



Land of  
Eagles and  
Castles

# LAND OF EAGLES AND CASTLES

INTEGRATED PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT  
FOR ALBANIAN COASTAL BIODIVERSITY

2021 | ISSUE 5

PROJECT  
NEWSLETTER

# PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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## INTERNATIONAL WATERBIRD CENSUS

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### COMMON CRANE (GRUS GRUS) REGISTERED FOR THE FIRST TIME AS WINTERING IN ALBANIA



During International Water Bird Census, the PPNEA team registered for the first time in Albania during the winter period, the presence of the common crane (*Grus grus*). 5 individuals of this species, from which at least 3 adults, were observed in the Bulo reservoir, Gjirokastra region.

This record represents a unique observation, given that in recent years reports, this species was encountered, in our country only during the migration period, in relatively large flocks, and mainly in the central and northern coastal area of Albania. Even in other countries, winter observations of this species are rare and mainly represented by young single individuals, as was the case on the island of Corfu in December 2012.

The Common crane is a large, stately bird, with a size up to 120 cm long and a wingspan of up to 222 cm. The vast majority of the Common crane population is migratory, and breeds in the zoogeographical region of the Palearctic starting from Northern Europe to Central China and the far east of Russia. Meanwhile, popular wintering grounds for this species are France, the Iberian Peninsula, Northwest and Northeast Africa, the Middle East, Pakistan, India, and South and Eastern China.

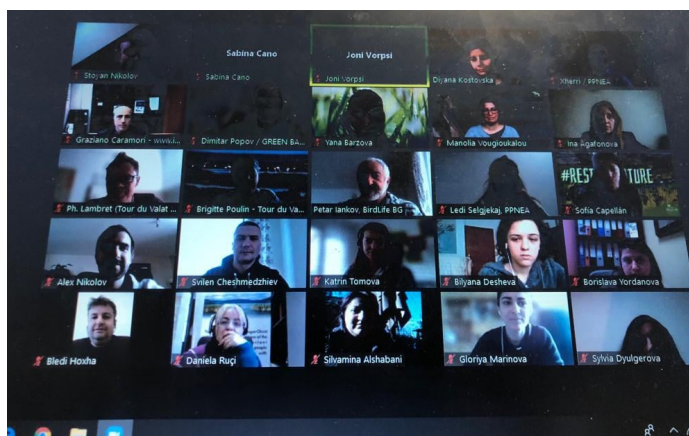
## INTERNATIONAL WEBINAR

### CONSERVATION & SUSTAINABLE USE OF SALTWATER WETLANDS IN THE BLACK SEA & MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation (BBF), Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB), and Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA), organized an international webinar on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Saltwater Wetlands in the Black Sea and Mediterranean Region, on behalf of World Wetlands Day - 2nd of February 2022.

Thirteen participants from 9 European countries presented different natural sites, like Atanasovsko Lake, Poda and Pomorie Lake coastal lagoon in Bulgaria, Narta Salina in Albania, Camargue in France, Cadiz in Spain, Ulcinj in Montenegro, etc. The key lecturers shared best practices for sustainable use of saltwater wetlands, that could be replicated or transferred to other sites, as well as the organization that he/she represents, the main management techniques used in the wetland, etc.

An important part of the webinar was to demonstrate the benefits for people and nature which was also the topic of this year's WWD celebration. Every presentation could be watched separately now from the link of the speaker's name, including the Questions & Answers to every lecturer.



# WEBINAR: INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT & FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT OF NGOS IN ALBANIA



The financial condition of any type of organization determines its future and long-term stability. So it is important to develop financial plans and their further implementation in order to maintain sustainability. Most NGOs rely on external funding and therefore having a proper financial management system is quite important, otherwise, they will not be able to achieve their goals with maximum effectiveness.

The purpose of this seminar organized by PPNEA was to share experiences between non-profit organizations, and beneficiaries of Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) grantees, related to institutional and financial development. PPNEA as an experienced NGO shared their experience in financial management and financial policies; CEPF Albania shared their experience regarding various financial procedures and irregularities, and Eldisa Zhebo as a community engagement expert explained the monitoring mechanisms of NGOs. Several NGO-s joined in this seminar. The seminar was very interactive, with a lot of questions directed to the experts and productive discussions.

## BUNKBIRD IN VJOSA - NARTA

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### PROMOTION OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL VLAUES IN ALBANIAN PROTECTED AREAS

In one of the bunkers in the Vjosë - Nartë protected landscape has been realized a mural, aiming to promote some of the most prominent bird species of this area, and also transform it into a touristic attraction, for locals and foreigners.

This mural presents two of the most interesting species present in the Vjosa-Narta protected landscape; Pied Avocett (*Recurvirostra avosetta*), the largest population of which is located in this area, but at the same time holds an endangered status according to the Red List of Fauna and Flora of Albania; Dalmatian pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*), a symbol of our country, which uses this area as a resting and feeding site. In continuity will be drawn graffiti in different places of Albania, as a way of raising awareness about critical issues.



## EXCHANGE VISIT IN BULGARIA WETLANDS & SALTPANS



Despite the recent spring day bringing sunshine to the country, the cold frost but warm company welcomed the PPNEA team during their visit to Burgas, Bulgaria. On March 9-12, the Bulgarian Society for Protection of Birds organized a study visit for the PPNEA team, representatives of Vloria Regional Administration of Protected Areas and Narta Saline, in some of the Burgas main wetland areas: the lake Atanasovsko, Pomorie lagoon, and Poda reserve.

During this visit, experience on the best management practices for wetland protected areas were shared, with a focus on the salines inside these areas, helping preserve these habitats' biodiversity, where a variety of birds are found.



# MANAGEMENT OF PROTECTED AREAS & ADVOCACY FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

## PARTERS EXCHANGE STUDY VISIT FOR A BETTER ADVOCACY



Representatives from the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation were welcomed by sunny days and a blue sea, during a two-day exchange study visit. PPNEA organized a seminar, by bringing together a group of stakeholders, such as Regional Administration of Protected Areas representatives, wildlife conservation researchers, environmental organizations, and community residents. The focus of this workshop was to exchange experience and reflect on important issues such as birds' conservation ...

... and habitat management, advocacy strategies, and implementation of direct actions for the preservation of the Vjosa-Narta wetland.

During the second day of this activity, our friends were introduced to the natural beauties of the Ionian coast, with a visit to the information center of the Regional Administration of Protected Areas, Vlorë, in Radhima, followed by birdwatching in the Orikum lagoon, visit BunkBird in the Forest of Soda, visit the local center of PPNEA, and ending with Salina, Narta Lagoon where thousands of wild birds were observed very close to the place where Vlora airport will be built.

This cooperation was made possible in the framework of the Land of Castles and Eagles: Integrated Participatory Management for Albanian Coastal Biodiversity Protection, with BirdLife Bulgaria the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation.



# PROMOTION OF VJOSA - NARTA AND ACTION ON SITE

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## AN EVENING DEDICATED TO BIRDS & ESTABLISHING THE LOCAL ACTION GROUP (LAG) FOR VJOSA-NARTA



PPNEA was invited to Qendra Dua to talk about 31 years of work and achievements. A long journey that would require successive meetings to talk in detail, but the panelists Aleksandër Trajçe (PPNEA executive director), Zydjon Vorpsi (bird expert), and Bledi Hoxha (mammal expert) covered the key stages of work over the years, including conservation of threatened species such as the Egyptian vulture, Balkan lynx, Mediterranean monk seal, etc, sustainable development, environmental education, and many other points. Among the topics was also the work done by PPNEA in Vjosa Narta, through monitoring and protecting it from the grey plans of the airport.

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Having in vision the preservation of natural values, and rich biodiversity as well as ensuring the well-being of future generations, PPNEA is working to establish a Local Action Group #LAG of the Protected Landscape "Vjosa - Narta".

#LAG will include various stakeholders, representatives of the national network of protected areas, local government representatives, public institutions operating at the local level, local businesses, community members of the area, and civil society, providing sustainable alternatives to the coexistence of nature and human beings. Only after several meetings with various local community actors, the first meeting of all participants together was made possible on 15 April.

## VJOSA - NARTA: A THREATENED PARADISE: UPDATE

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**THE BERN CONVENTION MANDATES AN ON-THE-SPOT APPRAISAL (OSA) ON THE ISSUE OF CONSTRUCTION OF VLORA AIRPORT IN THE VJOSA-NARTA PROTECTED AREA**



The construction of Vlora Airport within the Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape is listed as one of the main issues discussed at the 41st meeting of the Standing Committee of the Berne Convention (Convention for the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats), held on November 29 - December 3, 2021, in Strasbourg.

Following the constant calls from national and international conservation organizations to review plans for the construction of Vlora Airport within the protected area, the Bern Convention decided to tighten measures by requesting verification and assessment of the situation by sending a group of international experts in the area, from the beginning of the next year.

This action of the bureau comes as a result of its concern and that of the member states of the European Union for the urbanization of this protected area with high values of biological diversity.

Furthermore, the Standing Committee of the convention requested the Albanian authorities to consider the proposal of declaring the Vjosa River valley a National Park, as well as expressed their concern about the possible reductions in the national network of protected areas in Albania.

# VJOSA - NARTA: A THREATENED PARADISE: UPDATE

ENVIRONMENTAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND IN-COUNTRY EXPERTS OPPOSE THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT STUDY OF THE VLORA AIRPORT PROJECT



The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report of the Vlora Airport project is an unprofessional, unscientific, clearly clientelist and abusive analysis to justify the non-transparent and illegal decision-making of the inland airport construction, of the Vjosa-Narta Protected Area.

Despite numerous and continuous calls from national and international civil society organizations to cancel the construction of Vlora International Airport inside the Protected Area "Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape", the Albanian government has not yet withdrawn from this destructive plan, for the nature of our country.

The non-technical summary of the Environmental Impact Assessment for this project was made public. Based on a preliminary analysis conducted by experts of major national environmental organizations and researchers and scientists of the main academic and research institutions of the country, this report was conducted with a deep lack of professionalism and tendentiously in favor of the construction of Vlora airport in the Akërnja area, located within the boundaries of the Protected Area.

This summary does not take into account the fact that Vjosë-Narta is part of almost all international ecological networks that include our country and is thus protected by international conventions that Albania has ratified, the violation of which may face the country with international pressure and sanctions.

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