



• Creativity • Collaboration • Continuity • Community

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FEATURE STORY

AFIR AND APIFLORDEV DELIVER AN ADVANCED BEEKEEPING TRAINING

For the second time this year, we hosted beekeepers from the French association **APIFLORDEV**, who ran a series of workshops and hive visits to support the development of the **AFIR Bee-keeping and Nature Discovery Center**, with funding from the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (PACA) region.

Earlier in April, we had hosted *Paul Bonaffé* for 4 days during which he conducted sessions on hive sanitation with a focus on varroa diagnosis and treatment, in addition to hive visits for beekeepers in the **Jezzine** region. This time Paul came back with his colleague *Michel Tardieu*.

With more than 35 years of experience in beekeeping, Michel recently sold his hives to dedicate his time to teaching, before feeling nostalgic and going back to keeping bees but on a smaller scale. Earlier in his career, Michel used to make all sorts of products out of his hives: candles, propolis tinctures, honey based sweets, soaps, etc. and sell them in farmers' markets. He even set up a small bee museum at his house, with old beekeeping equipment he collected from here and there. He is currently the president of APIFLORDEV and still conducts workshops in France and abroad despite being officially retired.

Paul and Michel arrived in **Saidoun** on September 29. We held an organizational meeting and we were planning on having a presentation on autumn tasks for the beekeepers in the afternoon, but only 2 people were able to make it, one of whom was Jean Khawand - a young agriculture student from Saidoun who is eager to learn more about bees. This did not bring our morale down though, and we improvised a visit to the apiary of *Maurice Khawand* in nearby **Rimat**. There we noticed a big improvement since Paul's last visit in April. Maurice's hives looked free of **American Foul Brood** disease and ready to pass the winter.

On Friday, *Bassam Khawand* from SOILS drove Paul, Michel and Jean to **Qattine, Barti, Jezzine, Sfaray** and **Anane** for visits to 5 beekeepers who owned between 6 and 45 hives. It struck Paul and Michel to see supposedly experienced beekeepers (each with more than 10 years of experience) who didn't know how to diagnose diseases like American Foul Brood, a very contagious disease which could spread easily to neighboring hives. Some beekeepers even got upset when they were told they had to burn their hopelessly diseased hives (sadly, the only solution).

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On October 1 we had a rendez-vous with a group of 11 beginners, most of whom had previously followed introductory or advanced beekeeping workshops with SOILS. One of the participants came from a nearby village after seeing the announcement on Facebook. He owned 4 hives, but didn't have a clue about bees, only opening his hives to feed them. We were glad he took the initiative to come on his own and encouraged him to enroll in introductory workshops with us in the future. Bassam began the day with a quiz to see what the participants had retained from previous workshops. Then Paul gave a presentation on how to prepare the hives for winter, and what to check for, such as: the condition of the brood, provisions, and diseases. Then we moved to AFIR's apiary, where the participants were split in two groups to check on the hives up close and personal. Paul took advantage of the presence of two weak hives to demonstrate how to combine them. He also showed us how to harvest propolis to be used in tinctures or creams.

In the afternoon, 4 established beekeepers joined the group to learn more about making beeswax sheet templates for hives from scratch. Bassam showed the participants how he melts the wax from old frames using AFIR's new solar-powered wax melter or the steam pot he built himself. The purpose of this exercise was to educate participants about the importance of getting wax from trusted sources, and saving money instead of buying new sheets.

On October 2, Paul and Bassam visited the hives of *Jihad Khawand* in Saidoun and were very happy to see them in good shape. Jihad had followed workshops with us last year and this Spring he acquired 8 hives. They then visited our friends *Jean-Pierre* and *Yasmina Zahar* in Basatin Baanoub, passing by Rimat for another site visit on the way.

October 3 was dedicated to crafts workshops after hive visits in **Saida**. Michel showed us how to make a **tincture** from **propolis**, a substance that bees produce from tree resin to seal air passages in their hives and keep them warm. Propolis tinctures are a powerful antibiotic used to treat abscesses and small wounds or relieve throat inflammation. We then spent a fun time making beeswax candles in different shapes and molds.

On the last day on Tuesday we visited the beekeeping cooperative in **Azour**, and were impressed by all the equipment they have (laboratory, wax making tools, alembics, etc.) even though it isn't exploited to its full potential.

Afterwards, a group of 7 women gathered in our friend Hoda Khawand's (Em Rabih) kitchen with Michel who taught them how to make white **nougat** from honey, egg whites, sugar and nuts. The process seemed a bit complicated for the participants but the result was delicious!

We spent the rest of the afternoon finalizing administrative stuff and planning the next steps for AFIR.

It was a very rich week. Working with Michel on the crafts and tincture gave us a lot of ideas for simple products we could develop for AFIR, and we're hoping to have some ready for Christmas. Bassam, on the other hand, learned a lot from accompanying Paul and Michel on the hive visits, which will help him better manage AFIR's apiary.

While waiting for Paul's next visit in April 2017, we'll be working on developing some educational and awareness material not only about beekeeping but also about wild bees and their role in the ecosystem. We should also hurry to finish renovating part of the upper floor of the old house so we can start using it for workshops and for displaying beekeeping equipment and educational resources.

Despite the resistance of beekeepers when we first contacted them this year, it seems they are gradually becoming more collaborative and interested in learning more about sanitary beekeeping practices. Our biggest concern currently is to look for a way to limit the spread of American Foul Brood, and we hope to be able in the near future to arrange regular visits with local beekeepers in Saidoun and the neighboring villages that would help diagnose and destroy infected hives to limit the spread of this deadly disease.

We also hope that locals will gradually become interested in making use of beeswax and propolis to make products for AFIR that would generate some income for them.

Shared by the Editorial Team



LET'S FOCUS

THERE'S HOPE TO END ILLEGAL HUNTING IF WE COMBINE OUR EFFORTS

In Lebanon, people think of birds in one of two ways: either as living beings that we need and appreciate as part of our ecosystem, or as moving targets that should be shot, trapped, displayed and (less frequently) eaten.

Sadly, bird massacres have become commonplace. Every year we hear of wanton shootings of birds of all sizes, and see social media pages filled with pictures of frankly staggering amounts of dead birds. This is especially the case at the start of the autumn migration season around September. But what's worse is that sometimes these mass shootings even take place in Spring when birds are nesting!

Even as government control remains absent, many environmental activists believe social media has made things worse. So-called hunters proudly display their trophies on their pages and compete with each other for bragging rights and "Likes." However, such massacres most likely took place before the advent of Facebook and Instagram, and we didn't even know about them.

However, on the same platforms, pages like the [Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon](#) (SPNL), [Stop Hunting Crimes in Lebanon](#), or the **Lebanon Eco Movement** can denounce criminal hunting practices and track down perpetrators – something that wasn't possible before.

Social media has also given users the chance to advocate conservation, protection and hunting regulation on their personal pages or in groups. 2 years ago, we came across a Facebook page called [Birds of Lebanon and the Middle East](#), followed by around 300 people. We became fans and met with the page's creator, *Fouad Itani*, an ethical hunter turned photographer. As we started regularly collaborating, we met even more bird-lovers and experts, and together we helped raise further awareness. Today, the page has around 6,000 followers, and Fouad has started a website.

Change isn't happening only online. Through Fouad we met *Michel Sawan*, a photographer and bird-whisperer who is himself a one-man association working to prevent illegal hunting and protect birds. Each year he rescues wounded birds, heals them and releases them back into the wild, or keeps them in an aviary in case they can no longer fly or fend for themselves.

On August 14, 2016, Fouad and Michel gave a talk on sustainable hunting in collaboration in partnership with the **Union of Municipalities of Dannieh** in North Lebanon. They explained the importance of the hunting laws and emphasized the pressing need to protect migrating birds, particularly storks. They also gave attendees tips on birdwatching.

Later on September 11, a group of bird lovers calling themselves "[ناشطون لحماية الحسون و الطير البري](#)" (activists for the protection of the European goldfinch and wild birds) held a **Bird Day** event in collaboration with other NGOs at the **Ballouneh** nature reserve. Led by *Roger Saad* and *Samer Issa*, the event aimed to raise awareness of endangered species and the detrimental effects of illegally hunting and capturing such birds. Photos displayed at the event were provided by several birdwatchers, including our friend Fouad, and information about endangered and/or protected species in Lebanon.

Two rescued birds won attendees' hearts that day: a barn owl named "Phantom" and an eagle, both of whom had been shot and would sadly never fly again. Phantom was the star of the event, especially since many people had never seen such a beautiful bird up close.

ناشطون لحماية الحسون و الطير البري were primarily aiming to raise awareness about European goldfinches and partridges. The [Lebanese Ornithological Federation](#) was showcasing beautiful canary species that are suitable for raising in aviaries and selling as pets. Their aim was to promote these pet choices as an alternative to wild (often endangered) specimens captured illegally and sold without regulation.

Finally, the Ballouneh municipality released dozens of birds that different NGOs and activists had rescued from illegal pet traders and breeders: quails, doves, buntings, and European goldfinches. Some of these birds were in a terrible state of stress and had sustained injuries or caught diseases as they were held captive. The municipality hopes that these birds – especially the ground-dwelling quails – will remain inside the protected confines of the reserve where they will have better survival chances and reproduce.

Shared by the Editorial Team



Michel Sawan and a lesser spotted eagle, one of many birds he rescued in 2016 alone



Phantom the barn owl



A Yorkshire canary - A beautiful and sustainable pet choice, hopefully



Seconds after its release, this European goldfinch flew right into the hands of one bird-lover who decided to keep it and nurse it back to health

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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

MEET THE ORTOLAN BUNTING, AND PROTECT IT

By Fouad Itani

The **ortolan bunting** (*Emberiza hortulana* - دجّنة أو قمحي أو درسة الشعير) is a small passerine bird of the bunting family Emberizidae. It measures 17 cm in length and has an average weight of 23 grams. The male is greenish with a yellow streaked throat and upper part, as well as orange underparts. The female is much duller with a finely streaked crown and upper breast.

Ortolans are ground-dwelling buntings that feed on seeds and may offer their young insects as a source of protein. Their nests are usually placed on the ground or in low bushes and small trees. They lay an average of 4 eggs that are incubated for 12 days. Two weeks after the young are born, they will leave the nest.

Even though hunting and capturing the Ortolan bunting is banned, lots of EU and Middle Eastern countries including Lebanon still hunt and trap it. Traditionally in some European countries these delicate songbirds are captured alive using traps and nets, force-fed, drowned in Armagnac, then roasted and eaten whole. The customary way of eating ortolans involves the diner covering his head with a large napkin to preserve the precious aromas and, some believe, to hide from God the shame of such a disgraceful act.

In Lebanon, the ortolan bunting is considered to be a scarce migrant breeder from late March till July, and widespread on passage during spring and autumn migration. Lots of Lebanese hunters consider the arrival of the first flocks of the ortolan buntings at the end of August as a sign of the opening of the hunting season.



This article appeared on the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon's website: <http://www.spnl.org/the-ortolan-bunting-emberiza-hortulana/>



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UPCOMING EVENTS

"JABAL MOUSA - GUIDED LOOP HIKE AND LUNCH"



OCTOBER 8, 2016
8:30 a.m. - 5:15 p.m.

Departure from Em Nazih, Gemmayze

Discover stunning natural sites and historic Roman ruins.

Fees: \$40 per person - Reservation: 03-222 781
<http://www.lebtivity.com/event/wadi-moukhara-guided-loop-hike-with-lunch-1>

"DEMAIN" FILM SCREENING AND PANEL DISCUSSION



OCTOBER 15, 2016
6:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Sursock Museum, Ashrafieh

Film on living sustainably +discussion of local solutions with T.E.R.R.E. Liban and SOILS

Free entrance
Reservation: Contact Maya 03-119 465
<https://www.facebook.com/events/201992973546551/>

"HIKING ROUM-JEZZINE WITH PRO MAX"



OCTOBER 23, 2016
8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Departure from Furn El Chebbak

Scenic 10 km hike from Roum to Jezzine.

Fee: \$30 per person
https://www.facebook.com/events/1575128306124316/?active_tab=highlights

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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

MY PDC AT RE-GREEN IN GREECE

As the dates set for the **Permaculture Design Certificate (PDC)** organized by **SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon** last April did not fit my schedule, I started looking all over the internet for another one that would take place later. The course had to meet three criteria. First, it had to be in a Mediterranean country, as my purpose was to apply the knowledge I would learn in Lebanon and the region. Second, the workshop had to be in English, as most permaculture networks and techniques in the world happen to be in English. Third, it had to be affordable.

Thanks to *Rita Khawand* and *Alexandra Kahwagi* I got in touch with the **Re-Green** project in **Greece's Peloponnese**. It promised to be an unforgettable experience on all three levels: the location, the people and the training.

Re-Green is a Permaculture project started five years ago by *Flery Fotiadou* and her partner *Christo*. Its heavenly location is close to **Seliana**, a village in the mountains of the Peloponnese, 45 minutes by car from the first coastal town of **Akrata** and 160 km from **Athens**.

The similarities between the terrain there and in Lebanon are striking. Oak trees, pine trees, plane trees, thyme and mint are found all over. The limestone mountains and the climate make it so similar to the Levant that I felt myself completely at home.

The location includes many guest rooms and a plot of land where one can pitch a tent. Gardens of home-grown vegetables and free range chickens also share the space.

Re-Green is progressively being surrounded by new permaculture projects on lands bought by foreigners who previously attended the course and decided to settle in the area and support Re-Green by growing vegetables and herbs.

The courses were held in the "Maloga," a hand-built tent made of wood, clay and other local materials. All over the place, one can find tools built by previous PDC trainees like a sun dryer, a clay-built pizza oven, a rocket stove, etc., with dry toilets and a fish pond soon to be added. At 10 minutes' walking distance is a waterfall to which anyone can escape in their free time.

The 11-day PDC was organized and directed by *Rod Everett* (a British shepherd and former student of the late *Bill Mollison*) assisted by *Mill Millichap*. It covered a wide range of teachings, often beyond the classical permaculture frame. The priority however was always given to the theoretical teachings and principles of permaculture as defined and institutionalized by Mollison and *David Holmgren*.

We learned how to regenerate recently barren lands, how to produce Biochar (charcoal), as well as an introduction to natural building with the "Maloga" as an example. But the course also introduced things like dowsing and other philosophies such as biodynamics and homeopathy, with support from *Mario, Christo, Joey* and *Maria*.

Practical sessions included building a clay-based **rocket stove**, a **sun oven** with aluminium foil and cardboard, and an **air cooler** with plastic bottles and wood, among many others.

Students came from France, Canada, the Philippines, Iran, Lebanon, Germany, Poland all the way back to Greece, ranging in age from 18 to 50 years old. They included engineers, filmmakers, university students, mathematicians, P.E. teachers, software programmers and more. Many of them were at a professional turning point, quitting a career in preparation for a new one with their newly acquired permaculture knowledge, so they emitted a particularly enthusiastic energy.

Every Morning Amber and Themis offered Tai-Chi or Yoga courses to whomever was interested.

As all PDC courses, it ended with a design project students had to work on, combining and presenting what they had learned during the ten day course.

Last but not least, the amazing vegetarian meals were prepared and cooked by *Tomas*. A highly talented, never smiling chef. However, on the last day of the course, we had an amazing pizza dinner baked in the clay oven. Thanks to the locally organized meat-eater lobby, pepperoni was allowed on some pizzas!

Shared By *Karim Hakim*



PHOTO OF THE MONTH

You sent us your submissions and you voted for your favorites. Here it is, the PHOTO OF THE MONTH:
To send us your photos, email us on contact.soilslebanon@gmail.com



Bumblebee drying its wings in my garden. Ashrafieh -Beirut
Photo by Alexis Baghdadi

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GET IN TOUCH, GET INVOLVED


Do you enjoy reading this newsletter?


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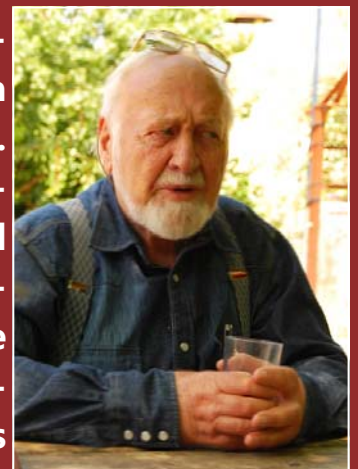
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Cover photo by Adel Nehmeh

A THOUGHT TO SHARE ...

“Sitting at our back door-steps, all we need to live a good life lies about us. Sun, wind, people, buildings, stones, sea, birds and plants surround us. Cooperation with all these things brings harmony, opposition to them brings disaster and chaos.”

–Bill Mollison (1928 – 2016)
Introduction to Permaculture



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