



الصندوق الدولي للحفاظ على الحبارى
International Fund For Houbara Conservation

PLAYING FOR CHANGE: NATURE-THEMED VIRTUAL ESCAPE ROOM GAME LAUNCHES TO ENCOURAGE CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Connect with Nature and the International Fund for Houbara Conservation (IFHC) use gamification to help boost awareness around sustainability amongst youth in the UAE

Abu Dhabi, UAE – 04 October 2020: On World Habitat Day, the Connect with Nature programme launched the UAE's first conservation-themed '3D Virtual Mobile Escape Room' offering youth an engaging new experience and learning opportunity. Through a series of exciting challenges, the all-new 3D virtual mobile escape room will educate youth on the importance of Houbara conservation and the UAE's rich natural heritage. Co-founded by Emirates Nature-WWF and Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi, with the International Fund for Houbara Conservation (IFHC) as a strategic partner, the Connect with Nature programme aims to engage and inspire youth to be future champions and leaders of sustainable growth and development.

The immersive Desert Survival Challenge will allow youth to connect with nature virtually and develop a deeper appreciation for the environment and more self-awareness on the human impact and responsibility for protecting wildlife. In as little as 10 minutes, players can embark upon a journey through the Arabian Desert, to survive the dangers of the sandy landscapes as they piece together a series of puzzles and riddles using cryptic clues. Following a successful physical escape room, Connect with Nature brought the virtual experience come to life as a result of the novel coronavirus. Users can look forward to a virtual medium of the innovative and exciting nature-themed mobile escape room.

What will youth learn? The importance of keeping the environment clean through waste segregation and how loud sounds and bright lights impact wildlife as well as an introduction to the Houbara bustard that can be found in a range of countries including Morocco in the west to Mongolia in the east. That's not all. Gamers will also be challenged to complete an experience in the shortest time and pass on the baton by tagging three friends on social media and challenging them to beat their time.

Commenting on the initiative, General Manager of Emirates Nature-WWF, Laila Mostafa Abdullatif said, "We are excited to launch the 3D virtual mobile escape room which will offer an engaging and playful approach to learning about our nation's natural heritage and the need to conserve it for future generations. The youth are the future of our planet, and it is our responsibility to provide them with tools that can expand their

knowledge and understanding of nature and encourage them to reflect and re-assess their attitudes, values and views about their relationship with the natural world as well as the importance of conserving our environment.”

Commenting on the launch of the virtual escape room, His Excellency Mohammed Saleh Al Baidani, Director General of the International Fund for Houbara Conservation said, “The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unexpected challenges across all industries and sectors. It has also presented opportunities for early adopters of digital initiatives. The launch of the 3D virtual escape room, in collaboration with Connect with Nature, is another step in our commitment to provide fun, interactive and informative learning experiences for our audience.”

IFHC has made great strides in engaging the youth in the importance of conservation, following the launch of its ‘Conservation Education: the Houbara Model’, programme in 2018. The programme has reached more than 36,000 students in 46 schools across the UAE. The Fund has successfully adapted its programme for digital platforms, providing young learners with a seamless and uninterrupted learning experience amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the past year, Connect with Nature has engaged with nearly 5,000 and young adult, ages 15 to 30, across over 90 events. The programme was founded on the philosophy that human connection is essential to inspiring positive change. Connect with Nature went virtual on April 2020 to deliver online experiences to youth while maintaining physical distancing in line with government and relevant local authorities’ guidelines. The programme has also selected 20 UAE Ambassadors for Nature who are tasked with generating innovative solutions to environmental challenges in collaboration with environment leaders and decision-makers across the nation. The Ambassadors have now completed their modules for the ‘LEARN’ stage of their 10-month journey and will now embark on to the ‘ACT’ stage running from September 2020 to January 2021 which will task them to contributing 40 hours of activities through Connect with Nature platform. During the ‘LEARN’ stage, youth had access to a wide range of workshops through a unique E-learning platform and were asked to complete weekly webinars and activities across biodiversity, climate change, market transformation and innovation.

With over 2,800 participants, Connect with Nature’s physical escape room took home the bronze award at the WOW Awards Middle East for Brand Activation of the Year, 2019. The escape room has also previously toured numerous events across the UAE, including Dubai Fitness Challenge, Al Hosn Festival, Al Quoz Arts Festival and the Middle East Youth Expo.

Youth can also take part in a series of virtual experiences that are open to all interested candidates in the UAE. Budding environmentalists are encouraged to discover the full line-up at the Connect with Nature activities hub, and keep an eye out for new additions every week.

- ENDS -