

VIROVITICA-PODRAVINA COUNTY



BIRDWATCHING
ALONG THE
DRAVA RIVER

BIRDS OF THE SANDBARS

The little tern (*Sterna albifrons*) is one of the best indicators for a well-preserved natural river area or river strip. Where it nests, the river is in a good natural condition. It nests on the sandbars or islands where it usually lays two eggs directly onto the gravel. The nest, if it can be called so, is unattractive, most often only a dent in the gravel, later sometimes marked with a few small twigs. The young, as well as the eggs, are very much like the gravel and the danger that they will be simply run over is very high if one moves on the sandbars where they nest. The nesting period is rather prolonged and starts after the high spring waters start to withdraw. It feeds on small fish that it catches by nosediving in the water, most often in the shallow waters behind the sandbars. The Drava population is up to 10 pairs of these birds.

The common tern (*Sterna hirundo*), as well as the little tern, nests in the same area, often in joint colonies. It is more numerous than the little tern and feeds on small fish that it catches by nosediving into the water, most often in the shallow waters behind the sandbars. The Drava population is up to 70 pairs of these birds.

The common sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*) is a typical bird in the vegetation of the overgrown sandbars. It nests along the edges of the vegetation where it finds refuge. The nest is nearly impossible to find; a proof of nesting is usually a particularly territorial behaviour of the birds or young birds that appear on the sandbars after they hatched. It feeds on invertebrates that it usually collects along the water edges. Even though it is very difficult to make an estimate due to their being so hidden, the Drava population probably does not exceed more than 100 pairs of these birds.

The little ringed plover (*Charadrius dubius*) is a bird nesting on the sandbars but also on other non-overgrown surfaces. It favours nesting on the sandbars, often along the edges of tern colonies but also independently. On the larger sandbars rich in food, it is common for several couples to nest. Like in the tern, the nest is very unattractive and is usually nothing more but a small dent in the gravel. It always lays four eggs placed with their tops in the centre of the nest, relatively large for the bird. The size and the colour of the eggs very much look like the surrounding gravel and it is extremely difficult to spot them. When approaching the nest, the parents will try to drive one away pretending to be wounded. In this case, it is best to carefully leave the ground, watching one's step, along the shortest route to the edge of the water away from the territory where the bird nests. The Drava population is up to 40 pairs of these birds.



THE



THE LITTLE RINGED PLOVER



THE LITTLE TERN



COMMON SANDPIPER



THE COMMON TERN



RING-BILLED GULL



THE COMMON TERN'S NEST



THE BLACK STORK

The list of birds in Croatia contains 390 species. Some species are similar to others and it is very difficult to tell them apart, while some are very typical and cannot be mistaken for any other. In some species, there is no difference between the male and the female, sometimes even among the young ones, while in some other species there is a major difference depending on the gender, age or season, i.e. their mating and winter feathers. Not only can birds be observed; rather, listening to the birds singing is very widespread as well as determining the species based on its song and call. On the territory of the Virovitica-Podravina County, a larger number of birds are nesting, spending the winter or flying over it, which is a result of a great diversity in the habitats of which one can in particular single out the UNESCO cross border biosphere reserve Mura-Drava-Danube, that extends in the County along the flow of the river Drava in the length of 72.5 km. This area is inhabited by very attractive and rare bird species such as the bee-eater, hoopoe, common kingfisher, common buzzard, black-winged stilt and others. Some of these species are non-migratory and can be observed during the entire year, while some are nesting, i.e. reside here only during the nesting season and while their young are growing up. Moreover, here one can see interesting birds that arrive in the winter, i.e. winter birds; during the nesting period, they move to the North.



BIRDS OF WETLAND HABITATS

The black stork (*Ciconia nigra*) is a nesting bird of vast forest areas of the Pannonian Croatia. The largest part of the population nests in the forests of common oak. It is a migratory bird and winters in Africa, South of Sahara, while in a smaller number it winters in Spain and Bulgaria. During the summer and migration to the rich feeding grounds (swamps, fishponds), they often gather in flocks. They are monogamous and territorial; the independent couple returns to the nest together. The nest is built from branches and twigs and covered in moss, grass and leaves. They build them in big old trees, most often in the upper third of the tree, 4 to 25 m above the ground. The older nests can be even 1.5 m in the diameter. Both parents sit on eggs and take care of the young. Young birds can fly after 63 to 71 days and build their first nest when they are three years old. They feed on fish, amphibians, bugs and their larvae and to a smaller extent on smaller mammals, snakes, lizards and crabs. The estimate of the total nesting population in Croatia is 350 to 400 pairs.

The white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*), as opposed to the black stork, mostly nests in areas inhabited by people. It most often builds the nest on houses and electricity poles, due to which in the past years platforms have been placed on the poles in order to prevent the nest from collapsing. The majority of the population nests in the valleys along large rivers. It often feeds on bugs, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians and whatever else it finds on agricultural land. It is precisely because of its food that people consider it a very useful bird since it helps them in preserving their harvest. The coexistence of humans and storks has been known from times immemorial and the stork is a much-liked bird. It spends the winter in the sub-Saharan Africa and comes to Croatia with the first days of spring.

The mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) is one of the most common water birds. It is much more frequent on lentic waters than on rivers but during the winter months, when the lentic waters are frozen, it can be found on the Drava in flocks of several thousands. It nests along the edges of swamps, canals and rivers. It usually has up to ten ducklings taken care of by the mother. The mallard feeds on plants, in particular the seeds of water plants, but also on small invertebrates that it finds in shallow waters and water plants. It is becoming ever more popular with people because it quickly gets used to the persons that it frequently sees and soon approaches them, most often collecting food rests such as bread, corn for fishing, etc.

The grey heron (*Graureiher*) is a non-migratory bird; it nests on the willow-trees and in the reed in swamps and carp ponds. It is relatively common on the Drava where in the shallow water it catches fish and amphibians. One can often see it also on agricultural land where it feeds on (in particular after the harvest and major rains) small mammals that have nowhere to hide.

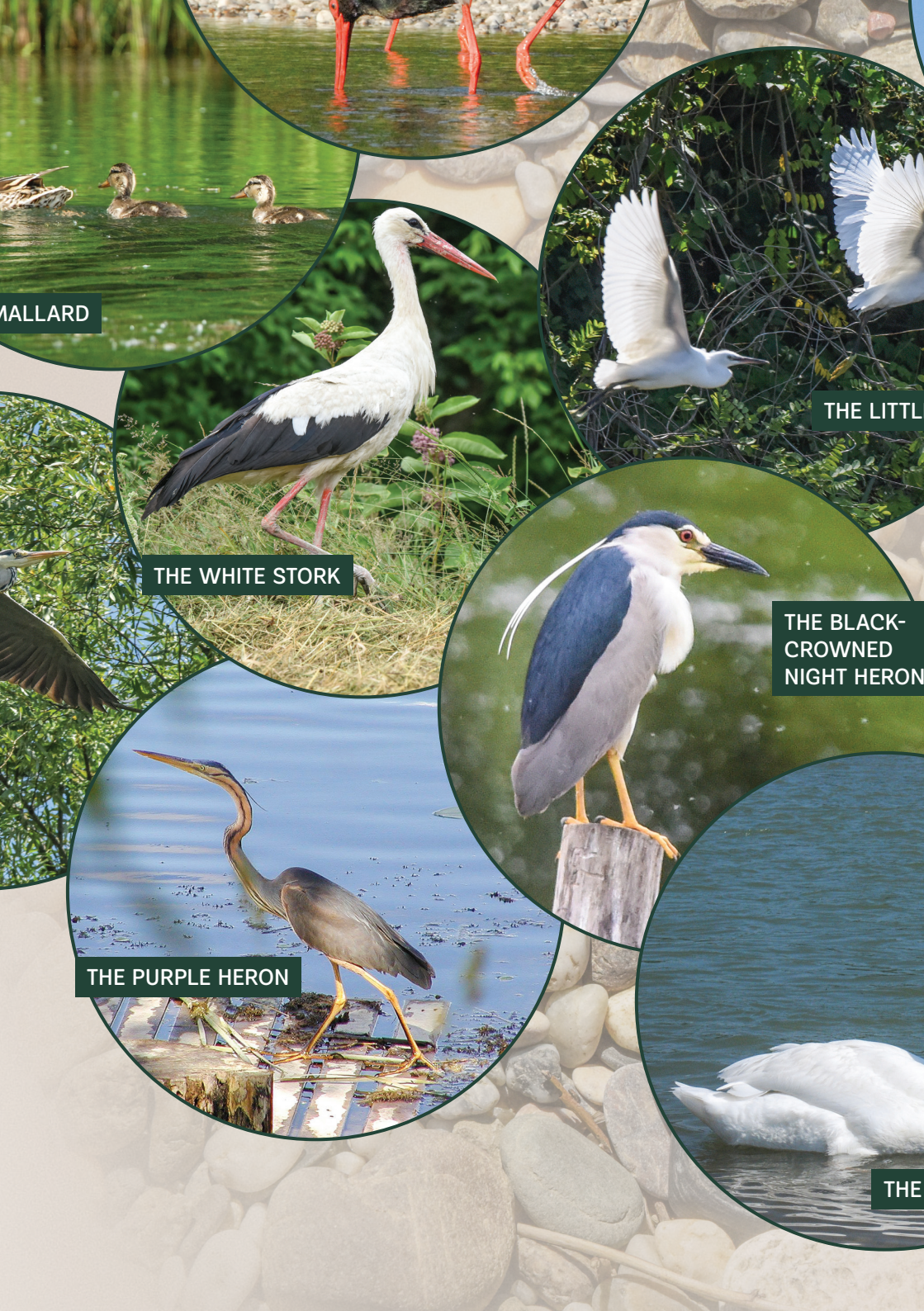
The purple heron (*Ardea purpurea*) is much rarer than the grey heron; it feeds in the shallow backwaters, more seldom on rivers. It most often feeds on fish and amphibians



THE M



THE GREY HERON



MALLARD

THE WHITE STORK

THE LITTLE

THE BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON

THE PURPLE HERON

THE



THE GREAT EGRET

but it will also gladly take other available food. It nests just like the grey heron in the reed and on willow-trees, often in mixed colonies with other herons.

The great egret (*Egretta alba*) is rarer than the grey heron; it feeds in the shallow backwaters and rivers, sometimes even along seashores. It most often nests in the reed in a colony with other egrets. It feeds mostly on fish and amphibians but it will gladly take also other available food. Just like the grey heron, it is often seen feeding on agricultural land.

The little egret (*Egretta garzetta*) is relatively numerous on the Drava. It is most frequently seen in the shallow waters behind sandbars. It hunts in a very particular way scaring fish by running in the shallow waters, waving its wings, jumping etc. It is adorned with a crest on its head and generally has a very graceful appearance. It feeds on small fish, amphibians and invertebrates. It leaves the area in the winter but one can see it in the coastal zone.

The black-crowned night heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) is a relatively rare egret on the Drava. It tends to hide so that many birds are probably not seen at all. It often sits on a branch above the water. It is most active at dusk when it often flies and uses the typical 'quack' sound. It feeds on small fish, amphibians and invertebrates. It often nests in colonies with other egrets on willow-trees, in reed and water plants.

The Eurasian coot (*Fulica atra*) is a frequent bird at the places where the flow of the river is significantly slowed down and where the water surface is covered in water plants. The greatest concentration of the Eurasian coot is in the upper shallow parts of the accumulations overgrown in water plants. It is most numerous during the winter months when birds from the North come to the accumulations. Then you can see ten and more thousands of birds on the accumulations. It usually feeds on water plants, in particular seeds, but it also comes on land where it frequently grazes grass. The nest is floating and made from water plants, most often along the edges of the reed.

The black-headed gull (*Larus ridibundus*) is not a frequent bird on the Drava. The majority of them can be found in the areas of the accumulations. It nests on small islands in colonies. It feeds on everything that is available, very often also upon landfills; it is not choosy and will gladly eat anything available. The number of the species oscillates from year to year. It is very prone to wandering.

The mute swan (*Cygnus olor*) is a relatively new nesting bird in the region. In Croatia, it has been nesting only for a little over 20 years and its number is still growing. It came to Croatia from the North of the continent. Lately, due to its aggressiveness towards other species, it is increasingly threatening the domestic species such as different types of ducks. It mostly feeds on water plants but also gladly takes food from people, in particular in the winter months. It makes its nest from water plants and the nest is floating on the water. It usually has four young but even seven in a nest have been noticed. It is not endangered, however, its number is limited by the surface of the existing habitats.



E EGRET



MUTE SWAN

THE BIRDS OF STEEP RIVER BANKS

Steep banks are most often found along the external edges of meanders; they can be more than one kilometre long and more than 10 m high. Most valuable as a habitat are the very high, long and steep banks. The common kingfisher, sand martin and bee-eater nest there.

The common kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) is one of the most beautiful nesting birds in Europe; what is more, it is one of the most beautiful birds in the world. It is rather frequent on the Drava, even though barely visible to those who are not well informed. The males are very territorial and jealously protect their part of the bank from the adversaries. Due to the expressed territoriality, battles are frequent, in particular on the edges of the territory. A male usually has several females and up to three nests per year, so it is common to find a larger number of holes in which they nest on one territory. Because of parasites in the nest, the kingfisher usually digs a new hole for every new nest. The Drava population, depending on the year, amounts up to 120 pairs of these birds.

The sand martin (*Riparia riparia*) nests in steep riverbanks where the sediment is favourable for digging holes. The colonies can be of various sizes; on the territory of the Drava, in the period from 2005 to 2015, the largest noticed colony had approximately 5,000 pairs. It feeds on the available insects that it catches while flying and these are most often fishflies, aphids and mosquitos, depending on what is available. It can have two nests, depending on the year; however, on the Drava it usually has one. It is an important species because it can very much reduce insects such as mosquitos.

The bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*) is easily recognised by its colour. The lower part of the body is blue and green, while the upper part is mostly red and brown. Below its beak, one can see a broad yellow spot, and across its red eye, there is a black patch. Despite its varied colouring, it is difficult to spot on the meadows full of flowers on which it lives. However, it is easy to spot when it sits on the electric wires and dry tree branches. The length of the bird is 27-29 cm, the wingspan is 44-49 cm. It nests in colonies of several couples, very seldom in a colony of more than a hundred couples. It lays 4-9 eggs on which it sits for 20 days. It feeds on large insects, mainly hymenoptera that it usually catches in flight. The smallest insects that it hunts are of the size of a bee but it does not catch them gladly due to their small size. Its most favourable catch are the dragonflies, hornets, bumble bees, grasshoppers and gadflies. The bee-eater returns to its nesting places at the end of April and beginning of May; it leaves for wintering from mid-August until mid-September. It breeds in holes that it digs in steep riverbanks or, more recently, in excavations, most often sandy ones; more seldom, it digs holes on a flat surface that it then digs obliquely downwards. It is estimated that the Croatian population of the bee-eater is 1,000-5,000 pairs.



THE COMMON KINGFISHER



THE SAND



THE BEE-EATER



D MARTIN

RIVER FLOW BIRDS

The **great cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) is one of the least popular birds of the water habitats. The great cormorant has earned this reputation because of the food that it eats, which is fish. The majority of people do not think that it is mostly the humans that are responsible for the devastation of the fish fund and not something else. Namely, where there are no cormorants, there is also no fish and not vice versa. The great cormorant feeds on fish hunting it diving. It eats the fish that it can swallow in one piece. It nests in colonies on the trees near the water.



THE GREAT CORMORANT

BIRDS OF PREY

The **white-tailed eagle** (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) is the largest bird of prey of the Pannonian region. The total nesting population in Croatia has been estimated at 140-150 couples. On the territory of Croatia, the white-tailed eagle is widespread in flooded valleys of large rivers and in the flooded lowland forests near carp ponds. The nesting season starts at the end of January by taking the territory and building or repairing the nest. On an individual territory, there are usually 2-3 nests. It builds nests almost exclusively in large and old trees of the silver and black poplar, white willow or common oak. The female lays 1-3 eggs; the incubation lasts for 35-38 days whereby both parents participate. After they have learned to fly, the young depend on the food of their parents for the next 1-2 months and they remain on their territory for 3-4 months after which they become independent and start the wandering stage dispersing throughout the Pannonian valley, which lasts until they are sexually mature.

THE WHITE-TAILED EAGLE





KOPRIVNICA-KRIZEVCI COUNTY

Bjelogora

POŽEGA-SLAVONIJA

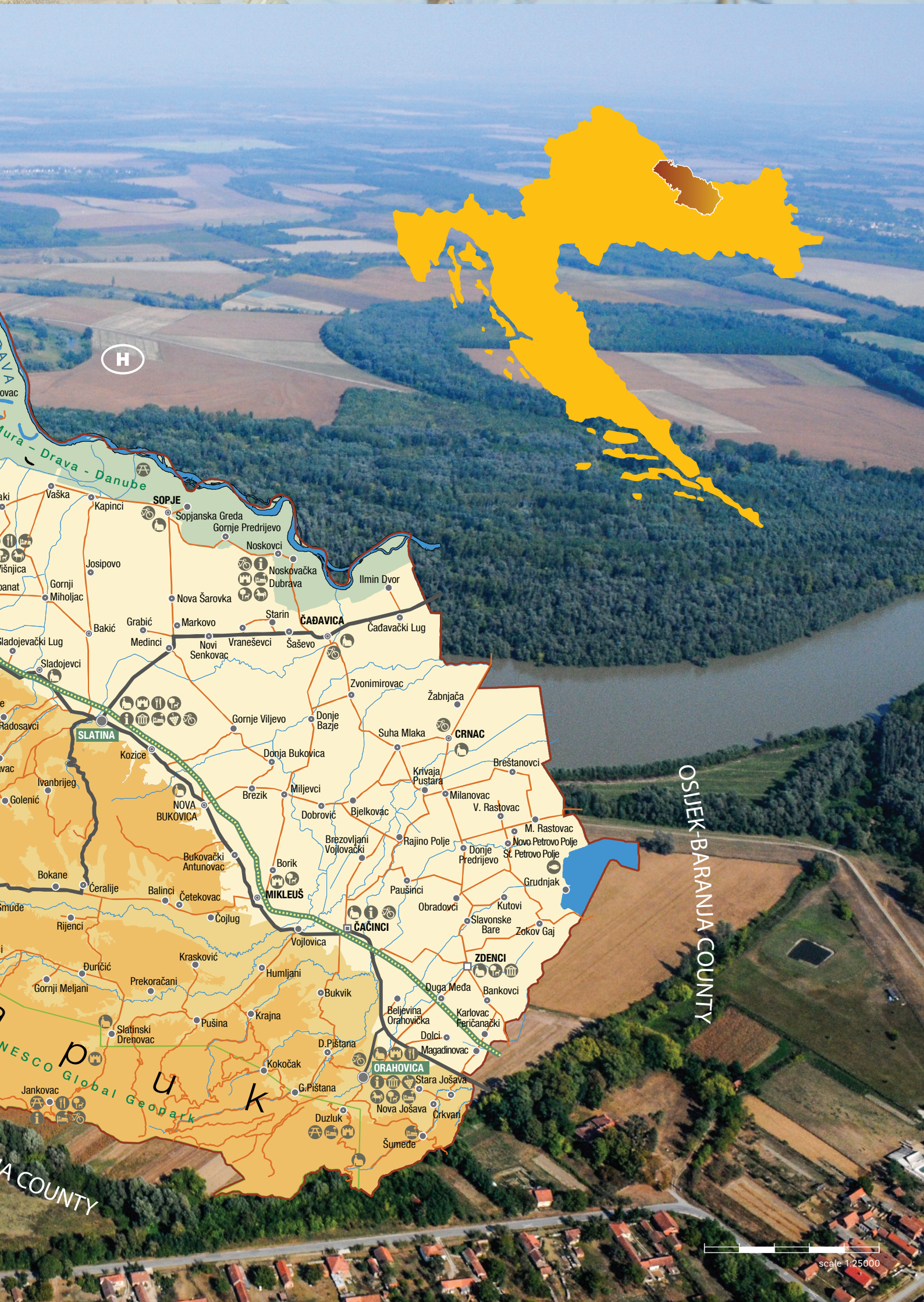
VIROVITICA-PODRAVINA COUNTY

Population (2011.): 84,836
Area: 2,024 km²
Settlements: 188

Map made by:
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Institute for Physical Planning
of the Virovitica-Podravina County

-  castle, manor
-  horseback riding, equestrian club
-  tourist office, info center
-  museum, gallery
-  viewpoint
-  vineyard
-  gastronomy
-  lake, pond
-  park, natural landmark
-  theater
-  accommodations
-  church, chapel
-  recreational airport
-  bike trail
-  excursion site
-  road
-  railway





IMPRINT

Publisher:

The Tourist Board of the Virovitica-Podravina County

Professional support:

Tatjana Arnold Sabo - Public Institution for the Management of Protected Parts of the Nature and the Environmental Network of the Virovitica-Podravina County

Editor:

Josip Mikolčić

Text:

Ivan Grlica

Photography:

Ivan Grlica

Graphical design and print:

Grafiti Becker d.o.o.

Virovitica 2017.

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Virovitica-Podravina County
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