



## **The Hellenic Society for the Protection of Nature: An Account of its History and Activities**

The **Hellenic Society for the Protection of Nature** (HSPN) is the oldest national environmental NGO in Greece, operating continuously since 1951 throughout the country for the protection of nature. From its very inception it has been at the forefront of efforts to establish national parks, to protect habitats and threatened species of fauna and flora, and to modernise and implement environmental legislation.

From 1958, the position of General Secretary was held by the late Byron Antipas, who was the driving force of the HSPN for the following 35 years. His pivotal role in the early environmental movement in Greece was illustrated by the fact that he was sent as the official representative of the national government in 1971 to sign the Ramsar Convention on behalf of Greece. Antipas' seminal work in nature protection has been widely recognized by many international organizations. In gratitude for his great contribution, the HSPN has established the "Byron Antipas Prize", which is awarded regularly to non-public organizations or individuals who have contributed significantly to the protection of nature and the environment, and have done so in an un-self-interested way over many years. Among the recipients are renowned environmentalist Luc Hoffmann (2005), the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (2011), and widely-known Swedish botanist Arne Strid (2017).

For many years the HSPN functioned as a kind of nursery, mainly through the encouragement Antipas gave to young Greeks to promote nature protection: from it developed other more specialised organizations such as the Hellenic Ornithological Society, the Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece, and the Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection of the Monk seal (Mom).

The HSPN is a member of important environmental organizations such as the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It also represents in Greece the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), a worldwide educational organisation, and it operates all five of its international programmes for environmental education and sustainable management. Since 2016, the HSPN is represent on the FEE Board of Directors by its current President, Nikos G. Petrou.

It works with many other NGOs for common goals, and cooperates with many national and regional state agencies, as well as with NGOs, authorities and universities in other countries for the implementation of international projects. In addition to its voluntary Board of Directors and its permanent staff members, the HSPN utilises an extensive network of volunteers in a lot of its work, including academics and specialist scientists.

The HSPN funds its activities from the annual fees and donations of its members and friends, as well as sponsorships given by the private sector. Its financial records are audited by accredited auditors.

For its work it has received awards from the Academy of Athens, the Council of Europe and the Ford Foundation.

Today the HSPN is active in 5 main areas:

1. **Environmental Interventions,**
2. **Nature Conservation,**
3. **Environmental Education,**
4. **Sustainable Management in the Tourism Sector,**
5. **Public Awareness Raising.**

## **1. Environmental Interventions**

The HSPN intervenes, alone or in cooperation with other national NGOs, with the public services and with various governmental agencies regarding violations of national or European environmental regulations and laws, or serious threats to the environment. This is done through direct contact, letters or press releases, or, in cases of serious infringement of laws, through legal action usually in the Council of State, the Supreme Administrative Court of Greece. Examples of this latter form of intervention are the cases against the State over the illegalities in the water-diversion project of the Acheloos and Nestos rivers, the non-compliance with EU regulations requiring the creation of a forest registry, effective protection of specific Natura 2000 sites, etc. The HSPN is a member of the Antipoison Task Force, a coalition of NGOs trying to control illegal use of poisoned baits through interventions with national and international authorities.

## **2. Nature Conservation**

The HSPN has implemented, alone or in cooperation with other NGOs and bodies, national and international, a variety of conservation projects, including:

- **Project LIFE02 NAT/GR/008489 (2002-2006):** The HSPN participated in this 4-year LIFE project in northern Greece, aiming at the protection of birds of prey in the Nestos River Gorge, the re-flooding and reforestation of riverine habitats in the Nestos delta, the construction of nesting platforms in the lagoons and the general development of eco-tourism.
- **Management of the Constantio Lagoon in the Amvrakikos Gulf (2003-2004):** An HSPN project for the general multi-purpose management of the Constantio Lagoon undertaken in cooperation with its owner, the Monastery of Prophet Elijah of Preveza. Measures implemented included the management of fisheries, the development of ecotourism, and informative publications on the birds and the fish of the Amvrakikos Gulf.
- **Promotion of the Natura 2000 network in Greece (2004):** An HSPN project that produced a detailed description of the habitat types and the important flora and fauna species found in the (then) 262 sites of the Natura 2000 network, later published in a book, produced by the HSPN in cooperation with the Ministry of the Environment, Urban Planning and Public Works.

- **Programme for the Protection and Management of the Oak Forest of Foloji in the Peloponnese (2008-2011):** The HSPN, originally in cooperation with the General Secretariat for Youth and local youth organizations, undertook to selectively reforest areas of the ancient Foloji oak forest destroyed during the fires of 2007. After 2010 the project was sponsored by Mercedes-Benz, Hellas. Activities undertaken included reforestation, regular waste removal and educational seminars on the protection of the forest and on fire-fighting for local young volunteers. The project also included the purchase of fire-fighting equipment for the local volunteer team and the establishment of an Information Centre in the village of Foloji.
- **Re-planting of the Communal Land of Arachamita, in the Peloponnese (2008-2012):** The HSPN, in cooperation with the local community, as well as local NGOs and volunteer organizations, selectively reforested and established a watering system in an area burnt during the fires of 2007. This project was supported in part by Edding Hellas.
- **Project LIFE11 NAT/GR/001014 "ForOpenForests" (ongoing since 2012):** The HSPN is the coordinating beneficiary of this 5-year LIFE+ project for the protection of priority habitats and species in two mountainous Natura 2000 sites in Central Greece. Goals include conservation and restoration of alpine meadows and temporary ponds, protection of endemic plants and priority bird species, habitat management for bears, support of local producers and promotion of ecotourism. The other partners are: University of Athens, Institute for Mediterranean Forest Ecosystems, Region of Sterea Ellada, and the NGO Arcturos.
- **Biodiversity assessments in Macedonia and Milos (2014-2015):** The HSPN carried out assessments of flora and fauna biodiversity for TITAN, a mining and cement company, in and around three of its operating sites in central Macedonia and the island of Milos.
- **Project ICON (2015-2017):** A 15-month project that was implemented as part of the "Civil Society Dialogue between EU and Turkey - IV Environment Grant Scheme (CSD-IV/ENV)". Its goal was to inform civil society in Turkey, including relevant local and regional authorities, about flora conservation, focusing on terrestrial orchids. Its actions included the creation of an interactive digital platform and database about all species of wild orchids (approximately 400) shared between Greece and Turkey, creation of educational materials, a documentary, an international conference, etc. Other partners were the German NGO Sails-for-Science (coordinating beneficiary), and the Turkish NGO Association for the Conservation of Antalya Orchids and Biodiversity.
- **Project LIFE14 GIE/GR/000026 "Natura THEMIS" (ongoing since 2015):** The HSPN is a partner in this 5-year LIFE+ project aiming to establish that environmental crime and damage to biodiversity are specific criminal acts, liable to prosecution and punishment, especially in Natura 2000 sites, according to the Environmental Liability Directive. This will be achieved by providing information on relevant EU acquis to the legal and judicial authorities, regional and local administration, as well as the general public and stakeholders in Crete. Other

partners are the University of Crete (coordinating beneficiary), the Chania and Herakleion Bars and the Ministry for the Environment and Energy.

- **Project INTERREG MED "POSBEMED" (ongoing since 2016):** The HSPN participates as an associate in this 15-month project, which will study the management, conflicts and opportunities of Mediterranean coastal protected areas and Natura 2000 habitats where interdependence between seagrass meadows, dunes and beaches occurs, in order to provide a Mediterranean strategy and governance model for enhancing the management effectiveness of these areas and beyond. The project is led by EID-MED (France) and partners include the IUCN (Spain), IMC Foundation and ECO-logica (Italy) and the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research.

### 3. Environmental Education

Since 1995 the HSPN coordinates five Environmental Education Networks, approved by the Greek Ministry of Education. During the past years, more than 1,500 schools (at kindergarten, primary and secondary levels) have participated in these networks, with thousands of students and teachers taking part throughout the country. Active cooperation with the local communities is required in these programmes, and the students through their "hands-on" activities learn how to interact with and how to influence adults and officials of their communities. The HSPN produces the appropriate educational material for all its programmes, with the voluntary assistance of experienced teachers specialised in Environmental Education, and distributes this free of charge to all the participating schools. It also organizes training sessions for the teachers involved (see <http://eepf.gr/el/ekpaideusi>).

- **Eco-Schools"** (FEE international programme). Each school studies problems that have to do with energy, water, waste management, resource conservation, etc., and comes up with practical solutions (see [www.ecoschools.global](http://www.ecoschools.global), <http://ecoschools.gr/>).
- **"Young Reporters for the Environment"** (FEE international programme). The students analyze a serious environmental problem, most often one which concerns their local community, frequently in cooperation with students from other European countries. The students have to write up and present these themes, like reporters, and communicate them from one school to the other using the Internet. (see [www.yre.global](http://www.yre.global)).
- **"Learning about Forests"** (FEE international programme). The students receive information about forests, their biological functioning and their uses, and practical applications of this knowledge are demonstrated. Students are then called on to implement what they have learnt, frequently in the forest itself ([www.leaf.global](http://www.leaf.global)).
- **"Litter-free Nature"** (national programme). Teams of students work with local authorities to make public opinion in their areas more sensitive to better ways of handling waste and combating all forms of pollution. (<http://eepf.gr/el/drasi/fysi-xwris-skoupidia>).
- **"Green Neighbourhoods"** (national programme). Students are given educational material about nature and wildlife within urban environments,

and then are called upon to observe and interact with nature in the field, in all its little refuges in their towns and cities (<http://eepf.gr/el/drasi/prasines-gonies>).

#### **4. Sustainable Management in the Tourism Sector**

The following two FFE international programmes aim at the sustainable, ecological management of beaches, marinas, and tourist facilities, while promoting environmental education and awareness among the staff, the visitors and the local societies. They also enhance the environmental image of Greece

- **“Blue Flag”**. Since 1992 the HSPN has been the national operator of the Blue Flag, a programme which aims at the ecological management of beaches, marinas and touristic boats. To receive the Blue Flag, all participating municipalities, hotels, marinas and boats must implement the strict criteria which are required by this internationally acclaimed quality-standard. These include, among others, excellent water quality, cleanliness of the beaches, provision of life-saving and other facilities, the undertaking of educational activities related to marine and coastal habitats, the protection of the beach area, and responsible behaviour around marine wildlife. In 2017, 486 beaches, and 12 marinas were awarded the Blue Flag. ([www.blueflag@eepf.gr](http://www.blueflag@eepf.gr))
- **“Green Key”**. The HSPN has operated this programme in Greece since 2009. It awards the “Green Key” eco-label to hotels, restaurants and conference centres that successfully meet the required strict environmental criteria, aiming to reduce the enterprise’s footprint and ensure sustainable use of resources. In 2018, more than 330 hotels have received the eco-label. ([www.greenkey@eepf.gr](http://www.greenkey@eepf.gr))

Every year, the HSPN organises specialised training seminars for the managers of beaches, marinas and hotels participating in the two programmes.

#### **5. Public Awareness Raising**

##### **a. Conferences, Seminars and Excursions**

The HSPN organises local and national conferences, seminars and workshops on a variety of environmental subjects. Examples in recent years include:

- 2009: National Conference on “Our Natural Heritage; its Value and its Protection”.
- 2011: 3<sup>rd</sup> National Student Conference on “Human Values and the Environment – Some waste, others starve”.
- 2012: Special Conference to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the adoption of Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.
- 2017: Special Conference to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the adoption of Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.

The HSPN also organises seminars on environmental subjects for the staff of large companies which want to meet the socially recognized goals of Corporate Social Responsibility.

It participates in events related to environmental issues, and organises educational excursions for its members and friends to all parts of the country, guided by experts in a number of fields such as botany, zoology, ornithology, etc. It also organises presentations and addresses for its members and the general public.

#### **b. Periodical, Publications and Website**

The HSPN has continuously published the quarterly periodical "I FYSI" (Nature) since 1975. The periodical features articles on a variety of nature and wildlife subjects and conservation issues, as well as reports on the Society's activities. It also publishes many books on nature subjects, informative material and newsletters about its educational programmes and other projects.

The HSPN details its activities and concerns on its website ([www.eepf.gr](http://www.eepf.gr)).

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