

Wadi Wurayah: Fujairah's Natural Heritage on the Path to the World Heritage List

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Deep in the Hajar Mountains of the Emirate of Fujairah, about 45 kilometers from the city, Wadi Wurayah stands as one of the UAE's most prominent natural treasures. Here, perennial springs and channels support unique biodiversity, creating a scene that embodies the richness of the UAE's environment and reflects its firm commitment to protecting its natural heritage.



Wadi Wurayah is not merely a nature reserve but a complete ecological system spanning 220 km². It is home to more than 1,099 species of living organisms, including 216 plant species, 114 bird species, 20 mammal species, and 30 reptile and amphibian species. Rare and endangered species such as the Arabian Tahr and Blanford's Fox, as well as other notable animals like the caracal, further contribute to making it one of the most important ecological sites in the region.

The wadi is distinguished by its permanent natural waterfall and springs, which have provided a source of life in this mountainous region for centuries and contributed to the formation of an exceptional ecosystem. It is also home to rare plants, most notably the wild orchid (*Epipactis veratrifolia*), the only one of its kind in the United Arab Emirates.

The wadi also serves as an important site for scientific research, as environmental studies have contributed to the rediscovery of rare organisms, documenting their presence within the reserve and naming them after their discovery, reinforcing the wadi's status as a natural laboratory for studying biodiversity in the region.

The wadi's importance is not limited to its ecological value but also extends to its historical and cultural significance. For hundreds of years, it has been linked to the lives of local communities and is adjacent to several prominent historical landmarks, including Al Bidyah Mosque, the oldest standing mosque in the United Arab Emirates. This reflects the deeply rooted relationship

between people and nature in Fujairah.

This natural heritage is now at the forefront of international attention, as the United Arab Emirates has submitted a nomination file for Wadi Wurayah for inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List as a natural site of Outstanding Universal Value. The nomination file is based primarily on Criterion (ix), which pertains to representing ongoing ecological and biological processes of global significance, reflecting the wadi's unique integration of geological formations, perennial freshwater springs, and natural habitats that have maintained their continuity over thousands of years, as one of the most prominent mountain desert ecosystems in the Arabian Peninsula.

The file is based on a series of national and international recognitions the wadi has received, having been declared a nature reserve in 2009, included on the list of wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention in 2010, becoming the UAE's first national park in 2013, before being registered as a Biosphere Reserve under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme in 2018.

As part of the follow-up to this international nomination, the Fujairah Environment Authority is participating in the work of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, hosted by the city of Busan in the Republic of Korea from July 19 to 29 of this year, in coordination with the relevant national authorities, in a step that reflects the commitment of the United Arab Emirates and the Emirate of Fujairah to protecting natural heritage, enhancing its international presence, and consolidating Wadi Wurayah's status as a site of outstanding universal value worthy of inscription on the World Heritage List.

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