

A Bird's Eye View of the Holy Land

Newsletter From Israel | No. 3 | Spring 2004



Israel Ornithological Center



The International Center
for the Study of Bird
Migration, Latrun



Tel Aviv University
Department of Zoology



A migrating flock of Pelicans, which roosted in the Hula Valley last November, was drawn into a hot eastern storm (also known in Arabic as: "Chamseen"). The Chamseen creates a unique atmosphere and color that is inimitable to Israel. (Photo by: Yossi Eshbol)

Dear Friends,

The Passing year has been one of the most challenging years ever in the history of the Israel Ornithological Center (IOC) and the International Center for the Study of Bird Migration at Latrun (ICSBM). Challenges that started from the scope of activities we undertook upon ourselves, but mostly due to the financial difficulties we faced, and still are facing. These difficulties can be attributed to the unstable political situation in the Middle East, a fact that affects our regional cooperation. Sadly, the escalation in the region prevents bird lovers from following the migration in the Holy Land.

Although the past year has given us plenty of rain, literally as well as metaphorically, we believe that "After the rain comes Sun." It is down to us to turn things for the best. We believe that spring will bring along rejuvenation, blossom, freshness and new beginnings. Despite everything, in 2003 we engaged in many activities: Much to our surprise, we had 200,000 visitors to watch the cranes in the Hula Valley - out of them 99% were Israelis; we concluded the planning and resource development for the ICSBM Complex; we had no severe collision to aircrafts from birds in 2003 (a clear advantage to pilots, birds and to the National Budget); and - our website is being translated into the Russian language. Should we have a sufficient budget for 2004 - it will be translated into Amharic as well. But for that - we need you. They say: "A friend in need - is a friend indeed". Well friends - this is our genuine time of need. Our two main pledges from the European Community and from US-AID, MERC, that supported our big projects for the past 6 years - are about to come to an end. Without an alternative, those important projects may come to a halt - something we have to prevent!

We urge you, as our friends, to continue and help us safeguard the birds of Israel and of the region, continue our conservation efforts, help us promote our research educational activities throughout the Middle East.

Warmly,

Dan Alon, Director
The Israel Ornithological Center

Dr. Yossi Leshem, Director
The International Center for the Study of
Bird Migration at Latrun



Visit our website: www.birds.org.il

Cranes continue to enjoy the Hula Valley



Eli Galili, a farmer from Kibbutz Ayelet Ha'Shachar in the North of Israel, who is in charge of feeding the Cranes at the Hula Valley, came up with a novel idea. He attached his feeding tractor to a cart, on which he placed 16 hidden chairs, especially designed for nature lovers. The result is that the Cranes, used to eat out of Eli's tractor, stand calm and peaceful near the tractor, while at the same time, nature lovers can watch the cranes from a very close range, just a few meters, and enjoy the magnificent site. As far as we know, Israel is the only place that this original idea is being performed. (Photo by: Yossi Eshbol)

The Hula Valley Crane Project has been operating for the past four years, a joint effort between the IOC and the valley's farmers. The goal is to reduce damage caused by cranes to agriculture in the area while simultaneously protecting the birds. The project includes feeding the cranes that remain in the area during the winter months with 200 tons of corn and scaring cranes off sensitive crop fields.

Amazingly, since this feeding program began, damage caused by cranes ceased almost completely! Last year, the Jewish National Fund (JNF) joined the project, and from this year they are now responsible for the project's operation. The *Agmon Area* of the Hula Valley, a restored wetland lake, has been designated as the Hula Park, and the Crane Project is an integral part of the Park, a fact that will enable the project's long-term operation.

The JNF has instituted a new policy forbidding private vehicles from entering the park. A large parking lot has already been set up at the Hula Valley's entrance, and visitors can choose between using special shuttles within the Park's grounds, touring the area by foot, free of admission, or renting bicycles. This new policy will hopefully enable the hundreds of thousands of visitors to the Hula Park to enjoy a higher quality of park services, while simultaneously protecting the thousands of birds that winter in or pass through the valley each year. The IOC assists the JNF in all regional bird-related matters, and is a full partner in the development of the Hula Valley.

People and Birds: Up Close and Personal



On Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year) 27-28 September 2003, the IOC, in cooperation with the Southern Sharon Regional Council and Kibbutz Horashim, located north of Tel Aviv, conducted a major birding event during the peak migrating season of the Lesser-Spotted Eagle. The event took place at Kibbutz Horashim and was attended by some 1,200 visitors who witnessed the breathtaking migration of the raptors while enjoying many other birding activities as well. The same event will take place during the 2004 holiday season at the same location, however it will be held during the weeklong Succoth holiday (Feast of Tabernacles).

The Sad Story of One Imperial Eagle

In November of this year, an ICSBM & IOC's Msc student, Ifat Davidson, spotted a young Imperial Eagle lying dead on the ground. The Imperial Eagle is a Globally Threatened species. Our surveys indicate that about 60-70 Imperial Eagles winter in Israel each year to spend the winter seasons in the Hula Valley and the Western Part of the Negev. This specific one, on the first year of its life, had either been poisoned, or electrocuted. Unfortunately, every year tens of raptors die from eating poisoned animals and by electrocution from unprotected high-tension lines. However, these cases are preventable through- promoting, safeguarding and educating government agencies, farmers, the Electric Company and the public as a whole. It is here that we need you and your financial assistance the most - help us to prevent such cases from happening over and over again!



Ifat Davidson with poisoned or electrocuted Imperial Eagle. (Photo by: Yossi Eshbol)

Stop The Slaughter of Birds



For over ten years a brutal and cruel phenomenon has been going on around fish - ponds throughout the country. Each year, literally thousands of birds from a variety of species are caught in nets that cover fishponds as a protective measure against fish-eating birds. The victims, many of which are not causing any damage to the fisheries, get tangled in the nets and die in a slow and cruel manner. The IOC has been fighting this phenomenon since it began. Two years ago the Israel Nature & Parks Authority issued specific guidelines to the fish - farmers aimed at reducing and preventing these tragic events. Unfortunately, the guidelines have not been implemented, and birds continue to die on a regular basis. Among the many birds trapped are rare and endangered species such as White and Black Storks, Little Bittern, Black Kite, and Kentish Plover. At the end of last year we rescued from one of the nets in the Beit She'an Valley a Bonelli's Eagle, a rare raptor close to extinction in Israel. The Bonelli's Eagle was treated and later released with a satellite transmitter. Unfortunately, we cannot say the same for the Osprey that was rescued from one of the nets- it died soon after his rescue.



A White Stork caught in a net over a fishpond. (Photo by: Eyal Bartov)

A Visitor in my Window Sill - the Personal Story of Birds & People in the City

Motti Charter, a new immigrant from the United States of America, is completing his Msc Degree at the Tel Aviv University, Department of Zoology, supervised by Dr. Yossi Leshem and Dr. Amos Bouskila. In the spring of 2003, Motti conducted a survey (using our website) on kestrels nesting in urban areas. As part of the survey, Motti placed an on-line video camera at a very unique location: the windowsill (in a flowerpot!) of an apartment on the 10th floor, located at Ramat Aviv in north Tel Aviv. The Blau family had joined the Internet survey and notified the ICSBM of the nest immediately. Their participation included the installation of a small video camera, daily nest observations, while the video camera sent live footage in real time to the ICSBM and IOC's site: www.birds.org.il. Thirty-three other families participated in the survey. This goes to show the wonderful awareness that the IOC and the ICSBM have managed to raise among many individuals and families throughout the country. In order to proceed with this project in 2004, the ICSBM is in urgent need of \$ 15,000.



Eldad Blau & a friend on his windowsill, Ramat Aviv, Tel Aviv. (Photo by: Ronen Veturi)



Anat & Motti Charter

Inside Information About Motti:

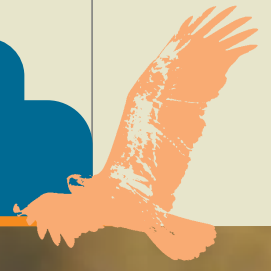
In addition to the Internet survey, Motti is conducting research at Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu using kestrels as biological pest control of rodents. Kestrels are the diurnal partners to the nocturnal Barn Owls (see below). Motti met his wife Anat, who emigrated from Ethiopia at the age of two, in her hometown of Ashkelon only a month after making Aliya. After ten months, they were married on the 28th of June 2001.

A Project in Motion - The Barn Owls as a Biological Pest Control - Project Continues

Following our previous report in last year's Annual Report, where we explained the idea behind the project and the seminar that took place with farmers from Jordan, and in order to further promote the project as well as get the farmers even more involved, the ICSBM issued a comprehensive guiding booklet, that has been given to local farmers, called: "The Barn Owl - A Biological Pest Control of Rodents. The 32-page booklet contains the conclusions of over 20 years of research conducted at Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu. The booklet was written by Shaul Aviel, Yoav Motro, Dr. Gila Kahila and Dr. Yossi Leshem. Yoav Motro, a Ph.D. student of the Hebrew University, is researching aspects of predator-prey interaction of the barn owls and rodents. Most importantly, it also includes specific instructions about build nesting boxes for the barn owls.



Autumn Survey of the Soaring Bird Migration, 2003



Since 1977, the IOC has been conducting a survey each fall to monitor the migration of soaring birds in Israel. Initiated by the Israeli Air Force to help prevent treacherous air-collisions, this survey is one of the most comprehensive surveys in the world. Due to the vast knowledge gathered during these surveys, we have significantly reduced air collisions between birds and aircrafts and developed an innovative model based on the identification of "Bird-Plagued Zones."

of three continents creating one of the most important bottlenecks for migrating birds in the world. Over 500,000 raptors pass through this intersection each autumn, as well as a similar number of storks and pelicans. This last autumn of 2003, IOC's surveyors counted about 310,000 Honey Buzzards, 80,000 Lesser-Spotted Eagles, and 80,000 Levant Sparrow Hawks - a world record (the annual average is 45,000).

We also spotted 450,000 White Storks and about 60,000 of White Pelicans. Last year we counted the largest number ever of Lesser-Spotted Eagles: 140,000 (a third more than average).



Lesser-Spotted Eagle. (Photo by: Hadoram Shirihai)

Join us to a Birdwatching Tour in the Holy Land

For the first time in many years, the IOC and the ICSBM offer their friends an exclusive birdwatching trip to Israel, designed and coordinated especially for bird lovers throughout the world. The trip, planned to be in November 2004, will include various birdwatching activities, such as: bird watching in the hottest spots for birdwatching sites spread across Israel. A special bonus will be added to our guests: professional lectures will be given each day by specialists and leading birders. In addition, a portion of the trip will include some site seeing and touring in the Holy Land's beautiful sites and places whilst putting an emphasis on unique natural resources for nature lovers.

Our package deal includes full board, lodging in 5 - star hotels: The Sheraton Hotel and Mitzpe Ha'Yamim Resort and transportation to and from the different sites - at a cost of \$ 2,500 per person (Airlines are not included). This amount includes a donation designated for the protection and conservation of Israel's birds. For more information and a registration please contact: Labinger@netvision.net.il



Good News for Lesser Kestrel

During March-June 2003, a detailed survey on Lesser Kestrels was conducted in northern Israel, primarily at the Ramot Menasheh region - located on the slopes of Mt. Carmel. The survey was a great success and showed that Lesser Kestrels are much more common in this region than previously known: we located at least 340 pairs!

Until this year, surveys had been conducted solely in the Alona Regional Council, where 100 pairs of Lesser Kestrels nest annually, but this year the survey was expanded to the many communities in the Megiddo Regional Council. The results were especially encouraging, considering the continual decrease in the number of nests in the Jerusalem area (where only 30-40 pairs nested this year). Other areas surveyed produced interesting results, including 17 pairs of Lesser Kestrels in the Gilboa region, and 14 pairs in Safed.



Flyways: Music & Birds Know No Political Boundaries

As part of the efforts to promote the project of the Great Rift Valley (GRV), the ICSBM invited two very dear friends, Mr. Paul Winter and Mrs. Kuki Gallman, to visit last November. The well renowned American composer and jazz player, Mr. Paul Winter, has won four Grammy Awards for his compositions of earth music - including music that combines the voices of birds, whales, wolves and the enchanting sounds of his saxophone. Mrs. Kuki Gallman, Italian-born author, poet, conservationist and founder of The Gallmann Memorial Foundation (GMF), moved to Kenya over 30 years ago and settled in Ol'ari Nyiro in Laikipia, a 100,000 acre estate on the edge



Kuki & her daughter Sveva "Fly Away" on the edge of the GRV - the Dead Sea - the lowest place on earth, during their visit in Israel this last November. (Photo by: Dr. Yossi Leshem)

of the Great Rift Valley. She wrote the book "I Dreamt of Africa", which was translated into 21 languages throughout the world, and later served as the basis for the Hollywood movie that described Kuki's life, with actress Kim Basinger starring as Kuki.

Paul Winter, who flew in 1999 on a motorized glider tracking migrating storks with Dr. Yossi Leshem, recently, wrote a magnificent new composition called: "Flyways". Inspired by the beautiful phenomenon of migration, the main theme in "Flyways" describes bird migration throughout the GRV, all the way from Turkey to Mozambique, and incorporates ethnic music from 12 different countries located along the GRV, as well as the voices of migrating birds.

Being so involved, as well as enchanted by the GRV, both Kuki and Paul gladly pledged their active support in order to help the ICSBM promote this important issue. We are currently acting to have the GRV declared a

World Heritage Site by the World Heritage Center of UNESCO (an organization of the United Nations that has already declared 754 sites around the globe as "World Heritage Sites").



Mr. Shimon Peres meets Mrs. Kuki Gallman, Mr. Paul Winter and their families - as well as enjoying our new organic wine. (Photo by: Kobi Cantor)

The Telecommunication Company Bezeq produced in cooperation with ICSBM & IOC 500,000 telephone cards to promote the concept of the Great Rift Valley. Drawings: Tuvia Kurtz



A new Organic Chardonnay Wine - The Wine of the Barn Owls -

a joint initiative with Ramat Ha'Golan Vineyards



The New Organic Chardonnay

On November 23, 2003, the IOC and the ICSBM launched a new wine at the unique health resort in the north of Israel: Mitzpe Ha'Yamim. The launching was a part of a special "Birdwatching Month", held for the 7th year in a row at this unique hotel that specializes in organic gardening and personal body treatments. In addition to the launching, the "Birdwatching Month" included ornithological lectures and birding tours that brought Mitzpe Ha'Yamim to 100% occupancy.

Born through a joint initiative of the Ramat Ha'Golan Winery and the SPNI, this wine is the first of its kind in Israel: an organic Chardonnay. This wine, accompanied by its unique packaging, tells the innovative story of the use of Barn Owls as part of the development of environmental friendly agriculture that creates a mutual benefit both for farmers and for the environment as a whole. Part of the income from selling this wine will be designated to continue this unique project of the Barn Owls.

Progress in the Construction of The International Center for the Study of Bird Migration at Latrun

This last summer, we finalized the architectural plans for the building complex of "The International Center for the Study of Bird Migration (ICSBM) at the Latrun Armor Memorial. The plans include a **beautiful multimedia center** and **fascinating interactive museum** that present Israel's unique position as a migration focal point, as well as a model of co-existence between birds and aircrafts; a **research center** and the new offices of the ICSBM and the IOC. The complex is being built due to the generous support of the Samis Foundation - leading donors for the project, Lockheed Martin, and Mr. Moshe Yanai (a successful hi-tech entrepreneur from Boston, who recently decided to make "Aliya", and return to Israel).

The plans were submitted to the authorities for final approval, and we are waiting for their final reply in order to proceed with construction.

Recently these donors were joined by a new supporter: Mr. Mark Gelfand, the president of the successful hi-tech company: Intex. It is through his vision and extreme generosity that we were able to complete our plans and step up to the next level. Mark donated the amount needed to enable us to finish the construction of our complex. He recently visited Israel for a week, toured the site at Latrun and was very impressed by the vision of the project, and by the great potential that such a multi-disciplinary center holds.

this opportunity to thank Mark again for his contribution and faith in our vision.



Mr. Mark Gelfand, ICSBM new leading supporter, with his very own "private jet" (made in Italy...), Boston, November 2003. (Photo by: Dr. Yossi Leshem)

The International Center for the Study of Bird Migration, Latrun Tel Aviv University & the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) Named after Captain Nir Poraz & Corporal Nachshon Waxman

Simulation of the Main Complex:

- A. The Sam Israel Multi-Media Center
- B. The Mark Gelfand Interactive Museum (on bird migration & co-existence with aircrafts).
- C. The Yundler Scientific Center (Moshe Yanai) & Offices of the Bird Migration Center and the Israel Ornithological Center.
- D. Bird Migration Observation Roof
- E. Elevator Entrance & Cafeteria
- F. Bird & Weather Russian Radar
- G. The Bird Observation & Bird sculpture Trail (from the main gate all the way to the education center and the hostel, 4 water ponds and bird observation points are situated around the building).





Middle East Meets North America

Dr. Yossi Leshem - Director of the ICSBM, Dan Alon - Director of IOC and Imad Al Atrash, Director of the Palestine Wildlife Society visited the United States last October 2003 for 3 weeks of lectures and meetings at various institutions and communities along the east and west coasts. The purpose of their visit was to present an overview of their unique and fruitful cooperation: "For Birds & People in the Middle

East", that includes full cooperation in developing conservation, research and educational programs for the region. Mr. Adnan Budeiri, head of the Middle East Section of BirdLife International, located in Jordan, was prevented from joining the group since he was denied a visa permit to the States (despite many letters and inquiries from influential people).

The group received a tremendous amount of support and enthusiasm during their visit, which is especially encouraging given the fact that the group presented a rare idea these days: a workable model of true sustainable cooperation in the Middle East! The group also met with Mr. Tim Wirth, President of the UN Foundation and longtime friend, as well as with World Bank representatives and other government officials in order to raise funds for this regional cooperation project.

The funds, by US AID MERC, that made these regional projects possible, will be finished by May this year (For Birds & People in the Jordan Valley) and in August 2004 (Migrating Birds Know No Boundaries). These two important projects have to continue! Not only for the sake of the regional environment, but also mainly for the sake of peace, and co existence in the Middle East. Help us continue to make our vision a reality through your critical donations and support.



From left to right: Mr. Tim Wirth, President of the UN Foundation, Speaks with Yossi Leshem, Dan Alon (Black shirt) and Imad Atrash to his right

Middle East Meets North America - the 2004 version

Our visit to the States in 2003 was very successful. One important outcome was that many people, community leaders, Rabbis, students and others approached us about giving additional lectures. Following this overwhelming response, we have decided to return to the states at the end of 2004. Host an event in your community or organization. Our group (Dr. Yossi Leshem, Mr. Dan Alon, and Mr. Imad Al Atrash) will be available for fundraising events, lectures, and informal social get-togethers. This is an excellent way to enrich your community and help support our important cause. Advanced booking is necessary and will require a minimum fee to offset incurred expenses, i.e.: travel expenses, lodging, and a small lecture fee

For further information, please contact The International Center for the Study of Bird Migration offices: yleshem@post.tau.ac.il, or The Israel Ornithological Center, at: ioc@netvision.net.il.

Design: Studio Billet

Donations

I would like to support the work of the International Center for the Study of Bird Migration and the Israel Ornithological Center:

Enclosed is a check at the amount of _____ \$

Please make check payable to ASPNI and designate it for Birding Activities and mail it to:

Ms. Robin Gordon
ASPNI
28 Arrandale Ave.
Great Neck, NY 11024
USA

Please charge my credit card:

AMEX Diners Mastercard Visa Other _____

Number:

Expiration date: Signature: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____ Cell: _____

Fax: _____ e-mail: _____

We would like to thank all our friends:



Ministry of Education
Ministry of Defence
(MAFAT)



USAID - MERC

The Samis Foundation

Moshe Yanai
Mark Gelfand
Abraham Bachri



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