

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first issue of our second year of publication. Our thanks again to RAKBank who have continued their commitment to WME News by providing sponsorship for our second year. As we write this editorial the Reith Lectures presented by the eminent economist Jonathon Sachs are being broadcast by the BBC (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2007/lecture1.shtml>) and they make worthy, but also sobering listening to any of us who are concerned about the environment. Jonathon Sachs believes that the challenge of humanity is learning to live peacefully and sustainably in an extraordinarily crowded world that is creating unprecedented pressures on human society and on the physical environment. He talks of a planet that is crowded to an unprecedented degree, a planet that is bursting at the seams in human terms, in economic terms, and in ecological terms.

Those of us involved with wildlife and environmental issues in the Middle East are aware that we inhabit one of the most environmentally sensitive and stressed parts of the world. Development has transformed sleepy coastal towns and oasis villages into high tech cities where the beaches and open desert are fast being fenced off for farms, factories, skyscrapers, hotels and commuter belt residential areas. The cost is a disconnection between an urban population and the environment and the rapid disappearance of plant and animal species from their desert, mountain and aquatic habitats. What can be done to help the fast-disappearing wildlife of the region?

In the first Issue of Volume 2 of the newsletter we are pleased to include an article by Gayatri Raghwa on the environmental awareness work being carried out by the Environment Agency of Abu Dhabi. It is reassuring to learn how the awareness programmes developed by one of the newsletter Editors (Theri Bailey) have thrived. Environmental awareness has been undervalued as a tool for inspiring both children and adults to care for their environment for too long and there is a tremendous need for awareness programmes to be developed in other Emirates and countries within the region.

The region may be developing at breakneck speed, but traditional forms of land management can still play a role in preserving biodiversity. Mr Dakdouk from the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon describes how the Hima, a traditional system to manage natural resources, is being revived in the Lebanon to protect nature reserves.

As part of series of articles on collection management we publish the first of a series of articles on the nutrition of captive wildlife by Mr Wensvoort who has worked in the nutrition field in the Middle East for over a decade. In the first article the challenges of keeping wildlife adequately nourished is reviewed along with common problems caused by poor diets.

Surveying wildlife in deserts can be challenging and Husam El Algamy and Greg Simkins report the use of camera traps to assess the status of wild carnivores in the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve. Last, but not least Simon Brusland from Qatar reviews the captive management of guineafowl.

Our news section features articles on the exciting discovery of the largest wintering population of one of Eurasia's most endangered birds – the Sociable plover. However, conservationists are concerned that hunting parties visiting the reserve may have a negative impact on the population and are working with government bodies to safeguard the species. Our literature and information review includes abstracts of recent scientific papers on dhub lizard taxonomy and sand fox distribution, as well as reviews of two UNESCO books and a natural history book produced by the Environment Agency of Abu Dhabi.

Some food for thought from the Reith Lecture to end this editorial, which presents some themes on the interconnectedness of the environmental and wildlife issues in the region:

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.

“Our challenge is to understand these common problems, to see that the whole world is arrayed on the same side of them; to understand that a leader in Iran, or in Korea, or in Sudan, or in other places where we've made it a point not even to have a conversation, much less a negotiation or an attempt at peaceful solution, is facing problems of water supply, climate change, food production, poverty, and disease burden, many of which impinge directly on us. Can it be true incidentally that because we don't want to talk to Iran, H5N1 won't pass through Iran, that we won't have to deal with avian 'flu in places we don't want to speak to, where we have put pre-conditions to negotiations, because we can't see the commonality of our problems? Can it really be, ladies and gentlemen, that the solution to Darfur, one of the most urgent crises on the planet, is all about peacekeepers and troops and sanctions, when we know that in Western Darfur the rebellion started because this is just about the poorest place on the whole planet, because there is not enough water to keep people alive, the livestock have no veterinary care, there's no basic infrastructure, and the electricity grid is hundreds of miles away? Can we really think that peacekeeping troops and sanctions will solve this problem? I do think we have a fundamental re-thinking to do.”

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