

# WILD ARABIA WITH NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC AL ARABIYA: ART AS A TOOL FOR CONSERVATION



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Fig 1. Steve Bloom's Spirit of the Wild exhibition in Copenhagen

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Keywords: Awareness, Arabian Wildlife, Conservation, Outdoor Touring Exhibition

## CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

For years, the international and local communities have associated the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries with empty deserts and endless construction sites. Wild Arabia, with National Geographic Al Arabiya, is hoping to reveal a vibrant new face of the region. "It is a multi-platform project that includes free, large-scale international touring exhibitions, an interactive website, books, educational materials and events. This 'tour de force' will help change people's perceptions and share a positive and powerful message about the GCC countries with the world" says Managing Director Caterina Lo Mascolo. Behind this momentous project is Univers K – an art, design, life, performance company, creating bespoke projects for the GCC. They have partnered with National Geographic Al Arabiya to showcase 100 stunning images of Arabian wildlife from National Geographic Society.

## TAKING ART TO THE STREET

Univers K is renowned for having amassed a 'Kollective' of world-class artists from all creative domains. Their exhibition designer, architect Franck Minthe, is no exception. This concept of outdoor exhibitions has existed for years in Europe and North America. Franck Minthe is internationally renowned for having designed outdoor exhibitions in some of the world's most beautiful squares such as photographer Yann Arthus Bertrand's famous 'Earth From Above' and Steve Bloom's 'Spirit of the Wild' exhibitions. Currently, Minthe is designing the outdoor exhibitions for 'Wild Wonders of Europe'. That said, no one has ever thought of showcasing Arabian wildlife on such a large scale, simply because most people are not aware of the fact that the Gulf is host to an incredible biodiversity. Furthermore, up until now there hasn't been much outdoor human traffic to properly experience an outdoor exhibition, but over time we have seen the cities develop their outdoor landscapes and we are thrilled to launch the World Première exhibition on the Abu Dhabi Corniche, hosted by the Abu Dhabi Municipality, where it will be seen by thousands of people, explains Lo Mascolo.

The organisers intend for the exhibition to be eco-friendly. His Highness Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Ali al Nuaimi, also known as 'the Green Sheikh', is a project Ambassador and spokesperson; and the pavilion information centre will be designed with 'green' in mind exclusively using 'Lussi Design' furniture made of recycled cardboard and FSC certified wood.

## LEADERS IN CREATING A CULTURE OF CONSERVATION

"When I tell people about the outstanding initiatives in the United Arab Emirates alone, they are surprised and even sceptic. What most people who have never come to this region don't realise is that environmental and wildlife conservation was one of the biggest concerns of the UAE's founding father, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan. Today, people are working together to create many initiatives to keep that dream alive" explains Caterina Lo Mascolo, who was recently invited to speak about conservation efforts at the TEDx Al Ain conference in the United Arab Emirates. Among the prestigious partners of Wild Arabia with National Geographic Al Arabiya, are the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund which was created with the largest endowment in the world for the preservation of international wildlife and ARKive ([www.arkive.org](http://www.arkive.org)) – an online image bank that can be used freely for educational purposes and is funded by the Abu Dhabi Environment Agency. "The international community is quick to judge this region, focusing on the construction of the cities,

however, people here are very proud of their heritage, and that includes a desire to protect and explore its natural wildlife" explains Lo Mascolo. Exhibition designer Franck Minthe adds, "With my exhibition designs, along with the photographers, we transform the street, creating a visual confrontation with citywalkers and the images before them. If people are familiar with their wildlife, they will be moved to help conserve it. Awareness is the first step to finding solutions."

Wild Arabia, with National Geographic Al Arabiya, will create a new consciousness on an international level about the abundance of the remarkably unique species in the GCC. The world première exhibition will launch in Abu Dhabi in the central part of the Corniche in December 2011 before heading to Dubai and then regionally and internationally over the next few years. Currently, extensive research is underway with the help of regional conservation groups to select the 100 Ambassador Arabian species that will be showcased. "It is an enormous undertaking and responsibility to determine what Arabian species will travel the world. We want to show everyone that the Gulf has much more to offer than camels, falcons and scorpions" explains Lo Mascolo. Each species will be scaled according to the IUCN Red List, the world's most comprehensive inventory of the global conservation status of plant and animal species. It will showcase endemic, endangered and also more common species.

"This region has many riches, but the wildlife is the hidden treasure we intend to reveal. Never before have so many conservation groups come together under one umbrella to promote this region's natural heritage and people are ecstatic to have the opportunity to bring the world face to face with 'Wild Arabia'.

To inquire about becoming a partner of Wild Arabia with National Geographic Al Arabiya, contact Managing Director Caterina Lo Mascolo at [caterina@universka.com](mailto:caterina@universka.com).

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### Wild Arabia with National Geographic Al Arabiya

<b>WHAT</b>	100 images of Arabian wildlife from National Geographic Al Arabiya showcased in outdoor exhibitions, an interactive website, books, and events.
<b>WHERE</b>	Launching in the central part of the Abu Dhabi Corniche.
<b>WHEN</b>	World Première from December 2011 to January 2012 followed by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Europe and North America
<b>WHO</b>	Conceived and Produced by Univers K, an Art Design Life Performance Company.
<b>SPOTLIGHT</b>	The exhibitions are designed by Univers K's Franck Minthe - Architect for Yann Arthus Bertrand's 'Earth From Above', Steve Bloom's Spirit of the Wild, and 'Wild Wonders of Europe' exhibitions.
<b>BONUS</b>	The exhibitions will be free and open 24/7.

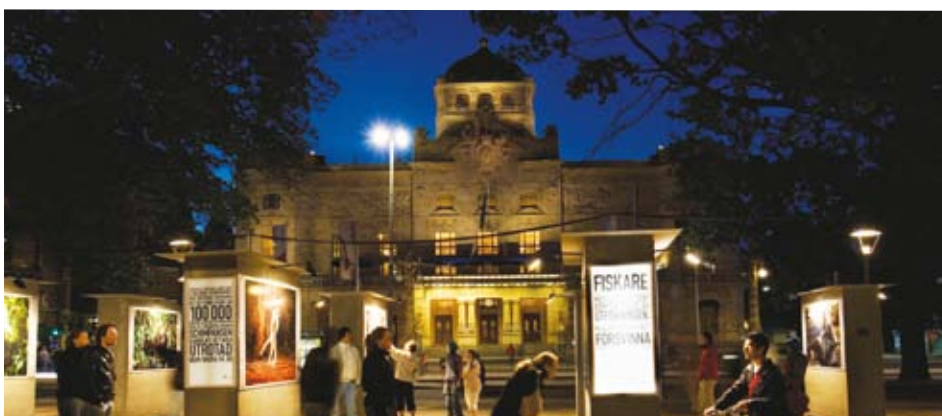


Fig 2. Spirit of the Wild exhibition in Stockholm

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