19th International Conservation Forum for Arabia's Biodiversity

PHILIP SEDDON Department of Zoology, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand. E-mail philip.seddon@otago.ac.nz

MIKE KNIGHT South African National Parks, & Centre for African Conservation Ecology, Nelson Mandela University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa

GERHARD STEENKAMP Department of Companion Animal Clinical Studies, Faculty of Veterinary Science, University of Pretoria, Onderstepoort, South Africa

CRAIG HILTON-TAYLOR IUCN Red List Unit, Cambridge, UK

DAVID MALLON Manchester Metropolitan University, UK, & IUCN Species Survival Commission

HELEN SENN Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, Edinburgh Zoo, Scotland, UK

The 19th Annual Sharjah International Conservation Forum for Arabia's Biodiversity was held at the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, during 5–8 February 2018. This forum brought together over 200 participants from Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Iraq, and also from the UK, South Africa, Australia, the USA and New Zealand. The Sharjah workshops are hosted by the Environment and Protected Areas Authority of the Government of Sharjah, under the patronage of H.H. Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Mohammed al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah.

The 19th meeting had four themes. A species assessment theme conducted an IUCN Red List assessment of the endemic plants of the Arabian region. The protected areas theme applied the new IUCN Key Biodiversity Area standard to selected taxa and sites across the Arabian Peninsula. The veterinary theme looked at clinical diagnostics and immunology in zoo and wild animals. A technical session looked at the application of drones in ecological monitoring and conservation management in the United Arab Emirates.

Working groups conducted an IUCN Red List assessment of endemic plants of the Arabian region. In total 375 species were assessed, 21% of which were found to be threatened, including 30 Critically Endangered species. This marked completion of the first comprehensive assessment of the status of all endemic plants in the region.

Taxonomic and regional working groups applied the Key Biodiversity Area Standard (IUCN, 2016, *A Global Standard for the Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas, Version 1.0*) to 37 species of threatened Arabian plants and animals, including six species of mammal, seven bird species, 11 reptiles, one amphibian and 13 aloes. Delegates delineated Key Biodiversity Areas for selected taxa and evaluated overlap between existing protected area networks and designated Important Bird Areas. The development of regional criteria for Key Biodiversity Areas was also discussed.

The veterinary theme focused on haematology, clinical chemistry, urinalysis, clinical immunology, neonatal immunology, vaccination and diagnostic testing, and the identification of disease using blood smears. Lectures introducing the topics were complimented with small-group sessions in which case studies were discussed and diagnoses made. It was agreed that this basic approach to animal health should be developed in the region, to equip veterinarians better for the pivotal role they must play in ecosystem health.

In the technical session, case studies were presented for the application of quad-copters and fixed wing drones for vegetation monitoring, counts of shorebirds and turtles, and monitoring of herd dynamics of Arabian oryx *Oryx leucoryx*. Delegates discussed the opportunities, constraints, and challenges relating to the expansion of drone-based ecological monitoring in the Arabian Peninsula.