

## EDITORIAL

Putting together each issue of WME News is a little like assembling a story-mosaic from the disparate pieces of the environmental jigsaw puzzle scattered around the region. We may not know the full picture, but tied together in the newsletter the pieces help us to see the <bigger picture>. This issue sees us report issues as diverse as the illegal wildlife trade, the persecution of predators, the dangers of highly infectious diseases to animal collections and some positive reports just to stop us getting too depressed - the potential for environmentally friendly tourism, environmental education for marine animals and an inspiring journey to reconnect National youth with their traditions and environment.

Sometimes putting the newsletter together can be a chore for the volunteer editors as we harass contributors, edit manuscripts, coordinate translations and proof-reading, pass drafts back and forth to designers and printers and finally see the end product stuffed into envelopes. But chore aside, there is always relief and pride in the final end product. We hope that these images and reports illustrating the good, the bad and the ugly sides of human interaction with the environment may in some small way contribute to a better understanding of Man's complicated relationship with wildlife in the Middle East.

In this issue we have stories that illustrate the best and worst of what humans can do for wildlife. Perhaps readers will be saddened when they read about the persecution of predators in Saudi Arabia. The images of wolves strung up from trees are brutal and depressing. As the parent of 2 children I cannot read such an account of pointless killing without thinking....what will be left for my children to see of this beautiful world. More than this what will be left for the children of Arabia to see in the future. Empty deserts strewn with bones and wrapped in a coating of discarded plastic bags. Worst case scenario perhaps. Glass half full? Perhaps? Within the realm of possibility? Definitely.

So a mosaic of environmental messages. We have contributions from Indyact, a citizen activist group who are bravely campaigning for Lebanon to ratify CITES. In the Arab region the fact that Lebanon, Bahrain and Iraq have not ratified CITES makes them hubs for laundering wildlife within the region. It is positive that in Lebanon Lebanese people feel passionately enough to campaign for environmental issues. Within the GCC we need more Nationals campaigning for their environment. Initiatives like the "In the footsteps of our forefathers" are therefore vitally important to reconnect local students with their traditions and with their environment. There needs to be more opportunities for Nationals to connect with nature. With this in mind the review of a recent publication from UNESCO on environmentally friendly tourism in biosphere reserves is a timely document promoting the benefits of sustainable and community based tourism. The full publication (available as a download) offers important information on how areas of natural beauty can be best developed sensitively and, adequately protected from the «beast of development».

Foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) is a highly contagious but usually nonlethal disease of ruminants and pigs characterized by ulceration of the oral mucosa and of the skin of the feet. The virus is present in domestic livestock populations in much of Africa and the Middle East and recent outbreaks in livestock have been reported in Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Syria, Kuwait and Bahrain. The report in this issue of two recent FMD outbreaks in the UAE demonstrates the importance of vaccination protocols – in one collection where the gazelles were unvaccinated the mortality was great and the majority of animals succumbed

to infection and died. In a second collection where the majority of susceptible wildlife had been vaccinated the effects of the disease was slight and only a handful of animals died. Unfortunately, the lax veterinary controls in the region mean that viral diseases like FMD are endemic and wildlife collection managers need to be vigilant to protect their stock. We have heard unconfirmed reports that one wildlife collection lost thousands of gazelles to FMD recently. If only these animals had been vaccinated. There is no doubt that handling and restraining wild animals for vaccination is time-consuming and challenging. However with advent of handling systems it is possible to process large numbers of animals making the implementation of preventive medicine protocols realistic.

Finally we would like to recommend the publication "*Global Re-Introduction Perspectives - Reintroduction Case Studies From Around The World*", edited by Pritpal Soorae and published by the IUCN Reintroduction Specialist Group. A good proportion of projects from the Middle East were featured, including reviews of the reintroduction of houbara bustards, Arabian oryx, red-necked ostrich, and sand gazelle, making this a very useful resource for anyone in the region working in projects that may be involved with animal re-introductions.

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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.