

BALKAN DETOX LIFE

Poisoning incidents annual report for 2022

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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BIRD PROTECTION AND
STUDY SOCIETY OF SERBIA



OPRNOLOŠKI
MELANI ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY



EURONATUR

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 2022.

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/ BirdLife Greece, 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 frequently used for poisoning, areas where this practice is most common (hotspots) 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, analyse 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 2022 to all interested parties.

Overview of wildlife poisoning in the Balkan Peninsula during 2022

During the implementation of the BalkanDetox LIFE project in 2022 a total of 30 presumable poisoning and poisoning incidents involving wildlife species as casualties were recorded across four countries of the Balkan region. It should be noted that 26 other cases not involving wildlife species but rather dogs (mainly shepherd and hunting dogs,

but also pet and stray dogs) and cats were also recorded in the data base as having taken place in the countryside but were not included in the analyses of this report.

The majority (55%) of wildlife poisoning events were recorded in Greece, while just under half (42%) of all recorded events in 2022 were recorded in Serbia (Figure 1.).

Results from forensic toxicological analysis performed for wildlife poisoning cases in 2022 were available only from Serbia. Poisoning from Carbofuran, an insecticide from the group of Carbamates which use is prohibited in all Balkan countries, was the confirmed cause of death in 9, or 28,1% of all recorded poisoning events.

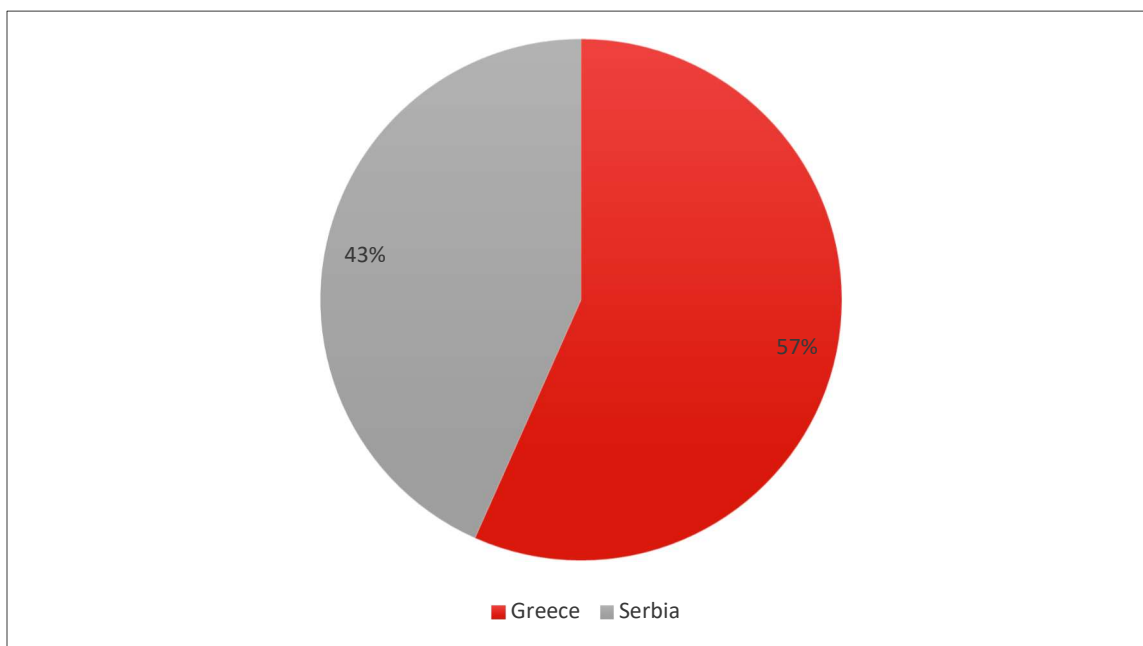


Figure 1. Distribution of wildlife poisoning events recorded in 2022 by different Balkan countries

A total of 22 wild species were recorded as casualties of poisoning and presumable poisoning events that were documented in 2022, while in one incident 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 31,25% of all documented incidents, with a total of 27 poisoned individuals (Figure 2.). The second most numerous and frequently poisoned species was Marsh Harrier, recorded in five poisoning events, with 17 perished individuals, followed by White-tailed Eagle, recorded in three poisoning events, with five perished individuals. Poisoning of both White-tailed Eagles and Marsh Harriers was only recorded in Serbia in 2022.

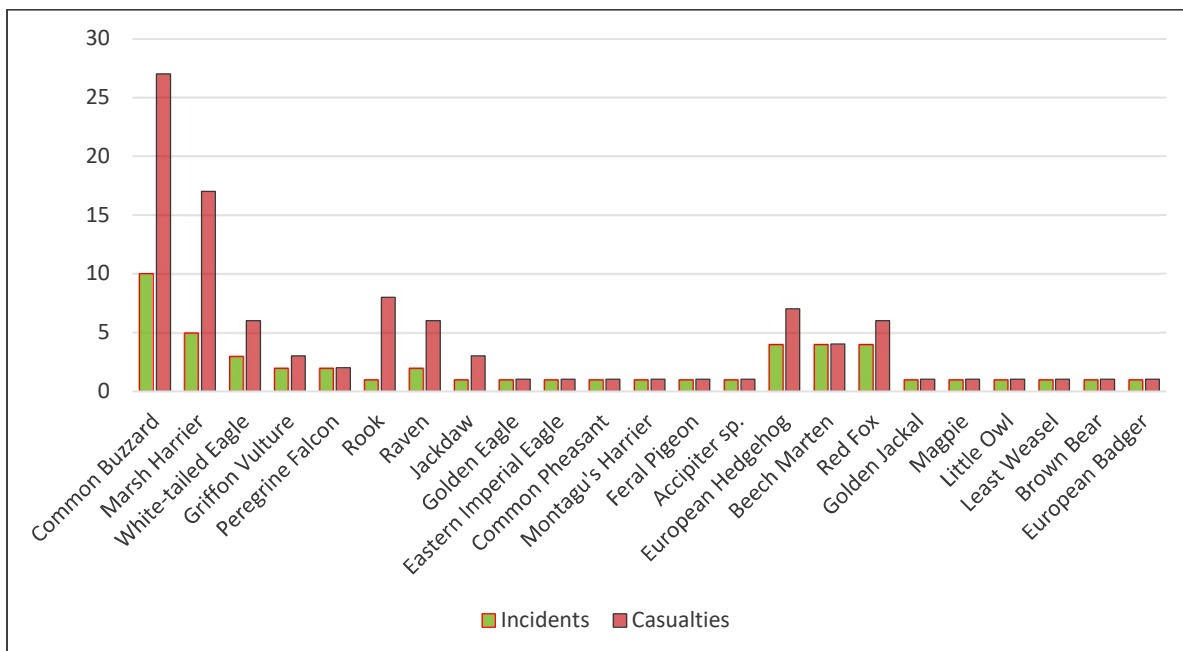


Figure 2. Recorded casualties of wildlife poisoning in the Balkan Peninsula during 2022

Presumable poisoning incidents where the casualties were vultures were recorded only in Greece. A total of three Griffon Vultures were recorded as casualties in 2022.

ALBANIA

There were no poisoning events recorded during 2022 in Albania that had wild animals as casualties. On the other hand, 4 poisoning events were recorded which targeted stray animals, mostly dogs. Two cases have been reported to the Municipal police, while one of the cases has been transferred to the prosecutor's office.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

There were no wildlife poisoning incidents reported in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2022. The only poisoning event recorded by the relevant institutions in the country relates to

poisoning of stray dogs. On February the 22nd 20 stray dogs were found presumably poisoned in Gacko.

CROATIA

Through keeping records and monitoring cases of poisoning in Croatia, we can conclude that there were no confirmed cases of poisoning of wild animals in 2022. Looking at data from the competent state institution, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, it was determined that there are approximately 10 cases of suspected poisoning of wild animals every year (from 2020-2022). The samples were analysed, but there was no confirmed poisoning of wild animals in 2022. The last case of poisoning of wild animals (eagle, wolf, fox, and raven) was in 2020, and the hearing is still pending.

However, poisoning of pets, cats, and dogs was reported in both urban and rural areas in 2022. Given the frequency with which this crime is committed with the intent of poisoning a neighbor's dog, hunting or herding dogs, we assume that wild animals are being poisoned in Croatia as well, but we need to look into this further.

GREECE

During the course of 2022 a total of 17 presumable poisoning events were documented in Greece where wild animals were recorded as casualties. Seven species of wild animals were recorded as casualties of this illegal practice. The most frequently recorded victim was the European Hedgehog, followed by Beech Marten, both recorded in almost every fourth poisoning event documented during 2022 (Figure 3.).

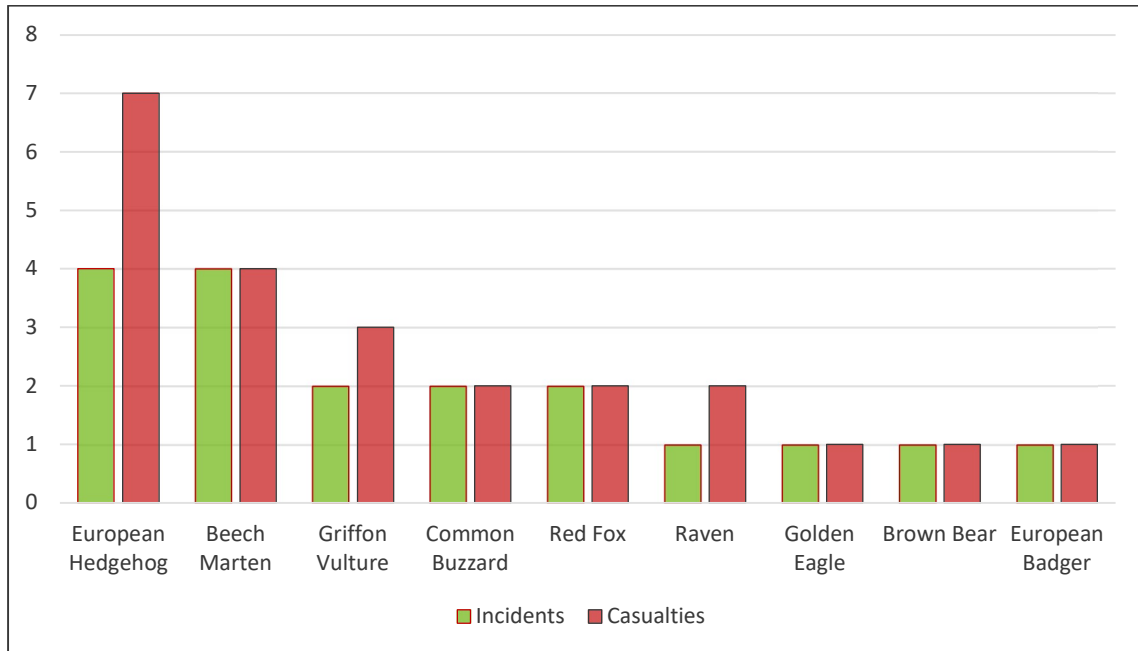


Figure 3. Recorded casualties of wildlife poisoning in Greece during 2022

Poison baits used ranged from individual pieces of meat, animal parts to entire animal carcasses. Motives behind the great majority of documented poisoning events remains unknown (76%), while all other events relate to conflicts with mammalian predators and the damages that they can cause to livestock and agricultural production (Figure 4.). Wolves were the main target of poison baits use in three poisoning events, while bears were targeted on one occasion.

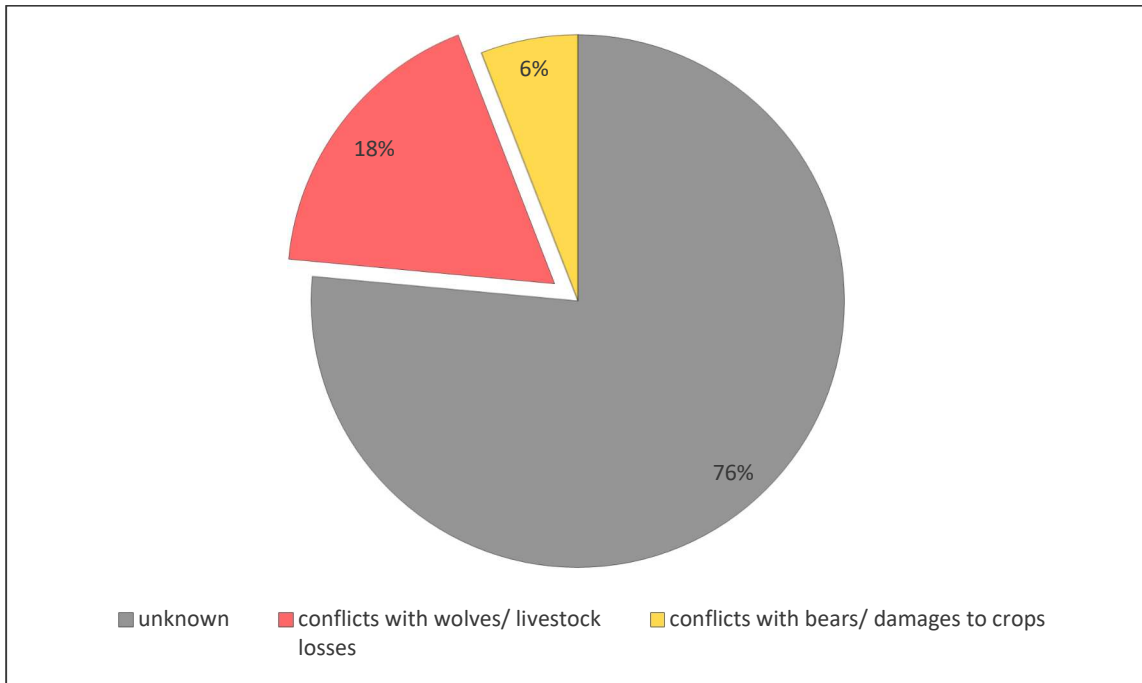


Figure 4. Motives behind the use of poison baits in Greece in 2022

From the available data we can conclude that the majority of poisoning incidents occurs in March and April (41,2%), which coincided with the start of the hunting season and seems to be a repetitive pattern every year.

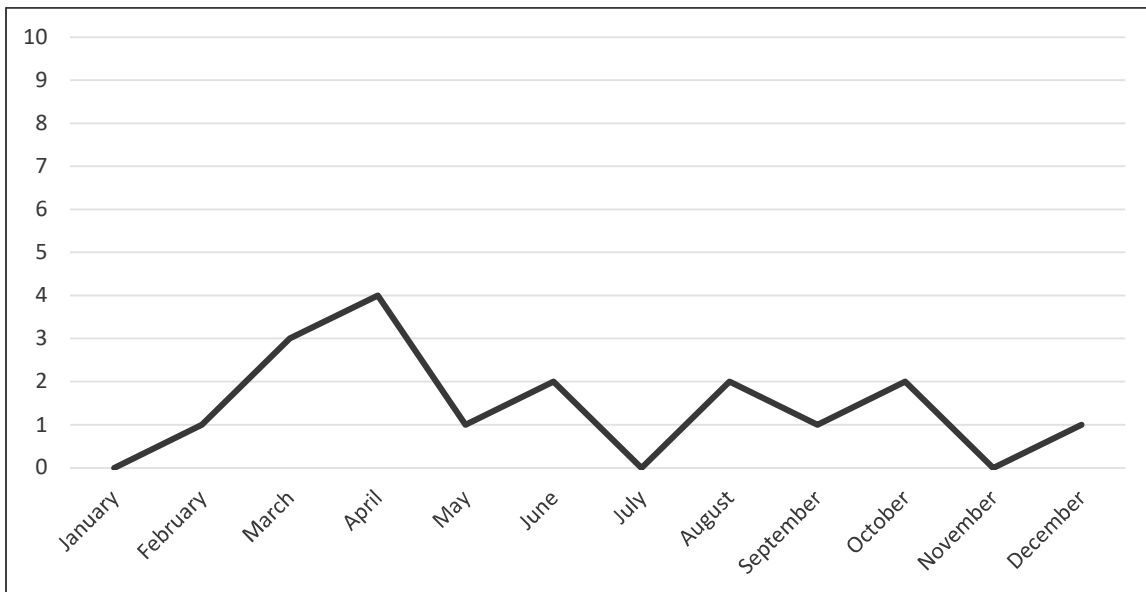


Figure 5. Temporal distribution of poisoning events during 2022 in Greece

More than half (58,8%) of the wildlife poisoning events that were documented during 2022 in Greece occurred in the region of Crete. All reported and documented poisoning events in 2022 were investigated by Anti-poison dog units. The relevant governmental authorities were contacted and were engaged in the field for documentation of 13 (76,5%) out of 17 wildlife poisoning events. Samples for forensic necropsies and toxicological analyses were taken in five (29,4%) potential poisoning events. However, official results of the analysis are to this moment unavailable. Official investigation was carried out by the relevant governmental authorities for just one poisoning event (Figure 6.).



Figure 6. Legal progress of registered wildlife poisoning incidents in 2022 in Greece

It is crucial to mention that apart from the reported wildlife poisoning incidents an additional 19 potential poisoning events, when only poison baits were discovered, were also documented. Additionally, 33 poisoning events where casualties were only domestic animals were also recorded in Greece during 2022. Seven of these incidents were recorded in urban environments, while the rest were recorded in rural areas and could have potentially represented a source of poisoning for wildlife. The most common victims of these incidents are shepherd dogs, followed by domestic cats. Potassium cyanide was identified as the source of poisoning in two separate poisoning incidents.

The motives behind the great majority of these poisoning events where only domestic animals were recorded as victims are unknown. However, from those better documented cases we can see that conflicts with predators (wolves, foxes), and the damages they can inflict on populations of game animals, as well as conflicts with shepherd dogs are a common driver of poison use in rural areas in Greece.

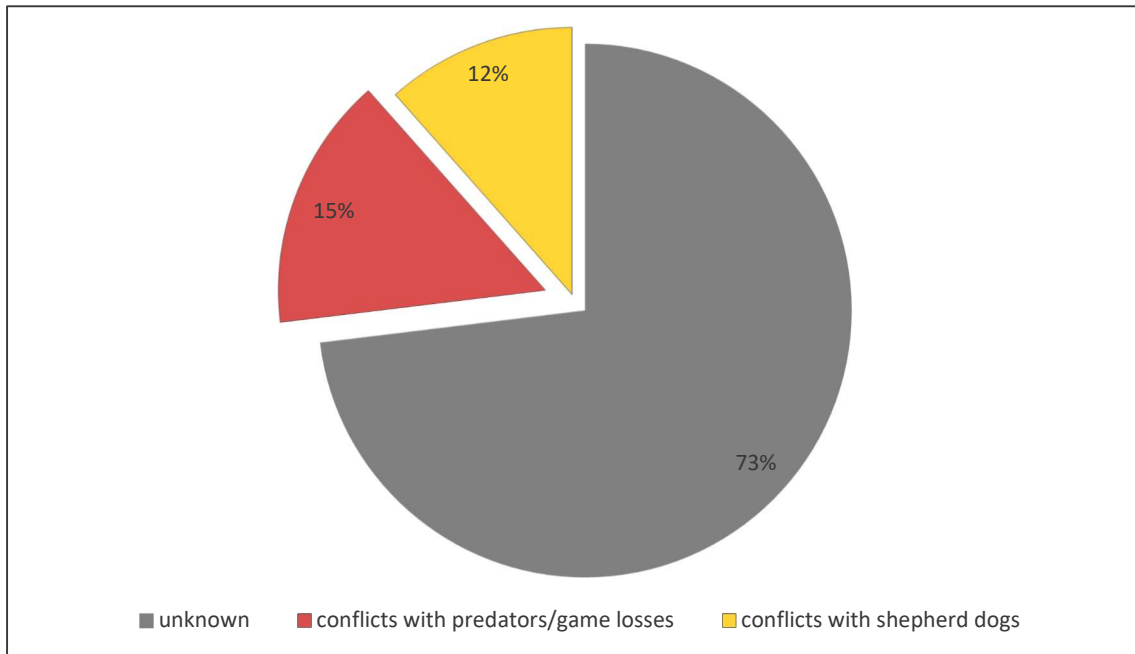


Figure 7. Motives behind poisoning incidents with domestic animals in 2022 in Greece

NORTH MACEDONIA

During 2022 only one potential poisoning event was documented in North Macedonia, within the Municipality of Prilep, in Vitolishte. In May two shepherd dogs were found dead with clear signs of poisoning. The incident was discovered thanks to the GPS tagged Griffon Vulture, whose movement data was indicative of a potential feeding event. A survey of the area revealed two fresh dog carcasses with clear signs of death from poisoning. Prompt response of the relevant institutions and local stakeholders in collecting evidence and removing the carcasses prevented a potential mass poisoning of Griffon Vultures, which were flocking in the vicinity of the dead dogs.

SERBIA

During the course of 2022 a total of 13 wildlife poisoning events have been documented. A total of 16 different species of wild animals were recorded as casualties of this illegal practice. Species which was affected the most by the illegal practice of wildlife poisoning during 2022 in Serbia was the Common Buzzard, which was recorded as a casualty in 61,5% of all potential poisoning events documented in the country (Figure ...). A total of 25 Common Buzzards were recorded to have died of poisoning. The second most common victim was the Marsh Harrier with 17 individuals recorded to have died of poisoning within 5 separate poisoning events, followed by White-tailed Eagle which was recorded as a casualty in 3 separate poisoning events with 6 poisoned individuals in total.

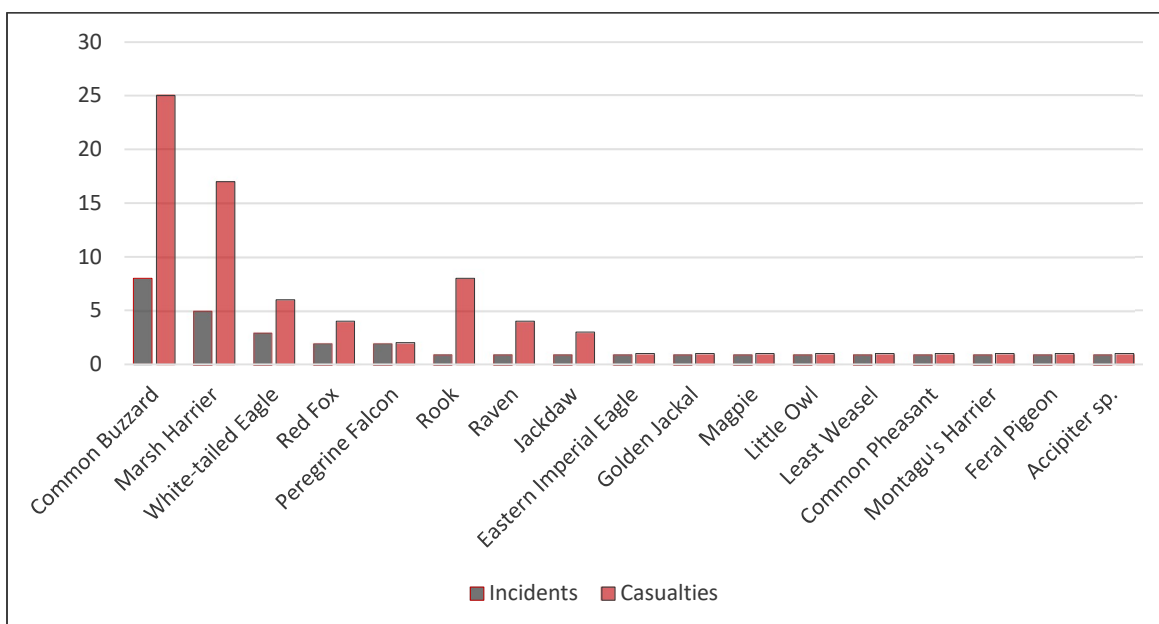


Figure 8. Recorded casualties of wildlife poisoning in Serbia during 2022

The motives behind most poisoning events that were documented in 2022 in Serbia were connected to conflicts with predators and the damages they can inflict to game animals in hunting areas, and to domestic animals such as poultry (Figure 9.), The main targets in most cases were foxes and jackals. In two incidents birds of prey were specifically targeted, due to conflicts with pigeon fanciers.

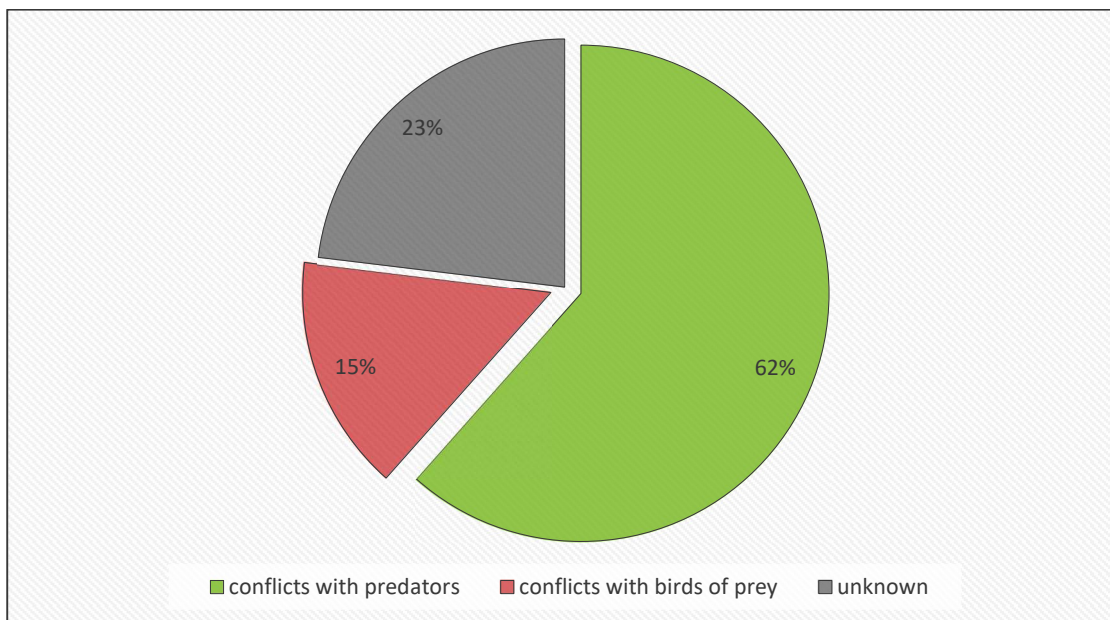


Figure 9. Motives behind wildlife poisoning events in Serbia in 2022

The single biggest documented poisoning event of 2022 in Serbia occurred in April in the municipality of Iđoš in Vojvodina province, where one Eastern Imperial Eagle, six Marsh Harriers, eight Rooks, six Jackdaws, one Golden Jackal, two Red Foxes, one Least Weasel and one Common Pheasant were poisoned by Carbofuran. Several other mass poisoning events occurred in the country during 2022 (see Annex I).

Almost every other poisoning event recorded during 2022 in Serbia occurred in April (Figure 10.). 11 out of 13 recorded poisoning events occurred in Vojvodina province, while one event was documented in Belgrade region and one in Mačva region.

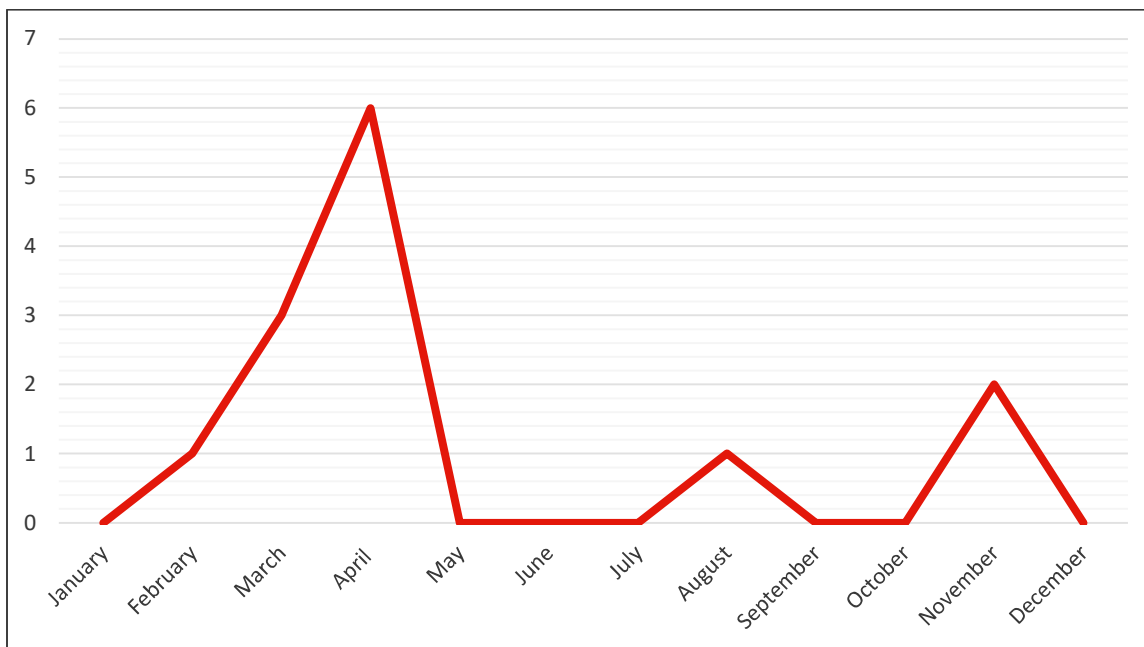


Figure 10. Temporal distribution of poisoning events during 2022 in Serbia

The relevant governmental authorities were engaged in the field for documentation of all recorded poisoning incidents. Forensic necropsies were conducted by the competent authorities in eight (61,5%) poisoning events, while forensic toxicological analysis was conducted for ten poisoning events (76,9%). Carbofuran was detected in seven (53,8%) poisoning events and continues to be the most common substance used for wildlife poisoning in Serbia. In three cases the toxicological results came back negative for Carbofuran, but the toxicological laboratory was not able to perform analysis of other group of pesticides. There were an additional two poisoning events for which toxicological analysis were not performed, but which had clear indications that Carbofuran was used, such as pink markings on certain body parts, which are indicative of the liquid form of this pesticide which is most commonly used for poisoning in Serbia.

Annex I. Poisoning and presumable poisoning incidents recorded in the Balkan Peninsula in 2022.

No.	Species	No. of poisoned animals	Date/ Period	Location	Type of poisoning	Main driver	Poison bait	Substance
1.	Golden Eagle	1	14.02.2022	Greece: Soufli	unknown	unknown	no	-
2.	Common Buzzard	1	03.03.2022	Greece: Crete, Ierapetra	unknown	unknown	yes	-
3.	Beech marten	1	04.03.2022	Greece: Crete, Irakleio	unknown	unknown	no	-
4.	Red fox; <i>1 shepherd dog</i>	1	18.03.2022	Greece: Soufli	unknown	unknown	no	-
5.	Beech marten	1	01.04.2022	Greece: Crete, Ag. Nikolaos	unknown	unknown	yes	-
6.	Red fox	1	09.04.2022	Greece: Soufli	intentional	conflicts with wolves/ livestock losses	piece of meat	-
7.	Beech marten; <i>1 cat</i>	1	11.04.2022	Greece: Crete, Ag. Nikolaos	unknown	unknown	no	-
8.	Beech marten; European badger	1; 1	18.04.2022	Greece: Crete, Rethymno	unknown	unknown	no	-
9.	Griffon Vulture	1	21.05.2022	Greece: Agrafa	intentional	conflicts with wolves/ livestock losses	cow carcass	tox. results pending
10.	European hedgehog; <i>1 dog</i>	1	09.06.2022	Greece: Crete, M. Padiadas	unknown	unknown	no	-
11.	Brown bear; <i>17 shepherd dogs</i>	1	20.06.2022	Greece: Amyntaio	intentional	conflicts with bears/ damages to crops	no	-
12.	European hedgehog; <i>2 dogs, 1 cat</i>	1	21.08.2022	Greece: Rodos	unknown	unknown	yes	-
13.	Common Buzzard	1	28.08.2022	Greece: Crete, Arhanes	unknown	unknown	no	-
14.	European hedgehog	1	21.09.2022	Greece: Crete, Viannos	unknown	unknown	yes	-
15.	European hedgehog	4	06.10.2022	Greece: Crete, Viannos	unknown	unknown	yes	-
16.	Griffon Vulture	2	30.10.2022	Greece: Agrafa	intentional	conflicts with wolves/ livestock losses	whole carcass	-
17.	Raven	2	20.12.2022	Greece: Crete, Arhanes	unknown	unknown	pieces of meat	-

18.	Common Buzzard; Accipiter sp; feral pigeon	1; 1; 1	04.02.2022	Serbia: Slano Kopovo	unknown	unknown	?	-
19.	Common Buzzard; Magpie; Little Owl	9; 1; 1	14.03.2022	Serbia: Veliki Gaj	unknown	unknown	?	Carbofuran
20.	White-tailed Eagle; Marsh Harrier; Common Buzzard	1; 2; 1	28.03.2022	Serbia: Sivic	intentional	conflicts with foxes and jackals/ poultry losses	?	Carbofuran
21.	Common Buzzard; 1 dog	5	28.03.2022	Serbia: Bogatić	unknown	unknown	?	-
22.	Marsh Harrier; Common Buzzard	2; 1	05.04.2022	Serbia: Sivic	intentional	conflicts with foxes and jackals/ poultry losses	?	Carbofuran
23.	Eastern Imperial Eagle; Marsh Harrier; Rook; Jackdaw; Golden Jackal; Red fox; Least weasel; Common Pheasant	1; 6; 8; 3; 1; 2; 1; 1	11.04.2022	Serbia: Idoš	intentional	conflicts with predators	?	Carbofuran
24.	Montagu's Harrier	1	12.04.2022	Serbia: Bački Petrovac	intentional	conflicts with foxes and jackals/ damages to game animals	?	Carbofuran
25.	Marsh Harrier; Common Buzzard	4; 1	21.04.2022	Serbia: Bački Petrovac	intentional	conflicts with foxes and jackals/ damages to game animals	?	Carbofuran
26.	White-tailed Eagle; Common Buzzard; Marsh Harrier, Raven	1; 1; 3; 4	19.04.2022	Serbia: Bački Petrovac	intentional	conflicts with foxes and jackals/ damages to game animals	?	Carbofuran
27.	Common Buzzard	6	19.04.2022	Serbia: Bački Petrovac	intentional	conflicts with foxes and jackals/ damages to game animals	?	Carbofuran
28.	Peregrine Falcon	1	02.08.2022	Serbia: Novi Sad	intentional	conflicts with birds of prey	?	Carbofuran
29.	Peregrine Falcon	1	17.11.2022	Serbia: Belgrade	intentional	conflicts with birds of prey	?	tox. results pending
30.	White-tailed Eagle; Red fox; 1 dog	4; 2	20.11.2022	Serbia: Ristovača	intentional	conflicts with foxes and jackals	?	tox. results pending

* only poison baits found;