

Emergency plan for the Syrian population

[PRINT](#)

TWELVE-MONTH EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN TO AVOID EXTINCTION OF WILD NBI COLONY FROM EASTERN RANGE

November 2009 – October 2010

1. *1. Background*

Radio-tracking of tagged ibises from eastern range during period 2006-09 (n=4) + observation of a yearling in Djibouti in January 2008 + radio-tracking of Turkish young in 2008 and 2009 have clearly shown that:

- adults and juvenile ibises migrate and winter separately
- adults and subadult ibises can start migration together and then split later.

Historical data collated by Welch and Welch (2004) + radio-tracking of Odeinat in 2009 + Djibouti observation in Jan 2008 suggest a likely scenario where young ibises disperse around the southern Red Sea basin and along the Rift valley in Eastern Africa for 2-3 years before returning to their birth place in Palmyra (homing), once they are close to sexual maturation. Only after they finally breed in Palmyra they might start following their partner to the already known wintering site on the Ethiopian highlands.

A mounting body of evidences is showing that the most severe threat to the survival of this colony is the high mortality rates of young and adult birds due to hunting within Syria and Saudi Arabia – while Yemen, Eritrea and Sudan still have to be assessed in these regards (Ethiopia seem fine).

In general terms, a very high rate of failures of migratory returns by adult birds have been observed during period 2003-09 in Palmyra: out of 7 migratory returns to Palmyra, 6 times at least one adult failed to return, about one each year. Not to mention juvenile/young ibises: out of 24 juvenile which left Palmyra during 2002-07 only 4-7 have made a come back. Most compelling specific evidences of high mortality rates due to hunting in Syria and Saudi Arabia are:

- killing of a breeding adult in July 2003 at breeding grounds in Palmyra, Syria
- failure of migratory return of a breeding adult (the partner of tagged female Salam) in March 2007 – the bird had been observed at Ethiopian wintering site in November 2006
- failure of migratory return of a breeding adult (Scheisch) to Palmyra in February 2009 together with his partner - in late January 2009 it was observed still alive at Ethiopian wintering site
- evidence of killing of a tagged subadult bird (Julia) during her first day of southward migration in 2009, at an agriculture farm in northern Saudi Arabia
- probable killing of Turkish tagged young in August 2009 in northern Saudi Arabia.

By making good use of satellite locations of 4 tagged ibises during period 2006-09, the key nodal sites of the migratory route have been identified and ranked according to their importance (Serra et al. *in prepar.*).

1. 2. *Problem statement*

If the trend of breeding failure in Palmyra and mortality rates during migration is not reverted starting from early 2010, the ibis colony of Palmyra will vanish completely during the next 1-2 years

1. 3. *Objectives and activities*

It is recommended to give priority to following emergency objectives during next 12 months:

Objective 1: ensuring good breeding in Syria in next years, starting from 2010

Activity 1.1: endorsing recommendations included in Standard NBI Protection Program in Palmyra, recently prepared for the benefit of local authorities

Activity 1.2: fix ibis nests according to L. Peske advise

Activity 1.3: finding out causes of high chick mortality in 2009: following up post mortem analysis done at Hama University by expert IAGNBI ibis veterinary

Activity 1.4: fund raising for technical assistance of ibis breeding protection in 2010

Objective 2: ensuring supplementation in Palmyra is carried out in 2010

Activity 2.1: renewed diplomatic efforts are carried out in Turkey to assist DD in overcoming the bureaucratic empasse

Activity 2.2: implementing training of selected Al Talila staff in Austria in ibis husbandry

Activity 2.3: fund raise to implement supplementation in 2010

Objective 3: minimizing uncontrolled hunting in Syria and Saudi Arabia at identified known nodal points of migration route

Activity 3.1: fund raising and implementing an emergency awareness raising at most dangerous sites along the migratory route before next spring migration in February 2010.

Note: focusing on survival of adults during migration is the only chance we have at this stage, as it would be unrealistic to attempt promoting conservation of young ibises due to their probable nomadic and quite unpredictable behaviour – not to mention that, because of the recent 2 breeding failures, very few young ibises are expected to be still alive and likely to make a come back in the next years to Palmyra.