



• Creativity • Collaboration • Continuity • Community

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## FEATURE STORY

### SOILS LAUNCHES THE 1ST BEEKEEPING APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM IN LEBANON

After a busy end-of-year period filled with activities, we took some time off in January to make new contacts and discuss potential collaborations (there are so many exciting things coming soon) and now we're back on track!

At **AFIR Beekeeping and Nature Discovery Center**, we are preparing the launch of our first-ever **Beekeeping Apprenticeship**.

This one-year program consists of 12 year-round sessions (1 session a month) during which participants will head to the center in Saidoun to learn the full basics of beekeeping through the seasons.

The Beekeeping Apprenticeship is inspired from the "rucher école" (apiary school) system in France. It aims to teach people who are serious about keeping hives professionally (for honey production or to introduce pollinators on their land) all the practical knowledge they need to get started, from providing their bees with a healthy environment to extracting honey and other hive products. Beginners who already manage a couple of hives and would like to get a more thorough and technical understanding of honeybees can also benefit from this program.

It is crucial that participants commit to the whole year program (unless there are exceptional circumstances).

The first session will take place on **February 26, 2017** and will be followed by 11 monthly sessions until December this year (the month that requires the most work will exceptionally include 2 sessions). Each training day will be divided in a theoretical and practical part in the AFIR apiary or in a workshop for looking after equipment and materials. Participants will work in small groups, over a small number of hives, and will have a tracking sheet to keep records.

Our own SOILS co-founder **Bassam Khawand** will be the main trainer, and we will be hosting additional local trainers to speak about specific subjects such as wild honey flowers, queen rearing, pest management, etc.

To read the full program and register, visit our website. Oh, that's right, we've also published the new AFIR website! We are still designing the content for some of the pages, but the workshop information and registration form is there:

<http://www.afir-beekeeping-center.com/>

We hope this program will fill a gap in vocational training in Lebanon related to agriculture, and that in the future we'll be able to develop additional programs for other topics like organic gardening.

*Shared by the Editorial Team*



**Beekeeping Apprenticeship Program**  
برنامج التدريب المهني في تربية النحل

February 2017 → December 2017 12 sessions  
شباط 2017 → كانون الأول 2017 12 جلسات



To register or find out more:  
contact:soilslebanon@gmail.com Tel: 71-617988  
www.afir-beekeeping-center.com

للتسجيل أو معرفة المزيد:



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## LET'S FOCUS

### ILLEGAL SEAGULL KILLING IN LEBANON - WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

At SOILS, we believe that true, sustainable change starts with each and every one of us. When we as individuals initiate change in our lives or support those who take positive action, we spread awareness and set examples for people around us. Together, we can create strong, cohesive communities. Only then can we lobby for change on a solid foundation.

For too long in Lebanon, people have expected — even demanded — top-down solutions from governmental bodies... and they have been let down repeatedly. Among other issues, we face serious environmental problems, from a waste management crisis that made international headlines to unregulated hunting, loss of green spaces and the pollution of our air, water and soils.

In **January 2017**, this sorry state of things reached unprecedented heights. The **Costa Brava** landfill site near the national airport and Ghadir river estuary (violating the **Convention for Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution - Barcelona Convention**) had attracted large numbers of gulls and other birds that posed a threat to civil aviation. In response, a decision to close the landfill was issued but not implemented — *senior airport officials said the birds had not been conclusively linked to the trash near the airport!* Meanwhile, the Council for Development and Reconstruction called for a series of repelling measures, *including hiring "hunters" to shoot the birds!* According to activists, this led to indiscriminate killing of different species.

Lebanese environmental groups rapidly mobilized to condemn the hunting and denounced it as illegal, criminal and downright farcical. The **Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL, BirdLife in Lebanon)** warned that seagulls are protected by international treaties, most prominently the [African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement \(AEWA\) 1999](#), dedicated to the conservation of 254 species of migratory water birds, which Lebanon is a part of.

SPNL produced a video with our friend *Fouad Itani* to raise awareness and end the massacre. Click on the image below to see the video:



Fouad also wrote the article below to help people get better acquainted with gulls. We can all do something to make a change, even something as simple as getting educated about gull species and hunting laws is a step in the right direction.

#### GULLS

By Fouad Itani (originally published on the SPNL website: <http://www.spnl.org/gulls/>)

**Gulls** are small to large seabirds of the *Laridae* family, many of which also live inland. They have heavy bodies with long slim wings, long necks, long bills and webbed feet. Gulls can fly exceptionally well. They also swim buoyantly and possess strong legs, which give them reasonably good mobility on the ground. Their colors vary between white, grey, black and brown. They range in size between 30 cm and 75 cm, and weigh between 120 g and 1,800 g.

Gulls are best known as scavengers. They're often seen in large, noisy flocks congregating wherever food is available, especially around fishing boats and garbage dumps. They are also known to consume a wide variety of food that includes fish, invertebrates, insects, earthworms, rodents, eggs, carrion, reptiles, amphibians, plant material and birds. Gulls can drink both salt water and fresh water, as they possess exocrine glands that excrete salt through the nostrils which help the kidneys maintain electrolyte balance. Gulls are mostly colonial ground nesters, they nest in large packed noisy colonies. They lay two to three speckled creamy white eggs in nests composed of vegetation and seaweed.

Many people consider gulls to be a nuisance, but these birds actually perform a very valuable service to humans by eliminating great quantities of organic waste, human refuse and dead animals, all of which could pose a health threat to us.

**14 species** of gulls occur in Lebanon to which the **Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA)** applies. As per the Lebanese hunting law, all fourteen species of gulls are non-game birds. Shooting these birds is both criminal and illegal.

Photos of massacred gulls and other birds have been widely circulated on social media. Rather than reproduce these images, we chose to celebrate gulls in their natural beauty and help get more people acquainted with them. All photos are by Fouad Itani.

For more photos, check out the Facebook page: [Birds of Lebanon and the Middle East](#)



**Slender-billed gull (*Chroicocephalus genei*)**



**Sooty gull (*Ichthyophaga hemiphrasi*)**



**Black-headed gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*)**



**Whiskered tern (*Chlidonias hybrida*)**

**WANT TO HELP MORE?  
VOLUNTEER WITH SPNL**

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## LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

### WHAT ONE GOLDEN JACKAL TAUGHT ME ABOUT SHARING

This month, *Rita Khawand* had an interesting "encounter" as we were exploring a plot of land that belongs to her family just outside the inhabited part of **Saidoun**.

The land consists of old stone terraces where olive trees have been growing for some 20 years. However, since they were left untended when the family left the village, many fell prey to goats at an early age and are now struggling to regrow. Located beneath the highest hill in the village, the area encroaches on an oak forest and has therefore retained some "wild" features. It is also along this "edge" that we find the most biodiversity. Wild boars often dig up the terraces in search of roots or insect larvae — after their passage, it looks like a small tractor has plowed the land. We also find different types of non-venomous snakes, frogs, salamanders, turtles, foxes and jackals, as well as a variety of birds, rodents, lizards and insects, not to mention the different endemic trees and plants.

For now, we keep the beehives of **AFIR Beekeeping and Nature Discovery Center** in the area for the summer. Rita has drawn the base map of the land and is planning to redesign it as a forest garden. Some of the weaker olive trees will be replaced with nitrogen-fixing trees, aromatics and other species to maximize mutually beneficial relationships and increase biodiversity. The only other structure there is a man-made, concrete-lined basin for collecting rainwater, which will come in handy when we start planting. In fact, the main reason for our visit was to find ways of increasing the basin's rainwater catchment.

To our great sadness, there was a dead **jackal** in the basin. He had visibly gone in to drink or slipped and drowned. Members of the canine family are usually very good swimmers but the water was about 2 meters below ground level and it had been extremely cold the previous nights (near 0 degrees Celsius). Since jackals are primarily nocturnal, I surmise that he fell in at night and the cold water numbed his muscles so he couldn't get out.

Sad as we felt, our priority was removing the body from the water to prevent it contaminating the water. With the help of a local, we tied a rope in a noose and while I lifted the jackal with a long rake — lying flat on my stomach to reach it — we slung the noose around his neck and lifted him out. On closer inspection, it turned out to be quite a beautiful specimen of a **golden jackal**. The body was not wounded or bloated, reinforcing my hypothesis that the animal had accidentally drowned no more than a day or two ago. As I looked at the lifeless form, I mused about how fitting it was that the ancient Egyptians gave **Anubis (the god of the after-life)** a jackal's head. I also reflected on the impact we have as humans on other species.

The conservation status of the **golden jackal (*Canis aureus*)** is assessed as least concern by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It is in fact quite widespread in Lebanon and well-adapted to the presence of humans. The golden jackal grows to a length of up to 85 cm, with a tail between 20 cm and 30 cm. Its fur is usually golden but varies between pale cream yellow and dark ochre. The fur on its back is a mixture of black, brown and white hairs, and its tail usually ends with a darker tip.

Jackals are quite shy. During the day, they spend most of their time in rocky areas covered with thick bushes. They are more active at night and typically howling at dusk or sometimes at dawn. They communicate by "braying" which produces a characteristic sound often transliterated as "okkay!" Females gestate for a period of 2 months and give birth to litters of 2-7 pups. By age 6 months, the pups are able to accompany their parents on hunting trips, and by age 8 months, they can hunt independently. Jackals are widely held responsible for killing poultry, although such instances are not as common as people believe. They prefer to feed on small animals such as rabbits, mice, birds and reptiles. If they are hungry, they will eat carrion, small insects or certain plants. Near human habitations, it is not unusual for them to raid garbage bins, and they have grown quite accustomed to municipal lights at night.

In fact, my first encounter with a jackal was in Saidoun in 2014 (I lived all my life in cities). I had stepped outside around 1:00 a.m. for a last smoke of my pipe before bed when I heard faint ruffling. I held still for a minute and was rewarded with the sight of a golden jackal emerging from behind a wall not 4 meters to my right going about his business of quietly sniffing around the garden. I was standing in a spot sheltered from the wind and municipal light, so he didn't notice me. When he was 3 meters away, I coughed to get his attention and he half-crouched, looking in my direction intently. This lasted for a couple of minutes, giving me the opportunity to observe him to my heart's content. I then gently made as if to wave him away and he slowly turned away, looking back over his shoulder once, then disappeared.

Our concern now is how to prevent more animals from drowning in the future. People in the village have advised us to place a metal net over the basin, which seems to have worked well before. However, that would prevent many animals from getting in to quench their thirst, and I am leaning towards a wooden ramp or stone pile (although the latter would somewhat reduce the holding capacity of the basin).

We share this earth with other creatures — big or small — and where our interference has impacted their lives we need to find solutions that work out to our mutual benefit.

Shared by *Alexis Baghdadi*



Scientific references for this article were provided by the **Field Guide to the Mammals of the Middle East**, published by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL):  
<http://www.spnl.org/product/field-guide-to-the-mammals-of-the-middle-east/>

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## LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

### HOW BABY JOUD GOT HER BIG RED CHEEKS

After 12 years of marriage I got pregnant with my daughter *Joud* completely naturally. This came after I did many changes in my life, such as getting rid of as much stress as possible, and growing and eating healthy food. However, because my husband and I were getting a bit on in years, we were mentally prepared in case our child might have some health problems.

Awaiting Joud were a mom and dad full of love and ready to share this love with her. At the same time, like most parents, the waiting period triggered in the excitement of finding out what would be the best we could offer her. From the moment we knew I was pregnant, we began a journey of preparation and research. Always, the same answer came up: "**breastfeeding!**" So this became a priority no matter what. In order to get scientific advice, we took pre-natal training sessions, which reinforced our convictions about breastfeeding, and clarified a lot of important issues related to pregnancy and giving birth.

Contrary to our fears, Joud was born a healthy child with a very good weight. In her first month, she gained a lot of weight solely from breastfeeding, and everything seemed under control.

We grew overconfident and overlooked some details. Joud started throwing up every morning, so I cut her breastfeeding time and removed her from my breast before she was full. Comments from the entourage started pouring in: *Don't you want to give her formula? You're very thin you cannot feed her enough! You're not like women from old times, you cannot depend only on your milk. Why on Earth are you doing all this effort? Poor baby, she looks skinny and little, you should give her formula. Don't breastfeed her at night, you'll get tired. Don't hold her when she's crying, she'll get used to it...* I admit this affected me negatively despite my determination.

When I took Joud to her periodic medical review at the end of her second month, I was shocked; she hadn't gained even half the required weight, and her pediatrician asked me to give her formula, at least during the night. Of course I refused, and asked the doctor to give me some time.

The state of emergency began. I contacted **Lactica** (a local NGO whose mission is to promote and support breastfeeding in Lebanon) who put me in touch with breastfeeding specialist *Joanna Nawfal*. Joanna's technical support and advice were crucial to break the negative cycle. At home, I started relying more on the assistance of people around me, especially my husband, to handle the logistic details of the house, visitors, etc. so I could give my full attention to Joud, just like the first day.

I then followed Joanna's recommendations to increase my milk:

- Pulling milk periodically to increase its quantity (extra milk can be stored in the fridge)
- Trying to pull milk straight after breastfeeding to trick the brain into thinking there is a shortage and the body needs to produce more
- Putting pressure on my breast when I felt Joud was falling asleep at the beginning of her feeding, so more milk would flow into her mouth and she would get used to sucking better
- Taking tablets of fenugreek and aniseed infusions, though their effectiveness isn't 100% proven
- Breastfeeding during the night as much as I can, since prolactin — the hormone that helps milk production — increases at night
- Checking that Joud's mouth is open wide enough, as this affects the milk quantity she can suck
- Breastfeeding whenever Joud needs to be fed, and not depending on the circumstances

Moreover, I was watching videos on to help me understand some details better. I also did a lot of research on specialized websites, and tried to compare subjects from different resources in order to ascertain their credibility (many websites communicate wrong information so it's important to stay vigilant). Sometimes I tried many ideas until I found the best for Joud and me. Finally, I followed many Facebook pages and groups where moms exchanged their experiences with breastfeeding. I can't deny the process was a bit tiring, but watching the progress in Joud's health day by day gave me an immense joy. I forgot about everything else and focused my energy on Joud's weight and how to provide her with more milk.

I remember the first day I took her to the pediatrician I had an endless list of questions. When I visit her nowadays, she's the one who asks pleasantly: "No questions today?" She even advises other moms to do what we did. My confidence in myself and in Joud's health has increased greatly, and she hasn't needed any medical intervention yet, apart from the regular vaccines. My best cure to a cold, fever after vaccination, or teething is breastfeeding.

Today I'm more convinced that every woman who breastfeeds will face some problems sooner or later, and it's very important that she has access to specialized support right from the first day. Some hospitals in Lebanon have started advocating breastfeeding although the majority still give formulas to babies right after birth, instead of encouraging the mother to breastfeed. A lot of doctors encourage formulas as well, unfortunately.

Here is my advice to every mom: Equip yourself with enough information on breastfeeding before giving birth, don't think twice about enrolling in a professional pre-natal training course, don't hesitate to get in touch with a breastfeeding specialist at the first problem.

Joud is 10 and a half months old now. She is still relying on my milk (in addition to hard food, of course), and has big red cheeks.

For a list of breastfeeding resources in Lebanon: <http://www.nutricycle.org/breastfeeding/breastfeedinglist/>

Shared by Silvana Khawand



Joud, day 1



Joud, 2 months



Joud, 10 months



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### AFGHAN CUISINE



**FEBRUARY 13-15, 2017**  
**8:00 p.m. - 11:00 p.m.**

*Makan, Armenia Street, Beirut*

3 dinners to experience the flavors of Afghan cuisine, including the country's most famous dishes: beef and vegetable soup, vegetable stuffed flatbread, salad, lamb kebabs, biryani, vegetable stew, sweet rice pudding.

**FEES:**  
Pay what you think is fair

**For reservations: 70-954057**

[https://www.facebook.com/  
events/345362082530960/](https://www.facebook.com/events/345362082530960/)

### BBC DOCUMENTARY NIGHT - THE HUNT IN THE GRIP OF THE SEASONS / ARCTIC



**FEBRUARY 14, 2017**  
**8:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.**

*Minus 1, Tabaris*

In the Grip of the Seasons looks at the challenges of hunting in the Arctic, the most seasonal place on Earth. Seasonal change means that all the parameters of the hunt - the conditions, the strategies, the prey - change too.

**FEES:**  
LBP 5,000 / person (includes popcorn)

[https://www.facebook.com/  
events/405886096413149/](https://www.facebook.com/events/405886096413149/)

### METROPOLIS YOUTH FILM FESTIVAL



**FEBRUARY 23-26, 2017**  
**Click on the link below for the full schedule**

*Metropolis Cinema, Ashrafieh*

A selection of short films for children 5 to 18 years old and above (most of the films are with no dialogue or dubbed to Arabic). Plus, 2 free workshops on puppet making and filmmaking.

**FEES:**  
LBP 8,000 / movie  
LBP 5,000 (students)

[http://www.metropoliscinema.net/2017/my-film-  
fest-2017/](http://www.metropoliscinema.net/2017/my-film-fest-2017/)

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## GET IN TOUCH, GET INVOLVED


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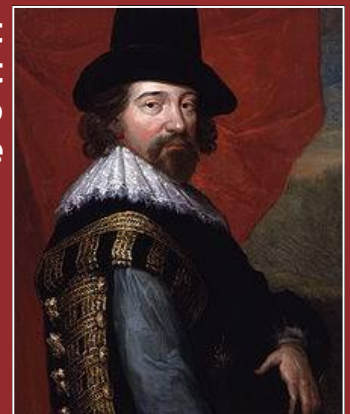
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## A THOUGHT TO SHARE ...

**"Where the cause is not known the effect cannot be produced. Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed."**



**—Francis Bacon (1561-1626)**  
**Aphorisms**

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