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**Israel Veterinary Medical Association**

P.O.Box 22, Raanana 4310001, Israel  
 Tel: 09-7419929 • Fax: 09-7431778  
 E-mail: ivma@zahav.net.il

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 Email: oren.print@gmail.com

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Front Cover: **EUROPEAN BEE-EATER** (*Merops apiaster*)

**EUROPEAN BEE-EATERS** are characterized by richly colored plumage, slender bodies, and usually elongated central tail feathers. All have long down-turned bills and medium to long wings, which may be pointed or round. Male and female plumages are usually similar.

As their name suggests, bee-eaters predominantly eat flying insects, especially bees and wasps, which are caught on the wing from an open perch. The insect's stinger is removed by repeatedly hitting and rubbing the insect on a hard surface. During this process, pressure is applied to the insect's body, thereby discharging most of the venom. Most bee-eaters are gregarious. They form colonies, nesting in burrows. Their eggs are white, with typically five to the clutch. Most species are monogamous, and both parents care for their young, sometimes with assistance from related birds in the colony. Many beekeepers believe that the bee-eaters are the main obstacle causing worker bees not to forage, and instead stay inside the hives. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) assesses species vulnerability in terms of total population and the rate of any population decline. The bee-eaters meet the IUCN vulnerability criteria, and all are therefore evaluated as a "Least-concern species".

The pictures of the cover were generously provided by Mr. **Moshe Tachnai**.