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A ROCHA

Together, caring for God's creation



Tannourine forest
An A Rocha study site this year

Dear Friends,

As this newsletter wings its way to you either through the post or electronically millions of birds are winging their way over Lebanon on their way to their wintering grounds far to the south. As the migrating birds mark the change in season we are reminded that change is an inevitable part of life. In the A Rocha Lebanon team we have been experiencing change as we have said goodbye to Martin and Lodi (with their new baby) and “hallo” to two new staff. We are grateful to all Martin and Lodi have done in running the center at Aana and the environmental educational program and wish them all the best in their big changes ahead.

So who are the new staff and what have the team been up to?

NEW STAFF: Mary asks Veronique some questions about herself and Veronique asks Mary!!

Veronique:

-So tell us a little about yourself

I was born in a small town in the French Alps and I got married to Rich Prior on September 10th, 2005. Rich has worked with A Rocha Lebanon since January 2005. I have worked as a nurse for 15 years in Geneva and until the end of August 2005; my job was to visit patients in their home (from babies to old people)

Outside my work, for the last 5 years, I was in charge of fundraising and administration of a charity to support a street children centre in Manila, The Philippines, which I visited 4 times.

- What will be your role with A Rocha?

With A Rocha I shall be involved in housekeeping and in looking after guests. I shall also be translating A Rocha Lebanon information and publications into French and assisting the team in scientific studies and the educational programme. I'm really happy to be involved with A Rocha's work.

- What have been your first impressions of life in the Bekaa?

After only 2 weeks in the Bekaa, I've been struck by the hospitality and quiet in the village, by the magnificent scenery and beautiful birds, but also by the presence of rubbish and shotgun cartridges everywhere in the countryside. I'm also moved by the traditional way of life of the shepherds with their flocks and the poor conditions of the migrant workers in their temporary camps. Another thing is that it will take me some time to get used to the Lebanese style of driving!



Mary:

-Where do you come from?

Originally I come from Syria, I was born in Jordan and spent the first 18 years of my life there, then I moved to Syria where I worked in a business company.

-For how long have you been in Lebanon?

I came here in 1998 that was when I started my theological studies. After I finished my B.Th degree I worked for one year in Schneller School in the Bekaa. In Schneller School I worked as a Bible teacher and a house mother. This year I graduated from N.E.S.T. (Near East School of Theology) with a Masters degree in Christian education. In April 2, 2005 I got married to George Al- Kopti who works as the rector of the Anglican Church in Beirut.

- What will be your role with A Rocha?

Church Liaison... Mainly I will be working as a link between A Rocha and the Churches of Lebanon. I will be visiting the churches to talk about A Rocha's work in Lebanon and our role in keeping and protecting God's creation. Beside that I will be helping in book keeping, translation, and teaching Arabic to the staff.



Aammiq Marsh Update - summer 2005

This summer has been a good one for birds at the Aammiq Marsh. Once again the marsh has remained wet all summer, with the pools near the main road still having plenty of water even as I write in early October. Because of this, water birds such as Coots, Moorhens, Mallards and Little Grebes have been able to raise young. One great success story this year has been the Black-Crowned Night Heron. Until 2004 this species was only an occasional visitor to Aammiq, but for the last two years it has bred successfully in the trees at the west end of the marsh. The maximum count of Night Herons this year was 215 at the end of August and it is probable that around 80 pairs nested.

A good indication of how the habitat has improved at Aammiq in recent years can be seen by comparing the numbers of breeding species in the marsh in 2001 and 2005. The number has more than doubled (7 in 2001, 15 in 2005).

This number should increase in future years – maybe the Pygmy Cormorant, which dropped in for three weeks in June and July, will come back next year with a few friends to form a mixed colony with the Night Herons (something which these species do in other countries).

Of course Aammiq is not just good for birds. There are many mammals found here, including otters which give away their presence by their droppings and distinctive five-toed footprints in the mud. Although rarely spotted, one was seen in June, amazingly enough on the same evening that the Pygmy Cormorant was first found.



Black-Crowned Night Heron

www.fnal.gov/.../Black_crowned_Night_Heron.jpg



Search for IBAs in Lebanon, 2005 – 2007

A Rocha Lebanon staff and visiting volunteers have made several visits during 2005 to 7 special sites around Lebanon to observe birds. These places have been selected as potential IBAs (Important Bird areas) as they are thought to hold, or have passing through them, significant numbers of migratory soaring birds, or globally rare or endangered species.



A further 5 sites are being visited by SPNL (Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon) bird experts, and together ARL and SPNL will submit the data from the most likely potential IBAs to Bird Life International who will decide which locations merit IBA status. By the end of 2007 over 30 sites will have been surveyed by the two organizations.

However, the IBA programme is not just about numbers, a site must also be amenable to practical conservation and form part of an integrated approach to conservation, involving local communities as “stakeholders”, protecting the IBA’s environment and hopefully generating benefits

to the community through eco-tourism and recreation.



On July 26th A Rocha and SPNL made a joint presentation launching the Search for IBAs programme to Lebanon’s scientific community at the Ministry of Environment in Beirut.

By September, over 120 species of birds had been identified at the 7 sites, highlights including the discovery of only the second breeding locations in Lebanon for White-throated Robin and Penduline Tit.

Penduline Tit

Lebanon’s Special Species

The Eastern Spadefoot Toad (*Pelobates syriacus*).

The Eastern Spadefoot Toad is a large toad which is found in South-eastern Europe and South-west Asia, from Bulgaria in the west to Iran in the East and going south to Lebanon, Syria and northern Palestine. In Jordan it is now believed to be extinct.

The Spadefoot’s name comes from its specially adapted hind feet which have hardened ‘tubercles’ that enable the toad to burrow quickly into loose soil, sometimes as deep as 1 meter below the surface. They are strictly nocturnal, only coming out of their burrows at night to look for food in their grassland habitat.

Like most amphibians, the Eastern Spadefoot Toad comes to water to breed, laying its eggs in

a thick band around the stems of submerged plants. However, because the large tadpoles are very tasty for fish, they can only survive in ponds that have no fish. Usually these are temporary pools which dry up each year.

The toad looks very similar to the much commoner Green Toad (*Bufo viridis*), being light grey with green blotches, but is a bit bigger and can be told by looking at its feet and at the eyes, which have slit-shaped, vertical pupils.

In Lebanon the species was unknown until discovered by the A Rocha France /A Rocha Lebanon frog research expedition this year. It was found in just 2 sites. The A Rocha team are working with the land owner of the West Bekaa site to try to ensure its survival, clearly with such a limited known distribution it can do with all the help it can get!



www.ittiofauna.org/webmuseum/anfibi/pelobates...

Thanks for reading to the end – don’t forget our website: www.arocha.org

Best wishes, The A Rocha Lebanon team



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