

News and events

9TH CONSERVATION WORKSHOP FOR THE FAUNA OF ARABIA: PROTECTED AREA SYSTEMS IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

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Since its inception 9 years ago, a central theme and concern reached at the end of each successive workshop suggested the need for protected area planning and management. This was an important unifying theme for species conservation in the region. The interest generated by discussions in 2007 made it clear that the 9th workshop in 2008 continued the focus on protected areas, while a series of parallel workshop sessions evaluated for the first time the status of the region's snakes to progress the taxonomic theme.

The general theme of the core workshop was the evaluation and development of protected areas networks in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula. Four core objectives were identified, each one forming a sub-theme for the workshop: (1) to review the current status of protected areas and protected area systems in the Arabian Peninsula; (2) to undertake a formal evaluation of protected area management effectiveness; (3) to identify priority sites for the development of Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs), and (4) to raise awareness of the implications of global climate on species conservation and protected area creation and management in the region.

Review of regional protected area status

Reports were presented for Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, Kuwait and UAE. Some common issues emerged, including the need for high-level political support and interagency involvements at all stages of protected area creation and management; the value of making linkages with appropriate and sustainable commercial activities; the importance of law enforcement; and the critical need to engage meaningfully with local communities.

Evaluation of protected area management effectiveness

Working groups applied the WWF Rapid Assessment and Prioritization of Protected Area Management questionnaire (an evaluation tool which has been implemented in over 20 countries and for more than 850 protected areas globally) to selected sites throughout the Arabian Peninsula. By examining sites in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, and UAE, there was excellent regional, institutional and ecosystem coverage. Some key points emerged from the analysis of the outputs of the questionnaire. Currently the region's protected areas face a number of environmental pressures, including overgrazing, wood-cutting, poaching, and other forms of unsustainable resource use. However, the future threats will probably come primarily from development that is incompatible with protected area conservation objectives.

Region	Partners	Focal species	Ecosystem
Rub' al Khali	UAE, KSA, Oman	Arabian oryx	Desert
Arabian Gulf	Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar, KSA	Dugong	Marine
Hawf region	Yemen, Oman	Arabian leopard	Montane

Table 1. Proposed priority sites for the development of Transfrontier Conservation Areas

Prioritization of transfrontier conservation areas

In a series of open discussions and working group sessions delegates suggested three sites (Table 1) in which the ecological needs of high-profile charismatic species encompass key habitats and ecological processes, providing natural and ecologically meaningful cross-boundary linkages.

Overview of the implications of climate change predictions

As the predictive models of global climate change are refined, it has become apparent that under most scenarios there are significant climatic changes forecast for the Arabian Peninsula. Over the entire region temperatures will increase, extreme weather events will become more frequent, and for all but the southeastern areas, rainfall will decrease.

A full report on this part of the 9th Annual Conservation Workshop which was held at the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife in Sharjah, UAE in February 2008 can be downloaded from www.wmnews.com.

Plans are already underway for the 2009 meeting, where the intention is to mark the 10th anniversary of this important workshop series. Suggestions for themes or topics for guest speaker presentations are welcomed and should be sent to Jane Edmonds at email: breeding@epaa-shj.gov.ae



Dr Mohammed Shobrak, one of the workshop delegates from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia