DELIVERABLE 1.13

TECHNICAL REPORT

SOARING BIRD MIGRATION ALONG THE ADRIATIC COAST OF ALBANIA – SEASON 2014

Photo: M. Topi/PPNEA

Reported by

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1 Summary

In 2014, under the frames of the CEPF project "Land of Eagles and Castels" a survey on raptor migration and wetland birds species composition and numbers was conducted by BSPB and PPNEA teams in the KBAs Narta Lagoon, Butrinti and Vlora Bay. The main goal was to explore the project KBAs and locations around where long-term tourist facilities on the base of birds and other biodiversity would be established to support local economy and Nature conservation. Regarding birds, more precisely we aimed to find appropriate sites for observation of soaring bird migration and wetland birds, give rough estimates of bird concentrations and numbers at these sites (including identification of flagship species), and evaluate the logistics for access and their potential for nature friendly tourism (including possibilities to establish infrastructures for tourists and photographers).

We used a standard methodology for data collection. Field work was conducted in April and October. Because of only one year of data collection and the relatively short term of the study period (only in April and October), the data collected is not enough to estimate the full numbers of species presented at the KBAs. However, the data are sufficient to fulfil the expected results from this study – i.e. to identify the potential of the studied sites for birdwatching tourism and establishment of appropriate infrastructure.

A total of 371 migrating birds of prey belonging to 15 species were observed during the study and 7666 wetland birds belonging to 58 species were recorded at studied KBAs. A total of 12 observation points for monitoring of birds of prey migration in the region of the studied KBAs and along the Adriatic coast were identified and appropriate bird flagship species for each KBA were proposed (i.e. Egyptian vulture, Golden Eagle, Great Flamingo, Spoonbill and Glossy Ibis).

In conclusion, the present study confirms the importance of the Albanian Adriatic coast as an important flyway for many wetland birds, and on a lesser extent – for the raptorial birds. All surveyed KBAs have significant potential for developing tourist product, based on birdwatching, wildlife photography, Nature lovers' tourism and for long-term monitoring of birds.

2 Objective

This survey was implemented in the frames of the CEPF project of collaboration between PPNEA and BSPB "Land of Eagles and Castles: Pilot Sustainable Tourism Model for the Albanian Adriatic Coastline".

Trip to south and south-western Albania to explore Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) and locations around them in the areas of Vlore and Saranda where long-term tourist facilities on the base of birds and other biodiversity would be established to support local economy and Nature conservation. Conduct counts of migrating birds of prey and wetland birds surveys at several sites to assess flight routes, bird concentrations and numbers, as well as logistics and their potential for nature friendly tourism. Other task was to check the studied areas for presence of flagship species and for assessing the possibilities to establish infrastructures for tourists and photographers.

3 BSPB involvement

Petar Iankov (03 - 16 April), Anna Staneva (03 - 16 April), Stoyan Nikolov (03 - 05 April), Ivaylo Ivanon (09-19 October)

4 PPNEA involvement

Mirjan Topi (03 - 16 April; 17-19 October), Oresta Saliaj (4-7 April).

5 Selection of locations and Monitoring approach

5.1 PRELIMINARY SELECTION OF POTENTIAL LOCATIONS

Based on the previous work of PPNEA, we considered several locations within and around the following KBAs: 1) Narta Lagoon, 2) Vlora Bay (including Karaburun peninsula, Chika Mountain and Sazan Island), and 3) Butrinti. Two types of observation points were established: (1) for observation of wetland birds on the wetlands and (2) for observation of birds of prey migration. So far there is poor data available collected by use of these methods in the country: eg. The International Mid-Winter Count - IMWC (PPNEA unpubl. data), and previous surveys of the Adriatic flyway (see the Preliminary report under Deliverable 1.13). In addition, we used the information from satellite tracked birds of prey, which all indicated passage across Albania. Hence, our first locations were on a west-east oriented line north of the town of Vlore where crossing of migrant birds of prey was expected. The westernmost observation point was at Karaburun Peninsula and the easternmost one was at Shkalla village, in the southern part of the country. The locations were then chosen based on field observations, local topography, and accessibility of suitable locations. We purposefully avoided locations that may have offered supreme vantage points but would have involved laborious and potentially hazardous pedestrian approaches, as it was deemed practically infeasible to provide tourist service at those locations.

5.2 MIGRATION MONITORING APPROACH AND SPECIES SELECTION

Data were collected following the methodology developed under the project (see Deliverable 1.12), and a protocol was established to record all migrating raptors in hourly totals. Relevant weather data were also recorded at hourly intervals using respective measuring devices. As there were no parallel counts from two neighbouring observation points, no measures were necessary to avoid double counting.

Observation points were localized in spring 2014, and data on bird migration were collected in April and October for all project KBAs.

All soaring birds were counted, predominant part of which were expected to be raptors, as no prominent migration of storks and pelicans was reported for the Dalmatian coast of Albania (see the Preliminary report under Deliverable 1.13). For passerines and other migrants, only species list was made. Local breeders of raptor species were not considered for the analysis of data.

Because the main goal of this trip was to explore different locations rather than to establish a solid quantitative baseline, the team did not stick to a rigorous daily recording schedule. On most days, raptor migration was monitored for one or two hours or between 10:00 - 16:00 hrs, but travelling and exploration time requirements reduced monitoring time on certain days. In the same time, during the travel all visited areas were surveyed for presence of migrating birds of prey and they were recorded in a separate form.

At the observation points for wetland birds the team collected information from certain points (with recording the distances of the observed birds to the point). Observation points were selected on a way to avoid double-counting.

6 Data Management and Interpretation

All data were entered into separate Excel sheets for wetland birds recorded within the KBAs and for migrating birds of prey. Single records of birds outside the counts were described in separate form to serve as a base for an annotated list of the birds, recorded during the trip.

Due to the variable nature of migration, with more strong migration during favourable weather, and less migration on days with or following poor weather, comparisons between sites that were surveyed on different days are generally confounded by time: some sites may have appeared 'poor' because they were inadvertently surveyed during poor conditions. The team attempted to monitor migration in different days at the sites situated in the areas with presumed migration ‘corridors’ to avoid misjudging sites based on single days without migration.

7 Map of explored Observation Points

A total of 13 observation points were identified (see **Figure 1**).

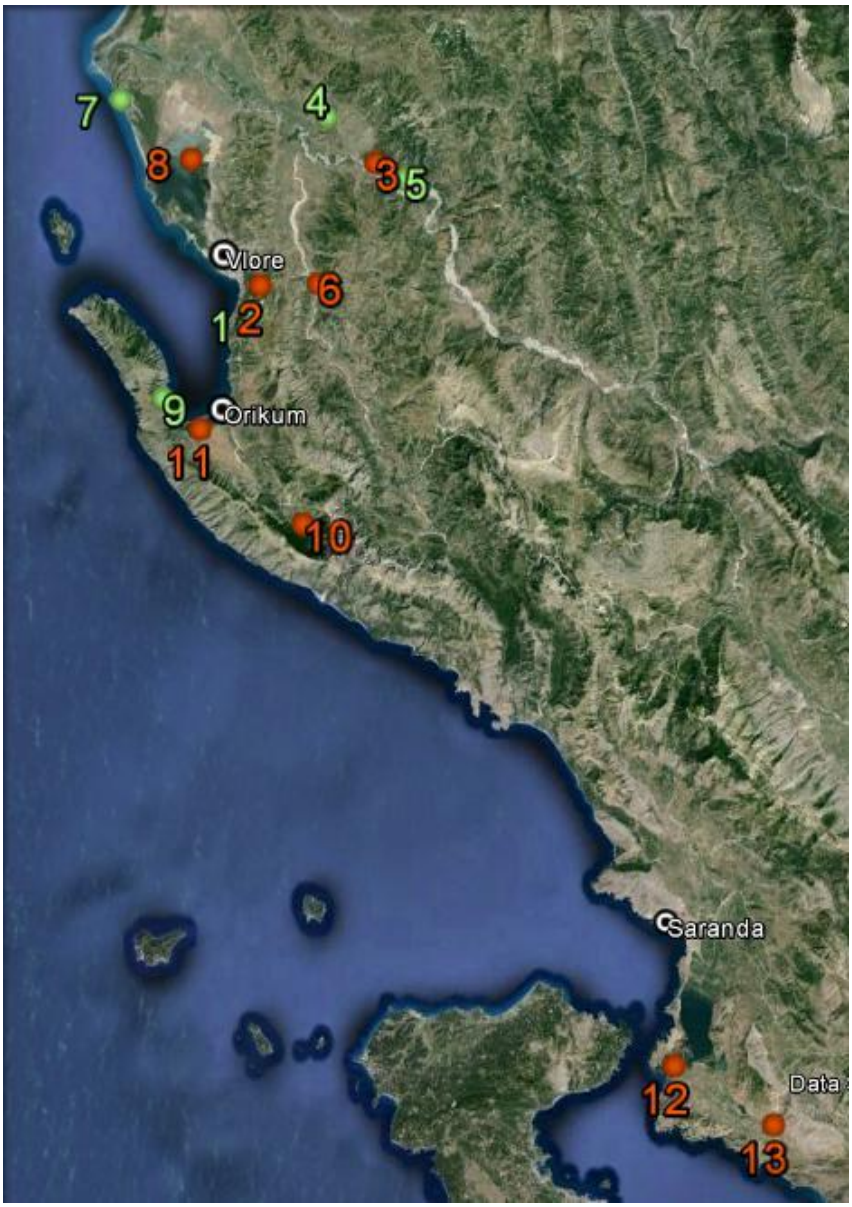

Figure 1. Map of the Western Albania with observation points explored in April and October 2014. Labels of observation points correspond to site numbers in text below; red observation points are recommended for long-term monitoring.

8 Detailed descriptions of Observation Points

8.1 Site 1 – Communication Tower south from Vlore

(723 m asl; 1 h) Expected good migration watch point owing to its disposition and elevation (see **Figure 2**). Located on top of east-west oriented ridge, accessible by unpaved road. Very good migration watch-point with all-round visibility, but two massive antennas and working generator of electricity for them obstruct visibility towards SW and the comfort of the observation. From this site is likely to record some of the birds of prey migrating closer to the sea. This site cannot be used for tourist purposes, because of its relatively difficult access and driving on rough road, antennae's inconvenience and the low numbers of birds passing there.

Figure 2. View from the Communication tower OP toward northwest and the town of Vlore (Photo: P. Iankov).

8.2 Site 2 – Kanine Castle

(379 m asl; 1 h) Identified after watching migration from Site 1, and subsequent exploration along asphalt road and short walk on a paved path through the small village (see **Figure 3**). Elevated vantage point with full all-round visibility on a concrete non-used platform within the remains of a medieval fortress. One of the watch points with excellent opportunity to combine birdwatching with presence at significant site of the Albanian history. Easily accessible by road from Vlore, opportunities for establishing simple little information centre. Nearby houses with enthusiastic children that can distract observers and will require special attention if birdwatching for tourist purposes is implemented. This site would have to be included in a permanent long-term monitoring array of points, as it will capture migration on most days under various wind conditions.

In April, a total of 4 birds of prey from 2 species were recorded for 1 day observation. In October, a total of 18 birds of prey from 2 species were recorded for 2 days observation.

Figure 3. View towards the Kanine Castle OP (left and middle), and the concrete platform that can be used for observations (right) (Photos: A. Staneva).

8.3 SITE 3 – ROADSIDE NEAR SELISHTE

(25 m asl; 3 h) Small open area at the deviation of the road Fier – Tepelene within the open valley, oriented north-west – south-east (see **Figure 4**). Good all-round visibility, but broad hill precludes views of migrants passing very low near the base of the hill. Located in the same valley as the site 4 bellow, this observation point can be important site in an array of points that would likely cover the bulk of migration under various weather conditions (see **Figure 1**). Explored twice on Apr 6th and on Apr 7th, when a total of 17 and 7 birds of prey were recorded, respectively.

Good conditions for watching raptor migration, but quite far from the nearest KBA Narta Lagoon.

Figure 4. View from Selishte OP towards southeast (Photo: A. Staneva).

8.4 SITE 4 – ROADSIDE NEAR VARIBOP

(28 m asl; 1 hrs) This observation point is located some 30 km from the town of Vlore, and 10 km east from Narta Lagoon KBA (see **Figure 5**). Small open place near the main road Fier – Tepelene, easily accessible by road. This location is the northernmost site in an array of observation points that would likely cover the most part of migration crossing the valley (see **Figure 1**). Cannot be recommended for tourist purposes due to its disposition aside of Narta Lagoon KBA and the low numbers of passing migrants.

Figure 5. View from Varibop OP towards northwest (Photo: A. Staneva).

8.5 SITE 5 – ROADSIDE NEAR ROMESI

(30 m asl; 1 hrs) Small open place near to unpaved road east of the main road Fier – Tepelene (see **Figure 6**). Located 18 km north-east from Vlore and easily accessible by road, this location is the southernmost site in an array of OP that would likely cover the most part of migration crossing the valley (see **Figure 1**). Cannot be recommended for tourist purposes due to its disposition aside of Narta Lagoon KBA and the low numbers of passing migrants.

Figure 6. View from Romesi OP towards east (left), and west (right) (Photos: A. Staneva).

8.6 SITE 6 – ROADSIDE NEAR DRASHOVICE

(55 m asl; 1 hrs) Foothill near to an unpaved road in the south-north oriented valley of tributary of Vjosa River (see **Figure 7**). Located about 10 km east from Vlore and easily accessible by road, this location is very good point that would likely cover the most part of migration following the valley (see **Figure 1**). It can be recommended for tourist purposes as it is close to the Narta Lagoon KBA and for the only one hour of observation relatively good numbers of migrants were observed.

Figure 7. View from the Drashovice OP towards northwest (left) and southeast (right) (Photos: A. Staneva).

8.7 SITE 7 – VJOSA RIVER OXBOW

(0 m asl; 1 h) This location was explored on April 7th. It is located 28 km northwest from Vlore and 8 km west form Novosele, from which the latter pass almost entirely on an unpaved road (see **Figure 8**). The site includes the marshlands surrounding the Vjosa River oxbow, as well as vast coastline. It seems a good place for observation of wetland birds, especially for waders.

A total of 37 birds from 7 species, from which the most interesting species is the Dalmatian Pelican, were registered during the current study.

Figure 8. Habitats at Vjosa River oxbow (left and middle) and a fishermen observation point (Photos: P. Iankov, M. Topi).

8.8 SITE 8 – NARTA LAGOON

(0 m asl; 4 h) This location was explored on April 4th and 5th (see **Figure 9**). A total of 3 observation points were chosen for the wetland bird survey, through which both the Narta Lake and the adjacent Salinas can be surveyed without overlapping the counts (see **Figure 10**).

The Narta Bridge observation point is situated in the southern part of the Narta Lagoon KBA, 8 km from Vlore and 800 m from Zvernec village. The south-eastern part of the Narta Lake can be surveyed through this point, which is used by PPNEA also during the IMWC.

The Salinas Barrier observation point is located in the middle of the KBA, offering great views both towards the Lake and the southern part of the Salinas, while the Salinas Administration (ADM) point gives opportunities to survey the northernmost part of the Salinas. The latter point is accessible through the main entrance of the Salinas Administration, where permission from the Salinas Manager is needed.

All 3 observation points are easily accessible, even though partially through unpaved road.

Figure 9. View from the observation points Narta Bridge (left), Salinas Barrier (middle), Salinas ADM (right) (Photos: A. Staneva).

About 5,500 wetland birds from 40 species were recorded in the site during the current survey (see ***Table 2***). Within the most interesting species observed are the Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*), not reported so far in the country as wintering species), and the Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) categorized as "vulnerable" by the IUCN Red List (2012).

The importance of the site as wintering and migration stop-over place is also confirmed by previous surveys in the area. In January 2014, during the IMWC the PPNEA team has registered more than 7300 birds from 30 wetland species.

Figure 10. Map of bird observation sites within and around Narta Lagoon KBA. Wetlands OP marked in blue, migration OP marked in orange.

8.9 SITE 9 – KARABURUN PENINSULA

(146 m asl; 1 h) This location was explored on April 9th (see **Figure 11**). The site includes the southern part of the Karaburun Peninsula, which can be accessed through an unpaved road and few hundred meters walk. The lack of registered birds from the observation point can be due to the strong wind during the observation. Eventual migration of low numbers of birds of prey can be expected from the seaside, as the distance between the peninsula and the connection with Italy (where another important migratory flyway is Messina) is only 100 km.

On the other hand, according to the existing management plan (MedWetCoast 2004) for the protected area, there are more than 40 mammal species, some rare plant species, as well as important and well-preserved habitats on the Karaburun Peninsula. This gives it a unique natural value. At the time of this survey 6 species of orchids were registered around the OP.

As the entire peninsula is a military area, a special permission from the Municipality of Orikum is needed. Because of this, the very limited possibilities to reach the most attractive from natural point of view parts, and the low numbers of migrating birds, the site is difficult to be considered of tourist interest.

Figure 11. View from the Karaburun Peninsula OP (Photos: A. Staneva).

8.10 Site 10 – Llogare Pass (581 m asl; 3:30 h) and Dukat

(343 m asl; 6:30 h) A very good observation site (see **Figure 12**) with a total of 84 migrating birds of prey from 10 species. Situated near the road Vlore – Saranda on the northern slope of the ridge at about 4 km from Llogare Pass, with excellent all round visibility, except towards SE, where is the peak of Chika Mountain. Migrating birds are approaching and passing both below and above the observer. It appears as if almost all birds passing over the Llogare Pass will be recorded.

Easily accessible by car, and nearby situated coffee shop can provide shelter from rain (though car can be parked on a concrete platform near to observers). The upper observation point (Lavazh) is located about 32 km from Vlore and 16 km from Orikum. The search done by Mirjan Topi resulted in an offer to hire nearby situated bungalow with two separate rooms, kitchen, bathroom and all basic facilities.

In April, a total of 54 birds of prey from 8 species were recorded for 2 days observation. In October, a total of 58 birds of prey from 6 species were recorded for 3 days observation. On days with heavy migration there is potential for overlap between this site and Site 2. However, most birds observed at this site were not visible from Site 2, and most birds passing Site 2 were not visible from this site. Confusion may arise when large streams of eagles or buzzards pass between the two points and may be recorded from either point, with counts being too different for observers to realise that the same flock/stream was counted.

Figure 12. View to the Llogare Mountaing, the Cika peak (far left) and the Llogare pass on its left. The white arrow shows the location of the Lavazh/Llogare OP (Photo: P. Iankov).

8.11 SITE 11 – ORIKUM WETLANDS

(0 m asl; 1 h) This location was explored on April 8th (see **Figure 13**). It includes a shallow brackish lake, separated from the adjacent Vlore Bay to the north by a narrow strip of land, and the related irrigation channels and marshlands. The site is easily accessible from the town of Orikum, situated 2 km to the east (see **Figure 13**).

The Orikum Lake impresses with its richness of food for wetland birds (frogs, fishes, lizards and insects), but at the time of the survey only 9 species of birds were registered. According to the data from the IMWC collected by PPNEA in January 2014, almost 1300 birds from more than 20 species were observed at the site, which suggests that the place has high birdwatching potential mostly in winter.

Figure 13. View of the Orikum Lagoon (Pasha Liman) (Photos: A. Staneva).

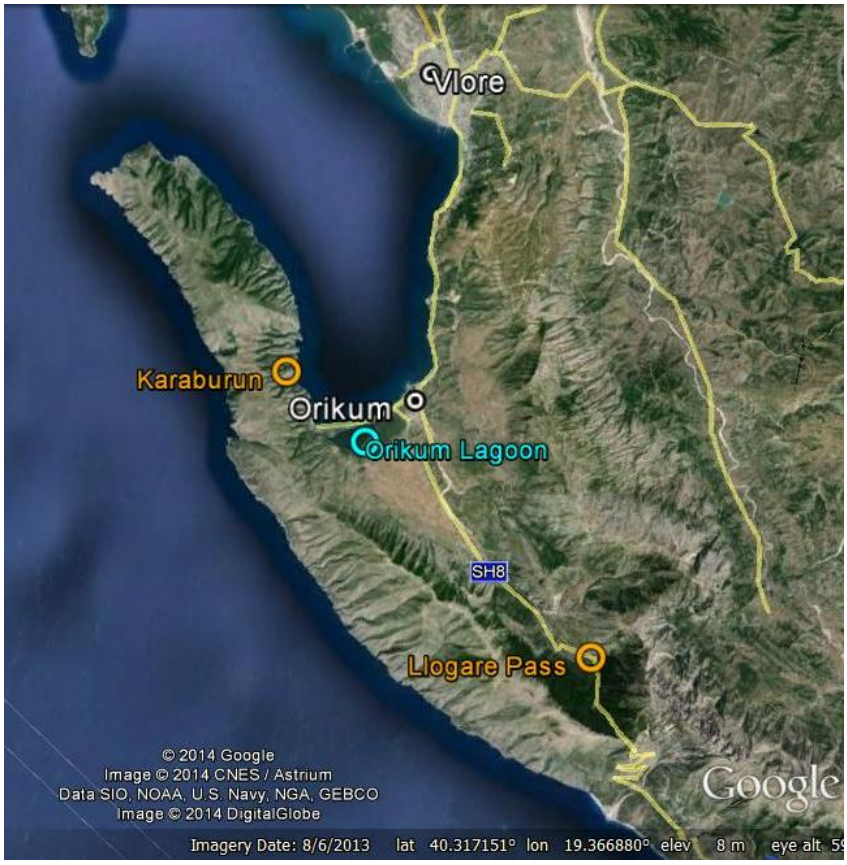

Figure 14. Map of bird observation sites within Vlora Bay KBA. Wetlands OP marked in blue, migration OP marked in orange.

8.12 SITE 12 – BUTRINTI

(146 m asl; 1 h) This location was explored on April 12th and 13th (see **Figure 15**). Two observation points were chosen within the Butrinti KBA: 1) Butrinti Mouth OP – situated on the northern side of the Vivari Channel, connecting the Butrinti Lake with the Ionian Sea, at parking on the right side of the road from Ksamil to Butrinti, 2) Butrinti Castle OP – at the uppermost part of the UNESCO Archeological site, just next to the tower.

The first OP offers a wonderful view to the wetlands along the Vivari Channel and the seaside. This OP is easily accessible, with benches and place for cars. It is also used by PPNEA for the purpose of the IMWC. In January 2014 the total number of registered birds was 4689 from 31 species of waterfowl, while during two consecutive counts in April under this survey, a total of 700 birds from 22 wetland species were registered. Five species of birds of prey were also observed at the place during winter and spring. It is a good site for observation of birds migrating along the coast.

The second OP offers good view towards south-east or north-west depending on the side of the tower that will be chosen for observation. A total of 15 birds of prey from 7 species (including Osprey *Pandion heliaetus*) were registered on their migration through the site.

The surveys realized shows that Butrinti KBA is an important wintering and stop-over site during migration for significant number birds, thus has high potential for the development of birdwatching tourism that can be combined with cultural-historical tourism.

Figure 15. View from the Butrinti Castle OP (left) and Butrinti Mouth (middle and right) (Photos: A. Staneva, M. Topi).

8.13 SITE 13 – HILLSIDE NEAR SHKALLA

(82 m asl; 7 h) This location was explored on Apr 13th and 14th (see **Figure 16**) to assess whether migrants approaching from the S and SE (from western Greece coast) may enter the south – north oriented valleys at this area and further to follow towards the Vjosa River valley and north. This is the southernmost point with excellent views into all directions (see **Figure 17**). Easily accessible by car through an unpaved road from Ksamil, 17 km from it.

In April, active migration from S, SW and SE was observed, with a total of 85 migrating birds of prey from 7 species. In October, a total of 56 birds of prey from 4 species were observed in 3 days of observation. Very good site for observation, even though out of Butrinti KBA.

Figure 16. View to (left; white arrow) and from (middle and right) the Shkalla migration observation point. View toward south (middle) and north (right) from the OP (Photos: A. Staneva, P. Iankov).

Figure 17. Map of bird observation sites within Butrinti KBA. Wetlands OP marked in blue, migration OP marked in orange.

9 Summary of All Observations

During the fieldwork, a total of 371 migrating birds belonging to prey of 15 species were observed during the study (*see* **Table 1**) and 7666 wetland birds belonging to 58 species were recorded at studied KBAs (*see* **Table 2**). Most records of migrating raptors were made in Butrinti and Vlora bay. The highest diversity and numbers of wetland birds were recorded both during spring and autumn visits in Narta Lagoon (a total of 5,458 birds from 41 species). Because of the irregular survey and monitoring schedule, all data collected must be seen as minimum numbers of birds migrating through the region or staging in the surveyed areas. Detailed data for migrating soaring birds (mainly birds of prey) could be seen in **Annex 1** and data for the wetland birds recorded in studied KBAs – in **Annex 2**. The bird list of Albania was updated with four more birds species (Greater Flamingo, Cattle Egret, Eleonora's Falcon and Red-necked Phalarope), not listed yet in the BirdLife list of birds for Albania (**Annex 3**).

Even some monitoring activities and counts of wetland birds have been done in Albania, there is no similar migration survey of birds of prey in the country yet (see the Preliminary report under Deliverable 1.13). Therefore, it is not possible to compare the data from the present survey with previous-ones in Albania. However, results from studies over several years along the western Adriatic coast show similar rate of raptors migration (Premuda et al., 2008), with evidences that many of them migrated at broad from and even over the sea (in some areas about 30% of the migrants), which make impossible their detection from the inland (Pandolfi & Sonet, 2006).

Regarding the wetland birds, the present study contribute to the study of Sackl et al. (2014) on the spring migration in the delta of Bojana-Buna River (Montenegro / Albania), both confirming the importance of the Albanian Adriatic coast as an important flyway for many wetland birds.

A total of 12 observation points for monitoring of birds of prey migration in the region of the studied KBAs and along the Adriatic coast were identified (*see* **Table 3**).

Table 1. Summary of observed migrating birds of prey around the studied KBAs.

Species	KBA Butrinti	KBA Narta Lagoon	KBA Vlora Bay	Totals
Accipiter gentilis	2		10	12
Accipiter nisus	27	4	17	48
Aquila chrysaetos			4	4
Buteo buteo	103	20	99	222
Buteo vulpinus			3	3
Circaetus gallicus	8	7	16	31
Circus aeruginosus	4	1	3	8
Circus cyaneus			2	2
Circus pygargus	2			2
Falco eleonorae			1	1
Falco peregrinus	1	1	1	3
Falco subbuteo			3	3
Falco tinnunculus	7	3	7	17
Falco vespertinus			1	1
Pandion heliaetus	2			2
Unidentified bird of prey	2		10	12
Totals	**158**	**36**	**177**	**371**

Table 2. Summary of observed wetland birds in the studied KBAs (during both spring and autumn visits).

	Numbers of birds in the Key Biodiversity Areas			
Bird Species	**Butrinti**	**Narta Lagoon**	**Vlora Bay**	**Subtotals**
Actitis hypoleucos		1	1	2
Alcedo atthis		6	12	18
Anas acuta	9			9
Anas clypeata	14	6		20
Anas penelope		16		16
Anas platyrhynchos	14	2	102	118
Anas querquedula	7			7
Apus apus	2			2
Ardea cinerea	123	61	20	204
Ardea ralloides	3		1	4
Aythya nyroca			50	50
Burhinus oedicnemus		16		16
Bubulcus ibis	1			1
Calidris alba		350		350
Calidris alpina	4	354		358
Calidris sp.		300		300
Charadrius alexandrinus		34		34
Charadrius dubius		274	2	276
Circus aeruginosus	2	1	6	9
Circus cyaneus			1	1
Egretta alba	26	42	2	70
Egretta garzetta	95	175	1	271
Falco columbarius		1		1
Fulica atra			249	249
Gallicago gallinago			5	5
Gallinula chloropus			2	2
Gelochelidon nilotica		2		2
Haematopus ostralegus		1		1
Himantopus himantopus	14	16		30
Hirundo rustica	300			300
Larus genei	1	322		323
Larus michahelis	108	158	5	271
Larus ridibundus	69	254	38	361
Limosa limosa	2			2
Numenius arquata	35	16		51
Numenius phaeopus		2		2
Pelecanus crispus		94		94
Phalacrocorax carbo	59	4	6	69
Phalacrocorax pygmaeus			14	14

Phalaropus lobatus		1		1
Philomachus pugnax	700			700
Phoenicopterus roseus		2137		2137
Platalea leucorodia	20	20		40
Plegadis falcinellus	25			25
Pluvialis squatarola		12		12
Podiceps cristatus		1		1
Podiceps nigricollis		5		5
Recurvirostra avosetta	1	526		527
Sterna albifrons	2	15		17
Sterna caspia		24		24
Sterna hirundo	8	4		12
Sterna sandvicensis	12	7		19
Tachybaptus ruficollis			32	32
Tadorna tadorna		94		94
Tringa erythropus	1	93		94
Tringa nebularia		4		4
Tringa ochropus	1			1
Tringa stagnatilis		1		1
Tringa totanus		6	1	7
Grand Totals	**1658**	**5458**	**550**	**7666**

Table 3. Proposed observation points for wetland birds and migration observations in the 3 studied KBAs in Albania (OP – observation point).

No	KBA	Observation point (OP) name	Nearest settlement	Wetland OP	Migration OP	In/Out of the KBA	Coordinates N	Coordinates E
1	Butrinti	Butrinti Mouth	Ksamil	X	X	In	39,74638	20,00561
2	Butrinti	Butrinti Castle	Ksamil		X	In	39,74604	20,01975
3	Butrinti	Shkalla	Shkalla		X	Out	39,69349	20,12108
4	Narta Lagoon	Selishte	Selishte		X	In	40,55451	19,65499
5	Narta Lagoon	Bridge	Zverneci	X		In	40,51773	19,40664
6	Narta Lagoon	Salinas barrier	Skrofotine	X		In	40,55919	19,43439
7	Narta Lagoon	Salinas administration	Skrofotine	X		In	40,57288	19,45566
9	Vlora Bay	Dukat Fshat	Dukat Fshat		X	Out	40,24174	19,55162
10	Vlora bay	Orikum Lagoon	Orikum	X		In	40,31567	19,44828
11	Vlora bay	Lavazh (Llogare pass)	Dukat Fshat		X	Out	40,22981	19,576
12	Vlora Bay	Canina Castle	Vlora		X	Out	40,44436	19,51987

10 Surveying Flagship species

One of the aims of this study was to look for species which may serve as flagship species for each region as components of the touristic brands, which will be further developed under the project.

Currently, the **Egyptian vulture** is recognised as the most steeply declining bird of prey in Europe, and still the species is present in Albania even though in low numbers (Velevski et al. 2015). The species is also long-distance migrant and related to different myths and legends in different countries, therefore it was considered as one of the target species to study as potential flagship species. Six breeding territories of Egyptian Vulture were surveyed for presence of the pairs along the way from Tirana to the studies KBAs: Vajzë, Poçem, Mashkullore, Salari (Sheshi), Zhulat and Gjirokastra. Direct observations and extensive conversations with local inhabitants and shepherds took place at most of the sites. Results show that 4 out of 6 breeding territories of the Egyption Vulture, checked between April 3th and 16th were already occupied by the birds. Pairs were recorded at Gjirokastra, Zhulat and Salari (Shashi). A single bird was seen at Mashkullorë, but according to a local shepherd two birds have already returned from their wintering sites. No birds were registered at Poçem and Vajzë, due to hampered observations because of heavy rain and very strong wind, respectively. It is not clear if the two birds observed just above the town of Gjirokastra and along the adjacent valley of Drino River are the birds from the Goranxi. At Salary, the pair of Egyptian Vultures was observed in the nest. The observations in the breeding territory close to Zhulat village, proved the presence of at least two adult birds. The birds were firstly observed in flight and then both individuals entered the nest. Around 30 min later another adult bird was observed in the eastern side of the territory (over the village). It is not sure if this bird is different or is one of the individuals seen in the nest.

According to the team there is higher potential risk of accidental poisoning for the birds inhabiting the area of Gjirokastër, as the birds are searching for food close to the urban area, where people may use poisons against house living rodents and small predators, damaging domestic birds. This makes logical the need of establishing of a Vulture feeding site (for providing supplementary food), which can be turned into attractive part of a tourist product by establishing a simple hide for observing and photographing the Egyptian Vulture, Raven and other scavenging birds.

Communication with local people from the surveyed territories was made whereas possible to increase environmental awareness within the local communities. This is important for conservation of biodiversity especially within and around the KBAs and the breeding territories of the Egyptian Vulture, and other threatened bird species. On the other hand, the exchange of knowledge with local people (especially shepherds), results in the collection of valuable information about the local breeding birds, their behaviour, as well as of legends and believes related to the flagship species.



Figure 18. Communicating with local people means increasing their environmental awareness and receiving valuable information about species and habitats (Photos: A. Staneva, P. Iankov).

Based on the data collected under the bird survey in 2014, we may also suggest the following potential flagship for the studied KBAs:

- **Golden Eagle** for Vlora Bay and Krababurun. The spesies is common and often observed in the area all around the year. It also a national symbol of Albania and well recognisable among the people.
- **Great Flamingo** for Narta Lagoon – the species is emblematic, easy to identify and remember. It is present every year in big numbers in the salt pans of Narta and could potentially attract many people for birdwatching tourism and wildlife photography. Because of its charismatic in appearance, by means of good communication and advertising programme, it could attract of the interest also of many people spending their holydays along the coast.
- **Spoonbill and Glossy Ibis** for Butrinti – both species provoque the interest of people, breed in the area and are not difficult to observe. They could be subject of birdwatching tourism and wildlife photography.

11 Potential for Nature Explorers' Tourism and for Long-term Bird Monitoring

All surveyed KBA have significant potential for developing tourist product, based on birdwatching, wildlife photography, Nature lovers' tourism and for long-term monitoring of birds. The sites are attractive in terms of birds, both in spring and autumn for all KBAs.

However, it should be considered that the period of survey covered relatively little part of the annual cycle of birds and only one year, therefore cannot pretend to fully represent all value of the areas with this respect. More complete picture can be obtained after gathering and analyzing the data from a long-term study.

The KBAs Narta Lagoon propose excellent conditions for tourism, based on observing birds, staging at the various types of wetlands, combined with observation of migrating raptors at Kanina Fortress or some of the nearest points to Vlore. The salt pans have a great potential for incorporation of touristic infrastructure by close collaboration with companies that maintain this production. Salt production itself could be advertised as a good example for sustainable coexistence between human production and wildlife.

Within Vlora Bay KBA, the Orikum Lagoon provides some good opportunities for watching wetland birds, but management of the wetlands, oriented to reduce the disturbance, and thus more birds to be attracted, are needed. The site has good potential for establishing simple hide for birdwatching in addition to the planned Information Centre. The site is one of the best for watching Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticolla juncidis)*.

Karaburun Peninsula possibly can be much more valuable as site of botanical interest, especially owing the rich diversity and abundance of orchids. From ornithological view-point, some local birds of prey like the Golden Eagle and Short-toed Eagle could be observed, together with some typical bird species for upland semi-natural grasslands (e.g. larks, chats, linnets, etc.).

Chika Mountain provides the best opportunities in this area for tourist activities, based on raptor watching. Llogare Pass could be considered as one of the best in Albania sites for establishing Raptor Migration Station, but for definitive decision more studies are necessary.

Butrinti KBA provides excellent opportunities for both observation of wetland birds, staging at the shallow waters near to the sea, and for raptor migration watch from the point at Shkalla. Some of the areas at the coastline there are very good for sea watching and can add to the list of observed bird species as Cory's Shearwater (*Callonectris diomedea)* and some other marine birds.

12 Conclusions and recommendations

Based on this pilot work done under CEFP project, some important guidelines for future development of the ornithological surveys in Albania can be designed. One of the most important needs is to identify the migration corridors and flight patterns of the raptors over the country, but for this a long term study is needed under future monitoring programmes. Definite need occurs for training bird experts and building capacity in PPNEA for work on birds and bird conservation.

We suggest that observations of the raptor migration continue at the most perspective sites, combined with search of other sites with intensive flyways. During these activities, capacity building and training of the local experts should continue. Some basic tools (e.g. bird book, written methodology instructions and others) should be ensured.

Concerning the work on the flagship species study and conservation, one of the most important actions seems to be the need to prepare simple, but informative and well illustrated information materials in Albanian for the local people.

In conclusion, the present study confirms the importance of the Albanian Adriatic coast as an important flyway for many wetland birds, and on a lesser extent – for the raptorial birds. All surveyed KBAs have significant potential for developing tourist product, based on birdwatching, wildlife photography, Nature lovers' tourism and for long-term monitoring of birds.

13 References

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14 List of abbreviations

CEPF – Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund

KBA – Key Biodiversity Areas

15 List with attached annexes

Annex 1. Data of migrating soaring birds (mainly birds of prey) counted during the study.

Annex 2. Data of wetland birds counted in the studied KBAs.

Annex 3. Updated bird species list for Albania (based on the data collected during the present study) and their conservation status according to the IUCN Red List and the Red Data Book for Albania. Species not listed yet in the BirdLife bird-list for Albania are marked in yellow.