

Transboundary conservation initiatives and opportunities in the Arabian Peninsula

Michael H. Knight, Philip J. Seddon, Abdulaziz Al Midfa

Abstract. This paper summarizes the status of and opportunities for transboundary conservation areas (TBCAs) in the Arabian Peninsula. Although there has been limited development of TBCAs in the Peninsula, the concept is seen regionally as valuable to: encourage collaboration and cooperation between conservation partners; provide a shared vision; enable joint and effective ecosystem management in a larger system; encourage social, economic and ecological partnerships; facilitate the development of a sustainable sub-regional economic base; and increase international cooperation at multiple inter-government levels. Three potential sites have been identified, each focused around a charismatic species for the region: The conservation of dugongs in the marine environment from the Gulf of Bahrain to the United Arab Emirates (UAE); the conservation of Endangered Arabian Oryx *Oryx leucoryx* in the UAE-Saudi Arabia-Oman border area; and the conservation of Critically Endangered Arabian Leopard *Panthera pardus nimr* in the Yemen-Oman terrestrial borders. There has been a call for a champion, such as the Sharjah government, to drive the process at the inter-government level, with representatives of relevant conservation authorities facilitating activities at the local level.

Key words. Transboundary conservation areas, TBCA, Arabian Peninsula, Arabian Oryx, Arabian Tahr, Arabian Leopard, Dugong, conservation.

Introduction

The Arabian Peninsula, inclusive of the countries of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait and Yemen, has a long history of traditional community-based resource conservation, applying the stewardship and conservation principles enshrined in Islamic (Shariah) law (BAGADER et al. 1991) to regulate tribal use of renewable resources such as firewood and wildlife harvests (LEWELLYN 1998). The institution of *hima* (with its specified use-areas) are some of the world's oldest and best developed traditions of resource management. These principles guided the equitable and efficient use and sharing of resources balanced with some strict elements of protection, and stimulated the development of sophisticated methods of terracing, rainwater harvesting, and irrigation, all aimed at better resource use and protection (DRAZ 1969, LEWELLYN 1998).

Formal western-styled conservation started relatively recently in the peninsula in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan with a royal declaration in 1965 paving the way for the establishment in 1968 of the Arabian Peninsula's first national park – Petra National Park (<http://www.rscn.org.jo>). Since then the number and diversity of protected areas on the Arabian Peninsula has increased considerably with the vast majority of protected areas established since the late 1980s and 1990s (CHILD & GRAINGER 1990, SEDDON 2000). In all these cases they were nationally focused initiatives, aimed at protecting specific unique