

## PALESTINIAN WILDLIFE SOCIETY AND JERICHO WILDLIFE MONITORING STATION

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Palestine Wildlife Society (PWLS) was founded in 1999 in Beit Sahour- Bethlehem District by 13 trained and experienced environmentalists from across Palestine. PWLS's scope of work covers the West Bank and Gaza with a multidimensional mission aiming at the conservation and enhancement of the biodiversity and wildlife in Palestine

Palestine is considered one of the most important places for monitoring bird migration in the world, mainly due to its geographical location at the juncture of the European, Asian, and African continents. The area encompasses diverse environments hosting many resident species. The PWLS places the conservation and rehabilitation of Palestinian wildlife at the top of its list of priorities. The Jericho Wildlife Monitoring Station (JWMS) was created with the aim of attracting wildlife back to the area whilst monitoring resident and migrant species.



Great grey shrike (*Lanius excubitor*), a resident bird at the JWMS. ©Imad Atrash-PWLS data Base 2006

Jericho is one of the oldest cities in the world, known for its historical, ecological and environmental importance. It constitutes part of the Great Rift Valley (lying 400 m. below sea level) and is also recognized as a bottleneck "Important Bird Area" (IBA) based on IUCN and Birdlife International criteria. Jericho is recognized as a valuable and sensitive site for it is the flyway for many birds such as the soaring migrants, as well as being exceptionally important for the habitats and ecosystems that it encompasses. It is estimated that around 500 million birds a year cross this region. The JWMS encompasses an area of about 150 dunums (around 38 acres) surrounded by agricultural fields to the west and a natural landscape to the east that reaches to the banks of Jordan River. Its relative distance from inhabited areas facilitates the abundance of wild fauna and flora.

The JWMS site was originally a botanical garden under the supervision of the Palestinian Committee for the Promotion of Tourism in the Governorate of Jericho (CPTGJ) and was funded by the Korean government. The area is now under full Palestinian control. Due to the significance of the area, PWLS, together with CPTGJ, will revitalize the area. The project will focus on supporting the conservation of biodiversity in the Jericho area, protecting the desert, promoting eco-tourism, establishing a bird ringing station, an environmental education centre, and a wildlife rehabilitation centre. The benefits of the project are plentiful; in addition to creating self-sustainable tourism enterprises, there are educational benefits for schoolchildren and teachers, nature and wildlife lovers, and birdwatchers. Agricultural benefits also arise from the placement of nest boxes for barn owls which help reduce the number of pests to a level at which it is not economically beneficial to use chemical agents that are harmful to the environment.



Anton Khalaih of the Jericho Wildlife Monitoring Station showing members of the Talitha School-Biet Jala, Palestine, how to ring a bird. ©Imad Atrash-PWLS data Base 2006

The PWLS team have rung and registered birds over the last few years at the JWMS. A number of returning birds have been recaptured on their Autumn and Spring migration and these include chiff chaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*), lesser whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*), bluethroat (*Luscinia svecica*) and black redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*). Migrating birds may return to this location because of its convenience location on the migration route between Europe and Africa and also because of the favourable temperatures, water and food supplies. Currently work is underway to investigate how long migrant birds stay in this location. In addition to migrating birds a number of resident birds have also been rung including Palestinian Sunbird (*Nectarinia osea*), Dead Sea Sparrow (*Passer moabiticus*), Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) and the Arabian Babbler (*Turdoides squamiceps*).



PWLS Researchers Anton Khalaih and Tall bani Odeh releasing a captured bird from a net. ©Imad Atrash-PWLS data Base 2006