



MUSEUM REVIEW

The Palestine Museum of Natural History

By PMNH Media Volunteers



Temporary Location of the museum in Mar Andrea (Bethlehem University).

Palestine is blessed with a unique geographic position at the crossroads of continents and boasts a rich diversity of fauna and flora. Foreign visitors, including immigrant Jewish scientists, have studied the area, but native Palestinian biologists also deserve credit, and their efforts are bearing fruit. The first Palestinian biologist, Sana Atallah, was born in 1943 and completed his research for a master's degree in 1966 at the American University of Beirut. In 1969 he earned a PhD at the University of Connecticut, doing research on mammals of the Eastern Mediterranean region. He managed to teach one semester at

Pahlavi University in Tehran (later called Shiraz University) before he was killed in a tragic car accident at the age of 27 in 1970. Despite his young age he had already published over a dozen scientific publications, and his doctoral thesis was published posthumously.

As a child, Dr. Mazin Qumsiyeh, the founder of the Palestine Museum of Natural History (PMNH) at Bethlehem University, used to accompany his uncle Sana to the field and thus fell in love with nature. Qumsiyeh was 13 years old when his uncle died, and that is when he resolved to fulfil not only his uncle's mission of doing research on mammals but also his dream of

building a museum. Qumsiyeh, who has taught at Duke and Yale universities, now teaches at Bethlehem and Birzeit universities. He has published more than 140 scientific papers on topics ranging from systematics to biodiversity to cancer. He has also published several books, including *Bats of Egypt*, *Mammals of the Holy Land*, *Sharing the Land of Canaan*, and *Popular Resistance in Palestine*.

The Palestine Museum of Natural History (PMNH) and its Palestine Institute of Biodiversity Research (PIBR) were established through a generous donation from Professor Qumsiyeh and the efforts of many volunteers. The mission of these institutions is to research, educate about, and conserve our natural world, culture, and heritage and use knowledge to promote responsible human interactions with our environment. The following ambitious goals have been set for this project: 1) exploring and researching the diversity of the fauna, flora, and human ethnography; 2) environmental protection and responsible interaction between people and the environment; 3) using knowledge to promote science education; 4) cataloguing and building a physical and electronic database of all existing animal and plant species, as well as beginning to catalogue and preserve objects/specimens related to natural history and biodiversity (including human diversity and

history); and 5) developing RESPECT for ourselves (self-empowerment), for our fellow human beings (regardless of background), and for all living creatures and our shared earth.

We take credit for being the first Palestinians to publish extensively on mammals of Palestine (over 40 scientific publications and two books) since the premature death of Dr. Sana Atallah; the first and only Palestinians to publish scientific research on scorpions and amphibians of Palestine; the first to publish research on the genotoxic effects of Israeli industrial settlements (near Salfit) and on the decline of biodiversity in a Palestinian area (Bethlehem District). The museum researchers recently completed a faunal study in Wadi Al-Quf, the first Palestinian-administered protected nature reserve. But this is just the beginning, and much more will be accomplished with our graduate and undergraduate students, and volunteers. The museum has numerous international collaboration projects and hundreds of local and international volunteers and supporters. Yet much more can be done, and we are always looking for volunteers and supporters.

For more information, visit <http://www.palestinenature.org/>, and/or contact us at info@palestinenature.org.

Article photos are courtesy from the PMNH.

A major component of the museum is education of children via touch-feel-question methods.



Much of the collection is scientific for research on biodiversity.

