



*Lake Qaraoun, a potential Important Bird Area in Lebanon*  
**Friends of A Rocha Lebanon Newsletter number 5**  
**February 2005**  
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Dear Friends,

Our Mediterranean spring is on the way! Sure signs are the flower sellers arriving in Beirut, holding their fragrant bunches of narcissi as the slow moving traffic inches past them. The Bekaa, although recently filled with snow is host to the first hardy migrants; Chiff Chaffs weighing only a few grams are already making their northward journeys. But these are just the first harbingers, and there is so much more to come!

**Lebanon's Special Species: Storks**

One of the great spectacles of the spring we have to look forward to is the migration of the storks. Lying as it does on the main migration route for the Eastern European and Western Asian populations of these majestic soaring birds, each spring we witness an aerial ballet as literally thousands spiral there way through Lebanon's skies.

**White Storks:** up to 500,000 birds pass over Lebanon each spring. Peak dates are at the end of March and early April, although they can be seen as early as mid February and as late as May. They live in farmland and wetlands feeding on large insects, frogs etc. Unfortunately populations are decreasing.



*White Storks*

*Writing in the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. the prophet Jeremiah was perhaps the first person to record bird migration in the world's literature when he wrote "Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons." (The book of Jeremiah, the Bible) He was, of course living on the same bird migration highway as we are in Lebanon today!*



*Black Storks*

**Black Storks:** A much rarer bird than the white stork it is a shy forest dweller, feeding at water margins. On migration a few individuals are often seen amongst much larger flocks of white storks, with whom they can be seen flying over almost any part of the country. Unlike the white stork their return fall migration also passes through Lebanon.

**Introducing Colin Conroy, Scientific Officer A Rocha Lebanon**  
**(Interview by Rich Prior, also a new Scientific Officer with A Rocha Lebanon)**

**Q. Where are you living whilst working for ARL?**

A. In Aana, a village in the West Bekaa valley.

**Q. What will your work involve?**

A. Assessing and contributing to the management of the Aammiq marsh, by setting up monitoring programmes needed to indicate the effectiveness of that management, also assisting in the IBA (Important Bird Areas in Lebanon) project.



**Q. What was your previous job?**

A. For the past five years I worked for A Rocha UK, since 2002 I was their Scientific Officer.

**Q. What was your proudest achievement in that time?**

A. Playing a major part in the creation of the Minet Country Park, A Rocha were the “champions for the wildlife” there!

**Q. Why did you decide to join A Rocha Lebanon?**

A. I was ready for a change and a new challenge and felt called to come here and experience a totally different culture and wildlife.

**Q. What are you most looking forward to in the job?**

A. Seeing new birds and flowers, particularly this spring.

**Q. What did your friends and family think about your decision to come to Lebanon?**

A. They’ve been incredibly supportive and encouraging, and without their support I wouldn’t be here!

**Q. What have been the highlights of your first month with ARL?**

- A. 1) Seeing up to 50 Harriers of three different species coming to roost in the marsh at dusk.  
2) Walking up to the top of Jabel Barouk (the mountain ridge behind Aana) and seeing Shore Larks singing in the snow.  
3) Abdul’s Chicken Shishtaouk at the Kebab shop in nearby Qab Elias.

**News on the Important Bird Area program:**

As we reported in the last newsletter (No.4 November 2004) “we are planning with SPNL, the national BirdLife partner, to launch a major research initiative in 2005 to identify and seek protection for “Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Lebanon.” IBAs are areas of crucial importance for the conservation of birds and other forms of wildlife and have proved to be a hugely important tool for protection of biodiversity around the world.”

Well we are delighted to report that we have been successful in fund raising for this vital project, so it is all systems go for 2005! Research is already underway with many more site visits planned through the year. As the research program identifies the priority sites so links will be established with the local communities to begin the vital work of conservation.

**A Rocha Spring open day:**

A chance to go early morning bird watching with the A Rocha team including a bird ringing demonstration, where you will see wild birds in the hand and learn about the research value of A Rocha Lebanon’s bird ringing (also called banding) programme.

**When: 7.30 am Saturday May 14<sup>th</sup> (ringing starts at 5.30 am)**

**Where: at the Springs, Aammiq marsh.**

**If you are interested contact Chris Naylor ([arocha@cyberia.net.lb](mailto:arocha@cyberia.net.lb)) for more information and booking. Limited to 20 places.**



*The Striped Hyena- did you know they were found in Lebanon? It is not just birds that benefit from IBAs.*



**A ROCHA**

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