

US FOREST SERVICE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS



MIGRATORY BIRD PROGRAM IN THE MIDDLE EAST Promoting Conservation and Collaboration

The US Forest Service (USFS) is working globally with partners to support, strengthen and enhance bird conservation programs. Through diverse partnerships, collaborative processes, and collective objectives, bird conservation activities improve habitat conditions for increasingly threatened bird populations. Bird programs also serve as catalysts for regional cooperation, economic development and community action. Since 2007, the US Forest Service has promoted a bird conservation initiative across the Middle East that encourages regional partnerships, technical exchange, and local conservation action.



BACKGROUND

The Middle East is home to what is possibly the most significant migratory bird corridor in the world. Over 500 million birds from across Europe and Asia traverse the region on a biannual basis as they head south to wintering grounds in the Middle East and Africa and then return north for the summer breeding season. However, birds are increasingly at risk from shrinking habitat, urban development, over hunting, and industrial and agricultural pollution. The demand for municipal water supplies and land for agriculture and grazing is overwhelming the available resource base. Wetlands have been drained, rangelands have been overgrazed and bird habitat is quickly being lost. To overcome these obstacles, bird programs require coordinated efforts at regional, national, and local levels.

US FOREST SERVICE APPROACH

An effective and proven strategy used to conserve bird populations is the flyway approach. The success of the flyway approach lies in creating links between critical bird habitat and communities along bird migration routes. A flyway approach creates a network of partners who share information, work towards common goals, and promote long term management capacity. Activities are carried out at the ground level, involving schools, communities, and local organizations. At the same time, exchange of techniques, policies and lessons learned occurs at national and regional levels to promote benefits across multiple areas. The results are multi-fold: linkages develop, people unite, communities are strengthened, processes are enabled, and economic opportunities are enhanced.

By promoting bird conservation initiatives across the Middle East, the US Forest Service and partners aim to:

- Conserve critical bird habitat areas;
- Expand and strengthen the network of collaborating non-governmental organizations in the region;

- Promote the involvement of local communities to manage and oversee their natural resources;
- Encourage and facilitate multi-institutional involvement;
- Disseminate successful management strategies and curricula across the region;
- Provide opportunities for international exchange and training;
- Develop a curriculum of conservation education for schoolchildren; and
- Encourage the participation of youth in civil society.

CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES

The US Forest Service actively collaborates with government and non-government partners across the Middle East, who serve as the foundation for on-going bilateral activities. As activities take root at the local level, this network of partners will foster the expansion and implementation of activities into a multi-lateral migratory bird initiative across the Middle East. The Forest Service is focused on strengthening the network and building the capacity of nongovernmental organizations, communities, and land managers to take part and engage in conservation and education activities.

The Forest Service is focusing current efforts on building the capacity of partners in monitoring and implementing bird conservation programs. Currently the Forest Service is:

1. Supporting the participation of rangers from the Nature Conservation Sector in Egypt and members of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel at training programs at PRBO Conservation Science in California that focus on bird monitoring and conservation education;
2. Partnering with the Nature Conservation Sector and local partners in Wadi El Gemal National Park in Egypt to develop bird related tourism activities in and around the Park;
3. Providing technical assistance and support to the Keren Kayemeth Leisrael and Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel at the Lake Agmon / Hula Valley



complex in northern Israel. This is an Important Bird Area, a BirdLife International designation reserved for the highest priority bird habitats, and an important migratory stopover point and wintering grounds for Eurasian Cranes and other globally important species, and;

4. Exploring opportunities to promote collaborative efforts between the Palestinian Wildlife Society in the West Bank and the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel.

Future activities will build upon the experience of current migratory bird programs operating in the region, promote existing ideas and techniques that work locally and regionally, and capitalize on partners' existing networks and capacity. The Forest Service aims to bring these groups together and encourage technical experts and partners to address bird habitat conservation at the local and regional level in the Middle East.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you would like to learn more about our program and/or discuss possible collaboration with the US Forest Service, please contact our Middle East or Migratory Bird Programs:

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Further information about International Programs can be found on our website at: www.fs.fed.us/global/globe/mideast/welcome.htm.