

THIS WEEK IN



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# alestine

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Palestine



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Thanks largely to our authors, this issue is a visual feast of the creatures with whom we share this planet. Palestine is home to a unique abundance of species, and the reasons for this variety can be found in this month's featured articles. Immerse yourself, enjoy the stunning images and informative captions, and become

inspired to venture out, possibly with a pair of binoculars and best with a bit of patience and perseverance, and meet more members of the global family of living organisms.

Sincere thanks go to the director and staff of the Palestine Museum of Natural History for contributions that cover the wide biodiversity of Palestine's mammals, birds, amphibians and reptiles, as well as invertebrates that populate Palestine – some of them as residents, others as visitors during part of the year. The Ministry of Agriculture informs us of efforts that are extended to care for domesticated animals, while taking into consideration that biodiversity must be preserved to best serve animals and humans alike. The Environmental Education Center gives an account of ongoing developments that might seem tame to science fiction enthusiasts but nevertheless are likely to have deadly consequences, leading to the extinction of species. One article finds inspiration and hope in relating a mythological bird to the history of Gaza, and another reminds us that for centuries, animals have played a role in the holy scriptures of our region. A special breed of dog is placed into its rightful historical context, and you will be introduced to inspiring efforts not only to care for its stray siblings but also to raise some rather unusual animals that, for the time being, are cared for as pets.

Our personality of the month is fulfilling his lifelong dream to enhance awareness of the need to preserve Palestine's beautiful fauna. We feature two books, and our artist of the month shows Palestine from a less familiar side – at least as official performance is concerned. If you are in the country, make sure to visit our exhibition of the month and take a look at the rich events section that is filled with exciting things to do on a beautiful summer evening in Palestine.

From all of us at TWiP, we wish you a good, safe, and peaceful summer.

Warmly,  
**Tina Basem**  
 Editor



## Forthcoming Issues

September 2016: **Caring for and Working with People with Disabilities**

October 2016: **Tapping into Palestine's Diaspora**

November 2016: **High Tech in Palestine**

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# Animal Biodiversity in Palestine



By Mazin Qumsiyeh

At the crossroads of three continents, Palestine is located in the western part of the Fertile Crescent that connects Africa with Eurasia. This location and the associated geologic activities over the past 100 million years have ensured a unique and rich fauna, flora, and human history. The diverse habitats include five ecozones that range from the Central Highlands to the Semi-Coastal Region, Eastern Slopes, the Jordan Rift Valley, and the Coastal regions, and cover four bio-geographical regions (Mediterranean, Irano-Turanian, Saharo-Arabian, and Sudanese/Ethiopian). It is thus not surprising that this small country is biologically more diverse than some countries ten times its size.

Tens of thousands of years ago, early humans initially migrated out of their region of origin in southeastern Africa to this part of the world, and not much later, farther on. The Fertile Crescent's mild weather and rich soils allowed for such a wide variety of wild plants and animals to thrive that humans in turn were able to flourish by harvesting them from nature. About 12,000 years ago the people of this region were among the first to rely on agriculture when they domesticated wheat, barley, lentils, and chickpeas, and raised goats and camels. This transition from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to settled agricultural and pastoral life made possible an increase in human population and the development of civilization and religious beliefs among first the local Natufian and later the Canaanitic peoples. Over time, a diversity of religious beliefs evolved here that led to its being considered a Holy Land for nearly half the earth's human population.

Palestine's diverse habitats have allowed for thousands of animal species to evolve, many of them unique to our country. It furthermore has provided ideal conditions for hundreds of millions of birds that



*The caracal is a nocturnal animal and difficult to observe.*

pass here on their annual migration between Europe and Africa. Yet human interventions, especially since the industrial revolution, have resulted in a strong decline of a previously amazing animal diversity of life. Animals that have become extinct in Palestine over the past few hundred years include ostriches, the fishing owl, the Syrian brown bear, the roe deer, the lion, and the cheetah. Lions lingered perhaps until the thirteenth century. The last cheetah remained in the distant hills in our countries up until the early 1900s. The large animals that remain, though endangered, include leopards, gazelles, wolves, vultures, and caracal, for which illegal hunting and destruction of habitats remain the main sources of threats.

Scientists prefer the term biodiversity conservation to wildlife

conservation when talking about animal (and plant) protection. "Wildlife" is sometimes used to refer to bigger animals such as mammals, birds, and reptiles. One could argue that humans are the wildest of all animals for their destructive impact on the environment. Only since the late twentieth century did the conservation of biological diversity become recognized as an urgent issue when scientists observed t h e



*The Middle East Tree Frog is endemic to the region and is threatened by human habitat destruction.*



*Hyraxes might resemble rodents at first glance, but they have hooves and two caniniform incisors that betray their common ancestry with elephants.*

*As an ibex ages, its horns may grow long enough to curve all the way down to its back.*

significant decline in biodiversity that has accompanied industrialization and human-induced climate change. Important in the recognition of the dangers to our natural surroundings were the publication of the Global Biodiversity Strategy and the adoption of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) that was signed at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (both in 1992).

In February 2002, special focus was given to Palestine at the Seventh Special Session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, held in Cartagena, Colombia, when a resolution was adopted concerning the situation of the environment in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt). The council requested that the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) carry out a desk study as a first step in the implementation of a decision to support and advance environmental conservation in the oPt. The resulting study, even though it lacked important details, identified major areas of environmental threats (UNEP, 2003). In 2015, its findings were corroborated and presented in more detail by a report that was issued in compliance with

the Convention on Biological Diversity by the Environmental Quality Authority (EQA, 2015). This report estimates that over 50,000 species live in Palestine, including over 540 birds and 100 mammal species. Yet much more work remains to be done to map these in a scientific way, and we estimate that one-third of the invertebrate species in historic Palestine are still to be described and named. Some may go extinct even before they are described by scientists.

Objective studies of animals in the oPt have been limited, compared to nearby areas. Research in general still lags behind in our area.\* Most studies of the fauna and flora within Palestine were undertaken by Western visitors who came on short trips to study the “Holy Land,” many of them connected to Western empires, such as Rev. Canon Henry Baker Tristram who conducted the first full survey of Palestinian fauna in the second half of the nineteenth century. Zionists in the early days of the movement saw the value of cataloging and understanding native animals and plants. One of the first native Palestinians who engaged in faunal studies was Dr. Sana Atallah,

who performed a number of studies from 1962 until his untimely death at the age of 27 in 1970. Since then, only few and sporadic research studies had been undertaken by local scientists before biodiversity research became more relevant in light of the deteriorating environmental situation. Examples include a research paper on the decline in animal biodiversity in the Bethlehem region due to human interventions (including the Separation Wall and settlements), and the Palestine Museum of Natural History (PMNH) at Bethlehem University has published fascinating studies on freshwater snails, scorpions, butterflies, birds, amphibians, and reptiles.

One of the most remarkable large mammals still found in large numbers is the ibex (*badan* in Arabic), a mountain goat that flourishes around the springs near the Dead Sea and is an amazing climber. The males have large curved horns, and during mating season the sound of these horns hitting each other reverberates in the hills of the Jordan Valley (*al-Ghor*). The ibex is still hunted by wolves and leopards around the Dead Sea, but it is protected in places like Ein Gedi (named for

another Arabic and Aramaic term for goat) on the western side and Wadi Mujib on the eastern side of the Dead Sea.

The hyrax or coney (*wabar* in Arabic) is an interesting brownish animal about the size of a rabbit that can be seen on the precarious edges of steep cliffs of valleys throughout Palestine, feeding on plants and furtively rushing back to its den when threats such as a predatory eagle or a jackal are sighted – a peculiar danger call can be heard from the animals that hold guard on lookouts. It belongs to a unique order of mammals and is in fact closer to tapirs and elephants than to rabbits and rodents. Humans occasionally hunt these for food, so the hyrax has become very shy around humans, but it can be observed in places such as Mar Saba and the Jordan Valley or on the hillsides of Jenin.

Of the small mammals, bats are fascinating creatures. We have over two dozen species, with all but one species being insectivorous (eating insects) and the Egyptian fruit bat being the largest in Palestine. Bats locate their insect prey by ultrasound which they emanate



The forearms of bats have developed into wings, making bats the only mammals that are naturally able to fly.

through their nose or mouth and receive back via specially shaped external ears and amazing adaptations of their internal ears and brain system. Each species can have unique frequencies and prey on certain types of insects or small animals. The long-eared bat of the genus *Otonycteris*, a desert species, feeds mostly on scorpions in arid regions such as the Jordan Valley, thus competing for food with the desert hedgehog that feeds on scorpions, large insects, lizards, and animal eggs. Among the three hedgehog species in Palestine, the desert hedgehog is the most handsome.

It is possible to be cautiously optimistic that Palestinians (with the support of others) can rise to the challenge of protecting our rich fauna and flora that

constitute an integral part of our native heritage. Such efforts not only connect us to this "Holy Land," they are critical for our human survival on this part of the planet and elsewhere.

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*Article photos courtesy of PMNH.*

\* See Qumsiyeh and Isaac, 2012, "Research and development in the occupied Palestinian territories: Challenges and opportunities," *Arab Studies Quarterly*.

The hedgehog hibernates in winter when it is cold and also becomes less active at the height of summer, when it gets too hot.



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# Animal Health and Wealth in Palestine



By Lyad Adra,  
Mohamad Issa, and  
Bassam Abu Aziz

Archaeological evidence shows that the Middle East, particularly the Levant region and the Jordan Valley, was the starting point for animal domestication more than eight thousand years ago. Since then, the people living in this area have relied on animals to support their livelihoods, and even now, Palestinian farmers raise and breed livestock as a source of food and income. Traditionally, the raising of small ruminants (sheep and goats) has been the largest segment of the agricultural sector. However, farming and herding sheep and goats is still managed mainly in traditional ways and with methods that have been inherited within families. About 730,000 sheep and 215,000 goats are being raised in Palestine according to the agricultural census carried out by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in 2015.<sup>i</sup> The cattle industry is managed with modern methods, mainly with regards to milk production, and Palestinian farmers are raising about 34,000 head of cattle, almost all of them of the Holstein-Friesian breed (black and white dairy cows, originating from northern Europe), whereas the local *baladi* and Damascene cattle breeds are now very rare. The chicken industry supports 1.5 million hens for egg production and produces 31 million broiler birds annually; this industry also uses modern management methods and attracts huge investments. Furthermore, there are approximately 1,500 camels and 3,600 equines.

The agricultural sector is affected by many obstacles, some of them due to the Palestinian political situation. During the 1948 *Nakba*, more than 500 villages and cities were evacuated and depopulated, which led to severe alterations in the animal population density and to losses of some local breeds. Furthermore, resources needed for raising farm animals are being curtailed on an ongoing basis by Israeli measures that are contrary to international human rights laws and to agreements signed between Israel and the Palestinians in the 1994 Paris Protocols. Ongoing confiscation of land

in the West Bank and East Jerusalem limits Palestinians' ability to cultivate fertile land and breed livestock since these measures both reduce the areas that can be used for grazing and decrease the availability of water that is required to irrigate crops and water animals. First, the apartheid Wall annexes Palestinian territories under the pretense of providing increased security for Israeli citizens. It is a cement wall that is 8 meters high and 782 kilometers long; it deviates widely in many places from the 1967 borders and cuts deeply into the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) to surround settlements located the heart of the oPt, thus effectively dividing the Palestinian areas into zones that have no chance of survival. Upon completion of the Separation Wall, 22 percent of West Bank land will be confiscated and 52 percent of Palestinian communities will be isolated into cantons and enclaves surrounded by settlements and military zones.<sup>ii</sup> Second, the more than 200 illegal Israeli settlements are, in many cases, built on prime agricultural land or at key water resources, such as the Western Aquifer Basin near springs and wells that have been confiscated from Palestinians. The inequitable distribution of water between settlers and Palestinians has been widely documented.<sup>iii</sup> Furthermore, settlements

Diseases that spread among Palestinian livestock have a negative impact on the economic and social situation of Palestinian farmers, decreasing their capability to breed livestock in Palestine.

discharge untreated wastewater into neighboring Palestinian areas, and Israel is dumping solid waste generated in Israel into the occupied territories without restrictions. All these factors affect Palestinian livestock breeding and are leading to ongoing increases in the cost of locally produced products for consumers, a situation that is aggravated by the high price of feed.<sup>iv</sup> Last but not least, even though the Paris protocols stipulate the free exchange of products between Israel and the oPt, Israel prevents any animal products from being exported to Israeli markets and most recently has even blocked Palestinian dairy and meat products from entering East Jerusalem markets.<sup>v</sup>

*The Separation Wall along the western border of the West Bank has reduced the areas available to herders for grazing their flocks.*



The general directorate of veterinary services and animal health of the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) is responsible for the health of animals and animal products in Palestine. It serves farmers through veterinary services offices that are distributed throughout all government districts. Main duties include free vaccinations against brucellosis and foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) for all herds and the provision of optional vaccination (for fees) against pox, PPR (peste des petits ruminants), enterotoxaemia, chlamydiosis, anthrax, and bluetongue disease. While vaccination can control some diseases, others require the culling of the infected flocks (slaughtering sick animals), which is done with compensation to farmers. Furthermore, the veterinary services carry out disease diagnosis through the central vet lab and regulate the dispensing of veterinary drugs and the running of private veterinary clinics and of slaughterhouses. In general, the vet services staff is working hard to protect animal health and human health and wealth from zoonotic diseases (diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans) – all this despite complicated logistics and a severe shortage in staff.

Because more than 80 percent of human pathogens come from animal origin, international trends in food-safety practices focus on animal health as the earliest point of the food-production chain in order to reduce the risk of human exposure. The “One World, One Health” principles outline recommendations that promote the establishment of a more holistic approach to measures that address the prevention of epidemic/epizootic diseases.

<sup>vi</sup> They urgently advocate the maintaining

As endemic and introduced animal diseases are of concern in Palestine, veterinary care is a top priority and steadily improving.

In 2000, An-Najah University in Nablus established a veterinary college that provides the local market with graduates in veterinary medicine. Currently, around 250 veterinarians work in Palestine, 60 of whom are employed by the government.



For Bedouins, such as these living in the Jordan Valley, sheep and goats are a main source of income. In efforts to better monitor animal health and establish an animal identification system, the Palestinian Veterinary Services, in 2015, began to tag the ears of all sheep and goats.

of ecosystem integrity for all forms of life and assert that this must not only serve the benefit of humans and their domesticated animals, but also protect the “foundational biodiversity that supports us all,” which includes the wildlife and flora of global land and water habitats. Unfortunately, this concept has not yet been well addressed in Palestine due to a lack of awareness among public and higher officials as well as policy makers who therefore fail to prioritize associated issues. This lack of care has led to the current situation in which there is a high incidence of human brucellosis that

is caused by consumption (in some cases also through handling) of contaminated dairy or meat products or, more rarely, through direct and prolonged contact with contaminated animals (through inhalation or wounds in the skin). It is important to note that more than 80 percent of the meat locally consumed in Palestine does not come from slaughterhouses that are under veterinary control

Although the Palestinian Veterinary Services are trying their best to control the many diseases that may affect livestock, they face a number of obstacles that make it hard to reach this goal. The main difficulty

relate to tracing, epidemiological surveys, and scientific research.

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The Ministry of Agriculture is working diligently to modernize legislation regarding animal health and veterinary services in order to make it compatible with international legislation and trade agreements. In addition, a national animal identification and tagging system was started in 2015 that enables every farm animal in Palestine to be traceable.

lies in a prevailing lack of vaccine supplies, a situation further exacerbated by the high cost of vaccines that not only contributes to the extant limited vaccination coverage but also affects the efficacy and efficiency of the vaccine. Further areas that need improvement

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*Article photos courtesy of the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture.*

<sup>i</sup> *Palestine in Figures 2015*, PCBS, available at <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2188.pdf>.

<sup>ii</sup> Thus, the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (4.1 million) will be living on only 12 percent of historical Palestine.

<sup>iii</sup> For example, by Amnesty International. For more information, see also the July 2016 issue of *TWIP*.

<sup>iv</sup> For example, between 1999 and 2009 the price of lamb meat rose from NIS 42 (US\$ 11)/kg to NIS 62 (US\$ 16)/kg, according to “The Impact of Closure and High Food Prices on Performance of Staple Foods and Vegetable and Fruits Market in the oPt, December 2009,” *UN World Food Programme*, published by OCHA, whereas the current price in July 2016 is NIS 90 (US\$ 23)/kg in Ramallah.

<sup>v</sup> Ben Lynfield, “Palestinian dairy and meat farms face bleak future if Israel continues import ban,” *The Independent*, available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/palestinian-dairy-and-meat-firms-face-bleak-future-if-israel-continues-import-ban-a6975911.html>.

<sup>vi</sup> See <http://www.oneworldonehealth.org/>.

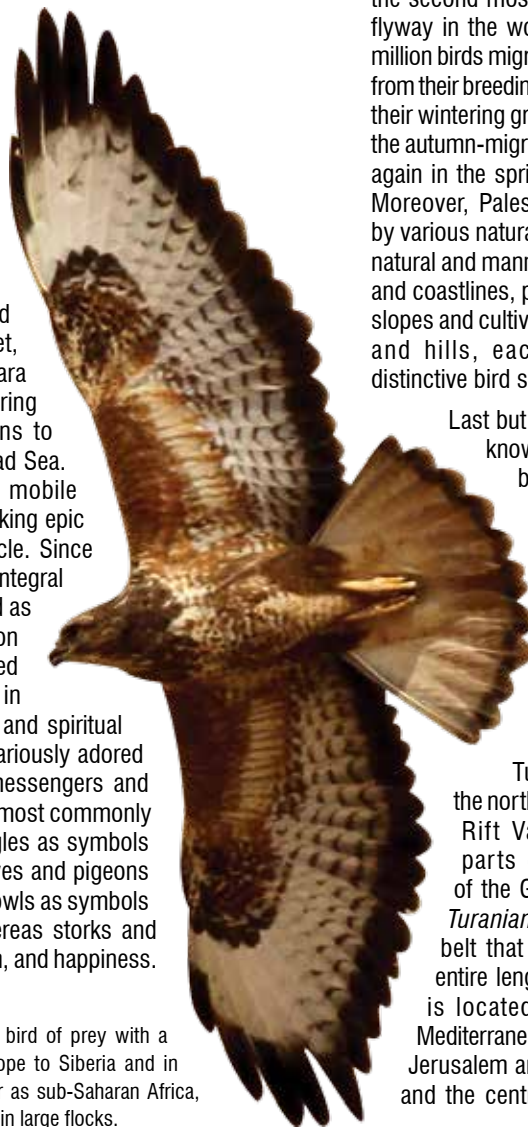
# Avifauna of Palestine



By Anton Khalilieh

vian species (birds) are conspicuous and can be found everywhere on our planet, from the frigid Arctic Circle to the Sahara Desert where the sun is creating blistering heat, and from the Himalaya mountains to the lowest point on earth around the Dead Sea. These creatures are among the most mobile animals on earth, some of them undertaking epic journeys during an annual migration cycle. Since the earliest records, birds have been an integral part of human cultures. They have served as symbols of peace and war, were inspiration for objects of art and study, and have acted as companions and a source of pleasure in sport. Birds are present in the religions and spiritual practices of many cultures worldwide, variously adored as deities themselves or heralded as messengers and emissaries to the gods. Among the birds most commonly featured in religions and cultures are eagles as symbols of power, resurrection, and courage; doves and pigeons as symbols of peace and tranquility; and owls as symbols of death, misfortune, and wisdom; whereas storks and cranes are associated with long life, health, and happiness.

The Steppe Buzzard, a medium- to large-size bird of prey with a wingspan of up to 125 cm, breeds from Europe to Siberia and in autumn-migration season heads south to as far as sub-Saharan Africa, with thousands of individuals crossing Palestine in large flocks.



Since Palestine is located within the Palearctic zoogeographical region that covers all of Europe, Asia (except for its southeastern tropical zone), and Northern Africa, the majority of Palestinian birds belong to this region. However, one can also find other bird species that have either a Holarctic distribution, which covers the Palearctic and Nearctic zoogeographical regions (North America and Greenland), or an Ethiopian or Oriental distribution (south of the Sahara and tropical Asia). Furthermore, Palestine is situated at the second most important migratory flyway in the world where about 500 million birds migrate every year, moving from their breeding grounds in Eurasia to their wintering grounds in Africa during the autumn-migration season and back again in the spring-migration season. Moreover, Palestine is characterized by various natural habitats that include natural and manmade forests, a desert and coastlines, plains and cliffs, rocky slopes and cultivated fields, mountains and hills, each accommodating distinctive bird species.

Last but not least, Palestine is known for its four different bio-geographical enclaves that include the *Mediterranean region*, which contains the central mountains that stretch from Hebron to Nablus, the semi-coastal plain with Qalqilya, Tulkarem, and Jenin, the northern part of the Jordan Rift Valley, and northern parts of the coastal plain of the Gaza Strip. The *Irano-Turanian region* is a narrow belt that extends through the entire length of West Bank and is located to the east of the Mediterranean region, covering the Jerusalem and Hebron wilderness and the central Jordan Rift Valley

with adjacent steppes and rocky areas that face the southern part of the Jordan Rift Valley. The *Saharo-Arabian region* is characterized by low precipitation that rarely exceeds 200 mm per year. This region is a wide strip located to the east of the Irano-Turanian belt, extending from the Dead Sea area to the central part of the Jordan Valley. The *Sudanese region* is restricted to pockets along the Dead Sea and the Jordan Valley, such as Ein Gedi and the area around Ein Fashkha. With this variety, it is no wonder that we have great faunal biodiversity, which includes birds.

This beauty and diversity has fascinated scientists and bird enthusiasts for centuries. European explorers have recorded descriptions of animal species in historical Palestine, beginning in the 1540s with the Frenchman Pierre Belon; similar efforts were undertaken in several waves until the middle of the twentieth century. Among the most prolific of these explorers was Henry Baker Tristram who between 1858 and 1897 visited Palestine six times. His work is considered the first primary (i.e., on-site) documented research about birds of Palestine. He summarized his findings in *The Fauna and Flora of Palestine* (1884) and in a series of articles published between 1865 and 1868 in *Ibis*, the journal of the British Ornithologists' Union. In addition to his publications, Tristram was an avid collector of specimens, most of which are now stored at the Liverpool Museum. The modern ornithological work, done between 1900 and 1945, has been documented in three books: *The Handbook of Palestine and Trans-Jordan* by Luke and Keith Roach, published in 1934; *A Handbook of the Birds of Palestine* by Captain Eric Hardy, written in 1946; and *Birds of Arabia* by Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, published in 1954, the most comprehensive work of that time about the birds of the region, including Palestine.



Based on the above-mentioned and more recent studies, the number of bird species recorded in Historical Palestine amounts to about 540 species. Taking into consideration the small geographical area of our country, this is a very large number if compared with other countries of the same latitude. Moreover, ornithologists and researchers expect a further increase in this number, year by year, as this field attracts more birders, birdwatchers, and bird enthusiasts.

As of today, the avifauna of the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) has not been studied, based on a scientific approach, at the national level by any organization or institute. The extant lack of comprehensive scientific information about the birds of Palestine (number of species, species richness and diversity, status, conservation, and threats) is a consequence of many factors, including the shortage of specialized Palestinian ornithologists, birdwatchers, and birders,\* the lack of dedicated institutes or organizations that focus on the avifauna of Palestine, and the unbearable restrictions on the movement of Palestinian researchers posed by the Israeli occupation authorities.

There are about 370 species of birds in the occupied Palestinian territories, and they represent 23 orders, 69 families, 21 subfamilies, and 173 genera. The largest numbers of species are from three orders: the Passeriformes with 146 species are the order that includes the majority of all known species with birds that characteristically have three toes facing forward and one backward, allowing them to perch on branches, which is why they are also called perching birds, at times also mistakenly called song birds; furthermore the Charadriiformes, with 65 species, an order that includes mostly strong-flying birds of coastal regions that feed on animal matter in and near water and nest on ground; and the Accipitriformes, with 31 species, an

order that includes most of the diurnal (active during the day) birds of prey such as buzzards, eagles, vultures, and many others. The families with the largest number of species are Sylviidae (alternatively called Old World Warblers and from the order Passeriformes) with 34 species, Turdidae (alternatively called thrushes and also from the order Passeriformes) with 32 species, and Accipitridae (one of the four families within the Accipitriformes, featuring large birds that have strong legs and feet, with raptorial claws and an opposable hind claw, as well as strongly hooked beaks) with 31 species. Some of the species were recorded almost two centuries ago and never recorded again in Palestine (but have been recorded recently in nearby areas) such as the Whooper Swan that was recorded at Solomon's pools on December 23, 1863.



The Griffon Vulture is among the largest flying birds in the world, with a wingspan of up to 3 meters. Some birds are migratory, others resident or nomadic. It can soar up to 10,000 meters high while migrating or foraging. This bird has been tagged by ornithologists for observation in efforts towards the conservation of the species that is endangered in the region.

Birds of the oPt can be divided into two main categories of breeding species, the first of which includes resident breeders and summer-visitor breeders, whereas the second comprises non-breeding species that include winter visitors, passage migrants, and vagrants (accidental visitors). The total number of breeding bird species is 133, of which 49 are considered as exclusively resident breeders (which includes three introduced species). These species



Palestine Sunbird is the Palestinian national bird. It is a small Nectariniidae bird that feeds mainly on flower nectar. The plumage of breeding males is mostly black but appears a glossy mixture of blue and green in the light.

spend their entire lives within the vicinity of Palestine, mainly within their breeding territories, and do not migrate. This group includes large species, such as the Eurasian Griffon Vulture that has a wingspan of about 3 meters, the Golden Eagle, and Bonelli's Eagle, as well as smaller species such as the Palestine Sunbird (the Palestinian national bird) or the Graceful Prinia that weighs about 7 grams.

Another 25 species are considered as exclusively summer-visitor breeders, which means that they are never recorded during winter. Most of these birds return to Palestine by early March in order to breed and return to Africa by July-September, such as the Black-eared Wheatear, Cretzchmar's Bunting, and Lesser Kestrel. The remaining 59 species are considered to be complex breeders: species that belong to various breeding populations with different seasonal behaviors, such as the Barn Swallow, Little Egret, and Black-winged Stilt.



The Arabian Babbler is a social bird that lives in groups of three to twenty-two individuals with a distinctive social hierarchy among both males and females. In a breeding group, parents, brothers, and sisters share in caring for, feeding, and protecting the newly fledged.



The Cretzchmar's Bunting breeding population is restricted to the eastern Mediterranean basin and migrates to spend its winters in Sudan, Eritrea, and Arabia.



The Lesser Kestrel, a small and slender-body falcon, feeds mainly on large insects (e.g., grasshoppers) that are caught either on the ground or in flight. It can be found from the Mediterranean and across Asia to as far as China.



The Black-winged Stilt is a widely distributed wader with very long bright-pink legs. It gives a repeated high-pitched barking call.

There is an abundance of migratory birds that can be observed in the skies above Palestine each year. This richness of both the species and numbers, unusual for this small an area, can be partially explained by

the fact that Palestine is situated on the second most important flyway in the world for migratory birds. A total of 275 species migrate through or over Palestine during the spring and autumn migration seasons. The spring-migration season starts around the last week of February, with the bulk of migration taking place around March and April, and continues until mid-May. The autumn-migration season starts around the end of July for some birds, with the bulk of migration occurring during September and October, and continues, in low numbers and for only a few species, until the first half of November. Seventy-three species are exclusively passage migrant, which means that they are recorded mainly or exclusively during migration seasons, among them the European Honey Buzzard and the Garden Warbler. This group includes the soaring birds that are characterized by large and broad wings (among them vultures, eagles, buzzards, storks, and pelicans); they make use of rising columns of warm

air "thermals" that are created over land and allow them to gain uplift to increase their flying height. When soaring birds have reached the top of the thermal, they start to glide down at a slow pace until they catch the next thermal. This technique helps to cover distances of up to 300 km almost without any wing-flapping, thus saving energy. Because these thermals only occur over land, many species of soaring birds from east-central Europe and west Asia must pass through our region, particularly Palestine, during their migration to and from Africa.

There are 189 species that are considered to be winter visitors, of which only 10 species are exclusively winter visitors, such as the Common Crossbill and the Rock Bunting. The other wintering species have either resident populations within Palestine or exhibit diverse seasonal behaviors, e.g., summer-visitor breeders, passage migrants, or accidental visitors (vagrants).



The Yellow-vented Bulbul, also called Whitespectacled Bulbul, lives in fruit plantations, gardens, and cities. When it feeds on small fruits, it swallows them whole, ejecting the seeds in its dropping, which helps to spread the seeds.

Eighteen species are considered as accidental visitors to our region: they find their way here from outside their normal migration range or wintering regions. Some of them are recorded rarely and unexpectedly, others are seen rarely but at predicted times. Consequently, the number and type of bird species observed in this group are likely to increase with intensive field work, monitoring, and survey. Examples are the Dark Chanting, Goshawk, and Oriental Skylark.

Five species have become extinct from our habitat as breeders: the Lappet-faced Vulture, Lammergeier, Cinereous Vulture, Verreaux's Eagle, Brown Fish Owl, and the Ostrich. These species used to reside and breed in Palestine but are now breeding in other areas of their natural distribution range. However, some of these species might be observed occasionally in Palestine during the winter or migration seasons, such as the Cinereous Vulture.

Birds of Palestine include four invasive species that have spread, that currently breed successfully, and that compete with native species for food, territories, and nesting sites, sometimes even preying on their chicks. This aggressive and territorial behavior of invasive species will eventually affect indigenous species dramatically and decrease their numbers in our habitat. Examples from this group of birds are the Rose-ringed Parakeet, Common Myna, and Indian Silverbill.

The Mediterranean mountain region stretches from Hebron to Nablus and features habitats characterized either by hills covered with batha, garrigue, or maquis vegetation, or exposed rocky slopes and cliffs. These habitats hold several bird species that are typical of the Mediterranean climatic region and include, in well vegetated areas, the Blackbird, Sardinian Warbler, Syrian Woodpecker, Great Tit, Masked Shrike, Tawny Owl, and Wren. Birds of rocky habitat with sparse and low vegetation include the Long-legged Buzzard,



The Myna is native to southern Asia, especially India, and considered a pest when outside its natural range. It is gregarious and feeds on insects and fruits. Some types of them are considered to be talking birds as they are able to reproduce human sounds and speech.



The Eagle Owl, one of largest living owls in the world, with a wingspan of up to 190 cm, strong legs, talons, and sharp claws, is a formidable and silent hunter and at the top of its food chain.



The Sand Partridge is a typical desert species with sandy-brown plumage to camouflage easily in arid areas. It is a remarkably noisy and vocal bird, often heard before it is seen, and prefers to run rather than fly when disturbed.

Eagle Owl, Lesser Kestrel, Little Owl, Long-billed Pipit, Blue-rock Thrush, Woodchat Shrike, Raven, Linnet, and Cretzschmar's Bunting.

Many species flourish in the desert habitat that reaches from the Dead Sea depression to the Jerusalem Wilderness (the eastern areas between Hebron and Jerusalem). This region contains a variety of habitats, including deep wadis, ravines, and cliffs as well as permanent springs and small oases. Several raptors breed in the area, among them the Griffon Vulture, Egyptian Vulture, Bonelli's Eagle, and Golden Eagle. Most of the desert species breed in this area, for example, the Sand Partridge, Hume's Tawny Owl, and Desert Lark, Blackstart, White-crowned Black Wheatear, Trumpeter Finch, House Bunting, Tristram's Starling, and Fan-tailed Raven and Dead Sea Sparrow.



With its glossy black plumage, striking orange beak, and yellow ring around the eye, the male Blackbird is strikingly beautiful. The females are sooty-brown for camouflage.



The Tristram's Starling, also called Tristram's Grackle, nests mainly on rocky cliff faces in arid areas. Jericho is its northernmost distribution range.

Even though the Palestinian avifauna is characterized by richness, the population of several species is declining at an alarming rate; some of these species are being threatened globally and included on the Red List of Threatened Species published by the International Union for the



The sociable Goldfinch often breeds in colonies and has a most delightful, liquid twittering song and call (song is the name for sounds birds use mainly during mating season to attract females, calls are used for other communication).

Conservation of Nature, such as the Egyptian Vulture. Other species are threatened at the national or the regional level, such as the Golden Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Spectacled Warbler, and Long-billed Pipit. The decline of many bird populations in Palestine can be attributed to several factors that include



The Calandra lark breeds around the Mediterranean, nesting on the ground. It has a beautiful song that sounds like a slow version of the song of the skylark.

people, various companies, and even the country's economy.

Bird-watching can be done via the naked eye or with visual-enhancement devices such as binoculars and telescopes. A good field guide and a notebook to write down the observations are useful but not essential. A digital camera with a telephoto lens lets you capture the fascinating behavior of birds during their daily activities of feeding, hunting, courtship display, singing, perching, diving, swimming, preening, defending their territories, or flying from one tree to another. There is plenty of opportunity for relaxation while you spend your day walking and sitting in nature, at times waiting quietly in order not to scare away these often-elusive beauties. Children will learn to exercise patience and attentiveness, and the whole family may enjoy showing off and sharing the trophies of their visual (!) hunts at the end of an exciting day.

the modification and destruction of natural habitats, intensive use of pesticides, illegal hunting, nest robbing of eggs and chicks by humans and feral dogs, diversion of natural springs into pipes at their source, and electrocution and collision with power lines.

Birds are not only studied in various scientific approaches by ornithologists and researchers, millions of people around the world enjoy going outside to watch birds as a recreational activity. This form of wildlife observation is called bird-watching; however, those who take this activity seriously and spend a lot of their time and money on watching birds prefer to be called birders. According to a study carried out in 2006 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, one fifth of all American citizens were classified as bird watchers and they contributed US\$ 36 billion to the country's economy. Hence, many countries consider bird-watching to be a major part of ecotourism activities that generate good income to local

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*Article photos by Anton Khalilieh.*

\* For a differentiation of the two, read the article "Bird-watching or Birding: It's all about intensity," on *AboutHome*, available at <http://birding.about.com/od/birdingbasics/a/Birdwatching-Or-Birding.htm>.

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WEIN A RAMALLAH SEASON  
**RAMALLAH SUMMER  
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Ramallah Summer Festival is an annual event that revives an old tradition and celebrates the city's history and contemporary role in nurturing cultural activities and the arts. The festival highlights a long tradition of artistic expression through various city venues and public spaces, and also acts as a platform to reinforce the partnerships between the numerous active institutions.

Ramallah Summer Festival 2016 will take place in the midst of "Wein A Ramallah" Season, a new concept initiated by Ramallah Municipality, which lasts from early April to October.

The theme "From Us and From Within" echoes metaphorically the festival philosophy of highlighting Palestinian artistic talent, whether local or from the diaspora. In addition, the festival hosts other Arabic and international artists to strengthen the fruitful cooperation between the cities that have been twinned with Ramallah Municipality as well as with friends from near and far.

This year's performances will include Bayat choral group from Ma'aliya, Yalalan from Ramallah, Ouf from Jerusalem, Sahar Khalife from Jordan/Palestine, The Street Carnival from Egypt, Emel Mathlouthi from Tunis, Mai Murad from Ramallah, Seraj choral group, and others.

During the "Wein A Ramallah" season, the municipality aims to organize and advance its cultural agenda to include broader cooperation with cultural and artistic institutions in the city. The municipality offers this platform to implement a wide range of art activities and showcase artists' works. All participating artworks represent social and cultural diversity, and demonstrate genuine professional Palestinian cultural production, which is at home in local, regional, and international arenas.

Ramallah Summer Festival targets the city's residents in all their social, religious, and cultural diversity, and acts as a networking ground that brings together artists, art organizations, and the public. This initiative offers Palestinian and international artists a public space to present their works to a wider audience and to engage openly with less-privileged communities who lack cultural interventions in their own societies. The private sector also plays a much more effective role at the developmental level. In general, the festival serves to promote Palestinian culture and cultural exchange between Palestine and the world.

WEIN A RAMALLAH SEASON



STATE OF PALESTINE



**Stay tuned for the program!**

Ramallah Summer Festival

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# Invasive Alien Birds in Palestine

## Bird Biodiversity



By Simon I. Awad

Palestine enjoys a privileged geographical location, lying between three continents: Asia, Europe, and Africa. Covering a small area compared to many other countries, its environment nevertheless contains a wide range of temperatures, rainfall, and topography. In addition, throughout history it has been the cradle of several different civilizations, religions, and cultures. The Bible contains the earliest written descriptions of the richness and diversity of bird species that existed in historic Palestine and its surrounding areas, and many of them can still be found here. Palestine profits greatly from this biodiversity and can be considered a sort of natural museum.

One of the best examples that illustrates this biological significance is the biannual bird migration for which the sky over Palestine is one of the most important paths. Five hundred million birds pass each year through this natural bottleneck between the desert and the sea. The Jordan Rift Valley is part of the Great Rift Valley/Red Sea flyway, which is the second most important flyway for migratory soaring birds (MSBs) in the world, and the most important route of the Africa-Eurasia flyway system. These habitats are a potent manifestation and symbol of Palestine's biodiversity, and we should continually remember the necessity to protect them. This includes the need to establish a wider network of ringing and monitoring stations for the observation of birds' presence and activities that at the same time will facilitate a more thorough recording of the various extant species.

Palestine took the lead in the Arab world when, in 1998, it started to monitor birds and watch migration through the process of ringing, obtaining international licenses for the setup of special stations to undertake identification and description of individual species and their habits. This process involves the capturing of individual birds that are then measured, with the details notated, and fitted with a ring that is fastened to one of their legs before they are released again into nature. The Environmental Education Center (EEC) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) initiated this endeavor in Palestine and the Arab world.

Three out of the 373 birds species identified and described in Palestine so far are considered to be introduced invasive alien birds species, introduced during the last decade: the Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*), the Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), and the Indian Silverbill (*Lonchura*

*malabarica*). They originate from escaped cage-birds that have been able to spread throughout the region and have been successful in establishing breeding populations.

**The Rose-ringed Parakeet** (*Psittacula krameri*) is an elegant, bright-green bird with a red bill and a length that ranges between 37 and 43 cm, in addition to a tail of 18 to 23 cm. The male has a rosy-red necklace across its neck and nap – which is why it is called the Rose-ringed parakeet – and a narrow black bib across the side of the throat. The female looks like the male, but without the rosy-red and black lines. This bird occurs in all climates, especially in well-vegetated areas such as cultivated gardens and orchards with medium to tall trees. It is mostly seen on treetops.

It is an enthusiastic, noisy bird and highly gregarious. During breeding season these birds can be seen in pairs, and outside the season, they form flocks. They roost communally, often with other species, and nest in natural tree holes or enlarged holes made by other species, such as the Syrian Woodpecker, but very rarely in rock clefts or on buildings. They



usually lay one to four eggs and have an incubation period of 25 to 28 days. At 8 weeks, they fly, and they continue to be fed by the adult 3 to 4 weeks after leaving the nest. Their food consists of vegetables, fruits, seeds, nuts, fresh leaves, and dates.

The Rose-ringed Parakeet is considered an Afro-Asian parakeet species from the wide-ranging Parrots family that was introduced to central Israel from Iran in 1963 as a cage bird. It escaped in 1964 in Herzliya, and later, other cage birds escaped from zoos in the Tel Aviv area and started to spread to various areas between 1985 and 1990. The first record in the State of Palestine was documented in Sept 2000, in Beit Jala, by EEC researchers, and in April 2001 two nests were documented in Jerusalem. Subsequently, the species spread and was observed in various districts.

**The Common Myna** (*Acridotheres tristis*) is a strong, confident brown bird with a glossy black head and a yellow

bill and legs, with bright yellow bare skin behind the eyes. The large white patches on its wings and its white-tipped black tail are clearly visible when the bird is in flight. Having a length of 22 to 25 cm, the male and female look similar. There are found in urban and suburban areas, as well as in semi-desert, scrub, or plantation habitats.

It is a highly sociable, highly vocal species that is capable of mimicking human and other animal sounds. They form pairs during breeding season and flocks at other times. They roost communally, often with other species. They nest in any type of cavity and usually lay four to five eggs. The incubation period is 13 to 18 days in duration, and they often leave the nest before being able to fly. Their dependence on adults lasts for several weeks.

Its attractive looks conceal a very opportunist, aggressive, and noisy bird. Its strong feet and straight bill enable it to choose a wide variety of food types,

including snails, insects, birds' eggs and chicks, and other animal matter, as well as fruits and seeds. It is also considered to be a scavenger.

Originally an Asian native species from the Starling family, it has been introduced to a wide range of countries, including Israel in 1997, as an escaped cage bird from a local zoo in the Tel Aviv area. It has been spreading to different areas since 2000. EEC researchers documented it on March 2011 east of Bethlehem, and in July 2011 in the south of Hebron. Later in April 2013, the EEC documented one nest in Beit Sahour. In 2015 it was ringed by EEC staff at the Tulkaram ringing station. Since 2013 it has spread quickly and widely and has become a common species in most areas.

**The Indian Silverbill** (*Lonchura malabarica*) is a small, bright brown bird with a small silvery bill, hence the name Silverbill. Its underside is white and has a Black tail and white upper-tail cover. It is usually between 11 and 12 cm long, and the male and female are similar. It occurs in the Rift Valley (Jordan River, Dead Sea depression, and Jericho).

These are sociable birds, even during breeding season. They build their nests on low bushes or in holes by a well-rounded cup of grass and fine stem

lined with finer grass and feathers. They usually lay 2 to 7 eggs, and the incubation period lasts between 11 and 15 days. They are tended by both adults after fledging and fed about two weeks more. They have a conical bill that enables them to feed on grass seeds and crops.

Originally an Indian native species from the Estridine Finches family, the Indian Silverbill reached the Rift Valley in 1983 as an escaped cage bird and spread along the valley. The EEC began in 1998 to document this species as individuals and flocks in Jericho and the surrounding areas. In 2000, the EEC ringed the first species at Jericho Ringing Station, and afterward tens of this species have been ringed.

### Threats and Concerns

Palestinian biodiversity has recently begun to suffer from invasive alien species that have been introduced to the region. According to the definition of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD): "Invasive alien species are plants, animals, pathogens, and other organisms that are non-native to an ecosystem, and which may cause economic or environmental harm or adversely affect human health. In particular, they impact adversely upon biodiversity, including decline or elimination of native species – through competition, predation, or transmission of pathogens – and the disruption of local ecosystems and ecosystem functions. Invasive alien species, introduced and/or spread outside their natural habitats, have affected native biodiversity in almost



every ecosystem type on earth and are one of the greatest threats to biodiversity. Since the seventeenth century, invasive alien species have contributed to nearly 40 percent of all animal extinctions for which the cause is known.” (CBD, 2006) According to Birdlife International, alien species that become invasive are considered to be the main direct drivers of biodiversity loss across the globe. In addition, alien species have been estimated to cost international economies hundreds of billions of dollars each year.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) declared the Common Myna to be one of only three birds among the world’s 100 worst invasive species. This bird behaves like extremist settlers by occupying other birds’ territories, destroying their nests and eggs, killing their chicks, and competing for their food. Flocks of Rose-ringed Parakeets and Indian Silverbills also fly several kilometers to forage in farmlands and orchards, causing extensive damage. These species can become a serious agricultural pest. The three above-mentioned species

may affect the populations of other breeding bird species in the future and lead to a decrease in their numbers in nature. While native species are generally subject to an ecologically evolved system of natural checks and balances in which, for example, and among other factors, predators help prevent a species from uncontrolled reproduction, invasive species may reproduce out of control, partly or fully invading the ecological niches of a number of other species, and thus leading to their endangerment and possible extinction.

From personal observation I can assert that these three species, in particular, the Common Myna, have in the remarkably short time of their presence spread quickly and widely.

Furthermore, I have noted that the Common Myna (in Ramallah) has occupied the nests of House Sparrows and eaten its chicks, also showing aggressive behavior towards larger-sized birds such as the Hooded Crow and Jackdaw (in Shuafat, Jerusalem).

There are as yet no studies available to show the impact of these birds on the environment in Palestine. However, this fact merely underscores the need to make great efforts to monitor the non-native species that enter Palestine through wildlife trade or as caged birds.

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There is an urgent need to address the impact of invasive alien species. Article 8(h) of the Convention on Biological Diversity states: “Each contracting Party shall, as far as possible and as appropriate, prevent the introduction of, control or eradicate those alien species which threaten ecosystems, habitats or species.” (CBD, 2016)

Article photos by Simon Awad.





# Brave Animals

## Without a Backbone



By Elias Handal,  
Mohammad Abu Sarhan,  
and Mohammad Najajreh



he largest number of animal species on earth is not found in the groups most familiar to us, such as plants, birds, mammals, and reptiles; this honor goes to small microorganisms and to invertebrates, the animals that have no backbones. Although vertebrates such as mammals, amphibians, reptiles, fish, and birds are more visible and known to most of us, all these animals together make up less than 4 percent of the total number of animal species in the world. There may be as many as one trillion species of microorganisms (including bacteria and other single-cell organisms), and over 96 percent of all animal species on earth are invertebrates, which includes some two million described species and millions more that are yet to be described. Invertebrates come in all sorts of shapes, colors, sizes, and behaviors; they include insects, spiders, scorpions, and snails; and they are key parts of an integrated ecosystem on which human life also depends.

Palestine has a very rich invertebrate fauna. We have perhaps more than 25,000 species of insects, including over 130 species of butterflies, hundreds of species of moths, and thousands of species of beetles (many still undescribed). In a recent survey, the Palestine Museum of Natural History (PMNH) documented 54 species of butterflies in the West Bank that range from the most spectacular Swallow Tail to the small iridescent-blue species called Common Blue. This constitutes a great diversity in a small area of land (in comparison, Jordan has 97 species, whereas Palestine, with less than half the geographic size, has 130 species of butterflies). Butterflies are easily observed on daytime excursions, especially during the spring season. Most commonly encountered are the Small White (*Pieris rapae*), the Bath White (*Pontia daplidice*), and the Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*). At night, moths take over, and the best



*Melanargia titea*, the Levantine Marbled White, common in April and May. Flying slowly, females lay their eggs in flight.

place to watch them is around lights. The Giant Peacock Moth (also called Giant Emperor Moth) *Saturnia pyri* can have wingspans of 10 to 15 cm; but there are also hundreds of tiny moths, including the one that infests our clothes (people use naphthalene or “moth balls” to drive them away). Each species of moth or butterfly is specific to a particular habitat, with its larva feeding on particular wild plants. The Cabbage White is of special concern as its larvae can damage crops. However, the PMNH recommends biological controls that are far better than the

insecticides that destroy our ecosystem and harm human health!

Desertification, climate change, human activities, and the use of insecticides and herbicides are threatening biodiversity and also affect butterflies. There are many threatened species of butterflies, including the brilliant, all-yellow *Gonepteryx*. The Orange Tufted Butterfly *Anthocharis cardamines* was common in the Bethlehem area in the

*Helix engaddensis* is a common land snail in the Levant, found in Mediterranean, desert, and montane habitats. Dormant in the ground during dry season, it emerges in winter.





One peculiarity this black scorpion shares with other scorpions is that it fluoresces under ultraviolet light.



*Blepharopsis mendica*, the Devil's Flower Mantis, is common in Western Asia. It is a formidable predator that preys on moths, grasshoppers, flies, and other insects - at times females devour their mating partners.

1960s, according to observations made by Sana Atallah, as can be seen in his field notes and collected specimens. However, the PMNH was able to record it only in Al-Makhrour and in a protected area of the Bethlehem University campus that has been fenced in since the 1960s.

Another group of insects that is very common in Palestine is called *Orthoptera* (Latin for "straight wings"), commonly known as grasshoppers (*janadeb* in Arabic). With hind legs adapted for jumping and mouthparts designed especially for ingesting their specific plant diets, these animals are encountered in just about every habitat, from deserts to humid areas.

A king scorpion carrying its babies on its back.



Some have a hidden second pair of wings, with vivid colors that can range from crimson red to radiant blue. Around the areas that contain water, we have many species of dragonflies in Palestine (*ya'soub* in Arabic). They can hover like helicopters and dive like hawks on their insect prey. During the summer in Palestine, we can hear the noisy cicadas (*tazziz* in Arabic), some of which can remain dormant in the ground for years.

Spiders and scorpions belong to the group known as the *Arachnida*. There are nearly 2 dozen species of scorpions in Palestine, some as small as 5 mm long and others reaching 12 cm in length. The most poisonous is the yellow Deathstalker of the genus *Leiurus* that is mostly found in arid and semi-arid rocky habitats. In parts of the Jordan Valley, such as the region around Bardala in the northern Jordan Valley, the PMNH has encountered a very high density of this species in rocky areas, with about 1 to 2 individuals per square meter. When someone is stung by this yellow scorpion, especially if the victim is a child, hospitalization is recommended. Keep the victim calm during transport. Spiders are less thoroughly studied, but the PMNH

has collected many species, perhaps over a hundred, whereas hundreds (perhaps thousands) more species remain to be collected and described. The known spiders in Palestine range from the very large Olive Black Spider (*Chaetopelmaolivaceum*) to the tiniest ones of 1 mm that live in leaf litter under oak trees. Spider stings in Palestine are rare and nonlethal, but care must be taken if an individual is allergic to such stings (this is true of most invertebrate stings, including those of bees and wasps). Within this group we also have the tiny pseudo-scorpions that are actually beneficial to humans as they prey on insect pests, the camel spiders that can be up to 15 cm long and that scared American soldiers in Iraq and may inflict a painful bite (that is, however, not deadly, as wrongful rumors have it), and ticks and mites (many of them parasitic).

Among invertebrates in Palestine are also millipedes and centipedes. The most common millipede is the Black Syrian Millipede that can be encountered in walks around most areas of Palestine, except in the very arid regions. Centipedes can be poisonous; however, these are less commonly encountered. But like the

spiders, their poison is very mild, and the symptoms are usually a temporary irritation and/or swelling that generally dissipates quickly.

One of the most spectacular invertebrate species in Palestine is the tadpole shrimp (*Lepidurus apus*) that is commonly found in rainwater pools in places like Salfit, and upon which depends the survival of the endangered toad *Pelobates syriacus*.

There are over 150 species of land snails known in historic Palestine, ranging from a species that is the size of your hand (the invasive and introduced Giant African Land Snail) to microscopic ones of 1 to 2 mm in length. Some of us remember our mothers harvesting wild land snails (called Levantine's Snail) after the first rains in the hills and serving them as a delicacy. There are also many species of freshwater snails and even more marine snails.

Some invertebrates are associated with human disease. Parasitic flat and



*Argiope lobata* is a non-poisonous spider, common in Palestine. Females lay eggs in a sac and watch over it. Eggs hatch in the sac and remain there over winter to emerge in spring. Feeding on insects, spiders are among nature's pest-control agents.

A camel spider, also known as a wind scorpion, sun spider, or solifuge.



round worms may infect our digestive system, while ticks, mites, mosquitos, sandflies, house flies, cockroaches, and fleas are mainly a nuisance, to various degrees, even though some of these may transmit certain microbial or viral diseases. Generally, these parasites are becoming rare in modern households that are kept clean, with closed doors, and window screens. It is also common sense to remove old tires and eliminate from our surroundings other places where small amounts of water can be found, as these are favorite places for mosquitoes to breed.

But there are also hundreds of species of insects that are beneficial to humans. They range from ladybugs that eat

aphids to the dragonflies that control insects of the wetland areas. Some invertebrates produce chemicals that are used in drug treatments for diseases that range from cancers to allergies, and research into the possible medical benefits of such substances is ongoing. Earthworms digest organic waste, and we can use their "products" as organic fertilizer and compost. Most people also do not know that without insects such as bees that pollinate our trees, we would not have many of the fruits and vegetables on which we depend in our diet. Bees, of course, are also kept for their honey, which is possibly the healthiest food per gram on earth. Domestic bees belong to a group

semi-arid regions in the south to very humid areas in the north, and from the heights of Mount Hermon/Jabal Al-Sheikh to the lowest point on earth at the Dead Sea. As ecotourism begins to grow in our homeland, more and more people are learning to enjoy nature with all its animals and plants. Invertebrates are fascinating, whether they are the beautiful butterflies or the ubiquitous fly. These small creatures that share our world are just as much part of the landscape as birds and mammals

*Vanessa cardui*, also known as the painted lady, is common in Palestine. It is known as a long-distance migrant species that spends summers in northern Africa and the Middle East, and breeds during winter in Europe, moving as far north as Britain.



of communal/social insects that include wild bees, wasps, and ants. There are lessons to be learned from watching these insects work together in cohesive, organized societies! Furthermore, all species of invertebrates are part of the earth's ecosystem, each with a role to play. Disturbing any part of this web of life can damage other parts, with consequences that may not readily be seen or predicted. Most of the songbirds of Palestine, for example, depend on insects, and the use of insecticide has depleted our bird fauna.

The rich biodiversity of invertebrates in Palestine is related to diverse habitats and climates that stretch from arid and

(including humans). Together we must protect this rich natural heritage just as we cherish and protect the rich cultural heritage of our beloved Palestine.

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Article photos courtesy of Palestinian Museum of Natural History.

# Reptiles and Amphibians of Palestine



By Zuhair Amr and Elias Handal

any people become distressed when they see a gecko on their wall and may not be aware of the fact that this little creature is highly beneficial in controlling insects. Others panic when they see a snake in a field, even though these animals are beneficial components of our ecosystem, and most of them are not poisonous. The herpetology (science of studying amphibians and reptiles) of Palestine is an interesting subject not just because it dispels myths but also because Palestine's location at a crossroads between Asia, Europe, and Africa has given us fascinating diversity of reptiles that includes many endemic species. The geological features of this small country have shaped the diversity of amphibians and reptiles, producing species that live in the Mediterranean mountains, others that thrive in the extreme arid regions, and everything in between. In this region we can find reptiles belonging to various bio-geographic zones such as the Ethiopian, the Mediterranean, the Saharo-Arabian, and the Irano-Turanian.

Modern scientific studies of Palestinian reptiles started in the nineteenth century. Today, we know of 98 species of reptiles and amphibians from historic Palestine, including 7 species of amphibians and 91 species of reptiles (9 freshwater, marine, and land tortoises; 40 snakes; and 42 lizards) represented in 26 families. Given its small area, Palestine enjoys a rich herpeto-fauna with regard to its total area.

Surveying these species by region, we find that many reptiles inhabit Al-Naqab Desert and have remarkable desert adaptations. We can find the Arabian Horned Viper, Sandfish Skink, Ornate Spiny-tailed Lizard, Al-Naqab Tortoise, and other small lizards and geckos that are able to live under conditions of extreme heat and aridity. There are coastal species, such as the African Soft-shelled Turtle, and marine species

*The Lebanon Lizard.*



such as the Green and Loggerhead turtles.

Others are aquatic and live in freshwater wetlands, such as the Spotted Salamander and the Hula Painted Frog that was believed extinct after Israel drained the Hula Wetlands in the 1950s but apparently resurfaced when a small area was rehabilitated.

The reptiles and amphibians of the West Bank and Gaza are much less studied than those of other parts of Palestine. In a recent study conducted by the Palestine Museum of Natural History (PMNH), a total of 36 species of reptiles that represent 13 families (Testudinidae, Geoemydidae, Gekkonidae, Phyllodactylidae, Chamaeleonidae, Agamidae, Scincidae, Lacertidae, Typhlopidae, Boidae, Colubridae, Atractaspididae and Viperidae) were identified in the West Bank.

If we differentiate these species according to habitat types, reptiles of the Mediterranean region include

lizards, such as the European Chameleon, the Starred Agama, and the Lebanon Lizard. Chameleons are a fascinating species with a laterally compressed flattened body and limbs adapted to hold tree branches through opposing fingers. They have the incredible ability to change their color in a matter of seconds to match their surrounding by relocating pigments in different layers of their skin that thus affect the reflection of light. The different colors are in fact not only an adaption to their surroundings, they can also indicate the mood and physical condition of the individual. In addition, these amazing animals have a 360-degree arc of full vision around their bodies and can extend their tongues almost one and a half times the length of their body to capture their prey.

Forests of Palestine house some unique species, some of which can be observed on tree trunks, such as the brilliantly colored Eastern Balkan Green Lizard that is mostly seen on pine trees and Kotschy's Gecko that matches the bark of oak trees, whereas Festa's Skink lives among the understory leaf litter, especially in oak forests.

*Kotschy's Gecko has small tubercles on its back and tail.*





*Festa's Skink is also known as Rüppel's Snake-eyed Skink.*

The arid regions of the southern West Bank and along the Jordan Valley host several species of reptiles that are adapted to the harsh conditions that develop especially during summertime. Several species of geckos known from these areas (e.g., Elegant Gecko and Natterer's Gecko) are active during the night to avoid high temperatures and water loss. The Small-spotted Lizard and Bosk's Fringe-toed Lizard are quite common. The Ein Gedi Mole Viper is a poisonous endemic species that lives in the arid regions around the Dead Sea, and the Arabian Saw-scaled Viper is another venomous snake known to inhabit rocky terrain in the Jordan Valley.

The freshwater habitat (streams, ponds, and irrigation canals) is home to the Western Caspian Turtle, the Dice Snake, the Levant Green Frog, and the Tree Frog.

If we consider vulnerability, the surviving amphibians of Palestine include the Syrian Spade-footed Toad (*Pelobates syriacus*) as one of the most threatened species. This toad inhabits seasonal ponds formed shortly after rainfall in the Salfit area. Habitat loss due to changes in land use is the major threat that faces this species. Its populations are declining in many regions of its distribution range. This species requires immediate protection measures to ensure its survival in the limited locations where it is known.

*The Western Caspian Turtle. (Although tortoises are land animals, turtles live in or near water.)*



*The threatened Syrian Spade-footed Toad has protruding eyes with vertically split pupils.*

The Spur-thighed Tortoise, called *qurqa'a* in Arabic, is threatened partially because many people remove them from their habitats and keep them in their gardens without knowing how to properly care for them or breed them, so they end up dying – and are replenished by more animals taken from the wild!



*The threatened Spur-thighed Tortoise.*

Some unique lizards that can be seen in any area of the West Bank include the Gunther's Skink, with its shiny light-brown color, which moves like a snake, and the Glass "Snake" that is, in fact, a large, limbless lizard that is often confused with a snake.

Snakes of the Mediterranean region include the unusual Blind Worm Snake. This pinkish, thin snake is similar in many ways to an earthworm. Its

eyes are rudimentary and covered by scales. But we can also find the Syrian Black Snake, the Narrow-striped Dwarf Snake, the Palestine Viper, the Striped Dwarf Snake, Roth's Dwarf Snake, the Coin Snake, Montpellier Snake, the Red Whip Snake, Mueller's Ground Viper, and the Black-headed Cat Snake.

Snakes are feared much more than they deserve. Although a relatively large number of snake species live in the

West Bank (27 have been recognized so far), most of them are not venomous. Snakes are an important part of the food chain in healthy ecosystems because most of them feed on a wide range of animals such as rodents, terrestrial invertebrates, frogs, toads, and birds, as well as other reptiles. Some non-poisonous snakes even eat poisonous snakes. Small snakes feed on scorpions, centipedes, and other insects. For instance, the Coin Snake feeds on small birds, whereas the Montpellier Snake feeds mostly on toads and frogs. Thus many snakes are considered to be friends of farmers. The Syria Whip Snake, locally known as *arbeed* or *haneesh*, is one such species and important to protect around farms because it keeps agricultural pests such as rodents in check.

Only four snakes are considered seriously venomous in the West Bank. They are not all found in the same area; one species is confined to the Mediterranean mountains, while the other three survive in arid habitats. Thus, the likelihood of encountering a poisonous snake while on an excursion in any area of the West Bank is small. The Palestine Viper is found in the Mediterranean regions and its bite can be lethal if not attended to with anti-venom at a hospital (the few fatalities that occurred during the past few years from snake bites were largely from this species). This is a heavily built viper with a distinctive triangular head covered with Y-shaped

streaks and a zigzagged dorsal pattern of connected spots (the snake with unconnected diamond spots on the back mimics this but is not poisonous). The Arabian Saw-scaled Viper is also considered deadly. Both vipers possess hemotoxins that cause blood hemolysis (rupture or destruction of red blood cells). The Ein Gedi Mole, a black snake that can be confused with the Syrian Whip Snake, is one of the most venomous snakes

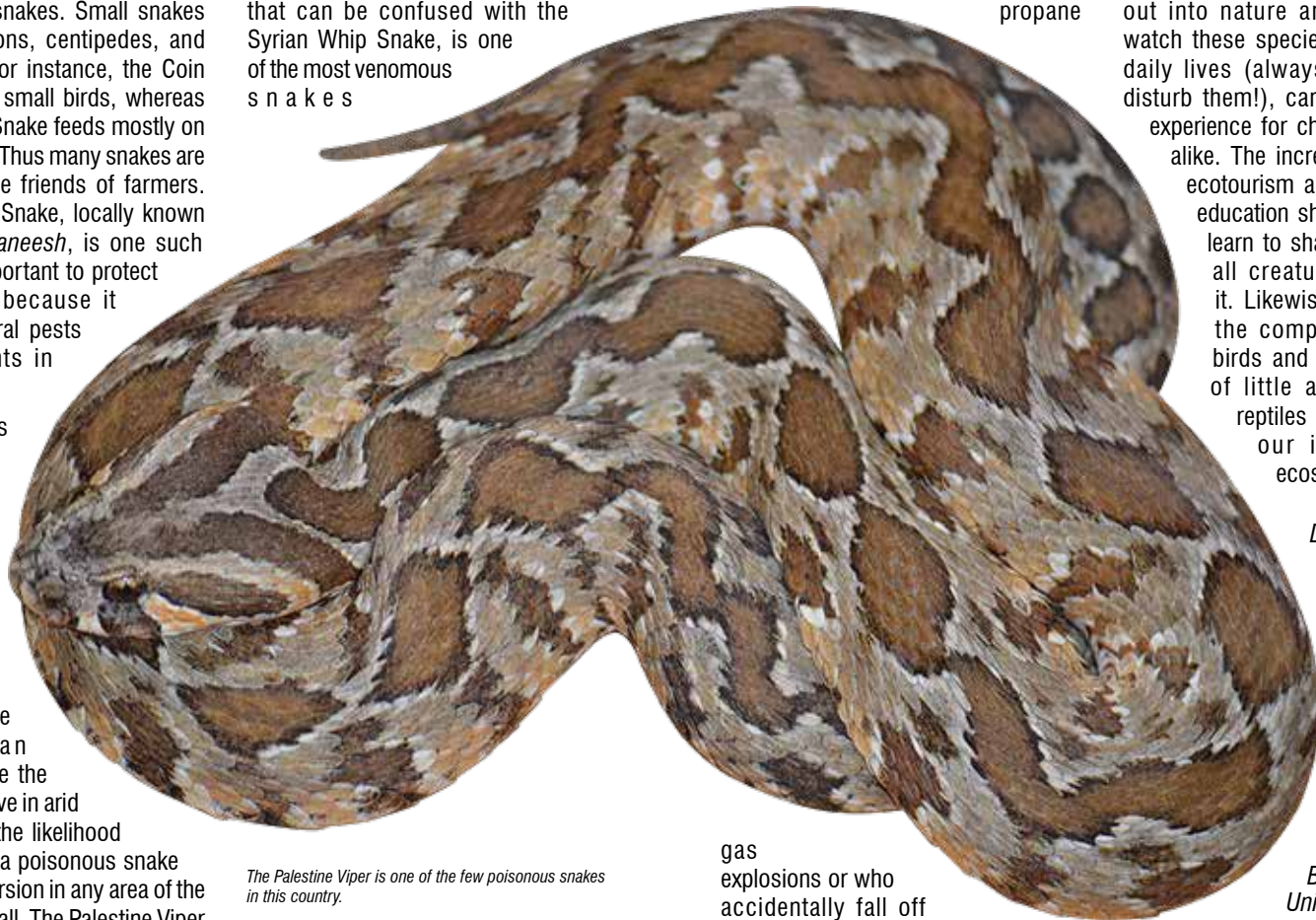
personal protection, while in the field or when snakes are encountered, it is not recommended to handle snakes if one is not knowledgeable about them (this is preferably left to a zoologist). Our readers should not be too alarmed by this information because there are certainly more people who die from household propane

to develop a better understanding and to break the instinctive fear between human beings and reptiles, particularly snakes. The staff of the PMNH not only engage in education but are also willing (as are many others) to respond to calls if people are concerned about certain animals in their neighborhood (tel. 277-3553). However, to venture out into nature and occasionally watch these species go about their daily lives (always careful not to disturb them!), can be an amazing experience for children and adults alike. The increasing interest in ecotourism and environmental education shows that we can learn to share this land with all creatures that inhabit it. Likewise, we can enjoy the company not just of birds and flowers but also of little amphibians and reptiles doing their bit in our interconnected ecosystem.

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*Article photos courtesy of PMNH.*



*The Palestine Viper is one of the few poisonous snakes in this country.*

in Palestine, owing its lethality to sarafotoxins that affect the heart muscle. Finally, there is the Black Desert Cobra that is hard to encounter, with distribution along the lower Jordan Valley; its venom contains neurotoxins (which affect the nervous system). For

gas explosions or who accidentally fall off their roofs than who die from snake bites in Palestine. Snakes are also notoriously shy and afraid of people, and they have no reason to bite a person unless they feel threatened.

Public awareness about these mysterious animals is the first step

# Canaan Dogs

## An Ancient Breed of Palestine



By Ahlam Tarayra

Although the world recognizes the Canaan dog as a rare breed, in fact one of the oldest-known dog breeds, it is ironic that most Palestinians consider it baladi (native, common), a low-class breed that few people, apart from herders, would choose as a pet. In Palestine, few people know that these dogs are an official pariah breed recognized under the name "Canaan." Nor do they know that the Canaan dog is promoted internationally as Israel's national dog breed, and that in 2015 an International Canaan Dog Conference was held in Israel, celebrating 50 years of recognition of the Canaan dog as the Israeli national breed. Thus, this independent, loyal, highly intelligent natural guard dog has been taken for granted in its homeland to the point that people are not only unaware of its significance as a cultural treasure, they also contribute, unknowingly, to the fact that the Canaan dog may face extinction.

Even Palestinian dog-lovers do not consider the Canaan dog as their first choice for adoption; if they do, they are

likely to be ridiculed, as it is perceived as a street dog. But the Canaan dog is believed to have been one of the first dogs to be adopted by humans and in existence in the Middle East since the pre-biblical era. It appears in ancient Egyptian paintings, together with other breeds, and is believed by many to be the breed referred to in the Bible as the watchdog (Isa. 56:10) and the guardian of flocks (Job 30:1).

Individuals of this species are generally healthy, vigilant territorial watchdogs that require a confident and consistent owner. It is a clean breed with a slight odor. To avoid unstable temperament in the Canaan dog's behavior, early and extensive socialization is required. But this type of training rewards its owners with a dog that is protective of its human family and very good with children and family pets, though it could

The Canaan dog, the common dog of Palestine, is another Palestinian asset claimed by Israel. Yet Palestinians barely recognize its uniqueness as one of the rarest and oldest-known dog breeds.

be wary of unfamiliar children. Although aloof with strangers and inherently distrustful of anything new or different, the Canaan dog is not aggressive toward people or animals, but rather reacts defensively from a distance with continuous barking. A primitive herder,

*Canaan dogs are sociable and protective of their owners.*





*Canaan dogs have been companions of humans for thousands of years.*

the Canaan dog requires intensive daily exercise if raised indoors. As a Middle-Eastern breed, Canaan dogs can survive extreme cold and hot weather with an average lifespan of twelve to fifteen years.

Even though it is locally believed that there are many Canaan dogs in Palestine, specialists have actually announced that the breed is endangered in its native land. It is estimated that thousands of Canaan dogs were killed in Israel's rabies eradication program that nearly wiped out the breed. According to a study on diagnosing and controlling rabies in Israel from 1976 to 1997, an average of 18,322 dogs each year were eliminated. It is stated that there was a sharp rise in the number of rabid dogs during 1991 to 1992, the period that marks the beginning of the Gulf War, when many pet dogs were abandoned and became part of a large stray dog population after their owners left their homes in Tel Aviv and other coastal cities for safer areas during the Iraqi missile attacks. Needless to say, the eradication process included the dogs

in the occupied Palestinian territories. Luckily, a few hundred Canaan dogs survived and continued to breed, mainly in Bedouin areas, where they are usually domesticated. Remarkably, the current Israeli government policies do not contribute to breed survival. On the contrary, the Israel Land Authority issued an eviction notice to shut down the only Israeli center, in fact the only center in the world, which, since the 1960s, has specialized in breeding Canaan dogs, claiming that the center was situated illegally on government land. Given that there is no alternative space to which the kennels can be moved, the fans of the breed from Israel and around the world continue to protest against the eviction notice. Meanwhile, the Palestinians are oblivious to the fact that a Palestinian dog has been registered as Israel's national dog and that its survival is challenged since today's conservationists do not put the Canaan dog on a par with the Arabian white oryx, which receives notable support from the Israeli authorities.

I grew up among Canaan dogs as my family kept them as guard dogs; however, it took me to adulthood to actually befriend one. Susu was brought to our house as a two-week-old puppy, and my brother used ewe's milk to raise her to become a charming female dog that, with almost no training, was the best guard we have ever had. Like all Canaan dogs, Susu was self-reliant, yet affectionate, with a mind of her own, light-footed, and an excellent problem solver. She was kind to other animals, including dogs and cats, and adopted three abandoned female puppies before she even reached her breeding age – while her best friend was actually a cat. When she had her own puppies and lost one of them after it had been beaten by our neighbors' children, she held him close until the next morning when we buried him under her watch. She in fact participated by gently pushing his paws into the soil.

The experience with Susu encouraged us to adopt other stray dogs. But after some time we had to give most of them up because the sheer number

became overwhelming due to our limited space and the objections raised by our neighbors. It was terribly painful to send them away again, knowing that there would be no safe place for them, neither in the wild nor in the street. Sadly, many people abuse stray dogs in every possible way and even instruct children to do so. They may use the uncommon incident of a stray dog attacking a human as an excuse to beat or even kill stray dogs, to the extent that some Palestinian municipalities organize regular campaigns to poison or shoot stray dogs. It seems, however, that pregnant female dogs can sense that it is safe to deliver around our house. Several times, stray female dogs have come to give birth to their puppies in our backyard.

One year, my parents camped with our sheep flock about seven miles from our house, and we used to walk back and forth to spend the weekend with them. I remember that our dog would walk with us until we reached the place where my parents were staying, and then he would head back to our house. And on Saturday afternoon, the time we were supposed to be heading back to the house, the dog would usually be there to walk us all the way back. We never knew how he could figure out the time we were supposed to be heading back home. He was always on time. Certainly, there is an amazing science behind a dog's marvelous navigation system. It was heartbreaking when some of the dogs we sent away would find their way back home after many months. Once a dog came back, it would rush to us for a hug. I must admit that every time I had to give up a dog, it felt like abandoning a part of me. The companionship, love, and loyalty that a dog gives are invaluable and irreplaceable. People indeed lose a unique friendship when they exclude these amazing creatures from their lives; a friendship where a friend can love you more than it loves itself. Interestingly, false religious





Canaan dogs come in a variety of colors.

teachings and lack of knowledge are the main reasons that prevent people from embracing the Canaan dog as a Palestinian dog. Mainstream religious teachings restrict the keeping of dogs to specific purposes, such as hunting and guarding livestock and crops, but forbid touching them due to their “impureness,” also claiming that angels do not enter houses that have dogs. It should be noted, however, that the Qur’an never indicates that dogs are impure. On the contrary, in the Qur’an’s version of the Seven Sleepers tale, the “Companions of the Cave,” a dog is clearly indicated as a friend of believers who also had angels guarding them through a hundred years of supernatural sleeping. The legendary young people hid inside a cave outside their city to escape persecution due to

their refusal to worship idols. People tend to completely ignore the significant part that the dog played in this tale as it was the guardian who stayed at the gate of the cave for the entire period before they eventually woke up. People are furthermore unaware that only one out of the four main schools of Islam considers dogs to be entirely impure. In their assessment, they mainly rely on alleged teachings of the Prophet that some scholars deem to be weak and corrupted. Most people, in fact, do not know that the Sunni Maliki school considers dogs to be entirely pure, and a number of Al-Azhar’s scholars have declared this same view.

Through years of observation, I must say that we do not have a stray-dog problem, but we have a people problem.

We have an attitude problem indeed. An attitude of avoiding dogs because they are dogs, getting rid of stray dogs because they are without a home, and degrading Canaan dogs because they are *baladi* dogs. It is, however, promising that the first Palestinian dog shelter was recently established in Bethlehem to rescue and shelter abused and abandoned dogs. The shelter helps to find homes for the rescued stray dogs. Before offering the dogs for adoption, the dogs are given the required medication and vaccinations and provided with tracking chips. Also, all dogs are being neutered and spayed in order to encourage people to adopt them. The shelter indeed debunks stigmas and has taken a huge step in encouraging Palestinians to bear responsibility for rescuing and protecting stray dogs. However, its mission is far from protecting the Canaan dogs as a breed whose survival is at stake if necessary measures are not adequately taken.

As a Palestinian, I felt painfully outraged when I realized that the Canaan dog was claimed by Israel along with other Palestinian natural resources and cultural treasures. But I feel even more outraged when I realize how we ourselves do not value this, our treasure, as we should. I can imagine the reaction of some Palestinians when they hear about or read this article. They would find it ridiculous and irrelevant compared to the causes that they consider big and important. What is significant here is that *everything* is relevant and important. There is no small cause in our struggle. Certainly, embracing and preserving the Canaan dog, the dog of the Land of Canaan, should therefore be a priority and a part of our struggle against the Israeli occupation.

*Ahlam Taraya is a Palestinian marketing professional interested in research into cultural, social, and political contexts in Palestine and their impact on development.*

*Article photos courtesy of the author.*

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# Palestine Choral Festival

continuing a musical renaissance

By Michael Stevens

The inaugural Palestine Choral Festival – a true celebration of community music-making – was held in 2013. The 10-day festival in August reached audiences throughout the West Bank, with more than 30 concerts and over 30 educational, outreach, and community events. Now, in August 2016, the Palestine Choral Festival returns, bigger and more far-reaching than before.

Even for people with only a limited musical background, singing together in choirs gives rare pleasure. Almost everyone can sing without even thinking about it, and with only very basic training, people can sing together in choirs in a way that gives enormous gratification and satisfaction not only to themselves but also to those who hear them. Singing in this way builds individual self-esteem and contributes to community cohesion and well-being. Even better, there is no need for expensive equipment or instruments, and it is a pastime available to people of all ages. It's fun, easy, and cheap!

It should be no surprise therefore that the range, number, and quality of choirs in Palestine continues to grow. This year there will be more than 50 – from Gaza, the West Bank, and 1948 Palestine.

Equally important in the festival is the involvement of high-quality, international choirs, both to perform concerts and to enjoy workshops and rehearsals with the Palestinian choirs. The festival is produced by the Choir of London, in association with the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music.

The Choir of London will be joined by the Choir of St Peter's College, Oxford (UK), the Choeur Régional Hauts de France (France) and, from Australia, the Open House Ensemble and The Australian Voices. These five visiting groups will travel throughout the country for a series of concerts, children's singing days, workshops, opera performances, and other events over ten days from August 11–20.

Highlights include a children's singing day for around 200 children from 15 Palestinian children's choirs in the Al-Khawaja Palace in Ni'lin on Saturday, August 13; a celebration of choirs from the Bethlehem and Hebron districts at Dar Annadwa (Bethlehem) on Friday, August 19; and a gala concert featuring all the international ensembles and many of the Palestinian choirs, at the Ramallah Cultural Palace on Saturday, August 20.

There are more than 40 public concerts in all (most of them free to attend) that will explore different choral traditions, including a performance of Fauré's Requiem in Beit Jala and concerts of Western and Arabic music, contemporary Australian music, opera highlights (featuring soprano Dima Bawab), and chamber music with some of Palestine's most talented young musicians, in cities and villages throughout Palestine.

We look forward to welcoming you to the festival – and hope that afterwards, whatever your age, interests, or experience, you might be inspired to contact one of the many participating choirs and try joining a rehearsal yourself!

Michael Stevens is the director of the Palestine Choral Festival.

# Palestine Choral Festival

*Songs and Stories from Around the World*

August 11-20, 2016



### Opera Highlights – featuring Dima Bawab

Thursday, 11 - Jerusalem  
Friday, 12 - Bethlehem  
Saturday, 13 - Ramallah  
Sunday, 14 - Haifa  
Monday, 15 - Birzeit University  
Thursday, 18 - Nablus

### Children's Choir Concerts

Thursday, 11 - Hebron  
Saturday, 13 - Ni'lin  
Monday, 15 - Beit Reema  
Tuesday, 16 - Nablus  
Wednesday, 17 - Deir Ghassane

### Chamber Music – featuring young Palestinian musicians

Wednesday, 17 - Bethlehem

### Gala Concerts

Thursday, 11 - Gaza  
Thursday, 18 - Beit Jala  
Friday, 19 - Bethlehem  
Friday, 19 - Birzeit University  
Saturday, 20 - Ramallah

Joint choral concerts that bring together Palestinian choirs and visiting choirs will be held in Aoud, Azzariyeh, Beit Jala, Beit Reema, Beit Sahour, Bethlehem, Bir Zeit, Deir Ghassane, Gaza, Haifa, Hebron, Jenin, Jerusalem, Jifna, Nablus, Nazareth, Ni'lin, Ramallah, Sebastiya, Shefa-Amr, and Taybeh.

[info@palestinechoralfestival.org](mailto:info@palestinechoralfestival.org)  
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# Gaza's Phoenix: Real or Legend?



By Yasmeen Elkhoudary

In history class, we were taught that Gaza has been a battleground over the centuries for many kings and conquerors from various civilizations; that again and again Gaza has been destroyed and then rebuilt.

Unlike in most Palestinian cities, little archaeological evidence remains in Gaza to attest to its ancient past. The rapidly increasing rates of urbanization and population growth are not the only reasons that Gaza has been largely inaccessible to archaeologists in modern times. Located at possibly the most important point along the Via Maris, an ancient route that connected Africa with the Levant, powers on either side of the route fought over control of Gaza for both military and economic purposes. Thus, the fact that Gaza was destroyed and rebuilt so many times over the span of its long history means that we are left with few remains (and more perhaps yet to be discovered); conquerors in antiquity were seldom thinking about preserving monuments for posterity.

Outside the municipality building of Gaza, a black statue of a Phoenix bird stands in the middle of *al-saha*, the city's main square. The statue resonates well with the coat of arms (COA) of Gaza's Municipality: a Phoenix bird. Unlike any other Palestinian municipality, Gaza is the only city with a COA that features something other than a historic monument or tree, let alone a legendary bird. After learning from a friend that the artist who designed the COA is the famous Laila Shawa, who happens to reside in London like me, I reached out to her hoping to learn more about the inspiration behind the design. "One day in 1980/1, I went to my father (the late Rashad Shawa, twice mayor



Byzantine palm-tree engraving, found in Gaza City, circa sixth century. Photo from Gaza: from Sand and Sea. (Jawdat Khoudary collection.)

of Gaza City) and told him that Gaza needed to have a COA. The Phoenix bird was our first and most obvious choice, and he asked me immediately to design it. It's pretty straightforward – the city is like a Phoenix bird."

Madame Shawa brought my attention to an important detail in the COA, "If you inspect its colors carefully, you will notice that it is red, green, black, and white. This was probably the biggest challenge I faced while designing the COA because back then, the Israeli army prohibited the use of the colors

of the Palestinian flag in any way. I tried and succeeded in incorporating the colors despite their ban and my potential imprisonment."

Indeed, it is. Prior to meeting Madame Shawa, I had started to conduct research for my master's dissertation, motivated by a desire to find an alternative future for my city. Refusing to believe that our future, much like our present so far, is doomed and unlivable (as foreseen by the United Nations), I decided to look for other options in our history. My father always tells me: "Had

Like the legendary Phoenix bird, Gaza has been rising from its ashes since the dawn of time despite every attempt to destroy it. Will the ashes that we have been living in for centuries clear away and give rise to Gaza's Phoenix once again?



The legendary mythical phoenix. Image courtesy of phoenixarises.com.

Gaza not been an ancient, 5,000-year-old city, it would not have been able to survive until today." Thus, I knew there was an answer to our ongoing misery: it lies in our history.

The cyclical nature of history is not a new revelation; "history repeats itself" is probably the best-known history lesson in the world. A closer look at the history of Gaza presents us with the most accurate depiction of the lesson. For the purpose of my research, I drew a timeline of the history of Gaza from the Early Bronze Age (3500 BC) to the present, and was able to trace a fluctuating pattern of highs and lows – prosperity and disaster – across the timeline. During the Bronze Age, for example, Tell Ajjul, just south of today's Gaza City and one of the most important archaeological sites in the region, was arguably one of the biggest trade centers in the Mediterranean, with a monopoly over trade routes that connected the Levant to Egypt and Cyprus. Hoards of gold were discovered at the site and are displayed in museums around the world. After a few centuries of prosperity, the city was destroyed by an Egyptian army led by Ahmose, who destroyed the city to punish the Hyksos who had fled to Tell Ajjul. Tell Ajjul was abandoned and never re-inhabited. But in the thirteenth century, the Muslims officially defeated the Sixth Crusade in a treaty that was signed near Tell Ajjul (the second part of the treaty was signed in Yafa).

In the fifth and fourth centuries BC, the nearby city of Gaza became a main stop on the Incense Route with its own port and its own coins (Gaza was the first city in Palestine to mint its own coins). In 332 BC, Alexander the Great faced an unexpected obstacle in Gaza as he was marching to Egypt. With fortified walls, Gaza stood on a hill of soft yellow sand, which meant that the wheels of Alexander's catapults sank deep into the sands as he tried to attack the walls. Thus, he decided to build towers around the city's wall in order to attack from the air, a process that took nine weeks. However, the besieged people of Gaza attacked Alexander's towers with fire and burnt them down, injuring Alexander himself in the process. Alexander's third attempt at defeating the city was by building tunnels, a technique that, ironically, worked after three months of failure. Alexander was so furious at Gaza's resistance that he executed the city's king Batis and all the men, selling its women and children to slavery. He looted massive amounts of incense and myrrh, and shipped them back to Macedonia as gifts to his mother and his teacher Leonidas. Without much explanation, this event in history has strong resonance with the present – and was actually followed by a period of great prosperity during the times when Gaza was under Ptolemaic rule.

The sequence of historical events, including the ones mentioned above and others, show that Gaza's life cycle

has consisted of ups and downs, or, in other terms, of falling to ashes and rising again. It is said that the legendary Phoenix bird that cyclically regenerates and is reborn from its ashes originated in India or Persia with the tales of Sindibad (in the stories of *Alf Leila wa Leila*) and was adopted by the Chinese, Arabs, Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians. The legend describes the Phoenix bird as a massive bird with golden red feathers that, after centuries of flying around Earth, starts to get old and sings a song to the Sun asking it to make it young again. The Sun ignored the bird's request. Then the bird started to collect cinnamon sticks, incense, and other fragrant herbs and plants from around the world (meaning the Incense Route), and built itself a nest on top of a palm tree on the Phoenician coast that extended to the southern Levant. The bird also collected myrrh and used it to make an egg. Then the Phoenix sat down in its nest and asked the Sun to make it young again. The Sun responded by setting the bird on fire and reducing it to ashes, from which a tiny, young Phoenix was reborn from the myrrh egg.

Beyond the metaphorical resemblance of the bird's legendary resurrection and rebirth to that of Gaza's timeline, a number of other symbols are also relevant to Gaza. Incense and myrrh were plentiful, and the palm tree, called *Phoenix* in Greek, is one of the most abundant trees in Gaza, to the extent that there is a town called *Deir al-Balah*, famous for its rows of palm trees. This draws another very interesting comparison to the city: the holy tree, which represents life, fertility, and victory, and inherently is a symbol of resurrection and rebirth, is another symbol of the city.

Can we find hope in the abstract, imaginary metaphor of a legendary bird? While the idea might seem too intangible for some, I believe that it is not much more abstract than the level of absurdity that marks the reality in which

The statue of the Phoenix bird in Gaza City was crafted from fiberglass by Iyad Sabbah. Photo by Motaz Alaaraj.



we currently live. During my preliminary dissertation viva, one professor asked me the following question: "This all seems good and hopeful, but what are you proposing to do about it? Are you saying that you all should just sit there and wait for the Phoenix to rise?"

The professor's remark struck me. I had been too busy analyzing the past to think about what needs to be done in order to build a better future. In a way, I was committing the mistake of those who give too much focus to the present/future and forget the past. Creating the balance between the past and the future is where our challenge lies. But most importantly we must

remember that whatever actions we take will be insignificant unless we genuinely believe that there is hope in the future. After all, the Sun did not grant the Phoenix's wish until it had built itself a nest.

*Yasmeen Elkhoudary is a master's student at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London. She is a researcher in Gaza's history and archaeology and an associate fellow in the Centre for Palestine Studies - SOAS. She currently volunteers in the ancient Levant galleries in the British Museum and in the Palestine Exploration Fund. While in Gaza, Yasmeen worked at Almathaf Museum. She publishes a blog at [yelkhoudary.blogspot.com](http://yelkhoudary.blogspot.com).*



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# Animal Symbolism in Religions



By Sami Backleh



Religion is all about beliefs – beliefs about creation, purpose, destiny, life, and love. What people believe or disbelieve about God and the world affects all aspects of their being, including their day-to-day behavior. As nature-protection movements are hoping to change people's behavior towards biodiversity, emphasize the need to preserve the wealth of creation, and protect the earth's wildlife, they also affect people's belief systems – and vice versa. It is important to take into consideration that religion can affect attitudes towards animals, and the way in which animals are treated, either positively or negatively. Thus religion can be important to wildlife conservation and protection in various ways. First, it can be used in support of animal protection, which can be particularly useful and powerful in countries where religion is important and influential. Second, religion is sometimes used to justify cruel treatment – and even the ritual sacrifice – of animals. Some animal protectionists fight against these cruelties carried out in the name of religion.

All major religions of the world praise creation and acknowledge that humankind depends on nature for its own survival. They also teach compassion and love of all living creatures. Nearly all religions recognize the inherent value of animal life and the need to avoid animal suffering. Such positive attitudes are probably generated from the fact that religious texts and scriptures promote these attitudes.

**Christianity** shares the story of creation that is often interpreted as commanding respect for all of nature and its inhabitants. This sentiment was also reflected in Jesus' ministry that stressed love and peace for all of God's creation. Recognizing this, many

devout Christians have been leaders of peacekeeping, environmental, and animal advocacy movements. For example, St. Francis of Assisi encouraged respect and reverence for all life.

In many stories, Christian saints have gained animal companions that they have cared for or healed. Abbot Gerasimus removed a large splinter from the paw of a lion that then carried water for his monastery and, following the abbot's death, lay down on his grave and died. Macarius healed a hyena whelp of blindness and slept for the rest of his life on the sheepskin that its mother carried to him in thanks. Many other narratives highlight animals performing invaluable functions for humans, displaying intuition and care. They become moral exemplars

that “the birds of the air are fed by God,” implying that if God cares for animals, he will also take care of believers. On Palm Sunday, a donkey carried Jesus into Jerusalem. Jesus is represented as a slain lamb, and after his resurrection, he cooked and ate fish with his disciples to prove his bodily existence.

Christian folk traditions, expanding on biblical texts, present certain animals that play positive roles in biblical stories. Farm animals were present in the stable at Jesus' birth. Biblical references and traditions show that animals play important, positive roles in Jesus' life and in subsequent Christian understandings of that life.

Moreover, the four Gospels are sometimes identified with various living beings. The lion, representing Mark, signifies the voice of John the



An icon illustrating the story of St. Gerasimus removing a large splinter from the paw of a lion. Image courtesy of *Russian Icons and Their Interpretation*.

for humans, showing the care they should give to each other.

Several of Jesus' apostles were fishermen, and the image of catching fish is used to represent the Christian mission. Furthermore, Jesus said

Baptist crying in the wilderness. The ox is associated with Luke because it is a sacrificial animal. The eagle soars and was believed to be the only animal able to gaze directly into the sun, and so represents John who contemplates the truth of Christ. Alongside these



*The four winged creatures that symbolize the four evangelists surround Christ in the central tympanum of the western façade of the Church of St. Trophime in Arles, France. Image courtesy of Images of Medieval Art and Architecture."*

animals, a human being symbolizes Matthew, who lists Christ's human ancestors.

The **Holy Qur'an** presents to us various stories of the Prophet. Within these stories we find a group of animals that have played a great and significant role in history.

The Holy Qur'an mentions animals, birds, and plants in stories that related miracles, some of which are also told in Christianity. For example, Musa's staff was turned into a snake, a wolf was falsely accused of eating Yusuf (Joseph) when his brothers presented the bloody garment to his grieving father. According to the Qur'an, a hoopoe informed Sulayman (Solomon) about the blasphemy of the Queen of Sheba, a whale swallowed Yunus (Jonah) for a while and then threw him onto the land because Jonah in his distress remembered God and asked for his help. Consequently, according to the Qur'an, he was among those who praise Allah. Abrahah's elephant was ordered to destroy the *Ka'bah* but was frozen in its place and thus could not proceed because of his fear of Allah.

In such stories, we may come to know a group of beings from the animal kingdom that played their roles in life and appeared on the platform of events for a while before the curtain was finally let down. The Holy Qur'an has only mentioned them or flashed a certain instance of their life before us,

whereas the other details of their lives remain vague. However, the message is clearly manifested that animals have been considered as divine messengers of lessons for humanity.

Allah says, "*There are [manifest] signs [of truth] in the creation [of humanity and numerous types of] animals scattered [on the earth] for those who believe [in Allah].*" (45:4)

From an Islamic point of view, not only animals but God's entire creation is a sign of His might and wisdom. For instance, Allah says, "*Do they see how [useful] a camel is created?*" (88:17). Several Qur'an verses invite humans to learn lessons from animals, birds, ants, and honeybees. Believers in God learn from studying animals as divine

signs, and in addition to opening up new horizons of knowledge and science, they deepen their faith.

It has been indicated that the Holy Qur'an has over two hundred verses that deal with animals and six chapters that are named after animals. From the Qur'an, the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and the narrations of the righteous leaders that came after him, a comprehensive legislative system regarding animals has been created.

The above narration shows us how some of the greatest men ever to walk upon the earth took lessons from the animal kingdom. The guidelines and rules were drawn up at a time when the rights of animals were abused, when animals were made to fight one another



*The Qur'an stresses the importance of grazing animals, and among them camels are highlighted because they are remarkable animals that provide great benefit to many people. Photo courtesy of the author.*



Arabic zoomorphic script "In the name of God the all-merciful and compassionate." Image courtesy of ArtIndia.<sup>ii</sup>

for fun, and they were hunted for sport. We are told in the Qur'an how animals have been created as communities in their own right, with the ability to communicate with one another. The following verse illustrates that, as indeed the human race is a community of needs, be they physical or mental, so the animal kingdom has certain needs too.

*"And there is no creature on [or within] the earth or bird that flies with its wings except [that they are] communities like you..."*

(Al- An'am 6:38)

In Islam, as in Christianity, there is the view that man has authority over the animal kingdom, yet this is an authority that comes with responsibility. Islamic teachings, moreover, discuss animal consciousness and assert that they suffer from pain and pleasure, but unlike humans they do not have the ability to rationalize. This fact has been scientifically proven: also in animals the release of endorphins is caused by stress and pain.

It is because of this that humane treatment of animals is obligatory, and an example of this is the manner in which we must co-habit with the animal kingdom. We must allow them to eat, and provide for those animals that are within our custody.

*"Then let mankind look at his food – How We poured down water in torrents, then We broke open the earth, splitting [it with sprouts], and caused to grow within it grain and grapes and herbage and olives and palm trees and gardens of dense shrubbery and fruit and grass – [as] enjoyment [i.e., provision] for you and your grazing livestock."*

Qur'an 80:24–32

To kill animals to satisfy the human thirst for trophies goes completely against Islamic tradition. To kill animals for their fur and to use it in unnecessary areas such as floor coverings, or to kill animals to hang their heads on walls is cruelty to animals. To undertake unnecessary experimentation for cosmetics or toiletries is against the humane treatment of animals and is a disgrace.

Islam permits the use of animals, the use of their strength and the use of their meat and skin where necessary. It is binding upon mankind to treat animals in a humane manner and to treat those within or outside one's custody with care, humility, and respect, not only for their physical well-being but for their mental health as well. Mistreatment of any part of nature, be it the animal kingdom or the earth itself, is a major sin and condemned in Islam.<sup>iv</sup>

*Sami Backleh is a part-time lecturer at Al-Quds University and a free lance natural heritage consultant who works with various organizations. He can be reached at [sami.backleh@gmail.com](mailto:sami.backleh@gmail.com).*

<sup>i</sup> Available at <https://russianicons.wordpress.com/2015/04/01/the-lion-the-splinter-and-folktale-motif-156/>.

<sup>ii</sup> Available at <http://www.medart.pitt.edu/image/France/arles/arlmain.html>.

<sup>iii</sup> available at <http://www.artnindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/018b.jpg>.

<sup>iv</sup> See also Harfiyah Haleem, «Animal Rights in Islam», available at <https://www.docdroid.net/n0yw/animal-rights-in-islam.pdf.html>.

## Filistin Ashabab

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# Gaza Lions



By Amira Gabarin



The Israeli assault on Gaza in the summer of 2014 inflicted tremendous damage and destruction. It destroyed Gaza's infrastructure, it took over 2,000 lives and wreaked havoc on thousands of others. And it broke every Palestinian heart. Yet stories of Gaza and its brave and enduring people never fail to inspire. Gazans deliver moving, often jaw-dropping tales of humanity at its most beautiful, of strength at its most powerful, and they tell of incidents that time and time again prove to the world that "Palestinians teach us how to live." It comes as no surprise that even on the obscure theme of animals, the people of Gaza do not fail to teach us a lesson.

Following the latest attack on Gaza, Rafah – a city caught in the middle of the complex political interplay between Egypt, Israel, and Palestine, and overwhelmingly populated by refugees – felt the full brutal impact of the conflict. Here people have continuously been living in poverty.



Photo by Atieh Darwish.



Photo by Adel Al-Hana.

But the destruction not only affected the people of Rafah, it also had an effect on its animals. Rafah Zoo owner Mohammad Juma explained, "We have a large number of animals that need to be taken care of, and since all people live in dire economic circumstances, there is a lack of interest in leisure activities. In such a situation one sells anything one has in order to save the rest of the animals." The zoo, struggling to make ends meet, was saved by refugee Saad Aldeen Al-Jamal and his six children who adopted two baby lions, Alex and Mona.

Although the cubs were initially bought in order to try to relieve the economic burden of the Rafah Zoo, they have without doubt become a cherished part of the family. Al-Jamal explains,

"They're living inside the house just like the children. They eat and drink inside the house, and they have a bed on which they both sleep. They also play football." The cubs have brought joy to many around them, most importantly perhaps to the camp's children who, during the last decade, had to witness and endure several wars.

However, the Al-Jamal family is faced with the expensive costs of feeding two lion cubs who already consume half a kilo of meat per day. This is proving to be a struggle because prices have risen drastically since the 2014 war. Al-Jamal's plan is to lease the cubs to lunar parks, seaside resorts, and restaurants in an effort to relieve the financial burden caused by the lions. Moreover, although the cubs are a small safety risk for the family now, once they are fully grown, they could weigh more than 400 pounds and will obviously not be able to roam freely.

This story parallels another one, much sadder and darker. During the horrific



Photo by Adel Al-Hana.

times of the 2014 war, the whole world was able to see heart-wrenching footage from the only hospital in Gaza, Al-Shifa: The waiting room was filled with women who showed every painful emotion possible as they waited for news on their children, husbands, and other relatives – not knowing if they were alive, injured, or, in many cases, dead. Their suffering was etched on their faces. These women overheard a doctor speaking about a group of children who had lost everyone in their family and were now orphans. Immediately and simultaneously, several women jumped up and said “We will take them, these are our children.” They said these words sincerely and were ready to follow up on their promises with true actions

Photo by Atieh Darwish.



of love and compassion. We must remember that this happened at a time when everyone in Gaza had lost a loved one or at least an acquaintance to the assault and was under terrible emotional stress. In such a position, when people were waiting for news on whether their own children were alive or dead, who would have the love, kindness, and compassion to think of others? The people of Gaza.

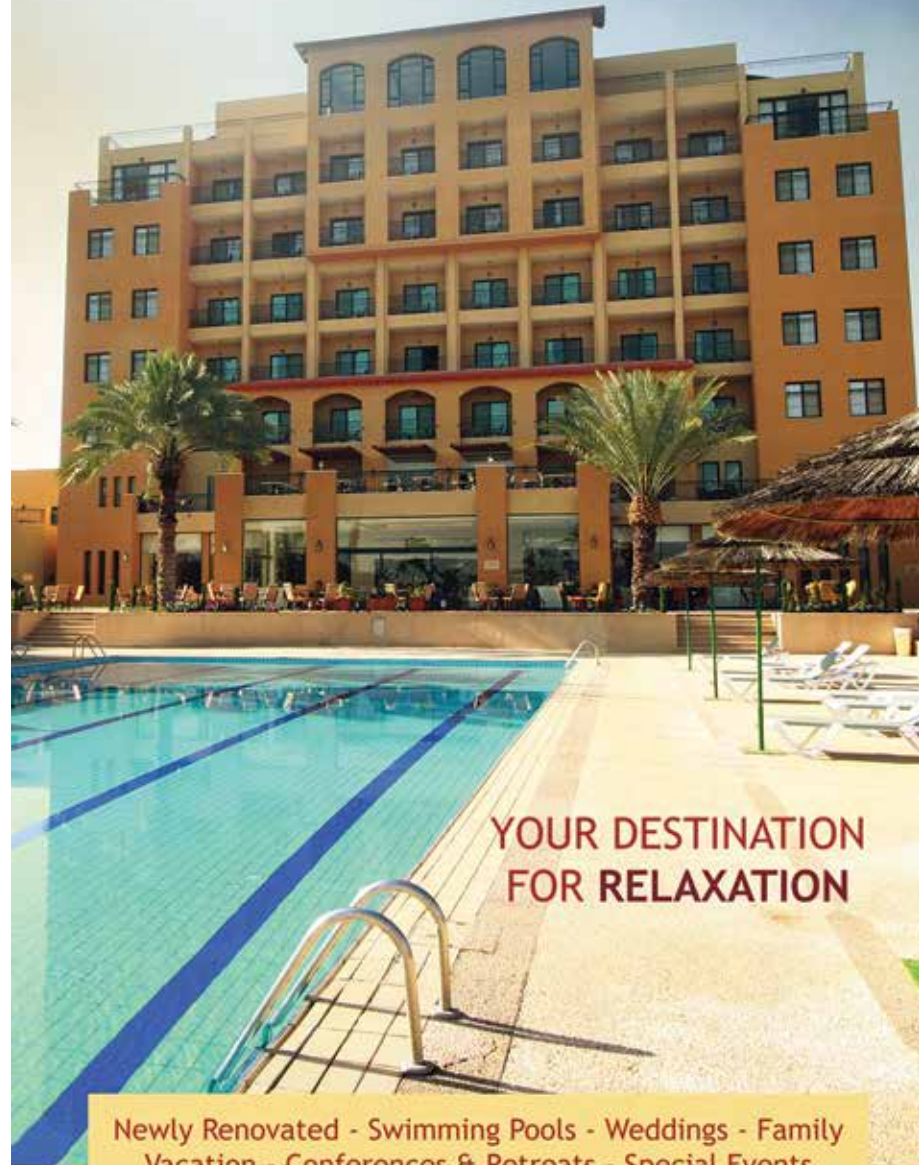
This same spirit drove the Al-Jamal family to take in the lion cubs and look after them, even though they were neither financially nor logistically in a position to fully take on this burden. Whilst the fate of Mona and Alex may be still undecided, this incredible and unusual tale must teach us the importance of compassion and strength in its purest form.

While animal activists might complain about the treatment of these animals and consider it inappropriate, the sad truth in Gaza under siege is that we simply do not have other options.

*Amira Gabarin is a Palestinian who studies international relations at SOAS, University of London. She loves to write about politics, especially the developments in the Arab-Israeli conflict. She has written in publications such as The Telegraph and has her own weekly blog.*



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# Caring for Stray Animals



By Diana Babish



The cities and villages in the Bethlehem Governorate are growing at a fast pace, and residential blocks and industrial compounds increasingly occupy most of the land. As of 2014, there were 30,200 residents in the three major cities of Bethlehem, Beit Jala, and Beit Sahour, which cover an area of 7 km<sup>2</sup>, and 210,500 residents in the Bethlehem Governorate, which includes three refugee camps (Dheisheh, Aida, and 'Azza) and a number of smaller towns and villages. However, there is another noticeable population, equal to or even larger than the human one, which consists of stray animals: cats and dogs that roam the streets and live on vacant plots of land. These animals live in bad conditions, multiply without control, and have a negative impact on the environment. However, they are victims of their situations, and many of them do not make it to adulthood.

It is important to note that an estimated 800 stray animals live in the city of Bethlehem, and 10,000 stray animals, particularly dogs and cats, in the Bethlehem Governorate. A great number of these form packs and live in areas with a low population density. They venture out to high-density neighborhoods in the morning and evening hours in order to

find food, which exposes both the stray animals and humans to danger. Evidence suggests that this occurrence also has a negative impact on the much-needed tourist industry. Solitary strays are often chased and abused out of fear that they might be aggressive or sickly. Stray packs attack domestic animals, livestock, and humans alike. There are many documented cases of dogs attacking children and adults as they head out in the early hours of the morning or when they come home late at night.\*

The strays, on the other hand, live in constant fear and under deplorable conditions. The absence of food and the infestation of fleas and parasites may lead to more serious diseases that can spread quickly and affect the human population and domestic animals alike, among them rabies, heartworms, tapeworms, and other pathogens. All these factors suggest that there is an urgent need to build an animal shelter with a capacity that allows it to serve not only the city of Bethlehem but the entire governorate.

In December 2013, the Animal and Environment Association (AEA) was established under an accredited license at 'Ush Al-Ghurab in Beit Sahour. Through its board of directors and dedicated members, the AEA proposed to design, construct, operate, and maintain a modern, state-of-the-art animal-control shelter that aims to provide services of the highest quality, including the rescue, care, and treatment of homeless animals. From its location in the Bethlehem Governorate, the shelter aims to care for animals from throughout the West Bank and to serve all municipalities that support this project by providing emergency rescue, medical care, and rehabilitation interventions that are carried out promptly and quickly, while keeping in mind the importance of caring for the environment. To support these activities, fundraising drives are implemented to solicit donations. At the

Until very recently there were no animal shelters in the Bethlehem Governorate or in other areas of the West Bank; and local governing bodies still lack animal control officers. The managing of stray animals is carried out at a most basic level by municipalities that simply kill the animals by poisoning or shooting them.

same time, the shelter hopes to be a venue for emerging veterinarians where they can receive hands-on training in various operations and the use of high-technology medical equipment. Experienced veterinarians will be available to do complicated surgeries when the need arises.

*The Bethlehem Animal Shelter hopes one day to have a fully equipped operating room like this one located in Jerusalem.*





Animals rescued from severe abuse and neglect usually suffer from acute and at times grave health challenges that are frequently related to starvation, dehydration, and physical abuse.

*The newly built shelter features large kennels. The search is on for a larger piece of land where the dogs can roam more freely.*

the public of the dangers that such practices pose and to shed light on the importance of preserving our environment from all forms of pollution.

The shelter does not use cages or chains and considers this method an important part of the process of relieving the animals' trauma – helping them to heal and redevelop healthy social instincts so that they can be adopted. The purpose is to facilitate healing and then transfer the animals to safe homes in order to create room for new rescues. In cases of severe trauma, a dog is provided a private area where it can feel safe while healing.

Thus, the shelter offers various options depending on the level of socialization and adaptation of which an animal is capable. The “Second Chance” option offers a place for cats and dogs to live as they wait to be placed into an adoption network that strives to find them a permanent home. The “Last Resort” is a program that provides a permanent sanctuary for unadoptable dogs, generally an option for a dog that may be less desirable to adopting families due to age, health challenges, or behavioral skittishness resulting from past abuse. These animals are provided

lifetime care and safety. On a regular basis Adoption Days are being held as public events in conjunction with local businesses in order to encourage and facilitate the adoption of companion animals. Last but not least, the shelter aims to provide a hostel service for dog owners who have no place to leave their dogs while they go on vacation.

Hoping to be able to change the view of the general public towards stray animals, the shelter intends to show how these animals can be beneficial once they are domesticated.

School and leisure activities will be offered to the general public, including children and youth, through promotional events that encourage citizens to get involved in acts of kindness and compassion.



*The current shelter has a yard where dogs like Max, Muphin, and Gold can move around freely several times a day.*

Intending to empower individuals to stand up for the humane treatment of animals, the shelter furthermore seeks to foster involvement of the general public through volunteer programs and workshops. It aims to serve people who need assistance with their own rescue efforts and to provide animal companionship by removing animals from circumstances in which they are unwanted or abused to places where they are wanted and cherished.

*Diana Babish is a former bank manager with 23 years of experience in banking. She holds a master's degree in international cooperation and development from Bethlehem University, and is currently president of the Animal and Environment Association.*

*For more information, visit [www.basau.org](http://www.basau.org).*

*Article photos courtesy of the Bethlehem Animal Shelter.*

\* Humans are not the only ones who are attacked; there have also been cases that document humans attacking animals. See “Stray dogs a serious problem in the West Bank,” published on May 9, 2015, via *Maan News*, available at <https://www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=765311>.



## Walid Salim Basha



His dream was to be a zoologist, but for social and economic reasons, Walid Salim Basha couldn't realize his dream. In 1995 he earned a bachelor's degree from Al-Quds University in medical laboratory sciences, which became his career. In 2005, Walid returned from Japan where he had been granted an MA and PhD in health sciences (molecular microbiology). He worked for four years at the faculty of allied medical sciences at Arab American University – Jenin, and then moved to the faculty of medicine and health sciences at An-Najah National University, where today he is an assistant professor of microbiology and immunology in the faculty of medicine and health sciences.

In 2006 he made plans to revive his dream and started his own research center (Basha Scientific Centre for Research and Studies) for biodiversity and environmental studies. He chose not to create an NGO since he believes

himself to be an NGI (nongovernmental individual). Through the center, Dr. Basha put Al-Muqata Valley in Jenin on the biodiversity map of Palestine where he recorded more than 40 bird species, including the moorhen, marsh harrier, water rail, and black-winged stilt, in addition to the Egyptian mongoose and coypu (water rat), which Israeli farmers introduced to the area in the mid-twentieth century and freed to the Jordan Valley and Hula.

In cooperation with international NGOs, Dr. Basha built the first environment pathway, which passes through Um-Altoot Forest. And now he has started the first fenced-in national environmental park with Zababdeh Municipality, Anazaha Co., and the Ministry of Agriculture in Raba Forest, which will include the first butterfly and reptile garden, and birding area.

As an alternative method for charcoal production, and in partnership with

World Vision, he introduced the first environment-friendly charcoal production in Yabbad-Jenin to avoid the pollution caused by traditional charcoal production.

Dr. Basha's daily routine includes at least one hour for birding, and he has documented many records for Palestine. In December 2013, he recorded the Black Vulture in Iz-Aldeen Mountains in Jenin, and, for the first time in Palestine, the Yellow-billed Stork in Qana Valley-Salfit in late March 2014. In 2010 he announced the first couple of common mynas as invaders in the West Bank (Jenin), and in 2015, he warned of the danger that this bird could present to the local house-sparrow community and other local birds.

Dr. Basha's mission is to enhance environmental awareness within the population. All new records are published in the local newspapers and on a Facebook page (Jenin Environment). During the past ten years, he has presented five photo exhibitions of his biodiversity records in Jenin and Nablus, and published four brochures – two field guides (birds), one of Jenin butterflies, and one of Palestinian poisonous snakes.

As a volunteer at the Palestine Museum of Natural History in Bethlehem, Dr. Basha believes that creating a healthy environment in Palestine requires the efforts of everyone, including NGOs and NGLs.



*The red fox is the most prevalent of the true foxes.*



*The legs of the Black-winged Stilt make up about sixty percent of its height and give it a feeding advantage in deep water.*



*The Palestine Sunbird has orange tufts at the sides of the breast that are visible only from close range.*



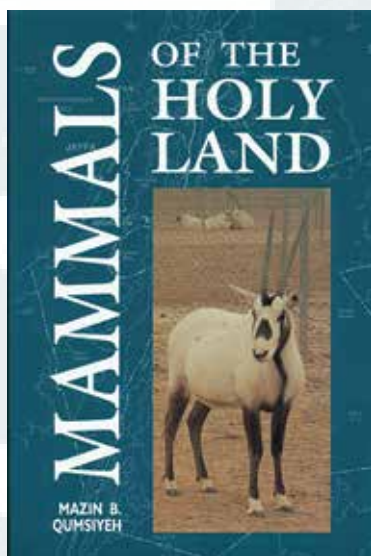
## Mammals of the Holy Land

By Mazin B. Qumsiyeh

Texas Tech University Press, Lubbock, Texas, USA, 1996

389 pages, US\$ 35.00

Reviewed by Dr. Zuhair Amr



The eleven chapters of this book discuss various aspects of the mammalian fauna of Palestine and Jordan. An overview of the historical background of mammalian studies in the Holy Land presents details on expeditions and studies undertaken by European naturalists since the sixteenth century. Emphasis is placed on the work of the late Dr. Sana Attalah (Qumsiyeh's uncle) who during the 1960s was recognized as the first Palestinian mammalogist with specialized knowledge on Middle Eastern mammals.

Methods applied to mammalogical studies are presented and scientific

standards and methodologies are articulated, followed by a brief chapter on the mammalian evolution. An excursion into human history provides insight into the consequences that have resulted from various civilizations with waves of colonization and wars that have taken place in what is called the Holy Land, ending with an optimistic view and the hope for peace that will allow both humans and animals to thrive.

Detailed accounts on the geography, ecology, and zoogeography of Palestine show the importance of this small country as a meeting point for various

animal assemblages that exhibit an extraordinary biodiversity in the Middle East. Another chapter outlines the intense threats that affect the animals of Palestine and sheds light on the practices that have caused the decline or extinction of some species. Population growth and mass immigration, as well as destruction of habitats by Israeli settlements have accelerated the decline of some animal groups, such as bats.

The bulk of the book accounts for over 100 species of mammals, with taxonomic keys for the differentiated species. It provides details on the diagnostic features, local status, ecology, distribution, biology, genetics, and human interaction for each species, including images for most animals and skulls for some of them. Chapter 11 is by far the most interesting for laypersons, with an overview of

mammals that have been introduced to Palestine, including aurochs and water buffalo.

*Mammals of the Holy Land* remains one of best textbooks written on the mammals of the Holy Land and enjoys around 100 citations in the scientific literature. An updated edition is certainly due now in order to integrate recent findings and to avoid some shortcomings that require revisions regarding the mammalian fauna of this country.

Dr. Mazin Qumsiyeh, a native of Beit Sahour, is a well-known mammalogist in zoological communities across the world, and particularly the Middle East and North Africa. Since the 1980s, his research on the mammals of the Middle East has contributed greatly to our present knowledge on the mammalian fauna of Palestine and Jordan.

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# Checklist of the Birds of Palestine

By Simon I. Awad, Riad K. Abu Saada, Michael H. Farhoud, Mahd I. Khair  
Environmental Education Center  
The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, Beit Jala, 2015  
23 pages, free for those who are interested



*Checklist of the Birds of Palestine* is the first of its kind and the outcome of an innovative 17-year effort that applied scientific methods to environmental research in Palestine. It presents a remarkable record of bird-related conservation efforts and extensive listings of birds that can be observed in Palestine. To carry out this research, the Environmental Education Center (EEC) obtained special licenses in 1998 for the setup of monitoring and ringing stations in study areas at Talitha Kumi near Bethlehem (permanent), Jericho, and later in Tulkarem (both seasonal) that had been selected as representative places with high-density bird populations within the state of

Palestine. They serve as resources for ornithologists and students in addition to a wide range of interested local and international visitors. Research methods have included observation and ringing data, monitoring the presence and behavior of birds, and studying skin specimens. EEC studies have been carried out in cooperation and partnership with international organizations and institutes that include the SE European Bird Migration Network (SEEN), the European Union for Bird Ringing (EURING), the Ornithological Society of the Middle East (OSME), Birdlife International, and the IUCN International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Two-thirds of the *Checklist* reveals the results obtained from direct scientific fieldwork in various locations. The first three chapters present the results obtained from the data of the ringing activity of 120 species (20 of them portrayed in images), information obtained from the examination of skin specimens of 28 birds taken from the collection of the EEC's Natural History Museum, and the results of general monitoring activities (with 15 species shown in photographs). Later chapters present a short literature review that includes historical accounts since 1860, a map of the most important birding areas in Palestine, and finally the actual checklist that identifies 373 bird species according to their order, family, subfamily, English and Latin names, and current status (identifying 22 orders, 64 families, 30 subfamilies, 186 genera, and 373 species).

Birds are listed according to a number of categories, such as resident breeder, passage migrant, winter visitor, vagrant, and summer visitor (breeding and non-breeding). Other categories include birds that are endangered and birds that are considered invasive. For example, the booklet presents four birds that are considered extinct or extinct-breeder species: the Ostrich (*struthio camelus*), the Brown Fish Owl (*Bubo zeylonensis*), and another two species that no longer breed in Palestine, namely the Lammergeier (*Gypaetus barbatus*) and the Lappet-faced Vulture (*Torgos tracheliotus*).

The publication ends with recommendations to the Palestinian Authority on measures that should be implemented at the national level in order to protect the treasures of nature in Palestine.



The Blue-cheeked Bee-eater is a strongly migratory species.



The Common Kingfisher is resident in most of its range.



The European Bee-eater is strongly migratory.



The carnivorous Red-backed Shrike eats insects, small birds, and mammals.



The Red-breasted Flycatcher resembles, but is not related to, a European robin.



The Eurasian Hoopoe raises its crest when excited.

## Amer Zahr



When Amer Zahr first got into comedy, there were just a few Palestinian comedians. Now, there is a whole crop. But Amer is not merely a comedian who happens to be a Palestinian. He is a comedian, an activist, an academic, and a Palestinian. All at once. All the time. He graduated from law school, and even though his mother tells everyone he is a lawyer, he doesn't practice the profession.

Amer was born in Jordan and raised in the United States, returning to Palestine whenever he can to perform, conduct workshops, or just be. His parents are Palestinian refugees from Nazareth and Akka. His mother, a Muslim, and his father, a Christian, met as young activists in California in the 1970s. Like every Palestinian, Amer was raised with Palestine ever residing on the tip of his tongue. Activism has always been at the core of his life. As he says on stage, "When Santa asked me what I wanted for Christmas, I replied, 'Enforcement of UN Resolutions 194 and 242.'"

After coming up through the ranks and making some marks in the comedy world, Amer is now one of the most in-demand Arab American comedians out there. He is currently producing a show titled *Being Palestinian Makes Me Smile*, which features him and three other Palestinian comedians, Said Durrah, Mona Aburmishan, and Mike Easmeil. The show has been featured at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC, and New York City's world-famous Carnegie

Hall. He is the only Arab American comedian ever to headline a show at both venues, two of the world's most prestigious stages.

Amer currently resides in Dearborn, Michigan, the unofficial capital of Arab America. He has produced a comedy festival there each year since 2013, and the fourth installment will occur on November 18 and 19, 2016. He also founded the "1001 Laughs Ramallah Comedy Festival," which will feature its second installment this summer, from August 22–26, 2016, with shows in Ramallah, Jerusalem, and Bethlehem. He is also an adjunct law professor at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law, where he teaches on Arab Americans and their history in the American legal system.

Palestinians always have stories to tell. And Amer is no exception. As he says in one of his most famous jokes, Palestinian can't ever talk to anyone without first saying, "In 1948..." Comedy is one of the vehicles of the greater Palestinian narrative. It can be humanizing, both for ourselves and for others. It can create some comfort in the face of a life riddled with abnormalities, anomalies, and aberrations. Usually, a comedian's job is to point out the absurdities in culture, politics, and society. For a Palestinian, this job is quite easy. Palestinian life is characterized by the daily experience of living in some sort of alternate universe where the usual norms of law, justice, and basic rights are themselves alien. The comedian's job, however, is not only to observe these things, but also to effectively convey them, through humor, to all audiences. Amer has made a bet that comedy and Palestine can coexist and thrive. So far, it seems, he's right.

## Monastery of St. George of Koziba in Wadi Qelt

*Courtesy of VisitPalestine.ps*

Stretching from the suburbs of Jerusalem to Jericho and the Jordan Valley, Wadi Qelt is an amazing experience for hikers and nature lovers. Rocks, caves, and eroded pebbles line the path that follows the valley. Visitors can also see the remains of a Roman aqueduct that was commissioned by Herod the Great to bring spring water from the valley to his winter palace and garden (*Tulul Abu el-Alayiq*). Evergreen trees and bushes along the aqueduct highlight the well-known grazing spot for herds of sheep and goats led by the local Bedouins.

The monastic movement in the valley flourished during the Byzantine period due to the availability of freshwater. Many of the caves and shelters along the wadi were densely populated by monks.

One such *lavra* was turned into what is currently the main landmark of Wadi Qelt – the beautiful and serene Greek Orthodox Monastery of St. George that clings to a cliff and overlooks the spring. It was founded around 480 AD by John of Thebes, who, accompanied by a few other hermits, settled around the cave where they believed Elijah stopped on his way to Sinai and was fed by ravens (1 Kings 17:5-6). However, the monastery was named after George of Koziba, who lived there in the sixth century. During his time, the place became an important spiritual center, but the church was damaged during the Persian invasion in 614 AD. The bones and skulls of the martyred monks can still be seen today in the monastery chapel. Crusaders partly restored the







church in the twelfth century, but the Greek monk Callinicos undertook the task of complete restoration between 1878 and 1901, giving the cluster its current shape. The bell tower was added in 1952.

The monastery complex encloses two churches, the Church of the Holy Virgin and the Church of St. George and St. John, both rich in paintings, icons, and mosaics. The cave-church of St. Elijah can be reached by stairs from the inner court of the monastery. From this cave, a narrow tunnel provides an escape route to the top of the mountain.

St. George's is one of only five monasteries in the Jerusalem wilderness that still function. The remains of around 60 Christian religious

buildings dating to the Byzantine period were found in this area.

It takes little more than one hour to reach the monastery on foot from Jericho, through Wadi Qelt. It can also be reached from the main road (No. 1) by car. There is a prepared parking area from which visitors must walk down a steep and winding (but paved) path for about 15 minutes or... hire a donkey from a local Bedouin. Opening hours are Sunday to Friday, 8:00 am – 11:00 am and 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm, and Saturday, 9:00 am – 12 noon.

Find out about other interesting destinations at [www.visitpalestine.ps](http://www.visitpalestine.ps). For more information, contact Visit Palestine Information Center in Bethlehem at [info@visitpalestine.ps](mailto:info@visitpalestine.ps) or call (02) 277-1992.



Solo Exhibition

# Fractured Time

By Monther Jawabreh  
 July 25 – August 25, 2016  
 Gallery One

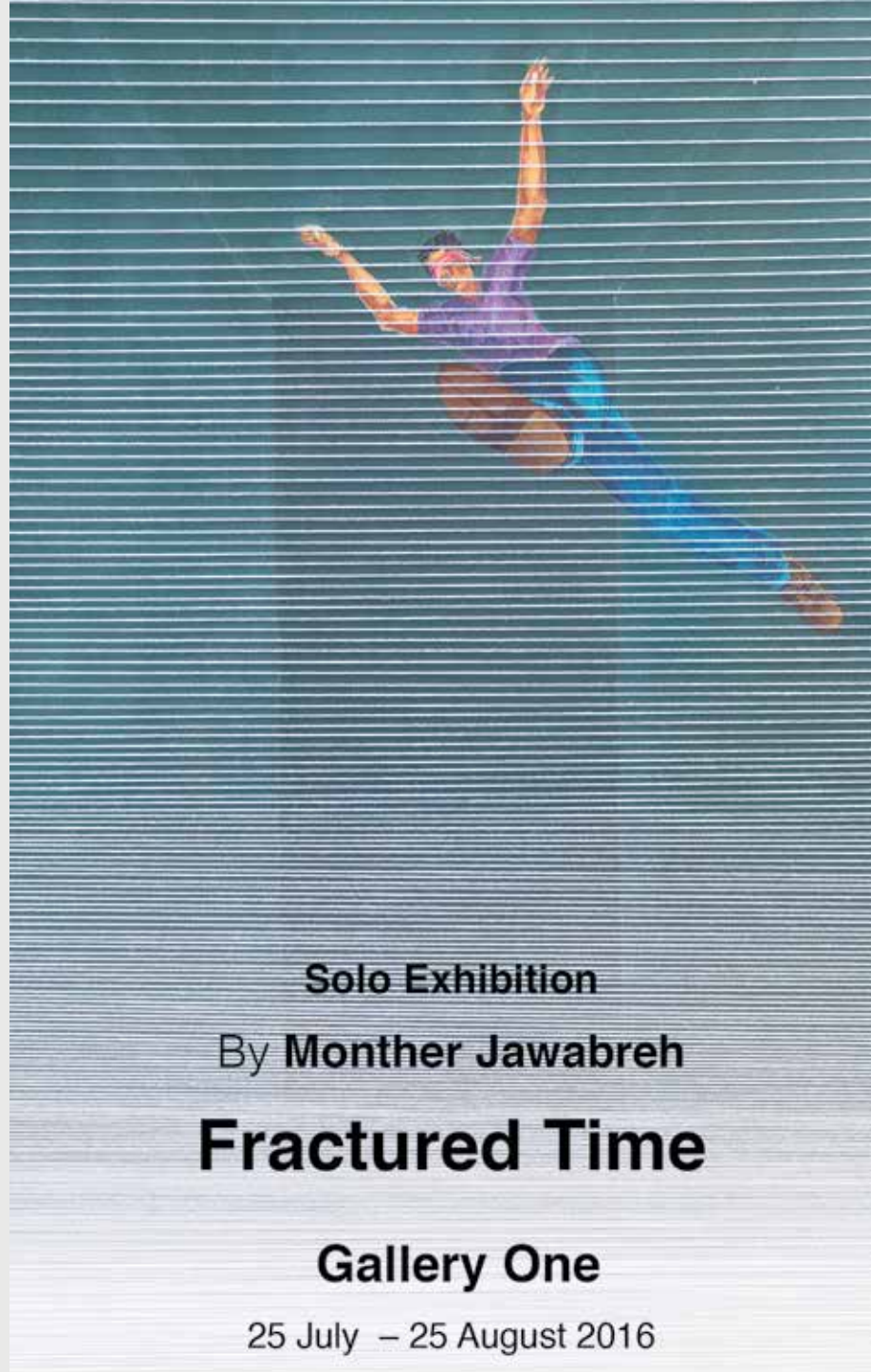
Born in 1976 in Al Aroub Refugee Camp in Bethlehem, Monther Jawabreh graduated from Al Najah University in Nablus with a bachelor's degree in fine arts. He has participated in a number of solo and group exhibitions locally and internationally, including in such countries as Germany, United Kingdom, Norway, Japan, Syria, and others.

In his new series of work "Fractured Time," Jawabreh reflects on Gaston Bachelard's philosophical research on time, mainly on the concept: We die and we live in time, moments suspended between two voids, the void of the past and the void of the future.

Having acted in Raed Andoni's film that deals with prisons, and thus having experienced voluntary detention for 45 days, Jawabreh reflects on time by producing a series of artworks with paintings, installations, and video art that take us on a journey in time that cannot be measured or substantiated. In his work we find that time can be grasped only through the woven threads that are superimposed on a work on cloth or wood, creating a fragile gateway to the construction of the work; and if the thread loses its strength and magnitude, the work itself becomes nonexistent. In "Fractured Time," Jawabreh uses wool yarn and relies on the employment of black and white colors to convey inevitable and limited options, as well as a clear vision of this experiment without lowering it into the trap of aesthetics at the expense of the subject.

With impeccable artistic talent and a solid command of technique, Jawabreh's paintings are highly captivating human expressions. His fabulous color coordination and sophisticated compositions of the acrylic paintings underneath the woolen threads require deep attention and careful examination, which reveal the nuanced shapes, stories, and messages that begin to emerge, full of soulful impact.

*Fractured Time 2*  
 Archival pigment print on cotton rag paper  
 200 x 60 cm, 2016  
 Edition 1 of 1



Solo Exhibition

By Monther Jawabreh

# Fractured Time

Gallery One

25 July – 25 August 2016



13 Haddad Building, 1st Floor, Khalil Sakakini Street  
 Ramallah, Palestine. Phone number: +970 02 2989181  
 Website: [www.galleryone.ps](http://www.galleryone.ps) Email: [info@galleryone.ps](mailto:info@galleryone.ps)

Gallery hours: daily from 11:00 am until 8:00 pm except Fridays

## EAST JERUSALEM

### CONCERTS

Friday 5

19:00 – 22:00 Open MIC Night is an evening of all genres. Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Old City, Jerusalem.

Saturday 6

19:00 Dawween Band presents music and singing from Palestine through the Palestine International Festival, organized by the Popular Art Centre. The Palestinian National Theater.

### FILM SCREENINGS

Friday 12

20:00-22:00 Film Screening at Al Ma'mal Rooftop. For the name of the film to be featured, please visit [www.almamal.foundation.org](http://www.almamal.foundation.org). Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Old City, Jerusalem.

## ABU DIS

Wednesday 17 – Saturday 20

PALIMUN 2016 is the first university-level Palestine Model United Nations Conference that is intended to bring internationals and locals together to engage in politics, economics, health, and global diplomacy. The conference will allow all parties to understand the various perspectives on complicated international issues through simulating authentic contemporary and historical UN committees and regional bodies in which students will role-play chairs and delegates using standard protocols and procedures in order to grapple with tough problems and build consensus around resolutions. Al Quds University.

For further information and registration, please visit [www.palimun.alquds.edu](http://www.palimun.alquds.edu).

## BETHLEHEM

### SPECIAL EVENTS

Thursday 4 – Sunday 7

10:00 – 12 midnight The 4<sup>th</sup> Bet Lahem Live Festival is a grassroots, nonprofit initiative that is made possible due to the generous support of actors in our community. Presented by the Holy Land Trust, the festival attracts more than 20,000 visitors each year, celebrating culture through community events that challenge local and international notions of justice, faith, and culture in a globalized world. Old city of Bethlehem.

Monday 1 – Thursday 11

9:00 – 13:00 Heritage in Our Hands is a summer camp for children between the ages of 8 and 12 that includes art activities and site visits in and around Bethlehem. Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation (CCHP).

Sunday 7

8:00 – 16:00 Tour of Bethlehem organized by the Palestinian Association for Cultural Exchange (PACE) that will take you on a voyage of discovery in the Bethlehem area, which is full of attractive sites and beautiful landscapes.

For further information and registration, please contact PACE at [info@pace.ps](mailto:info@pace.ps).

### THEATER

Friday 5

17:00 *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, a puppetry play presented by Yes Theater in cooperation with the Bet Lahem Live Festival, tells a classic tale from *One Thousand and One Nights*. It is one of the most familiar tales of the *Arabian Nights*, and has been widely retold and performed in many media, especially for children. Bet Lahem Live Festival stage, Star Street.

## RAMALLAH and EL-BIREH

### CONCERTS

Monday 1

20:00 – 22:00 Souad Massi, a singer from Algeria, is presented by the Popular Art Centre through the Palestine International Festival. Ramallah Cultural Palace.

Thursday 4

18:00 Majaz Ensemble is a Palestinian musical band that was established by a group of Jerusalemite youth in 2014. Its artistic production blends Arabic and Western classical music, and its melodies are arranged by merging these two musical styles into one unique frame that reflects a new artistic reality that is a vibrant extension of civilizations that left a cultural and musical impact on Palestine centuries ago. The Danish House in Palestine.

### SPECIAL EVENTS

July 27 – August 8

The 17th Annual Palestine International Festival for Dance and Music 2016 is a creative culture and arts project that communicates with the outside world and contributes to breaking the decades-long cultural siege that has been imposed on Palestine and Palestinian people. Organized by the Popular Art Centre to contribute to the revival and restructuring of the artistic and cultural scene in Palestine, it is held in several Palestinian cities, including Ramallah, Jenin, Hebron, Gaza, and Jerusalem.

For more information, please visit [www.popularartcentre.org](http://www.popularartcentre.org).

August 11 – 20

The second Palestine Choral Festival brings together more than 50 choirs from the West Bank, Gaza, 1948 Palestine, the United Kingdom, France, and Australia, as well as soprano soloist Dima Bawab, for a series of concerts, children's singing days, workshops, opera performances, and other events. Alongside Palestinian musical ensembles, performances will take place throughout the country over a ten-day period. Organized by the Choir of London in cooperation with the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music.

For venues and concert times, please visit [www.palestinechoralfestival.org](http://www.palestinechoralfestival.org).

August 12 – September 30

10:00 – 22:00 Al-Harajeh Market is organized by Ramallah Municipality to revive Ramallah's old city and promote Palestinian cultural heritage through hosting a vibrant marketplace for various handicrafts every Friday in an artistic atmosphere. Near the Ottoman court, old city, Ramallah.

### EXHIBITIONS

July 25 to Thursday 25

11:00 – 20:00 "Fractured Time," a solo exhibition that features works by the Palestinian artist Monther Jawabreh, is open daily except Fridays. Gallery One.

## JENIN

### CONCERTS

Thursday 4

20:00 – 22:00 Yalalan Group presents music and singing from Palestine through the Palestine International Festival, organized by the Popular Art Centre. Jenin Secondary Boys School.

### DANCE

Tuesday 2

20:00 Bara'em El-Funoun's dance production is presented by the Popular Art Centre through the Palestine International Festival. Jenin Secondary Boys School.

Friday 5

20:00 Naqsh Dance Troupe is presented by the Popular Art Centre and Naqsh Popular Art Center through the Palestine International Festival. Jenin Secondary Boys School.

### SPECIAL EVENTS

Sunday 21

8:00 – 16:00 Tour of Jenin organized by the Palestinian Association for Cultural Exchange (PACE) that will take you on a voyage of

discovery in the city of Jenin and some surrounding villages and sites.

For further information and registration, please contact PACE at [info@pace.ps](mailto:info@pace.ps).

## HEBRON

### CONCERTS

Monday 8

20:00 Coral Al-Thawra, the Revolution Choir, presents a new production with music and singing in the Palestine International Festival, organized by the Popular Art Centre. Halhoul Secondary Boys School.

### DANCE

Sunday 7

20:00 Naqsh Dance Troupe is presented by the Popular Art Centre and Naqsh Popular Art Center through the Palestine International Festival. Halhoul Secondary Boys School.

### THEATER

Monday 1 – Wednesday 3

12:00 *Sameh* is a play based on theater-of-the-oppressed techniques about a Palestinian man who has dreams, ambitions, aspirations, hopes, passion, and a lot of worries, but his destiny is to be born into a patriarchal family in which the father controls everything. What can he do to change his life for the better? Yes Theatre.

Thursday 4, Saturday 6

12:30 *Disbursed Hiroshima* is a stage reading (English SUB) for a script improvised from real stories collected from interviews with survivors who witnessed the atomic bomb in 1945. Yes Theatre.

## INTERNATIONAL

### SPECIAL EVENTS

Friday 19 – Saturday 20

20:00 – 5:00 White Lady Festival has been one of the summer highlights over the past three decades in Haapsalu, Estonia. The old town is transformed into a buzzing marketplace, and the vibrant cultural program lasts from dusk till dawn. As darkness begins to fall, the White Lady of Haapsalu begins her open-air performance. A delegation from Bethlehem will participate as part of the twinning relationship between the cities. Haapsalu, Estonia.



**Carmel Cultural Foundation**  
Tel: 298 7375, Fax: 298 7374

**Dar Zahran Heritage Building**  
Telfax: 296 3470, Mob: 0599 511 800  
info@darzahran.org, www.darzahran.org

**El-Funoun Dance Troupe**  
Tel: 240 2853, Fax: 240 2851  
info@el-funoun.org, www.el-funoun.org

**Franco-German Cultural Centre Ramallah**  
Tel: 298 1922 / 7727, Fax: 298 1923  
info@ccf-goethe.org, www.ccf-goethe-ramallah.org

**Gallery One**  
Tel: 298 9181, info@galleryone.ps

**Greek Cultural Centre - "Macedonia"**  
Telefax: 298 1736 / 298 0546  
makdonia@palnet.com

**In'ash Al-Uusra Society- Center for Heritage & Folklore Studies**  
Tel: 240 1123 / 240 2876, Telefax: 240 1544  
usra@palnet.com, www.inash.org

**International Academy of Arts**  
Tel: 296 7601, info@artacademy.ps

**Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center**  
Tel: 298 7374, Fax: 296 6820  
sakakini@sakakini.org, www.sakakini.org

**Mahmoud Darwish Foundation and Museum**  
Tel: 295 2808, Fax: 295 2809  
Info@darwishfoundation.org  
www.darwishfoundation.org

**Manar Cultural Center**  
Tel: 295 7937, Fax: 298 7598

**Mazra'a Qibliyeh Heritage and Tourism Centre**  
Telefax: 281 5825, mazraaheritage@yahoo.com  
www.geocities.com/mazraaheritage/

**Nawa Institute**  
Tel: 297 0190, info@nawainstitute.org

**Palestine Writing Workshop**  
Mob: 0597 651 408, www.palestineworkshop.com

**Palestinian Association for Contemporary Art PACA**  
Tel: 296 7601, fax: 295 1849  
paca@pal-paca.org, www.pal-paca.org

**Palestinian Association for Cultural Exchange (PACE)**  
Tel: 240 7611, Telfax: 240 7610  
pace@p-ol.com, www.pace.ps

**Popular Art Center**  
Tel: 240 3891, Fax: 240 2851  
info@popularartcentre.org  
www.popularartcentre.org

**Ramallah Center for Human Rights Studies (RCHRS)**  
Tel: 241 3002

**Ramallah Cultural Palace**  
Tel: 294 5555, Fax: 295 2107  
rcevents@ramallah-city.ps

**RIWAQ: Centre for Architectural Conservation**  
Tel: 240 6887, Fax: 240 6986  
riwaq@palnet.com, www.riwaq.org

**Sandouq Elajab Theatre**  
Tel: 296 5638, 295 3206  
sandouqelajab@yahoo.com

**Sareyyet Ramallah - First Ramallah Group (FRG)**  
Tel: 295 2690 - 295 2706, Fax: 298 0583  
sareyyet@sareyyet.ps, www.sareyyet.ps

**Sharek Youth Forum**  
Tel: 296 7741, Fax: 296 7742  
info@sharek.ps, www.sharek.ps

**Shashat**  
Tel: 297 3336, Fax: 297 3338  
info@shashat.org, www.shashat.org

**Tamer Institute for Community Education**  
Tel: 298 6121 / 2, Fax: 298 8160  
tamer@palnet.com, www.tamerinst.org

**The Danish House in Palestine (DHIP)**  
TeleFax: 298 8457, info@dhip.ps, www.dhip.ps

**The Edward Said National Conservatory of Music**  
Tel: 295 9070, Fax: 295 9071  
info@ncm.birzeit.edu, www.birzeit.edu/music

**The Palestinian Circus School**  
Tel: 281 2000, 0568 880 024  
www.palcircus.ps, info@palcircus.ps

**The Palestinian Network of Art Centres**  
Tel: 298 0036, 296 4348/9, Fax: 296 0326  
imian\_aoun@yahoo.com

**The Spanish Cultural Center**  
Tel: 296 9600, Mob: 0595 803 508  
centrohispanopalestino@gmail.com

**Young Artist Forum**  
Telefax: 296 7654, yaf@palnet.com

**Zawyeh Art Gallery**  
Mob: 0597 994 997  
anani.ziad@gmail.com, www.zawyeh.net

## GAZA STRIP (08)

**Al-Qattan Centre for the Child**  
Tel: 283 9929, Fax: 283 9949  
reem@qcc.qattanfoundation.org  
www.qattanfoundation.org/qcc

**Arts & Crafts Village**  
Telefax: 284 6405  
artvg@palnet.com, www.gazavillage.org

**Ashtar for Culture & Arts**  
Telefax: 283 3565, atlas9@palnet.com

**Culture & Light Centre**  
Telefax: 286 5896, ifarah@palnet.com

**Dialogpunkt Deutsch Gaza (Goethe-Institut)**  
Tel: 282 0203, Fax: 282 1602

**Fawanees Theatre Group**  
Telefax: 288 4403

**French Cultural Centre**  
Tel: 286 7883, Fax: 282 8811  
ccfgaza@consulfrance-jerusalem.org

**Gaza Theatre**  
Tel: 282 4860, Fax: 282 4870

**Global Production and Distribution**  
Telefax: 288 4399, artglobal@yahoo.com

**Holst Cultural Centre**  
Tel: 281 0476, Fax: 280 8896, mrcrg@palnet.com

**Theatre Day Productions**  
Telefax: 283 6766, tdpgaza@palnet.com

**Windows from Gaza For Contemporary Art**  
Mob: 0599 781 227 - 0599 415 045  
info@artwfg.ps



# ACCOMMODATION

## EAST JERUSALEM (02)

**7 Arches Hotel**  
Tel: 626 7777, Fax: 627 1319  
svnarch@bezeqint.net, www.7arches.com

**Addar Hotel** (30 suites; bf; mr; res)  
Tel: 626 3111, Fax: 626 0791, www.addar-hotel.com

**Alcazar Hotel** (38 rooms; bf; mr; res)  
Tel: 628 1111; Fax: 628 7360  
admin@jrscazar.com, www.jrscazar.com

**Ambassador Hotel** (122 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)  
Tel: 541 2222, Fax: 582 8202  
reservation@jerusalemambassador.com  
www.jerusalemambassador.com

**American Colony Hotel** (84 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)  
Tel: 627 9777, Fax: 627 9779  
reserv@arnool.co.il, www.americancolony.com

**Austrian Hospice**  
Tel: 626 5800, Fax: 627 1472  
office@austrianhospice.com, www.austrianhospice.com

**Azzahra Hotel** (15 rooms; res)  
Tel: 628 2447, Fax: 628 3960  
azzahrahotel@shabaka.net, www.azzahrahotel.com

**Capitol Hotel** (54 rooms; bf; mr; res)  
Tel: 628 2561/2, Fax: 626 4352

**Christmas Hotel**  
Tel: 628 2588, Fax: 626 4417  
christmas@bezeqint.net, www.christmas-hotel.com

**Commodore Hotel** (45 rooms; cf; mr; res)  
Tel: 627 1414, Fax: 628 4701  
info@commodore-jer.com, www.commodore-jer.com

**Gloria Hotel** (94 rooms; mr; res)  
Tel: 628 2431, Fax: 628 2401, gloriahl@netvision.net.il

**Golden Walls Hotel** (112 rooms)  
Tel: 627 2416, Fax: 626 4658  
info@goldenwalls.com, www.goldenwalls.com

**Holy Land Hotel** (105 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)  
Tel: 627 2888, Fax: 628 0265  
info@holylanhotel.com, www.holylanhotel.com

**ibis Styles Jerusalem Sheikh Jarrah** (91 rooms)  
Tel: 578 3100, Fax: 578 3129, www.ibis.com

**Jerusalem Hotel** (14 rooms; bf; mr; res; live music)  
Tel: 628 3282, Fax: 628 3282  
raed@jrshotel.com, www.jrshotel.com

**Jerusalem Meridian Hotel** (74 rooms; bf; mr; res)  
Tel: 628 5212, Fax: 628 5214  
www.jerusalem-meridian.com

**Jerusalem Panorama Hotel** (74 rooms; bf; mr; res)  
Tel: 628 4887, Fax: 627 3699  
panorama@alqudsnet.com  
www.jerusalempanoramahotel.com

**Hashimi Hotel**  
Tel: 628 4410, Fax: 628 4667, info@hashimihotel.com

**Knights Palace Guesthouse** (50 rooms)  
Tel: 628 2537, Fax: 628 2401, kp@actcom.co.il

**Legacy Hotel**  
Tel: 627 0800, Fax: 627 7739  
info@jerusalemlegacy.com, www.jerusalemlegacy.com

**Metropole Hotel**  
Tel: 628 2507, Fax: 628 5134

**Mount of Olives Hotel** (61 rooms; bf; mr; res)  
Tel: 628 4877, Fax: 626 4427  
info@mtolives.com, www.mtolives.com

**National Hotel** (99 rooms; bf; cr; res; cf)  
Tel: 627 8880, Fax: 627 7007  
www.nationalhotel-jerusalem.com

**New Imperial Hotel** (45 rooms)  
Tel: 627 2000, Fax: 627 1530

**New Metropole Hotel** (25 rooms; mr; res)  
Tel: 628 3846, Fax: 627 7485

**New Swedish Hostel**  
Tel: 627 7855, Fax: 626 4124  
swedishhost@yahoo.com  
www.geocities.com/swedishhostel

**Notre Dame Guesthouse** (142 rooms, Su, bf, mr, cr, res, ter, cf, pf)

Tel: 627 9111, Fax: 627 1995  
info@notredamecenter.org  
www.notredamecenter.org

**Petra Hotel and Hotel**  
Tel: 628 6618

**Pilgrims Inn Hotel** (16 rooms; bf; mr; res)  
Tel: 627 2416, info@goldenwalls.com

**Ritz Hotel Jerusalem** (104 rooms, bf, mr)  
Tel: 626 9900, Fax: 626 9910  
reservations@jerusalemritz.com  
www.jerusalemritz.com

**Rivoli Hotel**  
Tel: 628 4871, Fax: 627 4879

**Savoy Hotel** (17 rooms)  
Tel: 628 3366, Fax: 628 8040

**Seven Arches Hotel** (197 rooms; bf; mr; res)  
Tel: 626 7777, Fax: 627 1319  
svnarch@trendline.co.il

**St. Andrew's Scottish Guesthouse "The Scottie"** (19 rooms + Self Catering Apartment)  
Tel: 673 2401, Fax: 673 1711  
standjer@netvision.net.il, www.scotsguesthouse.com

**St George Hotel Jerusalem**  
Tel: 627 7232 Fax: 627 7233  
info@stgeorgehoteljerusalem.com  
www.stgeorgehoteljerusalem.com

**St. George's Pilgrim Guest House** (25 rooms; bf; res)  
Tel: 628 3302, Fax: 628 2253  
sgghostel@bezeqint.net

**St. Thomas Home**  
Tel: 628 2657, 627 4318, Fax: 626 4684  
aset@aset-future.com, www.aset-future.net

**Victoria Hotel** (50 rooms; bf; res)  
Tel: 627 4466, Fax: 627 4171  
Info@4victoria-hotel.com, www.4victoria-hotel.com

## BETHLEHEM (02)

**Alexander Hotel** (42 rooms; bf; mr; res)  
Tel: 277 0780, Fax: 277 0782

**Al-Salam Hotel** (26 rooms; 6f; mr; cf; res)  
Tel: 276 4083/4, Fax: 277 0551, samhotel@p-ol.com

**Angel Hotel Beit Jala**  
Tel: 276 6880, Fax: 276 6884  
info@angelhotel.ps, www.angelhotel.ps

**Ararat Hotel** (101 rooms, mr, ter, cf)  
Tel: 274 9888, Fax: 276 9887  
info@ararat-hotel.com, www.ararat-hotel.com

**Beit Al-Baraka Youth Hostel** (19 rooms)  
Tel: 222 9288, Fax: 222 9288

**Bethlehem Bible College Guest House** (11 rooms; mr; pf)  
Tel: 274 1190, guesthouse@bethbc.org

**Beit Ibrahim Guesthouse**  
Tel: 274 2613, Fax: 274 4250  
reception@luthchurch.com  
www.abrahams-herberge.com

**Bethlehem Hotel** (209 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)  
Tel: 277 0702, Fax: 277 0706, bh@p-ol.com

**Bethlehem Inn** (36 rooms; bf; mr; res)  
Tel: 274 2424, Fax: 274 2423





### Muntaza Restaurant and Garden

Barbecues and Sandwiches  
Tel: 295 6835

**Na3Na3 Café** Italian and Oriental Cuisine  
Tel: 296 4606

**Nai Resto Café** - Argeeleh  
Mob: 0595 403 020

**Newz Bar** Lounge and "Le Gourmet"  
pastries' corner

**Mövenpick Hotel Ramallah**  
Tel: 298 5888

**Osama's Pizza** Pizza and Fast Food  
Tel: 295 3270

**Orjuwan Lounge** Palestinian-Italian Fusion  
Tel: 297 6870

**Rama café Resto/Bar**  
Tel: 298 5376

**Palestine Revolving Restaurant**  
(23rd floor, Palestine Trade Tower)  
Tel: 294 6888, Fax: 297 3574

**PASTICHE Palestine**  
Tel: 298 5755

**Peter's Place Restaurant & Bar**  
(Taybeh) Palestinian Cuisine  
Tel: 289 8054, Mob: 0547 043 029

**Pesto Café and Restaurant** Italian Cuisine  
Tel: 297 0705, 297 0706

**Pizza Inn** Pizza and Fast Food  
Tel: 298 1181/2/3

**Philadelphia Restaurant** Middle Eastern Menu  
Tel: 295 1999

**Philistia Restaurant & Catering**  
Palestinian cuisine  
Tel: 298 9051

**Plaza Jdoudna Restaurant and Park** Middle Eastern Menu  
Tel: 295 6020, Fax: 296 4693

**Pronto Resto-Café** Italian Cuisine  
Tel: 298 7312

**QMHI**  
Tel: 297 34511

**Roma Café** Italian Light Food  
Tel: 296 4228

**Rukab's Ice Cream** Ice Cream and Soft Drinks  
Tel: 295 3467

**Saba Sandwiches** Falafel and Sandwiches  
Tel: 296 0116

**Samer** Middle Eastern Food  
Tel: 240 5338 - 240 3088

**Scoop**  
Tel: 295 9189

**Sangria's** French, Italian, and Mexican Cuisine  
Tel: 295 6808

**Shishapresso**  
Tel: 296 6060

**Sinatra Gourmet** Italian and American Cuisine  
Tel: 297 1028

**Sindyan Restaurant and café**  
Tel: 298 9575

**Sky Bar** (Ankars Suites and Hotel) Continental Cuisine  
Tel: 295 2602

**Sky Gate Terrace and Bar**  
Tel: 294 6888, Fax: 297 3574

**Sushi Restaurant** (Caesar Hotel)  
Tel: 297 9400

**Mövenpick Hotel Ramallah**  
Tel: 298 5888

**Stones** Continental Cuisine  
Tel: 296 6038

**Tabash** (Jifna Village) Barbecues  
Tel: 281 0932

**Tal El-Qamar Roof** Middle Eastern and Western Menu  
Tel: 298 7905/ 6

**TCHE TCHE**  
Tel: 296 4201

**THE Q GARDEN Roof-top garden** International Cuisine  
Tel: 295 7727

**Tomasso's** Pizza and Fast Food  
Tel: 240 9991/ 2

**Tropicana** Mexican Cuisine, Oriental Menu, and Zarb  
Tel: 297 5661

**UpTOWN** (Ankars Suites and Hotel) Continental Cuisine  
Tel: 295 2602

**Values Restaurant** International and Seafood  
Tel: 296 6997

**Vatche's Garden Restaurant** European Style  
Tel: 296 5966, 296 5988

**Zam'n Premium Coffee** Coffee Shop Style  
Tel: 295 0600

**Zaki Taki** Sandwiches  
Tel: 296 3643

**Zam'n Premium Coffee**  
**Masyoun** Coffee Shop Style  
Tel: 298 1033

**Zarour Bar BQ** Barbecues and Oriental Cuisine  
Tel: 295 6767, 296 4480  
Fax: 296 4357

**Zeit ou Zaater** Pastries and Snacks  
Tel: 295 4455

**Ziryab** Barbecues, Italian, and Oriental Cuisine  
Tel: 295 9093

## GAZA STRIP (08)

**Al Daar** Barbecues  
Tel: 288 5827

**Al-Deira** Mediterranean Cuisine  
Tel: 283 8100/200/300  
Fax: 2838400

**Almat'haf** Mediterranean Cuisine  
Tel: 285 8444, Fax: 285 8440

**Al-Molouke** Shawarma  
Tel: 286 8397

**Al-Salam** Seafood  
Tel: 282 2705, Telefax: 283 3188

**Avenue**  
Tel: 288 2100, 288 3100

**Big Bite** Fastfood  
Tel: 283 3666

**Carino's**  
Tel: 286 6343, Fax: 286 6353

**LATERNA**  
Tel: 288 9881, Fax: 288 9882

**Light House**  
Tel: 288 4884

**Mama House**  
Telefax: 282 3322, 282 2624

**Mazaj Coffee House**  
Tel: 286 8035

**Mazaj Resturant**  
Tel: 282 5003, Fax: 286 9078

**Orient House**  
Telefax: 282 8008, 282 8604

**Roots - The Club** Oriental Cuisine  
Tel: 288 8666, 282 3999, 282 3777

**Abu Mazen Restaurant**  
Tel: 221 3833, Fax: 229 3111

**Al Quds Restaurant**  
Tel: 229 7773, Fax: 229 7774

**Golden Rooster**  
Telefax: 221 6115

**Hebron Restaurant**  
Telefax: 222 7773

**Orient House Restaurant**  
Telefax: 221 1525

**Royal Restaurant**  
Tel: 222 7210



# ALESTINE ROAD MAP

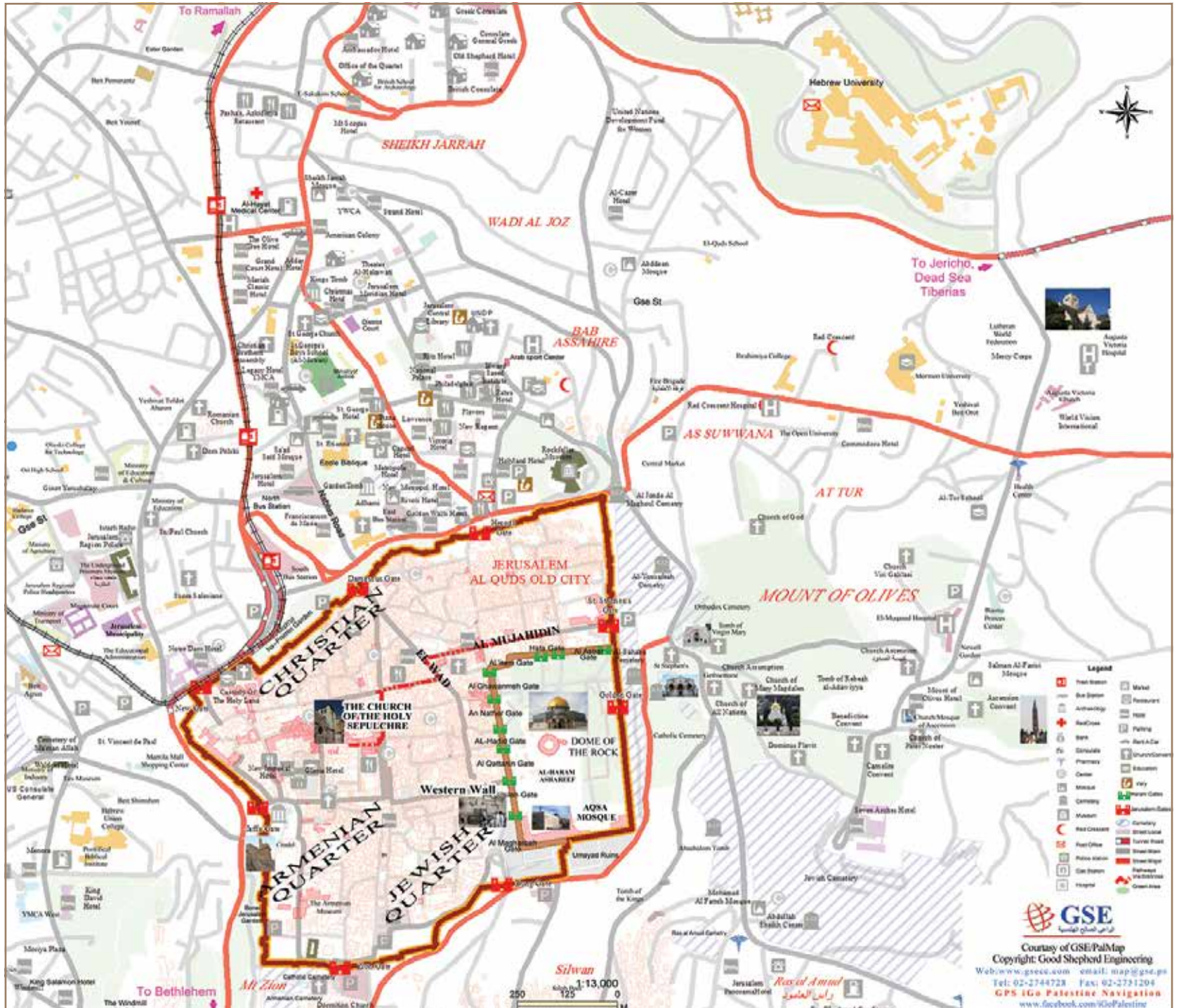


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## A Better World

You might have seen the caricature of the caged gorilla grabbing an older man by his necktie and shouting angrily “#@\*&% your theory of evolution, Darwin! I am not related to all these idiots.” As you can imagine, the background is filled with violent images – an ISIS-like character slitting the throat of someone, a bloody battle scene with a tank and wounded soldiers lying still, a policeman beating a young person, a dead baby with a vulture next to it, and a couple of dumb-looking characters making faces. The message is clear: the gorilla is shocked to see its descendants behave in such a savage manner. Spot on, Tarzan’s friend!

No one can deny the fact that we are living in a world marred by escalating violence. Nowhere is safe anymore; not a shopping center in Munich; not strolling along a boardwalk in Nice; not a club in Paris or Florida; not Brussels; not Istanbul; not Dhaka, and surely not Kabul, Myanmar, Baghdad, or anywhere in Syria. Mind you, apart from a civil war in Syria and to some extent in Iraq, the world is supposed to be at peace! I dare say that unfortunately the majority of the perpetrators of the extreme acts happening today come from our glorious part of the world, the Middle East!

The reasons for the current state of affairs are well beyond the scope of this column, but it is practically common knowledge now that malicious Occidental foreign policies have gotten all of us into this mess. The least we can say is that these foreign policies have created conditions that are ripe for the emergence of monsters with a doomsday agenda. In addition, with the decades of Saudi Arabian Wahhabi indoctrination that rejects anyone and any thought contrary to its own, coupled with the Arab Gulf States’ funding of fanatic factions with billions of dollars, the stage was set for such a cataclysmic situation.

I hate to be the prophet of doom, but I don’t see a safer world in the foreseeable future. In fact, political experts predict that it will get worse before it gets better. In the meantime (and apart from simply ducking), we could start with some major policy changes along with serious efforts to dry out the swamps of incitement, especially those that come through satellite channels. Obviously, much more is needed, but this would be a step in the right direction. Short of that, we will continue heading down an East-West collision course towards a culture war whose consequences only the Almighty knows.

**Sani P. Meo**  
Publisher



*Palestine Sunbird. Photo by Anton Khalilieh*





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