

The distribution of the Cape Hare, *Lepus capensis*, in Abu Dhabi Emirate, United Arab Emirates

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Abstract: A survey of the distribution of Cape Hares (*Lepus capensis*) throughout the Emirate of Abu Dhabi was carried out based on the presence or absence of faecal pellets. Evidence of the presence of hares was found throughout the Emirate, however, their distribution was patchy and appeared to be affected by the level of grazing by domesticated animals and by anthropogenic disturbance. Hare droppings were most abundant in grazing exclosures and least abundant in areas subjected to heavy grazing pressure.

Kurzfassung: Im Emirat von Abu Dhabi wurde anhand von Losungen eine Erhebung zur Verbreitung des Feldhasen (*Lepus capensis*) durchgeführt. In allen Landesteilen wurden Hinweise auf ein Vorkommen der Art gefunden, doch stellte sich heraus, dass das Verbreitungsmuster sehr ungleichmäßig ist und offenbar sehr stark vom Ausmaß der Beweidung durch Nutztiere und durch menschliche Störung beeinflusst wird. Am häufigsten wurden Losungen in Gebieten gefunden, die von der Beweidung ausgenommen sind, und am seltensten in Gebieten, die einen sehr hohen Weidedruck aufweisen.

Key words: Hare, desert, *Lepus capensis*, distribution, faecal pellets, Abu Dhabi.

Introduction

The Cape Hare has a wide geographic range, from South Africa, up to and across north Africa and Southwest Europe into the Middle East and central Asia to East China (FLUX & ANGERMANN 1990). Over this range there exist innumerable habitat types, influenced by temperate, subtropical, tropical and desert climates. Eighty sub-species have been described to date (FLUX & ANGERMANN 1990). The Cape Hare was until recently thought to be the same species as the European Hare, *Lepus europaeus* (also known as the Brown Hare) and indeed, there is still debate as to whether this may or may not be the case.

There are six sub-species of Cape Hare living on mainland Arabia and two subspecies living on offshore islands (HARRISON & BATES 1991). Of the six mainland subspecies, three are considered native to the UAE: *L.c. cheesmani* (Sand Hare); *L.c. arabicus* (Arabian Hare); *L.c. omanensis* (Omani Hare).

In the UAE, these three subspecies are known collectively as Arabian or Desert Hares. Regional differences in pelage colour within the same subspecies can lead to difficulties in taxonomic identification and for the purposes of this study, no attempt was made to differentiate the sub-species involved.

Desert Hares are clearly very different from their Brown Hare relatives in terms of physi-