**Annual Summary: 2020**

**Introduction**

How do we summarize this past year? It was a year in which many of our normal routines and familiar patterns were disrupted, a year in which certainty became a rare commodity, and planning ahead took on new dimensions. We found ourselves examining fundamental questions, repeatedly choosing and refining how we act in our various roles – as individuals, families, as community and organization members, as a nation, and also as a human society. **It was a year in which our health and physical existence, as well of that of our families and loved ones, both near and far, was always on our minds.**

So how should we summarize 2020?

Firstly, we’re not giving up, and we’re going to sum up what we did this year at the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI), and we did a lot! Although the COVID-19 crisis caused serious damage and disruption to many systems, it also revealed our abilities and strengths. Despite the numerous challenges, we can report an impressive and notable range of activities, and end this distressing COVID-19 year proudly with our heads held high.

Despite the difficulties, SPNI didn’t disappear or fade away during the COVID-19 period. On the contrary, not only did we maintain our position as a prominent nature-conserving organization in Israel, we furthered our leadership in every field of activity: as an organization that campaigns for nature conservation in Israel, and as an organization that educates, guides, and connects people to nature.

Throughout the crisis we set ourselves an objective: to never cease our efforts in all of the areas we engage in, so that, when the crisis is over, we will find ourselves in solid standing. First and foremost, we invested in ourselves and our employees – the heart of the organization – who experienced first-hand the difficult economic circumstances of the crisis; we invested in our digital tools and presence, which allowed us to stay relevant even during the pandemic and to reach new audiences; we invested in public assets – the community of SPNI members; and we invested in physical assets – by improving and renovating infrastructure in field schools and other field units. We will continue investing in these ways throughout 2021, as detailed below.

The annual report reviews our activities in the fields of nature conservation, education, leisure and recreation, and work in different media. But none of these, in our organization, happen by themselves. Our success as an organization depends on the committed, industrious, dedicated, intensive work performed daily behind the scenes: the work of the IT department, the finance department, the human resources department, the construction division, and the transport department. As a registered non-profit organization, we are required to meet standards and various regulatory requirements; as an organization with a broad national scope and diverse employees, ongoing management generates daily challenges. All of these were amplified during the COVID-19 period and required extra commitment, flexibility, and an increased range of responsibilities.

**Faith and persistence, consolidation, solidarity, loyalty, speed of response, openness, and flexibility were important keys for success during the year of COVID-19. We will need these values and skills in the future in order to continue to fulfill our goals.**

**COVID-19**

During March 2020, at the peak of spring, the peak of flowering and nature, following a rain-blessed winter, the pandemic spread from China throughout the entire world and turned our lives upside down.

The COVID-19 pandemic caught us during a challenging and difficult period financially, following three consecutive elections, a transition government, and no national budget. The COVID-19 crisis led to cancellation of many activities with technical and economic value, conferences and international events, the climate march, lodging and tourism in our field schools, educational and recreational hikes and activities in nature, and the activity of the Tourist Communication Bureau and the Situation Room.

At the intra-organizational level, the COVID-19 restrictions dramatically reduced physical meetings and forced us to transition immediately to distance working. SPNI is a very diverse organization and geographically decentralized; this reality creates an organizational and management challenge during routine times, and all the more so under COVID-19 restrictions.

Nevertheless, the COVID-19 crisis also created quite a few opportunities: the increasing demand for domestic tourism and hiking in Israel, the rapid transfer to digital platforms that exposed us to new audiences, and Zoom meetings that allowed greater numbers of us to meet up, albeit virtually.

At the time of writing this annual report, the vaccination campaign is at its peak, and we can see the light on the horizon for returning to regular life. We’ll all be happy to explore Israel’s beautiful, diverse nature, without restrictions, and leave behind the lockdowns, isolation, and other COVID-19 limitations. However, we must assume that some of the COVID-19 habits that we were forced to adopt will continue to accompany us, voluntarily, in the future as well.

So what happened to us during COVID-19?

**We fought to be able to spend time in nature**

From the first lockdown, and throughout the entire COVID-19 period, we ran an ongoing campaign with the Israeli Association of Public Health Physicians to allow, and even encourage, the safest of all activities – spending time in nature. As part of this campaign we approached decision makers, appeared in Knesset discussions, and expressed our opinions on this topic in detail through the communications media and on social media. Together with the organization of summer camp managers, we submitted an appeal to the High Court of Justice at the beginning of the summer, demanding to reverse the government decision to ban scouting activities, summer camps and day camps, for children and youth, within the COVID-19 restrictions. As background we note that many appeals had been submitted against government decisions concerning COVID-19 restrictions; nearly all of them were rejected outright or after consideration of all arguments. The appeal that we submitted was among the few that led to a significant change in the restrictions.

As part of our campaign we wrote a petition to encourage people to spend time in open spaces; it was signed by over 10,000 people. Similarly, we took part in a demonstration of leisure and tourism organizations.

These efforts were partly successful, and some outdoor activity was permitted thanks to the campaign.

**We operated ‘COVID-19 hotels’**

The Hermon, Achziv and Alon Tavor Field Schools joined the national effort during the COVID-19 period and hosted **three** cycles of COVID-19 convalescents. The complex operation, in collaboration with the Home Front Command and the Ministry of Health, was a great success.

The operation of COVID-19 hotels required complex logistical preparation that we had never experienced before: dealing with the exposure of our staff members to health hazards, 24/7 availability in providing solutions to all the issues and needs of the convalescents under complex circumstances, adapting the field schools at short notice for the unique needs of the convalescents, and dealing with strict regulatory requirements.

SPNI’s income from this project was significant, and contributed greatly to developing our economic resilience during a year in which most of our economic activity was dealt a critical blow.

Alongside the economic benefit, the operation of COVID-19 hotels created significant, touching connections with the ultra-orthodox community, a sector that we have difficulty connecting with during routine times. The thank-you letters that our dedicated staff members and managers received brought tears to our eyes. During the first cycle, our field schools were already ranked first among convalescents for satisfaction, far more than other, much more exclusive convalescent facilities. As part of our professional, committed hospitality, we offered our convalescents content and activities from our worlds of content, including both games and educational aids for children, and lectures and instructional classes by employees from our nature conservation and education divisions. Despite all the necessary social distancing rules – it was important and significant!

**We spoke online with the public**

COVID-19 forced us to transition for long periods from the real expanses of nature to virtual expanses. The challenge was to make SPNI’s content accessible to the general public in a new, original way, which will stand out among the myriad content and activities offered today by many companies and organizations across the internet. Using content branding such as **SPNI LIVE**, getting internet users to act, such as through **100 nature photos**, and providing content with national importance in a suitable language – we created a new, updated image for SPNI, and exposed the general public to our diverse activities. We created a new section on the SPNI website, called [**Nature at Home**](https://natureisrael.org/Home) , especially for the COVID-10 period; it brings together digital content, quizzes and activities for all the family.

**We have made every effort to stick together**

Throughout this challenging period, we have made every effort to keep in touch and feel close even when we are physically distant. We held a number of open meetings (in Zoom…) for all the organization’s employees, in order to share challenges, coping methods and plans for the future. We kept up an ongoing, permanent connection with representatives of the employee committee; we also held a number of enrichment and fun meetings in Zoom and significant celebrations and events throughout the year, such as toasts. Here and there, when it was possible, we ran a number of hikes for the families of the organization’s employees on the great dune in Ashdod, in Gazelle Valley, and more.

As well as managing COVID-19 challenges, we continued to build our infrastructure for future growth:

* We re-built our system for fundraising and selecting candidates from the younger generation and we continued operating it in accordance within COVID-19 restrictions.
* We built an organization-wide program for training managers. Training began in late December and will continue into the first quarter of 2021.

Following conversations and meetings with employees we set up **joint work teams** for female and male employees and board members who examine important issues together – in the light of COVID-19, with the aim of thinking together “outside the box”, to connect a range of perspectives and strengthen the search for the best solutions – as one organization. The teams acted in the following fields: nature conservation messages, educational activities during and after the pandemic, fundraising and partnerships during COVID-19, a projects club, and staying close even during periods of social distancing. Some of the meetings’ products were implemented during COVID-19, such as adapting nature conservation messages to this period, and we are implementing some of the programs today, including installing solar panels at field schools, initiated by the projects club, and training employees for fundraising, initiated by the fundraising team.

(A photo from Zoom of an employee meeting or family hike)

**We paid a painful price**

The COVID-19 crisis and its restrictions led to cessation of a significant part of our activities. This cessation, and the fact that we’ve been operating for two years already without a national budget, forced us to take dramatic, painful steps to maintain organizational resilience.

With the outbreak of the pandemic, many of the organization’s employees went on unpaid leave, the salaries/wages of others, including board members, were reduced, and we ceased most of the new recruitments and all of our non-essential expenses, mainly those related to journeys in the organization’s vehicles, office requirements and refreshments, and maintenance and operations. And the most painful step – during the year we were forced to farewell some of our employees due to the necessity to make reductions.

Throughout the period we acted to mobilize employees whose activity was ceased to fulfil roles and actions that are usually performed by casual workers and external service providers. In addition, we set up a loan fund to assist our employees during this period, a hotline for personal assistance in the human resources division, and a hotline for requests on economic issues by the manager of the finance division.

Between lockdowns, we put in great efforts and energy, in accordance with the restrictions and the ever-changing guidelines. We continued to protect nature in all areas and on all fronts, we continued instructing, educating, and connecting people to nature. This report provides a taste of the great work done during this strange year.

We take this opportunity to give thanks and show sincere appreciation for the understanding, solidarity, and partnership of destiny and responsibility from all our employees throughout this challenging period.

**The transition to digital platforms**

The COVID-19 crisis accelerated innovative processes, streamlining, and use of digital platforms. Beyond streamlining and innovation, these processes allow us to reach new audiences and expand the public circle exposed to our activity. We note that besides the great advantages of these systems, they are very demanding, and require 24/7 availability, a rapid response to requests and adaptions at short notice.

Here are some of the main processes that were implemented this year:

**The transition to digital green:** the paper booklets wrapped in plastic that we posted in the past became a flexible, up-to-date, accessible digital platform, with beautiful graphics and rich, diverse content. We transitioned to using the “eventbuzz” system for booking hikes, a move that proved to be efficient and flexible, and allowed rapid establishment of an entire hiking system for the general public throughout the period, particularly during Chanukah.

**Completing the assimilation of a new hospitality management system:** a new system (“Bell Boy”) replaced an outdated management system (Magic) at our field schools. This was a long, complex process, requiring development for our unique circumstances, and adaptations to other systems already in use, such as accounts management. The new operating system was designed to give us a good springboard to connecting to the other systems that we intend to implement.

**Field schools on “Booking”:** it appears simple, but it’s really not… and yet – just before the third lockdown our field schools were uploaded to the Booking website, through which guest rooms can be booked. We are still learning how to use the system, but we have already received initial praise and high ratings, which is especially very heart-warming since it’s coming from a new audience that did not know us in the past.

**Online map sales:** we began selling our trail maps through eventbuzz and the WallaShops platform. Here too, the transition to the digital platform exposed us to new audiences, with consequent public and economic significance.

**Rehabilitating Streams and Returning Water to Nature**

**We summarize 2020 with some successes in our efforts to protect Israel’s streams:**

**Thousands of participants in the “Carnival at the Stream” festival** – in November, about 1,800 hikers celebrated the first flows during a weekend of special tours and hikes along 20 streams and wadis throughout the country. The range of hikes, tours and activities was provided within the framework of the stream rehabilitation project and in partnership with most of our field units, with the aim of introducing the public to lesser-known streams and offer different, more unique perspectives of the known streams. These activities were run by our education and community staff, nature conservation staff and birders. Naturally, all of the activities were held in accordance with COVID-19 guidelines.

**Promoting protection of streams** – during the last year, at our initiative, significant planning processes were promoted to strengthen stream protection and implement nature and public aspects of stream protection principles.

**Stopping works in the Arava stream (“the hidden stream”) delta** – following the exposure of works by the Dead Sea Factories, which threatened to damage “the hidden stream”, we led a public and planning campaign to stop the works in order to effect a change to the plans based on a geological survey of the location’s value. Our aim is to protect the unique natural treasures of this location and maximize their accessibility to the general public.

**Halting the program to forge a military path in K’ziv Stream** – in cooperation with the region’s residents we managed to prevent an initiative of the Defense System to forge a path for heavy vehicles through the Kziv Stream Nature Reserve which would have caused heavy damage to the stream and its surroundings.

**“Stream Conservers” projects** took place in the Arab community in partnership with the Western Galilee Drainage Authority and Kishon Drainage Authority. “Stream Conservers” is an educational program. It aims to familiarize school children and the community with the aquatic habitats in their nearby environment and create involvement and action through environmental responsibility, together with close familiarity and a significant experience with the students’ nearby environment in their town.

**Challenges:**

**A decision to directly connect the Kinneret uplands and release Ma’ayont Hadofen (the side springs) –** the Water Authority Council is due to discuss the Water Authority’s program to increase the water supply to the region north of the Sea of Galilee. The council will be requested to examine an option which proposes pumping water from the Sea of Galilee to improve the water supply in the Upper Galilee. We think that the right way to ensure the long-term flow of the sources of the Jordan River is by direct connection to the national system, without pumping from the Sea of Galilee. In this light we will act, with the help of the public, to also release the flow of the springs that feed the Jordan River, which are currently blocked and pumped to fulfil agricultural demands.

**“The polluter pays” for stream pollution** – pollution destroys the stream and its surroundings and prevents us from enjoying this precious natural resource. The challenge we have taken upon ourselves is to bring about increased enforcement and punishment to create a real deterrence from polluting streams, and legislation to impose a tax on the bodies polluting the streams, so as to encourage them to change their behavior. Prior to promoting the regulatory action we will initiate public action to garner support.

**Establishment of “Stream Conservers” communities** – in partnership with the drainage authorities and local municipalities, communities of “Stream Conservers” will be established along a number of primary streams, in order to drive the responsible bodies to act to conserve the stream space and to strengthen the connection and belonging of the local public to the stream and its surroundings.

**Stream festival and conference** – in the spring we will hold the second stream festival throughout the country, with the participation of all of our units. In the autumn we are planning to hold a large conference directed at decision makers, to convince them to take responsibility for stream rehabilitation.

**Protecting the springs Wadi Fukin and Husan** – a series of construction plans promoted by Tzur Hadassah and Beitar Ilit is threatening the unique streams of Wadi Fukin and Husan. SPNI has submitted objections to each of these plans, and even appealed to the court in one case, to protect those flows that are used by traditional agriculture. This campaign will continue next year, in moving collaboration with the region’s Jewish and Arab residents.

**Protecting the Marine and Coastal Environment**

**Successes in 2020:**

**Preventing the establishment of a resort on Betzet Beach** – after a decade-long campaign together with the residents, the Appeals Sub-committee of the National Planning and Building Council decided to completely reject the construction plan for Betzet Beach, north of Nahariya. The area that was earmarked for construction was converted to a protected area; thus, this ongoing, determined campaign culminated in a resounding success.

**Preventing the transfer of ammonia tankers through the Gulf of Eilat** – following a public campaign that we led this year in partnership with the Eilat Municipality, which included sending thousands of letters to the then Minister for Environmental Protection, Ze’ev Elkin, the Ministry for Environmental Protection toughened its stance towards the initiative, and Haifa Chemicals decided to waive its intention to transfer ammonia tankers through Eilat Port, a move that would have endangered the coral reefs in the gulf.

**Promoting marine protection** – the declaration of Rosh Hanikra Nature Reserve last year added another 1% to the total protected area of Israel’s territorial waters. Furthermore, the Carmel Pinnacles Marine Reserve was approved by the planning authorities and is awaiting declaration by the Minister of the Interior. Recently, objections that were submitted against the Avtach Marine Reserve in the Nitzanim area were rejected, thus paving the way for its approval and subsequent declaration. Despite the progress during the last year, we are still far from the objectives that were set for protected marine areas (our objective is that 20% of the Mediterranean Sea area will be protected in nature reserves).

**Reexamination of grouper protection** – after the previous Minister for Environmental Protection, Ze’ev Elkin, avoided making a decision on the subject, the current Minister for Environmental Protection, Gila Gamliel, is due to classify two grouper species – dusky grouper and golden grouper – as protected species. We are leading a determined campaign on this issue based on the assumption that the extinction of the grouper is liable to endanger the marine ecosystem in the Mediterranean Sea.

With respect to all fish species, 2020 did not bring good enough news: the fishing ban period during the reproductive season stood at 31 days, and that of trawl fishing 60 days, much less that what was determined by the Economics Committee as the ban period intended to allow recovery of the fish catch.

**SEAWATCH, the marine civil guard** – in 2020, 1,300 people downloaded the app. It was used to submit 310 reports, including 265 in the Mediterranean Sea and 45 in the Red Sea. These reports led to dozens of enforcement incidents related to illegal fishing and to the removal of 8 ghost nets from the sea.

The **deep sea**, although out of sight – was also close to our hearts in 2020. We submitted an appeal to the High Court of Justice against the decision to perform gas and oil drilling near the ‘Palmachim disturbance’, an area with high value and sensitivity that is also used as a breeding site by tuna, and contains coral gardens and methane springs. We hope that the appeal will be discussed soon and the judges of the Supreme Court will prevent the drillings. Our aim is for this important area to be declared a nature reserve.

**Challenges:**

**Marinas** – a campaign that has accompanied us since the 1990s – will continue this year with greater vigor. The planning institutions are promoting a plan to establish 6 new marinas, which threatens the beaches that are open to the public for the benefit of a few. We have formulated an alternative that will allow prosperity for marine sport and education without causing damage to the beaches. In collaboration with Green Course we have also established a broad coalition that campaigns for the beaches to remain open to all.

**Marine reserves** – our aim is to bring about declaration of Carmel Pinnacles Marine Reserve and Avtach Marine Reserve. Likewise, we will continue promoting the securing of the Neve Yam and Poleg reserves and the unique reserve in the deep sea (Palmachim disturbance).

**Protection of groupers** – completion of the move to protect them and include them in the list of protected species in Israel.

**Completion of the fishing reform (removal of trawl nets)** – continued promotion of the fishing reform through three modes of action: first, reducing the fishing effort; second, promoting knowledge-based decision making; and third, establishing an economic safety net for active beach fishermen.

**Protection of economic waters** – strengthening the protection of economic waters over which Israeli Law applies only in part, mainly over areas with high environmental sensitivity, first and foremost, Palmachim disturbance. Our aim is to promote a “Maritime Zones” law that will regulate Israel’s developmental activity in its economic waters, while considering natural and environmental assets.

**Protection of the Gulf of Eilat** – in recent months we have witnessed development projects that threaten the health of the Gulf of Eilat. These projects include expansion of Europe Asia Pipline Company’s (EAPC) activities to transport greater quantities of crude oil through the Port of Eilat and authorization of the installation of a gas pipeline from the country’s center to its south for the benefit of export and liquefaction. We are acting with a broad coalition of organizations to maintain Eilat’s status as a city that bases itself on its unique natural assets.

**Cleanliness**

We declared cleanliness a cross-organizational objective two years ago, based on two main drivers: the understanding that an individual’s behavior with respect to cleanliness in the public space is an expression of their relationship to nature and the environment. A clean public space is the basis, the common denominator of responsibility for the environment, care, a concern for nature and personal responsibility through changing our behavior. This is also one of the topics that most bothers people when they spend time in nature; thus, it acts as a starting point when discussing affinity to nature and personal and operational responsibility for protecting it. This is one of the few topics in nature conservation in which each individual can create change through their own behavior.

In addition, waste in nature has a real, serious effect on the world of nature in Israel - whether through the direct impact of **harming wildlife** as a result of exposure to waste (eating, trapping etc.) or through an indirect impact – the accumulation of organic waste leads to **significant growth of local wildlife populations beyond the natural carrying capacity of the land (‘overabundant species’)** – which causes increased damage to agriculture – leading to poisoning and pesticide use that cause massive damage to the natural world (poisoning of vultures in the Golan, for example, stemmed from pesticides spread by farmers in an effort to deal with agricultural damage caused by wildlife).

Fortunately, towards the end of the year we received a designated budget that will allow us to run extensive activities on this topic through publicity campaigns, education, and development of content for raising public awareness. Some of the activities are run in collaboration with NAKI (association for cleaning culture in Israel).

So what did we do?

**Extensive education and publicity activities in the field**: from October to December, between the second and third lockdowns, we initiated extensive publicity activity in the field, under the title “Clean Nature Is in My Hands”. Our field units offered diverse educational activities for youth, school children, preschools and families. A special effort was made in the lead-up to Chanukah, to encourage the many hikers to leave nature cleaner than they found it.

The first International Coastal Cleanup Day was held on 30.10.20 with the participation of about 18,000 people. We were the main partners in the production and publicity of the event and many of our field units took part in running this day together with municipalities and many other organizations in one hundred locations along the coasts of the Mediterranean and Red Seas and the Sea of Galilee.

At the beginning of the bathing season the staff of the Golan and Hermonim Field School and Kiryat Shmona Field Study Center set out on a publicity campaign for clean beaches along the Kinneret Trail, with the help of the Kinneret Drainage Authority. On the coastal cleanup day, the community of Tel Aviv-Yafo and Modi’in and its surrounds, together with hiking groups, set up an information booth on the western coast of Yafo. Together with activists from the Scouts, they participated in races and games and of course – they left behind a much cleaner and healthier beach.

Be’er Sheva community, in cooperation with hiking groups, invited the residents to take part in a cleaning project, through a wonderful activity with children who came to the neighborhood parks (in capsules of course), listened to stories that our guides told them, participated in races and games, and of course – left behind a much cleaner park.

The pre-army service year (PASY) volunteers of the Eastern Galilee Field Studies Center also participated in the great Coastal Cleanup Day and “took charge” of three beaches in the south-west of the Sea of Galilee: Ginnosar Beach, the beach next to Kineret cemetery and Beit Gabriel Beach. Throughout the day different groups came to listen to explanations and clean the beaches and in order to leave the Sea of Galilee clean in the lead-up to the rainy season.

The Arab community ran information days in the streams of the Galilee and the Carmel region, in the urban nature of Jerusalem and in the open landscapes in the country’s south and center, in which we set up information booths and distributed waste bags to hikers. More than 500 families visited the booths. During each information day, short explanatory videos were made with the participation of the coordinating instructors together with the hikers, with the aim of promoting, expanding and raising public awareness through the media. In addition, interviews were conducted on radio and television on the use of disposables and their impact on nature and the environment, including a direct plea to hikers to support and help nature conservation.

Cleanup days were also held with the cooperation of the community, local councils and municipal heads in the Arab community, in Beit Jan, Kaukab Abu al Higa, Dir Hana, Ka’abiyye, Tamra and more.

The Hof HaCarmel Field School staff worked at the following beaches: Michmoret, Beit Yannai, Ma’ayan Tzvi, Ma’agan Michael, Jisr al-Zarqa and Nachsholim. Each Friday throughout the summer the guides provided information at the Hof HaCarmel beaches to encourage cleanliness and nature conservation, in cooperation with the regional council.

Within the framework of the great Coastal Cleanup Day, Sde Shikmim Field School ran information booths at the Ashkelon and Nitzanim beachers, in partnership with the Mediterranean People Campaign – south and the soldiers of the Nitzanim basic training camp who came to help and clean.

The Haifa and surrounds community staff led a cleaning activity in the Haifa and Krayot region; with the help of activists, hiking groups and many volunteers, instruction was provided at the different stations. The activity took place with the collaboration of the municipality and Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA), and acted as a springboard for new collaborations to expand activity on the sea and marinas. In total, more than 1,500 families, youth, adults, school children, scouts, marine scouts and many caring people took part in a significant cleanup of the beaches and participated in the environmental instruction sessions. More than 20,000 people visited the information booths that were set up for two months throughout the city.

In the Jerusalem community thousands of children from ultra-orthodox schools participated in the information, instruction and cleanup activities at urban nature sites. Likewise, tours we held on Rekhes Lavan.

In parallel, training sessions for the educational program “Clean Nature Is in Our Hands” were held for all the coordinators and instructors of the education division, new programs and activities were developed, and instruction manuals were produced for all units. In early 2021 we will finish preparing an educational computer program on cleanliness; it will enrich our toolbox for teaching this issue.

**Promoting waste treatment in the IDF**

Within the framework of the Nature Defense Force (NDF) – commanders taking responsibility for their environment – waste treatment was identified as a strategic issue. Led by the Shoha”m (marketing and transfer of IDF camps) and infrastructure divisions, a plan was formulated to measure waste and recycling on IDF grounds and in open landscapes, with the aim of reducing waste available to wildlife. The plan, which is in its initial stages, will provide the Defense System with hard data about waste composition in IDF bases and its recycling potential, alongside data on the actual implementation potential of waste separation, through the field of behavioral economics.

As well as measuring waste in the camps, and from an understanding that the waste from the camps reaches the open landscapes or leaks to them, a plan was formulated for defining a standard for waste, separation and cleanliness in training areas – by creating pilots that lead to a permanent/temporary infrastructural change in the area being used by IDF commanders and soldiers. The activity will also include monitoring of wildlife behavior following changes to waste management in the grounds of IDF units.

By integrating these data, decision makers in the Defense System will be able to examine the waste management system and adapt it to the findings and recommendations.

Dealing with IDF waste already led to a few successes in 2020: first, in the organization of the Chief-of-Staff, in about 130 IDF units, led by the Director of the Technological and Logistics Directorate (TLD), nature and the environment were examined and measured with an emphasis on the world of waste; the IDF held a waste separation and recycling competition; a wildlife and pest control administration was set up, including 30 service-contracted professional veterinarians; the TLD reestablished its environmental protection division and an environmental hazards hotline; fieldwork was done to define the commands and rules in the Planning Directorate. In addition to all this we have seen bottom-up trends in establishing independent, semi-military forums in WhatsApp and on social media, by soldiers and commanders who are initiating change with respect to reducing the use of plastic and the environmental crisis while developing means for informing and working with different parts of the system to promote the issue. These act to expand the power to assimilate the messages of the project into the IDF system.

**“Nature’s Way” reporting system**

In late 2020 we launched an experimental version of an app for reporting the state of cleanliness and a load index in 250 nature sites throughout the country. The aim of the app is to act as a civilian enforcement network, a public infrastructure through which we can put pressure on municipalities to adapt infrastructure to the needs on the ground, enforce, provide information and more. The information will encourage the public to be aware of the state of cleanliness, expose the state of cleanliness in the different sites and raise public awareness by publishing the findings routinely. The app was prepared according to a very (very) strict schedule, among other things, thanks to the broad mobilization of many of the organization’s employees to write content, collect photos, provide comments on the experimental version and more. The fruits of this combined effort will be available in early 2021 in the app store.

In the three months of the cleanliness project in late 2020 we worked hard preparing content, instruction and information that we will use in the near and distant future to promote the issue.

**Preparing publicity information about cleanliness**

We are currently producing a series of 9 short comic videos that illustrate the importance of maintaining cleanliness in nature, with an emphasis on the damage caused by waste to wildlife. The videos focus on a few common knowledge gaps (such as the damage caused by hanging bags of waste on trees or leaving them in the field, or the damage caused by organic waste) and encourage use of the app.

**Preparation of an educational computer game**

On the topic of cleanliness, that will be available and suitable for use within both formal and informal educational frameworks, for the benefit of the general public.

**Towards the next year**

From our examination of the cleanliness issue it is clear to us that **in order to effect real change, a general systematic approach is required: educational activity, informing to raise awareness, providing suitable infrastructural solutions in collaboration with local municipalities and enforcement**. Likewise, since we are dealing with cultural change, this process will require time, and of course, resources.

In the coming ear we will use our routine activity in the “Nature’s Way” app as well as publicity material, some of which is still being produced. These tools will enable us to continue raising awareness of this issue to a high position on the public agenda.

In order to create continuity of activity, we will continue our effort to raise funds to execute our “Great Plan” to create a clean country, among other ways, through a coalition with other agencies dealing with this issue in the government, local government and civil society.

**Open Landscapes**

The battle to protect open landscapes has accompanied SPNI since its inception. Protecting large, continuous, representative and well-managed open spaces is the best wayto protect biodiversity, to protect nature. As Israel becomes more and more crowded, protection of open landscapes is not easy at all. As development needs increase, so does competition over the land.

**Some successes were achieved in 2020 in our continued effort to protect open landscapes:**

**Statutory protection of ecological corridors** – following our action in the planning institutions, this issue was advanced significantly in the last year and currently each region has been requested to prepare a statutory plan for ecological corridors within its own jurisdiction.

**Strategic plan for open landscapes** – during the last year, following our action, the Planning Administration promoted a strategic plan for open landscapes, which creates a significant additional protective layer for the open landscapes, which do not currently have adequate protection.

**Energy policy oriented toward nature conservation** – in the last year we managed to implement a policy of increasing renewable energy objectives, while reducing damage to nature conservation, by directing the policy towards built-up and disturbed areas.

**Protecting Netiv HaAsarah Dunes** – Netiv HaAsarah Dunes have been saved and will become a nature reserve that protects endangered wildlife that live only on the dunes. This land belongs to JNF-KKL, who wanted to convert 800 dunams (80 ha) of natural landscapes to agriculture and hothouses. Thanks to the objection we submitted, together with INPA, the Regional Planning and Building Committee – South decided to prioritize a nature reserve.

**Stopping the plan to establish an industrial zone at Oron** – after a uncompromising campaign we led, the Planning Administration declared its stance, in principle, to cancel, in practice, the great plan of the Israel Lands Authority to establish a new industrial zone in Oron Valley in the Negev. Thus, we managed to prevent critical damage to a region located at the heart of the Biblical landscape. In our opinion, this region should be supported by desert tourism that views nature and its landscapes as an asset and not as a burden.

**Establishing a coalition against construction in Sha’ar Shomron** – collaborative work with a determined group of activists called “Saving Raba Stream”, aiming to protect a valuable and unique area located in the country’s center, at the heart of the national ecological corridor, has so far managed to delay deposition of the plan. In the next year we will continue to act to remove this plan from the agenda.

**Establishing a coalition against construction in the Valley of Peace** – Yokne’am municipality is interested in expanding its area of jurisdiction in order to build next to the Valley of Peace, an area with high environmental sensitivity designated for protection and used by many for recreation and leisure – an intention that has received approval in the meantime from the Borders Committee that recommended transferring the land to Yokne’am. In the light of this real threat we are central partners in a broad coalition leading public and professional opposition, with the aim of preventing the transfer of this sensitive land for the expansion of Yokne’am, despite other existing alternatives for the city’s development.

**Preventing the forging of a military path on Mt. Hermon** – this year we managed to thwart the Defense System’s intention to pave a road through the Mt. Hermon Nature Reserve, one of the most ecologically important and valuable areas in Israel, without the required authorization.

**The community of Jerusalem and its surrounds** is professionally accompanying a youth-led group, **“Saving the Jerusalem Hills”,** which recently raised a budget of 400,000 NIS for its campaign to protect the Jerusalem Hills and halt the development plan on Rekhes Lavan.

**The Nature Defense Force** chose fire in open landscapes as one of two focus issues for 2020, alongside waste. These two issues create a significant impact of the Defense System on nature and the environment.

With respect to fire prevention, in accordance with the agreement between the Fire and Rescue Commissioner and the Chief Safety Officer of the IDF, a joint team was put together, headed by the Safety and Quality Assurance Department in collaboration with the Fire and Rescue Authority and the regional deputy directors of INPA, to formulate a plan for reducing fires in firing ranges, defining a training program for commanders and soldiers and a clear objective for reducing fires during training sessions in 2021.

**Challenges for 2021:**

**The train to Eilat** – the plan to construct a railway track to Eilat is due to be tabled again following the peace agreements with the Gulf States, after being frozen for years. A few years ago we published an interdisciplinary expert report that showed clearly that the project will not achieve its objectives, but rather will cause enormous environmental damage. Our report has been the main factor halting the project to date, but the renewed planning is threatening the Gulf of Eilat, the Arava and the Negev.

**The Gulf of Eilat** – following the peace agreements with the Gulf States, EAPC has renewed its intention to transport crude oil through the Gulf of Eilat, which is liable to critically damage the reef in the Gulf of Eilat – a reef with great international importance. In addition, the State has initiated installation of a gas pipeline from the country’s center to Eilat to enable gas exports. These two threats, combined with the plan for a tunnel port for the train, cast a heavy shadow on the future of Eilat as a location based on its natural resources, primarily the gulf. In the next year we will lead a broad coalition, in collaboration with the Eilat Field School, to prevent these projects and strengthen the city’s perception as a city of tourism and recreation based on its natural resources.

**Secondary airstrip at Nevatim** – the final decision regarding the preferred location for a new airstrip (secondary to Ben Gurion Airport) is due to be made in the next year by the National Planning and Building Council and the Government. The broad, unanimous front with a clear preference for establishing it at Nevatim due to social-environmental and economic considerations, the alternative that we also support, is opposed only by the Defense System. This year we will continue acting within the context of this broad coalition in order to bring about the correct decision to build the airstrip at Nevatim and not at Ramat David in the Jezre’el Valley.

**New Majdal** – a plan is being promoted in the northern region to expand Majdal Shams into one of the most botanically and geologically sensitive and unique areas – Mt. Keta. We believe there are other alternatives that can provide a solution for the settlement’s needs and we will continue our campaign in the coming year, during which the final decisions are due to be made, and act to reject the plan and protect this valuable land.

**Biodiversity and Urban Nature**

Protection of nature is the aim for which our organization was established, and for which we act until today, every day, through a range of tools and approaches.

Sadly, environmental issues are at a lower priority than they deserve to be among decision makers, and among the environmental issues – promotion of nature and biodiversity has for too many years found itself at the bottom of the barrel. In the last year we have identified a positive trend for this issue and we hope it will lead to effective results. The COVID-19 pandemic, which like previous pandemics, erupted following consumption and trade of wildlife and the poor living conditions of farm animals – has raised awareness of how much our health, as a human society, depends on the health and stability of ecosystems. This insight is still not common knowledge, and has not infiltrated sufficiently among decision makers.

Some of our success from 2020:

**Progress in wildlife protection** – 2020 was one of the best years for wildlife in a long time, with respect to regulatory attention, thanks to a large-scale public campaign we led to ban sport hunting. The Minister for Environmental Protection banned hunting of endangered bird species – the turtledove and the quail – through a temporary order. She also banned the use of sound traps for hunting – these traps facilitate widespread hunting.

**Progress on the Poisoning Law** – this year the Ministry for Environmental Protection submitted an amendment to the Animal Protection Law–Poisoning, which is intended to prevent one of the greatest threats to all wildlife in Israel, first and foremost, the griffon vulture. Poisoning is the main cause of the vultures’ disappearance from our country’s landscapes. Although poisoning is banned by law, in practice, it is impossible to enforce the law since the crime is committed in open landscapes without witnesses. Therefore, the new legislation creates, for the first time, effective enforcement and punishment tools that will bring an end to poisoning and save the wildlife. The public involvement stage has ended for this law; 2021 will hopefully be the year in which it will be finally passed in the Knesset.

**Lighting that considers wildlife and the environment** – after two years of in-depth negotiations with Mekorot Water Company, 50 facilities located in areas with high ecological sensitivity in the country’s center were darkened. Likewise, internal regulations that demand intelligent planning of lighting and the use of specific light sources that reduce harm to nature while maintaining the company’s needs and constraints were assimilated into the company.

**Challenges:**

**Passing the amendment to the Animal Protection Law** – in 2021 we will continue acting to ensure the passage of the amendment to the Animal Protection Law, which will completely ban sport hunting.

**Passing the Poisoning Law** – in 2021 we will continue acting to promote legislation to restrict the use of poisons that are liable to harm wildlife, increase the severity of punishment and make enforcement easier. All of these are necessary for preventing events such as those that took place a few years ago, when half of the vulture population in the Golan Heights was poisoned.

**Environmentally friendly lighting** – in 2021 we are continuing to work on darkening and upgrading the facilities located in areas with ecological sensitivity in other regions, as well as developing a symposium for all of the relevant employees in Mekorot Water Company, which will provide them with necessary tools for assimilating the recommendations at the different stages: planning, execution, and maintenance.

**Urban nature**

There’s no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic, with all its restrictions, has given great publicity to urban nature. The regulations that forced us to remain within 100 m of our homes during the first lockdown, and 1,000 m during the following lockdowns, caused all of us to really understand and feel the importance of urban nature, and the importance of nature close to our homes.

Many of us discovered what there is (or isn’t…) close to their homes, and the importance of accessibility to nature, particularly in urban areas.

In order expose information on nature sites near the home and make it accessible to the public, we launched an **interactive map** that can be used to find places to hike in at a distance of up to 1,000 m from your home, including thousands of nature sites and streams throughout the country. You can type the name of a residential location on the map and discover where it is possible to hike, or wander over the map, without inputting a specific location, and find all the nature sites in each area. Preparation of the map was made possible by the information that was prepared and collected as part of our work in the field of urban nature for more than a decade.

The map also received impressive exposure in the media. Haven’t seen the map yet or checked what’s on offer within 1,000 m of your home? Click on the link and find out - <https://www.teva.org.il/Stop_Initiatives>

During 2020 the urban nature unit focused on assisting local municipalities and public action committees in promoting the establishment of urban nature sites. The unit’s staff worked to promote Zimri Stream Park in Jerusalem, a new park in Gazelle Valley in the capital, as well as a number of programs on sustainable urban runoff with Arim Urban Development Company Ltd. During the year a large number of urban nature surveys were performed; the most remarkable were the Ein Kerem Basin survey for the Jerusalem Municipality and the Upper Kidron Basin survey for the Dead Sea Drainage Authority. Another important component was intensive publicity on the importance of natural infrastructure in the urban environment during a pandemic.

In 2021 the unit focused on a new call for proposals from the Ministry for Environmental Protection for large-scale mapping of the natural infrastructures and hazards in cities and regional councils. The call for proposals will provide accessible information for sustainable urban planning and management to moderate the impact of development processes on nature in cities and in Israel in general.

**Citizen science**

As a public environmental body, citizen monitoring – collection of information about wild plants and animals from the public – reflects the essence of our work, the connection between humans and nature. The information, which is collected from the public, allows us to expand our information base with respect to the abundance and distribution of wildlife in Israel and also allows the general public to be active, collect information and be partners in the effort to protect nature in Israel.

In 2020 four new citizen science projects were born at SPNI:

**The little fire ant** – more than 4,500 people reported locations of fire ants. Thanks to these reports we expanded our understanding about the distribution and spread of this invasive species and discovered dozens of new infected settlements. In collaboration with the Ministry for Environmental Protection, we will approach the municipalities to encourage treatment and control and prevent further spread.

**Fireflies** – 1,400 different reports of fireflies taught us that there are fireflies in Israel throughout the Mediterranean region, from Mt. Hermon to Be’er Sheva, but mainly on Mt. Carmel and the Jerusalem Hills. Most of the individuals were reported in natural areas, but fireflies (manly larvae) were also observed in private gardens. Surprisingly, fireflies were also observed near farmlands in contrast to the assumption that the pesticides used in agriculture would prevent the presence of fireflies.

**Bats during the day** – in order to understand the strange phenomenon of diurnal bats, we requested the help of the public in reporting bats seen during daylight hours. More than 250 such bats were observed, mostly in Tel Aviv, but also in Hadera, Krayot, Jerusalem and other sites. The majority were observed eating on trees such as *Ficus* spp., sycamore and chinaberry. Thanks to these reports we began monitoring the bats by fitting them with transmitters and using trail cameras.

**Erosion monitoring in Kishon Stream** – a group of volunteers from the Kishon Basin began assisting a study by the Ministry of Agriculture’s Soil Erosion Station, in which they “adopt” the sampling facilities scattered along the stream’s tributaries and update their situation.

**Challenges:**

During the next year we invite the public to continue reporting through these projects, as well as through older, well-established projects – the Great Bird Count that is taking place at the moment (January), the butterfly count in April, the anemone survey, reports on salamanders, hedgehogs, gazelles, roadkill, urban nature and the new projects to come.

We are also working on establishing a stream monitoring project (RiverWatch) in which we will request the help of the public in reporting hazards in Israel’s streams.

**Birds**

The Israel Ornithological Center (IOC) was born from a project to protect an eagle nest in the 1970s, and since then, has worked on researching and studying in the field, to protect the diversity of birds in Israel. The main work of the IOC is to protect endangered species and the habitats important for their survival. Time after time we set out on public campaigns for the birds and together with you we have chalked up many successes.

In 2020 we entered the tenth year of Keren Duchifat (Hoopoe Foundation) and this gives us another opportunity to thank Racheli and Moshe Yanai, the donors who established Keren Duchifat, and Mark Gelfand and other donors, without whom we wouldn’t have achieved our continued action and great success of over 40 projects to promote birding in Israel.

The research aspect of nature conservation was strengthened last year through a vision shared by the Hoopoe Foundation, SPNI and the Hebrew University.

This year we commemorated 40 years since the establishment of our Birding Centers. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions the 41st birding symposium that was to be held during Chanukah was cancelled; in its place we held 10 lectures through Zoom, and on five nights a festive menorah-lighting ceremony took place with a 10-minute discussion and questions and answers with two lecturers each evening. Likewise, walking tours took place at five birding sites around the country, with the participation of 1,400 hikers. These events were very successful, and we thank the faithful public participants in our annual symposia – the annual Birding Symposium that takes place during Chanukah and the annual “Vultures in the Sky” symposium that takes place in collaboration with the Air Force – for following our COVID-19-adapted activities and taking part in them.

In the educational sphere – the educational activity “A Nest for a Bird” has been running for ten years and enjoyed great success. The activity includes 95 schools, half of which are in the Arab and Druze sectors, and 450 science and technology schools.

The barn owl project has reached 5,000 breeding boxes for barn owls in Israel. The project has also crossed new borders into Greece and Cyprus.

The on-line camera project serves as a unique public-research activity to expose the issue to the general public in Israel and around the world. The COVID-19 pandemic doubled exposure to this project – 6 million visits to the site last year increased to 12 million visits this year. The birds most watched were the snake eagle, long-legged buzzard, Griffon vulture, Egyptian vulture, and barn owl. This project is an example of successful collaboration with INPA and NDF.

This year we also added a prize of appreciation for “dilligence”, offered by Yossi Kfir, to encourage birders with no academic background, and a prize (named after Amit Gefen z”l) for exceptional young adults who contribute to birding.

Let by the IOC and a donation from Toronto, Canada, two clusters of fish ponds at Kibbutz Kfar Ruppin and Kibbutz Ma’agan Michael are being rehabilitated and turned into sites for birding and development of bird habitats as a ground-breaking project. The effort to rehabilitate these habitats and integrate public and educational activity in them will continue during 2021.

This year we ran a series of birding lectures though Zoom, with hundreds of listeners attending each lecture.

**Trails**

During this COVID-19 year we also continued to mark trails; in particular, we focused on maintaining the markings on existing trails.

Here are the main changes made along the long trails: the Israel National Trail was redirected through Dura Pond in Netanya, and the Golan Trail redirected across Mt. Avital.

In 2020, after 3 years’ work, we completed preparation of a set of maps in a new, rectangular format that is easy to fold and fits neatly into the pocket of your cargo pants.

While preparing the set of maps we re-divided the country’s area between the different maps, so that more heavily hiked areas with multiple trails will not be spread across two maps – for example, the area of Map 14 covers both the large crater and the small crater. This reorganization also reduced the number of maps; in the new set there are 17 maps, while in the old one there were 19. Likewise, the new maps are coated by a new laminating technology.

In 2020, with the accelerated transfer to digital tools, we began selling the maps online through the eventbuzz platform and WallaShops. This process exposes us to new audiences, and allows us to increase our sales and profits.

What will the next year bring?

* Israel Trail: continued work to distance the trail from roads, extend the trail to Mt. Hermon and make additional improvements to the route.
* Marking new trails in the Mt. Arif area, the Nitzana area, the Lower Galilee and other areas.
* Maintaining the markings along existing trails.
* Publishing an updated 2021 edition for a number of maps.

**2020 in Numbers**

30,500 households are members of SPNI

431,970 children and youth hiked with us, within the framework of 10,073 days of instruction

5,606 people hiked with us via ‘digital green’ (July to December) on 136 hikes. 215 hikes took place, 59 were cancelled due to bad weather or lockdowns

6,037 hikers participated in the Chanukah 2020 festival

28,000 children and teaching staff participated in environmental education programs in schools and preschools in ongoing activities throughout the year

66,000 participants from the general public in community events, workshops, lectures, information booths

2,200 activists took part in groups that we lead throughout the country

114,500 followers on our main Facebook page

2.863 million exposures on Facebook (number of people who were exposed to at least one of our posts at least once), a 61.5% increase compared to 2019

18,000 followers on Instagram (an increase of 15,000 followers from early 2020!)

1.037 million exposures on Instagram (91.6% increase compared to 2019)

16,200 members in our Facebook community groups, 8,000 members in our Facebook school groups and about 2,000 on Instagram

**Education, Community and Recreation**

The activity of our education division continued in full force throughout the year. During the lockdowns and periods with restrictions – online, and between lockdowns – through outdoor activities, summer day camps, family hikes, instructor training and more.

This complex time also afforded us many opportunities. The choice to continue running important educational activities required organization and adaptation from all of the units, and the great work speaks for itself. There is no doubt that educational hikes were dealt a significant blow during the COVID-19 year; multi-day hikes did not take place at all and are not likely to take place in the near future, but our educational work has not stopped, rather we found new directions. Here are the main ones, from north to south:

**Eastern Galilee Field Study Center**

Due to COVID-19, the PASY volunteers from the field study center volunteered in Kiryat Shmona, by taking children to the nearby Zahav Stream, by running the “How are you?” patrol around the city for children and youth wandering around idly, even helping renovate a playground for a special-needs preschool. Our energetic PASY volunteers ran about 100 hands-on sessions on environmental education as part of the summer school program. The project “Connected to Nature” in the neighborhoods of Kiryat Shmona was launched in the summer with the participation of 200 residents in afternoon meetings run by our PASY volunteers.

**Beit Ussishkin Museum**

The archaeological section of the building underwent a significant renovation and was reopened to the public in mid-June. During the summer nearly 3,000 people visited the museum. From the beginning of the second lockdown the museum has been closed. The museum took part in a regional cultural activity – “The Village Mouse”. The entire staff of the museum and the field study center took part in instructional sessions and hosted many seniors’ groups. Schools from the region came for full day (5 hours) activities in the museum and in the yard. Likewise, a plan to upgrade the second part of the building – the zoological section – has been prepared, and we are in the midst of a fundraising campaign to execute the plan.

**Golan and Hermonim Field School**

During the summer the field school held diverse activities as part of the summer school program, walking tours for the general public on the peak of Mt. Hermon in cooperation with the Mt. Hermon ski site, tours of the “Battle Hills” (where battles took place during the Yom Kippur War in 1973) and hikes to the hidden springs of the Golan Heights, which we discovered together with hikers from throughout the country. The Golan and Hermonim Field School staff participated in salvage excavations performed by the Antiquities Authority near Hispin.

**Western Galilee Field Study Center**

During the COVID-19 period the younger staff upgraded and became an environmental education patrol: educational programs and new routes based on local nature near schools were developed to replace the banned hiking program. Different programs were adapted and restructured. In the summer a group of **Experienced Stream Conservers in Mate Asher** was set up. During the lockdowns the younger generation joined the effort to help different communities in Ma’alot and Shlomi.

**In the Haifa community** SPNI instructors ran programs by distance learning for a number of schools in the city; the environmental education activity continued at full force as part of the summer school program. Thousands visited information booths about cleanliness and a range of other activities led by the Carmel Pinnacles marine community.

**In the Hadera community** environmental education activities took place as part of the summer school program, as well as in preschools. On the 23rd Knesset Election Day, thousands of people participated in a “Shark Day” activity.

**Hof HaCarmel Field School**

During 2020 the field school crossed geographical borders. Not only did the field school get through the COVID-19 crisis, it also expanded its client community:

* Multi-participant professional training sessions took place: guide training, a standards association stamp course, a professional birding course, lectures for seniors, all by distance learning.
* Environmental education throughout the council’s region expanded and upgraded – research programs in urban nature sites, forest days as an alternative for 5th-6th graders instead of distance learning.
* Creating a community platform for hikes within 1,000 m of home via games at urban nature sites in the surrounding regional councils.
* Running Zoom classes on nature and birding topics during all the lockdowns.
* Opening a birding club for youth that met monthly.
* Expanding activities for the general public – an enormous amount of birding tours, workshops on ancient crafts, family hikes on Mt. Carmel, also in the periods between lockdowns.
* As in previous years, a birding course for guides and amateur birders took place in the Ma’agan Michael Birding Center, for guiding at the center and gaining in-depth knowledge. Because of COVID-19 we were forced to run it through Zoom. This change led to the largest ever course – about 90 participants registered, including the young staff of other field schools as well as people from all around the country.
* The field school’s Facebook group was as active as ever, with relevant content for activities with children, studying nature outside of the house and using it wisely.

**Arab community**

For the first time, a 2-hour bird ringing session was broadcast live in Arabic; the broadcast was watched in preschools and in houses. We also began a green map project “There is heritage and nature in the village” with an emphasis on holy sites in Druze villages, in collaboration with the Religious Council and the Druze Heritage Center and a new project with the Ma’ar Local Council to establish a heritage and environment walking trail.

More than 8 proposals were submitted in the Arab settlements where we work to instill sustainable values in the communities, in collaboration with local municipalities in the country’s north and center and the Ministry for Environmental Protection.

**Environmental education and hiking group** meetings with children from the different settlements as a continuation of the activities that began before the COVID-19 pandemic; the diverse, interactive activities took place through Zoom.

**Seminars for youth** took place, including workshops on social and environmental leadership; each seminar lasted five days, the children gained instructional skills, participated in nature conservation activity days in the open landscapes and planned environmental days.

About 10 adult groups regularly hiked in our green nature, between the Galilee and Mt. Carmel, and between the beaches and the valleys.

**Modi’in community**

With the help of our wonderful PASY volunteers, the community set up field workshops in the summer for the city’s children on Cypress Hill. The workshops dealt with birding and fieldcraft, and were a great success. In total, 46 survival workshops were run for the city’s children, and an environmental education program was run for all of the city’s 5th- and 6th-graders in 250 “capsules”. SPNI also ran activities for children during the summer vacation in Yehud. During the lockdown the community organized many games and quizzes in the Facebook groups.

**Greater Tel Aviv community**

This community ran workshops via Zoom for secondary students in ORT schools, and hikes in urban nature for preschool children in Tel Aviv, Herzliya and Ramat Hasharon. Independent “treasure hunts” were held for 1,000 participants in Yarkon Park and Dresner Grove – all within the limitations of the COVID-19 restrictions! Lantern tours took place towards the end of the year, at Chanukah. Courses for activists took place throughout the year via Zoom.

**During the COVID-19 crisis we merged the administration of the Modi’in and Tel Aviv communities, and they now act as one administrative unit managed by Avital Yogev.**

**Jerusalem community**

During the year, the community ran a new activity for middle-school students, guided by the teaching staff, and produced materials for distance learning and for out-of-class activities. Activities were also run for the teaching staff.

In the public domain the seniors’ environmental group of Mevaseret Zion is working on developing and nurturing the source of Arza Stream and turning it into an urban nature site for the benefit of the city’s residents. The community is very active through Facebook, demonstrations and walking tours when permitted. The community provides professional guidance to the youth-led group “Saving the Jerusalem Hills”.

At Levi Eshkol House – we hosted the Director of the Ministry of Education and groups of soldiers and teachers at the beginning of the year, but following the COVID-19 outbreak the house sadly stood closed for a long time. In the summer we were able to open it for a short period for the tourists who visited the city, and at the beginning of this year we trained 3 new national service girls in the hope of reopening soon.

**Ofra Field School**

Despite the COVID-19 year, the field school staff was able to guide thousands of school children on hundreds of activity days as part of the summer school program.

Collaboration with the Jordan River Regional Council funds a project manager position for environmental education initiatives.

During Chanukah, about 4,500 people hiked with us in the Hasmonean castles and the Jordan Valley race. And in December, we ran 227 hikes for youth through the youth project in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education.

In between these activities we raised funds for interior renovation of the offices. The renovation will be finished shortly.

**Sde Shikmim Field School**

Until the outbreak of COVID-19, we ran educational walking tours throughout the region and a few summit days for schools. After the outbreak of COVID-19 the field school staff focused on fun, recreational activity: taking nature-loving hikers out to nature, both near to and far from their homes.

Throughout the year we exposed hikers of all ages to our campaigns for nature conservation on the Great Dune in Ashdod, through hands-on educational walking tours, we took hundreds of participants on hands-on lantern tours throughout the region, and ran publicity activities and many walking tours as part of the cleanliness project in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education. Likewise, we worked hard on training, managing and coordinating courses, on campuses, and on internal and external continuing education programs given by the adult staff of Sde Shikmim Field School.

Between these activities the field school staff collaborated extensively with INPA, observing, surveying and releasing sea turtles. The staff also ran an information booth at Nitzanim Beach and at the groundwater ponds (Nitaznim Lake).

We had the pleasure of hosting the Director of the Ministry of Higher Education and his staff; the guides of Sde Shikmim Field School gained experience giving their first instruction session to them, and reaped praise and compliments!

**Be’er Sheva community**

The community developed a new program with the school principals in the Education Department. Sha’ar HaNegev Field School joined the environmental education activity that continued in the city. The community activity focused mainly on the field of cleanliness.

**Har HaNegev Field School**

The field school staff, which specializes in teaching astronomy and the use of telescopes, played a major role in teaching astronomy throughout the summer. A 6-day event was held in collaboration with the Ministry of Science, during which astronomy activities and scorpion tours were held for all the region’s visitors each evening.

The field school staff also ran a campaign against moving factories to Oron Industrial Zone, and helped to mark trails and arrange rocks together with INPA.

The guides met thousands of people while guiding families throughout the Negev, and school children in environmental education activities. In the community domain, we took part in the Science Center’s geopark course, which aims to connect the community to the crater region (“Crater Land”).

**Eilat Field School**

Despite the difficulties, Eilat Field School had a year of successes and breakthroughs:

* Identifying the challenge of the hotels in providing content to their guests and marketing instruction sessions and lantern tours
* Identifying the need of Eilat families for children’s activities in late August and organizing day camps for Eilat children in the field school for the first time
* Establishing a suite of organized hikes and activities for the community and guests in Eilat, which ran more than one hundred activities between the lockdowns
* We opened a WhatsApp group for hikes and activities, which attracted more than 200 members; in parallel we opened a Facebook group that became active in May and now has more than 1,000 members
* Running Zoom activities and environmental education activities in schools and preschools, and instruction sessions in schools as part of the Summer School Program with great success
* Virtual tours of nature sites with Eilat Tourism Corporation
* Activity on the challenges of nature conservation – the hottest topic at the moment is the gas and crude oil pipeline; the field school staff led a Zoom event on this issue with more than 160 participants
* Diving education lectures in the One Star Diver course with the aim of teaching how to be a nature-conserving diver
* Webinars on the intertidal zone in collaboration with WildDive, an international diving company

**Training**

The fact that instructor training continued throughout the COVID-19 year should not be taken for granted. It included selections, training sessions, receiving the leaders of the younger generation, all with the adaptation and flexibility necessitated by the COVID-19 rules and restrictions that were updated from time to time.

The “Big Girls” course for second- and third-year girls in the field school took place just before absorption of the younger teams: 5 days of content, enrichment, professional training and preparation for leading and receiving the new groups in the field units.

Sadly, the soldier teachers left the units shortly afterwards and were sent on military tasks, as part of the ‘Ela’ unit that was set up for epidemiological investigations. We hope they return soon.

Just before the second lockdown we managed to run a limited environmental education course for graduate female instructors in the community.

In addition the entire younger generation (PASY volunteers and national service girls) was trained in environmental education instruction, which included familiarity with the philosophy of environmental education, experimentation, out-of-class learning, classroom management and more.

In the Arab community: 15 girls from different settlements in the country’s north and center participated in an environmental education instructors’ course in December. Training sessions were also held for the instruction, coordination and administrative staff to raise awareness among instructors and update managers on all the news. In addition 3 new Standards association stamp courses opened – one in the north, one in the center, and one in the south.

**Implementers Program**

We began the 2019-20 academic year with 50 continuing education programs for schools and 13 such programs for preschools, including 1,250 school teachers and about 300 preschool teachers and a similar number of continuing school and preschool teachers who are benefitting from a second year of guidance. The implementation staff includes 35 implementers, including 5 coordinators who are also implementers in practice. Like all of SPNI, the staff is a tapestry of Israeli society – secular, religious, ultra-orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Druze and Christian, urban and rural, central and peripheral.

COVID-19 caught us at the height of our ongoing education programs and implementation processes in preschools and schools, towards the end of the annual training program, which incidentally focused on urban nature. By virtue of its intensive efforts, the staff was able to create a database of adapted online ongoing educational programs, approved by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry for Environmental Protection, accessible and available to the implementation staff. Immediately after the Pesach break the entire implementation staff returned to work; the sharp, rapid transition, while recruiting all of the staff to an online work structure, enabled us to achieve 100% of our objectives for the continuing education program – without affecting their quality.

**Hiking groups**

The hiking groups faced an especially challenging year. In the formal education system it was possible to run distance activities through Zoom, activities in and around the school yard, and between lockdowns to go out on excursions; however, information education, which does not work according to the fixed capsules of the education system, was severely restricted.

Towards the end of the 2019-20 school year, following the blanket ban on hiking activities in informal education, we appealed to the High Court against this decision; this allowed us to at least run weekly meetings and daily hikes.

Until the imposition of the restrictions, at the very last minute, we managed to complete a young instructors’ course and an advanced instructors’ course, against all odds and in accordance with the restrictions.

At the beginning of the current school year, the guidelines for informal education have unfortunately not been updated, and even when they were updated – they only permitted activity in capsules, which greatly limits the activity.

But despite everything – throughout the entire period our activity continued: in activities, meetings and camps (!) that took place via Zoom, family hikes that took place together with the children’s parents, and other creative activities that helped us keep in touch and move forward.

**Haifa hiking groups:** as part of a collaboration with the Trail Marking Committee, a wadi survey took place in which hiking groups forged a trail, installed signage and built terraces. In addition, as part of the salamander project in the Haifa Zoo – the staff participated in the rehabilitation of the salamander ponds and raising awareness of the issue within the general public.

**Southern hiking groups**: volunteered at Neot Lon school; the children enjoyed an activity about nature and the hiking groups helped return formal education to action.

**Jerusalem hiking groups**: a hike at Shluchat Shayarot and training sessions were held in the lead-up to National Clean-up Day; a training session in the use of track plates for monitoring animals was held as part of the ecological survey project.

Likewise, an **online birding course** took place for the hiking group members at the national level.

**Speaking with the Public**

The COVID-19 period greatly reduced our ability to meet the public in our natural setting, in nature, but maintained and even strengthened our virtual and digital connection with the public. We strengthened and reinforced our message transmission, and we shared our messages with the public through the communications media with an emphasis on young audiences.

**Social media: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter** are divided into organic and funded promotion. Organic promotion is performed on the main Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages of SPNI and on the accompanying pages of the different field units.

**Instagram**

**Out of a desire to meet the young public, we put special emphasis on Instagram, which in early 2020 was our most marginal channel of communication with barely 3,000 followers, and has now reached 18,000 followers,** managed daily, with more than one million exposures to posts and increased awareness among young adults.

Here are the 5 posts that received the greatest exposure:

1. [The doctors to the government: let us spend time in nature](https://www.instagram.com/p/CFy9_4aHdSi/), 23.3 thousand (*1.10.20, second lockdown period*)
2. [Nature within a thousand meters](https://www.instagram.com/p/CJRPkdXHIdL/) – a map of hikes for the third lockdown period, 21 thousand, 26.12.20 *The map was uploaded during the second lockdown, but achieved greater success after the second upload (probably because we accumulated many additional followers between the lockdowns)*.
3. [Ibex crossing Route 90](https://www.instagram.com/p/CGHqhLyHPxW/), 21 thousand, 9.10.20.
4. [LED lighting on the streets](https://www.instagram.com/p/CI2tCEbnRlp/), 17.8 thousand, 16.12.20.
5. [The big hail has arrived](https://www.instagram.com/p/CHDN_LzHqwK/), 15.6 thousand, 1.11.20.

Here are the 5 most-liked posts:

. [מצילים את נחל אלכסנדר](https://www.instagram.com/p/CAGBqCbHzxf/), 2,400 לייקים, 12.5

1. [Saving Alexander Stream](https://www.instagram.com/p/CAGBqCbHzxf/), 2,400 likes, 12.5.20
2. [Ibex crossing Route 90](https://www.instagram.com/p/CGHqhLyHPxW/), 1,680 likes, 9.10.20
3. [The doctors to the government: let us spend time in nature](https://www.instagram.com/p/CFy9_4aHdSi/), 1,650 likes, 1.10.20
4. [The big hail has arrived](https://www.instagram.com/p/CHDN_LzHqwK/), 1,070 likes, 1.11.20
5. [The lockdown is over, we’re hiking again in Rahaf Stream](https://www.instagram.com/p/CGmecbSHL8P/), 910 likes, 21.10.20

**Facebook**

Our Facebook page has 114,500 followers, compared to 106,000 at the beginning of the year – an increase of 8,500 followers.

2863 million exposures to our posts – an increase of 61.5% compared to last year, including funded promotion.

The Instagram audience is younger, and in both media – Facebook and Instagram – the largest age group is 35-44. On both social media we have a slight female majority, but it is actually more significant on Facebook which is considered a more “masculine” network – this result is surprising.

The big ten on Facebook

The 5 posts that received the greatest exposure (not including funded promotion)

1. [Have you seen the fire ant? Tell us](http://facebook.com/tevaorg/photos/a.139877792244/10157024394417245/?type=3&source=48), 373.7 thousand, 5.8.20
2. [A call to decision makers: let us spend time in nature](https://www.facebook.com/tevaorg/posts/10156713862117245?__tn__=%2CO*F), 182.1 thousand, 16.4.20 (*first lockdown period*)
3. [Turtledove and quail hunting: disturbing photos](https://www.facebook.com/tevaorg/posts/10157088160507245/), 173.4 thousand, 1.9.20
4. [Saving Crater Land](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10156821502122245&id=54800287244&refid=52&__tn__=-R), 136.3 thousand, 19.5.20
5. [The doctors to the government: let us spend time in nature](https://www.instagram.com/p/CFy9_4aHdSi/), 126.6 thousand, 1.10.20 (second lockdown period)

The 5 posts with the most reactions:

1. [A call to decision makers: let us spend time in nature](https://www.facebook.com/tevaorg/posts/10156713862117245?__tn__=%2CO*F), 5.8 thousand reactions, 16.4.20 (*first lockdown period*)
2. [The doctors to the government: let us spend time in nature](https://www.instagram.com/p/CFy9_4aHdSi/), 4.6 thousand reactions, 1.10.20 (*second lockdown period*)
3. [Saving Crater Land](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10156821502122245&id=54800287244&refid=52&__tn__=-R), 4.4 thousand reactions, 19.5.20
4. [Turtledove and quail hunting: disturbing photos](https://www.facebook.com/tevaorg/posts/10157088160507245/), 4.2 thousand reactions, 1.9.20
5. [Have you seen the fire ant? Tell us](http://facebook.com/tevaorg/photos/a.139877792244/10157024394417245/?type=3&source=48), 4.1 reactions, 5.8.20

**Funded campaigns**

In 2020 we uploaded 75 funded campaigns (funded promotions) to Facebook, including 282 posts.

The campaigns included: the Hiking in Nature festival during Chanukah, the campaign against sport hunting, The Blue Half, Birding Week during Chanukah, Carnival in the Stream, green hikes and more.

The posts obtained 10,707 shares, 71,242 likes and 535,695 clicks on the posts. 2,372,626 people were exposed to the posts that were displayed 12,646,977 times.

We invested about 90,000 NIS in funded promotions for hiking (green hikes, Hiking in Nature at Chanukah, Carnival in the Stream) and 70,000 NIS in promotions related to nature conservation (hunting campaign, The Blue Half, various campaigns)

**Advertising on Google**

Advertising on Google was done using a special grant that Google awards to registered associations that it has recognized for this purpose. Advertising is permitted through advertisements alone, without videos or banners, and with a maximum daily and yearly scope. The daily promotional budget cannot be accumulated and implementation is per click.

**In total, $237,089 in credit were used this year for advertising on Google, compared to about $123,000 in the previous year.**

Some of the reasons for the increased use stem from additional sites for promotion, such as: The Blue Half, Moked Teva (security and safety for hikers), Let’s Talk Business, and improvements to existing campaigns.

Our 1,181,259 advertisements appeared in Google searches, leading to 323,006 clicks (people who entered the site after clicking on the advertisement, making 27.34% which is considered very high. The criterion for a grant from Google is 5%).

**Media**

2020 was a special, extraordinary year, both in Israel and around the world. Naturally, the media agenda in Israel was influenced mostly by the COVID-19 pandemic. Add to this the constant, extensive surveying of the crazy political system in Israel, and you’ll get journalism dedicated mainly to these two issues, leaving very little space over which all the other issues need to compete – education, international news, domestic news, nature and environmental quality, economics, consumerism, sport, culture, tourism and so on.

And within all of this, in the little space on news pages and internet sites dedicated to nature and the environment, we are competing with the Ministry for Environmental Protection, INPA, other environmental organizations, both natural and local, environmental activists, local residents, news on nature and the environment from around the world…

Besides the “regular” media, the SPNI spokesmanship also operates the organization’s Twitter account, which transitioned from a barely active account with 1,300 followers to an active, dynamic account, updated routinely on a daily basis, with 3,335 followers, and this number continues to grow.

**The SPNI spokesmanship works closely on a daily basis with many of the SPNI employees. They provide us with the relevant information and thanks to them we can fulfil our role and significantly amplify SPNI’s media presence.**

**Nature conservation knows no boundaries**

The skies were closed for part of the year, and for the part in which they were open, the number of flights was limited. However, connections were maintained with our supporters and partners across the oceans:

* Connections were made with 2 more hiking organizations in Germany, a process that is set to begin with an exchange of delegations of young adults, and continue with collaborations on adult hikes and trail marking.
* We participated in a European Union project on environmental education, together with organizations from Italy, Spain, Germany and Hungary. In the spirit of the times, the communication took place via Zoom.
* In September we received the Shimon Peres Prize from the German-Israeli Future Forum. The prize was awarded to us for our continued work connections with the German companies, NABU (Naturschutzbund Deutschland e. V.) and NAJU (Naturschutzjugend). The ceremony took place in the presence of the German Foreign Minister and was broadcast over social media. The moving ceremony can be viewed via the link below:

[**https://www.dizf.de/ivrit/shimon-peres-prize/award-ceremony/index.html**](https://www.dizf.de/ivrit/shimon-peres-prize/award-ceremony/index.html)

In an effort to keep in touch with our audience of thousands of supporters in Israel and around the world during the COVID-19 period, and in light of the fact that the planned tours and delegates of the board of directors in North America were canceled, we began producing a series of webinars in English, that are broadcast live to our supporters via Zoom and our English Facebook page.

Since March 2020, we have been uploading a fortnightly webinar on nature and environment, hiking, and a host of other topics in which SPNI is active. To date, many thousands of people around the world have watched the webinars and **more than 30 webinars have been broadcast** in total. The most popular topics to date were nature-based solutions to the climate crisis, protecting Israel’s seas and streams, mammals and amphibians, birds from throughout the country and live tours in Gazelle Valley and at the Jerusalem Bird Observatory.

Strengthening our connection with donors in Israel and around the world and our constant updates have strengthened their trust in us; indeed, the support we received from the organization’s regular donors in 2020 grew by 50% compared to 2019.

**So what’s next? Facing the future**

**In the lead-up to 2021, we set a number of strategic organizational targets:**

* **Maintaining resilience and stability in an era of uncertainty**: the shake-ups and uncertainty we experienced in 2020 are expected to accompany us this year too, perhaps also in the coming years. This reality demands frequent changes and adaptations, and ongoing examination of our ability to fulfil our programs and objectives. Within this uncertainty we have set ourselves the objective of maintaining all of the organization’s abilities and assets: human capital, organizational knowledge and generation of abilities – aiming to facilitate growth during and after the pandemic.
* **Rapid and accurate budget management in the light of the COVID-19 crisis and the continued absence of a national budget – during the last year we maintained** a dynamic budget, while responding rapidly to changes through ongoing assessment of results and adapting expenses. According to the consequences, the 2021 budget was built on a number of fundamental assumptions including: (1) budgeting under high uncertainty, and a crisis with long-term consequences; (2) the absence of a national budget for two years already and a fourth round of elections; (3) the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis – the working assumption is that the impact will continue at least until June 2021. The significance with respect to educational hiking is the beginning of a return to routine only in December; and (4) a low objective expectation, alongside lower profitability.
* **Investment in assets with a long-term vision**
  + **The human resource: our employees are our main asset** at SPNI. During this shocking and challenging period we are making every effort to maintain resilience and safety, to find a suitable solution for each one, to be attentive and to never cease developing our human capital. During a period in which physical meeting is limited, we continued and will continue to meet virtually, to hold inter-unit staff meetings, to deepen our intra-organizational communication and hold cross-organizational fun activities.
  + **Physical assets:** throughout the COVID-19 period, and after it, we continued making investments in the construction and development of essential infrastructure. The COVID-19 crisis taught us that the field schools were a significant source of income via the ‘COVID-19 hotels’; we expect that with the return to recreational activity and the increasing demand for tourism and hiking (that we experienced between the lockdowns) – our field schools and general recreational activity – will merit increased demand. During the year we completed renovating the hikers’ camping ground at the Mt. Meron Field School, and we began renovating the hikers’ clubroom. These two are expected to turn the location into a unique, popular camping site! Finally, we began renovating our camping site in Eilat; so far we have finished renovating the rooms. We have finished planning and will soon begin renovating rooms at the Ein Gedi Field School. A new exhibition was dedicated at Beit Ussishkin, and planning of the next stage of the exhibition has been completed.
  + **Digital assets:** as detailed above, the COVID-19 crisis led to a quantum leap in our digital abilities, and in the near future we intend to continue developing them by developing a new website and an application. The digital platforms will provide a solution for SPNI’s products and services, and create a fixed, stable and moral connection with all of SPNI’s members.
  + **Public assets:** our aim is to expand the organization’s member community and deepen our partnership with them by increasing their involvement in our subjects of activity.
* **Nurturing innovation and entrepreneurship in all the organization’s activity, developing new products and adapting our activity to changing trends in the light of the pandemic.**
* **Dialog with the employees’ committee towards a group agreement.**

**Our modes of action**

SPNI was established by nature lovers and dedicated visionaries who opposed the draining of the Hula Valley in 1953 and foresaw the future consequences of this enterprise, on the unique nature of the country’s north, and the need to protect nature alongside the development effort.

The draining of the Hula Valley led to regretful results – damage to nature and extinction of unique species, but the environmental battle gave birth to our organization, SPNI, an independent public, not-for-profit organization, the largest and most experienced environmental organization in Israel and one of the oldest in the world.

From its establishment, 67 years ago, until today, we focus on conserving Israel’s nature and landscapes, education, hiking and building a strong community that sees itself as part of nature and is committed to the conservation of nature and the environment.

Our vision – to protect nature and the environment in Israel, by creating a direct connection between people and nature

As part of our daily, organizational routine:

* We act to protect open landscapes and biodiversity.
* We encourage hiking and domestic and international tourism, in the belief that the encounter with nature is essential to strengthening our affinity for nature and the environment, and for developing environmental responsibility.
* We promote activity among decision makers, and in the Knesset and government, to raise awareness of nature and environmental issues, and assimilate considerations regarding the conservation of nature, landscapes and the environment as an integral part of decision-making processes.
* We represent the environmental organizations of Israel in the regional and national planning institutions.
* We mark the country’s trails, more than 10,000 km of trails, headed by The Israel National Trail.
* We create and promote collaboration among environmental organizations and other organizations.
* We maintain ideological, professional and organizational independence, so that the organization will be able to act to promote its aims freely and independently.
* We act together with the public, throughout the country. In large cities and in small settlements, in different sectors of the population and in diverse frameworks. Our strength lies in your support: the members of SPNI; those who follow us on social media and read our newsletter; those who support our work by donating, signing petitions and submitting appeals; those who join us in demonstrations; activists and volunteers; those who hike with us; the thousands of participants in our environmental education programs, and the amazing youth who take part in our hiking groups.

**The vision of SPNI**

The country’s landscape, natural resources and environmental quality are protected in harmony with development and settlement needs. Israeli society is aware of the importance of Israel’s natural resources, respects and protects them and enjoys them, as part of nurturing social resilience and quality of life in Israel.

The aims of SPNI:

To protect the environment, the natural assets and landscapes, and the historical and cultural heritage of humans in Israel and around the world

To educate about the environment and knowledge of the land, nurture an affinity for the landscape and the environment and strengthen the connection between the general public and its plant and animal assets, nature, the different landscape units, remains of the past and settlement throughout the generations.

To work with government municipalities to raise their awareness of environmental issues and increase their willingness to act to promote legislation that protects the environment, environmentally friendly and balanced planning and sustainable development.

To create awareness of protecting nature and the environment, action to shape the opinions of the public and decision makers on nature and environmental issues and increase their commitment to protecting nature and the environment.

To maintain ideological and organizational independence so that the organization will be able to act to promote the aims detailed in this report freely and independently.