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, 21 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 huge 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.
The Team

What is typical of the members of the team is that they are completely different kinds of people. 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 Centre 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.

Dr. Ivan Ivanov – Veterinarian

The Doctor. Dr. Ivanov is responsible for treatment and rehabilitation of patients. His duties also include analysis of the reasons for their conditions and the complications that may occur as a result of their captive breeding, as well as recommendations for appropriate changes. Thanks to his amazing «intuitions», many of our almost doomed patients are not only recovered and rehabilitated, but are then also released into the wild completely fit to survive in their natural environment.

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 protection of the animals and the development of the public, state and private institutions, and other NGOs, coordinating the implementation of the rescue projects, and 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.

Lyubomira Kirovska – Public Relations and Document Management

Veterinarian. Dr. Kirovska is responsible for receiving signals related to wild animals in distress. Also, Dr. Kirovska is in charge of maintenance of the Rescue Centre’s database and documentation regarding patient records and Veterinary Medicine Act; participation in information campaigns related to the Centre and the conservation of rare species; 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.

Karney Karnev – Breeding Program and Bird Training Coordinator

Karney’s profound knowledge of his «children» – the birds of prey, accumulated during the long observation 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 Centre. This is exactly the approach we need in order to secure successful implementation of any rehabilitation programs. Raptor breeding involves good knowledge of birds’ behavior and preferences, since successful breeding depends on the provision of suitable living conditions.

Venelin Hristov – Baby Ward Assistant

He is a veterinary student at the Thracian University – one of the persons upon whom we have set our hopes for the future. His good knowledge of the breeding of Columbidae and songbirds, as well as his eager interest in mammals proves to be of particular significance at the Baby Ward. All babies raised there are axial, because the facility grew healthy and thirsty thanks to his efforts and devotion.

Ivaylo Klisurov – Manager

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Dr. Rusko Petrov – Supplies Coordinator, Patient Inflow and Intensive Care Unit Assistant, Volunteers’ Coordinator

Veterinarian. Being a volunteer at the Rescue Centre for years, Rusko is the newest member of our team. He is the one in charge of securing the varied menu of our patients, providing appropriate quantities of medicines and consumables needed for their medical treatment, as well as implementing all kinds of useful endeavors. In addition, Rusko coordinates the work of our volunteers who help with the everyday caretaking of animals and supports the team of the intensive care unit.

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Rusko Lazarov – Baby Ward Assistant

Working at the Baby Ward, Rusko gained specialized skills for caretaking of small specimens – swallows, swifts, songbirds, showing gentle tenderness and affection for his patients. In his spare time he tries to combine his knowledge and skills that will be then put into practice.

Pavлина Nikolova – Hygiene, Disinfection, and Gardening Coordinator

Baby Ward Assistant

Pavлина is one of the newest members of our team. She is passionate about the hygiene and comfort of the Rescue Center’s patients and team. She is the one who creates the beautiful flowery garden – a beautiful vision meeting the visitors and guests of the Rescue Centre. Since last spring, Pavлина has been actively involved in the donations and adoption programs of the Wildlife Rescue Centre.

Signals of animals in distress are received from all over the country 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. On rare occasions, 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 Centre, as in many cases this is done by public transport.

In many cases, the people sending signals of animals in distress assist with their transportation to the Center. Thus, the patients get faster to the recue facility and have much bigger chances to survive.

In our everyday efforts we maintain successful and fruitful partnership with all Regional Inspectors of Environment and Water to whom we refer all cases related to protection of nature.

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 more than 1,000 individuals in 2011.
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 some towns we get qualified first aid and stabilization of animals in distress from veterinary clinics prior to their transportation to Stara Zagora. Veterinary clinics actively supporting our work are: Pet Hospitals Dr. Teekov in the towns of Kazanlak, Burgas and Haskovo, Central Veterinary Clinic – Sofia, AVICENA Veterinary Clinic – Sofia, ANIMO Veterinary Clinics – Sofia, BVET Veterinary Clinic – Burgas, „Sante Vita“ Veterinary Clinic – Kardzhali, „Blue Cross 24/7“ Veterinary Clinic – Sofia, „Odobrohradane“ Veterinary Clinic – Stara Zagora, „Dr. Kodzhabashev“ Veterinary Clinic – Russe.

Nature conservation status and dynamics of the patient flow throughout the year

Most of the patients are animals of high nature conservation status. Almost all of the animals received at the Centre are listed in Annex 3 of the Biological Diversity Act (BDA) and the Bern Convention. Some of the species are also included in CITES and the Bonn Convention, as well as the IUCN Red List. Most of the animals are received in the summer. On the average, 3 to 4 animals are received on a daily basis. As in previous years, these peaks coincide with the birds’ breeding period and the beginning of the hunting season for small local and migratory game, which begins at the end of the calendar year. During the winter peak period, most of the patients are victims of shooting or collision with vehicles.

List of private entities and institutions which have sent animals

Received animals by administrative division of RIEW in Bulgaria

Received animals by sites of finding

Monthly dynamics of arrival

Nature conservation status and dynamics of the patient flow throughout the year

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Main Reasons For Receiving Patients
Most of the animals received at the Centre during the peak summer period were young inexperienced birds fallen out of the nests. In 2011, they numbered 504 of a total of 1,290 received patients.

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.

In total, in 2011, in terms of the frequency of reasons for being received at the Rescue Centre, the patients were: young birds fallen out of the nests; birds hatched at the Rescue Center; patients injured by high-voltage electricity, heavily parazitised, fallen in petrol substances, etc.

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Unfortunately, as in previous years, there were numerous cases of poisoned animals. 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 usually result in mass poisoning of seed-eating and raptor birds.
Results of the Activities of the Centre
During the period January-December 2011, a total of 1,290 wild animals in distress were received at the Rescue Centre. After a period of treatment and rehabilitation, 35.8% of the patients were recovered and released back into the wild. The rest of the animals were either put in aviaries for captive breeding or had a lethal outcome.

The monthly dynamics of the patient flow reveals specific periods. Thus, April-August is identified as the period of fluffy babies, which, for one reason or another, fall out of their nests. September and October are the migrants’ months. Often, those that have not stored enough energy for the long migration are found exhausted or in distress. October-January is the period of shot animals. Not surprisingly, this period coincides with the hunting season, hence the problems for wild animals.

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.

This year again, to support the storks, we applied the method that involves placing the grown-up family and when it is time for autumn migration they join the flocks migrating southward.

This method cannot be applied with young storks that were kept in captivity for longer periods of time. The youngsters get easily tamed and imprinted. Thus, although they have no parents, they behave as a family and when it is time for autumn migration they join the flocks migrating southward.

Method of release of young storks
Another method we use is release through hack boxes. Special cages, called «hack boxes», provide temporary accommodation for the birds fit to be released into the wild. On the release day, we carefully open the door of the hack box and the birds leave the cage when they feel ready to do this. For the next few days, we provide food in the hack box in case their first attempts to hunt prove to be unsuccessful. We applied this method with Common Kestrels, Barn Owls, Little Owls, and Scops Owls.

Breeding Program
During the spring-summer season of 2011 the Wildlife Rescue Center took the first steps towards the breeding of some globally threatened bird species.

The Lesser Kestrel is an extinct species in Bulgaria. Two pairs of Lesser Kestrels breed at the Rescue Center as part of the activities within the reintroduction program. In April, the female individuals laid five eggs each. In mid-May, one of the birds hatched 5 chicks, and raised successfully 4 of them.

The rest of the pairs breeding at the Rescue Center consist of birds that have undergone medical treatment but remained permanently disabled. The Eagle Owls, inhabiting the Center for years, raised one chick. As to the Barn Owls, there were 14 eggs from 2 broods. 10 hatchlings and 5 chicks released into the wild for the entire breeding season. The pair of Levant Sparrowhawks made a serious attempt to breed, laying 3 eggs. Unfortunately, we did not get the chance to raise their chicks. Only one of the five pairs of Common Kestrels raised offspring – 7 chicks that were released into the wild.
**PROGRAMS FOR REINTRODUCTION AND RESTOCKING OF ENDANGERED OR EXTINCT BIRD SPECIES**

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

In 2011, The Wildlife Rescue Center continued their involvement in 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 envisaged import of 150–200 Griffon Vultures (Gyps fulvus) from Spain, which will be subsequently accommodated in four adaptation aviaries in the Balkan Mountains.

A total of 50 Griffon Vultures, marked with microchips, metal rings, wingtags, and the appropriate PVC rings were put under quarantine in the specialized avairy constructed within the project. A month later, following the quarantine period, the birds were accommodated in four adaptation aviaries in the Balkan Mountains.

**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 2011, experts of Green Balkans and IBES took part in the third international Festival of Falconry held in Al Ain, UAE, where the representative of Green Balkans presented the activities of the Wildlife Rescue Center before participants in the festival. 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.

For the second year in succession, the Rescue Center implemented the Saker Falcon Breeding Program that was launched in 2010 with the purchase of two pairs of the European race of this species, together with Spatia Wildlife. In 2011, there were already three pairs. We constructed a special breeding aviary, following the example of the best breeding facilities in Europe. Six young birds were released under a special methodology (hacking) in the project for reintroduction of Saker Falcons in Bulgaria. The birds were 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.

**Reintroduction of Lesser Kestrel (Falco naumanni) in Bulgaria**

The activities under the program for reintroduction of the Lesser Kestrel in Bulgaria continued in 2011. 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. We continued implementing 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. Within this project, a big new vivarium was constructed at the Rescue Center to secure live prey for the birds. The future activities include construction of cages to accommodate 5 new pairs from Spain, as well as identification of suitable territories for subsequent release of birds into the wild.

**Educational and Public Campaigns. Visits to the Centre**

In 2011, our team was involved in numerous educational and public campaigns. Green Balkans’ volunteers popularized and promoted various environment protection and nature conservation activities all over the country. Lots of campaigns and workshops about wild animals, victims to human impact, were organized.

Every day our specialists share their opinion on topics related to wildlife rehabilitation and medical treatment in various social networks and electronic forums. This raises the awareness of active citizens regarding the problems related to nature conservation in Bulgaria and the negative human impact.
In 2011, 1040 people in total – students, undergraduates, participants in events held at the Facility, were organized in group visits to the Rescue Center. In addition, there were many official guests, media, and partners visiting us. This year again, the Center was part of the programs of the school excursions organized by tourist agencies. 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 stories of some of the patients, and the negative human impact on nature.

Four major campaigns and public events focusing on the Rescue Center were carried out in 2011, including development and dissemination of the Report of the Rescue Center: «Green energy for nature conservation legislation. The main laws in charge of the enforcement of the Hunting and Game Protection Act (HGPA) and the Biological Diversity Act (BDA), chapters III and IV («Protection of Plant and Animal Species» and «Trade in threatened species of wild flora and fauna»).

In addition to direct accommodation of confiscated animals and parts thereof, the Rescue Center also provided important consultations in complicated cases.

In the period 1992–2011, a total of 28 confiscated animals and parts thereof, the Rescue Center also acted as consultants in two cases of birds – Toucans and Parrots, confiscated at Svilengrad Border Checkpoint.

Many public persons visited the Wildlife Rescue Center, namely: Mrs. Nona Karadzhova – Minister of Environment and Water, Mr. James Warlick – the United States Ambassador to Bulgaria, politicians, and public figures.

Donation campaigns

In 2011, we continued implementing various donation campaigns.

Traditionally, the Adoption program was carried out throughout the year, involving a total of 40 adoptions of patients by individual and group donors. The Christmas initiative called «My Christmas, my small green step» recruited more than 40 supporters. Within this initiative, a cloth bag was given in return for every BGN 10 donated to the Center, thus promoting the use of eco-friendly reusable bags.

»Choose to help« campaign initiated by Raiffeisenbank in 2010, continued through the first couple of months of 2011. The campaign raised donations from citizens, employees of the Bank, and the Bank itself.

Another campaign launched in 2010 that continued in 2011 was the SMS donation program at the unified charitable number DMS. The realization of another fund raising campaign – «Second chance for wild animals», continued in 2011 as well. The campaign was implemented in partnership with VIVACOM.

We thank you from the bottom of our hearts! Your support gives us the strength we need to continue!

Voluntary Efforts

In 2011, the daily work at the Rescue Centre involved mainly volunteers from Bulgaria – students, undergraduates, workers – both from Stara Zagora and other settlements.

Being a volunteer at the Rescue Centre 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 700 hours of voluntary work.

We express our most sincere appreciation of the efforts of these volunteers who supported the Wildlife Rescue Center in 2011.


We thank you from the bottom of our hearts! Your support gives us the strength we need to continue!
The Media about us

Being an organization of public benefit that helps wild animals in distress, the Rescue Centre is often popularized and promoted through numerous 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, the activity of the Rescue Centre was reported more than 196 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 2011, the Wildlife Rescue Center raised BGN 355,199.04, listed in details in the graphics below.

Expenses of the Wildlife Rescue Center for 2011 (by categories)