

## EDITORIAL

Hey it's time for the soapbox session. So up I step, imbued with a glass of South African Chardonnay, caressed by the warmth of a perfect Middle East evening and seduced by the cicadas cricking in my lush garden. Life is good.... well it is for those of us lucky enough to sit in a garden heavily irrigated with desalinated water and able to afford some of what we think are 'essential' luxuries of life. I thank God for the blessing in my life. But is life so good? Is this development sustainable? Should I feel a tinsy winsy bit guilty. Do we live beyond our means? Last week I had a conversation with a well known banking expert who is frequently consulted for his views on finance by the regional media. We discussed the subject of the rapid development in the region and I commented that scant regard was paid to the long term sustainability of urban development. In particular with regard to environmentally friendly buildings, the pressure on fresh water resources, the pollution of the marine and terrestrial environment and the loss of biodiversity. He was interested and commented that it was the first time he had thought of these matters with regard to the ongoing development. But as he said, like most expats here in the financial and development industries, he was here to make as much money as possible and wasn't worried about the long term. I suspect this is not an uncommon view and that many of the architects and financiers of the uber-developments are motivated less by greater good and more by obscene short term gain. Look at the globe and see other countries in the same latitude with similar harsh climates and the future may be a little different from the artistic impressions on billboards next to new developments. Look around at your skyline dotted with illuminated and flashing spires - would these have left the Babel-Tower builders open-mouthed with envy. Billions have been spent here on construction, on bulldozing the desert until for the majority of people in most of the cities of the region, the desert is a remote and unfamiliar place.

Remote and unfamiliar. You only have to visit the mountains or deserts in the region to realise what fragile and sensitive places they are. All the cities should have visible reminders of the desert left within their boundaries as a reminder of the sensitivity of sand and as a warning of what all will return to should we fail to consider the environment in our daily lives. Already the UN are predicting that one of the first cities to be uninhabitable as a result of running out of fresh water will be in the Middle East. So off my soapbox and back to WME News. We have a diverse range of articles. On the technical front we have articles outlining methods that have been introduced to improve the survival of newborn ungulates at Al Wabra Wildlife Preservation in Qatar. The paper will be of interest to those of us managing and breeding wildlife in captivity and it clearly illustrates how interventions to improve animal health can sometimes have unexpected consequences.

On the bad news front we reprint an article from Birdlife on the loss of more Bald ibis because of indiscriminate hunting in Saudi Arabia. Likewise also appears that hunting is still a threat to gazelle populations in Saudi Arabia. There must be some good news? Boug and colleagues describe the establishment of a breeding project for Arabian leopard in Saudi Arabia while Papathanasopoulou describes the fantastic environmental work being done by the marine rescue team in Kuwait. Finally, tucked away at the end of the newsletter, Francis Baines describes how she and a group of enthusiasts have contributed to furthering our understanding of the importance of UV light in reptile husbandry.

The technical paper on blood parameters in hawksbill turtles from Hampel and colleagues provides useful information for biologists and vets involved in turtle rehabilitation. This leads on to another bugbear. It is amazing that such basic and important information on most of the species of the region is lacking. It is true that there are a few well resourced flagship projects that have increased our understanding of local species and the example that comes to mind is the Houbara Bustard research conducted in North Africa and locally in the UAE and sponsored mainly, to their credit, by the Abu

Dhabi government. However, in truth, wildlife work throughout the region and outside Abu Dhabi is generally under resourced and under funded and when it does occur it often appears to be little more than a cynical public relations opportunity for a company or government. Perhaps this is a harsh conclusion, but when you see the billions spent on concretification and the token crumbs that are spent on the environment it is hard to give anyone in positions of responsibility the benefit of the doubt. Where are the serious philanthropic zoological societies and charities promoting and funding work on the environment and its wildlife??? How can a region where so much has been invested in luxury developments have, with the exception of Sharjah Wildlife Park and Al Ain Zoo, no other zoos of note and in notable cases only zoos of shame? What message does this tell to the world? There are certainly beautiful images of wildlife and scenery in the glossy tourist PR brochures. However have the overpaid executives peddling these images stepped outside their offices into the 'real' environment, do they even know where the desert really is?? Have they seen the rubbish strewn across the desert, the sand dunes criss-crossed with thousands of car tracks, the dying ghaf trees whose roots no longer reach the water table because the desert is almost running on an empty water tank and the bloated carcasses of the cows and camels that have choked to death on our rubbish? I doubt it

So as my word count has mounted and my Chardonnay is depleted it is time to get off the pulpit and leave you to read the current issue!

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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.