



## Prespa dwarf cattle in Albania and Greece

Short report, spring 2012



*Landscape and vegetation on the Albanian banks of the great Prespa Lake*

As part of the long-term monitoring in the Balkan region, breeds are being rediscovered that were believed to be forgotten or were previously unknown. First came the research: literature studies, reports, maps. According to reports, in the area of the Prespa Lakes very small cattle exist that can climb in the mountains like goats. Since Spring 2006, SAVE Foundation has been on the trail of these Prespa Cattle. At that time representatives of the Foundation went to the area of the great and the small Prespa Lakes, which are shared by three States, to follow up the clues about the dwarf cattle. This border was closed by the military up to the late 1990s. It belongs to Albania, FYR Macedonia and Greece. The search-tour led to the identification and the demonstration of possible conservation measures for this endangered cattle breed, that, these days, only has noteworthy numbers left in Albania. It was clear that cross-breeding with imported high-performance breeds was becoming increasingly popular.



(Link to identification: [http://www.save-foundation.net/english/PDF/Prespa\\_cattle.pdf](http://www.save-foundation.net/english/PDF/Prespa_cattle.pdf))

## Albania:

In the following year, 2007, in the Albanian part of the area, tissue samples were taken from 50 animals considered to be reasonably pure bred Prespa cattle and the DNA was analyzed at the Veterinary University of Munich. Dr. Ivica Medugorac, who conducted the study, came to the conclusion that the Prespa cattle are related to the Busha cattle of the Balkans, but represent a unique group that is very worthy of conservation. Some of the samples were also investigated by the Institute of Prehistoric Archaeology and Natural Sciences (IPAS), University of Basel, where genes were found that do not occur in other European cattle breeds (not yet published).



In 2008, together with the Albanian partner NGO AlbaGene, the first conservation measures could be started. With a GEF Small Grant Prespa cattle in the villages around Liqenas that were purebred were registered and ear-tagged. 54 animals were recorded. In order to continue breeding purebreds, SAVE Foundation bought three Albanian Prespa bulls and put them to use, free of charge, for breeders in Liqenas. The population in Liqenas has, thanks to the efforts of the local NGO "Sun of Liqenas", increased to 92 breeding animals. At a meeting of all relevant stakeholders held in 2010, it was deemed urgent to record also the remaining purebred dwarf cattle in the northern part of the Albanian shore and in the south-eastern part, where there are few purebred animals left, in order to form new breeding nuclei.



In cooperation with the Greek "Society for the Protection of Prespa" (SPP), also active in the Albanian part of the small Prespa Lake, a breeding nucleus could be set up in 2011 at Shuec in the south-eastern part of the Albanian Prespa region. With the purchase of animals for Shuec the opportunity has been taken to purchase some animals from the as yet not monitored northern part of the large community of Liqenas. This brought fresh blood into the breed, helped to estimate the numbers of purebred animals in this area and to raise awareness, not least with their owners, of the value of purebred cattle. It was probably the first time that someone – and especially outsiders – showed interest in and bought the "dwarves". The ani-

imals are, thus, placed in a new light and have gained in value and prestige. In future the high-quality products of the breed will be given an added value.

## Greece:

The last Prespa cattle are not only found in Albania but also in a relict herd in Greece in the village Psarades. Two years ago some of the animals were sold from there to Lehovo, a mountain village about 70 km south. The opportunity to create a nucleus herd in Albania has also been used in



*Half-wild Prespa cattle at Psarades in the "natural protection mission" in the reeds in the marsh-willow*

Greece to take one step further to record the purebred animals and form two new groups of breeding animals. In Psarades itself the identification of animals has proved very difficult. The semi-feral cattle are kept outside almost all year round. To be used for meat, they often need to be shot. Firstly, the purebred animals had to be identified and then the associated owners are found, this required a great effort over several weeks and could only be carried out thanks to the commitment of local volunteers. In contrast, in Lehovo the animals were visited at the farm and purebred animals were selected and purchased. Meanwhile, with the help of the Society for the Protection of Prespa and Amaltheia, the Greek SAVE partner, two breeding groups could be created one in the village of Lemos, another on the island of Agios Achillios

## Ark Farm on island Agios Achillios – the "park in the park"

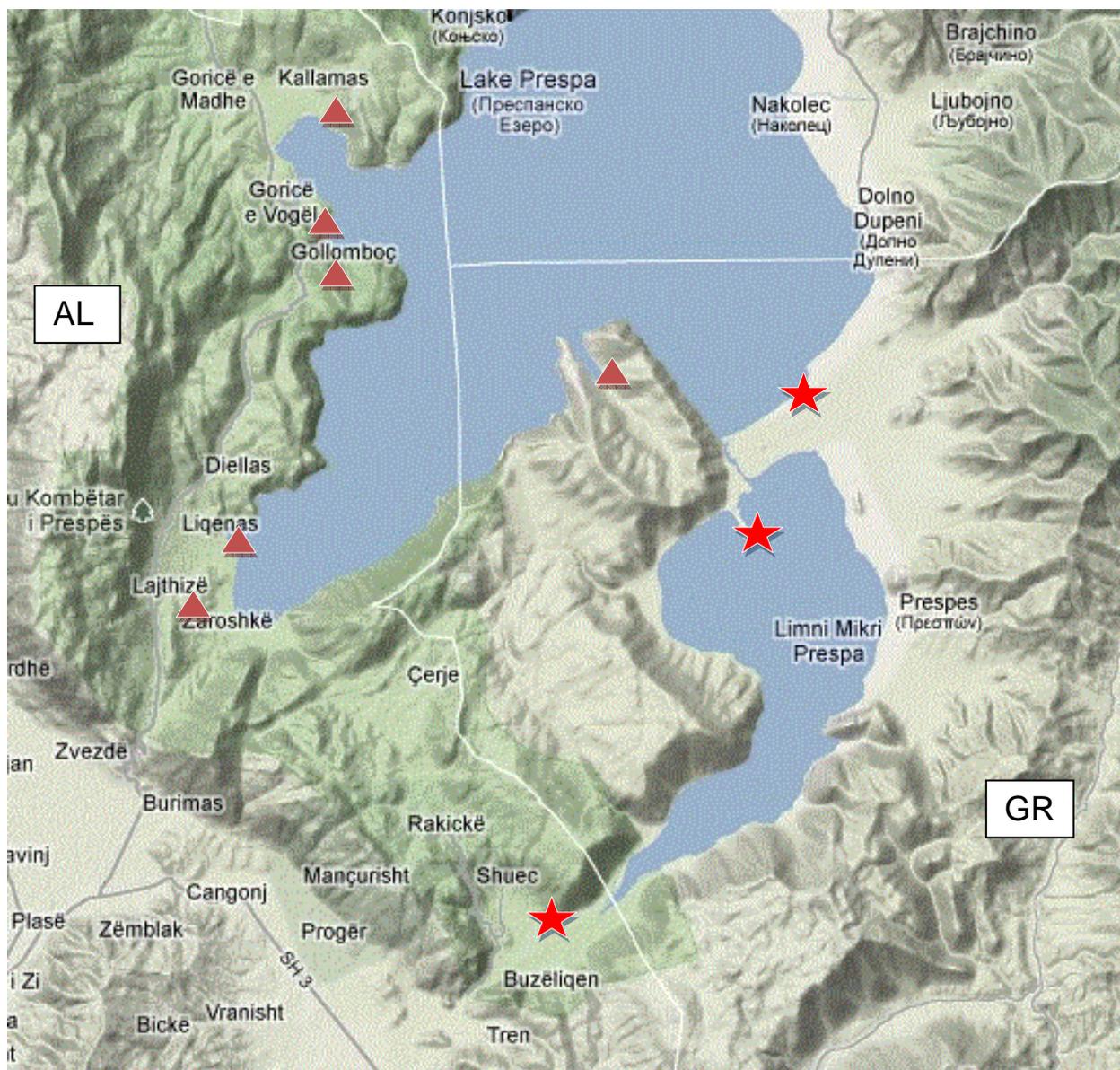


A few years ago the Prespa Lakes were declared a cross-border national park. The island of Agios Achillios is a closed part in the middle of small Prespa Lake and has important Byzantine monuments. It is accessible only via a pontoon bridge. SAVE's wish was to build an ark farm in this picturesque village, as a "park in the park". In cooperation with the family running the taverna on the island it was possible to set up this Ark Farm as an Island Park. In addition to the Prespa cattle, the last water buffalo in the region were brought here and soon two breeding groups of the highly endangered Florina-Pelagonia sheep will be re-located here. (Taverna Agios Achillios see entry in Arca-Net [www.arca-net.info](http://www.arca-net.info)).

The project is a good example of cross-border activities of several NGOs. In addition to the re-establishment of pure breeding, the future should see a concentration on adding value to the breeds through product marketing.

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# Origin and new places of Prespa cattle breeding



↓  
▲ Lechovo (70 km southwards)

## Legend:

- ▲ Place of origin
- ★ New breeding nuclei