

11. Kune-Vain Lagoon – Albania



Kune-Vain Lagoon, also known as Drin Delta, is situated in the administrative district of Lezha, on the northern Albanian coast. The Kune-Vain Lagoon was formed by the accumulated sediments from the Drin and Mati rivers. Two channels connect the lagoon with the sea. Within its district, various habitat types are found, such as riverine woodland, salt marshes, reed-beds, salicornia flats and sandbars. They host a variety of fauna, amongst which waterfowl prevail. It is an important area for migratory and nesting waterfowl. The site was relatively well preserved until 1991.

At the end of the Bronze Age and at the beginning of the Iron Age the area was populated by the ancient tribe of Illyrians. Close to Lezha, the Roman city of Lissus was located, founded by Dionysius of Syracuse in 385 BC, which possessed a strongly fortified acropolis called Acrolissus that was considered impregnable. Various remnants of those civilisations are scattered in the region, among which is the medieval fort in Lezha, where the grave of Skanderbeg is located. This was the site of the Siege of Lezha in 1444, where Gjergj Kastriot Skanderbeg united the Albanian princes in the fight against the Ottoman Empire.

Traditional activities practised by locals are farming, fishing, stock raising, forestry and hunting, whilst contemporary ones include development of agro-industry, aquaculture, beach and cultural tourism and nature conservation. Salt extraction nowadays is abandoned. Being rich in cultural

elements, the site is visited by many tourists. Locals manufacture and sell traditional handicraft products. Archaeological excavations are currently in progress, as well as restoration of historical monuments.

The site is, however, threatened by a number of factors, most notably industrial pollution and household waste. After the fall of the communist regime in 1991, land reform took place and the area was densely populated. This caused severe pressure upon the wetland. The new owners felt that they had the right to manage the place on their own, turning to practices that degraded the area (increasing the number of constructions destined for tourism, pollution, noise, car fuel gases, excessive hunting, illegal fishing, overgrazing).

As a result, the former rich and diversified bird colonies disappeared. The banks are deforested and water circulation must be improved. Therefore, hunting, fishing, building and overgrazing must be regulated and the environmental awareness of the local population must be improved. The wetland could be an ideal place for ecotourism and action can be taken towards this objective.