



# FOLLOWING THE FOOTPRINTS OF WILD ANIMALS

## Information and reservations

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I FEEL  
SLOVENIA



REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA  
MINISTRSTVO ZA GOSPODARSKI  
RAZVOJ IN TEHNOLOGIJO



EVROPSKA UNIJA  
EVROPSKI SKLAD ZA  
REGIONALNI RAZVOJ  
NALOŽBA V VAŠO PRIHODNOST



ko  
čev  
sko

The Secret Forest  
of Slovenia



## Welcome to Kočevsko

Slovenia is one of the most forested countries in Europe, since over half of the country is covered by forests. However, in Kočevsko region, the percentage is even greater, because forests take over 80% of the land area there. Due to prudent and systematic forest management in the past, many forest surfaces have been preserved in Slovenia, the structure of which is close to natural forests as reflected in the incredible biodiversity and the conservation of numerous animal species.

While discovering the magic of the intact nature of Kočevsko, you will get to know the mightiness of the Kočevsko forests. The Secret Forest of Slovenia will uncover its shelter and its habitat for many animal species, while hiding the remains of primeval forests in its deepest corners, where only nature has been managing the area for centuries without any human intervention. There are six in the Kočevsko region, which is nearly half of all registered primeval forests in Slovenia, and the biggest among them, Pragozd Krokar, entered the **UNESCO** list of natural heritage in 2017, which demonstrates the great importance of these areas. In these forests, decayed trees are neither cut down nor are they cleaned up, forest fruits are not picked, and animals are not disturbed. Because we wish to preserve these forests for our descendants, we do not enter them, while we can visit the edges of these forests on marked trails, and admire and feel their mightiness by looking into them.

The Kočevsko landscape offers adventures of primal experiences of forests, where you can feel the immense power of nature and discover the beauty that the nature has bestowed upon us, relax in the shade under the treetops and listen to the soothing sounds of the landscape. The mightiness of our forests has also been preserved by responsible and sustainable management, which also contributes to the fact that Kočevsko region is the cradle of responsible co-existence with wild animals, particularly beasts, because this is one of those rare areas of Europe where we can still find all three great beasts in their natural environment: the brown bear, the grey wolf and the lynx.



Our programmes for watching and following the footsteps and presence of signs of wild animals in their natural habitat are intended for all enthusiastic observers of wilderness and lovers of nature and animals who will have the unique opportunity in the Kočevsko region, the Secret Forest of Slovenia, to uncover the magic of the untouched nature and get to know the life of the big beasts and their role in the forest. While observing, you will get to know the attractiveness of nature and feel the mightiness of these animals, follow the signs of their presence in the environment, and with a bit of luck, perhaps see one of the forest inhabitants in its natural surroundings.

When establishing contact with wild animals, responsible, monitored and appropriately guided observance is of key importance, because too much contact between man and wild animals can have numerous negative consequences for the latter. By following footprints and other signs of presence of wild animals in the programmes, experienced guides will provide you with many interesting facts and make sure you will have an unforgettable adventure.



Foto: Marjan Artnik

### **There are various programmes for watching and following wild animals available to you:**

- Discovering and observing the brown bear in its natural habitat - one-day programme.
- Discovering and observing the brown bear in its natural habitat - two-day programme.
- Natural science - educational programme of learning about bears, for students.
- Following the wild animals in the Kočevsko region - one-day programme.
- Following the wild animals in the Kočevsko region - three-day programme.
- Following the wolf tracks by snowshoeing the snow-covered wilderness of the Kočevsko region.
- "Bear Trail Bike Packing".

For more information about the programmes, visit the website: [www.kocevsko.com](http://www.kocevsko.com)





Foto: Marjan Artnak

## THE BROWN BEAR (*Ursus arctos*)

The brown bear is the largest representative of the beasts, which is present in numerous countries of Southern Europe and in Scandinavia. Its population is very large in our forests. The bear is a protected species and it has been placed on the red list of endangered species in Slovenia since 1993 and it is also protected by other international conventions. Its body is strong and bulky. When walking, the brown bear presses the entire surface of its paws on the ground, which makes it appear clumsy, although it is actually a very quick and nimble animal. When meeting the brown bear, it is important to remain calm and not scare the bear away by yelling or throwing things at it. Its footprints are very distinct and are nearly impossible to be mistaken for footprints of any other animal species.

**Body mass:**  
120 - 400 kg.

**Shoulder height:**  
90 - 120 cm.

**Time of reproduction:**  
mid-June /  
start of August.

**Time of giving birth:**  
end of December /  
start of February.

**Number of cubs:** 1 - 4.

**Habitat:**  
larger dense forests in  
the karst world.

**Behaviour:**  
solitary, hibernates  
through winter.

**Peculiarities:**  
many different colour  
variations of the fur.

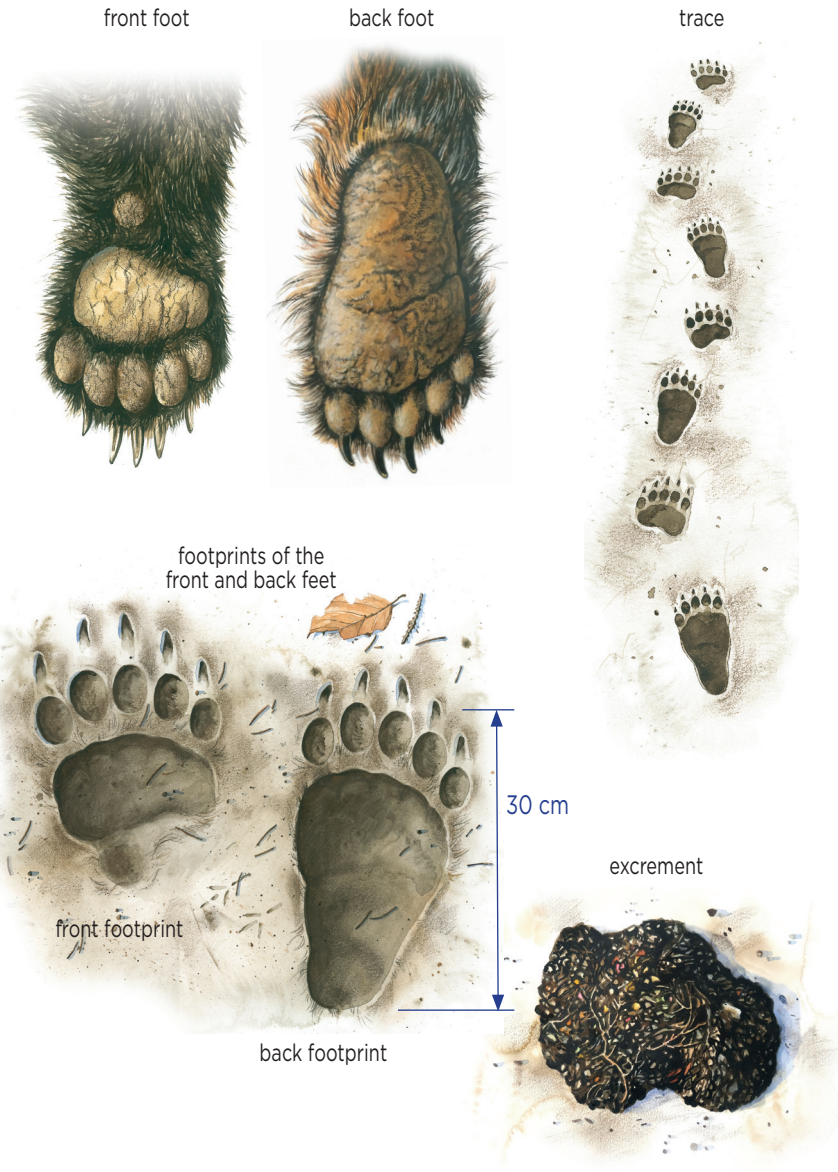






Foto: Marjan Artnak

## EURASIAN LYNX (*Lynx lynx*)

The lynx has all the characteristics of its genus, such as a short and wide head, tufts of hair on its ears, tall legs and a short tail. Its fur is thick, covered with long and fine hair, while its reddish-grey back is scattered with brown spots, which can be of various patterns. The lynx nearly disappeared from the Slovenian lands in the past, but it was resettled in the Kočevje forests in the 1970s. Today, it has once again become an endangered species, so efforts for another repopulation of new lynxes are underway. Due to their careful nature, it is incredibly hard to notice them. Their footprint is round with four small toe pads, while the claws can only rarely be seen in the footprints.

### Body mass:

25 - 35 kg.

### Shoulder height:

60 - 70 cm.

### Time of reproduction:

March / April.

### Time of giving birth:

May / June.

### Number of cubs: 1 - 4.

### Habitat:

larger dense forest.

### Behaviour:

solitary, hunts its prey mostly by waiting and stalking it.

### Peculiarities:

many different colour variations of the fur with spots.

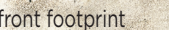
foot



trace



front footprint



back footprint

7 cm

excrement







## WOLF (*Canis lupus*)

The wolf is the largest representative of the dog family. It has a pointy snout, slanting eyes and relatively large and upright ears. Its neck and chest are very strong. The Slovenian wolf population is regarded as one of the rare autochthonous populations which remain in Europe, while the wolves are among the more important elements of Slovenian natural heritage. They live in packs and are very territorial animals. They are occasional predators of domestic animals. The footprint of a grown-up wolf is in its size and shape similar to a footprint of a big dog.

### **Body mass:**

40 - 55 kg.

### **Shoulder height:**

70 - 90 cm.

### **Time of reproduction:**

January / February.

### **Time of giving birth:**

April / May.

### **Number of cubs:** 3 - 8.

### **Habitat:**

larger dense forests in the karst world.

### **Behaviour:**

lives in packs. Males are solitary animals.

### **Peculiarities:**

they are very cautious and timid animals afraid of men.







Foto: Janez Papež

## WILDCAT (*Felis silvestris*)

The wild cat is a protected species in Slovenia and is similar to a domestic cat. Their habitats are secluded forests and rocky areas which offer a lot of hiding places, and they avoid men and his dwellings. It is a nocturnal animal, which moves around the forest inaudibly and marks its habitat with scent glands and by scratching the trunks of trees. It feeds on mice, birds and small mammals, and enjoys being in the warm sun throughout the day.

### Body mass:

5 - 12 kg.

### Shoulder height:

30 - 40 cm.

### Time of reproduction:

February / March.

### Time of giving birth:

April / May.

### Number of cubs: 2 - 6.

### Habitat:

larger dense forests with warm locations.

### Behaviour:

feeds predominantly with small rodents and birds.

### Peculiarities:

a wildcat can successfully mate with a domesticated cat.

foot



trace



excrement



footprint







Foto: Marjan Artnak

## FOX (*Vulpes vulpes*)

Fox is a solitary animal which relies on its own smelling and hearing senses while hunting. It has a distinctly slim body on relatively short legs. Its tail is longer than half of its body with its head, its back is usually reddish-brown, while its belly is dirty white. It is mostly a nocturnal animal, while in autumn and winter it can be seen during the day. It feeds on birds, small mammals, insects, carrion and strawberries, and its natural enemies are wolf, lynx and mountain eagle.

### Body mass:

6 - 12 kg.

### Shoulder height:

30 - 40 cm.

### Time of reproduction:

end of December /  
end of February.

### Time of giving birth:

March / April.

### Number of cubs: 3 - 7.

### Habitat:

forests, fields, larger  
city parks.

### Behaviour:

a very careful and  
adaptable species,  
mostly active at dusk  
and at night.

### Peculiarities:

transmits a life-  
threatening disease for  
humans - rabies.



foot

trace



footprint

excrement





Foto: Janez Papež

## ROE DEER (*Capreolus capreolus*)

The roe deer is a small species of the deer family. Its lower back is positioned higher than its shoulders, it has big eyes and ears and practically no tail. Its fur is long, stiff and brittle and it moves around nimbly in the lush forest undergrowths. With a couple of jumps into the thicket it quickly saves itself from danger and it can often be found on grasslands and pastures transitioning into smaller forests. Its main predators are wolf and lynx, and smaller roes can also become the prey of foxes or birds of prey.

### **Body mass:**

25 - 30 kg.

### **Shoulder height:**

65 - 75 cm.

### **Time of reproduction:**

mid-July / mid-August.

### **Time of giving birth:**

May / June.

### **Number of cubs:** 1 - 3.

### **Habitat:**

forests, fields, meadows.

### **Behaviour:**

active during morning and evening hours, also at night. They often stay nearby human settlements.

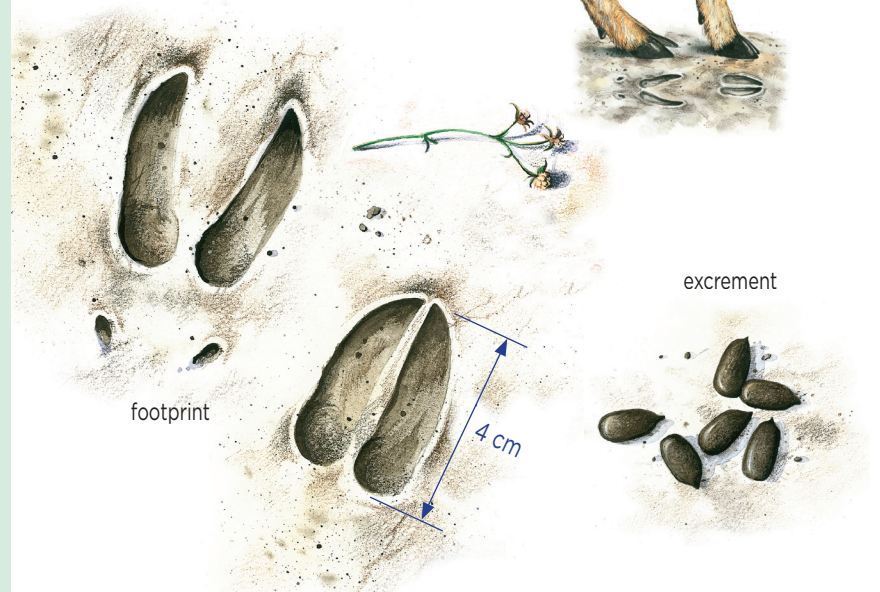
### **Peculiarities:**

a ruminant mammal. They form small groups in winter.

foot



trace



footprint

4 cm

excrement







Foto: Marjan Artnak

## RED DEER (*Cervus elaphus*)

The red deer is the largest deer in Central Europe. Males are adorned with branched antlers. Their head is long, the ears are large and pointy, and the tail is longer than that of the roe deer, measuring about 15 cm. Its fur is long and brittle, reddish-brown in summer and greyish-brown in winter. The red deer is a very changeable animal species. Its body size and the strength of its antlers are influenced by the living conditions of the environment. It is particularly active at dusk and night. During the day, it rests in the shelter of trees, but at dusk it comes out to graze.

### Body mass:

100 - 250 kg.

### Shoulder height:

90 - 130 cm.

### Time of reproduction:

start of September /  
start of October.

### Time of giving birth:

May / June.

### Number of cubs:

1 (only exceptionally 2).

### Habitat:

dense forests, fields.

### Behaviour:

active at dusk and  
night. Lives in herds.

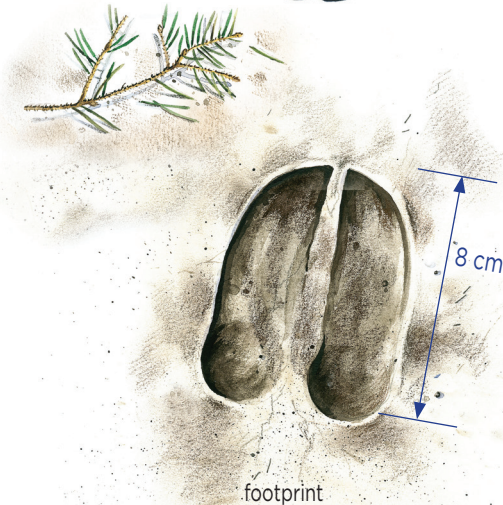
### Peculiarities:

a ruminant mammal.  
Well adapted to human  
presence.

foot



trace



footprint

excrement







Foto: Marian Artinak

## WILD BOAR (*Sus scrofa*)

It is characteristic for a wild boar to have its massive body carried around by short and stout legs. The front part of the body is particularly strong, and the long spiked head gradually narrows into a pointy snout. Its eyes are relatively small, the ears are short, wide and upright, and its short tail ends with a tuft of hair. Its body is covered in strong bristly fur of greyish-brown or dark brown colour. It is a very careful and intelligent animal, which is particularly active at night.

### Body mass:

70 - 250 kg.

### Shoulder height:

70 - 100 cm.

### Time of reproduction:

start of November /  
end of December.

### Time of giving birth:

March / May.

### Number of cubs: 3 - 8.

### Habitat:

forests, fields, meadows.

### Behaviour:

night animal which  
lives in herds. Adult  
boars are solitary  
animals.

### Peculiarities:

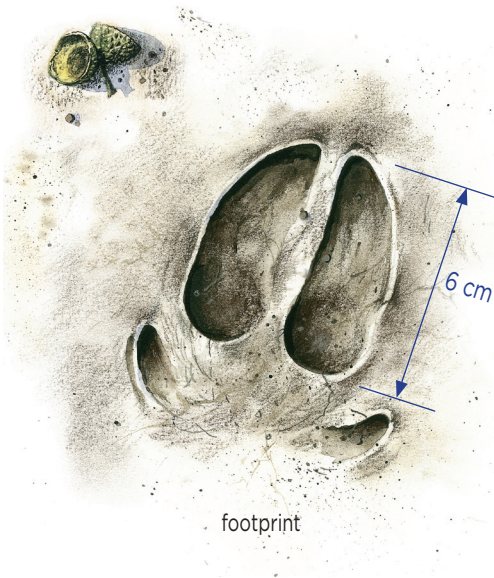
omnivore. Can cause a  
lot of damage in farming  
and agriculture.



foot



trace



footprint



excrement





Foto: Miran Krapež

## **BADGER** (*Meles meles*)

The badger is the largest Slovenian mustelid. Its head is pointy, its body strong and bulky, whereas its limbs are muscular with long claws on the toes. Its head is white and there is a wide black stripe over its eyes and ears. The back is of various shades of grey, while the belly is covered in thin black fur. The tail is short and light coloured. It is a nocturnal animal and usually moves around slowly and carefully, but it climbs quite well and swims when necessary.

### **Body mass:**

10 - 20 kg.

### **Shoulder height:**

30 - 35 cm.

### **Time of reproduction:**

March / August.

### **Time of giving birth:**

February / March.

### **Number of cubs:** 2 - 6.

### **Habitat:**

forests, fields, meadows and orchards.

### **Behaviour:**

nocturnal animal which hibernates through winter.

### **Peculiarities:**

omnivore. They live in underground burrows - setts.







Foto: Marjan Artnak

## MARTEN (*Martes martes*)

Martens are the most diverse and the largest family among the beasts, which is reflected in both their physical form and their eating habits. They have a slim body with a chestnut to dark brown coloured coat and short legs. They are solitary animals which feed on rodents, insects and forest fruits. Martens are excellent climbers which live in all types of forests and in the mountains up to the tree line.

### Body mass:

1,0 - 1,5 kg.

### Body length with tail:

60 - 75 cm.

### Time of reproduction:

July / August.

### Time of giving birth:

April / May.

### Number of cubs: 2 - 4.

### Habitat:

dense forest areas.

### Behaviour:

active during night time, partly also in the day time.

### Peculiarities:

related species is the beech marten, which stays nearby human settlements.

foot



trace



footprint

excrement







Foto: Janez Papež

# **EUROPEAN HARE** (*Lepus europaeus*)

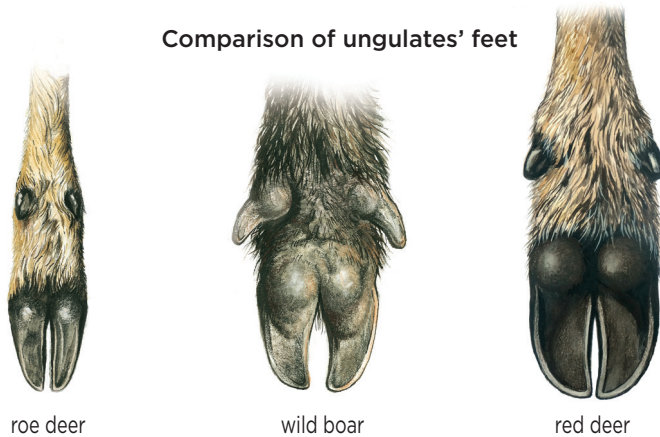
European hares range between 40 to 70 cm in length. The upper part of their fur is yellowish-brown with a grey coating, while the lower part is white. Their ears are very long with black tips, while the back legs are longer and stronger than the front legs. They have thick fluffy fur, which gets replaced in the spring and autumn. Hares' best developed sense is their hearing. They are also good and fast runners and can quickly save themselves from predators, relying on these particular skills. They are active both by day and night. They are solitary animals, which stay within its territory all year round.

- Body mass:**  
3,5 - 6 kg.
- Body length:**  
40 - 70 cm.
- Time of reproduction:**  
January / August.
- Time of giving birth:**  
March / September.
- Number of cubs:** 1-4  
(3-4 times a year).
- Habitat:**  
fields, forests.
- Behaviour:**  
solitary animal, when in danger it conceals close to the ground.
- Peculiarities:**  
in one year a rabbit can have 3-4 litters. Baby bunnies are born with hair and eyesight.

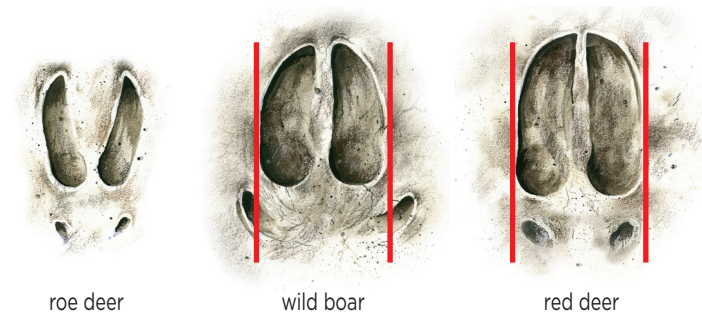




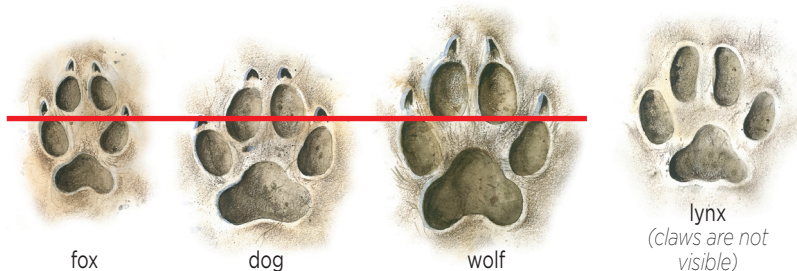
### Comparison of ungulates' feet



### Comparison of ungulates' footprints



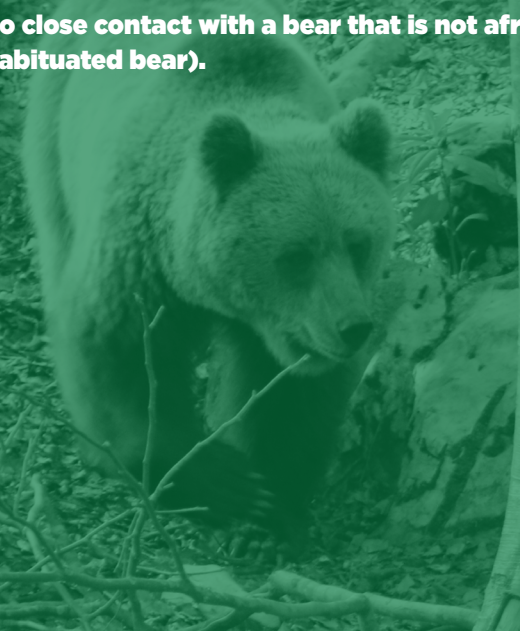
### Differentiation of beast footprints



## How to behave in bear areas

Bear is a cautious animal, which, as a rule, perceives a person as a danger, and therefore tends to avoid him, which is enabled by his well-developed senses. Bears only attack when surprised or provoked by the approach of a person, and as a defensive reaction. The most common situations that elicit such behaviour are:

- **an unleashed dog provoking a bear and then seeking its owner's protection,**
- **approaching an injured bear,**
- **surprising a female with cubs at a close distance,**
- **surprising a bear at a close distance where it has no option to leave the area immediately,**
- **approaching a bear when it is feeding, and**
- **coming into close contact with a bear that is not afraid of humans (a habituated bear).**





## **In order to avoid a bear encounter, we need to know and take into account some general rules of behavior:**

- Your presence in a bear habitat should not be so silent as to surprise a bear. Make yourself noticeable, especially when walking through dense vegetation or in rugged terrain.
- Keep your dog on a leash. If your dog comes upon a bear, it will probably rush the bear directly and lead it to you.
- If you see a bear, never try to approach or disturb it (e.g. by throwing rocks at it).
- Never feed a bear!

## **When a bear detects a person, he will immediately leave the area, in most cases even before we detect the bear's presence. However, if you encounter a bear anyway, it's important to stay calm and assess the situation, so we are giving you some helpful tips on how to react in such cases:**

- When you spot a bear from a distance, retreat slowly from the way you arrived and give the bear plenty of space to continue its route. Never run away!
- If a bear is coming towards you and it has not yet seen you, make yourself noticed by speaking calmly and retreat slowly. Bears have poor eyesight, so the animal must identify you as a human and realize you are not a threat.
- If you encounter a bear in close proximity: stop, stay calm and slowly move backwards without making any sudden moves and without screaming.
- Do not throw rocks or any objects towards the bear.
- In exceptional cases, a bear may perform a bluff charge without physical contact with the purpose of scaring away the unwanted visitor. In this case stand still or slowly lay on the ground with your face down, remaining as quiet as possible and never fight back.
- Remember: never run away from a bear or try to climb a tree. Bears are good climbers and can reach up to 50 km/h when running.

- Never approach bear cubs, even if they look curious or abandoned. If you spot them, retreat, because their mother is not far away.

## **Green Guidelines**

### **In order to preserve the nature for future generations, we also offer some guidelines that every forest visitor should follow:**

- **LEAVE NO TRACE BEHIND:** remember to take all the waste with you and place it in the assigned waste bins or a landfill, and never leave it in the wild. Fire can only be burned on suitably prepared fireplaces and must be completely extinguished before departure. During the fire hazard, burning is prohibited.
- **BE RESPECTFUL OF PROPERTIES, NATURE AND MARKINGS:** entering hunting observatories is not allowed without proper permits and it is prohibited to enter the virgin forests, which are marked with blue color and can only be observed from the paths. Do not collect endangered plants, crops or flowers or destroy undergrowth. Conserve water resources, which are rare and valuable when found in the karst area.
- **USAGE OF ROUTES:** for better safety and lesser impact on nature, follow the paths and ride vehicles on the intended roads taking any restrictions into consideration.
- **DO NOT DISTURB THE ANIMALS:** do not cause any unnecessary noises when visiting the forest which would disturb the animals. We can alert them of our presence simply by speaking. Do not feed or touch any forest animals, even if the offsprings appear abandoned.
- **SUITABLE EQUIPMENT:** Prior to visiting nature acquire suitable footwear, clothes and other equipment, including enough water and food supplies.