WILDLIFE REHABILITATION and BREEDING CENTRE
Green Balkans

annual report
2010
Dear volunteers, colleagues, friends, partners, Contributors and adherents of the Wildlife Rescue Centre,

The one and only Wildlife Rescue Centre in the country has been operating in Stara Zagora for more than 15 years so far, as a part of Green Balkans - Stara Zagora. For these years the professionalism of the Centre has proven the significance of the efforts aiming at conserving species ex-situ. For this time the team of the Centre has developed its professional skills and our activities have become popular on a national and European scale.

In 2010 the Centre received over 1045 wild animals in need of help, successfully treated and released back into the wild more than 480 of them. Some of these animals were rare or threatened species of European or global conservation concern.

I am convinced that the good results of the efforts of the Centre will be even more in the year to come, what will bring more nature in our lives and more volunteers and friends in the Centre.

I wish you all good health and loads of personal and professional success in 2011

Yours truly and gratefully,

Nona Karadjova - Minister of Environment and Waters of Republic of Bulgaria

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The Team

What is typical of the members of the team is that they are tireless, dedicated persons, ready to suffer privation for the sake of animals. Every signal related to a wounded animal or wildlife in distress involves different approach and a lot of ingenuity. Being extremely small, the team of the Wildlife Rescue Center has to combine numerous functions. The team members are specialized in specific areas of activity; however, they need to be familiar with the peculiarities of the rest of the activities, because in many cases their immediate reaction is of crucial significance. This, of course, requires information sharing and perfect coordination.

Ivaylo Klisurov – Manager

Ivaylo Klisurov is in charge of: organizing and managing the work of the Wildlife Rescue Centre; managing the team; developing projects and raising funds; contributing actively to the personnel policy and the relations with the public, state and private institutions, and other NGOs; coordinating the development of breeding programs, as well as reintroduction and restocking programs, where the Rescue Centre plays a key role. Ivaylo Klisurov is responsible for the development of the Organization and its activities in Stara Zagora.

Chair of the Managing Board of “Green Balkans – Stara Zagora” NGO

Dr. Hristina Klisurova – Veterinarian and PR

Dr. Klisurova is responsible for receiving, treatment and rehabilitation of patients. Also, Dr. Klisurova’s duties involve: maintenance of the Rescue Centre’s database and documentation regarding the Biological Diversity Act and the Veterinary Medicine Act; participation in information campaigns related to the Centre and the conservation of rare species; active coordination of the relations with the public, media, and state institutions; development of new projects and coordination of the donation and adoption programs of the Wildlife Rescue Centre

Dr. Ivan Ivanov - Veterinarian

Dr. Ivanov is responsible for treatment and rehabilitation of patients. His duties also include analysis of the reasons for their conditions and the possible complications that might occur as a result of their captive breeding, as well as recommendations for appropriate changes.

Dr. Boryana Hristova – Veterinarian

Dr. Hristova is responsible for treatment and rehabilitation of patients in cases when a veterinarian is urgently needed and there is no such specialist employed at the Center. Despite the pressure of her work, she is always available to help.

Krasen Lazarov – Transport and Supply Coordinator

Krasen coordinate the supplies of food for patients and materials needed for the functioning of the Rescue Center. Transportation of patients is his main duty. In fact, he has to be multi-functional, since he is involved in different activities.

Karney Karneev – Wildlife Rehabilitator

Karney’s profound knowledge of his “children” – the birds of prey, accumulated during the long observations of their behavior and life in the wild will improve the living conditions for the temporarily hospitalized and the permanently disabled patients of the Rescue Center. This is exactly the approach we need in order to secure successful implementation of our raptor reintroduction programs.

Ivan Ivanov – Breeding Program Coordinator and Technical Assistant

Nikolay Arabadzhiev – Wildlife Rehabilitator

Nikolay has long experience as a volunteer of Green Balkans actively involved in field activities for a long time. For several years now, he has held several positions at the Rescue Centre. In his capacity of a coordinator of the breeding program, Ivan is in charge of the breeding pairs, as well as the incubation and hatching premises. In addition, he contributes to the reintroduction and restocking programs, and assists with the general and specialized maintenance of the facility.

Lyubomila Krivoshieva – Wildlife Rehabilitator

Lyubomila has been a volunteer of Green Balkans and the Rescue Centre for many years, actively involved in the guarding of Imperial Eagle nests and the transportation of animals in distress from Sofia to the Rescue Centre. Wildlife photographer Mila has a very special attitude to animals, which, combined with good knowledge of their behavior in the wild, allows for a better assessment of their behavior as patients and easier adaptation of the animals to their temporary captivity. She is in charge of the intensive care unit and the baby ward. Mila is the photographer of the Rescue Centre and never misses an opportunity to document both the patients’ lives and the happy and sad sides of their treatment and therapy. She decides whether the patients that have undergone medical treatment and rehabilitation are ready and fit to be released back into the wild. He is actively involved in the maintenance of the facility and construction of new cages and perches.

Pepa Encheva – Team Coordinator and Wildlife Rehabilitator

Pepa combines several key activities: coordination of the everyday work of the team; preparation of the weekly and monthly programs; active participation in the receiving of new patients, food supplies and consumables needed for the daily routine at the Centre, as well as in the caretaking of the animals.

Venelin Hristov - volunteer

Venelin is the newest addition to the team. He is a veterinary student at the Thracian University – one of the persons upon whom we have set our hopes for the future. He has good knowledge of the breeding of Columbidae as well as songbirds, he is also good at acquiring new skills and knowledge regarding all other species. His cheerful smile and endless enthusiasm are quite promising!
The Wildlife Rescue Center is one of the main units of Green Balkans nature-conservation NGO. In 1990, a group of enthusiasts came up with an idea of establishing a specialized wildlife hospital. This idea was gradually developed, and today, 20 years later, the Wildlife Rescue Center has built a reputation as the only institution of its kind, working for rehabilitation, medical treatment, recovery, and release of wild animals in distress – either rare or threatened with extinction, back into the wild. Hundreds of supporters from all over the country render their voluntary assistance and cooperation, while the real value is the significant change in people’s attitude.

Currently, the Wildlife Rescue Center has numerous facilities for rehabilitation, treatment, breeding, and raising of rare species, and, despite the difficulties, continues to pursue its mission – changing people’s attitudes to wildlife and the problems it faces today, and encouraging their responsibility.

Main Areas of Activity of the Centre

- Providing medical treatment and recovery for rare or threatened species in distress (injured or exhausted), and releasing them back into the wild;
- Providing the necessary conditions and equipment for harboring confiscated rare animals of the Bulgarian fauna, which may be subject to illegal trade;
- Breeding permanently disabled rare or threatened raptors that cannot be released back into the wild;
- Developing reintroduction programs and supporting the populations of the following species: Bearded Vulture, Imperial Eagle, Black Vulture, Saker Falcon, and Lesser Kestrel;
- Implementing environmental educational youth programs.

Results Achieved

The number of patients increases every year, both as a result of the efforts for popularization of the activity of the Rescue Centre and the raised environmental awareness of the public. About 40% of these are successfully released back into the wild, including species of high conservation status such as eagles, vultures, falcons, herons, pelicans, storks, etc.
Signals of animals in distress are received from all over the country almost on a daily basis. Most often, signals come via the Centre’s hot line.

In some cases, the patients are brought directly to the Centre. Sometimes, the team of the Centre has to make on-the-spot visits, especially in specific cases, natural disasters or other calamities involving numerous casualties.

The team of the Centre has established a broad network of voluntary supporters in more than 50 settlements throughout the country. These volunteers receive signals on a local level and render assistance for the transportation of the animals to the Rescue Center, as in many cases this is done by public transport.

Bulgarians, living abroad, ask us for advice when they find a bird in distress or a chick fallen out of the nest. In most cases, the fact that they get our immediate support and advice saves the life of the bird. Thus, in 2010 we raised several chicks in Germany and the Dominican Republic.

Every year, as a result of the activity of the Rescue Centre, the number of people and institutions sending or assisting with the sending of animals in distress to Stara Zagora grows, reaching 866 in 2010.

In more serious cases, such as gun shot wounds or heavy bleeding from an accident, specialists from the Centre give instructions for applying first aid and stabilizing the patient on the spot. In the towns of Kazanlak, Burgas and Haskovo, with the assistance of Pet Hospital Dr. Tzekov, the animals are sent directly to the veterinary clinics where they receive qualified first aid and stabilization prior to their transportation to Stara Zagora.
Main Reasons For Receiving Patients

The most common reason for animals being received at the Centre during the peak summer period was young inexperienced birds falling out of the nests. In 2010, they numbered 450 of a total of 1046 received patients. During the winter peak period, the most numerous group is that of shot animals.

In total, in 2010, in terms of the frequency of reasons for being received at the Rescue Centre, the patients were: birds fallen out of the nest; animals found beyond their natural habitat; animals reintroduced within specific programs; victims to collision with vehicles; shot; hatched at the Rescue Center, etc.

In most cases, the animals received at the Centre are in extremely poor condition - shot, injured by high-voltage electricity, heavily parasitized, fallen in petrol substances, as well as animals with serious fractures caused by collisions with vehicles, etc.

The cases of poisoned animals have become more and more frequent in the recent years. Such cases most commonly appear in the period before sowing. Farmers have started to use treated seeds not only for sowing but also against rodents. In many of the cases the various poisonous substances are overdosed for guaranteeing more effective extermination of voles and other rodents. These activities result in poisoning vast areas as well as many seed-eating and raptor birds.

The cases of keeping wild protected species at home have multiplied in the recent years too. In some of the cases this is not deliberate but rather a result of occasional finding of birds in distress. Unfortunately the permanent taming of these birds is almost always fatal for a great deal of them.

As for the shooting of protected species, the general picture raises even more concerns. More and more animals with gun-shot-wounds arrive in the Rescue Centre every year. Very low percentage of them recovers successfully, especially among birds. Despite the enforced European agreements and various regulations, hunters continue shooting on all sorts of animals with almost no control. The hatred for birds of prey not only still exists but also increases. Many of the hunters shoot on raptors birds just for fun despite the fact that they are not game species and ignoring their high conservation status.
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Release Back Into the Wild

Prior to the selection of the sites where the animals that have undergone successful treatment and/or rehabilitation will be released back into the wild, the specialists of the Centre coordinate their activities with the Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Waters in Stara Zagora. Mainly, the criteria for the selection of the sites are protected areas, providing protection and conditions to monitor the released animals during their adaptation to the new environment. All birds are marked with special rings provided by the Bulgarian Ornithological Centre. A total of 322 birds released back into the wild have been ringed in 2010.

One of our important achievements in 2010 was a completely new method we invented and applied for the release of young storks fallen out of their nests and raised at the Rescue Center.

The method involves placing the grown-up youngsters in nests we have built in a suitable area, using their nest fidelity. The young birds leave the nest to forage in the abundant marshes and meadows, and then return to the nests to roost. Although they have no parents, they behave as a family and when it is time for autumn migration they join the flocks migrating southward.

Veterinary Caretaking

Veterinary specialists take care of the animals after being transported to the Centre in Stara Zagora – first, saving their lives, then securing proper rehabilitation. Every day, our veterinary specialists carry out numerous examinations, make diagnoses, perform surgical procedures and X-ray examinations. With some animals, the process of treatment and overall rehabilitation can take more than 6 to 8 months. During this period, depending on the case, there are often numerous complications related mainly to the animals’ wild origin and the shock and stress they get when taken into captivity. In most cases, this hampers the specialists’ work and the whole recovery process of the patient.

Patients presented according to the type of prescribed therapy

Number of patients by reasons for hospitalization

Release sites in 2010
Breeding Program

Although a great percentage of successfully treated animals have been released back into the wild, many of the patients remain permanently disabled and cannot survive in their natural environment. These animals are included in a series of rehabilitation courses to get adapted to the future aviary breeding.

Some of them are included in the breeding programs of the Centre. Parents unfit for living in the wild have absolutely healthy offspring that is subsequently released into the wild. In 2010, we had breeding success with pairs of Eagle Owls, White Storks, Common Kestrels and Barn Owls.
Programs for Reintroduction and Restocking of Endangered or Extinct Bird Species

Restocking of Griffon Vulture (Gyps fulvus) in the Balkan Mountains

In 2010, as part of the Balkan Vulture Action Plan, Green Balkans launched the implementation of a large-scale 5-year project "Recovery of the Populations of Large European Vultures in Bulgaria" LIFE08 NAT/ BG/278, through the financial support of the LIFE+ financial instrument of the European Community, the Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS), and Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU). The project envisages import of 150–200 Griffon Vultures (Gyps fulvus) from Spain, which will be subsequently accommodated in four adaptation aviaries in the Balkan Mountains.

The Rescue Center plays a key role in the project, providing the accommodation and caretaking of birds imported from Spain before being sent to the aviaries in the field, and securing specialized treatment and rehabilitation for vultures in distress found after their release in the wild.

A specialized aviary was built within this project to accommodate the imported birds. The first group of 31 Griffon Vultures arrived in June 2010. A month later they were tagged with micro-chips, metal rings, wing-tags, and PVC rings; then the birds were allocated to the four adaptation aviaries.

In addition, the Griffon Vulture pair inhabiting the Rescue Center for years was accommodated in the adaptation aviary in Central Balkan in order to attract the released vultures. Hopefully, the new environment will stimulate successful breeding.

The team of the Rescue Center assisted two birds in distress after the first coordinated release that took place in October 2010. The first bird (K01) was blown down by the wind and then found by citizens of Sliven, and the second one (K03) was caught by local people near the town of Montana and later confiscated by the project team with the assistance of the Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Water of Montana.

In November 2010, the team of the Wildlife Rescue Center performed an autopsy on a non-tagged Griffon Vulture that had collided with a wind turbine near Kaliakra; in December 2010, there was an investigation on the case of electrocuted vulture tagged with a ring numbered G34.

The project activities continue till 2012

Reintroduction of Lesser Kestrel (Falco naumanni) in Bulgaria

The activities under the program for reintroduction of the Lesser Kestrel in Bulgaria continued in 2010. This once common falcon went extinct as a breeding species in Bulgaria in the early 1960s. In general, the main reasons are related to human activity. In 2010, the project proposal entitled “Lesser Kestrel – no past, but future” won the first prize funded by M-Tel Eco Grant. The activities implemented within the second project funded by M-Tel included reconstruction of more breeding cages and purchase of additional specialized incubators. The implementation of the activities under the project “Conservation measures for target species of the EU Birds Directive – Lesser Kestrel, Black Vulture, and Imperial Eagle in their main habitats in Bulgaria” funded by Operational Program Environment (OPE), which began at the end of 2009, continued in 2010. One of the three project activities is directly related to the program – establishing material and genetic base for restoration of Lesser Kestrel and identifying potential sites suitable for the species’ populations. The facilities of the Rescue Center will be further expanded and adapted to the breeding of new Lesser Kestrel pairs, increase of the food resource, and provision of 5 pairs from Spain, as well as identification of suitable territories for subsequent release of birds into the wild.
Reintroduction of Saker Falcon (Falco cherrug) in Bulgaria

In 2006 the Central Laboratory of General Ecology (CLGE) at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, currently Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research (IBES), started a 4-year research on the status and ecology of the Saker Falcon in Bulgaria. At the end of 2009, a team involving Bulgarian and foreign organizations (Central Laboratory of General Ecology, Green Balkans, International Wildlife Consultants, National Museum of Natural History, Institute of Zoology - BAS, Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research) came up with a draft document discussing the need for reintroduction of Saker Falcons in the country and the possibilities for implementation of such a project. Green Balkans participated both in the field surveys and the elaboration of ex-situ measures for conservation of the species – breeding birds in captivity for the purpose of introducing their offspring in the wild.

In 2010, two experts of Green Balkans, one of IBES and one of Central Balkan National Park took part in an international conference on the Saker Falcon in Europe.

Green Balkans and IBES implemented two projects related to the conservation of the Saker Falcon in Bulgaria and the program for reintroduction of the species in Central Balkan National Park. The first project aimed at improving the hunting conditions and the food base, while the second one was intended to assess the risk of electrocution of reintroduced Saker Falcons.

In 2010, the Rescue Center launched the Saker Falcon Breeding Program with the purchase of two pairs of the European race of this species, together with Spatia Wildlife. The construction of a special breeding aviary for Saker Falcons began, following the example of the best breeding facilities in Europe. Six young birds are envisaged to be released under a special methodology (hacking) in 2011 within the project for reintroduction of Saker Falcons in Bulgaria. The birds will be tagged with satellite transmitters to secure daily observation of their movements and survival. The purpose of the project is supporting the restoration of the species in Bulgaria and identifying the unknown negative factors that hamper the natural recovery of the species in the country.

Educational and Public Campaigns and Visits to the Centre

In 2010, our team was involved in numerous educational and public campaigns. Green Balkans’ volunteers popularized various environment protection and nature conservation activities all over the country. Lots of campaigns and workshops about wild animals (e.g., victims to human impact), have also been organized.

Every day our specialists share their opinion on topics related to wildlife rehabilitation and medical treatment in various electronic forums. This raises the awareness of active citizens regarding the problems related to nature conservation in Bulgaria and the negative human impact.

In 2010, the Wildlife Rescue Centre welcomed more than 2,000 visitors. They were mainly students, undergraduates, conservationists, experts of the Ministry of the Environment and Waters and Executive Forest Agency and journalists. Many tourist operators organizing students’ excursions included the Rescue Centre in their offers as an important place that could be visited by children. Thus, the Centre became a preferred destination of excursions of students from all over the country. Here, in addition to nice emotions and close encounters with animals in distress, the children had the chance to get closely acquainted with the biology of the species, the story of every patient, and the negative impact of human on nature.

Many public persons visited the Wildlife Rescue Centre, namely: Mrs. Nona Karadzhova – Minister of Environment and Water, Prof. Tanchev – Mayor of Stara Zagora Municipality, the Rector of Trakia University – Stara Zagora, Mr. Yordan Nikolov – Regional Governor of Stara Zagora, Mrs. Elizabeth Chu – Ambassador of Taiwan to Athens, etc.
Voluntary Efforts

In 2010, the daily work at the Rescue Centre involved mainly volunteers from Bulgaria – students, undergraduates, workers – both from Stara Zagora and other settlements. The only foreign representative that year was Grant Garstka (US), an ex-Peace Corps volunteer in Bulgaria and an active volunteer of Green Balkans.

Being a volunteer at the Rescue Center is both interesting and responsible. The volunteers made their valuable contribution to the everyday caretaking of patients (food preparation, feeding, cleaning, monitoring) and the various activities related to the maintenance of the facility (grass mowing, disinfection, gardening, etc.). More than 30 volunteers, aged 15-45, contributed a total of 342 hours of voluntary work.

We express our most sincere appreciation of the efforts of these volunteers who supported the Wildlife Rescue Center in 2010:

Alexandar Zhankov Zahariev, Alexandar Mechev, Bozhidar Penev Velichkov, Victoria, Violeta Todorova, Gabriela Trifonova, Georgi Dimitrov Delchev, Grant Garstka, Delcho Rusenov Delchev, Dimka Ivanova Boeva, Dr. Bineva, Dr. Kirkova, Dr. Kostov, Dr. Petrov, Dr. Slavi Tzekov, the team of Pet Hospital Dr.Tzekov, Elena Kmetova, Elena Stoeva, Ivan Ivanov, Ivan Rumenov, Iglika, Iliyan Stoev, Yordanka Stoyanova Panayotova, Kremena Ivanova Valkova, Kristina Angelova Taskova, Marin Stoev, Petar Genchev Petrov, Radostin Georgiev Romanov, Rafil Sarkisyan, Rumyana Ivanova, Stanimir, Stefan Tihomirov Milkov, Stepan Dimitrov Gencheva, Tanyo Markov, Teodora Veselinova Kutsarova, Toni Ivanova Ruseva, Hristian Genov Marinov, Hristo Angelov Mitev, Yavor Madzharov, Yanitsa Vangelova Kostova, Hristina Taseva.

The Media

Being an organization of public benefit that helps wild animals in distress, the Rescue Centre is often popularized through media events. The purpose of these events is not gaining popularity, but reaching a wider range of people, encouraging them to protect nature and environment. In this regard, in 2010 the activity of the Rescue Centre was reported more than 150 times by TV channels, newspapers, and magazines at regional and national level. The number of publications in the national media is continuously increasing.
Funding

Fundraising for a facility like the Wildlife Rescue Centre is a difficult and complicated process consuming lots of energy, time, and patience. There are various sources of funding, including donations from private persons and companies, donations from specialized campaigns, projects funded by international donors, annual maintenance support provided by the Enterprise for Management of Environment Protection Activities (EMEPA) of the Ministry of Environment and Water. In 2010, the Wildlife Rescue Center raised BGN 234,330.06, listed in details in the graphics below.

Incomes in the Wildlife Rescue Center for 2010 – BGN 234,330.06

Expenses in the Wildlife Rescue Center for 2010 (by categories)

Donation Campaigns

In 2010, we carried out several donation campaigns to raise funds for the activity of the Rescue Centre. The traditional adoption program launched in 2006 continued throughout 2010. The campaign offers adoption of permanently disabled patients, and in 2010 in recorded 67 adoption cases, involving more than 600 donors, including citizens, whole school classes, schools and companies. The funds raised through the campaign amounted to BGN 11,810.50.

For the second consecutive year the Wildlife Rescue Centre was included in the donation campaign “Choose to help” organized by Raiffeisenbank that united more than 35 causes in different areas, such as Healthcare, Social Services, Environment Protection, Culture, and Education. The initiative was intended for the employees and the clients of the bank as well as supporters and friends of the Rescue Center. Thus, with the support of Raiffeisenbank and its employees and the funds donated from other donors, our project raised BGN 10,409. A total of 82 employees of the bank chose the cause of the Rescue Centre, for which we express our most sincere gratitude and appreciation.

At the same time, the employees of Lucrat and their friends “built a nest” in a campaign aimed at supporting the Kestrel pair at the Rescue Center. Thus, investing great euphoria and enthusiasm, they secured the future of their favorites by providing more than BGN 1,000.

Another donation campaign was carried out at the end of 2010. With the support of VIVACOM, the campaign “Second chance for wild animals” raised BGN 3,200 for two months through the DMS system. After the end of the campaign, our friends from the mobile operator donated another amount of BGN 2,000. Thus, the total amount raised through this action reached BGN 5,200.

Our thanks also go to the students of “P.R.Slaveykov” 2nd Secondary School – Stara Zagora for the wonderful charity bazaars organized for the Christmas holidays and March 1st. This was the seventh consecutive edition of the events, aimed at supporting the Eagle Owl pair at the Rescue Center.

Similarly, our friends from “Lyuben Karavelov” Primary School – Nova Zagora continued their campaign “For another flight with the wind”, supporting the Imperial Eagles – Kalin and Kalina.
Donors and Partners
We express our sincere gratitude to all who supported the development of Green Balkans’ Wildlife Rescue Centre, and most of all to:

Enterprise for Management of Environment Protection Activities (EMEPA)

Ministry of Environment and Water

Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Water – Stara Zagora

Trakia University – Stara Zagora

Vocational High School of Veterinary Medicine „Ivan P. Pavlov” – Stara Zagora

Pet Hospital Dr. Tzekov

Walsrode Bird Park (Germany)

M-Tel EcoGrant

“Workshop for Civil Initiatives” Foundation

Bulgarian Charities Aid Foundation

Bulgarian Donors Forum

The employees of Raiffeisenbank, who supported us through the donation program “Choose to help”

“Youth in Action” Program of the National Centre „European Youth Programs and Initiatives“ (NCEYPI)

Frankfurt Zoological Society (Germany)

Black Vulture Conservation Foundation (Spain)

DBU Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt

Raptor Breeding Facility (Wales, Great Britain)

LIFE+ financial instrument of the European Community (EU)

Zlin ZOO (Czech Republic)

Global Environment Facility’s Small Grants Programme (GEF – SGP)

Operational Program Environment 2007-2013, Priority Axis 3, (OPE)

MATRA Program of the Netherlands Embassy

VIVACOM

LUCRAT

VISAGES Model Group

We thank all those friends of wild animals, who supported our work!

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