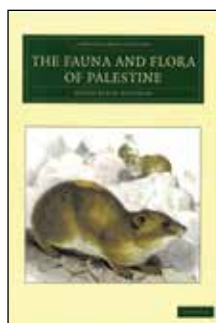


BOOK
OF THE MONTHThe Fauna and Flora
of Palestine

Henry Baker Tristram

**Cambridge University Press, 1884,
re-published 2013, 520 pages, \$56.00**

*Reviewed by Mahmoud Muna, The
Educational Bookshop, Jerusalem*

"The Survey of Western Palestine was carried out under the auspices of the Palestine Exploration Fund between 1871 and 1877, and its results were published in a series of books between 1882 and 1888. This volume was written by Reverend Henry Baker Tristram, born in England and died in 1906 aged 84. He was known as a keen traveller, famous naturalist, geologist, and Anglican priest. Although he declined a bishopric in Jerusalem, he made four separate trips to Palestine in order to compile this unique catalogue of the region's flora and fauna. Including all native vertebrates, molluscs and plants known at the time, the work was first published in 1884 and laid the foundation for a zoological and botanical study in Palestine." (Excerpt from book cover.)

The Palestine Exploration Fund was founded in 1865. It is the oldest organisation in the world created specifically for the study of the Levant and its southern portion known as Palestine. There is no doubt about the organisation's role in being a rich resource of information about the region for the public and academic community. It publishes an internationally respected journal, the Palestine Exploration Quarterly, in addition to holding regular lectures and meetings. Its current office is in London, UK.

First published in 1884, this volume of the *Survey of Western Palestine* is

considered the best-illustrated record of the fauna and flora of the region. And it was much-welcomed news back in 2013 when Cambridge University Press announced its intention to reproduce the text of the original edition. The volume contains details on more than 3,000 species; the most important of them are accompanied by detailed descriptions of their appearance and environment.

After almost 150 years of the original research, we know today that Palestine is home to a stunning variety of plants and animals, in fact many more than the 3,000 species identified in the book. There are more than 100 species of mammals native to Palestine, more than 500 kinds of birds, almost a hundred of types of reptiles and a dozen types of amphibians. The landscape of Palestine is full of flowers and plants that change suddenly according to the different geographical regions – mostly affected by the sun, water, and altitude. So while the natural woodlands of oaks carpet the upper Galilee and Mount Carmel, in spring, rockrose and thorny broom turn the hillsides pink, yellow, and white.

It is beyond doubt that this original work of Tristram will remain a cornerstone in the study of the fauna and flora of Palestine. Not only because the book includes detailed drawings and a scholarly preface that summarises and tabulates Tristram's research, but also because it offers a fascinating insight into the theories of late Victorian taxonomy, as well the species it classifies.