

A Bird's Eye View of the Holy Land



Newsletter From Israel | No. 13 | February 2014

Society for the
Protection of Nature in Israel
Israel Ornithological Center



The Hoopoe Foundation



The International Center for the
Study of Bird Migration, Latrun



TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ZOOLOGY



BirdLife
INTERNATIONAL



In 2013 a male Barn Owl with two females (bigamy) resulted in 17 nestlings that fledged out of the 20 eggs that were laid in an abandoned waterhole on the Judean Plain. As far as we know, this is the first documented case in Israel and perhaps in the world (!). The breeding cycle and the photographs were recorded by Ezra Haddad, an inspector of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority. (Photo: Ezra Haddad)

Dear Friends,

We are delighted to be back and report to our friends throughout the world and in Israel the annual summation of 2013's successful and action-packed activities for promoting bird conservation, research and education in Israel. With the generous aid from Racheli and Moshe Yanai and many other donors, we have concluded our third year of the Hoopoe Foundation's activity. Within its framework we have conducted over 30 educational endeavors, research and preservation of nature projects, some of which you can read about in the following newsletter.

The nationwide national birding centers funded by SPNI and the government have begun to take shape, as well as the new internet site. The Barn Owl and Kestrel as biological pest control agents in agriculture has widened its activity and has reached Taiwan. Educational activity concerning birding takes place in hundreds of schools in Israel, including the non-Jewish sectors. Outings for the public, the Autumn Festival in the Hula Valley and the Spring Festival in Eilat are expanding. In addition, this year we will begin a new tradition of the Champion of the Flyways, hoping that like the Crane Race, it will become an annual event in Eilat, in which ten chosen countries will compete in who can spot the highest number of bird species in a twenty-four-hour period during the peak of the migration season. The preservation of the Terns together with the rare nesting of the Pratincole in the Hula Valley was a great success. Preservation of the increasingly disappearing Griffon Vultures, and migrating Pelicans, still requires tremendous effort.

Nowadays, we are doubling our SPNI activity and the Hoopoe Foundation through the cooperative innovative initiative of the IDF - The Army for the Protection of Nature - Commanders Take Responsibility for Their Environment. With the contribution of Moshe and Racheli Yanai, the funds for the Hoopoe Foundation have doubled to NIS 2,000,000 annually for the next ten years. Nine unit commanders have agreed to allowing programs, funded to the extent of up to NIS 100,000, to support nature preservation together with their soldiers – bearing an impressive educational aspect, considering the environmental damage caused by military activity (more about this in the newsletter on page 4). We wish you an enjoyable read, and encourage you to join us in support for our widespread activities (see page 16).

Yours truly,

Prof. Yossi Leshem

Director, The International Center for the Study of Bird Migration at Latrun

Dan Alon

Director, Israel Ornithological Center



Two Barn Owls
Females incubating
20 eggs together
(Photo: Ezra Hadad)

Visit our website: www.birds.org.il



The national project on the use of Barn Owls and Kestrels as biological pest control agents in agriculture celebrates its 6th year (2008-2013) and the erection of 3,000 nesting boxes!



The male observing his two mates in the waterhole
(Photo: Ezra Haddad)



The two females that incubated 20 eggs (bigamy) with a brood patch on the belly.



One of the 3,000 nesting boxes erected all over Israel. (Photo: Itzik Eitan)

The Barn Owl Project was created in the field. Scientists and bird lovers understood the benefits of the Barn Owl to agriculture and erected nesting boxes in agricultural fields. The enterprise proved to be successful and it was expanded to become the national model for biological pest control using Barn Owls and Kestrels that was also expanded to Jordan and the Palestinian Authority.

The national project is under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the Ministry of Regional Cooperation, the Hanns Seidel Foundation, the Hoopoe Foundation, Tel Aviv University and the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, and it covers all regions of the country. Nesting boxes are erected in agricultural fields and their numbers are increasing. Today, thanks to the fruitful cooperation with the farmers, we can be proud of the 3,000 nesting boxes in use.

The team working on the project includes professional birders in the field, developing the contact with the farmers, monitoring the nesting boxes, leading research, increasing awareness and educational activities.

In 2013 the Barn Owls in the Jezreel Valley were thriving and about 92% of the breeding pairs successfully raised at least one nestling. (The pie in this page.) The number of nestlings raised also changes in the different areas. In some areas the number of nestlings that fledged ranged from 5.7 to 6.1 nestlings (the Hula, Negev, Jezreel Valley, Golan), while in the other areas the number was between 2.6 to 4.9 nestlings (Beit Shean Valley). The year 2013 was a special year for the Barn Owls in the Negev. During this period the occupation rate of the nesting boxes in the Western Negev rose from 35% (in 2010-2012) to 66%, and the average number of nestlings that fledged rose from 4 nestlings in a nest to 5.4.

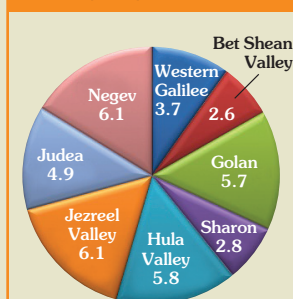


40 new Arab farmers from the Bet Netufa Valley in the Galilee at a training course each received the book on the Barn Owls in Arabic. (Photo: Yossi Leshem)

This year we organized conferences in Jordan and Israel on the use of Barn Owls and Kestrels as biological pest control agents under the auspices of General Mansour Abu Rashid and the Hanns Seidel Foundation. The contacts that were made are a model for professional and effective regional cooperation, as well as for social connections between nations.

The warm relationship among the representatives of the three countries encouraged a different attitude to the Barn Owls, and, from being a sworn enemy, it became appreciated and blessed, especially in the agricultural fields of Jordan and the Palestinian areas. The Barn Owl is useful to the farmers who have warmly accepted its existence and have become ambassadors of biological pest control instead of the intensive use of chemical pesticides. As an example of the change in perception, a farmer from the Jordan Valley, Jordan, who took part in the meeting exclaimed: "I looked into its eyes (of the Barn Owl) and fell in love with it".

Average number of nestlings in a nest in the different areas of Israel, where at least one nestling fledged from the nest.



40 Arab farmers from Israel with another 40 farmers from Jordan & the Palestinian Authority enjoying lunch together at Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu. Another special shared experience.

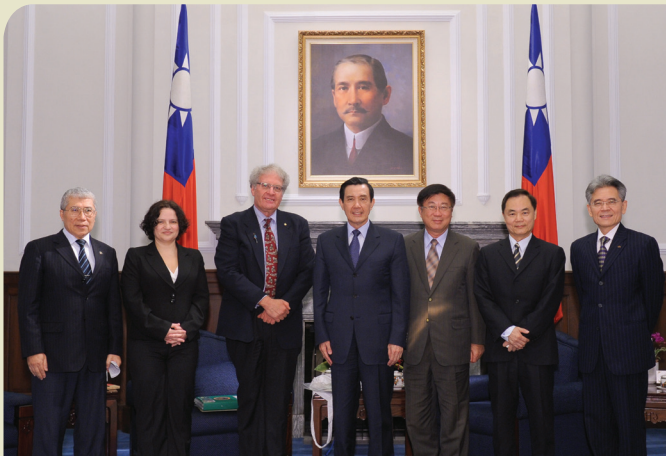


Taiwan government joins the project for using Barn Owls and Kestrels as biological pest control agents in agriculture

The success story of the use of Barn Owls and Kestrels as biological pest control agents in agriculture expanded this year to far off places and reached Taiwan, in the Far East!

Prof. Leshem visited Taiwan in 1998 as part of a deputation of the organization BirdLife International, and was hosted by the Mayor of Taipei, Prof. Ma Ying-Jeou, who paid a reciprocal visit to the International Center for the Study of Bird Migration at Latrun on September 19th 1999. In later years Prof. Ma was elected as President of Taiwan, and following this the Taiwanese Ambassador, H.E. Liang-Jen Chang, and Yossi Leshem, arranged to host an eminent deputation in Israel headed by General Liao Jung-Hsin, a senior Mirage pilot in the Taiwanese Air Force, and principally a sworn bird lover. Following this visit, relations were cemented, and on May 21st 2012 when President Ma was sworn in to his second term, as a measure of friendship, Yossi was invited to represent Israel at the most impressive ceremony held in the capital Taipei at the Presidential Palace. Within this framework, he was invited together with our Ambassador in Taiwan, H.E. Ms. Simona Halperin, to a preparatory meeting with the President.

Prof. Lucia Liu Severinghaus from the Sinica Institute visited Israel, and made acquaintance with the successful Barn Owls project, and together we decided to propose agricultural collaboration on the subject of biological pest control. As a result, we presented a joint proposal to the President of Taiwan, and a budget for advancing a similar project in Taiwan was approved, funded by the Taiwanese Ministry of Agriculture.



Left to right: H.E. Lin Jinn-Jong, Director General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Simona Halperin, Ambassadors of Israel to Taiwan, Prof. Yossi Leshem, President Ma Ying-Jeou, Dr. Bao-Ji Chen, Minister of Agriculture, Dr. Chien Chung, National Security Council, H.E. Simon S.Y. Ko, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The Taiwanese Minister of Agriculture, Dr Bao-Ji Chen, came to Israel to visit the kibbutzim Sde Eliyah and Kfar Ruppin and was enchanted. The minister and twelve of his staff members were hosted by Prof. Yossi Leshem, Dr. Yoav Motaro, Shauli Aviel and David Glasner. The minister learned about the national project for the use of Barn Owls and Kestrels as biological pest control agents and attended the lecture by Prof. Yossi Leshem, head of the project. He also visited the ringing station at Kfar Ruppin, led by Nadav Israeli and was escorted around the Bio-Bee factory at Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu by Shauli Aviel. He was most enthusiastic and decided to develop the cooperation most significantly.



October 23rd 2013 - The Israeli Minister of Agriculture, Yair Shamir (right), hosting the Taiwanese Minister of Agriculture, Dr. Bao-Ji Chen (center) at a dinner in Jaffa, where an agreement on cooperation on the subject of Barn Owls was reached. On his left, the Taiwanese Ambassador, Liang-Jen Chang. (Photo: Yossi Leshem)

October 23rd 2013 - H.E. Dr. Bao-Ji Chen, the Taiwanese Minister of Agriculture, greatly enjoying releasing to the wild a male Palestine Sunbird at Kfar Ruppin ringing station. On his left, Nadav Israeli, the professional bird ringer and Manager of the Birding Center at the Hula.



A seminar was held in Taiwan between 10-14 November 2013 to which Yossi was invited, together with Dr. Motti Charter and Prof. Alexandre Roulin from the University of Lausanne in Switzerland, an international expert on Barn Owls, and also attended by experts from Malaysia (where extensive action in the oil plantations has been taken for exterminating rats) as well as experts from US and Taiwan.

November 8th 2013 - In the center: the Taiwanese Minister of Defence, General Ming Yen (with the blue tie). On his right the 3-star general, General Liao Jung Hsin, the Taiwanese Deputy Chief of Staff. On his left Prof. Yossi Leshem, the Israeli Ambassador to Taiwan, H.E. Simona Halperin, and Prof. Alexandre Roulin.



After the conference, the project will be implemented in a defined area, and hopefully after its success, will be expanded to cover all of Taiwan. So also on the subject of Barn Owls, birds know no boundaries. Special thanks to the President of Taiwan, President Ma, and to General Liao Jung-Hsin who in the meantime has been appointed Deputy Chief of General Staff, to the Ambassador Liang-Jen Chang who doesn't cease to push and promote the collaboration, and to our Ambassador in Taiwan, Ms. Simona Halperin, and Prof. Lucia Liu Severinghaus.



November 10-14th 2013 - The Biological Pest Control Conference in Taiwan. At the left corner: Prof. Lucia and Prof. Roulin.

Three years of successful activities by the “Hoopoe Foundation” – and double the amount of funding for the innovative project: The Army for the Protection of Nature – Commanders take responsibility for their environment.

2013 celebrated the third year of the Hoopoe Foundation and it was an especially successful year: in addition to the donation of one million shekels by Moshe and Racheli Yanai, another donations of NIS 350,000 were received, enabling us to fund 26 different projects: 8 projects for the protection of birds and their habitats, 8 research projects and 10 projects in the fields of education, publishing books, conference days and the construction of an internet site. Some of the projects are described in this newsletter. Moshe and Racheli Yanai, the main donors, who initially donated NIS 10 million shekels for 10 years, have extremely generously decided to double their donation and donate another NIS 10 million (\$250,000 a year for 10 years) for conservation and education projects with the IDF. They were joined by an anonymous donor who donated NIS 100,000 a year for 10 years and another donor who donated \$100,000 for pilot activities.

The concept that we are working on is based on the fact that the IDF in its essence damages the environment as it carries out exercises on 50% of the land of Israel and it also has a significant educational influence on a large section of the population in Israel. Led by Prof. Yossi Leshem, Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Baruch Spiegel and Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Asaf Agmon we approached the Deputy Chief of Staff, Maj. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot and the Chief of Staff, Lieut. Gen. Benny Ganz, who showed great interest in our vision – that, with the support of the Society for the Protection of Nature through the Hoopoe Foundation, every commander who would initiate activities for his officers and soldiers to protect the nature and environment on his base or in the exercise area, will receive NIS 100,000 funding from us under the title: Commanders take responsibility for their environment. Maj. Gen. Noam Tibon of the General Staff volunteered to lead the process with Lieut. Col. Eyal Ezra, Head of the IDF's Environmental Command, Technology and Logistics Department. We contacted all the units in the IDF and 22 units applied. From these 9 were chosen with the help of a committee consisting of IDF representatives,

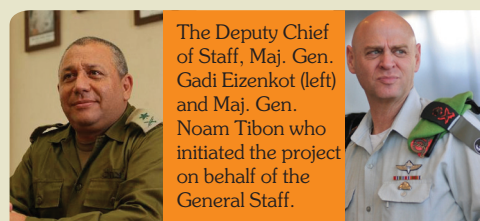
generals in the reserves, academics and environmentalists. The Israel Nature and Parks Authority also joined the venture and a representative from the Society for the Protection of Nature and the Nature and Parks Authority was appointed to escort each unit.

Some of the units that will take part in the project:

- Protection of the empty military positions in the Jordan Valley for bats.
- Protection of the Macqueen's Bustard on the Air Force base at Hatzerim (the most important site is Israel for these birds in the summer).
- Development of walking routes on Mt. Hermon to protect the unique flora and fauna.
- The eradication of invasive plant species on the Palmachim AFB which is a special dune nature reserve on the Mediterranean Coast.



The Chief of Staff, Lieut. Gen. Benny Ganz, toured the army exercise area on the Judean Plain with the friends of Moshe & Racheli Yanai on May 24th 2013. This is where fires caused damage to wildlife. On his left is Col. Dudi Oberman, the commander of the Lachish Training Base. In the white shirt is Maj. Gen. (Res) Doron Almog and the famous writer, Meir Shalev (with the binoculars).



The Deputy Chief of Staff, Maj. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot (left) and Maj. Gen. Noam Tibon who initiated the project on behalf of the General Staff.



The four-star General Robert Magnus who is now the Chairman of Elbit USA and was the highest ranking Jew in the USMC and second highest for all the US military, with his wife, Meredith. Both will be part of the council team.

- Development of a geophyte garden at the educational base of Havat Hashomer which is in an area where roads are being developed, so that they can be returned to nature in the future.
- Openings have been made in the new fence along the Egyptian border that was erected to prevent illegal entries into Israel – this will enable wildlife to move across. The Caracal Army Unit that patrols the fence will put up cameras near the openings to record the wildlife movements. The soldiers will also learn to identify animal tracks.
- The prevention of fires in army exercise areas in Lachish Training Base, Judean Plain, which have caused severe damage to the flora and fauna in the area.



Pilot cameras photographed a hare (left) and a fox (right) at the opening in the fence on the Israeli-Egyptian border, initiated by the Nature and Park Authority



The opening for wildlife in the border fence between Israel & Egypt.

- The adoption and development of an historic archaeological route by the Gaza Division.
- The development of natural areas on the Transportation Base in central Israel.

There will be a ceremony soon, attended by the Chief of Staff or his Deputy and the projects will commence.

“Yes to the Bird” – an educational program: Biological diversity and sustainability with the emphasis on birds

With the aim of increasing the awareness, responsibility and contribution to sustaining the environment in connection with the subject of birding, three years ago we decided to initiate a special educational project in the northern region of Israel to learn about the birds and their natural habitats. 2013 was the third year of the “Yes to the Bird” project in the northern region.

The project, which began in 2010 in the United Nations’ Year of Biological Diversity, is the result of the cooperation of the Ministry of Education’s northern region, with the Society for the Protection of Nature, funded by the Hoopoe Foundation, and green organizations in the educational system.

Increasing the awareness of pupils to their immediate surroundings was achieved in 93 schools in northern Israel, half of them from the Arab, Druze, Beduin and Circassian sectors.

We see this program as an additional means to educate the younger generation to protect the natural resources that we enjoy so that biodiversity will continue unharmed.

In 2013 we aimed to have one class from each municipality in the region in the program. The instruction of the leading class involved research into the variety of bird species near the school. The research process at many levels took place in the science classes combined with birding activities at school. The leading class then passed on the knowledge, research results and implications to the school community and the municipality.

An instructor was sent to each school who guided the teachers and the children in the birding group in the school grounds as well as in the surrounding area.

The children and the teachers were enthusiastic about the program and in many settlements even the parents and members of the community became involved. In addition, special meetings took place with different groups in the communities and, on 9 June, 2013, there was a celebration with the presentation of the stamp series “Spreading Wings with the Vultures in Israel.” We think that it is of the utmost importance to extend this unique program and hope that, in the future, it will become part of the general education system in Israel.



Circassian pupils of the Tinal School in Kfar Kama performing the Circassian “Dance of the Vulture” at the final ceremony of the region. Kfar Tavor, 9 June, 2013

The book “Flying with the Birds” – in honor of the first Israeli astronaut, the late Col. Ilan Ramon

The Ninth Ilan Ramon Annual International Space Conference was held on 29-30 January, 2014 in memory of the first Israeli astronaut who was killed in the Columbia disaster. The conference organizers, the Fisher Institute and the Ministry of Science – the Israeli Space Institute, decided to present the 20 astronauts and senior space agency officials from 15 countries with the book “Flying with the Birds” as the official present of the conference.



Right to left: Yossi with the Italian astronaut Paulo Nespoli from the European Space Agency (ESA), who gave a brilliant lecture! (Yossi's wife says that the reason for the great chemistry was because the guy with the glasses is also an astronaut...)



Left to right: Brig. Gen. (Res.) Asaf Agmon, CEO of Fisher Institute, Daniel Barok, ISA (who took 2 books for the astronauts that couldn't stay for the closing ceremony), Maj. Gen. (Res.) Herzle Bodinger, President of Israel Air Force Association and Menachem Kidron, CEO of ISA, Ministry of Science.



Left to right: Brig. Gen. (Res.) Asaf Agmon, CEO of Fisher Institute, Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Herzle Bodinger, President of Israel Air Force Association, Lt. Gen. John E. Hyten, Vice Commander, US Air Force Space Command and Maj. Gen. Amir Eshel, Commander of the IAF

Champions of the FLYWAY - a new international Bird Race

Champions of the Flyway is a major new international bird race taking place in Eilat, Israel organized by SPNI and Birdlife International - Eilat is one of the world's most spectacular migration hot spots and rewarding birding destinations.

Competing teams from around the world will try to find, identify and log as many species as possible – as they go head to head in an intense 24 hour contest to win the coveted title "Champions of the Flyway".

The birders taking part are of many different

nationalities and represent a huge variety of businesses, conservation organisations and bird clubs. On April 1st 2014, all will line up together in Eilat with a common purpose – to celebrate the miracle of migration in this spectacular part of the Great Rift Valley and to help protect its future throughout the Africa Eurasia Flyway.



Migrating White Storks at a roost site in the Western Negev, in the spring migration
(Photo: Thomas Krumenacker)

Champions of the Flyway will generate significant national, regional and global media coverage for all participants via a high-profile international marketing and communications campaign.

The race teams will initially meet in Eilat on March 28th and then spend three days familiarizing themselves with the course and birds, in preparation for race day. Champions of the Flyway is a focal event during the famous annual Eilat Bird Festival.

The Champions of the Flyway bird race is being staged by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (BirdLife's national partner in Israel) and is a BirdLife International Migratory Birds & Flyways Programme initiative. You can learn more and support one of the team at:

www.champions-of-the-flyway.com

The 3rd Crane Race, Agamon Hahula, November 29th 2013

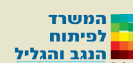
1,200 professional runners, 500 children and 400 IDF soldiers participated in the Crane Race – 10 kms, the Hoopoe Race – 5 kms and the Graceful Prinia Race – 1 km. The race took place around the

Agamon Hahula, with 30,000 Cranes performing an extraordinary concert in the background. The Ernst & Young Company sponsors the race with us and the staff of the Agamon.



1,200 professional runners in the Crane Race, 500 IDF soldiers and officers, lead by Maj. Gen. Yair Golan Northern Area Commander

400 children enjoying the Graceful Prinia Race, with the calls of the Cranes in the background





Protecting the Terns along the Carmel Coast

Two species of terns breed in Israel: the Common Tern and the Little Tern. Their small populations are concentrated at a limited number of breeding sites, which puts their continued survival here at great risk.

The most significant breeding sites of the terns are found along the Carmel coast, where all the Little Terns in Israel breed as well as most of the Common Terns. At the beginning of the 1990s there were about 550 breeding pairs of Common Terns and about 250 pairs of Little Terns at these sites. These breeding colonies have decreased considerably over the years for several reasons.

Since the beginning of the 2010 breeding season, a project has been carried out to determine the factors that limit the breeding; Demographic research was undertaken to understand the dangers that face the



Common Terns on their nest in Atlit (Photo: Yossi Eshbol)

Little Terns (*Sterna albifrons*) Carmel coast (Atlit) Photo: Yossi Eshbol



population, and the population of the two species was increased by spreading them out into a greater number of breeding sites.

The monitoring and management is being conducted with the cooperation of the company, Salt of the Earth Ltd., the Society for the Protection of Nature, the Israel Nature & Parks Authority, the Hoopoe Foundation, the Carmel Drainage Authority, Kibbutz Ma'agan Michael and independent birders.

Following the managements steps that were taken there was a gradual increase in the number of breeding pairs and during the last few breeding seasons there were about 800 pairs of Common Terns and about 200 pairs of Little Terns.



Nets covering fishponds



Millions of migrating birds land and rest at the fishponds in the Harod Valley, the Jordan Valley and the Bet Shean Valley every year. In order to protect the fish from the birds that eat the fish, the fishermen cover some of the ponds with netting. However, in time, these nets can become death-traps to the birds including those that do not eat fish... Each year hundreds of birds get entangled in the nets causing them to suffer from serious wounds or even die. This year the Israel Ornithological Center, in cooperation with the Israel Nature & Parks Authority and with the help of the Hoopoe Foundation, implemented a project to minimize the damage caused to the birds by the nets. A



Avishai takes out of the net the Black Stork that was caught and killed by the net.

Night Heron caught in the fishponds net (Photo: Gilad Ben Zvi)



field scout from the Ornithological Center releases trapped birds and takes care of wounded birds, if necessary. He monitors the damage in the different ponds and suggests the removal of nets wherever possible, with the fishermen's agreement.

This project drastically reduced the numbers of deaths of migrating birds in the Jordan Valley. In the framework of the project many nets that caused the deaths of many birds were removed, with the fishermen's agreement, of course.



Exploring Israel's Frontiers: Breeding Bird Survey of Mt. Hermon

Mt. Hermon is Israel's highest peak, at 2272 m. This mountain range is connected to eastern Turkey and the Caucasus, and these regions' avifauna strongly influences the bird communities on Mt. Hermon. Due to its unique geomorphological conditions, 17 bird species breed in Israel only on Mt. Hermon, some of them have very small populations.

Mt. Hermon is also Israel's only ski resort, and is strategically situated on the border triangle with Syria and Lebanon, hence the very prominent military infrastructure on the mountain. This leads to growing development pressures on the ecosystems of the mountain.

Little is known about the breeding birds of Mt. Hermon, mainly due to limited access to most parts of the mountain that are a security risk. The last time that the breeding bird community on Mt. Hermon was properly surveyed was 30 years ago.

In summer 2013, a team of top field ornithologists from the Israel Ornithological Center (IOC) performed an extensive mapping project of the entire mountain, in order to estimate breeding population sizes of the most sensitive species and create a solid database on which better management of the fragile ecosystems can be practiced. This project was supported by the Hoopoe Foundation. The team visited all parts of the mountain, right along the border frontiers, often with tight military escort. Some sites visited by the team had never been surveyed before by ornithologists. Echoes from the Syrian civil war were sometimes too



Birders in the survey in Mount Hermon, with IDF soldiers protecting them. Photo: Yoav Perlman



White-throated Robin (*Irania gutturalis*) photo: Yoav Perlman

loud, but the team, in cooperation with the military unit responsible for the mountain, and the Nature and Parks Authority, persisted and completed the fieldwork successfully.

Of all the observations by the team, two were outstanding: the first-ever breeding of Chiffchaffs in Israel was found – a remarkable concentration of 20 breeding pairs in a remote wooded gully. This relict population is the southernmost in the world, and is genetically distinct, as was found by DNA samples obtained from four individuals. In addition, the first breeding record of Finsch's Wheatear since the 1980s was found, above



Chiffchaff - for the first time ever found breeding in Israel. Photo: Yoav Perlman

the Druze village of Majd-el Shams. Some of the rare species recorded breeding in surprising numbers were: White-throated Robin, Crimson-winged Finch, Western Rock Nuthatch and Hill Sparrow.

Some management recommendations from this project are:

1. To extend the nature reserves on the mountain in order to better protect the fragile alpine habitats.
2. To better coordinate military activity in sensitive parts of the mountain. This will start very soon as one of the projects led by the IDF Mt. Hermon Colonel Commander who received NIS 100,000 from the Hoopoe Foundation.
3. To study the effects of grazing on the bird community of the alpine habitats.
4. To repeat the survey in 2014, in order to check the effect of variation in rainfall and snow cover on the breeding communities.

The 34th Yearly Birding Lecture Day at Tel Aviv University Hanukkah, December 2nd 2013

Prof. Peretz Lavie (on the right), President of the Technion, captured the flock of starlings on Valentine's Day February 14th, 2013. During the Hoopoe Foundation tour with the friends of Moshe & Racheli Yanai, we observed a flock of tens of thousands of starlings gathering for an overnight roost in Nahal Gerar, near Moshav Tidhar in the Western Negev.



On Hanukkah, December 2nd, 2013, the 34th Birds & Birding Lecture Day in Israel was held. This has long been the main conference for bird lovers in Israel. About 1200 participants attended the lectures given by the most respected lecturers on interesting subjects connected with birding in Israel and the world.

In the lobby of the hall there was an exhibition of the achievements of the 30 projects of IOC

and Latrun Center, many of them sponsored by the Hoopoe Foundation during the last three years, as well as an exhibition of the photographs of the finalists in the 7th Bird Photography Competition in memory of the late Amit Geffen.

The opening lecture was given by 3 respected and leading figures, who became keen bird photographers and told their personal stories:

Prof. Peretz Lavie, the President of the Technion, Haifa, who talked about starling flocking and the physics of their maneuvers.

Prof. Neri Laufer, retired head of Hadassah's Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, who became an avid bird photographer and showed a selection of his photos, and **Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Itzik Eitan** who is spending a lot of energy to document birds in Israel and abroad.



Short-toed Eagle soars over the Judean Hills. Photo: Itzik Eitan



Maj. Gen. Itzik Eitan in action (Photo: Yossi Eshbol)



Prof. Neri Laufer former chairman of Hadassah's Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, with his bird photographic equipment (on the left) and a pair of European Bee-eaters (Photo: Neri Laufer)



BirdLife International Conference, series of lectures & initiation of new projects in Canada, 16 June – 3 July 2013



H.I.H. Princess Takamado opening the conference at the Congress Center



600 participants from 120 countries attended the BirdLife Conference in Ottawa, Canada, 17-22 June 2013.



H.I.H. Princess Takamado of Japan, Honorary, President of BirdLife receiving the envelope with the first-day cover stamps of the Vultures from Yossi & Dan, with Chief Executive, Dr. Marco Lambertini



The Israeli stand at our booth BirdLife Conference.

The trip to Canada was based around the BirdLife International Conference, that is held every 4 years. This year it was held in Ottawa from 17-22 June. 600 people attended, from the 120 member countries, to discuss the protection of birds and to exchange information. Israel was represented by Dan Alon, Director of the Israel Ornithological Center of the SPNI and Yossi Leshem, Director of the International Center for the Study of Bird Migration at Latrun, Tel Aviv University and the SPNI. In addition to the conference, we planned to lecture in two important centers of the Jewish community in Canada: Toronto and Winnipeg. The lectures were organized in conjunction with the Canadian Friends of Tel Aviv University and CAASI (Canadian Association for Aviation and Space in Israel) who hosted Yossi for 5 days in Toronto for the lectures and meetings. In Winnipeg Yossi was hosted by the JNF Manitoba and the Minister Chris Melnick, who was previously the Minister of the Environment and Water Stewardship, and is presently the Minister for Immigration & Multiculturalism.

During 17 working and touring days Yossi gave 14 lectures to wide-ranging audiences (the first with Dan Alon). The tour was covered 14 times in the media in Canada (newspapers, radio & television) showing great interest in our activities. Dan Alon and Yossi Leshem initiated work meetings with the new elected Chairman of BirdLife International, Khaled Irani (Jordan) and the Chief Executive, Dr. Marco Lambertini, in order to advance common projects; met with representatives of the eastern migration route – to develop cooperation in nature conservation, education and research; initiated the promotion of the portal with Cornell University as well as promoting common resources with Gary Bertram, former chairman of BirdLife.

Our cooperation with CAASI that developed from our cooperation with the Fisher Institute for Space Research, we have decided to continue our common study days.



Before the dinner, sponsored by CAASI. Right to left: Marty Goldberg, Yossi Leshem, Bob Rubinoff and his sister, Penny



Birding with Gary Goldberg (at the back with the white sweatshirt), the birder Doug McRae at Presquile Park, filled with birds (and mosquitoes – see the headgear!)

The National Network of Israeli Birding Centers – Report for 2013

The national network of birding centers establishes and promotes birding centers that are spread all over the country. All the centers function to protect the natural habitats of the birds and to involve and encourage the public to observe the beauty and uniqueness of the birds as well as the protection of their habitat. The network maintains the geographical uniqueness and character of each center: the urban birding centers (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv), the research center (Hatzeva), bird migration (Eilat, the Hula Valley and Ma'agan Michael), local (Ein Afek and Kfar Ruppin), regional (Ramat Hanegev), ecological (Lotan), recycling (Ariel Sharon Park) and others.

The network coordinates all the bodies dealing with birding activities to work in cooperation and partnership under the management of this one network. It provides management and services to the birding centers, including an internet site, tourism marketing, monitoring and surveys, managing volunteers and education, as well as projects involving regional cooperation. During 2013 the groundwork for the establishment of the network began. An agreement was signed by the Society for the Protection of Nature and the Ministry of Tourism granting the management of the network to the Society for the Protection of Nature. Now the building of the first center has started: The Stork's Bill Birding Center at Kibbutz Kfar Ruppin in the Bet Shean Valley on the banks of the Jordan River. Plans for additional centers are well under way for: Ramat Hanegev, Ma'agan Michael, Hatzeva, Lotan and Eilat.



The plans of the renewed building of the Birding Center at Kfar Ruppin, Beit Shean Valley (above) and inside of the visitors center (below)



In the framework of the network, a new Israeli birding site was established on the internet. At the moment it is only in Hebrew, but, soon it will appear in English as well. The site serves as an information data bank about birds and birding in Israel for Israelis and for tourists. The site will also enable people to add observations directly on to the database of the Israel Ornithological Center. The internet site is: www.birds.org.il



January 22-23rd 2014: Mr. Reuven Pinsky Head of the Heritage division Prime Minister's Office, who played a key role in the budget approval for the National Bird Centers Network spent 2 days with us, to learn about our activities. The tour was guided by Prof. Amotz Zahavi at Hatzeva, in the Judean desert, in a night trip to enjoy the Hume's Tawny Owl, and in the Western Negev by Yoav Perelman to enjoy the roost of 30,000 Black Kites near Eshel Hanasi (Photo: Yossi Leshem).



February 19th 2014: MK Faina Kirschenbaum, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, and a member of the Knesset for Yisrael Beiteinu party, visited at the Jerusalem Bird Observatory (JBO) birding station, SPNI, at the Knesset, to learn more details about our activities, which she supports. Yossi Leshem and Amir Balaban the JBO Co-director, hosted her. In the Picture: MK Faina released a Yellow-vented Bulbul back to the wild with Amir and a young volunteer. (Photo: Yossi Leshem)



An extensive project to protect the migrating Pelicans in Israel



Migrating White Pelicans in the Hula Valley (Photo: Thomas Krumenacker)

Over 50,000 Pelicans migrate over Israel every autumn and spring. This is the entire population of the species that breeds in Europe and Western Asia. Their wintering sites are in East Africa, mainly in the Sudd marshes on the Nile, which are about 5,000 kms south of their breeding sites. This is a huge distance for a migrating bird with a body weight of about 9.5 kg to fly, so it is absolutely essential for them to stop and refuel on the way. Physiological research and satellite-telemetric monitoring of the Pelicans in Israel have shown that a high percentage of the Pelicans that reach Israel have to rest here and eat in order to continue their migration journey to East Africa.

The draining of many wetland areas from Turkey southwards means that Israel is the last stopover site where they can refuel and feed before crossing the deserts of Sinai and Egypt. The problem is that in Israel, the fishponds are their alternative food source. Without any other choice, the hungry Pelicans cause damage to the fishponds. At the same time many Pelicans are hurt by the efforts of the fishermen to prevent them from eating the fish.

Since the 1980s we have been trying to prevent the conflict by providing highbred fish at different sites in the Hula Valley, the Bet Shean Valley, the Carmel Coast and the area near Acre. During the last few years the Nature and Parks Authority has been managing the project. The Authority supplies fish to the Hula Reserve, the Heffer Valley on the Mediterranean Coast and in the region of the Bet Shean Valley.



3,000 Pelicans coming to be fed in the Carmel coast near Paradis, to avoid the conflict (Photo: Yossi Eshbol)

In 2011 and 2012 the Israel Ornithological Center and the Hoopoe Foundation have helped to fund the project. All the statistics show that, in spite of the difficulties that it entails, the management program carried out by the Nature and Parks Authority is the only way to enable the Pelicans to continue their migration to their wintering sites in East Africa.

“Spreading Wings over the Vultures and the Raptors”: a combined project of the Israel Electric Company, the Nature and Parks Authority and the Society for the Protection of Nature

In 1996 the Israel Electric Company, the largest industrial company in Israel, joined the Nature and Parks Authority and the Society for the Protection of Nature, the largest NGO in Israel, in a project to protect the Vulture populations in Israel. The three organizations hoped that this would be an example to other organizations in Israel to help with the protection of the Vultures, through positive action, research and field activities as well as educational activities to inform the general public of the situation. The project was expanded to include additional raptors, some of them extremely rare, that are on the verge of extinction.

As well as protecting the birds of prey, the aim of the project was to minimize the damage to the Israel Electric Company and the national economy of Israel as a result of the large raptors being electrocuted on electrical wires.

In 2011, an international workshop in connection with this project was held. It was attended by Vulture and raptors experts from all over the world. Following the workshop several decisions were made, among them the decision to increase the breeding population which would enable more Vultures to be released into nature, part of them imported from Europe. And indeed, these decisions are being actively carried out in the framework of the project.

The agreement of cooperation between the organizations has recently been renewed for an additional three years. Within three years hundreds of electricity pylons will be protected, feeding stations for the Vultures will be operated, surveys to monitor the Vulture populations will be conducted and there will be educational activities centered in the Golan Heights, the Galilee and the Carmel.

“Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand: the way of a vulture in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a virgin...”
(Proverbs, 30, 18-19)



A poisoned Griffon Vulture (Photo: Eyal Bartov)

Following the recommendations of the experts and with the aid of a new donation that has just been received through the Keren Hayesod, the breeding population of the Vultures in Israel will be increased significantly, allowing more Vultures to be released into nature each year, from 2 new cages, in the Golan Heights and Mount Carmel.



Griffon Vulture soars over Gamla Reserve, Golan Heights. Only 6 out of 50 pairs in the last decade still nest in Gamla (Photo: Pini Hemo)

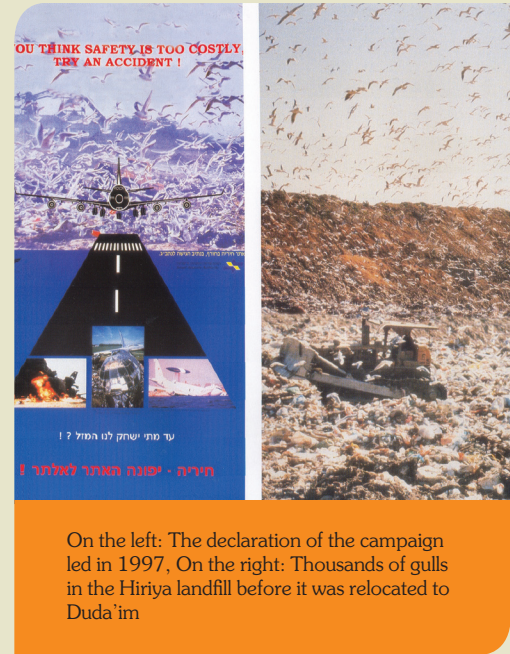
A Recent Conflict between Aircraft Activity and Black Kites in the Negev



A flock of thousands of wintering Black Kites in the Duda'im landfill (Photo: Yossi Eshbol)

Hatzerim, the IDF air force base just outside of Be'er Sheva, is one of the largest air force bases in Israel. Fifteen years ago, the large landfill known as "Hiriya", just west of Israel's only international airport, Ben-Gurion, was relocated to the Duda'im landfill in the Negev, a few kilometers north of Be'er Sheva. One of the main reasons for moving the landfill to the Negev was the severe threat towards flight safety for the aircraft landing and taking off, as during the winter months from October through March there were over 120,000 wintering gulls. Following great efforts and a wide-scale public campaign led by us in conjunction with the Ministry of Environmental Protection, in 1997 the landfill was relocated to Duda'im, with promises that the refuse would be dealt with on a completely different scale and that the birds would not gain access to the landfill.

Meanwhile, it has been discovered recently, through a survey led by ornithologist Amir Ben-Dov and the IOC, that the wintering Black Kites in the western Negev have increased drastically in number, from less than 2,000 a decade ago, to 30,000 as a result of the available food in the landfill, in Duda'im, Ginot Hadas and the refuse from the neighboring Bedouin towns which is dispersed throughout the area as they dispose of their rubbish in open spaces. The Kites have become the primary safety hazard for flight cadets and operational flights to and



On the left: The declaration of the campaign led in 1997, On the right: Thousands of gulls in the Hiriya landfill before it was relocated to Duda'im



from the Hatzerim air force base. The Air Force's Deputy Commander asked for Yossi Leshem's aid to rectify this hazard, which is essentially the exact same predicament as before, and presents the same dangers of grounding aircraft and possibly fatally harming pilots during the months from October through March. The cost of an F-15I aircraft reaches \$86 million! The site is exhilarating for an ardent birdwatcher, but dangerous for military and civilian flights (the Sde Teiman landing strip is also adjacent to the landfill).

In Memory of late Prime Minister Arik Sharon (1923- 2014) Re: The first copy of the “Bird Guide to Europe and Israel” Presented to Israel’s Prime Minister

On August 10th 2003 we presented Prime Minister Arik Sharon with the new “Bird Guide to Europe and Israel” the Hebrew version of Collins Bird Guide, by Mullarny, Svenson, Zettersrtom & Grant, edited by Dan Alon, Yossi Leshem and Dr. Avraham Arbel. The Bird Guide was dedicated to the late Captain Eran Shamir, who fell in the line of duty in Lebanon in 1997. The book was given to the Prime Minister by Eran’s uncle – Mr. Gideon Shamir. Eran, who was an enthusiastic birder since he was a child, lost his father Major Dubi Shamir, who also fell while serving his country, 25 years earlier.

Thrilled to hold the “Bird Guide to Europe and Israel” in his hands, Mr. Sharon explained that he had owned a rare copy of an early English edition of the former bird guide “Birds of Britain and Europe” by Bruun & Singer, in which the names of the birds had been translated to Hebrew and hand-written by Major General Abraham Yaffe, the first Director General of the Israel Nature & Parks Authority. The book was the favorite of Lili Sharon, the Prime Minister’s late wife, but was lost in a fire that swept through their house several years ago. Sharon was therefore thrilled that he could once again enjoy his own copy of the bird guide.

Prime Minister Sharon spoke with great appreciation about the hard work both organizations, the SPNI (which is celebrating this year its 60th anniversary) and the Nature & Park Authority (which is celebrating



August 10th, 2003: Prime Minister Arik Sharon with the first copy of the Bird Guide.

its 50th anniversary) do to protect Israel’s nature; this in spite of the fact that Israel is a relatively small country, and it is thus very difficult to properly balance between the need to develop Israel on the one hand, and to safeguard the environment on the other.

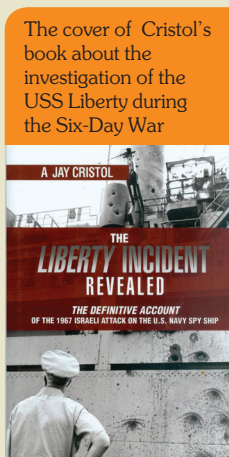
Birding with Judge Dr. Jay Cristol

Judge Dr. Jay Cristol visited Israel on December 22, 2013 for a day of birdwatching hosted by Yossi Leshem and Lt. Col. (Ret.) Danny Grossman. (Grossman, an A-4 Phantom navigator in the American Air Force, immigrated to Israel and joined the Israel Air Force and even earned an honor award for a classified operation while flying a Phantom.) Judge Cristol, a true friend of Israel, was a pilot in the American Navy who investigated the tragic bombing of the USS Liberty during the Six-Day War. Judge Cristol carried out an in-depth investigation, which subsequently became a doctoral thesis, was published in a book,

and printed in a number of editions (see photo). Judge Cristol sailed in Lake Tiberius with thousands of gulls, visited a bird ringing station, and roosting site of 30,000 Cranes in the Hula Agmon Park. Pilot Eli Peretz, CEO of Ayit, Ltd. hosted Judge Cristol, and flew the team to the north and back, and joined the exciting outing. During his visit, Judge Cristol met with Prime Minister Netanyahu, the Commander of the Israel Air Force and Navy, CEO of Raphael and many others, and participated in part of the culminating ceremony of the Israel Air Force at the Hatzertim Air Force Base.



Judge Cristol releases Water Rail with pilot Eli Peretz at the ringing station in the Hula Agmon



Judge Cristol and Navigator Danny Grossman sailing with gulls in Lake Tiberius

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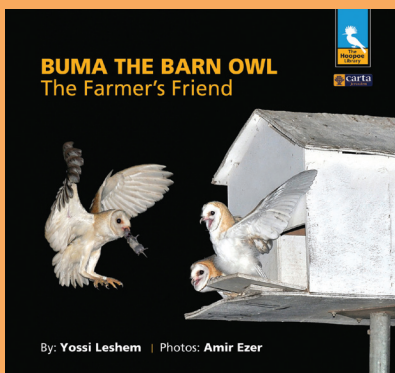


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