



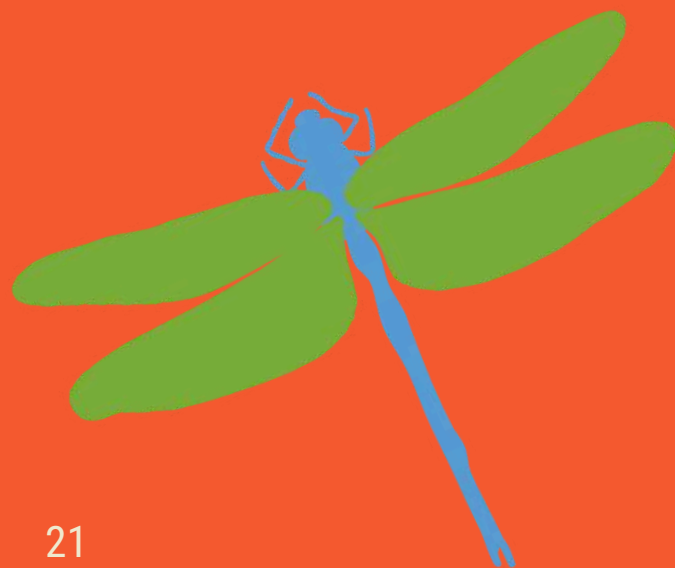
Bulgarian
Biodiversity
Foundation

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

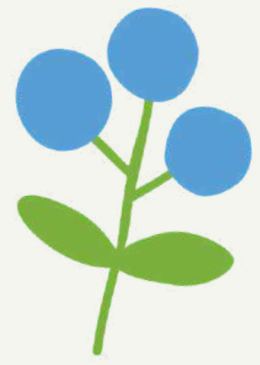
**THE YEAR OF BIODIVERSITY
AND CLIMATE**

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CONTEXT



The United Nations has declared 2023 the hottest year on Earth since records began. At the same time, the production of oil, gas and coal - the main sources of global warming - continues to grow. Many countries still rely on fossil fuels to earn more and grow their economy. However, the agreement at the world's biggest climate conference, COP28, finally heralds the end of the fossil fuel era and kick-starts the Loss and Damage Fund, with member states committing to provide more than €400m of initial funding. On a European level, the need for climate justice is becoming more and more implicit and the highly developed economies that cause the climate crisis already realise that they should support the financial losses of the most affected countries.

At the same time, only financial commitment doesn't seem a rightful lasting solution to the ongoing climate crisis, lengthening periods of drought, natural rains, floods and hurricanes, which are affecting and even more, taking away human lives. The fire in Hawaii alone destroyed more than 6,800 hectares of forest, and Storm Daniel killed more than 4,000 people on its way from the Balkan Peninsula to Libya and the Mediterranean Sea.

November, a provisional agreement was reached between the European Parliament and the Council on the Nature Restoration Act. Once adopted and implemented in EU member states, the law will make a key contribution to achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and increasing Europe's preparedness and resilience to the effects of climate change.

The law should set a process for the continuous and sustainable restoration of nature in the EU's land and sea. As an overall target to be achieved at EU level is aimed to be the introduction of measures to restore at least 20% of EU land and 20% of marine areas by 2030. By 2050, such measures should be introduced for all ecosystems in need of restoration. In our country, the necessary urgent measures to limit fossil fuels caused protests by the thermal power plant workers, even though climate change is becoming more and more visible in Bulgaria as well. There is a lack of a clear energy strategy that would protect the fertile agricultural soils and the high nature value territories while guaranteeing the rapid transition to green energy. People in small towns who grow their own food in their gardens are increasingly vulnerable to droughts or floods. Those in big cities are also not spared from extremely high summer temperatures.

The active entry of AI is changing the rules of the game on a global scale, but the world wars in 2023 have increased, and after the continuing war between Russia and Ukraine, a new war began in the Middle East in October, when fighters of the military group "Hamas" attacked Israel. In Bulgaria, the year passed under the sign of elections - first for the government, and then for local government. Against the background of the missing state governance, civil organizations carry out analyses, monitor the implementation of European policies, seek dialogue and conduct information campaigns.

THE YEAR FOR BBF

In 2023, the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation continued to implement specific measures to protect natural habitats and ecosystems for the benefit of biodiversity and people. The first pilot peatland restoration activities were carried out and impressive results were achieved in the restoration of seagrasses in Atanasovsko Lake lagoon.

We communicated the role that protected biodiversity and ecosystems play in creating a more stable microclimate, as a carbon sink and in limiting the effects of extreme climate events. BBF Annual Awards ceremony was a key event for the whole nature protection community which showcased outstanding examples of biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation efforts and brought together hundreds of people live at the event and thousands via the streaming broadcast.

The work for youth engagement continued and new inspiring partnerships in the fields of education, entrepreneurship, business and artistic circles were developed. Thanks to the support of the Sigrid Rausing Fund, the BBF supported the empowerment and networking of civil society actors as well as the development of BBF's internal capacity.

"Not a specific member or representative, but the entire BBF team" has been nominated for the annual Human Rights Awards "Human of the Year" organised by the Helsinki committee. In 2023, a process for changing the executive director of the BBF was launched, which went through a system of team steps and "passing the baton" so that the new executive director smoothly entered the new position while the team was preserved and expanded.

In 2023, the BBF team is working on developing the organization's capacity so that it can respond to the changing environment and be sufficiently prepared for the new challenges that arise in society. At the same time, it turned out to be well prepared for internal transformations in the management of the organization - for 6 months, people went through a deep internal voluntary process of replacing the Executive Director and choosing a new one from the team. The candidate was presented to the Management Board and received its support. From November 1, 2023, the BBF has a new director - Yordanka Slavova, and the previous one - Rumiana Ivanova remains in the team and will actively work as part of the Conservation Team and the management of SHTRAK.

New Management Board - two of the long-standing members of the Board - Gottlieb Dandliker and Dr. Plamen Dimitrov were replaced by Denitsa Petrova from Greenpeace and Svetoslav Velkov from Traventuria, who joined Bertrand Sansonens, Rosen Vasilev and Vera Petkancin. After maternity leave, Diana Pavlova - part of the Burgas team of the "Lagoon of Life" project and Martina Koleva - an Ecotourism expert returned to the working environment of the BBF. Stanimira Deleva joined the team as an expert in bats and dragonflies and we also had Mario Shimbov as a marine ecologist for 6 months.

THE BBF TEAM

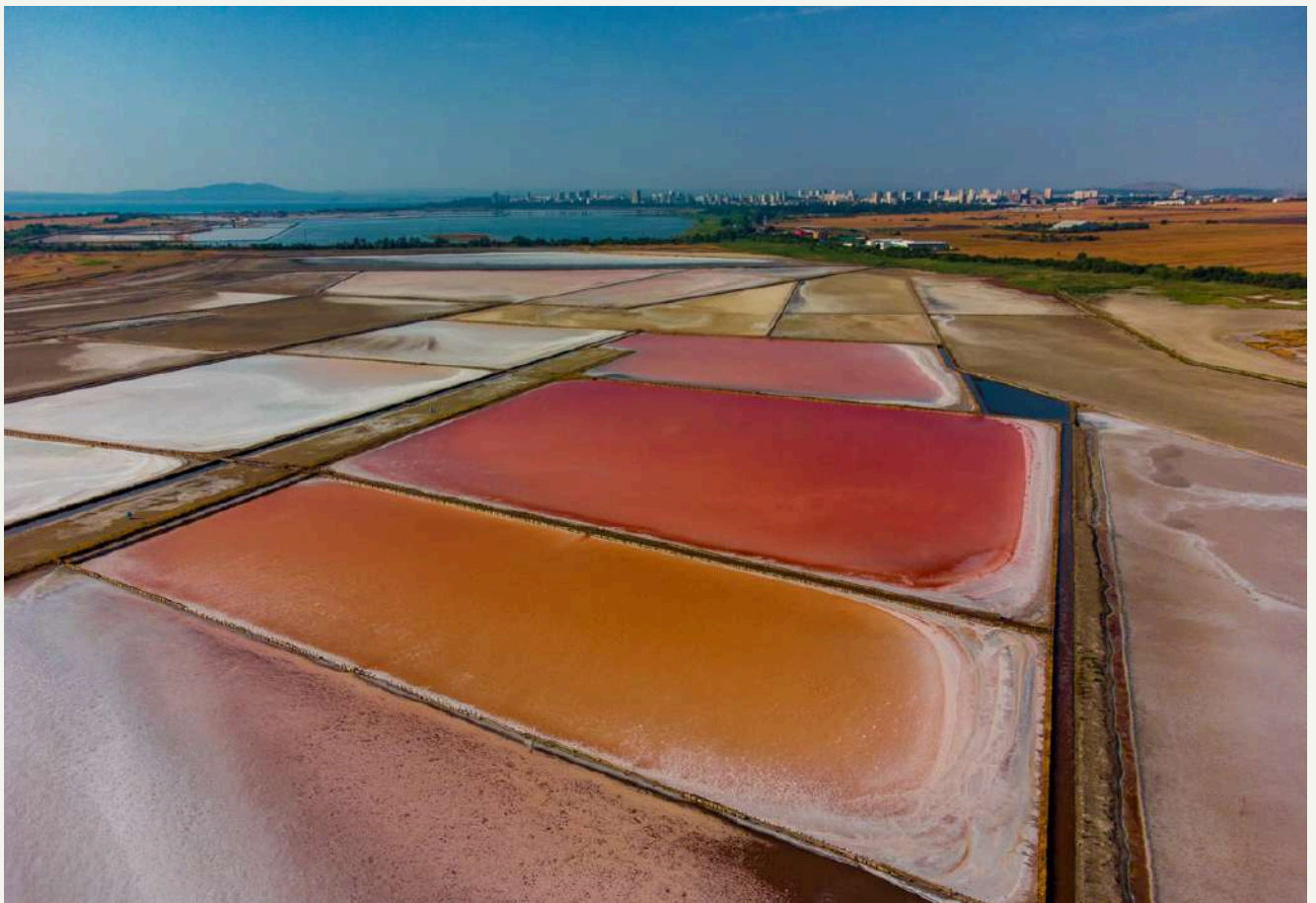


NATURE CONSERVATION IN ACTION

In 2023, the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation (BBF) continued the purposeful actions towards protecting Bulgarian nature for the benefit of people and biodiversity by the guidelines defined in the Foundation's Conservation Strategy. The activities include both direct measures to protect and restore priority species and habitats and actions to reduce the threatful effect on them by involving and supporting local communities in defending fundamental human rights - such as protecting nature and living in a healthy environment. BBF's involvement in policy-making, legislative initiatives improving the quality of legislation and its implementation, and participation in the development of strategic and administrative documents were an important part of our work during the year.

The work of BBF emphasizes the wetland areas - the coastal lagoons of Atanasovsko and Pomorie Lakes and the micro wetlands of Sakar Mountain. Pilot actions on peatland restoration activities in the Chaira Lakes (in Rhodope mountains) sets the stage for long-term efforts to protect these critically endangered habitats, especially in the context of climate change. The launch of the "Living Sands" campaign confirms the BBF's commitment to the protection of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast and more specifically the coastal dunes, alongside with over construction cases in the areas of Kavatsi, Sinemorets, Silistar, etc. The established Biodiversity Fund demonstrated its potential for supporting conservation actions for priority species and habitats with the campaign related to the critically endangered species *Serratula bulgarica*.

We continue to devote our efforts to protecting nature and local communities from unreasonable, dangerous, illegal and endangering nature and people investment proposals. Such as the construction of photovoltaic installations in Natura 2000 zones, threatening biodiversity - in the protected areas Aytoska Planina, Sredna Gora, and St. Iliya Heights revealing quarries or polluting operations of the mining industry - Sredna Gora, Shishmantsi village, Chervenata stena, illegal construction actions - Atanasovsko lake, Southern Black Sea coast, etc.



Coastal lagoons nature conservation

Atanasovsko Lake

In 2023 the final stage of the earthen dike reconstruction (5800m) in the northern part of Atanasovsko Lake was finalized. This is a key infrastructure for effective management of the water regime within the coastal lagoon and an additional 7 ha of new favorable nesting areas for target bird species within the most preferred part of the lake by them. By restoring these key dikes more than 200 ha of the priority habitat Coastal Lagoon (1690ha) is improved, and it is expected that 700ha will have indirect betterment. Additionally, more than 20ha on the periphery part of the habitat, which was permanently dry, are now covered with water. Within this action under the "Lagoon of Life" project, the restoration in this area achieves connectivity between three coastal habitats and their functioning in a single ecological complex. The restoration of mini-dykes and the cleaning of internal salt channels continued - a measure aimed at reducing the fragmentation in the lake and restoring the circulation between individual basins. Thus, the total length of the restored mini-dykes within the project reached more than 15,000m, and the cleaned internal canals - more than 11,000m.

Nearly 7 ha of *Salicornia* habitat and other annual species, the most favorable nesting areas in Lake Atanasovsko, have been created or have improved nature protection status.

The significant success of the sea grass *Ruppia maritima* restoration was continued and confirmed in 2023. The three new colonies created with an area of 0.01 ha are multiplying successfully and their size reached 0.3 ha. This achievement is of great interest to the conservation community and could be considered a key attempt in the subsequent restoration of seagrasses in the Black Sea region. This positions BBF as a leading organization in Bulgaria in the constantly developing aspects of cutting-edge environmental protection.

The small water reservoirs, created in 2022 with a total area of 6 ha, 2023 attracted several conservation-important bird species - several species of herons, terns, various plovers, red heron, white and black stork, brilliant ibis, and in the winter period the impressive grey cranes - an extremely rare species to be observed in Atanasovsko Lake. Moreover, indirectly this activity led to the improvement of the water regime in more than 16 ha of the territory of the reed massif, thus allowing the long-term retention of water, even in the driest periods.

BBF continuously monitors the effect of conservation activities on coastal habitats. The reports and the created database with the monitoring results are available at <https://lagoon.biodiversity.bg>



Coastal lagoons nature conservation

Pomorie Lake

The partner LIFE project “LIFE for Pomorie Lagoon”, implemented in Pomorie (2085 ha) and Pomorie Lake (922 ha) protected areas, was finalized in August 2023. In its last year, the BBF assessed the conservation status of the Coastal Lagoons habitat (1150*) and the effect of the applied conservation activities in the prepared general assessment of the habitat for the period 2021-2023. The report and the created database with the monitoring results are available at <http://lifeforpomorielagoon.eu>

BBF contributed to bettering the existing knowledge of the status of *Lestes macrostigma* (Dark Spreadwing) by monitoring its population in the target area and along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. The species is a very good indicator of the condition and quality of the peripheral parts of coastal lagoons and its presence helps conservationists and wildlife managers to pay attention to good water management in the Pomorie Protected Area. The research experience in monitoring *Lestes macrostigma* at the Tour du Valat and BBF was transferred to North Macedonia with the help of the Macedonian Ecological Society.

Together with the Municipality of Pomorie, BBF implemented a joint project for the promotion of *Lestes macrostigma* by creating a sculpture of the species. The artistic interpretation is located near the Museum of Salt, near Pomorie Lake, and was officially opened to the public in the summer. The main highlight of the project was the celebration of Nature Day 2000. On May 22 at the Pomorie Lake Visitor Center, the BBF organized an official award ceremony for the winners of the national youth competition called “Fresh or salty is the future of Pomorie Lake?!” 110 participants from all over the country have created 94 artworks. The event brought together some of the awarded participants, their teachers and families, representatives of the municipality of Pomorie, as well as a representative of the European Commission.



There was an organized media trip on March 15, which allowed the introduction of the problems related to the inflow of fresh water into the lake, the complaint to the EU and the project activities to the journalists.

In April, a BBF team visited several active and inactive salt mines in Portugal and exchanged experiences with local managers. Salinas do Samouco - Alcochete, near Lisbon, where salt mining dates back to the 13th century and has been abandoned for five decades. The team gained knowledge about biosaline agriculture from the family-run business Salina Greens which implements this new economic activity to stimulate the local economy and help the preservation of the fragile salt marsh ecosystem.



Coastal lagoons nature conservation

Empower us

Burgas and the coastal wetland complex that surrounds it, are one of the six Transitional coastal labs – TCLs part of the European scientific consortium EmpowerUs. In 2023, two workshops were held to introduce key pilot activities that will contribute to a more sustainable future for the coastal community of the city of Burgas. About 30 representatives of the local community took part in them, including institutions, scientific institutes, businesses, non-governmental organizations, representatives of the local government, and active citizens. Based on the principle of participatory methods and inclusivity 3 pilot proposals were put forward, to improve the social and ecological connectivity between the local community and the natural features of Burgas and its three lakes - Atanasovsko, Vaya and Mandra lakes.

In addition, several interviews with representatives of key stakeholders were conducted. A study on the intersections of environmental and socio-economic challenges of the coastal territory was prepared.

The project team presented the interim results at an international scientific conference "Protected Areas and Local Communities: Exploring the Challenges of Nature Conservation and Human Well-being" in Sofia, Bulgaria.



Public water fountains (cheshme) and micro wetlands and their importance for biodiversity

Micro wetlands: Fountains of Life for Biodiversity and Human Wellbeing Project

Fountains and micro-wetlands, including those that are formed and retained only for a certain period of the year, are extremely important not only for people, but also for biodiversity. They serve as drinking water for people and domestic animals, as well as for irrigation but also - a habitat for various organisms where they can rest, live or breed and that in turn support other species in the region.

In 2023, BBF started to work on a project to restore public water fountains (cheshme) with their troughs and catchments, as well as the micro-wetlands near them in one of the drought-prone regions in our country Sakar Mountain (part of the Green Belt).

In partnership with the municipality of Topolovgrad and with the financial support of BestBelt, we managed to restore 3 cheshme and 1 micro wetland, important for the local people, their domestic animals, as well as for the biodiversity of the region near the village of Oreshnik. We carried out a range of field research with expert botanists and zoologists which has yielded new data on interesting and valuable species of amphibians, insects and even a critically endangered species of aquatic plant (*Groenlandia densa*). We organized two meetings with local communities to share the importance of the cheshme and the temporary micro-wetlands that form near them.

Through the "Water for Life" project, financed by the EU Staff Fund for a Fair and Sustainable Future, we continued to work towards the restoration of public water fountains (cheshme). We repaired one of the cheshma closest to the village of Oreshnik. Its facade was restored and also painted by the artists from SuperGteam Burgas with a mural of characteristic and interesting inhabitants of the micro-wetlands. In this way, we managed to present in a creative way information about the interesting species associated with the small-sized wetlands, to attract the attention of the local community and to create an artistic product interesting for tourists to visit.



Chairite peatlands



A team of BBF experts alongside researchers from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences conducted 2 field trips to the Chairite lakes area. During that time we carried out a number of studies amongst which low-altitude drone photogrammetric surveying, geodetic surveys, depth and layer assessment of the biggest of the Chairite lakes and its peat islands. We also determined an electrical conductivity profile to identify the potential discharge points of polluted/wastewater, as well as a profile of basic physicochemical parameters.

We also built monitoring points and carried out laboratory analysis of water samples for the presence of biogenic pollutants. We are still currently studying the state of key elements of biodiversity - flora and vegetation, dragonflies, bats, amphibians, reptiles, fish. We identified some potential external impacts on habitats, including livestock grazing and land use associated with artificial fertilizers/pesticides.

Furthermore we mapped and assessed the hydrotechnical facilities (sluices, shafts, etc.) controlling the levels of fishing (for which the lake was used in the past) . A GIS database is being built as part of our action plan.

We developed a proposal for the extension of the protected area "Chairite" with a target area of 2.2 ha.

A series of meetings were held with key local stakeholders - DGS Trigrad, Chairski Ezera lodge, hotel owners from Trigrad. We are in constant contact with RIEW - Smolyan, and we also have had meetings with representatives of the Ministry of Environment and Water (MOEW).

During the field visit in May, an international expert from Wetlands International - Agata Klimkovska participated and contributed her experience to the scientific report and the planning of the specific conservation activities

EDUCATIONAL AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES



Educational and youth activities have always been an important part of the BBF's initiatives, through which we build the future generation of conservationists and nature lovers. After our camps, the participants always remain infected with the love for nature of the specialists who led their activities. The teachers we work with are actively looking for a way to engage their students on global topics and work on practical problems, so that young people better understand their role and apply the knowledge gained at school to solve specific cases. That's why we prepare guides, online courses, volunteer initiatives and conservation camps, where we create an opportunity for awareness, meetings and exchange of experience. Over the past year, the focus of our work has been climate change in a less discussed aspect, namely the importance of biodiversity and protected ecosystems in reducing the local and global effects of climate change and improving human well-being. We demonstrated and implemented direct measures to reduce water use in several households in the village of Oreshnik in Sakar - we installed rainwater collection containers and built drip irrigation systems in 3 households. We ran awareness campaigns about the effects of fast fashion and reduced our footprint by swapping clothes. We supported specific initiatives of young climate ambassadors and promoted scientific research of young professionals. We launched a project to develop the capacity of students to implement environmental protection ideas and continued our work at the Faculty of Biology of Sofia University.



Climate Game on



At the beginning of June, we held an international youth camp in the "Strandja" Nature Park, as part of the activities for youth in the "Climate Game on" project. Climate ambassadors from Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia took part in it.

We immersed ourselves in the cultural and natural heritage of the park by visiting the village of Bulgari for their annual Nestinari festival and together with experts from the park we carefully walked the paths of the oldest reserve in Bulgaria - Silkosia. The visit to the Black Sea beachline in the park showed the geological past of the coast and told about important moments in the history of activism.

In addition to the educational activities, we also carried out some fieldwork, as our participants joined as volunteers and helped the State Forestry "Kosti" take care of oak saplings planted in previous years. We also visited Burgas and Atanasovsko Lake, where our colleagues from BBF presented us with their work for the lake, told us about the typical salt extraction and showed us important habitats for birds and other inhabitants. The participants in the camp had the opportunity to try for themselves the healing properties of the lye and mud in the pools of Atanasovsko Lake provided for this purpose.

Thanks to the "Climate Game on" project, two young people from Bulgaria were able to participate in an educational camp by the Danube River in Slovakia. During the camp they learned more about the work of our colleagues from BROZ in the direction of restoring wetlands, helping farmers implement nature-friendly measures and growing food production with added value, developing a camping along the European Danube Cycle Route and organising company events, propagation of species and maintenance of habitats. The participants in the camp volunteered in activities for creating nesting conditions for the barn swallow.

Through the "Climate Game on" project, we adapted and translated an e-learning platform about climate change into Bulgarian. They are available on the "CLIMATE COMPACT" e-platform and consist of videos, presentations and short test questions for free use.

With the support of our associate partners from Junior Achievement Bulgaria, we organized training for teachers and created a thematic guide with 12 training programs in a school environment, divided into more complex and lighter practical activities. The workshops for teachers included a theoretical part from an expert on climate policies and a practical part working with the applied materials. Two workshops were held in February, involving 20 teachers. The total number of teachers trained in the program is 66 (training started in 2022), and the completed manual has reached over 150 teachers from all over the country who have expressed interest in receiving it.

In 2023, we published several interesting popular science materials written by students and PhD students supported by the Foundation.

- Dimitar Dimitrov: Influence of the heat island effect on dragonflies (Insecta: Odonata) along the Maritsa River in the city of Plovdiv
- Polina Dimitrova: The plain forests of the Upper Thracian lowland and their importance for biodiversity
- Dr. Milena Krastanova: Aquaponics in Bulgaria - A, B of innovations in agricultural production



„Back to school“ for nature protection cause

In 2023, we supported the students from the "Big Picture" club from the Faculty of Biology of Sofia University to develop a project idea for an educational initiative in the field of environmental protection. We prepared a proposal and won funding from the Vivacom regional grant. The project "Back to school" is an initiative through which students in the field of natural sciences from the Faculty of Biology return to their home schools, together with experts from the BBF, in order to provoke students' interest in environmental protection through a series of 4 activities in each of the selected schools: PMG "Vasil Drumev" - Veliko Tarnovo, OU "Hristo Smirnenski" - Cherven Bryag and 18 SU "William Gladstone" in Sofia. Meetings included lectures, workshops and interactive activities, educational outings in nature and support for the implementation of initiatives at the school or community level proposed by the students themselves. We held the first meeting with students in October 2023 in Cherven Bryag and it was on the topic of forest protection.

For a first time after COVID, we came back to the Faculty of Biology of Sofia University and organised several lectures for students on important conservation topics, thanks to the "We give nature a voice" project.

Be Smart, Think Circular

During 2023, the main focus was the promotion of the already developed handbook for teachers and the implementation of campaigns and online tournaments aimed at both teachers and children. With a team effort, we managed to reach nearly 140,000 people on social networks, over 12,000 people who visited the "Be Smart, Think Circular" website and over 1,600 downloads of the manual.

We have successfully run five campaigns on the topics of food waste, plastic pollution, recycling, biodiversity conservation and climate change. For the campaigns, five videos were created, which we targeted teachers through social networks. The campaigns also generated media interest, which led to the inclusion of experts from the team in radio broadcasts.

The most important achievement of the project was the engagement of nearly 6,000 students and school teams, who participated in the project activities such as training, but also in the campaigns with drawings, mock-ups, videos, experiments and other projects and thus engaged with the topics of nature protection.

All developed materials - presentations, methodological instructions, ideas for challenges and videos - are long-term available through the project website: <https://b-smart.education/>. In addition, thanks to our partners from PUK.bg, replaying all tournaments is also free and possible.



A volunteer camp in Sakar Mountain

A key activity in the "Water for Life" project was a volunteer camp to build drip irrigation in the gardens of several households. The aim was to demonstrate the application of good practices for saving water and direct support to 3 households from Oreshnik - a village of the driest southern part of Bulgaria, which is becoming increasingly vulnerable to prolonged periods of drought, currently even more extended as a result of climate change. In the demographic situation characteristic of Bulgarian villages - decreasing population, increasing average age and high level of unemployment, households depend to a large extent on the food they grow in their gardens. The event was attended by 15 volunteers from all over the country, who installed over 400 sq.m drip irrigation in the three gardens and placed 3 containers of 1000 litres each to collect rainwater.

Sakar Biodiversity Camp

In October and November, the autumn camp "Biodiversity of Sakar" gathered students aged 15-18 from the Sakar region - mainly from two local schools from Topolovgrad and Svilengrad. Field trips were led by botanists, ornithologists, mushroom and mammal specialists. During the camps, students learned ways to monitor biodiversity and used field book guides, GPS, photo traps, binoculars and scopes; recorded their observations in citizen science applications, such as SMART birds and iNaturalist. Some of the most interesting observations were *Spiranthes spiralis* - the only kind of autumn flowering orchid in Bulgaria, which, although overbloomed, was distinguished by its green stem, as well as the location of a mushroom (*Scleroderma polyrhizum*), observed for the first time during the camp on the territory of Sakar.



Here we swap again – clothes swapping event

In 2023, we organized the first open clothing swap events "Here we swap again" - spring and after that, autumn clothing „migration“. We partnered with For the Earth Association and Greenpeace. The event itself was inspired by our work with the young climate ambassador Julieta Dobcheva, a participant in the Climate Game on project. who prepared the necessary information and statistics on the subject of fast fashion. For the spring event, we chose Earth Day, April 22. We featured a screening of the film "The True Price" and a discussion with Tex Cycle - a company that collects and recycles used textiles and shoes. The autumn event was part of Nature Fest. During each of the events, over 200 garments found new owners and extended their lives.

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

We have always known the power of good communication to achieve important conservation goals, engage stakeholders, resolve conflicts and find like-minded people. In 2023, we were reaching out to people in the different regions and areas where we work, so that together we could help protect valuable places and species or provide needed information in an interesting and even entertaining way about biodiversity and climate change challenges. Organising camps in Strandja and Sakar, training for teachers and journalists on how to talk about climate change, the first escape room in the country together with the Natural History Museum, the Annual Biodiversity and Climate Awards, the Salty People film, the Dunes month and petition, Nature Fest, dozens of videos and posts are just some of the diverse tools we used throughout the year to achieve our goals.

2023 - YEAR OF BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE

We've dedicated 2023 to efforts to tackle the effects of climate change and the places, species and people we work for. The BBF is working to raise awareness of the effects of climate change and engage different groups in society. We help young scientists and youth have their voices heard. We develop playful and artistic approaches to influence the issue to reach more people. We share the stories of people - from Bulgaria or other parts of the world - because we are all connected in a common world and every action we take has a consequence.

We sent our ambassador to Honduras, Rada Boneva, who together with other activists participated in first-hand meetings with representatives of communities in the countries where climate change is having the greatest impact. The visit aims to bring what we learn first-hand through the social networks of activists and bloggers to more people in Bulgaria and other Central and Eastern European countries.

You can read an interview about the mission in the media: <https://www.bloombergtv.bg/a/17-v-razvitie/123561-tryabva-da-sprem-da-konsumirame-taka-syakash-nyama-utre> and on Rada Boneva's personal blog: <https://thriftsheep.com/>



Green Festival Guidebook

BBF team has translated and adapted the Green Festivals' Guide, which offers ideas for reducing the carbon footprint and direct environmental impact of mass events through actions addressing 5 key aspects: food; waste; energy and water; transport; and venue. The platform allows downloading a list of ideas applicable to a specific event format or downloading the entire guide in PDF format. Together with the environmental association "Za Zemiata" we worked to test pilot ideas during Uzana Polyana Fest, when a deposit system for reusable cups was first introduced and the School for Solar Professionals provided photovoltaic electricity for the Cognition Zone. The organizers from the municipality of Gabrovo ensured the availability of drinking water from a tap close to the chosen location, and containers for separate waste collection throughout the festival area, including compost.

<https://climategame.eu/greener-festival/bg/>

Annual Biodiversity and Climate Awards

It's one of the emblematic events of the BBF for the conservation community. Through the Awards, we honour the indomitable role models - campaigners, journalists, local initiatives, responsible businesses, politicians and conservation activists. In 2023 the awards took place for the 12th time and brought together 70 inspiring true stories worth knowing about because in smaller or bigger steps they are making Bulgaria a better place to live.

Traditionally, in each category, there was a "public winner" (voted for on Facebook) and a "jury winner", composed of public figures with an active civic position. This year the jury was composed of Radoslav Parushev - Bulgarian modernist writer; Dimitar Dimitrov, entrepreneur, and representative of 1% for the Planet; Vasil Gyurov - musician, activist and politician and Iva Doychinova (socially engaged journalist).

The significant examples awarded this year are: for a campaign related to biodiversity and climate protection, the campaign measuring nitrogen dioxide pollution (NO₂) in Sofia was awarded, which involved 80 volunteers and proved the toxic pollution, which until now has been denied by all institutions. Forest.bg because of the huge amount of reforestation campaigns across the country. The newest category "Initiatives with local significance" attracted a lot of interest because there are actions and initiatives all over the country that are of great local significance but often remain outside the media and public interest. Awarded by the jury were Clean and Green in Gotse Delchev, which in one biodiverse year organized more than 120 conservation activities, and the public - "Tran Ultra Run" - an initiative that shows the possibilities of sport to support the sustainable development of regions.

Victoria Simeonova from "Gospodari an efira" receives the award for her series of reports on illegal logging in the forests of Sofia region and an illegal dump near Kyustendil, harassing the residents of nearby villages for 20 years. Bivol were honoured by the public for their consistent reporting on deforestation and exposing corruption schemes.

Pencho Pandakov received the award from the jury for his active participation and expert assistance in the designation of new protected areas, river conservation and his support for the struggle of local people against the construction of a waste incineration plant near the village of Varbovka in Pavlikeni. The audience chose Ivelina Atanasova, a primary school teacher at Lyuben Karavelov Primary School, Nova Zagora, who organised a teaching practice for the bees.

The Responsible Business category is becoming more and more interesting and the awarding of the prize sends an important message not only to business but also to society, so the jury decided to award two prizes in this category as well. To Harmonica, who this year received a B Corp - a certificate awarded to companies that meet high standards of social and environmental performance, public transparency and accountability. To Kaufland for launching long-term support of Bulgarian polar expeditions and educational campaigns with environmental organizations. The public chose Elektrodistribution South to invest in securing the electricity grid,

The exciting ceremony was led by eco-influencer Rada Boneva and Iva Georgieva from the BBF team and took place on 30 September at Toplotsentrala, after a full day of Nature Fest and ended with a well-deserved celebration for the entire conservation community with the band No More Many More.

More about the awards: <https://biodiversity.bg/Nagradite-2023-1-187>



Nature fest

Nature Fest was the grand finale of the project "We Give Nature a Voice", funded by the Active Citizens Fund of the EEA Grants. It took place on 30 September at Toplotsentrala in Sofia, where all organisations and groups - members of the Coalition - presented their work in an interactive and fun way. We are proud to say that the festival exceeded our initial expectations and turned into a true celebration of nature in the heart of the capital. BBF joined the event with several workshops and games: a treasure hunt developed by one of the Climate Game on participants, Adi Kaneva, in which nearly 50 teams found hidden information about the birds, insects and trees in the park. We built a hotel for insects, more precisely for mason bees, organized workshops for flower bombs and salt with spices and presented the board game Terra Futura, in which the winner is the one who manages to build his economy more neutrally. Other highlights of the programme included birdwatching; an installation exploring the Dragoman Marsh; natural science-style painting and many more activities that attracted hundreds of people of all ages to the meadows by Toplotsentrala and South Park. The evening concluded with the traditional Annual Biodiversity and Climate Awards, which were presented for the 12th time by the BBF to activists, journalists, campaigners and businesses that have demonstrated their responsibility to a preserved environment over the past biodiverse year.



Salty people

In 2023, we presented Salt People to the Bulgarian audience. Through the BBF film, four nature conservationists share the challenges they face in protecting Lake Atanasovo. How do you do business here? Can different stakeholders get involved in the management and conservation of the lake? What are the fears and hopes of the people who have dedicated their lives to the coastal lagoon? The film "Salty People" was produced with the financial support of the LIFE Programme within the framework of the Lagoon of Life project and the Sigrid Rausing Fund. On the old-style Atanasov day - January 31 was the premiere at the Cinema House in Sofia, which turned into a real celebration and due to the great interest, there was an extraordinary screening in February. In March was the premiere in Burgas, and in June in Veliko Tarnovo. Each screening ended with a discussion with the film crew, a charity bazaar with products from the lake and a salty cocktail, discussing not only the themes raised in Salty People but also the hot challenges in the area.



WE GIVE NATURE A VOICE

In 2023 we finished our project "We give nature a voice, it has us", through which we worked to promote the efforts of nature conservation organisations and civic groups united in "For the Nature" Coalition. We created an Instagram and YouTube channel of the Coalition, as well as content for these platforms - educational pictures and videos that tell about the members of the Coalition, but also the need for such a union for the protection of our greatest national treasure - the preserved nature! We supported several citizen groups fighting to protect their right to live in a clean environment with legal and environmental advice. We participated in common battles against attempts to violate laws protecting nature and maintained the link between NGOs, experts, scientists and institutions on important issues related to the conservation of the country's biodiversity. We held meetings for the Coalition and liaison meetings with the media and civil society organisations, aiming to re-establish lost links, keep up with new trends in storytelling, and draw attention to important but complex issues, as conservation issues often are. With the help of other member organisations, we revamped the Coalition's website <https://forthenature.org/>

THE VOICE OF THE SOUTH

The Global North is largely responsible for the climate crisis, but its consequences are also being felt in the countries of the Global South. Individual countries and regions of the world, as well as different population groups within societies, are affected to varying degrees by climate change. Small farms in Central America, for example, are exposed to extreme weather events as a result of climate change - droughts, storms and torrential rains. This results in crop loss and food insecurity. Smallholder farmers are therefore more at risk than people engaged in other economic activities. Furthermore, the possibilities for adaptation vary, and the condition is that one has access to income, property (land), work, mobility, technology, credit and political decision-making processes. Anyone who has one can better protect themselves against the consequences of climate change. These conditions often depend on (created) categories that arrange our societies in a hierarchical system, such as gender, socioeconomic status, race, age, and disease. For this reason, the climate emergency reinforces existing social inequalities. Indigenous people, farmers with small farms, women, children, the elderly and the sick are particularly affected. The concept of climate justice aims at an equitable distribution of the burdens and opportunities that arise as a result of climate change. This is a central demand of climate justice movements, and it has different dimensions. The fact that the global North has historically been responsible for a huge share of emissions provides grounds for imposing restorative justice: the consequences of the climate crisis must be compensated fairly. However, it is also about whether responsibility for reducing emissions is distributed fairly (distributive justice) and how the people most affected by the climate crisis can participate in decision-making about climate policies.

More information can be found here
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1p5TsHCl3C6wwb_wag8qNAo7FN8WPsQAQH/view?usp=sharing
<https://climategame.eu/bg/product.php?id=7>
<https://www.bloombergtv.bg/a/17-v-razvitie/121491-globalniyat-sever-dalzhi-pomosht-na-yuga-zaradi-klimatichnite-promeni-koito-prichinyava>



PARTNERSHIPS

FOR THE NATURE COALITION

In 2023 we continued our work on strengthening "For the Nature" Coalition and gaining recognition for the civil society as a corrective to the political power in Bulgaria. The Coalition's actions were especially in demand due to the political and parliamentary crisis in Bulgaria after the fall of the regular government. Since the successful management reforms launched by the "green" ministers and deputy ministers were suspended, we had to protest in defence of different causes throughout the period. The Coalition expressed its disagreement with the wrongful dismissal of the Directors of Rila and Pirin National Parks and another attempt to pass lobbying changes to the Forest Law. "For the Nature" also supported the protests of the Coalition "Let's save Kresna Gorge" and the Bulgarian Rafting Federation in their struggle to save the Kresna Gorge from development. BBF also joined an unprecedented union of 192 non-governmental organizations, commercial companies and professionals against proposed changes to the Access to Information Act. BBF experts participated in the preparation of statements on these issues, for the purposes of Natura 2000 along the Black Sea coast; terminating of the measure "pastoralism" in National parks, as well as a statement on the development of renewable energy sources - <https://forthenature.org/attitudes/153-en>.

The Coalition website was successfully updated - a necessary step towards the Coalition's communication abilities improvement. On the occasion of Volunteer Day, a party was organized for the volunteers and supporters of the Coalition. The newly opened venue "Shtrak" (in English - "Click") is becoming a popular place for formal and informal meetings of the members of the Coalition and representatives of NGOs from other sectors.

SHTRAK

In 2023 the creation of the venue was completed and it began to operate. Despite all the "growth problems" the plan for a venue to turn into a home for the social enterprises seemed to work. "Shtrak" offers those enterprises the opportunity to display and sell their products, to present their causes, to meet their supporters and above all, to make possible experience exchange and mutual support. BBF also profited from the venue by finding a market for its products, by getting support for their marketing and sales, by getting access to large corporate sales, by participating in numerous workshops, bazaars and events. However, the biggest benefits are intangible – namely the opportunity to find points of intersection and unite for common actions with social NGOs, to establish a venue for the environmental community to meet and cooperate. BBF's income from "Shtrak" for the year is over 25 000 BGN



ESCAPE ROOM

In 2023 the first fact-based escape room began to operate. BioXcape is a joint project of BBF and the Natural History Museum Sofia and is located in the basement of the Museum. It tells the story of Irma Zhelyazkova - a Bulgarian scientist who disappeared in the 80s of the 20th century, during one of the climate change research missions. Although the character is fictional, the riddles in the room are based on scientifically proven facts about biodiversity, ecosystems and greenhouse gases.

Similar to real life we have limited time to act to cope with the climate crisis. The key is knowledge, but you don't necessarily need any before entering the room – this makes it suitable for a wide audience. It is about sharing with friends an experience with a cause and added value - with the entrance ticket the visitor supports the activities of BBF and the Natural History Museum. Visits require booking at: <https://bioxcape.com/>



BBF MEMBERSHIPS

SAR - Seas at risk

The BBF actively participates in the work of the organization Seas at Risk Presented in Brussels, especially in the formation of policies and campaigns for the protection of seas and oceans at the low level of the union. We were particularly active on issues related to marine protected areas, bottom trawling, individual fish and bycatch of rare species, and problems related to the placement of wind generators in the marine environment.

EGBA- European Green Belt Association

BBF supports and participates in the activities of EGBA by regularly participating in the meetings of the Management Board, where we perform the functions of Deputy Chairman. The main activity in the last year has been carried out under the EU-funded BESTBelt project, which supports activities on the overall protection of the Green Belt from the Scandinavian countries to the Balkans for the protection of biodiversity and cultural heritage, and the implementation of sustainable practices for the use of natural resources in the border territories, including projects in Bulgaria.

Ceeweb on Biodiversity

Our partnership with CEEweb for biodiversity - the network for the protection of biodiversity in Central and Eastern Europe continues this year, especially within the framework of the international project Climate Game on. Within the project, we accumulated strategic knowledge, prepared a number of guides - for holding green festivals, for training teachers, for online training of young people, we supported more than 10 youth initiatives with concrete results and a focus on reducing the carbon footprint and public awareness of climate change and the role of protected biodiversity for climate adaptation and mitigation.

IUCN - International Union for Conservation of Nature

Our joint work with the International Union for Conservation of Nature is mainly expressed in the participation of our representative in the session of the Steering Committee of the IUCN Interregional Committee for Europe, North and Central Asia, where various projects and initiatives of mutual interest to both regions are discussed and presented with the main objective of attracting new users from this part of Asia to the work of the Union.

Partnerships with companies

We have expanded our partnerships and joint initiatives with businesses. We were approached by 7 companies in connection with their CSR and volunteer projects, and as a result, in addition to our successful joint activities, BBF received in various forms and donations in the amount of over BGN 43,700.

This year, the dedicated efforts of the donation and business development team began to bear fruit. From wishful activities, they took their rightful place as a real source of funds and a channel of communication with society. Donations and business have enabled us to communicate our messages in a much more understandable language and reach beyond our circle of supporters. With an income of BGN 78,224.09 for business activity and BGN 72,802 from donations, and over 2,500 people participated in volunteer actions, workshops with a cause, field camps and corporate events. Donations and business activities for the first time really diversify the income channels for the Foundation.

In 2023, we developed the partnership with the mobile operator A1 through a series of events. We opted into their employee payroll donation program. With the support of BCause, it is now possible for them to regularly set aside an amount of their choice and donate it to the work of the BBF. In May, we delighted the A1 Kindergarten children with a story about pollinators and flowering plants, while the little ones made flower bombs with soil and seeds for honey plants. The second event was for the company's top 100 employees and included lectures and activities on sustainable living. Together with the eco-influencer Rada Boneva, we demonstrated how to make a composter for home use from available materials. With the participation of Rosen Vasilev, we held a lecture on food waste and gave valuable advice on how to reduce food waste at home. For the finale, we organized a workshop on salt with spices and presented the symbiosis in Atanasovsko Lake between human activity and biodiversity conservation. In 2023, part of our youth initiatives under the "Climate Game on" project were supported by The Body shop, through a donation from the company. The messages of the young climate ambassadors and their successful examples can be found in the specially developed section of the Climate Game website on ["Climate Ambassadors"](#).

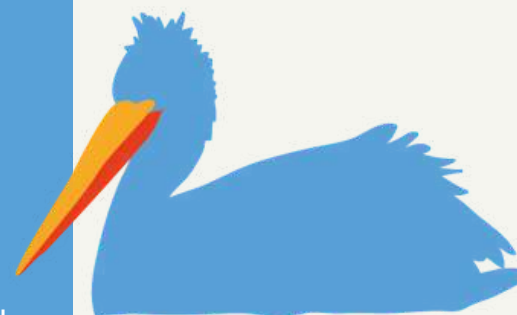
For the second year in a row, UniCredit Bulbank sought us out as partners in their "Green Day" initiative within the bank's National Volunteer Program. Over 800 employees and their families took part in the large-scale initiative which took place in 11 different places such as the Zoological Garden in Sofia, Burgas, Pleven, Burgas, Plovdiv, Vitosha Nature Park, where everyone with great enthusiasm repaired and improved tourist infrastructure, planted new plants, cleaned and painted facilities.

The strategic partnership with HPE continued in 2023 with an action to mark a tourist route to a protected area where the wild peony "Yankovets" is located and to place information signs (near the village of Izvor, municipality of Radomir). We also did three workshops with a cause for employees together. The income from the Benevity platform, through which we receive donations from HPE for the 23rd, is BGN 8,239, directed both to support the Biodiversity Fund and the "Living Sands" campaign.

SAP Social Sabbatical for local engagements

This is a short-term program for SAP employees to pro bono support selected NGO and social enterprise causes. Over a period of two weeks, multidisciplinary teams are formed to work on a specific need or opportunity identified by the selected organizations. BBF was one of the supported organizations, and so for a period of 2 weeks, Maria, Vyara and Dimitar (Jimmy) joined our team.

Our initial goals were in the field of social entrepreneurship, wanting to develop our channels for independent financial income for our work. Together we explored the possibilities of ESG standards (Environmental, Social and Governance). We studied the reports of large corporations, held 7 meetings with representatives of small, medium and large businesses in Bulgaria and looked for different methodologies for assessing the impact of companies on the environment. We have mapped out opportunities for business partnerships to support conservation activities.



Products with a cause

In 2023 a new product with a cause was developed - the Flamingo candle made by "Uhaya" Company. Ten per cent of the product's profit is donated to support the "Lagoon of Life" project to study the effect of the pink flamingo on other inhabitants of the lake. The candle is handcrafted, it consists of 100% natural vegan soy wax and has a certified organic natural scent that reminds one of wild nature. The pink flamingo already inhabits the lake all year round and has become the most popular species of Atanasovsko Lake for the citizens and guests of Burgas. Over 4,000 birds have been sighted here, some with rings from Spain, France, Italy and Turkey. It is important to make observations and analyses of this species regularly because this is how the influence of flamingos on other inhabitants of the lagoon and their competition for food and nesting and resting places is being tracked.



BIODIVERSITY FUND

This year has been quite successful in terms of donations for our organization and the funds collected for the Biodiversity Fund exceed nearly three times the donations in the previous two years with a total amount of BGN 56,464.22. As part of the active work of the Biodiversity Fund, an Operational Team was formed, including conservation, communication, financial experts and employees with fundraising experience. With his help and with the efforts of the entire team, numerous actions and activities were carried out to promote the Fund.

We have registered on the Global Giving platform and are now a full member of this global charitable community, to which we presented our Biodiversity Fund. On the other fundraising platform in which we participate, Benevity, we published two projects - for the distribution of the film "Salty People" and for the "Living Sands" campaign, with which we seek financial support for our activities to protect the Black Sea dunes. We are about to be included in the 1% for the Planet initiative, hoping through this channel to also increase the proceeds to the Biodiversity Fund. In addition to all this, the BBF was included in the catalogue of verified causes of one of the largest organizations working in the field of charity and giving, BCause, through which we got the opportunity to promote all our causes to a large circle of donors, as well as to be included in short application lists to funds.

We actively participated in the public donor life through participation in various seminars, conferences, workshops and forums. We are members of the "Fundraiser's Club" - a community of representatives of organizations from the entire non-governmental spectrum, in which issues related to this sphere are regularly discussed, experiences and ideas are exchanged, and initiatives are shared.

At the beginning of October, we organized an action, financed by the Biodiversity Fund, aimed at one valuable species - the Bulgarian sicklehorn (*Serratula bulgarica*). This is a rare and critically endangered species, included in the Red Book, found in the Pannonian steppes, which, however, without grazing and mowing, become overgrown with bushes and subsequently lost. We chose to work for the protection of one of the few places in our country where it can still be found and organized a volunteer action to clean part of the Natura 2000 area "Studena Reka" near the village of Hadjidimitrovo. In the spring, we will check how our intervention has affected the state of this valuable species.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTGky4OkJ2I>

17

team members

12 PROJECTS

<http://biodiversity.bg>



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Foundation

**WE THANK YOU
FOR YOUR SUPPORT**