

When the police warn the poachers

Zydjon Vorpsi is nervous. “I am standing in the midst of a hail of bullets, I can’t wait any longer!” “OK, we’re coming straight away!”, the voice of the policeman snapped back over the phone. Zydjon had already received the same message half an hour before. The lagoon is a dangerous place to be in the middle of the night, and the area round Durrës is a hive of criminal activity.

On this December night, Zydjon Vorpsi is tracking duck poachers for the Albanian conservation organisation PPNEA. Bang! Another shot echoes through the darkness. Torch beams sweep over the surface of the water. Then, after what seems like an age, the police finally arrive. But even before the two men get out of their car, Zydjon cannot help feeling suspicious. Suddenly the guns have gone quiet! There can be no doubt about it: the poachers have been warned by the police. Earlier, after his first phone call to the local police station, Zydjon had observed a police car turning off some distance from him. It was the very same vehicle as the one now stopped in front of him. The officers are not here to pursue the poachers, but to ask questions of Zydjon. He understands only too well where this might now going: the police will give his phone number to the poachers and he will get anonymous threatening phone calls. This wouldn’t be the first time this has happened to him.

Please make a donation and help make Albania safer for its birds and its conservationists!



This police officer arrived immediately after being contacted by Zydjon. However, the officer had no idea how he could help. Here, it was a matter of securing an illegally-placed electronic decoy for quails.



photo: Kristi Bashmili



photos: Xhemal Xherri / PPNEA - Screenshot facebook



Please support our Albanian colleagues in their anti-poaching operations (picture above: Erald Xeka and Klea Duro from the AOS). The photo on the left is sadly grotesque – out of fear of a fine for infringing rules on Covid safety, the hunter is wearing a mask. He is clearly much less worried about the fact that he is breaking the ban on hunting. (Photo: illegally shot woodcock in a restaurant in Elbasan).

“We hear shots, but nobody does anything to stop it“

Klea Duro and Erald Xeka from the bird conservation organisation AOS likewise feel abandoned by the police and especially by the Albanian government. “So far we have had no confrontations with the poachers, and we are hoping it stays like that,” says Klea.

“All the same, it’s depressing when we go out in the field in the morning. We see men with guns and hear their shots, but at the moment there is no official authority in Albania to report such incidents to. Usually we contact the police, but they don’t always respond because they supposedly have

more important things to do. They also don’t know how to deal with cases of wildlife crime. When, for example, we reported bird catchers with nets to the police, we had to accompany the officers to the scene of the crime and explain which birds are not allowed to be caught. These are tricky situations for us. We’d prefer some of these people not to see our faces,” says Erald. Yet he, Klea, and also Zydjon are in complete agreement: to watch birds being killed and do nothing is not an option.

A hunting ban – but what difference does it make?

The sky over Albania has literally been emptied of birds, and this is not a new problem. National and international conservation organisations, including PPNEA, AOS and EuroNatur, have reached a milestone in bird conservation. Seven years ago, the Albanian government responded to public pressure by declaring a nationwide hunting ban. “We welcomed the decision at the time. We expected the government not just to impose a ban, but also to actively deal with the problem. However, that didn’t happen,” says Erald Xeka. “The environment minister announced that he was intending to extend the ban, claiming he could see the positive benefits. His attitude was that because there was a ban, there was no hunting. We nature conservationists see it completely differently. All the hunting ban has achieved is to stop the tourist hunters. The locals are simply carrying on hunting, amongst them high-ranking politicians who are covered by the police. Every day social media show new pictures of birds which have been shot. The number of registered weapons in Albania is now more than seven times as high as the number of registered hunters. People just go out of the house and start shooting,” says Erald.



A call for your solidarity

Being a conservationist in Albania is anything but a dream job. During the hunting season, Klea Duro, Erald Xeka and Zydjon Vorpsi even go out on patrol at the weekends and at night, frequently putting themselves in danger. Please support our conservation partners in their important mission! If the ban on hunting is extended in March 2021, nothing will have been gained as long as it only exists on paper. Urgently needed are better legislation, proper hunt management and a strict application of the law on the part of the government. With the help of your donation we intend to make the state take full responsibility for the protection of birds in Albania.



photo: Ylberati Xherri / PPNEA



photo: Screenshots facebook

Picture above: As if the hunting ban did not exist: Stuffed birds are openly for sale in this shop in Tirana. In the picture below, a poacher shows off his handmade decoy ducks.



"Albania wants to join the EU and make a good impression. The greater the pressure from outside, the better is the chance that the government will finally clamp down on the illegal hunting of birds. Your support is important to us,"

says Zydjon Vorpsi, bird conservationist of the PPNEA.

With your donation we can take advantage of all the opportunities:

Opportunity #1 As a result of our pressure, the Albanian government decided in November 2020 to establish a committee for wildlife management, whose role will be to advise the environment ministry. Conservationists from our Albanian partner organisations have been appointed to this committee and participate in decision making.

It is imperative that our Albanian partners continue to document all cases of poaching. This will help to prove that a hunting ban on paper alone will not resolve the problems.

Opportunity #2 Authorities which look after protected areas in Albania are being granted extra personnel to deal with the slaughter of wild birds. This aim has already been realised.

Our partners from PPNEA and AOS will help the government in the training of the new staff to be deployed.

Opportunity #3 "For two years we were sending letters to the ministry, but nothing happened. Only when the matter appeared in the international media were we listened to," say our partners in Albania.

We will continue to direct the spotlight of European public opinion onto the wholly unsatisfactory state of affairs in Albania, particularly through the use of the media.

In the coming months we will need at least 300 donations each of 100 Euros to implement these and other measures.



"I am looking forward to a future in which the birds will allow us to get close to them. At the moment, they are so afraid that they can only be observed from afar,"

says Klea Duro, bird conservationist at AOS.

Give us the chance together to make the future a bit brighter!

Key word: migrant birds

Account no. for donations: 8182005

Bank für Sozialwirtschaft, Köln

IBAN: DE42 3702 0500 0008 1820 05

SWIFT/BIC: BFSWDE33XXX

EURONATUR FOUNDATION

Westendstraße 3

D-78315 Radolfzell

Telefon +49 - (0) 7732/9272 - 0

Telefax +49 - (0) 7732/9272 - 22

euronatur.org/zugvoegel

info@euronatur.org



**Where the birds fall
out of the sky
On the tracks of
Albania's poachers**