



**A ROCHA**

*Together, caring for God's creation*

**Press Release for the conclusion of the project Identification and Conservation of New “Important Bird Areas” in Lebanon**



With generous funding from the MAVA trust, A Rocha Lebanon and the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (the Birdlife National partner) have concluded the 3 year, science and community conservation project aimed at identifying and conserving new Important Bird Areas in Lebanon.

Prior to the project, four sites were internationally designated as Important Bird areas by SPNL and Birdlife International in 1994. These sites were; Ehden Forest Nature Reserve, Palm Islands Nature Reserve, Aammiq Wetland, and the Shouf Cedar Nature Reserve. Due to Lebanon’s importance for migrating birds and species with a restricted regional or global range coupled with the intense, largely indiscriminate hunting in the country, it was essential to identify sites important for:

- roosting soaring birds where these birds fly low and are therefore vulnerable
- over wintering raptors and water birds
- breeding, over wintering and passage of species with limited regional or global distribution e.g. Syrian Serin

From March 2005 to February 2008, 31 sites were surveyed throughout the country, through a complete yearly cycle, with repeated visits during the main migration period. A total of 320 site visits were conducted by teams of researchers, totaling over 3000 hours of observations, generating thousands of individual records, representing tens of thousands of birds. All data collected was matched to BirdLife IBA criteria.

**Following submission to Birdlife International, 9 new sites were designated as Global IBAs:**

<b>Newly designated global IBA Site</b>	<b>Birdlife Global IBA Criteria met</b>
Hima Aanjar / Kfar Zabad	A.1
Lake Qaraaoun	A.4.iv
Riim / Sannine Mountain	A.3 and A.4.iv
Tannourine Cedars Nature Reserve	A.1 and A.4.iv
Hima Ebel es-Saqi	A.1, A.3, and A.4.iv
Semi Deserts of Ras Baalbek	A.3
Beirut River Valley	A.4.iv
Upper Mountains of Akkar-Donnieh	A1, A2, A3
Jabal Moussa	A.4.iv

**Relevant Birdlife Global IBA criteria:**

A1. Species of global conservation concern:

The site regularly holds significant numbers of a globally threatened species, or other species of global conservation concern.

A2. Restricted-range species:

The site is known or thought to hold a significant component of the restricted-range species whose breeding distributions define an Endemic Bird Area (EBA) or Secondary Area (SA).

A3. Biome-restricted species:

The site is known or thought to hold a significant assemblage of the species whose breeding distributions are largely or wholly confined to one biome.

A4. Congregations:

iv The site is known or thought to be a 'bottleneck' site where at least 20,000 storks (Ciconiidae), raptors (Accipitriformes and Falconiformes) or cranes (Gruidae) regularly pass during spring or autumn migration.

**Following submission to Birdlife International, 2 new sites were designated as regional IBAs**

<b>Newly designated regional IBA Site</b>	<b>Birdlife Regional IBA Criteria met</b>
Bentael Forest Nature Reserve	B.1iv
Ramlieh Valley	B.1iv

**Relevant Birdlife Regional IBA criteria**

B.1.iv The site is a 'bottleneck' site where over 5,000 storks, or over 3,000 raptors or cranes regularly pass on spring or autumn migration.

Of the 11 sites declared, 2 are government declared nature reserves, 2 are conserved by SPNL in collaboration with local communities through the Hima approach, 3 have active conservation NGOs and 4 have no current protection. During the scientific field assessments, contacts with interested individuals from the community were established. Upon the official declaration of the new IBAs, these contacts were approached, asking them to nominate representatives from their sites to attend the IBA community workshop and form a site support group. Four, two day workshops were completed during the project:

- First day: an introduction on birds, their importance, bird ecology and bird identification skills.
- Second day: covered an explanation of the IBA programme, international criteria, conservation and monitoring procedures.

Site management committees were formed for sites with no protected area status, with representatives from the municipal council and community leaders in the region. The main role of these committees is the setting of a management plan for the conservation of the IBA. To help set priorities for the committees, the project produced site management statements for each site.

The Project marks the beginning in the conservation process for these sites, future plans include:

- Publishing simple, basic educational and training materials for bird identification training and IBA monitoring.
- Building up the national capacity for bird identification, research, and bird watching.
- Strengthening the scientific capacity of research staff at A Rocha and SPNL
- Concluding the national census for IBAs in country (several sites were not surveyed due to the 2006 war and security concerns).
- Developing monitoring schemes at each site and networking of the IBAs in country.
- Initiate conservation projects for the declared IBAs in collaboration with the local communities through the Hima concept.
- Monitor national development plans and advocate for the protection of the declared IBAs.