

UAE Identifies 9 Key Biodiversity Areas

The UAE has announced that it has identified nine Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) in the country. The announcement was made last month by the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment (MOCCA) and the areas in question were agreed upon after collaboration with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The designations should prove invaluable in safeguarding the environments of numerous plant and animal species, maintaining the ecological stability of the ecosystems concerned and providing crucial natural resources. In creating these nine protected areas, the UAE has once again shown how seriously it takes environmentalism, sustainability and biodiversity.

9 new KBAs

The determination of the KBAs was jointly undertaken by MOCCA and the IUCN last year, involving 75 Emirati nationals and ex-pat members of the IUCN. With training provided by international experts and guidance given by MOCCA, the members' decisions were ratified by Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan (the Emirati President) after a recent review of the project. They now appear in the World Database of KBAs and are as follows:

- Arabian Oryx Protected Area, Abu Dhabi
- Marawah Marine Area, Abu Dhabi
- Al Yasat Marine Area, Abu Dhabi
- Al Marmoom Desert Conservation Reserve, Dubai
- Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve
- Wadi Al-Helo, Sharjah
- Khor Fakan and Shark Island, Sharjah
- Wadi Al-Bih, Ras Al Khaimah
- Siniyah Island and Khor Al Beidah, Umm Al Quwain

These designations provide a significant boost to the percentage of terrestrial and marine sites important to biodiversity in the country. Land-based protected areas have leapt up from 51.55% to 98.08%, while sea-based protected areas have experienced a similar increase from 48.61% to 98.17%.

Breaking new ground

The two sites in Sharjah (Khor Fakan and Shark Island and Wadi Al-Helo), both of which are hugely important to endemic gecko populations, are the first KBAs for reptiles in the country. Meanwhile, the second-largest settlement of dugongs (or sea cows) is found in the UAE, with their populations largely split across the Al Yasat Marine Area and Marawah Marine Area. Both of these are the first such dugong-protected areas in the Middle East.

Elsewhere, the UAE is home to the largest Arabian oryx population of any country in the world. These are generally found in the Arabian Oryx Protected Area and the Al Marmoom Desert Conservation Reserve. In creating these KBAs for such species, the UAE is futureproofing the continued survival of these animals. In the case of the Arabian oryx, this is especially significant, given that the animal was on the brink of extinction 50 years ago.

Indeed, the project as a whole is testament to the UAE's commitment to protecting global biodiversity. "This achievement serves as a catalyst for ongoing conservation programmes aimed at safeguarding nature and preventing the extinction of rare species," [remarked MOCCA Minister Dr Amna bint Abdullah Al Dahak](#). "It represents a pioneering Emirati global experience in biodiversity conservation."