

CONFERENCE ON BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

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To celebrate a decade of successful annual conservation workshops, the Sharjah Environment and Protected Areas Authority (EPAA) hosted a two-day conference on biodiversity conservation in the Arabian Peninsula, the first in the world for 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity (www.cbd.int/2010). The aim of the meeting, held at the American University of Sharjah, UAE (February 3-4), was to review biodiversity conservation progress and needs throughout the Arabian Peninsula. The conference was opened by its patron, His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Mohammed al Qassimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah, and in a keynote address Dr Simon Stuart, Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission looked at the status of the Arabian fauna and flora in relation to global patterns. Mr Abdulaziz Al Midfa, Director General of the Sharjah EPAA, provided a review of 10 years of Conservation Workshop for the Fauna of Arabia.

In the following session on the first day, invited international and regional speakers gave presentations that highlighted the current state of Peninsula-wide biodiversity. Topics included reviews of Important Bird (IBA) and Plant (IPA) Areas, WWF Ecoregions, application of the Hotspot concept, regional conservation agreements, and protected area networks in the Arabian Peninsula. The first sessions concluded with the outputs of a two-day GIS Workshop held in the days before the conference hosted by the EPAA Sharjah's Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife (BCEAW), that sought to start the important process of integrating spatial data on species and habitats as a basis for a systematic conservation assessment for the Arabian Peninsula. The final session of the first day focussed on Trans-Boundary Conservation Areas (TCBAs), a regional conservation management approach developed during Conservation Workshops in 2007-09.



Fig 1. Dr Simon Stuart, Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission, speaking at the opening of the first Conference on Biodiversity Conservation in the Arabian Peninsula, hosted by the EPAA in Sharjah on 3-4 February 2010 (© Christel Griffioen).

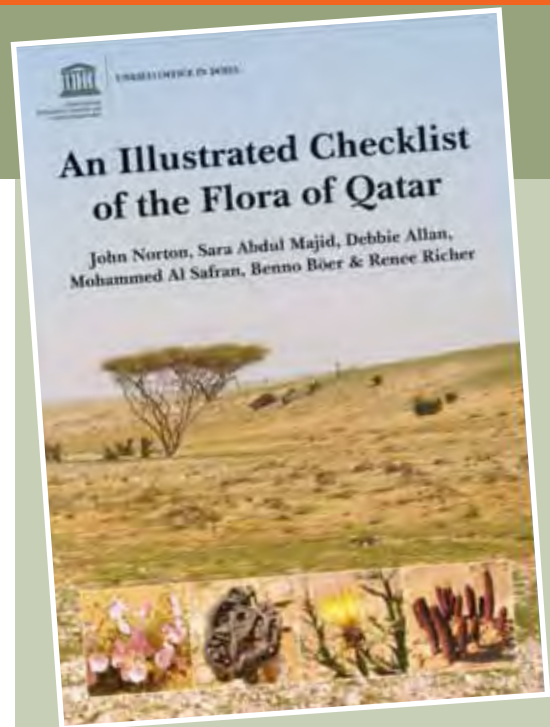
Training Workshop held before the conference, in parallel with the GIS Workshop. During an open discussion conference delegates identified a number of specific points under the headings of "Vision for the Future", and "Doing the Doing". The conference closed with a clear commitment from all involved to sustain the annual Conservation Workshops, taking a regional perspective in order to work towards regionally coordinated conservation action.

Outputs of the meeting will include a special issue of Zoology in the Middle East featuring selected peer-reviewed papers and short communications dealing with topics covered in the conference.

Information about past and future Conservation Workshops can be obtained by contacting the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife, Sharjah, UAE Email: breeding@epaa-shj.gov.ae

AN ILLUSTRATED CHECKLIST OF THE FLORA OF QATAR

This illustrated plant species checklist of the flora of Qatar has been produced in the overall framework of a major project linking biodiversity conservation with cultural heritage, namely the Quranic Botanic Garden (QBG) in Qatar. The guidelines for the QBG have been developed under the guidance of Qatar Foundation, and with the international and inter-disciplinary support and expert advice of Mr. Abdulaziz Al Midfa (United Arab Emirates), Prof. Dr. Abdulrahman Al Muftah (Qatar),



Prof. Dr. Kamal Batanouny (Qatar Foundation), Dr. Benno Böer (UNESCO), Dr. Gary Brown (Kuwait), Dr. Uwe Herpin (Brazil), Prof. Dr. Fareed Krupp (Germany), Dr. Guido Licciardi (UNESCO), and Ms. Narjes Yedder (Tunisia). They developed the overarching vision to "Provide the people of Qatar and the Gulf Region with a Centre of Excellence for Research and Education, promoting the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, emphasising the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith. This will also function as a prime recreational destination".

It was John Norton who suggested to UNESCO, Doha to develop a comprehensive plant species checklist, and this found positive feedback from UNESCO, Qatar Foundation & Maersk. This volume was necessary in order to allow for the collection and cultivation of the plants that occur naturally in Qatar. We suggested to John Norton to invite additional specialists, which he did, including a Qatari national Mohammed Al Safran Al Marri - this is real capacity building on the expert level.

A lot has been achieved in a short time, since October 2007, when UNESCO and Qatar Foundation embarked on this joint initiative, which received generous support by Maersk Oil Qatar, and which was assisted by Ralf Oliver of London (Sharjah), and Botanic Gardens Conservation International (London). The International Advisory Committee met, guidelines were developed based on expert-recommendations, the master plan was developed, reviewed, revised and produced, and an external evaluation report was compiled. These were all essential steps towards the establishment of the Quranic Botanic Garden.

This volume is a new and essential contribution, and it contains a comprehensive listing of species that occur in the country, as well as providing important eco-geographical information about these species. It is an important science-based source of information about, and education into, the understanding of the flora of Qatar. Contact UNESCO, Doha, Qatar, (e-mail b.boer@unesco.org) for copies.