**Protecting the Jerusalem Hills** [**https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/7305**](https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/7305)

This campaign is part of the campaigns:

* **Open Landscapes**
* **Urban Nature**

The Story in 100 Words

The Campaign in Numbers

The Full Story

The State of the Campaign

More Campaigns

1. The Story in 100 Words <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/7305#intro>

The Jerusalem Hills are a real natural treasure. There are green forests, magical springs, and ancient terraces.

This wonderful hiking site is home to the endangered Palestine mountain gazelle and many other species of animals and plants.

Unfortunately, building plans that are likely to destroy the beautiful nature surrounding Israel’s capital are proposed time and again.

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel campaigns consistently against plans to establish new neighborhoods and pave roads that may desiccate the springs and decimate the trees, and leave both animals and humans without escape from the city and its pollution.

2. The Campaign in Numbers <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/7305#small-fight-in-nums>

**The campaign for White Ridge in numbers**

5,250

residential units

in the White Ridge building plan

80,000

residential units

A myriad of units can be built within Jerusalem without having to endanger the incredible nature outside the city

Hundreds

of gazelles

The space around White Ridge is crucial for the Palestine mountain gazelle and is one of the most important habitats for this globally endangered species

10,000

trees

The White Ridge Plan will lead to extensive tree-clearing

3. The Full Story <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/7305#sf-story>

**The Full Story on the Jerusalem Hills**

The Jerusalem Hills are a spectacular green gateway to Israel’s capital; a wonderful celebration of nature and history with countless attractions for hikers.

They include an abundance of springs that flow in this region due to the soft chalky rock. During the last 3,000 years, diverse agriculture developed around the springs, leaving behind an impressive terraced landscape and ancient agricultural structures with great cultural importance.

The Jerusalem Hills are a natural system of global importance. They support a rich diversity of animals, including the Palestine mountain gazelle, which is globally endangered, as well as vegetation unique to the Land of Israel.

The importance of these assets is clear. However, in recent decades more and more plans are being proposed for extensive building in the Jerusalem Hills. These plans include the establishment of huge neighborhoods, multi-lane highways, interchanges, and other infrastructure which may destroy any trace of the wonderful nature adjacent to Israel’s capital.

The springs are, of course, used by both animals and humans—who currently enjoy the opportunity for a pleasant dip, and in the past depended on the springs to grow food on the terraces that characterize the region.

A study performed at the Hebrew University found that the Jerusalem Hills, a walk away from the Old City of Jerusalem, contain the highest density of tunnel springs. These are springs in which tunnels were quarried to store water in pools and drain it into plots for growing food. These are probably the oldest tunnels in the world, and they strengthen the importance of the Jerusalem Hills as the ancient agricultural belt that surrounded the Old City of Jerusalem.

**The Jerusalem Hills are threatened, again**

In 2007, the campaign to protect the Jerusalem Hills prevented the Safdie Plan, a large building plan that included 20,000 residential units. Thus, we protected the breath-taking landscape that provides a wonderful view from Sataf, in a campaign led by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel together with a coalition of organizations.

In 2014, we once again managed to stop initiatives for the building of a new city in the Zur Hadassah region and a huge neighborhood next to Mevaseret Zion on Mt. Harat.

But unfortunately, the need to protect the Jerusalem Hills continues today.

In recent years, the Safdie Plan returned to the public agenda, only this time the plan is more complex and covert.

Instead of one large plan, several smaller plans are being proposed without any apparent connection among them. But when we look closely at each building plan with a broad perspective, we see the disheartening big picture: the Jerusalem Hills are once more under threat from all directions.

At the forefront of these dangerous processes is the White Ridge Plan. The plan includes a huge neighborhood on the south-western side of Jerusalem, deep in the hilly forested landscape that surrounds the capital. It outlines 5,250 residential units as well as structures for employment, commerce, and hotels.

But the White Ridge plan is only the beginning of proposed plans. This is a concerning start that may lead to further plans and extensive threats to nature and the landscape. Most of the threats are related to a huge highway from the Mevaseret Zion region to the area of Ein Karem and Moshav Ora, which will completely dissect the Jerusalem Hills.

**Danger for the springs and gazelles**

As it is, nature in and around the White Range is fragile. Highways, railways, and many buildings in the region endanger wild animals, plants, and unique hiking sites. The significance of further building on White Ridge is very concerning.

Establishing a large neighborhood will fragment the Refaim Stream ecological corridor; meaning, it will fragment the natural open landscapes, severely impact animals and plants, and cause long-term damage.

The land where the building is planned is a habitat and refuge for wildlife, particularly, large mammals such as the Palestine mountain gazelle, a globally endangered species. Only 4,000 gazelles remain in Israel; approximately 200 of them live in the White Ridge region, which is an essential environment for these gazelles and for other herds of gazelles living nearby.

Further, the soil in White Ridge is important for the region’s spring water. Covering the ridge with houses and concrete will reduce the available surface for water infiltration; the expected result is that White Spring may dry up, and other springs are also likely to be affected.

**The entrepreneur’s interests**

The entrepreneurs of the White Ridge building plan claim that this plan is apparently essential. Similar claims also arose during planning committee discussions. How do they explain such a thing?

Their slightly warped argument is such: to increase the number of units inside Jerusalem through evacuation-building projects, they’d need to entice entrepreneurs and contractors.

If the contractors don’t receive some kind of “compensation” (in the form of housing units in the White Ridge hills), they will refuse to build within the city itself, claiming that it’s not profitable. Therefore, they are offered additional land for more profitable building (known as “complementary land”), outside the city.

Supporters of the White Ridge building plan contribute further additional claims to the effect that this region is not special or important, and has “mediocre” nature. We, of course, strongly oppose these claims. White Ridge is a region with particularly high-value natural assets.

The Jerusalem Hills are undoubtedly a paradise of wildlife, forests, and springs; and an incredible hiking site. Could the economic argument pull its weight?

Absolutely not! The economic argument of the entrepreneurs and supporters of the White Ridge building plan is deceptive and unfounded.

In February 2019, a report was published on Jerusalem’s land reserves for housing until 2040. The investigation revealed that there are 125,000 potential residential units in the capital. Even if we take into account the difficulties in building some of them, we are left with almost 80,000 residential units that can be built within Jerusalem, until 2040, without affecting the unique natural landscapes surrounding the city.

Furthermore, building on the city’s outskirts is complicated, inefficient, and expensive. It requires more highways and neglects the inner-city neighborhoods and the option of renewing and improving them. Building on White Ridge and other locations in the Jerusalem Hills will cause the diversion of many resources to outside the city, at the expense of building-evacuation plans, urban renewal, employment development, and hotels in the heart of Jerusalem.

**The vision: a national park in the Jerusalem Hills**

To protect the Jerusalem Hills for future generations, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel is promoting the establishment of the Jerusalem Hills and Springs National Park.

A national park will connect forests, open spaces, and existing nature reserves to create a unique and diverse protected area. It’d be a joy for hikers, and is particularly important for wildlife and plants. Only a diverse, continuous area will allow the natural systems to persist and flourish into the future. The Minister for Environmental Protection, Tamar Zandberg, declared that she will support the plan—for a protected green mantle that surrounds the City of Jerusalem in nature’s embrace.

**Video photography**: Yair Paz

**For Further Reading**

Position paper of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel against building on White Ridge

Report on land reserves for homes in Jerusalem until 2040

The full opposition of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel to building on White Ridge (February 2019)

Opposition letter from 72 scientists against building on White Ridge (February 2019)

4. The State of the Campaign <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/7305#current-state>

**The State of the Campaign**

Even after a years-long battle, many building plans threaten the unique nature around Jerusalem. If they are realized, tens of thousands of residential units, as well as highways and interchanges, will leave neither room or clean air for animals, plants, springs, and hikers.

The plan to establish a neighborhood on White Ridge has been approved, but our campaign against it has not ended. The same is true for other locations in the Jerusalem Hills, such as the plan to establish a highway in the area of Ora Intersection. We will continue highlighting the distortions in the plans and appealing against them in court.

Join us, and together we’ll protect the wonderful nature and landscapes surrounding Jerusalem.

**More stories from nature**

**Do you want to help us protect the Jerusalem Hills?**

**Become members and nature protectors**

Join now

**Unique Nature in Danger in the Mt. Hermon Foothills—the Full Story** [**https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/3842**](https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/3842)

**Unique Nature in Danger in the Foothills of Mt. Hermon**

This campaign is part of the campaigns:

* Open Landscapes

1. The Story in 100 Words <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/3842#intro>

In one location, at the northern tip of Israel, you can see the entire picture: if we don’t pay attention to the small details, humans are likely to destroy nature.

A plan to build a new neighborhood, New Majdal, in the Druze town of Majdal Shams, has been submitted to the planning committees. Majdal Shams is surrounded by the Mt. Hermon Nature Reserve, which is designed to protect plants, wildlife, and the open landscapes in the foothills of the country’s highest peak.

Apparently, the land allocated to New Majdal takes up only a small part of the Mt. Hermon Nature Reserve. But what is not immediately apparent is that this small place—Mt. Keta—is home to some of Israel’s most unique natural treasures.

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel calls on everyone to protect the rare plants and unique landscape of Mt. Keta. There is an alternative planning option for the new neighborhood which allows the building of houses without destroying nature; we must choose this alternative.

2. The Campaign in Numbers <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/3842#small-fight-in-nums>

**The Campaign for Mt. Keta in Numbers**

650

species of plants

A great number of plants grow in an area of only 10 km2 on Mt. Keta, where New Majdal is planned to be built

50

species of plants

Many of the plants growing on Mt. Keta are threatened or endangered

4

endemic species

Mt. Keta is home to four species of plants that are not found anywhere else in the world

3. The Full Story <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/3842#sf-story>

**The Full Story on Mt. Keta**

A new neighborhood, New Majdal, is planned for the town Majdal Shams, in the foothills of Mt. Hermon. According to the current building plan, New Majdal will be established on Mt. Keta, a small area of 10 km2 on the outskirts of the large Mt. Hermon Nature Reserve.

Whatever could happen if we build on a small hill and remove a bit of the reserve? Our thinking is clouded if we assume that this is okay.

In truth, it’d be a detrimental decision—Mt. Keta may look small, but it is home to an extraordinary richness of nature. This place is unique not just on a national scale, but has characteristics of global importance.

Scientists who’ve studied Mt. Keta declared that it is “a botanical point of interest worth more than its weight in gold. There is no other site like it in Israel that contains such a one-off unique concentration of rare species from different groups. Whatever is destroyed there will never return.”

**We can build without destroying**

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel strongly opposes building a residential neighborhood on Mt. Keta, which is expected to completely destroy the richness of nature on site. This plan will leave no hope for the rare, threatened plants.

In order to build houses on Mt. Keta, which has a unique topographical structure, massive development is required, after which nothing will remain of this very diverse nature.

Instead of the plan to build on Mt. Keta, we propose an alternative plan; it was rejected by the planning committees. According to the program that we recommend, the new neighborhood will be established on a site that is closer to the built-up area of Majdal Shams. This plan will not have any impact on important, unique natural assets such as those found on Mt. Keta.

The planners who chose the Mt. Keta building plan prefer it, among other reasons, because it includes more residential units than the plan we recommend. However, it is unclear whether there is actually a need for such a large number of homes.

If New Majdal is established on Mt. Keta, it will be geographically disconnected from the existing town of Majdal Shams; in practice, this neighborhood will be a new settlement. This is an example of problematic, partial planning, because this building plan does not cope with, or offer a solution for, future building problems that are likely to arise in the town or even the entire region.

The advantages of establishing a new settlement are completely unclear. In contrast, the environmental cost of building on Mt. Keta is tremendous, and we’ll never be able to repair the damage done.

**Irreplaceable richness of nature**

Let’s take a closer look at the extraordinarily wonderful landscape of Mt. Keta, and we’ll understand its unique importance.

The diminutive Mt. Keta was defined as a hotspot—a highly important nature site with a great, unique diversity of plants and animals. And that’s not all; scientists estimate that the more we learn about nature on Mt. Keta, the greater the richness we’ll discover.

Mt. Keta boasts impressive flowering during different seasons of the year. It has some of the largest and most beautiful orchids in Israel, with more than 20 different species. This is an incredible number because it represents three-quarters of all the species of orchids in Israel. Mt. Keta is home to endangered orchids, such as the lax-flowered orchid, and it also supports species that don’t grow in any other place in Israel, such as the Syrian orchid and Roman dactylorhiza.

This small area also supports other natural treasures that must be protected. To date, more than 50 species under different degrees of threat have been identified, as well as another 10 very rare species. It also boasts endemic species—species of plants that do not exist anywhere else in the world besides Israel.

**Desert soil and mountain air**

How did we get such incredible nature on Mt. Keta?

This abundance is thanks to the combination of the climate of the northern Golan Heights and a soil type that, in Israel, is only found in the desert; this is the only non-desert location with outcrops of Nubian sandstone. Thus exists an unparalleled geological and ecological system of plants and animals.

This small area of scrubland is home to prickly burnet, soft-hairy rockrose, spiny broom, and various trees. Bear’s plum, common hawthorn, and oak species may also be found. In 2021, a single prickly juniper tree was also found; until then, this tree had only been found in Israel in Mt. Meron Nature Reserve.

Mt. Keta also supports red-loam plants as well as alpine plants characteristic of Mt. Hermon and the peaks of the Golan Heights. In addition, it supports plants from aquatic habitats that grow on the edges of the springs that flow on the slopes, and a spectacular diversity of marlstone plants that grow around the beautiful marlstone outcrops on the mountainside.

**For further reading**

Article on the campaign on the Ynet website

4. The State of the Campaign <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/3842#current-state>

**The State of the Campaign**

The campaign to save Mt. Keta continues in full force.

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel is determined to protect the unique nature in the Mt. Hermon foothills—because if we don’t protect the rare vegetation of Mt. Keta now, we’ll lose it forever.

Currently, the planning committees have halted the process and we’ll continue campaigning in the future to prevent building on this location.

**More campaigns to save Israel’s nature**

**Protecting the open landscapes together—for the benefit of us all**

**Become members and nature protectors**

Join now

**Stopping the Crude Oil Disaster in the Gulf of Eilat** [**https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/2933**](https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/2933)

This campaign is part of the campaigns:

* Oceans and Beaches
* Open Landscapes

1. The Story in 100 Words <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/2933#intro>

Nearly every Israeli is familiar with the spectacular, unique coral reef in the Gulf of Eilat, and many have visited or dived there.

Unfortunately, Israel is currently promoting a project that poses a substantial threat to the corals. Not only is the reef in danger, but so are many other natural wonders throughout the landscapes from the Gulf of Eilat and through the Negev to Ashkelon.

The threatening cause is a project that is being planned for an unprecedented expansion of the amount of crude oil that reaches the Gulf of Eilat. From there, the crude oil will flow through a long, old, and dilapidated pipe to the Mediterranean Sea. Serious faults have already occurred in this pipe, causing serious damage to humans and the environment.

Another problem is that the crude oil pipe is managed by a government company, the Europe Asia Pipeline Company (EAPC), which hides its intentions by never fully exposing its activities to the public, let alone to government ministers or Knesset members.

2. The Campaign in Numbers <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/2933#small-fight-in-nums>

**The Crude Oil Pipeline in Numbers**

1959

establishment of the Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline. In 1969, the pipeline’s diameter was expanded, and since has been owned by EAPC

254

km

the length of the pipeline

10

million tons of crude oil

the maximum amount that flowed through the pipeline during the 1970s

30

million tons of crude oil

the potential amount of crude oil in the new agreement, according to EAPC publications

3. The Full Story <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/2933#sf-story>

The Full Story on the Pipeline

Alongside the signing of peace agreements with the UAE in 2020, an agreement was also signed for the transfer of particularly large amounts of crude oil from the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Eilat. From there, the crude oil is supposed to flow through a dilapidated old pipeline that crosses Israel northwards to Ashkelon.

Until now, five to seven tankers reach the Gulf of Eilat each year and empty their contents into the pipeline. According to this megalomanic plan, as far as we know, this number will increase to dozens of tankers per year. Most details of the plan remain a mystery because the agreement is confidential. What is certain, is that we are dealing with a tremendous risk to the environment.

The old pipeline was built in the 1960s and is run down and decrepit. Similar to many other issues related to the company operating the pipeline, EAPC, the public has very limited access to information, an issue upon which we will elaborate.

Nonetheless, we do know a few things: many researchers and scientists argue that the maintenance of the pipeline is inadequate. According to the findings of tests performed over the years, the pipeline wall has considerably worn away, and in some places, up to 70% of the pipeline’s thickness has corroded. It is also known that an additional pipeline, which extends from Ashkelon to Haifa, also exhibits extensive corrosion damage.

Despite the worrying findings, the problematic pipeline continues to be used to transfer crude oil under government approval. The proposed amount of oil to flow through the pipeline, according to the new plans, will reach unprecedented levels.

Old, long pipelines are known for faults, and the resulting significance is shocking: crude oil leaks have a devastating impact on unique natural wonders. These would include—first and foremost—the coral reefs of Eilat, and also entire ecosystems and vast landscapes that the pipeline passes through on its way to Ashkelon, which are home to a diversity of animals and plants.

Of course, such an event will also have an impact on humans; oil leaks could occur in the EAPC Port in Ashkelon. This would pollute dozens of square kilometers of the Mediterranean Sea and its beaches, as far as Tel Aviv, Haifa, Rosh Hanikra, and even beyond Israel’s waters.

A history of environmental damage

We must emphasize, that shocking scenarios of crude oil leaks are not unfounded. Cumulative evidence over several years has revealed that EAPC has been responsible for many leaks, some of which were hidden from the public.

A severe leak that shocked the public was the Evrona Disaster in 2014. The EAPC pipeline cracked near Be’er Ora, about 20 km north of Eilat. The leakage occurred during maintenance work as part of operations to establish the Ramon Airport. Approximately five million liters of crude oil flowed throughout the night and into Evrona Nature Reserve.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection classified the event as one of the most severe environmental disasters in the country’s history. The great damage to the diversity of plants and animals in the nature reserve was estimated at over 100 million NIS. Rehabilitation of the reserve continues until today and the level of soil pollution from the leak is still very high.

Moreover, the nature reserve was impacted by a crude oil leak in 1975, and the damage from that disaster is still felt today. The plants and animals living in the affected area have not yet been fully rehabilitated, even though decades have passed since the leak.

If tens of millions of takers of crude oil reach the Gulf of Eilat each year, the risk of faults rises significantly—and is incredibly concerning. We must do everything possible to prevent this from happening.

In July 2021, an appeal was submitted to the High Court against the new agreement with EAPC; the appeal was submitted by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, together with organizations Zalul and Adam Teva V’Din. In response, EAPC claimed that the chance of a leak was negligible; according to the assessment it submitted to the court, a leak is only expected to occur “once in 1,111 years”.

It turns out, that reality is much less comforting than the promises made by EAPC. Only one month had passed since the “once in 1,111 years” claim, and another leak was found in the pipeline near Ashkelon, which polluted 5,000 tons of soil over an area of approximately 3 dunams.

The secret agreement

The new agreement to transfer large quantities of crude oil through the pipeline was signed between EAPC and Red Med, a company from the UAE. This is another layer of secrecy in EAPC’s conduct, which usually acts far from the public eye, without transparency or supervision.

EAPC (which was previously called Eilat-Ashkelon Pipeline Company and is now called Europe-Asia Pipeline Company) is a government company that was established as part of the collaboration between Israel and the Shah regime of Iran. Among other things, the company built the pipeline from the Gulf of Eilat to Ashkelon (the Mediterranean coast) as an alternative to transferring crude oil in tankers through the Suez Canal.

EAPC was established under a screen of confidentiality. The company was registered in Canada and received various financial benefits. As such, the Planning and Building Law does not apply to EAPC and it received an exemption from paying taxes. The Mandatory Tenders Law also doesn’t apply to EAPC, whose leaders are appointed without a tender; usually, only retired military personnel and government officials receive such appointments.

The government prefers to reveal as little information as possible about what happens in EAPC. This is true not only for the general public but also for Knesset members and government ministers. Decisions concerning EAPC, such as the new agreement with the Emirates, are made in private meetings between the directors of government ministries and high-level officials.

As far as we know, the economic aims of the new agreement are similar to those for which EAPC was established several decades ago. Transferring crude oil through a pipeline saves having to sail the tankers from the UAE around Africa or through the crowded Suez Canal, whose shallow depth does not permit entry of large tankers.

According to EAPC, this agreement brings profit to Israel, yet we have no way of verifying this or any other claim regarding such agreements that are hidden from the public. However, we are certain that its implementation may cause an environmental disaster.

Danger to corals

The main concern raised by the oil transfer agreement is the coral reef in Eilat, a beautiful tourist destination and diving site. This is the northernmost reef in the world, and according to scientific estimates, it may be the only one to survive the climate crisis.

Throughout the world, coral reefs suffer a phenomenon known as bleaching, which can lead to their dying of starvation. Bleaching occurs when the algae that live on the corals and provide them with their main source of food, are destroyed. These algae are colorful; therefore, their disappearance causes the corals to look white.

It seems that the main cause of bleaching is the climate crisis and ocean warming. Due to reasons that are still not completely clear, the reefs in the Red Sea—in Aqaba, Eilat, and Sinai—have developed resistance to bleaching. Scientists believe that the reason for this is genetic resilience to living at higher temperatures. Therefore, they may be able to survive even if the water becomes warmer due to the climate crisis.

All this means that the reef in Eilat is important not just for us; it is a natural treasure of global significance. It may be one of the only places left in the world where we will be able to observe and study a healthy coral reef.

But one small crude oil leak could completely destroy it. If we add to this the government’s lack of preparedness for emergencies in coping with pollution, it’s clear that such a disaster could spell the end of the Gulf of Eilat.

The Gulf of Eilat is home to hundreds of species of fish and other marine organisms. The species richness in the gulf stems from its being an inlet with relatively gentle waves and thanks to that it has rarely suffered pollution. The resulting clear, beautiful waters allow the sun’s rays to penetrate the depths, which have become a fertile habitat for fishes and corals.

Don’t be fooled, the damage from an oil leak will not stop at fishes and corals. Tourism in Eilat depends, among other things, on tourists visiting and diving near the reef. Damage to the reef could cause a terrible economic blow. Therefore, the Eilat Municipality is one of the prominent opponents of the agreement.

Concern for an environmental disaster throughout Israel

Beyond the great dangers to the coral reef and the Gulf of Eilat, a leak along the pipeline in the Negev desert may cause heavy damage to extensive open landscapes in Israel, as happened in the Evrona disaster.

The Association of Public Health Physicians has previously highlighted the harm to the health of the residents of Ashkelon and its surroundings due to different facilities operated by EAPC there.

As an example: an oil leak could occur when loading the oil from the pipeline onto ships in the EAPC port in Ashkelon, or during the ships’ departure from the port. Such an event would cause severe pollution in the Mediterranean Sea over dozens of square kilometers and impact fishing and beaches as far as the north of the country.

This concern is of even greater importance than the disaster that occurred in February 2021, which was apparently caused by a ship from the Persian Gulf that poured hundreds of tons of crude oil into the Mediterranean Sea, adjacent to Israel’s coast. The event was classified as one of the most severe ecological disasters in the country’s history. It caused the death of fishes, birds, and marine organisms, and the entire country’s beaches were closed-off.

In December 2021, an appeal to the High Court (that was submitted by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel together with organizations Zalul and Adam Teva V’Din), demanding that the oil agreement be stopped, was withdrawn once the government transferred authority for the decision on this issue to the Ministry for Environmental Protection.

The Prime Minister’s Office declared that the government is not authorized to nullify the oil agreement. Nevertheless, it was decided that the Ministry for Environmental Protection, which opposes the agreement, would be the agency that deals with this issue on behalf of the government. Hence, the Ministry decided that the amount of oil flowing in the pipeline should be greatly restricted.

Currently, the legal process has been completed—but the public battle against this dangerous agreement continues in full force. We can and must stop the flow of crude oil through the dilapidated, old pipeline to protect the Gulf of Eilat, the Mediterranean Sea, and all of the natural landscapes between Eilat and Ashkelon.

Photos: Orel Ravivo, Erez Atir, Omri Salner, Noam Weiss, and Dov Greenblatt

Further Reading

The Website for the Campaign to Stop the Crude Oil Plan

Petition to Stop the Plan to Increase the Amount of Crude Oil in the Gulf of Eilat

EAPC said, “once in a thousand years”. So they said.

4. The State of the Campaign <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/2933#current-state>

The State of the Campaign

The campaign is at its peak. The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, together with a coalition of dozens of environmental organizations and residents of Eilat and Ashkelon, has declared that we must completely cancel the agreement to increase the amounts of crude oil reaching the Gulf of Eilat and flowing through the long, old, and dilapidated pipeline to Ashkelon.

This plan could lead to a disaster that would harm countless unique natural treasures, extensive open landscapes, and the residents of the entire country—thus we must stop it.

In Israel, as around the world, awareness of environmental issues is on the rise as part of the response to the global climate crisis. Unfortunately, despite the decision to restrict the amount of crude oil flowing in the pipeline, the Israeli Government continues to promote the agreement to transfer environmentally harmful fuels which contribute to global warming and endanger the unique coral reef in the Gulf of Eilat.

We are continuing our campaign in full force against the agreement and you’re welcome to join us.

More Campaigns

**Wildlife** [**https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns**](https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns)

**The Campaign against Hunting**

**The Full Story**

**License to Kill: The Campaign against Hunting** [**https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/1208**](https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/1208)

This campaign is part of the campaigns:

* Wildlife

1. The Story in 100 Words <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/1208#intro>

Israel is a nature hotspot with an incredible, unique diversity of wild animals. Unfortunately, many of them are endangered, and one of the cruelest threats they face is hunting.

We are campaigning for a complete ban on recreational hunting, which is currently legal. In our grim reality where wildlife struggle to survive, there is no reason to kill them just for fun. In Israel, extensive illegal hunting also occurs, and we are pushing legislation to expand enforcement and punishment against it.

Until we fully achieve these objectives, we are campaigning to stop the legal hunting of endangered wildlife, such as the European turtle dove and the quail.

2. The Campaign in Numbers <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/1208#small-fight-in-nums>

Hunting in Numbers

Thousands

of hunters

received hunting licenses from the State, but sadly, they are even allowed to hunt endangered birds, such as the European turtle dove and the common quail

Tens of thousands

of hunted wild birds

Each year, tens of thousands of wild birds are hunted in Israel; some are rare, endangered species

Thousands

of cases of illegal hunting

Each year, thousands of cases of illegal hunting occur in Israel. Only in a small proportion of cases are the offenders caught and punished; often these punishments are ridiculously insignificant

80%

The population of the common quail has plummeted by 80% in the last 30 years, yet only a *temporary* ban has been placed on quail hunting

3. The Full Story <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/1208#sf-story>

**The Full Story on Hunting**

Thousands of people wander the country with a license to kill. We’re talking about wildlife hunters. Absurdly, they call this “recreational” hunting a sport, when in fact, this is violent and cruel—the complete opposite of a nice, fair game that is practiced in real branches of sport.

Hunting is an unfair competition between those who hold great power—equipped with vehicles, weapons, and other technological means—and those who have almost no means of defense and finish this “sports competition” as corpses. In some cases, we’re talking about an agonizing and drawn-out death.

Not only the hunted animals are affected. Illegal hunting that takes place during the wildlife reproductive season may cause the death of cubs and fledglings who now have no one to care for them. The damage affects everyone who lives in the surroundings: just like animals, humans also suffer from the sound of the firing and vehicles, and the hunters’ invasiveness.

Thus, the death of one animal also results in great damage to many other animals for many years ahead; the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel sees this as a disaster that must be prevented.

**Israel—A Nature Hotspot**

Before we continue to describe the injustice caused by hunting, let’s first look at the wonderful side of this story: the incredible treasures of nature we have in Israel. Our small country is home to a rich diversity and impressive array of mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians, on a global scale.

But here lies the threat. Within Israel’s small, crowded land area there is unceasing competition between humans, who need more and more houses, highways, and infrastructure, and wild animals and plants. This expansion of human infrastructure leaves us and the wildlife without land to walk on, air to breathe, or water to drink. Under such difficult conditions there is no reason to allow hunting and the indiscriminate killing of animals.

But by law, thousands of hunters have received licenses to do just that. They can do so during the hunting season (yes, there is such a thing in Israel) which takes place between September and January each year. Hunters who receive licenses must pass test designed to ensure that they understand the rules and will avoid unnecessary, fatal harm to wildlife. But, in practice, there is almost no enforcement to ensure that this actually happens.

And that’s not all. Each year, thousands of cases of illegal hunting take place in Israel, according to the estimates of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel. Criminal hunters destroy wildlife that is already endangered: thousands of gazelles, rare ducks, hundreds of porcupines, hares, partridges, and even song-birds. Despite the great extent of illegal hunting, only in a few cases are the offenders caught. But even then, they are often released either without punishment or receive ridiculously insignificant punishments.

**The quail almost disappeared**

A shocking, irksome example of the cruelty of criminal hunters is the violent way in which they trap and kill the common quail, a critically endangered small bird. The hunters place high-intensity speakers that emit quail sounds at a said location, say, at the top of a hill. The speakers stay there for an entire night and attract the birds. In the morning, the hunters come with dogs and guns and decimate the quails indiscriminately.

Such shocking hunting events can lead to the death of dozens of rare birds. In the last few decades alone, the population of the common quail has declined by 80%.

Fortunately, the campaign by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel has led to a temporary ban on this hunting method, and we’re working to make this a permanent ban.

Before the establishment of the State of Israel, hunting almost led to the extinction of many wild animals, including the ibex. A great joint effort by many agencies managed to rehabilitate species of wildlife that had become extinct due to hunting. But even today, the danger of extinction threatens other animals, such as the European turtle dove. The law permits hunting of this beautiful bird, from the pigeon and dove family, which is one of the reasons why its population has dwindled by 40% in the last 30 years and why its future is in danger.

**Taking a hard line on punishment**

To cope with the injustices of hunting we must change the policy, which is conducted according to outdated rules that are irrelevant to protecting nature in the 21st century. The “Wildlife Protection Law” was legislated in 1955—despite its name it mainly refers to hunters, and not to protection of wildlife. Decades ago, awareness of nature conservation was scarce, but today there is no legitimization for the legal support of such a cruel, violent activity, which causes great damage that will impact nature for generations to come. Therefore, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel is requesting a complete ban on hunting that is falsely called a “recreational” sport.

But this is not enough. We must severely punish criminal hunters who are not deterred by anything, as it stands. It’s very hard to catch illegal hunters, although the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel is investing great efforts to do so. Even if the hunter is caught, they are often able to get out of taking responsibility. In the few cases where hunters have been caught and sentenced in court, they received light punishments, such as fines of only a few thousand shekels. To ensure that the hunters—who often also deal in the game meat market—will be wary of punishment, the fines must increase to hundreds of thousands of shekels. The current law does not provide a solution to another significant threat—undisciplined, illegal poisonings that kill thousands of animals; at the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel we are working to amend the this aspect of the law as well.

We often hear the claim that wild animals are hunted throughout the world, and thus, there’s no legitimacy for campaigning against it. But Israel is a small, crowded country. On the one hand, we are lucky to have an abundance of wildlife despite the reduced land area—from the gazelle, deer, and ibex to the vulture, turtledove, and egret. On the other hand, the open landscapes and the resources available to the animals are gradually disappearing. If we allow hunters to act without supervision and let criminals escape punishment, our treasures of nature will disappear.

**Photos**: Yuval Daks, Noam Weiss

**Further Reading**

Why do most of the birds migrate above us alone, at night?

The campaign against poisonings

Protecting wildlife

4. The State of the Campaign <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/1208#current-state>

The campaign to stop violent, illegal hunting continues in full force.

In recent years, hunting of the European turtledove and the quail, including the use of sound machines that facilitate hunting, was temporarily banned by the Ministry for the Protection of Nature. This ban was extended in the summer of 2021 for a further three years.

A real, long-term solution will come only after we completely ban hunting for “fun”, which is falsely called a “recreational” sport. Alongside this, we must ensure that criminal hunters will no longer be able to escape punishment and will be given heavy fines.

**More Campaigns**

**Do you want to join the campaign against wildlife hunting?**

**Become members and nature protectors**

Join now

**The Campaign against Poisonings**

**Fatal Poisonings: The Campaign for the Vultures** [**https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/507**](https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/507)

This campaign is part of the campaigns:

* Wildlife

1. The Story in 100 Words <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/507#intro>

Sometimes vultures fly to Israel in surprising ways.

A vulture named T78 was brought to Israel in a plane from Spain to help save the local vulture population; unfortunately, this didn’t happen. She was one of eight vultures who died in the terrible poisoning that took place in the Golan Heights in 2019.

The vultures are critically endangered. Only 230 of them currently live in Israel, compared to hundreds and thousands who flew over our country in the past. Come meet the king of the raptors and find out how to save it and many other wild animals from dangerous poisonings.

2. The Campaign in Numbers <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/507#small-fight-in-nums>

**The Vultures in Numbers**

230

vultures in Israel

Currently, only 40 mating pairs of vultures live in Israel, compared to thousands in the past. They disappeared because of poisonings, hunting, and electrocution

70%

until

The proportion of vultures harmed by illegal poisonings between 2001 and 2015

3. The Full Story <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/507#sf-story>

**The Full Story on the Vultures**

Agricultural fields surrounded by tens of thousands of bird corpses was once a common, albeit shocking, sight in Israel in the past. In the 1950s, farmers who wanted to protect their crops from rodents and insects used the infamous pesticide DDT. In later years, they used substances based on organic phosphates. In many cases, these substances also harmed all and anyone who passed by the fields, including mammals and raptors.

The poisonings caused harm not only to wildlife but also to humans because the dangerous substances reached our food. Gradually, in Israel and around the world, people began to understand that we cannot use such dangerous, poisonous substances and developed more cautious working methods by employing chemical structures designed to impact rodents without affecting the environment.

But what’s been done is hard to undo; the indiscriminate poisonings severely impacted populations of many wild animals, including raptors and songbirds. Many of these animals have still not recovered. Most of the raptors in Israel, such as the Egyptian vulture or the lesser kestrel, were severely inflicted by the indiscriminate poisonings. The most devastating impact was on the griffon vulture; their protection is the main focus of our campaign at the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel.

**Endangered griffon vultures**

This great vulture—king of the raptors—with a wingspan of up to 2.65 m, is classified as critically endangered. In addition to Israel, this saddening situation extends throughout most of the Eastern Mediterranean Basin. There were once thousands of vultures here; by the time the State of Israel was established only some hundreds survived, and now just 230 of them cross our skies. Though, there is also a positive aspect to the story: whereas in the past some of the vultures were harmed by electrocution, today most electrocutions are prevented thanks to collaboration with the Electrical Corporation to shield the poles.

In recent decades, many of the substances that were used in the past for poisonings (mostly organic phosphates) have been banned. But criminals continue to use them to poison wild animals, and current legislation is unable to deal with such people. The Israel Nature and Parks Authority has made efforts to locate the poisoners but the punishments given to them by court are ridiculously insignificant. The Wildlife Protection Law, that was legislated in 1955, is not on par with today’s world. A person who causes terrible deaths to raptors or other wild animals only pays a fine and is often released without any punishment.

**Dozens of dead vultures**

Thus, the illegal poisonings continue in the Golan Heights, the Galilee, and the Negev. Even today, this remains the main cause of wildlife deaths. Cattle-breeders who are scared of wolves, jackals, and foxes that harm their herds scatter poison bait—but the main victims of this fatal substance are the vultures.

In 1998, dozens of vultures were poisoned this way in one poisoning event, but the most severe case that occurred in recent years was in May 2019 in the Golan Heights, when ten vultures were poisoned and only two of them survived. To understand the severity of the impact, we are talking about half of the population of vultures living in the region. And that’s not all: the poisoning took place during the breeding season, thus, there may have been fledglings that died in the nest after their mother or father was poisoned. These are severe disasters, and recovery from them usually requires many years. In total, of the 213 vultures that were harmed between 2001 and 2015, 40% were certainly harmed by poisoning and another 30% died from unknown causes, which are most likely to be unsolved poisonings.

To save the vultures and other wildlife from dying for no reason, we and our partners initiated a campaign to amend the Wildlife Protection Law. Currently, it’s easy for criminals to escape responsibility or claim they don’t know who scattered the poison. Therefore, the law must state that whoever scatters poison on their own land is responsible for the collateral damage caused by it due to insufficiently careful conduct. Most importantly, we must take a hard line and increase the punishment for criminal poisoning to up to three years’ imprisonment, to create sufficient deterrence to such severe crimes.

**Photos**: Yuval Daks, Liron Shapiro

**Further reading**

This is how we’ll stop vulture poisoning

Why do most birds migrate at night, alone?

Protecting wildlife

15 vultures died in Israel within a month. What can we do?

4. The State of the Campaign <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/507#current-state>

**The State of the Campaign**

The vultures are in danger and we must save those that remain; they won’t be able to survive if the poisonings continue. Criminals who scatter harmful substances cause the death of raptors and many other wild animals.

Therefore, we are campaigning to amend the Wildlife Protection Law to place the responsibility squarely on those who scatter poison indiscriminately on their own land and set a significant punishment of up to three years’ imprisonment for convicted criminals.

**More Campaigns**

**Do you care about vultures, gazelles, and ibex?**

**Become members and nature protectors**

Join now

**Urban Nature**

**Protecting the Jerusalem Hills** [**https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/7305**](https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/7305)

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