



General Directorate of the Internal Security Forces  
Public relations department  
Service, Trust, Partnership

The Lebanese Internal Security Forces



## Strategic Advocacy for the Protection of Migratory Birds in Lebanon

Success Stories in the Spring and Autumn  
Migration 2020

The Way Forward



Dr. Marwan Owaygen

## A Letter from “Migratory Birds to the President of Lebanon” contributed to a major breakthrough in the battle of bird conservation in Lebanon

This letter set the ground for a new era after more than four decades of illegal and mass killing of millions of migratory birds in Lebanon, including globally protected species.

On 13 February 2017, a letter entitled “A Letter from Migratory Birds to the President of Lebanon” was handed in a personal capacity by a Lebanese activist and an international expert based in Cairo, Dr. Marwan Owaygen, to the President of Lebanon, General Michel Aoun, during his official visit to Egypt. The letter highlighted the black destiny that migratory birds are facing in Lebanon, the ethical and legal responsibility of Lebanon towards the international community in protecting migratory birds and the urgent need to take actions to put an end to their carnage in the country. Dr. Owaygen was invited for a meeting with the President at the Presidential Palace in Beirut. The idea of launching a national campaign for the protection of migratory birds in Lebanon was introduced in this meeting on 23 February 2017. A follow up meeting took place at

the Presidential Palace on 10 March 2017 with the advisor to the President. Specific suggestions were given for the proposed campaign.

On 1 April 2017, the President of Lebanon held a press conference and launched the Campaign for the Protection of Migratory Birds. With this initiative, he became the first president in the Arab World to highlight this topic in a presidential event. The letter handed to the President in Egypt was mentioned in the media coverage of the event. On 4 April 2017, the Minister of Environment (Mr. Tarek Khatib) announced in a press conference new regulations for bird hunting and the implementation of the hunting law (number 580/2004).

## An Action Plan Proposed to the Minister of Interior made a difference in the implementation of the hunting law in Lebanon

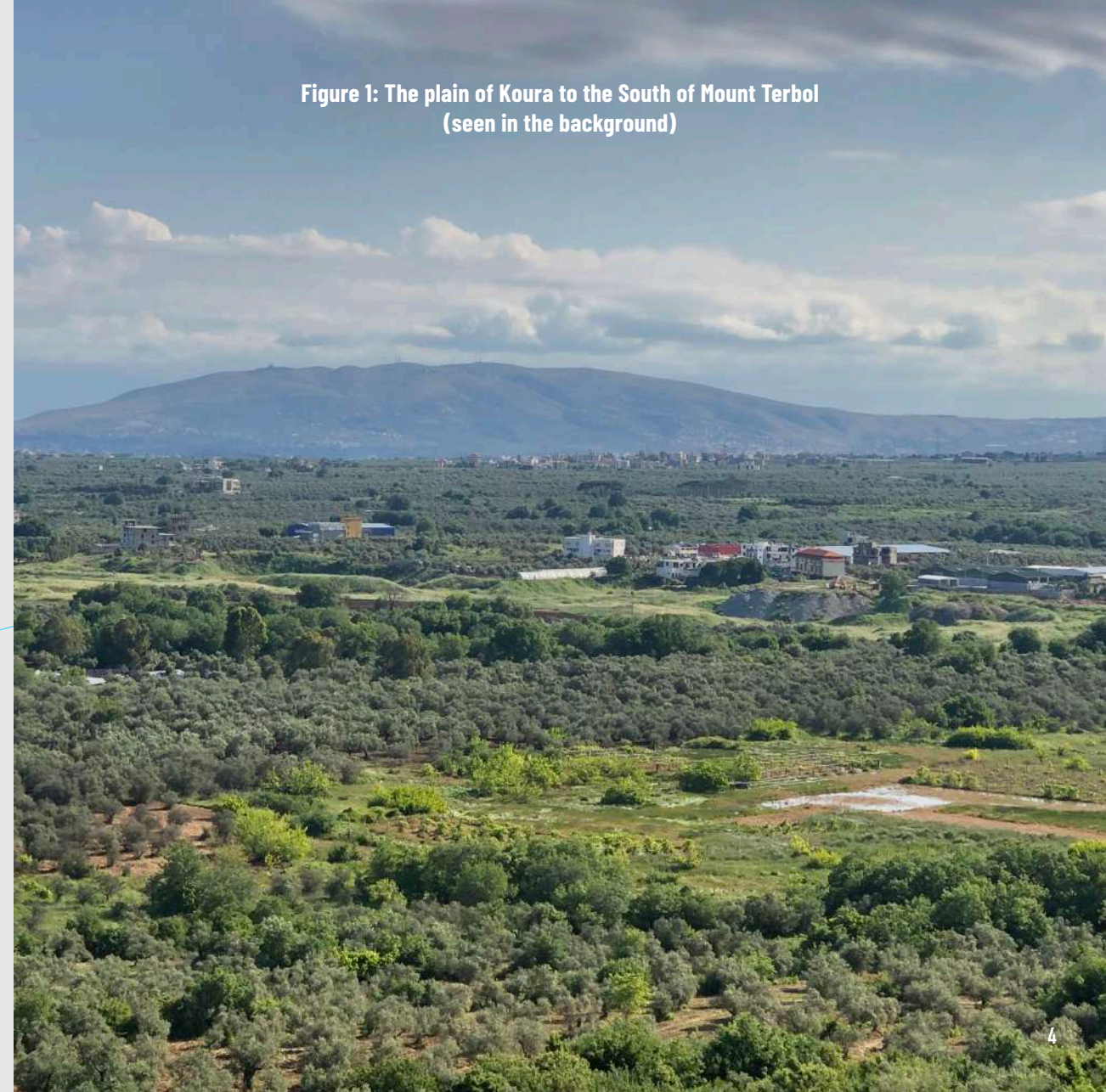
On 21 March 2019, Dr. Marwan Owaygen met in a personal capacity Prime Minister Saad Hariri in the Grand Serail in Beirut. The bad reputation of Lebanon for the illegal killing of migratory birds, and particularly of icon birds such as the white stork was brought to the attention of the Prime Minister. The urgent need to reinforce the implementation of the hunting law by the Ministry of Interior was highlighted. As a direct follow up on the meeting with the Prime Minister, Dr. Owaygen met, on the same day, the Minister of Interior, Mrs. Raya El Hassan. The Minister was briefed on the severity of illegal hunting in Lebanon. An urgent action plan to reinforce the implementation of the hunting law by the Lebanese Interior Security Forces (ISF) was suggested. This plan was drafted by Marwan Owaygen and communicated to the Ministry of Interior on 26 March 2019. It was adopted with its 6 action points and disseminated

officially by the Minister on 27 March 2019 to the General Directorate of Internal Security Forces for implementation (under number 6942). One of the 6 action points is the surveillance by ISF of two hotspot corridors for the spring migration, one of them is in North Lebanon. Another point relates to the assignment of a high-ranking ISF officer as a focal point for the coordination with NGOs and civil society to facilitate and reinforce the implementation of the hunting law. The action plan advanced significantly the implementation of the hunting law and led to large-scale arrests of poachers by ISF across the country for the first time ever. Since September 2019, at least 20 posts were advertised on the Facebook page of the Internal Security Forces, addressing arrests against illegal hunting and awareness on the hunting law and regulations.

## The Success Story of Mount Terbol Spring Migration 2020

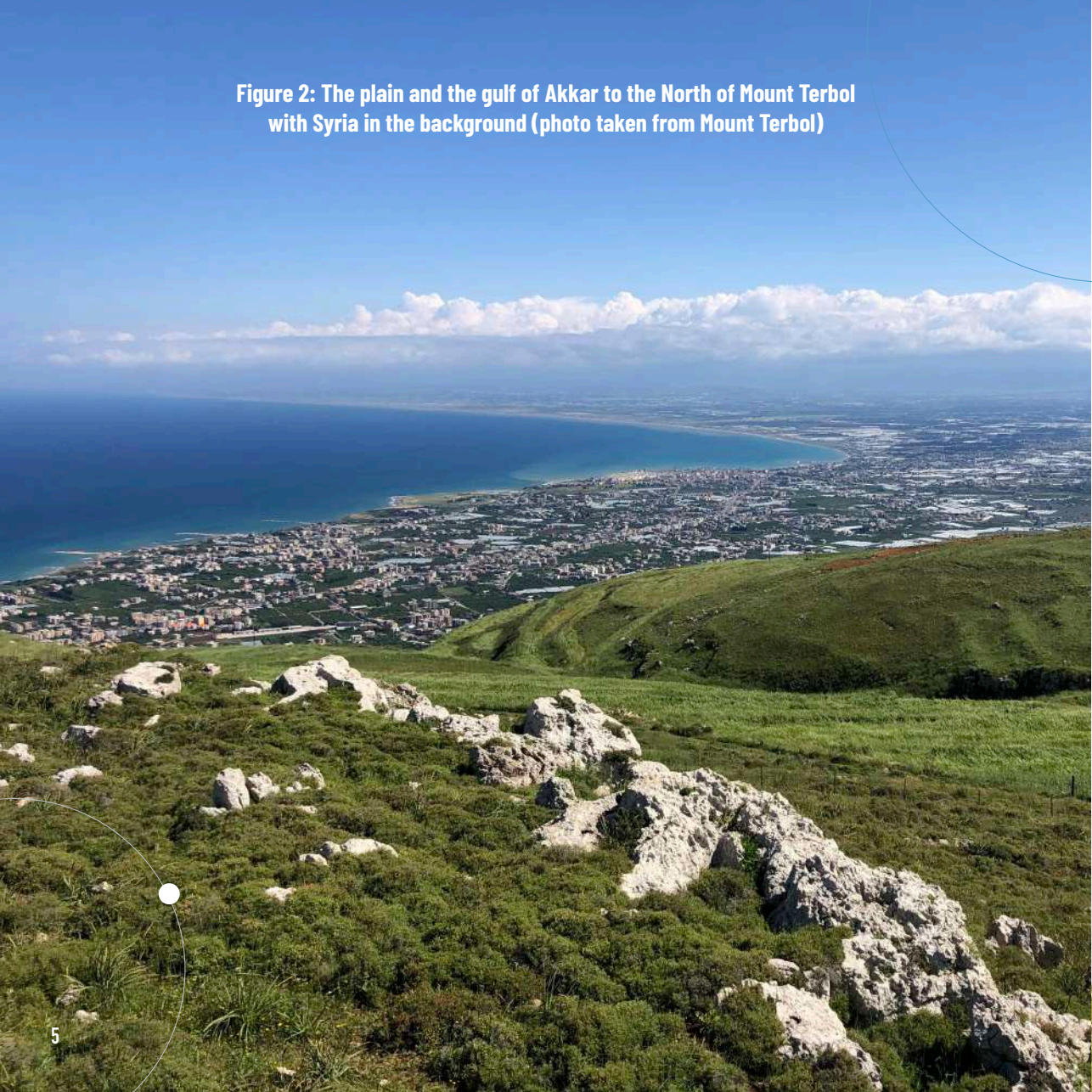
Mount Terbol (Jabal Terbol in Arabic) is a small stand alone mountain in the North Lebanon Governorate stretching from the East to the West between two plains: the plain of Koura to the South (Figure 1) and the plain of Akkar to the North (Figure 2). The Western edge of the mountain is less than 2 km from the Mediterranean Sea. Mount Terbol, which is around 23 km from the Syrian borders, is a hotspot for spring migration of soaring birds, mainly white storks and raptors, crossing generally at low altitude (Figure 3). Field observations revealed that an important part of the spring migration of white storks and of raptors over Lebanon crosses Mount Terbol before reaching the Syrian borders. On 14 March 2019, at least 220 short-toed eagles were counted above Mount Terbol in 30 minutes.

Figure 1: The plain of Koura to the South of Mount Terbol  
(seen in the background)

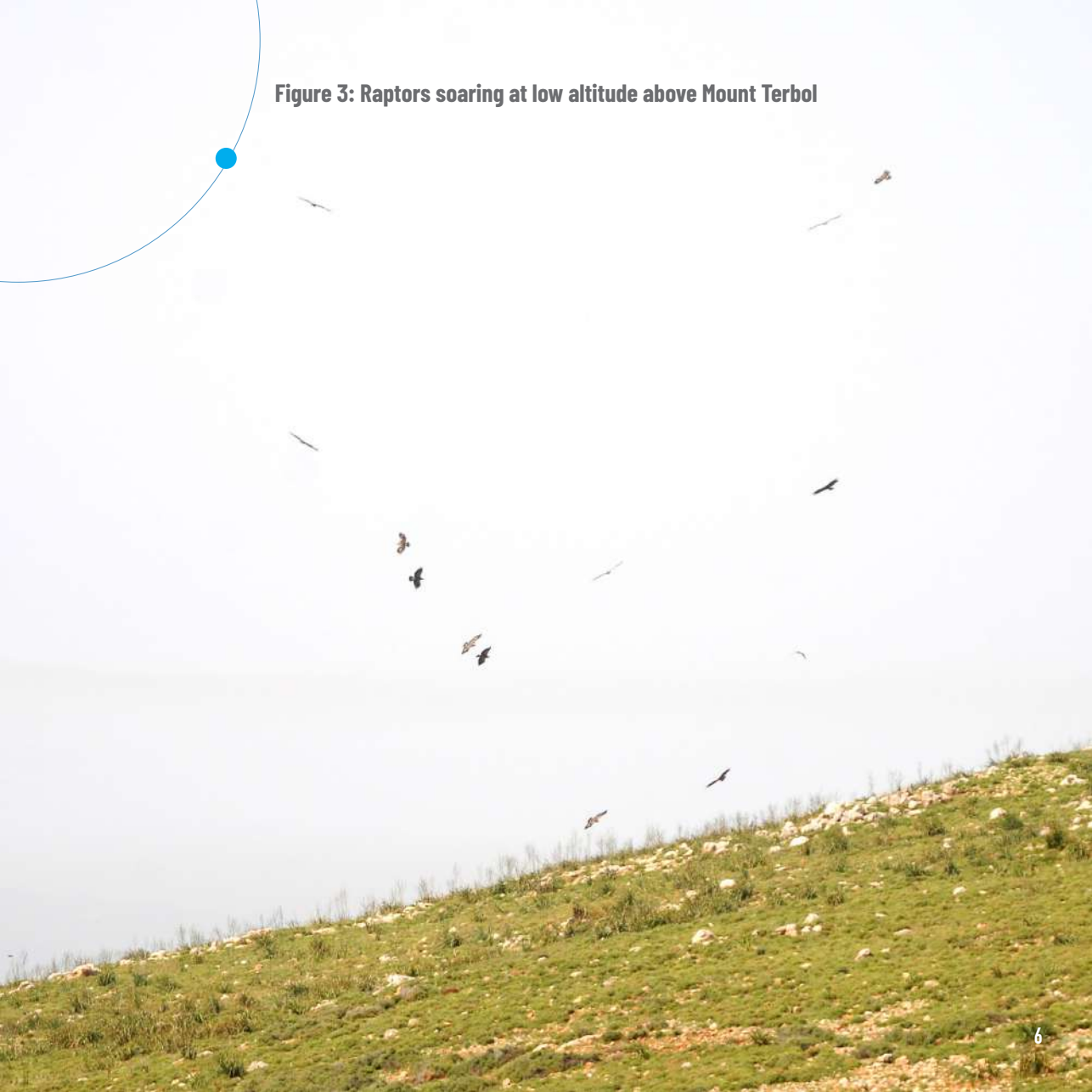




**Figure 2: The plain and the gulf of Akkar to the North of Mount Terbol with Syria in the background (photo taken from Mount Terbol)**



**Figure 3: Raptors soaring at low altitude above Mount Terbol**

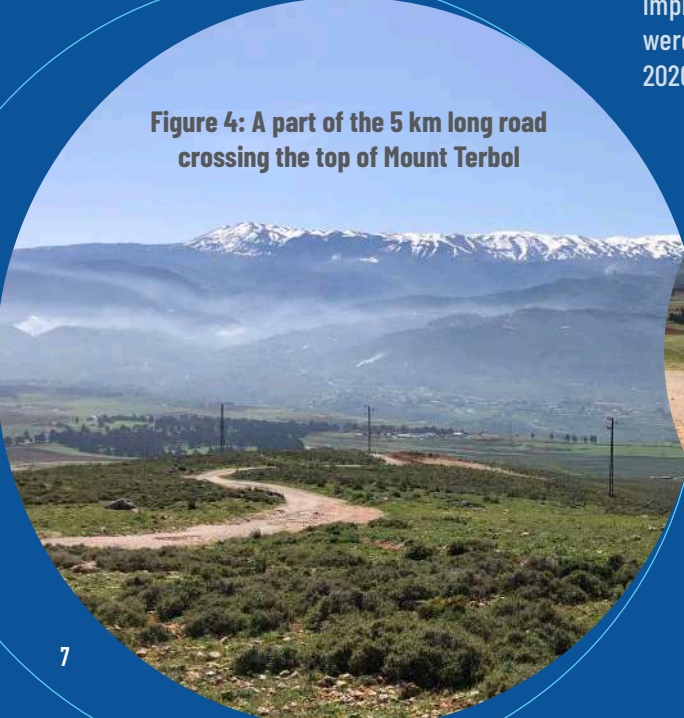




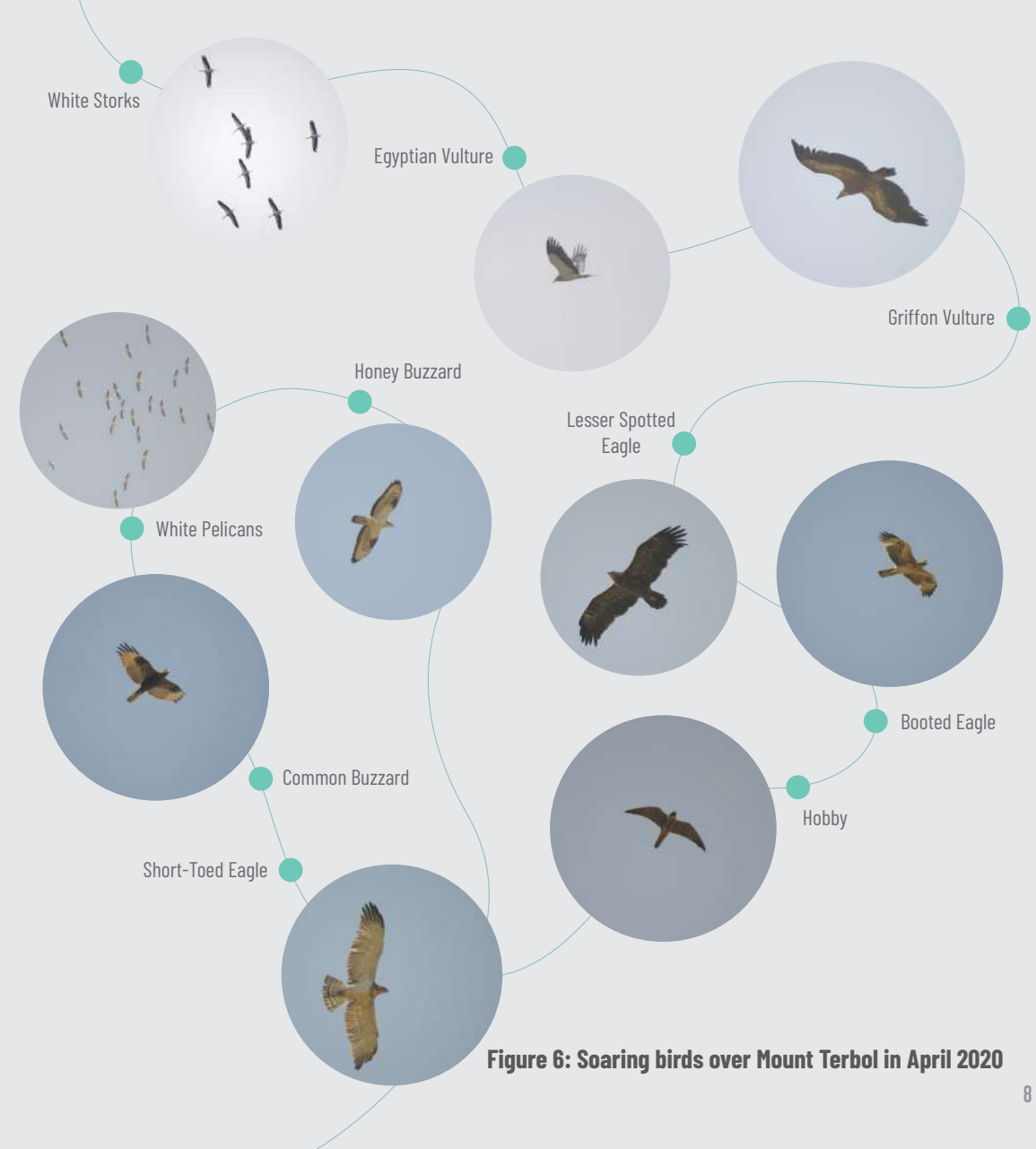
When reaching Mount Terbol, migratory birds have already crossed thousands of km safely from their wintering grounds in Sub-Saharan Africa and they are just around 23 km from the Syrian borders, towards their nesting grounds in Europe and Asia. A road with a length of 5 km crosses the top of Mount Terbol from the East to the West, starting at an altitude of around 415 m and ending at around 675 m (Figure 4). This short road is a death frontline where large numbers of white storks and raptors are massacred every spring.

Spring 2020 was different for migratory birds. For the first time in decades, thousands of migratory birds crossed Mount Terbol safely under the surveillance and protection of the Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF). From 27 February to 17 May a permanent presence of ISF officers (Figure 5) secured on a daily basis the 5 km long road on the order of the Director-General of ISF, Major General Imad Osman, through a memo issued on 25 February 2020. This memo is based on the action plan which was disseminated officially on 27 March 2019 by the Minister of Interior, Mrs. Raya El Hassan, to the General Directorate of ISF for implementation. Globally protected soaring birds were photographed in Mount Terbol during April 2020 in the presence of ISF (Figure 6).

**Figure 4: A part of the 5 km long road crossing the top of Mount Terbol**



**Figure 5: ISF securing the 5 km long road on the top of Mount Terbol**



**Figure 6: Soaring birds over Mount Terbol in April 2020**

## The Success Story of Daraya–El Ayacha Autumn Migration 2020

Daraya-El Ayacha in Miniyeh–Danniyeh district in the North Lebanon Governorate is an area located around 10 km East of Mount Terbol. It is a hotspot for the migration of raptors in the Autumn over a front of around 2 km. This hotspot is known for the mass killing of raptors. It is also known for the night-killing of passing migratory birds using light projectors, where tens of poachers gather until late night hours shooting passing birds of different species (including corncrake). On 23 July 2020, Dr. Marwan Owaygen met the Director-General of the Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF), Major General Imad Osman, where he praised the achievements of ISF in Mount Terbol during the spring migration and highlighted the need to transfer ISF surveillance to Daraya-El Ayacha during the autumn migration.

A memo was issued by Major General Osman on the same day requesting a daily surveillance by ISF of this area from August 10 to November 20 in two shifts: from 8am to 5pm and from 10pm to 1am. Under the protection of ISF, thousands of migratory birds crossed safely the sky of Daraya-El Ayacha, including raptors, pelicans and cranes.

This success was celebrated on 9 October 2020 through a birdwatching event which took place in the hotspot with the participation of members of NGOs and high-ranking ISF officers (Figure 7). Around 3000 raptors were counted on this day, mainly black kites (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Black kites crossing safely the sky of Daraya -Al Ayacha on 9 October 2020

Figure 7: Birdwatching in Daraya-Al Ayacha





## The Way Forward

The year 2020 was a very challenging year for Lebanon. The country faced a political, financial and economic crisis which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these challenges, the Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF) succeeded in ensuring the protection of two very important hotspots for bird migration against illegal hunting through a daily surveillance for around 160 days. As a result, thousands of migratory birds (mainly soaring birds such as raptors, white storks, pelicans and cranes) including globally protected species were saved. This is an accomplishment for ISF and for Lebanon to be praised nationally and internationally. With a strategic advocacy which started in February 2017, the cause of bird conservation in Lebanon is making significant progress and the bad reputation of the country as a blackspot for the mass killing of migratory birds which lasted for decades is changing. However, there is a long way to reach the day when migratory birds protected by the hunting law cross Lebanon safely.

The two success stories in Mount Terbol and in Daraya-Al Ayacha show an efficient hotspot-based model for bird protection that can be duplicated. The scaling out of this model requires as a first step a mapping of the top hotspots for bird massacres (mainly the raptors) across the country. As a second step, activists from the civil society and from NGOs can ensure a surveillance of these hotspots during the migration seasons in close collaboration with local authorities and with the Internal Security Forces. These hotspots can be converted progressively into destinations for birdwatching, attracting national as well as international visitors and supporting the local economy. The scaling out of this model can be enhanced through an umbrella project to be led jointly by the Ministry of Environment and by the Ministry of Interior with collaboration of active NGOs on the ground. This proposed project presents a funding opportunity for donors interested in bird conservation in Lebanon.

The creation of a special unit in the Internal Security Forces trained and exclusively dedicated to the protection of birds against illegal hunting across the country is of paramount importance to advance the cause of bird conservation in Lebanon.

Dr. Marwan Owaygen is a passionate of migratory birds and an advocate for the cause of bird conservation. He holds a Ph.D. in the field of Natural Resource Economics from the University of Hohenheim in Germany. He is a former expert of the World Bank and a former staff of the United Nations Development Programme. He is a senior program specialist with Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) since 2016, based in the Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa in Jordan.

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"The Internal Security Forces are committed to enforce the implementation of the hunting law and to secure the crossing of protected migratory birds over Lebanon. In fulfilling this task, the ISF are supporting Lebanon's contribution to the global efforts to preserve this shared world heritage. Our commitment gets stronger in times of great challenges"

Major General Imad Osman  
Director-General of the Lebanese Internal Security Forces

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Migratory birds are part of the shared natural world heritage. Lebanon has the responsibility to secure their safe flyway during their legendary migration between their breeding sites in Europe and Asia and their wintering grounds in Africa. Migratory birds connect our countries and our cultures.

*Let us connect to protect them.*

