



The spice of life

CEPF has been working on Dalmatian Pelicans at Lake Skadar, Montenegro (Jaime Rojo)

They say variety is the spice of life. Well, the Mediterranean is surely known for its spices, but is less well known for the variety of wildlife it holds. The truth is that the Mediterranean Basin is an incredibly species-rich region – in fact the third-richest biodiversity hotspot in the world.

For every bay leaf or sprinkling of saffron, the Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot secretly boasts ancient cedar forests, salt pans, wetlands, karst landscapes, snow-tipped mountains, bogs and lakes which together hold for example 13,000 endemic plant species. Key Biodiversity Areas are designated in all of these places, with many containing rare and endangered wildlife.

One of the most popular tourism destinations of the world, ‘the Med’ has to accommodate an extra 220 million people each year into an already-overpopulated region—nearly 32% of the world’s tourists—leaving populations of wildlife fragmented and isolated.

Resultant pressures on resources such as fresh water in the region, and emerging demands for energy, mean hydropower investments are

increasing. The designation of protected areas is low, and management plans are either not created or implemented correctly. Where there are policies in place, poor public awareness and enforcement leads to exploitation. Where does this leave biodiversity?

This is why civil society is needed to give nature a voice. Civil society organisations fill the vital role of engaging with local stakeholders, involving local communities, providing the ecological science behind development plans.

“Yet throughout the Mediterranean, civil society is struggling to be heard,” says Liz Smith, Regional Implementation Team Manager for the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot, funded by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF).

The important political changes of the Arab Spring in several countries of the region have in some cases led the way to a nascent civil society, eager to engage in environmental protection and development, but often lacking capacities to engage efficiently in preserving the natural wealth of their countries

“So in order to combat these risks to nature, we are engaging and building the capacity of civil society in developing countries of the region.”

A major \$10 million, five-year investment was launched in 2012 by CEPF in the Mediterranean Basin region—providing grants in Algeria, Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Cape Verde, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Macedonia, Morocco, Montenegro and Tunisia.

It is much more than granting funds: CEPF entrusted BirdLife International to lead the Regional Implementation Team which, in partnership with LPO (BirdLife in France) and DOPPS (BirdLife in Slovenia), supports the growth of civil society, provides organisations with access to networks, and is constantly evaluating the effectiveness of its investment, so biodiversity can be best-supported in the future.

With a motto of Together for biodiversity, the CEPF Med programme recently brought conservationists representing the entire region together to share experiences and learned lessons.

Now at mid-point of the programme, BirdLife has supported CEPF to invest

\$7.9million and significant impacts have been made.

Local expertise is key. So far 69 civil society organisations have been granted—with an impressive 74% of these being national organisations. For the international organisations funded, they are using their skills to support national sub-grantees, collaborating with local partners or coordinating regional-scale grants on key conservation themes.

Promoting innovative partnerships

One such theme is protecting coastlines along the Mediterranean from the major threat of development. A major achievement in this period has been the establishment of Montenegro’s first National Strategy for Integrated Coastal Zone Management. Four CEPF grantees were involved in—a great example of what can be achieved by civil society in a coordinated effort, and the relationships made are a crucial step to the protection of other key coastal sites.

On a smaller scale, communities and authorities are being educated in how they can support the protection

of their unique nature. The mixed cedar and oak forests of Ifrane National Park in the Middle Atlas Mountains of Morocco harbour the last large population of the Endangered Barbary Macaque *Macaca sylvanus*. Over-exploitation and overgrazing has rendered the park a mosaic of forest patches, isolating macaque populations. CEPF grantee Stichting Moroccan Primate Conservation is identifying and carefully mapping habitat fragmentation, and saving the macaques by restoring the chosen best priority corridors—all the more urgent as climate change will decrease the range of cedar trees.

But a major part of the success of this project is involving the local communities throughout the process, using them to help identify sites and helping them understand the effect of grazing on these areas. The community support of this project, and others across the Med, gives hope for the long-term future of biodiversity.

From the Atlantic to the Med: protecting turtles

Illegal poaching is a great threat to Endangered Loggerhead Sea Turtles in Cape Verde. Local grantee Biosferal has set up a surveillance scheme that involves local fishermen and is monitored by staff and volunteers. The project has already recorded a decrease in turtle poaching during the surveillance period, but it is hoped that through Biosferal's work with fishermen to emphasise the value of wild turtles over those on the dinner plate, this trend will continue afterwards.

On Kuriat Island, the only sea turtle nesting site in Tunisia, local conservation groups Association des Fans de la Chebba and Notre Grand Bleu constructed a cabin providing information and flyers to educate tourists about the charismatic species and to avoid accidental destruction, and to carefully showcase for

tourists the wildlife spectacle of turtle hatching. In three months, over 4,000 national and foreign tourists, and over 500 children attended the cabin and site. Additionally, over 100 fishermen have been introduced to measures to prevent the accidental capture of adult turtles, this educational project could eliminate turtle bycatch in Tunisia before a black market for their illegal meat grows.

Protecting hidden species

"It is so important for organisations to raise awareness that some species even exist, and give them a voice," said Liz Smith. Through CEPF's investment in the Med, a spotlight has been shone on underground biodiversity. One rare species' habitat, the subterranean waters of limestone cave systems in the Balkans, is completely inaccessible to humans, yet CEPF grantee Society for Cave Biology managed to identify a blind cave salamander (*Olm Proteus anguinus*) for the first time in Montenegro through a new Environmental DNA sampling technique.

By identifying these endemic and vulnerable species within the limestone karst of the Balkans, these civil society organisations have provided ecological evidence which will assist in development plans, helping to advocate for the protection of waterways and raising the awareness of the importance of underground biodiversity with the private sector, institutions and authorities.

Saving sites

In Lebanon the first plant micro-reserve was created through the work done by Université Saint-Joseph as part of a CEPF project. The charismatic purple sofar iris *Iris sofarana* is one of the endemic flowers of this rare microhabitat, and will now have extra protection due to the inauguration of the natural site El-Dichar. The site will also be an important ecological education tool and attract



(Olivier Langrand)

"As biologists, we know that biological diversity is important to the resilience of ecosystems," said Pierre Carret, Grant Director for CEPF. "Likewise, we and local grantees know that cultural diversity is important to the future of the Mediterranean basin."



A baby turtle in the care of a volunteer (Louis Marie Préau)

tourists to boost economic activity in the region.

In the Balkans, a CEPF grantee has managed to save a bird paradise from developers. After years of campaigning by the Centre for Protection and Research of Birds (CZIP, BirdLife Partner) and partner organisations, a coastal wetland of Montenegro—which is one of the most important areas along the eastern Adriatic for many migratory bird species—is now no longer set to become a hotel and golf complex.

After a mid-term assessment involving over 200 people, it is clear that the CEPF investment with the support from the BirdLife Regional Implementation Team has provided much needed support to the civil society community of the Mediterranean, with a strong portfolio of projects to protect biodiversity.

Local organisations are best-placed to know what needs to be done. So with empowerment through programmes such as CEPF—being given the tools and the platform to be heard on a higher level, the ability to connect with new partners to enrich projects, and to build their technical and organisational capacity—they build on their work for a more stable and independent future.

"We hope that civil society organisations will continue to effectively stimulate partnerships between governments and the corporate sector towards the sustainable conservation of biodiversity in the Med", said Liz. Thanks to CEPF, perhaps one day the Med will be as well-known for its biodiversity as it is for its spices.



CEPF is designed to safeguard Earth's biologically richest and most threatened regions known as biodiversity hotspots. CEPF is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the World Bank. Additional support in the Mediterranean Basin is provided by the MAVA Foundation. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation.