

Re-Introduction of the Red-Necked Ostrich (*Struthio camelus camelus*) in Fenced Protected Area of Central Semi-Arid Area in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract : The Arabian Ostrich *Struthio camelus syriacus* is a distinct subspecies that became extinct in the wild during the mid-20th century, due to over-hunting and commercial exploitation. The extant of *S. c. camelus*, a red-necked form that occurs in Northeastern Africa and is considered the most closely related, and possibly the same subspecies as the extinct Arabian form has been chosen for the reintroduction in 1988-89 by obtaining red-necked ostrich from Sudan from a private collection. Few birds were translocated to Mahazat as-Sayd protected area in 25 ha fenced enclosure in 1994. Until now a total of 96 red-necked ostrich have been released in fenced Mahazat as-Sayd, and the estimated population is between 125 to 150 individuals. Since captive flock of ostriches were translocated to Mahazat, their survival rate increased (>41%) by the end of 2000. On an average 22-30 chicks are hatched annually. A total of 137 ostriches recorded dead over the period of 13 years during the drought period. One of the key questions is what proportion of birds makes use of the supplementary food and water provisions, and what happens to those birds that do not use it? Captive-bred and wild-born adult and young ostriches died of starvation and thirst, despite being provisioned with alfalfa and water in several years. The present population of ostrich in Mahazat is more than 300.

Keywords : red-necked ostrich, *Struthio camelus camelus*, reintroduction, Saudi Arabia, drought

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