



Land of
Eagles and
Castles

LAND OF EAGLES AND CASTLES

INTEGRATED PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT
FOR ALBANIAN COASTAL BIODIVERSITY

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PROJECT
NEWSLETTER

PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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INTERNATIONAL WATERBIRD CENSUS

2021 INTERNATIONAL WATERBIRD CENSUS IN VLORA, GJIROKASTRA AND DIBRA



2021 is the year that marks the 55th anniversary of the International Waterbird Census. This programme, represents the largest citizen science activity, organized in 143 countries around the world, aiming to count birds across thousands of wetlands, around the globe. On the 15 - 16 of January, PPNEA in collaboration with NAPA Vlore, Diber and Gjirokastra and volunteers, counted the birds of 6 wetlands.

This year, in Vjosa - Narta we witnessed a decline in the number of birds, compared to the previous one. Nevertheless, the actual number was higher than the average number of the last 6 years. Unfortunately, in Orikumi wetland and Butrinti National Park, this year were registered the lowest numbers of the last 6. While in Blue Eye, the numbers were almost identical, in Bullo Reservoir we registered a significant increase, compared to the previous year.

These results, can be attributed to warm climate conditions, that have characterized these months up until the census days. For this reason, it is perfectly normal for fewer birds, to migrate towards the south.

The census also came with surprises, such as the observation of the purple heron (*Ardea purpurea*) in Orikumi wetland, which probably represents, the first wintering case of this species in Albania. Furthermore, after several years of absence, we observed, the presence of the Dalmatian pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) in Butrinti National Park and also found a white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) nest in the same area.

VJOSA – NARTA: A THREATENED PARADISE

An International airport is planned to build within the Vjosa-Narta Protected Area

The plans for the construction of the Vlora International airport, within the Vjosa-Narta protected area, are still ongoing, threatening this national and international ecosystem. This decision openly conflicts with national laws, as well as international conventions and European Directives. If this plan will be implemented, the whole ecosystem and species found in Vjosa – Narta will be irreversibly damaged. Together as a coalition of 38 national and international organizations sent an open letter, to the Prime Minister of Albania, Mr. Edi Rama asking to reconsider the location of this investment. Vjosa-Narta is one of the most important wetland complexes, not only nationally but also internationally. Over 200 species of wild birds have been recorded in this area. Together with Divjaka-Karavasta, they form a continuous ecosystem, making for one of the most important wetlands complexes in the whole Adriatic Flyway, where hundreds of thousands of birds, regularly stop, each year, during their migration from nesting sites to wintering areas, in autumn and vice versa in the spring.

In addition, press releases and conferences were held opposing these destructive plans within this ecosystem. Right after the signing of the contract of such investment by the Albanian government, a protest was planned and announced according to the law, but this action was immediately stopped with unfounded arguments.

Building an infrastructure of such dimensions, as the proposed airport, would not only irreversibly damage the magnificent landscape of the area, but would also dislocate all these species and values mentioned above but could pose heightened risks for the safety of airplanes and people.

Our efforts on this issue were extended and caught broad media attention, national and international, were later on several media, such as DW, EuroNews, Reuters, Liberation, Rai3, etc, visited the site and reported the issue.



VJOSA – NARTA: A THREATENED PARADISE

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Furthermore, this issue was raised even on the EU presence in Albania and the recommendations were sent to the EU Commission & Parliament, EU embassies in Tirana as well as to the embassies of our neighbor countries.

The EU has never before spoken more clearly: "The construction of the Vlora airport within a protected area, is a violation of the national laws and international conventions". The last EU Report for Albania (2021) describes in detail, the shortcomings of Albania, in addressing environmental issues with great importance, in the EU integration path. The construction of Vlora Airport inside the Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape, has been considered by the European Union, as a violation of national laws and international conventions. Also, the report emphasizes the granting of a proper status, for the entire Vjosa River, which also includes the river delta, where Vjosa-Narta protected area is situated.

Finally, the construction of an airport within Vjosa-Narta was raised and several letters were sent to international conventions, such as Bern Convention, CMS, AEWA, and the cases are under investigation by the experts of this convention.

PPNEA urges the responsible authorities, to withdraw the decision of the airport, which represents a step back, for the Albanian integration in the European Union!

PICTURES INSTEAD OF STUFFED ANIMALS

More than 10 stuffed animals were replaced with HD photos in several KBAs

The objects in the left corner, represent a time when there was no respect for the environment. No one looks at these stuffed species with curiosity anymore, nevertheless, they are left there, for a long time now. More and more businesses are joining our "Wildlife photos instead of taxidermized species" raising awareness campaign. This time, we returned to the initial location where we first started, the Vjosa – Narta Protected Landscape.



From the monitoring work of PPNEA and RAPA Vlora, we identified a restaurant that owned a considerable number of taxidermized species, such as Dalmatian pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*), flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*), Common buzzard (*Buteo buteo*), Barn owl (*Tyto alba*), Eurasian sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*), Least weasel (*Mustela nivalis*), etc. The owner gladly accepted our offer, to replace these objects with wildlife photos of symbol species found in Vjosa – Narta.



This is a beautiful example to be followed by other similar businesses. Our team is grateful to "Taverna e Miqesise", for joining our campaign and giving a positive message, regarding wildlife in Albania. We hope, that this campaign will erase the animal stuffing phenomenon and contribute to building strong ties, among the local communities and symbol species found around them, helping the cause of nature conservation in Albania.

CONSERVATION ACTIONS IMPLEMENTED IN NARTA KBA

NEW BREEDING PLACES FOR THE BIRDS OF VJOSA-NARTA KBA



Different tern species, nest in Vjosa-Narta Protected landscape, which can be easily observed in every corner of the lagoon, coastal areas, and in the vicinity of urban areas. Recently, PPNEA team has conducted several study visits in Vjosa-Narta, in order to assess and identify potential sites for Little tern and Common tern nesting, which carry the "Endangered" (EN) status, in our country. PPNEA together with RAPA Vlore, BirdON students, volunteers, and the local community, undertook some conservation measures for these species, which consist in maintaining and adapting the islands, thus creating natural nesting sites for them, and also constructing sustainable and long-term artificial platforms.

Vjosa - Narta Protected landscape is manifesting, more and more, its irreplaceable ecological capacity, by sheltering a large number of species and breeding pairs, sending us a clear message, ahead of advancing plans for its destruction. These findings show, once again, the importance of Vjosa - Narta Protected Landscape, as a key biodiversity area , not only in Albania but also worldwide.



5 JUNE - PPNEA'S 30 ANNIVERSARY

SAY NO TO THE AIRPORT AT THE VJOSA-NARTA PROTECTED LANDSCAPE!



"Say NO to the airport at Vjosa-Narta Protected Area", This was the main message that professionals, researchers, activists as well as nature enthusiasts, stated along with the celebratory event, for the 30th anniversary of PPNEA.

5 June 1991, did not only mark the establishment of an organization, but the beginning of the environmental civil society in Albania. This is why, the 30th anniversary was dedicated to nature's conservation and raising public awareness. The construction of an international airport, inside the protected area, most probably, represents the biggest threat imposed on nature over these last three decades, so there was no better place for celebration, rather than the exact location of this destructive plan.

The fight against the construction of the airport inside the Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape is one of those causes that need to be supported not only by environmental organizations, but by every Albanian citizen. If today, we allow these destructive plans, to be developed inside protected areas, in the future we will be introduced to many more similar ones, making it impossible to preserve the nature of our beloved country!

On June 5th, we gathered dozens of supporters and demonstrated, that the airport shouldn't be constructed inside the protected area. If the authorities, will not reconsider the exact location of the airport, they will soon face thousands of citizens, who will not allow its construction inside the protected area. We need to preserve the protected areas of our country at all costs!

NARTA'S WINE FESTIVAL AND CARNIVALS

Celebration of Narta's carnivals and Wine Festival



The old tradition of carnivals celebration in Narta, represents one of those cultural values that need to be preserved. In collaboration with Vlora Municipality and RAPA Vlore, we organized and celebrated at the historical center of Vlora, where several activities were organized, such as face painting, dancing, singing, and other improvisations. In addition, several stakeholders joined in this event and celebrated this old tradition.

Meanwhile, in October another celebration was organized in Narta, Wine Festival. Authorities, NGOs, local inhabitants, as well as numerous local wine producers were gathered in the heart of Vjosa-Narta Protected Area. The celebration started with a traditional fair, where local dishes were tasted while trying different wine samples offered by winery owners.

During the celebration a wine competition took place. This competition was won by "GX winery", which uses the local grape variety of vlosh for the production of its wines. Our team is grateful to the Municipality of Vlora and the Regional Administration of Protected Areas Vlore, for their cooperation. We hope that the wine festival will soon turn into a tradition for this small village, which has a great potential for nature-based tourism.



NEW NATURAL BREEDING SITES FOR TERNS

Success stories from implemented conservation actions



The amazing Vjosa - Narta, is important to a large number of bird species, whether migratory across the Adriatic flyway or breeding ones. In April, our team took some conservation measures for the tern species, in order to increase their breeding success, in the Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape. The natural nesting sites created by cleaning and adapting the islands marked a huge success. After a very short time, these habitats were populated not only by the Little tern (*Sternula albifrons*), but also by the Collared pratincole (*Glareola pratincola*).

In the new nesting spaces, were counted around 35 nests of the Little tern and 10 nests of the Collared pratincole. Creating nesting spaces for birds is important, for increasing the breeding success of the species, as well as, for recovering their population in the area.



MUSSELS FEST IN BUTRINTI KBA

PPNEA'S TRADITIONAL FAIR AT THE HEART OF BUTRINT NATIONAL PARK



On June 26, our team organized a traditional fair, at Butrinti National Park, where we gathered artisans, representatives of eco-businesses, the local community, as well as farmers who were supported before by the "Land of Eagles and Castles" project. Our aim was to promote the culinary tradition of Butrinti, as well as other sustainable initiatives, that help locals generate income, while preserving the natural values of the area. Along with the fair, we organized a series of education activities with pupils, such as marble carving, outdoor games, as well as the presentation of the recycling work carried out by the "9 Tetori" school in Saranda. We also organized a competition for the faster eater for a given mussels quantity, which are the symbols of the area. This competition was won by Era, a student at "9 Tetori" school.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM



Environmental education and outdoor education have been important components of this project. The students of "9 Tetori" school in Saranda, visited several protected areas and KBAs and bird watched several important birds species such as White stork, Dalmatian pelican, terns, flamingos, etc. After visiting Drino KBA, Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape, Divjaka-Karavasta National Park was the next stops for the children, they were informed about the importance of these areas, their diversity, and were also introduced to the migratory bird species. Such activities are very important for them, as it teaches more about nature and makes them aware of the importance of preserving it.

An interesting webinar dedicated to nature-based tourism, as well as, the great potential of the Albanian network of protected areas, was organized, aiming to raise awareness on sustainable tourism and interpretation. National and international experts, were part of this webinar, and discussed nature interpretation, birdwatching, sustainable tourism, as well as Albania's protected areas management.



Through a presentation, held from the representatives of RAPA Vlore, the participants explored a series of ecotourism activities, that can be carried out inside the protected areas, such as birdwatching, which was also the core theme of the presentation, held by the representatives of the Bulgarian Society from the Protection of Birds.



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