

EDITORIAL

"The man needs to deceive himself: firstly, it saves a species that has lost its ability to survive, on the other hand, it accelerates the destruction of the environment that allowed him to survive." (Soul Mountain, 2000) This timeless wisdom from Gao Xingjian makes us question our efforts to save the planet.

Welcome to Volume 6 Issue 4 of Wildlife Middle East News. Perhaps a little belatedly, we wish health and happiness to all our readers throughout the World. This issue sees a variety of contributions on topics detailing works being completed from Iraq, Oman and the UAE.

What is our position on environmental protection? As scientists, are we listened to? Where does our power lie? Can we wake up the moribund government environmental agencies that do not know where their environmental duty lies?

In answer to some of these questions there have been urgent calls for biodiversity surveys, protective measures and education programs echoing around the Middle-East. In one of the articles in this edition, Warren Aston takes us to Dhofar, Oman on a journey in Khor Kharfot, describing the unique microclimate there, as well as the rich fauna and flora which has enabled this area to be given formal protected status as a "Nature Reserve". The author warns us on the impact of development upon this fragile environment and requests more surveys in the region. To quote Warren directly:

This most fertile of Arabian environments remains poorly documented. Truly comprehensive biological surveys of many parts of Oman, indeed much of the Arabian Peninsula, are still in the early stages. One assessment in 2000 still largely reflects the situation in 2012 (VICTOR 2000); another recent study noted that most valley forest sites in southwest Arabia had not been surveyed for over 15 years (HALL et al. 2009). However, efforts are currently underway across a variety of disciplines to more completely survey Arabia's biodiversity (see, for example, HALL & MILLER 2011).

These sentiments were discussed in great detail at the 14th Conservation Workshop for the Biodiversity of Arabia held at the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife in Sharjah, UAE during February of this year. The concept of Bioregional Planning was looked at in previous workshops, and one of the actions from these was for the Environment Agency in Abu Dhabi to produce a regional biodiversity assessment plan.

Thirty six priority areas for conservation were identified. During the 14th Workshop, participants in a series of working group sessions reviewed and ranked these priority areas, identifying key sites for focused action, including a number of potential Transboundary Conservation Areas. Running in tandem with this was a Regional Red List assessment of the breeding birds of Arabia.

James Burton from the Earthwatch institute is updating the conservation community on their efforts to assess Arabian Leopard and Thar populations in Oman. Survey efforts have also been very rewarding in Iraq and Hana Raza from Nature Iraq shares with us the interesting finding of their wild goat survey in the Peramagroon and Qara Daghs mountains, as well as their collateral discoveries of the presence of Persian leopards, least weasel and Eurasian lynx in the region. Studies such as these are crucial to not only inform international conservation bodies on the

current status of rare animals and plants, but also to provide the necessary scientific data to establish conservation and education programs which are so important today.

Researchers from the UAE University in Al Ain (UAE) share with us their very interesting findings on breeding habitat and performance, population threat and long-term demographic studies' objectives of a little-studied seabird the Socotra cormorant (*Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*). It is hoped that the data collected during this study and any subsequent studies will be used to its full extent to ensure proper conservation measures of this species endemic to the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman.

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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.