

EDITORIAL

As you read this we have completed our 12th issue in three years and would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the Newsletter throughout this time. We have again been very fortunate to be associated with RAK Bank and would like to thank them for their support and encouragement over the last three years as well as for their continued support next year for Volume 4.

One of our stated goals with the Newsletter is “Raising awareness of environmental and conservation issues affecting wildlife in the Middle East” and we believe that we have done this over the last few years. With this in mind it is great to see the efforts of a 12 year old boy, Cameron Oliver, and his campaign to highlight the plight of the UAE’s camels and how they are being affected by the ever increasing amount of plastic and other forms of rubbish that are discarded throughout the Emirate’s deserts. Cameron was rewarded in December of last year when he received an Abu Dhabi Award for his contribution to building a greater sense of community and social welfare. Anyone who is interested in learning more or supporting Cameron in his endeavours can check out the links on our website.

This quarter we have a series of firsts. Daniel Orenstein describes the first Middle Eastern Biodiversity Network which was held in Aqaba, Jordan, where the survival of the region’s flora and fauna was discussed. Poverty, crime, pollution and overexploitation of resources were implicit themes in many of the talks. An Iraqi ecologist described the tragic loss of wetlands in the country’s southern region due to the combined impact of drought and dams. One presenter from the UAE described a rate of development on the Arabian Gulf coastline that was so accelerated that all they could do to catalogue local biodiversity was to collect “baseline” ecological data before those habitats were paved over. One has to ask whether one of the few “positive’s” from the current economic meltdown will be that the pace of these developments will decrease dramatically. On the other hand, many of these developments were in the infrastructural phase and much damage to the environment has already occurred, so it might be too late! Karl Marx once said that history has a habit of repeating itself, one time as tragedy and the second time as a farce. Let’s hope that all concerned can see this as they come out of the crisis and think twice about the sustainability and environmental impacts of their projects.

Nancy Papathanasopoulou describes the significance of Masirah Island off the Omani coast and how work there, utilising radio tagging techniques is helping to understand the life cycle of the Olive Ridley turtle. Another first using radio transmitters is the tagging of rescued Indus River dolphins in Pakistan. This work was co-funded by the Environment Agency in Abu Dhabi. Both of these projects have proved useful in discovering new behaviours and movement patterns of two different species.

As highlighted in Vol 3 Issue 1, animal diets commonly fed in the Middle East are often restricted to grasses, vegetables and high starch compounded feeds. In an article detailing her concerns on the feeding of high starch diets, Elizabeth Koutsos argues that exotic ruminants have evolved to eat diets that are relatively low in starch. In captivity, for browsing and grazing ruminants, high starch diets can cause rumen dysfunction and systemic health concerns. She argues that anytime starch is being added to diets of browsing ungulates, it should be done so slowly.

Following one of our first articles on the distribution of *Gazella gazella* (Vol 1 Issue 1)

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 the report in Vol 3 Issue 3 showing the differences in sampling methods, Strauss et al use similar techniques to estimate the population size of mountain gazelle in the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary in Oman. They identified a number of issues with an earlier study and corrected these to reveal an over-estimation of the original population census.

Chris Lloyd describes how the electrocardiogram could be used as a useful first step to determining the health status of captive felidae. Although used previously in species such as lions and tigers, no evidence was found indicating it had been used in leopards before this study. Chris suggests that ECG’s could easily be included in physical examinations of animals to judge their fitness to join breeding programmes.

A book of veterinary significance to the region “Diseases and Medical Management of Houbara Bustards and Other Otidae” has eventually seen the light of day. John Chitty comments, “I would, therefore, be very happy to advise any veterinary student or inexperienced avian veterinarian to read it as well even if their primary focus was with other avian species”.

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