

14566 Bargar, Norah. Getting Rid of Dirty Habits. MIDDLE EAST no.69:43-45 JI '80.

Jordan is moving to halt the mismanagement of its natural resources. Efforts of the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature have resulted in a ban on hunting of endangered species and the establishment of the Shaumari Wildlife Reserve. A new national parks law has been passed and the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and Environment has been created to deal with environmental concerns. Anti-pollution legislation is being prepared. Other plans call for an anti-litter campaign, water recycling, abandonment of careless land use policies, afforestation plans, and offensives against black goats and the ecological threat to the Gulf of Aqaba.

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Mosaic

Community medicine students - able to tackle health problems that arise

organisation they eventually admitted that they preferred the old idea of at least four sons and that they were willing to have eight or more pregnancies to achieve this.

During these discussions attitudes switched from dependency - "What can you do to help us?" - to resentment - "You should give us help; the Government should give us help; what are you here for?" But in time the group leaders were able to get their message across: "We cannot do things for you, nobody can. Decide for yourselves what you need and what you think can be done about it, and we will help as best we can." From that moment discussion became far more constructive.

At the end of the week the Cairenes left and the young "guides" in the village were charged with keeping the momentum going. But in a 48-hour follow-up which took place a month later the results were found to be disappointing. The young leaders had become very demoralised, alleging that the villagers had been unwilling to take part in meetings.

What had actually happened was that the *fellahin* had been quite active among themselves and the young had lost a certain amount of face when confronted by a situation in which they felt they had so little part to play.

Further sessions took place to bring the groups back in line with each other and a new system of joint leadership by an older member of the community and a younger guide seems to have solved the problem.

It was also discovered that many of the ideas that had been discussed had filtered quite extensively to other villages and favourable news of the project had spread.

Students involved in research return to the village for one or two days each month. They test for changes both in attitudes and in the actual situation. Many are community medicine students in their first or second year who are able to tackle any health problems that arise. They can diagnose up to 95 per cent of illness and serve as primary-health-care workers when it comes to dealing with such problems. Since the project has been in operation only a few months, it is too early to assess

just how effective it is going to be.

As a psychiatrist, Shaalan himself was eager to identify any mental problems among the villagers. He found these to be quite serious, mainly because people could not cope with the pressures of modern living. There is, it seems, a strong pull towards town life and therefore discontent with the traditional pattern of life. At the same time, thanks to the mass media, people are becoming much more interested in obtaining material possessions. Their aspirations are out of step with the reality of village life and a great deal of frustration results, especially among the young.

"To compensate for what they cannot have, some are turning to religion and taking up an extremist position in their crusade against what they have been unable to attain for themselves. This partly explains the Islamic revival among the young in Egypt.

What Shaalan would like to do eventually is include mental

as well as physical health advice in the programme. He is hoping to extend his research to other villages in the near future, especially if he gets a grant from AID.

Meanwhile the research in Mashaala goes on, and despite slow progress the graduate students involved show no sign of losing their enthusiasm. ■



ENVIRONMENT

Getting rid of dirty habits

"We have not inherited our land, water and air from our parents - we have borrowed them from our children." Thus was the World Conservation Strategy launched in 33 countries this March. Jordan was the only Arab country to adopt the Strategy. Norah Bargar in Amman discusses some of the measures being taken by the authorities.

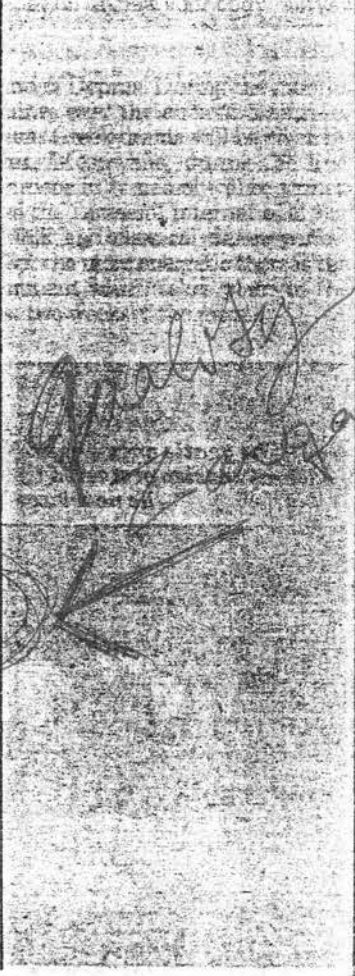
Until very recently conservationists in Jordan had little to be cheerful about. "We are now on the highest point on the 'mismanagement' curve of our natural resources and it cannot get much worse," commented one of the members of the National Committee for the World Conservation Strategy (WCS) programme in Jordan.

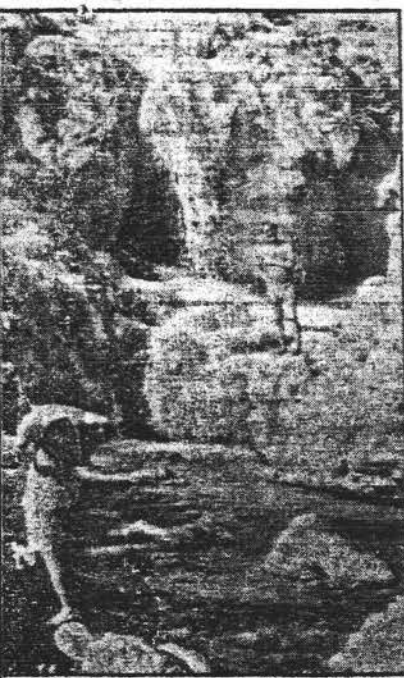
The story is a sad one. Over the past 50 years the Arabian oryx, cheetahs, leopards and ostriches, all once plentiful in Jordan, have disappeared. During the same period, half a million dunums of the five million dunums of arable land has been lost to urban growth.

With no anti-pollution laws yet in effect, a high rate of in-

dustrial and shipping discharge is doing great damage in the country's coastal waters and rivers. At the present rate, the renowned Red Sea corals will be killed off in another 50 years. The Zarga River is so polluted that it is neither technically nor economically feasible to treat its waters for human consumption.

Pioneer work by the voluntary Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN), founded in 1966 under the patronage of King Hussain by a small band of dedicated members, has achieved a number of encouraging results. These include a ban on the hunting of endangered species and, as important, one on the practice of mowing animals





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down with machine guns. More recently, in the first issue of its new environmental magazine *Reem* (Gazelle), the society announced its major triumph — a five-year ban on all hunting, in keeping with similar moves in Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

The society has also established the Shaumari Wildlife Reserve near the Azraq Oasis, which for centuries has been a resting place for about 250 species of migrating birds. The reserve will also serve as a breeding station for gazelles, as well as oryxes and ostriches recently imported from Qatar and the US.

Under a new national parks law to be passed this month as part of the WCS plan, Azraq itself will be declared a national park, along with Ajloun, Petra, Wadi Rum and Zarqa Ma'in. The law will also call for the

setting up of a Department of National Parks and Environment within the Ministry of Tourism and seven more sites will be designated as reserves.

In a completely different field, a law has been passed lifting the ban on buildings over three storeys high, to 15 for residential buildings and 24 for office blocks. With the lifting of the ban it is hoped that in future a vertical rather than a horizontal spread of urban growth will help to prevent the cities from further encroaching on agricultural land.

But the greatest single victory for conservation comes with the creation of a new Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and Environment, last year. The new ministry, headed by Dr Jamal Shaer, a member of the WCS Committee, is in charge of regional planning and development, which also guarantees its active involvement in environmental concerns. Although the new ministry is still in its infancy (UN advisers are helping to structure it), two comprehensive draft plans for the Amman and Irbid regions have already been put forward.

The first major anti-pollution decision from the ministry was delivered by Dr Shaer in April when the order to install filters on the furnace stacks of the country's major cement plant was issued. Until then, despite protests from the inhabitants, villages near Amman had suffered for several years from a fall of dust from the plant.

The WCS Committee is preparing a comprehensive anti-pollution legislation which, among other things, according to national co-ordinator Haitham Qassous, will recommend the installation of anti-

pollution devices costing \$12 million and will call for such devices to be included in the plans of any new project as a condition for the issue of a licence.

Other measures include a stringent anti-litter campaign involving television advertising and a scheme to encourage shopkeepers and merchants to install litter bins in front of their premises. German experts will be examining the feasibility of introducing a litter recycling system into Jordan.

Water recycling is also high on the list of priorities and already measures have been taken by the Ministry of Tourism calling for such systems in new hotels.

Such conservation measures will in no way hinder development, stresses Amis Mouasher, a businessman who heads the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature. "On the contrary," he told a recent press conference, "no development is possible in the long run without conservation."

His statement applies to the agricultural sector more than any other. According to Dr Subhi Qassem, Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture at Jordan University, careless land-use practices have turned vast areas into deserts and have forced farmers to migrate to the cities, with a resulting decline in food production. Qassem and others are lobbying for a steep tax to be placed on unused arable land where ownership is purely speculative.

As part of its role in the WCS plan, the Ministry of Agriculture is running a programme to encourage farmers to terrace their land. It is also undertaking a massive

afforestation plan. Both are designed to prevent soil erosion. Private landowners will be given free seedlings and paid JD10 for each successful planting. At the same time the Government plans to turn over 800,000 dunums of land in plots to various groups for planting and tending. Along with responsibility for the trees goes the privilege of enjoying them and the land on which they grow.

A number of private groups have already adopted such schemes, such as the Friends of the Children's Club, whose members, children and adults alike, have planted several thousand trees in the last few years. Along with other similar groups the club celebrates an annual Arbor Day.

Hand in hand with the afforestation programme goes an offensive against black goats. They are the biggest pest in Jordan," says Qassem. "After yanking at plants so that they are uprooted they eat 20 to 30 per cent of the trees planted each year." The Statistics Department is preparing a census of herds and examining the feasibility of slaughtering goats and replacing them with sheep. The University of Yarmouk has set up a permanent ecological station in Irbid and its first project will be to measure the effects of browsing.

But perhaps the most serious ecological threat is that posed to marine life in the Gulf of Aqaba. Both oil spills and spillages during the loading of phosphates are helping to destroy this environment. A fertiliser plant under construction poses a further threat. Proposals have been made to ban any further building within one kilometre of the shore south of the city.

The Government is expected to adopt a draft on "the Prevention of Marine and Coastal Pollution Act" which will impose stiff fines on onshore and offshore sources of pollution. It remains to be seen whether the act will discourage further industrialisation in the area — already strictly limited to certain zones. Here tourism authorities, backed by the environmentalists, now emerging as one of the country's strongest groups, are hoping to get the upper hand.

