



## **Results of Monitoring of Facilities for Wildlife Crossing at LOT 1 of the Struma Motorway within SaveGREEN Project Presented to Regional and National Media in Bulgaria**

27.10.2022

The Black Sea NGO Network (BSNN), Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation (BBF), and the South-West State Enterprise (SWSE) organised a field trip for regional and national media to present the conclusions and recommendations based on monitoring of the wildlife crossing facilities along Lot 1 of the Struma Motorway, part of the SaveGREEN project pilot area in Bulgaria.

The pilot area is situated along the important Struma Motorway in the south west of the country, part of the Pan-European Corridor IV and E79, important EU priority project. The area named Rila – Verila – Kraishte after the surrounding mountains is located on the 16-kilometer stretch of the motorway and comprises 15 large facilities for wildlife crossing.

Among them are an overpass for large mammals, an underpass for medium and small mammals and a viaduct. There are bridges with dry paths and culverts designed as passages for amphibians. As mortality reducing measures, there are "rabbit fences" and guiding amphibian concrete fences. Those facilities have been constructed in a problem area to mitigate the bottle neck effect and improve chances of the species to migrate and survive in the long term.

The overpass for bears and the underpass conditionally designated for the passage of wolves are two of the facilities subject to SaveGREEN monitoring activities. The nearby viaduct due to its size, is one of the convenient places for animals to cross the road.

The BBF SaveGREEN coordinator Petko Tsvetkov said that the main task of the project was to monitor some of the facilities, investigate the effectiveness of the mitigation measures and suggest improvements based on ideas from experts and



consultation with local stakeholders from the nearby towns and villages. The project aims to support the functionality of the ecological corridors, the natural migratory routes of species that often intersect with transport infrastructure, by proposing practical solutions.

Data is being collected on how useful those facilities are. For that purpose, photo traps have been placed to register and document the passage of animals. At the overpass, the passage of mainly smaller animals - jackals, foxes, and squirrels - has been observed. The neighbouring facility has been found to be used as passage by otters.

Large animals have been observed rarely. Red deer as well as a wild boar have been spotted near the highway. The underpass for wolves is one of the most intensively used facilities. Wild pigs, badgers and other wild animals have been observed there. Data collected so far suggest that mostly young animals pass through these facilities.

According to experts, the wildlife crossings need improvements, one of them is to plant bushes and low trees in the area of the overpass so that the animals can feel in an environment like their natural one. It is important that they should not encounter barriers on their way, but should pass unhindered. Inspection of one of the facilities shows that the nets of the fences are not high and dense enough and must be firmly fixed to the ground to prevent smaller animals from getting on the road.

The SWSE is an associated strategic partner of the SaveGREEN project, explained eng. Vanya Kamenova, head of the "Programs and Projects" Department. One of the SWSE main tasks is game management, and its experts can be of help in the designation of the natural ecological corridors and the proper design for future highway construction.

The Rila - Verila - Kraishte Corridor pilot area aims to promote ecological corridors in Bulgaria and their relationship with the impact of transport infrastructure on biodiversity.

The SaveGREEN project partners have applied joint efforts to improve the capacity of experts, administrations, and the media in Bulgaria on the topic of ecological corridors and their relationship with the impact of transport infrastructure on landscape connectivity, biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation.

The project SaveGREEN is financed under the Transnational Cooperation Program "Danube" 2014-2020, and the partners are nature protection organizations and institutions from Austria, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Ukraine and the Czech Republic. You can learn more about its activities at: [www.interreg-danube.eu/savegreen](http://www.interreg-danube.eu/savegreen)



*Petko Tzvetko, SaveGREEN coordinator for BBF and eng. Vanya Kamenova of SWSE being interviewed by media representatives at the at the overpass for large carnivores on Struma Motorway*

Picture credit: SWSE