



Land of
Eagles and
Castles

LAND OF EAGLES AND CASTLES

*“Integrated Participatory Management for
Albanian Coastal Biodiversity”*

2nd
Issue
Project Newsletter



PPNEA

Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania



BSPB

Bulgarian Society for
the Protection of Birds



**CRITICAL ECOSYSTEM
PARTNERSHIP FUND**

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Thank you!

WHAT THESE SIX MONTHS MEANT TO US



Since this is a second newsletter, we thought that the introduction part for the project and our team wouldn't be much needed. Nevertheless, we want to say a few words regarding the timeframe covered by this publication. In these six months we faced a large number of challenges, as well as achieved considerable victories. From facing the covid-19 lockdown, to undertaking important actions such as the breeding birds monitoring in two important wetlands of Albania, these months have been quite surreal.

We are happy that, in a way or another, we have managed to implement most of our planned actions. In the pages to come, you will find our highlights for this first half of the year 2020, with stories like boosting sustainable development on two important KBAs, lobbying against massive construction plans inside the protected areas, monitoring a large number of bird species in most of wetlands in Albania, etc.

If you like our articles please share this newsletter on your social media accounts using hashtags

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HOW IS OUR WEBSITE LOOKING

FIND OUT HOW TO GET PROMOTED

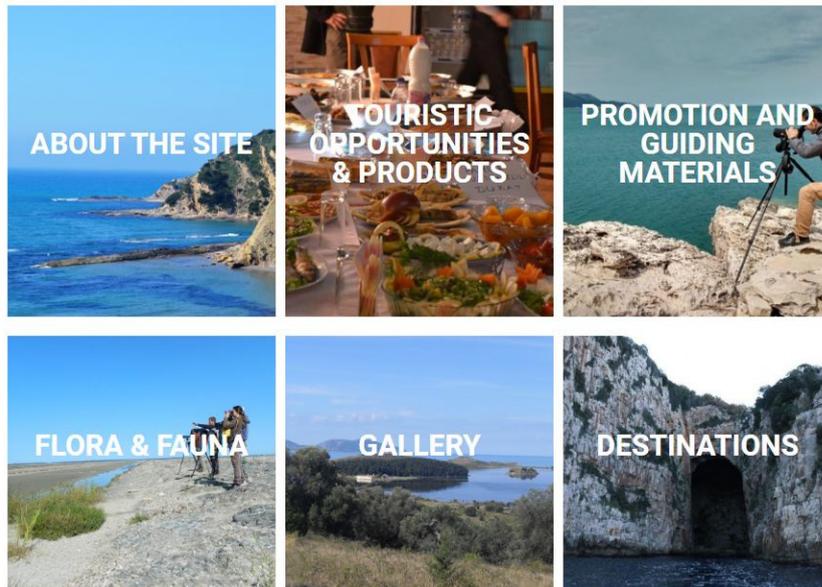


Even though these months have been tough, we have managed to create and upload important information and content in our website. Due to coronavirus, for some months, we couldn't visit any of the key biodiversity areas, couldn't organize meetings, or engage with locals in order to promote their small and sustainable enterprises. Nevertheless, after the situation changed a bit and the restrictions eased, we packed up and started again to be present in these two magnificent areas, such as Butrint National Park and Vjosë-Nartë Protected Landscape. Now, from our website, everyone could get

informed about these two key biodiversity areas. We have created and uploaded relevant information about them, such as: General information about each site and their protected status, practical information on how to get there, top destinations that must be seen and experienced, scientific information regarding Flora and Fauna, as well as guiding materials, such as different kinds of maps. We want that everyone who finds his/her way to our website, to have all the information needed for grasping a full picture of these areas.

HOW IS OUR WEBSITE LOOKING

FIND OUT HOW TO GET PROMOTED



In these two magnificent areas, one can find a large number of local entrepreneurship, such as: small restaurants, local guides, rental rooms, fish trade, beach bars, etc. We wanted to promote all these activities in order to boost their visibility. Our website now can be considered a marketplace of sustainable practices. Everyone who wants to experience local sustainable entrepreneurship can get informed there, while all of them who want to further promote their sustainable activity, can reach to us and get promoted on naturetouralbania.info

We invite all locals that live in these two magnificent areas to contact us and promote their businesses to our website. We want to promote such small scale sustainable businesses, because they go along with nature and do not impose a threat on it. Large scale entrepreneurship and unsustainable development can't be adopted in such key biodiversity areas, because they will alter the ecological values of these areas and destroy the unique ecosystems. Contact us at the address xh.xherri@ppnea.org

THE SUSTAINABLE ENTERPRISES WE ARE FUNDING



Sustainable development represents the best way to generate income at the local level while protecting nature and biodiversity. Only through small scale sustainable enterprises, locals and nature will have a chance to coexist in these areas. For some time now, we have seen a nice trend spreading fast: more and more people want to buy organic food and local products. This trend is helping a large number of small scale enterprises to compete with unsustainable alternatives that for years have dominated the market. In the framework

of our project, we are aiming towards funding one sustainable enterprise on each key biodiversity area we are working, such as Vjosë-Nartë Protected Landscape and Butrint National Park. At the former, we are funding an eco-business that will produce several kinds of molasses and fruit syrups. At the latter, we are trying to revitalize the old small jam factory of Saranda. These two businesses will serve as sustainable models for locals to follow and furthermore, will help in generating jobs.

THE SUSTAINABLE ENTERPRISES WE ARE FUNDING



BUTRINT

Our eco-business near Narta Lagoon has confirmed the list of products it will produce and, additionally, their etiquettes will be finalized soon. Did we grasp your curiosity? The three kinds of molasses will be made with Grape, Jujube and Xhinabuze. Trust us, you will be surprised. Furthermore, the syrups will be made with grapes, jujubes, figs, melons, plums and blackberries. All of these plants and fruits are grown in a sustainable way, free of any pesticides, producing great flavor. Also, everything is made the old fashion style, by hands. In Butrint National Park our work is aiming

to revitalize the small, old jam factory of Saranda. Because of this factory, an entire generation in the communist era associates jams and glikos with Saranda. We want the tradition to go on, despite being stopped for several years now. Our team has contacted some of the former employees of this enterprise, who expressed their gratitude and readiness to start working again. They will soon produce 4 types of Glikos, such as: Orange, Lemon, Clementine and Kumquat Gliko, and additionally, one type of jam: the famous Orange jam.

SMARTBIRDS APP



SmartBirds.org is an electronic database developed by BSPB, aiming to serve as an electronic notebook for the storage of records from observations of birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, protected plants and other invertebrates. This tool helps in getting informed on the distribution and abundance of wild animals, which is prerequisite for their effective conservation. PPNEA has been responsible for the translation and adaptation of this tool also in Albanian language, which will serve to the conservationists and nature lovers interested in collecting data on wildlife. Through this app they can contribute to establishing the trends of the populations of wild birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, plants and other invertebrates in the country.

The adaptation process of SmartBirds pro in Albanian started on March, during the pandemic and lockdown situation but, through this app, data have also been collected since the beginning of the year 2020 (January), almost in all parts of Albania: North, East and mostly in the Southern and Western part. The app consists of different sessions/forms for dedicated wildlife monitoring, like Common Birds Monitoring (CBM), Birds, Mammals, Amphibians and Reptiles (A&R), Protected plants/invertebrates and, furthermore, forms dedicated to White stork and different threats, making it an important tool to assess and plan actual and future conservation actions.

SMARTBIRDS APP



For the purpose of learning how to use the app, two video tutorials have been adapted and translated in Albanian, SmartBirds Android and Desktop version, which have been promoted in PPNEA's website, social networks and are also available in youtube for the wider audience.

For 2020, more than 300 records and circa 70 bird species have been registered through this app, during spring season and summer period. Based on the received data the highest number of records from observers consisted of form Birds, followed by Amphibians and Reptiles, Mammals, Protected Invertebrates and Plants.

Furthermore, SmartBirds has been an important tool to collect data for the critically endangered species in Albania, like the Egyptian vulture (territory, occupancy and productivity), White stork and the threats that these species are facing in our country.

The adaptation of the app in Albanian is carried out within the framework of the CEPF project "Land of Eagles and Castles - Phase II" and the LIFE project "Egyptian Vulture New LIFE".

INTERNATIONAL WATERBIRDS CENSUS



The International Waterbird Census (IWC) is an international program organized since 1967 which focuses on monitoring the conditions of water birds and wetlands.

In Albania, IWC was launched for the first time in 1993, continuing until these days. The main purpose of the International Waterbird Census is to provide essential information that supports the protection and conservation of waterbirds and wetland habitats where they live.

Mid-Winter Census was conducted also in Albania, on 11-12-13 January 2020, when in total 25 wetlands, including coastal sites, lakes and reservoirs, or even wet meadows and sandy beaches.

Out of these monitored areas, 15 of which were designated as Important Bird Areas (IBA), and 11 of them are part of the national network of protected areas. PPNEA's team conducted the census in Narte, Orikum, Butrint, Syri i kalter dhe Bulo.

INTERNATIONAL WATERBIRDS CENSUS



The total number of birds counted in wetlands during IWC 2020 in Albania was 150,806 individuals, representing 65 different species.

On the International Waterbird Census 2020, PPNEA's team had the chance to make an unusual observation in Narta lagoon. Two red knots were spotted between other waders, which usually pass the winter in our country, making this the first wintering observation of red knots in Albania. Red knot has 6 subspecies which breed in high Arctic. This species, which is usually observed in Albania only during migration, breeds in Siberia and winters in western Africa.

This observation witnesses once more the importance of Narta wetland as a wintering and resting site for a large number of birds which migrate along the Adriatic Flyway.

Initiative such as IWC are very important and play a crucial role in raising awareness for the importance of wetland ecosystems, as important areas for the survival of different water bird species. Moreover, they also help in motivating and engaging the participation of all interested stakeholders of nature conservation in Albania.

MONITORING OF BREEDING BIRDS

VJOSË-NARTË PROTECTED LANDSCAPE



Narta Lagoon is one of the largest and most important coastal wetlands of Albania. It represents one of the top sites for wintering and migratory waterfowl in our country, also an outstanding wetland complex of tremendous importance for the international bird migration system. This year, just as in 2016, PPNEA conducted the monitoring of breeding birds in Vjosë - Nartë Protected Landscape. This study, along with its research design represents a duplicate of the study on "Breeding Birds in Narta Lagoon" by Mladenov et al (2016), undertaken

in order to measure and analyze changes that have occurred in nesting wild bird populations in the area. Such work is essential to assess changes in ecosystem quality because birds are indicators of environmental quality. The results also serve to assess the management regime implemented in recent years by the relevant institutions, as well as the need for change or adaptation. Although in times of pandemic, all important habitats within the protected area have been covered.

MONITORING OF BREEDING BIRDS

VJOSË-NARTË PROTECTED LANDSCAPE



A total number of 153 species, belonging to 20 orders, 49 families and 103 genera have been recorded in the KBA Vjosë-Nartë along in both surveys for breeding and migrating birds realized in years 2016 and 2020. Out of the 153 recorded species in both surveys, 96 species have been classified as breeders, possible or probable breeders. The rest consisting of 57 species were classified as non breeders. A total number of 17 new species have been recorded in the area along this survey compared to 2016.

Results show Vjosë-Nartë to being a site with the largest breeding population of Pied Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) and Little tern (*Sternula albifrons*) in Albania. Regarding the breeding population of the Pied Avocet, it represents up to nearly 1% of the European Breeding population of this species. Regarding the colony of Collared Pratincole (*Glareola pratincola*), the number of breeding pairs resulted three times higher compared to the year 2016.

MONITORING OF BREEDING BIRDS

VJOSË-NARTË PROTECTED LANDSCAPE



In addition, the area represents the first site where Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) has attempted for several years to establish a colony and where around 2000 individuals of this species occur regularly in daily bases along all year around.

Moreover, nowhere in Albania, so far, is reported such a large breeding population of Calandra Lark (*Melanocorypha calandra*). Even though the area is highly important for the breeding birds, its major importance appears along the migration, where a number

of 10647 water birds have been counted in a single day in the first week of May near the Salinas.

To conclude, this site represents also an important habitat for the stop-over of migrating passerine birds.

The inventory of nesting birds has been carried out by PPNEA and RAPA Vlorë, thanks to the support of CEPF, within the "Land of Eagles and Castles" project.

MONITORING OF BREEDING BIRDS

BUTRINT NATIONAL PARK



This study has been focused in the Key Biodiversity Area of Butrint, situated in the south of Albania, bordering with Greece. This area is one of the most important coastal complexes of Albania, with nearly 17% of country's species richness. Comparisons done with the other wetland areas in Albania have shown that Butrint also registers the highest number of bird species ever recorded in one site - 75 % of all bird species, reported in Albania. The KBA has been proved as an important wintering and stop-over site during migration for a significant

number of birds. The aim of this study was to repeat the previous study and methodology after a time period of 5 years in order to improve the knowledge about the breeding avifauna in this area; monitor the changes and evaluate the progress realized in targeting the identified threats and implementation of the management recommendations. The results showed a total number of 96 species from 13 orders, 34 families and 69 genera, which have been recorded along this survey within the borders of the KBA.

MONITORING OF BREEDING BIRDS

BUTRINT NATIONAL PARK



The orders with the highest number of species were: Passeriformes with 53 species, Muscicapidae being the most abundant family, followed by Acrocephalidae, Motacillidae, Sylviidae and Corvidae, Charadriiformes with 13 species and Pelicaniformes with 8 species. Out of the total number of recorded species, 45 were confirmed as breeders in the area, 16 species as probable breeders, 9 species as possible breeders and 26 species as non-breeders. Despite being rich in avifauna, still KBA of Butrint faces many significant threats like human disturbance, where overfishing, building and construction, continues still to persist despite the intensity has fallen significantly along the last years.

The risk from this threat remains high, considering the demand to build tourism facilities in this touristic area. In addition, habitat loss continues and the situation in such regard is deteriorating in the Butrinti area.

Furthermore, during this study, an enjoyable observation was recorded by the researchers. It is about the Red-throated Pipit (*Anthus cervinus*), which in our country can be seen during the passage. This observation is of high importance as it represents the first observation or at least the first documented with photography of this species in Albania.

FLAMINGOS IN VJOSË-NARTË



PPNEA, in the framework of the breeding birds inventory process in Vjosë-Nartë Protected Landscape, has carried out two inventories of flamingos along the breeding season. The first one was implemented in 7th of May 2020 and the second one in 9th of June. In the first census 1890 individuals have been counted, while at the second more have been identified, exactly 2005 flamingos. This bird species, even though their constant presence in our country, is not yet identified as a breeding species here, despite several tentatives since 2013. The spectacle of such large number of flamingos, recently, has brought Narta Lagoon to the attention of several prestigious media, like The Guardian, The Telegraph, Euro News, Yahoo News and channel Asia. Also Albania's Prime Minister Mr. Edi Rama,

recently published the news of flamingos in this area to send positive messages for the future and to show the importance of this habitat for the migratory, wintering, and breeding bird species. However, strategic investments plans of the Albanian Government in the Vjosë-Nartë protected landscape, like the construction of an international Aeroport and touristic resorts within the protected area, pose a real threat to the tranquillity and values of this lagoon. This infrastructure will have a destructive impact by interrupting the breeding attempts of Flamingos in Narta's saline, removing one of the most important stops along the Adriatic Flyway for migratory birds and taking away the nesting sites for many bird species listed in the EU Birds Directive.

INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS FROM VJOSË-NARTË



Our researchers have encountered this year migratory groups of the **Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*)**. This species, currently, does not nest in our country, but we strongly hope that this will happen soon. Vjose-Narte offers very suitable habitats in which this species can choose to start nesting. During the inventory of breeding birds in the area, an individual of **Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)** that was ringed in March 2018 at the Bijagos archipelago in Guinea-Bissau

in Western Africa, has been observed. This observation was also considered very interesting by researchers who have ringed the bird, who confirmed that it is the first time that a ringed bird in the Bijagos archipelago is observed in Albania. This survey provides important data on the ecology of migration of this species. The Curlew Sandpiper breeds in Siberia and overwinters in the tropics and subtropics of Indo - Malaysia, Australia, and Afro - Tropical.

INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS FROM VJOSË-NARTË



This individual migrates over 20,000 km each year, from the nesting site to the wintering grounds and vice versa. In our country, as in the whole of the Palearctic (except for nesting areas), this species is encountered during the migration period. Hundreds of individuals of this species have stopped almost every day during this period in the Vjosë-Narte Protected Landscape. In addition, over **100,000 migratory birds** have stopped so far this year alone in the area since

the start of the migration season, and that number is expected to become several times larger throughout the remaining 2020 period. In addition, during observations in the Narta lagoon, among all other ringed birds in the country, **a flamingo** individual has been registered by the team. It was ringed 10 years ago near Izmir, Turkey, exactly in a 681 Km aerial distance from the observation point in Narta lagoon.

FROM BARRIERS TO FRIENDLY GLASSES

OUR DIRECT CONSERVATION MEASURE



The collision of birds with glass structures is a threat that birds face along their flyway and can be found even in Vjosë - Nartë Protected Landscape. In the framework of the project "Land of Eagles and Castles" and SpringAlive - an initiative of Birdlife International, PPNEA together with RAPA Vlorë set 300 stickers resembling birds at the Levan - Vlorë highway. This is a direct conservation measure which helps to prevent the collision of birds with glass barriers.

During this activity we encountered around 10 dead birds, which collided with this barrier. Through this action we hope to reduce such crucial threat in one of the most important wetlands of Albania.

We want to thank the State Police and our local officer for the collaboration and their help in the implementation of this activity. Birds now will no more collide with these transparent traps.

BOOSTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN VJOSË-NARTË PA



We protect several habitats because of their importance towards wildlife, the specific combination of species found there, or even for their conservation, since humans have transformed most of landscapes. Vjosë-Nartë is designated as a protected area because of its importance towards migrating birds, offering them a vast area to rest and feed. Also, this paradise is home to Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*), which is listed at the EU's Directive of Habitats.

Despite its status as a protected area, Vjosë-Nartë is facing cases of unsustainable development, starting from private entrepreneurship and ending to Albanian authorities absurd plan for building an airport inside the protected territory. We absolutely need to address such problems that are threatening the ecological integrity of the area, the lives of an enormous number of species, and the different habitats found in this unique ecosystem.

BOOSTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN VJOSË-NARTË PA



The only way that development and nature would coexist relies on sustainable practices which offer the local community a way to generate income while preserving nature and biodiversity. Our team, through supporting an eco-business that produces syrups and molasses aims to prove that such practices are a smart and fruitful way for generating income in these wonderful areas. We hope that the local community will follow our model entrepreneurship and multiply this trend in the area. Vjosë-Nartë need to be protected and we can do so

only by proving that sustainable practices can and will generate income for local families, supporting their life, and the lives of thousands of species that will not be disturbed. Were against massive resorts and airports, they will only destroy the habitats and the memory of local communities living in the area. Small scale sustainable practices, like fishing boats, restaurants, rental rooms, agriculture and farming are the only way for us to live alongside nature in these key biodiversity areas.

CELEBRATION OF WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL DAY



On 5th of June 2020, our team celebrated the World Environmental Day. Together with RAPA Gjirokaštër we conducted a monitoring of breeding birds along the Vjosa River, one of the most important ecosystems regarding biodiversity in Albania. Since it was a celebration day, we decided that some adventure wouldn't hurt, so we also rafted into this magnificent river. Our friends of Albanian Rafting Group helped us by bringing all the equipment needed and taught us how to raft properly. Vjosa river ecosystem is full of wildlife and an

important breeding territory for a large number of bird species. However, Vjosa same as other KBAs in Albania, is threatened from investments that affect not only its ecological integrity but its future sustainable development.

Our monitoring results confirm as nesting species: (i) the Stone Curlew (*Buhrinus oedicnemus*); (ii) the Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*) and (iii) Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus michaellis*). The black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*) was recorded as possible breeder.

CELEBRATION OF WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL DAY



The most special breeding species in this area is the Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*). Such [#magnificentvulture](#) represents the only breeding vulture left in Albania. Our team, since 2012, has worked for the conservation of the Egyptian vulture population by minimizing the threats it faces, such as poisoning, loss of habitat and direct persecution. We also have conducted several awareness raising campaigns and worked closely with a large number of organizations, from three continents, in order to secure its flyway, from the breeding territories to the wintering grounds.

To conclude, the 5th of June represents a special celebration day for our organization, since it marks PPNEA's 29th anniversary from establishing as the first environmental organization in Albania. Throughout the years we have grown to become a specialized scientific organization, with a strong reputation regarding nature conservation. Our work has been used as a reference for policy making and, furthermore, we have helped in creating networks of ENGOs that serve as watchdogs for environmental issues.

THE ABSURD PLAN OF ALBANIAN AUTHORITIES BUILDING AN AIRPORT WITHIN VJOSË-NARTË



The lagoon of Narta and the surrounding ecosystem represents one of the most important wetland ecosystems in Albania. Being a key part of the East Adriatic Migration Corridor, and because of its importance towards the conservation of wildlife, this wetland is officially nominated as a candidate site for the Emerald Network, under Bern Convention. Furthermore, following the Directives of Habitats and Birds, as a precondition for Albania's integration to EU, this area is under an in-depth evaluation regarding the Natura 2000 habitats.

Vjosë-Nartë PA is important to a large number of species. For some of them it represents a home that offers food, shelter and the right conditions to reproduce. For some other bird species it represents a crucial resting site along their flyway, where migrating birds stop to feed and regain their energy to continue the flying odyssey. Despite all these facts, and in addition, its protected status, the Albanian government is planning to construct an airport inside the territory of such magnificent area.

THE ABSURD PLAN OF ALBANIAN AUTHORITIES BUILDING AN AIRPORT WITHIN VJOSË-NARTË



In face of this tragic situation we are doing our best to stop these plans from being implemented. We have denounced the case to important national and international media, explaining to them why the implementation of these plans would irreversibly destroy a unique ecosystem within our country. Massive infrastructures such as an airport would alter the ecological values of the area and destroy the home of an enormous number of species. That is why we need to act now and stop these plans while we can. This is why everyone needs

to know the lengths and depths of Vjosë-Nartë, its importance to an abundance of species, and the illegal status of such plans that violate the national law of protected areas, international conventions and the EU Directive for Habitats and Birds. This fight isn't about protecting a common area, but protecting a unique ecosystem that can't be found elsewhere in Albania. For this reason, if you feel that this area needs to be protected, please **share our articles** and become a supporter of our cause.

Donate here:

<https://ppnea.org/donate/>

COVID-19 AND OUR WORK



Starting from mid-march up to these days, our work due to the coronavirus was impacted a lot. At first we thought that the pandemic wouldn't much affect us, but soon we understood that we were wrong. Even after several months coexistence with the virus, the situation remains unsure and people are still afraid to go on gatherings or promotional events. Having a great part of our project related to promotional activities, you can imagine the impact such pandemic has caused to us. Several of our activities were postponed and some of them were cancelled. We couldn't organize the Carnivals of Narta,

the Wine Festival, or even small meetings with businesses, tour guides and public institutions representatives. Nevertheless, in the meantime, we focused our energies to drafting the sessions of our website and promoting online our two magnificent KBAs. In the website naturetouralbania.info and PPNEA's online social medias, we advertised almost everything about our KBAs.

While we hope that you all stay safe, we want to remind everyone to follow Covid-19 protocols as long as such situation goes on.

Thank you!



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