

# NEWS & INFORMATION

*Dawn Balmer (compiler)*

## CYPRUS

### **Call for the adoption of 'zero tolerance' towards illegal bird trapping**

BirdLife Cyprus and Friends of the Earth Cyprus expressed their concern and disappointment regarding the state response to the incidents that took place in the village of Paralimni. On 27 April 2013, residents of Paralimni and the surrounding area sabotaged the elections for vice president of governing DISY, demanding the withdrawal of the anti-poaching unit of the Cyprus police from the Kokkinochoria area and the stopping of coordinated anti-trapping operations with regards to migratory birds, which the unit has been undertaking during the spring in cooperation with environmental organisations. The two organisations were shocked at the subsequent political decision to withdraw the anti-poaching unit from the Kokkinochoria area, caving in to the demands of protestors to stop the anti-trapping police operations, thereby safeguarding the interests of the trappers who can thus continue their illegal activity undisturbed during the festive season.

This political decision is disturbing since it does not give the right message of 'zero tolerance', something that all stakeholders agreed at the Larnaca Declaration (July 2011); instead, it encourages the continuation of this illegal activity and makes enforcement less efficient and effective. Moreover this decision sets a precedent regarding the way that the most relevant competent authority for crime enforcement of the state ensures the implementation of the legislation. BirdLife Cyprus and Friends of the Earth Cyprus are calling for true political will and upholding of the law, without the involvement of party political considerations, to combat illegal bird trapping with the use of limesticks and mist nets, which indiscriminately kills over 150 different bird species due to its non-selective nature, and results in hundreds of thousands of birds being killed each year due to the large scale trapping that takes place. (Source BirdLife Cyprus)

## **Griffon Vulture conference**

BirdLife Cyprus organized an international conference for the protection of the Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* in Cyprus, which was held 6–8 March in Limassol, as part of the project 'GYPAS' ([www.gypas.org](http://www.gypas.org)) for the protection and reinforcement of the threatened population of Griffon Vultures in Cyprus. The conference was attended by scientists from Cyprus and abroad who specialize on vulture conservation, as well as representatives of government agencies and non-governmental organizations concerned about the protection of this species.

## EGYPT

### **New agreements for bird sensitive energy development**

The Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA), the Migratory Soaring Birds Project's (MSBP) national partner in Egypt, and the New and Renewable Energy Authority (NREA) have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) crystallising their collaboration for bird sensitive energy development in Egypt. The purpose of this MoU is to provide a framework of cooperation destined to incorporate and promote the conservation of migratory soaring birds and biodiversity in general within the energy sector in Egypt. Both parties recognise that the switch from fossil fuels to renewable energies is necessary as a mechanism to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, ensure energy sufficiency and promote economic growth. However, the development of renewable energy should be undertaken in an ecologically sustainable manner, and subject to appropriate environmental planning and safeguards. Renewable energy can be bird sensitive through adoption of best practices being applied in the industry by planners, policy makers, donors, governments and renewable energy investors.

EEAA and BirdLife International's coordinated MSBP funded by UNDP/GEF has

embarked on the task of developing tools and guidelines to ensure that the risk assessment and management process for renewable energy and associated infrastructure in Egypt appropriately takes into consideration and effectively addresses key conservation concerns with regards to migratory soaring birds. As part of this partnership, EEAA backed up by BirdLife International will provide NREA with the proper technical tools and materials developed through MSBP along with capacity building activities empowering them to properly address bird conservation and renewable energy development. This agreement will mark the first step of a long-lasting collaboration between EEAA and NREA that will see bird sensitive energy development in Egypt take off. (Source BirdLife International)

## IRAQ

### **Nature Iraq's festival in the marshes**

Nature Iraq (BirdLife's Partner), held a spring festival on the banks of the Euphrates to celebrate the restoration of the famous Mesopotamian marshes. Richard Porter, BirdLife's Middle East adviser, had the privilege of being there and his personal account can be viewed online at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-22706024](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-22706024). Richard commented, "This Festival, on the edge of one of the world's great wetland complexes, was a truly memorable occasion, the result of months of planning and hard work by Nature Iraq. In such a short period NI has achieved so much for conservation, often in very difficult circumstances. I'm now eagerly awaiting the publication of *Key Biodiversity Areas of Iraq* which will cover over 100 sites and catalogue the results of eight years of extensive surveys by Nature Iraq biologists. A first step towards a national network of protected areas". (Source BirdLife International)

### **Iraqi conservationist wins the Goldman Environmental Prize**

The Goldman Environmental Foundation has awarded one of the six 2013 Goldman Environmental Prizes to Azzam Alwash, CEO of Nature Iraq. "The Goldman Environmental Prize for Asia to Azzam Alwash is a prestigious

tribute to the dedication and determination of individuals who are working in difficult socio-political situations to build a sustainable world where people and nature can live in harmony" said Dr Marco Lambertini, BirdLife's CEO. "It is a major acknowledgment to Azzam personally and indirectly to the organisation he is part of, Nature Iraq which we are proud to have as the BirdLife Partner in Iraq. A source of inspiration, motivation and hope for all of us."

As a young boy in Iraq, Azzam Alwash spent many days out in the marshes with his father, who was head of the irrigation department in the area during the early 1960s. He fondly remembers looking over the side of the boat into very clear water, watching large fish dart away, and spending precious time with his busy father whose work often required his presence in the field. When Saddam Hussein rose to power, Alwash moved to the United States. When the Hussein regime fell, Alwash knew the time had come for him to go back to restore the beloved marshes of his childhood. In 2003, he made the difficult choice of giving up a comfortable life in California and moved back to war-torn Iraq, with the hopes that one day his own daughters might be able to see the place he had loved as a child.

In 2004, Alwash founded Nature Iraq and put his experience in hydraulic engineering to use, surveying the region and developing a master plan to restore the marshes. He reached out to the environment and water resource ministries to educate government officials about the environmental, social and economic benefits of restoring the marshes.

His work was not only politically challenging; it was dangerous as well. Despite these hurdles, the Mesopotamian marshes are starting to flourish again as a result of Alwash's advocacy; the restored marshes are slated to be established as the country's first national park in the spring of 2013. While continuing the restoration work, Alwash is now fighting a new threat to Iraq's environment: an extensive chain of 23 dams upstream along the Turkey/Syria border, which if completed, would reduce the flow of water into Iraq to a mere trickle. He is organizing a flotilla tour to call global

attention to the threat of water-based conflicts and turning the dams into an opportunity to revive conversations about the need to protect water resources in the broader region.

The Goldman Environmental Prize, now in its 24th year, is awarded annually to environmental heroes from each of the world's six inhabited continental regions. With an individual cash prize of \$150 000, it is the largest award for grassroots environmental activism. (Source BirdLife International)

### Children make bird boxes

Iraqi children from five schools around the mountain of Peremagroon in Kurdistan made and erected over 40 nest boxes as part of a conservation education programme funded by the UK Government's Darwin Initiative (Plate 1). A year ago Nature Iraq, in partnership with BirdLife International and the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, embarked upon a multi-faceted, three-year conservation programme—the first of its kind in the Middle East. An online course in conservation has started at Sulaimani University and over 40 students and others have enrolled. Plans are also taking shape for developing an app to help identify birds, together with other animals and plants that children, students and Iraqi visitors to the region might expect to see around Peremagroon—one of the most important areas for biodiversity in Kurdistan.

The most exciting venture has been the nest box project. Holes for hole-nesting birds seem to be at a premium in Kurdistan, possibly because of the destruction of woodland in the past, and the fact that many trees have not been allowed to mature. Hopefully this Nature Iraq project will provide nesting sites for birds such as the Great Tit *Parus major* and Sombre Tit *Poecile lugubris*. A future step will be for NI to put video cameras in some of the boxes. (Source BirdLife International)

## KUWAIT

### Sociable Lapwings shot

In March three Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius*, 120 Caspian Plovers *Charadrius asiaticus* and hundreds of larks were shot in Kuwait. This is the first confirmed killing of Sociable Lapwings in Kuwait. These birds were returning to Kazakhstan where they

would have started to breed. From extensive research between 2004 and 2012, it is known that the Sociable Lapwing is declining due to low adult survival, which is almost certainly caused by being shot during migration. There is evidence from known stopover sites in northeastern Syria and some areas in Iraq from 2008 and 2009 that these birds are widely hunted by both locals and visiting falconers from the Gulf states.

The RSPB acts as co-ordinator for the implementation of the International Single Species Action Plan for the species under a memorandum of cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme secretariat of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA).

In May 2012, the revision of the 2002 action plan was adopted by the 5th meeting of the parties to AEWA (MOP5) in La Rochelle, France. This identified the urgent need for action across Sociable Lapwing range states to implement and enforce effective hunting legislation. Sergey Dereliev, AEWA technical officer, commented, "Although Kuwait is not yet a Contracting Party to AEWA, the Government has expressed its interest in the objectives of the Agreement through attendance at MOP5, and it could play a significant role in the Gulf region in helping to halt the decline of this Critically Endangered species by implementing and enforcing hunting legislation. By improving adult survival by 30% we could see a stabilization of the current population size on the way to a future increasing population trend". (Source RSPB)

## KAZAKHSTAN

### Lesser White-fronted Goose is 'Bird of the Year'

Kazakhstan has awarded the Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* 'Bird of the Year 2013'. This goose is included in the Red Data Book of Kazakhstan, where up to a 95% of their world population passes through on its way from breeding to wintering areas, forming large flocks in the north of the country. This bird is also part of a conservation action plan approved by the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Kazakhstan in 2012.





**Plate 1.** Iraqi children from five schools around the mountain of Peremagroon in Kurdistan made and erected over 40 nest boxes. © Nature Iraq

Groups of ornithologists from Kazakhstan, Norway, Finland, Russia and Bulgaria carry out every year the monitoring of migrating geese, which is a key activity in the project “Reducing the threat from (illegal) hunting on threatened waterbirds in Kostanay, Kazakhstan”, supported by UNEP-AEWA and coordinated by BirdLife Partner ACBK (Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan). In autumn 2012, the counting, which also includes all rare and game species of waterbirds, produced not only a result of 35 000 Lesser White-fronted geese at 89 lakes of two areas, but also 150 000 Red-breasted Geese *Branta ruficollis*, which became a sensation since this number is twice higher than the previous estimates of the species’ world population.

In addition to the field studies, meetings are conducted with management of game farms and game wardens, together with hunters and governmental officers, where questions on hunting management and conservation of wild animals are discussed. Booklets, posters, questionnaires for hunters with information on the Lesser White-fronted Goose and other globally threatened bird species are published annually.

This work is already giving significant results, such as the setting of quiet zones in several hunting areas and specific days for hunting. As a result of these measures, almost all the migratory flocks of geese were focused in autumn 2012 in the western side of northern Kazakhstan, just before they fly to wintering areas in the south.

### **Black Lark research**

Black Lark *Melanocorypha yeltoniensis* is the subject of a research project, part funded by the OSME Conservation and Research Fund, looking at the species’ breeding behaviour. The project team has set up a blogspot—[www.blacklarks.blogspot.de](http://www.blacklarks.blogspot.de). It is both informative and a good read! (Source Geoff Welch)

## **LEBANON**

### **Hikers walk through Lebanon for the conservation of birds**

The Lebanon Mountain Trail Association (LMTA) launched on 30 March 2013 its fifth annual ‘thru-walk’ from Andaket in north

Lebanon. This year, 150 hikers from nine countries spent up to 28 days on the trail, walking for birds and promoting new hunting regulations. The importance of birds and bird populations and the critical need to end hunting malpractices, including the massacre of migratory soaring birds was relayed to trailside communities (about 70 villages and towns). Armed with Lebanon’s new hunting regulations, the group of hikers presented and discussed a string of new procedures during evening seminars organized in collaboration with the UNDP/GEF-funded Migratory Soaring Birds Project which is implemented by the Ministry of Environment and BirdLife’s national partner, the Society for the Protection of Nature. To learn more about the trail and their activities, please visit [www.lebanontrail.org](http://www.lebanontrail.org). (Source BirdLife International)

### **SPNL receives ‘Best Practice’ award from the United Nations**

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL—BirdLife in Lebanon) recently received an international ‘best practice’ award for their work at the Qolieleh hima site, southern Lebanon, where they are preserving the coast and improving living conditions for local people. Dubai Municipality presented the Dubai International Award for Best Practices to SPNL for community-based conservation at the coastal hima site. This award focuses on projects that sustainably improve the living environment, under the United Nations Human Settlements Programme. This year, the ninth session of the award, they recognised SPNL’s work in reviving a traditional land-use practice, hima, as a model for improving the quality of people’s lives in an environmentally-sustainable and culturally-sensitive way.

Carried out in collaboration with the municipality of Qolieleh, the Site Support Group, Swiss Agency for Development & Cooperation, the German non-governmental organization EURONATUR, ATW-WWF, Care International and Jensen/BirdLife International, the project preserves the southern Lebanese coast and its resources whilst empowering local people. As well as attracting different species of marine bird, the project aimed to benefit local fishermen



by creating job opportunities, such as marine guides, and training them on sustainable fishing methods—and promoted eco-tourism in the area. The project also involved the neighbouring village communities (in the area stretching from the south of Tyre Coast nature reserve to Naqoura) in protecting the coast, birds and marine life. By raising awareness and support for nature conservation amongst local people, this will also promote sustainable living, improve daily income and enhance the respect they have for their local biodiversity. (Source BirdLife International)

## SYRIA

### Northern Bald Ibis update

Despite the current crisis in Syria, the field team have continued to monitor the ibises, and have reported the sad news that only one of the Northern Bald Ibises *Geronticus eremita* has returned to the breeding site at Palmyra this spring. Unfortunately, there are no signs of any more birds so far returning from their migration to Ethiopia. The returning female 'Zenobia' was last year paired to 'Odeinat', the last male, which was fitted with a small satellite tag that stopped transmitting in southern Saudi Arabia in July 2012 ([www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/tracking/northernbaldibis/](http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/tracking/northernbaldibis/)). It has not been possible to search for Odeinat, as the last signals did not give an accurate location. Subsequently, a total of four birds was seen briefly in January this year by Yilma Abebe and Tariku Dagne (a visit supported by the Ethiopian Natural History Society and the Culture and Tourism Office of Ethiopia, with funds from RSPB) at the usual Ethiopian highland wintering site, but it now seems clear that only one of these birds has returned to the breeding area.

This looks ominously like it may be the end for the relict eastern population of the species, having been rediscovered in 2002 when there were three breeding pairs. Despite huge efforts the colony dwindled to just one pair in the past two years and now it seems to just the one bird. This comes at a time when coordinated efforts are strengthening and indeed after the establishment of the new International Working Group in Jazan, Saudi Arabia in November 2012.

Among the hopes for maintaining the eastern population are further releases from the former colony site at Birecik in southeast Turkey where a semi-wild population persists. Meanwhile the only other wild population, which receives dedicated conservation efforts by Souss-Massa national park and the Spanish BirdLife International Partner SEO/BirdLife, has remained relatively stable (some recent increases) over the past 20 years despite growing development pressures, but comprises just over 100 breeding pairs at only two colonies in Morocco (<http://northernbaldibis.blogspot.com.es/p/about-nbi-projet.html>). (Source Chris Bowden)

## UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

### 420 bird species found in Abu Dhabi in 2012

About 420 bird species were found in Abu Dhabi emirate last year, according to the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi's (EAD) annual report for the year 2012. EAD monitored wild birds throughout the emirate at nearly 60 sites including various habitats in different terrains; an average 42 000 birds were recorded every month. Highlights included nearly 12 000 breeding pairs of Socotra Cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* and Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus roseus* breeding at Al Wathba wetland reserve with 17 chicks fledging successfully. The report released by Razan Khalifa Al Mubarak, EAD's Secretary General, documents its efforts in protecting the environment of the emirate. It highlights the measures taken in environmental regulatory and policy framework, conservation of ground water and biodiversity, ensuring clean air and minimising climate change and its impacts, and promoting sustainable communities. The agency succeeded in protecting approximately 60 000 square metres of mangroves on Al Reem island after learning of a developer's illegal attempt to clear the area. An environmental protection and awareness plan at the Eastern Mangroves in Abu Dhabi was also implemented last year. Two patrols are operated in the area daily to monitor ecological conditions. (Source Gulf News)

## REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

### Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia: 2013 records

Observers in the Arabian peninsula are asked to send in their personal observations of breeding species for 2013 at the end of the season. ABBA works closely with natural history groups active in Arabia and with their ornithological recorders, so that benefits may accrue to all parties. Information is regularly passed between ABBA and such groups and recorders but individual contributors are strongly encouraged to copy their ABBA reports to their local group or bird recorder. Records of observations prior to 2013 are also welcome. Please send records to Mike Jennings (ArabianBirds@dsl.pipex.com), Warners Farm House, Warners Drove, Somersham, Cambridgeshire PE28 3WD, UK.

### Crowd-sourcing an atlas of migratory bird hunting

OSME has received a request from Paul Jepson of the School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford, asking us to help with a project to create an atlas of migratory bird hunting. As he states, this practice is still widespread yet we lack an easily accessible overview of where hunting happens and what the trends are. A short questionnaire can be found at <http://research.ouce.ox.ac.uk/limesurvey/index.php?sid=47842&lang=en>.

Paul would be extremely grateful if you could first complete the questionnaire if you have knowledge of migratory hunting and secondly circulate news of this project via your networks and the birding and conservation social media with a request for community members to map and contribute their knowledge. This can be first-hand knowledge, from reports or books, or from friends and acquaintances.

The intention is to focus on the Mediterranean basin first. If successful this approach could generate a global map to bring wider attention to the issue and as a resource for policy and research. It may also inspire other projects to map the interactions of people and birds. The idea for this project

arises from collaboration with Cery Levy and the Bird Effect. (Source Paul Jepson)

## GENERAL

### Wildlife Middle East News

The latest issue (vol 6, issue 4) was published in March and includes an article on the breeding biology, threats and conservation of the Socotra Cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* at Siniya island, United Arab Emirates. A PDF can be downloaded from [www.wmenews.com](http://www.wmenews.com). Submissions for future issues should be sent to the editor at [info@wmenews.com](mailto:info@wmenews.com).

### Birdfair/RSPB Research Fund for Endangered Birds

The 2013 round of the Birdfair/RSPB Research Fund for Endangered Birds is now open. These grants of up to US\$2000 are to support research work on birds listed by BirdLife/IUCN as endangered, critically endangered or data deficient. Further details and an application form can be found at [www.birdgrants.org](http://www.birdgrants.org). The closing date is 31 October 2013.

### Migration blog for Djibouti

A blog about the migration count at Ras Siyyan, Djibouti and the tracking of an Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* via satellite captured in Tadjoura, Djibouti has been set up at <http://egyptianvulturedjibouti.blogspot.co.at/>. (Source Mike McGrady)

### New Yahoo Group for Arabian peninsula conservation

A new group called Biodiversity Conservation Arabian Peninsula has been created on Yahoo Groups. The purpose is to connect people actively involved in researching and managing the region's terrestrial biota. This includes regional and international scientists, people from NGOs, government and educational institutions and environmental authorities. It aims to promote inter and intra-regional and personal collaborations: to share knowledge, ideas, data, publications and biodiversity news. See [http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/Biodiversity\\_Conservation\\_Arabian\\_Peninsula/](http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/Biodiversity_Conservation_Arabian_Peninsula/). (Source Sarah May, Natural History and Science Museum, Qatar)

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