

TAYF

the Soqatra Newsletter

Issued By **FRIENDS OF SOQOTRA**



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**Agricultural
Education
Page 3**



**Bozwellia
Page 4 &
Page 18**



**Education
Page 5**



**New Hospital
Page 6**



**FoS AGM
Frankfurt 2012
Page 9**



**Duvaliandra
Page 16**



NEWS

12th Annual General Meeting Friends of Soqotra 13-15 September 2013 Mendel University in Brno, Czech Republic, Faculty of Horticulture, Lednice

12 Sept—Pre-conference excursion
13 Sept—Presentations, Dinner in Lednice chateau
14 Sept—Presentations, wine tasting
15 Sept—Morning: FOS Meeting, afternoon: excursion to Lednice chateau's garden
16 Sept—Post conference excursion

Lednice is a pleasant South Moravian town with a tradition of viticulture. The Lednice-Valtice Cultural Landscape is one of the treasures of UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage.

Contact irena.hubalkova@mendelu.cz, (registration; fee €40, including lunches and dinner at the Chateau) or kay.vandamme@gmail.com or Julian.jansenvanrensburg@gmail.com for more information and a brochure. Registration deadline 30 June; abstracts by 21 August. The proceedings will be published in a special issue of the Journal of Landscape Ecology.

Further information can be found on our website www.friendsosqotra.org

Socotra Biodiversity Project News

The Socotra governance and biodiversity project is reopening and Abdurraqeb Shamsan Al-Okaishi has been appointed the new Project Manager.

Best wishes and many congratulations to him!

Thanks to Mendel University!

Abdulwahab Saad Saeed Ali
Research and Study director
EPA-Socotra Archipelago

The Socotra archipelago has been supported by its friends from different countries to protect its unique biodiversity and to protect and organize the balance between the development of population and the sustainability of natural resources use. I would like to thank the people who are leading the Czech Project of Support of Small-scale Farmers and Agricultural education on Socotra archipelago for their supporting and sponsoring my master degree study at Mendel University in the Faculty of Forestry and Wood Technology Brno. I admit that I am getting special care as their friend, and also I would like to thank them for their activities which focus on helping the local Socotri communities by training and establishing home gardens in different places on Socotra Island. This is coming from their interest and desire to see Socotra stay as a beautiful place in the future.

Support of Mobile Clinics for the Rural Health Service of Soqotra

On 7 February 2013 the Friends of Soqotra handed over 500 £ to Abdul Basr, an assistant of Dr. Salem Yousef Muftah, money which supports the mobile clinics on Soqotra. The primary aim of the community-based project is to improve the health of children and their mothers in the archipelago, and in particular to bring down the high incidence of infant mortality on Soqotra. For further information see Tayf 9 (2012), p. 3.

Contact data

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Cover Photo: *Boswellia* sp. By Petr Madera. See p. 18.



Handing over the FOS funding
to Abdul Basr

C or Q?

Spelling of the main island name in English is still controversial. Contributors to Tayf are welcome to use whichever spelling they prefer.

Isam is the Best Student!

FoS committee member, Isam-Eldin Mohamed-Ali, is currently taking a post-graduate course in translation in the Sudan, studying at Khartoum University, Faculty of Arts, Translation and Arabicization Unit. We would like to congratulate him on his achievement of being named best student of the year. Isam also finds time to translate the Tayf Newsletter for the Friends of Soqotra.



NEWS

New Czech Development Assistance Project on Soqotra: Support of small-scale farmers and agricultural education on Soqotra Island

Hana Habrova & Petr Nemeč (Mendel University in Brno, Czech Republic)
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From August 2012 a new project supporting Soqotri people is being implemented by Mendel University experts. The project is funded by the Czech Republic Development Cooperation via the Czech Development Agency. The objective is to support the island's population in an effort to improve their food security and the nutritional quality of the food, and to increase the food self-sufficiency of local communities through educational activities in the field.

Project activities mostly continue to build on results of previous Czech projects carried out on Soqotra Island. Interested families were encouraged to establish or expand their home gardens. Nurseries producing seedlings of agricultural crops and endemic species were supported by providing equipment and salaries to their managers. Four larger agroforestry objects were established and serve as best practice examples and training centres.

Another activity, new on the island, was added. In collaboration with the Education Centre, 11 schools suitable for school gardens construction or expansion were selected. Each school was supported by providing fencing of an area sufficient for the establishment of a garden. The fence was stabilized with iron sticks and concrete blocks. Fertile soil, seedlings of local tree species, vegetable seeds and seedlings were provided by the project. To provide water plastic or concrete reservoirs were bought or constructed; in four schools water was brought from a nearby aqueduct. Schools were also supported by providing tools: wheels, shovels, rakes, hoes, hoses, etc. Planted trees will provide shade in the courts of the school, especially important in the hot streets of Hadibo city. Pupils led by trained teachers will take care of the gardens during lessons or in extracurricular activities, an activity of particular interest to students in Hadibo. Students are taught how to cultivate the soil, learn about producing food plants and are encouraged to pass their knowledge on to their families.

Criteria for the selection of schools were suitability of land, number of students and the motivation of the director or teachers, important to ensure continuity of the project. In 2012, following schools were supported:

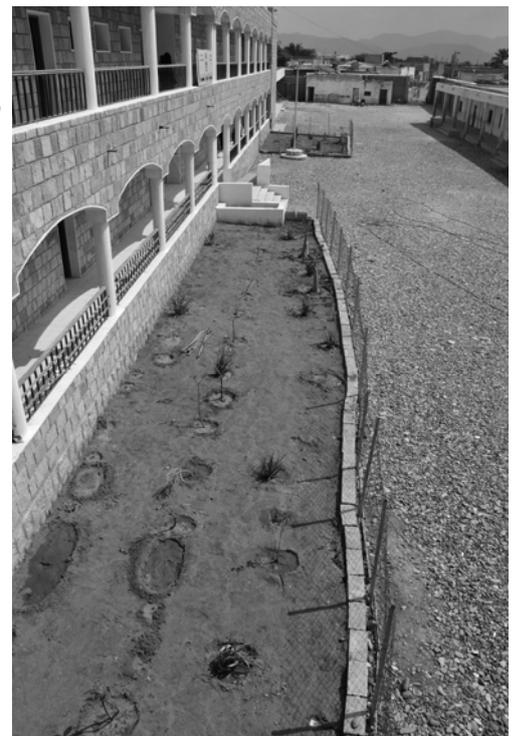
- Primary school Qalelhan
- Primary school and Secondary School Qalansiyah
- Primary school Rehen
- Secondary school Al-Zahra (Hadibo)
- Secondary school Khaled Bin Al-Waleed (Hadibo)
- Primary school Hafeg
- Primary school 30 November (Hadibo)
- Primary school Al-Wahda (Ma'nefo)
- Primary school Umm Al-Qara
- Primary school Homhil
- Primary school Mahfirhin

Garden being developed
in the Al-Zahra school
Hadibo
Photo: Irena Hubalkova

*more pictures on
back page*



Reservoir
construction
at 30
November
school
Photo:
Terezia
Durdiak



LIFE ON THE ISLAND

Further *Boswellia elongata* trees bed out in Homhil

Dana Pietsch

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Although initially sceptical about success at the beginning of the project, the soil and plant monitoring in Homhil in fact is successful: fences are stable and most endemic *Boswellia elongata* trees survive (Photo 1).

In February 2013, as part of a monitoring programme, five cuttings of *Boswellia elongata* – grown in the nursery since 2008 – have been planted out. Additionally, three seedlings were planted beneath protective shrubs to see whether or not they can survive.

The plantings were supported by Ahmed Adeeb (Hadiboh), Lisa Banfield (UK) and Khamis Tahki from Homhil (Photos 2 and 3). Khamis is controlling trees and fences during the spring and monsoon season. If necessary, fences are repaired, which is most important to defend the little trees from grazing. Also, once a month small amounts of water are given to weak trees. Important for success of the re-planting is that the trees need to grow for at least three years in a nursery before they can be planted out. In the first years the cuttings (or seedlings) should be watered under shade; in the second year they could be moved outside, while added water should be reduced drastically; in the third year the trees can grow outside with irregular and little watering.

Fencing around single trees is recommended rather than fencing large areas. The tree planting pattern should be in line with natural distribution patterns of these plants. Permanent irrigation of planted young trees does not seem to be necessary; a small amount of water could be given once or twice in a very dry month.



Photo 1: *Boswellia elongata* planted in Homhil in January 2011

Photo 2: Khamis Tahki, re-placing one of two dead trees by a new *Boswellia elongata* cutting in Homhil in February 2013



Photo 3: Ahmed Adeeb, watching the bedding out of *Boswellia elongata* seedlings beneath protective shrubs



LIFE ON THE ISLAND

Opinion of Soqotra Teachers on Local Education

Irena Hubálková
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This report is part of a research thesis and provides the opinions of Soqotri teachers on local education. Five English-speaking teachers have been asked about some basic facts such as numbers and gender ratio of students and teachers. They also answered questions about the qualification of teaching staff, the teaching system at all levels of education and employment of recent graduates.

The first respondent is Sulia, an English teacher at the primary school, and the second is Ayşe, an English teacher at secondary school. Other respondents are secondary school teacher Mehmet and university institute teacher Salem. The last respondent is undergraduate student and future teacher Saad.

As of January 2011 there are 72 schools on the island, including 66 primary schools, five secondary schools and one Collegiate Institute of the Hadramaut University for Science and Technology. The system of education is governed by Educational Act No. 45/1992 Coll., Child's Rights Act No. 45/2002 Coll. and Youth's Rights Act No. 24/1992 Coll., as is the case in continental Yemen. The age of primary school children ranges from 6 to 16 years, depending on school capacity and family situation. High school students usually move to university at the age of 20.

According to local teachers, the educational process is affected by the isolation of the island, cultural heritage, religious conviction, attitudes and the practices of teachers. Teaching quality at basic schools is weakened by a lack of competent teachers with sufficient teaching qualifications. An advantage is the presence of several qualified university graduates from overseas at secondary schools and at the university institute. One of them, Salem, graduated from the university in New Delhi. Interest in the teaching profession and the availability of teaching aids decreases with the remoteness of schools from the more densely populated areas. Local teachers also called attention to excessive student numbers and crowded classrooms, especially in elementary schools. Teachers believe that only 15% of pupils who completed primary education continue to secondary school. They also believe that only 5% of secondary school students study at university, despite enormous interest among students. The gender ratio is significantly in favour of men, with approximately 80% men and 20% women. Despite this fact, the teachers agree that the number of schoolgirls has been increasing in recent years. The gender ratio of teaching staff varies depending on the type of school and is balanced at elementary schools in densely populated areas.

What do the respondents recommend? Mehmet would like to use a range of new teaching methods. Salem wishes to improve education on Soqotra which he believes can best be achieved by the arrival of new qualified teachers from the mainland. Saad would appreciate the social and economic development together with improving of the quality of English lessons. In their view the lack of financial resources is the main obstacle to improving local education.

Photos, top to bottom:

An elementary school in Mahfirhin. (*Irena Hubalkova*)

A lesson, an elementary school in Homhil. (*Jan Forejt*)

Girls having a lesson, an elementary school in Homhil. (*Jan Forejt*)

English lesson, elementary school in Hadibo. (*Irena Hubalkova*)



LIFE ON THE ISLAND

Talk in the Town — A New Hospital for Soqatra

Dr. Salem Yousr Muftah

I have always firmly believed that good health is a person's most valuable possession. But here, in this small corner of the world, 'man lived and died and it was as if he had never existed', as was written in the *Al-'Arabi* magazine in the 1970s. Our grandfathers and our fathers struggled long and hard to bring us to this (relatively) improved situation. Clearly the island is no longer as described by Douglas Botting after his famous trip to Soqatra in 1954.

In December 2012 we opened a new hospital, and we celebrated and danced with joy at the arrival of this newborn. In March 2013, during his visit to the hospital, His Excellency Nicholas Hopton, the British ambassador to Yemen, said to me: "This is a real hospital!"

Now that we have reached this stage, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce to the world an exemplary employee of our hospital, Mrs. Ghariba Sinkour. I had for a while considered myself to hold this position, but she and many other of my colleagues (men and women) have shown themselves to be superior to me. Here I recall a story that has long been in my mind, one which demonstrates willpower and a strong resolve to achieve a better future. At the beginning of the 1980s Ghariba was close to death as a result of an obstructed labour. The whole town was worried, and was hoping and praying for her recovery. Her iron will and determination kept her going until the authorities sent a special plane to take her to Aden, where she gave birth to her child through Caesarean section. Now here she is, back with my male and female colleagues, leading the way on this humanitarian journey. I have been trying hard to find an appropriate way to describe them, but I have not succeeded. The Arabic proverb goes: "Good health is a crown that sits on the heads of the healthy that only the sick can see."

There is talk in the town: gratitude and appreciation for all those who have contributed towards our achievement and have participated in it. Top of the list is His Excellency Abdullah Matar Al-Muzrou'i, the former United Arab Emirates Ambassador to Sana'a, a man of vision with deep faith and humane values. This idealism has resulted in the renovation and rehabilitation of the new hospital, a most important developmental achievement, and one which sets an example for quality development and intervention in less developed regions, such as our island of Soqatra.

What pleasure it gives me to recall the great contribution of Britain! It is enough to remind us all that the very first health-care building in Soqatra was financed by Great Britain. So, to Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II: "Thank You". Thank you for the humane ideals and universal principles of compassion and altruism. Even if there are great physical distances between us yet these values and ideals are common to us all. I have been there, in that beautiful country, for my postgraduate study, and I rejoice in the knowledge, skills and values that I learned there and can now share with my people in my homeland.

The contribution of the Yemeni-British Society was and remains considerable: it is now contributing towards the support of a number of female students studying medicine and nursing on the mainland.



LIFE ON THE ISLAND

The part played by the Friends of Soqatra is palpable and valued, and its effect has been significant. Starting by providing some medical equipment they then went on to support the mobile clinics which are helping to realize the UN millennium goals.

The UN too is participating by financing a comprehensive obstetric emergency section in the hospital and by supporting female students to study midwifery.

Early in 2013 we received generous support from the WHO for the training of hospital staff in both Hadhramaut and Sana'a. They are also financing the recruitment of a female gynaecologist and obstetrician for the hospital, and are purchasing a boat for Abd-al-Kuri island.

People are also talking about the People's Republic of China as they look forward to the arrival of a Chinese medical mission that will work in the hospital for two years. This will certainly be inspirational.

Individuals too have played an important role, with donations received from Sheikh Abu Tariq, Sheikh Baqshan and Sheikh Bin Mahfouz. The Aid Organization (based in Sudan) has also made a donation which has contributed greatly towards the growth and development of medical services in Soqatra.

The visit of the Minister of Public Health and Population, His Excellency Dr. Ahmed Qassem Al-Ansi, in March 2013, provided long-awaited nourishment and a vital link, for His Excellency was understanding and supportive. How delighted we shall be to see the Ministry of Public Health and Population promoting and supporting the hospital!

To put it simply, this is our due: our grandfathers and our fathers struggled long and hard to pave the way for this. Now all our combined efforts are nearing fruition. We call on all the charitable hearts that participated in the planting of this seed to continue to tend and irrigate it so that it may in time become a well-grown and fruitful tree.

God bless you all.



Socotra: An island rife with discovery

Published on 26 November 2012 in <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1628/report/1665/Socotra-An-island-rife-with-discovery.htm>

Ashraf Al-Muraqeb

On Socotra Island, investigations are ongoing to verify the hypothesized centuries-old artifacts unearthed by a Yemeni-Russian team of researchers who have operated on the island for three decades. (YT photo by Sadeq Al-Wesabi). A Yemeni-Russian team that has been working together for five years in Yemen discovered last week a building on Socotra Island that dates back to the eighth century AD, according to Khalid Ali Al-Ansi, an archeology expert in the General Authority for Antiques.

Al-Ansi told the Yemen Times that the archeological site, found in the Foahr Sha'awb District on the island, dates back to the pre-Islamic period. After initially discovering the building, the team went on to find a whole compound consisting of square and circular buildings separated from one another by lanes.

Within the compound the archaeologists found ancient carvings bearing the south-Arabian alphabet, as well as a cluster of letters that Al-Ansi conjectures could be names of former rulers and kings. Al-Ansi speculates some of the findings date back to the Stone Age in the eastern and southern areas of Socotra. Investigations are underway to verify the validity of the hypothesized dates. Yemeni researchers hope to continue to work with the Russian team. Russian archeologists have been operating on the island for three decades.

Muhanad Al-Siani, the head of the General Authority for Antiquities, commended the historic relationship between Yemen and Russia in the field of research and exploration in several areas in Yemen. He praised the Russian team for its decision to resume their archeological activities on Socotra following the political turmoil of 2011.

Earlier this year, a Russian team of archeologists discovered a site named Kush on Socotra. On the site, many stone and wooden boxes and pottery utensils were unearthed. The artifacts are believed to date back to 2,000 years ago.

Jameel Shamsan, the manager of the Historic Cities Preservation Authority, said they are planning, in cooperation with the General Authority of Antiquities, to organize an international conference to exhibit the work that the Russian team of excavators has amassed on the island.

Al-Siani hopes the international attention, as a result of these discoveries, will lead to an increase in tourism on Socotra, an island characterized by its natural beauty and often called the Pearl of the Indian Ocean.

Najla Jubran, an employee at the Environmental Protection Authority in Socotra, said Socotra is distinguished by its botanical diversity. Despite its relatively small size, at 3,598 km squared, she said there are 825 types of wild plants, 307 of which only grow on Socotra.



CONFERENCES

Nature Research and Conservation at the Interface to Development Cooperation; the Case of the Soqotra Archipelago

Soqotra Symposium and 11th Annual General Meeting of the *Friends of Soqotra*

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The 11th meeting of the *Friends of Soqotra* (FOS) took place from 21 to 23 September 2012 at the BiK-F Climate and Biodiversity Research Centre, Senckenberg Research Institute and Natural Museums in Frankfurt Germany. The charity's meeting was part of a symposium, which started with a thematic workshop on Nature Research and Conservation at the Interface to Development Cooperation followed by talks and the *Friends of Soqotra* Annual General Meeting. The event was excellently organised by Uwe Zajonz, supported by Kay Van Damme (FOS chair), Julian Jansen Van Rensburg (FOS secretary), Edouard Lavergne (BiK-F) and Katja Setzkorn (GIZ).

We were very pleased with the large number of delegates attending the event – 65 colleagues from 15 countries participated. Particularly enjoyable was the large number of friends and colleagues from Soqotra and the Yemen mainland – it was great to see you all!

There were 38 presentations in total covering a wide range of topics from politics to art, education, genetic analysis, traditional uses and land management, history and, of course, biodiversity research and conservation. The former Minister of Water and Environment, Mr. Abdul-Rahman Al-Eryani, gave a particularly important keynote speech on the political future of Soqotra. Another important talk by Dr Miranda Morris underlined the changes in recent history in livestock management. These changes have been and will continue to be vital to understanding the changing environment of Soqotra and to designing future conservation efforts. While it is unfortunately not possible to reproduce all of the abstracts of the talks in Tayf, a selected number are summarised in the following pages. The rest can be found in full at http://www.bik-f.de/root/index.php?page_id=362&cms_veranstaltung_id=168

Another interesting and exciting aspect of the meeting was the "World Cafe", in which four thematic tables discussed topics such as international cooperation, biodiversity or building capacity for environmental protection.

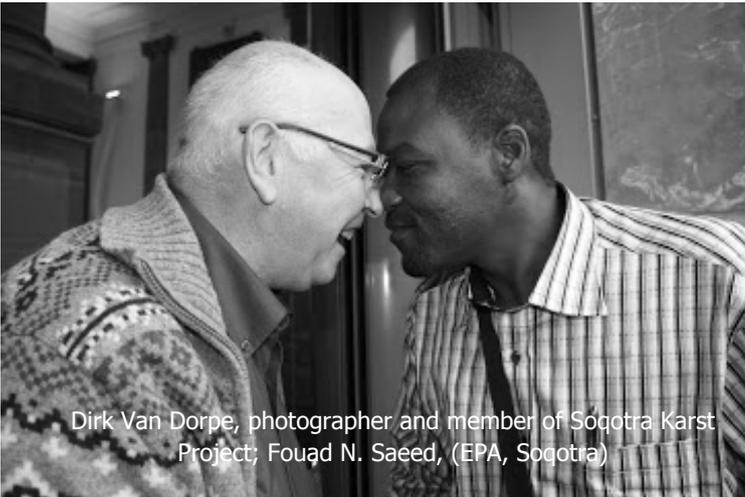
Besides the conference the participants had the opportunity to experience a guided tour of the Senckenberg Natural Museum and to join excursions to the Messel research station of the Senckenberg Nature Research Society and to the UNESCO World Heritage Sites Messel Pit and the Rhine Valley Loreley.

The meeting was a big success, not only for the *Friends of Soqotra*. The symposium brilliantly demonstrated how important the exchange is between practitioners, researchers and government facilitators. We hope that the political situation in Yemen will be stabilised after the elections in 2014 and that the implementation of new development projects is well underway.

FOS would very much like to thank the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Senckenberg Institutes for funding and supporting this event and in particular for enabling the attendance of our Yemeni and Soqotri friends and colleagues.



CONFERENCES



Dirk Van Dorpe, photographer and member of Soqatra Karst Project; Fouad N. Saeed, (EPA, Soqatra)



Dr. Saeed Alkhuzai (Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage (ARC-WH))



Eng. Abul-Rahman F. Al-Eryani



Professor Dr. Abdul Karim Nasher



Lisa Banfield; Fouad N. Saeed; Mohamed Amer; Ahmed Saeed Sulaiman; Professor Dr. Abdul Karim Nasher; Malek Abdulaziz



RESEARCH

11th Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Soqatra celebrating the 5th anniversary of Soqatra as UNESCO World Heritage Site in combination with the Thematic Workshop **Nature Research and Conservation at the Interface to Development Cooperation: the Case of the Soqatra Archipelago**

Abstracts from selected talks. The full report can be downloaded at:
[http://www.bik-f.de/files/veranstaltungen/soqotrameeting2012/
soqotra_symposium_fos_agm_2012_programme_book_version2-2.pdf](http://www.bik-f.de/files/veranstaltungen/soqotrameeting2012/soqotra_symposium_fos_agm_2012_programme_book_version2-2.pdf)



Eng. Abul-Rahman F. Al-Eryani; Dr. Edoardo Zandri (UNEP/GEF); Malek Abdulaziz (EPA); Mohamed Amer (EPA, Soqatra), FoS Soqatra representative

Biodiversity management overview of the Soqatra Archipelago

Malek Abdulaziz^{1,*}, Abdul-Rahman F. Al Eryani² and Mohammed Amer¹

¹ Environment Protection Authority, Ministry of Water and Environment, Yemen;

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The Soqatra Archipelago has witnessed international attention to its unique biodiversity only during the last few years of the 20th century; several projects have been internationally funded since the year 1997 and implemented with the partnership of relevant national agencies in Yemen. The principle of the initiatives has been to study the biodiversity at the Archipelago and develop a powerful tool to conserve the unique biodiversity.

In this regard, the effort resulted in conducting scientific research programmes for the Archipelago and documenting the findings. A conservation zoning plan has been developed in consultation with local partners and endorsed at a high governmental level, building the capacity of the EPA and EPA staff in Soqatra, and resulted in the inclusion of Soqatra in international declarations such as the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve and UNESCO World Heritage Site.

To integrate and enhance the local community in Soqatra to positively participate in the conservation efforts, some projects and programmes were planned to continue research and to support the conservation through responding to local communities' critical needs in regard to health, water and nutrition. In addition, these projects aimed to encourage the sustainable use of natural resources by support the establishment of community NGOs and build their capabilities to be able to manage and sustain income generating projects.

To date, the overgrazing caused by high numbers of goats, uncontrolled infrastructure development, exploitation of marine species, introduction of invasive species and wood collection, in addition to the poverty problem, still threaten the biodiversity of the Archipelago. Further international efforts should continue to support conserving the unique biodiversity of Soqatra through:

- continuing environmental research and monitoring programmes,
- updating, detailing and legislating the Soqatra conservation zoning plan,
- empowering the local authorities,
- supporting the establishment of the Soqatra Special Administration Zone,
- supporting the local community in defining, and
- implementing sustainable projects and continuing environmental education and awareness.

RESEARCH

What will be the future of Soqatra and other World Heritage Sites in the new decentralized Yemen?

Abdul-Rahman F. Al Eryani

Former Minister, Ministry of Water and Environment, Yemen. af.eryani@gmail.com

For the last 15 years, the government of Yemen and the international community have accomplished a great deal regarding the conservation of Soqatra. This includes:

- Extensive scientific surveys of the archipelago's terrestrial and marine life.
- A Zoning Plan (that may need updating).
- Widespread awareness of the biological importance of the island in the world.
- An international recognition of the island as UNESCO MAB and WHS.
- Training of dozens of Soqotri and mainlanders about different aspects of conservation.

Some of the negative issues that occurred during this period are:

- Raising too many unrealistic expectations among the population in the island.
- Weak and inappropriate development efforts to accompany the conservation effort.
- Weak and often contradictory central and local government policy towards the island (no unified vision) and weak and corrupt governance at all levels.
- Lack of sufficient demonstrative examples of appropriate beneficial conservation and development methods.
- Neglect and undermining of traditional power structures and indigenous knowledge and practices and, in general, a disregard for the socioeconomic context.
- This leads to a widespread undercurrent of anti-conservation emotion among the population of Soqatra.

Then came the Yemen Spring:

- Many are sceptical about the significance and depth of the changes that took place in 2011 and that are continuing, in what is called the youth revolution.
- I am of the opinion that the revolution has radically changed the status quo in Yemen forever, in spite of that it will take a few years to realize the full extent of these changes.
- One change is that no region will accept any kind of domination by another region. Some sort of federation is the only accepted form of government that will emerge from the national dialogue process, taking place now.
- Most probably: At least five and maybe more regions (states) will be formed in Yemen with a parliamentary central government.
- The Soqatra Archipelago must be one of these regions. Only the factional differences among the Soqotri may prevent this.
- The significance of this is both gratifying and terrifying.

Only the concerned international community and to a lesser extent the central government could orient and assist the future Soqatra emerging leadership in paving the path to sustainable development and conservation of the world heritage site of Soqatra.

What about other regions, MABs and WHSs:

- I think that with the development of the federal system in Yemen every region will aspire to have a conservation site/s that they could be proud of.
- The responsibility for taking care of cultural and natural sites moving from the central government to the new regional government will be, in my opinion, very useful provided that the international community and the federal (central) government provide the guidance and exert the pressure for more responsible management of these sites.

In conclusion:

- The changes in Yemen, in spite of being chaotic and confusing, are ultimately positive.
- Decentralization/federation and parliamentary system of government will eventually lead to better governance in most regions and hence better conservation potential.
- The international community will have and is having tremendously strong leverage to guide and help the citizens and governments of Yemen to do the right thing.

RESEARCH

The management of dragon blood trees *Dracaena cinnabari* between local tradition and new development

Abdulraqeb Al-Okaishi

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Many researchers believe that more intensive management of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) could contribute to both development and conservation objectives. While there is growing appreciation of the importance of NTFPs for rural households, especially of the very poor, there are also concerns about the potential impact of NTFPs collection on biodiversity. A number of critical questions are often raised, such as: under what conditions can NTFPs sustainably be harvested?

Dragon blood resin, harvested from *Dracaena cinnabari* trees, is one of the important NTFPs in Soqatra Island. During the past 20 years, there have been several studies on *Dracaena cinnabari* trees, focused on its taxonomy, morphology, distribution, use and threats affecting its survival. Those studies clarify many problems that *Dracaena cinnabari* trees face from climate change, grazing and overmaturity. The next logical step is how to manage those trees through a species or ecosystem approach, in order to conserve its socio-economic and ecological functions.

When Soqatra began to open up to the outside world in the 1990s three main issues have increased: construction, visitors and goods. In contrast, there has been a change in the way people live, which then affects the way people deal with their land. The *Dracaena cinnabari* trees have been directly affected by this development and also by the response of the people to it.

This presentation will go through the socio-economic and ecological importance of the *Dracaena cinnabari* trees. I will give an overview on the local traditional management system and ongoing conservation efforts, and explain how new developments affected *Dracaena cinnabari* trees and finally, I will suggest some management approaches for discussion.

Livestock husbandry and adjusting to change: Some perceptions of older islanders

Miranda J. Morris

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The talk will discuss some of the changes that have taken place on the island as they affect livestock husbandry, and as they have been experienced by the older generation who used to be able to rely on their expertise in rearing livestock and managing the rangeland for their and their families' survival. Changes discussed will cover livestock management and land-use, vegetation and exploitation of plants, water availability and use, cultivation, communications and infrastructure, marketing of livestock and livestock products, land disputes, population growth and the lure of the town, education and loss of appeal of the rural way of life. Beneficial changes, such as security, communications, health, employment, housing and diet will also be discussed.



Mohamed Amer, Malek Abdulaziz; Abdul Karim Nasher



Mohamed Amer (EPA, Soqatra), FoS Soqatra representative
Miranda Morris

RESEARCH

Initial steps to building a long term sea turtle conservation program in Socotra

Abdul Karim Nasher^{1,*} and Masaa Al Jumaily²

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The loggerhead turtle *Caretta caretta* is the only sea turtle species known to nest on Socotra. Four other species have been reported to forage in shallow and deep waters at northern and southern coasts of the island. As in other parts of Yemen, sea turtles are victims of poachers who slaughter them for their meat or destroy their nests for the eggs. In 1998 an initiative was launched by EPA, Yemen; together with international donors and involvement of Tsalmahu village community to monitor and protect sea turtles that visit Abalhen beach for nesting. Activities continued until 2007 then stopped due to suspension of financial support. The year 2011 has witnessed a terrible massacre of loggerhead sea turtles where dozens were killed by intruders and their nests were destroyed. Despite repeated attempts to urge officials to protect the turtles, all efforts have failed.

In 2011 the first author obtained a grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Services to assess the status and conservation needs for sea turtles in Yemen. Given the global importance of Socotra in terms of biodiversity, and being a World Heritage Site, a larger share of the funds was used to carry out activities there. Activities included meetings with Sheikhs and community individuals, awareness campaigns, and training sessions. Outputs of these activities showed that giving the local communities some confidence, and holding them accountable, can contribute effectively to the protection efforts.



Soqotra's ornithological importance

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What is the status of our knowledge of the Soqotran birds and their conservation in the last decade? What accomplishments have been made, and what are still important steps and directions for the future? In recent years, joint efforts by EPA Soqotra, BirdLife International and international donors (GEF-SGP, UNDP, UK's Darwin Initiative etc.) have ensured a continuation of bird monitoring and conservation on the archipelago, yet a lot remains to be done. At present, 221 bird species have been recorded on Soqotra, of which 38 species breed regularly – one, the Indian House Crow, has been successfully eradicated. Over 180 species are migrant visitors, and 11 species can now be considered as endemic to the Soqotra Archipelago.

Besides the endemics, 15 species are Globally Threatened or Near Threatened and ten species of seabirds that breed in internationally important numbers are all priorities for protection. One species, the Soqotra Golden-winged Grosbeak, *Rhynchostruthus socotranus*, was recently declared Yemen's national bird, and another species: the Soqotra Buzzard, *Buteo socotraensis*, appears in the Guinness Book of Records as the "newest bird of prey in the World". Surveys by BirdLife International, Soqotra Conservation and Development Programme (SCDP) and EPA that have been carried out since 1999, have involved over 380km of transects throughout the Archipelago and were used for estimations of the breeding species' populations. For example, the population of Egyptian Vulture is estimated at ca. 1900 individuals.

Genetic, population, morphological studies and conservation efforts are ongoing on the Soqotran birds. Key conservation recommendations or actions for the Soqotran birds should be focusing on the main threats such as the use of chemicals (pesticides, veterinary drugs, rat poisons) and habitat destruction, (overgrazing, wood harvesting, land use change), disturbances and on the continuation of local environmental education and the importance of Soqotra and its biodiversity, locally and globally. The Soqotran birds, being one of the main animal groups for which long-term data exist, are a key to the continued protection and conservation of the Archipelago, and remain an important group of study that needs on-going, joint efforts.

RESEARCH

Trends and issues in Soqatra's marine resource and fishery management

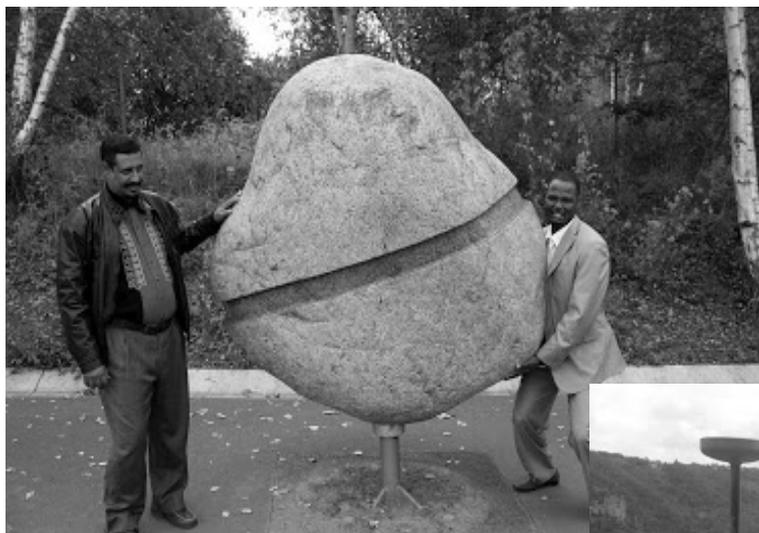
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Matching their high biological diversity, the coastal ecosystems of Soqatra are also highly productive and certain sites rank among the most productive sites in the Indian Ocean, as recent surveys have demonstrated. The primary productivity is seasonally fertilized by monsoon-driven nutrient-rich upwelling waters, and the resulting plankton biomass forms the basis for a marine food web that naturally sustains large populations of edible and commercially important species of fin fish. Other living marine resources such as spiny lobster and sea cucumbers are also abundant around the island group. The coastal fishery is therefore well developed and plays a significant role for the local population. It is one of the principle sources of food and income, representing a significant proportion of the local economy, and has been considered by many stakeholders as a main engine for economic growth and development of the island group. The fishery communities were for long praised for managing their stocks sustainably according to traditional regulations, with only a few target species such as sharks and lobster, and more recently sea cucumbers, being probably overused.

Coastal productivity, however, had until recently not been actually measured but instead rather inferred from production data. Recent data on fishing effort and production of finfish, lobsters and sea cucumbers are presented and trends, challenges and threats are identified. These production-based and experience-based observations are now corroborated by fish biomass census data. They strongly suggest that the fishery in general reaches its resource sustainability limits across a wide range of exploited stocks. Visual underwater estimates indicate that biomass decreased severely from 1.53 to 0.24 t/ha between 2007 and 2011, and that abundances dropped by about 75%. More recent data from 2012 appear to confirm this negative trend, and we call for improved fishery management, immediate catch and trading restrictions, contingency planning with regard to food security, and a change of aspirations with regard to the role the local fishery can play in the economic development of the islands.



Mohamed Amer (EPA, Soqatra), FoS Soqatra representative; Fouad N. Saeed, (EPA, Soqatra)

Mohamed Amer (EPA, Soqatra), FoS Soqatra representative; Malek Abdulaziz (EPA); Professor Dr. Abdul Karim Nasher, San'a University; Ahmed Saeed Sulaiman (EPA, Soqatra); Fouad N. Saeed (EPA, Soqatra)



RESEARCH

Conservation and Research Project for the Critically Endangered Plant *Duvaliandra dioscoridis*, Endemic to Socotra

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Duvaliandra is a genus only found on Socotra island and it contains only one species - *Duvaliandra dioscoridis*. *D. dioscoridis* is currently classified by the IUCN as Critically Endangered, meaning it has an extremely high risk of extinction in the immediate future.

In 2008 and 2010, along with staff from EPA Socotra and members of the local village in Adho di Meleh, CMEP staff have been recording and monitoring the remaining clumps of *D. dioscoridis*. These surveys found that a number of clumps have reduced in size or disappeared altogether with signs of possible illegal collection. Being a very rare succulent plant it is extremely attractive to private individuals and plant dealers.

In addition, comparison between CMEP's data and that of a survey carried out in 2002 by others shows that *D. dioscoridis* has declined hugely - approximately 90% of the plants disappeared in that 8-year period. However, several new locations were discovered by a staff member of EPA in 2010. This may or may not be a natural pattern - some succulent plant populations are known to be dynamic, disappearing from one area and reappearing in another. However, further research is needed to establish whether this is the case for *D. dioscoridis*.

Given the apparent decline of *D. dioscoridis*, CMEP has secured a small grant from the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund for a three or four year small project which aims to:

- Continue monitoring known clumps of *D. dioscoridis*.
- Explore the surrounding area to discover potentially unknown areas of distribution.
- Establish a small *ex situ* population in Adeeb's nursery kept only for insurance against extinction of the plant in Adho di Meleh (in which case the plants will be planted back in Adho di Meleh).
- Collect samples for DNA analysis to establish the genetic diversity of the population, how the plants are reproducing and dispersability between different locations, if any.
- Explore opportunities to prevent the illegal collection of this plant by tourists through the involvement of the people of Adho di Meleh.



RESEARCH

In February 2013 a short field visit took place to discuss the aims of the project with EPA and the people of Adho di Meleh and to make a start on the above aims. DNA samples were collected and a small number of dislodged plants were collected to establish the *ex situ* population in the nursery.

Monitoring of the known clumps of *D. dioscoridis* found that several of the clumps have disappeared since the last survey in 2010, including some of the largest clumps. Information from Issa Ali Abdullah of Adho di Meleh suggests that exposed plants are easily washed away in times of heavy rain and this seems likely given the shallow roots and the ease with which the stems of the plants break away. This highlights the importance of nurse plants and undisturbed rocks beneath which the plants are often found. No new clumps of *D. dioscoridis* were found although the presence of flowers and fruits suggest that regeneration is taking place. Despite these findings, no active conservation actions are planned at this stage until the ecology and dynamics of the population are better understood.

The next steps of the project will be to carry out the DNA analysis, continue monitoring the wild population and propagating the *ex situ* population. Additionally, a pilot project will be developed focused on providing benefits from tourism for local communities and creating opportunities for them to interact with tourists in their area with the aim of reducing illegal collection of endangered plants.

We thank the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, Dr Sue Christie for sharing the survey data of 2002, EPA, the Sheikh Abdullah Ahmed Saeed and Sa'ad Musallum Ali of Adho di Meleh and Ahmed Adeeb for their hospitality, support of the project and assistance in the field.



Issa Ali Abdullah in Adho di Meleh



Above right—possible evidence of illegal collecting.



Ahmed Adeeb counting *D. dioscoridis* stems

ETCETERA

Lines describing the hardships of drought *Traditional Poem*

Translated by Miranda Morris

Oh Lord, my eyes! Oh Lord, look after my eyes!

For it is with them, Lord, that I see the thorny *Lycium* and the spiny young *Ziziphus*. (i.e. to avoid them)

Today I can really see and fully appreciate how harmful this year of drought has been to me.

Because of it my beautiful red-brown goats, all of the same blood-line, are lying side by side (in death).

Oh Lord, give me a portion which is not niggardly!

So that visitors will not pass me by (and go to someone else) because I am unable to do my duty. (i.e. of helping them with food or livestock).

Oh Lord, calm the fury of this drought! Do not let this year of drought make away with them (i.e. my goats) all!

Do not remind me of Shibehon or Tiyde'eh – may I never see either of them again!

I was caused such pain by my gentle goats there that it will take a long time for the bitterness I feel to leave my heart!

Notes

- *Lycium socotranum*, a very thorny bush.
- *Ziziphus spina-christi*, the form used here refers to an immature and extremely thorny *Ziziphus spina-christi* with no central trunk. Both *Lycium* and the immature *Ziziphus* are regarded as useless by goat and sheep owners: they are leafless in the dry season and their thorns scratch the animals' udders and introduce infection.
- Shibehon, a plateau area in central Soqotra.
- Tiyde'eh, high plateau area of central Soqotra (literally 'back').

Soqotran *Boswellia* species investigation based on chemical analyses of resins

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All of the eight species of *Boswellia* described from Soqotra Island are endemic. This is nearly half of world species diversity in the *Boswellia* genus. Many works focusing on chemical composition of *Boswellia* resins have been published, but only exceptionally from Soqotran species and most results are not from fresh samples of olibanum.

Our approach was to collect fresh resin directly in glass tubes, diffused in 2 ml of methanol and closed by non-stick cover. The position of each sample tree was measured by GPS, the species was estimated and photos were taken. The samples were collected during May 2010, February 2011 and March 2012.

A total of 36 samples of all *Boswellia* species was analysed using gas-chromatography, and compared with 6 samples of *Commiphora* species. The terpenes were the subject of our interest.

Our aim was to describe the composition of terpenes in the olibanum of all Soqotran *Boswellia* and *Commiphora* species. Our hypothesis was that the resin composition would be species-specific, but the results did not confirm this. The terpene composition is similar among all *Boswellia* species, but *Commiphora* species are more variable. We found a total of 104 terpenes and derivatives, of which 28 were previously unknown.



Boswellia—Petr Madera

Young goat—Hana Habrova



CONTACTS

WEBSITES

www.FriendsofSoqotra.org
www.Socotraisland.org/fund

The following websites also provide information on the island:

<http://rbgesun1.rbge.org.uk/Arabia/Soqotra/home/page01.html> Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. Plants, panoramas and ethnobotany.

www.uni-rostock.de/fakult/manafak/biologie/wranik/socotra.
University of Rostock (Animals)

www.sogotra.info A personal view by John Farrar.

www.yemen-protectedareas.org

www.socotraproject.org – SGBP website

<http://www.sogotra.com>; <http://www.sogotra.org/int/>
<http://www.sogotra.com/vb/showthread.php?p=39668>

<http://socotra.info/socotra-news.php?start=20>

TAYF

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Many thanks to all the contributors, whose contact details are listed with their articles or can be obtained from the Editor. Unattributed 'News' articles come from the Yemeni press; full articles without named authors prepared by the Editor from submitted material.

FRIENDS OF SOQOTRA

Friends of Soqotra (UK Charity Number 1097546) was formed in 2001. Its distinctive rationale is to bring together people with backgrounds in scientific research and those with a more general interest and develops the synergies between them in order to:

- Promote the sustainable use and conservation of the natural environment of the Soqotra island group
- Raise awareness of the archipelago's biodiversity and the unique culture and language of the islanders
- Help improve the quality of life of the island communities and support their traditional land management practices.

New Friends of Soqotra website

At the FOS meeting in Bern in 2011 all attendant members voted for creating a new website. From 2001 the previous website was serviced by John Farrar, who now gave this job over to Dana Pietsch. Thanks John for this great work on public relations over the last 10 years! Friends of Soqotra is also deeply indebted to Bohdana Rombuskova for her help with structure and texts, and especially for her constructive comments on the new website. As the old one, this website provides information on completed and ongoing scientific research on Soqotra archipelago including data, bibliographies and contacts of institutions and research teams. The new structure and layout also includes a page in the Arabic language which will give some general information about FOS.

<http://www.friendsofsoqotra.org>



Contacting FoS

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See article page 3

