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

This campaign is part of the campaigns:

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

The Story in 100 Words

The Campaign in Numbers

The Full Story

The State of the Campaign

More Campaigns

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

The Jerusalem Hills are a real treasure of nature. They include green forests, magical springs and ancient terraces.

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

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

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

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

**The campaign for White Ridge in numbers**

5,250

residential units

in the White Ridge Building Plan

80 thousand

residential units

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

Hundreds

of gazelles

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

10,000

trees

The White Ridge Plan will lead to extensive tree-clearing

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

**The Full Story on the Jerusalem Hills**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**The Jerusalem Hills are threatened again**

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

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

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

In recent years, the Safdie Plan has returned to the public agenda, this time in a more sophisticated and hidden way.

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

The current leader of these dangerous processes is the White Ridge Plan. The plan includes a huge neighborhood at the south-western end of Jerusalem, deep in the hilly forested landscape that surrounds the capital. It includes 5,250 residential units as well as land for employment, commerce, and hoteliery.

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

**Danger for the springs and gazelles**

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

The establishment of a large neighborhood will fragment the Refaim Stream ecological corridor; in other words, it will fragment the natural open landscapes, severely impact animals and plants, and cause long-term damage.

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

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

**The entrepreneur’s interests**

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

The slightly complex argument goes like this: to increase the number of units inside Jerusalem through evacuation-building projects, we need to entice entrepreneurs and contractors.

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

Supporters of the White Ridge Building Plan add new claims to the effect that this region is not so important and has mediocre nature. We of course strongly oppose these claims. White Ridge is a region with particularly high-value natural assets.

The Jerusalem Hills are undoubtedly a kingdom of wildlife, forests, and springs, and an incredible hiking site. But perhaps the economic argument is correct?

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Video photography**: Yair Paz

**For Further Reading**

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

Report on land reserves for homes in Jerusalem until 2040

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

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

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

**The State of the Campaign**

Even after a years-long battle, many building plans threaten the unique nature around Jerusalem. If they are realized, tens of thousands of residential units, as well as highways and interchanges, will leave no room or air for animals, plants, springs, and hikers.

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

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

**More stories from nature**

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

**Become members and nature protectors**

Join now

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

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

This campaign is part of the campaigns:

* Open Landscapes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

650

species of plants

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

50

species of plants

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

4

endemic species

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

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

**The Full Story on Mt. Keta**

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

We could get confused and think that this is OK. Indeed, what can happen if we build on the small hill and remove a bit of the reserve?

But the truth is that this is very bad; Mt. Keta may look small, but it is home to an extraordinary richness of nature. This place is unique not just at the national scale, but has characteristics of global importance.

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

**We can build without destroying**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Irreplaceable richness of nature**

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

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

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

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

**Desert soil in mountain air**

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

Thanks to the combination of soil that exists in Israel only in the desert and the climate of the northern Golan Heights. This is the only non-desert location with outcrops of Nubian sandstone. Thus, an unparalleled geological and ecological system of plants and animals is able to exist.

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

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

**For further reading**

Article on the campaign on the Ynet website

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

**The State of the Campaign**

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

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

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

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

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

**Become members and nature protectors**

Join now

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

This campaign is part of the campaigns:

* Oceans and Beaches
* Open Landscapes

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

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

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

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

Another problem is that the crude oil pipe is managed by a government company, the Europe Asia Pipeline Company (EAPC), which hides in the dark without fully exposing its activities to the public, let alone to government ministers or Knesset members.

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

**The Crude Oil Pipeline in Numbers**

1959

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

254

km

the length of the pipeline

10

million tons of crude oil

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

30

million tons of crude oil

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

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

The Full Story on the Pipeline

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

As far as we know, if until now five to seven tankers reached the Gulf of Eilat each year and emptied their contents into the pipeline, according to the megalomanic plan—their number will jump to tens of tankers per year. Many details are still unknown to us because the agreement is confidential. What is certain is that we are dealing with a tremendous risk to the environment.

The old pipeline was built in the 1960s and is currently in a very dilapidated condition. Similarly to many other issues related to the company that operates it, EAPC, which we will elaborate on shortly, the public has very limited access to information about it.

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

Despite the worrying findings, and with government approval, the problematic pipeline continues to be used to transfer crude oil. Currently, the amount that will flow through it will reach unprecedented levels.

This old, long pipeline is known for faults, and their significance is shocking: crude oil leaks will have an impact on unique natural assets. First and foremost, the coral reefs of Eilat—but also the entire environment in the wide open terrestrial landscapes through which the pipeline passes on its way to Ashkelon, which is home to a diversity of animals and plants.

Of course, such an event will also have an impact on humans. An oil leak could occur in the EAPC Port in Ashkelon, polluting tens of square kilometers of the Mediterranean Sea and its beaches, as far as Tel Aviv, Haifa, Rosh Hanikra, and beyond.

A history of environmental damage

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

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

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

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

If tens of millions of crude oil reach the Gulf of Eilat each year, the risk of faults rises significantly and is particularly concerning. We must to everything possible to prevent this scenario from occurring.

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

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

The secret agreement

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

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

EAPC was established under a screen of confidentiality. The company was registered in Canada and received various benefits. For example, the Planning and Building Law does not apply to it and it received an exemption from paying taxes. The Mandatory Tenders Law also stops at the gates of EAPC, whose leaders are appointed without a tender. In general, retired military personnel and government officials received these appointments.

The government usually prefers to reveal as little information as possible about what happens in EAPC. This is true with respect to the general public, and even with respect to Knesset members and government ministers. Decisions regarding EAPC, such as the new agreement with the Emirates, are made in closed meetings between the directors of government ministries and high-level officials.

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

According to EAPC, this agreement brings profits to Israel, but we have no way of verifying this claim or any other fact regarding the agreement that is hidden from the public. However we are sure that its implementation may cause an environmental disaster.

Danger to corals

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

Throughout the world, coral reefs suffer a phenomenon known as bleaching–which may lead to death by starvation. Basically, the algae that usually live on the corals and provide them with their main source of food are destroyed. These algae are colorful; therefore, their disappearance causes the corals to look white.

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

This all means that the reef in Eilat is not important just for us, but rather it is a treasure of nature with global importance. It may be one of the only places in which it will still be possible to observe and study a healthy coral reef.

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

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

Don’t get confused. The damage from an oil leak will not stop at fishes and corals. Tourism in Eilat depends, among other things, on visits and dives next to the reef. Damage to the reef may bring a terrible economic blow. Therefore, the Eilat Municipality is one of the prominent opponents of the agreement.

Concern for an environmental disaster throughout Israel

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

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

An oil leak might happen, for example, during loading of the oil from the pipeline onto ships in the EAPC port in Ashkelon, or during the ships’ departure from the port. Such an event may cause severe pollution to the Mediterranean Sea, over tens of square kilometers, and impact fishing and beaches in the center, and even the north, of the country.

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

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

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

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

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

Further Reading

The Website for the Campaign to Stop the Crude Oil Plan

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

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

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

The State of the Campaign

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

This plan may lead to a disaster that will harm unique natural treasures, large open landscapes, and the residents of the entire country—thus we must stop it.

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

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

More Campaigns

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

**The Campaign against Hunting**

**The Full Story**

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

This campaign is part of the campaigns:

* Wildlife

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

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

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

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

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

Hunting in Numbers

Thousands

of hunters

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

Tens of thousands

of hunted wild birds

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

Thousands

of cases of illegal hunting

Each year, thousands of cases of illegal hunting occur in Israel. Only in a small proportion of cases are the protagonists caught and punished; often these punishment are ridiculous

80%

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

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

**The Full Story on Hunting**

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

Hunting is an unfair competition between those who hold great power, equipped with vehicles, weapons and other technological means, and those who have almost no means of defense and end the “sports competition” as corpses. In some cases, we’re dealing with death in agony following a protracted decline.

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

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

**Israel—A Nature Hotspot**

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

But here is the threat. Within Israel’s small, crowded area there is unceasing competition between humans, who need more and more houses, highways and infrastructure, and wild animals and plants. Thus we are left without land to walk on, air to breathe, or water to drink. Under such difficult conditions there is no reason to allow hunting that kills animals indiscriminately.

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

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

**The quail almost disappeared**

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

Such a shocking hunting event could lead to the death of dozens of rare birds. In the last few decades the population of the common quail has collapsed by 80%.

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

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

**Taking a hard line on punishment**

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

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

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

**Photos**: Yuval Daks, Noam Weiss

**Further Reading**

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

The campaign against poisonings

Protecting wildlife

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

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

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

A real, long-term solution will come only after we completely ban hunting for fun, which is falsely called “recreational”. In parallel, we must ensure that criminal hunters will not be able to escape punishment and will be given heavy fines.

**More Campaigns**

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

**Become members and nature protectors**

Join now

**The Campaign against Poisonings**

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

This campaign is part of the campaigns:

* Wildlife

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

Sometimes vultures fly to Israel in surprising ways.

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

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

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

**The Vultures in Numbers**

230

vultures in Israel

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

70%

until

The proportion of vultures harmed by illegal poisonings from 2001 to 2015

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

**The Full Story on the Vultures**

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

The poisonings caused harm not only to wildlife but also to humans, because the dangerous substances reached our food. Gradually, in Israel and around the world, people began to understand that we cannot use such dangerous poisons, and developed more cautious working methods using substances with a chemical structure designed to remove rodents without having an impact on the environment.

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

**Endangered griffon vultures**

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

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

**Dozens of dead vultures**

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

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

To save the vultures and other wildlife from dying for no reason, we and our partners initiated a campaign to amend the Wildlife Protection Law. Currently it’s easy for criminals to escape responsibility or claim they have no idea who scattered the poison. Therefore, the law must state that whoever scatters poison on his own land is responsible for the collateral damage caused by it due to insufficiently careful conduct. Most importantly: we must take a hard line and increase the punishment for criminal poisoning to up to three years’ imprisonment, in order to create a real deterrence to such severe crimes.

**Photos**: Yuval Daks, Liron Shapiro

**Further reading**

This is how we’ll stop vulture poisoning

Why do most birds migrate at night, alone?

Protecting wildlife

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

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

**The State of the Campaign**

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

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

**More Campaigns**

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

**Become members and nature protectors**

Join now

**Urban Nature**

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