



PPNEA

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

PPNEA
ANNUAL
REPORT 20
24

PPNEA **ANNUAL** **REPORT** 20 24



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Founded in 1991 as Albania's first environmental NGO, PPNEA has been a pioneering force in the country's environmental landscape. For over three decades, the organization has been dedicated to safeguarding Albania's unique biodiversity, conserving wildlife, protecting critical ecosystems, advancing scientific research, empowering local communities, and advocating for stronger environmental policies.



Our Vision

PPNEA works towards bringing harmony between nature and human society in Albania. We believe in a world where responsible institutions and the community engage actively in nature conservation and cultural heritage preservation.



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.

Core Areas of Focus

- 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).





Message from the PPNEA's Board

Albanian Alps National Park



Prof. Asc. Dr. Erjola Keçi

PPNEA Board Member

Trough this message I would like to express my gratitude to each PPNEA member, partner, supporter, stakeholder, volunteer for the day-to-day cooperation, dedication and commitment and important outputs achieved together bringing forward our mission for nature conservation and preservation in Albania, through rigorous scientific research, community engagement, strategic partnerships establishment, and continuous interaction with decision-making institutions.

This annual report is a moment for reflection: it marks not only the beginning of increased pressures on Albania's protected areas but also the continuing responsibility of civil society, authorities, and citizens to defend these irreplaceable ecosystems.

2024 has been a challenging year regarding the nature protection and conservation in Albania.

It will be remembered as the year when the very foundations of our protected areas were tested by the adoption of a controversial new law for Protected Areas – a law that was highly contested by many national and international experts and the European Union itself. While its implications threatened decades of progress, it also reignited a profound sense of purpose within our community: to defend nature not as a privilege, but as a right and responsibility.

Throughout 2024, PPNEA faced the difficult reality of weakened legal protections, yet our field teams never stopped monitoring, restoring, and protecting Albania's biodiversity, from the nesting birds of the lowland wetlands to the magical chamois of the highlands.

PPNEA continued to speak for rivers, forests, and species whose futures depend on its collective action.

During the 10th anniversary of the Berlin Process PPNEA ensured that environmental issues were not sidelined in the broader political dialogue but instead were positioned as central to the region's future development and integration into the EU.

This year PPNEA has been contributing to the development of actionable policy recommendations and presenting them to EU institutions and Western Balkan governments.

The ongoing struggle for the integrity of Vjosa–Narta showed how perseverance and science can transform public awareness into a national, and even international, movement. Despite the obstacles, this year also revealed the best of what we can achieve together.

Each project, each expedition, each partnership became an act of quiet defiance against indifference and a declaration that nature still matters. This annual report is not just a record of activities; it is a chronicle of commitment. Behind every image, statistic, and story lies the effort of people who refused to give up.

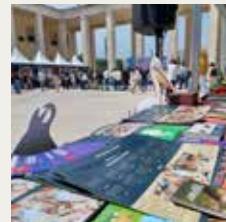
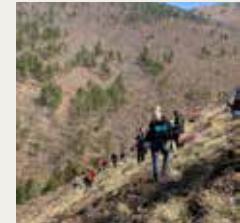
Every page in this report carries the weight of a year of vigilance, resilience, and perseverance. PPNEA has proven the continuous dedication to safeguard the natural environment in Albania, through conservation actions, research and monitoring, capacity building, awareness and outreach, legal actions and policy dialogue at national, regional and international level.

Conservation is not an easy path, especially in a changing legal and social landscape, but it remains a necessary one.

As we look ahead, PPNEA stands ready to continue this mission with renewed determination. The challenges of 2024 remind us that the future of Albania's natural heritage depends on unity, science, and courage. Together, we will ensure that the voices of our landscapes, wildlife, and communities are not only heard, but respected.



Photos Year 2024







“

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

”

366 Days of Vigilance, Hope, and Action



Every page in this report is the story of a year lived in the field, in offices, in meetings, in forests, rivers, and skies, 366 days of watching, waiting, acting, and hoping. In 2024, we faced challenges that tested every ounce of our dedication: legal amendments that threatened protected areas, infrastructure projects cutting through vital ecosystems, and the constant tension between development and preservation. We raised alarms, rallied communities, engaged authorities, and reminded the world that rivers, forests, and wildlife cannot speak for themselves. The international intervention on the Vlora Airport project was a moment of relief, but it was also a reminder that every victory requires relentless vigilance.

Our work spanned from the smallest to the largest: guiding storks to safer nests, counting hatchlings on the shores of the Adriatic, documenting a Laughing dove in Albania for the first time, tracking the journeys of brown bear and Egyptian vulture, and protecting ecological corridors that allow large carnivores - and hope - to move freely across the land. The Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme remained at the heart of our efforts, teaching us that patience, perseverance, and collaboration are the true currencies of conservation.

Beyond the field, we fought for knowledge, for awareness, and for a future where environmental governance matters. We trained, we built partnerships, we empowered youth, and we contributed to the Green Agenda across the Western Balkans, ensuring that policies, budgets, and actions reflect the urgent need for climate-resilient, biodiversity-rich landscapes.

This report is more than numbers, policies, or highlights; it is a chronicle of dedication. Every paragraph reflects the hours spent in the rain, under the sun, on mountains, and in meeting rooms; every data point is tied to a conversation, a community, a bird, a river, or a tree. And through it all, we have relied on the support of partners, donors, volunteers, and local communities.

If this report tells one story, it is this: conservation is never just work; it is a commitment of heart, mind, and spirit, sustained day after day, because the world we protect is worth every second.

In 2024, PPNEA continued its mission to protect Albania's unique biodiversity, from the depths of the Ionian Sea to the peaks of the northern forests. Across all our projects, one common thread guided us: protecting species and habitats through science, community engagement, and policy advocacy.

Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme 2.0

Duration: 01.09.2022- 31.12.2027



Forest Beyond Borders

Duration: 01.06.2022 – 31.12.2024



"Protecting Vjosa's Delta from unsustainable urban development: an integrated approach for the long-term conservation of biodiversity values in the lower Vjosa valley"

Duration: 01.01.2022 – 01.12.2024



Safe Flyways IKB 3

Duration: 01.01.2024 – 31.12.2025



Feasibility study on enhancing connectivity conservation in the PONT Focus Region: Albania

Duration: 18.03.2024 – 25.06.2024



Eastern Adriatic Monk Seal

Duration: 01.04.2021 – 31.03.2024



Balkania route: two steps towards others

Duration: 01.11.2023 – 31.10.2024



BalkanDetox Life

Duration: 01.10.2020 – 30.09.2025



Northern Forests Initiative: Forest restoration in North Macedonia and Albania

Duration: 21.06.2023-31.05.2025



Improving the status of Lutra lutra and their habitat in cross-border area of National Park Skadar Lake

Duration: 01.10.2024 – 30.09.2025

Transboundary Brown Bear Conservation in the Southwestern Balkans (TBBC)

Duration: 01.07.2024 – 30.06.2026



We go Coop

Duration: 01.01.2024 – 31.03.2026



Paving the Way towards the Implementation of CCAs in Albania through Enhancement of Governance and Management of Pas

Duration: 01.02.2023 – 31.01.2026



Adriatic Monk Seal Project

Duration: 01.04.2024 – 31.03.2027



Prespa Project Biodiversity Conservation in Transboundary Prespa (Euronatur)

Duration: 01.03.2024 – 28.02.2027



Green Agenda Navigator – Empowering civil society to support development of climate-neutral and climate-resilient economies in the Western Balkans

Duration: 01.12.2024 – 31.05.2027



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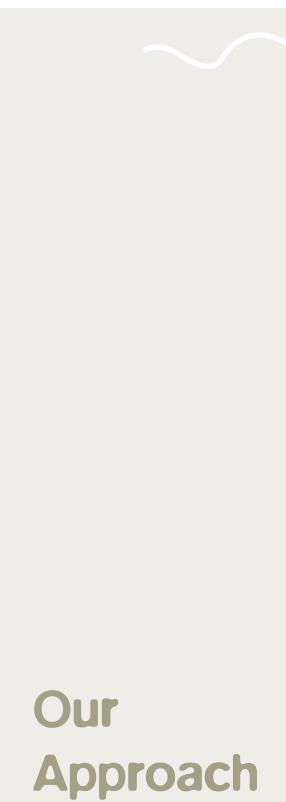
Duration: 01.09.2024 – 31.08.2027



The Prespa Project - Protecting Prespa's waters and wildlife in Prespa-Ohrid-Shebenik Ecoregion through Community Engagement

Duration: 01.02.2024 – 31.01.2027





Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)



Science & Monitoring

We rely on field-based monitoring to guide every action, from camera-trapping the endangered Balkan lynx to surveying fish and bird populations in rivers and wetlands. Data-driven conservation ensures credibility and measurable impact.



Community Engagement

We believe conservation cannot succeed without people. From reforestation actions and conservation camps to school programs and festivals, we engaged thousands of citizens in protecting their natural heritage.



Policy & Advocacy

Nature needs a voice at the decision-making table. PPNEA contributed to national strategies, EU reports, and regional dialogues, ensuring that conservation priorities are integrated into Albania's development.



Creativity & Awareness

From exhibitions to murals, documentaries, and social media campaigns, we used creativity to bring nature closer to society and inspire a new generation of conservationists.



Results at a Glance

- Critically endangered species protected
- Key habitats monitored and restored: forests, rivers, wetlands.
- Community & youth involvement: 1,000+ citizens and students engaged.
- Policy influence: Contributions to national and regional strategies, laws, and reports.
- International recognition: Features in global media and participation in expert networks.

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CHAPTER

1

**STANDING FOR
NATURE AT THE
BERLIN PROCESS
SUMMIT 2024**



The 10th anniversary of the Berlin Process was a landmark event that celebrated a decade of advancing cooperation and integration between the Western Balkans and the European Union.

This summit, a pivotal moment in the region's journey toward EU integration, focused on addressing key challenges such as environmental governance, sustainable development, and the rule of law. It also provided an important platform for civil society, governments, and international partners to engage in dialogue and promote policy reforms that align with EU standards.

At the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum 2024, held on the sidelines of the summit, over 115 organizations participated in shaping the sustainable future of the region. This forum provided an invaluable space for civil society actors to propose concrete solutions to the challenges facing the Western Balkans. This year's forum featured seven thematic working groups, with PPNEA serving as the rapporteur for Working Group F, which focused on "Environmental Protection and Sustainable Economic Development."

1.1 PPNEA's Key Role as Rapporteur for Working Group F

As rapporteur for Working Group F, PPNEA took a leading role in driving discussions and facilitating the development of recommendations aimed at improving environmental governance and ensuring sustainable economic development in the Western Balkans. PPNEA's participation in the forum was crucial in ensuring that the environmental priorities of the region were represented and heard by key stakeholders, including EU leaders and Western Balkan governments.

In this capacity, PPNEA contributed to shaping key policy recommendations in areas critical to the region's future development:

1. Strengthening the Rule of Law in Environmental Decision-Making: PPNEA emphasized the need for stronger legal frameworks and more effective enforcement mechanisms to ensure that environmental laws are respected and upheld. The absence of proper enforcement has often led to environmental degradation, and PPNEA advocated for better institutional accountability to address this issue.

2. Promoting Regional Environmental Cooperation: As part of its role in the forum, PPNEA pushed for deeper collaboration between Western Balkan countries and the EU on issues such as biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation, and the management of transboundary natural resources. This recommendation stressed that only through joint efforts can the region tackle shared environmental challenges.

3. Fostering Sustainable Economic Practices: PPNEA also advocated for integrating sustainability into economic development strategies. This included promoting green investments, supporting sustainable agriculture, and encouraging the development of renewable energy projects outside important biodiversity areas.



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1.2 Policy Recommendations Presented at the Berlin Process Summit

At the Berlin Process 10th Anniversary Summit, the policy recommendations developed by Working Group F were presented to EU leaders and Western Balkan governments. These recommendations, which were based on in-depth discussions and expert insights, aimed to advance environmental protection and sustainable economic development in the Western Balkans while strengthening the rule of law in environmental governance.

By bringing forward these recommendations, PPNEA ensured that the environmental priorities of the Western Balkans were directly addressed at the highest political level, urging EU and regional leaders to take immediate and long-term actions to protect the environment and ensure sustainable growth in the region.

1.3 Impact of PPNEA's Contributions

PPNEA's active participation in the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum 2024 and its role as rapporteur for Working Group F underscored the organization's leadership in advocating for environmental protection and sustainable economic development in the Western Balkans. Through its efforts, PPNEA ensured that environmental issues were not sidelined in the broader political dialogue, but instead were positioned as central to the region's future development and integration into the EU.

This engagement provided PPNEA with a unique opportunity to amplify the voice of civil society and directly influence the policymaking process at a high level. By contributing to the development of actionable policy recommendations and presenting them to EU institutions

and Western Balkan governments, PPNEA reinforced its commitment to promoting environmental sustainability and good governance in the region. This work will be instrumental in shaping the EU accession process for the Western Balkans and ensuring that environmental challenges are addressed in a way that benefits both the region and the broader European community.

Through its involvement in the Berlin Process, PPNEA demonstrated its critical role as a champion for environmental governance, helping to place the region's environmental priorities at the forefront of the EU integration agenda and contributing to the creation of a sustainable, law-abiding future for the Western Balkans.



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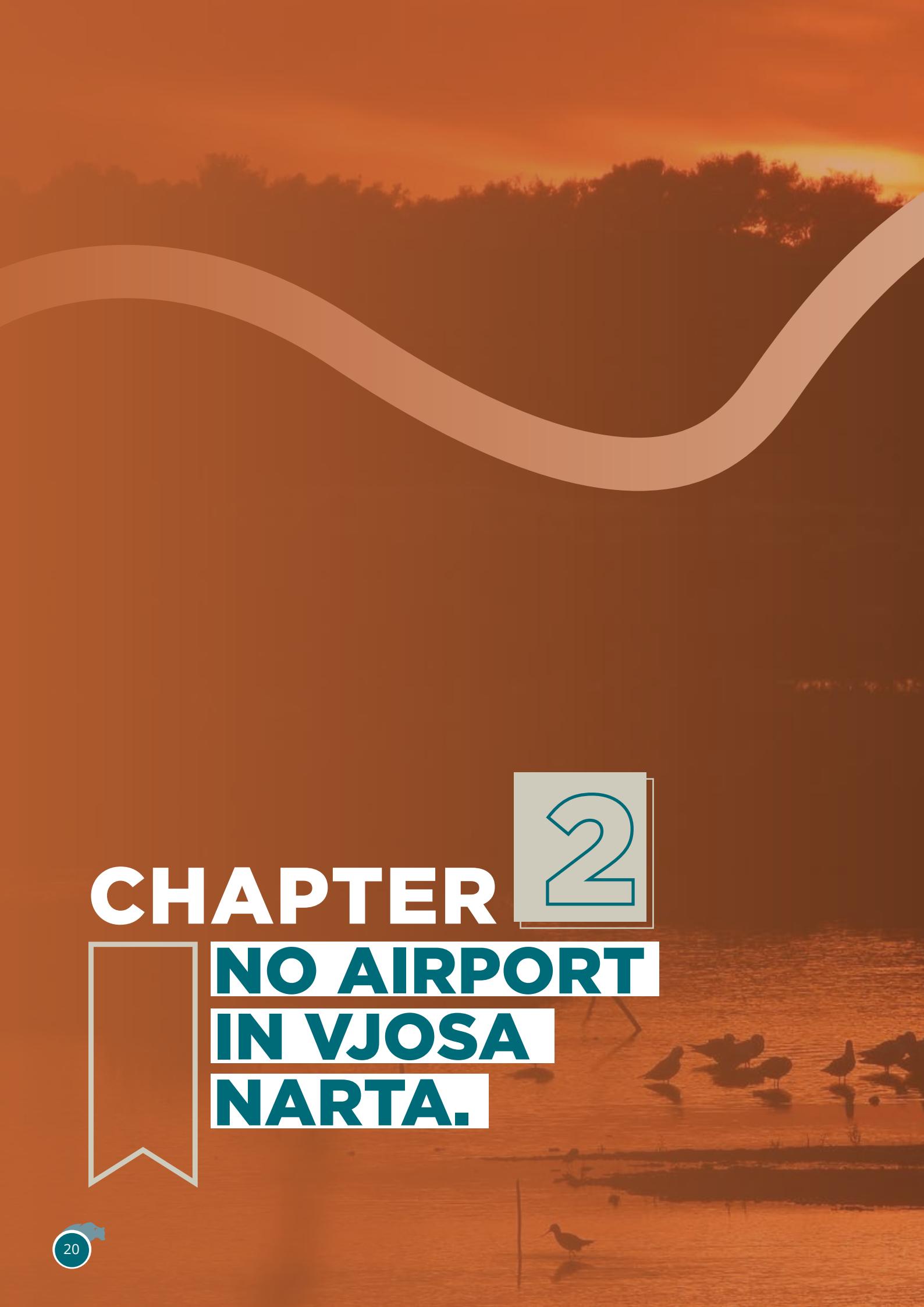
About

The Civil Society and Think Tank Forum 2024, held within the framework of the Berlin Process, provided a vital platform for over 115 civil society organizations and think tanks from the Western Balkans to engage in dialogue with policymakers from the EU and the region. The forum was implemented by the Southeast Europe Association and the Aspen Institute Germany, with generous support from the German Federal Foreign Office, ensuring a broad and impactful participation in these discussions.



CHAPTER

NO AIRPORT IN VJOSA NARTA.



**Protecting Vjosa's Delta from
Unsustainable Urban Development:
An Integrated Approach for the
Long-Term Conservation of
Biodiversity Values in the Lower
Vjosa Valley**



Location: **Vjosa-Narta
Protected Landscape**



Duration:
3 years



Project Partners:
EuroNatur



Project Donor:
DIMFE

STRATEGIC GOALS

- Knowledge baseline and information are generated for the Vjosa delta.
- Lobby and advocacy at the national, regional, and international levels, to protect Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape, a Wetland of International Importance from the unsustainable infrastructure plans within the protected area.
- Public awareness of the high biodiversity value of the area and its threats.
- Conservation and restoration of bird species population and their habitats.

Vjosa - Narta Protected Area



2.1 A battle for the Protected Areas in Albania

Vjosa-Narta and the surrounding ecosystem represent one of the largest and most important wetland ecosystems of Albania and the Mediterranean. Besides being part of the Albanian Protected Area Network, Vjosa-Narta is included in almost all international ecological networks that a natural site in Albania could be part of.

This wetland is recognized as an Important Bird Area (IBA), Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), and is officially nominated by the Albanian government as a candidate site for the Emerald Network. In addition, this wetland is part of the freshwater ecosystem, the Vjosa Delta, one of the most vital deltas in the Adriatic.

Its diverse habitats, such as sand dunes, lagoons, salina, delta, and seaside, make it a perfect shelter for a rich variety of important wildlife, including Dalmatian pelicans, Albanian water frogs (endemic), sea turtles, Mediterra-

nean monk seals, etc. Vjosa-Narta is a crucial stopover for migrating birds, a nursery for marine life, and a place of immense natural value.

Despite its importance, the construction of the Vlora International Airport and potential resorts within the borders of this protected area threaten its ecological integrity. Such threats pose serious risks of habitat loss and fragmentation, wildlife disturbance, and different forms of pollution (light, noise, and water).

A dedicated group of people and organizations is working to protect the Vjosa-Narta Lagoon from the damaging effects of the proposed airport. Efforts span multiple levels, scientific research, awareness raising, lobbying, engaging, and advocacy. PPNEA, in close collaboration with EuroNatur, has undertaken immense efforts toward this cause and project implementation.



Vjosa River Delta

2.2 Scientific Investigations

Scientific data collection and analysis formed a core component of the project. Regular monitoring activities were carried out, such as:

- Breeding bird monitoring
- International Waterbird Census
- Migratory bird counts (successfully implemented in 2023 and 2024)
- Dalmatian pelican census
- Golden jackal monitoring

In addition, two GPS devices were successfully installed on species like the Dalmatian pelican and the Stone curlew. Ringing of target species (Kentish plover, avocet, common tern, little tern, and Dalmatian pelican) was also conducted in collaboration with international experts.

These monitoring efforts documented biodiversity and supported conservation management strategies. They also helped to preserve sea turtle nesting sites and restore degraded forests by planting pine trees. Scientific monitoring activities continued in 2024.

2.3 Legal and Advocacy Initiatives

In parallel with scientific efforts, legal action was initiated against both the Revision of the Protected Area and the Airport Contract. Court proceedings in 2023 marked significant milestones, though progress stalled in 2024 with only procedural hearings taking place.

Advocacy remained strong throughout the project:

- Lobbying at national and international levels (Albanian NGOs, parliamentarians, Bern Convention, EU institutions, AEWA, BirdLife Europe & Central Asia, and diplomatic missions).
- Strategic meetings in Brussels and Strasbourg, including participation in the CEPF 10th-anniversary event and the Bern Convention Standing Committee meeting.

- Establishment of partnerships with the Mediterranean Alliance for Wetlands and BirdLife Europe & Central Asia, expanding the project's network and influence.

In 2024, efforts continued with meetings involving EU representatives in Albania, the Bern Convention, AEWA, NGOs, and media representatives. The ongoing campaign with the Mediterranean Alliance for Wetlands, using the Red Alert mechanism, remained a key advocacy tool. Project activities also contributed to opposition to the new protected areas law, which poses negative impacts on important protected areas, including Vjosa-Narta and Karaburun-Sazan Marine National Park.



Public statement at the Assembly of Albania

2.4 Public Awareness and Outreach

Raising public awareness was a central project objective. The “No Airport in Vjosa-Narta” campaign became the main platform for outreach:

- A two-day conference in Tirana and Vlora brought together experts, NGOs, and journalists to share findings and discuss the airport project.
- Public demonstrations were organized in Vlora and Tirana.
- Over 2000 individuals participated in project-related activities.

- Two documentaries (“Ndaloni Aeroportin” and L'aéroport de Vlora) and numerous media reports reached an estimated 1 million people.

- Educational initiatives included environmental education sessions, a summer camp, and reforestation efforts.
- Public awareness and promotion activities continued in 2024, targeting diverse stakeholders.

2.5 Main Impacts of the Project

- **Increased awareness** of the importance of the freshwater ecosystem, locally, nationally, and internationally.
- **Enhanced conservation** through scientific monitoring and direct conservation actions, supported by new technology.
- **Strengthened advocacy** against airport construction, mobilizing public support and influencing decision-making.

- **Empowered stakeholders** by engaging local communities, protected area staff, and CSOs in conservation and advocacy.
- **Built institutional capacity** at PPNEA, including new memberships in two key international networks: BirdLife International and the Mediterranean Wetland Alliance.



Narta Summer School 2024 at Vjosa - Narta Protected Area

2.6 BirdON Students Take Action in Vjosa-Narta

BirdON students, alongside PPNEA volunteers and RAPA Vlora, planted around 200 Mediterranean pine saplings in the Vjosa-Narta Protected Area. This hands-on activity combined restoration efforts with environmental education.



Reforestation Action with local schools in Pishe Poro

2.7 Discovering Narta Lagoon's Biodiversity

Participants also explored Narta Lagoon, observing iconic species like Flamingos, Kingfishers, Pelicans, and Cormorants. Through guided sessions, students deepened their understanding of the lagoon's ecological importance and the threats posed by developments such as Vlora Airport.



Greater Flamingo, *Phoenicopterus roseus*

2.8 Engaging the Next Generation

Educational activities extended to the “Kalif Malaj” school in Bishan, where students learned about Albania’s rich biodiversity and the critical need to protect it.



Manifestation against the new law on Protected Areas, No. 21/2024.

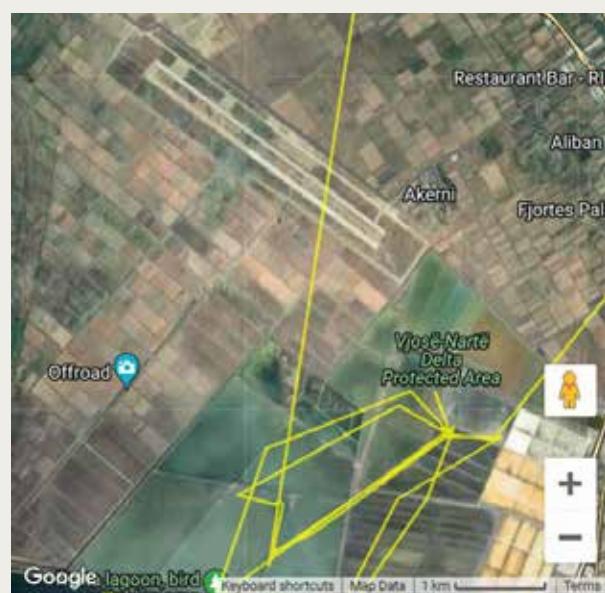
2.9 Vlora International Airport disrupts the migration route of the Dalmatian pelican

Vlora International Airport is situated between two of Albania's most important wetland systems, the Narta Lagoon and the Karavasta Lagoon. Every day, hundreds of birds land and take flight through this biological corridor, covering short and large distances to use these places for breeding, feeding, and during stop-over. However, this bird migration route will be impeded due to the ridiculous placement of the Vlora International Airport within the Vjosa-Narta Protected Area, posing a risk to the safety of citizens using the airport.

As the breeding season comes, the Dalmatian pelican colony, which is the only one in our country, started gathering in the Karavasta Lagoon. Among the flock of pelicans flying across the country's wetlands, there is also a recently tagged individual with a GPS transmitter. One of the biggest birds in the world and our nation, the Dalmatian pelican, demonstrates by its flights the disruption in the middle of this migration corridor and the risk for future aircraft collisions.

Recent studies using satellite transmitters for birds of national and international importance in the Vjosa-Narta Protected Area document the day-to-day movements of birds over the construction site of Vlora International

Airport. The decision-making behind the development of this project, as well as the preliminary research, are both inaccurate and will have detrimental effects on the nature of the country.



The Dalmatian pelican flying over the ongoing constructions of Vlora International Airport runway.



Environmental Forums on the preservation of Protected Areas.

2.10

Vjosa–Narta: Advocating for Europe’s Wild River

The Vjosa–Narta case featured prominently at the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention in Strasbourg, which ran through December 6. The discussion focused on the potential environmental impacts of projects along the Vjosa River system, including hydropower projects and the construction of Vlora International Airport.

Despite clear recommendations from the Bern Convention to suspend construction until a proper Environmental Impact Assessment is completed, work on the airport continues. Recent data highlight alarming consequences:

- Biodiversity loss
- Wildlife risks: GPS-tagged species, including Dalmatian pelicans and red kites, have been recorded flying over the airport area, contradicting prior environmental assessments.
- Restricted monitoring: PPNEA experts were prevented from conducting the International Waterbird Census in January.



Pelicans and cormorants roosting site, less than 3 km far from the ongoing constructions of Vlora International Airport.

Further threats arise from legislative changes allowing major infrastructure projects within protected areas, putting the Vjosa–Narta ecosystem and Albania's entire network of protected sites at risk. The river also faces pressure from proposed diversion projects, which could reduce flow and compromise ecological integrity.

PPNEA and partners called on the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention to:

1. Reaffirm the suspension of Vlora Airport construction.
2. Conduct an on-site assessment of the Shushica diversion project.
3. Urge Albanian authorities to repeal legal amendments that endanger protected areas and the Emerald network.

This represents a critical moment for the protection of Vjosa–Narta and the future of Albania's natural heritage.



Vjosa - Narta Protected Area

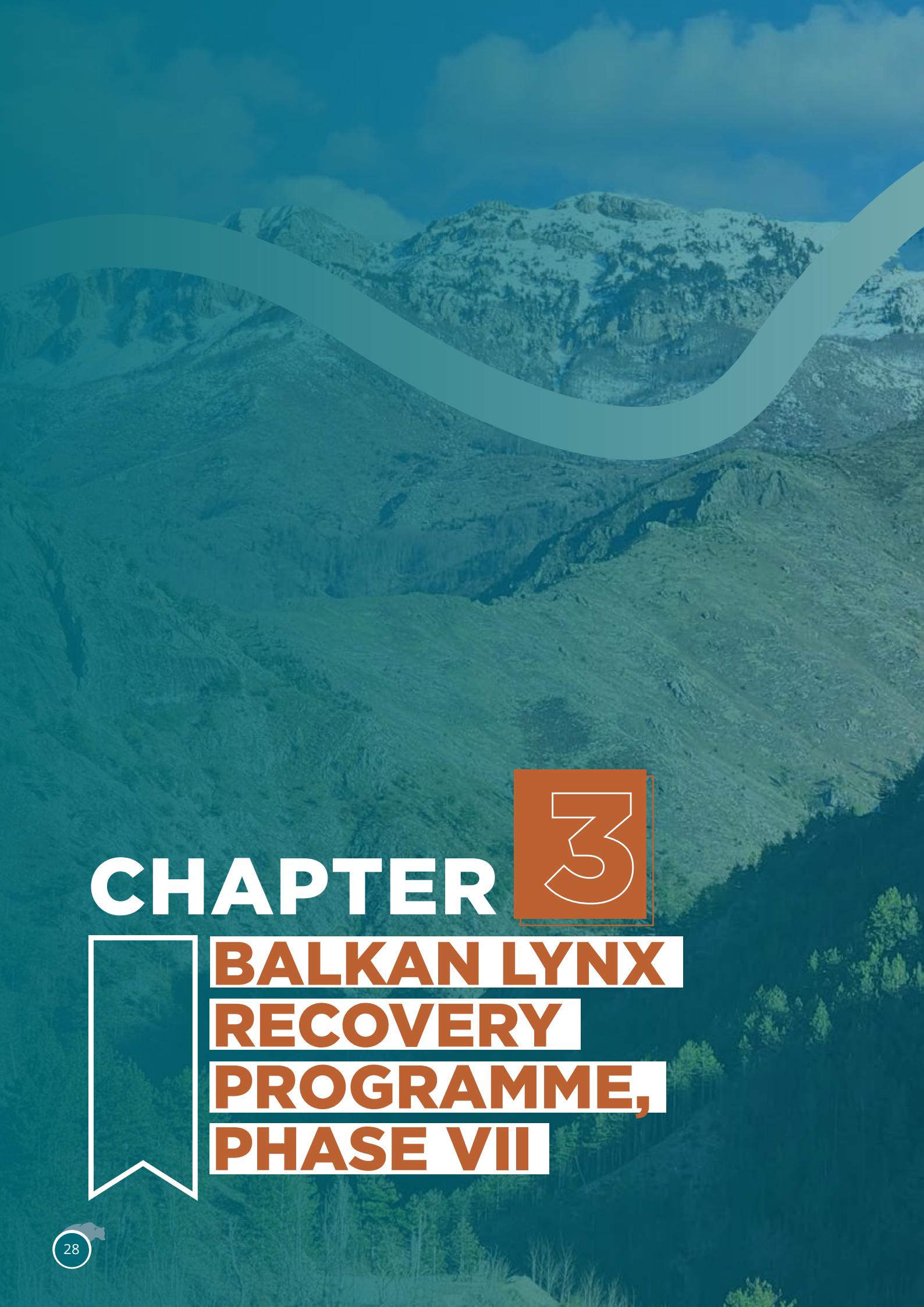
2.10

Captured as the Last Photograph

The Narta Lagoon, with its vast skies and shimmering waters, remains a crucial stopover for countless migratory birds traveling through the Vjosa–Narta corridor. For the second year in a row, PPNEA, together with regional experts, has carefully monitored these movements, documenting both the beauty of migration and the pressures threatening it.

During our monitoring sessions, we recorded species such as the Western marsh harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*), Eurasian hobby (*Falco subbuteo*), Red-footed falcon (*Falco vespertinus*), and Scopoli's shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*), all part of a fragile balance that depends on safe, undisturbed habitats.

Yet, the very landscape that welcomes these birds is under constant threat, with plans for airport construction and luxury developments overshadowing their ancient routes. Each photograph we capture is more than a record; it is a reminder of what stands to be lost if these pressures continue. We hold onto the hope that these images will not become “the last photograph” of a vanishing migration.



CHAPTER **3**

BALKAN LYNX RECOVERY PROGRAMME, PHASE VII



Location: In the southwestern part of the Balkan Peninsula, within the current distribution range that includes Albania, North Macedonia, and Kosovo.



Project Partners: Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA) based in Albania; Macedonia Ecological Society (MES) based in North Macedonia, ERA Group based in Kosovo, Euronatur Foundation based in Germany, and KORA Foundation based in Switzerland.



Project duration, phase VII: September 2022-December 2027



CHAPTER 3
BALKAN LYNX
RECOVERY
PROGRAMME,
PHASE VII



BALKAN
LYNX

RECOVERY
PROGRAMME

3.1 Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme, Phase VII

PPNEA has been working for 20 years to protect the Balkan lynx and support its recovery at national and cross-border levels. The vision of the Programme is to secure a viable population of the Balkan lynx that thrives in harmony with local communities. The fulfillment of the vision will be achieved through the main goal of the program, where the species is expected to be downlisted to Endangered on the IUCN Red List. This positive change will be achieved through increased genetic diversity, a stable and sufficient prey base, well-connected habitats, and a significant reduction in human-induced threats.

The Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme is a transboundary initiative started in 2006 and still ongoing. Since 2006, it has focused on safeguarding the remaining Balkan lynx populations while building a strong foundation of knowledge through ongoing natural and scientific research and conducting monitoring activities.

In 2024, significant progress was made. An intensive camera-trapping survey was conducted in the Polis–Guri Zi–Valamara region, in collaboration with the Regional Protected Areas Management. The survey successfully confirmed the presence of two individuals of the Balkan lynx.



Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*)

In October, a training session on wildlife monitoring techniques was organized for RAPA staff, helping to strengthen their capacity in using modern methods such as camera traps and genetic tools.

Public outreach and communication efforts continued throughout the year. Monthly meetings were held, and awareness campaigns were carried out to engage the public. A mural promoting the protection of the Balkan lynx was painted at Vasil Shanto School in Tirana, helping to raise visibility for the species among younger generations.

An active role in the policy aspect was played by PPNEA during 2024. It contributed input to the EU Albania 2024 progress report and took part in the review of the draft hunting law during a consultation meeting held at the Ministry of Tourism and Environment. In November, a roundtable was organized with regional institutions from northern Albania to discuss challenges related to the protection of endangered species and the promotion of sustainable hunting practices.



Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*)

3.2 2024 Key Outcomes & Indicators



SPECIES MONITORING & RESEARCH

- **40 camera traps** deployed across 20 grids in Polis–Valamara (312 km²).
- **2 Balkan lynx** individuals identified (30 photos at 4 locations).
- **14 DNA/scat samples** collected for genetic analysis.
- Abundant prey species recorded (roe deer, hare, red fox).
- **3 chamois monitoring events** (1 transboundary, 2 national).



Meeting with Albanian National Federation for Hunting, in Klos



CAPACITY BUILDING

- 3 PPNEA staff trained on Red & Green List assessments and lynx capture methods.
- 1 internship hosted (University of Bielefeld) – 7 weeks combining field & office research.
- Joint field visit with MES during lynx capture season in Mavrovo NP.



Reforestation action in Munella Nature Park



NOTABLE SUCCESS STORIES

- Community reforestation in Munella – high sapling survival, strong volunteer turnout.
- Youth engagement via mural and school activities.
- Illegal killing campaign gaining multi-stakeholder support.
- Policy influence through EU report contribution & hunting law review.



Environmental education campaign on 11th of June



POLICY & ADVOCACY

- Input provided for EU Albania 2024 Progress Report
- Hunting Law – review, written feedback, and advocacy for stronger species protection.
- Wildlife crime case – legal follow-up on lynx killing in Elbasan, opposition to case closure.
- 37 institutional representatives engaged in the Dibra regional roundtable on wildlife crime prevention.
- Contribution to LCIE report (lynx, bear, wolf, jackal) & advocacy at CMS conference for Balkan lynx listing.



Meeting with Albanian National Federation for Hunting, in Tirana



Environmental education campaign on 11th of June



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT & AWARENESS

- 4 major communication campaigns (illegal killing prevention, habitat restoration, youth engagement, rebranding).
- 3,700 black pine saplings planted in Munella & Thirra Mountains (80% survival rate, covering 2 ha).
- 190+ participants engaged in planting actions (locals, institutions, volunteers).
- #NatureLynxUs campaign.
- International Lynx Day is celebrated with activities in 7 cities.
- “Roots Renewed” documentary released on Earth Day.



Environmental education campaign on 11th of June



Environmental education campaign on 11th of June



OBJECTIVES

- A robust feasibility and risk assessment on a reinforcement of the Balkan lynx population will be made.
- All relevant stakeholder groups and the public will be informed about the reinforcement of the Balkan lynx.
- The Regional Conservation Strategy for the Balkan lynx will be developed.
- New National Action Plans for the Balkan lynx will be drafted and adopted, and implementation will have started.
- The Balkan lynx status, distribution, and trend will be continuously researched.
- The illegal killing of lynx and lynx prey species will be continuously documented and reported.
- Infrastructure projects will be continuously and carefully watched and denounced if needed.
- Munella PA will be supported in the development and implementation of a high-quality management plan.
- The proposal to have the small PAs in Polis-Valamara (AL) merged into one will be submitted.



"Nature Lynx Us" mural at "Vasil Shanto" School in Tirana



AWAWARENESS CAMPAIGN ON THE STREETS OF TIRANA

Since 27 September 2024, a mural dedicated to the endangered Balkan lynx has been part of Tirana's urban landscape. Painted on Vasil Shanto Primary School, one of the city's busiest intersections, the #NatureLynxUs mural combines art, conservation, and community engagement to raise awareness of this critically endangered species.



The artist of the mural, Franko Dine during the painting process



ART MEETS ACTION

The mural highlights the challenges facing the Balkan lynx and promotes conservation efforts. By bringing awareness to urban spaces, the #NatureLynxUs campaign, led by BLRP partner organisation PPNEA, connects wildlife conservation to everyday life. As the campaign grows, it encourages communities to actively protect the Balkan lynx through art, education and conservation initiatives, emphasising the shared responsibility to prevent its extinction.



Celebration event of the mural with students of "Vasil Shanto" school



A MURAL WITH A MISSION

The mural, created by artist Franko Dine, depicts the Balkan lynx with the slogan "Nature Lynx Us". It emphasises the connection between man and nature and the need for conservation. The project started at the beginning of the school year, when students and staff attended a session on the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme (BLRP).

The mural is part of a wider campaign to raise awareness for the Balkan lynx, a species with fewer than 50 individuals remaining in the south-western Balkans. Key threats include illegal hunting, habitat destruction, infrastructure development and forest fires. Inspired by the results of the camera traps in the Polis-Valamara region, the campaign plans to extend to other towns in Albania, such as Elbasan, Puka and Pogradec, where lynx individuals are also found.



Environmental education campaign on 11th of June



THE LAST FORESTS OF MUNELLA NATURE PARK AT RISK OF DISAPPEARING

Illegal logging in Albania has reached alarming levels, particularly in the Munella region. Vast areas of black pine forests have already been cut down, posing a serious threat to the survival of one of the country's most important natural habitats. Massive deforestation, especially in the southern part of Mount Munella, has been degrading the ecosystem of this area, which was designated a Nature Park in 2022 and is part of Albania's National Network of Protected Areas.

Despite its protected status, illegal activities persist. 2024 monitoring by PPNEA has revealed extensive deforestation, raising the alarm over the potential loss of this invaluable natural heritage, not only for biodiversity but also for the local communities that depend on it.

Mount Munella serves as a critical refuge for a wide variety of wildlife species, including the Balkan lynx, one of Europe's most endangered mammals. The destruction of its habitat through illegal logging undermines ongoing efforts aimed at the restoration and conservation of this territory.

PPNEA urgently calls on the responsible authorities to take immediate action to address this alarming situation. Urgent verification and intervention are needed to stop this and prevent further illegal activities. If action is not taken now, the once-thriving forest will soon be nothing more than a memory, and the landscape of Munella risks being reduced to a barren wasteland.



Meeting with Albanian National Federation for Hunting, in Klos



A COLLECTIVE CALL: PROTECT THE BALKAN LYNX

Habitat loss, poaching, and illegal killing have pushed the Balkan lynx to the very edge of extinction. Its survival now depends on urgent and united action.

In 2024, voices from across borders, institutions, schools, media, and activist communities came together in a powerful campaign, raising one clear message:

“Protect the Balkan Lynx. Say No to Illegal Killing!”

This campaign became more than an awareness effort; it was a collective moment of responsibility, showing that people everywhere can and must speak up for nature.

But the story does not end here. You, too, are part of this movement. By sharing your voice, your message, and your commitment, you strengthen the chorus demanding protection for the lynx and the ecosystems it represents.



Munella Nature Park

**PROTECT
THE
BALKAN
LYNX:
SAY NO
TO ILLEGAL**

killing!



CHAPTER **4**

#PRESPLANET



In a transboundary basin like Prespa is important to have coordination and cooperation since there will be no results if only one side does more than the other, and we do not protect the basin as a whole.

PrespaNet is a network of NGOs that are working together in the Prespa basin. PPNEA, together with the Macedonian Ecological Society (MES) from North Macedonia, the Society for Protection of Prespa (SPP) from Greece, marked through an agreement in 2013, their early cooperation and their work on the three sides of the basin for many years, and established the network "PrespaNet". The Network developed a Transboundary Strategic Plan aiming to protect and preserve the nature and the natural values of Prespa.

The mission of PrespaNet is to synergize and coordinate the activities and strengthen the trans-boundary cooperation by making an effort to overcome the gap created by the lack of institutional cooperation. By the synergized work and being locally present, a better flow of information can also work on influencing the environmental policies in the Prespa Basin.

All the conservation work that the network undertakes is based on good science, on ground experience and working and living in the area.

4.1 “Strengthening NGO-led Conservation in the Transboundary Prespa Basin”



Location:
Prespa National Park, Albania



Duration:
2024–2027



Partners: PPNEA, MES, SPP, RAPA Korça,
Municipality of Pustec, University of Korça

The Prespa Project strengthens biodiversity protection in the Prespa–Ohrid–Shebenik ecoregion, one of Europe's most unique transboundary landscapes. Its core mission is to protect endangered species, restore habitats, and ensure sustainable management of water and wetlands through science, education, and community engagement.

In 2024, efforts prioritized:

- Expanding monitoring of water, wetlands, and key species.
- Engaging schools, students, and communities in conservation.
- Reinforcing PrespaNet as a cross-border platform for regional collaboration.

Objectives:

Objective 1: Enhance the knowledge and research on the state of water of Prespa Lake and create a shared understanding at the transboundary level

Objective 2: Wetland monitoring, promote water resilience, and local biodiversity conservation

Objective 3: Transboundary waterbird research and monitoring is organized regularly by PrespaNet partners with PA involvement

Objective 4: Build capacities and raise awareness of Young Conservationists in Albania and the Prespa–Ohrid–Shebenik Ecoregion through wildlife monitoring

Objective 5: Conduct monitoring and research on selected key endangered mammal species in Prespa NP and Shebenik NP

Objective 6: Conduct a focused study to assess the human-wildlife Conflicts in Shebenik NP and implement respective measures

Objective 7: Identification of the wildlife crimes by involving the key stakeholders and institutions from the TB Prespa Basin

Objective 8: Assessment of the landscape perceptions, characteristics, and functionality in the Transboundary Prespa Basin

Objective 9: Transboundary cooperation strengthens the network partnership and raises the capacity of the NGO sector in Prespa



Greater mouse-eared bat, *Myotis myotis*



Prespa National Park

2024 Highlights & Indicators

Research & Monitoring

- **Water quality monitoring:** First complete hydrological program launched (piezometers installed, parameters analyzed).

Biodiversity monitoring:

- 4 waterbird surveys, incl. International Waterbird Census and SE Europe Pelican Census.
- 10 goosander families with 24 chicks recorded.
- Camera traps confirmed roe deer, brown bear, wild boar, wildcat, and wolf.
- Chamois observed in Shebenik NP (2 individuals).
- 70 dice snakes marked on Maligrad and Golem Grad islands.
- Habitats: Alder restoration sites maintained; orthophoto mapping of lakeshore habitats completed.
- Over 2500 specimens recorded and tens of caves visited for hibernation counts..

Education & Capacity Building

- 500+ students from 10 schools reached through environmental education.
- 18 students + 2 interns joined the Transboundary Summer School.
- 3 diploma theses were supported in collaboration with the University of Korça.
- 2 major youth events: Bird Ringing Camps and International Bat Night.

Community & Policy Engagement

- MoU signed with the Fishing Management Organization – Prespa.
- Local farmers, shepherds, women's groups, and fishermen engaged in biodiversity and water management.
- Road signs (6) installed for wildlife crossings.



Reforestation action in Lesser Prespa

Transboundary Cooperation

- Trilateral waterbird coordination meeting (April 2024).
- Participation in the Transboundary Wetland Management Workshop (Greece).
- Summer School, ringing camps, and joint monitoring missions strengthened cross-border trust and knowledge exchange.

Key Impacts 2024

- Science-based conservation: First-ever water monitoring program in Prespa; improved species data for informed management.
- Youth engagement: 500+ students, 20+ young researchers, and multiple diploma theses linked to practical conservation.
- Community empowerment: MoU with fishermen formalized cooperation; farmers and women involved in ecosystem management.



Bird census in Prespa National Park



Winterbird census in Prespa National Park



Reforestation action in Lesser Prespa



Reforestation action in Lesser Prespa

- Regional strength: PrespaNet solidified as a cross-border platform for advocacy, monitoring, and conservation action.
- International relevance: Activities aligned with EU Biodiversity Strategy, Green Deal, CBD, AEWA, and the Balkan Green Belt initiative.

Looking Ahead (2025-2026)

- Continue biodiversity monitoring (mammals, waterbirds, hydrology).
- Expand transboundary education and youth programs.
- Strengthen advocacy on illegal hunting/fishing and renewable energy.
- Enhance ecotourism and awareness (Prespa Festival, communication materials, Prespa Platform).
- Build organizational capacity for long-term conservation delivery.

Prespa Transboundary Summer School Portrait

In 2024, 21 students from Albania, North Macedonia, and Greece came together for the Prespa Transboundary Summer School. This week-long program combined hands-on learning, field research, and cross-border collaboration, providing participants with unique insights into conservation science and environmental protection.

Exploring Birds, Water, and Mammals

From the first day, students engaged in practical activities such as waterbird studies, census techniques, bird identification, and ringing sessions at Zaroshka Station. They learned the significance of monitoring water quality and explored priority habitats, including alder forests, while gaining first-hand experience in the role these ecosystems play in maintaining ecological balance.



Environmental education sessions



Prespa Summer School 2024



Prespa Lake

Discovering Reptiles and Aquatic Life

During the week, students explored Maligrad Island and Lesser Prespa, studying reptiles like water snakes (*Natrix tessellata*) and semi-aquatic mammals such as the European otter (*Lutra lutra*). They assisted experts in inspecting fishing nets, monitoring fish populations, and understanding aquatic ecosystem dynamics.

Learning Through Technology and Fieldwork

Participants practiced setting up camera traps to monitor large mammals, including Balkan lynx, chamois, brown bear, wild boar, and roe deer. This hands-on approach allowed students to understand wildlife behavior, conservation challenges, and the importance of non-invasive monitoring techniques.

Cultural Exchange and Collaboration

Beyond fieldwork, the program fostered cross-border connections and engagement with local communities and stakeholders. Visits to the Prespa National Park office, the Municipality of Pustec, and collaborations with RAPA Korça and partner organizations highlighted ongoing conservation efforts and the importance of collective action.

A Memorable Conclusion

The summer school concluded with reflections, certificates, and celebrations of achievement. Students left with not only scientific knowledge but also strengthened bonds across borders, embodying PrespaNet's vision of preserving natural and cultural heritage for present and future generations.



Common pochard (*Aythya ferina*)



Crocus sp.



CHAPTER 5 INTO THE WILD



5.1

Wrapping Up an Exciting Year of Camera Trap Monitoring

Our camera traps have offered a rare glimpse into the hidden lives of large and medium-sized mammals. These silent observers have recorded the subtle movements of wildlife as they wander through rugged landscapes, revealing moments that would otherwise remain unseen.



Macja e egër, Wild cat (*Felis silvestris*)



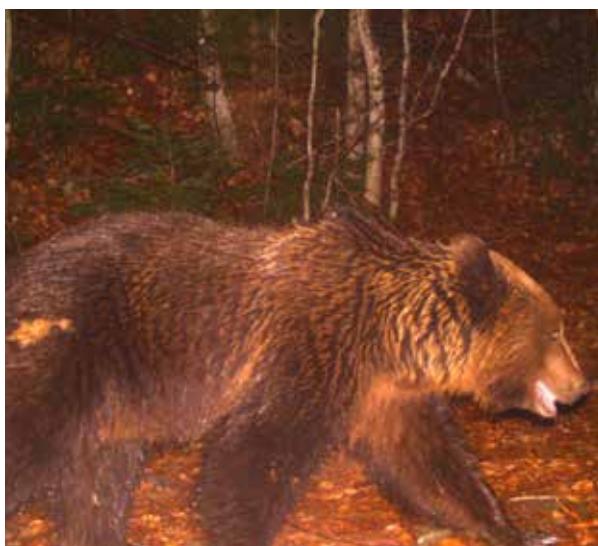
Baldosa, Badger (*Meles meles*)



Çakalli, Golden jackal (*Canis aureus*)



Lepuri i egër, Brown hare (*Lepus europaeus*)



Ariu i murrmë, Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*)



Derri i egër, Wild boar (*Sus scrofa*)

INTO THE WILD



Dhelpra, Red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)



Kunadhja, Beech marten (*Martes foina*)



Rrëqebulli i ballkanit, Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*)



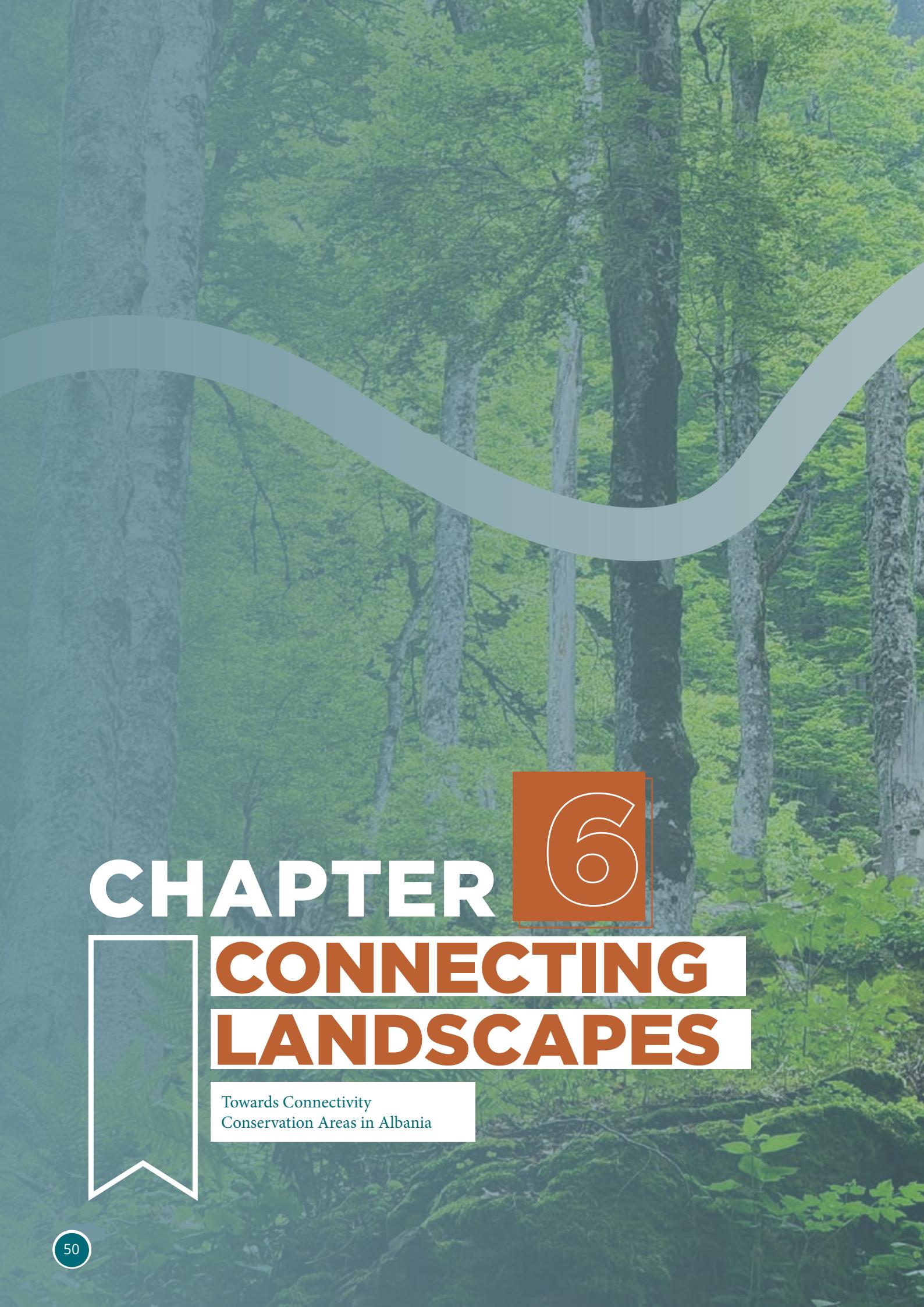
Ujku, Grey wolf (*Canis lupus*)



Rrëqebulli i ballkanit, Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*)



Kaprolli, Roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*)



CHAPTER 6

CONNECTING LANDSCAPES

Towards Connectivity
Conservation Areas in Albania



"Gashi River", Albanian Alps National Park

6.1 Paving the Way towards the Implementation of CCAs in Albania through Enhancement of Governance and Management of Protected Areas



Location: Ecological corridor Cukal–Munella–Balgaj–Martanesh



Duration:
2024–2026



Partners:
SHERM, ICLA INLSH, Ecologists for the Region



Donor:
PONT (Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust)

This project aims to create the conditions for implementing Connectivity Conservation Areas (CCAs) in Albania, piloting the concept in the ecological corridor Cukal–Munella–Balgaj–Martanesh. Efforts focus on building institutional capacity, developing governance models, strengthening community engagement, and advancing research, monitoring, and habitat restoration.

Objectives

- Build a shared understanding of the CCA concept with a pilot focus area.
- Strengthen the capacity and awareness of protected area administrations and institutions.
- Develop a governance model for the pilot CCA.
- Implement research, monitoring, and restoration for key species in AANP and KKNP.

Key Activities (2024)

Participatory Planning & Human Dimensions

- Transect walks held in Skavica, Bulqiza, and Radomira to inform governance and action planning.
- Four ecological “mini-corridors” were identified as guiding sites for activities.
- Human Dimension survey completed in early 2024; results on habitats, threats, and livelihoods will be published in spring 2025.

Community Engagement & Roundtables

- Librazhd Municipality: introduced the CCA initiative and partnered in Festivali i Yjeve (August 2024).
- Klos Municipality: roundtable on endangered species and sustainable hunting with police, hunters, local organizations, and the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (November 2024).

Legal & Policy Work

- Legal analysis of Albania’s forestry legislation conducted with IUCN support, identifying gaps and offering EU-aligned recommendations on forest governance and ecological corridors.



Trees for Lura nursery

Education & Outreach

- Local screenings of the “Roots Renewed” documentary with high school students in Bulqiza.
- Student engagement during participation in the fairs, and university events, building strong ties with professors, with good prospects for student involvement in CCA research.

Capacity Building & Exchanges

- Workshop (October 2024, Ulëz NP): trained RAPA staff from 7 regions on monitoring species in ecological corridors using telemetry, genetic tools, and e-DNA.
- Exchange (November 2024, Peshkopi): PPNEA and SHERM hosted LAGs from Vjosa and Korab–Koritnik, focusing on ecotourism, livelihoods, and CCA roles.

Research & Monitoring

- Camera traps (June 2024): 8 cameras set in Lurë–Dejë NP recorded brown bear, roe deer, wildcat, and wolves. No Balkan lynx has yet been observed.
- Chamois monitoring (November 2024): Though not observed directly in Munella NP, locals documented a group crossing the Fani River, confirming presence in this lynx-priority corridor.



**CONNECTIVITY CONSERVATION
CORRIDORS**



Lura National Park



Liqeni i Zi, Radomirë

Protected Area Support

- Korab–Koritnik NP: CCA integrated in management discussions; METT analysis participation (October 2024).
- Albanian Alps NP: advocacy included in new GEF7 biodiversity project (December 2024).

Regional & International Networking

- IUCN Regional Forum (October–November 2024, Bruges).
- Western Balkans Summit (October 2024, Berlin).
- BioNET meeting (November 2024, Shkodër).

Partnerships

- Strengthened collaboration with Trees for Lurë, AgroEkoDibra, LAG Sharr–Korab–Koritnik.
- Contributed to the feasibility study for “Tomorr–Vjosa” CCA.

Results & Indicators

- Community involvement:
- 5 community leaders engaged.
- 1 conservation plan for species/habitats has been developed.
- 4 sustainable practices supported via local CSO grants.



“Stargazing Festival”, Shebenik

Knowledge exchange:

- 10 PA governance members trained.
- 3 joint workshops with universities and PAs.
- 75 participants reached.
- 2 student research grants awarded.

Challenges & Lessons Learned

- No major obstacles, but introducing CCAs is a learning process requiring time and adaptation.
- Focusing on long-term actions fosters deeper collaboration and stronger outcomes.



Black Drin

Next Steps (2025–2026)

- Launch mini-grants scheme in Shebenik NP.
- Organize a transboundary summer camp on agrobiodiversity (Korab–Koritnik).
- Develop a governance model for the CCA.
- Expand wildlife monitoring with camera traps and box traps.
- Support reforestation with Ekologët për Rajonin Kukës.
- National Symposium on the connectivity

Policy Impact & Advocacy

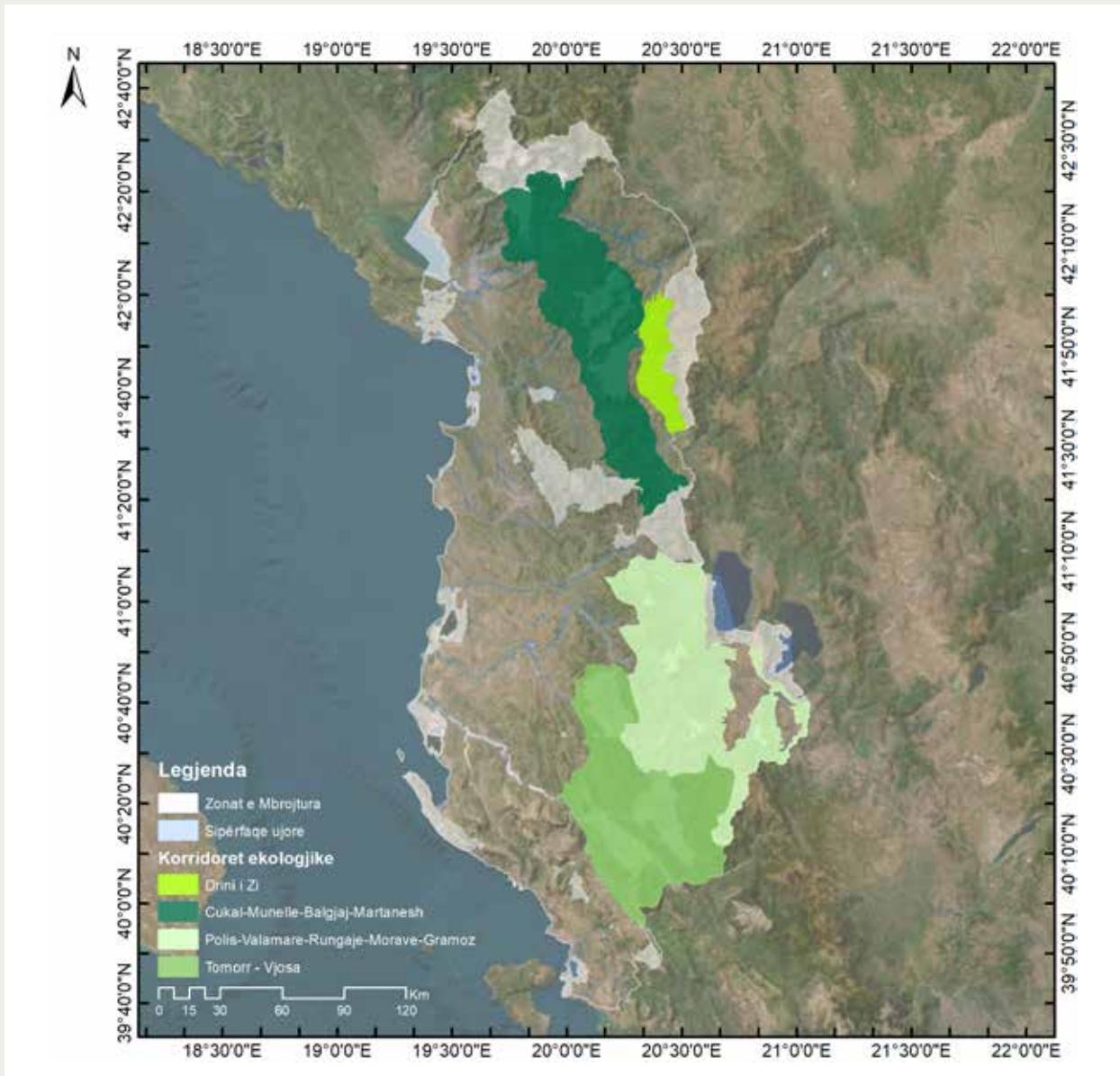
Active participation in regional and international forums (IUCN, Berlin Summit, BioNET) ensured Albania's CCA initiative gained visibility and contributed to European dialogue on connectivity conservation.

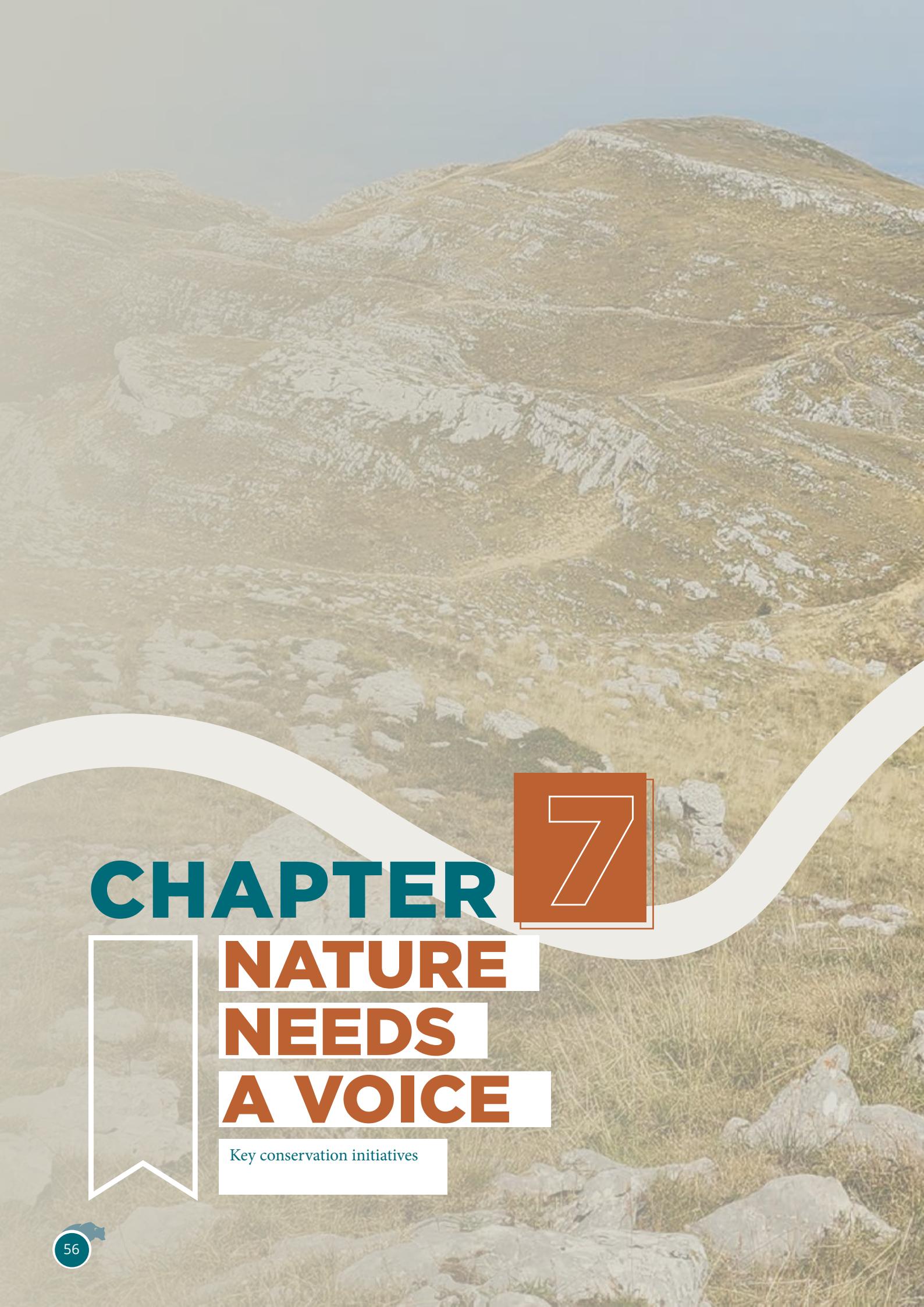
Sustainability & Long-Term Impact

The project builds foundations for embedding CCAs into Albania's protected area governance and legislation, with strong community involvement, partnerships, and institutional support, ensuring continuity beyond the project's timeline.

Expected results:

Result	Indicator
The local communities in the selected corridor are actively involved in the management of the CCA	5 Community leaders identified and engaged voluntarily; 1 community plan for a specific species/ habitat conservation
Community sustainable practices of nature resources management are identified and supported with a sub-granting scheme	At least 4 sustainable practices supported through local CSO grants
Knowledge and experience are exchanged among relevant institutions, and cooperation is enhanced for the CCA implementation	10 PA governance body members participated in two training workshops, organised 3 joint workshops with PAs & UNIs 75 participants, overall 2 students' research grants





CHAPTER 7

NATURE NEEDS A VOICE

7

Key conservation initiatives



Pashtrik Mountain



7.1 Transboundary Brown Bear Conservation - TBBC



Location:
 Southeast Albania



Duration:
 July 2024 – July 2026 (2 years)



Partners:
 EuroNatur (Germany), PPNEA (Albania), Callisto (Greece), Eko-svest (North Macedonia), MES (North Macedonia)

The TBBC project promotes **sustainable transboundary conservation of Brown bears** across Albania, Greece, and North Macedonia. Building on past collaboration, the project focuses on synchronized monitoring, conflict mitigation, capacity building, and awareness-raising, while addressing habitat and population fragmentation across the Prespa–Munella landscape.

Objectives

- Promote cooperation for sustainable transboundary bear conservation.
- Develop joint bear monitoring programs.
- Mitigate human-bear conflicts through the Bear Intervention Team (BIT).
- Strengthen institutional capacity against wildlife crime.
- Increase awareness and stakeholder engagement.

Expected Results

- Stronger institutional capacities and long-term frameworks for Brown bear conservation.
- Practical measures against habitat and population fragmentation, considered in infrastructure planning.
- Synchronized bear monitoring surveys and shared data across countries.
- Development of a **trilateral regional Bear Action Plan** based on science and stakeholder input.
- Improved human–bear coexistence through emergency response schemes and conflict mitigation.
- Reduced illegal practices through legal intervention and capacity building.
- Informed and engaged communities, schools, and tourism operators adopting sustainable practices.



Bear "Maya"

Key Activities & Achievements (July–December 2024)

Kick-off & Coordination

- Kick-off meeting in Berat (October 2024): 11 team members from all partners gathered to review outcomes of the earlier Tripoint Brown Bear Project and plan activities for the next two years. This was the first in-person TBBC meeting, boosting collaboration and team morale.
- Stakeholders for the **working group** identified and engaged, focusing on revising the Prespa Basin Bear Action Plan.

Research & Monitoring – Maya's Story

- **Three expeditions** carried out jointly by PPNEA and Callisto for the safe removal of the radio collar from Maya, a bear rescued from an illegal snare in December 2023.
- The 10-month telemetry study from her collar is **the first of its kind in Albania on a mammal species**, providing pioneering data on bear movements and habitat use.
- A follow-up expedition in December 2024 attempted to locate Maya's den; although not found, a **camera trap was installed on a nearby trail** to collect further data and awareness material.
- This collaboration highlighted the importance of **local-transboundary cooperation** and involved Albanian law enforcement authorities, setting a precedent for future interventions.



Tracking Maya with radio telemetry.

Awareness & Communication

- Maya's case generated valuable **awareness** and strengthened public communication about bear conservation.
- The project has committed to making data from her telemetry accessible to the public to increase support for large carnivore protection.

Next Steps (2025-2026)

- Develop a **Defragmentation Plan** and finalize the **Brown Bear Action Plan for Prespa Basin**.
- Identify and mitigate critical areas of habitat fragmentation through restoration and connectivity measures.
- Advocate at political and legal levels to reduce threats from grey infrastructure and strengthen protected area networks.
- Conduct **joint bear monitoring** across borders to improve data, capacities, and corridor identification.
- Promote the **Bear Intervention Team (BIT)**, ensuring its institutionalization and capacity to respond to human–bear conflicts.
- Prevent illegal killings through targeted interventions, capacity building, and law enforcement cooperation.
- Launch **public awareness campaigns** and install road signs at key bear crossing points.

Impact & Legacy

The TBBC project builds foundations for long-term, science-based, and transboundary bear conservation. It not only strengthens institutional and community capacity but also demonstrates successful models of cooperation, as shown by Maya's story, a landmark case for Albania's conservation history.

A Sad Story with a Happy Ending: Maya the Bear From Rescue to Research

In December 2023, Maya, a brown bear from the Mokra Highlands, was found trapped in a snare near the village of Çezma. Thanks to the swift intervention of PPNEA, Callisto, the Albanian Wildlife Rescue Team, RAPA Korça, and the State Police, she was safely rescued and became the first bear in Albania to be equipped with a GPS collar.

Over the following 10 months, the collar provided valuable data on her movements and denning site, greatly enriching scientific knowledge about bear ecology and conservation needs in Albania. Recently, the PPNEA bear team successfully removed the collar, closing this important chapter of her journey.

Maya's case highlights both hope and alarm: while her rescue demonstrates what collaboration between organizations, experts, and institutions can achieve, it also underlines the persistent threat of illegal snare trapping, a widespread and deadly practice that endangers not only bears (with an estimated population of fewer than 200 in Albania) but many other species.

Maya's story stands as both a warning and an inspiration, a reminder that collective action is essential to protect endangered wildlife and ensure a healthier natural world for generations to come.



Bear footprint

7.2 Forests Beyond Borders



Location: Albania, North Macedonia, and wider Western Balkans



Duration:
June 2022 – December 2024



Partners: Center for Environment, BIOM, Centar za zaštitu i proučavanje ptica Crne Gore, Društvo za zaštitu i proučavanje ptica Srbije, Macedonian Ecological Society, Bionet, Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA), Space for Good



Donor:
EuroNatur



Primary forest

The cross-border forests of Albania and North Macedonia are vital habitats for large carnivores, including the Balkan lynx and brown bear. These landscapes, rich in biodiversity, face pressures from unsustainable management, weak governance, and lack of harmonized protection across countries. Forests Beyond Borders works to strengthen regional forest conservation through science, legal reforms, and cross-border collaboration.

Objectives

- Assess the current status of primary and old-growth forests (PF/OGF) in the Western Balkans.
- Develop a harmonized identification method and tool for mapping PF/OGFs.
- Produce a regional map of PF/OGFs to guide conservation planning.
- Analyze and improve legal frameworks governing PF/OGFs in Albania and the region.
- Support measures to strengthen protection and align with EU legislation.

Key Activities (2022-2024)

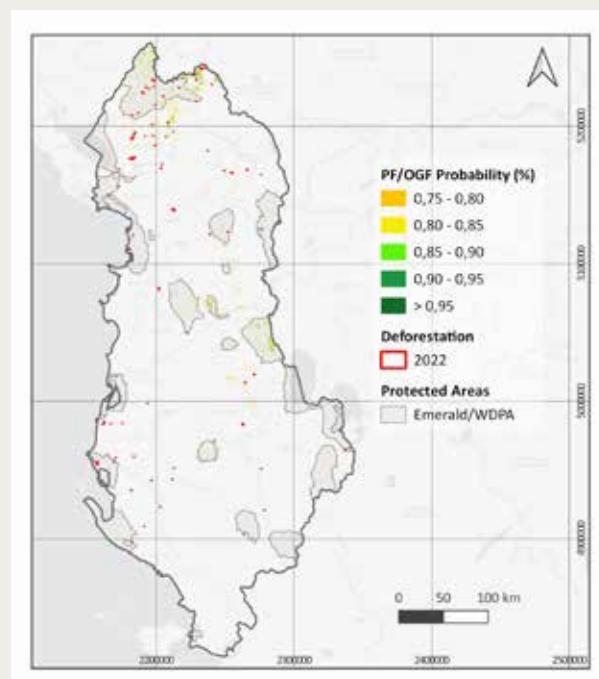
- Development of a harmonized methodology for identifying PF/OGFs across the Western Balkans.
- Creation of a comprehensive regional map of PF/OGFs using the agreed methodology.
- Publication of a legal analysis document on Albania's forest governance, assessing national legislation, EU alignment, and gaps in implementation.
- Stakeholder consultations and advocacy to promote stronger forest protection policies.

Results

- A regional PF/OGF map produced, offering a first-ever unified overview of old-growth forest distribution in the Western Balkans.
- Legal analysis for Albania published, identifying weaknesses in current governance and providing concrete recommendations for improving legal protection.
- Increased capacity of stakeholders to use scientific data and legal insights for forest protection.

Impact

This project has created a scientific and legal foundation for forest protection in Albania and the region. By harmonizing mapping methods and producing a regional overview, it enables coordinated conservation action across borders, supporting the survival of key species like the Balkan lynx.



7.3 Northern Forests Initiative *Restoration in North Macedonia and Albania*



Location: Bukovikj area (North Macedonia) and Pashtrik–Morina area (Albania). These lie at the crossroads of several protected areas in both countries, including Shar Mountain National Park, Jasen Nature Reserve, Mavrovo National Park, Korab–Koritnik Nature Park, Munella Nature Park, and the Albanian Alps National Park.



Duration:
2022 – 2025



Partners: IUCN, PPNEA, Macedonian Ecological Society (MES)



Donor:
Swedish Postcode Foundation



Pashtrik Mountain

The Northern Forests Initiative supports forest restoration and sustainable forest management in Albania and North Macedonia. These forest landscapes are ecologically critical, providing habitats for large carnivores and other species, while also supporting livelihoods. However, they face degradation due to unsustainable use and weak governance.

Objectives

- Develop forest landscape restoration (FLR) solutions in pilot sites in both countries.
- Improve the knowledge and capacities of institutions, municipalities, and communities for forest restoration.
- Strengthen commitment to sustainable management and cross-border cooperation.

Key Activities (2022–2024)

- **Capacity Building:**

- 1 training on forest governance for 15 municipal officials.
- 2 workshops with community rangers on monitoring and restoration practices.

- **Research & Monitoring:**

- Assessments of forest conditions in Bukovikj and Pashtrik–Morina.
- Development of tailored restoration plans.

- **Policy Dialogue:**

- Engagement with local authorities and protected area administrations.
- Knowledge exchange between Albania, North Macedonia, and international partners.

Results

- Strengthened knowledge base on forest conditions and restoration needs in pilot sites.
- Increased capacity of municipalities to integrate restoration and governance in forest management.
- Regional dialogue established, linking local actors with international restoration initiatives.

Impact

The project has laid the groundwork for forest recovery in critical cross-border areas. By combining technical restoration work with governance improvements, it strengthens both ecosystems and the communities that depend on them.



Sustainable Forests Management training in Tirana



WE GO COOP

**Interreg
Euro-MED**



**Co-funded by
the European Union**



Capacity building exchange seminar on Wetland Contracts and roadshow events in Euro-Med region



Capacity building exchange seminar on Wetland Contracts and roadshow events in Euro-Med region

7.4 WeGOCOOP – Improving WEtland GOvernance through a CCommunity Of Practice



Location: Vjosa–Narta Protected Landscape (Albania) with Mediterranean-level cooperation



Duration:
2 years



Partners: ANATOLIKI, UNIROMA3, MedWet, NPVL, FAMP, RCDI, PPNEA

Donor: Interreg Euro-MED Programme (EU-funded)

Wetlands are among the most threatened ecosystems in the Mediterranean, facing pressures from infrastructure development, pollution, and poor governance. WeGOCOOP seeks to address these challenges by promoting Wetland Contracts, a participatory governance tool that strengthens collaboration between authorities, stakeholders, and communities for wetland conservation.

Objectives

1. Establish a Community of Practice (CoP) on Wetland Contracts at the Mediterranean level.
2. Share experiences, methodologies, and solutions across regions.
3. Transfer the Wetland Contract tool to new contexts, including Albania, Croatia, and Portugal.
4. Foster transnational cooperation and capacity building for effective wetland management.

Key Activities in 2024

- Participation in a two-day capacity-building seminar on Wetland Contracts in Seville.
- Contribution to an exhibition showcasing successful wetland contract stories across Europe.
- National-level awareness and stakeholder engagement in Albania, focusing on Vjosa–Narta Protected Landscape.

Results

- Albania, through PPNEA, is now part of a Mediterranean network of wetland practitioners.
- National stakeholders in Vjosa–Narta introduced to Wetland Contracts as a governance model.
- Enhanced capacity for integrated wetland management at the local and transnational level.

Impact

WeGOCOOP provides Albania with a tested European tool for wetland governance, fostering collaboration at national and international levels. This strengthens the protection of Vjosa–Narta, one of the most ecologically valuable but threatened wetlands in the country.



7.5 Mediterranean Monk Seal Conservation



Location:
Ionian coast of Albania.

Overview

The Mediterranean monk seal is one of the world's most endangered marine mammals, with only a few hundred individuals remaining. Albania's Ionian coast has recently emerged as an important habitat, offering hope for the species' recovery. This project seeks to confirm and protect monk seal presence, engage local stakeholders, and advocate for stronger marine conservation.

Objectives:

- Confirm and monitor monk seal presence along the Albanian coast.
- Protect critical habitats, including marine caves.
- Engage fishermen, coast guards, and communities in conservation efforts.
- Strengthen Albania's contribution to regional monk seal conservation initiatives.



Monk seal monitoring

During 2024, PPNEA carried out significant monitoring, awareness, and coordination activities focused on the conservation of the Mediterranean monk seal. Camera traps were deployed inside the key coastal caves, where footage from Dafina Cave confirmed the presence of the species.

The Monk seal Sightings Network was strengthened through new contributions from local stakeholders and citizen scientists.



Monk seal monitoring

PPNEA also participated in the Porto Palermo Festival, organizing a beach cleanup and distributing educational materials to promote sustainable tourism and habitat protection. A regional workshop in Montenegro further advanced cross-border collaboration, emphasizing technical exchange, standardized monitoring protocols, and long-term project sustainability.

Meetings with project staff and experts helped refine monitoring protocols and prepare for fieldwork.

As tourism pressures increased, PPNEA plans targeted workshops for tour operators and will collaborate with institutions like Vlora's RAPA to mitigate disturbances to the Monk seal habitats.

Future efforts will focus on identifying critical habitats in Lukova and Kroreza, with the goal of proposing new marine protected areas.



PPNEA Camera trap

7.6 Setting the foundation for a sustainable future for Buna River Protected Landscape in Albania and Bojana Delta in Montenegro



Buna River



Funding:
CEPF



Duration:
2 years



Partners:
EnvPro Montenegro



Location:
Buna River (Albania) and Bojana Delta
(Montenegro)

CEPF Investment Priorities Addressed

- 2.1 – Enhancing the knowledge base on freshwater biodiversity: Achieved through scientific research on targeted species.
- 2.2 – Reducing threats and improving site management: Implemented via conservation actions based on a situation analysis for endangered species.
- 2.3 – Engaging stakeholders in integrated river basin management: Advanced through the situation analysis developed in close collaboration with managing institutions.

Overview

This project significantly contributed to the conservation of freshwater ecosystems in the transboundary Buna-Bojana River system. By combining research, training, conservation, legal intervention, and community engagement, it created a strong foundation for long-term sustainable management of this critical habitat.

Key Actions & Results

1. Situation Analysis & Reporting

- Conducted innovative monitoring of fish populations, using a combination of traditional methods and eDNA techniques.
- 31 fish species identified through eDNA analysis.
- Findings on species distribution and threats were shared among stakeholders in Albania and Montenegro.

2. Capacity Building

- Organized structured training sessions for authorities in Albania and Montenegro on freshwater ecosystems, fish monitoring methodologies, protocols, and EU directives.
- 47 participants benefited from these trainings, strengthening institutional and technical capacity for freshwater management.



E-DNA analysis in Buna River on Adriatic sturgeon, fish species.

3. Conservation Actions

- **Clean-up Action:** In cooperation with RAPA, FMO, Shkodër Municipality, schools, and other stakeholders, a shoreline cleaning activity was carried out.
 - 10 km of shorelines (30 ha) were inspected.
 - Old fishing nets were collected and removed by boat.
- **Legal Actions:**
 - Legal assessment initiated on infrastructure developments such as river quarries and metallic barriers.
 - Following this, a memo and environmental report will be delivered in February 2025 to the relevant institutions for on-site inspection and enforcement.
- **Patrolling:** Multiple patrols conducted in the area to record and report illegal activities, ensuring timely referral to relevant authorities.

4. Awareness & Outreach

- **Developed and distributed communication and educational materials, including:**
 - YouTube video highlighting project activities.
 - 100 calendars, 200 booklets, and 100 posters.
- **Materials disseminated widely to increase awareness among schools, local communities, and decision-makers.**



Clean up action and removal of old/abandoned fishing nets in Shkodra Lake and Buna River

Impact

Through innovative monitoring, cross-border collaboration, and targeted conservation actions, the project strengthened the knowledge base and management capacity for the Buna–Bojana River ecosystem. The combination of scientific research, practical clean-up efforts, and legal interventions not only tackled immediate threats but also laid the groundwork for long-term ecosystem protection in Albania and Montenegro.



Advocating and urging the authorities for the removal of metallic barriers in Buna River

7.7 BalkanDetox LIFE – Strengthening national capacities to fight wildlife poisoning and raise awareness across seven Balkan countries

The BalkanDetox LIFE project (2020–2025) is one of the key initiatives working to stop wildlife poisoning in the Balkans. It builds stronger capacities for managing poisoning cases, raises awareness of the problem, improves cooperation among institutions, and reduces incidents that threaten wildlife, ecosystems, and public health. In 2024, PPNEA focused on concrete actions in Albania, where progress was made through the following key highlights:

- Building institutional knowledge and cooperation**
In January, PPNEA contributed to the National Training Programme on Wildlife Crimes in Tirana, organized by AOS. Together with the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, NAPA, local prosecutors, the Hunters Federation, RAPA, and other institutions, our team shared project updates and took part in interactive sessions that reinforced institutional commitment to tackling poisoning incidents.
- Strengthening ties with enforcement agencies**
In August, PPNEA met with the Police unit to improve communication and cooperation in responding to environmental crimes. An agreement was reached on establishing direct channels for cases of poisoning or illegal killing, with the police expressing readiness for future joint trainings to enhance their capacity.



• Enhancing judicial and multi-stakeholder collaboration

In December, PPNEA contributed to a national workshop that gathered prosecutors, judges, state police, the Anti-Poisoning Working Group, and NGOs. Discussions focused on reinforcing legal and institutional frameworks to ensure more effective investigation and punishment of poisoning crimes.

• Raising public awareness and field-level action

PPNEA is an active contributor to the Wildlife Poisoning Database with records of poisoning incidents in Albania. The data show that most cases occur in urban areas, primarily affecting feral cats and dogs. In 2024, continuous field visits and informal meetings were conducted in hotspot areas where the Egyptian vulture is present, alongside monitoring of the species. At the end of August, a field visit to key Egyptian vulture territories combined the planned survey with discussions with local communities on various environmental issues, helping to raise awareness and promote preventive actions.

These actions in 2024 represent important progress in Albania's fight against wildlife poisoning. By improving cooperation, building institutional capacities, engaging local communities, and strengthening enforcement, the country is taking meaningful steps forward in protecting biodiversity and nature.



7.8 Safe Flyways IKB 3 – Ending the Illegal Killing of Birds in the Mediterranean and Beyond



Location:
Albania – Durres, Lalzi Bay



Duration:
01.01.2024 – 31.12.2025



Partners:
EuroNatur, BirdLife International



Donor:
EuroNatur

The primary goal of the Safe Flyways IKB 3 project is to tackle the illegal killing of birds (IKB) in Albania, particularly in Lalzi Bay—one of the country's most important sites for migratory and wintering waterbirds. The project seeks to build a sustainable, long-term anti-poaching framework that promotes legal reforms, community engagement, and stronger enforcement. In 2024, the main focus was reducing IKB in Lalzi Bay, enhancing data-driven monitoring, and strengthening public support for bird conservation.

These goals are directly aligned with PPNEA's mission to protect biodiversity, advocate for sustainable environmental policies, and prevent illegal wildlife killings. Through international collaboration and national advocacy, the project contributes to the preservation of migratory bird routes and Albania's ecological integrity.



Sunset in Fllaka, Lalzi bay

Major Actions Taken by PPNEA in 2024:

- **Research & Monitoring:**

- Conducted systematic field visits (March–May) to gather IKB data.
- Collaborated with ethical hunters, particularly on Common Quail monitoring.
- Initiated participatory monitoring with universities and local communities.

- **Workshops & Public Awareness:**

- Held a major workshop in Pogradec with stakeholders including NGOs, law enforcement, and hunters.
- Organized events like World Wetlands Day and Global Big Day to raise awareness.
- Launched the “Flight for Survival” campaign and White Stork census to engage the public in conservation.



Hunting hide and poaching monitoring in Lalzi bay.

7.9 “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



Partners: BBF in Bulgaria, PPNEA in Albania, TEAM in Serbia, Back to Nature in Turkey, and Center Ambrožija in North Macedonia

“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.

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 Ambrožija 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.

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



7.10 European Green Belt – Lighthouse projects pave the way to a sustainable future in Shar-Korab-Koritnik and beyond



Copyright Euronatur



Location: Transboundary Area
Sharr – Korab – Koritnik



Duration:
17 months



Project Partners: Euronatur; CNVP
Kosovo; Macedonian Ecological Society



Project Donors: AAEG V. Jensen Charity
Foundation

Objectives and Results

• **Objectives:**

- Amplification of the most successful model projects as lighthouse project for rural development and protected area management
- Enabling the Local Action Groups through own actions to become an independent and important stakeholder in the region and to multiply our efforts regarding conservation and sustainable development
- Scaling up our work in the Shar-Korab-Koritnik region as well as the identification of possibilities for replication of the approach

• **Results:**

- 0.1 ha planted with *Gentiana lutea* in Novosejë, Kukës
- Strengthen the transboundary collaboration between LAGs
- Model projects were presented between stakeholders

Key Activities:

European Green Belt Days Celebration in Radomira

On 21 September in Radomira, Dibra, PPNEA joined the European Green Belt Days organized by SHERM NGO, bringing together local communities, NGOs, beekeepers, RAPA Dibra, teachers, and pupils. The event included an info session on the Green Belt, a hike to “Liqeni i Zi,” discussions, and a shared outdoor lunch. PPNEA contributed by distributing a medicinal plants manual, plant packages, and local honey from Kosovo.

Planting of *Gentiana lutea*

In October 2024, PPNEA, in collaboration with MMZHT director Jahir Cahani and local farmers, supported the planting of the endangered medicinal plant *Gentiana lutea* on 0.1 hectares in Novosej, Kukës.



Planting of *Gentiana lutea*

LAG Vjona and Korab-Koritnik exchange

On 1–2 November 2024, PPNEA organized an exchange between LAG Korab-Koritnik and LAG Vjona in Peshkopi, with 27 participants including local authorities. The meeting focused on sharing experiences in LAG development and challenges of registration, while participants from Vlora also explored Dibra's cultural heritage through traditional "jufka" making. The program included visits to an apple juice factory as a model of local economic development, and a field trip through **Sllova** and **Radomira**, highlighting the ecological importance of the Black Drin valley and cultural heritage sites. In Radomirë, the **Transect Walk** methodology was presented, engaging the community in identifying natural values, practices, and threats, such as forest disease, bear presence, lack of government support, and youth emigration.

Bestbelt Pan-European Conference Jurmala, Latvia

From 14–18 October in Jurmala, Latvia, representatives from PPNEA, Ecologist for Region, and LAG Integrimi participated in a conference, with members also representing LAG Korab-Koritnik. The event provided opportunities to exchange with Green Belt partners, learn about Bestbelt projects, and visit three project sites showcasing conservation practices applicable to Albanian meadows. Thirteen model projects from the **Sharr-Korab-Koritnik initiative (2021–2023)** were presented, and PPNEA also took part in the **European Green Belt Assembly** on 17 October.

Lessons Learned and Next Steps:

- More work and effort are needed in the transboundary collaboration for joint activities in the future.
- More efforts and funding are needed for the conservation of medicinal plants and marketing of the initiatives.



Radomirë



7.11 From Nest to Sea: Protecting Albania's Sea Turtles



Implementation period:

2024 – ongoing



Funding:

Rufford Foundation



Country:

Albania

The work carried out by PPNEA for the conservation of sea turtles has been very important for protecting these ancient and endangered species. Sea turtles are among the oldest species on the planet and belong to the order Testudines. There are a total of seven species of sea turtles, six of which belong to the Cheloniidae family, while only the leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) belongs to the Dermochelyidae family (Rhodin et al., 2011).

In Albania, three species of sea turtles have been found along the Ionian and Adriatic coastlines: the loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*), the green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), and the leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*), which is very rare in Albanian waters and has been encountered only on a few occasions (Zeko & Puzanov, 1960).

Studies on sea turtle nesting in Albania have been limited, with significant research starting in 2002 (Haxhiu, 1981; 1985; 1995; 1997; 1998; Haxhiu & Rumano, 2005). After this period, several sporadic nesting events were recorded in the areas of Cape Rodoni and Divjakë (Piroli & Haxhiu, 2018). In recent years, a study was conducted to explore potential nesting sites and develop protective measures for the sporadic occurrences found in Albania (Sacdanaku & Rae, 2019). During this study, several beaches suitable for sea turtle nesting were identified.



Sea turtle monitoring in Vjosa - Narta Protected Landscape

Sea turtles spend most of their lives in the sea and come ashore only to lay eggs during the reproductive period. Their reproductive success largely depends on the preservation of nesting habitats, protective measures, and climate change, as rising temperatures can affect their gender and endanger their survival (Rhodin et al., 2011).

PPNEA's efforts for sea turtle conservation have intensified in recent years, with involvement in monitoring potential nesting sites along the Albanian coast. Over the last three years, PPNEA's team has collected data on distribution, threats, and reproductive patterns of these turtles. Although the data has not yet been published, six nests have been identified in previous years, all of which were destroyed by natural and anthropogenic pressures such as predators, tides, and human intervention.

An important achievement was the successful first nesting season of sea turtles in the Vlora region, where between June and September 2024, 4 out of 7 nests were successful.



Sea turtle monitoring in Vjosa - Narta Protected Landscape

This is a significant step forward for the conservation of these species and is considered a major achievement, showing an increase in the number of nests and an improvement in hatching success. This success was made possible by protective measures and habitat management applied during this season. This year also marks Albania's first attempt to relocate sea turtle eggs, which was successfully completed with support from the Rufford Foundation. This development shows that egg relocation could be an effective strategy for protecting endangered nests and offers new opportunities for conservation efforts. This success will be included in a scientific article, which will provide valuable guidance for future interventions in Albania and the region.

An important element to highlight in the context of sea turtle nesting studies in Albania is that they have used the southern beaches of the country, which are characterized by coastal areas with gravel, to lay their eggs. This fact has been a significant research subject, as traditionally, the beaches used by turtles for nesting have sandy substrates, whereas gravel beaches have not always been considered suitable for egg development. A clear example is the Palasë beach, where in 2021, some members of PPNEA's staff witnessed a loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*) laying eggs, and in 2024, the successful emergence of hatchlings was observed in the Palasë area, marking a turning point in our understanding of the possibility of nesting on gravel beaches. Scientifically, nesting on gravel beaches may offer several benefits to sea turtles. Gravel may be more stable and less sensitive to erosion caused by waves or tides, which often damage nests on sandy beaches. Additionally, flooding rates on gravel beaches may be lower, providing a safer habitat for egg incubation. This may be why turtles, despite preferring sandy beaches, can also adapt to other structures, like those with gravel, when they offer favorable conditions for egg development and nest protection.



Sea turtle monitoring in Vjosa - Narta Protected Landscape

With continuous monitoring, necessary protective measures, and local community engagement, PPNEA aims to contribute to the long-term protection of sea turtles and ensure a safer future for these endangered species.

A Record-Breaking Year for Sea Turtles in Albania

The 2024 nesting season marked a turning point for sea turtle conservation along Albania's Adriatic and Ionian coasts. For the first time, loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*) showed a remarkable increase in both the number of nests and hatching success rates, with four nests in the Pishë-Poro-Narta Protected Landscape producing healthy hatchlings that safely reached the sea. Even on the rocky shores of the Ionian coast, turtles demonstrated their adaptability, laying eggs and ensuring the next generation's survival.

This success reflects PPNEA's ongoing efforts, in collaboration with the Rufford Foundation, RAPA Vlorë, and local and international experts. A major milestone was Albania's first implementation of nest relocation in high-risk areas—an effective method that protected vulnerable eggs from tides and predators, ensuring greater survival rates.

After more than 55 days of incubation, the hatchlings began their midnight journey to the sea, guided by instinct and the shimmer of waves. These tiny steps represent both resilience and hope, as the turtles will one day return to the same shores to nest.

Protecting the fragile habitats of the Ionian and Adriatic coasts is essential—not only for sea turtles but for the entire marine ecosystem. This year's achievements show that with science, commitment, and collaboration, Albania's coasts can continue to be a safe haven for these ancient mariners.



Sea turtle monitoring in Vjosa - Narta Protected Landscape

Migratory bird count in Vjosa - Narta Protected Area





CHAPTER 8

CONNECT, SUPPORT, AND ENGAGE

Communications
and finance.



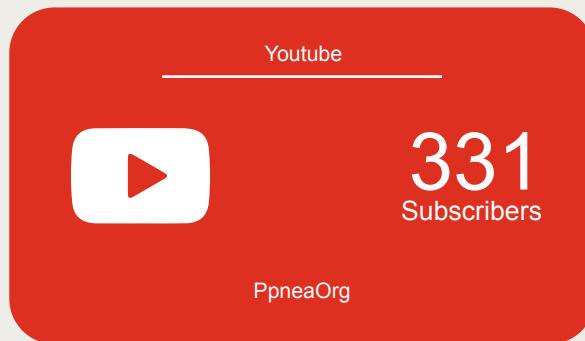
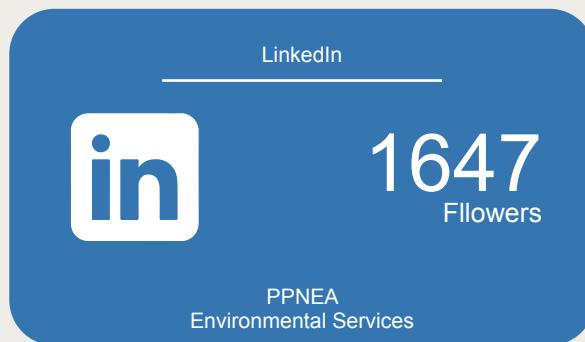
Vjosa - Narta Protected Area



CHAPTER 8

CONNECT,
SUPPORT,
AND ENGAGE

8.1 Engagement Across Platforms



8.2 Stay in touch with PPNEA:



8.3 Financial report for the year 2024





CHAPTER 8

CONNECT, SUPPORT, AND ENGAGE

8.3 Protecting nature is not an easy task!

It requires time, dedication, passion and persistence.

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!



QR Code: Access previous reports



8.4 Volunteer: Join our efforts

Volunteer - Help our nature by finding a volunteer role within PPNEA

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

Volunteering brings lots of enthusiasm, skills, and interests. At the same time, you learn and discover new skills too. There are practical tasks like wildlife surveys and various conservation tasks, volunteering can also mean leading walks or hikes for the public and helping visitors enjoy themselves in the great Albanian outdoors. This is a great way to gain a different experience of our nature and to contribute to something you care about.

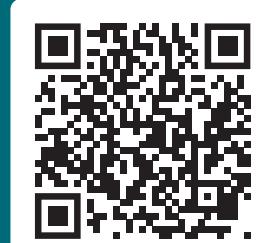
If you have some time, no matter how small, and the commitment to help us, consider yourself part of the team.



Support Us:
Donate
via PayPal



Get involved:



“

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

”

APPLY NOW



Tomorri Mountain National Park

CHAPTER

A solid orange square containing a large, white, outlined number '9'.

SHARING STORIES

Stories and highlights of PPNEA's fieldwork, research, conservation achievements, wildlife protection, community engagement, and scientific contributions





Yellow wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)



9.1 PPNEA Joins the Mediterranean Alliance for Wetlands

In 2025, PPNEA became a member of the **Mediterranean Alliance for Wetlands**, strengthening Albania's commitment to wetland conservation and enhancing its role in regional and international initiatives. The Alliance is a powerful network of 30 leading conservation organizations and research institutions from 18 countries, providing support, knowledge sharing, and advocacy to protect, restore, and sustainably manage Mediterranean wetlands and rivers.

Through this collaboration, PPNEA gains access to advanced restoration techniques, biodiversity monitoring tools, capacity-building programs, and a platform for cooperation with civil society and scientific institutions. This partnership supports the protection of Albania's key wetlands, including **Vjosa-Narta, Divjaka-Karavasta, and Prespa Lakes**, helping safeguard biodiversity, climate regulation, and essential services for local communities.



9.2 Laughing dove, new species for Albania

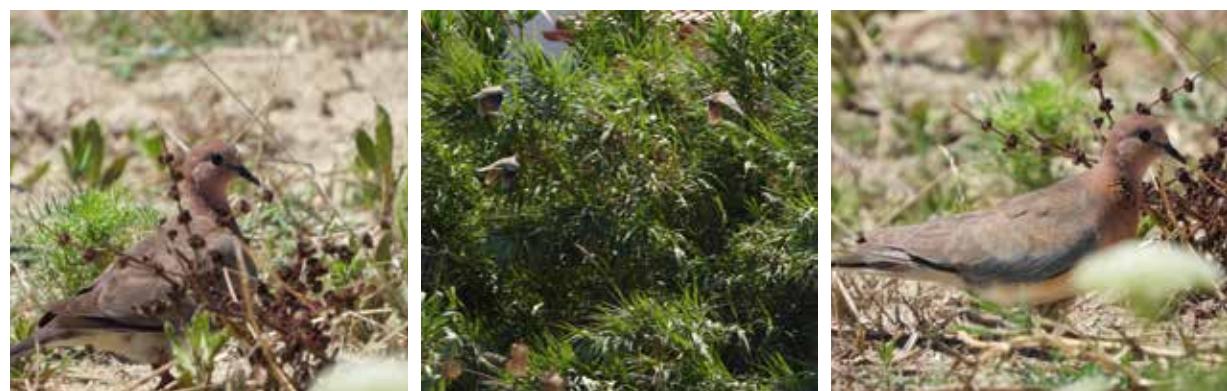
The Laughing Dove (*Spilopelia senegalensis*) is a widespread species found in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and southern Asia. This species typically inhabits dry or semi-desert regions, but it can also be found in villages and large cities throughout its range.

Over the past two decades, the Laughing Dove has expanded its distribution northward, with breeding populations recorded in the Canary Islands, Italy, Cyprus, and recently Greece.

The PPNEA team recently documented 3 individuals of this species in the city of Fier, thereby including Albania in its distribution map.

The information about the possible presence of the Laughing Dove in Albania was provided by Armando Doda, a nature enthusiast and member of the hunting community. Thank you for the contribution, which adds new species to Albania's bird list.

Spotting the laughing dove brought smiles to our faces.



Laughing Dove (*Spilopelia senegalensis*) in Fier region

9.3 A New Nest for White Storks in Gjrokastër

In spring of 2024, migratory White Storks returned to Albania as part of their #FlightForSurvival journey from Africa. After one pair attempted to nest on hazardous power lines in Dropulli, Gjirokastra, PPNEA alerted local partners and OSHEE. A safe nesting platform was installed, providing the storks a secure place to raise their chicks.



White stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) breeding

9.4 Large Carnivores in Europe

The latest report LCIE, mandated by the European Commission on the continental distribution of large carnivores and the assessment of their populations represents a significant joint contribution by scientists, focusing on five different species across 34 countries.

PPNEA experts, thanks to their many years of research on large carnivores in Albania, particularly on the lynx and brown bear, have contributed to the preparation of the report for our country.

The publication is based on the most recent data (2017–2022/23) and includes species found in Albania, such as the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*), wolf (*Canis lupus*), and golden jackal (*Canis aureus*).



**Read the article
QR Code**



9.5 The wolf's protection status will no longer be the same

The wolf's protection status was downgraded following a controversial decision by the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention. The Committee approved a request from the European Commission to move the wolf from Appendix II (strictly protected species) to Appendix III (protected species).

The decision sparked strong opposition among scientists and wildlife experts across Europe, who raised serious concerns about the long-term viability of wolf conservation and the recovery of populations across the continent.

Albania's opposition was a significant part of the process, as the country voted against the proposed change. Although Albania's position, together with that of several other non-member states, was not sufficient to alter the final outcome, it aligned with scientific recommendations to maintain the wolf's strict protection status.

While national legislation remained the primary legal framework for species protection, experts warned that the decision could have had negative implications for wolf populations in Europe. Like other large carnivores, wolves required expansive territories to survive and reproduce, making their conservation highly dependent on cross-border cooperation.

The European Commission's decision to lower the wolf's protection status was seen as a potential threat not only to wolf populations within the European Union but also to those shared with non-EU countries, placing both national and international conservation efforts at risk.



Grey Wolf (*Canis lupus*)

9.6 Our tagged Egyptian vulture, “Aoos / Vjosa,” hits the road to Albania

Our tagged Egyptian vulture, Aoos / Vjosa, embarked on her annual migration journey from Africa, where she had spent the winter, toward her breeding grounds in Albania. At the time, she was soaring through Egypt, making her way back to her forever home in the Vjosa Valley, where her return was eagerly awaited.

Summer Day in Albania was celebrated by welcoming back this magnificent species, a powerful symbol and messenger of spring. Each year, the Egyptian vulture returned to Albania after a long and demanding journey, facing numerous threats along the way, making each migration a true flight for survival.

Safe travels, Aoos!



Egyptian vulture migration route and Vjosa River

9.7 NEW SCIENTIFIC ARTICLE ON DIETARY HABITS OF THE BROWN BEAR (URSUS ARCTOS) IN THE TRANSBOUNDARY PRESPA BASIN

A study initiated in the year 2018-2019, focusing on the diet of brown bears (*Ursus arctos*) in the Prespa basin, has been published in the Macedonian Journal of Ecology and Environment.

This study included the first-time collection of 553 samples from 22 different habitats in Albania, Macedonia, and Greece. The results highlight the crucial role of fruit-bearing plants in the brown bear's diet, with plums and cherries (*Prunus cerasifera*) present in nearly half of the samples. Barberry and wild cherries dominate in spring, while apples prevail in autumn.

Moving forward, the preservation and control of the brown bear population in the Prespa basin should increasingly depend on comprehending the bear's main diet across various seasons and evaluating its preferred habitats.

These discoveries lay the groundwork for promoting a harmonious coexistence between humans and wildlife.



Brown bear - *Ursus arctos*



Read the full article -QR Code

9.8 New Scientific Paper: Status and Threats for the Egyptian Vulture in Albania

Exciting yet concerning news about Egyptian vulture in Albania! Over the last 15 years, a comprehensive study has revealed crucial insights into their population trends, breeding parameters, and threats.

Albania plays a pivotal role in the broader strategy for Egyptian vulture conservation in the Balkans. By mitigating the main threats, strengthening the collaboration with institutions, and adopting a National Action Plan for the species, we can contribute to the success of the regional population reinforcement program.



Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*)



Read the full article -QR Code



9.9 Rising threat of forest fires in Albania: Impact and urgent mitigation needed!

Forest fires have become an annual problem in almost all regions of the country, drastically altering and continuing to devastate entire hectares of forestland. Beyond the immediate destruction of vegetation, these fires have profound effects on wildlife, sequestered carbon, and soil biodiversity. It takes years to restore landscapes damaged by fires, with Pashtrik-Morina being one of the most notorious ecosystems for wildfires in the country. Since the beginning of the 21st century, 177 hectares of forests have been transformed due to fires in this ecosystem. The Pashtrik-Morina area, where efforts are underway to revitalize forests, remains at high risk of fires, emphasizing the need for collective action to prevent forest fires.

The impact of fires, combined with overgrazing, illegal logging, and intensive mining activities, results in a significantly worsened final effect.

PPNEA published a detailed forest loss report last year for the Munella and Polis-Gur i Zi-Valamare regions from 2016 to 2023. The study showed significant forest loss outpacing regeneration, mainly due to logging and fires. This deforestation has disrupted local ecosystems and wildlife habitats, notably impacting the endangered Balkan lynx.

We must act now to establish vigilant monitoring and preventive measures to protect our forests, rather than facing the challenging and costly task of reforestation later.



Munella Nature Park

9.10 “Roots Renewed” Documentary Restoring Nature in Albania

On World Earth Day, the premiere of the documentary “Roots Renewed – Restoring Nature in Albania”, directed by Artan Rama, brought together nature enthusiasts, partners, volunteers, schools, and stakeholders to celebrate a collective commitment to conservation. The documentary presents a visual symphony, telling stories of renewal, dedication, and the shared responsibility to protect Albania’s ecosystems.

Through compelling portraits, the film captures individuals, from volunteers planting seeds to young students learning to care for nature, embodying the contrast between destruction and protection, and illustrating that the fate of our environment depends on the choices we make every day.

Supported by BioNET and partners including EuroNatur, Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT), Aage V. Jensen Naturfond, IUCN Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Heinrich Böll Stiftung Tirana, DIMFE, and BirdLife Europe & Central Asia, this project reflects a united effort across the region.

“Roots Renewed” reminds us that nature’s restoration is a collective journey, and that every action, no matter how small, contributes to the renewal of the landscapes that sustain us. The documentary highlights both the challenges we face and the hope that arises when communities come together to protect and restore Albania’s natural heritage.



QR CODE

“Roots Renewed” Documentary event at National Academy of Arts

9.11 Tackling Wildlife Crimes Together

In 2024, PPNEA organized a workshop in Albania, bringing together government officials, law enforcement, and conservation organizations. The focus: combatting wildlife crimes such as illegal hunting of the Balkan lynx and Brown bear, and bird poisoning. The session strengthened collaboration, raised awareness, and set the stage for coordinated action.



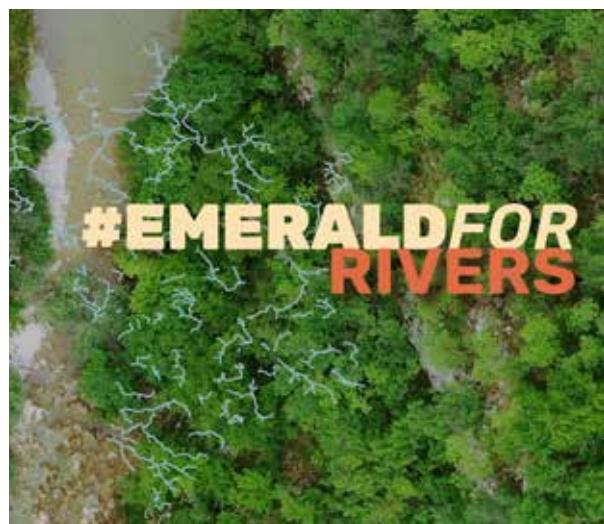
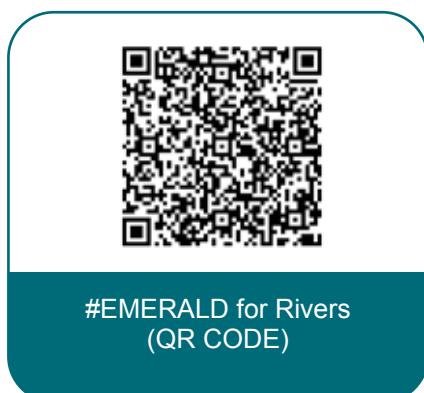
Tackling Wildlife Crimes meeting in Pogradec

EMERALD NETWORK IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia, as signatories to the Bern Convention, are obligated to establish a sufficient number of Emerald Network sites. However, since 2011, no new sites have been proposed, leaving many pristine rivers unprotected. The #EmeraldForRivers campaign aims to support governments in expanding the Emerald Network.

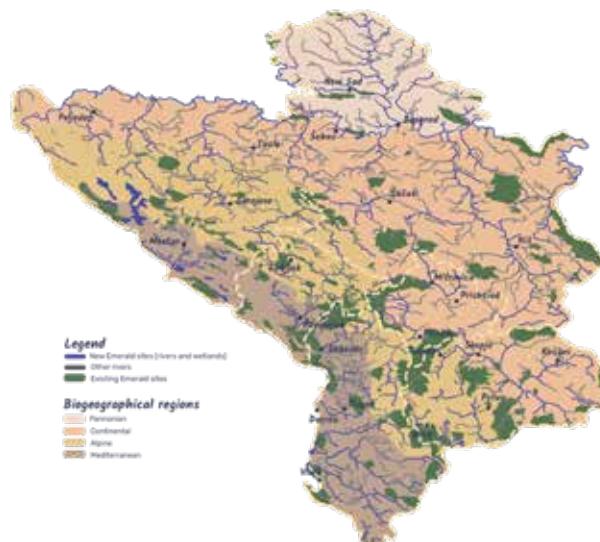
Key Facts

- Biodiversity Importance:** Balkan rivers host 50 fish species of European significance, none of which are adequately protected by the current Emerald Network.
- Limited Assessment:** Only one biogeographical seminar, held in 2011, has been organized to assess Emerald sites in the region.
- Proposed Additions:** During the Emerald Green seminar in December 2022, 39 scientists and NGO representatives from 11 countries identified 88 potential Emerald sites that need to be added to the network.



Key Issues

- Implementation Challenges:** The Council of Europe launched the Emerald Network as part of its work under the Bern Convention. Implementing the network at the national level is considered a primary tool for signatory countries to comply with their obligations under the Convention.
- Need for Cooperation:** Ensuring river conservation and the proper functioning of the Emerald Network in the region requires long-term cooperation between governments, scientists, NGOs, and local communities living within or near existing and potential Emerald sites.
- Preparation for EU Accession:** In the last decade, all Balkan countries have mapped the biodiversity of large parts of their territories in preparation for joining the EU Natura 2000 network. Before becoming Natura 2000 sites as part of EU accession, the most valuable areas #EmeraldForRivers Campaign: Protecting Western Balkans' Rivers



In 2024, a coalition of civil society organizations, including PPNEA, launched the #EmeraldForRivers campaign, urging Western Balkan governments to strengthen protection for the region's rivers through the Emerald Network, established by the Council of Europe in 1989. The campaign coincided with the 44th Standing Committee meeting of the Bern Convention in Strasbourg, where targets for the Emerald Network up to 2030 were discussed.

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia established the Emerald Network in 2011 but have not expanded their original list of sites since then. Many rivers remain unprotected due to insufficient management, monitoring, legal recognition, and resources.

The campaign builds on the Emerald Green seminar (December 2022), where scientists and NGOs identified 88 priority river sites supporting over 50 fish species of European significance. Key rivers highlighted include the Vjosa, Black Drin, Neretva, Bosna, Morača, Vardar, and Danube, which are vital both for biodiversity and local communities.

The campaign included a video launch and social media outreach, directly tagging environment ministers to amplify public and governmental pressure for river protection.

For more information please visit:



Campaign video:
#EmeraldForRivers (QR CODE)



Bern Convention meeting agenda:
44th Standing Committee
(QR CODE)



Shadow list of rivers & key fish
species: Bankwatch publication
(QR CODE)

9.13

INTERNATIONAL WATERBIRD CENSUS 2023

Indicators from the International Waterbird Census 2024



34 wetlands

in Albania and surrounding regions were surveyed on January 18th and 19th, 2024.

Survey Scope:



99,527 individuals

recorded across 60 species, indicating a 13 % decline compared to the previous year.

Total Waterbird Count:

Wetlands with Highest Waterbird Populations:



Divjaka Karavasta National Park:

25,473

individuals



Skadar Lake:

18,416

individuals



Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape:

10,724

individuals



Kune Vain Tale Nature Reserve:

10,487

individuals



Conservation Insight:

The decline in waterbird numbers highlights the need to strengthen wetland protection and address threats to critical habitats across the region.



Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*



Euroasian spoonbill - *Platalea leucorodia* Butrint National Park

SMART Balkans – Strengthening PPNEA's Institutional Development



In 2023, PPNEA reached an important milestone by receiving its first-ever operational grant since its establishment in 1991. This unrestricted support, provided by the SMART Balkans – Civil Society for Shared Society in the Western Balkans project, represented a turning point in strengthening PPNEA's capacity to address Albania's urgent conservation challenges. Operational grants are crucial for civil society organizations, as they provide the flexibility to improve governance, invest in long-term planning, and respond quickly to imminent environmental threats that arise from rapid development and weak enforcement of environmental legislation.

The first year of implementing this institutional support in 2024 marked a substantial acceleration in PPNEA's organizational development. Core funding proved vital not only for internal strengthening but also for impactful actions on the ground. Among the key achievements was the collaboration with POS.al to design a civil society-friendly software for financial management. The first version of the software was developed and tested by PPNEA, with plans to present it to other NGOs to facilitate their daily financial operations.

At the same time, PPNEA mobilized swiftly in response to one of the most significant threats to Albania's Protected Areas in recent years: the controversial amendments to Law No. 81/2017. Thanks to the institutional support from SMART Balkans, PPNEA was able to react decisively by opposing the amendments in parliamentary commissions, organizing citizen forums, and leading protests in front of the Albanian Parliament when the vote took place.

The SMART Balkans project, financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented by the Center for Civil Society Promotion (CPCD), together with the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) in Albania and the Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM) in North Macedonia, contributes to strengthening participatory democracy and advancing Euro-Atlantic integration across the Western Balkans. By empowering civil society organizations and networks, this initiative helps build peaceful, inclusive societies and ensures sustainable development in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.



PPNEA at the European Partnership Meeting in Almaty



On October 16–17, 2024, PPNEA joined BirdLife partners from across Europe at the European Partnership Meeting, hosted in Almaty by BirdLife's local partner, ACBK. This important gathering brought together the network to reflect on achievements since 2022, review the 2024 work plan and finances, and set joint priorities for 2025–2026.

The meeting placed strong emphasis on the shrinking space for civil society, the rise of disinformation, and increasing political and environmental pressures driven by far-right movements in the region and globally. Discussions focused on shaping coordinated responses to these challenges, reaffirming the role of BirdLife partners in safeguarding nature and civic participation.

Partners also explored new strategic frameworks for the African-Eurasian Flyways (EAFI, CAFI, and EAEF), reviewed progress of the RENATE (Recovering Nature in the East) initiative, and assessed the work of the Nature Restoration Working Group. These discussions highlighted key opportunities for ecosystem restoration and biodiversity protection across the region.

Another central theme was the development of strategies to support the expansion of renewable energy, particularly wind and solar, while ensuring nature-friendly solutions. BirdLife's leadership in guiding this transition underscored the importance of conservation organizations in shaping a sustainable energy future.

For PPNEA, participation in this meeting reinforced our commitment to contributing actively to regional and global conservation strategies, while ensuring that Albania's priorities and challenges are represented in these high-level discussions. Strengthening partnerships through BirdLife remains a cornerstone of our mission to protect biodiversity and advocate for a sustainable future in the Western Balkans and beyond.



CHAPTER

10

WHAT TOMORROW HOLDS





Zverneci site area in 2024

10.1 One Year After the Alarm: Protecting Protected Areas

In 2024, PPNEA sounded the alarm on the looming threats to the Vjosa River, anticipating serious consequences for Albania's protected areas. Today, many of those fears have become reality. Despite its designation as a National Park, recent legal amendments now permit construction and large-scale infrastructure within these critical ecosystems, leaving them vulnerable to irreversible damage.

The Bern Convention intervened to halt the Vlora airport project, underscoring the inadequacy of existing protection measures and the concerns of local communities. Yet, government actions continue, with propaganda supporting development and new threats emerging.

Key impacts of these decisions include:

- Expansion of permitted activities in protected landscapes.
- Removal of internal zoning, meaning even the most ecologically sensitive areas are now at risk.
- Threats to biodiversity, including habitats for sea turtles, birds, and mammals, are now facing the risk of permanent loss.

Despite public concern and legal challenges, recent decisions have ignored the advice of the European Union, civil society, and constitutional mandates, prioritising short-term economic interests over the long-term protection of nature.

The Standing Committee of the Bern Convention has urged Albania to immediately review these decisions, reaffirming the need for sustainable management of protected areas in line with European standards.



Zverneci site area proposed for 5 luxury resort project within the Protected Area



Vjosa - Narta Protected Area

This annual report is a moment for reflection: it marks not only the beginning of increased pressures on Albania's protected areas but also the continuing responsibility of civil society, authorities, and citizens to defend these irreplaceable ecosystems.

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Local Officer,
Vlora Region

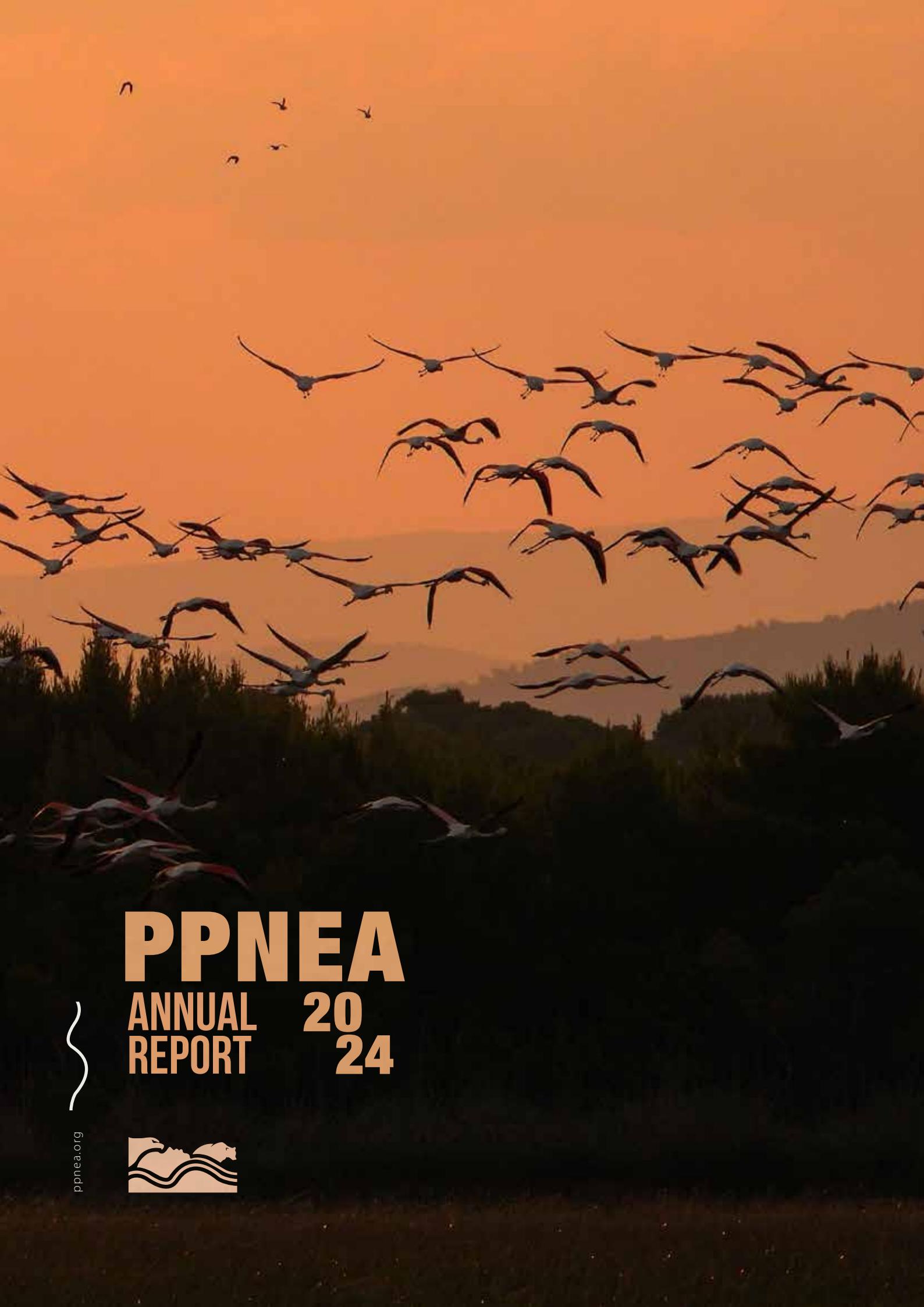
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Prespa Local Office



Little egret - *Egretta garzetta*



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