



Wildlife Middle East



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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

NEWS

CONTENTS

- 1.** Editorial
- 2.** Failaka Island Hadrans: a menace for dwindling biodiversity?
- 3.** Fence leads to mass mortalities of threatened ungulates in Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area in arid central Saudi Arabia
- 4.** Zoological institutions in the Middle East and potential for a regional zoo association
- 5.** Arabian oryx reintroduction in Abu Dhabi – UAE
- 6.** Animal trade in Iraq
- 7.** Northern bald ibis in Saudi Arabia: last step for its survival
- 8.** News and reviews
Emirates Marine
Environmental Group – a profile
Arabian wildlife art exhibition
- 9.** News and reviews
Goumbook.com - the first green website for the Middle East
Book review - BSAVA Manual of Raptors, Pigeons and Passerine Birds

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EDITORIAL

Hands up who knows what a 'Hadra' is? Well done those of you who knew! We certainly didn't before this issue and as part of the continued self-education that is being an editor of WME News (and thanks to the article by Nancy Papathanasopoulou) we now know a 'Hadra' is a traditional fish trap used in Kuwait and the Gulf!

While there are obvious ways that humans impact wildlife, such as through deliberate trapping and trade as is described by Anna Bachmann in Iraq and, or the pointless shooting of migrating bald ibis in Saudi Arabia as reported by Zafar Al Islam, there are other ways where wildlife is accidentally affected as collateral damage through peoples everyday activities. In this issue we see how 'Hadrans' set in Failaka Island to trap fish inadvertently catch and kill turtles in Kuwait, while in Saudi Arabia fences built to protect wildlife reserves have instead become obstacles to the traditional migration of oryx and gazelles leading to mass mortality events during the dry hot summers. The hand of man is everywhere, but just as we cause carnage in one ecosystem, in another ecosystem we bring hope. Husam al Qamy provides an encouraging report from Abu Dhabi of the progress of the Arabian oryx restoration project in the eastern part of the Empty Quarter desert (Ruba Al Khali).

But how much effort is it to maintain and sustain a restoration project? Dr El Qamy describes how the oryx have been monitored every day since their release 3 years ago. The scale of monitoring reveals a depth of commitment to the environment by the Emirate of Abu Dhabi that is to be admired and that one wishes would be emulated in other parts of the region. Conservation needs real, sustained and long term efforts that do not wobble. In another emirate of the UAE we have learnt that commitment to sea turtle rehabilitation has wobbled, because of the economic situation and we would appeal to those who control the purse strings of project budgets to think less like bean counting accountants and demonstrate their green vision that was bandied about in press releases during the 'good' times. Environmental issues do not disappear with the recession and deserve a lot more support than is currently being shown.

An old friend has reared its head again. WME News has long championed the creation of a regional zoological association since an article by Mark Craig, the former Director of Al Ain Zoo. Jonas Livet raises the issue again in his article and we hope that the current management of Al Ain Zoo, probably one of the few institutions in the region capable of resourcing such an initiative, takes note and runs with the idea.

In our news and reviews section we showcase examples of homegrown organisations that are 'doing their bit' to make a difference to the environment of the UAE. As we mentioned in our last editorial it is the actions of communities and their organisations that encourage change in people. We are pleased to highlight two important initiatives – goumbook.com and EMEG.

Tatiana Antonelli Abella and Randala Jishi Anabtawi, co-founders of Goumbook.com, provide us with information on the first Green website for the Middle East. The word goum finds its origins in the classical Arabic terms qum, "stand up", and qawm, a word used in bedouin times to describe a group of people living together according to an ethic of self-help and collective responsibility. Goumbook aims to make all of us stand up for a green ideal uniting towards a better world, sharing facts, ideas and advice on how to live an eco-friendly life in the era of real-time information. Anything we can do to curb pollution, conserve our natural resources and reduce our negative impact on our environment is a good thing for this and future generations. These are important aims and we recommend a visit to their website.

WILDLIFE MIDDLE EAST NEWS OBJECTIVES

- Raising awareness of environmental and conservation issues affecting wildlife in the Middle East.
- Distributing information to enable better management healthcare and welfare of wildlife.
- Providing a central contact point for practical advice and information on wildlife management in the region.

Keith Wilson, from the Emirates Marine Environmental Group, provides us with a profile of a Dubai based non-governmental, non-profit making organization specializing in marine wildlife monitoring and implementing marine environmental projects.

It is positive to learn that EMEG is also involved in empowering local women in conservation efforts and the protection of the UAE's natural heritage. This is accomplished by training women in the basic skills necessary to survey desert flora and fauna as well as how to capture and tag various animal species. This is certainly a region that suffers from the negative effects of an excess of testosterone charged Desert Hooligans and we certainly need an army of Desert Princesses to heal the broken landscape and damaged wildlife. WME News says Go For It Desert Princesses!

A special thanks to Mark Adlington for kindly allowing us to use the wonderful images of Arabian oryx.

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FAILAKA ISLAND HADRAS: A MENACE FOR DWINDLING BIODIVERSITY?

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Hadra, turtle, Failaka Island, Kuwait

As part of the Kuwait Turtle Conservation Project and following reports of our Kuwaiti team members that “*there were turtles in the waters around Failaka Island*”, we ventured there on the weekend of November 6th. This was to scout for turtle presence on the island and integrate our findings into our sea turtle research and conservation work, sponsored by TOTAL Foundation and TOTAL Kuwait and under the auspices of the Voluntary Work Centre Kuwait and the Scientific Centre of Kuwait.

Failaka Island lies twenty kilometres east of Kuwait City and fifty kilometres from the southernmost tip of Iraq. Its area is approximately twenty-four square kilometres. It is triangular in shape with its base in the west and head in the southeast. It is 14 km in length and its breadth varies between 8 km in the west and 2 km in the east. The island is flat, apart from a small hill thirty feet high in the extreme western part. Hellenistic ruins have been discovered on the island, along with Dilmun ruins from 5,000 BC and excavations are still ongoing by Kuwaiti and Western archaeologists.

Combining a desert inland and contoured by tidal mudflats, Failaka is not, as it turns out, a nesting stronghold for turtles. KTCP team members, mainly involved with turtle nesting areas on Qaru and Umm Al-Maradim islets in the south of Kuwait, toured the perimeter of the Island looking for tracks, old or new nests and any other possible evidence of turtle presence on the beaches but found nothing, except for a suspected old turtle nesting area, surprisingly situated next to the dock of the ferry boat. However, Green (*Chelonia mydas*) and Hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) turtles come to the shallows close to the coast to either forage or mate, and there they often perish, unfortunately not due to some natural process, but because they get trapped in a ‘hadra’.

A ‘hadra’ is a coastal fish trap, traditional to Kuwait and to some other Arabian Gulf countries. It entails setting up a barrier of reeds around a limited area off the coast. At the end of the barrier, an enclosure made of two parts is erected. The bigger part is called “Al Housh”, followed by a smaller one called “Al Ser”, which lies at the limits of ebb tides. There are many hadras constructed along the seashores of Failaka Island, in past years all along the shores of mainland Kuwait as well. During low tides, fishermen collect fish, which are trapped in the hadra. KTCP members were told by locals that turtles often get caught in there and are often harvested for food by fishermen, who are mostly unaware of these animals’ worldwide protection status. Rays, sharks, seabirds and small dolphins - resident populations of Spinner dolphins (*Stenella longirostris*) and Indo-Pacific humpback dolphins (*Sousa plumbea*), that are part of the island’s marine wildlife – often get caught in the hadras as well, dying a slow and purposeless death only to be discarded as “useless” by the fishermen who are interested in what are considered “edible fish”.

The geographical area of the island and Kuwait in general has suffered major ecological disasters, such as the massive oil spills following the Gulf War of 1990, the fires of the oil wells set by invading Iraqi forces and currently the raw sewage crisis which began in September 2009 and is ongoing, with unknown consequences on the marine environment of the country.



Fig 1. Hadra Fish Trap on Miskan Island (close to Failaka) (© N. Papathanasopoulou/KTCP).



Fig 2. Green turtle remains in a Failaka house courtyard. (© Claire von Ribbeck/KTCP).

Ten years ago, hadras were common all along the coastline of Kuwait but acknowledging the severe damage on marine wildlife the government banned them by law. Nowadays, special permits are needed for owning hadras and the population has been discouraged from using them. Very few are being encountered now on the mainland. But Failaka island and nearby islet Miskan are exempted from this law and KTCP team members encountered fifteen on Failaka and six on Miskan. Kuwait is a wealthy Gulf country where professional and recreational fishing are very popular. Most of it is exercised sustainably, with the 70 government shrimp trawlers operating their nets using TEDs (Turtle Excluder Devices), true pioneers of this practice in the region.

With the marine environment under such stress in the Gulf and in Kuwait itself, it is hoped that the practice of hadra, or any unsustainable fishing practice, shall soon be abandoned, giving wildlife the chance it deserves in regenerating and surviving the many existing trials of life the trying waters of the Gulf are ensuring for them. Government and NGOs should cooperate and raise an awareness campaign preceding an eventual legal and institutional framework to address this serious issue.



Fig 3. Green turtle in Kuwait (©David Robinson/KTCP).

FENCE LEADS TO MASS MORTALITIES OF THREATENED UNGULATES IN MAHAZAT AS-SAYD PROTECTED AREA IN ARID CENTRAL SAUDI ARABIA

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Die-offs of large numbers of globally threatened Arabian oryx (*Oryx leucoryx*), and Arabian sand gazelle (*Gazella subgutturosa marica*) were recorded from 1999 to 2008 in the fenced Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area in western-central Saudi Arabia. We found that mortality of these animals occurred every year during summer months when the rainfall is negligible. Deaths were due to starvation because of reduced availability, accessibility and quality of food plants in the area.

The population of Arabian sand gazelle between 1991 to 2008 was estimated as 66, 120, 220, 300, 450, 413, 812, 856, 1034, 1104, 1245, 1683, 700, 800, 1537, 1200, 800, and 654 respectively based on Distance sampling technique. During the stressful summer months between 1991 and 2008, large numbers of dead Arabian sand gazelles were recorded in Mahazat as-Sayd PA. Between these years, the number of dead sand gazelles were 13, 12, 3, 5, 0, 9, 0, 31, 939, 644, 8, 0, 77, 21, 77, 679, 302 and 151 respectively (Ostrowsky and Ismail 2000, Ismail 2005, Ismail and Strauss 2006, Ismail 2007, Islam *et al.* 2007, and Shah *et al.* 2008). (Figure 1). Most of the dead gazelles were found under large green *Acacia tortilis* or *Maerua crassifolia* trees, which were typical shading places for ungulates at Mahazat during summer months. More dead gazelles were found in the vicinity of the external Mahazat as-Sayd fence especially southern and south-north and north-western parts of Mahazat as-Sayd.

The population of Arabian oryx from 1988 to 2008 was estimated as 9, 19, 31, 42, 89, 128, 170, 221, 326, 355, 405, 415, 413, 469, 523, 547, 529, 605, 614, 550 and 378 respectively. On 2nd December 2008, N (population size) of Arabian Oryx was 378 or with 95% CI was 113 to 432 oryx with total number of observations 47, survey effort 231.1 km and the mean group (cluster) size was 5.45. The mortalities of Arabian oryx have also been recorded since the re-introduction and die-offs of 30, 34, 26, 35, 20, 37, 36, 12, 46, 71, and 159 animals were recorded between 1998 to 2008. Most of the dead animals were calves and lactating females. Arabian Oryx are free-ranging animals and move long distances in search of food and the Mahazat fence prevents this movement especially during the stressful summer periods when food availability is extremely low and finally animals die near the fence.

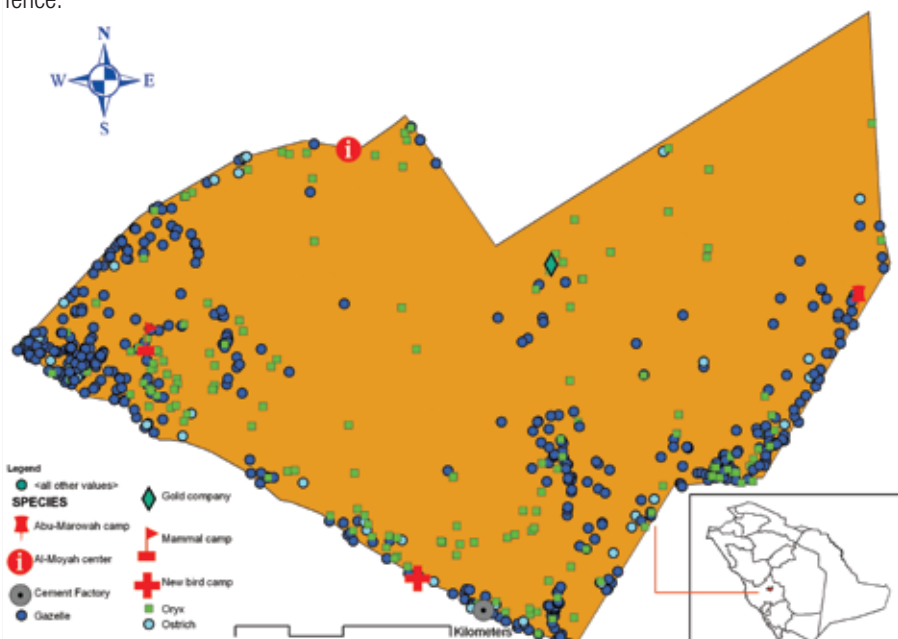


Figure 1: Locations of carcasses of Arabian oryx, Sand gazelle and ostrich in Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area in Saudi Arabia during 2006, 2007 and 2008 (Most of the carcasses were recorded near the north-western, southern and south-eastern parts of the Reserve mainly under green *Acacia* or *Mearua* trees, which were sites with typical thermal cover that are required for ungulates at Mahazat during summer months while in the north-eastern part very few carcasses were recorded which could be due to less vegetation in that section).



Plate 1: Skulls of Arabian oryx that are systematically kept in one camp of Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area (© K. Ismail)

Mortalities of ungulates were higher in 1999-2001, 2006, 2007 and 2008. Grazing of Arabian oryx habitat depends on rainfall and animals move over great distances in response to rain. The fence around Mahazat as-Sayd PA prevents natural movements of animals, and artificially concentrates the ungulate populations into possibly unfavourable habitat. The sand gazelle is a highly gregarious and migratory species, moving long distances in search of good quality pastures. Populations of sand gazelle in Central Asia are also known to migrate over large distances, covering several hundred kilometres. It is therefore likely that by preventing natural movements of sand gazelles and Arabian oryx, fencing may have reinforced the effects of stressful conditions such as drought. To reduce the catastrophic effects, a Strategy and Action plan was developed in August 2008 to manage oryx and gazelle within the Reserve and with provision for food and water at the five camps in the Reserve as an emergency plan to minimize mortalities.

A fully referenced version of this article can be found on the WME News website.



Plate 2: A Weak Arabian Gazelle just before its death near the fence (©M. Z. Islam)



Plate 3: A dead Arabian Oryx found under the dry *Acacia* tree (©M. Z. Islam)

ZOOLOGICAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND POTENTIAL FOR A REGIONAL ZOO ASSOCIATION

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Zoos and aquaria are places where animals are maintained in captivity for different purposes. Modern zoos have set up objectives which integrate conservation, education, research and recreation (Hediger, 1969). To help reach these goals, zoological institutions have started to organize themselves into organizations. These zoo associations are found now all around the world and gather zoos, aquaria and similar facilities into a strong network of communities with clear goals. Nevertheless the Middle East has never gone through the process of the creation of a zoo association. However, zoos, private collections and aquaria in this region face the same missions, challenges, problems and limitations as anywhere else in the world.

The goal of my thesis "Zoological institutions in the Middle East and potential of a regional zoo association", undertaken for the completion of a Bachelor Degree in Wildlife Management in Van Hall Larenstein, Leeuwarden (The Netherlands), was to give an overview of the current situation of zoos and aquaria in the Middle East and to assess the feasibility of creating a regional zoo association.

The interests, the expectations and the possible investments of local zoological institutions were examined and analysed. Three main instruments of research to reach the goal were used: literature research, questionnaire and observations. A total of 69 confirmed zoological institutions were found in the region. From these, 17 are 'Zoos', 8 'Aquaria', 3 'Dolphinaria', 13 'Private Collections', 10 'Breeding Centres', 8 'Minizoo's' and 10 'Others'. Each category has its own characteristics and developments, which are briefly mentioned in Chapter 3 and Appendix 2 of the full report (available on request at jonaslivert@wanadoo.fr).



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The potential of a regional zoo association in the Middle East was assessed through a survey realized via a specific questionnaire. This questionnaire was distributed by email, fax and paper. It was possible to only reach 49 institutions out of the 69 existing in the region. A total of 16 completed questionnaires were obtained. Conservation and research are two main fields in which zoological institutions from this region are actively involved: 63% of the surveyed institutions participate in conservation *in situ* and 88% state that they are doing research. Education is less developed with only 56% of the institutions involved in some form of education, but many of the institutions in this region are not open to the general public.

Nine zoological institutions in the Middle East are already members of international zoo associations, mainly based in other regions. Furthermore seven zoological institutions within the Middle East are members of the International Species Information System (ISIS).

Even without a structured framework, a certain number of collaborations and exchanges are already under way among zoological institutions in the region. Most of these exchanges are done with institutions situated in The United Arab Emirates.



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All the surveyed institutions are interested in joining a potential regional zoo association in the Middle East. They expect to gain benefit from it mainly in terms of 'Exchange of information', 'Exchange of animals', 'Conference/workshop' and 'International connection with worldwide association'.

The surveyed institutions are willing to support and participate in the following fields, as 'Exchange of information', 'Exchange of animals', 'Conference/workshop' and 'Technical assistance'. Active involvement in breeding programs, conservation and research committees appear to be the fields that are most aspired to by regional zoological institutions.

From the brief analysis of zoological collections in the Middle East and the results from the survey realized, a clear potential for a regional zoo association could be drawn. The foundation of such an association would require a detailed procedure and a strong structural base to encourage the future development, success and positive development of its members. Whatever the impetus, the decisions made by the founders during the start-up period of the new organization will have a profound impact on its success, effectiveness and longevity (Knowledge Center Staff, 2006). General recommendations about the starting steps of a regional zoo association in the Middle East are given in the last chapter of the report.

A full version of the report "Zoological institutions in the Middle East and potential of a regional zoo association" on pdf is available on request at jonaslivert@wanadoo.fr.

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ARABIAN ORYX REINTRODUCTION IN ABU DHABI – UAE

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Three years ago and under the patronage of HH Sh. Mohamed Bin Zayed, the Environmental Agency – Abu Dhabi embarked on a new project to bring the Arabian oryx back to the deserts of UAE. Arabian oryx reintroduction started in 2007 in the Arabian Oryx Protected Area (AROPA). The first release involved 98 animals in 3 different release sites in the eastern part of the Empty Quarter desert (Rubaa Al Khali) in the emirate of Abu Dhabi. The animals were selected from three different sources in an attempt to carry the highest possible genetic diversity into the reintroduced herd. The animals have been monitored since then on a daily basis. The monitoring strategy was devised in a way to provide discrete measurable indicators of the progress of the reintroduction. The population had a harsh first year where significant mortalities were recorded especially among new recruits. However, the herd has now started to cope well with its new habitat and has evolved into distinctive social groups. Survival rate increased in the second and third year, and improved fertility was reflected in the high rate of recruitment of new wild born calves. Here we report some of the most prominent indicators up to the end of 2009.

Indicator 1 - Births: A total of 91 deliveries were recorded in the project since the first release in 2007. These are distributed as 14 in 2007, 36 in 2008 and 41 in 2009. Details of annual births and their distribution over the calendar months are illustrated in Fig 1. These numbers show that fertility level is within acceptable limits. However, there was mortality among these recruits. During 2007, 5 calves were lost while 8 out of 36 lost in 2008 and only 2 calves were lost in 2009. The current population totals 154 individuals. Thus, the herd has a population growth of 21%. Such a steady growth in population and reproductive success is considered to be the first indicator of success and shows that the reintroduced animals are adapting well to their new habitat.

Indicator 2 - Survival rate: The first year of reintroduction showed a low calf survival rate. Only 64% of the calves survived their first year and grew into adults. This increased over the years and 77% of calves survived in 2008 and 94% of the calves survived their first year in 2009. Adult survival rate was 94%, 97% and 95% in 2007, 2008 and 2009 respectively (Fig 2). This is a second indicator of population establishment.

Indicator 3 - Population Growth Rate: There has been a varying, but steady increase in the rate of population growth in the herd. Growth rate was measured using two parameters. The instantaneous annual rate which gives indication of annual individual growth (r) and the second is the overall intrinsic growth rate (λ) that indicates growth over a period of several years. Table 1 (see web version) shows that the annual rate is increasing each year. The overall rate also shows an increase over the



Image 1. Arabian oryx in the Arabian Oryx Protected Area (©Husam El Alqamy).

cumulative time period. When λ is over 1.00 this is interpreted as an increasing population and that available resources are still accommodating for future increase. Figure 3 (see web version) graphically illustrates the increasing rate of the population. Increasing population change rate is the third indicator reported for population establishment in the new habitat.

Indicator 4 - Habitat utilization: The locations and numbers of animals are monitored on a daily basis. Since the beginning, the herd divided into three main groups with some individuals remaining either solitary or in small isolated groups. The biggest group is the one in Al Arbaeen forest. This group has grown now to about 67 animals. Movements of some individuals for considerable distances away from the forest are recorded but they tend to be seasonal and are not frequent. The second group has moved from the second release site to reside in Quessiwra forest and comprises 32 individuals. Movement of this group is more frequently observed. Movements are mainly confined to the colder months of the year. The third big group is found in the area of the northern shades and this group comprises 29 animals. This group of animals is more active in their movements. However, there is a noticeable reduction of their movements during summer. Though this group is considered to be more active compared to the other two and this may be attributed to the lack of forested areas in the vicinity and thus the animals are actively looking for resources of food and shade.

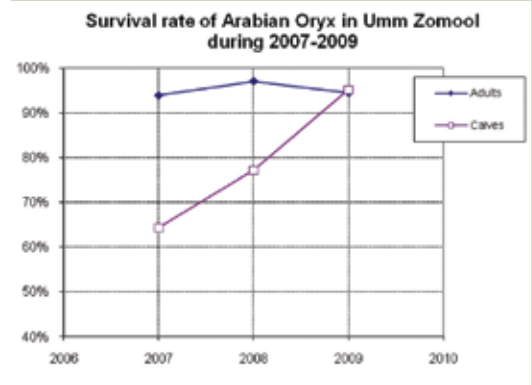


Fig 1. Survival rates recorded in the Arabian oryx Project.

This heat regulated pattern of spread is evident in all large groups of the herd. However, the northern group is thought to be isolated from the southern groups as no crossing between the two populations has been recorded. As the fourth indicator assessed to monitor the reintroduction process, habitat utilization has not yet been fully achieved by the reintroduced oryx as movement patterns are still sporadic and there are no long distance movements that are known to occur in other wild populations.

A version of this article with all the figures is available on WME website

ANIMAL TRADE IN IRAQ

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The trade in mammals and other species in Iraq are poorly understood, but survey teams from Nature Iraq, an Iraqi conservation organization, have been building a picture of the extent of the traffic. Since 2005, Nature Iraq has conducted winter and summer field surveys to identify sites of key biological diversity. Field teams have spent most of their time working in remote sites in marshlands, deserts, steppes and mountains, but in addition have visited local zoos and animal markets and have spoken with local communities including farmers, hunters/falconers, traders as well as local and regional government officials. Issues with unsustainable and uncontrolled hunting and animal trade have been raised repeatedly and a lot of anecdotal information has been gathered. As Iraq slowly rejoins the international community after years of isolation, the government is now considering joining the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). To provide information to the Iraqi government on this issue, Nature Iraq recently released a preliminary report on Animal Trade and Hunting in Iraq (Ahmed, H; Ararat, K; Fadhel, O, Haba, M & Salim, M, 2010).

There are some piecemeal attempts to curtail hunting and animal trade, with slightly more control over these activities in the northern part of the country (those areas controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government, which has benefitted from more stability in recent years). Still, even in these areas, hunting and animal trade simply occurs less openly than further to the south. Overall there is very little that has been done to address trans-border trafficking in species.

Hunting has always been an important source of income for most people in the rural and even the urban areas of Iraq, but this has caused wide-spread eradication of many wild species including several globally endangered animals and birds that once existed in the region. In the north of the country, where showing wild species in the local animal markets is now against the law, the animals are simply taken to the hunters' houses where the selling occurs. According to the Nature Iraq report, a local hunter in Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan, Northern Iraq stated that, *"the main buyers of live-caught species are wealthy people and officials who either want to boast about having such animals, putting them in their personal gardens, or they use them for special medical treatments."*

Another means by which animal trade is occurring is through small and medium-sized zoos throughout the country. The owner of a zoo in Kurdistan was interviewed for the Nature Iraq report and stated that most of the exotic animals in the zoos that are imported into the country may be illegally smuggled from places like Africa and Thailand into Syria, but from there paperwork and documents are created to import them into Iraq. Potential buyers in Iraq can simply submit a request for particular species and the zoos, since they are licensed to receive and maintain exotic and native wild species, provide them to their customers. Thus the zoos are in essence operating as a hidden market where trading in these wild species takes place. For example, during their visit to one zoo in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Nature Iraq team found a customer waiting to buy a six-month old female lion cub obtained through Syria for a price of approx. 80,000 USD.



Fig 1. Marbled Ducks for sale in the Suq (© AF Omar).



Fig 2. Lion cub in Erbil Zoo (© H Ahmed).

Unlike the Kurdish region of northern Iraq, there appear to be fewer controls on animal trade and several of the markets deal quite openly in the trade of wild species. The situation in southern Iraq, in the Mesopotamian Marshlands, is centered on hunting and trade in waterfowl species and many of these species are sold in the markets for local use. At one local market Mallards were being sold for around 20 USD, and other species for about 15 USD, actually considered quite high prices for these species.

Hunting of Houbara (MacQueen's) bustard, a vulnerable species according to the IUCN, occurs in the desert regions of southern and western Iraq by locals, but in recent years foreign hunters and falconers from Gulf countries have been entering Iraq and killing large numbers of these birds. In addition there is evidence of a strong smuggling trade in these birds to Gulf countries.

The Nature Iraq report provided a list of species that are routinely traded out of the country. Otter pelts, from animals caught in Iraqi rivers and wetlands are mostly exported to Turkey and they have been reportedly used in the drug trade (the pelt forms a water-resistant sac that protects the drugs during smuggling). Gazelles are hunted for local consumption, but are also exported as either live animals or pelts to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Persian Squirrels are hunted in large numbers in the mountains of Kurdistan, Northern Iraq and are often sold within Iraq, but are also exported to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria and some to Jordan. Indian crested porcupines are trapped and used locally (for folk medicinal uses), but also exported to Kuwait, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia. Saker, peregrine and barbery falcons are all traded with Gulf countries such as Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia. White-eared bulbul are transported to Syria and Jordan. Snakes like the horned sand viper are likely exported to Kuwait in the south and Turkey to the North.

Nature Iraq's initial report is preliminary and they hope to produce a more comprehensive version in the fall of 2010 but it is clear from these early findings that more attention and work is needed to fully characterize and eventually control hunting and the trade of species both into and out of Iraq.

A fully referenced version is available on the WME News website.

NORTHERN BALD IBIS IN SAUDI ARABIA: LAST STEP FOR ITS SURVIVAL

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The Northern Bald Ibis was once widespread across northern Africa, the Middle East and even the Alps (IAGNBI 2010). By 1997 the bird's population had fallen to fewer than 50 pairs, largely confined to coastal cliffs within the National Park, near Agadir in Morocco (IAGNBI 2010). This long-term decline has been driven by human disturbance and persecution, especially hunting, as well as habitat loss and pesticide poisoning (BirdLife International 2000). Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremite* is a Critically Endangered species (IUCN 2010 and CITES1), which was considered to be surviving only in Morocco until 2002. It had in fact been declared extinct from the whole of Eurasia in 1989. Northern Bald Ibis (NBI) breeds in Morocco and (to a lesser extent) Syria, but a tiny breeding population of 15 pairs also persists at Bireçik in Turkey. Although this population underwent a large decline between 1970–1990, it was stable between 1990–2000 (Serra et al 2003). Despite it having been declared as extinct in Syria soon after the 1930s, a relict colony of 3 breeding pairs was discovered in the Syrian desert, not far from the oasis of Palmyra, in 2002 (Serra et al. 2003). A high mortality rate due to hunting within Arabia has been recently assessed to be one of the greatest threats for the NBI colony in its eastern range.



Fig 1. Map of bald ibis sightings in Saudi Arabia.

Breeding and feeding ecology of the NBI relict colony have been studied across several breeding seasons (Serra et al. 2009; Serra et al. 2008). In 2006, 3 breeding adults were fitted with platform transmitter terminals (PTTs), which enabled their migratory route through the western Arabian peninsula to be tracked and this led to the discovery of their wintering grounds on the Ethiopian highlands (Lindsell et al 2009). Two additional subadult ibises were also tagged in spring 2009 (Serra personal comm. 2010).

In Saudi Arabia NBI is generally considered to be a very rare passage migrant (BirdLife International 2004 and Jennings 1981), while 12 records of the birds were reported between 1990 and 1991, totalling 25 birds, of which the largest flock was 15 on 30 July 1991 just 6 km away from the National Wildlife Research Center (Schulz and Schulz 1992). These records concluded that the eastern population of the NBI was more numerous than originally thought.

In 2006 the tagged NBI individuals named Zenobia and Salam came from Syria to the southern part of Saudi Arabia in Madinah and Al Baha. In 2007 the same individuals were reported from Al Baha and stayed more than 10 days there. In 2008, two birds named Sultan and Zenobia were moved from



Fig 2. Bald Ibis near the NWRC in Taif, Saudi Arabia (©X. Eichaker ©NWRC).

Syria via Tabuk in the north to further south, while Salam and Odeinat were found in Jizan area in 2008 and 2009. During 2009 these two individuals also stopped in Taif for two days, while moving further south of Saudi Arabia in Jizan area (IAGNBI 2010 and Serra personal comm. 2010).

In 2009 a tagged subadult bird (Julia) was killed during her first day of southward migration, at a farm in northern Saudi Arabia. The possible killing of Turkish tagged young in August 2009 in northern Saudi Arabia also occurred. It is clear that if this trend of ibis mortality rate due to hunting during migration is not reverted the ibis colony of Palmyra will vanish in the next 1-2 years.

From 2006 until 2010 we have been checking the tagged birds in collaboration with the Middle East BirdLife Secretariat. In 2009 NBIs were reported killed by the local people in Saudi Arabia and since then the Saudi Wildlife Commission (SWC) is making extra efforts to protect this bird while on migration. In March 2010, all the sites were checked where the Bald Ibises were recorded over the last 20 years and recommendations made that when tagged birds leave their winter breeding site the SWC will be alerted by BirdLife Middle East and provide data of birds movement so necessary and appropriate actions can be taken. These include providing information brochures in Arabic to local people in all those areas where birds occur and raising conservation issues with hunters. Minimizing the risks associated with uncontrolled hunting along the migratory route is a priority and a major emergency conservation measure currently being undertaken.

A fully referenced version of this article can be found on the WME website.

Acknowledgements

We thank HH Prince Bandar bin Saud bin Mohammad Al Saud (Secretary General, Saudi Wildlife Commission) for his support towards the protection of Northern Bald Ibises not only in the Kingdom but throughout its range.

We acknowledge Mr. Sham Davande for plotting NBI locations on the map.

EMIRATES MARINE ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP – A PROFILE

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Introduction

The Emirates Marine Environmental Group (EMEG) is a non-governmental, non-profit making organisation. Its headquarters is located at the base of Palm Jebel Ali in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. EMEG was established in 1996 under the patronage of Her Highness Sheikha Manal bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum and the leadership of Ali Saqar Sultan Al Suweidi. EMEG specializes in marine wildlife monitoring and implements marine environmental projects.

Given the scale and pace of construction taking place in the UAE and the potential for adverse impacts to fragile marine ecosystems in the region, now is a critical time for action. EMEG believes the environment needs protection and the EMEG team strives to minimize deleterious impacts, associated with anthropogenic activities, by recommending and providing sustainable environmental management solutions. EMEG is motivated by a deep commitment to environmental protection as well as the need to increase public awareness and provide educational opportunities.

Mission

As the first marine environmental group established in the UAE, EMEG provides services and solutions for a variety of projects focusing on marine and terrestrial environmental issues around the country.

EMEG's mission is to preserve biodiversity in the UAE by: -

- ✓ protecting endangered wildlife
- ✓ actively participating in conservation efforts
- ✓ advancing research
- ✓ promoting environmental education and awareness
- ✓ conserving fragile ecosystems for future generations



Fig 3. Pearl Diving activities (©EMEG).

Staff Experience

The EMEG field teams include many Emirati's with local knowledge of the environment and several professional biologists who possess multidisciplinary skills and wide levels of experience. Staff profiles of professional staff are available at EMEG's web site: <http://www.emeg.ae>. EMEG has the tools, techniques and knowledge to successfully tackle a wide range of environmental problems and implement a wide variety of marine conservation projects.

Projects

Over the past 10 years EMEG has implemented numerous studies and projects focusing on: -

- ✓ marine and coastal habitat biodiversity studies and ecological monitoring
- ✓ turtle monitoring and turtle egg relocation when threatened
- ✓ coral reef translocation, formation and monitoring
- ✓ water and sediment quality sampling and monitoring
- ✓ underwater, coastal, and beach clean-ups
- ✓ patrolling to prevent illegal fishing and unauthorized camping activities
- ✓ marine and terrestrial wildlife rescue, translocation and rehabilitation
- ✓ ecological surveys
- ✓ environmental education programmes
- ✓ underwater filming



Fig 1. Major Ali, President of EMEG, explaining EMEG work to Emirati's (©EMEG).

Ghantoot Coastal Reserve

EMEG maintains a coastal sanctuary and reserve on the western border of Dubai, in Ghantoot. The reserve is used as a base to develop and organize educational camps for schools, universities, community and corporate groups to increase awareness and understanding of the different threats the environment faces. Within structured programs, EMEG focuses on the cultural heritage of the UAE and incorporates traditional values and skills into each activity. The activities EMEG organizes at the reserve including; audio-visual presentations on EMEG activities, marine pollution and threatened species; bird watching; role of mangroves presentation and mangrove planting; discussions and presentations on the history of pearl diving in the UAE; beach and dune cleanups; workshops on fish biology, flora and fauna identification, medicinal properties of desert plants; hamour (*Epinephelus coioides*) feeding; canoeing and swimming competitions; traditional games; training in traditional skills including fishing, cooking, dancing, sailing and falconry; art creations from collected waste; and natural history scavenger hunts.

Desert Princesses

EMEG is also involved in empowering local women in conservation efforts and the protection of the UAE's natural heritage. EMEG strives to raise the status of women by encouraging them to participate in meaningful activities that will help them enjoy a better quality of life while contributing to the protection of the local environment. This is accomplished by training women in the basic skills necessary to survey desert flora and fauna as well as how to capture and tag various animal species. These 'Desert Princesses' have acquired computer skills and are able to successfully manage wildlife translocation projects.

Stakeholders and Sponsors

The group endeavours to work closely with all stakeholders to develop solutions to environmental problems and assist in management strategies. The group has expanded its scope of work and knowledge by collaborating with a range of local and international environmental organizations including World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Save Our Seas, Nakheel, Tourism Development and Investment Company (TDIC) and government agencies including Environment Agency Abu Dhabi (EAD), Dubai Municipality, Environment and Protected Areas Authority in Sharjah (EPPA) and Abu Dhabi Marine Operating Company (ADMA). EMEG's sponsors include numerous members, Zaya and HSBC Bank Middle East.

Membership

Anyone can become a member of the association for free by completing the online form available at www.emeg.ae.

By becoming an EMEG member, you can start making a difference and help to protect marine environment. You will receive information on EMEG's upcoming events such as beach cleanups, wildlife relocation, art creation, mangrove planting, turtle nesting monitoring, and a copy of the EMEG newsletter.

WILDLIFE ART

The Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife has hosted British wildlife artist Mark Adlington for a total of 11 weeks during the past five years during which he filled over 20 sketchbooks. As a result of this residency Mark will hold an exhibition at the John Martin Gallery in London from June 25 - July 24, 2010. To get a preview of the exhibition, download a press release (1.2 MB), and view a short video of the artist at work in Gran Paradiso



log onto
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We would like to thank Mark for allowing us to reproduce the oryx images on the front cover of this issue.

GOUMBOOK.COM, THE FIRST GREEN WEBSITE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

Tatiana Antonelli Abella & Randala Jishi Anabtawi (co-founders)

Goumbook FZ LLC, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Key words: environment, eco-friendly, green, directory, Middle East.

Introduction: Goumbook aims to become the main reference on green practices for environmentally conscious people and businesses across the GCC&MENA Region. It is an online information resource that provides consumers with the latest green news, issues, people, products and trends.

The main components: The comprehensive Green Directory, the first in the Middle East and North Africa, helps consumers, retailers, distributors and manufacturers interact and source products, services and materials; whether they are a business looking for sustainable raw materials, a traveler looking for eco-tours and wildlife, a volunteer looking to join an environmental organization, or someone who is just trying to get their arms around this new and evolving way of life. The Green News section is dedicated to give information about new products and services available in the Middle East, to spread awareness on environmental initiatives in the region, to report on local wildlife and endangered species and to shine the spotlight on associations and organizations working tirelessly to support their environment.

The Eco Calendar lists all the green events in the region and worldwide covering green initiatives, campaigns, forums or conferences focused on the environment and its resources.

Why "goum": The word *goum* finds its origins in the Classical Arabic terms *qum*, "stand up", and *qawm*, word used in bedouin times to describe a group of people living together according to an ethic of self-help and collective responsibility. In Farsi *ghoum* means people.

Goumbook aims to make all of us stand up for a green ideal uniting towards a better world, sharing facts, ideas and advice on how to live an eco-friendly life in the era of real-time information. Anything we can do to curb pollution, conserve our natural resources and reduce our negative impact on our environment is a good thing for this and future generations.

Conclusion: Goumbook has taken steps to play its part in reducing the global carbon footprint by becoming a "green certified site" and thus ensuring that the website is carbon neutral. Goumbook is the Region's first green platform that wants to capture a local and international network of people concerned about the future of the Planet in general, and the Region in particular, sharing their social and business green lives.

BSAVA Manual of Raptors, Pigeons and Passerine Birds

Edited by John Chitty and Michael Lierz (2008)

ISBN 978 1 905319 04 6

British Small Animal Veterinary Association, Woodrow House, 1 Telford Way, Waterwells Business Park, Quedgeley, Gloucester GL2 2AB, United Kingdom

The British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA) Manual of Raptors, Pigeons and Passerine Birds replaces the popular BSAVA Manual of Raptors, Pigeons and Waterfowl published back in 1996. The new BSAVA Manual has been extensively revised and extended making it basically a complete new book. This new Manual contains 37 chapters and four appendices, over 153 tables and an outstanding 660 colour photographs. After the introduction, three chapters deal with the husbandry and management techniques of the three groups of birds. The next 11 chapters address basic aspects of avian medicine, from an essential review

on anatomy and physiology to the most sophisticated diagnostic and surgical procedures. Raptor medicine is dealt in 11 chapters, while six chapters are allocated to pigeon and four to passerine bird medicine. The last chapter addresses the all important legal, zoonotic and ethical considerations. The larger number of chapters dedicated to raptor medicine is a testimony to how advanced and specialised raptor medicine has become over the years against other groups of birds. The Manual is well balanced combining mostly short sections of solid text with highly illustrative images and tables to simplify understanding at a glance. The BSAVA Manual of Raptors, Pigeons and Passerine Birds is a master piece produced by experienced and highly qualified authorities and it should find its way to the library of every Veterinary Surgeon working with birds.

Reviewed by Jaime Samour MVZ (Hons), MVZ, PhD, Dip ECZM, Wrsan, P.O. Box 77338, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

A full review of the book by Dr Jaime Samour is posted on the WME News website along with the following 3 low resolution pdf chapters of the book:

Chapter 17. Disorders of the Feet (Tom Bailey and Chris Lloyd)

Chapter 20. Respiratory Problems (Tom Bailey)

Chapter 23. Gastrointestinal tract disease (Chris Lloyd)

For further information on ordering this and other BSAVA books please visit the BSAVA bookstore at www.bsava.com

