

SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION
OF NATURE IN LEBANON

S P N L ANNUAL REPORT **2 0 2 4**

**FROM NATURE
RESERVES & HIMAS
TO NATURAL PARK**



SPNL ANNUAL REPORT 2024

FROM NATURE
RESERVES & HIMAS
TO NATURAL PARK



Cover photo / Little Owl rescued by the SPNL Anti-poaching Unit (APU), treated and released in the wild.
photo © Sherine Bou Raffoul



EDITORIAL / COMMON AND DIFFERENTIATING FACTORS OF NATURE RESERVE AND HIMA

A nature reserve is a terrestrial or marine area requiring the protection of ecosystems and habitats to conserve species of particular importance (rare, geographically restricted, endangered), distinctive natural features, sensitive and rare ecosystems and habitats, and which is capable of adequate maintenance and rehabilitation, where necessary, in a manner consistent with the objectives of protection, to care for the habitats of living organisms and to meet the unique requirements of these organisms. It may consist of either an entirely protected area or part of a protected area or areas and a controlled management area.

On the other hand, a Hima is not just a protected site, but a living testament to the harmonious coexistence of nature and culture. It encompasses a natural ecosystem and possibly another part that has been sustainably modified (i.e., through the sustainable use of natural resources) and that has important biodiversity, ecological services, and cultural values. The site is voluntarily protected by a traditional system of natural resource management by local communities, largely based on these communities' traditional local skills.

The Hima system represents a traditional recognition of the need to secure access to the use of scarce resources. Evidence shows that local awareness of this need has grown for hundreds of years. The Hima provides tangible benefits to the people who directly benefit from nature conservation, as it incentivizes local communi-

ties to invest in preserving natural resources and their protection from exploitation. These benefits include economic gains over time due to the benefits it offers and the social security it also provides. The Hima system also fosters a sense of community and shared responsibility among its members, further enhancing its value to the local population.

The Hima system is not just a concept, but a way of life, highly regarded, socially acceptable, and desirable by the people who bear the cost of its establishment. The Hima is managed locally through consultation and consensus, so individuals in the community can influence management decisions. While traditional Hima management has proven robust and resilient, few nature reserves have a history as ancient and historic as the Hima.

The Hima faces the same obstacles as other protected areas and will continue to do so. However, the Hima system carries a cultural and heritage meaning absent in the neutral nature reserve system. The Hima has a concept that goes beyond the tribal ties and traditional applications that have historically characterized Hima systems, but it also carries ethical meanings in Islamic law. The Hima is not a separate category from nature reserves; all categories of the International Union for Conservation of Nature apply to the Hima. Any nature reserve can be transformed into a Hima or be called a Hima if it is established by the guardian of the legitimate ruling authority, aims for purposes related to the public good, does not cause distress to the local population, and must not deprive them of indispensable resources, and achieves real benefits to society more than it causes harm, as the primary goal of the Hima is to secure economic and environmental benefits for humans.

The Hima system, based on the traditional classification of lands according to their uses, is considered one of the most critical systems that contribute to preserving biodiversity in the world and preserving nature and its resources by dedicating a heritage system adopted by Arab peoples and practiced by Lebanese villages and towns as an inherited tradition for land use, ensuring sustainable use of natural resources, and meaning a rational investment of resources and preserving the environment's ability to renew its resources. In other words, the main difference between them lies in the focus and management methods. Reserves focus on preserving biodiversity in general,



Assad Serhal
SPNL Director
General /
Birdlife International
Chairman of the
Middle East region

while Hima focuses on managing biodiversity, and while reserves are handled by law enforcement agencies, local community management is a fundamental pillar in managing Hima. It is known that nature reserves are established on lands belonging to the state that care for them and manage them with civil society and associations. As for the Hima system, it relates to private property or lands belonging to municipalities or common lands. These lands are placed within the Hima system by a decision from the municipalities. There are other types of reserves, such as natural parks and natural sites. These sites are evaluated according to cultural and environmental heritage and sustainable use of these areas. Lebanon has recently entered the third classification of reserves by establishing the Upper Metn Park, which consists of 70 square kilometers of forests. It is the first park in the country.

Work on establishing nature reserves in Lebanon began in 1996. Today, there are 18 reserves and 34 Himas. Lebanon has 22 percent protected lands between the Himas and reserves, while the average protected area, according to international standards, is 30 percent.

Hima means protected area in Arabic. It is not just a concept, but a community-based approach used to conserve sites, species, habitats, and people to sustain natural resource use. Himas originated more than 1,500 years ago and spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula as a “tribal” system for sustainable management of natural resources. The Hima system was applied to organize, maintain, and use natural pastures in a way compatible with local ecosystems and practices. It is worth noting that the local communities themselves make the management and decisions of the Hima.¹

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon, in cooperation with Homat Al Hima International, municipalities, residents, and production sectors, is actively involved in restoring the Hima system in 34 sites across Lebanon. Their work involves re-establishing the inherited system of resource use, land classification and protection, and developing the traditional inherited “Hima concept” to be in line with development aspirations and needs. This includes efforts to combat climate change, achieve sustainable development goals, enhance the conservation of important bird areas, and maintain the sustainable use of natural resources.

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon and Homat Al Hima International

works to encourage decision-makers to reconsider the management of nature reserves, especially those managed for the sustainable use of natural resources, to include the principles related to the Hima and the traditional method of its management. In particular, the organization focuses on the need to prove that the goal of establishing reserves is to serve the public interest and that the benefits of establishing reserves exceed their costs, and this cannot be achieved without cooperation with the local community. While the Hima is characterized by being managed in a past way, close to the people who use it, nature reserves are managed remotely from the central centers of authority in capitals, which prevents permanent and direct contact.

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon and Homat Al Hima International focus on partnerships with the private sector and rely on the private sector's role in preserving nature and nature reserves by adopting environmental initiatives and participating in strategic partnerships with the public sector and the local community.

The organization's strategy in partnership with the private sector is based on corporate social responsibility, where companies can adopt initiatives that include preserving the environment as part of their social responsibility, which may include allocating resources to protect natural areas, reserves, and Hima. The organization also focuses on forming partnerships with companies to develop nature conservation projects, allowing more significant and effective participation in environmental conservation efforts. It also focuses on supporting sustainable development projects that work to protect nature and promote sustainability in the surrounding areas, such as renewable energy and sustainable agriculture projects.

¹ Kilani, H., Serhal, A., & Llewellyn, O. (2007). Al Hima: a way of life. <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/9091>



وفي وقت تدار المحميات من قبل جهات انفاذ القانون، تكون الادارة المحلية المجتمعية مرتكز اساسي في إدارة الحمى.

معروف أن المحميات الطبيعية تقام على الأراضي التابعة للدولة التي تهتم بها وتديرها مع المجتمع الأهلي والجمعيات. أما نظام الحمى فيتعلق بأملاك خاصة أو أراض تابعة للبلديات أو أراض مشاع. ويتم وضع هذه الأراضي ضمن نظام الحمى بقرار من البلديات. وهناك أنواع أخرى من المحميات مثل المنتزه



الطبيعي والموقع الطبيعي. وتقييم هذه الأنواع يتم بحسب الإرث الثقافي والبيئي والاستخدام المستدام لهذه المساحات.

ويمكن أن تتألف إما كلياً من منطقة حماية، وإما جزئياً من منطقة أو مناطق حماية ومنطقة أو مناطق ادارة مراقبة.

في المقابل فإن الحمى هي موقع محمي يضم نظاماً إيكولوجياً طبيعياً ويمكن أن يضم جزءاً آخر معدلاً بشكل مستدام (أي من خلال الاستخدام المستدام للموارد الطبيعية) وهو ذو تنوع بيولوجي مهم وخدمات إيكولوجية وقيم ثقافية. تتم في هذا الموقع حماية إرادية للأنظمة الإيكولوجية والموائل الطبيعية والقيم الثقافية المرتبطة به بواسطة نظام تقليدي لإدارة الموارد الطبيعية من قبل الجماعات المحلية مبني بغالبية على المهارات التقليدية المحلية لهذه الجماعات.

وفي حين أثبتت الإدارة التقليدية للحمى أنها قادرة على الحزم والمرونة، فإن قلة من المحميات الطبيعية تتمتع بتاريخ مماثل لتاريخ الحمى القديم والضارب في التاريخ.

تواجه الحمى نفس العقبات التي تواجهها المناطق المحمية الأخرى، وتستمر في مواجهتها. لكن نظام الحمى يحمل معنى ثقافياً وتراثياً يغيب في نظام المحمية الطبيعية المحايدة عن هذه القيم. للحمى مفهوم يتخطى الروابط القبلية والتطبيقات التقليدية التي تميزت بها أنظمة الحمى تاريخياً بل هو يحمل أيضاً معان أخلاقية متضمنة في الشريعة الإسلامية. ليست الحمى فئة منفصلة عن المحميات الطبيعية، في الواقع ان جميع فئات الاتحاد الدولي لحماية الطبيعة تطبق على الحمى.

يمكن لأي محمية طبيعية ما ان تتحول إلى حمى او ان تسمى حمى إذا أنشئت من قبل ولي الأمر اب السلطة الحاكمة الشرعية، وان تهدف إلى أغراض تتعلق بالخير العام ولا تسبب ضيقاً للسكان المحليين، كما يجب أن لا تحرمهم من موارد لا غنى لهم عنها، وان تحقق فوائد فعلية للمجتمع أكثر مما تسببه من أضرار، فالهدف الأساسي للحمى هو تأمين فائدة اقتصادية وبيئية للبشر.

بمعنى آخر، الفرق الرئيسي بينهما يكمن في التركيز وطرق الادارة. تركز المحميات على الحفاظ على التنوع البيولوجي بشكل عام، في حين تركز الحمى على ادارة التنوع الحيوي،

المشترك والمفترق بين الحمية والحمى

أسعد سرحال

المدير العام لجمعية حماية الطبيعة في لبنان (SPNL)

يمنع الصيد في قطر أربعة أميال ويمنع قطع الأشجار والشجيرات بقطر ١٢ ميلاً. وبذلك أصبح الحمى رمزاً للعدالة والمساواة، وأداة لحماية الموارد الطبيعية.

يمثل نظام الحمى إدراكاً تقليدياً للحاجة الى تأمين الوصول الى استخدام المصادر النادرة وهو دليل على انه كان هناك وعي محلي لهذه الحاجة على مدى مئات من السنين. توفر الحمى منافع حقيقية للناس الذين يستفيدون مباشرة من صون الطبيعة، فإنها تشكل حافزاً للمجتمعات المحلية للاستثمار في صيانة المصادر الطبيعية وحمايتها من الاستغلال. يعطي نظام الحمى فائدة اقتصادية على مدى الزمن بسبب الفوائد التي يقدمها والضمان الاجتماعي الذي يوفره أيضاً. يستحوذ نظام الحمى على اهتمام كبير، وذا قبول اجتماعي ومرغوب به من قبل الأفراد الذين يتحملون كلفة إنشائه. تدار الحمى بشكل محلي من خلال المشورة والاجماع، لذلك فإن الأفراد في المجتمع قادرون على التأثير على القرارات الإدارية.

حققت العديد من المجتمعات المحلية فوائد عدة من خلال الاستثمار في صون الطبيعة من خلال نظام الحمى وذلك من خلال البرامج السياحية ومراقبة الطيور وتحقيق دخل من خلال بيع منتجات مثل الأخشاب والعسل والأعشاب الطبية، مما يساعد على تحسين الاقتصاد المحلي. اضافة إلى استدامة موارد الصيد البري والبحري وتحسين جودة المياه، مما يفيد السكان المحليين الذين يعتمدون على الصيد كمصدر رئيسي للدخل.

ما هو المشترك والمفترق بين نظامي الحمى والحمية الطبيعية؟

الحمية الطبيعية هي منطقة برية أو بحرية تتطلب حماية النظم الإيكولوجية والمواطن من أجل الحفاظ على الكائنات ذات أهمية خاصة (النادرة، المحصورة الانتشار الجغرافي، المهددة بالانقراض)، والمعالم الطبيعية المميزة، والنظم الإيكولوجية والمواطن الحساسة والنادرة، وهي قابلة لأعمال الصيانة والتأهيل بصورة فعالة، حيث تدعو الحاجة، بشكل يتلاءم وأهداف الحماية، وذلك للعناية بمواطن الكائنات الحية ولتأمين المتطلبات الخاصة لهذه الكائنات.



1 Kilani, H., Serhal, A., & Llewellyn, O. (2007). Al Hima : a way of life. <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/9091>

يعتبر نظام الحمى، القائم على التصنيف التقليدي للأراضي، وفق استخداماتها، من اهم الأنظمة التي تسهم في الحفاظ على التنوع البيولوجي في العالم والحفاظة على الطبيعة ومواردها من خلال تكريس نظام تراثي اعتمدته الشعوب العربية كتقليد موروث لاستخدام الأراضي، بما يضمن الاستفادة القابلة للاستمرار من الموارد الطبيعية، وبما يعني الاستثمار الرشيد للموارد والحفاظة على قدرة البيئة على تجديد مواردها.

تعني حمى منطقة محمية باللغة العربية. وهي نهج مجتمعي يستخدم للحفاظ على المواقع والأنواع والموائل والأشخاص من أجل تحقيق الاستخدام المستدام للموارد الطبيعية. نشأت الحمى منذ أكثر من ١٥٠٠ عام وانتشرت على طول شبه الجزيرة العربية كنظام "قبلي" للإدارة المستدامة للموارد الطبيعية. تم تطبيق نظام الحمى لتنظيم وصيانة واستخدام المراعي الطبيعية بطريقة تتلاءم مع النظم البيئية والممارسات المحلية. علماً انه يتم اتخاذ إدارة وقرارات الحمى من قبل المجتمعات المحلية نفسها¹.

لم يكن هناك أي نص واضح إذا كان الحمى يستخدم على أنه أداة حماية في زمن ما قبل الإسلام، فكان الحكام، أفراداً أو جماعات، يقومون بمنع الدخول إلى الحمى التي يملكونها أو يديرونها.

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «لَا حِمَى إِلَّا لِلَّهِ وَلِرَسُولِهِ». كما أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ حَمَى التَّقِيْعَ، وَأَنَّ عُمَرَ حَمَى السَّرِفَ وَالزَّبْدَةَ.

أسس النبي صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ حمى النقيب للخيول في جنوب المدينة، كما أسس أيضاً حمى حول حرم المدينة وأنشأ داخله نظاماً



المجلس العالمي للطيور يضم ممثلي 123 جمعية غير
حكومية من 119 بلداً، وجمعية حماية الطبيعة في لبنان هي
الشريك الوطني منذ أوائل التسعينات

BirdLife International is the global partnership of 123
Non-Governmental Organisations working for nature
in 119 countries/territories. The Society for the
Protection of Nature (SPNL) is BirdLife in Lebanon
www.birdlife.org | www.spnl.org



LEBANON PROTECTED AREAS

*Mediterranean
Sea*



This map is the result of a joint effort in Lebanon by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL).

LEGEND

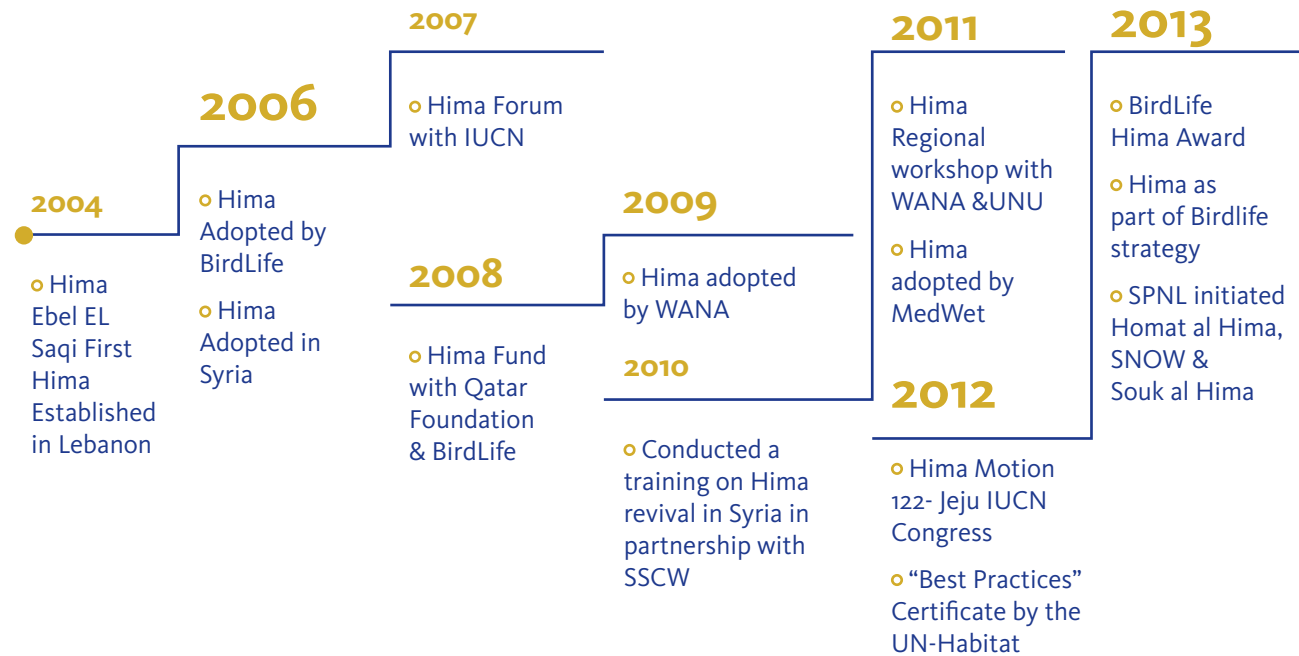
- [illegible]

A horizontal scale bar with markings at 0, 5, 10, 20, 30, and 40 km. The bar is divided into segments corresponding to these distances.

Copyright © UNDP & Ministry of Environment, Lebanon, 2024

This map is the result of a joint effort in Lebanon by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL).

HIMA TIMELINE



2014

- Hima Adopted by UN-Women for Gender Equality

2015

- Hima adopted in Cyprus & Greece

2016

- Hima Guideline Manual & HH Guideline Manual Published

2017

- 19 Himas established in Lebanon
- Initiated Luc Hoffmann Hima Home (LHHH)

2018

- 22 Himas established in Lebanon
- Hima West Baalbak First Regional Hima Established in Lebanon
- AEON MIDORI Prize for Hima Revival
- Hima For Peace, Tokyo, Japan

2019

- Lebanon passed a new protected areas Law 130, Year 2019
- 25 Himas established
- Hima to Stop Nature Bankruptcy, Yancheng, China

2020/22

- SPNL established the HH Center in West Beqaa, LHHH in Mount Lebanon and Hima Farm in Hammana

2023/24

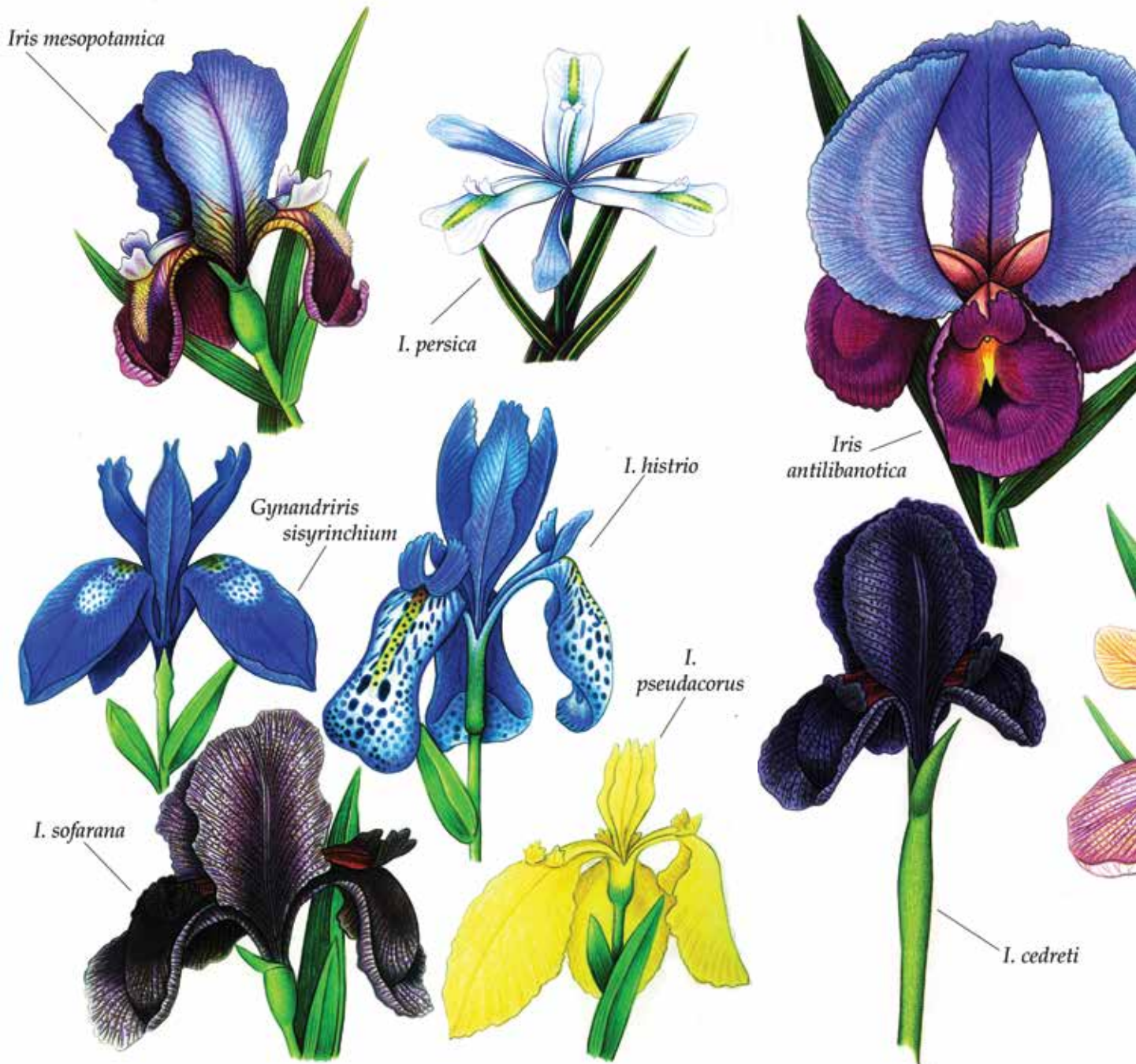
- 33 Himas established
- Linking Mount Lebanon (CBR) to Anti-Lebanon (MHR) via the Rift valley
- Initiation of 1st Natural Park
- Hima For Peace: 8 villages in Mount Leb. signed Hima Charter
- Launching SPNL's biannual *Al Hima* magazine
- Endangered Voices campaign / in partnership with Leo Burnett, HHI & SPNL

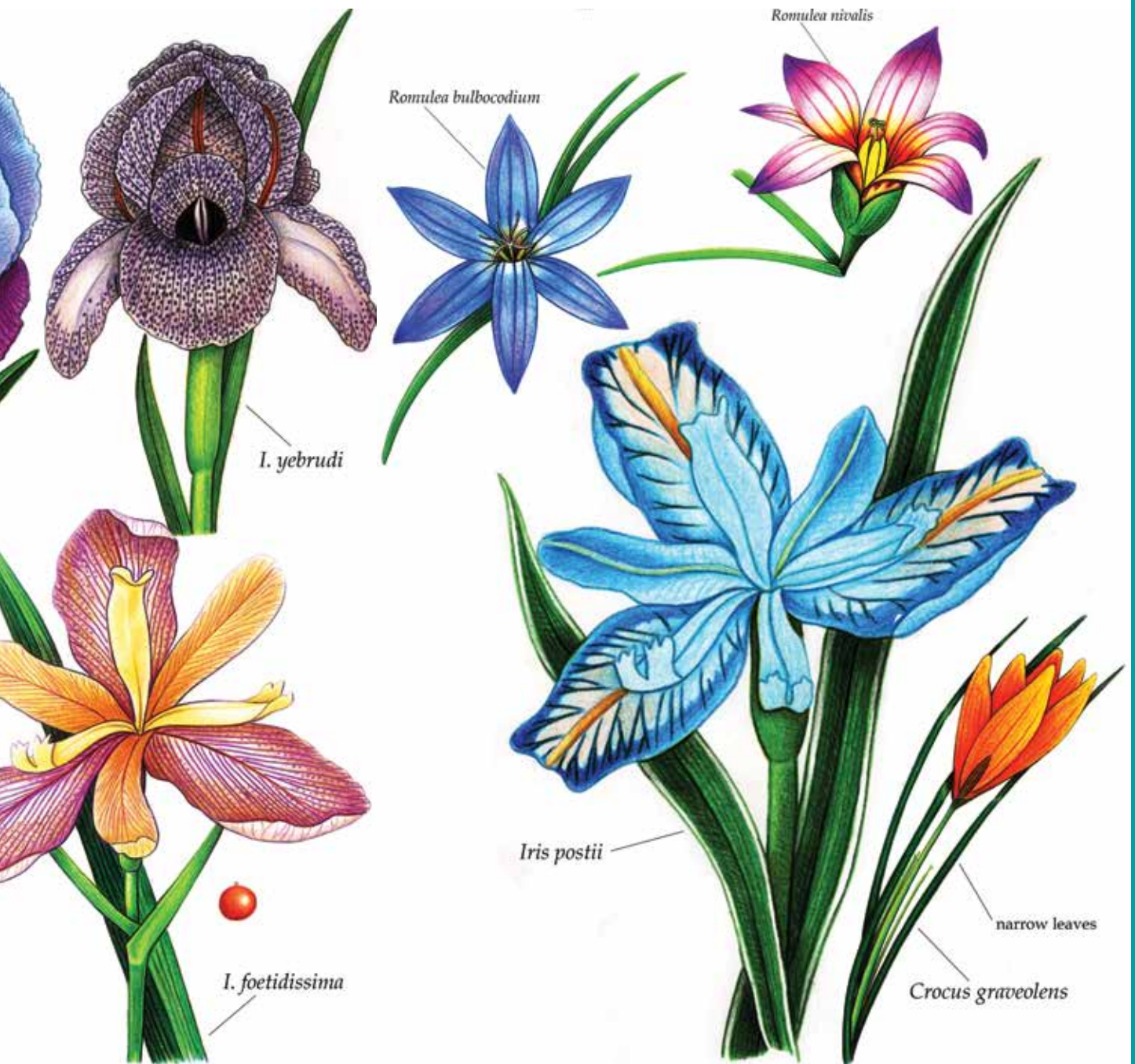


みどり賞
受賞者



ILLUSTRATING BIODIVERSITY MERGING SCIENCES AND ART







Byblos WHS

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, CONSERVATION, AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY SPNL'S CORE VALUES

By Maya Badran

Background

SPNL's mission is to protect preserve and enrich the biodiversity of Lebanon., and lead on the expansion of Hima community-based protected areas. SPNL was able to perform many success stories during this year that were divided under three pillars; Organizational Development, Conservation, and Financial Sustainability. Sigrid Rousing Trust (SRT) has continued supporting SPNL for the second year in its grant. The funding is being utilized in strengthening the institutional foundation of SPNL, specifically its organizational building, conservation capacity, and financial capability.

SPNL was able to create new opportunities, and new plans that will be implemented in the coming years with the support of the Sigrid Rousing Trust and to the other donors.

Organizational Development

Back to September 2019, SPNL has developed a new Development strategy 2020–2030 and following the revision of its strategic functions we continued working on our 2030 strategy in 2024 on several dimensions to generate increased impacts and successes

In reference to our strategy a Health check system was implemented and completed at the beginning of the year of 2024 for the entire team. This health check will be done on yearly basis to evaluate our team performance

To address gaps in our organizational development, SPNL was able this year to work on a new per diem policy to provide a clear image and numbers for the per diem procedure during our staff trips.

To motivate SPNL team members to work more and compensate them for their work we decided to do a Homat Al Hima Award this year. It was a democratic vote with the presence of the SPNL team that voted for the already-nominated team members. The idea was to have a Homat Al Hima award that is a way to promote good work, democratic spirit, motivation, hard work, dedication, and passion.



The annual Dubai Lynx Awards © dubailynx.com

Conservation

SPNL's main goal for the upcoming years is to have support to the local community in Lebanon by resolving potential conflicts over the sustainable use of natural resources and promoting the revival of the Hima system to develop community-based protected areas and include our local communities in it through Homat el Hima program.

the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) and The Homat Alhima International (HHI) have launched an environmental campaign, "Endangered Voices" in cooperation with Leo Burnett Dubai office, the campaign kicked off on 22 December 2023 and supported the HHI's pledge to save endangered, vulnerable, and threatened species, this campaign is based on recreating the sonic identities of the world's biggest brands as the sounds of endangered animals. We invite these brands to buy the endangered voices for a sum they wish to donate to conserve the endangered species. On social media, we appeal to the brands and invite them to use the new sonic identities to raise awareness about endangered animals and buy tunes to donate to conserve these species.



Maya Badran
Head of
Organisational
Development Dept.
and HR

On the 27th of April 2024 Under the Hima approach and with the primary objective of safeguarding the exceptional nature and biodiversity in the Upper Beirut River Valley, SPNL and the municipality of Ras El Matn organized an event, "Towards a Natural Park in the Upper River Valley," under the patronage of H.E. Minister of Environment Dr. Nasser Yassine and the presence of the MP Hadi Abou El Hassan. The main objective of this event was to recognize the need to establish the first natural park in the region. The Park will have a total area spans [70 sqKm] including 14 municipalities, the establishment of the natural park will not only contribute to the conservation efforts but will also create opportunities for sustainable nature-based tourism, enhancing the economic prosperity of the region.

The natural park provides individuals with an opportunity to take a break, connect with nature, improve physical fitness, and relax. Moreover, the inherent beauty of nature within the park will serve as a source of artistic, creative, and spiritual inspiration for visitors. This event is a special opening door for a very unique protection approach

in Lebanon. With the support of SRT and other donors we are dreaming of the first national park together!

SPNL also recognizes the importance of education and capacity building in developing the knowledge, values, and behaviors of children, youth and women that supports nature conservation by building pro-environmental profiles to lead on the management of their Hima and help implement it elsewhere. SPNL was working closely with youth by doing several workshops in universities like MUBS, and scout visits to SPNL center to increase awareness among them. Children were also part of SPNL strategy with our SNOW program, during this year many sessions and activities were conducted with more than 500 kids about: recycling, water, birds, animal monitoring, plants, mammals, biodiversity values, etc.

SPNL was able to publish several guides and magazines this year. SPNL published the third issue of Al Hima magazine. The cover story is about Hima Trails for Peace, which connects 31 Himas established by SPNL across Lebanon in cooperation with municipalities and local communities. These ancient trails enhance local tourism by focusing on each region's natural, cultural, and historical uniqueness.

Financial Sustainability

A main concern and challenge for SPNL was the socio-economic crisis due to the war and the banking situation Lebanon is passing through, SPNL has been able to secure its future plans with new projects and donor relationships in addition to working on its financial sustainability strategy

SPNL has been focusing on enhancing its fundraising effectiveness to fuel the delivery of its Strategy, and has worked on several points to support the financial sustainability of the organization.

Our communication team has worked on enhancing our fundraising section over the website and in our center and we were able to get many funds.

SPNL also continued implementing its



Towards a Natural Park in the Upper River Valley event

development plan by getting SPNL team closer to Hima communities. One of our success stories was reinforcing our Hima centers, an office in Souk el Ghareb Area was offered to us with no additional cost, the office is managed and held by our souk el hima manager who is also a leader in the women association of Souk el Ghareb

Last but not Least, implementing Souk el Hima Marketing Plan helps us also maintain financial sustainability in SPNL; by marketing publications on SPNL web, placing our Hima Market in the Shopping tab on Google channel and marketing at Beirut outlets especially hotels, and our next step is to start targeting airport outlets.



Hima Hammana covered with snow



Egyptian vulture © Boris Belchev

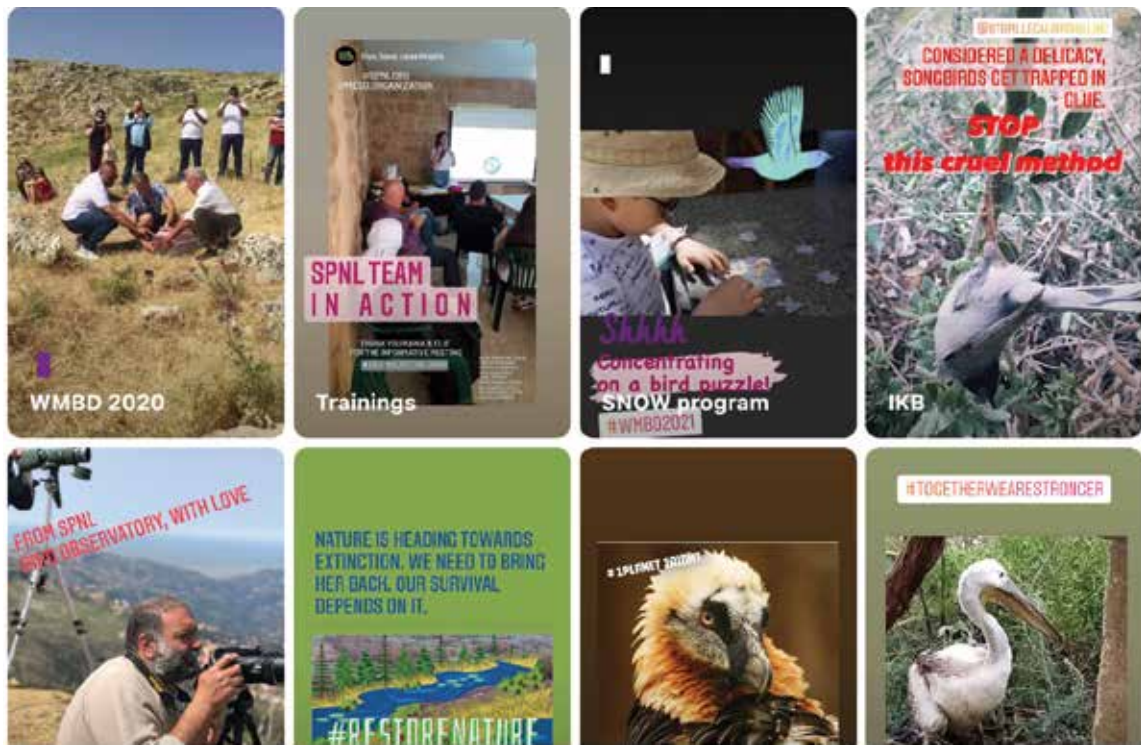
MAXIMIZING THE IMPACT OF SPNL THROUGH STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND DIGITAL TOOLS A 2024-2025 APPROACH

By Bassam Al Kantar

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) plays a vital role in preserving Lebanon's natural heritage through community-based conservation models, including the Hima system. With the advancement of digital communication tools and an increasing reliance on social media, SPNL is uniquely positioned to expand its reach, foster public engagement, and amplify its conservation message. By leveraging an effective communication strategy, SPNL can drive awareness and support for its projects, centers, and Hima sites, ensuring these initiatives have local and global impact.

1. Harnessing Social Media and Digital Presence for Targeted Outreach

SPNL's social media presence plays an indispensable role in reaching its target audience, which includes local communities and international conservation stakeholders. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube allow SPNL to showcase its conservation work, promote its Hima sites, and engage with supporters



in real-time. Through these platforms, SPNL reaches a diverse audience, including local communities living in or near Hima sites, potential donors, volunteers, governmental bodies, and international NGOs focused on conservation.

In addition to social media, SPNL's **interactive website** is a central hub for all its digital communications. The website provides users with detailed information on SPNL's projects, events, publications, and ongoing efforts to protect nature in Lebanon. The interactive features, such as online donations, volunteer sign-ups, and updates from field sites, ensure that the website is functional and engaging. Furthermore, the website is an educational platform, offering resources such as reports, articles, and videos demonstrating the organization's achievements and goals. SPNL's communication strategy emphasizes tailoring messages for each platform. On Instagram, the focus is on visually compelling content—such as images of wildlife, landscapes, and community activities—that grabs attention and promotes environmental consciousness. On Facebook, more detailed posts, such



Bassam Al Kantar
Communication
and IT Manager

as stories of local community involvement and updates on project milestones, foster more profound engagement. Twitter is used for quick real-time updates, news highlights, and stakeholders' interactions. YouTube is a repository for SPNL's video content, offering in-depth looks into Hima sites, community activities, and success stories.

2. Strategic Communication for Projects, Centers, and Hima Sites (2024-2025)

SPNL's communication strategy for 2024-2025 is designed to provide **strategic and practical communication solutions** tailored to the needs of individual projects, centers, and Hima sites. The overarching goal is to communicate the importance and success of conservation efforts effectively, ensuring that each audience understands the role they can play in preserving Lebanon's natural environment.

One of the critical elements of this strategy is the **promotion of Hima's best practices**. The Hima system, which involves community-based conservation management, has proven to be effective in balancing conservation with sustainable livelihoods. SPNL's

communications team is actively working to highlight the successes of the Hima sites through data-driven storytelling. By presenting precise, quantitative results—such as the number of species protected, hectares of land conserved, or livelihoods improved—SPNL can demonstrate the tangible impact of its work.

The strategy also includes a focus on **personalizing communications** for specific projects. For instance, when communicating about the restoration of a wetland, the focus may be on the ecosystem services it provides, the biodiversity it supports, and how local communities benefit from its protection. In contrast, for a project focusing on eco-tourism, the messaging may emphasize the economic opportunities created for local communities and the sustainable use of natural resources.

3. Press Coverage: A Tool for Amplification and Accountability

Gaining **press coverage** is essential for amplifying impact and ensuring transparency in any conservation effort. SPNL recognizes the importance of press engagement as a means to extend the reach of its message beyond its core audience. Adequate press coverage helps SPNL connect with the general public, governmental authorities, and international audiences, ensuring that the importance of conservation in Lebanon is widely understood.

For the 2024-2025 period, SPNL is investing in strengthening its relationships with key media outlets and journalists specializing in environmental issues. Through strategic **media kits**, press releases, and timely updates, SPNL ensures that each project milestone is shared with the press. Furthermore, the organization proactively invites journalists to visit Hima sites, attend project launches, and participate in eco-tourism activities, allowing them to experience firsthand the positive impact of SPNL's work.

However, achieving press coverage goes beyond merely reaching out to journalists. SPNL's communication team is trained to

understand the media landscape, ensuring that press outreach is **targeted and timely**. For example, when a new species is discovered, or an endangered species are protected in a Hima site, press releases are drafted and distributed promptly, taking advantage of the public's interest in environmental success stories. The team also considers the regional and international press to ensure Lebanon's environmental efforts gain recognition beyond its borders. While press coverage is highly desirable, SPNL understands that it may only sometimes be possible or necessary for all activities. When press coverage could interfere with sensitive operations or community relationships, the communication strategy is adapted to focus on internal or stakeholder-specific updates instead.

4. Internal Communication: Ensuring Consistency Across the Organization

A key pillar of SPNL's communication strategy is its focus on **internal communication**. Ensuring consistency in messaging across the board is crucial for an organization with diverse projects and partnerships. SPNL's internal communication processes are designed to ensure that all members, staff, and partners are aligned in their approach to media relations and public outreach.

Regular internal meetings, updates, and communication briefings ensure that all team members know ongoing projects and the best communication practices for each. A **centralized communication guide** helps staff understand the tone, language, and messages that should be used when engaging with the media, ensuring a unified voice across all public communications. By maintaining an open and transparent internal communication culture, SPNL ensures that its staff and partners feel empowered to represent the organization in the media accurately and confidently.

5. Highlighting Hima's Best Practices and Achievements

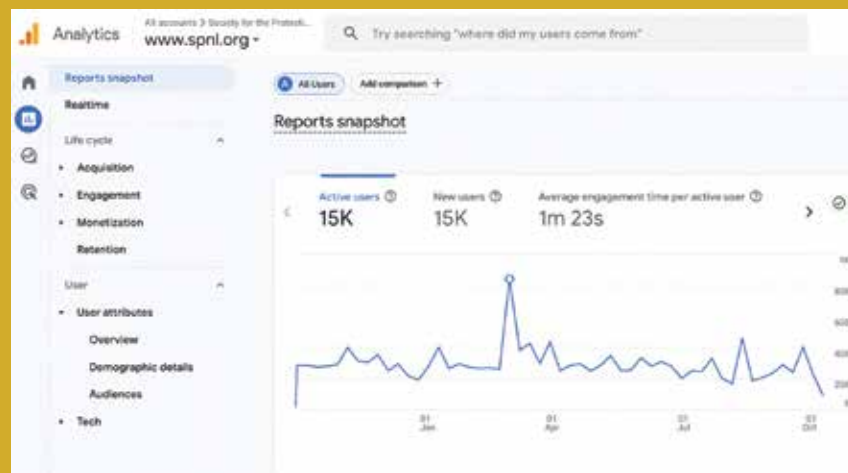
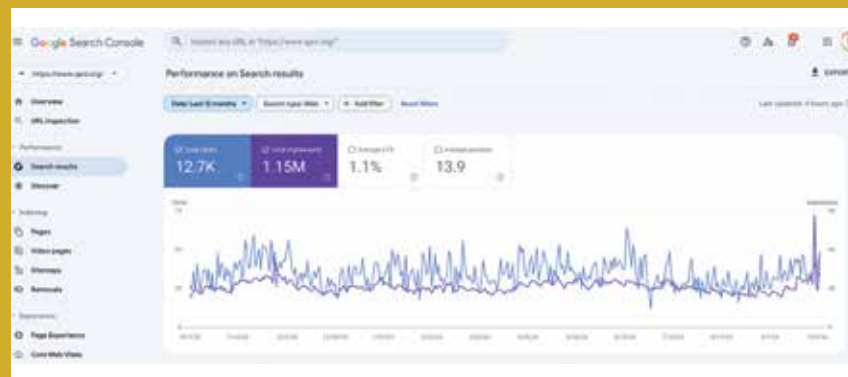
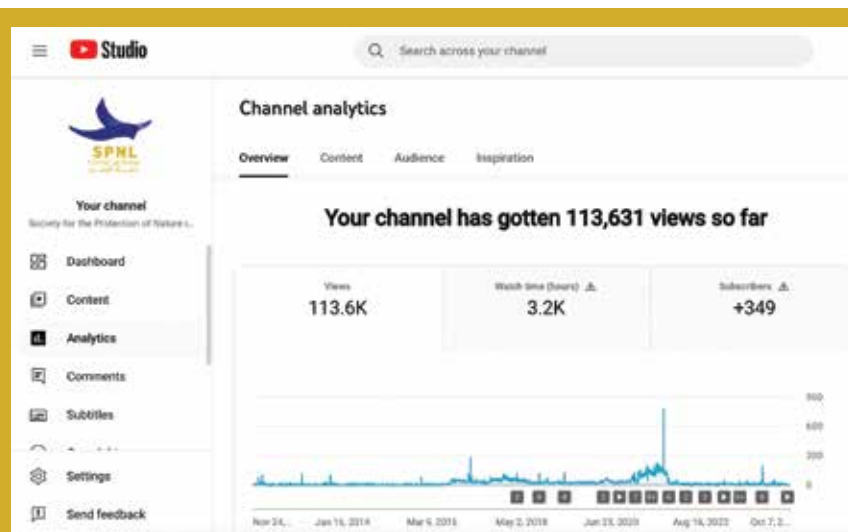
One of the most potent aspects of SPNL's communication strategy is its focus on **communicating the positive outcomes**

of its projects and Hima's best practices. At every stage of its operational work, SPNL is committed to highlighting the successes and lessons learned, using qualitative and quantitative data to reinforce its messages. For example, when SPNL rehabilitates a Hima site, the communication team ensures the process is documented and shared. They gather **before-and-after photos**, interview community members and conservation experts, and compile species recovery, land restoration, and community engagement statistics. This data-driven approach underscores the effectiveness of SPNL's work and builds trust with stakeholders, donors, and the general public.

The consistent communication of results and real-life stories from the communities living within Hima sites reinforce a sense of **concreteness and credibility**. By focusing on tangible results and local success stories, SPNL strengthens its position as a leading conservation organization in Lebanon.

Conclusion

In an increasingly digital world, SPNL's communication strategy for 2024-2025 leverages the power of social media, press engagement, and internal communication to amplify its impact. Through tailored messaging for each project and Hima site, SPNL ensures that its conservation work resonates with its target audience and reaches new supporters. The strategic use of press coverage further amplifies SPNL's work, while consistent internal communication guarantees a unified voice across the organization. By highlighting the positive outcomes of its projects with concrete data, SPNL continues to build a strong foundation for its conservation efforts and maintain its position as a leader in protecting Lebanon's natural heritage.





Connecting natural and cultural heritage through the Hima revival - Hima Anfeh © Rita Kalindjian

AL-HIMA MAGAZINE 2024

By Raghida Haddad

SPNL published two issues of its biannual *Al-Hima* magazine in 2024, in spite of the hostilities that devastated Lebanon. This is not surprising, as the Lebanese people never lost hope nor retreated in despair in the darkest of circumstances. Neither did SPNL, helping displaced citizens while implementing its environmental and development agenda. The crisis will end ultimately, and the land will remain a refuge and life-line for the people. SPNL will always be a pioneer in protecting nature and improving the livelihoods of local communities, with the dedication of its multidisciplinary team and in cooperation with local, regional and international partners.



Issue #3:

Hima Trails for Peace connecting protected areas

The third issue of *Al Hima* magazine, published in May 2024, featured Hima Trails for Peace, connecting 33 Himas (protected areas) established by SPNL across Lebanon in cooperation with municipalities and local communities. These revived ancient trails enhance local tourism focusing on the natural, cultural and historical uniqueness of each region.

The issue highlighted BioConnect project for managing sites of environmental importance, establishing new protected areas in southern Lebanon, and linking protected areas, supported by the European Union. SPNL is a partner in this project and focuses on seven Hima sites within its scope: Kherbet Qanafar and Ain Zebdeh in West Bekaa, Hammana and Ras Al Matn in Mount Lebanon, Qoleileh and Mansouri in southern coast, and Ebel Es Saqi near Marjeyoun in the south.

Another project that SPNL is implementing in partnership with the European Union is protecting endangered Egyptian vultures on their migration route between Europe and Africa. The issue includes an interesting story about five wounded vultures rescued from poachers and sent to the Prague



Raghida Haddad
Editor-in-chief of
Al Hima magazine



Zoo, where they entered a captive breeding program.

Al Hima is full of beautiful stories about thinking and working locally and globally to protect nature while improving the lives of communities. Since 2004, SPNL has been working to revive the Hima approach -- protected areas where communities live and meet their needs without depleting their natural environment, while adopting a sustainable economic model. Homat Al Hima International (HHI) was recently established with offices in several countries, aiming at exporting the Hima model internationally. An article was designated to present consulting services provided by the HHI group of experienced experts and consultants. Another article highlighted the Endangered Voices international advertising campaign in cooperation with the Leo Burnett, calling on international brands to contribute to the protection of threatened species.

Other topics included: Hima and social innovation from a civilizational perspective, the oldest mosquito in the world is trapped in Lebanese amber, Mongolia the land of blue skies, exploring Kazakhstan with Vostok, Oman's Trails, the Hima market, the annual Hima forum, in addition to launching the first natural park project in

Lebanon and the region, the Beirut River Valley - Upper Matn, based on a successful Hima model.

In his editorial entitled Reserves and Himas Are the Lungs of Lebanon, Asaad Serhal, SPNL Director General and HHI founder and chairman, narrated SPNL's history, its role in establishing reserves in Lebanon during the past forty years in cooperation with environmentalists, authorities and international organizations, and focusing since the 1990s on reviving the Hima system. Serhal concludes: "We have great hopes for a better future for wildlife, nature and people in Lebanon, thanks to the efforts of dedicated custodians in environmental NGOs, reserves, himas and natural parks, and linking them together through the Hima Trails program and the BioConnect project."

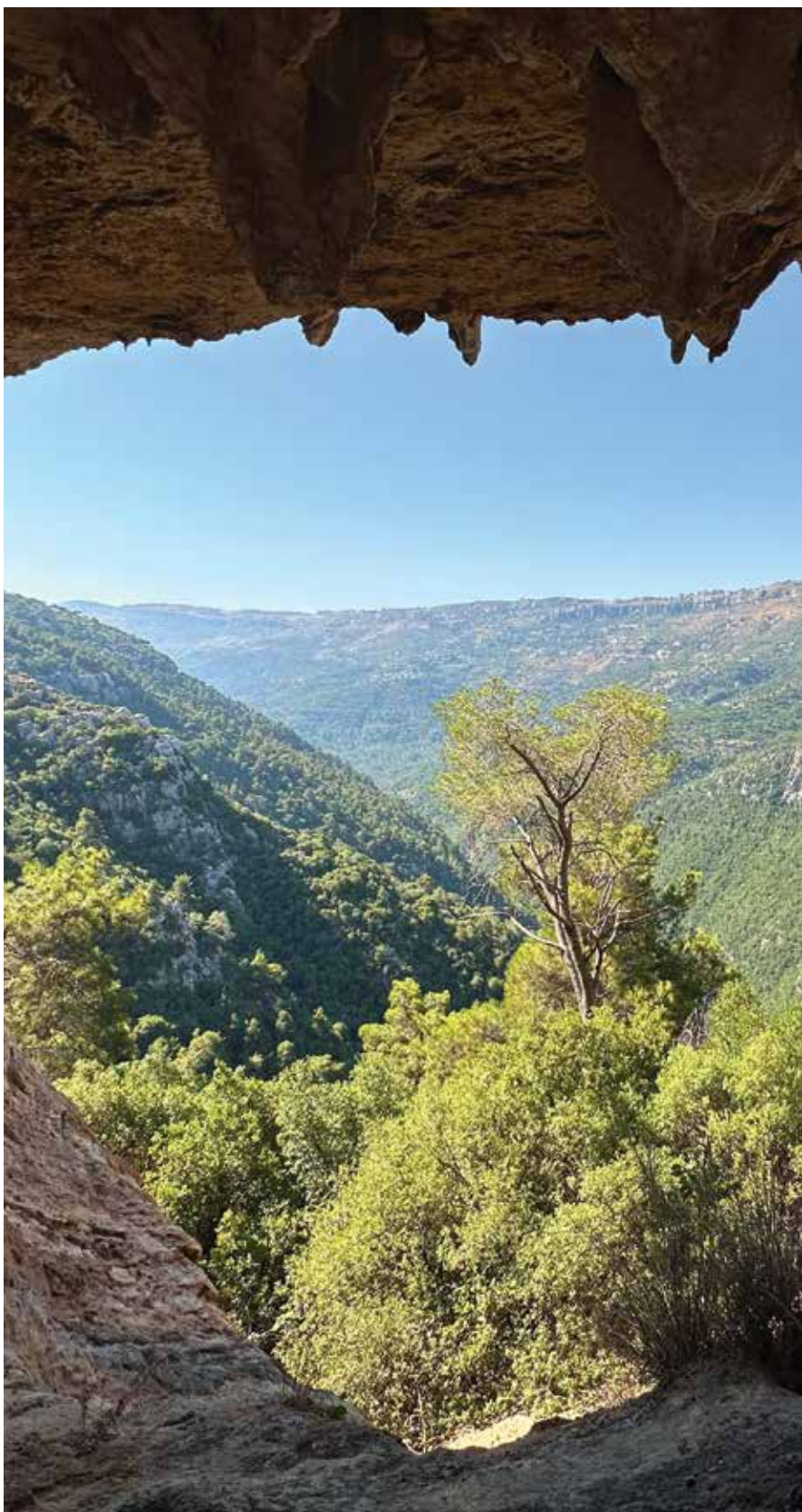
Issue #4:

Bird conservation and responsible hunting areas

Protecting migratory birds and allocating areas for responsible hunting were the main topics of the fourth issue of *Al Hima*, published in October 2024, coinciding with the autumn migration. Lebanon is located on one of the most important migration routes in the world, with millions of birds passing over it twice a year, every spring and fall, between Europe, West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, many of which are endangered species or significantly declining in numbers.

Asaad Serhal, SPNL's Director General, stated in his editorial: "An estimated 2.6 million birds are illegally shot over Lebanon every year, according to documentations by SPNL and BirdLife International. Both organizations have been working tirelessly for four decades to mitigate and prevent the decimation of bird populations and habitats in Lebanon and the Middle East region."

"More recently, SPNL has been promoting the concept of responsible hunting areas," Serhal added. "SPNL has established 33 Himas (protected areas) across Lebanon, covering more than 6 percent of its territory and representing the country's top import-





ant bird and biodiversity areas. Responsible hunting areas can be a valuable addition for Lebanon to realize the Global Biodiversity Framework's ambitious 30x30 target, with protected sites comprising 30% of its area," he concluded.

In a special commentary, Sami Dimassi, UNEP's Representative and Regional Director for West Asia, noted that "Lebanon has become a major hotspot of illegal bird killing and the fourth most dangerous country in the Mediterranean in terms of the number of birds killed."

The fourth issue of *Al-Hima* was in partnership with the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS), specialized in international anti-poaching operations and investigations in hotspots of illegal bird hunting and trapping, combatting wild bird trafficking networks and providing expert advice to the customs and appropriate governmental regulatory bodies. Several success stories in the issue featured the organization's operations in Lebanon, Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Italy, France, Spain and other countries.

The issue also highlighted Hima Anjar, a very good example of the harmonization of cultural heritage protection with conservation of nature in Lebanon and the Middle East. It is based on the Hima concept, a traditional Arab type of community conserved area revived by SPNL, using intercultural and interreligious approaches.

Other topics in the issue included: Important bird and biodiversity areas in Lebanon, the Rare Bird Club, establishing a network of marine protected areas in Lebanon, West Asia's habitat degradation crisis, wildlife crimes, reviving Anfeh's fishing legacy, Shimplan the Hima Village, UN-HABITAT project bringing Beirut River back to life, sea turtle conservation in the Mediterranean hotspot, return of the monk seal, Saudi reserves combating climate change, Hima Vs. Nature Reserve, conquering Europe's highest peak, Souk Al Hima.

Al Hima magazine archive:
www.spnl.org/category/al-hima-magazine/

Nature based tourism in Hima Ras El Matn © Ghada Makarem



NATURE AND CULTURE ARE TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN





Syrian Serin feeding on insects provided by crevices of Umayyad walls - Hima Anjar

HIMAS AS A TOOL FOR BOOSTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

By Bassima Khatib

SPNL, the BirdLife partner in Lebanon, has a long experience in scientific research (mainly avifauna and biodiversity), education and awareness, advocacy and networking, and community development. The main programme for BirdLife International partners is the Important Bird Areas programme. SPNL adopts scientific field research in order to identify IBAs/KBAs in Lebanon comparing the results to internationally adopted criteria. In collaboration with ARocha Lebanon, SPNL identified 15 IBAs distributed all over the country and diversified in habitats, ecosystems, social and cultural assets. Recently Rachaya has been nominated as an IBA and declared by BirdLife International thus the total became as 16 IBAs for Lebanon.

Ever since its establishment in 1986, SPNL advocated the establishment of protected areas and initiated with the Ministry of Environment the protected areas in Lebanon. After twenty years of experience working with nature reserves through government agencies, SPNL is now reviving and advocating the Hima community based conservation approach that has been prevalent in the Arabic region for more than 1500 years, for the conservation of key biodiversity areas.

SPNL has a solid experience in rural development and livelihood enhancement through community based approaches. Since 2004, SPNL has been promoting the "Hima" community based approach for the conservation of key biodiversity sites in collaboration with municipalities-local authorities. This approach concentrates on the involvement of local communities in decision making, promotes sustainable use of natural resources, and supports poverty alleviation through providing alternatives for income generation.

Since 2004, SPNL has re-established 32 HIMAs officially established in Lebanon by SPNL and declared on municipal land in collaboration with municipalities-local authorities (through municipal decisions); namely: Ebel es-Saqi and Arnoun in South of Lebanon, Anjar and KfarZabad wetland in Central Bekaa Valley, West Baalback,



Mixed Egrets in Hima Mansoura lake



Bassima Khatib
Head of Nature
Conservation
Department

Qoleileh and Mansouri in the southern coast, Maabour Alabiad in Upper Akkar, Andket in Akkar, Menjez and Charbein in Upper Hermel-, Jdeidet El-Fakiha in North Bekaa, Roum and Qaytouli in Jezzine, AinZebdeh & Kharebet Anafar, Mansoura, Qaroun, Aitanit, Rashaya & Ain Horshe in West Bekaa, Tarshish, Aakoura, Kayfoun, Chemlan, Kfar Matta, Ras Al Maten and Hammana, Baysour and Obeidieh, Jdeidet Chouf, and Baakleen in Mount Lebanon, and Anfeh in Keserwan. Himas concentrate on empowering local communities, upgrading their quality of life and improving their livelihood in addition to promoting the sustainable use of the natural resources in collaboration with the municipalities and local communities.

This is a great achievement as Himas currently cover around 6% of Lebanon contributing to the 30/30 obligation for the Global Biodiversity Framework-GBF.



SPNL is merging the traditions and values of the Hima approach with the modern scientific techniques, such as identification of ecological sites, stakeholder analysis, and using participatory approaches for involving the local communities from the visioning, planning, and implementation. Hima projects concentrates on scientific research (social & ecological), situation analysis, and developing management plan for the Hima sites that takes into consideration poverty alleviation & providing alternative ecologically friendly job opportunities for the local communities that raises their livelihood and quality of life (such as ecotourism, Bed & breakfast facilities, visitor centers, guiding in nature, cultural artisana and food,...).

SPNL builds its interventions based on the situation analysis and community needs. It also promotes the establishment of partnerships / or multi-stakeholder platforms that involve different partners & stakeholders on the ground.

The Hima approach concentrates on the involvement of the local community through its participatory framework. It makes sure to involve under-privileged groups such as women and youth, and concentrates on their empowerment to be active members in the society. SPNL applies gender sensitive planning and targeting to make sure women are well served in development programs. Women committees and cooperatives are an example of social assets promoted by SPNL.

SPNL has developed 6 programmes under the Hima programme, namely: Hima School (children education), Homat Hima (youth capacity building), Souk Hima (market for local community products and services), Hima to Hima (promoting ecotourism), and Hima Farm programmes (promoting Good Agricultural practices), and Hima for Peace (connecting villages through common environmental background).

SPNL has been advocating for the promotion of the Hima concept on national, regional, and international basis. It is adopted by the Ministry of Environment



within the national law for protected area management in Lebanon (Law 130/2019), and adopted by BirdLife International, IUCN, MedWet, WANA Forum,... Also SPNL was the leader for the establishment of the "Hima Fund" in Qatar for the conservation of Hima and Globally Threatened Species. Another achievement was the adoption of Motion 122, for promoting and supporting community based resource management and conservation (including Al Hima), by the IUCN during its 5th World Conservation Congress in Jeju- South Korea during September 2012, which was co-presented by SPNL and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water in Austria. SPNL was awarded in June 2013 the BirdLife Partnership Award for the revival of the Hima approach and contributing to improving hunting management in Lebanon, in addition to the Best Practices Award from the UN-Habitat and Dubai Municipality for preserving the Qolieleh Marine Hima. Lastly, is the Midori Prize from AEON Foundation and CBD in October 2018, President silver medal, IUCN Honorary membership, and last year Lifetime achievements to Nature Conservation by Birdlife International, presented at Birdlife Congress at London, September 2022. The Hima system has proved to be the best solution for sustainable use of natural resources and for the conservation of culture and traditions.



Local Community Maintaining the Wetland



Anjar ruins © R.Prior

PROMOTING CONNECTIVITY BETWEEN WHS AND PROTECTED AREAS: THE CASE OF HIMA ANJAR

The Hima Anjar case study is a very good example of the harmonization of the cultural heritage with the conservation of nature in Lebanon and the Middle East, based on the Hima, an Islamic type of community conserved area revived by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon, using intercultural and interreligious approaches. The site includes a complex of wetlands, which are considered a Key Biodiversity Area, specially for a number of bird species, as well as an outstanding archaeological site: the Islamic Anjar Castle, an UNESCO Cultural World Heritage Site. The Armenian local community, descendants of past century refugees, has played a significantly positive role, inspired by Christian religion and values. A significant part of the conservation management is under the responsibility of Homat al-Hima, volunteers from the local community, working in close collaboration with the concerned national and local institutions.

SPNL is the leader in Hima revival where Himas are declared by municipal decisions aiming towards the sustainability of natural

resources, while nature reserves are established by the government to promote biodiversity conservation. Thus, Hima supports decentralization and sustainable use of resources for the benefit of people and nature.

Hima Anjar

Natural Assets

Anjar wetland is a flood plain including a complex of permanent rivers (Shamsine and Ghazal rivers), seasonal rivers and streams, which provide habitat for different species of flora and fauna, some of them globally threatened, as the breeding European Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) and Syrian Serin (*Serinus syriacus*) bird species (BirdLife RedList, 2020b; Ramadan-Jaradi et al., 2008, 2020). Anjar's eastern communal lands (256 ha), including the lower slopes of the Anti-Lebanon mountain, have been declared an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBBA) category A1 by BirdLife International in 2008 (BirdLife, 2008).

In 2008, Anjar was also declared a Hima by the municipal council in collaboration with SPNL covering the IBBA and the remaining parts of Anjar (Serhal et al. 2010), including the Anjar residential area because the backyard of nearly every house with conifer trees hosts the globally threatened breeding Syrian Serin (Ramadan-Jaradi pers. obs.). In 2016, Hima Anjar was nominated as a Key Biodiversity Area and its Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) is in progress.

Cultural Assets

Anjar include an Umayyad Islamic Castle, an UNESCO Cultural World Heritage site. "The town of Anjar was established during the period Umayyad Caliph Al-Walid Ibn Abd Al-Malak (705-715) as a palace-city. Its name comes from the Arabic Ayn Al-Jaar (fountain from the rock) referring to the streams that flow from the nearby mountains. The ancient Anjar is an example of an inland commercial trading city at the cross-road of important routes to 4 main cities. Since 1939, Anjar is resided by Armenian community who came as refugees from Musa Dagh. They ensured the preservation of this World cultural site in addition to their own Armenian culture also.



Hima Anjar archeological site

SPNL is the responsible NGO for the Hima/IBBA Anjar, including the archaeological site, due to the presence of 29 breeding bird species within its boundary, some of which are globally threatened, biome restricted or rare. Hence, the archaeological site is co-managed by SPNL and the Directorate General of Antiquities.

The Homat Al-Hima consider the Syrian serin their symbol (Ramadan-Jaradi, G., 2016), they are aware of the inter-relation between biodiversity and cultural sites and they intent to transmit this knowledge to visitors. Moreover, Homat Al-Hima act as a bridge of knowledge transfer between visitors and locals of Anjar.

Pressures and Impacts

Tourism and agriculture are the main economic activities of Anjar. Clients of hotels and restaurants are attracted by the local gastronomy (delicacy and diversity of food) as well as by the generosity of the Armenian owners. The growing activities foreseen in the near future are eco, cultural

and agricultural tourism. Homat Al Hima takes care of the site especially the ruins of Anjar as the main area for Syrian serin through weeding, cleaning from trash, and preventing hunting practices.

When the Armenian refugees were brought to Anjar, the area was an inhospitable terrain—rocky, swampy, and thorny, with scorching summers and freezing winters. By time, the community transformed wetlands into agricultural lands and used forest wood for heating; thus leading to loss of habitats and degradation. Nowadays, SPNL and the municipality of Anjar are involved in the restoration of the forest cover and its biodiversity in collaboration with AFDC and LRI to protect fragile soils, scenic beauty, as well as to preserve downstream water resources which feed the area. This in addition to the construction of hotels and restaurants, which may cause loss of habitat and pollution. For this reason, modern restaurants are located at the periphery of Anjar. The garbage generated by some tourists is regularly cleaned by the municipality of Anjar.

Most of the prevailing economic activities of Anjar have positive impacts on the site conservation, including agricultural and forest activities. The reforestation with stone pine trees (*Pinus pinea*) is another economic activity aiming at producing pine nuts that are expected to generate a significant income in the near future. Cultural tourism to the Umayyad ruins and artifact shops near its entrance are also part of the economic activities. Eco-tourism involves observing biodiversity (mostly birdwatching through hiking trails, boats, camping etc).

In the near past, there was a conflict between the otter (*Lutra lutra*) and the aqua-culturists of one restaurant because of its raids on the trout in the breeding ponds. However, after the establishment of the Hima Anjar, the increased number of the otter-watchers pleased the restaurant owners who changed attitudes, and started dealing with this species in a friendly way, offering the otter food, so as to appear and attract more visitors (Ramadan-Jaradi et al., 2019).



Migrating storks at Hima Anjar ruins

Only the use of herbicides on the trails within the archaeological site deprives the Syrian serin bird from the seeds of his preferred plants (Ghassan Ramadan-Jaradi, pers. obs.). Early 2020, one of us (GR-J) discussed this subject that threatens the Syrian Serin at Anjar with the mayor of the town. The latter thankfully instructed the concerned people to stop using herbicides in the area where the Syrian serin do breed, and to coordinate with Homat Al Hima in order to do the job of clearing the pedestrian path by hand.

The municipality is the local authority that is holding the reins and coordinating with the Internal Security Forces to deter poaching and irregularities on the site.

Conservation Efforts and Sustainability

In Lebanon, the cultural heritage is protected by law. This law is firmly applied at Anjar since the discovery of the Anjar archaeological ruins. The protection is guaranteed by the Ministry of Culture through the municipality of Anjar, although the Department of Urban Planning is also involved.

Preservation of the intangible cultural heritage, including ideas, memories, knowledge, skills, creativity, spirituality, traditions, and other intangible values in conjunction with the places they are associated with Dagh Musa and its six villages has been very effective. Memories of the land of origin have made the refugees dedicated to the conservation of the new land. In the past, they purchased fruit trees and cultivated wheat and barley not only to survive but also to remember their homeland of origin. Today, the same memories and traditions have led the descendants of Armenian refugees to engage with reforestation plans that are supported by SPNL and AFDC. Similarly, the protection of the white storks was triggered by their memories of the fact that these birds could be on their way to breed in Armenia.

Before the middle of the last century, the refugees tended to Umayyad ruins that were neglected at the time, and they dust-

ed, cared for, and protected the ruins from intruders. In return, the government allowed them to manage the ruins site and benefit from the income generated by tourism. As for visitors, they are of all religions, as is the case with tourism in other countries. In 2008, the SPNL declared Anjar, through BirdLife International, an Important Bird Area (IBBA) (BirdLife, 2008) and a Hima declared by the Anjar municipality (2008). Consequently, the whole community of Anjar is nowadays involved in the management of Anjar and its natural and cultural heritage, especially after being trained on the management of the Hima and helped SPNL through projects funded from abroad by international organizations and donors.

Heritage conservation is an evolving practice, and one of the current trends focuses on identifying and recovering the connections between nature and culture. This approach has become instrumental for the interpretation, conservation and sustainable management of both natural and cultural heritage sites. At Anjar the cultural heritage is linked to the lives of communities and is fully integrated into the social, economic and environmental processes, making it an integral part of people's daily experience. Subsequently, any effort aiming at protecting the environment and improving the social and economic wellbeing of local communities should consider their cultural and spiritual heritage. The cultural and spiritual values may offer a remedy when an action is inappropriately used, because both contribute to generate incomes from responsible eco-tourism through a balanced development in the area. For this reason, when some thought of building a restaurant within the forest, the Homat Al-Hima immediately reacted to this idea by emphasizing the importance of the forest in inspiration, tranquility, reflection and comfort.

This explains why when a flock of 16 white storks, in 2015, was flying over Beqaa near Anjar and shooters began shooting at it, the survivors felt themselves safe and



Syrian Serin in Hima KfarZabad

roosted on the monuments of Anjar. The municipality police in collaboration with the local community protected these white storks so as to continue their journey to their breeding areas in Armenia where they nest on chimneys of houses and locals are waiting for their return. Armenians from the local communities said that they protected the storks because they are refugees like them.

Link to the full study:

www.spnl.org/hima-anjar-and-the-umayyad-ruins-natural-and-cultural-values-anjar-west-beqaa-lebanon/





TOWARDS LEBANON'S 1ST NATURAL PARK

Upper Beirut River Valley © Asaad Saleh



Old bridge at Hima Aabadiyeh

UPPER MATN NATURAL PARK A PROMISING CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

By Rania Khalil

Under a unique initiative, SPNL and Ras El Matn Municipality, along with the Ministry of Environment, worked together to start protecting the Upper Beirut River Valley in a new way in Lebanon. Using the approach of working with different villages and regrouping them under a natural park.

A natural park is a protected area having biodiversity value and ecological importance, aiming for long-term land preservation, using sustainable resource management, recreational activities, and the promotion of nature-based tourism by means of long-term land planning, sustainable resource management, and the limitation of agricultural and real estate developments



The Natural Park is a way to gather the local community to work together on the same goals and with a common vision:

- Protect biodiversity and conserve nature.
- Learn the importance of nature's values.
- Increase their capacities and awareness about nature and how to be involved in protection.
- Elaborate clear policies to protect the natural resources in the area.
- Create an economic benefit for the local community: nature-based tourism, jobs, a market for local products, etc.
- Foster and maintain connections between people and between locals and their lands. To know and learn better about their social and cultural values



Rania Khalil
Homat Al Hima
Program Manager



Signature of the Protocol from the mayors © Nabil Makarem



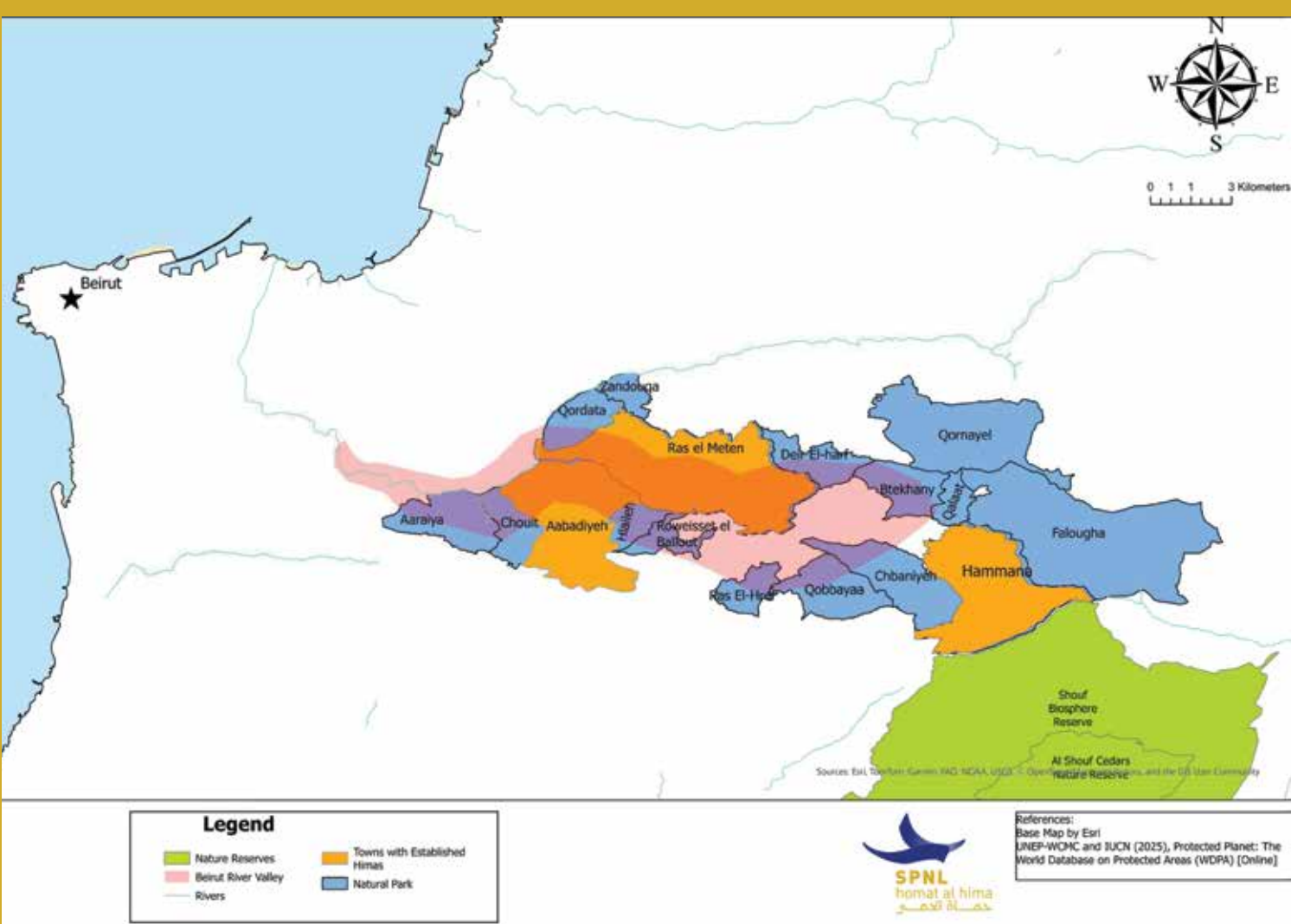
Launching event "Towards a Natural Park"

- It is a place to relax and connect with nature.
- Create a space for local participation and opportunities for opinion and speaking.

This year was the year of development and achievement for this initiative.

- Meeting between SPNL and Ras El Matn municipality to start all the processes
- Contacting and meeting with the interested municipalities
- Coordinating with the Ministry of Environment
- Launching event of the initiative
- Meetings and workshops were organized to elaborate on the official charter that should be presented to the ministries for approval and the official declaration of the Natural Park.
- Start the work on elaborating the management plan and concept notes for potential funding opportunities.

This park will be the first in Lebanon, working hard with all focal points and aiming for a successful initiative to be replicated in different regions.



Upper Matn Natural Park

SPNL UTILIZES INNOVATIVE MAPPING TOOLS TO ADVANCE CONSERVATION INITIATIVES ACROSS LEBANON

SPNL has unveiled the comprehensive use of dynamic mapping tools to enhance its projects, publications, and strategic outreach efforts. These maps, developed by SPNL's skilled team, are integral to the organization's recent reports, including the SPNL Annual Report and publications such as the Hima Magazine and SPNL's official website. According to Assad Serhal, SPNL's General Director, these maps will play a pivotal role not only in informing SPNL's ongoing conservation work but also in shaping the direction of new projects in partnership with international environmental organizations like the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), BirdLife International, SRT, HWF, and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), among other partners and donors.

“The integration of these innovative maps marks a turning point in how we visualize, communicate, and implement our conservation strategies,” said Assad Serhal. “They provide us with a powerful tool to analyze environmental data, identify high-priority areas, and guide the development of sustainable conservation projects. Through these maps, we aim to deepen our understanding of biodiversity needs in Lebanon, especially in critical regions like Mount Lebanon and Byblos, and to bolster our engagement with communities, schools, and other key stakeholders.”

Expanding the Conservation Scope with Interactive and Statistical Mapping

SPNL’s mapping initiative extends beyond simple geographic information. These interactive maps serve as platforms that visualize Lebanon’s natural landscapes and provide statistical insights into the organization’s reach and impact. SPNL can accurately allocate resources and tailor its projects to address specific environmental and community needs by focusing on crucial areas such as Mount Lebanon and the Byblos region.

With these maps, SPNL has crafted a more targeted approach to conservation that supports sustainable development and environmental stewardship across Lebanon. The mapping tool identifies alternative project sites and facilitates real-time data analysis, ensuring that SPNL’s work remains responsive to environmental changes and community needs.

Highlighting the Impact Through Data: Schools, Students, Communities, and More

SPNL’s new maps are not just focused on natural sites but extend their reach to include human engagement data. They feature data on the number of schools, students, and communities targeted by SPNL’s educational and conservation programs, especially those directed at raising awareness on pressing environmental issues. These statistical maps reveal the extent of SPNL’s reach across Lebanon, underlining the organization’s



Hima Ras El Matn © Nabil Makarem

commitment to fostering environmental awareness among the youth and within local communities.

Through SPNL’s interactive maps, communities can view the scope of SPNL’s efforts in their areas, providing them with a sense of involvement and transparency in the organization’s mission. Schools and educational institutions, especially those near Lebanon’s diverse Hima sites, can track how their involvement contributes to broader conservation goals. The data displayed includes the current and projected impact of SPNL’s initiatives for the upcoming years. This feature SPNL believes will reinforce the organization’s capacity to engage more effectively with educational institutions and local communities.

Supporting Hima Sites and Local Farmers

One of the most significant aspects of SPNL's new mapping initiative is its detailed focus on Lebanon's renowned Hima sites. Lebanon has 32 Hima sites, which SPNL has worked tirelessly to conserve and promote. These sites, managed through community-based conservation practices, reflect SPNL's commitment to biodiversity protection, sustainable development, and community engagement. The maps include specific data on the number of Homat al Hima—the guardians of these Hima areas—highlighting their essential role in safeguarding Lebanon's natural landscapes. In addition to Hima guardians, SPNL's maps also showcase data on local farmers who actively contribute to sustainable agriculture within these protected areas. By displaying the number of farmers involved in SPNL's conservation projects, the maps highlight the close relationship between sustainable agriculture and environmental protection. Through their participation, these farmers exemplify the potential for a harmonious relationship between land use and conservation, a model SPNL actively promotes nationwide.

Emergency Planning and Strategic Development

A unique feature of SPNL's mapping system is its use in emergency planning and strategic development. Lebanon's environmental challenges, compounded by socio-economic pressures, demand a proactive approach to conservation that can adapt to changing circumstances. To this end, SPNL's maps include data relevant to emergency response planning, allowing the organization to swiftly identify key areas, schools, and communities that may require immediate attention in times of crisis. These tools also help SPNL forecast potential growth areas regarding community involvement and environmental education, creating a data-backed blueprint for future action.

The maps' analytical capabilities also provide SPNL with vital insights into resource allocation for emergency response initiatives, from schools that serve as focal points for

awareness campaigns to community centers that can support conservation efforts. SPNL aims to leverage this data to ensure that the environment and the communities it serves are protected and resilient in the face of unexpected challenges.

Building Partnerships for a Sustainable Future

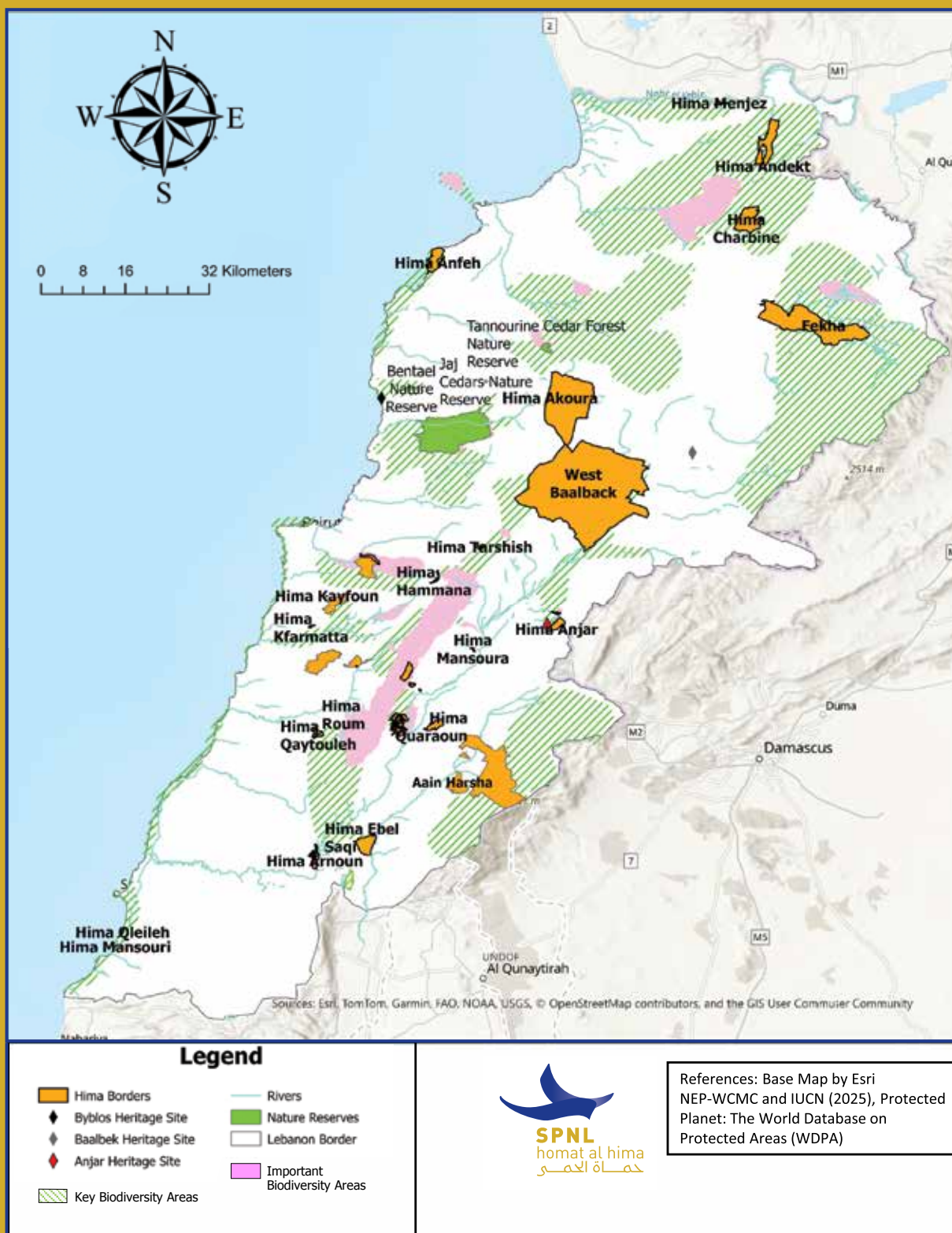
SPNL's collaboration with key environmental organizations and donors like IUCN, BirdLife International, SRT, HWF, and CEPF underpins its ability to effect positive change nationally. These partnerships are instrumental in facilitating SPNL's mission, providing funding, expertise, and global support that enable SPNL to scale its projects and expand its reach.

The development of these maps aligns with SPNL's commitment to transparency and accountability to its partners, donors, and the communities it serves. By offering stakeholders visual access to real-time data and project information, SPNL strengthens its relationships with local and international partners. These maps are valuable assets in SPNL's ongoing fundraising and advocacy efforts, providing an easily understandable representation of the organization's impact and future goals.

Looking Forward: The Role of Technology in Conservation

SPNL's adoption of advanced mapping technology exemplifies the organization's forward-thinking approach to environmental protection. As environmental challenges become increasingly complex, leveraging technological solutions is essential for effective conservation. These maps enhance SPNL's operational efficiency and demonstrate the potential for innovative approaches in conservation work.

As SPNL continues to refine its mapping tools, the organization remains committed to using technology to foster a sustainable relationship between Lebanon's communities and natural landscapes. With data-driven insights guiding its actions, SPNL is well-positioned to lead the way in conservation efforts that prioritize ecological integrity and community well-being.



Map showing all Hima borders while highlighting Important and Key Biodiversity Areas and World Heritage sites across Lebanon



Common Kingfisher - Hima Anfeh © Fouad Itani

A YEAR OF DATA-DRIVEN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

By Yara Alchammas

Strides in data collection and management

While in the year 2023 all of SPNL's past and present data was compiled into a functional and easily accessible database, in 2024, this database was perfected depending on the mapping and reporting needs of SPNL staff. Scientific and international criteria were used to make any extraction, analysis and visual representation from this database as quick and efficient as possible.

Data collection and compilation proved its own importance this year as it was the basis of the submission and the recognition of the Rashaya District as an Important Bird Area (IBA). Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) are sites of international significance for the conservation of the world's birds and other biodiversity. They also provide essential benefits to people, such as food, materials, water, climate regulation and flood protection, as well as opportunities for recreation and spiritual fulfilment. In order for such a recognition to be achieved, substantial data has to be compiled and submitted to BirdLife International regarding the site location and context, its key biodiversity features and

any threats to them, the prevailing habitats and land-use, conservation actions taking place and the presence of any protected areas.

Additionally, this year, an efficient data reporting system was created to be used by the Anti-Poaching Unit, with multiple contact points from the Internal Security Forces (ISF), the Middle East Sustainable Hunting Center (MESHC), and the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS). The creation of an effective reporting system is crucial to the curbing illegal killing of birds in Lebanon because the reception of accurate and timely data on the manner can help pinpoint hotspots, identify the most sought-after species, and allocate the Unit's resources properly. Data reporting also has the potential to lead to international cooperation and support because it provides evidence-based argumentation and reasoning behind policymaking and the root causes of illegal bird killing in the country.

The science of species conservation

Studying the morphology, behavior, and ecology of a wildlife species provides an inside look into its vulnerabilities and its possible need for conservation. Species research is therefore helpful in identifying threats, such as habitat loss, poaching, or climate change, and developing effective conservation strategies for fauna and flora. Furthermore, understanding multiple species in an ecosystem allows conservationists to protect the entire ecosystem rather than focus their efforts and resources on one aspect of it.

The year 2024 was a big year for species research at SPNL as substantial datasets of scientific information on regional fauna and flora species was created to fulfill the needs of two important projects:

1. The Leo Burnett “Endangered Voices” campaign, where the choice of species was backed by robust scientific research on the fauna species of the Middle East with the hopes of grabbing the attention of big brands and achieving lasting conservation results.



Yara Alchammas
Former Biodiversity
Research and Data
Manager



Biodiversity at the Wetland

2. The Souk al Hima program, where species research helped in the choice of species to feature in artisanal work, and also served as the basis of the creation of captivating stories to capture the attention of the public.

Scientific representation in global events and platforms

Research and science were brought to the forefront in the first half of this year as multiple invitations were extended to SPNL to participate in events and workshops on the national, regional and international scales, most notably:

● 2 February 2024: World Wetlands Day held in West Bekaa, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, along with the Arab Network for Environment and Development and the Lebanese Green Party, where students of the Antonine University - Zahle Branch were educated about the importance of wetlands, their various types, and the most important fauna and flora species that can be found at the Ammiq wetlands.

- 7 February 2024: Illegal Killing of Birds Lunch Time Talk where SPNL presented their approach to fighting the poaching of migratory soaring birds over the years.
- 14 March 2024: AUB-NCC and World Bank event on Climate Change activism which featured a wide range of perspectives, emphasizing the importance of a collaborative effort involving various fields and stakeholders to tackle environmental issues.
- 17 April 2024: USJ Roundtable on Geohazards in Lebanon the Association for Community & Environment/ACE and the EU-BioConnect project, and under the patronage of His Excellency Professor Nasser Yassin, Minister of Environment in Lebanon.
- 24 and 25 April 2024: A regional workshop tackling illegal bird trade and hunting in the Middle East, held in Amman, Jordan, spearheaded by BirdLife International and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW).
- 27 April 2024: “Towards a National Park in the Upper Beirut River Valley” event organized by SPNL, and the municipality of Ras El Matn in collaboration with Al Matn Organization for Environment & Sustainable Development (MESD), in Ras el Matn.
- 10, 11 and 12 June 2024: Tour du Valat training workshop on the importance and the methods of the creation of Wetlands Observatories in the Mediterranean region.





Hima Anfeh is a safe haven for endangered marine life



Himas and Species Map 01

MAPPING NATURE'S CONNECTIVITY: SPNL'S VISION FOR LEBANON'S HIMAS

Amid Lebanon's breathtaking landscapes, a unique initiative is bridging the gap between conservation efforts and ecological awareness. Miryam Salloum, Biodiversity Research & Data Manager at the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL), has unveiled a groundbreaking map design that showcases how the Hima approach provides essential connectivity between Lebanon's Nature Reserves, Biosphere Reserves, and Important Bird Areas (IBAs). This map is not just a scientific tool but a visual narrative that captures the essence of Lebanon's rich biodiversity and its interconnected natural systems.

The Hima model, rooted in a centuries-old community-based conservation tradition,

is central to SPNL's mission. By empowering local communities to sustainably manage their natural resources, the Hima approach fosters harmony between people and nature. Salloum's map highlights how Hima sites act as vital ecological corridors, linking protected areas and supporting the movement of wildlife.

At the heart of the map are key Lebanese flora and fauna species, carefully illustrated to emphasize their vital roles in the ecosystem. Iconic birds such as the Northern Wheatear and the striking Syrian Woodpecker highlight Lebanon's rich avian diversity, while mammals like the elusive striped hyena, the resilient Eurasian badger, the majestic grey wolf, and the critically endangered Mediterranean monk seal remind viewers of the country's unique and fragile ecological tapestry. Native flora, including the stunning Sofar iris and the enduring Lebanon cedar, add a touch of botanical splendor, symbolizing the resilience and beauty of the region's natural heritage.

The map's design is rooted in a robust foundation of reliable references, ensuring both accuracy and credibility. The base map is provided by ESRI, a global leader in Geographic Information System (GIS) technology, offering precise geospatial data and visualization. Additionally, the map incorporates data from the Protected Planet: The World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA), an authoritative resource managed by UNEP-WCMC and IUCN. The latest update, from November 2024, provides comprehensive information on protected areas worldwide, enabling Salloum's design to effectively highlight Lebanon's Nature Reserves, Biosphere Reserves, and IBAs within the global context of conservation efforts. This blend of local and international datasets enhances the map's scientific rigor and global relevance.

"This map is a testament to the connectivity that nature needs to thrive," says

Salloum. "It's not just about individual protected areas but the pathways that link them, allowing species to move, migrate, and flourish. Lebanon's Hima sites are the threads that weave this fabric together."

The map also underscores the pressing need for biodiversity conservation in a region facing mounting environmental challenges. Habitat fragmentation, urbanization, and climate change threaten Lebanon's natural treasures. Salloum's map, however, is a beacon of hope, showing how the Hima model offers a scalable and community-driven solution.

Beyond its scientific and educational value, the map is a call to action for policymakers, conservationists, and the public. It highlights the role of local communities in safeguarding biodiversity and the importance of sustainable land use. By visually connecting the dots between Lebanon's diverse habitats, the map inspires a sense of pride and responsibility among its viewers.

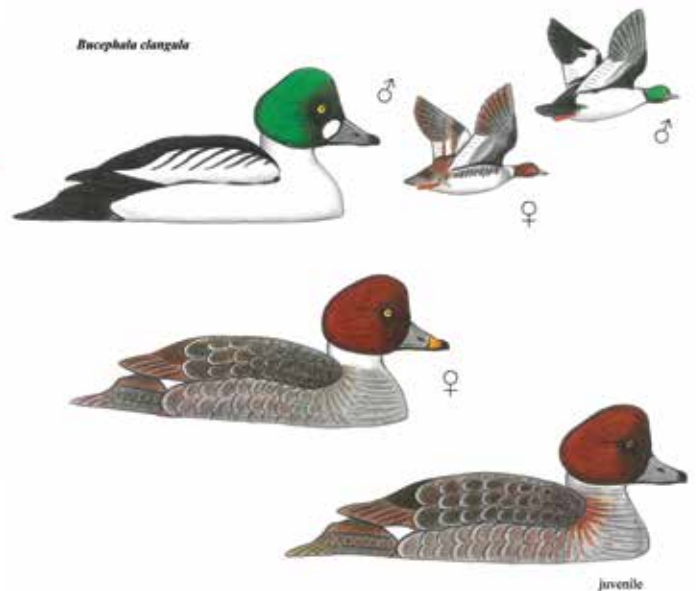
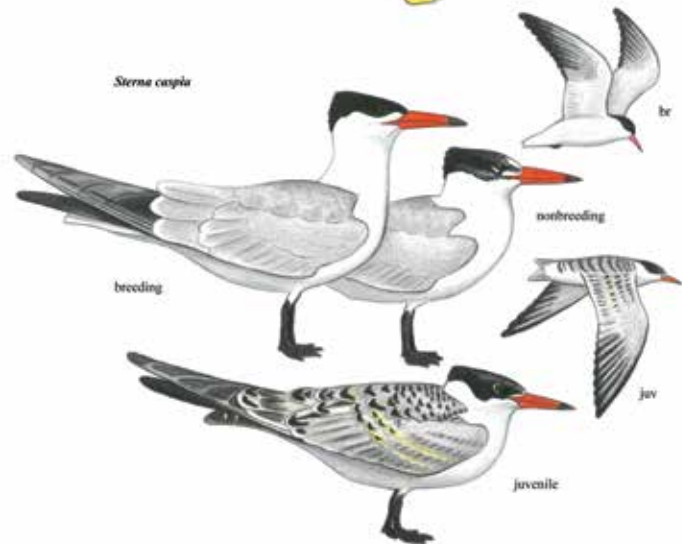
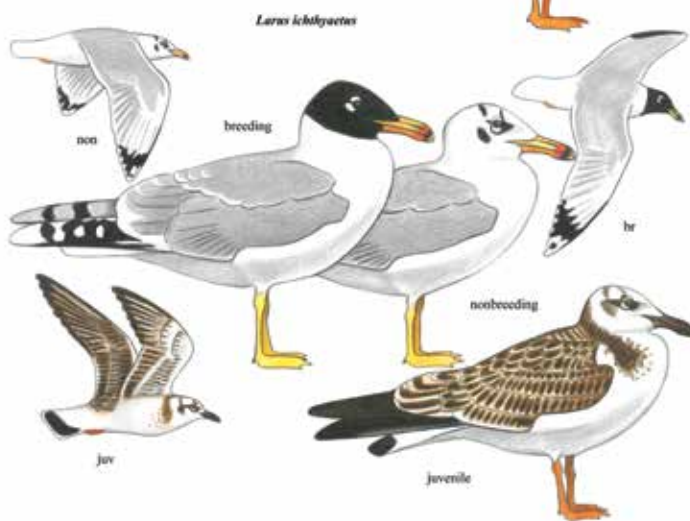
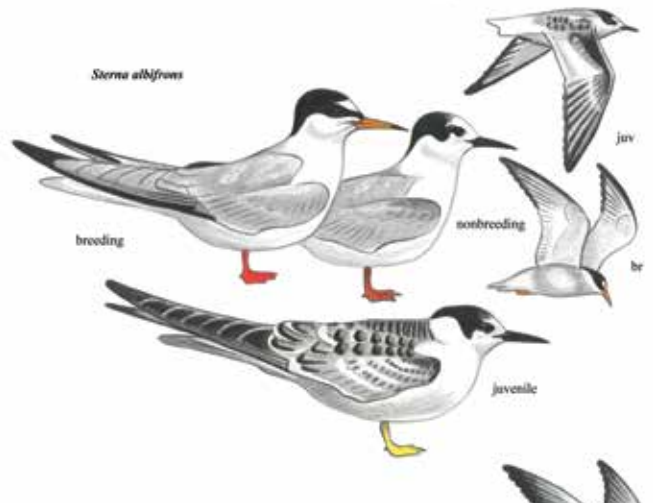
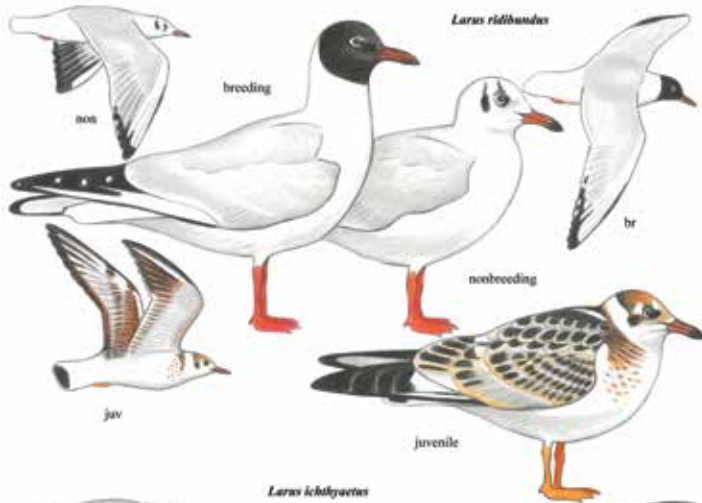
Miryam Salloum's design also bridges art and science. Her meticulous attention to detail ensures that the map is both accurate and aesthetically engaging. Each symbol, color, and line is carefully chosen to resonate with diverse audiences, from researchers and educators to nature enthusiasts.

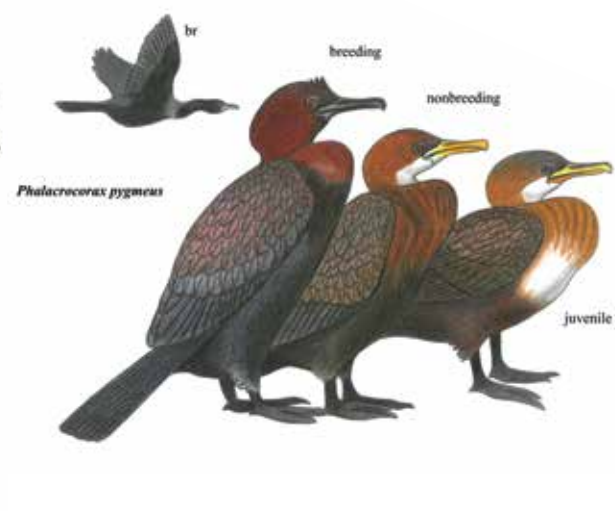
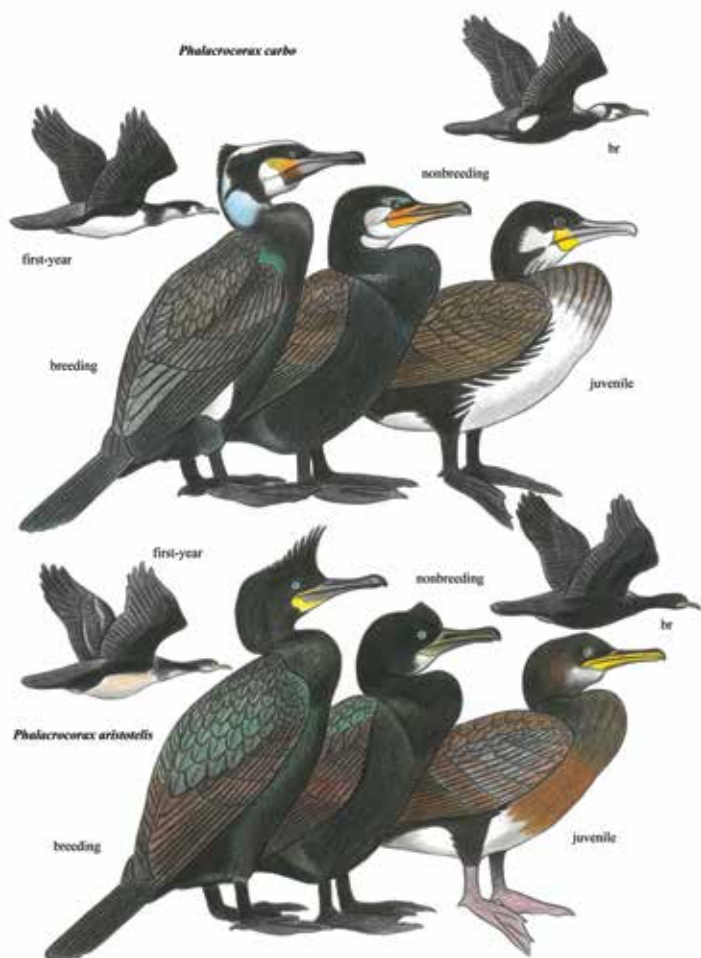
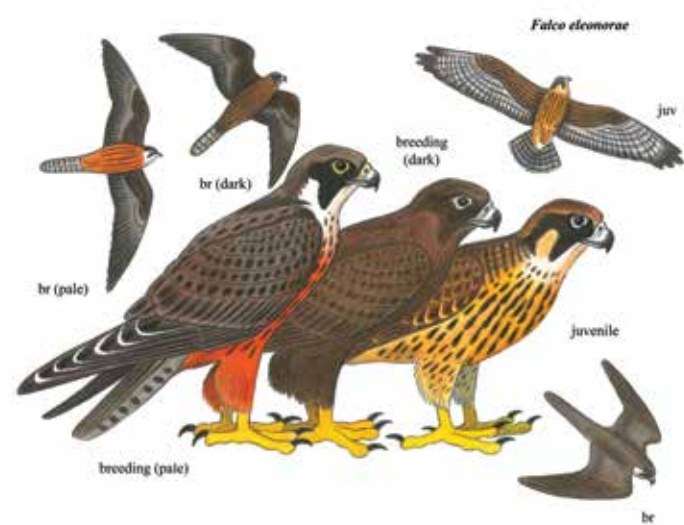
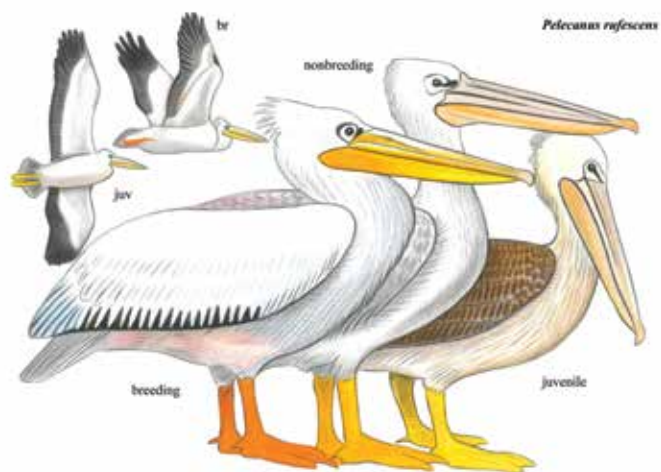
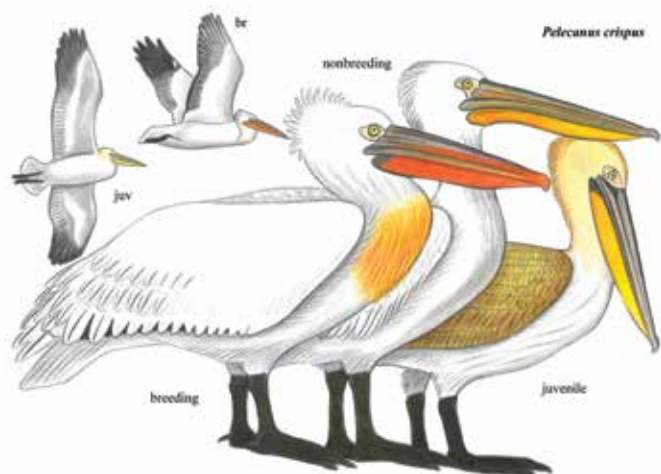
SPNL plans to use the map in schools, environmental campaigns, and stakeholder meetings to promote the Hima approach and encourage collaborative conservation efforts. "We want people to see this map and feel connected to the land, to understand that they are part of this intricate web of life," Salloum adds.

In a world where nature often feels distant, Salloum's map is a reminder that connectivity is key—not just for ecosystems but for the human spirit. By linking Lebanon's natural jewels, it offers a vision of hope, resilience, and unity for future generations.



Miryam Salloum
Biodiversity
Research and Data
Manager







Limesticks removed by SPNL/CABS anti-poaching unit

BIRD SHOOTING AND TRAPPING LEBANON

By Lloyd Scott,

CABS Campaigns and Operations Officer

The eastern Mediterranean is by far the most important migratory flyway for millions of birds passing back and forth each spring and autumn between continental Europe, western Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. As a result of Lebanon's central location along this route, the vast majority of these migratory birds' funnel through Lebanese skies each year. More than 385 bird species have been recorded in the country, and many of which are migratory species threatened with significant population declines or are considered species of international conservation concern. For example, the entire global population of Lesser Spotted Eagles cross the country twice a year!

However, like other areas around the Mediterranean basin, this bi-annual migration has resulted in deep rooted culture of migratory bird hunting and trapping. Unfortunately, conservative estimates suggest that between 2 – 3 million migratory birds fall victim to Lebanese hunters and trappers each year – hunters turned into poachers by a lack of knowledge or appreciation for nature conservation and

sustainable hunting laws. Among the species targeted are birds of prey, storks, pelicans, nightjars, swallows, orioles and bee-eaters, as well as countless numbers of songbirds. Besides shooting birds for sport or personal consumption, industrial scale trapping with gigantic nets and the use of limesticks is also a very big problem. Plucked and frozen songbirds such as blackcap and whitethroats are considered a delicacy in Lebanon and are offered openly by many supermarket chains and restaurants despite an official ban. Shrikes, redstarts, thrushes, flycatchers and many other species are also affected. Goldfinches are not killed but sold on to 'bird lovers' who keep them as cage birds – the market for goldfinches is gigantic in Lebanon. Bird trapping is most concentrated in the region around Baalbek in the northern Bekaa plain and in the coastal village areas in the south.



Lloyd Scott amid a raptor massacre © CABS

Start of bird protection camps in Lebanon

The Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) who specialise in coordinating and conducting 'bird protection camps' throughout Europe, first became aware of the situation in Lebanon in 2013, by assessing the vast number of images posted on social media showing poachers posing proudly with dozens of freshly killed protected birds. Then in 2017, things took a more pro-active and positive turn, when CABS and the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) first joined forces to conduct our first ever proper bird protection camp in the country during the autumn of that year - this also coincided with the introduction of hunting law 580 – the first enforceable hunting regulation in decades.

During the peak migration periods, teams of international bird experts and wildlife crime specialists as well as Lebanese conservationists and sustainable hunters combine strengths by conducting anti-poaching patrols and monitoring the most important migration corridors in the mountain regions, where the bird migration is enormously concentrated into so-called 'bottlenecks' and where massa-

ces take place on strong migration days. Many of the birds are shot to be eaten. Rarer species such as vultures or eagles are often sold alive at markets - provided they survive the shooting – or are stuffed by taxidermists and sold in shops. In 2021, following a tip-off, our teams seized three Egyptian vultures from a private collection in southern Lebanon. After assessment one of the birds was released back into the wild and the others were sent to a captive breeding programme at Prague Zoo where their young will be released to supplement the population.

Patrols are also conducted to identify and shut down illegal trapping sites in the more lowland areas like the Beqaa valley and coastal regions. The teams are directed to document illegalities and pass the information to local police of the Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF). In addition to law enforcement and cooperation with the authorities, education also plays an important role in our work. Our teams hand out information leaflets to hunters in the field and our partners from SPNL and the Middle Eastern Sustainable Hunting

Centre (MESHC) frequently organise events and training seminars for police officers, hunters and community groups in order to win them to the concepts of responsible and sustainable hunting as well as protecting the incredible interconnected natural heritage of Lebanon with the rest of the world!

Preventing illegal shooting of birds of prey

During our bird protection camps as a starting point we attach greater emphasis to our work against illegal killing of birds of prey and other large birds such as storks. Given their slower reproduction rates and smaller populations, the conservation impact of illegal hunting is having a more rapid negative effect on these species. In the first years, much of our focus each autumn was in the Keserwan district of Mount Lebanon, where our teams were horrified to discover 'plucking posts' amongst the drifts of trash and spent gun cartridges, containing the butchered remains of hundreds of honeys buzzards and other birds of prey. The birds are killed for both sport and for their breast meat. After maintaining both a covert and overt presence in the area and catching dozens of poachers red-handed, we have observed a significant decline in the number of birds of prey being shot in this hotspot. Almost all hunters we speak to are now aware it is forbidden to shoot larger soaring birds. The collaboration and training in documenting illegal killing has evolved to the point where our Lebanese friends have established a permanent year-round Anti-Poaching Unit and an increasing network of sustainable law-abiding hunters – who wish to protect their hobby – often report illegalities and assist with the collection and transport of injured animals.

Venturing into the North

The rapid improvements against the illegal killing of birds of prey in Mount Lebanon Governorate has enabled our teams to expand our focus to other dangerous hotspots areas, especially in the north such as Akkar and Danniye. Here the bird poaching problems are multifac-

eted. Similarly, the mountain passes are hotspots for raptor shooting in autumn, but we also observe extremely concentrated night shooting – during peak migration, hundreds of shooters take prime position along the ridges and play loud electronic decoys callers with nightjars' song. Bright lamps and lasers are then used to dazzle and disorientate any passing bird before being blasted from all angles. Thousands of birds are killed each night and the range of species affected here is truly shocking. In field searches our teams have recovered the remains of not just nightjars, but also variety of owls, lesser spotted eagles, short-toed eagles, kestrels, corncrakes, rollers, golden orioles, bee-eaters, shrikes, nightingales ... literally anything that flies - dies. In winter it is also common to see 'illuminated trees' in fields and on buildings as lures for the influx of thrushes. Furthermore, since spring 2022 we have also conducted bird protection camps to disrupt the massacres of White Storks as they pass through bottleneck areas north of Tripoli – and with success – as our presence has become more established and the threat of prosecution increased shooters are often seen leaving as soon as we arrive to monitor the safe passage of the birds.

Outside of the camps, the Anti-Poaching Unit lead by Adonis Khatib and CABS representative Shirine Bou Raffoul work relentlessly with local landowners, majors, politicians and chiefs of police to build relations in the fight against poaching. As a result, the APU deliver training seminars to police, hunters and community groups and have even hosted outdoor events to showcase alternative pursuits such as camping, archery, bushcraft and photography. During peak migration we have also witnessed an committed improvement in the level of support from the authorities to conduct joint patrols to disrupt and prevent illegal poaching during the peak migration periods.



Illegal Hunting senseless losses



.. another massacre!

SAFE FLYWAYS ENDING ILLEGAL BIRD KILLING IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

By Adonis Khatib

In the year 2023, SPNL's Anti-Poaching Unit further solidified its collaboration with the Internal Security Forces by producing an awareness-raising poster created by the APU with cooperation from the ISF signed by both parties and distributed to ISF stations around Lebanon, especially in hunting blackspots. The APU were supported by the ISF all year-long in their patrolling and removal of illegal killing violations, with missions often being the consequence of responsible hunters reporting illegal activities that they witnessed on the ground. These missions resulted in the arrest of several shooters and sellers, as well as multiple fines for illegal activities. The APU also received several injured migratory soaring birds to treat and take care of, among which 5 were released.

The APU met with environmental prosecutor Fady Malkoun, different religious and clan leaders, former and present Members of Parliament, ISF commanders of different blackspots, and municipality leaders. These meetings were strategic as they were held in towns where passage of migratory birds is important and rates of illegal killing are high.

All these leaders were willing to publicly sign a certification of support for the APU work. The APU also held and participated in multiple awareness-raising sessions with people of all ages attending and where alternative livelihoods and hobbies were showcased.

In the first half of the year 2024, the APU has continued their patrolling missions along with the ISF, and helped in the taking of legal measures against several illegal hunters. The APU has been getting more and more help from independent environmental activists and sustainable hunters who have reported illegal activities and handed the SPNL team multiple injured cranes.

The APU has doubled down on their cyber-tracking methods during this period and have anonymously infiltrated several Facebook and Whatsapp groups where they now get information on the approximate geographical locations of several mass hunters. This has helped the SPNL team to organize more than 40 anti-poaching missions in all Lebanese regions. The APU also held and participated in multiple awareness-raising sessions with people of all ages attending and where alternative livelihoods and hobbies were showcased. During this period, Local media has paid more attention to sustainable hunting and its importance, as well as to the work of the APU and SPNL in this area.

In the second half of the year 2024, the APU advanced its mission to address illegal hunting and promote sustainable practices across Lebanon. With continued coordination with the ISF and local partners, the unit carried out targeted operations to dismantle illegal poaching nets and enforce protection laws. These efforts were bolstered by reports and intelligence provided by sustainable hunters and environmental advocates, resulting in the rescue and release of multiple injured birds.

The period also saw increased focus on leveraging digital tools to track illegal activities, enabling the identification of key poaching areas and the planning of strategic



Young generation initiated to binoculars use, not shotguns, to appreciate birds



Adonis Khatib
Anti-Poaching Unit
Manager

interventions. This approach facilitated the implementation of numerous missions to safeguard biodiversity hotspots.

Education and awareness remained central to APU's activities, with various workshops, community sessions and meetings engaging participants from different age groups. These initiatives highlighted the significance of biodiversity conservation and offered practical guidance on sustainable alternatives.

The work of the APU continued to garner attention in local media, amplifying the message of responsible hunting and environmental stewardship. Nevertheless, as of the end of September, and per the request of the ISF, no on-ground activities were conducted due to the war in Lebanon and the associated security issues. Despite operational adjustments necessitated by such tensions, the unit upheld its commitment to protecting Lebanon's wildlife and promoting coexistence with nature through the collection of relevant data on illegal action and sharing some of the violations on the various social media platforms.



Droub el Hima for Peace Trail

HIMA FOR PEACE A TRANSFORMATIVE MODEL FOR CONSERVATION AND COMMUNITY HARMONY

By Fatima Hayek

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) has redefined conservation in Lebanon by reviving the ancient *Hima* approach. Rooted in tradition yet tailored for modern challenges, *Hima* offers a holistic framework that balances biodiversity protection with community well-being. Through the *Hima for Peace* initiative, SPNL has demonstrated how nature conservation can also serve as a platform for conflict resolution and social cohesion.

The Genesis of the Hima Approach

SPNL's revival of the *Hima* approach began in 2004, aiming to blend scientific methods with traditional practices. By establishing 32 *Himas* across Lebanon, SPNL has demonstrated how local communities can actively participate in managing ecologically important areas, such as Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs). The *Hima* framework integrates biodiversity conservation with the socio-economic and cultural needs of the communities, promoting equity and collective decision-making.

This approach has garnered national and international recognition, influencing Lebanese environmental law and being adopted by organizations like BirdLife International, IUCN, and the MedWet Initiative. Success stories include the preservation of marine ecosystems in *Hima* Qoleileh, which earned SPNL the UN-Habitat Best Practices Award, and global accolades like the Midori Prize for Biodiversity. Its success in Lebanon has inspired regional adoption in countries like Jordan, Cyprus, and Greece, showcasing its adaptability and effectiveness.

Hima for Peace: Addressing Conflict through Nature

Lebanon's complex social fabric, characterized by ethnic, sectarian, and resource-related tensions, has often fueled conflict. Recognizing these challenges, SPNL launched the *Hima for Peace* program, using nature and shared natural resources as neutral grounds to bridge divides. The program builds on SPNL's successful experiences, such as the *Himas* of Anjar and Kfar Zabad, to transform conflict into co-operation.

Anjar and Kfar Zabad: A Model for Conflict Resolution

Anjar and Kfar Zabad, two neighboring villages in the Bekaa Valley, epitomize the transformative potential of the *Hima for Peace* initiative. Despite their geographical proximity, the villages were divided by deep-rooted cultural, religious, and resource-related conflicts. Anjar, predominantly inhabited by Christian Armenians who fled the Ottoman genocide, contrasted sharply with Kfar Zabad, a mixed community of Sunni Muslims and Christians. Both villages depended heavily on agriculture and shared the wetlands of the Chamsin and Ghzayel rivers, which fueled disputes over water use and access. In 2004, SPNL approached both villages with the goal of establishing *Himas* to conserve the ecologically critical wetlands. Kfar Zabad, recognizing the environmental and economic potential, declared its wetland



Director General, Assad Serhal, traversing the Peace trails



Fatima Hayek
Water & Environmental
Sustainability
Manager

a *Hima*. The decision paved the way for various initiatives, including sustainable hunting, reforestation, youth training, and eco-tourism development, transforming the village into a sought-after destination for birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts. Meanwhile, Anjar remained hesitant, partly due to concerns over joint efforts with Kfar Zabad. However, witnessing Kfar Zabad's growing success and economic benefits—such as increased tourism—Anjar's municipality declared its wetland a *Hima* in 2008. This marked the beginning of a collaborative journey between the two communities.



Key Initiatives and Outcomes

SPNL facilitated numerous projects that fostered unity and cooperation between the villages, including:

- **Joint Eco-tourism Development:** Hiking trails were created to connect the two sides of the wetlands, encouraging visitors to explore both *Himas*. Events like bird migration festivals brought the communities together, attracting diplomats, tourists, and conservationists.

- **Youth Engagement through Homat al Hima:** A team of local youth from both villages was trained to protect natural resources, lead environmental activities, and participate in joint clean-ups and reforestation efforts.

- **Economic Opportunities:** Local women from both communities were empowered to produce and sell traditional goods, benefiting from the burgeoning eco-tourism sector.

- **Shared Conservation Goals:** Training sessions for farmers emphasized sustainable agricultural practices and efficient water use, creating a shared vision for resource management.

The collaboration gradually eroded cultural and religious barriers, replacing mistrust with dialogue and shared ownership of conservation efforts. By focusing on the mutual benefits of nature conservation—economic growth, ecological preservation, and improved livelihoods—SPNL turned a source of tension into a unifying force.

Today, the Anjar and Kfar Zabad *Himas* are celebrated as a single ecological entity, offering critical habitats for migratory birds along the African-Eurasian flyway and supporting diverse flora and fauna, including endangered species. This success story serves as a powerful example of how the *Hima* model can resolve conflicts and build resilient communities.

Kayfoun and Chemlan: A New Chapter for Hima for Peace

The villages of Kayfoun and Chemlan, nestled in Mount Lebanon, represent another compelling chapter in the *Hima for Peace* initiative. These neighboring communities, though geographically close,

have long been divided by political affiliations, religious differences, and competition over scarce resources. Historical grievances were further compounded by Lebanon's worsening economic crisis and the displacement of thousands of Syrian refugees, which placed additional pressure on already limited resources.

Kayfoun and Chemlan share a single well as their primary water source, located in Kayfoun village. This reliance on a common resource frequently triggered disputes, particularly as the demand for water surged with the arrival of over 5,000 refugees in Kayfoun. With livelihoods strained and tensions rising, SPNL stepped in with a bold plan to use the *Hima for Peace* framework to address these challenges.

SPNL began by facilitating open dialogues through participatory sessions with representatives from both villages. These sessions provided a platform for community members to voice concerns, share perspectives, and explore potential solutions collaboratively. The discussions highlighted not only the environmental issues but also the social and cultural dynamics contributing to the conflict.

As a first step toward fostering trust, SPNL established a *Hima* committee comprising mayors, religious leaders, community representatives, and local stakeholders. This committee played a pivotal role in identifying key issues, proposing solutions, and ensuring the fair distribution of resources.

Key Achievements and Collaborative Efforts

The *Hima for Peace* initiative in Kayfoun and Chemlan delivered impactful solutions that addressed both immediate needs and long-term challenges:

1. Solar-Powered Water Pumping System:

With funding from the German Development Bank and UNDP, SPNL installed a solar-powered water pumping system to sustainably manage the shared well. This initiative significantly reduced reliance on expensive fuel-powered systems, ensuring equitable water distribution at a lower cost. By resolving one of the primary sources of tension, this system became a symbol of cooperation and mutual benefit.



2. Hima Charter and Regional Cooperation:

The success of the initiative inspired six neighboring municipalities—Baysour, Souk El Gharib, Aitat, Ain El Sayde, Ain El Remeneh, and Kfarmatta—to join the effort. Together, the eight villages signed the *Hima Charter*, a memorandum of understanding to collaborate on conservation and resource management. This regional approach extended the impact of the *Hima for Peace* initiative beyond Kayfoun and Chemlan, fostering unity across Mount Lebanon.

3. Public Gardens for Biodiversity and Harmony:

The establishment of themed gardens—such as the Biblical Garden in Chemlan, the Quranic Garden in Kayfoun, and the Lavender Garden in Souk El Gharib—served dual purposes. These spaces not only promoted biodiversity but also became peaceful communal areas where residents could gather, interact, and strengthen social ties.

4. Droub el Hima for Peace Trails:

SPNL developed hiking trails connecting the villages of the *Hima Charter*. These trails were designed to boost eco-tourism and included accessible paths for people with special needs. By the end of 2023, over 6,400 hikers, including 2,200 individuals with special needs, had explored these trails, bringing economic and social benefits to the region.

5. Souk el Hima:

A community marketplace, led by women, was established to empower local artisans and promote traditional crafts such as soap, perfumes, and other handmade products. This initiative not only supported economic resilience but also fostered a sense of pride and collaboration within the community.

The *Hima for Peace* efforts in Kayfoun and Chemlan transformed these villages from areas of tension into symbols of unity and resilience. By addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting shared benefits, SPNL created an enduring framework for cooperation between communities across Mount Lebanon. The initiative highlights

how conservation can serve as a catalyst for peace, proving that when nature thrives, so too do the communities that depend on it.

Harvesting the Fruits of Hima for Peace in Mount Lebanon

The recent escalation of violence and displacement caused by Israeli attacks on Lebanon has tested the resilience of communities across the country. Villages in Mount Lebanon, particularly those involved in the *Hima for Peace* initiative, have risen to the occasion, demonstrating the profound impact of SPNL's efforts in fostering harmony and cooperation. Kayfoun, Chemlan, and the surrounding *Hima Charter* villages are now hosting displaced families from the South, Bekaa, and the southern suburbs of Beirut, offering them refuge during these challenging times.

This response underscores the strength of the bonds forged through the *Hima for Peace* program. The shared governance structures, community-led initiatives, and conflict resolution mechanisms established by the program have equipped these villages with the social cohesion and organizational capacity needed to manage the influx of displaced people effectively. Public gardens, communal spaces, and trails developed under the initiative are now serving as vital resources, providing displaced families with safe places to gather, rest, and find solace. Moreover, the economic initiatives sparked by *Hima for Peace*, such as the Souk el Hima marketplace and eco-tourism projects, have bolstered local livelihoods, enabling these communities to extend support to the displaced without overwhelming their own resources.

From conflict zones to sanctuaries of unity, *Hima for Peace* has turned these villages into pillars of resilience, proving that conservation and peacebuilding can light the way in times of crisis.

Lavendar Hima Community Garden, Souk at Ghareb, Mount Lebanon





Butterfly, WBCC © Mohamad Haimour

SPNL LAUNCHES BUTTERFLY GARDEN AND PLANT NURSERY AT QURANIC AND BIBLICAL GARDENS, STRENGTHENING CONSERVATION EFFORTS AND SPREADING A MESSAGE OF PEACE

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) has embarked on a new and inspiring initiative to create a butterfly garden and establish a plant nursery at the Quranic and Biblical Gardens. This project is designed to honor the natural beauty described in sacred texts, provide a tranquil space for spiritual reflection, and promote biodiversity through the support of delicate creatures such as butterflies.

The Quranic and Biblical Gardens, renowned for their serene landscapes and symbolic importance, will now serve as a sanctuary where nature and spirituality intertwine. The butterfly garden aims to foster a peaceful environment that attracts and nurtures butterfly species, offering an ideal setting for visitors to connect with nature and their inner peace. By integrating ecological preservation with spiritual values, this garden will enhance the natural beauty of the area and highlight the cultural and environmental significance of Lebanon's natural heritage.

The plant nursery is another critical component of this initiative. It will serve as a vital

resource for cultivating native plants, contributing to local conservation efforts, and supporting the restoration of ecosystems across Lebanon. By producing a variety of indigenous plants, the nursery will play a key role in restoring habitats crucial for the survival of Lebanon's diverse wildlife.

This project continues SPNL's ongoing efforts to promote environmental conservation through its successful programs, such as HIMA for Peace, Homat al-Hima, Hima Trails, and Schools with No Walls (SNOW). These initiatives have been instrumental in engaging local communities in protecting natural resources and raising awareness about the importance of preserving Lebanon's ecosystems. The signing of the Hima Charter by eight municipalities has further solidified the commitment of local authorities to the Hima movement, a traditional model of community-based conservation that SPNL has worked tirelessly to revitalize. Especially in the wake of the challenges posed by the recent war, SPNL's new initiatives represent a message of hope and resilience. SPNL aims to unite communities around shared peace and environmental stewardship values by focusing on protecting nature and wildlife. The organization continues to advocate for sustainable practices that support the recovery of ecosystems and the well-being of the people who rely on them.

"As we resume our efforts to promote peace and environmental conservation, we remain deeply committed to supporting the communities that have been affected by the hardships of war," said Assad Serhal, the Director General of SPNL (Birdlife Lebanon), and one of the winners of the 2018 MIDORI Prize for Biodiversity.. ***"This butterfly garden and plant nursery symbolize our continued dedication to nature's beauty, but also a beacon of hope for a brighter, more peaceful future."***

The butterfly garden and plant nursery will be open to visitors, inviting them to experience the beauty of nature while reflecting on the profound spiritual connections that bind humanity and the environment.



Through this initiative, SPNL hopes to inspire a renewed reverence for the natural world and encourage more people to protect Lebanon's unique biodiversity actively.

Managing a butterfly garden is crucial for conserving biodiversity and promoting environmental sustainability. These gardens serve as habitats for butterflies, many endangered due to habitat loss and climate change. By maintaining a butterfly garden, we support pollination, as butterflies play a key role in the reproductive cycle of numerous plants, contributing to food security and ecosystem balance. Effective management ensures the garden provides the necessary host plants for caterpillars and nectar-rich flowers for adult butterflies, fostering a thriving ecosystem. Moreover, butterfly gardens serve as educational and recreational spaces, raising awareness about the importance of protecting pollinators and inspiring communities to take part in conservation efforts. By nurturing these gardens, we create a sanctuary for butterflies while promoting ecological harmony and connecting people with nature.

Managing a plant nursery effectively is essential for ensuring the healthy growth of plants, meeting customer demand, and contributing to environmental sustainability. A well-managed nursery provides optimal conditions for propagating and nurturing plants, including proper soil, water, light, and pest control. This ensures high-quality plants thrive when transplanted to gardens, landscapes, or agricultural settings. Efficient management also involves inventory control, which helps maintain a balanced stock of diverse plant varieties to meet market needs. Furthermore, nurseries are pivotal in promoting biodiversity and combating climate change by supporting afforestation and sustainable landscaping efforts. By focusing on proper resource allocation, training staff, and adopting eco-friendly practices, a nursery can become a cornerstone for greener, healthier ecosystems.

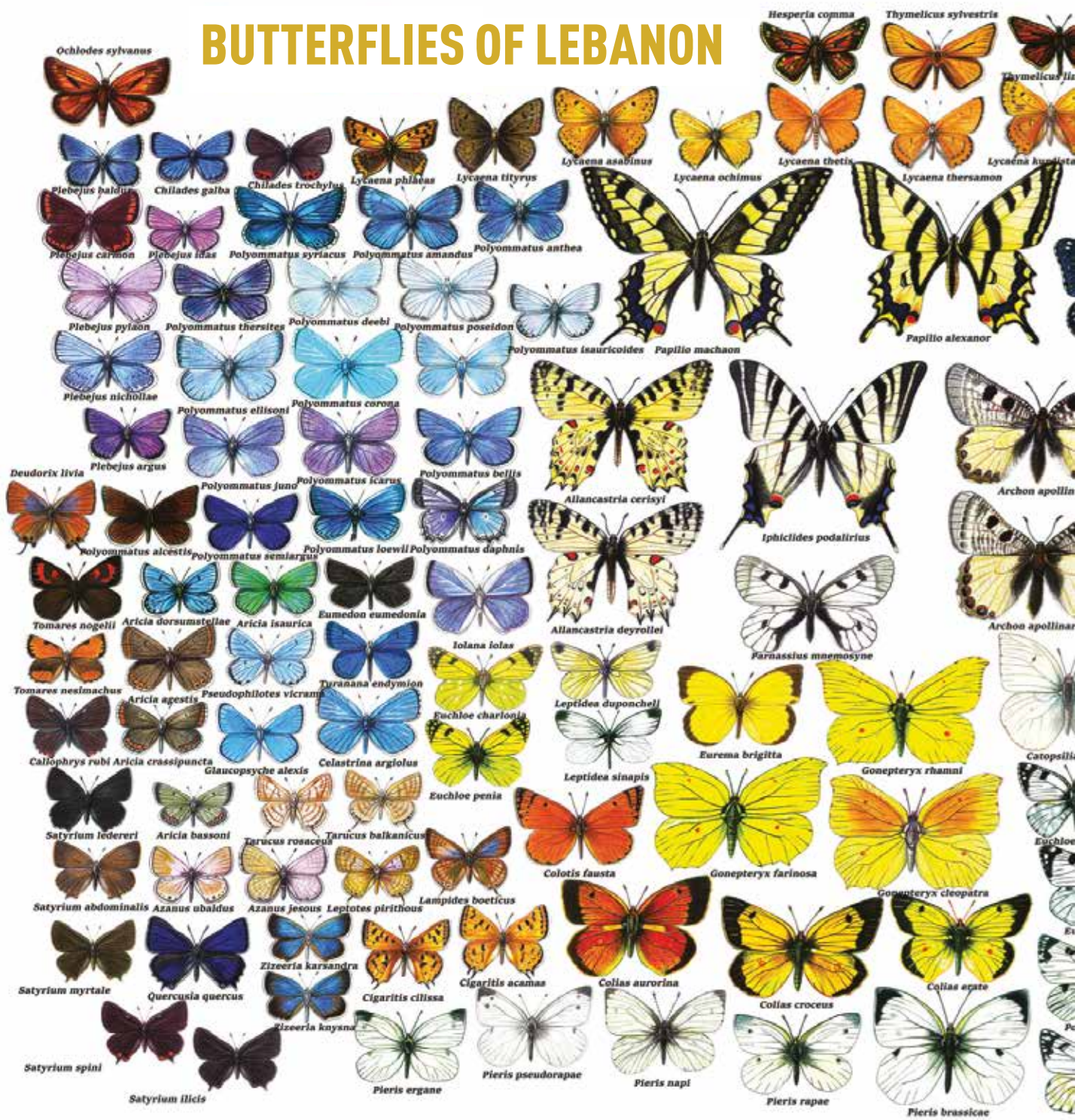


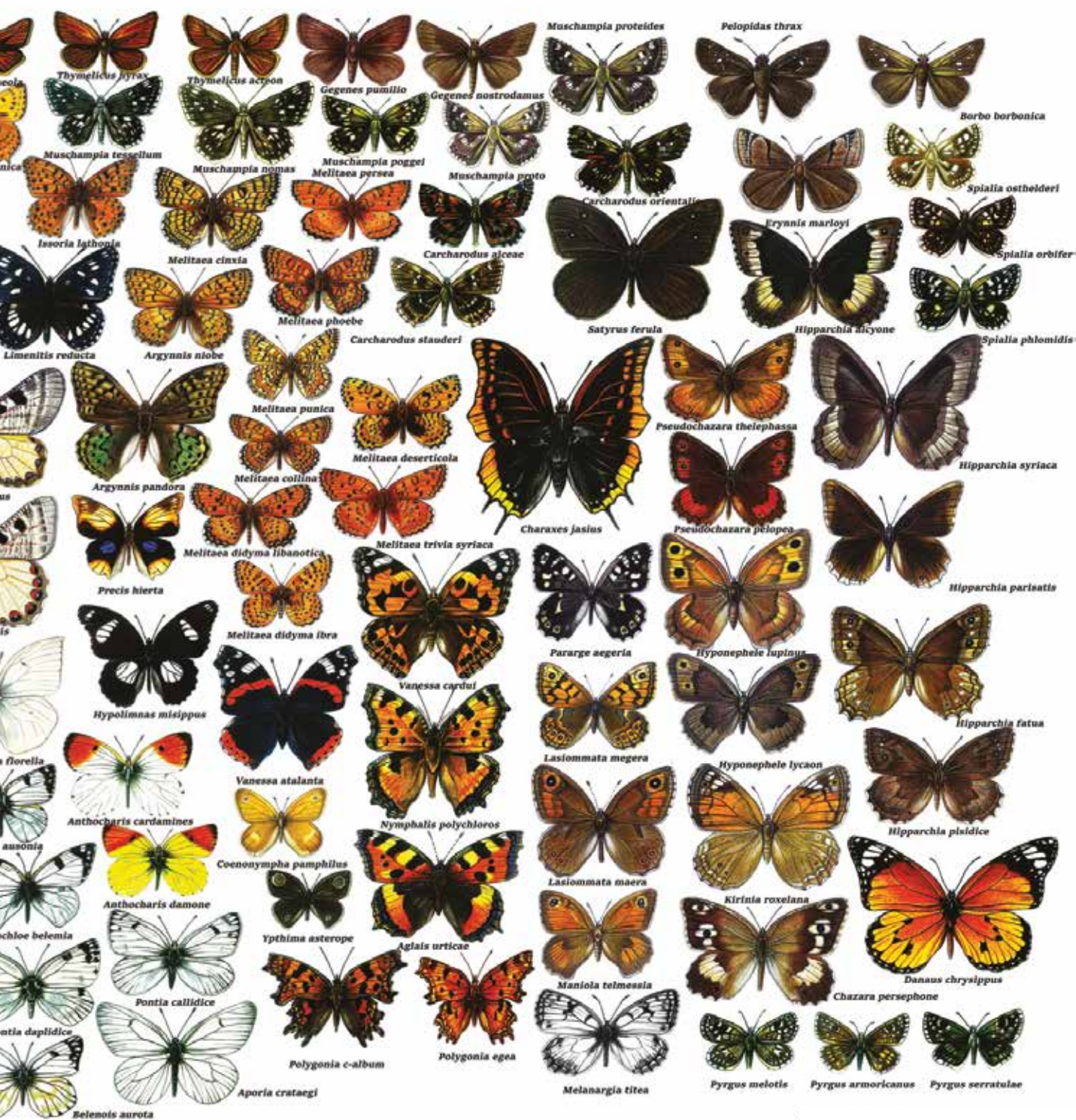
The butterfly garden and plant nursery under construction
SPNL butterfly garden, West Beqaa © Mohamed Haimour (left)





BUTTERFLIES OF LEBANON







A silent hike for students and their teachers to deepen their connection with nature

SNOW: TOWARD A NATIONAL PROGRAM

By André Béchara



The **School With No Walls (SNOW)** program has firmly established itself within the Lebanese educational system. Its significance was officially recognized in a joint circular issued by the Minister of National Education and the Director-General, granting all public schools in Lebanon access to resources provided by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL). This recognition underscores the growing importance of outdoor education in the country.

SPNL introduced the "**SNOW-Hima Green School**" program to further this mission, building strong partnerships with schools to promote innovative ecological and educational practices.



Teachers from NLC College with their director after completing a SNOW training session



Al Manar Modern School awarded the SNOW Hima Green School label by SPNL

Partnerships in Action

Two leading schools in environmental conservation have signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with SPNL to integrate the SNOW program into their curricula as a non-formal educational approach:

1. AL Manar Modern School (AMS) in Ras el Maten shares a vision of “empowering students to acquire, demonstrate, and value knowledge and skills that help them become lifelong learners with an outward orientation beyond the school gates.” This philosophy aligns seamlessly with the SNOW program’s core concept of being a School With No Walls, according to the school’s director, Mr. Wajdi Tarabay. A dedicated coordinator has been appointed to oversee the program’s implementation at AMS.



André Béchara
SNOW Program
Director

2. New Lebanon College (NLC), located in Ain Ksour in the Aley region, has committed to adopting the SNOW program across the entire school. Mr. Mazen Malaeb, NLC’s educational advisor, highlighted the program’s importance and pledged full integration into the school curriculum. Following a presentation by the SPNL team, teachers engaged in a productive discussion that culminated in the signing of the MOU designating NLC as a Hima Green School. A pedagogical coordinator has also been appointed to manage the program’s rollout.

The SPNL team provided both schools with digital educational materials, including presentations, films, and supporting documents, alongside SPNL books and manuals to aid research efforts. Additionally, teacher

training sessions were conducted to ensure effective program delivery.

Expanding the SNOW Initiative

In addition to formalizing the Hima Green School program in these two schools, SPNL continues to expand its reach by establishing connections with other schools. The team is promoting a program that is simple, practical, flexible, and highly impactful. The Hima Green School label is awarded by SPNL to schools that adopt the SNOW program as part of their curriculum. This label recognizes schools for their commitment to environmental awareness and conservation, focusing on outdoor education that encourages students to engage deeply with their natural surroundings.

Emphasizing Innovation and Child-Centered Learning

Similar to the Montessori and Reggio Emilia educational philosophies, the SNOW program emphasizes child-centered learning. Students are encouraged to explore and learn at their own pace, with a focus on outdoor experiences in natural environments. This approach is rooted in the belief that engaging with nature inspires curiosity and enhances children's understanding of the world.

The SNOW program values alternative and non-formal teaching methods, emphasizing hands-on activities and project-based learning over traditional structured lessons. Designed to promote environmental awareness, biodiversity conservation, and nature appreciation, the program aims to foster a meaningful connection between children and their environment, framed within the traditional Hima concept.

Hands-on learning about biodiversity!







Training Homat Al Hima from West Bekaa on guiding and nature-based tourism

HOMAT AL HIMA PROGRAM OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

By Rania Khalil

Every year in the Homat Al Hima Program, we have challenges due to the country's situation. Young people are hard to motivate when all they are thinking about is survival issues and securing their future. We are always trying to link the training and workshops to their daily lives to secure their interest and participation in the objectives:

Focusing on how new skills open doors for new opportunities and jobs

- Keeping their eyes ready to see new experiences
- Letting them focus on a positive attitude and how they can contribute to their society and villages
- Link nature and conservation to economic benefits and income-generating chances.

This year we continued our work in different Himas to empower local youth, and one successful story is that the Homat Al Hima group of West Bekaa finalized a one-year training program that was intensive and developed for their village needs. Gladly, 15 local youth, men and women, learned about: birds, sustainable agriculture/grazing/harvesting, biodiversity, citizen science, species (fauna and flora), fish and wetlands, teamwork, time management, positive thinking, and motivation. This group is ready to support their municipality in actions, projects, and activities on the ground. Having a group of young people willing and motivated to act on the ground, from cleaning the roads, maintaining trails, raising awareness, helping locals, guiding visitors, coming up with innovative ideas...

The aim is, hopefully, despite the challenges and obstacles, to continue working on young groups from different Himayas and have a locally engaged team to be present and active with the locals and municipalities.



Hiking in Hima Kayfoun

Training on biodiversity and agriculture





Doves of Peace soar at Mount Lebanon Hima Center—A testament to SPNL's mission to protect Lebanon's winged wonders!

MOUNT LEBANON HIMA CENTER FOSTERING EDUCATION, SUSTAINABILITY, AND COMMUNITY GROWTH

By Rami Kadro

The Mount Lebanon Hima Center, a vital hub in our efforts to preserve Lebanon's natural heritage and support sustainable development, has continued to evolve as a cornerstone for the work of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL). Located in the picturesque Mount Lebanon region, this center serves as a multifunctional space that is not only a base for SPNL staff but also a key venue for educational and community activities. In alignment with SPNL's mission to promote conservation, environmental education, and sustainable livelihoods, the Mount Lebanon Hima Center is designed to support and engage the local community in these endeavors while fostering self-sufficiency through income-generating initiatives.

A Space for Staff and Community

The center provides a much-needed space for SPNL's staff to work in close proximity to the communities they serve, offering a serene and functional environment for operational and logistical support. Additionally, it plays an important role in hosting SNOW (School with No Walls)



A rescued raptor soars again at MLHC



Nature Lovers Wander the Biblical Garden

sessions, an innovative educational program that breaks the traditional classroom boundaries by engaging students directly with nature and environmental conservation. Through SNOW sessions, local schools and youth groups participate in hands-on learning activities that promote environmental stewardship and awareness. These experiences, held regularly at the center, aim to nurture a deeper connection between the younger generation and Lebanon's diverse ecosystems. Moreover, the Mount Lebanon Hima Center is utilized for various community-oriented programs and events, serving as a venue for workshops, seminars, and local gatherings. These initiatives empower the local community by offering educational opportunities and promoting collaboration between SPNL and local NGOs, environmental groups, and other stakeholders working toward sustainable development.

Crafts and Sustainable Income Generation

A key aspect of the center's self-sustainability is its crafts sales program, which provides an income stream while simulta-



Rami Kadro
Mount-Lebanon
Hima Center
Manager

neously supporting the local community. The center collaborates with local artisans and community members to produce and sell high-quality, handmade crafts. These items, which range from traditional handicrafts to modern sustainable products, reflect the rich cultural heritage of the region and are a testament to the skill and creativity of local artisans.

In the past year, the center earned \$1,300 in income through the sale of these crafts. This income helps to sustain the center's operations and contribute to the broader financial independence of SPNL's initiatives. The sale of crafts not only offers a market for local artisans but also contributes to the wider goal of promoting sustainable livelihoods, as the materials used in production often come from the natural environment surrounding the center.

Workshops and NGO Collaborations

In addition to its crafts program, the Mount Lebanon Hima Center has also been utilized for workshops and trainings organized by other NGOs. This collaborative approach is vital for fostering partnerships and encour-

aging cross-sectoral efforts toward community development and environmental conservation. By renting out the center for these purposes, SPNL can support other organizations and initiatives, further establishing the Hima Center as a focal point for educational and environmental activities in the region.

The income generated from renting the center to NGOs has added to the overall sustainability of the project, helping to cover the center's operational costs and ensuring that it remains a valuable resource for the community and its visitors.

Looking Ahead

As we move into the coming year, SPNL is committed to continuing to develop the Mount Lebanon Hima Center as a hub for education, community engagement, and sustainable development. With ongoing efforts to promote local crafts and expand its role as a venue for educational and NGO activities, the center will remain an important asset to both SPNL and the local community.

Through these initiatives, the Mount Lebanon Hima Center is not only a space for conservation work but also a platform for building resilient, sustainable communities in Lebanon.







Homat al Hima at SPNL tree and plant nursery (EU-BioConnect Project)

THE HHIC NURSERY A BEACON OF SUSTAINABILITY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT IN THE WEST BEKAA ZONE

By Wassim El Khatib

Since its inception in 2016, the HHIC (Homat Al Hima International Center) nursery in the West Bekaa zone has stood as a testament to the power of adaptability and community-driven initiatives. What began as a project to supply seedlings for butterfly gardens has evolved into a multi-faceted effort, addressing the needs of the local environment and community alike.

From Butterfly Gardens to Vegetable Seedlings

Initially, the HHIC nursery's primary mission was to provide seedlings for butterfly gardens, fostering biodiversity and creating spaces for pollinators essential to ecological balance. However, the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 brought unforeseen challenges to the local community, particularly for farmers. Recognizing this, the nursery shifted its focus to producing vegetable seedlings, ensuring local farmers had the resources to sustain their livelihoods during a crisis. This pivot reinforced the nursery's commitment to supporting its community and highlighted its ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

Reforestation Efforts and Native Trees

As the region began to recover from the pandemic, the HHIC nursery expanded its role to support municipalities in reforestation projects. The emphasis was placed on planting native trees, which play a crucial role in maintaining the ecological integrity of the West Bekaa zone. Among the species cultivated were oak, locust, rosemary, lavender, and others, all selected for their compatibility with the local environment and their contribution to biodiversity.

Thousands of Trees for the Community

Under the careful supervision of the HHIC team, thousands of trees and plants have been distributed to the local community. These efforts have not only enhanced the region's green cover but also strengthened the bond between the HHIC nursery and the residents it serves. The nursery has ensured that its initiatives have a lasting environmental and social impact by involving local farmers, municipalities, and other stakeholders.

An Ongoing Commitment

The HHIC nursery's work is far from over. Its dedication to fostering sustainability and supporting the local community continues to drive its efforts. Whether through further reforestation projects, cultivating diverse plant species, or providing resources to local farmers, the nursery remains a cornerstone of environmental and community resilience in the West Bekaa zone.

Conclusion

The HHIC nursery's story concerns innovation, resilience, and unwavering commitment to nature and people. From its beginnings as a hub for butterfly gardens to its current role in reforestation and community farming, the nursery exemplifies how thoughtful environmental initiatives can create ripples of positive change. As its work continues, the HHIC nursery is a shining example of how local actions can lead to significant, long-term benefits for ecosystems and communities.

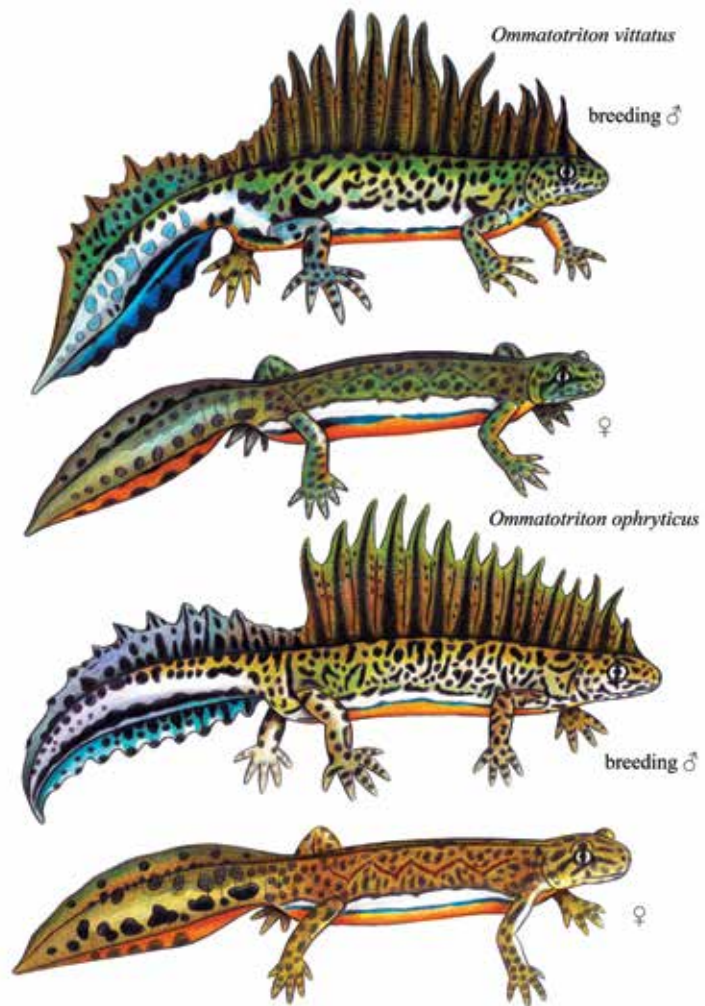
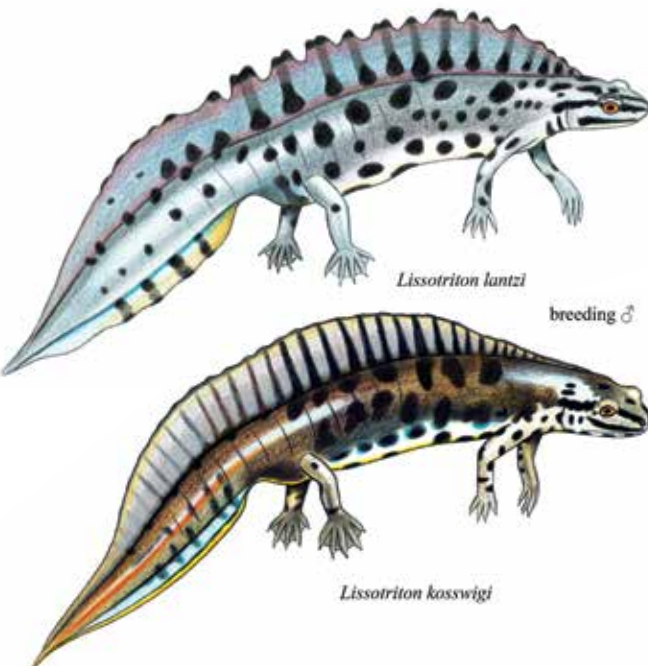
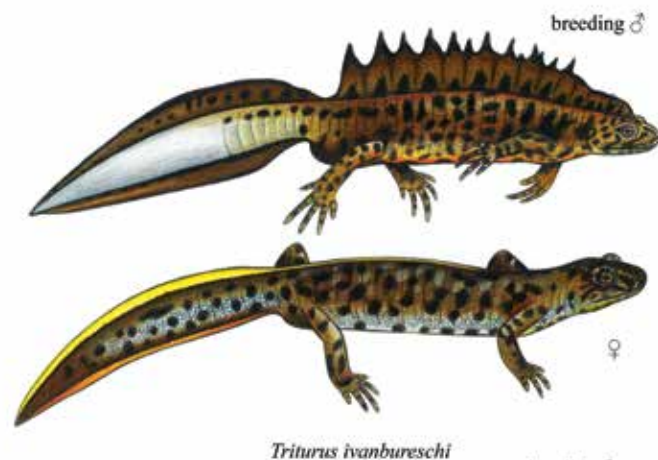
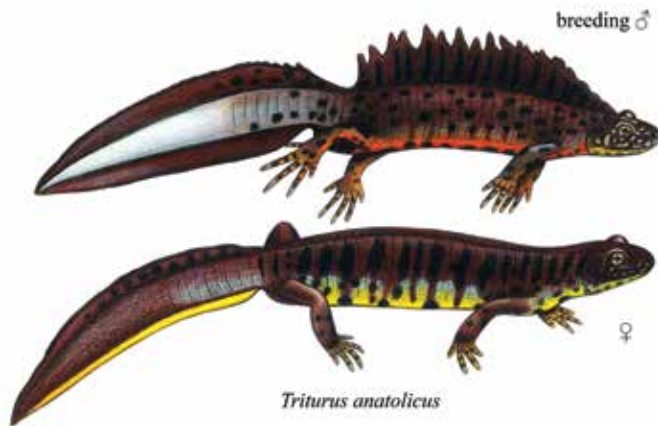


SPNL nursery

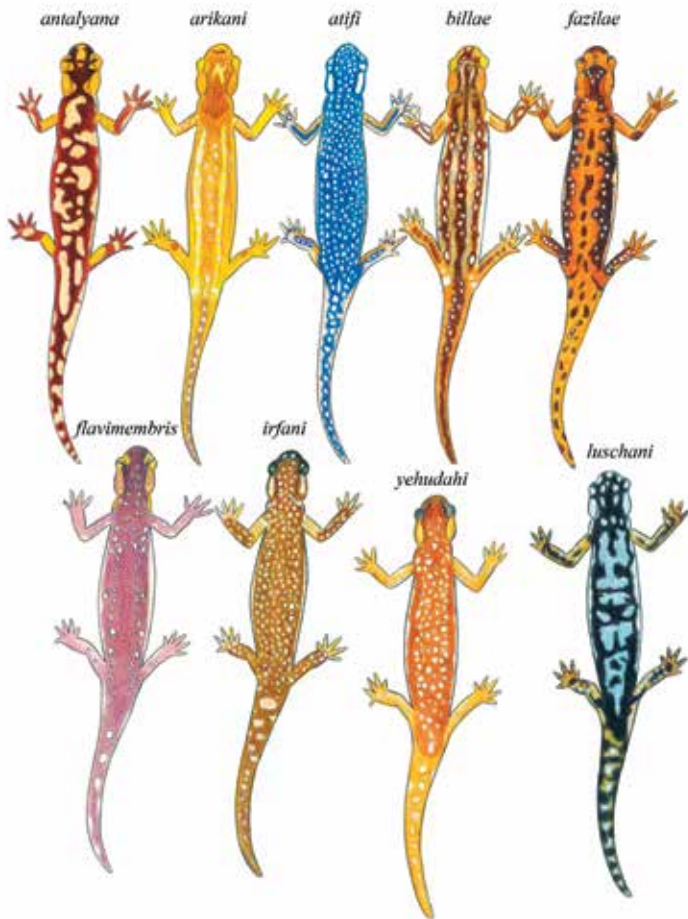


Wassim El Khatib
Fish and Wildlife
Unit Manager /
Director of HHIC

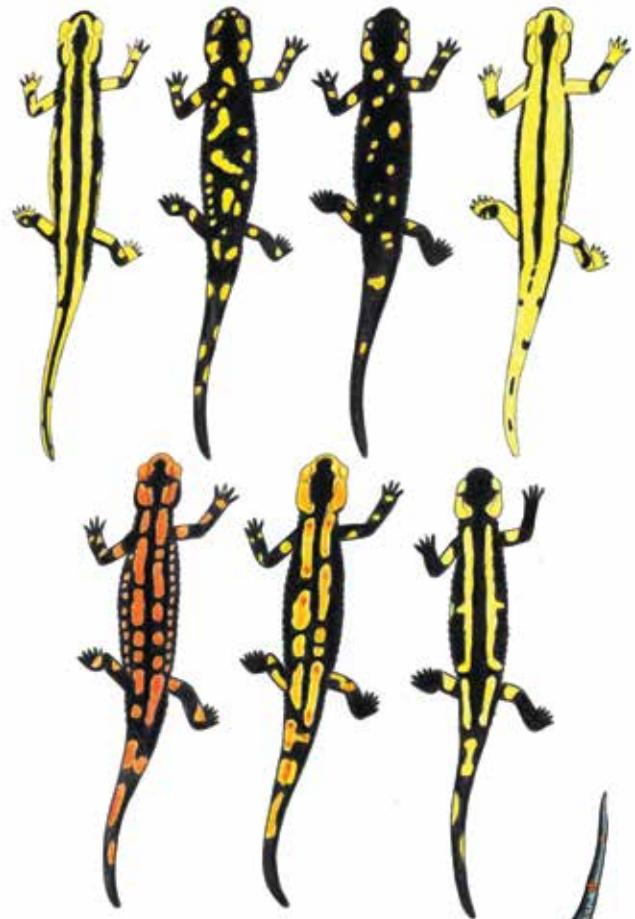




LYCIAN SALAMANDERS



Salamandra salamandra pattern variations



Sclerophrys blanfordii



Sclerophrys tihamica



Sclerophrys arabica



Sclerophrys gutturalis



Sclerophrys steindachneri



Isabelline Wheatear © Fouad Itani

FINANCIAL SITUATION FOR THE YEAR 2024

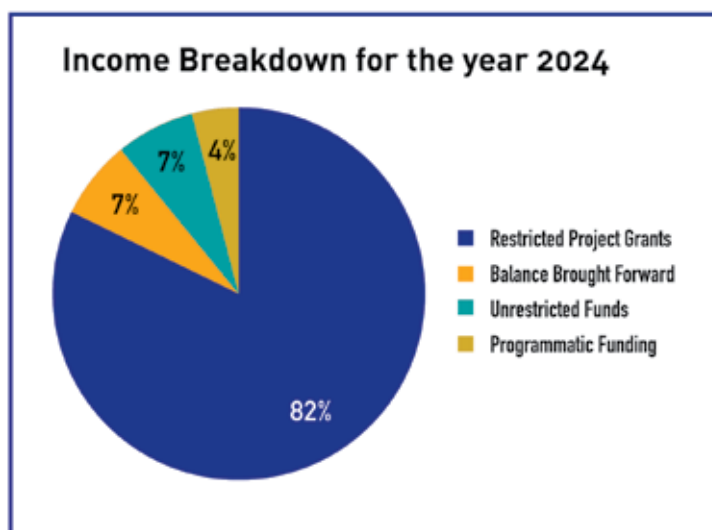
By Mazen Yassin

Income

In 2024, SPNL continued to thrive thanks to the unwavering support of its regular donors, who significantly contributed to various departments focused on conservation and community initiatives across Lebanon. Their efforts also emphasized capacity building, awareness, and environmental education.

Key donors included:

- European Union (EU)
- Global Environment Fund (GEF)
- l'Agence Française de Développement (AFD)
- Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial (FEEM)
- Bosch Foundation
- Sigrid Rausing Trust (SRT)
- Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)
- Hans Wilsdorf Foundation (HWF)



• International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

In addition to restricted project grants, SPNL benefited from annual membership fees, sales of guides and bird nests, free rental agreements, and contributions from the private sector.

As shown in the accompanying figure, 82% of SPNL's funding derives from restricted project grants provided by these donors. A portion of these funds includes non-restricted contributions from SRT and HWF. SRT grants focus on three essential pillars: conservation, organizational development, and financial sustainability. HWF grants are specifically allocated to support the HH program and the Hima initiative.

This robust funding structure has enabled SPNL to continue its vital work in conservation and community engagement throughout Lebanon.

Expenditure Overview

SPNL allocates its resources primarily toward human resources, research, conservation, and community livelihood initiatives. The expenditure breakdown is as follows:

- **Community Work and Research:** 49%
- **Consultant and Expert Fees:** 42%
- **Administrative Running Costs:** A smaller percentage

Overall, the majority of SPNL's budget is dedicated to program expenditures designed to benefit both nature and local communities, emphasizing our commitment to sustainable development and conservation efforts.

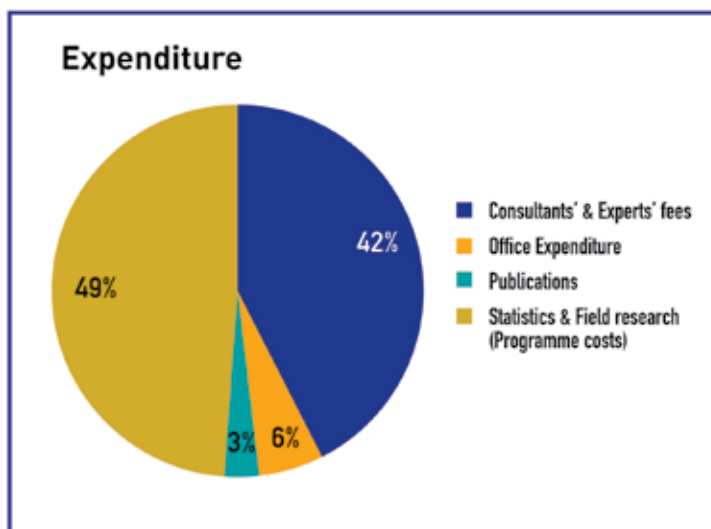
SPNL Plans for Financial Sustainability

To ensure long-term financial sustainability, SPNL is implementing several strategic initiatives:

1. Diversified Funding Sources:

- Expanding partnerships with new donors and funding agencies.
- Increasing engagement with the private sector for sponsorship and support.

2. Membership and Community Engagement:



Mazen Yassin
Head of Finance
and Administration
Department

- Enhancing membership programs to attract more individuals and organizations.
- Promoting community involvement in conservation efforts, which can generate additional funding.

3. Income-Generating Activities:

- Developing and marketing educational guides and bird nests.
- Exploring eco-tourism opportunities that align with conservation goals.

4. Capacity Building:

- Investing in staff training and development to improve efficiency and program delivery.

- Strengthening organizational management to attract and retain donors.

5. Grant Management:

- Focusing on high-impact projects that demonstrate measurable outcomes to attract restricted funding.

- Ensuring transparency and accountability in all financial dealings to build trust with donors.

6. Strategic Partnerships:

- Collaborating with local and international organizations to pool resources and expertise.
- Engaging in joint projects that leverage funding from multiple sources.

By implementing these strategies, SPNL aims to create a stable financial foundation that supports its mission of conservation and community development in Lebanon.

MEET THE REST OF SPNL'S TEAM



Farah Alkhansa
Head of Project
Development Unit



Stephanie Ferando
Project Manager



Husein Ali Zorkot
Butterfly Garden &
Pavilion Manager /
Lepidopterist



Louis Jr. Saad
IKB Manager



Karim Yassine
Procurement &
Logistics Officer



Alexandra Baka
Central
Administration
Officer



Malake Daher
Administration
Officer



Amer Saidi
Volunteers
and Outreach
Coordinator



PARTNERS & DONORS



Buitenlandse Zaken
Ontwikkelings
samenwerking





BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

PICK UP YOUR HIMA BIODIVERSITY GUIDE

BUY / DONATE ONLINE
www.soukalhima.spnl.org/ www.spnl.org/donate/

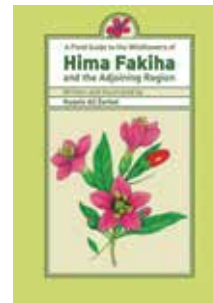
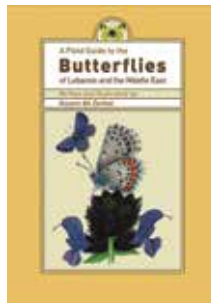
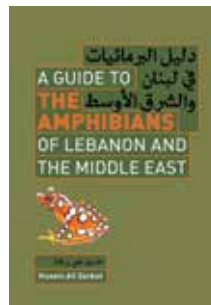
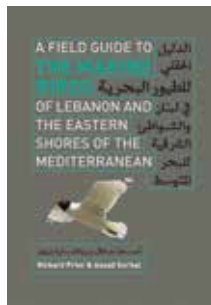
Credits

Design | **Karim Farah**
Illustrations | **Husein Ali Zorkot**
Printing | **Salim Dabbous Printing**

Beirut 2024



/ SpnlOrg



HIMA SERVICES

Homat Al Hima International proudly operates in many areas and enables individuals to connect with nature and wildlife. We offer a range of services such as consulting, excursions, film shooting, and sale of natural products. You can ask for customized services, and we will be pleased to assist you and meet your specific needs. To that end, kindly find below our contact details:

www.homatalhima.com
contact us:
www.homatalhima.com/contact/

CONTACT

MAIN OFFICE

MLHC

Kayfoun, Mount Lebanon, +961 5 271 041

OTHER CENTERS

HHIC

West Bekaa, Kherbet Kanafar

news@spnl.org
www.spnl.org

41 YEARS SERVING SPECIES SITES SOCIETY



WWW.SPNL.ORG

SPNL THE WORLD LEADER IN HIMA REVIVAL

Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) is a national non-governmental organization established under a no.6.A.D. in 1986.

SPNL is the national partner for Birdlife International in Lebanon, and the first IUCN member in Lebanon.

SPNL aims to conserve birds, and biodiversity in Lebanon; and to promote the sustainable use of natural resources. SPNL is a leader in reviving the "Hima" community based approach as a decentralized approach for managing natural resources in a sustainable way.



SIGRID
RAUSING
TRUST

HWF

