

BALKAN DETOX LIFE

Poisoning incidents annual report for 2021

BALKAN DETOX LIFE: STRENGTHENING NATIONAL
CAPACITIES TO FIGHT WILDLIFE POISONING AND RAISE
AWARENESS ABOUT THE PROBLEM ACROSS SEVEN
BALKAN COUNTRIES
(LIFE19 GIE/NL/001016)

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Project Partners:

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Subject and purpose of the document

This document is prepared within the framework of the BalkanDetox LIFE project (LIFE19 GIE/NL/001016) and relates to *Action C.1: Establishment of national databases for poisoning incidents* and deliverable foreseen under this action: Poisoning incidents annual report 2021.

This report is designed to provide an overview of wildlife poisoning incidents that were recorded during the implementation of the BalkanDetox LIFE project in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

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About the project

The BalkanDetox LIFE project is a five-year endeavour with a €1.8 million budget, which aims to raise awareness and strengthen national capacities to fight the problem of wildlife poisoning across Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, the Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia. It received funding from the EU's LIFE Programme with a contribution of 1.004.792€ (54,82%) to the total project budget, and it is co-financed by the Vulture Conservation Foundation, the MAVA Foundation and Euronatur, as well as by the Whitley Fund for Nature and Environmental Protection and Energy Efficiency Fund for specific actions. Project partners are the Vulture Conservation Foundation as the coordinating beneficiary, and the Albanian Ornithological Society, Association BIOM, Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia, Fund for Wild Flora and Fauna, Hellenic Ornithological Society, Macedonian Ecological Society, Ornitološko društvo NAŠE Ptice and the Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania as associated beneficiaries. Furthermore, this project is based on Spanish best practice experience and counts with the support from the Junta de Andalucía and the Spanish Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge.

Learn more at www.balkandetoxlife.eu



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INTRODUCTION

Databases are necessary for storing relevant information about incidents of illegal poisoning of animals, specifying with precision all relevant data: location, date, affected species, substances used, (results of the necropsies and toxicological analyses), actions taken, penal consequences, etc. Systematic compilation of this relevant data enables us to better define the scope and severity of this illegal practice in each target country, but also on a larger scale, such as the region of the Balkan Peninsula, identify drivers behind it, substances most commonly used for poisoning, hotspots for poisoning and species most affected by this practice.

Additionally, regularly updated databases enable us to disseminate information to target audiences through publication of periodical reports on poisoning, analyze and monitor the effects of implemented anti-poison actions. Cohesion of this information within a Balkan database enables us to better grasp the situation on a regional and international scale.

Finally, databases for poisoning incidents provide us with a possibility to monitor the practical effectiveness of some of actions aimed at reducing the threat of wildlife poisoning. In the framework of the BalkanDetox LIFE project National Anti-poison Data Bases were additionally established in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia to match those already developed and put in use within LIFE10 NAT/BG/000152 and LIFE16 NAT/BG/000874 in Greece, Bulgaria, North Macedonia and Albania.

This report aims at disseminating information about wildlife poisoning incidents that occurred in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, North Macedonia and Serbia during the implementation of the BalkanDetox LIFE project in 2021 to all interested parties.

Overview of wildlife poisoning in the Balkan Peninsula during 2021

During the implementation of the BalkanDetox LIFE project in 2021 a total of 41 presumably poisoning incidents were recorded across four countries of the Balkan region. The great majority (76%) of these incidents were recorded in Greece, while 20% were recorded in Serbia (Figure 1.). Forensic toxicological analysis was conducted for only two incidents in Serbia and confirmed poisoning as a cause of death in one incident from

January, in which 3 Golden jackals were poisoned by *7-benzofuranol*, a Carbamate insecticide which is illegal in Serbia.

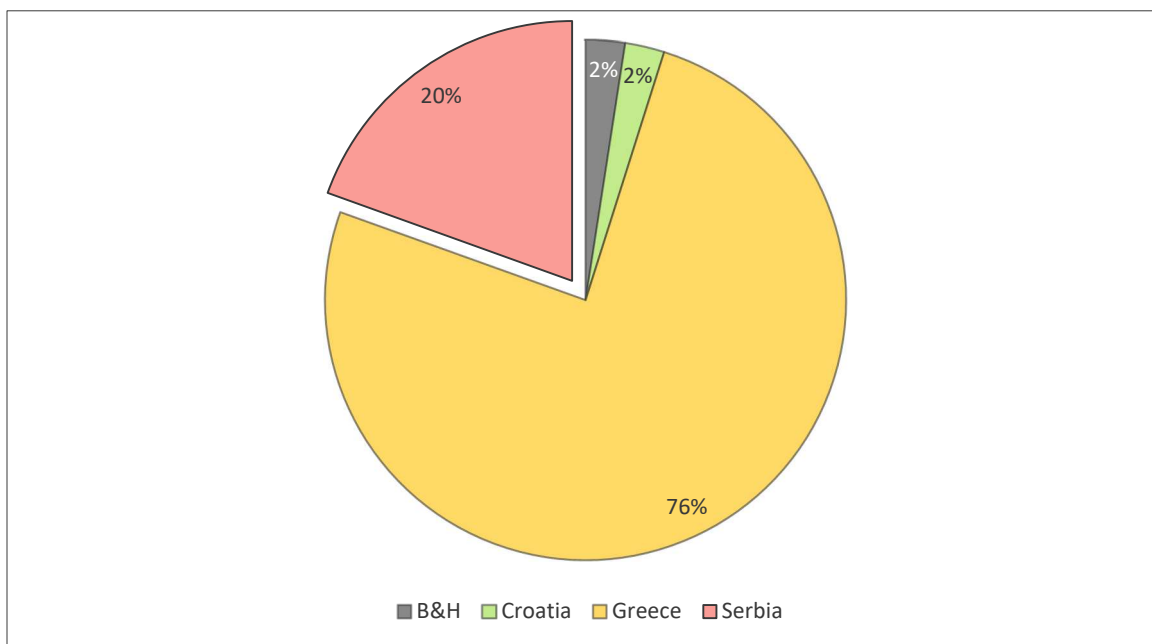


Figure 1. Distribution of presumable poisoning incidents recorded in 2021 by different Balkan countries

A total of 19 wild species were recorded as casualties of presumably poisoned incidents that were documented in 2021, while in two incidents the carcasses were in an advanced state of decay which made identification on a species level impossible. The most common victim was the Common Buzzard, recorded as a casualty in 26,8% of all documented incidents, with 17 presumably poisoned individuals (Figure 2.). The second most numerous and frequently poisoned species was Beech marten, recorded in 8 presumable poisoning incidents, with 10 perished individuals, followed by Red fox, recorded in 5 presumable poisoning incidents, with 5 perished individuals.

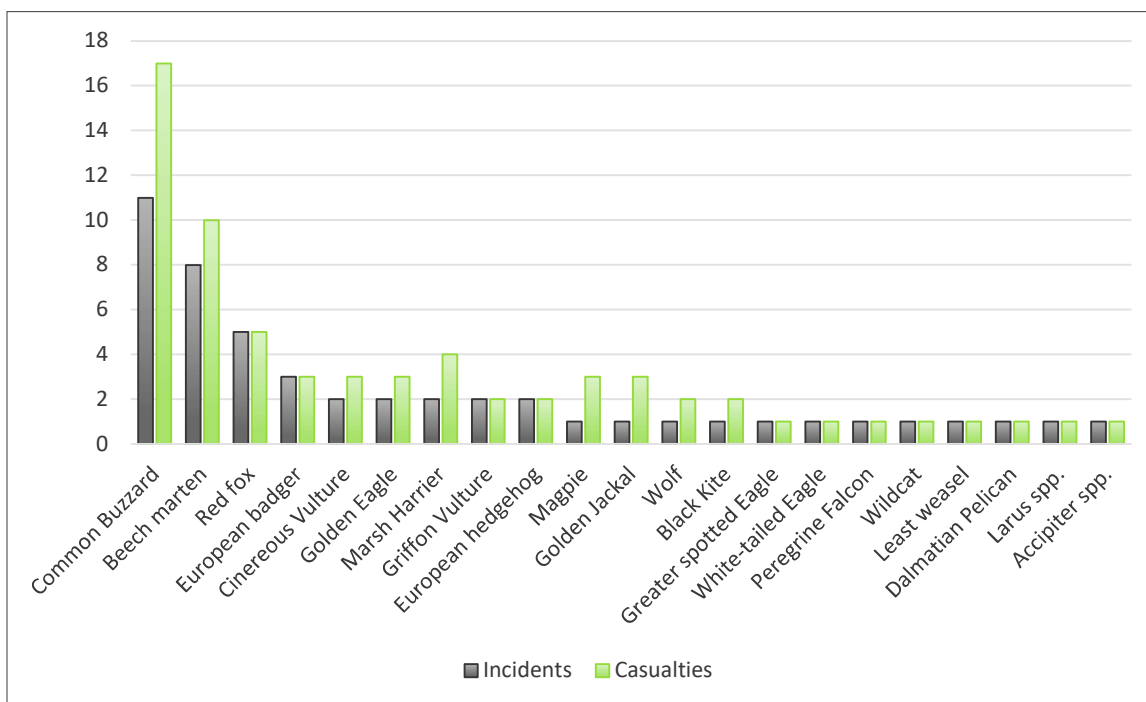


Figure 2. Recorded casualties of wildlife poisoning in the Balkan Peninsula during 2021

Presumable poisoning incidents where the casualties were vultures were recorded only in Greece. A total of 5 vultures were recorded as casualties in 2021, 3 Cinereous Vultures and 2 Griffon Vultures.

ALBANIA

During 2021 there were no wildlife poisoning incidents that were reported to the governmental authorities in Albania, nor to beneficiaries of the BalkanDetox LIFE project in the country.

On the other side, it is important to mention that a total of 14 poisoning incidents where the victims were domestic animals were recorded during 2021 in Albania. In all of these reported incidents but one the primary targets were stray dogs. In 3 incidents poison baits were found in the vicinity of dead animals.

The largest poisoning event, where 14 dogs were found presumably poisoned, happened in the municipality of Bulqizë in March, followed by the event in Vlorë where 9 dead dogs were found next to poison baits.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

One wildlife poisoning incident was recorded in Bosnia and Herzegovina during 2021. In September, in the municipality of Blagaj in Herzegovina 1 Common Buzzard and 3 Magpies were found presumably poisoned by a local citizen. The dead animals were moved and dumped in a dumpster before the authorities could be organized to conduct a field investigation.

Apart from this event, on two occasions poison baits (pieces of meat laced with presumably toxic substance) were found in the city park in Mostar by local citizens, most likely intended for stray dogs.

CROATIA

One presumable poisoning event where wild animals were found as casualties were recorded in Croatia during 2021 in Split-Dalmatia County. The incident was discovered in April by a local citizen while managing livestock. Corpses of 2 Beech martens were found on open pastures, along with a corpse of a dead cow. Additionally, poison baits (pieces of bread and pellets laced with poison) were also found in the vicinity of the dead animals. It is suspected that the motive behind this presumably poisoning event was conflicts that local hunters have with mammalian predators and that the target species was Red fox. Relevant authorities (Police, Public prosecutor office) were informed, and official complaints were submitted by the project beneficiary in Croatia.

Apart from this incident, it is important to mention that another 2 poisoning incidents, where the victims were hunting dogs, were recorded during hunting activities and reported to the relevant authorities. Both incidents were reported by hunters from local hunting associations. In both case poison baits (pieces of meat) were found. For the incident that occurred in January in Zadar County, where one hunting dog was poisoned and another 2 dogs successfully recovered, pieces of meat laced with *Metaldehyde* were used as poison baits. The suspected motive behind this poisoning was personal disputes.

GREECE

During the implementation of BalkanDetox LIFE project in 2021 a total of 37 presumable poisoning incidents were documented in Greece where wild animals were recorded as casualties. Additionally, on 20 separate occasions only poison baits were found. It is also important to mention that 13 events were documented where only domestic animals (mostly stray dogs and cats, but also hunting and shepherd dogs) were found as casualties of suspected poisoning.

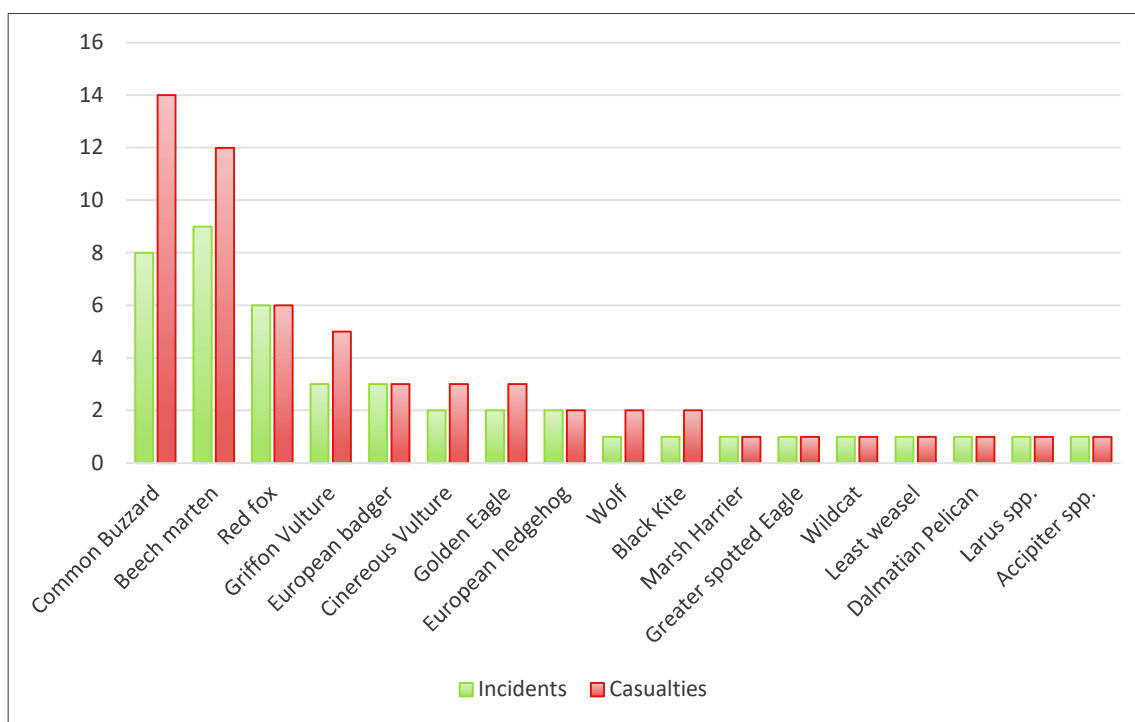


Figure 3. Recorded casualties of wildlife poisoning in Greece during 2021

A total of 15 wild species were recorded as casualties of presumable poisoning events that occurred during 2021 in Greece, while on two occasions the carcasses were in advanced stages of decay that prevented exact identification (Figure 1.). The most numerous and frequently recorded victim was Common Buzzard, documented in almost every fifth presumable poisoning event with 14 perished individuals in total, followed by Beech marten and Red fox. Poison baits used ranged from individual pieces of meat, livers, intestines, fish, milk, water, bread, dried fruit, sausages, animal parts and entire carcasses.

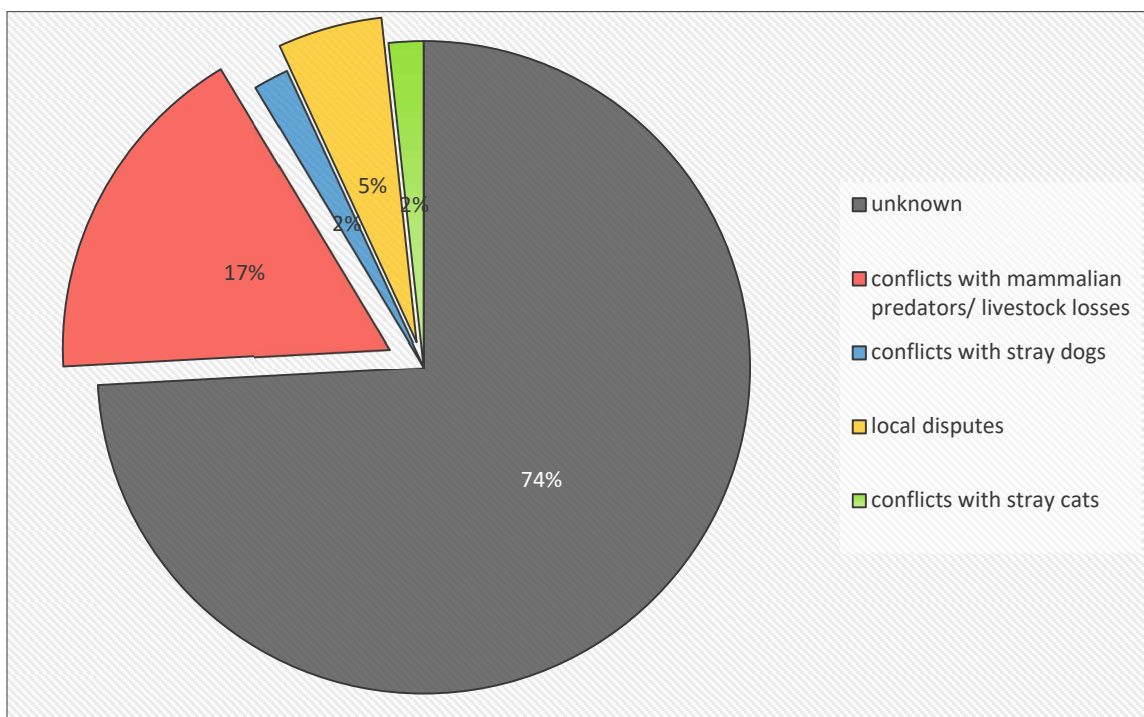


Figure 4. Motives behind the use of poison baits in Greece in 2021

Motives behind most wildlife poisoning events documented in Greece in 2021 remain unknown (Figure 2.). However, from those better documented incidents we can conclude that the biggest driver of the use of poison baits were conflicts with mammalian predators (17%) which cause certain livestock losses. In 5 out of 10 poisoning events Wolf was identified as the primary target for the poison baits. The other events relate to conflicts with Brown bear and Red fox. The second most significant motive were local disputes between different land users, mostly hunters and livestock breeders. These disputes usually result in setting poison baits for either hunting or shepherd dogs, but wild animals quite often get poisoned as well.

From the available data we can conclude that there was no significant difference between the different seasons of the year and the frequency of poison bait use. The highest number of poisoning incidents was recorded in March (Figure 3.).

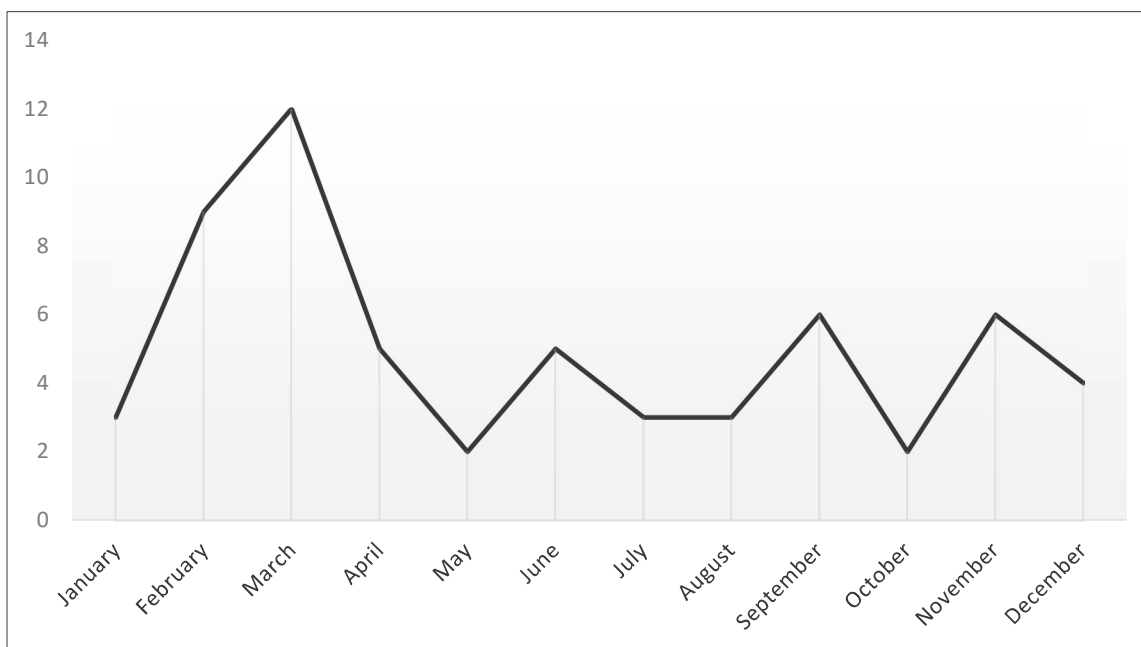


Figure 5. Temporal distribution of poisoning events during 2021 in Greece

Almost half (44,8%) of the wildlife poisoning events that were documented during 2021 in Greece occurred in the region of Crete (Figure 4.), followed by Southern Aegean region (12%).

In more than half of the recorded events relevant authorities were actively engaged in the investigation and submitted official complaints. Active field searches with Canine Teams (Anti-poison dog units) were conducted for 70% of reported poisoning events in 2021. Official necropsies of collected carcasses of wild animals suspected to have died of poisoning were conducted only for 3 incidents. Additional information about the results of these necropsies were not available. According to the available information forensic toxicological analysis were not conducted for any poisoning events recorded in 2021.

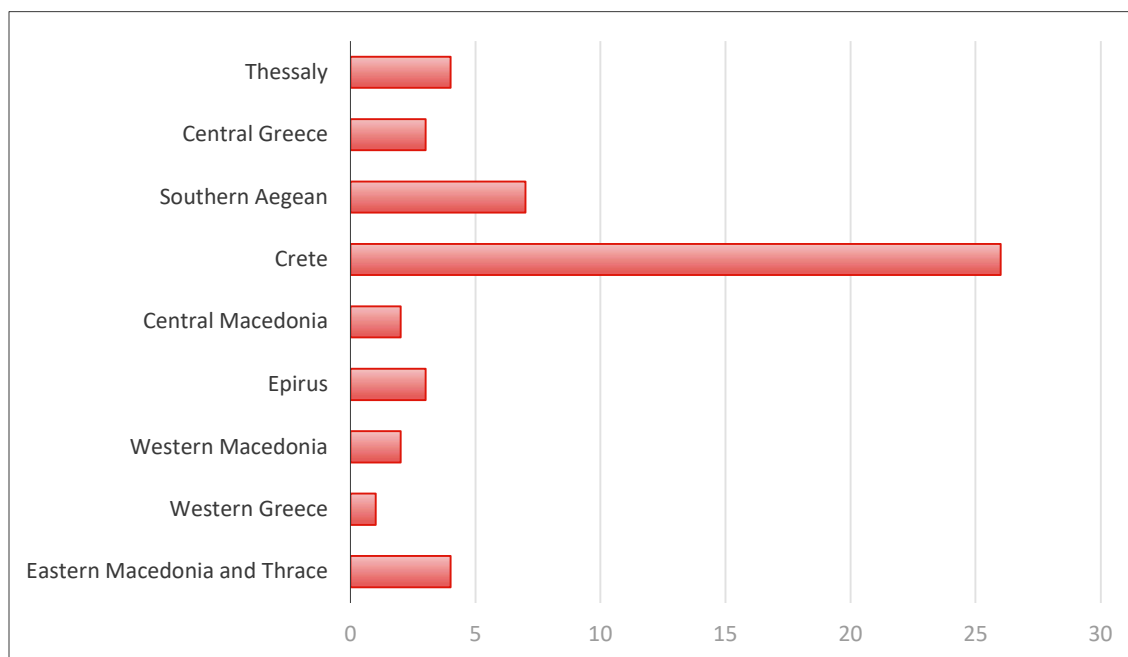


Figure 6. Regional distribution of poisoning events recorded during 2021 in Greece

NORTH MACEDONIA

According to the available information that were able to gather for the purpose of this report, there were no poisoning incidents documented or reported to the relevant stakeholders in North Macedonia during 2021 that resulted in death of wild animals.

However, it is important to mention that there were 2 relevant incidents recorded in the area of Mariovo where the casualties were hunting dogs, and which could have caused potentially massive poisoning of wildlife if they had not been reported and responded to promptly. The first incident occurred in January, in which 2 hunting dogs were found poisoned next to a calf carcass laced with poison. Forensic toxicological analysis conducted by the Crime Lab of the Police identified Methomyl as the poison substance used. The second poisoning incident was reported in November. Three shepherd dogs and one hunting dog were found poisoned in the vicinity of the breeding grounds of the Griffon Vultures. 18 vultures were chased away from feeding of the dog carcasses by the local Police and thus potential secondary poisoning was prevented. The suspected motive behind this poisoning incident are conflicts that local residents have with stray dogs. Both events were reported to the Police who took charge of the investigation.

SERBIA

During 2021 a total of 8 presumable wildlife poisoning events have been reported to the relevant authorities and documented. Species which was affected the most by the illegal practice of wildlife poisoning during 2021 in Serbia was the Common Buzzard, which was recorded as a casualty in every second potential poisoning events documented in the country (Figure 5.). All events were recorded in Spring, during March and April.

Relevant governmental authorities were engaged in investigation of two poisoning events that occurred in 2021 and issued official complaints. In the first incident that was reported in January, poison baits were placed intentionally to eliminate jackals which often inflict damages to local livestock breeders and also in hunting grounds. Three jackals were found dead, and the forensic necropsy and toxicological analysis conducted by the relevant authorities confirmed that the animals died as a result of poisoning with 7-benzofuranol, a Carbamate insecticide which is illegal in Serbia.

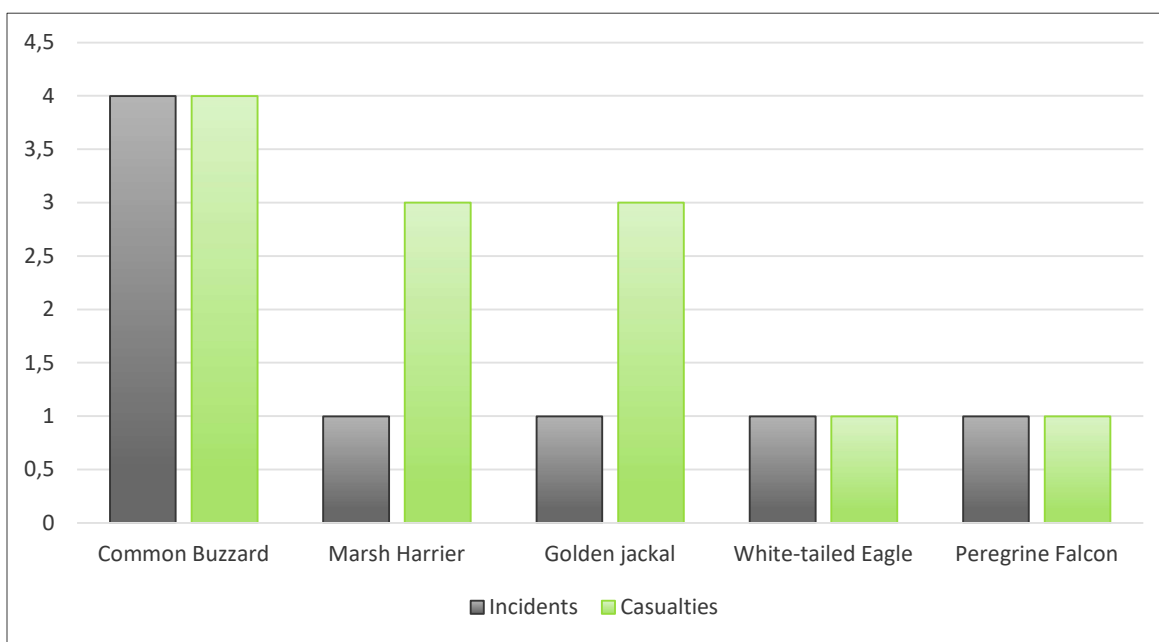


Figure 5. Recorded casualties of wildlife poisoning in Serbia during 2021

The second poisoning event which was investigated by the relevant authorities had one Peregrine Falcon as a casualty. This incident occurred intentionally most likely, due to

conflicts that breeders of competition pigeons often have with various birds of prey, primarily falcons and hawks. The dead bird was analyzed for presence of toxic substances almost a year after the event. The analysis were negative for Carbamates, but the toxicological laboratory was unable to perform analysis of other groups of pesticides.

Annex I. Poisoning and presumable poisoning incidents recorded in the Balkan Peninsula in 2021.

Species	No. of poisoned animals	Date/ Period	Location	Type of poisoning	Main driver	Poison bait	Substance
Common Buzzard; Magpie	1; 3	29.09.2021	B&H; Blagaj	unknown	unknown	no	unknown
Beech marten; cow	2; 1	24.04.2021	Croatia; Split-Dalmatia County; Prgomet	intentional	conflicts with foxes	pieces of bread and pellets	unknown
**	-	02.01.2021	Greece: Rodos	intentional	unknown	goat carcass	unknown
**	-	09.01.2021	Greece: Rodos	intentional	unknown	pieces of meat	unknown
Golden Eagle; Wolf	2; 2	21.01.2021	Greece: Serres	intentional	conflicts with wolves/ livestock losses	calf carcass; pieces of liver and intestines	unknown
**	-	01.02.2021	Greece: Crete, Heraklion	intentional	unknown	bones	unknown
Black Kite	1	03.02.2021	Greece: Crete; Arkadiou	unknown	unknown	no	unknown
Griffon Vulture	1	03.02.2021	Greece: Crete; Malevyziou	unknown	unknown	no	unknown
Red fox	1	12.02.2021	Greece: Rodos	unknown	unknown	sheep bones	unknown
Common Buzzard	1	18.02.2021	Greece: Rodos	intentional	conflicts with foxes/ livestock losses	sheep carcass, pieces of liver and intestines	unknown
Larus spp.	1	23.02.2021	Greece: Crete; Malevyziou	unknown	unknown	no	unknown
Red fox	1	25.02.2021	Greece: Thessaly; Smiksi	intentional	local disputes; conflict with foxes	numerous pieces of meat	unknown
**	-	25.02.2021	Greece: Crete, Lasithi	intentional	unknown	pieces of meat	unknown
**	-	27.02.2021	Greece: Crete; Heraklion	intentional	unknown	pieces of meat	unknown
Dalmatian Pelican	1	01.03.2021	Greece: Thessaly; Carla lake	unknown	unknown	no	unknown
Cinereous Vulture; Greater spotted Eagle; Wildcat	2; 1; 1	06.03.2021	Greece: Dadia; Kornofolia	unknown	unknown	no	unknown
Common Buzzard	1*	09.03.2021	Greece: Crete; Hersonisos	unknown	unknown	no	unknown
**	-	13.03.2021	Greece: Crete; Lasithi	unknown	unknown	yes	unknown
European badger	1	18.03.2021	Greece: Crete; Rethymno	unknown	unknown	no	unknown
Red fox; shepherd dog	1; 1	18.03.2021	Greece: Evros; Soufli	unknown	unknown	no	unknown

**	-	19.03.2021	Greece: Crete; Heraklion	intentional	unknown	pieces of meat	unknown
**	-	23.03.2021	Greece: Crete; Chania	intentional	unknown	yes	unknown
Marsh Harrier; Red fox; Accipiter spp.	1; 1; 1	28.03.2021	Greece: Evros; Alexandroupoli	unknown	unknown	no	unknown
Common Buzzard	1	28.03.2021	Greece: Metsovo	intentional	conflicts with bears/livestock losses	3 whole chickens; goat carcass	unknown
Red fox	1	29.03.2021	Greece: Trikalon; Kalithea	intentional	local disputes; conflicts with shepherd dogs	no	unknown
Beech marten	3	30.03.2021	Greece: Crete, Heraklion	unknown	unknown	yes	unknown
Common Buzzard	1	02.04.2021	Greece: Ioannina, Metsovo	intentional	conflicts with bears	pieces of meat; chicken carcass	unknown
Griffon Vulture	3	23.04.2021	Greece: Agios Nikolaos	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown
**	-	11.05.2021	Greece: Aitolakarnania, Apodotia	intentional	conflicts with wolves/ livestock losses	cow carcass	unknown
**	-	28.05.2021	Greece: Thessaly; Mparos	intentional	conflicts with wolves/ livestock losses	cow carcass	unknown
European badger	1	02.06.2021	Greece: Crete; Rodgia	unknown	unknown	no	unknown
Griffon Vulture	1	08.06.2021	Greece: Ipeiros; Kamaria	intentional	conflicts with wolves/ livestock losses	cow carcass	unknown
Beech marten	1	10.06.2021	Greece; South Rhodes	unknown	unknown	no	unknown
**	-	14.06.2021	Greece: Crete; Agia Triada	intentional	unknown	piece of sausage	unknown
Beech marten; Hunting dog	1; 2	21.06.2021	Greece: Rhodes; Psinthos	unknown	unknown	no	unknown
**	-	07.07.2021	Greece: Crete; Heraklion	intentional	unknown	pieces of meat	unknown
**	-	18.07.2021	Greece: Crete; Heraklion	intentional	unknown	pieces of meat	unknown
**	-	31.07.2021	Greece: Rhodes; Afoantou	unknown	unknown	piece of bread	unknown
European badger	1	01.08.2021	Greece: Crete; Agiou Nikolaou	unknown	unknown	no	unknown
**	-	13.08.2021	Greece: Crete: Faistou	intentional	unknown	unknown	unknown
Common Buzzard; Least weasel; unidentified mammal	1; 1; 1	15.08.2021	Greece: Crete, Limnes	unknown	unknown	no	unknown
Red fox	1	03.09.2021	Greece: Sterea Ellada; Parnassos	intentional	livestock losses	no	unknown

Beech marten; European hedgehog; stray dog	1; 1; 1	08.09.2021	Greece: Crete; Chersonisou	unknown	unknown	piece of meat	unknown
**	-	11.09.2021	Greece: Crete; Galipe	unknown	unknown	piece of sausage	unknown
Common Buzzard	1	17.09.2021	Greece: Notio Aigaio; Notia Rodos	unknown	unknown	animal fat	unknown
Beech marten	1	25.09.2021	Greece: Crete; Livadia	unknown	unknown	no	unknown
Beech marten	2	29.09.2021	Greece: Crete; Goudouras	unknown	unknown	no	unknown
**	-	16.10.2021	Greece: Crete; Gortynas	unknown	unknown	dried figs; water in canisters	unknown
Golden Eagle	1	20.10.2021	Greece: Anatoliki Makedonia, Thrace; Paranesi	intentional	conflicts with wolves and hunting dogs	liver, intestines of Roe deer	
Beech marten; pet and stray dogs	1; 5	04.11.2021	Greece: Crete; Faistou	intentional	conflicts with stray dogs	no	unknown
**	-	09.11.2021	Greece: Crete; Potamies	unknown	unknown	can and bottle with dried milk and dead insects	unknown
Beech marten	1	11.11.2021	Greece: Crete; Maleviziou	intentional	unknown	bottle with milk	unknown
**	-	11.11.2021	Greece: Crete; Archanon Asterousion	unknown	unknown	bottle with milk	unknown
European hedgehog; cat	1; 2	27.11.2021	Greece: Crete; Sitia	intentional	conflicts with stray cats	fish	unknown
Beech marten; hunting dogs	1; 3	28.11.2021	Greece: Crete; Archanon Asterousion	intentional	local disputes/ conflicts with hunting dogs	cans with milk	unknown
Common Buzzard	5	19.12.2021	Greece: Sterea Ellada; Voiotia	unknown	unknown	whole carcass	unknown
Cinereous Vulture	1	23.12.2021	Greece: Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki; Soufli	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown
**	-	27.12.2021	Greece: Crete; Lakonia	unknown	unknown	goat carcass	unknown
Common Buzzard	3	31.12.2021	Greece: Sterea Ellada; Orhomenos	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown
Golden jackal	3	11.01.2021	Serbia: Belgrade; Surčin	intentional	conflicts with jackals/ livestock losses	unknown	7- benzofuranol
Common Buzzard	1	01.03.2021	Serbia: Vojvodina; Bačka Palanka	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown
Common Buzzard	1	29.03.2021	Serbia: Šumadija and W Serbia; Knić	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown

Common Buzzard	1	29.03.2021	Serbia: Vojvodina; Novi Sad	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown
Peregrine Falcon	1	31.03.2021	Serbia: Vojvodina; Sombor	intentional	conflicts with birds of prey	unknown	unknown
White-tailed Eagle	1	02.04.2021	Serbia: Vojvodina, Zrenjanin	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown
Marsh Harrier	3	30.04.2021	Serbia: Vojvodona, Novi Kneževac	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown
Common Buzzard	1	30.04.2021	Serbia: Vojvodona, Novi Kneževac	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown

* animal found alive and sent to rehabilitation centre;

** only poison baits found;