

A herpetological survey of some islands in the Arabian Gulf, Abu Dhabi Emirate, United Arab Emirates

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Abstract. Five species of geckos (*Bunopus tuberculatus*, *Cryptodactylus scaber*, *Hemidactylus flaviviridis*, *H. turcicus*, and *Pristurus rupestris*), one lizard species (*Mesalina brevirostris*) and three snake species (*Eryx jakakari*, *Coluber ventromaculatus* and *Psammophis schokari*) were recorded on a total of 13 islands during a herpetological survey conducted in 2003-2004 in the Arabian Gulf, Abu Dhabi Emirate. The distribution and abundance of these species is also described in detail. *Bunopus tuberculatus* and *Mesalina brevirostris* are more commonly distributed on the islands and the remaining gecko species are limited only to certain islands, whilst the three snake species were recorded only on one island.

Kurzfassung. Bei einer Erfassung der Herpetofauna von 13 Inseln im Arabischen Golf im Emirat von Abu Dhabi in den Jahren 2003-2004 wurden fünf Arten von Geckos (*Bunopus tuberculatus*, *Cryptodactylus scaber*, *Hemidactylus flaviviridis*, *H. turcicus* und *Pristurus rupestris*), eine Eidechsen-Art (*Mesalina brevirostris*) und drei Arten von Schlangen (*Eryx jakakari*, *Coluber ventromaculatus* und *Psammophis schokari*) nachgewiesen. Die Verbreitung und Häufigkeit wird detailliert beschrieben. *Bunopus tuberculatus* und *Mesalina brevirostris* sind relativ am häufigsten und am weitesten verbreitet; das Vorkommen der Geckos ist auf bestimmte Inseln beschränkt und die drei Schlangenarten wurden nur auf einer Insel festgestellt.

Key words. Gecko, snake, lizard, islands, Arabian Gulf, Abu Dhabi, Middle East.

Introduction

There are over 30 major islands of significant biodiversity in the waters of the Arabian Gulf, Abu Dhabi Emirate, United Arab Emirates (UAE). These islands are known to have significant sea-bird breeding colonies (JAVED & KHAN 2003) and some islands are also important sea-turtle nesting sites (DAS 2003). These islands range in size from approximately 0.5 km² to over 350 km² (Fig. 1); some are uninhabited whilst others, such as Sir Bani Yas and Delma, have sizeable human populations. Arzanah and Zirku are offshore oil-field sites with related infrastructure, and others such as Merawah, Al Bazam, Jenanah are classified as Marine Protected Areas (MPA's). Other islands such as Ushsh and Al Aryam are privately owned with limited public access. There are also some islands with restricted access.

These islands have attracted some interest for herpetological work, which has been conducted mainly by natural history groups. The Emirates Natural History Group (ENHG) has conducted some natural history trips to islands such as Merawah, Jernain and Sir Bani Yas where species have been recorded (ENHG 1989, 1990). Herpetological surveys have generally been limited to the UAE mainland, and a 1991/92, predominantly mainland survey identified a total of 33 species of reptiles (from the UAE's 36 known species) from a total of 737 records) in the UAE (EL DIN 1996).