

# NEWS & INFORMATION

*Dawn Balmer (compiler)*

## GEORGIA

### **Batumi Bird Festival**

To celebrate the 5th Batumi Raptor Count, a festival will be held on 19–23 September 2012. During the full four-day programme there will be daily guided excursions in small groups; visits to birding hotspots in the region and interesting lectures by leading raptor specialists (Dr Keith Bildstein, Alejandro Onrubia, Erwin van Maanen, Andrea Corso). The festival can be easily reached from Batumi airport. For further information visit [www.batumiraptorcount.org](http://www.batumiraptorcount.org)

## IRAQ

### **Joint UK and Iraq team set to work on major new conservation initiative in Iraq**

Thanks to a £300 000 grant from Defra's Darwin Initiative, a major new three year conservation programme is starting in Iraq. Focusing on the mountainous region of Kurdistan the project will involve experts from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) and BirdLife International, in partnership with Iraqi NGO Nature Iraq. The project will generate new data for conservation and resources for protected area management and environmental education. The team's aim is to make progress in addressing the challenges of conservation resulting from nearly 30 years of scientific isolation.

At present the only internal organisation engaged in conservation work is Nature Iraq. Supported by BirdLife International, since 2005, it has adopted a Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) approach to identifying biodiversity-rich regions. This is not the UK teams' first involvement in Iraq. Both BirdLife and RBGE have been working with Nature Iraq for several years, delivering training to Iraqi scientists. These activities have involved staff, students and personnel

from all major Iraqi organisations with an interest in the environment, including the major universities and ministries in Iraq and the Kurdish autonomous region. This project brings together the foremost British expertise in both Middle Eastern plants and birds to work in partnership with Nature Iraq. It will involve extensive fieldwork in the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq. One legacy will be interactive identification guides to the biological diversity of Piramagroon (a KBA), including photographic guides which can be downloaded to mobile phones. This technology has been recognised as a particularly appropriate, accessible and user friendly way to disseminate information in the Middle East. (Source: BirdLife International, Migratory Soaring Birds Project)

### **Threat assessment of Lesser Zaab river**

Nabil Musa started a threat assessment of the Lesser Zaab, a tributary of the Tigris, in February 2012. A project partly funded by the Rufford small grant foundation, the aim is to develop action plans for addressing the important problems on the river including fuel spills, municipal sewage works, dams and water extraction.

### **Nature Iraq uses art to raise environmental awareness**

Julius Richard, Zoilo Lobera and Nabil Musa are working to create, produce and deliver a community arts education programme campaigning for the health of the upper Tigris river basin and all Iraq's rivers.

### **Iraq ministry publishes book on threatened birds**

The Iraq ministry of environment has published the first book about the threatened birds of Iraq (in Arabic) as a preliminary step towards a conservation programme for these species.

## **New management team leads Nature Iraq**

Azzam Alwash, Nature Iraq's founder and CEO, and OSME vice-president has resigned from his position. He will serve as president of the organization's board. From January 2012, Jassim Muhammad Al-Assadi, Araz Mustafa Hamarash and Nadheer Abud Fazaa will form the Nature Iraq management team as managing directors. Nadheer Abood Fazaa was appointed as Nature Iraq's CEO.

## **KAZAKHSTAN**

### **New website for Kazakhstan**

Arend Wassink, author of *The Birds of Kazakhstan* (2007) has developed a new website ([www.birdsofkazakhstan.com](http://www.birdsofkazakhstan.com)) which he hopes will generate more interest in the birds of Kazakhstan and that will contribute to the protection of Kazakhstan's birdlife. The site will be updated continuously with new data from literature, scientific reports, trip reports *etc* and additional photographs and sound recordings will be added. Contributions in the form of good quality sound recordings (in mp3 format) and photographs of birds, landscapes and habitats (preferably unedited and in the best possible resolution) taken in Kazakhstan are welcomed. For further information contact Arend (email: [a.wassink@texel.com](mailto:a.wassink@texel.com)).

## **SYRIA**

### **Death of Syrian ornithologist**

We are sad to report that Yousef Ali Alzaoby was killed in his home town of Dara'a on 10 April. Yousef's intimate knowledge of the Yarmouk valley and Harrah regions of southern Syria was invaluable to ornithological research of the region. He was a life-long birdwatcher and acted as a guide and advisor to numerous researchers and birders visiting Syria. He was a much valued member of the Global Owl Project team and contributed valuable information on distribution and breeding biology of owls.

## **OTHER NEWS & INFORMATION**

### **First international gathering of Middle East NGOs marks a new era for nature conservation in Iraq**

The first ever gathering of international civil society organisations for nature in post-Saddam Iraq has taken place in Sulaimaniya, Iraqi Kurdistan, hosted by BirdLife partner Nature Iraq. The event, the tenth annual meeting of BirdLife's Middle Eastern partnership, drew representatives from the most active nature conservation organisations in the region. BirdLife International is the largest partnership of national civil society organisations in the region with representatives in Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen.

Nature Iraq's CEO, Nadheer Abood commented, "We are at a crucial turning point where we can shape the country's nature conservation agenda and conserve the amazing natural heritage of our country for the benefit of nature and people alike". BirdLife International CEO Dr Marco Lambertini said, "We are very excited to have Nature Iraq as BirdLife Partner and we are deeply impressed by the dedication, professionalism, knowledge base and conservation achievements of this young and extremely dynamic organisation. We are very proud that the tenth BirdLife Middle East partnership meeting was the first ever meeting of an international nature conservation organisation to take place in Iraq. It is a great recognition of Nature Iraq's efforts and dedication and testimony of how civil society is fast developing in Iraq. The development of civil society organisations like Nature Iraq brings real hope to our quest for a future where nature is valued and people live sustainably respecting the environment".

Nature Iraq is the country's most influential conservation organisation. Now with a staff of 37, and conservation projects across the country, it is also slowly developing a membership base. Nature Iraq actively supports the capacity of Iraq's institutions to protect the environment,

encourages environmental awareness and stewardship, and promotes the sustainable use of Iraq's natural resources. Among the young NGO's most spectacular achievements is the restoration of a large area of the Mesopotamian marshes, which were drained under Saddam. With the support of BirdLife partnership staff Nature Iraq is also developing a biodiversity database of sites and species, environmental conditions and trends within Iraq, following 30 years of scientific isolation. The BirdLife Middle East meeting discussed the partnership's work to save the region's biodiversity and improve the livelihoods of local people through programmes and initiatives, such as the innovative Hima fund which aims to revive the traditional and sustainable use of natural areas for the benefit of local communities and wildlife. A Hima Fund to support the development of local projects has been recently launched with the support of Sheikha Jawaher Bint Hamad Bin Sahim Al-Thani and Friends of the Environment, the Qatari BirdLife affiliate organisation. (Source: BirdLife International)

### World Migratory Bird Day

On 12–13 May, the BirdLife International UNDP/GEF Migratory Soaring Birds project celebrated World Migratory Bird Day 2012. The events took place, under the umbrella of the Migratory Soaring Birds project, in Egypt, Ethiopia, Jordan, Palestine, Sudan and Syria and involved hundreds of participants from the hunting, energy, waste management, agriculture and tourism sectors as well as local communities. This year's theme was "Migratory Birds and people together through time" and was intended to raise awareness and emphasise the cultural, economic and environmental connection with migratory birds throughout history.

The economic benefits of supporting the world's migratory bird species was one of the key themes of the celebrations. There is a growing trend among bird tour operators to practice sustainable and socially responsible ecotourism, while relying on local goods and services or supporting local conservation projects. Indeed, the UNEP Green Economy report shows that global spending on all areas

of ecotourism is increasing by about six times the industry-wide rate of growth. A survey by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service puts the annual economic value generated by bird watchers (or 'birders') and other wildlife watchers at around US\$ 32 billion per year in the United States alone. This amount corresponds to the GDP of Costa Rica, which, coincidentally, is a popular destination for US birders. (Source: BirdLife International)

### Phoenix 28

*Phoenix 28* was published in January 2012. The issue contains more photos and is 'full colour' for the first time. The contents include reports on Sooty Gulls *Larus hemprichii* breeding at Sir Bu Nair Island, UAE; the status and range expansion of Purple Swampheens *Porphyrio porphyrio* in eastern Saudi Arabia; studies of the Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola* in the Barr al Hikman region of Oman; news of recent rarities in Kuwait; the ornithological dividends of the study of Leopards in Yemen; a further successful breeding in 2011 of the Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* at Al Wathba wetland, UAE; the decline of the Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* in Saudi Arabia; results of a bird survey in eastern Yemen in January and February 2011; further records in 2011 of Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla flava* breeding in the UAE; breeding seabirds in the northern Red sea, Saudi Arabia; birding at Al Wathba lake, Abu Dhabi; the status of shelducks *Tadorna* spp in the Eastern province, Saudi Arabia; Caspian Terns *Sterna caspia* breeding at Sir Bani Yas and Umm Al Kurkum islands, UAE; a record of a Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* in summer in Saudi Arabia; weavers *Ploceus* spp in the UAE; the wildlife trade in the Taif region of Saudi Arabia; bird observations at three protected areas, northwest Saudi Arabia, May 2011; notes on recent changes in the avifauna of the Liwa oasis, Abu Dhabi, UAE; a Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* survey in western Saudi Arabia in January 2011 and the breeding of Socotra Cormorants *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* at Umm Qasar island, UAE over three breeding cycles, 2009/10 to 2011/12. Copies of this issue can be purchased for £5 (includes postage). For further information

and payment methods please contact Mike Jennings (email: ArabianBirds@yahoo.com). For a single payment of £25 (€35/US\$45) subscribers are sent the next five issues (28–32). Mike welcomes contributions of articles, photos and other material for *Phoenix*.

## REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

### Wintering/migrating Black-tailed Godwits in the OSME region

Information is required for the AEWA single species action plan for the Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*. The objective of the action plan is to improve habitat conditions for this species throughout the flyway. The initial target group are policy makers and other people responsible for bird conservation in each of the countries that are visited by Black-tailed Godwits during their annual cycle. Most policy makers know very little about when godwits are in their country and what areas and sites they use. Furthermore, although we know the phenology of the western flyway population (Netherlands–Guinea-Bissau and vice versa) even ornithologists have poor understanding of the phenology of the eastern flyway population (Russia–sub-Saharan Africa and vice versa). Information from

bird surveys in habitats that seem suitable to the Black-tailed Godwit (zero counts are also important in this respect) is required. Using these data, a number of maps showing when godwits are in which countries and which sites they use will be produced. These will provide a good starting point for taking action on the ground. For further information contact Diedert Spijkerboer (email: diedert.spijkerboer@wur.nl).

### Bibliography of Owls of the World

Prof Richard J Clark and a small team of researchers are currently undertaking the work of updating the Working Bibliography of Owls of the World (Clark *et al* 1978). This is an enormous task, involving collecting and collating thousands of owl related citations from all regions of the world. Also, as the ultimate aim is to produce and publish the completed work both in hard copy and digitally, they are also collecting pdf copies of articles corresponding to the citations. If anybody can supply owl related citations and/or owl related articles concerning any countries in the OSME region, please contact Alan Sieradzki (email: naturalistuk@aol.com).

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