

EDITORIAL

In this issue we are pleased to include a local perspective on wildlife with an interview with HE Sh Butti Bin Maktoum Bin Juma Al Maktoum, owner of the Sh Butti Maktoum Wildlife Centre. HE Sh Butti Al Maktoum is known for his passionate interest in the wildlife of the Arabian Peninsula and beyond. Within the Middle East there are many well managed private wildlife collections, indeed more wildlife is probably managed by private individuals than by zoological institutions. Some, such as the Sh Butti Maktoum Wildlife Centre are members of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria and actively participate in international breeding programmes and animal exchanges, as well as contributing to local conservation efforts, such as the release of cheetahs on the island of Sir Banyas. These efforts are to be applauded. Other private collections are unfortunately more secretive, obtaining animals by unscrupulous means, endangering wildlife species and tarnishing the reputation of the region.

One challenge facing conservationists in the region is how to improve the contribution that these private collections make to the wider wildlife community. Indeed this was a feature in Vol 5 Issue 1 of WME News when Jonas Livet described his thesis which looked at different Zoological institutions in the Middle East and the potential for a regional zoo association. The role of regional zoo associations was also called for by Mark Craig in Vol 1 Issue 2. Such a Zoo Association could lead to a well-regulated licensing system for zoos which is sorely needed in Gulf countries, as is the will to enforce the licensing regulations. Countries that have instituted and enforced such legislation have improved the standard of care of their animals and encouraged zoos to contribute to both the education of the public and the conservation of the species they manage. An example of this type of legislation is available online (see: Zoo Licensing Act: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/zoos/licensing-act.htm>). In the next WME News we will present the perspective of Mr Majid al Qassimi on the regional wildlife trade and what can be done to prevent it. Mr Majid al Qassimi is a young Emirati veterinarian who we think will make a great contribution to his country and who has already started publishing his opinions on the environment in The National newspaper (see: <http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/news-comment/having-relied-on-nature-for-years-it-no-w-counts-on-us>).

Green Prophet is one of the leading sources of environment news on the Middle East region and Taflin Laylin explains how she became one of 15 writers based around the world who passionately cover environmental stories that impact policy, clean tech investments, and environmental education and advocacy in the Middle East. We at WME News are impressed by the range of stories that arise from Green Prophet and recommend our readers to check out their website and subscribe by visiting: <http://www.greenprophet.com/>.

Social media sites have been credited with contributing to the wave of political change that is taking place in the region. News sites like Green Prophet and others such as Goumbook, play an important role in raising awareness to the many environmental challenges facing the Middle East. Just as despots trying to hide behind their tanks have been out-manoeuvred by the peaceable armies of Twitter and Facebook followers, in the future the smugglers of wildlife will similarly find it harder to hide behind their garden walls in anonymity. As an example, a recent Green Prophet issue exposed the wildlife trade in the Middle East in a report called Animal Smuggling in Mideast: GP Interview With Wildlife Trafficking Activist (<http://www.greenprophet.com/2011/01/wildlife-trafficking-karl-ammann/>).

Malini Pittet provides us with an interesting account of the camera trapping survey she recently conducted with the Foundation for the Protection of the Arabian Leopard in Yemen (FPALY). Although Malini was unable to photograph a leopard during her visit she left trained staff and in January 2011 Murad Mohamed and Waleed Al-Ra'il made history by becoming the first people ever to photograph a wild Arabian leopard in Yemen. Our congratulations to the FPALY. This project was funded by the Mohammed

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.

bin Zayed Conservation Fund. It is excellent news that there is a well endowed fund in the region to assist wildlife projects and in our news section we provide further information on it.

Another article is by two WME News editors on the contribution that externship programmes can make to falcon medicine and wildlife health in the region. Over an 8 year period the program at Dubai Falcon Hospital and Wadi Al Safa Wildlife Centre hosted 34 externs and enabled the publication of 2 academic theses, 16 peer reviewed papers, 22 conference papers with a further 14 scientific papers being finalised. Well-organised extern programmes have the potential to help train tomorrows conservationists and veterinarians as well as helping to improve our understanding of wildlife health and we would encourage other veterinary organisations working in a zoological setting to follow suit.

Brendan Kavanagh outlines the aims and objectives, results and future direction of a bird ringing project in Bahrain. Brendan recommends that the establishment of a single, centralized ringing scheme would be a major step forward for ornithological research in the region into the future. Last but not least Asghar Mobaraki and Adel Mola review the status of a very peculiar reptile in Iran – the Rafesh or Euphrates Soft Shell Turtle.

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