



# Al-Asad au Natural



Volume I, Issue # 14

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## Creature Feature

### *Special Points of Interest:*

- Who's Protecting You from Typhus, Hantavirus, Leptospirosis, and Rat-bite Fever? Our Creature Feature!
- Laying Down Law on Jungle Cats—Page 3
- Al Asad Got You Down? Find Advice on Page 4!
- **Next Issue:** A Special Creature Feature!

### **Inside this issue:**

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"One way to open your eyes is to ask yourself, 'What if I had never seen this before? What if I knew I would never see it again?'"

- Rachel Carson

### Rueppell's Fox

Also known as the Sand fox, these little (6 lbs) guys are among the most efficient means of pest control on Al Asad. As omnivores, they are opportunistic feeders, but studies show their main diet is of insects, arachnids, and rodents—all critters that pose health risks to humans! They supplement this diet with fruit, reptiles, eggs, and carrion. These foxes are efficient—depending on the method of calculation, they may cover up to 70 sq. km each night! During the day, Sand foxes rest in underground dens, moving on average about once every 5 days. They have large ears to regulate body heat and help

find prey during their solitary nocturnal hunts. They also have furry foot pads for traction on loose sand and protection from the hot desert ground. A

monogamous pair will usually have 2-3 kits in the spring, and may travel in a family pack until the young disperse. (continued on page 2)



## Who's Living Under My CHU?

Ticks Voted (by the editorial staff) "Most Disgusting Critter", ticks are common on Al Asad. Lyme disease is present here, so if you get a tick, use tweezers to remove it promptly and see the TMC just in case. Removal in under 24hrs lessens the chance of problems. Prevent ticks by keeping covered, use bug juice, and checking yourself often. Some ticks wait at the top of foliage for passing mammals, but a few will actually chase the CO2 emitted when animals breathe!



< hard body tick

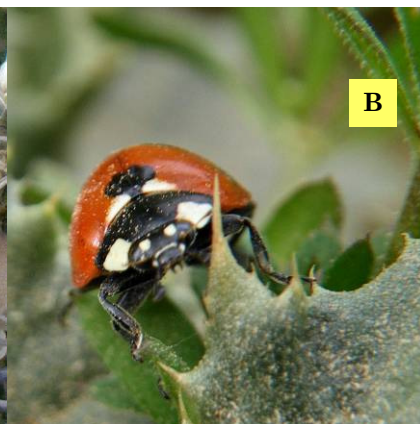
soft body tick >





# My Garden

As promised, this edition of My Garden will showcase some of the creatures I have found living among the wildflowers, and also a couple of recent blooms.



A. 3 varieties of flowerflies—these often impersonate bees  
B. 7-spotted ladybug C. Striped hawk-moth D. Hummingbird moth (another variety of hawk-moth) E. Painted lady butterfly  
F. Green lacewing—in its larval stage known as the “aphid lion”

## Creature Feature (continued)

Sand foxes are shy and not a threat to humans, and 157 tests conducted in Anbar Province last year exhibited zero instances of rabies. They are only preyed upon by hawks and owls, but are out-competed by larger canines (Red foxes, jackals) and are severely persecuted by humans. Their conservation status is un-

known, and they are listed by the IUCN as “data deficient”. Although it is assumed that overall the population is strong, it is not known if this is true for all of the 5 sub-species or in all regions.

*The Sand fox is 1 of 3 fox species in Iraq (Fennec and Red also occur here)*

*The unique furry paw pad of Rueppell's fox. >>>*





# Questions from the Field—Your Questions Answered!

## Are Jungle Cats Protected by Law?

**Somewhat.** This is not a simple answer. Yes, the cats are protected by CITES, an organization of 175+ countries including the U.S. but not including Iraq that regulates trade in wild animals, and who list the Jungle cat in Appendix II (Appendix I grants the most protection, Appendix III grants less). The IUCN only recently listed this species, and has it as a species of “Least Concern” based on its wide distribution and strong numbers of some sub-species in some regions. In countries where the cat is extremely rare (e.g. Jordan, Egypt), the cat is protected by the laws of those countries. Iraq is

home to the subspecies *Felis chaus chaus*, which can be common in areas with permanent wetland habitat. This limits the cats to the southern marshes (95% drained by Saddam, currently being restored but facing challenges) and the river valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates. Many of these wetlands are being destroyed by development, and the cats are hunted for fur and poisoned by farmers (they will prey on unprotected poultry). It is likely that *Felis chaus chaus* does warrant listing as Vulnerable or even Threatened in Iraq, and possibly as a sub-species, but the challenge is that there have been no studies in Iraq for over 30 years, so no one really

knows. For this reason, Nature Iraq (the NGO responsible for conserving Iraq’s wildlife) urges a conservative approach, according the animal protection at least until studies can provide data for science based management decisions. Since these shy cats pose no danger to humans, and poultry can be protected by barriers or farm dogs, that seems like a reasonable approach.



## My Garden—Recent Blooms



- A. *Unk. legume*  
 B. *Broom rape (a parasite that lives off the roots of other plants) family*

- C. *Unk. groundcover*  
 D. *Knotweed*  
 E. *Spurge family*  
 F. *Thistle family*



# 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**



Illustrating our dedication bringing you this fine publication, our staff photographer goes after a picture of a Honey badger.

## Birders' Corner

It was a quiet week for birding, so I thought I might take a moment to ask a question: of these pictures, which is the way you will remember Al Asad? Will you only remember the desert as it has been scarred by man, or have you looked around to appreciate what the desert is really like? How prison-like Al Asad must be if you have never looked beyond the area between our office and the PX. Our time here grows short, but it is spring and a bigger world is only a block or two away.



Species identified  
on Al Asad to date:

**104**