

REHABILITATING THE MIGHTY JORDAN RIVER THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEMAKING

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The Jordan River is a historical, cultural, and religious site with great ecological significance for the four regions that share its banks and tributaries. Revered in the holy books of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the Jordan River has been a sacred place for the world's three monotheistic religions. Situated in the Jordan River Valley, the Jordan River is part of one of the most important bird migration flyways on the planet. An estimated five hundred million birds migrate annually through this region between the northern and southern hemispheres.

A historic flow of 1.3 billion cubic meters (bcm) coupled with the river's great biodiversity generated the river's nickname as "the mighty Jordan." Yet, if one looks at the river today, only 2% of the original volume remains, and the water that "flows" is nothing but a polluted trickle. Many people are not aware the Jordan is drying up due to the fact that most of the river is a closed military zone and off limits to the public. Yet, one organization in the Middle East is raising awareness about the dire state of the Jordan River, and is bringing it back to life.

EcoPeace/Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME) is an environmental peacemaking organization that promotes transboundary collaboration among Palestinian, Jordanian, and Israeli environmentalists. A unique organization, FoEME tackles common ecological issues by creating a space for dialogue and action for communities in all three regions vis-à-vis cooperative efforts. One such program dedicated to protecting the region's shared environmental heritage is the Jordan River Rehabilitation Project, which focuses on restoring the Lower Jordan River.

FoEME's Jordan River Rehabilitation Project recently published an extensive environmental flows report in 2010 explicating how to rehabilitate the river, as well as a complementary economic analysis of policy opportunities to return fresh water to the river. The reports recognize the essential need for ecological stability for the Jordan, such as the return of annual floods, reduction of pollution and sewage, and the restoration of natural flora and fauna.

The Lower Jordan River (LJR) once flowed from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea, creating a lush wetland, rich in biodiversity. Overdevelopment and intensive agriculture led to divergence of over 98% of the water to the surrounding regions. Not only did this have a dire effect on the annual water flow, but also drastically affected the ecological makeup of the river. Rampant pollution and sewage dumping further led to a dramatic 50% reduction in biodiversity.

One of FoEME's recommendations includes an experimental flood of the LJR to flush sediment and pollutants, which would reconnect the channel and floodplain while removing invasive plant and animal species. The restoration of freshwater would create biological cues for native migration and breeding. FoEME calls for the return of a healthy ecosystem, which benefits nature and society alike.

FoEME is a best practice model for environmental peacemaking in the Middle East region, demonstrating how collaboration among Jordanians, Palestinians, and Israelis leads to both peaceful interaction and ecological rehabilitation.

For more information about FoEME please visit our website at www.foeme.org.

For recent highlights of our activities, read our monthly environmental peacemaking newsletter (available at: <http://www.foeme.org/peace.php>) or follow us at Facebook, Twitter and blog.

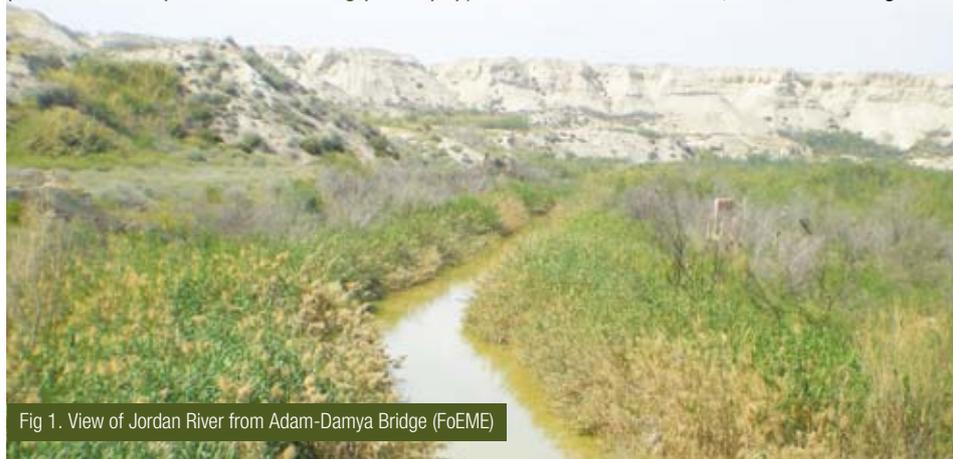


Fig 1. View of Jordan River from Adam-Damyia Bridge (FoEME)

ABU DHABI IS GEARING UP FOR THE LARGEST GATHERING OF FALCONERS THE WORLD HAS EVER SEEN.



Fig 1. Falconer on horse (Linda Wright)

The International Festival of Falconry will come to the Jahili Fort, Al Ain, in December 2011 to celebrate this ancient sport. The week-long festival will be a free event, hosted by the Emirates Falconers' Club, which will showcase falconry's contribution to education, science, art and heritage.

The Festival will open with a three-day conference that will see vets, conservationists and regional experts gather to discuss the most topical issues that they face. Conference organiser Dr Andrew Dixon believes it will be a forum for lively debate and where some of the most respected and senior falconers, such as Dr Tom Cade (founder of the Peregrine Fund), can engage with the next generation of falconers.

The importance of education and passing on skills and knowledge is vital for the survival of falconry. As such, the Festival will host local schools and children at the Education Day. For children, the Education Day is a brilliant opportunity to come into close contact with birds of prey, ask questions, and learn about wider issues such as the conservation of prey species such as the Houbara bustard.

The 16th and 17th December will see the Festival open its doors to the public who will be hosted by the international falconers in their assorted tepees, yurts, hunting lodges and Bedouin tents. There will also be a full arena programme of historical re-enactments and flying displays with horses, camels and salukis.

Festival Director, Nick Fox believes that the Emirates have never seen such an event. "Emirati, expatriate and international visitors will all find something to enjoy. People are invited to experience the rich and varied cultures of falconry in the Americas, Asia, Africa, Europe and of course the Middle East, which makes this an event not to be missed. This is going to be the world's largest gathering of falconers and we hope you'll be there too".

For more information in 10 languages, visit www.falconryfestival.com or find us on Facebook