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“Conservation of the Wintering Population of the Globally Threatened Red-breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*) in Bulgaria” (No LIFE 09/NAT/BG/00023)

COMPARATIVE RESULTS OF REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE POLL

1. Conducted by the method semi-standardized interviews during the period 24 November to 2 December 2010
2. Conducted by the method semi-standardized interviews during the period 31 March to 14 April 2015

Summary

In each of the studies were carried out 420 interviews:

300 adult residents of the Municipality of Shabla

120 hunters, fishermen, farmers and teachers

1. Public opinion of the environmental activities

In 2015 only 13% of the land owners and 7% of the business community have stated that they are not interested in environmental issues – in 2010 these rates were higher.

During the period 2010-2015 the main outstanding issues related to the protection of Shabla and Durankulak, remain the same but have different importance. These issues continue to be interrelated:

- ✓ First, according to 26% of the local people are the household waste, pesticides, and the swamping of the lakes.
- ✓ On the second place according to 21% of the people is the poaching.
- ✓ According to 13% the inefficient enforcement and the poor management of the lakes are prerequisites to intensive poaching in the area. This share has decreased by 26% compared to the poll from 2010.



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The change in the last question and the reduction of its importance probably reflects on the achievements of the Project team efforts for improving the enforcement of legislation in the SPA areas.

2. Attitude to rare bird species inhabiting the region of Shabla and Durankulak

In the last five years the four bird species that have been studied (Red-breasted Goose, Greater White-fronted Goose, Lesser White-fronted Goose and Mallard) have become more familiar to the majority of the surveyed residents of Shabla Municipality.

The Red-breasted Goose continues to be the most popular of those four - the share of respondents who have heard of this species has risen from 94% in 2010 to 98% in 2015, which means that almost 100% of the local population is aware and knows the Red-breasted Goose as a species. In the same period, nearly 10% has increased the ability to identify each of the other three bird species among the local people.

In 2015, as in 2010 the respondents indicate poaching in the region as the main threat to these birds. Unintentional poisonings of birds with pesticides and poisons has kept the last five years its status as the second most important threat. There is concern that its importance has increased during the period between the two surveys. In 2010 this threat was listed by 44% of residents of Shabla, and in 2015 - by 56%.

In the last five years the residents of the municipality of Shabla have become even more convinced that solving the main problems related to the conservation of rare birds should take effective measures. The biggest support found the measures that can help to resolve the major issues facing the birds:

- ✓ Enhanced measures against poaching in protected areas and stringent penalties for causing harm to endangered species (supported by 95% of respondents);
- ✓ Enhanced measures against illegal use of pesticides, and poisons and stringent penalties for those who use them unregulated (supported by 95% of respondents);



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- ✓ Reducing threats to birds caused by stray dogs and jackals - (supported by 95% of respondents).

The strengthening of the control over the activities of the fishermen during the period of wintering of the birds inhabiting the Shabla and Durankulak lakes is approved by 89% of the residents of Shabla Municipality. Compared to five years ago, today significantly more local people pay attention to this measure (in 2010 the measure was approved by 77% of respondents). Limiting the construction of wind turbines in the region is a measure that meets the approval of 85% of the population of the municipality of Shabla. Its importance, according to the local people, also increased significantly in recent years (in 2010, 69% have supported it).

In the recent years, the share of the respondents who believe that the protection of rare species of birds should be the main priority and concern of the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds has a two-fold increased (from 14% in 2010 to 28% in 2015). The role of the BSPB in the protection of birds is advocated mainly by the younger people (under 29 years old), the businesses, private sector employees, and the landowners within the nature protected areas network "NATURA 2000".

3. Media and information channels for local events

According to the poll three-quarters of the respondents in the region of Shabla manifest a strong interest in environmental problems. The main information channel is the local free newspaper "Sunrise"

4. Awareness for the project for the conservation of the protected species in the Shabla and Durankulak lakes.

The share of the people, who say they have heard of a project related to the conservation of protected species in the Shabla and Durankulak lakes, is increased (from 20% in 2010 to 23% in 2015). Those who have information about the project are young people (under 29 years old), landowners, farmers, hunters and hoteliers.

5. Favorite media channels



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The television remains the favorite media for 48% of the participating experts and residents of Shabla Municipality. The number of people who prefer Internet to get acquainted with the activities of the BSPB has increased by 15%.

6. The most popular conservation organizations among residents and experts from the region of Shabla

The Bulgarian Society for Protection of Birds is the most spontaneously mentioned organization in 2015. The share of the respondents has increased by 9 points – up to 38%, in the past five years.

7. Overview of the activities of the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds

In 2015 BSPB continues to be a very popular organization in the region. For the past five years has been registered an increasing disapproval for its activities (from 4% in 2010 to 18% in 2015). For the time of the Project duration BSPB has worked actively and have been key factor for preventing the realization of several development projects including wind farms and resort developments around the lakes shores. Therefore the organisation was portrayed as main cause of the lack of economic development in the municipality. This has become very active with the change in the Shabla municipality Mayor office in 2012. The new leadership of the municipality has been active in generating negative campaigns against BSPB and the relations built with the previous municipality mayor have deteriorated greatly in the following years of the project implementation.

The public support for the efforts of the BSPB to improve the chances of survival for the Red-breasted Goose as protected and emblematic bird of the region has decreased with 14% (84% in 2010 - 70% in 2015). The main criticism in this direction comes from interviewed hunters, fishermen, farmers and teachers. Obviously major part of these respondents is suffering from the improved law enforcement in the SPAs and has negative attitude especially the hunters and fishermen. Still the predominant part of the respondents support the BSPB activities and achievements.

Currently, 72% of the surveyed residents and experts of Shabla Municipality approve the BSPB's efforts to protect the birds.



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BSPB initiative for the promotion of Shabla and the region by organizing a "Kite Festival" has strong support among the local people – on a scale from 1 to 6 the average grade is 5,09. The "Kite Festival" is most popular among people between 30 and 39 years old, the owners of agricultural land, hunters, and private sector employees. The highest rating ("6") was given to the BSPB initiative by two-thirds of the adults.

The inclusion of a new measure for the Red-breasted Goose in NAEP of Bulgaria (National Agri-Environmental Programme) is supported by the people of the municipality of Shabla.

8. "Natura 2000"

93% of all respondents in 2015 have heard of the ecological network "NATURA 2000" and this share is 7 points higher than in 2010, which confirms the success of the awareness and publicity work on Natura 2000 sites implemented by the Project team.

The understanding that ecological network rather prevents people to dispose of their property continues to be widespread among the landowners. For the past five years the positive attitudes towards ecological network "Natura 2000" has decreased by 7 percentage points (from 36% in 2010 to 29% in 2015), while negative opinions regarding the ecological network has increased by 15%. The 2015 survey has noted a relationship between the attitude to "NATURA 2000" and the ownership of land within the boundaries of protected areas. The negative attitude of landowners has increased by 15% for the last 5 years – up to 78%.

As a whole for the past five years significant growth in awareness of the local people in all matters related to "Natura 2000" is registered. From 38% to 56% has increased the proportion of respondents who feel informed about their rights and obligations relating to protected areas.

All in all the results of the public opinion poll indicate the important achievements and their appreciation by the local people, at the same time the active work has generated some negativism related to the blocking of controversial projects, which is inevitable in such conditions. The main targets of active involvement and raising the awareness of the stakeholders about the species and its habitats conservation have been successful.