

# Bats in the Balkans ? there is biodiversity underground too!

## Title

Two projects aimed at conserving bats and underground biodiversity in the Neretva River Catchment Area have been kick-started with a workshop in Citluk, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The two projects are funded by the **Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)** and supervised by the Regional Implementation Team from BirdLife International, including DOPPS (BirdLife Slovenia).

The Neretva River is the largest karst river in the Dinaric Alps. It is a karst region, meaning where layers of rock are dissolved by rivers, intricate cave systems can be formed. Which is great for bats and unique underground biodiversity!

Both projects, which are implemented by the **Center for Karst and Speleology (CKS)**, have been kicked off with a workshop on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2013. The event was aimed to introduce over 40 key stakeholders to the projects goals and planned activities and establish fruitful cooperation between the implementation team and the final beneficiaries. Experts from CKS and Croatia gave lectures on the important ecological role of bats and underground biodiversity in the regional ecosystem and their urgent need for protection. The workshop also provided an occasion to meet, discuss and collaborate with other CEPF grantees or potential

CEPF grantees in the region.



The first project, which received a large grant from CEPF, **Protection of Bats in the Neretva River Catchment Area** aims to raise awareness of the positive contributions and threats to bat species living in the caves of the karst region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, culminating with the holding a first national **"Bat Night"** festival on 24th August in **apljina**, which is open to the public. The project also aims to create a network of volunteer bat monitors to provide accurate data.

The second project, which received a small grant from CEPF, **Protection of underground biodiversity in the Neretva River catchment area ? Identifying and raising the awareness of conservation hotspots**

? aims to establish a preliminary inventory of underground karst species in the Neretva River catchment area, identifying current threats and proposing hotspots for conservation. Additionally it will provide capacity building opportunities to train local experts and raise awareness to protect the underground biodiversity.



*The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Government of Japan, the MacArthur Foundation, and the World Bank. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation. CEPF has a unique mechanism for funding, which is outside the political context, and focuses on high-priority biological areas, and examines ways to protect vulnerable areas. From this perspective, CEPF seeks to identify and support a regional, rather than national approach to achieve results in the protection of endangered areas, and engages a wide range of public and private institutions to address the problems of conservation and protection of endangered areas through coordinated regional efforts.*

---