

The restoration of the Belene Marshes brings back the Dalmatian pelicans

Title

The restoration of the largest marsh on the Bulgarian part of the Danube was done in 2008 with the financing of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), as part of a World Bank managed project. **Wetlands Restoration and Pollution Reduction**. The project was the first of its kind under the umbrella of the GEF Black Sea/Danube Strategic Partnership **Nutrient Reduction Investment Fund** which aims to control or mitigate nutrient inflow to the Black Sea. Thus the marsh situated on the largest of the Danubian islands, and part of the Ramsar site Belene Islands Complex (IBA BG017), is once again rebuilding its position of a birds' paradise. That is more than a welcome development, bearing in mind the inherent sombre reputation of this place, used as a deadly prison for the political opposition to the former Communist regime of the country. BSPB/BirdLife Bulgaria in partnership with the Persina Nature Park and the WWF-Bulgaria are monitoring the ecological effects of the wetland restoration project on biodiversity. As part of a conservation project and with the help of the Park management a fixed platform of reeds was built to stimulate the breeding of the Dalmatian pelicans. Two months after the platform was constructed it was already used by a group of 20 Dalmatian pelicans for roosting. Public access to the island is still very limited, which helps to ensure a minimal human disturbance, a critical factor for the pelicans to start breeding. Observations from the last three years show that more than 200 Dalmatian pelicans from the Srebarna Lake (IBA BG033) and the Danube Delta (IBA RO081) breeding colonies use this area after their breeding season. BSPB hopes that the pelicans will adopt the marshes as a breeding site next year when a second bigger platform will be built. **We are eager to see the Dalmatian pelicans returning to breed in the Belene Marshes, but even now it is already obvious that the restoration of the wetland was a blessing for biodiversity in the region**, Emil Todorov, Coordinator of BSPB in the region says. **With every monitoring visit we witness the return of many water birds here, including at least 62 species of European conservation concern**. The site is known for protecting one of the largest breeding concentrations of grebes, herons, ducks along the lower Danube. During the spring and autumn the restored wetland is an important stop-over area for many migratory species. Thousands of geese use it as a quiet roosting place during the cold winter months.
