

October 03 2011 | Last updated 3 minutes ago

gulfnews.com

UAE | Environment

A walk on the wild side in the heart of Dubai

loading
Close [x]

Reserve offers eco-tourists chance to study species from region

By Emmanuelle Landais, Senior Reporter

Published: 00:00 October 1, 2011

GULF NEWS



Image Credit: Karen Dias/Gulf News

Dubai: A nature reserve in the heart of Dubai emirate will serve as the holiday backdrop for eco-tourists from January who want to see conservation up close and help study species special to the Arabian Peninsula.

Desert animals such as the Arabian oryx, Gordon's

wildcat and McQueen's bustard will be the focus of the research conducted at the Emirates-owned Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve, in partnership with international conservation organisation Biosphere Expeditions.

With two projects in Oman on coral reefs and the Arabian leopard, this new project will be the first in the UAE and the third in the region. The Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve (DDCR) became an official member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 2008.

The 225 sq km reserve makes up nearly 5 per cent of Dubai's land area and is registered with the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA), managed and audited by the United Nations Environmental Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC).

Article continues below



The participants will operate from a field camp base in the reserve and venture out in Land Rovers and on foot to study oryx behaviour and social structure, camera-trap and live-trap Gordon's wildcat and monitor Macqueen's bustard by radio and GPS telemetry.

Breaking new ground

All three are on the IUCN Red list of threatened or

endangered species.

"The reserve is huge so there really isn't much difference in terms of animal behaviour and movement compared to the wild. The fence just ensures that the animals are protected from being shot, harrassed, persecuted, as they have been all over the rest of the Arabian Peninsula," said Dr Matthias Hammer, founder and executive director of Biosphere Expeditions.

"The oryx breeding programme, has been very successful, for example with several hundred individuals in the reserve now. What we do is the nitty-gritty work of putting up and checking camera and live traps, darting and collaring animals, tracking them, counting sex ratios and assessing movement patterns. This is very labour-intensive and therefore perfect for our volunteer model. It means that we gather data for the DDRRC, which they don't have the capacity or time to gather themselves. It be used in the sustainable and long-term management of populations within the reserve such as oryx, Gordon's wildcat and Macqueen's bustard," he said.

The boundaries of the Al Maha Desert Resort and Spa which takes up 27 sq km of the reserve were extended in 2003 to create the area it is today.

The inaugural expedition in the UAE will take place next January and paying volunteers will be able to sign up to help scientists inside the reserve.

"Anybody is invited to join. There are no prerequisites in terms of skills or knowledge of biology or conservation, as all techniques will be taught on the expedition," said Hammer.

How to become a conservationist

People interested in seeing conservation in action and becoming a conservationist for a week from January

6-14 can sign up and find out more about the expedition via www.biosphere-expeditions.org/emirates. The cost for the eight-night expedition in the desert is Dh5,660.