

## **Information Network for Conservation of Fungal Diversity in Lake Prespa Basin**

In Lake Prespa basin the presence of rare and unique forest associations and substrates has a beneficial effect on the growth of specific mycoflora with plenty of rare species not only at the local but also European level.

In the last two decades, in the Macedonian part of Prespa region, there has been an immense interest for commercial collection of mushrooms, and an increased number of purchasers of self-grown edible fungi. Due to the low purchase price and the lack of secondary legislation on fungi protection, there is huge interest for export to countries from Western Europe. In the Albanian part of the basin there are not any mushroom purchase points yet but in recent years the local population has increasingly been collecting self-grown fungi to sell them to vendors from Macedonia. In Albania there are not by-laws on fungi either.

Excessive collection severely threatens fungi, in particular the rare and sensitive species. The intensive popularisation of fungi collecting in the basin has led to evident reduction of the populations of edible mushrooms. The inappropriate modes of collection by individual collectors destroy fungi mycelia and their habitats. Continuous removal of fruit bodies from the habitat decreases their capacity to reproduce and inhabit new areas, and causes genetic depletion of populations.

The project goal is fungal conservation and raising of public awareness of fungi significance for Lake Prespa basin by informing the local population on the rare and threatened species and the proper methods of collecting edible mushrooms, coupled by alarming and encouragement of the competent authorities as regards adoption and reinforced implementation of legislation on fungi conservation.

The target groups to benefit from the project are the local population, nature protection institutes and NGOs, forestry institutions, individual mushroom collectors, mushroom hunters' societies, mushroom purchase companies, and educational institutions from both countries.

The main project goal has been accomplished via workshops, lectures, exhibitions, and a round table, along with production of a leaflet and poster for raising the awareness of fungi in Prespa region.