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## FEATURE STORY

### BEEKEEPING AND WORKING WITH REFUGEES AT THE LUSH SUMMIT 2018

On **February 14-15, 2018**, I was invited to represent **SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon** at the **LUSH Summit** in **London**, an event that gathers LUSH shops, employees, partners, suppliers, and activists from different parts of the world to exchange over environmental and social issues.

LUSH is an ethical cosmetics company committed to sourcing its raw materials from suppliers that practice sustainable and regenerative farming, and it supports environmental projects through specific product campaigns or via its **Sustainable LUSH Fund**. As we are supported by Slush for our **AFIR Beekeeping and Nature Discovery Center**, we were invited to participate in a couple of panels (honey and gardens in refugee camps).

The event venue was divided into spaces each dedicated to a theme (conservation platform, earth stage, buying space, migration and disaster space, ocean platform, queer café, etc.) Panels and talks were held simultaneously in the different spaces, and there were stands and posters about raw materials (cacao, argan, etc.) and packaging (cork, recycled paper, organic cotton, etc.) used in Lush products.

#### DAY 1 | HONEY AND BEEKEEPING

On the first day I participated in a panel around honey (bee welfare and the use of honey being a controversial topic at LUSH - a vegetarian company). We discussed how beekeeping can be an important source of revenue for rural residents and how it can help them become protectors of the ecosystem on which bees depend. By taking only surplus honey and leaving sufficient stores for the bees, beekeepers can also play their part in sustainable and ethical beekeeping.

Among the panelists was *Philip Chandler* (UK) - the "barefoot beekeeper" - whom I was very happy to meet. Philip works on breeding the endangered native black bee (*Apis mellifera mellifera*), and varroa-resistant bee colonies. He practices what he calls "balanced beekeeping" which puts the bees' welfare and needs before the beekeeper's.

Other panelists were representatives of **Casa Apis** (Brazil) who supply Lush with organic fair-trade honey. Casa Apis is an umbrella organization for 5 cooperatives in Northeastern Brazil, representing around 1,000 beekeepers. One of the cooperatives present at the summit was established in the **Barro Vermelho Quilombola** community, descendants of freed slaves. This community used to rely on growing corn and beans for income, which was nowhere near enough. They started learning beekeeping in 1999 and found that it provided good income while making people care about regenerating bee habitats. They are now reforesting areas they had previously cleared out, in order to help bring back rains and the native flora that supports the bees. Bee welfare standards are high: intervention kept to minimum, swarming is not prevented, only surplus honey is collected, no chemical treatment is applied.

#### DAY 1 - BIRD CONSERVATION

*Assad Serhal* from **SPNL** (the **Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon**) participated in a talk with *Axel Hirschfeld* (**Committee Against Bird Slaughter - CABS**) titled...

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... "Killing Fields and Safe Havens for Birds in Lebanon." After Axel exposed the horrifying bird massacres he witnessed in Lebanon in 2017, Assad explained how SPNL is trying to raise awareness about sustainable hunting through its **Himas**, protected areas that create socio-economic interest and income generation opportunities to inhabitants while turning them into protectors of bio-diversity.

## DAY 2 - MIGRATION - - - - -

The next day I participated in a panel on gardens in refugee camps. I had the chance to meet *Mohamad Saleh* from Palestine (founder of **Moustadam**, ecological design company), the **Lemon Tree Trust** (a UK NGO establishing gardens in refugee camps in Iraq), and **Together for Better Days** (an NGO working in refugee camps in Greece), among others. I presented the **micro-gardens pilot** we did in the Bekaa back in 2016 and the lessons learned, and distributed some copies of the **micro-gardens manual** we created.

## DAY 2 - OLIVE OIL AND RE-WILDING

**Bioland** (an organic food company from Lebanon) was invited to speak about its collaboration with SPNL and LUSH on bird conservation in a talk titled "Olive Oil and Re-wilding." Bioland owns 65 h of land, 30 of which have olive trees. After meeting Assad and LUSH, Bioland decided to turn their land into a forbidden hunting area. They also released a **Syrian wood pecker** couple (a species considered to be extinct) last year in their olive orchard in collaboration with SPNL and the female chose one of the trees to nest in.

Representatives from **Doğa Derneği** (a partner of Birdlife International in Turkey), explained their approach to protecting ancient land management practices which support wildlife and people. For example they collaborate with indigenous people who live in tents among olive trees as part of the eco-system, where wild olive trees grow naturally with no irrigation and parts of them are grafted with productive varieties. Doğa Derneği helps them improve the price of oil and resist pressure from the commercial industry.

## DAY 2 - PALM OIL

One of the hot topics that were highlighted in the event through many talks, panels, and videos was palm oil. Is the idea of sustainable palm oil a realistic one?

Industrial palm oil plantations are wiping out rainforests such as in Sumatra (Indonesia) to make way for palm tree monocultures. Species like orangutans are losing their habitat and so are indigenous people such as the Orang Rimba tribe. Demand for palm oil is rising, with production doubling between 2000 and 2012, and it has become the most widely consumed vegetable oil. It can be found in almost everything from biscuits to shampoos and under different names, so boycotting it completely is very difficult if not impossible - and it may not be very useful. Direct interventions are more efficient. For instance, the **Sumatran Orangutan Society (SOS)** a UK-based NGO is supporting people on the ground in Sumatra (such as the Orangutan Information Center) to save their forests by launching a LUSH-supported reforestation campaign.

A replay of most panels and talks can be found here: <http://player.lush.com/events/summit2018>

Shared by Rita Khawand



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# LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

## LEBANON'S THIRD ANNUAL SEED EXCHANGE... AND MEETING WITH BIAU GERME

For the first time this year, the young NGO **Buzuruna Juzuruna** took over from **SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon** to organize Lebanon's annual seed exchange. The event took place on **March 24, 2018** at the **Grand Meshmush Hotel** in **Gemmayze, Beirut**.

Buzuruna Juzuruna was happy to share its recently completed **catalogue of seeds** grown and sown in their farm in **Saadnayel, Bekaa**, and showcase some of their produce. To get a copy of the catalogue, contact Buzuruna Juzuruna on Facebook or by email at [grainesetcinema@gmail.com](mailto:grainesetcinema@gmail.com)

We were also very pleased to welcome many friends and partners from the Lebanese permaculture and agro-ecological network, including **SOILS**, **Les Racines du Ciel**, the **Badaro Urban Farmers Market**, and many others.

The highlight of the event was the talk by heirloom seed champions **Philippe** and **Elizabeth Catinand** from **Biau Germe (France)**, who were Buzuruna Juzuruna's guests in Lebanon that month. Philippe and Elizabeth's talk comprised three parts: a technical presentation about seeds, hybrids, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs), an overview of agro-industrial corporations' strategies, and finally seed farmer organizations around the world, with an emphasis on Biau Germe's internal structure.

Biau Germe is a network of **11 farms (21 farmers)** in southern and western France specialized in producing heirloom seeds. These farms are located between **Bordeaux** and **Toulouse** and spread around the main office/farm in **Montpezat d'Agenais**. Biau Germe was founded in 1984 by **Sylvia Schmid** who had been working on reproducing heirloom seeds since 1970s and selling them since 1982. The originality of Biau Germ comes from two main elements: their activity and their organization. The association produces and distributes heirloom seeds to fight seed...



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... monopolies by large agro-industrial corporations. Second, Biau Germe has succeeded in implementing and maintaining a horizontal, direct democracy experience.

Seed production and food safety are very important issues, but here I want to share some notes on the association's organizational structure in particular, as it was probably one of the most striking experiences I heard about recently.

First, Biau Germe follows a special election system known as "**direct democracy**" where each of the 11 farms is represented by an administrator who assumes some of the managerial responsibilities like culture quotation, communication, assembly and meeting organization, to name a few. Every task requires two persons in charge (although an individual can take on more than one task at a time). Some tasks are assigned for a period of one year, others longer. Once a year, the 11 administrators meet for elections that follow a very interesting process and have always guaranteed a very smooth management of the network.

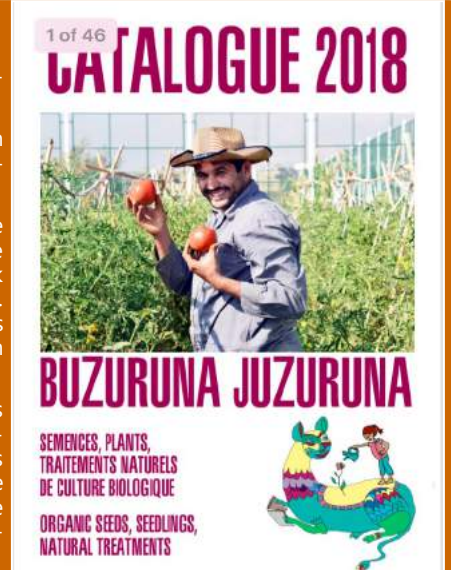
The administrators define the tasks and personal qualities for their manager. Each person then writes down the names of one or two persons whom they believe have the required qualifications for a specific task, as well as their own name, and take turns to defend their choices. The final two candidates are assigned to a task once a unanimous decision is made, this way it is not actual persons who are chosen but rather qualifications. The 2 nominees can also express their view; if they do not accept the task, they can make a counter proposition or ask their supporters to help them neutralize any insecurities they might have.

After the tasks have been assigned, it is time for organizing the coming year. Every farm states how much income it aims to achieve by the end of the year, based on its income from the previous year. The administrators then draw up a plan with income-generating activities for the farm to reach its goal. This plan takes into consideration the size of the farm, the number of working hours (on the farm and in the office), the variety and volume of seeds produced (some seeds are harder to produce than other), and other criteria.

Once this is done, things are good to go. The farms support each other throughout the year. In case they secure excess income, they either use it to make up for any losses some of them might have faced due to natural disasters or other complications, or keep it in a common fund and distribute it equally among themselves at the end of the year.

Of course much more was said about Biau Germe's alternative horizontal management policies. To find out more about Biau Germe, visit their website: <https://www.biaugerme.com/>

Shared by Karim Hakim



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## EGYPT TURNS TO PERMACULTURE TO ADDRESS WATER SCARCITY

When we created the **FEED** **فید** **initiative** in **2017**, we were a group of families in **Egypt** seeking a more self-sufficient life, open to our surroundings and based on collaboration, moral values, and spiritual awareness. We had also reached a point where we could no longer remain silent spectators of humanity's problems (especially in our part of the world), problems like water scarcity, food insecurity, the energy crisis and many more that result primarily from wars and climate change.

**Permaculture** was the answer to this situation. We started working with children and designed special pedagogic programs that instil in them positive qualities like commitment, readiness, independence, resilience, empathy, cooperation, group spirit, etc. We also introduced them to practical workshops including carpentry, plumbing, and home economics, to prepare them to adopt permaculture practices.

More recently, we started making preparations to hold our first ever **Permaculture Design Course (PDC)**, which promises to be a great experience. The course will allow us to protect ourselves and build up our capacities. It will be held from **January 18 to 27, 2019**, at the **King Mariout Motel** in **Alexandria**, with an emphasis on the issue of **water scarcity**. The PDC will be led by **Rhamis Kent**, a permacultivator and expert on water strategies and solutions, along with other international and regional co-teachers.

The 10-day course is open to Egyptian participants and visitors from around the region and the world. It offers a glimpse of practical solutions and strategies for living a self-sufficient lifestyle in a system capable of coping with climate change and its consequences.

For more information and registration, check out the event page on Facebook: [Permaculture Design Course | January 18-27, 2019](#)

Prior to the PDC, we will hold a **3-day Urban Permaculture Workshop** on **September 5-7, 2018** at the King Mariout Motel. This workshop will be led by a group of young permacultivators and highlights solutions to reduce the high cost of living, for example by growing food on balconies, rooftops, and in home gardens, or by managing water and energy smartly and rationalizing your consumption. The teaching in this workshop includes self-study material and books on urban permaculture to take back home, in addition to relevant presentations and lots of practical sessions. Participants will learn to grow their own food through by applying a micro permaculture system in their home garden or their flat in the city.

Shared by Aycha-Rahaf Badaro



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## LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

### THE EURASIAN SKYLARK STILL FACES A NUMBER OF THREATS IN LEBANON

The **Eurasian skylark** (*Alauda arvensis* - قبرة السماء) is a small passerine bird from the *Alaudidae* family. It measures 18 cm in length, with a wingspan of 39 cm, and an average weight of 40 g. Like most larks, the Eurasian skylark is a brown to sandy grey bird, it has a buff breast with dark streaks, a white belly, and a short foldable crest on the head.

In **Lebanon** the Eurasian skylark is a common passage migrant (abundant during autumn migration), a scarce winter visitor, and a rare non-breeding summer visitor. It is a ground-dwelling bird usually found in open farmlands and grasslands along the coast, and in the Bekaa valley where it feeds mainly on seeds.

The Eurasian skylark still faces a number of threats, like farming practices, habitat destruction, the use of pesticides, and hunting. Even though it's not listed as a game bird, the Eurasian skylark remains one of the most hunted birds in the country. This is mainly due to its abundance during the hunting season, the illegal use of calling machines, and the misconception and confusion created by the Arabic name used by most Lebanese hunters (*Matwaa* - مطوق) that refers to it, and which really designates the Calandra lark, a game bird actually referred to in the Lebanese hunting law.

Hopefully, and with the recent implementation of the hunting law #580/2004, and all the awareness efforts by the Ministry of Environment, local NGOs, and ethical responsible hunters, the Eurasian skylark will soon be protected in Lebanon.

Shared by Fouad Itani

This article was originally published on the SPNL website:

<http://www.spnl.org/the-eurasian-skyllark-still-faces-a-number-of-threats-in-lebanon/>

All photos courtesy of Fouad Itani. See more photos on the Birds of Lebanon website:

<https://www.birdsoflebanon.com/>

Facebook: Birds of Lebanon and the Middle East

<https://www.facebook.com/birdsoflebanon/>



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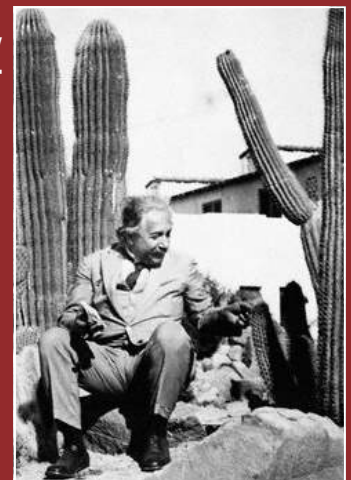
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### A THOUGHT TO SHARE ...

**“Look deep into nature,  
and then you will understand  
everything better.”**



**–Albert Einstein (1879-1955)**

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