

Tayf - the Soqatra Newsletter

Issued By *FRIENDS OF SOQOTRA and SOCOTRA CONSERVATION FUND*



Soqotran Exhibition Attracts Royalty

Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall were among the first visitors to the Soqatra Exhibition held last summer at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE). The Exhibition ran from 1 July to the end of October with a special opening ceremony held on 30 June and attended by numerous dignitaries including the Yemeni Ambassador to London, the British Ambassador to Yemen and the Yemeni Ambassador to Canada. Full write up on pages 6–8 and colour photographs in the central pages.

Friends of Soqatra Conference Explores Climate and Weather

The fifth Conference and AGM of Friends of Soqatra was held on the 8–9 September 2006 at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. Nearly 30 people from eight countries attended. Following presentations and discussions on the afternoon of the 8th, the group toured the Soqatra Exhibition and enjoyed further discussions over dinner and at the AGM held the following morning. Presentations are summarised in the Research section of this *Tayf* and in *Tayf 3*.

Below: Photograph from Dana Pietsch's presentation on Erosion on Soqotran Soils. Meeting in March 2006, Gullying and erosion of top soil. See article page 16.

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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.



U.S. Embassy donates Toyota to SCF

Essam Al-Sulaihi
SCDP Office Manager

The United States Embassy in Sana'a donated a 2001 White Toyota Landcruiser car to the Socotra Conservation Fund (SCF).

The car will be used to further improve the conservation and environmental efforts on the Island of Socotra. "Socotra Island is a natural treasure and a wonderful place" U.S. Embassy Charge' Dr. Nabeel Khoury said in the donating ceremony attended by Dr. Nabeel Khoury the Deputy Ambassador, Mr. Essam Al-Sulaihi SCDP Office Manager, Mr. Ali Zaid SCF Financial Manager and embassy staff members.



H.E Mr.Nabil Khori the Deputy Ambassador, Mr.Essam AlSulaihi SCDP Office Manager, Mr.Ali Zaid SCF Financial Officer and Embassy staff.

Soqotran Folklore recordings published in California

Vladimir Agofinov

California Linguistic Notes has published a Soqotri original text from my Soqotri recordings collection – a Soqotran BISMILLA folk tale in the dialect of Qalansiya. There are also a foreword and free English translations. In fact these are a first part of a tale - maybe the second and final part also will see print because it is even more informative.

The address of publication is:
http://hss.fullerton.edu/linguistics/cln/pdf/bismilla%20_text%201-102_%20Qlns.pdf

Heavy Rains Cause Major Flood Damage on Socotra Coast

By Observer Staff
YEMEN OBSERVER Jun 6, 2006

SANA'A - Heavy rains destroyed dozens of homes and seriously threatened the livelihoods of the inhabitants of villages along the southern coast of the island of Socotra on 27 and 29 May, according to the Yemeni Red Crescent (YRC). Socotra which is part of the Aden governorate lies about 340km from the coast of the Yemeni mainland and 250km off the Somali coast, IRIN reported Monday.

"People are now suffering from a water crisis," said Dr Usamah Noman, YRC secretary-general in Socotra. "An epidemic is expected in the affected areas as a result of all the dead animals." Noman affirmed that no one had been reported killed but that stricken residents were in desperate need of foodstuffs and a means of transporting clean water. "No one expected such rains," he said. "People weren't ready, and were taken aback by the flooding."

According to Salem Daheq, YRC secretary-general for financial affairs in Socotra, some 2,700 people in thirteen villages had been affected by the rains, although they had yet to receive aid. Roughly 35 homes were totally destroyed, he added, while another 75 had been badly damaged. The flooding also destroyed livestock, claiming 3,024 head of sheep, nine camels, four cows and six donkeys. Some 1,500 palm trees were also washed away and many orchards destroyed, according to a YRC report. Other properties lost in the downpour included fishing boats, nets, rods and water pipes.

In 1999, the remote island was pounded by heavy rains for seven consecutive days. Heavy flooding led to the destruction of 1,500 homes and the partial destruction of another 1,000. Dozens of farms and orchards were also destroyed at the time.

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News

Notes from Douglas Botting

A new paperback edition of my 1958 account of the island (and the Oxford University Expedition to it) - 'Island of the Dragon's Blood' – the first general account of the island since the 19th century - is being republished soon as a paperback by Steve Savage Publishers, London. It was recently described by Michael Carter, of the 'Observer' newspaper, as follows:

'It really is a little masterpiece - up there with travel classics, a wonderful, wonderful piece of writing - his island, a unique and remarkable place, so lovingly and warmly portrayed.'

Incidentally, I'm glad to report that all six members of the Oxford Expedition are still alive and kicking, including the most senior member, the archaeologist Professor Peter Shinnie, now 92.

For anyone who is interested, I feel I should report that my original 1956 tape recordings of Socotran music (and language) have turned up in the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in America, where they can be accessed. How they got there I am not quite sure.

My 1956 documentary film of Socotra - 'The Forgotten Island' was broadcast by BBC TV in two half-hour episodes (and in many other countries around the world). It was only the third programme David Attenborough had up to that point produced. It was shown at the Socotra Exhibition in the Royal Botanic Gardens during the Edinburgh Festival, along with an edit of a self-contained episode from my 1993 video documentary on the dhow voyage from Hadiboh to Abd el Kuri and our stay thereon, featuring Dr Miranda Morris and the late Dr Patrick Carter (archaeologist) - and me, of course!

Nooh's Beekeeping Visit to Paris

Rowan Salim

In May 2006, Mr. Nooh Adham Ali of Ras Moomi, Socotra, visited the little village of Milly La Foret in La Fontainebleau Forest south of Paris. The visit was part of the beekeeping project run by Camille and Thierry Sergeant and funded by the French. Nooh's visit involved two weeks of training at the Sergeant's Miellerie du Gatinais in which he was acquainted with beekeeping skills and techniques and the management of a family-run productive honey business.

As part of his visit, a presentation was organised entitled "Apiculture Rationnelle sur l'île de Socotra", which was attended by approximately 80 individuals and received enthusiastic local press coverage. The event included a film show on the beekeeping project on the island, a photo exhibition, a display of local crafts, and a honey tasting session. Three honeys from Socotra, one from Wadi Do'an in the Hadramout, and several from the Miellerie du Gatinais were tasted and compared by the guests, in what turned out to be a rather sweet event!

Nooh also had the opportunity to visit Paris and numerous local sites including a goat farm (with particularly large goats), a cow farm (with particularly large cows) and get an idea of the environmental management systems operating in the French countryside.

Nooh will supervise the ongoing project on Socotra Island.



FoS News

New FoS Representatives in Oman and the Gulf

Oman: Issam Khamis Thabit Al Soqotri has agreed to work with Ahmad Sa'ad Tahki to represent FoS in Oman. Issam works as a nurse for the Ministry of Health and speaks English fluently. He sent us a letter in which he says that, although he has not yet had the opportunity to visit Soqatra himself, he keeps closely in touch with family members and what is going on via telephone and talking with other emigré Soqotrans who have been able to visit the island. He follows closely all developments on the island and wishes Soqatra all the best for the future. He wishes to express his gratitude to organisations such as Friends of Soqatra who are doing their best to help the islanders and raise the profile of the archipelago. He would like to thank Friends of Soqatra especially for helping those who live outside Soqatra to keep in touch with what is happening on the island. His contact details are as follows:

Issam Khamis Thabit Al Soqotri, P.O.B. 766, Area Code 211, Governorate of Dhofar, Sultanate of Oman; telephone 00 968 99492584.

The Gulf: Shukri Nuh Abdullah Al Harbi Di Kishin has agreed to represent FoS in the Gulf to relieve some of the pressure on Ahmad Sa'ad Tahki (formerly FoS representative for Oman and the Gulf). Shukri works as a policeman in 'Ajman, and manages to return frequently to his former home. He traveled to Scotland to attend the opening of the Soqatra Exhibition and was able to see something of Edinburgh, St. Andrews and the Scottish highlands during his visit, which he spent with Ahmad Sa'ad Tahki staying with Miranda Morris. His contact details are as follows: P.O.B. 1590, 'Ajman, U.A.E., telephone 00 97150 5775678 or 00 97150 2320808.

New FoS Representative on Soqatra

We have a new FoS representative for Soqatra, Ali Salim Shukri Sowqer. Thanks to his efforts, we are now beginning to build up our Soqotri membership. We now have 19 FoS members on Soqatra and, in addition, the Homhil Protected Area Co-operative has joined. Ali Salim can be contacted at P.O. Box 111, Soqatra, Republic of Yemen, telephone 00 967 77112017.

Donations from FoS members in the Gulf and Oman

FoS is delighted to have received donations from Issam Khamis Thabit Al Soqotri in Oman, and from Shukri Nuh Abdullah Al Harbi Di Kishin in the Gulf. They have each donated one hundred dollars to further the work of FoS.

Donation from Soqatra

The tourist restaurant, Mat'am Mahmiyah Homhil al Siyahi in Hadiboh, which is run by the Homhil Protected Area Co-operative, has donated one hundred dollars to further the work of FoS.



Shukri Nuh Abdullah Al Harbi Di Kishin



Issam Khamis Thabit Al Soqotri

Death of benefactor Shaikh Ibrahim bin Saif Al Na'imi while visiting Soqatra

Shaikh Ibrahim bin Saif Al Na'imi was born 1930 in 'Ajman. He began visiting Soqatra in the 1950s during the time of the 'Afrer sultanate. He was a trader and called at Soqatra to purchase mother-of-pearl, pearls, coral, aloes, incense mixtures and frankincense. When it was possible again to do so, he returned once again to Soqatra in 1995. Thereafter he decided to make an annual visit to the island in order to undertake various charitable enterprises, and especially to build and renovate mosques.

During a winter visit to Soqatra in 2005, at 8.30 in the evening of 26th December, Shaikh Ibrahim suddenly collapsed and died. His body was transported by Yemenia Airlines to Rayyaan airport in Hadhramaut, where the plane was met by Shaikh Ahmad Sa'id Hamad bin Hamaad, who thereafter accompanied the body on the Yemenia flight to Dubai. Shaikh Ibrahim bin Saif was buried where he was born, in 'Ajman, where the ceremony was attended by his sons, by many Soqotrans and other Yemenis, and by various shaikhs and princes of the Emirates.

We send this news for publication in the FoS Newsletter as we know that many Soqotris would wish to extend their condolences to the family and to express their gratitude for his generous help over the years. My God have mercy on his soul.

Information provided by Muhammad Amir Da'arhi Al Soqotri and Ali Salim Sowqer Al Soqotri.

Projects

News of the Sewing Machines for Soqotra

Miranda Morris

I reached Soqotra in February to find the 16 sewing machines, purchased by FoS donations from André van Ryn, sitting in a store in Hadiboh, a facility which proved very expensive. So after paying, we transferred the machines to the Darwin House where I was staying and where storage was free. Ten of the 16 sewing machines were then safely handed over to the Local Council of the Qalansiyah District. Once they have distributed them to appropriate women in their area, they will pass on the details to FoS.

The remaining six were originally destined for the Soqotra Women's Development Association (SWDA), an NGO established in 2001. However, due apparently to internal problems, they were unable to come and collect them in the three months of my time on Soqotra. So finally, in consultation with Ali Sali Sowqer, the FoS representative on Soqotra, we went to visit the NGO Jam'iyah Soqotra An-Nisawiya (The Women's Association of Soqotra), established 2000, to see whether they might be suitable recipients instead. They have some 60 members and six main aims:

1. to increase opportunities for women on Soqotra,
2. to encourage and develop handicrafts,
3. to establish a craft centre in order to raise the standard of handicrafts,
4. to educate women in order to improve the role of women and the family in society,
5. to eradicate illiteracy among women on Soqotra, and
6. to raise awareness among women through educational programmes and training.

They have a five-person committee, which includes the Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and two elected members. In the years since their establishment, they have held illiteracy-eradication sessions for 16 women, held family planning classes over a period of 6 months for 30 women, held classes in embroidery and sewing over a month for 10 women, produced and distributed 8 educational newsletters, and this year opened a nursery school which already has 34 children, with more waiting to join. They have held competitions for schoolgirls both at primary and secondary school in a variety of educational fields.

The Women's Association of Soqotra rent a house with a large courtyard in Hadiboh which is well signposted and easy to find. We had a very enjoyable visit, talking to the committee and various members, and admiring the hand-produced educational posters and newsletters that they produce. Sounds of the nursery school children enthusiastically learning their ABC from their voluntary teacher had drifted across to us from one of the rooms off the courtyard where the nursery is held, and we looked in on them before leaving. We also visited their craft room where sewing and embroidery is taught, and agreed to offer the remaining six sewing machines to them. They were collected from the Darwin House the very next day and delivered to the craft room where they will be used to teach sewing to NGO members, but also to any interested woman from Hadiboh or elsewhere on the island.



A paradox of modern life:
an ass transports a broken
engine.
Photo: Richard Porter

Soqotra Exhibition

Royals witness spirit of Soqotra in the UK RBGE Press release and photos

HRH Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall took time out from a busy week of engagements to enjoy an informal visit to "*Soqotra – Land of the Dragon's Blood Tree*" at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) on Friday, July 7.

The couple viewed the world premiere exhibition – which ran until Sunday, October 29 – in the company of Tony Miller and Sabina Knees, two RBGE botanists specialising in the plant species of the remote archipelago, often referred to as "the Galapagos of the Indian Ocean". Also present was Yemen's ambassador to the United Kingdom.

"*Soqotra – Land of the Dragon's Blood Tree*" demonstrates clearly the innovative conservation work being conducted globally by the Garden. This island group, home to extraordinary strange super-sized succulent trees, unique animals and birds and centuries old traditions of land use, has remained lost in time. Scientists now believe it may hold important clues about the ecology of the entire Mediterranean and Middle-eastern region.

The Dragon's Blood Tree, so called because of its deep red resin which was once considered a panacea, has become a symbol for the conservation agencies seeking to protect the unusual flora and fauna along with a lifestyle that has much to teach the modern world about living in harmony with the environment. The exhibition also highlights how this fragile balance is now under threat as development and tourism begin to change the islands forever. In 2003, the Soqotra archipelago was declared the first UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve in Yemen, in recognition of its world class status as one of the best preserved island ecosystems anywhere on earth.

Tony Miller, a recognised authority on the Soqotran archipelago, explained: "This is an extremely important area both botanically and ecologically and I think it is vital that people are given the chance to learn about the islands and how man and nature have co-existed in harmony for so many years, virtually untouched by the outside world. Yet, change is on its way and the culture and ecology of the islands are now under threat. To address this, the exhibition also looks at steps being taken to preserve the islands' eco-systems."

Roderic Dutton, of the Friends of Soqotra added: "It has been a great pleasure and privilege for the Friends of Soqotra to play a role, alongside the Yemen British Friendship Association, the Soqotra Conservation and Development Programme, the Socotra Conservation Fund, and the British Yemeni Society, in supporting the magnificent work undertaken by the Royal Botanic Garden in mounting this exhibition. The Garden is a natural venue for the exhibition in that it has been closely involved with botanical and related research on the Soqotra islands since the 1880s. It will be a wonderful outcome if the active Yemeni participation in the exhibition, including generous donations by Yemeni individuals and companies, lead to the exhibition eventually opening in Yemen."



Soqotra Exhibition

Royal Visit—Continued

Professor Stephen Blackmore, Regius Keeper, the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh concluded: "Bringing the spirit of Soqotra to Edinburgh through this exhibition is not only a great joy, it is an important opportunity to spotlight a core challenge of the 21st century: the need to identify, record and protect the world's biodiversity. A significant proportion of all the plants and animals found on Soqotra occur nowhere else on Earth making it one of the world's most important island groups. What is particularly remarkable is how both the unique plants and the rich cultural traditions surrounding them have survived in this special place, virtually untouched by the outside influences. People and plants have interacted for thousands of years and adapted together to the Soqotran environment with its diverse and beautiful landscapes.

"As scientists from RBGE continue their research programme in partnership with the Yemen Government and other agencies, it is important we provide the public with access to this amazing land and its truly unique culture. This exhibition – the first of its kind anywhere in the world – is a tribute to the people of Soqotra who have been watchful stewards of their homeland down the centuries. Their knowledge, built up over the millennia and passed on from generation to generation, is of enormous value, not only as part of the rich cultural diversity of our own species but as a reflection of the fundamental requirement to protect Earth's biodiversity.

Even remote islands face the threat of global warming and the growth of tourism brings both benefits and challenges. There is much that every nation can learn from the care that is being taken to protect Soqotra and all of us must hope that these efforts will succeed."

Ahmad Sa'ad Tahki helps at the Soqotra Exhibition

Miranda Morris

Ahmad reached Scotland on 21st June and immediately plunged into work. He met with the RBGE story-telling group, led by Claire Mulholland, to teach Soqotri stories, collected and translated by Miranda Morris. This group, Talking Trees, will hold Soqotra story-telling sessions for families throughout the four months of the Soqotra Exhibition. He taught the story-tellers, all volunteers, how to wear Soqotri dress and how to greet one another in the Soqotri way.

The following Sunday saw Ahmad again telling Soqotri stories at the newly opened Scottish Story Centre in Edinburgh High Street during their celebratory Non-Stop Ceilidh on 25th June. The next Tuesday Ahmad returned for another teaching evening at the RBGE, this time to demonstrate various skills to the RBGE volunteers who will help man the Soqotra Exhibition. He taught fire-making techniques, how to spin wool, work clay and play a variety of Soqotri games.

The next few days leading up to the official opening were spent hard at work helping to display the 200 plus artifacts collected from Soqotra, and especially helping to furnish the Soqotri house which has such a prominent role in the exhibition hall. The day before the opening Ahmad was interviewed by a journalist from the Evening News and had an enormous number of photographs taken by their photographer. The two page article appeared on July 5th.

After the official opening, at which Ahmad made a speech in Soqotri, he and our other Soqotri visitor, Shukri Noh, were invited by the Regius Keeper to the dinner following the opening ceremony, an experience which they both found very interesting.

Ahmad finally had a well-deserved rest when he and Shukri accompanied Miranda Morris to the western highlands. Here they spent time sailing, talking, eating and sleeping. They saw wild deer, seals and otters, ate their first venison and attended a wedding in an Indian tepee! Before they left Britain on 7th July they wrote a letter of thanks to the Regius Keeper of RBGE; they also wrote to Anna Pugh to express their enormous admiration for her unremitting hard work in organising the exhibition.



Soqotra Exhibition

Soqotra Exhibition Events Programme

A number of events were held to accompany the Soqotra Exhibition:

* **Storytelling – Tales of the Island**

July & August - Every Wednesday and Saturday at 2 – 2.45pm & 3.15 - 4pm

September & October – Every Saturday at 2 – 2.45pm & 3.15 - 4pm

Storytellers told wonderful, evocative tales which took visitors into the heart of Soqotra, onto the high seas of the east and gave them a taste of the myth and mysteries that surround this magical island.

* **Soqotra – Galapagos of the Indian Ocean**

Thursday 13th July 7 - 8pm

The Soqotra islands have been described as the Galapagos of the Indian Ocean. This talk, by Tony Miller, gave visitors the opportunity to discover some of the fascinating plants and animals of this little-known and isolated Archipelago and to make up their minds whether the comparison with the Galapagos is justified. The talk also explored the impact of both development and climate change on these unique islands.



* **Soqotra : A Cinematic Introduction**

Thursday 17th August 7 - 9pm

This was an evening exploring the intriguing island of Soqotra through the medium of film. The films showed the people and their lifestyles, so remote from 21st century Britain; the amazing landscape and caves and some of the remarkable plants and trees that live on the island. Films by Phillippe Axell, Douglas Botting and J. Edward Milner. Following the films there was the chance to speak to Douglas and Edward about their work on Soqotra.

* **Soqotran Daily Life – Behind the Scenes of the Exhibition**

Thursday 14th September 6.30 – 7.15pm

Friday 15th September 6.30 – 7.15pm

The stories behind the exhibition were told in this hands on artifact session and private view. Led by linguist and ethnographer Dr. Miranda Morris, who worked with Soqotrans to collect the artifacts on display, this was a chance to handle many of the fascinating exhibits, following the journey they took to be here and discovering more about everyday life for people on Soqotra.

* **Exploring Ecotourism**

Thursday 19th October 7 - 9pm

How do our holiday plans affect the world? Is Ecotourism a good thing? Does the money we spend really benefit the local communities? If we really care about conservation should we leave these remote, unspoilt areas of the world alone entirely? This evening provided lively discussion and interesting perspectives from eco-tourism companies, from experts who either support or oppose ecotourism and from the audience. The evening was chaired by Nick Baker of The Really Wild Show.

Tourism



Trekking on Socotra

Frank M. Mann, German Ambassador to Yemen since 2003

Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed Sofan was recently asked in an interview in Germany about the strategies in Yemen to create extra income for the population. His reply was that the tourism industry, among other sectors, offers very good opportunities in this respect.

The Island of Socotra has now been discovered as another highlight for tourists who love to hike and to discover a so-far unspoiled nature and in November 2005 a group of 18 hikers completed the first 7-day tour organized by the Summit Club of the German Alpine Association in cooperation with a local tourism agency. Supported by a caravan of 10 camels and Socotri cameleers, the group trekked all the way from Nogud in the south of the Island to its capital Hadiboh. The trail led through the most varied and magnificent landscapes of rugged stone formations to pastures in the highlands and wadis filled with water. The caravan reached its first campsite at 450 m and spent the second night on a plateau at 750 m. The trail then led along Jebel Haggir to a height of 1,200 m. The highlight in a true sense of the word was reached after climbing the Summit of Jebel Mashannig at 1520 m. From there, a descent of 1,100 m was to be covered to reach the last campsite at Wadi Ayhaft which offered rest and a swim in crystal clear water. To reach Hadiboh a last stretch through Wadi Tanhiten to Muqadrihon Pass had to be mastered. Of course the group did not miss the Marine Protected Area of DiHamri and Homhil with its forest of Dragon's Blood trees. Here two tourism cooperatives have been founded, supported by the UNDP Socotra Conservation and Development Programme. These Cooperatives are a very good example of how ecologically sound tourism can provide income and opportunities to the local population. The future installation of eco-lodges in Socotra – supported by UNDP and with financial help of the Global Environmental Facility – is another important step to open up the Island for environmentally sound tourism.

The German Summit Club is offering another three trekking tours in Socotra before the next monsoon season and the program will be continued, improved and expanded in the years to come. Thus Socotri villagers are starting to reap the benefits of eco-tourism and tourists will become a more familiar and welcome sight as they enjoy the unique landscape, flora and fauna, and the hospitality of the Socotri people.



Life on the Island

Introducing the Dragonflies of Socotra

Richard Porter

Amongst the animal groups on Socotra the dragonflies (order Odonata) are not well represented in either number of species or endemism. Just 18 species have been recorded, only one of which, Grant's Damselfly *Azuragrion granti*, is endemic.

The order can be broken down into two suborders: Zygoptera (damselflies) and Anisoptera (the true dragonflies). Of the 18 species identified on the archipelago, four are damselflies and 14 true dragonflies.

Wadis with slow running or still water, small freshwater reservoirs, cisterns and pools around leaking pipes are all good places to find these large insects. At such sites at least six species can frequently be seen. Amongst the better localities are the pools at Wadi Denegen, Wadi Ayhaft, Wadi Zirage (especially at Diksam) and the small steamlets and pools at Homhil. One species, *Macrodiplax cora*, is unusual in that it frequents brackish water, and can be commonly found in coastal lagoons and estuaries.

There have been no systematic surveys of the dragonflies of Socotra and this would make a very useful research project. This could easily be accomplished in a few days by visiting all places with fresh water, no matter how small.

Recommended reading: *The Fauna of the Socotra Archipelago (2003)* by Wolfgang Wranik. Published by Universitat Rostock, Germany

Annotated checklist of the archipelago's Odonata

(From brief surveys in Feb 2004 and Feb/March 2006)

Coenagrionidae (Banded Damselflies)

Azuragrion granti Endemic Recorded at Diksam and Wadi Denegen

A. nigradorsum Easily observed at Wadi Denegen

Ceriagrion glabrum Common at Homhil

Ischnura senegalensis Common at Homhil and found at the lagoons at Hadibu

Aeshnidae (Hawker Dragonflies)

Anax imperator Fairly widespread; common at Diksam

Hemianax ephippiger Frequent at Diksam; and migrants can be widespread

Gomphidae (Wide-eyed Dragonflies)

Paragomphus genei Rather uncommon; found at Wadi Denegen

Libellulidae (Darters)

Orthetrum Sabina Common, especially on smaller pools and cisterns

O. chrysostigma Common and widespread

Crocothemis erythraea One of the commonest dragonflies on Socotra

Trithemis arteriosa Also common and widespread

Pantala flavescens Widespread in small numbers; often away from water

Rhyothemis semihyalina separate Apparently rare

Tamea basilaris Apparently rare

Trapezostigma limbata Uncommon; found at Wadi Denegen and Wadi Ayhaft

Zygonyx torridus Apparently rare; found at Ma'abdh

Macrodiplax cora Common in coastal brackish water at Hadibu and Qalansiya

Diplacodes lefebvrei Common and widespread



Crocothemis erythraea

Anax imperator male



Publications

Socotra— A Natural History of the Islands and their People

Catherine Cheung and Lyndon DeVantier
Science Editor: Kay Van Damme

Odyssey Books and Guides, Airphoto International Ltd, Hong Kong. 408 Pages.

This book provides a comprehensive review of the Socotra Islands' flora, fauna and people, by documenting the geological history, land and marine biodiversity, human culture and history. It highlights hitherto unexplored aspects of the islands' biogeography, ecology and evolution. Nine case studies illustrate recent and ongoing conservation efforts. Together with SCF, the authors hope to arouse interest and engender actions for conservation of Socotra's unique natural and cultural heritage.

Thoroughly researched and referenced, with extensive contributions from national and international researchers, the book is packed with the latest scientific, historic and cultural information. Each chapter has been reviewed by specialists renowned in their particular fields.

Chapters: Overview, Geology and Environment, Flora, Fauna, Birds, The Marine Realm, Ealy Settlers and Visitors, The Islanders, Conservation and Development, Case Studies.

Arabic abstracts for all chapters: 215 X 280 mm, 408 pp, hardback: 400 colour photographs, historic illustrations and maps: UK £39.50, US \$59.95

Available from:

NHBS Environment Bookstore, UK (www.nhbs.com)

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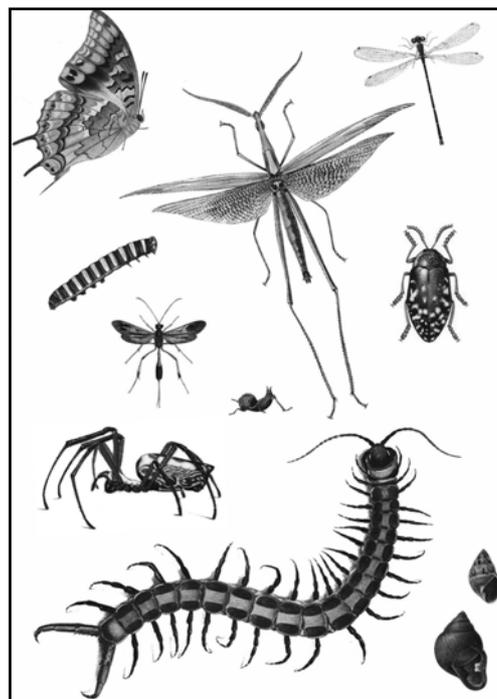
Socotra Conservation Fund, Yemen (Tel: 967-1-425310)

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A collage of some invertebrates from Socotra. Individual illustrations from contributed papers in Forbes, H.O., 1903 (ed.). *The Natural History of Sokotra and Abd-el-Kuri*. Special Bulletin of the Liverpool Museums. Courtesy of the National Museums Liverpool, UK.

Socotra—a review

Kay Van Damme, Ghent University, Belgium

The last book on Socotra's natural history was compiled by H.O. Forbes and W.R. Ogilvie-Grant and published as a monograph in 1903 by the Museum of Liverpool. Leading a group of scientists interested in its richness of biodiversity, Dr Henry O. Forbes visited Socotra and Abd al Kuri in the late 19th century to study terrestrial fauna of the islands. Since then, the island has been visited by many more expeditions by researchers fascinated by Socotra. However, only recently have most of these investigations been linked to conservation. Researchers are now aware, from lessons learned in other places, that Socotra is now under an increasing threat which may cause its uniqueness and richness in cultural and biological diversity to decline, and maybe even disappear.

This new book on Socotra's natural history, by Catherine Cheung and Lyndon DeVantier, builds on this knowledge and probes the minds of researchers which have recently been working on the island. These all share the view that Socotra is a unique, fascinating but, as any island, very vulnerable place.

Filled with information on biology, archaeology, conservation and other fields, it is not meant as a leaflet to attract people to Socotra's nice scenery. Instead, the book is a compilation of scientific knowledge to help create the awareness that, besides being visually attractive, this nice scenery actually consists of unique habitats for a number of plants and animals, all part of an ecosystem in which people are trying to survive. An island of which the Socotrans have been careful stewards for centuries.

I'm proud of having been part of making this book, which is a token of respect for the islanders and the people who are working to help protect Socotra's heritage. Like the Galapagos, Socotra is a microcosm of our planet, and there are still many generations to come after ours.

Research

Development of *Dracaena cinnabari* stands in the Scant mountain range in the last 100 years

Zdenek Cermak, MUAF Brno, Czech Republic

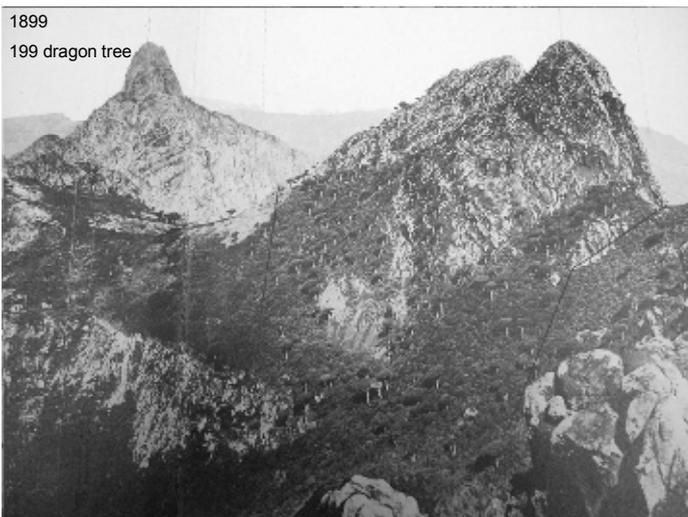
In 1899 an expedition led by Prof. Dr Muller and Prof. Kossmat took photos of the highest sections of the Haggeher mountain range. After rediscovery of these photographs in the Vienna museum archive, I had the idea to find a locality photographed 108 years ago. On the basis of these photos it would be possible to compare dynamics of the development of local *Dracaena cinnabari* stands over time. After repeated attempts, in 2004 I managed to locate a place in the mountains which served for taking a new photograph of the site shown in the 1899 photo.

However, different photographic techniques meant it was not possible to obtain completely identical photos. Particular proportions of photographs are different which makes their comparison difficult. Therefore it was necessary to determine reliably identifiable points between which limits of a sample plot could be set. On the basis of such a sample plot, the number of trees of *Dracaena cinnabari* was determined. Further, the total area of crowns was determined by a relatively accurate and simple planimetric method (on a graph paper). This method appeared to be practical and preferable to the original idea of using image analysis programme ECOGNITION, which is applicable for rather larger areas. The total area of crowns was expressed in per cent compared with the total area of a sample plot on the different photos.

Comparing the number of trees on particular photos, i.e. 199 in 1899 and 111 in 2004, the decrease in dragon trees by 44% is evident. However, different light conditions during photography mean that illuminated stems are evident in a photo from 1899 whereas a photo from 2004 was illuminated by the noon sun, which meant that it is difficult to recognize individual trees growing in closed groups. Therefore, it is possible that the actual number of dragon trees in 2004 was a little higher than recorded.

The absence of trees of lower age classes is evident from the photos. As a matter of fact, it is a problem of the whole island because overgrazing in most areas does not allow the development of a new generation. Despite the longevity of the species, gradual die-back threatens in the absence of younger trees.

The area of dragon tree crowns represented 8.2% of the total area of the studied region in 1899. In 2004, the total area of dragon tree crowns amounted to only 6.6%. It represents a total decrease in the species covering within the area amounting to 19.0% during the past 105 years.



Research

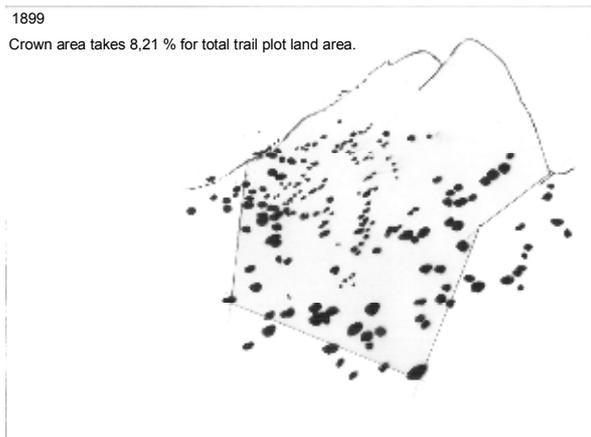


Places are also evident on the photos where removal of the stand had occurred. This was probably caused by water erosion during rainstorms which occur there regularly, sometimes reaching destructive intensity.

In spite of these not very optimistic results the situation cannot be considered to be critical because the studied stand is in good health condition at this time. Also, we know very little about the developmental dynamics of natural dragon tree stands and possible oscillations of their numbers in the longer term.

It is possible that if intensive grazing were prohibited this might enable regeneration in these regions; however, it is a very difficult and long-term task and there may be other factors involved leading to reduced reproduction.

To monitor the development of forest stands of this rare species it would be useful to prepare detailed maps of the present condition of *Dracaena cinnabari* stands at the level of individual trees through the analysis of a Quick Bird or other high resolution satellite imagery as well as comparison of the present condition with aerial photos of the British RAF from the 60s. This work is proceeding, led by Roderic Dutton, as detailed in **Tayf 3**.



Soqatra Karst Project (SKP)

Multidisciplinary Scientific Approach

Peter De Geest

Over the last six years the SKP-team has explored around 50 cave systems on Soqatra island and mapped approximately 37km of underground galleries, rooms, vertical shafts, rivers and lakes. During each expedition an international expert in a different field (biologist, geologist, geomorphologist, marine archaeologist, linguist) was invited to join the team, widening the knowledge and strengthening the SKP approach.

The first part of our report "SKP2000-2004" has been published in English (De Geest P. (ed.), 2006). Some highlights of this research and case studies are also presented, accompanied by colour photographs, in Cheung & DeVantier (2006).

As initiator of the SKP expeditions, I will finish my Ph.D.study at the VUB (Vrije Universiteit, Brussels), entitled *A palaeoclimate reconstruction of the monsoon variability in the Holocene with the use of stable isotopes from speleothems* in 2007 and continued by a new student. As an introduction, the climate will be accurately described in this thesis, thanks to the meteorological datasets made available by the close collaboration with the SCDP/EPA-teams and the Ministry of Water and Environment. Also a broad estimate of the karstic aquifer recharge will be possible on the basis of the differences in isotopic signature between the island's different water bodies (meteoric, vadose and phreatic waters). There will be direct benefits for the future management of the island's underground freshwater resources, as tested in a pilot project near the village at Riy di Iriseyl in 2003 (De Geest, 2006).

Research

Karst Studies

Continued

The physical geographer, Mathias De Flou (Universiteit Gent, Belgium) just finished his MSc thesis, describing the climate and geomorphology of the island. His approach is based on the interpretation of the cloud formation, visible on satellite images collected over the last 30 years. He also partly constructed a digital terrain model (DTM) made on the basis of high-resolution (1,83m/pixel) Corona images from 1972 with the photogrammetrical restitution software Virtuozo. Thanks to this new technique, a digital elevation model (DEM) can be built without the use of exact GPS positions. The result is a 3D map of the island with equidistant elevation lines of only 5m. This work is the basis for further geomorphological work and the integration of the mapped 3D cave data, so the underground areas of the island could be visualised in the near future.

Biologist Kay Van Damme (Universiteit Gent, Belgium) will continue to focus on the cave biology, providing extremely important clues to the biogeography of the archipelago, adding a totally new aspect to the islands' biodiversity. His efforts as Science Editor of the new reference work *Socotra: A Natural History of the Islands and their People* is extremely valuable for further research and conservation efforts on the archipelago in general.

Julian Jansen van Rensburg, a South African marine archaeologist, laid the firm foundations for the study of the quickly disappearing traditional Hourri (pl Hawari, a type of fishing boat) on the island. He determined, on the basis of the type of wood used, that the origin of these boats is India, Pakistan and SE Asia. These Indian links are now being studied by Dr. Ingo Strauch, after the discovery of around 100 epigraphs in a Soqotran cave site dating from the first centuries CE. These writings demonstrate the position of Soqotra Island in this ancient history as an important location on the marine trade route between SE Asia, the Arabian world and East Africa.

At this moment the SKP team is dividing its attention between further investigation of new sites and the protection of some recently discovered sites. The sustainable development versus ecotourism management of the karstic areas will be a new challenge to be tackled in the near future. Thanks to the interest of and determined collaboration with several Yemeni partners, such as the SCDP, SCF, EPA, Ministry of Water and Environment and others, we are rather confident of a positive result. Insh'Allah!



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Cheung, C. and L. DeVantier, 2007. *Socotra - A natural history of the islands and their people*. K. Van Damme (Science Editor). Odyssey Books and Guides, Airphoto International Ltd. 408 pp.

De Flou M., 2006. Studie van het fysisch milieu van het eiland Socotra (Jemen) : klimaat en geomorfologie. Unpublished MSc thesis at the Dpt. of Geography, University Gent, Belgium, 320pp.

De Geest P. (ed.), 2006. SKP2000-2004. *Berliner Höhlenkundliche Berichte Band 20*, 69pp. (info http://www.speleo-berlin.de/gb_publicationen.php)



Research

Climate of Soqotra with a View to Rains

Hana Habrová

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Czech Republic

You have often read in Tayf about heavy rains on Soqotra. I would like to provide some information based on data from automatic weather stations placed by the Mendel University of Agriculture and Forestry (MUAF) team on Firmihin plateau.

Although there is much information on climate in the literature, much of this information is based on individual experience from short-term stays on the island or from considering wider climatic characteristics from the Indian Ocean or the nearby mainland. Although information is sometimes conflicting, one conclusion remains: the Soqotra climate is strongly influenced by the southwest summer monsoon and the northeast winter monsoon.

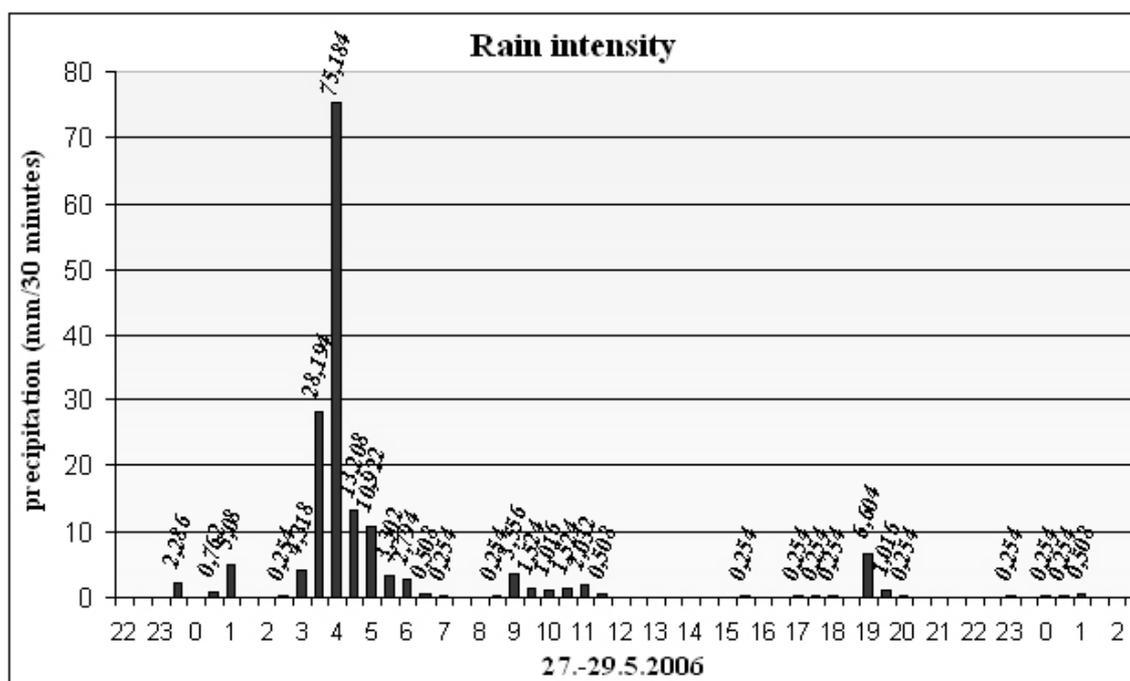
Only a long-term, continuous period of measurement at different locations on the island can lead to an understanding of its present climate. With this aim, the MUAF team installed a weather station including an automatic data-logger at Firmihin in November 2000 at an altitude of approximate 440 m above sea level. Five other mini-stations measuring only air temperature and air humidity were placed at different localities in 2004 (one of these was stolen on Skant after just one month).

The key climatic feature in Soqotra is the extreme variability of the climate caused by monsoon effects and the specific topography of the island. Consequently, two sites just a few kilometres apart may have completely different distributions of rainfall and vegetation seasons. Therefore, these conclusions are valid mainly for the southern part of Soqotra.

Month Rainfall (mm)

january	11,6
february	0
march	0
april	26,1
may	68,2
june	24,0
july	7,1
august	0,4
september	131,5
october	2,6
november	67,4
december	4,2
total	343,1

Table: Monthly means (mm) of precipitation on Firmihin, 440 m, from 12/2000-5/2006



Graph: Rain intensity during heavy rains on Soqotra in May 27-29th 2006.

Research

Rains article—Continued

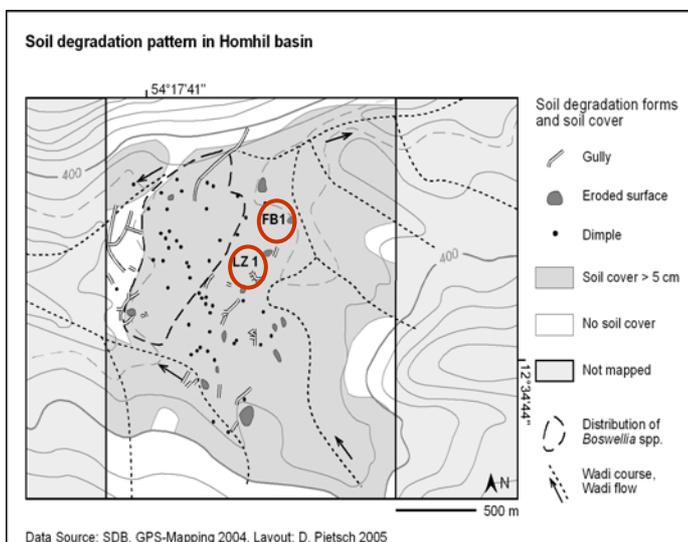
From our observations, we conclude the following:

- The summer monsoon is linked with strong southwest winds (daily means reach 8 m/s in July and August), clouds and rains on the southern part of the island. This period usually starts between April 20th and May 10th with strong rains (sometimes more than 50 mm per day) and increasing wind speed. Rains are more common during May and June and again at the end of September, when heavy rains may also occur (i.e. 305 mm in September 26-28th 2002). The summer monsoon usually ends between September 25th and October 15th.
- After a short transition period, the winter monsoon linked with rains on the northern part of the island starts between October 25th and November 15th. Winds blow from the northeast. Rains occur mainly during November and the first half of December, but some precipitation can fall until the first half of February. Winter monsoons usually end between February 1st and 25th. The spring transition period is very dry without any rains and breezes are caused only by night and day differences in temperature.
- The lowest record for air temperature was 8.2 °C on January 30th 2005 in the Skant area (1450 m). The highest recorded was 43.5 °C on June 10th 2005 in Hadibo (27 m). The average annual air temperature ranges between 17.9 °C in Skant and 28.0 °C in Hadibo while the average annual air humidity ranges between 67 % in Hadibo and 87 % in Maaleh (690 m) though they vary greatly through the year. Daily means of air humidity can fall to 7-15 % at the end of the transition period in April while during July and August daily means of air humidity are usually higher than 90% in the southern part of Socotra. The northern part is at its most humid and cloudy during December and January.
- During the last period of measurements, one extremely heavy rain occurred. This caused serious damage around the whole island, i.e. roads from Shibhon to Darho and Taakes road (to Zemhom - Shaab) were destroyed. During 26 hours (from 11:30 p.m. on May 27th to 1:30 a.m. on May 29th 2006), 168 millimetres of rain fell – of which 75 mm fell from 4:00 to 4:30 a.m. on May 28th! This rain was the most intensive during more than five years of records taken by our Firmihin station although the September rain in 2002 was also very intensive. However, in spite of the fact that on September 27th precipitation reached an incredible 207.5 mm, the rain was distributed rather uniformly during the day (never exceeding 25 mm/30 minutes). Damage caused by this rain was therefore less serious even though total rainfall reached 305 mm.

Soils and soil degradation in Northern Socotra

Dana Pietsch

I have been working on soils and their degradation on Socotra since 2003. Besides soil formation factors like secondary calcification, which is typical for semi-arid environments, I have also developed a soil distribution map of the Homhil Basin. The aims of the research are to figure out the soil degradation itself (below right) which is mainly the result of overgrazing, and to monitor the degraded sites, working together with the Biodiversity Project and local inhabitants (page 1), starting in Homhil, part of the National Park Zone of the Island. Especially in such areas the control and conservation of soils is important to protect this resource for the people, the flora in general and the soil fauna, as termites for example are structuring and enriching the soil with humus. The monitoring of two selected sites in Homhil (below left) will be starting in spring 2007 as a first step to soil conservation planning on Socotra.



Below: Eroded top soil, badland development
Left: Selected soil monitoring sites in degraded areas of Homhil basin



Research

Some New Observations on Birds

Richard Porter

During a visit to Socotra in February and March by Richard Porter, accompanied by Ahmed Saeed Suliman of SCDP, a number of interesting bird observations were made.

First, three new species were added to the Socotra list bringing it to 192: Long-toed Stint, Baillon's Crake and Siberian Stonechat, all of which were photographed.

Other vagrants were sighted which have only been recorded on the archipelago once before. They included 4 Mallard, female Marsh Harrier, female Amur Falcon, 2 Intermediate Egrets, Sacred Ibis, 2 Slender-billed Gulls, 2 Great Black-headed Gulls, 4 Jack Snipe and a Collared Pratincole.

The sighting of an adult Yellow Bittern at Sirhan - a bird normally found in south east Asia - was intriguing. On a previous visit a juvenile was found at an adjacent lagoon with dense palm groves and this must provoke the thought that the species might be nesting.

During breeding bird surveys a new area for the Socotra Cisticola (in dwarf acacia) was found with an estimated 200 or so individuals in the 5sq kms censused. A Socotra Warbler's nest with 3 eggs was only the second ever to be found.

Cattle Egrets on the island have now increased to over 30, Black-winged Stilts were pairing up and there were up to 7 Moorhens at one wetland. All these three could be potential new breeding birds for Socotra.

The House Crow eradication programme is continuing to keep the population under control with just 12 birds now present in Hadiboh.



Socotra Bunting. This is the rarest of the Socotra endemic birds, mainly found in the Haggeher.



Socotra Sunbird. This endemic is widespread throughout Socotra and is attracted to flowering trees.



Long-toed Stint. A vagrant from eastern Asia which is only rarely recorded in the Middle East. This bird, seen in February and March, was the first to be seen on Socotra.

Research

Lizards as pollinators and seed dispersers on islands

Dennis Hansen, Alfredo Valido & Jens Mogens Olesen
(From Zurich University, Switzerland; CSIC, Spain; and Aarhus University, Denmark)

Contact: dhansen@uwinst.unizh.ch

In general, only insects, birds and certain species of mammals have been considered to be efficient pollinators – and only mammals and birds have been considered to be efficient seed dispersers. However, recent studies have documented that lizards can play important roles as pollinators and seed dispersers on isolated islands that often lack pollinating insects and large fruit-eating mammals, and have only relatively few species of frugivorous birds. Thus, on islands many lizard species visit flowers to lick the sweet nectar, and thereby pollinate them (see Figure 1), and the lizards also eat fleshy fruits, and thereby disperse the seeds (see Figure 2). Pollination and seed dispersal are two of the most important ecosystem processes, which together are required for the natural regeneration of plant communities.

Socotra has a unique flora and fauna, which include many endemic flowering plants and many endemic lizards. It is therefore likely that at least some of the plants are either pollinated, or have their seeds dispersed by these lizards. Other dominant pollinators in Socotra are likely to be flies, small moths and butterflies, solitary bees, and the sunbird. So far, very few studies have investigated pollination or seed dispersal in Socotra. We hope to be able to contribute to the ongoing conservation efforts in Socotra by initiating pollination and seed dispersal studies that can be applied to both conservation planning and to long-term ecosystem monitoring. If anyone has some preliminary observations, or ideas and suggestions, we would be more than happy to receive them!



Abpve: In Mauritius, another island in the Indian Ocean, endemic *Phelsuma* geckos pollinate many flowering plants. Here, a *P. cepediana* gecko pollinates the endemic *Labourdonnaisia callophyloides* (Sapotaceae).

Left: *Phelsuma cepediana* geckos also eat the fruits of some plants in Mauritius. Here, it eats the soft pulp of the endemic *Roussea simplex* (Rousseaceae), swallowing the tiny seeds and thus dispersing them.

Etcetera

Letter to the Editor

Shukri Nuh Abdullah Al Harbi Di Kishin in the Gulf sent a letter with his \$100 donation, saying:

To the editor of Tayf and to the Vice Chairman and all those connected with producing the magazine, Greetings.

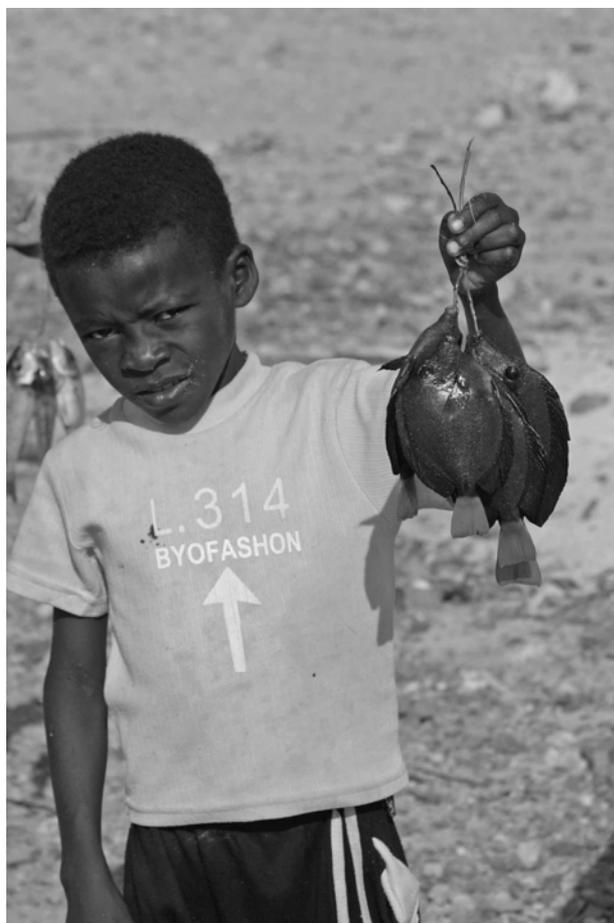
I would like to offer my sincere thanks and recognition for all the hard work taken on behalf of Soqatra, and especially for producing the splendid Newsletter. It is filled with very interesting articles all of which make good reading: the Newsletter certainly deserves to be widely read. I would like to make a few comments about what I read in the last magazine:

1. The botanic garden of Homhil: this is an excellent project, and we would like to encourage other islanders to embark on similar undertakings elsewhere on the island.
 2. Rubbish: we encourage any project involved in trying to solve the problem of rubbish disposal. However, we would encourage the citizens of Soqatra to pay greater attention to disposing themselves of rubbish they produce. This can only be good for the health of the environment as well as for the health of all islanders.
 3. Eco-Tourism: this kind of tourism is potentially of great benefit to the islanders, and we would encourage the development of this kind of tourism. We would also encourage awareness training and education for the islanders: how to interact properly with tourists and help them have a happy and interesting time on the island. This will encourage them to return again and to spread the word about this kind of beneficial tourism. It is up to us as Soqotrans to look after tourists and to teach them about Soqatra and its unique biodiversity. As a further encouragement towards this, we would ask Yemenia not to overcharge visitors to Soqatra.
- As a minor point, I feel a better-quality cover for the Newsletter would attract more Gulf readers.

(summary translation by M.J. Morris)



An Oman Hawkfish *Cirrhitichthys calliurus* being cleaned by the cleaner wrass *Labroides dimidiatus*, over the branching coral *Acropora haimeii*. The coral occurs from East Africa to the Red Sea. The hawkfish is restricted to the Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Oman while the cleaner wrass occurs widely across the Indo-Pacific. Photo by Hajnalka Kovacs - Attila Siklosi (aquaware.net). Illustration from Cheung and DeVantier, see page 11.



Boys will gather at the morning catch to buy fish. Photo: Richard Porter

Etcetera

Friends of Soqotra Subscriptions

At the Annual General Meeting in Edinburgh on 9th September 2006 it was proposed and passed that all subscriptions will become due on 1st October each year.

Of course, if you have paid in recent months we will not be asking you to pay the full subscription again on 1st October but I hope this suggestion will meet with your approval.

Subscription last paid on or between October and December 2005 75% of the subscription is due on 1st October 2006.

Subscription last paid on or between January and March 2006 50% of the subscription is due on 1st October 2006.

Subscription last paid on or between April and June 2006 25% of the subscription is due on 1st October 2006.

Subscription last paid on or between July and September 2006 0% of the subscription is due on 1st October 2006.

Please be advised that a Paypal system has been created on the FoS website and this is a convenient way to pay FoS and to also have your subscription paid annually automatically. Paypal is very safe, certainly safer than giving credit/debit card details over the telephone.

If you pay by Paypal you could use the Donation button to pay the amount of your subscription.

In future, will you please send your payment direct to the Treasurer. If your payment is in a currency OTHER than Pounds Sterling please make your cheque (check) payable to the Treasurer and NOT FoS. At least, until advised otherwise.

Any queries please contact the Treasurer John Farrar at 2, Marsh Lane, Hayle, Cornwall, TR27 4PS, U.K. or by email john@soqotra.info or 01736 752982 by telephone.

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.socotra.info A personal view by John Farrar.

www.yemen-protectedareas.org

If you know of other sites, please let us know and we can publish them in

Friends of Soqotra Website

We use the Website to keep Members and others informed of new information and activities. If you would like to include a note, article or report on the Web, please get in touch with John Farrar,

JohnFarrar@metronet.co.uk.



Young Dragon's Blood Tree
Photo: Richard Porter

TAYF

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND REQUEST FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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SCF T-SHIRT

T-shirts, books and cups available for sale at the Airport and Hadibu visitor centres on Socotra.

T-shirts YR700—all proceeds to SCF.

FRIENDS OF SOQOTRA

Friends of Socotra (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 Socotra 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.

SOCOTRA CONSERVATION FUND

The Socotra Conservation Fund is an independent, not for profit organisation dedicated to support conservation and sustainable development on the Island of Socotra. The Fund is a non-governmental organisation, born in Yemen in November 2002 and registered in the United Kingdom (Company No 4545975). The main objective of the Socotra Conservation Fund is to support community based environmental projects on the Socotra Archipelago.

The SCF aims to improve the lives of the islanders through capacity building and activities such as ecotourism development and nature conservation handicrafts. All our activities are focused on sustainable development for the Socotra Archipelago. The Fund also supports the conservation and protection of the unique characteristics of the island and its culture.



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