

NEWS & INFORMATION

Dawn Balmer (compiler)

CYPRUS

BirdLife Cyprus reveals online bird trapping death toll count for 2011 autumn migration

BirdLife Cyprus has published online (www.birdlifecyprus.org) an estimated death toll from the illegal bird trapping taking place in Cyprus during the 2011 autumn migration season. The toll has been estimated on the basis of field data from BirdLife's ongoing field monitoring of trapping activity with mist nets and limesticks, part of a systematic surveillance programme. The first weekly estimate, 89 225 birds, represents the number of birds killed between Thursday 1 September and Sunday 11 September 2011. The estimate was updated every Monday until the end of October by which time it had reached 1 447 308 birds. BirdLife Cyprus posted this death toll on its website to highlight the urgency of the situation and as a call for action to halt this slaughter. In July 2011, the 'European Conference on Illegal Killing of Birds', that took place in Larnaca, concluded with a clear 'zero tolerance' message and an urgent call for appropriate measures to stop the bird slaughter. BirdLife Cyprus is now calling for words to be turned into action by all competent authorities at all levels. BirdLife Cyprus is once again calling for decisive action against the restaurants serving the trapped birds, for targeted enforcement against big, organised trapping operations and for tougher sentences for convicted trappers. In autumn 2010 BirdLife Cyprus estimated that 1.4 million birds were killed by trappers in the Famagusta and Larnaca districts, an unprecedented death toll resulting in the highest trapping levels recorded since 2002, when BirdLife Cyprus began its systematic monitoring of trapping activity.

DVD launched

In July 2011, BirdLife Cyprus launched the DVD documentary *Important areas for birds and other wildlife in Cyprus* (Plate 1). This

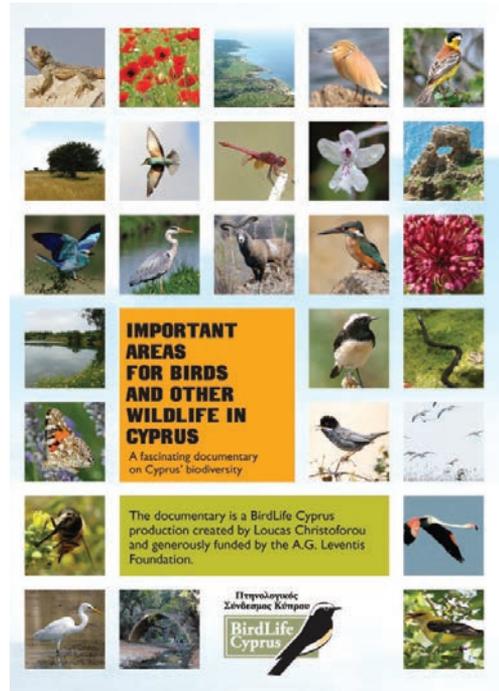


Plate 1. BirdLife Cyprus launched the DVD *Important areas for birds and other wildlife in Cyprus* in July 2011. © BirdLife Cyprus

presents unique images of Cyprus's wildlife and natural landscapes. It covers the diversity of landscapes, rich wildlife and endemic and other special species found on the island, with a simple and informative narrative accessible to all ages. The documentary is a reminder of the natural heritage of the island and also a wake-up call on the urgent need to protect the island's wild places and creatures at a time when the natural environment is threatened as never before. The DVD runs for 55 minutes and consists of 30 chapters, one for each area described. The price is €7 for BirdLife Cyprus members and €10 for non-members with all proceeds going to conservation. Further information is available at: www.birdlifecyprus.org.

EGYPT

Spring raptor survey planned

A survey of spring raptor migration at Ayn Sokhna on the Egyptian Red sea coast is planned from 1 March to 5 May 2012. There is no published data on raptor migration from this location, and the only comparable survey (run some 60 km north, in and around Suez city) is that of Wimpfheimer carried out in 1982. Observers with experience in raptor identification and censusing, are invited to travel to Egypt and be in charge of the survey for periods of seven consecutive days, from 08.30 to 15.00 h, and record data. Accommodation will be provided in a private home nearby. Please contact Mary Megalli (mary.megalli@gmail.com) or see www.calfree.com/SokhnaInvitation.pdf for more details.

IRAN

Iranian Birding Day

The first Iranian Birding Day was held on 24 November 2011. Several organizations and institutions gathered at the Iranian House of Artists in Tehran for a day about bird watching and the birds of Iran. More information can be found in Farsi at www.iranbirdingday.ir. (Contributed by Amir Behzad Eslami/'Avaye Tabiate Paydar')

Papers on rare birds in Iran

Abolghasem Khaleghizadeh, editor of *Podoces*, recently circulated three papers on rare birds in Iran: Scott DA. 2008. Rare birds in Iran in the late 1960s and 1970s. *Podoces* 3(1/2): 1–30, Roselaar CS & M Aliabadian. 2009. Review of rare birds in Iran, 1860s–1960s. *Podoces* 4(1): 1–27. Khaleghizadeh A *et al.* 2011. Rare Birds in Iran in 1980–2010. *Podoces* 6(1): 1–48. These articles can be accessed on the OSME website (under ORL/Trip Reports) or directly from Abolghasem at akhaleghizadeh@gmail.com.

IRAQ

Nature Iraq Bird Records Committee

Intensive field studies by Nature Iraq since 2004 have resulted in the discovery of several new bird species for Iraq. The Arabic *Field*

Guide to the Birds of Iraq published in 2006 contains the latest bird checklist but many new birds were found by the NI bird team after its publication. In view of the recent 'firsts', a records committee was required to review and assess these new claims so they could have scientific credibility and so in 2009 the Nature Iraq Bird Records Committee (NIBRC) was founded. Although NIBRC was established to assess its own records of new species, the committee will be happy to use its experience and expertise to assess any records by other observers. The NIBRC examines the claim carefully, consulting with external experts when necessary. The final judgment on whether the record is acceptable for the Iraq list is made by voting. For a record to be accepted only one rejection is permitted. If more than one then the record is not accepted. All new species will be announced on the NI website: www.natureiraq.com. NIBRC currently has six members: Laith Ali (Iraq), Korsh Ararat (Iraq), Sancar Baris (Turkey), Omar Fadhil (Iraq), Richard Porter (UK) and Mudhafar Salim (Iraq). The late Simon Aspinall (UK) was also a member. To make a submission of a new bird record to NIBRC or if you have questions, please contact Mudhafar Salim, NIBRC coordinator, at mudhafar.salim@natureiraq.org. (Source Richard Porter)

Nature Iraq attends third International Falconry Festival

Omar Fadhil attended the third International Falconry Festival in Al Ain, Abu Dhabi, UAE, from 10–18 December 2011 as a representative of Nature Iraq. This was the first participation for Iraq and NI hoped to get the message across that falconry has a long history in Iraq but it is carried out in balance with nature (Plates 2–4). Iraqi falconers are restricted in what species can be targeted and are fully aware of the endangered species in the country. The NI stand focussed on conservation of birds of prey and other endangered species and falconry, and how the two issues are linked. NI aimed to show how it has been working closely with falconers to help conserve endemic and rare species and how to control their trapping, trade and traffic.

The conservation of the Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* was one of the main issues



Plate 2. Haj Saeed Al Zirgani, head of Iraq falconry society, informing visitors to the Iraq stand about status and conservation of Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius*. © Omar Fadhil



Plate 3. Iraq stand: International Falconry Association member with Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* leaflet. © Omar Fadhil



Plate 4. "Yes, falconry is carried out in Iraq but in balance with nature, conservation and protection." © Omar Fadhil

raised during the festival as its decline has been related to falconry. NI was able to demonstrate the role of conservation to an international audience. On the NI stand were a range of pictures, posters, leaflets and also oil paintings. These were well received by visitors. Attending the conference was an excellent opportunity to spread the work of NI and to meet representatives from other organisations such as the Hawk Conservancy Trust (UK) and the Wildlife in the Middle East Group. (Contributed by Omar Fadhil)

JORDAN

New staff for the Migratory Soaring Project

Two new members are joining the Regional Flyway Facility (RFF) team in the Amman office. Osama Al-Nouri, is appointed as the regional project manager (RFF coordinator)—he previously worked for the Syrian Society for the Conservation of Wildlife, the Birdlife affiliate in Syria. The second new appointment

is Julien Jreissati who will act as the project communication officer. Julien has previously volunteered and worked with the BirdLife partner in Lebanon. (Source: Ibrahim Khader, Regional Director, BirdLife International)

First CEPF Workshop in the Arabian peninsula

At BirdLife International's Middle East office on the banks of the Dead sea in Jordan, representatives of the Saudi Authority for Wild Animals (SAWA), Yemen's Ministry of the Environment, as well as biologists from the region and representatives from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) and Conservation International convened on 28–29 July 2011. The meeting focused on the advancement of the ecosystem profile for the 'Eastern Afromontane Hotspot', which includes critical ecosystems in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Though these two countries are recognized as being very different from each other politically and economically, they both have extremely valuable ecosystems in common, and face similar environmental threats. Traditional hunting and agricultural abandonment are two key issues. In Yemen, this abandonment is due to a lack of water or to make way for the planting of khat, a flowering plant that has mild stimulant properties when chewed. In Saudi Arabia, however, this abandonment is linked to rural exodus and growing urbanization. Particularly in the mountainous regions of the country, these trends threaten biodiversity, which is closely linked to tree cover or to fragile areas with particular microclimates.

Through CEPF's ecosystem profile, these issues, and many other concerns and opportunities for conservation, are being analyzed across the eastern afromontane hotspot, which stretches through eastern Africa from Zimbabwe in the south to Saudi Arabia in the north. Many other topics were addressed during the two days of the workshop, providing CEPF and partners with new information and perspectives on the important ecosystems of Saudi Arabia and Yemen. This exchange marks the first steps in a future long and fruitful collaboration with Saudi and Yemeni partners to protect their critical natural areas. (Source: Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund)

KAZAKHSTAN

Important Bird Areas recognised officially

New additions to Kazakhstan's legislation have recently been published and the term 'Important Bird Area (IBA)' was included in the law 'On Specially Protected Nature Areas' of Kazakhstan for the first time. IBAs are now considered as 'objects of state nature-reserved fund' (in Russian 'prirodno-zapovedniy fond'). Such objects are not a direct component of the national Specially Protected Areas (SPA) network but the Kazakhstan government now has an obligation for their protection and control. Official recognition provides a good basis for 'upgrading' IBAs to SPA status in the future. Lobbying for inclusion of IBAs in the legislation has been led by the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK—BirdLife Affiliate in Kazakhstan) with the support of the Committee of Forestry and Hunting. The next step is to get all confirmed IBAs (121 at present) included in the list of 'objects' approved by the Kazakhstan government. New lists should be prepared in the near future to take into account the new legislation. (Contributed by Dr Sergey Sklyarenko, Head of the Centre for Conservation Biology/ Science Director, ACBK)

OMAN

Sultanate of Oman hosts an international conference on migratory shorebirds

An international conference "Oman as a Gravitational Center in the Global Flyway Network of Migratory Shorebirds" was recently organised by the Centre for Environmental Studies and Research (CESAR) at Sultan Qaboos University, Oman, under the auspices of Dr Khalifa al Jabri, member of the Majlis Addawla. The three-day conference, 14–16 November 2011, was organised in association with the Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research, the Ministry of Environmental and Climate Affairs, Shell Development Oman, and the Centre for Field Research on the Environment (Diwan of the Royal Court). In his opening remarks, Dr Mushtaque Ahmed, director of CESAR, said

that an important aim of the conference was to raise awareness about wetlands and to stress their international importance for the world's biodiversity. More specifically, the conference had a focus on the West Asian–East African flyway, in which Barr al Hikman, a large pristine coastal wetland in Oman, is a key wintering and stopover site. In the opening ceremony, Dr Jens Eriksen, gave the keynote speech about bird migration in Oman. He observed that some species have declined dramatically during the last few decades and are now seen only sparingly in Oman. He emphasised that in order to preserve biodiversity, it is important to protect not only the breeding sites, but also the wintering areas and migratory bird stop-over sites. These include the many khawrs and wetlands along the coast of Oman and in particular Barr al Hikman. He further added that although much had been learned from intensive observations, we still have little knowledge about local movements of birds during their time in Oman and the actual migration routes. Thus, much research is still needed and modern techniques of fitting satellite transmitters to migratory birds opens up new possibilities. Papers by speakers from Oman and abroad included 'Connectivity of Bird Populations', 'Shorebird Populations: Middle East stop-over & wintering grounds', 'Both ends of the flyway', 'Ecological research & conservation', 'Ecological Research in marine habitats'.

Research period on Sooty Falcons extended

The Office for Conservation of Environment (OCE), Diwan of Royal Court, which started research on Sooty Falcons *Falco concolor* in 2007 along with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs and Sultan Qaboos University has extended the commitment till 2013. Oman is considered to be one of the most important breeding grounds for the 'near-threatened' Sooty Falcon, with perhaps 4% of the global population being found on Fahal island alone. But since 1978, when the first survey was done, (initial survey was done for a year only in 1978) the population has declined by about 15% and it is estimated that annual mortality among adult birds is about 20% and about 70% among juveniles. "From 2011 onwards, we

are the main authority to conduct a detailed study of population dynamics and ecology of sooty falcons," said Dr Mansoor al Jahdhami, senior specialist, environmental studies, OCE. The authority carried out field visits to the Damaniyat and Fahal islands in September and October 2011 and ringed about 50 chicks. Since 2007, 300 birds have been ringed. Dr Mike McGrady, from Natural Research (Scotland-based research charity), who is working with OCE as the chief researcher, was in Oman for the 2011 survey. Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, he said that there were three main initiatives that OCE has started from this year. "Firstly, to track more birds with help of satellite transmitters. Secondly, to look into migration and the study of wintering grounds with a possible collaborative venture with Madagascar where Sooty Falcons winter. Thirdly, to make a documentary film on the ongoing research." With such a high mortality rate, McGrady feels there is a need to urgently raise awareness and embark on better and detailed researches on the ecology of these falcons. "There is no proper data on the population demographics of these birds in Oman except for the Fahal and Damaniyat islands. There is a possibility of its presence in places along the coast, like south of Duqm, Musandam and Jebel Akhdar. It may be that the population in Musandam can be globally significant," said McGrady. Thanks to Simon Tull, OSME Country Contact and Zahran Al Abdulasalam, who works at the Al Ansab Wetlands, Muscat. (Source: www.muscatdaily.com)

Wildlife rangers to be trained in anti-smuggling skills.

Oman has launched a programme to develop the skills of its frontline staff engaged in combating illegal trades in wild flora and fauna. The fight against wildlife smugglers is being spearheaded by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs which in September 2011 hosted a training course for officials from a number of enforcement agencies. The training programme was organised in collaboration with the World Wildlife Fund. Poachers supported by cross-border smuggling networks continue to prey on elements of Oman's diverse wildlife, notably its endangered Arabian Oryx *Oryx*

leucoryx, as well as Arabian Gazelles *Gazella arabica*, Green Turtles *Chelonia mydas*, and other species. The mammals are targeted either for their meat or end up in the private zoos of wealthy farm-owners around the Arabian peninsula. Around 60 wildlife rangers and other personnel attended the training course which was aimed at building the capacities of national enforcement staff in meeting Oman's obligations under CITES which the Sultanate signed in November 2007. (Source: *Gulf News*)

UAE

Abu Dhabi environmental atlas released

An environmental atlas of the Abu Dhabi emirate was launched at the 'Eye on Earth Abu Dhabi 2011 Summit' recently. The 200-page colour book was released by the Environment Agency, Abu Dhabi and highlights the unique natural heritage of the emirate. It presents information in an engaging narrative and is interwoven with stories, case studies, facts and statistics, illustrative figures, anecdotes, photographs and thematic maps. Through the atlas, it is hoped to promote a better understanding and greater appreciation for the unique natural heritage of the emirate of Abu Dhabi and the Arabian gulf region. Developed by a team of experts, the atlas is the result of thousands of hours of research over a period of two years. It includes the most up-to-date information along with rich visuals ranging from oil paintings to futuristic digital renderings. The first half is filled with graphical and artistic depictions of geological and cultural history, status and the future of Abu Dhabi.

The second half of the atlas is dedicated to cartography. These maps feature the results of studies carried out by the Abu Dhabi Global Environmental Data Initiative, its partners and other organisations. Published in English and Arabic, the *Environmental Atlas of Abu Dhabi Emirate* is priced at Dh270 and is available in all Gulf and international leading outlets and online at www.booksarabia.com and www.ead.ae. (Source: *Gulf News*)

Collared Kingfisher threatened by demise of mangroves

The *kalbaensis* subspecies of Collared Kingfisher *Todirhamphus chloris* is only found on the UAE's east coast, and at two sites in Oman. They inhabit the coastal mangrove forests of Kalba, an enclave of Sharjah. A new study of the population has shown that the birds are still present but their numbers have fallen since 1995, the first time the population was studied. The first survey was carried out by the late Simon Aspinall, who estimated between 44 and 55 breeding pairs lived in the Kalba mangroves. In spring 2011, a survey of the area was carried out by Oscar Campbell, Ahmed Al Ali and Neil Tovey and they estimated the number of pairs was between 26 and 35. The research was supported by a grant from the Emirates Natural History Group. The reason the numbers of Collared Kingfishers are declining is that the condition of the mangrove trees supporting it is also declining. Development and the construction of the corniche have been harming the forest. Oscar Campbell commented "Some mangroves were destroyed to make room for villas and a new road and the development of the corniche limits the amount of seawater reaching the trees. Mangroves need to be submerged twice a day". The birds nest between February and June, using holes and cracks in aged mangroves to build their nests and it is possible the lack of suitable nest sites is restricting the population. (Source: *The National* www.thenational.ae)

OTHER NEWS & INFORMATION

Experts reach agreements on mainstreaming migratory soaring birds' conservation into the hunting sector in the Rift Valley/Red sea region

BirdLife International and its Partners concluded a productive three day regional workshop which brought together representatives from governments and NGOs on mainstreaming the conservation of migratory soaring birds (MSBs) into the hunting sector along the Rift Valley/Red sea flyway. Major achievements accomplished

include a regional declaration on hunting, guidelines for mainstreaming MSBs considerations into the hunting sector and a five year regional action plan. The guidelines as well as the regional action plan agreed upon by the participants will show the way forward to achieve mainstreaming of MSBs considerations into the hunting sector along the flyway. This regional workshop, held in cooperation with SPNL (BirdLife in Lebanon) is part of the BirdLife International/UNDP-GEF Migratory Soaring Birds project.

The Rift Valley/Red sea flyway is the second most important flyway for migratory soaring birds (raptors, storks, pelicans and some ibis) in the world, with 37 different soaring bird species, including five globally-threatened species. The Migratory Soaring Birds project aims to mainstream migratory soaring bird considerations into the productive sectors along the flyway that pose the greatest risk to the safe migration of these birds—principally hunting, energy, agriculture and waste management—while promoting activities in sectors which could benefit from these birds, such as ecotourism. (Source: BirdLife International, Migratory Soaring Birds Project)

Hima Fund now available for Middle East IBAs

The launch of the Hima Fund, which enables BirdLife Partners and allied organisations to apply online for funding to manage Important Bird Areas (IBAs) as himas, took place in Doha, Qatar, on 6 October 2011, in the presence of Her Highness Sheikha Jawaher Bint Hamad Bin Sahim Al-Thani. The Hima Fund was established with a \$1 million donation from Her Highness Sheikha Jawaher, with the aim of re-establishing hima, a traditional approach to conserving biodiversity and managing natural resources, throughout the Middle East and beyond. Her Highness Sheikha Jawaher announced the donation at BirdLife's 31st Global Council Meeting at the Virginia Commonwealth University, Qatar. During the meeting, Qatar's Friends of Environment Centre joined the BirdLife Partnership as the BirdLife Affiliate in Qatar.

The hima was established within the Arabian peninsula and adjacent areas before Islam. The Prophet Mohammed laid down

general guidelines that transformed hima to become one of the essential instruments of conservation in Islamic Law. He abolished the pre-Islamic practice of making private reserves for the exclusive use of powerful individuals, and ruled instead that they should be used for public welfare. He further ordered that in hima, plants and grass should be allowed to grow, flourish and regenerate abundantly 'for the benefit of all animals', wild as well as domestic.

The hima system promotes responsibility and equity. It is community-based, recognises the role, rights and values of local communities, and offers opportunities to link conservation and livelihoods development. It is culturally appropriate, values traditional practices and local knowledge, and is socially and economically adaptable. It is complementary to nationally designated protected areas.

Details of the Hima Fund and how to apply can be found on the new website www.himafund.org. The fund is managed by the regional members of the Hima Fund board, who will consider applications based on advice from the Fund's technical committee. Sites eligible for funding must be IBAs. At this stage, the Hima Fund is available for IBAs in the following countries: Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait and Palestine.

Proposals must recognise the interests of the local communities who depend on natural resources within or around the sites. There is a need to demonstrate that protected areas are for the public good, and to ensure their benefits remain greater than their costs. This can only be done through close collaboration with local people.

Since 2004, BirdLife Partner the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) has taken the lead in the revival of the hima concept for the conservation of IBAs, in collaboration with locally elected authorities. So far, six IBAs have been declared as himas in Lebanon. Traditional himas already exist in Saudi Arabia and Oman, and more himas have been proposed recently in Syria and Yemen. Dr Assad Serhal, director general of SPNL and chair of the regional committee, added: "The Hima Fund is a window of opportunity for saving the Middle East's

Globally Threatened Species, and to conserve our top priority IBAs by reviving Himas, a way of life for local communities, fishermen, Bedouins, farmers and others who depend on the sustainability of the natural resources for their survival, together with Birdlife Partners and Local Conservation Groups.” (Source: BirdLife International)

New bird conservation fund welcomes applications

A new conservation funding initiative, the Sound Approach Bird Fund, offers grants of up to £10 000 sterling (cUS\$15 800) to bird conservation projects around the world. They are looking for projects that will have a significant conservation benefit, making a real impact on the survival of globally or nationally threatened species or globally important sites. They are particularly looking for small, grassroots groups, rather than large national or international organisations, and projects

which are difficult to raise funds for. There are no deadlines; applications are reviewed on a rolling basis. For further details, guidelines for applicants including eligibility criteria, and a downloadable application form, please visit www.soundapproach.co.uk/funding.php or email birdfund@soundapproach.co.uk. (Contributed by James Lowen on behalf of the Sound Approach Bird Fund)

Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia

The OSME Library has received two reports from Mike Jennings, ABBA co-ordinator, on recent ABBA surveys conducted in southwest Saudi Arabia (ABBA 42) and northwest Saudi Arabia (ABBA 45). Subscribers to *Phoenix* can obtain an electronic copy from Mike Jennings (arabianbirds@dsl.pipex.com). Hard copies cost £10.00 including postage.

Dawn Balmer, 7 Fisher Way, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2LD, UK. dawn.balmer@bto.org