



Al-Asad au Natural



Volume I, Issue 10

2 January, 2009

Special Points of Interest:

- CBC Results—Page 4!
- The largest poisonous snake on Al Asad! Page 3.
- Froggy went a-swimming! Page 3.
- **Next Issue:** Our “order” will be “Odonata”!

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“What a country chooses to save is what a country chooses to say about itself.”

-Mollie Beattie

Creature Feature

co-written by SGT Steven Bradley

Regionally Endangered

Syrian Bear

At 350 pounds, the Syrian bear is the smallest member of the brown bear family which includes its much larger cousin, North America’s Grizzly bear. They are opportunistic eaters—in Iraq they probably eat nuts, berries, reptiles, small animals, and insects, and may also scavenge any carcass they come across. Many types of brown bears exist in small, isolated populations, and these sub-species or races are vulnerable to extinction. Such is the case with the Syrian bear,

which lives in mountainous areas of Syria, Turkey, and Iraq. Uncontrolled hunting and habitat loss has reduced its numbers, allowing

the European brown bear to encroach in the northern part of its range and the Himalayan bear to encroach from the east. Its numbers in Iraq are not known, but thought to be few, with southern Turkey being the core of its present range. Al-



though its numbers continue to decline, Turkey recently lifted its ban on hunting in order to make money from foreign trophy hunters. It may seem insignificant if an isolated race of a species goes extinct as long as (cont. on page 3....)

“Extralimital” means an animal found outside its normal range.

Who’s Living Under My CHU?

Deathstalker. Previously we looked at the deadly Fat-tailed scorpion, but the Deathstalker is the most dangerous scorpion in Iraq. Nonetheless, its venom is used in medicines for diabetes and brain tumors.



Ester Inbar

Rule of Thumb:
scorpions with smaller pincers are more dangerous.

3 Plants to “C” in Iraq

Three commonly seen plants on Al Asad are capers, camelthorn, and Mediterranean cypress. Enjoy these short profiles of each!



Mediterranean cypress trees (left) may be some of the oldest living creatures on Al Asad—they can live over 1,000 years! Each tree will grow both tiny male and female flowers. The female flowers develop into the round seed cones (far left). This tree is drought resistant and gets about 80' tall.

Camelthorn, or manna, (below) develops small pink flowers and is a legume related to peas. It is the sole food of the larva of one species of casebearer moth (*C. argyrella*).



Capers (above) can be a spiny bush or vine and has large white flowers which close at sunset and turn into fruits that look like miniature watermelons. As the fruit ripens, it opens, exposing its red flesh and seeds to birds and other animals, which are attracted to the open fruit, eat the fruit and then spread the seeds through their scat. Capers are also salted or pickled and used by humans as condiments, while young leaves and shoots can be added to salads. Last summer I noticed that Common babblers and Gray hypocolius were among the birds that seemed to especially like capers.

Nodules on the roots of legumes such as camelthorn fix nitrogen in the soil making it available for other plants to use.

The Dusty Lens: Pic of the Week!



Levant water frog photographed by Randy Mendenhall

Creature Feature (cont. from page 1)

there are still plenty of the races that exist in larger numbers, but in fact the loss of extralimital or sub-species restricts both the range and genetic diversity of a species, making it vulnerable to a single disease or natural catastrophe. Also, the loss of a sub-species often means the loss of a unique or culturally important animal (such as the rare “spirit bears” of western Alaska) or

one that has unique qualities like resistance to a particular disease.



Range of all species of brown bears, Syrian brown bear denoted by **GREEN** circle.

Questions from the Field— Your Questions Answered!

Are there cobras on Al Asad?

Yes. One member of the cobra family is native to western Iraq, the Desert black snake (top). Larger Arabian cobras (bottom) are not native, but may escape from fakir shows. Cobras prefer wooded stream sides, but may occur any-

where. Both have potentially fatal venom. They are round-eyed, and are best identified by their shiny, smooth appearance and the larger scales on top of their head. When agitated, they may display their hood, but may attack without doing so. The Desert black snake can grow to 52”, but is usually 3-4’ long.



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Always Right, Sustain the Fight!

371st SB

Birders' Corner

Species identified
on Al Asad to
date:

94

Al Asad CBC Results!

The Al Asad Christmas Bird Count was completed and the results are in! This survey counted all birds seen between 15 DEC and 1 JAN, with only the largest daily count for each species tallied to prevent counting the same individual more than once. **2,054** individual birds were counted, representing over **47** species! Some of the highlights included a large number of **Mallard** and **Northern shoveler** (A) ducks, both of which were new additions to my Al Asad list, and a pair of **Finsch's wheatears** (B), which were life birds for me. One **Black francolin** didn't count—I found only it's feathers in



the wadi after it had been eaten! The culprit may have been a jackal or fox, or perhaps a Jungle cat, since this grouse-like bird would be one of it's favored meals.

Kestrel	7	Grey hypocolius	1	Northern shoveler	11	***1 <i>phyllo</i> , 2 unk.
Black francolin	3	Robin	3	Mallard	23	Other observations:
Water rail	2	Bluethroat	1	Stonechat	4	Common jackal (12)
Little crane	2	Black redstart	9	Finsch's wheatear	2	Sand fox (3)
Moorhen	18	Isabelline wheatear	2	Unidentified warbler 4***		Cape hare (3)
Coot	48	Graceful prinia	4	Stock pigeon	5	Crested porcupine
Red-wattled plover	6	Hen harrier	1	Ruff	2	
Common snipe	8	Common babbler	35	Common sandpiper	2	
Rock dove	250	Iraq babbler	26	Little grebe	3	
Wood pigeon	102	Isabelline shrike	2	Moustached warbler	1	
Collared dove	29	Great gray shrike	1	Spotted flycatcher	3	
Laughing dove	11	Magpie	10	Grey heron	1	
Unidentified lark*	32	Rook	1000+	Marsh harrier	1	
Crested lark	25	House sparrow	72	Desert lark	2	
Tawny pipit	40	Spanish sparrow	163**	Pochard	1	
White wagtail	17	Green Sandpiper	2	* pos. short-toed var.		
White-cheeked bulbul	44	Hooded Crow	13	** 3 Spanish/House sparrow hybrids		

