

Ten Years of Conservation Workshops for the Fauna of Arabia 2000-2009

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Abstract: A series of annual conservation workshops on the fauna of the Arabian Peninsula was initiated in 2000 under the patronage of His Highness the Ruler of Sharjah. The 10 workshops held to date have brought together many experts from across the region and outside, fostering co-operation and assessing the regional status of several taxonomic groups. The Arabian Leopard has been a major topic and a region-wide conservation strategy has been produced. The workshops have also produced the first assessment of Arabian freshwater habitats and since 2007 protected areas have formed an important topic.

Key words: Arabian biodiversity, Sharjah, conservation workshops, protected areas

Introduction

Recognising that networking and information sharing are pivotal in addressing major regional threats to biodiversity, His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Mohamed Al Qasimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah hosted the first Conservation Workshop for the Fauna of Arabia at the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife (BCEAW) in February 2000. Annual conservation workshops have been held since then under the auspices of the Sharjah Environment and Protected Areas Authority (EPAA). These meetings have become an important annual event, bringing together regional and international scientists and conservationists to discuss the status, threats, challenges and the future of biodiversity conservation in the Arabian Peninsula.

Ten workshops took place between 2000 and 2009, and were attended by a total of 316 people from 41 countries, including all those in the Arabian Peninsula (Fig. 1), others in the wider Middle East and outside the region. There has been regular involvement from IUCN Species Survival Commission, including direct participation by the IUCN/SSC Antelope, Canid, Cat, Conservation Breeding, Reintroduction, and Rodent Specialist Groups.

Species assessments

Workshops have reviewed the current distribution and status of selected taxonomic groups at the regional level (Table 1), to assess threats and recommend conservation actions. In total, 203 species have been assessed including mammals (almost all species except bats and marine mammals), birds (raptors and shorebirds), snakes, amphibians and fish and major groups of freshwater invertebrates (Fig. 2). All results were published in annual workshop reports (CBSG 2000, 2001, EPAA 2002-2007; SEDDON et al. 2008, 2009, PORTER et al. 2009).