



(<https://www.swara.co.ke/>)

(<https://www.facebook.com/eawildlife>) (<https://twitter.com/eawildlife>)

(<https://plus.google.com/117918365695043154657/videos>)

(<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFfcohkOwnbv3K-qV4QKjjg>)



SWARA MAGAZINE (/INDEX.PHP)	NEWS (/INDEX.PHP/NEWS)	CONSERVATION FEATURES (/INDEX.PHP/CONSERVATION-FEATURES)
DEBATE & OPINION (/INDEX.PHP/DEBATE-AND-OPINION)	YOUR EXPERIENCE (/INDEX.PHP/GUEST-BLOG)	PRINT EDITION (/INDEX.PHP/PRINT-EDITION)
ABOUT SWARA (/INDEX.PHP/ABOUT-SWARA)	EAWLS WEBSITE (HTTPS://WWW.EAWILDLIFE.ORG)	

You are here: Home (/index.php) » Category Blog - 2 columns (/index.php/category-blog-2-columns) » The Barn Owls: Ambassadors of Peace

!! CONTENT
Single Article (/index.php/single-article)
Category Blog - 2 columns (/index.php/category-blog-2-columns)

On Safari (/index.php/conservation-features/on-safari)
THE BARN OWLS: AMBASSADORS OF PEACE
Written by Website Master Science and Research (/index.php/conservation-features/science-and-research)
CATEGORY BLOG - 2 COLUMNS (/INDEX.PHP/CATEGORY-BLOG-2-COLUMNS)
Created: 15 May 2017
Hits: 300
Ranger's Diary (/index.php/conservation-features/ranger-s-diary)

Category Blog - 1 column
(/index.php/category-blog-1-column)

Category List
(/index.php/category-list)

Tabs (/index.php/tabs)

Accordion
(/index.php/accordion)



0 Comments



Two barn owl siblings in Switzerland. One is dark reddish and the other whitish, but both display many black spots, like Kenyan ones.

Photo Credit: Alexandre Roulin

By Rupi Mangat

Twenty-five years ago, Alexandre Roulin began his research on owls, fascinated by a bird that had crossed so many continents from its original home in Asia and become so widespread on the planet -- just like humans -- although human originated in Africa.

Despite so much bad press that owls receive, they are intriguing birds and a quarter of a century later, Roulin, now a full professor at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, is still enchanted by them. On a recent visit to the National Museums of Kenya's (NMK) ornithology department, he related an amazing story of barn owls as harbingers of peace in a conflict zone -- Israel, Jordan and Palestine.

It goes like this.

It is not no secret in many cultures around the world that the poor owl is seen as a bird of bad omen.

But owls are exquisite. With beautiful round faces and forward looking eyes, they are swift flyers, swooping on their prey without a sound.

Roulin was nevertheless fascinated by the colour variance of the barn

owls -- almost white in southern Europe to reddish plumage around central Europe. To cut a long story short, it has to do with the diet of the owls -- vole-eaters are dark while the mice-consumers are white.

In pursuit of the barn owls, this deceptively-looking simple research led Roulin beyond the boundaries of Europe to the Middle East in the 2010s, a region rich in history, but infamous for conflict. He was to join the team of Yossi Leshem, a professor in Tel Aviv University who started the barn owl project in the Middle East, and General Mansour Abu Rashid from Jordan. The region of research was where the farms were and where poison was used intensely to get rid of pests -- that is rodents. The scientists and the farmers were concerned about the increasing dependence of pesticides to control the pests with chemicals eventually entering the human food chain.

Unfortunately the intended victims are raptors like owls, eagles and vultures, with more than 90 per cent drop in populations of vultures in two decades.

Thinking out of the box

Ornithologists were quick to engage the people and the authorities on a simple way to control the rodents. Build bird boxes for the barn owls to roost on the farms thus saving the barn owls while controlling pests.

“The Jordan Valley is at the junction of Europe, Asia and Africa,”

Roulin pointed out to an excited audience of researchers and scientists at the NMK. “It is an important biodiversity hotspot and an important bottleneck on the world’s principle birding migration routes.

“To protect birds migrating from Europe and Asia from poisoning, we developed a project to replace pesticides by biological pest control agents in agricultural fields. Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian farmers participate in this joint integrative pest management project, with the ultimate aim of promoting more sustainable and environmentally friendly farming habits,” said Roulin.

“Barn owls and kestrels are common throughout Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian [territory].

Each pair of barn owls produce up to 11 offspring, which eat between 2,000 and 6,000 rodents per year, making them an efficient alternative to pesticides for the farmers.”

The science behind this lies in understanding the natural behaviour of the two species of birds. Both make their nests in cavities, either natural or man-made and are comfortable living in urban spaces.

“They were perfect candidates for populating the nest boxes specifically erected for this purpose,” Roulin added.

Some 3,000 nest boxes were placed on farms in Israel, and 220 each in Jordan and the Palestinian Authority.

The experiment was so successful that since 2002, Israelis, Jordanians and Palestinians regularly exchange experience during joint seminars even during periods of unrest.

Political will and ecological education

At the heart of the success are two unlikely protagonists.

Two army generals: Mansour Abu Rashid from Jordan and the Israeli Baruch Spiegel.

Interestingly Baruch Spiegel has a degree in biology. General Rashid though not a biologist understood the symbolic power of birds to reconcile people.

“In the Middle East, local cooperation around nature conservation projects started to interest politicians and members of the society, including those interested in peace processes such as the late honourable Shimon Peres,” explained Roulin.

The 1994 Peace Treaty between Israel and Jordan was instrumental in starting several cross-border environmental projects between the two states. One was the Red Sea Marine Peace Park between Israel and Jordan to protect the coral reef running across the two countries.

“General Rashid and General Spiegel were in the peace negotiations and realized the power of nature for peace-building and became strong advocates of nature conservation,” according to Roulin. Today both men are at the forefront of the barn owl project.

“While military forces are at the frontlines of conflicts, they can also play central roles in peace-building and motivate people to take responsibility for their environment,” said Roulin.

Another important factor is education for public awareness.

Documents are prepared in Jewish and Arabic for farmers and their children about the owls and other birds.

The Kenyan visit

Knowing that birds have no boundaries and barn owls are common in Kenya and along the Great Rift Valley which runs from Jordan to Mozambique, Roulin and Leshem are keen to start a project which is connected to the project in the Jordan Valley.

“The idea is to connect the different human cultures along the Rift Valley from Kenya to the Jordan Valley,” he said “The onus though is on the key politicians from the region to work with us to start such a project.”

It would be a less poisonous and much healthier world if they did.

Comments **Community** 1 Login ▾

♥ Recommend 🔗 Share Sort by Best ▾

LOG IN WITH

OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS ?

Be the first to comment.

[back to top](#)

0 Comments

Sort by **Oldest**

[Facebook Comments plug-in](#)

LATEST STORIES

- >> **Richard Leakey's Interview**
(/index.php/news/latest-news/205-richard-leakey-s-interview)
- >> **Community Ecotourism can Resolve Conflict between Humans and Lions – Report**
(/index.php/news/latest-news/east-africa-news/247-community-ecotourism-can-resolve-conflict-between-humans-and-lions-report)
- >> **Kenyan Conservations Oppose Govt Move to Allow Settlements in Key Forest**
(/index.php/news/latest-news/east-africa-news/246-kenyan-conservations-oppose-govt-move-to-allow-settlements-in-key-forest)
- >> **Kenya Ponders Alternative Rail Route amid Concern over Effects to Wildlife**
(/index.php/news/latest-news/east-africa-

TWITTER FEEDS

Tweets by
@SwaraMagazine



Swara Magazine
@SwaraMagazine

Kenya's iconic Chyulu Hills Launches Carbon Offset Programme bit.ly/2tVd5hV
.[@ConservationOrg](#)
.[@KeForestService](#)
.[@biglifeafrica](#)



1 Aug 2017

Swara Magazine
Retweeted



EA Wild Life Society
@eawildlife

Did you know a group of Rhinos 🦏🦏🦏 is called a CRASH? [#DidYouKnow](#)
[#VoiceOfConservation](#) [#Rhino](#)

[Embed](#)

[View on Twitter](#)

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWS



Sign up now to receive exciting and insightful conservation news delivered directly to your inbox.

Click Here to subscribe and access our past newsletter archive

(/index.php/news/subscribe-to-our-newsletter)

news/245-kenya-ponders-alternative-rail-route-amid-concern-over-effects-to-wildlife)

**>> Six poachers sentenced to 15 years in prison
(/index.php/news/latest-news/africa-news/234-six-poachers-sentenced-to-15-years-in-prison)**

**>> Video and photos confirm South Africa's legendary Knysna elephants still exist
(/index.php/news/latest-news/africa-news/227-video-and-photos-confirm-south-africa-s-legendary-knysna-elephants-still-exist)**

**>> Celebrating the Earth Hour
(/index.php/news/latest-news/world-news/232-celebrating-the-earth-hour)**

**>> New Butterfly species discovered in Alaska
(/index.php/news/latest-news/world-news/228-new-butterfly-species-discovered-in-alaska)**

Contact Us (/index.php/about-swara/contact-us-today) | Give a Gift (/index.php/about-swara/give-a-gift) | Shop (/index.php/about-swara/shop) | Newsletters (/index.php/news/subscribe-to-our-newsletter) | Advertising (/index.php/about-swara/distribution-circulation) | Subscribe (/index.php/subscribe) | About EAWLS (/index.php/about-swara/history-of-swara-magazine) | Submit a Swara Magazine Article (/index.php/about-swara/contribute)



Copyrights. All rights reserved.

East African Wild Life Society