

Project Update: May 2022

On our last field trip, we were pleasantly surprised by the good condition of animals on the island. The dice snakes, vipers and tortoises were all mating and were in good numbers. The pelicans, cormorants and herons are nesting, and eggs and young birds were littered across the island in large numbers. It seems that all species are on a good way to recovery. We are however worried about the avian flu that decimated the pelican population in Scutarii lake and seems to be spreading towards Lake Prespa.



A rather thirsty tortoise

The number of tourists was low, probably because the season hasn't started yet. Still, no concrete efforts are happening into organising regulated tours to the island. The checkpoint in the village Konjsko seems finished but no official notice or information is available. We did encounter only one tour guide that explained to us that there is a backup with the tours because some organisation still have not completed the tours scheduled back in 2020.

We were joined by students from the Faculty of Natural Sciences from Skopje, and we had the chance to talk about our project activities and share some insights into the type of work we do on reptiles. Similarly, for a part of our stay on the island we were joined by a film crew from Germany, which is making a documentary about the dice snakes on Golem Grad. Also, a [mini documentary](#), dedicated to our team on Golem Grad was finally published by MED.

We were again helped by Dr Xavier Bonnet, a renowned herpetologist from CNRS (French National Research Centre) and his PhD student. They immensely helped during field activities and processing of animals.

The fishing ban that is present in Macedonia and Albania up until the 25th May seemed effective at first as we did not see any fishing boat or nets placed in the water. However, it did not take long for our team to spot nets placed in the lake. After this we

spotted multiple dead fish in the water and some snakes with visible, fresh scars from when they were entangled in these nets. There is still no effective way of preventing this activity and no recognition from Macedonian and Albanian sides that activities occur in the Lake.



Marks from the fishing nets clearly visible on this dice snake

We again visited the island of Mal Grad and PPNEA headquarters on Lake Prespa. We were joined by students from Tirana and officials from the Regional Agency of Protected Areas in Albania, for a short tour of the island followed by some intense activities on dice snakes.

We also continued our educational effort in and around Konjsko village. This time around the locals were more welcoming even joining us on a few excursions around the beaches. We tried to get information about the construction of the checkpoint from the NP officials, but we gathered no valuable information. It seems that the length of our presence here eventually earned trust of the locals and they seem a lot more welcoming and eager to help our efforts.

Although our project is officially ending, we feel optimistic for the near future. In a sense, true and renewed conservation area in this area is just starting. With the help of MES and PPNEA, we feel that we have raised enough attention to gather support and that eventually, with continued efforts this will lead to a positive change and preservation of the ecosystem in Lake Prespa.



A goodbye (for now) from our Team!