

# Promoting the sustainable development of Livanjsko Polje freshwater ecosystem in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Grantee: EuroNatur - Stiftung Europäisches Naturerbe

Location: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Europe

Grant Cycle: 2024 – 2025

Type of Grant: one-year program support,  
Environment & Biodiversity Protection

Website: [euronatur.org](http://euronatur.org)

EuroNatur is a non-profit foundation established in 1987 to protect species and habitats in Europe by supporting local conservation organisations and fostering international cooperation. Its key initiatives include advancing the European Green Belt, safeguarding European rivers and wetlands, protecting wilderness and cultural landscapes, and implementing species conservation projects, such as those focused on migratory birds. EuroNatur also engages in conservation policy to promote sustainable environmental practices.

EuroNatur has been active in the Balkans for over 15 years, working with local partners to protect karst fields and promote sustainable development in the region. Karst poljes, meaning “karst field” in Slavic languages, are widely distributed from Slovenia to Albania, with Bosnia and Herzegovina having the highest concentration. Karst poljes are characterised by a high biodiversity and a mosaic of different habitat types created by a combination of temporary natural flooding and grazing, functioning as fertile “oases” within predominantly arid karst landscapes. Poljes represent crucial ecological and social systems, with the present-day karst landscape being the result of natural and human interactions over thousands of years.

In the past decade EuroNatur and its partner organisations have focused their work especially on Livanjsko Polje as the largest temporarily flooded karst polje in the world and the largest wetland complex in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Livanjsko Polje is characterised by a diverse range of habitats, including dry grasslands, peatland, marshes, wet meadows and alluvial forest, influenced by the water

gradient, making it the most important wintering, migration and breeding site for waterbirds and raptors in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The ecological value of Livanjsko Polje has been recognized at the international level, but despite various efforts, its protection status has not yet been acknowledged at the national level. The ecological and cultural value of karst poljes is generally underestimated, leading to insufficient protection and unsustainable exploitation. This includes disruptions to the natural hydrological systems, which significantly affect the ecological integrity of the poljes. Additionally, rural depopulation, driven by industrialization and the aftermath of multiple conflicts, has resulted in a decline in farming and the erosion of traditional land management practices. This trend poses a serious threat to the preservation of high nature value farming in the poljes. If it continues, the environmental and cultural functions of these landscapes may be irreversibly damaged, leading to the permanent loss of biodiversity and cultural heritage. In line with its mission to promote a sustainable relationship between humanity and nature, the **Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation** (NaEPF) has supported EuroNatur’s efforts to address the unsustainable use of the Livanjsko Polje. The granted project focuses on promoting environmentally sustainable land-use management practices as well as knowledge gathering, exchange and cooperation among local stakeholders. Farmers and tourism providers will receive essential knowledge about the values and threats to the area, as well as the sustainable use of wetlands and will get more knowledge regarding illegal activities in

Livanjsko Polje. Moreover, local communities need education in order to understand what their benefit through these conservation processes are and how they can ensure their own existence, fostering resilience and ensuring the continued socio-economic stability of the region.

The project has five main objectives:

1. Enable long term and sustainable protection of Livanjsko Polje and surrounding karst poljes as an important freshwater ecosystem through protection at the national level and the development of a suitable management plan.
2. Conservation and restoration of freshwater ecosystems and its biodiversity in Livanjsko Polje through improvement, restoration and renaturation of different wetland habitats and fostering and improving of environmentally beneficial land use practices.
3. Reduce illegal and harmful activities through comprehensive monitoring and reporting systems to identify and address environmental threats.
4. Strengthen local initiatives that contribute to nature conservation and the sustainable management of the freshwater ecosystem, ensuring community engagement and participation in conservation efforts.
5. Increase public awareness and knowledge about the natural and cultural values of the region, fostering a deeper understanding of the importance of conservation efforts.

The overall goal of the project is to achieve the conservation and sustainable management of Livanjsko Polje through co-existence between people and nature.