

B I O D I V E R S I T Y

D E S E R T I F I C A T I O N

EIECP

Support Programme to the National Environmental Action Plan: Wadi El Rayan Protected Area Egypt

- CAPACITY BUILDING
- COLLABORATIVE MANAGEMENT
- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
- ECO-TOURISM
- ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY





*The landscape
in Wadi El Rayan*

Background and rationale

This project is part and parcel of the wider Egyptian-Italian Environmental Program, referred to as the Egyptian-Italian Environmental Cooperation Programme (EIECP), which is being carried out within the framework of donor initiatives aimed at assisting the Country in the implementation of the National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP). The national institution responsible for the whole Programme is the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) under the Ministry of Environment. The first Programme phase will be completed by the beginning of 2003 and includes five components.

The second phase, under final formulation, will start in 2003 and will expand to nine components, including the second phase for Wadi El Rayan Protected Area.

Wadi El Rayan is a sparsely populated desert oasis in the Fayoum region on the Western bank of the Nile, some 80 kilometers from Cairo. Historically, the area has been a major crossroads for travellers between the Nile valley and the oases of the Western Desert, as testified by ancient Egyptian and Roman remains.

The area contains indeed important wildlife and geological features. The Wadi Hytan, with 40 million-year-old whale skeletons, is one of the most important fossil sites in North Africa and the desert supports a range of rare plants and animals.

The Wadi El Rayan Protected Area (WRPA) was established in 1989 to conserve local natural resources. The Protected Area covers almost 1,800 sq km including 113 sq km of artificial lakes. Originally created in the 1970's to channel out excess agricultural drainage water, the two slightly brackish lakes have become an important habitat for birds and other wildlife.

In modern times, Wadi El Rayan was considered a virtually uninhabited desert oasis and the Project was originally initiated to conserve the biological diversity and geological features of the site. However, the first field mission by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) to the site concluded that uncontrolled economic activities were the main threat to the natural resources of the Protected Area. These activities include a large-scale land reclamation scheme, oil extraction,

rapidly expanding aquaculture, commercial fishing and tourism. If left unregulated, these activities could easily over-exploit the natural resources leading to a collapse of other more important economic sectors. For example, eco-tourism is expanding rapidly in the area, which is the second most visited Protected Area in Egypt after the Sinai Peninsula. Tourists are attracted to Wadi El Rayan because of its wildlife, unspoiled landscapes and fossils. Unregulated human activities within the area could lead to the degradation of these natural features and a consequent negative impact on tourism revenues for local inhabitants. Another problem stemmed from the development of a 2,500 ha drip irrigation scheme, where 1,700 families were expected to settle. While land reclamation is important for food security in Egypt, this development would affect the natural resources of Wadi El Rayan. Water would be taken from the lakes for irrigation and domestic use and if left unchecked, pollution from the new settlements would discharge into the lakes. Any such feedback would inevitably impact on the ecosystem and subsequently on other economic activities in the area: if bird-life, another major tourist attraction, is affected negatively, it will bear direct

*Cover photo:
fossil whales skeleton*





consequences on the number of visitors. Also, almost 2,000 fishermen make a living on the lakes: any disturbance may cause a drop in fish stocks and the livelihoods of many will be affected. Similarly, the uncontrolled expansion of aquaculture, with its associated pollution, could also damage the lakes and the economy of the region. Oil exploration in the Protected Area must also be carefully controlled and regulated, to avoid a negative impact on the natural system through pollution or landscape disruption.

Under these circumstances, the Wadi El Rayan Protected Area Project (WRPA) was formulated, to promote the sustainable use of the natural resources by the local inhabitants as part of the management of the Protected Area. The involvement of local stakeholders is key to the success of the conservation of the site. The goodwill and knowledge of local stakeholders can greatly facilitate the sustainable management of the Area. Likewise, the management of local natural resources under a Protected Area framework will allow the long-term economic stability of the region.

The first phase will come to an end in December 2002, after approximately four years of operations. The second phase is planned to start immediately after. The Nature Conservation Sector (NCS) of EEAA is the institutional counterpart to the Project, and the IUCN is responsible for its implementation.

Goal, objectives and expected outputs

EIECP overall objective is to contribute to the protection of Egypt's natural and cultural resources, through strengthening EEAA's capacities in planning and management for environmentally sustainable development.

Its specific objectives are as follows.

- Strengthen Egyptian capacities to analyse, plan and implement adequate measures for the rehabilitation and conservation of natural, cultural and man-made environments.
- Enhance current strategies and approaches to protect and expand the available natural resources base, aiming to increase productivity, reduce migration and improve the living conditions in the rural areas.
- Contribute to reinforce the role of EEAA, as the central coordinating and supervising body, and of its partner institutions for the protection of the environment.

Within this framework, the main objective of the Wadi El Rayan Project is to contribute to the protection of the flora and fauna wildlife and the geological features of WRPA, by enhancing the capacity of EEAA to plan and implement nature conservation.

The specific objectives of the Project are as follows.

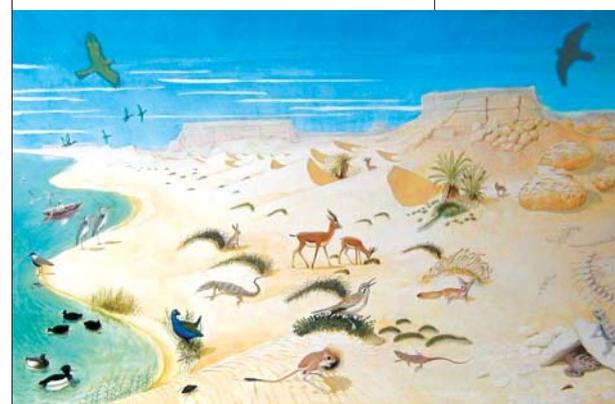
- Strengthen the capacity of the Protected Area Management Unit (PAMU) to manage the WRPA ecosystem in accordance with international standards of nature protection and sustainable management of natural resources.
- Strengthen PAMU's collaborative management with local stakeholders.

- Promote WRPA as a model site for raising public awareness on sustainable development, biodiversity conservation and Protected Areas management.
- Promote WRPA as a model for the development of sustainable tourism in the Fayoum district.
- Develop and implement a plan for the conservation of the Wadi Hitan area of WRPA as a World Heritage Site ensuring the long-term involvement of local stakeholders and the private sector in the sound and collaborative management of the site.
- Enhance the management capacity of the environmental office in the Fayoum Governorate, to enable it to fulfil its environmental protection function in support of WRPA.

Expected results are the following.

- The PAMU is strengthened through the enhancement of its administrative and technical capacity and increased financial sustainability.
- Key stakeholders are involved in the collaborative management of the Protected Area.
- The eco-tourism sector linked to the Protected Area is developed.
- Wadi El Rayan is a leading site for environmental education.
- The recreational and educational functions of Wadi El Rayan and Medinet Madi are integrated.
- The Wadi Hitan area of the WRPA is effectively managed according to the standards of UNESCO World Heritage sites.
- The management capacity of the environmental office in the Fayoum Protectorate is enhanced.

A poster on Wadi El Rayan biodiversity, for sensitisation purposes





Implementation and results

So far, during the first phase of the Project's implementation, the following activities were carried out.

- ❶ WRPA headquarters, outposts and other essential infrastructures have been built and supplied with basic technical and scientific equipment. A full complement of rangers, community guards and support staff has been recruited and trained. The PAMU has also been established and EEAA has a permanent presence in the Protected Area.
- ❷ Basic eco-tourism infrastructure and visitor facilities have been developed, together with interpretation services and materials. Environmental education tools have been produced and a communication campaign promoting WRPA has been launched.

Right:
map of Wadi El Rayan
Protected Area

Below:
desert fox



- ❸ A regulatory mechanism for the use of natural resources has been designed and pilot collaborative management agreements have been established with selected stakeholders on key sectors such as eco-tourism. An environmental investment plan has also been developed for the licensing of economic activities.
- ❹ Detailed management guidelines have been drawn up, based on extensive negotiations with the key stakeholders of the Protected Area.
- ❺ A Management Plan and Management Planning System for WRPA have been developed, so that internationally recognised guidelines and strategies related to the protection and sustainable management of natural resources can be applied to the Protected Area. These tools relate to the following aspects of management:
 - a system for the involvement of local stakeholders in the collaborative management of the Protected Area;
 - guidelines and investment plan for the development of eco-tourism;
 - plans to develop the site as a centre of environmental education and communication.

Lessons learned

The main lessons learned from the first phase of Wadi El Rayan Project can be summarised as follows.

- ❶ Appropriate financial mechanisms are required to cover the long-term costs of PAMU.
- ❷ Private sector involvement, particularly from local communities, should be actively encouraged to ensure the effective long-term management of eco-tourism facilities and services being developed by the Project.
- ❸ Participatory efforts need to be intensified in order to negotiate effective collaborative management agreements involving all key stakeholders.
- ❹ Links with national and international organisations and universities should be strengthened to facilitate management-oriented research activities.

The second phase of WRPA Project has been formulated to build on the success and outcomes of the first phase. It aims to continue the development of WRPA using the Management Plan and the Management Planning System as the building blocks for its implementation.

