

Title

Fourteen teams of adrenalin charged birders will step boldly into the Israeli night at midnight on 31 March, as they cross the start line of a unique, new, bird race.

Champions of the Flyway is the brainchild of SPNI (BirdLife in Israel) and will raise conservation funds to help BirdLife Partners tackle the illegal killing of birds in Southern and Eastern Europe.

You can follow the [Champions of the Flyways race live here](#), as teams arrive from March 28th and watch the event kick off at midnight, on March 31st.

Supporting BirdLife's Flyways Programme, the race takes place during the Eilat Birds Festival and celebrates the extraordinary miracle of migration in this spectacular part of the Great Rift Valley as thousands of migratory storks, raptors and songbirds rush north towards their breeding grounds.



Jonathan Meyrav, Tourism Director of SPNI's Israel Ornithological Center said, "Champions of the Flyway isn't just a fun race for avid birders; it also carries a strong message for wildlife enthusiasts everywhere. While most of us enjoy wild birds in beautiful settings, millions of birds are slaughtered every year as they migrate to and from their breeding grounds. The numbers lost by illegal killing is staggering and truly worrying."

The recipients of funding generated by the first Champions of the Flyway Bird Race will be Bird Conservation Georgia (BCG)—an NGO that was established through a merger between the Georgia Centre for the Conservation of Wildlife (BirdLife Partner) and the Batumi Raptor Count (BRC).

The conservation action BCG is undertaking will help preserve the miracle of migration at the Batumi Gorge in Ajara Autonomous Republic, Georgia. The 'Batumi bottleneck' is an area of the utmost importance for migratory birds. Every autumn a huge concentration of southbound soaring migrants get funnelled through the narrow stretch between the Black Sea's east-coast and the high mountains of the Lesser Caucasus.

With more than one million migrating raptors of up to 35 species passing through the area at this time, it is simply the greatest bottleneck for migrating birds of prey in all Eurasia.



Research has shown that around ten thousand birds of prey fall victim to illegal shooting here each autumn, as raptors pass low through the gorge, unwittingly presenting themselves as easy targets.

Bird Conservation Georgia takes a novel approach to tackling the illegal killing here and strives to work with, rather than against, local communities in order to reduce hunting pressure through mutually beneficial actions.

Each year, volunteers are invited to attend Batumi Raptor Camp and participate in BCG's work recording the extraordinary passage of migrants that takes place there in the spring and autumn. Visitors stay with local families and bring valuable ecotourism revenue to the economy. The many volunteer raptor counters considerably swell the ranks of the professional scientists at Batumi and their 'Citizen Science' contribution helps expand the scale of monitoring that is now possible. With support raised through Champions of the Flyway, they will also engage receptive local hunters and falconers as 'ambassadors for conservation', to raise awareness among their peers of the consequence of their current actions and the significant ecotourism opportunities that a change of attitude and behaviour presents.

BirdLife International has entered a team in the race sponsored by leading optical manufacturer Swarovski Optik called [the BirdLife Swarovski Optik Racers](#). Every team is in competition to raise the most funding for the appeal. Please support our 'racers' and make a donation to help stop the illegal killing of birds today.

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