

## Jabal Moussa Important Bird Area



Jabal Moussa is one of nine new Global IBAs declared in Lebanon. It received this designation because it forms part of the most important bird migration route in Lebanon and is therefore on one of the most important flyways between wintering grounds in sub Saharan Africa and summer breeding sites in Europe and Russia. Birds of prey and other large soaring birds avoid dangerous and energy-inefficient sea crossings and instead rely on thermals: warm air rising from their overland flight paths that helps to maintain them aloft. Due to the relative positions of the Black, Caspian and Mediterranean seas, Lebanon lies at one of the most constricted points on this complex migration route. Although flocks of birds of prey and other soaring birds can be seen almost anywhere above Lebanon during migration times, there are places where high concentrations regularly occur, notably along the Mount Lebanon range. On the western side of these mountains birds tend to migrate at 750 to 1500 m above sea level, particularly along the lower reaches of Jabal Moussa.

Jabal Moussa was one of the sites included as part of the original three-year project to survey different areas in Lebanon for their designation as IBAs (see previous page). Following preliminary bird counts at Jabal Moussa in 2007, intensive work was carried out in 2008. On each of the survey days, fieldworkers scanned the sky and surrounding area with binoculars and telescopes and noted all soaring birds seen during a minimum period of four hours (unless

Jabal Moussa IBA is internationally important for the number of soaring birds that regularly pass through during spring and autumn.

**COUNTRY:**  
**LEBANON**

cut short by fog or low cloud). In spring, the species that were recorded most were White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*, White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*, Black Stork *C. nigra*, Common Crane *Grus grus*, Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina* and various buzzards (Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, Long-legged Buzzard *B. rufinus* or Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorous*). In the autumn, the most numerous species were Honey Buzzard (71% of all birds counted) and Lesser Spotted Eagle, with much smaller numbers of storks and cranes (and no pelicans) because these latter birds take a different route further east at this time of year.

Additional work at Jabal Moussa showed that it also has potential importance as a stopover site for other migrating birds. These were mainly pipits, chats, warblers and buntings, and a range of larger species that included Quail *Coturnix coturnix*, Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*, Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster*, Golden Orioles *Oriolus oriolus* and Corn Crakes *Crex crex*.

Breeding birds were assessed by walking and mapping the birds along two easily repeatable routes that together incorporated most of the habitat zones of Jabal Moussa. Mist netting on six days in April 2008 further helped to discover which birds were breeding (and others that were passing through). Most of the breeding birds were common species, including some of local interest because of their rarity in Lebanon (e.g. Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*, Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* and Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *P. orientalis*).

**Project leader:** Helen Demopoulos

**Partners:** The Jabal Moussa Society, Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon, BirdLife International, MAVA

Migrating birds at Jabal Moussa IBA (fieldwork recorded only a sample of birds passing so BirdLife International asked for numbers to be multiplied by 2 or 3).

Family	Fieldwork totals SPRING 2008 22 visits 20 Feb – 21 May	Extrapolated No. SPRING 2008	Fieldwork totals AUTUMN 2008 24 visits 12 Aug – 21 Oct	Extrapolated No. AUTUMN 2008
Pelicans	525	1,050 - 1,575	0	0
Storks	1,365	2,730 - 4,095	711	1,418 - 2,127
Cranes	172	344-516	30	60-90
Birds of prey	457	914 - 1,371	13,982	27,964 - 41,946