

MONITORING THE EFFECTS OF THE HIGHWAY SIATISTA - KRYSTALLOPYGI (K45) ON WILDLIFE IN GREECE

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Vehicle collisions have become an important mortality factor for wildlife in Greece. Since 1998 when the non-governmental organization ARCTUROS recorded the first fatal bear-vehicle collision, more than 30 bears have died.

In 2009 we initiated efforts to study this new mortality source by monitoring the effects of the highway Siatista – Krystallopygi (K45 – a vertical axis of the “Egnatia” highway) on wildlife in northern Greece. During the study we focused mainly on bears and wolves and used three different methodological approaches: satellite telemetry in order to monitor animal movements, genetic tagging in order to evaluate the genetic status and camera trapping. Within the framework of the study 7 bears and 1 wolf have been fitted with satellite collars, while at the same time genetic monitoring efforts have identified 40 different bears in the area and a genetically diverse wolf population. Camera trapping and satellite telemetry revealed that the mitigation structures are used mainly during the evening hours. These research efforts have been carried out concurrently with efforts to genetically monitor brown bears throughout Greece that indicate that the wider region is the converging point of two genetically distinct populations. In view of the urgency of the situation ARCTUROS has drafted management recommendations towards Egnatia Odos S.A. and the relevant state authorities – based also on the results of this study. Urgent efforts are currently underway so that the “bear-proof” enclosure fence at the sides of the highway is completed as soon as possible.