Dr. Petar Iankov – a talented and dedicated researcher and conservator of birds in Bulgaria. Biobibliography on the occasion of his 70th anniversary

Zlatozar N. Boev*

National Museum of Natural History, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 1 Tsar Osvooboditel Blvd., 1000 Sofia, BULGARIA
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8049-7509
*Corresponding author: boev@nmnhs.com; zlatozarboev@gmail.com

Abstract. Brief biographical data and the main nature conservation and scientific contributions, teaching and educational activity and compete bibliography containing data for a total of 419 author’s publications in specialized scientific and popular science editions are presented.

Key words: Ornithology in Bulgaria, Nature conservation, Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds, Bird fauna of Bulgaria, Eminent ornithologists

Short biographic data

Dr. Petar Ninkov Iankov (Fig. 1) was born on 21.12.1953 in the town of Sevlievo, where his parents were interned for disloyalty to the totalitarian regime established after 09.09.1944.

He obtained his elementary, primary and secondary education in the town of Krumovgrad. His interest in birds ignited in his earliest school years. Even as a student, he began systematic observations of birds, compiled a list of birds in the city area, ringed birds, began (since 1969) to keep daily ornithological notes, which he continues to this day. He completed his mandatory military service in 1971-1973 in the town of Maritsa (now Simeonovgrad).

In 1973, he was accepted as a student at the Faculty of Biology of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and in 1977 he completed his higher education as a "biologist-ecologist" specialist. During the next two years (1977-1979), he worked on a freelance basis at the then Studio for Popular Science Films "Vreme" as a consultant, and subsequently as an assistant director of films about nature ("The House of the Birds" based on a script by Nikolay Boev; "Life under armor" - based on the script of Tsolo Peshev, "The Last ones" - based on the script of Stiliyan Parushev and others).

In 1979, after winning a competition, he made a doctoral (PhD) dissertation on the topic "Ornithofauna of Sofia City, characteristics of its structure and formation" under the supervision of Prof. Mikhail Dolbik from the Institute of Zoology in Minsk (Belarus), which he defended successfully in 1983 (Iankov, 1983a). In the same year, he started...
Dr. Petar Iankov—a talented and dedicated researcher and conservator... working as a research assistant at the Institute of Zoology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, where he worked until 1994. After 1994, he held various positions at the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds, the BirdLife International partner in Bulgaria where he ended his working career.

Fig. 1. Dr. Petar Iankov, May 2008. Photo: A. Alexiev.

Main contributions

Dr. Petar Iankov's contributions in the field of ornithology and nature conservation are largely (but not entirely) contained in his more than 431 scientific and popular science publications. His first publications appeared in the late 1970s (Iankov, 1978).

Nature conservation activity

Since not only the Egyptian vulture (Iankov, 1977a, b) but also all our vultures are of special interest, Iankov P. organized and carried out in 1984 the first supplementary feeding of vultures in Bulgaria (in the Eastern Rhodopes).

Petar Iankov is one of the most active founders of the Youth Club for the Protection of Nature, founded in 1976 at the Faculty of Biology of Sofia University (Boev, 1977). Students from many universities in Sofia participate in it, but soon the club was
disbanded due to going beyond the framework of the national structures at that time. Although it has a short-lived history in the conditions of the totalitarian government of the country, it appears as a kind of predecessor of the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB), which was founded in 1988 on the idea of the ornithologist Nikolay Boev (1922-1985). From this year onwards, the life and overall scientific, practical and organizational activities of Petar Iankov are inextricably linked with this organization. His role is of decisive importance for the creation, organization and promotion of the BSPB to the international level and for the selection of this organization as the national partner for Bulgaria of the oldest international conservation organization in the world - BirdLife International (formerly the International Council for Bird Preservation, ICBP). For 8 years (1992-2000) he was a member (and Eastern European representative) of the World Council and European Committee of BirdLife International. He went through the entire hierarchy of BSPB - from an ordinary member, through executive director to chairman of its Management Board. As a management position holder in the BSPB, he assisted in the organizational development of nature conservation organizations and partners of BirdLife International in Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Russia, North Macedonia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Albania. Through BSPB, Dr. Iankov introduced in Bulgaria the concept of nature conservation centers as centers for practical biodiversity conservation and organized the creation of the country's first nature conservation centers, such as "Poda" (July 1997; Fig. 2) and "Eastern Rhodope" (October 1997; Fig 3). He organized and compiled (with the participation of hundreds of professional and amateur ornithologists) the first Bulgarian ornithological atlas (Iankov, 2007; Fig. 4).

Dr. Petar Iankov—a talented and dedicated researcher and conservator...

**Fig. 3.** Nature Conservation Center "Eastern Rhodopes" near town of Madzharovo. 09.07.2020. Photo: Z. Boev.

**Fig. 4.** Dr. Petar Iankov presenting the book “Atlas of the breeding birds in Bulgaria” at the British Natural History Bookstore, British Birdwatching Fair, Rutland Waters, UK, August 2008. Photo: M. Day.
His participation is key in the identification and description of the most significant ornithological territories in Bulgaria (Important Bird Areas), which are the basis of the national ecological network NATURA 2000, built by the state, which is the backbone of the territorial conservation of the Bulgarian nature.

As an expert, Dr. Iankov P. took an active part in the development of Bulgaria's new nature conservation legislation after the social changes in 1989, both by assisting the Ministry of Environment and Water (MOEW) in the preparation of the drafts of the Protected Areas Act and the Biological Diversity Act, and in their discussion in the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry in the National Assembly. He also participated in the development of the first Bulgarian National Strategy for the Conservation of Biological Diversity (1995) and the National Plan for the Conservation of Biological Diversity (2000) and was one of the main authors of the first National Plan for Priority Actions for the Conservation of Biodiversity the most significant wetlands of Bulgaria (1995), as well as in its updated version (2013).

As a specialist ornithologist with extensive field and conservation experience, he is a major participant in the organization and development of the first Action Plans for endangered species in Bulgaria (2002) and author of the national plans for the conservation of the Saker falcon, the Egyptian vulture, the Lesser white-fronted goose, the White-headed duck and the Slender-billed curlew. He developed Bulgaria's first Management Plan of a Protected Area according to the internationally recognized EUROSITE standards (1994) - Management Plan of the Protected Area "Poda", managed by the BSPB.

He is also an active participant in the organization and implementation of one of the largest international programs for the conservation of Bulgarian nature - the Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Program (1994-2002) and the Biodiversity Support Program (1994-2004) d.), implemented by the US Agency for International Development, WWF, The Nature Conservancy and the World Resources Institute.

In the preparation of management plans for one of the largest protected natural areas in Bulgaria - Central Balkan National Park and Rila Monastery Nature Park (2003) P. Iankov is the main author. He is a key participant in the planning and implementation of the first Rapid Ecological Assessment in Bulgaria of a protected natural area - that of the "Rila Monastery" Nature Park.

Scientific activity

One of his first scientific contributions was in the field of experimental ornithology. While still a student in 1977, in-situ ethological experiment, through which he proved the use of tools by the Egyptian vulture in Europe as well. This study was published in the French ornithological journal Alauda (Iankov, 1983b). At that time, he also conducted the first complete ornithological mapping of a territory in Bulgaria (1980-1982, the territory of Sofia) according to the standard methodology of the European ornithological atlas (Iankov, 1983c).

In the following decades, P. Iankov identified 5 species of birds as new to Bulgaria Eleonora's falcon (Falco eleonorae), Italian sparrow (Passer italiae), Ring-billed gull (Larus delawarensis), Red-flanked bluetail (Tarsiger cyanurus) and Long-billed dowitcher (Limnodromus scolopaceus), as well as the nesting of the Griffon vulture (Gyps fulvus) after a long non-breeding period, and the Pallid swift (Apus pallidus). With a series of publications about birds in urban areas, he practically contributes to the
Dr. Petar Iankov—a talented and dedicated researcher and conservator... development of "urban" ornithology in Bulgaria, and several of his graduates develop questions with a similar theme. About the avifauna of Turkmenistan has established a new species of bird (Iankov, 2016) – Himalayan vulture (Gyps himalayensis).

He is the correspondent for Bulgaria of the British magazine "British Birds" and one of the national correspondents for our country in the preparation of one of the main monographs on the birds of the Western Palearctic (Cramp & Simmons (eds.), 1977-1994). Since its establishment until 2021, he is among the most active members of the Bulgarian National Rarities Committee (BUNARCO).

For 4 decades, he participated in the annual monitoring of migratory soaring birds near Burgas (since 1983) and in the annual mid-winter counts of waterfowl (Fig. 5) in Bulgaria (since 1984). He participated in international scientific and conservation expeditions in Turkmenistan (Fig. 6), Turkey, Albania and other countries.

![Fig. 5. Dr. Petar Iankov in the company of three red-breasted geese (Branta ruficollis) near Shabla Lake. February 2011. Photo: N. Petkov](image)
Dr. Iankov P. participated in dozens of scientific forums (including the International Ornithological Congress in 1982 in Moscow), conferences, symposia on ornithology and bird conservation (Figs. 7, 8), including the meetings of the Bern Convention, the Ramsar Convention, the Convention on Biological diversity, etc.
Teaching activity

In addition to practical and theoretical nature conservation, P. Iankov also made a significant contribution to the training of personnel. He led lectures (on the specialty "Nature Reserve Activities") and exercises (on ornithology) at the Faculty of Biology of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski (1990-1998) and was the supervisor of 8 graduate students who developed their diploma theses on ornithological topics. He was the scientific leader of more than 10 student expeditions in the Eastern Rhodopes, Pleven Region and Targovishte Region (1977-1991).

Educational activity

He is practically one of the founders of birdwatching tourism in Bulgaria (since 1985). He has developed dozens of itineraries and has been an ornithological guide for more than 100 groups of birdwatchers from over 12 countries. He is the author of the first Bulgarian guidebook for ornithological tourism (and the first Bulgarian ornithological book in English (Iankov, 1996; Fig. 9).

His promotion activity is extensive. He has given more than 700 interviews on radio, television, social media and has written dozens of popular science articles and books for children and older birders.

For Bulgarian bird lovers, he has translated and adapted into Bulgarian the "Bible" of professional and amateur ornithologists - "Field Guide to the Birds of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East" - first edition for the country, 2013 (Svenson et al. 2013), and second edition for Bulgaria (2023).
It is difficult to briefly cover the entire activity and all the contributions of this dedicated and tireless researcher and bird conservationist in Bulgaria. It will not be an exaggeration if we summarize that he is the brightest representative of the Bulgarian ornithological class in the first quarter of the 21st century. Let's wish him health and many more new successes in the second half of his life's journey!

Fig. 9. Cover of the Petar Iankov’s book “Where to Watch Birds in Bulgaria”.

**Bibliography**

It turns out that Dr. Petar Iankov does not have his own complete bibliographic list of his scientific and popular science works. Separate lists, compiled on different occasions, as well as our data, collected unintentionally, served to prepare the current bibliography of this notable Bulgarian ornithologist. It is clear from it that the publications were written in 6 languages – Belarusian, Bulgarian, English, French, German, and Russian in dozens of countries.

One necessary clarification: Due to the different Latin spelling of the Bulgarian letter “я” (“ya”) in different languages, Dr. Petar Iankov's family name is spelled as Yankov, Iankov or Jankov.

The list presented here includes both publications in specialized scientific editions and those in popular journals and even newspapers. His scientific and popular science books are also included in the bibliography. All works are presented chronologically.
Dr. Petar Iankov—a talented and dedicated researcher and conservator...

1977

2. Iankov P. 1977b. On the breeding ecology and some behavioural activities of the Egyptian Vulture Neophron percnopterus L. in Bulgaria. Diploma work, Sofia University, Faculty of Biology, Sofia. 54 p. (in Bulgarian).

1978


1979


1980


1981


1982


1983


1984

Dr. Petar Iankov—a talented and dedicated researcher and conservator...


1985


54. Iankov P. 1985. What we shouldn't have seen. Zashtita na prirodata, 10: 5-6. (in Bulgarian).


1986


Dr. Petar Iankov—a talented and dedicated researcher and conservator...

1987


1988

1989


1990


1991

Dr. Petar Iankov—a talented and dedicated researcher and conservator...


1992


1993


1994


Dr. Petar Iankov—a talented and dedicated researcher and conservator...


1995


1996


1997


Dr. Petar Iankov—a talented and dedicated researcher and conservator...


Dr. Petar Iankov — a talented and dedicated researcher and conservator...


1998


1999


2000


2001


2002

Dr. Petar Iankov – a talented and dedicated researcher and conservator...


2003


2004


2005


2006


2007

Dr. Petar Iankov—a talented and dedicated researcher and conservator...


Dr. Petar Iankov – a talented and dedicated researcher and conservator...


2009


2010


2011


Dr. Petar Iankov – a talented and dedicated researcher and conservator...


2012


2013


377. Mateeva, I., Iankov P. 2013. Migration Pattern of 42 bird species form the Bulgarian Bird Fauna according to the current knowledge. Report from the International Project


2014


385. Iankov P., 2014. The places without which there is no flight. Za ptitsite, 1: 5-6. (in Bulgarian).


2015

Dr. Petar Iankov—a talented and dedicated researcher and conservator...


2017


2018


2019


2020


2021

Dr. Petar Iankov—a talented and dedicated researcher and conservator...

2022


2023


Acknowledgements

The author owes special thanks to Mrs. Svetlozara Kazandzhieva, Co-Editor-In-Chief of Bull. Nat. Hist. Mus. – Plovdiv for the precise editing of the manuscript.

References

Iankov P. 1977b. *On the breeding ecology and some behavioural activities of the Egyptian Vulture Neophron percnopterus L. in Bulgaria*. Diploma work, Sofia University, Faculty of Biology, Sofia. 54 p. (in Bulgarian).


