

# Wildlife tourism in Dubai: a veterinary perspective

PeterMckinney MVB CertZooMed  
Zoo and wildlife Veterinary Services  
[birdvetmckinney@gmail.com](mailto:birdvetmckinney@gmail.com)

- Dubai is a tourist hotspot !
- Al Maha desert resort
- Dubai sea turtle rehabilitation Project



# Al Maha desert resort and spa

An ecotourist project established in 1993. Bedouin settlement style

- Funding: Ruler of Dubai and emirates airline
- Luxury facility in a protected area of desert
- habitat rehabilitation of indigenous trees and shrubs
- Introduction of oryx and gazelle



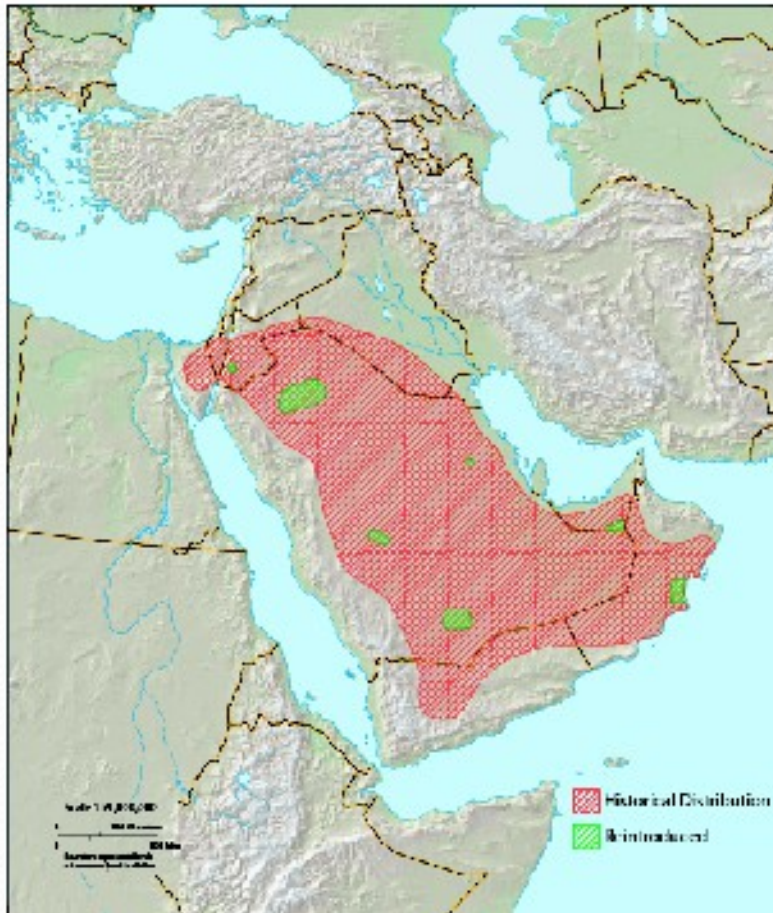
# The Arabian oryx

- Hunting pushed the oryx to very low numbers
- Hunting of gazelles was banned in 1983
- Well adapted to the desert
- Oryx ‘Unicorn’ are culturally significant.





# Oryx



- Arabian Oryx (*Oryx leucoryx*) are endemic to the Arabian Peninsula, with a historically range across Oman, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, United Arab Emirates

- Initially 118 individuals were released into the Al Maha Reserve and provided with supplementary feed
- artificial shelter and water
- Veterinary supervision





# Project aspirations

- Over 300 Arabian oryx providing a viable breeding population of Arabian Oryx
- Protecting an area of desert landscape
- Encourage visitors in a controlled sustainable manner to view the project



# Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve (DDCR)

- A conservation zone of 225 km<sup>2</sup> was established in Dubai emirate in 2003
- 5% of the total land area for Dubai
- Emirates Airline, and the government of Dubai
- Over 200 000 people visited the DDCR in 2007.





## DDCR

- member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- Member of the UNEP –the united nations Environment programme
- 2008 - National Geographic Adventurer - Worlds Top 50 'Ecolodges'
- It is the first wildlife and conservation area in the UAE to be formally declared by IUCN as a Protected Area



# Guest activities

- Falconry displays
- Horse riding
- Camel riding
- Bedouin style desert dinners
- Walking tours
- Animal photography



**A buffer zone between livestock and oryx is essential**



**Traditional camel grazing land**





## Falconry




## Bustard releases



# Research

- Role of shrubs in combating desertification
- Effects of camel vs oryx grazing on plant ecology in DDCR
- Assessment of arthropod fauna  
Al Maha is home to over 33 mammal and reptile species, all indigenous to the Arabian Peninsula





Al Maha started as a hotel project

Developed into a conservation project where an area of land was protected and managed

A large area is protected and wildlife numbers are increasing

The project serves as a model for the tourism/conservation industry.

Economics: Conservation costs money but like art, one cannot put a price on it

Big business ;should they get involved?



# Dubai turtle rehabilitation project

- Founded in 2004,
- Burj Al Arab and the Madinat Jumeirah
- Dubai's Wildlife Protection Office.
- 500 sea turtles rehabilitated
- The program includes participation of hotel guests and locals



# Aim of the project

To rehabilitate sick and injured turtles to the wild

Promote environmental awareness

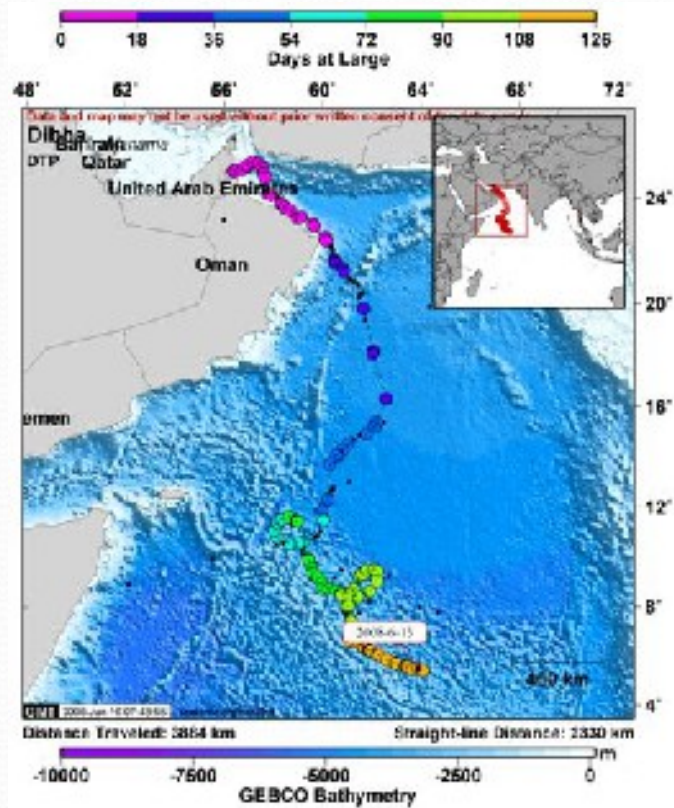
Aid Research in turtle conservation

Media coverage?/good PR!





## Research



## Sponsorship of satellite tags





- The Hawksbill turtle, is critically endangered
- An 80% drop in numbers of egg laying females recorded in last three generations
- Most cases are juveniles stranded during colder months
- UAE law prohibits capture of turtles or egg collection



# How does the hotel benefit?

Open day releases

School visits

Mina A 'salam-pre release





# Promotion of turtle conservation

## Why bother?

- Jumeirah :dedicated aquarium staff
- The outdoor lagoon pre-release area
- Wildlife protection office
- Facebook linked releases
- Positive media exposure

## Everyone loves turtles!





# Benefits

- stimulated interest in sea turtle conservation
- protection of nest sites
- Guest approval positive
- The hotel and Dubai gains valuable media attention
- Good reasons for major hotels linking to conservation projects



# Thanks: shookran

