

Protecting Brown Bears in the Southwestern Balkans



Why Are Brown Bears Important?

Brown bears play a crucial role in maintaining the ecological balance in their habitats. By protecting them, we also protect the rich biodiversity of the Southwestern Balkans.

What We Addressed Under the Tripoint Brown Bear Project:

- Low Political Prioritization
- Lack of Reliable Data
- Human-Bear Conflicts
- Poaching and Illegal Killing
- Increasing Habitat Fragmentation

Strategic Goals of the Previous TBB Project:

1 Securing Support from Authorities and Stakeholders

- Transnational communication and cooperation between authorities and a network of relevant stakeholders in the area were established
- A Memorandum of Understanding draft (MoU) was commonly elaborated and agreed upon among the partner NGOs

2 Identifying Hotspots of Habitat Fragmentation

- An online platform, enabling the partners to standardize the collection, management, and sharing of different data sets from the three project countries was established
- A species distribution map was completed, which is the base for individual evaluations, i. e. the overlay with the habitat data, then later with the existing and planned infrastructure and the protected areas

3 Identifying Hotspots of Habitat Fragmentation

- A lot of work towards comprehensive national bear monitoring in the partner countries in the future has been done
- Pilot areas in all three project countries were identified, where selected stakeholders were given a first round of training on different methods of bear monitoring
- The recruitment of Bear Emergency Teams (BETs) has been prepared with a first Bear rescue operation successfully finalized
- Operational protocols were elaborated and a first training workshop was implemented

The Path Forward: TBBC Project

Building on our successes, the Transboundary Brown Bear Conservation (TBBC) project will continue on that path and extend its strategic approach within the project region. Furthermore, it will work towards an effective population-based approach by strengthening cross-border cooperation.

Duration: 2 Years

Coordinated by: EuroNatur

Partners: Callisto (GR), Eko-svest, MES (both NMK), and PPNEA (AL).

TBBC will focus on 6 strategic goals:

1

Promoting cooperation for sustainable transboundary conservation

Formation of sustainable networks between stakeholders, e.g. by establishing a transnational working group and elaborating a common project proposal for the EU's Life program

2

Enhancing habitat connectivity in the project area

Identification of key habitat linkages between countries. Development of tools, production of guidelines, and implementation of measures to improve connectivity, e.g. land-use planning or road mortality mitigation

3

Developing transboundary bear monitoring

Establishment of cross-border monitoring initiatives, cooperation with stakeholders and creation of a shared database to enhance knowledge of the species and guide conservation efforts

4

Mitigating human-bear conflicts by involving Bear Intervention Team (BIT)

Implementation of conflict mitigation measures (electric fencing, etc.) as well as joint interventions in bear-related emergency cases by a trained BIT using common operational protocols

5

Capacity building against wildlife crime

Lobbying for national anti-poaching laws and legal action in poaching cases. Collaboration with law enforcement, joint anti-poaching training. Capacity building through cross-border exchange of knowledge

6

Increasing public awareness and encouraging stakeholder involvement

Conduction of public awareness campaigns and educational programs. Engagement of local stakeholders. Production of a project documentary about co-existence with the brown bear.

The project area will remain similar to TBB, with the project activities being mainly focused on the transboundary mountain areas between North Macedonia, Greece and Albania.

Target Groups:

- Local, regional, and national decision-makers
- Protected area managers
- Hunters' associations
- Relevant ministries and agencies responsible for large carnivores' management
- Nature conservation organizations
- Universities
- Local communities
- General public and media