

Project Update: February 2021

During the past months we focused on collaboration with protected natural area managers in different parts of our country, in order to gather as much information on the problems and obstacles in conservation management in Serbia today.

Based on conversations and on-site inspections, we came to the following conclusions:

- The lack of financial investment (predominantly governmental) leads to a neglect of many protected areas, especially if they have no commercial value and are not promoted as touristic sites.
- Most of the finances are dedicated to main infrastructure problems (which are still many), which leaves very little, or no funding for research work. This is predominantly true in the southeast of the country.
- Many of the managers in protected areas are unqualified for the position (with very little or no education in natural sciences and conservation). Most of our research protected areas are under jurisdiction of public communal companies or tourist agencies.
- A few of the managers are completely uninterested in cooperation with researchers and have lack of understanding for the importance of monitoring programmes that are necessary to be implemented.
- Many of the managers have a lack of communication with the scientific community (especially young researchers) and, even though open for collaboration, are unaware of the possibilities for research and conservation activities that could be undertaken within protected areas they manage.
- Most of the "attractive" sites have been overly visited by tourists this year (which was influenced by COVID-19 pandemics and restrictions for international travel). This had both positive and negative impacts on the sites: hidden corners of Serbia are being revealed and appreciated more, but the lack of environmental education and improper manners in nature lead to many problems.

Activities update:

- Our website (<http://hiddenserbia.com/>) dedicated an entire category to reports from mountain areas of Serbia that are written by Milica Blagojević. It consists of reports from our fieldtrips, as well as useful information for nature lovers, travelers, adventurers and mountaineers of Serbia: <http://hiddenserbia.com/category/putem-planinara/>
- We created and uploaded several videos to our YouTube "The journey" playlist in which we are describing the process of video documentary creation, the importance of nature documentary in conservation today, and how it looks like working with our team: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCNEPoEm47DexvbplCYuHbeg>. These videos have been created in cooperation with Danica Popović, a student of Journalism, who joined our team as a volunteer and is creating

video and written reports about our work. Having a journalist in our team brings a very different and important perspective to our research work.

- An article about bat species of Serbia and their potential connection to COVID-19 was published at our website, after fieldwork and filming within "Resavska" cave Protected Area in collaboration with chiropterologists Dr. Ivana Budinski and Branka Pejić: <http://hiddenserbia.com/slepi-misevi-stanari-pecina-ljubitelji-mraka/> . Video material obtained during this fieldwork will be included within our "Hidden Serbia" documentary series, which will emphasise the problems associated to human and wildlife conflict.
- We have been working on "Hidden Serbia" feature-film and "Wild interviews" short movie series. First episode, about our visit to protected natural Areas of Vojvodina (northern Serbia) is now available at our YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9SSgqRVFCQ&t=11s&ab_channel=HiddenCornersofSerbia, followed by an online article on our website: <http://hiddenserbia.com/film-o-zasticenim-podrucjima-krajnjeg-severa-vojvodine/> . This episode highlights the examples of good management practices, especially active conservation through traditional methods, which are usually applied in northern Serbia. This episode is intended both as a promotional and as educational tool for protected area managers who are struggling with issues of management in other parts of Serbia.
- Two feature length documentaries have been made about "Lalinačka slatina" and "Cerjanska pećina" nature monuments. They have been carefully examined by authorities and The Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia and are going to be officially premiered in April 2021.

All activities were adapted to follow the recommendations of the World Health Organization and the authorities in Serbia on the COVID-19 pandemics (with the approval from The Rufford Foundation). We must emphasise that the support from foundations, such as The Rufford Foundation is, in times of crisis like this, is invaluable to research and species conservation in our country, for which we are very grateful.



Colony of the greater horseshoe bats (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*) filmed at the "Resavska" cave for "Wild interview" series. @Marko Nikolić.



Bos taurus in the fields of "Ludaš" lake protected area in Vojvodina. Shot from "Hidden Serbia" documentary series episode filmed in the North of Serbia. @Nikola Radović.



Interview by Danica Popović with Dr. Ivana Budinski and Branka Pejić in Resavska cave about bat species of Serbia @Dimitrija Savić-Zdravković.



Speaking about problems and obstacles in nature management and conservation at the oldest Protected Natural Area in Serbia – "Ripaljka" waterfall. @Milica Blagojević.



Speaking about freshwater conservation and fight for protection of rivers in Serbia against Mini Hydropower Plants with Dule Mihajlović at the village of Temska. @Milica Blagojević.



Emerald tufa wells of the "Bigar" waterfall Natural Protected Area. Shots for "Hidden Serbia" series. @Milica Blagojević.