



„A madárbarát Magyarorszáéért!”

Magyar Madártani és Természetvédelmi Egyesület/BirdLife Hungary

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Statement of MME BirdLife Hungary about the planned location of the mountain bike race of the 2024 Olympic Games in Budapest

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The decision that the area of the Pesthidegkút glider runway is going to be the terrain for the mountain bike race of the 2024 Olympic Games in Budapest, was made public on the 5th of December 2016 during a public hearing for the residents of the II. district of Budapest. The plans presented make it clear that the project will profoundly disturb the natural state and values of the area, especially the rare and highly protected Caspian Whip Snake (*Dolichophis caspius*) and the European Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilus citellus*). The plan poses a real threat to these and other protected plant and animal populations in peril and will negatively affect their populations. We cannot accept that such an important international sport event can only be organised with significant damages to the natural values of the hosting town, so we ask decision makers to take natural values into consideration and change the location of the sport event to a place where the conflict with natural values can be avoided or minimised.

The Pesthidegkút glider runway and its vicinity with the Vörös-kővár in the II. district of Budapest is a seminatural landscape with almost unharmed natural values. Two strictly protected and high profile vertebrate species, the European Ground Squirrel and the Caspian Whip Snake inhabit the area. Both species are top priorities of Hungarian nature conservation, having nearly the highest theoretical conservation values of 250.000 HUF and 500.000 HUF respectively. Beyond that an official Species Conservation Plan was prepared for the Caspian Whip Snake in 2005, signed by the Minister of Environment and Water. In this Conservation Plan mountain bikers are mentioned as one of the threats to local populations in Buda-hills. The Conservation Plan calls for protection of these local populations by prevention of over passing bike traffic.

The Caspian Whip Snake population of the Vörös-kővár and its vicinity was described in 2012. Ever since the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Group of MME BirdLife Hungary has been monitoring this population. What we see from the data at this point is that this is the second strongest population in Hungary after the one on the Szarsomlyó near Villány in South Hungary. This year we have been tracking five specimens with radiotelemetry. After a full season of following these snakes, we can state that they are using the adjacent grasslands regularly and to a great extent during their active season from early March to late October.

You can see on the attached map that the planned track of the Olympic event would cut in half the home-ranges of at least two of the five tracked individuals. Furthermore the preparation of the event, the attracted spectators would greatly increase the disturbance of the area, which will surely affect these snakes negatively.

The same disturbance is expected to the local populations of European Ground Squirrels. These mammals can exist with the casual disturbance of trespassers, but the planned permanent construction work and the event itself would definitely affect their population negatively for too long period. At the moment we consider Pesthidegkút population as one of the few remaining stronger populations, just a stone's throw from the heart of Budapest.

Why should we sacrifice this healthy state and the locally occurring top priority nature conservation values for a sport event that may find suitable place elsewhere within Budapest? We welcome the idea of having a "green" Olympic Games in Hungary in 2024. But a really "green" event should include consideration of nature conservation in planning and in such case when we possess so many evidences about the possible future negative impacts we simply have to abandon the idea of organising this event at that exact location. Therefore we think organisers and Budapest City Council should transfer the location of the mountain bike race elsewhere!

Gergely Babocsay

President of Amphibian and
Reptile Conservation Group of MME

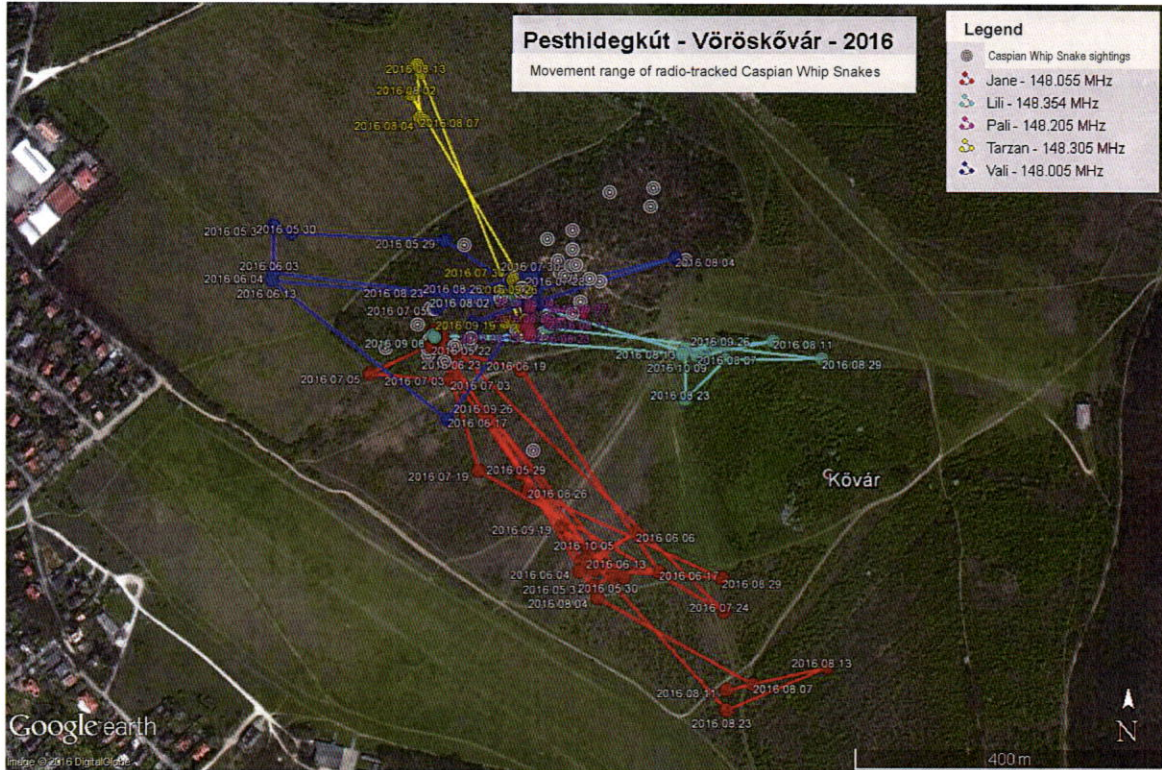
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Zoltán Bajor

President
of MME

Gábor Csorba

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Conservation Group of MME

Appendix



Picture 1: Caspian Whip Snake individual with wounded neck, using a burrow right in the middle of the track of bikers.



Picture 2: Road killed, freshly hatched specimen, found on the track of bikers.