United Nations Environment Programme

Mediterranean Action Plan

Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas

Report on an Ornithological Survey in Albania from 25 January to 4 February 2005

© T.Bino

By :

- Taulant Bino
- Michael Smart

REPORT ON AN ORNITHOLOGICAL SURVEY IN ALBANIA, 25 JANUARY – 4 FEBRUARY 2005

By Taulant Bino and Michael Smart

1. International Framework

Albania is a Contracting Party to most of the international biodiversity-related conventions, including the Barcelona Convention, Ramsar, CITES, Biological Diversity, the Bonn Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), and AEWA (the Afro-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement under the Convention on Migratory Species).

The present survey was organized under a Memorandum of Understanding between AEWA, RAC/SPA (the Regional Activities Centre on Specially Protected Areas of the UNEP Mediterranean Action Programme, based in Tunis), and the Department of Nature Protection, Ministry of Environment, Albania (National Focal Point for RAC/SPA)

The Action Plan for the conservation of bird species listed in Annex II of the Protocol concerning specially protected areas and biological diversity in the Mediterranean

The UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) brings together 21 countries round the Mediterranean, operating within the framework of the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the marine environment and the coastal region of the Mediterranean. They adopted in 1995 a "Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean" which includes in its Annex II a "List of Endangered or Threatened Species". This List includes fifteen species of bird, and at the latest Conference of the Parties in Catania, Sicily in November 2003, an Action Plan for the conservation of these species was adopted, following similar plans on monk seal, marine turtles, cetaceans and marine vegetation. The Action Plan for Birds notes initiatives taken by bodies such as BirdLife International partners in Mediterranean countries, WWF, IUCN, Medmaravis and Tour du Valat, which contributed to the development of the text. The fifteen birds include a variety of species of differing status, some globally endangered, some whose breeding area is concentrated on rocky Mediterranean islands, some found mostly in beaches and coastal lagoons, as follows: Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*, Mediterranean Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan*, Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*, European Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*, Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*, White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*, Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*, Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*, Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*, Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*, Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*, Lesser

Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*, Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* and Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*.

2. Objectives

- To search for Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*, a critically endangered species, one of the rarest birds of the Western Palearctic with a total world population of less than 100 birds, which breeds in western Siberia and migrates through the Black Sea to winter in the Mediterranean. There have been autumn records in the Black Sea in the last two years, and wintering records in Morocco and Italy in the last fifteen years. There are records of small numbers in Albania in November 1992 (at Patok) and February 1993 (at Butrint). Albania is a likely wintering area, which has not been surveyed in detail for this species in recent years, though midwinter counts of waterbirds have been carried out on an almost annual basis. Slender-billed Curlew is one of the fifteen species on the RAC/SPA Action Plan for Birds, and is the subject of a special agreement under AEWA.
- To investigate the status in Albania of the other 14 bird species on the RAC/SPA Bird Action Plan.
- To carry out a mid-winter waterbird census in Albania, at the time of the midwinter International Waterbird Census, organized by Wetlands International (WI), and to record other wintering birds.
- To confirm which wetlands are of major importance for wintering waterbirds.
- To help strengthen ornithological research and recording structures in Albania.
- To test in field conditions the use of the RAC/SPA Standard Data Sheet.

3. Participants

- Dr Taulant BINO, Museum of Natural History, Tirana (TB).
- Michael SMART (RAC/SPA consultant) (MS)

TB is Albania's most experienced ornithologist, and has taken part in most surveys of winter waterbirds carried out in Albania over the last fifteen years. MS took part in the survey for Slender-billed Curlews in Tunisia in January 2003, and in Libya in January 2005.

4. Programme

A number of sites were covered between 25 January and 3 February. See Appendix 1 for descriptions of the wetlands visited.

On 4 February a meeting was held at the Ministry of Environment in Tirana to discuss the results of the survey and to review the draft recommendations.

5. Results

Weather during the visit: In general weather conditions were difficult, with a series of wet and windy days at the beginning of the visit, improving slightly towards the end. These difficult conditions may well have influenced the numbers of birds recorded.

Slender-billed Curlew: Sadly, no Slender-billed Curlews were found. Nevertheless, many sites with suitable habitat were identified, in general coastal sites with shallow brackish water, and surrounding vegetation of *Salicornia/Arthrocnemum*, which could support Slender-billed Curlews and are worth further study in future. Among these, the following were considered to be particularly suitable for wintering Slederbills: Patok, Karavasta, Narta and Butrint; furthermore during autumn and spring migration the species might well use any of the coastal wetlands as stopover points. Eurasian Curlews were recorded at most of the sites, generally in flocks of several dozen birds; it seems likely that any wintering Slender-billed Curlews might associate with Eurasian Curlews.

Other RAC/SPA Bird Action Plan species:
The following other 14 RAC/SPA species were recorded:

- Pygmy Cormorant (numerous at Shkoder, small numbers at other northern sites)
- Dalmatian Pelican (at Velipoja, wintering) and at Karavasta where breeding activities had already commenced.
- Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* (wintering at many coastal sites).

It should further be noted that some of the other species included in the RAC/SPA Action Plan are summer visitors (so were not seen in this January survey) and are known to nest in Albania. Little Tern *S. albifrons* certainly nests; some of the

shearwaters and petrels might nest on offshore islands (eg. Salazani), as no detailed ornithological investigations have ever been carried out in the breeding season.

A Symposium on the Ecology of Seabirds is to be held, in the framework of the RAC/SPA Action Plan on birds, in Barcelona, Spain from 17-19 November 2005.

Surveys and censuses of other wintering waterbirds:
All species of waterbirds were counted at each site (see Appendix 2 for full details). A total of some 57,000 waterbirds, of a wide range of species, was recorded including 295 birds of 5 species of divers and grebes, 1,241 birds of two species of cormorant, over 473 herons of 3 species, nearly 29,000 ducks of 12 species, nearly 10,000 coots, about 12,500 waders of 15 species, about 3,500 gulls of six and 92 terns of two species. The numbers were rather lower than recorded in previous winter surveys; this decrease may be due to very mild weather in November and December 2004, or to hunting pressure, or to habitat degradation, to the difficult observation conditions, or to a combination of all these factors.

Among world endangered species, Dalmatian Pelican and Pygmy Cormorant were recorded.

Among unusual wintering waterbirds were six Bewick's Swans at Karavasta. As in previous winter surveys, small numbers of divers and Velvet Scoter, species which just reach the Adriatic and Ionian seas from their breeding places in Siberia, were recorded.

In recent years, programmes of colour ringing of a number of species have been carried out in the Mediterranean, notably on Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Spoonbill and several species of gull. Birds seen were checked for rings, but none were found. In fact no Flamingos were seen; only 17 Spoonbills, all at Butrint; 15 of the latter were checked for rings, and were definitely not ringed; Albania must be an important stopover site in spring and autumn for Spoonbills moving between their wintering grounds in North Africa and breeding site in the Danube Basin. A Symposium on Spoonbills, organised by the International Spoonbill Working Group, was held in Hungary in September 2005; the next meeting in this series is to be held in Tunisia in 2007; it would be of great value if an Albanian participant could attend.

No ringed gulls were found. It would be of great interest in future to continue monitoring these species for rings.

Confirmation of the importance of Albanian wetlands for waterbirds:
Previous studies have already identified the importance of Albanian sites for waterbirds. Site descriptions of all major wetlands visited are given in Appendix 1. However, the following wetlands stood out, either for the numbers of birds seen, for their representative or unique character, or for their very near-natural conditions:

- Karavasta
- Narta
- Drini
- Patok

In addition, it should be noted that many Albanian rivers (eg Vjosa, Mat, Drinos) are still in a very near-natural condition and could well be candidates for Ramsar designation.

Strengthening of ornithological research and recording structures in Albania.

As yet there are few experienced ornithologists in Albania; the survey made it possible to practise some identification and census techniques with Albanian colleagues. Much discussion took place of future activities required between participants and at the meeting on 4 February.

The Museum of Natural History comes under the authority of the University, and advises the Ministry of Environment on biodiversity issues; the Dean of the Faculty of Science is a mathematician. The Ministry of Environment has an Institute of Environment which deals with mainly chemical and pollution issues. The management of protected areas is generally carried out by the Forestry Department of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Currently, the Museum collects data on wintering waterbirds, mainly through the personal involvement of TB. These data are made available to the Ministries of Environment and Agriculture as required. It is an excellent principle for the collection, verification, storage and analysis of data to be entrusted to a different body from the management authority, and it is strongly suggested that this system should continue and be strengthened.

It would be of great value for the Museum to establish a formal bird recording system, perhaps beginning with wintering waterbirds, for which the most data are currently available, and perhaps also for the 15 species on the RAC/SPA Action plan. This could be the basis for a future comprehensive bird data basis and monitoring system. The principal impediment is the lack of experienced ornithologists, which should be addressed.

At present, NGOs dealing with birds are not very active in Albania, and there is no formal Albanian partner organization for BirdLife International, though Important Bird Areas in Albania have been identified (largely by TB) and published by BirdLife. It seems important to establish better links with BirdLife with a view ultimately to establishing a formal BirdLife partner.

Use of the RAC/SPA Standard Data Sheet

Completion of this extremely comprehensive Data Sheet would require input from a multi-disciplinary team and a great deal of time; the expertise of participants in this survey was mainly ornithological, and their time was limited, given the huge area covered. The site descriptions in Appendix 1 will be presented on the basis of Section 4 of the Data sheet, and Appendix 2 could be used for the accounts of bird species.

Site descriptions of most major sites already exist (eg. in TB's doctorate thesis, in IBA publications, in Ramsar site descriptions, in accounts of previous winter waterbirds surveys). It seems unnecessary to repeat these descriptions in a new format, and it is suggested that efforts be made to coordinate site recording techniques (particularly for coastal wetlands) for different international bodies

(Ramsar, RAC/SPA, BirdLife) in a single format, combining the RAC/SPA and Ramsar recording sheets

Hunting pressure in Albania

Hunting pressure is extremely heavy in Albania, even in protected areas, where it is theoretically forbidden. We met hunters on every day of the week at every site visited, even at Butrint where pressure was nevertheless lower. This very wide practice of hunting is apparently a fairly recent phenomenon. Until the end of the 1990s, firearms were not widely distributed, but since then they have become widely available and almost everyone in country areas has a firearm.

The situation was particularly worrying at Karavasta, where two hunters were seen hunting on the island where the endangered Dalmatian Pelican breeds. The pelicans (surprisingly) were already in breeding condition and were occupying the nesting island, perhaps already incubating. The presence of the hunters caused the birds to leave the island, and they were extremely slow to return after the hunters left, several hours at least. This must present a major threat to this very rare species. Numbers of the species nesting at Karavasta have decreased gradually in recent years, whereas the colony in the Greek sector of Lake Mikra Prespa, very close to the Albanian border has prospered

6. Suggested follow up activities

6.1 Further ornithological surveys: The current survey has of course raised more questions than it has answered. A number of additional ornithological surveys would be desirable in the future (and might be carried out in association with broader wetland surveys or inventories carried out by such bodies as MedWet).

Recommendation: Further ornithological surveys and monitoring should be carried out in Albania, with special attention being paid to the following subjects:

- Further winter searches for Slender-billed Curlew, with more concentrated attention on certain key sites such as Patok, Karavasta, Narta and Butrint; but also at passage periods, especially in autumn (September - November).
- Breeding of RAC/SPA species, especially Dalmatian Pelican and Little Tern. In view of the success in conservation measures at colonies of Dalmatian Pelicans in neighbouring countries (notably Greece) and the decrease of the numbers of nesting birds at Karavasta, it is suggested that exchange visits be arranged for Albanian ornithologists and for local community leaders from the Karavasta area to the Greek colonies and vice versa. For Little Terns, the project originally proposed by RAC/SPA in 2004 (to study concentrations of Little Terns after the breeding season, in collaboration with Italian studies in the Adriatic), should be carried out in the future, if possible in 2006.
- Continued surveys of wintering birds, and continuing regular contributions each January to the International Waterbird Census organized by Wetlands International, with input from external experts as required, at least at the most important sites; this would be particularly important in view of the survey's findings on. Standardized counting systems have already been developed so that coverage is comparable form one year to another.

- Spoonbills: need for observation and ring reading, especially in spring and autumn; participation at the Tunisian meeting in 2007.

6.2. Application of existing regulations on protected sites and hunting: It was evident at most of the sites visited (many of them legally classified as protected areas) that neither the legislation on protected areas nor that in hunting was being strictly applied. Unauthorized construction, dishing and hunting is carried on in many, indeed in practically all, protected areas. This is clearly to a large extent a result of the country's difficult economic situation and the lack of resources available to many country people; in some sites (notably Karavasta and Narta) extensive campaigns of public awareness have been carried out, and have had some results, but the situation is still difficult. It is important that resources should be made available to the Ministries of Environment and Agriculture to develop public awareness activities and policing so as to promote implementation of conservation legislation. Effective application of existing laws at protected sites is a much higher priority than listing of new sites.

Recommendation: The Albanian authorities should take measures (public awareness, policing to reduce the impact of illegal activities (uncontrolled building, fishing and hunting) at major sites, especially protected areas, and should take measures (such as stricter application of hunting legislation, establishment of non-hunting areas, control of poachers) to reduce this impact, which is undoubtedly excessive. This is particularly important at Karavasta around the Pelican nesting site

6.3 Ramsar Listing of additional Albanian wetlands: Albania has designated two sites (Butrint and Karavasta) for the Ramsar List of wetlands of international importance.

Recommendation: the Albanian authorities should consider designating, as soon as possible, the three wetlands mentioned above (Narta, Drini, Patok) as wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. Consideration should also be given to listing of rivers.

Given the Ramsar Convention's current focus on cultural values of wetlands, special attention might be paid to certain sites with historical cultural interest; Butrint has already been designated, but others might be listed.

6.4 National protection measures for other sites: A number of sites are worthy of protection at national level. Among these are: ( ).

Recommendation: the Albanian authorities should consider taking measures at national level (e.g. establishment of Protected Areas) at the above sites.

6.5 Special Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs) under the Barcelona Convention: The 1995 Protocol to the Barcelona Convention establishes SPAMIs. In order to develop a spirit of marine and coastal environmental protection in the Mediterranean region, the SPA/Biodiversity protocol defined a new concept, that of "Specially Protected Area of Mediterranean Importance" (SPAMI) and has provided for drawing up a "SPAMI List" since 2001. The general characteristics of sites to be included on the SPAMI List are defined in Article 8. They are sites which

"are of importance for conserving the components of biological diversity in the Mediterranean" or "contain ecosystems specific to the Mediterranean area or habitats of endangered species" or "are of special interest at the scientific, aesthetic, cultural or educational level".

Recommendation: The Albanian authorities should give consideration to amending legislation so that some of the above sites can be designated as SPAMIs in the framework of the Barcelona Convention.

6.6. Symposium on Species in Annex II, November 2005, Spain: The first Mediterranean Symposium on the ecology and conservation of species in Annex II of the RAC/SPA Action Plan on Birds will be held from 17-19 November 2005 on Vilanova I la Geltru, Barcelona, Spain.

Recommendation: It is strongly recommended that at least one Albanian representative should take part in this symposium, in order to participate in the discussion of further activities under the Action Plan, and to report on Albania's plans for implementation of the plan.

6.7. Publication of the results of the present survey: The current survey has produced a wealth of information on the avifauna of Albania, which will be of great interest to the international ornithological community. Given the paucity of recent data on Albania, this should be given the widest publicity in appropriate ornithological journals.

Recommendation: The participants in the survey should make the results of the counts available not only to RAC/SPA and AEWA, but should communicate their waterbird counts to Wetlands International.

6.8 Training courses: Albania still has only a small number of competent field ornithologists. Members of the survey team emphasize that competence in field ornithology requires long practice and experience in the field

Recommendation: The Albanian authorities should organize practical training courses in field ornithology for interested persons, with the support of bodies like RAC/SPA, ONCFS or Tour du Valat, which have considerable experience in this field.

6.9. Ornithological structures: One of the essentials for successful policy making is the availability of reliable data. If the Albanian authorities wish to conserve the undoubtedly rich bird life of the country, they will need to have access to sound data, going back over a long period. The need for such data was acknowledged at the meeting on 4 February.

Recommendation: The Albanian authorities should consider establishing a national ornithological data base at the Museum of Natural history, to collect, validate, store and analyse data on Albania's birds. This data base should be managed by competent ornithologists. At the same time there is a need to re-invigorate conservation NGOs (non-governmental organizations), dealing with birds, particularly in areas around the

major wetlands. In the long run there is a need to establish a body which could become an Albanian partner for BirdLife.

7. Thanks

The members of the survey team wish to extend their warmest thanks to the many people who provided help and support during their visit. Particular thanks are due to:

- Mr Zamir DEDEJ, Director of Nature Protection at the Ministry of Environment, Tirana, who gave authority for the visit, and provided essential moral and logistic support.
- The Environment Department of Lezhe.
- The Director and staff of the Narta Medwet coast project.
- The Director and staff of the Butrint Reserve.

The RAC/SPA consultant would like to express particular thanks to his Albanian colleagues, not only for their companionship in the field, but also for their unfailing kindness and constant concern to demonstrate Albania's cultural and natural diversity.

8. References

Bino T (1998): *L'avifaune aquatique du système lagunaire méditerranéen de Karavasta (Albanie) et sa conservation.* Cyclostyled doctoraate thesis, 177 pages + annexes, University of Montpellier.

Bino T, C. Tourenq, Y. Kayser, S. Busuttil, J. Crozier, B. J. Dore & F. Bego (1996) : *Recensement des oiseaux d'eau hivernants en Albanie (14 -31 janvier 1996).* Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat and Natural History Museum, Tirana. Cyclostyled report 102 pp.

Bino T & G. Jorgo (2002): *Conservation status and threats over Albanian wetlands.* Albanian Society for the Protection of birds and Mammals. Cyclostyled report 47 pp.

Gjiknuri L & N. Peja (1992): *Albanian Lagoons: their importance and economic development.* In Finlayson C M, G E Hollis & T J Davis (Eds): *Managing Mediterranean wetlands and their birds.* IWRB Special Publication No 20, pp 130-133.

Kayser Y, T. Bino & M. Gautier-Clerc (1995) : *Recensement des oiseaux d'eau hivernants en Albanie 17 janvier – 7 février 1995*. Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat. Cyclostyled report 79 pp.

Kayser Y, T. Bino, F. Bego, W. Fremuth & G. Jorgo (1997) : *Recensement des oiseaux d'eau hivernants en Albanie (3- 19 janvier 1997).* Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat and Natural History Museum, Tirana. Cyclostyled report 52 pp.

Vangeluwe D & M-O Beudels (1992) : Approche préliminaire du statut et de la distribution de *Pelecanus crispus* et *Pelecanus onocrotalus* en Albanie. Cyclostyled report 5 pp.

Vangeluwe D, M-O Beudels & F. Lamani : *Evaluation de l'état de conservation des zones humides du littoral albanais et appréciation de leurs potentialité pour le Courlis à bec grêle Numenius tenuirostris* in (1994) : Préparation d'un plan de sauvetage pour Numenius tenuirostris, Rapport à la Commission des Communautés européennes. Cyclostyled report.

Zekhuis M J & D Tempelman (1998): *Breeding birds of the Albanian wetlands, spring 1996*. WIWO report Nr 64, Zeist, Netherlands

Albania January 2005: site descriptions

The following site descriptions follow Sections 3 and 4 of the RAC/SPA Standard Data Form (SDF). In addition, the site's category is given according to the Ramsar classification of wetland types, which is rather more detailed than the coastal wetland type given in Section 3 of SDF. The main Ramsar category is given first in bold, with other less important types listed afterwards. Descriptions are given for all the major wetlands visited, but not for non wetland sites o for very small wet areas of no significance. It must be emphasized that the main basis for the descriptions are ornithological data. The date of the visit is given, together with the amount of the area covered (sometimes relatively limited in the case of very large coastal sebkhets).

An indication of the suitability of the site for Slender-billed Curlew is given (following the system adopted in the Tunisian Slender-billed Curlew survey in 2003), with separate entries for feeding and roosting areas, based on the assumptions that the species' feeding habitat preference is for coastal areas with *Arthrocnemum,* and inland ephemeral wetlands and wet depressions, also with *Arthocnemum*. Habitat suitability is given for feeding and roosting, on a scale of 0 to 2, 0 meaning poor, 1 meaning moderate, 2 meaning high.

SDF Coastal categories:

Coastal areas:
- Coastal wetlands (lagoons, estuaries, deltas, saltpans)
- Saltmarshes
- Dunes, sandy beaches, rocky beaches
- Marine cliffs, rocky coasts
- Mudflats and sandbanks
- Bush, maquis and garrigue
- Woodland
- Agricultural land
- Other sites (including urbanized and industrial areas, roads, rubbish tips, factories)

Marine areas:
- Hard bottoms
- Rocks
- Muds
- Sands
- Gravel bottoms
- Pebbles
- Marine vegetation beds
- Caves
- Other marine bottoms

Ramsar categories found in Albania (only principal category listed):

(a) Marine/Coastal

A: ("Shallow permanent marine waters, in most cases shallower in than six metres in depth, including marine bays or straits"): Patoku

B: ("Subtidal marine aquatic flats")

D: ("Rocky marine shores, including rocky islands, sea cliffs"):

E: ("Beaches of fine or coarse sand, including sandbanks and sandspits, sandy islands, dune systems and damp depressions between the dunes"): Lalzi Bay

F: ("Estuarine waters, permanent estuaries and deltas"): Drini Delta; Velipoja (part)

J: ("Brackish or saline coastal lagoon linked to the sea by a relatively narrow channel")

ZK (a): ("Coastal karstic systems")

(b) Inland

O: ("Permanent freshwater lakes (more than 8 hectares), including large oxbows"): Lake Shkoder

Q: ("Permanent saline/brackish/alkaline lakes"):

R: ("Salty lakes and seasonal or intermittent brackish or alkaline areas"): Sp: ("Permanent saline, brackish or alkaline lakes"):

Ss: ("Saline, brackish or alkaline pools, seasonal or intermittent"):

Tp: ("Permanent freshwater pools and marshes; ponds (less than 8 hectares, marshes on inorganic soils; with emergent vegetation dry for the major part of the growing season at least"): Dumi Marsh; Velipoja (part)

Y: ("Freshwater springs"):

(c) Artificial

5: ("Salt production"):

6: ("Water storage areas"):

8: ("Sites for treatment of waste water, including sediment ponds, oxidization ponds etc):

9: ("Drainage ditches and canals"):

Section 4 of RAC/SPA SDF

4.1 Quality and importance

4.2 Conservation Status

4.3 Vulnerability

4.4. Designation of site (remarks on the quantitative data below)

4.5 Ownership

4.6 References

RAC/SPA SDF site classification:

Ramsar Classification:

Suitability for Slender-billed Curlew:

Lalzi Bay

Visited on 25 January 2005, observation conditions poor, with light rain, poor light. Area covered: from peninsula north of Durres, to mouth of major drainage channel south of River Erzeni estuary (essentially same as shown in Kayser *et al* 1995).

4.1 Quality and importance

A long beach (perhaps 20kms long), between two rocky peninsulas north of the town of Durres, with the dune system behind it. The area normally covered on winter ornithological surveys covers not the whole beach, but the area from the peninsula to the Erzeni estuary, about eight kms. Total surface 1400 hectares including water surface of 560 hectares (Bino & Jorgo 2002)

The coastal plain is in fact the estuary of the River Erzeni; this plain has been reclaimed for agriculture in the past but is still very damp with areas of standing water in winter; the coastal wetland is separated from the coastal plain (mainly used for grazing nowadays) by a stone causeway, along which a poor unmetalled track goes, perhaps a kilometre from the sea. Between this causeway and the beach there is a zone of Salicornia / Arthrocnemum crossed by ditches which carry water away from the inland agricultural area. There are extensive plantations of Umbrella Pine to stabilize the sand dunes, and many wet areas with reeds and other vegetation in wet areas of the dunes.

Until recently the area was under military control and there are still large numbers of abandoned pillboxes and bunkers, so there is little or no building along the beach. Fishing, using "bilanz" nets" and sheep grazing are practised on a small scale. There are a number of shooting butts along the beach, behind which shooters hide to hunt ducks.

Only MAP species seen was Sandwich Tern (13 resting on posts offshore). Among other species present were over 1,600 Wigeon on the sea (perhaps more because many were far out to sea); they no doubt feed on the coastal plain by night, but by day stay on the sea to take refuge from hunters. Small numbers of waders were on the beach, perhaps 200 in all. In all 1,763 waterbirds of 14 species were seen. These numbers are lower than those recorded in previous winter surveys: 3,887 waterbirds of 28 species in 1995; 10,020 waterbirds of 23 species in 1996; 7,421 waterbirds of 20 species in 1997 and 7,913 birds of 29 species in 2001 (Bino & Jorgo, 2002). The lower numbers may reflect a general tendency, but were no doubt also influenced by poor observation conditions on the day of the visit in 2005).

Fairly untouched coastal area, with fair numbers of birds, and potential for more if some control of hunting were to be introduced. Considered by Bino & Jorgo (2002) to be "a site of medium importance for waterbirds".

4.2 Conservation Status

This area is not protected; north of the Erzeni mouth is Rrushkulli Nature Reserve, a woodland site (IUCN Category 4); although the site is formally established as a reserve, the Forestry Department of the Agriculture Ministry was been unable to prevent illegal cutting of trees between 1992 and 1995, so that much of the value of the protected area has been lost.

Included as Albanian Important Bird Area 015 by BirdLife International.

4.3 Vulnerability

Some threats to the habitat were apparent; the beach is used by local bathers in summer, and there are one or two restaurants and beach facilities. There is clearly industrial pollution flowing in from the industrial complex in the coastal plain at Porto Romano (large amounts of foam seen in the water); and much sold waste (plastic bottles etc carried in the rivers and drainage ditches. The main threat from the birds' point of view is the heavy and uncontrolled hunting; we saw five hunters in action on a week day, and there were other hunters in the restaurants. Bino & Jorgo (2002) rate illegal cutting of forest and industrial pollution as very high impacts, solid waste as a high impact; former drainage programmes, illegal hunting, illegal constructions, massive tourist development and human disturbance as medium impacts, and overgrazing and overfishing as low impacts.

4.4. Designation of site (remarks on the quantitative data below)

Worth protecting as untouched coastline; numbers of birds not enormous, but could increase under protective regime.

4.5 Ownership

Public?

4.6 References

Bino T, Ch. Tourenq, Y. Kayser, S. Busuttil, J. Crozier, B.J. Dore & F. Bego (1996) : *Recensement des oiseaux d'eau hivernants en Albanie (14 -31 janvier 1996)*. Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat and Natural History Museum, Tirana. Cyclostyled report 102 pp.

Bino T & G. Jorgo (2002): *Conservation status and threats over Albanian wetlands.* Albanian Society for the Protection of birds and Mammals. Cyclostyled report 47 pp.

Kayser Y, T. Bino & M. Gautier-Clerc (1995): *Recensement des oiseaux d'eau hivernants en Albanie 17 janvier – 7 février 1995*. Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat. Cyclostyled report 79 pp.

Kayser, T. Bino, F. Bego, W. Fremuth & g. Jorgo (1997): *Recensement des oiseaux d'eau hivernants en Albanie (3- 19 janvier 1997).* Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat and Natural History Museum, Tirana. Cyclostyled report 52 pp.

Vangeluwe D, M-O Beudels & F. Lamani : *Evaluation de l'état de conservation des zones humides du littoral albanais et appréciation de leurs potentialité pour le Courlis à bec grêle Numenius tenuirostris* in (1994) : Préparation d'un plan de sauvetage pour Numenius tenuirostris, Rapport à la Commission des Communautés européennes. Cyclostyled report.

RAC/SPA SDF site classification: Dunes, sandy beaches, rocky beaches

Ramsar Classification: **Marine/Coastal E:** ("Beaches of fine or coarse sand, including sandbanks and sandspits, sandy islands, dune systems and damp depressions between the dunes"):

Suitability for Slender-billed Curlew: 1-2: Salicornia area, about 30 Eurasian Curlew present in January 2005; shallow coastal waters, with Salicornia. Not visited by Vangeluwe *et al* in November 1992 and May 1993.

Patoku Complex

Visited on 26 January 2005 in appalling weather conditions; a light south west wind brought a weather front that met cold northern air, producing heavy rain, thunder and lightning, with occasional clear periods between storms. Area covered essentially the same as that covered in Kayser *et al*. (1995).

4.1 Quality and importance

On the coast north of Lalzi Bay, seaward of the village of Patok. An area seaward of the coastal plain, with a total surface of 2194 hectares including a water surface of 620 hectares (Bino & Jorgo 2002). Two major rivers (River Mati to the north in the immediate area of the complex, and the River Ishmi much further south), carrying waters from the high mountains inland, reach the sea and form a complex of lagoons; formerly there was an extensive coastal marsh, now drained. The River Mati is a very large river with a broad, imposing bed, with extensive banks of pebbles and gravel, clearly prone to spates following heavy rain in the mountains. At least one hydroelectric dam has been built in the mountains.

Of the two largest lagoons, one is directly connected to the sea with a narrow opening through the coastal sandbar, the other is separated by a causeway along which a series of buildings used by fishermen and as restaurants are sited. Waters fresher in winter with inflow from rivers, no doubt higher salt content in summer. Some vegetation (*Salicornia, Juncus, Tamarix*) along the causeway and in shallower areas, but rather little shallow water or open edges where vegetation might develop. Only area of shallow edge was along the coastal sand bar which appears to be extending southwards, and on which a house (complete with flock of farmyard geese!) has been built, apparently recently. Fisheries using "bilanz" system (notably in drainage channels and across exit to sea) and also nets on poles planted in water

Only MAP species seen was Sandwich Tern (about 20). Most birds (mainly waders, gulls and terns) were on the coastal sandspit which was inaccessible during our visit but would be worth visiting (by boat) in future). A total of 777 waterbirds of 16 species recorded, mainly gulls and waders (no ducks); one slightly unusual species was Red-throated Diver. Numbers lower than in previous surveys (4,400 birds of 24 species in 1995; 4,415 birds of 28 species in 1996; 2,004 birds of 16 species in 1997; 2,928 birds of 27 species in 2001, Bino & Jorgo, 2002); the reason for the lower numbers was perhaps the poor observation conditions. The main interest of the site, in the past, as in 2005 was for waders and gulls.

Vangeluwe et al (1994) considered that the shallow waters of the outer lagoon were "the only habitat of this type observed in Albania. The substrate, of alluvial origin, is extremely rich in terms of biomass, in contrast to mainly sandy coastal areas. The presence of nearly 3,000 waders in November 1992 and 1,500 in May 1993 confirms the value of this site".

4.2 Conservation Status

The site is a Managed Nature Reserve (IUCN Category 4) under the name of Fushe Kune – Patok, though there was little indication of any management activities or of the site's status during our visit.

Included as Important Bird Area 014 (**or 007? Check)** by BirdLife International

4.3 Vulnerability

Main threat seemed to be constant disturbance by hunters, fishermen and, no doubt more in summer, by people visiting beach and restaurant facilities; a variety of buildings, along the causeways, some in very poor state of repair and in danger of falling down, others being newly built.

Bino & Jorgo (2002) list the following threats: illegal cutting of forest (very high impact); human disturbance, illegal fishing and overgrazing (high impact); former drainage of wetlands, organic pollution from agriculture, industrial pollution, solid waste, overfishing and illegal constructions (medium impact).

4.4. Designation of site (remarks on the quantitative data below)

A coastal lagoon complex in near natural state, though the coastal plain inland has been drained. Considerable potential for management as a protected area, at least covering part of the site, and would probably merit Ramsar or SPAMI designation.

4.5 Ownership

Public?

4.6 References

Bino T, C. Tourenq, Y. Kayser, S. Busuttil, J. Crozier, B. J. Dore & F. Bego (1996) : *Recensement des oiseaux d'eau hivernants en Albanie (14 -31 janvier 1996)*. Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat and Natural History Museum, Tirana. Cyclostyled report 102 pp.

Bino T & G. Jorgo (2002): *Conservation status and threats over Albanian wetlands.* Albanian Society for the Protection of birds and Mammals. Cyclostyled report 47 pp.

Kayser Y, T. Bino & M. Gautier-Clerc (1995) : *Recensement des oiseaux d'eau hivernants en Albanie 17 janvier – 7 février 1995*. Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat. Cyclostyled report 79 pp.

Kayser Y, T. Bino, F. Bego, W. Fremuth & G. Jorgo (1997) : *Recensement des oiseaux d'eau hivernants en Albanie (3- 19 janvier 1997).* Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat and Natural History Museum, Tirana. Cyclostyled report 52 pp.

Vangeluwe D, M-O Beudels & F. Lamani : *Evaluation de l'état de conservation des zones humides du littoral albanais et appréciation de leurs potentialité pour le Courlis à bec grêle Numenius tenuirostris* in (1994) : Préparation d'un plan de sauvetage pour Numenius tenuirostris, Rapport à la Commission des Communautés européennes. Cyclostyled report.

RAC/SPA SDF site classification: Coastal wetlands (lagoons)

Ramsar Classification: **Marine/Coastal A:** ("Shallow permanent marine waters, in most cases shallower in than six metres in depth, including marine bays or straits"):

Suitability for Slender-billed Curlew: 2; shallow brackish lagoons seemed suitable, though no very large areas of Salicornia seen. Eurasian Curlews present. Five Slender-billed Curlews were observed at this site by Vangeluwe *et al* in November 1992, and were considered to be migrants.

Drini Delta (Kune & Vain)

Visited on 27 January 2005; weather conditions poor (heavy showers on south west wind, with thunder and lightening, visibility poor at times). Area covered as in Kayser *et al* (1995), i.e. Vain (south of Drini River) area covered in morning, Kune area (north of Drini) covered in afternoon.

4.1 Quality and importance

The delta of the River Drini, north of Patoku, downstream of the city of Lezhe. The River Drini is the longest river in Albania by far; the Black Drini is the outlet for Lake Ohrid, flows north through the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo, joins with the White Drini at Kukes, then turns in a large arc, passing Lezhe before reaching the sea in a very large delta. However, during the Ottoman period, it was diverted, north of Lezhe (to protect Lezhe from flooding), to join the River Buna just south of Shkoder, so that the outlet for most of the water is now via the Buna mouth. Water still passes down the old course but in much smaller quantities than previously.

What remains is still a major river delta, with an area of shallow lagoons, mainly fresh in character ("Vain"), south of the Drini, and an area north of the river ("Kune"). The total area is 1700 hectares, with a water surface of 1,400 hectares (Bino & Jorgo, 2002). The whole site is on the seaward side of the coastal plain, much of which has been drained in the last century for agricultural purposes.

Vain, the more important sector, is an area of shallow freshwater lagoons with open water areas and extensive reed-beds, with rather few areas of open mud or shallow water, suitable for waders. The reed-beds are some of the most extensive seen in Albania. It is separated from the sea by a sand bar with extensive woody vegetation (pines, willows and ashes), and is enclosed by a series of embankments. The water is mainly shallow (about 1-2 metres deep). The area is extensively used for fisheries, with nets in the lagoons and "bilanz" fisheries in the major water channels.

Kune, the northern section, comprises wet marshes, one deep lake ("Kenalla"), a series of shallow marshy lakes, and the river mouth. The deep lake receives some water from underground springs of karstic origin, and also sewage inflow from the town of Shengjini. In the 1960s, the island at the mouth of the river held a huge colony of nesting herons, spoonbills and ibises, 2,500 breeding pairs, but this sadly disappeared because of human disturbance and change in habitat (salt water was channelled into the site, so that many of the trees on which the birds had nested were replaced by tamarisks).

MAP species seen included about a dozen Sandwich Terns and a single Pygmy Cormorant. Among less unusual birds, two Black-throated divers and a single Red-crested Pochard may be mentioned. A total of 2,137 waterbirds of 25 species were recorded, there were fair numbers of ducks, very few waders (only Lapwing) and fair numbers of gulls; this compares with 17,256 birds of 47 species in 1995, 9,823 birds of 35 species in 1996, 10,795 birds of 43 species in 1997 and 3,391 birds of 29 species in 2001 (Bino and Jorgo, 2002).

At the entry to Vain, there is a reserve building and observation tower. The site is currently the subject of a GEF project which will develop a management plan and

improve application of protection measures. It would appear logical, once this project is completed, to give the site an international designation; it would undoubtedly qualify as a Ramsar site, not on the grounds of the numerical ornithological criteria, but as an excellent example of a river delta with extensive reed-beds; it could also be listed as a SPAMI.

4.2 Conservation Status

Kune-Vaini is classified as a Managed Nature Reserve (IUCN Category 4). As noted already, the reserve buildings are more obvious, and protection measures appear to be more effective than at some other reserves (cf. the greater number of raptors, notably Marsh Harriers); but there is still illegal hunting (many cartridges found, shots heard and one or two hunters seen).

The site is listed as Albanian IBA 007 by BirdLife International.

4.3 Vulnerability

The main problem appeared to be illegal hunting. Bino & Jorgo rate the threats as follows: siltation of communication channels linking the lagoon with the sea; overfishing; illegal cutting of forests; overgrazing; illegal hunting; illegal constructions; high human disturbance (very high impact); deposition of solid waste, industrial pollution from formerly active paper factories (high impact); former drainage programmes; organic pollution from agriculture (medium impact).

4.4. Designation of site (remarks on the quantitative data below)

Would qualify as a Ramsar site or SPAMI

4.5 Ownership

Public?

4.6 References

Bino T, C. Tourenq, Y. Kayser, S. Busuttil, J. Crozier, B. J. Dore & F. Bego (1996) : *Recensement des oiseaux d'eau hivernants en Albanie (14 -31 janvier 1996)*. Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat and Natural History Museum, Tirana. Cyclostyled report 102 pp.

Bino T & G. Jorgo (2002): *Conservation status and threats over Albanian wetlands.* Albanian Society for the Protection of birds and Mammals. Cyclostyled report 47 pp.

Kayser Y, T. Bino & M. Gautier-Clerc (1995) : *Recensement des oiseaux d'eau hivernants en Albanie 17 janvier – 7 février 1995*. Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat. Cyclostyled report 79 pp.

Kayser Y, T. Bino, F. Bego, W. Fremuth & G. Jorgo (1997) : *Recensement des oiseaux d'eau hivernants en Albanie (3- 19 janvier 1997).* Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat and Natural History Museum, Tirana. Cyclostyled report 52 pp.

Vangeluwe D, M-O Beudels & F. Lamani : *Evaluation de l'état de conservation des zones humides du littoral albanais et appréciation de leurs potentialité pour le Courlis à bec grêle Numenius tenuirostris* in (1994) : Préparation d'un plan de

sauvetage pour Numenius tenuirostris, Rapport à la Commission des Communautés européennes. Cyclostyled report.

RAC/SPA SDF site classification: Coastal areas - Coastal wetlands (lagoons, deltas).

Ramsar Classification: **Marine/Coastal F**: ("Estuarine waters, permanent estuaries and deltas"):

Suitability for Slender-billed Curlew: 0/1. Practically no shallow water or muddy edges at Vain, though some at Kune. Water mainly fairly fresh, hence no Salicornia. Wader populations minimal as a result.

Lake Shkoder

Visited briefly on 28 January 2005; only a small sector of the site seen, the area visible from the city.

4.1 Quality and importance

4.2 Conservation Status

4.3 Vulnerability

4.4. Designation of site (remarks on the quantitative data below)

4.5 Ownership

4.6 References

RAC/SPA SDF site classification: Not applicable, inland site.

Ramsar Classification: **Inland O** ("Permanent freshwater lakes (more than 8 hectares), including large oxbows")

Suitability for Slender-billed Curlew: 0/1; large freshwater lake, not preferred habitat, but the species could conceivably mix with Eurasian Curlews round the banks.

Dumi Marsh

Visited on 28 January 2005, coverage as in Kayser et al 1995

4.1 Quality and importance

4.2 Conservation Status

4.3 Vulnerability

4.4. Designation of site (remarks on the quantitative data below)

4.5 Ownership

4.6 References

RAC/SPA SDF site classification: Not applicable, inland site.

Ramsar Classification: **Inland Tp**: ("Permanent freshwater pools and marshes; ponds (less than 8 hectares, marshes on inorganic soils; with emergent vegetation dry for the major part of the growing season at least").

Suitability for Slender-billed Curlew:

Velipoja

Visited on 29 January 2005, coverage much as in Kayser et al 1995.

4.1 Quality and importance

4.2 Conservation Status

4.3 Vulnerability

4.4. Designation of site (remarks on the quantitative data below)

4.5 Ownership

4.6 References

RAC/SPA SDF site classification:

Ramsar Classification: partly **Marine/Coastal F**: ("Estuarine waters, permanent estuaries and deltas"), partly **Inland Tp**: ("Permanent freshwater pools and marshes; ponds (less than 8 hectares, marshes on inorganic soils; with emergent vegetation dry for the major part of the growing season at least"). A mosaic of floodplain wetlands where a major river and an artificial side channel of that river reach the sea.
:

Suitability for Slender-billed Curlew:

Site name		Lalzi Bay 25.01.05	Patoku 26.01.05	Drini Delta - Vain 27.01.05	Drini Delta - Kune 27.01.05	Lake Shkoder 28.01.05	Dumi Marsh 28.01.05	Velipolje 28.01.05	Karavasta 29.01.05	Karavasta 30.01.05	Narta 31.01.05	Orikumi 01.02.05	Butrint 02.02.05																
English name	**Scientific name**																												
Waterbird species																													
Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*			11			9	22			21	4	2																
Great Crested Grebe	*Podiceps cristatus*	3	5	2	6				22	18	114	9	12																
Black-necked Grebe	*Podiceps nigricollis*							15		1			8																
Red-throated Diver	*Gavia stellata*		2	1				1																					
Black-throated Diver	*Gavia arctica*			2							1	4																	
Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*		2	150	6			173	291	52	253	9	98																
Pygmy Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax pygmaeus*				1	150+	47	5																					
Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*			55	2	2				65	8		14																
Great Egret	*Egretta alba*		5	45	38		1		34	121			1																
Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*				6					30		9	37																
Spoonbill	*Platalea leucorodia*												17																
Dalmatian Pelican	*Pelecanus crispus*							2	58	62																			
Bewick's Swan	*Cygnus bewickii*									6																			
Common Shelduck	*Tadorna tadorna*								155	51	166				372														
Wigeon	*Anas penelope*	1600		650				86	2895	3450	3390	30	960		13061														
Gadwall	*Anas strepera*			36							5	5	22		68														
Teal	*Anas crecca*							5		6412	2300	470	132		9319														
Mallard	*Anas platyrhynchos*							32		185	400		493		1110														
Pintail	*Anas acuta*							20	560	1000	80		45		1705														
Shoveler	*Anas clypeata*	5		3					1500	1200	30		100		2835														
Rec-crested Pochard	*Netta rufina*			1											1														
Pochard	*Aythya ferina*			2				27					106		135														
Goldeneye	*Bucephala clangula*				6			2			187				195														
Red-breasted Merganser	*Mergus serrator*							2	49	11			29		91														
Velvet Scoter	*Melanitta fusca*							8							8														
Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*			5			38					2	1		46														
Water Rail	*Rallus aquaticus*	2		10			3	1	4		2	2	2																
Coot	*Fulica atra*			395			55	1322	1600	200	2760	2500	1205																
Avocet	*Recurvirostra avosetta*		28						2	50	250				330														
Ringed Plover	*Charadrius hiaticula*									6					6														
Kentish Plover	*Charadrius alexandrinus*	7						8		34	30		2		81														
Golden Plover	*Pluvialis apricaria*								40	1000	1000		150		2190														
Grey Plover	*Pluvialis squatarola*	20	3							1			3		27														
Northern Lapwing	*Vanellus vanellus*		200	130					2100	2100	3009		842		8381														
Little Stint	*Calidris minuta*	25								34	10				69														
Dunlin	*Calidris alpina*	40								62	940		35		1077														
Unidentified Calidris	*Calidris spp*		20												20														
Snipe	*Gallinago gallinago*		1					1				1	1		4														
Woodcock	*Scolopax rusticola*			1											1														
Eurasian Curlew	*Numenius arquata*	32	22						18	21	20		184		297														
Slender-billed Curlew	*Numenius tenuirostris*														0														
Redshank	*Tringa totanus*	4	5							36	20		3		68														
Green Sandpiper	*Tringa ochropus*												1		1														
Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*							1					2		3														

			Total by species
			69
			191
			24
			1034
			53
			146
			245
			82
			17
			6
			744
			26122
			136
			18638
			2220
			3410
			5673
			270
			92
			26
			10037
			660
			12
			162
			4380
			54
			16762
			138
			2154
			8
			594
			136
			2
			6

Common Gull	Larus canus							5		1			2		8														
Mediterranean Gull	*Larus melanocephalus*		150	1	5			5							161														
Little Gull	*Larus minutus*		2					5	5						12														
Black-headed Gull	*Larus ridibundus*	5	300	50	454	50	20	65	11	570	860	15	705		3105														
Slender-billed Gull	*Larus genei*									15					15														
Yellow-legged Gull	*Larus michahellis*	5	5	5	40			42	5	100	15	5	29		251														
Caspian Tern	*Sterna caspia*												1		1														
Sandwich Tern	*Sterna sandvicensis*	13	30	11				12		1	15		9		91														
Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	2	2	5	2		2		7	3	4	2	2																
Total by site		**1763**	**782**	**1571**	**566**	**52**	**175**	**1867**	**9356**	**16898**	**15890**	**3067**	**5255**																

			322
			24
			6210
			30
			502
			2
			182
			31
			101606