

The status of illegal trade in wild birds at the local market and online with focus on soaring birds



Upper left: Crane, Upper right Black vulture, lower left Griffon vulture and lower right Amman local birds' market.



Table of Contents

Acknowledgement	4
الملخص باللغة العربية	5
Abstract	6
1. Introduction /project overview	7
1.1- Migratory Soaring Birds Project.....	7
1.2 Objectives	9
2. Methods and site description	10
3. Results.....	12
4. Discussion	14
7. Conclusion and recommendations	18
8. Reference	19
9. Appendix.....	20



Table of Figuers

Figure 1. Amman local street market.....	10
Figure 2. Online bird advertisements.	11
Figure 3. Soaring birds in Local markets, 2019.....	12
Figure 4. Falcons hunting in the eastern desert, 2019 Facebook.....	13
Figure 5. Native birds in local markets.....	14
Figure 6. Number of soring birds in Zoos of Jordan.	21



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الملخص باللغة العربية

يأتي هذا المشروع كأحد المشاريع المهمة بحماية الطيور المهاجرة والمقيمة وخصوصا الطيور المحلقة والتي تعبر العديد من الدول في مسارات هجرتها متعرضة بذلك الى العديد من المخاطر والمهددات، أتت هذه الدراسة لتحديد حجم الإتجار بأنواع الطيور المحلية المتاجر بها في الأسواق الشعبية والإلكترونية والنظر في زيادة فرص الحماية لأنواع الطيور بشكل عام وللطيور المحلقة بشكل خاص.

أجريت هذه الدراسة في الفترة الواقعة بين شهر نيسان و تشرين الأول لعام 2019، واستهدفت بالتوازي سوق عمان الشعبي (سوق طيور الجمعة) بحيث تم انجاز اثني عشرة زيارة ميدانية اشتملت على مسح مبكر للسوق لتحديد الأنواع والأعداد للطيور المتاجر بها، والمواقع المعنية بتجارة طيور الزينة والحيوانات والتي تضمنت العديد من الصفحات والمجموعات على الفيس بوك بالإضافة الى موقع السوق المفتوح. أظهرت النتائج بأن السوق الشعبي يظهر نشاطا في تجارة الأنواع المحلية ولكن وبشكل عام كانت اعداد الطيور المحلية المتاجر بالمقارنة ودراسة مشابهة أجريت عام 2009 بأن السوق الجمعة يشهد تراجعا ملحوظا في أعداد الطيور. كما وأظهرت الدراسة بأن متابعة ومراقبة الأسواق الإلكترونية أصبحت أكثر صعوبة لوجود مجموعات مغلقة للتجارة بالأنواع، وان هناك طرق تجارية خاصة لا يمكن متابعتها، يتم من خلالها الإتجار بالأنواع البرية ذات القيمة الاقتصادية عالية والتي تنتمي غالبا الى عائلة الطيور الجارحة والصقور بالتحديد.

وقد أوصت الدراسة بالعمل المشترك بين الجمعية الملكية لحماية الطبيعة والجهات المعنية بزيادة الوعي المجتمعي بأهمية الطيور البيئية في المحافظة على النظام البيئي والعمل بشكل مستمر على مراقبة وضبط الحركات التجارية في كافة أرجاء المملكة والتي تشتمل على مراقبة الأسواق المحلية والإلكترونية والحدود الدولية والتي قد تعتبر ممر لبعض الأنواع المهمة والنادرة.



Abstract

This study was carried out during the period between April-October 2019, and was concerned to perform a comprehensive survey aimed to identify the size of illegal bird's trade at Amman local market and online pages and groups. Totally, 727 native bird were counted in the local and online markets belonging to fifteen families; white spectacle bulbul (as wild bird) and Peregrine falcons (as soaring bird) were the most abundant species in both local and online markets, followed by common kestrels and long-legged buzzards that considered the most common species in trading for soaring birds in Jordan.

Moreover, the illegal capture and trade of birds involved large numbers of species; led to a serious impact on many other species and demand urgent attention from government and conservation organizations. The laws for native species in Jordan generally afford good protection on the local and online market in main governorates "Irbid, Amman and Al Zarqa" but monitoring and enforcement of the wild life in the eastern and southern desert are weak, and need to immediate attention.



1. Introduction /project overview

1.1- Migratory Soaring Birds Project

The Jordan Rift valley hosts millions of migration birds every year, from some individuals to tens of thousands, the soaring birds also crossing whole areas from wintering grounds in Africa to breeding grounds in Europe and Central Asia, which considered the second biggest Flyway in the world.

In Jordan, more than 300 bird species have been identified as migratory birds pass through the Kingdom, through two main corridors the Rift valley and the eastern desert. However, these corridors are located among high development pressures, as increased demands for energy, food industry, Agriculture and many other actions lead to significant changes in land use, and generate exhaustion of natural resources that lead to habitat degradation and increasing pressure on wild birds parallel with illegal hunting and trading.

Therefore, a new problems were appeared through these sectors (Agriculture, Energy, Food industry, tourism and waste management) might pose a clear threat to soaring specie, through gradually changing to environment and suitable habitats. Accordingly, The Migratory Soaring Birds (MSB II) project aims to integrate conservation of visiting birds into these key sectors of our societies, through partnerships and strategic alliances with private businesses, NGOs, governments and international organizations in order to incorporate protection of the flyway at within widespread regions with control of illegal hunting and trade.

An understanding of the importance of soaring birds in preserving our environment considered a critical edge to cooperation between countries to conserve migration flyways, and as one of project outputs, it was important to determine the level of trafficking birds through transit countries.



1.2 The “Egyptian Vulture New LIFE” Project

The “LIFE Project Urgent Action to Strengthen the Balkan Population of the Egyptian Vulture and Secure Its Flyway (LIFE16 NAT/BG/000874)” can be considered as the most ambitious project concerning vulture conservation. Ten organizations from 14 countries in the Balkans, Africa and Middle East, are joining forces to save the last Egyptian vultures by implementing urgent conservation measures that address the major threats to the species. The aim is to reduce deliberate and accidental poisoning, poaching, use of the bird in cultural and belief-based or medical practices in Africa, electrocution risk in roosting sites, and to increase food availability at its breeding and wintering grounds and along its flyway.

The Project is funded by the LIFE Programme of the European Union and co-funded by the BirdLife International in the Middle East and in Africa as well as through national support for project activities throughout project areas in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.



1.3 Objectives

The MSB and EV new life projects aims to integrate conservation of soaring birds among transit countries. Therefore, this survey concerned to identify the size of trading of soaring birds at local markets in Jordan, and to identify any others impacts facing these birds to help on put foundations for conservation soaring birds.

2. Methods

The Amman local street market (ALSM) “The Friday Market or Souk el-Joumea” is a largest birds, pigeons, dogs and pets market in Jordan, it is located near Roman amphitheater on the middle of downtown in Al-Talini Street (Figure1). In total, twelve visits to ALSM were carried out during period between April-October 2019. Each visit involved an early inspection to looking for native birds, in order to identify the species and counting the number of individuals.

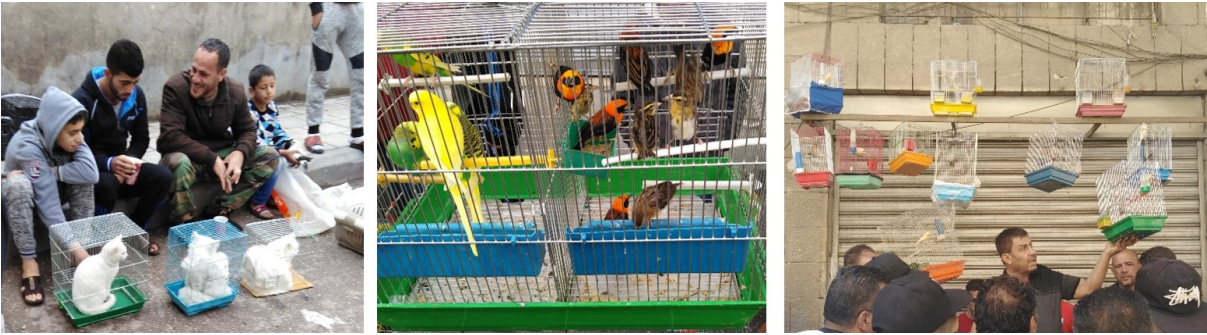


Figure 1. Amman local street market.

Simultaneously, online surveys were performed to get more details about the volume of birds trading; and to get knowledge about unconventional trade routes. Therefore, more than twenty groups and pages were checked by specific Arabic key words (عقاب، صقيري، صقر كروان، لقلق، أبو سعد، نسر... etc.), to survey as many as possible sale bird's advertisements (Figure 2) and appendix 1.



Figure 2. Online bird advertisements.

Furthermore, literature review was taken into account to get the advantage of accumulated research knowledge through reports, old-field visits and articles. This tool enables the researchers to take the information instead of starting from scratch and thus significantly contribute to the building on previous experiences, to saving time, effort and resources. In this study, literature review was achieved to assess the status of soaring birds among pervious ASLM study in 2009.

3. Results

3.1 Soaring birds

A total of (106) soaring birds belonging to four families (Gruidae, Ciconiidae, Accipitridae and Falconidae) were recorded among local and online markets during the period between April-October 2019 (Figure 3). In general, 105 individuals were recorded in online markets and only one common kestrel was recorded in Amman local street market in March. On the other hand, most of Peregrine falcons that recorded on online markets were captured on eastern desert (Figure 4).

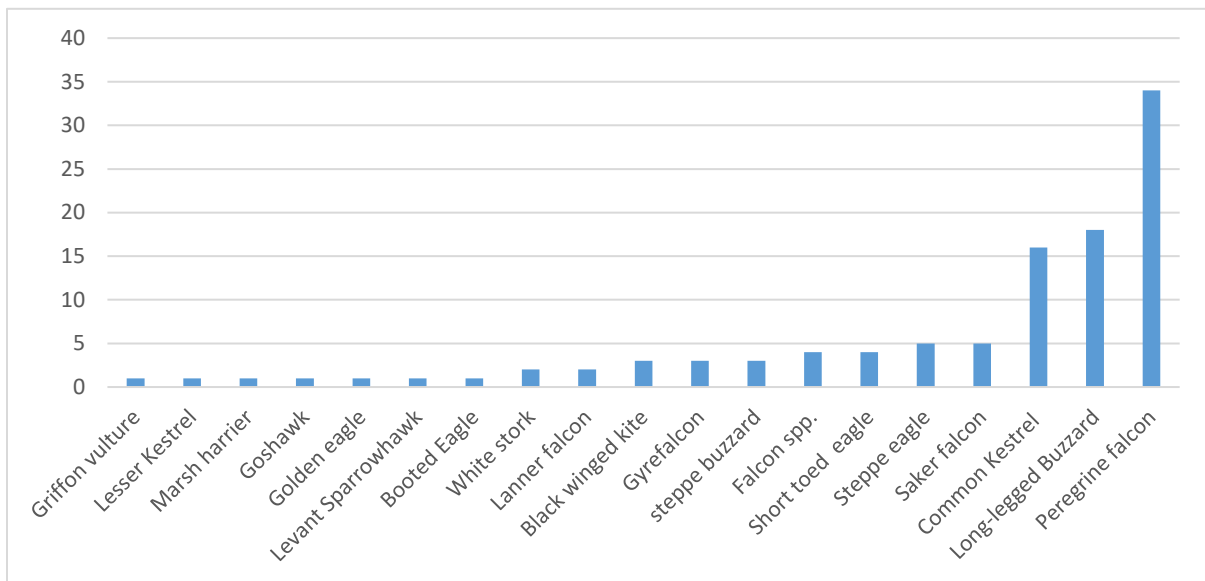


Figure 3. Soaring birds at online and Local Street markets, 2019.



Figure 4. Falcons hunted in the eastern desert, 2019 Facebook.

In general, Peregrine falcons are the most abundant species on trade list, followed by long legged buzzards and common kestrel with (34), (18) and (16) individuals respectively. Furthermore, the griffon vulture was considered the lowest abundant soaring birds on online markets with one individuals in November. On the other hand, other trading soaring birds were records in spring season especially in late of March to the middle of April that considered the highest abundant season for migration soaring birds.

In addition , a total of 727 native bird were counted in the local and online markets belonging to fifteen families (Alaudidae, Columbidae Hirundinidae, Strigidae, Icteridae, Rallidae, Sylviidae, Emberizidae, Paridae, Phasianidae, Fringillidae, Passeridae, Sturnidae, Nectariniidae and Pycnonotidae) (Figure 5), 641 birds were recorded in Amman Local market, 362 of them belonging to Pycnonotidae family. Moreover, a huge number of golden finches and chucker's observed as the most available species in Amman local market, but these numbers did not add to results, due to their non-native origins.

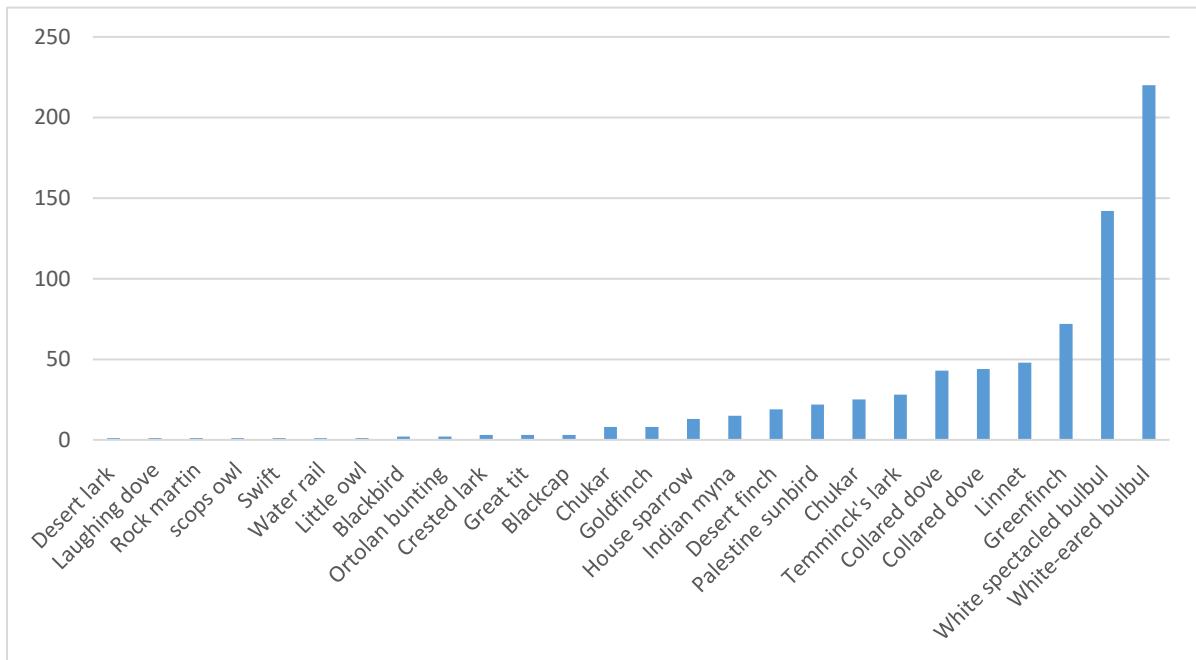


Figure 5. Native birds in local markets.

4. Discussion

Wildlife trade is a profitable economic activity, with billions of living organisms or derived products being traded around the world annually (UNEP Interpol, 2016). Birds are the most commonly traded taxonomic groups worldwide, with ca. 4000 of both wild-caught and captive-bred origin species sold and kept as pets (Birdlife International, 2015). Furthermore, millions of individuals belonging to 4,000 birds' species are exposed to domestic and international trade (Birdlife International, 2019).

In Jordan, keeping wild birds as pets is a very popular and widespread hobby. Finches, doves and bulbuls are the most popular species in the local markets. In 2009, ten comprehensive visits were conducted in Amman local market to identify the size of bird trade, a total (16942) specimens, represented by (54) species (27) are native among 19 families were recorded with (345,835 \$) total price (Eid et al., 2011).



Whereas, the most available non-native species was canary with total number (8317), and the most available native species were Golden finch and White spectacled bulbul with (1221) and (302) respectively. It worth to mention that, golden finch is still one of the most available species in the Amman local street market, but it become not an authentic species (imported from Ukraine), so it was not included to these results.

Furthermore, online trading closed social media groups could be more difficult to control than traditional market, which might explain the change on the volume of native birds trading in local street market from (1389) specimens were recorded during ten visits in 2009 to (702) specimens were recorded during 12 visits in 2019. These results are fitting with establishment of “Environmental Police Department” on 2006 and “Environmental Detective Platoon” on 2010, to implementation the Agriculture law number 13, year 2015, and to confiscate species that are not allowed to trade and violating illegal traders.

However, many of wildlife traders and hunters have various ways to trade and transport birds and animals in and out the country, like falcons (Lanner, Saker and Peregrine Falcon) that sold to gulf countries, either through a group of dealers and hunters in both countries or through private Facebook groups. Moreover, many game birds, such as Houbara Bustard, Stone Curlew, Cream-coloured Courser and Sandgrouse have been sold in the same way. On the other hand, many of passerines species are hunted and sold for food and treatment purposes, such as Blackcap, Calandra lark, Golden oriole and Greenfinch (Figure 6), which hunted during the period between August to mid of October.



Figure 6. Cooked of Green finches in the eastern desert.

Raising and training Falcons is deeply rooted in the Bedouin culture. It is an indicator of power, authority, and richness for their owners (Upton, 2010) {In: Arabic}, But since the advent of online trading, falconry has spread to reach some cities and villages, and now it appears clearly in the online groups and pages. In addition, the size of trafficking has increased after hunters became more accurate in determining the time and location of falcons' migration. Therefore, it must develop standards for the protection of migratory birds, especially birds of prey in time of migrations.

As a final point, it is necessary to establish the practicalities and standards to control of bird's trade patterns in Jordan. One of the biggest challenges is how to change people's overall compartment from looking at birds as an opportunity to make money to being important species for biodiversity. The Eastern Desert (Ruweished and Al-Jafr) is one of the hottest areas to the illegal trade of birds, hunting migratory falcons and passerines and exporting them illegally is the biggest challenge facing the conservation of nature in Jordan. Therefore, identifying trade paths of trade and border control is a turning point for these illegal practices.

Besides, The RSCN plays an important role to control illegal trade, through continuous cooperation with government institutions and local communities, and these shows clearly through many cases of community cooperation successful have been recorded in the protection of many threatened species on a national and international level (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Releasing confiscated birds with local communities.



7. Conclusion and recommendations

The illegal capture and trade of wild birds are widespread throughout Jordan, as has been shown in the present study, involves large numbers of species. The high taxonomic diversity among traded birds is giving a better chance to understand the volume of birds trading in Jordan with clear surpass all other Fauna families.

The results from this survey show that online pages and groups appear to be a serious threat to many species and demand urgent attention from government and conservation organizations. The laws for native species in Jordan generally afford good protection on the local and online market in main governorates “Irbid, Amman and Al Zarqa” but monitoring and enforcement in the east and north desert are weak, an area that requires continuous and immediate attention.

Note: the size of soaring birds within zoos of Jordan was added as Annex (appendix 2), which may need to reassessment to make a good understanding of the role of zoos in soaring birds trade.



8. Reference

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9. Appendix

Appendix 1.

The number of bird species that listed under appendix I and II in Local markets were fourteen (table 1).

Table 1. Observed birds that listed under appendix lists.

Birds species	Number of individuals	Cities Appendices
Peregrine falcon	13	1
Long-legged Buzzard	18	2
Steppe eagle	5	2
Saker falcon	5	2
Black winged kite	3	2
Lanner falcon	2	2
Griffon vulture	1	2
Lesser Kestrel	1	2
Marsh harrier	1	2
Goshawk	1	2
Golden eagle	1	2
Levant Sparrow hawk	1	2
Scops owl	1	2
Little owl	1	2

Appendix 2.

Considerable, Zoos of Jordan are considered one of the impact actors on wildlife trading. Vultures, eagles, owls, strokes, hyenas, wolves and many others were recorded in zoos status assessment during 2012 and 2018 (Figure 7).

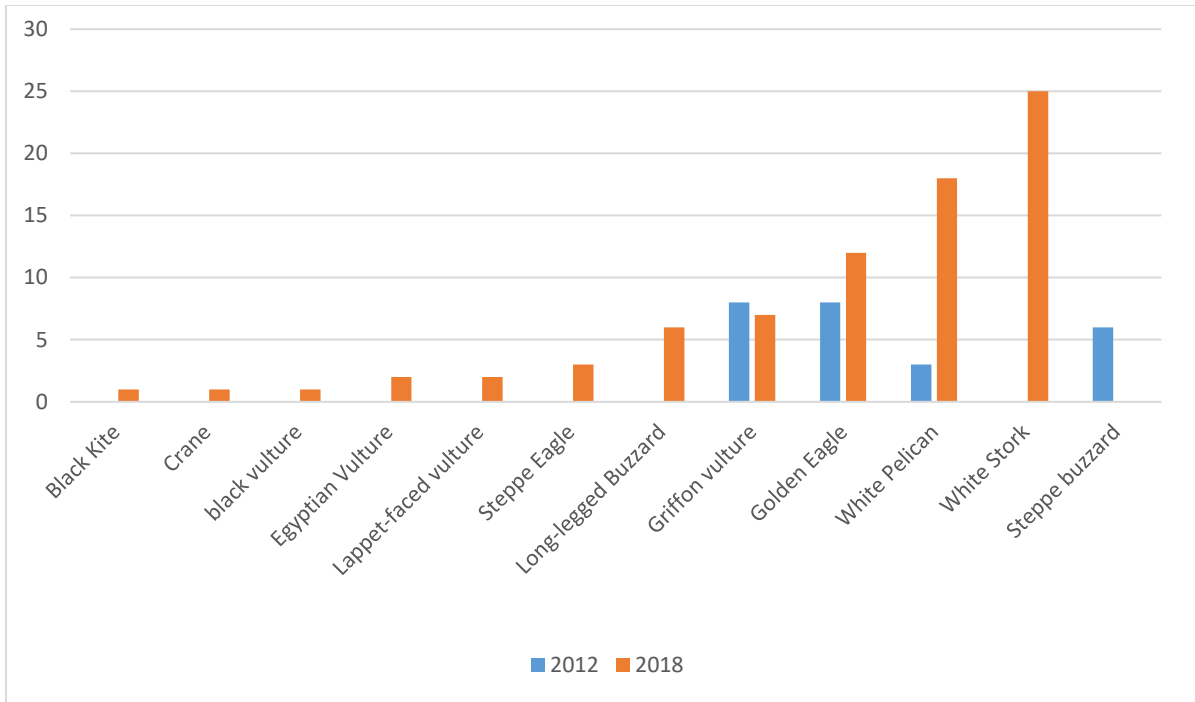


Figure 6. Number of soring birds in Zoos of Jordan.