

EDITORIAL

It is impossible not to notice the breakneck pace of development in the Middle East. Drive down the roads and count the number of building sites, cranes and emergent skyscrapers. Open the newspapers and up until a month ago, when easy credit dried up, adverts tempted readers with the prospects of double digit profits on a luxury property development. One consequence is that the environment and wildlife populations of the Middle East are under tremendous pressure. Developers and decision makers appear to be disconnected from environmental consequences. But given that cracks are appearing in the regions environmental window that directly affect the quality of life of human and wildlife inhabitants, things may now change.

In our last Marine issue, we raised the issue of the potential damage that oil pollution could cause to both the natural ecosystems of the Middle East and the growing tourist industry. So much for 'Oil-gate'. Little did we suspect that Dubai would be hit by 'Sewage-gate'? The contamination of parts of the Dubai coastline, close to well known 5* hotels, was a problem that few of us could have imagined happening in a city keen to project itself as a high end tourist destination. This situation is caused by too many people producing too much waste and too little infrastructure in place to deal with the sewage.

Sammy the whale shark, originally a free resident of the Arabian Gulf, made headlines throughout the world, unfortunately not the right sort of headlines. What could have been a public relations coup for the newly opened Atlantis resort - a story about an organisation rehabilitating a debilitated shark back into the wild - turned sour when rumours circulated that fishermen had allegedly been paid to catch the shark from the sea and that Sammy was destined not to be released, but instead to become a tourist attraction. Fact or fiction? The public outcry became global and the last the editors heard was that pressure from local government may encourage Atlantis to release Sammy back into the sea. Congratulations to the officials in the UAE government who took up Sammy's cause. It could be said, tongue in cheek, that Sammy might prefer living in his clean Atlantis aquarium to be being released in a sea contaminated by raw sewage! In addition, as we read from Dr Hampel's article on the rehabilitation programme of turtles, the sea can be a dangerous place for marine animals due to frequent collisions with boats.

It may be that the credit crisis could offer breathing space for the regions much pressured environment. Saud Anajariyya and colleagues demonstrate clearly how our rubbish is lethal for Arabian oryx in Saudi Arabia. Plastic bags carelessly discarded by humans blow into the desert, get eaten by animals such as oryx and accumulate over time eventually leading to an agonising death as the bags obstruct the stomach.

Without an accurate estimate of animal numbers in a reserve, proper management is not possible. To quote Professor Rudi Bigalke, determining animal numbers is like "opening a can of worms" and the complexities of determining free ranging animal numbers are often not understood or appreciated. We are grateful to Peter Cunningham and colleagues who concisely explains the science of estimating animal populations in a reserve in Saudi Arabia.

While the plight of the Iran's critically endangered Asiatic cheetah has received much international attention, efforts to conserve the Persian leopard leave much to be desired. Dr Ghoddousi and colleagues update us on the problems facing the Persian leopard in Iran. The work of the Persian Leopard Project is a positive initiative but clearly, as the authors state, more resources and collaborative ventures are needed.

The use of synthetic ultraviolet lighting is now recommended by veterinarians and aviculturalists for environmental enrichment in birds housed indoors. Bailey and Lloyd provide an overview of research on ultraviolet lighting, including many positive benefits to captive breeding projects such as improved vitamin D3 synthesis, vision, and breeding and feeding behaviour.

Not all species are threatened, some species, like the house crow have expanded their range throughout the Middle East and have become pests. Ryell and Meier explain why there is concern over the regional spread of this species and suggest what steps should be considered by the authorities to limit the crow population.

Well-designed animal holding and handling facilities that incorporate manual restraint equipment are essential for the proper care of captive animals. Mark MacNamara and colleagues describe how handling facilities and behavioural conditioning provide a non-stressful environment for animals such as Prezwalski's horses. This has enabled the development of a research programme to investigate the reproductive biology of this endangered species.

Over 10,000 AED has been raised by the children of 4 primary schools in Dubai for the Yemen Leopard Recovery Programme through their 'Spotty Days'. At the same time, the Sanaa International School (where David Stanton, the founder of the YLRP works) had a sponsored walk. The money raised by the children will go towards the publication of a children's book called 'Vanishing Spots'. WME News is proud to promote projects that raise awareness of important conservation issues in a region where, if nothing is done soon, very little wildlife and nature will be left for tomorrows' children. The editors thank the Organic Café for distributing our newsletter flyers and magazines. Finally, thanks to Gulf News for allowing us to reproduce part of their article on Spotty Day as our cover image.

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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.