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A LIFE+ [1] project for the restoration and protection of Oroklini lake

Nicosia, 16 February 2012

A pioneering project co-funded by the EU (LIFE+ project) has started just this January to restore and manage Oroklini Lake which is a Special Protection Area (SPA) and a Site of Community Interest (SCI). The 3-year project's beneficiaries are the Game Fund as lead beneficiary, BirdLife Cyprus [2] as coordinator, the Environment Department, the Forestry Department and the Oroklini Council. All beneficiaries met in January for the kick-off meeting of the project and the milestones were set for a successful start of the project.

The LIFE Oroklini project includes concrete conservation actions that will tackle the pressures threatening this important wetland. These actions include fencing of the lake to prevent disturbance from motor vehicles and motorcycles that enter the lake, removal of invasive alien plant species, planting indigenous shrubs and trees, water management and restoration of the area where a flea market operates illegally. The project, will implement many actions proposed in the Management Plan of Oroklini Lake. However, the environment is not the only one benefiting from this project, as many communication actions are also planned during the implementation of the LIFE Oroklini project. Public awareness actions for the significance of the lake include installation of notice boards at the site, construction of a visitor information point with a hide for nature watching, a photo competition for the production of a photo album, volunteer 'Clean Oroklini Day' and information material for schools and the wider public. In this way, the project will play a significant role on raising public awareness for the wetland and by the completion of the project we expect that Oroklini Lake will attract many visitors that will want to enjoy nature.

Oroklini Lake is a Natura 2000 site and is especially important for the two qualifying bird species, Black-winged Stilt (Oroklini Lake is the best nesting site in Cyprus for this species) and Spur-winged Plover that nest there. It is worth noting that Cyprus holds more than 50% of the EU's breeding population of the Spur-winged Plover and on a local scale, Oroklini Lake is one of the top 5 areas in Cyprus for the reproduction of this species. In total 190 bird species have been recorded at the site. The site is also classified as a SCI under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) for its halophytic marsh vegetation.

The benefits from this project are many. An important wetland will be restored and this project can be the model for future projects, the project will help to raise public awareness in the area, and also the lake could be used for environmental education among pupils. At the same time, the project will help in managing the water level of the lake. Moreover, the involvement of these five beneficiaries, provided by the project, will play a great role in the project's success in restoring and managing Oroklini Lake and for building support in the community for this important site.

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Notes to editor:

1. **LIFE+** is the EU's financial instrument for the environment, which supports environmental and nature conservation projects throughout the EU, as well as in some candidate, acceding and neighbouring countries. Since 1992, LIFE has co-financed some 3506 projects, contributing approximately €2.5 billion to the protection of the environment.
2. **BirdLife Cyprus** is a registered, non-governmental, not for profit organisation (NGO) that dedicates itself to the conservation of wild birds and their habitats in Cyprus. It was formed in 2003 through the merge of the two Cyprus Ornithological Societies and now has offices in Strakka, Nicosia comprised by professional staff. <http://www.birdlifecyprus.org/>