

**Friends of A Rocha Lebanon**  
**Newsletter number 2**  
**April 2004**  
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Dear friends,

As I write, spring is in full spate with the migrating birds pouring through the country on the way back to summer breeding grounds to the north. The cyclamen still cling to the higher slopes but are all but finished along the coast to be replaced by the blood red of the poppies and the pastel pinks and whites of the holly hocks.



*spring at the Aammiq marsh, (water crowfoot)*

**What have we been doing through the early spring?**

If we rewind nature's calendar to the wetter and very much colder months of February and March, Richard was busy finalising the water monitoring programme before he left. Now in place, Mayya ( of our partner Med Wet Coast project) is collecting the vital data that will in time give us a much better understanding of the water regime of the area, which in turn will help us advise the land owners more effectively as they manage the area for the benefit of wild life and the local economy.

**Good bye to Richard, hello to Simon**

Reluctantly we said goodbye to Richard Storey in February. He contributed so much to our scientific and educational programmes. As well as the hydrological work he conducted a freshwater invertebrate survey providing valuable data on little known groups to aid in the conservation of the area.



But we also welcomed Simon Helou as our new scientific officer. We got to know Simon as he worked with Andy Sprenger (a previous scientific officer) and as he took part in our bird identification training. He, along with the other participants, attended the A Rocha / SPNL presentation ceremony held in Beirut, where we were graciously joined by Mme Lahoud, the first lady who presented the certificates.

## Spring research

Another cooperative venture with SPNL carried out this spring season has been our research towards the the Birdlife Important Bird Area programme. The aim is to establish which areas of the country are important, at an international level, for birds, as a first step to preserve these vital habitats. For a fortnight in March and April our research was boosted as we were joined by 5 volunteer bird watchers from the UK and Belgium to survey more than a dozen sites in the Bekaa and adjacent mountains. Highlights included more than 600 eagles over the mountain of Sannine, thousands of wheeling white storks and the exquisite markings of the larks of the semi desert near Ras Baalbek.



Simon & Chris will be following up this research through the spring and summer. We are also planning an intensive autumn programme.

**From Sep 26<sup>th</sup> to Oct 9<sup>th</sup> 2004 we are looking for up to 8 people to join us who are competent in field identification of soaring & other Mediterranean birds, for more details contact Chris Naylor.**

Other research programmes continued at the Aammiq marshes including a new survey for Great Snipe (a threatened wading bird), Martin's flora of the area and an amphibian survey conducted by visiting colleagues from A Rocha France. As well as establishing just how important the wetlands and associated water bodies are for frogs, toads and salamanders they confirmed the presence of the previously locally extinct otter. As well as a delightful mammal to have in the area it confirms the enormous improvements in the wetland of the past few years.



Space is running- out next time the education programme with schools, universities and local groups.....

With best wishes,  
Chris Naylor & the team



**A ROCHA**

*Together, caring for God's creation*

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