

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



MACEDONIAN
ECOLOGICAL
SOCIETY

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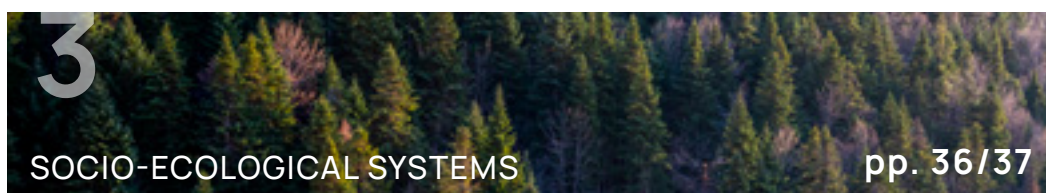
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A Note from Our Executive Director

Robertina Brajanoska



Looking back on the year that has passed, I feel proud of what we have achieved, but also deeply aware of the responsibility that lies ahead. For MES, 2025 was marked not only by scientific achievements and significant nature conservation activities, but also by a process of internal transformation. We worked intensively on the new MES Strategic Plan, which will guide our work until 2030 and align our activities with European and global biodiversity goals.

We live in a decisive decade for the conservation and restoration of nature. The loss of biodiversity, the degradation of ecosystems and climate change are no longer warnings about the future – they are already transforming our landscapes, societies and economies. For this reason, during 2025 a significant part of our energy was directed towards securing funding through the preparation of applications for European funds, particularly the EU LIFE Programme, and for private foundations, as well as towards building strategic partnerships. In this way we are securing not only financial support, but also the foundation for long-term impact and stronger action in the years ahead.

We are particularly encouraged by the fact that our work is increasingly becoming part of broader regional and transboundary nature conservation efforts. The multi-year activities in the transboundary Prespa Region, implemented with the support of PONT and in cooperation with PrespaNet and the managers of protected areas, were further advanced last year through the “EU for Prespa” programme, which we expect to make a significant contribution to the conservation and sustainable management of the region over the next three years.

Aware that strong partnerships are essential for the conservation and restoration of biodiversity, in recent years we have built strong partnerships across the Balkans and Europe, particularly with our partners BirdLife, EuroNatur and IUCN. Collaboration with the business sector – such as EVN Macedonia and dm-drogerie markt – has opened a new dimension of joint action for the conservation of our natural heritage. Cooperation with institutions remains especially important to us, which is why we invest greatly in ensuring that our collaboration endures and delivers mutual benefits.

At the same time, we remain committed to investing in people – young researchers, students, local communities, managers of protected areas and all those who believe that a more sustainable relationship with nature is possible. Nature conservation means not only protecting species and habitats but also building a society that understands its dependence on nature and is prepared to act responsibly – this is an investment in the future and in the quality of life of the generations to come.

The year behind us has shown that even in times of uncertainty, real change is possible when knowledge, dedication and partnerships are united around a shared vision. I wish to thank all our staff, members, volunteers, donors, institutions, partners and private foundations for their trust, support, perseverance and shared vision. It is precisely their support that enables us not only to continue our work, but to think more boldly, act more decisively and look towards the future with optimism and determination.

The years ahead will demand courage, innovation and perseverance. But they also bring with them a unique opportunity to redefine the way we value and protect nature. I am confident that we are ready to make an active contribution to that transformation.

MES Profile



The Macedonian Ecological Society (MES) is a civil society organisation actively engaged in researching and conserving nature and the environment. Founded back in 1972, MES remains to this day the only non-governmental organisation in the country that operates in the field of ecology on the basis of scientifically grounded principles and a scientific approach.

MES pursues its mission through scientific research, measures for the conservation and restoration of species and habitats, experiential learning, civic engagement, and the development of partnerships at national and international level. MES also builds capacity by training its members, engaging young professionals and other enthusiasts in scientific research and citizen science, and supporting their continuing development through various programmes, training courses and studies in the country and abroad. One such initiative is the Dr Ljupčo Melovski Young Ecologists Programme, established in 2009 on the initiative of Prof. Melovski, long-serving President of MES.

From Macedonia's independence to the present day, MES has remained the foremost organiser of scientific ecological gatherings in the country. One such event is the Congress of Ecologists of Macedonia, attracting international participants, which MES has been organising since 1998. MES also publishes scientific and popular publications in the field of ecology and environmental protection. Since 1992, it has been publishing the Macedonian Journal of Ecology and Environment, which has had an international scope since 2011.

MES cooperates with other organisations and is a member of numerous national and international associations, including the [International Union for Conservation of Nature \(IUCN\)](#), [BirdLife International](#), the European Green Belt Association, the European Ecological Federation, the transboundary PrespaNet network, the National Platform 27 on the Environment, and the Climate Coalition. It also helped initiate the 'Friends of Šara' platform.



Operational areas
of MES in 2025

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[@macedonian.ecological.society](https://www.instagram.com/macedonian.ecological.society)



[Macedonian Ecological Society](https://www.youtube.com/MacedonianEcologicalSociety)

More on MES's work:

MES Congress

Experiential Learning Network

Ptici.mk

BalkanLynx.com

PrespaNet

Key Acronyms

ELN	Experiential Learning Network
FLR	Forest Landscape Restoration
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
MoEPP	Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning
MPA	Multi-Purpose Area
NM	Natural Monument
NP	National Park
PE	Public Enterprise
PL	Protected Landscape
PP	Nature Park
PPNEA	Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania
ROAM	Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology (ROAM)
SPP	Society for the Protection of Prespa
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme



Nature Protection and Restoration



*“Traditional knowledge
and the interest of
local communities are
indispensable for the
conservation of nature.”*

*Despina Kitanova,
Manager of Protected
Areas Program*

1.1.

Protected Areas and Ecological Corridors



The year 2025 was marked by...

Supporting protected area managers

We continued to assist NP *Galičica*, NP *Pelister*, NP *Šar Planina*, MPA *Jasen* and PP *Ezerani* with biodiversity monitoring, with a particular focus on the following species: **newts, reptiles, priority birds** (all waterbirds, selected important species and other bird communities), **bats, the Balkan lynx, and the brown bear**. This enriched and deepened our knowledge of the population numbers of these species, the threats they face, and the conservation measures required.

In the Osogovo Mountains, our focus was on **newts and otters, peatlands, and refugial and riparian forest communities** of conservation significance. Peatland monitoring continued in the Maleševija region as well. We successfully completed **the survey of autochthonous fruit varieties** and identified around 40 trees, mainly apple varieties but also plums and pears, providing a basis for landscape management in the area.

Given its limited institutional capacity, we continued to support the PE *National Forests* as the management body of the PL *Osogovo Mountains* by helping them prepare the Annual Work Programme and the Annual Report. In accordance with their obligations established under the Law on Nature Protection, these documents are to be submitted for approval to the Nature Department within the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MoEPP).



A population analysis of the Macedonian crested newt (©MES)

© Филип Крстески



Wild apple blossom (©MES)

Management Plan for Ezerani Nature Park

We initiated the process of **updating the outdated Management Plan for Ezerani NP**, which will form part of the future Natura 2000 site network. We secured resources, engaged a consultancy firm, and are continuously contributing data and expertise.

Active participation in the new Strategic Action Plan for the Prespa Park

As part of our **longstanding commitment to a functional Prespa Transboundary Park**, we joined our partners from the PrespaNet network, PPNEA and SPP in contributing to **the preparation of the new Strategic Action Plan (2025–2030)**, a process led by UNDP. We participated in workshops and meetings as part of the *Prespa Park* Management Committee and the transboundary PrespaNet network, providing comments and proposals to strengthen the scientific approach and the protection of biodiversity.

Visit by the Ramsar Advisory Mission to North Macedonia

In April, the Ramsar Advisory Mission visited our country to assess the ecological and hydrological condition of Lake Prespa and to provide guidance on its transboundary management. The Mission prepared a report with **10 key recommendations**, which also **drew on MES's input**. The recommendations are directed towards consolidating monitoring data, supporting informed decision-making, preparing for future climate change, and strengthening transboundary cooperation between the neighbouring states and local stakeholders.



Visit of the Municipality of Resen by the
Ramsar Advisory Committee (©MES)



Research in ecological corridors

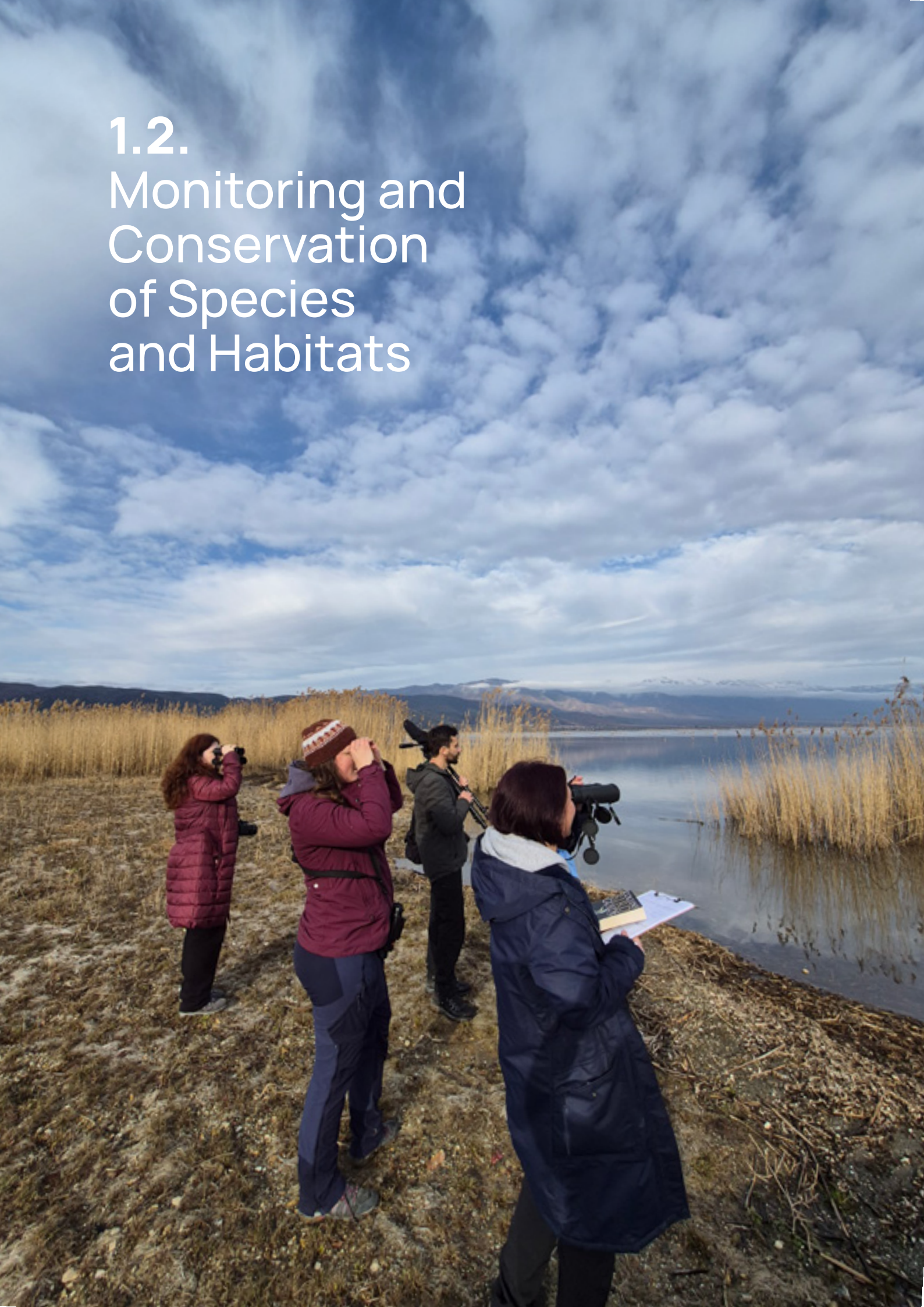
PrespaNet's interest in the broader Prespa context enabled us to conduct **baseline faunistic surveys on Stogovo Mountain**. A rich mosaic of habitats was documented, the most significant being the alkaline marshes, home to an exceptional diversity of Balkan endemic and rare species. More than half of the country's butterfly species can be found on Stogovo, along with significant populations of amphibians and reptiles – including newly recorded species – as well as a rich bird community with rare high-alpine species such as the white-winged snowfinch. The findings make a strong scientific case for the formal protection of the region, in line with the proposed declaration of Stogovo as a Nature Park under the National Spatial Plan. The report concludes that the establishment of Stogovo as a protected area within the Natura 2000 network is of essential importance for preserving its ecological integrity and its critical role as a functional landscape connection between the Šar–Korab massif and the Ohrid–Prespa Region.

Preparation of the Jablanica Valorisation Study

Our research on Jablanica Mountain was focused on the potential proclamation of a new protected area. We participated in the preparation of the Jablanica Valorisation Study, in collaboration with the Environmental Management Associates *DEKONS-EMA*, *Farmahem*, experts from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Skopje, and the *Goce Delčev* University in Štip, this time financed by MoEPP. Its finalisation is currently under way.



1.2. Monitoring and Conservation of Species and Habitats



More and more people know and respect the lynx thanks to MES's work



We confirmed the cub from the female lynx Luna in the vicinity of NP Mavrovo (©MES)

Context

The Balkan lynx is an endangered subspecies with fewer than 50 adult individuals in the wild. Most of its population is found in the western part of the country. Habitat loss due to illegal logging and infrastructure construction, as well as inbreeding, are among the greatest threats to its survival.

What do we do?

Since 2006, we have been implementing the transboundary Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme – one of the longest animal species conservation programmes in the Balkans. In the most recent period, in addition to MES, the programme has involved PPNEA from Albania, ERA from Kosovo, EuroNatur from Germany, and KORA from Switzerland.

Activities:

- ▶ Conducted research and monitoring (camera traps, radiotelemetry) in the key distribution areas of the Balkan lynx – the hunting grounds around and between all four national parks, including a monitoring session in the important biocorridor of Ilinska–Plakenska Mountain;
- ▶ Collaborated with private veterinary clinics to capture and neuter dogs, with the aim of reducing the growing competition for the lynx's prey;
- ▶ Promoted the project's conservation work through participation in several international conferences and gatherings (Patra, Athens, Ioannina, Sofia, Thessaloniki);

- ▶ Organised workshops for children and a travelling photography exhibition dedicated to the Balkan lynx to educate young people and the public.

Results:

- ▶ Identified new areas of Balkan lynx presence on Ilinska Mountain;
- ▶ Captured the 15th individual Balkan lynx – Zora – and confirmed a cub from the female lynx Luna, in the vicinity of NP Mavrovo;
- ▶ Neutered a total of 9 stray dogs at locations critical for the Balkan lynx;
- ▶ Signed memoranda of cooperation with the hunting associations *Elen* (Kičevo) and *Hunting Safari* (Demir Hisar);
- ▶ Developed protocols for the sedation of Balkan lynx individuals and for monitoring their health status;
- ▶ Launched a new website dedicated to the Balkan lynx in Macedonian, Albanian and English: <https://www.balkanlynx.com/mk>
- ▶ Reached a total of 576 children from the Šar Mountain region through the Balkan lynx educational programme (176 of Macedonian ethnic background and 337 of Albanian ethnic background);
- ▶ Displayed the travelling photography exhibition on the Balkan lynx at 7 locations across Macedonia, including the national parks *Mavrovo*, *Jasen*, *Pelister*, *Galičica* and *Šar Planina*.

Donor: Hans Wilsdorf Foundation
(La Fondation Hans Wilsdorf)

Protection of Prespa – an inexhaustible source of transboundary activities and cooperation

Context

The Prespa Region is of exceptional importance for its biodiversity and the numerous protected areas it encompasses, including the *Ezerani* NP, the *Galičica* and *Pelister* National Parks in our country, as well as the *Prespa* National Parks in Greece and Albania. Although it is a transboundary region shared by three states, there is no integrated approach to the monitoring and conservation of its various species and habitats, and local institutions lack the professional capacity to implement such activities.

What do we do?

The protection and restoration of the Prespa Region are the focus of several ongoing projects whose activities complement one another:

Through **“PrespaNet III: Biodiversity Conservation in Transboundary Prespa” (2024–2027)**, we are strengthening the protection and sustainable management of Prespa and its protected areas by advancing cross-border cooperation, information exchange and ecological restoration. This project is funded by the Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT) and the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation, supported by EuroNatur, and implemented in partnership with the Society for the Protection of Prespa from Greece, and the Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania from Albania.

Through the **“Prespa – Green and Blue Initiative: Strengthening Protection through Research, Education, and Communication” (2025–2029)**, we are advancing the management of natural resources in Prespa through

the active engagement of the community in research, education and conservation, thereby contributing to their long-term preservation. This project is funded by the European Union through the “EU for Prespa” programme and co-financed by the Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT). It is implemented together with the Municipality of Resen, the *Galičica* NP, the Society for the Protection of Prespa from Greece and the Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania from Albania.

Through the project **“Encouraging Behavioural Changes of Citizens for Improving Waste Management Practices in the Prespa Region”**, we are improving the environmental awareness and behaviour of the local community about waste management in the Prespa Region. The project is funded by the “EU for Prespa” programme and coordinated by the Institute of Communication Studies (ICS).

Activities:



Exploring the tortoise population on the island of Golem Grad (©MES)



The winter waterbird count is part of the regular monitoring of Lake Prespa (©MES)

- ▶ Conducted ongoing intensive monitoring of mammals, amphibians, reptiles and birds;
- ▶ Held a one-week transboundary summer school with practical activities on wetland habitat management, waterbird monitoring, and drone and GIS habitat mapping for students from Albania, Greece and Macedonia on the Greek side of the Prespa basin;
- ▶ Carried out afforestation with 1,500 common alder seedlings raised from locally collected seed the previous year with the support of the local nursery *Prespadrvo*;
- ▶ Conducted intensive one-week summer and spring monitoring and education camps to study reptiles on the islands of Golem Grad in Macedonia and Mal Grad in Albania, with international experts and students;
- ▶ Held roundtable discussions with local hunters and farmers to draw on their unique experience in the management and conservation of the region;
- ▶ Conducted 170 interviews with the local population of Macedonian Prespa (with interviews ongoing in Albanian Prespa) on their perception and valuation of pre-defined landscapes, with the aim of integrating both aspects into the first

transboundary holistic mapping and valorisation of the Prespa landscapes;

- ▶ Presented PrespaNet's work at the 16th International Congress on the Zoogeography and Ecology of Greece and Adjacent Regions in Athens with 7 poster presentations and 2 oral presentations.

Results:

- ▶ Developed the first transboundary interactive biodiversity database for Prespa: prespa.mes.org.mk;
- ▶ Raised the environmental awareness of 420 local pupils and 20 teachers through interactive workshops and the "Prespa" board game, available at <https://presparazbudise.mk/>;
- ▶ Built the research capacities of over 40 students from the three lakeside countries through monitoring and conservation activities in Prespa;
- ▶ Reached 186 farmers from 28 Prespa villages through the survey on fertiliser use – of whom 142 reported using fertilisers;
- ▶ Mowed 70 hectares of wet meadows and produced 60 tonnes of hay distributed among the local population.

Cross-border cooperation – the cornerstone of brown bear conservation efforts



Brown bear spotted on
a camera trap (©MES)

Context

The brown bear population in Macedonia, which forms part of the Dinaric–Pindos population, has been listed as *vulnerable* on the IUCN Red List. This is the result of numerous threats including poaching, habitat degradation and fragmentation, among others.

What do we do?

Within the framework of the Transboundary Brown Bear Conservation Project (2024–2026), we are working to advance the conservation and sustainable management of the brown bear in the transboundary region between North Macedonia, Albania and Greece. This includes strengthening partnerships and habitat connectivity, developing a transboundary monitoring system, mitigating human–bear conflicts, building capacity to combat wildlife crime, raising awareness among the local population, and encouraging the participation of relevant stakeholders. Project partners include *EuroNatur* (Germany), *PPNEA* (Albania), *Eko-svest* (North Macedonia) and *Callisto* (Greece).

Activities:

- ▶ Prepared an action plan for brown bear management and conservation;
- ▶ Conducted a pilot survey in the transboundary area NP *Pelister* – *Prespa* Park, Greece;
- ▶ Carried out drone surveys of 6 orchards in the Galičica and Plakenska Mountain area;
- ▶ Strengthened local capacities for wildlife sedation.

Results:

- ▶ Trained 10 rangers in wildlife sedation;
- ▶ Brought together 18 relevant stakeholders from Macedonia, Greece, Albania and Bulgaria at a workshop in transboundary Prespa to review the Brown Bear Action Plan;
- ▶ Deployed 8 camera traps and obtained 13 photographs of brown bear.

Donor: Budai Foundation (Budai Stiftung)

Part of the team that worked
on the Brown Bear Action Plan
revision (©MES)



The rich biodiversity of Lake Dojran – an indispensable part of our research and educational activities

Context

Lake Dojran is a key wetland ecosystem of great value for migratory birds. Although data form the basis for effective management and decision-making, there is no continuous and comprehensive waterbird monitoring at national level, particularly for breeding populations.

What do we do?

From 2024 to 2027, through the project “Protection and Restoration of Wetlands in the Mediterranean: Strengthening Knowledge, Protection and Revitalisation of Wetlands in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (PROZHUM)”, we are improving knowledge of the biodiversity of Lake Dojran and supporting the development and implementation of sustainable management practices for its protection. At the same time, we are working to raise awareness among the local community and foster its engagement through educational and communication initiatives.

Activities:

- ▶ Spent approximately 20 days conducting field surveys of birds, reptiles, amphibians, dragonflies, butterflies, plants and habitats;
- ▶ Organised a four-day educational camp for secondary school students on the shores of Lake Dojran;
- ▶ Provided mentoring support to the local non-governmental organisation *Polimat13* in developing a small grant to establish a local action group for the protection of Lake Dojran;
- ▶ Participated in the Scientific Council of the manager of the NM *Lake Dojran* in the



High school students from the Dojran Region explore the surrounding wildlife (©MES)



Teaching young people to identify amphibians and reptiles on the shores of Lake Dojran (©MES)

Municipality of Dojran to finalise the Lake Dojran Management Plan.

Results:

- ▶ Developed and enhanced skills among 50 secondary school students from 5 secondary schools in 4 of the nearest surrounding towns in the Dojran Region in amphibian identification, mammal surveying and birdwatching;
- ▶ Implemented a mini educational campaign on social media, comprising 10 posts with interesting facts about bird species specific to Lake Dojran.

Donor: French Development Agency (Agence Française de Développement – AFD)

The connection between birds and aquatic habitats is most visible through the winter waterbird count



The common merganser or goosander (*Mergus merganser*)

Context

Providing standardised and comparable data on waterbirds is essential for monitoring the status of their populations as well as the condition of aquatic habitats. These data enable the timely identification of threats, including climate change and disease, which form the basis for coordinated waterbird conservation measures along their migratory routes across Europe. In this way, they also contribute to the effective implementation of international agreements such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat and the Agreement on the Conservation of African–Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds.

What do we do?

The winter waterbird count takes place as part of the International Waterbird Census, one of the largest and longest-running citizen science programmes in the world. It has been running for 60 years under the coordination of Wetlands International. The winter count, which we have been conducting regularly every year since 2010, provides insight into the abundance of breeding and wintering populations, their changes over the years, and their relationship with the condition of aquatic habitats.

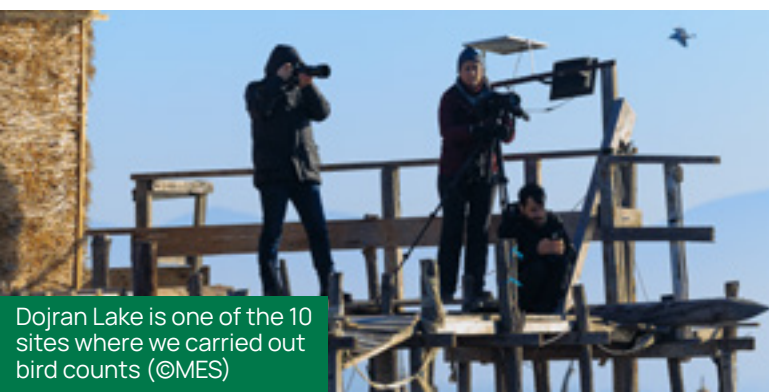
Activities:

- ▶ Conducted the winter waterbird count with the participation of over 20 volunteers and collaborators from PP *Ezerani*, NP *Galičica*, MES volunteers and bird photographers;
- ▶ Carried out bird counts at 10 sites – the three natural lakes, the artificial reservoirs *Mladost*, *Mantovo*, *Paljurci*, *Vardarski Rid* and *Ćol Bogorodica*, and several fishponds.

Results:

- ▶ Counted 10,233 individuals of 18 species on Lake Prespa, 26,704 individuals of 20 species on Lake Ohrid, and 4,239 individuals of 25 species on Lake Dojran;
- ▶ The most abundant species on these three lakes were the Eurasian coot, black-headed gull and great crested grebe;
- ▶ Identified 10–12 breeding pairs of goosanders (*Mergus merganser*) on Lake Prespa – a relict population – and a further 14–16 pairs on Lake Ohrid;
- ▶ Recorded active hunting of ducks on Lake Dojran using illegal plastic decoys and audio devices, which were reported to the relevant inspectorates and the local police.

Donor: French Development Agency (Agence Française de Développement – AFD)



Dojran Lake is one of the 10 sites where we carried out bird counts (©MES)



More than 20 volunteers joined the winter waterbird count (©Bobi Kuzmanovski)

Healthy pastures require local communities and sustainable traditional practices



Context

In the Šara/Korab–Koritnik/Mavrovo region, which extends across Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo, nature is formally protected, but pastures are increasingly being abandoned and degraded. The lack of sustainable livestock farming and the absence of local communities are disrupting the balance of this sensitive ecosystem.

What do we do?

The conservation of mountain pastures with their flora, as part of the biodiversity and cultural heritage of the Šara/Korab–Koritnik/Mavrovo region, is the focus of the project “European Green Belt: Vital Pastures in Transboundary Šara/Korab–Koritnik/Mavrovo” (2025–2028). We are implementing it together with PPNEA (Albania) and EuroNatur (Germany) with the aim of contributing to the preservation of traditional livestock farming and food production, including medicinal and edible plants, and promoting knowledge exchange and learning among local stakeholders.

Activities:

- ▶ Established a formal partnership between MES and the Public Institution *Šar Planina* National Park;
- ▶ Organised the “Bean Day” event in the village of Tearce with the participation of local producers, livestock farmers and residents from the region;
- ▶ Initiated the preparation of an analysis of the state of pasture management, through the collection and processing of baseline data relevant to future sustainable measures.

Results:

- ▶ Strengthened institutional cooperation and coordination in pasture management;
- ▶ Over 150 visitors were informed about the project objectives at the “Bean Day” event;
- ▶ Engaged approximately 20 representatives from local communities and relevant institutions in the consultation process related to the sustainable use of natural resources;
- ▶ Laid the foundation for the development of long-term sustainable pasture management practices, with a direct focus on local livestock farmers and the management structures of the protected area.

Donors: Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation and Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation – NaEPF



The “Bean Day” event was an excellent opportunity to inform the locals on the importance of pasture management (©CED)



During 2025, our focus also included...

Vultures

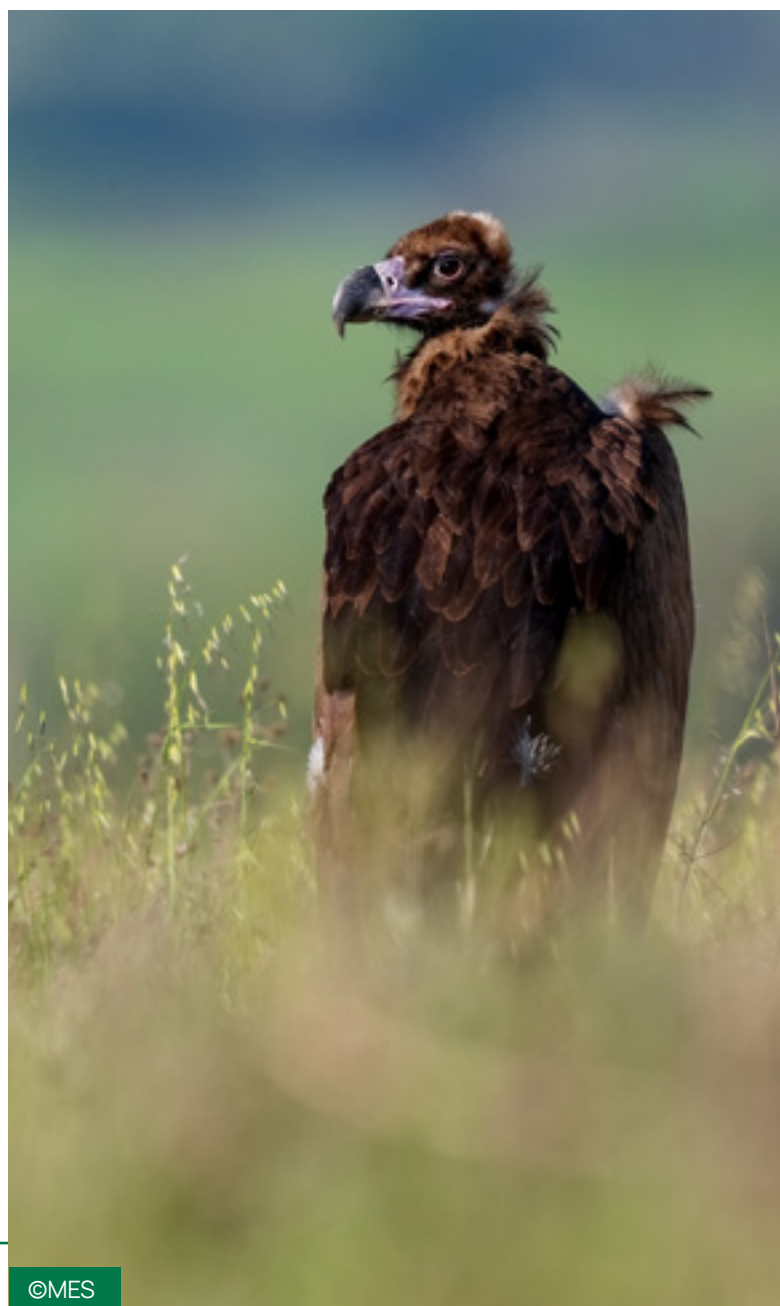
Monitoring of these fascinating birds showed that the local Eurasian griffon vulture population continues to grow (19–20 breeding pairs), and that the decline of the Egyptian vulture population has stabilised. For over eight months we cared for a black vulture that had flown in from Bulgaria and was found in a state of exhaustion. Due to the incompatibility of national veterinary procedures with EU requirements, we were unable to return the bird legally to Bulgaria and released it back into the wild two months ago.

Safe power lines and endangered birds

The Eastern imperial eagle and the Egyptian vulture are globally endangered species according to the IUCN that regularly perish due to electrocution and collisions with overhead power lines. For this reason, the international project “Safe Wires for Endangered Birds” will over the next five years upgrade and make safe the hazardous overhead power lines in Macedonia, Bulgaria and Türkiye. On Macedonian territory, we will carry out these activities for the first time **in equal partnership with EVN Macedonia**, with the aim of insulating over 3,000 hazardous pylons and installing 1,000 diverters on overhead power lines across 4 important bird and biodiversity areas in the country. The project is funded through the LIFE Programme of the European Union.



©MES



©MES

Bats

As a result of continued monitoring of bats in 6 caves in NP *Galičica*, **we discovered the largest winter colony of lesser horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*) found there.** In the Prespa area, meanwhile, we discovered several new and significant artificial summer roosts for bats.

We participated in the **revision of the Bat Action Plan for the Transboundary Prespa Region**, originally prepared in 2012, which summarises current knowledge on bats and defines the conservation measures to be implemented in the period 2025–2030.



Amphibians and reptiles

We surveyed amphibians through 4 ongoing and 2 newly established programmes, while reptiles were the subject of interest in as many as 6 ongoing programmes.

We conducted **intensive one-week summer and spring monitoring and education camps** to study reptiles on the islands of Golem Grad (Macedonia) and Mal Grad (Albania). Among the participants were international experts and students.

We continuously carry out precise **monitoring of tailed amphibian populations**, applying the mark-recapture method to track the dynamics of individual animals. Through this programme we cover the areas of NP *Galičica*, where we have been monitoring the Macedonian crested newt (*Triturus macedonicus*) since 2020, the PL *Osogovo Mountains*, where we have been monitoring the Balkan crested newt (*Triturus ivanbureschi*) since 2022, and Dojran, where we have been researching the hybrid zone between these two species since 2022.

Thanks to one of the student projects supported by the Dr Ljupčo Melovski Young Ecologists Programme, **a population analysis of the Macedonian crested newt on Galičica Mountain was produced for the first time.** There, the scope of monitoring was expanded through the inclusion of additional sites and field activities across multiple seasons. Monitoring was also established on Jablanica Mountain, where the populations of the Macedonian crested newt and the Alpine newt (*Ichthyosaura alpestris*) were monitored for the first time.



1.3. Restoration



80 autochthonous fruit trees – part of the precious natural and cultural heritage of Maleševo and Belasica



Field surveys and GPS mapping of autochthonous fruit varieties in Maleševo and Belasica (©MES)

Context

Maleševo and Belasica are regions with a long tradition of fruit growing, known for centuries of developing autochthonous varieties and a unique agrobiodiversity. Old varieties of apples, pears and plums represent both an important genetic resource and part of the cultural heritage of local communities, and a vital component of local biodiversity – serving as home, shelter and food source for various bird and animal species, including the bear. However, due to the abandonment of orchards, intensive agriculture and the use of trees as firewood, such fruit species are under threat.

What do we do?

Through the project “Conservation of Local Fruit Varieties in Maleševo and Belasica”, we worked to identify, map, conserve and promote these varieties as a valuable natural and economic resource. Considering the potential that their sustainable use holds for the development of green local economies, we also worked to raise the awareness and knowledge of local communities, particularly among young people. We implemented the project in partnership with the civil society association *Ambrozija* (North Macedonia) and the organisation *Biomatera* (Bulgaria), with support from EuroNatur (Germany).





The 'Turshijarka' pepper is among the 80 identified and GPS-tagged autochthonous fruit trees (©MES)



This is what an old fruit tree of an autochthonous variety looks like (©MES)



Activities:

- ▶ Conducted baseline research and mapping – carried out field surveys in Maleševo and Belasica with GPS recording of over 80 old fruit trees of autochthonous varieties (apples, pears and plums);
- ▶ Conducted stakeholder analysis – carried out 23 surveys and consultations with local fruit growers, producers and institutions to identify challenges and opportunities for the conservation of these varieties;
- ▶ Organised training and awareness-raising – training sessions and educational activities for local producers and 20–30 young participants on the importance and sustainable use of autochthonous varieties;
- ▶ Implemented pilot revitalisation activities – carried out activities for the identification, grafting and conservation of reproductive material from selected varieties, with the involvement of local experts and fruit growers.

Results:

- ▶ Created the first database and map with over 80 identified and GPS-tagged autochthonous fruit trees in Maleševo and Belasica;
- ▶ Established cross-border cooperation among experts, institutions and local fruit growers for the conservation of autochthonous varieties;
- ▶ Formed a local action group and trained residents in inventory-taking, variety identification and basic grafting techniques;
- ▶ Raised awareness of and interest in autochthonous varieties among the local population and young people through workshops, field training sessions and participation in local events and fairs;
- ▶ Promoted traditional products from autochthonous varieties and their potential for the development of green jobs and local businesses.

Donor: European Commission
(BESTbelt programme)

20 hectares of beech forest restored in the Buković corridor – the result of a partnership between the civil sector, experts and relevant institutions



Forest thinning process
(©Nikolčo Velkovski)

Context

The Buković corridor is an important forest and ecological landscape that connects wildlife habitats and enables species movement. However, illegal logging, fires and degradation are undermining its function. The lack of systematic data makes it difficult to plan appropriate conservation and restoration measures.

What do we do?

Through the project “Northern Forests Initiative: Forest Restoration in North Macedonia and Albania” (2023–2025), we are creating the foundation for the restoration and sustainable management of this key corridor. We are implementing it in cooperation with PPNEA (Albania) and the IUCN Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Activities:

- ▶ A restoration opportunities assessment (ROAM) of the forest landscapes was prepared by an expert team, in close cooperation with PE *National Forests – Šar Branch*, Gostivar;
- ▶ A multi-sectoral advisory group was formed, composed of representatives of PE *National Forests*, the relevant line ministries, forestry experts and the project team, to select priority locations for restoration;
- ▶ A closing event to promote project results was organised in Bajram Curri, Albania.

Results:

- ▶ Restored 20 hectares of beech forest – 10 hectares reforested with 21,000 beech seedlings, and thinning carried out on a further 10 hectares as an applied nature-based solutions measure;
- ▶ Trained and engaged 79 local stakeholders in the ROAM process and in Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR);
- ▶ Trained 27 representatives from the forestry sector in the principles of sustainable forest use;
- ▶ Held 10 project events for the education and engagement of relevant stakeholders;
- ▶ Engaged approximately 50 representatives in field restoration activities at Buković.

Donor: Swedish Postcode Lottery Foundation (Svenska Postkodlotteriets Stiftelse)



Afforestation in the Buković area (©MES)

The Vardar Islands – a new home for the fragile little tern population



The little tern (*Sternula albifrons*) is one of the rarest breeding bird species (©MES)

Context



Mapping islands for restoration (©MES)

The little tern (*Sternula albifrons*) is one of the rarest breeding bird species, with the population in Macedonia estimated at 6–8 pairs. It requires very specific nesting conditions – vegetation-free islands that are simultaneously inaccessible to predators such as jackals, foxes and otters.

Such sites are very limited in our country. As the water level of the River Vardar drops in its southern course, several islands appear where little terns nest, while most of the permanent islands are too overgrown for nesting. As a result, the status of the local populations is unstable and unpredictable, which is even more concerning given that the little tern is an umbrella species. By protecting and restoring its nesting sites, other rare and significant bird species also get protected, such as the common tern (*Sterna hirundo*) and the common sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*).

What do we do?

Through the project “Vardar Islands – A New Home for the Little Tern” (2025–2026), we are working on the restoration and adaptation of three islands in the lower course of the River Vardar in a manner suitable for little tern nesting.

Activities:

- ▶ Monitored and counted the little tern population;
- ▶ Mapped islands for restoration;
- ▶ Cleared three islands of invasive vegetation;
- ▶ Developed an informational field guide for identifying tern species in Macedonia;
- ▶ Conducted education for children through school lectures and a field visit;
- ▶ Raised public awareness of the importance of the little tern through social media posts.

Results:

- ▶ Improved population estimates for the little tern, which now numbers 29 breeding pairs;
- ▶ Selected 7 river islands for further restoration and adaptation;
- ▶ Restored one island through the removal of invasive vegetation and the collection of bulky waste from the island;
- ▶ Confirmed the presence of other rare bird species such as the collared pratincole (*Glareola pratincola*).

Donor: dm-drogerie markt

The little tern nests on vegetation-free islands that are inaccessible to predators (©MES)



During 2025, we also worked on...

Wet meadow management

We continued our cooperation with the Municipality of Resen, NP *Galičica*, the network of local farmers and local mowers. As a result, **18 hectares of wet meadows in Ezerani** were mowed and over 4,000 bales of hay produced. Of these, **1,500 bales were donated to NP *Galičica*** as support for the deer in its Breeding Centre, while the remainder were distributed among some ten livestock farmers from the region. Together with other livestock farmers along the Prespa shoreline, a total of 70 hectares of wet meadows were mowed, yielding 60 tonnes of hay.

In addition to the benefits they provide for the local population, these mown areas also impede the spread of wildfires, while the removal of biomass reduces the nutrient load on the lake (eutrophication) and slows its ageing.



Wet meadow management by mowing (©MES)



We carried out three drone surveys to document the consequences of the fire in the Ezerani Nature Park (©MES)

Burned-area analysis

During July, several fires broke out in the *Ezerani* Nature Park. The largest fire, which occurred on 20–21 July, destroyed an area of approximately 560 hectares inside and outside the protected area, consisting mainly of shrub, reed and grass habitats, but also tall-stemmed vegetation. Following the fire, **we carried out three drone surveys** to document the consequences of the burned areas and to monitor changes in vegetation regeneration.

Restoration of alder forests

In cooperation with PE *National Forests*, the Municipality of Resen and the local population, **we planted 1,500 one-year-old common alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) seedlings in Ezerani Nature Park.**

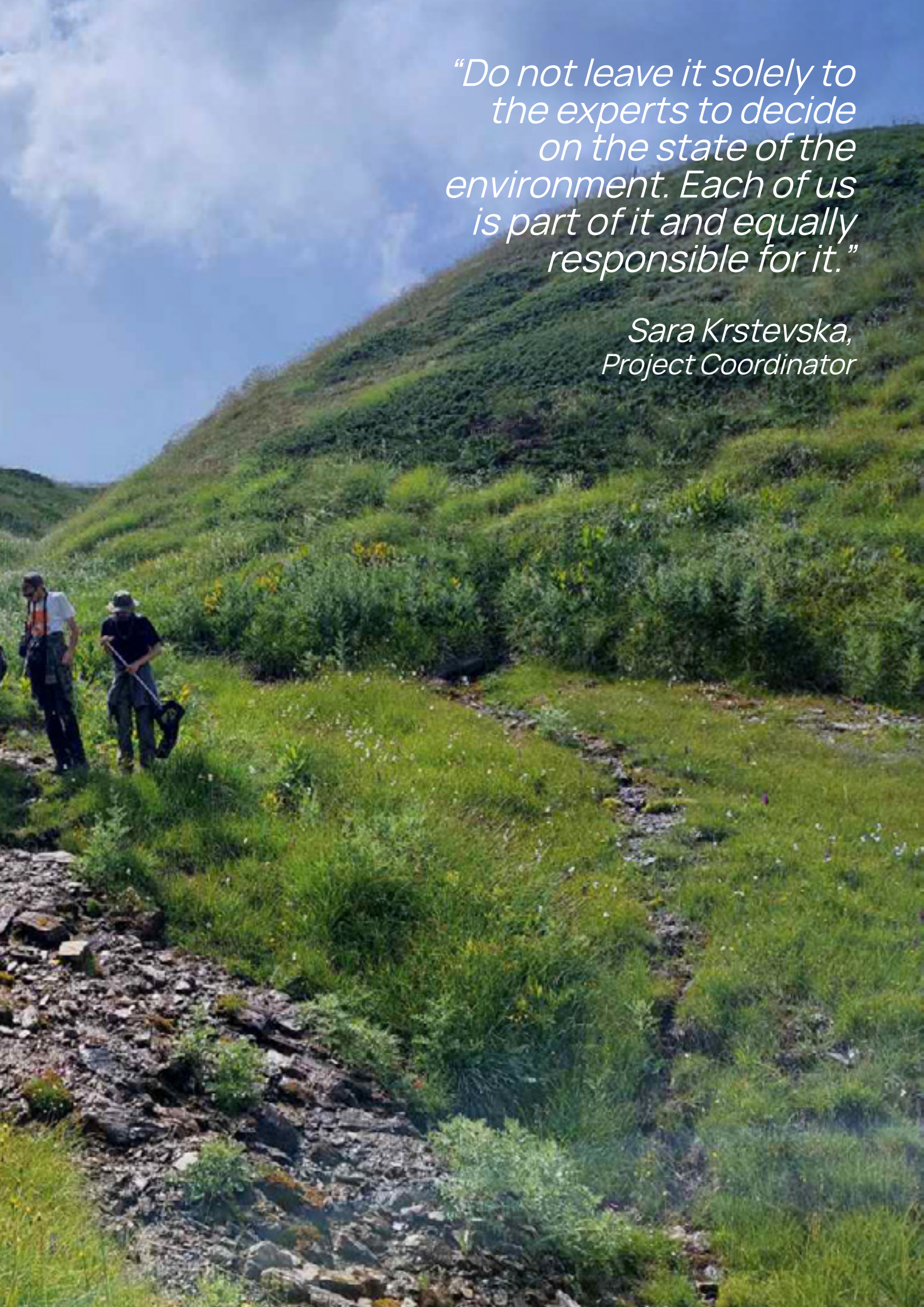
We also carried out **an assessment of invasive plant species** and put forward proposed measures for their removal. Specifically, we prepared a Feasibility Study for the removal of the invasive false indigo-bush (*Amorpha fruticosa*) in Prespa and conducted pilot removal activities along the course of the Golema Reka river. **We also trained PE *National Forests* employees** on the harmful impact of invasive species and provided a recommendation to amend the seedling production plans for afforestation.

Conservation of Golem Grad Island

Through lobbying and education, together with NP *Galičica* we secured funding for the organisation of two expert workshops on the **conservation of the Greek juniper** and on the **conservation of the critically endangered island population of Hermann's tortoise.**



Knowledge
and Science



*"Do not leave it solely to
the experts to decide
on the state of the
environment. Each of us
is part of it and equally
responsible for it."*

*Sara Krstevska,
Project Coordinator*

A focus on national ecological research and academic development

Monitoring and scientific research feature in the activities of the majority of ongoing projects. MES employees made active **contributions to several international scientific bodies**, including EUROLYNX and the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group. They participated in the preparation of scientific papers and published **6 papers in scientific journals with an impact factor**. At least **7 employees presented project results at scientific conferences**, and three employees continued to advance their professional knowledge by pursuing master's degree studies. Towards the end of 2025, we also began **preparations for the 7th International Congress of Ecologists**, planned for October 2026, thereby strengthening MES's role in providing scientifically grounded foundations for national conservation policies.

Biology Students Research Society (IDSB)

We continued our **mentoring of IDSB students** – through one-day field excursions and through the organisation and implementation of the summer research expedition, held in July 2025 in NP *Galičica*.

Macedonian Journal of Ecology and Environment

12 new papers were published in the *Macedonian Journal of Ecology and Environment* during 2025. Among the authors and contributors in volumes 27-1 and 27-2 are MES employees, whose focus covers the brown bear, the relative importance of rural landscapes for the conservation of European wildcats, and the influence of mountain beech forest management practices on the formation of the forest ecosystem.



By the end of 2025, the ptici.mk mobile app counted almost 30,000 records (©MES)

Ptici.mk – a Macedonian example of citizen science

Citizen science involves the active engagement of volunteers in the collection of scientific data and in expanding knowledge on any topic related to the environment or on any plant or animal species.

Citizen science is embedded in the work of the Macedonian Ecological Society. It is central to the “LIFE EBP Reinforcement” project, which is implemented with financial support from the European Union's LIFE Programme, together with partner organisations from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia, with technical support from Statistics Netherlands, the Swiss Ornithological Institute and the Czech Society for Ornithology, under the leadership of Spain's Centre for Ecological Research and Forestry Applications (CREAF).

We use structured and standardised data collection protocols to advance citizen science, thereby contributing to greater geographical coverage and improved quality of the overall bird data collected in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe. This is of exceptional importance because without continuous and high-quality data, effective nature conservation is impossible, and Important Bird Areas and migratory routes cannot be managed appropriately.

As part of this project, we created **ptici.mk** – the first national portal with a mobile application for collecting bird data – which by the end of 2025 counted almost 30,000 records!

During 2025, we trained over 15 new volunteers in birdwatching and bird identification and in the use of the *ptici.mk* application, thereby gradually expanding the community of dedicated birdwatchers in the country.

The consolidation of data from *ptici.mk* into the **EuroBirdPortal** is currently underway, where observations made in Macedonia will be recorded in real time. In this way, **birds observed in Macedonia will become “visible” through the EuroBirdPortal.**



Part of the community of dedicated birdwatchers (©MES)

The Dr Ljupčo Melovski Young Ecologists Programme produced 10 new research projects by young ecologists

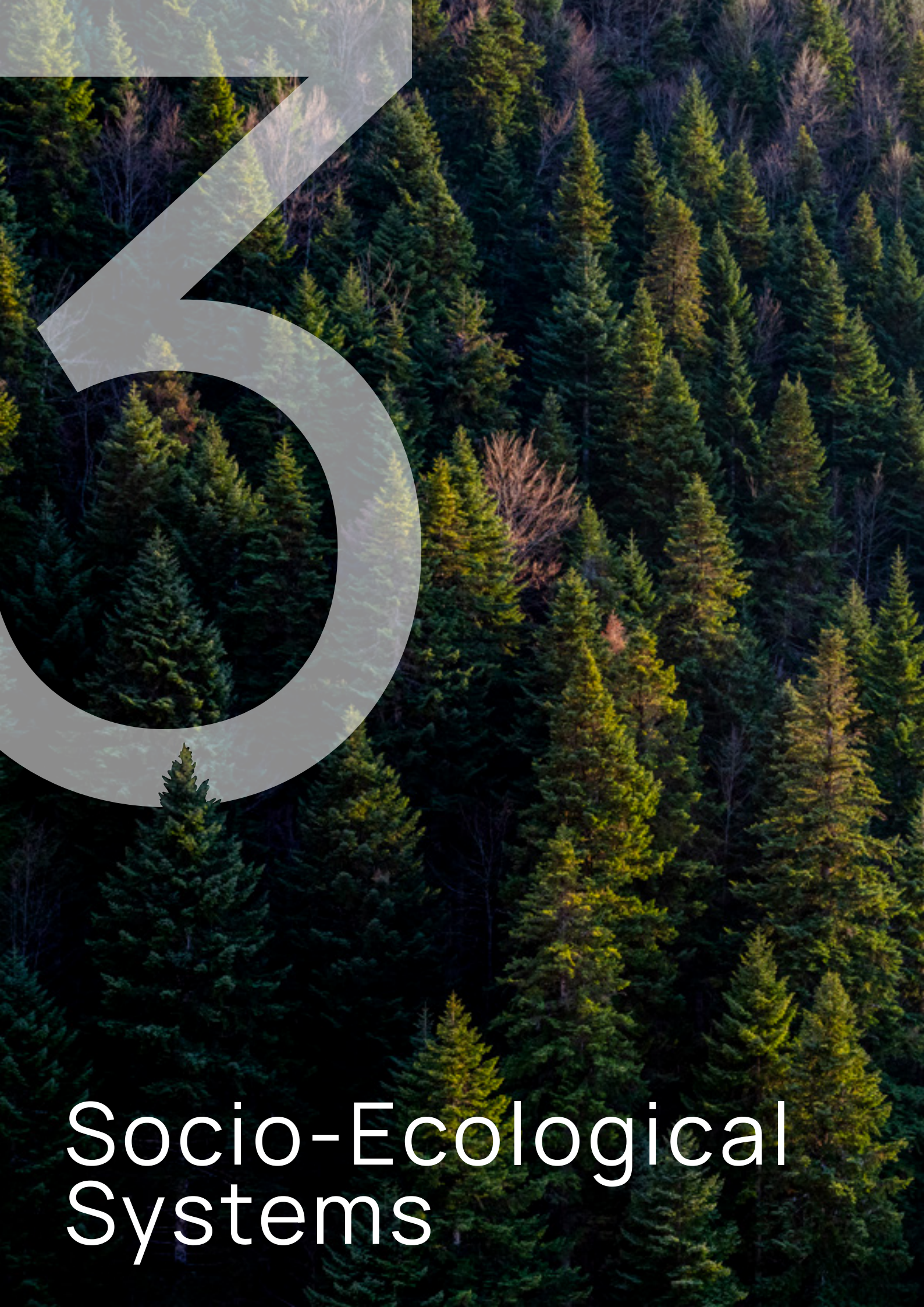
During 2025, we awarded 7 small and 3 medium grants to young researchers, while 5 research projects supported by medium grants in 2024 were also ongoing.

The **small grants** focused on:

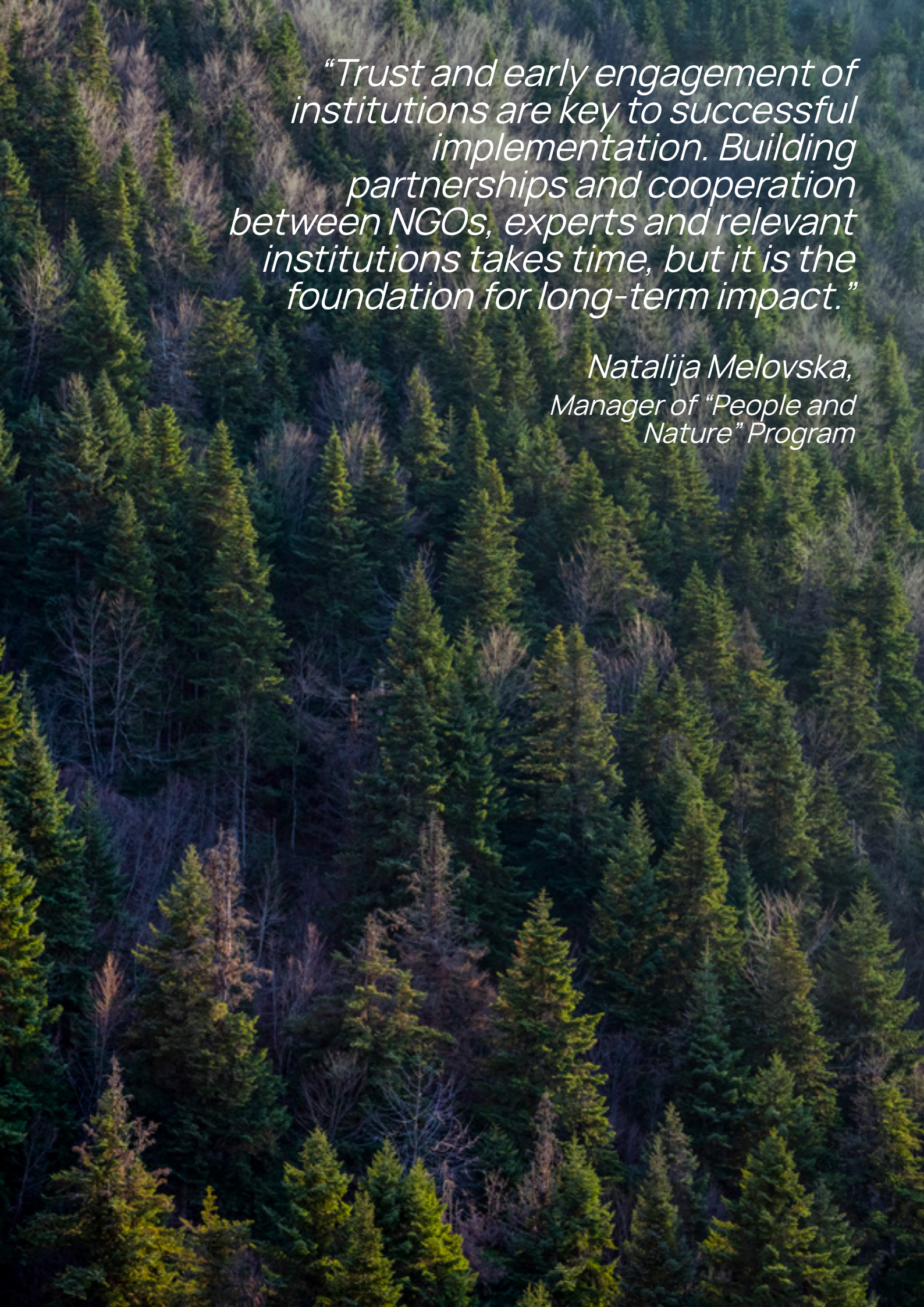
- the ecological approach to the extraction of bioactive components of St John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*);
- the micronucleus test in *Tradescantia* as an indicator of the genotoxic potential of air pollution in Skopje;
- the assessment of the indirect pesticide contamination status of wild flora in Prespa;
- the ecological conditions, status and significance of *Pterocephalus perennis* for Jablanica;
- the microbial diversity along the River Vardar;
- the antimicrobial potential of a laboratory-produced hydrodistillate from species of the genus *Lavandula*;
- the organic carbon sequestration in Monospitovo Wetland according to gradient of humidity and degree of preservation.

And the **medium grants** helped to:

- identify a new endemic plant species, *Euphorbia glareosa*, in Macedonia;
- analyse the distribution and diversity of bioactive compounds in endemic plant species from the Prilep–Mariovo Region;
- advance knowledge on the biodiversity of yeasts associated with different cereal species, their ecology, and their role in microbial ecosystems; and
- highlight the potential of milk thistle for phytoremediation, i.e. for the removal of heavy metals and nitrogen compounds from soils.



Socio-Ecological Systems



“Trust and early engagement of institutions are key to successful implementation. Building partnerships and cooperation between NGOs, experts and relevant institutions takes time, but it is the foundation for long-term impact.”

*Natalija Melovska,
Manager of “People and
Nature” Program*

Supporting institutions and engaging local communities

In cooperation with the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, the organisation *ESSA Synergy* and UNEP, we contributed to the preparation of a **rapid assessment of national biodiversity targets and the monitoring framework** necessary for the process of revising the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, **in order to align it with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework** in accordance with the guidelines of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The project is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and coordinated by UNEP.



Global Biodiversity Framework

Effective biodiversity conservation also depends on the mainstreaming of biodiversity into the work of relevant sectors and on the degree of policy implementation. For this reason, **we submitted comments on the new Law on Forests** to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy.

We participated in the preparation of **the new Shadow Report on Chapter 27 – Environment and Climate Change**, as part of the civil society network “Platform 27”, which includes the Centre for Climate Change, *Milieukontakt* Macedonia and *Eko-svest*, among others. The report provides a comprehensive analysis of the degree of alignment of Macedonian legislation with the European legal framework in the field of environment, examining the level of implementation of reform legislation, available administrative capacities and budgetary support, as well as the key challenges facing the process, while offering concrete recommendations for a more sustainable development. At the public forum held on 12 December at Europe House in Skopje, our Executive Director, **Robertina Brajanoska, MSc, elaborated in greater detail on nature protection**, one of the seven key areas in the report, alongside air quality, water, waste management, industrial pollution and risk management, and climate change.



As part of our work to empower local communities through sustainable land use practices, we conducted **training for two nature guides** (with a focus on birdwatching) in the Prespa Region in cooperation with the National Tourism Agency.

We also supported the Kičevo-based Association for the Development of the Village of Belica and the Network of Rural Communities along the Belica River in the Ilinska–Plakenska Mountain Ecological Corridor through the identification of priority actions and the preparation of project applications.

Nature conservation also means combating wildlife crime

Context

Illegal poisoning is one of the leading causes of death among vultures. Although strictly protected by law in our country, their survival remains threatened. As a result of poisoning, the numbers of Griffon vulture and Egyptian vulture in Macedonia have declined drastically, while the black vulture and the bearded vulture were last recorded nesting in 2005/2006.

What do we do?

Through the “BalkanDetox LIFE” project (2020–2026), we are working to strengthen national capacities to combat illegal wildlife poisoning. Led by the Vulture Conservation Foundation (based in Switzerland), this project is being implemented in 7 countries by the Macedonian Ecological Society, the Albanian Ornithological Society, the Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania, the Croatian association *BIOM*, the Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia, the Bulgarian association Fund for Wild Flora and Fauna, the Hellenic Ornithological Society and the Ornithological Society *NAŠE Ptice* from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Activities:

- ▶ Revised the National Action Plan against Wildlife Poisoning in North Macedonia, together with the Nature Department within Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning;
- ▶ Following the training sessions for inspection services and public prosecutors in 2024, last year work continued further strengthening institutional capacities to address wildlife crime;
- ▶ Conducted ongoing monitoring of vultures across the territory of Macedonia.

Results:

- ▶ Published the Manual for Criminal Investigations and Inspections in Wildlife Poisoning Cases (in Macedonian and Albanian);
- ▶ 18 institutional representatives from North Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo participated in a study visit to the Catalonia Rural Ranger Corps;
- ▶ Organised 2 workshops on wildlife crime within the framework of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme;
- ▶ Finalised the National Action Plan against Wildlife Poisoning with the active participation of MoEPP;
- ▶ Organised a roundtable with hunters in the Prespa Region, which gave rise to an ongoing analysis of the extent of wildlife crime in the region.
- ▶ Confirmed 20 breeding pairs of Griffon vultures.

Donor: European Union, LIFE Programme



On a study visit to the Catalonia Rural Ranger Corps (©MES)





Environmental Education

*"You can learn
from a book, but
you can only
understand through
experience."*

*Elena Minova,
Project Coordinator*



Our Experiential Learning Network – a potential that is recognised and growing

Context

Natural science teaching remains largely theoretical and insufficiently connected to real-world contexts. Pupils, particularly in rural settings, have limited access to practical teaching and scientific institutions. This results in reduced interest, poor understanding of ecological challenges and insufficient engagement. In 2022, we established the **Experiential Learning Network (ELN)** to contribute, through experiential learning and the practical application of knowledge, to improved understanding and active long-term care for the environment.

What do we do?

The focus of the project “Expansion and Sustainability of ELN” (2025–2027) is on equal access to practical and interactive learning for all children. This is envisaged to be achieved in partnership with UNICEF through the expansion of the membership of the Experiential Learning Network – which was established with 5 institutions and organisations – as well as through ensuring its long-term sustainability and strengthening inclusivity as an approach. The educational content is precisely aligned with the official educational programmes of the Bureau for Development of Education (BDE) and the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES).

Activities:

- ▶ Conducted large-scale educational activities in coordination with the Bureau for Development of Education – online, in the field, in rural settings and through natural science challenges at national level;
- ▶ Established an accredited teacher training programme for experiential learning;
- ▶ Maintained continuous cooperation with the Bureau for Development of Education;
- ▶ Identified opportunities and models for the sustainability of the Network.

Results:

- ▶ 5 new partner organisations joined ELN;
- ▶ Conducted workshops with a total of 1,341 pupils from across the country, the majority from rural areas;
- ▶ Engaged over 60 Biology and Natural Sciences teachers;
- ▶ Extended annual experiential learning programme approved by the Bureau for Development of Education;
- ▶ Educational programmes are also adapted for children with disabilities.

Donor: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Styrelsen för internationellt utvecklingssamarbete – Sida)



Knowledge is best gained through experience (©MES)



Curiosity is inseparable from the love for nature (©MES)

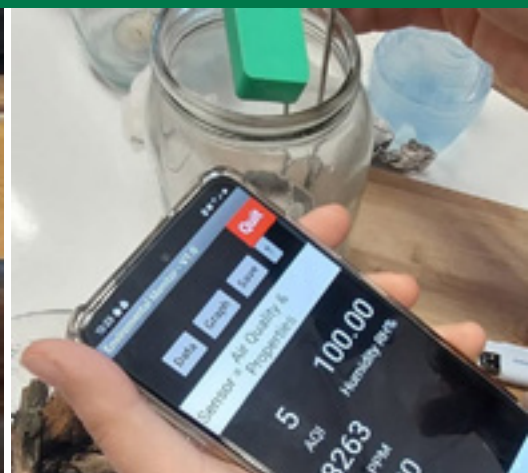


One of the numerous workshops through which we reached over 1300 children from all over the country (©MES)

Education – an integral part of our work



Air quality – among the topics covered by the Experiential Learning Network (©MES)



Air quality as the focus of a new Experiential Learning Programme

A total of 432 primary and secondary school students deepened their knowledge of air quality as an important aspect of the environment and climate change through 15 workshops that we successfully delivered through our Experiential Learning Network in cooperation with specialist partner organisations. The educational programme on air pollution in our country, developed in line with a UNICEF initiative, enabled children to connect with nature and new environments, develop new habits and build a greater sense of responsibility for the conservation of the environment.

Šara and the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme

As part of this Programme, which will mark its 20th anniversary in 2026, we implemented educational activities with a focus on Šar Planina. We reached 511 pupils from primary schools in the region, of whom 151 were of Macedonian and 360 of Albanian ethnic background.

Educational camp on the biodiversity of Lake Dojran

This four-day educational camp was attended by 30 secondary school students from the Southeast Region, **who learned, experienced, tested and led numerous research activities first-hand**. During the camp, through practical experiential learning in the natural setting of Lake Dojran, they not only learned why it is important to protect biodiversity but also became eager to pass on what they had learned to others.



Four-day educational camp on the biodiversity of Lake Dojran for school students from the Southeast Region (©MES)

Guided by the principle **“by locals, for locals and for nature”**, we have for many years been supporting the implementation of a similar project led by the NGO *Polimat13*. Its goal is to establish a Local Action Group for nature conservation to address ecological challenges and issues related to local biodiversity in and around Lake Dojran. In this way, we are contributing to stronger public engagement in nature conservation.



Practical experiential learning in the natural setting of Lake Dojran (©MES)



Proper afforestation (©dm-drogerie markt)



Proper afforestation and building environmental awareness among children – the main goals of the new cooperation with dm-drogerie markt

The cooperation with dm-drogerie markt began with activities for the greening of school yards and educational activities on proper afforestation. As part of the project “Green Future: From Kindergarten to School” and the campaign “Planting Trees Together for a Greener Tomorrow”, we provided **expert support and guidance on the selection of appropriate tree species**, as well as a precise assessment of the suitability of locations for afforestation. We also actively participated in **afforestation in the surroundings of Štip**. In addition, through intensive educational activities we reinforced the **knowledge of the youngest participants about the irreplaceable importance of trees**, using educational content adapted for all ages – from children in kindergartens to pupils in the four schools covered. There we also provided specific support in the selection of seedlings for the greening of school yards.

In the transboundary Prespa Region:

- ▶ We held a **one-week transboundary summer school** with practical activities on wetland habitat management, waterbird monitoring, and habitat mapping using drones and Geographic Information System (GIS) for students from Albania, Greece and Macedonia on the Greek side of the Prespa basin.
- ▶ **We raised the environmental awareness** of 273 local pupils and 20 teachers using material prepared specifically for the Prespa Region (interactive workshops and our “Prespa” board game).
- ▶ Through **5 educational workshops** we reached a further 129 pupils from primary schools in the Prespa Region, while 20 children and parents participated in the **family workshop** that we organised on the theme of the impact of waste on ecosystems and biodiversity in Prespa.
- ▶ The impact of waste on nature also served as inspiration for the **educational video and interactive educational quizzes**, which are available on the website www.presparazbudise.mk. By raising pupils’ awareness and knowledge of the impact of waste on nature, habitats and biodiversity in the Prespa Region, we encouraged them to manage waste more responsibly, which includes sorting, recycling and caring for nature.



Edu-activities in the transboundary Prespa Region (©MES)





Environment and Climate

*“We do not need
a perfect system,
but responsible
decisions – both from
institutions and from
each one of us.”*

*Natalija Melovska,
Manager of “People and
Nature” Program*



The current situation with environmental pollution - in the focus of the 10th Public Scientific Forum



©MES



Јавна научна трибина

СОСТОЈБИТЕ СО ЗАГАДУВАЊЕТО НА ЖИВОТНАТА СРЕДИНА

 Трајче Стафилев Професор - наставнички Факултет - Виступи за темата	 Сузана Андонова Наставница за Персистентни органички загадувачи 90862797	 Марина Стефова Професор - наставнички Факултет - Виступи за темата	 Ивица Милевски Професор - наставнички Факултет - Виступи за темата
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18 декември 2025 (четврток)

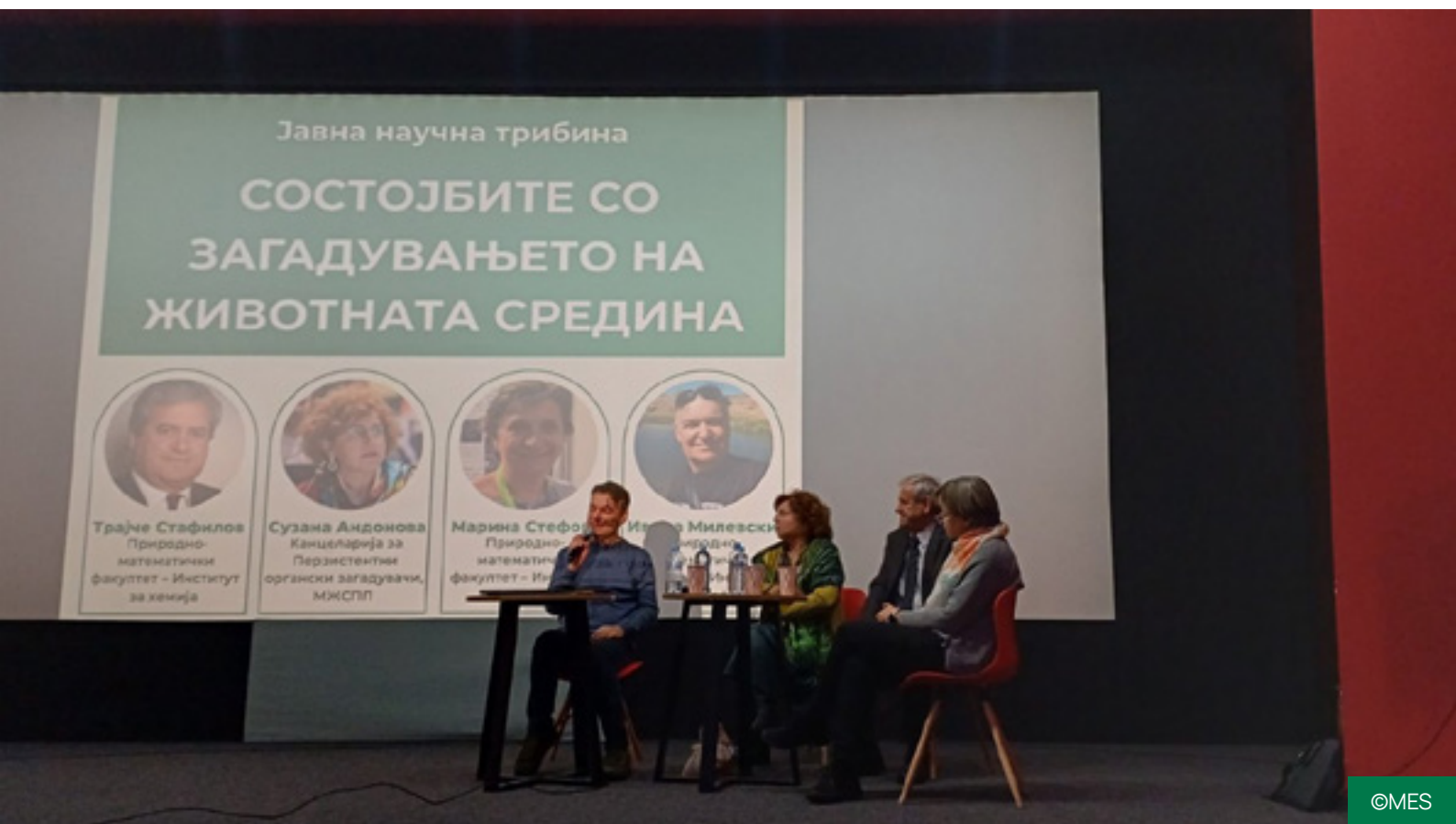
КИНОТЕКА НА МАКЕДОНИЈА (СКОПЈЕ)

13:00 часот

The current state of environmental pollution was the focus of the **10th Public Science Panel Discussion**, which we organised on 18 December 2025 at the Cinematheque of Macedonia in Skopje. Addresses were delivered by Prof. Dr Trajče Stafilev and Prof. Dr Marina Stefova, both from the Institute of Chemistry at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics (PMF) in Skopje, Suzana Andonova from the Office for Persistent Organic Pollutants within the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, and Prof. Dr Ivica Milevski from the Institute of Geography at PMF.

The scientific presentations and data presented were related to **soil, air and water pollution**, during which the serious shortcomings in the system for the disposal and management of industrial and municipal waste were inevitably highlighted, and recommendations were offered

for mitigating and addressing the consequences of pollution. The attending MES members, students, pupils, parents and representatives of various institutions and civil society organisations also had the opportunity to watch a **short documentary film** which depicted, in a clear and visually compelling manner, the entire process of remediation and clean-up of the small landfill at the former OHIS site.



©MES

During the discussion, it was concluded that, in order to achieve a substantive improvement of the situation, **it is essential to strengthen the institutional capacities and professional staff of the relevant inspectorates and institutions**, particularly at the municipal level. At the same time, the need was highlighted for **greater and more consistent pressure from the public**, which will actively demand from its political representatives that issues related to environmental protection be treated as a priority and addressed at the highest national level.





Public
Communication

"We must not take anything for granted. Everyone must be aware of the dark scenarios that likely await us, and everyone must stand up for our common future. The slogan 'Think globally, act locally' has never been more relevant."

*Dime Melovski,
Manager of Wildlife Program*



With the awakening of nature...

The first part of the year was marked by a series of positive events: **the discovery of the young female lynx Zora**, the launch of the digital **birdwatching platform ptici.mk**, the start of **afforestation in the Buković area** near Gostivar, and the **encouraging growth** in the endangered griffon vulture population in Macedonia.

In mid-May we organised the meeting of the **Nature and Climate Working Group of BirdLife International for Europe and Central Asia**. The workshops and discussions held as part of the event focused on practical solutions – from biodiversity financing to climate adaptation and strategic communication. As political pressure, the lack of nature conservation funding, and shifting narratives increasingly affect our work, we explored how to build resilience from within and outwards – by adapting the way we organise, communicate and advocate for birds and their habitats, whether located inside or outside protected areas.

МЕД лоцираше уште еден балкански рис, Зора, млада и здрава женка

Мачешкото еколошко друштво успеа да лоцира уште еден балкански рис, објави спонзорите на Фејсбук.



Објавено на 15.04.2025 18:34 часот
„Станува збор за млада женка, која ја среќавме Зора. Тешка е 15,5 килограма. Ова е 15-ти балкански рис на кој МЕД му постави еколошкиот, преку кој собираме драгоцелна информација или ни помагаат за закрепнувањето на овој наш најдраг подвид“, објави Мачешкото еколошко друштво.

➤ The discovery of the young female lynx Zora drew big media attention

➤ The Nature and Climate Working Group of BirdLife International for Europe and Central Asia (©MES)

Launch of the digital birdwatching platform ptici.mk (©MES)



A summer in the colours of Prespa

The “Prespa – Green and Blue Initiative” was launched

On the occasion of World Environment Day (5 June), in the Prespa lakeside village of Ezerani we officially presented the new project “Prespa – Green and Blue Initiative: Strengthening Protection through Research, Education, and Communication”, funded by the European Union within the framework of the “EU for Prespa” programme. Among those present were the Ambassador of the European Union H.E. Michalis Rokas, the UNDP Resident Representative Armen Grigoryan, the Mayor of the Municipality of Resen Jovan Tozиеvski and the Executive Director of the Macedonian Ecological Society Robertina Brajanoska, MSc, together with representatives of several public institutions, non-governmental organisations and residents.



©MES



“Tour de Galičica” was held for the 12th time

The Macedonian Ecological Society was **one of the main sponsors of the 12th edition** of the traditional cycling and hiking tour “Tour de Galičica”, organised by the local cycling and hiking club *Prespa Bike* from Resen. The event was held on 14–15 June in *Galičica* National Park and attracted **around 150 nature enthusiasts from across the country**.

Tour de Galičica – an unforgettable experience (©MES)

Public roundtable on wet meadow management in PP Ezerani

On 19 June, we also organised a public roundtable in Resen dedicated to the management of wet meadows in *Ezerani* Nature Park, held every year in cooperation with the Municipality of Resen. Representatives of MES, the Municipality of Resen, *Ezerani* NP, *Galičica* NP, *Pelister* NP, UNDP, the Resen Territorial Firefighting Unit, local non-governmental organisations, livestock farmers, crop farmers, and other relevant stakeholders took part in the discussion.



Wet meadow management (©MES)

Increased media interest in MES field work

During the summer, the media showed considerable interest in our field work in the Prespa Region, including the **population monitoring of the rock partridge (*Alectoris graeca*)** in *Galičica* NP, as well as of the **dice snake (*Natrix tessellata*)** and the **nose-horned viper (*Vipera ammodytes*)** on the **islands of Golem Grad and Mal Grad**. The **enigmatic numerical markings** observed on the dense population of Hermann's tortoise (*Testudo hermanni*) on Golem Grad drew particular attention as they could help shed light on the origin of these land tortoises on the island.

МЕД: Енигматични ознаки на најстарите желки на Голем Град



Дали нешто ново постои во овој франконт? Големградот постои и постои не се баво каде секогаш на истото место. Иако тоа не забораваме во Голем град започнаа, поранешно од Македонските острови друштво (MES), кои објавија и фотографии со ознаки со „12“ и „20“ на островот на остров.

Enigmatic numerical markings observed on the dense population of Hermann's tortoise



Population monitoring of the rock partridge (©MES)



Disaster management also requires continuous communication

The summer will also be remembered for the large wildfire that engulfed *Ezerani* Nature Park, destroying almost half of its land area. After several days of effort, the fire was finally extinguished thanks to the selfless engagement of the teams of *Ezerani* NP under the Municipality of Resen, *Galičica* NP, *Pelister* NP, the Territorial Firefighting Unit in Resen, PE *National Forests*, the Protection and Rescue Directorate, the Crisis Management Centre, the Voluntary Firefighting, Environmental and Humanitarian Association *EKO-FAP* from Ohrid, and the local populations of Ezerani, Dolno and Gorno Perovo, Volkoderi, Pokrvenik, Preljubje, Šurlenci, Asamati and all others involved.

Throughout the entire crisis, the Macedonian Ecological Society led communications with the public and **kept up a sustained media presence** in support of the field teams and to secure additional firefighting resources – including the state Air Tractor firefighting aircraft. Following the stabilisation of the situation, the Macedonian Ecological Society worked together with the Municipality of Resen **to assess and analyse the damage sustained** and report its findings through the media. The entire situation was covered by 56 articles in the Macedonian media.



A glimpse into the world of the lynx

On **11 June – International Lynx Day** – we unveiled the **new mural** featuring a Balkan lynx on the building of **Skopje's Komedija Theatre**, and in August, at an event at *Neda Hotel* in Galičnik, we launched the **travelling photography exhibition** dedicated to this endangered subspecies. Through some 20 photographs, most of them obtained using the camera trap method, the exhibition captures the magnificence of this mysterious animal in its natural



surroundings. Starting from the heart of the Mijačija region, by the end of 2025 the exhibition continued its journey through the whole of Western Macedonia, with exhibitions at *Mavrovo* and *Pelister National Parks*, then in *Ohrid* and *Resen* in cooperation with *Galičica NP*, then in *Tetovo* in cooperation with *Šar Planina NP*, and at *Jasen MPA* in cooperation with the *Grizli Mountain Centre*.

The exhibition was the occasion for the **Annual Meeting of Members of the Macedonian Ecological Society**, held in September at the Info Centre of *Pelister NP*. It also served as an impetus for important stakeholder meetings – ahead of the opening of the exhibition in *Resen*, in October we held a **roundtable** dedicated to the current situation, challenges and the role of the community in the **conservation of the lynx and other large mammals in the Prespa Region**. In addition to MES representatives, the event was attended by representatives of management bodies, institutions, protected areas, local hunting associations, law firms and other relevant stakeholders.

The **brochure 'Wild and Rare: The Story of the Balkan Lynx'** was produced in cooperation with the partners of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme. It features unique photographs of Balkan lynx individuals and of our field work, as well as brief and relevant texts that provide a broader picture of this endangered subspecies. In addition to English, it has been translated into Macedonian and Albanian. In December, the first issue of the **e-newsletter on the Balkan lynx** was published, to which all interested parties can subscribe at <https://www.balkanlynx.com/mk>.

In October, our lynx team took part in the **8th EUROLYNX meeting – the international platform** that connects the European scientific community engaged in lynx research for the exchange of new findings and opportunities for future collaboration. The event brought together over 100 lynx experts from across the continent, with 30 presentations and 8 poster presentations.





Lynx mural in Gostivar
(©MES)

Participation in international and local events



IUCN World Conservation Congress, Abu Dhabi (©MES)

The Macedonian Ecological Society participated in the **World Conservation Congress of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**, held from 9 to 15 October in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The Congress brought together over 10,000 participants, including decision-makers, representatives of the civil sector, Indigenous Peoples' organisations, the scientific community and the business community, all with the aim of advancing and establishing the global agenda for a healthier and more sustainable planet in the years ahead. Our Executive Director, Robertina Brajanoska, MSc and the Programme Manager of our Protected Areas Management Programme, Despina Kitanova, MSc attended the event. Brajanoska also served as a panellist in the regional discussion "From Concept to Practice: Implementing Nature-based Solutions in the Western Balkans".



World Congress of Biosphere Reserves, Hangzhou, 22-26 September 2025 (©MES)

In September, our Daniela Zaec, MSc represented the Macedonian Ecological Society at the **5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves** in Hangzhou, People's Republic of China. Every ten years, the World Network of Biosphere Reserves convenes to establish priorities, strengthen cooperation and define a Global Action Plan for the future. This year, over 2,000 participants – including scientists, policymakers, entrepreneurs and ecologists – gathered to shape the future of more than 750 biosphere reserves under the protection of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 136 countries worldwide.



Transboundary River Forum, Ioannina and Konitsa, 24-27 September 2025 (©MES)

On the occasion of World Rivers Day (28 September), Brajanoska and Kitanova also participated in the **Transboundary River Forum** in Ioannina and Konitsa, Greece, organised by the Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos (MedINA). Brajanoska spoke at the panel discussion **“From Prespa to Today: 25 Years After the First Transboundary Balkan Initiative – Where Are We Now?”**, highlighting the long-standing experience of the Macedonian Ecological Society and our partner organisations within the PrespaNet network in the conservation of nature in the transboundary Prespa Region.



Our long-standing collaboration with the **EHO Mountain Film Festival** this year gave us the opportunity to organise workshops and lectures on the Balkan lynx recovery, ecosystem services and the new bird portal *ptici.mk*, which were met with great interest and were well attended. We also traditionally served on the jury, which gave us the opportunity to view excellent films and take part in inspiring discussions.

The closing event of the project “Northern Forests Initiative – Forest Restoration in Albania and North Macedonia” took place in early November in Albania, attended by over 40 stakeholders, including government representatives, local authorities, project partners and nature conservation experts. *“Despite challenges with institutional capacity, the project set a strong example of nature-based solutions and offers a replicable model for forest restoration and cooperation in the conservation of large carnivores throughout the Western Balkans region”,* stated Robertina Brajanoska, Executive Director of MES, pointing to the excellent results achieved through the restoration of the Buković forest landscape in Macedonia and the Pashtrik-Morina landscape in Albania as vital ecological corridors for the Balkan lynx.

At the ceremonial event **marking the 100th anniversary of the founding of Ljuboten Mountaineering Club from Tetovo, the Macedonian Ecological Society received an award for lasting values**, accepted on behalf of the Society by our President, Prof. Dr Slavčo Hristovski. A posthumous award was also presented to our long-standing President, Prof. Dr Ljupčo Melovski, and was received by Dr Dime Melovski of MES.



The Northern Forests Initiative – a strong example of nature-based solutions (©MES)



What else marked the year?



We discovered the largest hibernation colony of lesser horseshoe bat in Prespa

We continued our ongoing field activities, which included the **regular monitoring of chamois on Galičica, Jablanica and Jasen**, while the discovery of the **largest hibernation colony of lesser horseshoe bat in Prespa** attracted public attention.



Memorial March in honour and remembrance of Ljupčo Melovski (©MES)



For the fifth time, the **Memorial March “To Kitka in Memory of Ljupčo Melovski”** took place, in honour and remembrance of the man who devoted his entire life to nature conservation and who was President of MES for many years. We have been organising it traditionally since 2021, and this year’s edition was held in cooperation with *Ljuboten* Mountaineering Club from Tetovo. In 2025, we launched a photo competition for the first time on the topic of wild spring plants, open to all those attending the memorial march on Kitka.



We also launched a **photo competition dedicated to canyons and gorges**, inviting enthusiasts and professional photographers to capture the vivid beauty and ecological importance of these habitats and the species that inhabit them. Traditionally, we selected 12 photographs that became part of the **MES calendar for 2026**.

The first Saturday in September is reserved for the International Vulture Awareness Day (©MES)



On 6 September we marked the **International Vulture Awareness Day** at the Skopje Zoo. Through board games and fun activities, scouts from the First Scout Unit of Skopje learned about the journey of the Egyptian vulture.

Towards the end of September, **we promoted the educational *Petko's Trail***, which we restored together with the local office of *Farmahem* in Pehčevo and the Educational Centre in Negrevo. This well-known and frequently visited trail, inspired by the white-backed woodpecker, was damaged by the forest fires that struck the Maleševija Region in 2024 and 2025. The reconstruction was completed with 15 redesigned and reprinted information boards and wooden structures anchored in the ground, in cooperation with the local population. The work followed the damage assessment and clearing of the burned area conducted by PE *National Forests* and relevant experts.

What attracted the public's interest the most?

During 2025, the project activities, field work and public engagement of the Macedonian Ecological Society were covered in **over 260 media items** from the Macedonian-speaking area.

Social media is one of the key channels through which the public learns about our work. During 2025, our Facebook posts reached a total of 2,399,359 views and 42,252 interactions, representing a growth of +90.6% compared to the previous year. The number of our followers grew by 1,768 user profiles, representing growth of +42%! On Instagram, our posts reached 239,421 unique user profiles, representing growth of +382.6% compared to the previous year.

2025 vs 2024

- ▶ A **+90.6% growth** in audience interactions on **Facebook**
- ▶ A **+42% growth** in new followers on **Facebook**
- ▶ A **+382.6% growth** in audience reach on **Instagram**.

The following attracted the greatest public interest in 2025:

- The post about the **European Green Belt Days** reached a total of 133,130 views on social media, while the initial post that informed the public about the **dangerous wildfire in Ezerani NP** reached 125,645 views. The video presenting the consequences of the fire received 83,534 views.
- **The field footage of the female lynx Zora** was viewed over 56,680 times, **and the cub of the female lynx Luna** – 25,210 times. One of the posts dedicated to the **Balkan lynx mural** at *Komediya* Theatre in Skopje received 42,206 views, and the poetic announcement of the first Balkan lynx photography exhibition in Galičnik received 41,656 views.
- **The restoration activities in Osogovo**, for which we had a joint post with BirdLife International and BirdLife Europe & Central Asia, received a total of 50,315 views.
- The **enigmatic markings on the tortoises of Golem Grad Island in Lake Prespa**: the photo gallery on this topic was seen by 116,090 users on Facebook and Instagram, while the video clip dedicated to the marked island tortoises, taken from our herpetologist Dr Dragan Arsovski's appearance on the morning programme "Zdravo Makedonijo" on Kanal 5 Television, has almost 95,000 views.



Organisational Development

Last year our focus was on the development of the new Strategic Plan, which sets out the directions and priorities of MES until 2030. It is grounded in the experience and achievements of the organisation, while at the same time representing a response to the new ecological challenges facing the region. The Strategy is aligned with global biodiversity goals, as well as with the vision of the international conservation community, including the BirdLife International network and IUCN.

Last year we also invested considerably in updating MES's internal policies: upgrading the financial framework, human resources management, training needs assessment, improving communication activities, procuring necessary equipment, and expanding the MES team. These activities were made possible through unrestricted grants from Sigrid Rausing Trust and Hans Wilsdorf Foundation, for which we are immeasurably grateful.





Collaborators,
Partners and
Donors



National Collaborators and Partners



International Collaborators and Partners



Donors





Finances



Financial report for the period 01.01.2025 - 31.12.2025

Starting balance on January 1, 2025

33.712.453,00 MKD

REVENUES

A) Revenues from donations	652.051,00 MKD
B) Revenues from positive exchange rate differences	3.796,00 MKD
C) Revenues from project grants	81.200.072,00 MKD
D) Revenues from compensation	12.952,00 MKD
E) Revenues from membership fees	33.377,00 MKD
F) Revenues from Consulting Services	527.300,00 MKD
G) Revenues from collected insurance-based damages	129.370,00 MKD
Total revenues for the period January 1 - December 31, 2025:	82.558.918,00 MKD
Total funds available:	116.271.371,00 MKD

EXPENSES

1	Salaries for employees	28.169.589,00 MKD
2	Supporting Materials for Project Activities	2.129.985,00 MKD
3	Office materials, and hygiene and disinfection Materials	920.578,00 MKD
4	Transport costs	2.159.826,00 MKD
5	Communication service costs	84.264,00 MKD
6	Costs for paid contract-based fees	7.665.935,00 MKD
7	Daily allowances and tax on daily allowances, compensation for the use of personal vehicle	1.169.799,00 MKD
8	Rent and utilities	799.725,00 MKD
9	Bank fees	220.487,00 MKD

10	Negative exchange rate differences	359.839,00 MKD
11	Other costs (accounting, legal, audit, notary, design services, other intellectual services, etc.)	3.592.712,00 MKD
12	Insurance for persons, property, equipment and vehicles	264.838,00 MKD
13	Maintenance of vehicles, computer equipment, and inventory	557.926,00 MKD
14	Hotel services and refreshments costs	3.484.847,00 MKD
15	Advertising, representation, and refreshments costs	415.690,00 MKD
16	Production costs for informative and educational materials	993.568,00 MKD
17	Contract-based subgranting	10.712.253,00 MKD
18	Costs for registration and membership fees	199.914,00 MKD
19	Procurement of fixed assets, including ongoing investments	2.029.345,00 MKD
20	Audit costs	72.570,00 MKD
21	Donations to individuals and legal entities, associations, etc.	325.000,00 MKD
22	Costs for professional education, seminars, training	220.433,00 MKD
23	Costs for services performed for research and implementation, analyses for preparing reports, etc.	2.314.682,00 MKD
24	Other expenses	98.634,00 MKD
Total expenses:		68.962.439,00 MKD
Final balance on December 31, 2025:		47.308.932,00 MKD

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