

## **Project Update: January 2024**

The first field season of our project turned out to be everything that we hoped for, and more! We have processed over 500 individual European pond turtles, across the five chosen localities! With this sample size, PhD student Marko Maričić managed to complete the planned sample for his thesis (photo 1).

During our fieldwork we managed to involve eight undergraduate and four graduate students of Faculty of Biology, University of Belgrade. While some students joined our project activities for a brief period and helped with fieldwork, others became more involved. Specifically, a Master's student Sara Arsenijević and two undergraduate students, Tijana Tekić and Jana Kovačević, gathered data and wrote small research papers about different aspects of biology of European pond turtles.

Pariguz Lake seems to have a large population of red eared sliders. We captured nine of these invasive turtles and housed them in the Belgrade Zoo after a period of quarantine.

We started a promising collaboration with colleagues from the Department of Radiology and Radiation Hygiene at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of University of Belgrade. We brought 53 female European pond turtles from three chosen populations in order to reveal the percentage of gravid females, and their clutch sizes.

Besides fieldwork, the promotion of our project and education are always a focus. We are actively engaging with our audience via Instagram (200 followers) and Facebook (163 followers) pages and through collaborations made with other social media profiles. Additionally, during the "Noć istraživača" manifestation, we had an opportunity to hold a lecture for 80 students in the primary school "Mile Dubljević" in Lajkovac (photo 2), near the city of Valjevo. We talked about some interesting facts regarding chelonians, conservational threats that these animals face globally and our project activities. In the form of a miniature discussion, we talked about how each and every one of us can help protect these interesting reptiles and their habitats in Serbia.

We are looking forward to continuing with all of these activities in the next field season. We are getting closer toward good quality data needed for population viability analyses, the essential method for risk assessment and adequate conservation measures.

Finally, after all the fieldwork, we got the answer to our official report about findings in the Mlava River oxbow from the officials the Municipality Malo Crniće. At this locality an illegal dumping site affected the habitat quality and size and changed spatial distribution of European pond turtle population. As we hoped for, they made an effort to revitalise the habitat! We are providing their official report with photographs as a separate document (in Serbian). We hope that they will also manage to prevent further garbage disposal, which we will witness next spring!



Marko Maričić carrying female European Pond Turtles from his favourite locality, in order to explore reproductive biology of the Malo Crniće population. © Ana Golubović.



Pupils from primary school "Mile Dubljević" in Lajkovac after a lecture and project promotion. © Ana Milićević.