



Al-Asad au Natural



Volume I, Issue # 15

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- Is My Camera Really Water-proof? Find out! page 4
- **Next Issue:** An Unusual Creature Feature!

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"The wilderness holds answers to questions man has not yet learned to ask."

- Nancy Newhall

"Earth and sky, woods and fields, lakes and rivers, the mountain and the sea, are excellent school-masters, and teach some of us more than we can ever learn from books."

- Sir John Lubbock

Creature Feature

Critically Endangered

Sociable Plover.

The Sociable plover (or lapwing) is a critically endangered species, with only about 6,500 birds known to exist. The 11" tall bird spends its winters in India, NE Africa and the Middle East, and breeds on the grasslands of south-central Russia. When a flock of half the known population was observed in Turkey 2 years ago, it was surmised that many of these birds migrate through western Iraq. England's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds formed a special working group to study this species, and they have now banded the legs of over 1,000 birds, and also applied a satellite tracking device

to a few. On February 24th, one of the tracked birds that wintered in the African nation of Sudan landed near a lake just 65mi. east of Al Asad. A few days later on March 1st, an un-banded bird, a female, was found at Al Asad. Documentation of this sighting was prepared for the RSPB, the Ornithological Society of the Middle East, and Nature Iraq's newly formed Bird Records Committee. Both birds were likely headed towards breeding grounds in Kazakhstan. It is hoped that further study



will reveal yet unknown populations of this species and allow it to be upgraded to Endangered status. The primary threats to this species may be hunting & habitat destruction on wintering grounds & probably also on key migration stops.

Who's Living Under My CHU?



The House Mouse

One of these common rodents ran under a T-wall near my CHU just the other night! Properly storing food and trash will help keep them from over running our area.

House mice have little or no color vision, but can hear ultrasound, and use it for short range communication.

My Garden

For this edition I've focused on the wildflowers found on about 40 acres of relatively dry grassland / seasonal marsh at the west end of the wadi.



Questions from the Field—Your Questions Answered!

What Kind of Snake is This?

A Dice Snake. The vet at Mosul sent these pictures, which show a Dice snake, a non-venomous, non-biting species that eats fish and amphibians and is known to both play dead and secrete a smelly mucous as defense measures. Dice snakes are listed by the IUCN as **Vulnerable**, and are found near permanent bodies of water.

Photos by: CPT Keith Koistinen



Ode for a Jackal (and apologies to a bard)

Iraqi Friends, Soldiers, and Countrymen, Lend Me Your Ear....

We have come to bury the Jackal, not to praise him; the evil that wild dogs do lives after them, the good is oft incinerated with their bones. So let it be with the Jackal. Noble policy has told you that Jackals are dangerous—if it were so, it is a grievous fault, and Jackals have grievously answered for it. I come to speak at the Jackals' funeral; they have been my friends. Faithfully have they kept the roadside and the living areas free of carrion and even our own misplaced garbage. Noble policy (and policy is honourable) says Jackals have been ambitious, and indeed they have ambitiously swept our base of disease bearing rodents (but have they

unprovoked attacked man?). Ambition should be made of sterner stuff. Others (they are all honourable men) accuse the Jackal of the theft of poultry (surely this poultry was protected by dogs and barriers?), and this charge I can not deny. We find joy in this new safety for all of



the chickens on military bases. Noble policy says Jackals are diseased, and again the Jackal must stand guilty. We thrice presented the Jackal an annual rabies program, and in scores of tests over those 3 years, in fact, 1 (**one**) Jackal did fail. I do not speak to disprove policy, nor unfound local custom—they call the Jackals' howl a sign of danger (I call their evening serenade "The Call of the Wild") - but I am here to speak what I know. O judgment! Thou art fled from the brutish beasts, and men have lost their reason...Bear with me; my heart is in the incinerator there with the Jackal, and I must pause till it come back to me.....

My Garden (cont.)

- A. Poppy B. Zilla C. Horsemint D. Italian bugloss
E. Yarrow F. Pimpernel G. Ladybug larva (on Arugula)
H. Broom rape
I. unknown
J. unknown
K. Roemeria



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:

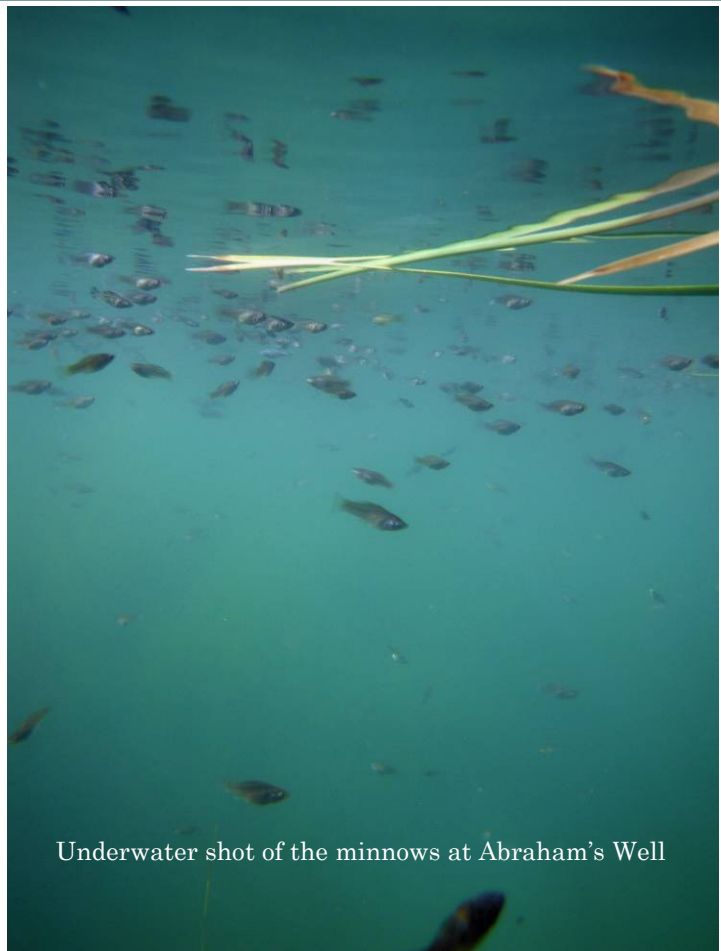
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Always Right, Sustain the Fight!

371st SB



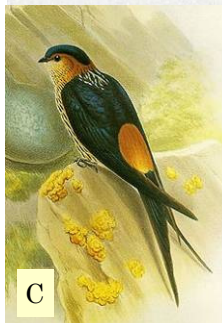
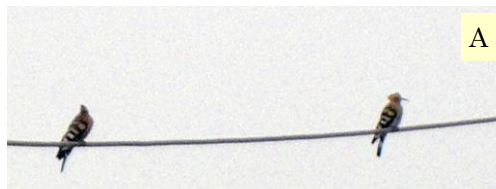
Underwater shot of the minnows at Abraham's Well

Birders' Corner

Species identified
on Al Asad to date:

109

The excitement of spring migration went into high overdrive in early March, with a number of migrants spotted including **Hoopoes (A)**, **Red-rumped swallows (C)**, and **Northern wheatear (E)**. I also added **Spur-winged plover (G)** and **Jack snipe** to my Al Asad list, and saw a number of **Common teal**, **Grey wagtail (F)**, and various **warblers** this week. Two large raptors were observed, one was a **Hen harrier**, but the other was too far away to I.D. Overwintering birds have already established territories and bird-love is in the air. Some species I have noted performing breeding rituals include **Shoveler ducks**, **Bluethroat**, **Stonechat (B)**, **Mesopotamian hooded crow**, **Rooks**, **White-cheeked bulbuls**, **Graceful prinia**, **Little crakes (D)**, and others.



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