Wildlife Middle East News is published quarterly. It contains papers, reports, letters and announcements submitted by veterinarians, biologists, conservationists, educators, and other animal care professionals working with captive and free-living wildlife in the Middle East region. Contributions are not refereed, although every effort is made to ensure the information contained within the newsletter is correct, the editors cannot be held responsible for the accuracy of contributions. Opinions expressed within are those of the individual and are not necessarily shared by the editors.

Guidelines for authors can be downloaded from www.wmenews.com
In this issue we are pleased to include a local perspective on wildlife with an interview with HE Sh Butti Bin Maktoum Bin Juma Al Maktoum, owner of the Sh Butti Maktoum Wildlife Centre. HE Sh Butti Al Maktoum is known for his passionate interest in the wildlife of the Arabian Peninsula and beyond. Within the Middle East there are many well managed private wildlife collections, indeed more wildlife is probably managed by private individuals than by zoological institutions. Some, such as the Sh Butti Maktoum Wildlife Centre are members of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria and actively participate in international breeding programmes and animal exchanges, as well as contributing to local conservation efforts, such as the release of cheetahs on the island of Sir Banyas. These efforts are to be applauded. Other private collections are unfortunately more secretive, obtaining animals by unscrupulous means, endangering wildlife species and tarnishing the reputation of the region.

One challenge facing conservationists in the region is how to improve the contribution that these private collections make to the wider wildlife community. Indeed this was a feature in Vol 5 Issue 1 of WME News when Jonas Livet described his thesis which looked at different Zoological institutions in the Middle East and the potential for a regional zoo association. The role of regional zoo associations was also called for by Mark Craig in Vol 1 Issue 2. Such a Zoo Association could lead to a well-regulated licensing system for zoos which is sorely needed in Gulf countries, as is the will to enforce the licensing regulations. Countries that have instituted and enforced such legislation have improved the standard of care of their animals. Indeed this was a feature in Vol 5 Issue 1 of WME News.

Another article is by two WME News editors on the contribution that externship programmes can make to falcon medicine and wildlife health in the region. Over an 8 year period the program at Dubai Falcon Hospital and Wadi Al Safa Wildlife Centre hosted 34 externs and enabled the publication of 2 academic theses, 16 peer reviewed papers, 22 conference papers with a further 14 scientific papers being finalised. Well-organised extern programmes have the potential to help train tomorrows conservationists and veterinarians as well as helping to improve our understanding of wildlife health and we would encourage other veterinary organisations working in a zoological setting to follow suit.

In the region there is a well endowed fund in the region to assist wildlife projects and in our news section we provide further information on it.

Brendan Kavanagh outlines the aims and objectives, results and future direction of a bird ringing project in Bahrain. Brendan recommends that the establishment of a single, centralized ringing scheme would be a major step forward for ornithological research in the region into the future. Last but not least Asghar Mobarak and Adel Mola review the status of a very peculiar reptile in Iran – the Rafles or Euphrates Soft Shell Turtle. Green Prophet is one of the leading sources of environment news on the Middle East region and Tafline Laylin explains how she became one of 15 writers based around the world who passionately cover environmental stories that impact policy, clean tech investments, and environmental education and advocacy in the Middle East. We at WME News are impressed by the range of stories that arise from Green Prophet and recommend our readers to check out their website and subscribe by visiting: http://www.greenprophet.com/.

Social media sites have been credited with contributing to the wave of political change that is taking place in the region. News sites like Green Prophet and others such as Goumbook, play an important role in raising awareness to the many environmental challenges facing the Middle East. Just as despots trying to hide behind their tanks have been out-maneuvered by the peaceable armies of Twitter and Facebook followers, in the future the smugglers of wildlife will similarly find it harder to hide behind their garden walls in anonymity. As an example, a recent Green Prophet issue exposed the wildlife trade in the Middle East in a report called Animal Smuggling in Mideast: GP Interview With Wildlife Trafficking Activist (http://www.greenprophet.com/2011/01/wildlife-trafficking-karl-ammanr). Malini Pittet provides us with an interesting account of the camera trapping survey she recently conducted with the Foundation for the Protection of the Arabian Leopard in Yemen (FPALY). Although Malini was unable to photograph a leopard during her visit she left trained staff and in January 2011 Murad Mohamed and Waleed Al-Ra’il made history by becoming the first people ever to photograph a wild Arabian leopard in Yemen. Our congratulations to the FPALY. This project was funded by the Mohammed bin Zayed Conservation Fund. It is excellent news that there is a well endowed fund in the region to assist wildlife projects and in our news section we provide further information on it.

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Interviewed by Tom Bailey and Declan O’Donovan from WME News

The zoological and conservation fields have a long tradition of being supported by royalty: HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, was President of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) from 1981-1996, while in the UAE HH Sheikh Zayed al Nahyan, the former President of the UAE founded many programs to protect the country’s wildlife.

In this article WME News editors have interviewed Sh Butti Bin Maktoum Bin Juma Al Maktoum who is known for his passion for the wildlife of the Arabian Peninsula and beyond.

As a boy growing up in Dubai what animals did your family keep?

My father was a falconer, so falcons were part of my childhood, as were salukis which along with the falcons were used for hunting. Traditionally the falcon and saluki were important animals for the Bedouin family, particularly during the winter when we went hunting houbara and hares in the desert.

What are your earliest memories of wildlife?

One of my earliest memories of wildlife is when my father brought me a baby hare to look after when I was about 5 years old. My father also brought back young hedgehogs and gazelles for us to rear. We lived in Jumeirah and there was one mountain gazelle I remember in particular that had been hand-reared and would follow us around the garden!

What are your earliest memories of the desert?

In the late 1960’s I remember hunting with my father in the desert south of Jebel Ali. What I remember most is the fact that other than our vehicles there were no other car tracks in the desert. It was pristine. I remember more vegetation in the 1960’s, indeed we used to call the ghaf areas of Wadi Al Safa and Al Awir ‘forests’. I think the rainfall patterns have changed since that time.

Again, I remember there were often heavy rains in October and November which meant we would collect many truffles from the desert the following February. I feel there is less rain falling in the desert areas of the UAE and this is having a bad effect on the vegetation.

People living in Dubai and the Middle East in 2010 probably consider that the desert is a very impoverished environment for wildlife, but when you were growing up what wildlife could you expect to see in the desert?

In the late 1950’s and early 1960’s we used to see many hares, houbara and karowas (Burhinus oedicnemus) in the desert. We used to see small numbers of mountain gazelle and I remember my saluki catching a rheem gazelle which were very seldom seen near Jebel Ali.

Wolves were not uncommon and I remember my father returning with 2 that he had shot once. Obviously one thing that has changed for the better with modernisation is the increase in wildlife, mainly birds, in our towns and cities because of the irrigated gardens and parks.

Are traditional values that were important for the relationship of the Bedouin with the desert environment changing?

Our people, by this I mean the next generation, are losing many of their traditional skills that helped us survive as a people in the desert. The old Bedouin knew so much about the desert, about tracking animals and navigation. I remember being lost in the desert at night and being navigated out by an old Bedouin who took us safely out using only his knowledge of the vegetation and the wind direction pattern of the dunes. I feel sad that these traditional skills are being lost.

Has your passion for animals affected your own children’s outlook on wildlife?

Just as my father brought me animals to look after when I was growing up, so I have taken young orphaned animals to my daughter Mariam, to nurture. Now my daughter also has a passion and interest in wildlife.

What do you think are the biggest environmental problems in the Middle East and what can the Arab nations do to deal with them?

Pollution is one of the big environmental issues, we have a lot of air pollution form cars and trucks and our factories are not being monitored effectively enough for the waste they discharge into the environment. Water consumption in the region is worrying.

What are the biggest threats to the wildlife in the Middle East and what can the Arab nations do to deal with them?

Lack of education on the environment and wildlife is the biggest threat facing wildlife. Our people need to be more aware of the problems and threats that wildlife and the environment faces.
Interviewed by Tom Bailey and Declan O'Donovan from WME News (Contd.)

You were instrumental in the breeding success of the cheetahs in Sir Bani Yas, Abu Dhabi – do you think there is scope for other species to be released into protected areas in the UAE?

Yes there is tremendous scope for releasing other species not only here in the UAE. I have been thinking for some time about making some of the cheetahs bred in my centre available for release back into Africa.

Many of the flamingos I breed at my centre are free-flying and they fly out of my centre and join the greater flamingos on the creek here in Dubai. Of course there is the possibility of releasing mountain gazelle and sand foxes that we have bred into the desert as well.

What we need though is proper planning of releases and the availability of suitable areas to release the animals into. We need large areas and I would love one day to see fewer fences in the desert.

There are many private collections in the Middle East, including your own. How do you think these private zoological collections can contribute to the biodiversity of the region?

There needs to be more coordination between the government and private collections in the region. There is simply not enough connectedness at the moment.

Your centre, the Sh Butti al Maktoum Wildlife Centre was the first collection from the Middle East to become a member of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA). Why was this important and what value do you think this gives your collection?

It is very important for us to be able to exchange animals between other wildlife collections in Europe and EAZA recognised collections here in the Middle East. I am very happy to be part of a community that allows me to manage and move my animals thereby limiting the potential for inbreeding.

You are a falconer. How has your passion for falconry influenced your interest in preserving wildlife?

I am a falconer, but my desire is to protect the wild populations of falcons. I have also established a falcon breeding centre to produce captive bred falcons. This is helping to reduce the need for wild falcons to be used because the local falconers are very happy with the hunting quality of the birds I produce.

You are a very ‘hands-on’ person who is intimately involved with the management of your collection. Where do your driving force and motivation come from?

When I started to breed racing pigeons I bought a specialist from Europe to manage the birds. I realised by letting someone else do the work that I was not involved and I did not always know what was happening.

After this I have always got involved directly with managing my animals directly and I love this contact I have with the animals in my collection.

Finally, any closing remarks?

I hope it is not too late for us to do something for the Arabian environment.
LEGENDS OF THE ARABIAN LEOPARD IN THE HAWF PROTECTED AREA, SOUTHERN YEMEN

Malini Pittet

Keywords: Arabian leopard, Hawf Protected Area, legends and folklore, human-animal conflict

The Arabian Leopard is Yemen’s national animal since 2008. An iconic species and top predator of its niche, it gets its name from the range it occupies- the Arabian Peninsula. Yet the natural history of the Arabian leopard is little known due to the various threats it faces in its range. Of the four subspecies in the Arabian Peninsula, the Panthera pardus nimr is the sole survivor and occurs in restricted pockets. Local culture and social values combined with a lack of education and understanding of the intrinsic value of biodiversity, threaten the survival of this species in Yemen. Today, the Arabian leopard has been listed as a Critically Endangered species with a decreasing population trend, existing in the mountainous regions of Saudi Arabia, Oman, Yemen and in isolated pockets of Israel. A camera-trap study, at the initiative of the Foundation for the Protection of the Arabian Leopard in Yemen (FPALY), to assess the status of the Arabian leopard in the Hawf Protected Area was carried out over a period of 58 days in 2010. The study was successful in capturing images of 60% of the species present in the area as well as improving our understanding of the public’s perception of the Arabian leopard (Figures 1-5). The one year study is funded by the Mohammed Bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund.

Protecting a carnivorous species is never an easy task especially when the livelihood and culture of communities is at stake. The local population uniformly fears the leopard and until now, were not concerned for the welfare of the species. It is interesting to note that their fear does not concern their own lives but rather that of their livestock. This would mean that they are aware that there is little risk of a leopard attacking human being unless the animal is in a dire situation. The Arabian leopard is half the size of the Indian and African species, and is too small to prey on large livestock such as cows and camels. The domestic animals they are more likely to prey on are goats and sheep.

Local legends and folklore are interesting in understanding the place the leopard occupies in this society. A clear lack of understanding of the natural history of the animal and its behaviour can be discerned from these stories. Some speak of “leopards which kill camels and only drink the blood, leaving the meat”. Another tale speaks of the leopard having a prehensile tail and using it to anchor itself on a tree trunk so it may attack a camel without fear of being caught and swung round. When discussions of baiting arose, the villagers were clear that the smell of clarified butter or ghee is the most effective lure for the leopard. Another very common tale in Hawf spoke of the leopard going to the beach every Thursday at a specific time. On further questioning, it appeared that the animals do this to cleanse themselves for the Friday prayers. One stigmatizing statement by a villager was “leopards are very aggressive; when you try to shoot it, it will attack you.” Lastly, villagers of Hawf were clear in their statement “a man with 30 bullets is not safe against a leopard.” I was warned several times, jokingly and seriously, that the leopard was extremely aggressive towards human beings and that it would eat me.

Incidents of encounters with villagers in Hawf inevitably result in the death of the leopard. In one incident, a leopard attacked a goat; the goat herder shot the leopard but only wounded it. The leopard took shelter in a cave. The herder went into the cave to see if the leopard was dead but was charged by the leopard, bit his arm, knocking the rifle out of his hand. The herder passed out from loss of blood and as he did not return by nightfall his fellow villagers came looking for him, armed to the teeth. They pulled the man out of the cave and shot hundred rounds into the cave killing the leopard.

For more information about FPALY, to join the “Friends of the Arabian Leopard” newsgroup, or to make a contribution, please contact the Executive Director, David B. Stanton, at P.O. Box 7069, Sana’a, Republic of Yemen, david@yemenileopard.org
**BIRD RINGING PROGRAMME IN BAHRAIN 2005-2010**

Brendan Kavanagh, RCSI-Medical University of Bahrain, Po Box 15503, Adliya, Bahrain.

Editors Note: This is an abridged version of a very detailed article. Please see our website (www.wmenews.com) for the full web version.

**Introduction**

Individually marking birds is a scientific technique used throughout Europe and North America since the earliest years of the last century. Today, we now have hundreds of ringing schemes covering all the continents. The data gathered are still providing valuable information on movements, longevity, mortality and morphology of countless numbers of bird species globally.

Ringing activity in the GCC has been sporadic. While a number of projects have been initiated within the region, there has been a lack of consistency of effort. Ringing schemes have been registered in Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in the past (EURING 2010). However, with the exception of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, all schemes are now non operational. While many of the recoveries of ringed birds have been recorded in the Atlas of Breeding Birds of Arabia (ABBA) (Jennings, 2010), most of the original data is either held personally by the ringers or has been lost.

In 2004, the author, who is a trained ringer and trainer, under the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) joint British and Irish ringing scheme, undertook to develop and operate a ringing programme in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The permission to use BTO rings was obtained in 2005 and the programme has been implemented without respite to date (2010). This paper outlines the aims and objectives, results and future direction of this ringing effort.

**Study area**

The Kingdom of Bahrain is in the south western section of the Arabian Gulf between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, in a shallow section known as the Gulf of Salwa, Figure 1.

The northern section of the main island is richly supplied with sweet water from natural wells, treated sewage and desalination plants. Palm groves are common and locally produced fruit and vegetables are grown primarily in the north and west of this area. While there are some communal areas associated with the villages, most of the land is in private ownership and inaccessible to the author for ringing purposes. Consistent access to suitable ringing sites has been problematical.

**Materials and Methods**

All ringing activity was conducted under the auspices of the Bahrain Natural History Society, a non-Governmental Society. The rings used in the project are issued through the British Trust for Ornithology Ringing Scheme, to whom all data is returned for storage and archiving.

Birds are caught using mist nets and traps. Two shelf and four shelf nets ranging in size from 6 meters to 18 meters are erected depending on terrain and habitat. Tape lures are used on occasion to support catching effort particularly of hirundines in autumn and pipits in winter. Tern pulli are retracted while still flightless.

**Table 1:** The number of age and sex of the Grey Hypocolius ringed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age and Sex</th>
<th>Number of birds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile Female</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult female</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile Male</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Male</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrapped birds</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Caught</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

Ring recovery data from the project are very limited to date. Only two rings from 7,000 rings fitted have been recovered. This is a 0.0003% recovery rate for the project as a whole or 0.001% for Lesser-crested terns and 0.003% for Bridled terns respectively. Recovery rates from similar sized terns in Europe are in the range 0.8 – 2.9% (Coiffait et al 2009), while species such as blackcaps Sylvia atricapilla and whitethroats S. communis have a recovery rate of about 1 bird per thousand ringed (Robinson et al 2009), If one excludes the terns ringed in Bahrain then the ringing of over 7,000 birds of 125 species has resulted in no recoveries to date.

Based on these facts it would seem that the results gathered from recovery data are a poor return for effort. However, two aspects of the project are contributing significantly to our understanding and knowledge of the avifauna in the Middle East region; 1) retrap data (catching a bird more than once), which gives specific information on site fidelity, duration of stay and migration strategies, and; 2) unique morphological and moult data on the birds once in the hand. This is particularly relevant in the case of the grey hypocolius which is an elusive and little known species outside the Middle East, Table 1.

**Results**

Ringing commenced in Bahrain in October 2005. A total of 7000 birds were ringed between 2005 and July 2010. (Please see the online version of this article for further details regarding the total number of rings used, number of each species ringed)

The increased in the annual total of birds ringed is primarily due to the training of a local ringer over this period, which has enabled additional independent ringing activity to take place. With one local ringer now fully qualified, this training is seen as an important development of the ringing project which will ensure the continuation of the project in the future.

The disparate nature of avian ringing studies in the Gulf region and the lack of centralization of these data have resulted in much knowledge being lost. The publication of the Arabian Breeding Bird Atlas (ABBA) in 2010 (Jennings 2010), has captured some of the findings from these studies, however, a more centralized approach to the collation, collection and storage of ringing data in the gulf region is needed. The establishment of a single, centralized ringing scheme would be a major step forward for ornithological research in the region into the future.
MESOPOTAMIAN SOFT SHELL TURTLE (*Rafetus Euphraticus*),
THE STRANGEST TURTLE OF THE MIDDLE EAST

**Asghar Mobaraki** 1, **Adel Mola** 2

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Introduction: Chelonia have existed for nearly 300 million years and are major biodiversity components of the ecosystems they inhabit, often serving as keystone species from which other animals and plants benefit. Increasingly, however, human activities are driving many species to extinction (TCF 2002). Softshell Turtles, (family Trionychidae) have a leathery carapace that lacks the horny scutes typical of most chelonia. The members of this group are widespread in temperate to tropical areas and occupy fresh water habitats (Halliday and Adler 1987). The Euphrates Soft Shell Turtle (*Rafetus Euphraticus*) (Rastegar et al 2008) population is declining in its global range and is listed as an “Endangered” species on the IUCN Redlist (IUCN 2010). It is extinct in Kirkiz (Garments 1993) and it is declining in Turkey because of damming. The small population in Iran is thought to be restricted to Khuzestan province. *R. euphraticus* is facing several threats (Mobaraki 2003). Locally *R. Euphraticus* is referred to as “Rafesh” or “Righal” (Mobaraki 2007).

Global Range and Distribution in the country: This species occurs in the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, from south-eastern Turkey, through Syria and Iraq to the Persian Gulf extending into south-western Iran. It occurs from elevations of 1000 m to sea level (Baran & Atathur 1998). The range in Iran is limited to central and western Khuzestan province and related to the main rivers. The border areas of Iran and Iraq contain many important rivers considered as the “habitats” of *R. euphraticus* including Karkheh, Dez, Karoon, Djarrahi, Shahoor and Bahmanshir. Other important habitats are the wetland sites listed as “international wetlands (Ramsar Site) like Shadegan and Hour-Al Azim.

Habitat and Ecology information: *R. euphraticus* is highly aquatic and prefers various types of related fresh water habitats. During field studies turtles were found in different habitats such as slow moving rivers, drainage / irrigating channels, ponds and lakes. The turtles avoided fast moving waters. The sandy or muddy riverside is used for basking although they are difficult to approach out of the water and retreat to the water immediately on recognizing a threat, even from long distances. Many turtles will bask in shallow water to avoid being totally out of the water. The turtles also bury themselves in both riverbeds and riversides.

Ghaffari in her field work reported the nesting season as occurring May (Ghaffari 2004). In our studies we discovered hatched eggs in mid June suggesting that the nesting season could be started early May or before that too. The sandy riversides are used as nesting sites (Mobaraki 2007) with reported clutch size for the species in Turkey between 8 and 17.

Feeding: *R. euphraticus* is a greedy and opportunistic carnivore but fish is the main food resource with the most common fish being Barbus spp, Cyprinion spp and Capoeta spp. The feeding instinct is so strong that often turtles attack fish trapped in nets or take bait on hooks. Unfortunately capture of turtles on hooks or in nets is a common occurrence.

Tuck (1978) reported about the carapace length for mature specimens as 38 cm. In Iran, biometric data collected from about 20 turtles recorded the largest size as about 70 cm (curved carapace length) and 20 kg in weight. There are records of 290 mm as the largest recorded Iranian specimen (Andrson1979). Turtles sometimes show different colour patterns too (Figures 1 & 2).

Conservation measures in Iran: Based on current environmental laws all wild life species, including the soft shell turtle are protected and there is a fine of US$ 30 for killing any turtle. Areas of the turtles’ habitat have been designated as “protected areas” or “wildlife refuge” in which specific regulations and legislations apply. These areas are under direct control of Department of the Environment and are monitored by guards.

Main threats: There are multiple threats facing *R. euphraticus* Iran. Water pollution by pesticides, fertilizers, oil, industrial chemicals, garbage and sewerage are some of the most important threats. Hunting and fishing is also a significant factor which is mostly related to people’s ignorance. Most of the local people use long lines and single hooks for fishing in the rivers and the baits are subject to attract the poor and hungry turtles. As the turtle’s jaws are dangerous people sometimes cut the head off the turtle to release the hooks. There is also a belief that turtles compete for fish, which is a human food resource so turtles are killed to prevent them from eating their fish. By-catch also causes some mortality (Mobaraki 2007).

References: Please see the wme news website for the full article including references.
Practical skills: Externships were hosted at the Dubai Falcon Hospital (DFH) and the Wadi Al Safa Wildlife Center (WASWC) and emphasized practical training in falcon and wildlife medicine and management. During this time 34 externs, were involved in activities at DFH, falcon breeding projects and wildlife collections. The wildlife collections comprise over 250 different species and manage important regional breeding programmes for carnivores and ungulates. To give an idea of the cases seen at the hospital: 50% were raptors, 20% were other birds (owls, bustards, stone curlew, pigeons, waterfowl, pheasants) and 30% were mammals (oryx, gazelle, ungulates, cheetah, sand foxes, hares) plus a smattering of miscellaneous native wildlife including green and hawksbill turtles undergoing rehabilitation at the Dubai Turtle Rehabilitation project. Externs learnt a wide range of practical skills. In the hospital every extern learnt to endoscope a bird and in the field externs experienced first-hand the mass capture of hoofstock through a Tamer handling system.

Research projects: Externs participated in clinical research and most published papers in scientific journals. Projects investigated an aspect of a clinical or management problem. The objective of the research was to improve the understanding of clinical conditions in a region where there is poor history of wildlife health research. Laboratory costs were generously covered by a close working relationship with the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory and from sponsorship of some projects by HH Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid al Maktoum.

Projects covered a wide range of species and included: urine analysis in falcons, assessment of aspergillosis test in falcons, foot and mouth and PPR vaccine trials in oryx, H5 influenza vaccination trials in zoo species, viral investigations in pigeons and gamebirds, mycoplasmas surveys, blood gas values in oryx and falcons, nutritional assessment of flamingos, bustards and falcons, voriconazole pharmacology in falcons, electrophoresis of falcons, cheetah and ungulates and serology surveys of raptors and wildlife for brucellosis, Q-fever, avian influenza and encephalomyocarditis virus. A list of projects is presented in the web-based version of this article.

Costs and benefits of running an externship programme: Externs paid for their travel costs, but were provided with food and accommodation. The benefits to DFH were; 1) practical with an additional pair of hands to help with cases and 2) analytical with the benefits of the research projects. Most externs selected for the programme were qualified veterinarians who were able to manage cases independently. The externship had an informal link with the MSc in Wild Animal Health run at the Zoological Society of London. This not only meant that the ‘externs’ were up to date with their knowledge, but they were ‘hungry’ for practical experience and were motivated to complete a research project. Learning is a two way street and those of us working at DFH and WSWC learnt from ‘our’ externs who came with interesting work and life experiences. Two academic theses, 16 peer reviewed and 22 conference papers and non-peer-reviewed articles were published. A further 14 papers are being finalised by externs.

What does the extern gain from the programme?: Being an extern at DFH is an excellent way to pick up new skills in avian medicine and surgery. The opportunity to take care of a range of species, from cheetahs to swans and baboons to giraffes and back to falcons and oryx and gazelles, is thrilling and teaches you about animal specific diseases and medical conditions. Being a wildlife veterinarian is about learning how to deal with the unknown and this externship is a good way to gain confidence in this field. The research project is not only a perfect way to use analytical skills, but also helps answer practical questions with regards to veterinary treatment. These projects also help to raise awareness about wildlife health in the region. The externship is an open door to a network of professionals, who are happy to share their passion.

What does the wildlife manager gain from the programme?: As an animal manager, one is always striving to maintain and improve the conditions of the animals within your collection. The lack of fresh ideas and intelligent discussion about the evolving fields of animal management and veterinary care can lead to professional isolation which over time could negatively impact the care of the collections animals. We have found that when externs are involved in the treatment of sick animals they bring fresh ideas and ask those questions which we sometimes forget or have taken for granted.
COMMON BIRDS OF QATAR

By Hanne & Jens Eriksen and Frances Gillespie.

A search on the internet for Bird Books reveals a plethora of field guides, bird watching books from almost every corner of the globe. However, when one looks at bird books from this region there is a paucity of information. It was therefore very exciting to hear that Frances Gillespie was releasing her book “Common Birds of Qatar” last November.

The book, which is beautifully illustrated with photographs from Hanne & Jens Eriksen, is a welcome resource to a subject which has fascinated people since cave dwellers learned to draw. The birds are split into three habitat types, 1) gardens, parks and farms; 2) lakes, lagoons and coasts; 3) deserts and arid plains. While this might not be an ideal way to classify a species, it helps the novice user to make an initial identification based on where they might have seen the bird.

According to the authors, there are 280 bird species identified for Qatar, but about 65 of these are rare and difficult to find. As the name suggests, this book contains 215 identified species (with around 400 colour photographs) which are considered common and easy to see. Each page contains at least one photograph of the species being identified, together with a map of Qatar showing the distribution of the bird and a bar graph at the bottom showing the months which the birds can be found in the country.

Frances gives a very good introduction for the beginner, detailing how to watch birds, equipment to use, how to properly identify a species based on common features such as size, plumage, colour of face masks, tail size and shape, plus many other small identifiers which when put together makes identification all that more easy.

The book also tells the reader where some of the better bird watching locations in Qatar are. It also contains the important “Bird watching code of conduct” which should be adhered to by all bird watchers irrespective of the country they are in.

GREEN PROPHET - THE LEADING SOURCE OF ENVIRONMENT NEWS ON THE MIDDLE EAST REGION. Tafline Laylin, taflinekay@mac.com

Not long after graduating from Northern Arizona University, I took a job as a tour-guide, believing that it would enable me to share my love of the North American outdoors. Ours were supposed to be “eco-friendly” camping tours that ventured to such iconic national parks as Yosemite, Yellowstone, and the Grand Canyon. It soon became apparent that the tours weren’t so friendly at all. I drove a giant Ford van from east to west, north to south, and my passengers left behind a trail of plastic bottles and beer cans. Save a special few, they scarcely learned a thing about the wonders of nature. This is when I decided to pick up my mighty pen instead.

Born in Iran and raised in South Africa, I have an enduring interest in both the Middle East and Africa and their unique environmental circumstances. So I packed a backpack and moved to the Middle East. It wasn’t long before my editor Karin Kloosterman accepted me as a Green Prophet contributor. So far, it has been an amazing journey.

Although environmental awareness is less prominent in the MENA region than it is in Europe it is far from environmentally dead. We have sought to dispel the notion that it is, and to provide a meeting space for like-minded enthusiasts, a space that is at once newsy and practical, inspiring, and informative. There are incredible initiatives in the works: Abu Dhabi is becoming one of the most environmentally progressive nations on the planet, Israel is famous for its cleantech, Qatar will host the 2022 World Cup with solar-powered stadiums, and conservation organizations are transcending political obstacles with important transboundary work.

Of course, the Middle East also faces a difficult and uncertain future. Temperatures in the last year were higher than ever, water is becoming increasingly scarce, food more expensive, and eventually - regardless of corporate hubris - we will have to shift away from fossil fuels if we want to retain even a semblance of climatic normality. We highlight these problems, but attempt to do so with at least a view towards viable solutions. It is not instructive to beat readers over the head with doomsday predictions, nor is it ethical to pretend that “everything is alright.” Finding a positive balance forms the backbone of what we do.

In addition to keeping an eye on corporations that attempt to usurp our natural resources without the same due process demanded in western countries, we provide delicious recipes; while keeping an eye on Egypt and its potential impact on renewable energy projects, we also provide news about inspiring designs that encourage creative, critical thinking. And we try to direct our readers’ attention to the extraordinary biodiversity of our region. Leopards, hyenas, falcons, dunes, desert, oases, Bedouin: our treasure trove of culture, fauna, and flora is unique and we’re proud of it. Thanks in part to Green Prophet, which has an extensive international readership, the rest of the world is gradually becoming aware of both the challenges and the progress that are otherwise hidden behind mainstream political headlines.

For more information and to subscribe go to: http://www.greenprophet.com/

In 1984, Michael Jennings embarked on an ambitious project called the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia Project (ABBA) to collect information on the status and distribution of Arabian breeding birds. Twenty six years later, the results of his determination and the hard work of all those who have contributed observations, data and knowledge to the project are published in this volume. This is a labour of love. I enjoyed reading the Author's Preface and learning a little more about the personnel journey that Mike Jennings has taken since his arrival in Arabia in 1969. Also worth reading in the Preface is a discussion on the contribution made by Richard Meinertzhagen, author of 'Birds of Arabia' whose reputation has been questioned in recent years.

This is a beautifully produced volume that is well illustrated with line drawings and maps that accompany each species account. A generous number of first rate colour photographs, many by the well known bird photographers Hans and Jens Eriksen make this an easy book to 'leaf' through.

Chapter 1 covers aspects of Arabian ornithology including endemism, nomadism, exotic birds, reintroductions and extermination campaigns. Chapter 2 discusses factors affecting bird distribution in Arabia including climate and altitude, geology and topography, vegetation and habitat change and man-made habitat change. Chapter 3 reviews regional bird communities, with Arabia being divided into ten avifaunal regions based on habitat types, topographical features and zoogeographic influences. In Chapter 4, conservation issues are examined, including human exploitation, habitat change, farming, pollution, hunting and introduced species. This chapter concludes with a review of the conservation needs of Arabian countries and summaries some of the actions being taken across the region.

The bulk of the book is concerned with species accounts covering the 273 species that have been proven to breed within the Arabian Peninsula (including Socotra). These are well researched references, where available, are up to date. Most species accounts comprise 2 pages, but are longer for some species, such as the sooty falcon (Falco concolor) where discrepancies in population estimates exist. In the case of the sooty falcon while Del Hoyo (2009) gave a population estimate of 40,000 pairs, Jennings has reviewed what is known about this bird and estimates the population has declined and may be as low as 1,000 pairs. The value of the thorough research by Jennings and his team has ensured that species like the sooty falcon have had their conservation status in the IUCN Red List amended.

At over 750 pages long this is a mine of useful and interesting information for anyone wanting to know more about the avifauna of Arabia.

Biologists, biology teachers and students, conservationists, anyone involved in wildlife management and especially anyone interested in birds will find this volume valuable.

Zoological Education Network is proud to announce the release of “Diseases and Medical Management of Houbara Bustards and Other Otididae” as a digital Adobe Acrobat PDF instant download file.

Available at www.exoticdvm.com/avian

Some selected topics include:
• Diets fed to bustards and bustard chicks in captivity
• Clinical observations of changes in biochemical values in bustards regarding: fatty liver disease, myopathy, effects of management, angular limb deformities
• Principles of cytology and cytodiagnosis of common bustard diseases
• Administration of medications to individual bustards and bustard flocks
• Preventive medicine programs and quarantine protocols for breeding projects
• Rehabilitation techniques

For further information, contact: Zoological Education Network, P.O. Box 541749, Lake Worth, Florida, USA. www.exoticdvm.com

ATLAS OF THE BREEDING BIRDS OF ARABIA

The Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund was initially announced at the World Conservation Congress in Barcelona in October 2008, and was established in the form of an endowment through a donation by Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi. The Fund has been accepting applications since mid-March 2009 for grants of up to $5000 and $25,000.

The Fund was established on the basis that in the broader environmental debate, direct species conservation has lost out to wider issues such as climate change, sustainability, poverty alleviation etc., as it is seen now as a by-product of larger issues. This has led to fewer resources going to support direct species conservation, resulting in under-funded field biologists, wardens and conservationists, as well as leading to a loss of expertise and experience in this field; all to the detriment of global biodiversity.

It is the objective of the Fund to work towards a well-supported community of conservationists and experts, helping to re-affirm the importance of species conservation as a discipline and encouraging direct species conservation in the field. The Fund aims to achieve this by providing grants to dedicated individuals and organizations who genuinely make a difference in the field, to in situ conservation work which really helps a species.

The grants will be awarded to individuals and organizations who will actually improve the long-term survival chances in the field of a given species. This is on a genuinely global level, including any animal, plant or fungus species.

For more information about the Fund, and to apply, please go to the Fund’s website at www.mbspeciesconservation.org, or write to the Fund Manager at nico1as.heard@mbspeciesconservation.org. It is intended that as the number of projects the Fund supports increases, the website will also become a forum for species conservationists and a site on which grantees can highlight the work they have done.

During 2009-2010 cheetahs (Acinonyx jubatus) in two collections in Dubai (UAE) showed clinical signs consistent with Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP). A total of fourteen animals presented with diarrhoea, lethargy, anorexia, weight loss, abdominal distention and/or regurgitation. Clinical examination and sample collection were performed under general anaesthetic using intramuscular injection of 2.5mg/kg ketamine combined with 0.07mg/kg medetomidine hydrochloride followed by 0.35mg/kg alfalone as reversal. Diagnosis of FIP was also supported by hematology and biochemistry findings such as anemia (46%), hyperproteinemia (69%), hypalbuminemia (54%) often combined with hyperglobulinemia (54%) causing a decreased Albumin-Globulin ratio (38%), pronounced leucocytosis (69%) with neutrophilia (38%) and lymphopenia (54%). Unfortunately no records were made of animals with transient diarrhoea so a morbidity estimation can not be made. However mortality after only one year was 32% and 50% in sites 1 and 2 respectively. The majority of deaths occurred amongst young cheetahs (75% < 3 years) and male cheetahs, with respectively 43% and 75% of the total male population succumbing to the infection in sites 1 and 2 respectively. Compared to this the female death toll was significantly lower with 18% and 33% in sites 1 and 2 respectively. Post mortem findings confirmed FIP in 77% of the animals that died during this twelve month period. Immunohistochemistry done so far on tissues of two cases from each site came back negative. Sequential testing of surviving cheetahs using, rapid FIP snap tests, coronavirus immunocomplex, electroforetics and results which will be presented will contribute to the FIP diagnostic puzzle.

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The Fund would support projects on species which are endangered (generally according to the IUCN/SSC Red List), data deficient, or locally important, covering work such as surveying, direct conservation action, scientific research and local awareness.

The grants will be awarded to individuals and organisations who will actually improve the long-term survival chances in the field of a given species. This is on a genuinely global level, including any animal, plant or fungus species.

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Dip ECVIM (Avian)

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