

starting point for a productive discussion regarding the future of genetic research and conservation of brown bears in the region. It was agreed that the overall goal of genetic research on brown bears in the region should be to facilitate managing and protecting this species on a population level. In order to achieve this, three distinct levels of action were identified. The following first level activities were already carried out at the workshop:

1. Creation of a network of stakeholders involved in the genetic research and conservation of brown bears in the region. This network includes the following members / institutions:

- Albania: NGO Transborder Wildlife Association, Korça
- Austria: Research Institute of Wildlife Ecology/University of Veterinary Medicine and Laboratory of Molecular Systematics/Natural History Museum, Vienna
- Croatia: Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb
- F. Y. R. Macedonia: NGO Macedonian Ecological Society, Skopje
- Greece: NGO ARCTUROS, Thessaloniki
- Italy: Autonomous Province of Trento, Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA), University of Udine
- Romania: ICAS and the University of Transylvania, Braşov
- Serbia: NGO Mustela, Belgrade
- Slovakia: Faculty of Forestry, Technical University of Zvolen
- Slovenia: Department of Biology, Biotechnical Faculty, University of Ljubljana

2. Preparation of a document that will be available as a CD-ROM or download by the end of the year, defining common guidelines for the genetic research on the species in the area. 🐾

## New Environmental Centre on Brown Bears in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

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Bear conservationists from Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (F.Y.R. Macedonia) have recently looked past their countries decade-long differences and are engaging in a new era of fruitful cooperation. Since 2006, joint projects of NGOs from the two countries have included the genetic monitoring of bears in F.Y.R. Macedonia and the

SEE.ERAnet, an international project on the conservation of brown bears in the Balkans (see also *IBN* 18(1 & 2)).

In May 2009 another joint project was successfully completed. With funds provided by the Greek Development Program of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Greek NGO ARCTUROS, in cooperation with its counterpart MOLIKA implemented the project "ECO – INFO II". This project involved the environmental education and sensitization of the people of F.Y.R. Macedonia. Within the framework of this project, an environmental centre focused on large carnivores – bears in particular – was built close to the town of Bitola (Figure 1). The centre, which will be run eventually by the NGO MOLIKA, aims to become a focal point for environmental conservation in the region and will highlight the endangered status of the brown bear in a rapidly developing country. 🐾



Figure 1: School children learn about the life of the endangered brown bear during the official opening of a new environmental centre on large carnivores, in Bitola, F.Y.R. Macedonia