Special points of interest:

- Happy Halloween! Some creepy critters lurk in this issue!
- For a Ghoulish Story, See Page 2.
- Are there bats in your belfrey? Page 3.
- Who’s the Hannibal Lector of the bird world? Page 4, if you dare!
- Next Issue: Treasure found at TQ!

Inside this issue:

An Al Asad Ghost Story... 2
Skeletons in the Closet 2
Going Batty in Iraq 3
Questions from the Field 3
The Dusty Lens: Pic of the Week! 4
Birders’ Corner 4

“Nevermore.”
— The Raven

Creature Feature

The Yellow Sac Spider

Yellow sac spiders are found around the world and are present in Iraq. They are one of two spiders venomous enough to be dangerous to humans on Al Asad. Named for the silk sack they spin to contain their eggs and their pale yellow color, sac spiders are about 1/4” long and with legs are about the size of a quarter. They generally live outside, but as the temperature cools down this fall they will also move inside. For this reason you should shake out any clothing or dufflebags that have sat in one place for a while, and watch for silk “tents” to form in corners and along the edge of the ceiling. These guys are very common, even in our houses in the States, and one scientist has estimated that this is the spider most often swallowed while you sleep! I don’t know if that is true, but I do know that they can give a nasty bite, similar to a Brown recluse. Spider bites do not hurt at first, but soon become painful and swollen as the tissue around the bite dies. Some victims can suffer anaphylactic shock. Although a spider bite is seldom life threatening, it can be a serious injury, especially if you are allergic. LTC Gouhin found one at the office!

Who’s Living Under My CHU?

The Turkestan Roach

Not only are these guys under our CHUs, but they are also invading the U.S.! Starting with the 1st Gulf War, this species has hitched a ride with soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, & now are invasive from CA to FL. Males are 1” long and have wings, females are wingless. Being thin shelled (easy to digest & high meat-to-shell ratio) and fast breeding, they are raised as pet food and are sold on the internet for $.50 to $1.50 each. Downside—they lay multiple egg cases and can spread disease.
An Al Asad Ghost Story...

In the canine issue I mentioned that the Striped hyena is sometimes thought to be a Djinn in Arabic folklore. Specifically, it is said that a type of Djinn known as a Ghul, a shape-changer that lives in the desert or abandoned villages, will often take the shape of a hyena while in search of graves with fresh corpses.

I was reminded of this the other afternoon when I hiked up to the abandoned village on the ridge overlooking the oasis. It was getting late and the empty shacks cast long shadows as the fragments of curtain rustled in empty windows. Sitting on the far side of the camp was a large man dressed in the manner of the local farmers, but a poor one whose clothes and appearance was dirty and ragged. He was too far away to speak to, but I nodded in his direction. He seemed to ignore me, and although he looked a bit intimidating and I was not sure where he might have come from, I could tell he was lost in some lonely thought and decided to let him be.

I took the pictures I wanted, then spent some time examining a number of truly large dog tracks that could be found throughout the village. Surely a hyena must be a regular visitor to the ruins, probably in search of rodents and snakes for dinner. By the time I had followed the tracks around the village, it was getting very late – I was suddenly glad I had a flashlight with me, as I would need it before I could walk back to main post.

As I started to walk across the village, I glance back to where the farmer had been sitting, and was startled to see that he was standing there looking directly at me! I don’t think that would have struck me so, except that seeing him standing revealed his full height, which had to be nearly 6’6” - much taller than any other Iraqi I had met. I looked away and continued to walk towards the edge of the village, but from the corner of my eye I saw that he started to follow me! As I reached the edge of the village, I came to a steep bit of cliff that drops about 30’ to the dirt trail that leads down to the end of Wadi Road. As I picked my way carefully down to the trail, I figured my strange companion would stop at the edge, and when I reached the trail I looked up and he was nowhere in sight. I started down the trail, glancing back one more time, and there he was! He had reached the trail only 100 yards behind me! I couldn’t figure out how he could have gotten down so fast without me seeing or hearing him, but decided to just walk away and see what would happen. After several steps it was apparent that he was following me. I stopped and turned to him and loudly asked, “Can I help you?”, but he only stopped and silently glared at me. Now I turned and picked up my pace, but the stranger stayed behind me. It seemed that no matter how fast I walked he would match my pace. By the time I reached the road, it was nearly dark, and when I looked back I found that the stranger had actually gained on me and was now only 50 yards behind me. I knew there was a security checkpoint about 400 yards down the road, and knew that my only escape from a confrontation was to sprint to this checkpoint. Without another look back, I broke into a dead run. I could not hear his footsteps and did not dare to look, (continued on page 5.....)

Skeletons in the Closet..

One of the interesting notes I took from the “History of Al Asad” class was that skeletons of Neanderthals had been found in a cave in northern Iraq. Neanderthals were an early member of the hominid family that lived until about 20,000 ears ago. Ten skeletons were found near Shanidar from 1957-61.
Going Batty in Iraq!

Nearly one-fifth of all the types of mammals in Iraq are bats. Iraq is home to at least 20 different species! Bats are a critical link in the environment, controlling insects and pollinating a number of night-blooming plants. Most bats eat small insects, but others eat fruit and still others are vampires, biting a small cut into an animal in order to drink the blood. In Iraq nearly all the bats eat insects, the exception being the Egyptian fruit bat. Although largely beneficial and harmless, bats also pose a few of health risks. For one, bats are especially susceptible to rabies, which they can pass either thru a bite or thru inhalation in extremely confined areas. Bat dens can also build up toxic levels of ammonia and the accumulated guano on the floor can cause disease or host biting insects. It has recently been established that the Egyptian fruit bat carries the flesh-eating Marburg virus. Most bats spend the day in a communal den, which can be under the eaves of a building, the cracks between concrete barriers, or a hollow tree. Other bats will hang in trees, and some also live solo lives. Bats hunt at night using echolocation—they emit high pitched noises and triangulate the return echoes from even the smallest of objects with great accuracy. Most of the bats of Iraq are very common, but some species are endangered, usually due to the effects of habitat destruction & pesticides. Look for them at dusk!

Questions from the Field...your questions answered!

What Kind of Skull is This?

Golden Jackal. This skull was found in the ASP at TQ and was thought to be from a Striped hyena. Only about 7” long, it appears a little small at least for an adult hyena, and the wear on the teeth do indicate this was from an adult animal. To positively identify it, it was necessary to study the dental pattern. Each side of this upper set of teeth has 3 incisors, 1 canine, 4 pre-molars, and 2 molars, matching the dentate of the Golden jackal. The Striped hyena would have had one less molar. Teeth can often tell about the type of animal, it’s health, and age. The dollar in the photo shows scale, an aid in identification. (photos courtesy of CW4 Rohrbacher)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Upper Dentate</th>
<th>Golden Jackal</th>
<th>Striped Hyena</th>
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<tr>
<td>3 incisor</td>
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<td>1 canine</td>
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Send your photos, questions, and submissions to MAJ Rogers at:
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Only one local bird was suitable for the Halloween issue—**The Butcher Bird**! Butcher Bird is a nickname for various types of shrikes—small carnivorous birds that live in many parts of the world. In Ohio, we have the Northern and Loggerhead shrikes, and at Al Asad I have seen Masked, Woodchat, Great Gray, Lesser Gray, and Red-backed shrikes. They get their nickname from their habit of hanging their prey (small birds, lizards, or large insects) on thorn bushes and returning to feed on the bodies as needed. Effectively, they use the thorn bush as a larder. They love military camps—barbed wire is also a great place to hang dinner! Adding to the spectacle is their habit of often eating the head first. If you find headless critters hanging on the fence, a shrike is nearby!

MAJ Rogers pulled this **Egyptian rat snake** out of luggage at the airfield. Often mistaken for a Sand viper due to its similar pattern, this snake is completely harmless and can be distinguished from the viper by its slender build, round eyes, and non-triangular head. They grow to 3-5' in length and mainly eat rodents, so are beneficial to keep around!
but somehow I sensed that the stranger was also running and was getting closer.

The sun had dropped behind the ridge and it was deep twilight as I approached the Ugandan sentry running as hard as I could. The sentry raised his weapon and shouted “Polle! Polle!”, which I knew meant to slow down, but there was no way I was going to stop until his rifle was between me and my pursuer! I stopped beside the sentry and, pointed my flashlight directly at my pursuer, now only 10 yards from me and the guard. But it was not the farmer! Instead, running directly into the light, was a large hyena!

The guard reacted swiftly and fired two shots that I felt must have hit the beast, but rather than fall, the hyena slid to a stop, gave us a long, hateful look, then disappeared into the wadi. The guard must have missed, because we found no blood, but it seemed that the animal was gone, and there was no sign of the man.

We reported the man to the MP’s, who came and gave me a ride back to the CHU, and I assumed I had been mistaken about the man following me. He must have been trying to beat the sunset himself and turned towards his home at some point – so I thought nothing else of the incident. At least not until the following week when I mentioned the hyena sighting to my friend in Animal Control. He told me they had found the body of an unusually large hyena along that same stretch of road just days before my incident – apparently run over by a truck in the dark. Chills shot up my spine as I suddenly realized that the hyena and man had been the same, and further had been neither hyena nor man, but a Ghul! More specifically, the GHOST OF A GHUL!

It is a beautiful view of camp from the deserted village high on the wind swept ridge, but that’s one view that I don’t believe I will return to enjoy!

Happy Halloween!