



Bird Camp Besh Barmag

the initiative

past – present – future

Young people brought together by the spectacle of bird migration

Interest in birds and nature, an awareness of the need for its protection paired with curiosity in other youth from different cultures has a thrilling potential. In the present case, the experience of bird migration as provided by Mother Nature, may foster both environmental awareness, international learning and tolerance as well as developed opportunities for both youth and local communities.

Some 90km north of Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, the eastern foothills of the Greater Caucasus reaches down almost to the shores of the Caspian Sea. The "bottleneck" effect this has on migrating land birds has been the subject of regular studies since 2007 when German bird reserachers from the Greifswald University started monitoring the site (Heiss & Gauger 2011). Local students and organizations have been visiting and foreign birdwatchers have been even more attracted to both Azerbaijan and Besh Barmag over the last few years. Millions of birds pass during the autumn period with day counts of over 100.000 birds and with 150 species in a few days. Up to 300 species can be seen in a counting season! This is an incredibly species-rich bird watching area!

Read more about the bird migration studies, the importance of Besh Barmag and enjoy photo galleries at

- www.birdingaze.blogspot.se
- www.tomasharaldsson.se
- http://www.wesca.net/Podoces/Podoces6.1/PODOCES%206.1_%20Coastal%20bird%20migration%20in%20Azerbaijan%20Republic.pdf
- <http://dx.doi.org/10.3161/000164513X678900>
- <https://doi.org/10.1017/S095927091500009X>



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Who are we, what do we do and why

We are a loose gathering of nature conservation organizations, ornithologists, researchers, students, tour operators and individuals all gathered around a common interest and conviction; the bird migration site of Besh Barmag has outstanding importance and a great potential for promoting both interest in birds, academic as well as popular learning, nature awareness and inspiring meetings between young people.

One way to manifest this is to physically gather young interested people at the site and enjoy the spectacle of bird migration. This has been done occasionally and in different forms since 2006 but in more organized shape since 2015. In late October 2015 ten Swedes monitored the site during a few days and in September 2016 some 15 Azeris, three Germans and eight Swedes spent a weekend here. In April 2017 the next Bird Camp is coming up with some 30 planned participants from four countries.

Nature Friends Azerbaijan have been the operative organizer of the camps so far and have made an excellent effort. Baku-based travel agency Caspian Tour have been used for bus transports, tourist visas and other logistics, also with a very fine effort. Our many years of collective experience in tour organizing, travel operations and leading bird watching groups in the region is fundamental for the successes so far.

During the 2015 trip we also visited Shirvan Nationalpark and lake Haji Gaboul together with Nature Friends Azerbaijan and in April 2017 we will visit the Greater Caucasus for two days. We have summed up the camps with a final dinner in Baku which has been very appreciated.

Fundings and costs

This work lives purely out of sponsoring from organizations and individual self costs and the absolute majority of the efforts are volunteer-based and by a passionate group of people. It has no political nor religious affiliations and wants to promote tolerance, mutual learning and sustainable development through the joys of what we do.

From an international perspective Azerbaijan is still a cheap country in terms of living and traveling costs and youth arrangements can be done with a surprisingly low budget. Most of the sponsored funds go straight to the camp costs (food, transport, equipment etc.). We are enormously grateful to our sponsors over the years with well over 13.000€ in total supporting of the three camps so far and giving some 80 young enthusiasts the possibility to enjoy bird migration and camping by the Caspian Sea.

BirdLife Sweden have sponsored the Swedish participants and the initiative holder with some 4.000€ during the camps.





NABU, the German BirdLife partner, sponsored with 1.500€ for the 2016 camp.
 OSME, the Ornithological Society of the Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asia, sponsored with 1.500€ for the 2016 camp.
 BirdLife Switzerland sponsored with 1.000€ for the 2017 camp.
 Batumi Birding sponsored with 4.800€ for the 2017 camp.

The ambition has been to cover 100% of the camp costs for Azeri participants and international participants are expected to cover flight tickets (usually 300-400€ return trip with Turkish Airlines) and tourist visa themselves or ask for funding from their local or national organizations.

Future plans

There is a momentum now that has been achieved through these activities and we hope it can continue and also transform into other good things. The development of the local nature conservation scene, bird tourism to Azerbaijan, youth opportunities, rural development in the area and ultimately the safeguarding and protection of the site. Until someone takes the firm commitment and long term guardianship of the place we hope to keep this platform as open and pragmatic as possible and hereby welcome more participants, organizations, sponsors and stakeholders!

The possibility of creating some kind of facility, like a nature conservation and visitors centre, has been floated and something we want to look more into. This would take a whole new level of commitment, financing and partnership but the prospect is very interesting.

Contacts

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