I'm proud of the fact that for more than 20 years, thanks to the work done by conservationists, volunteers, supporters and partners of the Wildlife Rescue Center, Stara Zagora has ranked among the cities taking care of wildlife and endeavoring to preserve nature. This is natural continuation of the work implemented by the Municipality of Stara Zagora to protect and improve the living conditions and the environment.

Increasingly large numbers of young volunteers come here to contribute to the cause and find a new meaning of the preservation of global wildlife. I believe that in recent years the Wildlife Rescue Center has attracted more visitors and become increasingly popular among nature lovers in Bulgaria and abroad.

In order to facilitate the access to the facility, last year the Municipality allocated funds in its investment program to improve and cover with asphalt the section to the main boulevard "St. Patriarch Euthymius". I hope this will enable the socialization of the Rescue Center and the recruitment of even more supporters and animal lovers.

In 2013, a total of 1,367 wild animals in distress from all over the country were admitted to the Rescue Center in Stara Zagora. Nearly half of them were released into their natural environment. This means dedication and work based on the formula 365/7/24.

I'm really impressed by the last year's report, realizing that a substantial part of the activities of the Rescue Center was working on public and charity campaigns, educational initiatives as well as programs for reintroduction of animals into the wild. I hope that your work will attract many followers and make the younger generation think how fragile and vulnerable the life on our planet would be without wise and environmentally-friendly attitude to nature.

I wish the entire team of the Rescue Center and all your followers to have your good deeds multiplied and to get better understanding and support for your work from the society and the institutions. I wish you good health! Enjoy life! Love Stara Zagora!

ZVYHKO TODOROV
Mayor of Stara Zagora Municipality

TEAM

The team of the Wildlife Rescue Centre is composed of staff members – volunteers. There is no other way to become one of us. If you are not dedicated to our cause 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

In 2013, our team underwent quite a metamorphosis, accepted new members, said farewell to others, but the rest of us – faithful and dedicated to our work, are still here.

Dr. Ivan Ivanov – Veterinarian
It was just another year when, thanks to Dr. Ivanov’s expertise, the unusual patients of the Centre were saved. His orderliness and dedication were part and parcel of the work at the intensive care ward.

Dr. Klisurova – Manager
And when working with volunteers, no one else could be as good as Rusko.

Ivanka Licheva – Veterinarian, Intensive Care Unit
Resuscitation is her territory. Being Dr. Ivanov’s right hand, Vanya has recently assumed much of the work in the clinic. At the same time, she helps with signals of wildlife in distress, release of birds into the wild, database update, contains with laboratories for paraclinical tests, as well as transportation of patients and work with volunteers.

Nikolay Arabadzhiev – Inpatients and Visitors Area Coordinator
This is the man that makes everything in the visitor area, the aviaries, the garden and the rest of the base absolutely flawless. The volunteers, brought to this part of the Centre by Nikolay, love hard work, but also special attitude, and, most of all, gather huge quantities of knowledge of the operations they are involved in.

Venelin Hristov – Associate in the baby room
Venelin is a student of Veterinary Medicine at the Trakia University. In the summer he is a seasonal worker at the center. He has a great passion for baby mammals. Thanks to his care we are able to raise and release into the wild baby squirrels, rabbits and otters.

Pavлина Николова – Hygienist, Baby Room Assistant
In winter; Pavлина is responsible for hygiene and disinfection, which is especially important for the activities implemented in a place like the Rescue Centre. From early spring till late autumn, she is intensively involved in the caretaking of babies, where her knowledge and patience give huge results.

Darren Weeks – Saker Falcon Assistant
Until recently an active volunteer of the Centre, this year Darren joined the team. Besides his main duties related to Saker Falcons, the honor fell to him to take care of the rest of the patients at the Centre as well as to train birds that cannot be released. We rely on Darren for professional photographs, translation and proofreading of texts and presentations intended for English-speaking audience.

Boyko Vasiiev – seasonal worker
In the summer, Boyko, who was a volunteer last year, became a member of our team. His main responsibilities were securing general maintenance of the base as a whole.

Christina Tasova – seasonal worker
As a longtime volunteer of the Rescue Center this summer Christina was invited to join the team of the Centre. Her job was assisting with the caretaking of babies, securing transportation, and working in the intensive care unit, while in her free time she helped with English translations and the work with trainees and interns.

Penyo Milev – Assistant of the Support and Service Unit of the Wildlife Rescue Center in the visitor, rehabilitation, and breeding sections
He is always ready to help. No matter what his duties are – feeding, cleaning, securing transportation of patients, receiving groups of visitors, or assuming just another task, Penyo is always dedicated to his work. Moreover, he also assists with the examinations of the wild patients and the maintenance of the base as a whole.

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Of all 1567 animals received in 2013 House Martins were the most numerous group of patients (176 individuals), as this year we applied an extremely successful practice with this species – namely, placing the chicks in foster parents’ nests.

Like in previous years, White Storks also ranked among the most numerous patient groups represented by 168 individuals, followed by Kestrels with 130 birds.

This year, thanks to the volunteers of the Centre and the increasingly better cooperation with RIEW and RFA, the team of the Rescue Centre advised the people, who had found juvenile birds and mammals to return the animals to their natural environment if there was no particular reason for sending them to the Center.

Fortunately, most of the patients were admitted to the Rescue Center thanks to the vigilance of private persons, logically followed by NGOs (whose support and assistance in 2013 was twice bigger than in 2012), and RIEWs.
Patient Dynamics and Conservation Status

Like in previous years, the peak intake of patients at the Centre was in the summer months, which is logically related to the offspring born or hatched during this period of the year. Winter peaks, like the one in October, are directly related to the active hunting season, with the most of the birds received at the Center are shot.

It is clearly visible on the Chart showing the summary of the results that 2013 was the year with the highest number of patients. According to the team of Green Balkans, the reason is not wider encroachment on wildlife, but the increasing popularity of the Center, especially in Sofia, the capital. The last, but not least, is the growing efficiency of the network of volunteers and the coordination with RIEWs.
Patients' Condition and Reason for Admittance

Like in previous years, this year the animals of unknown reason for admission were the most numerous group of patients. This is due to the fact that the patients of the Center are wild animals and there are rarely witnesses of the incidents causing the distress. The second most numerous group were chicks fallen from their nests as well as the Griffon Vultures and the Lesser Kestrels imported from Spain within the relevant reintroduction programs. Moreover, collisions with vehicles and power lines were significantly more numerous than in 2012.

Veterinary Care

One of the main activities of the center, of course, is the caretaking of patients. We can safely say that every year the team of veterinarians gains more skills and wins more fights to save the lives of our wild patients.

In 2013, 215 patients had fractures of the limbs. 47 of them were released into the wild after successful surgery interventions or immobilization of the injured limb.

Many of the patients do not need treatment, namely the chicks fallen from their nests. In such cases, a strengthening therapy is applied.

Work in the Baby Sector

Spring and summer are the busiest seasons in the Center. During this period, the team works from early morning till late evening. In 2013, the team working in the baby room took special care of nearly 980 wild orphans. 575 of them were released into the wild.

Results of the Activities of the Centre

The results of the Centre’s activities in 2013 were significantly better, considering the high percentage of animals released into the wild – 52.3% compared to 32.8% in 2012.

The percentage of lethal outcome was also lower – 30.1% compared to 47.7% in 2012. The number of non-recoverable, euthanized animals was also lower than that in 2012 – 6.7% vs. 10.7%.
Release Back Into the Wild

When releasing our patients we use wildlife-friendly methods – hacking facilities, adaptation aviaries, artificial nests, and nesting platforms. This year, again, we identified and selected release sites in conformity with the species’ needs and the conditions provided by the particular area, such as non-disturbance, food availability, etc.

We are always happy when we can share the excitement of the release of recovered animals with our friends and supporters.

All birds released by the Rescue Center are marked with standard rings of the Bulgarian Ornithological Center, and some of them are also tagged with radio or satellite transmitters. Thus, we can track the survivorship of our patients when they leave the center since this information is extremely important for us. For example, by using transmitters we tracked the movements of four juvenile Saker Falcons – Hala (Whirlwind), Burya (Storm), Vihra (Hurricane), and Veyo (Whiff), hatched in the Center and released into the wild in 2013.

Breeding Program

Breeding “disabled” animals and releasing their offspring is an important part of the Centre’s activities.

In 2013, our cages and aviaries harbored 8 juvenile Kestrels and 5 Barn Owls. Unfortunately, in 2013 we lost the female Eagle Owl of the 25 year old pair in the Center – sad times for the whole team.
REINTRODUCTION PROGRAMS

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

The activities implemented in the Balkan Mountains within "Vultures' Return in Bulgaria" project, funded by the EU LIFE+ Program, continued in 2013. Being a "quarantine stopover", the Rescue Center harbored 71 Griffon Vultures from Spain. After about a month's stay at the Center, the birds were distributed among adaptation aviaries in the Balkan Mountains.

Reintroduction of Saker Falcon (Falco cherrug) in Bulgaria

In 2013, thanks to the activities implemented within the project coordinated by the Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research (IBER), seven chicks were hatched by two pairs at the Wildlife Rescue Center. Four of them were released, while the other three were kept to be involved in the breeding program.

Recovery of Lesser Kestrels (Falco naumanni) in Bulgaria

In 2013, within Green Balkans' project "Lesser Kestrel Recovery" funded by LIFE+ instrument of the EU, the Rescue Center housed 40 Lesser Kestrels from Spain, hoping that the birds will form pairs, whose offspring will be released into the wild in the coming years.

Education and Public Awareness

Campaigns. Visit to the Rescue Center

Everything we do at the Rescue Centre would be worthless if not related to the environmental education of young people. Therefore, we are happy to welcome them to our facility. Thus, in 2013, some 2200 young people, such as schoolchildren, students, participants in events held at the Center, took part in organized group visits.

At the same time, 8 large-scale public campaigns were realized.

Donation campaigns

This year we continued our adoption campaign, with a total of 52 adoptions by individuals, legal entities, and whole school classes. The Wildlife Rescue Center took part in "More and more" program for donations via payroll giving organized by BCAF.

The names of the people, who made donations for our work in 2013 are listed below:

Voluntary Efforts

Since their establishment, the Rescue Center and Green Balkans rely to a great extent on voluntary work for the realization of the daily activities.

We are happy to note that in 2013 we were favored with numerous and motivated volunteers. In tot 70 people aged 10 to 50 contributed over 700 man-hours of voluntary work at the Center. Also, we participated in the project “Students and graduates’ practical training” of the Ministry of Education and Science. Within this project 22 undergraduates and 20 students had their practical training with us. The “Success” project of the same ministry also involved 15 students. We are happy to note that after the end of the practical training courses most of the undergraduates and the students became volunteers, while some of them were even invited to join the team of Green Balkans.

Our thanks go to:

The Media about us

In 2013, more than 300 publications in electronic, printed, and online media posted information about our activities. The Rescue Center receives great media support, which brings us closer to people and promotes our work.
Donors and Partners
We express our sincere gratitude to our partners:

- Enterprise for Management of Environment Protection Activities (EMEPA)
- Ministry of Environment and Water (MOEW)
- Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Water – Stara Zagora

- Trakia University – Stara Zagora

- Vocational High School of Veterinary Medicine – Stara Zagora

- Pet Hospital Dr. Tzekov

- INTERNATIONAL WILDLIFE CONSULTANTS Ltd. (UK)

- Mtel ECO Grant

- Bulgarian Charities Aid Foundation

- Frankfurt Zoological Society (Germany)

- Abu Dhabi Environmental Agency

- Contour Global

- Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU)

- Insurance JSC ARMEEC

- LIFE+ financial instrument of the European Community (EU)

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

- Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research – BAS

- Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF)

- Zlín ZOO (Czech Republic)

- Toner Stream

- BULGARIAN-SWISS COOPERATION PROGRAMME

- Contour Global