

Whitley Fund for Nature rewards BirdLife Bulgarian Partner for its work on the Imperial Eagle

Title

The **2014 Whitley Awards Ceremony** was held on the 8th of May at The Royal Geographical Society in London. Among **the 9 organisations rewarded**, the **Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB; BirdLife in Bulgaria)** received a **Whitley Award donated by Foundation Segré** for its project 'The Imperial Eagle as a flagship for conserving the wild grasslands of south-eastern Bulgaria'. The Ceremony was hosted by the English television presenter **Kate Humble** and the Awards were presented to the winners by WFN Patron, **Her Royal Highness The Princess Anne**.

By the end of the 20th century, Bulgaria was known as the 'country of eagles'. Nowadays, only eight Imperial Eagle nests remain in the country and yet they account for 20% of the EU population. The efforts from BirdLife Bulgarian Partner BSPB, aimed to establish the **Imperial Eagle** as a flagship for wild grassland habitats in order to bring the species back from the brink of national extinction whilst protecting other endangered species including the **Saker Falcon**, the **European Souslik (ground squirrel)**, the **Marbled Polecat** and the **Tortoise**.

The colony's decline is mainly caused by habitat loss, electrocution from over-head pylons, nest poaching and illegal killing. The accession of Bulgaria to the EU and agriculture subsidies heralded a large scale ploughing of grassland pastures, which has been threatening the remaining Eagle population. More profitable and environmentally friendly farming subsidies are available, but remain little known and difficult to apply for.

Within the framework of the project, BSPB has been providing support to Bulgarian farmers to apply for and implement agri-environmental measures that conserve the Eagle's habitat while boosting the farmers' incomes. Also, the organization has developed environmentally friendly businesses based on eco-tourism. Indeed, it was recognized that eagles can generate local income through bird watching tourism and sustainable farming. Finally, BSPB trained local communities in participatory monitoring and nest guarding in order to develop sense of ownership and responsibility among the community and ensure that conservation efforts last in the long-term.

"Our nest-guarding programme has significantly increased breeding success and the survival of juvenile eagles" commented Stoycho Stoychev, Conservation Director of the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB). [Watch the video](#) and learn more about the project.

The work done so far by BSPB has highly contributed to the increase of the Imperial Eagle population in Bulgaria, which has doubled over the last decade to reach 25 breeding pairs.

The [Whitley Fund for Nature](#) (WFN) is a UK registered charity offering awards and grants to the **world's most dynamic nature conservationists** and supporting projects founded on good science, community involvement and pragmatism.
