

## EDITORIAL

One great benefit of editing this newsletter is how we editors learn more about the environment in the Middle East through the articles that we are sent and from correspondence we have with colleagues. We often hear about new species being discovered in tropical rainforests, so how unexpected and wonderful to hear from Dr Macdonald from Qatar about the possible discovery of a new species in the Gulf of Arabia – an incredibly photogenic sea slug belonging to the Genus *Chromodoris*.

It is hard not to be affected by the ‘concretification’ of the natural environment in the region. How many years before there is no desert to camp in? Impossible you say? But could any of us have imagined 10 years ago that in 2007 it would be impossible to camp on a beach in Dubai because every beach has been developed? We humans find this inconvenient but spare a thought for the natural animals and plants that have been pushed aside. Where have all the animals been relocated to and beyond the glossy Public Relations headlines does anyone know or care where the wildlife is now?

Humans with grievances can down tools and block highways. The voiceless inhabitants of the natural world have no choice but to rely on fickle humans to fight their corner? So thank goodness there are people who are aware of the serious issues facing the environment, who can articulate the concerns of their community and who are in positions of responsibility to affect change. In a recent interview with Gulf News, (September 08, 2007, Environmental abuse will kill our tomorrow. <http://archive.gulfnews.com/articles/07/09/09/10152422.html>) Mr Abdul Aziz Al Midfa, Director-General of Environmental and Protected Areas Authority in Sharjah warns the inhabitants of the Middle East region that they are on the brink of “an environmental disaster”. Mr Aziz considers that natural resources in the UAE and wider region are being used up in frenetic development projects and that these projects threaten the equilibrium of the environment. Mr Aziz asks the question - what is the use of sand dunes or deserts? He thinks, like we do, that the desert and the sea are necessary for our mental health and that living in a ‘concrete’ forest turns man into a machine. We need more people like Mr Aziz – who speak up for the environment - for the silent sea slugs buried beneath artificial islands and for the voiceless dhub lizards whose burrows have been scraped away to make room for luxury developments.

Diseases spreading from animals to humans are considered by scientists to be one of the biggest threats facing mankind. In this issue Dr Wernery and colleagues report the first case of West Nile Fever caused by West Nile Virus (WNV) in a horse in the UAE. This is a disease that after it was introduced into the USA in 1997 spread rapidly and caused deaths in humans, horses and many bird species. Migrating birds carry WNV in their blood and have a significant impact on the spread of WNV. Dr’s Lloyd and Stidworthy report on another disease with implications for human health, Q fever. This appears to be the first recorded cases of this disease in the UAE or Arabian Peninsula and one that zoological and domestic animal health professionals in the region should be aware of. Avian influenza is a well-known viral disease that affects birds worldwide. In recent years, highly pathogenic avian influenza (AI) has re-emerged worldwide, raising concern in human and veterinary health authorities. Dr’s Obon and colleagues report the results of a survey which showed antibodies for the H5 strain of AI in many species of wild and captive birds in the UAE. West Nile Fever, Q fever, and influenza are all diseases that can have serious impact on human health and regional agricultural industries. Within the UAE and, no doubt the region there is need for more

surveillance to monitor and understand the potential effects of these diseases on people, domestic animals and wildlife.

The local environment is blighted by litter. In places the desert is treated like an open-air dustbin. Over the past 15 years, the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory in Dubai has observed a tremendous increase in deaths of animals caused by plastic ingestion. However, this epidemic of ‘plastic bag disease’ could be a thing of the past as we report in our News section the development of biodegradable plastics that are now (according to their manufacturers) cheaper to produce than non-biodegradable bags. Contamination of the environment, in the form of veterinary medicines (diclofenac) given to cattle and whose residues in the meat kill scavenging vultures has caused a catastrophic decline of vulture populations in Pakistan and India. Campbell Murn and colleagues describe the efforts being made to conserve vulture populations. Worryingly BirdLife reports that diclofenac is available at veterinary practises in Tanzania representing a new threat for African vultures ([http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/10/africa\\_diclofenac.html](http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/10/africa_diclofenac.html)).

The endangered Northern bald ibis was rediscovered in Syria in 2002 after it was believed to be extinct. Recent studies have shown the migration route and wintering grounds of this species, and Dr’s Bowden and Aljour highlight the need for better protection of roosting and breeding grounds to save this bird from disappearing from the Middle East again.

So lots of issues, some solutions and plenty for those of us concerned about the state of the environment to chew over in our latest issue. Happy reading and please keep the articles coming in.

The Editors

[editors@wmenews.com](mailto:editors@wmenews.com)  
[www.wmenews.com](http://www.wmenews.com)

### 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.

### NEWSLETTER EDITORIAL TEAM

Tom Bailey  
Declan O’Donovan  
Chris Lloyd  
Theri Bailey