

# Strengthening Regional Cooperation to Mainstream Migratory Soaring Birds Safeguards:

Strong Partnership with Private Sector and CSOs in Middle East and Africa

PROJECT FULL NAME	COUNTRY & REGION		IMPLEMENTING AGENCY
<b>Mainstreaming Conservation of Migratory Soaring Birds into Key Productive Sectors along the Rift Valley / Red Sea flyway</b>	Regional (Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, and Sudan)		United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
			
GEF PROJECT ID: <b>9491</b>	<b>FOCAL AREAS</b>	<b>EXECUTING PARTNERS</b>	<b>IMPACT AREAS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Biodiversity</li> <li>▪ Land Degradation</li> <li>▪ Sustainable Forest</li> <li>▪ Poverty Reduction</li> <li>▪ Food Security</li> <li>▪ Socio-economic Benefits</li> <li>▪ Education</li> </ul>
PROJECT TYPE: <b>FSP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Biodiversity</li> </ul>	BirdLife International with BirdLife local partners	
GEF PERIOD: <b>GEF-6</b>	GEF Project Grant <b>\$3,500,000</b>	Co-financing Total <b>\$10,534,885</b>	

## Summary

This project has achieved successful and transformational results in mainstreaming migratory soaring bird (MSB) safeguards into the five key sectors directly affecting MSBs along the Rift Valley/Red Sea flyway: hunting, energy, tourism, agriculture, and waste management. The project has generated numerous global environmental benefits through the establishment of governmental and private sector policies and practices across the five sectors. Initiated by BirdLife International and its partners, the project also developed sector-specific guidance to share across the flyway countries in order to increase MSB conservation awareness and build the capacity of local partner organizations.

The Rift Valley/Red Sea flyway is the second most important MSB flyway in the world. Each year, over 1.5 million birds of at least 37 species, including five globally threatened species, use this corridor between their breeding grounds in Europe and West Asia and wintering areas in Africa. The project builds on success achieved in Tranche I of the project in GEF-3, which includes establishment of the Regional Flyway Facility (RFF). Under Tranche II, the project aims to mainstream MSB considerations into the productive sectors along the flyway that pose the greatest risk to the safe migration of these birds. The project focuses on 7 out of the 11 flyway countries:<sup>1</sup> Djibouti, Egypt,

<sup>1</sup> The 11 flyway countries are Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.



Workshop on "A Road Map to tackle illegal bird killing in the Middle East" (October 2021) @ BirdLife International

Eritrea, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, and Sudan. The project established strategic partnerships with the private sector and international financial institutions and applied an integrated approach to collaborate with local youth in all five sectors. The project's approach of implementing the project through international and local CSOs as executing partners worked well in a complex region to engage various stakeholders. With the RFF and local CSOs initiatives, regional corporation and exchange on MSB conservation are building trust, promoting dialogue, and fostering solid relationships in the flyway countries. Key elements of the success of the project are building on learning from Tranche I and the long commitment of GEF engagement.

## Results and benefits

The project's key results to date:

- MSB concerns incorporated into 94 new private sector policies and schemes, and 29 new and revised public sector policies on hunting, energy, tourism, agriculture, and waste management.<sup>2</sup>
- Around 5,802,706 hectares of land at bottlenecks along the flyway managed for hunting, energy, agriculture, and waste management applying "flyway sensitive" practices (exceeding the 40 percent increase in the project target).
- 20 new sites along the flyway apply "flyway sensitive" practices.
- 130 governments and private sector requested guidance on "flyway sensitive" best practices developed by the project.
- In Egypt, mandatory MSB safeguards are now built into Power Purchasing Agreements with private sector wind farm developers.
- In Ethiopia, the International Finance Corporation (IFC)/ World Bank (WB) have engaged BirdLife in sensitivity mapping for nine proposed sites for wind farm development.
- In Lebanon and Jordan, the project established strong ties with tourism operators and hotels to promote the guidance and best practice in the tourism sector that considers MSB risks and concerns.
- The project is effectively influencing the enactment of new and revised country sector policies and won two awards in 2020: the Energy Globe National Winner in Egypt, and the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature Environmental Protection "Good Practice of the Year" in Jordan.

<sup>2</sup> These 29 new and revised public sector policies include Inclusion of Important Bird Areas and flyway bottleneck sites into National Land Use Plans and the new Decree on regulating bird hunting and trade in Jordan, and bird monitoring obligation on energy sector in Egypt.

## Environmental challenge

The Rift Valley/Red Sea flyway is the second most important flyway for MSBs in the world, with over 1.5 million birds of at least 37 species, including five globally threatened species. They use this corridor between their breeding grounds in Europe and West Asia and wintering areas in Africa each year. However, this is where MSBs are the most physiologically stressed and for some species 50-100 percent of their global or regional populations pass along the route and through flyway "bottlenecks" (strategic points where soaring birds are funneled, either to make water crossings or to maintain flying height) in the space of just a few weeks. As a result, during the migration along the flyway these large, slow-moving birds are highly vulnerable to localized threats such as hunting and collision with wind turbines and associated power lines (particularly when they fly low or come into land). These threats could have severe impacts on global populations.

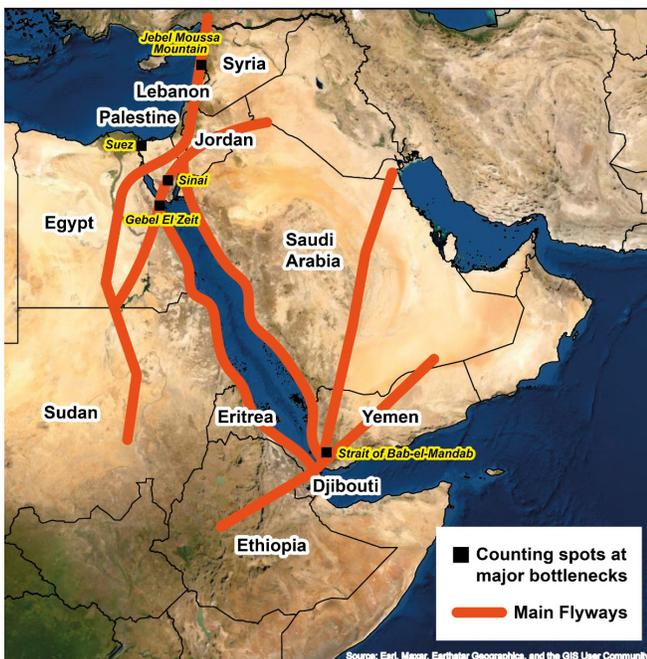


Figure 1: Map of the flyway @ BirdLife International

Unfortunately, it is difficult to predict where the birds will come down to roost or sit out bad weather because their migrations are dependent upon weather conditions. This makes it unfeasible to improve the safety of the flyway simply by protecting key sites. Consequently, conservation actions need to address the flyway as a whole, at a regional or multi-regional level rather than the national level and not through

a traditional site-based approach. Therefore, the project aims to mainstream MSB considerations into the productive sectors along the flyway that pose the greatest risk to the safe migration of soaring birds. The five key sectors that create the most extensive, urgent, and critical threats are hunting, energy, tourism, agriculture, and waste management. This is a complex project with a regional and multi-national scope ranging over five different sectors in a highly volatile region with multiple risks. Thus, the mainstreaming is challenging given varying ecological, socio-economic, and political contexts along the flyway exacerbated by a lack of policy and regulatory frameworks and institutional capacities. Lack of awareness on impacts of the five sectors on safe migration of MSB is another challenging factor.

## Integrated approach and key features

### Strategic partnership with private sector and international financial institutions

The project has achieved successful and transformational results in mainstreaming MSB safeguards into the energy, hunting, and tourism sectors in partnership with the private sector and has produced guidance and tools for key stakeholders. For the energy sector, the project has established a strategic partnership with the private sector and international financial institutions such as IFC/WB, Japanese International Corporation Agency, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and KfW to ensure that new projects in the region consider MSB risks and concerns. This strategic partnership has contributed to mainstreaming MSB concerns into 65 private sector energy projects along the flyway in Egypt, Jordan, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. This includes the upscaling of shutdown-on-demand operations, which is being successfully piloted at wind farms in the Gulf of Suez. In Jordan, eight windfarm projects have incorporated MSB pre-construction requirements into their designs.

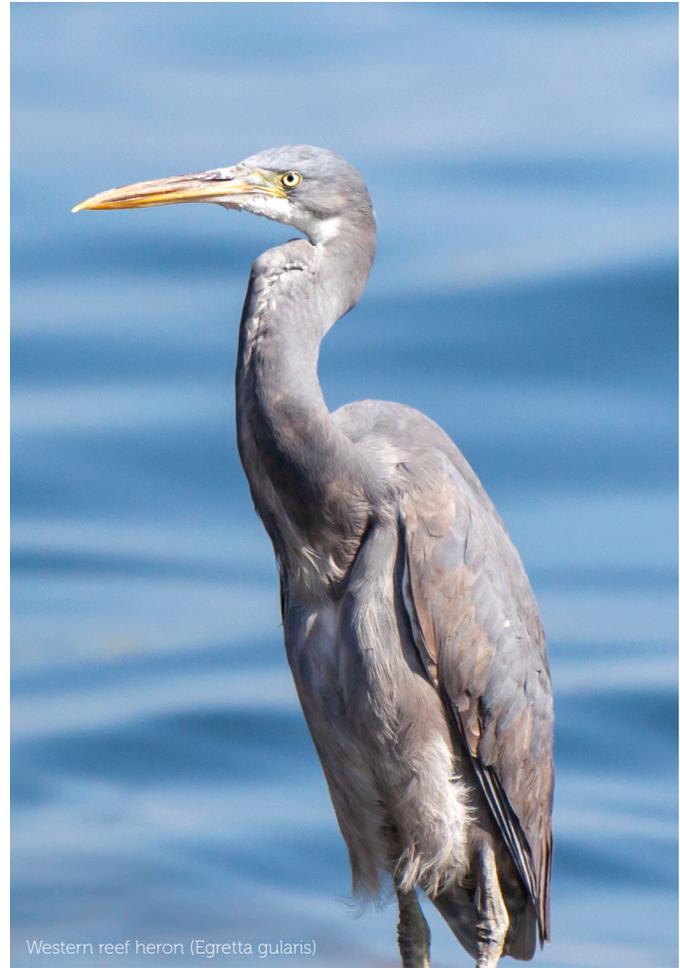
In Egypt, mandatory MSB safeguards are now built into Power Purchasing Agreements with private sector wind farm developers. In Ethiopia, the IFC/WB have engaged BirdLife in sensitivity mapping for nine sites proposed for wind farm development. Egypt, Jordan, and Ethiopia became members of the Convention of Migratory Species Energy Task Force on Reconciling Selected Energy Sector Developments with Migratory Species Conservation. Various guidance materials and case studies for wind energy, solar energy, and

electrical power lines to conserve migrating soaring birds in the Rift Valley/Red Sea Flyway were developed, including shutdown-on-demand for wind turbines and an impact assessment of power grids on MSB. These materials are tailored to different target audiences such as governments, development banks and donors, developers and consultants, partners/civil society. Sensitivity mapping developed by the project has attracted several international financial institutions and the Asian Development Bank is working on sensitivity mapping with BirdLife in India, Thailand, Myanmar, and Viet Nam.

### **Integrated approach collaborating with local youth**

The project contributed to a huge increase in land managed for hunting, energy, agriculture, and waste management under flyway-sensitive practices from the baseline 187,939 hectares to a total of 5,802,706 hectares, far exceeding the 40 percent increase in the target. Restrictions regarding illegal bird killing around Lake Nasser in Egypt and the designation in Lebanon of 25 Himas<sup>3</sup>—community-based conservation of key biodiversity sites—that give special considerations to MSBs largely account for this increase. Since 2004, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) is promoting Himas in collaboration with local authorities. These 25 Himas cover more than 8 percent of the total surface area of Lebanon. This approach involves local communities in decision making, promotes sustainable use of natural resources, and supports poverty alleviation by providing alternatives for income generation. Capacity building trainings targeting local youth to manage Himas raise awareness about MSB conservation as a regional issue and the importance of protecting nature in the region. SPNL expects these local training to contribute to regional peace-building through conservation across the flyway.

In Lebanon, the Ministry of Tourism is promoting eight locations, including five Himas, as tourism destinations, highlighting birdwatching MSBs at the sites. In collaboration with the Ministry, SPNL also organized training on ecotourism and biodiversity for tourist guides. Sixty-nine guides attended the training from all over Lebanon and these guides were certified as MSB friendly guides. The Ministry has adopted this ecotourism training that incorporates MSB issues as an official training program for a tour guide in Lebanon.



Western reef heron (*Egretta gularis*)

## **Lessons learned**

### **CSOs as executing partners to engage diverse stakeholders**

The project's executing partners are CSOs: BirdLife International and their local partners in the flyway countries.<sup>4</sup> They facilitated collaboration and exchange among flyway countries and this CSO modality works well in this complex region to work together. Good governance across the flyway is critical to mainstream conservation of MSBs into key productive sectors where the member states are at varying levels of development and indeed many are in or close to conflict situations. Thus, BirdLife International is positioning the RFF as a key facilitator and coordinator in the flyway and is working with national governments, private sector,

<sup>3</sup> The Hima is a traditional system of resource tenure that has been practiced for more than 1,400 years in the Arabian Peninsula. Under Islamic law, a Hima signifies a natural area that is set aside permanently or seasonally for the public good and may not be privately owned. Himas have helped conserve natural resources and biodiversity in the Arabian Peninsula and adjacent areas. They have secured sustainable use of renewable natural resources by and for the people living adjacent to them.

<sup>4</sup> These local organizations are Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL), Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) in Jordan, Sudanese Wildlife Society, Association Djibouti Nature, Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society, Nature Conservation Egypt, and Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (government agency).

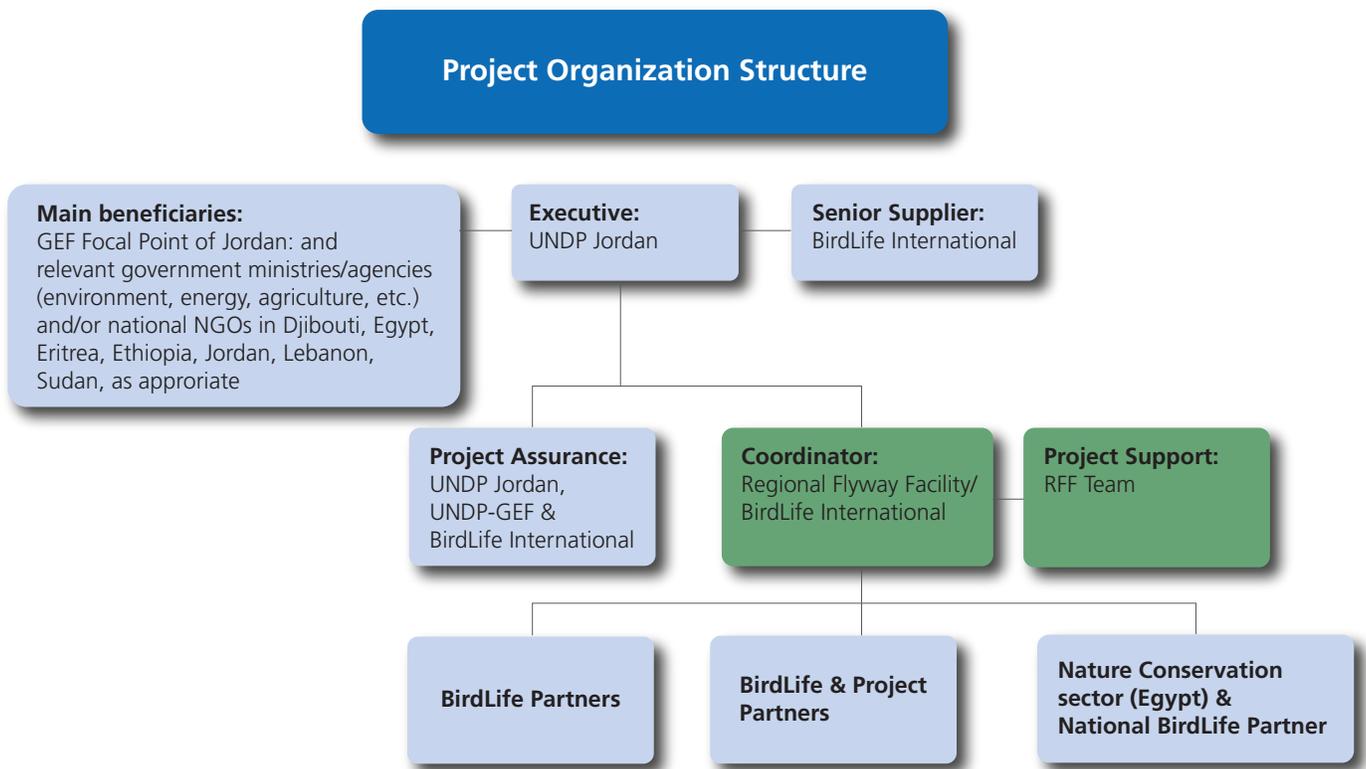


Figure 2: Project Governance @ BirdLife International

and international financial institutions to help continue the good work and effectively monitor MSBs on the flyway. The RFF plays a pivotal role in the project, coordinating with the seven countries, identifying key projects together with local partners, negotiating contracts, supervising and monitoring their progress, and providing technical support. In addition, BirdLife International and their local partners are committed and enthusiastic about MSB conservation. All stakeholders of the project highlighted the importance of the high-quality technical support the RFF provides and the key coordination role it plays. In fact, it is easier for local and international CSOs in the region to collaborate with neighboring countries without political constraints. The CSO implementation modality is efficient in terms of facilitating project implementation and reducing operational costs as well.

The project has promoted proactive engagement and participation of diverse stakeholders, which vary considerably due to the geographic scale of the MSB project and its focus on different sectors. The project worked closely with diverse government agencies that

go beyond the statutory environmental agencies in the countries because of the sector engagement in energy, tourism, and agriculture. Other key stakeholders include local CSOs and community organizations. In five of the seven target countries, the lead executing partner is a national CSO which forms part of the Middle East or Africa Partnership of BirdLife. For example, expansion of Himas in Jordan was possible through strong engagement with local CSOs that built trust with local communities. The private sector is also involved in the project mainly through the sub-projects as well as international financial institutions. Across all key sectors, the project was harnessing, encouraging, and building solid relationships among the different stakeholders and promoting dialogue.

#### **Strengthening regional cooperation through South-South exchange**

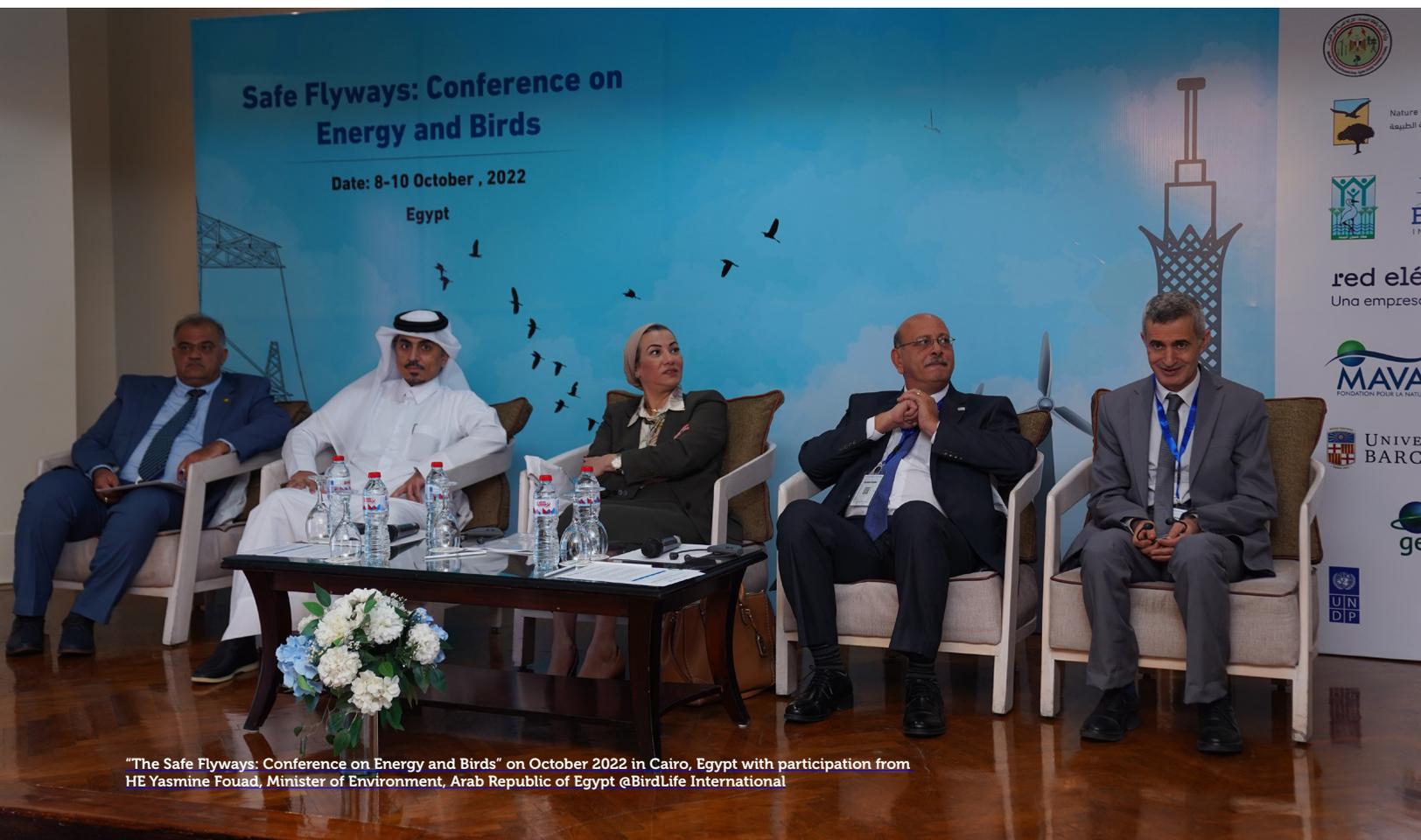
The RFF's regional facilitation and coordination were vital to promote cooperation for exchange experiences in the flyway countries. With BirdLife local partners, the project has advanced mainstreaming conservation on MSBs in the different sectors in Jordan, Egypt, and

Lebanon and is moving ahead in Ethiopia and Sudan. The RFF's continuous monitoring of the regional and national activities is time consuming but enables it to quickly identify potential mainstreaming activities in the other flyway countries. Strengthening the RFF as a key player in the region ensures sustainability of the actions and robust monitoring to support better planning and decision making in the flyway region. The establishment of the RFF, serving as the leading regional institution, ensures capacity-building in the region and sustainability and provides expertise and technical know-how. It also contributes to mainstreaming MSB risks in the flyway countries through collaboration with BirdLife local partners.

One of the highlights of regional cooperation is the regional hunting workshop, the first attempt for regional exchange of regulations and their implementation. Hunting has huge cultural and traditional roots in most of the countries in the north of the flyway, and it remains prevalent along the Rift Valley/Red Sea flyway. The extent and impact of hunting is much lower in the African states. Thus, 10 countries including Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria and UAE organized a regional workshop, "A road map to tackle illegal

killing, taking and trade of birds (IKB) in the Middle East," in Jordan (October 2021). Aside from exchanges of country experiences, the workshop published a regional booklet, "How to prevent trafficking in protected bird species," and a report on "killing in the Arabian Peninsula, Iran and Iraq." The workshop included a field trip to the Fifa Nature Reserve and Feynan Eco-lodge, and a Booted Eagle was released in celebration of the World Migratory Birds Day.

The "Safe Flyways: Conference on Energy and Birds" was held in Cairo, Egypt (October 2022) with participation from HE Yasmine Fouad, Minister of Environment, Arab Republic of Egypt. The Conference aimed to ensure closer ties and mutual understanding between the energy industry and the conservation community along the African-Eurasian Flyway towards a win-win relationship between nature conservation and energy infrastructures along with the flyway. It was a great introduction for Egypt before UNFCCC COP27 in November 2022. Moreover, the event brought together the energy industry - such as national and international utility companies, industry organizations, academia, governments - in addition to the conservation community from all over the Mediterranean, North Europe, the Middle East, and East Africa.



"The Safe Flyways: Conference on Energy and Birds" on October 2022 in Cairo, Egypt with participation from HE Yasmine Fouad, Minister of Environment, Arab Republic of Egypt @BirdLife International



Common kestrel (Falco tinnunculus)

## References and multimedia

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- Soring Birds Sensitivity Map – A planning tool for wind energy and other sectors, <https://maps.birdlife.org/MSBtool/>
- Video: Migratory Birds Are Our Guests, Database for the Bird Monitoring program in Energy Projects and others, <https://migratorysoaringbirds.birdlife.org/en/videos#gsc.tab=0>
- Guidelines of Best Practice for Bird Friendly Hotels in Egypt – Nature Conservation Egypt, [https://migratorysoaringbirds.birdlife.org/sites/default/files/guidelines\\_of\\_best\\_practices\\_for\\_bird\\_friendly\\_hotels\\_in\\_egypt.pdf](https://migratorysoaringbirds.birdlife.org/sites/default/files/guidelines_of_best_practices_for_bird_friendly_hotels_in_egypt.pdf)
- Review and guidance on use of “shutdown-on-demand” for wind turbines to conserve migrating soring birds in the Rift Valley/Red Sea Flyway, [https://migratorysoaringbirds.birdlife.org/sites/default/files/msb\\_guidance\\_shutdown\\_on\\_demand.pdf](https://migratorysoaringbirds.birdlife.org/sites/default/files/msb_guidance_shutdown_on_demand.pdf)
- Guidance on appropriate means of impact assessment of electricity power grids on migratory soring birds in the Rift Valley / Red Sea Flyway, [https://migratorysoaringbirds.birdlife.org/sites/default/files/msb\\_guidance\\_impact\\_assessment\\_of\\_power\\_grids.pdf](https://migratorysoaringbirds.birdlife.org/sites/default/files/msb_guidance_impact_assessment_of_power_grids.pdf)
- Birdwatching in Jordan – Where birds from three continents converge, [https://migratorysoaringbirds.birdlife.org/sites/default/files/jordan\\_birding\\_brochure.pdf](https://migratorysoaringbirds.birdlife.org/sites/default/files/jordan_birding_brochure.pdf)

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Lake Abhe Bad volcanic Landscape with Flamingos and rock formations, Djibouti, East Africa, Horn of Africa

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