



# Al Asad au Natural



Volume I, Issue 7

16 November 2008

## Creature Feature

### *Special points of interest:*

- What is mutualism? See page 2.
- A *fil* here, a *fil* there, soon you talking real *dinar*! Page 3!
- Mirror, mirror, on the car... Page 4.
- **Next Issue:** The toughest animal on Al Asad!

### Inside this issue:

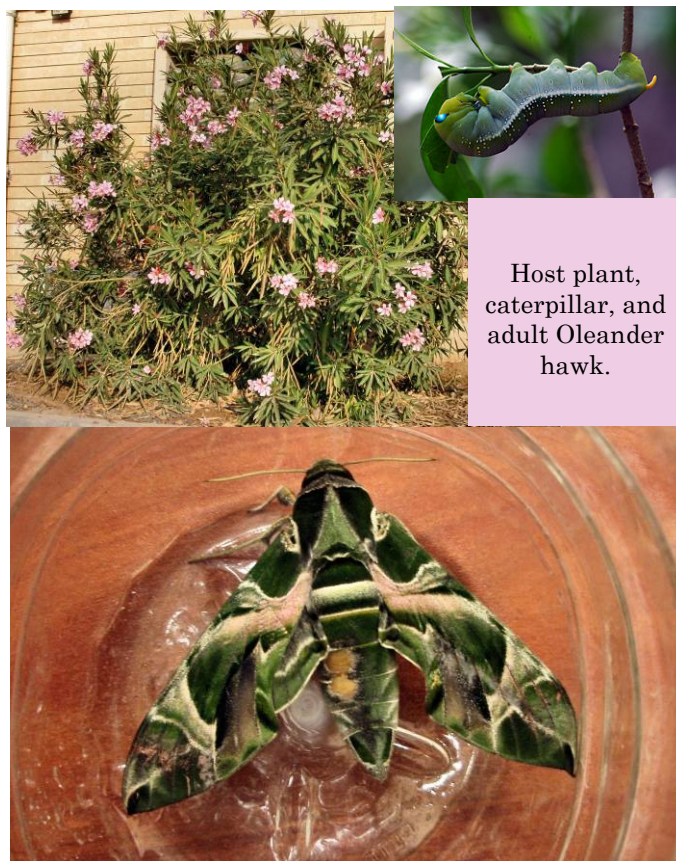
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"To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering."

- Aldo Leopold

### Oleander Hawk

The Sphingidae family of moths are often called hawk moths or sphinx moths. Such is the case with the moth that SSG Timmons found in HHC, the Oleander Hawk. In this case the moth is named for the oleander flower, which is the host plant that the moth feeds on during it's caterpillar stage. Their body sequesters the highly toxic poison found in this bush, allowing them to eat it without harm. The moths return the favor of the plant providing food in their larval stage by pollinating the oleander as adults. These beautiful moths can be found wherever there is oleander, including the U.S.



Host plant, caterpillar, and adult Oleander hawk.

## Who's Living Under My CHU?

### Fat-tailed Scorpion

Thankfully none of these guys have been found, but this common 4" long scorpion is one to watch for—they have a deadly neurotoxin and cause several human deaths each year!



# Words and Music

In the 80's movie "Eddie and the Cruisers", the main character explains why he needs his friend to stay with the band by explaining that he can provide the music, but without the lyrics provided by his friend the songs are not complete. Words and music. I was reminded of this scene while writing this issue's Creature Feature on the Oleander hawk. The moth can not survive without oleander leaves to feed it during it's larval stage, and the plant's survival is aided by the adult moths as they pollinate it's flowers. In this example, if oleander became valuable and was harvested in an unsustainable manner, when the oleander was gone, so to

would be the Oleander hawk. In some instances, a plant may have only a single species that is capable of pollinating it's flowers. If some species of sunbirds, hummingbirds, bats, or insects were to go extinct, these plants would also disappear, effecting any other animal that relied upon them for food, shelter, or medicine. These arrangements in nature are called mutualism, and are the effect of millennia of evolution and specialization. They are an indicator of healthy biotic diversity, and examples of the intricate nature of the web of life. These relationships provide salient arguments for protection rare ecosystems, for although we do not completely

understand the many links of the food chain, we do understand that if we lose too many links the chain is no longer a chain, but merely a jumble of disconnected links. A song is not a jumble of disconnected notes, but rather a relationship of notes connected by melody and given meaning with lyrics. Words and music.

*Hawaii was once home to at least 71 birds found nowhere else in the world. 48 are left, and 30 of these are endangered.*



In Ohio, the Spicebush butterfly (right) depends on the spicebush (far right) to host it larval stage (bottom far right)



In Hawaii, 4 species of Hibiscadelphus (far left) are extinct and the remaining 3 are going extinct because honeycreepers, such as the Maui nukupu'u (left) that once pollinated them are now extinct.



## Questions from the Field...your questions answered!

### Does Cactus Grow in Iraq?

**Yes.** Native to Mexico, the prickly pear cactus has been cultivated since ancient times and spread around the world. This adaptable species can be found across the U.S., around the Mediterranean, and throughout the Middle East. It

is used for medicines, beauty products, food, and (most importantly in Iraq) fodder for livestock. In Iraq the most common variety has no thorns, and in addition to providing both food and water for animals, the fruit, called cactus apples in the U.S. and Indian figs here, are commonly eaten by people. It may have





# Well, Well, Well!

I was surprised to learn recently that Abraham's Well is not the only oasis on Al Asad! In fact, there are three oases, with Abraham's well being the largest and the only one with an open pond. Working from SW to NE, there is Abraham's Well, then a much smaller oasis near the waste water treatment plant, and an oasis near the concrete plant that is sized between the others. Although they are not marked by an open body of water, in these spots the water is held very near the surface, allowing palm trees and lush grass to grow. From my exploration, I suspect these underground pools are held by a layer of clay, outcrops of which

can be found along the northeast end of the wadi. I recently slogged through the mud to the medium sized oasis, where I found a number of birds including a Black francolin and several Spanish sparrows. There were a lot of animal tracks including those of birds, canines, cats, and possibly a badger and a pig or goat. Following some fresh jackal tracks allowed me to catch up to a pair of Golden jackals enjoying

the shade of the oasis' palms, but when they noticed me reaching for my camera they took off down the wadi. Although not a source of open water, these smaller oases allow for trees, thick grass and reed beds, and other plants that provide food and habitat for our diverse wildlife.

**Pictured: Abraham's Well  
lower left, the middle oasis  
top, and the NE oasis lower  
right**



## TQ Treasure! (or a *fil* for your thoughts!)

While walking around TQ, CW4 Rohrbacher found this interesting old coin. It has been identified as an Iraqi coin minted in 1938. The obverse side shows a picture of King Ghazi, who ruled Iraq from 1933 to 1939, while the inverse indicates that it is a 1 *fil* coin. Chief found a similar coin for sale on Ebay for about \$18.00.



# 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:

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and greatly appreciated!



*Always Right, Sustain the Fight!*

**371st SB**



White-cheeked bulbuls play in their reflections.  
Photo courtesy of SGT Robinson

## Birders' Corner

This week provided me with a surprise trip to TQ and a chance to sample the birdlife of Lake Hab-baniyah. My birding time was limited to the time that most people were eating breakfast, but for an hour after sunrise each morning I stood near an observation tower high on the plateau overlooking the lake and scanned the shoreline with my spotting scope. Most prominent were various species of gulls including the Lesser black-backed and Slender-billed varieties and hundreds of Coots. Also prominent were large Gray herons, smaller Little egrets, and 2 varieties of cormorants (Pygmy and Shag). My favorite was the Pied kingfisher, and I also enjoyed great looks at a Marsh harrier eating a large fish. In all I identified 21 species at TQ during my brief stay. Not bad!

**Eurasian coot**



**Marsh harrier**  
hawkconservancy.org



**Pied kingfisher**  
©Isak Pretorius



**Little tern**



Birds I've Identified on Al Asad

to Date: **80**