

# PPNEA ANNUAL REPORT 2023



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Editor:

Light and Moving

“Albania is Biodiversity” by Kleidi Eski

PPNEA COPYRIGHT

Lorena Pyze Xhafaj

*Communications and Public Relations Officer*

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## PPNEA COPYRIGHT

**For** over 32 years, PPNEA has led environmental conservation in Albania since its establishment in 1991 as the country's pioneer non-governmental environmental organization, dedicated to protecting and preserving the natural environment.

PPNEA focuses on conservation efforts in challenging regions, engaging in various projects, conducting research on wildlife and habitats, organizing educational programs, and advocating for nature conservation.

This annual report details PPNEA's journey throughout 2023, highlighting its continued dedication since 1991 to protecting and preserving Albania's natural environment for future generations.

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## OUR VISION

PPNEA works towards bringing harmony between nature and human society in Albania

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## OUR MISSION

Our 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.




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## PPNEA'S 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).



**Ariel Brunner,**  
Director,  
BirdLife Europe & Central Asia

“It is with excitement and hope that we welcome PPNEA into the BirdLife Partnership. PPNEA’s deep-rooted commitment to protecting Albania’s natural heritage makes them a vital addition to our global conservation efforts.

At BirdLife, we firmly believe that lasting change stems from strong, national civil society organisations that work both locally and in unison on a global scale. With PPNEA now part of the BirdLife family, we are confident that together we will have an even greater positive impact on nature conservation, not just in Albania, but across the region and beyond. We look forward to the meaningful contributions PPNEA will bring, and to the transformative successes we will achieve together for biodiversity and the future of our planet.”

## Dr. Aleksandër Trajçe

Director, PPNEA  
BirdLife Albania

**2023** stands out as a pivotal year for PPNEA, marked by significant milestones in our mission to protect Albania’s natural heritage. While our ongoing efforts to conserve threatened species like the Balkan lynx, brown bear, Egyptian vulture, and Dalmatian pelican remain at the heart of our work, two landmark achievements define this year.

First, PPNEA was honored to become the official BirdLife International partner for Albania, integrating us into a global network of over 115 national organizations. This affiliation not only elevates our role in the global conservation community but also enhances our capacity to protect Albania’s rich biodiversity. As the representative of BirdLife in Albania, we now join a collective that spans continents and ecosystems, with a shared commitment to both nature and humanity. This partnership brings new responsibilities, especially as Albania faces the dual challenges of rapid development and the preservation of its natural heritage. Through this collaboration, we have a valuable opportunity to exchange knowledge and implement best practices from across the globe, further strengthening our efforts to conserve wildlife and habitats in Albania.

Secondly, 2023 will be remembered as the year of our most successful public engagement campaign to date – the “Albania is Biodiversity” campaign. This initiative captured the public’s imagination with a stunning mosaic installation at Skanderbeg Square in Tirana, showcasing Albania’s flagship and endangered species of fauna. For three weeks in October, PPNEA’s team and volunteers engaged thousands of citizens and visitors, raising awareness about the country’s biodiversity and the urgent need for conservation. The overwhelming public interest in our work has reinvigorated our efforts and expanded our supporter base, amplifying the voice of nature in Albania.

In addition to these achievements, 2023 marks a strategic shift in our conservation approach.



PPNEA has embraced ecological connectivity as a critical element in our efforts to preserve Albania’s biodiversity. Alongside traditional conservation methods, we are focusing on maintaining and restoring ecological connectivity across wider landscapes. This approach is essential in the face of global challenges like climate change, as it supports the long-term functioning of ecosystems and the conservation of numerous species. With substantial support from PONT, we are currently implementing an initiative on Connectivity Conservation Areas (CCAs) in Albania. This initiative aims to create a framework for managing CCAs at both broad and fine scales, integrating various management regimes and land uses to ensure effective conservation outcomes.

Furthermore, through the “Recovering Nature in the East” (RENATE) initiative, in partnership with BirdLife Europe and Central Asia, we are starting to focus on restoring critical ecosystems in Shkodra Lake, Buna River, and the Karavasta and Narta Lagoons. These efforts are essential for maintaining the long-term ecological sustainability of our natural landscapes and will be pivotal for future integration of the ‘nature restoration’ concept and framework in the country.

As we look back on 2023, we celebrate a year of growth, collaboration, and renewed commitment to our mission. We are proud of what we have achieved and excited about the future possibilities for nature conservation in Albania.

1991 – 2023



We thank all our partners and collaborators who have supported and contributed to our initiatives to protect and preserve the natural environment in Albania.

In 2023, PPNEA achieved a significant milestone by formally joining the esteemed BirdLife International network.

BirdLife International functions as a collaborative hub for countries and territories worldwide, fostering shared priorities, policies, and conservation programs. This partnership facilitates the exchange of skills, achievements, and information, thereby enhancing collective abilities, authority, and influence in the pursuit of biodiversity conservation.

As the representative of Albania in this alliance, PPNEA joins a diverse family of over 115 national partners spanning continents, landscapes, and seascapes, and a membership exceeding 13 million individuals and supporters, employing a unique local-to-global approach for high-impact. These long-term conservation initiatives benefit both nature and humanity. With a decentralized Secretariat and strategically positioned regional offices in Brussels, Cambridge, Nairobi, and Quito, BirdLife International stands as the largest international partnership dedicated to nature conservation.

PPNEA's integration into BirdLife International holds particular significance, representing an elevated level of responsibility for the organization in Albania, as the country is currently in an ever-increasing clash between rapid and unsustainable development on one hand and the conservation of its natural heritage on the other.

This membership represents a valuable opportunity for enhancing the protection of Albania's biodiversity through the exchange of experiences and transfer of best examples from partners worldwide, for wildlife and their habitats. It is another opportunity to work towards restoration perspectives guided by the best principles of protecting nature together with local communities and the scientific community.

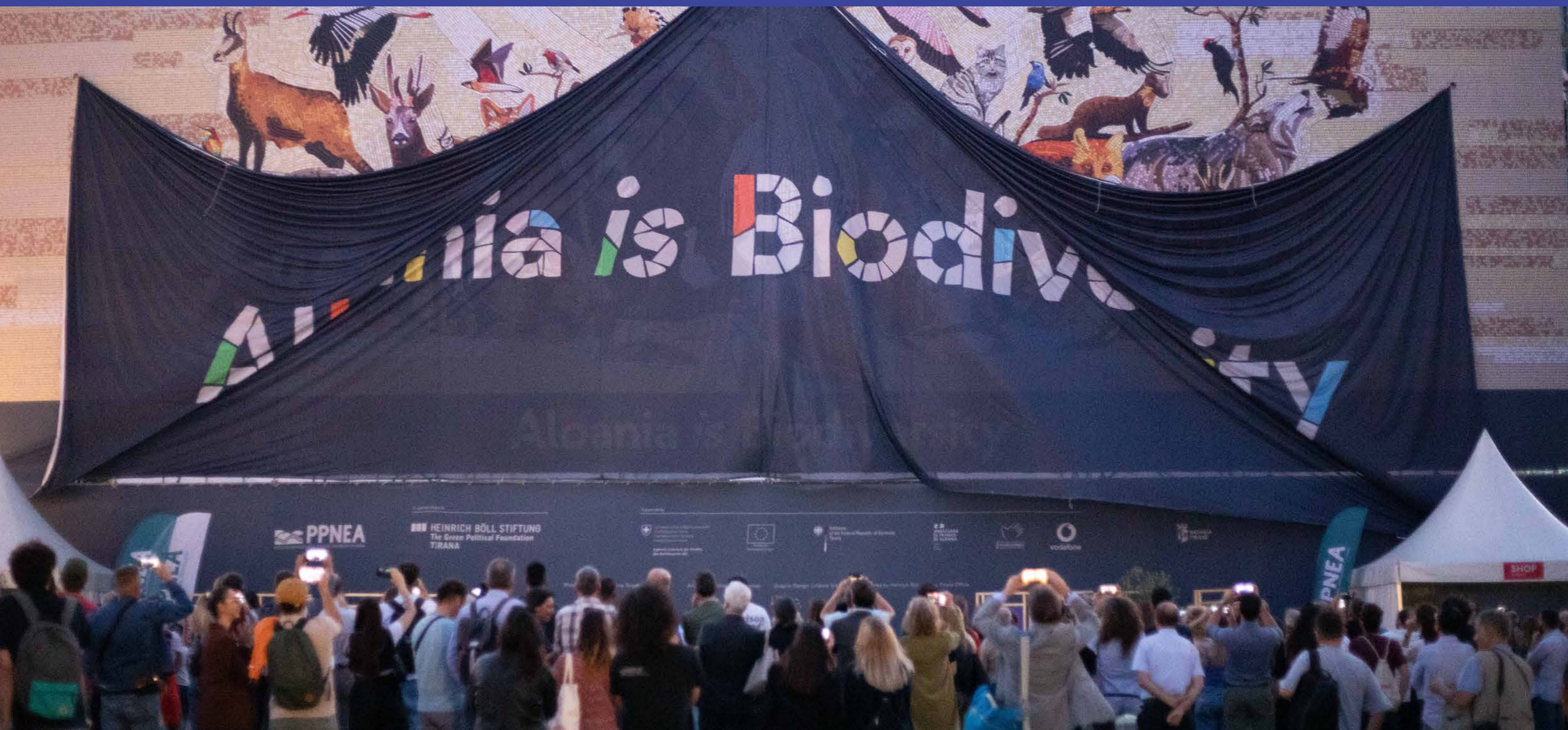
For this significant achievement, we take this opportunity to thank all our partners, collaborators, stakeholders, and volunteers who joined us on this journey.

Albania's participation in BirdLife International represents a significant stride in enhancing global conservation initiatives. PPNEA, as the representative of Albania, will actively contribute to the partnership's collective endeavors to conserve biodiversity and address environmental challenges at local, national, regional, and global levels.

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# CHAPTER 1 ALBANIA IS BIODIVERSITY



## A VISUAL JOURNEY THAT BROUGHT BIODIVERSITY TO THE HEART OF TIRANA

After three decades of advocating for nature conservation across Albania, PPNEA and Heinrich Böll Stiftung Tirana developed and launched a significant awareness campaign called “Albania *is* Biodiversity.” This campaign, likely one of the most extensive and impactful in the country, embodied PPNEA’s mission and reached the general public in the heart of Tirana.



### Albania *is* Biodiversity Artwork and campaign

Provocative enough, the hook of the campaign was the re-conceptualization of the “Albania” mosaic, which stands proudly at the front the of National Historic Museum. The re-conceptualized mosaic was presented to the public in the format of a 1200-meter square fabric hung next to the original mosaic. The artwork featured 38 threatened and amazing species that can be found in the country’s wild and pristine habitats, such as forests, wetlands, high pastures, and many more, carefully selected by PPNEA experts. The species were illustrated by a national geographic illustrator Mr. Kadir Ozmen and brought together with an amazing mosaic brush by the renowned Albanian artist Mr. Kleidi Eski.

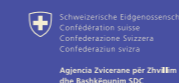
The educational and artistic intervention, “Albania *is* Biodiversity,” was inaugurated on October 2nd with an opening ceremony attended by approximately 500 people. The event featured a mosaic unveiling accompanied by Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy,” performed by Albanian cellist Mr. Iqer Zeqiri, Concertmaster of the Symphony Orchestra of the Albania Radio Television.



## Albania *is* Biodiversity

**PPNEA**  
PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN ALBANIA  
SINCE 1991

Supported by



In partnership with

**HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG**  
The Green Political Foundation  
TIRANA

Venue partner

#AlbaniaIsBiodiversity campaign is a joint initiative between the Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania and Heinrich Böll Stiftung Tirana, supported by the Embassy of Switzerland in Albania, the European Union in Albania, the Embassy of Germany in Albania, the Embassy of France in Albania, AICS Tirana, and Vodafone Albania.

Venue partner: Tirana Municipality





21

Days of educational and awareness campaign

600 m<sup>2</sup>

Area for activities tailored to various target groups

## Educative campaign

The reconceptualized mosaic was designed to be a major city attraction, inviting curiosity, admiration, and photographs from passersby while also drawing visitors into a series of educational events organized by PPNEA. From October 2nd to October 22nd, a 21-day educational and awareness-raising campaign was held in the 600 m<sup>2</sup> area beneath the banner. This space was divided into five subareas, each offering different activities tailored to various target groups throughout the day.



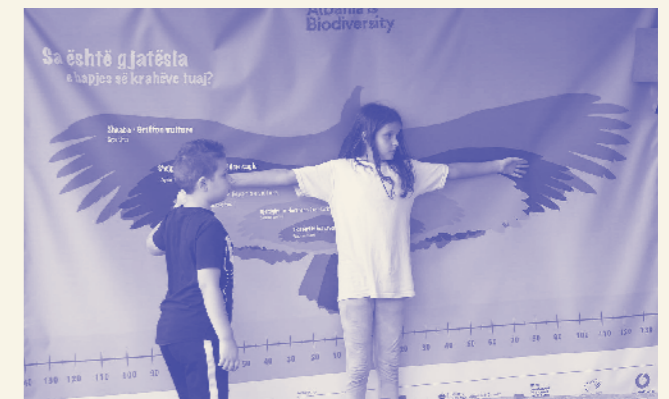
### 1. Information Area

The information center provided leaflets, maps, and informational sheets highlighting Albania's biodiversity.



### 2. Education Corner and Tours

The education corner offered a daily program designed by PPNEA experts, including educational sessions, games, life-sized 2D animal figures, biodiversity posters, and videos for children.



### 3. Digital Corner

The digital corner featured two televisions and several tablets displaying camera-trap videos and other audiovisual materials from PPNEA's archive to educate visitors about biodiversity.



### 4. Shop

The shop sold campaign-branded products like calendars, notebooks, stickers, posters, and #AiB catalogs. Operated by Berk Publishing House with volunteer help, a portion of the sales supported PPNEA.



## Events

Besides the five corners, the education campaign gathered many visitors through the public events that took place during the three weeks of its implementation.

### MOVIE SCREENING NIGHT "UNTAMED ALBANIA"

October 5<sup>th</sup>  
18:00 – 20:00



### MEDITERRANEAN MONK SEAL PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION

October 6<sup>th</sup>  
09:30 – 21:00

### ECO 'DANCE ZONE | NATURAL BODY' WITH WASBLEIBTKOLLEKTIV

October 7<sup>th</sup>  
17:00 – 18:30

### VISIT AT THE BOTANICAL GARDEN OF TIRANA

October 10<sup>th</sup>  
11:00 – 13:00



### FUNDRAISING EVENT FOR THE RESTORATION OF MUNELLA MOUNTAIN

October 8<sup>th</sup>  
18:30 – 20:30

### LECTURE "MANAGEMENT OF ECOLOGICAL CORRIDORS"

October 10<sup>th</sup>  
18:00 – 20:00

### BIRDWATCHING TOUR AT THE LAKE OF TIRANA

October 12<sup>th</sup>  
16:00 – 17:30

### MOVIE SCREENING "LEKË GJIKNURI, THE ENVIRONMENTAL WARRIOR"

October 11<sup>th</sup>  
18:30 – 20:30

### LECTURE "BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION", UNIVERSITY OF TIRANA

October 13<sup>th</sup>  
08:30 – 10:30

### LECTURE "BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION", MARIN BARLETI UNIVERSITY

October 13<sup>th</sup>  
15:00 – 17:00



### WILDLIFE ALBANIAN PHOTOGRAPHERS EXHIBITION

October 13<sup>th</sup>  
17:00

### PEDALING FOR NATURE WITH GIZ ALBANIA

October 14<sup>th</sup>  
11:00 – 13:00

### MOVIE SCREENING AND DISCUSSIONS EVENT "ZERA NGA LUMI"

October 15<sup>th</sup>  
18:00 – 20:00

### CELEBRATION OF INTERNATIONAL LYNX DAY

October 14<sup>th</sup>  
17:00 – 20:00

### BAT NIGHT AT THE LAKE OF TIRANA

October 13<sup>th</sup>  
18:00 – 20:00



### VISIT AT TIRANA ZOO PARK

October 17<sup>th</sup>  
10:00 – 11:00

### FLASHMOB PERFORMANCE "ODE OF JOY"

October 18<sup>th</sup>  
17:30 – 18:30

### VISIT AT THE MUSEUM OF NATURAL SCIENCES "SABIHA KASIMATI"

October 19<sup>th</sup>  
11:30 – 13:00



### TRADITIONAL FAIR "ALBANIA IS BIODIVERSITY"

October 19<sup>th</sup>  
10:00 – 13:00

### MOVIE SCREENING AND DISCUSSIONS "SHQIPËRIA E MUGËT"

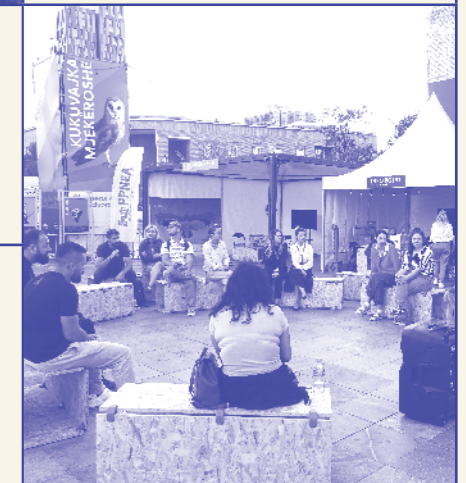
October 20<sup>th</sup>  
18:30 – 20:00

### CHASING WILDLIFE IN DAJT NATIONAL PARK

October 20<sup>th</sup>  
09:30 – 13:00

### PUBLIC DISCUSSION "TO WHOM DOES THE CITY BELONG TO?"

October 21<sup>st</sup>  
18:30 – 19:30





## Educational packages for 100 schools

One hundred schools nationwide received the “Albania is Biodiversity” educational package, strategically designed to enhance the campaign’s reach by equipping students with materials aimed at fostering environmental awareness. These packages included engaging brochures, informative posters, and supplementary materials, intended to enrich students’ understanding of Albania’s diverse biodiversity and cultivate an appreciation for the interconnectedness of nature.

## Communication campaign

The team designed an extensive communications and public relations campaign, utilizing mass media, social media, and engagement with interest groups. The campaign achieved over 50 media mentions, interviews, and TV appearances, successfully reaching the general public.

Partner organizations such as Birdlife International, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, the EU Delegation in Tirana, the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, the Embassy

of Switzerland in Albania, and Vodafone Albania further promoted the campaign. This broadened its reach to activists, diplomats, youth, artists, local communities, and school children.

The social media effort reached over 690,000 people across Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter), and LinkedIn.

**50+**

Media mentions, interviews and TV appearances

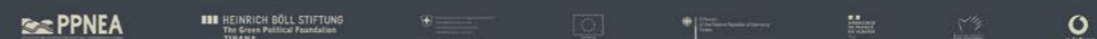
**690,000+**

People reached across Facebook, Instagram, X and LinkedIn



## Shqipëria është Biodiversitet

- |                         |                         |                            |                       |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Lakuriqi i natës     | 11. Pupëza              | 21. Trishtilli me çafkë    | 31. Kojlliku i madh   |
| 2. Lejtoku              | 12. Çafka e verdhë      | 22. Çakalli                | 32. Kunadhja          |
| 3. Shqiponja e malit    | 13. Pelikani kaçurrel   | 23. Ariu i murrmë          | 33. Breshka e Tokës   |
| 4. Flamingo             | 14. Kukuvojka mjekroshe | 24. Dhejpra                | 34. Kredharaku i madh |
| 5. Kali i qyqes         | 15. Macja e egër        | 25. Derrri i egër          | 35. Breshka e detit   |
| 6. Qukapiku i zi        | 16. Tusha blu           | 26. Baldosa                | 36. Laroshja          |
| 7. Shqipja e kënetës    | 17. Zardafi             | 27. Sqepbiza               | 37. Foka e mesdheut   |
| 8. Dhia e egër          | 18. Ujku                | 28. Rreqobulli i Ballkanit | 38. Lundërza          |
| 9. Dallëndyshja e detit | 19. Gargulli            | 29. Cinja                  |                       |
| 10. Gushëkuqi           | 20. Kaprolli            | 30. Lepuri i egër          |                       |





### Campaign highlights

**10,000+**

people reached as on-site visitors on Skanderbeg Square for three weeks

**3**

lectures organised with 3 Albanian universities

**17**

public and private education institutions (elementary schools) with a total number of

**920**

pupils followed the education program on biodiversity identification and conservation organized on-site by PPNEA education experts.

**20+**

activities organised on-site and on natural spots around Tirana

**10**

limited edition promotional and education materials produced

**~200**

youngsters registered to volunteer long-term with PPNEA in nature conservation activities on the field.

**~1M**

people reached through the online social media campaign implemented by HBS Tirana, PPNEA, and Vodafone Albania.

**~100**

schools all over Albania have received educational packages with the campaign products until the end of February 2024.

## 1.2

# STRENGTH IN COLLABORATION: THE HEINRICH BÖLL FOUNDATION PARTNERSHIP



At Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Tirana Office, we are committed to supporting nature protection efforts in Albania, and the partnership we have established with PPNEA aligns well with our mission in the country, as well as with our core values as a Green Political Foundation - sustainability, social justice, and democracy.

PPNEA's dedicated work in promoting biodiversity and environmental awareness has had a significant impact on local communities. We have seen how their efforts in education and outreach have empowered citizens to engage in the protection of Albania's natural heritage, fostering a deeper understanding of the importance of conservation.

Since our partnership began in 2021, we have organized numerous activities across Albania, focusing on driving political education related to nature conservation. This collaboration has been mutually beneficial, allowing us to address ecological issues more effectively and mobilize community involvement in the process.

The launch of the "Albania is Biodiversity" campaign is a clear example of what we can achieve together. This initiative has successfully cultivated awareness about Albania's unique ecosystems and reinforced local and international efforts to safeguard its natural resources. Through education and community engagement, we have highlighted the pressing need for nature conservation in Albania.

We are proud of what we have accomplished together and are confident that our ongoing partnership with PPNEA will continue to foster positive change for Albania's precious nature and its people.

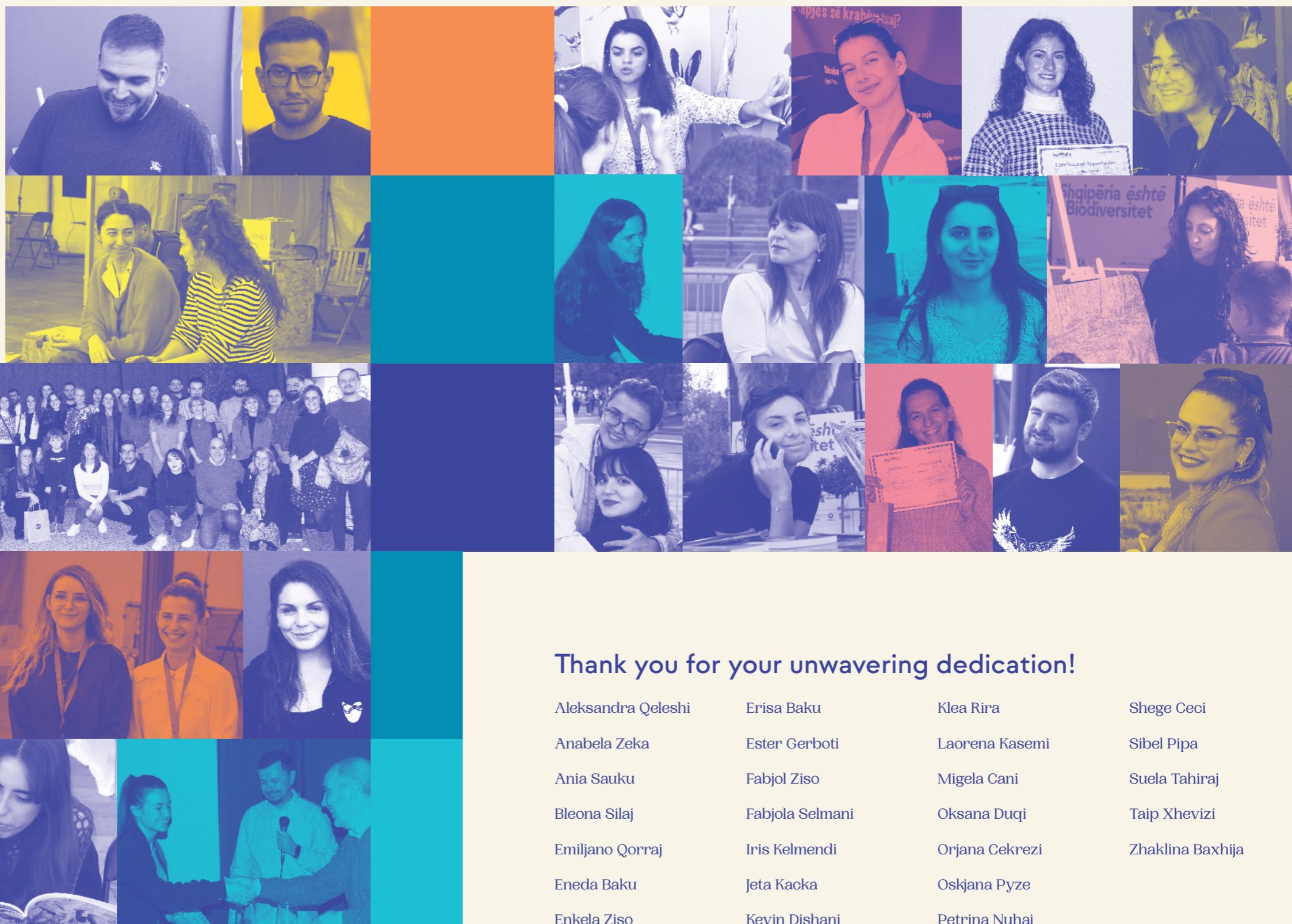
Dr. Gökhan Tuncer  
Director, Heinrich Böll Stiftung Tirana



# 1.4 EVENTS IN FRAMES: VOLUNTEER CHRONICLES

#AlbaniasBiodiversity campaign brought together partners from various sectors, including non-governmental organizations, informal groups, artists, local communities, and businesses, driven towards the promotion of Albania's natural environments. This extensive outreach also involved a team of 26 volunteers supporting the campaign by engaging with visitors, overseeing the four designated corners, and facilitating multiple events throughout three weeks.

We take this moment to extend our heartfelt gratitude and we express our sincere appreciation for their youthful enthusiasm and impactful involvement in this important cause.



## Thank you for your unwavering dedication!

- |                    |                 |                |                  |
|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|------------------|
| Aleksandra Qeleshi | Erisa Baku      | Klea Rira      | Shege Ceci       |
| Anabela Zeka       | Ester Gerboti   | Laorena Kasemi | Sibel Pipa       |
| Ania Sauku         | Fabjol Ziso     | Migela Cani    | Suela Tahiraj    |
| Bleona Silaj       | Fabjola Selmani | Oksana Duqi    | Taip Xhevizi     |
| Emiljano Qorraaj   | Iris Kelmendi   | Orjana Cekrezi | Zhaklina Baxhija |
| Eneda Baku         | Jeta Kacka      | Oskjana Pyze   |                  |
| Enkela Ziso        | Kevin Dishani   | Petrina Nuhaj  |                  |

## 1.5 A CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

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!

Helen Dyer

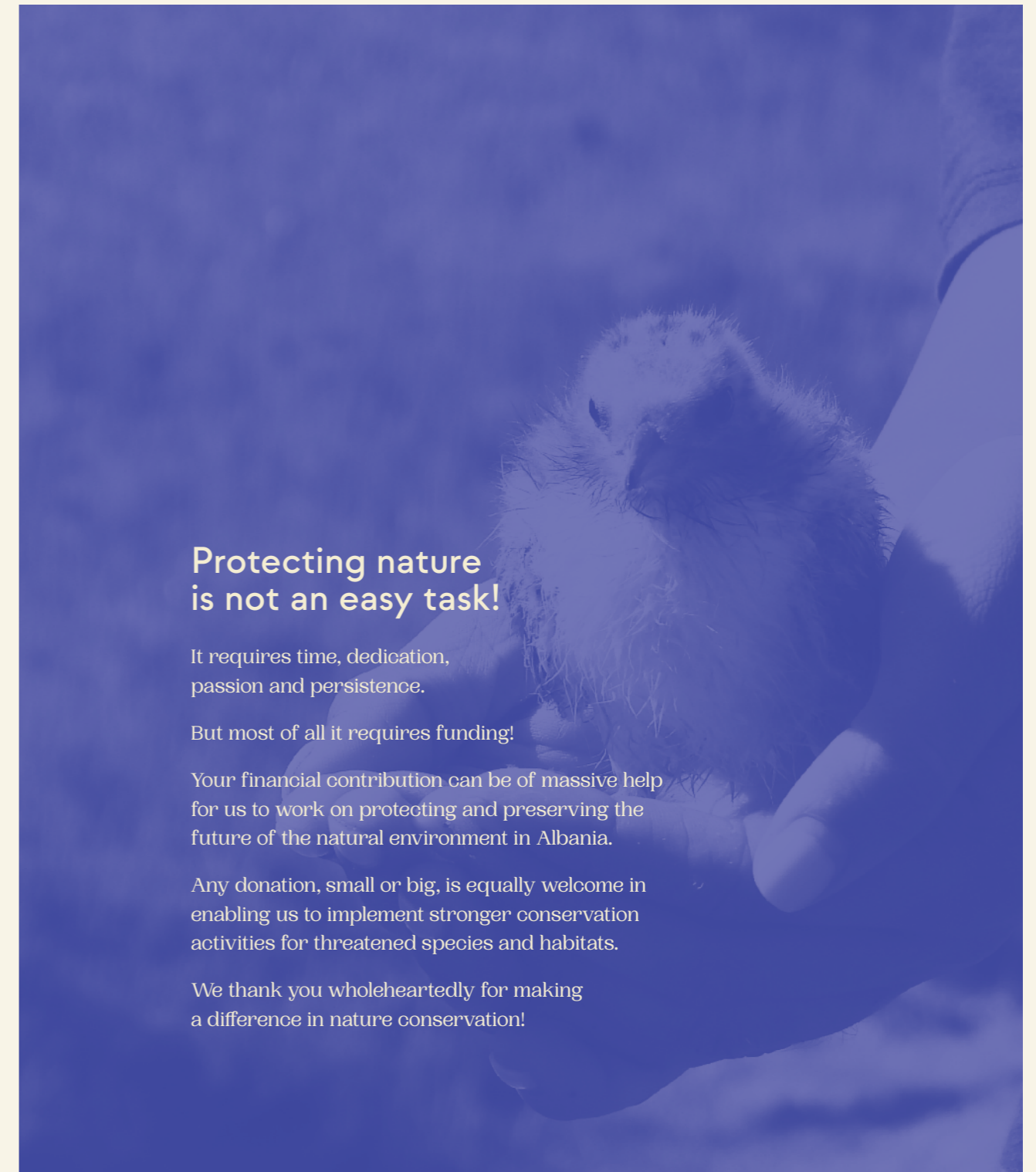
### Help our nature by finding a volunteer role within PPNEA

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



### Protecting nature is not an easy task!

It requires time, dedication, passion and persistence.

But most of all it requires funding!

Your financial contribution can be of massive help for us to work on protecting and preserving the future of the natural environment in Albania.

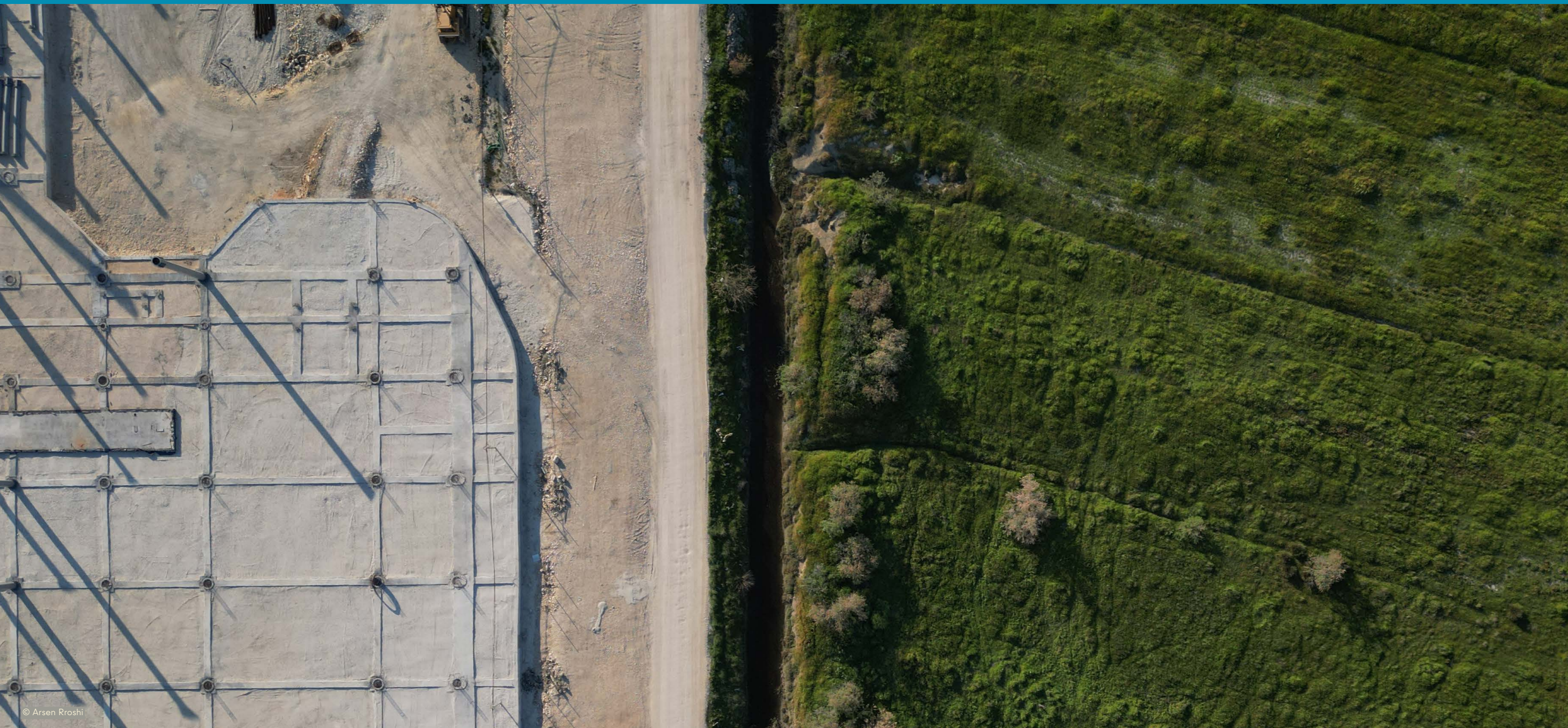
Any donation, small or big, is equally welcome in enabling us to implement stronger conservation activities for threatened species and habitats.

We thank you wholeheartedly for making a difference in nature conservation!

DONATE



CHAPTER 2  
**NO AIRPORT IN  
VJOSA-NARTA**





## 2.1 FLAMINGOS AGAINST AIRCRAFTS



With the industrial development revolution, humankind started witnessing climate change and its effects. In a negative series of climate events, such as natural catastrophes, species loss, etc., the developed countries learned the lesson the hard way. Only after losing a lot of their natural space, they understood that the current way of development was insecure and unsustainable. The learned lesson paved the way for science to study and propose mitigation measures together with a sustainable way of development, concluding that key biodiversity areas and the created protected areas should remain intact.

Meanwhile, after the fall of the communist regime, Albania had the chance to follow another way of development in its transition phase. Guidelines and directives were already developed at the European level. Such best practices were created after the developed countries learned that flamingos win against the aircrafts. Yet, Albania chose to not use the lessons learned from others during these 32 years of transition, and misused the natural resources, and destroyed the landscape because of informal and unplanned urbanization. The damage done by natural disasters throughout the years, like earthquakes, floods, erosion, etc., would have been enough to admit that nature wins against unsustainable development.

To our surprise, Albanian authorities still try to challenge nature by proposing Vloa airport and other tourism infrastructure within fragile ecosystems. One thing is for sure; nature fights back and fragile ecosystems can turn very aggressive for their own survival. Wherever such a challenge has taken place, flamingos at the end of the day have won against airports. But, we as Albanian citizens cannot afford such a fight and do not have the luxury to lose our vital ecosystem to prove ourselves that we were wrong. To have a sustainable future, we should all engage in the fight to protect our wild places. By doing so, we can ensure that Vjosa delta remains intact for the generations to come, for nature and people.

## 2.2 DEFINING THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE AIRPORT IN VJOSA'S RIVER DELTA



### Destructive and illegal!

2023 was a milestone when it comes to defining Vloa International Airport construction within a natural jewel such as Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape, as a wrong one. Since the beginning of these destructive plans, the Albanian government has presented the airport as a sustainable construction without any negative impact on the protected area. The mainstream media would support mainly the same narrative by sharing the authorities' statements.

The construction of the airport started in a rush in November 2021, without an environmental declaration nor a construction permit. Such an illegal start was made around a big campaign from the authorities to legitimize the airport as a green infrastructure. As the illegal construction was ongoing, the protection was removed from the 300 hectares where the construction site was, even though it is in the heart of the protected area. So, for the first time, a protected area with a hole at the heart of it was invented. After this, a construction permit was granted in February 2023, more than a year after the construction work already started.

Nevertheless, after an intense campaign during 2022, the airport construction in the Vjosa Delta was marked by the European Commission in the progress report as a construction happening inside the Protected Area which contradicts the national laws and international conventions that Albania has ratified.

As two lawsuits were already filed at the end of 2022, January 2023 started with a protest on the construction site. More than 150 youngsters, traveled to the construction site in Vjosa-Narta demanding the halt of the construction work. This protest was widely published in the media, especially in the international one, raising awareness and gaining a lot of attention and support. This protest, the first one on the site since the beginning



of the construction work was very significant as it was a clear request from the citizens: **STOP THE AIRPORT!**

Directly after the protest, an international conference was organized in Tirana. The conference was a joint call to stop the construction work from the organizations, experts, lawyers, engineers, students, and citizens.



Although Albania has ratified the Aarhus convention, the first instance on the administrative court did not legitimize the NGOs for the submitted lawsuit against the construction of the airport, with the reasoning that we are not affected by the construction of this infrastructure. Such a decision opposed the former decision of the Supreme Court which already legitimized the Civil Society Organizations on suing wrong decision-making on natural resources management. Such a decision caused a significant delay in the start of the court case.

In the third quarter of 2023, the European Parliament approved a resolution where they urged the Albanian government to halt the construction of Vlora International Airport, adding to the international authorities aligned with the request of the Albanian public, to Stop the Airport.

In an unprecedented case, the convention created by the Council of Europe for the protection of nature, the Bern Convention Standing Committee took via written procedure the urgent decision and recommended officially to the Albanian authorities the suspension of the construction work and implementation of a Proper Environmental Impact Assessment. African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement standing committee approved the same recommendation directed to the Albanian authorities.

A Red Alert application to the Mediterranean Alliance for Wetlands mobilized the international community of NGOs which were involved in a joint advocacy campaign to raise awareness and ensure that Albanian authorities would imply to the international agreements that Albania has ratified. 33 organizations from 26 countries were engaged to inform the public and their supporters for the imminent threat that migratory birds and one of their main habitats are facing on the Mediterranean coast. Moreover, this international coalition directed letters to all the relevant institutions, demanding the Stop of the Airport! Letters were addressed to Prime Minister Edi Rama, the European Commission, and the International Airport Transport Association (IATA).



On the other hand, international organizations Euronatur and BUND (Friends of the Earth Germany) officially requested in a national press conference the withdrawal of Munich International Airport from the operation of Vlora International Airport.

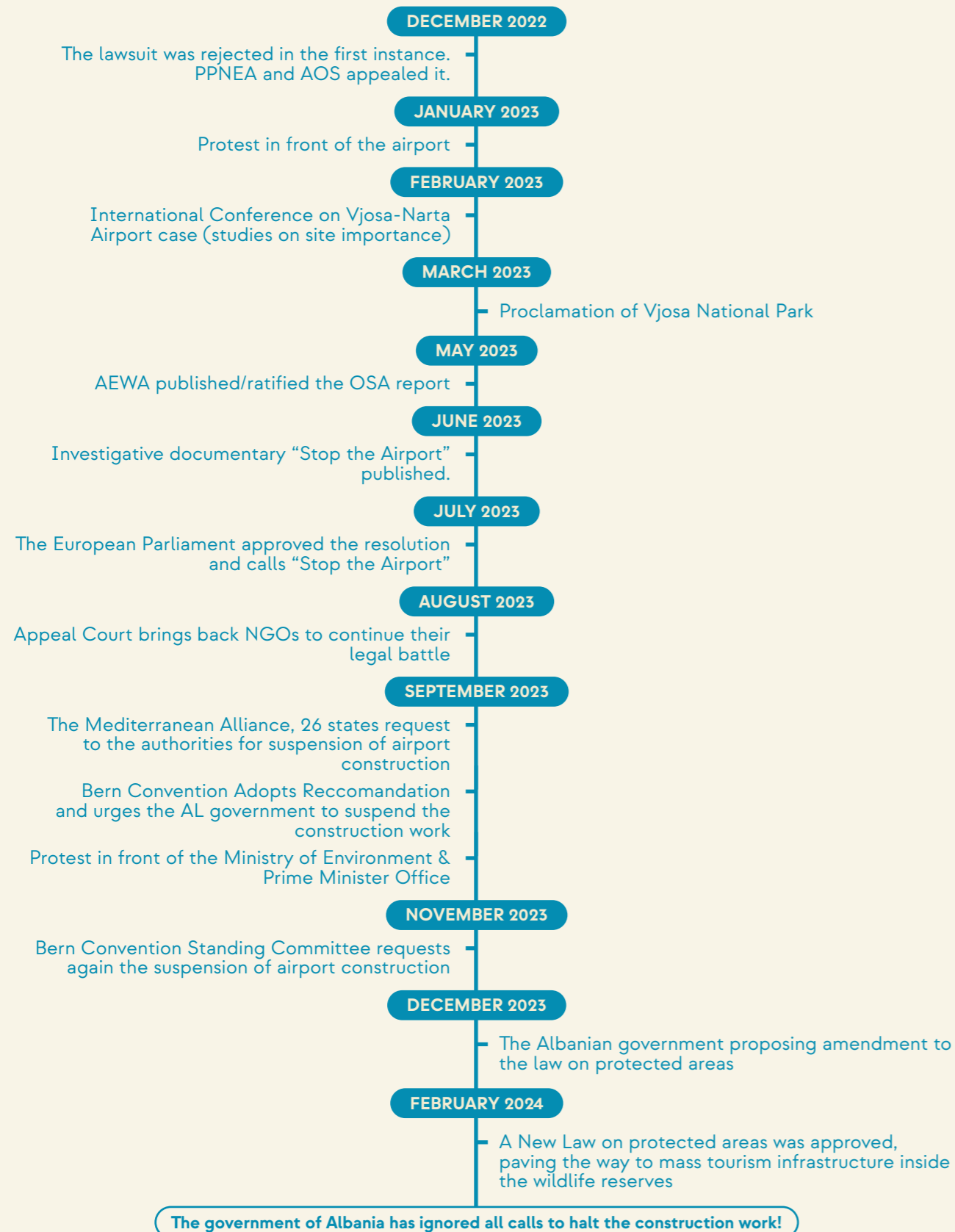
As all these calls were being addressed at the international level, the Albanian public was asking the same. Two other protests took place in Albania, in front of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and in front of the Prime Minister's office, urging the government to stop the construction work and respect the national legislation as well as international agreements.

The battle to stop the construction work has been long and it is still ongoing. Although the authorities tried to downplay the fact that this airport would destroy the delta of the Vjosa River and one of the most important wetlands in the Mediterranean, all the other actors aligned themselves among us and joined the same call to Stop the Airport!

Now that everything is clear and the airport is defined as a destructive one for the environment, the Albanian government has chosen another approach. Admitting that the airport is inside the protected area, the authorities now ask to be left alone to reach the vision of urbanizing the protected areas in Albania. Through this aggressive approach, the law for protected areas was proposed at the end of 2023.

## 2.3

# THE PATH MARKED BY OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES OF #NOAIRPORTINVJOSANARTA



## 2.4

# "STOP THE AIRPORT" MOVIE PREMIERE



On the 28th of June, a social event was held in the Millennium Cinema at the heart of Tirana. This event was the premiere of the film documentary "STOP THE AIRPORT!", produced by Elementi i Pestë (The Fifth Element) and directed by the investigative journalist Artan Rama.

The documentary is about how people see natural space and what we choose to do with it. How the sustainable efforts and our motivation to protect nature, can ensure a safer future for our society. A strong note is that when biodiversity richness is at stake, there is nothing that can surpass the need for its protection.

At the peak of the debate between civil society and government about whether the airport is a threat to Narta lagoon, 300 people joined a movie screening with a clear standing, STOP THE AIRPORT!

For the first time in Albania, an environmental case was able to get the attention and fill the whole cinema in the middle of the capital city. The general public, activists, businesses, donors, and embassies, all gathered for two hours in the movie theatre in an intellectual note of protest and discussed after about all of us can do to stop such destructive plans.

The airport case in Vjosa's delta has attracted the attention of many international media, producing a lot of reportages. Another special documentary was produced by Arte TV, named "Natural Paradise Under Threat in Albania-Flamingos or an airport?".

Scan QR Code to watch the film



20.01.2023

**YAHOO NEWS:** Reuters/ Protesters rally against airport project near bird habitat in Albania

**SKIFT:** Albania's Coastal Airport and Tourism Project Meets Resistance

**REUTERS:** Environmentalists protest airport project near Albanian bird sanctuary

**EURONEWS:** Environmentalists protest airport project near Albanian bird sanctuary

30.01.2023

**SIGHT:** Environmentalists protest airport project near Albanian bird sanctuary

**EURACTIV:** Albanian environmentalists protest Vlorë Airport construction

**DAILY TELEGRAPH:** Protesters rally against airport project near bird habitat in Albania

**GEELONG ADVERTISER:** Protesters rally against airport project near bird habitat in Albania

**AZUL:** Construção de aeroporto num santuário de aves gera protesto na Albânia

**DAWN NEWSPAPER:** Environmentalists protest airport project near Albanian bird sanctuary

**CAIRNS POST:** Protesters rally against airport project near bird habitat in Albania

**TRT WORLD:** Activists protest against airport project near bird habitat in Albania

31.01.2023

**CYPRUS MAIL:** Environmentalists protest airport project near Albanian bird sanctuary

**INQUIRER NET:** Environmentalists protest airport project near Albanian bird sanctuary

**EURONEWS.GREEN:** Spectacular bird sanctuary threatened by construction of Albania's biggest airport

15.02.2023

**AP NEWS:** Environmentalists say new airport threatens Albanian lagoons

**WTOP NEWS:** Environmentalists say new airport threatens Albanian lagoons

**UNITED NEWS OF BANGLADESH:** Environmentalists say new airport threatens Albanian lagoons

**VOICE OF AMERICA:** Environmentalists Say New Airport Threatens Albanian Lagoons

16.02.2023

**DAILY SUN:** New airport threatens Albanian lagoons!

19.02.2023

**ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETT:** Airport feared as flyway threat across Albania

14.03.2023

**SMART WATER MAGAZINE:** Vlorë Airport: The development threatening Europe's first River National Park

22.03.2023

**THE GUARDIAN:** 'The hydropower goldrush': how Europe's first wild river national park saw off the dams

05.04.2023

**NEW SCIENTIST:** Europe's first Wild River National Park is great, except for one thing

15.06.2023

**FRANCE 24:** Airport threatens Albania's fragile wild paradise

**PHYS.ORG:** Airport threatens Albania's fragile wild paradise

**TERRADAILY:** Airport threatens Albania's fragile wild paradise

**RFI:** Airport threatens Albania's fragile wild paradise

16.06.2023

**BULGARIAN NEWS AGENCY:** Will Vlorë Airport in Albania Lead to Ecological Disaster?

**RTL TODAY:** Airport threatens Albania's fragile wild paradise

17.06.2023

**SIN CHEW DAILY:** Airport threatens Albania's fragile wild paradise

20.07.2023

**THE GUARDIAN:** Albania: fears grow over environmental impact of new airport

17.08.2023

**OCULUS NEWS:** The battle for the protection of the Narta lagoon also reaches Germany

**Environmentalists protest airport project near Albanian bird sanctuary**



19.07.2023

**RIVERWATCH:** The battle for the protection of the Narta lagoon also reaches Germany

18.09.2023

**EUROACTIV:** Bern Convention: Vlorë Airport row will make its way into EU membership talks

25.09.2023

**MEDINA:** Airport in the Narta lagoon, Albania: threat to the Aos/Vjosa river and its species

27.09.2023

**EAST JOURNAL:** ALBANIA: Nuovo aeroporto di Valona, la battaglia degli ambientalisti

31.10.2023

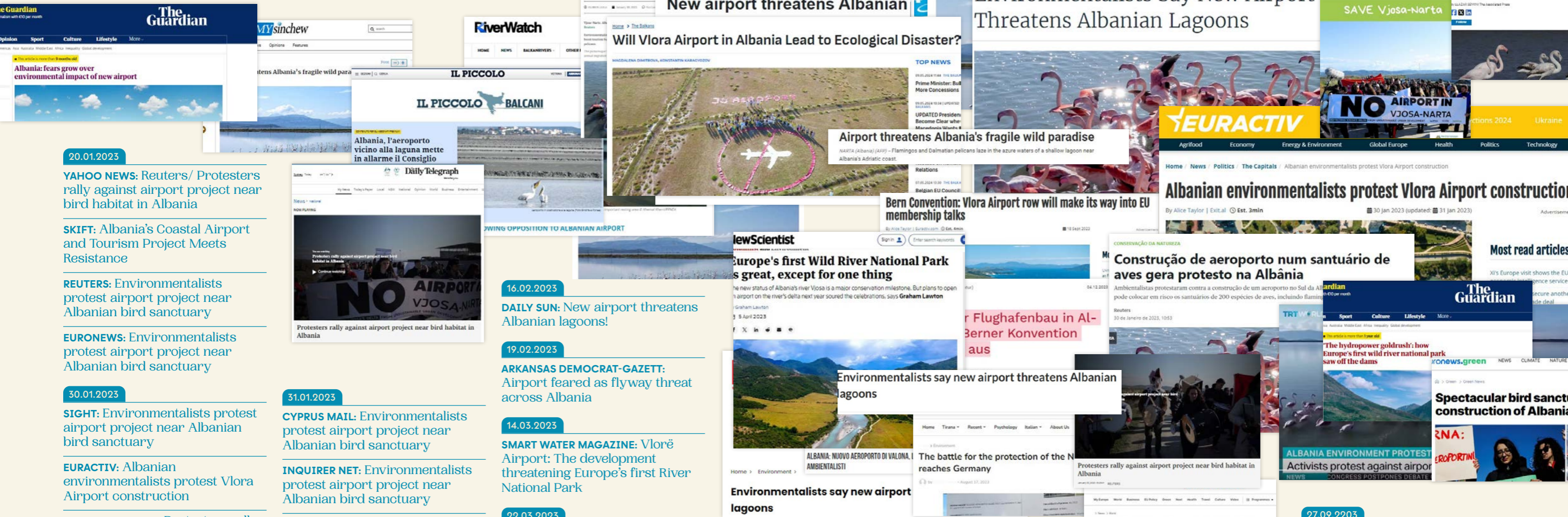
**ABENDZEITUNG-MUENCHEN:** Umstrittener Bau im Naturschutzgebiet in Albanien: Diese Rolle spielt der Flughafen München wirklich

04.12.2023

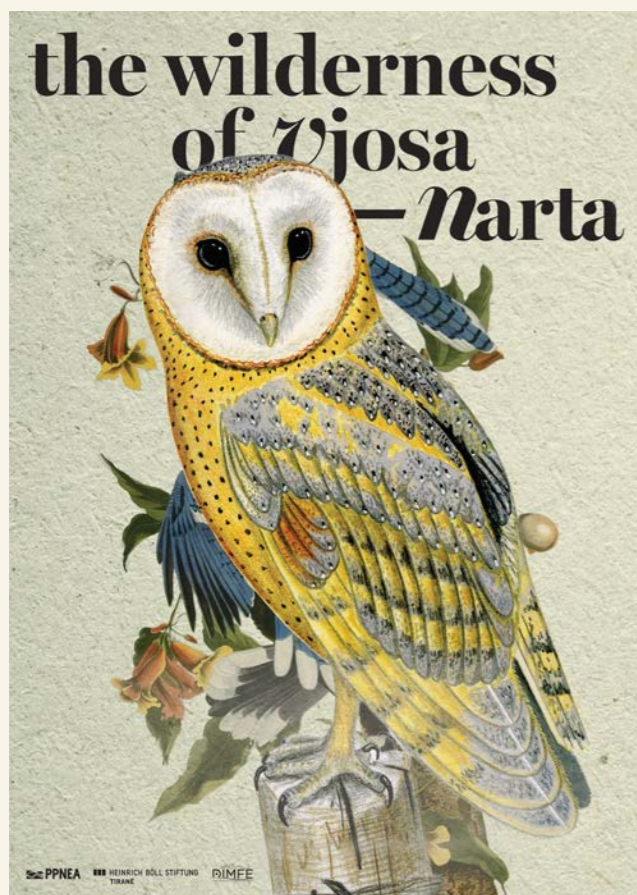
**LIFEPR:** Fortschreitender Flughafenbau in Albanien löst bei Berner Konvention große Besorgnis aus

28.12.2023

**IL PICCOLO:** Albania, l'aeroporto vicino alla laguna mette in allarme il Consiglio d'Europa



## 2.6 THE WILDERNESS OF VJOSA NARTA



The artistic curation was led by Donika Çina, with design by Apparat Studio.

The wilderness of Vjosa-Narta' was an artistic intervention implemented by PPNEA with the support of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Tirana office. It began in mid-December 2022 at Destil Creative Hub, expanded to "Antigua Café," and subsequently attracted visitors to Zoo Park Tirana. The initiative aimed to introduce endangered bird species from the Narta lagoon and the Vjosa River estuary the last free-flowing river in Europe, to the capital city.

Although the Vjosa River was declared a National Park in the subsequent months of 2023, the government's ongoing airport construction within its lagoon poses a significant threat to the area's rich biodiversity. The Narta Lagoon serves as a crucial area along the Adriatic flyway, providing essential habitat for wildlife, particularly birds, due to its unique environmental conditions and geographic location. It holds high biological value both nationally and internationally.

The exhibition was brought to life by PPNEA with support from the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Tirana. Illustrations, photography, and text on birds were sourced from the book 'Shpendët e Shqipërisë' (Birds of Albania), published by PPNEA.



## 2.7 BIRDON COURSE AN INTERACTIVE JOURNEY INTO BIRD CONSERVATION



In 2023, PPNEA and Heinrich Böll Stiftung Tirana conducted the BirdON Course, a dynamic bird conservation program aimed at equipping participants with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills in bird identification and conservation. This year, the course attracted 30 participants, including students and young professionals from environmental fields.

### Theoretical Sessions: Setting the Stage

**Bird Conservation and Politics:** Discussed the potential ecological impacts of the planned Vjosa-Narta airport.

**Bird Identification Techniques:** Equipped participants with fundamental skills for identifying diverse bird species.

### Practical Sessions: Action

Sektor-Rinia-Fllakë

Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape

Prespa National Park

Divjaka-Karavasta National Park

### Mini-Project Initiative: Sparking Innovation

Participants were encouraged to propose mini-projects focused on bird conservation. Three proposals were received, with Klea Rira's "Environmental Education and Nature Restoration" project winning. Implemented in January 2024, this project included:

Forestation efforts in Vjosa-Narta.

Conducting birdwatching activities with school children.

Delivering lectures on local bird species to school children.



## 2.8 LOCAL ACTION GROUP - VJONA



### Establishment of LAG VJONA in Vjosë-Nartë Protected Landscape

A Local Action Group (LAG) named VJONA has been established within the Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape. Inspired by the successful Korab-Koritnik LAG, the community adopted the LEADER approach to creating a structure focused on sustainable development and opposing the construction of an airport.

An external expert was hired to aid in forming the LAG, involving extensive fieldwork and over 15 community meetings. This led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), making LAG VJONA operational. Efforts continue to formalize the group legally, with valuable exchanges of information with Italian LAGs informing the process.



### Report on Livelihood Values in Vjosë-Nartë

A report was created to identify the local livelihood values within the Vjosa-Narta Protected area, which are threatened by the proposed airport construction. The report developed through over 10 community meetings and interviews, was presented during LAG VJONA's formation meetings to raise awareness of the airport's potential impacts.



# CHAPTER 3 SAVE THE BALKAN LYNX



## BALKAN LYNX RECOVERY PROGRAMME



Country	Albania, North Macedonia, Kosovo
Funding:	EuroNatur Foundation

The Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme (BLRP) represents a collaborative initiative operating across the Western Balkan Peninsula (encompassing Albania, North Macedonia, and Kosovo) since 2006 and persisting to this day. Specifically, the project is carried out through partnerships with NGOs like the Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA), the Macedonia Ecological Society (MES), and the Environmentally Responsible Action (ERA) group in Kosovo. Additionally, it receives oversight from organizations such as Carnivore Ecology and Wildlife Management (KORA) in Switzerland and the EuroNatur Foundation in Germany.

The Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*) is a subspecies of the Eurasian Lynx, with a mature population of approximately 30 individuals as of 2015. It is currently distributed among three subpopulations: one in North Macedonia (Mavrovo National Park) and two in Albania (Mali i Munellës and Polis - Gur i Zi - Valamarë). Additionally, it is found in the “Bjeshkët e Nemuna” and Sharri Mountain in Kosovo. Classified as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List since 2015, this population represents the most threatened native lynx population in Europe. Urgent conservation efforts are imperative to prevent the extinction of the Balkan Lynx.

RRËQEBULLI  
I BALKANIT  
BALKAN LYNX  
LYNX LYNX BALCANICUS



The Balkan lynx is a large mammal with a height of 0.6 - 0.7 m, a length of 1 - 1.3 m, with a yellow to gray or reddish-brown color and black spots, while the belly is white. It has long legs, a short tail, tufts above ears, and weighs 15 - 25 kg. Forest ecosystems are the preferred habitat of the Balkan lynx. The reproduction period stretches from February to April, which after 60-70 days is followed by the birth of cubs.

The Balkan lynx hunts Roe deers, Balkan chamois, as well as the European hare. Other alternative preferred prey can be also forest birds, as well as rodents. This species is threatened by poaching, cutting and logging of forests, habitat degradation, as well as the low number of prey and very low genetic variation.

## YEAR 2023

The PPNEA BLRP team focused on deploying camera traps in the Munella region during January-February 2023. By May, the systematic camera-trapping survey captured 89 lynx photos across 12 locations, alongside abundant prey such as roe deer, brown hare, and red fox. Additionally, 14 scat samples were collected during genetic monitoring in the Munella area. A human dimension survey involved training volunteers and staff, with 310 questionnaires filled out by December.

PPNEA also contributed to communication and policy strategies, raised awareness through campaigns like “Albania is Biodiversity,” and engaged stakeholders



through consultation meetings. Future plans include further camera trapping and genetic monitoring, feasibility assessments, and management plan development for Munella Nature Park.

### The results of the Balkan Lynx Intensive Camera Trapping Survey conducted during Winter/Spring 2023 in Munella Nature Park and its surrounding areas

From December 2022 to mid-February 2023, 59 out of 60 planned camera traps were deployed in the Munella region, covering 59 grids. Cameras were checked every 15 days from mid-February to mid-April, resulting in the photographing of two Balkan Lynx individuals. A total of 89 lynx photos were taken in 12 locations, along with images of various prey and other carnivores. Despite technical issues with four cameras, no theft occurred. However, illegal human activities like logging and infrastructure construction were observed, leading to denunciations by PPNEA. Additionally, 14 genetic samples were collected for further analysis. The survey identified two lynx individuals previously spotted in 2021. Plans for an intensive camera trapping survey and genetic monitoring in the Polis-Valamara ecosystem in Winter/Spring 2024 are underway.

## Human Dimension Survey



- April - June 2003  
84 questionnaires filled in northern Albania
- July - December 2023  
226 additional questionnaires filled in northern Albania (310 of 400 planned)
- January - February 2024  
90 additional questionnaires scheduled

The second Human Survey, conducted in 2023, includes Kosovo for the first time. The survey was planned by PPNEA and finalized after a training workshop in Tirana. Volunteers, students, and BLRP members were trained to conduct interviews in regions where the Balkan lynx is present.

The data collected will inform a feasibility assessment and risk analysis, aiding in the genetic reinforcement of the Balkan lynx population.





### Workshop with Hunter's associations

PPNEA organized a workshop at Tirana International Hotel on September 18, engaging over 60 representatives from hunters' associations across regions with significant Balkan lynx presence in Albania. The event aimed to educate hunters about the lynx's status and promote cooperation for its protection. PPNEA's Executive Director highlighted hunters' crucial role in wildlife conservation, while the President of the Hunting Federation emphasized the importance of a healthy environment for hunting. Following presentations, discussions among associations revealed regional insights and concerns, including habitat destruction and illegal hunting bans. It was agreed that PPNEA would provide lynx monitoring training to hunters, collaborate on denouncing illegal activities, and establish a monitoring network inclusive of hunters.



### Workshop with Regional Agency of Protected Areas (RAPA)

A consultative meeting, held on September 21, involved NAPA and RAPA-s from Lezha, Shkodra, and Kukës. Quality participation was observed from each RAPA. Presentations on the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme and the status of lynx in the region were delivered. Discussions highlighted the need for a comprehensive Management Plan. PPNEA committed to further meetings with NAPA and authorities to establish a working group and improve protected area management.

## 3.2 BALKAN LYNX NEWSLETTER



## 3.3 FORESTS, FORESTATION AND DEFORESTATION

### Verification of tree cover loss in the Wider Munella Mountain Region and Polis-Valamara Region

PPNEA prepared a forest loss report with the help of an external GIS expert, addressing the impact of forest moratorium in the Munella and Polis-Gur i Zi-Valamara regions from 2016 to 2023. The study revealed significant forest cover changes in both areas, with forest loss exceeding regeneration rates.

This report primarily focuses on forest surface, forest loss, and forest height gain trends over various time periods, aiming to provide insights into the changing forest landscape and potential environmental factors impacting these regions. Fires and logging were identified as major causes of deforestation.

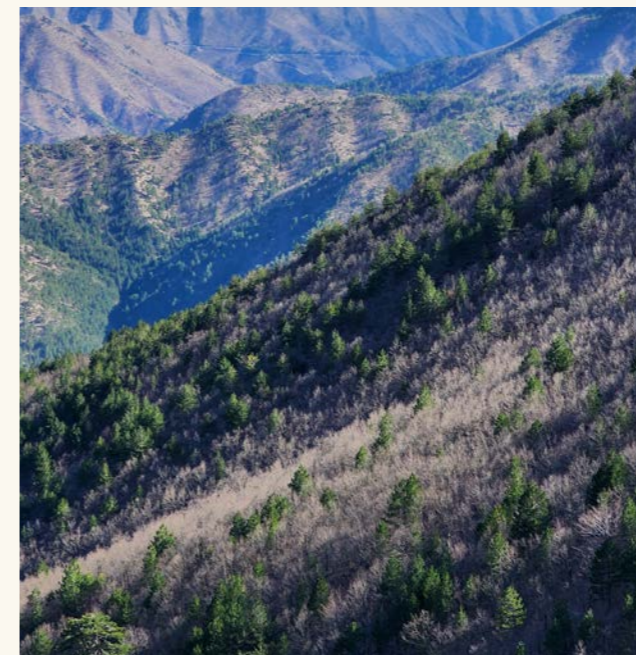
#### Study Methodologies:

We utilized three distinct methodologies:

1. Global Forest Watch (GFW) data analysis
2. Manual NDVI (Normalized Difference Vegetation Index) assessment
3. ESA (European Space Agency) landcover data analysis

#### Key Findings:

1. Both regions experienced significant tree cover loss, primarily attributed to logging, fires, and other disturbances.
2. Reforestation efforts were limited, with minimal regrowth observed.



PPNEA shared the findings with the National Agency of Protected Areas (NAPA) and the National Forest Agency (NFA) to raise awareness and seek cooperation to prevent further forest loss. Meetings with NAPA and NFA were held in November and December 2023, respectively, followed by a press conference to inform the public.



Scan to read full study

### 3.4

## PLANTING HOPE IN MUNELLA MOUNTAIN



In 2023, PPNEA secured 3,700 two-year-old *Pinus nigra* saplings from a local nursery in Puka City. PPNEA provided 2,500 saplings. Biologist Roland Lleshi facilitated the purchase of 1,200 saplings through a GoFundMe initiative. Additional logistic support for the event was provided by Heinrich Böll Stiftung Tirana. This collaborative effort aimed to protect Munella's unique ecosystem, threatened by fires and deforestation, which affect habitats crucial for the Balkan lynx, the endangered species and one of the rarest mammals globally.

Extensive preparatory work identified suitable planting sites, and from September to December 2023, PPNEA engaged with key stakeholders including partners, NAPA, RAPAs, municipalities, and the National Agency of Forests. On December 23, 2023, approximately 100 individuals, including representatives from PPNEA, RAPAs, Fushe-Arrez Municipality, local volunteers, high school students, and media, gathered to plant 2000 saplings in the northern part of Munella Nature Park.

This reforestation marathon holds profound significance due to this region was once teeming with biodiversity but is now marred by logging and wildfires. The impact on the Balkan lynx's habitat has been devastating. However, through this united initiative, which will continue into the first months of 2024, hope is taking root with each sapling planted. This collaborative initiative serves as a potent call to action, urging us all to protect, preserve, and revitalize Munella Nature Park for future generations.



# 3700

two-year-old  
*Pinus nigra*  
saplings secured

# 2500

saplings provided  
by PPNEA

# 1200

saplings  
purchased  
through  
crowdfunding

# 2000

saplings planted  
in Munella  
by December  
2023



# CHAPTER 4 INTO THE WILD



## CAPTURING WILDLIFE THROUGH CAMERA TRAPS

In this chapter, we will share the “clicks” gained through camera monitoring and highlight the significance of this method in understanding and conserving biodiversity. Through collaborative efforts with institutional agencies like RAPA’s (Regional Administration of Protected Areas), including RAPA Korçë, RAPA Elbasan, RAPA Shkodër, RAPA Lezhë, and RAPA Kukës, we have expanded our reach and effectiveness in monitoring wildlife across various regions.

# CHAPTER 5 PrespaNET

*prespa*NET  
A NETWORK OF ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS FOR PRESPA



## BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION IN TRANSBOUNDARY PRESPA: A DECADE OF IMPACT



PrespaNet, a network of environmental NGOs dedicated to the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the transboundary Prespa Lakes Basin, was proud to pass its 10th anniversary last year! Founded in 2013 by three organizations with a rich history of environmental stewardship in the region – the Society for the Protection of Prespa (SPP), the Macedonian Ecological Society (MES), and Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA) – PrespaNet has made significant strides in advancing conservation efforts in the area since then.

Situated at the crossroads of Albania, North Macedonia, and Greece, the Prespa region is a unique ecological treasure that hosts both extraordinary biodiversity and a rich cultural heritage. PrespaNet's mission is to protect this natural wonder for the sustainable benefit of both people and wildlife, now and for generations to come. Over the past decade, PrespaNet has worked to strengthen transboundary cooperation between NGOs and protected area management authorities. The network has always highlighted that collaboration is key to the success of conservation efforts and has fostered close partnerships with all the authorities responsible for the preservation of the basin's remarkable nature, landscape, and culture.

Just a few of the network's significant achievements have been the more effective engagement of local communities and regional stakeholders with the establishment of Prespa offices on all three sides of the basin, joint conservation work to help protect the region's rare species and habitats, and the development of the Transboundary Strategic Framework for conservation in Prespa, which outlines the priorities for NGOs in safeguarding the area's precious natural heritage.

To mark its 10th anniversary, PrespaNet organized a unique event at the crossroads of the network's work, the heart of the Great Prespa Lake where three borderlines meet, but also the point where our collaboration started! Holding hands, we reaffirmed our

commitment to the preservation of Prespa's unique character and we promised to continue working steadfastly with partners, authorities, and local communities to ensure the sustainable future of this invaluable ecological and cultural treasure. Following this meeting, PrespaNet then continued at PPNEA's local offices in Dolna Gorica, where supporters, stakeholders, local authorities, and PONT joined in celebrating this milestone and warmly expressed their continued commitment to supporting PrespaNet's mission.

## 5.2 EDUCATIONAL CORNER AT ALBANIA IS BIODIVERSITY AND MORE...

The Environmental Education Program made significant strides over the past year, with the local office team organizing a variety of educational events. Celebrating World Wetlands Day 2023 and engaging in restoration actions, the team hosted over 10 outdoor events at the "Prespa Laboratory." These events involved primary school children from both Great and Lesser Prespa lakes, offering hands-on learning experiences about birds, mammals, wetlands, and habitats.

The program also facilitated outdoor education exchanges between students from the Prespa and Ohrid regions in Albania, promoted local products, and established the local office as an educational hub. Collaboration with stakeholders was a key focus, ensuring a communal spirit at the heart of environmental events.

Moreover, over 100 schools across Albania, including 35 in Prespa National Park, biocorridors in the Korça and Pogradec areas, and several in the Valamara region, received comprehensive education packages about Albania's biodiversity values.

Through the transboundary teachers' training program, organized by PrespaNet partners and hosted by the PPNEA team in the touristic village of Dardhë, connections were established with a network of primary school teachers from Albania and North Macedonia. During this program, 20 primary school teachers and protected area education staff from both countries were trained over two days in outdoor education principles and effective methods for designing education programs.



## Educators are teachers, coordinators, mentors, and community leaders.

Teachers actively contribute to environmental protection and promotion, educate others on the importance of preserving the environment, and play a significant role in raising environmental awareness among children and young people. The multilingual training, conducted in Albanian, Macedonian, and English, was led by Ms. Klauđja Koçi from PPNEA, with support from PrespaNet officers, Tina Donefski and Adnand Bego. It included a variety of outdoor activities designed to enhance participants' knowledge and skills, empowering them to independently conduct environmental education, preservation, and protection activities.

Collaboration with universities and capacity building for young conservationists were further supported by the Transboundary Summer School hosted by the Macedonian Ecological Society. A total of 25 students and PrespaNet junior staff members participated in this week-long event focused on biodiversity monitoring. The program included visits to Albanian Prespa and the PPNEA local office. The partnership with the University of Korça "Fan S. Noli" was strengthened and formalized through an agreement with the Agricultural and Economic Faculties. PPNEA representatives continued to participate in university round tables and guest lectures, becoming a reference point for biodiversity monitoring and transboundary collaboration in the region.

### 5.3 "PRESPANET IN A NUTSHELL"



## 5.4 INSTALLATION OF SIX NEW WARNING SIGNS IN BIO-CORRIDORS FOR RAISING AWARENESS FOR BROWN BEAR CROSS-BORDER

In collaboration with the National Road Authority, PPNEA installed six Brown bear road signs along the national road Pogradec-Korçë-Kapshticë. Additionally, six wildlife road signals were produced for roads within Prespa National Park based on recommendations from the Regional Agency of Protected Areas, Korçë, during a coordination meeting with PPNEA.

On March 2023, the PPNEA team organized consultation meetings in nine of the most recognized villages located in the bio-corridors established between Prespa, Pogradec, and Korça regions, to raise awareness of Brown bear presence. These community meetings helped gather information on the acceptance of placing brown bear road signs in the most important crossing corridors.



These signs are the first wildlife signs ever installed in Albania, strategically placed in bio-corridors identified through camera trap monitoring, revealing not only the presence of the Brown Bears but also indicating signs of their reproduction. The warning signs serve as a measure until proper infrastructure can be established to ensure the safe passage of

wildlife. By raising awareness and encouraging caution, PPNEA aims to prevent tragic accidents that threaten not only brown bears but also other species dependent on these fragmented habitats. This coordinated effort for wildlife protection sets a positive precedent for future conservation initiatives.

## 5.5 BALKAN CHAMOIS OBSERVED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN PRESIPA NATIONAL PARK

The comprehensive training, protocol development, and pilot monitoring of the Balkan chamois in the transboundary Prespa basin (Mali i Thatë - Galicioë) have been completed.

On November 1, 2023, the PPNEA team, in collaboration with RAPA staff, organized the first pilot monitoring field visit in Mali i Thatë. This initiative was part of coordinated efforts at the transboundary level with Galicica National Park and

MES partners. Due to certain circumstances, only the monitoring in Mali i Thatë was organized by the PPNEA and RAPA teams, divided into three teams.

The pilot monitoring was highly successful, marking the first time chamois were observed during such a visit. The team spotted four individuals, including one male and three females, in the north-eastern part of Mali i Thatë at an altitude of 2044 meters above sea level. This observation and photography of the Balkan chamois indicated a viable population with suitable conditions for shelter and reproduction.

This particular subspecies, autochthonous to the Balkan Peninsula, holds significance as a prey species for the rare Balkan Lynx. This success sets the stage for upcoming monitoring visits for chamois in areas where the Balkan lynx is present, during the next year in Mali i Thatë and in other regions of Albania, in Shebenik NP, Valamara region, Korab-Koritnik NP, and Albanian Alps NP.



## 5.6 IN THE WINGS OF NIGHT: EXPLORING BATS AND THEIR HABITATS

### Unveiling Albania's Bats: 13 Species Identified, up to 2600 Individuals Counted during one season, and Key Colonies Found in Prespa National Park.

PPNEA team closely monitored the underground and forest habitats for bats within Prespa National Park, during spring, summer, autumn, and winter periods, as suggested in the study methodology. For each season, approximately 4-day expeditions were organized to cover all 33 potential locations, including cave habitats, bunkers, abandoned structures, and forested habitats. Notably, five of these locations served for the capture of individuals utilizing specialized nets (mist nets), followed by identification through bat detectors.



As a result of this monitoring session, new bat habitats and important colonies were identified.

The team considers the presence of two distinctive bat colonies in two different caves.



Treni cave remains still the most important hibernating site for bat colonies in Prespa National Park in Albania with a maximum of around 2500 individuals counted in the summer season. Treni Cave, a nature and culture monument in Albania, now has a management plan to be implemented. According to it, the cave has to be cleaned of debris accumulated and the number of visitors reduced.

Bat monitoring was a transboundary action coordinated with MES partners. Common stakeholder engagement and capacity-building events were undertaken, then monitoring expeditions in two countries followed by conservation measures.

## First bat houses for Prespa

In November 2023, during autumn season monitoring, the team installed 10 bat boxes in the high-frequency places of bat presence, in Prespa National Park. In a celebration spirit on Halloween night, the team involved local volunteers, and local actors, raising their awareness in bat protection. These dual-chambered wooden houses, designed with openness to facilitate maximum airflow, will serve as cozy shelters for Prespa's bats. Simultaneously, they play a crucial role in the study of bat behavior.

Bat species that inhabit forests are facing a habitat crisis due to the loss of their roosting spots in recent years. These species heavily rely on the presence of old-growth forests, which are becoming increasingly scarce. Additionally, cleaning actions of Shuec tunnels were also undertaken as a recommendation of the "Bats in the Prespa Area Report".

## 5.7 INSIDE THE STORK'S NEST

### Conservation Efforts: Dutch Ambassador, Pustec Municipality, RAPA Korçë, OSHEE, SPP, PONT, and Local Community Unite

In 2023, the PPNEA local office in Prespa National Park had the honor of hosting Dutch Ambassador Reinout Vos and his wife, Corien Vos, alongside PONT's Executive Director, Mirjam de Koning. This significant transboundary meeting provided an opportunity for the Dutch Embassy and PONT to gain a closer understanding of PPNEA's work.

The visit featured a variety of activities highlighting the natural values of Prespa. Attendees included the Mayor of Pustec Municipality, the Director and staff of RAPA Korçë, and PPNEA staff.

Additional activities included an interactive



environmental lesson at Pustec High School, led by Tina Donefski, PPNEA's local office coordinator, with assistance from RAPA Korçë. The group also visited a stork platform installed on a high-voltage pole in Kallamas village and toured the PPNEA local office premises in Goricë e Vogël. This visit underlines the collaborative efforts in preserving the rich biodiversity of Prespa National Park.

## 5.8 TRANSBOUNDARY ALDER RESTORATION EFFORT IN PRESPA

### Learning and sharing of experiences among PrespaNET partners

In 2023, PPNEA and SPP collaborated with MES partners on a transboundary alder restoration initiative across all three sides of Prespa. Building on the lessons and knowledge transferred by MES, PPNEA engaged in extensive discussions with PrespaNet partners and accepted a donation of locally collected alder seeds from Ezerani Nature Park.

In May 2023, PPNEA organized the transport of these seeds across borders and partnered with a local nursery in Korça to produce alder seedlings. The nursery followed a specific plan and protocol prepared by the Habitats team. The progress of the seedlings was monitored weekly by the local team, resulting in the successful production of 300 alder seedlings.



Intensive preparation work was necessary to prepare the ground and openings for planting the 300 seedlings, *Alnus glutinosa*. This work carried out over three days, involved local office staff, RAPA Korçë rangers, and local contracted workers. The planting action took place on February 7, 2024, with approximately 60 participants, including primary school and high school students from Pustec and Bilisht, RAPA Korçë staff, municipality staff from Pustec and Bilisht, local actors ACEG and Korça Alpin, and community members.

## 5.9 MAMMAL MONITORING PROGRAM

The mammal monitoring program has achieved notable progress over the past year. Key activities included:

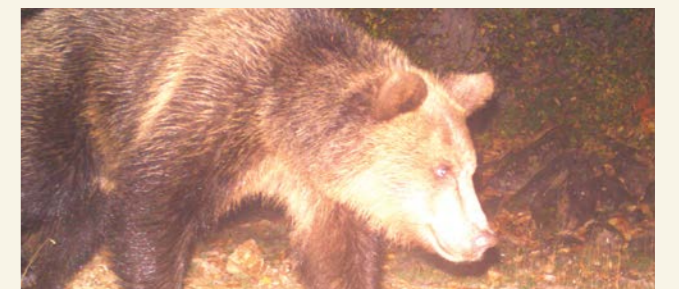
**Brown Bear Monitoring:** Camera trapping sessions in bio-corridors during autumn-winter 2023.

**Transboundary Chamois Monitoring:** Conducted in November 2023.

**Otter Monitoring:** Conducted during autumn 2023.

**Bat Monitoring:** Conducted throughout all seasons of 2023.

Highlights of the program included the confirmation of a Brown bear presence in the village of Vërnik and the sighting of four Balkan chamois individuals in Mali i Thatë.





## BIRDBANDING THROUGHOUT 3 YEARS IN PRESPA NATIONAL PARK



Throughout three years, bird ringing in Prespa National Park has been a vital activity attracting young enthusiasts to bird conservation and study. Implemented in 2021, 2022, and 2023, this initiative has tagged a total of 343 individuals representing 49 species, spanning 34 genera, 20 families, and 2 orders.

Notably, the Great Reed Warbler topped the list with 9%, followed by the Green Finch and Barn Swallow at 9% and 8% respectively.

Moreover, 56% of the tagged birds were categorized as residents, vertical migrants, or short-distance migrants, while the remaining 44% were transcontinental migrants. This effort not only fosters interest in bird conservation among the youth but also generates valuable scientific insights crucial to conservation.

Bird banding has become a cherished tradition, especially during the summer school of PrespaNet, which brings together students from North Macedonia, Albania, and Greece. Here, participants can engage in bird banding activities, expanding their knowledge and skills in this field.

# 343

individuals  
tagged between  
2021 – 2023

# 49

species

# 34

genera

# 20

families

# 2

orders

# 56%

of tagged birds  
categorized as  
residents, vertical  
migrants or  
short-distance  
migrants

# 44%

categorized as  
transcontinental  
migrants



CHAPTER 6  
**ADVOCACY AND  
AWARENESS  
FOR NATURE  
CONSERVATION**



## POLITICAL EDUCATION FOR NATURE CONSERVATION



### Objectives and achievements

#### Raise environmental consciousness within the general public.

Two wildlife exhibitions and a series of five film screenings showcased Albania's biodiversity. These events reached over 127,899 individuals through social media campaigns, successfully raising environmental consciousness among the general public.

#### Create a new group of volunteers for nature conservation that independently undertake actions.

Through public events like movie nights, discussions, and exhibitions, PPNEA created a group of 60 youth activists. These individuals, alongside 30 volunteers who responded to an open call, are driving conservation actions and awareness campaigns. The volunteer group is taking the first steps towards self-organization, proposing new ideas while inviting new members.

#### Establish the volunteer structure within PPNEA.

Monthly gatherings at Heinrich Böll Stiftung Tirana served as a hub for volunteers, fostering both camaraderie and leadership. With eight meetings led by a volunteer coordinator, PPNEA is building a dedicated network of change-makers committed to preserving Albania's natural heritage.

#### Inform the general public about the most pressing nature conservation causes in Albania.

Leveraging media outreach and seven public events, including sessions and workshops, PPNEA raised awareness of conservation issues. Efforts reached diverse audiences, inspiring action for environmental sustainability and informing them about the most pressing nature conservation causes in Albania.

#### Encourage collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including those not directly involved in nature conservation causes.

Collaborating with organizations like UNAA, Qëndresa Qytetare, and Tek Bunkerri, PPNEA expanded its reach and has invited partner organizations to join its causes. Activities included film screenings at the premises of Tek Bunkerri and a camping experience with Scouts Albania, promoting collaboration for nature's protection.

#### Promote sustainable development initiatives within the Albanian network of protected areas.

From field expeditions and birdwatching in Vjosa-Narta to clean-up initiatives in Porto-Palermo, PPNEA promoted sustainable development in Albania's protected areas network. A camping event in Prespa National Park highlighted eco-friendly practices and landscape appreciation.

PPNEA's commitment to environmental education and conservation advocacy throughout the year, by engaging diverse audiences through artistic displays, empowering youth volunteers, and forging impactful partnerships, has not only raised awareness but also inspired tangible actions for nature conservation in Albania.

## FORESTS BEYOND BORDERS

<b>Dates:</b>	01 June 2022 – 31 December 2024
<b>Location:</b>	Throughout Albania
<b>Project Partners:</b>	Space for Good
<b>Donor:</b>	EuroNatur

PPNEA in partnership with Space for Good and EuroNatur has continued in 2023 the implementation of the "Forests Beyond Borders" project, which aims to encroach remote sensing in nature conservation efforts.

## Deforestation Detection

PPNEA's role was to validate the deforestation patches provided by Space for Good using in-situ remote sensing.



On April 24th, we validated the ID point D22101013, which is located in Dardhë, Albania. Logging and forest fires were present in the area.



On May 23rd, two PPNEA staff members validated the ID points D2210103, D2210104, D2209301, D2210105, D2210109, D22101010, D22101011 and D22101012. Three of these ID points (D2210103, D2209301, D2210105) were located near the village of Drisht. In all the locations, forest fires were present.



Four ID points (D2210109, D22101010, D22101011, D22101012) were located near the Bukëmirë village. In the four ID points, forest fires were observed.

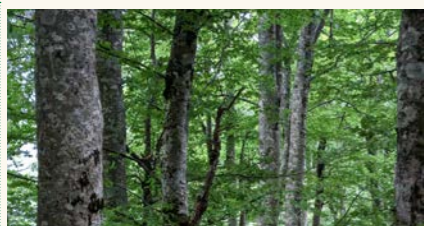


One ID point (D2209301) was located in Kune-Vain. No signs of deforestation were observed since the ID point was located in the middle of the lagoon.

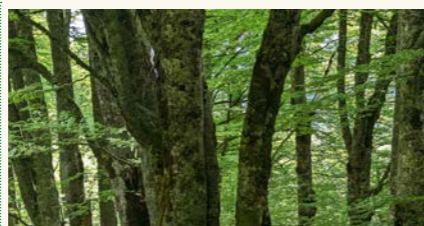
## Mapping Primary Forests / Old Growth Forests

In total, three field expeditions were conducted to validate (in situ) primary and old-growth forests at the GPS locations that were provided by Space for Good.

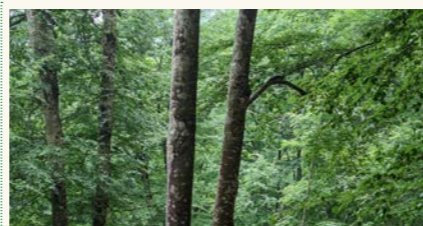
The first field expedition was conducted in Tropojë Municipality (07/06/2023- 09/06/2023), where ID\_3, ID\_4 and ID\_12 were validated. Two PPNEA staff members conducted the expedition, alongside a volunteer who was eager to learn about the forest situation in Albania.



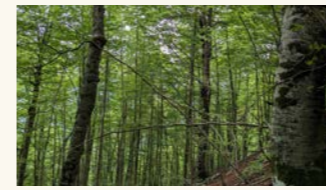
ID\_3 was located near Bradoshnicë village, where there were traces of human interventions in the area. Nevertheless, we observed small patches of primary forest at the southern end of the line. Along the line, we observed different aged stands of forest (including saplings).



ID\_4 was located in Valbonë-Bradoshnicë. We could not follow the entire line because of a rocky segment near the middle. There were different ages of forest in some parts of the line. Small patches of primary forest were observed on the eastern end of the line. A smaller patch was observed on the western part of the line.



ID\_12 was located near Tropoja River. There were different aged stand of forest (including saplings) along the line. Small patches of primary forest were observed at the northern end of the line.



The second expedition was conducted in Dajti National Park (15/06/2023). Two PPNEA staff members conducted the expedition. At this location we validated ID\_13. There were two or more different ages of forest (including saplings). A small patch of forest fire was observed at the end of the line.



The third expedition was conducted in Bizë-Martanesh on June 27th. Two PPNEA staff members validated the ID\_11. Along the line, there were different ages of forest (including saplings). A large area was burned by forest fires. Some logging activity was also present.

## 6.3

# NORTHERN FORESTS INITIATIVE FOREST RESTORATION IN NORTH MACEDONIA AND ALBANIA

The NFI Project is a conservation initiative financially supported by the Swedish Postcode Foundation and executed by the IUCN Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (IUCN ECARO) in collaboration with two national partners: the Macedonian Ecological Society (MES) and Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA). The project is part of the Swedish Postcode Foundation's Northern Forest Initiative.

## Objectives

The NFI Project aims to prevent further net loss of forests in North Macedonia and Albania by:

Initiating restoration work in key biodiversity landscapes outside protected areas.

Strengthening capacities and commitments toward sustainable forest management.

The project employs Nature-based Solutions (NbS) for Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) in areas critical for the conservation of the Balkan lynx, particularly the Pashtrik-Morina ecosystem in Albania.

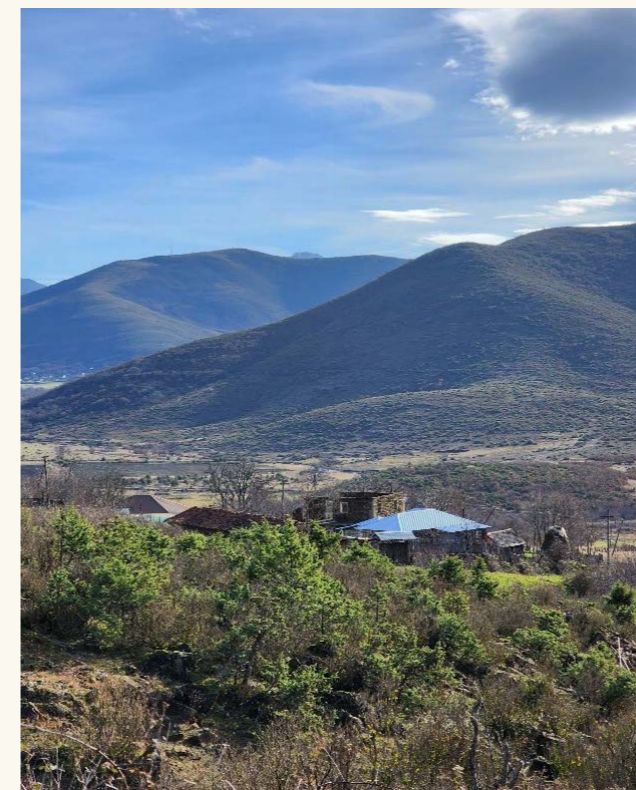
## Background

According to Global Forest Watch:

North Macedonia lost 5.5% of its total tree cover in the last 20 years.

Albania lost 6.5% of its total tree cover in the same period.

Recent local analyses confirmed these trends with losses of 6.78% and 4.88% of non-degraded forests over the last 12 years. These negative trends are apparent in high biodiversity value regions, including core habitats of the critically endangered Balkan lynx, as well as habitats for wolves and bears. The



affected area includes 15 important habitats listed in the EU Habitats Directive.

Management of key biodiversity landscapes in protected areas has not sufficiently prevented forest losses. Areas outside legal protection are particularly vulnerable to further degradation.



## Challenges

Illegal logging has been a persistent problem.

Rapid urbanization and land use changes have damaged biodiversity-rich ecosystems.

Climate change has increased wildfire damages, threatening rural communities.

The forest ecosystem's resilience has decreased, making it susceptible to pests and diseases.

## Efforts and Collaboration

Governments and CSOs have undertaken various conservation initiatives for regional biodiversity. However, knowledge and capacities for sustainable forest management remain low. A comprehensive and collaborative approach involving governments, civil society organizations, and local stakeholders is essential to reversing forest degradation and restoring ecological functionality.

## Project Goals

The overall objective of the NFI Project is to restore and protect forest ecosystems in North Macedonia and Albania, promoting resilience and enhancing well-being for both people and nature. The project will

implement Nature-based Solutions, such as Forest Landscape Restoration, in prioritized sites using the ROAM (Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology). The targeted landscapes, “Bukovikj” in North Macedonia and “Pashtrik-Morina” in Albania, include heavily degraded forests that need restoration to enhance biodiversity and connectivity with surrounding protected areas.

## Expected Outcomes and Key Performance Indicators:

### Outcome 1

Forest landscape restoration solutions for Albania and North Macedonia.

**KPI:** At least 40 ha of forest landscape restored (at least 20 ha in each country).

### Outcome 2

Improved knowledge and capacities for forest restoration and sustainable forest management (SFM).

**KPI:** 80 to 100 technical staff trained on SFM; at least 100 local community members engaged in FLR participation and education.

### Outcome 3

Increased commitment to forest restoration and sustainable management.

**KPI:** Albania pledges to the Bonn Challenge; North Macedonia increases the number of forest restoration projects in implementation or design phases.

## Project Launch and Initial Meetings

In 2023, PPNEA, in collaboration with partners and experts, established the groundwork for the restoration interventions through a series of consultations with local actors. The inaugural meeting took place in Mavrovo National Park, North Macedonia, where the initiative was officially introduced. This was followed by two workshops and several focused meetings in Tropoja and Has.



## Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology (ROAM)

A key component of the preparation involved the application of ROAM for the first time in Albania. This methodology helps identify critical restoration measures and map potential areas for restoration, considering the socio-economic needs of local residents and ecological balance.

## Field Evaluations and Planning

The evaluation process included multiple field visits aimed at inventorying degraded forest areas in Tropoja and Has. The assessment covered existing vegetation, causes of degradation, and potential restoration opportunities. Following these evaluations, a comprehensive plan of measures was developed, and ready for implementation. This plan includes actions such as planting, erosion prevention, sustainable land and forest use practices, and community engagement initiatives.

## Priority Areas and Future Work

The implementation of ROAM produced a detailed plan and an inventory of the most degraded areas needing restoration. Nine priority areas have been identified based on socio-economic analyses, stakeholder consultations, and ecological needs. Restoration efforts will concentrate on these areas.

## 6.4 ECOLOGICAL CORRIDORS



The connectivity conservation concept represents a very innovative field of work for Albania and the Western Balkans. PPNEA has well recognized the need for bio corridor management for the connectivity of habitats for mammals such as Balkan lynx and Brown bear populations. Nevertheless, PAs in Albania, local authorities, local CSOs, and the communities with a stake in decision-making for enhancing bio corridor connectivity are lacking the

awareness, knowledge, and capacities to consider working for these innovative management practices.

The seeds of this project came from the research and consultations during the preparation of the feasibility study on enhancing connectivity in Albania and North Macedonia, in the PONT Focus Region. In this context, an introduction to this concept was carried out with specific stakeholders such as RAPA's and municipalities.

Three main connectivity conservation areas were identified in Albania:

1. Cukal-Munellë-Balgjaj-Martanesh CCA
2. Black Drin CCA
3. Polis-Valamara-Rungajë-Gramoz CCA

This initiative represented an opportunity for both the PPNEA team and stakeholders to discuss ecological corridors in more detail. The three-year

project “Paving the Way towards the Implementation of CCAs in Albania through Enhancement of Governance and Management of PAs”, includes a series of actions targeting the capacity building of different stakeholders in the selected Cukal - Munellë - Balgjaj - Martanesh CCA. This project has four specific objectives to be accomplished through several actions, focused on:

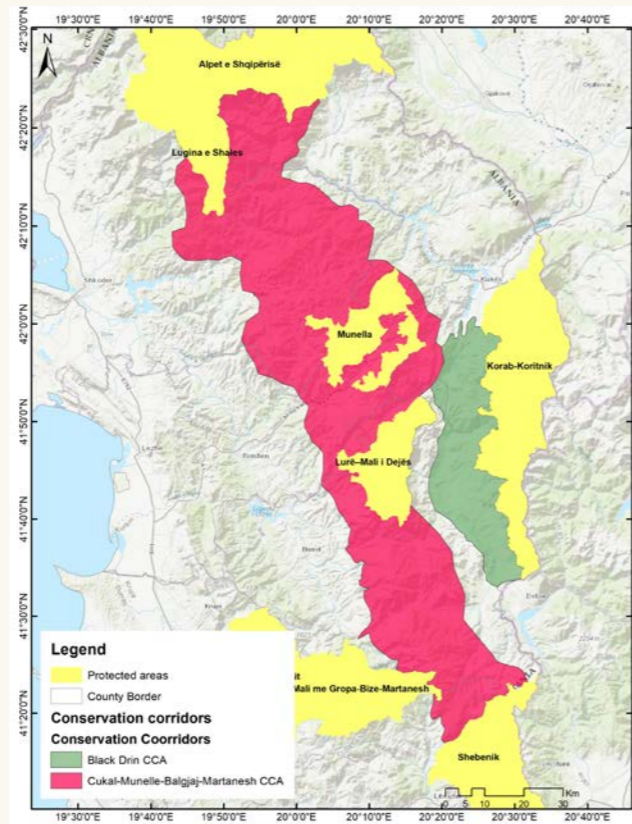
1. Working to create an understanding on the community level in the selected CCA through mobilization of community leaders as well as other individuals, as well as piloting an initiative for CCA management;
2. Working to create a shared understanding among stakeholders for the bio-corridors and the Connectivity Conservation Areas with a focus on the Cukal - Munellë - Balgjaj - Martanesh CCA as a pilot area;
3. Enabling the participation of CSOs in decision-making in the PA management, as well as building capacities for CCA implantation; and,
4. Implement research, monitoring, and habitat restoration activities concerning key species present in the Albanian Alps and Korab - Koritnik Protected Areas.

This ecological corridor connects important core areas. Within this CCA, our focus will be on the following Protected Areas:

- Shala Valley Nature Park,
- Bizë - Martanesh Nature Park
- Lurë - Dejë National Park.

Moreover, this Corridor connects two core areas, the Korab - Kortinik Nature Park and Albanian Alps National Park, which encompasses several municipalities, the Shkodër municipality, Vau i Dejës, Pukë, Fushë-Arrëz, Mirditë, Kukës, Dibër, Bulqizë, Klos, Mat and Librazhd..

Munella region, which includes several important mountains such as Munella, Zeba, Bjeshkët e Tërëbunit, Krabi, Kunora e Dardhës and Thirra-Runja, is the main important bio-corridor that connects the Albanian Alps NP with Korab-Koritnik PA throughout Skavica gorge. Also, it connects with other mountain ranges inside of the Albanian territory such as Lura NP - Balgjaj - Mali me Gropa - Bizë - Martanesh protected areas, and goes to Shebenik National Park.



## Engaging Communities and Institutions: A Year in Review

Over the past year, PPNEA has actively engaged with a diverse array of local and national institutions, including:

- NAPA and RAPA: Regions including Kukës, Dibër, Shkodër, Tiranë, Elbasan, Korçë.
- National Agencies: National Forest Agency and National Environment Agency.
- Academic Institutions: Universities of Tiranë, Shkodër, Korçë, and the Agricultural University.
- NGOs and Grantees: PONT grantees, Trees for Lure, Info Kulla, AlbNatyra, and the National Federation for Hunting.
- Educational Outreach: Local high schools in CCA regions, such as “Arbëria” in Bulqizë and “Fushë-Arrëz” High School.
- Volunteer Engagement: Our dedicated PPNEA volunteers.

## Achievements through 2023

PPNEA solidified impactful partnerships with Bulqizë and Mirditë municipalities, while actively advocating for corridor protection with Fushë-Arrëz municipality.

Noteworthy reforestation initiatives were undertaken across the Connectivity Conservation Area (CCA), garnering broad community involvement.

The annual joint workshop held at Dajti National Park facilitated collaborative efforts between RAPA’s, universities, and stakeholders, amplifying wildlife monitoring and connectivity initiatives.

Through the “Albania *is* Biodiversity” campaign, PPNEA engaged university students and formalized partnerships to enhance practical learning experiences.

Field trips were instrumental in promoting a comprehensive understanding of the CCA, with ongoing efforts to identify and prioritize key ecological sites.

The development of the participatory methodology, Transect, highlights PPNEA’s commitment to inclusive community engagement in conservation efforts.

## 6.5 TRIPOINT BROWN BEAR

**Project areas:** Southeastern area of Albania: Shebenik-Jabllanicë, Polis-Gur i Zi-Valamarë, Prespë, Moravë, Gramoz, Rungaj, Hotovë, Tomorr and Ostrovicë.

Also, with a focus on the new areas where the Brown bear has been identified in the last decade, west of the Vjosa River, including Dhëmbel-Nemërçkë, Lunxheri-Bureto, Sotira, Lucë and Kurvelesh.

**Project partners:** EuroNatur, Macedonian Ecological Society, Callisto



The Brown bear is the largest mammal as well as one of the most charismatic species in Albania.

Physical dimensions: Body length: 1.4 – 2.8 m. Females weigh around 140 – 160 kg, while males weigh 170 – 190

kg. It has a lifespan of 35 years.

The Brown bear is an omnivore species, feeding mostly on forest fruits, seeds, as well as plants, while in agricultural areas, prefers cereals. During the winter season, they hibernate in caves. The winter season finds them resting in caves. The reproduction season occurs between May and August and the female gives birth to two cubs every three years.

The Brown bear is a priority species at the European level with a special conservation status. In Albania, there are 190 - 210 individuals that classify the species with the status “Vulnerable” (VU) from the Red List of Flora and Fauna.

This species is threatened by poaching, deforestation, habitat degradation and fragmentation, as well as captivity. These threats are the main cause of its constant decrease in population. The past year saw notable progress in our ongoing efforts to protect the brown bear population and its habitats across the Balkan region.

## Brown Bear Conservation

Despite challenges, progress has been made in protecting the brown bear population and its habitats across the Balkan region through collaborative initiatives and strategic partnerships aimed at promoting coexistence between humans and wildlife.

In 2023, PPNEA focused on three strategic goals for long-term sustainable brown bear management:

1. Securing support from authorities and stakeholders.
2. Identifying hotspots of habitat fragmentation.
3. Improving coexistence between bears and humans.

By combining species distribution maps and physically collected data, PPNEA identified current and future habitat fragmentation hotspots. We created a synthesis map of brown bear distribution, protected areas, fragmentation, and future infrastructure recommendations.



## Community and Stakeholder Engagement

PPNEA conducted six consulting meetings with stakeholders in project areas, fostering dialogue on brown bear conservation and gathering valuable feedback. These meetings aimed to raise awareness, gather local insights, and identify solutions to mitigate threats to Brown bear populations and their habitats.



## Workshops and Training

A pivotal workshop on Brown bear monitoring protocols was held in May at Prespa Transboundary Park, gathering stakeholders from Callisto, MES, PPNEA, and RAPA Elbasan. This event finalized monitoring protocols through knowledge exchange and practical field testing.

In November 2023, the Bear Emergency Team training workshop in Leimos/Prespa, Greece, gathered over 35 participants from three countries. The workshop featured technical sessions, field presentations, hands-on exercises, and Karelian Bear dog demonstrations, equipping attendees with essential skills for managing human-bear conflicts.



## Study Visit and Rescue Operations

In December 2023, representatives from PPNEA, NAPA, and the Agricultural University of Tirana visited the Florina and Castoria regions in Greece to learn about wildlife conservation efforts, particularly safe wildlife crossings for bears. This visit highlighted the importance of proactive measures in mitigating wildlife-vehicle collisions and enhancing habitat connectivity.

In a collaborative effort with CALLISTO, PPNEA facilitated the rescue of a trapped bear in Pogradec, Albania. The successful operation, supported by local authorities and wildlife rescue teams, demonstrated our commitment to swift action and coordinated response in safeguarding wildlife from illegal trapping activities.

## Future Plans

Looking ahead, the potential follow-up project “TBBC - Transnational Brown Bear Conservation in the Southwestern Balkans” aims to bridge the successful work of TBB with a large-scale EU LIFE project planned for late 2025. This project will involve partner organizations from all nine countries sharing the Dinaric-Pindos Brown bear population.

## Reflection on Challenges in 2023: The Reality of Illegal Wildlife Trapping

The rescue of a Brown bear caught in an illegal foot snare near the village of Çezmë in Mokër area, on December 27th 2023, is a stark reminder of the daily reality of illegal wildlife trapping in Albania. During this rescue operation and our routine wildlife monitoring, PPNEA has frequently encountered numerous traps specifically set to capture various species. The placement of illegal snares along wildlife pathways significantly impacts not only bear populations but also other species.

Since the hunting moratorium was enacted, illegal snare trapping has increased, becoming a silent mass killer of wildlife in the region. Despite the

severe impact, preventive and elimination measures remain minimal and almost negligible, even though such actions are criminal offenses under Albanian law.

PPNEA urges authorities to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for these wildlife crimes. We also call for increased patrolling in affected



areas and implementing concrete measures to prevent future incidents. Consistent enforcement and penalties for violators are essential to curb this issue.

This rescue operation marked the first instance of equipping a Brown bear in Albania with a GPS collar. This significant scientific achievement will gather valuable data to improve our understanding of the species' ecology and biology.

We extend our gratitude to our partner organization CALLISTO, the Albanian Wildlife Rescue Team, the Regional Administration of Protected Areas Korçë, and the State Police for their joint effort in rescuing the Brown bear. This incident highlights the urgent need for increased efforts and collaboration to address illegal wildlife trapping and protect Albania's vulnerable species.

## SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR SHAR-KORAB-KORITNIK

In April 2020, the “Sustainable Future for Shar-Korab-Koritnik” project was launched in the cross-border regions of Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. This initiative received funding from the German Federal Foundation for the Environment (Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt) and the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation.

### Project Goals and Implementation

The project aimed to promote sustainable development in agriculture and tourism. To achieve this, 13 model initiatives were supported and implemented by local organizations, focusing on sustainable practices in these sectors.



### Support for Local Action Groups

We also continued our efforts to support and strengthen three Local Action Groups (LAGs) in the region:

- Friends of Sharri in North Macedonia
- LAG Korab-Koritnik in Albania
- LAG Sharri in Kosovo

### Cultural and Traditional Practices

The inhabitants of Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Albania have a rich tradition of harvesting and cultivating wild plants, producing high-quality teas and spices. They use various plant parts, including fruits, leaves, bark, roots, seeds, and flowers, for their therapeutic and medicinal properties. The region is also renowned for animal husbandry, seasonal migration to stables and artisanal milk by-products. These practices have been integral to their nutritional and healthcare needs for centuries.

### Adapting to Local Needs

Given the diversity of their activities and cultures, our project models were designed to closely align with the residents’ rural lifestyles, ensuring relevance and effectiveness.



### Project Conclusion and Impact

The year 2023 marked the successful conclusion of three years of implementing model projects in the Korab-Koritnik area. PPNEA has been deeply

involved with the local communities, not only through project implementation but also through various awareness activities and fairs.



### Celebrating Success

The project concluded with a celebratory event in Kukës, featuring:

- Traditional food
- Handicrafts
- Promotional materials
- Folk songs and dances

### Positive Outcomes

These model projects demonstrated various ways to utilize the region’s natural and traditional values for nature-friendly income generation. They have been highly successful, with numerous positive outcomes for the region, including:

- Promoting sustainable use of natural resources
- Rehabilitating degraded areas
- Generating and disseminating knowledge
- Strengthening local civil society and cross-border collaboration

### Empowering Local Communities

Through these efforts, we have empowered local residents to take responsibility for building a sustainable future for the Shar-Korab-Koritnik region.

### Long-Term Preservation

The long-term preservation of the region requires:

- Proper management of the area
- Sustainable use of natural resources by the local population
- Ensuring biodiversity protection through relevant knowledge and sustainable practice

By enabling local people to secure their livelihoods through the sustainable use of nature and natural resources, we can ensure the long-term protection and prosperity of the Shar-Korab-Koritnik region.

### Project Achievements

# 13

model projects focused on sustainable agriculture and tourism implemented

# 15

local organisations/ businesses involved

# 950+

local residents participated in activities between September 2020 and August 2023





## Enhancing connectivity at the Balkan Green Belt in Albania and North Macedonia

The Balkan Green Belt (BGB) is essential for developing 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.

Country: Albania and North Macedonia

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.

## Programs and strategies

**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.

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.

The Balkan Green Belt (BGB) is crucial for advancing Green Infrastructure (GI) across the EU. The project's objective is to develop the BGB and ensure GI connectivity in the cross-border pilot region of Shebenik-Jabllanicë, extending beyond the protected area. Achieving this goal requires enhancing legislation and land use planning implementation along the BGB, particularly in Albania and North Macedonia.

## Objectives achieved during 2023

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

Increased cross-border institutional collaboration on Green Infrastructure topics between Albania and North Macedonia

Increased the engagement of the local institutions that work in environmental and wildlife protection.

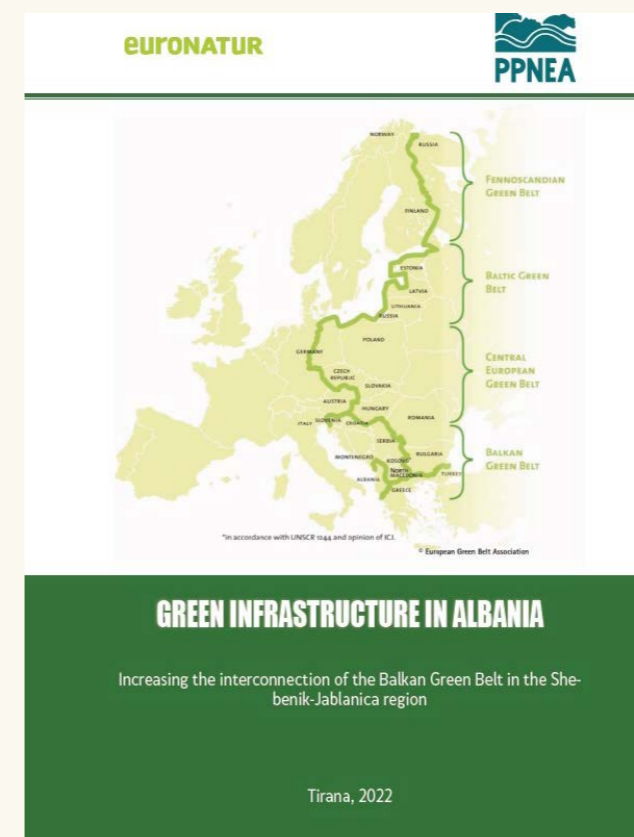
## Activities Implemented in 2023

1. Engagement of National Institutions: Conducted three Steering Committee meetings to foster collaboration and strategic planning among national-level institutions.
2. Completion of National Report on Green Infrastructure: Finalized the National Report, outlining key findings and recommendations for advancing Green Infrastructure in Albania.
3. Completion of EU Legislation Report: Finalized the report analyzing EU legislation related to Green Infrastructure and spatial planning, highlighting alignment and compliance strategies.
4. Joint Report on Spatial Planning and Green Infrastructure: Completed a comprehensive analysis of spatial planning and Green Infrastructure in the pilot area of Shebenik-Jabllanicë, including recommendations for improvement and cross-border harmonization.
5. Workshops with Local Stakeholders: Organized workshops focusing on Green Infrastructure (GI) with local stakeholders, including a transboundary workshop that brought together representatives from Albania and North Macedonia.

## Study Tour in Germany (North Rhine-Westphalia)

EuroNatur facilitated a study tour to Germany for representatives from Albania and North Macedonia to share experiences on Green Infrastructure planning and investments. Participants included representatives from EuroNatur, PPNEA, the Ministry of Tourism and Environment of Albania, the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning of North Macedonia, and various local government officials.

During the tour, participants attended an open lecture titled "Green Infrastructure in Rural Areas,"





presented by Professor Dr. Boris Stemmer and Evelyn Behre at Kreativ Campus Detmold. The group's first stop was at a natural reserve in Lage/Lippe, where they learned about pasture management and nature restoration through livestock grazing alone.

The team also visited the Wildcat Fair in Hüttscheroda, accompanied by Thomas Molich from BUND NGO and Manfred Großmann, Director of Hainich National Park. Additionally, the team explored a wildcat corridor with Knut Rommel from the Thuringian State Office for Land Management and Geoinformation, who discussed land consolidation tools used in planning processes.

## Closing Event in Rrajca

The final transboundary workshop and closing event for the Green Infrastructure project took place in Rrajcë, Albania. This workshop provided a platform for participants to share project achievements and discuss future activities, with a focus on establishing Green Infrastructure in the Shebenik-Jabllanicë pilot area and promoting cross-border cooperation.

The workshop served two key purposes: to inform stakeholders from both countries about the project's overview and accomplishments and to foster interaction and dialogue on the critical topic of Green Infrastructure.



## Joint recommendations

Intensify cooperation within the pilot region to develop a Joint Action Plan for identifying, protecting and implementing GI

Roadmap to this cooperation; the steps build on each other

Establish a transboundary coordinating body on Green Infrastructure in the pilot region

Establish a common map of GIS for both countries

Develop a financing mechanism

Monitor and evaluate



## Outlook on potential common fields of work in the Joint Action Plan

Compile a Design Code for materials which would define the rules on which materials to build with and which techniques to use, in a way that is specific to the region

Build a common system for forest management for forest fire protection

Seek the opinion of the local population

Create green corridors and natural areas to improve air quality in heavily polluted areas

Plant rows of trees and low vegetation along roads to mitigate climate change effects, provide shade, absorb exhaust fumes, etc.

Establish parts of natural habitats through planting endemic plants

Create vegetation corridors along cycling or walking paths to enhance landscape diversity

Prioritize defragmentation measures to mitigate the impacts of intensified agriculture and road infrastructure on species movement

Plan wildlife corridors (habitat corridors or green corridors), to address the fragmentation of habitats caused by structures and human activities

Foster inter-municipal cooperation in land-use planning, particularly to enhance environmental connectivity at local and regional levels. Coordinated management between sectoral departments is crucial

Facilitate exchanges of initiatives among businesses, schools, academics, and researchers through meetings, training sessions, or study trips focused on green infrastructure

Building relationships and, collaboration are central to these gatherings. Through this project, we have laid a solid foundation of information and contacts among relevant national, regional, and local stakeholders, paving the way for further transboundary cooperation to thrive.

## 6.8 “BALKANIA ROUTE”



Time frame: November 2023 – October 2024

Funding: European Green Belt, Bestbelt, with financial support from the European Union

Country: Bulgaria, Albania, Serbia, Turkey, North Macedonia

Project partners: BBF in Bulgaria, TEAM in Serbia, Back to Nature in Turkey, and Center Ambrozija in North Macedonia



As an integral part of EGB (European Green Belt), the “Balkania Route” aims the promote sustainable livelihoods, conservation of natural resources, foster collaboration, and education of the next generation.

## Drafting the “Balkania Route” Trail Map



“Balkania Route” is a partnership project, that is carried out in Balkan countries with the main purpose of strengthening, supporting, and connecting existing trail infrastructure along the Balkan Green Belt, by creating a scenic hiking route called “Balkania Route” for promoting the biodiversity values of the countries and contributing to sustainable livelihoods with the time frame of implementation from November 2023 to October 2024.



The creation of a draft map for visualizing the 3550 km Balkania Route trail on Mapy.cz was a comprehensive and collaborative effort. In Albania, detailed studies were conducted to explore all possible connections with Montenegro, Kosovo, Greece, and North Macedonia. The objective was to design a hiking trail that showcases the region’s diverse natural attributes. This complex drafting process extended over five months, taking into account the experience and expertise of key stakeholders operating in Albania. The goal was to avoid overlapping efforts and create a unique and compelling trail, leveraging the combined expertise of stakeholders and PPNEA staff.

To further this initiative, a national workshop was organized on March 27th, bringing together eight participants from major stakeholders, including the Regional Agency of Protected Areas in Korça, the Department of Forestry in Pustec Municipality, the “Korça Alpin” NGO, PPNEA staff, and other experts.

This project consists of the creation of a 3550 km hiking trail, which will pass through Hungary, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Albania, North Macedonia, Greece, and Turkey, will be implemented particularly by the partners: Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation from Bulgaria, Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania organization from Albania, Protection and Citizens Association TEAM, from Serbia, Back to Nature from Turkey and Association Center for medical herbs and berries Ambrozija in North Macedonia.

This project’s main purpose is to diversify the rural economy and create the trail for generating various opportunities for different job roles such as mountain guides, birdwatching, environmental education, safe infrastructure for ridge runners, and organic farming initiatives.

## 6.9 “SYRI I GJELBËR”

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

“Syri Gjelhër” 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 illegal cutting and logging, poaching, 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.

Help us preserve the natural resources of our country!



CHAPTER 7  
**MARINE AND  
COASTAL  
CONSERVATION**



## BUNA RIVER PROTECTED LANDSCAPE AND BOJANA DELTA



### Setting the Foundation for a Sustainable Future for Buna River Protected Landscape in Albania and Bojana Delta in Montenegro

“Setting the Foundation for a Sustainable Future for Buna River Protected Landscape in Albania and Bojana Delta in Montenegro” is focused on the Buna River - Velipoja Protected Landscape and Bojana Delta and aims to increase the knowledge of the freshwater species living in the transboundary, Buna River Protected Landscape and Bojana Delta. In addition, the project will highlight the importance of species such as Adriatic sturgeon (*Acipenser naccarii*), and European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) and dedicate conservation actions towards its conservation.

This project is supported by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF).

**Geographical Area:** ALB10 Lake Shkodra, Buna River Velipoja - Vau i Dejës and MNE03 Bojana Delta.

**Project Partners:** EnvPro Montenegro

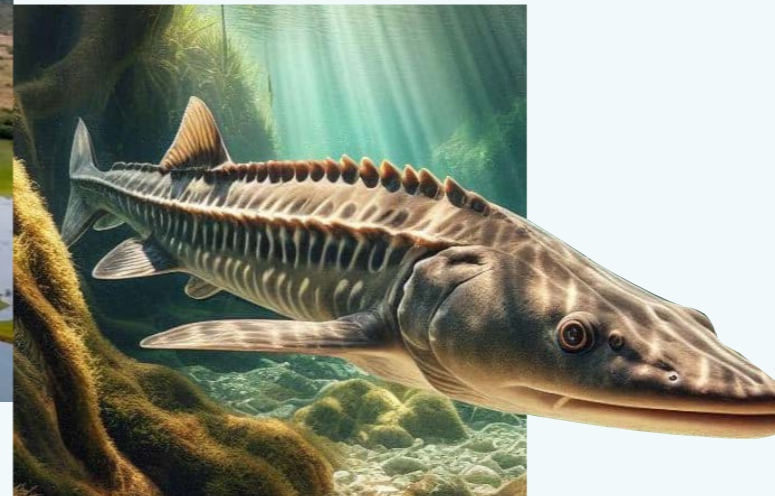
Project focus in strategic direction 2: “Support the sustainable management of water catchments through integrated approaches for the conservation of threatened freshwater biodiversity”.

## Investment priorities

**Investment Priority 2.1:** Enhance the knowledge base on freshwater biodiversity and the importance of freshwater ecosystem services. This will be achieved through the development of scientific research for the targeted species.

**Investment Priority 2.2:** Take action to reduce threats and improve management of selected sites (KBAs) in catchment management zones (CMZs) with the participation of local stakeholders (these actions could imply restoration of freshwater ecosystems). This will be achieved through the implementation of conservation actions, based on a situation analysis for the endangered species.

**Investment Priority 2.3:** Engage with government, private sector, and other stakeholders to support integrated river basin management practices that reduce threats to biodiversity in catchment management zones (CMZs). This will be achieved through developing and implementing the situation analysis in close collaboration with managing institutions.



significant coastal wetland areas in the region, emphasizing the urgency to intensify efforts in preserving and protecting this invaluable habitat.

## Focus on Freshwater Ecosystems and Fish

Fish serve as crucial components not only for human sustenance but also as vital indicators in assessing the ecological health of aquatic ecosystems. Recent efforts in Shkodër brought together students, specialists from Albania and Montenegro, and cross-border institutions responsible for the conservation and management of natural resources in Lake Shkodra, the Buna River, and its delta.

The objective of the gathering was to address regional issues and enhance capabilities in innovative fish monitoring methods within these ecosystems. Participants underwent training in both traditional and innovative fish monitoring techniques, integrating theoretical knowledge with practical skills.

Furthermore, this meeting marked the commencement of monitoring endeavors. Collaborating with RAPA Shkodër, OMP Shkodër, EnvPro, and institutions from Montenegro, data collection efforts will inform subsequent conservation measures aimed at supporting fish populations. Enhanced insights will be gained through DNA analyses, providing a comprehensive understanding of fish species within these basins. The significance of this project lies in the Buna River basin’s crucial role as a migratory corridor for fish, bridging marine and freshwater habitats.

## Adriatic sturgeon Enigma Revealed Through DNA Analysis

The Adriatic sturgeon, native to the basin of the Adriatic Sea, has been a subject of mystery regarding its presence or disappearance in recent years. Despite its classification as ‘Endangered’ in Albania’s fauna and flora red list and ‘Critically Endangered’ on the IUCN list, sightings of this species have become increasingly rare, likely due to human activities.

Planned research in the Buna River and its delta, utilizing DNA analysis methods, aims to confirm the existence of the Adriatic Sturgeon and other endangered species in this ecosystem. The study will investigate the negative impacts affecting these species, with a focus on revitalizing crucial populations and addressing threats to freshwater ecosystems. The Bunë - Velipojë Protected Landscape and its delta stand as one of the most

## THE EMERALD NETWORK, UNPROTECTED RIVERS, AND VJOSA'S DELTA

### Western Balkans: Scientists and NGO representatives call for more rivers to be protected as part of the Emerald Network



One significant initiative last year involved advocating for the designation of new Emerald Sites and the expansion of existing ones, integrating them into the National Protected Areas Network. Notably, since 2011, there has been no new proclamation of areas for the Emerald Network.

Some of the most important rivers in Albania are still not protected according to the Bern Convention. There is a very old assessment from a biogeographic seminar for the Western Balkans, and there has been very limited progress since then across the

whole Balkans to propose new Emerald sites. At the same time, in the last few years, the scientific community and NGOs have gathered a lot of data on fish and other species and GIS data is available for many rivers.

We emphasize the results of the Emerald Green Initiative organized by the CEE Bankwatch Network and the crucial need to extend protection to 88 unprotected rivers in the Western Balkans. These rivers include the following 15 new Emerald sites or extensions of existing Emerald sites in Albania:

#### Vjosa and tributaries

Drini i Zi (Black Drin)

Shkumbini and tributaries

Semani AL0000016 extension

Erzeni AL0000024 extension

Mat AL0000017 extension

Pavlo river + Spring-fed streams

Butrinti National Park AL0000004 extension

Shkodra lake AL0000009 extension

Alps AL0000010 extension

Buna-Velipoja AL0000021 extension

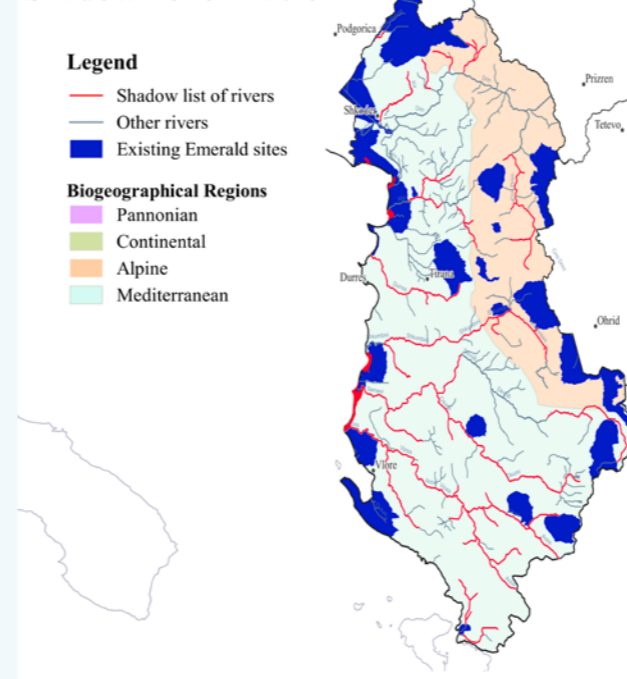
Shengjin-Ishëm AL0000017 extension

Karavasta AL0000016 extension

Cemi

Morava AL0000013 extension

### Shadow list of rivers



### Points to be considered

#### 1. Biodiversity Conservation:

The unique ecosystems of Vjosa river and its delta, known as Vjosa-Narta, can significantly contribute to the broader goals of biodiversity conservation, and we suggest the proposal to include Vjosa and all Albanian rivers important for biodiversity in the Emerald Network.

#### 2. Community Engagement:

Involving local communities is a shared value between PPNEA, the Emerald Network, the Bern Convention, and the initiative to protect the 88 rivers in the Western Balkans. Collaborative decision-making processes, inclusive of community perspectives, are pivotal for effective and sustainable conservation practices in the Emerald Network sites and beyond.

#### 3. Legal Framework Synergy:

Ensuring that new initiatives align with both national regulations and international standards set by the Emerald Network, the Bern Convention, and the imperative to protect additional rivers reinforces the legal foundation for comprehensive protection. This

alignment strengthens the commitment to meeting European-level and international expectations. Moreover, sufficient protection of Emerald sites is a prerequisite for the Natura 2000 Network and the Accession of Albania to the EU.

#### 4. Transparency and Accountability:

PPNEA, the Emerald Network, the Bern Convention, and the initiative to protect the 88 rivers emphasize transparent and accountable governance in conservation efforts. By fostering openness and accountability, we enhance public trust, especially pertinent in cases like Vjosa river and the broader Western Balkans where public interest and environmental concerns intersect. Explicitly referencing the criteria and guidelines set by the Emerald Network, the recommendations outlined in the Bern Convention, and the imperative to protect the 88 rivers in the Western Balkans, ensures that the Vjosa river and its delta, alongside other important Albanian rivers, align with European and international conservation expectations.

Bankwatch and PPNEA will continue to cooperate on the expansion of the Emerald Network in Albania.

Finalizing the Emerald Network will be important for the accession process of Albania to the EU. We are committed to consistently supporting efforts aimed at enhancing legislation concerning nature protection and enlarging the protected area network in Albania. Additionally, we emphasize the importance of further actions towards the designation of new Emerald Sites, the enlargement of existing ones, and their integration into the National Protected Areas Network. Strengthening collaboration with scientific experts, including those associated with the Emerald Network, the Bern Convention, and the initiative for additional river protection, fortifies the scientific foundation for decision-making processes.

## TRACING THE JOURNEY OF THE MONK SEAL INTO THE ALBANIAN SHORE

Country:	Albania, Greece, Montenegro, Croatia
Funding:	Prince Albert de Monaco
Project partners:	EURONATUR, BIOM, MOM, CZIP, MONK SEAL ALLIANCE



The Mediterranean monk seal is a very rare species, with only 700 individuals worldwide. There are only three to four isolated subpopulations in the Mediterranean Sea, around the Ionian and Aegean islands.

The size of its body is variable, where males' length reaches from 2 - 4 m with a weight of approximately 315 kg, while females reach length from 2.0 - 2.4 meters with a weight of approximately 300 kg.

Its diet includes various species of fish, squid, octopus, eel, and crustaceans.

Before, the Mediterranean monk seal used open beaches to rest or give birth, now they use secret

sea caves due to enhanced human presence.

It is one of the most threatened species at the European level and in Albania, it is classified as

“Critically Endangered” (CR). One of the main threats to the Mediterranean monk seal population is the degradation of its preferred habitat, as well as sea pollution, and entanglement in fishing nets.

In the pursuit of our conservation objectives for the Mediterranean monk seal, PPNEA has actively engaged in our ongoing efforts to protect this iconic species have been marked by strategic team meetings and collaborative initiatives, signifying significant milestones.

The Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) is the rarest seal in the world and the most endangered marine mammal in Europe. According to the most reliable estimates, there are less than 700 individuals left worldwide. In the North Atlantic, two subpopulations exist one at Cabo Blanco (“Cap Blanc”) at the border of Mauritania and Western Sahara and one at the Archipelago of Madeira. More than half of the remaining population lives in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, and some are occasionally sighted along the coast of the Adriatic Sea. It was once widely and continuously distributed in the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and in the North Atlantic but today the distribution of the Mediterranean monk seal is highly fragmented and consists of three to four isolated subpopulations.

### Programme goal

“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”.

## YEAR 2023

### International Forum in Athens



At the prestigious international forum held in Athens, PPNEA presented the objectives and outcomes of our project alongside esteemed organizations dedicated to marine conservation. As part of the Monk Seal Alliance, we participated in discussions revolving around the Regional Strategies and National Plans of Action aimed at safeguarding the Mediterranean monk Seal. This forum provided a platform for intensive deliberations on priority conservation actions and monitoring methodologies. Notably, PPNEA signed the Declaration of Intent, symbolizing the commencement of promising partnerships for future endeavors. The success of this forum underscores the importance of collaborative efforts in advancing the protection of our marine biodiversity.

### Establishment of a Mediterranean Monk Seal Veterinary Network

In Thessaloniki, Greece, PPNEA contributed to a comprehensive workshop focused on monk seal rescue and rehabilitation. Through theoretical lectures and practical training sessions, participants acquired essential skills in rescue operations, health assessment, and monitoring techniques. This immersive experience empowered our team members with the expertise needed to effectively support monk seals' conservation.

The workshop's success highlights our commitment to capacity building and knowledge exchange within the realm of marine conservation.





## Conducting Information Events for the General Public and Stakeholders

In collaboration with local schools and communities in Vlora, Himara, and Ksamil, PPNEA conducted educational activities aimed at nurturing environmental stewardship among youth. Through interactive sessions and presentations, students gained insights into the Mediterranean monk seal's biology, ecology, and conservation status. These initiatives not only fostered a sense of environmental responsibility but also inspired future generations to actively contribute to marine conservation efforts.

The PPNEA team is proud of all the students for their enthusiasm and commitment to conservation and looks forward to further education and awareness activities. It was impressive to see how enthusiastic these kids were to learn more about this aquatic creature that is at risk of extinction.

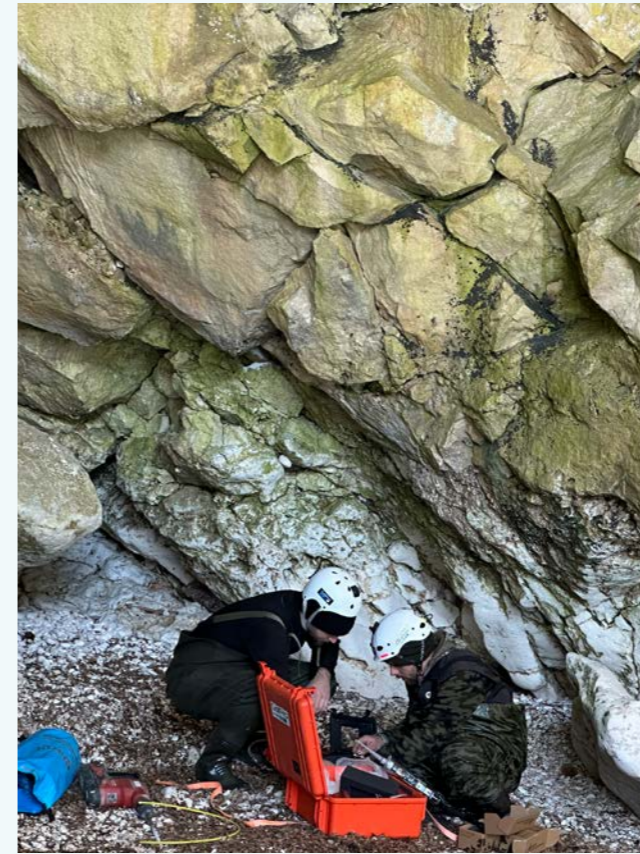
## Exhibition Tour Events

PPNEA played a vital role in key cultural gatherings such as the Porto Palermo Festival and the South Outdoor Festival, seizing these platforms to spotlight the Mediterranean Monk Seal project. Through active engagement with various stakeholders, including governmental figures, local communities, and tourists, we facilitated constructive dialogues on conservation challenges and opportunities.

In the third edition of the Porto Palermo Festival, a prestigious celebration of classical music and dance held at the historic Castle of Ali Pasha Tepelena in Himare from July 14 to August 14, PPNEA played an integral role. This event, orchestrated by the esteemed Albanian violinist Olen Cesari, provided a significant platform for our cause.

Additionally, PPNEA participated in the South Outdoor Festival for two days, dedicated to developing a Touring Exhibition for the Eastern Adriatic, with a primary focus on raising awareness about the Mediterranean monk seal and its habitat. Attendees had the opportunity to learn more about the biology and behavior of this rare species while learning about the conservation measures implemented to safeguard its precious habitat. Furthermore, they gained insight into how individuals and targeted groups, such as ours, can actively contribute to the protection of these endangered species.

These events attracted numerous local and international tourists, often overlooking the significance of biodiversity values in places like Porto Palermo or Borsh due to the proliferation of such significant gatherings. PPNEA's mission was to shed light on the regions' locations where human intervention threatens coastal habitats, aiming to raise awareness and inspire action to mitigate these threats.



## Objective: Population Monitoring in Target Area

PPNEA's field expeditions to monitor monk seal populations along the Albanian coastline have yielded valuable insights into their behavior and habitat preferences. Through meticulous observation and data collection, we have identified key areas, such as the Karaburun-Sazan Marine Protected Area, as critical habitats for monk seal sightings. This monitoring initiative forms the cornerstone of our conservation strategy, guiding future interventions to ensure the long-term survival of this endangered species.

In summary, our participation in strategic team meetings and collaborative activities underscores PPNEA's dedication to the conservation of the Mediterranean Monk Seal. As we continue to forge partnerships, empower communities, and advance scientific research, we remain committed to preserving our marine ecosystems for generations to come.

## Monk seal exhibition at Albania is Biodiversity





CHAPTER 8  
**MIGRATORY  
SPECIES  
AND THEIR  
CONSERVATION**



## ACROSS CONTINENTS: THE EGYPTIAN VULTURE'S FLIGHT FROM AFRICA TO ALBANIA

**KALI I QYQES**  
EGYPTIAN VULTURE  
NEOPHRON PERCNOPTERUS



### Egyptian vulture: A star in “Albania is Biodiversity” campaign

The Egyptian vulture, Albania's last nesting vulture, took center stage in the “Albania is Biodiversity” campaign. As the only remaining nesting vulture in the country, it symbolized Albania's rich biodiversity. Its image was prominently featured across various platforms, accompanied by activities designed to raise public awareness. Initially presented as part of a mosaic of 38 species, the Egyptian vulture was highlighted as one of Albania's rare and endangered species, now on the brink of extinction.

With intriguing facts about the species, updates on its status in Albania and the wider Balkan region, and discussions about the threats it faces, the campaign attracted widespread attention. Children, in particular, were drawn to learning about this unique bird and its migration, emphasizing a “Flight for survival”. Through interactive board games such as Egyptian Vulture Odyssey and educational initiatives, the campaign effectively combined fun with awareness-raising, fostering a deeper appreciation for biodiversity conservation and vultures particularly.



### Egyptian vulture monitoring results for 2023

Throughout 2023, our dedicated efforts to monitor the Egyptian vulture population faced both challenges and progress. Despite its status as one of the most endangered species globally, the Egyptian vulture population remains stable with 5 breeding pairs distributed across eight territories in southern Albania, Drino, and Vjosa Valley.

Of particular significance was the discovery of a new territory within the picturesque Tomorri National Park. This newfound habitat welcomed the presence of an individual Egyptian vulture, showing an expansion of its territory across its traditional ranges, Drino Valley and Vjosa Valley. The discovery of this territory marks an important moment in our conservation journey, promising hope for the species' future.

However, despite this success, it's important to recognize the ongoing challenges that threaten the Egyptian vulture's survival. The risk of extinction is very real, and it takes a combined and continuous effort from everyone involved to keep this iconic bird safe, including local, national, and international partnerships.

### International Vulture Awareness Day

In early September, we celebrated the International Day of Vultures with great enthusiasm! The event had a special focus on educating young people about the importance of conserving vultures. Organized in collaboration with APR Tirana, the event brought together enthusiastic young volunteers from the #BirdON course, families with their children, and other visitors to Tirana Grand Park for an afternoon filled with entertainment and learning.

The highlight of the event was the various educational games and activities designed to engage children and teach them about vultures. From the exciting “Egyptian Vulture Odyssey” game to educational activities from PPNEA's education packages and vulture coloring, there was something for everyone. These activities were not only fun but also aimed to raise awareness among the younger generation about Albania's natural treasures and the importance of preserving its rich biodiversity, including its diverse birdlife and Egyptian vultures.

### Supplementary feeding for the last breeding vultures in Albania, Egyptian vulture



Upon reaching Albania and its breeding grounds, from its flight for survival, the Egyptian vulture continues with its daily routine. Alongside ongoing monitoring in the nesting territory, snapshots from camera traps at the Supplementary Feeding Station in Drino Valley have captured the species enjoying its regular meal during the season when the Egyptian vulture is present.

Operating for five years now, the supplementary feeding station in Drino Valley remains a favored haunt for the Egyptian vulture. The station is maintained regularly by PPNEA local collaborators, while through the camera traps and live cameras stationed at the site, we not only captured their presence but also gained valuable information into the behavior and lifestyle of this endangered species. In Albania, where the Egyptian vulture's breeding pairs number no more than 6, every observation of such is a vital contribution to their conservation.



## IT'S TIME TO STOP ILLEGAL WILDLIFE POISONING!



### Raising Awareness Through Animation: Combating Illegal Wildlife Poisoning

Illegal wildlife poisoning persists as a cruel and detrimental practice, despite being prohibited in many countries. This method, often used to eliminate animals perceived as pests or predators, carries consequences that extend far beyond its intended targets. Leaving poison baits in open areas sets off a vicious cycle, indiscriminately claiming the lives of any creature that encounters these toxic substances. This cycle wreaks havoc on ecosystems, threatens protected species, and poses a threat to human well-being.

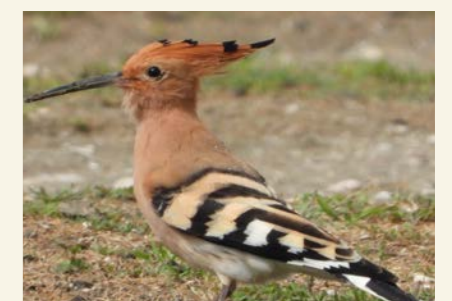
In the ongoing efforts under the BalkanDetox initiative, a series of captivating animation videos have been developed to shed light on the severity of illegal poisoning in the Balkans. Through compelling visual narratives, we aimed to reveal the grim reality of this issue and inspire action to combat it. The first animation vividly illustrates the lethal consequences of poison baits on wildlife and ecosystems, emphasizing the indiscriminate harm caused by this practice. Following this, the second animation passionately urges immediate action to end illegal wildlife poisoning, highlighting the interconnectedness of all life forms and the pressing need for environmental preservation. Lastly, the third animation uncovers the hidden health risks associated with pesticide misuse, advocating for sustainable solutions to safeguard both wildlife and human well-being.



## ALBANIA: FLYWAY CORRIDOR OF MIGRATORY BIRDS

Albania, part of the Adriatic Flyway, is a crucial stopover for numerous migratory bird species. However, the country faces a significant challenge with the illegal killing of birds. Annually, approximately 206,000 to 300,000 birds fall victim to illegal practices, making Albania one of the top 10 hotspots for IKB in the Mediterranean. Due to these threats, their migration journey is considered a Flight for Survival.

**Flight for Survival** is the international campaign by BirdLife International aimed at raising awareness about the perilous journey of these migratory birds from Africa to their breeding grounds. The campaign focuses on nine species, including the critically endangered White Stork and Egyptian Vulture, which are threatened in Albania.



# CHAPTER 9 PATHS TO ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION

Summary of overarching strategies and future directions.



## 9.1 SMART BALKANS



### FIRST OPERATIONAL GRANT FOR PPNEA A MILESTONE FOR STRENGTHENING CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN ALBANIA

Nature conservation approaches are supposed to work well and be successful, while conservation groups use the time to change the behavior of the society and raise awareness as the nation and the rule of law are in place to protect the natural resources. But, how much time do we have when development is the lighthouse that leads the whole society?

As Albania is under rapid development, authorities often put economic growth and development infrastructure construction first, marginalizing the protection of nature and environmental legislation. Such an approach often finds the general public and local communities unprepared for a quick reaction to oppose such decision-making.

In the meantime, civil society organizations, aiming to improve the governance and decision-making, continuously struggle because of the lack of capacities and resources, making it impossible for them to always react on time and target a new issue that concerns the ecological integrity of areas with high natural values.

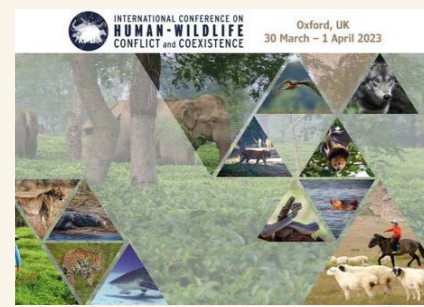
In this regard, operational grants are one of the best tools to improve the state of an organization and civil society. Through such support, NGOs can have more flexibility and engage more in long-term planning and improving their own governance and operational skills. Unrestricted funding gives the opportunity to fight exactly the imminent threats that may arise, thus being a crucial support in the fight to protect our natural resources and have a sustainable future.

In 2023, PPNEA received its first-ever operational grant since 1991. This support was granted from SMART Balkans to help PPNEA improve its management and take more steps when it comes to ensuring good governance for environmental decision-making.



**SMART Balkans – Civil society for shared society in the Western Balkans**, is a project financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs implemented by the Center for Civil Society Promotion (Center za promociju civilnog društva - CPCD), together with partner organizations from Albania – Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) and North Macedonia – Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM). This initiative contributes to strengthening participatory democracies and Euro Atlantic integrations in the Western Balkans by empowering civil society organizations and CSO networks for stronger and active role in creating peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

## 9.2 CONFERENCE ON HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT AND COEXISTENCE



PPNEA joined the International Conference on Human-Wildlife Conflict and Coexistence, hosted by IUCN in Oxford, UK.

This global summit gathered hundreds of experts from conservation organizations, academia, governments, businesses, and indigenous communities from six continents and 70 countries.

The International Conference on Human-Wildlife Conflict and Coexistence took place from 30 March to 1 April 2023 in Oxford, UK. It was organized by the IUCN SSC Human-Wildlife Conflict & Coexistence Specialist Group, and co-hosted with the GEF-funded and World Bank-led Global Wildlife Program, and WildCRU of Oxford University. The conference brought together participants from non-profit, government, academic, and donor backgrounds from around the world, providing a forum for the exchange of knowledge and interdisciplinary discussions. The programme included scientific presentations, panel debates, short courses, keynotes and interactive discussions. It was an interdisciplinary conference with participation from diverse fields such as ecology, animal behavior, psychology, policy, political ecology, conflict analysis, mediation and peacebuilding, international development, economics, and anthropology. Our Director Dr. Aleksandër Trajçe, HWCCSG Member, who was part of the panel for the discussion of “What future for large carnivores in Europe? Chasing the elusive state of coexistence”, had the opportunity to share our successful local mechanisms and approaches for addressing human-wildlife conflict, emphasizing the importance of empowering and supporting local solutions that are already working well. It is in PPNEAs mission to promote coexistence between humans and wildlife for a harmonious future.



## 9.3 INTERNATIONAL WATERBIRD CENSUS 2023



Key Indicators from the International Waterbird Census 2023:

Survey Scope: 34 wetlands in Albania and surrounding regions surveyed on January 14th and 15th.

Total Waterbird Count: 114,293 individuals recorded across 61 species, indicating a 15% decline compared to the previous year.

Wetlands with Highest Waterbird Populations:

Divjaka Karavasta National Park: 25,757 individuals

Skadar Lake: 32,089 individuals

Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape: 14,472 individuals

Kune Vain Tale Nature Reserve: 11,534 individuals

Conservation Insight: The results emphasize the critical importance of preserving wetland ecosystems for the conservation of bird populations.

## 9.4 BioNET NETWORK



In 2016, a process of capacity assessment and self - assessment of biodiversity-related CSOs in the SEE region was conducted by the GIZ ORF Biodiversity project in cooperation with international organizations with a nature protection portfolio. The assessment was focused on reliable technical and institutional capacities and financial status in terms of sustainability and midterm perspectives of the CSOs, as well as the identification of gaps, needs, and challenges in the planning and implementation of nature conservation initiatives. The data was structurally analyzed, and potential members of the network were pre-identified and bilaterally interviewed to review and confirm findings from the self - assessment and ensure pre-confirmation for joining the future BD-related network i.e., finalize the list of BioNET member organizations.

Today, BioNET is a network of different and nationally recognized environmental CSOs from the Western Balkan countries that uses their long years of experience and knowledge for purposes of the nature protection in the Balkans through joint action, focusing especially on protected areas and sustainable use of natural resources.

## Vision

| Preserved Balkans nature for Europe's future.

## Mission

BioNET is a regional network of organizations that stands for nature protection in the Balkans through joint action.

Representatives from environmental organizations across the region, Centar Za Zivotnu Sredinu (Bosnia & Herzegovina), Mladi istrazivaci Srbije/YRS (Serbia), Udruga Biom (Croatia), Inca Albania and PPNEA, Green Home NGO, Crnogorsko Drustvo Ekologa CDE / Montenegrin Ecologists Society and CZIP Montenegro, eight out of 14 organizations in total, gathered to exchange insights and discuss

their incredible achievements from 2021 to 2023.

The main focus was BioNET activities during this period and reinforcing the importance of the BioNET Strategic Plan 2021–2025.

The meeting was not just about professional discussions; it was an opportunity to foster camaraderie and enhance mutual understanding. We exchanged a lot of ideas for future work, learned about each other's work better, and also had a chance to socialize and take a tour through the beautiful city of Trebinje.

As we look forward to new endeavors, we're happy about the collaborative spirit and the impactful initiatives that will unfold within the BioNet network!

## 9.5 BUTRINT NATIONAL PARK: CATTLE EGRET AND GRAZER STORY OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP



Because different species often inhabit the same spaces and share or compete for the same resources, they interact in a variety of ways, known collectively as symbiosis. Some of the main symbiotic relationships include mutualism, commensalism, and parasitism. The cattle egret and grazing cattle in a close association is a classic example of commensalism.

The cattle egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) always forage close to where the cattle are grazing because the cattle, as they move, stir up and flush out insects from the vegetation that otherwise might be difficult for the egrets to find and catch. That is why they are often observed riding on grazers, as in the case of the photos, above a sheep, enjoying its lunch.

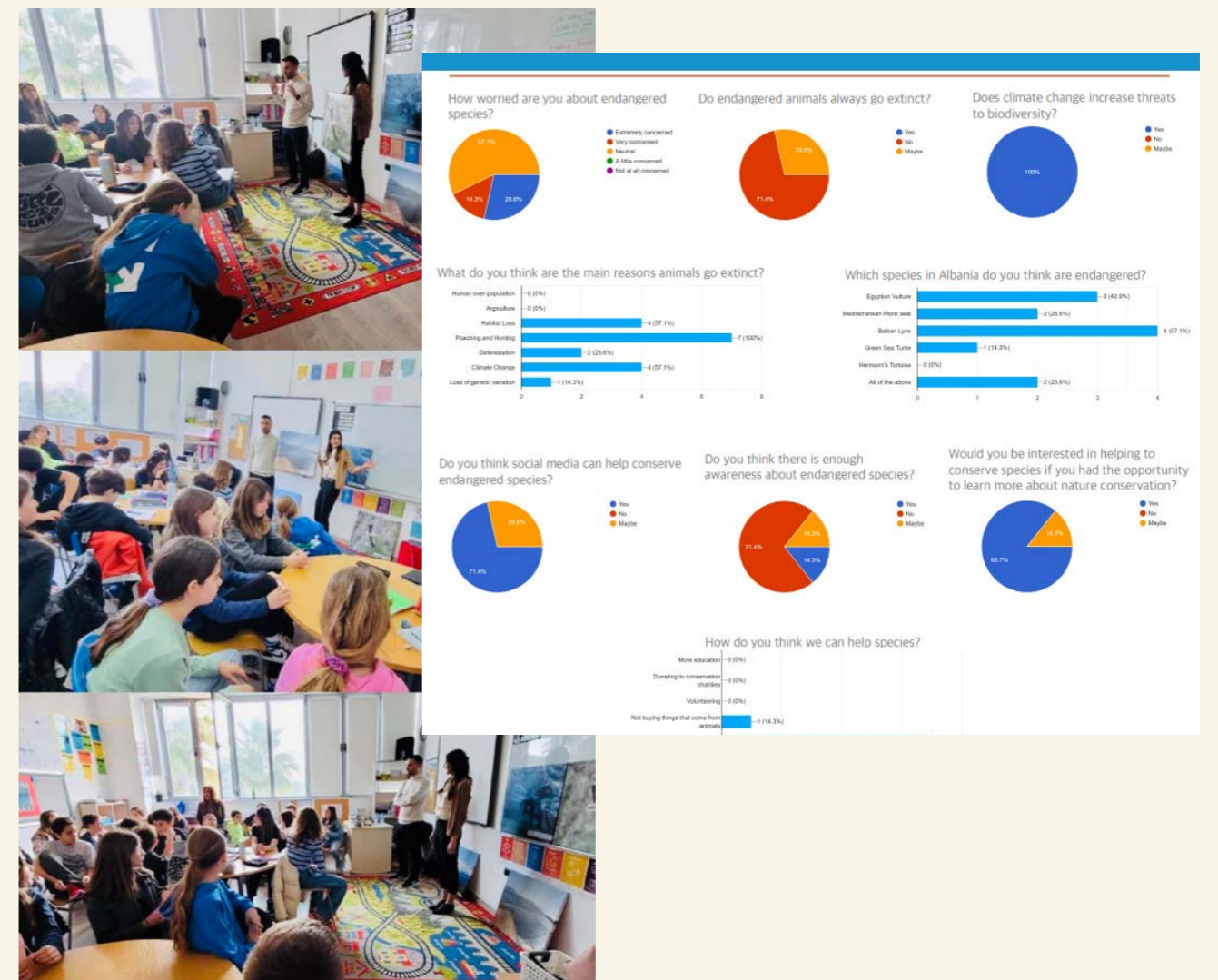
## 9.6 MEET VIVI.

A 10-year-old student named Vivi from the World Academy of Tirana (WAT) conducted a school project on endangered species after being inspired by a visit from PPNEA. She shared her findings with PPNEA, including a survey she conducted on what her grade 3-4 classmates know about conservation.

“I wanted to do a project on endangered species because I have been interested in them since when I was in 4th grade. My interest in endangered species started with a unit we had in school about the environment. I am worried about endangered species because I know that when we [humans] hurt them, we are also hurting ourselves. I feel bad about species that go extinct because they all had their place in this world, and then they were taken away. And to think it happens mostly because of humans makes me very sad”.

These findings can help all of us, to better understand what kids know about conservation.

Thank you for your immense contribution, Vivi!



# CHAPTER 10 COMMUNICATIONS REPORT YEAR 2023

This report provides an overview of the performance and engagement metrics achieved through PPNEA's social media channels, including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and the organization's website, [www.ppnea.org](http://www.ppnea.org).

## Engagement Across Platforms

Our online presence experienced significant growth, with 23,000 users and 115,000 page views on our website. On social media, Twitter saw over 60,000 interactions, while Facebook reached 401,612 people and Instagram engaged 141,170 users. Our YouTube channel had 423,800 impressions, and LinkedIn achieved 275,434 impressions. We also connected directly with over 10,000 individuals through campaigns, impacting 920 pupils from 17 schools and reaching ONE MILLION PEOPLE nationwide.



# CHAPTER 11 FINANCIAL REPORT YEAR 2023

**768,029 €**  
Total income grant agreements

**16,166 €**  
Total income expertise contracts

**329,944 €**  
Staff costs

**400,098 €**  
Supplies and services for activities and projects



# CHAPTER 12

# A MOMENT OF REFLECTION: PROTECTED AREAS AS STAR OBSERVATORIES

On August 13, 2023 people in Albania and beyond, enthusiastically traveled to natural areas with no artificial lights around to enjoy the so-called Meteor Shower.

Humankind and the sky are closely connected, not only through the ambition to reach it and explore in space but also history-wise. Stars have been a natural guide to navigating through the earth or guiding economic activities such as agriculture. As these are already solved by the development, nowadays stars still serve to light up hope by giving the chance to express wishes or by guiding poetic inspiration.

Being once a common experience, stargazing and standing in awe in front of the Milky Way, is turned

now to one of the rarest human experiences. The light pollution of the cities has won against the skylight. Thus, illuminating us to the close but blinding us to the beyond.

The few remaining opportunities to see the sky and earth merging are our nature reserves. Proclaimed to protect the biodiversity of those areas, totally clear from artificial lights, they preserve our intimacy with the stars and all the cultural values they represent.

Unfortunately, Albania, in the name of development, is increasing light pollution in the protected areas. The artificial lights of the construction sites in our natural landscape, will chase away the wildlife and steal the stars away.

# LAST CHAPTER OF 2023 WORLD WILDLIFE DAY



Humans



Wildlife



Water



Land



# PPNEA

PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN ALBANIA  
•SINCE 1991•

On World Wildlife Day 2023, March 3, organizations across the globe participated in a powerful campaign by temporarily removing nature elements from their logos and trademarks. This striking visual statement served as a poignant reminder of the potential loss we face if we fail to protect our natural environment.

By erasing images of animals, plants, and other natural symbols from their branding, these organizations highlight the stark reality that such elements could vanish from our world altogether.

This visual experiment underscores the urgent need for collective action in conservation efforts, emphasizing that without concerted effort and awareness, the absence of nature in our logos today could foreshadow a future where these elements are lost FOREVER.

# PPNEA TEAM

## Board of Directors

Ajola Mesiti

Enerit Saçdanaku

Erjola Keçi

Kujtim Mersini

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Aleksandër Trajçe

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Project Manager

Xhemal Xherri  
Project Manager

Dea Zyryku  
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Redon Hasanllari  
Project Assistant

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Finance Officer

Kejsi Haxhiraj  
Finance Officer

## Fundraising Department

Cveta Trajçe  
Fundraising Officer

Olsion Lama  
Fundraising Officer

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Communications and Public Relations Officer

Klejn Ngraçani  
Project Manager

## Local offices

Kostandin Xhaho  
Local Officer, Vlorë

Tina Donefski  
Local Office Coordinator, Prespa

Adnand Bego  
Local Officer Assistant, Prespa



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