



# ANNUAL REPORT 2020

**NATIONAL PARK OF WHITE MOUNTAINS (SAMARIA GORGE)**





## 2020 Annual Report for Samaria (Lefka Ori) National Park

### Resolution **CM/ResDip(2019)**

on the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to the Cretan White Mountains National Park, Samaria (Greece)  
*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 21 November 2019 at the 1361<sup>st</sup> (Budget) meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

Name of the area: Samaria (Lefka Ori) National Park – (designated as “Cretan White Mountains National Park”)

Year and number of years since the award or renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas: 2020, 1 year after the last renewal (11/2019). First award: 1979.

### Central authority concerned:

Name: Ministry of Environment and Energy / General Directorate of Forests and Forest Environment - General Directorate for Environmental Policy<sup>2</sup>

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### Authority responsible for its management:

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### Authority responsible for its management:

Name: Management Body of Samaria National Park-Western Crete

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1.Conditions: List here all conditions which were attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma. Explain either how the conditions have been totally complied with or detail the progress in complying with the conditions. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

- In 2019, there were not set any conditions for the renewal of the diploma of the National Park of Crete White Mountains, Samaria (Greece), according to the resolution CM / ResDip (2019) 9, which was approved by the Committee of Ministers on November 21, 2019 at the 1361st meeting of the Representatives of the Ministers.

2.Recommendations: List here all recommendations which were attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma. Explain either how the recommendations have been totally complied with or detail the progress in complying with the recommendations. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

2.1 proceed as quickly as possible to the signing of the pending presidential decree recognising the new boundaries of the Samaria National Park; adapt accordingly the funding of the management board and the implementation of the management plan; continue the monitoring of species and ecosystems, including in particular the phenomenon of drying pine trees;

- adjust the funding of the board and the implementation of the management plan to continue the monitoring of species and ecosystems, including of drying pines • Law 4664/2020 (National Printing House of Greece issue A.32) was issued and in accordance with article 6, the management of the White Mountains National Park (Samaria Gorge) is extended to the Decentralized Administration of Crete through the Chania Forest Service.
- Law 4685/20 (National Printing House of Greece issue A92) "Modernization of environmental legislation, incorporation into Greek legislation of Directives 2018/844 and 2019/692 of the European Parliament and of the Council and other provisions" was issued. According to him, in Chapter C "Management of protected areas" The Natural Environment and Climate Change Agency (NECCA) is established in order to implement the policy set by the Ministry of Environment and Energy for the management of protected areas in Greece, the conservation of biodiversity, the promotion and implementation of sustainable development actions and Climate change and at the regional level is formed by the Protected Areas Management Units (MAIS), the Regions and the Municipalities.
- With Law 4685/20 The Natural Environment and Climate Change Agency (NECCA) has financial independence.
- Chania Forest Service has submitted the study "Protection and clearing of pine forests in the areas of Anopolis and Agios Ioannis Sfakion" of Chania in the area NATURA2000 of the White Mountains GR 4340014, for funding in sub-measure 8.3 of measure 2014 of the Rural Development program co-financed by the European Rural Development Fund with a budget of 800,000€
- The study of the Management Body "Study for the evaluation and evaluation of pine diseases and its extensibility in the White Mountains with management proposals." the year 2019 was included in a project funded by the business plan "Transport Infrastructure, Environment and Sustainable Development" NSRF 2014-2020, for conducting pilot management actions to address the existing problem and to monitor its process. The contract for the scientist who will implement the monitoring program is expected to be finalized in December 2020. The contract for the pilot actions is expected to be signed in 2021
- The Managing Authority is in the process of awarding contracts to external scientific experts for the monitoring of 3 types of marine habitats and seals monachus (*Monachus monachus*) as well as for the bird fauna of the protected area and the relevant programs are expected to start in 2021.
- The Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania (KEK-MAICh) in collaboration with the



Decentralized Administration of Crete - Chania Forest Service and the Management Body of the Samaria-Western Crete National Park for the implementation of 3 projects in the area of NAT which include NAT actions 2000. In addition, the MAICH Mediterranean Plant

## Projects

- Development of methodology for the strengthening and protection of endangered plant populations of Crete. Pilot application in the Prefecture of Chania. Project implemented by the Decentralized Administration of Crete - Chania Forest Directorate and the CIHEAM Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania (MAICH). The project includes actions related to plant taxa in the NATURA2000 area of the White Mountains. The project is funded from national resources under the Program "Protection and Upgrading of Forests 2019" of the Green Fund - Special Forest Agency. Duration: January 2020– December 2022.
- Monitoring of flora species and terrestrial habitat types except TO.8310 (in the White Mountains code GR4340008, NATURA2000). Project implemented by the CIHEAM Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania (MAIC) with the Contracting Authority the Management Body of the Samaria-Western Crete National Park. The purpose of the project is to monitor and evaluate the conservation status of terrestrial species of flora and habitat types in the NATURA2000 area of the "White Mountains" (code GR4340008). 17 habitat types are monitored in about 150 sample areas and over 30 species of flora sampling surfaces. The results of the project will be utilized by the Management Body of the Samaria-Western Crete National Park, both in the context of compliance with Directive 92/43 / EEC, and in the context of planning management measures and sustainable development of the protected area. This is the Sub-project 2 of the Act "INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT OF THE SAMARIA NATIONAL FOREST", in the Operational program "Crete 2014-2020". It is co-financed by the European Union (European Regional Development Fund) and national resources. Duration: January 2020 - October 2023
- Conservation of *Ampelitsia* (*Zelkovaabelicea*) in Crete. Continuation of a project implemented in the NATURA 2000 area of the White Mountains by the Decentralized Administration of Crete - Directorate of Forests of Chania, the CIHEAM Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania (MAIC) and the University of Friborg, Switzerland The *Zelkidova abeliki* (Endangered) according to the International Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species. It is protected by national law (Presidential Decree 67/1981) and the Berne International Treaty (Annex I), and is included in Annexes II and IV of the Habitats Directive (92/43 / EEC). The current phase of the project (2019-2021) is funded 70% by the Franklinia Foundation. Duration: January 2014 - December 2021 Website: <http://www.abelitsia.gr/>

2.2 open a certain number of side trails along the main trail for several purposes: a. for mountaineering, b. for scientific research, c. to make some historical buildings or ruins accessible for rehabilitation, and d. to create new emergency paths for rescuing people or combating fires. The access to these newly reopened trails should be prohibited for visitors and strictly regulated;

- The Municipality of Chania, working in this direction, implemented a study "maintenance and marking of mountaineering-banking trails in the Prefecture of Chania, in order to make accessible research and scientific observation.
- Maintenance and marking of a path leading to the Cyclops cave in the NATURA2000 area of the "White Mountains" (code GR4340008)
- Maintenance and marking of a path leading to the age-old *Zelkova abelicea* which is over 700 years old, dedicated to the late Professor Oliver Rackham at the spot Koutsopetros Omalou, (wider area of EDLO) in the NATURA2000 area of the "White Mountains" (code GR4340008)
- The Directorate of Forests of Chania implemented a study of 2019 "Maintenance of buildings of paths and other facilities in the wider area of the Samaria National Park" in order to improve the infrastructure to contribute to the better and safer operation of the Forest, maintenance and renewal

of buildings used as accommodation by the forest guards and in the most effective protection of the Forest

- The Managing Authority participates in the Xenios Project funded by the O.P. "Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship & Innovation" (EPAnEK) 2014-2020. The project was developed for Samaria and Dion National Park with the aim of developing a platform and smartphone application for the development of services for the short, medium and long term forecast of extreme natural events and natural disasters in areas of particular tourist and cultural interest are also vulnerable to natural risks. In this way, it contributes to the more effective management of these risks. In addition, the project aims to improve security and improve the tourism product on these sites, through a mobile application that will provide visitors with instant and reliable information. Further proposals on this recommendation will be thoroughly considered / studied in the future by the "Organization for Natural Environment and Climate Change" in collaboration with the competent authorities.
- In the year 2019, the Ephorate of Antiquities of Chania prepared restoration studies for the five small single-aisled temples dating from the beginning of the 14th century to the 18th, which concern the resolution of static issues, as well as the replacement of elements suffering from severe erosion. In 2020, the study was approved with no. ΥΠΠΟΑ / ΓΔΜΤΕ / ΔΑΒΜΜ / ΤΜΒΜΜ / 218012/26382/2330/596 / 14-5-2020 (ΑΔΑ: ΨΖΤ04653Π4-97Ι) Ministerial decision, while with the no. 4575 / 28-09-2020 (ΑΔΑ: ΩΘ237ΛΚ-2ΝΗ) Decision of integration from the Region of Crete, the act was included in the Operational Program "Crete 2014-2020" with OPS Code 5053961, budget 350.000,00 euros, and title Restoration and promotion of five of churches in the Samaria National Park. The aim of the act is to restore, highlight and tidy the temples, so that they are delivered statically and morphologically restored and safely accessible, harmoniously integrated into the natural environment of the forest.

### 2.3 design and apply measures to reverse the observed invasion of old olive groves by pine trees next to the village of Samaria;

- The Directorate of Forests of Chania has submitted a study ("Promotion of olive groves and improvement of infrastructure at Agios Nikolaos." ) which has been approved and it will be also submitted in the NSRF Region Of Crete for the UNESCO areas.
- The Management Body of the Samaria National Park in October 2020 signed a contract with an external consultant for the mapping and assessment of the current condition of the old olive groves near the village of Samaria, as part of a project under the OP "Transport Infrastructure, Environment and Sustainable Development »NSRF 2014 -2020. The duration of the project is 8 months. The results of this report will be used to carry out an action plan for the management of the olive groves, in order for the specific habitat to be strengthened and clearly defined in relation to the surrounding coniferous habitat.

### 2.4 preserve the current extent and quality of wilderness, excluding any new roads within the limits of the Samaria National Park, and retain a similar situation as far as possible in the surrounding areas;

- In the year 2020, both the Directorate of Forests of Chania and the Management Body have not submitted requests for examination for the opening of new roads within the borders of the National Park. In addition, in relevant meetings / consultations with the local communities, the Board of Directors of MB as well as the staff of the Directorate of Forests of Chania, point out the importance of maintaining the current area of wildlife in the National Park, which maintains the unique natural and cultural character of the area, compared to the most developed northern part of the island of Crete.

### 2.5. Take appropriate measures to facilitate the accessibility of the national park for the disabled up to 2.5 km. From the southern entrance of the park.

- The Directorate of Forests of Chania in collaboration with the Region of Crete, which is also represented in EDLO, have prepared a study "Samaria access for all. Agia Roumeli entrance gate of EDLO "in order to facilitate the accessibility of the National Park for people with special needs.

The studies and their funding will be finalized within the first half of 2021 and the entire accessibility chain will be operational by the summer of 2023

**3.Site Management:**List here any changes to the European Diploma holding site management, in relation to both terrestrial and aquatic environments (as appropriate), and in relation to staff and finances, since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

- There are no changes in the Samaria National Park, in relation to the terrestrial or aquatic environments.
- In the year 2020 the operation and management was done by the permanent staff of the Directorate of Forests of Chania.
- The permanent staff employed this year by the Directorate of Forests of Chania, included two (2) Foresters, four (4) Foresters and 13 forest rangers
- Two contracts, of the Directorate of Forests of Chania, cleanliness and observance of Health protocol against Covid-19, with seven (7) and five (5) employees were implemented during the operation of EDLO.
- The financing of EDLO in addition to the salaries of the permanent staff reached approximately 240,000 euros at the expense of the Regular Budget of the State.
- This year, the Fire Service employed 4 people on a daily basis along the main path.
- This year, as every year before the opening of the gorge to the public, this year was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the main path was cleaned and repaired from the various damages caused during the winter and the paving was replaced where necessary. This project was carried out by the Directorate of Forests of Chania with the permanent staff being responsible for its maintenance along the main path. In addition, escape routes to the concentration camps were cleaned and restored.
- The implementation of restrictive measures in relation to the entry of domestic goats in the National Park, continued. In this way the natural selection and succession were allowed to continue their course unaffected.
- The effort to eliminate illegal hunting is an ongoing process.

Doctors covered the medical needs of the visitors, with great success. This success was based on the existing logistical infrastructure, but also in the limited visits of older people due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

- The number of visitors to EDLO decreased compared to previous years, expected due to Covid-19 pandemic.
- The staff of the Chania Forest Directorate transported to the two entrances and exits of the Park 70 visitors who were unable to leave for various reasons (pathological causes of fatigue)
- The Directorate of Forests of Chania collected and treated wildlife from all over the Prefecture of Chania 25 birds, 7 of which were sent to Athens to ANIMA - Wild Life Conservation Society, and the rest after being treated by local veterinarians and the staff of the IHL were released in the White Mountains.

**4.Boundaries:** Give details of any changes to the boundaries of the European Diploma holding site since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. If there are any changes, please attach an appropriate map to this report. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

- There are no changes in the boundaries of the protected area compared to the last annual report.

**5. Other information:**List here any other information about the European Diploma holding site which you consider should be provided to the Council of Europe.

- The logo of the European Diploma has been placed on the signs of the Forest, both at the main entrances and along the entire length of the main path. While, it also appears on the official website of the Management Body of the Samaria National Park (<http://www.samaria.gr>).
- Council of Europe flags have been hoisted at both entrances. Due to Covid-19 pandemic, this year's mountain running race "Samaria Run" was not organized, in collaboration with the Mountaineering Association of Chania, nor the annual festival of the church of Samaria.
- The Directorate of Forests of Chania has supplied a paste of sulfuric acid paste to be used for educational purposes in forested villages adjacent to EDLO
- In collaboration with MAIC and the Region of Crete, the Directorate of Forests of Chania, with its staff, distributed a questionnaire to visitors within the Samaria National Park in order to record the views of visitors on the management and operation of the Samaria National Park in the middle of the Covid19 pandemic. From the elaboration of the questionnaires as well as from the guest books it emerged that the management-operation of the Samaria National Park in the middle of a covid-19 pandemic by the Directorate of Forests of Chania is considered very good.
- In 2020, the "Organization of the system of environmental interpretation and visitor management" was completed, which is included in a MB project funded by the Operational Program "Crete", NSRF 2014-2020. Through this action, a group of 7 routes for environmental interpretation was created at the borders of the Samaria National Park (White Mountains), based on low power Bluetooth technology and the smartphone application ("Ovgoro" application), in order to offer visitors a brief and holistic guidance for understanding the natural and cultural environment of the pilot sites of the most emblematic protected area of Crete.
- Conservation Status Estimates for the IUCN Red List Conservation Status Estimates for the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) were prepared for 9 plant neighborhoods of the White Mountains in 2019 by the CIHEAM Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania (MAIC) under the CARE-MEDIFL project ([www.care-mediflora.eu/el](http://www.care-mediflora.eu/el)). IUCN Red List Update Pending. The taxa are the following: *Alyssum fragillimum* (Bald.) Rech.f., *Anchusace spitosa* Lam., *Chaerophyllum creticum* Boiss. & Heldr., *Centaurea abaldaccii* Bald., *Helichrysum heldreichii* Boiss., *Hypericum ciferum* (Greuter) N. Robsoran, *Nep. H. Davis*, *Nocca azaffranii* (Greuter & Burdet) F. K. Mey.