

UČKA ORNITOLOGY CAMP 2016.

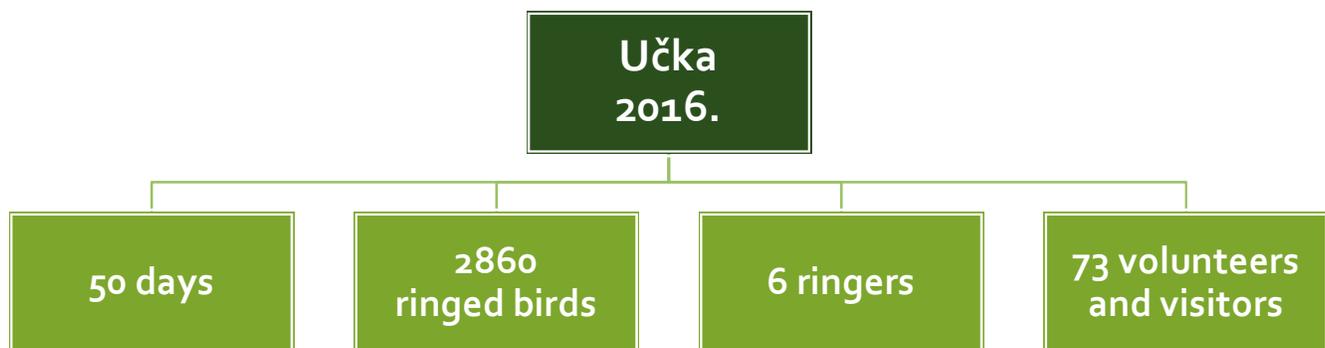
Report for volunteers, visitors and bird lovers



UČKA ORNITHOLOGY CAMP

On the sunny slopes of the southern part of **Nature park Učka**, amongst the groves and clearings, lies **Rovozna** – the largest pond in the area. Rovozna is an important water source for birds and other animals inhabiting its surroundings, and is therefore rich with wildlife throughout the year. The pond comes to life particularly during the autumn bird migration, when numerous species stop there to find water, food and shelter during their journey to warmer regions.

This is the location of the **Učka ornithology camp**, which has been organised in 2016 for the 14th year in a row by **Association BIOM** and the **management of Nature Park Učka**. The camp is one of BIOM's oldest projects. Its aim is to monitor the autumn bird migration, but also to educate interested visitors about birds and their habitats, as well as other plants and animals present on the location. The camp is open for about 50 days each year, from mid-August to the beginning of October. During this period we use 14 ornithological mist nets to catch and ring birds. We identify the species, age and sex of each individual, we measure and ring them and immediately afterwards release the unharmed. We do not use tape lures or any other methods of attracting birds during ringing.

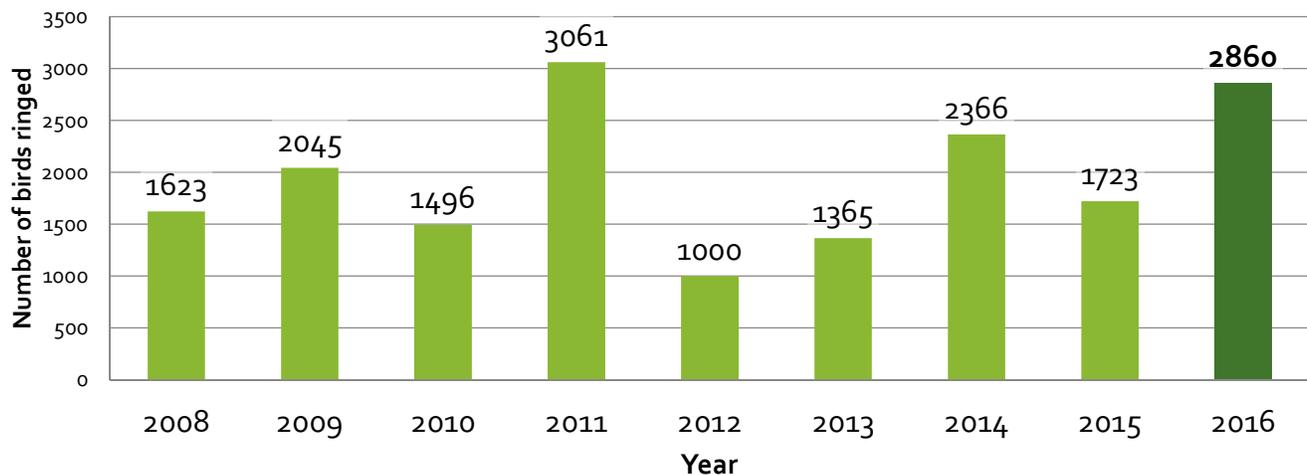


f: Iva Šoštarić

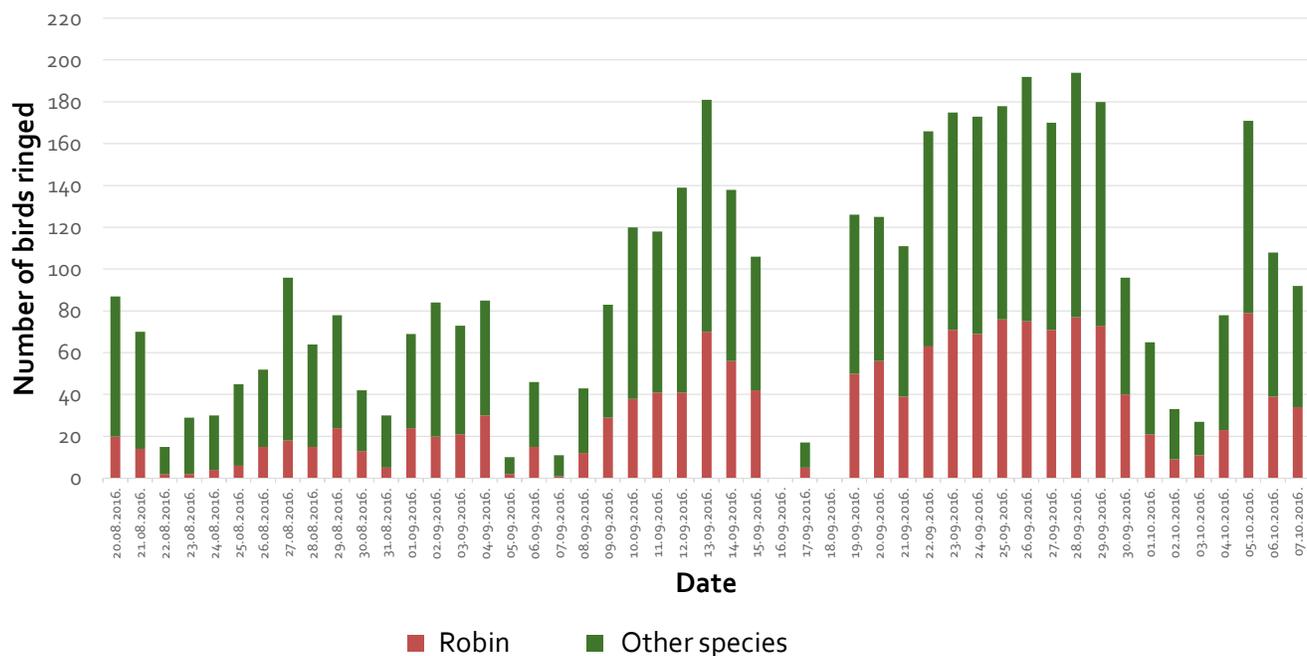
RINGING RESULTS

Učka ornithology camp 2016.

During the camp in 2016 we ringed a total of **2860 birds**, belonging to **47 different species**. This was our second most successful year, just after the record 2011. The most commonly caught species, the Robin, started its migration somewhat earlier this year, resulting in a record number of **1556** individuals caught and ringed!



Weather conditions were extremely favourable, with only a couple of rainy and/or windy days. Hence ringing was rarely interrupted.



BIRDING CURIOSITIES

Učka ornithology camp 2016.

f: Jonathan Pruskin



This year we recorded a high number of **Crossbills (*Loxia curvirostra*)** flying around the area searching for food. Birds moved in nomadic flocks of 15-30 individuals, mostly foraging high in the canopy. We caught and ringed a total of 12 Crossbills.

f: Florbela Torres



The **Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*)** resides and hunts on clearings in the surrounding area. Its characteristic song can commonly be heard at dawn and dusk during the first couple of weeks of the camp. Before leaving for Africa, one Nightjar let us see it up close.

f: Jonathan Pruskin



The **Red-breasted Flycatcher (*Ficedula parva*)** breeds in lush continental forests, and can occasionally be seen on Učka during its migration towards wintering sites in Pakistan and India. In mid-September we were visited by one juvenile individual.

f: Iva Šoštarić



One of the surprises we found in our mist nets was a **Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)**, a species commonly inhabiting river banks and fishponds, where it feeds on fish. One juvenile bird, most likely on the way to its wintering site on the Adriatic coast, decided to stop by our pond.

f: Iva Šoštarić



Grey-headed Woodpecker (*Picus canus*) is a common resident bird of surrounding area, often announcing its presence with characteristic repeating whistles. It usually keeps to high canopy, so we were particularly lucky to catch one young male.

f: Iva Šoštarić



We catch and ring more than 1000 **Robins (*Erithacus rubecula*)** each year, so it is not surprising that we occasionally encounter some unusual individuals. This year we ringed a Robin with an uncharacteristic grey collar and dull, dark-grey upperparts.

f: Eliza Świtalska



Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*) nests in swampy forests of continental Croatia. Two juvenile birds surprised us with a visit to the pond during their trip to tropical Africa. They spent the midday feeding at the pond, slept in a nearby grove and left the next day.

f: Mirjana Valjak-Porupski



We also recorded nine species of raptors and three owl species in the area. Aside from the local pair of **Common Buzzards (*Buteo buteo*)**, Griffon Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*), Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and Short-toed Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*) were often seen flying above us.

STORIES FROM THE CAMP

Učka ornithology camp 2016.



A clearing in the vicinity of the camp was subjected to **habitat restoration** for yet another year. Restoration of meadow habitat which gradually disappears due to succession was initiated by our longtime volunteer, Trevor Phelps, who helps us with mowing and cutting down bushes. A volunteer group of 20 Belgian scouts also made an important contribution to restoration in early July.



In addition to standard data recorded for each ringed bird (species, gender, age, wing length, weight), this year we introduced some **additional measurements**. Fat score, a measure of the amount of fat deposits, is now mandatory to record. Additional measures of wing, tail and muscle score were occasionally taken, in order to obtain new knowledge about birds migrating through this area.



During 2016, in collaboration with Nord University, we organized **BirdID – Bird identification training**. An important part of the field program was held at the camp. Participants had the opportunity to learn more about bird identification from the hand, practice recognition of calls and songs of many resident and migratory species, and encounter a number of rare species of songbirds, raptors and owls for the first time.



In late September we were visited by a group of high school students from the UK, Germany, France and Croatia, as part of the project **"Mint Exchange"**. Bioteka, an association promoting biology and related sciences, is one of the partners participating in this exchange of students and teachers. They hosted this year's outdoor learning program, as part of which students spent a day on Učka.



Veterinary science student Dina Vukoja spent a day with us at the camp, collecting samples of cloacal swabs of some ringed birds. Dina will **analyse** the collected samples in a veterinary laboratory using molecular method Real-time PCR, in search of **bacteria belonging to Chlamydiaceae** genus. The obtained data will be included in her master thesis.



Florbela Torres, our volunteer from Portugal, recorded a short **promotional video about the camp**. The video perfectly captures the beauty of Nature Park Učka, along with the various camp activities. It can be viewed on Association BIOM's YouTube channel. Flor was a member of our BIOM team for a total of one year, as a part of "Birds and Nature Protection", a project within the European Voluntary Service program of Erasmus +.

VOLUNTEERS AND VISITORS

Učka ornithology camp 2016.

The camp was successful thanks to the efforts of members and employees of the Association BIOM, the management of NP Učka, as well as volunteers from Croatia and abroad. This year we welcomed a **total of 73 volunteers and visitors!** Some of our British volunteers came for the fifth year in a row, and plan to continue visiting our camp. We are especially pleased that the majority of visitors expressed a wish to participate again next year.

Ringers present during the camp:

No.	Name	Country	No. days
1	Iva Šoštarić	Croatia	33
2	Biljana Ječmenica	Croatia	31
3	Sven Kapelj	Croatia	13
4	Tomislav Hudina	Croatia	10
5	Luka Basrek	Croatia	5
6	Miloš Martinović	Croatia	4

Volunteers with most days spent at the camp:

No.	Name	Country	No. days
1	Renato Katić	Croatia	23
2	Trevor Phelps	UK	13
3	Russel Harris	UK	13
4	Elaine Drewe	UK	13
5	Izabella Rząd	Poland	9
6	Eliza Świtalska	Poland	9
7	Bartłomiej Rząd	Poland	9
8	Florbela Torres	Portugal	9
9	Tadija Kekić	Croatia	8
10	James Allsop	UK	7
11	Jonathan Pruskin	UK	7

We would like to use this occasion to **express our sincere gratitude to all of the ringers, volunteers, visitors and staff of NP Učka** who helped us carry out another successful ringing season!



HOW TO JOIN?

Next camp:

18th Aug – 5th Oct 2017

If you are interested in joining our camp as a volunteer or a visitor, or would like to know more, feel free to contact one of the camp coordinators:

Iva Šoštarić

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Biljana Ječmenica

biljana.jecmenica@biom.hr

You can also follow our news and announcements online:

Association BIOM

<http://www.biom.hr/en/>

<https://web.facebook.com/biom.hr/>



f. Mirjana Valjak-Porupski

Basic information about the life conditions on the camp:

► Sleeping in tents

There are always a few available tents at the camp location, provided by Association BIOM. We advise those planning a longer visit to bring their own tents.

► Cooking on camp fire / gas cooker

Every couple of days we visit a nearby town to buy groceries (we ask participants to contribute to the budget with around 5.5 EUR / 5 GBP per day). Help with cooking, as well as collecting and chopping wood is more than welcome!

► Drinking water available on location

Our water supply is stored in a 1500 L tank and should be used rationally. There are no showers, but it is possible to occasionally use a public one, located on a beach of the nearby town.

► Toilet in nature

The toilet consists of a shovel, forest and an improvised chair made from hornbeam wood.

► Electricity from solar panels

Only for charging small electrical equipment (e.g. cell phones and cameras).

► Weak phone/internet signal

Cell signal is present but mostly weak. Occasionally it disappears completely and in that case finding it requires a short walk uphill.

► Routine daily schedule

We open the mist nets before dawn each day, and check for birds every 45 min afterwards. The midday break starts at 11 a.m. and during this time the nets are closed. The break finishes at 4 p.m. and the mist nets are then open until sunset.