



# International

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## International

### International conservation action

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Extinct woodpecker rediscovered in USA

### Tagging success boosts hopes for Arabian phoenix

World's threatened birds still need help

### International research

A year in the Seychelles

Illegal hunting in southern Europe

Aquatic warblers need help

Save the albatross

Asian vultures appeal

International policy

## Follow the migration of the Arabian phoenix online

*You can follow the journeys of three northern bald ibises as they migrate from Syria into the unknown.*

Scientists from the RSPB and BirdLife Middle East will track the trio's migration as they leave breeding sites near Palmyra in south-east Syria this month - and you can [follow their progress](#).

On this website, we'll show you day-by-day data about where the birds are. Satellite tags have been attached to three of the remaining seven adult northern bald ibises in Syria.

This species was thought extinct in the region until four years ago and where they migrate to is still unknown to scientists.

Bedouin nomads and Syrian government rangers have been watching over the nests of Zenobia, named after Palmyra's third century warrior queen, Sultan and Salam. Scientists hope to locate their winter base and discover why so few birds are returning.

The project is being strongly supported by the Syrian government and the Syrian Society for the Conservation of Wildlife, and was also funded by the National Geographic Society's Research and Exploration Committee and the Africa Eurasian Waterbird Agreement.

### Scientists hope to locate their winter base and discover why so few birds are returning

our very last chance to keep the Syrian population alive.

'If we can follow their migration and locate their winter home we should find out why their numbers are so low and how we can protect them. That is the first step towards increasing their numbers again.'



Numbers of the bald ibis plunged because of habitat loss, human disturbance and persecution.



### Support the RSPB

Every penny donated will be wisely invested in the future of our birds and other wildlife.



### [Find out more](#)

### See also

[Northern bald ibis](#)

[Satellite tracking map of northern bald ibis](#)

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## Once widespread

The northern bald ibis is a large, mainly black bird, with a bald red face, red bill and legs and 'punk' plumage. It was once widespread across the Middle East, northern Africa and the European Alps, was revered by the Egyptian Pharaohs and had its own Ancient Egyptian hieroglyph.

Numbers plunged because of habitat loss, human disturbance and persecution and the species is now classified as Critically Endangered by the IUCN - World Conservation Union, the highest level of threat there is.

The Syrian group forms one of only two wild populations of the species in the world. The other is found in Morocco, mostly in the Souss-Massa National Park, south of Agadir.

Ibrahim Khader, Head of BirdLife Middle East said, 'Discovering the ibis was like finding the Arabian phoenix. Our survey and tagging work was some of the most challenging fieldwork we had ever done. We knew they were in Palmyra because of reports from Bedouin nomads and local hunters. Without this tracking project, the bird would have been consigned to history and hieroglyphics.'

## Last chance to save?


When the birds leave Palmyra, they are likely to fly as a group heading south towards Saudi Arabia and Yemen or even as far as Eritrea.


Dr Ken Smith, a senior scientist at the RSPB said, 'Tracking the birds and finding their wintering sites may be the last chance to save them. We won't be able to help them until we at least know where they go and the threats and pressures they are facing.'

'The low numbers and difficult terrain in Palmyra make this species particularly difficult to work with but its resilience so far suggests it has a future. Other birds have been brought back from the brink and with the Syrian authorities backing our work we are hopeful that we can save this bird.'

Dr Gianluca Serra, Field Team Leader for BirdLife and NGS Grantee said, 'Not only have we tagged the birds at last but we now have 13 ibises in Syria after the best breeding season yet. Our chances of saving this bird now seems more than just a dream.'

Source: *RSPB Public Relations department*  
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