

## Planning workshop of the project LIFE "Conservation measures to assist the adaptation of *Falco eleonora* to climate change"

Athens, 20-21 March 2015

### Introduction

On March 20-21 the first workshop for the Life project "LIFE13 NAT/GR/000909 Conservation measures to assist the adaptation of *Falco eleonora* to climate change" was held in Athens. More than 30 species experts and representatives of competent authorities from Greece and abroad attended the workshop.

The planning workshop aimed at the designation of strategic and effective operational plans for the implementation of the project's concrete conservation and scientific actions through the contribution of species' experts with their knowledge, experience and expertise for the development of relevant methodologies. To this end, the planning workshop consisted of four thematic sessions. In total, 16 oral presentations were presented by the Life EIClimA working team and the invited species' experts.

During the first day of the workshop, an introductory session took place during which information was presented about the outline of the Life EIClimA project, the results of the previous Life project on Eleonora's falcon (LIFE03 "Conservation measures *Falco eleonora* in Greece), as well as the results of breeding studies on Eleonora's falcon in Crete since 1965.

In continuation, two thematic sessions regarding the concrete conservation actions (rat eradication operations, construction of artificial nests, creation of refueling oases) of the Life EIClimA project took place. These sessions focused on past experience on rat eradications and artificial nests from previous Life projects and/or independent studies in Greece and Italy, update on the current knowledge on the impact of climate change on passerines, the ranging behavior of Eleonora's falcon and the outline of the operational plans of the Life EIClimA concrete conservation and scientific actions.

During the second day of the workshop, special focus was given on global conservation issues regarding the migratory and wintering period of Eleonora's falcon annual cycle (such as conflict with future renewable energy investments, mismanagement of the species wintering areas), as well as regarding other migratory species relevant as Eleonora's falcon prey.

Finally, during the closing session a brief presentation of the workshop's main conclusions took place, followed by a vigorous discussion among the participants on future course of action.

## General conclusions

Overall, the operational plans of the concrete conservation and scientific actions are at a rather mature stage mainly due to the experience of the project partnership furnished by previous Life projects. Suggestions for improvement with regard to their technical implementation as well as recommendations for future studies are provided below per thematic subject.

During the last day of the workshop and following the participants' presentations, there was a consensus on the need to ensure appropriate follow-up of the project actions given that both the level of public awareness and law enforcement by competent authorities are currently low.

At the species breeding grounds, the promotion of the ecological and biodiversity value of the islets could bring about a general change in the attitude of local communities towards species' conservation. In this context, Eleonora's falcon could be promoted as an umbrella species for the protection of other local species and the overall Aegean biodiversity. In addition, the project partnership could proceed to the compilation of action plans for each project area to be distributed to the competent authorities and, depending on the case, propose the upgrade of their protection status (e.g. declaring them wildlife reserves). Cooperation with Birdlife International could help in this direction. Further promotion of the Aegean islet ecosystems as wildlife hotspots and refuges through positive publicity could further enhance the conservation related attitudes of local societies, for the benefit of these precious ecosystems and their biodiversity.

At the species wintering grounds, where the species spends most of its annual cycle, no conservation actions are currently put in place due to, inter alia, the lack of trained personnel and available funds. Alongside the current project, a *Falco eleonora* study group consisting of species' experts could be created in order to implement capacity building projects in the species' main wintering area, i.e. Madagascar, but also for carrying out further research at the migratory and wintering grounds of the species, involving also the assessment of anthropogenic threats, such as aerial spraying of insecticides in the African countries and its direct and indirect toxicity effect on Eleonora's falcon.