



Wildlife Middle East



NEWS

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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



بَنْكُ رَأْسِ الْخَيْمَةِ الْوَطْنِيّ (ش.م.ع.)
RAK BANK
 THE NATIONAL BANK OF RAS AL-KHAIMAH (P.S.C.)

NEW REGIONAL NEWSLETTER FOCUSING ON ZOO AND WILDLIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

There are great pressures on the environment and wildlife throughout the Middle East. The rapid pace of economic development, the fragility of the natural ecosystems and low population densities are factors making many indigenous species vulnerable to extinction. The expansion of human populations and the increasing contact between domestic and wild animals has also increased disease transmission between wild and domestic species, including humans. Some governments have recognized the need to tackle these conservation issues and over the last 10-15 years a number of projects working with both captive and free-living wildlife have been established in the region. In addition to these publicly funded projects there are many privately funded zoological collections, large commercial breeding projects for falcons and houbara bustards and an ever-increasing number of 'exotic' animals kept as pets by the rapidly expanding population of the region.

The Middle East also has great importance as a migration route and wintering area for a large proportion of northern Palearctic birds. In this sensitive area, habitat degradation, oil spills, pesticide use, and infectious disease outbreaks have the potential to cause immense impacts on free-living and captive wildlife populations. In some cases wildlife species, e.g. waterfowl, may carry diseases such as the highly pathogenic avian influenza virus that can cause great economic impact to domestic poultry industries, cause disease in other birds such as falcons, as well as being highly dangerous to humans.

There are a number of factors that hinder the ability of the veterinarians, biologists and wildlife managers working in the region to improve the care and husbandry of the species that they look after. Some of these factors include:

- No easily available sources of practical and relevant information on the husbandry, capture and handling techniques, preventive medicine and nutrition for many species.
- Little information available that is relevant to the region.
- Poor communication and interaction between organizations and personnel such as wildlife managers and veterinary professionals working in the region.
- Insufficient regional training opportunities for veterinarians and wildlife managers who are often working in isolated situations in a specialist field.
- Poor awareness of wildlife management and health issues by regional government departments and agencies charged with the management of reserves and captive collections.
- No central contact point for advice, references, recruitment, equipment and food sourcing.

Wildlife Middle East News will be produced as a dual language (English-Arabic) quality newsletter and will be published quarterly. The newsletter will be distributed to biology departments and libraries of institutes of higher education, agricultural and environmental agencies, conservation groups, wildlife projects, zoos, zoologists, vets working with wild animals, vet hospitals involved in wildlife medicine, municipality vets, and pet shops. A PDF format newsletter will be e-mailed to a wider circulation of interested readers within and beyond the region.

We are interested to hear from individuals, institutions, zoos and conservation projects working with wildlife within the Middle East region or with wildlife species from the Middle East managed outside the region. If you have interesting findings, news or observations please submit or request further information from the editors

THE EDITORS

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.

NEWSLETTER EDITORIAL TEAM

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The newsletter aims to contribute to the development of a network between zoo and wildlife professionals working in the Middle East with the objective of being the premier source of regional information on zoo and wildlife management, husbandry and care. The newsletter will publish articles with an emphasis on practical, useful and relevant material. Proposed categories include:

- Conservation education & environmental awareness.
- Husbandry & nutrition.
- Design and management of zoological facilities.
- Capture and translocation techniques.
- Wildlife diseases and preventive medicine
- Products, book reviews & research.
- Summaries of recent literature on Arabian animals.
- Letters

THE SEVENTH ANNUAL CONSERVATION WORKSHOP FOR THE FAUNA OF ARABIA HOSTED BY THE ENVIRONMENT AND PROTECTED AREAS AUTHORITY, SHARJAH, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The seventh annual Conservation Workshop for the Fauna of Arabia hosted by the Environment and Protected Areas Authority, Sharjah was held at the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife between the 19th and the 22nd of February 2006.

Issues discussed included the Arabian tahr (*Hemitragus jayakari*) which is critically endangered and requires immediate conservation action. Recommendations and strategies for the short and long-term protection of the tahr were discussed for both in situ and ex situ stabilization of the tahr population.

In order to further stabilize the captive population of Arabian leopard, (*Panthera pardus nimr*), the Arabian Leopard Working Group held an annual meeting to implement future breeding and loan agreements. On behalf of the Environment and Protected Areas Authority, Dr. David Mallon reported on the progress of a survey for Nubian Ibex, (*Capra nubiana*), in Wadi Hadramout conducted in collaboration with the Environment Protection Authority of Yemen and the IUCN Caprini Specialist Group.

Following on from the freshwater invertebrate assessment in 2005, the Freshwater Fauna Group met this year in conjunction with facilitators from the Freshwater Invertebrate Group to prioritize measures for conservation of the freshwater habitat. Progress within the Freshwater Fauna Group over the past years has resulted in new status data for many species.

Two new topics were introduced this year; the Rodents, Hedgehogs and Shrews of Arabia and Small Raptors and Owls Breeding on the Arabian Peninsula. As in the past, the topics were discussed and evaluated following an adaptation of the process recommended by the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG). Where relevant, workshop data will be included in the current IUCN Red List and Red Data Books.

Further reports will be presented as the summaries become available.

<http://www.breedingcentresharjah.com/Home.htm>



Mr Abdul Aziz Al Midfa (left) Director General of the Environment and Protected Areas Authority, Sharjah and Dr Urs Breitenmoser IUCN Cat Specialist Group at the closing ceremony of the workshop.



(Left to right) Dr Fareed Krupp, Freshwater Fauna Group Facilitator. Mr Mike Jennings, Small Raptor and Owls on the Arabian Peninsula Group Facilitator.



(Left to right) Dr Lyad Nadah, Rodent, Hedgehog and Shrews Group Spokesperson. Dr Urs Breitenmoser, Arabian leopard Group Facilitator giving their final presentations.

DISTRIBUTION OF *GAZELLA GAZELLA* SUBSPECIES WITHIN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

D. O'Donovan

Wadi Al Safa Wildlife Centre, Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Currently recognised subspecies of *Gazella gazella* are:

<i>Gazella gazella gazella</i>	Eastern Mediterranean
<i>Gazella gazella acaciae</i>	Wadi Arava
<i>Gazella gazella cora</i>	everything else
<i>Gazella gazella muscatensis</i>	Batinah coast
<i>Gazella gazella farasani</i>	Farasan Islands

Based on mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) analysis conducted at the King Khalid Wildlife Research Centre (KKWRC), Saudi Arabia using DNA samples obtained from museum and live specimens from known locations, a tentative re assignment of *Gazella gazella* subspecies has been suggested as follows:

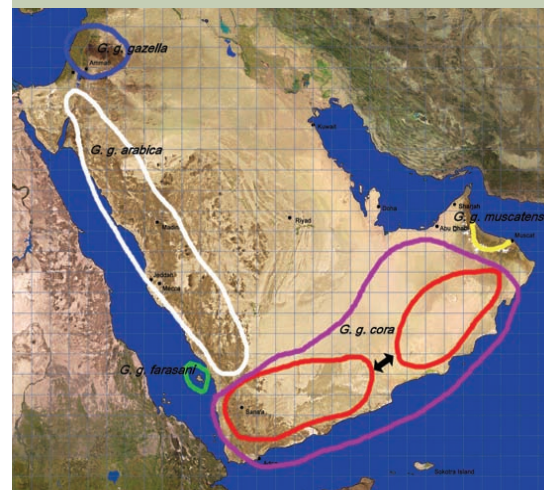
<i>Gazella gazella gazella</i>	This is a good subspecies (blue circle)
<i>Gazella gazella acaciae</i>	This is closely related to the gazelles from western Arabia therefore is not a distinct subspecies.
<i>Gazella gazella arabica</i>	These are all the gazelles from western Arabia and include what used to be described as <i>Gazella g. acaciae</i> (white circle).
<i>Gazella gazella farasani</i>	This subspecies needs a lot more investigation (green circle).
<i>Gazella gazella cora</i>	This is not supported as a widespread subspecies. It is probably good to describe gazelles in Oman and Yemen as well as southern parts of the UAE. On the distribution map there are two closely related groupings which have been described as <i>G. g. cora</i> (red circles). It is suggested that these are so closely related that they could be lumped in together to form the greater distribution shown in purple.
<i>Gazella gazella muscatensis</i>	This is a poorly documented subspecies. A lot more information is needed but it may be grouped in with <i>Gazella gazella cora</i> (yellow line).

A further question arises regarding the classification of *Gazella gazella darehshourii*. This species is only found on Faru Island in the Persian Gulf. Is it to be considered a sub species similar to *G. g. muscatensis*?

Thanks to Dr Kris Hundertmark for providing me with this Information and reviewing this summary. Thanks to Dr Tim Wachter, Dr Rob Hammond and all the staff at King Khalid Wildlife Research Centre, Saudi Arabia without whom none of this work would have been completed.



Male dumani gazelle (*Gazella gazelle cora*). Wadi Al Safa Wildlife Centre, Dubai



PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF A FIELD TRIAL USING THE H5N2 AVIAN INFLUENZA VACCINE IN ZOOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS IN DUBAI.

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Avian influenza virus is a member of the Orthomyxovirus family. Infections in birds can cause subclinical to mild respiratory diseases or generalised acute lethal disease (Gerlach 1994). The severity of clinical signs depends on the pathotype of the influenza virus and in poultry influenza A viruses are divided into two distinct groups on the basis of their ability to cause disease (Swayne and Halvorson 2003). The virulent serotypes cause highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), which can result in flock mortality of 100% (Capua and Alexander 2004). Other viruses cause a milder disease, consisting of mild respiratory signs, depression and egg production problems and are known as low pathogenicity avian influenza (LPAI). In this short communication we report preliminary results on the use of the inactivated H5N2 vaccine Nobilis Influenza H5, (Intervet) to vaccinate a variety of exotic birds (11 species belonging to 5 orders), kept in two different animal collections, in UAE. The objectives of this study were to:

1. Assess the efficacy of the avian influenza inactivated H5N2 vaccine (Nobilis Influenza H5, Intervet) in exotic bird species.
2. Monitor the immune response of vaccinated birds over time.
3. Assess whether or not antibody levels are significant and associated with particular species of bird.

The species vaccinated were: Carolina duck (*Fix sponsa*), fulvous tree duck (*Dendrocygna bicolor*), greater flamingo (*Phoenicopterus c.ruber*), stone curlew (*Burhinus oedicephalus*), thick knee (*Burhinus capensis*), crested fowl (*Guttera pucherani*), silver pheasant (*Lophura nycthemera*), turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), crowned crane (*Balearica pavonina*), houbara bustard (*Chlamydotis undulate macqueenii*) and white bellied bustard (*Eupodotis senegalensis*). The dose given was dependant on the weight of the bird:

Animals less than 400g received 0.25ml.
Animals between 400g and 2Kg received 0.5ml.
Animals over 2Kg received 1ml.

We gave the vaccine by subcutaneous injection. No adverse reactions were seen in the inoculation point. No mortality was reported related with the vaccination. The vaccination protocol consisted in two doses given four weeks apart. We followed the antibody response of these animals over time (before 1st vaccination, and at 4 and 8 weeks after 1st vaccination) and we believe that the titres obtained (checked individually using haemagglutination inhibition test for the antigen H5N2 at CVRL, Dubai) would probably be protective if we compare our results to the titres, which are known as protective in poultry.

In five species (Carolina duck, fulvous tree duck, crowned crane, thick knee and wild turkey) one dose of the vaccine produced 100% seroconversion of the animals (all animals produced antibodies, even though the titres were low in some cases). In an three additional species (crested guinea fowl, silver pheasant and white bellied bustard) all animals seroconverted after the second dose of vaccine, obtaining variable antibody titres.

We obtained confusing results in houbara bustards, and we decided to repeat the protocol using 20 new animals, but we have not finished this study yet. For greater flamingo s, the result was good (low titres were found after the first dose and high titres were found after the second dose), but one animal remained negative through all the vaccination process. This may have been the result of poor vaccination technique. Stone curlews were the only species that failed to show good antibody titres. These animals had other health problems in the aviculture unit, and we suspect that they probably had some immunosuppressive condition and consequently failed to respond to the vaccine.



Mr Sean McKeown and Ms Jo Kent vaccinating greater Flamingos during the startup phase of the study.

All species received two doses of the vaccine. The antibody titres obtained after the booster were greater in all cases. The findings of this study will be reported in more detail in the scientific literature.

Acknowledgements

We thank His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid AL Maktoum and Mr.Humaid Obaid al Muhari for supporting the research projects of Dubai Falcon Hospital. We also thank Dr Antonio Di Somma, and all the staff at Wadi al Safa Wildlife Centre, Sheikh Butti Maktoum's Wildlife Center, Dubai Falcon Hospital and Central Veterinary Research Laboratory.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO ARTIFICIAL LIGHTING FOR REPTILES

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Light plays a number of key roles in the normal physiological processes of reptiles. As a result the pet market is amply supplied with products claiming to provide the perfect lighting for captive reptiles. In reality, however, reptiles' requirements vary and no single product will be suitable for all species. Many manufacturers also make claims for "full spectrum lighting systems" with very little independent evidence to support these claims. A full spectrum bulb is defined by the following specifications; colour temperature index of around 5500 °K, a colour rendering index of 90 or above and a spectral power distribution for UV and visible light similar to that of natural light at noon. However, this definition has been abused and is all too frequently applied to lamps that have no UVA or UVB output but produce a clear light appearing similar to sunlight when viewed with the human eye. Light can be categorized by wavelength into the following groups;

Visible light (400-700nm)

The photoperiod of visible light helps to determine reproductive activity and other endocrinological processes via retinal and extra retinal light detection. Mimicking the reptiles' natural day length would appear to be beneficial. A good quality "full spectrum" visible light also enhances the appearance of animals on display. Most fluorescent tubes emit no UVA or UVB light.



Infrared light (>700nm)

Infrared light is a critically important source of heat for reptiles allowing normal behavioural and physiological processes to occur. Infrared radiation can be provided with an incandescent lamp or mercury vapour lamp (see later). Alternatively, a non-light emitting heat source can be used which can be controlled thermostatically. Incandescent / reflector lights, halogen lights and spotlights produce visible and infrared light.

Ultraviolet light

UVA (315nm-380nm). There is evidence to show that reptile eyes are UVA sensitive and that their appearance is affected when viewed in this spectrum. The femoral pores of iguanas and the dewlaps of anolis lizards fluoresce strongly under UVA light which may play a role in courtship. Some breeders may temporarily use a bulb with high UVA emissions, such as a black light during the breeding season.

UVB (280nm-315nm).

This wavelength plays a role in the conversion of provitamin D to previtamin D3 in the skin of the reptile. Vitamin D3 is in turn used in the absorption of calcium from the digestive tract. The rate of this conversion is dependant on the amount (the irradiance) and the wavelength of UVB (maximum conversion occurs at 295nm) to which the animal is exposed. Thus lamps with the highest irradiance are not always the most beneficial. Measurement of irradiance can also be very variable and this can cause complications when assessing bulbs. Recent work to assess bulbs has used vials containing a known quantity of provitamin D which is then exposed to UVB light sources. The resulting amount of provitamin D is then measured. The most effective fluorescent tube light tested was the Reptisun 5.0 (Zoomed Labs)

Mercury vapour lamps claim to emit substantially higher levels of UVB than fluorescent UVB bulbs. These bulbs also produce visible, UVA and infrared light so encourage basking thus increasing the reptiles' exposure to UVB wavelengths. There are anecdotal reports that these lamps are able to reverse metabolic bone diseases in reptiles and also maintain adequate serum levels of vitamin D3. An example of such a light is the "Powersun" (Zoomed). Vitamin D3 obtained via exposure to UVB is safer than that obtained by dietary supplementation which can easily lead to hyper or hypovitaminosis D3. Sun lamps (as used in tanning salons) produce very high levels of UVB and are unsuitable for herpetology as extended exposure may cause burns.

How do UVB bulbs compare to natural sunlight ?

The UVB irradiance from the sun at midday at 35°Latitude North, during the winter would be around 45µWatts/cm². The output from one of the better UVB reptile bulbs available (Reptisun 5.0 – Zoomed) has been independently measured at 4µW/cm². Manufacturers claim the mercury vapor bulbs (Powersun – Zoomed) produce around 50µWatts/cm² although this has not been validated. It is thus clear that no artificial light can substitute for natural light and where possible this should be provided either by taking the animal outdoors for a few hours a week or by constructing an outdoor enclosure. Thus the choice of lamp for a captive reptile is affected by many factors including the enclosure design, species and temperature required in the enclosure. However, in the absence of accurate data for many species the following guidelines may be useful:

- Infrared heat is provided by incandescent bulbs, reflector lamps or mercury vapour lamps.
- Mercury vapour lamps produce a basking spot which increases UVB exposure.
- Fluorescent UVB lights placed more than 30cm from the animal will reduce UVB exposure.
- Photoperiods should mimic the reptiles' natural conditions.
- UVB light will not penetrate glass barriers.
- UVB lights have a limited lifespan.
- UVB lights should not be used as a substitute for calcium supplementation.
- A full spectrum light is not the same as a UVB light.

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Gehrmann, W.H., Jamieson, D., Ferguson, G.W., Horner, J.D., Chen, T.C. and Holick, M.F. (2004) A comparison of vitamin D synthesizing ability of different light sources to irradiances measured with a solarmeter model 6.2 UVB meter. *Herp Review* 35(4): 361-364.



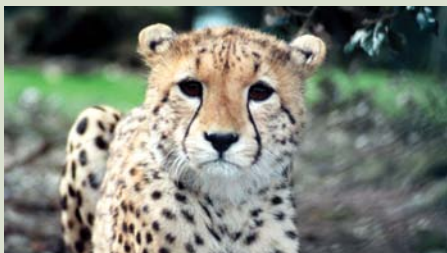
WHAT'S NEW IN THE LITERATURE

Behavioural training and hydraulic chute restraint enables handling of eland antelope (*Taurotragus oryx*) without general anesthesia. Wirtu, G., Cole, A., Pope, C.E., Short, C.R., Godke, R.A., Dresser, B.L. *Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine*. 2005. 36; 1: 1-11.



Difficulties and risks associated with restraining large nondomestic ungulates are limiting factors toward developing and applying assisted reproductive technologies, such as artificial insemination and embryo transfer. In this study on 10 female eland (*Taurotragus oryx*), we evaluated the use of behavioral training and handling in a hydraulic chute to perform transvaginal ultrasound-guided oocyte retrieval and other clinical procedures. Nine females were conditioned to associate specific sound cues with food treats. The interval from the audio cue until acceptance of handheld treats varied among females (1.8-58.3 min). Animals also differed in their response to training for voluntary entry into the chute. Handling eland for oocyte retrieval in the hydraulic chute required xylazine sedation. During sedation and handling, eland undergoing oocyte retrieval procedures had higher blood glucose levels (14.4 ± 3.1) than females handled similarly but without oocyte retrieval (9.3 ± 2.7 mmol/L). Plasma osmotic pressure, hematocrit, and creatine phosphokinase activity were similar between these two groups. Females that were more difficult to train had higher blood glucose levels than the more cooperative animals. Cooperative females had fewer vertical stripes on their sides. More than 40 procedures were conducted without complications or mortality. The combination of behavioral conditioning-training and restraint of sedated eland in a hydraulic chute was a reliable and repeatable method for performing minimally invasive assisted reproductive techniques.

Efficacy and long-term outcome of gastritis therapy in cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*). Citino, S.B., Munson, L. *Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine*. 2005. 36; 3: 401-416.



A prospective clinical trial evaluating efficacy and long-term outcome of treatments for lymphoplasmacytic gastritis in cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*) was conducted. The study evaluated efficacy of 11 different antibiotic and antiinflammatory treatment protocols in 32 cheetahs (19 male, 13 female) for reducing gastric inflammation and *Helicobacter* colonization and monitored the course of disease through histologic grading of gastric biopsies. All cheetahs were biopsied up to 1 wk before treatment and then rebiopsied within 1 mo after treatment. Most animals were reassigned to a second treatment regimen within 6 mo. Each animal received from one to three treatments during the study period. After the trial, gastric biopsies were obtained from each cheetah annually until death or transfer from the facility to assess disease progression. The trial and follow-up period spanned 10 yr. At onset of the trial, all 32 cheetahs had some degree of gastritis, and 26 cheetahs (81%) were colonized with *Helicobacter*. Inflammatory lesions worsened regardless of treatment or the presence of *Helicobacter*. No treatment had a significant effect on inflammatory changes except the lansoprazole/clarithromycin/amoxicillin treatment group, which produced a short-term decrease in inflammation when compared to controls. Prednisone had no effect on gastric inflammation. Overall, 65% of colonized cheetahs were initially cleared of histologic evidence of *Helicobacter* by treatment, with short-term eradication occurring in 100% of the animals treated with omeprazole / clarithromycin / amoxicillin or tetracycline / metronidazole / Pepto-Bismol for 28 days. Long-term follow-up of treated animals in this study clearly demonstrated that these treatments had little effect on life-long progression of gastritis or on *Helicobacter* burden in individual cheetahs, although some treatments provided short-term reduction in gastritis and *Helicobacter*. These results provide evidence that *Helicobacter* alone is not the cause of gastritis in cheetahs and do not support the use of antibacterial treatments in cheetahs unless significant clinical signs (e.g., frequent vomiting/regurgitation, weight loss) are apparent.

Serologic surveillance for selected viral agents in captive and free-ranging populations of Arabian oryx (*Oryx leucoryx*) from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Frölich, K., Hamblin, C., Jung, S., Ostrowski, S., Mwanzia, J., Streich, W.J., Anderson, J., Armstrong, R.M., Saud Anajariyah. *Journal of Wildlife Diseases*. 2005. 41; 1: 67-79.

A total of 294 sera collected between 1999 and 2001 from eight captive and one free-ranging herds of Arabian oryx (*Oryx leucoryx*) distributed in Saudi Arabia (SA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were assayed for antibodies against 13 selected viral agents. Arabian oryx have been exposed to bluetongue virus (BTV), epizootic haemorrhagic disease virus (EHDV), rinderpest virus (RPV), bovine respiratory syncytial virus (BRSV), bovine adenovirus 3 (BAV-3), cervid herpesvirus-1, foot-and-mouth disease virus, equine herpesvirus 9, and bovine viral diarrhoea virus. The high seroprevalence to BTV and EHDV in the UAE and SA indicates that Arabian oryx are likely to be susceptible to infection by these viruses and therefore could act as a source of virus to vectors during the infective stage of infection. Moreover, antibodies were detected against RPV and BRSV in sera from SA and against BAV-3 in sera from the UAE. No antibodies were found against bovine herpesvirus-1, caprine herpesvirus-1, enzootic bovine leukosis virus, and peste des petits ruminants virus. On the basis of these results, caution should be applied when considering translocation of Arabian oryx, and only those proven to be free of infectious agents that might present a risk to other species should be moved.

Serum gamma-glutamyltransferase as a prognostic indicator of neonatal viability in nondomestic ruminants. Howard, L.L., Turner, L.M., Stalis, I., Morris, P.J. *Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine*. 2005. 3; 2: 239-244.



Rapid assessment of immune status in neonatal ruminants of endangered species facilitates early intervention in cases of inadequate passive transfer of maternal immunoglobulins. Serum gamma-glutamyltransferase (GGT) was used to evaluate suspected passive transfer status in 25 North Indian muntjac (*Muntiacus muntjak vaginalis*), 45 Cretan goats (*Capra algagrus cretica*), 20 white-lipped deer (*Cervus albirostris*), 25 Mhorr gazelles (*Gazella dama mhorr*), and 31 Soemmerring's gazelles (*Gazella soemmerringi soemmerringi*). Serum GGT, measured within 48 hr of birth, was compared with clinical condition at 5 days of age. Neonatal Soemmerring's and Mhorr gazelles with $GGT > 600$ U/L were likely to survive without medical intervention, whereas $GGT < 400$ U/L was a good indicator that the gazelle neonate would need medical intervention. Neonatal muntjac with $GGT > 200$ U/L were also likely to survive without medical intervention. Because there is no gold standard for evaluating passive transfer status in neonatal nondomestic ruminants, it is recommended to evaluate the results of more than one diagnostic test, as well as clinical condition, in considering health status and disposition of neonatal ruminants of endangered species.

NEWS AND EVENTS

BIRDLIFE LEADS IRAQ PROJECT

Iraq's Mesopotamian marshes – thought to be the biblical Garden of Eden, and the site of brutal habitat destruction during the Saddam Hussein era – are the focus of a pioneering BirdLife International project to monitor and improve the status of wildlife in the Middle East.

Funded by the Canadian government, BirdLife's Middle East Conservation Advisor Richard Porter has been travelling to the region to train local biologists in skills to survey, monitor and improve Iraq's marshes for the wildlife that live there. He will be leading a team from BirdLife International's regional headquarters in Jordan to train biologists from Nature Iraq, a new non-governmental organisation established in the region to help protect the country's environment. Eighteen globally threatened species of bird occur in the marshes between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, alongside three types of bird that are found almost nowhere else in the world. The region is also home to Iraq's Marsh Arabs.

Drained of water during the Saddam Hussein era, 90% of the marshes became almost devoid of wildlife. Since the collapse of the regime, a rehabilitation programme has begun. Water has started to return to the internationally important wetland, restoring a vital habitat that is critical for the survival of several bird species in the region.

[19-04-2006]



<http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2006/04/iraq.html>

ENDANGERED MARINE TURTLE 'BUTCHERED' BY TOURISTS

Zarina Khan News Reporter (Emirates Today)

An endangered marine turtle was captured and butchered by tourists for its shell in a sad incident that experts say highlights the risks facing the UAE's fledgling ecotourism sector. Emirates Diving Association (EDA) spokesperson Ibrahim Al Zu'bi said the incident was an example of just how badly ecotourism can go wrong. "Some Russian tourists had undertaken an eco-tour of sorts offered by a local hotel. While they were at sea, they captured a turtle and decided they wanted its shell as a souvenir.

"An EDA member saw what was happening and tried to stop them, but did not get any support from the tour operator, and the rare turtle was butchered," the official from the UAE's largest dive body recalled. The UAE's budding ecotourism sector currently offers coral reef diving, bird watching, hiking and trailing of rare marine and desert animals.

While extensive legislature has been put in place to safeguard the UAE's natural wealth – with the killing of endangered animals a punishable offence – Al Zu'bi and others say a lack of enforcement of the laws has made them seem voluntary. "There are 31 dive centres in the EDA and we insist on teaching them all responsible tourism, but not everyone does. We know the laws but we cannot enforce them on others," he said. The marine environment, along with the desert landscape, is also highly susceptible to the risk of being neglected.

[29-05-2006]



http://213.132.44.184/emiratestoday/artMailDisp.aspx?article=29_05_2006_003_007&typ=0&pub=1

ENVIRONMENT 2007 - INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

28 Jan, 2007 to 31 Jan, 2007

Environment 2007 – the International Conference on Integrated Sustainable Energy Resources in Arid Regions, will be held under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President of United Arab Emirates. It is jointly organized by the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi (EAD) and Abu Dhabi National Exhibitions Company (ADNEC), from 28th – 31st January 2007, at the Abu Dhabi International Exhibition Centre, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Website: <http://www.ead.ae/en/?T=1&ID=187>

NEWS AND EVENTS

TURKEY LAUNCHES FUND TO HALT BIODIVERSITY DECLINE

Doga Dernegi (BirdLife in Turkey) has formed a partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Turkish Ministry of Environment and Forestry to establish a national fund to halt biodiversity decline. The Turkish Zero Extinction Fund will carry out priority conservation actions in the 305 Key Biodiversity Areas identified by Doga Dernegi. The official launch will take place on 4 June on CNN Turk, one of the main media sponsors of the campaign. CNN Turk will promote the fund and its ten highest priority projects through a series of television broadcasts. A number of fundraising initiatives will also be carried out including an internet-based auction of 18 Turkish artists' paintings, whose profits will feed the fund.

The projects that will benefit include: threatened orchid species conservation in Southern Turkey; the rediscovery of the Anatolian leopard; the conservation of the Sultansazligiz wetlands; and the preservation of the country's last remaining Demoiselle Cranes and globally threatened Great Bustards.

"We are very pleased to launch the Turkish Zero Extinction Fund, one of the first national initiatives dedicated to halt biodiversity decline. Turkey, one of most biodiversity-rich countries in the world, has a global responsibility for halting species extinctions - a united goal of the contracting parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the European Union. We hope that this partnership will trigger larger support from the private sector for biodiversity conservation," said Güven Eken, Doga Dernegi's Director General.

[02-06-2006]



Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) female and chick, in Russia. (Photo credit Nature Conservation Bureau)
<http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2006/06/turkey.html>

EVENTS

DATE

Al Isra'a Wal Miraaj

21st August 2006

World Ozone Day

16 September 2006

Clean Up The World Week Begins

19 September 2006

World Habitat Day

2 October 2006

UN International Day For Natural Disasters Reduction

11 October 2006

Arab Environment Day

14 October 2006

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