



ZSL SCIENCE AND CONSERVATION EVENTS

ABSTRACTS

Biodiversity and conservation in the Middle East

Tuesday 14 January 2014

The Meeting Rooms, The Zoological Society of London, Regent's Park, London NW1 4RY

Chair: David Mallon, Manchester Metropolitan University, IUCN/SSC Antelope Specialist Group

The global importance of the marshlands of southern Iraq for birds

Mudhafar A. Salim, Technical Director, Nature Iraq

The marshlands of southern Iraq are one of the most important wetlands in the world and the largest marsh complex habitat in the Middle East. A total of 264 species have been recorded in the marshes and their environs. Of these, 77 have been found breeding; a further eleven may breed. Fifty four of the breeding species are resident in the marshes though some also have migratory populations. Some 197 species are regular winter visitors or passage migrants and a further 20 species are rare visitors or vagrants having been recorded. Some species that used to be regular winter visitors or passage migrants 50 or more years ago, no longer occur, and this requires further research. Despite the drainage faced by the marshes that started in the 1980s, no breeding bird species has been lost.

In terms of conservation priority, 16 species that regularly occur are Red Listed by IUCN Redlist as globally threatened or Near Threatened. Also, an additional four breeding species are regionally threatened, and a further six breeding species are regionally Near Threatened. Furthermore the marshes hold globally or regionally important populations of 30 species, two of which, the Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis* and Iraq Babbler *Turdoides altirostris* are endemic to Iraq. The economic value of birds, their threats and conservation are discussed as well as opportunities and recommendations for future actions.

An elusive and rare cat: Asiatic cheetah in Iran

Mohammad Farhadinia, Iranian Cheetah Society and WildCRU, University of Oxford

Despite the disappearance of Caspian lion and Asiatic lion, Iran still has eight species of cats, including the largest remaining population of Persian leopard. Iran also has one of the rarest species of cat of the world, the Asiatic cheetah. Asiatic cheetahs once roamed across south and western Asia but the species is now confined to Iran, with a total population of fewer than 70 individuals. Unlike their plain-dwelling African cousins, Asiatic cheetahs live in mountainous and hilly areas, hunting their main prey of wild sheep and ibex. The species is found in over 15 government-protected reserves. During the 1990s cheetahs were known to be killed by people

due to a lack of awareness of their conservation importance; however, since 2001 fewer cheetahs have been killed by people. The species is currently facing a new threat: the development of a network of roads, which accounts for around 40% of human-caused mortality of cheetahs. Thanks to vast media coverage and public education, the Asiatic cheetah has become widely known in Iran as a symbol for a new era of wildlife conservation. The country's government and conservation NGOs are keen to create initiatives to extend awareness of this iconic species in Iran.

For more information, please visit www.wildlife.ir

Socotra - Yemen's special island

Richard Porter, author of 'Birds of the Middle East' and adviser to BirdLife International's Middle East conservation programme

Socotra, Yemen's special island, is one of the great centres of endemism in the Middle East with over 300 endemic plants, 20 reptiles and 10 birds. It is often dubbed the Galapagos of the Indian Ocean. Detailed studies over the last 20 years have mapped the distribution of habitats and birds and shown the important relationship between them. During this time the first breeding site in the world for Jouanin's Petrel was discovered and the resident buzzard named as a full species, becoming the 'newest bird of prey in the world' in the Guinness Book of Records. The studies of bird populations and distribution are the most comprehensive for any large area in the Middle East and have shown that no species is Globally Endangered. Socotra is now a World Heritage Site and Richard will talk about its threats and conservation opportunities.