

# EDUCATION AND AWARENESS EFFORTS ON WILDLIFE ISSUES BY THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY- ABU DHABI

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Little Salama was asked by her teacher to name four mammals in the UAE in her science class. She took her time and answered 'Rheem' (Sand Gazelle), 'Nimr' (Arabian leopard), 'Maha' (Arabian Oryx) and 'Tahr' (Arabian goat). The teacher asked her if she had seen them in her home in the desert and little Salama answered 'No, none of them'

For a small country, the UAE is blessed with a variety of habitats such as, the desert, marine, mangrove, mountain and wadi. About 800 species of plants, 35 species of terrestrial mammals, 435 species of birds and 53 species of reptiles besides a number of marine species are known to occur in the UAE. Four of the 35 species of terrestrial mammals, according to the IUCN Red Data Book, are listed as 'extinct in the wild', four as 'critically endangered', three as 'endangered' and three as 'near threatened'. The current estimate of UAE's population is over 4 million and the population has increased by 74.8 % in the last 10 years. Increasing population and impact of the fast pace of developmental activities, across the country, have taken their toll on the wildlife species and their habitats. It has also resulted in a complete dissociation of people living in the country from nature. With increasing habitat loss and developmental activities threatening the biodiversity in the Emirates, effective awareness and educational programmes to help raise this issue amongst the various targeted audience becomes imperative. Recognizing this need, the Environment Agency of Abu Dhabi (EAD), has established a 'Environment Education and Awareness Division' to identify the current state of awareness among the different targeted audience and establish effective environmental education programmes.

## EAD Programmes For Students

The EAD's 'Environment Education and Awareness Division' started its efforts to help raise awareness amongst students in 1998, with the launch of the 'Nature Bus'. The 'Desert Experience' and 'Marine Experience' help to make primary and middle school students aware of the UAE's biodiversity. For secondary and senior students a field trips programme was started to explain different habitats through a very 'Hands on' approach to studying what they learn about in their in their school curriculum and helping them to apply their knowledge to real and local environmental situations. Currently, field trips on the marine, wadi, wetland, mountain and mangrove habitats have been developed. In addition, senior students are also taken to study Sir Baniyas Island, as an example of ex situ conservation, and to the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital to learn about falcons, falconry and sustainable hunting. On average nearly 3000 students from the Government and the Private Schools attend field trips each year. Students from Higher Education establishments are also targeted.

## Teacher Training

Under the 'train the trainers' programme, teachers are shown interactive ways to incorporate environmental education into their classroom teaching. They are also updated on environmental issues through workshops and presentations. Government school teachers have been trained in making taxidermy specimens for their biology labs.

## Educating The General Public

Besides students and teachers, the Agency motivates the general public, and especially women, through its non- formal awareness programmes. Under these programmes the division conducts regular clean up campaigns to help raise awareness about marine debris and its effect on marine organisms. The Agency also observes environmental days with appropriate activities and conducts regular public exhibitions, workshops and conferences on endangered species.

## Marine Protection Department

The Marine Protection Department of the Agency has identified education and awareness as one of the important strategic actions towards the management of the MPA's (Marine protected areas). Awareness on marine endangered species is one important action undertaken by the Marine environment research center of the Agency. Efforts have so far centered on raising awareness about dugong and turtles. Materials and resources have been produced for those target groups who interact with the marine environment, such as; fishermen, island managers, coast guards and oil field workers.

## National Avian Research Center

Similarly, the National Avian Research Center undertakes awareness programmes about the protection and conservation of the Houbara bustard. They do this through media campaigns, presentations, promoting visits to NARC and so on. Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital reaches out to falconers, students, and other VIP's to help raise awareness about the status of falcons and the need to practice sustainable hunting.

## Environmental Materials And Information

The Agency has produces a wide variety of materials; such as books, videos, posters and interactive CD's on environmental issues. For further information, please contact: 'Environment Education and Awareness Division', Environment Agency- Abu Dhabi, PO Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, UAE, Tel: +971 2 681717, Website: www.ead.ae



Nature bus of the Environment Education and Awareness Division', Environment Agency- Abu Dhabi © Tom Bailey