



# The Museum of Natural History



By Bassam Almohor

When I asked Professor Mazin Qumsiyeh,\* why there are no dinosaurs at the Palestine Museum of Natural History, he smiled and said, “because dinosaurs did not live in Palestine. This land was under the sea 60 million years ago. But we have their descendants: birds!”

The Palestine Museum of Natural History in Bethlehem is part of Bethlehem University. It was established by Mazin, along with the Palestine Institute for Biodiversity and Sustainability, to research, educate about, and conserve nature, culture, and heritage in Palestine.

The place is kept natural, chaotic; it echoes the local landscape of Palestine’s southern hills, with its semiarid climate, hilly formation, natural bushes, and even *natesh* (prickly burnet), which covers the land in this topography. Mazin leads the way to the collections and explains passionately the flora found there and his efforts to preserve and study the land and its people. For Mazin, this is a national struggle that he has spent his life training for.

Established in 2014 on 14 dunums (3.4 acres) of land in Bethlehem, the museum houses exhibits related to natural and cultural heritage, including ethnology, herpetology, mammalogy, mushrooms, bees, marine snails, land snails, desert fauna, embryos, live creatures (scorpions, mealworms, hamsters), extinct animals, and much more.



The museum has rescued many animals and released them into the wild through its rescue and rehabilitation program. A hyena named Linda, a striped hyena, a golden eagle, and several great owls were all rescued, rehabilitated, and released into the wild.

The botanical garden at the Palestine Museum of Natural History is a place to study and learn about the diversity of plants and wildlife in Palestine. The work of the botanical garden is to preserve and protect more than 360 domestic vegetation species that are present in the garden. Experiments with aquaponics (fish farming) and hydroponics, the process of growing crops without soil and with only water, are yielding successful results.

The museum also houses a community garden that serves as a permaculture model and education center for the playful exploration of sustainability concepts. A small amphitheater and an environmental exploration playground for children have been constructed as well.

In the museum, you will be introduced to methods of crop cultivation, composting, recycling, and upcycling while learning how to transform by-products and waste materials into new products. Teaching visitors how to make compost is an important part of the museum’s educational and preservation goals. Compost provides a suitable means to

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For more information and guidance, contact the museum at [info@palestinenature.org](mailto:info@palestinenature.org), phone 02-277-3553, or visit [www.palestinenature.org](http://www.palestinenature.org); Facebook: @PIBS.PMNH, or Twitter: @PaIMNH.

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recycle organic waste on-site and turn it into a natural fertilizer. At the museum, all vegetation that has been cut down and all leftover food is composted to be used for the community garden.

The recently opened ethnography exhibition includes tools, implements, traditional beehives, farming equipment, native seeds, farmers’ clothes, old books and ledgers, heirloom seeds of plant varieties, and artistic objects made from plants and animal products.

In the museum library, students and researchers will find a significant physical library of over 10,000 books that cover many fields of science, in addition to a digital library and access to tens of thousands of relevant published articles and books in those fields. Workshops on various science topics are held weekly. Follow the museum’s social media to learn more.