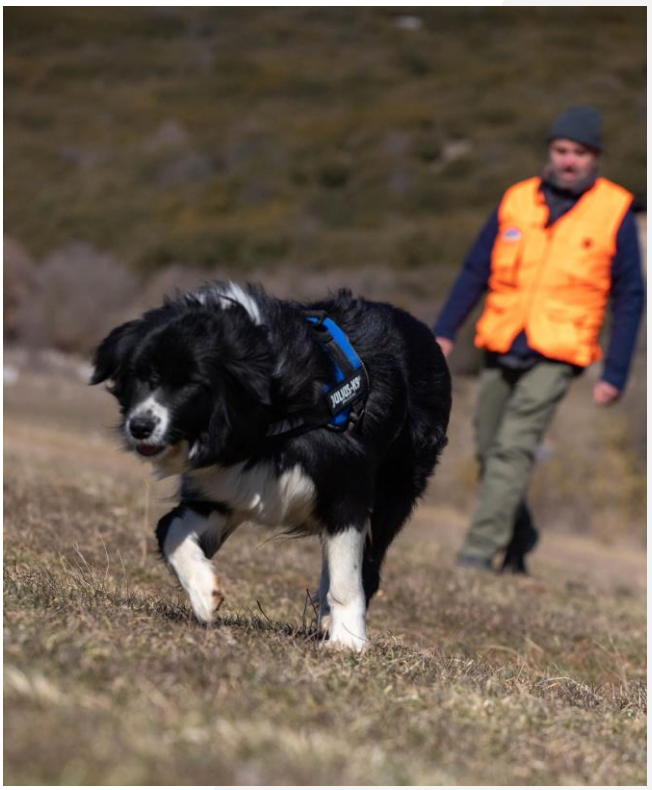
LIFE ARCPROM

ΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΣ UOMO HUMAN // ΑΡΚΟΥΔΑ ORSO BEAR

# LIFE18 NAT/GR/000768

Improving human-bear coexistence in 4 National Parks of South Europe

## Action C3- Results of the dog and handlers Anti-Poison Dog Unit's (ADUs) training procedure



N.E.C.C.A.

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*The photo of the front page was taken by Mr. Vavylis Dimitris*

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## *SUMMARY*

The devastating effects of poisoning have now become one of the main threats to biodiversity. The consequences affect both wildlife & domestic animals, such as Livestock Guarding Dogs (LGDs). The loss of the latter, has also an indirect (negative) impact on brown bear conservation, since they are used as a damage prevention method, which reduces human-bear conflicts. Based on the experience gained in other LIFE projects (LIFE Antidoto, Italy, LIFE Neophron, etc.), the use of Anti-poison Dog Units (ADUs) is a very good method for minimizing the poison baits impact.

The Action involved training & operation of ADUs, one in each Greek National Park. Poison detection dogs are especially trained to search & locate in the field several types of poison baits, poisoned carcasses & also already poisoned animals. The dogs were purchased & trained by an expert trainer based in Thessaloniki. After the signing of the contracts, the selected puppies were kept & trained at the trainer's premises for the necessary training for 12- 15 months period. After completion of training, dog handlers stayed for a certain time period, worked with their dogs and followed relevant seminars. Before their selection, the handlers, passed an interview from the trainer in order to see if they can pull of the job.

Unlike the two Greek Parks of PINDNP and RMNP that have established and operate ADUs in their area, PRESPNP decided to employ an Anti-Poison Dog Unit that was created initially by the Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS) in the framework of another project in the Region of Western Macedonia, which has been now completed. This way, the Prespa NP will benefit from the operation of an already trained dog, under the supervision of an experienced handler.

The main part of this Action for the PINDNP was finally decided to be financed in the framework of the National Operational Programme "Transport Infrastructure, Environment and Sustainable Development" 2014-2020 (OP TIESD 2014-2020). Thus, most of the allocated funds will not be used by the beneficiary and will be used by other beneficiaries, in other project Actions.



## *ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ*

Οι καταστροφικές συνέπειες της χρήσης δηλητηριασμένων δολωμάτων έχουν γίνει πλέον μία από τις κύριες απειλές για τη βιοποικιλότητα. Οι συνέπειες επηρεάζουν τόσο την άγρια ζωή όσο και τα οικόσιτα ζώα, όπως τα Σκυλιά Φύλαξης Κοπαδιών (ΣΦΚ). Η απώλεια των τελευταίων, έχει επίσης έμμεσο (αρνητικό) αντίκτυπο στη διατήρηση της καφέ αρκούδας, καθώς χρησιμοποιούνται ως μέθοδος πρόληψης ζημιών, που μειώνει τις συγκρούσεις ανθρώπου και αρκούδας. Με βάση την εμπειρία που αποκτήθηκε σε άλλα έργα LIFE (LIFE Antidoto, Ιταλία, LIFE Neophron, κ.λπ.), η χρήση των Ειδικών Μονάδων Ανίχνευσης Δηλητηριασμένων Δολωμάτων (ΕΜΑΔΔ) είναι μια πολύ καλή μέθοδος για την ελαχιστοποίηση της επίδρασης της χρήσης δηλητηριασμένων δολωμάτων.

Η δράση περιλάμβανε την εκπαίδευση και λειτουργία ΕΜΑΔΔ, μία σε κάθε Εθνικό Πάρκο από τα τρία της Ελλάδας. Τα Σκυλιά Ανίχνευσης Δηλητηριασμένων Δολωμάτων είναι ειδικά εκπαιδευμένα για να αναζητούν και να εντοπίζουν στην ύπαιθρο αρκετούς τύπους δηλητηριασμένων δολωμάτων, πτώματα που χρησιμοποιούνται ως δολώματα και επίσης ήδη δηλητηριασμένα ζώα. Τα σκυλιά είχαν προμηθευτεί και εκπαιδεύτηκαν από ειδικό εκπαιδευτή με έδρα τη Θεσσαλονίκη. Μετά την υπογραφή των συμβολαίων, τα επιλεγμένα κουτάβια διέμεναν και εκπαιδεύτηκαν στις εγκαταστάσεις του εκπαιδευτή για την απαραίτητη εκπαίδευση για περίοδο 12-15 μηνών. Μετά την ολοκλήρωση της εκπαίδευσης, οι χειριστές σκύλων παρέμειναν για ένα συγκεκριμένο χρονικό διάστημα και αυτοί στη Θεσσαλονίκη,

εργάστηκαν και εκπαιδεύτηκαν και αυτοί μαζί με τους σκύλους και παρακολούθησαν σχετικά σεμινάρια. Πριν από την επιλογή τους, οι χειριστές πέρασαν από μια συνέντευξη από τον εκπαιδευτή για να αξιολογηθούν ως προς την καταλληλόλητα τους για τη θέση.

Σε αντίθεση με τα δύο Εθνικά Πάρκα της Βόρειας Πίνδου (PINDNP) και της Οροσειράς Ροδόπης (RMNP) που έχουν ιδρύσει και λειτουργούν ΕΜΑΔΔ στην περιοχή τους, το Εθνικό Πάρκο Πρεσπών (PRESPNP) αποφάσισε να απασχολήσει την ΕΜΑΔΔ που δημιουργήθηκε αρχικά από την Ελληνική Ορνιθολογική Εταιρεία (ΕΟΕ) στο πλαίσιο άλλου έργου στην Περιφέρεια Δυτικής Μακεδονίας που έχει πλέον ολοκληρωθεί. Με αυτόν τον τρόπο, το PRESPNP θα επωφεληθεί από τη λειτουργία ενός ήδη εκπαιδευμένου σκύλου, υπό την επίβλεψη έμπειρου χειριστή

Το κύριο μέρος αυτής της δράσης για το Εθνικό Πάρκο Βόρειας Πίνδου (PINDNP) αποφασίστηκε τελικά να χρηματοδοτηθεί στο πλαίσιο του Εθνικού Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος «Υποδομές Μεταφορών, Περιβάλλον και Βιώσιμη Ανάπτυξη» 2014-2020 (ΕΠΥΜΕΠΕΡΑΑ 2014-2020). Έτσι, τα περισσότερα από τα διατεθέντα κονδύλια δεν θα χρησιμοποιηθούν από τον δικαιούχο και θα χρησιμοποιηθούν από άλλους δικαιούχους, σε άλλες δράσεις του έργου.

# CHAPTER 1. Training of Anti-poison Dog Unit

## *Subchapter 1.1. Introduction*

The effects of using poisoned baits are nowadays a major threat to biodiversity. These effects in the area of the Northern Pindos, Rodopi Mountain-Range and Prespes National Parks are observed both in wild nature (brown bear, birds of prey, etc.) and in domestic animals, such as Livestock Guarding Dogs (LGDs). The loss of these animals also has an indirect (negative) impact on brown bear and wolf conservation, since the presence of LGDs reduces conflicts between wildlife and damages to livestock.

Poisoned bait detection dogs are specially trained to search and locate in the field, various types of poisoned bait, poisoned carcasses and already poisoned animals. The use of anti-poison dogs helps to find and remove toxic substances from nature and avoid further victims. It also helps to collect evidence for the investigation of the criminal activity by the authorities.

In order to deal with the phenomenon in the protected areas, it was decided to create Anti-poison Dog Units, which will intervene in poisoning incidents and carry out scheduled patrols in the National Parks. The planned investigations, in addition to prevention, will also play the role of continuous training of the dog. Each unit consists of the specially trained dog and its handler.

In PINDNP and RMNP two dogs (Yasmin and Laika), both border collies, were trained by Mr. Demosthenes Moumiadis at the School of Dog Trainers, “Kynagon” Dog Academy, based in Vasilika Thessaloniki. The timeline of the preparation and all the stages of the training of the ADUs is given in the Annex.


***Pictures 1-2.*** *PINDNP’s Anti-poison Dog, Yasmin (left) and RMNP’s Anti-poison Dog, Laika (right) (photos taken by D. Vavylis)*

Unlike the two Greek Parks of PINDNP and RMNP, Prespa NP decided to employ an Anti-Poison Dog Unit that was created initially by the Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS) in the framework of another project, which has been now completed, in the Region of Western Macedonia. This way, the Prespa NP was going to benefit from the operation of an already trained dog, under the supervision of an experienced handler. The Unit consists of the dog handler Victoria Saravia-Mullin and the specially trained border collie dog, Ioli.

Their training took also place at the School of Dog Trainers "Kynagon" in Vasilika Thessaloniki and is the first ADU that was fully trained in Greece and by a Greek instructor.

***Picture 3.*** *Prespa NP's Anti-poison Dog, Ioli (photo taken by V. Saravia-Mullin)*

## *Subchapter 1.2. Training with the dog*

### PINDNP

The visits to the trainer's place started in January 2022, initially not so much in a training context as in an initial acquaintance and development of a relationship with the dog.

From March 15, the intensive training for the creation of the "Anti-poison Dog Unit" began. Daily theory and practical lessons were taking place, as well as educational investigations to find poisoned baits. The goal was to familiarize the handler with the dog's behavior as well as its correct handling according to the trainer's guidance. The training method is based on rewarding the dog with food or a toy.

### RMNP

On 23-02-2021 the contracted dog trainer sent a report to RMNP regarding the progress of the dog's training procedure. In this report the trainer argued that the selected dog revealed signs of potentially inappropriate behavior on stress-inducing circumstances (like the ADU real life operation) and suggested the dog's release from the training program. A new dog was selected and its training started immediately. This incident, along with the process of finding a suitable handler for the Unit, brought a delay in the action's implementation.

The training of the dog was finalized on April 2022. The handler was selected on August 2022, between 6 candidates and after the successful evaluation of him from the trainer. The visits of the new handler to the trainer's place started in September 2022 and lasted one month.

The intensive training for the creation of the "Anti-poison Dog Unit" began and included daily theory and practical lessons, as well as educational investigations to find poisoned baits. The goal was same as PINDNP's, to familiarize the handler with the dog's behavior as well as its correct handling according to the trainer's guidance. The training method is based on rewarding the dog with food or a toy.

### *Subchapter 1.3. Adjustment and binding*

From March 15th for PINDNP and from 1st of September 2022 for RMNP and for the following days, the training process involved contact and socializing with the dog in order to establish an initial relationship and bonding with the handler, accordingly. The dogs' daily handling routine, involved feeding, cleaning, walking and playing. In order to minimize the dogs' contacts with the original trainer and the other members of the academy, socializing took place every day (morning – afternoon). The goal was to have as much contact as possible, so that the dogs gradually begin to "bond" with the handlers.

At the same time, in the theoretical part, the trainer focused on the importance of rewarding the dogs every time they had the desired behavior using a reward treat bag and a clicker. The clicker is a small plastic accessory that makes a neutral sound and it's used to mark the desired behavior that the trainer wants to reinforce. In case the specific accessory is not convenient or available, there is also the use of the word "yes". The clicker was chosen by the trainer so that the desired behavior is always marked with exactly the same sound, something that the dog finds more helpful.

The process followed was: command, dog action, click, reward. If the dog did not do what it should, it was corrected in a gentle way and of course there was no process from the click onwards.

In the next stage the handlers started using the clicker with the dog's presence and it was used every time after a special behavior for the dog. Therefore, the specific time (instant) of using the clicker, was particularly important since it must always coincide with the desired behavior (not earlier or later). Thus, the dog associates the reward with the specific action at that particular time.

The beginning of the training included just calling the dog's name. After that, other commands followed. In general, the command process was the following: Dog's name (the dog turns) - click, come (the dog comes) - click, sit (the dog sits) – click, reward with a treat (usually food). From the moment the dog started to get used to the handler's presence (voice and movements), the trainer decided that it was time to move on to the next stage of training.

### *Subchapter 1.4. Handling and fieldwork*

During the working phase of the dog (searching for poisoned baits) certain factors must be taken into account. The stage that precedes the investigation, is the preparation of the dog and the control of the area in which we will work.

At the beginning of the investigation, the most important factor that decides our actions, is the direction of the wind. We always move against the wind so that the smell can be detected by the dog easily. After that, we prepare the dog by fitting the collar and muzzle (optional). Once the dog has calmed down and the handler judges that its ready, the search begins by giving the command "search" and pointing in the direction that it needs to follow. From this point on, no further commands are needed. The handler just follows the dog at a steady pace without stressing or scaring it. It is important to mention that various other disturbances in the research area (people gatherings, other animals, etc.), are not desirable. The dog needs to stay focused on the work, without extraneous influences. For example, if there are other dogs barking

or moving aggressively, the dog will turn its attention there. Something similar happens when there are people talking loudly.

When the dog detects an odor (poison), it follows it and marks it (by sitting next to it or pointing at it with its nose). Then the handler approaches, pets the dog, clicks to mark the desired behavior and finally rewards it by playing with the “special” ball three to four times. This ball is only used when the dog is “working” in order to have great desire and expectation for it.

During the period of the handlers training, this particular "research simulation" was taking place every day. At the beginning, it was taking place with the presence of the trainer, in order to give advice and make the necessary corrections. After that the handlers started working on their own to gain experience and confidence during the research.

***Picture 4.*** *Initial training at KYNAGON headquarters*

***Picture 5**. Research simulation*

***Picture 6.** Research simulation – Rewarding the dog*

## *Subchapter 1.5. Training completion*

After a month of daily contacts, socializing and field investigations with poisoned baits, the dog's handling training was completed.

Before departing for their bases, the handlers were given instructions on what they needed to do on a daily basis to keep the dog's interest and zeal undiminished and also maintain it on a good physical and mental health.

***Picture 7.*** *RMNP's ADU training (photo taken by P. Agorastos)*

### *Subchapter 1.6. Return to the base - Adjustment*

The next step was the transfer of the dog to the base, where the investigations for poisoned baits was going to be carried out. The journey proved difficult and needed many breaks, as the dog did not have any experience of being transported by car for such a long time.

For PINDNP the dog's place of residence is the village of Dilofo (municipality of Zagori), which is located within the area of the National Park. For RMNP the dog's place is a village of Drama, named Kalos Agros.

The first month for PINDNP's ADU was used for rest and adaptation to the area and the dog's new living environment. For RMNP, from November 2022 till the end of the year, the ADU entered the adaptation period because of the change in the dog's environment and its routine. During this time RMNP started to organize the necessary provisions to equip the ADU, and the dog already started the periodical visit to the veterinary. During this time the ADU progressively performed recognition patrols of the area and RMNP prepared the contract to be signed by the handler. The fully operation of the team took place on January 2023.

In order for the dogs to get to know the new field and take in the new smells of the area, a few short leash walks took place at first. It's important for the dog not to get distracted during the field work.

After that, the Units started working in a small space (as much as a room) by placing poison baits so that the handlers could watch the behavior and the reaction of the dog in a minimal space. Over time, there was a gradual increase in the working areas.

When the handler judged that the dog was ready, based on the communication and feedback from the expert trainer the patrols started, in different fields of the National Park's areas.

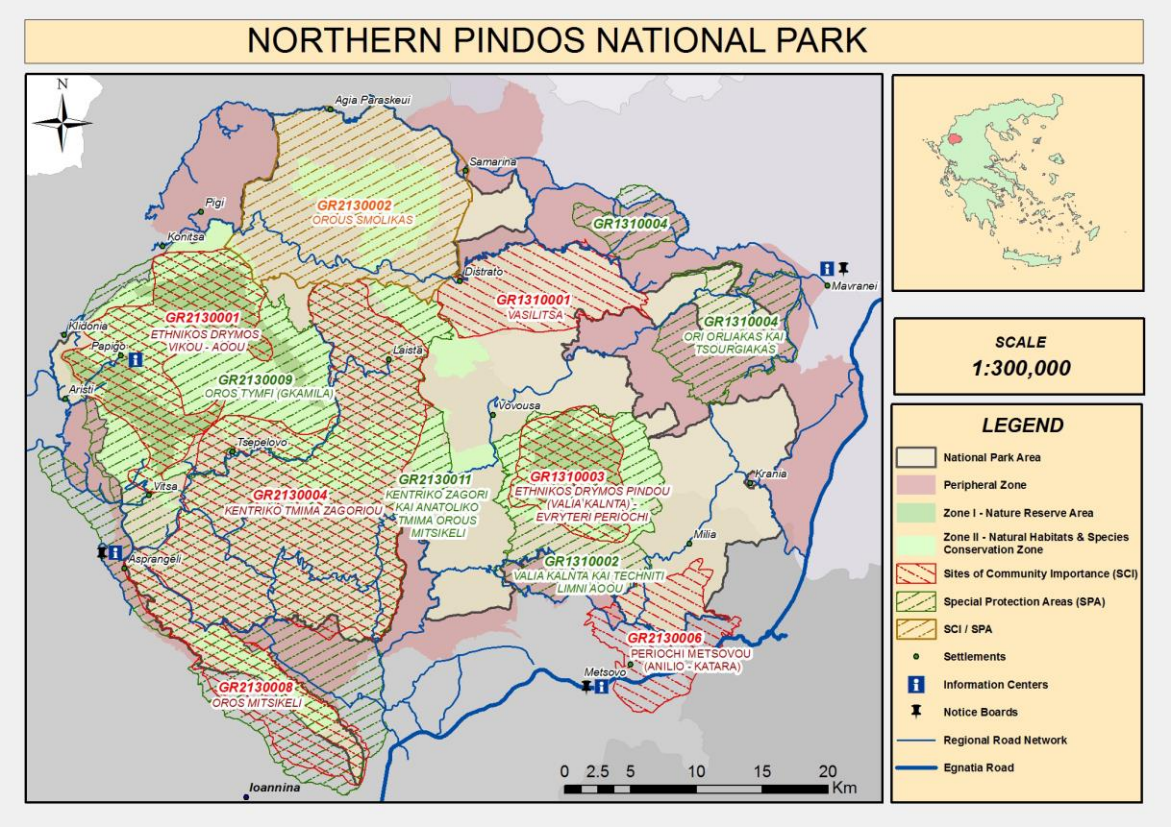
***Picture 8.*** *RMNP's ADU with a leash (photo taken by E. Grigoriadou)*

# CHAPTER 2. Methodology

## *Subchapter 2.1. Study area*

### PINDNP

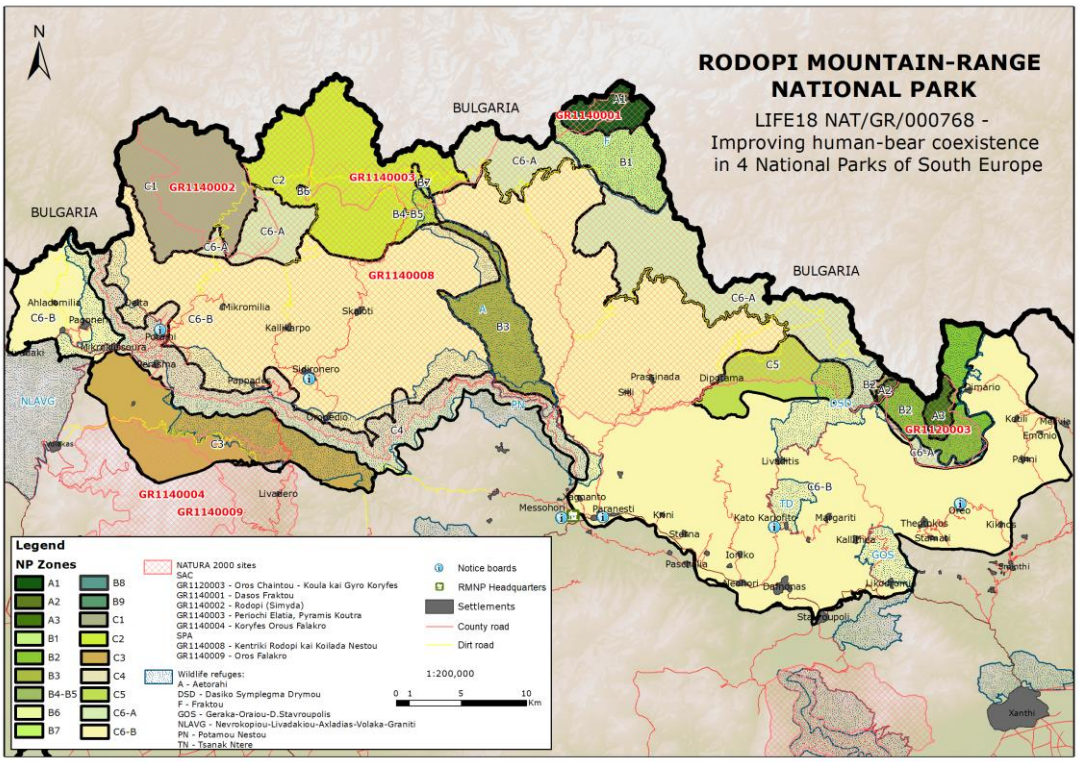
The project area is concentrated within the boundaries of Northern Pindos National Park, although exceptionally and on a case-by-case basis, it may be extended to other areas within the area of jurisdiction of the Management Unit of the Northern Pindos National Park and the rest of Epirus. The Northern Pindos National Park is characterized by mainly mountainous terrain and includes five (5) Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and seven (7) Special Area of Conservation (SACs) of the Natura 2000 network (Map 1).




***Map 1.*** *Main study area on the borders of the Northern Pindos National Park*

### RMNP

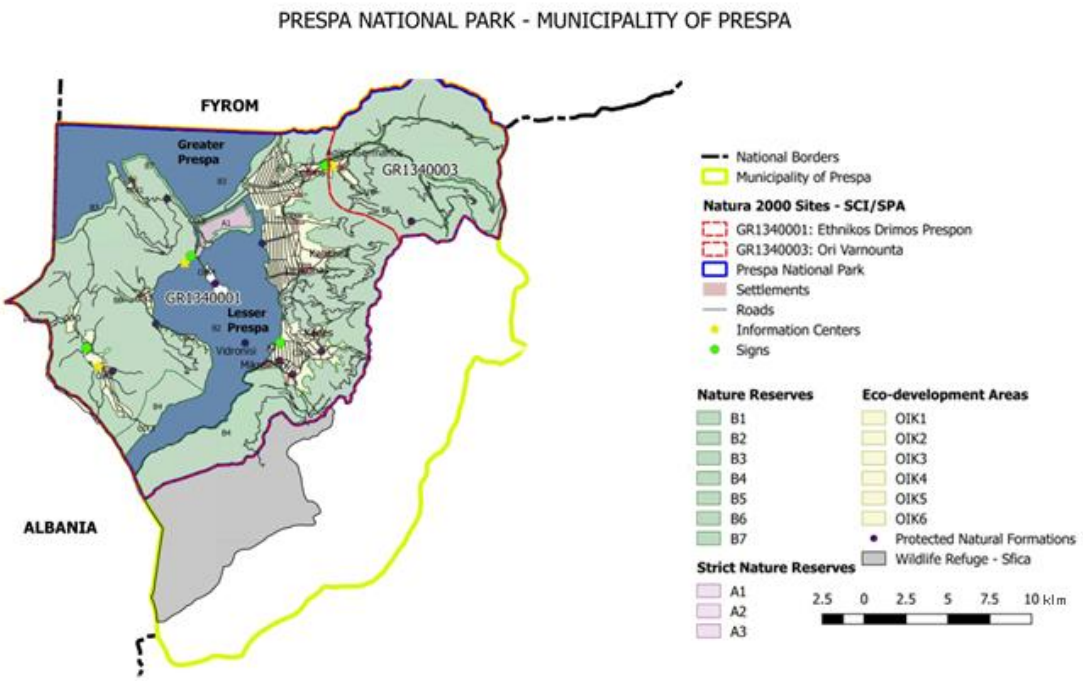
The project area is concentrated within the boundaries of the Rodopi Mountain-range National Park, although exceptionally and on a case-by-case basis, it may be extended to other areas of jurisdiction of the Management Unit of Nestos-Vistonida and Rodopi National Parks. The Rodopi Mountain-range National Park is characterized by mountainous and semi-mountainous terrain with one big river and includes five (5) Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and two (2) Special Protection Areas (SPAs) of the Natura 2000 network (Map 2).




***Map 2**. Main study area on the borders of the Rodopi Mountain-range National Park*

## PRESPNP

The project area is concentrated within the boundaries of the Prespa National Park, although exceptionally and on a case-by-case basis, it may be extended to other areas of Western Macedonia. The Prespa National Park is characterized by mountainous and semi-mountainous terrain with lakes and is almost entirely covered by 4 Natura 2000 sites, two (2) Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and two (2) Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) (Map 3).




***Map 3.** Main study area on the borders of the Prespa National Park*

## *Subchapter 2.2. Detection of poisoned baits and animals*

During a patrol, the dog searches freely and autonomously, without the need for more commands than the initial one, while the handler simply determines the search area. When the dog spots a poisoned bait or animal, it marks it by sitting next to it. His reward is always - and only - the game, usually a ball or some other chew toy.

ADU patrols always took place in the countryside, and two types of patrols were carried out: practice patrols and patrols following a notification of a poisoning incident. Practice patrols are part of the dog's continuous training, necessary to keep the Unit in good shape (good physical condition, strong handler-dog bond, dog motivation) and at the same time function as a kind of guarding and supervision of the countryside as its presence ADU in an area has a deterrence and prevention character, although such a patrol is rarely expected to find poisoned bait or animals. In contrast, in incident patrols the chances of finding a bait or poisoned animal are high and therefore aim to clear the incident area of the poisoned baits or animals in time, thus stopping the chain of death caused by the poisoned baits. Also, in these cases, the ADU can help identify evidence of the crime.

Each ADU patrol requires careful preparation and planning that must take into account the topography of the area, weather conditions, etc. For example, hot weather can have a very negative effect on the dog's effectiveness, so patrols on very hot days or at least midday hours are avoided. The equipment of the Unit at work is also very specific. During the patrol, the dog wears a special collar and muzzle (optional). The operator's equipment includes: whistle, GPS, camera, plastic bags of different sizes, aluminum foil and containers for poisoned baits, disposable drill gloves and masks. Also, for the dog, the handler carries with him/her: water, first aid and a toy for the reward (Picture 1).

***Picture 7**. The PRESPNP's ADU in action with the necessary equipment*

Practice patrols lasted an average of 30 minutes, while in a real incident the duration depended on the needs of the incident and whether or not there were any finds, as the dog needs to find something to keep the level of concentration and motivation of high. Also, we must always be aware of weather conditions, terrain and vegetation that can negatively affect the dog's effectiveness.

The actual incident patrols were carried out after being informed by the staff of the National Park's Management Units, and always accompanied by their guards. The staff of the National Park's Management Units undertook to inform other competent authorities such as the Forestry Services, the Police, the Municipalities and the Veterinary Services.

Each patrol was recorded by GPS, the geographical coordinates of the location of each poisoned bait or animal were recorded and the necessary photographs of the findings were taken. Also, the ADU was equipped with the appropriate consumables in case they are needed to collect samples or other findings to be sent for toxicological analysis or even forensic analysis (eg fingerprints).

***Picture 9.*** *RMNP's ADU in action (photo taken by E. Grigoriadou)*

***Picture 10.*** *PINDNP's ADU in action (photo taken by D. Vavylis)*

When an incident of poison use is recorded the Poisoning Incidents Recording Protocol is activated (Demiris & Saravia, 2016). The record of poisoning incidents is carried out in a database. In each case of poisoning, the following information is recorded:

1. Details of the organization / person managing the incident

- Date of poisoning and notification

2. Location – incident characteristics
   - Geographical location, coordinates
   - Type of area
   - Protection regime in the area
3. Dead animals – Mode of poisoning
   - Wild or domestic animal
   - Number of animals (dead or poisoned and alive)
   - Poison bait condition (fresh, rotting, advanced rotting, feathers and/or bones)-Possible other cause of death
4. Bait
   - If bait found, type and number of baits
   - Causes for using poisons
5. Handling method
   - Services involved in the incident
   - Reporting or not reporting the incident to the competent authorities
   - Clinical examination, necropsy
   - Toxicological analysis - conclusion (type of poison, active substance, mode of use)
   - Laboratory that has undertaken the toxicological analysis

**ΠΡΩΤΟΚΟΛΛΟ ΚΑΤΑΓΡΑΦΗΣ ΠΕΡΙΣΤΑΤΙΚΩΝ ΔΗΛΗΤΗΡΙΑΣΕΩΝ**

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| | | | Προληπτική Επιτόπουσα |
| Η/ΝΙΑ ΕΙΔΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ: | ΠΙΘΑΝΗ Η/ΝΙΑ ΔΗΛΗΤΗΡΙΑΣΗΣ (αν είναι διαφορετική από η/νια ειδοποίησης) | | ΠΗΓΗ ΕΙΔΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ/ ΠΛΗΡΟΦΟΡΙΑΣ: |
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| ΧΩΡΙΟ: | ΔΗΜΟΣ: | ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΑΚΗ ΕΝΟΤΗΤΑ: | ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΑ: |
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| ΑΛΛΑ ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΑ Η ΣΧΟΛΙΑ: | | | |
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| 2 ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΑ ΠΑΡΟΝΤΩΝ ΑΡΜΟΔΙΩΝ ΥΠΗΡΕΣΙΩΝ | | | |
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| 3 ΕΙΔΙΚΗ ΟΜΑΔΑ ΣΚΥΛΟΥ (ΕΟΣ) | | |
|---|---|---|
| ΠΑΡΕΜΒΑΣΗ ΕΟΣ: | ΦΟΡΕΑΣ / ΟΡΓΑΝΩΣΗ ΕΟΣ: | ΟΝΟΜΑΤΕΠΩΝΥΜΟ ΟΔΗΓΟΥ ΣΚΥΛΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΟΝΟΜΑ ΣΚΥΛΟΥ |
| ΝΑΙ ΟΧΙ | | |

# CHAPTER 3. Bibliography

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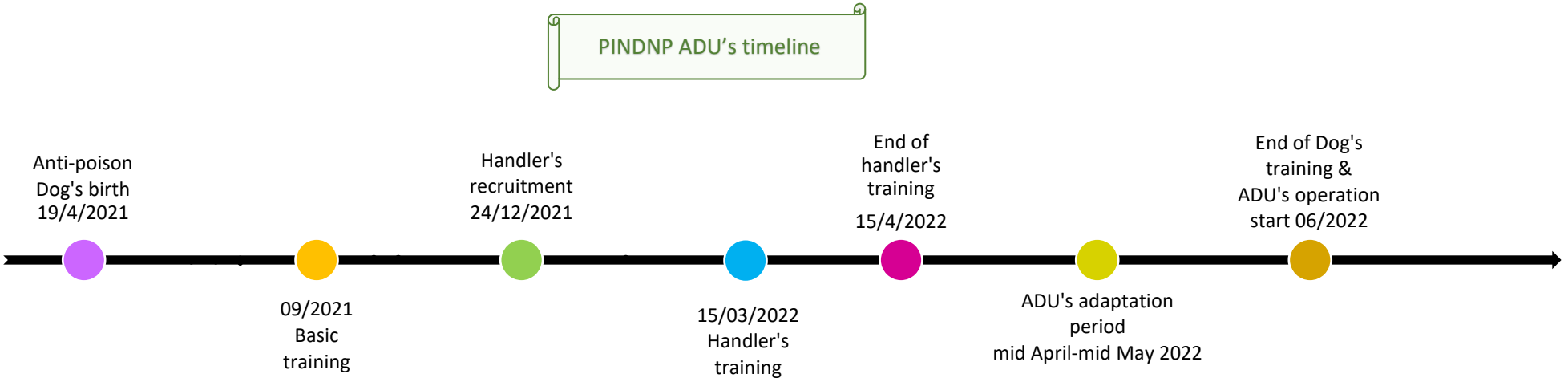
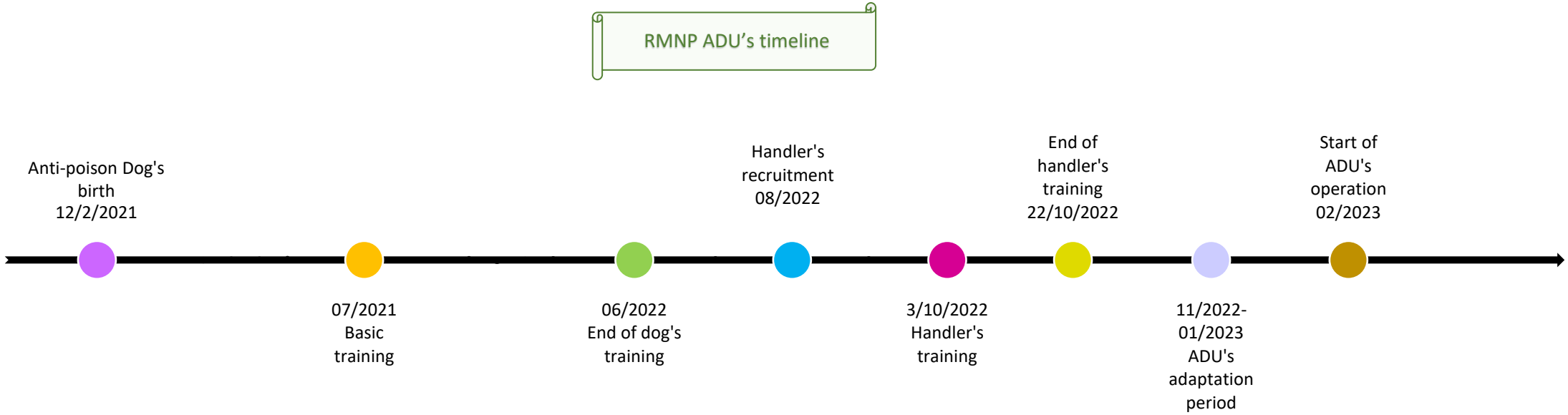
# ANNEX


PINDNP ADU's timeline
Anti-poison Dog's birth 19/4/2021
09/2021 Basic training
Handler's recruitment 24/12/2021
15/03/2022 Handler's training
End of handler's training 15/4/2022
ADU's adaptation period mid April-mid May 2022
End of Dog's training & ADU's operation start 06/2022


RMNP ADU's timeline
Anti-poison Dog's birth 12/2/2021
07/2021 Basic training
06/2022 End of dog's training
Handler's recruitment 08/2022
3/10/2022 Handler's training
End of handler's training 22/10/2022
11/2022-01/2023 ADU's adaptation period
Start of ADU's operation 02/2023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