

# Palestine: First Scientific Studies Highlight Environmental Catastrophe due to Israeli Occupation

By [Global Research News](#)

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[Bethlehem University](#)

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*Over the last 40 years occupied Palestine has witnessed a catastrophic decline in biodiversity. Loss of habitat, desertification and pollution of water sources have all been linked to the occupation by Israeli forces.*

This summer scientific research led by Professor Mazin Qumsiyeh at new Palestine Museum of Natural History at Bethlehem University was published in January 2014 in the “Jordan Journal of Biological Sciences” and titled ‘[Decline in Vertebrate Biodiversity in Bethlehem, Palestine](#)’. The speed of decline in biodiversity due to habitat destruction in Palestine over the last few decades has been catastrophic. Samples in the Bethlehem area have found that of 31 species of mammals commonly witnessed in the 1960s and early 1970s 13 species have already disappeared, including 4 of 7 varieties of bat and 8 species of carnivore. Badgers and the native gazelle are also reaching a point of critical endangerment. Similarly, one third of species observed few decades ago were not seen in more recent surveys.

The human population has not been immune from the ongoing environmental catastrophe. In a 2013 [paper on genotoxicity](#) published in “International Journal of Environmental Studies”, Dr. Qumsiyeh and one of his master’s students showed the effect that the Israeli industrial settlement of Barqan near Salfit is having on DNA of local Palestinians. In a sample of blood from this community, the percentage of cells with aberrations stood at 4.08%, far above the level that has been considered normal for healthy individuals (0.48% – 0.88%). Such aberrations increase the incidence of cancers, infertility, and congenital abnormalities.

Environmental damage in Palestine is due to Israeli colonization, population growth, global climate change, and unregulated industrial development. Israeli policies have greatly exacerbated these problems. In particular research highlights the destruction of Palestinian villages long structured to be in balance with nature for thousands of years, the creation of millions of refugees living in unsustainable conditions, and bringing in settlers from abroad (e.g. over 600,000 settlers have moved to the West Bank since 1967).

Other problems highlighted in the ongoing research are impact of draining the Hula wetlands, the diversion of headwaters of the Jordan Valley, and the impact of the annexation and segregation wall.

If nothing changes, Dr Qumsiyeh forecasts that the process of decline in biodiversity,

desertification and polluting of water sources will only get worse; while temperatures in the West Bank could rise by as much as 5 degrees over the next 30 years and rainfall decline by 20-25%. Only through a radical movement to resist Israeli policies and settlement construction, to conserve local biodiversity and clean up water supplies, can environmental Nakba be averted. That is part of the reason why volunteers established the Palestine Museum of Natural History and its Institute of Biodiversity Research and Conservation.

To join this group of volunteers send an email to [info@palestinenature.org](mailto:info@palestinenature.org)

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