

## EDITORIAL

*Nature reaches out to us with welcoming arms, and bids us enjoy her beauty; but we dread her silence and rush into the crowded cities, there to huddle like sheep fleeing from a ferocious wolf.* A profound appreciation and love of nature is evident throughout Kahlil Gibran's Arabic writings. Nature is obviously to respect and protect, by everyone. The Middle East is facing enormous environmental challenges linked to a changing world: human expansion and booming needs in energy and water. The path of development is such that damage to the environment might be discovered too late. Conservationists and scientists are like sentinels reminding the ones swept along by the current of urban existence to what is being lost in the wild, forever. We are fortunate that some authorities and financial sponsors are supportive of conservation work making our task possible. We are grateful to RAK Bank for their continued support and sponsorship of Wildlife Middle East News which allows us to continue publication for another year. Our printed newsletter and on-line resources are not only available for professionals working with wildlife; they are for anyone who is interested in, or, concerned about the wildlife and environment of the Middle East. Your contributions are essential to make this newsletter a success. Thank you for your contributions!

The development of a network between wildlife professionals and enthusiasts throughout the Middle East region is necessary to tackle the environmental challenges arising across the region. Collaboration between professionals is becoming widely accepted, and the first Arabian Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZAA) Conference was hosted by Al Ain Zoo with the theme of One Region One Vision One Plan. The conference helped contribute to developing a strong network between the institutions that share the same values. Al Ain zoo also hosted the Arabian Sand Cat "One Plan" Conservation Workshop: The "One Plan" approach is a recent initiative promoted by the IUCN Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG) which aims to make conservation efforts more effective and efficient by encouraging collaboration and cooperation between the ex situ and in situ conservation communities. Collaboration is also highlighted with the official relaunch of the Wildlife Disease Association African and Middle East. Having a specific section in the region will be a useful tool in acquiring, disseminating, and applying knowledge of the health and diseases of wild animals. We also hear the very welcome news from the FEW/FPALY (Foundation for Endangered Wildlife (Yemen)/Foundation for the Protection of the Arabian Leopard in Yemen) of the relaunch of their newsletter.

Cooperation between different institutions and countries is also crucial for conservation and re-introduction programs. The sand gazelle project launched in Al Wusta Wildlife Reserve, Oman is an example where several captive collections, if properly managed, can be used for re-introduction purposes back into reserves. Establishment of protected areas in a world facing exponential population growth and ever-growing needs seems the only way to preserve the wild fauna and flora.

Increasing human disturbance over animal ranges also affects migratory birds. Sabir Bin Muzaffar stresses the importance of understanding the relation between foraging habits of Socotra Cormorants and fisheries. It is demonstrated that protection of the species will have to incorporate areas beyond their breeding colonies that include foraging grounds as well as roosting sites in the post-breeding period.

Disease transmission is as important as ecology when managing wildlife, the tick survey in Ethiopian hedgehogs at Thumanah, Saudi Arabia, catalogued a tick burden that can potentially lead to disease transmission. It is a nice reminder that the most important role of the veterinarian

relates to assessing risks of disease transmission and not just as the expert brought in for the capture and movement of the animal(s).

Yasaman Hassan-Beigi et al. introduce us to a study that will enhance our knowledge on phylogeny and genetic diversity of caracal in Iran. Research on caracals in the region is important and we can hope that other Middle Eastern countries will soon follow this example.

Last but not least, we share in our announcement section a request to gather information regarding vulture poisoning incidents and poisoning threats to vultures in the Middle East. Populations of three species of vultures have declined by more than 95% in ca. 10 years across the Indian subcontinent, mainly due to unintentional poisoning related to Diclofenac use in cattle. The situation in Africa is also worrisome as poachers intentionally poison thousands of vultures to evade detection. Vultures are unfortunate collateral victims of Africa's wildlife poaching. What is the vulture situation in the Middle East? Numbers are difficult to estimate accurately, but there are still a lot to research and protect in the region, hopefully all the efforts made and conservation projects to come won't be blown away by the frenetic course to modernity.

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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.