2021 Annual Summary for BirdLife Israel

2021 was another COVID-19 year that impacted international and domestic tourism. Moreover, in late 2021 Dan Alon ended his role at BirdLife Israel, and Yoav Perlman replaced him. In December 2021, an outbreak of avian flu hit Israel, causing a great impact on storks in the Hula Valley, and driving important management processes.

Rehabilitation and Restoration of Aquatic Habitats

This issue has become a central theme at BirdLife Israel. In this context, funds are being raised for the Start-Up Nature project that was launched in 2021; the trip made in May by Dan Alon to North America to raise funds was very successful. Similarly, the Kfar Ruppin rehabilitation project progressed significantly in 2021. Establishment of the birding park on its aquatic habitats was completed, and the management program for Amud Reservoir continued; this reservoir has become a regional focus for birds, including rare breeding birds.

Network of Birding Centers

Work continued on the Ma’agan Michael Birding Park, including signing an agreement with the Israel Government Tourism Corporation and Kibbutz Ma’agan Michael. Physical work to establish the park began with the entrance lobby that is located in the field school; later work during 2022 will focus on the pools that will be rehabilitated and turned into aquatic habitats. In Kfar Ruppin, work has finished on the birding park, including setting up the infrastructure for receiving the public. In the Nili and David Jerusalem Bird Observatory we finished constructing the field laboratory; its will begin operating in 2022. In the Eilat Birding Park we set up the new water body and the system of observation hideouts and trails.

Surveys and Data Collection

The 2021 breeding season was the second of three data collection seasons for the Israel Bird Atlas, with the active participation of hundreds of birders via the eBird application. Two other comprehensive surveys were held in spring 2021 – the second and last season of the Nitzana Region Survey, and the first of two seasons of the Golan and Mt. Hermon Survey. The Birding Center will continue to work in partnership with the Nature and Parks Authority (NPA) to closely monitor breeding raptors in Israel.

Champions of Migration and the Wildlife Protection Law

Even without international participation because of COVID-19, we launched a ‘Year of the Turtledove’ initiative in 2021, aiming to raise awareness and funds to protect the European turtledove in the Mediterranean Basin. Last September in the Hula Valley a very successful ‘Champions of Migration’ race was held; it included dozens of groups, including children and teenagers, women, the Ultra-Orthodox and Arabs. Following pressure by BirdLife Israel, the Minister for Environmental Protection declared a temporary three-year ban on hunting the European turtledove in Israel and a permanent ban on hunting the common quail in Israel.

Tourism and Public Action

Despite the lack of international tourism, domestic birding tourism activities continued to be very successful in 2021. The Israel Birding Club continued to grow, and birding activities were in high demand, including tours and workshops. Following our activities during the COVID-19 period, our Series of Online Lectures continued with great success; it included many meetings throughout the year, including field meetings.

Online Cameras

Broadcasting by our online cameras from raptor nests entered its sixth season in 2021. As in previous years, the online cameras received great exposure and also conveyed important nature conservation messages. During 2021, we operated online cameras in nests of the griffon vulture, long-legged buzzard and short-toed snake-eagle, and for the first time, the Egyptian vulture.

Spreading Wings

Within the framework of the ‘Spreading Wings’ project, a partnership between SPNI, NPA and Israel Electric Corporation (IEC), our work continued in two main directions: promoting national action to prevent poisoning, which has a devastating impact on raptors in Israel, and working with IEC to minimize electrocutions and collisions with power lines, particularly with respect to raptors. Concerning the Action to Prevent Poisoning, particularly after the severe poisoning event in October, we continued working to correct the relevant sections of the Wildlife Protection Law that deal with poisoning, as well as promote a national plan for preventing poisoning, led by the Ministry for Environmental Protection. In our work with IEC we made significant headway – an agreement to protect 6000 utility poles over the next five years and comprehensive research to find effective protective means for minimizing collisions.