

NEWS & INFORMATION

Dawn Balmer (compiler)

ARMENIA

Lesser Kestrel project update

Since 2006, the Armenian Society for the Protection of Birds (BirdLife in Armenia) has been running a project to save the only breeding colony of Lesser Kestrels *Falco naumanni* in Armenia. In the 2010 breeding season a total of 33 juveniles and 10 adults were ringed with colour rings with alphanumeric and numeric codes. Rings with alphanumeric codes have been placed on the birds' right tarsi and those with numeric codes have been placed on their left tarsi. Any reports should be emailed to armbirds@yahoo.com.

CYPRUS

E-newsletter launched

The first issue of the BirdLife Cyprus e-newsletter, called *In-Flight e-news*, was released in June 2010. This is an important milestone in the new membership and people engagement work programme that BirdLife Cyprus is now implementing. See <http://birdlife.bpweb.net> for more information.

Illegal bird trapping

The latest report from BirdLife International details their continued monitoring of illegal bird-trapping in Cyprus. The team monitored bird-trapping activities for the ninth year, September to November 2010. Autumn 2010 saw illegal bird-trapping on a scale unseen since BirdLife's monitoring work began nine years ago. Trapping levels may still be lower than in the 1990s, but the situation is extremely serious. The team found a 75% increase in mist-net use and an 89% increase in limestick setting compared to autumn 2009; autumn trapping levels have been on the increase over the last four years. The estimated death toll within the Famagusta and Larnaca districts was around 1.4 million birds. Non-selective trapping means that a broad range of species are caught.

The report reveals mist-netting levels were five times higher in the Dhekelia sovereign base area, in the southeast of the island, than in areas of the republic. As EU member states, both nations have obligations under the EU Birds Directive to protect birds, and migrant birds in particular. BirdLife Cyprus's Martin Hellicar says the island has now lost significant ground in the battle against bird trapping. He added: "The picture emerging from this autumn is one of a bird-trapping disaster unseen since we began monitoring almost 10 years ago. Bird trapping is an illegal indiscriminate practice that threatens many birds of conservation concern, especially migratory ones."

Tim Stowe is the RSPB's International Director. Commenting on the rapidly worsening situation, he said: "The fact that more than five times the level of netting activity was recorded on the UK's Sovereign Base Area compared with the Cypriot Republic is a major embarrassment for the Ministry of Defence and the UK Government. We know that some efforts have been made to clear trapping equipment from the Base Area, but this serious organised criminal activity and annual carnage will only be ended by increasing the level of arrests and convictions."

The report says a priority area for action remains the restaurants that provide the economic impetus for trapping by buying and serving *ambelopoulia*. Priority must also be given to increasing enforcement resources on the ground and changing public attitudes to trapping and eating *ambelopoulia*. The report calls for clear condemnation of trapping from ministers and other key decision-makers and opinion-formers to attempt to shift public attitudes. For more information see <http://migration.files.wordpress.com/2010/12/final-trapping-report-autumn-2010.pdf>. (Source: BirdLife Cyprus www.birdlifecyprus.org)

IRAQ

Conference participation

On 15 July 2010, Korsh Ararat from Nature Iraq gave a short lecture at the Sixth International hole-nesting birds conference at Oxford University, entitled *Bird surveys in Kurdistan, northern Iraq and some notes on hole-nesting species*. Korsh has been the lead person for the Nature Iraq KBA surveys in Kurdistan that have been carried out over the last three years. They are building up a picture of the most important sites for conservation in northern Iraq. (Contributed by Richard Porter)

Sociable Lapwing team

The Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* field team completed field surveys at potential sites during the autumn in the centre and west of Iraq. Unfortunately there were no sightings of any Sociable Lapwings. The survey team, however, carried out various other activities including distribution of Sociable Plover Awareness leaflets in Salah Ad Din and Anbar provinces (Plates 1 & 2), which have most previous reports of this species. (Contributed by Omar Fadhil)



Plates 1 & 2. Distribution of Sociable Lapwing Awareness leaflets in Iraq. © Nature Iraq

SOCOTRA (YEMEN)

SGBP supports environmental activities

The Socotra Governance & Biodiversity Project has supported environmental activities on Socotra to celebrate 2010 Year of Biodiversity and the Arabic Environment Day. Activities included a drawing competition for schools, cleaning of Hadibo and Qalansiya, public events and planting fruit trees. (Contributed by Richard Porter)

SYRIA

Bald Ibis donation to Syria

Formerly thought to be extinct in the wild in the Middle East, in 2002 researchers were delighted when they discovered a tiny population of Northern Bald Ibises *Geronticus eremita* near the ancient city of Palmyra in Syria, their last known refuge in the region. In 2010 there were just three wild individuals in Syria left plus a newly reared juvenile.

The Turkish Government (Nature Protection and National Parks) has donated six semi-captive birds from Turkey which have been taken to Syria in the hope they can prevent the disappearance of the wild Middle Eastern population. Two of these, juveniles, have been fitted with satellite transmitters and with expert help have been carefully introduced to the wild birds in the hope they will follow them and ultimately bolster the precariously-small population. Meanwhile, the Syrian General Commission for Al Badia Management has built aviaries where the remaining birds will be kept for breeding and future releases of juveniles.

Two of the wild adult birds have been fitted with satellite tracking devices, allowing researchers to monitor their movements. A team of biologists will also be attempting to locate the birds on the ground, and to record habitat details and ensure that no illegal hunting takes place. This operation is the result of a major international collaboration of efforts between conservation NGOs, governments, researchers, funders and individuals. (Source: BirdLife International)



Plate 3. Children at the Northern Bald Ibis day, Palmyra, Syria, April 2010. © Roula Raya/SSCW

Family fun to help Northern Bald Ibis in Syria

On 3 and 4 April 2010, staff from the Syrian Society for the Conservation of Wildlife (SSCW, the BirdLife affiliate), in partnership with the General Commission of Al Badia Management, organised a series of events and activities centred around the critically endangered Northern Bald Ibis and the other wildlife of the protected area at Palmyra, the last breeding colony of wild Northern Bald Ibis in the Middle East. Over the two days, two hundred children and parents learned more about the unique wildlife of the area through a combination of games, competitions and cartoon characters. For almost everyone attending, this was the first time that they had experienced an event of this kind. Gaining the support of local communities is essential for the long term conservation of the ibis and its habitats and it is planned that 'ibis days' will become a regular event. This year's event was supported by the Hans-Seidel Foundation. (Contributed by Roula Raya, SSCW)

TURKEY

Bosporus count

For the first time birdwatchers in Istanbul have organised themselves to do a complete count of all migrating raptors passing through the Bosporus. Between 15 March and 31 May at least two birdwatchers were positioned on the most relevant spot all day long counting the raptors crossing the Bosporus on their migration to Europe. A total of 188 000 raptors

were counted. See *Der Falke* 57 (2010) for more information.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Saker Falcon project supported

The Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi (EAD) is working on an innovative project with the Ministry of Nature, Environment and Tourism (MNET) in Mongolia on an artificial nesting programme aimed at increasing the wild Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* population. The process of placing 5000 artificial nests in 20 different areas throughout the country has begun. It is hoped they will provide nesting sites for up to 500 pairs of Saker Falcons by the year 2015. The boxes will be placed within a 25 000 km² area, with each nest lying 1.5 km apart. This project is being funded by EAD and resourced by International Wildlife Consultants (IWC) and their Mongolian partner, the Wildlife Science and Conservation Center (WSCC). Several of the artificial nests placed have been fitted with a nest camera which records continuously with the aim of establishing how many Brandt's Voles and Mongolian Gerbils are eaten by Saker Falcons and their young. This information could be given to herdsmen so they can see for themselves how the increased numbers of birds of prey can improve the degraded Mongolian Steppe.

YEMEN

Trip report online

A comprehensive 57 page report covering a trip to mainland Yemen and Socotra in 2009 that includes species lists, birding sites, day-by-day diary and many photos is available online at <http://socotra2009.blogspot.com>. (Contributed by Niklas Holmstrom)

REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

Request for Francolin feathers

The request is for feathers (collected on the ground or taken from captive birds) of both Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus* and Grey Francolin *F. pondicerianus*. Feathers should be air dried and stored in a plastic bag without any chemicals. Keep feathers cool

before shipping in a standard envelope—it is important to provide precise details of the location where the feathers were found. Other samples may also be used (eg dry faecal samples). If possible long feathers are better than short ones; young feathers are better than old ones. The priority countries are Palestine (no samples), Lebanon (no samples), Syria (two samples only) and Israel (a few samples only). Samples collected in other countries are also very welcome. The samples are required for a PhD study on the molecular evolution of the five Asian francolin species using also DNA from museum specimens. Please send samples to Filippo Barbanera, Department of Biology, Protistology-Zoology Unit, Via A. Volta, 6, I - 56126 Pisa (PI), Italy.

Lesser Spotted Eagle migration

A Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina* that had been fitted with a satellite tag in July 2009 was recorded crossing Bab-el-Mandeb at the southeastern end of the Red sea on 8 October 2010. It wintered in Tanzania and migrated to Ukraine in spring via the Caucasus mountains east of the Black sea. It migrated south again in autumn 2010 on almost the same route and passed through eastern Syria into Saudi Arabia. Following the well-known route of Steppe Eagles *Aquila nipalensis* along the eastern coast of the Red sea it arrived at the

bottleneck of Bab-el-Mandeb in Yemen. It had waited two days for a tail wind before crossing Bab-el-Mandeb.

Any records of Lesser Spotted Eagles crossing Bab-el-Mandeb in spring or autumn are sought. In spring 2010 a young bird was tracked on the African side but did not cross. Details should be sent to Bernd & Chris Meyburg (BUMeyburg@aol.com). Further information about the project can be found online at www.raptor-research.de/pdfs/a_sp100p/a_sp147_poster_Steppe_Eagle.pdf.

OTHER NEWS

Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia

The Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia was published mid 2010. Many OSME members have contributed to this impressive book. With 772 pages, 106 colour plates and many maps and figures it is packed with information on Arabia's birds. The book was produced as volume 25 in the *Fauna of Arabia* series. For details on obtaining this book please contact: Andrea Murdoch, Karger Libri, International Subscription Agency Ltd, Journals Administration & Book Series. Phone: +41 61 306 15 23; fax: +41 61 306 15 67. The general Karger Libri Website is www.libri.ch/Default.aspx.