

INTERVIEW WITH HIS EXCELLENCY SHEIKH BUTTI BIN MAKTOUM BIN JUMA AL MAKTOUM

Interviewed by Tom Bailey and Declan O'Donovan from WME News (Contd.)

You were instrumental in the breeding success of the cheetahs in Sir Bani Yas, Abu Dhabi – do you think there is scope for other species to be released into protected areas in the UAE?

Yes there is tremendous scope for releasing other species not only here in the UAE. I have been thinking for some time about making some of the cheetahs bred in my centre available for release back into Africa.

Many of the flamingos I breed at my centre are free-flying and they fly out of my centre and join the greater flamingos on the creek here in Dubai. Of course there is the possibility of releasing mountain gazelle and sand foxes that we have bred into the desert as well.

What we need though is proper planning of releases and the availability of suitable areas to release the animals into. We need large areas and I would love one day to see fewer fences in the desert.

There are many private collections in the Middle East, including your own. How do you think these private zoological collections can contribute to the biodiversity of the region?

There needs to be more coordination between the government and private collections in the region. There is simply not enough connectedness at the moment.

Your centre, the Sh Butti al Maktoum Wildlife Centre was the first collection from the Middle East to become a member of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA). Why was this important and what value do you think this gives your collection?

It is very important for us to be able to exchange animals between other wildlife collections in Europe and EAZA recognised collections here in the Middle East. I am very happy to be part of a community

that allows me to manage and move my animals thereby limiting the potential for inbreeding.

You are a falconer. How has your passion for falconry influenced your interest in preserving wildlife?

I am a falconer, but my desire is to protect the wild populations of falcons. I have also established a falcon breeding centre to produce captive bred falcons. This is helping to reduce the need for wild falcons to be used because the local falconers are very happy with the hunting quality of the birds I produce.

You are a very 'hands-on' person who is intimately involved with the management of your collection. Where do your driving force and motivation come from?

When I started to breed racing pigeons I bought a specialist from Europe to manage the birds. I realised by letting someone else do the work that I was not involved and I did not always know what was happening.

After this I have always got involved directly with managing my animals directly and I love this contact I have with the animals in my collection.

Finally, any closing remarks?

I hope it is not too late for us to do something for the Arabian environment.

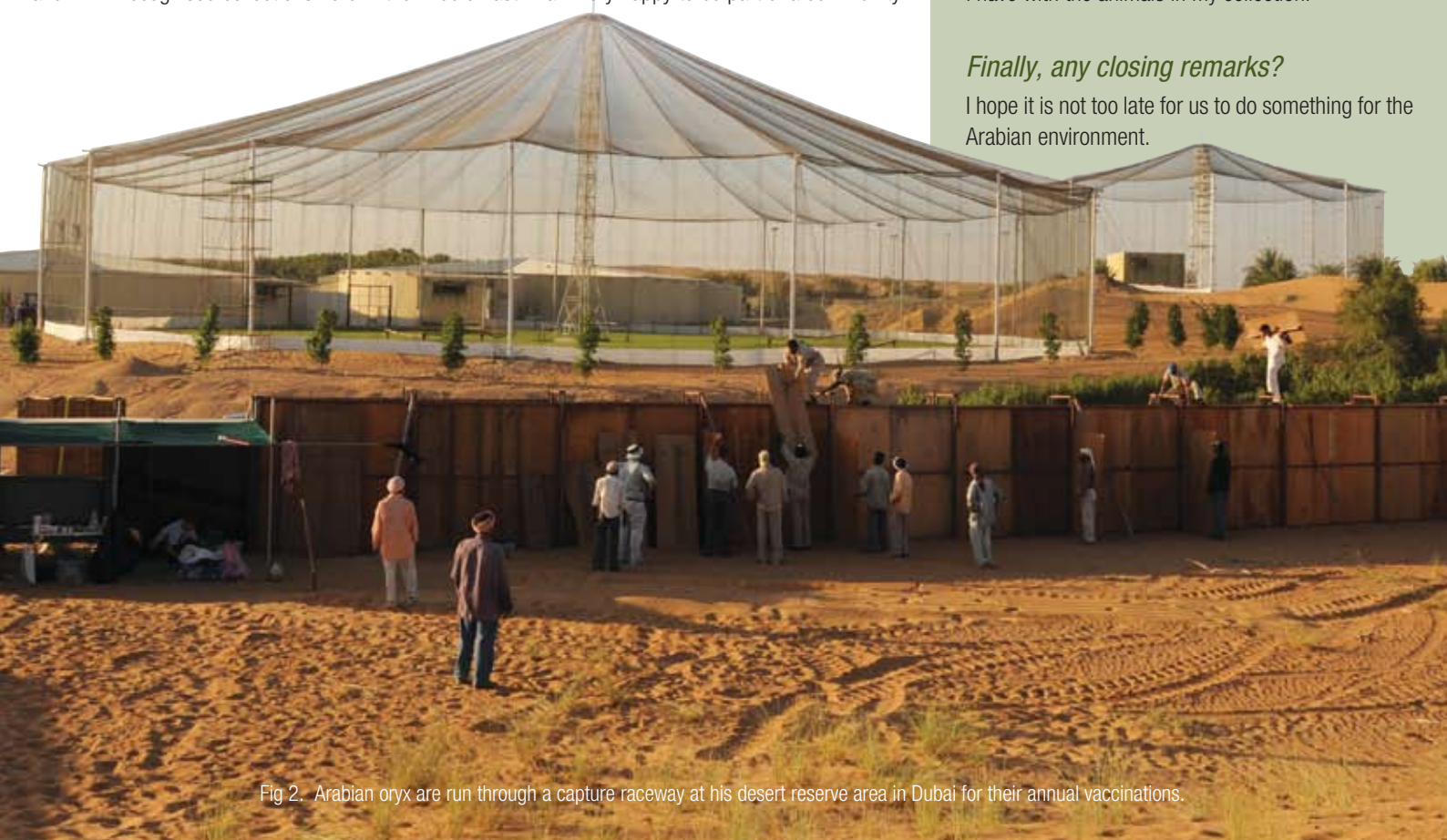


Fig 2. Arabian oryx are run through a capture raceway at his desert reserve area in Dubai for their annual vaccinations.