Flora and Fauna on Masar Ibrahim al-Khalil
A Cultural and Natural Trail in Palestine

Palestine Sunbird
*Cinnyris osea*

عصفور الشمس الفلسطيني
Masar Ibrahim al-Khalil

Masar Ibrahim al-Khalil is a cultural walking trail in Palestine. The route is 330 km long and extends from the village of Rummana, northwest of Jenin, to Beit Mirsim, southwest of Hebron. The trail passes through more than 50 cities and villages where travelers can experience great Palestinian hospitality and an amazing landscape. The trail is a stunning journey through the natural environment of West Bank covering multiple ecosystems, from Mediterranean mountains to deserts and subtropical regions.

Variety of Flora and Fauna

Despite its relatively small area, Palestine is a country with a rich diversity of natural scenery. Thanks to its unique geographical location at the crossroads of three continents, this small area encompasses various ecosystems that offer significant diversity in flora and fauna and a wide range of beautiful landscapes.

Natural habitats in mountainous regions are dominated by oak forests, while cypress trees abound in more arid places. In the springtime, colorful wildflowers begin to bloom across the country. Cyclamens and red Anemones emerge from under rocks and on stony hillsides. The cultivated areas are rich in olive, almond, and fig trees, as well as grape vineyards. Citrus trees are grown in the area of Jericho.

The natural areas are the living space for various wild animals, which can be sometimes spotted along the Masar Ibrahim trail. Eagles flying high in the blue skies, tortoises hiding in tall grasses, Rock Hyaraxes and different kinds of lizards basking on projecting stones are only some of the examples of Palestine’s diverse fauna that walkers can notice during their journey.
The Central Highlands

The Masar Ibrahim passes through much of the Central Highlands region, stretching in the West Bank for over 120 km from north of Jenin to the south of Hebron. It is a mountainous area with some peaks reaching over 1,000m above sea level. The western slopes towards the Mediterranean are where most rainfall occurs, while the eastern slopes are drier. The higher areas have a characteristically Mediterranean climate with warm, dry summers and cool, wet winters.

European green toad

This toad will change color when the heat and light changes. Female toads can lay between 9,000 and 15,000 eggs at a time and are larger than the males.

Deathstalker

Also known as the Palestine Yellow Scorpion, the Deathstalker is the most poisonous scorpion in the region. Adults usually survive its sting while children if untreated, may die.

Mediterranean Spur-Thighed Tortoise

This tortoise is identified by large symmetrical markings on the top of the head and large scabs on its front legs. It might live up to 125 years.

Palestine Sunbird Cinnyris osea

This is the smallest bird in Palestine and is an endemic breeding species seen in both natural habitats and around gardens in Palestine from very hot climates in Jericho and around the Dead Sea to the highest and coldest central hills.

Feeding mostly on nectar, sunbirds and hummingbirds need the high nutritional value to keep their amazing muscles and heart at work; this allows them to produce the fastest wing beats of all the birds. This sunbird was named the national bird of Palestine.

Jerusalem Sage/Phlomis fruticosa

It is a small spreading evergreen shrub with erect stems bearing sage-like, grey-green ovate leaves. The plant blooms in early summer. Flowers are hooded and deep yellow.

Palestine oak/Quercus calliprinos

This tall evergreen tree may reach a height of 15 meters and can live more than 850 years (as dated for an oak called “Ibrahim’s Oak,” growing in Hebron). The ancient tree served as an inspiration for the logo of Masar Ibrahim al-Khalil.
Plant (and animal) species with 'palestina' or 'palaestina' in the second part of the Latin names were described first in Palestine and some can be found along the Masar Ibrahim. Searching for these plants while hiking could be an exciting and interesting way to learn about the specific native species of the region where they grow, their impact on the environment, and the ways of using them in the local traditional medicine and cuisine.

**Palestine Hawsbeak**
*Crepis palaestina*

Palestine Hawsbeak usually has branching scapes with multiple heads of yellow hermaphrodite flowers that blossom between March and May.

**Palestine scabious**
*Scabiosa palaestina*

This tree is common in the region and it flowers in March and April. Terebinth's younger stems are beautifully reddish in color. It has alternate and compound leaves. Its fruits are brownish. It grows up to around 3-5 m in height.

**Palestine Pheasant’s Eye**
*Adonis palaestina*

It has creamy white flowers that produce a lot of nectar which attracts pollinators. Its leaves are thin and have a grey-green color. A single plant can produce around 2,000 seeds which can remain in the soil for years.

**Palestine Salvia**
*Salvia palaestina*

The plant's simple leaves vary in shape and size, with light hairs on both sides, and a cluster of flowers 4-6 at the top of the stem. An ointment made from its leaves is antibacterial and is used to heal wounds.

**Palestine Comfrey**
*Symphytum palaestinum*

A medicinal plant used for treating burns and wounds. The plant is toxic if eaten.

**Palestine Arum**
*Arum palaestinum*

Arum grows between rocks and cracks. It blossoms only for a short period in March and April. In traditional medicine it is used to heal skin conditions such as acne. Arum is an edible plant and is widely used in cooking.

**Palestine Marigold**
*Calendula palaestina*

An annual herb of the Asteraceae family. The name “calendula” is a modern Latin diminutive of calendae, meaning “little calendar” or “little clock.” The common name “marigold” possibly refers to the Virgin Mary.

It is a protected annual flower with red, alternate petals. In Greek Mythology, Adonis was a god that the goddess Aphrodite fell in love with. He was killed by a wild boar. As the god was dying in the arms of Aphrodite, drops of his blood spilled out and stained the anemone flower crimson red.
Wadi Qelt

Wadi Qelt or the Valley of Qelt is admired for its rich history, archaeological sites and stunning natural landscape. Its name in Arabic means eye socket for the shape of one of its springs. The valley includes three main springs (Fawwar, Fara, and Qelt) that flow from near Ramallah all the way to Jericho.

Epaullet Skimmer

Orthetrum chrysostigma

The males of this species of dragonfly are powder blue with a slight constriction towards the top end of the abdomen and a streak of yellow on the inner edge of the hindwing. Their name comes from a black-edged white epaulet on the sides of the thorax.

Roman Nettle

Urtica pilulifera

Its ellipsoid fruits are brown when ripe with a crispy skin enclosing a sticky brown or brown-green pulp around a hard stone. They are edible but bitter. In Palestine, traditionally it is associated with Zaqqum (زَقْعٌ) which according to the Quran “springs out of the bottom of hell-fire” or Jahannam.

Cattle Egret

Bubulcus ibis

These egrets can often be seen accompanying herds of sheep, cattle and deer. They stand on the backs of the animals and eat the ticks on their backs. The nesting of these birds can be damaging to the trees because of the acidic nature of their waste. These egrets nest in large colonies.

Apple of Sodom

Calotropis procera

It also often called the Dead Sea Apple. Its blossom is composed of many smaller florets. Its fruit resembles a green apple. When ripe and dry, it opens revealing many small seeds which are later carried by wind on parachute-like canopies. Its white juice is considered poisonous.

Tristram’s Starling

Onychognathus tristramii

It is a resident species in Palestine. This species resembles a Blackbird in size and color except that of the rusty or sage color on the wing side which is seen during flight. It is a gregarious bird most of the year found in small groups, usually of parent birds and their chicks. It inhabits cliffs, canyons and rocky ravines around the Dead Sea, Jericho and parts of east-northern Jerusalem wilderness.

Rock Hyrax

Procavia capensis

The hyrax is a social animal forming dense herds numbering up to 100, divided into several families. In each family there is one dominant male, a few females, and their young. The dominant male often stands on prominent rocks, and announces its territory with scream type calls. It possess 29 vertebrae in its spine more than most mammals, which gives them greater flexibility.
The vast semi-desert mountainous spaces east of Jerusalem and Bethlehem include three distinct habitats with significant variation in plant and animal life. Semi-shrubs cover the slopes and hills which receive 80 to 250 mm of rain a year. This vegetation formation is often referred to as a steppe.

Nubian Ibexes live in rough, dry, mountainous terrain where they eat mainly grasses and leaves and are preyed upon by leopards, eagles, and bearded vultures. They live usually in small troops led by an old male, and march slowly in single file, one behind the other.

They utter a whistling snort when alarmed and run away, but not very rapidly. The males are solitary or form more transitory groups of up to eight individuals During the breeding season males join the female-based herds for the six to eight week rut.

The Palestine viper is a large and heavy snake. It has a distinctive triangular head structure due to the large venom glands located on both sides of the head. The overall body color varies from light brown to dark orange. It is often found in man-made habitats, best known in the public for being the leading cause of snakebite.

The Lesser Kestrel is a small falcon, and a rare passage migrant for the summer breeding season. In Palestine, it breeds in colonies, both adjacent to human habitats (rural and urban) and in the countryside, where they are found especially on cliffs. It lays up to 3–6 eggs. No nest structure is built, which is typical for falcons. They eat insects, but also small birds, reptiles and rodents (especially mice), which are often taken on the ground. The Lesser Kestrel is an endangered species worldwide.
The Jordan Valley

The Jordan Valley is a part of the Great Rift Valley formed between the African and Arabian tectonic plates. In Arabic the area is called Al-Ghor (depression). The climate is sub-tropical. While annual rainfall is low at between 20 and 100 mm, there are many springs and tributaries plus the Jordan river itself which make it a fertile area suitable for the earliest of human farmers in the fertile crescent. For example, Jericho is an oasis that is the oldest continuously inhabited town on earth.

![Christ’s Thorn Jujube](image1)

*Ziziphus spina-christi*

A dense thorny tree with edible fruit. Its name is a reference to the belief that its thorns were used to crown Jesus before his crucifixion. In Arabic, the tree is called Al-Sidr, mentioned in Quran as a tree marking the end of the seventh heaven. Its fruits, leaves, roots and bark have medicinal properties while its honey is prized.

Arabian Green Bee-eater

*Merops cyanophrys*

A year-round resident in Palestine with bright blue forehead and throat, and bluer lower belly. Its diet includes bees, wasps etc.

Judean Viper’s-Bugloss

*Echium judaicum*

It is a small, lilac, trumpet shaped flower. The color of flowering changes into red after pollination. Its leaves and stems are covered with bristles.

Archispirostreptus syriacus is an endemic and common species that grows up to 12-15 cm in length and has around 150 legs. Although they move rather slowly, they are powerful burrowers.

Bird Watching: Palestine is a birdwatcher’s paradise because of its rich diversity all year round. Its central position at the crossroads between Africa, Asia, and Europe makes it the second most important migration route for soaring birds in the world. It is estimated that over half a billion migratory birds of all kinds pass through the region and many of them are using Palestine as a stopover site to refuel for their journey.

![Arabian Babbler](image2)

*Passer moabiticus*

A resident species in Palestine and endemic to the Middle East. It is a common winter visitor and passage migrant in Palestine. It starts to arrive at the end of September and during October and stays until March. It is a species where both the male and female hold and defend territory.

![European Stonechat](image3)

*Saxicola rubicola*

It is a small, lilac, trumpet shaped flower. The color of flowering changes into red after pollination. Its leaves and stems are covered with bristles.

Nile Tamarisk

*Paraplectranthus aequinoctialis* is a common species that grows up to 12-15 cm in length and has around 150 legs. Although they move rather slowly, they are powerful burrowers.

![Arabian Babbler](image4)

*Turdoides squamiceps*

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The Masar Ibrahim passes through natural areas but also runs through agricultural Palestinian communities. The Central Highlands region is particularly rich in agricultural terraces, dominated by olive groves and vineyards. Olive trees were first introduced to Palestine by Canaanites over 6000 years ago and have now become symbols of national identity because they are one of the central economic products (oil, pickles, wood) that help maintain people on their land.

In Palestine, olive trees are one of the major agricultural crops, mostly grown for olive oil production. The harvest season (mid-September to mid-November) is a time of celebration. Family and local community celebrations are organized with traditional Palestinian folk music and dancing.

In Palestine, the fig yields two crops annually—an earlier one (called dafuri), ripe about June, growing from the “old wood,” the midsummer sprouts of the previous year, and a second, ripe about August, which grows upon the “new wood.” By December, fig-trees in the mountainous regions have shed all their leaves, and they remain bare until about the end of March, when they put forth their tender leaf buds and the tiny figs. They are an early sign of spring.

The Almond is another tree in Palestine that has been cultivated for centuries, and shares the rocky terraces with the olive tree. Almond trees are the first to blossom, as early as February. Palestinian farmers have grown superb almonds for centuries, and every farmer has some almond trees. Palestine’s sun and rich soil is perfect for almonds known for their large size, crunchy texture and sweet flavor. Green almonds (young almond fruit before its shells turn hard) are one of the fresh fruits to taste during the month of March.

Prickly pears are a delicious fruit favored by Palestinians in summer time. The pear has the ability to survive drought as its stalks are filled with water. In the past, the plant served the practical function to designate territorial borders in peasant villages. The cactus in Arabic is called sabr (patience) has also become a symbol of Palestinian defiance.

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Syrian Oregano (Za’atar)
Origanum syriacum
The plant may be called za’atar by association with its use in a spice mixture. It is a native to the Middle East, and is harvested in the wild for use in preparing za’atar, a mixture of dried herbs, sesame and sumac for flavoring and garnish. However, it has recently entered cultivation due to high levels of demand.

Prickly pears
Opuntia ficus-indica
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Armenian Cucumber (Faqous)
Cucumis melo var. flexuosus
Faqous is a type of long, slender fruit which tastes like a cucumber and looks somewhat like an acucumber inside. It is thin, elongated, curved, and often irregularly curled with a dark green to creamy pistachio colored skin that is textured with smooth, longitudinal furrows.
Impact on Youth

Youth groups are one of the main pillars of the Masar Ibrahim al-Khalil. They are a future generation advocating for the importance of the community tourism leading to the development of hosting communities. Many of our projects involving school pupils and university students focus on environmental issues and cleaning campaigns. Through these activities we aim to get the youth out on the trail and make them experience their country on foot and learn about the rural Palestinian communities.

To respect the environment and ensure its future enjoyment by hikers and local residents, we encourage everyone to follow closely the principles of Leave No Trace.

Plan ahead and prepare
Travel and camp on durable surfaces
Dispose of waste properly
Leave what you find
Minimize campfire impacts
Respect wildlife
Be considerate of other visitors

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CONTENT DEVELOPMENT:
Masar Ibrahim al-Khalil
Beata Andonia

REVISION:
Palestine Museum of Natural History

EDITED BY:
Jennifer Thomas

PHOTOGRAPHY:
Cover: Rashid Marie
Palestine Wildlife Society
Elias Halabi
Nidal Ahmad
Beata Andonia

Masar Ibrahim al-Khalil
+970-(0)2-274-9264 | +970-(0)2-276-9691
www.masaribrahim.ps | info@masaribrahim.ps