

Conferences

Status and Conservation of dugongs

Symposium On Status and Conservation of Dugongs of the Arabian Gulf, Red Sea and Western Indian Ocean, May 29 - 31, 2006, Abu Dhabi.

This symposium was organised by the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi, (EAD) and was sponsored by Total Abu Al Bukhoosh (TOTAL). It provided an up-to-date appraisal of the status of dugongs in the Western Indian Ocean region.

The following keynote addresses were given on the first morning: Dr. Anthony Preen (Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority, Kempsey, Australia) on the "Status of Dugongs in the Arabian Gulf, the Red Sea and the East African Countries"; Prof. Helene Marsh (James Cook University, Australia) on the "Biology and Conservation of Dugongs"; and Dr. John Reynolds (Co-Chair, IUCN Sirenian Specialist Group) on "International and Regional cooperation for conservation of dugong and its habitat". A series of Country Reports then followed in the afternoon which included presentations on the status of dugongs in the UAE (Dr Himansu Das, EAD), Bahrain (Ebrahim A. Abdulqadaer and Mohammed Al-Rumaidh, Bahrain Centre for Studies and Research) and Qatar (Ghanem Abdullah Mohammed and Nasser Sultan Al-Mureikhi, Supreme Council for Environment and Natural Reserves). A presentation giving an archaeological perspective on the exploitation of dugongs in the Arabian Gulf was given by Dr Mark Beech (Head of Division - Cultural Landscapes, Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage).

The second day was devoted to the remainder of the Country Reports, including the Seychelles (Lindsay Chong Seng, Seychelles Island Foundation), Mayotte (Jeremy Liszka, OMMM), Kenya (Sam Weru, WWF-Kiunga MNRC&D Project), Tanzania (Catharine Muir, Sea Sense) and Mozambique (Almeida Guissamulo, Museu de Historia Natural, Maputo). A discussion session followed which led to the development of the Abu Dhabi declaration on the "Conservation and Management of Dugongs in the Arabian Sea, Red Sea and Western Indian Ocean Region" (see *below*).

The third and final day of the symposium comprised a field trip to the Marawah Marine Protected Area. After travelling from Abu Dhabi to Mirfa, the symposium delegates then went by speedboat to the waters within the Marawah Marine Protected Area. Dr Mark Beech gave a tour of an archaeological site known as MR11, on the island of Marawah, the earliest Late Stone Age settlement known in the United Arab Emirates. Excavations directed by Dr Beech there in 2004 discovered traces of dugong bones within one of the stone houses, as well as a flint spear which may have been used for the hunting of dugongs.

The following draft declaration was prepared as a result of the meeting:

Declaration of Intent on Co-operation on the Conservation of Dugongs and their Habitats in the Arabian Gulf, Red Sea and Western Indian Ocean - Abu Dhabi, 29-31 May 2006

Dugong range countries of the Arabian Gulf, Red Sea and Western Indian Ocean, hereinafter called "the region".

Aware, based upon the best available scientific evidence, that most of the dugong populations and their habitats, such as seagrass areas, are threatened throughout the range of their occurrence in the region;

Recognising that dugongs travel over large distances and have a wide range of distribution within the region, thereby requiring regional cooperation and coordination among the range states in the region;

Acknowledging that some human activities threaten dugong populations directly or indirectly and that these activities include fishing activities, particularly gillnet fishing, unsustainable coastal development, pollution, uncontrolled mariculture, tourism, boat strikes, and illegal take of the species;

Noting that dugongs have a priority for conservation action by virtue of their being listed in various international agreements including the Convention of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species;

Realising that there is a general lack of scientific information required for conservation of dugongs in the region, especially pertaining to the status of dugong populations and their habitats;

Acknowledging that, despite limited resources, government and non-government agencies, and international organisations have taken up varying degrees of conservation actions for dugongs and their habitats at local, national and regional levels;

Further noting recommendations of relevant international organisations including the seventh and eighth sessions of the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS) Conference of the Parties and the first and second meetings on Dugong conservation and management held in Thailand in August 2005 and May 2006 respectively, calling on dugong range states to develop and actively participate in regional cooperative endeavours on dugong conservation;

Hereby agree:

1. To work closely together to improve (or maintain as appropriate) the conservation status of dugongs and the habitats on which they depend.
2. To make every effort to formulate, review, revise and harmonise local/national legislation or regulations pertaining to dugongs and their habitats as appropriate.
3. To develop mechanisms towards facilitating exchange of scientific expertise, information, research findings and outcomes of conservation actions among the countries of the region.
4. To undertake joint research programmes and collaborative studies on population abundance, distribution, biology, ecology and conservation of dugongs and their habitats, especially across trans-boundary sites, and including studies of the social and economic aspects of conservation initiatives to promote capacity building.
5. To develop and implement a Memorandum of Understanding and Regional and Sub-Regional Conservation and Management Action Plans on dugongs and their habitats.
6. To endeavour to participate in all Regional and International initiatives on dugong conservation and work towards concluding agreements designed to foster cooperation in dugong conservation as appropriate.
7. To develop research and management capacity within and among the range states.

Mark Beech

Annual Archaeological Symposium in Al Ain

The *Fourth Annual Symposium on Recent Palaeontological and Archaeological Discoveries in the Emirates*, organised by the Zayed Centre for History and Heritage, was held in Al Ain on 29th-30th March 2006. The following papers were presented.

Umm al-Ishtan and Bida al-Mutawa: new Late Miocene fossil sites in the Western Region of Abu Dhabi Emirate

Dr. John Stewart, (*University College, London*), Dr. Mark Beech (ADIAS), Dr. Heiko Kallweit (ADIAS)

Abrupt Holocene Climate Change from Southeast Arabia and the Nature of Cultural Transitions in the Gulf Archaeological Record

Adrian G. Parker (*Oxford Brookes University*), Gareth W. Preston, Helen Walkington & Martin J. Hoson

Ortho-Photography and Archaeological Information Systems as tools for the excavator: The example of Al-Buhais 85

Johannes Schmitt and Adelina Uerpmann (*University of Tubingen*)

Prehistoric News from Sharjah Emirate

Hans-Peter Uerpmann, Margarethe Uerpmann, Sabah A. Jasim, Marc Händel & Johannes Schmitt (*University of Tubingen*)

Investigating the Desert Neolithic: a report on the 3rd season of archaeological survey and excavations at Umm az-Zamul, Abu Dhabi Emirate

Dr. Heiko Kallweit (ADIAS), Richard Cuttler (*Birmingham University*), Dr. Mark Beech (ADIAS) and Dr. Walid Yasin al-Tikriti (*Department of Antiquities and Tourism, Al Ain / Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage*).

Synthesis of the eighth season of excavations at Hili N, Al Ain

Dr. Sophie Mery, (*CNRS, Paris*), Dr. Walid Yasin al-Tikriti, (*Department of Antiquities and Tourism, Al Ain / ADACH*) and Dr. Julio Bendezu-Sarmiento (*CNRS*).

Archaeological survey and excavations on Sadiyat island, Abu Dhabi Emirate: 2005 and 2006 seasons

Dr. Heiko Kallweit, (ADIAS), Richard Cuttler (*Birmingham University*) and Dr. Mark Beech (ADIAS)

The Archaeological Landscape of Dhayah, Recent Observations and Surveys

by Christian Velde, Imke Moellering and Ahmed Hilal (*National Museum of Ra's al-Khaimah*)

Some thoughts on the Islamic Archaeology of the Al-Ain/Buraimi Oasis based on aerial photographs

Andrew Peterson (*Emirates University*)

Tales from the old guards: Bithnah Fort, Fujairah, U.A.E.

Michele C Ziolkowski & Abdullah S. al-Sharqi (*Fujairah*)

News, Reviews and Publications

Yasat islands declared as MPA

The Yasat group of islands in Western Abu Dhabi have been formally declared as the UAE's second Marine Protected Area, MPA, under the terms of Emiri Decree no. 33 for 2005, issued late last year by President HH Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan in his capacity as Ruler of Abu Dhabi.

The group consists of four islands, Upper Yasat (Yasat al-Ulya), Lower Yasat (Yasat Sufla), Esam and Karsha, and the MPA includes both the islands and their surrounding seas, covering a total area of 482 sq. km. The managing authority for the MPA will be the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi,

EAD, which also manages the other, larger, Marawah Marine Protected Area.

The seas around the Yasat group have been declared a no-take zone for fishermen.

According to EAD, the group of islands and surrounding waters in the MPA are of considerable ecological and cultural significance. There are extensive coral reefs, with at least eight species of corals present, which provide suitable habitat for a number of over-exploited fish species, including *Hamour* and *Sha'ari*, while populations of the critically endangered hawksbill turtle, the endangered green turtle and the dugong are also present. Upper Yasat also holds an important breeding colony of Socotra cormorants, a near-endemic bird species for the UAE.

In terms of cultural and historical importance, surveys undertaken by the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey, ADIAS, in the early 1990s identified a number of sites dating back to the late pre-Islamic period (1st - 7th Century AD) as well as extensive evidence of occupation during the Late Islamic period, some sites being considered of national or regional importance.

Under the terms of the Emiri decree, all hunting, fishing or other catching of wildlife, whether marine or otherwise is banned, as well as any damage to nesting areas of birds and turtles. Within a three nautical mile zone around the islands, fishing is restricted while the berthing of boats on non-designated areas is forbidden.

As part of preparation for the designation of the Yasat MPA, EAD undertook extensive research, including surveys and assessment of the coral reef habitats, installation of permanent monitoring stations to monitor the regeneration of the coral reefs and satellite tracking of turtles after egg-laying.

Over twenty marine marker buoys are being installed to delineate the limits of the MPA.

(Source: EAD press release, 18th June 2006).

State of the Environment, SoE, report due in November

The first State of the Environment, SoE, report for the Emirate of Abu Dhabi is due to be released in November, according to an Environmental Agency - Abu Dhabi, EAD, press release.

The report will identify and analyse key issues in environmental areas according to each of their Drivers, Pressures, State, Impact and Response, DPSIR, in accordance with a model designed by the United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP.

Core data being used in the development of the State of Environment report was compiled by EAD and its partners, including local and federal government bodies, academia and non-governmental agencies.

The report will be produced in Arabic and English and will be available to the general public and decision makers in both electronic and hard copy formats at www.ead.ae and through the AGEDI portal which will be launched soon.

The report is being produced in collaboration with UNEP and GRID-Arendal, a UNEP-approved centre based in Norway.

The SoE is part of the Abu Dhabi Global Environmental Data Initiative, AGEDI, which was launched by the UAE Government in 2002 at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa.

(Source: EAD press release 5th June 2006)

Falcon Release Programme

The annual falcon release programme undertaken by the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi, EAD, took place in May 2006 for the twelfth successive year, with the Pakistani district of Chitral, close to the border with Afghanistan, being used as the release site, for the third time. Chitral has been identified

as being on the normal migration route north for falcons returning to their breeding grounds in central Asia after the winter.

26 sakers and 34 peregrines were released, all being fitted with rings and several with satellite transmitters, so that their movements could be tracked. The birds were provided by a number of leading UAE falconers, continuing the traditional practice of releasing wild-caught birds back into the wild at the end of the falconry season.

The programme, originally called the Sheikh Zayed Falcon Release Programme, began in 1995, when falcons were released in the Kharan District of Pakistan's western province of Baluchistan. In subsequent years, releases have taken place in the Gilgit district of Pakistan's Northern Areas, in the Lake Issyk-kul area of Kyrgyzstan and in Iran's Gurgan province.

In all, a total of 1,008 falcons have now been released under the programme, with several having been tracked by satellite to their breeding grounds and then on return migration, with, in some cases, birds being tracked over a period of several years, providing useful information on migration routes and on the behaviour of the birds in their breeding and wintering grounds.

(Source: EAD press release 21st May 2006).

Livestock grazing regulated

Regulations have been issued to regulate the grazing of livestock in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, in accordance with Emiri law no. 13 for 2005. A committee is to be formed to handle the regulation, with representatives from areas used for grazing and from relevant bodies, which will make a register of areas used for grazing, the number of livestock and their owners, before issuing the relevant permits

The committee will also establish a record of traditional water wells and will prepare a report on well maintenance and measures whereby traditional grazing areas can be protected as well as specifying areas that may be used for grazing.

New regulations on grazing prohibit the use of all vehicles in activities related to the grazing of livestock and place restrictions on the cutting or burning of vegetation, hunting or otherwise harming animals, including birds, and the collection of birds' eggs or destruction of nests.

The regulations also specify that any residential compound must be at least one kilometre from a water well used by livestock and that water from the well may only be used within a one kilometre radius.

Permits for the grazing of livestock will only be issued to UAE citizens.

The new rules, to be implemented by the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi, EAD, are intended to place controls on, and eventually to reduce the amount of domestic livestock being grazed in the desert areas of Abu Dhabi, where uncontrolled grazing has had a significant and damaging effect on the natural vegetation.

(Source: Emirates News Agency, WAM, 7th February 2006).

New Site on Emirates Birds

The Recorder of the Emirates Bird Records Committee, Tommy Pedersen, has launched a website on UAE birds - <http://www.tommypedersen.com>

The site contains a regular update of all reported sightings since the beginning of 2006, now gradually being extended backwards to include older data, photographs, a list of those who have obtained membership of the 300 Club (i.e. those people who have seen more than 300 species in the Emirates), details of how to find particular sites, including GPS co-ordinates and maps, and much, much more.

ANNOUNCEMENT

WILDLIFE MIDDLE EAST - NEWS - A NEW REGIONAL NEWSLETTER FOCUSING ON ZOO AND WILDLIFE ISSUES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

We are pleased to announce the creation of *Wildlife Middle East - News*, a new bilingual regional newsletter focusing on zoo and wildlife issues in the Middle East. The newsletter aims to contribute to the development of a network between zoo and wildlife professionals working in the Middle East with the objective of being the premier source of regional information on zoo and wildlife management, husbandry and care. The newsletter will publish articles with an emphasis on practical, useful and relevant material. Proposed categories include:

- Conservation education & environmental awareness.
- Husbandry & nutrition.
- Design of zoological facilities.
- Capture and translocation techniques.
- Wildlife diseases and preventive medicine
- Products, book reviews & research.
- Summaries of recent literature on Arabian animals.
- Letters

Wildlife Middle East - News will be produced as a dual language (English-Arabic) quality newsletter and will be published quarterly. The newsletter will be distributed to biology departments and libraries of institutes of higher education, agricultural and environmental agencies, conservation groups, wildlife projects, zoos, zoologists, veterinarians working with wild animals, veterinary hospitals involved in wildlife medicine, municipality veterinarians and pet shops. A PDF format newsletter will be e-mailed to a wider circulation of interested readers within and beyond the region.

We are interested to hear from individuals, institutions, zoos and conservation projects working with wildlife within the Middle East region or with wildlife species from the Middle East managed outside the region. If you have interesting findings, news or observations please submit or request further information from the editors:

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Obituary

Professor Ronald Phillips

Professor Doctor Ronald Phillips died in November 2005, after returning from Florida to his family in the Ukraine. Many *Tribulus* readers will know and fondly remember him, either as a highly professional researcher, or as an extremely friendly and charming companion, or both.

Ronald was a seagrass specialist with many years of experience throughout the world and more recently experience in the Arabian region, in particular the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. He was undoubtedly the father of seagrass research and published over 70 papers and five books on the subject during his long career.

He was one of the pioneers of seagrass conservation, being active back in the 1960s and 1970s, and assisted substantially in spreading awareness of the values of these habitats to marine and coastal users.

In 1997 he fulfilled a lifelong dream to study seagrass in the southern Arabian Gulf when he was invited to assist the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi, EAD, (formerly ERWDA) to undertake seagrass research in Abu Dhabi Emirate.

Ronald continued his efforts in Abu Dhabi with the Emirates Heritage Club throughout the late 1990s and into this century, and was one of the first researchers to collect extensive baseline data on the rich seagrass resources of Abu Dhabi.

Ronald was also invited on several occasions to work with the regional UNESCO office on important publications on seagrass research methods. In 2002 he was one of the most eminent of the keynote lecturers in Qatar at the QUEST 2002 conference. In 2003 he assisted UNESCO and the Kingdom of Bahrain with their plans to establish a World Heritage Site covering the Hawar archipelago, based on the presence of some of the world's most productive seagrass beds, which support entire Gulf food chains, including dugongs and numerous other marine species.

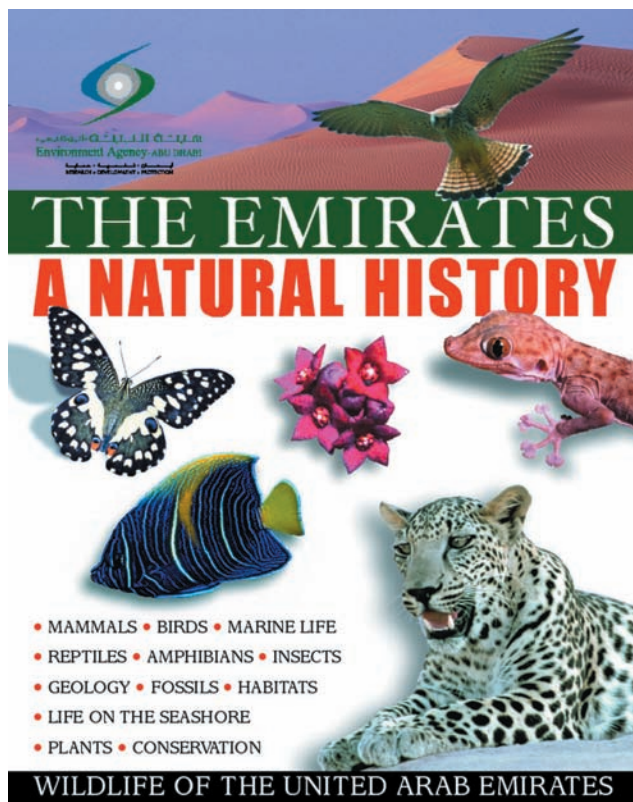
During his frequent research trips throughout the marine and coastal areas in the Gulf, Ronald collected extensive field data and also trained local Emirati postgraduate students on the techniques to monitor seagrass, and on its ecological values and general environmental importance. In 2002 and 2005 Ronald published his survey results with Abu Dhabi-based researchers and students, as part of the Emirates Heritage Club's Abu Dhabi Marine Atlas programme.

Ronald was liked by all people he came in contact with, regardless of age, cultural, or ethnic differences, and he will be sadly missed by his family, colleagues, friends and students, particularly those of us here in Abu Dhabi.

We are thankful for the time Professor Phillips spent with us, and for the knowledge he shared with us. We will not forget him, or the tremendous importance of his pioneering work. Professor Phillips was an inspiration to us all, and, in his memory, we continue to work towards the conservation of seagrass resources in the Gulf region.

Ronald Loughland
Emirates Heritage Club,
Abu Dhabi, UAE

Benno Boer
Ecological Sciences Advisor -
UNESCO Arab Region.
UNESCO Regional Office in the
Arab States of the Gulf.
Doha, Qatar



Reviews and Publications

The Emirates - A Natural History. Edited by Peter Hellyer and Simon Aspinall. Trident Press Ltd. (2005). Published with the support of the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi, EAD, Mubadala, First Gulf Bank, Dolphin Energy, Aldar Properties, Total & Shell. Trident Press Ltd. (2005). ISBN 1-905486-02-02

At first glance, the names of contributing authors of *The Emirates - A Natural History*, (published by Trident Press in November 2005) reads like a short list of some of the most prominent contemporary Arabian naturalists, all of whom are professionally known to the two editors, Peter Hellyer and Simon Aspinall. This is a strong editorial duo, both of whom have considerable relevant experience in the UAE, one as expert professional naturalist and the other as naturalist, writer, archaeologist and journalist of some standing.

This massive undertaking comes as the ambitious sequel to the previous "Natural Emirates", published in 1996, which was in itself a very useful mini-encyclopaedia of amateur and professional alike. What the present work gains in much increased coverage it loses in reader-friendliness. But how could you make it any smaller and still retain its appeal, its hundreds of photographs, which are of a very high quality, and all the textual detail? Nevertheless, it remains a somewhat cumbersome object to read. A large inclined museum desk would be perhaps the easiest method. It has all the trappings of an addition to the reference section of your local library.

The book represents not only a staggering scholarly review of every domain of the natural world within the borders of the UAE, but is also testimony to how the work of recording the data has gradually moved into the hands of professionals from the beginnings of data collection carried out by enthusiastic amateurs of the Emirates Natural History Group in the late 1970s. The next obvious goal for subsequent editions would be to have contributions by UAE citizens to the scientific investigation of their own environment.

The success of the present venture is that every area of natural history has been included within the 432 pages of the book, with the lists of species recorded. It also contains two