

# Acopian's Legacy Soars High

**F**rom late May to August, the wildlife habitat in Armenia thrives—especially that of the birds. Amidst the massive fields and vast acreage of land, semi-collared flycatchers forage through orchards, and thrush nightingales sing until dawn. Eagle owls, known for their bright orange eyes, roost on branches close to the river gorge in the middle of Yerevan. And active green warblers build their nests on balls of dry plants in nearby woodlands and scrub.

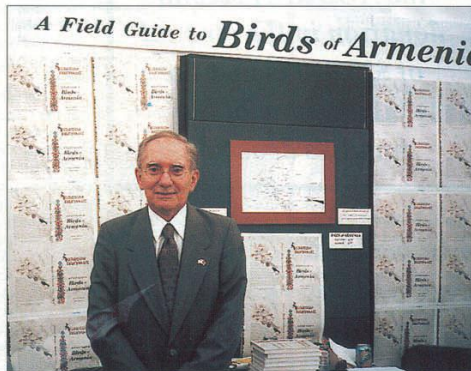
Armenia is brimming with natural treasures such as these. But every year, as trees are cut down and wetlands are destroyed, the environmental health of the country is slowly deteriorating. At the forefront of preserving the habitat for future generations is Pennsylvania resident, Sarkis Acopian, whose tireless commitment to conservation in Armenia began many years ago and culminated with a major donation to the AGBU to establish the Sarkis Acopian Chair in Conservation and Environmental Management at AUA in 1996.

"Armenia," says Mr. Acopian, "is a very small country. When you are in the air making an approach to land, you can see from one end of Lake Sevan to the other; from the border on this side to the border on the other side. And if you get up a little bit higher, you can see everything—this is all we have. We just can't wait to pay attention to something until we are so well off. By then, we will have wasted too much time. My dream is for conservation in Armenia, and my hope, through the establishment of the faculty chair at AUA, is to provide the country and its people with some kind of lasting effort."

The need for environmental management and conservation is not a unique concept in Armenia. Since the first days of Armenian independence in 1991, the Armenian government has been working to clean the environment after years of ecological neglect left over from the Soviet era. Along with the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the Acopian Chair at AUA is one more vehicle to establish programs in conservation and wildlife management, and to introduce the importance of environmental conservation to the general public.

Over the last year, the Acopian Chair has already made progress toward that end. Environmental awareness courses are now being given to all students attending AUA regardless of their major; environmental research is being conducted; and, in conjunction with the Ministry of Ecology and Ministry of Environmental Protection, plans for conservation are being presented to Parliament to establish laws. In addition, a program to teach environmental protection in high school has been implemented, as well as a

**When it comes to helping Armenia GO GREEN — the sky is the limit for industrialist Sarkis Acopian. His major donation to support an American University of Armenia (AUA) Faculty Chair—the Sarkis Acopian Chair in Conservation and Environmental Management—and his unrivaled dedication to produce *A Field Guide to Birds of Armenia* is paving the way to preserve the ecological well-being of the country for generations to come.**



**Mr. Sarkis Acopian (above left). Authors Dr. Daniel Klem, Jr. of Pennsylvania and Dr. Martin S. Adamian of Armenia at International Birdwatchers Fair in England (above right). The "Armenian Gulls" of Lake Arpie in Northeast Armenia (facing page).**

program to train teachers to teach environmental studies.

"When Sarkis approached me with the idea of the Chair," says AUA President Emeritus and AGBU Central Board Director Dr. Mihran Agbabian, "I embraced it with great enthusiasm, as it was very much in line with the needs of Armenia. I have worked closely with him in the last six years, and during that period have observed a commitment to conservation and preservation that I haven't seen anywhere else. Sarkis is a visionary and his contribution to AUA and to Armenia is monumental."

## ■ FLYING EAST

Few people know that ancient Armenia is symbolized by the white crane—a sign of good luck, kindness and success. During the fourth century farmers had great affection for the crane. Because they consumed such large quantities of crop-damaging insects, they considered killing one to be tantamount to committing a sin. To this day, the crane is honored in folk songs, literature and art. And some still believe that when a crane dies, its mate will kill itself from grief.

Birds have long been a part of Armenia's history. And for conservationist Mr. Acopian, featuring the birds of Armenia is just his latest way to introduce the importance of environmental conservation to the general public. Leading a glob-

al team of experts, Mr. Acopian recently published *A Field Guide to Birds of Armenia*—aimed not just to up-date the level of knowledge on Armenia's bird population, which was last done 40 years ago, and to provide practical assistance to an international contingent of bird enthusiasts; but also to introduce the beauty and utility of Armenia's birds to Armenian communities world-wide.

"I started work on the guide in 1991, after my son, Jeff, gave me the book *A Field Guide to Birds of the USSR*," explains Mr. Acopian. "You see, birds are just the starting place to get people to begin to appreciate nature. The book was written to show the world and Armenia that it's not just about a couple of birds flying around—that health of the birds and respect for them gives respect to everything that grows."

Ornithologist Dr. Daniel Klem, Jr., one of the authors of the guide explains, "Birds have had a long history in Western civilization of forecasting changes in the environment. A good example of this is the birds of prey in North America. Birds of prey lie high on the food chain and eat many of the foods that we humans and other large mammals eat. When the poisons from agricultural practices, that have gotten out of hand with the use of pesticides, are administered in ways which are harmful to these birds, they are often indicators of conditions that are

harmful to humans as well."

At Lake Sevan, in Armenia, the absence of some birds have begun to signal changes in the environment. As the second largest alpine lake in the world, Lake Sevan has been drawn down 22 meters because of industrial use, hydroelectric power and irrigation. As a result, many of the shoreline areas that supported bird life have been eliminated along with the birds that nested there. One particular bird that is no longer found in that area is the white-winged scoter. "When you no longer have these animals, you have to ask yourself what has happened to the land that has eliminated the opportunity for them to survive," says Mr. Acopian.

Authored by ornithologists Dr. Martin S. Adamian from the Institute of Zoology of the Armenian National Academy of Sciences and Dr. Daniel Klem, Jr., from the Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania, the guide is the culmination of four years of intense field, museum and literary research. To date, it is the most accurate, comprehensive and technically sophisticated publication on the birds of Armenia and Caucasia in general. With descriptions of 346 species of birds identified in the region, illustrations of 61 plates drawn by 12 of the world's most distinguished artists, and distribution maps accurately documenting the location of species, the guide puts Arme-

nia on the international map as one of the most unique sights to see and study a variety of bird species.

With all proceeds from the sale of the book benefiting AUA, the guide is a major contribution and reference. Lauded in the international birding world for "promoting awareness of the rich avifauna this little known Republic possesses, and for making Armenia's birds accessible to all." It also has been commended for its tersely worded text translated to reach the widest of audiences.

### ■ A BIRDS-EYE VIEW AND BEYOND

"I stayed with it until it was done and worked seven days a week," says Mr. Acopian in reference to his four year challenge of putting the field guide together. "I didn't spend that much time starting my business. When it looked like it wasn't going to happen, it made me try that much harder. There were many obstacles, but we didn't throw in the sponge because we didn't want to fail. I wanted to accomplish something for Armenia that was lasting—that would be good for many years from now. And to do something that has international interest."

With Mr. Acopian leading the way to the guide's completion, a team of more than a dozen players involved in its production share a similar sentiment of a job well done. With the book's first introduction to a large audience at the International Birdwatching Fair in England this August, its artistry, accuracy, and maps have set it in a category all of its own in the birding world.

"Mr. Acopian's attention to detail is phenomenal," says Peter Saenger, International Project Manager. "During proofing stages, he'd go through the book, read the description of the bird, then go feather by feather comparing the illustrations to the description. At the printers, Mr. Acopian used to take the proof sheets outside in the natural light to review the colors of the plates, since the guide would ultimately be used by people in the field. If a color was slightly off, he'd have it changed."

Artist Martin Hallam, who drew the vulture plates in the guide comments, "The one thing that struck me was that everything had to be exactly accurate in the guide. For example, if you drew a plant with the bird, the plant had to be accurate to the bird species. There was greater attention given to detail than in any other field guide book I've worked on or seen."

Not a beat has been skipped in the development of the guide, including the maps in the back which are cross-referenced with the plates to show the distribution and disbursement of a particular species of bird. In addition, the most prominent or observable feature of each species has been underlined in the species' descriptions.

With a finished project on the shelf, few can image the steps it has taken to get a project of such magnitude and precision off the ground. Shortly after finding Dr. Adamian and Dr. Klem, two highly exper-

rienced and respected ornithologists, to author the guide, Mr. Acopian's next challenge was to establish communications between Armenia and the States. After remodeling the Armenia offices and sending generators to run the fax lines, Mr. Acopian was short someone to translate information from Russian, the working language in Armenia, to English. Since 1994, approximately 95 percent of all communication between the American and Armenian teams has been funneled through Yuri Zharikov, from the Ukraine. "In all respects, it has been a perfect match for me," expresses Zharikov. "I love translation a lot and have a certifi-

gained. Levan Janoian started working as project manager in the Armenia office in December of 1993. At that time, the project was located in the Institute of Zoology where Janoian's primary role was to act as liaison between the Institute and AUA.

For Janoian, an architect by trade, the most difficult part was not learning the new zoological terms, but learning how to work. "The most challenging part of my job was learning how to make specific input and ship specific results," says Mr. Janoian. "And the important part in this learning process was the presence of Mr. Acopian.

all those involved, *A Field Guide to Birds of Armenia* promises to place Armenia on the international map not only as a site for beautiful birds, but also as a place to visit.

U.S. project office research ornithologist Tanya Bray, who worked on both the field guide and handbook, a more technically written reference for scientists due out in one year, says, "For birders, the more obscure the place, the more people want to go." Nobody could answer that better than John Muddeman, a volunteer for the guide, who spent seven months in Armenia documenting birds. When asked when he was planning to



cate as a translator. And my formal education is in biology."

Once communications were established, ornithologists Adamian and Klem then went through the painstaking task of working through differences in measurement technique and species between the east and west. Later, when it became obvious that all the kinks had been smoothed over, research teams from Armenia and Great Britain were sent out to collect data.

"In addition to the data that was collected throughout time," says Dr. Adamian, "a great deal of new data was collected that was not available before. All the information is now up-to-date."

With all research completed, the book slowly began to develop. Working with Mr. Acopian at AUA was Michael Kouchakdjian. "I am in awe of what Mr. Acopian has done for Armenia," he says. "He saw potential in the country and was not afraid to meet the challenges head on. He is a pioneer."

Beyond the birds, much has been learned from the project and more will be

"Of course, I am grateful to him for sponsoring this project and literally making this project exist. But personally, I am more grateful to him for teaching me how to work. If instead of him, we had a less patient person, I would never have learned what I learned. And I mean this sincerely from my heart.

"These three years have made me understand it is not so much who you are, where you are from and what you have inside—the most important thing is whether you can bring it out and let other people use it. Nobody remembers everything, so I learned to write everything down. I learned that once somebody says 'A,' to understand that 'B' follows. And by the time they say 'B,' to know what to do next. I had a bit of *perestroika*, rebuilding in myself. And what you often see in our society is that the old has been broken, but the new hasn't been built yet."

Personal growth, such as Janoian's, has only added to the already rich teachings of the guide and project itself. But beyond the impact the book has had on

back, Muddeman answered, "As soon as I can."

"Certainly anyone who goes to Armenia from a Western European perspective will be seeing a lot of birds in all sorts of different habitats," explains Muddeman. "If you have been to Turkey, you've seen quite a few of the same things—it's just not as accessible as the small distances in Armenia.

"At the moment, we are trying to organize bird watching tours. If we can find a way around the high cost of the flights in and out of Armenia, most people will find very good bird watching there. It does help to know where some of the sights are. Some of the sights are very restricted. But Armenia is safe enough. Certainly with an organized group, and with Armenians, there shouldn't be any problems."

Muddeman was one of several project members trying to field questions about Armenian birding and tourism at the Birdwatching. One photographer at the Fair, specializing in photographs of birds' nests and eggs, was thrilled to

learn through the field guide about several sought-after species. "Certainly is a lovely book, isn't it," he remarks.

## ■ SECOND NATURE

Though Mr. Acopian is fully invested in the preservation and conservation of the environment today, his interest in caring for the outdoors and nature developed only a short while ago. "My son, Jeff, is very involved in nature," says Mr. Acopian. "And when my wife, Bobbye, and I built our house in 1965, I became interested too. Shortly after we moved, I learned that all the 150-year-old trees around the property were going to be leveled for a housing project. I thought you can't just cut down the trees and put pavement.

his studies at Lafayette. Around that same time, Mr. Acopian married his wife, Bobbye, whom he had met while stationed in Texas during his service. Then, his education was again interrupted when the National Guard and the Reserves called him to active duty during the Korean conflict. By 1952, Mr. Acopian was back to school again.

In addition to studying during the day, Mr. Acopian started working from three in the afternoon until eleven at night in production for Weller Manufacturing Company, known nationally for manufacturing soldering guns. Later, he served as engineer, and chief engineer of the organization.

In 1957, Mr. Acopian left Weller to

tomter tells us what model they want, we can build it within three days and have it out."

Starting with five employees, ATC has about 150 today with two operations—one in Easton, Pennsylvania and the other in Melbourne, Florida. "We started the plant in Florida in 1972," says Mr. Acopian. "First of all, we have this three day delivery. Now, when you have three day delivery and you're snowed in and you can't get to the plant and UPS doesn't pick up, this is a problem. That gives a bad feeling to somebody in California who ordered a power supply, and you have to say well I'm sorry there was a storm. Those kind of excuses I don't buy.

transfer of materials and transportation of management personnel in 1967.

In the early 1950s, he picked up scuba diving and in the early 1960s began to sky dive. With over 150 dives recorded, Mr. Acopian says he became inspired to pursue the activity after hearing a world champion sky diver talk. "His talk was very interesting," says Mr. Acopian. "What I realized was that it's not just about jumping out of an airplane, opening up your parachute and letting what happens happen. I learned that you could actually control the dive."

For the last 30 years, Mr. Acopian has dedicated himself to conservation and to making a difference for others in the future. Mr. Acopian has made major



The "Chough" (above left) and the rock partridge (above) from Armenian illuminated manuscripts.



The "Armenian Gull" (right). The main population of this species is in Armenia.

Today, I look at my land and its like a mini ecosystem—an oasis in the middle of the construction. But just my little efforts aren't going to do any good."

Whether it's the environment, his business or his hobbies, whenever Mr. Acopian sets his mind to do something, he carries it out with perfection, passion and perseverance. Mr. Acopian was born in 1926 in Tabriz, Iran to Grigor and Araks Acopian, and was one of three children in his family. His father, born in Karadakh, Iran in 1892, later attended the School of Dental Medicine in Tiflis, Georgia where he became Doctor of Dentistry in 1919. His mother, Araks Djigardjian, born in Kars, Turkey in 1898, also attended the School of Dental Medicine in Tiflis, Georgia where she was one of Dr. Grigor Acopian's students. After they married, Drs. Acopian left Georgia and moved to Tabriz, Iran. Later, the family moved to Tehran in 1932.

Mr. Acopian moved to the United States from Tehran, in 1945, to attend Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania where he studied engineering. A year later, just after the end of World War II, Mr. Acopian was drafted into the U.S. Air Corps and was sent to San Antonio, Texas for training.

"I had an immigration visa when I came to the country," explains Mr. Acopian. "My primary goal was to go to school. However, when the boat docked in Philadelphia, the customs people wanted to know whether or not I was planning to stay in America. When I told them that I was planning to stay, my name was automatically placed on the draft list."

By 1947, Mr. Acopian was discharged during general demobilization and was back in Pennsylvania continuing

start his own business. "My intention has always been—even when I was in Iran—to go into my own business," says Mr. Acopian. "When I went into business, the best thing I thought I could do was get into sub-contracting—to build equipment for someone else. One of my largest customers, in the beginning, was Philco Corporation, a giant in the television industry. While doing that, I noticed there was a need for power supply. Power supply is the source of the power. Without it, nothing works. That's how I started Acopian Technical Co. (ATC)."

But how Mr. Acopian has differentiated himself from the more than 300 power supply manufacturers throughout the country is to supply power supply products quickly. "When I decided to get into this business," says Mr. Acopian, "there was no mystery to it. But what I found out was that people needed power supplies quick, and no one could do that. We've designed the equipment and production in our company so that we can consistently deliver a high quality product to be shipped within three days."

"A lot of our competitors ship from stock," continues Mr. Acopian. "But when that stock goes down, the customer has to wait nine to ten weeks before the product is shipped. We don't have anything in stock and we don't produce mass quantity items. We have a large inventory of parts and the internal capability of building these things. So that once a cus-

"Keeping the integrity of the three day delivery, we decided to have two different locations so that in case there is an emergency, we can always ship from the other plant. We decided on Melbourne because there was a pool of skilled and semi-skilled aerospace workers who were unemployed after the boom in the seventies, there was space available at low costs, and there was good weather."

Having built the company from its infancy, Mr. Acopian is technically retired today having passed the presidency on to his son, Greg and the vice presidency on to his son, Jeff. But anyone who knows Mr. Acopian knows that he's not really retired at all—he's just moved up the ladder. "Greg and Jeff started working at the plant before I retired," says Mr. Acopian. "When they began, they worked in every phase of the operation, so they would know what was going on. I told them not to come to me unless they had a problem they weren't sure about. They are doing good so far."

For most people, the effort to build a successful business such as ATC would have left little to no time for anything else. But for Mr. Acopian, hobbies and outside interests have been part of his schedule from the beginning. In the late 1940s, he had his first flying lesson in a J-3 Piper Cub. Completing the requirements for his private pilot license became useful when Mr. Acopian purchased his first corporate aircraft for inter-company

gifts to the Nature Conservancy and the Florida Institute of Technology. Along with the millions he has given to AUA, the Armenian Embassy in Canada and earthquake relief in Armenia, he is a major supporter of the AGBU Soup Kitchens and Camp Nubar.

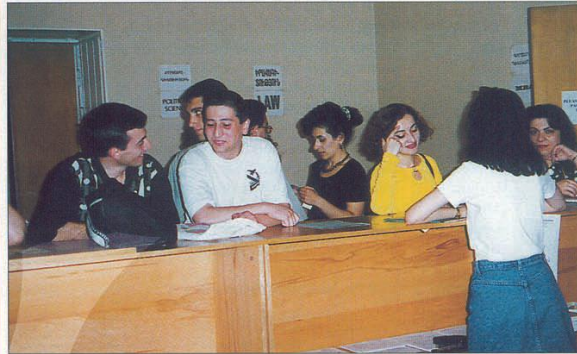
"We had a neighbor," says Mr. Acopian. "And one day when I was out in front of our house, he was out too with binoculars at his head looking up in the trees. He said to me, 'Look at that such and such bird.' I said, 'Oh yeah, that's nice.' Then I went back into my house and told my wife, 'You know our neighbor, he's crazy. He's out there with binoculars looking for birds. There is something wrong with him.'"

"I used to be one of those people who didn't understand the beauty that nature had to offer. But now that I do, I want to share, preserve and conserve it for others. I don't know if I'll succeed. I'm just trying to get some people organized so that after I am dead the idea won't stop. I'll soon be 71-years-old. At this age, here today and gone tomorrow. I want something set so that at least somebody will provide them with some kind of lasting effort. This is what my hope is with the AUA chair. My dream is for conservation." □

*A Field Guide to Birds of Armenia* is available through the AGBU Bookstore (see page 59).

1973	USA	Anonymous "MM"	\$ 95,589
1973	USA	Bedrosian & Egoian Memorial	1,845
1973	USA	Nicholas & Berj Der Manuelian Memorial	12,151
1973	USA	Harry Hairabedian Memorial	20,678
1973	Italy	Yervant Hussissian Memorial	500,000
1973	USA	Gadarine Kulhanjian Memorial	18,795
1973	Ethopia	Sarkis Melikian Estate	25,000
1973	USA	Mard & Rose Peloian Memorial	200,000
1973	France	Hovannes Telian Estate	52,700
1973	USA	Kissak Vrouyr Memorial	20,012
1974	USA	Dr. Grant V. Athanas Memorial	20,000
1974	USA	Hrant Baroony Estate	108,325
1974	USA	Haig Berberian Memorial	258,520
1974	USA	Nishan & Mildred Dagavarian Memorial	317,385
1974	USA	Alan M. Fenner Memorial	125,868
1974	England	Nazar D. Funduklian Memorial	54,042
1974	France	Krikor Hurmuzian Estate	23,400
1974	USA	Nazareth Jedidian Estate	57,826
1974	Lebanon	Zabel and Elmast Movsessian Memorial	73,947
1974	USA	Minni Pap Papazian Memorial	12,045
1974	USA	Edward H. Touloukian Foundation	571,814
1975	USA	Hagop B. Barsamian Estate	17,082
1975	USA	Joseph Bastian Estate	29,444
1975	USA	Hampartsoum S. Kaloyan Memorial	10,580
1975	USA	George Marderosian Estate	8,488
1975	USA	Louis N. & Aznif Melikian Estate	35,044
1975	USA	John Gregory Moskoffian Estate	18,986
1975	USA	Esther Solakian Estate	54,314
1975	Iran	Hovanes & Vartouhi Ter Hovannessian Memorial	261,600
1976	USA	Hagop & Mariam Arzoumanian Memorial	1,601,163
1976	France	Garabed Avedikian Memorial	54,650
1976	USA	Karnig & Sirarpi Babayan	12,000
1976	Cyprus	Sirouhi Benlian Estate	19,141
1976	USA	Kazar Chutjian Memorial	54,200
1976	Belgium	Hovannes & Yeghisapet Doudouyan Memorial	60,000
1976	USA	Mardiros & Haiganoush Hagopian Estate	26,742
1976	France	Gabriel Hamparzumian Memorial	109,700
1976	USA	Ardashes Lajikian Estate	4,052
1976	USA	Louis Mugerdichian Memorial	512,913
1976	USA	Mary A. Negohosian Estate	38,247
1976	USA	Edward G. Nishan Memorial	50,000
1976	USA	Mariam Baltaian Sarkissian Memorial	10,250
1977	USA	AGBU School Alumni "Sanoutz"	62,395
1977	Venezuela	Anonymous "V"	1,683,952
1977	USA	Vartan A. Arkanian	177,345
1977	USA	Michael & Marion Avsharian	11,000
1977	USA	Mihran Exerjian Memorial	10,000
1977	USA	Mathew O. Najarian Memorial	5,200
1977	USA	Satenik & Adom K. Ourian Memorial	18,500
1977	USA	Nerses Papazian Estate	57,783
1977	Austria	Victoria Tchertchian Memorial	39,787
1978	USA	Hagop & Mary Booloozian Estate	481,177
1978	USA	Marderos Chebolian Estate	13,815
1978	USA	Edward & Larry Egavian	20,000
1978	USA	Garabed Ethikian	8,411
1978	USA	Sarkis Fereshetian Memorial	5,000
1978	France	Garabed & Ara Hodaghian Estate	47,900
1978	Lebanon	Gulbenk & Nver Juknavorian Memorial	17,247
1978	USA	Hovannes & Hnazart Khashkhashian Memorial	20,000
1978	USA	Tashjian & Lamson Memorial	111,048

## Highlights of 1997 AGBU Programs in Armenia Funded by our Donors



American University of Armenia students registering for the new academic year. AUA now has 450 graduates working in ministries, joint ventures, local and foreign institutions and agencies in Armenia (above). New American University of Armenia Business Center under construction—to be completed late 1998.



After three years of renovation, the former 50,000 sq. ft. communist government office building, damaged in the 1988 earthquake, will be reopened as the Gyumri Academy of Performing and Visual Arts.