

THE FIRST ARABIAN ZOO AND AQUARIUM ASSOCIATION (AZAA) CONFERENCE CONTINUED

Progress

Following on from this successful regional networking meeting, Al Ain Zoo proceeded to coordinate communication over the following 12 months with the view to host the 1st Arabian Zoo and Aquarium Association Conference at which a framework of membership would be presented to delegates. This was finally achieved from the 10th – 12th December 2013 when the first conference was hosted by Al Ain Zoo with the theme of One Region One Vision One Plan.

Over 60 delegates from zoos and aquarium facilities in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Jordan attended the conference presenting papers on topics including conservation programs, education initiatives, animal management, veterinary research, staff training and exhibit management. The keynote speaker was John Newby, CEO of the Sahara Conservation fund who spoke of the various conservation projects currently being undertaken in the Sahara region of North Africa and the impact zoos can make in such programs directly or in partnership with the SCF.



Delegates got a preview of the new Al Ain Wildlife Park and Resort conservation centre in Al Ain.

The full conference program included plenary sessions and a series of facilitated workshops to review draft documents on the proposed governance of AZAA. Draft documents discussed in detail were a Code of Ethics, Code of Practice and a Constitution. With much enthusiasm and cooperation from the working groups a series of changes, additions and clarifications were recorded that will form the basis of final documents.

At the end of the final session all delegates unanimously agreed to the following recommendations

- The agreed draft AZAA Code of Ethics, Code of Practice & Constitution to be documented and forwarded to all delegates for approval. Will be translated to Arabic
- Al Ain Zoo to establish the AZAA Office and take on the role of coordinator of AZAA affairs.
- Al Ain Zoo to establish a provisional Core Committee of representatives (for the next 12 months) to carry forward implementation of the agreed constitution.
- AZAA to meet again in Nov 2014.

This historic 1st Arabian Zoo and Aquarium Association conference was a great success and will form the basis of its future development. There is still much to do in developing a working framework of governance and establishing standards for animal care in the region but a huge step has been taken towards the realisation of this region's very own zoo and aquarium association.

A SAND GAZELLE PROJECT LAUNCHED IN AL WUSTA WILDLIFE RESERVE, OMAN

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INTRODUCTION:

Historically the Arabian sand gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa marica*, ranged the open sand habitats of the Arabian Peninsula through Iraq, Jordan, Syria and into southern Turkey (Mallon & Kingswood 2001 in Wacher et al. 2010). In Oman the species inhabited the open sands of the Empty Quarter Desert, Eastern Sands/Wahiba Sands and marginally the gravel desert of central Oman. A survey by the Saudi Wildlife Commission in 1990 reported that sand gazelles were found in the border area of Ghanim in the Omani side, with sizeable herds ranging across 30 kms of the border. In 2000 when Massolo et al. (2008) carried out a two days survey (line transect by car) in the central sand desert of Oman, only 44 gazelles were sighted and 34 were tracked, totaling 78 gazelles (estimated density 1.26 ind./sqkm).

Unfortunately in recent years, the sand gazelle populations throughout the range have been subject to habitat degradation and excessive hunting and poaching. The unprecedented economic development in the region and availability of four-wheel vehicles and automatic rifles



Reem feeding in captivity at WWR. (Khalid Al Jahwari)

to poachers resulted in an almost complete wipe-out of the wild species.

Many range states established captive populations of sand gazelles in zoos and breeding centres. Some of these were later used for introductions/re-introductions into the wild.

During 1990 in Saudi Arabia, a captive group was successfully re-introduced into the Mahazat As Sayd Reserve, a fenced protected area located c. 150 kms northeast of Taif (Haque & Smith 1996). Today the IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species classifies the Arabian sand gazelle as vulnerable.