

Blanford's Fox, Arabian Tahr found in Fujairah

During the wildlife survey carried out by Chris and Tilde Stuart of African Carnivore Research between March and May 1995 on behalf of the Arabian Leopard Trust, several specimens of a fox previously unrecorded in the UAE, **Blanford's Fox** *Vulpes cana* were trapped in Fujairah's Wadi Zikt.

The species is best known from its occurrence in Pakistan, north east Iran, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. Previous records from the Arabian Peninsula have been few and far between: Sinai (1983), Jebel Samhan, Oman (1989) and recently from the Asir district of south western Saudi Arabia.

Harrison's *Mammals of Arabia* describes the Blanford's Fox as being the size of Rueppell's Fox, with a long, bushy, black-tipped tail. The muzzle is acutely pointed, and the face is slender. There is a striking mid-dorsal black band extending from the nape of the neck, along the spine, and becoming a very marked mid-dorsal crest throughout the length of the tail. The species favours steep cliffs and rocky slopes.

Three animals were trapped, measured and released: one a lactating female, one a male that was captured three times (presumably in exchange for the free meal of quail on offer), and one a male with a white-tipped tail - an aberration that may require further study.

The records represent a considerable extension to the

known geographical range of the species, and confirm, yet again, that there is a substantial amount of information yet to be discovered about the wildlife of the UAE, even for mammals.

Another major discovery, in late April, was evidence of the continued presence of the **Arabian Tahr**, *Hemitragus jayakari*, in the UAE. While surveying a Fujairah wadi not far from Khor Fakkan, the Stuarts saw one female tahr, accompanied by a single youngster, probably three or four months old.

Villagers in the nearby Wadi Safad last year reported the presence of 'wa'el,' which were assumed to be either Ibex or Tahr, and the sighting confirms the tahr's presence.

The Arabian Tahr was previously known to exist in the UAE only on Jebel Hafit, near Al Ain, where they were seen by Wilfred Thesiger in the late 1940s. The last known record was of a carcass found in 1982, and the species was believed extinct in the Emirates.

Regrettably, the tahr is still hunted by villagers, and, like the Arabian Leopard, its continued survival in the wild must be considered highly unlikely unless tough legislation is implemented to curb hunting.

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Safavid and Sassanian Coins in Fujairah

In **Tribulus Vol. 2.1** (April 1992), Page 25, the discovery by a farmer in Mirbah, Fujairah, of a pot containing several hundred coins was reported.

After cleaning undertaken by the Department of Tourism and Antiquities in Al Ain, the hoard was found to contain a total of 381 coins, all of which were copper or copper-bronze, minted in Persia (Iran) during the Safavid dynasty, and covering the period A.H. 1075 - 1135 (AD 1668 - 1722).

A representative selection of the coins are now on display in the Fujairah Museum.

In the third decade of the eighteenth century, Oman and the area now comprising the United Arab Emirates was engaged in the conflict between the Hinawi and Ghafiri tribal alliances, in which Rahmah bin Mattar of Julfar (Ras al Khaimah) was involved.

It is reasonable to assume that the coins were buried by their owner because of the civil disturbance prevailing in the area during the years immediately following A.H. 1135 (AD 1722).

The contents of the hoard suggest active trading, even if on a small scale, between the Fujairah area and Iran in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries AD.

Another, smaller, hoard found on the outskirts of Fujairah city has also now been examined by a member of the staff of the Al Ain Department.

A report submitted to the Fujairah Museum notes that the hoard, comprising 18 silver coins and some bangles, dates to the late Sassanian period, shortly before the coming of Islam to the region.

Although the coins have not yet been formally studied by a numismatist, all of them are ascribed to the reigns of two of the later Sassanian emperors, Hormuz IV (579-590) and Khusrau II (590 - 627).

The coins came from several mints, which the report from Al Ain identified as including Nehawand, Peshabor, Abrashahr, Marro, Al Rayy, and also Samarkand (one) and Astakhar or Azerbaijan (one). Where weights were given in the report, they varied between 2.91 and 2.99 grams.

Sassanian coinage continued to be used after the coming of Islam until around the middle of the Omayyad Caliphate, circulating alongside copies produced by Muslim governors, which were struck with Arabic inscriptions. The Fujairah hoard has no such inscriptions, suggesting that it was perhaps buried around the time of the arrival of Islam in the UAE and certainly prior to the Omayyad currency reform of AH 78 or 79, (AD 698-699).

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