

ANNUAL REPORT 2020 - 2021



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Winner of Spring Alive Contest

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WHO WE ARE?

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.

WHO WE ARE?

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 Environmental Civil Society Organizations (ECSOs)

PPNEA: THE HISTORY AND FUTURE OF NATURE CONSERVATION IN ALBANIA

The English acronym PPNEA (Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania), is a widely found term in the nature conservation field in Albania. It is difficult to discuss, find an article, documentary, or any type of publication which discusses nature conservation in Albania and that has no reference or mention of PPNEA. Being privileged to lead PPNEA in this 30th anniversary of its establishment is a challenging responsibility but at the same time, it brings hope. It is challenging because three decades of history of nature conservation represent a valuable heritage, and securing its continuation is a moral and professional obligation. It gives hope because even though three decades have passed, characterized by the ups and downs of the societal and economical transition of Albania, PPNEA continues to stand strong in protecting the natural heritage of our country. Anniversaries are moments of happiness and reflection, and as such, this thirtieth anniversary of PPNEA made me look back and reflect on the values of this organization and the foundations of this heritage which comes along with challenges and successes. The successful continuation of PPNEA can be found in three main foundations.

The first foundation is **investing in the youngsters**, as promoters and leaders for nature conservation. Despite being the oldest environmental organization in the country, PPNEA has always been known for promoting and building capacities of the young generations and young professionals in the nature conservation field, in our country. In thirty years of existence of PPNEA, a complete change of generations has taken place, when the first generation of distinguished professors of the organization, led by Prof. Lekë Gjijnuri, has passed on the work to the young generation full of energy and passion for the protection of nature. My professional engagement is a testimony of the dedication

and investment that PPNEA has done with young people and their potential. In 2004, I was a 20 years old student, and was fortunate to engage for the first time with PPNEA as a volunteer, in the organization's initiatives. The late Prof. Lekë Gjijnuri had passed away 3 years ago, however, his passion, determination, and strong willingness to preserve the natural values of our country were still very strong within PPNEA, and that spirit was induced in me and other young colleagues in the organization. PPNEA enabled us to create an identity as nature conservationists, through different trainings and initiatives, to engage in fieldwork and demonstrate our values as young professionals, for the future of our country. Within PPNEA, I had the opportunity to grow professionally by starting as a volunteer and continuing in different positions as assistant, specialist, manager and after 14 years of engagement with the organization, I was lucky to be appointed executive director, in 2018. My case and that of several other colleagues, who have grown professionally at PPNEA, is a testimony of the great trust that this organization offers to the new generation, and this approach is at the core of PPNEA even nowadays.

The second foundation of the successful continuation of PPNEA is **innovation**. PPNEA has been and still is the first organization in Albania that introduces innovative approaches to nature conservation. In 1999, PPNEA led the process for the declaration of the first protected areas in Albania, which, differently from the previous ones, aimed to protect nature at an integrated ecosystem level in harmony between people and nature. Prespa National Park and the Pogradeci Protected Landscape were the first declared protected areas which included many inhabited areas, and not only small and isolated forest areas like it was a practice of that time for protecting areas. In this way, man and his cultural

heritage were considered inseparable from the natural heritage, dictating that nature conservation cannot happen isolated from the human presence. Since that year, all the following declared protected areas in our country have followed the same approach, by increasing the surface of the protected areas and harmonizing livelihood activities with nature conservation. PPNEA introduced also innovative practices and technology for nature and wildlife research in Albania. In 2008, we started to use camera trapping for the first time, as a method very innovative for mammal monitoring. Now, after 13 years of monitoring work accompanied by capacity building of relevant institutions, camera traps have become a normal practice for the monitoring of wild fauna in Albania. Moreover, in 2013, we were the first to introduce the concept of GPS-tagging, equipping an Egyptian vulture individual with GPS which enabled real-time tracking and recording of its flyway from Albania to Africa. In the same direction, in 2017 we tested for the first time in Albania the 'box-trapping' methodology for Balkan lynx, to capture and equip one individual with GPS and aim to study its ecology and know more about its living habits. All these and many more, are a testimony of the innovative approach that PPNEA follows and that places innovation at the core of nature conservation.

The third foundation and maybe the strongest is the creation of **strategic partnerships** and the great number of supporters of PPNEA throughout the years. PPNEA cooperates with a large network of organizations and national and international institutions, many of which are partners for decades in different initiatives. Nature conservation requires the inclusion of many parties and individuals, and in many cases goes beyond the borders of only one place. Nature knows no borders and requires us to work together and engage with other countries of the region, but even beyond.

Especially, the protection of migratory bird species requires coordination and cooperation on an intercontinental level, and for initiatives such as that of Egyptian vulture, PPNEA has been strongly engaged since 2012, bringing together European, Asian, and African countries to help this species. Of course, such challenges would not be possible without the cooperation and engagement of a great number of people, who with passion and commitment dedicate their time, often voluntarily, to our causes. The wide network of volunteers and collaborators of PPNEA is found throughout the country and beyond, and their precious help is the biggest contribution in achieving our successes. Nothing would be possible to achieve for our nature without the financial support of our many donors, the time and contribution of our local collaborators, and the engagement of our volunteers full of passion. On this 30th anniversary of the organization, I would like to thank them wholeheartedly and invite them to enter the fourth decade of PPNEA, stronger and more committed than ever to protecting the natural heritage of our country.



Aleksandër Trajçe
Executive Director of PPNEA



BACK IN TIME

1.1) 30 years of challenges, 30 years of achievement



1996 – Awareness-raising activity



1996 – Outdoor activities with children and beach cleaning



1996 – During the PPNEA assembly



1996 – During the PPNEA assembly



1996 – During the PPNEA assembly



Magazine “We and the Environment”



1997 – Consultative meetings on conservation of Prespa



1997 – Consultative meetings on conservation of Prespa



1997 – Consultative meetings



1999 – Transboundary meetings



Community Action



During the 25th anniversary of the establishment of PPNEA

1.2) Greetings for PPNEA

Cheers PPNEA!

Another 100 years of work and success!

The 30th anniversary of the Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment in Albania marks the middle of the COVID-19 crisis, where the safety of human health around the world is the priority issue of the moment and the year. But, the “bells” of this crisis are spreading wider reminding us of the environmental challenges which also affect our health and well-being.

Exactly 3 decades ago, a group of professors from the Faculty of Natural Sciences had the idea of creating an environmental association as a way to give a voice to raising awareness in environmental protection. The association didn't consist only of people from the university, but also from various scientific institutions, and even from the media, one of whom I was. My passion for nature and the environment ignited when I was a child growing up in the fascinating world of the Saranda coast. Then, this passion brought me to the Faculty of Natural Sciences and then to Albanian Radio Television (ART) where informing and collaborating with scientists and nature turned into my daily work. When I joined this environmental organization in 1991, the first in Albania of its kind, I realized that collective action and purpose had a much greater force in protecting the environment. Now, as we celebrate the 30th anniversary of PPNEA, I am reflecting on the history of environmental problems that flowed after the 90s, and in parallel, I see the sustainable work of PPNEA from its inception until today. How much has PPNEA managed to cope with the destruction of natural resources and environmental degradation of the country during these years? In mathematics, there is a theorem called the “opposite theorem”. According to it, the opposite is assumed to prove something. So, let's suppose that PPNEA did not exist at all in these decades. What would happen more in environmental degradation?

Of course, the green spaces of Tirana would be concreted much more, the Artificial Lake of Tirana would have 2-3 times more constructions of cafes and hotels, while the Botanical Garden would be turned into an urban area full of palaces as it is done today. PPNEA has fought through an awareness-raising campaign and constant pressure on politics and citizens to curb this alienation of Tirana, although it did not stop completely. If PPNEA wouldn't exist, the nature and national parks, especially Divjaka-Karavasta together with the dalmatian pelicans, would have been degraded to the last level of their existence; Prespa Park would probably not be declared at all, embarrassing us with neighboring states in that area. In addition, Korab-Koritnik Nature Park may not have been declared as a protected area and, finally, the Munella protected area would continue to be at the mercy of robbers.

If PPNEA wouldn't exist, the Albanian nature of the 90s, before and during the massive degradation, would not have been documented in films. Furthermore, we would not have had footage with a helicopter from the rare forest of Lura Park and its lakes, views that today all the media use them as a documented accusation against the barbaric exploitation of forests by the system of those years; there would not be for years, every week, a special program for the environment on ART and there would not be dozens of environmental films that would take Albania to many international festivals. If PPNEA wouldn't be reformed into a professional organization, dozens of environmental

studies would be missing, without which we would not know the environmental truth, the state of where we are, what we should do to avoid the worst impacts on the wildlife and in the natural ecosystems of the country; we would not have special studies on endangered animals and birds, such as the Balkan lynx, brown bear, golden eagle, and the Egyptian vulture, the Mediterranean monk seal and the seagrasses of the Mediterranean, *Posidonia oceanica*, and consequently, there would be no comprehensive measures and laws for their protection. And finally, we would not have this awareness in our entire society of the value and importance of the environment in our health and economy. Therefore, the establishment and sustainable growth of this organization should be congratulated and thanked for these 30 years of work and struggle in the protection and good management of the Albanian environment. However, the problems continue and require an even more dedicated attention and struggle; therefore, I wish PPNEA another 100 years of work and success in the protection and preservation of the Albanian environment!



Xhemal Mato

Former board member and friend of PPNEA

PPNEA – The “Conjunction” between nature conservation and old roots to bring about renewal

PPNEA – A success story intertwined with the name of the organization itself.

Like PPNEA, there are a considerable number of organizations across the Balkan Peninsula whose work transcends the borders of a single state, focusing on activities at a regional level. From the beginning of time, it is well known that nothing exists in a vacuum and that everything is interconnected! In the absence of forests and living beings living in it, in the absence of bees and land, in an alienated circumstance of climate change, there would not be enough space and food for everyone. Our aquatic ecosystems, pastures, and forests are not just habitats for rare and endangered species; They provide a range of services for people and are based on the necessary renewal of life. The focus of PPNEA is best reflected in its Vision and Statute, which set out the obligations to advance nature conservation in Albania in order to protect, maintain and restore the flora and fauna of the natural environment. PPNEA is the first organization that transcended existing nature conservation concepts, paving the way for integrated ecosystem management through the proclamation of a number of protected areas such as Prespa National Park, Protected Landscape Lake Pogradec, Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park, Korab-Koritnik Nature Park, etc.

The focus of PPNEA is not only the proclamation of new protected areas in Albania, or work to preserve them, but also the unification of local communities, researchers, national and international partners, farmers, politicians, administrators of protected areas, cross-border communities, etc., aiming at a lively and meaningful communication between the parties. All of these contribute to the advancement and conservation of nature,

giving a special role to local communities and improving their livelihoods. The achievements and successes of long-term efforts would not be ensured without the help of local and international partners, as well as effective work with various donors, supporters, or sponsors. Without these efforts, many projects would not have been realized. Personally, I am taking this opportunity to express my gratitude and support to the current staff of the organization. I wish that in the future we witness as many achievements for the good of nature and human society.



Spase Shumka,
Former executive director of
PPNEA

30 Years PPNEA!

Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA) is the first environmental association of civil society in Albania, established right after the democratic changes in the early '90s. It was created by various intellectuals and specialists, who united a goal: To be a strong and free voice, without distinction and party affiliation, a constructive and determined opposition to the government for the protection and preservation of the natural environment of the country that was threatened by the thirst for development and profit after the long period of dictatorship.

Very soon PPNEA would turn into a broad-based movement, part of which were the young students, which were organized under the group “PERLA”. PPNEA would establish its branches in most cities, giving a new spirit of freedom and organization to other environmental associations that would be established in Tirana and throughout Albania. So, in a sense, PPNEA was the “first swallow” to announce the birth of a new civil society, organized and capable of contributing to the democratic development of the country, on the one hand, and to raising public awareness of as well as the political class itself on the need to preserve and protect the environment.

PPNEA was the organization that lobbied the Government, the National Environment Agency of that time, for the proclamation of Karavasta lagoon as the first Ramsar Zone in Albania in 1995. It was the initiator for the establishment of intergovernmental dialogue (Albania, Greece, FYROM) for the preservation of the transboundary lakes of Prespa and Ohrid, creating the bases for their proclamation, respectively “Prespa National Park” and “Protected Landscape of Lake Pogradec”. PPNEA has made a valuable contribution to the establishment of an increasingly strong ecological network of Protected Areas in our country. The Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park, the Korab-Koritnik Nature Park, and, most recently, the Munella Natural Park, are some of the most outstanding contributions that make this organization proud of its achievements on this 30th anniversary.

Today, PPNEA is a strong centre of professionals dedicated to the preservation of Albanian nature and biodiversity, which has many partners in the country and the region, located at the forefront of Albanian civil society when it comes to saving natural and cultural heritage values of Balkan, Mediterranean, European and global importance of our country. The project for the rescue of the Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*), the project for the conservation of vultures, the campaign for the preservation of rivers from the construction of HPP, the campaign for the protection of the Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape endangered by the construction of the Airport is some of the battlefields on which PPNEA is engaged in its 30th anniversary.

As one of the first signatories to the establishment of PPNEA, I feel happy that it continues to be a strong, free and committed voice for the protection and preservation of the nature and biodiversity of our country. The natural environment is the greatest and most precious capital we have and we must inherit it on to the future generations of this country. For this reason, PPNEA should feel privileged and proud of what it has done in these 30 years. I am sure it is more motivated today than ever to continue the mission for which it was created 30 years ago.

In honour of the contribution of all those who created, led, developed, and strengthened PPNEA, I feel honoured to have the opportunity to greet and thank all the many members, volunteers, friends, and partners of PPNEA, and to wish you further success in your work and mission!

Happy 30th Anniversary PPNEA!



Ferdinand Bego
Professor at the University of Tirana

30th anniversary of the establishment of PPNEA!

In the summer of 1991, professors from the Faculty of Natural Sciences, led by Professor Lekë Gjikhuri, gathered to establish the first environmental association and the first civil society organization in Albania. We physicians also joined, together with professors from Geography, the Agricultural Institute, some branches of engineering, etc. In that period, which coincided with the fall of the dictatorial regime in Albania, we were very happy and full of enthusiasm for new beginnings. This is how we thought and hoped that we would build a new, better, fairer, richer, and more human world, but very few of our dreams have come true today after 30 years. The only movement or organization that recognized only achievements and gave great results in the field of nature conservation, was the Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment in Albania, PPNEA. I cannot mention all the results achieved over the years from the tireless work of its members, but I can list any that relate most to my memories.

During the summer of 1991, we gathered almost every day after work, near our office, which was located near the apartment of Professor Lekë Gjikhuri, where we worked as volunteers, even though we were employed in other institutions. During this period, a call from our director was enough for us to be everywhere alongside nature, through planting trees in January in the park of Tirana, cleaning the waste on Mount Dajti in spring, or in various activities aiming to protect the Dalmatian pelican.

From all the colleagues, it seems to me that I have remained as the “dinosaur of the past”, even for the simple reason that I worked in the organization with various tasks even after retirement. Over the years, we have changed several offices, but what I remember most is the office on Myslym Shyri Street, which is associated with an extraordinary memory of 2011, which was the first photograph of the Balkan lynx captured by camera traps on the mountain of Munella, and then the discovery of a small Balkan lynx population in this region in 2012.

I remember the professor and many others in the office, working for the creation of the package of environmental laws in the Albanian parliament, where he was already a deputy and where he did commendable work for the adoption of these laws. Also, I remember that with the help of foreign associations that helped us not only with funds but also with knowledge, we were recommended to study the laws of the Portuguese state, similar to ours, especially in terms of similar features from the dictatorial past. Also, I do not forget the time when we all left Tirana and joined the environmentalists of Vlora to win the battle for the proclamation of Vjosa-Narta as a protected area.

Lastly, I will also talk about the project that started with the slogan to protect the blue heart of Europe. In 2014, several international donors, mainly Euronatur, entrusted PPNEA with the difficult task of protecting the Vjosa River until it was declared a national park, as the last wild river in Europe. For some reason, our association split in 2015, giving “birth” to a new organization named Eco Albania, where I worked for several years and where the basis was laid to achieve this goal.

BACK IN TIME

This was my last task before I left Alexander, Bledi, Mirjan, and many other colleagues, with whom I shared not only the difficulties of a long job with its ups and downs but also some family joy, because PPNEA although is already a genuine institution with contemporary organization and scientific features, preserving the features of its beginning, it continues to maintain an important human dimension.



Vera Bekteshi
One of the founders of PPNEA

BACK IN TIME

All together for the celebration of the 30th anniversary of PPNEA in Akërni, Vlorë

June 5 marks PPNEA’s birthday and the establishment of the first environmental organization in the country, at the same time, pioneering the start of environmental civil society in Albania. 2021 marked the 30th anniversary of the founding of our organization and the celebration took place in several different forms and locations.



The 30th anniversary began with the redesign of PPNEA’s visual identity, based on the elements that have accompanied us throughout three decades: human, wildlife, and natural ecosystems. These three elements flow in harmony, the noble vision of this institution: “Bring harmony between nature and human society”. This historic starting point for the organization was followed by a series of greeting words and memories, published by some of the organization founders, honoured professors, former leaders of the organization, and nature lovers, who remembered with nostalgia the beginning of the first environmental movement in the country and the difficulties during the transition years.

The main manifestation of the 30th anniversary was celebrated in one of the most endangered wetlands of the country, within the Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape. This protected area is threatened by urbanization and the grey plans of building an airport within the protected area. Opposition to the construction of the airport in the Vjosa-Narta Protected Area is one of those issues that should unite not only environmental organizations but all Albania’s citizens, who joined us in our manifestation.





CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

2.1) Towards a 5-year strategic action plan

PPNEA's current action plan for 2018–2022, with the rapid growth of the organization in the project portfolio and staff, needed to undergo revamping. New management and financial challenges, but also the influence of external factors, political and economic context, requires new strategic action plans and approaches to better respond to urgent and projected nature conservation challenges.

The new strategic action plan 2022–2027 is a result of several workshops conducted with PPNEA staff in the past two years. The seeds of the new strategy came from the monitoring and evaluation training and annual planning meeting of PPNEA staff, in January 2018 in Razëm, Shkodra. With the support of the PONT project, external assistance was provided to facilitate the first annual planning meeting. After assessing the organizational setup and processes, the consultant developed a set of working documents and organized three workshops during 2020, with all PPNEA's staff and the external facilitator, and one workshop in April 2021 among staff, dedicated to the development of the new organizational strategy.

The workshops provided an excellent opportunity for the PPNEA staff to enhance their knowledge and skills related to organizational development and management and also build strong ownership of the new Strategy. The entire work for the action plan and the write-up of this strategic document was done by the PPNEA staff itself, contributing to great ownership of this document. Moreover, during the process of working with the strategy itself, progress was made with organizational strategic documents which were developed meanwhile, such as a financial practices manual, a strategic fundraising plan, or the work and safety guidelines document.

A short version of the document will be published and actively communicated to key stakeholders through PPNEA's website and social media.

2.2) Conservation of wildlife Species in focus



Egyptian vulture
(*Neophron percnopterus*)

The Egyptian vulture is a migratory vulture that winters in sub-Saharan Africa and breeds in countries of the European continent, including Albania. It represents the last breeding vulture in their country, with an estimation of less than 10 occupied territories in the southern region of Albania. The population of this vulture has decreased drastically over the last 50 years as a result of a series of threats which include habitat loss, poisoning, electrocution, collision, etc.

PPNEA has been working since 2013 for the recovery of the Egyptian vulture population in the country, becoming part of the international efforts for the preservation of this majestic vulture, taking concrete conservation actions such as the construction of 2 supplementary feeding stations, or the creation of the "Savers of Egyptian vulture" network.



Mediterranean monk seal
(*Monachus monachus*)

The Mediterranean monk seal is the only species within the genus *Monachus*. As a result of various threats, the population of this species has decreased significantly over the last 50 years and has changed a lot from the biological behaviors inherited over the centuries. Years ago, the Mediterranean monk seal used open beaches to rest or reproduce, while now this species is forced to shelter in "secret" marine caves. However, the massive development of marine tourism has made this type of habitat even less safe for the Mediterranean monk seal.

Since 2018 PPNEA is working to identify the main habitats that serve for its sheltering and reproduction. Indicators of its presence along our coasts also include reports from residents and fishermen of the area, footage, as well as photos with camera traps captured by RAPA Vlorë, with which PPNEA is cooperating.



The Balkan Lynx
(*Lynx lynx balcanicus*)

The Balkan lynx is a subspecies of the Eurasian lynx, which is critically endangered (CR). This subspecies is found in several countries of the Balkan Peninsula, such as Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. In total, its population is thought to be no more than 50 individuals, while in Albania there are no more than 10.

PPNEA has been working for the recovery of the Balkan lynx population since 2006, implementing conservation and educational actions, as well as social awareness initiatives.

CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT



The Brown bear
(*Ursus arctos*)

The Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) is the largest of the carnivore species found in the mountainous forested areas that surround the Prespa Lake watershed. It is a species of particular conservation concern in Europe, as it is listed as a priority species and included in Annex II & IV of the EU Habitats Directive.

The population of brown bear in Albania, according to the experts is estimated to be between 180–200 individuals. The PrespaNet Partners have been working and studying the status of the brown bear since 2012. According to studies conducted in this region, through camera traps, diet, and genetic analysis, it is estimated that the bear population in the entire Prespa Basin is about 51 individuals.



Eurasian otter
(*Lutra lutra*)

The Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*) has the widest distribution of all otter species. Its range covers parts of three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. The Eurasian otter lives in a wide variety of aquatic habitats, including highland and lowland lakes, rivers, streams, marshes, swamp forests, and coastal areas independent of their size, origin, or latitude.

Eurasian otter is fully protected by Albanian hunting legislation. Also, it is included in Annex II and IV of the EU Habitat Directive. In Albania, according to a study conducted in 2017, otter presence was confirmed in all the three main lakes of Albania; Shkodra lake, Ohrid, and Prespa lakes. Since 2021, this species is also in focus for a study dedicated to the Prespa National Park, which includes monitoring activities, education and awareness-raising, etc.



White Stork
(*Ciconia ciconia*)

The white stork, once common from north to south and east to west, today represents one of the rarest breeding bird species in Albania. It is considered one of the most critically endangered species in our country, with a breeding population of only 7 pairs. The white stork is threatened by electrocution and collision with electric infrastructure, habitat fragmentation, destruction, etc.

For the recovery of the population of the White stork, PPNEA has been undertaking direct conservation measures including the creation of safe places for reproduction, such as the construction of breeding platforms in Gjirokaster, Albania.

CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT



Bats

Did you know that bats are the only mammals that can fly? These latent species are of tremendous importance to ecosystems, controlling insect populations and carriers of various diseases. Bats also feed on flower nectar, pollinating a considerable number of fruit trees.

Among the 32 species found in Albania, 26 are thought to be present in the Prespa National Park. Bats represent a new conservation target for PPNEA in this transboundary region, undertaking regular monitoring, restoration actions and management plans, or awareness-raising activities.



Chamois
(*Rupicapra rupicapra*)

Balkan Chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra balcanica*) lives in Balkan Mountain areas. In Albania, there are several small isolated populations which are spread in mountainous areas, mostly present in the border regions of Albania (Albanian Alps, Korab–Koritnik PA, Shebenik–Jabllanica NP, probably is present in Mali i Thatë, Gramozi, and Nëmërçka mountains).

Also, it has occurred in the mountain areas in the interior of the country such as Munella mountain, Bizë–Martanesh area, Tomorri NP, and Stravaj–Guri i Zi – Valamara areas). Balkan chamois is not a game species and is fully protected by Albanian hunting legislation. Also, it is included in Annex II and IV of the European Habitat Directive.



Dalmatian pelican
(*Pelecanus crispus*)

The Dalmatian pelican represents one of the most endangered species in Albania, whose breeding population is found only in the Divjaka–Karavasta National Park. Since 2014 PPNEA, together with RAPA Fier and with the support of Noe Conservation and Euronatur, has worked for the recovery of the population of this species by undertaking various conservation measures such as cleaning and maintenance of Pelican Island, construction of a nesting platform to create new spaces for the breeding of the colony, etc, thus increasing the number of breeding pairs and recovering its population.

In terms of education and awareness-raising on the importance of this species, in 2017 PPNEA together with Noe Conservation and the Park Administration proposed May 10th as a symbolic date for the celebration of Dalmatian Pelican Day, a day which continues to be celebrated since already 5 years.



Measures taken results achieved

Lobbying for the Balkan lynx

Lobbying process on the Munella declaration as Protected Area was continued during 2020, but it faced very difficulties due to the Covid-19 pandemic situation and lack of political will. Despite these, PPNEA continued lobbying focusing more on promoting the region and thereby raising institutional attention to the process of PA designation. The idea was to organize several activities (e.g., hiking on Munella mountain and a fair) involving the local community and local NGOs to emphasize once again the support of locals on the Munella Proclamation process.

For the activity purpose, were organized two promoting campaigns organized by local's organizations with the support of PPNEA in the Munella region. The hiking activity took place on October 1st, 2020. 27 participants joined the hiking and two important national media (TV KLAN and NEWS 24) were present. It is important to mention that among other decision-makers (Mrs. Adriana Petri NAPA's Management Director and Mr. Agim Dardha the Director of RAPA Shkoder), Mrs. Ornella Cuci Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment participated in this activity as well. She stated that the proclamation of Munella as a protected area is a question of time.

The second one took place in the "QSNNAFA" local NGO premises in Fushë-Arrëz city, on December 15th, 2020. The activity was opened by several speeches held by the Deputy Mayor, Mr. Sokol Gjoni, who highlighted the importance of Munella mountain to nature and biodiversity, and what makes Munella more unique and special is the Balkan lynx

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presence. Furthermore, the Executive Director of PPNEA, Dr. Aleksandër Trajçe, stated the importance of these bottom-up campaigns regarding nature conservation. After the opening speeches, it was continued with the traditional music and dance where the Children from Cultural Centre performed a wonderful concert.

Meanwhile, 12 representatives from different business sectors exposed their local products including pottery, jams, liker, cheese, wine, medicinal plants, etc. During this session, at least 59 participants in the event had the chance to taste the local products. Also, a large poster of the Balkan lynx with the slogan "a natural gem waiting for protection" was exposed. The local businesses were very happy and emphasized that there is a need to organize more events like this in the future.

Review of the red list of Albania

The first Red List of Flora and Fauna in Albania was approved in 2007 based on Law no. 9587, dated 20.07.2006, "On the Protection of Biodiversity", as amended. According to this law, the Red List of Flora and Fauna has a validity period of 5 years, where it must then be reviewed based on scientific data that are collected periodically. The first revision of this list was made in 2013, producing a document that is still in force due to the delay of the second revision that had to be conducted in 2018.

As one of the leading organizations for monitoring and studying wildlife, PPNEA has actively assisted the red list review process in 2020. Periodic data collected by our team on the presence and distribution of endangered species in Albania have been available to the authorities responsible for reviewing this list. Still, further, we have actively provided our expertise on large and medium-sized mammals, such as the brown bear, grey wolf, Balkan lynx, golden jackal, wild cat, the roe deer, chamois, and the wild boar.

Update of the European Mammal Atlas

The European Atlas of Mammals is a document that summarizes the distribution of mammal species across the European continent. The first publication of this atlas was made in 1999, while the second publication is expected to be published in 2024. Updating this atlas requires dedicated research work in each of the countries of the European continent, where through modern techniques is analysed the presence and distribution of different species of mammals, including those with a large, medium, and small body.

PPNEA has been selected as the main data collection partner in Albania. While the data collected over the years by our team have been made available to international experts, we are also monitoring new areas, for which scientific information on the presence of mammals was absent.

Updating the European mammal atlas paves the way for the long-term protection and conservation of many endangered species, such as the Balkan lynx, the brown bear, etc.



Anti-poaching camp organized in Durrës, Albania

In December of this year, PPNEA organized the Anti-poaching camp, a camp against the illegal killing of birds, with the participation of the National Inspectorate for the Protection of Territory, State Police, National Agency of Protected Areas, Durrës Hunting Association, Albanian Trip, and representatives from investigative journal platform BIRN.

During this meeting, representatives of the above-mentioned institutions discussed various issues, ranging from lack of knowledge about this phenomenon, lack of infrastructure needed to track bird-killing cases, and the negative impact that such cases may have. Hunters expressed themselves highly against this phenomenon, declaring that these cases do not represent any of their community and they help in creating a negative public perception about hunting activity. Meanwhile, in this meeting, representatives from touristic agencies presented the potential of avitourism in Albania and explained the negative impacts this phenomenon has on this sustainable way of tourism.

Apart from the discussion, joint monitoring activities were organized in Sektor Rinia, one of the hotspots for the illegal killing of birds in the Adriatic Flyway corridor. The monitoring teams destroyed 11 hunting hides inside the lagoon and identified, in addition, supplementary devices such as the electronic bird callers.



Feeding stations maintained periodically.



Maintenance of two supplementary feeding stations in Albania

The Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), the last breeding vulture in Albania, is considered one of the most endangered vulture species in Europe. The Egyptian vulture population has suffered a drastic decline in the total number of individuals, with circa 50 occupied territories across the Balkans. However, a large number of organizations spread across three continents have joined forces to reverse the situation, trying to ensure the long-term survival of this majestic vulture that winters in sub-Saharan Africa.

In order to combat the threats that affect the population of the Egyptian vulture in the country, in the vicinity of the breeding territories, our team has built two supplementary feeding stations which provide safe and free-poison food for this endangered species. For three years, both stations have been frequently visited by two Egyptian vultures' pairs, reducing the risk of poisoning along breeding grounds. The maintenance of these stations is realized in cooperation with the staff of RAPA Gjirokastra and members of the network "Savers of the Egyptian vulture".

The periodic supply of supplementary feeding stations has attracted not only individuals of the Egyptian vulture, but also other iconic species, such as the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*).

40%

Of EV population supported by the SFSs



Strengthening the “Savers of Egyptian vulture” network

The “Savers of Egyptian vulture” network, established in 2012 and now formalized, is constantly strengthening its role in conserving the Egyptian vulture population in the country. Year after year, this group is constantly welcoming new members, who express the desire to be part of conservation actions or social awareness initiatives.

Some of the members of this network are actively involved in our activities, especially in the implementation of conservation measures, such as the maintenance and supply of two supplementary stations with safe food, located in the Drino valley and the Kurvelesh region.

Through this network, PPNEA also aims to understand the needs of members and contribute to their fulfillment. During the various meetings held with members of this network, our team has distributed essential materials for their daily life, such as raincoats, bags, hats, and thermos flasks. We have also prepared and distributed anti-poisoning kits for vets’ part of the network, to manage as efficiently as possible, the cases of poisoning that may occur in the area.

Our team believes that further strengthening this network and building a genuine strategy for the continued engagement of members in conservation measures and those to raise awareness, will be one of the most sustainable investments for the conservation of Egyptian vultures and other birds of prey in Albania.

35
MEMBERS

From Gjirokastra, Delvina, Tepelena, Dropull

35
KITS

Produced (raincoats, hats, thermos, bag)

8
ANTI-POISON

Kits produced

600
BLACK PINE

Seedlings by SEVN in the territories of the EV



500
BIRD SILHOUETTES

From “barriers” to “bird-friendly” glasses

Collision of birds with glass is a phenomenon that often occurs in areas where there are facades with significant glass surfaces and a high presence of bird species. The reflective effect of the glass causes the birds to perceive them as passable objects, causing many of them to collide and, in some cases, not even survive.

One technique used to avoid this phenomenon is the sticking of birds’ silhouettes on the glass surfaces so that the birds can see a physical barrier in front of them. PPNEA team applied this technique on the highway glasses of Levan – Vlora, a conservation measure which was supported by the project “Land of Eagles and Castles” and the initiative of Birdlife International “Spring Alive”.

In total, our team together with RAPA Vlorë managed to use 300 bird silhouettes. During the process, several dead birds were easily spotted on the ground. We believe that through this initiative, the bird collision very close to the Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape will be reduced.



BalkanDetox LIFE

KICK-OFF MEETING



Balkan Detox LIFE: New project combats illegal wildlife poisoning across Balkan countries

Even though wildlife poisoning is illegal in the Balkans, this phenomenon is still widespread. Over the years, the practice of using poisons has led to the extinction of several species of vultures in certain regions, including Albania.

Balkan Detox LIFE is called the newest project, which aims to raise awareness and strengthen national capacities to combat the phenomenon of wildlife poisoning. This project, which started in 2020 and will end in 2025 extends to Albania, Greece, Croatia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia, thus promoting close collaboration between 8 organizations across the Balkan Peninsula.

PPNEA, as a partner organization of this project, in the following years will undertake a series of campaigns to raise awareness of the dangers posed by poisoning to vulture populations, as well as strengthen local and national networks of cooperation against illegal use of poisoning practices. The BalkanDetox LIFE is led by the Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF) and funded by the European Union "LIFE" Program.

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2.3) Ecosystems: Home of life itself

Transboundary regions

Korab – Koritnik – Sharr

The Korab-Koritnik-Sharr transboundary region is divided between Albania, Kosovo, and northern Macedonia. Like all areas that are part of the European Green Belt, this region carries an extraordinary natural wealth consisting of forest massifs, alpine slopes, pastures, glacial lakes, etc. All of these habitats are home to a variety of wildlife, from mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies, to plants. Many of these species carry an endangered status according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) red list.



Beyond biodiversity, the Korab-Koritnik-Sharr region has been inhabited for centuries by people who have inherited the local culture from generation to generation to the present day. The inhabitants of the area are mostly engaged in agriculture and livestock, where practices learned over the centuries continue to be practiced by the younger generations, such as the pastoral tradition.

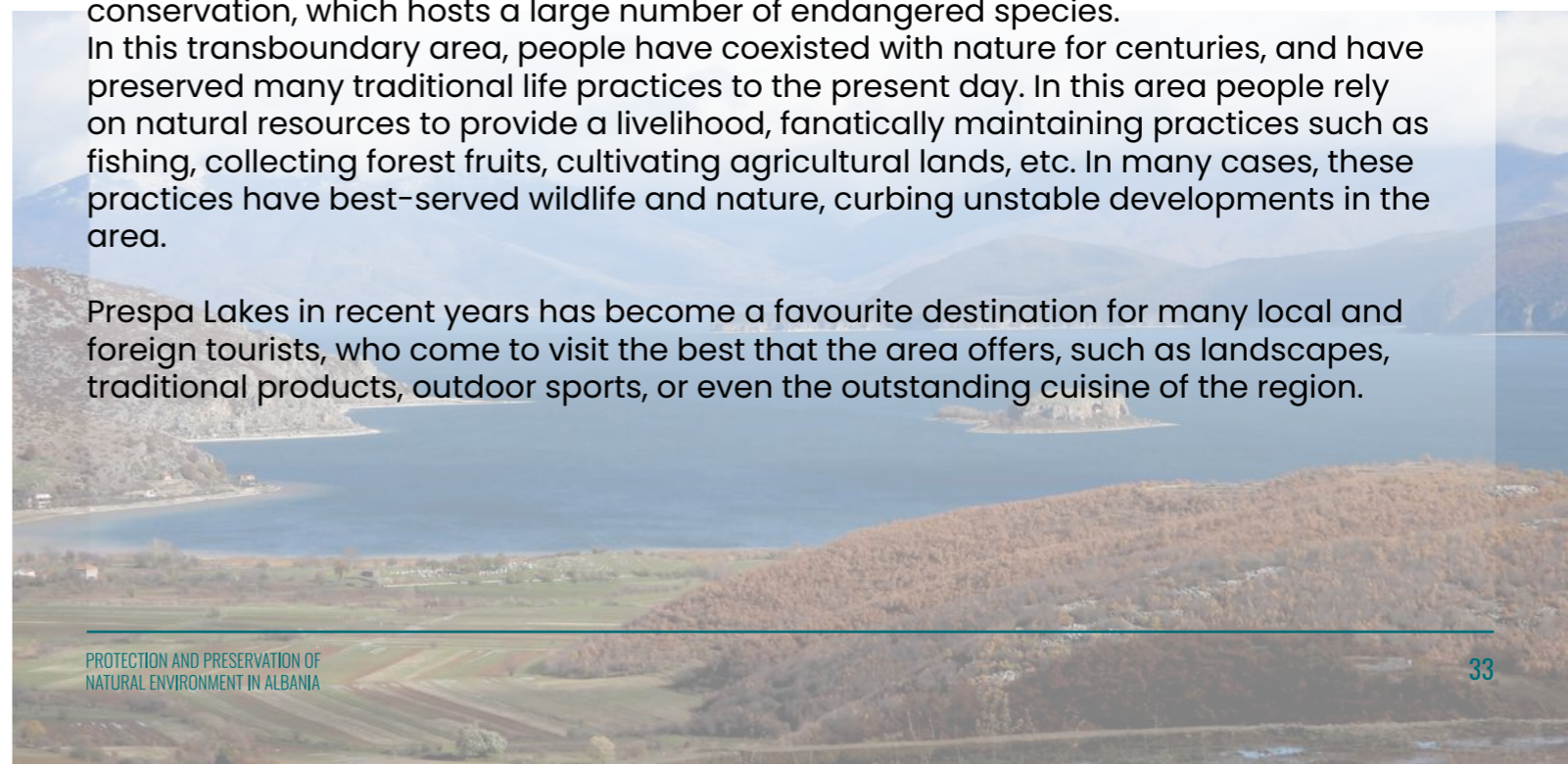
In recent years this natural paradise has attracted a considerable number of local and foreign tourists, who want to try local products such as milk, cheese, forest fruits, etc., or even climb high mountain peaks, including the peak of Korab, which is also the highest peak in Albania.

Prespa National Park

The Prespa Transboundary Park was declared in February 2000 through a joint statement signed by the political representatives of three border states such as Albania, North Macedonia, and Greece, creating the first protected transboundary area on the Balkan Peninsula. Consisting of two lakes, Great Prespa and Lesser Prespa, as well as a range of mountain, hilly, wetland habitats, etc., this area is of exceptional importance for nature conservation, which hosts a large number of endangered species.

In this transboundary area, people have coexisted with nature for centuries, and have preserved many traditional life practices to the present day. In this area people rely on natural resources to provide a livelihood, fanatically maintaining practices such as fishing, collecting forest fruits, cultivating agricultural lands, etc. In many cases, these practices have best-served wildlife and nature, curbing unstable developments in the area.

Prespa Lakes in recent years has become a favourite destination for many local and foreign tourists, who come to visit the best that the area offers, such as landscapes, traditional products, outdoor sports, or even the outstanding cuisine of the region.



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Natura 2000

Habitat mapping in Prespa

The year 2020 marked the publication of a very important study for the Prespa National Park, which focused on the mapping of priority wetland habitats, according to Natura 2000, as well as on determining the level of conservation and specific threats.

The working group led by local researchers and the Agricultural University of Athens, through the Braun-Blanquet method, conducted a total of 62 relevés from May to September 2019. The synthesis report following this study presents the identification of 24 different vegetation units, of which 11 associations and 13 communities, in the area of the Great and Lesser Prespa Lakes by following the Natura 2000 guidelines and two combined habitat mapping methodologies. At the end of the study were counted 5 habitat types listed in Annex I of the European Habitats Directive. Also, using the EUNIS system, a total of 5 other important habitats were identified in the area, which is not listed in the aforementioned directive.

This study was attended by two members of the PPNEA team, who were trained by the team of researchers to apply the Natura 2000 methodology on habitat mapping, improving knowledge so that in the future such actions can be carried out by PPNEA staff themselves.

The findings of this study, as well as the report on integrated management measures, were shared with environmental institutions, and were discussed in a virtual consultation meeting with stakeholders in December 2020, which may be taken into account when drafting management measures or for the future in creating the Natura 2000 network in the country. Recommended measures for the management of these habitats include waste management, preparation of a management plan for grazing, reed management, as well as restoration of the priority habitat of mixed forests with lakes in Lesser Prespa Lake.

62
RELEVÉS

24
DIFFERENT

Vegetation units

5
HABITAT

Types listed in Annex I of the
Habitats Directive

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Priority habitats in Nartë-Pishë-Poro complex site

Paving the way towards a sustainable Natura 2000 network in Albania: the case of Narta-Pishë- Poro complex site” is one of the many other projects that PPNEA has implemented in Albania, and more specifically in the Narta-Pishë-Poro natural complex. Its main purpose was to achieve the obligations deriving from the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, as prerequisites to integration, through an integrated eco-participatory process, of Natura 2000 site designation.

Together with trained national experts, the scientific criteria required for the process have been fulfilled, by implementing the N2000 framework. Apart from the scientific studies of the project, 4 trainings and 4 workshops have been implemented by the external researchers/experts and the internal expertise of PPNEA. These training programs have helped local CSOs, for better understanding of the integration process of Natura 2000 in their living area, focusing on themes such as the benefits and limitations of Natura2000, identification of conservation targets and ecosystem services in the pSCI, and the final definition of the boundaries of the pSCI through a participatory ecological approach. The main results, achieved at the end of the project, included the analysis of natural values of the area; Natura 2000 Habitats and species, plant communities; important plants and animal species distribution in the area, taking into consideration, the relationships between natural values and local communities, as well as the identification of pressures and threats, stakeholders, solving of conflicts, etc.

The study of the flora of the natural complex Nartë - Pishë - Poro, showed the appearance of a large variety of floristics in this territory of Albania. A total of 770 species belonging to 450 genera and 110 families were identified. During the field expeditions, it has been discovered for the first time the presence of Galatella albanica, a sub endemic species that extends in Albania and Serbia.

Furthermore, 11 species of reptiles, 4 species of amphibians, 5 mammal species have been identified during the study. 3 of 5 species of mammals (Golden jackal, Grey wolf, Eurasian otter) are part of the Red List of Flora and Fauna in Albania and are listed in Annex II, IV, and V of the Habitats Directive.



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Munella Mountain

The Munella Mountain region shelters a hidden subspecies that has turned this area into his home. This subspecies is the Balkan lynx, which has been the focus of PPNEA's scientific research since 2006. Annual camera-trap monitoring has proved that Munella Mountains shelters a small population of this feline, with at least 4 individuals.

To learn more about the Balkan lynx and its ecology, our team placed a box trap in the heart of Munella Mountain, hoping that this species would be caught and then equipped with a radio collar, by offering us the opportunity to track his movements in real-time. The box trap was deactivated for a long time (1 February – 21 March 2020), due to the quarantine situation imposed by the Covid 19 pandemic. Though we couldn't catch the lynx individual, some incredible photos and videos were collected near the box-trap. In one of these videos, it was noted that an individual of lynx, after standing for a few moments in front of the box-trap continued the walk passing along the box trap installed by our team.

Even further, several videos and photos from different species have been captured by our camera traps, such as the wild cat, brown bear, golden jackal, red fox, beech marten, and European hedgehog.



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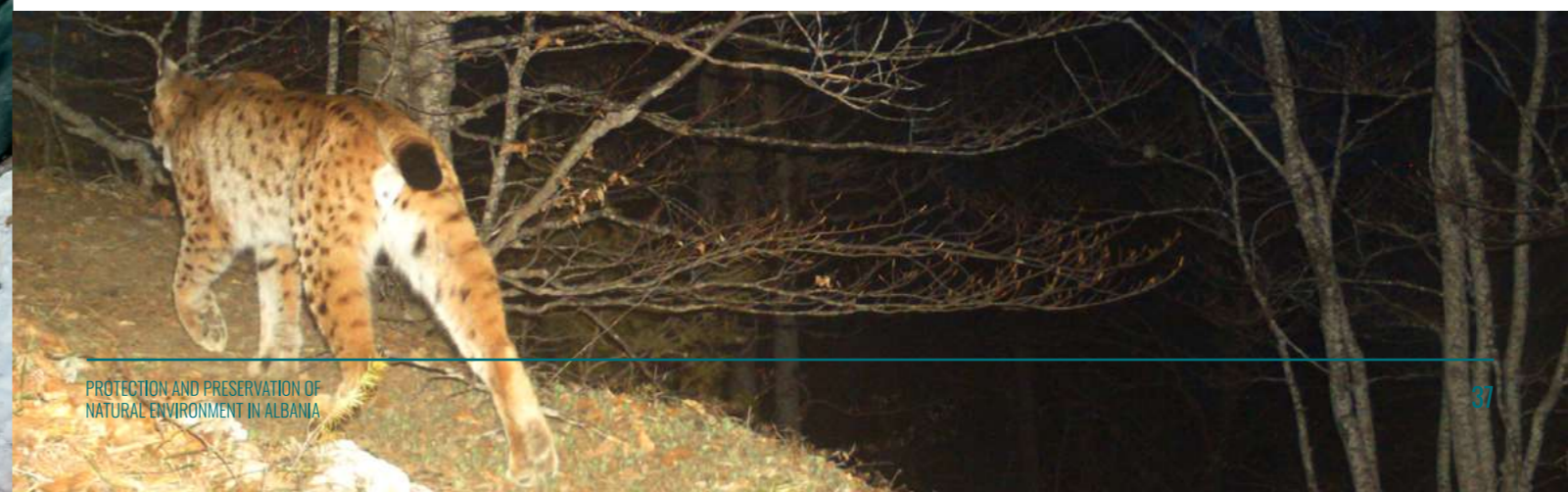
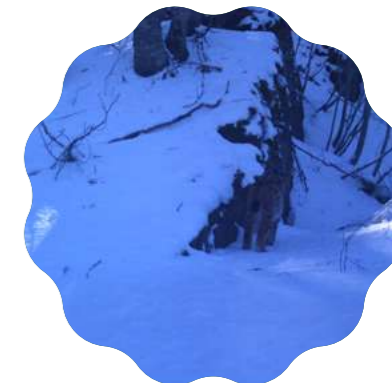
Polis-Gur i Zi-Valamarë

Results of the Balkan Lynx Extensive Camera Trapping Survey – Winter/ Spring 2021, Albania

The Balkan lynx 2021 monitoring survey, was implemented under the "Research and Monitoring Strategy of the BLRP", Phase VI. This survey aimed to estimate the minimum number of the Balkan lynx population in Albania. Also, this activity was coordinated at the transboundary level, including all the Balkan region countries (North Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo) where the Balkan lynx is present. The results obtained at the regional level will contribute to updating the report on the status of the "Large Carnivores of Europe" prepared and published by LCE every three years. This report is an instrument to inform the policy of the Europe Commission on managing and protecting large carnivores, in this case, the Balkan lynx is a Critically Endangered Subspecies in the world.

To fulfill this objective, PPNEA conducted extensive camera trapping monitoring surveys in two nuclei Balkan lynx areas in Albania, during the Winter/ Spring season of 2021. In total, 51 camera traps were spread in two study areas (29 cameras in Munella area/central north and 22 cameras Polis – Gur i Zi – Valamara/central and southeast of Albania) covering approximately a size of 400km². The survey was supported by the Elbasan's RAPA staff, Rrëshen municipality, and PPNEA's fieldwork assistants. Throughout this survey, we took a very low number of lynx pictures compared with previous monitoring conducted in 2019-2020.

By comparing 22 lynx pictures taken in both study areas, 4 different individuals were identified. Having this very low number makes us realize that the lynx population is very low, so concrete and quick measures for its protection are required. Increasing the illegal activities such as lynx persecution (as the case of the illegal killing of the lynx in the Elbasan region in 2020), lynx prey depletion and trafficking wild meat illegally in restaurants, and habitat degradation (intensive logging in Polis – Gur i Zi – Valamara), recently in the area where the lynx is present, has contributed in decreasing of the Balkan lynx population in Albania.



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Sustainable development in important areas

Establishment of the Korab – Koritnik local action group

Local Action Groups (LAGs) are decentralized institutions, composed of local, public, and/or private organizations, which aim at the sustainable economic development of the area where they operate, based on the LEADER approach (IPARD Program), funded by the European Union.

The LAGs support the implementation of a rural development strategy, based on the needs, priorities, and potential of the area. To ensure long-term conservation and protection of biodiversity in the Korab-Koritnik Nature Park, while promoting sustainable economic development and well-being of the local population, PPNEA together with four local environmental organizations launched the initiative to form the Korab- Koritnik Local Action Group.

During this year a series of activities were held, such as the first workshop, on 31st of January, where the Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC), Mission, Vision, Logo were drafted, and the name of the LAG was agreed upon. The workshop was followed by the signing of the Memorandum, on April 10th, an activity which paved the way for the promotion of this initiative in a wider environment, creating an identity on social media, organizing continuous meetings with various groups of interest, as well as producing and distribution of various promotional materials. Creating a network of members was another essential activity for the formalization of this initiative, as these members are the ones who will decide on the decision-making bodies of this initiative.

This activity was carried out with the inclusion of the local community through a series of meetings in the area during September 2020. The following activity was the organization of the first Korab-Koritnik LAG assembly, where the first steps for the formalization of this initiative were concreted with the selection of the Governing Board of 17 members and the voting of the chairman of the Governing Board. This activity held on March 27, 2021, was a great success as over 70% of the members network, despite the difficulty created by the pandemic.

All the activities mentioned above have made a substantial contribution to the formalization of this initiative, however, there is still a way to go. The challenges of the future are the organization of the First Assembly of the Korab-Koritnik LAG, the selection of decision-making structures, such as representatives of the Board of Directors or executive staff, as well as the drafting of the Statute, Regulation, and Local Development Strategy.



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Along 2020 and 2021 a series of activities have been held, such as

- 10 meetings with the local and central institutions, including the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, MoTE, NAPA, RAPA Kukës and Dibër, Kukës the Dibër municipality, together with representatives from the administrative unit
- 8 meetings with the local community where 250 locals in the administrative units of the focus area such as Shishtavec, Topojan, Zapot, Gorke-Caje, Dodës, Melan, and Maqellarë have been met.
- Over 15 meetings between 5 founding organizations: PPNEA, Agro-Eco Dibra, Ecologists for the Region, Environmental Protection and Tourism Development, Young Environmental Experts.

Sustainable future for the Sharr / Korab-Koritnik transboundary region

Implementation of model projects to support sustainable development and nature conservation in the Sharr / Korab-Koritnik transboundary region along the Balkan Green Belt.

The vision of this project is to prepare a basis for the sustainable development of the region and at the same time enable inherent and long-term conservation of the extraordinary mountain landscape, with the local population as an active stimulant in both directions. The project aims to contribute to sustainable regional development, combined with the reduction of threats to biodiversity in the Shar / Korab-Koritnik region, having the local population as the main driver.

The main component of the project is to implement and support 13 model projects (MP), which are developed by local actors, within the previous project funded by DBU. Thus, model projects are divided into 3 themes: "Livestock and Beekeeping", "Forest (Fruits)" and "Tourism", where each component is run by a national project partner (CNVP, MES, PPNEA, or a leader for each component.)

This project has been prepared and is being implemented by Euronatur in coordination with the Macedonian Ecological Society (MES) in North Macedonia, Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA), and the Connection of the Natural Values and People (CNVP) Pristina, Kosovo.

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It is funded by the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt- DBU and AAGE V. Jensen Charity Foundation in cooperation with Euronatur Foundation, with a 30-month implementation time, starting from April 2021 to September 2023.

During 2021 many activities were successfully implemented which focused on presenting and promoting the project, initiating the implementation of small projects, and increasing cross-border cooperation between institutions responsible for managing protected areas in the region but also of society organizations civil and local community.

Drafting and signing contracts with 5 local organizations that will implement 5 projects in the Korab-Koritnik Nature Park was the main activity that paved the way for a long and positive process of implementing these projects that focus on different themes. Contracts were signed with local organizations such as:

- **Agro – Eko Dibra**, which will implement the project that focuses on the support of livestock farmers in the creation of 3 model activities where agrotourism will be melted with livestock breeding in Korab-Koritnik Nature Park.
- **Ekologët Kukës** will focus on promoting sustainable tourism through the direct investment that will enable access and promotion of tourist destinations of the Korab-Koritnik Nature Park.
- **Young Environmental Experts**, focusing on the support of area farmers in cultivating medicinal herbs with the main goal of reduction of impact on plants and wild species.
- **The Association of Use of Forests and Pastures (Novosejë)** will implement the project that focuses on the improvement of the population of gentian (*Gentiana lutea*) through its outdoor planting and the creation of 3 model activities for its cultivation.
- **The forest and pasture use association (Tomin)**, with a focus on beekeeping. Through this project, it is intended to create 3 model activities supporting the area farmers to reduce negative pressure on natural resources and revenue generation by taking care of these sources.

Protected Areas for Nature and People

Protected areas have a very important role in preserving and protecting biodiversity.

They also carry considerable potential for economic development and the promotion of the well-being of local communities. For this reason, the Protected Areas for Nature and People (PA4NP) program focuses on promoting the protection of Protected Areas to respond to biodiversity threats and provide solutions to the needs of local communities. The main objectives of the PA4NP program are to strengthen the engagement of local communities in the management of Protected Areas, as well as the impact and monitoring of national environmental policies in 8 Western Balkan countries, including Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia and, most recently, Albania. PA4NP's vision is "Preserving biodiversity in the Western Balkans and ensuring well-being for all present and future generations".

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To achieve this vision, PA4NP will address biodiversity conservation by supporting a functioning System of Protected Areas and promoting services provided by protected ecosystems.

This program is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) in cooperation with the organization WWF Adria. The time frame for the implementation of this program in Albania will be 27 Months, starting from October 2020 until December 2022.

The signing of the contract in October 2020 opened the way of implementing the activities, starting in January 2021 with a series of the project presenting meetings with different actors. Among the main activities that have been successfully implemented during this period are:

- Supporting the Elbasan Protected Areas Management Committee in updating the internal regulation, drafting an action plan through the organization of 3 meetings of this very important body for managing protected areas.
- Support RAPA Elbasan in the celebration of the 13th anniversary of the Shebenik-Jablanica National Park through the organization of the local fair in Fushë-Studë, with the participation of the local community and representatives of important institutions such as the Ambassador of the European Union in Albania, the Ministry of Tourism and the Environment, Deputy ministers of the Albanian Parliament and Municipalities Librazhd and Prrenjas, etc
- Support RAPA Elbasan in reviewing the Shebenik-Jablanica National Park Management Plan including 3 experts for the three revised flora, fauna, and socioeconomic components.
- Support and training of representatives of RAPA Elbasan, Kukës, and Dibër in designing and implementing the education program, which was implemented during June and September 2021 through theoretical and practical demonstrations including 80 students from 4 local schools located in the Shebenik-Jablanica and Korab-Koritnik Nature Park.
- Increasing the capacity and interest of the media and the local community on environmental crimes through support while developing investigative reports, updating and promoting the Syrigjelber.info platform.
- Support the community that lives within the Vjosa-Narta protected landscape for opposition to the construction of Vlora Airport within the protected area through i) Identification and promotion of local values affected by the construction of this airport, ii) the establishment of a local action group, as well as iii) establish a court case against the construction of this airport within the protected area.

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Sustainable development and promotion of protected areas

Promoting sustainable development and promoting nature-based tourism have been among the main objectives of our organization since its inception. These objectives were implemented in several areas, such as organizing and supporting local fests, promoting birdwatching tourism, supporting financial set-up for local small businesses, etc. In the framework of the “Land of Eagles and Castles” project, during 2020–2021, through small grants financing schemes, we have supported four small businesses in two Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA), Vjosa–Narta protected area and Butrinti National Park.

Both of these businesses are focused on producing various kinds of jams and marmalades, bringing to life traditional recipes from each area. The support to these businesses consisted of branding, equipment for product production, and packaging for each enterprise. The businesses we supported were: Alexandra HandMade Products, Butrint Honey, Butrint Mussels, and GreenWay Medicinal Plants.

Through the support provided by PPNEA, 4 individuals have managed to build a sustainable future by following entrepreneurial models that go hand in hand with nature. All four of these ventures have become landmarks for locals, who we hope will follow these examples to ensure sustainable living.



Were supported during the COVID-19 pandemic, 6 employee



Wine festival

Narta village has been cultivating, the variety of vlosh grape, for years now, which has become a symbol of this area and is rich in both cultural traditions and high biodiversity values. PPNEA, together with the relevant institutions, organized again the summer festival, a festival in which traditional cuisine, traditional music, and vlosh wine were combined. The professional jury composed of well-known sommeliers in the country announced the winner for the best wine, who used a raw variety of vlosh grapes.



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Mussel festival

In the framework of the promotion of the natural and cultural values of the country, PPNEA organized a festival for the ‘queen’ of Butrinti Lake, the mussel. Mussel Festival was organized in cooperation with local organizations such as “Ksamili. al”, and relevant state institutions. ‘Aromë Tradite’ fair, included traditional dishes, folk music, and dances, traditional costumes, local products, and a mussel eating competition, where the winner was Era Cepe, a student at “8 Tetori” school.



Sofat Festival

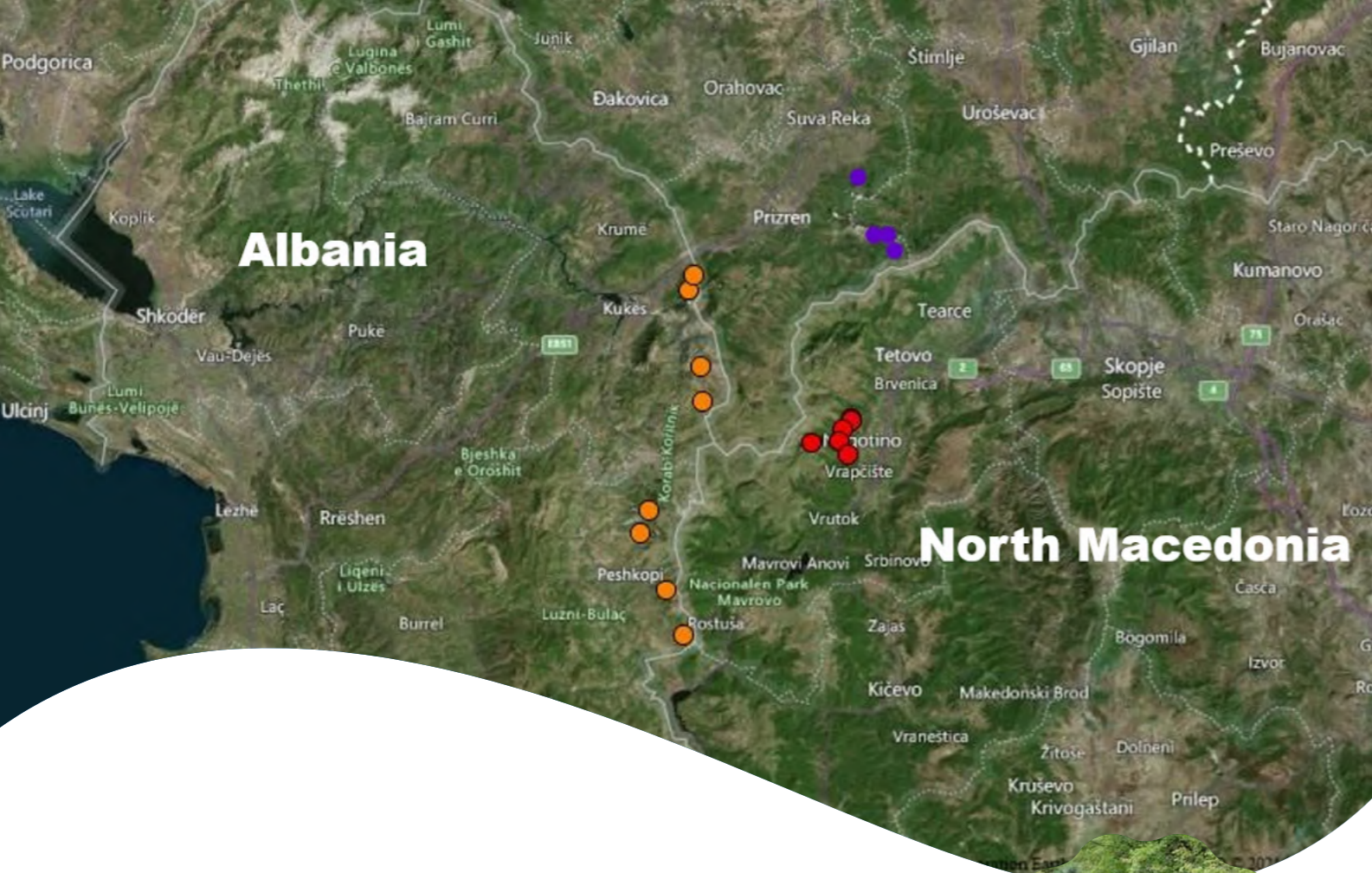
Local guides trained by PPNEA on birdwatching in the Kurvelesh region, together with PPNEA bird experts, became part of the annual SOFAT Festival, organizing a tour along the Egyptian Vulture trail, one of the most special trails in the country and beyond. During the walk on this trail, the participants had the opportunity to see one of the most peculiar vultures, which is the last breeding vulture in Albania, the Egyptian Vulture. This trail will soon turn into a tourist attraction for bird watchers and nature lovers. Moreover, this alternative activity was interesting for the participants and generated income for one of the supplementary feeding stations for the Egyptian Vulture in the area.



Tourism, nature-based interpretation, and protected areas promotion

Tourism promotion, nature-based interpretation, and protected areas promotion were one of the online webinars organized by PPNEA, to promote nature tourism and the tremendous potential, the protected areas have, for exercising sustainable activities including bird watching, nature interpretation, etc. In this webinar, representatives from Albania and abroad, respectively the Regional Administration of Protected Areas Vlorë, Interpret EU, and the Bulgarian organization for Protection of Birds (BSPB), shared experiences and reflected on the potential of sustainable development in the country, especially in protected areas and promoted alternative types of nature-based tourism. In addition to webinars on sustainable tourism, PPNEA organized two trainings for eco-guides in two important areas of the country, the Divjaka–Karavasta National Park and the Drino Valley.

The intertwined practice–theory sessions and interesting materials brought interest for the locals of these areas, who participated and started their engagement, with sustainable tourism and bird watching promotion. This type of tourism was the center of both training and specifically the promotion of main species like the Dalmatian pelican and the Egyptian Vulture



2.4) Scientific research

Camera traps

Transboundary study in Korab-Koritnik

The Korab-Koritnik-Sharr transboundary region is an area with high natural values and rich biodiversity, which includes a considerable number of species of flora and fauna. To increase monitoring capacities, PPNEA in cooperation with the Regional Administration of Protected Areas Kukës and Dibër, DAPK Sharri, and FOSH, successfully implemented in this region the project "Support to the management bodies of protected areas in the transboundary area between Albania, Kosovo and Northern Macedonia in monitoring endangered species."

In the framework of this project, the representatives of the above-mentioned institutions were trained on the methods of monitoring endangered species, and for the first time in this region, a transboundary camera-trap study was conducted. The study included the installation of 18 camera traps throughout the region, 8 of which were installed in Albania in the Korab-Koritnik Nature Park, 4 in the Sharri National Park in Kosovo, and 6 others in Sharr Mountain, in the North Macedonian part. The cameras remained active for more than a month and the results obtained, albeit for a short time, were astonishing. The cameras managed to photograph many species, including the brown bear, grey wolf, red fox, European badger, roe deer, wild cat, etc.

CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

Gashi River Valley

Our team carried out extensive monitoring of the Strict Nature Reserve of the Gashi River Valley, which lasted from September to December. The diversity of wildlife photographed by our cameras was impressive, counting species such as brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), European edible dormouse (*Glis glis*), European badger (*Meles meles*), wild cat (*Felis silvestris*), roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), rock partridge (*Alectoris graeca*), wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), the grey wolf (*Canis lupus*), red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), European hare (*Lepus europaeus*) and beech marten (*Martes foina*).



Although the purpose of this study was to confirm the presence of the Balkan lynx, the data obtained only confirmed the presence of its prey. This monitoring was carried out together with the staff of RAPA Kukës, who were trained by our team, helping to increase the institutional capacity for wildlife management.

Monitoring of the wild boar population (*Sus scrofa*)

In the frame of the ENETWILD consortium initiative, on harmonizing wild boar monitoring in South-Eastern Europe, Munella mountain was one of 19 study areas in Europe to generate reliable data on the wild boar density, during 2021. PPNEA was trained by ENETWILD in applying the random encounter camera trapping method (REM) to estimate wild boar density, during 2019-2020.

From mid-September to the end of November 2021, PPNEA conducted a wild boar monitoring survey in Munella mountain. The study area was divided into grids with 1.5x1.5 km and a surface of 27 km² (2700 ha). One camera trap was set in each grid and was left in the field for more than 60 days. All 12 camera traps, were deployed and moved at least once to a different grid (e.g., a similar grid moved in NW, NE, SE, or SW direction around 1 km).

From all 19 populations, REM densities ranged from 0.35 individuals-km² (Biokovo study site, Croatia) to 37.23 individuals-km² (Mrezicko, North Macedonia). Munella mountain showed a low-density situation of the wild boar population, with 1.45 ± 0.49 individuals.km² compared to other counties, in the Balkan region and Europe. In most of the countries in Europe, the wild boar is considered a game species and its population is stable, while in Albania it is listed in the Flora and Fauna Red List and has a small population, due to the poaching activities in the countries.



CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

Monitoring of bio corridors in Prespa National Park

Monitoring of the brown bear is a transboundary activity that will be implemented for three years (2021–2023) in the ecological corridors, connecting the Prespa basin with other large areas in Albania and North Macedonia.

This activity is in the same line with the outcomes of the “Brown Bear Conservation Action Plan for the Prespa Lake’s watershed”, prepared in 2012. Based on this study, three important ecological corridors were identified in Albania, which connects Prespa National Park with other biogeographical large areas, in the Korça region and beyond. This activity aims to understand and assess the functionality of the brown bear and other large mammals’ bio corridors, by proving the bear movement in the bottleneck areas, as part of the ecological corridor network. Also, the data collected will help us to ensure the long-term favorable conservation status of the Brown Bear population and the sustainable management, restoration, and protection of the habitats and ecological corridors. Four bottleneck crossing areas have been identified in the study area.



In total, 13 camera traps were set, in four bottleneck crossing areas, during survey 2021. All cameras were deployed during the first half of October and were left in the field for more than 60 days. In the setting, checking and removing process of the camera, several people from central and local PPNEA offices were involved. Even, two PPNEA interns, volunteers, and Korça’s RAPA staff were trained and engaged in the field.

Parallel with implementing the camera trapping methodology, brown bear signs were searched and recorded by the research team in each study area. Collecting data on brown bear presence, through implementing extensive camera trapping and tracing methodologies, providing reliable information on the brown bear and other species during the first survey. Two brown bear scats were found in the Qafë Plloçë in October during the first field mission. Also, one young brown bear individual was photographed from one of the camera traps in Cangonj gorge late in autumn. These hard facts proved the functionality of the brown bear and other mammals in two bio corridors through bear movement in the two bottleneck areas as part of the ecological corridor network.

Monitoring of fauna in three protected areas in the Gjirokastrë area

To improve the knowledge on mammals in this region and use these data to update the 2nd European Mammals Atlas, PPNEA in collaboration with the Faculty of Natural Sciences, Tirana University, and Gjirokastra’s Regional Administration of Protected Area, conducted an extensive Sherman and Camera Trapping survey during Summer/Autumn 2021. Respectively, the study was carried out in three Protected Areas such as Kardhiq, Sotira’s Fir, and Zagori Nature Parks (Category IV, according to the IUCN criteria).



CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

This survey generated important data on small and medium-large mammals’ presence and distribution which are classified as vulnerable and endangered species listed in the IUCN Red List and Flora and Fauna National Red List. Here we can mention the presence of the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) recorded in Zagori Natural Park, wild cat (*Felis silvestris*) recorded in three Protected Areas, and chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra balcanica*) recorded in Sotira’s Fir Natural Park, also other mammal species which are protected by Albanian law. Two species of rodents (*Apodemus sylvaticus* and *Apodemus flavicollis*) were collected through Sherman traps while the present signs of the lesser mole-rat were recorded in Çajupi field (Fusha e Çajupit), at cc 1200 m above sea level.



Implementation of these methods obtained reliable data which provided the first inventories list of small (bats are not included) and medium-large size mammal species. Related to the small mammal’s data collection, two PPNEA experts and one ranger of Zagori NP were also engaged in the field, using this opportunity as on-job training on how to set up traps for small mammals. Also, training on the camera trapping method on medium-large mammals monitoring was provided by PPNEA to Gjirokastra’s RAPA staff. GPS records, photos for the habitat where trapping was applied and specimens have been collected.

Assessment of the parameters of the Eurasian otter population trend in Macro and Micro Prespa lakes

The Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*) has the widest distribution of all otter species. Its range covers parts of three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. The Eurasian otter lives in a wide variety of aquatic habitats, including highland and lowland lakes, rivers, streams, marshes, swamp forests, and coastal areas independent of their size, origin, or latitude. Eurasian otter is fully protected by the Albanian hunting legislation. Also, it is included in Annex II and Annex IV of the EU-Habitat Directive. According to Mediterranean IUCN Red List is classified as NT, while in Albanian Red List is classified as VU.

The littoral zones of both Great and Small Prespa Lakes and the nearshore areas are important places for various wetland habitats. The shallow part of the littoral zone is characterized by different ecological conditions providing an important habitat for plant and animal species. Numerous caves and crevices along the shoreline provide safety shelters and potential holt, while shallow waters with abundant fish are suitable feeding places for otters.

According to the Management Plan for the Prespa National Park (2014–2024), the otter is reported as being a common species in the Prespa lakes area, based on confirmations from fishermen and the assessment of good fish stocks which are its staple food. During the 2017-year, Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA), reviewed and made recommendations of concrete conservation actions related to this species on the Prespa NP Management Plan and also, monitored the assessment of its presence in Prespa, Ohrid, and Shkodra lakes. The results showed that the otter is present in the three lakes, but with a high presence in Prespa Lake. Taking into consideration the need to conduct a systematic survey in collaboration with Korça’ RAPA to give continuity of data and to estimate the parameters of otter populations in Prespa lakes, PPNEA with the support of the PONT project conducted the first national survey during September – October 2021. To make a comparative analysis to evaluate the dynamic of otter population trend in both lakes, another survey with the same methodology will be conducted in 2023.

CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

Providing data on the status population of the otter in Prespa lakes, through assessment of positive stations and sprainting points number within a transect with a minimum distance of 200 m and maximum of 600 m in each station, will be a good result to help RAPA to take concrete conservation measures on its protection. Also, the methodology was followed by the investigation of the number of resting otter sites, monitored by spraints observation and camera traps as an alternative method. Throughout the implementation of this activity, PPNEA is increasing the capacity of Korça's RAPA staff on otter ecology/biology and monitoring methods.

Bats: A new Target Conservation for PrespaNet Partners

PPNEA and the Prespanet partners from North Macedonia, MES have started the work for conducting a transboundary study for the conservation of bats, including national and international experts for monitoring and identifying key conservation measures.

The work for bats began with the organization of a theoretical online training with cross-border participation, organized by PPNEA and partner organizations, in May 2021. The training has been attended by representatives of Prespa Basin protected areas, representatives of local governing authorities from Albania and North Macedonia, Prespa partners, PONT and KFW representatives, as well as students and lecturers of the University of Korça. The training continued with a two-day field expedition, where some of the main habitats of bats were identified, such as caves or forest areas, as well as the species present, conservation measures, etc. The bat tracking devices and nets were some of the most specific techniques implemented during this monitoring.

In addition, PPNEA worked last year for the development of the Treni cave Management Plan, which is classified as a cultural monument, and at the same time represents a very important habitat for the sheltering and reproduction of a bat population in Prespa National Park, being constantly threatened by activities inside the cave or nearby it. Under the direction of an external expert, PPNEA has held several consulting meetings with the group of interests in the area and local institutions such as RAPA Korça, Devoll Municipality, and Pustec Municipality.

Soon, the Treni cave will have its management plan that we hope will improve its condition and ensure the conservation of the bat population in this area.

Camera trap and live camera monitoring of the supplementary feeding stations (SFS) for the Egyptian vulture

600+
PHOTOS

Of the Egyptian vulture collected

Live
streaming

In Glina SFS

5
SPECIES

Have visited this station

CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

Camera traps have not only served in monitoring wildlife within forest ecosystems but also to collect data on the Egyptian vulture visits, in two supplementary feeding stations, built by PPNEA, near the breeding territories of this endangered vulture.

During 2020-2021 we witnessed frequent visits of this species, on both supplementary feeding stations, and collected important data for the ecology of this vulture, such as breeding behavior. About 10,000 photos were collected from camera traps and more than 600 of them belong to the Egyptian vulture. Furthermore, for the first time, it was possible to install a live camera at one of the supplementary feeding stations in the Drino Valley. Already, through this technique, the frequency of the Egyptian vulture's visits, duration, breeding behaviors, etc. can be monitored in real-time.

Monitoring of the Eurasian's sparrowhawk using camera traps

In 30 years, PPNEA has been fortunate to collaborate with professionals and nature lovers who have helped us grow and fulfill our mission. One of the valuable collaborators is also Ndoc Mulaj, who has been part of some successes with our team. In 2021, he discovered a nest of a pair of the Eurasian sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*), an endangered species, in the Shala Valley where he helped our team install a camera trap. The data collected by this camera is impressive and important for the study of the species. In this nest were 4 hatchlings, of which only 3 of them managed to fledge.



Real-time white stork monitoring in Albania (*Ciconia ciconia*)

Working to preserve wildlife is becoming more and more challenging. To achieve successful results, PPNEA has been trying to adopt technological and scientific innovations with its daily work. One of the methods used to study the stork nesting behavior while raising public awareness was to place a live broadcasting camera in front of the White stork nesting platform, in the Drino valley. Live streaming cameras will be set during each breeding season, providing detailed information on the pair's behavior in the nest as well as the hatched birds. Some of the received information is the hatching period and caring of the chicks, the first flight of the hatched birds, etc.



Coexistence between human society and wildlife

Working for wildlife protection and conservation means not leaving the human factor aside, but considering it in each step or action undertaken. For PPNEA especially, it has always been crucial to involve the people in our work and work together towards mitigating conflicts that might arise in areas where human-wildlife coexistence is an inseparable phenomenon. We work to protect species such as brown bears, wolves, and lynx, etc., that represent a natural treasure for Albania, but sometimes they are perceived as a threat to the local communities.

To study the human-large carnivore conflict dynamics, the PrespaNet members, led by PPNEA, have conducted and concluded a detailed study in the Albanian and North Macedonian part of Prespa, with shepherds along this transboundary region.

Following the results and analysis from the study, it was concluded that large carnivores in the Albanian and Macedonian parts of Prespa are of lesser concern to the shepherds than other issues affecting their livelihoods, such as lack of subsidies, inadequate veterinary control and services, and the abandonment of the shepherd profession.

Locals in Prespa have continued to live alongside large predators, developing tolerance, as well as practices and strategies that minimize conflicts. The shepherding practices that are used on both sides of the basin such as surveillance of herds and sheep held at night as well as ongoing attendance during the day by both humans and livestock guarding dogs have largely contributed to minimizing damages and loss from large carnivores.

The study concluded that conflicts with large carnivores do not pose a major challenge for the livelihoods of shepherds in Albania and North Macedonia and suggests that any measures addressing conflicts with predators should be carefully balanced against alternatives addressing the more pressing issues the local shepherds are facing.

CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

Study of the legislation on veterinary medicinal products in Albania

The widespread use of antibiotics and Veterinary Medicinal Products (VMPs) in livestock poses an extremely serious threat to vulture populations. For this reason, during 2020 our team undertook a detailed study of the existing legislation in Albania that regulates the marketing and use of these products, to analyse the situation and identify alternatives to the use of some dangerous drugs.

The results of the study showed that Albania enjoys detailed legislation regarding the production, trade, import, and use of veterinary medicinal products. In the regulatory acts, all activities related to the treatment of livestock, veterinary control, the work of professionals in the field, as well as the production or marketing of these products, are best provided. However, the study showed that the implementation of this legislation was weak, leading to situations such as high registration prices, lack of vets at customs, non-publication of a transparent list of veterinary medical products used in the country, lack of equipment in veterinary laboratories, etc.



With a group of interests



Involved in the case

Monitoring of marine caves

The Albanian coastline carries a considerable number of marine caves, many of which are located in areas that are not well explored, becoming perfect habitats for the sheltering and reproduction of the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*). To obtain as much information as possible, on the marine caves, as well as, to identify the most suitable habitats for the Mediterranean monk seal, during 2020 and 2021, our team continued the monitoring of the Albanian coastline. So far, we have identified around 50 marine caves, where some of the most important and potential ones, regarding sheltering and reproduction of the species, will be monitored by camera traps during the next year.

At the end of the monitoring process, PPNEA will produce a complete map with all the potential habitats for the sheltering and reproduction of the Mediterranean monk seal, along the Albanian coastline.

Last but not least, PPNEA has been conducting several awareness activities, aiming to raise awareness for locals, children, students, and also nature lovers, focusing on the protection and preservation of the Mediterranean monk seal topic. The invitation at the WakeUp national program and Nova TV, Croatian media, were also two positive indicators that raised awareness to the wider general public, regarding the importance of the conservation of the species.

CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

Mediterranean monk seal – Questionnaires of the human dimension

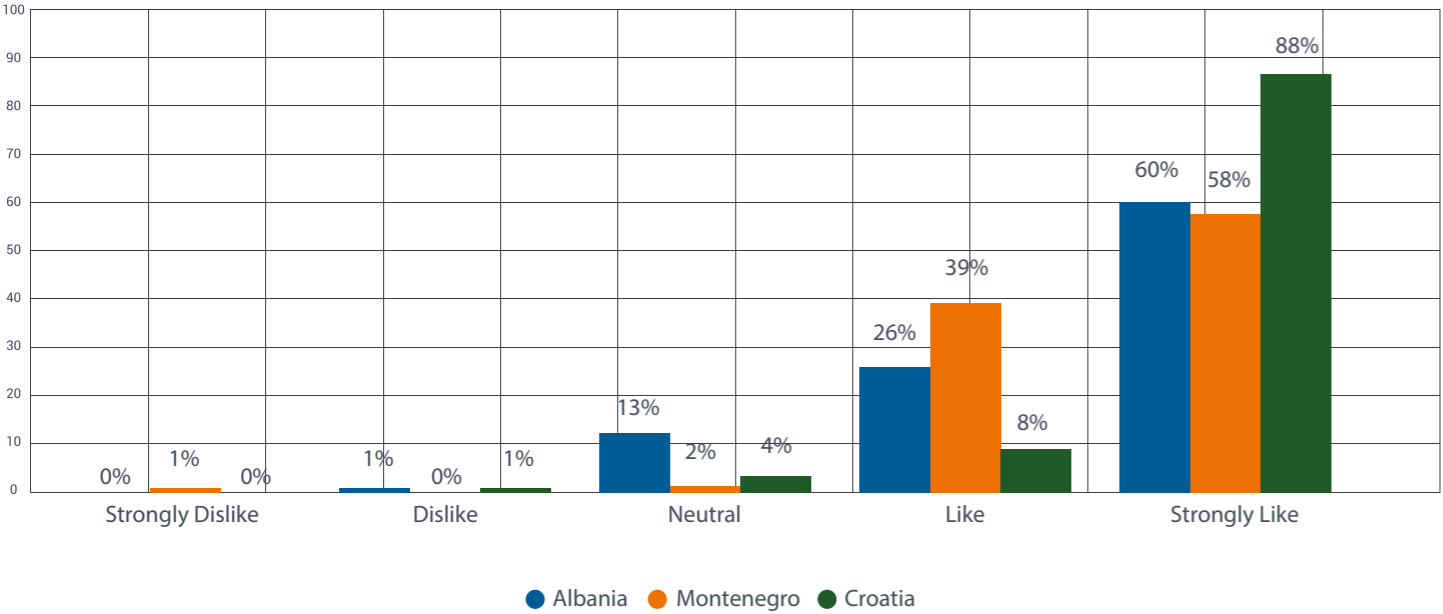
Exploring the local's information and knowledge, about the Mediterranean monk seal, is extremely important to identify potential threats to this endangered species. In 2020, our team trained two students from the Faculty of Natural Sciences of the University of Vlora and Tirana to implement questionnaires that aimed to gather information on people's knowledge about the Mediterranean monk seal. After the consultation process, both students applied the questionnaire in residential areas, near potential habitats, that the Mediterranean monk seal can use in southern Albania. Out of 106 interviewees, a large number had information on the Mediterranean monk seal and had even observed it, at one time or another.

The same methodology has been conducted by our project partners, in Montenegro and Croatia to have a better overview of the general attitudes, towards the presence of Mediterranean monk seal. PPNEA has been involved in the process of analyzing the collected data and creating a quantitative and quality report which will be taken into consideration for the final narrative report of the project.

In total, 106 respondents were interviewed, in the coastal areas of Albania, 90 in Montenegro, and 107 in Croatia during 2020. The general attitudes towards monk seals, in the three countries, can be described as highly positive. In Croatia, 90% of respondents confirmed to have positive (like and strongly like) feelings towards monk seals, in Montenegro 82% and in Albania 80%.

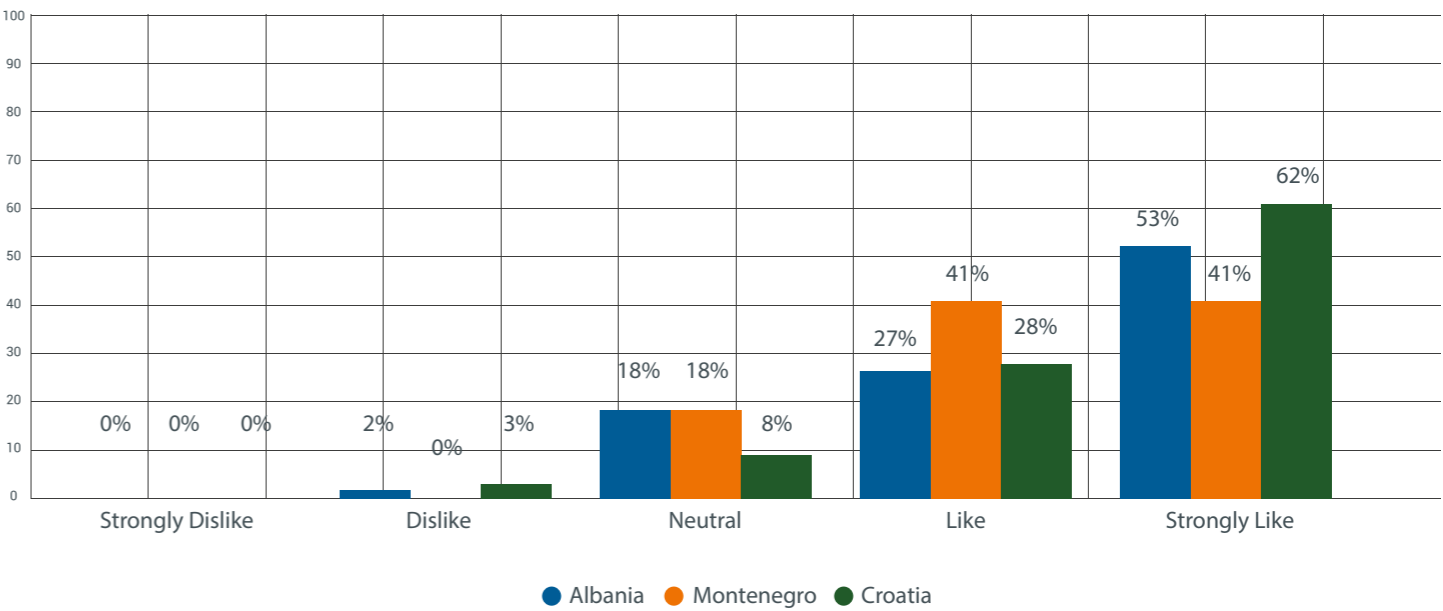
Furthermore, monk seals were seen as a great potential to attract tourists in all three countries. In Albania, 86% of respondents thought that monk seals can attract tourists, together with 92% of Montenegrin respondents and 85% of Croatian respondents.

Very valuable indicators were also the pictures and video footage taken by the residents, who had managed to make amateur filming, in the moments when they observed the Mediterranean monk seal. Later on, our team will establish an Information and Rescue Network in the Saranda area, which will help us raise local awareness, for the threats this endangered species faces, as well as implement concrete actions on the ground.



Importance of conserving the monk seal

CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT



Perception towards the monk seal

International Waterbird Census

The International Water Bird Census (IWC) represents the largest citizen science event organized in 143 countries around the world to count birds and assess bird populations across thousands of wetlands around the globe. The IWC, coordinated by Wetlands International is conducted every year on the 2nd week of January. In Albania, the census took place in 30 wetlands, which represented coastal lagoons, parts of rivers, natural and artificial lakes, swamps, sandy beaches, etc. 15 of the areas covered are part of the network of Important Bird Areas, while 11 are part of the National Network of Protected Areas.

A considerable number of actors became part of the waterbird census, including public institutions, non-profit organizations, or even volunteers. As every year, our team was part of the counting team, covering Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape, Butrint National Park, Orikumi Lagoon, Bufi lake, Bulo Reservoir, Syri I Kaltër nature monument, Ulza lake as well as participated in the counting in the Prespa National Park. The total number of birds counted during IWC 2020 in Albania was about 150,000 individuals, represented by 65 species, meanwhile the year 2021 presented a decrease in the total number of individuals and species, respectively by about 143,000 individuals and 61 species.



Monitoring of breeding birds in Vjosë–Nartë and Butrinti KBAs

In 2020, PPNEA conducted a study for the monitoring of breeding birds in Vjosë – Nartë Protected Landscape and Butrinti National Park. This study aimed to repeat the same study held in 2016, to improve the knowledge about the breeding avifauna in both study areas; monitor the changes and evaluate the progress realized in targeting the identified threats. Furthermore, the results also will serve to assess the management regime implemented in recent years by the relevant institutions, as well as the need for change or adaptation. Along with this study, all-important habitats within both protected areas have been covered.

A total number of 153 species have been recorded in the KBA Vjosë–Nartë along in both surveys for breeding and migrating birds, and a total number of 17 new species have been recorded in the area compared with the 2016 study. The results showed that Vjosë–Nartë is the site with the largest breeding population of Pied Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) in Albania, representing up to nearly 1 % of the European breeding population. Moreover, this wetland shelters the largest population of Little Tern (*Sternula albifrons*) in Albania, and so far, is reported the largest breeding population of Calandra Lark (*Melanocorypha calandra*).



Regarding Butrinti National Park, a total number of 96 species from 13 orders, 34 families and 69 genera have been recorded along with this survey within the borders of the KBA. Out of the total number of recorded species, 45 were confirmed as breeders in the area. Furthermore, in this area has been observed the Red-throated pipit (*Anthus cervinus*), constituting the first documentation of this species in Albania.



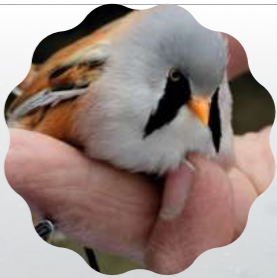
Despite being rich in biodiversity values and being important internationally, both KBA is facing various threats that violate the integrity of these protected areas such as the construction of Vlora airport and other massive touristic investments within the borders of the KBAs.

Inventory of breeding birds in Prespa National Park

Prespa National Park is known as an important area for birds, but breeding avifauna within the National Park boundaries has been quite faintly surveyed in the last years. The most complete survey has been realized in 2011 within the frame of management plan preparation and since then no complete studies have been carried out anymore for the breeding birds in the National Park.

To increase knowledge on the breeding avifauna of the park, in 2021, PPNEA conducted a study during the period May–June following the same research design that has been applied in the year 2011. The study included a wide range of habitats including aquatic, shrublands, forests, habitats, agricultural fields as well as urban habitats. A total number of 123 species from 18 orders, 42 families, and 81 genera have been recorded along with this survey, where the highest number of species are from order Passeriformes. Of the total number of species recorded, 82 species have been confirmed as breeding in the area. Furthermore, the horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris*) has been observed in this area, constituting a rare species during the breeding season in Albania.

In addition to increasing knowledge on breeding birds in the park, the results of this study will also serve to evaluate and assess the management regime implemented by the relevant institutions, including changes or adaptations to improve it.



Bird Banding camp in Prespa National Park

Prespa National Park is quite an important area for nesting of birds of the order Passeriformes, where a considerable number of species are migratory. The establishment of a ring camp in this area represents an important action that generates knowledge about the ornitofauna of the area and at the same time contributes to the development of the science of ornithology and bird conservation in the country as it builds capacities and attracts young birders or conservationists in identifying and learning other morphological and ecological features of birds.

During 2021, 2 bird banding camps have been organized by PPNEA in the Prespa National Park; in the spring and autumn season, respectively March–April and August–October. The ringing of birds was carried out in various habitats within the park, focusing mainly on the reed beds. The results showed that a total number of 155 individuals, from 39 species, belonging to 1 order, 17 families, and 28 genera have been ringed along the year.

In this camp, besides the external experts and the PPNEA team, staff of RAPA Korça and student interns from the Eberswalde University in Germany also joined the camp. The bird banding camp further complements the ongoing studies with focus birds, as part of the Prespa Project–Biodiversity Conservation in Transboundary Prespa”.

CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

Monitoring of Collared pratincole population

Since the discovery of the collared pratincole colony (*Glareola pratincola*) in 2019, in the Lalzi Bay, Important Bird and Biodiversity area, PPNEA is continuing to monitor the population of this species, which carries the status of “Vulnerable” (VU) in our country.

In addition to monitoring the nesting process in the existing colony in Lalzi Bay, a team consisting of PPNEA and Birds of Albania experts conducted further research in the area, to discover new habitats suitable for the breeding of the collared pratincole. These researches enabled the discovery of a new colony of this species, with at least 70 and at most 100 breeding pairs, resulting in 230 breeding pairs in total. Meanwhile, detailed studies were conducted in Divjaka-Karavasta National Park, in cooperation with RAPA Fier, where new breeding pairs of this species have been recorded.

For this year, the results of the studies show that the population of the collared pratincole in Albania consists of about 500 breeding pairs, ranking Albania in 8th place on the European continent for the size of the breeding population of this species, which reaches up to 5.6% of the entire European population.

Egyptian vulture monitoring

Monitoring the Egyptian vulture population (*Neophron percnopterus*) is an engaging activity, which requires long hours of dedication near the breeding territories, to generate the necessary data, such as the occupied territories, the number of pairs or individuals, of hatchlings and fledglings, etc.

Since 2013, our team has continuously monitored the territories of the Egyptian vulture to collect solid data to understand the trend of the population of this species and take measures for its recovery. In Albania, during 2020, 9 territories were occupied, 6 of which were occupied by pairs and 3 by single individuals. Meanwhile, 2021 data showed a shrink population of up to only 5 pairs, distributed along Drino valley, Vjosa valley, and Kurveleshi region.



CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT



The critical status of the Egyptian vulture entails that the loss of even a single individual can jeopardize the survival of the entire population and at the same time emphasizes the need to take concrete actions to protect the last breeding vulture in our Albania, from various threats, such as poisoning, electrocution, collision with electric infrastructure, habitat degradation/fragmentation, etc.

Monitoring of White stork population

The White stork (*Ciconia ciconia*), once common throughout the country, today represents one of the rarest species of breeding birds, found only in the southern and southeastern regions of Albania. To analyze the trend of the stork population, PPNEA, as every year, carried out the monitoring of the population of this critically endangered species.

In 2020, in total, the White stork population numbered 9 breeding pairs, where PPNEA managed to discover a new breeding pair of this species. Monitoring of the white stork population was carried out in different seasons, including the occupation of the territory, the nesting season, as well as the productivity or the number of hatchlings and fledglings. The same methodology was applied in 2021 when 7 breeding pairs were counted. Unfortunately, for the low number of the population, the decrease of the population with 1 breeding pair is significant for the continuity of the species in our country. Despite the successful nesting of these pairs, the survival of all storklets and their migration route to Africa will continue to be a challenging mission.

To mitigate the main threats that have led to the decline of the White stork population in Albania, such as electrocution or collision with power lines, degradation and loss of habitat, lack of breeding spaces, etc., PPNEA during 2021 installed 1 additional nesting platform in the Drino valley and created 4 nesting platforms that will be installed during 2022, thus creating more breeding spaces contributing to the recovery of the White stork population in our country.



CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

Pelican census

One of the coordinated international activities that were canceled due to the Covid-19 virus pandemic situation was the Pelican Census for southeastern Europe. However, this activity as important and beloved for PPNEA took place in the Prespa Lakes in coordination with PrespaNet partners. In 2020, this action coincided with the celebration of the Day of Biological Diversity, a day which we celebrated by counting 188 pelicans on the Albanian side of Prespa. In 2021 the Pelican Census for Southeastern Europe was conducted regularly and PPNEA covered Prespa Lakes and Narta Lagoon where 364 and 34 individuals were counted respectively. Both of these areas represent ecosystems of great importance not only for pelicans but also for other bird species, providing the necessary conditions to feed, rest, and nest.



552 pelicans in the albanian side of Prespa lake

34 pelicans in Vjosa-Narta PL



CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

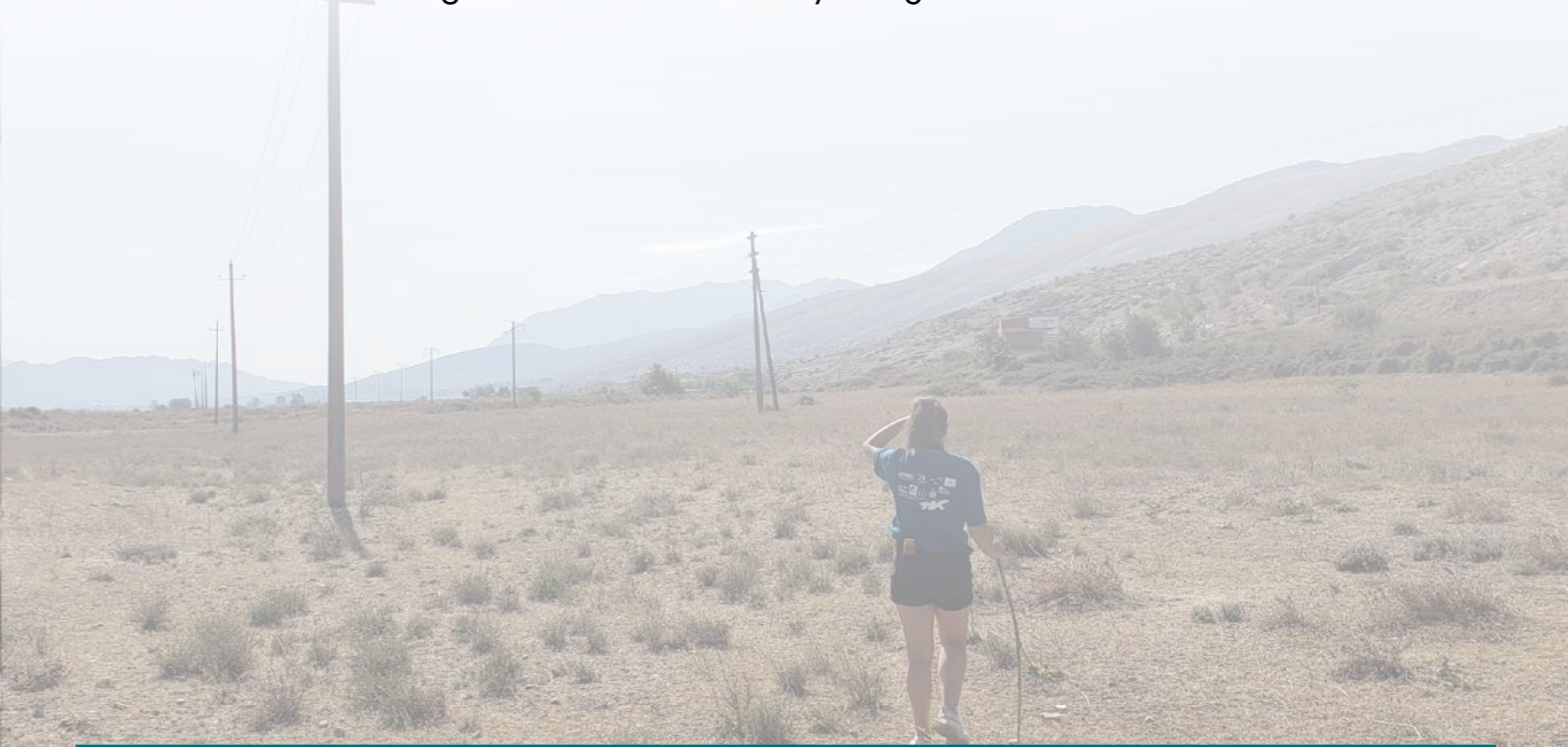
Study on mortality of birds due to electrocution in Important Bird Areas

The Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) is classified as “Endangered” according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. The decline of the population of this species has come due to the many threats encountered in both breeding and wintering grounds.

In addition to poisoning, which represents one of the most serious threats, another threat worth mentioning is also electrocution or collision with electric infrastructure. To assess the risk posed by the power grid, our team conducted 2020 a study along the Drino Valley, classified as an Important Bird and biodiversity area (IBA).

During this study, transects with a length of 14 km of 10 kV, 35 kV and 110 kV power lines were realized, as well as some dangerous electric poles that could cause electrocution or a high probability of collision were identified. Furthermore, along the transects, were found 4 dead individuals, belonging to 3 different species (common buzzard, lesser kestrel, common kestrel), which we believe to have fallen victim to electrocution.

Through this study, our team re-confirmed the belief that the power grid poses a risk to the Egyptian population and other birds of prey. To avoid this risk, immediate measures need to be taken for the maintenance of the electricity network, isolating the problematic poles, or adapting the future infrastructure according to a more bird-friendly design.



CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

Assessment study on the population of dice snake in Maligradi island

Maligrad is one of the two islands in the Great Prespa Lake and an inseparable part of Prespa National Park distinguished as a core zone. Maligrad and Golem Grad, also known as Snake Island, have a lot of similarities and aspects that are of interest for scientific studies, protection, and promotion. Based on its position, the scenery, natural and cultural elements that can be found on Maligrad, it has been recognized as a very attractive touristic destination for visiting.

Besides the cultural values, the island holds plenty of natural elements and living creatures that consider the island as their home. In comparison to Golem Grad, the species found on Maligrad are severely understudied, especially the seemingly large dice snake population. An experienced group of herpetologists that for more than 10 years have been studying this species on Golem Grad, together with the PrespaNet partners, identified the need for the study to be replicated on Maligrad Island and to create a scientific connection between both islands.



During two field trips conducted in late spring and summer of 2021, 84 snakes were captured and processed and were found to be in good condition in terms of reproduction and nutrition. Similarly, to other regions of Prespa Lake, all the three-color morphs of dice snakes are present on Maligrad: the most common, green snakes with a dark blotched pattern, uniformly green, and completely melanistic individuals. Besides all of this, this species cannot escape the threats that are forming around them.

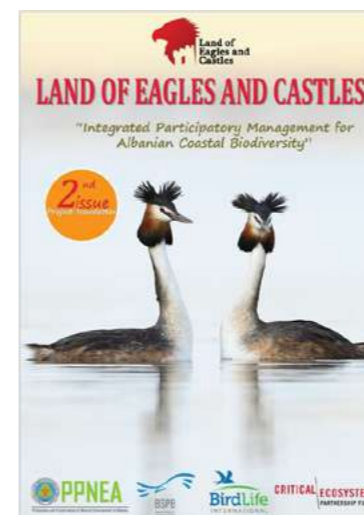
The island itself is close to an inhabited area where one of the main activities practiced by the locals is fishing and is becoming an attractive touristic destination as of late. This means direct exposure to threats coming from both human and natural factors that affect directly and indirectly their population. Illegal fishing is a direct and indirect threat in terms of the snakes being caught in the nets, but also overfishing can affect their food supply, as fish is one of their main prey. In such a fragile system found on Maligrad, the collapse of any part of the trophic chain may well perturb the trophic relationships and endanger the whole ecosystem as a whole.

The study will continue for the next two years to build a reliable database for comparison between the two localities and to monitor the dice snake population. The potential identified by the research group is promising for undertaking future detailed initiatives that will contribute to the connection and protection of the natural resources of both islands.

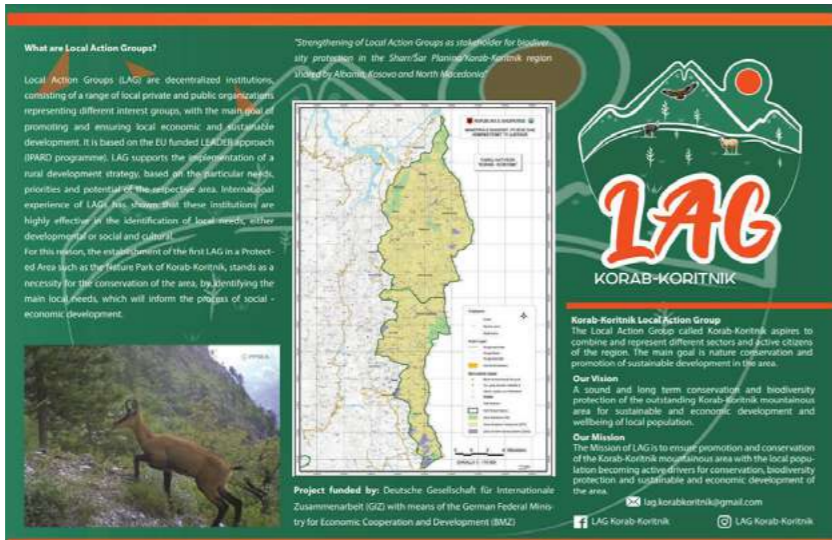
CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

2.5) Education, communication, and advocacy for nature conservation

Publications



CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT



CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

The nature education program in Prespa

Engaging children in natural education activities that are interactive, creative, but above all practical and close to nature is an education philosophy that PPNEA has followed and will continue in the future. This is how the “educational journey” with the children of Prespa schools goes. The second PrespaNet educational program on Rivers and Streams was able to be implemented later than planned due to the school closure. Following the experience from the previous sessions during last year, the positive spirit among the children, and their curiosity to learn practically about the values of the place they live in, was a motivation to find a way and go back to the schools of course by following all the restrictions and measures.

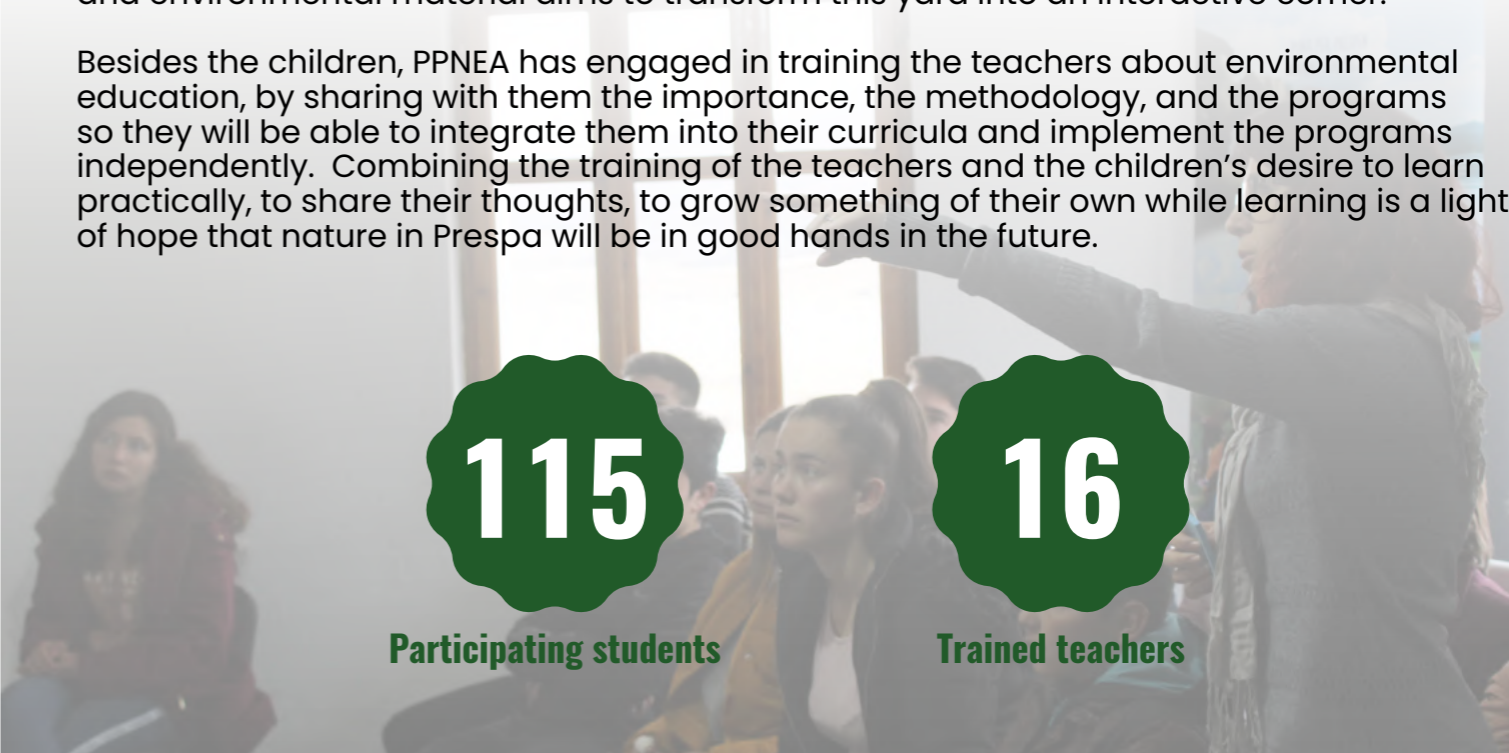


As always, their eagerness to learn quickly, understand, adapt, and their engagement in the activity was an indicator of their desire to be included in such interactive learning programs, especially after being locked down and being obliged to be captured in front of the smart devices’ screens. The implementation of the second program has been easier, because of the experience, the familiarity, and the relationship established with the Local Office coordinator during the first sessions.

The Nature education program in Prespa, goes beyond schools, where during 2021, education activities were organized, on-premises of the local office, to celebrate important environmental days, such as World Migratory Bird Day and Children’s Day. For the 30th anniversary of PPNEA, primary school children in Tuminec created a small maker presenting the nature of their village. This is an indication of appreciation, established relationships, and unconditional desire, to learn and create out of the curriculum.

Such activities are a push and inspiration to create and do more with them. For this reason, we undertook a mini project in the yard of the same school. The local office staff together with the children and with the help of teachers, by integrating some recycled and environmental material aims to transform this yard into an interactive corner.

Besides the children, PPNEA has engaged in training the teachers about environmental education, by sharing with them the importance, the methodology, and the programs so they will be able to integrate them into their curricula and implement the programs independently. Combining the training of the teachers and the children’s desire to learn practically, to share their thoughts, to grow something of their own while learning is a light of hope that nature in Prespa will be in good hands in the future.



115

Participating students

16

Trained teachers

CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

Spring Alive

PPNEA for several years is continuing the tradition of organizing birdwatching camps with 9-year and high school students, within the program of Birdlife International, "Spring Alive". Spring Alive is a campaign that aims to raise awareness of children, teachers, and their parents on the importance of migratory birds and many threats they face in wintering grounds, breeding grounds, or even along their migratory route.

Within this program, our team had planned to organize a three-day camp in the spring of 2020, which would combine theoretical knowledge with practical knowledge of bird experts, bringing children closer to birdwatching and the magic of migration. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we faced difficulties implementing the activity, so two one-day mini-camps in the Prespa National Park and Gjirokastra area, have been organized. These Spring Alive camps brought together children and teenagers in a small theoretical and practical marathon on learning "How to be a good birdwatcher".

The Migration season of 2021 was more successful for PPNEA and Spring Alive partners, as more outdoor activities were implemented. In June, PPNEA conducted a summer camp with 9-year school students '9 Tetori' of Saranda, who had the opportunity to learn about the high biodiversity areas in Albania, focusing on the avifauna.

Under the theme of this year's Spring Alive "How can we protect bird nests", students visited the stork nesting platform in Gjirokastra, built by PPNEA, TSO, and RAPA Gjirokastra. Through a conversation with the director of RAPA Gjirokastra, the children learned more about the stork pair, the way they build the nest, their behavior, and the care that parents show for their young. Furthermore, they had the opportunity to get acquainted with other species of the area such as the Egyptian vulture, the lesser kestrel, etc. The tour of the students was concluded visiting the Vjosa-Narta protected landscape, and the Divjaka-Karavasta National Park, where in addition to being informed about the importance of these areas and the diversity they carry, they were introduced to the 7 species of Spring Alive, some of which managed to watch during this tour. Such activities are very important for children, as it enables them to recognize more nature and to become aware of the importance of protecting it.



CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

Nature education program P4NP - WWF

A new natural education program for primary school pupils has been designed by WWF Adria and adapted in Albanian by PPNEA. The "Teacher's Guide" contains a variety of educational activities and games, often including individual or group physical activities, which aim to educate children about the natural values of the protected areas around them. Initially, our education team trained in theory the staff of the areas protected, as part of the program, and then these trainings were followed by a practical session, with field expeditions, together with PPNEA and participating students, from the Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park and Korab-Koritnik Nature Park primary schools.



Four educational excursions have been developed in these two protected areas of the country, by PPNEA experts, RAPA Elbasan, Dibër, and RAPA Kukës. In total, 81 students of IX-XI grades, became part of a series of activities, which aimed to increase their attachment to the natural environment, learning about bird species, animals, and plants that are found in the area through various games. While the students of the United School "Shefqet Dosku" in Dorëz visited the forests of Rrajca, part of the UNESCO world heritage, those of the School "Sali Halili" Rrajca got acquainted with the visitor center and the forests of Fushë-Studën.

On the other hand, in the Korab-Koritnik Nature Park, the students of the United High School of Slovenia had the opportunity to visit the village of Shishtavec and Lake Novoseja, while those of the United High School of Shishtavec visited Radomira and the Black Lake. This exchange form was carried out, in order for children to understand the wide geographical extent of parks, which carry a variety of biodiversity values.

The students and their teachers eagerly welcomed their involvement in these educational games, which differ from the usual teaching in school facilities, and expressed their readiness to become part of the future activities of PPNEA and Protected Areas Administrations Elbasan, Kukës, and Dibër.



Education corner for the Balkan Lynx

In the continued efforts of the PPNEA and BLRP partners to protect the Balkan lynx, since the end of last year, an interactive education corner thematic to Balkan lynx was established at the National Museum of Natural Sciences “Sabiha Kasimati”. School children, teachers, and their parents have the opportunity to learn about Balkan lynx ecology and distribution, in different entertaining ways, such as the information displayed in the banner next to the real size Balkan lynx statute, or from reading “The story of Hope, Balkan lynx”, in the outdoor wall. Because play is so important to children, we take them to get active and explore the “forest inhabitants” in the binocular with scrolling images, test their knowledge with the lynx Origami facts and curiosities, and for the super active ones, there is the opportunity to prepare the lynx track with plasticine, using the real size track model produced by PPNEA. The education corner was designed all about the engagement and excitement of little children from the early ages throughout primary school levels!

According to the National Museum staff, who were trained to interpret the edu corner by PPNEA, the Balkan lynx corner received children’s visitors regularly, even during the school close down period of last spring. We have also seen their joy when we celebrated International Lynx Day, on 11 June 2021 with school children’s visitors from the “World Academy of Tirana”. Most of the children had never heard of the Balkan lynx. Nevertheless, after we introduced them to its home, favourite food, as well as the dangers it faces, they were thrilled to learn more.

The education corner will continue to stay open at the Museum of Sciences until it is transferred to another education hub, and our team is thankful to the National Museum staff who are guiding all the children’s visitors every time to explore the Balkan lynx education corner.

Environmental education program for the Egyptian vulture

The education program was designed by the partners of the Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS) and adapted to the context of our country in the Albanian language by PPNEA. The purpose of this program is to teach children about the biology of Egyptian vulture migration, threats, conservation measures, and relationships with humans. This program consists of a “Teacher’s Guide” and worksheets for the student, which are specially designed to attract them to engage in interactive activities. The teacher’s guide contains support information for carrying out various activities in the school environment and nature. The activities are designed for two groups ages, children from 9 – 11 and 12 – 15 years old. They can work individually or in groups, to complete activities such as “Find Someone Who”, “In the Egyptian vulture’s neighborhood or create an action plan to propose potential solutions to problems identified in the joint discussion.

In addition to this program, partners from BSPB have designed the educational game “Egyptian vulture Odyssey”, adapted in Albanian for all children to learn about the challenges and threats faced by this magnificent species during its journey. Produced in a floor game format by PPNEA, this game was unveiled in the historic center of Vlora, in celebration of Carnival Day 2021. Its magnificent design, with the Egyptian vulture

displayed in it, was one of the most visited activities by children, in the festive corner of PPNEA and RAPA Vlora.

Recycling program in Saranda

In the framework of the project “Land of Eagles and Castles”, our team supported 2019 the school “9 tetori” in the city of Saranda to organize a recycling activity with children, which would increase their awareness of the damage that plastic causes in the environment. This activity quickly won over the children, who committed themselves to collecting plastic items on the seashore and turning them into useful objects. In 2020, the teachers of the school “9 tetori”, under the direction of the biology teacher, Mr. Guri Tatari, led the children in a recycling activity, which is already taking the form of a tradition that is expected to continue in the future years. All the items made by the children appeared in a fair in one of the classrooms of the school “9 Tetori”, where among others stood out models, dolls formed from plastic cups, vases, lampshades made with plastic, etc.

Such activities are more than necessary to raise the awareness of the younger generation about plastic pollution, especially in areas with high biodiversity values. Such activities where children learn through work, constitute the best forms of non-formal education, which combine theoretical knowledge with entertainment.

PrespaNet Transboundary Summer School

The summer schools organized by PPNEA are not only a platform for bringing students or nature enthusiasts together but also a very good basis for networking, identifying potential new scientists and those who continue to advocate the purpose of these initiatives. We can proudly say that for many of the participants in the summer schools organized by PPNEA their participation has served as a stepping stone towards their future engagements and career paths.

PPNEA has managed to organize annual summer schools in different regions where we are working, either alone or together with Network partners. Even in the unpredicted 2020 year, the off-plan developments and the world pandemic didn’t hold PPNEA and the PrespaNet partners back, to adjust and find a way of bringing together students from all the three states and sides of the Prespa basin and give them again the opportunity to learn and discuss the most relevant topics concerning the Biodiversity conservation in the Prespa Basin. 14 participants this year were able to virtually meet, collaborate, and learn about Wetland Monitoring and Management.

The working groups despite the distance managed to work on the assignments, discuss possible solutions, and give constructive opinions on current issues related to the region’s wetlands. Although the distance was not a problem for the participants, they received an invitation for joint field visits to Prespa in the future. The virtual summer school was a test of the willingness and desire of young students and nature lovers from all three countries, who combined technology with the knowledge to convey and disseminate it and also to inspire other generations to undertake proper action for wetland management and conservation.

CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

Capacity building of young generation in bird identification; BirdON course

The Centre for the Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA) has a long and wide experience in the field of ornithology and is working on the conservation of birds in Albania, for years. This year, experts from PPNEA, in collaboration with Birds of Albania, organized a bird identification course called BirdON, focused mainly on the identification of wintering bird species in several wetlands of Albania. BirdON lasted for about 5 months, from November to March 2021, and included young people from various branches or fields relevant to issues of environmental protection or nature conservation. The purpose of conducting such a course is to increase the capacity of the young generation in the field of ornithology, also contributing to generating data and improving the management of Important Bird Areas in Albania.

Through this course, the participants had the opportunity not only to learn to identify different bird species but also to visit some of the main wetlands of the country, thus becoming part of various concrete monitoring activities. The participants also gained knowledge in inventory methodologies by following the process of counting (IWC) and collecting accurate field data, data which will be available to relevant management institutions to use to improve the planning and management of protected areas visited by BirdON.



in BirdON



Flight for survival

The Flight for Survival is a campaign initiated by BirdLife International to raise awareness of the general public about the dangers posed to birds during the annual migration from breeding grounds to wintering ones.

The PPNEA communication team successfully implemented this campaign in 2020 and 2021, reaching 30,000 individuals through 14 social media posts, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Hundreds more were reached through a public appearance on Top Channel television where the story of Elsa, an injured white stork, has been promoted. Elsa, after receiving the necessary care near the Recovery Center of Wild Birds in the Divjaka-Karavasta National Park, was released again to continue the migration.

In addition, the species mentioned in our publications were Common quail (*Coturnix coturnix*), white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*), turtle dove (*Streptopelia turtur*), as well as the last breeding vulture in Albania, the Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), for which we listed the main threats and the most effective measures to combat them.

Our team chose to tell pleasant storied or interesting facts about these birds so that we could create a strong bond between our audience and these magical birds, which twice a year travel thousands of miles across dozens of states.



On social media



People reached

CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

A mile for the Egyptian vulture

The bird migration route is fraught with dangers. However, this fact does not stop the Egyptian vulture from migrating every year from the countries of Africa where it spends the winter, to the breeding grounds located on the European continent, including Albania.

“A mile for the Egyptian vulture” campaign aims to raise awareness of the public about the threats that this vulture faces along the way of migration, and invites them to participate in this “marathon” by running at least 1 mile for this majestic species. More than 200 participants from Albania participated in this marathon, publishing in real-time the described distance and the time it took to reach it. All participants were supporters of the cause for the conservation of the Egyptian vulture and this was best shown by their support on social media during that day.

Furthermore, residents, students and local supporters from the Gjirokastra area participated in the “Gjirokastra Run” marathon, wearing T-shirts with the emblem of Egyptian vulture. This activity was supported by PPNEA and RAPA Gjirokastra, which turned the city marathon into a mini-marathon for the Egyptian vulture.



**Ran for the
Egyptian vulture**

European Green Belt Days in Shiroka and Ulcinj, and Shishtavec, Kukës

From an iron curtain to a green belt that connects Europe.

The European green belt carries a special symbolism. For years during the 20th century, this “curtain” has represented the dividing border, between Western and Eastern Europe. Due to low human activity, the areas this dividing border has crossed were transformed into green spaces, where nature best revealed its values, by inheriting stunning landscapes, or species of special importance for biodiversity. After the political transformations of the '90s, the border that once divided Europe now unites it, inviting citizens from all over the continent to visit the natural wonders this green belt offers.



CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

Every year, our team celebrates the green belt days, through various awareness-raising activities, bringing people closer to a sustainable lifestyle. In 2020 and 2021 the green belt days have been celebrated in different locations. On September 22nd, 2020, in collaboration with the MSJA and WellPoint associations, we organized an expedition near the Ulcinj Salina, where students in the area had the opportunity to learn from bird experts, on the identification of various bird species. The celebration of this day continued in Shiroka, with the support of the Municipality of Shkodra, where a fair was organized, that aimed to promote the natural and cultural values of the area, emphasizing the importance of transboundary cooperation, for nature conservation and sustainable development.



While in 2021, the green belt day has been celebrated on the 19th of September in Kukës, Shishtavec area, in close collaboration with the FINCH organization from Kosovo. The event opened with the celebration of the “Potatoes festival”. Shishtavec area is well known for its agricultural products and especially for potatoes, thus this activity contributed to the promotion of the area and emphasized the importance of preserving the natural and cultural heritage. Furthermore, during this event, a traditional fair has been prepared by the locals, who also had the opportunity to present their traditional costumes, music, sporting activities, etc. The culture fest and also all the traditional sporting activities took place in the garden of the Shishtavec school, which were facilitated by the director of the school.

In this joint atmosphere, significant local figures and personalities attended the celebration, including the Mayor of Kukës, Director of RAPA Kukës, etc.

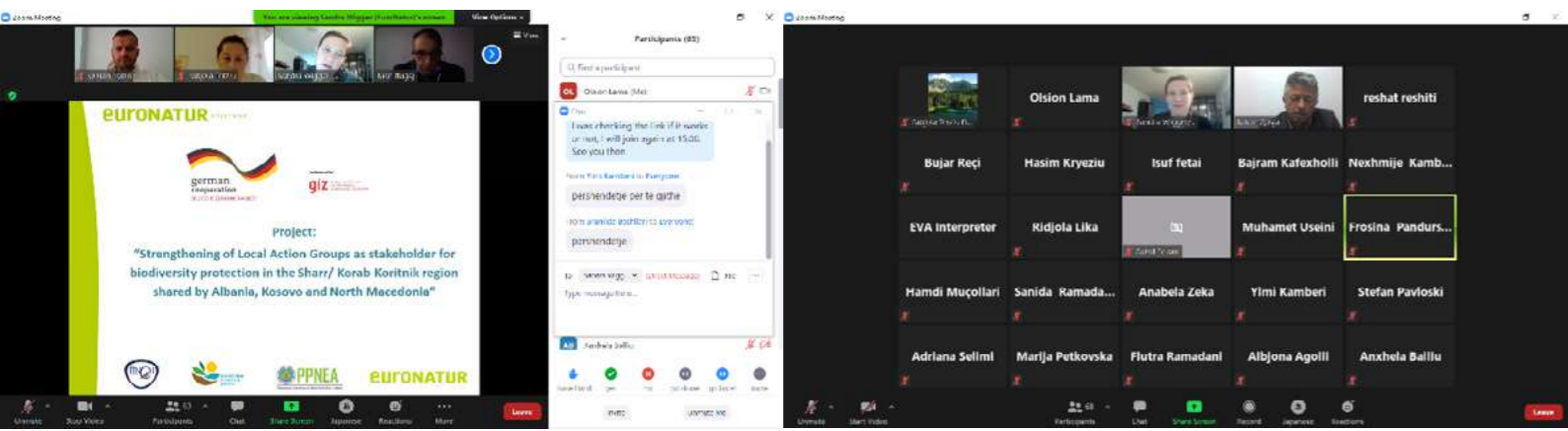
Information days for the Korab-Koritnik / Sharr transboundary area

In December 2020, a three-day webinar was organized on the transboundary region Korab-Koritnik-Sharr. During this activity, the participants were informed about cooperation across borders for the implementation of various activities with a focus on preserving the natural values of this region rich in biodiversity values. In particular, participants were informed about:

1. Natural values of Korab-Koritnik Nature Park in Albania, Sharri National Park in Kosovo, and Sharr Mountain in North Macedonia;
2. Joint transboundary activities of protected area management institutions;
3. Sustainability and Sustainable Development;
4. Establishment of Local Action Groups, such as LAG Korab-Koritnik in Albania and LAG Sharri in Kosovo, as well as cooperation with the Friends of Sharri platform in North Macedonia.

CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

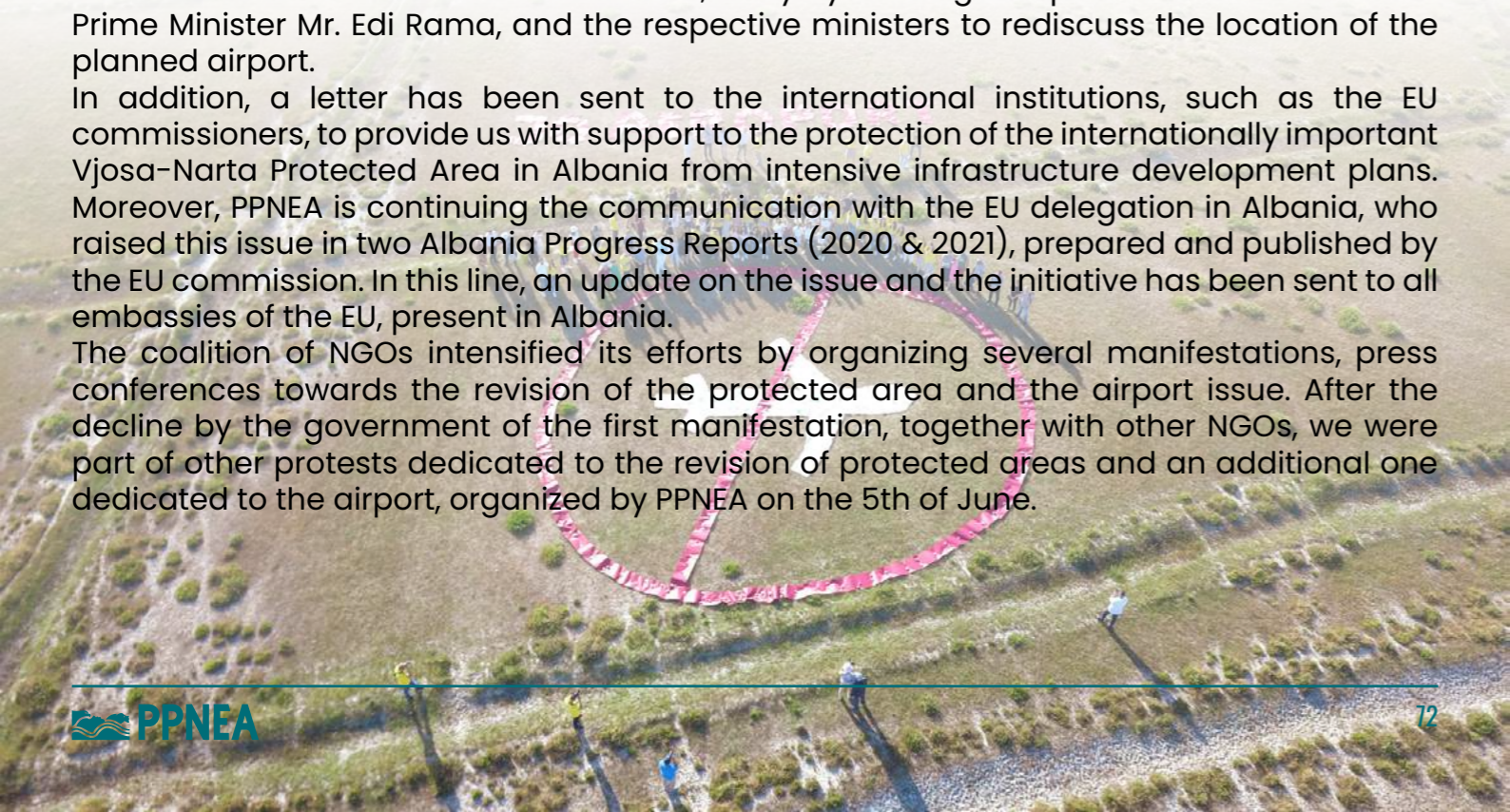
The activity was attended during the three days by about 70 participants, most of whom were students. At the end of the activity, the participants were provided with a certificate. This activity was organized within the project “Strengthening Local Action Groups as actors for the protection of biodiversity in the area of Sharr / Šar Planina / Korab-Koritnik, which is divided between Albania, Northern Macedonia, and Kosovo.”



Only birds should fly over Vjosa–Narta Landscape

Vjosa–Narta airport issue

The plans of the Albanian government to build an international airport within the boundaries of the Protected Area Vjosë–Nartë are still ongoing. Meanwhile, our efforts to oppose this threat, to one of the most important wetlands in Albania and the Adriatic Flyway, is increased significantly and the initiative passed the national boundaries. A coalition of circa 40 national and international organizations joined efforts and raised this issue on the national and international institutions, firstly by sending an open letter to the Albanian Prime Minister Mr. Edi Rama, and the respective ministers to rediscuss the location of the planned airport. In addition, a letter has been sent to the international institutions, such as the EU commissioners, to provide us with support to the protection of the internationally important Vjosa–Narta Protected Area in Albania from intensive infrastructure development plans. Moreover, PPNEA is continuing the communication with the EU delegation in Albania, who raised this issue in two Albania Progress Reports (2020 & 2021), prepared and published by the EU commission. In this line, an update on the issue and the initiative has been sent to all embassies of the EU, present in Albania. The coalition of NGOs intensified its efforts by organizing several manifestations, press conferences towards the revision of the protected area and the airport issue. After the decline by the government of the first manifestation, together with other NGOs, we were part of other protests dedicated to the revision of protected areas and an additional one dedicated to the airport, organized by PPNEA on the 5th of June.



CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

#togatherforvjosenarte was the media campaign launched by PPNEA, which tackled international media attention. We have been very proactive in organizing field trips with journalists on-site, providing information to journalists, sending press releases, producing communication materials, etc. In the last year, we have organized dozens of reportages with international media such as DW, EuroNews, EN2, Fri, Liberation, Balkan Insight, etc.

From PPNEAs communication channels there have been reached more than 400.000 people on this issue over the last two years.



2.6) Institutional development

Local office in Prespa

PPNEAs Local Office in Dolna Gorica (Goricë e Vogël) in Prespa was a success achieved with a lot of work behind it. In a difficult year like 2020, keeping the office active and achieving an ambitious work plan was challenging, it put our creativity and purpose to the test, but despite the difficulties, the work continued and in the following year, the local office slowly strengthened its position in the region, becoming an easily identifiable space and undertaking and implementing actions independently on the ground. Moreover, the local office has also expanded the staff working there. At the same time, much work has been done, to achieve the independence of the office by transforming it into a fully functional space, with adapted administrative rules while being in constant coordination with the head office.

Turning the local office into a reference point and education center is a goal that is being achieved day by day. In a year like 2020, alternative solutions were found to increase its visibility and bring people closer to PPNEA. As predicted, but on limited terms, in the local office, several activities were organized with school children, such as the celebration of World Wetlands Day 2020, the summer bird watching camp, as well as various activities with volunteers in the area.

Although the developments were small, during the first year, our optimism for the future showed that in 2021 the outcome was better with more activities being organized. During the past year, several important environmental days were celebrated in the Local Office space, engaging children and students in activities interactive with educational themes. These activities were initiated not only by PPNEA but also by children and students who had a curiosity to learn about our work and the importance of nature conservation in their region.

The Local Office is slowly becoming a stop for many locals, where Cveta, our Office Coordinator, assists them in developing possible ideas and projects for the sustainable development of the area. In addition to the local population, many NGOs, stakeholders, etc., have visited the local office over the past year. Cveta has been able to promote the work of PPNEAs and the local office to visitors and tourists from outside the area and has also hosted some of them at the Local Office premises.

In addition to short-term visitors, during the last 4 months of 2021, two German students were welcomed into the Local Office as part of their Internship program. They helped implement PPNEA activities in the region and beyond. This experience was a test of the functionality of the local office, also as a study station.

The PPNEA Local Office in Prespa is not just a place to work, but is becoming a place for interaction and space for informal education, a station to further discover the area not only locally but also across borders. It is a fully functional environment for anyone who comes and spends the night there and above all, a warm corner with hospitable staff that will make you fall in love with Prespa.

Agreement with Supreme State Control Institution

The work on nature conservation is closely linked to law enforcement efforts by law enforcement institutions as well as ensuring the implementation of the national legal framework for nature conservation along with the implementation of international agreements. A concrete problem that our country is facing is the contradiction between strategic investments and the national legal framework for nature conservation.

To increase vigilance and influence in decision-making, in June 2020, PPNEA entered into a cooperation agreement with the Supreme State Audit. The agreement focuses on two audit departments, the Performance Audit Department and the Environmental Assets Audit Department.

The State Supreme Audit Institution expressed their enthusiasm and affirmed that this agreement modernizes this institution by strengthening it in a battle that all countries are facing such as environmental protection and climate change.

Partnership with WWF Adria

PPNEA and WWF Adria (World Wide Fund) have further strengthened their collaboration, after collaborative and joint actions together, as part of different networks and coalitions. Since September 2020, PPNEA is the official partner organization for Albania for WWF Adria. This partnership was achieved after an assessment process, over a couple of months, conducted by WWF Adria to evaluate the compatibility of the organization in fields such as governance and policies, strategic approaches, operational level, and so on.

This partnership will not only benefit PPNEA and its institutional advancement and project portfolio but will also secure more support to the environmental causes of civil society organizations in Albania, such as in the case of stopping the governmental plans for constructing the Narta airport. From 2020, PPNEA is implementing in Albania the project "Protected Areas for Nature and People II, in two protected areas, the National Park Shebenik-Jabllanice and Nature Park Korab-Koritnik.

Also, PPNEA together with WWF and other partners has been committed to the protection of the Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape, against the destructive plans of the Albanian government through the construction of the airport within the protected area.

Civil Society Tracking Tool

Since 2017, PPNEA has monitored its institutional progress through the Civil Society Organisational Capacity Tracking Tool (CSTT), an evaluation tool developed by the Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund (CEPF). This evaluation tool represents a framework for monitoring the institutional capacity and advancement in fields such as effective planning, implementation, and evaluation of conservation actions.

This annual practice of PPNEA, conducted in one-day internal workshops, is organized based on a participatory and inclusive approach of all the staff. For completing the 2020 and 2021 evaluation, PPNEA organized several workshops to conduct the CSTT with the help of an external facilitator and without the participation of the Executive Director. This different approach proposed by the Executive Director was aiming to offer an open and safe environment for the organizational staff to independently evaluate the annual institutional progress. PPNEA seriously considers conducting this annual institutional practice, the findings of which have served as a starting point for improving and developing a series of internal documents and practices, which now have become an integral part of its work.



**TOWARDS
THE FUTURE**

3.1) Invitation to become Birdlife partner

Becoming a BirdLife member, the international organization representing the largest partnership of conservation organizations in the world has been a long aspiration for PPNEA. The membership process has been ongoing for the past years, nevertheless, the official invitation for assessment was received in January 2020.

Due to the difficulties caused by the COVID 19 pandemic, there were delays in this process and the assessment visit to Albania took place almost a year later, in the autumn of 2021. For many years now, PPNEA has worked alongside BirdLife members in the region and beyond and has joined actions and important conservation initiatives such as the protection of the Adriatic Flyway, the protection of the Egyptian Vulture, the education and awareness-raising campaigns of Spring Alive, Safe Flyways, addressing the poisoning threat or stopping the poaching phenomena.

All these conservation efforts were undertaken under the objectives and advocacy work, conservation actions, and so on. One of the biggest motivations to join the largest international NGO partnership is to secure a united and powerful voice for successful national and international campaigns, for advocating policies for nature conservation in general and birdlife in specific.

3.2) Mava Academy and Sky Blue

Nature conservation requires interdisciplinary approaches and multiple lenses for identifying our strengths and weaknesses, the ways which could be used, challenges faced, as well as acquiring the most effective and efficient ways to bring about the change. We believe that by increasing our institutional capacities, we will become stronger in addressing nature conservation challenges that face Albania.

5 of the staff members have been accepted in prestigious leadership programs, such as the MAVA Leaders for Nature Academy and the SkyBlue Academy. These two leadership programs, 1 year and 6 months respectively, are offered to MAVA partner organizations worldwide, aiming to continue its work in nature conservation, even after the closing of the Foundation. For PPNEA, this represents an opportunity to strengthen the civil society sector in Albania and the challenges they face in nature conservation work.



"On daily work in nature conservation we face countless unfamiliar territories, but knowing well our core and flex values we have enough culture intelligence to transform systems."

-Xhemal Xherri-



"Knowing well yourself allows you to make progress as a good leader by impacting the others positively and work together to achieve your dreams"

-Bledi Hoxha-



"To effectively protect the biodiversity of global importance, we need to move away from the conventional leadership model. Young conservationists in Albania should be the first to embrace innovative leadership models such as Leading Beyond Authority, which provides more space and opportunities for promoting leaders for nature."

-Klaudja Koçi-



"MAVA Academy is an experience that changes the mindset and focuses on restoring the human values and empathy of the people among them."

-Olsion Lama-



"Changes and progress need time and patience especially when it comes to nature and its way of functioning, and what we need is people that understand this and are willing to lead towards that progress. People with wider horizons, inclusivity, understanding, willingness to learn, change, share, and most importantly prepared to lead beyond their authority towards a common goal."

-Cveta Trajçe -



3.3) Application for fundraising grant

Ongoing training for fundraising towards ensuring financial stability is something very important for any organization, which mostly relies on external funding sources. Given the ongoing developments as well as institutional changes over the years, there has naturally been a need to manage physical and intellectual resources while ensuring PPNEA’s financial stability. Each member of PPNEAs is a voice for our causes but at the same time responsible for raising funds for the organization. Structuring this activity has been a challenge for PPNEA, but this year the foundations were laid for the organization’s approach to fundraising. Some of the PPNEA members had the opportunity to attend a fundraising course, organized by the Acumen Academy and with support from the MAVA Foundation.

It was a learning experience for the staff, which helped us with research, experience sharing, learning, empowerment, and field preparation for further development of PPNEA fundraising practices. The training continued with the drafting of the first PPNEA Strategic action plan, which we hope will serve as a guide on the path to securing funding for the organization over the upcoming years. The planned activities and the drafted plan will be an integral part of the projects and activities for achieving the goals of financial security step by step.

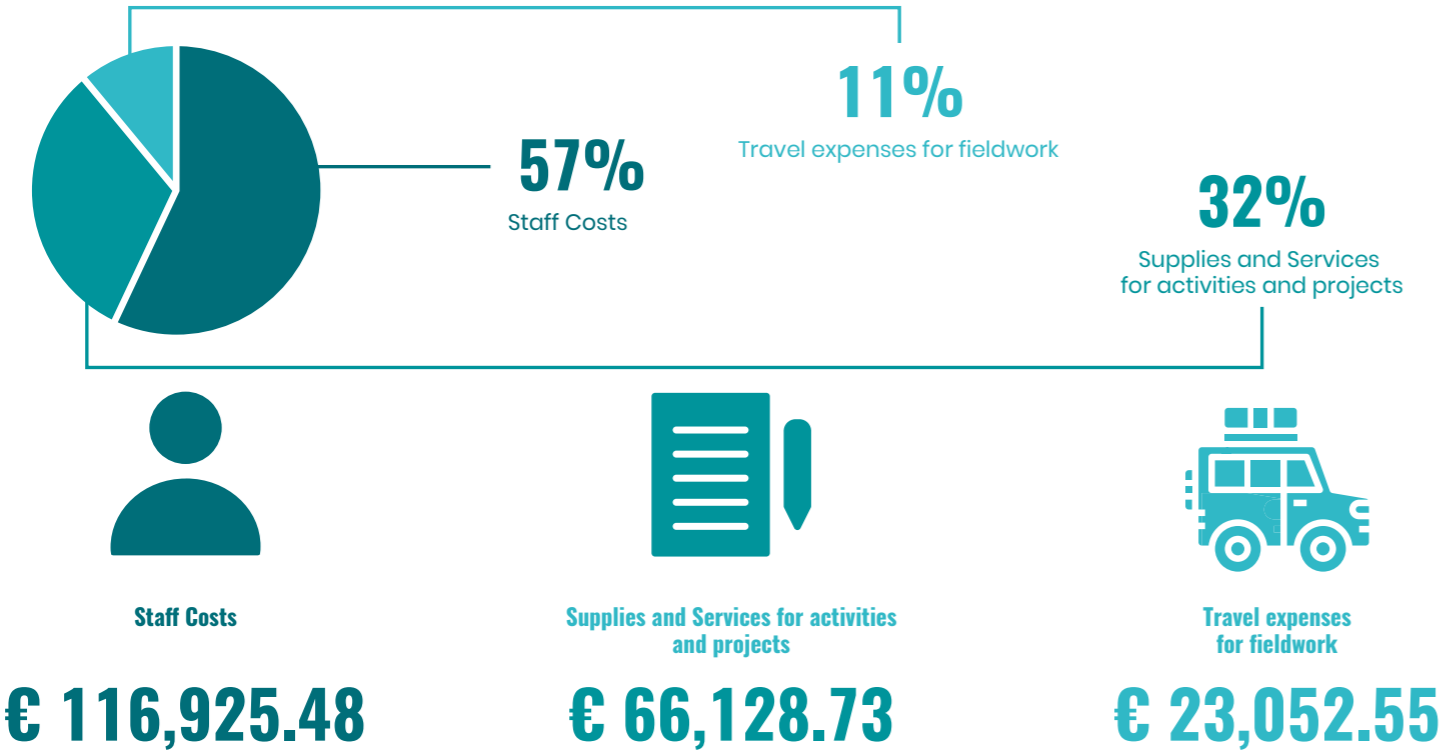


FINANCIAL
SUMMARY

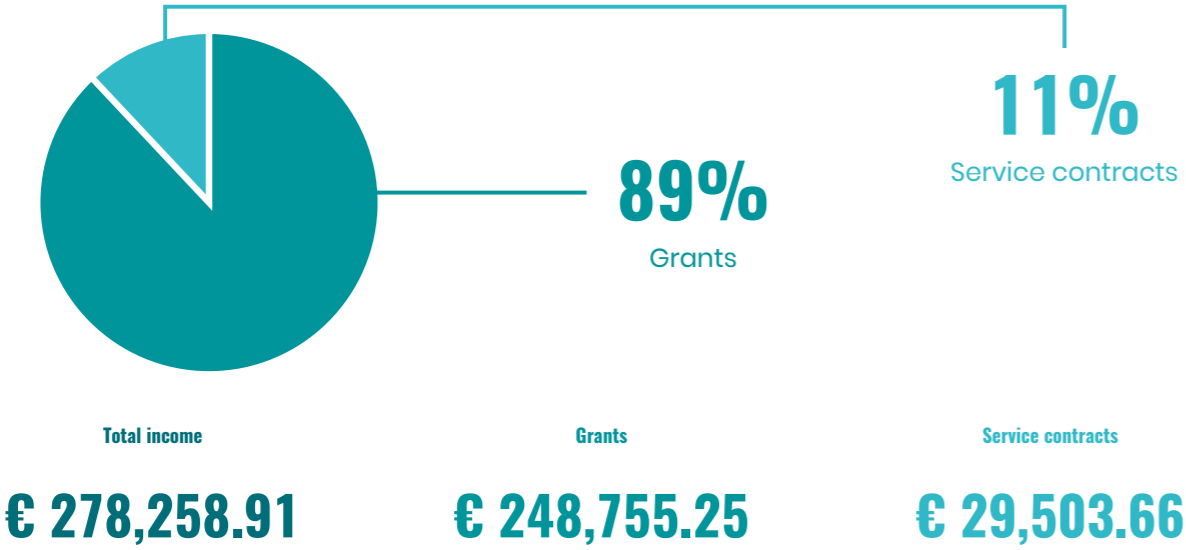
FINANCIAL SUMMARY

4.1) Financial summary 2020

Expenses



Income



FINANCIAL SUMMARY

4.2) Financial summary 2021

Expenses



Income



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.

OUR PARTNERS



OUR PARTNERS

