

Annual Review

Highlights of the year 2023

SOCIETY FOR
THE PROTECTION
OF PRESPA





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Message from the President & Managing Director

In 2023 Greece was thrust unwillingly to the centre of the world stage, when the climate crisis era made its presence felt in two catastrophic events. Firstly the devastating wildfire that burned for three weeks in the northeast of the country, unprecedented in its intensity and the largest ever recorded in the EU, which ravaged tens of thousands of hectares in the Dadia-Lefkimi-Soufli National Park, a protected area of priceless natural and cultural value that was hitherto a haven for 36 of Europe's 38 raptor species, including the majestic black vulture. Barely were the last flames extinguished when storm Daniel produced similarly unprecedented levels of rainfall in the region of Thessaly, with several areas receiving a year's rainfall in only a few hours, leaving well over 1,000 km flooded, mostly along the Pineios River. The contrasting images of wildlife scorched to ashes and glassy-eyed fish stranded in fields unimaginably far from their riparian home, let alone the human suffering and misery caused, brought home the sickening urgency and magnitude of the threats we face.

But, even during those dark days and their aftermath, sparks of evidence kindled hope that this new era can also bring new ideas, new solidarity and new perspectives on what the global commons means to us all. Desperately needed equipment and hundreds of firefighters were sent to help Greece and Dadia, including from tiny Malta which sent firefighters abroad for the first time in its history, while waves of humanitarian aid from every corner of Greece and beyond its borders too, poured into flood-stricken Thessaly. These and many other natural disasters around the world are not only prompting a re-alignment of priorities but also a re-thinking of our common global citizenry. We saw this same collaborative spirit too in 2022, when so many gave a helping hand to try and save Prespa's Dalmatian pelicans during the outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) that year.

That's what our times call for, without a doubt – the making of alliances, sticking together in the face of the overwhelming, from the global to the local. And it's what we've endeavoured to build in Prespa in a multitude of ways, strengthening coalitions and growing a web of collaboration for this still-astonishing corner of the world. Our year began with an anxious wait for the return of pelicans to Prespa and a fear of history repeating itself, but to our immense relief there were no incidents of HPAI in Greece at all, and 600 Dalmatian pelican breeding attempts were made over the spring and early summer, while some the highest numbers of great white pelicans we've ever seen also returned to breed. Multiple research collaborations were instigated to find answers to why our Dalmatian pelicans were so vulnerable to HPAI, involving individuals and institutions from across the hemisphere, all helmed by our determined and diligent scientists, joining with hundreds of others around the world who seek to understand the zoonotic diseases that might one day evolve into another worldwide pandemic.

After this positive start, the SPP continued to have a good year through 2023, building on the results of prior investments in co-operation, from joint wetland management covering its largest extent ever, to celebrating a decade of PrespaNet and a wonderful, unexpected accolade from the UN for our multi-stakeholder efforts for water management, amongst many others. Despite our planet being under threat as never before, tectonic shifts are underway in society and we want to be part of this global movement for transformation and transition.

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 the interest of ecologists, nature-lovers and environmental scientists over several decades, due to its exceptional natural beauty and rare biodiversity. A pivotal group of individuals played a decisive role in its formation – the internationally renowned conservationist and philanthropist, Dr Luc Hoffmann, the environmentalist Thymios Papayannis and the biologist, Dr Giorgos Catsadorakis. Together they laid the foundations for the establishment of the SPP, with the help and support of a series of non-profit organisations. Accordingly, the SPP was created with the participation of ten national and international environmental NGOs as its members.

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, which it achieves through a wide range of projects promoting the harmonious co-existence of man and nature. Its 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. From the beginning the SPP has always understood that safeguarding Prespa's exceptional biodiversity and

cultural traditions requires the harmonious co-operation and involvement of the three states that share the lakes.

For this reason, in 2013, the SPP launched PrespaNet, a cross-border network of environmental NGOs for Prespa, together with MES and PPNEA, and began the initiative to establish the Transboundary Prespa Park, with a quadrilateral agreement between the three countries sharing the lakes and the EU in 2010.

Today the SPP is an environmental organisation whose work is internationally recognised. The organisation is locally based, in the villages of Agios Germanos and Laimos in Prespa, and employs 22 people. One of the basic principles of its work is that common approaches and close collaboration between stakeholders and organisations at local, national and transboundary levels promotes mutual understanding, builds capacity and social capital, and fosters sustainable long-term solutions. As a result, the SPP promotes partnership at many levels, from participatory governance schemes to support for conservation volunteers, and from multi-stakeholder joint projects to international scientific alliances.



Members of the SPP

The SPP has eight environmental organisations as its 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, Friends of Prespa, 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, deliberating crucial matters at the organisation's annual General Assembly. They also actively collaborate on many projects, bringing a wealth of knowledge and experience to bear in their support for the programme. The contribution of all the members to the issues that the SPP faces and their assistance at critical junctures are of vital importance for the SPP.



First small encouraging steps on the road to recovery

Hope in the aftermath: Relief at the return of Dalmatian pelicans

The devastating outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in 2022 was the greatest wildlife disaster Greece had ever seen, in which almost 2,300 Dalmatian pelicans were lost, more than 1,700 of these in the Lesser Prespa wetlands. We awaited the birds' return in 2023 on high alert and with great trepidation, so it was with joy and great relief that we saw no HPAI incidents anywhere in Greece during the year.

In a real-life good news story, and thanks in part to the resilience built up over decades of conservation work that saw the number of colonies in Greece increase from 1 to 6 from the Prespa 'source' population, around 600 Dalmatian pelican breeding efforts took place at Lesser Prespa in 2023, with a further 60 at the Lake Cheimaditida colony, which had been completely wiped out by HPAI the previous year. Of course, we know it will take many years for the colony to recover and we are putting significant resources into finding out what factors might have been behind the Dalmatian pelicans' heartbreaking vulnerability to the virus. However, for conservationists who have spent their life's work in protecting this majestic threatened species and were rendered a devastating blow by the impacts of the outbreak, the simple human gladness of a ray of hope amidst such losses is hard to deny.

As we begin the journey of supporting Dalmatian pelicans on the long road to recovery, it was also heartening to see good numbers of great white pelicans, who were mercifully unaffected by the HPAI outbreak, return to breed in 2023. There were 820 great white pelican breeding attempts in the year, not far shy of the record numbers seen in 2021, giving cause for some cautious optimism for the future of Prespa's pelicans overall.

Helping waterbirds to thrive despite dry conditions

2023 was the 5th consecutive year of dry conditions in the Prespa wetlands, with evident drought pressure on Prespa's waterbirds. Large parts of the Lesser Prespa reedbeds are rendered unsuitable for nesting in these conditions and the dry years have seen some colonies fragment and move to more suitable areas. However, population trends for 2023 were generally good, with waterbirds using normally deeper areas cleared by the SPP's amphibious machinery for firebreaks or around stream mouths as feeding grounds. Likewise, although dry conditions cause problems for some Lesser Prespa habitats, conversely, the fall in water levels around Great Prespa Lake is exposing new shallow water habitats, ideal for waterbird feeding.

Covering all the angles: Prespa waterbirds through 360°!

In May the SPP led a fruitful 360° PrespaNet waterbirds knowledge-exchange tour all around Prespa. Our ornithologists showcased existing monitoring methods and the teams exchanged information on monitoring activities, while also exploring wetlands and reedbeds to establish a joint knowledge base on waterbird populations. Setting aims for future waterbird monitoring and wetland conservation, this novel 360° tour built on long-term PrespaNet collaboration and put discrete experiences into shared practice.

Asking the questions and finding the answers

Pelicans under the microscope

After the huge shock of the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) outbreak across northern Greece hitting Prespa's Dalmatian pelican colony particularly hard, questions began to arise. Why were the Dalmatian pelicans so dramatically affected while great white pelicans, their cousins and next-door neighbours on the breeding colonies, were not? What factors make the birds more vulnerable to the wider range of threats they face?

In search of answers that can help determine future risk management measures for pelicans, the SPP has launched various pieces of research, in particular on HPAI and other diseases in Dalmatian pelicans, in collaboration with Prof. Ursula Höfle and her team at the University of Castilla-La Mancha, Spain. SPP scientists collected samples from young, pre-fledged Dalmatian and great white pelicans at all the Greek colonies throughout the spring and summer of 2023, with the technical support of a local veterinarian, and the final results of this crucial investigation are due in 2024.

Meanwhile, work was also initiated on a study to assess the genetic diversity, phylogeny and gene flow, amongst other factors, of breeding colonies along the Dalmatian pelican's SE European range, as well as their updated post-HPAI conservation status. In collaboration with the University of Ioannina, Greece, a sampling scheme has been designed, foreseeing sample collection in Montenegro, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey in 2024, in collaboration with several Pelecanus network members.

Lastly, the SPP continues to add to its pelican movement dataset, with a further 20 transmitters fitted on Dalmatian pelicans in 2023. The data is used to explore dispersal, movement and migration patterns, shed light on causes of mortality and improve the accuracy of proposed exclusion zones for wind parks along pelican movement corridors. In addition, planning and development began for a new large-scale study launching in 2024, aiming to enhance our understanding of pelican feeding performance, which will see even closer collaboration with the Pelecanus network as well as a major new citizen science effort.

Go with the flow: What future for the Agios Germanos River?

2023 saw the start of an exciting pre-feasibility study on the rehabilitation of the Agios Germanos River, the largest watercourse in Prespa in Greece and home to the endemic Prespa trout. The river, which now flows into Great Prespa Lake and is enclosed by embankments along its lower reaches, once had a natural channel that opened into the shallower Lesser Prespa Lake, sharing its waters between both water bodies.

The study will help to develop a comprehensive rehabilitation plan for the river, considering the riparian and lakes ecosystem as a whole. Focused on improving wildlife stewardship in Prespa, particularly benefiting spawning fish, this work also prioritises stakeholder participation and takes a problem-solving approach, with ongoing activities including a robust analysis of the regulatory framework and a national-level stakeholder mapping process.

The flora of the wilder corners of Prespa

The Flora Prespae Database containing all the plant species records for Prespa in Greece, and its associated mobile phone app, have both allowed us to get a clear picture of the places where knowledge on flora remains lacking. Seeking to plug these gaps, the SPP supported two young botanists to survey plant species on under-explored parts of the Sfika plateau, enriching the database and our knowledge of the plant diversity of this remarkable karstic landscape.

A unique chance to join renowned international field research

Our Young Conservationists Programme continued to invest in the researchers who will form the next conservation generation, with support for a young Greek biologist to join the international Herpetological Research Volunteer Programme on Golem Grad Island, Great Prespa Lake in July 2023. This long-term collaboration between PrespaNet partner MES, the University of Belgrade, Serbia, and the National Centre for Scientific Research, France, offers volunteers invaluable field experience in herpetological monitoring, as well as the opportunity to join research on the island's isolated Hermann's tortoise population.

Wherever water flows – Prespa’s wetland landscape

Wetland management on the road

Our experience of using the Truxor amphibious machinery in wetland management, which is almost unique in Greece, was shared with local site managers during an autumn visit to Pamvotida Lake, at the invitation of NECCA. Meanwhile, the SPP riparian team also exchanged experience during the prestigious European BioClim Wetlands Conference in Bonn, Germany. The conference focussed on the role of riverine and coastal wetlands in biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation, and we were quietly proud to see Prespa recognised by our conference peers as one of the best-known wetlands in the world!

More wetlands managed than ever before!

2023 was the best year ever for wetland landscape management in Prespa, with a new area added to the mix for the first time. The SPP closely collaborates with the National Environment and Climate Change Agency (NECCA) and the management unit for the Prespa National Park, who organise stockbreeders to cut and graze wetland vegetation, according to five-year guidelines set by the last Wetland Management Committee in 2022. The SPP supplements this effort, using its Truxor amphibious machinery to cut firebreaks in deeper, less accessible parts of the reedbeds, to prevent the spread of wildfires to waterbird colonies.

This year NECCA additionally funded management activities in Pyli, a place that has not been managed up to now due to its difficult terrain. The SPP mowed 10 ha in this new area and distributed the cut biomass to local stockbreeders, while we also continued to keep stream mouths clear of vegetation for fish moving upstream to spawn. Overall this wetland management aims to maintain shallow areas around the lake that can form wet meadows in spring, providing feeding areas for Prespa’s rare waterbirds and spawning grounds for fish.

Our work on the wider wetland landscape, including Prespa’s river, streams and ecologically valuable riparian zones, also continued in 2023 with an array of studies on these relatively mysterious elements of the watershed. These will give us an in-depth picture of the hydrology and geomorphology of riparian areas, their use by breeding birds and large and medium-sized mammals, and their context within local society, forming a basis for developing measures for their protection and promoting their values.

Riparian conservation in action

Working to reduce water pollution from used agro-chemical containers and protect our river and streams, the SPP collaborated with the Municipality of Prespa to install 14 new specially marked bins, together with info boards giving disposal instructions at designated collection points, supporting good environmental stewardship amongst the area’s farmers. Likewise, the SPP also planted 500 *Alnus glutinosa* saplings along streams, seeking to strengthen EU priority alder forest habitat and further support riparian conservation.

Land and water: Protecting the commons

The SPP acquired another 3.05 ha of land within the Lesser Prespa Lake wetlands in 2023, continuing its work to address historical conflict between wet meadow conservation needs and agriculture in flooded conditions. The land acquisition programme has also been expanded to refugia and wildlife corridors within the agricultural zone as well as ecologically valuable riparian areas, aiming to secure these vital habitats and commons for conservation and biodiversity protection long into the future.

Shaping a greener future: Environmental policy work

Wind and wing: The battle to keep pelicans from harm

The fact that Prespa's iconic pelicans can travel such extraordinary distances to cover their needs, due to their large wingspan, unfortunately also renders them particularly vulnerable to threats along the flyways that they use. As we've seen from the data from transmitters we've fitted on them in the past, the birds are faithful to certain movement corridors, a result of the specific topography of these areas that allows the development of the warm rising air on which pelicans depend for flight. The same conditions are also favourable for wind energy infrastructure, meaning that the impact of such developments on pelicans demands serious consideration by means of a Special Ecological Assessment (SEA).

Many dozens of wind farms have been proposed in these highly sensitive pelican flight corridors, both around the Prespa protected areas and in the wider region of Western and Central Macedonia, and our policy work on threats during 2023 was overwhelmingly occupied with interventions in relation to these. This very demanding work involves thoroughly studying enormous environmental assessments and submitting detailed comments to public consultations under often very tight deadlines. Urgently seeking better protection for pelicans across their whole range, the SPP pulled out all the stops and managed to work on 15 projects over the year, four of which are especially alarming as they are close to Prespa, placed squarely at the centre of the pelicans' movement corridors to and from their breeding colonies.

An exceptional course of action taken by the SPP, and supported by our national NGO network partners, was a judicial challenge to the legality of the environmental permit for a planned wind farm on Mt Vitsi overlooking Lake Kastoria, after a first administrative appeal was rebuffed. This case is particularly important because the administration's appeal decision called into question the shift effected by previous sustained effort from the SPP towards requiring a SEA, on the basis of ornithological studies, when projects are planned in pelican movement corridors, even when they fall outside NATURA 2000 sites.

Landscapes and lives: Influencing decisions on people and place

The Landscape Public Participation Tools project, led by MedINA and partnered by the SPP, with Prespa as a pioneering pilot site, came to a fruitful conclusion in 2023. Landscape is a part of our everyday lives and is recognised by the European Landscape Convention (ELC) as a common resource that affects citizens' well-being and quality of life. So, public participation is really important for making coherent landscape policies and effective landscape management. Based on the outcomes of the project, a brand-new set of landscape guidelines and proposals were completed and widely shared with regional and local authorities and stakeholders in Prespa and beyond.

The project also hosted senior officers of the Ministry of Environment and Energy and the Ministry of Culture and Sports at an Athens meeting, presenting its results and discussing the wider issue of ELC implementation and public participation in policies affecting the landscape, seeking to address the fragmentation of landscape management in sectoral policies and a hitherto top-down approach that excludes the very people who interact most with the landscape from the process. The meeting wrapped up this highly original exercise in public participation, which not only produced invaluable policy guidelines for future decision making but also the first extensive study of Prespa's landscapes ever attempted.

A slower pace for interstate collaboration in the Prespa Park

Following on from the 2022 landmark first meetings of the Prespa Park Management Committee (PPMC) and Working Group on Water Management (WGWM), over a decade after the signing of the quadrilateral Prespa Park Agreement, the SPP rounded off Greece's chairing of the process with constructive second meetings online in January, in its pivotal role as secretariat. Although the chair of the system should have passed to North Macedonia, this has not yet happened due to bureaucratic and other difficulties, while the SPP has focussed on a Memorandum of Co-operation to define the roles and responsibilities for Greek stakeholders in the Prespa Park scheme, so as to productively streamline efforts and effectiveness.



Meeting the challenge: Partners for nature

PrespaNet: 10 years of collaboration beyond border

2023 was a landmark year for our PrespaNet NGO network, as together with MES and PPNEA we celebrated an amazing decade of achievements with the 10th anniversary of the signing of our Agreement of Co-operation in March 2013! Looking back on that optimistic moment it's been fantastic to see how far we've come thanks to the hard work and commitment of the partners and everyone who's supported the network and its activities. We celebrated with a symbolic meeting by boat where the borders of the three countries meet in Great Prespa Lake, and a thank-you event for stakeholders, donors and friends from across the region.

One of PrespaNet's biggest achievements was the setting up of local offices for PPNEA and MES on their sides of the basin, a goal that has been close to our hearts for all the many years we've worked on transboundary collaboration. These offices have been a gamechanger for local collaboration and have enabled both organisations to really embed themselves in their local communities and make a difference. From work on large carnivores, chamois and Balkan lynx to wet meadows and alder forests, from collaboration on wetland protection to support for park managers, and from environmental education and volunteers to the amazingly successful 'Wild Side of Prespa' youth programme, PrespaNet has covered a lot of ground in such a short space of time!

The partners also developed a Transboundary Strategic Framework (TSF) for Prespa, laying down the most important priorities for their conservation work over the years. The TSF was also the basis of the third phase of the PrespaNet project, which the partners developed together in 2023. This project, which builds on previous work and also introduces exciting new efforts on landscape, wildlife crime, water and policies for responding to renewable energy source infrastructure development, will kick off in early 2024.

United we stand!

Closer to home, the SPP has kept its role in the strong coalition of Greek environmental NGOs, with the organisations supporting each other on specific campaigns, as well as joining their voices on issues affecting nature and biodiversity nationally. This year saw notable interventions following the shocking natural disasters Greece faced in August and September, the Evros mega-wildfire and Thessaly floods, while we also participated in the EU Nature Restoration Law campaign run by a pan-European network of NGOs.

Networking for Mediterranean forests and wetlands

At the Mediterranean level the SPP is a member of the Mediterranean Alliance for Wetlands (MAW) and attended the 2023 general assembly, meeting with partners and agreeing on the alliance's new action plan. We also supported MAW and PrespaNet partner PPNEA on a Red Alert campaign for the Narta wetlands in Albania, threatened with an airport development, as well as exploring strategic opportunities at the annual meeting of the MedForVal network for high-nature-value forests, in Luberon, France.

Pelecanus Group: wings around the world

The Pelecanus network the SPP established in 2013 has proved invaluable time and again, especially during and since the 2022 avian influenza outbreak, when the news and information shared was very helpful in depicting the situation worldwide and alerting members. Pelecanus is a global network, with members across the Dalmatian pelican's full distribution range, and has also been playing a key role in research work on pelicans this last year, particularly in helping to collect samples for a new genetic study.

The power of possibility: Common ground and shared resources

A 'community of interest' for Prespa

The SPP's pioneering PoliPrespa project saw Prespa joining forces to carry out a programme that crossed from culture and society through the local economy to the environment and nature protection. The four years of the project brought together the whole community, each partner weaving their particular concerns and activities into a co-ordinated effort for the area's sustainable development, strengthening Prespa's social and institutional capital and incorporating environmental values in productive and social processes. Differing perspectives were reconciled through shared higher values: love of place, ensuring a future for Prespa, shared resources, a story of people and nature.

Seeking to build on the shared recognition of the power of community that PoliPrespa unleashed, the SPP has been working on a legacy project during 2023. Just as communities around the world are finding like-minded voices in the struggle to safeguard the global commons – the interconnected natural systems that maintain a stable, resilient planet and keep us alive – so PoliPrespa not only wants to bring the geographically local community together but also the worldwide community of interest in the region and harness it for the protection of the Prespa commons.

As a starting point for this endeavour a digital platform is being developed that will allow those interested in Prespa, wherever they may be in the world, to join in the Prespa conversation. The platform will act as an information portal for these different audiences and a platform for co-operation between all those with a stake in Prespa, offering a digital space where this online community of people can collaborate. Ultimately the platform aims to strengthen democracy, consultation, transparency and co-operation between individuals and institutions for the benefit of Prespa.

Being the change we want to see in the world

One of the natural audiences for the new PoliPrespa digital platform will be the many volunteers who've tirelessly supported the SPP's work for Prespa, tapping into the enormous energy and commitment they bring to efforts to change the world for the better. In 2023 we worked with an inspiring young group from the Greek NGO Callisto and the Municipality of Prespa to clear rubbish from Mikrolimni, Kallithea and Platy streams, the Agios Germanos River and the riparian forest on Great Prespa Lake.

Many hands make lighter work!

The collective approach will also contribute to our research on pelicans, with citizen scientists gathering a wide array of data across many wetlands for the SPP in a new study on diet and feeding performance, especially in view of climate change, which threatens to disrupt freshwater habitats and affect fish populations. We're developing a handy new mobile app to collect this data, working closely with the Pelecanus network and the youth wing of the Danish Ornithological Society to kick off the study in 2024.

A fresh understanding of the world around us

Brought by the river: A new chapter for the Agios Germanos watermill

The huge success of the restoration of the Agios Germanos watermill, which won the Europa Nostra Grand Prix Prize for Cultural Heritage in 2016, has been the launchpad for an additional project to restore an adjacent mill building and create new ancillary spaces so that the complex can operate fully as a flour-producing mill. The original Agios Germanos watermill, built by a local family, has stood at the edge of the river since 1930, and is still an intrinsic part of village life in its re-imagined role as a place where visitors can glimpse Prespa's pre-industrial past and understand how central the river remains to its future.

Up until the mid-20th century Prespa was much more densely populated than it is today and there were once many mills, particularly in the eastern part of the basin whose granite slopes are home to several small rivers and streams. The Agios Germanos watermill is one of the few mills in the area to have survived almost completely intact and has restored flour mill, fulling mill and fulling tub mechanisms, all powered by the waters flowing down the Agios Germanos River, a vital part of the area's wider wetland landscape and home to important biodiversity, including the endemic Prespa trout.

Restoration work continued throughout the year and the SPP looks forward to re-opening the watermill complex in 2024!

www.spp.gr reloaded!

The SPP launched its new-look [website](http://www.spp.gr) in late 2023, spruced up with a fresh re-design to make finding key information easier on both phones and computers, and with new functionality planned to be added in the near future. Many of our collected resources have already been uploaded, as well as a comprehensive, cross-referenced breakdown of all the SPP's [projects](#) over more than three decades, helping to fulfil our aim of making the insights and results we've gained through our collaborative work available to all.

Conservation crusaders: Forging tomorrow's scientists in the field

In what has been a PrespaNet tradition since 2018, MES hosted an exhilarating transboundary summer school this year for students from all around the basin. A week-long intensive field workshop, guided by experienced instructors from each partner, took students on a deep dive into wildlife monitoring and practical conservation. From large mammals and bird ringing to fish, tortoises and snakes our team gave up-close insights into the joys and demands of field research to the next generation of conservationists!

Flower power, climate activism and teaching out of the box!

What do energy consumption, flowers and lesson plans have in common? They all featured in our 2023 environmental education programme! We supported PPNEA to train educators from Albania and North Macedonia in the latest ways to tackle ecological issues indoors and out, and put some new ideas into practice in our own annual sessions for local kids, this time on climate change and reducing their energy footprint. Meanwhile, Prespa's teens learnt how to use the new Prespa Florae mobile app, putting Prespa's incredible plant wealth neatly into their back pocket!



The SPP in the spotlight

Prespa is “what progress looks like”!

2023 saw the SPP honoured with international recognition for its persistent and systematic work over the last two decades for cross-border collaboration in the Prespa basin, with special emphasis on joint water management. In February the UN-Water mechanism chose transboundary co-operation in the Prespa Park as one of only two global good examples it showcased in its publication “SDG 6 Acceleration Snapshots” to demonstrate “*what progress looks like*” in the field of transboundary co-operation for water under its Sustainable Development Goal 6 and target 6.5 for cross-border collaboration!

The UN-Water mechanism highlighted the ratification and eventual entry into force of the 2010 Agreement on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Prespa Park Area, signed by the three states sharing the Prespa lakes as well as the EU. This agreement, instigated and championed from its inception by the SPP, set up permanent collaboration structures in the form of the Prespa Park Management Committee and the Working Group on Water Management (WGWM), which met for the second time in 2023, with the WGWM resulting in a jointly agreed road map for implementing shared water management priorities.

What was especially warmly received and rewarding for the SPP was the wholehearted endorsement by UN-Water of our strategic approach for a modern official multi-stakeholder participatory transboundary governance scheme, which often met with resistance from core central state officers in all three countries. Even more so their acknowledgement that a key success factor in bringing about this formal cross-border collaboration was the “Sustained efforts by local civil society organisations and municipalities”.

The many sides of PoliPrespa on camera

The remarkable work of the SPP’s PoliPrespa project was captured in a series of beautiful [documentary videos](#) put together by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation and released at the end of the year. Mirroring the three pillars of the project – community, economy, environment – the films document the dizzying array of activities in this ground-breaking programme and celebrate how crucial the long interplay of people and nature has been for Prespa’s unique culture and biodiversity.

Prespa flying high!

Prespa and the SPP proudly took to the skies at the beginning of 2023, appearing in an extensive article extolling the region’s virtues and hidden secrets in the Aegean Airlines in-flight magazine, “[Blue](#)”, to passengers travelling all over the world! Likewise, the SPP’s work for Prespa’s river, streams and riparian forests – our precious “[Green and Blue Lifelines](#)” – was promoted in an interview for the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation’s widely circulated magazine, “[Impact](#)”, in the spring.

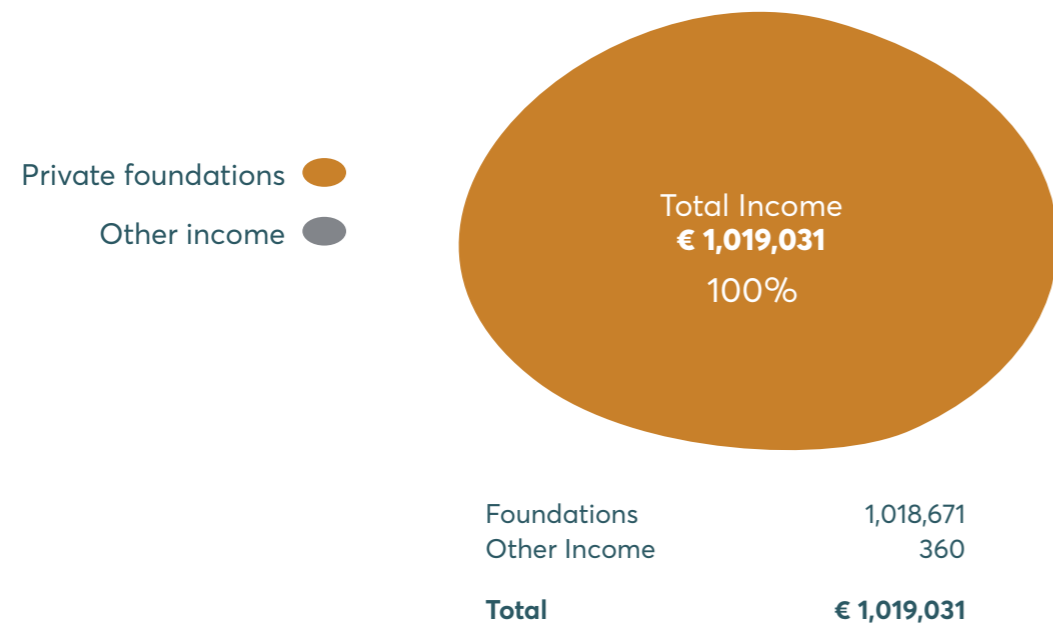


Financial management

**For the period
January - December 2023**

Over the last 30 years, the SPP has been managing the financial resources entrusted to it by its donors with absolute transparency and accountability. The Society applies 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.

Sources of income



Income analysis

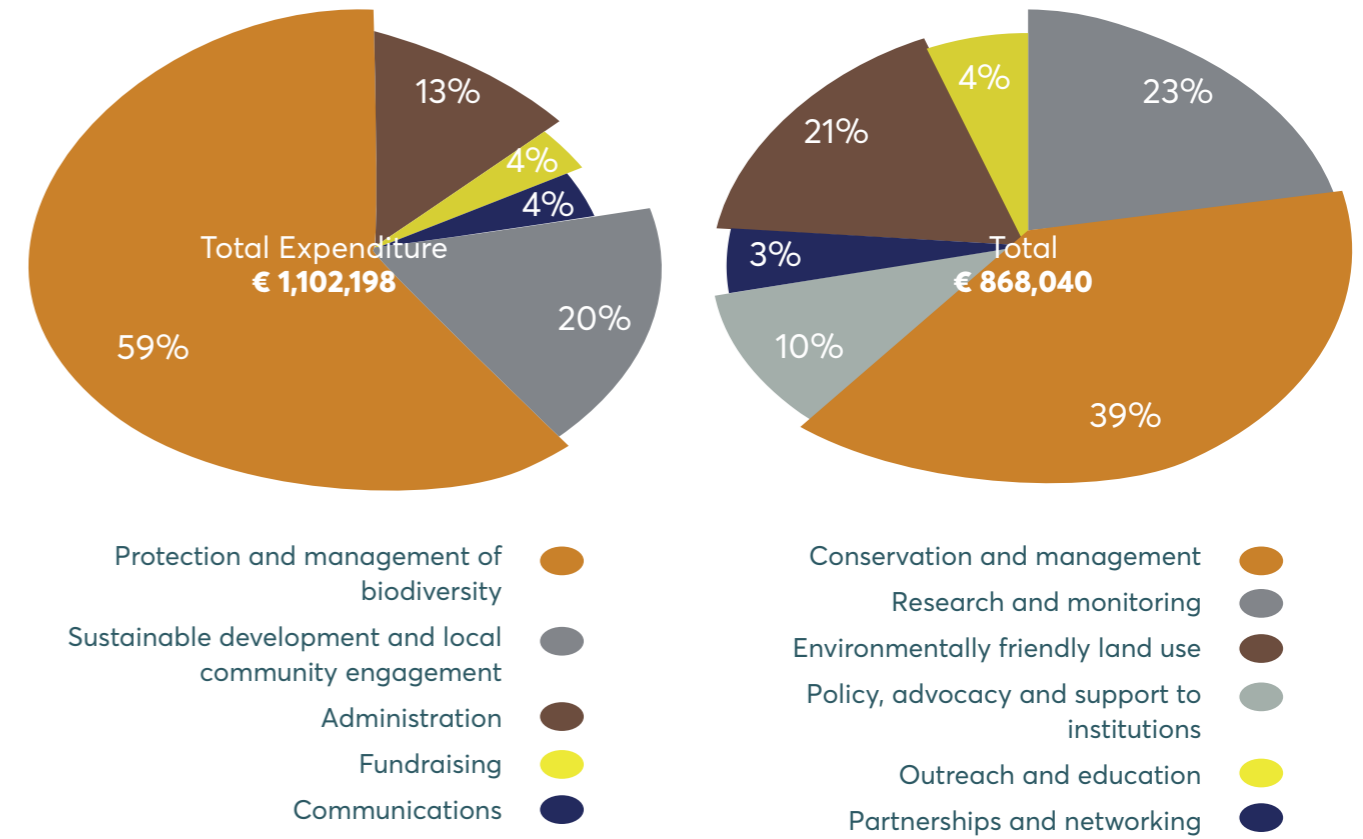
Foundations

Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust Fund (PONT) / MAVA Foundation - support for the whole SPP programme	531,681
Hans Wilsdorf Foundation - support across the SPP programme	205,186
Stavros Niarchos Foundation - for the watermill restoration and digital platform	149,868
WWF Greece - for the rehabilitation of the Agios Germanos River	80,000
Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation, fund operated by EuroNatur - for the PrespaNet III project	26,500
The A.G. Leventis Foundation - for the watermill restoration	19,421
EEA Grants Active Citizens Fund, fund operated by the Bodossaki Foundation with SolidarityNow - for the landscape project	6,015
Sub-total	€ 1,018,671

Other income

Private donors	360
Sub-total	€ 360

How we spent our resources



Analysis of expenses

Conservation programme

Protection and management of biodiversity	651,636	Allocation of expenditure on protection and management of biodiversity + Sustainable development and local community engagement	
Sustainable development and local community engagement	216,404	Conservation and management	339,102
Administration	146,455	Research and monitoring	201,449
Fundraising	46,052	Environmentally friendly land use	177,961
Communications	41,652	Policy, advocacy and support to institutions	85,601
Total expenditure	€ 1,102,198	Outreach and education	38,443
		Partnerships and networking	25,484
		Total	€ 868,040

Foundations



MAVA Foundation

The MAVA Foundation was a charitable foundation which supported activities for the protection of the environment. The existence of the SPP would not have been possible had it not been for the valuable and generous financial support of the MAVA Foundation, from its earliest years until the closure of the foundation in 2022. From 2018 onwards, MAVA funding has been channeled through the Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT).



Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT)

The Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT) is a transboundary conservation trust fund. PONT funding is long term, and designed to ensure the sustainable management of the Prespa Ohrid ecoregion. Since 2018 it has supported the overall SPP programme and been the main funder of the work that the organisation carries out. Thanks to its generous support the SPP is able to continue to plan for the long term and implement its programme to protect and promote Prespa and the wider region. PONT support also provides co-funding for many of the SPP's activities across the whole programme.

Hans Wilsdorf Foundation

The Hans Wilsdorf Foundation is active in the fields of social action, training, cultural, humanitarian aid and the protection of animals and ecosystems. In accordance with the wishes of its founder, it operates in the territory of the canton of Geneva, with the exception of the protection of animals and ecosystems. In this field of nature protection, the foundation contributes to the development of a world where biodiversity and human communities are jointly thriving. It supports initiatives promoting ecological integrity and strengthening the conservation community.

Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF)



The Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) is one of the largest private charitable foundations in the world and provides grants to a wide range of non-profit organisations. In 2018, the SNF launched a prototype collaboration with the SPP, the Municipality of Prespa and several local associations, known as the PoliPrespa project. PoliPrespa sought to contribute to the sustainable development of Prespa using the natural capital of the region as a vehicle, creating a model for sustainable development in protected areas, with activities ranging from support for environmentally friendly agriculture to wetland management, from support for the public library to sports activities for the young, and from cultural activities to educational equipment in Prespa's schools. The SNF also generously continues to support the ongoing restoration and expansion of the Agios Germanos watermill complex.



WWF Greece

The mission of WWF Greece is to preserve biodiversity and climate stability, ensuring a future where people live in harmony with nature, through the protection and restoration of important natural habitats and species, promoting solutions to avert the climate crisis and reducing the human footprint on Earth from the use of natural resources. In fulfilling its purposes and recognising the value of collective action to address common challenges for the benefit of biodiversity conservation, WWF Greece supports environmental organisations that have the expertise and potential to make a positive impact. In this context, WWF Greece is supporting the SPP's work on a pre-feasibility study for the rehabilitation of the Agios Germanos River.



Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation (AVJCF)

The Danish Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation operates all over the world via ownership as well as support of research and nature projects. Many SPP activities, both in the past and today, have been implemented with the generous and longstanding support of the AVJCF. Most recently these have included the project, "Enhancing the Eco-tourism Identity of Prespa", which aimed to strengthen ecotourism and recently published the book "Flora and Vegetation of the Prespa National Park, Greece", as well as the work of PrespaNet in three consecutive projects from 2018-2021, 2021-2024 and 2024-2027, aiming to protect and preserve the rare natural environment of the transboundary region. The SPP and the AVJCF are also proud of their partnership for the pilot project on the acquisition of land around the shore of Lesser Prespa Lake.



A.G. Leventis Foundation

Established in 1979, from the outset the A. G. Leventis Foundation has focussed its charitable programme on society, education and culture. The valuable funding of this donor joins that of the SNF to support the ongoing restoration and expansion of the Agios Germanos watermill complex and the SPP's work to ensure its maintenance as a unique cultural landmark for the area in the future.

EEA Grants



Lastly, the SPP has been receiving support from the Active Citizens Fund programme, funded by Iceland, Lichtenstein and Norway, which forms part of the **EEA Grants** funding mechanism. The programme seeks to develop the long-term sustainability and capacity of civil society, with the aim of strengthening its role in promoting democratic participation, active citizenship and the protection of human rights. The SPP and MedINA, in collaboration with the Captain Vassilis and Carmen Constantakopoulos Foundation, have been funded by the Active Citizens Fund programme to implement its "**Landscape Public Participation Tools – LPPT**" project, which aims to promote public participation in landscape management and planning policies. In Greece, the Fund is managed by the Bodossakis Foundation in partnership with SolidarityNow.

Collaboration

Seeking out collaborative partnerships has been a longstanding and fundamental priority for the SPP since its establishment, and for this reason the organisation has invested in maintaining strong collaborations, as well as in finding new partners in relation to its needs and new activities. For the implementation of its programme the SPP collaborates with its member organisations, a wide network of environmental organisations from Greece and abroad, international organisations, management authorities for protected areas, universities and foundations, as well as local authorities at national and transboundary level.

GREEK ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS:

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

LOCAL & 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

TRANSBOUNDARY & INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS:

African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement
 BirdLife International
 Wetlands International
 IUCN SSC Pelican Specialist Group
 EuroNatur
 Macedonian Ecological Society (MES)
 Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA)
 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

PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT UNITS OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE AGENCY (N.E.C.C.A.)

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

UNIVERSITIES & RESEARCH INSTITUTES:

National Observatory of Athens
 Digital Media & Strategic Communication Lab, Department of Communication & 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 & Kapodistrian University of Athens
 Natural History Museum of Crete (University of Crete)

NETWORKS:

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

Scientific publications

- Alexandrou, O., Höfle, U., Azmanis, P., Malakou, M., Nikolaou, H., & Catsadorakis, G. 2023. Avian influenza and Dalmatian pelican *Pelecanus crispus* mass deaths: Events, lessons learned, future challenges and first results of a research study. 11th Congress of the Hellenic Ecological Society (HELECOS-11), Patras, 4-7 October 2023 (oral presentation).
- Alexandrou, O., Theodoropoulos, I., & G. Catsadorakis. 2023. Assessing the use of time-lapse cameras to estimate breeding success and collect other data in the Dalmatian pelican colony, Prespa, NW Greece. 11th Congress of the Hellenic Ecological Society (HELECOS-11), Patras, 4-7 October 2023 (oral presentation).
- Apostolopoulos, E., Magdalini, E., Koutseri, I. & F.-N. Sakellarakis. 2023. Recording the flora of Mountain Triklarion (Florina, Greece): Preliminary findings and conservation implications. 11th Congress of the Hellenic Ecological Society (HELECOS-11), Patras, 4-7 October 2023 (abstract - poster presentation).
- Blanis, E., Koutseri, I. & G. Fotiadis. 2023. First record of habitat type 3270 in Greece, from the area of Prespa National Park. 11th Congress of the Hellenic Ecological Society (HELECOS-11), Patras, 4-7 October 2023 (abstract - poster presentation).
- Catsadorakis, G. & O. Alexandrou. 2023. Climate change affects the breeding ecology of the Dalmatian pelican: Observations from a 40-year study in Prespa, Florina, Greece. 11th Congress of the Hellenic Ecological Society (HELECOS-11), Patras, 4-7 October 2023 (oral presentation).
- Fotiadou, E., Panou, E., Graikou, K., Sakellarakis, F.-N., & Chinou, I. 2023. Volatiles of all native *Juniperus* species growing in Greece - Antimicrobial Properties. *Foods* 12, 3506. <https://doi.org/10.3390/foods12183506>
- Georgopoulou, E., Alexandrou, O., Manolopoulos, A., Xirouchakis, S., & Catsadorakis, G. 2023. Home range of the Dalmatian pelican in south-east Europe. *European Journal of Wildlife Research* 69, 41. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10344-023-01667-1>
- Graikou, K., Mpishinioti, A., Tsafantakis, N., Maloupa, E., Grigoriadou, K., & Chinou, I. 2023. Comparative Phytochemical Analyses of Flowers from *Primula veris* subsp. *veris* Growing Wild and from Ex Situ Cultivation in Greece. *Foods* 12, 2623. <https://doi.org/10.3390/foods12132623>
- Gonev, A., Pavlov, A., Lama, O., Alexandrou, O., Henderson, J., Hoxha, B., Melovski, D., Shyti, I., Stojanov, A., Trajçe, A., & Catsadorakis, G. 2023. Dietary habits of the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) in the transboundary Prespa basin. *Macedonian Journal of Ecology and Environment*, 25(2), 101-112. <https://doi.org/10.59194/MJEE23252101g>
- Karouzas, I., Smeti, E., Sperelakis, E., Kassari, N. & Dimitriou, I. 2023. Οικολογική ποιότητα και βιοποικιλότητα των ρεμάτων στη Λεκάνη Απορροής των Πρεσπών. 5th European Conference Riverine and Coastal Wetlands for Biodiversity and Climate (BioClim-Wetlands), Bonn, 26-28 September 2023 (poster presentation) [Greek only, title translation: Ecological value and biodiversity of the streams of the Prespa basin]
- Koutseri, I., Fotiadis, G. & F.-N Sakellarakis. 2023. Dynamic changes in wetland vegetation in Prespa National Park. 11th Congress of the Hellenic Ecological Society (HELECOS-11), Patras, 4-7 October 2023 (abstract - poster presentation).

- Sakellarakis F.-N., Bounas A., Manolopoulos A., Paidi Ch., Kazoglou G., Vrachnakis M., Strid A., Bergmeier E. & G. Fotiadis. 2023. Flora Prespae Database: a dynamic tool for research, protection, and management of the flora of the Prespa National Park. 11th Congress of the Hellenic Ecological Society (HELECOS-11), Patras, 4-7 October 2023 (oral presentation).
- Tourlouki, A. & Malakou, M. 2023. Conservation and rehabilitation of Prespa's riparian zones: A holistic approach to biodiversity and ecosystem management. 5th European Conference Riverine and Coastal Wetlands for Biodiversity and Climate (BioClim-Wetlands), Bonn, 26-28 September 2023 (poster presentation)
- Μπισχινώτη, Α. 2023, Χημικές αναλύσεις επιλεγμένων δειγμάτων από το Εθνικό Πάρκο Πρεσπών: • Μελιών • Αρωματικών-φαρμακευτικών φυτών • Άγριας και in vitro παραγόμενης *Primula veris* subsp. *veris*. Postgraduate thesis, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, <https://pergamon.lib.uoa.gr/uoa/dl/object/3328712/file.pdf> [Greek only, title translation: Chemical analyses of selected samples from the Prespa National Park: • Honey • Aromatic-medicinal plants • Wild and in vitro produced *Primula veris* subsp. *veris*]



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