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Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity, including indigenous, minority and regional languages and multilingual issues (Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage)

Significance of place names in the distribution of wildlife species and their benefits in the reintroduction process

Summary**

Most place names are derived from the name of a person, animal or plant. Researchers can know the current status of natural and human environments because they can record events and conditions through direct observation and real-time data collection and reporting. However, understanding past environmental conditions is a difficult task that requires an analysis of the legacy of species that once roamed that environment. One of the most important of these legacies, created by human beings, is place names, which play an important role in the identification of ancient environmental conditions. Place names document the existence and areal extent of species as well as the state and contents of such environments and their relationships to human activities. Place names also make it possible to gain insight into the ancient climate and the plant types and water resources that prevailed within that environment.

The documentation of place names and determining their locations are very important, particularly given the decreased public interest in the subject. Previous generations had a thorough knowledge of everything pertaining to the desert land of Saudi Arabia. They observed it, described it and named its places and features.

As these names still exist without change, they have been used, to the extent possible, to pinpoint the past distribution of wildlife species, beginning with those species that are extinct and followed by those that still exist in small numbers despite the shrinkage of their former habitats. The report provides evidence of the benefits accruing from the use of place names to ascertain the former distribution of natural fauna. That knowledge can contribute to the success of the reintroduction process for such fauna.

* GEGN.2/2019/1.

** The full report was prepared by Abdullah Nasser Alwelaie, National Committee on Geographic Names, Saudi Arabia. The report is available at unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/1st_session_UNGEGN.html, in the language of submission only, as document GEGN.2/2019/7/CRP.7.

