Hima Fund now available for Middle East IBAs

Title

The launch of the Hima Fund, which enables BirdLife Partners and allied organisations to apply online for funding to manage Important Bird Areas (IBAs) as Himas, took place in Doha, Qatar, on October 6th, in the presence of Her Highness Sheikha Jawaher Bint Hamad Bin Sahim Al-Thani. The Hima Fund was established with a $1 million donation from Her Highness Sheikha Jawaher, with the aim of re-establishing the Hima, a traditional approach to conserving biodiversity and managing natural resources, throughout the Middle East and beyond. Her Highness Sheikha Jawaher announced the donation at BirdLife's 31st Global Council Meeting at the Virginia Commonwealth University, Qatar. During the meeting, Qatar's Friends of Environment Centre joined the BirdLife Partnership as the BirdLife Affiliate in Qatar. The Hima was established within the Arabian Peninsula and adjacent areas before Islam. The Prophet Mohammed laid down general guidelines that transformed the Hima to become one of the essential instruments of conservation in Islamic Law. He abolished the pre-Islamic practice of making private reserves for the exclusive use of powerful individuals, and ruled instead that they should be used for the public welfare. He further ordered that in Hima areas, plants and grass should be allowed to grow, flourish and regenerate abundantly "for the benefit of all animals", wild as well as domestic. The Hima system promotes responsibility and equity. It is community-based, recognises the role, rights and values of local communities, and offers opportunities to link conservation and livelihoods development. It is culturally appropriate, values traditional practices and local knowledge, and is socially and economically adaptable. It is complementary to nationally designated Protected Areas. Details of the Hima Fund and how to apply can be found on the new website www.himafund.org. The fund is managed by the regional members of the Hima Fund board, who will consider applications based on advice from the Fund's technical committee. Sites eligible for funding must be IBAs. At this stage, the Hima Fund is available for IBAs in the following countries: Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait and Palestine. Proposals must recognise the interests of the local communities who depend on natural resources within or around the sites. There is a need to demonstrate that Protected Areas are for the public good, and to ensure their benefits remain greater than their costs. This can only be done through close collaboration with local people. Hima Fund Coordinator Dr. Elsadiq Bashir said: "It gives me great pleasure to thank, on behalf of the Hima Fund Board and its Chair Dr Saif Ali Al-hajari, HH Sheikha Jawahir bint Hamad ben Saheim Al-Thani, the Consort of HH the Heir Apparent of Qatar and the founder and major donor of the Hima Fund, on this historical occasion marking the official launching of the Hima Fund, its website and guiding booklet. I seize this opportunity to extend our thanks and appreciation to all our partners in the Middle East, particularly BirdLife International and its Middle East

Regional Office in Amman, for their various inputs and technical support." Since 2004, BirdLife Partner the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) has taken the lead in the revival of the Hima concept for the conservation of IBAs, in collaboration with locally elected authorities. So far, six IBAs have been declared as Himas in Lebanon. Traditional Himas already exist in Saudi Arabia and Oman, and more Himas have been proposed recently in Syria and Yemen. Dr Assad Serhal, Director General of SPNL and chair of the regional committee, added: "The Hima Fund is a window of opportunity for saving the Middle East's Globally Threatened Species, and to conserve our top priority IBAs by reviving Himas, a way of life for local communities, fishermen, Bedouins, farmers and others who depend on the sustainability of the natural resources for their survival, together with Birdlife Partners and Local Conservation Groups."