**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 springtime flowering, following a winter blessed with abundant rain, 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 initial lockdown, and throughout the past year, we ran an ongoing campaign with the Israeli Association of Public Health Physicians, to enable 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 on social media and through other communication modes. Together, with the Israel Summer Camps organization, 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, as part of the COVID-19 restrictions. To provide context, we note that many appeals had been submitted against government decisions concerning COVID-19 restrictions, and nearly all of them were rejected, either outright or after consideration. 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 spending time in open spaces, and over 10,000 people signed it. Similarly, we took part in a demonstration composed of leisure and tourism organizations.

These efforts were partly successful, and some outdoor activity was permitted as a result of 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 recovering COVID-19 patients. 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 and unprecedented logistical preparation: dealing with our staff members’ exposure to health hazards, being available 24/7 to provide solutions for the complex needs of recovering patients, adapting the field schools at short notice for the unique needs of the recovering patients, 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 recovering patients for satisfaction, far more than other much more exclusive facilities. As part of our professional, committed hospitality, we offered our patients content and activities, including both games and educational activities for children, as well as lectures and instructional classes, led by employees from our nature conservation and education divisions. Despite all the necessary social distancing rules, these events were important and meaningful to the patients!

**We spoke online with the public**

COVID-19 forced us to transition from natural expanses to virtual spaces, for prolonged periods. It was a challenge making SPNI’s content accessible to the general public in a new, original way, that stands out from among the myriad content and activities offered by many companies and organizations across the internet today. By using content branding such as **SPNI LIVE**, engaging internet users through platforms such as **100 nature photos**, and providing accessible content of national relevance, we created a new, updated image for SPNI, and informed the general public of 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 the whole 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 maintained an ongoing, continuous connection with representatives of the employee committee; we also held a number of light-hearted enrichment meetings in Zoom, and significant celebrations and events throughout the year, such as toasts. 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 dealing with COVID-19 challenges, we continued to build our infrastructure for future growth:

* We re-built our system for recruiting and selecting youth candidates, 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 employees and board members to examine important issues together. Within the context of COVID-19, our goals included thinking together “outside the box”, that is, connecting different perspectives and searching intensely for the best solutions, as one organization. The teams operated 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. During the epidemic, we implemented some of the results from the meetings, such as adapting nature conservation messages to our times, and we are implementing some of the programs at present, 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 an employee meeting on Zoom, or a family hike)

**We paid a significant price**

The COVID-19 crisis and its restrictions led to the cessation of a significant part of our activities. This cessation, and the fact that we have 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, and the salaries and wages of others, including board members, were reduced. We ceased most of our new recruitments and all of our non-essential expenses, mainly those related to trips in the organization’s vehicles, office expenses and refreshments, and maintenance and operations. The most painful step was being forced to bid farewell to some of our employees out of necessity to cutback.

Throughout the period, we mobilized employees whose roles had been affected and placed them in capacities usually performed by temporary 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 questions about financial issues, led by the manager of the finance division.

Between lockdowns, we put forth our best efforts energetically, while observing the restrictions and the ever-changing guidelines. We continued protecting nature across the country, and 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 share our gratitude and sincere appreciation for the understanding, solidarity, camaraderie, and teamwork from all our employees throughout this challenging period.

**The transition to digital platforms**

The COVID-19 crisis accelerated innovative processes, streamlining, and the use of digital platforms. Aside from streamlining and innovating, these processes allow us to reach new audiences and expand our public audience. We note that, along with the advantages of these systems, they are very demanding, and require 24/7 availability to rapidly respond to requests and adapt at short notice.

Here are some of the accomplishments that were implemented this year:

**The transition to digital green:** The plastic-wrapped paper booklets that we previously mailed out became an adaptable, up-to-date, and accessible digital platform, with beautiful graphics and rich, diverse content. We transitioned to using the “eventbuzz” system for booking hikes, improving efficiency and flexibility, and allowing for the rapid establishment of an entire set of hiking trips for the general public throughout the period, particularly during Chanukah.

**Completing the incorporation 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 adjustment to our unique circumstances, and adaptations to other systems already in use, such as those for accounting 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 reserved. We are still learning how to use the system, but have already received praise and high ratings, which is especially heart-warming, coming from a new audience that did not know of 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 venue exposed us to new audiences, with consequent social and economic benefit.

**Rehabilitating Streams and Returning Water to Nature**

**We conclude 2020 with some successes in protecting Israel’s streams:**

**Thousands of participants at the “Carnival at the Stream” Festival**: In November, about 1,800 hikers celebrated the start of seasonal streamflow during a weekend of special tours and hikes along 20 streams and wadis throughout the country. The hikes, tours, and activities were provided within the framework of the stream rehabilitation project and in partnership with many of our field units, with the aim of introducing the public to lesser-known streams and offering different, unique perspectives on more familiar streams. Our education and community staff, nature conservation staff, and birders ran these activities. Naturally, all of the activities were held in accordance with COVID-19 guidelines.

**Promoting the protection of streams**: During the last year, our efforts have promoted in-depth planning processes to strengthen stream protection and implement ecological and societal aspects of stream protection principles.

**Stopping pollution in the Arava river (“the Secret River”) delta**: Following the exposure of pollution by the Dead Sea Factories, which threatened to damage “the Secret River”, we led a public campaign to stop the actions and alter 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 plans to build a military road through the K’ziv Stream**: In cooperation with the region’s residents, we managed to prevent a military initiative to develop a path for heavy vehicles through the Kziv Stream Nature Reserve, which would have heavily damaged the stream and its surroundings.

**“Stream Keepers” projects** took place in the Arab community, in partnership with the Western Galilee Drainage Authority and Kishon Drainage Authority. “Stream Keepers” is an educational program. It aims to familiarize school children and the community with the aquatic habitats in their nearby environment, and encourage engagement through environmental responsibility and exposure to the students’ local environment.

**Challenges:**

**A decision to directly connect the Kinneret uplands and release Mayanot HaDofen (the side springs):** The Water Authority Council is due to discuss the Water Authority’s plan to increase the water supply to the region north of the Sea of Galilee. The council will be asked to consider a proposal to pump water from the Sea of Galilee and thereby increase the Upper Galilee’s water supply. We believe that the proper way to ensure sustainable flows upstream of the Jordan River is by direct connection to the national system, without pumping from the Sea of Galilee. Accordingly, we will campaign, with the help of the public, to also release the flow from springs that feed the Jordan River, which are currently blocked and pumped to meet agricultural demands.

**“The polluter pays” for stream pollution**: Pollution destroys streams and their surroundings, preventing us from enjoying these precious natural resources. The challenge we have taken upon ourselves is to bring about increased regulation to create a real deterrence from polluting streams, and legislation to impose a tax on the polluting parties, so as to encourage behavioral change. Prior to promoting the regulatory action, we will initiate public action to garner support.

**Establishment of “Stream Keepers” communities**: In partnership with the drainage authorities and local municipalities, communities of “Stream Keepers” will be established along a number of primary streams, in order to motivate relevant groups to conserve the surrounding area, and to strengthen the connection between the local public and the stream and its surroundings.

**A festival and conferenc**e on streams: This spring, we will hold the second national stream carnival, with all our divisions participating. In the autumn we are planning to hold a large conference directed at decision makers, to encourage 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 these streams that are used by traditional agriculture. This campaign will continue next year, in 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 in collaboration with residents, the Appeals Sub-Committee of the National Planning and Building Council decided to completely reject the construction plan on Betzet Beach, north of Nahariya. The area that was earmarked for construction was converted to a protected area; thus, our persistent campaign culminated in a resounding success.

**Preventing the passage 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 plans to pass ammonia tankers through the Eilat Port, a move that would have endangered the coral reefs in the Gulf.

**Promoting marine protection**: The newly announced Rosh HaNikra Nature Reserve last year added another 1% to the total protected area of Israel’s territorial waters. Furthermore, planning authorities approved the Rosh Carmel Marine Reserve, and we are awaiting an official announcement from 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 our set goals for protected marine areas (our target is that 20% of the Mediterranean Sea area will be protected within nature reserves).

**Reexamination of grouper protection**: After the previous Minister for Environmental Protection, Ze’ev Elkin, avoided deciding on the subject, the current Minister for Environmental Protection, Gila Gamliel, is due to classify two grouper species – the dusky grouper and the golden grouper – as protected species. We are leading a focused 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.

Considering all fish species, 2020 fell short of good news: the fishing ban period during breeding season stood at 31 days, and that of trawl fishing at 60 days, much less than what the Economics Committee determined as a ban period that would allow for the 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 eight ghost nets from the sea.

The **deep sea**, although out of sight, was also on our minds 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’, a valuable and vulnerable area 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 that the Supreme Court judges 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. Planning institutions are promoting the establishment of six new marinas, which threatens the public beaches for the benefit of a few. We have formulated an alternative that will allow marine sports and education to prosper without damaging 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 help make the Rosh Carmel Marine Reserve and Avtach Marine Reserve declared reserves. Likewise, we will continue campaigning to secure the Neve Yam and Poleg reserves, and the unique deep-sea reserve, the Palmachim disturbance.

**Protection of groupers**: We wish to see the completion of the motion to protect them and include them in the list of protected species in Israel.

**Completion of the fishing reform (removal of trawl nets)**: We continue promoting fishing reform that would involve three modes of action: first, reducing fishing activities; second, promoting knowledge-based decision making; and third, establishing an economic safety net for active beach fishermen.

**Protection of economic waters**: We strive to strengthen the protection of economic waters over which Israeli Law applies only in part, mainly over areas with high environmental sensitivity, notably the 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 the expansion of the Europe Asia Pipeline Company’s (EAPC) activities to transport greater quantities of crude oil through the Port of Eilat, and the 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 known for its unique natural assets.

**Litter Prevention**

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

Additionally, litter in nature has a real, serious effect in Israel - whether through the direct impact of **harming wildlife** as a result of exposure to waste (by eating it, becoming trapped, 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’)**. This causes increased damage to agriculture, leading to poisoning and pesticide use that further damage nature. The 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 content development for raising public awareness. Some of the activities are run in collaboration with NAKI (an association for promoting litter-reduction 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 issued extensive publicity 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, the Red Sea, and the Sea of Galilee.

At the beginning of the swimming season, the staff of the Golan and Hermon Field School and Kiryat Shmona Field Study Center embarked 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 surroundings, 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.

The Be’er Sheva community, in cooperation with hiking groups, invited residents to take part in a cleaning project, through a wonderful activity with children who came to the neighborhood parks (in pods), listened to stories told by our guides, participated in races and games, and also 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 southwest of the Sea of Galilee: Ginosar Beach, the beach next to Kinneret 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 on the streams of the Galilee and the Carmel region, within the urban nature of Jerusalem, and in the open landscapes of 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. The goal was to promote, expand, and raise public awareness through media. In addition, interviews were conducted on radio and television, regarding the use of disposable items and their impact on nature and the environment, including a direct plea to hikers to support and aid nature conservation.

Cleanup days were also held in cooperation with the community, local councils, and municipal leaders in the Arab community, in Beit Jann, Kaukab Abu al Hija, Deir Hanna, Ka’abiyye, Tamra, and more.

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

Within the framework of the great Coastal Cleanup Day, the Shikmim Field School ran information booths at the Ashkelon and Nitzanim beaches, in partnership with the people of the region and in cooperation with soldiers from the Nitzanim training base who came to help and clean.

The staff from Haifa and the surrounding area led a cleaning activity in the Haifa and Krayot region; with the help of activists, hiking groups, and many volunteers, information was provided at different stations. The activity took place with the collaboration of the municipality and the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA), and acted as a springboard for new collaborations to expand activity related to the sea and marinas. In total, more than 1,500 people, including families, youth, adults, school children, scouts, marine scouts, and others 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 education and cleanup activities at urban nature sites. Likewise, tours about Rekhes Lavan were held.

In parallel, training sessions for the educational program “Clean Nature Is in Our Hands” were hosted for all the coordinators and instructors of the education division. New programs and activities were developed, and instruction manuals were produced for all divisions. In early 2021, we will complete an educational computer program on litter reduction, which will enrich our toolbox for teaching about this issue.

**Promoting waste reduction in the IDF**

Within the framework of the Nature Defense Force (NDF), commanders take responsibility for their environment, and waste treatment was identified as a strategic issue. Led by the army’s infrastructure division, a plan was formulated to measure waste and recycling on IDF grounds and in open landscapes, with the aim of reducing waste that may attract wildlife. The plan, which is in its initial stages, will provide the military with concrete data about waste composition at IDF bases and its recycling potential, alongside data on the feasibility of waste separation, based on behavioral economics.

As well as measuring waste on the bases, and from an understanding that waste from the bases reaches or leaks into open landscapes, a plan was formulated for defining a standard for waste separation and litter prevention in training areas. This includes pilot projects to create permanent/temporary infrastructural change in the spaces used by IDF commanders and soldiers. The activity will also include monitoring wildlife behavior following changes to waste management at IDF bases.

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

The issue of IDF waste already resulted in a few successes in 2020. First, in the Chief-of-Staff office, in about 130 IDF units, led by the Director of the Technological and Logistics Directorate, nature and environmental topics were evaluated with an emphasis on 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 directorate reestablished its environmental protection division and an environmental hazards hotline; and fieldwork was done to define the commands and procedures in the Planning Directorate. Additionally, we have seen the organic growth of independent, semi-military forums in WhatsApp and on social media, led by soldiers and commanders taking initiative with respect to reducing the use of plastic and minimizing environmental harm, while developing means of sharing information and collaborating system-wide to promote the cause. This expands the ability to spread the messages from the project within the IDF system.

**Reporting with the “For Nature” app**

In late 2020, we launched a demo version of an app for reporting on the maintenance level of 350 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 convince municipalities to adapt infrastructure to pressing needs, enforce rules, provide information, and more. The information will encourage the public to be aware of the sites’ conditions and raise public awareness by publishing the findings routinely. The app was prepared on a very (very) short timeline, thanks to the broad mobilization of many of the organization’s employees to write content, collect photos, provide feedback on the demo version, and more. The results of this collective effort will be available in early 2021 in the app store.

In the three months that we worked on this project, in late 2020, we prepared content, training, and information materials that we will use in the near and distant future to promote the issue.

**Preparing litter prevention materials**

We are currently producing a series of nine short comic videos that illustrate the importance of not littering, with an emphasis on the damage caused to wildlife by waste. The videos focus on a few common knowledge gaps (such as the damage caused by hanging garbage bags on trees or leaving them in the open, or the damage caused by organic waste), and encourage use of the app.

**Preparation of an educational computer game**

We are constructing a game on the topic of litter prevention that will be available and suitable for use in both formal and informal educational frameworks, for the benefit of the general public.

**Towards next year**

From our study of waste-related problems, it is clear to us that **in order to effect real change, a general systematic approach is required, including: educational activities, information to raise awareness, and suitable infrastructural solutions, in collaboration with local municipalities and enforcement**. Likewise, since we are dealing with cultural change, this process will require time, and naturally, resources.

In the coming year, we will routinely use the “For Nature” app as well as publicity material, some of which is still being produced, to continue raising awareness of this issue and make it a priority on the public agenda.

In order to continue our progress, we will continue our fundraising efforts to implement our “Great Plan” to create a clean country, among other initiatives, through a coalition of other agencies dealing with this issue in national government, local government, and civil society.

**Open Landscapes**

Since its inception, SPNI has been involved in the battle to protect open landscapes. Protecting large, continuous, representative, and well-managed open spaces is the best way to preserve biodiversity and nature. As Israel becomes more and more populated, protecting open landscapes is not easy. As development demands 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 work with 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 involvement, the Planning Administration promoted a strategic plan for open landscapes, which creates a significant additional protective buffer 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 increased renewable energy objectives, while reducing damage to nature conservation, by directing the policy towards built-up and already-developed areas.

**Protecting Netiv HaAsarah Dunes**: The Netiv HaAsarah Dunes have been saved and will become a nature reserve that protects endangered wildlife living exclusively in the dunes. This land belongs to JNF-KKL, who wanted to convert 800 dunams (80 ha) of natural landscapes to agricultural areas and greenhouses. Thanks to the objection we submitted, together with INPA, the Southern Regional Planning and Building Committee decided to prioritize a nature reserve.

**Stopping the plan to establish an industrial zone at Oron**: After an uncompromising campaign we led, the Planning Administration issued a statement, effectively canceling the Israel Lands Authority plan 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**: The collaborative work of 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 the plan. In the next year, we will continue trying to remove this plan from the agenda.

**Establishing a coalition against construction in the Valley of Peace**: Yokneam municipality is interested in expanding its area of jurisdiction in order to build next to the Valley of Peace, a very ecologically vulnerable area that is designated for protection, and used by many for recreation and leisure. This motion has already received approval from the Borders Committee that recommended transferring the land to Yokneam. In the light of this real threat, we are key 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 Yokneam, despite other existing alternatives for the city’s development.

**Preventing the construction of a military road on Mt. Hermon**: This year we managed to thwart the military’s plan 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 surroundings** is professionally joining 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.

As two focus issues for 2020, **the Nature Defense Force** selected wildfires and waste. These two issues significantly impact 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 assembled, headed by the Safety and Quality Assurance Department in collaboration with the Fire and Rescue Authority and the regional deputy directors of INPA. The goal of the team was to formulate a plan for reducing fires in firing ranges, and to define a training program for commanders and soldiers with the goal of 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 for reconsideration, following the peace agreements with the Gulf States, after being frozen for years. A few years ago, we published an interdisciplinary report with many experts, clearly showing 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 goal 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. Additionally, Israel has initiated the 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 canal port for the train, cast a heavy shadow on the future of Eilat as a location known for its natural appeal, especially 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 image as a city of tourism and recreation based on its natural beauty.

**Secondary airport at Nevatim**: The final decision regarding the preferred location for a new airport (secondary to Ben Gurion Airport) is due to be made in the next year by the National Planning and Building Council and the government. We are part of a broad, unanimous front with a clear preference for establishing it at Nevatim, due to social-environmental and economic considerations, and this alternative is opposed only by the military. This year we will continue acting within the context of this broad coalition in order to bring about the correct decision to build the airport at Nevatim, and not at Ramat David in the Jezreel 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, in order to reject the plan and protect this valuable land.

**Biodiversity and Urban Nature**

Our organization was established to protect nature, and we continue carrying out our purpose, 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 environmental issues, promoting nature and biodiversity has, for too many years, found itself at the bottom of the list. 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, like some previous pandemics, may have erupted following the consumption and trade of wildlife, bringing light to 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 successes from 2020:

**Progress in wildlife protection**: This year was one of the best years for wildlife in recent history, 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, which 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 wildlife in Israel, especially the griffon vulture. Poisoning is the main reason for the vultures’ disappearance from our country’s landscapes. Although poisoning is forbidden by law, in practice, it is impossible to enforce this, since the crime is committed in rural areas without witnesses. Therefore, the new legislation creates, for the first time, effective enforcement 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 approved 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 the central region, and in areas with high ecological sensitivity, modified their lighting. Likewise, internal regulations demanding intelligent planning of lighting, and the use of specific light sources that reduce harm to nature, were incorporated into the company’s operations, while meeting the company’s needs and operating within constraints.

**Challenges:**

**Passing the amendment to the Animal Protection Law**: In 2021, we will continue our efforts 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 our efforts to promote legislation restricting the use of poisons that are liable to harm wildlife, and increasing the severity of punishment and ease of enforcement. All of these are necessary for preventing events such as what 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 dimming and upgrading Mekorot facilities located in areas with ecological sensitivity, as well as developing a symposium for all of the relevant employees in Mekorot Water Company, which will provide them with necessary tools for incorporating the recommendations at different stages: planning, implementation, and maintenance.

**Urban nature**

There’s no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic, with all its restrictions, has brought great attention 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 truly understand the importance and value of nearby urban nature.

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

In order share information about local nature sites and make it publicly accessible, we launched an **interactive map** that can be used to find places for exploring, 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 possible walking areas, or peruse the map without inputting a specific location, and find all the nature sites in an area. The map was created from information prepared and collected as part of our urban nature fieldwork of over more than a decade.

The map also received impressive exposure in the media. Haven’t seen the map yet or checked what’s 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 environmental impacts of development, in cities and throughout Israel in general.

**Citizen science**

As a public environmental body, citizen monitoring – the 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 partner in the effort to protect nature in Israel.

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

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

**Fireflies**: 1,400 different reports of fireflies revealed 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 fireflies were reported in natural, undeveloped areas, but fireflies (mainly 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 their presence.

**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 the *Ficus* spp., sycamore, and chinaberry. Thanks to these reports, we began monitoring the bats by fitting them with transmitters and using tracking 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 provide updates on their conditions.

**Challenges:**

During the next year, we invite the public to continue engaging with these projects, as well as with older, well-established projects: the Great Bird Count in January, the butterfly count in April, the anemone survey, reports on salamanders, hedgehogs, gazelles, roadkill, urban nature, and 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 began with a project to protect an eagle nest in the 1970s, and since then, has worked on field research and study, to protect the diversity of birds in Israel. The main work of the center is protecting 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 achieved 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 sustained our efforts and succeeded in over 40 projects promoting birding in Israel.

The research aspect of nature conservation was strengthened last year through a vision shared by the Duchifat 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 ten lectures through Zoom. On five nights, a festive menorah-lighting ceremony took place, along with with a 10-minute discussion and question-and-answer sessions 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 during Chanukah and the annual “Eagles in the Sky” symposium held 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 remains very successful. 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 a milestone of 5,000 breeding boxes for barn owls in Israel. The project has also spread across borders, into Greece and Cyprus.

The live cam project serves as a unique public-research activity to engage the general public in Israel and around the world. The COVID-19 pandemic doubled our audience in this case: we had 6 million site visitors in 2019, which increased to 12 million visitors in 2020. 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 the INPA and NDF.

This year we also added a prize of appreciation for “diligence”, 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 center and a donation from Toronto, Canada, two clusters of fish ponds at Kibbutz Kfar Ruppin and Kibbutz Ma’agan Michael are being rehabilitated into sites for birding and bird habitat development, as a ground-breaking project. The effort to rehabilitate these habitats and integrate public and educational activity within 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 year we also continued to mark trails, and we particularly focused on maintaining the markings on existing trails.

The main changes made along the long trails were that the Israel National Trail was redirected through Dora Pond in Netanya, and the Golan Trail was redirected across Mt. Avital.

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

We apportioned different areas between this set of maps, so that more heavily hiked areas with multiple trails would 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 total number of maps; in the new set there are 17 maps, while in the old one there were 19. Likewise, the new maps have a new laminate coating.

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

What will the next year bring? We plan on:

* Continuing our work to distance the Israel 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, accounting for 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 ongoing environmental education programs and activities in schools and preschools throughout the year.

66,000 participants from the general public joined 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 views on Facebook (the number of people who saw at least one of our posts), a 61.5% increase compared to 2019.

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

1.037 million views on Instagram (a 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**

Our education division continued in full force throughout the year. During the lockdowns and periods with restrictions, we operated online, and between lockdowns, we led outdoor activities, summer day camps, family hikes, instructor trainings, and more.

This complex time also afforded us many opportunities. The choice to continue important educational activities required organization and adaptation across the organization, and the positive results speak for themselves. There is no doubt that educational hikes were significantly impacted during the COVID-19 year; multi-day hikes did not take place at all, and are not likely to resume in the near future, but our educational work has not stopped. Instead, we have moved in 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, through a city-wide program for idle children and youth, and even helped 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” was launched this summer in the neighborhoods of Kiryat Shmona, and 200 residents participated in the 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. Since the beginning of the second lockdown, the museum has been closed. The museum took part in a regional cultural activity, “The Village Mouse”. At other times, the entire staff of the museum and the field study center led instructional sessions and hosted many seniors’ groups. Schools from the region came for full-day (five hour) activities in the museum and outdoor area. 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 implement the upgrade.

**Golan and Hermon Field School**

During the summer, the field school held diverse activities as part of the summer school program. These included 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 explored together with hikers from throughout the country. The Golan and Hermon 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 junior staff underwent additional training and became an environmental education patrol: educational programs and new hiking routes, based on the local nature near our schools, were developed to replace the banned hiking program. Different programs were adapted and restructured. In the summer, a group of **Experienced Stream Keepers in Mate Asher** was established, and during the lockdowns, the younger group joined the effort to help different communities in Ma’alot and Shlomi.

**In the Haifa community,** SPNI instructors ran distance-learning programs for a number of schools in the city, and environmental education continued at full capacity as part of the summer school program. Thousands visited information booths about litter prevention and the range of other activities led by the Rosh Carmel 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 endure the COVID-19 crisis, it also expanded its client community:

* Multi-participant professional training sessions took place, encompassing guide training, a standards association stamp course, a professional birding course, and lectures for seniors, all by distance learning.
* Environmental education throughout the council’s region was expanded and upgraded, including research programs in urban nature sites, and forest days as an alternative for 5th-6th graders, instead of distance learning.
* A community platform for walking paths within 1,000 m was created via games at urban nature sites in the surrounding regional councils.
* We ran Zoom classes about nature and birding topics during all the lockdowns.
* We opened a birding club for youth that met monthly.
* Activities for the general public were expanded, entailing an enormous amount of birding tours, workshops on ancient crafts, and family hikes on Mt. Carmel, as well as expanded activities 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 there and gaining in-depth knowledge. Because of COVID-19, we were forced to run the course over Zoom. This change led to the largest-ever enrollment – about 90 participants registered, including the younger staff at other field schools, as well as people from all around the country.
* The field school’s Facebook group sustained its engagement level, providing relevant content for children’s activities, studying nature outdoors, and using nature wisely.

**Arab community**

For the first time, a 2-hour bird ringing session was broadcast live in Arabic, and was watched in preschools and in homes. We also began a green map project called “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. Likewise, we began a new project with the Ma’ar Local Council to establish a heritage-based, environmental walking trail.

More than eight proposals were submitted in the Arab neighborhoods, 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 groups** with children from the different communities began before the COVID-19 pandemic and continued throughout it, with diverse, interactive activities using Zoom.

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

About ten adult groups regularly hiked 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 during the summer, for the city’s children on Cypress Hill. The workshops dealt with birding and camping, and were a great success. In total, 46 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 “pods”. 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 Drezner 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 pandemic 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 activities outside of class. 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, and also 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 was closed for a while. In the summer, we were able to open it for a short period for tourists who visited the city, and at the beginning of this year, we trained three new national service girls, with hopes of reopening soon.

**Ofra Field School**

Despite COVID-19 difficulties, the field school staff was able to involve 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 palaces and the Jordan Valley race. And in December, we ran 227 hikes through the youth project, in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education.

Between these activities, we raised funds for an interior renovation of our offices, which will be completed shortly.

**Shikmim Field School**

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

Throughout the year, we exposed hikers of all ages to nature conservation issues regarding the Great Dune in Ashdod, through experiential educational walking tours. We also took hundreds of participants on lantern tours throughout the region, and ran publicity activities and many walking tours as part of the cleanup 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 the Shikmim Field School.

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

We had the pleasure of hosting the Director of the Ministry of Higher Education and his staff. The guides of Shikmim Field School gained valuable experience by delivering their first instructional session to them, and garnered 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 city’s ongoing environmental education programs. The community activity focused mainly on litter prevention.

**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 six-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 the Oron Industrial Zone, and helped to mark trails and clear rocks together with INPA.

The guides met thousands of people while leading families throughout the Negev and teaching school children through environmental education programs. Within the community, we participated in the Science Center’s Geopark course, which aims to connect the audience to the crater region (“Crater Land”).

**Eilat Field School**

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

* We identified the hotels’ difficulties to provide content to their guests, and advertised instructional sessions and lantern tours.
* We identified the need of Eilat families for children’s activities in late August and organized day camps for local children at the field school for the first time.
* We established a set of organized hikes and activities for the community and guests in Eilat, and ran more than one hundred events between lockdowns.
* We opened a WhatsApp group for hikes and activities, which attracted more than 200 members. In parallel, we opened a Facebook group in May that now has more than 1,000 members.
* We ran Zoom activities and environmental education activities in schools and preschools, and instructional sessions in schools as part of the summer school program, with great success.
* We held virtual tours of nature sites with the Eilat Tourism Corporation.
* We faced the challenges of nature conservation. The hottest topic at the moment is the gas and crude oil pipeline, and the field school staff led a Zoom event on this issue with more than 160 participants.
* We offered diving education lectures in the One Star Diver course, to teach about being a nature-conserving diver.
* We hosted webinars on the intertidal zone in collaboration with WildDive, an international diving company.

**Training**

The fact that instructor training continued throughout 2020 is noteworthy. The process included selections, training sessions, and youth leader receptions, all while remaining adaptable and flexible, as necessitated by the COVID-19 rules and restrictions that were continually evolving.

The “Big Girls” course for second- and third-year girls in the field school took place just before taking on the younger teams: there were five 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 that 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 cohort (PASY volunteers and national service girls) was trained in environmental education instruction, which included familiarity with the philosophy of environmental education, experiential and extracurricular learning, classroom management, and more.

In the Arab community, 15 girls from different areas in the country’s north and center participated in an environmental education instructors’ course in December. Training sessions were also held for coordinators and administrative staff, to raise awareness among instructors, and to update managers. In addition, three new Standards Association stamp courses opened – one in the north, one in the center, and one in the south.

**Integration 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. A similar number of continuing education and preschool teachers are benefitting from a second year of guidance. The integrators staff includes 35 employees, including five coordinators who are also integrators 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, and towards the end of the annual training program, which incidentally focused on urban nature. With 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 integration staff. Immediately after the Pesach break, the entire integration staff returned to work. The sharp, rapid transition, while shifting all staff to an online work environment, enabled us to achieve 100% of our objectives for the continuing education program, without affecting its quality.

**Hiking groups**

The hiking groups faced an especially challenging year. In the formal education system, it was possible to conduct distance learning through Zoom, hold activities in and around school yards, and go on excursions between lockdowns; however, informal education, which does not work according to the structure of the formal 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, which 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 junior 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. Even when they were updated, they only permitted activity in pods, which greatly restricts activity.

But despite everything, we remained active throughout the entire period: 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 raised awareness of the issue within the general public.

**Southern hiking groups**: Our staff volunteered at Neot Lon school, where the children enjoyed an event about nature and the hiking groups helped bring a hands-on element to formal education.

**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 about 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 hiking group members at the national level.

**Speaking with the Public**

The COVID-19 period greatly reduced our ability to interact with the public in our preferred setting, in nature, but we maintained and even strengthened our virtual and digital connection with the public. We reinforced our communications and shared our messages with the public through 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 reach the youth audience, we put a special emphasis on Instagram. In early 2020, this was our most marginal channel of communication, with barely 3,000 followers, and we have now reached 18,000 followers while daily managing our page**, with more than one million views 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/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), 23.3 thousand views, *1.10.20, second lockdown period*
2. [Nature within a thousand meters](https://www.instagram.com/p/CJRPkdXHIdL/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) – a map of hikes for the third lockdown period, 21 thousand views 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/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), 21 thousand views, 9.10.20
4. [LED lighting on the streets](https://www.instagram.com/p/CI2tCEbnRlp/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), 17.8 thousand views, 16.12.20
5. [The big hail has arrived](https://www.instagram.com/p/CHDN_LzHqwK/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), 15.6 thousand views, 1.11.20

Here are the 5 most-liked posts:

1. [Saving Alexander Stream](https://www.instagram.com/p/CAGBqCbHzxf/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), 2,400 likes, 12.5.20
2. [Ibex crossing Route 90](https://www.instagram.com/p/CGHqhLyHPxW/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), 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/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), 1,650 likes, 1.10.20
4. [The big hail has arrived](https://www.instagram.com/p/CHDN_LzHqwK/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), 1,070 likes, 1.11.20
5. [The lockdown is over, we’re hiking again in Rahaf Stream](https://www.instagram.com/p/CGmecbSHL8P/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), 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 views of our posts – an increase of 61.5% compared to last year, including funded promotion.

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

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" \t "_blank), 373.7 thousand views, 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" \t "_blank), 182.1 thousand views, 16.4.20 (*first lockdown period*)
3. [Turtledove and quail hunting: disturbing photos](https://www.facebook.com/tevaorg/posts/10157088160507245/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), 173.4 thousand views, 1.9.20
4. [Saving Crater Land](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10156821502122245&id=54800287244&refid=52&__tn__=-R" \t "_blank), 136.3 thousand views, 19.5.20
5. [The doctors to the government: let us spend time in nature](https://www.instagram.com/p/CFy9_4aHdSi/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), 126.6 thousand views, 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" \t "_blank), 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/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), 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" \t "_blank), 4.4 thousand reactions, 19.5.20
4. [Turtledove and quail hunting: disturbing photos](https://www.facebook.com/tevaorg/posts/10157088160507245/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), 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" \t "_blank), 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 in total 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 (the hunting campaign, The Blue Half, and various other campaigns).

**Advertising on Google**

Advertising on Google was done using a special grant awarded by Google 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 volume. The daily promotional budget cannot be accumulated, and implementation is per click.

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

Some reasons for the increased credit use stem from additional promotion sites, such as: The Blue Half, Moked Teva (security and safety for hikers), Teva-Biz, and improvements to existing campaigns.

1,181,259 of our advertisements appeared in Google searches, leading to 323,006 clicks. This refers to people who entered the site after clicking on the advertisement, representing a 27.34% success rate, which is considered very high. The criterion for a grant from Google is 5%.

**Media**

2020 was an extraordinary year, in Israel and around the world. Naturally, the media in Israel was mostly consumed with the COVID-19 pandemic. Add to this the constant, extensive coverage of the chaotic Israeli political system, and the result is journalism dedicated mainly to these two issues, leaving very little room for other topics such as education, international and domestic issues, news about nature and environmental quality, the economy, consumerism, sports, culture, tourism, and so on.

Simultaneously, for the limited space that news agencies and internet sites dedicate to nature and the environment, we are competing with the Ministry for Environmental Protection, INPA, other environmental organizations (both national and local), environmental activists, local residents, and news on nature and the environment from around the world…

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

**The SPNI communications liaison works closely with many of the SPNI employees on a daily basis. They provide us with the relevant information and thanks to them we can fulfill 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 two more hiking organizations in Germany, a process set to begin with an exchange of young adult delegations, 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)

During the COVID-19 period, in an effort to keep in touch with our thousands of supporters in Israel and around the world, and in light of the fact that the planned tours and delegations of the North American Board of Directors were canceled, we began producing a webinar series in English, broadcast live to our supporters via Zoom and our English Facebook page.

Since March 2020, we have been uploading a biweekly webinar on nature and the 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 have been 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 with our constant updates has 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, and perhaps in the coming years as well. This reality demands frequent changes and adaptations, and ongoing examination of our ability to implement our programs and fulfill our objectives. Within this uncertainty, we have set ourselves the goal of maintaining all of the organization’s abilities and assets: our human capital, organizational knowledge, and expansion of our capabilities, with the aim of facilitating growth during and after the pandemic.
* **Rapid and accurate budget management in light of COVID-19 and the continued absence of a national budget – during the last year we maintained** a dynamic budget, while responding rapidly to changes through continually assessing results and adjusting our expenses. Accordingly, 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 pandemic – the working assumption is that the impact will continue at least until June 2021. With respect to educational hiking, the beginning of a return to routine is expected only in September; and (4) lower target expectations, alongside lower profitability.
* **Investment in assets with a long-term vision**
	+ **The human resources: Our employees are our main asset** at SPNI. During this shocking and challenging period, we are making every effort to remain resilient and safe, to find a suitable solution for each challenge, and to be attentive and never cease developing our human capital. During a period in which in-person meetings are 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 leisure activities.
	+ **Physical assets:** Throughout the past year, we continued making investments in the construction and development of essential infrastructure. The COVID-19 pandemic taught us that the field schools were a significant source of income via the ‘COVID-19 hotels’; we expect that with the return of recreational activity and the increasing demand for tourism and hiking (similar to what we experienced between the lockdowns), our field schools and general recreational activity will face increased demand. During the year, we renovated the hikers’ camping ground at the Mt. Meron Field School, and we began renovating the hikers’ clubroom. These two areas are expected to turn the location into a unique, popular camping site! Finally, we began renovating our camping site in Eilat, and 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 we completed planning the next stage of the exhibition.
	+ **Digital assets:** As detailed above, the COVID-19 pandemic 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 place for SPNI’s products and services, and create a stable and meaningful connection with all of SPNI’s members.
	+ **Public assets:** Our aim is to expand the organization’s membership community and deepen our partnership with members, by increasing their involvement with us.
* **Nurturing innovation and entrepreneurship throughout the organization’s activity, developing new products, and adapting our activity to changing trends in 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 action on the unique nature of the country’s north, and predicted the need to protect nature amidst development efforts.

The draining of the Hula Valley led to regretful results, including damage to the local environment and the extinction of unique species. However, the environmental conflict resulted in 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, educating, 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 is 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, with the belief that experiencing nature is essential for strengthening our affinity for nature and the environment, and for developing environmental responsibility.
* We engage with decision makers, in the Knesset and elsewhere in government, to raise awareness of environmental issues, and incorporate considerations regarding conservation, landscapes, and the environment as integral parts 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 worth, 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 promote its aims freely and independently.
* We act together with the public, throughout the country, in large cities and in small localities, 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 tandem with national growth and development. 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 a high quality of life in Israel.

The aims of SPNI:

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

To educate about the environment and the land, nurture an affinity for the landscape and the environment, and strengthen the connection between the general public and the land, its flora and fauna, nature, different landscapes, ancient remains and human history.

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

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

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