



Liz Smith

CEPF RIT Manager: Mediterranean Basin Hotspot

"I manage the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund's (CEPF) Regional Implementation Team (RIT) for the Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation, and promote innovative partnerships between NGOs, government, local communities and landowners to enhance conservation and connectivity in the region. The RIT is still fairly new, formed in October 2012, but we've already granted a number of large and small projects and initiated new partnerships within the Hotspot.

After my Geography degree I worked in the online fundraising sector managing

charities, and volunteered for a few wildlife NGOs. I did an internship in the Ecuadorian Amazon rainforest, carrying out biodiversity surveys. I witnessed the impact of oil in the region, and the pressures on indigenous people, as well as the incredible range of species in the relatively small reserve I was working in. After my time there, I knew it was a sector that I needed to work in.

The Mediterranean Basin is the world's second largest hotspot, and covers a vast range of habitats including cedar forests in the mountains of Lebanon, the unique aquatic ecosystems of the Macedonian lakes, and Algerian wetlands that are vitally important for wintering waterbirds. This size is a challenge when we want to

communicate the fund to all stakeholders in the region. The RIT is made up of members spread throughout the Hotspot, looking after their key regions—the Balkans, North Africa and the Middle East.

There are many threats to biodiversity, especially poor water management, and pressure from over-population, tourism and agriculture, with some countries dealing with significant socioeconomic problems and civil unrest. In countries such as Libya and Algeria, NGOs need targeted support, and so the RIT has focused on capacity-building and encouraging civil society participation.

The team includes experts from two BirdLife Partners, Slovenia and France, as well as

staff in the Middle East office. The team have worked in their regions for decades and know first-hand the challenges civil society organisations face when attempting to work on these projects. We believe in the importance of local knowledge and partnerships.

I feel incredibly lucky to be working with both BirdLife and CEPF, as both have such similar priorities. BirdLife's Partners are incredibly important, with their expert insight and contacts with key stakeholders, and their deep knowledge of what is needed by their regional ecosystems, giving us a richer understanding of the challenges we face, and more importantly, the vast potential for successful projects."

BirdLife comprises more than 100 conservation organisations working together to promote sustainable living as a means to conserve biodiversity



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