

## 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.

### NEWSLETTER EDITORIAL TEAM

**Tom Bailey**, BSc, BVSc, MRCVS, Cert Zoo Med, MSc (Wild Animal Health), PhD, Dip ECAMS, Falcon and Wildlife Veterinarian, Dubai Falcon Hospital, PO Box 23919, Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

**Declan O'Donovan**, Dip.H.Ed., B.Sc., M.Sc. (Conservation Biology) CBiol, MIBiol, Director of Wildlife Services, Wadi Al Safa Wildlife Centre, PO Box 27875, Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

**Chris Lloyd**, BVSc, MRCVS, Cert Zoo Med, MSc (Wild Animal Health), Medical Director, Nad Al Shiba Vet Hospital, PO Box 116345, Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

**Theri Bailey**, BSc, MSc, Cert Ed FE, FRGS, Adjunct Instructor in Environmental Science, Zayed University Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

### 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.