



Wildlife Middle East



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NEWS

CONTENTS

- 1.** Editorial
- 2.** Distribution & abundance of greater flamingo in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
- 3.** Status and ecology of brown bears in Iran
- 4.** Distribution update of the Arabian wolf from Saudi Arabia
- 5.** Oman trains Yemeni conservationists in leopard research
- 6.** Raptor trade in Kuwait bird market
- 7.** *Rhodococcus equi* infection in Blanford's foxes infected with distemper virus
- 8.** News and reviews
Using drop nets to capture free ranging wildlife
- 9.** News and reviews
Diseases and medical management of houbara bustards and other otitidae
12th conservation workshop on the fauna of Arabia, first announcement
Feline infectious peritonitis in cheetahs in the UAE

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

RAKBANK
Simply Better

The National Bank of Ras Al-Khaimah (P.S.C.)

EDITORIAL

We have an excellent spread of articles from around the region in this December issue and our electronic distribution list has grown to over 7,700. We apologise for the delays in getting the last issue out. The larger the mailing list gets, the more work this brings us for distributing postal and electronic versions. You will notice that the website has been upgraded and we would value your feedback. We hope the search engine makes it easier for you to find articles and that you will notice that we have made subscribing to the electronic version simpler.

Good news to report, Shakeel Ahmed and colleagues from the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi recorded over 18,000 flamingos from the Bu Al Syayef salt marsh area in Abu Dhabi where the colony reared 800 chicks in 2009. This makes it one of the largest successful breeding colonies of flamingos in the UAE. Not only is it a tremendous natural asset, but it has the potential to provide an unforgettable wildlife spectacle for tourists.

Abdul Rahman and Ouda from Kuwait are to be congratulated for their report on the raptor trade in the bird markets of Kuwait. It is disturbing to hear that wild caught Griffon vultures and Imperial eagles are blatantly offered for sale. One can only wonder why 963 kestrels are being sold and who is buying them? Some are destined to be cheap disposable toys for children and many will be used as bait birds to catch large valuable falcons. Most will die sad and pointless deaths. It is not only Kuwait, however, which has animal markets where protected species are sold. The presence of these markets is shameful for the region, but it does at least provide a realistic indicator of 'where we are' in attitudes to conservation and animal welfare. More conservation awareness and better welfare laws are required across the region.

Bagher Nezam and Mohammed Farhadinia from the Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) provide a useful update on the status of the brown bear in Iran. We are concerned to learn that bears are still being persecuted in Iran and hope that the ICS is able to promote a more enlightened understanding of this magnificent species. We look forward to further reports from ICS when they have some results from their exciting radio-tracking project.

We have a carnivore theme to this issue. Peter Cunningham and Torsten Wronski from the Zoological Society of London provide a concise report on the status of the Arabian wolf in Saudi Arabia. It is disturbing to hear that 'hanging trees' are still used to display shot wolves. Their survey showed that wolf carcasses were encountered approximately every 10 km in the Western Asir mountains where Bedouin still lose sheep and goats to wolf predation. This unfortunately says a great deal about how well wildlife is really protected in this region and we would encourage the law makers, sitting in their air-conditioned offices in the cities to get out into the field a little more often. Why make laws if no one bothers to enforce them?

It is hardly surprising that for any of us, even field biologists, wishing to see an Arabian carnivore we must visit a zoo to be certain of seeing one. We don't see carnivores in the wild because so few are left and those that are, are the survivors of the long-running one-sided war of attrition between men and predators. Hunting pressure has led to the extinction of cheetah in Arabia in the 1960's and the Arabian leopard has the dubious reputation of being the rarest large cat on the planet. There are about 200-250 Arabian leopards left in the wild and about 50 in captivity. To put this in context, if all the leopards left in the world were people, they would fit into 5 or 6 coaches. If we can build the tallest building in the world, can we also not save a species of cat from extinction?

We have reported previously on the work being done by the Foundation for the Protection of the Arabian Leopard in Yemen (FPALY). It is positive to learn from David Stanton about the cooperation between the Diwan's Office of the Conservation of the Environment in Oman and FPALY in Yemen.

Disease is an important issue that can 'finish off' small populations of carnivores in the wild or captivity. Wild carnivores are susceptible to the common viral diseases of domestic cats and dogs. An Pas and colleagues, from the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife have found that captive Blanford's

foxes, a rare fox species found in the UAE, are vulnerable to lung infections with a bacteria called *Rhodococcus* after the animals immune system has been weakened by the distemper virus. Disease prevention is likely to play a more important role in the conservation of Arabian carnivores in the future.

Check out the weblink to the Wildlife Capture Services website at <http://wildlifecapture.com> to see some impressive videos on capturing wildlife using drop-nets. This system may be useful for biologists and vets working with 'hard-to-catch' species in 'hard-to-reach' locations across the Middle East.

What is needed here in this region is better enforcement of legislation that should protect wildlife and better conservation awareness programmes for the communities in the areas where carnivores live. How about regional universities establishing wildlife management courses to provide Nationals with the skills to embark on careers in conservation? We need more locals to become champions of their own wildlife.

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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.

DISTRIBUTION & ABUNDANCE OF GREATER FLAMINGO (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) IN ABU DHABI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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INTRODUCTION

The greater flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) has a wide distribution, ranging from the western Mediterranean, where it occurs in Spain, southern France as well as in north and west Africa (Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco). The range also extends eastward to Iran, the former USSR, India and Sri Lanka (Ogilvie 1986). Greater Flamingos are classified as a widespread and abundant species in the 2010 IUCN Red List of threatened species. The breeding population in SW & Southern Asia is 180,000 pairs. (Aspinall 2010). In the Arabian Peninsula, the first breeding record of greater flamingos was documented in 1922 (Ticehurst 1926) when the species bred in Kuwait. The UAE's flamingo population originates from breeding colonies in Iran, Turkey and Central Asian countries. Flamingos successfully bred for the first time at Al Wathba wetland reserve in 1993, leading to the site being declared as a protected area in 1998 (Aspinall and Hellyer 1999). Our article summarizes the distribution and abundance of greater flamingo in 2009 in different wetlands in Abu Dhabi Emirate.

METHODS

We used fixed monitoring points from wild bird and avian influenza monitoring in the Emirate, to extract data on flamingo numbers. Sites for wild bird monitoring were established by dividing the entire coastline of the Emirate into a 25x25 km grid and using the midpoint for routine monitoring. Moreover, flamingos were recorded on different islands of Abu Dhabi Emirate while collecting data on winter and summer breeding birds. Three inland wetlands (Al Wathba, Shahama & Zakhir Pools) were also monitored along with coastal sites. Bird data were recorded on a pre-designed data sheet and maximum number of birds recorded was used for analysis. The sites were monitored twice a month.

Results and Discussion

During the entire year 28 sites (Fig. 1) were monitored to observe the distribution and abundance of Greater Flamingo. Out of 28 sites, 12 were coastal, 13 Islands and three inland wetlands. The highest numbers of 18,855 flamingos were recorded from Bu Al Syayeeef, an inter-tidal mudflat and salt marsh area to the west of the Musaffah channel. The area also recorded breeding of flamingo in April 2009 where 800 chicks and more than 1000 un-hatched eggs were recorded, making it one of the largest successful nesting of flamingos in the UAE (Javed et al, 2009).

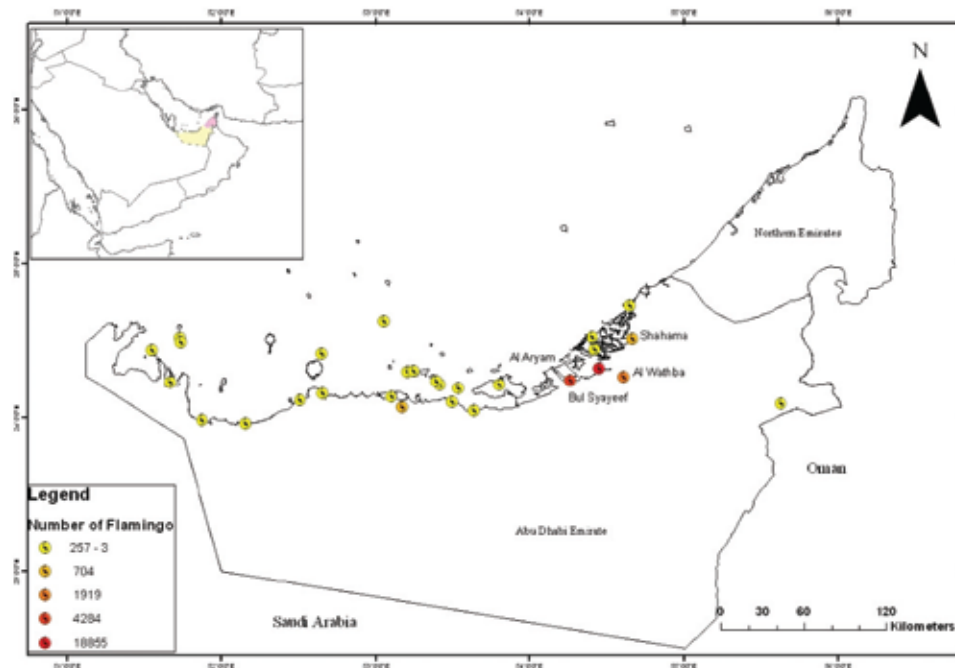


Fig. 1: Map Showing number of sites monitored and highest numbers of Greater flamingo recorded in Abu Dhabi Emirate.



Fig. 2: Greater flamingo in Abu Dhabi (©Ahmed).

The second highest numbers of 4,284 flamingo were recorded from Al Aryam in April 2009 followed by Al Wathba Wetland Reserve with 1,919 and Shahama, a privately owned inland wetland near the east coast of Abu Dhabi. Furthermore, out of 13 islands that were surveyed the highest numbers were recorded from Butinah Island (257 flamingos) followed by Jenana (120) and Abu Al Abyad (81). Thus Greater Flamingos were found consistently distributed year around in different areas of Abu Dhabi Emirate and their occurrence was recorded regularly on the western coastline although in lower numbers. One of the major threats to the breeding population is human disturbance. Greater flamingos are highly vulnerable to disturbance, particularly at breeding times and human disturbance can lead to desertion of the nesting site and lower breeding success. Protection of Bu Al Syayeeef from human disturbance and proper management of habitat in Al Wathba Wetland Reserve is essential to retain and increase the number of breeding flamingos in Abu Dhabi Emirate.

Acknowledgments

We thank Thabit Zahran Al Abdessalaam, Director of EAD's Biodiversity Managing Sector and Mr. Abdullnasser Ali Al Shamsi for their support and help in facilitating the study.

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STATUS AND ECOLOGY OF BROWN BEAR

Ursus arctos IN IRAN

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Keywords: Brown Bear, *Ursus arctos*, Iran, Ecological study, Database.

Recognized as *Ursus arctos syriacus* (Hemprich & Ehrenberg 1828), the Iranian brown bear exists in the north and western parts of Iran, mainly associated with Zagros Mountains, from Azerbaijan to near Shiraz in Fars and the Alborz Mountains, from Astara to eastern Golestan.

Northern forests support a larger population than the western areas of the country, ranging from western North Khorasan and Golestan through Mazandaran to western Gilan. It is thought that they have the highest abundance in Mazandaran and Golestan, particularly North Alborz Protected Area and Golestan National Park.

The present study was carried out between 2004 and 2010 in conjunction with the development of a database to store the information that we already have about the brown bear in the Iranian literature.

Although the species is supposed to exist in 21 provinces we only confirmed brown bear presence within 16 provinces of the country. The presence of bears in 5 further provinces needs to be confirmed (Fig. 1). Based on field surveys and expert interviews, a total of at least 108 areas were identified as brown bear habitat which 44 (41%) are under conservation categories of the Iranian Department of Environment.

Poaching and habitat loss are recognized as the two major threats to the survival of the brown bear in Iran. Bears are mainly poached due to conflict with local people, but they are occasionally killed to collect bear fat. Trophy hunting is also an irregular cause of bear poaching in some areas, particularly in the northern population (Fig. 1).

The Golestanak Bear Project, the first ecological study to increase knowledge about the largest carnivore in Iran, was initiated in 2005. Monitoring demographic properties of brown bear populations has been accomplished by counting annual number of females with cubs of-the-year (COYs) in the population and is central to evaluating conservation measures.

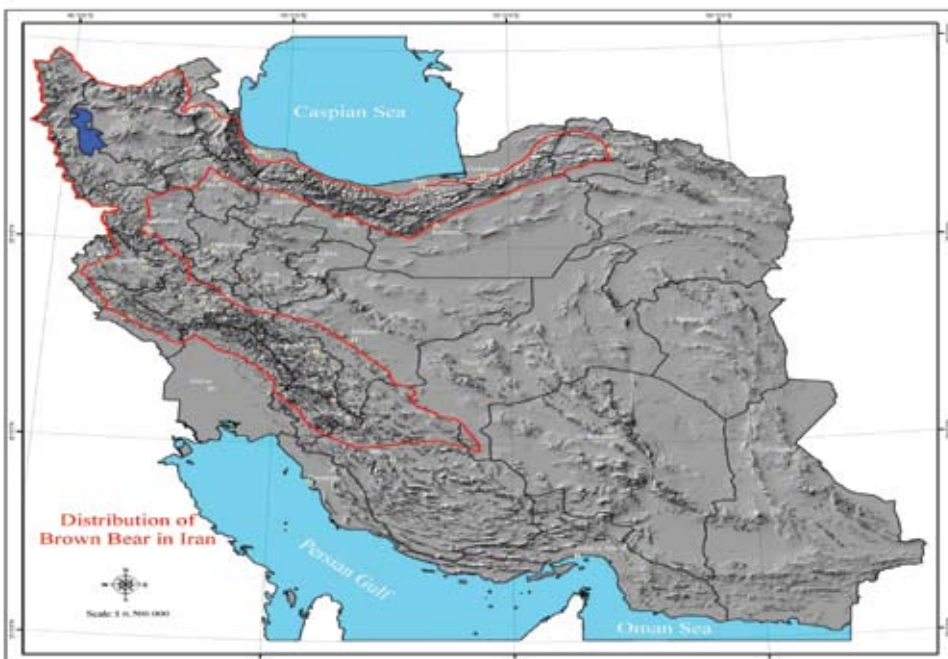


Fig. 1: Distribution of the brown bear in Iran.

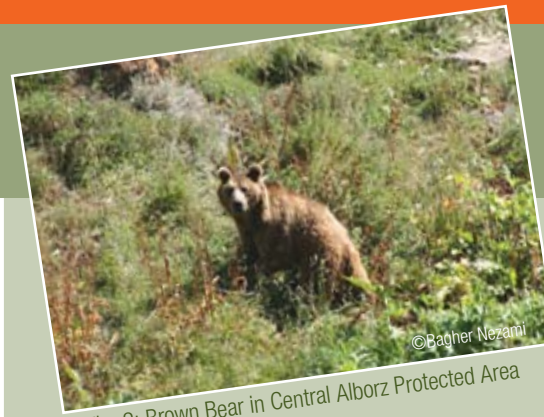


Fig. 2: Brown Bear in Central Alborz Protected Area

During the investigation, a total of 115 brown bears were sighted 45 times. Ten individual sightings occurred in spring, and the remaining 91% took place in summer. Despite continuous field surveys, we did not see animals during both autumn and winter, with only sporadic fresh tracks noted in early December. Encounters with brown bears peaked between June and August when they are highly active in upper elevations. The mean litter size of brown bears in Golestanak Reserve was calculated as 2 for COYs which is lower compared to European populations.



Fig. 3: Brown Bear in Central Alborz Protected Area
The Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) is producing a documentary movie about the brown bears in Iran. Moreover, in order to study movement patterns and activities of the animals, we plan to capture bears and install radio-collars which will be the first radio-telemetry project conducted on brown bears in Iran.

Acknowledgments

We thank the Iranian Department of the Environment (DOE) and Mazandaran Provincial Office of DOE, who provided financial and logistical support for field surveys. The Dutch Zoo Conservation Fund (DZCF) partially funded the project during 2007-2009. Finally, we express our thanks to the game guards for their kind cooperation in field surveys.

DISTRIBUTION UPDATE OF THE ARABIAN WOLF (*CANIS LUPUS PALLIPES*) FROM SAUDI ARABIA

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Introduction

Since the first Arabian wolf records in late 1880's from northern and central Saudi Arabia their actual distribution has been sketchy with wolves never viewed as being very common throughout their range. Although widespread throughout Saudi Arabia earlier publications indicate wolves either from the mountainous south western Asir, northern rocky areas bordering Jordan or the central areas around Riyadh. Being an understudied species, Arabian wolves are probably more widespread than currently documented and accordingly the species is listed as Least Concern (LC) with a stable population trend with a CITES protection status of CITES Appendix II. The status of wolves in Saudi Arabia is difficult to determine due to a lack of research and systematic census although estimated numbers vary between 500 and 700 animals. The only official census in Saudi Arabia to date was conducted during late 1999 and early 2000 by Sinibaldi et al. (2000) who concluded that the overall numbers might be higher albeit still in a decreasing trend. The aim of this paper is to update the distribution of Arabian wolf in Saudi Arabia by providing recent locations and data from unpublished field reports difficult to access from outside Saudi Arabia.

Methods

Data were collected through a search on the literature published from Saudi Arabia including unpublished reports (grey literature) by various authors, samples collected from the wild and stored for genetic analysis at the King Khalid Wildlife Research Centre (KKWRC) and recent (2008/2009) sightings by the authors.

Results

This paper confirms an additional 64 confirmed wolf sightings (i.e. live, dead, tracks, prey) since 1999 with the most recent sighting being of a female captured in a box trap on 15 November 2009 approximately 30 km north of Riyadh in central Saudi Arabia.

Discussion

The Arabian wolf, against the odds, tenaciously survives throughout much of its original distribution range in Saudi Arabia. A lack of herding of domestic livestock and abundant and ubiquitous refuse in Saudi Arabia may also have contributed to the wolf's successful persistence as they may achieve densities in relation to the available food source. They suffer greatly from persecution with "hanging trees" – sites (often trees) traditionally used to display wolves (as well as other predators such as hyena, caracal and leopard) – testament to their encounters with humans (Figure 2). Notwithstanding this persecution they are still viewed as numerous in certain inhospitable mountainous areas by Bedouin who often loose domestic stock to wolf predation. In a recent survey in the western Asir (An Namas/Bisha area) the wolf carcass encounter rate was 0.12 wolves per km. Elsewhere, they are expected at lower densities and anecdotal evidence suggests that they are highly mobile seasonally in Saudi Arabia. The importance of establishing and maintaining protected areas (including active enforcement thereof) in the mountainous areas of Saudi Arabia would not only benefit wolves, but also other species (e.g. ibex, mountain gazelle) facing a tentative existence. Wolves may be able to re-establish in areas where active persecution is limited such as in certain protected areas as recently confirmed from the Ibex Reserve (approximately 180 km south of Riyadh) in central Saudi Arabia.

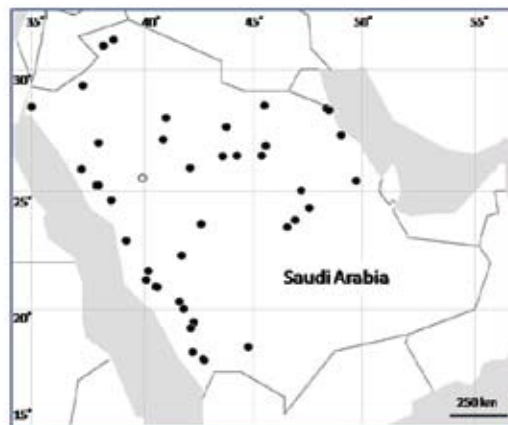


Fig. 1: Wolf distribution in Saudi Arabia.



Fig. 2: Wolf carcasses in hanging tree in the An Namas area, western Saudi Arabia (©Cunningham).

The greatest threat to wolves is increased human population and inevitable conflict leading to active persecution, transferable canid related diseases (e.g. rabies) and better veterinary care of free ranging domestic stock thus limiting carcasses for scavenging and predation. On the other hand wolves have become habituated to humans and being opportunistic omnivorous foragers with a high reproductive rate may ensure their survival in an otherwise marginal environment.

Acknowledgments

We thank H.H. Prince Bandar bin Saud bin Mohammed Al Saud, Secretary General, NCWCD for his continued support towards conservation efforts in Saudi Arabia. Our appreciation also goes to Ernest Robinson (Director KKWRC, Thumamah) for commenting on a draft of this note.

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OMAN TRAINS YEMENI CONSERVATIONISTS IN LEOPARD RESEARCH

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In a region that faces numerous conservation challenges, there is perhaps no issue quite as pressing or problematic as the preservation of the Arabian leopard. As a result of relentless persecution and several other factors, the most powerful predator in the peninsula has become one of the rarest mammals on Earth. Some experts estimate the population to number fewer than 100. Of these, approximately 50 range the Jebel Samhan Nature Reserve and Jebels Qara and Qammar in Dhofar, Oman. The other key state for the survival of Arabian leopards in the wild is presumed to be Yemen where an unknown number are believed to exist at several sites. While the conservation of Arabian leopards in the Sultanate of Oman is effectively coordinated by the Diwan of the Royal Court, in Yemen leopard conservation is spearheaded by an NGO, the Foundation for the Protection of the Arabian Leopard in Yemen (FPALY). In an historic event that laid the foundation for future cooperation between the two nations, the Diwan's Office of the Conservation of the Environment recently hosted a team of seven FPALY trainees for a week of leopard field research training.

Engineer Salah Said Al-Mahthori, a Senior Wildlife Biologist with the Arabian Oryx Project and Senior Wildlife Ranger Mr. Khalifa Mohammed Al-Harsausi supervised the training. The program, which was designed by Hadi and Khaled Al-Hikmani of the Arabian Leopard Survey, consisted of two days each on Jebels Samhan, Qara, and Qammar. Khaled Al-Hikmani led the training. The five Yemeni trainees included Dr. Mohamed Al-Doais, Ibrahim Wada'i, Nasser Aswot, Yousuf Mohageb, and Awad Al-Akbary. Also participating were Swiss graduate student Malini Pittet and FPALY Executive Director David Stanton.

The original concept behind the training was to partially address the capacity gap that exists in Yemen. As one of two nations with a potentially viable wild leopard population, Yemen is challenged by its lack of qualified field researchers. Until now, leopard research in Yemen has been sporadic and opportunistic and executed by volunteers with little field experience. As a result of the training, Yemen now has a cohort of five Yemenis who have first-hand experience in tracking leopards, in identifying and assessing leopard sign such as scats and scrapes, and who have trekked extensively through prime leopard habitat. The group received further training in the placement and monitoring of trail cameras for optimal results.

Initial support for the mission in the form of a \$3,000 grant to cover travel expenses and other costs was awarded by the Abu Dhabi Chapter of the Emirates Natural History Group. The Griffin Group provided a grant of \$2,240 to cover additional expenses and a project vehicle was provided by the National Tobacco and Matches Company. Finally, the mission was generously hosted within Oman by the Diwan of the Royal Court of the Sultanate under the direction of His Excellency Dr. Sheikh Talib Hilal Al-Hosni, Secretary General of the Diwan.

Hadi and Khaled designed an exceptional programme. Spending the first two nights on Jebel Samhan, the team hiked to a remote ledge where it saw leopard scrapes, scats, and tracks. Further along the ledge Khaled had installed a trail camera, which in addition to pictures of Nubian Ibex and Rock Hyrax, had recorded two images of an Arabian leopard.



Fig. 1: Group Portrait. Standing L to R: Tom Evans, Awadh Al-Akbary, Yousuf Mohageb, Darko Mocičnikar, Kevin Rushby, David Stanton, Ibrahim Wada'i, Salah Al-Mahthori, Khaled Al-Hikmani. Kneeling L to R: Nasser Aswot, Khalifa Al-Harsausi, Mohamed Al-Doais, Fadhli Al-Eryani, Malini Pittet



Fig. 2: The team negotiates a ledge on the south face of Jebel Samhan

The next two nights were spent on Jebel Salalah (aka Jebel Qara) where Khaled assured the team that it would find much more recent sign. Hiking down the near vertical wadi slope, the trainees accessed a ledge covered in a thick layer of gray dust where it found tracks so fresh that the texture of the leather on the pugmarks could clearly be seen. Here, Khaled's cameras had recorded Porcupine, Blanford's Fox, and a healthy male leopard.

The team spent its final night on Jebel Qammar near the Yemen border where it found more signs, and another trail camera which had recorded yet more pictures of leopards. The difference between this site and the previous two visited was that on Jebel Qammar the camera was placed an easy five minute walk from the plateau, not far from human habitations. It seems Arabian leopards, like their African and Indian cousins, can live in close proximity to humans.

Saying 'goodbye' to its Omani hosts was not easy for the team; strong bonds can develop during a week in the field. More important than these bonds, however, is the link that has now been established between the key stakeholders for the conservation of Arabian Leopards in Oman and Yemen. Plans for a reciprocal visit in the spring are already being made and the possibility of future annual trainings was enthusiastically discussed. Since 1997, Oman's Arabian Leopard Survey has been at the forefront of the in situ conservation of Arabian leopards. For almost a year, FPALY has persevered in its struggle to create a credible leopard conservation programme in Yemen. It will be years, if ever, before the Yemeni effort catches up with that in Oman. However, a precedent has been set and a seed for future cooperation planted. We need now only water it and see what grows. 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 Stanton, at P.O. Box 7069, Sana'a, Republic of Yemen, david@yemenileopard.org Mobile No. 967733916928.

Fig. 4: Khaled Al-Hikmani shows us an Arabian leopard recorded by one of his trail cameras on Jebel Qara



Fig. 3: A very fresh leopard track on Jebel Qara, probably less than 24 hours old

RAPTOR TRADE IN KUWAIT BIRD MARKET

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Summary

This article documents the illegal raptor trade in Kuwait Bird Market for the period from 1st January 2010 to 30th May 2010. Seventeen species of raptors were offered for sale of which three are listed in the IUCN red list.

Introduction

There have been a number of recent assessments of the trade in wild birds in the Middle East, (Bachmann 2010, Stanton 2010) and our report sheds some light on this illegal activity in Kuwait. Our aim was to address this issue for further bird conservation.

The Bird Market is situated in Al-Rai Area. It started near to the old Sheep Market and developed into a weekend market run by pet owners who sell pigeons, chickens and cage birds. The municipality intervened and made a building to include licensed pet shops and a covered open area used by pet owners who only sell during weekends. Later the area was expanded to include what is known today as the Friday Market.

The birds include many cage birds imported from Europe, South America and South East Asia. Many wild birds caught from neighbouring countries (Iran and Iraq, Syria) are imported into Kuwait for sale in the Bird Market. These wild birds include raptors (Accipitriformes), bulbuls (Pycnonotidae), Hypocolius (*Hypocolius ampelinus*), Larks (*Alaudidae*), sandgrouses (*Pteroclididae*) and quails (Coturnix). Birds used in Falconry such as Saker (*Falco cherrug*) and Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) are trapped during their Autumn migration and are usually kept in private houses. They are sold to interested parties in at informal auctions where the highest bidder gets the bird.

Table 1. The species and numbers of birds observed in the Kuwait Bird Market Survey.

Species	IUCN Red List Summary	Number of Birds	Other Remarks
Eurasian Griffon Vulture <i>Gyps fulvus</i>	LC	3	Offered for sale at US\$450
Short-toed Snake Eagle <i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	LC	5	
Western Marsh Harrier <i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	LC	25	
Pallid Harrier <i>Circus macrourus</i>	NT	25	
Montagu's Harrier <i>Circus pygargus</i>	LC	11	
Dark Chanting Goshawk <i>Melierax metabates</i>	LC	1	Caught in Qatif, Saudi Arabia
Levant Sparrowhawk <i>Accipiter brevipes</i>	LC	1	
Eurasian Sparrowhawk <i>Accipiter nisus</i>	LC	14	
Northern Goshawk <i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	LC	1	
Steppe Buzzard <i>Buteo buteo vulpinus</i>	LC	8	
Long-legged Buzzard <i>Buteo rufinus</i>	LC	1	
Steppe Eagle <i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	LC	2	
Eastern Imperial Eagle <i>Aquila heliaca</i>	VU	1	
Lesser Kestrel <i>Falco naumanni</i>	VU	225	
Common Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	LC	963	
Eurasian Hobby <i>Falco subbuteo</i>	LC	13	
Peregrine Falcon <i>Falco peregrinus</i>	LC	1	

IUCN Red List Categories Key: LC: Least Concern, NT: Near Threatened VU: Vulnerable



Fig. 1: Kuwait bird market

METHODS

The weekend in Kuwait is Friday and Saturday. Weekly visits were made to the Bird Market on weekends from 1st January to 30th May 2010. Only one weekend was missed in January. Visits were brief; scanning the market from one end to the other, sometimes more time was spent.

Thirty two visits were paid to the Bird Market. The authors estimate that on average they have recorded only less than 25% of what had been sold in the market and actual numbers may be much higher. Our survey provides a snapshot of the range of birds sold in the market.

Results

Seventeen species of raptors of which three are in the IUCN red list were offered for sale in the Bird Market. The species and numbers of birds are presented in Table 1.

Conclusion

Although the survey was done by private individuals, our purpose was to attract the attention of governmental bodies and encourage them to take appropriate action. A detailed copy of the survey was distributed to governmental bodies. It has yielded some effects and tighter controls and law enforcement have partially stopped the illegal trade. Now we hope this survey might encourage other individuals in the Middle East to do the same, so that a regional picture will emerge and tighter controls over the bird trade can become a reality.

Fig. 2: Raptors for sale in Kuwait bird market



Fig. 4: Griffon vulture for sale



Fig. 3: Kestrels for sale

References:

Bachmann, A. 2010. Animal trade in Iraq. Wildlife Middle East, vol 5, 1. Stanton D.B. 2010. A rough guide to the raptor trade in Yemen, Falco, Newsletter of the Middle East Falcon Research Group 36: 5-7

A full version of this report is available on the website

RHODOCOCCLUS EQUI INFECTION IN BLANFORD'S FOXES INFECTED WITH DISTEMPER VIRUS

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In 2008-2009 three Blanford's foxes (*Vulpes cana*) kept at the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife in the United Arab Emirates died acutely with severe pneumonia. *Rhodococcus equi* (*R. equi*) was cultured and later confirmed by PCR. Serology and PCR revealed a concurrent infection with distemper virus in two of the three cases.

Rhodococcus species are a group of Actinobacteria (Nocardiaceae) that are largely environmental organisms known for their biodegradable properties (TB, 2009; RGP, 2009). They can be pathogenic for plants (Agrios, 2005), animals (Prescott 1991; Yassin, 2005) and humans (Graham et al., 2007). *R. equi* is best known for causing pneumonia and lung abscesses in foals (Muscatelo et al., 2009; Prescott, 1991). The bacterium can be found in soil and is commonly detected in the faeces of herbivores (Prescott, 1991). Human *R. equi* infections are usually seen in immunocompromised patients (Kwa et al., 2001; Puthuchery et al., 2006). Only a few cases have been reported in cats and dogs (Takai et al., 2003; Prescott, 1991).

Since *R. equi* is usually described as a secondary infection, possible underlying causes were investigated. PCR carried out on post mortem samples of the first two foxes were both positive for distemper virus infection. The last fox that died had a negative PCR for distemper. Serum samples of all unvaccinated foxes were tested for distemper IgG and IgM antibodies. All nine Blanford's foxes and all eight Sand foxes tested, showed distemper antibodies although no illness or mortality in the past could be related to this infection. Uncomplicated distemper virus did not seem to cause symptoms in the foxes and clinical problems and mortality were only seen in association with the *R. equi* related pneumonia. Most likely the distemper virus decreased the immune response, resulting in acute mortality due to secondary bacterial infection.

R. equi is widespread in the environment and infection occurs commonly in horses. The infection might be underreported in other species such as in canids because of the difficulty of interpreting culture. The bacteria are Gram variable and can appear both as cocci and rods in the culture. The prevalence of a morphologic type can change with every subculture of the organism. The staining and morphologic variability can make it rather easy for *R. equi* to be overlooked in mixed cultures or misidentified as diphtheroids, Mycobacterium species or Nocardia, during a routine bacteriological examination (Puthuchery et al., 2006).

Fig. 1: Blanford's fox.

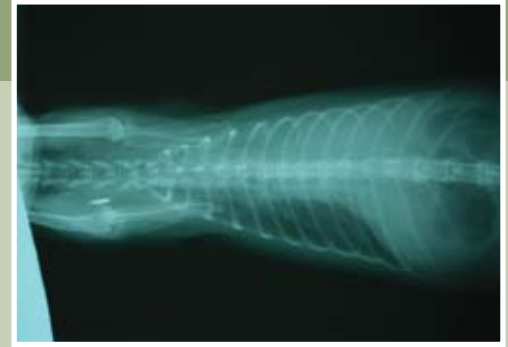


Fig. 2: Radiograph showing consolidated lung tissue.

The high prevalence of distemper antibodies in the foxes draws attention to how widespread the virus is in the region. Vaccination of canids against distemper should therefore be considered. The vaccine commonly used in dogs is however a modified live vaccine which has been reported to cause vaccine induced distemper resulting in high mortality in many non-domestic species (Montali et al., 1994; Deem et al., 2000). Therefore a recombinant canary pox vectored vaccine such as the commercially available Purevax distemper® (Merial) as used for ferrets is recommended for all non-domestic canids (Bauman et al., 2010). This vaccine is however not available in all countries and might have to be imported from abroad.

This case also emphasises the importance of co-infections. Uncomplicated distemper infection seems not to lead necessarily to clinical disease but makes the animal more susceptible to other concurrent infections. This has also been noted in other species such as during the distemper outbreaks in the Serengeti lions and Santa Catalina foxes where infections with respectively Babesia and Toxoplasma contributed to mortalities (Munson et al., 2008). Knowing these co-pathogens has consequences for deciding on appropriate treatment and for making a prognosis.

References:

A fully referenced version is available for download on the WMENews website.



Fig. 2: Post mortem examination showing necrotic pneumonia.

USING DROP NETS TO CAPTURE FREE RANGING WILDLIFE

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Live capture of free ranging wildlife has always been a difficult but necessary component in population management, animal tracking, disease investigation, marking, and many other conservation practices. These capture efforts are costly and labor intensive. Several techniques have been developed to capture numerous animals at one time, minimizing the expense involved in these operations.

Drop nets have been used for over 30 years to capture various species of birds and mammals. They have become a preferred method of live capture for biologists and wildlife managers around the world due to their ease of use, relatively low cost and the ability to capture large groups of animals at the same time.

A drop net is simply a large net (up to 60'x60') that is suspended in the air over an established bait site. When the target animals walk under the net to feed, the net is dropped and the animals are quickly restrained by hand and removed from the net for processing. Ungulates can be hobbled and blindfolded for easier handling or loaded into a stock trailer for transport.

Creating an established bait/feed site is the key to successful and efficient drop netting. Once the animals are habitually feeding at the site regularly, the drop net is set up and the animals are allowed to feed normally for several days until they are comfortable feeding under the net. The net height should be between one and two meters higher than the animal's head. At this time the net is prepared for capture by attaching a 12 volt power supply, turning on the receiver and removing the locking pins from the corner magnets. An appropriately sized handling crew is readied in a hiding location approximately 100 meters or less from the net.

Drop nets are highly portable and can be set up by one person. Different net and mesh sizes are available to capture different species. Nets of the same size are interchangeable so different sized species can be targeted with the same drop net system. Net height is adjustable. The number of animals that can be captured at any one time varies by species. The most popular size (40'x40') will capture up to 15 white-tailed deer. The 60'x60' size has been used to capture as many as 26 rocky mountain bighorn sheep. Be sure to have the appropriate sized handling crew before dropping the net.

Wildlife Capture Services (WCS) manufactures commercially available drop nets that operate on a completely silent electromagnetic system that is controlled by wireless remote. These nets have



Fig. 1: Wild Turkey caught in a WCS Drop Net.

been sold around the world for over 8 years to capture various bird species and ungulates weighing up to 600 pounds. Complete drop net systems can be shipped internationally and arrive in four parcels. These systems include everything needed to live capture animals except a 12 volt power supply. WCS recommends purchasing a high quality deep cycle marine battery. These batteries will power the drop net system for up to 20 hours between charges. An instructional video is included with each system and can be viewed on their website:

http://wildlifecapture.com/drop_net.html



Fig. 2: Drop Nets are used to capture a wide variety of animals such as this Bighorn sheep.



Fig. 3: After processing, animals are released without the side-effects of chemical immobilization. There are no lasting physiological effects or post capture myopathy.

NEWS AND REVIEWS

Melissa Nollet, Tom Bailey, Joerg Klinne, Christudas Silvanose, Declan O'Donovan, Sean McKeown, Rahul Verghese, Meredith Brown (2010) Feline Infectious Peritonitis in Cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*) in Dubai, UAE. American Association of Zoo Veterinarians Annual Conference, South Padre Island, Texas. Pp 255.

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 hand-injection of 2.5mg/kg ketamine combined with 0.07mg/kg medetomidine hydrochloride followed by 0.35mg/kg atipamezole as reversal. Diagnosis of FIP was also supported by hematology and biochemistry findings such as anemia (46%), hyperproteinemia (69%), hypoalbuminemia (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 positive. Sequential testing of surviving cheetahs using, rapid FIP snap tests, coronavirus immunocomplex, electrophoresis and results which will be presented will contribute to the FIP diagnostic puzzle.

**12TH CONSERVATION WORKSHOP ON THE FAUNA OF ARABIA, FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT. SHARJAH'S DESERT PARK
7 February – 9 February 2011.**

Following on from the success in 2010 of the First Conference on Biodiversity in the Arabian Peninsula, and building on the achievements of ten years of Sharjah Conservation Workshops, the aim is to initiate a five-year programme to move the annual workshop series forward in a more strategic direction. It is envisaged that each year two main parallel themes will be developed namely: formal IUCN Red Listing Assessments of selected regional groups of species, and Protected Areas development and management.

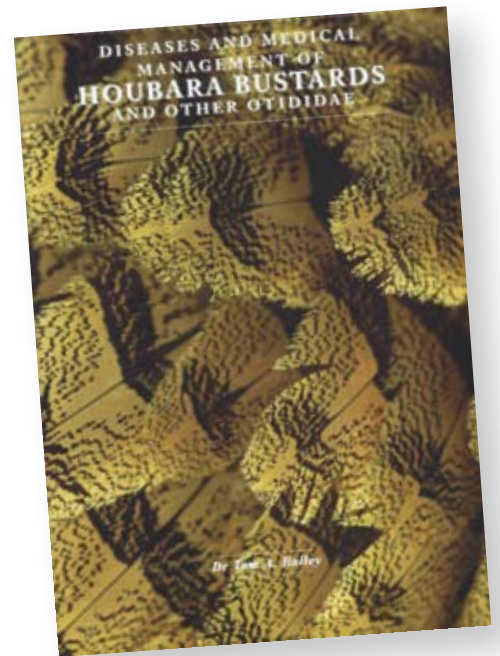
For 2011 and in cooperation with EAD – Abu Dhabi, we will continue in one group with the Protected Area theme by focusing on developing management plans and strategic conservation planning. A review of the progress made since the 2010 Biodiversity Conference on the first day will be followed with a practical example of conservation planning for one particular area.

The second group will expand the taxonomic theme by holding a formal Red List Assessment for the carnivores of Arabia, leading to the publication of the Status and Distribution of Carnivores on the Arabian Peninsula. This program will be guided by trainers from the IUCN Red List offices while we aim to have representatives of the relevant IUCN/SSC Specialist Groups at our meeting.

Formal invitations to our regional colleagues will be sent out shortly. For more information contact: Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife, P.O. Box 29922, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. E-mail: breeding@epaa-shj.gov.ae



Fig 1. Previous CAMP workshop



Diseases and Medical Management of Houbara Bustards and Other Otididae

ISBN 978-9948-03-562-6

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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.

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Some selected topics include:

- Diets fed to bustards and bustard chicks in captivity
- Clinical observations of changes in biochemistry values in bustards regarding: fatty liver disease, myopathy, effects of management, angular limb deformities
- Principles of cytology and cytodagnosis of I 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