



Al-Asad au Natural



Volume I, Issue I I

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Creature Feature

Special Points of Interest:

- The Order *Odonata* is Showcased on Page 2
- A Bonus Question in This Issue! Page 3
- A Bird in a Cage? Page 4
- **Next Issue:** We'll meet a "sharp" character!

Inside this issue:

<i>Sky Dragons!</i>	3
<i>Questions from the Field—Your Questions Answered</i>	3
<i>The Dusty Lens: A Pic of the Week!</i>	4
<i>Birders' Corner</i>	4

"The human race is challenged more than ever before to demonstrate our mastery, not over nature but of ourselves."

-Rachel Carson

Cape Hare

The Cape hare, also called the Brown hare, is one of two members of the *Lepus* family in Iraq, and the only one likely to be found on Al Asad. Cape hares have been seen in the desert scrub areas around the airfield, and also in the wadi. They are nocturnal herbivores, and grasses make up the staple of their diet. During the day they often sit in small depressions, and when closely approached will burst off in a zig-zag pattern. They can run at 30 mph, with bursts up to 45mph. The Cape hare lives from South Africa to the Middle East, but there is a large gap between the South African race and (cont. on pg 3)



Hares differ from rabbits by being larger and having longer ears. They are more powerful runners, and live in open areas, where rabbits tend to hide in vegetation. Hares are born furred and with open eyes, rabbits are born helpless, and so the parents build a nest before giving birth.

Who's Living Under My CHU?

Roof Rat Also known as Black, Asian, Ship, or House rats, these guys are all over the warm areas of the world. Rats are very intelligent, and this species likes living in buildings. Rats spread several diseases including

rabies and the plague, so fortunately very few have been found in our work or living areas.

In cold areas, the Norway or Brown rat replaces the Roof rat.



Sky Dragons!

Nearly as addictive as birdwatching, dragonfly watching is growing in popularity. In North America, a popular field guide focuses on identifying dragonflies and damselflies through binoculars. Unfortunately, the only guide I can find for this area is out of print and can't be had for under \$50. So many of the dragonflies pictured here I have not been able to identify, but wanted to share some of the pictures of these brightly colored insects encountered on Al Asad. Dragonflies are excellent predators—one of the reasons mosquito spraying is discouraged is because it kills beneficial insects like these along with harmful ones.

Damselflies can be distinguished from dragonflies by their clearly separated eyes.



Randy Mendenhall



Creature Feature (continued)

those living in North Africa and the Middle East, and further study may split these as separate species. Cape hares average between 6 and 18 pounds, have 3.5" long ears, and commonly leap up to 4'. Leaps of up to 12' have been observed! A group of hares is called a "down" (as in "Watership Down"). All members of this family are lagomorphs—they do not get all of the vitamin B they need by digesting food just once, and at night pass soft stools that are re-ingested in order to extract more of this nutrient. Think about that the next time you kiss a bunny rabbit!

Questions from the Field—Your Questions Answered!

Why does the wadi and oasis sometimes smell like rotten eggs?

Sulfur. At the bottom of the wadi near the clay layer it is possible to find powdery yellow rocks or soil. This is the mineral sulfur, and it's smell is distinctive!



Sulfur is usually bright yellow in the ground, but quickly darkens when exposed to air

Bonus Question!

Are there horses in Iraq?

Not Wild Ones. Arabia is famous for the Arabian Horse, which has been domesticated for 4,500 years or more. Also common in Iraq are donkeys and onagers, and these are sometimes abandoned or escape to become feral. The Syrian onager was a wild horse native to Iraq that likely went extinct in the 1930's due to the impact of WWI and over

hunting. The Syrian onager was prominent in Arabic poetry and provided the "jawbone of an ass" used by Sampson in the Bible. Wild onagers are very hard to tame, but domestic onagers and donkeys are important as beasts of burden. The Arabian horse was bred as a pre-eminent warhorse and are still considered some of the finest horses in the world.



Left: An Arabian horse.

Right: An escaped donkey captured at Ramadi.

Upper Right: Onagers. The Syrian onager, a wild horse once native to Iraq, is now **extinct**.



PIC of the WEEK

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE UNOFFICIAL
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Send your photos, questions, and submissions to
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Always Right, Sustain the Fight!

371st SB



Occasionally large birds get trapped in the dog traps. This **Eurasian magpie** (above) was released unharmed at Al Asad after enjoying a large meal of sardines! Magpies are closely related to *Corvids* (see Birders' Corner). The male Black francolin (below) was released from a trap at Ramadi.



Birders' Corner

Species identified
on Al Asad to date:

98

The *Corvid* family, commonly known as crows and ravens, can be difficult to tell apart. Two of the birds I have seen on Al Asad fit that bill—the **Rook**, seen this winter in large numbers, and the **Brown-necked raven**, seen this summer when it mixed with smaller numbers of rooks. The Rook usually is seen in a group, while the raven is more likely alone or in a pair. The Rook is 2 cm shorter and has a more domed head and more feathery thigh. Most significant, the Rook has a lighter, longer, and straighter bill. A *Corvid* here that is easier to distinguish is the large, two-tone **Hooded crow**. Smaller **Jackdaws** (which we saw at the airport in Germany), should be here in winter according to some range maps, but so far I have not seen one, pointing to the lack of accurate data for Iraq.

Mesopotamian Hooded crow



Brown-necked raven



Rook R.Komorewski



Jackdaw

Darkone

