

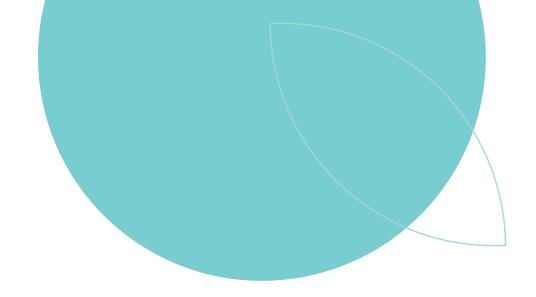






the Protection of Birds





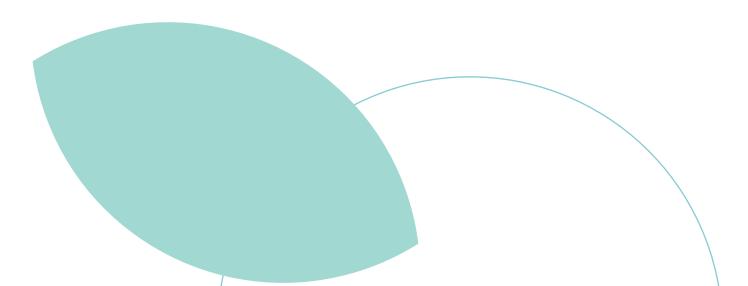
International Webinar: Conservation and sustainable use of saltwater wetlands in the Black Sea and Mediterranean region

2nd February 2022









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Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation (BBF), Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB) and Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA) have committed to organise an international webinar Conservation and sustainable use of saltwater wetlands in the Black Sea and Mediterranean region on 2nd of February 2022. The webinar has celebrated World Wetlands Day 2022 and highlighted the importance of saltwater wetlands for people and nature. As Ivonne Higuero, Secretary-General, CITES said in her message for

the World Wetlands Day 2022: "The World Wetlands Day 2022 is celebrated for the first time as a United Nations International Day. This is a recognition of the global importance of our wetlands and the global importance of managing them and preserving them. 40% of the world's plants and animals depend on wetlands and we know that without them we can't achieve the sustainable development targets we've set ourselves." In the course of the webinar, we have brought together key partners from nine countries from the target region to





share their experience in the management and protection of saltwater wetlands.

Saltwater wetlands in Europe include estuaries, saltwater marshes, active and unactive saltpans, lagoons. Urbanisation, pollution, poaching and mass tourism are some of the threats that resulted in habitat and species loss. Climate change is expected to increase the pressures on saltwater wetlands. The necessity to balance economic development with nature protection is evident.

Lecturers from Portugal, France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Albania, Montenegro

and Bulgaria have presented best practices for bird conservation in saltwater wetlands, the example of dragonflies for increasing biodiversity in saline wetlands, birdwatching tourism, biosaline agriculture to the recovery and management of the abundant salt pans, main management techniques and conservation actions used in the restoration of wetlands and demonstrated the benefits for people and nature, and socio-economic and ecosystem services to save the saltpans.

The presentations have shown opportunities and challenges and drawn lessons learned.



Best practices for bird conservation & birding tourism at saltwater wetlands - Atanasovsko Lake and Poda lagoon

Conservation and birding tourism history of two emblematic Ramsar sites – Atanasovsko Lake and Poda Lagoon is presented. Both activities were initiated by BSPB in paralel with the change of the political system in Bulgaria in 1989. Driving factor was the cooperation with RSPB, which had great contribution for the BSPB establishment and successful development.

Lessons learned include science based approach, target oriented and timely action, internal motivation, professionalism, partnerships, stakeholders involvement, international context, ensuring income generation and benefits for locals, flexibility, birding helps conservation and vice versa.



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Wildlife monitoring, conservation actions and sustainable development in Narta Salina

Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA) is a non-governmental environmental organization that operates nationwide, known to be the first environmental organization in Albania, since 1991.

"Land of Eagles and Castles II" is one of the biggest project implemented in Albanian wetlands, especially in Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape and Butrinti National Park. The implemented actions in these two areas combination of bird monitoring, conservation, sustainable development, and support of local livelihood activities. More in detail, all actions aim to address three following investment priorities: (i) Engage local stakeholders in conservation actions that address threats to key elements of biodiversity in priority Key Biodiversity Areas in the coastal zone. (ii) Engage private sector stakeholders to adopt sustainable practices that deliver positive impacts for conservation in priority Key Biodiversity Areas in the coastal zone. (iii) Support civil society to engage with local or national governments to mainstream biodiversity conservation into integrated coastal zone management, land use, and development planning process.

Furthermore, this project implementation is stressing out the main threats of the above-mentioned wetlands such as poaching, electrocution, collision, pollution, etc. Among the most highlighted threats is the grey plans of the Albanian government, such as the construction of an airport within the Vjose-Narta Protected Area. Lessons learned: Instant collaboration with stakeholders on the conservation of habitat and species; Local presence on the field; Instant collaboration, involvement and support of local business in implemented initiatives; regular data collection on various fauna & flora fauna species.













Waterbird conservation in saltwater wetlands on the Greek coast: opportunities and challenges

The Hellenic Ornithological Society – HOS has been working for decades on the great wetlands on the west coast of Greece and currently more intensely in the framework of an EU LIFE project on the conservation of the Dalmatian Pelican (Project code: LIFE19 NAT/NL/716). Amvrakikos gulf and Messolonghi lagoon are predominantly salt water wetlands with some fresh water influx from rivers and streams. They both host Dalmatian Pelican colonies that are the only colonies in Greece located on salt water wetlands. Two Dalmatian Pelicans from these sites are so far being tracked by satellite transmitters while chicks are colour ringed. Our tracking data has shown that the pelicans remain on the west coast, show limited movement throughout the year and also feed during the night. Collision with electrical wires is a threat for the Dalmatian Pelicans at these sites, 13 of which have been found dead during a period of a 12 month survey that assessed the power network in those areas. Both sites are largely unregulated and illegalities that threaten wildlife take place regularly most commonly illegal fishing and hunting. Due to its affiliation with the Great Cormorant, the Dalmatian Pelican can be also persecuted by fishermen. We conduct patrols specifically during the breeding period of the Dalmatian Pelican aiming to reduce disturbance that can reduce breeding success. Both areas are ideal for the development of ecotourism and awareness raising activities due to their proximities to main towns and their specialization in very high quality commercial food products. The HOS is looking into developing a new project focusing on the operating salinas at the Messolonghi National Park.





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Increasing biodiversity in saline wetlands: the example of dragonflies

The dragonfly aquatic larvae are well-known indicators of freshwater conservation status. The threatened Dark spreadwing Lestes macrostigma is a flagship species for the restoration of brackish temporary waterbodies, a type of ecosystem that dramatically disappeared along the Mediterranean coast due to human activities. To favor this species and the associated flora and fauna, we encourage wildlife conservationists to manage waterbodies with (1) a flooded period lasting from November to June, (2) water salinity levels ranging from 6 g/L in March to 12 g/L in June, and (3) patches of the Sea club-rush Bolboschoenus maritimus. We also recommend to monitor these environmental variables together with the dragonfly assemblages.



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Contribution of biosaline agriculture to the recovery and management of old salinas in alcochete-portugal

Salt marshes are among the important ecosystems, combating climate change by sequestering carbon in our atmosphere but also providing vital ecosystem services. Most of the marshes in Portugal, which were previously used for the production of sea salt have been abandoned over the last decades. Without human intervention, these biodiversity hotspots could well disappear. In Portugal, a small business dedicated to the organic production and processing of Salicornia, a native plant species growing on salt marshes, has thrived. "Salina Greens" is working on a new economic activity to both boost the local economy and help preserve the fragile ecosystem of the salt marshes. Growing Salicornia represents a sustainable solution to the marshes' degradation. In addition, this plant shows high resistance to climate change. Moreover, Salina Greens has built up trade relations with different Portuguese supermarkets, as well as with some international cosmetics, pharmaceutical companies, and local organic restaurants. This inspiring project encourages local actors to have a closer look at their surroundings and develop innovative concepts to create value out of allegedly unproductive sites and it is a good example of how connecting economic activity with environmental protection can benefit communities.

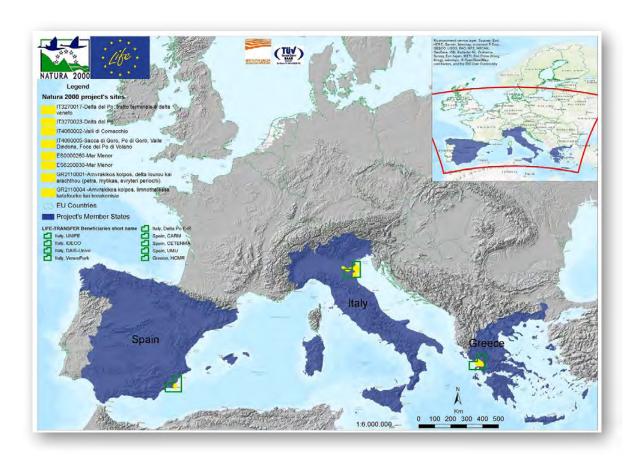


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LIFE transfer and the potential of application in wetlands

The goal is to restore and improve the conservation status of habitat 1150*Coastal lagoon in 8 EU Natura 2000 sites in Italy, Greece and Spain. The method is the transplant of phanerogams to restore underwater meadows disappeared or reduced. The habitat can be free of vegetation, but marine phanerogams it is greatly improved and it provides more services. Expected benefits besides habitat improvement: CO2 sequestration; increase of sedimentation rates; increase of water transparency; nursery habitat for fish fauna; Habitat for and birds. Social and economic results: Increment of ecosystem service: Provisional, fish; Cultural tourism.





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Restoration of Oroklini marsh in Cyprus

Oroklini Lake is one of only few natural wetlands in Cyprus and the smallest Natura 2000 site on the island. The wetland is around 53 hectares that collects water during wet months while most years it naturally dries out in end summer. The site has been designated as a Special Protection Area and as a Site of Community Importance.

The wetland was facing numerous threats, including disturbance from human activities, lack of water management, Invasive Alien Species and a general lack of protection and management due to lack of awareness. The LIFE Oroklini project co-funded by the LIFE program of the European Union, started in January 2012 to tackle the number of pressures through a combination of direct conservation work and community awareness initiatives. The key objective of the project was to bring the site into Favourable Conservation Status. Main actions included the elaboration of key studies to help design conservation actions that (i.e. fencing, creation of water management features, earth works for habitat improvement, removing IAS) and finally awareness raising actions. In the post project era, continuation of management actions is a challenge in order to maintain all that the project has achieved. The project created fundamental tools for continuing the management of Oroklini Lake and to achieve this it brought together key stakeholders including competent authorities, NGOs and the local community. The project also achieved effective management with specific conservation objectives, especially on the issue of hydrological management of a seasonal wetland which can be used as a management model for other areas in Cyprus that need protection.













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Restoration of the former salt works in the Camargue

The selling of 5000 ha of former saltworks to the French Coast Conservancy in 2008-2012 provided an outstanding opportunity to restore natural coastal habitats in the Camargue while addressing various society challenges: electric pumping of sea water was replaced by gravity flows; extensive areas of bare ground were colonized by Salicornia marshes; embanked lagoons used for pre-concentration of salt became nurseries for marine fish; and the collapse of a seafront dyke gave rise to a natural sand barrier acting as a buffer zone against sea storms and sea-level rise. Restoration success relied on a collaborative work among scientists, NGOs and public bodies.





























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The Lagoon of LIFE – Man-Lake symbiosis in Atanasovsko Lake for the benefit of biodiversity and people

Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation is a national NGO, established in 1997 and with more than 25 years of conservation work in Burgas wetlands.

The main objective of the project the Lagoon of LIFE (2018-2024) is to maintain the fine-tuned symbiosis of Man and Lake in the long-term for the benefit of people, species and habitats of EU conservation concern in the Atanasovsko Lake Natura 2000 site (BG 0000270). The Natura 2000 area is the most significant site in Bulgaria for the conservation of the habitat of Coastal lagoons (1150*). The project will deliver towards enhancing the habitat conditions for Great Bittern (Botaurus stellaris), categorised as "Endangered" in the Bulgarian Red Data Book, and other bird species listed in Annex I of the BD.

The Lagoon of LIFE project is one of the most complex and intricate attempts for habitat restoration in Europe and certainly, the most advanced coastal wetland active management is undertaken in Bulgaria now.

Lessons learned to maintain Man-Lake symbiosis:

The landscape context needs to be taken into account combining actions on habitat and landscape level.

Ensure participatory management of the lagoon by involving key stakeholders.

Maintaining traditional salt extraction is not possible without alternative use of natural products and services.

The owner of the salt pans has to be an active partner in the conservation work.

Participating in the spatial planning process is important.

Generating attachment and awareness among the public.

Networking and replication from other projects in very important for our work.













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Bringing socio-ecosystem services to save the saltpans

The Fund for the Stewardship and Recovery of the Salt Marsh (SALARTE), is a non-profit organization founded in 2012 by a group of independent professionals with a vocation to recuperate, manage and highlight the value of the salt marsh through scientific, environmental, ethnographic, economic and socio-cultural initiatives.

Salarte strives to demonstrate that a sustainable management of these marshes can generate social and economic benefits, improve biodiversity and strengthen the bond between the land and its citizens, developing projects in the Bay of Cádiz Natural Park, Doñana and the Trebujena Marshes, amongst others. It/we have been recognised by numerous public and private entities amongst which the Andalucia Environmental Award in 2015; the Andalusian Voluntary Award 2016; its recognition with the Flag of Andalucia 2017 for its environmental dedication and awarded in 2020 with the EUROPARC Inspiring Experiences Awards, are to be highlighted.

Land Stewardship: The recuperation, management and highlighting the value of the salt marshes in the mediterranean basis providing the necessary services to drive scientific, social, cultural, economic, ethnographic and environmental initiatives.

Conservation management: Strengthening biodiversity and improving the ecological functionality of these territories generates numerous associated benefits with regard to income, wealth and employment, basing ourselves on the premise of the sustainability of the proposed actions, guaranteeing a minimal environmental impact of aforementioned actions.

Dissemination: Disseminate and make public the multiple benefits at every level of a territory that has been secularly used by human beings, bearing in mind that marshes constitute the ecosystem of greatest biological productivity on the planet and their abandonment entails an uncalculable loss of heritage.



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Conservation of Pomorie Lake coastal lagoon

Pomorie Lake is natural hypersaline lagoon on Bulgarian Black Sea coast protected by national and international legislation. The site is hosting the largest breeding colony of Sandwich tern on the Balkans and is secondly ranked nationally for priority habitat 1150* Coastal lagoons. The project restores bypass drainage channels and protective dikes to secure the lagoon against floods and to sustain traditional salt production that ensures water circulation. Operation of saltworks and related salinity and depth gradients are key elements of site's importance as stopover during migration for shorebirds that are facing global decline.













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Biodiversity and conservation of Ulcinjska salina

Montenegro is a very mountainous country, whose peak goes up to 2,534 m above sea level. Average altitude in Montenegro is 1020 m, filled with deep canyons, hill mountains and a very big karstic area. Beside this, few international wetlands are present in this country, such as Skadar lake (biggest lake on Balkan) and Ulcinj salina, one of the most important locations for birds on east Adriatic coast. Ulcinj salina lies inside a wider very biodiversity rich area and this is Bojana/Buna delta. Salina is an artificial ecosystem, with more than 250 birds registered, and around 55 nesting birds. After abandoning salt production in 2013. situations start changing very fast and affect the fauna of birds. Ulcinj salina was in focus in big corruption affairs, but last year some progress was made, such as official national and international protection, especially after big international support from organisations and citizens. Mismanagement, habitat changing and illegal hunting are one of the biggest problems happening on salina. A lot of effort was put into conservation measures and activities last year.





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Flight in the salt

The creative collaboration "Flight in The Salt" aimed to raise awareness about the Atanasovsko lake near the city of Burgas in Bulgaria. We also wanted to provoke a deeper self-reflection within our viewers concerning the relationship between man and nature. Because nature conservation is such a massive and important issue the best chance at reaching the public is through an interactive cross-disciplinary approach, that creates a dialogue throughout different age groups. We implemented that strategy, collaborating with different organizations, with great results. We stirred more curiosity, reached a broader audience and opened more doors. We also organized site-specific events in a variety of locations, in order to present our message in a different light and to people within different circles of interest. Engaging with our audience on different levels, having a presence in social media and in the virtual world (through a website and an app), left a longer-lasting impression. That helped us build a "following", making our viewers feel like a part of the cause. We believe that awareness is the key component to any public-wide change. That's why "Flight in The Salt" is an example of expanding the reach of the single piece by having it be a part of the bigger picture. We hope our work inspires similar initiatives and helps people face the enormous responsibility that we share.









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Acknowledgements

(credits of the two projects hosting the event)

The work done for the event 'International Webinar: Conservation and sustainable use of saltwater wetlands in the Black Sea and Mediterranean region' would not have been possible without the dedicated support and commitment of many people and the two projects "The Lagoon of LIFE" and "Land of Eagles and Castles".

"The Lagoon of LIFE" (Maintain the Man-Lake Symbiosis for the Benefit of Species and Habitats of EU conservation concern / LIFE17 NAT/BG/000558), provides a new opportunity to preserve the symbiotic complex Man-Nature in the Atanassovsko Lake. The project represents one of the most ambitious and complex attempts to restore habitats and manage a coastal wetland at the European scale. The funding secured through the LIFE Programme of the European Commission is a proof for the high conservation value of the Lake and its European importance, as well as a recognition for the high quality of the work carried out so far by the project partnership.

"Land of Eagles and Castles" (Land of Eagles and Castles: Integrated Participatory Management for Albanian Coastal Biodiversity), CEPF funded project, is in line with the CEPF Strategic Direction 1: Support civil society to engage stakeholders in demonstrating integrated approaches for the conservation of biodiversity in coastal areas. The project aim to engage local stakeholders in conservation actions that address threats to key elements of biodiversity in priority Key Biodiversity Areas in the coastal zone; Engage private sector stakeholders to adopt sustainable practices that deliver positive impacts for conservation in priority Key Biodiversity Areas in the coastal zone; Support civil society to engage with local or national governments to mainstream biodiversity conservation into integrated coastal zone management, land use and development planning process.

Bulgarian **Biodiversity** Foundation (BBF) is nongovernmental nonprofit organization working for nature conservation Bulgaria and neighbouring countries and especially for key regions as Central Balkan, Pirin, Burgas Wetlands, Strandja Park, Belasitsa. Osogovo and More than 20 years BBF

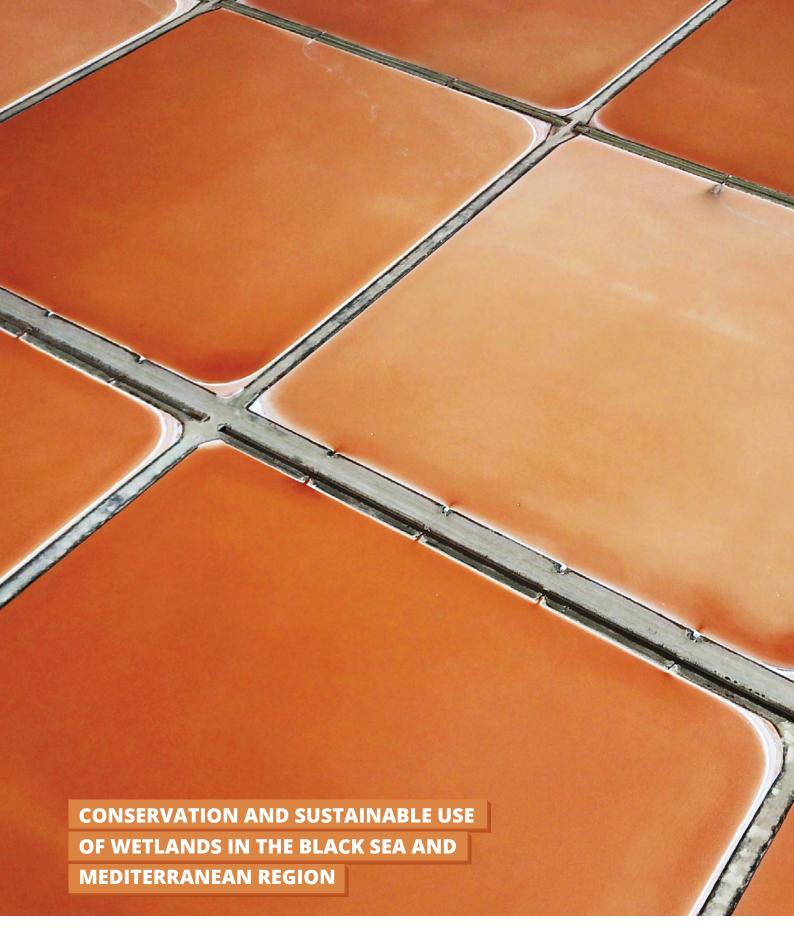
supports civil participation in managing natural resources and protected areas (PA), changing environmental presenting legislation, sustainable business models, enhancing organizational cooperation, raising public awareness on the issues of biodiversity and nature protection.

Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA) is a nongovernmental environmental organization that operates nationwide, known to be organization in Albania. It was officially established on 5 June 1991, with a special

decree of the Albanian Academy of Sciences at the time. It emerged in a period of turmoil and socio-economic change in the country and the wider region - a time the first environmental where environmental issues were looked down upon and given marginal priority in governing and policy issues.

The Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB) is the first citizens' nature conservation organization in the most recent Bulgarian history. Our date of birth in June 3rd, 1988, more than 30 years ago. The BSPB was founded scientists, university

professors and bird lovers, led by their will to take real action for bird conservation. In 1992 the organization was approved as the Bulgarian representative of the oldest international organization for bird conservation BirdLife International.



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