

Tayf the Soqatra Newsletter

Issued By **FRIENDS OF SOQOTRA and SOCOTRA CONSERVATION FUND**



Traditional Soqotran greeting to FOS Chairman Dr Kay Van Damme
Photo: Thanos Petouris

FOS AGM 2011 Bern, Switzerland 23—25 September 2011

The 11th AGM and Conference is being organised by Dr Eike Neubert, Curator of Malacology at the Natural History Museum of Burgergemeinde in Bern. There will be a full programme of presentations and discussions over Saturday and Sunday; contact Eike to contribute and for more information at Eike.neubert@nmbe.ch. It promises to be a high point of FoS AGMs, near to several summits above 4,000 m!

2 Killed in 2010 Floods

A woman and a young girl were killed in late May 2010 in the worst flooding to hit the island in decades as winds reached nearly 55 mph. Following torrential rains in the eastern areas water streaming down from the mountains flooded homes in Hadibo, swept away many vehicles, killed scores of livestock and destroyed boats. Students were unable to take their final exams as schools were shut down.

Alajooz village was 'ravaged' and many homes destroyed in other villages. Helicopters were used to help people who were moved to refugee shelters at schools and government buildings.

Yemen Post, Sahwa, others; Photo: Sahwa net.



Ten years of Friends of Soqotra!

In August 2001 people interested in the future of Soqatra assembled at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh and decided to form a charity to be called Friends of Soqatra. The charity was to bring together people from throughout the world with an interest in the sustainable development of the islands and their people.

Over the last ten years the charity has been able to:

- Support a number of projects on the island, including donating sewing machines, eyeglasses and stethoscopes,
- Produce an annual Newsletter, in both English and Arabic, promoting and publicising news and research from the island to a wider audience,
- Provide major support to the RBGE Exhibition on Soqatra in 2006,
- Hold annual conferences to discuss research and decide priorities for project support,
- Provide a website to promote the island and provide information on it,
- Help scientists working on Soqatra to develop their work and engage with others to promote it, and
- Encourage greater understanding of the island and her people throughout the world.

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NOT For Sale but

DO Photocopy!

Tayf Newsletter is produced for members of Friends of Soqatra and is distributed free to them. Neither current nor back issues should be sold.

People are welcome to photocopy the journal for their personal use or to give to others.



NEWS

Soqotra Public Library – Update

On my last visit to the island (November - December 2010) I found the situation in the library unchanged since I last wrote (*Tayf* 7). The joint Chairmen, Dr Sa'ad Qaddomi and Fehed Seleem Kafayan, had been unable to reach any agreement with the librarian to keep the library open, nor had any of the promised developments proposed from the Gulf taken place. The Chairmen and Library Committee have been unable to agree to return the funds still in the library account so that they can be used for other projects, and the rent for the library building continues to be paid although the building is actually locked. The books and other contents of the library (furniture, DVD player and DVDs) are safe, but their future, when the funds run out, is unclear. This is sad news for all those who contributed their time and energy and funds to the project, and also for the many students who were enthusiastic users of the library.

Darwin House Closed

The Darwin House in Hadibo, initially set up by the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh as a home base for their researches on the island, has been closed. Although, once the RBGE had withdrawn their financial support, the house continued to be used as a base for many researchers coming to work on the island, it became increasingly difficult for me to fund single-handedly the rent and running costs as the numbers of researchers dwindled. In addition, the availability of places in Hadibo to use as a research base has grown, and most have better facilities in terms of reliable electricity and more comfortable accommodation. So at the end of my visit in December 2010 I distributed all the camping and cooking equipment among Soqotrans, the life-vests to Fouad Naseeb for his marine work, the tables and chairs to a Soqotran friend setting up a café, and other bits and pieces among neighbours who had been so kind to us over the years.

News provided by Miranda Morris
Miranda@mirandamorris.com

Reading glasses donated by the Friends of Soqotra

The 50 pairs of non-prescription reading glasses reading glasses donated by the Friends of Soqotra, originally for the Soqotra Public Library (See *Tayf* 7) have been distributed. In November a number of Imams of Hadibo mosques were contacted with a view to donating reading glasses to various mosques for the use of members of the congregation. They advised that, rather than leaving pairs of glasses in the mosques, the best way forward was to donate them to individuals. Some of these were selected by Imams, some by the College, and some by other institutions, their names being presented on a list. Though by no means an ideal way of distributing the reading glasses, it was the best I could devise, given the time constraints and pressure of other work during my visit. It did become clear, however, that the need for non-prescription reading glasses is great: there was a steady stream of people to my door right until the day I left asking for a pair for themselves or for an elderly relative.

Nuh Abdullah 'Almihi awarded a Masters in the Phonology of the Soqotri Language

Friends of Soqotra would like to congratulate Nuh Abdullah Salim 'Almihi on the Masters Degree he was awarded last year from Ta'izz University, with the title *Al-Lahja Al-Mahkiya fi Jazira Suqutra al-Yamaniya (The Oral Language of the Yemeni Island of Soqotra)*. Nuh and I had discussed various aspects of his language studies in earlier years, and during my visit to the island last year Nuh was kind enough to bring me the only copy of his thesis to look at. Not only does it represent a huge investment in time and labour - Nuh is also a teacher - but also he is the only Soqotri scholar I know who has taken on the considerable task of learning the relevant symbols of the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) for transcribing Soqotri. This means that his work is available to a much wider and international audience. Nuh is very keen to pursue his language studies overseas, and we ask any FoS member who thinks they might be able to help to contact the FoS committee at fos.secretary@gmail.com.

TAYF Newsletters continue to reach the island

The Soqotra representative of the Friends of Soqotra, Muhammad Amer, asked for many more copies of the *Tayf* newsletter to be sent to him. However, logistically and financially this is not straightforward. However, thanks to FoS member Salwa Barkwan whose brother has a publishing business in Al-Mukalla, we have decided to try printing the Arabic version of *Tayf* in al-Mukalla. Muhammad Amer is enthusiastic about this plan, as Soqotrans travel frequently to and from al-Mukalla so it would be very much easier to collect copies and bring them back to the island.

RORO Vessel Lost off Soqotra

The Dubai Moon, Panamanian-registered ship that originated in Ajman in the United Arab Emirates, sank in bad weather while en route to Somalia. It was carrying 5500 tonnes of various products. The 23 members of the crew of different nationalities were transported by a Lynx helicopter from HMS Chatham, one of the British warships fighting piracy in the region. The Dubai Moon's master reported that the ship had gone off its normal course to avoid pirates and could not find shelter from the storm. He praised his rescuers: 'They were the only people to respond to our distress call; we owe them our lives'.

Yemen Post and Shipsmoonthly

NEWS

Turtle Monitoring

The Environmental Protection Agency has completed the Turtle Monitoring Program for 2010, focusing primarily on the Abalhen Marine Reserve where many turtles nest during the Monsoon season. Local community members and members of the tourism police took part in the program in addition to the team from the EPA.

Workshop on Management

His excellency Mr. Abdurrahman Fadhl Al-Iryani, Minister for Water and the Environment, opened a workshop aimed at studying the current management of the Socotra archipelago. He was joined by Mr. Mohammed Al-Hamadi who is in charge of decentralization at the Ministry of local affairs. The workshop was held under the auspices of the Socotra branch of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Price Increases

Prices rises were seen again this year on the island during the annual monsoon season which affects Socotra from May to September. The price increases affected all food products, especially sugar which reached 13,000 Yemeni riyals on the black market.

New Generator for Hadibo

The Islanders are looking forward to the arrival of an electricity generator with the capacity of 1200KW to Hadibo. This will help reduce the sharp supply deficit which the city has faced recently.

Training Course

Thirty local government employees took part in an English Language and ICT skills training course held in Sanaa during the summer. The participants, both male and female, came from the departments of health, fishing, agriculture, statistics, water, tourism and the Environmental Protection Agency both from Hadibo and from Qalansiya. The training course was funded jointly by the Italian Government, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Ministry of Water and the Environment.

Mohammed Amer Ahmed
The Director of EPA on the Island
FOS Representative
Mohammed7amer@yahoo.com

Over 300 foreign visitors touring 'charming Socotra'

Over 300 foreign tourists, mostly Italians, were visiting Yemen's Archipelago of Socotra during one week in January 2011. Mubarak Amir, director of the Socotra Tourism Office, said a programme had been prepared for the guests that included visits to tourist attractions, monuments and nature reserves.

The Tourist office in the island said that about 2,590 tourists visited Socotra last November.

Saba

Socotra in the News

A major article on Socotra appeared in *Conde Nast Traveler*, Nov. 2010: 'In the Land of the Dragon's Blood Tree' by Andrew Cockburn (pps.184- 195 with good pictures). This has been reprinted in *Traveler* (UK) and in two Chinese magazines.

A short article on 'A still-enchanted island' appeared in *The Economist*.

Major article in *Nature* online: <http://www.nature.com/nmiddleeast/2011/110525/full/nmiddleeast.2011.61.html> See p19.

Somalia Claims Socotra

Somalia has claimed that the islands of Yemeni Socotra Archipelago are part of it, requesting the United Nations to determine the status of the archipelago, executive director of the Saba Center for Strategic Studies said. In response, Yemen submitted a request to the UN saying the archipelago is Yemeni and history and its influence on it prove its claim, he said. The remarks were given at a seminar on Socotra, at which the participants voiced concerns about the situation of the archipelago amid poor basic services and infrastructure. They said the current situation in Socotra could lead to unacceptable security, military and economic consequences that may hamper preparing the investment climate on it and its development as Yemen is seeking to better use its potential. *Yemenpost*.

The Songs and Poems of Soqotra

An article by Miranda Morris will be published in *Wasafiri*, Volume 26 Issue 2, June 2011 - a special issue on the Indian Ocean. Later this year a permanent web-page with recordings will be established.

SOCOTRA: UNKNOWN TALE

A documentary film premiered in December 2010 which is dedicated to Socotra's humanitarian past. The film is in Russian and Soqotri with some Arabic.

The film tells the story of daily life and heritage of Socotran hermits, of the tale of "Two Brothers" from the library of Pharaoh Seti which is told to Socotran children at night, of incense of Socotra, its exotic species and much more. It presents authoritative opinions of leading Russian experts on Socotra and the recent sensational discovery of Socotra's "Oldowan Mariners' culture" more than 1.5 million years ago.

Vladimir Agafonov



Hadibo's new Mosque—photo R. Porter

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.*

NEWS

H E Abdulrahman Fadhl Al-Eryani

Richard Porter

With the political upheavals in Yemen, one casualty that will concern FOS is the resignation of His Excellency Abdulrahman Fadhl Al-Eryani Minister of Water & Environment. I understand this was in sympathy with the youth movement that is peacefully demonstrating for political change. Minister Al-Eryani has long been associated with conservation on Socotra; indeed the archipelago is probably his first and main love.

His finest achievements? Well to pick just two: steering the declaration of Socotra as a UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve in 2003. Then in 2008 helping ensure the naming of the archipelago as a World Heritage Natural Site. His greatest disappointment? I suspect it was not being able to have a greater influence over the planning and design of the road developments, to make sure they were less destructive to the environment, but he tried very hard in the face of opposition from the other powerful ministries, such is his commitment to conservation. Al-Eryani strongly believes that the future economy of Socotra lies in strong community-based ecotourism, at the heart of which is safeguarding its biodiversity and scenic beauty.



FOS sends their best wishes to the former Minister and a request that he continues to be involved in the conservation of the island complex - though this will probably now be more at grass-roots level, which we know he will enjoy more!

Ancient city unearthed on Socotra Island

A Russian archaeological team has unearthed an ancient city in Socotra Island, reported on 24 December 2010. After a four-year archaeological excavation the Russian team reported the discovery of an ancient city called "Khajlah" located near Hidibu city, the main city in the island. The city is dated back to the second century AD. The team said that the remains of the exposed ancient houses, roads, alleys and squares indicated that the city had been an administrative, religious and cultural area for the entire island.

Saba News



Goat browsing. Photo: R. Porter

House Crow Eradicated on Soqotra

Ahmed Saeid Suliman, Guntram G. Meier & Peter J. Haverson

The house crow (*Corvus splendens*) is native to India and its neighbouring countries. The bird has been introduced by people to the Arabian Peninsula and East Africa where, assisted by ships, it has spread to many coastal regions. The multiple negative effects associated with its spread made it the subject of control projects; however despite much effort, eradication has not succeeded in Aden or Jeddah.

A pair of house crows arrived in Hadibo in 1995/96 from Yemen by ship and established a breeding colony which grew to nearly 30 adult birds in 1999. A bounty system was established by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) which rewarded the collection of nests with eggs or chicks with cash. The funding stopped in 2008, by which time 550 chicks were collected, minimising the population growth but not resulting in eradication. A joint programme by the EPA and InGrip (a company with relevant expertise) began in April 2009 and within 15 days the last 13 house crows were eliminated by shooting and all nests were destroyed.

Following a year of monitoring the eradication was officially confirmed, making Soqotra the most significant island eradication site for the house crow. However, the threat of reinvasion persists through ship traffic from ports in Yemen or Oman.

This successful eradication project demonstrates that relatively few resources can deliver major success, with early planning and effective action crucial to controlling invasive alien species, and similar programmes are needed in existing house crow populations in the region to ensure Soqotra is not reinvaded.

Wildlife Middle East 4(4):4. March 2010

NEWS

Socotran Poet of the Year

Saad bin Hamed bin Maged was the winner of the Socotri poetry competition which took place on Socotra in the last week of December 2010 under the auspices of Abdulrahman Al-Eryani, the Minister of Water and Environment. Nine local poets competed in reciting poems that they had composed themselves in the traditional Socotri language. The third year of the competition was, as usual, the biggest cultural event of the year and was organized by the Socotra Culture and Heritage Society with the aim to preserve threatened Socotri traditions.

The year's participants were divided into three groups, each of them presenting their poems on one of three consecutive evenings. The final was held on December 29, 2010 and the winner was triumphantly carried out on the shoulders of happy fans from his village. The audience of each evening reached more than 1,000 men, many of them arriving on trucks from distant countryside areas.

"The competition has been very popular since its beginning in 2008," says Ismael Mohammed Ahmed, an organizer of the competition within the Socotra Culture and Heritage Society. He is delighted that the majority of the audience were young boys and men from villages where the Socotri language is still spoken and Socotri traditions are still observed. Ismael's hope that the ancient Socotri language will not perish was revived last year when a 25 year old man became a winner beating out his much older and more experienced rivals. Ismael himself supports the survival of Socotri traditions by recording old poems, tales and songs and keeping them for future generations. For next year, Ismael's ambition is to extend the poetry competition into a festival of various Socotri arts including singing and playing musical instruments.

Socotri is an ancient language of pre-islamic origin related to the Mahri language spoken in the Mahra region in the Southern Arabia. It is unwritten and quite different from Modern Arabic which is taught at schools nowadays. Along the coast of Socotra island, the inhabitants speak both languages fluently but in the mountains, older people still communicate primarily in Socotri.

The 2010 Socotri poetry competition was kindly supported by Abdulkareem Al-Eryani a special adviser to the President of Yemen, by Ali Saed Sheibani the sheikh of Socotris living in the Emirates, and by Socotri poetry lover Yahya Beidhobo.

Yemen Post

Spring on Socotra - what's new?

Richard Porter

I was back for a month in February and March after an absence from the island of two years. So what was new? Well, on the bird front that's easily answered - three new species were added to the islands growing list, all with Asian origins: Watercock - probably from India, Black-throated Thrush from Russia and Steppe Grey Shrike, probably from Kazakhstan. It is surprising how many vagrant birds come from the east rather than from closer Africa.

For much of the time Ahmed Saeed Sulieman, from the EPA, and I were helping a team from Japanese TV with a documentary about the island's wildlife. They decided to major on the Socotra Buzzard, but when we failed to find any nests with young much of the focus turned to the Egyptian Vulture - Socotra holding probably the highest population in the world of a species that has recently been classified by IUCN as 'Endangered'.

Ahmed Saeed and I also took a packed workshop and site visit for the island's eco-tourist guides, organised by EPA and SGBP. Many who attended I have watched develop over the last ten years and it was a pleasure to see how good they were. If that sounds patronising it's not meant to. Some were seriously competent on their bird, plant and general wildlife knowledge with sound views on conservation issues such as wood collection and overgrazing.

Hadibo was also much cleaner - less rubbish strewn in the streets, and although I rarely use hotels I was amazed how Summerland had been transformed into a delightful place to stay. Another thing that surprised me was the number of Japanese tourists, they seem to have taken over from the Italians and French. One Chinese lady I met was learning and studying Socotri.

But the EPA building looked bare and almost unused, and certainly not buzzing with conservation effort. That and the continuing development of the road which now countours round the head of the island - were sad memories to take home.

Steppe Grey Shrike. Photo R. Porter



NEWS

Honey Gardens

Rowan Salim

A new "garden" has been set up near the village of Terebik in Firmhin supported by the French-funded beekeeping project. The garden consists of a fenced area approximately 50 meters by 100 meters and includes plants which are naturally found in the area. Pipes have been set up to provide water. The garden is maintained by Sheikh Mohammed Salem and the project is coordinated locally by Ahmed Mohammed, both come from Terebik. It is managed from Hadibo by Nooh Adham.

The aim of the garden is to observe whether local plants, and especially Dragon's Blood Trees, are likely to regenerate if not subjected to grazing. A handful of Dragon's Blood trees have been actively planted; however there is also evidence of seeds germinating independently. The garden is also used by the village to grow some vegetables.

In the long run it is also hoped that the garden can be used as a plant and flower rich area to attract bees and encourage beekeeping and honey production. Two beehives have already been set up there in order to encourage honey production.

The Socotra Beekeeping Project

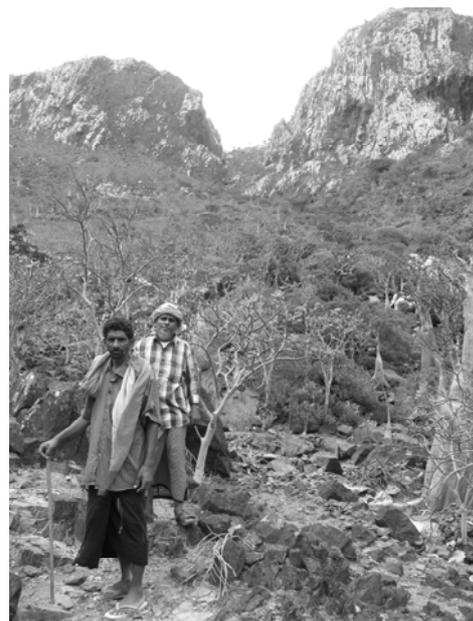
The garden represents one of the final steps of the French-funded Beekeeping Project which started in 2004 and the funding for which has come to an end this year. The project leaves in its wake over 150 trained beekeepers; a fully functional, locally-led Beekeepers' Association which runs training programs, monitors quality, and works to protect and raise awareness of Socotra's endemic bee species; and a shop where Socotri beekeepers can sell their honey produce. Staff at the shop are trained to test the quality of the honey ensuring acceptable levels of humidity, cleanliness, and use of smoke. Women who work in the shop have also been trained to produce plates of wax for use in the beehives. The shop's output currently stands at 800Kg of honey per year, with the lion's share of the market going to local and gulf buyers.

Protecting Socotra's Bees

One of the biggest challenges which the Beekeepers' Association is currently tackling is the import of honey and honey producing equipment which may bring with it bee diseases and pests. The Socotra bee is fortunate to be free from all the major pests which plague bee populations elsewhere in the world. The import of unsterile equipment and honey could pose a credible threat to the Socotra bee which is adapted to the local environment.

The Beekeepers' Association is currently working with their counterparts in the Ministry of Agriculture and the Airport to ensure that such dangerous imports are spotted and stopped. While this work has been perceived by some on the island to be an attempt by the Association to monopolise the honey producing market, it is important to understand the Association's aims and to note that the Association can buy honey from all producers provided the quality is satisfactory, and that membership of the Association is open to all Socotris.

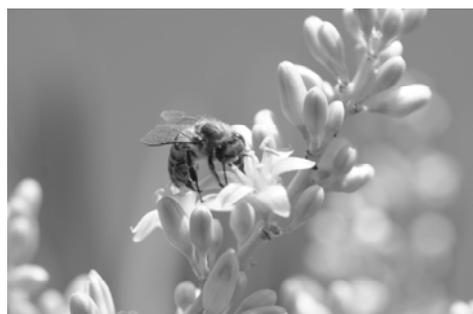
For more information, please feel free to contact Camille and Thierry Sergent at mielleriedugatinais@free.fr or Nooh Adham at the Beekeepers' Association in Hadibo.



Nohu Adham and Ahmed Mohammed on route to the garden



Monitoring the quality of Socotra honey



Socotran bee

Stethoscopes for Soqotra

Hugh Morris

Dr Salem Youssr Muftah has been studying for a postgraduate qualification in paediatrics at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine since September 2010. Previously he had been working at Hadibo General Hospital and when he came to the 2010 AGM of Friends of Soqotra in Exeter he gave an excellent and informative presentation about the health problems faced by Soqotrans and by those trying to help them. Many of these problems are such that they can, of course, only be addressed by larger organisations including first and foremost the Ministry of Health; however, Dr Salem was able to help identify where quite small contributions might be effective and help make a difference. There is a shortage of simple equipment including stethoscopes and sphygmomanometers in the hospital. Friends of Soqotra has purchased some of what is needed and Dr Salem has kindly agreed to take them out with him when he goes out to do field work for his thesis on Soqotra in April 2011. It is hoped that Friends of Soqotra will be able to provide more of what is needed in the future for him to take back to the island.

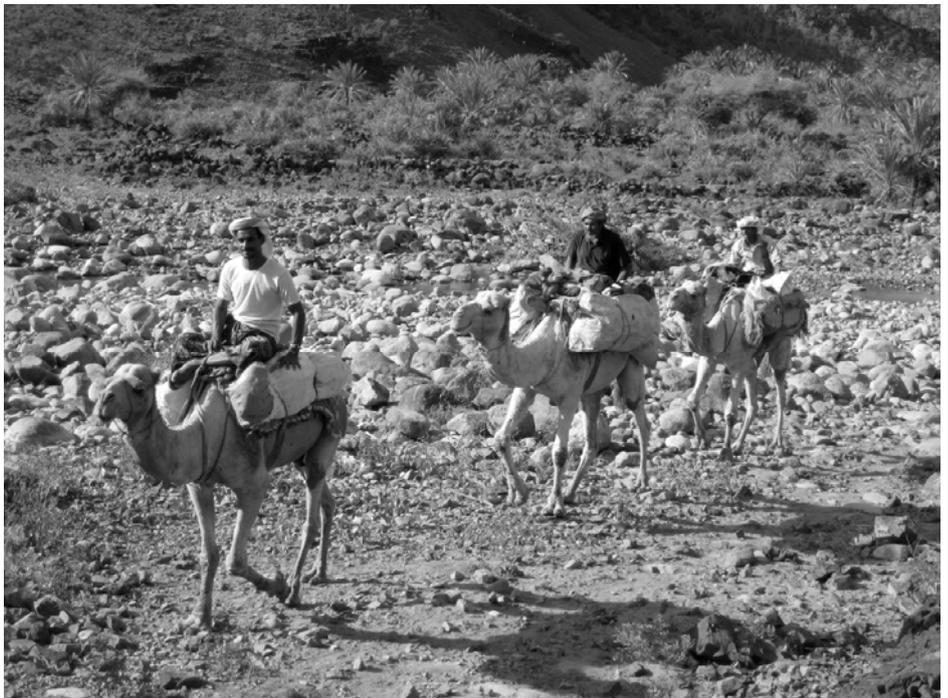
ECO-TOURISM

The Camel Drivers of Soqatra

Thanos Petouris

After years of visiting and living in Yemen, the question one hears the most is what makes one want to return to such a remote part of the world, especially when Soqatra is mentioned. The answer that effortlessly springs to mind is 'the people'. And it is indeed the people of Soqatra who leave a lasting impression to the visitor, even more so than the unique biodiversity of the island. Thus, from among Soqotris one particular community stands out: the camel drivers.

But why would camel drivers be such an iconic component of Soqotri society? After spending time walking with them through the Haggier mass, one soon realises what a treasury of local customs and traditions they are. They are excellent botanists, able to identify, and know how to use, even the smallest grass that grows on their island. A succulent piece of *Caralluma socotrana* from their hands becomes in the arid



Wadi Darho a rare delicacy. Their songs, echoing in the wadis, and aqabas as they pass with their camels, repeat old soqotri stories, in the local language, such as the legend of the sheep Harhara, which once fed thirsty travellers with five litres of milk, or the camel that wanted to sail to 'Abd al-Kuri, but had no passport! Their relationship with their camels is one of mutual respect. The camels are



taken care of above all else, and despite their grudging manners, they always seem to submit to their masters' will in the end. However, as the road network of the island expands, and more areas become accessible by car, the role of the camel as a means of transporting people and goods, and therefore also of the camel driver is becoming increasingly limited to the mountainous areas.

Nevertheless, if there is an area where the contribution of the Soqotri camel drivers can be invaluable in my opinion, that is in assisting with the international conservation efforts. Their love for their island, and intimate knowledge of every part of it, can prove crucial. They are the ones who can direct, educate, and even transmit their affection for Soqatra to any visitor. They embody Soqatra.



ECO-TOURISM

COMMUNITY BASED ECO-TREKKING

Nick Jeffries

The opening of Hadibo airport in 1999 to commercial flights meant that, for the first time in Soqotra's history, people could plan a visit to the island without having to factor in the fickleness of weather and sea. The effect of a regular flight schedule to the island has been a year on year increase in tourist numbers from less than 100 intrepid travellers in the first year to a reported 4,000 visitors in 2010. This large increase will inevitably have a negative impact on the physical and cultural fabric of the island if the support infrastructure is not developed and managed in the appropriate way. This article describes a community-centred approach to tourism that can provide benefits to island communities while at the same time creating a more enriching and meaningful experience for visitors.

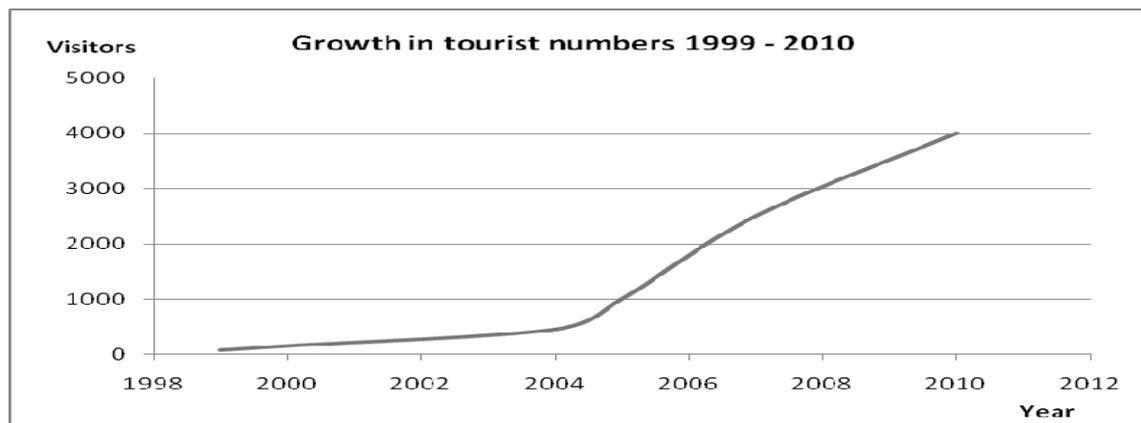
The popularity of Soqotra is not surprising; its otherworldly beauty offers an unusual experience for curious travellers that are seeking an adventure in a remote outpost of the world. Like all new discoveries, the numbers start small but rapidly grow, as the place enters the public consciousness through word of mouth, magazine articles, increased promotion by tour operators and a rapidly increasing online presence. In a few years time, it is not inconceivable that annual visitors could reach 10,000, particularly if one considers that the two airlines that serve the island can transport at least 16,000 people in and out during the tourist season. Assumes 6-month tourist season. Flights - Yemenia 2 weekly - 737s – 150 seats, Felix airlines 6 weekly - Bombardier CJ200s – 50 seats (*Limited hotel beds and a government plan to cap tourist numbers may ultimately prevent this number being reached*)

The potential negative impacts of growing tourist numbers on the island's ecosystem and its cultural traditions are manifold:

- Pressure on scarce resources
- Increase in waste
- Increased traffic and pollution
- Destructive interactions with wildlife and natural landscape features
- Inequitable distribution of tourist revenue
- Erosion of traditional practices and values.

Some of these concerns do appear to have been heeded by tourist organisations already, either through their own sense of responsibility or through enforcement by the Minister of Tourism. The ubiquitous 'eco'-prefix has been tagged onto a number of tours offered on the island and 'sustainability' and 'responsible' are peppered liberally throughout tour descriptions. Happily this is not all just green-washing as is evident by the recent award of a UNDP-sponsored Equator prize to the Rosh Community for "*converting their environmental assets into sustainable livelihoods without compromising future generations*". However, there are other tour groups who have not grasped the concept of 'treading gently on the landscape' quite so well. This was revealed quite distressingly in Essam's Al-Sulaihis's photographic evidence of the abuse of Hoq Cave.

One model of tourism that could be applied to Soqotra to help mitigate potential future negative impacts was encountered during visits by the author to Ethiopia in 2007 and 2010. In the northern highlands from its base in Lalibela, an organisation called TESFA (Tourism in Ethiopia for Sustainable Future Alternatives) had set up a network of community-owned enterprises to support a variety of multi-day walking routes. The basic idea is that trekking fees are paid directly to the community who in turn provide hospitality in the form of food, refreshments, accommodation and sometimes even entertainment. The balance of the fees is put into a savings account which is then invested in community projects such as a water supply, education, healthcare, grainstore, a mill or whichever project that the community collectively decide that they need. The other essential requirement is the development of a Guiding Enterprise and a Technical Support Unit in Lalibela. This provides the multi-lingual trekking guides as well as acting as the administration and logistics office for co-ordination of activities before and after the trek.



Data source:
UNEP,
www.socotraproject.org

ECO-TOURISM

The development of such a network requires donor assistance to start the process. In Ethiopia, TESFA linked with an existing program of Rural Livelihood creation being implemented by Save the Children (UK). The idea is that as the operation becomes established it becomes a sustainable, profit making entity. At this point donor subsidies are no longer required and the only support required is some technical assistance as well as marketing and sales support. In Ethiopia, this point was reached in 2008, five years after the enterprise was set up.

The potential benefits of developing such a model on Soqotra are wide-ranging and apply just as much to the visitors as to the host communities. Not only is trekking a healthy activity, but it also increases the likelihood of spontaneous encounters with locals on an equal level. Guided trekking creates the conditions for serendipitous discoveries of natural treasures revealed through slow and quiet movement through the landscape. Resting and sleeping within communities allows a deeper, much less superficial interaction with the Soqotri people.

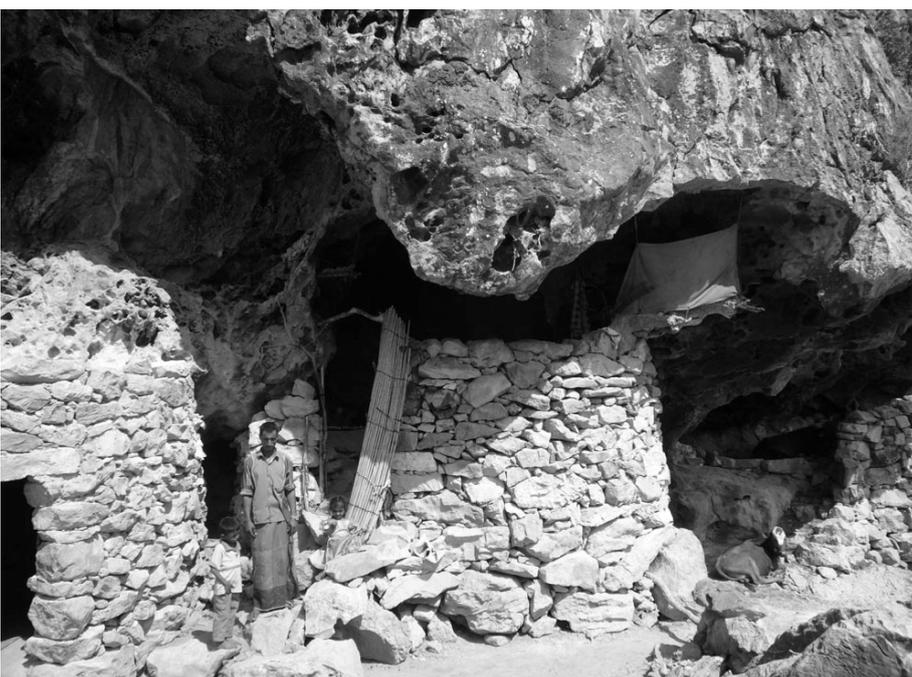
During a visit to the island in January 2008, I experienced a small taste of community-based eco-trekking that offered a positive sign that such a model could work on the island. My project with the Socotra Conservation Fund had finished early leaving me a couple of spare days to kill before the flight back to Sana'a. Rather than stew in Hadibo, I decided to accompany a group of veterinarians on a goat inoculation trip into the eastern hinterland. During a lunch stop in a shepherd's house whose ceiling looked like the underside of a Dragon's blood tree, I asked the shepherd's son if he would walk with me to the coast. He agreed and shortly afterwards, having made an arrangement to be picked up by the vets the next morning, we struck out into the wild landscape. In my pocket I had a letter addressed to the villagers (Arher, I think) on the coast that explained who I was.



Descent from the high plains to the coast

The trek to the coast lasted about five hours and took me across several beautiful limestone ridges, through amazing vegetation and skirted a number of isolated pastoral settlements. At one point I separated from my guide and wandered near to the cave dwelling of a shepherd and his wife who invited me into their grotto, giving me hot milk and many kind smiles.

The final approach to the coastline was incredible, as we descended in the fading light along a plant-lined bouldery track while the view of the sea opened up through interlocking valleys and swirling mist. Arriving at the village, I presented the vet's letter to a community member and was ushered to a stone hut in which I was told I could stay the night. Having fed and provided me



Hot milk cave break with a shepherd and his wife

with countless cups of tea, frustrated with my lack of Arabic and hence inability to communicate, I was left in the dark hut, along with one other silent visitor to the village, to contemplate peacefully the unexpected denouement to my day.

If you would like to learn more about community based eco-trekking refer to organisations such as <http://www.community-tourism-ethiopia.com> and in India <http://www.villageways.com/>. If anyone wants to start a discussion on the possibility of creating such an enterprise on Soqotra, please contact nick.jeffries@gmail.com.

http://www.yementimes.com/defaultdet.aspx?SUB_ID=35385

<http://content.undp.org/go/newsroom/2011/january/undp-administrator-visits-Soqotra-applauds-rosh-community-for-work-in-biodiversity-.en>

ECO-TOURISM

Hoq Cave Tourism

Peter De Geest & Kay Van Damme

Data were compiled from logbooks kept for visits between 25/09/2009 and 17/03/2010, but not all logbooks were available so it may be a slight underestimate; nevertheless it provides valuable and representative data on the use of the cave by tourists. The recommendations have been prepared from the authors' experience for many years of Hoq Cave, one of the most important natural and cultural heritage sites on Socotra Island, and provide a contribution to a complicated and challenging project: the protection and future management of this important site.

Conclusions

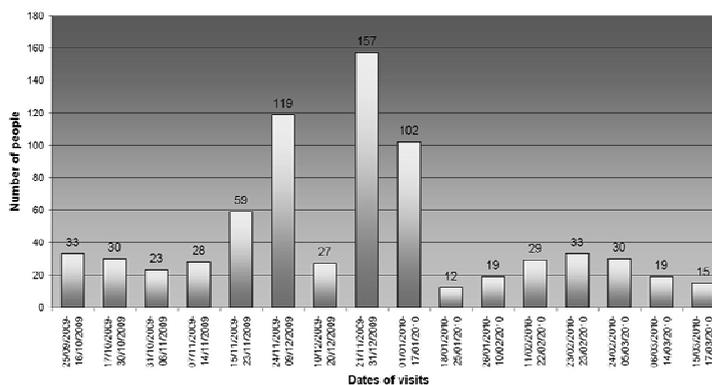
- 735 tourists visited Hoq Cave between 25/09/2009 and 17/03/2010;
- The cave was regularly visited over the complete time span, with a clear augmentation between mid November to mid January;
- More than 150 people visited Hoq Cave between 21/11 and 31/12 2009;
- Sometimes more than 30 people visit the cave in one day (23/02/2010);
- Almost 200 Italian tourists, more than 140 Yemeni and 68 French visitors make the top countries;
- The cave was visited by people from 41 different nationalities from all the different continents;
- 61.8% of the visitors come from Europe (Italy, followed by France, Czech Republic, Germany, Austria,...);
- 33.9% of the visitors arrive from Asia, of which 68% from the Middle East (Yemen, followed by Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi, Oman,...) and 32% from the "Far East" (Russia, followed by Japan, India, Ukraine, Korea,...);
- The remaining 4.4% derives from America (USA & Canada), Africa (South Africa) and Oceania (Australia & New Zealand);
- All visitors appreciated the cave (visit) a lot and hope that this still unspoiled beauty can be maintained.



General recommendations

- The walking pathway should be maintained and adapted at several places, if possible with more durable materials;
- The new guides from Terbaq village should be properly trained, as before only Omar and his relatives from another village were trained;
- Clear logbooks should be prepared, so that tourist can provide their proper feedback;
- A fixed entrance fee should be asked and the money should (at least partly) be used for maintaining and expanding the cave infrastructures;
- There should be headsets made available for tourists and a few powerful lights for the guides;
- Information flyers with more details should be present for visitors in different languages (Italian, Arabic, French, Russian, English);
- More information could be made available at a touristic centre, but visits should always be guided and coordinated by local authorities;
- Local communities should gain a profit, not only individuals or some authorities.
- A full consultancy master plan, based on our direct experience, can be provided upon request (generators, big fixed lights inside the cave, too much promotion and high impact constructions should be avoided at all cost)!

Hoq Cave Visits Season 2009 - 2010



LIFE ON THE ISLAND

INTRODUCING THE DRAGONFLIES ON SOCOTRA

Richard Porter, BirdLife International

Dragonflies are amongst the largest and most spectacular insects. They are day-flying, easy to observe and are good indicators of unpolluted water. Dragonflies are placed in the order 'Odonata' which means 'tooth jaws'. The adults have the largest eyes of any insect and two pairs of large wings. There are over 5,300 species in the world.

The life history of a dragonfly has four distinct stages: egg, larva, pupa and adult. Eggs are laid directly into the water or into plant tissue to protect them. The larvae hatch after 2-5 weeks, depending on temperature. The larva is an 'eating machine' which grows through a number of stages (instars) at the end of which it splits its skin to grow into the next instar.

Dragonflies can remain in the larval form for one or two years, but the length of time for those species occurring on Socotra has not been studied. The larva develops onto a pupa which changes from gill-breathing to air-breathing and emerges on the stem of vegetation. It is from this last stage that the adult insect will emerge. Adults are short-lived and after mating and egg-laying soon die. Dragonflies are carnivores: the larva are aggressive predators, hunting by ambushing their prey underwater, particularly insect larvae, fleas, snails and small fish. The adults prey on flying insects.

Dragonflies on Socotra

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

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 streamlets 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. Swarms of the migrant Globe Skimmer *Pantala flavescens* in October and November can be spectacular.

The most important systematic survey of the dragonflies of Socotra is published in *Zoology in the Middle East*, Volume 50 (2010): A contribution to the knowledge of the odonatofauna of the Socotra Archipelago (Yemen) - *Elisa Riservato, Cristina Grieco, Francesca Pella, Roberto Sindaco, Fabio Pupin, Ahmed Saeed Suleiman, Mauro Fasola*. See also *The Fauna of the Socotra Archipelago* (2003). Wolfgang Wranik. Published by Universitat Rostock, Germany.

A list of all Socotran dragonflies is on the FoS website.



Crocothemis erythraea, female



Macrodiplax cora



Orthetrum sabina



Orthetrum chrysostigma
mating

LIFE ON THE ISLAND

Socotra Buzzard

Richard Porter

The recently named Socotra Buzzard *Buteo socotraensis* has just entered the Guinness Book of Records as the Newest Bird of Prey!

After spending more than a century without a name, the Socotra Buzzard *Buteo socotraensis* has at last been named officially, in a paper by Richard Porter and Guy Kirwan the June 2010 issue of the Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club (Studies of Socotran Birds VI: the taxonomic status of the Socotra Buzzard). Like all other members of the *Buteo buteo* superspecies, it is poorly differentiated genetically from most Old World buzzards, but it is closest to *B. (b.) bannermani* of the Cape Verde Islands and the comparatively widespread Long-legged Buzzard *B. rufinus* of the southern Palearctic. As well as discussing taxonomy, the authors also describe its breeding biology, diet and conservation prospects – the taxon should probably be ranked as Vulnerable according to IUCN criteria. The Socotra Buzzard is now in the Guinness Book of Records as the newest species of bird of prey in the world.



Juvenile Socotra Buzzard



Adult Socotra Buzzard with centipede

The naming of the Socotra Buzzard brings the number of endemic bird species on Socotra to ten. It now ranks alongside the Highlands of Yemen as the most important area for bird endemism in the whole of the Middle East, Europe, Central Asia and North Africa.

Checklist of the Birds of the Socotra Archipelago

Richard Porter & Ahmed Saeed Suleiman, on behalf of the Socotra Governance and Biodiversity Project, the Environment Protection Authority & BirdLife International, have prepared an updated list of all birds recorded on the Archipelago as of February 2011.

See FoS website for complete list.

Annotated Checklist and Distribution of the Socotran Archipelago Herpetofauna (Reptilia)

Edoardo Razzetti, Roberto Sindaco, Cristina Grieco, Francesca Pella, Ugo Ziliani, Fabio Pupin, Elisa Riservato, Daniele Pellitteri-Rosa, Luca Butikofer, Ahmed Saeed Suleiman, Badar Awadh al-Aseily, Caterina Carugati, Eleonora Boncompagni & Mauro Fasola

We update the knowledge on the 30 terrestrial reptile species of Socotra, an archipelago well known for its highly endemic flora and fauna. We use the records obtained during several surveys throughout all the islands of the archipelago, carried out between 2007 and 2010, as well as the bibliographic records. We recorded all the known species of terrestrial reptiles for the islands (*Chamaeleo monachus*, *Haemodracon riebeckii*, *Haemodracon trachyrhinus*, *Hemidactylus dracaenacolus*, *H. granti*, *H. homoeolepis*, *H. flaviviridis*, *H. forbesi*, *H. inintellectus*, *H. oxyrhinus*, *H. robustus*, *H. pumilio*, *Pristurus abdelkuri*, *P. guichardi*, *P. obsti*, *P. insignoides*, *P. insignis*, *P. sokotranus*, *P. samhaensis*, *Mesalina balfouri*, *M. kuri*, *Hakaria simonyi*, *Trachylepis socotrana*, *Pachycalamus brevis*, *Leptotyphlops filiformis*, *L. macrurus*, *L. wilsoni*, *Typhlops socotranus*, *Dityophis vivax*, *Hemerophis socotrae*). We report for the first time the occurrence of *Hemidactylus robustus* in Samha Island. *H. homoeolepis* is excluded from the fauna of Abd al-Kuri Island.

Zootaxa 2826: 1–44 (2011) www.mapress.com/zootaxa/

LIFE ON THE ISLAND

Turtle Hunting Continues in Reserve

Zuzana Tollrianova

The turtle nesting season in Socotra stretches from the beginning of May till the end of August, during which around 200 turtle females (EPA and UNDP SCDP estimates) of four species (*Chelonian mydas*, *Eretmochelys imbricate*, *Caretta caretta*, *Lepidochelys olivacea*) arrive at Socotra's beaches to lay their eggs. Not all of them accomplish their mission successfully as they are also a welcomed supplement to the Socotri diet and night life. Their oil and meat, said to have a magic property and cure all the diseases, attract numerous turtle hunters, sneaking along the dark beaches by car, boat or just walking.

Around eight volunteer guards from the local community, Fisheries and Tourism offices and the EPA patrol in shifts the 12 kms of the Abalhan Turtle Protected Area, but they are certainly not enough. By the end of June the death toll rose to 48 and this is probably not the total. Turtle carapaces are being found around the island, some hidden in caves, some openly left behind on beaches or inland places like Wadi Ayhaft of Dirhor. Recently even the use of firearms for self defense by the hunters has been reported. There are some successes though thanks to the night guarding and increasing cooperation of the Public Security. A group of hunters was caught red-handed in the protected area and put into prison for few days. One turtle still alive was found hidden in a trunk of a car, arriving at 3 am from the West to the Police checkpoint Hadibo. Although 37 turtle crime files have been raised to the Hadibo court up to date no offender has yet been convicted and thus the penalty of two months in prison or 10,000 USD according to the Fisheries Law has been not applied.



Living turtle in a police car prior to its release after rescue

Carapaces in Wadi Ayhaft



Photos from
Abduljameel
Abdullah, SGBP and
EPA

CULTURE AND HERITAGE

The Island that No Longer Sings

The unique language of the Yemeni archipelago is in danger of extinction

April 2010—Daily Star, Lebanon

The elderly people of Socotra might be feeling nostalgia, not just a longing for an older way of life, but also great fear for the future of their endangered language and cultural heritage. “[Socotri] is endangered because it’s not written,” says ethnographer and linguist Miranda Morris, who’s been visiting the island since 1989.

The Socotri people speak a language, Socotri, or Saqatari as they call it, which has no written form. It’s of a family of six languages known as the Modern South Arabian languages (MSA) that were widely spoken in southern Arabia for centuries, perhaps even for millennia, and have managed to survive in isolated areas in southern Yemen and southern Oman. These include Mahri, spoken in parts of Yemen’s Mahra governorate, near the Omani border, and a now-dead language called Bat’hari in Oman’s coastal Dhofar area. Other languages in southern Arabia disappeared as Islam was gradually adopted along with the language of the Koran, Arabic. The MSA are part of the larger group of Semitic languages that includes Arabic, Hebrew and Amharic, spoken in Ethiopia and Eritrea, which is the second-largest Semitic language after Arabic.

Socotri is one of several thousand oral languages that exist around the world without a script, which makes them vulnerable to extinction if their speakers adopt more dominant languages and cultures, as is happening in Socotra.

“Less than 20% of languages are written even today,” says Gregory Anderson, director of the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages. “All languages were oral before the development of writing four or five millennia ago.”

The Living Tongues Institute recently launched the Enduring Voices Project with National Geographic to preserve the world’s threatened languages.

Although Arabic and Socotri share many phonetic sounds, Socotri has letters that are unique to it, and which are difficult for beginners to learn. Each of the two languages is incomprehensible to speakers of the other unless it is learned, despite some similarities. In a town east of Hadibu, the island’s capital, an elderly Socotri woman claims she never interacts with native Arabic speakers: She doesn’t speak or understand the language. But the picture is rather different only 45 minutes away here in Hadibu, where Socotris speak a mix of Arabic and Socotri, with Arabic usually dominating conversations. “Our children do not know Socotri now,” says Ahmad Abdallah, 50, a Socotri poet. “If I give them an old word from our grandparents’ [time], something related to goat herding, for example, they don’t know what it means. Sometimes they can’t pronounce the right Socotri, so they use Arabic.”

Even the island’s main artistic expression, poetry, has been inter-penetrated with Arabic. Socotri poetry is usually sung and sometimes improvised. It was once a part of everyday life, but the spread of a conservative form of Islam has reduced its use. It’s said that in the past if poetry wasn’t heard from a house when someone passed it, they tried to find out what ill had befallen its residents. Now the island appears to have stopped singing. “Singing was widespread,” says Fahd Kfayin, secretary general of The Heritage and History Association of Socotra. “When people fished they sang, when they herded, when they rode camels for long distances. There’s a song in every situation that fits with the environment and with the movements of the activity.”

A Socotri living in the city says that his young daughter replaces the Socotri-specific letters with closely-related Arabic ones. He attributes this to the fact that she spends the majority of her days studying Arabic in school. The daughter is emblematic of a significant and worrisome transformation, in one person’s lifetime, of a language that has survived the centuries. Many believe that the rapid development of the island, while mostly beneficial, has had a direct impact on its language. This is especially true in the capital, where all business is carried out in Arabic. Many business owners are from the Yemeni mainland and do not speak Socotri. The language of instruction in schools is Arabic, with no Socotri component. “It became necessary for Socotris to use Arabic to communicate with others,” explains Kfayin. “The doctor, the teacher, the salesman, the police chief are not from Socotra, so Socotris are forced to use it [Arabic], and therefore have had to learn it.”

The problem is more widespread among those who are 30-years-old or younger. As more and more Socotris go to school or move from the mountainous areas to the capital, they increasingly speak Arabic as a sign of progress and prestige, abandoning Socotri altogether. “Once the group in power is solidified and their written language enfranchised ... [other smaller groups] may be devalued as dialects or unworthy of being written,” writes Anderson. “If such negative valuation from the socially dominant language group takes root, the language will likely be abandoned before it can be written. This is a typical scenario.”

Morris believes that, due to the absence of a state-led program to preserve Socotri, it’s at great risk of extinction. Socotri individuals who are aware of the danger are eagerly trying to create an alphabet to record the language in the face of the growing trend of the use of Arabic. But little else is being done. International researchers, who arrive regularly on the island, are more interested in Socotra’s stunning natural resources. In the meantime, the Socotri language may be slowly disappearing, taking with it its unknown cultural wealth.

CULTURE AND HERITAGE

AIYS Library

Stephen Holness & Faraj Al-'Araimi

The American Institute for Yemeni Studies (AIYS) is an independent research facility in Sana'a, Yemen. AIYS provides numerous services for foreign and Yemeni members who are conducting research in the country, including access to its large academic library. The AIYS library is also one of the few public libraries in Yemen, and is perhaps the best English-language library in the country.

Containing over 7,000 books, 200 journal titles, 3,000 articles; primarily in Arabic and English and a few other European languages; the general collection of the library houses publications about Yemen, the Middle East, and increasingly the Horn of Africa. These works range from purely literary ones, such as novels and poetry, to policy papers and academic texts. AIYS also strives to build certain niche collections, including every dissertation about Yemen in English written over the past three decades; governmental and non-governmental publications about development issues in Yemen; and books published by Yemeni governmental agencies, especially the Ministry of Culture, which are not readily available to the public. Special focus is given to areas of particular interest among AIYS-affiliated scholars, such as studies about the flora and fauna of Yemen and Soqatra, including foundational texts such as *Socotra: a Natural History of the Islands and Their People* (Cheung and DeVantier and Van Damme), *Ethnoflora of the Soqatra Archipelago* (Miller and Morris), and *Fauna of the Soqatra Archipelago* (Wranik).

In addition to its paper-based resources, AIYS provides access to JSTOR, a large electronic database for periodicals, as well as wireless internet connection. There is also quiet study space, a work room, and a lecture area which hosts monthly public discussions on topics of general interest pertaining to Yemen.

The AIYS library is open from Saturday through Wednesday, 09:30 to 16:30. Access to the library is free of charge.

Faraj Al-'Araimi, Librarian at the American Institute for Yemeni Studies, cataloguing the institute's library. Photo by Kay Van Damme, Sana'a, August 2010



Friends of Soqatra Annual Conference 25-26 September 2010—Exeter, England

The Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter hosted the ninth Friends of Soqatra Annual General Meeting and Conference. Organised by Julian Jansen van Rensburg who is working with the MARES project at the University, about 30 people assembled on Friday night ready for a full day of conference proceedings on Saturday. Presentations in the morning by Francesca Pella (sustainable management of Soqotran biodiversity), Carl Phillips (exploration of Soqatra in 1834/5), Salem Yousef Muftah (Health infrastructure on the island), Hana Habrova (native tree planting) and Kay van Damme (recent developments) were followed by a wonderful lunch provided by the Institute.



In the afternoon the AGM discussed the business of the organization, including the newsletter, website and projects. Officers were elected and new people joined the Committee (see page 23). As always, there was far more to discuss than time available, and discussions continued over dinner and during the excursions the next day, when most of the group visited the Gardens of Heligan.



PUBLICATIONS

Soqotra – Heritage and Future Distribution and Proceeds

Sue Christie & Roderic Dutton

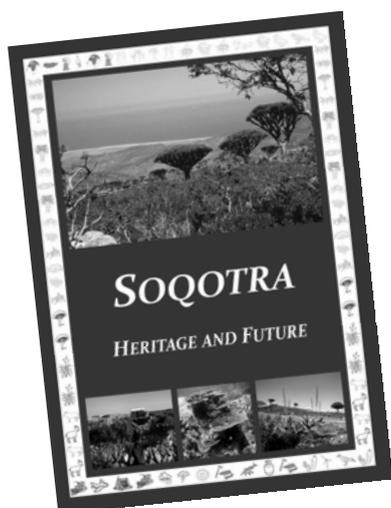
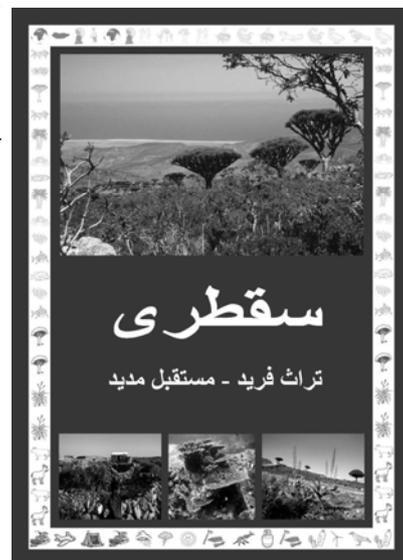
The Darwin Initiative funded environmental education project which led to the publication of the above book has now seen almost 10,000 copies of the soft-cover A4 book distributed on Soqotra since January 2011. The books arrived on the island in May 2010 following an eventful journey, immediately endured a cyclone and required some editorial work involving sticky labels and lots of effort by local youngsters at the English School and Development for Isolated People garage. The goal is that every family will have access to one of the books, and English copies are being used in schools and will be available for tourists to purchase with the funds going to projects on the islands.

The distribution began in earnest in late January 2011. The distribution to villages and individual households has virtually been completed. This represents 6,000 Arabic books to about 300 villages. About 3,500 books remained to be distributed as of April, with about 20 more villages to receive the books. The islands of Abd Al Kuri and Samha have not been reached yet. The remaining books will be distributed to the headmasters of individual schools throughout the island. The concern now regarding the remaining books is to protect them from both the weather and insect (in particular termite) damage.

First impression of interest in the book: As members of the DIP team have been out and about on the island (subsequent to the distribution) they have noted that the book has been well received and Soqotrans are fascinated with a book about their island. After the distribution in Hadibo one could see groups of people and children reading and discussing the books. It has been observed that some students are carrying the book along with their school books.

We are extremely grateful for the enormous efforts by Len Pierce, Larry Dickson, Ali Muqaddam and others in storing, amending and distributing the books. We hope to continue to monitor their use and report on the projects aided by the sale of the English version.

The English version of the books were given to the Socotra Tourist Centre, The Women's Co-op, the tourist shop at the airport, the Al Jazeera Café, Socotra Folk Museum and the Summerland Hotel. A total of YER 156,000 (US\$730) has already been received from the sale of the English books. Due to the unrest in the country tourism virtually stopped on the island at the end of March. This money and subsequent sales will benefit the following projects, among others.



- **Pre-school project in Deham village.** The women running the project had acquired a building along with some furnishings and materials. The pilot project (from February through May of 2011) had seen 60 students coming to the classes. However, some basic supplies were needed for each student and 28,000 YER was given to this project for the initial student supplies. They are encouraged by the support from the families and village. They expect more students in September. Families will be asked to pay for the future student supplies. A visit was made to the school observing the facilities, classes and the materials being used in the classes. It was a very positive, encouraging and heart warming experience.
- **Folk museum:** The proceeds from the sale of books distributed to the Socotra Folk Museum have been retained by the Museum for its operating needs.
- **Women's Co-op:** The group has sold seven books and those proceeds will remain with the Co-op for its operations.

The team on the island constantly is looking for other projects that would benefit from the funds generated by the sale of the English books. If you know of a project which would benefit from a small contribution please contact Larry Dickson at DIP.

RESEARCH

Biodiversity and Climate Research Centre (BiK-F) and Senckenberg Research Institute and Natural History Museum (SFN), Frankfurt a.M., Germany - *Tropical-Marine Ecosystem Group*

Edouard Lavergne, Fareed Krupp, Fouad N. Saeed, Hannes Pulch, Maren Ziegler, Rebecca Klaus, Tilman Alpermann, and Uwe Zajonz

The *BiK-F Field Research Station* (FRS) has been established in Hadibo serving as platform for the joint research activities of the Biodiversity and Climate Research Centre Frankfurt (BiK-F), the Environmental Protection Authority and other Yemeni institutions on Socotra. The FRS as well as the research activities of the BiK-F and the Senckenberg is based on the Framework Agreement on Scientific and Technical Cooperation and the associated Memorandum of Agreement concerning Socotra signed between the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA), the Ministry of Water and Environment Yemen (MoWE) and the BiK-F/SFN.

The BiK-F Field Research Station was designed to offer research teams decent working and living conditions on Socotra. The FRS establishment started in March 2009 and was finished in December 2010. Located in the very east of Hadiboh City, some 100 m away from the shore and the ring road, it provides easy access to the sea and the road system. The FRS consists of two buildings, the Dormitory and the Science Building and encompasses two terraces to sit and work under open sky and a small garden.

The Dormitory Building provides three to four sleeping rooms and can comfortably accommodate up to eight people, who share a small living room, an equipped kitchen, two bathrooms and an outside shower. The Science Building contains an air conditioned office equipped with several workplaces, a desktop computer with internet connection and telephone, a meeting space, microscopy work spaces and a basic marine library. The well ventilated wet lab is equipped with sinks and work benches serving the handling, washing, sorting and storage of samples. Close-by is the compressor room harboring two breathing air compressors and SCUBA tanks and the store room where survey equipment such as diving and camping equipment are kept safely. Another bath room is available here to shower off the dust of the field work.

A 4WD Toyota Double Cabin pick-up truck ensures mobility on the island. A ramp allows direct loading and unloading of a car from the street into the station. Daily operations are supported by 2000 L water tanks and a generator which provide freshwater and the power needed in the station at times of heavy duty and unreliable public water and electricity supply.

Researchers of international and Yemeni institutions are admitted for joint study and research or as guests upon request on a cost-recovery base. So far it has been used by researchers of the BiK-F, the University of Ghent, the University of Tübingen and the Royal Botanical Gardens Edinburgh as well as several Yemeni institutions and authorities.



FRS Socotra
left Dormitory Building, right
Science Building



RESEARCH

Systemic Approach for Conservation and Sustainable Management of Socotra Biodiversity

Francesca Pella

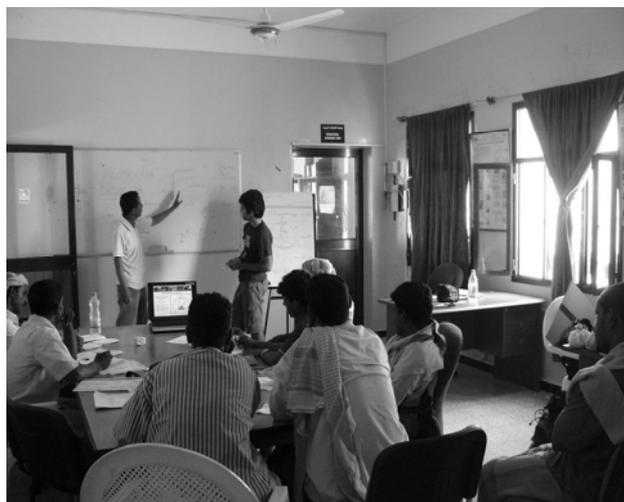


Training session in the field with Prof. Mauro Fasola (with folder) and Dr. Francesca Pella, the scientific coordinator and technical expert of Animal Terrestrial Ecology team, Italian Cooperation of Minister of Foreign Affairs

The achievements of vulnerable ecosystem management are often difficult to assess, since most developing countries have no established system for monitoring trends in biodiversity. On the Socotra archipelago, we used a 'bottom-up' approach and involved local stakeholders in the decision-making processes in order to obtain a meaningful impact on land-use decision making. We developed a comprehensive Decision Support System (DSS), in collaboration with the consulting firm PROGES and the Universities of Rome "La Sapienza" and Pavia. The DSS is aimed at enhancing the institutional capacity of the local and central governments of Yemen to plan, manage and monitor sustainable development on Socotra. The work was carried out in close cooperation with the Yemeni Environmental Protection Authority (EPA). After a first phase in 2007 with UNDP, the Italian Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, launched a new project in 2009 to support sustainable development on the Socotra archipelago, called (قدرات, pronunciation: cudarat, **C**apacities **D**evelopment fo**R** socotra **A**rchipelago conserva**T**ion). One of the first activities of this project was to develop an integrated "reference framework", drafted jointly with EPA, with the support of the DSS, following the Strategic Environmental Assessment approach defined in the OECD "Good Practice Guidance".

We focused our efforts on capacity building of local collaborators for the conservation and management of ecosystem services: field surveys, database input, explanation of biological indicators used in the DSS, and

software training. The overall aims, shared by the seven Italian scientific teams (fisheries and marine environment, fresh water management, wildlife and livestock management, botany, socio-economics, health, infrastructures including energy, roads, solid waste), were to create and implement the DSS and to integrate the contributions of the local stakeholders. We are presently carrying out projects, coherent with the reference framework, for the sustainable development of the Archipelago. All these projects aim for the essential collaboration of the trainees, in a process defined as "training on the job", and to the main goal of the Italian project, the training process. The project is ongoing, and the following main outputs have been achieved so far: the collection of the baseline data for the DSS, some degree of capacity building, and the involvement of our collaborators in scientific publications on the reptile fauna that is rich in endemic species. We are also preparing the necessary information in order to attribute a vulnerability category to each species of terrestrial reptile of the Socotra archipelago, since they do not have a IUCN Red List assessment. This assessment is crucial in order to properly address conservation efforts on Socotra and contribute to a better protection of this World Heritage site.



Lesson in the office with trainees of botanical and wildlife teams: Mrs Luca Malatesta (expert of botany) and Abdurraqeb Shamsan Abdullah (local units coordinator) are explaining the geographical coordinate systems, in order to learn the proper use of GPS in the field

RESEARCH

Past and Present Human Impacts on the Biodiversity of Socotra Island (Yemen): implications for future conservation

Kay Van Damme & Lisa Banfield

The Socotra Archipelago (Yemen) is globally recognized for its outstanding biodiversity and endemism, designated on this basis a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008. The island underwent long geological and political isolation, ensuring preservation of unique ecosystems until

the start of the new millennium. Now, Socotra Island is undergoing rapid development, out of balance with conservation. Major causes for biodiversity loss in other global insular ecosystems such as habitat fragmentation and degradation, pollution, invasive species and the impact of tourism, are becoming pressing issues that deserve close attention. Unsustainable resource use, the loss of traditional land management and illegal trade in biota are worrying phenomena that further increase the pressures on Socotra's ecosystems. We provide the first comprehensive review of potential human impacts on Socotra before the 21st century, an updated discussion of some of the principal threats to its biodiversity in recent times, discussing local examples within a historical context of known extinction processes on islands, and underline the importance of traditional knowledge in the protection of Socotran ecosystems.

Biodiversity Conservation in the Arabian Peninsula, Zoology in the Middle East Supplementum 3:2011:31-88

The Climate of Soqotra

Paul Scholte & Peter De Geest

The climate of Socotra, influenced by the Indian Ocean Monsoon, is poorly known, hampering understanding of its paleoclimate and (endemic) biodiversity. Mean annual rainfall and temperature, measured in a network of meteorological stations from 2002 to 06, were 216 mm and 28.9°C. Combined with cloud cover information from satellite images, this data provides clear ideas on inter- and intra-annual variability. Precipitation derived from the northeast (NE) winter monsoon influences especially the NE plateaus and windward side of the Haggeher Mountains because of orographic effects. The southwest (SW) summer monsoon concentrates at the southern half of the island and generally produces less rainfall. During the SW summer monsoon, clouds cover the highlands and plateaus south of the Haggeher Mountains, creating fog. Preliminary measurements suggest that at higher altitudes, fog-derived moisture may constitute up to two-thirds of total moisture, amounting up to 800 mm. The predominant SW aspect of the enigmatic dragons blood tree underlines the importance of fog. Long-term weather observations by Socotri put these short-term meteorological observations into a longer perspective. Socotri informants also described the drought years when livestock populations crashed, after which windows of opportunities for the regeneration of dragons blood and other grazing-sensitive trees may have occurred.

Journal of Arid Environments 2010.05.017



Soil conservation in Homhil – second step

Dana Pietsch

As reported in *Tayf 2009* results of soil investigations showed that in Homhil Protected Area erosion due to soil structure and humus loss increases drastically. When soil is eroded, trees are uprooted and the possibility for fresh food supplies for cattle in dry seasons is reduced.

After preserving the soil by building walls in terms of sediment traps (done in 2007) tree planting on sediments behind these walls was done in January 2011. Together with Ahmed Adeeb from the nursery in Hadiboh, and with the help of Homhil residents, the first endemic *Boswellia elongata* seedlings, grown in the nursery, have been planted within pottery made in Momi. Fences for the protection of single trees have been created and positioned. If successful, more trees will be planted in 2012. To preserve soil and plants for the future generations, soil conservation on Socotra Island is strongly recommended.



COMMENTARY

Soqotra's Transformation Process: A Social Science Perspective

Serge D. Elie*

Change is the genome of both society and nature: That is, change is intrinsic to society's development and nature's evolution. Yet, the dominant narrative about Soqotra's environment and community is one that conflates social change with environmental damage, and even "ecological tsunami." This is evident in a series of recent hyperbolic and anachronistic descriptions of Soqotra's people and environment. Two representative samples taken from recent policy documents are offered. The first ignores the island's complex economic geography and depicts Soqotrans as if they were inhabitants of Arcadia, an idyllic pastoral abode frozen in time: "They live by fishing, herding livestock, date cultivation and gathering plant products – a lifestyle that has changed little since the first settlers arrived 2000 years ago." The second likens Soqotra's environment to Noah's Ark: "The natural environment of Soqotra has retained an impressive level of integrity till present date, making it the equivalent of a precious Noah's Ark, where ancient flora and fauna, as well as an associated unique culture and traditions, have survived until the present day." In addition to these historically uninformed and primitivizing descriptions of the island and its inhabitants, there is the problematic status of the knowledge of Soqotra's environmental problems, which is mostly anecdotal. That is, it is not based on sustained empirical research but on logical deduction and hasty generalizations from unsystematic observations, and that usually and prematurely blame Soqotrans' livelihood practices. I offer two examples from recently published sources: The first is the presumption of an "overgrazing problem" in the absence of adequate data on the animal population and of its distribution, and without taking into consideration the actual human population distribution in settlements around the island: "Human population movements to larger settlements, where the practice of keeping a household herd in addition to the main one increases the pressure of grazing around these settlements." The fact is that outside the two main urban agglomerations of the island, only 22, from over 600, villages have a population of more than 200 inhabitants, and nearly all of which are on the least biodiversity endowed coastal zones, according to the 2004 census. The second is the existence of a contrived "wood fuel crisis" that is claimed to be leading to "vanishing forests" in Soqotra, which is based on a catastrophic scenario analysis and not on the testimonies of local residents or on multiple sampling of regions of the island, and without considering external aggravating factors (e.g., climate change) or internal mitigating factors (e.g., increasing use of cooking gas): "Rural and urban population growth and the associated demand for wood as fuel for domestic consumption have induced uncontrolled deforestation and widespread destruction of the semiarid forest biome."

Both, the condescending ascription of Soqotrans as denizens of Arcadia and shipmates from Noah's Ark, and the Cassandra-like environmental predictions are couched in the language of advocacy, which was useful in raising the attention of the world vis-à-vis the need to protect Soqotra's environment, but is no longer an adequate foundation for environmental policy. Moreover, these descriptions reflect the external observers' environmental perceptions inspired by a fear of the impending demise of "a *self-sufficient* pastoral society" that never existed in Soqotra, and that neglect Soqotrans' aspiration for socio-economic advancement. As a result, there is an absence of a shared valuation of the environment between well-intentioned environmentalists and most Soqotrans, which has led to the adoption of a conservation policy for Soqotra that suffers from what I call the "let's save them from modernity" syndrome: A form of modernization-prevention on the island that far exceeds the exigencies of its environmental conservation. This policy has not only reified conservation and development into two mutually exclusive alternatives, but also alienated Soqotrans from recent environmental conservation initiatives. This is evident in the summary evaluation of Soqotrans' problematic reception of the main environmental conservation initiative: "Although SCDP [Soqotra Conservation & Development Project] and SCF [Soqotra Conservation Fund] have been working with local communities for nearly 10 years, perceptions of local benefits that can be derived from biodiversity remain tentative at best... Even though the CZP [Conservation Zoning Plan] was developed in a highly participatory manner, local communities did not immediately support the enforcement of the conservation zones... Local communities only cooperate with the project because they hope to benefit directly from the *project* rather than from the *outcomes* of the project" (SGBP project document, 2008:9).

This unfavorable, yet accurate, assessment of over a decade of conservation work on the island begs for an explanation, which I locate in the continuing contradiction between project objectives and Soqotrans' socio-economic priorities. This is the consequence of ignoring the changes in the socio-cultural context of the islanders that resulted from the institutional modifications and economic interventions of different political regimes over the last century, and which have transformed Soqotrans' relationship to their environment. This unawareness of historical change and the assumption of cultural continuity from "2000 years ago" have resulted in a crucial disjuncture between the environmental ethos of conservation policy designers and Soqotrans: In the case of the policy designers they adopted a virtual standpoint, which was driven by an abstract ahistorical thinking that modeled the island's environment into unrealistic maps of zones to be protected, and structured the use of its resources within a regulatory framework that was more responsive to global environmental concerns than to Soqotrans' lived experience in their local environment. In the case of Soqotrans, they embodied a practical outlook, which stemmed from experiential learning in their quest for effective material and social practices for livelihood-making adapted to the island's natural settings as well as to climatic change and government economic policies.

COMMENTARY

This disjuncture in environmental ethos led to an inadequate policy vis-à-vis the current historical period in Soqatra. The adopted policy, as described in the CZP and in the rationale of UN projects and EU planning documents, sought to recreate an “ecological community” based on “environmental practices of eons”, which were in use until the time of the Sultan. This was a period of seasonal food shortages, which engendered chronic hunger because Soqotrans were primarily reliant on nature’s bounty as well as its vagaries. Then, the prevailing human-environment ethic was based on a relationship of commensality: That is, livelihood was intrinsically guided by the judicious consumption, sharing and conserving of environmental resources as a communal virtue. However, by the time of the UN intervention in the mid 1990s, the nature of the human-environment relations in Soqatra had already changed. From the early 1970s onward, the state partially substituted itself for nature, and thus shifted Soqotrans’ dependency from the environment to its institutions, which modified their relationship with the environment. Moreover, this period heralded the establishment of a parallel economy to the previously dominant pastoral economy, namely an urban and coastal-based economy that offered alternative means of livelihoods (e.g., fishing, office jobs, tourism, etc) with a regular salary instead of the cashless subsistence pastoral livelihood of the rural economy; thereby initiating an inexorable shift in economic orientation: From an environmental dependency to a cash dependency that has been accelerating ever since.

Finally, the disengagement of Soqotrans from Soqatra’s environmental protection initiatives’ locally mal-adapted objectives, will persist until environmental policy for Soqatra is based on the following: (a) the empirical assessment (not logical deduction) of Soqatra’s environmental problems framed within the island’s historical continuum, and informed by Soqotrans’ evolving economic incentives and social needs, and the corresponding mutations in their livelihood practices, and environmental values; and (b), the government’s official recognition of the Soqotri language as the ultimate repository of the island’s rich repertoire of traditional ecological knowledge, given the inextricable interdependency between biodiversity and cultural diversity conservation.

Notes:

* He has D.Phil in social anthropology and is currently completing a book which elaborates on the themes of this article.

Republic of Yemen, (2006) *Socotra Archipelago: Proposal for Inclusion in the World Heritage List of UNESCO*. Sana’a: Ministry of Environment and Water, p. 40.

Ibid., p. 6.

A. G. Miller and M. Morris, (2004) *Ethnoflora of the Soqatra Archipelago*. Edinburgh: The Royal Botanical Garden Edinburgh, p. 42.

G. Orlando and B. Mies (2001) “Vanishing Forests and sustainable Development of an Arid Island, Soqatra (Yemen): An Example,” *Insula* 10:2 (September), p. 97.

NOTE: This article is the opinion of the author and has been reproduced exactly as provided. Translation has been kindly provided by Lena A. H. Al-Eryani and in the interests of simplification is not a direct ‘word for word’ translation.

Donation to Soqotri Physician

Dr. Khalid Sorour, Professor of Cardiology, Cardiology Dept. Kasr Al Ain Hospital, Faculty of Medicine, Cairo University, Egypt, donated \$500 (five hundred dollars) to Dr. Salem Yousef to help him with the necessary expenses for his year in UK studying tropical paediatrics at Liverpool University this year, funded by the British-Yemeni Society. This period of study includes time spent in the field on Soqatra carrying out research towards his final degree. We are glad to report that Dr. Salem has just returned safely from this period of field work and is now continuing his studies in Liverpool.

Obituary — Margaret Munro

We are sorry to have to report the death last October of Miss Margaret Munro, a founder member of the Friends of Soqatra, and a woman who had been a great traveller and mountain-climber in her youth. She was very interested in Soqatra, and only old age and ill-health frustrated her plans for making a trip to the island. She was a generous supporter of the Friends of Soqatra, contributing generously to many projects on the island, including the Soqatra Public Library, the Soqatra Folk Museum and the collections of early photographs of the island which were distributed to these two organisations. She read every publication about the island she could get hold of, and welcomed the FoS representative for Oman, Ahmad Sa’ad Tahki, and his wife, Sa’idah, to her home in Edinburgh. In her will she left a most generous bequest to the Friends of Soqatra, stipulating that it be used for the benefit of the islanders for ‘the conservation and preservation of their unique island’.

ETCETERA

Socotra Dragon's Blood resin as a natural food preservative

Analysis of the resin of *Dracaena cinnabari* from Soqotra (the Dragon's Blood Tree), which is used as a traditional herbal medicine on the island, has confirmed some of its remarkable traits. In a recent study, Gupta & Gupta (2011) have investigated the use of the resin as a **natural food preservative**. Food preservation is important to avoid food spoilage for a long period of time, for example of fruits and vegetables. The researchers analyzed two main properties: 1. the **antimicrobial** activity of the *Dracaena* resin, inhibiting the growth of fungi and bacteria, and 2. the **antioxidant** activity, inhibiting the decay of food through oxidation. The study showed that the resin is very effective against bacterial and fungal food pathogens, and that it indeed has a high antioxidant activity, linked to the high phenolic content. Its antioxidant and antimicrobial traits are partly responsible for the use of this resin in traditional medicine, as anti-inflammatory, as a wound healing agent and against diarrhea and dysentery. The latter traits of the resin are well known to the Soqotri. Other studies on chemical properties of Soqotran plants, like several *Boswellia* species, also confirm a high natural antimicrobial activity.

Gupta & Gupta. *BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine* 2011, 11:13 & Mothana et al. *Food Chemistry* 2011, 126: 1149-1154.



Young dragon's blood tree planted in a garden



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/biologie/wranik/socotra. University of Rostock (Animals)

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

www.yemen-protectedareas.org

www.socotraproject.org – SGBP website

Friends of Soqotra Website

John Farrar, who has been managing the FOS website since its beginning, has decided to pass on the work. We are very grateful for all the wonderful work John has done and thank him very much for his excellent work.

Dana Pietsch has agreed to be the interim webmaster; contact her at Dana.pietsch@uni-tuebingen.de with any information you'd like to put on the FoS website.

Ahmad Sa'ad Khamis Tahki from Homhil

Ahmad and Sa'idah visited Margaret Munro in her Edinburgh flat, during their very happy visit to stay with Miranda and Hugh Morris in June 2008. I was lucky enough to see them both again in February this year. While still disabled by his stroke and with limited speech, I was glad to see Ahmad and Sa'idah looking serene and surrounded by members of their large and loving family.

Stethoscopes for Hadiboh Hospital

Three stethoscopes were handed over on behalf of FoS by Dr. Salem Yours to Khadija, Zainab and Amina for them to use in the Labour Room, Female Ward and Out-Patient Clinic of Hadiboh Hospital. Dr Salem reports that they were delighted to receive them, as there is a serious shortage of stethoscopes in the hospital.



Peter de Geest finds a reminder of Soqotra in Australia!

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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.

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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Gathering summer fuel



Hadibo fish souk



Off to school



The morning catch



Towards the national tree



Washing clothes

*All photos by
Richard Porter,
spring 2011*