

AVAYEBOOM BIRD CONSERVATION SOCIETY

2023

ANNUAL REPORT

Prepared by the Social Media Team

A WORD FROM THE CEO

As we reflect on 2023, I am filled with immense pride and gratitude for the progress and achievements of the AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society. Despite the challenges posed by the global pandemic, economic pressures, and sanctions against Iran that impacted funding and supplies, our dedicated team has demonstrated unwavering commitment to bird conservation in Iran.

This year, our field projects spanned various parts of Iran, from Tehran in the north to Hormozgan in the south. Our collaboration with local and international experts on projects like managing conflicts between beekeepers and bee-eaters highlights our innovative conservation solutions. Additionally, we expanded our focus to include the Asiatic cheetah, marking our first mammal conservation project due to its significance for Iranian conservationists.

In the past year, our membership has grown to over 300 individuals. We have built an NGO for the conservation of birds that once seemed unimaginable in Iran, especially given the economic difficulties and the perceived lack of interest in environmental conservation compared to developed countries. This achievement fills us with immense pride.

Moving forward, I am confident that the foundation we have built over the past eight years will continue to support and expand our mission. I extend my deepest thanks to everyone involved in our journey – your dedication and passion are the driving forces behind our success. Together, we will continue to strive for a future where Iran's birds and their habitats are protected and cherished.



IMAN EBRAHIMI
CEO

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 01** Flagship Species Selection in Arjan Wetland
- 03** Conflict Between Beekeepers and Bee-Eaters
- 04** Gavkhouni Wetland Website
- 05** Bird Nest Box Installation
- 06** Management Plan for Shidvar Island
- 07** Waterbird Census in Fars Province
- 08** Road Safety for the Asiatic Cheetah
- 09** Waterbird Census in Hormozgan Province
- 10** Shidvar Island Bird Census and Ringing
- 11** Birdwatching Tours and Plans
- 12** News
- 14** Rescue and Rehabilitation
- 15** Events
- 17** Our Future Plans

Flagship Species Selection in Arjan International Wetland

Continuing its efforts in the Arjan International Wetland, and building on previous collaborations with the Parishan Heritage Association and SGP/UNDP, AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society was tasked with selecting a flagship species for the Arjan International Wetland. The selection and introduction of a flagship species is an effective method for conserving animal species and their habitats in a targeted region. In this project, AvayeBoom experts reviewed the process of selecting flagship species in various studies and regions, and chose a method suited to the Arjan International Wetland.

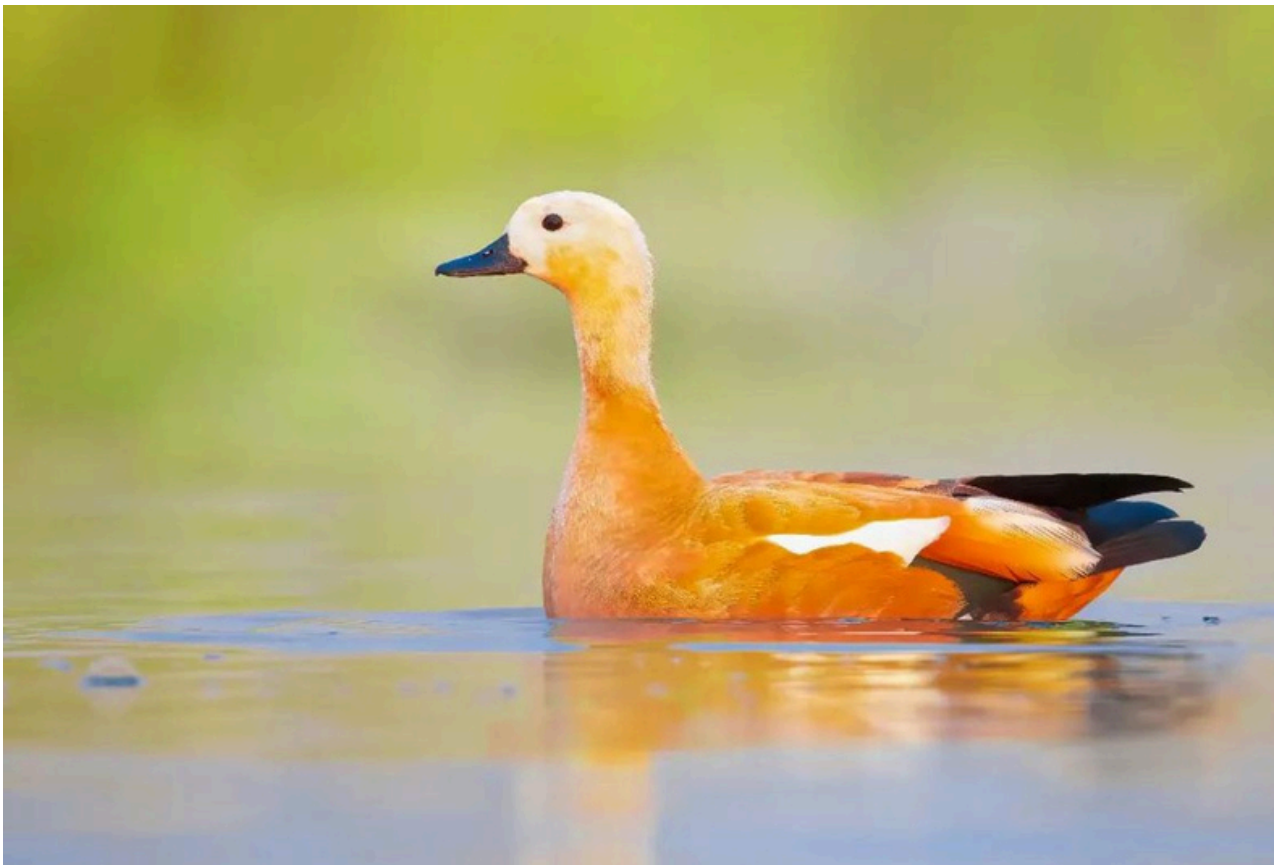
For the flagship species selection in the Arjan International Wetland, ten different criteria were considered and evaluated. This evaluation was conducted through field activities, interviews with stakeholders, and consultations with both domestic and international experts. Ultimately, the "Ruddy Shelduck" (locally known as the "Red Goose") was selected as the flagship species.





The selection process involved field interviews with 65 participants, assessment of four criteria through literature review, and evaluation of two additional indicators via team assessment. Among the ten criteria considered were the ecological role of each species, its presence in cultural artifacts, and the local community's attitude towards it.

Upon completion of the project and the selection of the flagship species, the final project report was presented to representatives and stakeholders in Arjan International Wetland. In a meeting attended by local communities and environmental activists, the selection process and its results were explained. Additionally, suggestions were made for using the selected flagship species in educational and promotional materials to support conservation efforts in the Arjan International Wetland.



Controlling the **Conflict** Between Beekeepers and Bee-Eaters

(Final Phase)



Each year, during the spring and summer, bee-eater birds migrate from Africa to northern regions, including Iran. These birds are frequently seen in large flocks during late summer and early fall as they prepare to return to Africa. During this time, conflicts arise between them and beekeepers, as bee-eaters feed on honeybees around hives.

To address this issue, since 2020, the AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society, in collaboration with the Nazre Tabiat Association, has initiated an educational and conservation project aimed at mitigating this conflict and protecting bee-eater birds and the environment. This project has been implemented in three phases with field training trips to selected pilot areas. The first phase in 2021 took place in parts of the Dalan Kooch pastures, and the second phase in 2022 in areas of Kazeroon County.

In the final phase of this project, the pilot area selected was the Fereydunshahr region in Esfahan Province. In October, experts of the AvayeBoom carried out the last phase of the project. They engaged with beekeepers, assessed their situation, and provided training on methods to deter birds and reduce conflict. To evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention, a pre-test was conducted with all participants, and a post-test will follow. The results of the three-phase project will be published to share the findings and impact.

Gavkhouni International Wetland Biodiversity Website

(Second Phase)



Following the successful implementation of Phase One of the Gavkhouni International Wetland Biodiversity Website project last year, Phase Two was launched to further develop. This phase included making the website bilingual, improving the infrastructure, and adding new sections. With the participation of several environmental experts and activists, over 50 specialized articles on wetlands and biodiversity were prepared and published on the site. The website now stands as the richest online resource in Iran for education on wetlands.

Additionally, in Phase Two, 360° images of the wetland were captured, and a virtual tour feature was added to the website. After the completion of the website development project, an event was held in February 2024 to commemorate World Wetlands Day.

The event, organized by the Esfahan Department of Environmental and Esfahan University of Medical Sciences, was attended by environmental activists and university professors specializing in water and wetlands.

During the event, speakers discussed the challenges and solutions regarding the Gavkhouni International Wetland. The event concluded with the unveiling of the Gavkhouni International Wetland Biodiversity Website. Iman Ebrahimi, the project manager, presented the various sections of the website, highlighting its goals, which include creating an integrated database of books, studies, and articles, offering a virtual tour to showcase less seen areas of the wetland, and introducing the wetland's biodiversity. The website is now available in two languages at Gavkhouni.com.

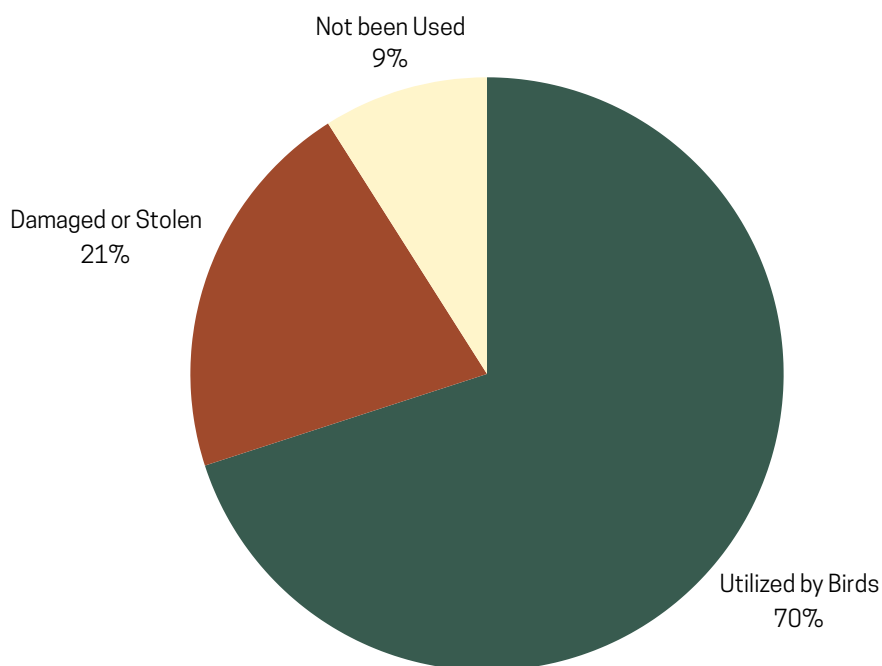
Bird Nest Box Installation

(Third Phase)

The Bird Nest Boxes Installation Project by AvayeBoom began in 2016. Since then, with the collaboration of the Esfahan Municipality, numerous nest boxes have been installed in various locations including Chaharbagh Street, Hasht Behesht Park, Women's Garden, and the Sefeh Mountain Park. These nest boxes are regularly monitored to ensure their effectiveness and maintenance.

Nest boxes are tools used to familiarize the general public with birds. AvayeBoom uses them to create a stronger connection between people and birds, thereby raising awareness about their importance.

Continuing this project in 2023, new nest boxes were installed in Sofeh Mountain Park with the cooperation of the Esfahan Municipality. The previously installed nest boxes were also monitored.



Management Plan for Shidvar International Wetland

(Ecosystem-Based Approach)



Given the current conditions of Shidvar International Wetland and the threats that could lead to its destruction, the project aimed to draft and implement a comprehensive management plan with an ecosystem-based approach. This approach involves assessing and documenting the current state of the ecosystem, setting short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals, and detailing specific plans to achieve these objectives

The planning process included the participation of facilitators and all wetland stakeholders, culminating in a final plan submitted to higher authorities for approval and implementation.

Throughout the project, five participatory workshops were held with stakeholders, resulting in the development of the management plan. Facilitators from AvayeBoom, PlaneforLand, and Mashq Afarinesh led these workshops. Shidvar International Wetland, centered around Shidvar Island near Lavan Island in Hormozgan Province, is protected by the National Environmental Protection Agency. This wetland is critically important for bird breeding, turtle conservation, and maintaining the coral reef ecosystem.

Mid-winter Waterbird Census in Fars Province

One of the significant projects undertaken by the AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society in 2023 was the Mid-winter Waterbird Census in Fars Province. The Fars Department of Environmental Protection entrusted AvayeBoom with conducting the census of the province's wetlands. For over 50 years, the Mid-winter Waterbird Census in Iran has been conducted under the guidelines of Wetlands International by experts in the field.

In 2023, AvayeBoom surveyed a total of 13 natural and artificial, permanent and seasonal wetlands in Fars Province for the bird count. Four experts from AvayeBoom, along with several volunteers, carried out the census in selected habitats. These habitats included Bakhtegan Wetland, Maharloo Wetland, Arjan Wetland, Parishan Wetland, Doroodzan Dam, Lake Tashk, and the seasonal wetlands west of Bakhtegan, many of which are unfortunately in poor condition.

During the winter 2023 census, a total of 20,027 birds from 76 species were counted. Among the bird families, ducks had the highest number with 6,782 individuals. Among specific bird species, flamingos were the most numerous with 4,437 individuals, followed by common cranes with 3,726 individuals.



Road Safety for the Asiatic Cheetah



The Abbasabad-Miami Road Safety Project was conducted in collaboration with the AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society, Nazre Tabiat Association, Iranian Cheetah Society, Nature Sustainability Institute, and independent experts. This project, titled the "Safe Passage for Cheetahs Campaign," was launched in the spring of 2023 to secure the Abbasabad-Miami road in Turan National Park.



This area is occasionally crossed by critically endangered Asiatic cheetahs, and there have been instances of these animals being hit by passing vehicles. The campaign's initiatives include fencing along the Abbasabad-Miami road, installing lighting beside the road, and improving existing underpasses. The project priorities were based on two documents: "Priorities for Reducing Road Accidents Involving Asiatic Cheetahs" and "Review of Studies on Reducing Wildlife Road Accidents." These documents were compiled by the project stakeholders in 2022 and 2023.

Although AvayeBoom's primary focus has always been on birds, the importance of the Iranian cheetah, a symbol of wildlife conservation in Iran, led to their participation in this crucial project.

Mid-winter Waterbird Census in Hormozgan Province

Another significant census project conducted by the AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society in 2023 was the Mid-winter Waterbird Census in Hormozgan Province. Under a contract signed in July 2021 between the Hormozgan Department of Environmental Protection and AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society, AvayeBoom was tasked with conducting the bird census in the province for a duration of three years.

This project aimed to monitor the habitats of waterbirds and shorebirds in Hormozgan and assess the population and diversity of birds in these habitats. It was carried out over three weeks with the participation of five experts from AvayeBoom and several volunteers. A key initiative of this project was inviting qualified specialists and enthusiasts to participate, resulting in over ten individuals contributing to the fieldwork and improving the project's execution over two years.

During the Waterbird Census in Hormozgan Province, 29 wetlands were surveyed, and 64,123 birds from 97 species were counted.

Notably, several key sites experienced a significant decline in bird populations compared to the previous year, including Koor-e Kholasi, Koor-e Kargan, Koor-e Azhini, Koor-e Sorgom, and Koor-e Ziyarat.



Shidvar Island Breeding Bird Census and Ringing

(Third year)



This census and ringing project not only included counting the breeding birds but also assessing threats to their survival. Part of this project involved banding the birds, with experts checking for previously installed bands. The bird species counted during this project included the Lesser Crested Tern, White-cheeked Tern, and Bridled Tern. Additionally, the presence of breeding Western Reef Herons and Great Black Cormorants was recorded.

Since 2021, the AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society has been actively involved in the Shidvar Island Breeding Bird Census Project. Following the surveys conducted in 2021 and 2022, AvayeBoom experts, alongside the Deputy for Natural Environment of Hormozgan's Department of Environment and experts from the Office of Birds, completed the third consecutive survey in July 2023.





In Iran, after years of effort, various groups and organizations have begun organizing birdwatching tours. AvayeBoom continues its commitment to this activity, helping to familiarize people with birds and increase their awareness. An important aspect of these tours is that participants who once joined as **young birdwatchers have now become skilled enough to serve as guides in some of the tours.**

Birdwatching Tours and Plans

One of the regular activities organized by the AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society is birdwatching tours. These tours, guided by AvayeBoom members, offer participants the opportunity to learn about birdwatching and observe birds in their natural habitats. Over the past year, several birdwatching tours were conducted in Najvan Forest Park and around the Youth Garden. Each tour typically included about ten enthusiasts who, in addition to watching birds, also learned about their behavioral characteristics. The first step in bird and environmental conservation is awareness and familiarity, two main goals of birdwatching that complement its recreational aspect. Birdwatching tours serve as an introduction to the fascinating world of birds for many nature and wildlife enthusiasts. This activity is widespread in many countries, carrying cultural, environmental, and economic significance.



NEWS

Collaboration Between AvayeBoom and Isfahan University of Technology for Internship Program

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Second Phase of AvayeBoom's Collaboration with Divar Website

AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society's collaboration with the Divar website began in 2020 with the goal of permanently removing wildlife trade advertisements. As part of this effort, several meetings were held, resulting in Divar permanently deleting all wildlife ads from its platform.

The second phase of this collaboration commenced in September 2023 when Divar invited AvayeBoom and several environmental activists, including Mohammad Darvish, Reza Saki, Majid Mirghazanfari, Hamidreza Mirzadeh, Fatemeh Babakhani, Ahmad Bahri, and Zeinab Rahimi. In this phase, AvayeBoom is involved in updating the checklist of prohibited plant and animal species for trade and providing consultations on related matters.

Publication of the Bird Census Report for the Coasts of Hormozgan

Over two consecutive years, 2021 and 2022, AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society conducted a comprehensive census of waterbirds in Hormozgan Province. At the end of this period, the census reports for a single province were compiled and published as a booklet for the first time in Iran. Previously, only the bird census reports conducted by Dutch experts from WIWO in 2007 and 2009 were available in English.

The Hormozgan Province Waterbird and Shorebird Census Report includes the census results, a comparison and analysis of the data collected over the two years, and recommendations for improving the census process.

Nomination of AvayeBoom at the National Environmental Award Ceremony

During the 13th National Environmental Award ceremony, held by the Iranian Department of Environment, AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society was honored as one of the nominees.

The 13th National Environmental Award aims to identify, introduce, and appreciate the notable and impactful services and activities of environmental activists and NGOs.



Participation of AvayeBoom in the "My Neighborhood Nature" Exhibition

The Municipality of Esfahan organized a seven-day exhibition focused on ecotourism and agritourism. Invited by the municipality, the AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society participated in this exhibition to introduce the key birds of Esfahan. The exhibition featured three sections: environment, agricultural farms, and livestock farming. It hosted school students in the mornings and students with their families in the afternoons.

To effectively participate in this exhibition, AvayeBoom set up a display of bird photographs from Esfahan, distributed brochures about Esfahan's birds, and had its members present to provide information about birdwatching and the local bird species to the attendees.



RESCUE AND REHABILITATION

In 2023, AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society continued its dedicated efforts to rescue and rehabilitate injured birds. Despite limited budget and human resources, AvayeBoom successfully rescued and rehabilitated many birds, ensuring their safe return to the wild. The organization's approach involves collaboration with volunteer veterinarians and local volunteers who help transport and care for injured birds. AvayeBoom's small rehabilitation center in Esfahan, with a capacity of 10 birds, plays a crucial role in treating those requiring specialized care and successfully released 8 birds to wildlife from 13 that it had received.

A significant part of AvayeBoom's strategy is educating and guiding volunteers to care for injured birds themselves. This method has proven effective, allowing the society to extend its reach and impact. When contacted about an injured bird, AvayeBoom coordinates with the nearest veterinarian and provides detailed instructions to ensure the bird's safe handling and transport. This year, more than 32 injured birds were saved through this community-driven approach.

EVENTS



Boutimar

The Boutimar event, organized by the Sarve Azad Art Institute in collaboration with the AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society, focused on reviewing the book "Bird Migration - Migratory Birds of Iran" written by Iman Ebrahimi. Alongside the book review, discussions were held on the status of migratory birds in the world and Iran.

The event took place at the Imam Khomeini Cultural Center in Tehran, coinciding with World Migratory Bird Day. Notable attendees included Mohammad Darvish, a member of the academic staff at the National Plant Studies Center; Jamshid Mansouri, a renowned ornithologist and ecologist; Alireza Hashemi, director of the Tarlan Ornithology Institute; Hamidreza Mirzadeh, editor-in-chief of the Payam-e Ma newspaper; Arash Habibi Azad, a famous birdwatcher in the country; and Iman Ebrahimi, director of the AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society.

Eighth Anniversary of AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society

The AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society was established in 2015 in Esfahan by a group of environmental activists. Its primary goals are to promote birdwatching and to engage in bird conservation activities across Iran. In September, a friendly gathering was held to celebrate the eighth anniversary of the society. The event was attended by AvayeBoom members, representatives from the Esfahan Department of Environmental, and members of other environmental organizations such as Payam Sabz and the Iranian Cheetah Society.

Mr. Farkhondeh, the father of the late Behrad Farkhondeh, also shared memories of his son's involvement with AvayeBoom. Behrad Farkhondeh was a young member of AvayeBoom who tragically passed away in a mountain climbing accident. The event also featured an exhibition of photographs by Mr. Hassan Moghimi, where attendees could view and purchase the images to support wildlife conservation efforts.

Representatives from the National Department of Environmental honored AvayeBoom's efforts with certificates of appreciation, acknowledging the society's contributions to bird conservation in Iran.



Our Future Plans

As we look ahead to 2024, AvayeBoom Bird Conservation Society plans to focus on gathering and publishing comprehensive data from our completed projects. By making this information accessible, we aim to enhance the impact of our conservation efforts and provide valuable insights for future initiatives. Establishing a stronger community network will be a key priority, enabling us to foster greater collaboration and support for our mission.

Additionally, we will intensify our efforts to raise public awareness about the importance of bird conservation. Rather than expanding our operational scope, we intend to concentrate on disseminating our findings and continuing the successful projects we have initiated. This focused approach will allow us to build on our achievements, ensuring sustained progress in protecting Iran's avian populations.



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