

ANNUAL REVIEW

Highlights
of the year
2024



SOCIETY FOR
THE PROTECTION
OF PRESPA



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT & MANAGING DIRECTOR

In the midst of both climate and biodiversity crises, and with geopolitical tensions riding high, the big picture can seem crushing at times. But, away from the attention economy, in between the headlines and soundbites, good news and causes for optimism can be found, particularly in the everyday and the local, where personal accountability and willingness to act are making all the difference.

In 2024 we've definitely had reasons to celebrate, despite the weight of bad news – Dalmatian pelican numbers rose again for a second year, putting some distance between this breeding season and the catastrophic avian influenza outbreak of 2022, with no further cases being seen again. We've also had some successes in protecting the fragile flight corridors these magnificent birds use to travel from wetland to wetland from intense renewable energy development. This threat reaches right to the borders of Prespa, with a windfarm planned for the majestically wild karstic peaks of Mount Sfika; local opposition to the despoiling of this beloved landscape runs deep, with a seminal unanimous decision against the development in a packed council meeting marking a new era in united community resistance on behalf of nature.

This kind of solidarity in defence of the commons is exactly the antidote we need to the prospect of apathy and overwhelm, and at the SPP we're standing in its support; shoulder to shoulder with the people, landscapes and wildlife of Prespa.

Dr Claire Papazoglou
SPP President



Myrsini Malakou
Managing Director



THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF PRESPA

The Society for the Protection of Prespa (SPP) was formed in 1991, with the area having already attracted scientific interest, due to its rare biodiversity and natural beauty.

The SPP was created with ten national and international environmental NGOs as members, after the renowned conservation philanthropist, Dr Luc Hoffmann, the environmentalist Thymios Papayannis and the biologist, Dr Giorgos Catsadorakis, together laid the foundations for its establishment.

The SPP's mission is to safeguard the natural and cultural heritage of the Prespa basin as a whole, for the benefit of all its inhabitants both today and in the future. Our activities seek to secure the appropriate management of natural resources, the sustainable development of the basin and the protection of threatened species and habitats, as well as to inform the public and raise awareness of conservation issues. One of our basic principles is that joint approaches and collaboration between stakeholders and organisations at all levels promotes mutual understanding, builds capacity and social capital, and fosters long-term resilience.

Understanding that safeguarding Prespa's exceptional biodiversity and cultural traditions requires the co-operation of the three states sharing the lakes, the SPP began the initiative to establish the Transboundary Prespa Park at the end of the 1990s. A quadrilateral agreement between the three countries and the EU was signed in 2010 and, together with our counterparts MES and PPNEA, in 2013 we launched *PrespaNet*, a cross-border network of environmental NGOs for Prespa.

Today the SPP is an internationally recognised environmental organisation, locally based in Prespa and employing 24 people. We have seven members: **Hellenic Society for the Protection of Nature, ELLINIKI ETAIRIA – Society for the Environment and Cultural Heritage, Hellenic Ornithological Society, Goulandris Natural History Museum/ Greek Biotope Wetland Centre, WWF Greece, Arcturos and MedINA**, while the **Danish Ornithological Society** and **Tour du Valat** research institute are permanent observers. These members play a key role in the governance of the SPP, as well as bringing a wealth of knowledge and experience to bear in their vital support for the organisation.

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PROTECT PELICANS

Prespa is home to both pelican species found in Europe: the Dalmatian pelican and the Great white pelican.

It holds the largest Dalmatian pelican colony in the world, acting as a source for the total Mediterranean and the Black Sea population of this rare and threatened bird. Thanks to conservation efforts, in the last decade or so great white pelicans at Prespa have numbered around 500-800 pairs, while Dalmatian pelicans regularly exceeded 1,200 pairs until hit by a catastrophic avian influenza outbreak in 2022.



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DEEPENING KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Pelicans were one of the reasons the SPP was founded, with its work gradually reversing their alarming downward population trend in the late 1980s.

Local conservation efforts have not only seen pelicans, and other waterbirds, increase, but also created multiple benefits for fishing, livestock farming and tourism, though the protection of pelicans goes far beyond Prespa and even Greece, since they are migratory species and the birds of SE Europe and Turkey regularly travel to wetlands throughout the region to meet their feeding and nesting needs. Long-term monitoring has been a key part of this work, with ecological studies being immensely valuable in helping to understand parameters like population size and their correlation over time with environmental factors and different events, such as the 2022 avian influenza outbreak. The resulting long-term datasets also underwrite conservation measures and inform public policy decisions, as well as helping to assess their effectiveness.

In 2024, our monitoring programme confirmed 680 Dalmatian pelican breeding pairs in Prespa and 55 at nearby Lake Cheimaditida, a slight increase on last year and with no further outbreaks of avian influenza. Meanwhile, great white pelican breeding efforts in Prespa shot up to a record 1,273 pairs, outnumbering Dalmatian pelicans for the third year running, with almost double the number of pairs in 2024. Monitoring will continue to help us in understanding these new and dynamic changes in the relative proportions of the two species, with the shifting dominance of nesting space affecting interactions between them.



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DALMATIAN PELICAN, PROTECTION ON THE WORLD STAGE!

Although conservation efforts led to the Dalmatian pelican being downgraded to *'Near Threatened'* in the IUCN Red List in 2017, across its northern-hemisphere range the species continues to face serious pressures, including wetland degradation and potentially fatal threats such as those posed by energy infrastructure in their movement corridors or climate change.

For this reason, the SPP, together with the Hellenic Ornithological Society and international partners in a 2018 EU LIFE project, led the production of an International Single Species Action Plan (ISSAP), which sets out the actions states in the range should take in order to improve the Red List status to *'Least Concern'*. These aim to increase the survival of the birds by reducing threats, increase breeding success by keeping colonies safe and undisturbed, prevent any more loss or degradation of habitat, and ensure that conservation measures are underpinned by up-to-date scientific knowledge

In 2024, the Secretariat for the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement asked the SPP to support the implementation of the ISSAP, and the two organisations signed a Memorandum of Understanding to facilitate the work, which includes setting up an International Working Group for the Dalmatian Pelican, formed of representatives from the range states, and holding a first meeting of the group.

The SPP is honoured to undertake the responsibility of this high-profile and critically important work, and we feel a deep sense of responsibility as we step up to a global stage in our long-term efforts for the protection this iconic emblem of wild Prespa.



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PROTECT PELICANS

AVIAN INFLUENZA: WHY WERE DALMATIAN PELICANS SO STRONGLY AFFECTED?

After Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) devastatingly killed over 1,700 of Prespa's Dalmatian pelican population in 2022 – some 60% of the colony – the SPP immediately embarked on research to try and understand the reasons why it was so uniquely vulnerable, when their great white pelican co-colonists remained unaffected.

In collaboration with the University of Castilla-La Mancha, Spain, we examined the ecoepidemiology of HPAI and other diseases in Dalmatian pelicans, and in mid-2024 we received the final report on this research from Prof. Ursula Höfle, who led the team carrying out the analyses. A key result was the presence of antibodies against HPAI in one out of four Dalmatian pelican adults captured after the outbreak, notably showing that some infected breeding birds likely survived the disease, while the research found no clear evidence for associated diseases that could explain the higher susceptibility of Dalmatian pelicans in comparison to great white pelicans.

In late 2023, we also began research to assess the genetic diversity, phylogeny and gene flow of Dalmatian pelican breeding colonies throughout their global range, as well as their conservation status, in collaboration with Dr Tasos Bounas, a conservation genetics expert at the University of Ioannina, Greece, and several members of our PELECANUS Network, who helped to collect samples. Initiated by the SPP in 2012, the network connects more than 80 pelican experts from 22 countries around the world and is particularly invaluable in such challenging efforts.

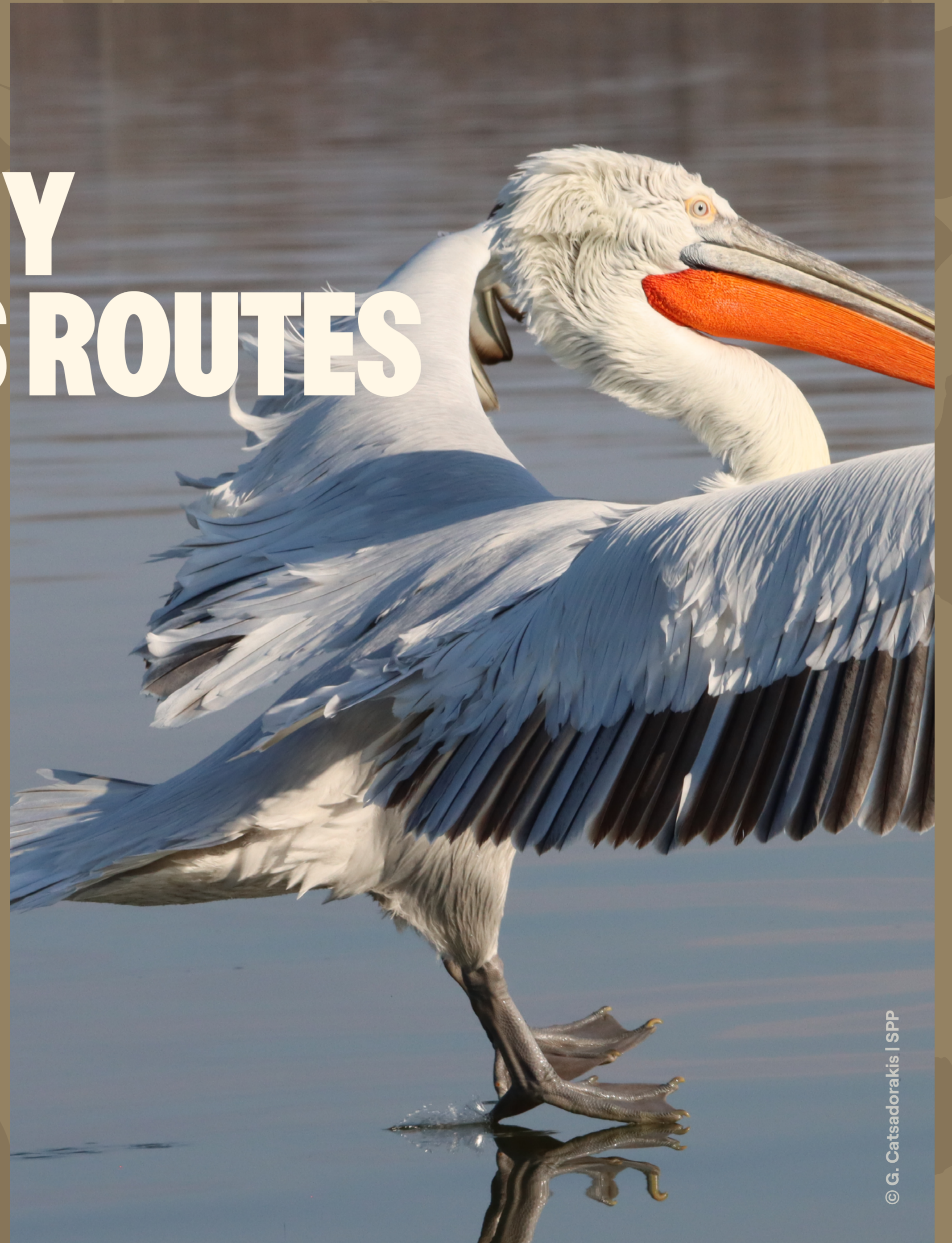
Greater genetic diversity can help populations be more resilient in the face of environmental pressures, such as disease outbreaks, so the study may shine further light on the particular vulnerability of Dalmatian pelicans to avian influenza. In 2024, samples were received from Russian colonies and the sole Mongolian colony, while additional samples from Bulgaria, Montenegro and Greece were also collected.

WIND AND WING: PELICANS JOURNEY ACROSS TIMELESS ROUTES

Despite their size, pelicans glide almost effortlessly in flight, due to the large surface area of their wings in comparison to their body weight. This allows the birds to gain altitude simply by circling upwards in rising thermals of warm air, then glide slowly down from the top of one thermal to the base of the next, repeatedly using the updrafts along mountain slopes to travel faithfully along flight paths set according to an ancient topography.

But, these same winds are also the focus of intense renewable energy development and the SPP has been at the forefront of largely successful efforts to ensure the impacts on these majestic birds are fully considered in a Special Ecological Assessment for any wind farms proposed within pelican movement corridors. From 111 such projects in which we have intervened since 2021 due to their serious impacts, 42 have been rejected or cancelled, while one has been required to cease operating in low visibility – the first time this term was imposed in the country and a real achievement for our policy team and the pelicans we battle to protect.

These efforts are underpinned by our ongoing telemetry study of pelican movements, which saw 18 new transmitters fitted on Dalmatian pelicans in Greece in 2024. Five further transmitters were placed on Dalmatian pelicans at the small and vulnerable colony in the Karavasta wetlands in Albania, illuminating their use of 15 different wetlands across the country, including the threatened Narta Lagoon. Lastly, two transmitters were also placed on juvenile great white pelicans for the first time, which are already providing important data on this species' migration route through Turkey and Israel, as well as their use of fishponds and dams in Israel during staging.



© G. Catsadorakis | SPP



STAND TOGETHER

Like any NGO, the SPP often needs to take a stand in order to safeguard the environment, wildlife, landscape and cultural heritage of Prespa on which its vision and mission are firmly focused. Whenever threats arise we seek common ground and solidarity with like-minded others above all, and prioritise responding to threats with irreversible consequences.



#SAVESFIKA – IN DEFENCE OF A BIODIVERSE GEOLOGICAL MARVEL

Mount Sfika stands on the southern border of the Prespa National Park and is included in the ‘*Prespa National Park – Wider Area*’ Natura 2000 protected area for its natural values, notably its habitat types and flora.

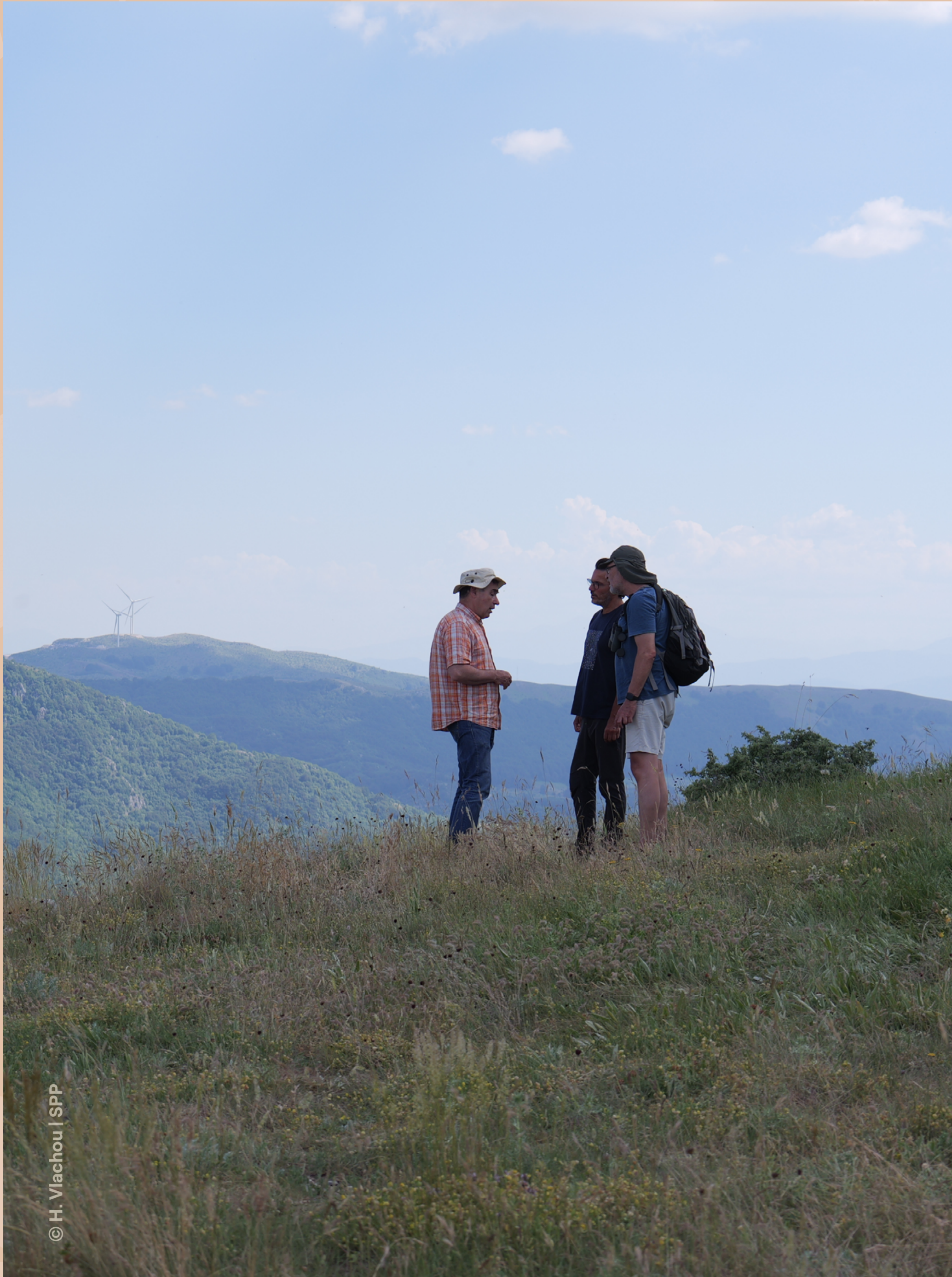
The karstic massif is also distinguished for its rare geological formations, and the long overdue Special Environmental Study (SES) for the Prespa National Park, finally submitted to the Greek environment ministry in 2022, made a point of proposing the whole Sfika plateau as a Nature Protection Zone, ensuring that land uses that could degrade the area’s biodiversity and limestone landscape, such as renewable energy installations, would not be allowed.

Fast forward two years, to the inexplicable issuing of an environmental permit for a planned 3-tier wind farm on Mount Sfika, as well as on the adjacent Malimadi mountain, which falls just outside the Natura 2000 area. This permit not only ran counter to the spirit of the designation proposed in the SES, whose approval and implementation remains mired in delays, but also went against a negative opinion on the permit application from the administration’s own Natural Environment & Climate Change Agency.

Steadfastly joining forces with the environmental NGOs Arcturos, the Hellenic Society for the Protection of Nature, MedINA and Callisto, the SPP has resorted to court action, arguing against the licensing decision and requesting the annulment of the permit. In addition, we have been developing and implementing a #SaveSfika campaign for local and national media in support of our action and this karstic jewel. A series of biodiversity surveys on the mountain plateau have also gathered data in support of the campaign, mobilising other strands of our conservation programme and utilising the passion of young conservationists and educators from the universities of Athens and Ioannina.



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STAND TOGETHER

UNITED WE STAND - HOW COMMON GROUND BRINGS US TOGETHER

The investors behind the planned 3-tier wind farm on Mount Sfika and the adjacent Malimadi mountain, in a bid to bolster support for their development with the municipality and the nearby village community of Kristallopigi, proposed a slew of parallel investments and technical works to support local development. As a locally based organisation, that has built trust over many decades in the area, the SPP was well placed to initiate even-handed public dialogue on the offers and on the long-term repercussions of the wind farm development, encouraging all views and open discussions.

In a packed public meeting at the height of the summer season, a fierce love of place and all the treasured local particulars it contains, including the biodiversity and natural landscape at the centre of the SPP's mission, emerged as the common ground on which overwhelming opposition to the wind farm development was formed. The objections were crystallised in a seminal unanimous decision by the Municipal Council, not only to reject the investors' offer, but also to stand against any further development of wind farms in the wider region surrounding the protected areas. The wide community support underpinning the decision was a huge win for conservation and a testament to many years of SPP communications and policy efforts on behalf of nature and the immense value it holds for local people.

“The preservation of the natural heritage and biodiversity of the area are priceless and cannot be ‘compensated’”

Prespa Municipal Council

STAND TOGETHER

BUILD CONSENSUS

When it comes to conservation,
nothing happens in isolation!

An important part of our work is sharing the knowledge we gain from our activities, raising awareness and working towards a consensus on environmental issues. Only when everyone can be fully part of the discussion are we jointly able to find solutions that balance the needs of both people and nature.



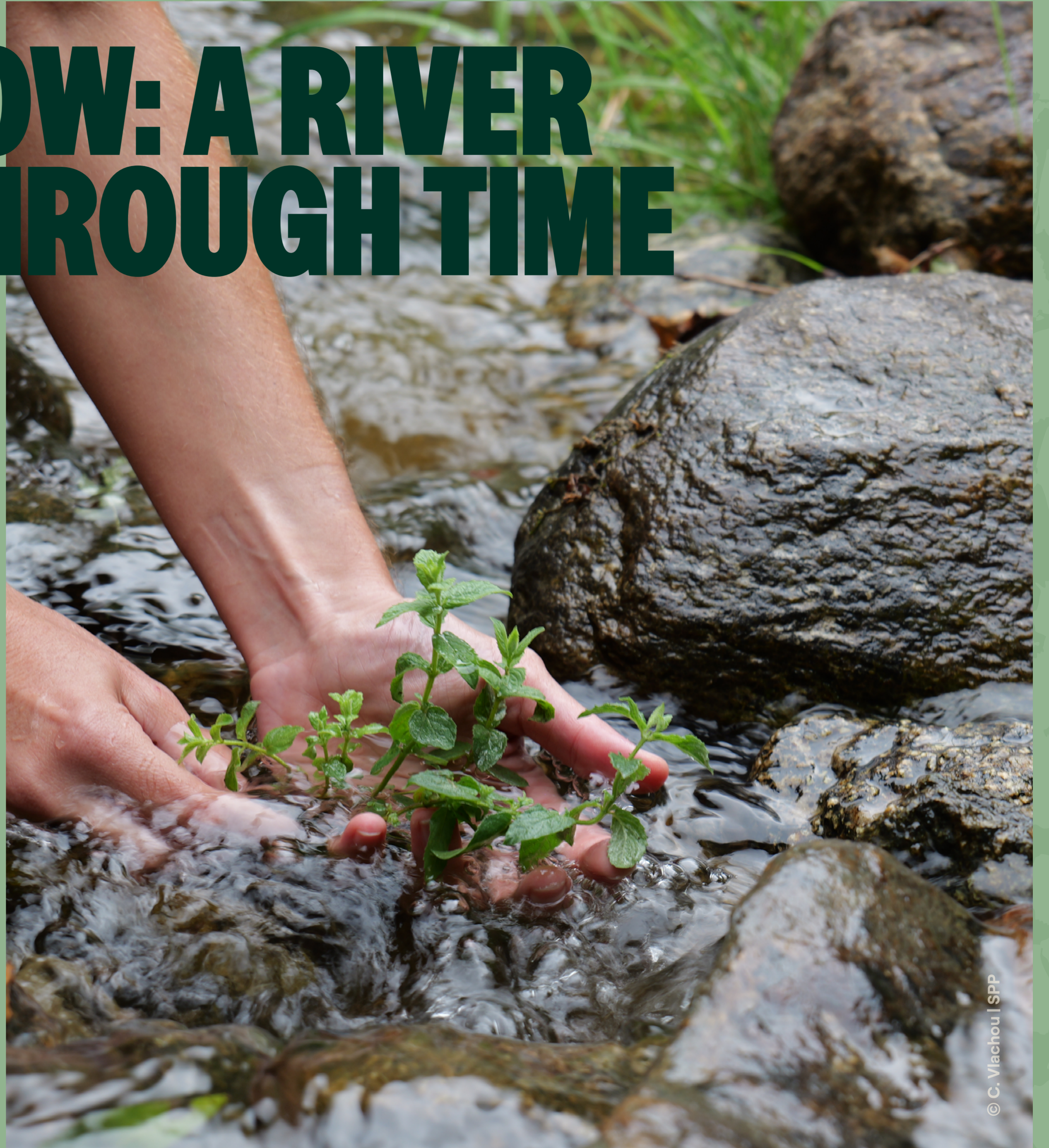
FLUX AND FLOW: A RIVER IN MOTION THROUGH TIME

The Agios Germanos River begins life high on Mount Varnous and flows down its granite slopes, passing local villages before reaching Great Prespa Lake through its embanked lower reaches in the agricultural flatlands that once constituted its floodplain and delta. Prior to engineering works in the 1930s that enclosed its course, the river also emptied into Lesser Prespa Lake during flood years, via a channel that formed part of this delta. When Prespa's irrigation network was built in the 1970s, the rich soils of the floodplain and delta were converted to farmland and the river was constrained to the embanked course we know today.

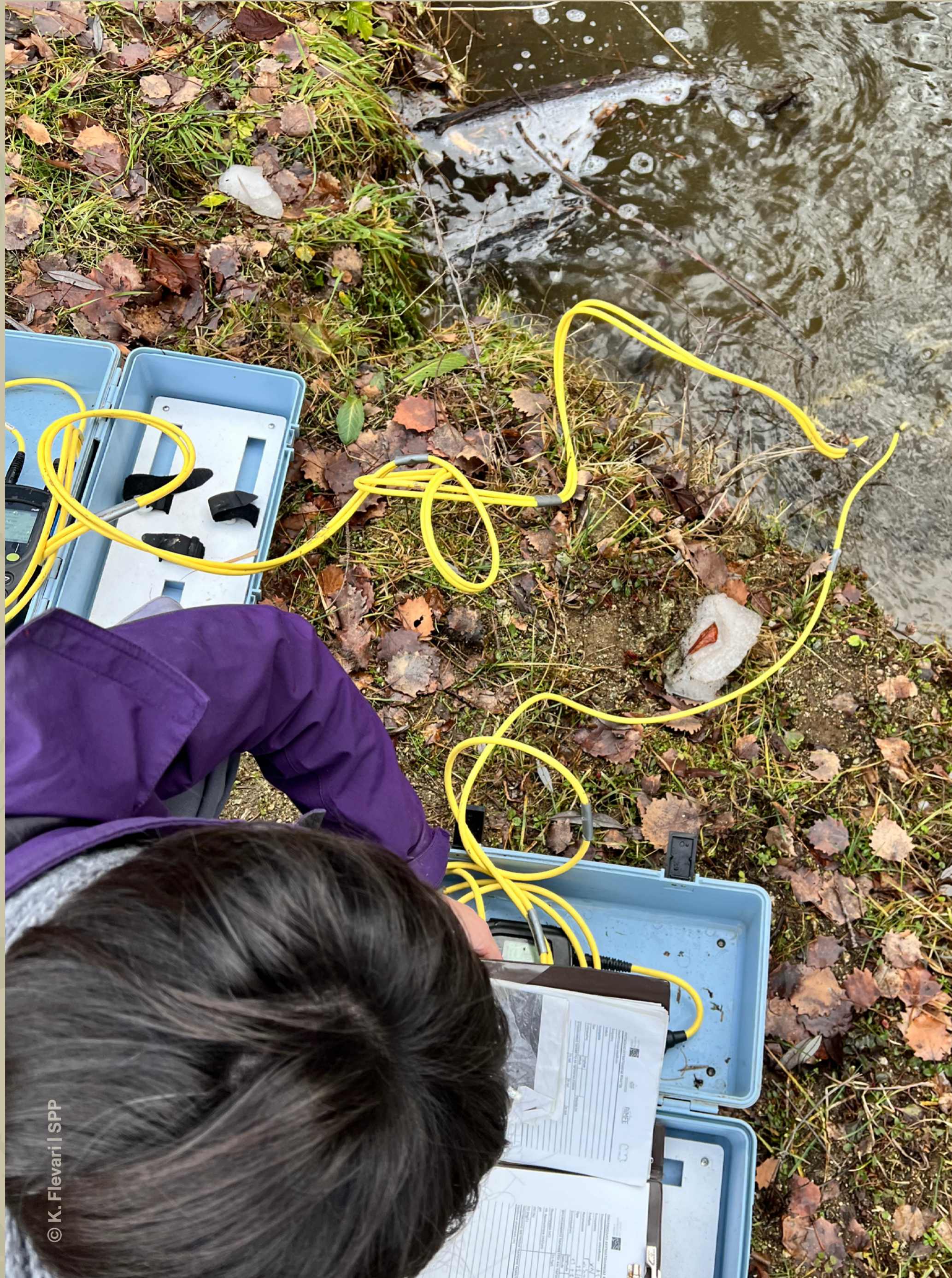
These interventions brought significant changes to the river's hydrology and morphology, their effects intensified by further challenges from the climate crisis, rising annual temperatures and declining water levels in Great Prespa Lake. To protect the health of the Agios Germanos River ecosystem we need to stay one step ahead of the changes taking place, by adapting our activities and the management of the river.

All of this starts with finding out more about the river's many different scientific, ecological, social and cultural aspects – and that's exactly what we and our partners have been doing in the last three years. These multifaceted studies have allowed us to widely share a clear picture of how the river is and what it could be, the life its waters and banks sustain, who holds a stake in its future and what kind of action needs to be taken to reinstate its ecological functions.

Just as tributaries combine to form a river, so, with this groundwork completed, all these aspects can now be taken into account and braided together in a cohesive rehabilitation plan.



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BUILD CONSENSUS

PRESPA'S LIFELINES - BLUE AND GREEN BUT LARGELY UNSEEN!

Our project on “Prespa’s Green and Blue Lifelines” set out to highlight the significance of the hitherto overlooked river, streams and riparian zones of Prespa as an integral part of the wetland landscape of Prespa.

These sometimes disregarded or misunderstood parts of the lake basin ecosystems support our biodiversity, perform important ecological functions and have long provided the people of Prespa with all kinds of benefits.

Prespa’s streams supply Lesser Prespa Lake with around 4 million m³ of freshly oxygenated water per year, though they are under pressure from agrochemicals, nutrients, rubbish dumping and, most worryingly, climate change. We can help to ensure a future for our streams by managing these valuable resources well, restoring natural flow and increasing connectivity between the stream beds and their riparian surroundings.

The streams, and river, are home to distinctive riverine forests, whose roots purify the water, provide an ideal place for fish to lay their eggs and stabilise the soil and banks, protecting neighbouring land from flooding. The magnificent riparian forest that curves along the shore of Great Prespa Lake is home to rare Balkan endemic plants and provides much needed refuge for wildlife and pollinators, while the rich greenery of branches and leaves lowers local temperatures, holds back dust and reduces wind intensity, protecting nearby crops

All this information and much, much more is already being shared widely, in meetings and other media, and we are preparing a series of booklets that approachably tell these complex stories about Prespa’s river, streams and remarkable riparian forests in non-scientific language. Many forms of life, including people, have a stake in these blue and green lifelines, and all have a right to be heard!

CONSENSUS IN ACTION

Formed as a member organisation that brought together the different voices of national NGOs to speak as one for Prespa, the SPP has long advocated for the principles of equitable and participatory decision-making.

This was particularly evident in the Wetland Management Committee (WMC), a 2008 SPP initiative that brought together all those concerned with, or affected by, the management of the wetlands of Lesser Prespa Lake. In annual meetings the WMC jointly decided on what management should be carried out, based on scientific reports drawn up by the SPP and taking account of everyone's needs, together with the impacts on nature and wildlife. Despite the often conflicting viewpoints, the committee's deliberations were notable for always ultimately arriving at balanced, unanimous decisions.

After a change of legislation in 2022 removed the committee's official remit, leading to its final meeting that year, the former members joined the SPP in seeking a new solution to maintaining the successful collaboration, which had been unique in Greece when it was established. The need to broaden the scope of any new mechanism, to include the whole wetland landscape from mountain springs down to the lake wetlands that had been the former focus, was clear to all, especially in light of the increasingly apparent impacts of climate change on Prespa's waters.

In 2024, the recently elected Mayor, on behalf of a new Prespa Municipal Council, and the SPP's Managing Director signed a Memorandum of Co-operation, cementing agreed collaboration rooted in Prespa's mutually esteemed natural and cultural values. A key part of the memorandum was the launch of a new Water and Wetlands Forum, to take up where the WMC left off, with an expanded remit and a reinvigorated commitment to joint decision making for the benefit of all.



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THINK LIKE A WATERSHED

While Prespa is known for its lakes and wetlands, they are only one part of the vastly wider wetland landscape. The whole watershed, from the tops of the encircling mountains, through the springs, streams and aquifers, and down to the lakes and marshlands, forms one ecological and hydrological system teeming with life. And this watershed is shared by three countries, too; where we humans so often see lines or eye-catching features, nature sees only connection.



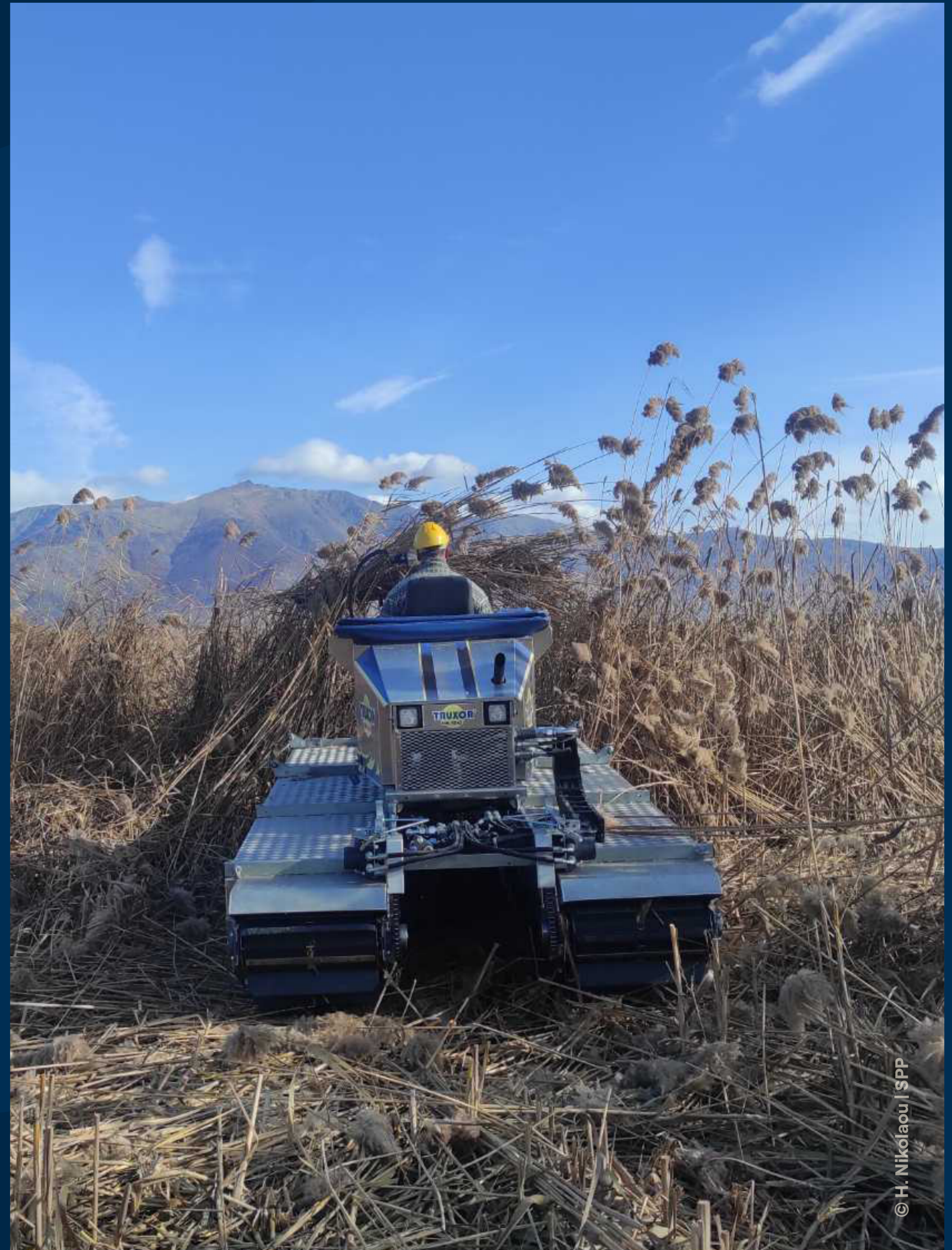
WETLANDS IN AN ERA OF CHANGE AND UNPREDICTABILITY

For the sixth consecutive year Prespa's wildlife and wetland landscape once again suffered drought conditions in 2024, while unseasonable weather events throughout the year also hit the region's farmers badly. The signs that climate change is affecting how the wetland ecosystem functions can be read more easily each year.

While dramatic falling water levels in the lakes make the headlines, our long term monitoring and wetland vegetation management activities zoom in on these myriad unpredictable impacts and illuminate the interplay between them.

Reduced precipitation and higher temperatures increase the risk of wildfires throughout the region, for example, and Prespa's wetlands are vulnerable to fires spreading from nearby agricultural fields and drainage ditches. In wetter years, the SPP supported the management authorities and cattle farmers in wetland vegetation management around the lake, through a programme of mowing and grazing. This kept wet meadows open for feeding waterbirds and spawning fish, whilst also providing good quality cattle fodder and boosting fisheries. Nowadays, as more farmers support the programme, grazing around the lake has increased and while wet meadows aren't formed in low water years, these grazed areas form an extensive and welcome firebreak between agricultural areas and the reedbeds, protecting waterbird colonies.

The SPP still maintains firebreaks in deeper waters where cattle cannot graze, using its amphibious machinery, further preventing the spread of fire and creating feeding areas for waterbirds in the absence of wet meadows. Although dry years are hastening the growth of woody vegetation in both firebreaks and stream estuaries, making cutting harder, grazing successfully cleared 261 ha of vegetation in 2024 and 95% of farmers participated, more than double the number of five years ago!



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THINK LIKE A WATERSHEED

BRANCHING OUT: HOW WETLANDS CAN BE A WHOLE WATERSHED!

When we talk about wetlands in Prespa, it is a given that our thinking stretches beyond the marshes and shores of the lakes, permeating every part of the watershed that is the source of their inestimably valuable waters. As rivers and streams branch into ever smaller tributaries across the mountainsides, and as riparian forests branch out into the sky to give shady refuge below, so we too follow nature's example and spread our work to protect wildlife throughout the whole wetland landscape.

Decades ago, conflict between maintaining lake water levels high enough for Prespa's life-giving wet meadows to form but low enough for landowners around the lake to sustain their agricultural livelihoods with unflooded fields, caused friction for conservation goals. Trade-offs between the two were reached in community-based decision making on managing water levels, initiated by the SPP, which also saw the start of jointly agreed efforts to transfer these land parcels to nature management, and we duly began land purchases around the lake in 2021.

The story of climate change is still being written, but dry years are shifting the balance against wet meadows around the lake. Meanwhile, at landscape level these same effects have brought the ecological value of Prespa's streams, river and lush, greenery-cooled riparian woodlands to the fore. In 2024, we extended our land acquisition project into these areas too, looking to reinforce their protection, preserve remnants of important alder forest habitat and boost the conservation of Prespa's endemic fish, particularly the rare Prespa trout.

Protecting the Prespa lakes means that wetlands are more than the waters, they're the forests and mountains too!

IN PARTNERSHIP, ACROSS WATERS, ACROSS BORDERS

The Prespa watershed, with all its streams, rivers, wetlands, forests, lakes and more besides, is shared between three countries. And while geography might tell us where any particular spot is located, ecology and hydrology see movement and connection everywhere.

It's precisely this shared character of our natural heritage that we've taken into account in our work from our earliest days, and it was one of our driving forces in establishing *PrespaNet*, the network of environmental NGOs for Prespa in which we partner with PPNEA and MES from our neighbouring countries.

The *PrespaNet* NGOs work closely with local people, the protected area authorities and the region's municipalities to protect the single ecological unit that is Prespa, treating it as one living landscape in our work. In 2024, we began a new three-year project cycle together, building on over a decade of successfully aligned conservation activities carried out not in parallel but in partnership across borders, with much of the new project focussing on species and habitats from the transboundary perspective essential to their protection.

Together the partners also published a concise and accessible report on the "*Conservation of wetland habitats across the transboundary Prespa basin*" in 2024, the culmination of detailed studies on these habitats in all three countries over several years. The report highlights the significant changes in our wetland habitats in recent years and makes some clear recommendations for decision makers to follow in order to protect them and retain the benefits they provide across the whole transboundary basin.



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MOTIVATE NEW ENERGY

From the region's capital cities you'd be forgiven for thinking that Prespa is perhaps far away. But up close, from our perspective, it's at the very heart of things, beating with energy and ideas! It's this centrality of vision that motivates us to look outwards, attracting all kinds of people to bring their dynamism, commitment and creativity to Prespa and join us.



NEW WAYS OF WORKING, NEW CONNECTIONS, NEW VITALITY!

A generous slice of our work revolves around bringing others into our activities, offering them the chance to get involved, gain valuable conservation experience and get that personal boost of positivity that giving back to a community has long been acknowledged to provide. 2024 saw many different groups and individuals joining us in Prespa for a really impressive array of activities for which we want to say a huge thank you!

The Cleaningans group from Thessaloniki made their third Prespa visit in March, joining local volunteers in clearing a heroic 600 kg of assorted rubbish from the Agios Germanos River along a 1 km stretch and leaving nothing behind but happy footprints.

We also supported interns to gain important work experience at the SPP, and they thoroughly enjoyed their fieldwork surveying small mammals on Mount Sfika and Hermann's tortoises on Agios Achillios Island, while a local biology student got to put her newly acquired theoretical skills into thrilling practice when we secured her a coveted place on the international reptile research camp on Golem Grad Island organised by our partners in MES.

Meanwhile, the new Pelican Watch app, which we developed to collect important data on pelican feeding success by tapping the talent of citizen scientists, gained some enthusiastic fans during its testing phase in 2024. Amongst those trying out the app were a group of ardent ornithologists from the youth wing of the Danish Ornithological Society, who visited in July and also joined in butterfly surveys on Mount Sfika as keen volunteers.



Another great *PrespaNet* transboundary summer school took place in late summer, this time hosted by PPNEA and offering amazing opportunities for university students to learn about a wide range of fieldwork skills. From large-mammal camera traps to fish sampling, and from snake surveys to an early-morning bird ringing camp, the summer school gifted students from all three countries a rare chance to see conservation in exciting action and understand the hard work that goes into acquiring the top quality data our scientists use in order to determine how best to help wildlife to thrive.

All these activities bring new vigour and fresh thinking to Prespa, as well as making a serious contribution to our work, and many of our participants go on to have committed careers in conservation, with some even inspired to come and work in Prespa after their formative experiences here!



© V. Youtsinas | SPP

OPEN ARMS

Communication opens us up to new possibilities; conversation is how we learn, how we decide, how we resolve conflict and gain new narratives. Exchanging ideas clarifies what we care about, leading to intention and action. When we listen and pay attention, we grow.



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FOR PRESPA AND BEYOND: ENGAGING A COMMUNITY OF INTEREST

In a bid to reach out to the worldwide community of people who have a connection to Prespa, whether through work, family, friendship, investments or travel, our new digital platform *engage.poliprespa.gr* was launched in 2024, operating as part of the core PoliPrespa site which also came online in the spring. The platform is a long-term investment in developing this wider ‘community of interest’ and harnessing it for the protection of the Prespa commons. Over 100 users have already kicked off the first actions on the site and our focus is on steadily building up this membership in the years to come.

Our outreach efforts also include the many visitors that come to Prespa every year, often visiting our offices to say hello and find out more about Prespa. One of our top recommendations in 2024 was the re-opened watermill on the banks of the Agios Germanos River, which is also home to the endemic Prespa trout. Joining the original award-winning watermill restoration, is a newly restored flourmill next door and ancillary facilities for visitors, making the mill complex a must-see stop on any Prespa itinerary. A lively visitor exhibition details the extraordinary cultural and natural heritage the mill represents.

We took our work on the road this year, with a trip to the Green Weekend at the Open Agora in the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre in Athens. Our visit enabled us to introduce Prespa’s astonishing biodiversity to the capital’s urban audiences, and with more than 3,000 visitors over the weekend there were plenty of conversations to be had! Many visitors to our stand had heard of Prespa but never been, so it was a great opportunity to show them how important the area and its wildlife is and build greater connections!



© Z. Anastasiadou | SPP

Every year we take part in conferences and meetings, sharing what we’ve learned through our conservation efforts, finding out the latest ways of working for nature and meeting potential partners in person. In 2024 these included the energising Balkan River Summit in Montenegro, which brought activists, scientists and artists together to exchange ideas on river protection, as well as the Free Flow Conference in the Netherlands and the River Restoration Centre in the UK, from which we left with some innovative ideas for our work on Prespa’s river, streams and riparian forests.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY – DECEMBER 2024

Over the last 30 years, the SPP has been managing the financial resources entrusted to it by its donors with absolute transparency and accountability. We apply strict financial procedures and accounting standards in order to ensure the full protection of the assets of the society, and our accounts are independently audited on a yearly basis.



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY - DECEMBER 2024

SOURCES OF INCOME

INCOME ANALYSIS

FOUNDATIONS

Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust Fund (PONT) / MAVA Foundation	511,651
Hans Wilsdorf Foundation (HWF)	200,000
Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF)	129,700
Donors' Initiative for Mediterranean Freshwater Ecosystems (DIMFE)	110,334
EuroNatur Foundation	95,250
WWF Greece	22,019

Sub-total €1,068,953

PUBLIC FUNDING

Green Fund	27,949
Interreg	3,401

Sub-total €31,350

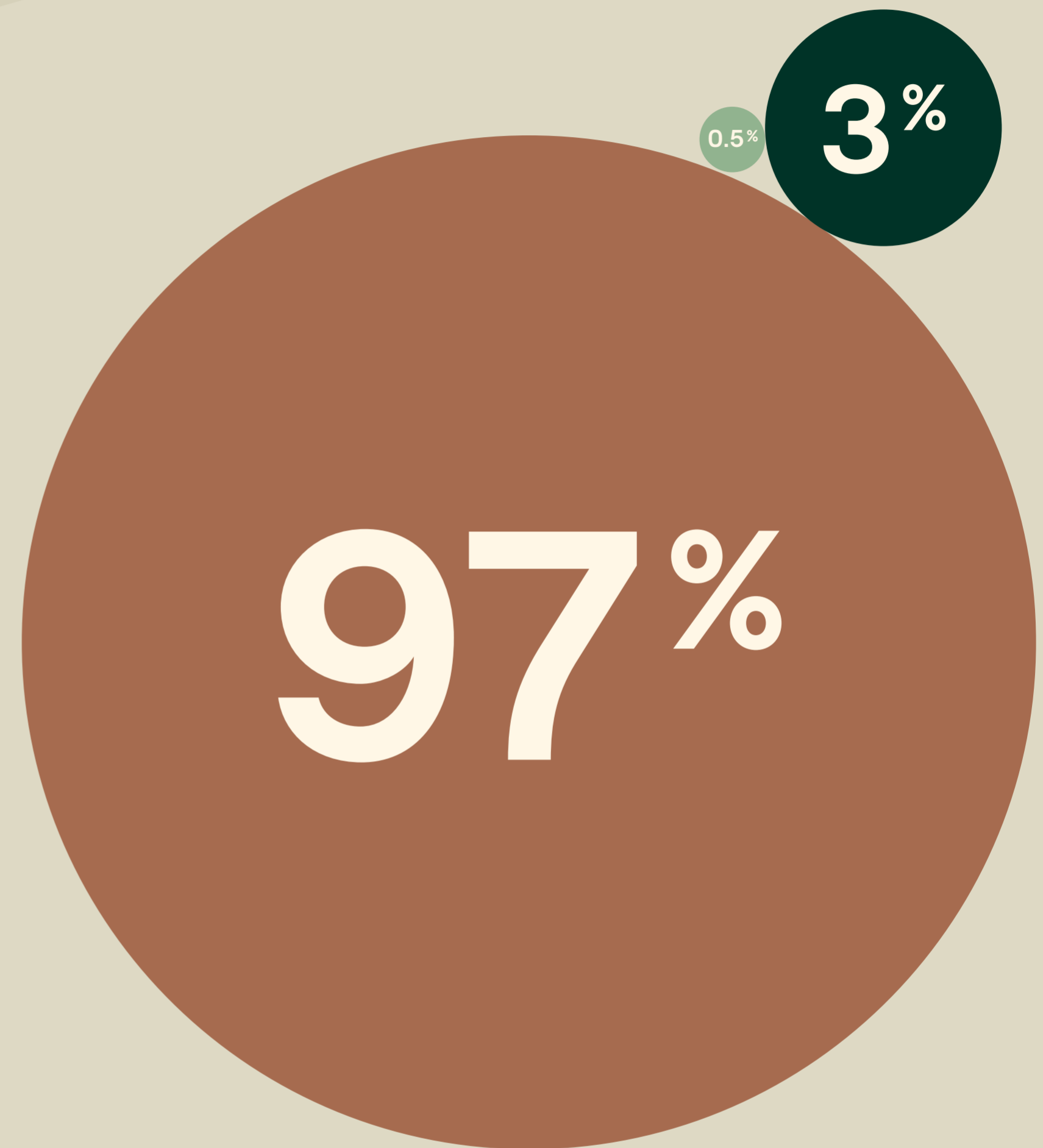
OTHER INCOME

Private donors	4,429
Trading income	1,152
Earned income	67

Sub-total €5,649

Foundations	1,068,953
Public Funding	31,350
Other income	5,649

TOTAL €1,105,952



Total Income €1,105,952



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY - DECEMBER 2024

ANALYSIS OF EXPENSES

CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

Protection and management of biodiversity	658,721
Sustainable development & local community engagement	172,062
Administration	140,934
Fundraising	50,748
Communication	47,498

Total expenditure €1,069,963

ALLOCATION OF EXPENDITURE ON PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF BIODIVERSITY

Conservation and management	343,456
Research and monitoring	180,642
Policy, advocacy and support to institutions	101,712
Partnerships and networking	32,911

Sub-total €658,721

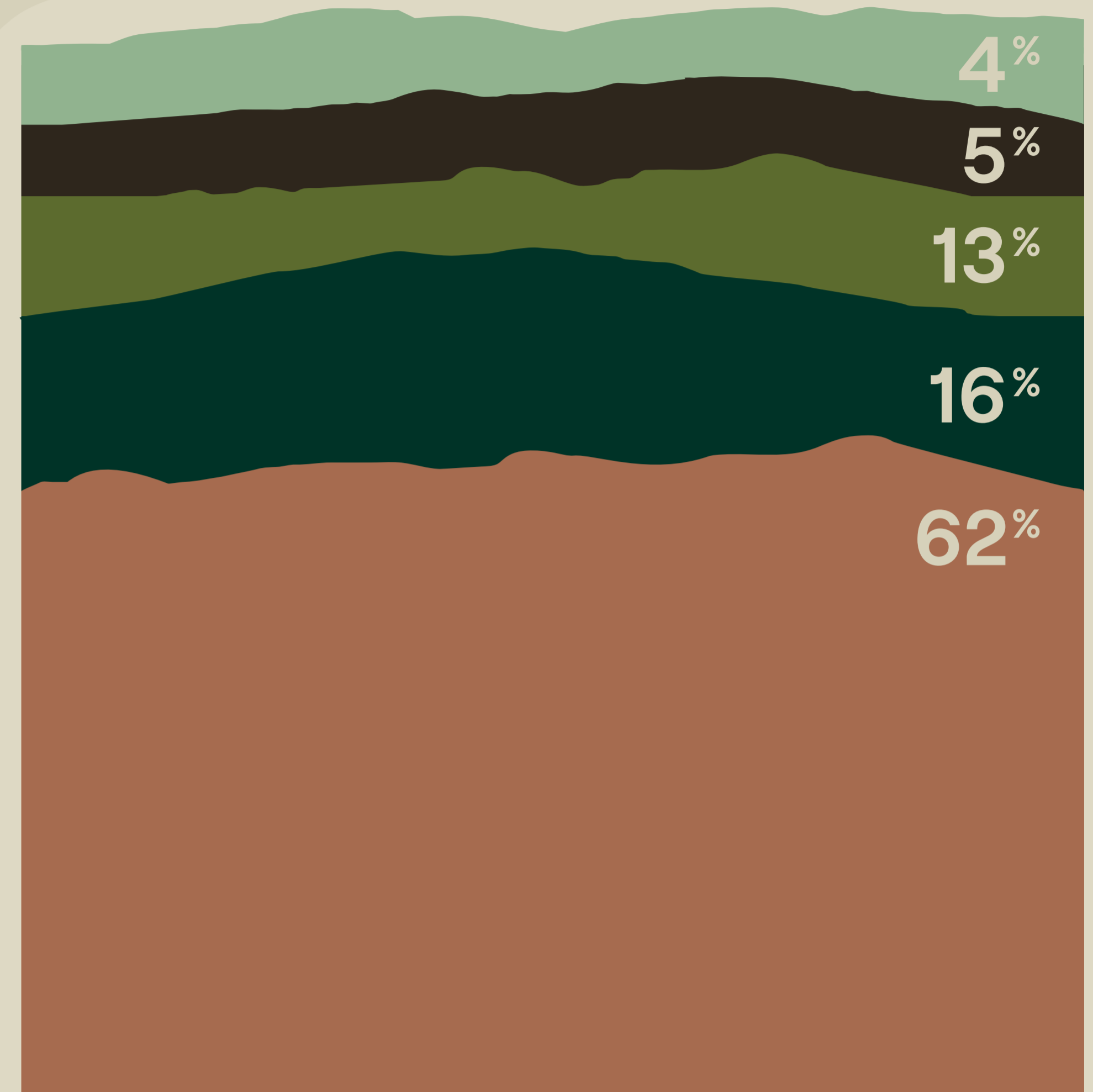
ALLOCATION OF EXPENDITURE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Environmentally friendly land use	117,200
Outreach and education	54,862

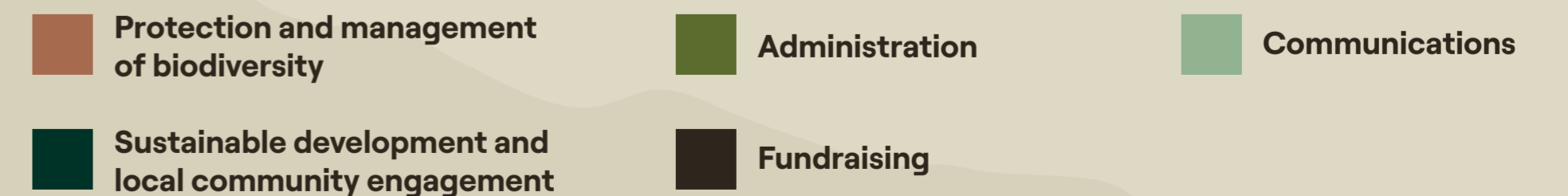
Sub-total €172,062

TOTAL €830,783

HOW WE SPENT OUR RESOURCES



Total Expenditure €1,069,963



THANK YOU

The SPP collaborates with many individuals, organisations and funders, who help us in our mission to protect Prespa's natural and cultural heritage for the benefit of all. Without this partnership our work would not be possible and we offer heartfelt thanks to all our supporters, donors and partners for their contributions, investments and faith in the future of this remarkable corner of the world.



Private and Public Funding Partners

Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT) / MAVA Foundation

PONT funding supports core activities across our conservation and operational programme, spanning from regular monitoring to wetland management, and from policy initiatives and networking to work on outreach, community engagement, communications, fundraising and administration.

Hans Wilsdorf Foundation

Unrestricted funds from the Hans Wilsdorf Foundation underwrite the SPP's conservation efforts for the iconic pelicans of Prespa, as well as contributing to our work with young scientists, land acquisition in the wetland landscape around the lakes, river and streams, and our core operational costs.

Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF)

Following up the highly successful PoliPrespa project and previous support for the restoration of the Agios Germanos Watermill, funding from the SNF enabled us to restore a second watermill and ancillary facilities for visitors in 2024, as well as to launch our online community platform, engage.poliprespa.gr.

Donors' Initiative for Mediterranean Freshwater Ecosystems (DIMFE)

Together with PONT co-funding, DIMFE's support enables our work on *Prespa's Green and Blue Lifelines*, which seeks to enhance conservation of the area's river, streams and riparian forests, as well as carry out activities to prevent the spread of wetland wildfires and support spawning endemic fish.

EuroNatur Foundation

EuroNatur continues to support PrespaNet's transboundary conservation work, now in its third project cycle. These funds underwrite efforts for water and wetland conservation, reconciling conservation interests, and addressing priority threats to wildlife, habitats and the landscape at transboundary level.

WWF Greece

The SPP's efforts to promote the rehabilitation of the Agios Germanos River are supported by WWF Greece, together with our participation in the Greek Wildlife Alliance for the protection of iconic species, improving environmental policies and co-creating solutions.

Interreg

Interreg is a series of EU funding programmes that support regional co-operation. In 2024 the SPP received final payments for work on cultural heritage in support of the Agios Germanos Watermill and the impact of public lighting on bat populations, in bilateral projects with our neighbouring countries.

Green Fund

Greece's Green Fund enhances development through environmental protection. In 2024 the SPP received its final payment for work on establishing, promoting and enriching the Flora Prespae Database, which gathers together all the existing information on the exceptional plant species of Greek Prespa.

THANK YOU

Collaboration

GREEK ENVIRONMENTAL NGOs:

ANIMA
ARCHELON
Callisto
Ecological Recycling Society
Greenpeace
Green Tank
MEDASSET
MOM
Society for the Protection
of Biodiversity of Thrace (SPBT)

LOCAL AND NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS:

Ministry of Environment and Energy
Municipality of Prespes
Pelekanos Bean Farmers' Co-operative
Local Land Reclamation Service
Cultural and sports associations
Schools' and parents' associations
Farmers' and stockbreeders' associations
Fishermen's associations
Directorate of Environment and Special Planning
Macedonia (of the Decentralised Administration
of Epirus and Western Macedonia)
Directorate of Waters of Western Macedonia
(of the Decentralised Administration of Epirus
and Western Macedonia)
Regional Veterinary Unit of Florina
Florina Ephorate of Antiquities

PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT UNITS OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE AGENCY (NECCA):

Management Unit of Prespes National Park
and Protected Areas of Western Macedonia
Management Unit of Acheloos Valley and
Amvrakikos Gulf Protected Areas
Management Unit of the Protected Areas of Epirus
Management Unit of Messolonghi National Park
and Protected Areas of Western Central Greece
Management Unit of Evros Delta and Dadia
National Parks
Management Unit of Nestos-Vistonida
and Rhodope National Parks
Management Unit of Protected Areas
of Central Macedonia
Management Unit of Protected Areas of Thessaly

NETWORKS:

European Green Belt
Pelican Specialist Group
(New and Old World) / IUCN-SSC
Mediterranean Alliance for Wetlands
MedForVal network for Mediterranean forests

TRANSBOUNDARY AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS:

African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement
BirdLife International
Wetlands International
EuroNatur
Macedonian Ecological Society (MES)
Protection and Preservation of the Natural
Environment in Albania (PPNEA)
Albanian Ornithological Society (AOS)
Public Institution Galicica National Park
Public Institution Pelister National Park
Municipality of Resen
Regional Administration of Protected Areas (AL)
Rewilding Europe
Municipalities of Pustec and Devoll
Public Enterprise for National Parks of Montenegro
Romanian Ornithological Society (SOR)
Danube Delta National Institute for Research
and Development, Romania
Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds
(BSPB)

UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH INSTITUTES:

National Observatory of Athens
Digital Media and Strategic Communication Lab,
Department of Communication and Digital Media,
University of Western Macedonia
Department of Forestry and Natural Environment
Management, Agricultural University of Athens
Hellenic Centre for Marine Research
(Inland Waters)
Department of Agronomy,
University of Western Macedonia
Institute of Urban Environment and Human
Resources, Panteion University
Department of Pharmacy, National and
Kapodistrian University of Athens
Natural History Museum of Crete
(University of Crete)
Molecular Ecology and Conservation Genetics,
Department of Biological Applications
and technologies, University of Ioannina
Instituto de Investigación en Recursos
Cinegéticos IREC / University of Castilla-
La Mancha, Spain
The Grenfell Lab, Department of Ecology
and Evolutionary Biology, Princeton University, USA

SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS

Alexandrou, O. & G. Catsadorakis. 2024. Assessing the efficiency of time-lapse cameras in collecting data on various life-history traits of two sympatric-nesting pelican species. *Macedonian journal of Ecology and environment* 26(1), 15–24. <https://doi.org/10.59194/MJEE24261015a>

Alexandrou, O., Höfle, Ú. & G. Catsadorakis. 2024. Dalmatian pelicans in Greece and avian flu outbreak 2022: impact and preliminary results of an ecoepidemiology study. 31st Symposium 'Deltas and Wetlands'. Tulcea, Romania. 13–17 May 2024 (oral presentation).

Bounas, A., Catsadorakis, G., Hatzilacou, D., Naziridis, Th., Champagnon, J. & A.J. Crivelli. 2024. Differential colour-ring loss among Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) colonies and its consequence on survival estimates. *Avian Research* 15, 100166, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avrs.2024.100166>

Cardona-Cabrera, T., González-Azcona, C., Eguizábal, P., Alexandrou, O., Azmanis, P., Lozano, C., Höfle, U. & C. Torres. 2024. Bacterial diversity in choanal swabs from free-living pelicans in Greece. High frequency of methicillin-susceptible *S. aureus*. 34th Congress of the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases. Barcelona, Spain. 27–30 April 2024 (poster).

Cardona-Cabrera, T., Martínez-Álvarez, S.A., González-Azcona, C., Alexandrou, O., Azmanis, P., Höfle, U. & C. Torres. 2024. Occurrence and characterization of Extended-spectrum beta-lactamase-producing *Escherichia coli* ST69 from free-living Dalmatian pelicans (*Pelecanus crispus*). 34th Congress of the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases. Barcelona, Spain. 27–30 April 2024 (poster).

Catsadorakis, G. 2024. *Pelecanus crispus* (Green Status assessment). The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2024: e.T22697599A2269759920251. Accessed on 22 May 2025.

Catsadorakis, G., Alexandrou, O., Hatzilacou, D., Kasvikis, I., Katsikatsou, M., Konstas, S., Malakou, M., Michalakis, D., Naziridis, Th., Nikolaou, H., Noulas, N., Portolou, D., Roussopoulos, Y., Vergos, I. & A.J. Crivelli. 2024. Breeding colonies, population growth and breeding success of the Dalmatian pelican *Pelecanus crispus* in Greece: a country-wide perspective, 1967–2021. *European Journal of Ecology*, 10.1, pp. 63–83. <https://doi.org/10.17161/eurojecol.v10i1.20352>

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Fotiadis, G., Mplanis, I., Zianis, D., Ioakeimidou, A., Bairaktaridou, K. & A. Turlouki. 2024. Assessment of Prespa's riparian forest in Northwest Greece. River Restoration Centre Annual Network Conference, Llandudno, North Wales, 24–26 April 2024 (poster presentation)

González-Azcona, C., Cardona-Cabrera, T., Eguizábal, P., Fernández-Fernández, R., Álvarez-Gómez, T., García-Tuesta, Ó., Marañón-Clemente, I., Alexandrou, O., Azmanis, P., Lozano, C., Höfle, Ú. & C. Torres. 2024. Antimicrobial activity of *Staphylococcus* isolates from free-living pelicans and potential role in microbiota modulation. 34th Congress of the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases. Barcelona, Spain. 27–30 April 2024 (poster).

González-Azcona, C., Cardona-Cabrera, T., Eguizábal, P., Álvarez-Gómez, T., Catsadorakis, G., Alexandrou, O., Azmanis, P., Lozano, C., Höfle, U. & C. Torres. 2024. Microbial diversity in choanal swab samples from nestling and adult Dalmatian pelicans (*Pelecanus crispus*) and nestling great white pelicans (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*). European Wildlife Disease Association Conference 2024. Stralsund, Germany. 9–13 September 2024 (poster).

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Markogianni, V., Mentzafou, A., Turlouki, A. & E. Dimitriou. 2024. Preliminary assessment of hydrological processes and water quality status in Prespa National Park. River Restoration Centre Annual Network Conference 2024, Llandudno, North Wales, 24–26 April 2024 (poster presentation)

Panou, E., Graikou, K., Tsafantakis, N., Sakellarakis, F.-N. & I. Chinou. 2024. Phytochemical Profiling and Biological Activities of Two *Helianthemum* Species Growing in Greece. *Scientia Pharmaceutica*, 92, 42.

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Varsamis, G., Tsiftsis, S., Koutseri, I. & T. Merou. 2024. Optimizing *Juniperus excelsa* (Cupressaceae) germination for sustainable ecosystem restoration in the Prespa area (Western Macedonia, Greece). *Nature Conservation Research. Заповедная наука* 2024. 9(4): 21–31

Cover photo: Nikos Tsilis

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