

Under Our Wings

SPNI's Birding News



The Bonelli's Eagle is a large diurnal raptor that captures its prey in the air: pigeons, partridges, bats, and hyraxes cubs. Before the establishment of the state of Israel, about 65 pairs nested in the country; today only, nine pairs nests in Israel. This year, for the first time ever in Israel, an online camera was placed in a Bonelli's eagle's nest (see article in the newsletter) as well as in the nests of other raptors. (Photo: Hadoram Shirihi)

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Dear Friends,

After 26 years at the helm of bird conservation in Israel, Dan Alon steps down as director of BirdLife Israel, and moves on to become Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) Deputy Director for Conservation. Dan has a long list of impressive achievements in bird conservation in Israel and worldwide. Dan is well known for his creativity, ambition and stamina. During his years as director of BirdLife Israel, Dan elevated its status to a leading conservation

organization nationally and internationally. Dan who replaced Yossi Leshem who established the SPNI Bird Centers, was replaced by Dr. Yoav Perlman, who has been working for BirdLife Israel for almost as many years, and worked very closely with Dan. In his previous role, Yoav was Science Director. Yoav is a leader in the Israeli conservation arena, and is well respected globally. Together, Dan and Yoav will continue to lead action to protect the biodiversity of Israel.

Enjoy your reading,

Prof. Yossi Leshem, Dr. Yoav Perlman, Dan Alon

For the most updated birding news
from Israel visit: www.birds.org.il



**The Society for the
Protection of Nature
in Israel**



Project "Barn Owls as pest control agents in agriculture fields" in Expo 2020 Dubai

In October 2021, Expo 2020 Dubai inaugurated its activities. In its first week, we were honored to present our "Barn Owl as pest control agents in agricultural fields" project with a large and impressive exhibition. The Swiss Foreign Minister, contacted by Prof. Alex Roulin of University of Lausanne, hosted our events in the Swiss pavilion, which carried out very successful. See presentation: <https://bit.ly/3oX4zhG>

Our delegation was attended by Gen. Mansour Abu-Rashid from Jordan, a representative from the Palestinian Authority, Prof. Imad Cherkaoui from

Morocco, Prof. Alex Rolin from Switzerland and Prof. Yossi Leshem from Israel.

In addition to the events, we had some meaningful meetings. We met with the Israeli Minister of Environmental Protection, Ms. Tamar Zandberg, the Emirates Minister of Climate Change and the Environment, Her Majesty Miriam Binat Muhammad Said Harb al-Mairi, and with the Ministry's Director General, Ms. Khiba al-Shahi, who stated that they were very interested in joining the Barn Owls project.



Yossi Leshem and Minister Tamar Zandberg presented the Emirates Minister of Climate Change and the Environment with the book "BUMA the Barn Owl" in Arabic



Our delegation in front of the Swiss pavilion where we presented our activities and gave talks with great success and high interest from the visitors



Gen. Mansour Abu Rashid (Jordan)



Prof. Yossi Leshem (Israel)



Prof. Imad Cherkaoui (Morocco)



Prof. Alex Roulin (Switzerland)



(Palestinian Authority)

The Barn Owls project delegation to EXPO Dubai: Moroccan, Israeli, Swiss, Jordanian and Palestinian



The delegation with the Emirates Director General of the Ministry of Climate Change and the Environment, and senior officials of her office, after our meeting in their Dubai Office, in which it was decided that Dubai would join our project.

Despite COVID-19 - A Barn Owl Regional Seminar, Israel, November 2021

"Barn Owl as pest control agents in agricultural fields" seminar on November 21-25, 2021



Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were forced to postpone (for two years) the meetings between all the leaders of the Barn Owls Project. Finally, on November 21-25, 2021 we held a seminar in Israel. Twenty-three representatives from: Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Greece, Morocco and Israel attended the seminar. Unfortunately, the representatives from Cyprus and Switzerland did not attend because of COVID-19 restrictions. The participants listened to lectures, practiced pellets analyzing, visited project nesting sites, met with the Minister for Regional Cooperation and the President of the State of Israel; and most importantly, they strengthened and established personal ties with the project leaders and with the project farmers from the various countries. We were especially pleased to have Prof. Imad Cherkaoui join us to lead and promote the project in his country, Morocco.

A delegation with a representative from each country visited the President of the State of Israel House, Yitzhak Herzog and his wife Michal, and presented him with the project and the cooperation. The President was very impressed with the project and promised to promote it personally as an example of successful regional cooperation.

We hope to host, in June 2022, the Cyprus Minister of Agriculture and

Environment, Prof. Kostas Kadis and the Greek Minister of Agriculture, to present them with the projects' activities in the agricultural fields; and that at the end of the visit, they will sign the trilateral MOU at the President's House. The ceremony will be attended by the ministers from Cyprus and Greece, along with three ministers from Israel: the Minister for Regional Cooperation, the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Environmental Protection



November 25, 2021: The President of the state of Israel, Mr. Itzhak Herzog and his wife Michal hosted representatives of the delegations from Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Israel, Greece and Morocco, at the President's House in Jerusalem. From left to right: General Mansour Abu Rashid, President Herzog, Ms. Michal Herzog, Prof. Imad Cherkaoui (photo: Yossef Avi Yair Engel (Jucha))



November 24, 2021: All seminar participants met at Tel Aviv University, with the Minister for Regional Cooperation, Mr. Issawi Frej, and the Director General of his office, Ms. Roni Elon. The Minister enthusiastically supports the project's activities.



August 26th, 2021 - Minister of Regional Cooperation Issawi Frej's visit to the Barn Owls as biological pest control agents in agriculture project, at Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu. Right to Left: Prof. Abed Gera, head of the Plant Protection and Inspection Services in the Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Cooperation Minister Issawi Frej, and Prof. Abed Azem, Dean of the Faculty of Life Sciences, Tel Aviv University. Each holding a Barn Owl in his hand



The monitoring team of the Barn Owl Project in Jordan, with a T-shirt produced in Israel for all participants in the project





Israel Raptor Nest Cam record-breaking drama!



Bonelli's Eagle nesting on cliffs of Judean Desert (Artist: Juan Varela, Spain)

Our successful project, Israel Raptor Nest Cam, brings directly to your living room the secrets of the mightiest birds of Israel. For its sixth season, quality live broadcast from the nests of the raptors of Israel is broadcasted 24/7. This project, that is a collaboration between the Society for the protection of Nature in Israel and Israel Nature and Parks Authority, reaches out to enormous audiences in Israel and worldwide, broadcasting live jaw-dropping drama, while aiding in data collection for better conservation of these threatened species.

This year, for the first time, a camera was installed to monitor a nest of Bonelli's Eagle deep in the remote Judean Desert. Bonelli's Eagle is critically endangered in Israel, with fewer than 15 pairs breeding nationally. How excited was our team when the female laid two eggs in front of the camera. However, after two days it became apparent that the incubation was not progressing properly. Following swift consultation among raptor conservation experts it was decided to

retrieve the eggs from the nest, with the hope that in an incubator the eggs would develop well. Two dummy eggs were placed in the nest, hoping that the female would continue to incubate and not abandon the nest. Sadly, after few days in the incubator it was realized that the eggs retrieved from the nest were infertile. However, that was not the end of the story. Two tiny Bonelli's Eagle chicks, which hatched in a reinforcement project by a pair that cannot survive in nature, were transported to the nest on the exact date when hatching was predicted to happen. The wild eagles accepted the adopted chicks happily. Since then, both chicks are receiving the most amazing care by the adopting parents, and are developing very well, live on camera. We are looking forward to see them fledge in several weeks - fingers crossed! On paper all this extraction and return seems very simple. In reality, it was an extremely complicated operation by the special project team, likened to Mission Impossible!



Start-Up Nature: Rewilding Wetland Habitats to Support Bird Migration

For millennia, Israel's wetlands have served as a vital resting place for hundreds of millions of birds who migrate across Europe, Asia and Africa. In recent decades, most of these areas have been lost to development, and migration is suffering as a result. These birds are responsible for the biodiversity and ecological processes across three continents, including pest control, seed dispersal, pollination and climate regulation. This scenario reflects a crisis, which demands rapid and effective response all across the globe: the collision of human development and nature.

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel launched Start-Up Nature to permanently secure and maintain the first two locations in a network of state-of-the-art wetland wildlife sanctuaries and ecotourism destinations. SPNI's Start-Up Nature will secure not only the world's largest flyway, but Israel's place as a leading innovator in global conservation.

Start-Up Nature seeks to repurpose fish farms slated redevelopment to regenerate Israel's historic coastal and inland wetlands. This network of rewilded Israeli habitats will be uniquely positioned to support the migrations of hundreds of millions of birds, bolster the biodiversity of three continents and help mitigate the impacts of climate change by storing carbon in the soil and vegetation, all while supporting the local economy and providing citizens and tourists with high quality, authentic nature experiences.

We already have progress on the ground. We spearheaded two projects, repurposing fishponds from fish production to wetlands with high ecological function for biodiversity. Start-Up Nature started operating at two sites, Kfar Ruppin in the Bet Shean Valley, along the Great Rift Valley, and Ma'agan Michael, on the Mediterranean Coast,

both are major global bird migration flyways. At both sites, large sections of fish ponds have already been converted to biodiversity and climate function, through collaboration with the landowners, governmental agencies, academia and fellow NGO's. The response is amazing. Birds identified the rich habitat and safe haven almost instantly; over two hundred bird species already use the new habitats, including species of conservation concern - Ferruginous Duck, African Swamphen, Greater Spotted Eagle, Purple Heron, Turtle Dove, Roller, Dead Sea Sparrow are some of the important species already using the restored wetlands. Using monitoring data, we are using the two sites to develop best practices for management, based on evidence. This new knowledge and experience will be replicated at other sites in Israel and will be made available globally.



Amud reservoir at Kibbutz Kfar Rupin (photo: Yoav Perlman)



More diversity in Israeli birding



Compared to other countries in North America and Europe, the size of the birding community in Israel is small. In recent years, however, it is increasing rapidly. With this rapid increase in the number of people interested in birds and supporting bird conservation, it is becoming clear that there is great importance to also increase the diversity of the birding community in Israel. BirdLife Israel is directing action in this field. Led by Alena Kacal, director of The Nili & David Jerusalem

Bird Observatory (JBO), a national network of youth clubs is operated, engaging with youth and children across the country, connecting youth with mentors, and making birding more accessible to youth. In a recent youth congress, tens of youth congregated at the JBO for a morning of excellent presentations presented by youth, and an important mingling and networking opportunity.

Additionally, Alena and her team at JBO launched the first Women Birders Club gathering post-COVID, that included a virtual get-together and field excursions, all led by women.



Wallcreeper is a small passerine bird that winters in Israel. It was chosen to be the icon of the children's club



Advertisement (in Hebrew) for a lecture and birding tours for women only, celebrating International Women's Day



Champions of the Flyway and Year of the Dove

Champions of the Flyway is a unique conservation initiative led by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, in collaboration with the global conservation partnership BirdLife International. Since 2014, each year, a novel conservation project aimed at tackling illegal killing of birds, is selected. In previous years, projects from Europe, Central Asia, Middle East and Africa were chosen, awareness campaigns were launched and vital funds were raised.

The beautiful Turtle Dove is a long-distance migrant, breeding mainly in Europe and Mediterranean Basin, migrating to winter in Africa. Across its range, it is declining fast, and it is globally threatened with extinction. Horrifically, it is feared that the Turtle Dove will become the modern Passenger Pigeon. Hunting is a major contributor to the decline - Turtle Dove is still massacred around the Mediterranean Basin.

In 2022, Turtle Dove conservation projects were chosen in Malta, Greece and Cyprus, tackling killing of Turtle Doves through targeted outreach, advocacy, enforcement and research. The project was named Year of the Dove. This yearlong project has already made important progress in Israel, leading the Minister of Environment. Mrs. Tamar Zandberg to ban Turtle Dove hunting for three years.

The conservation project culminates in an international bird race, Champions of the Flyway, where teams of birders all over the world try to identify as many bird species as possible in 24 hours. The main event took place in Eilat on April 5th. Bringing together tens of youth, women, Israeli, Arabs and international birders for a celebration of birding and conservation, for the Turtle Doves.



(photo: Yuval Dax)





Bird Conservation

Information on the birds of Israel is a key to their conservation. BirdLife Israel's team of professional ornithologists is busy every breeding season in data collection on the birds of Israel. Greater Hoopoe-Lark is a striking, beautiful lark of the remote Negev desert. It is critically endangered in Israel, threatened by ongoing habitat loss and climate change. Meidad Goren photographed this brilliant male in display flight - amazing!

The Greater Hoopoe-Lark's courtship dance is very impressive (Photo: Meidad Goren)



For further information please contact:

Migration Center: yossile@taueax.tau.ac.il or SPNI: ioc@inter.net.il

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