



# Al-Asad au Natural



Volume I, Issue # 16

16 March, 2009

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- A Foggy Issue—Page 3.
- Soldier Skills? Page 4.
- **Next Issue:** “Parting is such sweet sorrow.....”

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“To stand at the edge of the sea, to sense the ebb and flow of the tides, to feel the breath of a mist moving over a great salt marsh, to watch the flight of shore birds that have swept up and down the surf lines of the continents for untold thousands of years, to see the running of the old eels and the young shad to the sea, is to have knowledge of things that are as nearly eternal as any earthly life can be.”

- Rachel Carson

## Creature Feature

### The Marsh.

The marsh at Al Asad is not a single creature, but it is a living community consisting of thousands of living plants, animals, and insects. Their existence depends on the health of the habitat, and the habitat is a product of geology and the actions of the creatures living here, to include man. From the surrounding clay and limestone, groundwater in the marsh picks up calcium carbonate, giving it a slightly low (base) ph. This slightly low ph is good for plants like the Common reed, which in turn provides habitat for animals all the way up to



the Jungle cat. Changes to water quality, the destruction of the reed beds, or the loss of any species changes the nature of the community, causing some species to suffer, and perhaps encouraging others. This is true whether the subject is a fishbowl, a particular marsh, the ocean, or the planet. The only difference is scale and the amount of change needed to effect conse-

quences. And did I mention that ultimately we drink this water? The concept of biotic communities consisting of both living and non-living features is the central point of Aldo Leopold's “land ethics”. Leopold wrote, **“The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.”**

## Who's Living Under My CHU?

These tiny ants are among several species common at Al Asad. Ants help clean the desert floor and provide food for many other animals. I liked the architecture of these particular ants!



# My Garden

- A. male Small Cabbage butterfly
- B. unknown mint
- C. unknown Compositae
- D. white-flowering variety of Tamarisk
- E. unknown
- F. flowering tree
- G. unknown
- H. dandelion variety
- I. Italian bugloss
- J. unknown
- K. Cloven-petalled flycatch

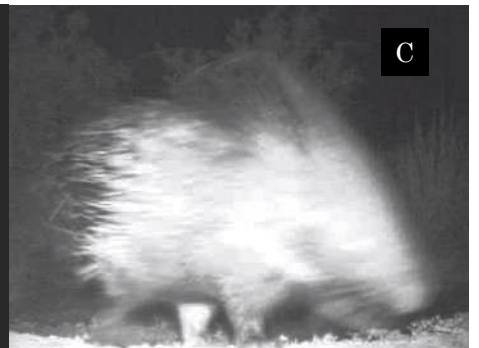


# Al Asad Nightlife



A

I have always known that Al Asad had a hidden night scene, but it took a friend with a game camera to show just how wild things get when the desert sun goes down! These images are all stills taken from video recorded on a game camera left in a remote area, and show how active the desert is at night—most of these were taken in a single weekend!



C



B



G



D



E

- A. Sand fox
- B. Jungle cat
- C. Indian crested porcupine
- D. Golden jackals
- E. Striped hyena
- F. another Jungle cat
- G. a large bat



F

## Questions from the Field—Your Questions Answered!

### Is Mosquito Fogging Al Asad a Good Idea?

**NO.** Studies show fogging to be a poor method of mosquito control. In ideal conditions, it kills some adult mosquitoes, but these are replaced in as little as 4 days. Harder to replace are the beneficial insects killed—ladybugs, mantis', dragonflies, and similar mosquito-eating bugs. Also harmed are amphibians, fish, birds, and the food chain that supports a healthy wetland.

Plus it puts poison dangerous to humans in the environment and may contribute to mosquitoes developing resistance to insecticides. Fogging is a solution in isolated cases, but is often used by cities to create the appearance of solving a problem. Real solutions are to eliminate man-made sources of stagnant water and leave a buffer zone around wetlands.

Window screens, long sleeves, and bug juice all work as effective means of personal protection. When fogging is called for, some insecticides are safer than others, oversight must insure chemicals are not abused.

*Anbar Province is not considered a high-risk area for malaria or West Nile virus.*

# 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:

randel.rogers@aa.mnf-wiraq.usmc.mil

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*Always Right, Sustain the Fight!*

**371st SB**



Full-arch rainbow over Al Asad on March 6th.

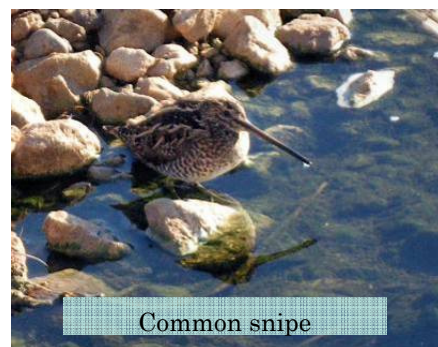
## Birders' Corner

"Gizz" describes identifying a bird by a general impression or intangible qualities when you fail to see or hear any trait that allows for positive identification. For instance, many of the local snipes are very similar at a glance, but several that I flushed in late February and early March seemed just a little smaller, maybe with just a little shorter bill, than the **Common snipe** I had been seeing here. Also, they were in somewhat drier habitat, and while the Common snipe would seldom allow me to get close and were noisy in flight, these were flushing right at my feet and remained silent. The "gizz" just wasn't the same, and I suspected these might be migrating **Jack snipe**. I checked with birders with more regional experience. They confirmed that my observations were very

typical for Jack snipe, but would not be consistent with the Common snipe. And so another bird was added to my list. A lot of times noticing new things in nature is not just a matter of seeing the obvious—it is noticing minor changes or differences—a different "gizz". This requires careful observation of the usual, so that any small change is more apparent. Strangely, these same skills have military applications! In fact, these are the same skills that allow vehicle crews to spot IED's, point men to spot mines, and guards to know when something isn't right. For that matter, these are the same skills that allow mechanics to know when something is about to go wrong on equipment or staff officers to spot minute errors on Powerpoint slides! Be a better Soldier—become a birdwatcher!

Species identified  
on Al Asad to date:

**113**



Common snipe



Jack snipe

PKucynski