

## BIRDING NEWS FROM ISRAEL

January 2010



**4th INTERNATIONAL SPRING MIGRATION FESTIVAL, EILAT,  
18 - 24 March, 2010.**

Once again we'll be heading south to the Spring Migration Festival! We invite birdwatchers from all over the world to join us in Eilat in March to experience the amazing bird migration over the southern part of Israel.

For information about the festival tours and registration, please check the website:  
[www.eilatbirdsfestival.com](http://www.eilatbirdsfestival.com)

⌘ **The Israel Ornithological Center:** [www.birds.org.il](http://www.birds.org.il)

On 26 January we celebrated 30 years of birdwatching in Israel. In the morning the new Visitor Center was opened at the Jerusalem Bird Observatory. Then, in the afternoon there were discussions at the Knesset and a celebration in the auditorium with 400 guests. A film on the use of Barn Owls and Kestrels as biological pesticides was shown and three new stamps were presented: one shows the Israeli national bird, the Hoopoe and the other two show the Graceful Prinia and the Goldfinch.



Amir Balaban shows the new JBO Visitor Center roof

Otniel Dayagi

✂ **The Jerusalem Bird Observatory (JBO):** [www.jbo.org.il](http://www.jbo.org.il)

After almost a year of building and preparations, the Jerusalem Bird Observatory opened its new Visitor Center this month. The Gutman Visitor Center houses the new office of the Observatory, an upgraded shop and the Gail Rubin Galley. It is Israel's first "living building" incorporating several unique features in its construction: the use of materials made of recycled plastic bottles; over 60 bird houses embedded in the outside walls and a living roof on which over 600 native bulbs and hundreds of seeds were planted. Visitors to the center can enjoy the exhibition of photographs of wildlife photographer Gail Rubin in the gallery that has been named in her memory.

On 26 January, officials of SPNI and Keren Hayesod, many friends and supporters were present as the Mayor of Jerusalem, Nir Barkat, officially opened the building. In addition, the newly-renovated Beracha Foundation Bird hide was rededicated.

Bird wise it was a quiet month, lots of seed-eaters including **Hawfinches** (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*), and wintering **Robins** (*Erithacus rubecula*) were seen and ringed. The almond trees bloomed, attracting many birds and bees and there was much needed rain.

### ⌘ Israel Rarities

Following is a list of rarities recorded in Israel during the period 25/12/09 - 25/1/10:  
**Red-throated Diver** (*Gavia stellata*) - 1 remained at Acre all month (4th record, since December 2009).

**Leach's Petrel** (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) - 11 off Jaffa, 25/1/10.

**White-fronted Goose** (*Anser albifrons*) - 4 at Shomrat, NW Galilee, 13/1/10; 2 at Zohar, S Coastal Plains, 15/1/10.

**Terek Sandpiper** (*Xenus cinereus*) - 1 unseasonal bird at Shlomi, NW Galilee, 15/1/10.

**Great Black-backed Gull** (*Larus marinus*) - 1 adult remained at Acre all month.

**Audouin's Gull** (*Larus audouinii*) - 1 1st-winter at Maoz Hayim, Bet Shean Valley, 10/1/10; 1 first-winter at Ashdod, 13/1/10.

**Red-breasted Flycatcher** (*Ficedula parva*) - 1 unseasonal bird at En Afek, NW Galilee, 4/1/10.

**Common Rosefinch** (*Carpodacus erythrinus*) - 3 ringed at Tsor'a, Judean Plains, during the month.

### ⌘ The Hula Birdwatching Center:

January is a beautiful and interesting month at the Hula. There aren't too many song birds so we do have time to catch other species such as waders and raptors.

This January we caught and ringed a **Jack Snipe** (*Lymnocyptes minimus*) which is not a common wintering species. It is a very shy bird and not easy to spot as its camouflaged plumage blends into the surroundings. It feeds on invertebrates that it finds in the mud, relying on nerve cells at the end of its long beak to feel them in the mud. The eyes that are on the sides of the head enable the bird to keep a look-out for predators coming from all directions.

We also ringed a **Kestrel** (*Falco tinnunculus*) in a field to the north of the Agmon. This is a common diurnal raptor that feeds on insects, reptile and small mammals. Its keen eyesight enables it to spot signs of rodents' urine from a distance, discover the entrances to their burrows and ambush them as they come out. Kestrels are now part of a project to decrease the use of pesticides in agriculture by using Kestrels and Barn Owls as biological pesticides - the Kestrels "work" during the day and the Barn Owls at night.

### ⌘ International Birdwatching Center, Jordan Valley: [www.birdwatching.org.il](http://www.birdwatching.org.il)

Thousands of wintering birds of dozens of different species fill the fishponds and fields in the area. There are large groups of hundreds of individuals of **Black Stork** (*Ciconia nigra*), **Pallas's Gull** (*Larus ichthyaetus*), **Teal** (*Anas crecca*) in especially large numbers this year, **Redshank** (*Tringa tetanus*), and, of course, thousands of **Coot** (*Fulica atra*), **Grey Heron** (*Ardea cinerea*), **Black-headed Gull** (*Larus ridibundus*).

The fishponds that are emptied during the winter attract many interesting species to the shallow water: **Gadwall** (*Anas strepera*), **Wigeon** (*Anas penelope*), **Spoonbill** (*Platalea leucorodia*), **Little Stint** (*Calidris minuta*), **Curlew Sandpiper** (*Calidris ferruginea*), **Little Ringed Plover** (*Charadrius dubius*), **Black-tailed Godwit** (*Limosa limosa*), **Citrine Wagtail** (*Motacilla citreola*) and others.



Ringed Spoonbill

Kobi Sheffer

The Spoonbill in the picture was ringed On 24.05.2009 at Bolluk Lake, Tuz Lake basin, Anatolia by the Suhenden Karauz team and was photographed near Akko, Israel in December 2009.

In the damp fields we saw dozens of **Lapwings** (*Vanellus vanellus*) and several **Golden Plover** (*Pluvialis apricaria*).

At the foot of the Gilboa Range were **Long-billed Pipit** (*Anthus similis*), **Blue Rock Thrush** (*Monticola solitarius*), **Woodlark** (*Lullula arborea*) and **Black Redstart** (*Phoenicurus ochrurus*).

The area is filled with raptors during the winter. There are **Osprey** (*Pandion haliaetus*) in all the areas with fishponds, **Spotted Eagle** (*Aquila clanga*), **Marsh Harrier** (*Circus aeruginosus*), **Hen Harrier** (*Circus cyaneus*), **Merlin** (*Falco columbarius*) and hundreds of **Black Kite** (*Milvus migrans*).

⌘ **Gamla Nature Reserve:** <http://gamla.golan.org.il>

During the monthly count, 20 **Griffon Vultures** (*Gyps fulvus*) were counted at Gamla and Daliyot gorges, none at Yahudia, none at Ein-Gev, 8 at Evyatar Mt. (Upper Galilee), none at Akbara Rock, 31 at Lower Amud and 2 at Hai-Bar Carmel - a total of 61 **Griffon Vultures** for the north of Israel.

The feeding station at Gamla has been quite active this month - on 8 separate occasions, 30-40 **Griffon Vultures** entered the station, accompanied by crows and jackals. One pleasing visitor was a juvenile **Marsh Harrier** (*Circus aeruginosus*). All the activity was recorded by the cameras at the observatory.

The two young recently released **Griffon Vultures**, **G77** and **G78**, are seen daily around Gamla. One of them, **G77**, was pictured at the feeding station with one strap of the transmitter hanging down his body. Although the breeding season has started, we decided to open the cage and trap the vulture in order to fix its transmitter. Once the cage was opened, both **G77** and **G78** entered. They were weighed and checked and released back into

the wild. Unfortunately, **G76** that was released at the same time, didn't make it and was found dead at the end of December at the bottom of the Gamla gorge.

The nesting activity on the cliff is slow at the moment. There are three couples building nests and mating, almost daily. At Lower Amud there are eight couples busy with nest building and mating.

## **VOLUNTEERS WANTED AT:**

**Gamla Nature Reserve:** <http://gamla.golan.org.il>

Volunteers are needed for the nesting surveillance project. We invite you to participate in our efforts to save the endangered population of the Griffon Vulture in Israel. In order to sustain and conserve these vulnerable birds we will conduct nest surveillance and reproductive surveys at the Gamla Nature Reserve, which is located at the center of the Golan Heights in the north of Israel. The area is very calm and remote from the center of the country. In the canyons of this Reserve exists one of the last and biggest breeding colonies of the Griffon Vulture in Israel (and in the whole Middle East). Volunteers from all over the world participate in this project. They help us watch and document all behaviors (courtship, mating, incubating, hatching, feeding, fledging etc.) and track fledglings and juveniles, which will be ringed and/or fitted with radio transmitters. Accommodation and transport are provided. **Please contact:**

E-mail: Gamla Nature Reserve: [st.gamla@npa.org.il](mailto:st.gamla@npa.org.il) or Yael Choresh: [yaelch@npa.org.il](mailto:yaelch@npa.org.il)

Tel: + 972-4-6822282 Fax: + 972-4-6822285

**The Jerusalem Bird Observatory (JBO):** [www.jbo.org.il](http://www.jbo.org.il)

Volunteers wanted for bird monitoring in the spring, and help with maintenance. Volunteers who would like to help with monitoring and ranger work in the Gazelle Valley would need a bit of Hebrew. No accommodation etc. provided.

Please contact: Amir Balaban at e-mail: [amirbalaban1@013.net](mailto:amirbalaban1@013.net)

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**The Checklist of the Birds of Israel, compiled by Yoav Perlman and Jonathan Meyrav.**

This comprehensive checklist includes all species and distinctive forms recorded in Israel to date, and, in addition, describes the status and distribution of each species in Israel in a comfortable layout.

Futhermore, this volume provides useful information for travellers to Israel - birdwatching centers and birding sites, recommended literature and selected websites. This new checklist will definitely become an integral part of the Israeli birding literature.

The checklist can be ordered from Yona, the secretary of the Israel Ornithological Center: [yona@spni.org.il](mailto:yona@spni.org.il)

As Israel is uniquely situated at a strategic point on the migration route of millions of birds of several hundred species and is also the wintering site for thousands of birds, the birdwatching opportunities are endless, all year round.

\*The IOC birdwatching club "Knafaim" (Wings) offers a variety of birdwatching tours. The tours are day tours and half-day tours and usually depart on Fridays from central Tel Aviv. Transport is either by bus or in private cars. And, although the tours are guided in Hebrew, the guides and the participants would be very happy to welcome visitors and translate the information for them.

\*We can also organize birdwatching tours, tailor-made to your requirements, with English-speaking guides.

For additional information, please contact: [ioclaya@inter.net.il](mailto:ioclaya@inter.net.il) If you do not wish to receive our Birding News updates, please contact: [ioclaya@inter.net.il](mailto:ioclaya@inter.net.il)