

With the ever-accelerating pace of development throughout the United Arab Emirates, it is good to be able to report in this issue (see page 21) that a new Marine Protected Area has been declared in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. To be managed by the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi, EAD, it covers an area of over 480 sq. km. around the Yasat group of islands in the far west of the UAE, with important marine habitats, including coral reefs, and complements the much larger Marawah MPA declared a couple of years ago, and also managed by EAD. The islands themselves are also included, and although, sadly, a substantial amount of development has recently taken place, affecting archaeological sites of regional importance, it is to be hoped that the declaration of the MPA will provide effective protection for what remains, both onshore and offshore.

There's been progress, too, on the UAE's East Coast, where a proposal has been put forward to the Ruler of Fujairah on the establishment of a Mountain Protected Area in the Wadi Wurayah watershed, home, amongst other things, to the only perennial waterfalls in the emirates as well as to the endangered Arabian tahr and, possibly, the Arabian leopard. The proposal has been prepared by the WorldWide Fund for Nature, WWF, and its local affiliate, the Emirates Wildlife Society, working with the Fujairah Municipality and has been received with interest by the Fujairah Government, although no formal decision has yet been taken on whether or not the proposal will be implemented.

It is particularly encouraging to be able to note these initiatives at a time when in other parts of the UAE the drive for development appears to be riding roughshod, to put it mildly, over the landscape (and sea-scape). The picture is, we happily concede, somewhat different in Abu Dhabi, where the Environment Protection Division, EPD, of EAD is increasingly showing its teeth in terms of demanding that would-be developers carry out proper environmental baseline studies and impact assessments, and then implement the conditions laid down by EAD before work can proceed. Some of the developers may not be too happy now, but in the long-term it is only through such measures that anything resembling a sustainable balance of development can be achieved.

In some other areas, though, no proper baseline studies at all seem to be required, while in yet others the studies are commissioned in such a way that there is scarcely time to finish preliminary fieldwork before the bulldozers move in. As for the long-term impact, we will have to wait and see but, as we've noted before, a little bit more research and planning now might well pay dividends in the long run, not just in terms of protection of the

country's environment, wildlife and heritage, but in terms of the viability of the projects being built.

As our Patron, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, noted in remarks in mid-June, the carrying out of scientific research into the UAE's environment and heritage is a "must."

"The late President Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan taught us the importance of studying and protecting our environment and our heritage, so that we are properly equipped to deal with the challenges of today and to face the tasks of tomorrow," he noted. "The carrying out of scientific research into these topics is a 'must'. It is something that all those concerned with protecting our country for the generations of the future have a duty to undertake. "

"Unless we take seriously the need for scientific research - in all fields - then we will not be able to meet the objectives for the country's development that have been laid down by our leaders, headed by President HH Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Investment in research, by Government, by the private sector and by individuals, has a crucial role to play in our future," Sheikh Nahyan added.

Such research, of course, should not simply be driven by the need to carry out studies ahead of bulldozers, but should be a continuing process, and this issue of *Tribulus* has several papers and notes that indicate, yet again, that there is still much that is to be discovered about the UAE's environment. One reports on new discoveries in north-eastern Abu Dhabi of the large mollusc *Terebralia palustris*, a species once believed to have been extinct in the lower Gulf since the pre-Islamic period, and another the discovery of a previously-undescribed type of Neolithic stone tool for Eastern Arabia. Other notes cover a new species of orchid for the Emirates, a new foodplant for the Blue Pansy butterfly and a preliminary report on an EAD satellite-tracking programme for greater flamingos that is revealing valuable new data on movements both within the UAE and northwards to Iran and Turkmenistan of populations of this bird, rightly described as a "flagship species" for protection. Finally, our lead paper shows that there is much in the way of historically-available data that needs to be coherently analysed and presented, with an important study of rainfall and climate records from Sharjah.

As usual, it's an eclectic mix, yet one which, we believe, reflects the great variety of the scientific research that is being done in the UAE, and which needs to be done. We look forward to reporting more results of research in future issues.

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