BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

The ecosystems, habitats and communities of flora and fauna of Abu Dhabi are a fragile, precious resource. However, development and growth impose intense pressure on these natural assets. Consequently, there is an urgent need for planned and wide-ranging approaches to ecological management and conservation.

In protecting the natural assets of the Emirate, EAD has adopted a variety of measures, requiring effective policies, regulations and action. These include the signing of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with partners to maintain the delicate balance between development and the environment. EAD is also implementing international commitments and treaties for biodiversity conservation. For example, in February 2000 the UAE ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

The CBD aims to establish a global network of comprehensive, representative and effectively-managed protected areas, covering at least ten per cent of each of the world’s ecological regions. Abu Dhabi supports this crucial target through its conservation policies, spearheaded by EAD.

Marine Protected Areas Network

Abu Dhabi is gradually designating an increasing number of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). The total area of all MPA is over 2,000 km², which represents 3% of the territory of Abu Dhabi waters.

Al Yaar Protected Area

The 2,046 km² Al Yaar MPA in the west of the Emirate is a well-recognised conservation area that provides breeding sites for the critically endangered Hawksbill Turtle (Eretmochelys imbricata). This coastal area falls under the High Priority Protection Category, and is designated based on the environmental, economic and social values it offers. Multiple environmental management policies are in place, including a Ban on all marine activities with the exception of fishing, ensuring the effective protection of turtles.

Ecosystem Approach

To achieve this goal, an 'ecosystem approach' is being implemented that integrates land, water and biodiversity management to promote the necessary conditions for ecosystem resilience and recovery. The approach is focused on biological systems that consider the essential structures, processes, functions and interactions among organisms and their environment. Significant examples of the role of the ecosystem approach in the context of cultural biodiversity are evident in the nature conservation strategies and plans of various Emirate authorities. The EAD has adopted an ecosystem approach to design and implement its conservation strategy, and to ensure that development is sustainable and that biodiversity is conserved in appropriate areas.

Terrestrial Protected Areas Network

The sustainability and importance of the marine environment to humans has been discussed extensively. The EAD has implemented a number of measures to promote protected areas that require protection to preserve their natural status and to limit the impacts of human development. The EAD has designated one area as a Marine Protected Area Network, and an additional five areas as Territorial Protected Areas Network to improve the health of the environment and the survival of its species through effective management and conservation.

Masirah Marine Biosphere Reserve

Masirah is a 2,285 km² UNESCO-designated ‘Marine Biosphere Reserve’, comprising a range of unique marine and coastal habitats including seagrass beds, mangroves, coral reefs, lagoons and coastal wetlands. These are especially important to migratory and endangered species, such as the Olive ridley (Lepidochelys olivacea), and the Hawksbill (Eretmochelys imbricata) and Green (Chelonia mydas) turtles. The Masirah Marine Biosphere Reserve recognizes and balances the needs of local communities with the requirements of conservation, ensuring that the local population benefits from the environment for more generations. They are highly knowledgeable fishermen with a profound understanding of sustainable fisheries and their own unique environment.

Jebel Huft Protected Area (proposed)

As the only inselberg in Abu Dhabi, Jebel Huft is a well-known landmark that provides habitat to a wide range of species. This unique ecosystem is of global significance, and requires protection to ensure its sustenance and survival. The EAD is currently reviewing various options for designating a protected area in this area, and plans to implement a management strategy to safeguard its biodiversity.