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CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE STUDY OF THE SPECIES *Sagittaria sagittifolia* L. AND *Carex pendula* Huds. IN THE FLORA OF THE "PRUTUL DE JOS" RESERVE

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The "Prutul de Jos" Reserve is one of the most important protected natural areas in southern Moldova, distinguished by a wide diversity of aquatic, wetland, grassland, and forest ecosystems. A comprehensive floristic study conducted over the last decade identified 314 vascular plant species within the reserve (Cassir, 2021). Furthermore, research into the aquatic and wetland habitats of Lake Beleu and its surroundings revealed the presence of two species rare to the reserve's territory: *Sagittaria sagittifolia* L. and *Carex pendula* Huds. Annual monitoring of these species' populations is carried out during the growing season to assess their current status and document bio-ecological and chorological characteristics – data essential for identifying limiting factors and estimating short-term trends for the taxa.

Carex pendula Huds. – a vulnerable (VU) species protected by law (*Legislation...* 1999) in the Republic of Moldova. Within the reserve, it grows solitarily or in small groups, sporadically distributed in damp areas and floodplain forests dominated by *Salix* and *Populus*. The area occupied and the number of individuals vary depending on growing conditions, with the largest population recorded in plot 9 (Covrea). It is a perennial, meso-hygrophilous plant at high risk of endangerment due to both climate change, which alters the hydrological regime and intense anthropogenic pressures.

Sagittaria sagittifolia L. – a rare species within the flora of the Republic of Moldova, found sporadically in the aquatic basins of the Lower Prut and Lower Dniester rivers. Within the reserve, it has been recorded at shallow depths in stagnant or slow-flowing waters with a muddy substrate near the banks of Lake Beleu and its associated channels. It grows singly or in a scattered manner, and only rarely in small groups, the highest number of specimens was observed at Lake Robu. It is a perennial, medicinal, and ornamental plant thriving in wet or aquatic environments that is threatened by severe pressures such as significant hydrological fluctuations, drainage, and human disturbance.

Maintaining the satisfactory condition of wetland habitats is crucial for the conservation of vascular plant species that are rare within the "Prutul de Jos" Reserve – specifically *Sagittaria sagittifolia* L. and *Carex pendula* Huds. as these areas serve as an essential ecological refuge. The presence of these taxa underscores the high conservation value of the aquatic and marsh ecosystems of Lake Beleu and the surrounding area.

Keywords: Rare plants species, "Prutul de Jos" Reserve.

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