

# Friends of Soqotra

## Conference and Annual General Meeting

8-9 September 2006  
Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh

### *MINUTES*

#### Conference.

##### Present:

Dana Pietsch, John Shipman, Salem Abdullah bin Ashoor al-Mahri, Hana Habrova, Zdenek Cermak, Martin Coree, Miranda Morris, Roderic Dutton, Sue Christie, Tony Miller, Sabina Knees, Dennis Hansen, Jens Mogens Oleson, Julian Paxton, Nelly Paxton, Rowan Salim, John Dickson, John Farrar, John Mason, Sue Mason, Sandy Smith, Morag Smith, Wolfgang Schneider, Tony Harris, Alfredo Velido, Sophie Neil, Abdelmalek Eagle, Pixie Shipman

##### Presentations and Discussion

Hana Habrova - Climate of Soqotra with a view to Rainfall

Zdenek Cermak - Changes in Montane *Dracaena* Vegetation in 100 Years

Roderic Dutton – *Dracaena* and Corona

Dana Pietsch - Soil Degradation in Soqotra

Dennis Hansen & Jens Mogens Oleson - Lizards as pollinators and seed dispersers on islands.

Kay Van Damme – Book on Natural Heritage and History of Soqotra.

The presentations were most interesting and summaries will be prepared for the Website and *Tayf*.

##### Workshops

These discussions began on Friday afternoon but were continued on Saturday morning; this summarises both discussions.

**Getting Aid to the Island – Sewing Machines and Disaster Relief.** Miranda reported on the experience of the sewing machines; only three of the ten donated to the eastern section of the island have been located. Of the second batch of 16, ten have been given to the western council and we will learn of their fate in December; the other six have been given to a Women's Group. Although a donation of \$1000 has been sent to the island as a result of the 'disaster

appeal' it arrived two months after the problem and has yet to be distributed; we will hear in the next few weeks how that has worked. It can be used as a trial for future donations. However, a discussion was held about the appropriateness of FoS providing donations at all; they are of a very small amount, and can cause political problems if seen as competing with other aid giving bodies. If we are to provide aid it needs to be seen to be fair, and to be rapid. A suggestion was made that we provide a sum (\$1000?) to the local group of FoS members to allocate as they see fit (subject to ratification by the Executive, or membership?). However, the political problems in all of this are manifest. It was also suggested that our aid should be restricted to technical expertise and translation and dissemination of knowledge, as this fits better with our composition and networking role and avoids some potentially difficult issues. It was also suggested that FoS should devise guidelines or publications based on the scientific knowledge; again there are political sensitivities and discussion with SCF on what they require is needed. **It was agreed that FoS and SCF should have an annual meeting (the first to take place as soon as practicable) to determine what their feelings are as to how we can best help the island.** Ultimately the Soqotran members should form a NGO on the island, and this could be the most effective way of dealing with these issues; we can assist them in their capacity building work and help them as needed. There is a definite conflict between the desire by those who contribute to FoS to have specific help going to the islands and the difficulties of doing this. The organisation must determine its role and make this clear; the amount of money is extremely small, but the potential for misunderstanding is disproportionately large.

**Promoting Soqotra – after the Exhibition.** The Garden is pursuing options for the Exhibition to move to Liverpool and Eden, and a number of other possible venues have been proposed and expressed interest. It must be up to the Garden to pursue this, but it was agreed that if no decision is made by the end of September that the exhibition must go to Sana'a to the museum there rather than into storage or be broken up. There are always conflicts between promoting the islands and the damage that visitors can cause; FoS attempts to promote ecotourism and show how maintaining the environment can contribute financially to the islanders in an attempt to overcome negative developments.

**Tayf .** The Soqotran members have still not received their newsletters, despite them having been sent three times. A new distribution system was discussed, with agreement that ultimately the SCDP people must deliver the *Tayfs* to the island and our members pick them up from that office. To overcome the specific problem with the current issue Wolfgang will see if Abdul Karim Nasher would be willing to receive a pack at the University (or pick them up from SCDP) and hand over to Ali Salem when he is next visiting Sana'a from the island. Articles must be received by end September, including short reports from all talks given at the AGM. Longer articles can be published as well, up to 1000 or 1500 words, but there is an overall length limit. It is hoped that the current timetable (final copy to Sana'a for 15 November; to be translated and printed and received back in the UK by 31 March) will be adhered to and members will have their next issue in April.

## FoS AGM

**Present:** Miranda Morris, Dana Pietsch, John Shipman, Dennis Hansen, Jens Oleson, John Dickson, Martin Coree, John Farrar, Kay Van Damme, Roderic Dutton, Sue Christie, Wolfgang Schneider, Julian Paxton, Salem Abdullah bin Ashoor al-Mahri, Tony Miller, Hana Habrova, Rowan Salim, Zdenek Cermak, Sabina Knees.

1. **Apologies** – Nick Jeffries, Diccon Alexander, Peter de Geest.
2. **Minutes of the Fourth AGM, 17 September 2005** – approved.
3. **Matters Arising** - none not elsewhere on the agenda.
4. **Annual Report** - discussed, incorporated in notes above. The website needs more frequent updating; all members asked to supply information and a 'round robin' email to be sent to all every six months to act as a reminder. A list of members' research interests will be compiled and put on the web. A calendar of visits will also be put on the web.

### 5. **Treasurer's Report & Annual Accounts**

Report and accounts were approved.

**Resolution: To have all subscriptions due on 1 January each year.** It was unanimously agreed that all subscriptions should become due on the same day of the year, however it was decided that **October 1** was the better date, coming soon after the AGM. It was also agreed that the FOS account should be moved from Nationwide Building Society to a bank to facilitate international subscriptions.

### 6. **Election of Executive Committee and Officers**

Roderic Dutton expressed his wish to resign as chairman, however there is to be a phased handover of the position to Kay Van Damme, completing before the 2007 AGM.

This agreement was approved and all other committee members were reinstated for a further year.

7. **Appointment and Remuneration of Auditors** – Approved.
8. **Any Other Business** – Julian Paxton and John Shipman requested 100 copies of Kay Van Damme's book for distribution at the meeting of the British Yemeni Society.
9. **Date of Next Meeting** – While a firm date was not forthcoming, it was decided that the next AGM would be held at the **University of Ghent, Belgium in Autumn of 2007.** Date to follow.