

Saudi Arabia's Uruq Bani Ma'arid Joins IUCN Green List of Protected Areas

RIYADH, RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA, June 24, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Uruq Bani Ma'arid, one of Saudi Arabia's most ecologically significant protected areas and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has been admitted to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas. This recognition confirms the site's global ecological importance and highlights the Kingdom's expanding leadership in conserving arid-land habitats.



Uruq Bani Ma'arid photo credit NCW

Saudi Arabia's inclusion of Uruq Bani Ma'arid follows earlier Green List achievements, notably for Ibex Protected Area and King Salman bin Abdulaziz Royal Reserve. These milestones reflect sustained progress toward excellence in protected-area management.

Uruq Bani Ma'arid spans over 1.27 million hectares at the western edge of the Rub' al Khali—the

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*Dr. Mohammad Qurban, CEO
of the National Center for
Wildlife*

world's largest continuous sand desert—harboring the greatest biodiversity in the Empty Quarter. Its ecological importance lies in the convergence of the Tuwaiq escarpment, expansive sand dunes, and seasonal wadis, creating a critical sanctuary for desert wildlife. In 2023, the landscape was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its outstanding natural value.

The IUCN Green List sets the global benchmark for effective and equitable protected-area management. To qualify, sites must demonstrate transparent governance,

measurable conservation outcomes, and meaningful engagement with local stakeholders. Uruq Bani Ma'arid met these criteria through its integrated planning, resilient ecological monitoring, and habitat restoration programs.

Under the stewardship of the National Center for Wildlife, Uruq Bani Ma'arid has successfully implemented a breeding and reintroduction program for the endangered Arabian oryx. Once extinct in the wild, the species now thrives there—almost 20 percent of the global population resides within the protected area.

This milestone supports Saudi Arabia's contribution to the global 30 x 30 biodiversity target—protecting 30 percent of terrestrial and marine areas by 2030—as outlined in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. It also aligns with the national Saudi Green Initiative, which integrates conservation as a core pillar of Vision 2030.

Dr. Mohammad Qurban, CEO of the National Center for Wildlife, said: "Uruq Bani Ma'arid exemplifies what science-guided conservation can achieve in extreme landscapes. Its inclusion on the IUCN Green List reflects our dedication to protecting biodiversity and delivering real conservation impact at both national and global scales."

This recognition reinforces the growing role of Saudi Arabia in advancing protected-area excellence and demonstrates the potential of arid regions to contribute meaningfully to global biodiversity conservation.

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