

ECOLOGIST'S VIEW

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the future, we need to protect these biological components.”

The findings also have wider implications and suggest that we must give individual consideration to each major group because they respond differently to different scenarios and conservation problems.

STUDYING THE DUNES

Another ongoing project is being carried out in the western Negev. This sandy area has three separate habitats—stabilized, semi-stabilized and shifting dunes, Ziv explains. In the western portion of the area, Bedouins are not grazing their animals and there are few wild grazers. This allowed the production of a physical and biological soil crust that covers the habitats, causing a loss of shifting sands.

“We start to lose the mosaics of the habitat and then we start losing species like rodents and reptiles, which need the shifting dunes for burrowing and foraging,” Ziv notes. “They’re adapted to cope with the sandy habitat and suddenly, because the large animals aren’t there anymore, the ground is like concrete. While in nearby areas, there is too much grazing. So we’re losing the region’s heterogeneity, and we’re losing species.”

In this project, work goes beyond the research to experiments with habi-

tat restoration, in collaboration with Israel’s Nature and Parks Authority. SUVs equipped with tilting metal structures are used to artificially break the soil crust, and highly controlled analysis is carried out with eight dunes.

It will take two to three years to evaluate results. The problem is complicated by 13 years of consecutive drought, which adds to the soil crust and prevents plants from growing and feeding the animals. Ziv envisions dropping seeds from airplanes to compensate for decreased productivity.

Is taking action in this manner within the province of today’s ecologists? “In the past most ecologists were busy with basic science,” Ziv says, “but today many of us are involved with applications as well.” But action must be based on understanding, he stresses.

Ziv sees a growing willingness worldwide to take ecological ideas and conservation into account. In Israel, he believes, “we have grown up” and are starting to appreciate the desert’s beauty and the importance of preserving the natural landscape. “We need the desert on the global scale too,” he points out. “The desert has its own contribution to ecosystem functioning—it’s part of the worldwide circle.”

“We learn all the time how complex things are in ways we didn’t

know before. What we want is to preserve the treasure we have so it’s there for our kids. They need the desert, the canyons, the animals. All the research we do contributes to diversity, open spaces, the functioning of ecological systems...Israel’s future needs healthy land and ecological systems.

“We need nature to live.” ■



Spring in the Negev brings beautiful desert irises.

MARGIT MEISSNER

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She then decided to become a volunteer at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. “It’s very effective to have someone who lived through that period guide you,” she observes.

Margit takes great satisfaction in having reclaimed her very international roots. Because her family was so widely dispersed, its members had

substantially lost touch. But nine years ago a reunion was organized.

“So we have family reunions now in Australia, Mexico, the Dominican Republic and next summer in Canada.” The reunions are an important response to the Holocaust, she feels, because so many families lost and never found each other. “We need to remember the Holocaust and understand what might have been different had other countries intervened.”

Margit sees BGU as a good example of taking responsibility. “The students are really engaged and BGU is very involved in the community. The mixed student body is a great asset. There’s more cooperation between Jews and Arabs in the Negev than anywhere else.

“I think my supporting BGU is also a way of supporting an organization that is involved in more than only scholarship—it is also involved in the social dimension.” ■