

possible. It is Council's hope that the OSME website becomes *the* place where birdwatchers and researchers go to find out more about the region. Therefore one of the key positions Council is seeking to fill is that of Website Manager. To be effective, websites not only have to be attractive and informative, they need to be updated on a regular basis. However, because of the nature of website design and management, such work can be done 'remotely' so work on the site can be undertaken from anywhere. Therefore, if you have website design and management skills or know someone who does, we would be very pleased to hear from you.

These are just a few of the main areas of work for OSME in the coming months and years but to make this possible we need your support so please remember to renew your membership, encourage your friends to join, sign up to Gift Aid and don't forget this year's raffle—it's not too late to buy tickets!

Subscription rate increases

It has been 10 years since subscription rates were increased, a period in which gen-

eral costs have steadily increased and, of major impact on OSME, postage costs have increased markedly, including by 25% in the last two years alone. Therefore, to ensure that OSME publications can be maintained at the current high standard and, importantly, support can be maintained for the Conservation and Research Fund, Council has decided that subscription rates will be increased from 1 January 2010. Details of the current and new rates are given below and it is hoped that following these increases rates will be held at these levels for several years to come.

Category	Current rate (£)	New rate (£)
<i>UK addresses</i>		
Individual	15.00	20.00
Family	20.00	25.00
Supporting	30.00	40.00
Institution	30.00	40.00
<i>Overseas addresses</i>		
Individual	20.00	25.00
Family	25.00	30.00
Supporting	35.00	45.00
Institution	30.00	40.00

NEWS & INFORMATION

Dawn Balmer (compiler)

AFGHANISTAN

List of protected species for Afghanistan

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) announced in early June that Afghanistan's National Environment Protection Agency (NEPA), in an effort to safeguard its natural heritage, has released the country's first-ever list of protected species now banned from hunting or harvest. The list, consisting of 20 mammals, seven birds, four plants, and a single amphibian and insect, provides legal protection to some of Afghanistan's wildlife, which has been devastated by more than 30 years of conflict. NEPA, in partnership with the USAID-funded Wildlife Conservation Society, the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, and Kabul University created

the Afghanistan Wildlife Executive Committee (AWEC) to facilitate the listing process. NEPA has also worked collaboratively with students at the University of Richmond in Virginia, USA, to complete the listing process. NEPA will be responsible for managing Afghanistan's protected species including writing recovery plans for species designated as threatened. Species will be re-evaluated every five years to determine whether populations have recovered to the extent where they may be removed from the protected list.

In May, Afghanistan announced the creation of its first national park: Band-e-Amir, a series of six deep blue lakes separated by natural dams made of travertine, a mineral deposit. (Source: Wildlife Conservation Society)

AZERBAIJAN

New potential IBAs in Azerbaijan

With the support of the Azerbaijan Ornithological Society (AOS, BirdLife in Azerbaijan), a young Azeri researcher Arzu Mammadov has spent the past three years surveying the birds of the autonomous republic of Nakhchivan, in the south-west of Azerbaijan. As well as recording many species of conservation concern and identifying a number of new candidate Important Bird Areas (IBAs), he has also involved the local community and institutions in his work, becoming Chairman of the regional AOS branch.

The research project, funded by the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences and AOS, aimed to identify potential IBAs, develop the research on existing IBAs and increase the protection of local biodiversity. Prior to this study, 217 bird species were known from the region and four IBAs had been identified. Arzu and his team have now increased the list of species to 241 and identified three new potential IBAs. The existing and candidate IBAs of Nakhchivan autonomous republic hold 18 globally threatened species and 24 species of European conservation concern. Arzu and his team used some of these species as ecological indicators to assess the status of the sites in which they occur, using BirdLife's global IBA monitoring framework. The assessment revealed that the condition of four sites (Ilandag, Negramdag, Toglugaya, Garagaya) was deteriorating because of intensive livestock grazing, cultivation, grass burning and other types of habitat degradation. However, the status of the other sites (Ordubad, Shahbuz, Araz water reservoir) was assessed as improving. Arzu and the local AOS branch will continue to work with the local institutions to try to improve the condition of deteriorating sites and restore their biodiversity values. (Source: BirdLife International)

CYPRUS

May hunting ban in Cyprus

After a successful campaign led by BirdLife International and BirdLife Cyprus, the Cypriot government has decided to stop the shooting of birds during the month of May

on the island. Prior to the new law, hunting was allowed in 2008 for eight days in May to control crows, particularly Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* and Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*. This initiative was then seen as an excuse to allow hunters to also shoot migratory species like European Turtle Doves *Streptopelia turtur*. However this year, the 'corvid control decree' has been reduced to just three days in June, when the risk to migratory species is deemed to be low. (Source: BirdLife International)

Migratory birds served in Cypriot restaurants

BirdLife Cyprus recently announced that in 2008 more than 1.1 million birds were illegally slaughtered in Cyprus by trappers eager to feed a lucrative demand for banned Warbler 'delicacies'. A report on the situation, compiled by Birdlife Cyprus and RSPB, has been submitted to the Wildlife Committee of the Council of Europe, the Cypriot government and the European Commission. In response to worrying declines, BirdLife has launched the Born to Travel Campaign to protect migratory waterbirds, soaring birds and songbirds along the African-Eurasian flyway. Born to Travel is a perfect example of how effectively the unique BirdLife Network meshes together as a united force to take action for conservation. For more information visit www.birdlife.org/flyways. (Source: BirdLife International)

EGYPT

Website development

The birding website for Egypt, www.birdingegypt.com, now allows you to upload your records of rare and scarce birds by clicking on the 'Birding News' button. (Source: Moldován István)

GEORGIA

Volunteers for raptor migration counts in Batumi—Makhindjauri, Georgia, in autumn 2009

In 2008, the count recorded a total of 812 000 raptors migrating from the European and Russian breeding grounds to Africa. Other Georgian birding hotspots like Kazbeg or the southern steppe lakes near the Armenian

border are easily visited from Batumi. Anyone wishing to join the 2009 count can find more information online at <http://www.freewebs.com/batumiraptorcount/participatein2009.htm>. (Source: Pieter Vantieghe)

IRAN

Radio-tracking of Pleske's Ground Jay

A project has begun to radio-tag a number of Pleske's Ground Jays *Podoces pleskei* in Touran Biosphere Reserve, Iran. The project is being carried out by a team from the University of Tehran and is supported by the Iran National Science Foundation (INSF). Between 21–25 March 2009, four (three females and one male) were captured using mist-nets and were radio-tagged and released. The aim is to investigate the ecology of this poorly known species in Iran. (Source: Mohammad Tohidifar)

Red-necked Stint added to list

Guy Kirwan (*Dutch Birding* 29(2): 92–93 2007) found two female Red-necked Stints *Calidris ruficollis* that had been collected by Walter Koelz at Borujerd, Lorestan province, western Iran on 25 July 1941. This is a new species for the Iranian list. (Source: Abolghasem Khaleghizadeh)

IRAQ

Awareness campaign

The surveys of the Mesopotamian marshes that Iraqi environmental group Nature Iraq has carried out over the last 5 years have shown that large numbers of the globally near-threatened Marbled Duck are being hunted. Many of these birds are then sold in the local markets. The globally endangered Sociable Lapwing also occurs in Iraq on migration and whilst there have not been any surveys it is known that they too are hunted. Now NI (BirdLife's partner in Iraq) is trying to address the problem and has started a public awareness campaign, particularly aimed at hunters. Posters (Plates 1 & 2) are on display (Plate 3) especially in the areas where hunting occurs. The aim is not to stop all hunting (whether by gun or falcon) but to encourage respect for birds that are threatened and for which Iraq

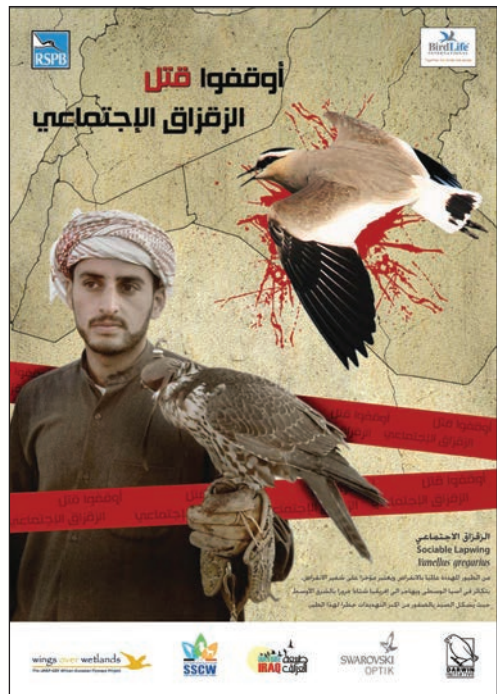


Plate 1. Poster against the hunting in Iraq of Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris* and other endangered species. © Nature Iraq

Plate 2. Poster against the hunting in Iraq of Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius*. © Nature Iraq



Plate 3. Posters against the hunting of Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius* (Plate 2) and Marbled Ducks *Marmaronetta angustirostris* and other endangered species (Plate 1) on display at one of many locations in Iraq. © Omar Fadil/Nature Iraq

has a global responsibility. (Source: Richard Porter)

Training course in Iraq

A ten-day training course, hosted by Nature Iraq was conducted from 14–23 April in Iraqi Kurdistan for over 20 bird and botany field biologists (Plates 4–6). This is the fifth bird training course (the others having been in Syria). This double course focused on bird and botanical identification in the field, survey methodology and assessment of conservation issues. Trainees from various facilities and institutes all over Iraq attended the course, which included extensive field visits to areas in the Kurdistan governorate of Sulaimani.

Richard Porter, an advisor to the Nature Iraq Biodiversity Program shared his expert knowledge of birds of the Middle East with the students. Richard’s visit may be an indica-



Plates 4–6. A ten-day training course, hosted by Nature Iraq, was conducted from 14–23 April 2009 in Iraqi Kurdistan for over 20 bird and botany field biologists. © RF Porter

tion of a future when opportunities increase for outside birdwatchers to visit Iraq and see its unique bird populations and ecosystems. Tony Miller and Sophie Neale from the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh, Scotland, provided the botanical training.

During the course a number of diverse mountain, wadi and riverine habitats were visited including Homer Qawm, Zewe and Peramagroon, Kobi Qara Dag, Chami Rezan, Darbendikhan lake, De Lezha, Chamchamal, Ahmed Awa, Waraz and Mawat. The information collected will be included in Nature Iraq's extensive database on Iraq's flora and fauna. In terms of bird observations, the training team found a wide spectrum of breeding birds that are listed as globally threatened or near threatened species by the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN) or are species of conservation concern.

From a botanical point of view, the areas visited during the course were lush and green (Iraq has been facing a drought over the past two years but recent rains had covered the Kurdish mountains in grasses and herbs). Tony Miller of the RBGE stated, "When we got down to looking at the vegetation in detail we found it to be rich in species, on a par I would say, with some of the richest areas I have visited in the Middle East. In particular, I was impressed by the changes in species composition across fairly small distances as we changed altitude or moved, for instance, from limestone to serpentine soils." Nature Iraq along with other Iraqi government and university stakeholders propose to produce a modern flora of Iraq. This will involve extensive surveying of Iraq's botanical resources and new methodologies are needed to complete this work.

As a result of the course, many additional trainees received a solid baseline of skills in field ornithology and botany which could help with the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) summer survey. Nature Iraq teams are carrying out their fifth summer survey of the southern marshes, their third of the Kurdistan hills and woods and their first of the western steppes. All are aimed at identifying Iraq's most important areas for conservation action. (Source: Omar Fadhil, Anna Bachmann and Richard Porter)

ISRAEL

Natural predators encouraged

Barn Owls *Tyto alba* and Common Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* are being encouraged by farmers in Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority area to control agricultural pests instead of using harmful chemicals. The two species provide round-the-clock predation of mice, rats and voles. However, modern development has reduced the number of suitable nest sites available in barns, attics and deserted buildings. This was easily remedied by providing nest boxes and the first boxes were erected for Barn Owls in the fields of an environmentally-friendly kibbutz (communal farm), Sde Eliyahu, in the Bet-She'an valley. Boxes have now been placed throughout the valley, and 70% are already occupied by owls. It's estimated that Barn Owls are removing at least 80 000 rodents from Bet-She'an's fields each year which has ensured a reduction in the damage pesticides cause to people, soil, water, wildlife and migrating birds. The project was expanded to also include Common Kestrels, with nesting boxes erected throughout Israel.

During 2005–2008 the project was expanded beyond the borders of Israel, and 37 nesting boxes were erected in fields in Jordan east of the Jordan river. At the same time, Imad Atrash, director of the Palestine Wildlife Society (PWLS: BirdLife in Palestine), erected 10 nesting boxes for Barn Owls in the fields of Jericho in the Palestinian Authority area.

The success of using birds of prey to control rodents now continues to go from strength to strength. In Israel, the General Directors of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environmental Protection decided to promote a three-year national project (2008–2010) using Barn Owls and Common Kestrels countrywide, together with the Baracha Foundation, the SPNI (BirdLife in Israel) and Tel-Aviv University. Furthermore, USAID-MERC (Middle East Regional Cooperation) recently provided funds for a research project to compare experimental results of using Barn Owls and Kestrels in Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority area.

A total of 1480 nest boxes are now located throughout Israel, with approximately 600 pairs of nesting Barn Owls. SPNI are now

seeking to develop the project further and create a regional project with Palestinians and Jordanians. (Source: BirdLife International)

Hoopoe chosen as National Bird

The Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* has been awarded the title of Israel's National Bird by President Shimon Peres. The bird will be celebrated with the issue of new coins and stamps. The initiative to choose a national bird for Israel, by the Israel Ornithological Center, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) and the International Center for the Study of Bird Migration, began two years before the celebrations for Israel's 60th birthday. (Source: BirdLife International)

Spring Migration Festival 2010

The 4th International Spring Migration Festival at Eilat is scheduled for 18–24 March 2010. Further details can be found on the website www.eilatbirdsfestival.com. This spring over 220 birders from Israel and ten other countries took part in the festival activities and 221 species were recorded.

Birding & Wetlands Centre, Ma'agan Mikhael

The centre is looking for volunteers who have some experience with bird ringing, mist netting and waders (licensed ringers preferred). Accommodation will be provided. For details please contact Shai Agmon by email, aquila@kfitz.net, or fax: +972 73 2413843

LEBANON

Identifying and Conserving IBAs in Lebanon

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) and A Rocha Lebanon have completed a three-year nationwide search for new Important Bird Areas (IBAs). An impressive 3000 hours of monitoring was carried out which has more than tripled the number of IBAs in Lebanon, marking the start of the conservation process for these sites (Plate 7). Prior to the recent surveys only four sites in Lebanon had been recognised as IBAs.

One newly identified IBA, the Beirut River Valley, covers over 8000 hectares of riverside, woodland, cultivated ground and high cliff tops. During the migration periods, more than 70 000 soaring birds fly through the Beirut River Valley IBA, including White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*, European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* and Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*.

Teams of researchers from SPNL and A Rocha Lebanon made a total of 320 visits to sites over the three year period thanks to generous funding from the MAVA trust. Thousands of bird records from sites were then compared against BirdLife's global IBA criteria resulting in the identification of nine new IBAs of global significance and two of regional significance, with additional funding to support documentation in a database provided by the UK Government's Darwin Initiative.

During the monitoring work, contact was made with interested individuals from local communities who were subsequently asked to provide representatives to attend the IBA community workshops and form Site Support Groups. Four two-day workshops were set up to provide people with an introduction to bird identification and explain BirdLife's IBA



Plate 7. Poster showing Important Bird Areas in Lebanon. © BirdLife International/SPNL

programme, along with the basics of site management. Site management committees have now been formed for sites with no current conservation status, to create management plans for their conservation. To help the local committees set their priorities, the completed project has produced site management statements for each IBA.

The completed project marks the beginning in the conservation process for Lebanon's newest IBAs. SPNL and A Rocha Lebanon are now planning to publish education and training materials for local groups, build their combined capacity for undertaking research and surveying work, elaborate site monitoring programmes, provide networking between the IBA sites and initiate conservation projects for the declared sites. (Source: BirdLife International)

QATAR

Updated checklist

A provisional checklist of the birds of Qatar has been created by Qatar Bird Club, summarised below:

- Category A: species occurring in an apparent wild state [284].
- Category C: introduced and established resident breeding species [9].
- Category D: vagrancy possible but escapes not ruled out [6].
- Category E: released or escaped birds, with populations not considered self-sustaining [5].
- Category X: species claimed to have been seen without any supporting documentation [56].

One notable species missing from the list is Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*, for although it breeds on the Hawar Islands (Bahrain), which are within 2.75 km of Qatar, there are no documented records for Qatar itself. It is hoped the checklist will be published in full in due course. (Source: Jamie Buchan)

SAUDI ARABIA

ABBA Survey 40: Northern Saudi Arabia

During February 2009 a survey was made of wintering birds in northern Saudi Arabia

by Mike Jennings and three staff members from the NCWCD Riyadh. The main study area was within about 200 km of the borders with Jordan and Iraq. The survey covered the whole region from near the Arabian gulf coast to the gulf of Aqaba, chalking up 8700 km (mostly off-road). In previous similar surveys to this generally treeless plain, thousands of sandgrouse (Pin-tailed *Pterocles alchata* and Black-bellied *P. orientalis*) and uncommon wintering waders such as Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* and Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus* have been encountered, sometimes in large numbers. One of the aims of the survey was to systematically cover the region so numbers of these important species could be estimated and to judge how important the region is as wintering habitat for them. Methods included a series of vehicle transect counts (more than 1500 km of measured off-road counts) as well as early morning timed censuses on foot. However, whilst this region has enjoyed good rains during the 1990's, it has suffered widespread drought conditions for most of the 21st Century. Indeed, most of this region was showing conditions consistent with prolonged drought and in many areas there was a complete absence of green vegetation. Probably because of these conditions, in a classic case of failure to make contact with the study species, not a single Dotterel or Sociable Lapwing was seen and only a few dozen Pin-tailed Sandgrouse were found, at one site. The Pin-tailed Sandgrouse were seen on irrigated farmland and it is possible that many more, and the other species, were wintering on other farms where they would find green vegetation, such as alfalfa, which at some stages of its growing/cropping cycle can resemble the desert in a wet year. However, the lack of records of the study species in desert regions also suggests that many had gone elsewhere this winter. Numbers of other wintering birds were generally low and not a single wintering vulture was seen, although Lappet-faced Vultures *Aegyptius trachelotos* were breeding at one locality. There were very good numbers of Eastern Imperial Eagles *Aquila heliaca*. At least 500 wintering Black Kites *Milvus migrans* were roosting at one farm, more than previously recorded wintering in this region. Breeding range extensions were recorded for Desert Finch

Rhodospiza obsoleta, Desert Eagle Owl *Bubo ascalaphus*, Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*, and Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* amongst other species. Wintering birds included several small flocks of Eurasian Linnets *Carduelis cannabina* (not recorded in northern Saudi Arabia before) and Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* relatively numerous at one farm. This area has rather limited species diversity in winter but the short list included 13 species of raptors, five owls, nine larks (numbers were low of this group and more species were expected) and seven wheatears.

The NCWCD sponsored the survey and a full report of the findings is being prepared for them, which will include full details and analysis of transects counts and censuses and a systematic list. A soft copy of this report will be available to those who subscribe to *Phoenix* and a summary of the survey will appear in *Phoenix* 26 (January 2010). (Contributed by Mike Jennings)

SOCOTRA (YEMEN)

House Crows *Corvus splendens* eradicated from Socotra

The House Crow, which arrived on Socotra by boat ten years ago, has now been eradicated. The population gradually built up and there were concerns about the damage the species could do to the bird populations on this island of high endemism. (Source: Richard Porter)

TURKEY

New Hope for Ilisu

In late December the German government decided to withdraw its support for the controversial Ilisu dam project in Turkey. For many years nature conservation organisations, including Doga Dernegi (BirdLife in Turkey) and NABU (BirdLife in Germany), have been campaigning against the construction of the hydro-electric dam on the Tigris river in the south-eastern part of Turkey. The project, which had financial backing from Germany, Switzerland and Austria, would destroy the habitat of up to 123 bird species including the Endangered Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, which breeds in the cliffs along the valley in Hasankeyf, and the Near Threatened Cinereous Bunting *Emberiza*

cineracea, which breeds on the rocky slopes of the river basin. It would also have devastating consequences for the local community, flooding many villages including Ilisu and the ancient city of Hasankeyf and forcing up to 60 000 people to leave their homes. The German government decided to start the pullout proceedings as environmental and human rights standards have not been met. As a last chance the Austrian, German and Swiss export credit agencies have still agreed to give the dam authorities another deadline of 180 days to fulfil their obligations. Nevertheless the German government's decision is an exceptional u-turn and is an important step towards victory for people and nature. However, the final pullout can only be enforced after the deadline has passed. This will sadly come too late for the local inhabitants whose homes have already been taken and who have neither been offered suitable compensation nor an appropriate site to resettle. (Source: BirdLife International)

Turkey book updates

A webpage has been set up devoted solely to providing updates and corrections to the recently published Turkey avifauna. It can be found at www.freewebs.com/guykirwan/turkeybookupdates.htm. Anyone with information concerning new unpublished records for the page should contact Guy Kirwan at GMKirwan@aol.com.

OTHER NEWS

Large-billed Reed Warbler discovered in museums

According to a recent paper in the *Journal of Avian Biology* (39: 305–310 Nov 2008) by Lars Svensson and colleagues, Large-billed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orinus* can be added to the bird lists of Afghanistan and Kazakhstan, after finding 10 new specimens in museum collections. The Kazakhstan specimen was collected by N Zarudny on 18 August 1900 in the south-east of the country. The four Afghan specimens were collected by WN Koelz in north-east Afghanistan in July 1937. Until recently, Large-billed Reed Warbler was known only from one specimen, collected in the Sutlej valley, Himachal Pradesh, India in November 1867. In March 2006 one was

trapped at Laem Phak Bia, Phatchaburi province, south-west Thailand. (Source: BirdLife International)

New CEO for BirdLife International

Dr Marco Lambertini has been appointed as the new Chief Executive of BirdLife International by the BirdLife Global Council and took up this position on 1 March 2009 and succeeds Mike Rands, a former chairman of OSME. (Source: BirdLife International)

Bibliography of Arabian Ornithology

The huge number of references collated during the preparation of the Atlas of Breeding Birds of Arabia (ABBA) has now been brought fully up to date with all sources traceable to April 2009, some 2100–2200 titles in total. The bibliography is in rich text format (.rtf), about 0.5 MB. In addition, the latest edition of *Phoenix*, the newsletter of the ABBA project, was published at the end of January. Copies of the Bibliography and *Phoenix* are available from Mike Jennings, Warners Farm House, Warners Drove, Somersham, Cambridgeshire PE28 3WD, UK. Email: ArabianBirds@dsl.pipex.com.

BirdLife launches new migratory bird project

BirdLife's newest flyways project was launched in early May at an inception workshop in Jordan. "This marks a significant increase in our efforts to conserve migratory soaring birds in one of world's most important migratory flyways" said Dr Jonathan Barnard, Senior Programme Manager at BirdLife International. Government and NGO partners from eleven countries across the Middle East and Africa came together in Amman, Jordan, to discuss and launch the UNDP-GEF/BirdLife International 'Migratory Soaring Birds' project. "We need to acknowledge the importance of international and regional conservation to reduce threats to significant populations of Globally Threatened migratory soaring birds" said H E Eng Khaled Irani, Minister of Environment of Jordan. The Jordan Rift Valley–Red Sea flyway is recognised as the most significant corridor for bird migration in the world. However, many parts of the flyway are undergoing a period of rapid

development. At the migration bottlenecks, expanding urban, industrial, agricultural and tourism developments are creating hazards to birds in areas where previously no threats existed. More than two-thirds of the migratory soaring bird species which use the Jordan Rift Valley and Red Sea flyway have an unfavourable conservation status. Hazards include direct threats from development, habitat alteration, pollution, and the construction of barriers such as power lines that obstruct the flyway resulting in fatal collisions. Soaring birds are also directly threatened by illegal and unsustainable hunting. (Source: BirdLife International)

Wildlife Middle East News

Wildlife Middle East News volume 3 issues 3 and 4 have been published in the last few months and PDFs can be downloaded from www.wmenews.com. The editors are requesting articles for future issues particularly from Iran, Syria, Jordan, Bahrain, Turkey, Palestine, Kuwait, Iraq and Oman. Please contact the editors (editors@wmenews.com) with any ideas that you may have.

Workshop on Sociable Lapwing

An International Species Action Plan workshop on the Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* was held at Almaty, Kazakhstan, from 30 March to 1 April. The Sociable Lapwing is a Critically Endangered species that has undergone a large population decline. Initial estimates put the world's breeding population as low as 200–600 breeding pairs. However, recent exciting discoveries would suggest that this estimate was too pessimistic, but that the species' status remains precarious. Recent research efforts for Sociable Lapwings have been targeted at the breeding grounds in Kazakhstan, as recommended by the AEWA International Species Action Plan published in 2004. However, it now seems likely that the magnitude of the recent population decline cannot be wholly explained by the observed levels of breeding success. The workshop was organised by AEWA, CMS, RSPB, Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan (ACBK) and the Committee for Forestry and Hunting, Kazakhstan. The aim of the workshop was to review progress made under the first Species Action Plan

and to present the findings of work undertaken as part of the Darwin Initiative project *Conserving a flagship steppe species: the critically endangered Sociable Lapwing*. The workshop was attended by Sociable Lapwing researchers and Government representatives from a number of countries including Kazakhstan, Russia, India, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Sudan, Germany and the UK.

The workshop reported excellent progress on determining the causes of population decline in the Sociable Lapwing. Research on the breeding grounds in central Kazakhstan from 2004–2008 found that nest survival is generally high but varies from year to year and that chick survival tends to be high in most years. This coupled with low return rates of colour-ringed individuals suggests that factors away from the breeding grounds may be responsible for the reported decline of the species. Presentations by Birdlife partners highlighted how the increased collaboration across range states in recent years has led to the discovery of several large flocks of Sociable Lapwings in south-west Russia, south-east Turkey and northern Syria. The largest flock located to date was that of c3200 individuals in Ceylanpinar, Turkey, in October 2007. This flock was located partly due to the relocation of a satellite tagged bird that subsequently migrated to Sudan, the first record there for more than 50 years. In addition, a survey by the Sudanese Wildlife Society in January 2009 confirmed the presence of a number of flocks totalling 150 birds. Representatives from Syria and Iraq outlined recent work in their respective countries, including worrying reports of hunting being targeted at Sociable Lapwings.

The Action Plan is currently being drafted for consultation but some of the key recommendations include urgent work in Syria and Iraq to determine the extent of hunting and to work with Government Agencies and local people to limit hunting where possible. Further work is also required in India to determine the number and distribution of Sociable Lapwings occurring there. Increased collaboration between Birdlife partners will be required in the coming years to undertake co-ordinated counts across the species' range to get a robust population estimate and to further increase our knowledge of Sociable Lapwing migration routes and wintering areas.

The workshop ended with a presentation by Andreas Pittl, who outlined Swarovski Optik's commitment to Sociable Lapwing conservation through Birdlife International's Preventing Extinctions programme through which they are joint Species Champion with the RSPB. Swarovski optical equipment was presented to a number of the researchers to help the survey effort across the Sociable Lapwing's range. Further information can be obtained from Rob Sheldon at robert.sheldon@rspb.org.uk or Maxim Koshkin at maxim.koshkin@acbk.kz. (Contributed by Rob Sheldon)

REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

Information on Semi-collared Flycatcher

OSME has received a request from Kostadin Georgiev from Birdlife Bulgaria for unpublished information on the Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata*. BirdLife International has created a group of Single Species Action Plans (SSAP) for threatened species in the European Union. The Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB) is responsible for the development of the SSAP for the Semi-collared Flycatcher. Unpublished records of Semi-collared Flycatchers in the Middle East (with date, location, count) are required. Information on where the borderline is between migrating and breeding Semi-collared Flycatchers and the most southerly recorded breeding pair is particularly welcomed. Details should be sent to Kostadin Georgiev, BSPB/BirdLife Bulgaria, PO Box 50, BG-1111 Sofia, Bulgaria or kostadin.georgiev@bspb.org.

Rollers in Iran

Records of European Roller *Coracias garrulus* from Iran are required to help assess the status of the species. European Roller is listed as Near Threatened by BirdLife International. Records including date, place, number and breeding status should be sent to Abolghasem Khaleghizadeh at akhaleghizadeh@yahoo.com.