyish, with

reddish or dark greyish shades, depending on season and age. Both smell and hearing are good, unlike sight: they perceive only moving objects. Their mating period starts in September and end in January. Gestation lasts for 17 weeks, after which females give birth to up to 10 brown-yellowish, dark brown-striped piglets each.

It is important to note that, though the animals can look healthy, they carry bacteria that can affect the visitors' immune system: if their immune system is deficitary, they can catch diseases after their contact with the animals. The pens, stables, boxes, and pastures should not be reachable for the protection of both the visitors and the animals [3, 4, and 5].

CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion, the development of a mini-zoo at the entrance to an agri-tourism farm can be profitable for the farmer since it is an attraction for both adults and children.

To prevent visitors from getting diseased because of different pathogens (*Campylobacter coli*, *Campylobacter jejuni*, *Cryptosporidium* spp., *Escherichia coli*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, *and Salmonella enterica*) [1, 2], each farmer should bear in mind the following [4, 6, and 7]:

- emphasise the importance of hygiene, by ensuring sanitary facilities necessary for both hand washing and hand disinfecting;
- ensure proper conditions for food services as far as possible from the animal area;
- maintain cleanness along the entire itinerary;
- observe the following criteria in the choice of the animals to be included in mini-zoos:
    - to ensure enough space for the animals in order to avoid overcrowding;
    - to enjoy the supervision of a veterinary that monitors animal health and that vaccinates them.

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