

REVIEWS AND NEWS

10TH CONSERVATION WORKSHOP FOR THE FAUNA OF ARABIA: PROTECTED AREA SYSTEMS IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULAPhilip J. Seddon¹ and Mike Knight²

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The Tenth Annual Conservation Workshop for the Fauna of Arabia was held at the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife (BCEAW) in Sharjah, UAE, from the 10th - 11th of February 2009. This regional forum is hosted by the Environment and Protected Areas Authority (EPAA) of the Government of Sharjah, under the patronage of His Highness Dr Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed al Qassimi.

In recent years the workshops have focused on protected areas in the recognition that the identification and protection of suitable habitats was a key conservation issue throughout the Arabian Peninsula. The 10th Workshop in 2009 sought to advance the theme of protected areas by setting three objectives: (1) to review the status of protected areas in the Arabian Peninsula; (2) to apply a management effectiveness tracking tool; and (3) to progress plans for the promotion of Trans Boundary Conservation Areas (TBCAs).

Review of regional protected area status

Country representatives provided a brief summary of the status of developments within their protected area networks. Reports were presented for 61 sites in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, Bahrain, and the UAE. These highlighted the importance of current, active, integrated management plans for all sites within a given network; a general lack of adequate visitor facilities; continued impacts from recreational and harvesting uses, and a continued need for social research to balance the current good standard of biological research to inform area management.

Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT)

An adaptation of the METT was used to explore management effectiveness in seven protected areas drawn from different ecoregions in the Peninsula. The analysis highlighted a need for better management plans with explicit links between monitoring indicators and protected areas objectives. Moreover, there was a general need for more socio-economic information and greater community involvement in protected area planning and management.

Plans are underway for the 2010 meeting; contact Mr Kevin Budd, BCEAW, Sharjah, UAE. Email: breeding@epaa-shj.gov.ae.

A full version of this report is available at the WME News website.

PERSECUTION OF CARACALS IN THE UAE

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Despite being protected under federal law, the Arabian caracal (*Caracal caracal schmitzi*) continues to be persecuted in the UAE. Reports of dead animals put on display are frequent. But the sighting of nine animal corpses in a remote area of the Hajar Mountains is unusual considering the large number of animals involved. The incident calls for better enforcement of the existing laws.

The caracal is listed as Least Concern (Breitenmoser et al, 2008) by the IUCN but its numbers thought to be declining in the UAE. The caracal is listed in Appendix I of federal law 24 of 1999. This means that anyone destroying, killing or trafficking live and dead parts of the animal gets a prison sentence and a fine.

The corpses of the nine dead animals were seen hanging from a ghaf tree (*Prosopis cineraria*) along a gravel road in the vicinity of the Tawian Dam. Richard Hornby, the Abu Dhabi resident who discovered the corpses, said they were in various stages of decomposition. Some of the animals looked like they had been killed two years ago, while other corpses were fresher, belonging to animals which must have died as recently as January this year. Another sighting, this time of two dead caracals, has been reported by members of the Dubai Natural History Group.

"Predators like the caracal are seen as competitors by people and are therefore persecuted with little regard for their endangered status", said Dr Christophe Tourenq, manager for science and research at the Emirates Wildlife Society - World Wildlife Fund for Nature.

One solution is better enforcement of the law. "It is terribly sad that anyone would firstly kill these animals and then be so proud, ignorant and disdainful of the law as to want to hang them in a tree for public display," said Mr Hornby. "Certainly, there is an obligation on the government to investigate the matter and at least try to educate those involved, if not prosecute. Both would help to spread the word that such actions are unacceptable." Another necessary step is education. While there are no initiatives now, a good example exists from the past. Founded by a Dutch expatriate, Marijke Jongbloed, the Arabian Leopard Trust was functioning through the 1990s, educating city dwellers as well as local tribesmen about conservation. The initiative was so successful as to raise enough money for a leopard breeding programme, which later provided the foundation for the government-sponsored Sharjah Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife. "The Arabian Leopard Trust was an excellent initiative taken with the active support of the ruler of Sharjah," said Peter Hellyer, co-editor of the book *The Emirates: A Natural History*.

"It is time that there was a resumption of serious efforts by both local and federal agencies to educate the population of the mountains and to promote further research and active conservation related to species such as the Arabian Leopard, caracal and others," said Mr Hellyer.



Fig1. Mr Abdula Aziz al Midfa introducing the Conservation Workshop.



Fig2. Dead caracal removed from a ghaf tree in the UAE (© Richard Hornby).

References

Breitenmoser, C., Henschel, P. & Sogbohossou, E. 2008. Caracal caracal. In: IUCN 2008. 2008 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, www.iucnredlist.org The Emirates: A Natural History.

Acknowledgements

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