

A Bird's Eye View of the Holy Land

Newsletter From Israel | No.8 | Spring 2009



The Hoopoe was elected as the National Bird of Israel from 10 candidates. In the photo the Hoopoe is seen bringing a scorpion back to the nest to feed its chicks on Kibbutz Mashabei Sade in the Negev. (Photo: Dubi Kalai)

Dear Friends,

The campaign for the election of the National Bird was a success beyond all expectations: 4,000 schools, 9,500 kindergartens, all the army units and about 350,000 people from the general public participated in the campaign which was part of the 60 year celebrations of the State of Israel, and the impact was felt throughout the country at a level not felt for many years. The project was led by Yossi Leshem and Dan Alon, under the auspices of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Ministry of Education. Besides the significant increase in awareness to bird conservation, the process also constituted the basis of a unique lesson in democracy with all ages asserting their voting rights. The process was widely covered in the media with hundreds of reports on the TV channels, radio and in the newspapers. During the Jewish festival of Purim 2009 about a month before Passover when everybody puts on their fancy dress costumes, the traditional parade was led by an enormous float of President Peres hugging the Hoopoe which was declared the National Bird during an official ceremony by Shimon Peres at his residence in May 2008.

We wish you enjoyable reading!

Yours truly,

Dan Alon, Director
Israel Ornithological Center
(IOC)

Dr. Yossi Leshem, Director
International Center for the
Study of Bird Migration (ICSBM)

Society for the
Protection of Nature in Israel
החברה להגנת הטבע
Israel Ornithological Center



International Center
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Tel Aviv University
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12 foot high doll of
President Shimon Peres
hugging the National Bird
in the "Adloyada" in Holon,
leading the Purim festival
parade. (Photo: Eli Ne'eman)

Israel Chooses its National Bird – the Hoopoe – During the 60 Year Celebrations



The initiative to choose a national bird in Israel began about two years before the celebrations for Israel's 60th birthday when we were searching for a new educational theme such as the extremely successful project for protecting wildflowers five decades ago.

The concept evolved into the idea of choosing a national bird, and after its approval by the government committee in charge of the celebrations, the road was paved for its launching, under the auspices of the Minister of Education, Prof. Yuli Tamir, and the Minister for the Protection of the Environment, Mr. Gidon Ezra, as well as the involvement of the IDF's Chief Educational Officer. A 30-member public committee was established, with representatives from various sectors. It was decided to hold democratic elections for choosing the national bird, with the votes of four bodies contributing each an equal share: the general public, students, soldiers and the public committee. Criteria were decided upon for inclusion of the candidate bird species – the bird must nest in Israel, be mentioned in the Jewish sources and characterize a typically Israeli attribute. From a list of 50 birds, 10 were chosen by 1,000 wildlife enthusiasts in the primaries held at the annual birdwatching lecture day in December 2007 at the Tel Aviv University.



The unveiling of the winning bird by President Shimon Peres (right), together with Motti Kirshenbaum (to the left of Peres), the host of the ceremony, and two school children. (Photo: Michal Fatal, Flash 90)

Ashkenazi chose the Hoopoe, the Air Force Commander the Kingfisher, and Mr. Barak the Lesser Kestrel.

About 40 embassies from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also took part in the elections, following the voting of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ms. Tzipi Livni. Voting booths were placed in public spots, such as the Agamon Hula, Safari Park and Jerusalem Biblical



Ms. Tzipi Livni, voting at the Foreign Office. Tzipi is a nickname for bird in Hebrew. (Photo: Flash 90)



At the General Staff base in Tel Aviv, Mr. Ehud Barak (center) arrives to vote and meets his old army friend, Muki Betser (right) (Photo: Gilad Friedman)



From left to right: Mr. Zvi Bar, Mayor of Ramat Gan, Prof. Yuli Tamir and Mr. Gidon Ezra at Blich High School straw poll. (Photo: Rafi Deloya)



The Graceful Prinia party celebrates their victory at the Blich High School straw poll. (Photo: Rafi Deloya)

During the first months of 2008, schools, kindergartens as well as IDF units studied the subject using a specially prepared kit, emphasizing the ecological and conservation aspects of the project. On March 5th 2008 a straw poll was held at the Blich High School near Ramat Gan. For over three weeks the students held educational activities on the subject and prepared an extensive campaign. On March 31st 2008 elections were held at the General Staff base in Tel Aviv. About 800 officers and soldiers voted during the day after visiting the explanatory booths manned by representatives of 15 army units named after birds or having birds on their unit tag or as their symbol as well as various air force squadrons. The Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant General Gabi Ashkenazi, the Minister of Defense, Mr. Ehud Barak, commander of the Israeli Air Force Major General Eliezer Shkedi and other Generals, visited the booths, met with the soldiers and voted for the National Bird. Lieut. Gen.

Zoo, and it was also possible to vote in Ynet. The entire National Bird election events were extensively covered by the media, and helped to raise public awareness to nature conservation, the protections of birds and their habitats by prominently placing these issues on the public agenda.

In the final tally, the Hoopoe came first receiving 35 percent of the 355,000 votes, second place went to the Graceful Prinia, and third place to the Goldfinch.

The Hoopoe was awarded the title of the National Bird by the President of Israel during an official ceremony at the Presidential Residence in Jerusalem on May 29th 2008.

This national event will be celebrated by three new gold and silver coins, stamps and telecards of the Hoopoe. The coins will be issued by the Bank of Israel on Israel's 61st Independence Day and the stamps by the Israel Philatelic Service on Tu B'Shevat (the Jewish Arbor Day) in 2010 at an official ceremony in the Knesset (Israel's Parliament).

The Second Annual Artists For Nature International Art Festival at the Hula Valley

Sponsored by the European Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the SPNI, the JNF, the Hula Agamon, Galilee Development Authority, Friedman Family Foundation and the Art for Nature Foundation (ANF), the festival aims to raise awareness of nature conservation through dialogue and cultural exchange between artists, art and nature and particularly bird lovers from Europe and Israel and the general public.

The festival, spearheaded by the IOC and ICSBM, took place between the 6th and 15th March, 2009 and was an enormous success, with non-stop nature art workshops, tour groups visiting artists on site, lectures, discussion groups about art and conservation, exhibitions and more.

Visiting International Artists Paint the Hula Valley's Wonders together with Israeli Artists

Seventeen visiting European artists from Scotland, England, Ireland, Spain, Holland, Germany, France and Greece, under the guidance of Ysbrand Brouwers and Suzanne Wolff (Holland) of the ANF met up with Israeli artists Amir Balaban (Jerusalem Bird Observatory Director), Zev Labinger (Israel Ornithological Center Ornithologist), Elie Shamir, Varda Breger, Anat Shreiber, Maureen Fein and Farid Abu Shakra. In addition we invited Barry Van Dusen from the United States and Kioko Mwitiki from Kenya giving us a diverse group of 26 artists from 11 countries. All these artists work outdoors focusing on birds and nature in their artwork.

During an intense and exhilarating 10 days, participating artists concentrated on painting and sculpting birds, wildlife and landscapes around the Hula Valley. The Agamon HaHula (JNF) was the main location for the festival activities. One of the most moving days was Sunday the 8th when we arranged for over 100 school children from Jordan and Israeli Arab (JalJulia) and Jewish (Petah Tikvah) children that spent a magical day learning about the Hula Wetlands, bird migration and painting nature. The day climaxed with a visit by Israeli President Shimon Peres and VIPs including Mr. Jonathan Claridge, Head of the Political and Trade Section of the EU Delegation to Israel.

At the end of the week, we held a festive exhibit of the abundant artwork and were treated by a very special performance by Alaskan David Grimes who sang his original songs about nature accompanied by guitar and hilarious tales from the Alaskan outback.

Over twelve thousand visitors flocked to the Agamon HaHula during the festival illustrating the important economic role eco-tourism, nature art and bird watching can be for the region. Through wildlife and bird conservation efforts the SPNI are creating a healthier environment and benefiting the entire biodiversity of the region. We hope to see you at next years' event!



Spur-winged Plover painted by Barry Van Dusen from Massachusetts, USA



Our President meets the young artists for nature

Book and travelling exhibition

With works from over 40 artists we are now working towards publishing a book of the Hula Valley that will combine art and text (English, Hebrew and Arabic) to tell the fascinating story of this area and its importance to birds and people. With book and original art works we will exhibit in Israel, Europe and North America. Please help us support this one-of-a-kind project!



President Peres learns about the SPNI study using Kestrels and Barn Owls as pest controllers in agricultural fields. To the President's right, Mr. Efi Shtenzler, Chairman of KKL-JNF, the body that developed the Agamon Hula

Cutting Edge Technology in Crane Studies

In January 2008, the Jewish National Fund (JNF) was awarded financial support through the U.S. Forest Service to implement a study on Crane Energetic and Management Techniques within the Hula Valley. Itai Shanni who manages the Hula Birdwatching Centre for the Israel Ornithological Centre, SPNI, is responsible for designing and conducting this research in cooperation with Prof. Ran Nathan and the Movement ecology Lab at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

The aim of this research is to identify the key factors distinguishing between wintering and migrating cranes, in order to develop new methods for reducing or stabilizing populations in the Hula Valley. A major part of this work will be the development of an energetic model based on behavioural patterns of cranes within the Hula Valley, assuming that energetic state of the individual plays a major role in its decision to stage or to migrate.

We're using a recently developed transmitter, which records simultaneously and in high resolution (every 15 minutes) both the GPS location of the bird and 3D Acceleration (Acc). Assuming that each behaviour has its own unique digital signature, we managed to develop a new tool which enables us to use a 'big brother' approach as we now know on each tagged individual where he/she is and also what does it do.

So far 130 Cranes were trapped and color-ringed, and 17 individuals were fitted with these new transmitters. We now await their return next year so we will be able to retrieve our results and hopefully manage to get a better understanding of the way Cranes make their decision whether to stay for the winter or keep on migrating to Africa.



Map presenting position of a specific study Crane every 15 minutes in the Hula Valley



One of 130 Cranes with color rings (bands) on their legs in the Agamon, Hula Valley

Increasing cooperation between the Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF) and the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI)

During the last few years cooperation between the SPNI and KKL-JNF has increased. Dan Alon (IOC) together with Dr. Omri Boneh (KKL) advanced the activities in the Agamon Hula and two students of Dr. Yossi Leshem, Prof. Yoram Yom-Tov and Prof. Uzi Motro carried out their M.Sc. theses on the Long-legged Buzzard and the Short-toed Eagle with funds from the KKL-JNF. At present we are working on a number of joint projects in bird and habitat conservation, as well as birding ecotourism in Israel.

Yossi was invited to give a key lecture to the KKL-JNF Presidents global conference in Eilat in May 2008, and in September Yossi was also invited to lecture at the annual JNF conference held in Phoenix Arizona, USA, and here too the subject was accorded unusually high interest.



September 2008: During the annual National Conference of JNF donors held in Arizona, Yossi Leshem was the keynote speaker about the power of birds on a global level. After the lecture, Yossi presented Ron Lauder, Chairman of the Board of JNF USA (center) with a painting of the Hoopoe by A.M. Voelker from Texas. Left: Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Doron Almog who established "Aleh Negev", a rehabilitation village for the handicapped.

Using Barn Owls and Kestrels as Biological Pest Controllers Becomes a National Project



At the initiative of the AIOC and ICSBM, the SPNI (with funds from the Baracha Foundation), Tel-Aviv University, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Ministry of Agriculture joined forces in January 2009 to announce the launching of a national project for the use of Barn Owls and Kestrels as biological pest controllers in agriculture.



A nesting box recycled from an ammunition case, populated by a pair of Barn Owls. (Photo: Amir Ezer)

It is known that a pair of Barn Owls preys on about 2,000 rodents per year. Over the past two decades, as part of the preparations for the project, 1,640 nesting boxes were erected in Israel with about 650 of them occupied by Barn Owls. Led by the General-Director of the Ministry of Agriculture, Ms. Yael Shealtieli, and the General-Director of the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Mr. Shai Avital, and with the assistance of Mr. Martin Weill from the Baracha Foundation, \$250,000 was raised per year, enabling instruction to farmers in seven different areas countrywide by a team of experts, the development of learning and publicity materials for farmers and students in 15 schools in agricultural areas and the promotion of a public campaign for the reduction in the use of pesticides.

The Israel Military Industries joined the project in March 2009 and contributed 500 empty ammunition cases for their conversion to nesting boxes. The ammunition box is the modern version of the verse from Prophet Isaiah “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares...” (Isaiah 2:4).

Barn Owl – the ultimate nocturnal rodent hunter. (Photo: Amir Ezer)



General-Director of the Ministry of Agriculture, Ms. Yael Shealtieli, met with the project leaders and received a nesting box for a Common Kestrel, Barn Owl, Hoopoe and Great Tit recycled from ammunition cases.

The project was also greatly successful on a regional level – the Jewish Federation of Cleveland funded a pilot project in Israel and Jordan along the Jordan River during 2006. In June 2007 USAID-MERC joined the initiative and funded an extensive 3-year research project to study the use of Barn Owls and Kestrels in wheat fields in Jordan (Irbid), Israel and the Palestinian Authority in the area of Tamoun in the West Bank, led by Imad Atrash, the Director of the Palestine Wildlife Society. Tens of Palestinian farmers, for whom the subject was completely new, joined the project.

In 2008 a joint seminar was held in Jordan, and the Hanns Seidel Foundation from Germany, via the European Union, joined the project enabling the extension of the USAID-MERC project to include educational activities for students and farmers throughout the region. The total funding for the regional project by the three foundations reached approximately one million dollars for the three partners, for 3 years.

The launching of the joint regional project with the Palestinian farmers in their wheat fields in the Tamoun area in the West Bank. (Photo: Imad Atrash)



A National Network of Birdwatching Centers in Israel

Nine birdwatching centers have been established under the initiative of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI), the Israel Nature & National Parks Protection Authority, the JNF, the Israel Government Tourist Corporation, and municipalities and local councils, such as the Eilat and Jerusalem municipalities.

The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies (JIIS), the SPNI and Tel Aviv University initiated the establishment of a team of 21 experts who examined the vision of developing a network of birdwatching centers. The team recommended to the decision-makers to increase the number of existing birdwatching centers from nine to fifteen and to define the activities of each center as a regional center that would cooperate with all the relevant bodies.

The idea is that each bird center will focus on multi-disciplinary aspects: nature conservation, ecotourism, education, scientific research, conflicts with farmers etc. as well as the extending of professional assistance in bird-related issues to the region where the center is situated. The national network will thus act as an umbrella organization for all local activities, and assist in the professional aspects of each center's activities.



At the Hatzeva Field School, one of the proposed new birdwatching centers in the arid Arava Valley between the Dead Sea and Eilat, the Arabian Babblers can be observed. The Babblers have been habituated to the presence of people by Prof. Amotz Zahavi in a unique research carried out over 35 consecutive years. In the photo, a Babbler “watches” the birdwatcher. (Photo: Rei Segali)



Map of Israel presenting the 15 existing and planned birdwatching centers in the national network.

Establishing the new Tel Aviv Bird Observatory – “Rosh Zipor” (Head of the Bird)

As part of its 100th anniversary celebrations, Tel Aviv aims to create a bird observatory of its own – just like the successful one in Jerusalem. The municipality of Tel Aviv and the SPNI will create the observatory in the coming year, located near the Yarkon River. The Jerusalem Bird Observatory attracts 60,000 visitors annually – we believe that in Tel Aviv the number of visitors will be double. JNF-KKL and Tel Aviv University intends to join this initiative as well.

The area for the establishment of the Tel Aviv Bird

Observatory is called Talmei Aviv Agricultural Farms located between the Yarkon and Ayalon Rivers. Each year the farm is frequented by tens of thousands of school children and students majoring in Environmental and Agricultural Studies. Tel Aviv Municipality recently began to advance a plan for the expansion of Talmei Aviv – planning to diversify to also include activities for families and adults. The Bird Observatory is integrated within this plan.

The site will encompass 4.7 dunams (a little over 1 acre) at the north-east corner of the agricultural farm and includes

the following:

A winter seasonal pond with a path and an observation post.

A body of water will be created, partly covered with wetland flora. A hidden observation post will be erected.

A 2-duman orchard comprised of trees that attract birds.

As part of the cooperation of SPNI and the JNF, JNF Australia is trying to raise funds in order to enlarge the site.

A pavilion for bird ringing and other educational activities.

A trail will connect the hidden observation areas with the orchard.

Bird ringing stations set up near the flora wetland area, the winter seasonal pond, and in the orchard. Trail signage and information posts erected throughout the site.



Aerial view of the meeting point of the Yarkon and Ayalon Rivers which create an image of a Bird's Head, "Rosh Zipor" in Hebrew, in the urban center of Tel Aviv

“A Nest for a Swift Guest” Securing the future of the Common Swift in Israel

The Common Swift (CS) is a unique bird that spends most of its life on the wing. It feeds on flying insects which it hunts in the air, it drinks while flying, it sleeps on the wing and even mates in the air.

The CS spends most of the time living in Africa in dense colonial groups, and during the spring starts migrating north to its breeding sites, which spread from North Africa to Asia, Europe and Scandinavia. During mid February it arrives in Israel, which is known to be one of its first breeding sites, migrating back to Africa at the beginning of June, immediately after its chicks have fledged.

It is a small bird, weighing only 35-45 grams, but is a superior flyer and an aerial acrobat. It has a thin short body and impressive long-span scythe-like wings with an impressive aspect ratio.

Ever since humans have built cities, the CS has found our buildings perfect for nesting sites and became dependent on us. Our cities also produce heat that provides the constant lift required for the non-breeders to sleep.

The Western Wall in Jerusalem serves as one of the oldest CS nesting sites known. A special study to map the CS nests was conducted there in 2002 by Mr. Tigges and by the late

Prof. Mendelssohn during which 88 nest sites were noted.

However, the future of the CS is at risk. The vast renovations in our cities and the modern style of our buildings leave the CS with no nesting sites. Their numbers are decreasing rapidly.

The “Friends Of The Swifts” Association in Israel, directed by Amnon Hahn, was founded by those who care about the CS and wish to secure its future. The association is collaborating with the SPNI and the Tel Aviv University.

Ever since UNESCO declared the “White City of Tel Aviv” as a World Heritage Site, the above groups applied to the Mayor of Tel Aviv and are now working in full cooperation with the Conservation Department to preserve the CS nests. Five schools in Tel Aviv were chosen and special nests built and installed for the CS.

The first CS project in the “White City of Tel Aviv” area has just been completed. It was carried out in the Schiff House and sponsored by the owners, Discount Bank. All four, long active, CS nests were spared. 20 new nesting boxes were designed, built and installed in the house roof and two webcams were installed in two of the active nests for future live internet transmits.



The poster produced for the 100 year celebrations of the city of Tel Aviv, celebrating the Common Swift, the city's symbol



Rabbi Shmuel Rabinovich, the Rabbi of the Western Wall, welcomes the arrival of the Swifts during a ceremony held at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. 88 pairs of Swifts nest in holes in the Wailing Wall

Special offer for the spring migration, Passover 2009

The following products can be ordered from the ASPNI office in the USA and will be sent by mail from Israel (please allow 3 weeks for delivery). The cost includes package and posting from Israel.

Gold



Silver

Israel Government Coins and Medals Corporation: Gold and silver coins of the National Bird for Israel's 61st Independence Day produced by the Bank of Israel can be ordered directly from medals@coins.co.il or www.israelmint.com.

Hoopoe T-shirt -

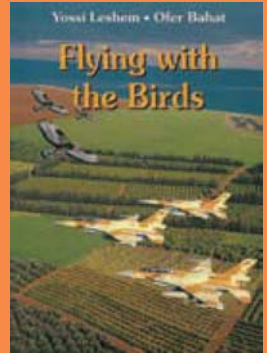
20 US \$ - S, M, L, EL, EEL



Giant postcards (9.5 x 6 inches) -
5 US \$ for both postcards

Flying with the Birds -

the updated edition of the book "Flying with the Birds" by Dr. Yossi Leshem and Dr. Ofer Bahat will be shortly published (272 pages, album format, 9 x 13 inches) -48 US \$



I wish to order: T-shirt Size ___ Two postcards Flying with the Birds **Total: US \$ _____**

For further information, please contact:
ICSBM : yleshem@post.tau.ac.il or the IOC: ioc@netvision.net.il

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I would like to support the work of the ICSBM and the IOC.
Enclosed is a check in the amount of \$ _____
Please make check payable to ASPNI or SPNI UK and be sure to designate it for Birding Activities and mail to:

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