

NEWS & INFORMATION

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CYPRUS

Important Bird Areas of Cyprus

BirdLife Cyprus launched a new publication *Important Bird Areas of Cyprus* in autumn 2014. The book documents the 34 priority sites for bird conservation across the entire island. The main objective of the project is to establish an IBA Caretakers' Network for the 34 IBAs in Cyprus. IBAs are sites recognized by BirdLife International according to internationally agreed scientific criteria for their importance for birds. This network of volunteers will play an active role in the protection of those important sites for biodiversity, through monitoring the threats, the birds that live there and taking action for their protection. By becoming IBA Caretakers, people concerned about nature near where they live will be able to channel their concern in a dynamic, constructive and empowering way. Through this project BirdLife Cyprus will provide the volunteers with the necessary materials, essential information and training in nature conservation issues, bird identification, protected area management issues, as well as public awareness, to become watchdogs of their local IBA. This inventory, which is the result of a rigorous and exhaustive 3-year assessment period (2010–2012) involving extensive field work across Cyprus and analysis of all available data, was compiled following BirdLife International's IBA criteria and represents a key instrument for bird conservation in Cyprus. (Source: BirdLife Cyprus)

Griffon Vultures counted

On 15th December 2014 fifteen volunteers and staff from BirdLife Cyprus and the Game Fund, took part in the annual count in Cyprus of Griffon Vultures *Gyps fulvus*, distributed over seven survey lookout points in the western part of the island. Once common, Griffon Vultures decreased significantly on the eastern Mediterranean island and were on the verge of extinction, victims to poison, direct persecution and

lack of food—in 2010 only 10 birds and two regular breeding pairs remained. In 2010, a project to reinforce the population with birds from Crete was implemented by the Game Fund, with BirdLife Cyprus, the Department of Forestry, the Natural History Museum of Crete and Gortyna Municipality Crete. In total 25 Griffon Vultures from Crete, mostly birds that entered rehabilitation centres because they were found weak, lost or poisoned, arrived in Cyprus and 10 have already been released after time in acclimatization cages. This was complemented by anti-poisoning campaigns and the establishment of two new feeding sites for vultures. A total of 15 birds were counted in the western part of the island; at least 5 of them were birds originally from Crete, as these have wing tags. (Source: Vulture Conservation Foundation)

ISRAEL

Champions of the Flyway 2015

The second Champions of the Flyway 24-hour bird race event will take place in Eilat 15–22 March. The competing teams will attempt to raise money and awareness for the prevention of the widespread illegal killing of migratory birds of prey. The 2014 project was focused on the Batumi bottleneck area in Georgia and the teams involved helped raise close to \$60 000, from hundreds of individual donations and sponsors. Most of the money raised was channeled via BirdLife International to Bird Conservation Georgia and is already helping to address hunting issues there. As financial targets were greatly exceeded, the extra funding raised is now helping BirdLife Malta address illegal hunting issues too. You can read more and sponsor teams online at www.champions-of-the-flyway.com.

LEBANON

Bird Identification Manual

A Bird Identification Manual has been published by the Society for the Protection of Nature in

Lebanon. It is an important tool for training and improving the skills of local birdwatchers. As well as sections on bird identification, there are important chapters on migration, threatened species and conservation. The book can be downloaded for free at www.spnl.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Bird-Identification-Manual-Low.pdf.

Soaring Bird Atlas launched

Migratory Soaring Birds Lebanon and the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon has just launched a major Atlas on the Soaring Birds. The publication, collated & edited by Assad Adel Serhal, Bassima Chafic Khatib, Ghassan Ramadan Jaradi & Zeina Kasem Badran, aims to map through the presence/occurrence and the distribution of a group of species, the Migratory Soaring Birds (MSBs), across Lebanon. The great value of this Atlas is its comprehensive coverage—it covers most parts of the country, all migratory soaring bird species on autumn and spring passage. The Atlas can be downloaded for free at www.spnl.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Soaring-Birds-Atlas.pdf.

Fieldguide to the Soaring Birds in Lebanon

This book is an important resource collating all available scientific data for identifying migratory soaring bird species in Lebanon. Eight chapters cover a range of subjects including identification of migratory soaring birds and conservation status of species. The fieldguide can be downloaded for free at www.spnl.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Field-Guide-to-the-soaring-Birds-in-Lebanon.pdf.

OMAN

Egyptian Vultures

Two Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* were trapped in early January at the main Muscat municipal rubbish dump. The birds were both fitted with 40 g solar powered satellite transmitters; these transmitters operate on a duty schedule uploading GPS locations via satellite and use the Argos satellites system to calculate, with lower accuracy than GPS, bird locations. You can find out more about the project and

follow the birds' movements online at <http://egyptianvultureoman.blogspot.co.at>.

QATAR

Irkaya Farm protected

The Qatar Government's Cabinet of Ministers has formally approved the protection of Irkaya Farm as a site of exceptional biodiversity in Qatar. Once drafted into legislation, this will mean that all forms of hunting will be banned on the site. Moreover an active programme of conservation, habitat development and management, as well as research and education will get underway. A visitor centre and interpretation facilities plus a dedicated education facility on site at the farm for schools and colleges are being planned.

TURKEY

Poisoning of vultures

At least four Eurasian Black Vultures *Aegypius monachus* and two Griffon Vultures *Gyps fulvus* have been found poisoned in eastern Turkey in mid January. The birds were discovered near the rubbish dump at Tuzluca, close to the Armenian border. There has been cooperation between local people, a local NGO (KuzeyDoğa), the Turkish National Parks and Vulture Conservation Foundation and two birds were saved from death. The Vulture Conservation Foundation experts suggest that the birds were poisoned probably with carbamate or an organophosphate.

GENERAL

Review of illegal killing in the Mediterranean

BirdLife International have announced that the preliminary results from the review of illegal killing in the Mediterranean are now available online for public consultation. The document can be viewed online at www.birdlife.org/globally-threatened-bird-forums/2014/10/review-of-illegal-killing-and-taking-of-birds-in-the-mediterranean.

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