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# **Wildlife and Fauna of Lebanon**

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## Introduction

Lebanon, perched at the crossroads of Africa, Asia, and Europe, is a country of remarkable natural complexity. Despite covering less than 0.007% of the world's surface, this Mediterranean nation harbors an extraordinary variety of ecosystems and wildlife. Its small size belies its significance as a biodiversity hotspot, where the towering Mount Lebanon range, lush forests, fertile valleys, and a scenic coastline provide sanctuary for countless species. This exceptional diversity is a testament to Lebanon's unique geography, ranging from sea level to snow-capped peaks, and to its storied history as a land of migration, adaptation, and resilience.

The wildlife and fauna of Lebanon encompass almost every corner of the animal kingdom. From large predators like the gray wolf and striped hyena to the tiniest of insects, the land teems with life. Lebanon's location along a primary migratory route further enriches its avian diversity, making it a haven for birdwatchers and ornithologists. Under its waves, the Mediterranean teems with fish, marine turtles, and other sea creatures, while its inland waters and wetlands host rare amphibians and endemic species. These rich assemblages of flora and fauna position Lebanon as an irreplaceable link in the intricate web of global biodiversity.

Yet, the country's natural heritage faces numerous and growing threats. Intensive urbanization, deforestation, unsustainable resource exploitation, and pollution—exacerbated by periods of conflict and economic instability—have all exacted a toll on Lebanon's ecosystems. Many species, once common, are now rare or locally extinct, echoing a broader global crisis for wildlife. The struggle for survival is seen daily: in the efforts to rescue stranded sea turtles, restore cedar forests, or protect threatened mammals from diminishing habitats.

In response, Lebanon has witnessed a burgeoning movement for conservation, driven by government action, NGO initiatives, and the work of passionate researchers and communities. National parks and nature reserves have been established, threatened habitats restored, and strategies outlined to safeguard the country's natural treasures for future generations. These efforts are both a sign of hope and a recognition of the immense responsibility that comes with being a steward of such a unique natural legacy.

This book, "Wildlife and Fauna of Lebanon: A Guide to the Wildlife and Fauna of Lebanon," is intended as a comprehensive introduction, reference, and celebration of Lebanon's living heritage. It explores the astonishing range of animals, habitats, and biological processes that make this small country so ecologically significant. By delving into individual species and broader patterns, as well as challenges and

successes in conservation, this guide aims to foster appreciation, knowledge, and action among readers of all backgrounds.

Whether you are a naturalist, a researcher, a student, or a curious reader, may this book inspire a deeper connection with Lebanon's wild places and creatures. Through greater understanding comes the power and motivation to cherish, protect, and restore a biodiversity that is not only Lebanon's pride, but the world's shared inheritance.

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## CHAPTER ONE: A Land Shaped by Mountains and Sea

Lebanon's geographical story is one of dramatic contrasts, a narrow strip of land where towering mountains plunge towards the Mediterranean Sea. This isn't just a pretty picture; it's the fundamental reason for the country's extraordinary biodiversity. The varied elevations and proximity of different environments create a mosaic of habitats, each with its own unique set of flora and fauna. It's like several different countries crammed into one small package.

The dominant feature, the spine of the nation, is the Mount Lebanon range. This majestic chain runs roughly parallel to the coastline, stretching the length of the country. Reaching elevations of over 3,000 meters at Qurnat al-Sawda in the north, these mountains create a significant rain shadow effect, influencing the climate and vegetation of the regions to their east. The western slopes, facing the Mediterranean, are exposed to moist winds, resulting in higher rainfall and lush vegetation. The eastern slopes, in contrast, are drier and more arid.

To the east of the Mount Lebanon range lies the Beqaa Valley, a fertile agricultural plain that runs between the two major mountain chains. This valley, while lower in elevation than the mountains, is still considerably higher than sea level, often exceeding 850 meters. It's fed by rivers like the Litani, Lebanon's most important river, which flows south before turning west towards the Mediterranean, and the Nahr al-Assi, which flows north into Syria. This valley acts as a significant corridor for wildlife movement and provides vital wetland habitats.

Bordering the Beqaa Valley to the east are the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, a range that forms part of the border with Syria. These mountains are generally drier than the Mount Lebanon range and feature different plant communities adapted to more arid conditions. Mount Hermon, at the southern end of this range, is another prominent peak.

Finally, a narrow coastal plain fringes the Mediterranean Sea. This strip is where most of Lebanon's population lives and where major cities like Beirut, Tripoli, and Tyre are located. The coastal plain is naturally fertile but has been heavily impacted by human development. It features sandy beaches, rocky shores, and some coastal wetlands, providing habitats for marine and coastal species.

The geological history of Lebanon is a tale of tectonic plates colliding and shifting. The country sits at the intersection of the African, Arabian, and Eurasian plates, and this dynamic setting has shaped its dramatic topography. The Levant Fracture System, a major strike-slip fault zone, runs through the region, with the Yammouneh Fault being

a significant segment within Lebanon, particularly influencing the formation of the Beqaa Valley. Over millions of years, sedimentary rocks like limestone, sandstone, and dolomite were deposited in ancient seas, and these layers were subsequently folded and faulted by the immense forces of plate tectonics, creating the mountains and valleys we see today. Volcanic activity in the past has also contributed basaltic layers to the landscape. The prevalence of limestone has also led to the formation of karst landscapes, with features like caves and dolines.

This complex topography, combined with Lebanon's position on the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea, results in a varied climate despite the country's small size. The climate is generally subtropical Mediterranean, characterized by hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters. However, there are significant regional variations. The coastal areas experience higher humidity and milder temperatures than the inland regions. The mountains are considerably cooler, with heavy snowfall in winter and cooler summers. The Beqaa Valley has a more continental climate, with hotter, drier summers and colder winters, often with frost and snow.

The interplay of these geographical and climatic factors has made Lebanon a true biodiversity hotspot within the Mediterranean Basin. The Mediterranean Basin itself is recognized globally for its exceptional plant diversity and high levels of endemism. Lebanon, despite its small size, punches well above its weight in terms of species richness. This is because it acts as a meeting point for different biogeographic regions. The western slopes of Mount Lebanon are strongly influenced by the Mediterranean climate and flora. As you move eastward and to higher elevations, you find influences from Euro-Siberian, Irano-Turanian, and even Saharo-Arabian biogeographic zones, creating fascinating transition areas where species from different regions mingle.

This unique blend of geography and biogeography provides a wide array of habitats, from the marine environment of the coast to the alpine zones of the highest mountains, and everything in between. This is the foundation upon which the rich tapestry of Lebanese wildlife is woven. It's a land of dramatic elevation changes and distinct climatic pockets, creating the conditions for a remarkable variety of life to thrive, adapt, and evolve. Understanding this geographical context is the first step in appreciating the fascinating fauna that calls Lebanon home.

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