

Sharjah Conference on Biodiversity Conservation in the Arabian Peninsula

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The Conference on Biodiversity Conservation in the Arabian Peninsula was held at the American University of Sharjah during 3 and 4 February. The two-day conference was organised by the Environment and Protected Areas Authority (EPAA), Government of Sharjah under the patronage of His Highness Sheik Dr Sultan bin Mohammed al Qassimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah.



IUCN Red List Training Workshop participants at American University of Sharjah

The aim of the meeting was to review biodiversity conservation progress and needs throughout the Arabian Peninsula. The conference was opened with a keynote address from Dr Simon Stuart, Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission who looked at the status of Arabian fauna in relation to global patterns. Mr Abdulaziz Al Midfa, Director General of the 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.

The second day of the conference had the theme of “Looking to the Future”, aiming to identify data gaps and needs for the implementation of both national and regional conservation programmes. Presentations and associated discussions ranged over captive breeding, habitat restoration, species re-introductions, and climate change, and taxonomic reviews. These talks drew heavily on the outputs of previous CAMP workshops and charted a course for a future, formal Regional Red List assessment process, as detailed in an IUCN Regional Red List Assessment 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.

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