

Strategy to preserve

By RAJI UNNIKRISSHAN

A NATIONAL strategy to preserve Bahrain's lush green mangroves is underway as 10,000 seeds are expected to be planted by the end of the year.

It is being spearheaded by a six-member team at the Supreme Council for Environment (SCE), which also plans to expand the area in Tubli Bay that is rich with natural mangrove trees.

A Royal decree, issued in August 2006, determined the bay's size as 13.5km, but this has shrunk to 9km as illegal land reclamation in the area continues unabated.

A part of the bay called Ras Sanad is densely populated with mangroves and was designated a natural reserve in 1988.

The SCE increased the area from 0.43sqm to 1.6sqm, but its senior environment inspector Adel Almajed said the council plans



■ Migratory birds in Tubli Bay

to also plant mangrove trees in Tubli Bay, Dohat Arad, Ras Hayan, Ma'ameer Channel and

Fasht Al Jarim off the coast of Duraz.

"We hope to initiate the

strategy within four months and would aim to expand the existing 1.6sqm of Ras Sanad

mangroves and plant as many as 10,000 saplings across all mangrove populated areas in

Bahrain," Mr Almajed told the GDN.

"Our team has initiated at-

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mangroves on way

tempts to plant 10,000 saplings, after successfully planting 2,000 in 2013 and 2014.

"We face many challenges in achieving this target which includes the availability of seeds, meaning protecting existing mangroves.

"Reclamation around Tubli Bay, sewage networks and illegal dumping of waste all affect the bay.

"Through this strategy we are trying to put in place some solutions to enhance this area, apart from the planted mangroves."

He explained that the strategy will include monitoring reclamation in the bay to protect natural habitats.

Monitoring

"We have reached the red line of reclamation but we haven't crossed the line yet," said Mr Almajed.

"The new strategy aims to monitor this continuously and maintain the healthy and protected natural bay.

"We also will be adopting techniques to enhance the affected area, the southern tip of the bay, which has slightly passed the reclamation limit."

Avicennia Marina is the only mangrove species in Bahrain, according to SCE specialist biologist Ali Mansoor.

"There are approximately 80 species of mangroves worldwide, which differ in characteristics and diversity," he explained.

"Out of these only one exists in Bahrain, the black or the grey Avicennia Marina.

Compatibility

"Other species are not compatible with Bahrain's environment and if we try to import others, they will be alien species, which may not be a successful attempt."

SCE environment technician Ali Shuaib said among the benefits of mangrove trees was that they sheltered smaller species in Tubli Bay.

"The natural mangrove trees are in a large area with inter-tidal mud flat, which helps the growth of micro-organisms due to the tidal waves and the area has become a nursery for fish and the commercially important shrimp," he told the GDN.

"These trees which grow to a height of six to eight me-



■ Ras Sanad is rich in mangroves



■ Mangrove trees in Tubli Bay

ters contribute to sediment and shoreline protection and maintain water quality by absorbing sediments and absorbing excess nutrients from the water.

"It provides shelter for tadpoles from predators and acts as a nursery for juvenile species and a home for migratory birds.

"Above all, it acts as a natural carbon sink, which helps in regulating the climate.

"Seeds are collected during

September and October and they are tended to in special areas in plastic bags until they grow a few inches high and then they are planted - 80 to 90 centimetres apart."

Meanwhile, SCE environment specialist Nouf Al Wasmī called for stricter action against illegal hunting of migratory birds in the bay, which currently carries a minimum BD50 fine.

"Tubli Bay is home to thousands of migratory birds and there are people who illegally hunt these birds," he said.

"The problem is that the mangroves area is open for public and people can freely access these areas.

"Some try to catch the birds, while others take away their nests with eggs.

"Once these birds sense human presence near their nests they will fly away, which is not healthy for the environment."

The strategy to preserve mangrove trees in Bahrain is expected to be implemented in the summer.

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■ Mr Almajed, second from left, with his team cleaning the collected seeds before planting



■ Mangrove seeds are collected during September and October



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