

NEWS AND EVENTS

Ornithologists “hit jackpot” on sightings of Critically Endangered bird.

Damascus, Syria: A small expedition team travelling across Syria today announced the discovery of the largest wintering population of one of Eurasia’s most endangered birds, the Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarius*). Globally, the Sociable Lapwing has suffered a very rapid population decline – halving between 1960 and 1987. In recent years these declines are thought to have worsened, resulting in its Critically Endangered status. Previous estimates placed the global population of this Critically Endangered species at between 400 and 1500 individuals. However the expedition team reported seeing over 1200 birds in one day and over 1500 in total during the trip, all within a few grassland sites in Northern Syria. The finding gives tremendous encouragement to conservationists working to save the bird across Central Asia (where it is a summer resident) and the Middle East (where the bird winters).

The two major causes of biodiversity loss in the Syrian desert are illegal hunting and habitat degradation – both of which are thought to pose a threat to Sociable Lapwing in the region. Conservationists in the Middle East are now working urgently to ensure that the wintering population can be afforded immediate protection from these twin threats. “In order to safeguard this newly-discovered wintering population of Sociable Lapwing we have had to act quickly, working with local government agencies and the Syrian Society for the Conservation of Wildlife to help secure the site and its vitally important bird populations,” said Sharif Jbour of BirdLife Middle East, who are among those coordinating actions in the region. The expedition by the Syrian Sociable Lapwing Team was partly funded via a number of organisations: the RSPB (through a grant from the UK government’s Darwin Initiative), the Ornithological Society of the Middle East and the Dutch Van Tienhoven Foundation.

Story from BirdLife News Alert

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http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/03/sociable_lapwing_discovery.html



The Sociable Lapwing ©Mahmoud Sheish Abdallah.



Sociable Lapwing: less than 1500 were thought to exist before today’s announcement ©Koshkin Maxim.

Kuwait on alert after bird flu detected

Kuwait announced on Sunday [25 Feb 2007] that it had detected the deadly strain of avian influenza in poultry and birds and had shut the nation’s only zoo, AFP reported. The 20 cases of the deadly H5N1 avian influenza were detected in birds, mainly falcons. A nationwide emergency response program was implemented, which included a ban on all bird imports, the temporary closure of Kuwait Zoo and bird markets. Blood samples from all people suspected of having had contact with the infected birds were taken, and tests were underway. About 30 teams were dispatched to various parts of the country following the discovery of the virus. Kuwait is a member of the 6-nation Persian Gulf Cooperation Council which has recently adopted measures to prevent the spread of avian flu, including the ban of birds, poultry and their products mainly from countries in Asia and Europe, where bird flu cases have surfaced. The last case of avian flu in Kuwait was discovered in November 2005.

A ProMED-mail post

<<http://www.promedmail.org>>

Source: AFP via Presstv.ir [edited]

<<http://www.presstv.ir:80/detail.aspx?id=630§ionid=3510210>>

Foot & Mouth Disease, Gazelle - United Arab Emirates

According to the full report, 2 samples from FMD-infected gazelles were sampled in the UAE on 10 Jan 2007, received by the World reference laboratory for FMD (WRLFMD, Pirbright) on 9 Feb 2007, received for sequencing on 14 Feb 2007, and reported on 2 Mar 2007. The 2 UAE gazelle isolates had 100 percent identity. The other 9 close viruses were all Iranian (2006), of which the 2 closest were O/IRN/12/2006 and O/IRN/24/2006, both showing 98.9 percent identity with UAE/1/2007 and O/UAE/2/2007. No official information on the current FMD situation in Iran could be found in OIE’s WAHID (serotypes O and A) might be spreading there. FMD in free-roaming *Gazella gazelle* has been described in Israel in 1985, with extremely high morbidity and mortality rates. Similarly, cases have been reported from Israel earlier this year (2006) (see ProMED-mail posting Foot & mouth disease, gazelle - Israel (L. Galilee) (02): conf, OIE 20070324.1025). In both cases, FMDV serotype O was the causative agent.

A ProMED-mail post

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Source: World Reference Laboratory for Foot-and-mouth Disease (WRLFMD) (IAH-Pirbright) [edited]

<http://www.iah.bbsrc.ac.uk/virus/Picornaviridae/Aphthovirus/fmd_genotyping/2007/WRLFMD-2007-00002-UAE-O.pdf>