

Annual report

2019

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PPNEA History

Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA) is a non-governmental environmental organization that operates nationwide, known to be the first environmental organization in Albania. It was officially established on 5 June 1991, with a special decree of the Albanian Academy of Sciences at the time. It emerged in a period of turmoil and socio-economic change in the country and the wider region - a time where environmental issues were looked down upon and given marginal priority in governing and policy issues. Following its creation, PPNEA established as a highly active organization, participating in and organizing many environmental awareness campaigns in Albania as well as undertaking a vast array of different projects with focus on various environmental issues. Almost three decades after its creation the organization carries with it a vast experience in nature and biodiversity conservation issues, in environmental

education, in promotion of a more sustainable livelihood and most recently has engaged in interdisciplinary projects regarding natural resources management. In the first decade since its creation PPNEA had a particular active role in the public space by means of environmental radio shows, documentaries and road show events. Also, numerous awareness raising activities were organized throughout the country. The organization has brought together national and regional organizations in different occasions by organizing seminars, training, workshops and conferences led the way for many years in strengthening the role of civil society and creating a network in order for the latter to be more able to advocate for the environmental problems the country faced. PPNEA is an active member of several environmental coalitions of core environmental organizations in Albania, continuing thus its vigilant and monitoring efforts regarding the environment.

In the second decade, the organization has developed a high research and environmental policy advocating profile. Hence, it influenced public attitudes and the process of political decision making for environmental protection and sustainable development. This has been culminated by the creation of two important National Parks in Albania, Prespa Park in 1999 and Shebenik – Jabllanica NP in 2008. Here is important to emphasize another achievement, after a long process of environmental evaluation, mapping and consultations PPNEA contributed to the proclamation of Korab-Koritnik as a Nature Park in December 2011.

In terms of wildlife conservation PPNEA has been involved since 2006 and on, in a large scale initiative for the conservation of the critically endangered Balkan lynx. The Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme has been implemented in several project phases and is currently in its fifth implementation phase. The innovative work and methodology of the programme have become a reference point for wildlife monitoring, protected area management and conservation in Albania and the larger region.

In this last decade, PPNEA has expanded its work in almost all the national parks and protected areas in Albania and in the transboundary areas with Kosovo, North Macedonia and Greece.

Its work has been extensive in the protection of wetland habitats and coastal areas, very important for hundreds and thousands of breeding, wintering and migratory birds. PPNEA has been working for several years now for the conservation of endangered species such as the Dalmatian Pelican or critically endangered Egyptian vulture, in Albania.

Vision

Bringing harmony between human society and nature!

Mission

PPNEA's mission is to secure a societal and governing atmosphere where nature conservation is a priority, through rigorous scientific research, community engagement, strategic partnerships establishment and continuous interaction with decision-making institutions.

Thematic Working Areas

- Conservation of keystone, threatened and rare species;
- Conservation of high biodiversity value areas;
- Scientific research on wildlife and habitats;
- Education, awareness raising and advocacy on nature conservation;
- Institutional development of ECSOs (Environmental Civil Society Organizations)

PPNEA: 29 years of conserving the nature of Albania

A few words by Aleksandër Trajçe Executive Director of PPNEA



The continuous work that PPNEA has conducted in the country and its engagement in the Albania's environmental issues since the collapse of the totalitarian regime in 1991 and the establishment of the organisation on that very same year, have defined the identity of the organisation as one that has endured the hardships and the turbulences of the country's development in the past three decades and has grown stronger out of such challenges. The development of PPNEA has followed the needs of the country in terms of environmental issues and nature protection. Following the collapse of the totalitarian regime and the change of the economy from a controlled one to a market one Albania has undergone, and is still undergoing, a period of rapid social and economic transformations in the past three decades. Economic instability and political turmoil have often eclipsed environmental issues, which have never been considered as a priority by Albania's governments in many of the past decades and up to the present.

Under this background, the existence of a consolidated civil society sector that focuses on nature conservation issues is of paramount importance for counter-acting on the negative influences that the economic, social and political transition of Albania is bringing on the natural heritage of the country. From its onset, PPNEA was established to raise concerns and focus on the environmental issues the country is facing, and has developed over decades into a professional nature conservation organisation. We seek to advance nature conservation in the country, by following principles of sound scientific research, stakeholder engagement and by prioritising the needs and benefits of local people in the areas that we work. PPNEA has greatly advanced wildlife research and monitoring in Albania. We have been the first to introduce novel approaches in wildlife monitoring for Albania, such as the use of camera-trapping (first used by PPNEA in Albania in 2008), radio-telemetry as well as standardised surveys for bird counting.



Such work has become a milestone for the country's wildlife surveying and, to date, national authorities responsible for wildlife management are actively using the information generated by PPNEA for their decision-making and actions on the ground. Additionally, our experts have increased capacities of the staff of national authorities responsible for wildlife in monitoring methods and field techniques. They are now independently conducting surveys on a regular basis and up-keeping databases on wildlife in the country.

The research work of PPNEA has been crucial to the declaration of three new protected areas in the country, namely Prespa National Park (1999), Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park (2008) and Korab-Koritnik Nature Park (2011). We are currently in the final stages of having a protection status for Munella Mountain - the last stronghold of Balkan lynx in Albania - for which PPNEA has submitted the official proposal to the responsible authorities.

We have also finalised the proposal for Fllaka lagoon, an important bird area of Albania, to be declared as a new protected area in the country. These protected areas are not important just for safeguarding the natural habitats within, but also create new opportunities for local inhabitants living inside or adjacent to them. PPNEA has been fostering the sustainable development of communities living in these areas by providing direct and measurable socio-economic benefits in the form of micro-grants for sustainable initiatives and alternative income generation. Over the past 14 years, PPNEA has re-allocated in the form of micro-grants ca. 80,000 euros to local organisations and communities to support alternative income generating & sustainable initiatives like ecotourism promotion, beekeeping and honey production, cultivation of medicinal plants, energy efficiency measures, planting of fruit trees for alternative crop production and re-forestation, marketing of local products, training of local eco-guides, hiking trail marking and promotion, etc.

Such initiatives have had a tremendous positive influence on the beneficiaries and local organisations, but, most importantly, have engaged the wider local population with models of sustainable development for them to increase their benefits through the preservation of the natural environment.

2019 has been a crucial year for PPNEA in terms of advancing activities on nature conservation, reinforcing strategic partnerships and improving institutionally through long-term objectives in mind. In this report we are delighted to present to you the highlights of our work for 2019.

Of course, none of these achievements would have been possible without the generous support coming from our donors, without the commitment of our staff and board, without the collaboration with our key network members across the country and without the support and understanding of the local communities in the areas where we work. We want to thank all of them wholeheartedly for their help and commitment and we remain trustful that by continuing our collaboration and cooperation we can achieve greater things for nature conservation in Albania in the future.

Dr. Aleksandër Trajçe
Executive Director



Wildlife Conservation

Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme



Ilir Shyti, Program Assistant



Bledi Hoxha, Program Manager

2019 has been the year of challenges and high expectations for the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme in Albania. Specifically, the finalization of Munella declaration application process, sustainable hunting platform development, lynx capture in Munella and unplanned but urgent activity of Shkodra's lynx sheltering in Tirana Zoo Park, have been the main activities where PPNEA was focused during 2019. Moreover, considerable work has also been done related to Operation, Education and Munella Promotion strategies.

With regard to the Munella declaration process, a great step was undertaken in this direction. After several meetings and lobby work with relevant institutions in Albania (Ministry of Tourism and Environment, National Agency of Protected Areas, Austrian Embassy and municipalities of Puka – Mirdita region), the Minister of Environment and Tourism accepted the invitation to participate in a cross ministerial meeting, organized by

PPNEA on 09th of March 2019. This meeting took place in the Munella region where the Minister Blendi Klosi publicly declared his support towards the Munella initiative.

This activity has been very important, because it brought together all the stakeholders (national and local administrations, NGOs and local community) who are responsible for nature protection and management in Albania, and discussed the Munella issue and tried to reach a common understanding on the importance of declaring Munella as a protected area. Lynx capturing in Munella was the most important activity regarding PPNEA's research work. During the first week of February 2019, PPNEA Blx team built and activated the box trap in the final destination with an altitude 1530 m above sea level. The terrain and the weather conditions were very difficult, but the group was motivated and excited for this work. Box trap activation by lynx on 10th of March 2019 was a great news for us, however this enthusiasm lasted very shortly.

The Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*) is a critically endangered species (CR) according to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. In Albania are estimated to survive not more than 10 individuals.



© PPNEA

After checking the camera traps set in front of the box trap, and from the hair found in the doors, PPNEA Blx team realized that the box trap was activated by lynx, however the team was a bit unfortunate, because one of the box trapping doors was not activated in time, and the lynx crossed it to the other side very fast. Despite the hard work, the research team was unlucky this time.

From February-April 2019, parallelly with the box trap survey in Munella mountain, an extensive camera trapping monitoring was conducted in this region.



19 camera traps X-Cuddeback color Model 1279 were set in Munella region, respectively in Terbuni mountain, Krabi mountain, Iballe-Kryezi area, Munella mountain and Zeba – Kurbnesh area. Most of the cameras were set in February 2019 and left till the end of April 2019. During this period of time, cameras have been checked regularly every 15-20 days. In total, 4 people took part during the process of setting, checking and removing camera-trapping in the field. 35 photos of lynx and 9 videos were gathered from our cameras, where at least 2 different individuals were identified. Most of the lynx pictures were

taken in Munella mountain and Krrabi mountain. Both these individuals are the same with 2 from 4 different individuals identified in 2017. It is important to highlight that during this survey our camera traps took a picture of golden jackal in Munella region. The animal was photographed more than 900 m above sea level. It is the first time that we have photographed golden jackal in the Munella area and it was a big surprise for us to see it in such terrain and altitude in Albania.

Shkodra's lynx case was completed successfully. Shkodra's lynx and other animals were confiscated to Shqiponja Restaurant in Shkodra city by the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MTE), Shkodra's Environmental Inspectorate and Four Paws NGO in Albania (FP), during January 2019. After lynx confiscation, MTE decided to keep the lynx in Albania and contacted PPNEA as the only NGO in Albania working on Balkan lynx conservation to discuss about this case and asked for financial support for building a new enclosure inside Tirana Zoo Park, based on the standards and expert's recommendations. PPNEA strongly supported this proposal, because it is the only captive Balkan lynx in the world, but also for other reasons related to awareness raising. On 4th March 2019, PPNEA together with MTE realized the lynx transportation from Shkodra to Tirana Zoo Park and sheltered it temporarily in one of the existing free cages of Zoo.

On the other side, the lynx team started working on defining the space for building the new enclosure inside of Tirana Zoo Park territory. Following expert's recommendations and EAZA standards, it was decided that the total surface of the lynx enclosure would be 200 m² (10m x 10m x 2.5m). Thanks to BLRP and UNDP, all the construction work lasted only one month and lynx was transferred to the new shelter in the middle of April 2019. Keeping Shkodra's lynx in Albania impacted positively on increasing relevant institutions' awareness and public information on lynx protection in Albania.

Education strategy activities were awaited with interest by national and regional education institutions, which have assisted in the implementation of this strategy. Preparation of "BlxEduKit" training program, and work package for teachers has been implemented successfully in 16 elementary schools in Puka-Mirdita region where 40 teachers were trained and 395 pupils were educated. For having a standardized, and structured work it was very useful to



A golden jackal photographed by camera traps in the region of Munella.

implement several activities using a combination of methods, such as direct class observation methodology, professional network teacher's experiences meeting, drawing contest and reflective outdoor activity. This was very helpful and allowed us to get successful results in the end.

Munella catalogue and promotional video and other info materials were disseminated to the general public through social network, touristic agencies, local NGOs and gate openers identified by PPNEA. On 20th of June 2019, PPNEA organised a meeting with the tourism agencies at Tirana International Hotel. The meeting's purposes were to promote sustainable tourism in the Munella area, present the current situation and the local community's perspective to the tourism agencies, and bring together the tourism agencies and local community (gate openers), in order that agencies could include the Munella area as in their tours. Local and national touristic agencies expressed their willingness to include the Munella region as a tourist destination in their programme tours.



The newly build lynx shelter into Tirana's zoo.

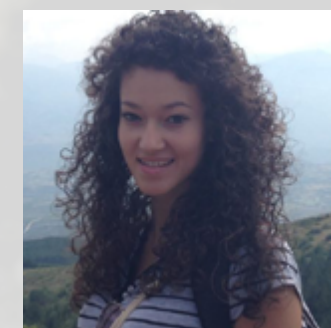
Eastern Adriatic Monk Seal Project

PPNEA in collaboration with EuroNatur, Biom CZIP and MOm started in June 2018 the implementation of the Eastern Adriatic Monk Seal project in Albania in the context for the endangered marine mammal protection, *Monachus monachus*.

The aim of this 3-year project is finding solutions for the recovery of the Mediterranean monk seal into the Albanian coastline, by identifying and protecting the main habitat for resting and reproduction behaviour, and informing the main stakeholders of the area. As part of this new project, the full capacity building of the staff was realized as well as its beginning of the coordination and implementation in the field. Marine National Park of Karaburun-Sazan is identifying potential and suitable territories for the monk seal presence. Since April, PPNEA started with marine caves investigation in this area and including Albania's entire coastline. The Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) is the rarest seal in the world and the most endangered marine mammal of Europe.



The Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) is the rarest seal on the entire planet, as well as Europe's most endangered aquatic mammal.



Sabina Çano, Project Manager

According to the most reliable estimates, there are less than 700 individuals left worldwide. It was once widely and continuously distributed in the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and in the North Atlantic but today the distribution of the Mediterranean monk seal is highly fragmented and consists of three to four isolated subpopulations. The main threats to the survival of the species are habitat degradation, deliberate killing and accidental entanglement in fishing gears.

The main activities of the project for 2019:

1- Capacity building and establishment of ARINT network in the area

On 22nd of March, a joint meeting was held in Podgorica to have a clear overview about how to establish the Rescue and Information Network in our area and who will be the stakeholders to be involved in this network. The network will be part of several meetings that PPNEA will organize as part of its follow-up project. The main role of the ARINT network in the project is to serve as a bridge between PPNEA and stakeholders in Vlora and Saranda for cooperation and information exchange.

2 - Theoretical and practical workshop, Athens Greece

Based on the project's objectives, it was important to increase the staff scientific capacity for its implementation in the southern part of Albania. PPNEA staff was part of a workshop in Athens on May 19-20, which followed a detailed theoretical and practical program. The program consisted of getting to know the methodology of sea cave investigation, characteristics and data collection methods, combined with field practice. During the field practice, the main and suitable habitat for the seal (*Monachus monachus*) was monitored, giving due consideration to the physical and environmental characteristics necessary to understand and the morphology type of a marine cave.

Identification and evaluation of suitable resting and pupping sites were the main activities for 2019.

Two fieldwork methodologies were used:



Identification and evaluation of suitable resting and pupping sites, using GPS for cave's position recording

During this year, PPNEA in collaboration with RAPA Vlora, conducted 3 expeditions from April to September. Albania has a lack of information and studies about the marine caves. Related to this, it has been decided to conduct a detailed road map of the entire coastline, after the investigation and registration of the most morphologically suitable caves for the presence of monk seal. In this way the study area will be further expanded. The identification of the marine caves was carried out in collaboration with RAPA Vlore staff. It was started with the circumnavigation of the Karaburun coastline, with a small boat at a distance of 40 m from the shoreline, in order to locate all potential caves. When a potential cave was identified, PPNEA staff recorded its GPS position and its specific physical and environmental features.



Until now, PPNEA has conducted several fieldwork in Karaburun Sazan, Radhime and Himara area.

Human Dimension Questionnaires on the study area.

Gathering data as much as possible is one of the main aims of this phase of the project. After consideration of several discussions, it was decided to complete Human Dimension Questionnaires in the study area and involve in this process volunteers, students who would be interested to be part of RINT members as well. Two students from the Faculty of Natural Sciences of Tirana and Vlora have been involved in this process, who

will be part of the ongoing ARINT group. PPNEA has organized several consultation meetings at the office and in the field, to fully implement this methodology in the field. This process began in September and by December, 50 questionnaires had been completed, of which a high percentage of them report having seen the seal at different periods of time. Very good indicators of the monitoring process are the photos and videos taken in different periods of 2019, which prove the presence of the seal on the Albanian coast. In the coming year, PPNEA will continue with the project activities as well as conducting awareness raising sessions with various local target groups.

The Challenges of Birdlife Conservation

Egyptian Vulture New LIFE

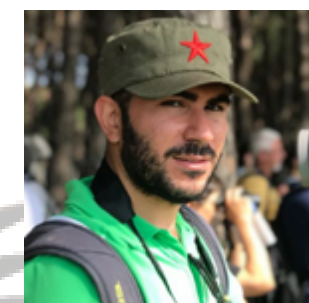
The Egyptian Vulture or Cuckoo's horse is a globally threatened species and over the last 30 years, its population in the Balkans has declined by more than 80%, with no more than 50 pairs remaining. According to the 2019 monitoring work in Albania, there are six pairs and three single individuals located in the southern part of Albania – Vjosa valley.

PPNEA started to work for the conservation of Egyptian vulture in 2012, raising awareness and implementing concrete conservation actions for the recovery of its population in Albania. PPNEA alongside 22 other organizations from 14 countries spanning the Balkans, Middle East and Africa, is implementing successfully the project "Egyptian Vulture New LIFE" (LIFE16 NAT/BG/000874) - supported by the EU's LIFE Programme and the co-financing of the AG Leventis Foundation and the MAVA Foundation. The aim of the project is to reinforce the easternmost European Egyptian Vulture population by delivering urgent conservation

measures to address major known threats at breeding grounds and also along the flyway.

Besides regular monitoring for Egyptian vulture in Albania and different studies related to the impacts and threats of this species, PPNEA has also implemented direct conservation actions aiming to help the recovery of Egyptian Vulture species and prevent threats such as poisoning, electrocution, collisions, habitat destruction etc.

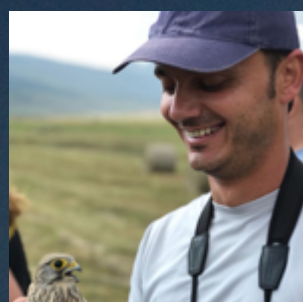
Poisoning of food is among the main threats for the species survival and one of the immediate actions undertaken by PPNEA was the construction of two supplementary feeding stations (SFS) along Egyptian vulture breeding territories in Albania.



Xhemal Xherri, Project Manager



Ledi Selgjakaj, Project Assistant



Mirjan Topi, Former Project Manager

The Egyptian Vulture is a critically endangered species whose population over the last 30 years in the Balkans has declined by more than 80%, shrinking to just 50 pairs. There are less than 10 occupied territories in Albania.

Both stations, in Kurvelesh region and Drino's valley, were supplied with safe food on a regular weekly basis. A camera trap was set in the supplementary feeding station in the Drinos' valley, which secured wonderful photos of all the bird species which visited it, but most importantly secured the evidence that this station was visited by three different Egyptian vulture individuals, among them also a juvenile individual.

Electrocution is among the main threats to the birds of prey, and in order to mitigate this an effective direct measure is the insulation of electric poles, especially in the territories of the globally endangered species, the Egyptian vulture. The insulation of over 30 electric pylons with high risk of electrocution for birds or around 4 km of dangerous electric network has been successfully

realized for the first time in Albania during 2019.

Involving local people in Egyptian vulture conservation work represents a great part of our work, and last year PPNEA formalized the creation of the network 'Savers of the Egyptian Vulture'- a group composed of farmers, shepherds, teachers, rangers, environmental inspectors and other locals from the breeding grounds of this species. This group contributes greatly to our efforts by sharing information and also reporting on issues of concern for the survival of Egyptian vulture and other birds. They are the first ones to notify us every year for the arrival of EV in spring. Moreover, 3 sign boards were developed and placed in the Kurvelesh region to inform the local population about this project and about the species.

"A Mile for the Egyptian Vulture" is one of the information campaigns implemented by almost all partners of "Egyptian Vulture New LIFE Project" in 14 countries and three continents. On October 13, 2019, PPNEA participated in one of the biggest sport activities in Albania, the annual event of "Tirana Marathon", where a group of more than 120 nature lovers ran to raise awareness for the globally endangered species, Egyptian Vulture cause. With the Egyptian vulture t-shirts on, they concluded the race to associate with the difficulties and challenges that Egyptian vulture faces in its migration journey from Albania to other countries and across continents.



A Mile for The Egyptian Vulture



Adriatic Flyway

Albania is a key part of the migration corridor along Eastern Adriatic flyway, which is used by hundreds of thousands of birds as a highway toward the southern part of the globe during autumn migration or otherwise during spring migration. Among various habitats found across the country birds find the optimal conditions to pass through, to fulfil themselves with energy using the sources of food, spending the whole winter period or even choosing our country as a perfect breeding site. All these mentioned processes do not flow as peacefully as imagined since threats like illegal killing and trading of birds, electrocution or collision of birds with power lines and deliberate poisoning continuously take place in Albania. In the framework of this project PPNEA aims to mitigate all of these threats to create a safer flyway for migratory birds.

Most of the wetlands within the coastal wetlands network do have a protection status as Important Bird Areas (IBA) and Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA). Meanwhile Lalzi bay as part of these wetlands does not own a protection status. Thus, it is under the high pressure of poaching even though Albania is under a total hunting ban until 2021.



Zydjon Vorpsi, Project Manager

During 2019 PPNEA has been implementing many activities toward solving this issue, consisting of awareness raising, scientific research and direct actions on the field leading to advocacy and lobbying.

Efforts to involve the public in ending IKB are one of the most useful tools to give an end to this phenomenon, taking in consideration that local people are often in touch with such cases. During 2019 these efforts were channelled in various directions, starting from the involvement of local schools in activities, social media posts in line with Flight for Survival campaign, direct communication with restaurants specialized in cooking game species and organizing events related to migratory birds.

Sektori Rinia - Fllakë Lagoon Important Bird Area, in which environmental crimes are often reported.

Such actions helped our team to connect more with the local community and to explain to them the harm that poaching does directly to their common home. One of the most successful activities was the celebration of Spring Alive in the area, where volunteers from the area, local schools and University of Durres joined in a cleaning activity with the topic "Protect Birds: Be the solution to plastic pollution". Before the start of this action the importance of Lalzi Bay regarding the migratory birds was explained and teachers from the villages nearby expressed their will to help against poaching.

Scientific research and actions on the field have been an ongoing activity throughout the year, starting from January to late December. Regardless of the status of the important bird area (IBA), not all parts of Lalzi Bay are proclaimed as a protected area. To reach this goal PPNEA's fieldwork team has been collecting continuous data during all seasons, data which strengthened the importance of the area and the need for it to have a protected status and a management body. One of the most important findings was a colony of collared pratincole (*Glareola pratincola*) in the southern part of the bay. This colony was discovered at the end of the breeding season.

Although the chicks were already hatched and some of the individuals had fledged, our team was able to make an estimation of the colony which consisted

of 80-100 breeding pairs.

On the other hand, regular monitoring against poaching has been taking place in the lagoon during the period January-March and from September-December. Poaching pressure is easily noticeable in the lagoon with its peak during November, December and January. In these monitoring sessions state inspection and state police have joined. With obstacles like the suspension of state inspection for a considerable period of time and the leak of information the results of field monitoring can be classified as satisfactory for the only reason that local people have been reporting a decrease of poachers in the following days. The frequency of the field monitoring was decreased after the big earthquake on 26th of November, as the emergency authorities in Durres region were engaged in helping families affected by this natural disaster.

After localizing all the hunting hides and the hotspots in the area, PPNEA's team together with state inspectorate have continuously taken action to destroy the hides. More than 25 hunting hides were destroyed during 2019 in Lalzi Bay.

Collaboration with high governmental institutions is the main tool to conclude and give a solution to all the issues and problematics evidenced in the field. The presence of OSCE in Albania has created a consultative group against the environmental crimes, consisting of Non-Governmental Organizations.

PPNEA has been engaged in this group within the group, bringing to attention the illegal killing and trade of wildlife among other crimes toward nature. This group has the chance to present its work and sit in a table with a group of national institutions which work against environmental crimes. During 2019 the Ministry of Tourism and Environment started an initiative about the revision of protected areas boundaries, with the aim to have a better management of the sites. PPNEA together with other NGO's and experts actively participated to keep the important agricultural lands within the protected areas. Apart from these efforts our team send an argumentation for the expansion of Lalzy Bay as a protected area, including Sektori-Rinia lagoon as an important bird area, in this way this important site could have a management body and the status would reduce poaching pressure and reduce the risk of unsustainable development in the area. To strengthen the battle against poaching, PPNEA together with its national and international partners have constantly lobbied for the reform of the hunting legislation, giving our contribution to the amended law of wild fauna and the amended law of biodiversity. The main request from this coalition where our organization is a member, was the creation of a sustainable hunting platform which goes in line with the predicted national fauna council on amended law of wild fauna.

Mitigating the risk of electrocution and collision with energy infrastructure is an initiative that PPNEA have implemented throughout the years with awareness raising and other actions. In the frame of this initiative the recovery of white stork population in Albania is one of the main objectives. The main problems causing this decrease in this species population is the loss of habitats, loss of nesting places or direct damage of the nest from people, electrocution or collision with energy infrastructure and poaching. To come in help of this magnificent bird in 2019, PPNEA created 3 breeding platforms and installed 2 of them in Drino Valley in close collaboration with Transmission System Operator. One of these platforms were quickly accepted by a pair of white stork, which started building their nest there and had a successful breeding season with 4 chicks hatched and fledged, keeping the population of white stork in Albania with 5 breeding pairs for 2019. A study was implemented in Kurvelesh region for the impact of electrocution in bird species, where a powerline going through 3 villages was surveyed.



© Zydjon Vorpsi

Investigating deliberate poisoning impact in migratory birds have started since 2016 from PPNEA, implementing questionnaires mostly in the southern region in the framework of Egyptian Vulture New Life project. Such investigation has kept on going during 2019, expanding the areas where questionnaires are implemented. From such an investigation it is seen that poisoning is a tool still widely spread in our country.



International Waterbird Census

For several years now, PPNEA has participated in the International Waterbird Census (IWC), an initiative which is coordinated by the Wetlands International. Mid Winter Census was conducted also in Albania, on 11-12-13 January 2019, when in total 25 wetlands, including coastal, lakes and reservoirs or wetmeadows, sandy beaches etc. were included in the counts. Out of these monitored areas, 15 of which were designated as Important Bird Areas

(IBA), and 11 of them are part of the national protected areas network.

PPNEA's team conducted the census in the Protected Landscape of Vjose-Narte, National Park of Butrint, Orikumi wetland, Bufi's lake, reservoir of Bulo and also took part in the census conducted in the Prespa lakes. In total, 61 waterbird species were identified in Albania during 2019, out of a total number of 146,395 individuals.

An initiative such IWC is very important and plays a particular role in raising awareness for the importance of wetland ecosystems, as important areas for the survival of different water bird species. Moreover, it also helps to motivate and engage the participation of all the interested stakeholders in the nature conservation work for Albania.



“Syri i Gjelbër”, an Online Platform for Reporting Environmental Crimes in Albania

Natural environment in Albania has somehow always faced devastating impacts along the last century, and particularly along the last 25 years, where forests are cleared, natural wetlands drained, wildlife is persecuted, water and soils are polluted. Because of this, populations of different wildlife species, such as for instance vultures, are already extinct, and other species are at the edge of extinction. Considering all this, the government of Albania has designed and approved a complete legislation in line with conservation objectives, but unfortunately, the level of enforcement still stands at a very faint level, increasing the gap between the current context and normal situation. In order to stop the biodiversity drain in the country, the government of Albania has approved two moratoriums: (i) forest moratorium (Nr.5/2016) and (ii) hunting moratorium (Nr.61/2016). Even though the moratoriums are approved, from the field monitoring and reports sent to our social media results that the level of enforcement of moratorium, is far from the required level.

Day after day, several nature lovers and responsible citizens' report on PPNEA's social media different environmental crimes such as poaching, poisoning,

habitat destruction, in the whole country. Due to this and in the line with the approval of two moratoriums, it was created www.syrigjelber.info, an online portal that support law enforcement and collects the environmental crime cases from a wide nature lovers network from all over Albania and it reports back to relevant institution such as Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Municipalities, Regional Administration of Protected Areas and Inspectorate for the Protection of the Environment, Forests and Water. A good instrument to somehow “assess” the implementation of the moratoriums. This website was created in September 2016 with the support of the Democracy Commission Small Grants Program, U.S Embassy in Albania in the framework of the project “Creating a watchdog network and raising environmental awareness in areas of high biodiversity values”. The maintenance of the website was supported by the U.S Embassy in Albania until end of 2018 and later on its continuation continued and supported by WWF Adria through a small project related to environmental crimes. The data collected from this website may help in the assessment of these two moratoriums and may be used as an indicator testing the right implementation of both moratoriums. Meanwhile this report you may found here. For more information about the project, please visit the website www.syrigjelber.info.

Besides collecting environmental crime cases, throughout this portal we have received even reports on wild injured species, which we have always given our support. The last report was about a collided golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) which was saved by our team and after one month of recovery, it was set free in her territory. Since the creation of this website we have received several environmental crime cases and some of them helped in the identification and localization of poisoning cases, one of the biggest environmental crimes in the Balkans and among the main threats for the vultures.



Wetland Management and Conservation of the Dalmatian Pelicans in the Mediterranean Basin

Mediterranean Wetlands are key ecosystems and essential for many species including pelicans such as Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) one of the rarest species in the world, classified as Vulnerable (Vu) on the IUCN Red List and Critically Endangered (CR) in Albania, and the Great White Pelican. Due to several threats such as habitat degradation, land use change (drainage programs), poaching, taxidermy and climate change we had diminishing of pelican's colony in Albania. Around 25 years ago, the number of Dalmatian pelicans dropped to its lowest levels with less than 30 pairs and PPNEA took action and started to work with the conservation of Dalmatian Pelican in Divjake-Karavasta National Park.

The pelican's colony in Karavasta lagoon has been quite stable until the first years of 1960 with around 200-250 pairs but after the civil disorder and riots domestically there was a dramatic drop and close to extinction with only 19 breeding pairs. PPNEA started to work with the conservation of pelicans in 2012 with the implementation of the programme "Wetland management and Dalmatian pelican conservation in the Mediterranean basin".

The program aimed at conserving biodiversity and ecosystem functions by implementing an efficient management of Divjake-Karavasta National Park and conservation of Dalmatian pelican, as an emblematic umbrella species.

The programme "Wetland Management and Dalmatian Pelican Conservation in the Mediterranean Basin" intends to support the management of three remarkable wetlands, all listed as Wetlands of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention: Kerkini Lake National Park in Greece (pilot site), Skadar Lake National Park in Montenegro and Divjake-Karavasta National Park in Albania throughout these objectives:

- Gathering necessary knowledge on Dalmatian Pelican and its habitat for an optimal implementation of site-specific conservation plans for the Dalmatian Pelican and of PAs management plan;

- Implementing a regional network of effectively managed PAs, thanks to improved local capacities;
- Engaging local communities in sustainable development, respectful of the Dalmatian Pelican and its habitat;
- Mainstreaming environmental issues and threats to the Dalmatian Pelican among communities, and therefore integrating environmental issues within relevant local policies and economic activities.

PPNEA took direct actions aiming the recovery of this species by restoring the natural breeding habitat of Dalmatian Pelican in Karavasta Lagoon, improvement of the zonation and the information infrastructure around pelican's island which had an immediate impact on increase of the colony.



Weather conditions often are a problem for pelican's natural breeding habitat, due to high floods in the area. Due to this fact, we tried to restore pelican's natural breeding habitat by adding tree branches, small trunks, shrubs and salt marsh. The nests were high enough and pelicans had a safe and comfortable nesting site for the breeding season.

In order to secure the proper condition and avoid disturbance along the breeding season from visitors like fishermen, tourists, photographers etc, a line with colored buoys were necessary for protecting this critically endangered species in Albania. Moreover, two new sign boards were set around the

zonation, informing the people to not enter and get closer to pelicans nesting island.

Bird-watching is one of the main activities to do in Divjake-Karavasta NP, and the bird-watching towers infrastructure are serving this purpose for all those interested in this activity. Four bird-watching towers built by PPNEA were maintained, restored and have a proper informative infrastructure for the area and birds. Throughout these actions, PPNEA hopes to raise awareness for a new type of sustainable tourism, nature based, as it is bird-watching and to facilitate bird lovers by creating appropriate infrastructure.



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Spring Alive

Spring Alive is an international project aiming to raising children's awareness to preserve nature and birdlife and educating them about migratory birds, in order to engage them in nature preservation, especially birds, and at the same time participate in activities organize in 59 countries across Europe, Central Asia and Africa with the support of the international organization of birds- BirdLife. PPNEA and Spring Alive partners in Europe participate in the European season of migration, between february and july, meanwhile in Africa they participate in the Africa migratory season, from september and onwards. Children, youth and adults engage through education activities and register their first observations of migratory birds in the international webpage of Spring Alive, which displays the map with the presence and distribution of the six migratory species, barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), sand martin (*Hirundo rustica*), swift (*Apus apus*), white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*), European bee-eater



Klaudja Koçi, National Coordinator

(*Merops apiaster*) and cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), who come from breeding areas in Europe and Central Asia.

PPNEA joined the Spring Alive initiative in 2016 through implementation of education and awareness raising activities for the protection of migratory species. A special dedication was made to involve a great number of children, schools and the community in protected areas through activities indoors and out in nature.

In 2019, PPNEA continued to implement the project in Albania. Following the annual practice, a different communication theme was promoted last year, not only to be innovative when working with children's education but also to offer them a diversity of information about migratory birds.

The 2019 communication theme promoted by Spring Alive partners was "Protecting birds from glass collision". PPNEA's bird experts designed a project with a diversity of activities with three primary aims:

- Children's and youth education and awareness raising about the importance of birds and mainly migratory birds that this project is focused on;
- Implementing conservation measures for nature biodiversity; and
- Strengthening of cooperation with stakeholders and active volunteer network for achieving the organization's mission, to educate children and youth about the protection of birds.

Activities undertaken for 2019:

Within the scope of this project, an education program was conducted with primary school children and several activities with focus on the importance

and protection of six bird species of Spring Alive. The overall aim was to expand with participating primary schools in different geographical areas in Albania.

During May, PPNEA in cooperation with two elementary schools in Maliq area, elementary schools "Agimi" and "Muharrem Veizi" established a local network of teachers from Korca district who were very enthusiastic to realize the Festival of migratory birds, **"Spring Messengers"**. At first, PPNEA organized indoor education sessions with pupils to introduce them with migratory birds, and with the great support of teachers pupils then started preparing for the successful organisation of the nature festival of birds. Teachers and pupils shared the work and responsibilities among them. Pupils were free to use their imagination to draw or make handcrafts. There were about 50 pupils from both the elementary schools.

PPNEA produced different materials to give away to pupils and teachers participating at the festival, such as bags, t-shirts and stickers with six of the Spring Alive birds. The open air festival was organised at the Pheasant's forest, in the vicinity of Maliq area, where pupils were equipped with binoculars for birdwatching and identified some of the SA bird species, with the guidance of PPNEA experts. It was an education session organized very differently from their everyday classes, in harmony with nature and bird songs, presented their handcrafts and drawings for the **"Spring Messengers"** festival, and also they were introduced with birdwatching step by step.

The journey of the education program continued with the selected elementary schools in the southern city of Vlora and north to the city of Shkodra. PPNEA's local partners supported the organisation of indoor education sessions and the outdoor bird watching activities. Ms Aurora Piroviq, teacher of the V-th grade from elementary school "Zogaj" in Shkoder, organized an excellent interactive education session in the classroom and had children present stories and poems celebrating their love for birds. Pupils' curiosity was stimulated through interesting information about birds and they were motivated to take notes of their sightseeing about SA bird species and went to update the webpage during until their summer holidays.

Conservation of Ecosystems and Habitats

PrespaNet and the Transboundary Joint Project for Prespa

Prespa, divided between three countries, but united by the unique nature.



Klaudja Koçi, Project Manager

PPNEA has been working in the Prespa region since the `90s together with the Macedonian Ecological Society -MES from North Macedonia, the Society for Protection of Prespa- SPP from Greece. However, only in 2013 the organizations marked their early cooperation through an agreement and established the network "PrespaNet". This organization's network aims to protect and conserve nature in Prespa through coordination and strengthening the transboundary cooperation, by making an effort to overcome the gap created from the lack of institutional cooperation. PrespaNet in 2018 started with the implementation of the first joint transboundary project "Strengthening NGO-led Conservation in the Transboundary Prespa Basin" financed by PONT- Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust and Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation with support from EuroNatur.

During 2019 PrespaNet continued with

the implementation of the activities from the second phase of the project that started in February 2019. The activities that have been implemented within the project are related with the education of the younger generation, the school children through the environmental education programs and the youngsters by including them in transboundary summer schools; distributing information in the territory of the basin through the jointly prepared communication materials, aiming to raise the awareness for the nature conservation issue and to promote the work of PrespaNet in the basin; monitoring and study of the wildlife in Prespa and in particular of the large carnivores; mapping of the wetland habitats and vegetation along the lake shore of the Prespa Lakes following the Natura 2000 process. All the activities aim to contribute to the fulfilment of the project objectives.

Transboundary Park of Prespa, an area shared between Albania, North Macedonia and Greece.

Maligrad Island

Mapping and evaluation of the habitats along the shorelines of both Prespa Lakes following the Natura 2000 process was implemented for the first time on the Albanian side of Prespa. The team of experts from SPP and PPNEA together with volunteers from Fan S. Noli University from Korca, during the summer and autumn period of 2019 conducted field expeditions for the habitat mapping following the Natura 2000 procedures. The results from this work and the map developed for the Albanian side will complete the map with the most important habitats that are found along the shorelines on the three sides of the Prespa Lakes, results that were enabled from the same studies conducted on the other two sides of the basin. The results of this study will be used as a reference for implementing pilot conservation measures of these habitat types during 2020-2021.

The large carnivores by being an integral and the most invisible part of the biodiversity in the region, increase the curiosity to discover more about them, that's why the study of the wildlife continues also in Prespa.



Using camera traps that were placed in the region for the second year in the row during the autumn period in 2019, enabled us to learn more about the diversity of the animal species that live in the transboundary territory of the basin. In order to go deeper in the mysterious life of the large carnivores, PrespaNet is conducting another more specific study, through the collection of the bear scat samples and secure data that will give information regarding the diet of the brown bear. This samples will also help to conduct a genetic study (DNA) to estimate the number of the brown bear population in the whole Prespa basin.

Prespa is an inhabited area on all its three sides where the humans live very close to the wildlife living in the region, therefore the "humans-wildlife" conflicts are present. Aiming to identify these conflicts in Prespa, a study was conducted to collect data about the damages caused to the farmers from the wildlife present in the region. These data will be used to undertake mitigation measures in the future.



Raising awareness about nature conservation should be led from those who have the biggest energy and desire to learn about it, the young people. The transboundary summer schools are organized every year from PrespaNet. Following the transboundary summer school that was organized in 2018 from PPNEA in Prespa, in 2019 MES organized the Summer Camp in Pelister National Park. This camp like every year brought together students and young scientists from all the three countries to learn about the monitoring methods and other different study aspects of nature and biodiversity, by working together on the field with experts from the respective fields.

Information sharing/ distribution and promoting the work of PrespaNet is a very important and integral part of the network. By sharing information with the wider audience and specifically with those who don't have the possibility to follow up our work through the technology, creates us new



possibilities for cooperation since the local population is the best partner that PPNEA and PrespaNet can have. Through the newsletters, leaflets and the videos we promote and share information about the latest developments of our work. A very important and necessary part during our work is also the involvement and creation of the volunteer network. By giving the possibility and involving them in the project activities in general and in PPNEA-s activities in particular, we try to create a group of young specialists that have the will and desire to learn and follow up the experience that could serve them in various research and professional aspects. Sharing the knowledge and experiences with them is a pleasure, because in that manner we build a very valuable and helpful asset for our work and for their benefit. With the support from PONT and Aage V. Jensen, PPNEA established their local office in Prespa National Park, promising a long term and dedicated commitment in the Prespa region.



Pelican Census in Prespa National Park

Pelicans, as a flagship species breeding in Greek side of Prespa lake, have been monitored through the transboundary cooperation partner of PrespaNet, until it was deemed that the existing data were sufficient in 2018. In 2019 PPNEA's team together with RAPA Korce staff, conducted a counting on the Albanian side to confirm the roosting sites and feeding grounds of the pelicans in Prespa National Park in Albania. The pelican census took place during the period of June-July 2019 and about 300 individuals of both Dalmation and Great White Pelicans were counted by the joint team of PPNEA and RAPA Korce.



A new start for PPNEA in Prespa - Opening of the local office in Prespa



Cveta Trajçe, Local Office Coordinator

Being present and always close to the region you are working in, is a very valuable asset for the work and the vision of PPNEA.

The early engagement and dedication of PPNEA in Prespa and the historical contribution for the declaration of the Prespa National Park, couldn't be reflected better than with the opening of a permanent local office in Dolna Gorica (Goricë e Vogël), proving the seriousness and the desire to continue working in the region. PPNEA in scope of the project "Strengthening NGO-led Conservation in the Transboundary Prespa Basin" following the PrespaNet partners, MES and SPP that operate with their local offices in Prespa, by opening of the local office aims to increase and strengthen the presence in the region and to invest further in the efforts for the protection and preservation of the nature in Prespa.

During 2018 PPNEA increased the local presence with the local representative, that was managing and coordinating the activities on the field, and at the same time working towards strengthening the relations with the local people and the cooperation with the managers of the protected areas and the local institutions. While sharing project related information, about the work of PPNEA the local coordinator prepared the ground to achieve the goal of the main office – strengthening PPNEA's presence in Prespa through opening of the local office in 2019. The challenging work of PPNEA for identifying the local office building resulted as successful and also with the good cooperation from the Municipality of Pustec, was made possible to rent and restore the abandoned building that used to be full with joy and laughter of the kindergarten children in Dolna Gorica (Goricë e Vogël). This building that used to be empty and depreciated was completely transformed, in a very short period of time, into a very serious and functional working space for PPNEA's staff and friendly for the visitors.

The local office takes a step forward in

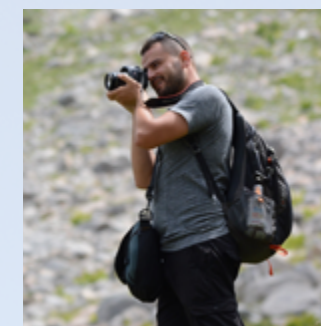
the actual work of PPNEA in the region. This will be an active space where, besides the project activities, will be organized also other different activities with the children and the young people of the area and also will be opened for meetings and discussions of the local community about the issues regarding nature protection and preservation. The office will work to raise awareness and educate the children for the importance of protecting the natural values of the region, promoting the cultural values and developing sustainable tourism. This new local approach for on site management of the activities is a good practice for everyone who is interested in protecting the nature of Prespa, to get more involved, by increasing the interest of the community for nature, the people and wildlife. The local office will operate following an annual work plan and the local officer Cveta expects ardently everyone who wants to visit the office and learn more about the work of PrespaNet in Prespa and of PPNEA in Albania. With the local office not only PPNEA comes closer to the region, but also brings the people of the area closer to PPNEA.



Our Work for Korab-Koritnik Nature Park

The Korab-Koritnik mountain range has an exceptionally high biodiversity, represented by a large number of endemic and rear flora and fauna species. Due to these high natural values, this area has been under protection since 21 December 2011 as Nature Park, category IV according Albanian laws, which are referred to the IUCN categorization. On the transboundary aspect, the area is shared between North Macedonia on the west side and Kosovo on the north side. In North Macedonia the area still does not have any kind of protection status, even though there is an ongoing process to proclaim it as a National Park. In Kosovo the area is known as Sharri National Park, category II according to the IUCN categorization, and it is the first National Park in Kosovo established in 1986.

Due to the high natural values of the area, the mountain range plays a significant role in the local economy that uses these resources for forest products (e.g. timber and firewood) and special forest products (e.g. medicinal herbs, fungi etc.)



Olsion Lama, Project Manager

Human pressure on these natural resources has been constantly increasing and expanding in more remote areas and have led to the irreversible damage. In order to promote the sustainable use of the natural resources and to raise attention to the environmental problems identified in these areas, during 2019 were jointly implemented two projects by PPNEA in Albania, MES in North Macedonia and FINCH in Kosovo with the support of EuroNatur. The first project title is: **Nature conservation along the Balkan Green Belt: Analysing threats, developing solutions and building capacities in the Sharr/Šar Planina/ Korab-Koritnik region** and the second one is: **Strengthening of Local Action Groups as stakeholder for biodiversity protection in the Sharr/Šar Planina/ Korab-Koritnik region shared by Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia.**

Korab-Koritnik Nature Park

Nature conservation along the Balkan Green Belt: Analysing threats, developing solutions and building capacities in the Sharr/Šar Planina/Korab-Koritnik region.

The project started in January 2019 and finished in December 2019. During this period several successful activities were implemented with the main aim of having a list of possible small to medium scale projects targeting nature conservation, biotope management and sustainable regional development as well as having local actors with the respective potential and capacity at hand. During 2019 were identified the local actors, the main threats to the Korab-Koritnik area and the innovative measures to face these threats. In order to identify the main threats and highlight them on the map, a meeting was held with the local actors who have good information about the area. After main threat identification the work was oriented on the capacity building of the

local actors which was done by organizing a training session, and a study tour in Germany, where best examples on sustainable use of natural resources were presented and visited. With local actors that have the potential and the capacity at hand, it has started the process of project development. This was another training session, where local actors were learning by doing the project proposals with the open standard method. This session was coordinated by a PPNEA representative on the Albanian side and was successfully completed by developing five project proposals. The project proposals aim is to reduce the human pressure on the natural resources by making models of sustainable use activities. The implementation of these projects is foreseen to start in 2021.



Study visit in Germany, Rhon Biosphere Reserve.



While presenting the best examples.

Strengthening of Local Action Groups as stakeholder for biodiversity protection in the Sharr/Šar Planina/Korab-Koritnik region shared by Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia

Except the aforementioned project, PPNEA has worked during 2019 in the Korab-Koritnik area towards the formation of a Local Action Group (LAG). The project started in July 2019 and it is foreseen to finish in October 2020. The project objectives are as follow:

- Establishment of LAGs in Albania and Kosovo as well as strengthening the three LAGs (Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia) through knowledge and capacity building in order to become more effective and efficient to support biodiversity protection and sustainable use of natural resources,
- Increasing awareness of the local

population and key stakeholders about the values of the area and the need of protection and sustainable use of natural resources.

In order to achieve these objectives during 2019 PPNEA has organized several activities starting with the identification of the local stakeholders, potential members of LAG, by conducting interviews and survey questionnaires. After the identification, it was continued with the joint meetings between the LAGs of the three countries, held in North Macedonia during the European Green Belt Day celebration.



Meeting between representatives from FOSH LAG in North Macedonia and representatives from Albania and Kosovo.



Meeting between the administration of Mavrovo National Park and the staff of RAPA Kukës and Dibër.

Another successful activity organized in the framework of this project was the meeting between Mavrovo National Park administration and representatives from RAPA Kukes and Diber. The meeting was held in the town of Peshkopi and the purpose was to discuss the way of collaboration between two managing bodies related to jointly monitoring of the protected area and also to get to know how the Korab-Koritnik and Mavrovo areas are being managed and protected. This meeting was a successful one because it was followed by another activity that was held in North Macedonia.

Representatives of RAPA Diber had a field trip in Mavrovo National Park where they were informed firstly in the offices about the monitoring methods used for the Chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*) and after it was demonstrated on site with a field trip inside the Mavrovo National Park. During this joint field trip they had the opportunity to observe a small population of the species. From this activity were built new communication bridges between the two protected areas managing bodies, in Albania and North Macedonia.



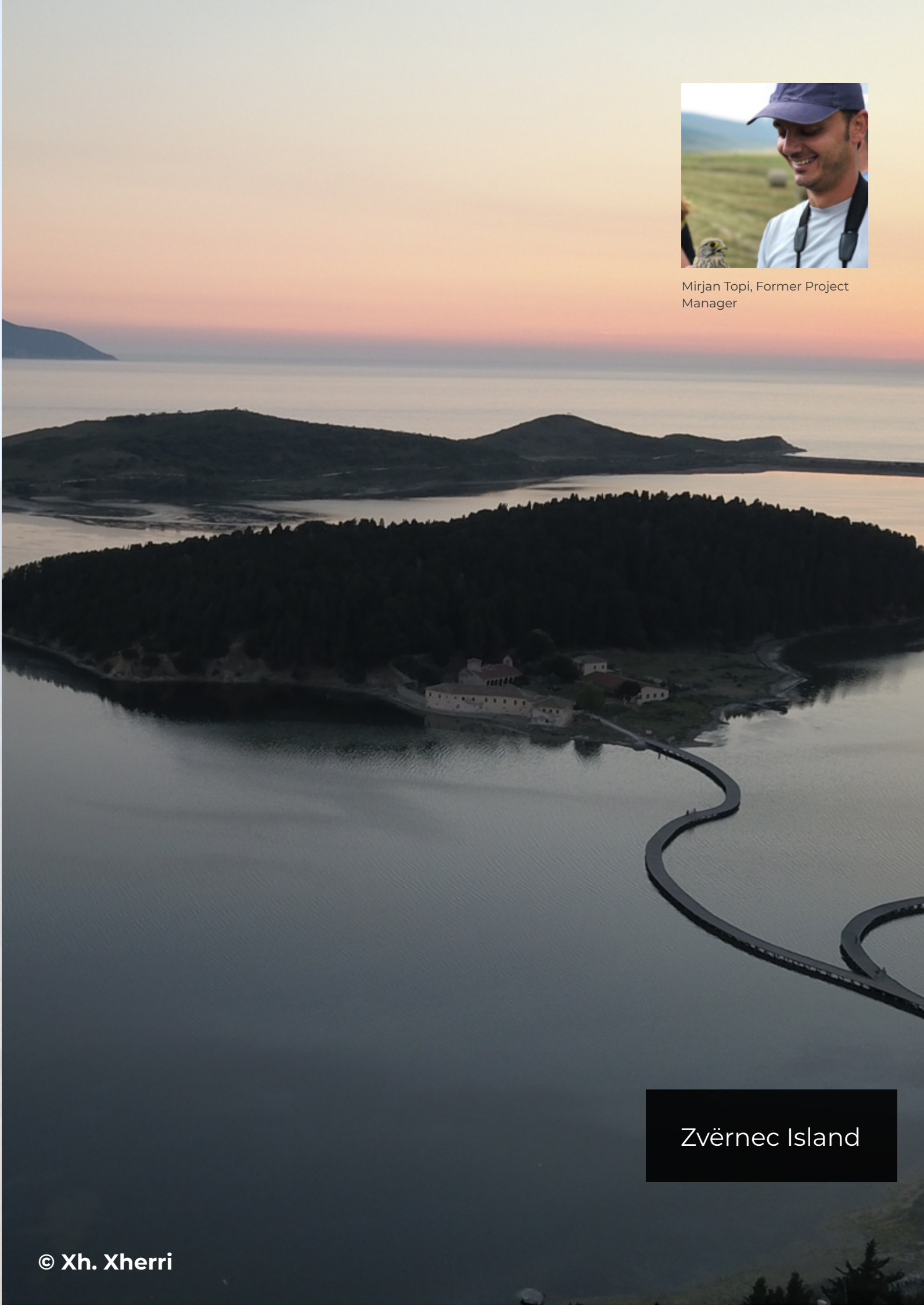
During the joint monitoring in Mavrova National Park.



During the celebration of Green Belt Day.



Mirjan Topi, Former Project Manager



Zvërnec Island

Land of Eagles and Castles: Integrated Participatory Management for Albanian Coastal Biodiversity

People in the biodiversity hotspots rely on the species and ecosystems around them for income-generating activities as well as food, fuel and water. The development of sustainable livelihoods activities and eco friendly nature based tourism, could greatly contribute in the improvement of socio-economic situation at local and national level.

With support from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) through its investment in the Mediterranean Basin biodiversity hotspot, PPNEA has been developing ecotourism activities and has supported the development of sustainable livelihood activities for the conservation of three key biodiversity areas (KBAs) in southern Albania :

- Vjosë - Nartë Protected Landscape;
- Butrint National Park – Saranda Bay;
- Sazan-Karaburun National Marine Park.

On 2019, PPNEA started the implementation of the project “CEPF-108570 - Land of Eagles and Castles: Integrated Participatory Management for Albanian Coastal Biodiversity” in line with the CEPF Strategic direction 1 :

“Support civil society to engage stakeholders in demonstrating integrated approaches for the preservation of biodiversity in coastal areas”.



Xhemal Xherri, Project Manager

Awareness raising activities were among the main activities implemented in the framework of this project. We have started the work for the operation of the project website, www.naturetour-albania.info, with a new template and more interactive. The idea was not only to operate the existing platform but to re-design it in a way that would be more beneficial for the promotion and development of nature tourism in the area. The goal was to make it useful for the local communities and tourists and be focused in promoting the tourism brands for each of the Key Biodiversity Areas.

In addition, we produced an interesting and interactive calendar distributed to locals in both project areas, Vjosë - Nartë Protected Landscape and Saranda Bay. The content was related to the importance of the biodiversity and cultural values of both KBAs. A total number of 2000 wall calendars have been produced and distributed in both project areas.

Promoting the local celebration of natural and cultural activities stands also among PPNEA’s key priorities. The last Saturday of September, with the help of Vlora Municipality PPNEA organized the “Wine Festival” in Vjose-Narte Protected Landscape. In this activity, around 15 wineries from all over the country and a competition for the best wine was organised and judged by a group of sommeliers. In addition, during the celebration of wine fest different local families presented their products and prepared traditional seafood, making this festival unique and memorable. Such a traditional event contributes greatly to the promotion of natural and cultural values of Vjose-Narte Protected Landscape and the development of social economy in the country.

PPNEA also supported **local NGOs** with small scale initiatives but meaningful such as the school project “We recycle”. Primary school students in the city of Saranda, collected used plastic and glass bottles, cardboards and other recycled materials and reused them to produce different objects.

Their inspiring initiative was quite engaging and motivated other schools to start such projects as well.

The support of local businesses and leading them towards sustainable livelihood activities was successfully initiated. Two businesses in both KBAs have started their preparation for opening. In Butrint KBA, the project will revitalize the old factory of jam production of Saranda. For 10 years of years, Saranda was very well-known for production of different jams in its famous “Jam Factory of Saranda”. PPNEA has contacted former factory employees and offered support to restart their work again, and their enthusiasm is promising. In the KBA of Narta the project is also working to establish an eco-business for the production of molasses and syrups of fruits. So far, the list of products to be produced has been finalized. The etiquettes are under finalization. Both eco-businesses will generate working places and other related benefits for the local communities.

The support of local businesses and leading them towards sustainable livelihood activities was successfully initiated. Two businesses in both KBAs have started their preparation for opening. In Butrint KBA, the project will revitalize the old factory of jam production of Saranda. For 10 years of years, Saranda was very well-known for production of different jams in its famous “Jam Factory of Saranda”. PPNEA has contacted former factory employees and offered support to restart their work again, and their enthusiasm is promising. In the KBA of Narta the project is also working to establish an eco-business for the production of molasses and syrups of fruits. So far, the list of products to be produced has been finalized. The etiquettes are under finalization. Both eco-businesses will generate working places and other related benefits for the local communities.

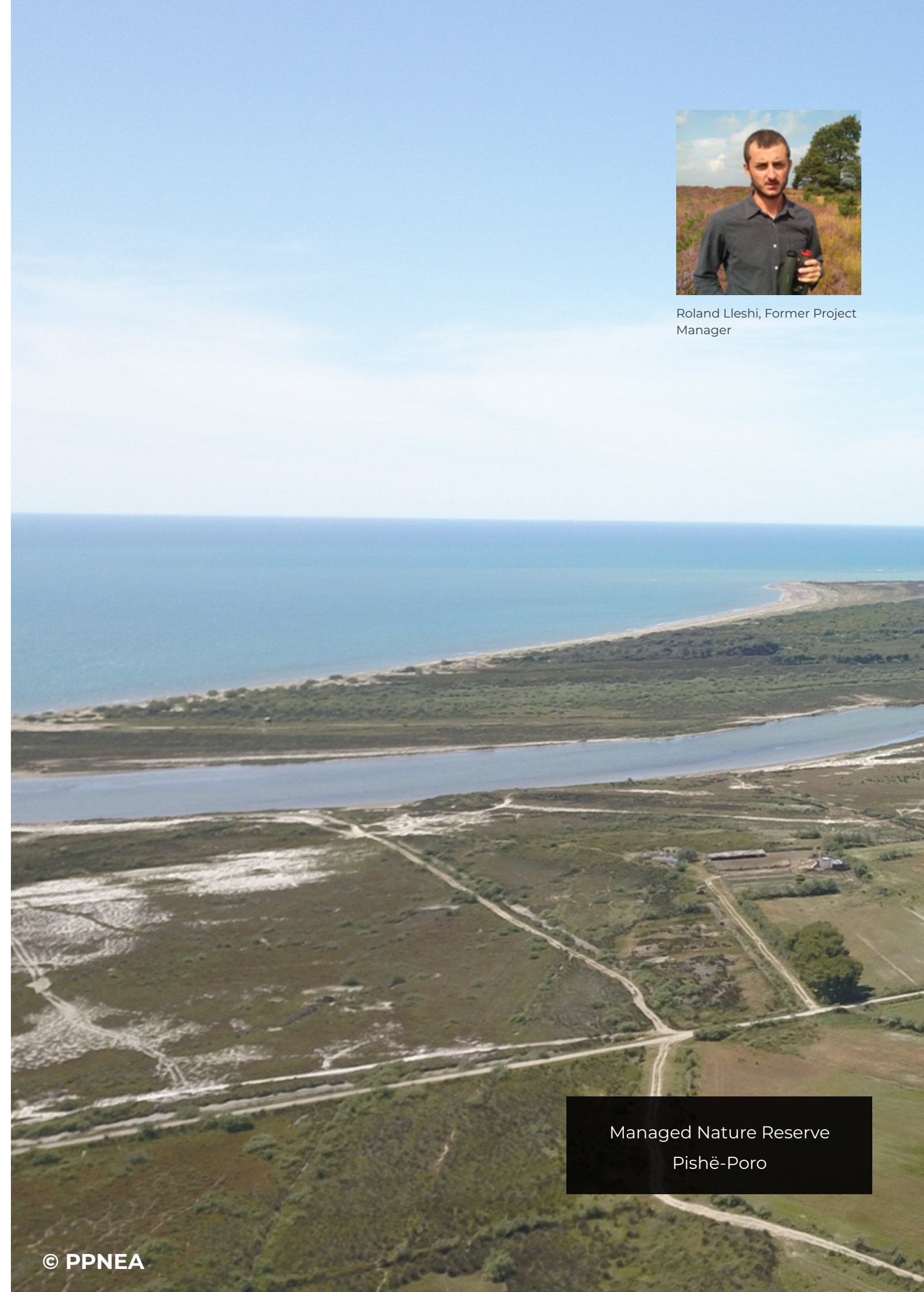
The tourism office constructed by PPNEA in 2015 in the Protected Landscape “Vjosë-Nartë” was operational along all the touristic season and a local officer was hired to inform the tourists visiting this area. This office, placed in a very favorable site, along the main road Vlorë-Nartë-Zvërnec,

is set to firstly serve international and Albanian tourists through providing professional touristic information, touristic businesses and touristic agencies through promoting their products, and local communities through advertising the touristic values of the area around and their local made products.

Protection of the ecological integrity of the KBAs is among the main focus for PPNEA. Since 2018, Vjose-Narte KBA is threatened by ‘Grey’ investments which will have a huge impact on habitat alienation and avifauna. Projects such as the construction of a commercial airport and massive tourism resorts. These investments will threaten the ecological integrity of this area because of habitat alienation during investment phase and continuous disturbance during the operational phase. PPNEA has been taking concrete actions at national and international level against the investment plans that threaten the biodiversity and ecological integrity of this area. Participations in meetings and lobbying in different levels helped in maintenance of the border integrity of the Vjose-Narte Protected Landscape and we will continue to do so.



Roland Lleshi, Former Project Manager



Managed Nature Reserve
Pishë-Poro

“Paving the Way Towards a Sustainable Natura 2000 Network in Albania; the Case of Nartë-Pishë-Poro Complex Site”

This project has its starting point in the first days of October 2019. Although a newly launched project, there is high expectation of undertaking significant work on the biological assessment according to Natura 2000 standards for natural sites within the Albanian Protected Areas.

The project aims to provide a detailed assessment of the Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape (Vlora district) and the Pishë-Poro Managed Nature Reserve (Fier district) as one natural complex in the field of nature protection. The assessment will be according to the criteria of Natura 2000 sites referring to the Habitats and Birds Directives which represent the foundation of the European Union legislation on nature protection. The boundaries of the area will be determined according to an eco-participatory method together with the identification and mapping of habitats and species of European importance. These assessments are a prerequisite for meeting the standards of nature protection for European Union integration.



Sabina Çano, Project Manager

The implementation of this project aims to become a model to showcase how nature conservation and human activities are interlinked. The project considers as crucial the dissemination of the scientific work and the right understanding from people of how such a new protecting status can impact their lives and daily activities.

The project “Paving the Way Towards a Sustainable Natura 2000 Network in Albania; the Narta-Pishë-Poro Complex Site” falls in the footsteps of previous projects on Natura 2000 assessment but not necessarily directly related. The importance of the implemented project like NaturAL from 2015 to 2019 in some of the Protected Areas in Albania is to be highlighted as it has started a long and difficult process. The team of national experts engaged during the NaturAL project will also be the core of this project’s experts.

The Protected Landscape Vjosë-Nartë and the Natural Park Pishë-Poro as the proposed areas for Natura 2000 assessment by this project are recognized as Important Bird Areas (IBAs) since 2013. Both areas have national protection status according to the criteria of the International Union for Nature Conservation (IUCN), category V and IV under the National Agency of protected Areas (NAPA, RaPA) administration. Moreover, they are recognized for their biological importance and diversity of the Mediterranean pine forests, marine wetlands, sand dunes and shrubs and river estuaries. Of importance are also the cultural and historical values that the area represents with about 11 villages, among them the Greek minority. The main income in the area is secured via agriculture, tourism, fishing or salt production activities. The local community’s perception of the potential new status that the area may get is not very tangible or clearly understood. Therefore, continuous work and communication with them is the basis for a sustainable project implementation. Six main target groups have been identified to have implications with the implementation of the described action. The target groups are listed below:

- Government of Albania
- Local Government
- NGOs
- Universities

- Business
- Local inhabitants

Project activities implemented during 2019 :

- During 2019 it was possible to establish the team of experts working for the implementation of the project. During meetings with the team of experts was determined the work plan and distribution of work.
- The collection of existing literature on scientific research regarding the Narta-Pishë-Poro area was identified and collected as a very important reference for the work to be carried out in the framework of the project.
- Visits to the Narta-Pishë-Poro area with the involved team of experts were carried out.
- A direct contact has been established with the Regional Administration of Protected Areas of Vlora and Fier (RaPA Vlora and RaPA Fier) as the institutions responsible for management of these areas where the project will be implemented.
- The main activities will be implemented throughout 2020 and until the end of March 2021 when the implementation of this project is completed.

The project is supported financially by the European Union and EuroNatur foundation.

Environmental Education and Awareness Raising Initiatives

Working with elementary schools, organizing teacher's training and conducting indoor and outdoor education sessions with primary school pupils within protected areas, stands among the main conservation efforts of PPNEA. These programs are complementary to all the other species and habitats conservation actions undertaken by the organization. PPNEA has developed a general conceptual framework as a guiding document with its education principles for designing environmental education programs with a strong outdoor component, for activities which expose children to the great world of outdoors, experiencing nature to its fullest through excursions and outdoor games. PPNEA always seeks the support of school teachers for conducting education sessions, and has adopted a methodology for organizing teacher's training prior to the implementation of the programs. Moreover, cooperation was established with professional networks of biology teachers, where the organization has consulted its education framework and has planned jointly the education activities.



Klaudja Koçi, Coordinator of Education Programs

We would like to acknowledge the great cooperation with teachers in all the country regions, and to extend immense gratitude to the teachers' network from Puke-Mirdita region and Korca region who so passionately have embraced our vision to integrate outdoor learning and play into the school's subjects during 2019. Special thanks for the respective Regional Directorates of Education (DAR's) and Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth of Albania (MASR) for the shown support.

PPNEA 2019 education & awareness raising Figures at a Glance :

- **648 children** and high school students ;
- **80 university** students ;
- **99 teachers ;**
- **27 schools ;**
- **35 indoor** sessions ;
- **5 outdoor events** (WMBD + SA festival + Munella + Nivica run) ;
- **6 regions** of Albania.

Balkan Lynx Education Kit or “BlxEduKit” was especially developed for the primary school children from 1st to 6th grade, with the aim to teach them about Balkan lynx, habitat and its prey as well as human impact on it. The program included a teacher’s manual book for conducting the sessions, a powerpoint presentation followed by indoor and outdoor group activities for different age groups; a storytelling book “Hope, the Balkan lynx”, and besides providing supporting materials for the handcraft activities, a real size 3 D Balkan lynx individual was produced and brought to schools to better illustrate the learning. It was successfully conducted in 16 elementary schools in the Puka-Mirdita region, and the education sessions were

followed up by a drawing competition open to all the primary school children of the Puka-Mirdite region. Children participants have made extraordinary drawings focusing on the symbol of this region, the Balkan lynx, and participated in an open Facebook contest. The winners joined in an expedition in the home of Balkan lynx, in the magnificent mountainous scenario in open air in Zepa and Munella mountain. They read poems, sang songs, played games, sparked curiosity and storytelling, and did birdwatching and camera trap setting- “the little scientists” celebrated their love and commitment to safeguard the Balkan lynx through information sharing to their peers and family.



Teacher’s training group in Pukë and Mirditë region.



Teacher’s training group in Pukë and Mirditë region.

Egyptian Vulture Education activities

engaged children in the southern region of Tepelene –Gjirokaster in several environmental education activities aiming to raise awareness on the importance of Egyptian vulture and endangered species and its threats. In the villages of Nivice and Prognat, surrounded by mountains, children and young students did bird watching and learnt to identify different species, among them the majestic Egyptian vulture.

Young students celebrated their love for Egyptian vulture by participating in the activity **“Gjiro Run- - Run for the Egyptian Vulture”**, a competition organized in Gjirokaster, which symbolized the difficulties that this rare species is facing in its long journey when migrating from Europe to Africa and then back again.

However, last year’s biggest awareness raising event of PPNEA was the organized participation at “Tirana Half marathon 2019”, for the campaign **“A Mile for the Egyptian Vulture”**. On 13th October 2019, more than 100 participants ran for the globally endangered species of Egyptian Vulture. Plenty of our supporters ran with the t-shirt of Egyptian vulture aiming to raise awareness of the importance of this species and the direct actions needed for the recovery of its population. This awareness raising campaign was implemented by almost all partners of “Egyptian Vulture New LIFE Project” in 14 countries.



Gjiro Run - Run for The Egyptian Vulture.

Celebrating World Migratory Bird Day 2019

“Feeding the only bird in the world who loves plastic!”

“Protect Birds: Be the solution to plastic pollution!”, World Migratory Bird Day 2019 theme brought together more than 70 nature lovers who joined PPNEA’s initiative to clean up one of the most important wetlands in central part of Albania, Sektori Rinia –Fllake, along the Adriatic Flyway. PPNEA together with ISHMPUT Durres, RAPA Durres, CSDC Durres and students from Albanian International School, “Aleksander Moisiu” Manez high school, cleaned up the beach and the forest of this area and practiced birdwatching. This is a very important area for migratory and wintering birds.

PPNEA created a big metal structure of a duck to be used to store garbage collected in Sektori Rinia – Fllake wetland.

The duck metal structure continues to impress community members and visitors of the area every day, and is being filled with plastic all the time. Not only this is helping gather easily the plastic, but most importantly it triggers the people passing by to think more critically on the aim of this bird structure and the impact of plastics for birds and other species. This statue reminded us how big is the damage caused by plastic pollution.



“Discovering plants of my region”

Education Program, PrespaNet’s joint environmental education programme for 2018-2019, has reached all the schools within Prespa National Park in Albania. The “education journey” included schools in Gorice e Vogel, Kallamas, Treni and Pustec. The program included education sessions, both indoors and outdoors, aimed at stimulating children’s senses, observation and imagination while teaching them about plants biology and ecology, and animal relationships. PrespaNet strongly uses “Place Based Education” approaches to their joint education programs, to offer children the opportunity to learn about the extraordinary Prespa’s biodiversity values, to help create connections in nature connections at an early age.



Institutional Advancement of PPNEA in 2019

Aleksandër Trajçe

Executive Director of PPNEA

During 2019, PPNEA invested considerably in the institutional advancement of the organisation. In terms of strategic planning and long-term institutional advancement in 2019, PPNEA organised its first ever staff retreat. A two and a half day workshop was held in the beautiful mountain area of Razem, North Albania, on 16-18 January 2019. During this retreat the PPNEA staff through the help of an external facilitator, jointly prepared the annual plan for 2019, conducted team-building exercises and started the discussion for a long term operational strategy for the organisation. The main pillars of the future strategic directions of the organisation were established with the decision to work as a team towards a new strategy in the new decade.

2019 saw the finalisation of the Internal Regulations Manual and Policies, a strategic document for the organisation that started in 2018 and was finalised through the approval by the Board of Directors in January 2019. This manual includes all internal rules for office operation, personnel regulations, human resources, as well as ethical considerations at the workplace and beyond.

The Board of Directors of PPNEA held five meetings during 2019, having had the highest number of meetings per year in recent years. Meetings were held respectively in January, June, July, October, November and December 2019. During these meetings matters related to the smooth operation of the organisation were discussed and respective institutional measures were addressed. The Board of Directors actively engaged with institutional issues of PPNEA during 2019, which has made the implementation of day-to-day work by staff members much more easy and efficient.

Through a generous institutional grant offered by EuroNatur, PPNEA’s long term partner, we managed to gain legal support for the institutional advancement of the organisation. A law firm was contracted by PPNEA to look into the legal matters of the organisation, help with the improvement of strategic and legal documents (Statute, Regulations, etc.) as well as act as PPNEA’s representative in all legal matters related to the organisation both on environmental/nature conservation and institutional aspects.

PPNEA uses a set of well-developed methodologies for measuring progress. In terms of programme/project progress, important PPNEA initiatives follow the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation (<http://cmp-openstandards.org/>) which is an adaptive planning framework utilised by local governments and NGOs around the world to collaboratively and systematically conserve flora and fauna. In terms of institutional progress, PPNEA uses the Civil Society Organisational Capacity Tracking Tool - CSTT (<https://s3.amazonaws.com/cepf-documents/CivilSocietyTrackingTool-EN>); a framework that aims to monitor the civil society organisations' capacity to effectively plan, implement and evaluate actions for biodiversity conservation. Since 2017, PPNEA has been fulfilling the CSTT on a yearly basis, through a participative workshop among all its staff members. PPNEA staff jointly conducted the yearly assessment based on the Civil Society Tracking Tool in January 2019. Such a practice has become a yearly practice for PPNEA, and is proving of immense help for looking into the issues of the organisation, measuring progress, as well as identifying areas for improvement.

A major development in terms of institutional advancement in 2019 was the start of procedures for opening a local office in Prespa National Park. Given the long term engagement of PPNEA in Prespa and in help of increased coordinated actions with the other PrespaNet Members (the Macedonian Ecological Society and the Society for the Protection of Prespa), a decision was made to progress with concrete plans for the establishment of a physical local presence in Prespa. After careful considerations and assessments, the former elementary school building in Gorice e Vogel village was selected to be transformed into our local office. Through the immense support of Pustec Municipality, as well as the generous financial support provided by the Prespa-Ohrid Nature Trust and the Jensen Foundation, concrete steps towards the opening of the local office were taken. Reconstruction works advanced considerably and the office was scheduled to be opened in February 2020, in celebration of both, the 20th anniversary of the Transboundary Prespa Park declaration, as well as the 10th anniversary of the Declaration for the Protection of Prespa.

Staff members of PPNEA received substantial training during 2019, as part of the institutions aims to increase the capacity of the members in delivering more efficient project activities, as well as working towards the general advancement of the organisational mission and goals. PPNEA's Executive Director completed the one year course on conservation leadership, organised by MAVA, the MAVA Academy for Leaders in Conservation. All staff members received training on project planning and strategic planning during the staff retreat; a training that was delivered by the expert facilitator. More specialised training included habitat identification and monitoring following Natura 2000 guidelines organised within the PONT-Jensen funded project in Prespa and delivered by renowned experts in N2000 methodology in Greece.

A media and communication training funded by GIZ was attended by our communication officer. Two staff members took part in study tours, respectively in Slovenia and Germany, to gain experience respectively on sustainable development and protected area management and efficiency. The local officer in Prespa received training on nature tour guides principles. Lastly, staff members have the opportunity to consult with the ED for mentoring related to various issues on day to day work and professional advancement. The experience and skills gained at the MAVA Academy are being transmitted to PPNEA's everyday work and the initial feedback of staff members is that it is making a difference for the improvement of the organisation's management.

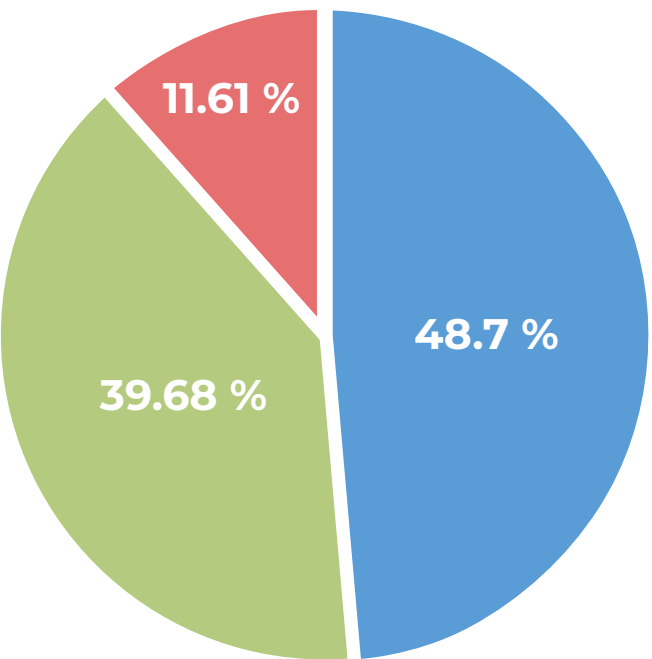


Financial Statements

Expenses



Eljona Pujo, Finance Officer



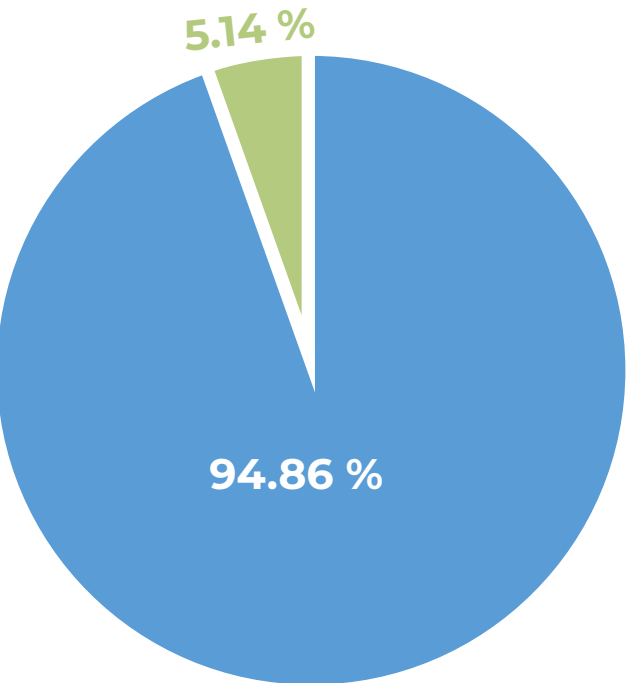
- Staff
- Supplies, treatments and services for project activities
- Travel expenses for field work

121,113 Euro: Staff costs

98,680 Euro: Expenditures for supplies, sub-treatments and services for activities and projects

28,891 Euro: Travel expenses for field work

Income



- Grants
- Service contract by specialists

261,008 Euro: Total income

247,608 Euro: Grants

13,400 Euro: Service contract by specialists

Acknowledgments

We thank all our partners and collaborators, who have supported our initiatives and have kindly contributed to the protection of the natural environment in Albania.

International Partners





Partnerë Lokal



Partnerë Kombëtar

