



Al Asad au Natural



Volume I, Issue 5

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Special points of interest:

- You've met the dogs, now meet the cats of Al Asad!
- What's an endemic? Read Birders' Corner.
- **Next Issue:** I'm going batty over the Halloween Issue!

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“ He goes out hunting
The mountain lion I am
With mahogany bow he
goes out hunting
With the yellow tail-
feathered arrow he
goes out hunting
The finest of female game
Through the shoulder
that I may shoot
In death it obeys me.”
- Navajo folk song

Creature Feature

(Extirpated—Critically Endangered)

The Asiatic Lion Al Asad translates to “The Lion”, a symbol of strength and cutting edge military might, and a traditional Iraqi symbol dating back to the Lion of Babylon and biblical times. The lion that once roamed Iraq (and in fact an area from India to Greece and across northern Africa) was the Asiatic Lion. Today only 350 wild Asiatic lions remain, all centered around a small preserve in India. The Asiatic lion is slightly smaller than the African lion, has a shorter mane (exposing its ears more), and has a wrinkle of skin running down its abdomen that the African version lacks. Persecuted since Roman times, this animal has been hunted

to the brink of extinction, with the last Iraqi lion

shot in the Tigris / Euphrates delta in 1918.



Who's Living Under My CHU?

The Domestic Cat I was surprised to see a cat of the tabby variety near pad 9 a couple weeks ago. This cat appeared healthy, but outdoor cats are subject to several fatal feline diseases, attacks from other animals,

mistreatment from humans, hunger, accidents, parasitic worms, fleas, and ringworm (a fungus). These last two are easily transmitted to humans, and a bite can pass rabies.



Sand Cat

Sand Cats live in the harshest deserts, hiding under rocks during the day and hunting at night for lizards, rodents, and insects. This cat lives away from water, completely meeting its fluid requirements from its food. Sand cats are small at about 20" in length and an average weight of 6 lbs. They have a broad head and large ears, with a 12" tail. Their paws are protected from the hot sand by long hairs between their pads. They are further insulated from the sun by their dense fur. Unusually, Sand cats will share territories and even



take turns using the same dens. They also have highly developed

hearing for hunting in the dark and can hear the sound of a rodent scratching out an underground tunnel. The numbers of Sand cats are not well known. While widespread, they are threatened in some areas by habitat destruction and hunting. They are non-aggressive and can be observed sunning on rocks during cooler days.

"Extirpated!" describes a native plant or animal that no longer lives in a certain part of its range.

Wildcat

Wildcats are a widely spread, slightly larger version of a domestic cat, and their habits and diets are similar. The subspecies in Arabia is called the Tawney cat. These cats are timid and avoid humans. The main threat to the Wildcat is interbreeding with domestic cats and also the diseases transmitted by feral cats. This is ironic because domestic cats are descended from African subspecies of the Wildcat.



"Sufferin' Succotash!"
The cartoon cat Sylvester gets his name is from the Latin name of the Wildcat, *Felis sylvestris*

Questions from the Field...your questions answered!

What is the difference between chert and flint?

Not much. Both form when silica minerals replace sediments in a low heat and low pressure environment. Both form as nodules and occur in various colors, and have similar characteristics. Traditionally flint

occurs in chalk and chert in other sedimentary rocks like limestone or dolostone. In general usage, flint denotes a higher gem quality and chert a less attractive piece. Agate and jasper are types of flint. Both can be used to spark a fire. Another name is cryptocrystalline quartz. Flint is the State Gem of Ohio!



Chert found by Chaplain Lewis

Jungle Cat



The Jungle cat is a resident of Al Asad, and sometimes approaches

villages or lives in abandoned buildings. In Iraq, they prefer to live among reed beds along rivers or in swampy areas. Rodents, birds, and amphibians make up the diet of the Jungle cat, and near water they will swim for fish. They average 28' long with a short 8-10" tail and weigh 9-35 lbs

(males much heavier than females). Though widespread, they are be-

coming rare in the Middle East due to hunting and poisoning by farmers protecting their poultry. When bred with domestic cats, the result is a breed called a "chausie". Vector Control occasionally catches one of these cats (see photo) around the wadi. Al Asad has a catch and release policy for Jungle cats, which do not pose a threat to humans.

Cheetahs and Leopards once lived in Iraq, but like the Asiatic lion have been extirpated. The European lynx lives in northern Iraq.

Caracal


Caracal derive their name from the Turkish word *karakulak*, meaning "black ear". They live in semi-desert and savannah areas and can go for long periods without drinking. Weighing up to 40 lbs, Caracals are the largest cat that live in this part of Iraq. They are known for their skill in hunting birds, jumping to snatch them in flight—sometimes catching more than one

at a time! They will eat animals up to the size of a gazelle or small antelope, but are picky about which parts they eat (most cats will eat the entire animal). They are also highly territorial with other cats. Caracals are easily tamed and can be trained for hunting, but are rarely seen in the wild due to their ability to hide & blend in.



The Original "Jungle Cat"

The Lion of Babylon

Attack Cats are concentrated near Athens, Ohio, and can give an embarrassing but non-lethal bite to their larger neighbors!

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Send your photos, questions, and submissions to MAJ Rogers at:

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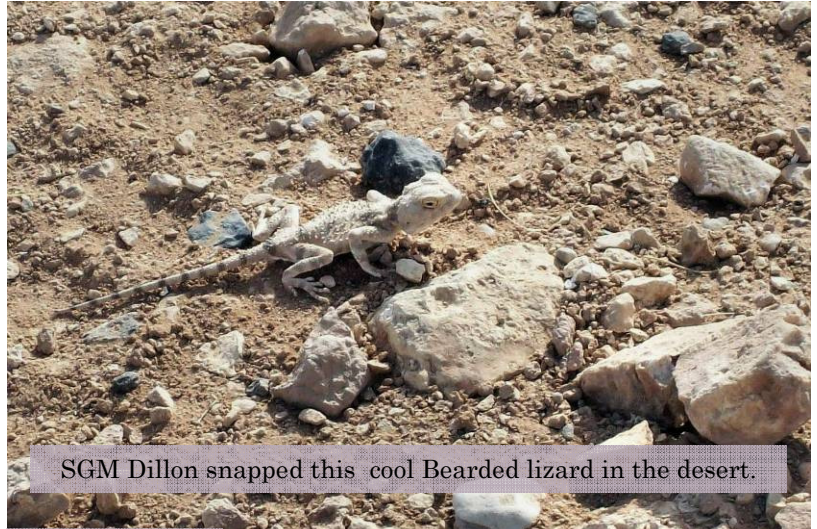
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Always Right, Sustain the Fight!

371st SB

Pics of the Week!



SGM Dillon snapped this cool Bearded lizard in the desert.



MAJ Hinton caught this baby House gecko (photo & finger courtesy of MAJ Rogers)

Birders' Corner

One of the distinctive (some would say noisy) sounds of the Al Asad oasis is the Great Reed warbler (A). It's close cousin, the Basra Reed



© P. Doolin - 4 May 2002
Acrocephalus arundinaceus
#329663 (© Empress Espiga)

A

warbler (B), is one of the special birds of Iraq. An inhabitant of the southern marshes, the BRW is considered an endemic of Iraq, meaning it occurs nowhere else. In truth, the BRW can also be found in Kuwait, probably in SW Iran, and in 2006 a small breeding population (only about a dozen individual birds over 2 years) was found in Israel. When Saddam Hussein drained the marshes in the south of Iraq (attempting to destroy the culture of the Marsh Arabs), the BRW was put in serious jeopardy of extinction. Thankfully the marshes and the birds are slowly recovering through the efforts of Nature Iraq and Birdlife International. Iraq's only other endemic bird, the Iraq babbler (C), is one of two types of



B

©Mike Pope



C

babblers that live here in the wadi, the other being Common babbler.