

EDITORIAL

Thanks to Rakbank for their continuing support of the newsletter and to our membership who now number more than 5,000. It is a fascinating process of creation to see how each issue of the newsletter turns out from the material the editors amass over 3 months. This last issue of our second year of operation has an ungulate theme, which is no bad thing, because if one thinks about conservation in Arabia, probably the icon that comes to mind is the Arabian oryx. Like all well versed school children, we all know the Arabian oryx story, the rescue of a species from the brink of extinction, the successful breeding in zoos and the release back into the wild. However, the world's favourite conservation success story is perhaps less mission accomplished and possibly more mission impossible than we might have believed.

In this issue, we include a series of important articles on the care and management of ungulates in the Middle East. Two papers by veterinary colleagues show us how modern veterinary intervention can help both an individual animal that has suffered the misfortune of a broken leg, or in the treatment of large herds of ungulates that have been afflicted with deadly diseases. In this age where many species have been exterminated from the wild and captive populations have been founded by a few individuals, the need for genetic management is crucial and Colleen Lynch summarises the importance population management for wildlife managers.

Maartin Strauss reviews 'where we are in terms of Arabian oryx conservation' and his conclusions are important and insightful, not only for oryx, but for the conservation of every species and habitat on the Arabian peninsula. Important problems identified by Maartin that are worth reiterating and commenting on in this editorial include:

- There are a large number of oryx (for oryx replace with any species) in captive collections in the Middle East that are maintained with no genetic management and consequently are of dubious value.
- The lack of priority given by national and regional governments to conservation –highlighted by the fact that there is little long term commitment, little funding, very few laws and no enforcement, or penalties. This means that the sectors of society doing the damage, be they development companies or young men with guns or falcons, just do not take conservation seriously.
- The absence of local, talented young professionals in the field of biology and conservation biology throughout the region. Where are the Nationals protesting outside development sites as beloved bits of desert or beach are bulldozed? Where is the commitment by those in power to protect unspoilt areas of desert, mountain and coast as National Parks so that the natural beauty of Arabia may continue to be enjoyed by both the inhabitants of the region and visiting tourists in the future?

There is a clear need for the collections in the region to work more closely together

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.

and WME News supports the idea promoted by Mark Craig in Volume 1, Issue 2 of our newsletter, to initiate a Middle East Zoological Association. We also feel that there should be greater emphasis on regional training programmes to promote better management of captive and free-living wildlife. This is necessary to ensure that there will be a well trained and motivated pool of local talent to care for the wildlife in the future.

Similar issues were also highlighted at the recent Annual Conservation Workshop for the Fauna of Arabia held at the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife (BCEAW) in Sharjah, UAE. As part of this workshop some common regional issues surfaced, including the need for high-level political support and interagency involvements at all stages of protected area creation and management; the importance of law enforcement; and the critical need to engage meaningfully with local communities.

Finally, how about some high profile awards to reward those organisations and individuals who are making a commitment to conservation in the region?

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