



# Al-Asad au Natural



Volume I, Issue 8

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## Creature Feature

### *Special points of interest:*

- Which local animal will fight leopards and cobras? See the Creature Feature!
- For a celestial event, see Page 3!
- A frequently asked about bird is discussed on Page 4.
- **Next Issue:** A Christmas Tradition Comes to Al Asad!

### Inside this issue:

Honey Badger Myths	2
Geology Update	2
Questions from the Field	3
The Dusty Lens: A Pic of the Week	4
Birders' Corner	4

### Honey Badger

Described in the 2002 Guinness Book of Records as, "the most fearless animal in the world," the Honey badger, or Ratel, is a member of the weasel family and is the toughest animal on Al Asad. Like other badgers, the Honey badger avoids people and is mostly nocturnal, although they become diurnal during the cool of winter. Badgers are carnivores and will eat anything they can catch and kill, which is nearly everything! Video on the internet show Honey badgers chasing large cats, climbing a tree to eat a cobra, and shaking off the effects of snake venom. They are attracted to beehives (more



Honey badger captured and released on Al Asad

for the bee brood than the honey), and in Africa they will follow the lead of a bird, the Greater honey-

guide, to find beehives, which they tear into oblivious of the stings of hundreds of bees. Honey

## Who's Living Under My CHU?

### House Centipede.

Venomous to its prey but beneficial to us, this insect is eating spiders, termites, and roaches in the admin supply closet and other damp, dark corners of our offices.



[www.insectpod.com](http://www.insectpod.com)

Born with only 2 pairs of legs, by the time they are adult the House centipede has 15 pairs, 1 per body segment

"I was expecting someone taller."

- a dying badger

## Creature Feature (cont.)

badgers can weigh up to 30 lbs, have 32 teeth, and 3.5 cm long front claws. They are widespread, but locally threatened by bee keepers and ranchers protecting their stock, poison meant for jackals and wild cats, and poaching for traditional medicines. Males have large territories that include multiple female territories, and a typical litter is a single cub. Badgers avoid humans, but have quick, unpredictable tempers and must be left alone. One other type of badger is found in Iraq, the European badger.



**Above:** a probable honey badger den in the wadi at Al Asad. **Right:** the Greater honeyguide (an African bird) points out a beehive in a painting by Walter A. Weber. Humans also follow this bird to honey.



## Honey Badger Myths

1. They attack to castrate other animals. No direct evidence supports this myth.
2. They follow a bird to honey. Probably true—the bird then gets leftovers.
3. They are bulletproof. Not true, but they do have thick skin and are tough.
4. They cache extra food. Anecdotal evidence supports this.
5. They are impervious to stings or venomous bits. While protected by thick, loose skin, they are occasionally killed by bees, especially when they are caught in a trap near a commercial hive. They do seem to have some resistance to snake and scorpion venom.

*The Honey badger is more closely related to the wolverine than to true badgers*

## Geology Update

An earlier issue identified two possible theories for the formation of the valley we occupy. One was that it originated as a rift over a fault. The other was simple erosion. Much poking around has led me to give more credence to the erosion theory. In deeper parts of the wadi, I have found outcroppings of clay,

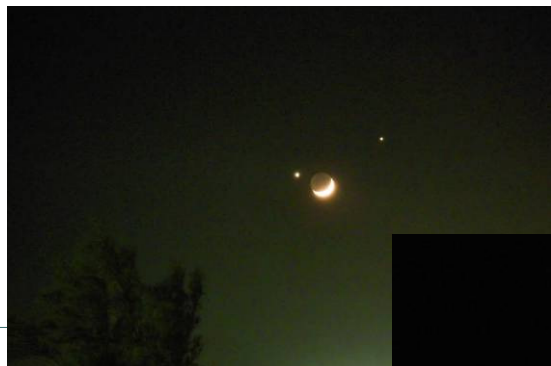
and this layer of clay, deposited long ago at the bottom of the Pre-Tethys Sea, blocks ground water and holds it near the surface. This explains the oasis, which, combined with its neutral to alkaline water, is actually a type of wetland known as a fen. The water is likely higher in pH due to passing through layers

of limestone, an outcropping of which can be found behind the fuel farm. Where the fen gives way to grasslands lower in the wadi, the technically correct name for these wetlands would be a freshwater marsh. The valley itself is therefore not a rift, but a true wadi carved as water flows to the Euphrates River.

## Questions from the Field...your questions answered!

### What are the 2 Bright Stars in the Night Sky?

**Venus and Jupiter.** The lower is Venus, which appears larger and brighter because it is much closer. The higher is Jupiter, and through binoculars you can see up to 4 of Jupiter's moons. Just at dark during the first week of December, these planets will be very close to the crescent moon in the night sky. On the first, western Europe, may see an "occultation" of Venus—the planet will disappear behind the moon, and as it reappears it will appear to be touching the moon. In Iraq the two will just appear close.



*"Earthshine" is the light reflected off Earth onto the part of the moon that is in eclipse (shown in left photo)*



### Corrections

1. Issue 2 identified the bird photographed by CPT Kaiser as a Brown-necked raven; it is more likely a Rook.
2. Some versions of Issue 7 cut off the last line of "Questions from the Field" - it should have read that the cactus was likely spread around the world by sailors as a cure for scurvy.

*The Magpie (see page 4) is the only non-mammal known to recognize it's own reflection!*



# PIC of the WEEK

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE UNOFFICIAL  
UNIT NATURALIST...  
PUBLISHED EVERY 2 WEEKS, MORE OR LESS

Send your photos, questions, and submissions to  
MAJ Rogers at:  
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*Always Right, Sustain the Fight!*

**371st SB**



**MAJ Rogers helped release this young Crested porcupine caught by Vector Control**

## Birders' Corner

People seem to ask about the large, noisy, or strikingly patterned birds that appear around our buildings. No one has ever asked about any of the little brown flycatchers or warblers that I have seen by the break area, but everyone notices when a **Eurasian magpie** makes an appearance! Magpies (A & B) are often the subject of local superstitions or folk stories. In Britain and Ireland the number of magpies seen determines your luck: "One for sorrow, Two for joy, Three for a girl, Four for a boy, Five for a wedding, Six for gold, Seven for a secret never to be told." Other recent AI Asad sightings include the **Common kestrel** (C) and **Black francolin** (D).

