Following a debate that lasted several weeks, the Greek Parliament voted in Greece’s first national Biodiversity Law in March. This important development comes at a time when Greece finds itself in the midst of an unprecedented economic crisis with mounting pressure on the natural environment and biodiversity. “WWF Greece actively campaigned for this law - an important step for nature conservation in Greece and a sign of hope that Greece’s natural heritage will not be ignored or sacrificed in the quest for rapid financial gain”, stated Demetres Karavellas, CEO of WWF Greece. “The greatest challenge however lies in implementing the provisions of this law. WWF stands ready to assist in making this happen.”

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Generate a sea change in Mediterranean marine management

Calls for suspension of bluefin fishery as tuna boats head to Libyan waters

WWF and Greenpeace called for the industrial purse-seine bluefin tuna fishing season in the Mediterranean to be suspended, sending an urgent request to members of the organisation meant to manage the fishery – the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT).

The call followed a late intervention from Libya that it would allow fishing in its waters despite having no agreed fishing plan for the season. “Tough times require tough measures,” said Sergi Tudela, Head of Fisheries at WWF Mediterranean. “The painstaking and fragile achievements of the last years are endangered by the maverick attitude of a small minority. Responsible members of ICCAT must rally to do what is necessary to save this species and fishery.”

New platform gives voice to Mediterranean artisanal fishers

Artisanal fishermen from France, Greece, Italy and Spain gathered in the port of Arenys de Mar in Catalonia, Spain, in February to agree on common principles for sustainable fisheries management in the Mediterranean Sea – based on the ideas of bottom-up co-management of common resources, environmental sustainability and economic and social viability. 2012 is the deadline for a complete overhaul of the management of European fisheries by the EU Commission, and WWF is active in pushing for the complex Mediterranean reality to be fully taken into account. Sustainable artisanal fisheries are a strong element of the reform process, showing how low-impact traditional methods of catching fish, highly efficient in energy consumption, are sustainable and support coastal communities. WWF encourages more artisanal fishers’ groups to join the platform – the more fishers represented, the louder the voice and the greater the chance of being heard.

Time to put Mediterranean at heart of EU fisheries reform

For almost two decades, the EU’s Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) has failed to achieve sustainable fisheries management in Europe’s Mediterranean waters. Welcoming EU Fisheries and Maritime Affairs Commissioner Maria Damanaki to their Mediterranean headquarters in Rome in February, WWF fish experts stressed that a new operational framework is needed for Mediterranean fisheries. Commissioner Damanaki’s visit entailed an open exchange of views on what a reformed CFP should mean for the Mediterranean, on the need to give voice to artisanal fishermen especially in this region (see below), and touched briefly on the bluefin tuna debacle.

Commissioner Damanaki later commented that “The WWF Mediterranean Programme is an important voice in taking care of getting our act together to preserve one of the most beautiful regions of the world for future generations.”

MedPAN South Project updates

The MedPAN South Project website has recently been updated, providing an overview of this four-year collaboration between over 20 national and international organizations. The website provides information on the challenges faced by MPAs in the Mediterranean and how the MedPAN South Project contributes to improving the situation in the south and east of the basin. The website will be regularly updated until the end of the project in 2012 with news, stories and videos of the five pilot projects in Algeria, Croatia, Libya, Tunisia and Turkey, bringing the achievements of this ambitious project to life.

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LEARNING FROM THE SUCCESSES OF CO-MANAGED FISHERIES IN TORRE GUACETO

The abundance of fish at the Marine Protected Area (MPA) Torre Guaceto is not a coincidence but the result of a carefully planned approach, collaboration between fishermen, MPA staff and scientists. A delegation from the Lastovo MPA in Croatia recently travelled to Italy to meet the management team of Torre Guaceto. During the event, Italian fishermen explained how they collaborate with the MPA management authority to understand the issues and find long term solutions. Scientists from the University of Salento are also a key part of this process.

Within the capacity building programme of the MedPAN South Project WWF is promoting a series of exchanges between Mediterranean MPAs to help managers tackle difficult issues, to promote cooperation between MPAs, to enable peer-to-peer discussion and to build a strong network of Mediterranean MPAs.

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Montenegro in breach of EU legislation on new hydropower development

The Government of Montenegro recently launched the tendering process for a series of hydropower plants on the Morača River and expects to subcontract the execution of the project within a matter of months. WWF is particularly alarmed by the fact that the hydropower scheme, as they have seen it to date, gives strong evidence of severe negative environmental impacts of the project on Lake Skadar, as well as two upstream canyons – the Mala Rjeka and Mrtvica – which should become Natura 2000 sites when Montenegro accedes to the EU.

The European Parliament recently adopted a resolution on the EU integration of Montenegro, in which they warned that large-scale dams can have significant negative impacts on the environment, and called for appropriate and transparent environmental assessments and ‘environmentally better options’.

Network of local volunteers monitor Crete’s wetlands

To counter the local authorities’ inability to monitor illegal activities on Crete, volunteers are organizing a network to protect the island’s wetlands. Local volunteers, trained by WWF Greece staff, will monitor water quality and illegal activities in the areas concerned for the next three years. They will forward complaints to WWF’s Citizens Legal Support Team. The network will significantly contribute to the conservation of 206 Cretan wetlands which are threatened by tourism, aquatic pollution, drainage, land use change and illegal construction.

World Wetlands Day

ARTISTIC YOUNG PANDAS FOR LIVANJSKO POLJE

Livansko Polje, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is a massive 46,000ha flat limestone plain - one of the biggest in the world. It joined the list of Ramsar sites in 2008. To celebrate World Wetlands Day and the 40th anniversary of the Ramsar Convention in February WWF and Livno Youth Centre launched an art competition for schoolchildren – “Protection and sustainable use of Livansko Polje”. Of the more than 300 artworks submitted, 50 were shortlisted and uploaded to a web gallery – http://livanjskopolje.com/gallery/index.php. The artworks that received most votes by visitors were awarded prizes at an event organised in Livno (photo above, and two of the artworks below).

SAVING CROATIAN RIVERS

On World Wetlands Day a delegation of Croatian NGOs, WWF and EuroNatur protested to the EU delegation in Zagreb. They expressed their concern about new regulation projects planned by the Croatian Water Management Authorities which would destroy Croatia’s unique rivers and wetland areas of the Danube, Drava, Mura, Sava and Neretva, home to Europe’s largest floodplain forests and several endangered species.

INVESTMENT IN HUTOVO BLATO

A special event in the Hutovo Blato Nature Park in Bosnia and Herzegovina was held on World Wetlands Day to discuss ways to stop further degradation of this unique and valuable wetlands ecosystem. More than 100 participants agreed that the problems in the park can be overcome by the mutual efforts of all stakeholders. WWF is preparing an economic evaluation of Hutovo Blato.
**HIGHLIGHTS FROM COUNTRIES THROUGHOUT THE REGION**

- in Portugal, one third of the country – almost 100 cities and towns – was involved in Earth Hour
- in Croatia Earth Hour was celebrated at a number of UNESCO sites, and in 19 cities and towns
- in Bosnia and Herzegovina there were candle installations in several cities
- in Morocco hundreds of people participated in the main ceremony in Rabat
- in Montenegro activities focused on children, with an exhibition of their Earth Hour art
- in Malta there was poetry by candlelight.

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**Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Earth Hour was organized for the fourth year in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with six cities involved. The famous UNESCO site, the Mostar Old Bridge, where the main Earth Hour celebration was held, was switched off and a candlelit concert, featuring Earth Hour ambassador Damir Imamović, prominent musician and man of the year, took place.

**Morocco**

There were hundreds of people at the official Earth Hour ceremony in Rabat for an unplugged concert. The NGO Ribat Al Fath helped organize the event. In Casablanca a concert, candlelit dinner and dance performances were organized with the support of the Fondation Zakoura pour l’Education, a restaurant and an art school.

**Malta**

Nature Trust (Malta) organized activities in several towns, and in many parts of Malta local councils switched off monuments. The two main monuments in Floriana – the Porte de Bombes (the first gate leading to the capital) and the aqueduct that was used by the Knights of St John to get water to the city – were switched off.

**Montenegro**

Earth Hour in Montenegro was organized by NGO Green Home with the help of 3 NGOs in their respective cities (Priroda and Mladi Ekolozi from Niksic, Eko-fest from Herceg Novi). The main celebration was organized in Podgorica, where children spread the Earth Hour message with an exhibition of their artwork.

**Portugal**

With 89 cities and towns (3 of which are on the UNESCO World Heritage List) taking part across the country, Earth Hour really inspired people to think about their lives and the way they live and how they can change the way they act. There were 2 sponsors – Coca-Cola and IKEA – and 10 ambassadors (top models, actresses, actors, TV presenters, singers, and a sports star). The Young Violin Players of the Orchestra of Lisbon (between 3 and 18 years old) gave a wonderful concert. Most remarkable was the participation in Earth Hour through Facebook with more than 10,000 fans at www.facebook.com/earthhourPortugal.
RENEWABLE ENERGY IN TURKEY

WWF Turkey recently began a renewable energy transition project to review Turkey’s renewable energy policies and to contribute to the process of transforming potential renewable energy into reality. WWF Turkey builds on the experience of similar projects implemented in other Mediterranean WWF offices, within the framework of WWF’s “Mediterranean Solar Hot Spot” project. The project calls for the participation of civil society, investors and energy sector representatives in decision-making processes, the raising of public awareness regarding renewable energy, and the creation of a roadmap to alleviate obstacles to renewable energy investment.

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Online platform for ecosystem services in the Mediterranean

The new online platform www.habeas-med.org, a web portal specializing in ecosystem services in the Mediterranean, was launched in April. The HABEaS project contributes to making Payment for Environmental Services a reality in Portugal through the economic valorisation of High Conservation Value Areas. This portal is an extension of the WebGIS www.habeas.com.pt, and provides news, articles, reports, and a blog about ecosystem services. The existing WebGIS is to be expanded from Portugal to Spain, south France and Sardinia. In 2012 it will also include Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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Endangered wild cats protected

Turkey’s jungle cats (Felis chaus), have been studied for the first time by WWF Turkey and Doğa College’s Adana-Akyatan Wildlife Permanent Reserve. Using advanced photo capture traps vital information was obtained about the animal’s life cycles and habitat use. The results of this field study, information such as the places most frequented by the cats, the times of day that they are most active, the size of their habitat and how far they travel within this area, will contribute to the protection of the species. Akyatan Lagoon’s marshes and wooded areas, when compared to the world’s other jungle cat habitats, are among the most important areas for this animal.

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Rewilding Europe

WWF Mediterranean is to take part in a pioneering project to rewild a million hectares of abandoned agricultural landscape in five areas across Europe: Velebit, Eastern Carpathians, Western Iberia, Danube Delta and Southern Carpathians. Rewilding will include the re-introduction of wild, large grazing herbivores and provide current generations a unique opportunity to develop complete ecosystems as the foundation for new rural economies, where nature itself is the driving engine. In the Velebit Mountain area, one of the major biodiversity hotspots in the Western Balkans, WWF has partnered with three Protected Areas to popularize the concept of wilderness. WWF will also work closely with policy makers in Croatia and the EU to integrate the wilderness concept into nature conservation policies, priorities and funding mechanisms.

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Stay tuned for our next newsletter
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