



“Efforts of the UAE in Biodiversity Conservation”

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Abstract:

Despite being regarded as an unfertile desert, the UAE like most of the other GCC countries hosts a unique and remarkably adapted fauna and flora. Several causes are threatening the biodiversity in the UAE. These include natural coastal development and urbanization, as well as over-exploitation of natural resources (over-fishing, over-hunting, overgrazing and water extraction) that are linked with the tremendous population increase and changes in lifestyle. Over the last few decades, the UAE has lost most of its big fauna and several others are at the edge of extinction.

Huge efforts are paid by the UAE to conserve biodiversity. Several official decrees have been produced locally or at federal level by the UAE since its creation in 1971 to conserve biodiversity and its habitats. In addition, like most countries, the UAE has ratified biodiversity and environment related international conventions and signed regional agreements that enhance and conserve biodiversity.

Fifteen protected areas have been declared officially in the UAE. Six of them are terrestrials (one in Abu Dhabi and 5 in Dubai) and seven marine areas (two in Abu Dhabi and four in Fujirah and one in Sharjah). The total areas of these protected areas are 4406 Km² (= 5.4% of the total lands of the country). In addition, 46 protected areas have been un-officially declared in the UA. According to the Emirates, they are: 23 in Abu Dhabi, One in Dubai, One in Sharjah, 3 in Ras Al-Khaimah and 4 in Um Qwuan. According to the ecosystem, 32 are terrestrials and 14 are marines.

More efforts are needed to declare more protected areas for habitat/species management, and for the protection of the landscape/seascape area (Categories IV and V of IUCN), as none of the protected areas in the UAE have been declared for these purposes. Due to the fact that all of the major habitat types are repeated in the different GCC countries, it is important to compile one database for both fauna and flora of these countries, instead of individual lists and books for each country. These will help in defining the species that should receive more priority for conservation at the level of the region, rather than at the level of each country.