

EDITORIAL

Many of the wildlife and environmental issues that we learn about in the daily news seem too BIG for ordinary people to deal with. It is easy to become paralysed into thinking that fixing the BIG problems is best left to the BIG organisations or conservation specialists with lists of qualifications after their names. BIG organisations are notoriously inefficient tools to fix problems that are often symptoms of a wider malaise within society. Likewise conservation specialists often spend more time fighting with other specialists for their patch of 'Eco-Turf' than solving the problems they were paid to solve in the first place. In the end, no matter how much money is spent and how many BIG projects are initiated, if the people within societies do not change their behaviour, then BIG projects are often hollow PR opportunities.

Which brings us on to why Wildlife Middle East News was established in the first place - we wanted to show that it is possible for people with an interest and passion for wildlife to make a small difference, even in their spare time. In many countries it is often grassroots organisations that make a real difference with respect to social and environmental issues. If you doubt this then consider the story of Chico Mendes. Chico Mendes fought to stop the logging of the Amazon Rainforest and founded a national union of rubber tappers in an attempt to preserve their profession and the rainforest that it relied upon. He was assassinated in 1988, by those who were opposed to his activism. If you want to be inspired by his story go to the BBC website (http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/documentaries/2008/05/080507_living_with_chicomendes.shtml) and listen to a powerful radio documentary on the remarkable tale of a self-educated man who came from a remote corner of Brazil and whose legacy was to create reserves and preserve vast tracts of land.

So how refreshing it is to read an article from the Yemeni Leopard Recovery Programme (YLRP), an initiative that was started last autumn in an attempt to reverse the decline of Arabian Leopards in Yemen. Not a BIG project from a BIG organisation, this idea originated with a pupil, Melissa Stanton, from the Sana'a International School. In just a few months the YLRP has achieved some notable accomplishments which are outlined in the article by David Stanton. Likewise in our promotion of 'small is beautiful' projects Theri Bailey, one of our editors, describes how she set up a grassroots environmental education initiative, 'The Green Group', at Horizon School, Dubai. So it is possible for 'ordinary' people who may not be directly involved with environmental issues as part of their work, but who are concerned and prepared to commit some time and effort to make a positive contribution through grassroots initiatives like the YLRP or The Green Group at Horizon School. Just think of the number of parents and families touched by the enthusiasm of their children returning home, heads buzzing with ideas on leopard conservation or saving water and imagine what could really be possible if we all gave just a little of our time to a worthwhile cause.

In our announcement Wildlife Middle East News is distributing information on the 'Vanishing Spots' appeal by the Yemeni Leopard Recovery Programme and should any schools or organisations in the UAE wish to support this appeal we are happy to provide further information – please contact the editors. Already we are pleased to announce that the Jumeirah English Speaking School (JESS) in Dubai has raised some funds for this appeal and we congratulate all the teachers and children from JESS who have worked hard for this important cause.

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.

So although this issue has a carnivore and education flavour, we have a diversity of other contributions. Two articles related to nutrition make important reading for those of us managing captive wildlife. In their article, Giulio Russo and, Jaap Wensvoort summarise potentially toxic plants in the UAE. While not an exhaustive list of dangerous plants, their article is an important resource for people who may be setting up wildlife collections. Managers of captive wildlife are aware of how hard it is to provide browsers with the correct diet and Jaap Wensvoort describes how he has developed a novel method for making browse silage. Although early days, this project looks very promising and we look forward to reporting updates on this project. The issue of smuggled wildlife is always a hot topic in the Middle East. In the current issue, An Pas provides us with an important summary of why primates should not be kept as pets. Finally, David Mallon and his colleagues provide some fascinating observations on how leopards were trapped in the mountains of Arabia using traditional stone traps called *margaba*.

So thanks for your support as we go into our third year of operation – keep the articles coming!

NEWSLETTER EDITORIAL TEAM

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