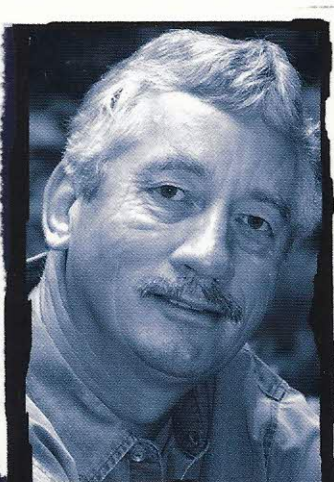
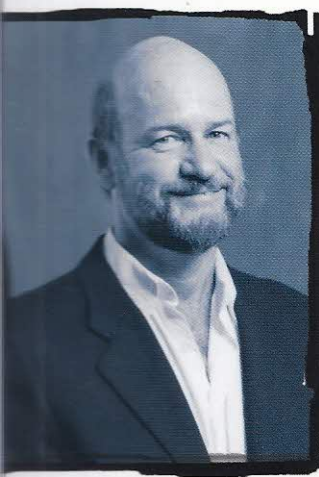


Leaders in Animal Behavior

The Second Generation



Edited by

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CAMBRIDGE

Living with birds and conservation

AMOTZ ZAHAVI



Beginnings

I don't remember myself without birds. My mother used to say that I was watching them before I could even walk or talk. I was born August 14 1928, in Petach-Tiqva, then a small town near Tel-Aviv, Israel, then Palestine, under the British mandate. Petach-Tiqva was the first Jewish village built in Israel by Jews in the nineteenth century, and my grandfather was among the early settlers there. When I was growing up there were many open fields and orchards among the houses, and I used to set out in the early mornings to watch birds before going to school. I did not know anybody who knew birds other than the most common ones, and there were no illustrated guidebooks available to me to help in their identification. I enjoyed the birds, found their nests and knew their songs, so I had my own names for them.

At the age of 12, in 1940, I met Dr Heinrich Mendelssohn. He was the director of a small zoo at the Biological-Pedagogical Institute in Tel Aviv. From then on, I could identify birds and learn their proper names at the collection of stuffed birds that was exhibited at the zoo.

and there was someone who was interested in my observations. I had the privilege of accompanying Mendelssohn in the field and I attended many of his talks.

My only sib sister died of pneumonia at the age of 15, in 1941, a few months before the sulfa drugs that could have saved her life were first available. Following her death my family left Petach-Tiqva. I studied at the Pardess Hana Agricultural Secondary School.

In 1941 the German army was advancing in North Africa towards the Middle East. The British were preparing to move their army to India. The Jewish community in Israel was facing the danger of extermination. Plans were made to make the Carmel mountain range into a stronghold and fight to the end. I remember how we, the high-school students, participated in these preparations. Soon, however, the British defeated the Nazis in the battle of El Alamein and we were saved.

I was a boy scout. At that time our goal was to establish new farming settlements. I planned to be a member of a kibbutz (a communal settlement) and a farmer. The school taught agriculture and science along with practical work. We worked on the farm two days a week in the first three years, and up to three days a week during the last two years. I got special permission to use these days to watch birds in the spring in exchange for working for a whole month during the summer vacations.

Mendelssohn persuaded me, in 1947, to study biology rather than agriculture at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His argument was that I could be a farmer without a university diploma, but that it would be more difficult to go into biology if I studied agriculture. He also argued that, since at that time there were hardly any other young ornithologists in Israel, being a professional ornithologist would be a greater service than adding one more farmer to the many who were already there.

1947/8 was to be my first year at the university, but within a month the War of Independence interrupted my studies for a year. I was not involved in actual fighting (I was exempt because the recent death of my sister left me as an only child). Instead, I drilled young people at the besieged city of Jerusalem. Later I was the commander of a company that was stationed in several kibbutzim in the Jordan valley, near the Sea of Galilee.

In 1949, after my military service, I attended some geology courses besides biology. One of the lecturers, Professor Ben-Tor, was conducting a geological survey of the Israeli Negev, a desert that extends over more than half of the country. Before 1948, the British authorities of Palestine did not allow Jews to travel freely in that part of the country. My knowledge of life in the desert was therefore very restricted. Ben-Tor needed helpers to carry stones and guns, cook, and guard at night. I was among the few students who felt themselves lucky to accompany the survey. During 1949–54 we spent a few hundred days in the field. I missed many lectures and much lab work, but I learned much about the desert and got to know its geology, its flora and its fauna (mainly the vertebrates). The biologists among the student-carriers included Eviatar Nevo, now a famous evolutionary biologist at Haifa University, and the late Amiram Shkolnik, who became a professor of Eco-physiology at Tel-Aviv University; we collected plants, trapped rodents and watched the birds. It was at that time that I fell in love with the open desert.

