

Without reliable scientific information about the ongoing environmental crisis, we can never hope to overcome it.
Audrey Azoulay
 UNESCO director general



Spotlight GREEN

SAUDI ARABIA

From awareness to action

Eco-journalism takes center stage as the Kingdom's environmental watchdog advances Vision 2030 goals

Haifa Alshammari Riyadh

As a nation moving toward a greener future, Saudi Arabia is building bridges between the public and officials, raising awareness, and designing campaigns that promote sustainable development.

These efforts, in line with Vision 2030, seek to educate people about how they play a role in protecting ecosystems. To support these goals, journalism is one of the most effective tools.

From reporting on ecological issues to empowering communities to take part in Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia needs more environmental journalists. Yet the field remains relatively unknown in the country.

Recognizing this gap, the National Center for Environmental Compliance has begun taking steps to advocate for and support eco-journalism.

"I think we had been noticing for the past years ... a decade ago that there wasn't really this professional, specialized media... in the Arab world," Saad Al-Matrafi, NCEC's executive director of media and communication and official spokesperson, told Arab News. Al-Matrafi noted that while political, business, and sports journalism are quite popular, environmental

journalism lags far behind. "Here at the center we're concentrating on actually bringing up a specialized generation, to be well-focused, well-informed, and educated about the environment," he said. Al-Matrafi explained that environmental journalists should not only report on events but also take part in wider conversation. "If we relate that to our

DID YOU KNOW?

1 The National Center for Environmental Compliance monitors air quality and emissions at the source and protects marine and coastal environments.

3 In the first seven months of 2025, the center evaluated more than 11,000 environmental tests, including 8,124 water samples and 3,618 soil samples.

strategy at the NCEC, part of that is improving the quality of life of citizens and the visitors and the tourists of the Kingdom," he said.

For him, compliance programs and inspection systems are not simply about monitoring firms and factories. They are also about ensuring safer conditions for workers, their families and communities.

Al-Matrafi stressed that NCEC's purpose is not to



detect violations and issue penalties, but to save lives. He described operations the center oversees, such as preventing and managing oil spills, which, if neglected, could cause severe health and environmental damage. Al-Matrafi also highlighted

the NCEC's national oil spill drills. "We have two national oil spill drills a year — the last one was in Yanbu in July," he said. "It was drill number 17 ... "It goes from 40 to 60 entities in the country who actually participate ... that covers government entities,

private sector, and even non-government sectors like institutes, universities." Journalists, he noted, are central to these exercises. "We have journalists on the boats to see what is going on, and we have them in the media center, they write, they take

shots, and they record." Al-Matrafi concluded that no matter how much effort a nation invests in tackling environmental challenges, raising awareness is just as important. "It's awareness, enlightenment, instructions, and good journalism."

Finding a clear legal definition for environmental crime

AMAL ALBAWARDI

Often overlooked and dismissed as a minor issue, "environmental crime" remains undefined in international law, even though it is acknowledged as one of the fastest-growing areas of illicit activity worldwide. Yet the absence of a definition has led countries and institutions to adopt their own interpretations, undermining international cooperation. For now, environmental crime exists as a fragmented legal concept that hinders global enforcement coordination and policy harmonization because it lacks universal recognition comparable to piracy or terrorism. The varying definitions have created

obstacles to establishing mutual understanding. While several nations support creating a new treaty or recognizing ecocide as an international crime, others continue to focus on strengthening existing frameworks. While this global discussion continues, Saudi Arabia has worked to establish domestic legal certainty through the Environmental Law of 2020, supported by complementary regulations that codify a wide range of environmental crimes and their penalties. Key classifications include industrial pollution and hazardous waste, covering unlicensed discharges, dumping, or mishandling of dangerous materials, and illegal hunting and trading of wildlife. Enforcement is shared among specialized institutions, including the National



Amal Albawardi is general manager of the General Department of International Agreements and Cooperation at Saudi Arabia's National Center for Environmental Compliance.

Center for Environmental Compliance, which oversees compliance and regulations, and the Special Forces for Environmental Security, responsible for field enforcement. These also include the National Center for Wildlife, which manages biodiversity and protected areas, and the Public Prosecution, tasked with bringing serious environmental crimes to court to hold offenders accountable. These institutions show that the Kingdom treats environmental protection as integral to its law, sovereignty, and security. In 2025, Saudi Arabia participated in the first meeting of the UN Intergovernmental Expert Group on Crimes that Affect the Environment, held in Vienna. This demonstrated its commitment to global governance through international policy work that protects national sovereignty

while creating equitable partnerships. The Kingdom's position builds on Vision 2030 domestic reforms, which place environmental sustainability at the center of national transformation. Saudi Arabia's approach demonstrates both national commitment and international responsibility. Domestically, the Kingdom enforces laws that punish pollution, wildlife trafficking, deforestation and illegal oil drilling. Abroad, it actively engages in shaping the conversation on how to confront these crimes collectively. The Kingdom demonstrates its position as a global leader through clear domestic policies and active international relations. Environmental crime exists beyond borders, and so does the commitment to fight it.

The complexity of scientific information makes it difficult to communicate without losing meaning.

Sattam Fahad Al-Mojil
Associate professor of environmental engineering, King Saud University



Spotlight GREEN BLUE

SAUDI ARABIA

Grounded roots, green journalism

Experts urge smarter reporting and closer collaboration to match Kingdom's sustainability push

Hebshi Alshammari Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's accelerated sustainability drive under Vision 2030 plan puts environmental journalism at a critical juncture. While science and environmental coverage is expanding, experts say oversimplification, lack of training, and weak collaboration between journalists and scientists hinder high-quality reporting.

Academic and industry leaders agree that tackling these issues requires institutional investment, specialized news units, and advanced tools like AI-powered data analysis. "One of the key challenges facing environmental journalists in Saudi Arabia is striking a precise balance between simplifying complex scientific information and preserving its accuracy," said Talal Al-Shathry, an expert in environmental journalism.

He proposed strengthening ties between academia and the media through workshops, joint conferences, and digital platforms. Echoing these concerns, Mutlaq Al-Mutairi, supervisor of the Dr. Ibrahim Al-Muhanna Chair for Energy and Specialized Media, stressed academia's role.

He told Arab News that university research chairs

are designed to support fields aligned with national goals. Still, he said the issue is not a lack of research but reluctance among institutions to build structured partnerships. He cited Saudi success stories in international collaboration and said academia should shape the media landscape. Sattam Fahad Al-Mojil, an environmental engineering professor at King Saud University, pointed to the

DID YOU KNOW?

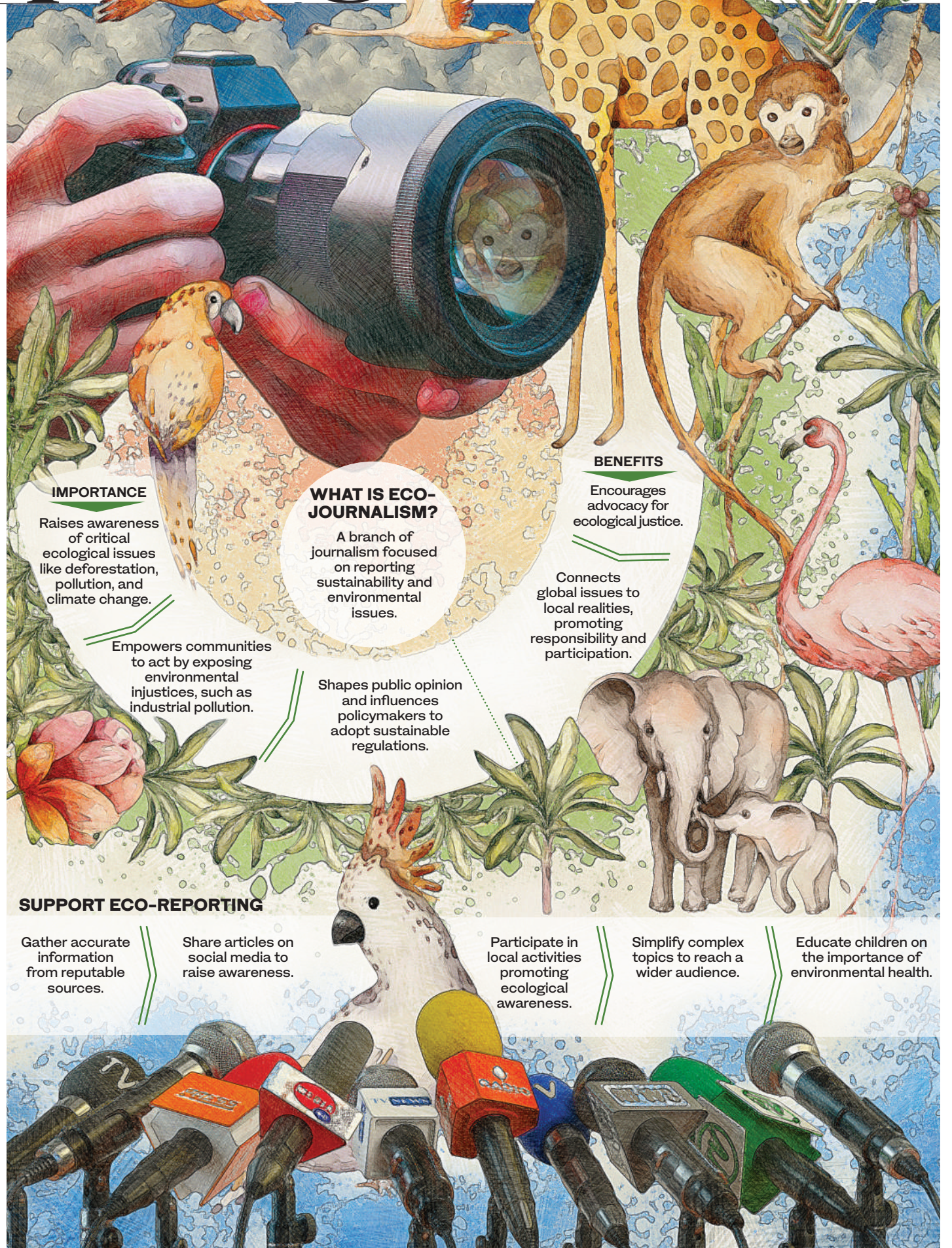
1 Eco-journalism highlights climate change, conservation and sustainability to raise awareness and drive action.

2 Environmental reporters face challenges in simplifying complex topics and engaging audiences.

3 Eco-journalists use tools like interactive maps and multimedia to simplify complex issues and engage audiences.

complexity of scientific content as a barrier, compounded by limited training.

"The complexity of scientific information makes it difficult to communicate without losing meaning, and most reporters receive little to no training in environmental journalism," he told Arab News.



IMPORTANCE

Raises awareness of critical ecological issues like deforestation, pollution, and climate change.

Empowers communities to act by exposing environmental injustices, such as industrial pollution.

WHAT IS ECO-JOURNALISM?

A branch of journalism focused on reporting sustainability and environmental issues.

Shapes public opinion and influences policymakers to adopt sustainable regulations.

BENEFITS

Encourages advocacy for ecological justice.

Connects global issues to local realities, promoting responsibility and participation.

SUPPORT ECO-REPORTING

Gather accurate information from reputable sources.

Share articles on social media to raise awareness.

Participate in local activities promoting ecological awareness.

Simplify complex topics to reach a wider audience.

Educate children on the importance of environmental health.

Farah Al-Gharib, founder and president of Precision & Choice Environmental Solutions, described the field as a critical bridge between science and

the public. "Its strength lies in transforming difficult concepts into clear, actionable information that empowers people to act," she told Arab News.

Her company contributes to this mission by providing transparent data and maintaining open communication with journalists. "Effective

communication between the media and the environmental sector is not a choice — it's a necessity for building a greener tomorrow," she said.

Why boards must take the lead on sustainability

MAJED AL-QATARI



Majed Al-Qatari is a sustainability leader and ecological engineer experienced in advancing environment, social, governance and sustainability goals.

Environmental, social and governance considerations have evolved from peripheral corporate concerns to central elements of business strategy. However, in some cases, a significant governance gap persists between commitments to sustainability and accountability at the board level.

Boards that continue to delegate sustainability to operational committees fail to fulfill their fiduciary duty to oversee it effectively.

A 2023 PwC survey found that 64 percent of directors recognize climate change as a significant business risk, yet only 38 percent report that their boards possess expertise in ESG matters. This gap exists despite growing investor demands for climate accountability.

Corporate sustainability pledges are often ambitious, but they are not always met. Board oversight remains insufficient. According to recent research, 71 percent of institutional investors believe most companies overstate their ESG progress.

In response to these challenges, shareholder activism on ESG issues has surged, with climate-related proposals at S&P 500 companies increasing by 88 percent since 2020. Regulatory pressures are also mounting.

As these pressures increase, forward-thinking boards are responding by integrating sustainability into core governance structures. High-performing companies tend to have boards with dedicated sustainability panels.

This shift in perspective reveals

sustainability as not just a defensive measure, but a driver of business growth.

Unilever's board-level sustainability leadership, exemplified by its Corporate Responsibility Committee, oversees the company's Sustainable Living Plan. This governance structure has helped Unilever reduce carbon emissions per unit of production by 56 percent.

Sustainability must therefore be viewed as more than just compliance; it must become an engine of innovation. Companies with board-level sustainability oversight are approximately 2.7 times more likely to drive product innovation with environmental benefits than those without it.

Just as regulatory frameworks following accounting scandals in the early 2000s mandated financial expertise

on boards, regulatory bodies should now require ESG competence.

Despite agreeing that financial capital remains the primary tool for meeting business objectives, companies lacking sound sustainability governance can face up to 30 percent higher costs than their more sustainable peers. This is a material financial impact that boards can no longer afford to ignore.

Ultimately, sustainability governance is essential for long-term value creation. In 2024, BlackRock CEO Larry Fink positioned climate risk as investment risk.

Boards that fail to lead on sustainability neglect their fiduciary duty to protect and enhance shareholder value in a rapidly evolving environment marked by environmental and social transformation.

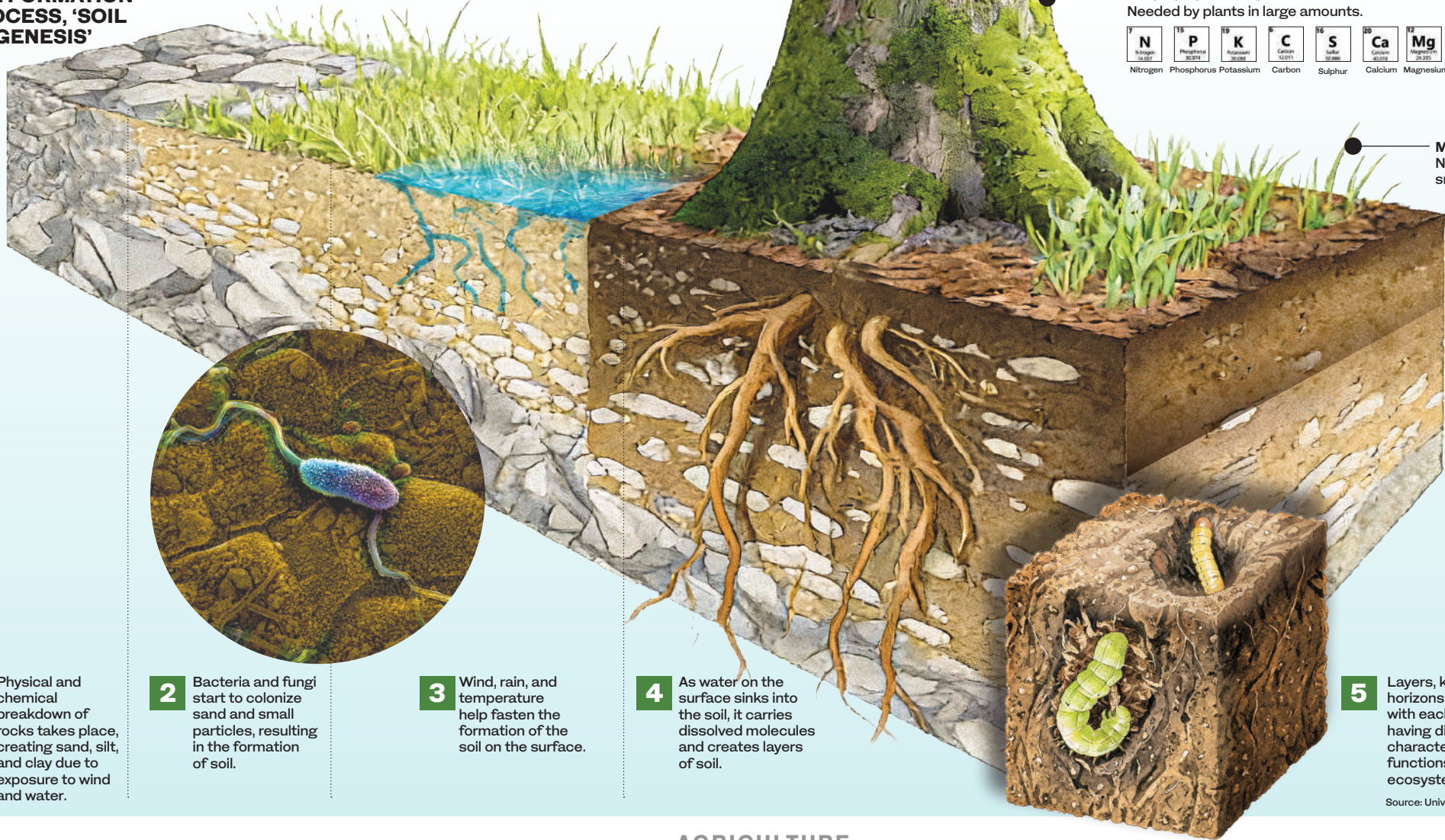
The role of soil includes structural stabilization, providing nutrients and a communication medium for plants.

Basil Nasir
Soil lead at engineering consultancy
William Sale Partnership



Business

SOIL FORMATION PROCESS, 'SOIL GENESIS'



- 1** Physical and chemical breakdown of rocks takes place, creating sand, silt, and clay due to exposure to wind and water.
- 2** Bacteria and fungi start to colonize sand and small particles, resulting in the formation of soil.
- 3** Wind, rain, and temperature help fasten the formation of the soil on the surface.
- 4** As water on the surface sinks into the soil, it carries dissolved molecules and creates layers of soil.
- 5** Layers, known as horizons, are formed, with each layer having different characteristics and functions in the ecosystem.

AGRICULTURE

Soil secrets of the Kingdom

Palm trees, root crops, and coastal plants all tell the story of the land that nurtures them

Haifa Alshammari Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's varied landscapes — from deserts and valleys to mountains and coastlines — play a decisive role in shaping agriculture across the Kingdom. Alongside geography and climate, soil conditions determine what can grow and how crops can be sustained.

Explaining the country's soil diversity, Turki Almutairi, senior environmental specialist at the National Afforestation

Center, said: "The dominant soil in the Kingdom are sandy desert soils, alongside calcareous soils in the central region. Rocky and stony soils are present along mountainous and hilly landscapes."

"Alluvial soils are common in wadies (valleys), while saline and sodic soils are located in depressions (Sabkhas) and along coastlines. Pockets of clayed soils can be also found around few sites along the Kingdom."

These variations allow different crops to thrive depending on location. "Soil is the growing medium for plants.

The role of soil includes structural stabilization, providing nutrients and a communication medium for plants," said Basil Nasir, soil lead at William Sale Partnership.

According to Nasir, understanding soil use is key to determining fertility. "The soil used for trees differs from the soil used for ornamental plants and from the soil used for aquatic plants. It varies according to the specific needs of each plant, and based on this, we determine what the soil requires and assess its fertility," he said.

Soil characteristics are shaped by mineral particles

DID YOU KNOW?

1 Saudi Arabia cultivates around 1 million hectares, mainly in Riyadh, Qassim, Hail, and Jouf.

2 Farming follows the seasons: Winter brings onions, garlic, and carrots, while summer yields watermelon, tomatoes, and cucumbers.

3 The Kingdom is a top date producer, with over 31 million palm trees generating nearly 1.54 million tonnes, especially in Riyadh and Qassim.

such as sand, silt and clay, as well as water, air and organic matter. Their balance affects physical properties, including water-holding capacity.

"If the soil is like dunes, adding water will cause it to run off, but if the soil is clay, its ability to retain water will be very high. If you add water and return the next day, you will find that the water is still there," Nasir said.

Chemical properties also matter. "What determines whether a plant is suitable for a particular environment is primarily the plant's nature. For example, some

plants have fibrous roots and therefore do not require well-draining soil," he added.

"Soil is considered fundamental for the National Greening Program's objectives. Understanding the soil variability along the Kingdom is a precondition for fostering sustainable soil management," Almutairi said.

"In this line, the NGP is working toward the establishment of the Saudi Soil Information System, which consists of mapping soils and its functional properties in the Kingdom using state-of-the-art technology."

Mapping Saudi Arabia's soil diversity

ADNAN MASOUDY, HASSAN ALZAIN

Artificial intelligence is advancing at unprecedented speed, yet its energy appetite is growing just as rapidly. Data centers consumed around 415 terawatt hours of electricity in 2024, and global demand could surpass 1,000 TWh by 2026 — roughly Japan's annual consumption.

Beyond electricity, AI expansion strains water resources, generates e-waste, and pressures land and local grids. These externalities highlight the need for climate-aligned governance alongside technological growth.

The risks emerge amid a warming world. Over 2.4 billion workers face unsafe conditions due to heat, with climate change already costing hundreds

of billions annually in lost output.

An AI boom adding further emissions could exacerbate challenges for countries already struggling with climate impacts. Strong adaptation, mitigation, and nature-based solutions are essential for ensuring that AI innovation supports long-term stability.

AI can also advance climate solutions, optimizing electricity grids, improving weather modeling, accelerating low-carbon materials discovery, and aiding decision-making across food, water, and energy systems.

As experts note, durable outcomes depend on cross-sector collaboration and integrating sustainability into investment and corporate strategy.

Saudi Arabia is emerging as a central



Adnan Masoudy is manager of corporate sustainability, environment, and biodiversity at Ma'aden.

Hassan Alzain is author of the award-winning book "Green Gambit."

force in climate-smart AI. Under Vision 2030, AI is projected to add over \$135 billion to GDP by 2030.

The Kingdom aims to source at least 50 percent of its power from renewables by 2030, expanding capacity to roughly 130 GW, including 58.7 GW from solar and wind.

Recent initiatives include Humain's joint venture with AMD and Cisco to build renewable-powered data centers starting at 100 MW and scaling to 1 GW, and xAI with NVIDIA developing a 500 MW AI facility deploying 600,000 processors nationwide.

Human capital development is also pivotal. The "One Million Saudis in AI" program has trained over 1 million people — 52 percent women — ensuring

expertise to design, regulate, and maintain sustainable AI systems.

Nuclear energy and green-hydrogen projects, including NEOM's \$8.4 billion hydrogen plant, further support low-carbon AI expansion.

Saudi Arabia can lead the global race for climate-aligned AI by ensuring clean power for AI clusters, setting environmental standards for data centers, embedding green skills in AI training, advancing global digital infrastructure standards, and embedding emissions accountability in investments.

With these strategies, the Kingdom can showcase a rapidly growing AI economy powered by green energy, governed transparently, and aligned with planetary limits.

The National Center for Wildlife is dedicated to safeguarding the Kingdom's diverse habitats and managing protected areas.
Mohammed Qurban
NCW CEO



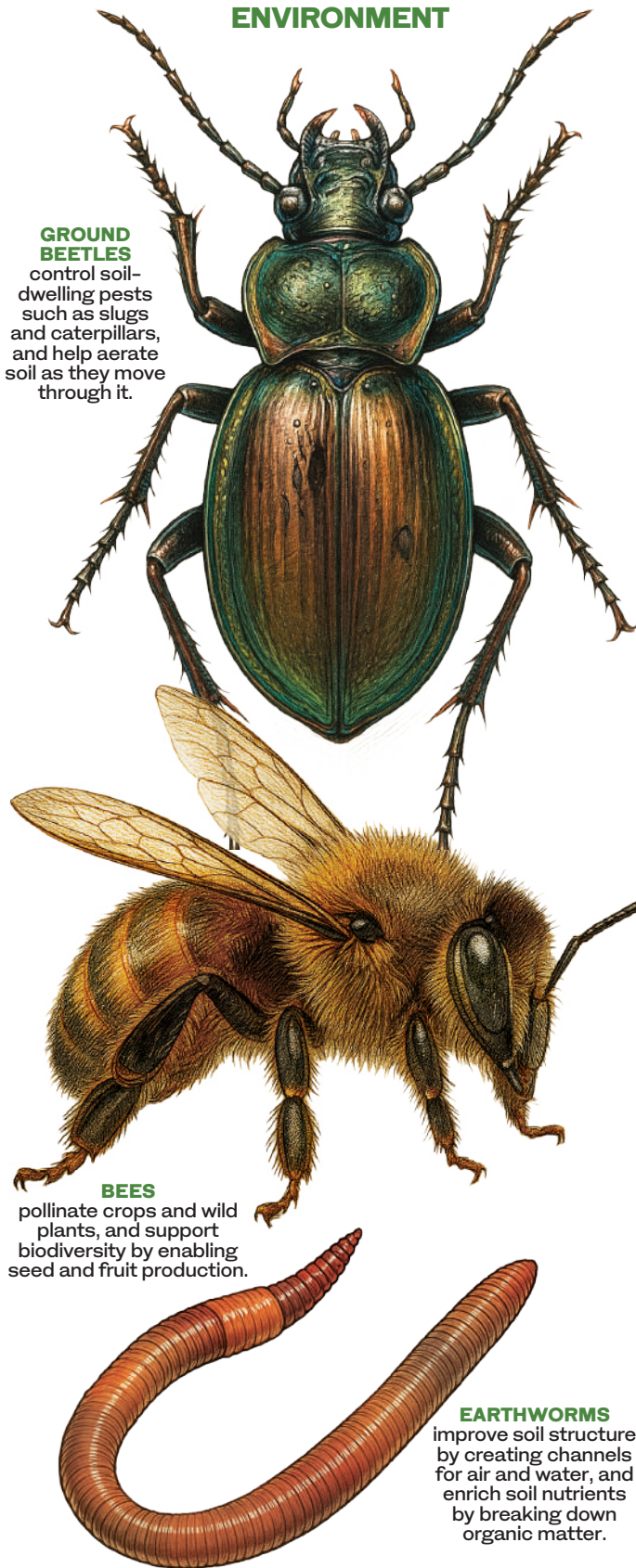
Business

NATURE'S HEROES

How insects protect crops and biodiversity

Experts explain how small creatures are delivering big environmental impact

INSECTS THAT ARE HELPFUL FOR THE ENVIRONMENT



GROUND BEETLES control soil-dwelling pests such as slugs and caterpillars, and help aerate soil as they move through it.

BEES pollinate crops and wild plants, and support biodiversity by enabling seed and fruit production.

EARTHWORMS improve soil structure by creating channels for air and water, and enrich soil nutrients by breaking down organic matter.

Haifa AlShammari Riyadh

In the heart of Saudi Arabia's deserts, an unseen workforce of insects is protecting plants, enriching soil, and sustaining ecological balance.

The Kingdom supports a wide range of insect species that are vital to environmental protection and the success of its green agenda.

Last summer, the National Center for Wildlife launched its "Decade Land Expedition to Explore Terrestrial Ecosystems," a major research initiative to document terrestrial biodiversity, density, and species distribution. Local and international experts are contributing to the effort.

Mohammed Qurban, CEO of the NCW, said the data helps the organization "develop effective strategies for protecting species and raising awareness of the importance of preserving biodiversity," and to "document this great biological richness at the global level, and enhancing the Kingdom's role in regional and international environmental agreements."

Among the Kingdom's most important species is the Arabian honeybee, *Apis mellifera jemenitica*, which is uniquely adapted to Saudi Arabia's harsh climate and essential to agriculture.

According to the US Department of Agriculture, three-quarters of the world's flowering plants and about 35 percent of global food crops rely on animal pollinators, with more than 3,500 native bee species boosting crop yields.

In Saudi Arabia, bees support the prized Sidr honey industry and promote biodiversity by enabling wild plant reproduction. "The more pollinators there are, the more mature the flowers will be," said environmental consultant Oubaid Alouni.

DID YOU KNOW?

1 Ground beetles help maintain healthy soil structure by improving aeration and water penetration as they burrow through the soil.

2 Honeybees are among the top pollinators in the Kingdom. They are also vital for honey production, as they help maintain the health of native plants and trees in Saudi Arabia.

3 Ladybugs rely on aphids as a food source, helping to eliminate the number of insects that damage crops like cucumbers and date palms.

He added: "There are bumblebees, and there are also insects that come out at night because some flowers bloom at this time, and then these insects come and pollinate them."

Ladybugs, another key species, feed mainly on aphids — each consuming up to 5,000 in its lifetime, according to National Geographic — reducing the need for chemical pesticides.

Butterflies, including the plain tiger butterfly, pollinate wildflowers and desert plants after rains and serve as indicators of ecosystem health.

Green lacewings, newly recorded in Saudi Arabia, prey on crop-damaging pests in their larval stage, while adults feed on nectar and support pollination. Earthworms enrich soil by breaking down organic matter and creating tunnels that enhance water absorption.

Plant specialist Mohamed Al-Arnaout highlighted their importance: "Earthworms aerate the soil, and bees and other small flying insects act as pollen carriers from flower to flower." Farmers increasingly raise and release earthworms to naturally cultivate land.

LADYBUGS eat aphids and other plant pests, and they naturally reduce the need for chemical pesticides.

BUTTERFLIES act as pollinators for many flowering plants, and serve as indicators of a healthy ecosystem.

LACEWINGS larvae consume large numbers of pests like aphids and mites, and adults help pollinate flowers.

HOVERFLIES adults pollinate a wide range of plants, and larvae eat aphids and other soft-bodied insects.

KSA's water future is being built on partnership

RAMI GHANDOUR

Saudi Arabia's water sector is undergoing one of the most ambitious transformations in the world. Over the past decade, the Kingdom has developed a structured public-private partnership framework that is redefining how essential infrastructure is financed, delivered and sustained. With scarce rainfall, limited freshwater resources, and a rapidly expanding population, the Kingdom has long recognized that water security is as a foundation for national development.

To achieve this, the National Water Strategy 2030, launched under Vision 2030, introduced a unified framework aligning policy, regulation, and operations across the sector to strengthen governance, improve

efficiency, and encourage private-sector participation. By 2030, the Kingdom aims to treat up to 10 million cubic meters a day of wastewater and reuse 70 percent, advancing a true circular-water economy.

Succeeding these ambitions requires partnership and innovation. The government defines strategy and ensures equity and environmental protection, while the private sector contributes expertise, financing, and technology to deliver sustainable water management solutions and long-term impact. Having developed water PPPs across the Gulf, Africa, CIS, Europe, and China — pioneering first-of-their-kind projects and seen firsthand how structured partnerships accelerate



Rami Ghandour is CEO of Metito Utilities.

process and ensure long-term performance, it is clear that Saudi Arabia stands out for translating this balance between public stewardship and private efficiency into clear policy and measurable results across such a large and well-structured program.

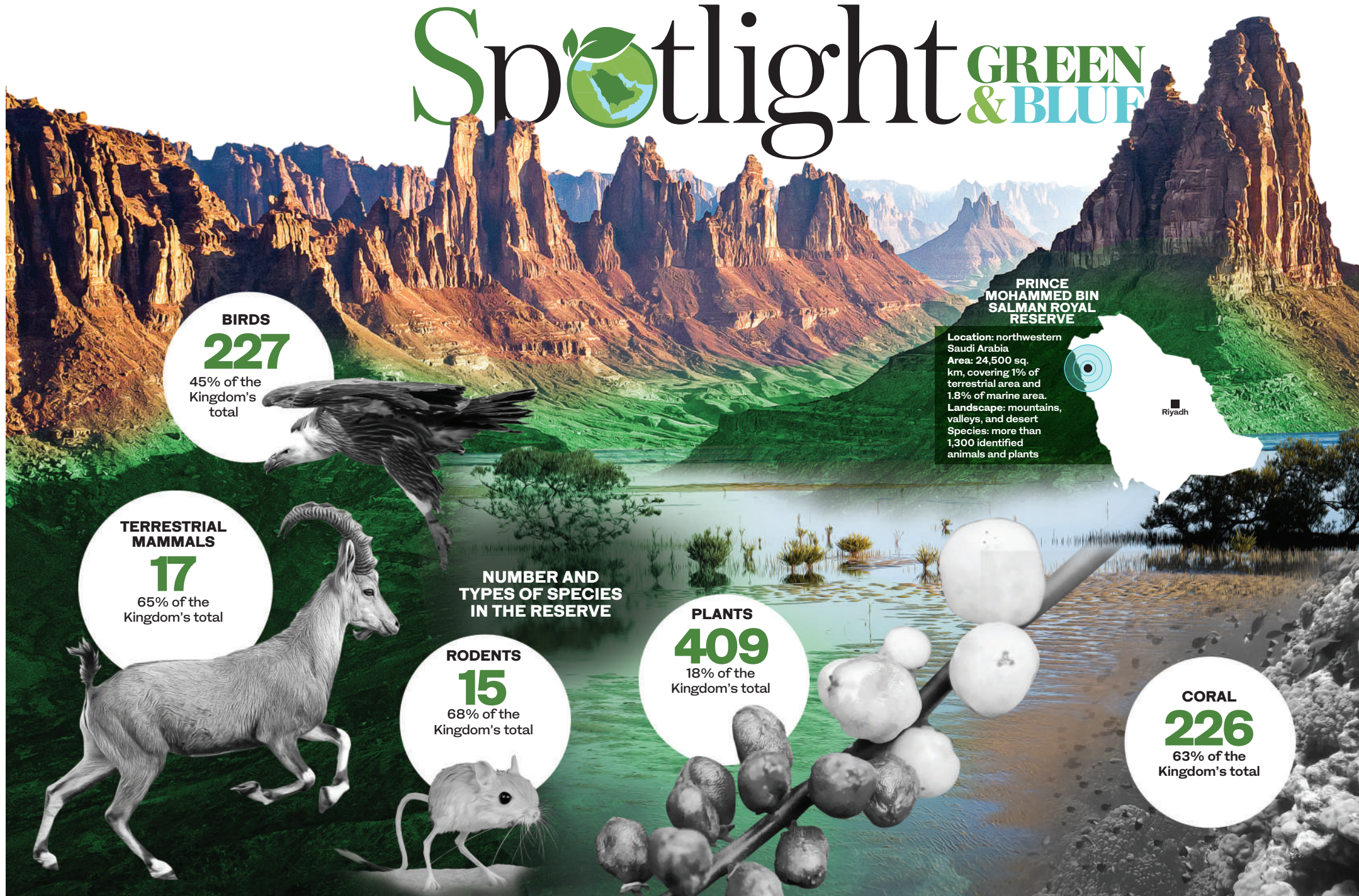
At the core of PPP model, which enables each partner to focus on what it does best. The public sector defines national priorities, provides strategic oversight, and safeguards public interest, while private partners bring technology, finance, and operational expertise. When a PPP project is well-structured with clear risk allocation and performance-based contracts, it reduces lifecycle costs, accelerates delivery, and ensures accountability for long-term results

that endure long after construction ends.

Through the Saudi Water Partnership Co., the Kingdom has built a transparent PPP framework that continues to expand rapidly. Over the last years, SWPC has led the development of multiple independent water plants and independent sewage treatment plants under long-term concession models. According to their published 2024-30 roadmap report, more than 30 projects worth over SR60 billion (\$16 billion) are planned under PPP structures.

Our projects in wastewater and water treatment, desalination, and non-revenue water management continue to demonstrate how public-private collaboration can deliver measurable, long-term impact.

Spotlight **GREEN & BLUE**



SAUDI ARABIA

A sanctuary for wildlife

Rewilding and ecosystem restoration protects biodiversity at the Prince Mohammed bin Salman Royal Reserve

Haifa Alshammari Riyadh

Established seven years ago as part of Saudi Vision 2030, the Prince Mohammed bin Salman Royal Reserve stands as a testament to the Kingdom's commitment to environmental conservation.

Saudi Arabia has made significant strides in protecting its ecosystems, expanding its protected areas from 19 to more than 400 — covering 18 percent of the Kingdom's territory.

"When I was invited to come and look at Saudi Arabia, I was struck by its rugged expansive beauty, natural wildness and unique biodiversity," Andrew Zaloumis, CEO of the Prince Mohammed bin Salman Royal Reserve, told Arab News.

"I was impressed by the vision and strong leadership and direction with respect to conservation. Vision 2030 puts in place a framework to make the Kingdom's commitments to the environment a reality and globally relevant."

Located in northwestern Saudi Arabia, the reserve spans about

24,500 sq. km, encompassing 15 ecosystems and hosting more than 50 percent of the Kingdom's marine and terrestrial species, making it one of the most biodiverse protected areas in the Middle East.

The Prince Mohammed bin Salman Royal Reserve has successfully reintroduced 11 of its 23 native species, including sand gazelle, mountain gazelle, onager and pharaoh eagle owl.

"Genetic testing is key to ensure the correct subspecies are brought back," Zaloumis said.

"One of the reserve's conservation successes recognized

DID YOU KNOW?

1 The reserve is home to more than 1,300 species and 2,000 historical and archaeological sites.

2 It protects 50 percent of the Kingdom's species, making it one of the region's most biodiverse areas.

3 It stretches from the Harrat lava plains to the Red Sea, linking NEOM, the Red Sea Project and AIUla.

globally is the return of the Persian onager after a 126-year absence. There are less than 600 left in the wild globally.

"The big-picture strategy is to create an open ecological area where historically occurring species can roam freely as they once did more than a century ago."

Beyond conservation, the reserve also highlights historical landmarks from both the Islamic and pre-Islamic periods, including sites built by the Nabataeans. Zaloumis said that the reserve's greatest asset is its people, with 85 percent of its

staff drawn from nearby areas.

A key initiative has been the establishment of a ranger force — including an all-women unit, the first of its kind in the Middle East.

"We have established a highly effective 250-strong ranger force from scratch, drawn from the towns and villages in the reserve," Zaloumis said.

"Thirty-four percent of our rangers are women compared to a global average of 11 percent."

He added: "These are the first women ranger units in the Middle East. Women globally have an important role to play in conservation."

A coordinated approach to West Asia's water

SAMI DIMASSI

One vital resource sits at the heart of all life — water. But as populations grow, so too does the demand for water to support development, placing a strain on limited surface and groundwater.

Ten percent of the global population live in nations under high to critical levels of water stress. Most disasters that befall humanity are directly or indirectly linked to water. Climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of such disasters.

Several countries in West Asia face severe water scarcity due to their arid climates, reduced rainfall, limited freshwater resources, habitat loss, and over-extraction of groundwater.

Five of the region's 12 countries have the

lowest water availability per capita in the world. Millions of people in these countries lack access to clean drinking water.

Since its inception, the UN Environment Programme has been monitoring, managing, and protecting water resources and freshwater ecosystems.

UNEP recognizes that environmental crises directly affect freshwater bodies. At the same time, when functional, protected, restored, and well managed, freshwater bodies are strong allies in combating such crises.

They can protect and restore biodiversity, mitigate pollution through water filtration and purification, and contribute to climate stability by providing mitigation and adaptation benefits.

Long-term improvements in water quality



Sami Dimassi is director and regional representative of the UN Environment Programme in West Asia

require work on infrastructure, storage, and distribution, coupled with robust legislative and institutional frameworks.

Exploring unconventional water sources, such as rainwater harvesting, and wastewater recycling, can help meet the growing demand.

Building databases and using technology to track water quality trends over time can help countries identify pollution hotspots and prioritize action in areas most at risk.

These solutions require collaboration among governments, industries, and communities, as well as the integration of advanced technologies and sustainable practices to ensure access to clean water in the face of growing challenges in West Asia.

Many countries in the region share river basins and aquifers, such as the

Tigris-Euphrates and Jordan rivers, making regional cooperation essential to address pollution and the over-extraction of water resources, ensuring equitable distribution and sustainable use.

Moreover, collaborative efforts between countries on water conservation, pollution control, and ecosystem restoration can help improve water quality across borders.

Water is at the center of sustainable development. Integrating water into national strategies across all sectors and fostering regional cooperation can build resilience against mounting environmental and socio-economic pressures in West Asia.

Now is the time to shift to a more coordinated, forward-looking approach — one that ensures water remains a source of stability and progress.