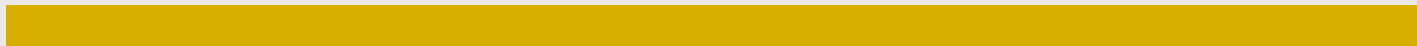


COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAYBOOK · LEBANON

Hima

Nature Protection Through Community Partnership



An ancient stewardship system, revived for our generation
and a practical guide to starting one

4000+
YEARS OF HISTORY

60+
HIMAS IN LEBANON

460K+
BENEFICIARIES

27
WDPA RECOGNISED

500K+
BIRDS MONITORED ANNUALLY

FOREWORD

For more than 15 centuries, the Hima (Arabic for protected land) has been one of the world's oldest systems of community-based conservation. Built on the principles of stewardship, equity, and the sustainable use of natural resources, it reflects the enduring connection between healthy ecosystems and thriving communities.

Today, as the world confronts biodiversity loss, climate change, and ecosystem degradation, the Hima offers a practical and inspiring model for conservation and sustainable development. Rooted in local knowledge and shared responsibility, it demonstrates the vital role of communities in protecting both nature and cultural heritage.

This booklet introduces the Hima as a living tradition and a modern conservation approach. It highlights its successful revival through the work of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL), whose partnerships with municipalities, local communities, national institutions, and international organizations have shown how the Hima and community-led conservation can restore ecosystems, strengthen local governance, and support sustainable livelihoods.

As interest in the Hima grows across the Middle East region and beyond, we hope this booklet will inspire policymakers, practitioners, educators, and community leaders to embrace this proven model, establish and support Himas, and help build a future where people and nature thrive together.

Assad Serhal
Director General, Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL)



DOROUB AL HIMA & SNOW



INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS HIMA?

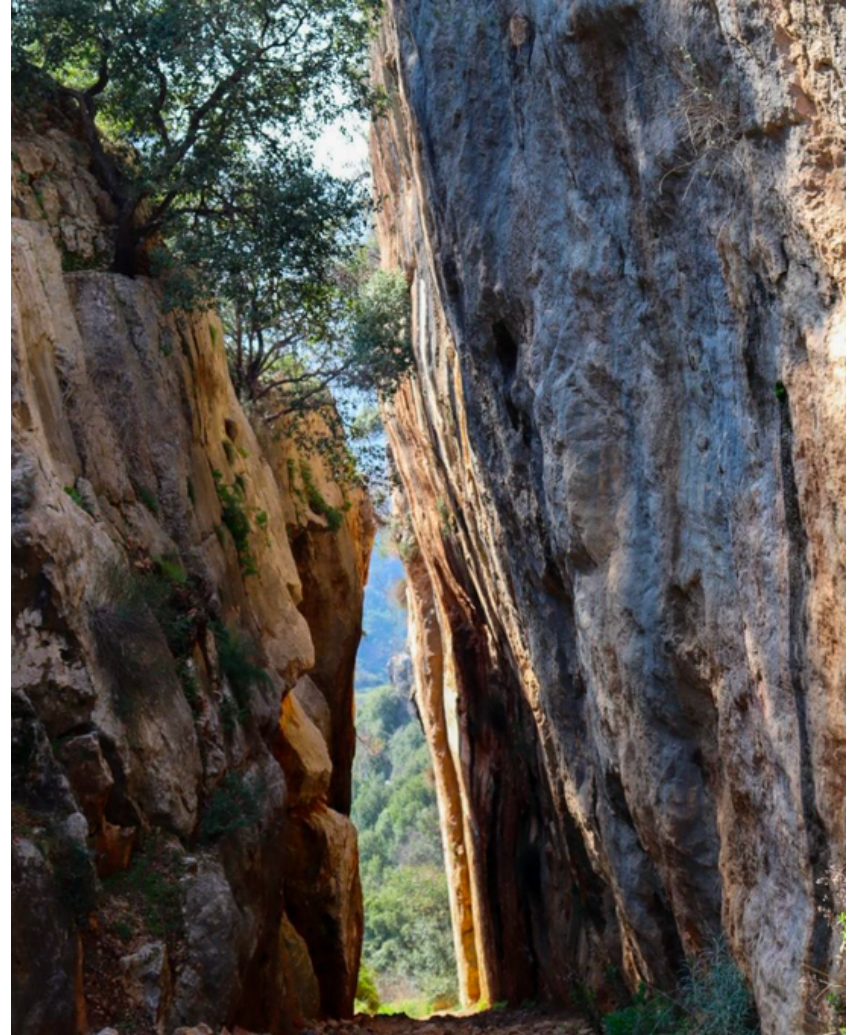
In a world of accelerating environmental crises, the Hima system offers one of humanity's oldest and most elegant answers.

The Hima (also written as Himā, Arabic: حمى) is a traditional Arabian and Levantine conservation system, one of the oldest known forms of community-based natural resource management in the world, dating back over 1,500 years.

The Hima model has been revived as a modern conservation framework, most notably in Lebanon by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon, (SPNL).

Hima sites combine ecological protection with community livelihoods - sustainable agriculture, ecotourism, local food systems, and nature education - so that conservation benefits the people living alongside it rather than excluding them.

It's a powerful model because it frames nature conservation as something indigenous to the region, not a Western import, giving it deep cultural legitimacy across the Middle East and North Africa.



The Fizr Geological Site - Kfarmatta. A Hima landscape

"Hima makes humans partners in conservation, not just consumers of it."

SCHOOL WITH NO WALLS - SNOW



TIMELINE

A LIVING HISTORY

THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO

Origins in Arabian Tribal Society

Bedouin and Arab tribes designated Hima zones around wells, pastures, and forests. Seasonal bans on grazing and hunting let ecosystems recover rotational conservation, millennia before the term existed. Tribes enforced these zones through shared honour and collective governance.

19TH–20TH CENTURY

Decline Under Modernisation

Colonial land laws and centralised state administration eroded customary governance across the Arab world. Hima zones were absorbed into state land; the communal ecological knowledge that sustained them began to fade. Generations grew up without ever hearing the word.

7TH–15TH CENTURY

Codified in Islamic Civilisation

Prophet Muhammad established Himas around Medina. Islamic jurisprudence formalised the system, embedding environmental justice and collective responsibility into law. Hima became synonymous with a sacred compact, between people, between generations, and between humanity and the land.

2004 — PRESENT

Revival in Lebanon by SPNL

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon became the first modern organisation to systematically revive the Hima model, partnering with municipalities from the south to the north and from Mount Lebanon to Bekaa. By 2025, 27 sites were internationally recognised. National Geographic, IUCN, and Leo Burnett campaigns brought the story to the world.

HOMAT AL HIMA - BIRD MONITORING



SIDE BY SIDE

HIMA VS NATURE RESERVE

They are complementary, not competing.

Understanding the difference helps communities choose the right approach.



HIMA SYSTEM

ORIGIN

Ancient Arab tradition, thousands of years old

GOVERNANCE

Community-led; local customs and knowledge

RESOURCE USE

Sustainable use permitted within agreed limits

FLEXIBILITY

Adapts to changing seasons and community needs

IDENTITY

Reflects local culture, language, and heritage

COST

Low as it runs on community commitment, rather than budgets

VS



NATURE RESERVE

ORIGIN

Modern concept, Western 19th–20th century environmental law

GOVERNANCE

State or institution-managed; formal legislation

RESOURCE USE

Often restricted or banned to protect ecosystems

FLEXIBILITY

Governed by fixed scientific and legal frameworks

IDENTITY

Based on global ecological standards preferably

COST

High as it requires rangers, infrastructure, and enforcement

HIMA FARMERS - LAVENDER HARVESTING



FACTS

DID YOU KNOW?

Six surprising facts about the world of Hima



How many bird species migrate through Lebanon each year?

ANSWER
Over 300 species

Lebanon sits at the crossroads of three continents and is one of the world's most critical bird migration corridors.



How old is the Hima system?

ANSWER
4000+ years old

One of the oldest documented conservation systems in human history, predating modern nature reserves by millennia.



What global body officially recognises Lebanon's Himas?

ANSWER
World Database for Protected Areas

27 Lebanese Himas are formally listed alongside national parks and UNESCO sites worldwide.



How many people benefit from Lebanon's Hima programmes?

ANSWER
460,000+

Through trails, markets, farms, and education. Working with entire communities, not just nature lovers.



What mammal signals a healthy Hima river system?

ANSWER
The Eurasian Otter

Its presence signals clean, thriving rivers. Hima sites along the Litani have become otter refuges.



What % of Lebanon's territory do Hima sites cover?

ANSWER
6.5% of Lebanon

Across 60+ sites, from cedar forests in the north to wetlands in the Bekaa and the southern coast.

HOMAT AL HIMA



WILDLIFE

BIODIVERSITY IN THE HIMA

500k+ birds from 300 species migrate over Lebanon yearly connecting the Euro-Asian African flyway, using Lebanon's Himas, IBBAs and KBAs for resting, refuelling and breeding. Hima sites are their lifeline.

**RAPTORS**

Honey buzzards, black kites, short-toed eagles, and other raptors funnel through Lebanon's ridges each spring and autumn. Hima sites protect their stopover habitats.

**SONGBIRDS**

Goldfinches and other songbirds nest in Hima woodlands. Tens of Thousands of individual birds are monitored annually across SPNL's network of sites.

**POLLINATORS**

Hima wildflower meadows are critical refuges for pollinators supporting regional agriculture across the region.

**EURASIAN OTTER**

Its presence indicates clean rivers. Otters have returned to Hima corridors along the Litani and tributaries, a sign that the system is working.



*"Lebanon is a **bridge between three continents** for migratory wildlife. The Hima system protects that bridge, one community at a time."*

HIMA FARMERS



IMPACT

LEBANON HIMA **IMPACT**

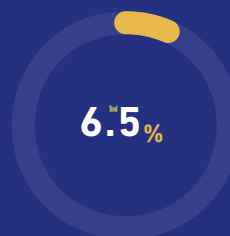
Numbers that tell a story of communities choosing to care



ACTIVE HIMAS IN
LEBANON



WDPA
RECOGNISED



OF LEBANON'S
TERRITORY



MONITORED
PER YEAR

 **460,000+**
Beneficiaries

 **1,550**
Homat Al Hima
volunteers

 **219 km**
Ecological trails

 **200+**
Hima farmers

 **5,890**
Students engaged

HOMAT AL HIMA - BIRD MONITORING



WHAT SPNL HELP DEVELOP

THE HIMA ECOSYSTEM?

Five interconnected programmes that touch every dimension of community life.



DOROUB AL HIMA

219KM+ OF TRAILS

A 219km network of ecological hiking trails connecting Hima sites across Lebanon. Sustainable tourism generates income for local communities, turning conservation into a livelihood, not a sacrifice.



SCHOOL WITH NO WALLS (SNOW)

5890+ STUDENTS

Outdoor environmental education bringing 5,890+ students into direct contact with nature, developing ecological awareness and a lifelong relationship with their landscape.



HOMAT AL HIMA

1550+ GUARDIANS

A youth volunteer programme training 1,550+ Guardians of the Hima, equipping a new generation with ecological monitoring and conservation leadership skills.



HIMA FARM

200+ FARMERS

Supporting 200+ farmers to adopt sustainable practices, reducing chemicals, preserving heirloom varieties, and producing local goods that carry the Hima mark of environmental integrity.



SOUK AL HIMA

WOMEN-LED

A marketplace connecting rural producers, especially women, with urban consumers. Strengthening local economies while preserving traditional food culture and giving communities a stake in their Hima's health.

SMART HIMA PROJECT



PROCESS GUIDE

THE GOLDEN10

A practical, step-by-step guide developed by SPNL to walk any community from first conversation to active stewardship.

1 Assess the Site Together

Meet with the SPNL team to jointly evaluate the proposed Hima area, whether on village communal land or based on a community-proposed zonation plan.

2 Prepare the Maps

Produce the required maps defining the Hima boundaries and land use zones.

3 Draft the Hima Decision

Draw on the municipality's strategic plans where available, alongside SPNL's environmental and socio-economic assessment, to draft the formal Hima decision.

4 Adopt the Hima Decision

SPNL provides a flexible, community-adapted decision framework, which the municipal council formally adopts.

5 Form the Hima Committee

Together with SPNL, establish a Hima Committee drawn from village stakeholders across key community sectors.

6 Appoint the Hima Coordinator

Together with SPNL, designate a village Hima Coordinator to lead day-to-day stewardship of the site.

7 Build the Management Plan

Begin co-developing the Hima Management and Action Plan and roadmap for how the community will care for its land.

8 Train the Homat Al Hima Team

Launch training and capacity-building for a Homat Al Hima volunteer team drawn from within the village.

9 Launch Doroub Al Hima

Initiate the Doroub Al Hima trails programme alongside the Homat Al Hima programme to connect people to the land and generate local income.

10 Write the First Project

Together with the municipality and any local NGO partners, draft the first Hima project proposal to secure the funding needed to sustain and grow the work.

SCHOOL WITH NO WALLS



HOMAT AL HIMA - TRAINING



WHY IT WORKS

THE HIMA DIFFERENCE - COMMUNITY

The Hima Difference: *The Community Owns It*

Hima gives local people real authority, without restricting their authority over it. They set the rules. They enforce them. They benefit from them. This is why Himas outlast government programmes as they are not imposed from outside.
They grow from within.



01 Protect

Natural areas are safeguarded through community rules. Seasonal fishing bans, grazing limits, and fire prevention are enforced by people who live there and care about the outcome.

02 Sustain

Hima allows sustainable use: farming, herding, and harvesting continue, but within limits that let resources renew for current and future generations.

03 Empower

Communities become stewards, not bystanders. Municipal councils, farmers, fishers, youth, and women all have formal roles, turning conservation into civic pride.



READY TO PROTECT YOUR **LAND**?

The Hima system proves that the best conservation solutions grow from communities themselves. Whether you are a municipal leader, a farmer, a student, or simply someone who loves Lebanon's land, there is a role for you.

SPNL supports every community from the first conversation to formal recognition and beyond.



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"A people that cares for its land will always have something to pass on."



SPNL
hومات ال هـما