



LIFE – REFOREST

PROJECT “ENHANCING THE RESTORATION, CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND BIODIVERSITY VALUE OF PRIORITY FOREST HABITATS WITHIN NATURA 2000 SCIS”
LIFE19 NAT/BG/000986 -- LIFE REFOREST

LAYMAN’S REPORT

Southwest State Forestry Enterprise

The enterprise manages state forest territories in seven administrative regions – Blagoevgrad, Kyustendil, Sofia city, Sofia region, Pazardzhik, Pernik and Lovech. Its structure includes 38 territorial units, of which 32 state forest units and 6 state hunting units.

Blagoevgrad, „Zora“ str. № 18
swdp@abv.bg

WWF

Founded in 1961, the international nature conservation organization WWF operates in over 100 countries with the help of 7,000 employees and over 5 million volunteers. WWF works to improve the state of the environment so that people can live in harmony with nature. In Bulgaria, WWF deals with protected areas and habitats of European significance in the Natura 2000 network, forests and freshwater ecosystems, sustainable development of rural areas, and climate change.

Sofia, 1000, „Knyaz Boris I“ str. № 147, floor 1
office@wwf.bg

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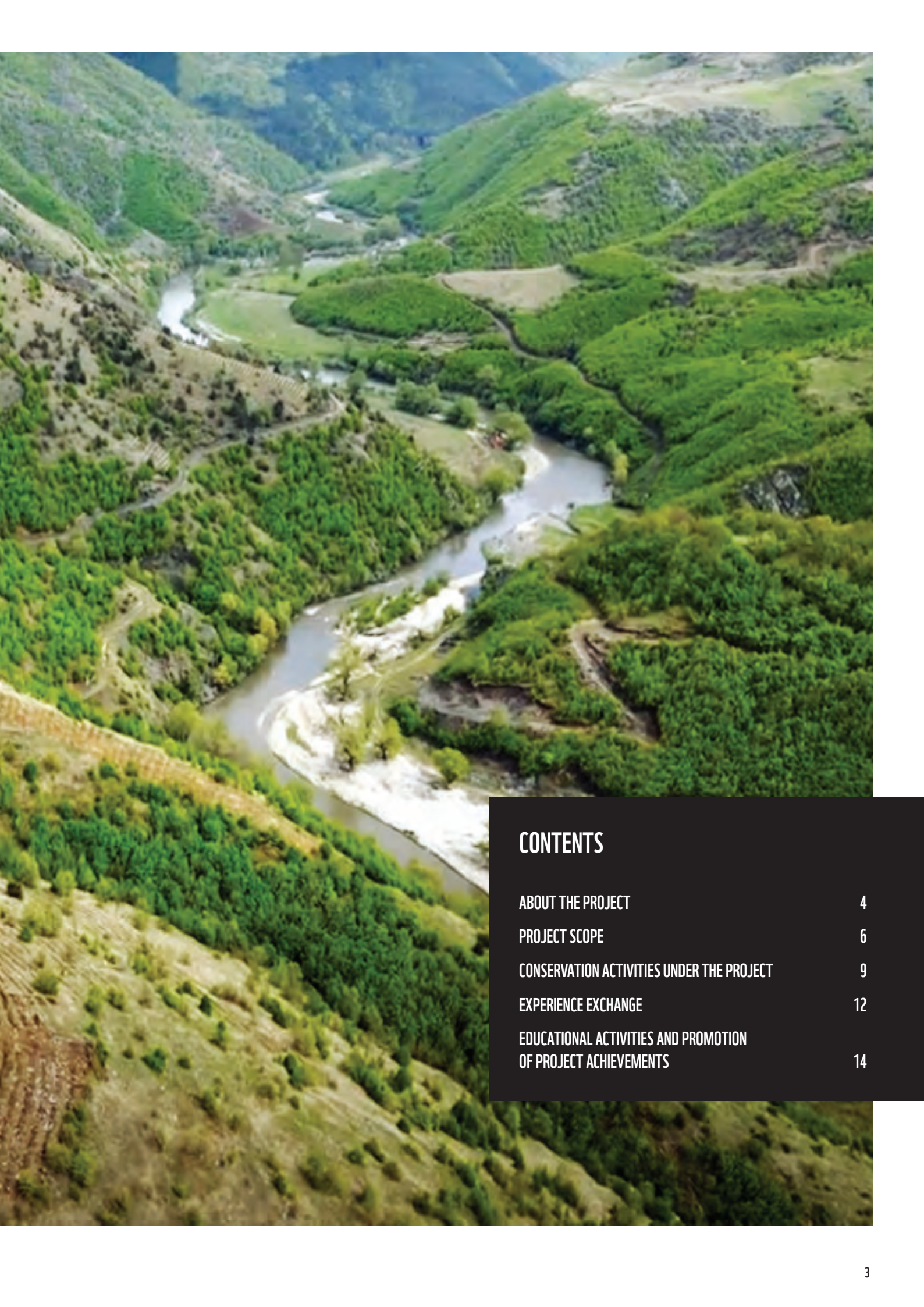
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Sofia, 2025



This report has been prepared under the project „**Enhancing the restoration, climate resilience and biodiversity value of priority forest habitats within Natura 2000 SCIs**“ and is implemented with the financial support of the LIFE Nature 2019 Programme of the European Commission.





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ABOUT THE PROJECT





#lifeREforest

Southwest State Forestry Enterprise and WWF Bulgaria completed the project **„Enhancing the restoration, climate resilience and biodiversity value of priority forest habitats within Natura 2000 sites“**, with acronym LIFE REFOREST. Its main objective is precisely the restoration of forest habitats within the „Natura 2000“ protected areas network. To achieve the project objectives, Southwest State Forestry Enterprise applied modern practices for forest regeneration.

Within the framework of the project, latest models were applied to predict the effects of climate change on the different types of forest habitats. As a result, a GIS database was prepared for the forest types in our country, which, in addition to the optimal tree species that are currently allowed for reforestation in a given forest habitat, also proposes a list of species that will be most suitable for the respective site in the future.

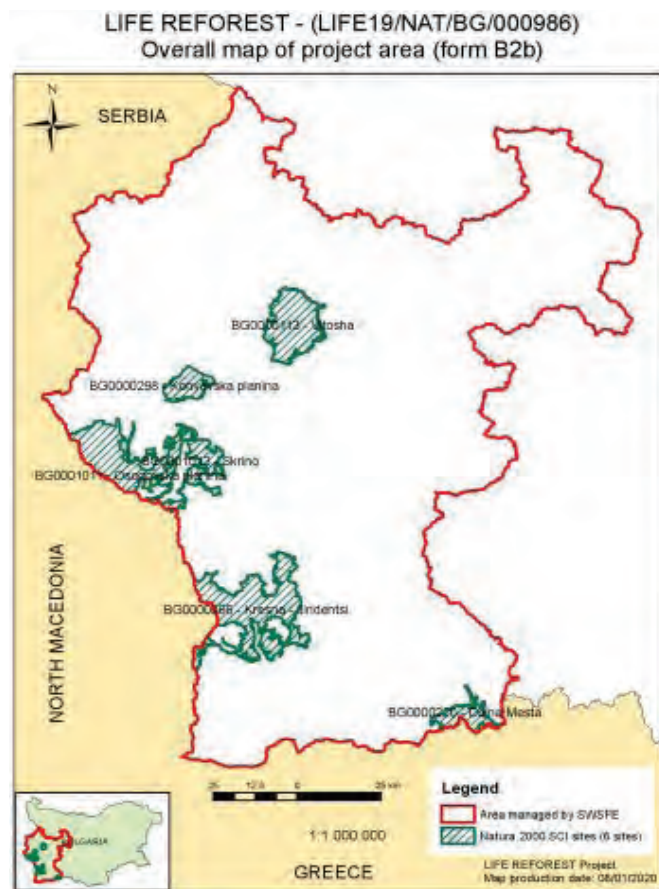
Habitat restorations were carried out in the following protected zones from the Natura 2000 network: Osogovo Mountain, Konyavska Mountain, Kresna-Ilindentsi, Dolna Mesta, Reka Mesta, Skrino and Ograzhden-Malashievo. In addition to the production of millions of seedlings and large-scale reforestation activities, the project built an information center for forests and the „Natura 2000“ network on the territory of the Forest Nursery „Lokorsko“ near Sofia, where an automated line for the production of containerized seedlings operates.

Other key project activities were the organization of training seminars and field visits for experience exchange with forestry organizations and non-state forest owners with the aim of broader multiplication of the achieved results in state, municipal and private forests in the country.

The total project budget was 2,066,611 euros, of which 1,537,148 euros (74.38%) are provided by the LIFE Nature 2019 Programme of the European Commission.

PROJECT CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS

- **C.1** Collection and processing of forest reproductive material;
- **C.2** Production of seedlings for reforestation;
- **C.3** Restoration of priority forest habitats within target SCIs;
- **C.4** Providing input for the improvement of national forest policies.



As a result, the partners achieved the restoration of 361.6 ha of 5 priority forest habitats damaged by natural disasters within 7 Natura 2000 zones in Southwest Bulgaria. Over 10,000 kg of seeds from 18 forest species were collected – most of which have already been used for seedling production for reforestation. Over 2.5 million containerized seedlings were produced, used for reforestation activities under the project.

The partners also developed a Programme for restoration of target priority habitats, which was approved by the Ministry of Environment and Water. The development was assisted by expert GIS analysis, with a database linked to the requirements for forest habitats and climate change scenarios for Bulgaria.

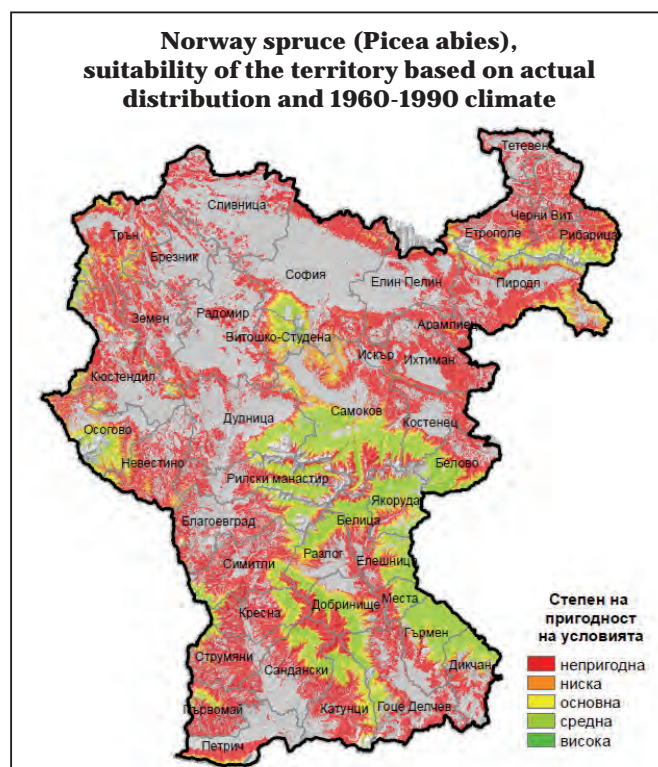
Through the efforts of the project participants, a contribution was made to improving national forest policies by integrating climate and biodiversity-related issues – a proposal was developed for updating key regulatory documents on the topic and it was submitted for adoption to the Executive Forest Agency.

Last but not least – the partners built capacity for restoration of priority habitats in non-state forests.

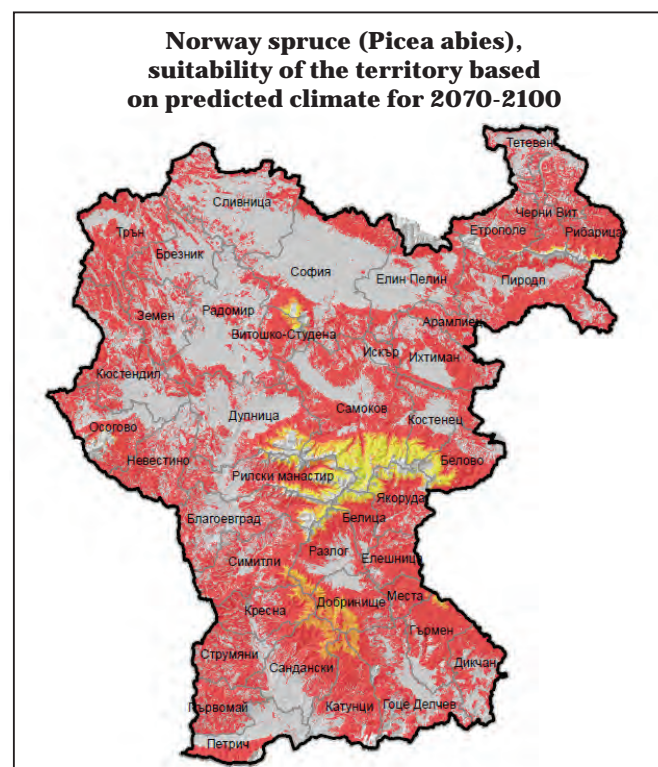


ACCORDING TO THE CLIMATE ANALYSIS, BY 2100 THE TERRITORY WITH “SUITABLE CONDITIONS” FOR NORWAY SPRUCE WILL SHRINK DRASTICALLY FROM 2,288 KM² TO

137 KM²



Low-suitability spruce habitats (km²) (>0.3, <0.5): 992
High-suitability spruce habitats (km²)(>0.5): 2288



Low-suitability spruce habitats (km²) (0.3, <0.5): 579
High-suitability spruce habitats (km²) (>0.5): 137



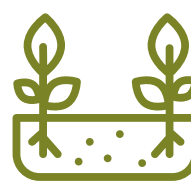
PROJECT AIMED

to restore **275 ha** of the targeted habitats in Natura 2000 sites



PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Total of **361.6 ha** were restored, representing 132% of the planned target, within the targeted Natura 2000 sites



KEY CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES

Seed collection, nursery production, forest restoration

Nº	Target protected zone from Natura 2000 network	Protected zone code	Area afforested under project, ha	Additional afforested area, ha	Total afforested area, ha
1	KRESNA-ILINDENTSI	BG0000366	55.2	126	181.2
2	SKRINO	BG0001013	34.3	15.2	49.5
3	OSOGOVO MOUNTAIN	BG0001011	12.1	12.9	25
4	KONYAVSKA MOUNTAIN	BG0000298	1	0	1
5	DOLNA MESTA	BG0000220	28.7	40.7	69.4
6	REKA MESTA	BG0001021	3	0	3
7	OGRAZH DEN - MALESHEVO	BG0000224	32.5	0	32.5
Total			166.8	194.8	361.6

CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES UNDER THE PROJECT



SEED COLLECTION





SEEDLING PRODUCTION AND REFORESTATION





FOREST RESTORATION THROUGH REFORESTATION



EXPERIENCE EXCHANGE

The partners organized three three-day expert visits to Northeast Bulgaria, Southwest Bulgaria and Northern Greece. 70 forestry experts participated in them, with 15 experts participating in at least two of the trips. They represented 39 institutions and organizations from both countries including:

- **28** different departments from the state forest system;
- **4** forestry institutions from Greece;
- **1** scientific organization;
- **6** non-governmental organizations.

17 forest sites of different ages and with different restoration practices were visited and discussed.

An international conference was organized in Sofia, bringing together:

- **68 forestry specialists** and/or environmental protection experts;
- **8 countries:** Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, North Macedonia, Romania, Poland, Slovakia, Spain;
- **23 institutions/organizations** including 15 state institutions, 2 scientific institutions, 6 non-governmental organizations;
- **15 lecturers** from different countries.





PUBLIC AWARENESS AND DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS

WWF distributes a regular project **forest bulletin**, targeting professional audiences. In addition to Reforest, the bulletin provides information about LIFECLIMAFORCEE and other forest projects.

The first edition was sent to 256 subscribers in 2022.

At the end of the project, subscribers are already over 450.

The bulletin is published every 6 months.

Within the framework of the project, a **Forest Information Center** was built. It is located on the territory of Lokor-sko Nursery, houses an exhibition of forest priority habitats and is open for visits for those who want to learn more about forest restoration activities.



VOLUNTEER ACTIONS

Four volunteer actions and a support day were held at the nursery in Lokorsko. Volunteers helped with field gathering and sorting seeds and seedlings. At the same time they received basic knowledge about forest planting techniques.

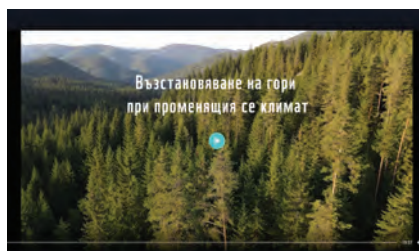


EDUCATIONAL FILMS

The partners also created a series of educational films.

▶ Forest restoration under changing climate

The film addressed to forest specialists and draws attention to main challenges and opportunities in forest restoration in view of the increasingly large-scale and extreme effects of climate change.



▶ How to plant a tree? • Tips for proper reforestation

The film was designed for non-professional audiences, with the aim of providing practical guidance to individuals interested in contributing to reforestation but uncertain about whom to approach or which aspects to consider. With the video archive from the above mentioned films, several short clips for social networks were also produced.

Executive producer of the films is Biota Films.

TRAVELING EXHIBITION

One of the most ambitious communication products of the project is the traveling exhibition

WONDERS OF NATURE: FROM SEED TO FOREST.

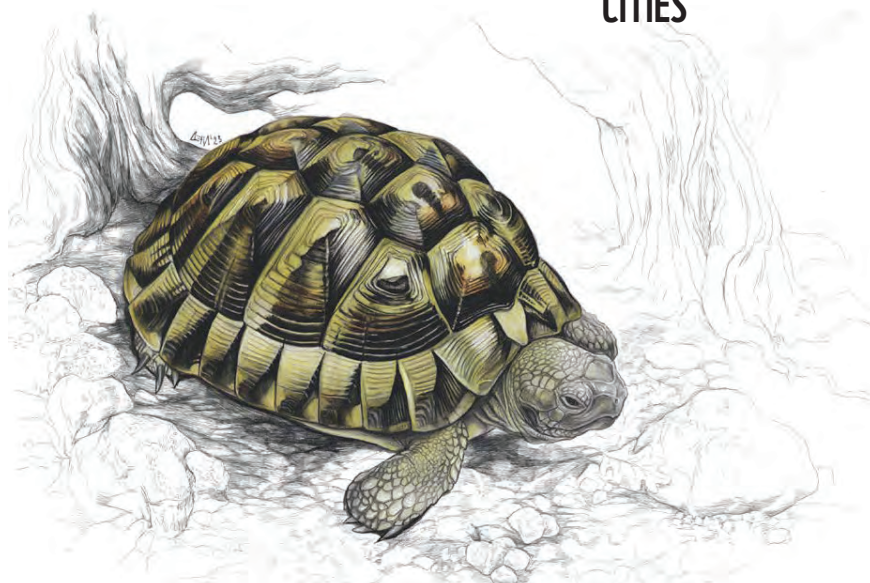
Through it, WWF and SWSE specialists, with the artistic contribution of the Society of Animalists, Florists and Scientific Illustrators, presented in an impressive way the richness of forests, their role in biodiversity conservation and important facts about Forest habitats restoration.



28
PANELS

4
EXHIBITIONS
IN SOFIA

6
EXHIBITIONS
IN OTHER
CITIES





NATURA 2000 DAY IN BLAGOEVGRAD

One of the largest events under the project was **Natura 2000 Day**, held in May 2024 in collaboration with the Regional Historical Museum in Blagoevgrad. Over 400 people learned about forest conservation and protected areas through games, quizzes, films and exhibitions.



SOCIAL NETWORKS

Another great opportunity for educational activities and engagement was social networks.

Within the framework of the project, 4 rubrics were developed for Facebook and Instagram on the topics:

**FOREST TREE SPECIES AND HABITATS TARGETED
BY THE PROJECT**

WHY IS FOREST RESTORATION IMPORTANT?

SUCCESSFUL FOREST RESTORATION

FOREST FIRES



132

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS
REACHED OVER

710,000

USERS

The rubrics can be seen [here](#) (Facebook).





THIS PROJECT
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PROGRAMME



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