

Monday, 21 January 2013

Wildlife park give illegally bought animals a new home



Three years ago, Jasim Ali was able to make his dream of creating a wildlife park a reality. With the backing of the local government and following almost two years of preparatory work, Ras al Khaimah's first ever wildlife park opened across one square kilometer to house over forty different types of wild animals. Many of the animals in the park were adopted after owners who bought them in a flashy display of wealth and bravado later abandoned or severely neglected their 'pets' once they grew older, bigger and became harder to take care of. "The idea started when I saw some people raising animals in an illegal way in domestic homes or not taking care of them. So we started this project as a wildlife park and at the same time as a refuge for animals that don't have a place of refuge," Ali said. Due to the illegal purchase of these animals on the black market, those in need of care are often denied access to professional help since most animal welfare organizations and zoos in the Emirates will refuse to accept them without legal paperwork. "When someone raises a lion in their house to show off, and then wants to give it to a zoo, the zoo won't take it in. In fact nowhere will because it doesn't have the right paperwork. But we always take them in because it isn't the animal's fault," he added. This is not a money-making venture but a labor of long-standing love for Ali, who has loved and cared for animals since childhood. "I currently have about 40 different types of wild animals and I have a special friendship with each one... I befriend all of the animals in the park," he said. The park gets between 200,000 to 250,000 visitors a year, many of whom appreciate the park's offerings. "The unique thing about this park is that it shows you something different which is the treatment of the animals, the interaction with the lions, so I really felt like there was something different," one visitor, Yusif Abdullah, said. There are plans to build on the success of the Ras al Khaimah's wildlife park. "We are thinking of collaborating with international wildlife parks and to carry out awareness programs for those people who don't really know how to care for animals and we are thinking of expanding the new park to have all different types of animals for visitors to see roaming freely," Ali said.