

According to the claims of the Society for the Protection and Study of Birds of Serbia (DZPPS), the Special Nature Reserve “Pasnjaci velike droplje” is currently one of the most endangered protected areas in Serbia because a unique combination of steppe, slatina and marsh ecosystems is endangered and some animal species are threatened with extinction. If the destruction of pastures and other grassland habitats in Vojvodina continues, the disappearance of several very rare and strictly protected bird species, such as the velika droplja and the bald eagle, is possible.

Statistical data show that grassland habitats are drastically declining, primarily due to their ploughing. In addition to agriculture, the disappearance of grass habitats in Vojvodina is also affected by the construction of fishponds, excavation of mineral raw materials (most often sand and clay), removal and burning of vegetation, and construction of infrastructure facilities.

“We call these meadows, pastures, steppes, salt marshes and reeds habitats. These are areas mostly covered with herbaceous vegetation with a very small share of trees and shrubs with uneven distribution. SRP ‘Pasnjaci velike droplje’ is certainly the best-preserved complex of grass habitats in Vojvodina, inhabited by typical plant and animal species of the Pannonian Plain. Some of them are very endangered “, states Marko Tucakov from the Provincial Institute for Nature Protection.

The census of agriculture conducted in 2012 shows that in Vojvodina, the area under pastures has been halved in fifty years. In 1960, there were about 177,000 ha of pastures in Vojvodina, in 2012, 86,000 ha were registered. The Agricultural Land Administration claims that in 2019 alone, at least 50 ha of pastures were destroyed. VOICE research shows that in addition to ploughing certain plots on the territory of the Special Nature Reserve “Pasnjaci velike droplje”, about 40 ha of pastures were ploughed within the Special Nature Reserve “Okanj bara”, which is located in the municipality of Novi Becej.

The Society for the Protection and Study of Birds of Serbia claims that the disappearance of grasslands in Vojvodina directly affects the survival of the last population of the golden eagle (lat. *Aquila heliaca*) and the velika droplja (lat. *Otis tarda*) in Serbia. According to the Red Book of Birds of Serbia, published in 2019, the populations of both mentioned species in Serbia have been assessed as critically endangered, and they are in the greatest danger of extinction.

These species are also on the “Red List of Endangered Species” maintained by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

“In the last three decades of the last century, when the cruiser was intensively researched, its number dropped from 16-24 pairs to 2-3 pairs. Even then, he mainly concentrated only

on the wider area of Fruska gora and Deliblatska pescara, and that was exclusively due to the open grass habitats in these two localities. If it weren't for the grass habitats where the crusader hunts, this species would certainly stop nesting in our region ", says Marko Tucakov from the Provincial Institute for Nature Protection.

"At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, velika droplja nested in most of Vojvodina, in Pomoravlje around Nis and Prokuplje, then around Leskovac and Vranje, as well as in Negotinska Krajina and Kosovo. By destroying the most favourable habitats and direct hunting, velika droplja withdrew from most of the former habitats. This bird was a hunting game until the beginning of the Second World War. It is believed that at the beginning of the 20th century, over 1,000 of velika droplja lived in Vojvodina. Today, there are only 8 individuals left, "says Tucakov.

As we were told in the Agricultural Land Administration - due to poor management and maintenance of pastures, the Ministry of Agriculture, on the initiative of several Vojvodina livestock associations, is rapidly preparing a bill that would regulate pasture control and responsibility for their maintenance and use. According to the announcements, the law could be adopted in the next few months.

"Livestock, under the open sky, and semi-extensive, must be preserved in Vojvodina, through a system of subsidies for livestock production. In order to completely protect the pastures from the construction of ponds, and the meadows from the possibility of ploughing, it is necessary to change the Law on Agricultural Land as soon as possible ", points out Tucakov.

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