

EDITORIAL

After a delay we have returned with another interesting issue of WME News and this issue has a diverse selection of articles from contributors throughout the Middle East. While the majority of articles are from the United Arab Emirates where WME news has its “base” we also have contributions from Iran, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Iraq so this is truly an issue that represents the region. We encourage all readers to consider how they can contribute to the knowledge of wildlife in the Middle East and submit articles.

A number of articles are based on the observation and recording of species, not necessarily rare in global terms but unusual in certain environments. The significance of these observations may not be immediately apparent but as Nancy Papathanasopoulou explains in her observation of black tipped sharks in Kuwait, these records have important implications for the health of the environment. Similarly the recording of common species is also essential as a baseline of population status. To quote Christophe Toureq in his article on Pallid Swifts in Dubai, *“Common species are usually excluded from the interest of naturalists worldwide. Recent studies have shown that common forest, farmland and even urban bird species, like the so familiar House Sparrow (Passer domesticus), have undergone drastic population declines in Europe during the past decade. However, the lack of data prior to the observed decline makes scientific investigations on the reasons of this decline difficult.”*

The requirement for baseline data is again highlighted by Omar Al Sheikhly when he describes the threats facing the larger mammals of Iraq. Not having correct data makes decision making that much more difficult to implement and substantiate. While most people in the field recognise there is a problem, decision makers, who often feel they have far more pressing issues to deal with will not act without fact and figures.

It should be remembered that in a part of the world often not associated with rich biodiversity there is a great abundance of wildlife if one cares to look for it. A survey of Wadi Wurayah in the UAE in 2011 revealed 55 new species for the UAE, 25 possibly new to science. Hopefully this success will encourage more countries to survey and record their own natural heritage. The progress of conservation efforts can only be gauged once a baseline has been established.

Education features heavily in this issue and excellent work in public education and wildlife awareness is being done in Lebanon. The Animal Encounter in Lebanon has successfully utilized its role as a wildlife rehabilitation unit to use the animals that are unable to be fully rehabilitated to educate a public possibly not exposed to many of its indigenous species. The figures are truly impressive with an annual visitor count of 35,000 and good follow up work to assess the impact of their education program.

Closer to home, Joerg Kinne reminds us of the dangerous health risks associated with the smuggling of illegally imported wildlife while An Pas presents the results of a study investigating safe anaesthetic protocols for gazelle.

Vicki Baldrey and colleagues working on Hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricate*) in Dubai report a mortality event at a rehabilitation centre. This occurred when snails living in the enclosures multiplied and were eaten by the turtles in excessive quantities leading to gut impactions. Such events are reminders of how important attention to health and management are in the rehabilitation of endangered species.

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.

There is good news for the wolves in Arabia, where Al Haza and Wronski have found evidence of wolves in the Ibex Reserve in central Saudi Arabia. Camera trap photos show a healthy adult animal. It is suggested that there could be two packs in the reserve. In the central parts of Saudi Arabia, wolves are the only remaining large predator and it is important to the region that they are protected. The Ibex Reserve offers a remnant of the original intact habitat where the wolf can hunt and survive.

Another endangered species is Wildlife Middle East News. It is unfortunate that an ever increasing workload on all of the editors has meant that we are now combining issues. We will sit together and discuss how we can continue to produce this newsletter. We feel that we might have to reduce the number of issues produced each year in order to keep going.

Whatever happens, to continue we require articles from all those working in the field within the Middle East, and ask anyone who would like to contribute to please forward articles to editors@wmeneeds.com.

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