

**O 14. THE ROLE OF BEECH FOREST IN BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN ALBANIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** In the last three decades the size of protected areas has been considerably increasing particularly after the Strategy and Action Plan on Biodiversity, 2000. Since 2005, the number of protected areas has more than doubled, out of 5 % to over 16 %. The current network of Protected areas includes 119.401 ha coastal areas and 13.261 ha marine areas. In the last decades the national interest in the protection of the virgin beech forests in Albania with its natural values and high biodiversity has been reflected in proclaiming series of protected area including Rrajca and Lumi i Gashit as strict nature reserves. After the '90s due to the hard economic situation, these forest sites were affected by unsustainable forest use in the surrounding areas, but the current policy reflects an increased conservation effort. The current beech forest cover in Albania is estimated to be approximately 142 610 ha, with ancient and virgin forests almost completely altered. Beech forest in Albania provide important habitat for a number of medium to large mammals, including Balkan lynx, wolf and brown bear. Further on the aquatic biodiversity is also connected with beech forest areas. In both Albanian Alps and also at the northeastern and eastern part of the country, there are numerous species of community interest and other species. Among amphibians is been identified *Bombina variegata* and several reptiles that are listed in the Annex II, while eight species of Amphibians and 31 species of Reptiles are listed in the Annex IV. These areas fit well with beech forest and subalpine areas distribution. 20 mammal species, of which 18 terrestrial mammals and two marine ones are included in the Annex II of HD in Albania, while 40 mammal species in Albania are part of the HD Annex IV.

**Keywords:** *Biodiversity, Beech forest, Conservation, Species, Wildlife.*