



euRONATUR
Annual report 2015

Photo: Christiane Runte



Dear Friends of EuroNatur,

As conservationists we face many challenges, some of which are quite overwhelming. However, the 2015 EuroNatur Activity Report shows once again that we can do something about the destruction of our European natural heritage if we try to do so together. At first sight, some of the achievements might appear like the proverbial drop in the ocean. But each of these drops holds the promise of positive change. For example, thanks to the persistent pressure exerted by both national and international conservation organizations, the Albanian government finally pulled the ripcord and in March 2014 enacted a nationwide moratorium on all hunting. Again and again we had publicly called on the powers that be to put an end to the unbridled hunting of migratory birds and other wildlife in the country. While the situation continues to be critical, the moratorium is already having a positive impact: There was a significant decline in commercial hunting tourism in 2015. Instead, the number of birdwatchers

has grown in attractive areas for bird observation such as the Karavasta Lagoon. The hunting moratorium provides new and sustainable sources of income for the local population. A few months ago we received the delightful news that the hunting moratorium in Albania has been extended for another five years. The conditions have never been better for finally making substantial improvements to the catastrophic situation faced by wildlife in Albania. Since wildlife knows no national borders, the effects will even be felt way beyond Albania's borders.

It has always been one of EuroNatur's core objectives to forge connections between countries and regions. It is a matter of deep concern to us that conditions in Europe at present are pointing in the opposite direction: Barbed wire fences have made a come-back, some countries have closed their borders, and parts of the European Union are pursuing a policy of isolation. Our work therefore is more important than ever. The EuroNatur projects are not just about making peace between humans and nature. With their practical work and human encounters, cross-border conservation efforts also bring reconciliation between people and cultures.

The European Green Belt is a classic example of this type of reconciliation. In 2015 the initiative made decisive progress when the European Green Belt Association was formally registered and officially obtained its status as a non-profit association. It now comprises about 30 governmental and non-governmental organizations from fifteen countries! The great task before it is to establish more firmly the idea behind the Green Belt, with all of its four sections, in society at large and in the political sphere, and to dovetail conservation activities across borders. Here too we are on the right track.

We would not be able to implement our projects without the support of our donors, supporters and sponsors. I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to you for your loyalty! On the following pages we are highlighting some of what we have achieved together in 2015.

I trust that this report will make interesting reading.
Yours sincerely,

Christel Schroeder
President of EuroNatur

Photo: Goran Safrek - Vjosa river



EuroNatur – Nature conservation without borders

EuroNatur, the European Nature Heritage Fund, lives up to its name: There are virtually no other organisations that focus their project activities on transboundary conservation in Europe as strongly as we do. This European focus is enshrined in EuroNatur's Statutes which set out the organisation's commitments to include the "implementation of and support for nature conservation projects in Europe aiming at the protection, maintenance and reintroduction of fauna and flora in the wild". We see it as our core task to overcome the many national borders in Europe in a positive manner and to enable nature conservation efforts at the level of the European continent.

What are the particularly distinct features of EuroNatur's work?

- **Transboundary protection of wild fauna:**
EuroNatur engages in protection measures for species of wild fauna such as wolves, bears, lynx, Mediterranean monk seals, migratory birds and their habitats in Europe.

- **Large-scale protected areas in outstanding landscapes:**

We safeguard large-scale, intact natural landscapes and ecologically valuable cultural landscapes in Europe. In this context, one focus of EuroNatur's work is on projects along the "Balkan Green Belt".

- **We don't shoot from the hip but we're in it for the long haul:**

EuroNatur fosters long-term relationships and works on lasting successes rather than leaving important regions to their own devices on foot of implementing short-term projects.

- **Capacity building:**

We primarily work with regional partner organisations on site and provide advanced training for our partners in the EuroNatur project areas to enable them to effectively protect nature in their own regions.

- **Conservation WITH people:**

We promote sustainable development in rural areas and offer functioning examples of regional development in harmony with nature. This helps us to win over local people as partners for achieving our conservation objectives.

- **Presence both in the political arena and at the practical level:**

EuroNatur is an advocate of European nature in Brussels. We fight for a reorientation of the European agricultural policy to render it more favourable both in economic and environmental terms. And we fight for a conservation policy that opens up future prospects for both people and nature. Moreover we campaign for the actual implementation of planned measures for the protection of European natural heritage.

- **Networks for nature:**

EuroNatur does not only engage in establishing an ecological network of the most important ecosystems in Europe but also brings together scientists, partners in conservation, farmers, politicians and business people from various countries, thus establishing transboundary communication and understanding.

Photo: Kerstin Sauer - Radolfzell on Lake Constance



A Foundation to protect Europe's nature

EuroNatur is a non-profit foundation established in 1987 by Friends of the Earth Germany (Bund für Umwelt- und Naturschutz Deutschland, BUND), the German Federation for Nature Conservation (Naturschutzbund Deutschland, NABU) and German Environmental Aid (Deutsche Umwelthilfe, DUH). It is headquartered in Radolfzell. EuroNatur is legally, organizationally and financially independent, autonomous and non-partisan. A foundation having legal personality (rechtsfähige Stiftung) such as EuroNatur differs from a registered voluntary association (Verein) in that it has no membership base. The latest exemption notice (Freistellungsbescheid) was issued by the tax authority in Singen on December 14, 2015. EuroNatur is a member of, amongst others, the following organizations: European Green Belt Association, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), European Habitats Forum, German League for Nature Conservation and Environmental Protection (DNR), Association of German Foundations, AgrarBündnis e.V., Europarc, and Wetlands International – European Association.

The current Statutes (in German only) can be downloaded at www.euronatur.org/Organisation.1247.0.html.

Presiding Committee provides strategic orientation

New members of the Presiding Committee are proposed by existing members and elected to the Committee by majority vote. The President is elected from among the members of the Presiding Committee. In 2015, EuroNatur's Presiding Committee had six voting members, all of whom served in a voluntary capacity. Their duties include determining the organization's strategic orientation, approving annual budgets, and approving the annual accounts. The Presiding Committee oversees the work of the Executive Director and the Director for Nature Conservation Policy with a view to its lawfulness, expediency and economic efficiency. Detailed Committee member profiles can be accessed at www.euronatur.org.

Board of Trustees serves as an advisory committee

EuroNatur's Presiding Committee can nominate persons to the Board of Trustees who support the organization's concerns. In 2015, EuroNatur's Board of Trustees had 22 members, all of whom served in a voluntary capacity. They support EuroNatur in three areas: technical advice, especially with respect to access to funding; public relations work; establishing the organization and its work more firmly within society. The Chairman of the Board of Trustees attends the meetings of the Presiding Committee in an advisory capacity.

Detailed profiles of the Members of the Board of Trustees can be accessed at www.euronatur.org.

Salaried management staff in charge of operative implementation

The full-time salaried management team consisting of the Executive Director and the Director for Nature Conservation Policy is in charge of and responsible for steering the organization's operative work. In 2015, EuroNatur maintained two offices in Germany and employed a total of 21 staff. Central functions such as managing donors, bookkeeping, general administration and public relations work are based in Radolfzell at Lake Constance, as are most of the project management activities. The conservation policy office is based in Rheinbach near Bonn. More than 30 voluntary collaborators support the work of EuroNatur Foundation.

EuroNatur Service GmbH

Almost twenty years ago, the European Nature Heritage Fund established a wholly owned subsidiary, the EuroNatur Service GmbH, a limited company. This small but efficient service provider publishes and markets landscape and wildlife calendars and guidebooks on EuroNatur's project regions as well as a wide range of reference books and exclusive items. Additionally the EuroNatur Service GmbH has specialized on layout and mail order services which it provides to the European Nature Heritage Fund and other clients.

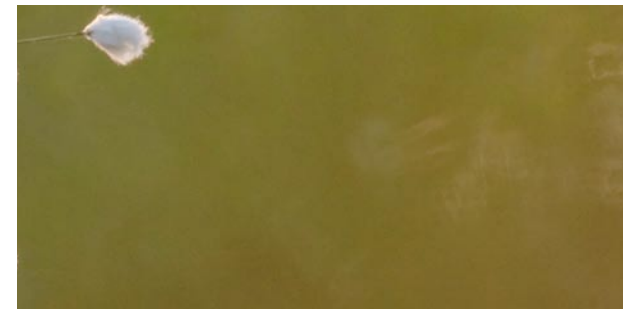
Important project areas

- ① Cantabrian Mountains (Spain)
- ② Senne (Germany)
- ③ Brandenburg (Germany)
- ④ Narew/Podlasie (Poland)
- ⑤ Western Beskidy Mountains (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia)
- ⑥ Bohemian Forest/Šumava (Czech Republic)
- ⑦ Mura-Drava-Danube „Amazon of Europe“
(Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia)
- ⑧ Sava floodplains (Croatia)
- ⑨ Livanjsko Polje (Bosnia-Herzegovina)
- ⑩ Neretva-Delta (Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina)
- ⑪ Labudovo Okno (Serbia)
- ⑫ Bojana-Buna and Lake Skadar (Montenegro, Albania)
- ⑬ Karavasta Lagoon (Albania)
- ⑭ Prokletije/Bjeshket e Nemuna (Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo)
- ⑮ Munella Mountains and Mavrovo National Park (Albania, Macedonia)
- ⑯ Jablanica-Shebenik Mountains (Albania, Macedonia)
- ⑰ Illinska-Plakenska Mountains (Macedonia)
- ⑱ Šar Mountains (Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo)
- ⑲ Vjosa (Albania)
- ⑳ Belasitsa Mountains (Bulgaria)
- ㉑ Osogovo Mountains (Bulgaria, Macedonia)
- ㉒ Sakar (Bulgaria)
- ㉓ Carpathian Mountains (Romania)
- ㉔ Northern Dinarides (Croatia)
- ㉕ Tilos (Greece)





Photo: Willi Rolles - Bog cotton



EuroNatur's project foci in 2015

In 2015, the projects implemented by EuroNatur Foundation focused on the following areas:

- Protecting the European Green Belt and further advancing the European Green Belt Initiative
- Protecting Europe's rivers
- Protecting migratory birds in Europe
- Large mammal protection in Europe
- Agricultural policy, biodiversity policy, energy policy

This Annual Report describes in some detail a selection of projects under individual priority headings. EuroNatur Foundation has supported and implemented a number of additional projects and initiatives over and above these priorities, a more detailed description of which is beyond the scope of this report.

Priority "European Green Belt"

Funding spent on this priority: 272,000 Euro

Projects:

Development of the European Green Belt as part of green infrastructure (Partners: BUND; Funding: BfN with funds provided by BMUB, EuroNatur's donors), Strengthening the cooperation along the

Balkan Green Belt (Partners: IUCN, PPNEA, BBF, Green Balkans, SPP, ERA, MES, CZIP, BPSSS, DAYKO, ASER; Funding: DBU), **Nature conservation and sustainable development along the Green Belt in Albania** (Partners: PPNEA; Funding: BfN with funds provided by BMUB, EuroNatur's donors), **Transboundary protection for the Belasitsa mountains** (Partners: BBF Belasitsa, Belasitsa Nature Park, Lake Kerkini National Park, Environmental Association Planetum-Strumica; Funding: DBU, EuroNatur's donors), **Transboundary protection for the Osogovo mountains** (Partners: BBF, MES; Funding: ZGF, DBU, EuroNatur's donors), **Biodiversity protection in the Macedonian Šar Mountains** (Partner: MES; Funding: DBU, EuroNatur's donors), **Protection of the Šumava National Park** (Partners: Hnutí Duha; Funding: BUND, EuroNatur's donors)

Priority "Protecting Europe's rivers"

Funding spent on this priority: 426,000 Euro

Projects:

"Save the Blue Heart of Europe" campaign (Partners: Riverwatch, MES, Eko-svest, Front 21/42, EcoAlbania, HDZPP, Neza Posnjak; Funding: Mava Foundation, Manfred-Hermesen-Stiftung for Nature Conservation and Environmental Protection, Patagonia, EuroNatur's donors), **Protecting one of Europe's important lifelines – Support for the Transboundary Biosphere Reserve "Mura-Drava-Danube"** (Partners: Green Osijek, HDZPP, WWF; Funding: EuroNatur's donors, Mava Foundation), **Protecting the Sava floodplains** (Partners: HDZPP, Lonjsko Polje Nature Park;

Funding: EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **SavaParks network for transboundary protection for the Sava river landscape** (Partners: Lonjsko Polje Nature Park, HDZPP, all members of the SavaParks network; Funding: Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation, Michael Otto Foundation for Environmental Protection, EuroNatur's donors)

Priority "Agricultural policy, biodiversity policy, energy policy"

Funding spent on this priority: 327,000 Euro

Projects:

Agricultural platform – alliance consisting of roughly 30 associations representing the concerns of nature conservation, environmental protection, animal welfare, family farming, organic farming, and development policy in the process for the reform of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (Funding: BfN with funds provided by BMUB, Ludwig Raue Memorial Fund), **Guidance for the establishment of regional, decentralized economic and supply structures in Podlasia/Poland with a focus on renewable energy** (Partners: Białystok Marshal's Office, Politechnika Białystok, the town of Lapy, Energievision Frankental e.V., the town of Wunsiedel and the Wunsiedel Department of Public Works; Funding: UBA with funds provided by BMUB), **Critical input to the "fitness check" by the EU Commission of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives** (Partner: EHF; Funding: EuroNatur's donors)

Priority "Protecting migratory birds in Europe"

Funding spent on this priority: 493,000 Euro

Projects:

Safeguarding important resting areas for migratory birds along the **Adriatic Flyway** (Partners: HDZPP, Baobab, BIOM, DOPPS, BPSSS, CZIP, Naše ptice, Naša bastina, APAWA, MES, PPNEA; Funding: Mava Foundation, EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **Protecting the Ulcinj salt flats** (Partners: CZIP; Funding: Mava Foundation, EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **Protecting the Tivat salt flats** (Partners: CZIP, Tivat municipality, Morsko Dobro; Funding: DBU, Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation, EuroNatur's donors), **Optimizing management at the Hutovo Blato Nature Park, with special emphasis on controlling poaching** (Partners: Hutovo Blato Nature Park, Naše ptice, Lijepa naša; Funding: CEPF, Turdus – bird and nature conservancy, Schaffhausen/CH, EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **Protecting the Dalmatian pelicans at Lake Skadar and in the Karavasta Lagoon** (Partners: Noé Conservation, Lake Skadar National Park administration, Tour du Valat, APAWA, CZIP, Natural History Museum of Montenegro, Lake Kerkini Management Authority, Divjaka-Karavasta National Park administration, SPP, IUCN/WI-Pelican Specialist Group, INCA, PPNEA; Funding: Mava Foundation, CEPF, CMS, Botiaux Dulac Stiftung, Lush cosmetics company, EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **Protecting Ospreys in Asturias** (Partners: FAPAS; Funding: EuroNatur's donors), **Protecting migratory birds on Tilos island** (Partners: TPA; Funding: EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **Protecting migratory birds in the Senne landscape** (Partners: Paderborn-Senne Biological Station; Funding: Gelsenwasser AG (water and energy supply company), Stadtwerke Bielefeld GmbH – public utility, EuroNatur's donors), **Protecting the Eastern imperial eagle at Sakar** (Partners: Green Balkans; Funding: EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **Lesser kestrel reintroduction at Sakar** (Partners: Green Balkans, Dema; Funding: Life+, EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **Protecting of European wet meadows and pastures, in particular in the European Stork Villages** (Partners: Ciconia Foundation, European Stork Villages; Funding: Pancivis Foundation, Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation, Bristol Foundation, EuroNatur's donors and sponsors)

Priority "Large mammal protection in Europe"

Funding spent on this priority: 439,000 Euro

Projects:

Protecting brown bears in the Cantabrian Mountains (Partner: FAPAS; Funding: EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **Protecting brown bears in the eastern Carpathians** (Partner: Milvus; Funding: WWF Germany, EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **Protecting primary forests in Romania** (Partner: Agent Green; Funding: EuroNatur's donors), **Protecting brown bears in Albania** (Partner: PPNEA; Funding: EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **Protecting brown bears in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro** (Partner: CZIP; Funding: EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **Protecting brown bears, lynx and grey wolves in the northern Dinarides** (Partner: University of Zagreb, Carnivora Magna; Funding: LIFE+, EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme** (Partners: MES, PPNEA, CZIP, Finch, ERA, KAE, KORA; Funding: Mava Foundation, EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **Protection of grey wolf populations that have recolonized western Poland** (Partner: Wilk; Funding: Lappat Foundation, EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **Protection of large carnivores in Poland, with special emphasis on wolves and lynx** (Partner: MRI; Funding: Elisabeth Seifert-Becker's endowment fund for the protection of wolves in memory of Viktoria Neumann, Emilie and Franz Seifert, EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **Maintaining the ecological integrity of migration corridors for large carnivores (especially wolves) in Poland** (Partners: Conservation organisation "Workshop for all Beings"; Funding: EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **Transboundary protection of wolf populations in the Western Beskids** (Partners: Hnutí Duha, Wilk; Funding: EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **Protection of large carnivores in Baden-Wuerttemberg, Guidelines for dealing with wolves** (Partners: EuroNatur is a member of the 'Arbeitskreis Wolf' working group as part of the 'AG Lynx Baden Wuerttemberg' working group, Funding: EuroNatur's donors and sponsors), **Mediterranean monk seals – Cap Blanc** (Partner: CBD Habitat; Funding: EuroNatur's donors and sponsors)

Abbreviations

Partners:

APAWA: Association for Protection of Aquatic Wildlife of Albania
ASER: Romania Explorers Speleological Association
BBF: Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation
BIOM: BirdLife Croatia
BPSSS: Bird Protection Study and Society of Serbia
CZIP: Center for Protection and Research of Birds of Montenegro
DAYKO: Foundation of Protection of the Natural Life
DOPPS: BirdLife Slovenia
EHF: European Habitats Forum
ERA: Environmentally Responsible Action group
FAPAS: Wild animal protection fund (Spain)
HDZPP: Croatian Society for Bird and Nature Protection
INCA: Institute of Nature Conservation in Albania
IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature
KAE: Kosovo Association of Ecologists
KORA: Coordinated Research Projects for the Protection and Management of Carnivores in Switzerland
MES: Macedonian Ecological Society
MRI: Mammal Research Institute
PPNEA: Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania
SPP: Society for the Protection of Prespa
TPA: Tilos Park Association
WI: Wetlands International
Wilk: Conservation Association "Wolf"
WWF: World Wide Fund For Nature

Funding:

BUND: Friends of the Earth Germany
BfN: German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation
BMUB: Federal Environment Ministry
CEPF: Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund
CMS: Convention on Migratory Species
DBU: German Federal Environmental Foundation
UBA: German Federal Environment Agency
ZGF: Frankfurt Zoological Society

Photo: Gunther Willinger - Bulgarian-Turkish border area



Borders separate. Nature unites

The European Green Belt represents one thing above all else and that is connectivity. As an ecosystem corridor with an extraordinarily high level of biodiversity it stretches along the route of the former border between East and West from the Barents Sea all the way down to the Black Sea. Habitats that have become hard to find elsewhere in Europe, such as species-rich cultural landscapes as well as wild mountain and river landscapes, are strung here like precious pearls on a necklace. Almost undisturbed by human impacts for a long time, unique ecosystems were able to thrive. Today they are of key importance to the protection of endangered species of flora and fauna such as brown bears and lynx.

Threat of destruction

With the historical turning point – the beginning of the post-Cold War period in the early 1990s – these natural treasures became freely accessible to people. Biodiverse forests became fragmented due to road construction, near-natural river landscapes were channelized, and almost untouched mountain regions came under serious pressure from timber extraction and ski tourism. In the Balkans in particular the Green Belt is in grave danger.

More than the sum of its parts

Our aim is to develop the European Green Belt into a European-wide ecosystem network that protects and interconnects the most important habitats. To this end we must increase awareness of the idea behind the European Green Belt in society and better coordinate the individual projects along the Green Belt. EuroNatur is the regional coordinator of conservation activities in the Balkan Green Belt. In this role we are developing pilot projects for successful, transboundary cooperation that can also serve as templates for other European regions.



Selected EuroNatur projects in 2015

European Green Belt Initiative: Many heads – one vision

Geographical location in Europe

Ecosystem network with an extraordinarily high level of biodiversity, forming a 12,500 km long corridor along the route of the former Iron Curtain (Map p. 8). The European Green Belt connects eight biogeographical regions and 24 nations. The Balkan Green Belt is its southernmost section.

Status

Conservation activities carried out by the numerous actors involved are coordinated by four regional coordinators – one for each of the Green Belt's four sections. EuroNatur is the regional coordinator of conservation activities in the Balkan Green Belt. There had not been an overall European-level coordination unit since the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) laid down this mandate in 2010. Since 2011, EuroNatur and BUND, as part of an international steering group, have been coordinating the initiative. In 2014, the European Green Belt Association was established, which represents the European Green Belt initiative and is in charge of coordination. Governmental and non-governmental stakeholders work together in the association. EuroNatur and BUND were appointed as chair and deputy chair respectively.

Objectives

Our aim is to work together with all the stakeholders involved to structurally advance and bring substantive progress to the European Green Belt Initiative, to gain backing and support for the idea behind the Green Belt in society at large and in the political sphere, and to dovetail individual projects more effectively. Our aim is to develop the initiative into an influential and powerful movement, especially in the Balkans.

Selected activities in 2015

- The initiative was presented at important EU-level events including the "Green Week", a conference for conservation experts on issues of European environmental policy.
- A travelling exhibition on the European Green Belt was opened in the presence of representatives of the European Parliament and the EU Commission; it was on display in Brussels in early 2015.
- High-profile PR events such as a photography competition for the Balkan Green Belt or the "Green Belt Day" have successfully been prepared for 2016.

Important achievements in 2015

- In November 2015, the European Green Belt Association officially obtained its status as non-profit association – an important precondition for long-term funding to be allocated to this major project.
- At the European policy level, the significance of the European Green Belt Initiative is gaining ever greater recognition.
- Four new members joined the European Green Belt Association in 2015. It now comprises 29 governmental and non-governmental representatives from 15 countries.

Outlook

Our aim is to further foster exchange between stakeholders and to enhance the initiative's image. Especially in the Balkans we are working on raising awareness for the ecological and economic value of the natural treasures contained in the Green Belt. Regional organizations are to be given impetus for transboundary cooperation. Moreover, we are making every effort to ensure that the protection of the Green Belt is given consideration at the European policy level.

Partners: BUND, IUCN and all stakeholders in the European Green Belt

Funding: BfN with funds provided by BMUB, DBU, EuroNatur's donors



Belasitsa: Conservation in the tri-border region

Geographical location in Europe

The Belasitsa Mountains (Map p. 5, No. 20) are located in the tri-border area of Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece. They form one of the cornerstones of the Balkan Green Belt. The project area also includes Lake Kerkini National Park in Greece which is located only a few kilometres south of Belasitsa Mountain.

Status

The Belasitsa Mountains with their centuries-old sweet chestnut and beech forests are an important refuge for rare species of flora and fauna. Lake Kerkini with its extensive alluvial forests offers significant breeding and wintering areas for endangered bird species including the Dalmatian pelican. It is a big plus that the fall of the Iron Curtain made it possible for this transboundary natural treasure to be experienced by all; its transboundary protection however is a major challenge. Since 2013, EuroNatur in cooperation with its international partners has worked towards creating the preconditions for the region's protection. The project is primarily being coordinated by EuroNatur's Bulgarian partner organization BBF.

Objectives

Our aim is to foster transboundary cooperation and to create an awareness in the local population of Belasitsa as a jointly shared natural landscape unit. The focus here is on environmental education and the establishment of sustainable nature-based tourism. The overall objective is the conservation for posterity of the Belasitsa region's natural treasures.

Selected activities in 2015

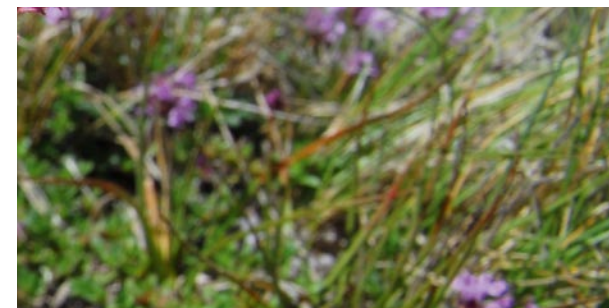
- All the tourism offers and destinations relevant to ecotourism in the Belasitsa region were compiled in a catalogue which now contains detailed descriptions of approximately 40 sites in Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece.
- In August 2015, an international youth work camp was held in Macedonia. The Macedonian and Bulgarian participants experienced Belasitsa's natural assets and jointly developed ideas for sustainable development in the region.
- The photo exhibition entitled "The Incredible Belasitsa" presented this precious part of the Balkan Green Belt to the public and was displayed, amongst other places, at the Natural History Museum in Sofia.

Important achievements in 2015 and outlook

- Belasitsa's popularity as a promising region for sustainable nature-based tourism, environmental education and international cooperation has significantly increased as a result of the project.
- Regional tourism providers increasingly see Belasitsa as one physiographic region uniting three countries and recognize this as an asset. With the publication of the catalogue in 2015, every tourism operator in the Belasitsa region was given a valuable source of information on the available ecotourism offers.
- The transboundary cooperation will continue beyond the official end of the project: In November 2015, the project partners in all three countries agreed to continue to implement transboundary conservation measures in the Belasitsa region and to support initiatives working towards balanced regional development.

Partners: BBF Belasitsa (Bulgaria), Belasitsa Nature Park (Bulgaria), Lake Kerkini National Park (Greece), Environmental Association Planetum-Strumica (Macedonia)

Funding: DBU, EuroNatur's donors



"Yes" to the Šar Mountains National Park!

Geographical location in Europe

The Šar Mountains (Map p. 5, No. 18) as part of the Balkan Green Belt are located in the north-westernmost region of Macedonia. A greater part of the mountain range extends into Kosovo and a smaller part is located in neighbouring Albania.

Status

Particularly the Macedonian part of the Šar Mountain massif is a true biodiversity hotspot, providing precious habitat for numerous endemic plant species, a wealth of butterfly species and large mammals such as grey wolves and brown bears. The Macedonian Šar Mountains also connect the rare Balkan lynx's (please refer to p. 24-25) core range – the Mavrovo National Park to the south – with potential lynx ranges to the north. This diversity is however under threat. The natural treasures of the Šar Mountains are at serious risk from clear-felling, construction developments, and unsustainable hunting. In contrast to neighbouring Kosovo, the Macedonian part of the Šar Mountains has no protective status whatsoever. The Macedonian government has thus far failed to take any steps towards protecting the area, despite repeated proclamations to this effect.

Objectives

We hope to gain the support of the local communities for a national park designation. Our aim is to increase grassroots pressure in order to compel the Macedonian government to designate the Šar Mountains as a national park. Moreover we aim at initiating sustainable natural resource use in the region.

Selected activities in 2015

- As part of a public forum in Tetovo the idea of a national park was promoted. Thirty-six representatives of the participating non-governmental organizations supported the idea.
- In May, representatives of local conservation organizations established the "Friends of Shara" action group and initiated a campaign promoting national park designation.
- In September, the action group organized a rock concert with a view to promoting the idea of a national park amongst young people.
- In the autumn of 2015, the members of the action group were taken on a study trip to the Black Forest National Park where the Macedonian conservationists saw how a successful campaign for national park designation can be run.

Important achievements in 2015

- Not only has the campaign for national park designation been initiated but it has also developed its own strong dynamic. The "Friends of Shara" action group autonomously organizes events and promotes the idea of a national park in the general public.

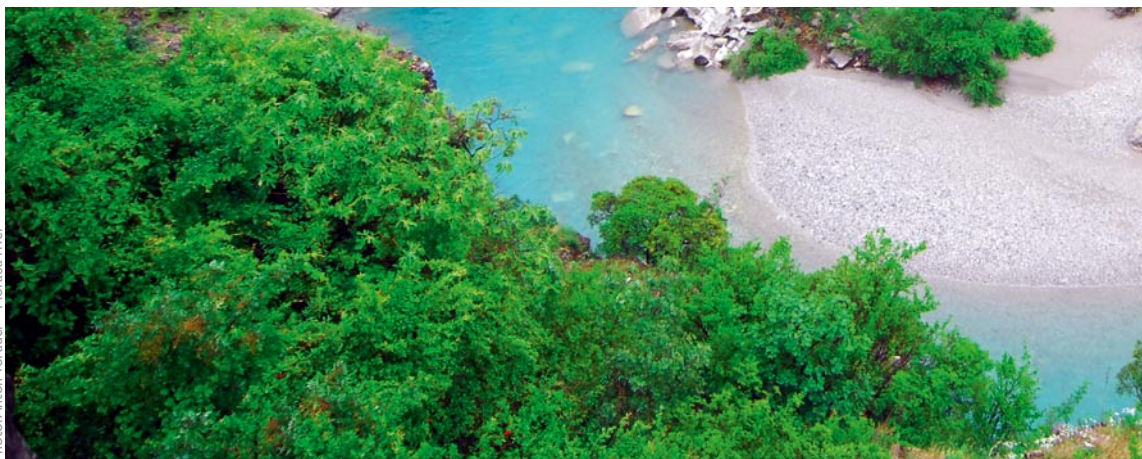
Outlook

The campaign for national park designation is ongoing. In order to put the Šar Mountains on a trajectory of sustainable natural resource use, our aim is create compelling models. We will support local initiatives engaged in developing ecologically compatible tourism and in the improved marketing of cheeses and other local products.

Partners: MES

Funding: DBU, EuroNatur's donors

Photo: Anton Voraue - Morača river



Dynamic diversity

Free-flowing rivers are amongst the most varied and biodiverse ecosystems in our part of the world. The rhythms of rising and falling waters in these river landscapes create a paradise not only for resting and breeding birds, fish, mussels and snails but also fertile land for humans, space for recreation, and a rich food base.

Time is running out for Europe's rivers!

The uncontrolled expansion of hydropower and development for inland navigation threaten even the last of these valuable ecological arteries of the European landscapes. A hydropower plant fundamentally destroys a river's diversity as well as its natural dynamic; it blocks and alters the river's discharge. However, it is not easy to recognize the full extent of hydropower impact since much of the damage is hidden under water. „It is water still“ is a commonly held notion. But a natural river has as little in common with an impounded reservoir as a primeval forest has with a spruce plantation – both consist of trees but the ecosystems are fundamentally different. The same is true for rivers and reservoirs – one is diverse, the other monotonous. Hydropower is neither a renewable nor a “green” form of energy generation per se. It has massive adverse and long-standing impacts on rivers, floodplains and biodiversity, if it does not destroy them outright, and for good. River channelization for shipping purposes destroys a river's natural dynamic, cuts it off from its floodplain and stops the pattern of flooding and drying out to which riparian ecosystems have adapted; at the same time the risk of downstream flooding increases.

Our mission

Together with our partner organizations we aim at protecting the last remaining intact ecological arteries on our continent and strive for their sustainable utilization. Shipping must adapt to rivers – not the other way round. Hydropower projects must give due consideration to aspects of nature conservation and species protection, rather than destroy species and habitats under the guise of “green” energy generation.

The focus in 2015

Our continent's last pristine river paradises can be found in the Balkans. They are one of the major European biodiversity hotspots. Nonetheless the Balkan rivers are about to be hit by a dam tsunami of alarming proportions. Our attempts to save the Blue Heart of Europe continued to keep us busy in 2015.



Photo: Paola Lucchesi - Una river

Selected EuroNatur projects in 2015

Transboundary network to protect the Sava river

Geographical location in Europe

Sava river along its entire course from its source in the Julian Alps to its confluence with the Danube at Belgrade. Along its length of 950 km, the Sava river connects four countries: Slovenia, Croatia, (Map p. 5, No. 8), Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia.

Status

Massive pressure is being exerted on the Sava river by the hydropower lobby (please refer to p. 14-15). Short-sighted planning threatens to destroy one of Europe's most important river landscapes, to weaken the region's sustainable development, and to further heighten flood risks. There are already several protected areas along the Sava river that significantly contribute to biodiversity protection and ecological regional development. However, to date too few measures have been implemented and for the longest time there had been no transboundary concept. The protected area administrations and conservation organizations active in the area had largely been working in isolation. There had been little or no exchange or mutual support. In order to remedy this situation, the SavaParks Network was established in 2014.

Objectives

The aim of the SavaParks Network is to render the work of the protected area administrations more effective beyond national borders and provide the river with transboundary backing along its entire course. SavaParks promotes the river landscape's conservation and sustainable use.

Selected activities in 2015

- A manual containing basic standards of sustainable development in the Sava river landscape was completed and sent to the European Commission and the International Sava Commission, amongst others. In this manner we are influencing the political discourse and countering with a positive vision the plans for the destruction of the river landscape.
- We have selected nine pilot projects addressing nature conservation, ecological regional development, and river restoration along the Sava river and we are providing technical and financial support to these projects.

Important achievements in 2015

- The SavaParks Network has gained strength: At the occasion of the World Wetland Day 2015, representatives of protected area administrations and other public institutions in all the countries bordering the Sava river signed a joint declaration of intent. They endeavour to engage in national and transboundary efforts for the protection of the Sava river's ecological assets. The SavaParks Network now has twenty members.
- In the Una National Park (a member of the SavaParks Network) we contributed to preventing the construction of two hydropower plants. The Una river is one of the most valuable rivers in the Sava catchment.

Outlook

We are working on making the SavaParks Network even more powerful. The pilot projects addressing nature conservation, ecological regional development, and river restoration will be completed in 2016.

Partners: Lonjsko Polje Nature Park, HDZPP

Funding: Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation, Michael Otto Foundation for Environmental Protection, EuroNatur's donors



"Save the Blue Heart of Europe" campaign

Geographical location in Europe

Streams and rivers in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia–Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Kosovo. Key areas of the "Save the Blue Heart of Europe" campaign are the Mavrovo National Park (Map p. 5, No. 15) in Macedonia, the Vjosa river (Map p. 5, No. 19) in Albania, and the Sava river in Slovenia and Croatia (Map p. 5, No. 8).

Status

The wild and pristine river landscapes of the Balkan Peninsula are some of Europe's greatest natural treasures. Our continent's "Blue Heart of Europe" is beating in the Balkans. However, the Balkan rivers are about to be hit by a dam tsunami of even greater proportions than previously thought: If small plants are included in the count, the total number of planned hydropower projects is well above 2500; many of them are being supported by international banks and companies. Hardly any river would remain untouched.

Mavrovo National Park:

The hydropower lobby does not even respect protected areas. Mavrovo is one of Europe's oldest national parks and a jewel in the crown of the European Green Belt. More than twenty planned hydropower plants threaten to destroy biodiversity that has developed here over thousands of years. The critically endangered Balkan lynx (please refer to p. 24–25) is under particular threat, amongst other species and habitats.

Sava:

The Sava river with its enormous alluvial forests, meanders, and agricultural lands under the influence of the river's water regime gives rise to one of the most interesting riverscapes in Europe. But the existing hydropower plants in the upper reaches of the Sava catchment are already causing significant damage downstream. Nonetheless there are plans for additional plants all along the Sava river as well as in almost all of its tributaries.

Vjosa:

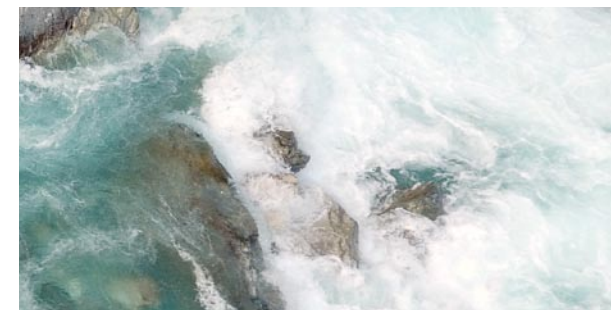
The Vjosa river is one of the last remaining truly wild rivers on our continent but it is threatened with total destruction and some of the destructive developments are already in motion. Numerous hydropower plants are projected along the Vjosa and its tributaries. Practically every single one of the tributaries is to be dammed and diverted.

Objectives

Aided by the "Save the Blue Heart of Europe" campaign, which commenced in 2013, our objective is to stop the hydropower projects in the three key areas described above. At the same time we aim to draw the national and international public's attention to the Balkan rivers' beauty and to the risks they face. It is not our aim to completely block hydropower in the Balkan Peninsula. However, plans for hydropower expansion must urgently take into consideration aspects of nature conservation and species protection. Therefore we strive for a comprehensive concept that sets out rivers and river sections which under no circumstances must be subjected to engineering measures.

Selected activities in 2015

- At the European level we have drawn the attention of the EU Commission and the European Parliament, amongst others, to the impending destruction of the Balkan rivers.
- In order to close knowledge gaps and bolster the case for the conservation of the Balkan rivers, we have commissioned several studies (i.a. on the extent of the impending dam tsunami, on hydropower projects in protected areas, and on the financiers behind the hydropower plants).



Mavrovo National Park:

- In December 2015, the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention, one of the most significant conservation conventions in Europe, took a decision in the Mavrovo case. We had informed the Bern Convention of the planned hydropower construction projects in Mavrovo National Park in 2013.
- We requested statements from the financiers (World Bank and EBRD) of the two large-scale hydropower projects in Mavrovo National Park.

Vjosa:

- As part of a personal meeting we promoted the designation of a Vjosa National Park with the Albanian Prime Minister.
- In April 2015, we participated in a protest involving approximately 150 people, primarily local residents, against a hydropower plant that is under construction at the Benca river, one of the ecologically most valuable tributaries to the Vjosa.

Sava:

- We highlighted the serious threat faced by the Huchen due to the planned hydropower projects along the Sava river and published the findings of the expert study at an international press conference. The Huchen, or Danube Salmon, is one of the rarest fish species in our latitudes.
- The river bed of the Slovenian section of the Sava river was studied for the presence of invertebrate "gap species"

(e.g. freshwater snails, rotifers and aquatic insects) that are strictly protected under Slovenian wildlife legislation. This study aims to help make a case against the multitude of hydropower projects.

Important achievements in 2015

- In their reports on the Europe accession countries' progress, the European Commission highlighted the expansion of hydropower as a significant threat to European natural heritage in the Balkans. The Commission advocated that any investment into hydropower expansion must urgently take into account the requirements of nature conservation.
- The Standing Committee of the Bern Convention called on the Macedonian government to stop all construction projects in Mavrovo National Park and to conduct an extensive Strategic Environmental Assessment. As a result, the financiers of the two planned large-scale hydropower plants in Mavrovo National Park withdrew, at least for the time being, from financing the projects.
- We achieved that the assessment of the environmental impacts of the planned Mokrice power plant on the Slovenian Sava river will also need to include transboundary effects, i.e. it will need to be extended into Croatia. This is buying valuable time. The hydropower plant would, inter alia,

damage an upstream spawning ground of the Pigo, a fish species protected under EU law.

- In the section of the Sava river located near Mokrice, "gap species" were recorded, the occurrence of which may be a "knock-out criterion" for the construction of the hydropower plant.
- The studies we commissioned have helped to considerably improve the knowledge base on the status of the Balkan rivers and have thus significantly improved the chances of our campaign to be successful.

Outlook

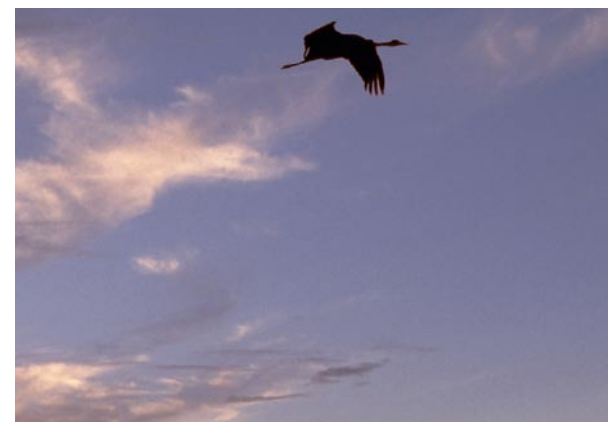
We have been successful in increasing the public's awareness, at both national and international levels, of the outstanding ecological value of the Balkan rivers and of the threats they face. We will continue to conduct the "Save the Blue Heart" campaign with great intensity. This will continue to involve public awareness-raising and mobilization of civil society in the affected countries, as well as media relations and lobbying at the national and European policy levels.

Partners: Riverwatch, MES, Eko-svest, Front 21/42, EcoAlbania, HDZPP, Neza Posnjak

Funding: Mava Foundation, Manfred-Hermesen-Stiftung for Nature Conservation and Environmental Protection, Patagonia, EuroNatur's donors

Internet: www.balkanrivers.net

Photo: Bruno Dittich - Migrating cranes



Protecting migratory birds in Europe

Every spring and autumn the nomads of the sky repeat their journeys between different climatic regions in order to benefit from their respective advantages. Science still has not unlocked all the secrets of bird migration. But one thing is for sure: It's always a dangerous journey!

In restless transit

On their long journey between their summer and wintering grounds, intact resting places allowing migratory birds to feed and recover their strength are becoming ever rarer. Habitat destruction and bird hunting are rampant. And the situation in the breeding areas is no different, with habitats for white storks, eagles, cranes and other species becoming increasingly scarce.

Our mission

Our aim is to not only protect Europe's migratory birds in their breeding grounds but also to ensure they have safe and intact resting and wintering grounds at their disposal. A special geographical focus of our work in 2015 continued to be on the Balkan Peninsula where our efforts are primarily targeted at curbing illegal bird hunting.

European allies

Successful protection of migratory birds requires a strong network of allies. In 2015, EuroNatur was able to extend

its cooperation with international organizations and with the Secretariats of a number of multilateral environmental agreements. Amongst others, we work closely together with AEWA, the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement, with a view to safeguarding the Adriatic Flyway for bird species such as cranes, grey herons, garganeys and many others. Almost all of the countries along the Adriatic Flyway are signatories to the agreement.

Under the umbrella of Wetlands International, EuroNatur together with seven other conservation organizations from all over Europe work to protect Europe's alluvial plains, peatlands and wet grasslands. While most European countries have designated major proportions of their wetlands as protected areas under the Ramsar Convention, losses of these valuable ecosystems have continued largely unabated for years. The European section of Wetlands International aims at reversing this trend and at saving and restoring wetlands instead. To this end, a substantial two-year programme and work plan was prepared in the summer of 2015.

Selected EuroNatur projects in 2015

Meadows and pastures for Virgil's "white bird"

Geographical location in Europe

"European Stork Villages" in Croatia, Hungary, Germany, Spain, Romania, Slovenia, Poland, Austria, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Turkey, Macedonia, Slovakia and Serbia.

Status

Hundreds of hectares of species-rich meadows and pastures are lost in Europe every day, primarily as a result of the intensification of agriculture. Amongst other species, these changes affect well-loved birds such as the white stork. As the wet grasslands vanish, so do the storks' feeding grounds. While these developments have not yet left their mark on the white storks' population figures, this may change very quickly.

Objectives

In cooperation with the "European Stork Villages" our aim is to decisively and visibly counter the increasing loss of stork habitat. EuroNatur honours villages or municipalities for their exemplary efforts in the protection of white storks and aims at further enhancing their status as "flagship projects", especially with regard to the conservation of biodiverse meadows and pastures.

Selected activities in 2015

- Targeted action plans for improving the living and breeding conditions for white storks were developed for five stork villages.
- Five small stork conservation projects were successfully implemented and a further eight projects have commenced. These range from wet meadow restoration to the installation of information panels.
- The 12th Conference of "European Stork Villages" was held in Croatia and was attended by representatives of almost all the stork villages.

Important achievements in 2015

- At the conference in Croatia, the mayors and official representatives of ten of the "European Stork Villages" publicly committed to the effective protection of white storks and their habitats within their districts.
- In 2015, the Spanish stork village of Malpartida de Cáceres for the first time hosted as many breeding pairs again as it had in 2009. This is attributed to a wetland the village had established with support from EuroNatur in order to improve the storks' nesting and feeding conditions.



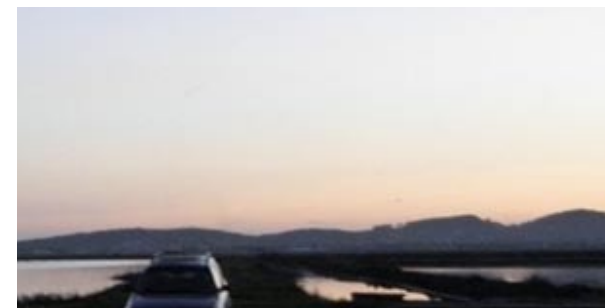
- The planned expansion of Grenchen Airport in Switzerland has been scrapped. This development would have threatened the storks of the Altreu "European Stork Village" and would have destroyed important feeding grounds of the Swiss stork population. In addition to EuroNatur, the network of "European Stork Villages" as well as other organizations had opposed the airport expansion.

Outlook

The network of European Stork Villages is now well established and is set to continue its growth in 2016. It is envisaged that for all villages, sets of measures will be developed for the conservation of storks and their habitats and sizeable wet grassland restoration projects will be implemented.

Partners: Ciconia Foundation, European Stork Villages

Funding: Pancvis Foundation, Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation, Bristol Foundation, EuroNatur's donors and sponsors



Adriatic Flyway – Running the gauntlet on the Balkan Peninsula

Geographical location in Europe

Bird habitats along the Adriatic Flyway in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Albania. The Adriatic Flyway stretches from north-eastern Europe through the Balkans down to Africa. Key areas are the Hutovo Blato Nature Park in the Neretva Delta in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the karstic Livanjsko polje in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Labudovo Okno wetland along the Danube in Serbia, and the Ulcinj salt flats in the Bojana Delta in Montenegro (Map p. 5, No. 10, 9, 11, 12).

Status

The Adriatic Flyway is of major importance for many species of wetland birds and birds of prey as well as for a large number of songbird species. Intact breeding, resting and wintering grounds have however become very rare on this route. The majority of wetlands have been drained for farming, built-over for tourism, or degraded in some other way. The few remaining wetlands are crowded with bird hunters. Bird populations are hemorrhaging along the Eastern Adriatic due to the killings – every year well over two million birds fly to their deaths there.

Special focus in 2015

The Ulcinj salt flats are a major international bird migration hub on the Eastern Adriatic. Their significance could reasonably be compared to the importance of London Heathrow for European air traffic. But this wetland is to be developed for mass tourism. The fight for the Ulcinj salt flats has been keeping EuroNatur and its partners on tenterhooks for years now. While our fight has been given international support, the situation continues to be highly volatile.

Objectives

Our aim is to protect the most important resting, breeding and wintering grounds along the Adriatic Flyway and make them safer for migratory birds. We work on establishing a functioning network of birdwatchers that regularly patrol these areas to gather data on both bird populations and illegal hunting activities. The aim is to strongly curb bird hunting on the Balkans. Sustained improvements for migratory birds on the eastern Adriatic coast can only be achieved if we can get governmental and non-governmental organizations to work together closely at both national and international levels.

Selected activities in 2015

- Breeding, wintering, and migratory bird censuses were conducted in all project areas. Reliable population figures are an essential prerequisite to the successful protection of migratory birds.
- In two areas suffering most from bird hunting (Hutovo Blato Nature Park and Ulcinj salt flats) we ensured regular patrols during the core hunting periods, with rangers and staff of our partner organizations checking the areas for illegal hunting activities.
- Workshops with local stakeholders (from local conservation organizations to local hunting associations) were held in almost all key areas. The aim was to conduct an interim review and to analyse the success or otherwise of measures taken against bird hunting to date. Arising from this analysis, the key players in bird conservation developed concrete project proposals aimed at ending the annual massacre of birds once and for all.
- In April 2015, a conference on saving the Ulcinj salt flats was held in Podgorica. It had been co-organized by EuroNatur and CZIP and was attended by about 80 representatives from conservation organizations, the political sphere and the business world. Additionally, EuroNatur send out numerous letters to politicians and institutions at the national and international levels in order to alert them to the threat to the Ulcinj salt flats.

Important achievements in 2015

- We were able to further extend the network against illegal hunting in the Hutovo Blato Nature Park. An official Memorandum of Understanding on protecting birdlife in the Hutovo Blato Nature Park is now in place. This has also been signed by the local hunting association.
- Illegal hunting in the Hutovo Blato Nature Park has significantly decreased since the hunting patrols commenced in 2013. As part of the international mid-winter waterbird count in January 2015, almost 17,000 birds were recorded on the Svitava Lake which is located in the nature park – same as last year, this number is more than ten times as high as those recorded prior to the ranger patrols.
- As a result of the intensive awareness-raising campaign, the Ulcinj salt flats have received backing from the highest level: In its accession progress report for Montenegro in November 2015, the EU Commission called on the Montenegrin government to make resolute efforts to protect and manage the Ulcinj salt flats as a nature and bird reserve.
- In March 2014, the Albanian government had declared a two-year hunting moratorium for the entire country. This well-overdue step had been taken on foot of persistent pressure exerted by both national and international conservation organizations including EuroNatur. There was a significant decline in commercial hunting tourism in 2015.

Outlook

We will further extend the network of trained birdwatchers and increase hunting patrols along the Adriatic Flyway. In this context it is crucial for the partner organizations to work together and also to bring the local hunting associations on board. A sequence of workshops will therefore be held in 2016 for all project partners along the Adriatic Flyway. These workshops will include practical trainings on bird conservation and monitoring of bird populations following accepted international standards. In addition to knowledge exchange, the aim of the workshops is to network between the various players who are scattered along the Adriatic Flyway.

Saving the Ulcinj salt flats continues to be a particular challenge. While the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism at the international conference on saving the Ulcinj salt flats committed to designating the salt flats as a Ramsar Site and an Emerald Network Site (ASCI) by June 2015 at the latest, there has been no movement at all on this issue. All the indications are that we are dealing with major corruption.



Partners: HDZPP, Baobab, BIOM, DOPPS, BSPSS, CZIP, Naše ptice, Naša bastina, Hutovo Blato Nature Park, Lijepa naša, APAWA, MES, PPNEA

Funding: Mava Foundation, CEPF, Turdus – bird and nature conservancy, Schaffhausen/ CH, EuroNatur's donors and sponsors

Photo: Willi Rolfes - Brown bears



Large mammal protection in Europe

They are the kings of the wilderness: brown bears, lynx and wolves. While they had gone extinct in many regions of Europe, they have been making something of a comeback in recent years. Together with our partners we are working to protect these fascinating animals and their habitats. In the marine sphere the organization focuses on the last remaining Mediterranean monk seals.

Brown bear

In Europe, brown bears continue to be amongst the highly endangered species, which is why they are under strict protection. Significant populations can still be found in the Balkans, amongst other regions. From there the bears may one day be able to resettle the Alpine arc. For this reason, the focal areas of EuroNatur's brown bear protection programme in 2015 included the northern Dinarides (primarily in Croatia; Map p. 5, No. 24) and the south-western Balkan Peninsula. Significant knowledge gaps about brown bear populations remain in countries such as Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina. A further focus was on the protection of a small and isolated bear population in the Cantabrian Mountains (Map p. 5, No. 1) in northern Spain. Key threats for the bears in these focal regions primarily include illegal hunting and the destruction and fragmentation of their habitats.



Photo: Heinz Lehmann - Lynx

Lynx

The lynx's former range has contracted sharply over the course of recent centuries. As a result, lynx in Europe have been reduced to residual populations. They primarily suffer from illegal killings, the decimation of their prey, and from habitat loss. Together with reputable experts and selected partners in the countries concerned, EuroNatur is fighting for the lynx's survival in Europe and tries to give the species the chance to re-colonize parts of its former range. The protection of the last Balkan lynx continued to be a focal point of EuroNatur's work in 2015. The shy subspecies of the Eurasian lynx occurs in the south-western Balkans and is critically endangered.



Photo: Wolf Steiger - Wolf

Wolf

Wolves were once widespread in Europe but have disappeared from many regions. Despite the fact that the 'grey hunters' enjoy the highest level of protection in most EU countries there continue to be incidences of wolves being shot. Moreover, they suffer from the fragmentation of landscapes as a result of the construction of roads and settlements. A significant focus of EuroNatur's programme for the protection of wolves in Europe in 2015 was on Poland. Together with our partners in Poland we are working to raise the level of acceptance for these fascinating animals and to lay the foundations for the recovery and expansion of the wolves' populations.

Mediterranean monk seal

Mediterranean monk seals used to roam the entire Mediterranean Sea and adjacent marine regions. Today they are amongst the twelve most highly endangered species on the planet. Ecosystem destruction, marine pollution and overfishing have brought them to the brink of extinction. Undisturbed sandy and rocky shores have become rare throughout the monk seals' range. Sports divers, tourists, and fishers advance even into the remotest of caves. As a result, the seals not only lack valuable resting areas but it has also become difficult for them to rear their young. The largest and last major surviving colony of Mediterranean monk seals lives at Cap Blanc, a peninsula on the Mauritanian Atlantic coast. This is also the region on which EuroNatur focuses.

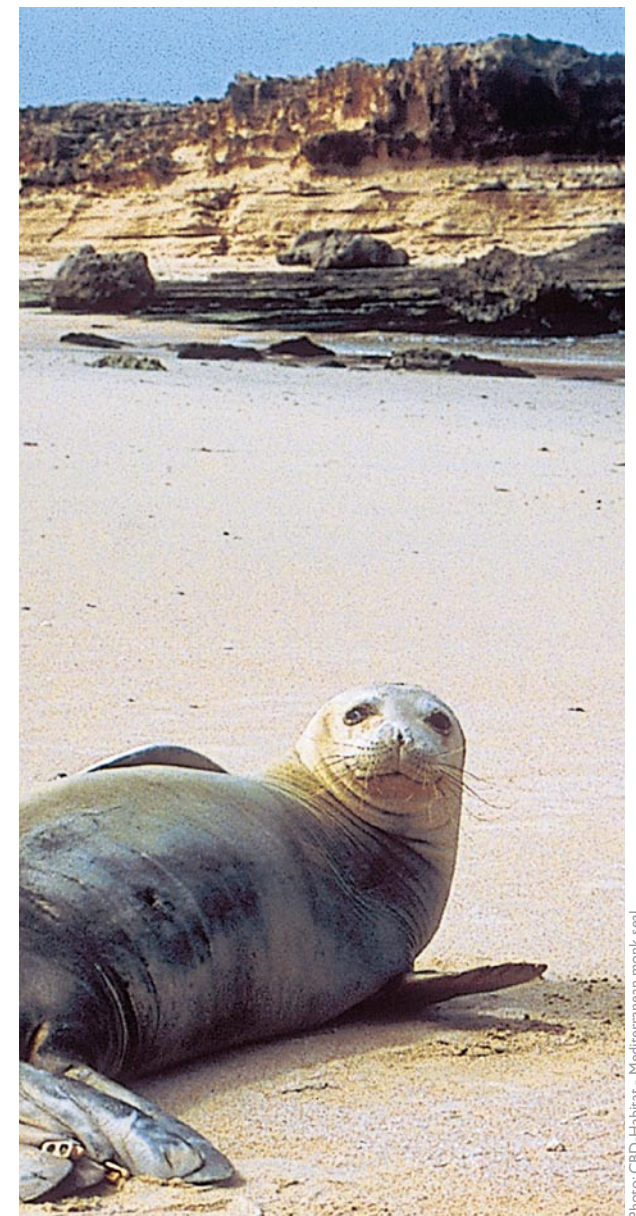


Photo: CBD-Habitat - Mediterranean monk seal

Selected EuroNatur projects in 2015

Crime Scene: Cantabrian Mountains

Geographical location in Europe

Cantabrian Mountains in the north of Spain (Map p. 5, No. 1). These mountain ranges are home to two separate populations that are largely isolated from each other: one in the west and one in the east of the Cantabrian Mountains. Fapas' work has thus far largely been focused on the western population.

Status

The primary impacts that have driven brown bears to the brink of extinction in the Cantabrian Mountains are illegal hunting, scarcity of food, and habitat loss. However, as a result of persistent protection measures, the population in the western Cantabrian Range has steadily increased over the past twenty years. In contrast, the eastern population is at acute risk of extinction. Poachers are relentless in their hunting of the bears and are thus also threatening to bleed out the western population.

Objectives

Our aim is to prevent the extinction of brown bears in the Cantabrian Mountains and to facilitate the populations' re-expansion.

Selected activities in 2015

- Combating illegal hunting continued to be the focus of Fapas' work in 2015: Approximately 90 camera traps were active and allowed for surveillance even in very remote areas. Fapas staff conducted regular patrols. In cooperation with the environmental arm of the Spanish Civil Guard their aim was to catch illegal hunters ...
- ... and to collect data on the brown bears' distribution, population density and behaviour – an indispensable baseline for the assessment of the bears' population development. To this end, Fapas staff travelled more than 2,500 kilometres on foot and collected more than 1,000 samples of evidence of the presence of bears.
- Camera traps recorded six incidences of illegal hunting in the west of the Cantabrian Mountains. It was not possible to identify all of the hunters, in part owing to the fact that they have adapted by using face masks and other disguises.



Photo: Kerstin Sauer - Beehive on a finca

Important achievements in 2015

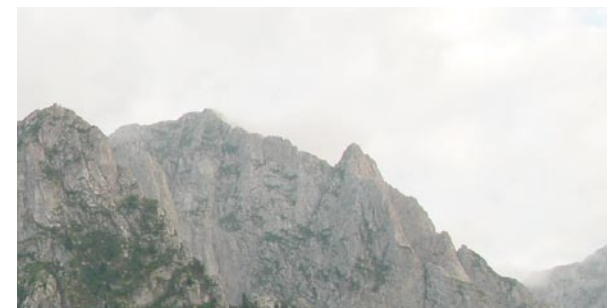
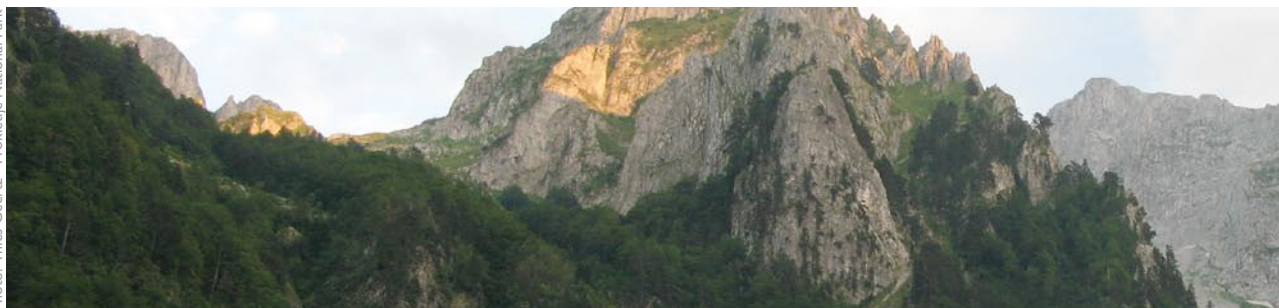
- In 2015, Fapas recorded a total of 14 females with 20 current year's cubs in the area in which the conservation organization is active (2014: 15 females with 27 cubs). The western population thus continues to be at a high level.
- The western population range is continuously expanding. Fapas was able to record bears all the way up to the Portuguese border.
- Thanks to generous donations received, in 2015 Fapas was able to complete the purchase of a total of four fincas which the Spanish conservationists have been buying up since 2012 and on which they have been planting fruit trees and placed beehives for the bears.

Outlook

Combating illegal hunting continues to be a focus of our conservation efforts. In future, Fapas will increase their work in the eastern range. Their aim is to transfer to the eastern range those strategies that have proved successful in the western range.

Partners: FAPAS

Funding: EuroNatur's donors and sponsors



Balkan bears: From the Dinarides to the Alps?

Geographical location in Europe

Balkan Peninsula with a particular focus on the northern Dinarides (Croatia, Slovenia) and the south-western Balkans (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro).

Status

The Dinarides-Pindos brown bear population covers a total of eight countries between Slovenia and Greece. Overall, the population is not considered to be endangered. However, the fragmentation of bear habitats, primarily as a result of transport routes, as well as illegal killings are major threats to the bears. Moreover, due to the high number of legal shootings in Slovenia there is a risk that the entire population is being bled dry. As Slovenia is the natural connection between the Dinarides and the Alps, the survival of the few remaining bears in the Italian and Austrian Alps is similarly at risk. At the same time, the south-western Balkans largely remain as a "blank spot" on the map of bear populations. It is currently impossible to make any reliable statements about the bear populations in countries such as Montenegro.

Objectives

Our aims are to close the knowledge gaps about the current situation of the bear populations in the Balkans, to protect the bear populations, and to create the right conditions for the re-colonization of the Alpine arc by brown bears.

Selected activities in 2015

- The University of Zagreb continued their intensive field work aimed at bear conservation in Croatia (including improved wildlife crossings at the Rijeka-Karlovac motorway) and extended their work to Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the first bears have been fitted with transmitters.
- Moreover, seven young scientists from different European countries were trained in bear management and monitoring.
- In October 2015, EuroNatur conducted a workshop on bear conservation in the Prokletije National Park (Map p. 5, No. 14) in Montenegro. This workshop was attended by 16 stakeholders from eight countries, including employees of conservation organizations and conservation authorities as well as international experts.

Important achievements in 2015

- The intensive bear conservation programme in Croatia is taking effect. All the information gathered to date indicates that the Croatian bear population is on a positive trajectory.
- As part of the bear workshop in Montenegro, the participants developed an initial package of measures for bear conservation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro.

Outlook

A major regional focus in 2016 will be on Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro. Amongst other measures, we will conduct several workshops together with a variety of stakeholders in order to develop a bear management plan for both countries.

Partners: University of Zagreb, Carnivora Magna, CZIP

Funding: Life+ (DINALP BEAR – Bear conservation project in the northern Dinarides), EuroNatur's donors and sponsors



Red alert for the Balkan lynx

Geographical location in Europe

Mountainous border regions as part of the Balkan Green Belt between Albania and Macedonia as well as between Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo.

Situation

Time is running out for the Balkan lynx. The Balkan subspecies of the Eurasian lynx is critically endangered as a result of habitat loss, illegal hunting, and the reduction of its prey base due to hunting. The most recent estimates indicate that there are less than 50 Balkan lynx left. The Balkan lynx's core range is the Mavrovo National Park (Map p. 5, No. 15). The park's forests probably host eight or nine individuals. But this refuge is under threat as there are plans for the construction of more than 20 hydropower plants (please refer to pp. 14–15). In addition to the Mavrovo National Park, the Munella mountains (Map p. 5, No. 15) play a crucial role for the conservation of these elegant predators, presumably hosting the last remaining lynx population in Albania. But land-use pressure in the Munella mountains is particularly high, with legal and illegal logging being a serious problem in addition to illegal hunting. It is likely that only a few vagrant individuals remain in Kosovo and Montenegro at this point.

Objectives

Effective lynx protection necessitates that their last remaining habitats are sustainably safeguarded. Our long-term objective is the creation of a coherent network of protected areas in the Balkans, managed with a view to lynx conservation and the protection of their prey. This is to create the right conditions for the lynx to re-colonize their former ranges and to allow for genetic exchange between subpopulations. To this end we must further develop and strengthen our local partner organizations, close the knowledge gaps about the Balkan lynx's distribution and ecology, and improve awareness in the political arena as well as in the general public of the lynx's conservation needs.

10 Years of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme

In 2006, EuroNatur and its partner organizations initiated the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme (BLRP). We jointly developed an elaborate conservation programme designed to save the last remaining Balkan lynx and their habitats and at the same time to open up prospects for the people in the region. Four countries, i.e. Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro, are now integrated into the conservation programme. At the outset of the programme the Balkan lynx was something of a phantom. Not even the most reputable experts knew where lynx could still be found, much less how many of them remained. As a result of intensive field work we now have factual evidence of the whereabouts of subpopulations and of their small size. We know of the locations on which we must focus our conservation efforts in order to save the Balkan lynx from going extinct.



Photo: PPNEA / BLRP - Balkan lynx



Selected activities in 2015

- The partners continued their systematic camera trap monitoring in 2015: Between January and late March, the Albanian lynx team installed a total of 44 camera traps in the Munella mountains and recorded 21 lynx images. In Mavrovo National Park, a total of 60 camera traps were installed in the spring of 2015 and these recorded 37 images of lynx.
- PPNEA staff organised an educational programme termed "Balkan Lynx Ambassador" with a view to raising awareness amongst young people and their families for the conservation needs of the Balkan lynx. In two-day workshops, a total of 25 children and youths from schools in the Munella region acquired knowledge of lynx ecology and the threats to the species. Some of the participants were then certified as "Balkan Lynx Ambassadors".
- An international symposium on Balkan lynx conservation was held in the Dajiti National Park on October 21-22, 2015. Seventy-four participants from all over Europe discussed, amongst other topics, the measures necessary to save the Balkan lynx.

Important achievements in 2015

- In November 2015, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) formally recognized the Balkan lynx as a distinct subspecies of the Eurasian lynx and subsequently classified it as "Critically Endangered". So now the Balkan lynx is officially one of the rarest cat species on Earth and urgently needs protection. EuroNatur and its partners had conducted years of field work to gather the data needed to establish the Balkan lynx' critical conservation status.
- In November 2015, it was confirmed that Albania, in addition to the Macedonian Mavrovo National Park, hosts one of the two last remaining subpopulations of the Balkan lynx, as a dead kitten was discovered in the Munella mountains.
- In mid-November 2015, the Kosovar Ministry of the Environment decided to designate as a protected area 6,000 hectares of land at the Pashtrik Mountain on the border to Albania. The area is an important corridor for Balkan lynx expansion.
- The "Balkan Lynx Ambassadors" certified as part of the workshop in Munella are now "on tour" and pass on their newly acquired knowledge to pupils in selected schools in the region.

Outlook

For 2016 we are planning to focus our efforts on the two regions proven to host the last two subpopulations, i.e. Albania and Macedonia. There we will continue our education campaign on the Balkan lynx. Additionally we will conduct targeted lobbying with a view to extending the hunting ban declared by the Albanian government, and in order to effect a comprehensive reform of the hunting legislation. Moreover we will lobby for the Munella mountains to be designated as a protected area.

Partners: MES, PPNEA, CZIP, Finch, ERA, KAE, Kora

Funding: Mava Foundation, EuroNatur's donors and sponsors



Building bridges for Poland's wolves

Status

Thanks to intensive protection measures, Poland's wolf populations have grown continuously in recent years. In the east of the country, the 'grey hunters' have now colonized all suitable habitats and from there they are also increasingly expanding into the west of Poland. Nonetheless they continue to face many dangers. Illegal hunting and road traffic in particular are causing many losses and threaten the population. Moreover, there is a strong lobby that aims at changing the wolves' protective status. A wolf management plan produced in 2011 provides for the reintroduction of legal wolf hunting. EuroNatur's partner organization Wilk, together with a broad alliance of conservation associations and other stakeholders, is working on stopping the management plan from being adopted.

Objectives

Our aims are to protect the existing wolf population in Poland and to accomplish an expansion of the wolves' range within Poland. Additionally, we endeavour to raise the level of acceptance for wolves in the general public.

Selected activities in 2015

- In April 2015, Wilk and the MRI participated in a conference entitled "A Future for Wolves in Poland" at the Polish parliament. Its aim was to prepare the participants for a discussion on the wolf management plan and provide facts and figures. In her contribution, Wilk President Sabina Nowak highlighted the major significance wolves have for ecosystems.
- Wilk provided technical assistance to investigating authorities with regard to several cases of illegal hunting with a view to more efficient detection and prosecution of these offences.
- Advice and assistance were provided to road development projects in all parts of Poland so as to ensure that adverse impacts of construction works on existing wildlife corridors are minimized.

Important achievements in 2015

- The number of wolf packs in western Poland and close to the German border has further increased compared to the previous year. The region hosted 40 packs or pairs in 2015. Offspring was recorded in 34 packs. Therefore a further increase of the wolf population can reasonably be expected in 2016.

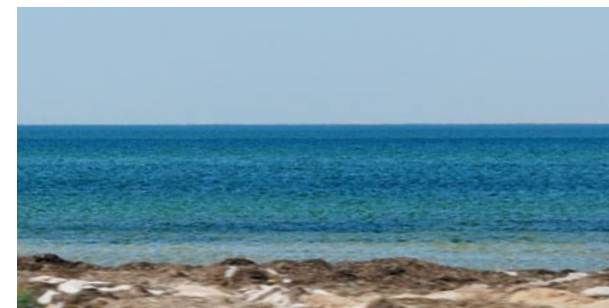
- The motorway expansion schemes between Poznan and Frankfurt/Oder and from Wroclav to the Polish/Czech border will take account of the wildlife corridors affected by the developments and provide optimum protection.

Outlook

The prevention of the implementation of the wolf management plan in Poland will continue to be a focus of our work in 2016. A scientific study will demonstrate the wolves' contribution to minimizing economic losses in farming and forestry (e.g. browsing damage to trees caused by roe deer and red deer). This will help us to argue effectively for the wolves' permanent protection.

Partners: MRI, Wilk, Conservation organization
"Workshop for all Beings"

Funding: Lappat Fund, EuroNatur's donors and sponsors, Elisabeth Seifert-Becker's endowment fund for the protection of wolves in memory of Viktoria Neumann, Emilie and Franz Seifert



Mediterranean monk seal: Hope at Cap Blanc

Geographical location in Europe

Mauritanian Atlantic coast, Cap Blanc peninsula. The six kilometre long "Costa de las Focas" seal reserve is located approximately ten kilometres north-west of Mauritania's second-largest city Nouadhibou.

Status

Cap Blanc hosts the world's largest colony of Mediterranean monk seals. As a result of many years of intensive protection measures the population is on a steady path of recovery following a mass die-off in 1997. While it now includes more than 250 seals, the population continues to be highly sensitive.

Objectives

Our aim is to continuously improve the monk seals' natural resource base and to minimize threats to the species so as to allow the colony at Cap Blanc to increase and ensure its long-term survival.

Selected activities in 2015

- CBD Habitat staff patrolled the seal reserve twice daily on average in order to minimize disturbances resulting from the presence of fishers and shell collectors.
- In order to demonstrate round-the-clock presence, CBD Habitat introduced additional night patrols in June 2015.
- CBD Habitat reached agreements with the Coast Guard and the Mauritanian Institute of Oceanography on increased seaward patrols with a view to further minimizing disturbances from the seaward side.
- CBD Habitat used fixed surveillance cameras in the caves used by the colony for rearing their young in order to study the seals' behaviour. Video surveillance of the colony's caves and daily cliff patrols help to monitor population development and allow pups to be saved that have gotten into difficulties.

Important achievements in 2015

- There has been a further increase in the Mediterranean monk seal population at Cap Blanc. Seventy-three pups were born in 2015, i.e. four more than in the previous year. The number of births has thus reached a new high since the introduction of surveillance.
- Thanks to regular ranger patrols, the levels of disturbances caused by fishers and shell collectors again remained very low in 2015 in the sensitive zone where the caves are located that are used by the colony to rear their pups.
- It was finally possible to install a camera in the last of the three caves used by the seals for pup rearing. This allows the conservationists to monitor even more closely the colony's activities in the caves.

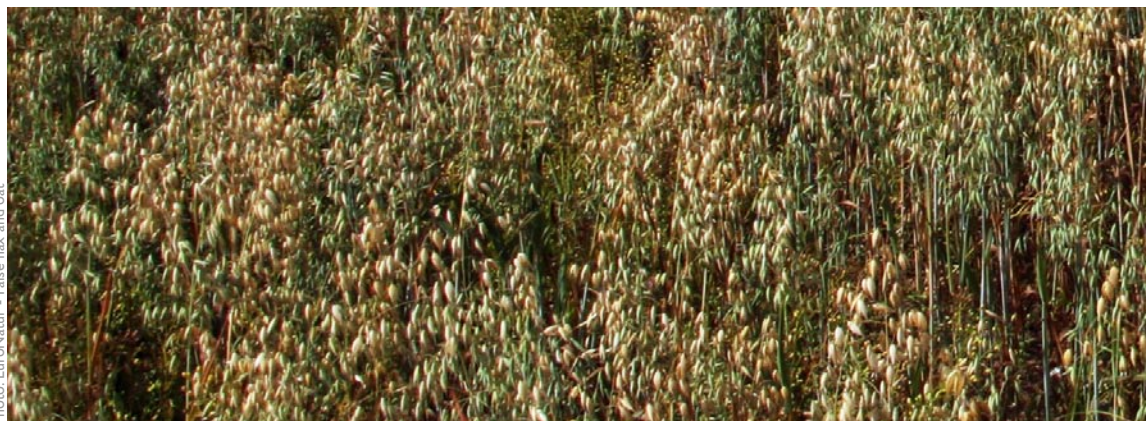
Outlook

The long-term aim is for the seals to return to open beaches for breeding purposes where it is much easier for the adults to protect their pups from high surfs and swells than in the caves. To this end, we aim to continue to keep disturbances at a very low level at all times and to continuously improve the seals' natural environment.

Partners: CBD Habitat

Funding: EuroNatur's donors and sponsors

Photo: EuroNatur - False flax and oat



European conservation legislation under scrutiny

Climate change and the ongoing loss of biodiversity are probably the most pressing conservation policy issues of the early 21st century. EuroNatur as an advocate of nature is fighting internationally for effective conservation policy. Moreover, we support an energy transition that gives due consideration to nature conservation.

In 2015, the EU Commission carried out a "fitness check" of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. According to the EU Commission, the aim was to provide an analysis of whether the EU legislation in force is suited to achieving the European Union's ambitious nature conservation objectives. From late April to late July 2015, the EU Commission carried out a public consultation. More than half a million citizens participated in the consultation, with 94% supporting the NatureAlert campaign initiated by European conservation and environmental organizations. The message sent by the EU citizens to Brussels and to the EU Member States was loud and clear: "Don't mess with the Nature Directives!"

In November 2015, the draft emerging findings of the Fitness Check were presented. The report presented by an expert committee commissioned by the EU Commission confirmed that under no circumstances should the EU Nature Directives be weakened. EuroNatur is of the opinion however that this is not a strong enough stance to take: While there has been progress in some areas with regard

to the implementation of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, especially when it comes to the completion of the Natura 2000 network, many of the Natura 2000 sites are little more than paper tigers! In practice there is a lot of catching up to do. For example, management plans have so far only been prepared for approximately 30 % of the Special Protection Areas under the Birds Directive and for roughly 40 % of the Special Areas of Conservation under the Habitats Directive. In Germany there are management plans for only about one in three of the Natura 2000 sites – in other words, at many of the sites concrete conservation measures have not been put in place.

On account of this situation, EuroNatur and nineteen other member organizations of the European Habitats Forum adopted a joint position paper in November 2015, in which they call not only for maintaining the EU Birds and Habitats Directives but also for more rigorous implementation than has been seen to date. To this end, the necessary funding must urgently be made available and complementary measures must be taken in other policy areas.



The Common Agricultural Policy, in particular, must clearly focus more strongly on achieving biodiversity objectives. EuroNatur will continue to work on this front. In 2016, the EU Commission will report its conclusions on the results of the Fitness Check.

Partners: EHF
Funding: EuroNatur's donors

Poland: The long road to energy transition

When it comes to a successful policy turnaround in the energy sector, Poland has a particularly significant backlog. The country's central government continues to bank on coal, wants to enter the nuclear market, and embraces fracking. The development of regenerative, decentralized energy structures is still in its infancy.

Over the past three years, EuroNatur was advising the Marshal's Office as well as a number of municipalities in the province of Podlasie (Map p. 5, No. 4) with the aim of achieving a more efficient and considerate utilization of resources in the region. Our aim was to initiate concrete pilot projects in the region with the active participation of the local people and municipalities, while at the same time contributing to generating the necessary political receptiveness for a bottom-up energy transition. Our project focused on the establishment of decentralized economic and supply structures based on renewable energy sources. In 2015, we have successfully built on the foundations laid in the previous two years. Amongst other achievements, we were able to deepen the first German-Polish energy town twinning: The mayors, council factions and Public Works Departments of the Upper Franconian town of Wunsiedel and the Podlasian municipality of Lapy engaged in intensive exchanges in 2015, also involving their local communities. One of their initiatives was a highschool student

exchange on the topic of energy which they are planning to hold every year from 2016 onwards. For several years now, Wunsiedel has consistently pursued a path towards regional, climate-smart energy solutions. Lapy is to benefit from this expertise. Supported by EuroNatur, this municipality aims at becoming independent of external energy supplies. An energy concept has been developed to this end and will now be studied as to its feasibility.

With the country's first decentralized oil press for producing plant oil, an important pilot project has been completed. It is a blueprint for making Poland's farming sector less dependent on fossil fuel. More than 150 people came to the plant's opening ceremony in October 2015, including decision-makers from the Podlasie region.

Moreover, EuroNatur continued to publicize sustainable energy generation in Poland as part of several events, including a local government conference in Cracow attended by roughly 1,000 participants. The Podlaskie Voivodship now expressly wishes to become a model region for decentralized, resource-efficient energy supply concepts. Now the priority is to address the lack of necessary technical expertise at the local level.

Partners: Bialystok Marshal's Office, Politechnika Bialystok, the town of Lapy, Energievision Frankenwald, the town of Wunsiedel and the Wunsiedel Department of Public Works
Funding: UBA with funds provided by BMUB

Brandenburg: Hanging on to the silverware

The federal state of Brandenburg hosts a stunning diversity of habitats that provide a home to numerous endangered wildlife species, such as white-tailed eagles and black storks. Together with other ecologically valuable landscapes in eastern Germany they are considered the "family silver of German re-unification". These habitats primarily need protection from increasing land use pressure. In 2000, the German federal government established the statutory basis for their protection by making it possible for ownership of

such sites to be transferred to conservation organizations, amongst others. Back then, EuroNatur agreed to take on approximately 1,000 hectares of land. As of March 2016, EuroNatur has taken ownership of approximately 860 hectares. Some of the sites are situated in Brandenburg (Map p. 5, No. 3) and include ecologically valuable orchid-rich grasslands, lakes, and peatlands. Approximately three quarters of the acreage transferred to EuroNatur is under forest cover. In 2015, we undertook silvicultural conversion measures on a total of 20 hectares of woodland, as the forested acreage is as yet dominated by species-poor pine monocultures which are not site-appropriate. This is also

true for the "Kienheide" Natura 2000 site. As part of the LIFE "Sandrasen" project our aim is to progressively convert the vegetation into open, lichen-rich pine woodland. Management measures to this end were carried out on close to ten hectares of the "Kienheide" site in 2015.

Partners: Nature Park administrations at Dahme-Heideseen, Märkische Schweiz, and Schlaubetal; German Federation for Nature Conservation (NABU) – Märkische Schweiz regional association; local conservation groups and farmers

Funding: EuroNatur Trust for Eastern Germany (thanks to generous financial endowments this trust now holds approximately EUR 370,000), EuroNatur's donors and sponsors

Senne: Award-winning diversity

For many years now, EuroNatur has been supporting the "Paderborn-Senne Biological Station" in their work to protect the species-rich Senne heathlands (Map p. 5, No. 2). Given that the majority of plant and animal species found in the Senne landscape are dependent on open habitats, a number of different grazing projects have a special role to play here. In September 2015, the Biological Station's "Senne Horses" project was recognized as an official project of the United Nations Decade

on Biodiversity. For more than ten years now, this robust breed of horses has been grazing the dry grasslands of the "Moosheide" Nature Reserve, thus creating valuable habitats for sand lizards as well as for numerous species of insects, plants, and fungi. In 2015, special emphasis was placed on the protection of northern lapwings. In cooperation with local farmers, staff at the Biological Station marked lapwing nests on arable land using wooden stakes. This allowed the farmers to avoid the nests while cultivating their land, thus giving the ground-nesting birds a chance to complete their nesting cycle and let the young fledge.

This project will be continued in 2016. Additionally, the walking guide booklet for the "Furlbachtal" Nature Reserve, which had been out of print, was revised and the new edition printed. The booklet can also be downloaded at the Biological Station's website.

Partner: Paderborn-Senne Biological Station

Funding: Gelsenwasser, Stadtwerke Bielefeld GmbH (public utility), EuroNatur's donors



EuroNatur in the media and beyond

Focus on the Blue Heart

One of the main objectives of the "Save the Blue Heart of Europe" campaign (please refer to pp. 14–15) is to draw public attention to both the Balkan rivers' beauty and the threats they face. With press tours, press conferences and other activities we have successfully drawn further international attention to the issue. Prestigious newspapers and journals reported on the matter, amongst them the British daily "The Guardian" and the German daily "taz". Journalists travelled the Vjosa river, one of Europe's last wild rivers, in an inflatable dinghy for the GEO magazine. Its December issue contained a multi-page article on this river expedition and on the threats from hydropower development faced by the river. A campaign brochure published in 2015 (available for download free of charge at www.balkanrivers.net) provides background information, facts and figures on the planned hydropower plants and the impacts these will have. Numerous colour photographs capture the breath-taking diversity of these Balkan riverine landscapes. Additionally, two short films were produced; they can be viewed at www.youtube.com/euronatur.

2015 EuroNatur Award for Jonathan Franzen

For several years now, the US American best-selling author Jonathan Franzen has been using his international profile to put the spotlight on the serious threat to European wild birds resulting from legal and illegal hunting as well as habitat loss. His commitment was honoured when he received the EuroNatur Award in October 2015. His article entitled "Last Song for Migrating Birds" published in National Geographic in 2013 significantly contributed to the Albanian government declaring a two-year hunting moratorium for the entire country. At a press conference in the run-up to the awards ceremony Franzen once again brought much needed attention to the issue of bird hunting in the Balkans. High ranking media outlets published articles, some very substantial, amongst them the daily newspapers "Süddeutsche Zeitung", "Die Welt", "taz" and "Berliner Zeitung" as well as National Geographic magazine.

ARD reports on contentious Ulcinj salt flats

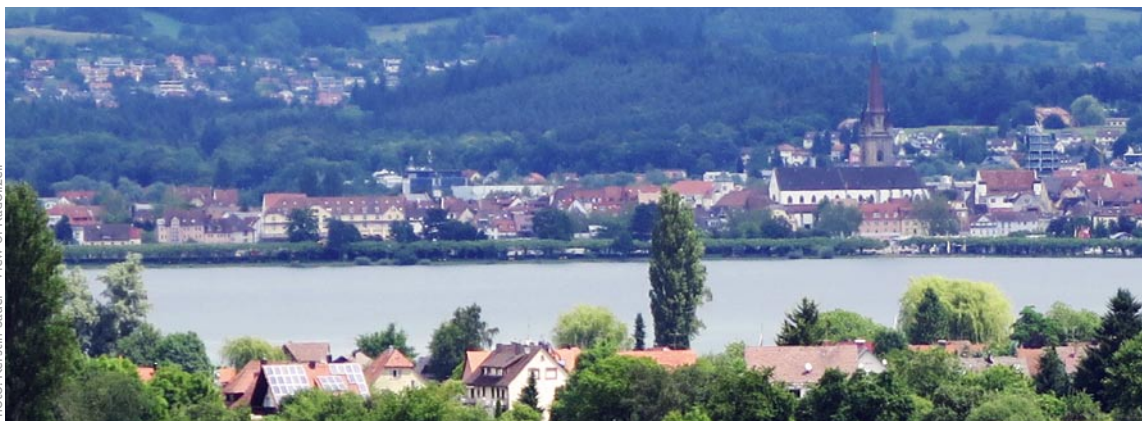
International attention is similarly essential to the Ulcinj salt flats issue. The important resting area for migratory birds is to be developed for mass tourism (please refer to pp. 18–19). There was a favourable response to the issue in the media in 2015, including coverage of the conference held in April on saving this ecological gem. In a radio feature, the German public-service broadcaster ARD reported

on the background to the dangerous tug-of-war over this avian paradise. Additional features were published by the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" and the news television station "Al Jazeera Balkans".

Giving Tuesday: charity, not consumerism

As a response to commercialization and consumerism in the pre-Christmas period, on each first Tuesday in December the Giving Tuesday movement calls on millions of people worldwide to give back. In 2015, Germany's largest donation platform betterplace.org brought Giving Tuesday to Germany for the first time. EuroNatur participated with an initiative for the protection of the Balkan lynx. We used Giving Tuesday 2015 to draw attention to the species' plight and to gain new supporters for its protection by featuring short articles on the organizer's webpage as well as on EuroNatur's webpage and Facebook page. On December 1, project manager Thies Geertz kicked off EuroNatur's Giving Tuesday campaign with a presentation on saving the Balkan lynx. As in 2014, the EuroNatur advent calendar again revealed behind its 24 little digital doors trivia questions, movie recommendations and recipe ideas from EuroNatur project regions, thus allowing visitors to gain insights, including some more unusual insights, into EuroNatur's conservation efforts, with a special focus on the Balkan lynx and the Giving Tuesday donation drive.

Photo: Kerstin Sauer - View of Radolfzell



Economic situation in the 2015 financial year

Donors form the basis

In 2015, EuroNatur Foundation's regular donors, sponsors and legacy donors continued to provide the financial footing for our tangible conservation efforts in Europe as well as for political lobbying and environmental education. Once again, EuroNatur also attracted substantial financial support for project implementation from private foundations and associations as well as public sector funding, most notably from the Mava Foundation, the Dr. Manfred and Gudrun Keim Fund, German Federal Environmental Foundation (DBU), Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND), the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation, the Manfred-Hermesen-Stiftung for Nature Conservation and Environmental Protection, the Federal Environment Ministry (BMUB), the German Federal Environment Agency (UBA), the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN), and the European Commission. Moreover, EuroNatur's work was financially supported by certain commercial enterprises in 2015. These included i.a. the utilities company Gelsenwasser and the Bielefeld public utilities.

Income and expenditure headings based on DZI specifications

The income and expenditure headings used for the purposes of this activity report correspond to the prescribed specifications as part of the guidelines for the DZI (German Central Institute for Social Issues) Seal of Approval. The headings therefore diverge somewhat from the customary breakdown set out in the Handelsgesetzbuch (German Commercial Code), especially in the profit and loss account. Amongst the criteria assessed by DZI are two important threshold values, i.e. the share of expenditure on advertising and administration in total relevant expenditure, and the ratio of expenditure on advertising to total income from donations. Not all expenditure is included for the purpose of calculating the share of administrative expenditure: Expenditure on portfolio management is only taken into consideration if its total is a negative amount. Commercial activities are not considered at all.

DZI Seal of Approval

In December 2015, EuroNatur Foundation was again awarded the DZI (German Central Institute for Social Issues) Seal of Approval. EuroNatur had applied for the seal in August 2015 based on its 2013 and 2014 annual accounts. Due to changes in the assessment process on the part of DZI, our application for 2013 and 2014 was processed in the autumn of 2015.

The result of the DZI assessment of EuroNatur Foundation was a positive one: Its advertising and presentation of information are truthful, unambiguous, and factual. Funding acquisition and the use of funds as well as the financial situation are clearly documented. The foundation and its gremia have suitable controls in place.



Appropriate proportion of administrative expenses

Compared to the previous year, EuroNatur Foundation saw its income increase somewhat by € 231k to a total of € 2,846k. Total income from donations and fines in 2015 was € 1,324k, an increase of € 144k. Relevant total expenditure for calculating the proportion of administrative expenses in 2015 stood at € 2,567k, up by € 221k compared to the previous year. Our projections for 2015 show that EuroNatur Foundation spent approximately 18.7 % of relevant total expenditure on advertising and administration. DZI will assess our results at a later point in time. The institute considers appropriate a proportion of expenses for advertising and administration of up to 20 %. The previous year's figure was 20.6 %.

In 2015, the proportion of advertising expenditure in total income from donations was 17.3 % according to our own calculations. For 2014, DZI had calculated a figure of 20.3 %. The proportion of all expenditure on advertising, which according to DZI definitions also includes general PR work, must not exceed 30 % of total income from donations.

Individual sources of revenue

There was a decrease in revenue from donations in 2015 (–€ 228k) compared to the previous year which was due to significantly lower donations from bequests (–€ 224k).

Approximately one third of the 2015 income came from donations. Third-party grants for concrete project implementation increased once again in 2015 (+€ 215k). This increase was solely due to greater financial support received from private foundations and associations. EuroNatur Foundation's non-profit tax-exempt commercial activities saw a significant increase in turnover (+€ 114k) compared to 2014. Interest and capital gains were significantly higher than in the previous year due to major nonrecurring items (+€ 105k).

Expenditure in detail

Compared to 2014, EuroNatur Foundation increased its total expenditure on projects, campaigns and education by € 205k. Close to 80 % of total expenditure therefore went directly into work on projects, campaigns and education. There was a slight nominal decrease in expenditure on advertising, general PR work and administration in 2015 compared to 2014 (–€ 10k). The share of expenditure under these headings in total relevant expenditure now stands at approximately 18.7 %, which according to DZI is an acceptable proportion of expenditure for general PR work, advertising and administration. Pure administrative expenditure actually accounted for only 9.5 % of total relevant expenditure, with advertising and public relations

expenditure accounting for approximately 4 % and 5 % respectively in 2015.

Successful conclusion to the 2015 financial year

EuroNatur Foundation concluded the 2015 financial year with a positive operating result of € 279k. € 4k were withdrawn from project-specific reserves for site protection in Brandenburg. Revenue of € 84k from ecological forest conversion was added to project-specific reserves for site protection in Brandenburg. Revenue from bequests and endowments was added to the revenue reserves in full (€ 61k). The amount of € 94k was transferred to the "Umschichtungsrücklage" (special reserve for gains from transactions to cover potential losses of future transactions) which was established as a safeguard against potential risks associated with financial assets. A further € 43k were added to the revenue reserves. These additions thus further strengthened the capital stock and significantly added to the revenue reserves. Overall, EuroNatur Foundation was able to considerably strengthen its financial foundation in 2015.



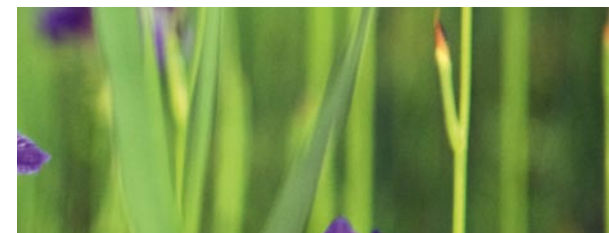
Notes on the 2015 Statement of Financial Position

Compared to the previous year, 2015 saw an increase of € 2,022k in EuroNatur Foundation's total assets which now stand at € 6,806k. At the end of the financial year, non-current assets (fixed assets) stood at € 3,178k, whereas current assets stood at € 3,628k. Fixed assets increased by € 665k compared to 2014, while current assets, i.e. primarily liquid funds and securities, increased by € 1,358k. EuroNatur was able to further reduce accounts receivable to a level of € 112k. These are all considered recoverable and € 108k are due within the next twelve months.

At the end of the 2015 financial year, the foundation's capital stood at € 2,929k, i.e. € 422k higher than in the previous year. Compared to the previous year, equity increased by € 640k to a total of € 4,500k. Revenue reserves increased considerably compared to 2014 and stood at € 1,571k (+€ 218k) at year's end. The liabilities of 2,199k primarily consist of project grants already received but not yet spent in 2015.

Economic development in recent years

EuroNatur Foundation's statement of its financial position clearly shows that recent years have not only brought successes in the organization's conservation endeavours but that its work has also been successful in economic terms. Over the past five years, i.e. since 2010, total assets increased by € 4,244k and thus more than doubled by far. Over the past ten years, i.e. since 2005, total assets even increased by € 5,168k and thus more than quadrupled. The increase in equity, i.e. the foundation's core capital including endowments and revenue reserves has been similarly positive. These developments demonstrate that EuroNatur is on a secure financial footing and has been able to significantly improve its financial position in recent years.



Wills and testaments for European nature

A further strengthening of EuroNatur's asset base is of great importance for the foundation's independence and performance as a successful advocate for nature in Europe. The increase in the foundation's capital creates planning certainty and independence. Endowments and bequests therefore provide immensely valuable support to us and are a great sign of confidence, confidence that we endeavour to honour with our commitment. In 2015, we once again transferred all endowments and yields from bequests to the foundation's capital stock. This has further strengthened EuroNatur Foundation's financial position. We expect that revenues from portfolio management will increase in coming years.

Bequests and legacies in 2015

We are particularly indebted to those who in 2015 bequeathed funds to us upon their deaths and we honour their memory:

- Lore Braun, Gechingen
- Walter Dempfle, Friedrichshafen
- Walter Schuhmann, Ludwigsburg

Dependent foundations and named funds

In 2015, EuroNatur managed three dependent foundations and three earmarked named funds. The latest fund to be added in the 2015 financial year was the EuroNatur Fund for the Protection of Migratory Birds. The named funds' capital increased significantly compared to 2014 and now totals € 485k (+€ 250k). The total capital stock of the dependent foundations remains largely unchanged at approximately € 2,143k. In the reporting year, yields from dependent foundations continued to benefit EuroNatur projects.

- Dr. Manfred and Gudrun Keim Fund
- Ludwig Raue Memorial Fund
- Lappat Fund
- EuroNatur Fund for Eastern Germany
- EuroNatur Fund for the Protection of Migratory Birds
- Elisabeth Seifert-Becker's endowment fund for the protection of wolves in memory of Viktoria Neumann, Emilie and Franz Seifert

Working together for Europe's nature

EuroNatur's successes in nature conservation in Europe in 2015 were made possible by the regular donors, sponsors and legacy donors as well as by the providers of grants and by our commercial sponsors, all of whom helped us in so many ways. We are most grateful for your support!

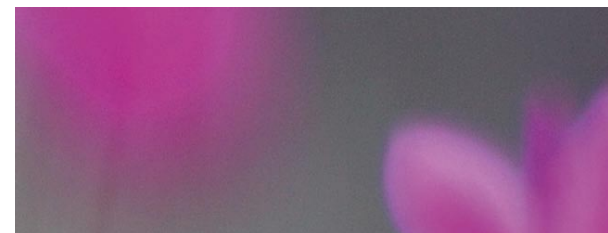
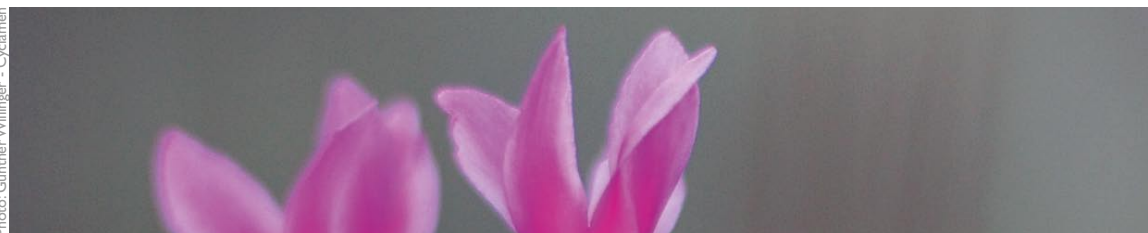
Statement of Financial Position as at 31.12.2015

ASSETS		2015 " 000 €		2014 " 000 €	
A. Fixed assets		3,178		2,513	
	I. Intangible assets + tangible assets		53		56
	II. Financial assets		3,125		2,457
B. Current assets		3,628		2,270	
	I. Stocks		17		17
	II. Accounts receivable and other assets		112		156
	III. Liquid funds, short-term securities		3,499		2,097
C. Deferred items		0		1	
TOTALS		6,806		4,784	

LIABILITIES		2015 " 000 €		2014 " 000 €	
A. Equity		4,500		3,860	
	I. Foundation's capital				
	Core capital		77		77
	Endowments		2,852		2,430
	II. Revenue reserves		1,571		1,353
B. Provisions		107		110	
C. Liabilities		2,199		814	
D. Deferrals		0		0	
TOTALS		6,806		4,784	

Profit and Loss Statement for 2015

Revenue according to DZI	2015		2014		Expenditure according to DZI	2015		2014	
	" 000 €	%	" 000 €	%		" 000 €	%	" 000 €	%
Cash donations	855	30,04	868	33.19	Expenditure on project aid				
Donations in kind	30	1.05	21	0,80	Staff-related expenditure	397	15.47	452	19.27
Bequests	61	2.14	285	10.90	Administrative and other expenditure	1,244	48.46	1,050	44.76
Fines	16	0.56	6	0.23	Expenditure on project monitoring and assistance				
					Staff-related expenditure	208	8.10	193	8.23
Subtotal (total income from donations)	962		1,180		Administrative and other expenditure	22	0.86	23	0.98
					Expenditure on campaigns, education, public awareness				
Government grants	304	10.68	319	12.20	Staff-related expenditure	141	5.49	90	3.84
Grants from other organizations	1,229	43.18	999	38.20	Administrative and other expenditure	54	2.10	53	2.26
Nonprofit tax-exempt and taxable commercial activity	131	4.60	17	0.65	Expenditure on advertising and general PR work				
Interest and capital gains	181	6.36	76	2.91	Staff-related expenditure	104	4.05	97	4.13
Other revenue	39	1.39	24	0.92	Administrative and other expenditure	125	4.87	145	6.18
					Expenditure on administration				
Total revenue	2,846	100	2,615	100	Staff-related expenditure	186	7.25	175	7.46
Withdrawals from revenue reserves	4		18		Administrative and other expenditure	59	2.30	67	2.86
	2,850		2,633		Expenditure on portfolio management & commercial activities				
					Portfolio management	27	1.05	1	0.03
					Commercial activity	0	0.00	0	0.00
					Total expenditure	2,567	100.00	2,346	100.00
					Transfers to the Fund's capital stock	61		5	
					Transfers to revenue reserves	128		282	
					Transfers to „Umschichtungsrücklage“ (special reserve for gains from transactions to cover potential losses of future transactions)	94		0	
						2,850		2,633	



Dealing with potential risks

For a non-profit foundation, the European Nature Heritage Fund's capital stock is relatively slim. Therefore the organization is urgently dependent on donations and third-party grants in so as to be able to discharge its mandate as an advocate of nature in Europe. We are aware of the fact that with this funding comes great responsibility and day in, day out we work towards using the funds as efficiently as possible. The manner in which these grants and donations are passed on to partner organizations in the east and south of Europe is also a sensitive issue, one that is predicated on a very good network of contacts built up over many years. Moreover, a multi-level control system is essential for the correct assessment of and effective response to risks. Risk mitigation measures must also be adopted for capital investments.

Potential risks and the measures we take to avert them

Financial and economic crises

The global financial and economic crisis which began in 2008, and the impacts of which are still being felt, has shown once again that our lives' economic circumstances can change swiftly and dramatically. The fact that there is

no interest without risk has definitely become apparent since the onset of the financial crisis in 2008. In this light it is becoming increasingly difficult to find some middle ground between security and financial returns. Charting our course in this respect we abide by the following principles: The European Nature Heritage Fund invests its equity capital in low-risk funds, taking into account ethical and environmental criteria (please refer to the chapter on "Transparency"). Moreover, reserves are built up in order to be able to even out fluctuations in revenues. The special reserve which has been set up in the meantime for gains from transactions which can in turn be used to cover potential losses of future transactions ("Umschichtungsrücklage") is a safeguard against potentially required depreciation of fixed assets.

Lack of competent and trustworthy partner organizations

The European Nature Heritage Fund has very consciously not opted for a Europe-wide network of offices with full-time employees, thus eliminating the considerable administrative expenditure such a network would incur. We are primarily concerned with cooperating with existing conservation organizations that are well connected in their local areas and are successful in their endeavours. In many countries of southern and eastern Europe, powerful non-profit and independent conservation organizations are few and far between. The lack of competent and trustworthy partners limits our options. It is for this reason that EuroNatur also invests in the systematic development and strengthening of civil society in southern

and eastern Europe. EuroNatur's project work is always predicated on cooperation with a local partner organization. If there is no such partner organization in a particular region, it is reason enough for EuroNatur not to engage.

Misappropriation of funds

We have self-imposed strict rules on budgetary control. All outward payments are checked for mathematical and factual correctness. Payment orders are always subject to the "two-man rule". Target-performance comparisons are carried out on a monthly basis, allowing for swift detection of potential irregularities. Our 2015 annual accounts were audited by the independent auditing and tax accounting firm WISTA AG and endorsed with an unqualified audit certificate.

Inefficiencies and ineffectiveness in project work

We regularly scrutinize our internal processes, which allows us to continuously increase our efficiency. We also analyse the work of our partner organizations and work with them to find solutions to increase their efficiency. Our partners' statements of expenditure are checked by the project liaison person for factual accuracy and by the accounting department for financial accuracy. All statements of expenditure are submitted to the managing director for approval prior to funds being released. In order to increase the efficiency of our work we conduct staff development and training, in terms of both content and methodology, for ourselves and our partners on an ongoing basis.

Photo: Pavel Bečka



Transparency – one of EuroNatur's important tenets

EuroNatur was again awarded the DZI Seal of Approval

In 2015, EuroNatur Foundation was again awarded the DZI (German Central Institute for Social Issues) Seal of Approval. It will expire at the end of the third quarter of 2016. The Seal of Approval certifies that, among other things, EuroNatur conducts its work in keeping with its statutes, is reputable in its solicitation of donations and in its public relations work, and that the proportion of funds spent on advertising and administration in 2014, i.e. 20.6 %, has been at an acceptable level („acceptable“ meaning between 20 and 30 percent).

Initiative for transparency in civil society

EuroNatur has been a signatory to Transparency International Germany's "Initiative Transparente Zivilgesellschaft" (Initiative for transparency in civil society) since 2010. Signatories to the initiative voluntarily commit to publishing ten particular items of information about their organization on their homepage. These include i.a. their statutes, the names of essential decision-makers, and information on how they are funded, how they use their funding, and their personnel structure.

Auditing

In 2015, EuroNatur once again voluntarily submitted to an audit of its annual accounts by an auditor. The auditing and tax accounting firm WISTA AG audited EuroNatur Foundation's 2015 annual accounts in accordance with Par. 317 of the German Commercial Code (HGB) and in accordance with the accepted standards for the review of financial statements (IDW PS 201) as set out by the Institute of Public Auditors in Germany (IDW) and endorsed the accounts with an unqualified audit certificate. An extract from the audit certificate states the following:

„We have audited the annual financial statements, consisting of the balance sheet, statement of income, and notes, and including the accounting and the management report of EuroNatur – Stiftung Europäisches Naturerbe, Radolfzell, for the fiscal year from January 1 to December 31, 2015. [...] Our audit did not lead to any objections.“

25 May 2016, WISTA AG, Mannheim

Capital investment based on environmental and ethical criteria

EuroNatur Foundation's foundation capital now amounts to almost EUR 3 million. Moreover, EuroNatur Foundation holds trust property of more than EUR 2.2 million in trust for the benefit of the non-autonomous foundations. In keeping with the organization's philosophy, investment decisions are based on environmental and ethical criteria. Both inclusion and exclusion criteria are applied to these decisions. As a minimum, investment products are not considered if they invest in companies involved in nuclear power, agrochemicals, weapons, genetic engineering, pornography, alcohol, tobacco, the motor industry, the oil and coal industries, airline companies, or if they are invested in government bonds in nations practicing capital punishment, actively driving forward nuclear energy, or which are considered corrupt. Our main financial service providers for asset management purposes are the Umweltbank AG, the Bank J. Safra Sarasin AG, Vescor, and the GLS Bank.



System of remuneration

EuroNatur's employees are assigned at five different functional levels, in addition to the management team. These five levels are Administration I and II, Divisional management, and Project management I and II. Remuneration bands have been set for each of the levels, extending 20 % either side of the mid-point. The mid-points for the Administration I and Project Management II remuneration bands are EUR 34k and EUR 51k per annum respectively.

In 2015, the Executive Director received an annual remuneration package of EUR 92k. Without exception all members of the Presiding Committee and the Board of Trustees act in a voluntary capacity and only receive reimbursements for cost incurred, but no expense allowances.

Advertising and donor information

Six times a year EuroNatur Foundation sends out information to its donors to keep them in touch with ongoing projects and request support for concrete endeavours. Similarly, support for individual projects is solicited, and information provided, through the organization's website at www.euronatur.org and the digital EuroNatur newsletter. In addition, regular supporters receive the EuroNatur magazine as well as topical project reports containing comprehensive infor-

mation and reports on current developments in the projects. In 2015, EuroNatur Foundation conducted its own donor information and fundraising. With the exception of printers, no aspect of these tasks was outsourced to any agency or external service provider.

Impact monitoring and impact analysis

One of the most important tenets of EuroNatur's work is the efficient deployment of funds entrusted to us by our donors and by the organizations (both governmental and non-governmental) that support our work. Systematic planning and comprehensive impact monitoring are preconditions to the efficient use of funds.

EuroNatur Foundation takes both a supportive and an operative role. For projects undertaken by EuroNatur in cooperation with its partner organizations, and which in most instances are in receipt of third-party financial support (from both governmental and non-governmental sources), EuroNatur reports back in detail to the financial backers. Impact monitoring already begins at the stages of project development and project application. EuroNatur develops projects based on comprehensive situational analysis and needs assessments. Together with our partners we formu-

late the overall objectives and prepare project applications based thereon. These can only attract funding if the objectives are clearly set out and if activities are proposed that serve to meet these objectives. Evidence of the use of funds must include comprehensive evaluations of the achievement of set objectives as well as rationales for potential changes in or adjustments to activities or even objectives. In order to receive grants from EuroNatur, applicants must present cohesive project designs in keeping with the principles set out above. The partner organization's reports are subject to comprehensive evaluation by EuroNatur and our project managers regularly visit the project areas to discuss the projects' progress.

Both positive developments and difficulties arising are assessed in order to allow for procedural adjustments to be made and to learn lessons for the future. Progress reports document project development up to the point of the projects' completion.

Photo: Kerstin Sauer - chamomille



Planned giving for nature in Europe

Over the last three decades, bequests and endowments made to EuroNatur have significantly strengthened the Foundation's financial asset base. This type of financial support is particularly valuable to us as it enables long-term planning of project activities.

Your legacy creates life

A bequest made to EuroNatur allows you to do good beyond your own lifetime and to shape the future. No matter how large or small, your legacy will continue to bear fruit, year after year. Your bequest will not burn away in one-off activities. Instead, it will lay a solid foundation for effective nature conservation and thus generate far-reaching prospects for people and nature: With its projects for nature conservation and species protection EuroNatur Foundation helps to protect in perpetuity Europe's natural heritage in all its diversity, including its natural resources which are of such great value to humankind. Your contribution leaves a living and dignified legacy for yourself or a loved one who has passed away.

The state won't become a co-inheritor

Use the opportunity to freely and autonomously decide how your assets will be used and let them be a reflection of your commitment and convictions. Any such financial support you entrust to EuroNatur will be used in full to support the charitable causes you wish to assist. EuroNatur Foundation, as a non-profit foundation, is exempt from inheritance tax and gift tax. Any gifted or bequeathed assets are therefore tax-free to EuroNatur Foundation and can exclusively be devoted to the pursuit of the Foundation's objectives, and the person making the bequest can be sure that the funds will be used as he or she had intended, without the state taking a share.



“When a person makes a bequest to EuroNatur in their will, this is a sign of great confidence in us and our work, a confidence we will do our utmost to honour”,

says Sabine Günther who is in charge of donor management at EuroNatur.

Are you thinking about considering EuroNatur in your will? To find out more about bequests please contact:

**Sabine Günther, phone: +49 (0)7732 – 9272 17
e-mail: sabine.guenther@euronatur.org**

Photo: EuroNatur - group picture EuroNatur



EuroNatur Offices

Radolfzell

Konstanzer Str. 22
starting December, 2016: Westendstraße 3
D - 78315 Radolfzell
Fon +49 (0)7732/92 72 0
Fax +49 (0)7732/92 72 22
info@euronatur.org

Bonn

Euskirchener Weg 39
D - 53359 Rheinbach / Bonn
Fon +49 (0)2226/20 45
Fax +49 (0)2226/171 00
bonn@euronatur.org





eurONATUR FOUNDATION

Presiding Committee:

President: Christel Schroeder

Vice president: Prof. Dr. Sven Olaf Hoffmann

Members of the Presiding Committee:

Dr. Thomas Griese, Jörg Nitsch,

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Executive Director:

Gabriel Schwaderer, Radolfzell

Director for Nature Conservation Policy:

Lutz Ribbe, Rheinbach

Imprint:

EuroNatur Foundation

Konstanzer Str. 22, D-78315 Radolfzell

Fon +49 (0)7732/92 72 0

Fax +49 (0)7732/92 72 22

info@euronatur.org

www.euronatur.org

www.facebook.com/euronatur

www.youtube.com/euronatur

www.twitter.com/EuroNaturORG

Writers:

Katharina Grund, Angie Rother, Gabriel Schwaderer

Translation:

Ute Bohnsack, Email: agroeco@eircom.net

Photo credit:

Cover: Gunther Willinger – sage and carthusian pink

Graphik design:

Kerstin Sauer; EuroNatur Service GmbH

ISSN 0945-148X

Printing:

Fischer Druck GmbH & Co. KG,

printed on 100% recycling paper



The DZI (German Central Institute for Social Issues) seal of approval certifies that EuroNatur is serious, transparent and uses donations wisely and effectively.

Conservation needs action – and money!

Our successful work is built on targeted strategies, efficient methods, sound knowledge, rich practical experience and respectable partner organisations in the project regions. But existing opportunities translate into concrete measures only with the help of our donors.

Donations to registered charities such as EuroNatur are tax-deductible. Please help us help Europe's nature and wildlife.

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www.euronatur.org

