

# BALKAN DETOX LIFE

## Poisoning incidents annual report for 2023

BALKAN DETOX LIFE: STRENGTHENING NATIONAL  
CAPACITIES TO FIGHT WILDLIFE POISONING AND RAISE  
AWARENESS ABOUT THE PROBLEM ACROSS SEVEN  
BALKAN COUNTRIES  
(LIFE19 GIE/NL/001016)

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## **Subject and purpose of the document**

This document is prepared within the framework of the BalkanDetox LIFE project (LIFE19 GIE/NL/001016) and relates to *Action C.1: Establishment of national databases for poisoning incidents* and deliverable foreseen under this action: Poisoning incidents annual report 2023.

This report is designed to provide an overview of wildlife poisoning incidents that were recorded during the implementation of the BalkanDetox LIFE project in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

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## About the project

The BalkanDetox LIFE project is a five-year endeavour with a €1.8 million budget, which aims to raise awareness and strengthen national capacities to fight the problem of wildlife poisoning across Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, the Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia. It received funding from the EU's LIFE Programme *with a contribution of 1.004.792€ (54,82%) to the total project budget*, and it is co-financed by the Vulture Conservation Foundation, the MAVA Foundation and Euronatur, as well as by the Whitley Fund for Nature and Environmental Protection and Energy Efficiency Fund for specific actions. Project partners are the Vulture Conservation Foundation as the coordinating beneficiary, and the Albanian Ornithological Society, Association BIOM, Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia, Fund for Wild Flora and Fauna, Hellenic Ornithological Society/ BirdLife Greece, Macedonian Ecological Society, Ornitološko društvo NAŠE Ptice and the Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania as associated beneficiaries. Furthermore, this project is based on Spanish best practice experience and counts with the support from the Junta de Andalucía and the Spanish Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge.

Learn more at [www.balkandetoxlife.eu](http://www.balkandetoxlife.eu)



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## INTRODUCTION

Databases are necessary for storing relevant information about incidents of illegal poisoning of animals, specifying with precision all relevant data: location, date, affected species, substances used, (results of the necropsies and toxicological analyses), actions taken, penal consequences, etc. Systematic compilation of this relevant data enables us to better define the scope and severity of this illegal practice in each target country, but also on a larger scale, such as the region of the Balkan Peninsula, identify drivers behind it, substances most frequently used for poisoning, areas where this practice is most common (hotspots) and species most affected by this practice.

Additionally, regularly updated databases enable us to disseminate information to target audiences through publication of periodical reports on poisoning, analyse and monitor the effects of implemented anti-poison actions. Cohesion of this information within a Balkan database enables us to better grasp the situation on a regional and international scale.

Finally, databases for poisoning incidents provide us with a possibility to monitor the practical effectiveness of some of actions aimed at reducing the threat of wildlife poisoning. In the framework of the BalkanDetox LIFE project National Anti-poison Data Bases were additionally established in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia to match those already developed and put in use within LIFE10 NAT/BG/000152 and LIFE16 NAT/BG/000874 in Greece, Bulgaria, North Macedonia and Albania.

This report aims at disseminating information about wildlife poisoning incidents that were documented in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, North Macedonia and Serbia during the implementation of the BalkanDetox LIFE project in 2023 to all interested parties.

## Overview of wildlife poisoning in the Balkan Peninsula during 2023

During the implementation of the BalkanDetox LIFE project in 2023 a total of 29 presumable poisoning and poisoning incidents involving wildlife species as casualties were recorded across four countries of the Balkan region.



The majority (62%) of wildlife poisoning events were recorded in Greece, while 38% of all recorded events in 2023 were recorded in Serbia (Figure 1.).

Results from forensic toxicological analysis performed for wildlife poisoning cases in 2023 were not available on time for this report. However, this information will be included and further analysed within the second edition of the Study about illegal use of poison in the environment of the Balkan Peninsula in 2025.

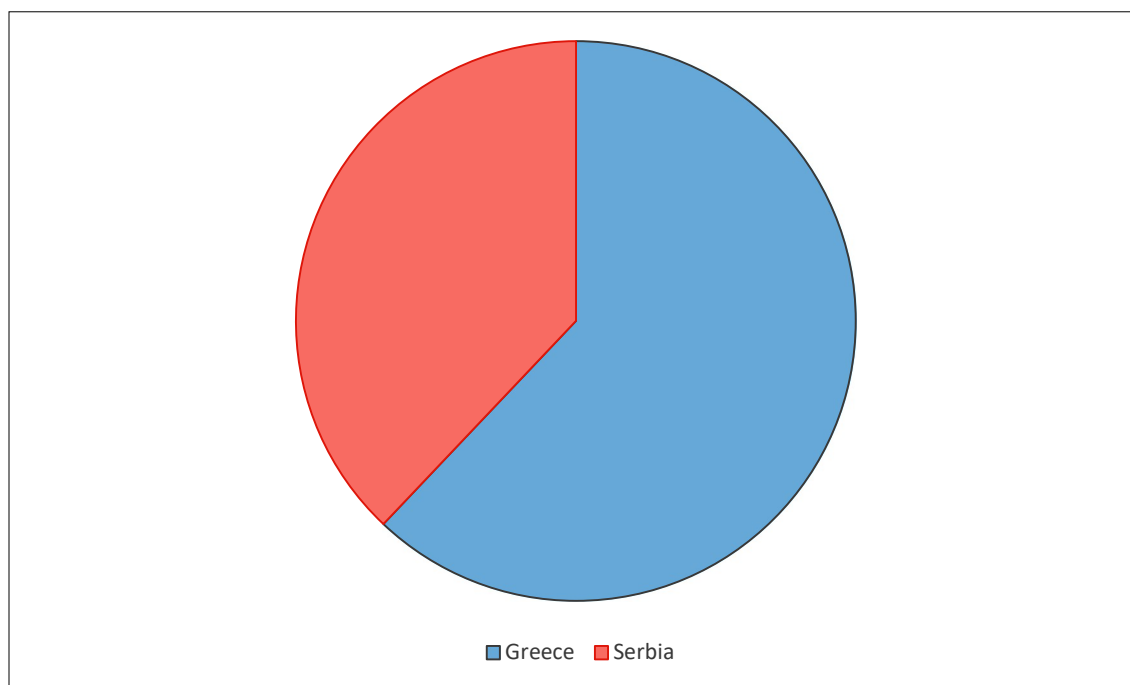


Figure 1. Distribution of wildlife poisoning events recorded in 2023 by different Balkan countries.

A total of 20 wild species were recorded as casualties of poisoning and presumable poisoning events that were documented in 2023. The most common victim was the European hedgehog, recorded as a casualty in 27,6% of all documented incidents, with a total of 8 poisoned individuals (Figure 2.). The second most numerous and frequently poisoned species was Common Buzzard, recorded in 20,7% of all poisoning events, with 12 perished individuals, followed by White-tailed Eagle, recorded in three poisoning events, with three perished individuals.

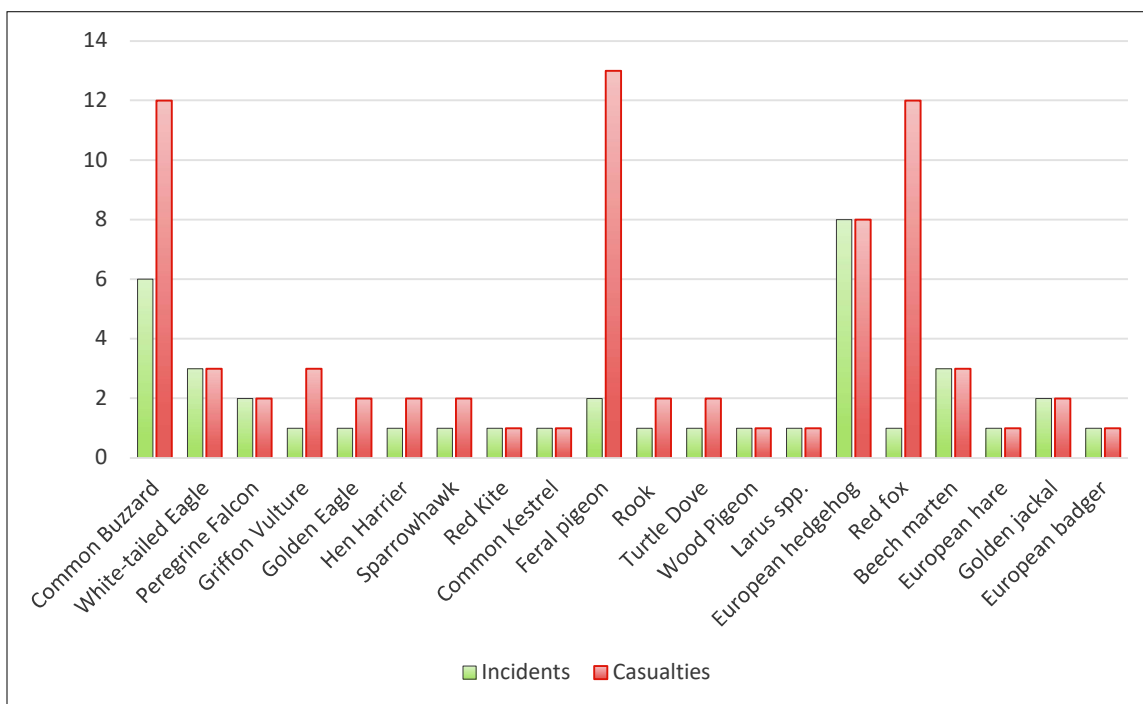


Figure 2. Recorded casualties of wildlife poisoning in the Balkan Peninsula during 2023

Presumable poisoning incidents where the casualties were vultures were recorded only in Greece. A total of three Griffon Vultures were recorded as casualties in December 2023.

## ALBANIA

In 2023, four poisoning incidents of stray dogs were documented. Two occurred in January in Tirana. Additionally, in September, there was another attempted poisoning of stray dogs in the city. Thanks to the swift response of citizens and the prompt removal of the poison baits, no casualties were reported. One poisoning incident with stray dogs was reported for Gjirokaster area.

These cases have not been added to the project database for poisoning cases in the Balkans because these cases occurred within urban areas and did not involve wild animals.

## BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

There were no wildlife poisoning incidents reported in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2023. The only poisoning event recorded by the relevant institutions in the country relates to poisoning of stray dogs.

## CROATIA

During the course of 2023 there was only one known case of intentional placing of a poison bait that was documented. The incident occurred in the Lika region, which is a known blackspot for wildlife poisoning. The poison bait was a calf carcass, which was cut open and laced with poison. We believe that the poison bait was set up for wolves as similar wildlife conflicts have been recorded in this region before. Poisoning was thankfully prevented due to a rapid reaction of local hunters and Association BIOM.

Publicly the most recognized case of a possible poisoning is a Northern bald ibis “Gipsy”, which was found dead in the Neretva delta, Croatia. The cause of death was a blunt head trauma, but internal organs showed signs of poisoning, which is not confirmed yet. On both occasions, the relevant authorities responded accordingly to their jurisdiction and initiated investigation, collected and sent samples for due process.

Regular occurrence of poisoning of feral cats, pet dogs and hunting dogs has been recorded throughout the year. Feral cats are usually targeted intentionally, while pet dogs and hunting dogs are accidental victims of baits which target martens, foxes, jackals or wolves. By data collected through BalkanDetox LIFE we can identify southern Dalmatia (areas of the Biokovo Mountain, Imotski and Vrgorac) as poisoning blackspot as there is a regular occurrence of poisoning incidents with pet dogs, and mass poisoning incidents of hunting dogs.



## GREECE

During the course of 2023 a total of 18 presumable poisoning events were documented in Greece where wild animals were recorded as casualties. Twelve species of wild animals were recorded as casualties of this illegal practice. The most frequently recorded victim was the European Hedgehog, followed by Beech Marten (Figure 3.). Vultures were recorded as casualties in only one poisoning incident. Three Griffon Vultures were found dead in the vicinity of a calf carcass which was placed as a bait. One of the Griffon Vultures was tagged with a GPS transmitter which facilitated the discovery of the poisoning event.

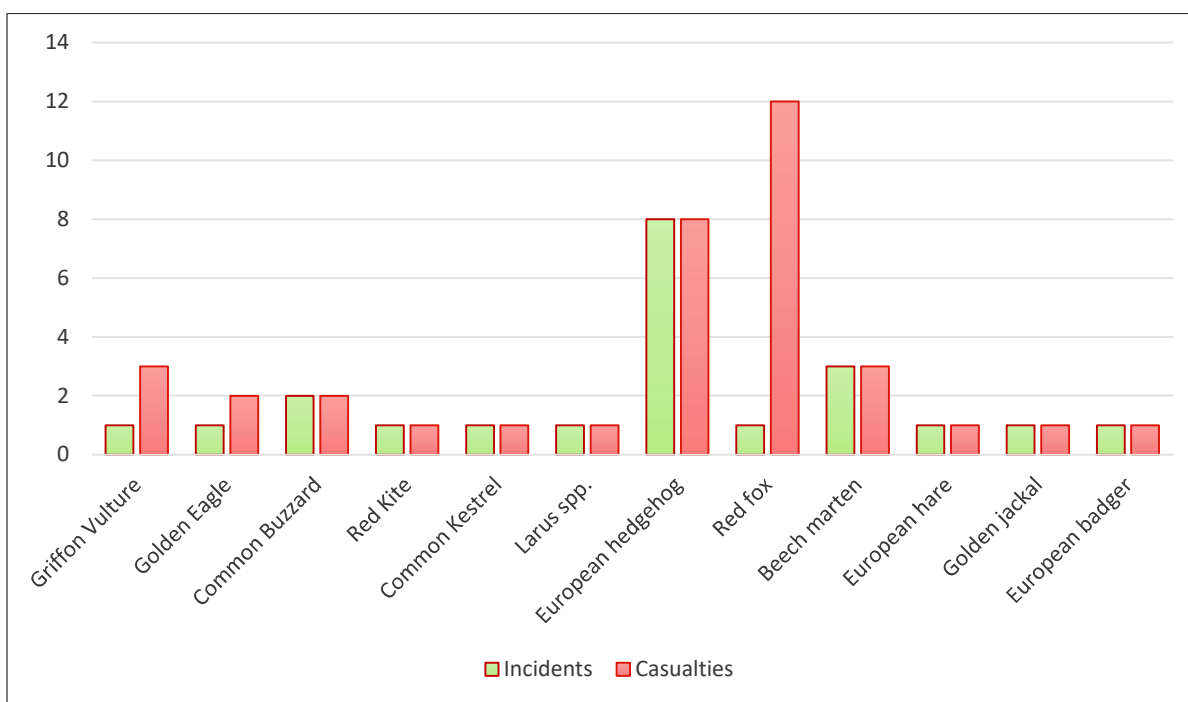


Figure 3. Recorded casualties of wildlife poisoning in Greece during 2023

Poison baits used in poisoning incidents that were documented in 2023 ranged from paraffin capsules with cyanide, individual pieces of meat, animal parts to entire animal carcasses. Motives behind the great majority of documented poisoning events remains unknown (67%), while all other events relate to conflicts with mammalian predators and the damages that they can cause to livestock and agricultural production (Figure 4.). Wolves were the main target of poison baits use in three poisoning events, while foxes were targeted in two poisoning incidents.

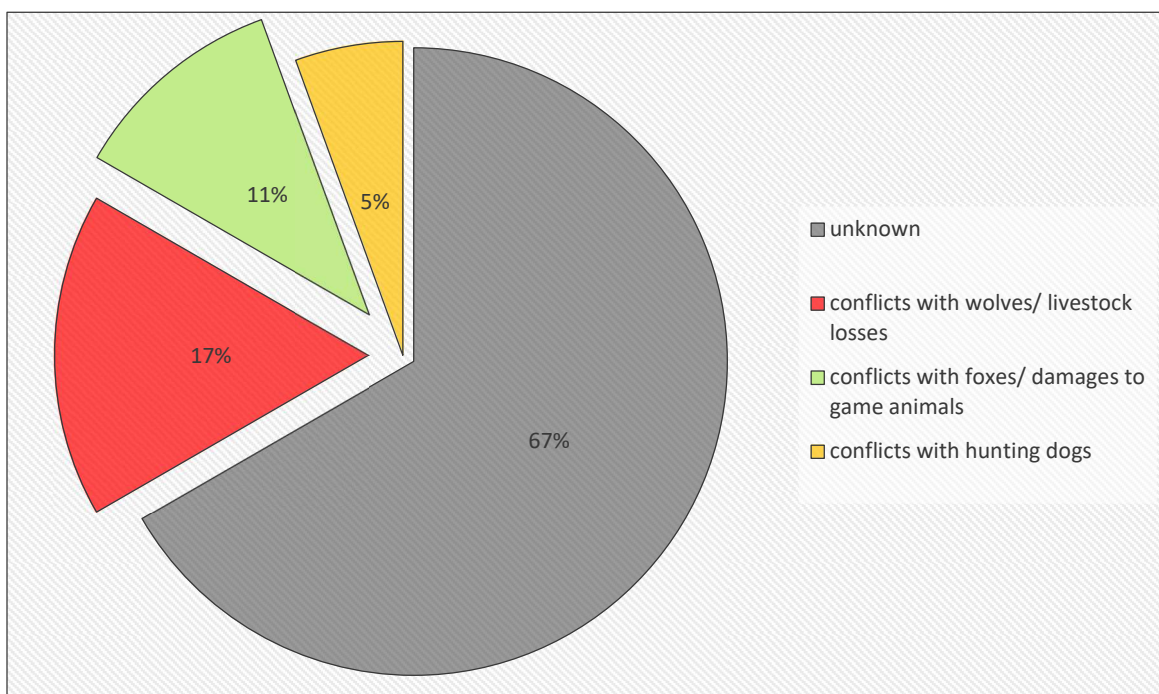


Figure 4. Motives behind the use of poison baits in Greece in 2023

From the available data we can conclude that the majority of poisoning incidents of 2023 occurred in January (27,8%), while another peak was recorded in autumn (Figure 5.).

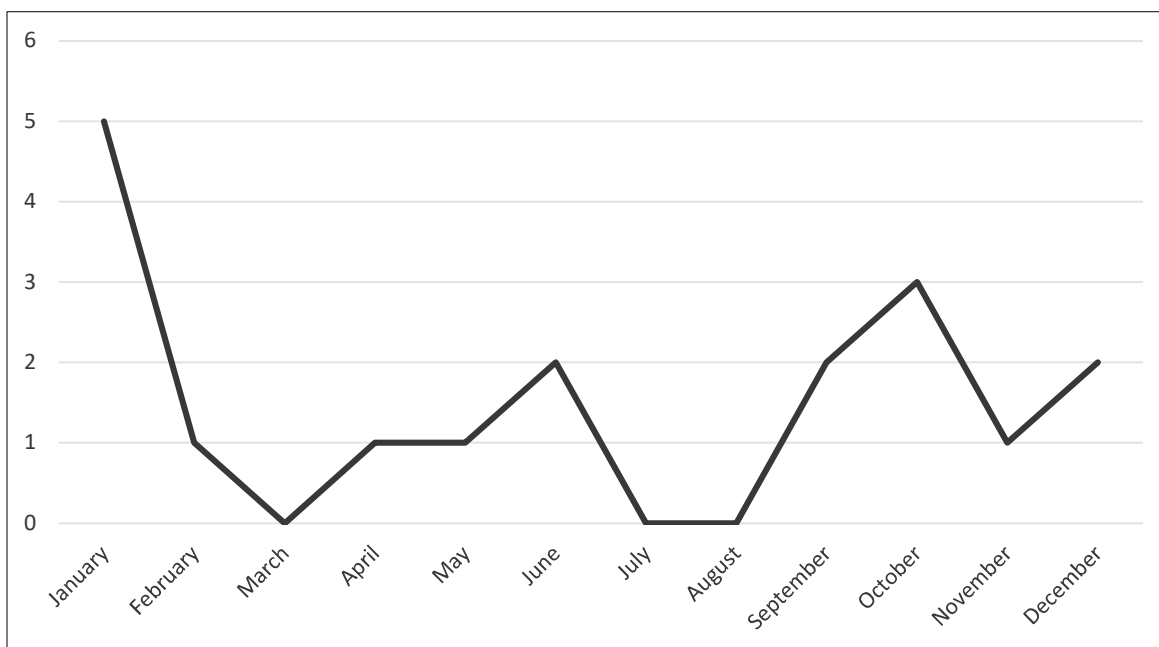


Figure 5. Temporal distribution of poisoning events during 2023 in Greece

More than half (55,5%) of the wildlife poisoning events that were documented during 2023 in Greece occurred in the region of Crete. All reported and documented poisoning events in 2023 were investigated by Anti-poison dog units. The relevant governmental authorities were contacted and were engaged in the field for documentation of 12 (66,7%) out of 18 wildlife poisoning events.

Unfortunately, not all data from the relevant institutions was available for the production of this report. Therefore, we have no information regarding how many official investigations did the authorities launch, for which incidents forensic necropsy was conducted, and samples taken for toxicological analysis. This information will be included and further analysed within the second edition of the Study about illegal use of poison in the environment of the Balkan Peninsula.

It is crucial to point out that apart from the reported wildlife poisoning incidents an additional 17 potential poisoning events, when only poison baits were discovered, were also documented. Additionally, 14 poisoning events where casualties were only domestic animals were also recorded in Greece during 2023. Four of these incidents were recorded in urban environments, while the rest were recorded in rural areas and could have potentially represented a source of poisoning for wildlife. The most common victims of these incidents are dogs (stray and unidentified dogs), which were victims in every second poisoning event, followed by pet dogs.

The motives behind the great majority of these poisoning events where only domestic animals were recorded as victims are unknown. However, from several better documented cases we can see that livestock losses, conflicts with stray dogs, hunting dogs, as well as personal disputes are a common driver of poison use in rural areas in Greece.

## NORTH MACEDONIA

There were no wildlife poisoning events recorded in North Macedonia during 2023.

## SERBIA

According to the available data that we were able to procure for this report, during 2023 a total of 11 wildlife poisoning events have been documented. A total of 10 different species of wild animals were recorded as casualties of this illegal practice. Species which was affected the most by the illegal practice of wildlife poisoning during 2023 in Serbia was the Common Buzzard, which was recorded as a casualty in 36,4% of all potential poisoning events documented in the country (Figure 6.). A total of 10 Common Buzzards were recorded to have potentially died of poisoning. The second most common victim was the White-tailed Eagle with three individuals recorded to have died of poisoning within three separate poisoning events, followed by Peregrine Falcon, which was recorded as a casualty in two separate poisoning events.

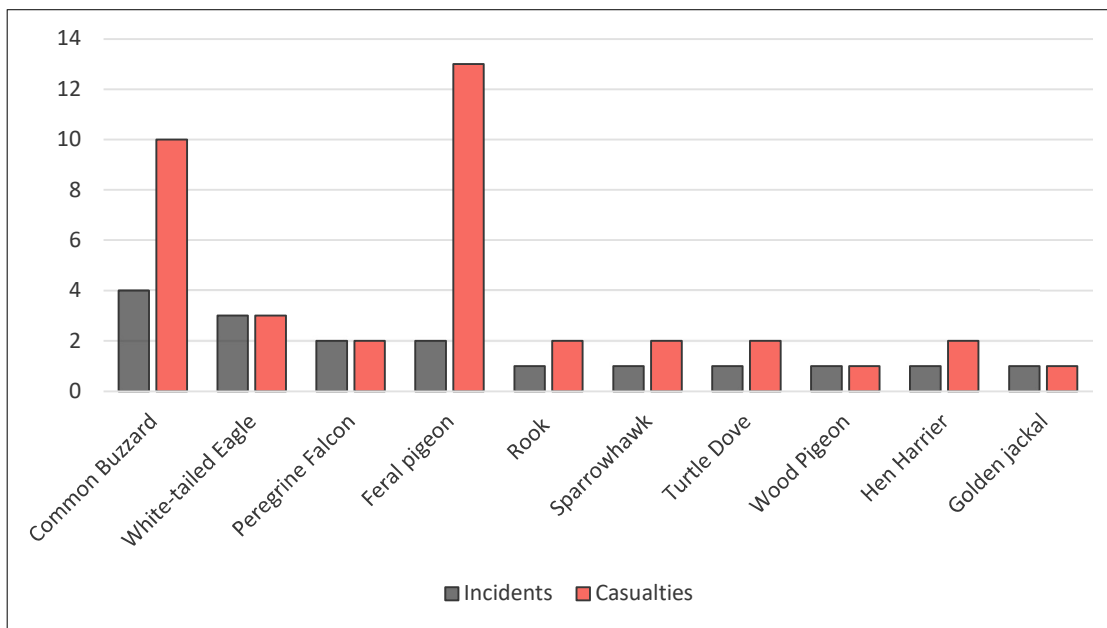


Figure 6. Recorded casualties of wildlife poisoning in Serbia during 2023

The motives behind most poisoning events that were documented in 2023 in Serbia were connected to conflicts with predators and conflicts with birds of prey (Figure 7.).

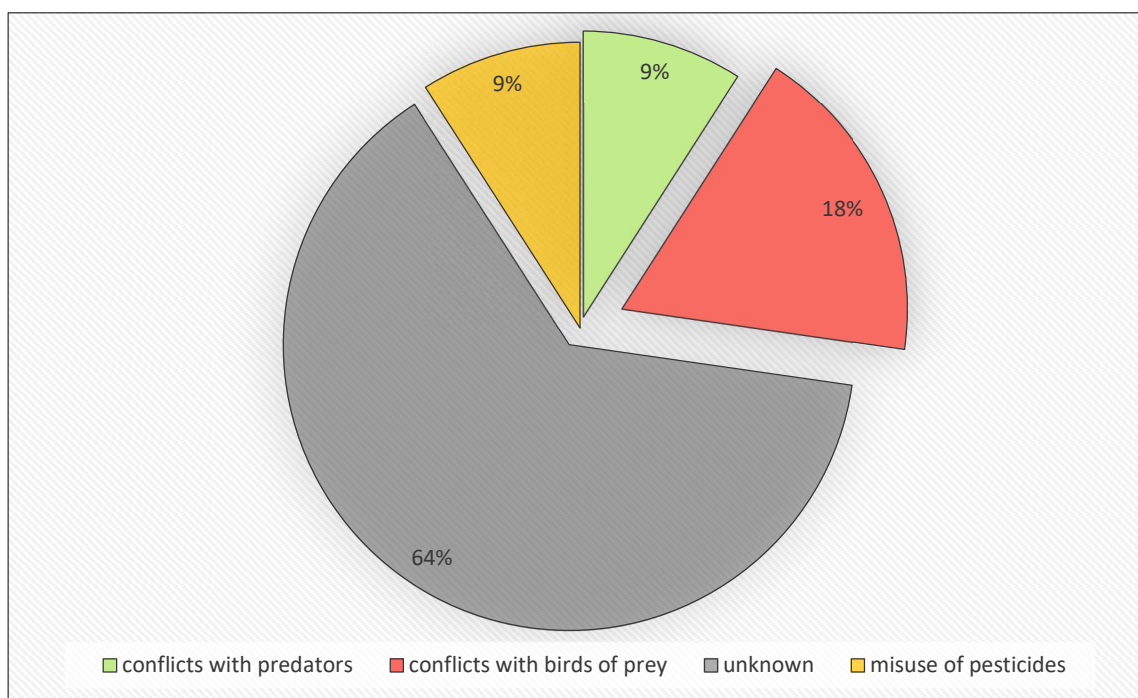


Figure 7. Motives behind wildlife poisoning events in Serbia in 2023

One of the biggest documented poisoning events in Serbia during 2023 occurred in March, within the municipalities of Novi Sad and Bački Petrovac, in Vojvodina province, where one White-tailed Eagle, six Common Buzzards and one Golden Jackal were found dead with indicative signs of poisoning.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to obtain all the information needed from the relevant authorities, particularly information related to progress of official investigations, on time for the production of this report. Therefore, we have limited information regarding how many official investigations did the authorities launch, for which incidents forensic necropsy was conducted, and samples taken for toxicological analysis. This information will be included and further analysed within the second edition of the Study about illegal use of poison in the environment of the Balkan Peninsula. From the available data we know that the relevant governmental authorities were engaged in the field for documentation of 10 out of 11 reported poisoning events, and that forensic necropsies and toxicological analysis were performed for two incidents. However, we were not able to obtain the information about their results on time for this report.

During 2023 wildlife poisoning incidents mostly occurred in spring. March and April account for more than half (54,5%) of all documented poisoning events (Figure 8.). Seven out of eleven (63,6%) of all recorded poisoning events occurred in Vojvodina province, while three were documented in Belgrade region and one in the region of Šumadija and Western Serbia.

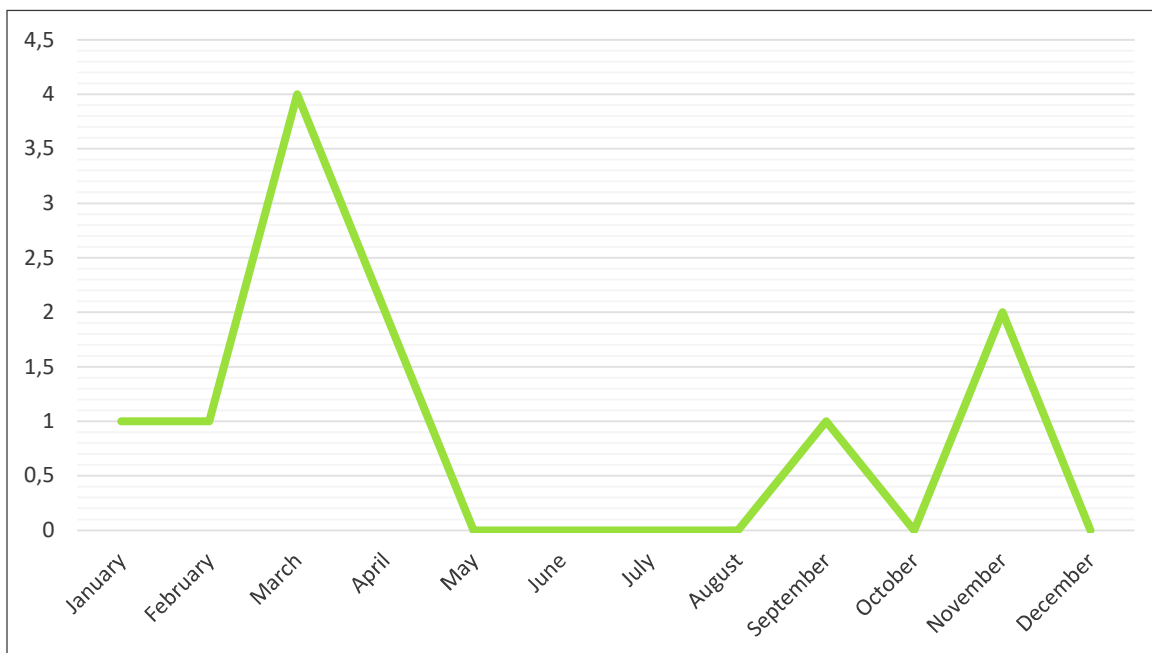


Figure 8. Temporal distribution of poisoning events during 2023 in Serbia



## Annex I. Poisoning and presumable poisoning incidents recorded in the Balkan Peninsula in 2023.

No.	Species	No. of poisoned animals	Date/ Period	Location	Type of poisoning	Main driver	Poison bait	Substance
1.	Common Buzzard <i>1 goat</i>	1	11.01.2023	Greece: Rodos	unknown	unknown	no	-
2.	Beech marten	1	12.01.2023	Greece: Rodos	intentional	unknown	bones	-
3.	European hare	1	14.01.2023	Greece: Rodos	intentional	conflicts with foxes/ damages to game animals	fat	-
4.	European hedgehog	1	23.01.2023	Greece: Crete, Chania	intentional	unknown	piece of sausage	-
5.	Common Buzzard <i>2 dogs, 1 cat</i>	1	29.01.2023	Greece: Crete, Irakleio	intentional	unknown	food remains	-
6.	European hedgehog	1	05.02.2023	Greece: Crete, Irakleio	unknown	unknown	no	-
7.	European hedgehog	1	27.04.2023	Greece: Crete, Irakleio	intentional	unknown	piece of sausage	-
8.	Red fox <i>1 domestic dog</i>	12	11.05.2023	Greece: Megara	intentional	conflicts with foxes/ damages to game animals	paraffin bait with cyanide	-
9.	European badger; European hedgehog <i>1 shepherd dog, 1 hunting dog</i>	1; 1	10.06.2023	Greece: Soufli	intentional	conflicts with wolves/ livestock losses	mince meat	-
10.	Common Kestrel; Larus spp.	1; 1	19.06.2023	Greece: Crete, Lasithi	unknown	conflict with hunting dogs	no	-
11.	European hedgehog	1	20.09.2023	Greece: Crete, Chania	intentional	unknown	piece of sausage	-
12.	Beech marten	1	27.09.2023	Greece: Crete, Chania	unknown	unknown	no	-
13.	European hedgehog	1	05.10.2023	Greece: Crete, Chania	unknown	unknown	no	-
14.	Beech marten	1	11.10.2023	Greece: Crete, Lasithi	intentional	unknown	plastic container with milk	-
15.	European hedgehog	1	23.10.2023	Greece: Crete, Lasithi	unknown	unknown	no	-
16.	European hedgehog <i>1 domestic cat</i>	1	28.11.2023	Greece: Crete, Lasithi	unknown	unknown	no	-
17.	Golden Eagle; Red Kite; Golden jackal	2; 1; 1	18.12.2023	Greece: Evros	intentional	conflicts with wolves/ livestock losses	whole carcass	-

18.	Griffon Vulture	3	23.12.2023	Greece: Empessos	intentional	conflicts with wolves/ livestock losses	whole calf carcass	-
19.	Common Buzzard 2 domestic dogs	2	30.01.2023	Serbia: Novi Bečej	unknown	unknown	no	-
20.	Peregrine Falcon	1	24.02.2023	Serbia: Kragujevac	intentional	conflicts with birds of prey	no	-
21.	Rook; Common Buzzard; Sparrowhawk; Turtle Dove; Wood Pigeon	2; 1; 2; 2; 1	02.03.2023	Serbia: Stari Banovci	unintentional	misuse of pesticides	no	-
22.	Feral pigeon	3	10.03.2023	Serbia: Barajevo	intentional	conflicts with birds of prey	3 feral pigeons smeared with Carbofuran	Carbofuran
23.	Peregrine Falcon	1	14.03.2023	Serbia: Belgrade	unknown	unknown	no	-
24.	White-tailed Eagle; Common Buzzard; Golden jackal	1; 6; 1	29.03.2023	Serbia: Novi Sad, Bački Petrovac	intentional	conflicts with jackals	no	-
25.	White-tailed Eagle	1	12.04.2023	Serbia: Stara Pazova	unknown	unknown	no	-
26.	Hen Harrier	2	13.04.2023	Serbia: Odžaci	unknown	unknown	no	-
27.	White-tailed Eagle	1	19.09.2023	Serbia: Bačka Topola	intentional	unknown	yes	-
28.	Feral pigeon	10	12.11.2023	Serbia: Pančevo	unknown	unknown	no	-
29.	Common Buzzard	1	22.11.2023	Serbia: Belgrade	unknown	unknown	no	-