How do you make a million people care about birds? This was the challenge Yossi Leshem faced as he strived to engage Israelis in caring for the world around them. Yossi, and his colleague Dan Alon, came up with an idea that would help increase awareness of birds and nature in Israeli society. In May of 2008, Israel celebrated its 60th birthday, and to mark the occasion a campaign was launched to choose a national bird. The United States has the bald eagle, Canada has the loon. Now Israel would have its own national bird.

The campaign involved finding a bird that reflected Israel’s national character. Candidates included birds that were colorful, made pleasant sounds and nested in Israel. Having a biblical connection was a bonus. Bird experts selected 50 initial candidates that were then narrowed down to 10. Israel is a democracy, so the national bird was selected in a national election!

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) posted pictures and descriptions of the “candidates” on their website. Newspapers and television stations reported on each candidate and their election activities. Ballot boxes were placed and every military base in Israel and the public voted online or by phone.

The choice was too important to be left to adults alone. 4,000 of Israel’s public schools and 9,500 kindergartens were given the chance to vote too. During the month prior to the election the children learned about each of the candidates and the threats to its environment. In the end, 350,000 people cast their votes. Israel’s president, Shimon Peres, announced the winner: The hoopoe! This election proved to be a great lesson in birding and democracy.

Questions to Consider…

• Why the focus on birds? Why a national bird? How do birds contribute to the environment in which we cohabitate?
• Why was the hoopoe chosen? Do some research online to find out.
• Have you ever wondered how your state/country chose its national bird? What is your state’s bird and how does it reflect your state motto or characteristics of citizens of your state. 
• What have you learned about birds that you didn’t know before? How will you go about learning more about birds in your community?
• What would your campaign look like?
Activity

How would you go about selecting a bird for your school?

1. Split students into groups.
2. Introduce the TV Show *Shark Tank*. Ask if anyone has seen the show. Describe the show.*
3. Explain to the students that they are going to play *Shark Tank*. Instead of selling a product, they are going to choose a bird that is indigenous to their community and try to convince their classmates that the bird they picked should become their “School Bird” or “Temple Bird.”
4. Each group will research birds within the local community and choose a bird around which to create a campaign. Students can make posters and videos making a case for their bird. They can decorate the classrooms and hallways with images, facts, and reasons to vote for their bird.
5. Students present their birds to one another. Presentations should consist of at least one visual sign and a 1-2 minute pitch or skit.
6. Key questions to consider:
   - What makes your bird unique?
   - How does your bird best represent your local community? What Jewish values does it represent?
7. Each group presents their campaign to the rest of the group. Groups vote on the campaign they like best (they can't vote for their own).
8. Votes are counted and the winners are announced.

* *Shark Tank* is a hit ABC TV show that features a panel of five wealthy investors called "sharks" who consider offers from entrepreneurs seeking investors for their business.