

#### Title

A day full of environmental activities attracted more than 150 students aged between 8 and 12 from Aanjar and its neighboring villages in Lebanon under the theme of “The Secrets of Bird Migration and Forests of Hope”.

Aanjar’s festival, on Saturday 6 October, allowed students and attendees to gather information about their communities' natural resources firsthand, and how forest conservation and wildlife fit into the larger ecosystem and the local natural resource management system or "Hima."

#### **A collaborative project in a protected place**

Organised by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL; BirdLife Partner) with support of the Aanjar municipality and in collaboration with the Lebanon Reforestation Initiative (LRI), the activities aimed to focus on natural concepts of sustainability and conservation. The program was funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by the United States Forest Service (USFS). Hima Aanjar was announced as an Important Bird Area (IBA) in 2005. The area consists mostly of: freshwater wetlands, mixed woodland, cultivated fields, open scrubby hillside and commercial fish farming, and is managed and respected under the traditional principle of "Hima", meaning "a protected place".

#### **Amongst nature and culture**

Activities started with biking around the UNESCO World Heritage Site, where kids were exposed to the cultural aspect of the area, and learned about the habitat of the globally threatened Syrian Serin bird. The nature trail walk allowed the participants to watch the birds and engage with the educational signage that introduced them to the wildlife and reforested trees at the site, as well as animals such as the otter and swamp cat. All the children then had the chance to watch 'The Miracle of Migration' movie in Hima Aanjar’s visitor centre followed by a tree planting activity facilitated by LRI. This focused on the importance of trees in our life and the involvement of each child in helping to conserve their nature. At the end of the day, participants were encouraged to create a kite, bird house, or bird feeder from recycled materials, allowing them to understand the concept of recycling.

“I am delighted that all Aanjar’s community is gathered here today and was able to make such a great contribution and make our first Aanjar Festival a true success.” Said Garabet Sarkis Panpokyan, Mayor of Aanjar.

“Aanjar attracts thousands of tourists from all over Lebanon throughout the year. Its Hima is now a destination for every person who would like to learn about this protected area”, added Mr. Garabet.

**The engagement and commitment of the young people of Aanjar and their love for their natural surroundings will have a lasting benefit for their community, their environment, and the future of their birds and forests.**