



ANNUAL REPORT 2022



Our annual report for the year 2022

reflects the remarkable achievements of our organization, as witnessed through the dedicated efforts of our team, partners, collaborators, volunteers, and all those who have shared the challenges and celebrated the successes with us throughout the years, and those we encountered along our journey. It highlights the tireless work and commitment that enabled us to achieve our mission and make a lasting impact on the protection and preservation of Albania's natural environment.

We emphasize the importance of collaborating with individuals who share our deep appreciation for nature and align with our purpose. The report proudly showcases the thoughts of esteemed donors and partners who have personally witnessed the transformative power of our mission. With their unwavering support and collaborative spirit, we have forged new paths and expanded our efforts toward a sustainable future.

This annual report serves as a testament to our organization's unwavering commitment to embarking on a journey of environmental consciousness.

Within the pages that follow, you will discover a series of projects that have been meticulously designed to address the pressing issues facing our natural environment. Each project represents a step forward in our vision, bringing harmony between nature and human society in Albania.

ANNUAL REPORT 2022

LAYOUT & DESIGN
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PPNEA TEAM:
UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF:
KLAUDJA KOÇI, CONNECTIVITY CONSERVATION MANAGER, PPNEA
LEDI SELGJEKAJ, PROJECT MANAGER, PPNEA
LORENA PYZE XHAFAJ, COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER, PPNEA

PPNEA AT A GLANCE

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.

Since its establishment in 1991, the Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania, has been at the forefront of environmental conservation in the country. As the first non-governmental environmental organization in Albania, PPNEA has dedicated itself to protecting and preserving the natural environment.

Over the past three decades, PPNEA has actively engaged in a wide range of initiatives. The organization has undertaken various projects addressing environmental issues, conducted extensive research on wildlife and habitats, and organized educational programs and advocacy campaigns to raise awareness about nature conservation.

Overall, PPNEA's 31-year journey is a testament to its unwavering commitment to the protection and preservation of Albania's natural heritage and promoting a sustainable future for generations to come.

THEMATIC WORKING AREAS

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

THREE MAIN FOUNDATIONS:

- | Investing in the youngsters, as promoters and leaders for nature conservation.
- | Innovation - Innovative approaches to nature conservation.
- | Creation of strategic partnerships and great supporters of PPNEA throughout the years.

MEET OUR TEAM

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Ajola Mesiti
» Botanist at
University of Tirana «



Kujtim Mersini
» Veterinary Epidemiologist
at Food Safety and Veterinary
Institute «



Enerit Saçdanaku
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University of Tirana «



Erjola Keçi
» Deputy Dean for Research, «
Faculty of Professional studies,
University of Durres «



Aleksandër Trajçe
» Executive Director «

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» Project Manager «



Ledi Selgjakaj
» Project Manager «



Dea Zyruku
» Former Project Manager «



Xhemal Xherri
» Project Manager «

MAMMALS' CONSERVATION PROGRAM



Bledi Hoxha
» Project Manager «



Sabina Çano
» Project Manager «



Ilir Shyti
» Project Assistant «



Melitjan Nezaj
» Project Coordinator «

EDUCATION, COMMUNICATION AND ADVOCACY ON NATURE CONSERVATION



Klejn Ngraçani
» Project Manager «



Lorena Pyze Xhafaj
» Communications
and Public Relations Officer «

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND PROTECTED AREAS PROGRAM



Klaudia Koçi
» Connectivity Conservation
Manager «



Stephanie Gentle
» Project Manager «



Emir Gjyzeli
» Project Assistant «



Sabajete Islamaj
» Project Finance Specialist «
& Connectivity Conservation Officer «

MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION



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» Financial Officer «



Kejsi Haxhiraj
» Financial Officer «



Cveta Trajçe
» Fundraising Officer «



Olsion Lama
» Fundraising Officer «



Kostandin Xhaho
» Local Officer, Vlorë «



Tina Donefski
» Local Officer,
Prespa Region «



Adnand Bego
» Assistant in
Prespa Local Office «

PPNEA OVER THE YEARS



PPNEA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE UN 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



SDG 4 :

**QUALITY
EDUCATION**

SDG 6 :

**CLEAN WATER
AND SANITATION**



SDG 8 :

**PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM /
DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH**



SDG 11 :

**SUSTAINABLE CITIES
AND COMMUNITIES**

SDG 13 :

**CLIMATE
ACTION**



SDG 14 :

**LIFE BELOW
WATER**

SDG 15 :

**LIFE ON
LAND**



SDG 17 :

**PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS**

PPNEA's dedication to these SDGs reflects our commitment to advancing sustainable development goals implementation in Albania and contributing to the global efforts outlined in the UN Agenda 2030.

GREEN AGENDA FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS

A New Growth Strategy for the Western Balkans, leaping from a traditional economic model to a sustainable economy, in line with the European Green Deal.



Align the region with the EU's 2050 ambition to make Europe a carbon-neutral continent



Unlock the potential of circular economy



Fight pollution of air, water and soil



Promote sustainable methods of food production and supply, and



Exploit the huge tourism potential of the region, focusing on biodiversity protection and restoration of ecosystems.

PPNEA, AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATION, PLAYS A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN ADDRESSING CHAPTER 27 OF THE EU ACCESSION PROCESS, WHICH FOCUSES ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE.

PPNEA actively advocates for the adoption, implementation, and monitoring of environmental policies that align with EU standards and regulations. Our organization engages with policymakers, government agencies, and other stakeholders to ensure the effective integration of nature conservation principles and best practices into national legislation and strategies. PPNEA provides expert input, research, and recommendations to support the development of robust nature protection policies and the promotion of models of sustainable development in line with Chapter 27 requirements.

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EMBARKING ON A JOURNEY OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Dear stakeholders, partners, and supporters,

We are happy to present the annual report of the Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania - PPNEA for the year 2022.

Under the theme *"Embarking on a Journey of Environmental Consciousness in Albania,"* we highlight our tireless efforts and notable achievements across various projects. Each initiative represents a vital step forward in our mission to protect and preserve Albania's unique ecosystems and biodiversity.

Our core values as wildlife researchers and educators aligned with our organizational mission urged us to protect Albania's natural heritage preserved through protected areas network. In this regard, the fight to protect Vjosa-Narta protected landscape from the governmental plans of building an international airport, represents the most important PPNEA's nature protection fight for 2022. With the support of **CEPF** and **DIMFE**, we have increased the efforts for the preservation of wetlands and especially of freshwater ecosystems through improving knowledge and mitigating threats along one of the most threatened protected areas, Vjosa-Narta.

The finalization of the Vlora Airport project within the Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape will irreversibly destroy the entire ecosystem, jeopardizing one of the most important wetlands for migratory bird species in Albania, an integral part of the Adriatic Flyway. Although such a huge impact is scientifically explainable and relatively easy to access information, the general public and other stakeholders themselves are not fully aware of the scale of the impact, which on the other hand produces a lack of opposition.

We launched a campaign known as **#NoAirportinVjoseNarta**, we organized visits on the site with different stakeholders, partners, media, as well as lobbied with international institutions and Conventions. We have informed the general public and also local stakeholders on the impacts of the airport construction in this protected area. In this account, environmental and political education is crucially needed, in order to amplify the oppositional voices within the country and strengthen the environmental causes from a bottom-up standpoint.

RUNNING OUT OF TIME initiatives have provided essential knowledge and skills, equipping future generations with the tools to address pressing environmental challenges.

As we celebrate **World Wetland Day**, we bring attention to the importance of wetland conservation and the need to safeguard these vital ecosystems. Our dedication to environmental detoxification - **DETOX** has led to tangible results in reducing environmental toxins and promoting cleaner and healthier surroundings for communities across Albania.

Volunteers are at the heart of our work, and their invaluable contributions have been instrumental in activities ranging from **Egyptian Vulture** conservation to **Adriatic Flyway initiatives**. Through collaborative efforts, we have successfully engaged volunteers in conservation projects, instilling a sense of stewardship and environmental responsibility among individuals and communities. Additionally, our **Spring Alive** project has promoted bird conservation awareness and fostered an appreciation for migratory birds.

To empower individuals and communities, we have conducted training and education programs aimed at building capacity and raising awareness about environmental issues with annual **transboundary summer schools** in the Prespa region and the **BIRD ON** initiative continues to be a strong voice for the protection of birds and their habitats. We strive to influence policy and legislation, ensuring that environmental conservation remains at the forefront of national and international agendas.

In our annual report recap, we highlight PPNEA's dedicated efforts in gathering valuable information about the presence of the endangered **Mediterranean monk seal** in the southern region. Since 2018, we have maintained continuous contact with the local community, allowing us to collect important data. Under the collaborative project "**Eastern Adriatic Monk Seal**," PPNEA and RAPA Vlore have actively monitored the Karaburun Peninsula and Sazan Island. This monitoring aimed to identify potential areas that could support the survival of this crucial species. Through the analysis of videos, it has become evident that a juvenile monk seal has made Vlora its home, as confirmed by the locals. The **Mediterranean monk seal** holds an endangered status according to the IUCN, with habitat destruction, water pollution, and deliberate killing being the primary threats it faces.

The **Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme – BLRP** stands as the main example of our dedication to conservation. Through rigorous research, habitat protection, and community engagement, we have made significant strides in preserving the critically endangered Balkan Lynx and declaration of protected areas.

BLRP partner organizations and the support of MAVA foundation throughout the years, made significant milestones when securing the continuation of the longest programme in the region for another 5 years. BLRP partners gathered in person for a meeting in Pogradec, Albania after more than two years from the pandemic situation. The extensive survey conducted from November 2021 to July 2022 yielded amazing results, confirming the presence of lynx in the Albanian Prespa National Park. Munella was officially declared a Nature Park after extensive lobbying efforts.

PPNEA's accomplishments throughout the years include the establishment of two national parks, Prespa National Park and Shebenik-Jabllanice National Park, as well as its contribution to the designation of Korab-Koritnik as a Nature Park. Our involvement in initiatives such as NATURA 2000, PRESPA NET, BLRP, and **Protected Areas for Nature and People** demonstrates our unwavering commitment to preserving biodiversity and protecting critical habitats. By working hand in hand with local communities, stakeholders, volunteers, and international partners, we have made significant contributions to the resilience and sustainability of Albania's natural resources.

The Three Point Brown Bear project has also played a crucial role in cross-border cooperation and conservation efforts, contributing to the overall efforts for the protection of this iconic species and its natural habitat, as based on the "Brown Bear Conservation Action Plan for the Prespa Lake's watershed". Important ecological corridors for the brown bear were identified some years ago, connecting Galichica National Park with other biogeographical large areas in North Macedonia and continuing with Prespa National Park Albania, Pogradec Protected Landscape, and to the south with Greece. Prespa Project contributed significantly to data gathering for the monitoring of the functionality of bio-corridors for brown bear in all three countries.

None of these achievements would have been possible without the dedication of our team, the unwavering support of our partners and stakeholders, and the generosity of our donors. We extend our deepest gratitude to all those who have joined us on this transformative journey, and we look forward to continued collaboration and progress in the years ahead.

Together, let us embark on this journey of environmental consciousness.

Chapter I

Embarking on a Journey of Environmental Consciousness



Nature Conservation Developments in Albania

The year 2022 proved to be a critical juncture for nature conservation in Albania, marked by significant developments that evoked a mix of emotions; while on the surface positive achievements were visible, underneath there was more cause for concern than celebration. Amidst these milestones, one event that captured the attention and scrutiny of conservationists and the public alike was the finalization of the protected areas reform. Regrettably, this process would become emblematic of the challenges inherent in nature conservation, illustrating the adage that "the devil is within the details".

The government proudly celebrated the expansion of Albania's protected area network, which now covered an impressive 21% of the country's territory. However, a closer examination revealed a less favorable picture. The enlargement was mostly done in highland mountainous regions, while protected areas in the coastal regions, known for their rich diversity and extensive wetland habitats, were dramatically reduced in size. The reform process led to the creation of vulnerable "holes" of unprotected land within once-secure protected areas. Of particular notoriety was the contentious decision to remove the Vlora airport area from the Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape. This move, perceived by many as a desperate attempt to mask potential corruption in the airport's location selection, elicited outrage and concern. Since 2018, PPNEA had voiced resolute concerns about this ill-fated project. The construction of the Vlora Airport within the Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape posed a substantial threat to vital migratory bird routes and the most significant ecological corridor for birds in Albania, the link between Karavasta and Narta lagoons. The ramifications for the local ecosystem and biodiversity are dire and most likely will affect not only the biodiversity of Albania, but of the entire region that is connected by the Adriatic flyway.

PPNEA has continued its proactive engagement in the cause, passionately engaging in advocacy efforts and raising public awareness about the detrimental impacts of the airport project. The European Union echoed these concerns, urging Albania to adhere to environmental regulations and international conservation standards by suspending airport construction within the protected area. This pressing issue featured prominently in the 2020, 2021, and 2022 EU country reports for Albania, underscoring its gravity, especially as the nation aspired for EU accession. Despite the chorus of warnings from national and international organizations, the airport's construction stubbornly persisted, challenging the very foundations of democratic decision-making.

In the face of these formidable challenges, PPNEA and other committed partner organizations took up the gauntlet, filing four lawsuits to defend what they held dear. Two of these lawsuits directly targeted the contentious airport construction, while the other two addressed the perceived unfairness of the protected areas reform in 2022. The battles ahead were not just for the preservation of Albania's precious natural resources; they were a clarion call for democracy, fair justice, and transparency within the nation's institutions.

In 2022, a significant moment in nature conservation came to fruition as the Albanian government took a momentous step towards the declaration of the Vjosa River National Park. This moment was met with anticipation and jubilation by the natural conservation community, both within Albania and around the world. The signing of a memorandum of understanding between the government and Patagonia laid the groundwork for the national park designation, representing a remarkable achievement for nature conservation in the country.

However, as the details unfolded in early 2023, it became evident that the outcome of the process fell short of expectations. The "wild river" national park, while a positive development, raised concerns due to the exclusion of the most crucial, ecologically rich and wildly dynamic part of the river – its delta. The Vjosa delta, a vital area for the biodiversity of the Vjosa ecosystem, was omitted from the boundaries of the national park. This decision

appeared to be influenced by political considerations, favoring development over the preservation of nature, as we know that, the Vjosa delta is currently the site of the ongoing construction of the Vlora airport, a project that poses a significant threat to the region's fragile ecosystem. The exclusion of this critical part from the national park demonstrated a clear preference of the current government for development at the expense of nature's well-being and painted the tremendous achievement of the Vjosa National Park with tints of 'green-washing'.

It is essential to recognize that the Vjosa River National Park cannot truly be considered complete without the inclusion of its delta within its protective borders. The delta is an integral part of the river's ecosystem, playing a vital role in sustaining biodiversity and supporting various wildlife species. To fully realize the conservation potential of the national park, it is imperative to halt the detrimental construction project and ensure the inclusion of the Vjosa Delta in the protected area.

While the declaration of the Vjosa River National Park was undoubtedly a positive step for nature conservation in Albania, the exclusion of the Vjosa Delta raises concerns about the influence of political interests and negotiations on conservation decisions. Unfortunately, nature cannot be negotiated, much like the future of our children cannot be negotiated. To achieve the park's full potential and protect its valuable ecosystems, we must strive for the inclusion of the delta and address the issues surrounding the airport construction. By doing so, Albania can set a powerful example of responsible and balanced development that embraces its natural wonders as pillars of prosperity for the nation and the planet.

Amidst the turbulent landscape of 2022, the declaration of Munella Nature Park in February marked a momentous occasion. PPNEA's tireless advocacy and lobbying efforts finally bore fruit as one of the last sanctuaries of the critically endangered Balkan lynx received official protection. Nevertheless, the celebration was tinged with sadness, as the protected area's final size fell far short of PPNEA's ambitious proposal for a 530 sq. km. reserve. The government's decision to designate a mere 200 sq. km. as protected land left concerns about the efficacy of securing the future of this endangered species in Albania. In addition, the protection of Munella took place amidst the larger decision regarding the revision of Albania's entire protected area network, a highly contentious process described earlier.

In conclusion, the year 2022 bore witness to significant strides and setbacks in Albania's nature conservation efforts. While there were achievements to be celebrated, there were also pressing challenges that demanded resolute action and advocacy. The road ahead may be arduous, but the dedication of organizations like PPNEA and their allies in defending the nation's natural heritage remains unwavering. With lessons learned and renewed determination, Albania stands at a crucial crossroads in its commitment to safeguarding its unique biodiversity and securing a sustainable future for generations to come.

PhD. Aleksandër Trajçe

Executive Director PPNEA

1.2 Contributing Partners in 2022

We express our gratitude to all our esteemed partners and collaborators for their unwavering support throughout the year. Their generous contributions have played a pivotal role in the protection and preservation of Albania's precious natural environment.



| PRESPA OHRID NATURE TRUST (PONT) - A LEARNING PARTNERSHIP! |

BY MIRJAM DE KONING

From a series of grants for the protection of Prespa, the PONT-PPNEA cooperation is evolving into a true learning partnership. The opening of a local office, the PPNEA strategy, the joint transboundary wetland mapping and genetic bear study with PrespaNet partners, are just a few of the many highlights.

Embracing the exciting 'Connectivity Conservation' topic is next! Both partners, joined by others, are exploring ways to enhance connectivity conservation in the PONT Focus Region starting in the Cukal- Munelle-Bajaj-Martanesh Connectivity Conservation Area in Albania. More to come in this exciting journey of learning together!

| SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF PRESPA |

BY MYRSINI MALAKOU

The SPP has had a longstanding co-operation with our colleagues in PPNEA – formalized together with MES in the PrespaNet NGO network in 2013. PPNEA opened the doors of its new office to their local community in 2020, with MES and the SPP by their side and our partnership has gone from strength to strength as we've worked to bring the transboundary dimension of conservation center stage in Prespa. Heading towards the 10th anniversary of the network, we look to a future with ever closer collaboration for nature and people in our shared region, despite the challenges we all face.

| CARNIVORE ECOLOGY AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT |

BY MANUELA VON ARX

KORA's experience of supporting PPNEA increasing capacity on lynx monitoring and conservation in Albania.

I first came into contact with PPNEA in 2005 when we were investigating the possibilities of starting a project to recover the Balkan lynx, which is threatened with extinction. To gain experience, PPNEA staff were invited to Switzerland, where lynx research was already established. It fills me with great joy to see how PPNEA has developed over the past years, both in terms of individual and organizational skills, professionalism and strength. PPNEA has become a flagship for lynx monitoring and conservation in Albania – just as lynx should become a flagship for nature in this country. For this, PPNEA needs the support of everyone: the authorities and civil society.

| FONDATION PRINCE ALBERT II DE MONACO - FPA2 |

BY LÉA GLÂTRE

Today, freshwater resources and their biodiversity are severely threatened. In the Mediterranean region, the situation is particularly worrying. Mediterranean wetlands are biodiversity hotspots boasting a high abundance of different species, including a third of the region's vertebrates. But they are increasingly vulnerable, with overexploitation of water resources, unsustainable land use practices, and climate change all heavily impacting the region. As a result, since 1970, almost half of Mediterranean wetlands have disappeared. Since 1993, freshwater vertebrate populations have declined by 28% on average; and 36% of species are currently endangered.

This is why the Donors' Initiative for Mediterranean Freshwater Ecosystems is supporting PPNEA through its actions to preserve, protect and safeguard the natural and cultural values of the Vjosa Delta, which is one of the most important wetland complexes. This area is internationally recognised for its nature and biodiversity, including more than 200 species of birds, such as the flamingo and the pelican, and is an important site for nesting and wintering. Destroying this area would be a disaster for biodiversity but also for human well-being, as wetlands bring many vital ecosystem services and are nature-based solutions to tackle climate change. This paradise needs to be protected, saving Vjosa-Narta is a need!

| HELLENIC SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY AND PROTECTION OF THE MONK SEAL |

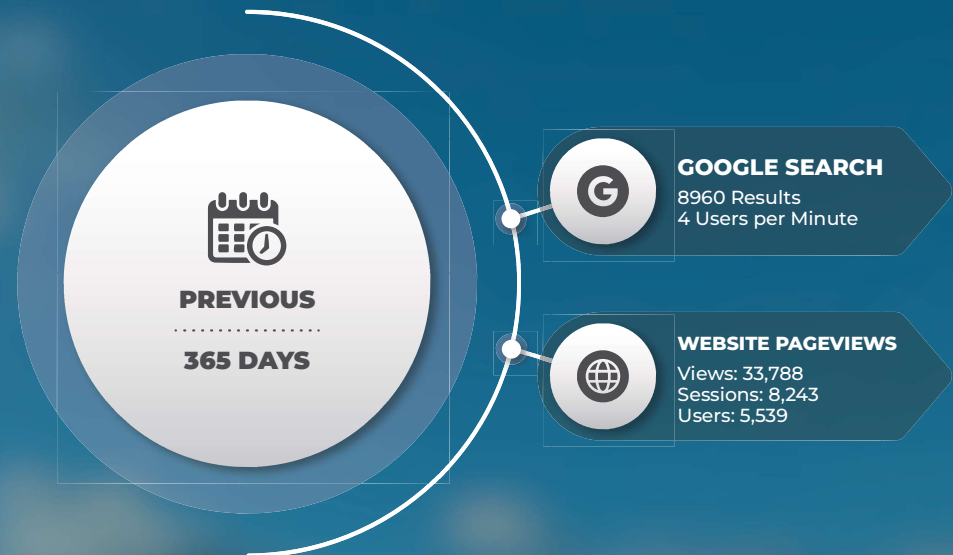
ODYSSEAS PAXINOS , OCEANOGRAPHER MSC

MOm/ the Hellenic society for the study and protection of the monk seal has had the honor of supporting PPNEA in their admirable conservation efforts regarding the endangered species of the Mediterranean monk seal *Monachus monachus*. Through our collaboration, we have witnessed firsthand the dedication and passion of the PPNEA team in implementing impactful initiatives. Together, we have worked within the context of the Eastern Adriatic Monk Seal Project, for the mapping and the preservation of the species' habitat, as well as the monitoring of the species and promoting sustainable practices. The collective efforts involving local communities, volunteers, and stakeholders have been instrumental in achieving tangible results, including increased public awareness and heightened community engagement. Despite challenges faced along the way, the remarkable moments and success stories we have encountered together serve as a testament to the effectiveness and positive impact of PPNEA in the EAMSP project in contributing to the conservation of the species

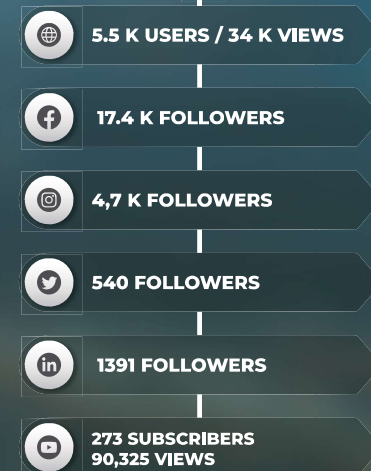
FINANCIAL REPORT



COMMUNICATION REPORT



PPNEA SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS



Chapter II

Conscious Conservation #NoAirportInVjosaNarta



PROTECTING VJOSA'S DELTA FROM UNSUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

FUNDING:

DONORS' INITIATIVE FOR MEDITERRANEAN FRESHWATER ECOSYSTEMS (DIMFE)

COUNTRY:

ALBANIA

CONTACT:

Zydjon Vorpsi / z.vorpsi@ppnea.org
Xhemal Xherri / xh.xherri@ppnea.org

The Center for the Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA) is implementing the project "Protecting Vjosa's Delta from unsustainable urban development: an integrated approach for the long-term conservation of biodiversity values in the Lower Vjosa Valley", supported by the Donors Initiative for Mediterranean Freshwater Ecosystems (DIMFE).

The project aims to safeguard the natural and cultural values of the Vjosa Delta, from the grey urbanization plan

OBJECTIVES:

- Scientific data collection on the wild fauna and socio-economic opportunities.
- Conservation and restoration of bird species population and habitats.
- Promotion of the area on a national and international level.
- Engage and strengthen the CSOs to actively contribute to the Vjosa-Narta Protected area.



IMPLEMENTATION

The project is focused on Vjosa – Narta Protected Landscape, (Protected Landscape/IUCN category V) and aims to highlight the importance of the protected areas, and freshwater ecosystems and prevent one of the biggest threats to the area, the construction of Vlora International Airport.

IMPORTANT ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED ALONG 2022

MONITORING OF BIRDS AND MAMMALS

Monitoring of birds and mammals has been the main action of this project, by implementing innovative methodologies and gathering new data in Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape. PPNEA by 2022 has been involved in monitoring wintering birds, breeding birds, migratory birds, and a dedicated study for the golden jackal. These data, translated into reports, have been the main argument against the urbanization of this protected area.



FORUMS ON THE PRESERVATION OF FRESHWATER ECOSYSTEMS

Several forums were organized, with diverse panelists and experts on the support of the preservation of Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape against the construction of Vlora International Airport. Scientists, volunteers, nature lovers, and activists discussed and joined our efforts on the preservation of this national and international wetland.

FIELD VISIT WITH MEDIA

National and International media have been visited the Vjosa-Narta Protected Area and besides highlighting the natural and cultural values, highlighted the threats of the construction of Vlora International Airport within this highly important wetland.



NO AIRPORT IN VJOSA-NARTA

Narta Lagoon and the surrounding ecosystem represent one of the largest and most important wetland ecosystems of Albania and the Mediterranean. Besides being part of Albanian's Protected Area Network, Vjosë-Nartë is part of almost all international ecological networks that a natural site in Albania could be a part of. This wetland is recognized as an 'Important Bird Area' (IBA) with ID site "AL005". Furthermore, this area is recognized as 'Key Biodiversity Area' (KBA), known as (Vjosë-Pishë Poro-Laguna e Nartës) with ID site ALB24. Vjosë-Nartë meets all the criteria to be classified as a 'Wetland of International Importance' under the Ramsar Convention, which Albania has ratified. Finally, it is officially nominated by the Albanian government as a candidate site for the Emerald Network under the Bern Convention, with ID site AL0000008 and an area of 19,412,00 hectares.

More than 200 wild bird species have been recorded in the area. From this number, 33 species are listed as threatened on the Red List of Albania Flora and Fauna, with 8 bird species having Critically Endangered (CR) status, 9 classified as Endangered (EN), 13 bird species classified as Vulnerable (VU) and 3 bird species carrying the Low Risk (LR) status. Moreover, 123 species are listed in Appendix II of the 'Bern Convention', a convention that Albania has ratified. Appendix II of the 'Bern Convention' lists all species which require special protection. Further to that, 43 species are listed in Appendix I of Emerald Network. In this appendix are listed all the species which require specific habitat conservation measures. 7 species are listed in Annex I of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), which lists migratory species whose populations are estimated to be threatened partly or in all of their distribution area. Under this convention, Albania has signed the 'Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds' (AEWA), which concerns 92 species found in Vjosë-Nartë and obliges signatory parties to create or preserve adequate habitat conditions for these species. Meanwhile, with regard to bird populations within the EU, 23 species are of particular conservation interest as their populations have entered one of the threatened lines according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Finally, 62 species are listed in Annex 1 of the Birds Directive, which obliges member states and those countries that have signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union to proclaim Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for these species.

Vjosë-Nartë is the most important breeding site in Albania and one of the most important in Europe for several species of Charadriiformes order, which have populations that go beyond 1% of the total population within the biogeographic region. Such is the case of the pied avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*), the breeding population of which, within the Vjosë-Nartë Protected Landscape, is more than 1% of the total population in the biogeographic region of Southeast Europe, the Black Sea and Turkey. In addition, the area regularly sustains more than 1% of the populations of two species of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea region, such as the Dalmatian pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) and flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*).



WHAT WOULD YOU RATHER CHOOSE?



PROTECTING VJOSA'S DELTA
FROM UNSUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

JAN 2018

The Albanian government mentions for the first time the construction of an airport in Vlora, potentially within the Protected Landscape Vjosa-Narta.

MAR 2020

The Albanian government progressed with the plan of the construction of the airport in Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape and a call for tender on the construction and operation of the Vlora Airport was published. The process was stopped and re-opened again after a while.

DEC 2020

The project decision for the determination/revision of the protected areas was approved. According to the plan, there was a big cut of around 309 ha, which corresponded precisely with the [potential future Vlora Airport.

**MAR 2021**

Mabetex Group won the tender for the construction and operation of Vlora International Airport. A contract was signed in frame of this.

**NOV 2021**

On 27th of November 2021 it was organized the first and the last public consultation on the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the Vlora International Airport. The day after, on 28th of November 2021 it was held the inauguration ceremony of this plan and the works for the construction of this airport started, within the protected area.

OCT 2022

The decision for the revision of the boundaries of Vjosa-Narta and the removal of the exact area of 309ha was cut. Parallely, the construction of the Vlora International Airport has progressed for almost one year. Within this area, there were build runways and taxiway.



A group of environmental Civil society organizations, national and international, had an immediate reaction to the discussions on the construction of the Protected Landscape Vjosa-Narta.

FEB 2018**MAY 2019**

On the yearly progress report 2019 for Albania, prepared by the EU Commission, it is emphasized that such investments raise concern for the preservation of biodiversity and fulfilling the relevant objectives in the frame of the Stabilization and Association Agreement.

SEP 2020

PPNEA raised this concern to the main international institutions, such as Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) through their review mechanism. In addition, the Bern Convention attached this case to the existed open file 2016/5 on the HPP in Vjosa River.

OCT 2020

On the yearly progress 2020 report for Albania, prepared by the EU Commission, it is emphasized that such investments raise concern for the preservation of biodiversity and fulfilling the relevant objectives in the frame of the Stabilization and Association Agreement.

JAN – MAR 2021

PPNEA with a group of around 36 NGOs sent several open letters were sent to the main Albanian institutions, raising concern of the construction of an airport within a protected area. Besides sending open letters to EU institutions, PPNEA held high-level meetings with MEPs and Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations.

APR – JUNE 2021

PPNEA together with environmental CSOs call for a protests which as prohibited by the authorities. But, on PPNEA's birthday, 6th of June, it was organized a manifestation on site to oppose the future planes on the constriction of Vlora Airport within the Vjosa-Narta Protected Area.

OCT 2021

On the yearly progress 2021 report for Albania, prepared by the EU Commission, it is emphasized again that such investments raise concern for the preservation of biodiversity and fulfilling the relevant objectives in the frame of the Stabilization and Association Agreement.

SEP 2022

After the complaints sent to the international conventions (Bern Convention, CMS, AEWA) at the end August, and beginning of September 2022 a group of experts arrived in Vjosa-Narta to implement an On-the-spot appraisal and make an assessment report on the actual situation and the damage done so far.

OCT 2022

On the yearly progress 2022 report for Albania, prepared by the EU Commission, it is emphasized again that such investments raise concern for the preservation of biodiversity and fulfilling the relevant objectives in the frame of the Stabilization and Association Agreement.

DEC 2022

Bern Convention SC, after the publication of the assessment report prepared by experts, recommended to the Albanian government the suspension of the constructions of Vlora International Airport.

JAN 2023

PPNEA organized a protest with volunteers, students and nature lovers in front of the construction site to oppose the construction of this destructive project within a protected area.

LAND OF EAGLES AND CASTLES INTEGRATED PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT FOR ALBANIAN COASTAL BIODIVERSITY



COUNTRY:
ALBANIA

FUNDING:
CRITICAL ECOSYSTEM PARTNERSHIP FUND (CEPF)

CONTACT:
Xhemal Xherri, xh.xherri@ppnea.org

PARTNERSHIP:
PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN ALBANIA (PPNEA) AND BULGARIAN
SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF BIRDS (BSPB)

GOALS

THE IMPLEMENTED ACTIONS IN THESE TWO IMPORTANT KBAS,
VJOSA-NARTA PROTECTED LANDSCAPE AND BUTRINT NATIONAL PARK ARE:



Our 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.

All our actions addressed its three following investment priorities:



IMPORTANT ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED ALONG 2022

TIMEFRAME | 2019 – 2022

This project implementation was stressing out some of the main threats to the abovementioned wetlands such as poaching, electrocution, collision, pollution, etc. Among the most highlighted threats are the urbanisation plans of the Albanian government, such as the construction of an airport within the Vjose-Narta Protected Area.

HOW TO ENJOY ROCK CLIMBING



In collaboration with BSPB and the rock-climbing community in Albania, PPNEA designed a booklet dedicated to this newest community. The booklet aims to raise awareness on the importance of raptors and vulture species and guide this target group in sustainable rock climbing. In addition, this devoted community expressed their willingness to help with reporting and mitigation of threats related to bird species and additional threats that this community might face along their expeditions. In a joining event with Tirana Rock Climbing there were distributed around 1200 copies and discussed potential collaboration in bird conservation and monitoring.

HAVE A LOOK AT THE NEW SIGNBOARDS IN VJOSA – NARTA PROTECTED LANDSCAPE AND BUTRINTI NATIONAL PARK

Six-road tables have been renovated and new ones have been installed in two important Key Biodiversity Areas, Vjosa – Narta Protected Landscape and Butrinti National Park. New birdwatching sites, interesting sightseeing, nature, and cultural monuments are easily found in each table, at every main entrance of these protected areas.

The phenomenon of taxidermy is spread almost all over Albania. The stuffed animals exposed in bars, restaurants, and on social media, include different species of birds, mammals and reptiles. Based on an analysis, most of the taxidermized species are protected and carry out the status Critically Endangered, Endangered, Vulnerable, and LRnt according to the Red List of Albanian Flora and Fauna. PPNEA, in the framework of the 'Art for Life' initiative has identified and removed several stuffed fauna species from bars and restaurants and replaced them with HD-quality photos. The initiative was highly appreciated and welcomed by the owners.

SmartBirds, the application through which you can collect data on wildlife is now available in Albanian. Through this app you can collect data not only on birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles, plants, or insects but also on various threats to biodiversity. Since the beginning of March, PPNEA has been engaged in translating and adapting the app, through which data were collected during the monitoring of the population of the Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), the White stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) and the threats that these endangered species face in our country. Students, nature lovers and scientists may use the application to collect scientific data and additional information on nature conservation.



ONLINE TRAINING ON FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT FOR ALBANIAN LOCAL NGOS

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. Due to this, PPNEA organized an online seminar aiming to share its experience in financial management and financial policies with non-profit organizations, and beneficiaries of Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) grantees, related to institutional and financial development.

JETË E EGËR NË SHQIPËRI OR WILDLIFE IN ALBANIA PODCAST LAUNCHED!

JETË E EGËR në Shqipëri or WILDLIFE in Albania it's a podcast aiming to inform the general public in Albania and beyond borders, on various topics from biodiversity, wildlife, and ecosystem services, climate change to sustainable development and many other topics concerning nature conservation and the importance of biodiversity. Hosted by Xherri, a passionate naturalist, each episode will have diverse guests such as academics, scientists, activists, and nature lovers who will talk and share important topics concerning nature and promote positive initiatives toward nature conservation and sustainable living.



SEMINAR - MANAGEMENT OF PROTECTED AREAS AND ADVOCACY FOR NATURE

Preservation of coastal areas, community engagement, and advocacy for nature conservation has been the targeted topics for the hybrid seminar "Management of protected areas and advocacy for nature conservation" organized on the 7th of April 2022. National and international lectures joined the seminar and presented their work and shared their experience on the preservation of nature in coastal protected areas. Besides the monitoring, initiatives, the preservation of the Vjosa-Narta protected area and the illegal construction within the airport were highlighted.



BUNKBIRD

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 transforming it into a tourist attraction, for locals and foreigners. Pied avocet is one of the most interesting species found in this wetland and more than 1% of these species, of the European continent, breeds here.

A kind regard goes to Franko Dine.



EXCHANGE VISIT ALBANIA ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF SALINA, NATURE CONSERVATION, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT - BULGARIA / PPNEA, ALBSALE, BSPB, BFF

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 Vlorë 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.



OVERALL RESULTS OF THE PROJECT

Land of Eagles and Castles II has given a huge contribution to the two important Key Biodiversity Areas:

- Vjosa – Narta Protected Landscape and Butrinti National Park implementing several diverse activities towards nature conservation and mitigation of threats;
- Promotion of both sites and their precious and representatives' values in national and international scale;
- Supporting the local community through proactive activities and stimulating the increase of sustainable livelihood activities.

In the field of research and monitoring, tremendous work has been done:

- By collecting systematic data for 2019-2022, in partnership with other institutions, from various monitoring such as mid-count waterbird census, pelican census, breeding birds and several interesting observations have been spotted by our bird monitoring team.
- For the first time, a dedicated scientific bird monitoring app was adapted into the Albanian language and was used for various critically endangered species such as the Egyptian vulture, white stork, etc.
- Several conservation actions were implemented aiming to increase new breeding areas for birds and mitigate threats such as fishing nets, collision, disturbance, etc.
- Through intensive communication campaigns and promotion, both areas have been the focus of national and international audiences and the tourism figures could be increased. These are due to four local celebrations organized on-site, an increase in alternative tourism attractions such as BunkBird station, an increase in tourism infrastructures (signboards), video promotions, and reportages with prestigious media, etc.
- Through the support of the local community on traditional livelihood, 4 families got engaged and increased their revenues by working on sustainable livelihood activities. From this, and the events organized on-site, we believe that at least 10 new jobs have been created on the site.
- Advocacy and preservation of protected areas have been at the core of this project's implementation.

RUNNING OUT OF TIME

SHKODËR



TIRANË



ELBASAN



VLORE



GJIROKASTËR



KORÇË



COUNTRY:

ALBANIA

FUNDING:

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG TIRANA

CONTACTS:

Klejn Ngraçani, k.ngracani@ppnea.org

Running Out of Time is a project implemented by PPNEA in close collaboration with HBS Tirana that aimed to raise the green consciousness in Albania through engaging young people in activities such as film screenings, green and political discussions, raising awareness campaigns, wildlife exhibitions, peaceful manifestations, and many more.



12 FILM SCREENINGS THROUGHOUT ALBANIA

Tirana, Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape, Gjirokastrë, Elbasan, Shkodër, Prespa National Park

In order to enhance public debate about nature protection issues, PPNEA delivered 12 film screenings throughout the country, which were followed by discussions on how youth activism can help in preserving the wonderful nature of Albania and, furthermore, how they can oppose

unsustainable decision-making. The discussion took as an example the case of the airport construction in the Vjosa-Narta protected area, which is violating national laws, as well as international conventions for nature conservation, jeopardizing one of the most crucial wetland ecosystems in Albania and the region. The participants were shocked to uncover how the propaganda machine has surrounded the case of the airport with narratives of development, while hiding corruptive practices in its core.



“RUNNING OUT OF TIME” INTERNATIONAL RELAY

Running Out of Time is one of the longest non-stop relays ever attempted in history. Runners, cyclists, and sailors worked together to pass a baton hand-to-hand which contained a powerful climate message from young people to the decision-makers at COP27. The Relay started Glasgow,

the site of the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference #COP26, and ended in Sharm El Sheikh, at the next #COP27 conference that started on November 6, 2022.

PPNEA was a cooperating partner in Albania, organizing hundreds of participants throughout the country to pass the baton, which entered through Shkodra and passed in Greece through Lake Prespa. Four special handovers were organized within the country, where PPNEA aimed to raise awareness about pressing nature protection issues, such as the case of the airport construction in the Vjosa-Narta, poaching, urbanization of wetlands, and many more.



THE WILDERNESS OF VJOSA-NARTA

With the help of a visual artist, PPNEA installed at Destil Creative Hub a wildlife-themed exhibition which aimed to raise awareness about the airport construction in the Vjosa-Narta protected area. The exhibition was accessible for an entire month from December 15th to January 15th. The exhibition was visited by at least 100 people on a daily basis.



ESTABLISHMENT OF A GROUP OF VOLUNTEERS

Since all the activities implemented throughout the project aimed to raise awareness about unsustainable decision-making and the dangers it imposes to nature conservation issues, PPNEA managed to gather at least 60 volunteers that were eager to fight alongside the organization. The volunteers were recruited to the events and they were enthusiastic to take

action for preserving the wonderful nature of Albania. The group is constantly recruiting new members and has begun to take the first steps towards self-organization.

GOALS

01

To make sure that the knowledge of the general public regarding nature and environment protection issues is enhanced.

02

To create a community of young volunteers who are eager to join environmental causes and raise awareness through peer exchange and proactive activism.

02

General public is informed about nature protection issues in Albania, leading to the creation of environmental forums;

02

The Running Out of Time message that promotes the crucial role of education in climate change action is highly spread in Albania, leading to the broad participation from the general public in the relay;

TARGET GROUPS REACHED:

Youth ■

General public ■

Nature enthusiasts ■

School children ■

Local activists ■

Students ■

Foreign activists ■

Policymakers ■

Public institutions ■

Journalists ■

Artists ■



Chapter III

Wings Across Borders: Fostering Environmental Consciousness for Migratory Birds



EGYPTIAN VULTURE NEW LIFE PROJECT

"URGENT ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE BALKAN POPULATION
OF THE EGYPTIAN VULTURE AND SECURE ITS FLYWAY"



FUNDING:
THE EC PROGRAMME LIFE+,
THE A.G.
LEVENTIS FOUNDATION,
GREEN FUND MAVA FOUNDATION

COUNTRIES:
14 COUNTRIES, 22 ORGANIZATIONS

CONTACTS:
Ledi Selgjekaj, l.selgjekaj@ppnea.org

GOALS

Reinforce the easternmost European Egyptian Vulture population by delivering urgent conservation measures to address major known threats at breeding grounds and also along the flyway



01
Achieving a steady increase of the population on the breeding grounds in the Balkans

02
Enhancing the context for conservation along the flyway and in the wintering grounds by minimizing the loss of migrating birds, particularly mature individuals.

EGYPTIAN VULTURE UNDER THE LENS OF CAMERAS

PPNEA continues to monitor and study the Egyptian vulture population since 2013, now using the modern method of live cameras. Live cameras placed in the two supplementary feeding stations constructed in the Drino Valley over a period of years have been monitoring the Egyptian vulture round-the-clock. Live cameras are a revolution for wildlife monitoring, enabling us to provide more complete data on the Egyptian vulture's behavior, frequency of station visits, length of stay, reproductive behaviors, etc. Film footage is broadcasted on YouTube and PPNEA's social media and serves to increase the awareness of the general public.

EGYPTIAN VULTURE TURNED INTO STREET ART

Murals are an opportunity to tell a community's story. The last remaining vulture in Albania, the Egyptian Vulture nests every year along the south of the Vjosa River valley, and Drino River after successfully completing the #flightforsurvival from the lands of Africa. Given what this species represents to the locals and their commitment to protecting it, an Egyptian Vulture mural was painted in Tepelena's town square, in front of a historical castle.



Inaugurated on the eve of the tourist season, residents and tourists seemed to enjoy this new and important symbol, as it attracted their attention. Feeling lucky enough to live in the presence of this rare threatened species, and occasionally spot it flying in the sky, the locals consider this piece of art as a great promoter of the natural and cultural values of the area, serving as a tourist attraction. In addition, we also think, the huge Egyptian Vulture mural will make everyone increase their interest to learn more about the fauna and especially bird species encountered in Albania. If you want to get amazed, visit Tepelena City!

HAPPY INTERNATIONAL VULTURE AWARENESS DAY



The first Saturday of every September highlights the value and importance of vultures on International Vulture Awareness Day, which is celebrated every year in different forms.

The successful marathon of Dropulli, held in Dervician, Cjirokastra, is a demonstration of the appreciation that local residents have for the last breeding vulture in Albania, the Egyptian Vulture. Many citizens, young people, and even children took part in the 1 km, 6 km and 12 km running races, running for the Egyptian vulture, and winning prizes with the emblem of the species.

This marathon has been taking place for years, and PPNEA's staff also joins and serves as a promoter for this area's values by also raising awareness of the Egyptian Vulture and the ecosystem services this nature cleaner offers.

EGYPTIAN VULTURE POPULATION FOR THE YEAR 2022

The Egyptian vulture is the only breeding vulture nesting in Albania and its condition of population remains critical. The monitoring of the population of the Egyptian vulture occurs each year, where PPNEA from April up to September monitors the species occupancy, and incubation and assesses the productivity and fledgling success. The year 2022 resulted in 8 occupied territories, where 6 breeding pairs have been observed. Compared to 2021, a slight recovery has been registered, with 1 new territory increasing the number of breeding pairs from 5 to 6.



The preliminary results from the monitoring of the Egyptian vulture in the Balkans conducted within the project "Egyptian Vulture New LIFE" demonstrate a slight improve in the number of occupied territories across the peninsula with 53 compared to 51 occupied in 2021. Overall, the population remains stable and vital. Regardless of the optimistic results about the number of occupied territories, a decrease in the number of breeding pairs is observed in 2022, with 5 breeding pairs (n=43) in comparison to 2021 (n=48).

Direct conservation actions have been undertaken jointly with partners from 3 continents all over the world, but joint efforts need to continue in order to ensure the survival and recovery of the population of Egyptian vulture, which is endangered globally.

NEW POSTAL STAMP WITH THE EGYPTIAN VULTURE EMBLEM WAS PUBLISHED BY THE ALBANIAN POST OFFICE



One of the newest postage stamps already carries the Egyptian Vulture as its main character. The postage stamp is a key piece of evidence of a country's history and culture, but also of national identity. Precisely the Egyptian Vulture represents a symbol of the country's natural heritage, as the last nesting vulture in Albania, with a Critically endangered status.

These stamps serve not only Albanian and foreign philatelists to increase their interest in collecting stamps with the Albanian fauna theme, but also for the public to recognize the important species of our biodiversity and take an interest in protecting them.

Next time you post a letter, ask to use the Egyptian Vulture postage stamp; we're sure they'll be impressed!

FLY WITH THE EGYPTIAN VULTURE

The latest edition of the Albawings magazine has dedicated an article to the Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), the last breeding vulture in Albania. Albawings represents one of the high-performance airlines based in Albania. The article narrates about the threats faced by the Egyptian vulture along its #flightforsurvival, which connects the breeding grounds with the wintering ones. Furthermore, the article narrates the work of PPNEA and other national and international partners for the conservation of this species, which plays a crucial role in the environment, such as cleaning it from carcasses that can easily spread diseases.



The collaboration with Albawings was realized in the framework of the campaign "Fly with the Egyptian Vulture", which aims to raise awareness among the general public on the threats faced by the Egyptian vulture, whose population in Albania has declined to only 6 breeding pairs in 2022.

Adriatic Flyway 4

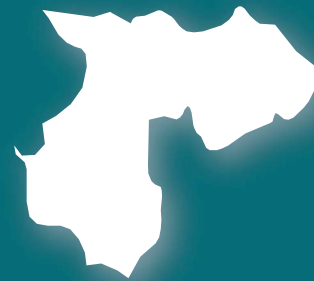
Combating Illegal Killing and Illegal Taking of Birds (IKB) in Albania

FUNDING:

EURONATUR FOUNDATION, BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

CONTACT:

Zydjon Vorpsi, z.vorpsi@ppnea.org



LOCATION: LALZI BAY

OBJECTIVES

01

Reduce IKB in the project areas;

02

Revise the extent and characteristics of IKB in Albania and evaluate its impact on decreasing bird populations;

03

Improve the hunting legislation in Albania, towards a more responsible and sustainable hunting;

04

Raise awareness and education on the impacts of IKB;

05

Train relevant stakeholders on bird identification and monitoring;

06

Implementation of current legislation and promoting alternative nature-friendly livelihood activities towards hunters, local tour operators, local businesses, and the public at large.



2022 was the last year of the Adriatic Flyway Project and all its components.

The aim of this project was to create a safer flyway and to tackle the three of main issues that birds face during their migration; Illegal killing, poisoning, electrocution, and collision with energy infrastructure.

The work to tackle these threats has been focused on monitoring, direct actions on the field, awareness raising, and advocating to implement management actions.

Monitoring of poaching activity has been ongoing during the first three months of 2022 in Lalzi Bay.

In September 2022, State Police prosecuted the illegal killing of common quails in Shkodra by a group of poachers. After this event, PPNEA organized a training for the authorities on the negative effects of poaching activity and how to deal with IKB cases. The main participants in this activity were the Prosecution Office, State Police, Local Prefecture, NGOs, Tour Operators, Hunting Association, and Media.

International Waterbird Census 2022

The international waterbird census for 2022 has been held on the 15th and 16th of January, where 33 wetlands have been visited for counting the wintering waterbirds. Like every year, PPNEA coordinates the counting in Vjosa-Narta Protected landscape, Orikumi Lagoon, Butrint National Park, Bulo reservoir, Syri i Kalter Nature Monument as well as covers the counting in Prespa National Park. In total, 138494 individuals have been counted, represented by 60 species.

The highlight of this census was the observation of the Common crane (*Grus grus*) in Bulo, Gjirokaster, representing the first time being observed in winter in Albania. 5 individuals of this species, where at least 3 are adults, were recorded. This record represents a unique observation, given that in our country this species is encountered only during the migration period, in relatively large flocks and mainly in the central and northern coastal area of Albania, based on reports in recent years. This is not the first case of rare findings from the International Waterbird Census. It is worth mentioning the observation in the winter of the White stork in Bulo, the registration as wintering of Red Knot in Vjosa-Narta, the purple heron in the Orikum lagoon, etc.



Monitoring wintering waterbirds in Prespa Lakes

The annual joint monitoring of wintering water bird species from Lake Prespa and Ohrid took place during the period of October - March in coordination with our partners from the Macedonian Ecological Society (MES). During 2022, it was noticed that the number of individuals increased from month to month, with the peak in January. In general, Ohrid Lake resulted in a higher number of individuals compared to Prespa lake. An interesting result is the observation of the Smew (*Mergellus albellus*), during October 2022 in Prespa National Park and Velvet scoter (*Melanitta fusca*) in February in Lake Ohrid.



Bird Ringing in Prespa National Park

Bird Banding camps which have been regularly organized in Prespa NP by PPNEA, serve to build capacities of PPNEA staff on bird banding, but also of local volunteers and RAPA Korce. For 2022, they were organized in June-July for the spring period, and again in September-October for the autumn season. A total number of **146 individuals of birds, from 29 species, belonging to 1 order, 14 families, and 21 genera have been ringed along the 2022 in Prespa National Park.**



5th Spring Census of the Dalmatian Pelican in South Eastern Europe

The year 2022 marked the pelican's darkest year since avian influenza struck its biggest breeding population in Greece. In the meantime, there have been few cases in the Albanian side of Prespa or in the other populations located in Montenegro, Bulgaria, etc. The pelican census in South Eastern Europe in 2022 was given particular focus and relevance under the avian flu scenario. In Albania, the census coordinated by PPNEA was conducted in the country's main wetlands, and a total of **265 Dalmatian pelicans and 24 Great White Pelicans** were counted. Prespa National Park, Divjaka-Karavasta National Park and Vjose-Narte Protected Landscape represent the main areas for the presence of this species in Albania.



BIRD BROTHER

Birds as flagship species for sustainable development

The Bird Brother project was an innovative initiative that finished in 2022. With its support, we had the opportunity to maintain two live cameras on white stork nests and conduct the monitoring for the population of this species. One of the live cameras was installed in the nesting platform in Gjirokastra, which was constructed in 2019. While the new camera was installed in Delvina, in a new breeding platform. This innovative tool gives the chance to study the behavior of White storks during the breeding season, by obtaining significant information on the incubation period and productivity of the species. All the gathered data are stored on the server of PPNEA and are available to any research institution, or students who want to conduct scientific research and analyze the data extracted from this footage. Last but not least, this archive is available for students from other fields who want to develop awareness-raising campaigns or use it for other multimedia materials.

“Spring Alive”

Birdlife International Education Programme

Spring Alive international campaign, an annual education programme organized by PPNEA in Albania, from February until September, successfully achieved all three main goals,

- 1 Children's and youth education and awareness-raising;
- 2 Implementing conservation measures for natural biodiversity and especially birds conservation;
- 2 Strengthening of cooperation with different stakeholders (Elementary schools, teachers, Universities and Institutions (RAPA,NAPA, etc) and active volunteer network. A new member/ intern, a biology student from the University of Tirana, Arlinda Halilaj, was engaged throughout the Spring Alive season with this programme.

Last year's communication theme “**Citizen Science for Birds**” was promoted in all social media channels as well as in education events organized with primary school children in Gjirokaster, Tepelene, and Prespa National Park. With co-financing from other donors such as GEF, EuroNatur, and PONT conservation actions were undertaken to improve the conditions for the nesting of white stork populations in the south and southeastern part of Albania, by establishing nesting platforms.



23680

people reached on Facebook only for the Communication theme launching

2895

observations

26

primary school children

5

teachers from 2 schools involved

8

volunteers

2

conservation actions conducted

Chapter IV

Flowing Towards Consciousness: Promoting Environmental Awareness through Water Management and the Protection of Aquatic Ecosystems and Wildlife



THE PRESPA PROJECT-BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN TRANSBOUNDARY PRESPA

COUNTRY:

ALBANIA IN THE TRANSBOUNDARY REGION OF PRESPA



In a transboundary basin like Prespa, cooperation is essential. Great results can only be achieved if the countries sharing this region work in coordination with one another. Prespa basin does not recognize borders and requires that approaches or actions for its protection should be unified within a joint effort. PrespaNet is a network of organizations that work together in the Prespa Basin. This network was established in 2013 through an agreement between the organizations, PPNEA (Albania), MES (North Macedonia), and SPP (Greece). This network has implemented a transboundary Strategic Framework (TSF) aiming to preserve and protect in the long term the natural values of this amazing basin. The work that the network does is based on scientific methods, field experiences, and everyday living in the region. PPNEA in partnership with PrespaNet has implemented 2 joint projects to date in the basin, 'Strengthening NGO-led Conservation in the Transboundary Prespa Basin' (2018-2021) and 'The Prespa Project-Biodiversity Conservation in Transboundary Prespa' (2021-2024). Both projects have been financed by PONT- Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust and Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation with support from EuroNatur. PPNEA is also locally present in Prespa, closer to the region, with a local office in Dolna Gorica (Goričë e Vogël) where our Local Officers welcome everyone who wants to stop by, learn about the work of PPNEA, the network, and the region.



FUNDING: PONT – PRESPA OHRID NATURE TRUST,
EURONATUR, AAGE V. JENSEN FOUNDATION

CONTACTS:
Klaudja Koçi, k.koci@ppnea.org
Cveta Trajce, c.trajce@ppnea.org
Tina Donefski, t.donefski@ppnea.org

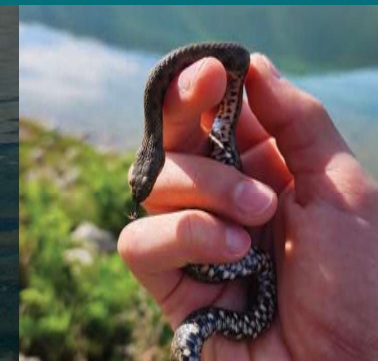
GOALS

The general objective of this project is to consolidate and strengthen PPNEA's local office presence by conducting a programmatic long term approach of priority conservation themes, in line with Transboundary Strategic Framework of the PrespaNet, organizations strategic action plan and in coordination with PrespaNet partners.

PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES

(5 dots – 5 Programms- 3 countries)

The project work of PrespaNet is divided into five main programs, with Joint actions implemented at the same time in all the three sides of the basin, and national actions depending on the local needs.



MAIN SUCCESSES FOR 2022



WETLAND HABITAT MANAGEMENT

From March 2022, PPNEA has worked to prepare a Grazing Management Plan for the Natura 2000 wetland habitats types in Prespa National Park, with engagement of Greek Experts. Continuous monitoring work of the wetland habitats has taken place, especially during the months April – July, a period of time when 14 experimental plots were installed and monitored from which biomass was collected to analyze the grazing effect. The team from PPNEA Albania and Greece is now working on the results of the experimental plots and data from the farmers' questionnaires to develop an Action Plan for Grazing for the Park, which will be ready in 2023.

PRESPA FIELD LABORATORY, TRANSBOUNDARY UNIVERSITY SUMMER SCHOOL

Encouraging young conservationists to work in Prespa by promoting the Prespa basin as a field laboratory has been one of the crucial progress points during this period. The summer school tradition with participants from Albania, Greece, and North Macedonia was another annual success for PPNEA and PrespaNet partners for 2022. "Monitoring and management for conservation in Prespa", and focused on bird ringing, birdwatching, and bird identification, and were introduced to the methodology of bird monitoring and the importance of conservation and management actions and it brought together 15 university students and recent graduates from the 3 neighboring countries for 1 week in September in Prespa National Park Albania. They had the opportunity to learn about and explore the topic delivered from 19 lecturers. The event included visits both in Prespa National Park, Albania and Ezerani Nature Park in N.Macedonia.

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION IN PRESPA

The 2022 camera trapping season focused on the bio corridors took place from the end of August to the beginning of November of 2022. These results indicate the importance of the corridors connecting Prespa National Park and other natural areas such as Morava and Valamara ranges aimed at assessing their functionality mainly for connecting large mammal populations and in this case the brown bear. Four bottleneck crossing areas including those connecting with Greece and North Macedonia were identified and monitored as brown bear crossing corridors. At the end of the study, optimistic results were provided such as the presence of the brown bear and the reproduction of the species.

The highlight of 2022 camera traps monitoring, was the photography of a **Balkan Lynx** individual, captured for the first time in Prespa National Park, by PPNEA. As borders do not exist for wildlife, it was confirmed with our partners from MES that this exact individual was also photographed in Galičica Park, North Macedonia.

During 2022 PPNEA has also been working with Balkan Chamois Association Experts and as a result, developed a methodology and protocol for joint monitoring of **Balkan Chamois** in Prespa NP and Galičica NP. Scoping visits and relevant training sessions were organized in order to present and test the developed protocols. The Chamois monitoring will be the first pilot monitoring study of this species in Albania.

The report containing the results of the otter monitoring study that took place in 2021 on the Albanian side of both Prespa Lakes was produced in April 2022 under the title 'Assessment of the parameters of the Eurasian otter population trend in Macro and Micro Prespa lakes, through investigation of signs of otter activity and camera trapping survey'. The presence of the otter was confirmed in all monitoring stations in both Prespa Lakes showing also a stable population trend.

Following extensive consultation and on-field monitoring processes the **Management Plan for the Treni Cave** in Lesser Prespa was produced in March 2022. The plan provides recommendations for conservation actions to be implemented in the future.

For the second year in a row, PPNEA participated in the expedition for the monitoring of the **dice snake** population, led by MES partners in collaboration with experts from the University of Belgrade that took place on Mali Grad Island. The experts continue to implement the first capture-mark-recapture study that would help differentiate snakes found on both islands in Great Prespa Lake. The team was able to recapture individuals marked during the first expedition and also determine as good the condition of the dice snake population found on Mali Grad, which occasionally faces some risks by the poaching phenomenon present there.

TRANSBOUNDARY COLLABORATION

After 12 years after the signing of the Prespa Park Agreement the Prespa Park Management Committee held the 1st high-level meeting, on 23rd-24th June, in Pyli, Greece, and the 2nd virtual meeting in January 2023, where PPNEA participated as an NGO representative in the Committee. The meeting brought together the most important environmental-related institutions from all three countries, representatives from protected area managers,



local authorities, environment ministries, and the European Commission.

Relevant Network Transboundary meetings took place from 12th

December to 14th December of 2022 at the SPP partner premises. The most important was the workshop for finalizing the midterm review of the Transboundary Framework Strategy, followed by the Project review meeting. The first meeting of the Transboundary Wetland Management Technical Group (TWMTG) was organized by the SPP in coordination with PrespaNet partners, on the 14th of December 2022, in Laimos, Greece. The mayors from the three local municipalities following the joint event decided to establish and sign a memorandum of cooperation in different fields of work, including the environment.

Local Office Management: Through the local office PPNEA is now being recognized by the relevant institutions as an important factor in the region and on the transboundary level. It has also become a reference point for Prespa National Park, with many events and organizational meetings taking place in the office premises. There is an increased interest in the local office and the transboundary collaboration model of the PrespaNet Network from other national and local organizations, also from media and tourists.

DURING 2022

150

VISITORS

10

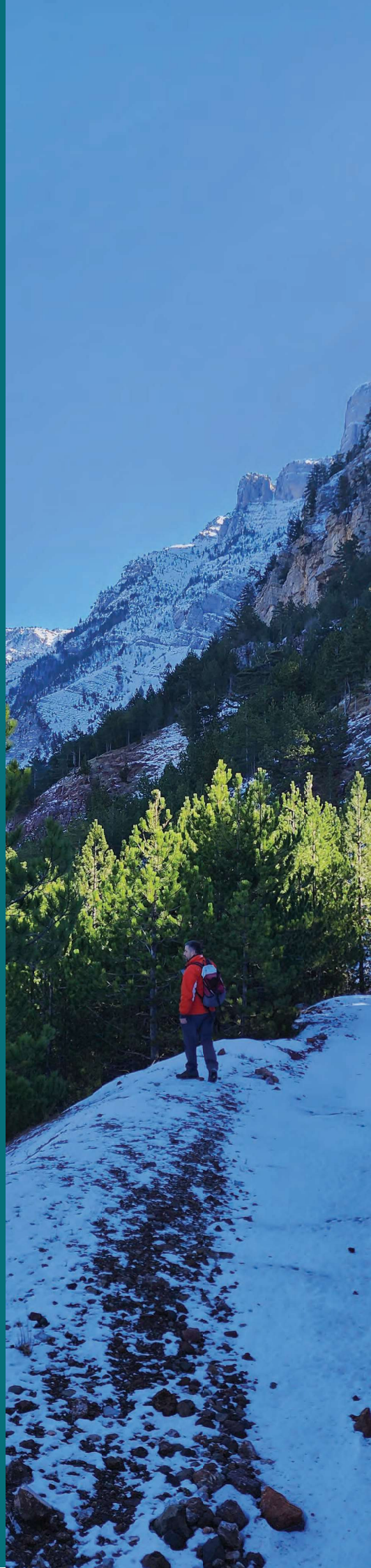
LOCAL
VOLUNTEERS

4

INTERNATIONAL
VOLUNTEERS

2

LONG TERM
INTERNS



EASTERN ADRIATIC MONK SEAL

PROJECT PHASE II

SEA MAP:

COUNTRY: ALBANIA, GREECE, MONTENEGRO, CROATIA

FUNDING:

PRINCE ALBERT II DE MONACO

PARTNERS:

EURONATUR, BIOM, MOM, CZIP, MONK SEAL ALLIANCE

CONTACT:

Sabina Çano / s.cano@ppnea.org

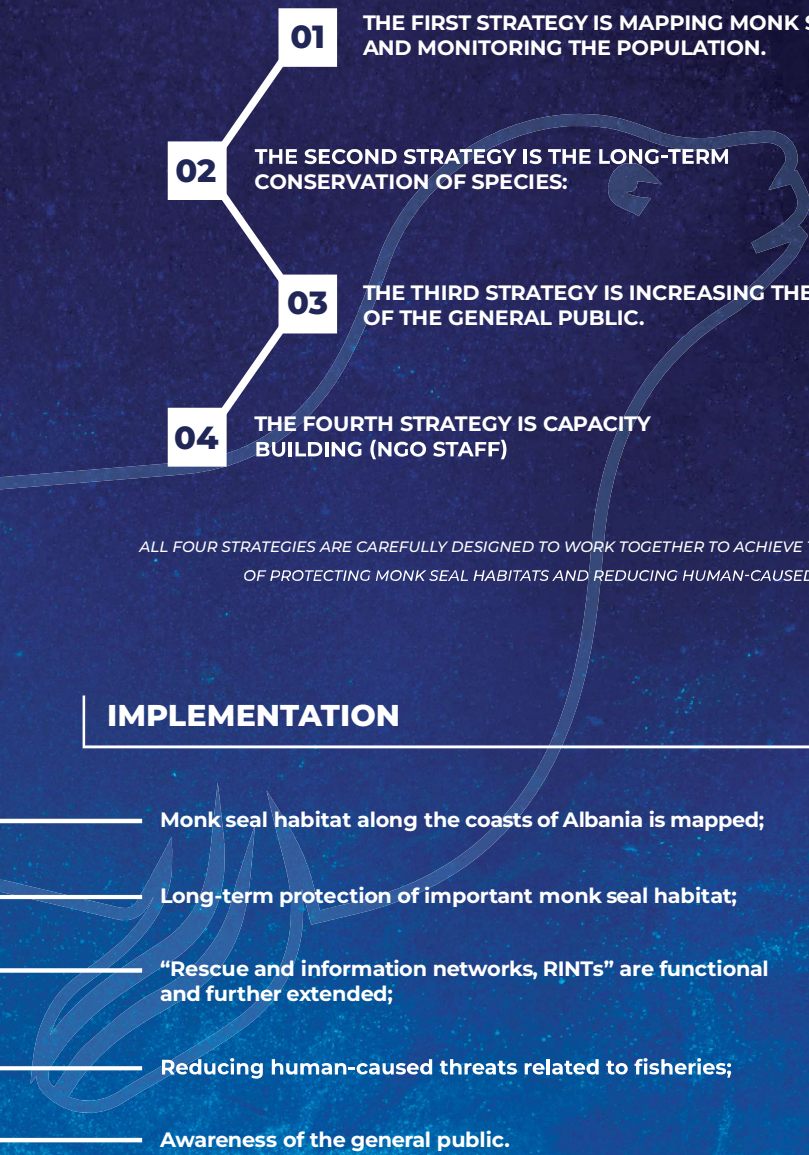
Emir Gjyzeli / e.gjyzeli@ppnea.org

Kostandin Xhaho / k.xhaho@ppnea.org

GOALS

"The species is in urgent need of immediate and effective conservation and management measures. The habitats need to be identified and protected, along the shore and also in the Sea. To reach the goals, the status of the monk seal population must be known, and suitable habitats for pupping and resting must be mapped". The project is a comprehensive plan to protect monk seal habitats along the coasts of Albania, Montenegro, and Croatia and reduce human-caused threats related to fisheries.

FOUR DISTINCT STRATEGIES:

- 
- 01 THE FIRST STRATEGY IS MAPPING MONK SEAL HABITAT AND MONITORING THE POPULATION.
 - 02 THE SECOND STRATEGY IS THE LONG-TERM CONSERVATION OF SPECIES:
 - 03 THE THIRD STRATEGY IS INCREASING THE AWARENESS OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC.
 - 04 THE FOURTH STRATEGY IS CAPACITY BUILDING (NGO STAFF)

ALL FOUR STRATEGIES ARE CAREFULLY DESIGNED TO WORK TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE THE DESIRED OUTCOME OF PROTECTING MONK SEAL HABITATS AND REDUCING HUMAN-CAUSED THREATS.

IMPLEMENTATION

Monk seal habitat along the coasts of Albania is mapped;

Long-term protection of important monk seal habitat;

"Rescue and information networks, RINTs" are functional and further extended;

Reducing human-caused threats related to fisheries;

Awareness of the general public.

MONK SEAL HABITAT ALONG THE COASTS OF ALBANIA IS MAPPED.

The habitat monitoring activity was completed successfully by the PPNEA team. The results:

- First draft document completed with all marine caves presence in Albania
- Under the guidance of the Greek expert from MOm Alexandros Karamanlidis it was worked to arrange and fix the data collected in the fieldwork in order to be easily understandable by the expert for preparing the final document.
- Preparation of the coordinates and maps of the potential and non-potential caves found in the Albanian coastline.



THE MAIN AIM: THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE EASTERN ADRIATIC MONK SEAL (EAMS) PROJECT'S SECOND PHASE WILL BE THIS SPECIES MONITORING THROUGH CAMERA TRAPS.

During the expedition, conducted in July the participants shared their experiences regarding the work done for the conservation of the Monk Seal (*Monachus monachus*) on the Albanian and Greek coastlines.

The aim of this expedition was to train the members of PPNEA and RAPA Vlora regarding the techniques of installing camera traps inside the marine caves.



RESEARCH ON THE FISHERY SECTOR WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF 124 QUESTIONNAIRES.

The main objective of this study was to reduce human-caused threats related to the fisheries sector in Albania and also to obtain an overview of their importance, fishing practices used and resulting potential for conflicts between fisheries and monk seals (i.e. net damages; accidental drowning; illegal fishing).

Existing data are summarized and collated to increase the overall effectiveness of research. It includes research material published in research reports and similar documents regarding the fishery sector. The resources of these materials are from different NGOs which have conducted their own research in the entire Albanian coastline. The general purpose of these data was to clarify all the problematic issues related to the important sectors of aquaculture and fishery sector, which are the most frequent fish species etc.

Also a questionnaire, a research instrument was conducted during 2022 from the EAMSP team of Albania basically on the coastline from Vlora to Saranda area which consisted of a series of questions for the purpose of gathering information from fisheries. Questionnaires used for this research were mostly qualitative in order to better understand the potential conflicts between fishery and monk seal, target species caught by them, types of fishing gear, their main locations etc.



EXPEDITION AT THE NATIONAL MARINE PARK KARABURUN – SAZAN

Expedition at the National Marine Park Karaburun – Sazan in cooperation with RAPA Vlora, under the guidance of the expert Alexandros Karamanlidis from the partner NGO MOm - *Monachus monachus*.

The monitoring of the monk seal on the Albanian coastline is important for the species' reproduction and survival and also to get more familiar with its behavior in Albanian shorelines. By monitoring the species not only with camera traps but also using other methodologies like observing the coasts, the bays, or the capes from a considerable distance from the boat using binoculars or a telescope it can gain insights into the species' behavior, and its preferable habitats and places. Thus it can help to take conservation measures to protect the monk seal and its habitat as well from different threats.



10.06.2022 WORKSHOP IN CYPRUS FOR NATIONAL PROJECT COORDINATORS ON MONK SEAL CONSERVATION TOPICS

The Eastern Adriatic Monk Seal (EAMS) project team had the opportunity to be part of the first THALASSA 2022 Conference, held in Larnaca, Cyprus, organized by the Cyprus Marine and Maritime Institute.

It was such a great opportunity for the team to learn more about the most critical issues that marine and coastal aquatic environments face, and also learn about the innovative and interdisciplinary methodologies for the preservation, protection, and restoration of the Mediterranean Sea.

After that, the experience continued with the project workshop. The main aim of it was to exchange knowledge on conservation actions for the Mediterranean Monk Seal between representatives of the Department of Fisheries and Marine Research at the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment from Cyprus and the Eastern Adriatic Monk Seal project partners.

Each partner had prepared a presentation and had the opportunity to present the progress of the project in their areas, the threats, and discuss conservation measures for the species, habitats, and difficulties in protecting the Mediterranean Monk Seal from factors such as mass tourism, fishing, etc.

Another important activity of this workshop was the opportunity of visiting the 2 marine caves which were important hot spots for the presence and reproduction of the Mediterranean Monk Seal.



THE STUDY AREA INCLUDED:

- The Port of Vlora (triport);
- The port of Radhima (where it is located and the association of responsible fisherman).
- The port of Orikum, the port of Himara (the only port in Himara); the port of Porto Palermo (mainly a port for small fishing boats or yachts);
- The port of Saranda (commercial fishing boats) and Saranda Llanen;
- Aquacultures were also included in the development of the questionnaires, where we mention: aquaculture near the Karaburun Peninsula as well as aquaculture in Porto Palermo.

The reason why was thought to include the aquaculture places is because many different marine species have been observed near the fish tanks as a simple way for finding food.

Which are the most common fishing methods you use?	of Responses	% of Responses	
Bottom trawling	2	2%	2%
Cast nets	1	1%	1%
Fishing lines	6	5%	5%
Fishing lures	8	7%	7%
Fishing hooks	45	37%	37%
Nets	44	36%	36%
Ship, nets	5	4%	4%
Spearfishing	10	8%	8%
Trap nets	1	1%	1%
Total	122		

Is dynamite still used?	of Responses	% of Responses	
No	2	2%	2%
Yes	118	97%	97%
Not sure	2	2%	2%
Total	122		

Which aquatic species do you encounter in marine protected areas (MPAs)?	of Responses	% of Responses	
Various aquatic species observed in MPA	10	8%	8%
Dolphins observed in MPA	12	10%	10%
Sharks observed in MPA	7	6%	6%
Monk seals observed in MPA	6	5%	5%
Sea turtles observed in MPA	14	11%	11%
Rarely / never observe species in MPA	73	60%	60%
Total	122		

DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING APPROPRIATE AWARENESS-RAISING ACTIVITIES

Developing and implementing appropriate awareness-raising activities with fishermen is essential to ensuring the protection of marine environments, species, and habitats. Through these activities, fishermen can learn about the importance of sustainable fishing practices, how their activities can impact the environment, and how to protect the species that inhabit their local waters. These activities also provide an opportunity for fishermen to discuss the difficulties they face in their daily activities and to find potential solutions to mitigate these issues. The success of these activities relies on the ability to engage fishermen and make them aware of the importance of their role in protecting the marine environment. It is only through awareness-raising activities that fishermen will be able to gain the knowledge and understanding necessary to ensure the protection of marine species and habitats. Meetings are conducted with the fishermen in different locations like: Zvernec, Vlore, Himara and Saranda area. Other participants in these meetings were the representatives from local associations, CELIM Albania, representatives from RAPA Vlore, International expert on marine species, especially sharks.

AWARENESS OF GENERAL PUBLIC

Two educational sessions, are conducted respectively in the schools 'Elite', and 'Numër 1' in Vlora, as well as 'Hasan Tahsin', and '9 Tetori' in Saranda, our team held a presentation on the journey and history of this charismatic species, its morphological features and threats that face due to various factors. It was admiring to see the interest and curiosity these children had about learning more about this endangered aquatic mammal.

Together with their teachers they eagerly welcomed and got involved in some educational games that are produced in the framework of the project which differ from the usual teaching methods, as well as expressed their willingness to be part of future activities, in support of the protection of habitats and aquatic species that take shelter near our shores.

To each school it was distributed: Board games, Salt Paper game, posters and leaflets.

The educational sessions were carried out in May in which 4 schools and 117 students in total were included in the educational session. Around 130 children were well informed about the presence of the unique species in their hometown.



NEXT STEP

The PPNEA team's next step is to use camera traps to provide evidence of the presence of the monk seal. This will be beneficial for both the fishermen, who are the most important stakeholders, as well as the research team, by providing fundamental data about the species' ecology and potentially capturing wonderful images of the monk seal in its natural habitat. It would be beneficial for conducting awareness meetings with the fishermen community and with different target groups.



WORLD WETLANDS DAY 2022

INTERNATIONAL WEBINAR: CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF WETLANDS IN THE BLACK SEA AND MEDITERRANEAN REGION

This webinar was organized by the PPNEA in collaboration with the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB), and Bulgarian Biodiversity Fund in the framework of World Wetlands Day aiming to raise awareness of the vital role of wetlands for people and our planet. Despite the incredible services they provide, our precious wetlands continue to be lost to new unsustainable developments.

Chapter V

A Year of Environmental Consciousness in Forest Ecosystems and Large Carnivore Conservation



BALKAN LYNX RECOVERY PROGRAMME



COUNTRY:
ALBANIA

FUNDING:
EURONATUR

CONTACT:
Bledi Hoxha, b.hoxha@ppnea.org

The Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme has been active for over 16 years and is implemented in cooperation with partners EuroNatur, KORA, Macedonian Ecological Society and ERA Group.

OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE 1

The Balkan lynx status, distribution and trend are continuously known.

OBJECTIVE 2

All relevant authorities, stakeholder groups and the public are continuously informed about the delicate Balkan lynx status and project activities

OBJECTIVE 3

New National Action Plans for the Balkan lynx are drafted and adopted and implementation has started

OBJECTIVE 4

Munella PA is supported in the development and implementation of a high-quality Management Plan



PROGRAMMS AND STRATEGIES:

1 Research & Monitoring and Reinforcement planning & piloting

2 Communication & education

3 Policy, legal compliance & law enforcement

4 Natural resource management / Protected Areas Network

IMPLEMENTATION FOR 2022



MONITORING EFFORTS WITH CAMERA TRAPPING

End of 2021- mid July 2022, BLRP team set overall 20 camera traps a central north, Munella Nature Park, and south-east, Polis-Gur i Zi – Valamara ecosystem region and in Prespa NP. The aim of this survey was to monitor the lynx presence in two nuclei Balkan lynx areas in the autumn/early winter season and provide its presence in the new potential lynx area such as Prespa NP. This monitoring is conducted with the collaboration of Elbasan and Korca RAPA staff. Due to the difficulties of the weather and road conditions, cameras have been checked not in a systematically way every month but for longer than one month. The results from the extensive survey from November 2021 – July 2022, were great and amazing related to lynx presence, prey and other large mammals, confirming for the first time the lynx presence in Albanian Prespa National Park. In Munella PA, 2 lynx pictures have been taken, while in Polis - Gur i Zi - Valamara surprised us by obtaining 9 lynx pictures from 6 camera traps set in this ecosystem. This is a promising result for the continuation of the existence of the lynx population in this area. Also, a great result of this study was proving the chamois' presence in Valamara mountain. Besides lynx, we obtained other large carnivore species like brown bear and wolf and other large and medium mammals like roe deer, chamois, wild boar, wild cat and etc.

The habitat destruction in this area is quite active (by destroying the ancient lakes taking the water and use for HPP, also in Stravaj and Gur i Zi area there is intensive logging). So, this area requests a special focus to implement threat reduction activity in the ground.



DECLARATION OF MUNELLA NATURE PARK



After a long time of lobbying work for the proclamation of Munella Mountain, home of Balkan lynx, was officially declared as Nature Park with the No. 60, dated 26.1.2022, for the declaration of Natural Ecosystems, Natural Reserves Managed/Nature Park (Category IV). Munella Nature Park has an official size of 20760 ha and is under the management and administration of the National Agency of Protected Areas and three Regionals Agencies of Protected Areas such as Shkodra, Lezha and Kukes.

The next conservation action that could guarantee the Balkan lynx protection and its population recovery in the long term in Munella region and beyond is developing a high-quality management plan. PPNEA is lobbying and supporting the relevant institutions to establish a working group that will be led by the National Agency of Protected Areas in Albania for developing the Management Plan as an important major milestone of the Balkan Lynx Project.

The small population of the Balkan lynx discovered in Munella region is suffering a lot from direct threats such as poaching, habitat destruction and the low number of its prey population. Unfortunately, the new threat will affect negatively the lynx habitat in the region. Public information is very scarce, but from different communication channels, PPNEA found out about the plans for building an eolic park in Munella area. It goes without saying that this will be a substantial threat to the very few Balkan lynx left in Albania as the location of this future eolic park is right into the middle of Balkan lynx territory. We actually have plenty of camera-trap pictures taken over several years on that very mountain ridge where this development is supposed to happen.





GENETIC WORKSHOPS

Genetic studies carried out for the Balkan lynx population, showed that it has the lowest nuclear diversity levels amongst all Eurasian lynx populations, this could be another threat that could negatively affect the health of the population and its reproduction. Considering the critical situation, BLRP team organised a genetic workshop from 2-3 November 2022 in Switzerland, and gathered renowned geneticists. The workshop discussed reinforcing feline populations with the aim of investigating the possibilities of strengthening the population, discussing the current state of knowledge, identifying gaps and means to fill them. Following the workshop, PPNEA had a meeting with the Tourism and Environment Ministry to inform about inbreeding as a threat where relevant institutions need to be informed and involved by giving support in order to prevent it.



© PPNEA | BLRP





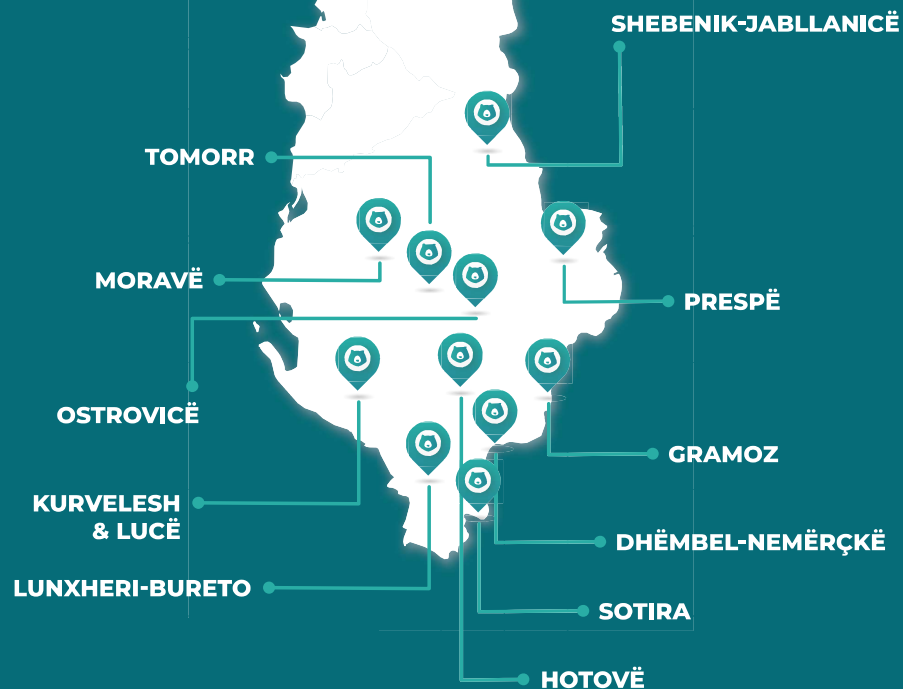
REFORESTATION ACTION IN MUNELLA MOUNTAIN

On December 27th and 28th, PPNEA alongside the group of volunteers, planted more than 1000 saplings in the Munella Mountain, which is the home of the critically endangered Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*). The initiative was started by an engaged supporter of PPNEA, who opened a call for donations on the platform GO FUND ME, from which we funded at least 50% of the saplings. The rest was sponsored by PPNEA and HBS Tirana, which organized the group of volunteers on the forestation action. Even though many more trees are needed to restore the ecosystem there, these saplings were a first step to many more forestation actions that we are going to implement in the future.

TRIPOINT BROWN BEAR (TBB)

COUNTRY:

ALBANIA



FUNDING:

FONDAZIONE CAPELLINO & FUNDS OF EACH PARTNER ORGANIZATION.

THE PROJECT IS IMPLEMENTED IN COOPERATION WITH PARTNERS: EURONATUR, MACEDONIAN ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY & CALLISTO.

CONTACTS:

Bledi Hoxha / b.hoxha@ppnea.org

Sabina Çano / s.cano@ppnea.org

GOALS

The aim of the project is to ensure the conservation of the brown bear in the cross-border area between Albania, North Macedonia, and Greece as part of the Pindo-Dinaric population. The TBB aims to gather intel about brown bear habitats, their quality, and the drivers of current and future fragmentation.

01

Ensuring the necessary support for the transboundary management of the brown bear from the relevant authorities and interested parties;

02

Identification of hotspots of habitat fragmentation and development of recommendations for their mitigation (creation of protected areas, wildlife corridors, and passage structures);

03

Creation of structures to ensure coexistence between bears and humans, namely bear population monitoring teams and bear emergency teams.



PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN ALBANIA (PPNEA) IMPLEMENTED THE “TRIPOINT BROWN BEAR (TBB)” PROJECT FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE BROWN BEAR AND ITS HABITATS.

The Brown bear is the largest carnivore species in Europe. Once present all over Europe, today bears are extinct in most of the Western European countries and many remnant populations are tiny and fragmented. Brown bears in Europe are clustered into 10 populations. Brown bears in North Macedonia, Albania, and Greece are part of the Dinaric-Pindos population that is expanding from the Alps in the north to the Pindos Mountains in the south with an estimated total number of circa 3000 individuals.

Although bears are classified as carnivores, in Europe they are actually omnivorous and mostly feed on food resources of plant origin (85-95% of a bear's annual diet). Brown bears prefer old broadleaf forests (oak and beech forests) and mixed coniferous and broadleaved forests with openings and rich undergrowth of fruit bushes and orchards.

PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES:

01
OBJECTIVE

> By mid of 2023, the support of relevant governmental and civil society stakeholders of the cooperation for bear and habitat conservation has been secured in each of the three countries.

02
OBJECTIVE

> By mid of 2023 hot spots of present and future habitat fragmentation have been identified for the 3 countries and concrete recommendations for protected areas, connectivity corridors, and crossing structures (as mitigation measures) are elaborated and presented to relevant authorities and stakeholders.

03
OBJECTIVE

> By mid of 2023 pilot population monitoring areas have been selected and stakeholders trained in monitoring methods.

04
OBJECTIVE

> By mid of 2023 Bear Emergency Teams will be trained in all three countries.

TIMEFRAME

APRIL 2022 – SEPTEMBER 2023

IMPLEMENTATION:

APRIL 4TH, 2022 THE KICK-OFF MEETING

The Kick-Off meeting between five TBB PPNEA staff members and a GIS expert was done with the purpose of familiarizing the participants with the project and its objectives, as well as the relevant activities. Additionally, the availability of existing data from their past projects and those collected by other relevant institutions in the TBB study area was discussed. Moreover, the GIS expert outlined the Protected Areas in the country, Natura 2000 and Emerald areas, and the existing and planned grey infrastructure in relation to hotspot habitat fragmentation.



SEPTEMBER 7, 2022, KORÇA FIRST CONSULTATIVE MEETING/WORKSHOP.



The meeting was attended by 10 participants, PPNEA staff engaged in the implementation of the project, participants from the Regional Hunters' Associations of Korça, Pogradec and Devoll, the Librazhdi Beekeepers' Association, Pylli i Blertë Environmental Association, Enkelana Pogradec Association, Agri-EN NGO, Regional Administration of Protected Areas of Korça and the Directorates of Forests and Pastures of Prenjas and Devoll Municipalities.

The main topics discussed at the meeting were the current state of the brown bear population in Albania, the challenges, and the importance of preserving the species in the country.

SEPTEMBER 12, 2022, BERAT MEETING IN BERAT



The meeting was attended by PPNEA staff engaged in the implementation of the project, participants from the Regional Associations of Hunters of Kuçova, Berat, Poliçan and Skrapar, the Albanian National Federation for Hunting and Conservation, the Regional Administration of Protected Areas of Berat and Gjirokastra and the Municipalities of Berat, Dimal and Skrapar.

EVALUATION

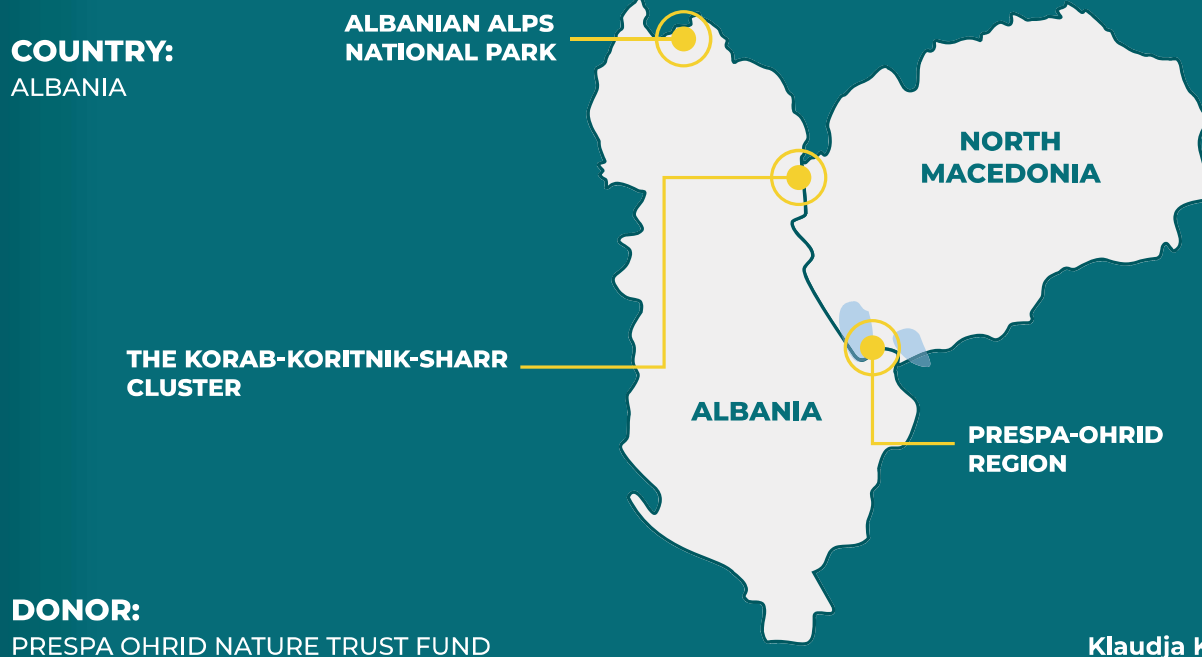
By the end of 2021, the support of relevant governmental and civil society stakeholders in the cooperation for brown bear and habitat conservation has been secured in each of the three countries. During 2022, PPNEA identified and prepared a list of local and national core stakeholders and different institutions that were relevant to build cooperation and working together on the brown bear and its habitat protection within study areas.

- The National Agency of Protected Areas
- Municipalities
- Universities
- 4 Regional Agencies of Protected Areas (Korça, Elbasan, Berat and Gjirokastra)
- Hunting Federation in Albania
- Hunter Associations and local NGOs

NEXT STEP

- PPNEA will continue lobbying work with GOs to get the green light for signing the TBB MoU in which it will be sending the final version of the TBB MoU to the MTE.
- Merge the monitoring and BET protocols to be in the same line with all international partners.
- Increasing the capacity of the relevant institutions for brown bear monitoring.

FEASIBILITY STUDY ON ENHANCING CONNECTIVITY CONSERVATION IN THE PONT FOCUS REGION: ALBANIA AND NORTH MACEDONIA



FEASIBILITY STUDY ON ENHANCING CONNECTIVITY CONSERVATION IN THE PONT FOCUS REGION: ALBANIA AND NORTH MACEDONIA

To assess the options and opportunities for PONT's contribution to enhancing conservation connectivity between the three main clusters of protected areas in the PONT Focus Region: Wider Prespa-Ohrid Region, the Korab-Koritnik-Sharr cluster, and the Albanian Alps National Park.

Bio corridors and connectivity conservation areas represent new concepts of work in Albania and the Balkans region. PONT announced the plan to expand to new geographic regions in Albania and North Macedonia, recognizing the importance of great uninterrupted habitats for wildlife. PPNEA from Albania and MES from North Macedonia, were mandated by PONT to conduct a feasibility study, from April to August 2022. A team of ecologists and social scientists, experts from two countries were established to design the methodology and data analysis for three mammal species selected (lynx, brown bear,

For the realization of the study, the team conducted analysis of already existing data, but also organized fieldwork for confirmation, as well as stakeholder consultation workshops in the north and southeastern region of Albania. As a result, three bio-corridors were selected in Albania, named "Cukal-Munelle-Balgjaj-Martanesh" and "Black Drini river basin" in north Albania, and "Polis-Valamare-Rungaje-Morave-Gramoz" located in the south part of Albania. For all interested parties, there is available information in PONT website in the form of a Scoping report and the full report containing descriptions of the selected, priority ecological corridors between the three main clusters of protected areas in the PONT Focus Region.

The feasibility study opened up the opportunity for project applications, which resulted in support for support to national CSOs to work on the governance and management aspects of connectivity conservation areas.

Chapter VI

Winds of Change: Wildlife and Habitat Protection



PROTECTED AREAS FOR NATURE AND PEOPLE (PA4NP)

OBJECTIVES:

- 1 Improving national policies for Protected Area management and biodiversity conservation;
- 2 Strengthening the accountability of decision-makers;
- 3 Raising awareness of the importance of protected areas and biodiversity in general;
- 4 Promoting and supporting civic activism; and
- 5 Increasing the participation of local communities in the management of protected areas.

FUNDING:

SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY (SIDA), WWF ADRIA

PARTNERS:

PPNEA, WWF ADRIA, LOCAL COLLABORATORS

CONTACTS:

Olsion Lama, o.lama@ppnea.org,
Ledi Selgjekaj, l.selgjekaj@ppnea.org

PARTNERSHIPS STRENGTHENED IN SHEBENIK NATIONAL PARK AND KORAB KORITNIK NATURE PARK THROUGH PA4NP PROJECT

The work of Protected Areas for Nature and People during the year 2022 continued by supporting the Management Committee of Shebenik National Park, the Regional Administration of Protected Areas (RAPA) Elbasan and extended to the Korab-Koritnik Nature Park by collaborating with the Regional Administration of Protected Areas Kukes. Three meetings of the Management Committees, one in the Elbasan region and the other two in the Kukes region have taken place.

OUTPUTS

- | Preparation and approval of the revised Action Plan, part of the Management Plan
- | Preparation and approval of revised internal regulations for the Park's Management Committee
- | Organization of two meetings with the Management Committees of Protected Areas Kukes
- | Several new partnerships were created and strengthened with local and national organizations such as the Bulqiza Nature and Tourism Association, Institute for Change and Leadership in Albania, LAG Korab-Koritnik, Environment Protection and Tourism Development, and Ecologist of the Region.

"EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION OF NATURE", A 5-DAY TRAINING FOR PROTECTED AREAS SPECIALISTS IN ALBANIA

Outdoor education is of fundamental importance for the development of children's personality, as it helps them to establish connections with nature, from an early age. Educators play multiple roles, also being mentors for children to bring them closer to nature and contribute to creating future active citizens. This important message was conveyed to the education officers of the 12 Regional Administrations of Protected Areas in Albania, as well as 2 National Parks from Kosovo; "Sharr" and "Bjeshket e Nemuna" National Parks, during the 5-day training organized by PPNEA and WWF Adria, in Shebenik National Park.

Through educational activities from experiential learning in nature, as well as the organization of games, participants experienced different educational activities outdoors, just as students would experience them, in such educational sessions. Throughout the training, exploring nature and identifying species, using various but simple tools, such as birdwatching in the area, were examples of activities that helped increase knowledge about the ecosystems in general and relationships between the living organisms. Important activities were also role-playing games, such as the creation of imaginary national parks, the criteria for declaration, and the roles of a manager of protected areas. This beautiful experience was concluded with an expedition of the participating group to the Ice Cave, a natural monument, in the magical landscape of the Shebenik National Park.

RESULTS

- | 5-day training delivered
- | 18 PA staff trained on outdoor education



NATIONAL TRAINING FOR RAPAS ON FOREST BIRD MONITORING METHODS

PPNEA organized a 2-day training in Shebenik National Park, with the participation of 12 representatives from the Regional Administrations of Protected Areas in Albania, and one representative from the National Agency of Protected Areas with a focus on the increase of knowledge and capacity building of all the respective institutions on forest bird monitoring.

The training on forest birds was led by the Slovenian expert Tomaz Mihelic from DOPPS Birdlife Slovenia and PPNEA covering topics such as the importance of birds as indicators of forest ecosystems health, as well as the monitoring methods/methodology for the study of forest birds, including woodpeckers, owls, capercaillie, and hazel grouse.

The increase of capacities of the respective institutions contributes to more effective monitoring or management of the network of protected areas.

RESULTS

- | 2-day training delivered
- | 12 PA staff and 6 PPNEA staff trained on forest bird monitoring methods



SUPPORTING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND NGOS IN SHEBENIK NATIONAL PARK FOR ENHANCING NATURE CONSERVATION

The local community's participation is crucial to the management of protected areas. Aiming at building the capacity of local/social groups to improve their socio-economic well-being and increase the involvement of local communities in decision-making processes in order to improve cooperation between local communities and protected areas, the program concentrated on local NGOs and associations that contribute to the protection of nature by using sustainable practices. Two workshops were organized in Shebenik National Park in order to promote the work that was done for the investigative reports and "syrigjelber.info" platform, as well as to share information about the granting scheme of WWF Adria, and to inform the participants on how to apply for these grants.



RESULTS

- | 10 participants from 9 different local organizations informed about WWF granting procedures
- | 2 NGOs received project support
- | 40 participants informed about the syrigjelber.info platform
- | More than 40 participants were informed about the investigative report on illegal hunting in Albania.

BALKAN DETOXLIFE



COUNTRY:

ALBANIA, NORTH MACEDONIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, SERBIA, GREECE, BULGARIA, CROATIA

FUNDING:

MAVA, EURONATUR, WHITLEY FUND FOR NATURE,
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY FUND

PARTNERS:

PPNEA, MES, NASE PTICE, BPSSS, HOS, FWFF, BIOM, AOSPPNEA, MES, NASE PTICE, BPSSS, HOS, FWFF,
BIOM, AOSPPNEA, MES, NASE PTICE, BPSSS, HOS, FWFF, BIOM, AOS

CONTACT:

Ledi Selgjekaj, l.selgjekaj@ppnea.org

Emir Gjyzeli, e.gjyzeli@ppnea.org

GOAL

“Strengthen national capacities to fight wildlife poisoning and raise awareness about the problem in the Balkan countries”

OBJECTIVES

Improve management of poisoning incidents and achieve a significant reduction of mortality of vultures and other affected species caused by wildlife poisoning by ensuring real and continued engagement of relevant governmental authorities in combating this issue and labeling it as a socially unacceptable occurrence in the eyes of the general public.

Time to stop

Illegal wildlife poisoning!

It harms us, our animals and nature.

BALKAN DETOXLIFE

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT IN 2022:

TIMELINE | 01.10.2020 – 30.09.2025

ADOPTION OF NATIONAL ANTI-POISONING ROAD MAP IN ALBANIA

In 2022, two consecutive meetings with the National Anti-Poisoning Workgroup (APWG) have been held, with representatives from MoTE, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the State Police, the National Inspectorate for the Protection of Territory, Academic institutions as well as CSO's working for nature conservation. The National Anti-Poison Working Group (NAWG) constitutes the government's advisory body on issues regarding the illegal use of poison baits. The aim of these meetings included the formalization of the APWG, its members and roles, and the formalization of the Road Map, which represents the main political document that consists of actions eliminating the use of poison baits in Albania.

The finalized Road Map includes 5 main objectives: 1. Understand the scale, root causes, and consequences of the illegal use of poison bait, 2. Prevent, deter, survey/monitor the illegal use of poison, 3. Ensure prosecution efficiency for the illegal use of poison baits, 4. Control the sale of toxic substances likely to be used for preparing poison bait, 5. Ensuring administrative action for the protection of biodiversity and improvement of coordination and cooperation among all relevant bodies.

The Road map has been sent to the MoTe and is waiting for final approval and incorporation into our legislation. The adoption of this tool aims to ensure the continuous engagement of governmental authorities in combating illegal wildlife poisoning.

STUDY ABOUT THE ILLEGAL USE OF POISON IN THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE BALKAN PENINSULA

This study is designed to provide a clear and up-to-date overview of the current circumstances regarding the illegal use of poisonous substances and the detrimental effects this illegal practice has on vulture populations and other wildlife species in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Serbia. Additionally, it represents a baseline for monitoring the impact that actions implemented within the BalkanDetox project and other similar conservation initiatives towards diminishing the threat of illegal wildlife poisoning will have in the region, as well as monitoring the change in perception about this practice among key stakeholder groups and socio-economic impact.



PARTICIPATION IN MOBILE PASTORALISM AND VULTURES REGIONAL WORKSHOP, N. MACEDONIA

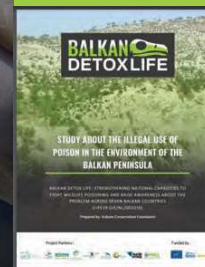
PNNEA and AgroEkodibra from Albania participated in the Mobile Pastoralism and Vultures event, organized jointly by Yolda Initiative, Vulture Conservation Foundation, EuroNatur, and Macedonian Ecological within the framework of the BalkanDetox LIFE project.

The event was held in October 2022 and included thematic presentations and working group sessions to co-create a new understanding between mobile pastoralists, vulture conservationists, and conservation authorities, based on respect and dialogue by offering a space for exchanging knowledge and experiences. Furthermore, all participants learned more from each other and co-developed new ideas, actions, and collaborations for the future of the conservation of vultures and mobile pastoralism in the Balkans and Europe, and beyond.

Last but not least, the workshop helped to explore traditional and novel predator control strategies and poison-free techniques to mitigate poisoning, mutually beneficial solutions minimizing the mortality of vultures, possible advocacy actions that enable policy changes recognizing the value of mobile pastoralism and vultures for each other and for the common welfare.



EVALUATION OF THE CHANGE OF PERCEPTION ABOUT THE PRACTICE OF INTENTIONAL USE OF POISON FOR ERADICATING UNDESIRABLE WILDLIFE AND OTHER ANIMALS



A study has been held with local communities in southern Albania about the use of poison baits. In the country, the research included 100 respondents to the survey questionnaires, which consisted from livestock/cattle breeders, agricultural production farmers, rangers, veterinarians, and policemen in hotspot areas of poisoning. The results of this study show that the major people mostly resort to poisoning to resolve conflicts with wildlife, most often predators such as foxes, wolves, and bears in order to reduce the damages that these animals may inflict upon livestock and other agricultural practices. The respondents' knowledge related to the causes of vulture poisoning is limited and unclear, as the majority identify poison baits intended for other animals (29%) and consumption of poisoned animals (18%) as the key causes of vulture poisoning, which implies accidental poisoning, at the same time close to 50% of respondents believe that wildlife poisoning mostly occurs intentionally, with illegal poisons from the black market (36%) or by abuse of legal poisoning substances such as pesticides, insecticides, etc. Further activities aimed at increasing local community awareness about illegal wildlife poisoning will be carried out. An education and awareness campaign with a focus on alternative methods for solving human-wildlife conflicts will be implemented throughout the Balkan Detox project.





REPORT ANY ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME YOU ENCOUNTER ON THE PLATFORM SYRI I GJELBËR

PPNEA has redesigned the platform Syri Gjëlber. This website is dedicated to reporting environmental crimes throughout Albania. Its mission is to collect cases of environmental crime and report them to relevant institutions such as state inspectorates, municipalities, or regional administrations of Protected Areas. These crimes are present everywhere, in any action that damages the natural environment and everything in it, such as cutting down trees, illegal hunting, deliberate fires, poisoning, pollution of habitats, etc.

Now, we all have an opportunity to do what is right, to report any crime against the natural environment, helping preserve the extraordinary biodiversity values found in our country!

This platform processing was made possible in the framework of the "Protected Areas for Nature and People" project.



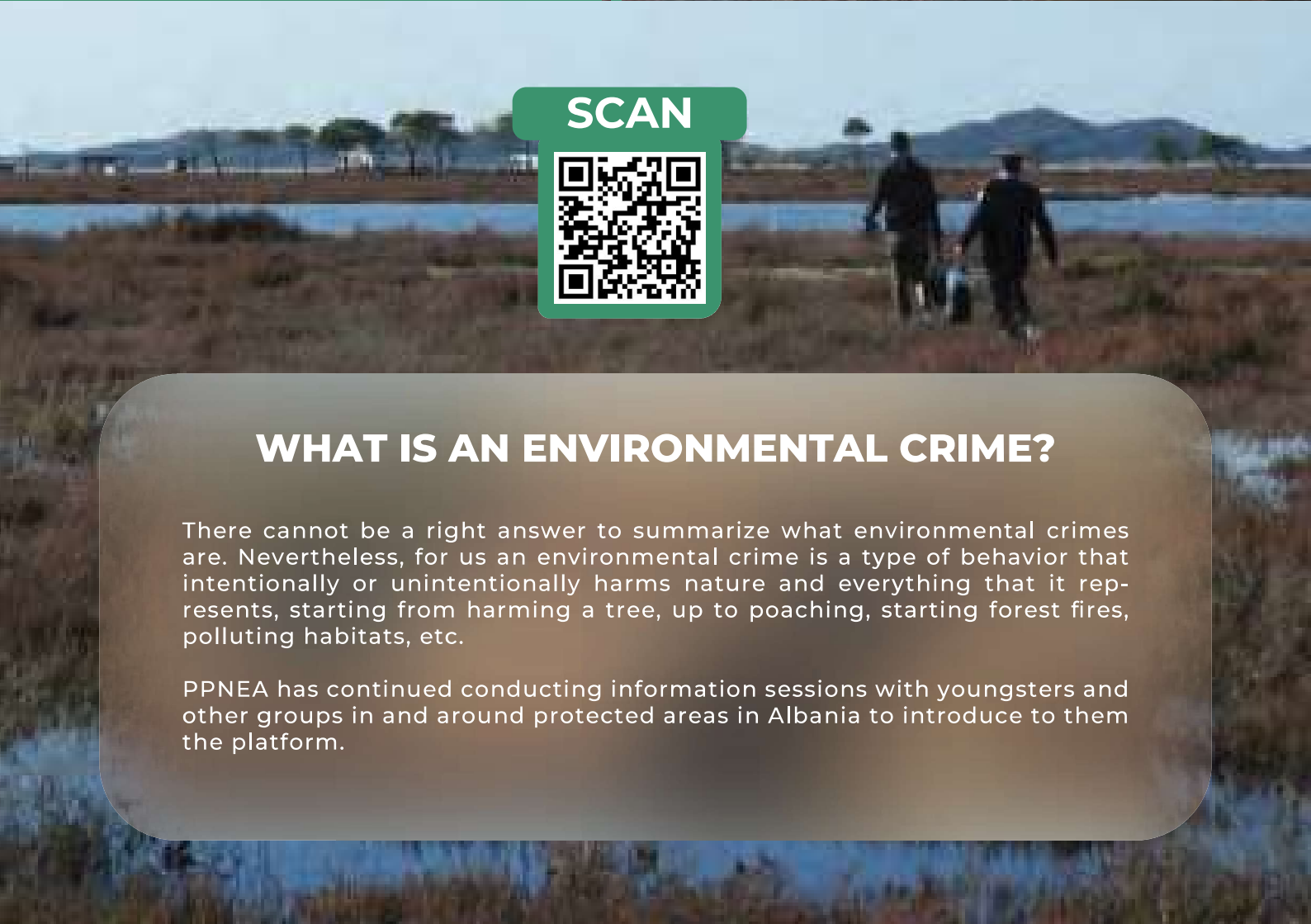
SCAN



WHAT IS AN ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME?

There cannot be a right answer to summarize what environmental crimes are. Nevertheless, for us an environmental crime is a type of behavior that intentionally or unintentionally harms nature and everything that it represents, starting from harming a tree, up to poaching, starting forest fires, polluting habitats, etc.

PPNEA has continued conducting information sessions with youngsters and other groups in and around protected areas in Albania to introduce to them the platform.





INVESTMENTS THAT ARE FADING HOPE OUT – A GLIMPSE INTO THE “ENVIRONMENTAL MASSACRE” TAKING PLACE IN DIVJAKA-KARAVASTA

Environmental crimes are gaining ground in Albania. The investigation and reporting of such crimes, however, can aid in preventing and handling them. With the support of PPNEA, investigative journalist Artan Rama has thoroughly investigated a case of illegal solar greenhouse construction within the borders of Divjake Karavasta National Park, one of the most significant wetlands for waterfowl in the nation and at the same time, a delicate natural ecosystem that is currently under severe threat. Since the Park's entire area is designated as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA), it is of worldwide significance.

However, none of the aforementioned reasons stopped the "strategic investors" from occupying 440,170 m² from the Divjake-Karavasta National Park illegally, but instead rushed to establish the construction site inside the protected area without a single piece of paper, an environmental permit, or a construction permit.

This investigative study reveals the illegal activity taking place in Divjake-Karavasta and the various ways in which Albanian government institutions are enabling the development of intensive agriculture within national parks, so impairing the natural integrity of these areas. Additionally, the stirring film "Investments that are fading hope out" presents the testimonies of the courageous few who are fighting to stay in the country.

Chapter VII

Unleashing the Power of Unity



SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR SHARR-KORAB-KORITNIK



PARKU NATYROR
"KORAB- KORITNIK"

COUNTRY:

ALBANIA, KOSOVO AND NORTH MACEDONIA IN THE TRILATERAL BORDER AREA
ALONG THE EUROPEAN GREEN BELT

FUNDING:

DEUTSCHE BUNDESSTIFTUNG UMWELT (DBU), AAGE V. JENSEN CHARITY FOUNDATION,
AND PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS EURONATUR, MACEDONIAN ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY (MES),
CONNECTING NATURAL VALUES AND PEOPLE (CNVP), AND PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION
OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN ALBANIA (PPNEA).

CONTACT:

Stephanie Gentle, s.gentle@ppnea.org
Sabina Çano, s.cano@ppnea.org
Olsion Lama, o.lama@ppnea.org

EVALUATION

Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA) is implementing the project "Sustainable Future for Sharr-Korab-Koritnik" to prepare the basis for sustainable development of the region and at the same time enable a sound and long-term conservation of the outstanding mountainous landscape.

The Sharr-Korab-Koritnik region is a transboundary area shared by Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia along the Balkan Green Belt. This mountainous area has high biodiversity characterized by many rare and endemic species. The area also possesses a valuable cultural heritage reflected in the landscape formed by traditional land use.

The core component of the project is the implementation and support of 13 model projects. Different supporting cross-border activities including training, workshops, regional conferences and thematic fairs will further improve the implementation as well as the transboundary cooperation, learning and exchange between the model projects.



GOALS

The project goal is to contribute to a sustainable regional development, combined with the reduction of threats to biodiversity in the Sharr-Korab-Koritnik region with the local population as main driver. The project has the following objectives:

- 1 Supporting sustainable regional development
- 2 Increasing engagement of local people
- 3 Reducing threats to biodiversity
- 4 Improving habitats
- 5 Strengthening transboundary cooperation, learning and exchange
- 6 Increasing visibility of the transboundary area

PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES:

The 13 model projects are thematically divided in three work packages: "Livestock & Bee keeping", "Forest fruits" and "Tourism".

Five model projects are being carried out in Albania. They address the following topics: support for traditional livestock keepers and beekeepers in the region, actions for the protection and cultivation of medicinal and aromatic plants, and regional development of nature-friendly tourism.

NOVEMBER 2-3, 2021 FIRST TRANSBOUNDARY ACTORS MEETING

This was the first transboundary meeting between all local actors involved in the project. The five local actors from Albania presented their project and the progress in the implementation.



1

MAY 27, 2022 LOCAL ACTION GROUP (LAG) KORAB KORITNIK MEETING

LAG Korab-Koritnik representatives participated in the LAG meeting held in Bustricë village. The Executive Director of LAG Korab-Koritnik was selected and the terms for the Executive Director position decided.



2

SEPTEMBER 28, 2022 ROUNDTABLE AND FAIR IN POPOVA SHAPKA



PPNEA participated in the roundtable discussion about the developments in the Sharr-Korab-Koritnik region in collaboration with EuroNatur, MES and CNVP. The roundtable was attended by different donors, organizations and institutions active in the region and served as a space for information exchange and to meet local actors of the region. Following the roundtable was the public fair to present the natural and cultural values of the region. The fair was an important platform to meet other local actors involved in the project, exchange ideas, and showcase their work and products to the public and to key project stakeholders.

3

NOVEMBER 24, 2022 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM EXCHANGE AT INFO-KULLA MIRDITË



PPNEA organized a site visit to Info-Kulla Mirditë as a knowledge exchange and promotional event in the framework of tourism. The focus of the event was to learn how the Info-Kulla Tourism Development Center is developing the region through ecotourism, and for local actors in the tourism work package to meet, present their work, and have interactive discussions important to the field of tourism.

4

JUNE 13-14, 2023 LAG WORKSHOP IN DRAGASH, KOSOVO

A capacity-building workshop among the three Local Action Groups from the Sharr-Korab-Koritnik region was held in Dragash, Kosovo. The primary objectives of the workshop were to build necessary capacity among LAGs, facilitate exchange and collaboration between different LAGs, and support and advance cross-border cooperation.



5

6

ONGOING SITE VISITS AND MONITORING TO MODEL PROJECTS

On a regular basis, PPNEA visits the various model project sites to get exposure to the local culture, understand the positive impact of the conservation investments on the communities, and identify any issues or concerns and recommend follow-up actions.


NEXT STEP

Between 29 September–2 October 2023, an evaluation of the successes and challenges of the project is to be carried out using the participatory MARISCO method (<https://www.marisco.training/>) for the assessment of risks and development potentials for ecosystems. The analysis is intended to show the potential effects of the approach as well as to identify future needs for action and promising options for action in the region. The results of the evaluation will guide the project proposal for the next phase.

LOCAL ACTION GROUPS “KORAB-KORITNIK” AND “VJONA”

Local Action Groups (LAGs) are decentralized institutions, composed of local, public, and/or private organisations, which aim at the sustainable economic development of the area where they operate, based on the EU LEADER approach. Following the successful story of the creation and establishment of LAG Korab-Koritnik, PPNEA through the PA4NP programme, worked at the creation and establishment of a new local action group- this time in the southern part of Albania. The main aim was to form a structure where the local community in the protected area of Vjose-Narta could become the main driver for sustainable development and nature protection.

In order to succeed in this activity, an external expert was contracted to contribute to the formation of such a structure. Immense work has been done for developing the methodology, identifying the main actors by conducting field trips in the focused area and organizing more than 15 meetings with the local community, etc. LAG VJONA was established by signing an MoU and has self organised to conduct activities, meetings, exchange visits in the region etc. to explore the opportunity of legalization of LAG VJONA.




AN ETHNOGRAPHICAL STUDY DEVELOPED ON THE LIVELIHOOD VALUES OF THE VJOSE-NARTE PROTECTED LANDSCAPE

An important and intensive work was done with the local community in the villages under the administrative unit of Novosele, municipality of Vlore. This was an ethnographic research which looked at the research question of what is it that brings together these communities and what is their relationship with the state and with nature. Thus, the ethnographic study looks at the state intervention history in this area, through investigation of memories, emotional attachment, personal and collective experiences of the inhabitants in relation to the state, and focusing specifically on the human-nature relationship and the role that state policies has had and whether or not the residents have an affective and economic connection with nature.

The main criteria for choosing this area for this study were: 1. proximity to the airport that is planned to be built, respectively in the territory of Akërni village; 2. the potential of sustainable economic development this area, taking into account the current and historical connection of the villages that make it up area; 3. taking as the main criteria of economic development, the potential of nature conservation.

The final study report was a result of more than ten community meetings, several interviews analyzed by Prof. Asoc. Dr Nebi Bardhoshi, anthropologist, who designed the study. The study conclusions, rather than stating findings or solutions, refer more to recommendations for the working group and the local network of collaborators for wildlife protection and who are thought simultaneously create conditions for the economic development of the area. Trust building, creation of an ecological culture, wildlife protection, cultural heritage followed by concrete short term and midterm sustainable development plans, stand among the main recommendations.



ENHANCING CONNECTIVITY AT THE BALKAN GREEN BELT IN ALBANIA AND NORTH MACEDONIA



COUNTRY:

ALBANIA AND NORTH MACEDONIA IN A CROSS-BORDER MODEL REGION SHEBENIK-JABLLANICË

FUNDING:

GERMAN FEDERAL ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY'S ADVISORY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME (AAP) FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN THE COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE, THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES NEIGHBOURING THE EUROPEAN UNION.

CONTACT:

Stephanie Gentle, s.gentle@ppnea.org;

Emir Gjyzeli, e.gjyzeli@ppnea.org;

Dea Zyruku, d.zyruku@ppnea.org

The Balkan Green Belt (BGB) is essential for the development of Green Infrastructure (GI) at the EU-level. The goal of the project is a developed BGB with secured connectivity of GI in the cross-border pilot region Shebenik-Jabllanicë and outside the protected area. For this it is necessary to improve legislation and implementation of land use planning along the BGB, with a focus on Albania and North Macedonia.

PPNEA, in collaboration with the project team from Macedonian Ecological Society (MES) and EuroNatur, is identifying gaps and needs for adaptation of the national legal frameworks and working closely with national and regional key stakeholders to improve the legislation and implementation of spatial and land use planning. PPNEA and MES are facilitating training courses to support capacity building in the relevant ministries, leading a national project steering group to ensure technical coordination with decision makers in both countries, and working with a team of experts in Green Infrastructure and Spatial Planning to elaborate recommendations for the improvement of concrete planning processes on the municipality level. The intensive exchange of information between the departments responsible for spatial planning prepares the harmonization of national procedures in the pilot region.

GOALS

The primary goal of the project is to contribute to the improvement of spatial and land use planning along the BGB, for the long-term goal of preserving and improving the connectivity and biodiversity of the BGB.

PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES

The program is organized into five work packages. Each work package is further divided into activities.



WORK PACKAGE 1:

Coordination with the project steering group



WORK PACKAGE 2:

Improvement of the knowledge base regarding spatial and land use planning and GI in the target countries.



WORK PACKAGE 3:

Capacity building and knowledge regarding land use planning and green infrastructure



WORK PACKAGE 4:

Development of a model example in the cross-border context in the region Shebenik-Jabllanicë



WORK PACKAGE 5:

Increase civil society awareness of the importance of connectivity/green infrastructure and land use planning and participation opportunities in these.

IMPLEMENTATION:

01

Creation and engagement of a national steering committee.

02

Improved knowledge of existing country-specific legislation on land use planning and GI, and implementation of the framework set by the EU.

03

Strengthened capacities regarding the concept of GI and its implementation in the context of land use planning through trained representatives of relevant institutions at the national level, strengthened transnational network.



04

Knowledge and capacity building on the concept of GI and its implementation in land use planning by trained representatives of relevant institutions at local/regional level, strengthened cross-border cooperation at local/regional level.



05

Drafted a national report on green infrastructure in Albania.

06

Increased awareness of civil society for the importance of connectivity/green infrastructure, the role of landscape planning for its implementation, and participation opportunities in the planning process.

07

Increased the visibility of the Green Belt and the knowledge of its importance in the local communities. Local people learned more about their community's role within a larger context in Europe.



EVALUATION

By the end of 2022, the support of relevant national and regional stakeholders in the cooperation for Green Infrastructure and Spatial Planning is achieved.

DURING 2022, PPNEA ORGANIZED TEN ACTIVITIES INCLUDING:

Engagement of the national and local institution representatives through the project Steering Committee, workshops and training.

Supported the elaboration of a report on EU-level legislation related to spatial planning and green infrastructure.

Drafted national report on green infrastructure in Albania.

Increased the knowledge on GI among national and local government representatives, academics and relevant decision makers through workshops and discussions during the work on the national report on GI.

Increased the engagement of the local institutions that work in environmental protection, such as the Regional Agency of Protected Areas, municipalities in the Albanian side of the pilot region (Librazhd, Prrenjas, Bulqize) and local NGOs.

Increased the awareness of villagers who live in Rajcë and the surrounding region within the Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park boundaries through the European Green Belt days celebration.

NEXT STEPS

PPNEA and project partners are planning a Study Visit with the participation of select members of the Steering Committee from each country to travel to a location in Western Europe and see good examples of Green Infrastructure. Continue to encourage local key stakeholders to apply for funding opportunities to continue the work of the project through small grants.



Chapter VIII

The Power of Volunteers Champions of Environmental Consciousness



The Power of Volunteers Champions of Environmental Consciousness

In this chapter, we celebrate the invaluable contributions of our dedicated volunteers who have wholeheartedly embraced environmental consciousness. Their passion, commitment, and unwavering support have been instrumental in driving our organization's mission forward. Together, we have made significant strides in protecting and preserving our planet, thanks to the relentless efforts of these remarkable individuals.

I INSPIRING THE CALL TO ACTION:

Our volunteers are the driving force behind the environmental movement, inspiring others to take action. Through their tireless efforts, they have shown that every individual can make a meaningful difference. Their unwavering dedication ignites the spark of environmental consciousness in communities far and wide.

I AMPLIFYING AWARENESS:

Volunteers play a vital role in raising awareness about pressing environmental issues. They actively engage with the public, organizing educational campaigns, and hosting community events that encourage people to embrace sustainable practices. By sharing their knowledge and passion, they empower others to become active stewards of the environment.

I ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION:

Our volunteers are passionate advocates for environmental education. They collaborate with schools, universities, and local organizations to develop and deliver educational programs that foster environmental consciousness among students of all ages. Through workshops, seminars, and interactive initiatives, they equip future generations with the knowledge and skills needed to create a sustainable future.

I CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION:

From reforestation efforts to coastal clean-ups, our volunteers are at the forefront of conservation and restoration projects. They actively participate in hands-on initiatives, dedicating countless hours to protecting and restoring our natural habitats. Their unwavering commitment to preserving biodiversity and combating climate change serves as a shining example for all.

I SUSTAINABLE LIVING AMBASSADORS:

Our volunteers not only talk the talk but also walk the walk. They embrace sustainable living practices in their daily lives, becoming ambassadors for eco-friendly choices. By leading through example, they inspire others to adopt greener habits and promote a more sustainable lifestyle.

I ADVOCACY AND POLICY INFLUENCE:

Volunteers leverage their collective voices to advocate for stronger environmental policies and regulations. They collaborate with like-minded organizations, engage in public consultations, and actively participate in community meetings. Their efforts have been instrumental in driving positive change at the local, regional, and national levels.

Together, we will continue to inspire!

VOLUNTEER

.....
**HELP OUR NATURE
BY FINDING A VOLUNTEER
ROLE WITHIN PPNEA**
.....



As a Volunteer of PPNEA, your time, talent, and skills help conserve the diversity of life in our country! Your involvement with us can help with expanding existing projects and with the development of new initiatives. The support of our Volunteers is vital to our success.

Volunteering brings lots of enthusiasm, skills, and interests. At the same time, you learn and discover new skills too. There are practical tasks like wildlife surveys and various conservation tasks, volunteering can also mean leading walks or hikes for the public and helping visitors enjoy themselves in the great Albanian outdoors.

This is a great way to gain a different experience of our nature and to contribute to something you care about.

If you have some time, no matter how small, and the commitment to help us, consider yourself part of the team.

APPLY NOW



VOLUNTEERISM IS THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE PUT INTO ACTION.

**THESE ACTIONS SHAPE AND MOLD THE PRESENT
INTO A FUTURE OF WHICH WE CAN ALL BE PROUD.**

As we see it...

