

Lesson 4 Preserving the Past, Protecting the Future

Reading 1

The Fading Melody of Kuşköy

If you ever get a chance to travel through the mountains of northern Türkiye, you may hear a whistled melody echoing through the peaks. At first, it may seem like the song of a bird sitting in the tree above. However, if you listen more closely, you will hear a response to the melody and realize that someone is using it to communicate. The amazing melody you hear is the bird language of Kuşköy.

Kuşköy, which means “bird village,” is located in the Pontic Mountains of northern Türkiye. What makes it different from other villages is the fact that over 80% of the people there can communicate by whistling! They use “bird language,” a special regional language that translates the Turkish language into a series of high-pitched whistles and melodies. The combination of these two sounds makes the language sound like a bird’s song.

Not only can bird language be used for simple interactions such as an invitation for tea, but it can also be used for complex conversations about the latest news and the year’s harvest. Unlike most languages, bird language can be heard over long distances, which is especially useful for the farmers of the community. Through bird language, they can easily communicate with one another as they work in the fields and orchards spread throughout the mountain valleys of the area.

The remarkable bird language has been passed down from generation to generation for centuries, and it was once used throughout the northern regions of Türkiye. However, it is now in great danger of becoming a dead language. Only about 10,000 people who can use the language remain, and most of them live in Kuşköy. As a result, bird language was registered on UNESCO’s List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding in 2017.

One big threat to the language is modern technology. With the convenience of cell phones, many people no longer see a need for such a language and are not willing to learn it. After all, why would you whistle to your neighbor when you can just send them a quick text message? To make matters worse, many of the younger people from Kuşköy are moving away from the area to seek employment in larger urban centers. Consequently, most of the villagers who are able to use bird language are aging, and their number has continued to decrease.

Thankfully, the people of Kuşköy are doing all they can to prevent this vital part of their culture from fading into history. Since 1997, the natives of the village have organized an annual culture and art festival to celebrate and promote their language. It is usually held over two days in the summer and features a bird language competition. The contestants in the competition are given instructions on what to whistle, and a panel of judges decides who whistled the best!

Local experts are doing their part to conserve the language as well. In 2014, they started teaching classes on bird language in primary schools throughout the region. Students start out by learning the technique of the language and the different sounds it requires. Once this is mastered, they can move on to learning how to actually communicate with it.

Giresun University in northern Türkiye has also joined in the effort to save bird language. They now offer a course on it for junior and senior students in their Faculty of Tourism. Furthermore, since bird language doesn't have a written form, a group at the university has started a project to create a written alphabet for the language.

UNESCO warns that the future of this incredible bird language is unknown. It is in danger of becoming a language that is used only for show rather than as a tool for communication, and it may even be lost completely. Nevertheless, the Kuşköy community and its supporters will continue to do all they can to preserve it and pass it on to others. Through their efforts, there is still hope that the whistles and melodies of bird language will be heard echoing through the mountains of Türkiye for generations to come.

Reading 2

**An Interview with the Creator
of an Earth-Saving App**

Host : How often have you opened your refrigerator and found expired food? You have no choice but to throw it away, but this leaves you feeling wasteful. Restaurants deal with an even worse problem: they often have to throw away food that is perfectly edible. Not only is this a food waste problem, but it is also a heartbreaking situation, considering that there are so many people around the world facing hunger. Is there anything we can do about this problem? Let's talk to Sandra Miller, the creator of one of the apps that use the power of technology to address it.

Host : Thank you for your time, Sandra. Can you tell us about your app?

Sandra : The purpose of the app is to fight hunger and help the environment by reducing food waste. Donating leftover food is a great way to reduce waste, but it takes a lot of time and effort for restaurants to do this. The app provides a solution to this problem by easily connecting restaurants with drivers who pick up and deliver their leftover food. Basically, the app makes the process of donating food easier for everyone involved.

Host : What made you interested in the issue of food waste?

Sandra : I spent many years organizing free dinners for the homeless. These events make a difference, but many individuals who deal with food insecurity have limited access to transportation, which can tragically prevent them from attending. Meanwhile, over one billion tons of edible food is wasted each year, and much of it is thrown away by restaurants. This discarded food ends up rotting in landfills, producing greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. I became determined to find a way to reduce this environmentally harmful waste while helping people who do not have reliable access to adequate food.

Host : How did you come up with the idea that app technology might help in addressing the problem?

Sandra : I realized that the social problem of food insecurity and the environmental problem of food waste are connected. The key to solving these problems, I thought, might be found by thinking in terms of distribution and accessibility rather than production and scarcity. To find a way to bring those in need together with leftover food, I started to think about how food delivery apps connect restaurants with customers and delivery drivers. That's when I asked myself: Why can't this technology be used to help fix this problem?

Host : That's great. Would you like to offer any final words to our audience?

Sandra : Yes. Technology has made life more convenient for many of us. However, great social and environmental challenges remain, and my app cannot resolve all the issues around us. Still, I believe that, by using technology in creative ways, we can develop new solutions to the challenges that we face and build a more sustainable world. In this way, technology can help us protect the environment and make the world a better place for everyone.