

# Tayf - the Soqatra Newsletter\*

ISSUED BY *SOCOTRA CONSERVATION FUND AND FRIENDS OF SOQOTRA*



Photo: SCF

## JAPAN SUPPORTS GRASSROOTS PROJECTS

The Government of Japan has donated \$82,000 to the Socotra Conservation Fund for the development of Grassroots Projects. The SCF, in collaboration with four local Socotri non-governmental organizations, will support capacity building of three local NGOs working on ecotourism development. The local collaborating NGOs will be the Socotri Women's Development Association (working on women's development and empowerment), the Socotra Ecotourism Society (committed to becoming the main promoter of ecotourism services to visitors) and the Homhil and DiHamri Protected Area Associations (whose goal is to represent the local communities in these areas with reference to their conservation and development efforts). The initiatives will draw upon the natural and cultural characteristics of the island of Socotra while promoting the island's conservation and development. SCF international volunteers Jeremy Roeygens (Fra) and Miles Davis (UK) are at work on this project with the team in Socotra as of April 2004.

## WELCOME TO TAYF

Dr. Abdelkareem Al Eryani

As the Director of the Socotra Conservation Fund, I am extremely honoured to present the first edition of the joint newsletter of the Socotra Conservation Fund and the Friends of Soqatra. The first edition of our joint newsletter does not only seal the beginning of a fruitful cooperation between two dedicated and active non-governmental organizations, but also underlines our firm commitment to the conservation and the development of the Island of Socotra. I am confident that the Island of Socotra will only draw benefit from this cooperation.

Despite the fact that SCF is a relatively young organization, its devoted work has already brought tangible results to support community projects in the island: the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Project sponsored by the Japanese Government is ongoing, the German Embassy is supporting the Socotra Women Development Society through SCF, and several small projects were successfully completed. Moreover, SCF and FOS are jointly organizing the exhibition on Socotra which will be hosted at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh in 2005. Our deepest gratitude goes to HRM Prince Charles, Abdulla Al Hussein, Antoine Bess, Saher Abd Al Hak, Canadian Nexen Yemen, all participants to the first "women for women" trip, and many others, for their generous support and encouragement to SCF.

I would also like to take the opportunity to congratulate the people of Socotra, the Environment Protection Agency and the Socotra Conservation and Development Programme of UNDP on this recent achievement: the inclusion of the Socotra Archipelago in the network of UNESCO man and biosphere reserves, the first of its kind in the Arabian Peninsula. Even though our single and joint achievements have been remarkable so far, our commitment to Socotra will still face many hard challenges. However I am fully confident that as one large and committed team in Yemen and abroad, SCF and FOS can really make a difference for the future of the island.



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## C or Q?

*Spelling of the main island name in English is still controversial.*

*Contributors to **Tayf** are welcome to use whichever spelling they prefer.*

\* Incorporating *Dioscorida*, the Friends of Soqatra newsletter.

# Current Issues



Top—road construction above Qaysoh.  
Bottom—Road going up the Diksam plateau from Hadibo plain  
Photos: S. Christie

## NEW ROADS FOR SOQOTRA

The road to Qalansiya is being diverted to a more environmentally sound route which will preserve the Ditwah lagoon sanctuary in the vicinity of Qalansiya. The new routing is being finalised by MPWUP engineers in consultation with the EPA and the SCDP team on the island. The main concern now is to maximise services to the communities living around the old road and pressing ahead with road construction work so as to reach the important city of Qalansiya as soon as possible, to serve the needs of the community there.

Three other roads are in the meantime being developed, the Ghubbah to Diksam road, which is being developed in close collaboration with the EPA/SCDP team, the road up Qaysoh and the Hawlaf to Di Lisheh road. Each of these passes through sensitive areas and much attention must be paid to both where and how they are built to minimise damage while benefiting local people. There are concerns around routing, width, collateral damage during construction and sourcing of road construction materials. Scenic impacts of the roads are also of concern, as all of these areas offer high potential for tourism. Care at this stage could ensure that the scenery and natural heritage of Soqatra is maintained while providing the many benefits to the residents that the roads will bring.

The recent Cabinet decree no 47, 2004 supports the position of the Ministry of Water and Environment, and this should allow a mitigation of damage caused by road construction and in some cases (including Di Lisheh) may even allow the re-routing of the road along a more environmentally friendly path.

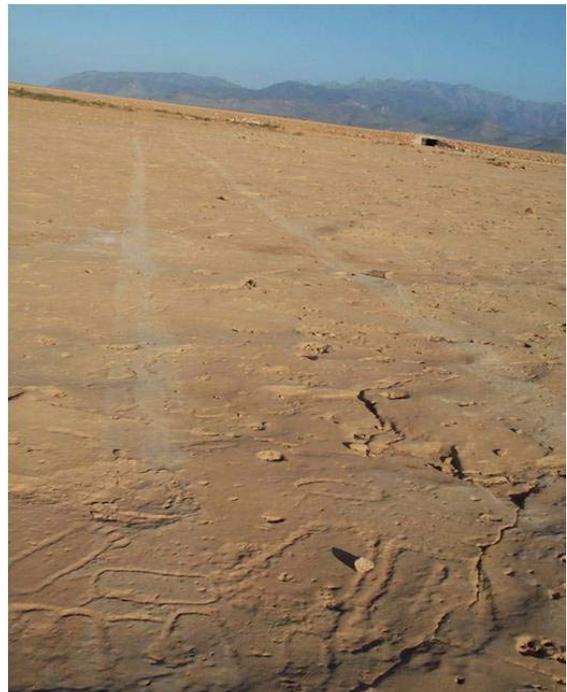
For more information see the report: ***Road Construction on Soqatra; Achieving development goals while protecting the environment*** by Sue Christie and Tony Miller. Drsuechristie@aol.com, or on the FoS website.

## ERIOSH ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE DAMAGED BY ROAD CONSTRUCTION

As development picks up speed, some parts of Soqatra are under considerable threat. Among the most important of these is an intriguing archaeological site in the northern coastal plain, 20km southwest of Hadiboh: Eriosh (Iryosh). The enigmatic petroglyphs and a large temporary pool with endemic freshwater biota suffered from considerable damage by construction of a new road (Diksam Road) in 2003. Eriosh can be seen as an example of how fast the loss of biodiversity and cultural heritage happens on an island as fragile as Soqatra. SCF and EPA have taken immediate action towards protection of the site.

From the report: ***Soqatra Island, Conservation Issues*** by Kay Van Damme, Peter De Geest and Julian Jansen Van Rensburg. [Kay.VanDamme@UGent.be](mailto:Kay.VanDamme@UGent.be)

Eriosh. Photo: K. Van Damme



# Current Issues

## THE STUDY OF UNDERGROUND KARSTIC WATER RESOURCES OF SOQOTRA: AN APPLICATION.

Erher Cave is an active karstic system situated at the NE coast of Soqatra. Large pools of stagnant water, a 12-m-high waterfall and an important lake at the end of the cave were explored, mapped and dived during three successive Soqatra Karst Project expeditions. The stagnant pools harbour many underwater invertebrates new to science (Van Damme K., Taiti S., Messana G., under study). In January 2003, local Soqotri were guided towards the waterfall and a water capture plan was formulated, together with a preliminary environmental impact study (Van Damme K. & De Geest P.). A catchment was built, capturing the waterfall with plastic tubes, the main one leading to a large water tank in Irisal village.

Unfortunately, during construction, some of the stagnant pools were drowned, resulting in the loss of some of the unique habitats of endemic cave-dwelling organisms. The hydrogeology of the system and its link with monsoon activity is monitored closely (De Geest P., under study), as the waterfall is not continuous throughout the year; if water is extracted at such times the danger persists that other pools could be drained, causing further damage to the fauna.

This unique pilot project is a sustainable way of transporting fresh water supplies to approximately 600 people in Eriseyl, over a distance of 10-15km from the source, using only the force of gravity!

Peter De Geest & Kay.Van Damme; Peterdegeest@hotmail.com, Kay.VanDamme@UGent.be



### TAYF

**Tayf** is the Soqotri word for Aloes, including *Aloe perryi*. This is a plant of special importance to the people of Soqatra. It has many medical and veterinary uses and is exported throughout the Gulf region. Many families, having inherited land on which *Aloe* plants grow, harvest the *Aloe* sap, a practice that has been carried on for thousands of years. The dried sap serves as an important source of income for many families, and the market is expanding in the whole of the Gulf region.

We have chosen to call this newsletter **Tayf** in recognition of the social and economic importance of the plant to the people of the islands.



Photo: SCF

## ILLEGAL TRAWLING THREATENS LOCAL LIVELIHOODS

Foreign trawlers are scouring the bottom of the sea, fishing too close to shore or without lawful permits, and fishing in prohibited areas. This is not only a threat to the local sustainable fisheries, but can cause direct damage to local nets and smaller boats.

Controlling this activity is very difficult, but must be a priority area for action.



Above: Eriseyl water tank. Right: Erher waterfall. Photos: P. de Geest



*Aloe perryi* (Tayf) growing on limestone pavement, Jabal Falanj, Momi. Photo: S. Christie

## CONTROLLING HOUSE CROWS

The House Crow *Corvus splendens* is alien to Socotra, but has been breeding since it was accidentally introduced from boats in the late 1990s. Elsewhere in the world where House Crows have established themselves as alien species they have caused environmental problems so it was important to devise a control programme for them on Socotra. This was started in 1999. The numbers of crows were known to have risen to 28 but a count in February 2004 found only 14.

At first trapping was tried, using designs of crow traps that have been successful elsewhere; however because there is so much food for crows in Hadibo, the baited traps failed to attract them. It was then decided to pay boys to find the nests and bring the young to the Biodiversity Project Office to be destroyed. To encourage this the boys are paid YR 1,000 for each young crow they delivered. Eggs were not taken but left in the nest until they hatched and then the young collected. To date over 153 young have been destroyed. In addition YR 2,000 is paid for an adult crow which encourages boys to kill them with catapults.

Although complete eradication of this avian menace will be attempted this may prove difficult. However, at least there is now confidence that the population will be contained.

House crow; Photo W. Wrantik



## PRESIDENT ALI ABDULLAH SALEH VISITS SOCOTRA IN MARCH 2004

The recent visit of the President to the Island of Socotra stands as a remarkable point in the history of Socotra. This visit is symbolic: the Yemeni government has again formally acknowledged the importance of the conservation and sustainable development programs on the Island of Socotra.

The visit reached the front pages of most of the newspapers and magazines. During his first visit the President, who was accompanied by various Ministers and the Secretary of the Socotra Conservation Fund, Mr. Abdelrahman Al Eryani, not only stressed the importance of biodiversity conservation projects, but also addressed the ongoing dispute between the Environment and Public Works Ministries. His Excellency's commitment to the preservation of the unique biodiversity characteristics of Socotra was later sanctioned in the Cabinet Decree, which strengthens the role of the Ministry of the Environment with reference to its conservation efforts on Socotra.

The President pledged to guarantee the delivery of development facilities such as the construction of a main seaport and a water desalination plant. Maintaining conservation values is difficult due to the number of projects currently underway and the scarce economic resources. However, all parties need to be working together very closely to steer this process and ensure the sustainable development of the island of Socotra, with improved livelihoods for its people as well as the conservation of its unique flora and fauna.

## THE DEVELOPING STRATEGY OF SOCOTRA ARCHIPELAGO AND OTHER YEMENI ISLANDS

Second International Symposium  
14 - 16 December 2003, Aden, Republic of Yemen

This conference was well attended with more than 100 papers covering a wide range of aspects of scientific, cultural, medical and geological work. Parallel sessions allowed a large number of papers to be presented, and introductory and plenary sessions raised many issues.

A series of general and a number of specific recommendations were agreed at the end of the conference. General Recommendations were:

1. Establish a management body with authority and capacity to conserve the natural and cultural heritage and promote its sustainable development.
2. Implement existing environmental protection legislation, especially the articles relating to environmental impact assessment.
3. Nominate Socotra as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
4. Conserve the Socotri language.
5. Establish a tourism tax to help finance conservation and sustainable development.

# News

## MA'ALIH: HOME TO ALL ENDEMIC BIRD SPECIES

The Ma'alih plain and limestone slopes were identified in February as the only site on Socotra that holds all the endemic bird species. Its protection and conservation are vital for preserving the island's biodiversity.

## NADIM TALEB HEADS SOCOTRA CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

Nadim Taleb, who recently obtained his MSc in Applied Ecology and Conservation at UK's University of East Anglia, has now returned to his native Yemen and is taking the lead role on Socotra in managing the islands' conservation programme.

In this new position, funded by UNDP, Nadim will be the National Site Coordinator of the Socotra Conservation and Development Programme (SCDP). He will be responsible for implementing the project's aims and objectives including day-to-day management of the program, supervision of all national and international project staff and consultants in Socotra, and providing formal and informal training to national staff.

Nadim has been involved with the Socotra biodiversity project since 1998, undertaking a variety of tasks. His main responsibility was the implementation of biodiversity surveys for the Zoning Plan. He also received training from BirdLife International in bird identification and census techniques and from RBGE in plant surveys during the Darwin Initiative programme of 1999 to 2001. It was as a result of this that he gained a place at the University of East Anglia.



Grey Shrike, one of the six endemic bird species.  
Photo: O. Saghier

## AIRPORT & PORT CONSTRUCTION

Socotra Airport is fully operational (instrumental flight support may be added with assistance from the EU). The new SCF/EPA/SCDP Visitor Centre & Nature Shop at the airport offers essential services for all visitors to the island.

Plans by the Aden Port Authority for the construction of the new sea port are proceeding, and a new location was selected in the proximity of the Mori airport.

## GALAPAGOS PARTNERSHIP

In the framework of the new phase (2003-2008) of the "Socotra Archipelago Conservation and Development Programme (SCDP)" a partnership initiative between Socotra and the Galapagos islands (Ecuador) will be supported by the Italian Government. This aims at facilitating exchange of know how and experiences between professional teams of the EPA/SCDP and the emerging eco-tourism sector in Socotra and their colleagues of the Galapagos islands. In the Galapagos the National Park was established over 40 years ago and the Park receives some 60,000 visitors every year representing an important source of revenue for Ecuador as a whole. This partnership will provide many opportunities to learn for the SCF team.



## SOQOTRA IMAGE WINS PHOTO AWARD

This image of the intricate branches of a Soqotran dragon's blood tree (*Dracaena cinnabari*) by Diccon Alexander has recently won a major photography award. The "Visions of Science" competition, organised jointly by the Science Photo Library, NESTA and the Daily Telegraph to promote links between art and science, gave the prize in September 2003 at the Royal Society in London. Taken as part of botanical research by the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, the photograph also appeared in 2003 in *Natural History* magazine and *National Geographic (España)*. A travelling exhibition of all "Visions of Science" winning images is now on tour throughout the UK – see [www.visions-of-science.co.uk](http://www.visions-of-science.co.uk) for details.

# Events and Activities

## SOQOTRA EXHIBITION, SUMMER 2005 THE NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE SOQOTRAN ISLANDS

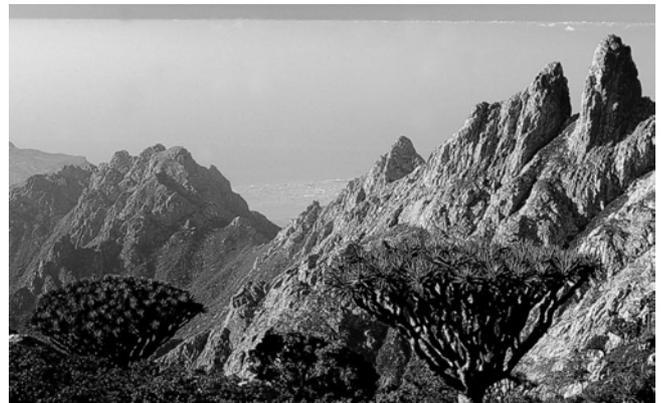
Work continues on developing the programme for this Exhibition at Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh for summer 2005. The Exhibition itself will run from June to September, including the period of the Edinburgh Festival. There will also be a series of ancillary events during the entire year, including film shows, cultural events, lectures and a scientific symposium. Timing for all of these events is still being determined, but we are planning for the Symposium to be in June.

The exhibition will tell 'stories' around the following main themes:

**ISLAND ADAPTATIONS.** More than a third of Soqotra's plants are found nowhere else on Earth, making it one of the richest island floras in the world. Over millions of years they have adapted to the extreme environment of seasonal drought, summer gales and rugged terrain, often in bizarre and beautiful ways.

**PEOPLE AND NATURE.** Soqotra is home to around 50,000 people who, over millennia, have deciphered the secrets of the islands' flora and fauna and adopted them as an integral part of their rich and unique culture.

**CONSERVATION IN A CHANGING WORLD.** The natural environment of the Soqotra Archipelago is remarkably healthy, unlike that of many other oceanic islands. The Soqotran people have developed sophisticated rules to ensure that their resources are conserved for future generations. Throughout much of the islands these rules are still in place, but modern development could challenge the established ways.



### The Natural and Cultural Riches of the Soqotra Archipelago

Exhibition and associated events • June – September 2005

This little-known archipelago is home to the richest biodiversity in Arabia and holds a valued position in Yemen's outstanding natural and cultural heritage.

This exhibition will reveal the secrets of Soqotra's unique culture and environment. It will show how the islanders live in harmony with the land that sustains them, and will examine some of the factors which could threaten this precious balance.

**PATRONS:**  
Dr Abdelkareem Al Eryani, Advisor to HE, The President of the Republic of Yemen and  
Chairman of the Soqotra Conservation Fund  
H.E. The Ambassador of the Republic of Yemen to the United Kingdom  
H.E. The British Ambassador to the Republic of Yemen.

**SPECIAL AMBASSADOR:**  
The Representative for Soqotra to the Yemeni Parliament

**PARTNER ORGANISATIONS:**  
British Yemeni Society  
Friends of Soqotra  
Soqotra Conservation Fund  
Yemeni British Friendship Association

## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

A project designed to use material gained from the last few years of scientific work on the island to construct innovative, exciting and activity-based education materials for use in Soqotran schools has been submitted for funding to the Darwin Initiative. It is a partnership between FoS members and SCF/SCDP, with Roderic Dutton of Durham University as lead partner.

This is a most exciting project to bring environmental education and training in traditional land management practices into the school system. It is hoped this could be a pilot project for other areas of Yemen, and part of the project is to introduce a requirement for environmental education into the Curriculum.

Although the Darwin Initiative has recently denied funding for the project, work continues to find an alternative sponsor.

## CURRENT SOCIAL ISSUES FOR SOQOTRA

### FoS AGM and Annual Meeting

18—19 September 2004,

Commonwealth Hall, University of London

The 2004 FoS Conference will explore how the islanders are responding to change. Afternoon workshop sessions on Saturday will look at Current Infrastructure Development and at the Evolution of Society in Recent Years. Each session will have a small number of short scene-setting talks and a long period for open discussion, hopefully resulting in some ideas for how these changes can be absorbed by the Soqotran society. Following dinner Miranda Morris will give a presentation on *Soqotra in Song: Poetry as a Valuable Storehouse of Language and Culture*, followed by discussion of the difficulties of maintaining unwritten languages.

The AGM will take place on Sunday morning and, in addition to the normal business, will include discussion on the RBGE Exhibition and the sewing machine and other practical projects.

Do try to come; the venue is convenient and inexpensive and we are planning for plenty of time for discussion during the two days. Please contact Sue to book your place: [drsuechristie@aol.com](mailto:drsuechristie@aol.com).

# Funding

## ITALY AND UNDP SUPPORT NEW SCDP PHASE

A programme of support for "Sustainable Development and Biodiversity Conservation for the People of Socotra" was signed between UNDP, the Ministry of Water and Environment and the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. UNDP, the Government of Italy and the Government of Yemen will contribute US \$ 2.5 million, Euros 2.5 million and US \$ 383,000 (in kind) respectively.

The overall goal of the programme is to conserve and use, in a sustainable way, the biodiversity of Socotra Archipelago, ensuring the implementation of the community-based Conservation Zoning Plan for Socotra and the development of eco-tourism and sustainable fisheries.

The programme will promote systematic and integrated human development and biodiversity conservation on the Socotra Archipelago, through its assistance to the Government in the following areas: (a) Support the main engines of growth for the local economy (eco-tourism and sustainable fisheries) while implementing the archipelago's zoning plan and the community based management of protected areas, (b) Address the most pressing basic community development needs and mobilize communities to engage in the process of sustainable human development, and (c) Enhance professional capacity of local and central government to work towards sustainable development for the archipelago, and mobilize additional resources to support an integrated conservation and development programme. The programme also includes the setting up of a technical partnership between the Socotra and Galapagos archipelagos, supported by the Italian government. The project is for five years beginning in December 2003.

## GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FUND

A proposal for a medium sized GEF project is being submitted by the SCF to the Global Environment Facility, in collaboration and with support from UNDP/SCDP. This proposal, if approved, will provide substantive support for the initial stages of the SCF over the coming five years. The objective will be to enable the SCF to become a fully independent Yemeni organization, able to deliver micro-grants to the people of Socotra in support of nature conservation and livelihood improvement.

## GERMANY DONATES SOLAR LAMPS

The German Embassy in Sana'a donated to the Women's Development Society, through the SCF, a set of 100 small and practical solar lamps to be assembled and used on Socotra. The grant includes the 7500 Euro value of the solar equipment (made in Germany), and the assistance of a German Engineer who will train local women to assemble and maintain the lamps in Socotra starting in April 2004. This demonstration project will demonstrate the advantages and foster the use of appropriate renewable energy sources on the island.

Photo: SCF

## SCF PROVIDES LOBSTER TRAPS

The lobster is a precious resource from an ecological as well as from an economic point of view. It is an important economic resource, not only for the fishermen in Socotra, but for fishermen throughout the whole of Yemen. However, the Yemeni coastline is being severely over fished, thus threatening fish and lobsters stocks. Lobster stocks have been dramatically reduced along the coastlines of Hadramout and Socotra.

In Socotra the main reason for the decrease in lobsters is the use of unsuitable fishing gear. SCF is working with fishermen to allow them to continue their traditional way of making a living while preserving the island's resources. One step has been to help the men improve their fishing methods by introducing lobster traps. The traps allow fishermen to release the egg-bearing and small lobsters back into the sea (which they can't do when using nets), thus ensuring the preservation of this valuable natural resource.



# Women

## THE SOCOTRI WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

The SWDS was first established on April the 11th, 2001 with assistance from the SCDP of UNDP. The society aims to assist women through promoting collaboration among the local population, governmental institutions, regional and international organisations. The society is developing the Socotri women's capacities in aspects within health, cultural, agricultural and economical areas, and is in addition supporting the development of their professional and craftsmanship skills. The society has been engaged in encouraging the women of Socotra to be involved in educational training and in the active participation in eradicating illiteracy. It has arranged workshops for the women in computer skills, secretarial training, crafts such as sewing and weaving, and in the design of clothes and in several languages.

The society has also been encouraging women to be involved in agricultural production, in particular home gardening and in the cultivation and propagation of indigenous and endangered species of trees. These activities are serving to generate income and at the same time conserve the fragile biodiversity of Socotra. Finally, the society promotes health awareness among women, especially in the field of reproductive health.



Photos: SCF



## 'WOMEN FOR WOMEN'

Due to the great interest shown last spring for an organized trip for women to the island of Socotra, the Socotra Conservation Fund (SCF) and the Socotra Eco-tourism Society (SES) organised a "women for women" trip to Socotra, from 5—10 October 2003. The trip was an opportunity for visiting women to meet with local women, gaining an insight into their every day life, problems and needs. A new "women for women" trip is planned—book directly with the SES.

## THE SWDS HOME GARDENING PROJECT

Vegetable cultivation has not been known on the island until recent times. Even today the Socotrans' diet consists mainly of fish, meat, goat's milk and dates, supplemented by imported rice and flour. Such a limited diet has led to widespread vitamin deficiency, especially among women and children. A number of Socotrans have started planting vegetables and fruits in their home gardens to increase the availability of fresh vegetables and fruit. We are aiming at supporting women farmers in Socotra with their home gardens and promoting agro-forestry, which increases biodiversity, supports wildlife, provides fire wood and natural fertiliser, and improves the soil, all of which will benefit the farmers and their environment. Traditionally, women are the key work force in the household in Socotra, responsible for bringing water to the entire family, raising the children, tending the livestock and processing milk products. Furthermore, women have always, after the men have prepared the earth, taken charge of sowing, watering, transplanting, controlling pests and harvesting the crops. Therefore, the SWDS has chosen to give women the key role in home gardening projects, so that it can benefit from their existing knowledge. The society will assist local women in improving their home gardens, which will meanwhile ensure the conservation of genetic resources, through the promotion of traditional crop varieties. Furthermore, it will increase in the production of vegetables and fruits, which will, in the long run, improve the overall health of the people of Socotra. Finally, the SWDS is striving at developing a production, marketing and assistance network among the women farmers in order to ensure a market for their produce.

Photo: SCF



# Women

## THE SOCOTRAN DRESS



Photo: SCF

The specific nature of the Socotran population is vividly demonstrated by the clothes traditionally worn by the women. The dress 'halaq' worn by a Socotran woman was highly original in its design and "endemic" to the island, being quite distinctive even from the dresses worn in the Hadramaut and Mahra. Black was the usual colour for everyday wear but they also came in red, green, lilac, brown and yellow. The long back panel, which was almost twice as long as the front, made it possible to draw this part more tightly by wrapping it around the hips. The sides of the dress thus came to the front, around the waist, where a belt, often with a decorative bunch of keys hanging from it, was used to hold everything in place.

Typically, a Socotran dress was embroidered with stripes of six, seven or ten silver threads. The stripes either ran straight or in zig-zags. The dresses were made from a light fabric and women usually wore the dress over a short petticoat. However, in the last few years Socotran women have taken to wearing brassieres. Also, by wearing the fabric more tightly the women can carry small objects in the bodice of their dresses.

Sewing machines can be found in the remotest of villages, and the women use them to make their dresses which they embroider with silver threads. The fabrics have been brought to the island from the Gulf countries since ancient times. The dress decorated with silver embroidery is very expensive for the local women, so women who have sewing machines and who can embroider are able to earn a good income from dress making.

*Professor Vitaly V. Naumkin*

## SEWING MACHINES FOR RURAL WOMEN

Friends of Soqotra is aiming to raise £1000 to buy and deliver sewing machines (including simple maintenance kits and auxiliary tools such as scissors) to communities across the island. The women who will be given the machines will be selected by their communities, and will be given training in their use and maintenance in Hadibo. They will agree to train at least five other women in their community to use the machines; as more funding becomes available in the future these women will in turn be given machines and will train additional women to cascade the training and use across communities. SCF/SCDP will identify the women, arrange for the training, deliver the machines to the communities and provide updates on progress of the scheme. Whenever FoS members visit the island we hope that the projects can be visited and photographs taken to bring back reports on the women's progress.

Why sewing machines? Resources to buy ready-made clothing are obviously limited, and ready made clothes are expensive and often of poor quality or inferior materials. By providing hand-operated sewing machines women will be able to sew clothing for their own families and to provide a small income through sales to their neighbours. This is a common request by women on the island. By providing training and appropriately 'low tech' equipment that can be easily maintained it is hoped that this project will be sustainable and can cascade through a number of communities. It can grow as more funding becomes available to provide for more communities, and the concept of 'each one teach five' will help to strengthen bonds within and between communities. Previous schemes to train women in the use of sewing machines have been generally successful, but have encountered difficulties when the machines required maintenance or spare parts. These latter aspects are a crucial and integral part of this programme, with training in maintenance provided and spare parts being available at minimal cost to participants.

Each machine plus spares and transport costs £25. This pilot project will be run with FoS providing the money and SCF/SCDP providing the practical delivery and monitoring on the island. If successful we hope to not only continue and expand this project, but to raise funds for other projects identified by the local communities. Please do help us to deliver some practical assistance to Soqotra. Send your donation to: Friends of Soqotra, c/o 49 Carnbane Road, Lisburn BT27 5NG. So far funding has been raised for the first ten machines, and delivery of these will be arranged in the next few months.

# Publications

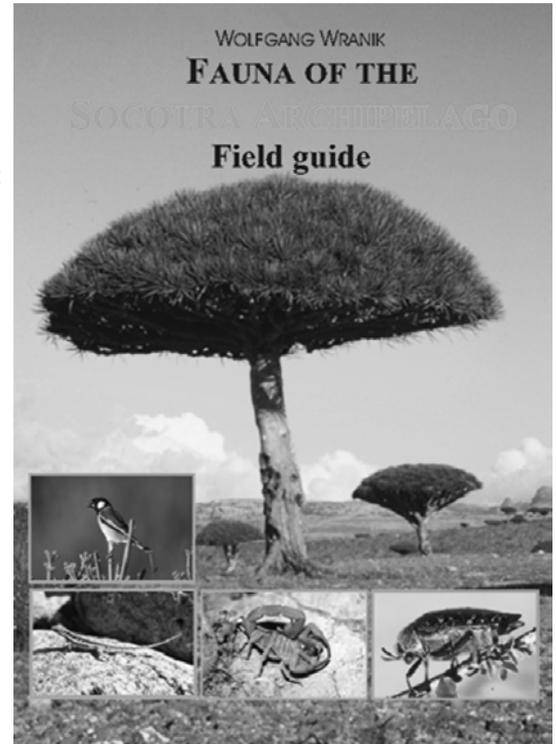
## FAUNA OF THE SOCOTRA ARCHIPELAGO – FIELD GUIDE

WOLFGANG WRANIK, 2003.

This excellent guide to the fauna of the archipelago, fully illustrated with beautiful colour pictures, is a must for all those interested in the islands. At just under 550 pages with 760 colour photos illustrating some 1000 species it is the definitive guide to the animals of the Archipelago. The book also includes contributions by Omar Al-Saghier, Simon Aspinall and Richard Porter (Birds) and Herbert Rosler (reptiles). For your copy write to Universitätsdruckerei Rostock, Zum Laakkanal 20, 18109 Rostock, Germany. Alternatively you can contact them by emailing: [uni-druckerei@verwaltung.uni-rostock.de](mailto:uni-druckerei@verwaltung.uni-rostock.de).

The book summarises the authors' research on the Archipelago from 1982 to 2001. Its purpose is to provide:

- A visually interesting insight into a fascinating island fauna, with often bizarre adaptations, which is little known but of exceptional importance,
- Support to the national and international activities to maintain the archipelago's unique biodiversity for the benefit of future generations, and
- A reference source for present and future generations of local people, scientists and visitors.



## THE TARANTULA

The tarantula *Monocentropus balfouri* (Pocock, 1897) is the largest, most impressive spider found on Soqotra. An adult specimen with extended legs is almost the size of a person's palm. It seems that the hairy specimens live underground, in open-ended, silk-lined burrows where they hide during the day, emerging only at night to hunt by touch and not moving far from the burrow. Tarantulas line the top of their burrows with silk, but do not spin webs to catch prey. Males have longer legs and are more active than females, and might be met wandering about after dark in search of mates. Males are short-lived and do not moult after they mature at a few years of age, while females continue to moult in some species and are known to live up to 30 years in captivity. However, little is known of the biology of this fascinating Socotran endemic. Most local people consider this spider to be very dangerous and aggressive, with a bite toxic enough to kill a dromedary. However, this is not only an overestimation of its real toxicity, which is not dependent of the size of a spider, but also an incorrect interpretation of the behaviour of a disturbed or cornered specimen. Instead of attempting to escape by flight it immediately rises up, rearing up the forelegs in an attitude of defence, which is mistaken by the people for an aggressive behaviour. There has been no investigation of the venom of this spider. However, most tarantulas can give an unpleasant bite, but are not fatal to man. They do not generally attack people and will usually try to escape rather than fight.



Arachnids in general have an important ecological function, with the majority being active predators which destroy a large number of pests. Therefore they should be neither killed nor harmed if discovered in the field.

# Publications

## ETHNOFLORA OF THE SOQOTRA ARCHIPELAGO

ANTHONY G. MILLER & MIRANDA MORRIS, 2004

The *Ethnoflora of Soqatra* provides comprehensive information on the traditional uses of all plants found on the islands. The 600 page publication contains a fully illustrated key to families and species. The book is priced at £75 but order early through RBGE's publication department and a pre-publication offer [£60 plus p&p] is available. For more information contact e.carter@rbge.org.uk



### *Euphorbia arbuscula*— plant of many uses

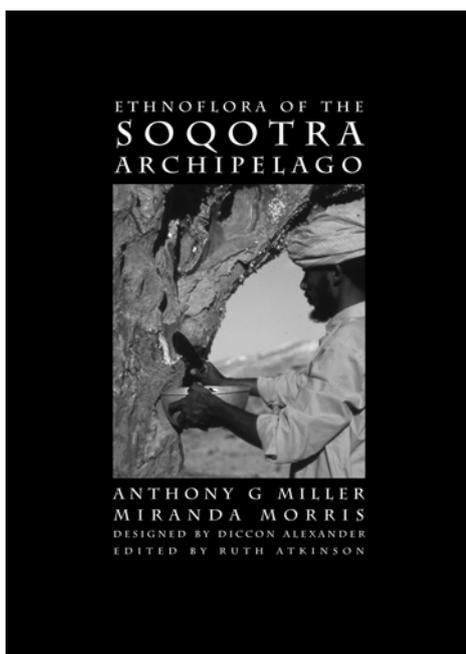
*Euphorbia arbuscula* is one of the commonest and most widespread endemic trees in the Archipelago. Its cactiform, succulent branches bear only small leaves but when cut exude copious amounts of white latex. It is found in a variety of vegetation types on the drier hills and escarpments but it is perhaps most noticeable as an emergent in the *Croton* shrubland which covers the inland and coastal plains of Soqatra. It is sometimes planted, and is often found in small groves, particularly by settlements. At present it is under no immediate threat, however, its use as a crucial dry season fodder means that if livestock numbers increase greatly, or a succession of drought years occur, it could rapidly become threatened. Small populations also occur on the outer islands.

The occurrence of populations of the same species across the islands is of significance when investigating speciation and adaptive radiation in the Archipelago. Island groups are often considered laboratories of evolution and therefore the conservation of populations, such as those of *Euphorbia arbuscula* on Abd al Kuri and Samha, is of particular importance. However, as *E. arbuscula* is an important browse food on Soqatra, its introduction by man to the other outer islands cannot be ruled out. There is some morphological variation found within *E. arbuscula* on Soqatra.

*Euphorbia arbuscula* is one of the plants which has a huge variety of uses. It is the key dry season fodder provided for goats, who come running to stand beneath the tree being pruned for them. Feeding on the plants does, however, impart a strong flavour which many people dislike to the milk and meat. Even the skin of slaughtered animals retains the smell and taste of the caustic latex and is not used to store food or water.

The latex has many medicinal and veterinary uses; it is used to cauterize wounds, assist with breathing difficulties (as a rub or breathing fumes), treat mange, seal wounds, repel flies, and bandage sprains or breaks. It can also be used to stupefy fish and to kill off larvae and insects in water catchments and pools prior to the rains. The adhesive properties are used to caulk dugout canoes, to manufacture the horn handles of knives, make booklets from Quran pages and fix glass to wooden frames to produce goggles for diving for pearls. The latex is an effective insecticide, as is the ash of the burned wood, and both also deter rodents. It can also be used to kill ravens. Although the wood doesn't provide much heat when burned it is the fuel of choice when insect pests abound, and the smoke is used to fumigate livestock quarters.

The tree is also credited with supernatural properties; since evil spirits are wary of it, people avail of the protective properties by carrying sprigs of leaflets, planting trees near entrance doorways or at openings of pens or byres or laying leaves across storage pots to protect food. It was also used by traditional healers in ritual cures for possession or to lift the curse of witches.

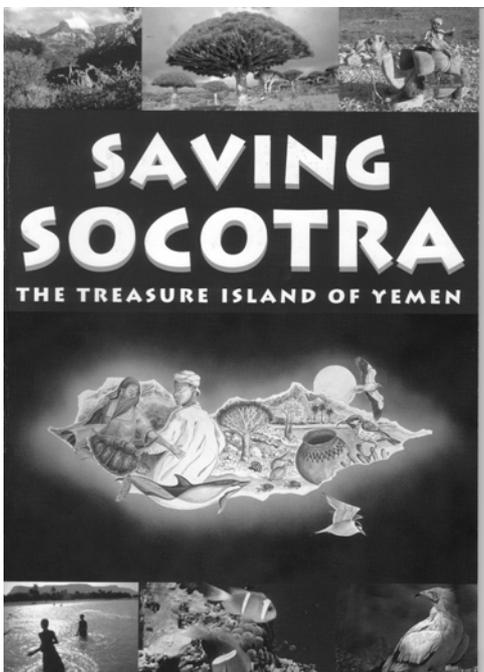


# Publications

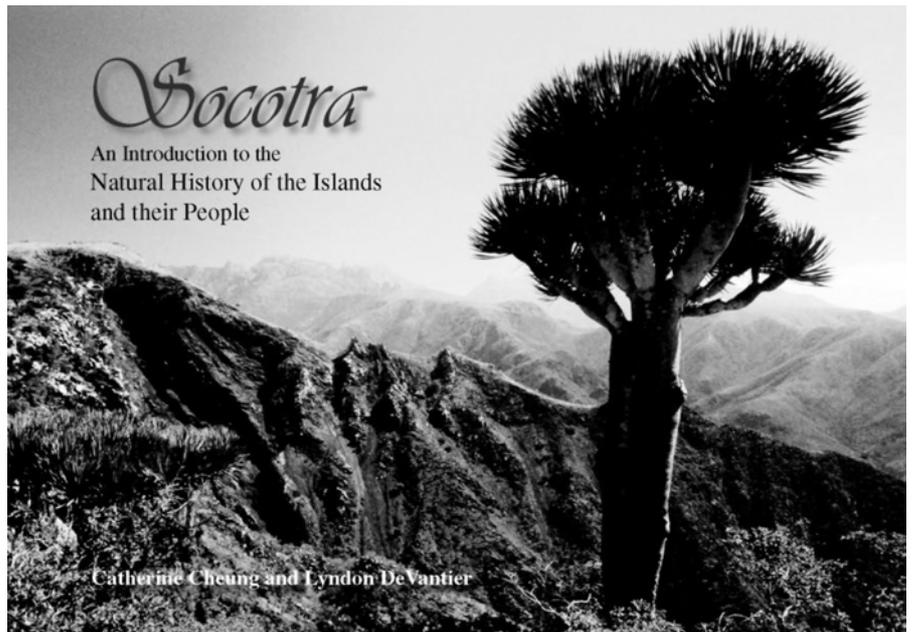
## SAVING SOCOTRA the Treasure Island of Yemen

Zandri, Edoardo. Published by UNDP/EPA/GEF/UNOPS, January 2003. 48pp. Price 1800 YR - \$10

The book offers a description of the archipelago, the creation of the conservation zoning plan and information about the SCF. It is fully illustrated with maps, drawings and photographs illustrating life on the island. It presents background information on the Archipelago, its biodiversity and culture, but its distinctive feature is a presentation of an informative review of the development of and content of the Biodiversity Conservation Zoning Plan.



*The proceedings from the sale of the books and the T-shirts will directly benefit the people of Socotra through the programmes of the Socotra Conservation Fund.*



## SOCOTRA - AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE ISLANDS AND THEIR PEOPLE

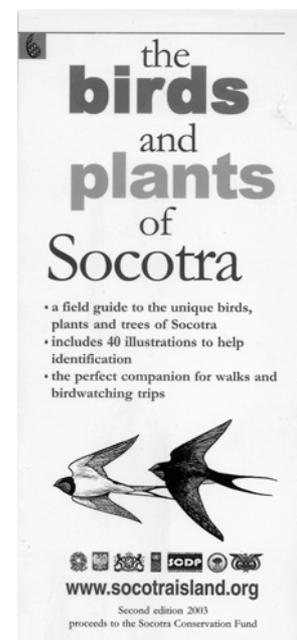
Cheung, Catherine and Lyndon DeVantier, 2003. . Published for the Socotra Conservation Fund. 52 pp. ISBN 0-646-43264-8. Price: 2760 YR - \$15

The booklet is written for nature lovers and visitors who are keen to learn about the natural and cultural heritage of the unique Socotra Islands, acclaimed as the "Galapagos of the Indian Ocean". It is also written to raise awareness on the fragility of the Islands' intricate ecosystems and the urgency for conservation and sustainable development. With 70 coloured photographs from over a dozen scientists, the booklet is also an informative, educational and beautifully presented souvenir for all visitors and those interested in the Islands.

## SOCOTRA, THE BIRDS AND PLANTS

A small pocket guide to the birds and plants of Socotra. Price 900 YR - \$ 5

This plastic field guide includes 40 drawings of some of the unique birds and plants of Socotra. It is the perfect companion for walks and birdwatching trips. The illustrations of the most distinctive birds and plants are accompanied by descriptions of the habitats found and short notes on behaviour (birds) or uses (plants). The beautiful paintings allow field identification and include flowers, fruits, leaves, overall shape and habitats for plants. The birds are pictured in typical habitat.



# Protected Areas

## DI HAMRI - UNIQUE AND THREATENED MARINE AREA

The Di Hamri Marine Protected Area lies on the northeast coast of Socotra, some 30 kilometres from Hadibo. The protected area includes Ras Di Hamri, the surrounding shallow marine habitats and an area of sea that is around 300 meters deep at its northern boundary. The site serves as a regular fishing area for fishermen from the eastern region of the island. However, there are no permanent residents in the protected area due to scarce fresh water.

Despite its modest size, Di Hamri includes diverse marine biotopes, assemblages and species. The site is characterised by having one of the most diverse coral reefs on the island including at least two coral species that are thought to be new to science and probably are endemic. It also hosts around 80 species of coastal fish representing 27% of the fish species recorded on the archipelago. Furthermore, it hosts 19 species of crabs, thus making it the richest site for crab species among the 50 sites surveyed on the island.

Unfortunately, fishing activity is resulting in serious impacts on the fragile coral community and its coexisting fish populations. Therefore, the SCF is now promoting local awareness and commitment towards the site's protection and developing and promoting alternative use patterns..



*Amphiprion*, photo: SCF



Dragon's Blood Tree—Homhil  
Photo: SCF.



DiHamri  
Photo: S. Christie

## TOURIST BOOKLETS

Friends of Soqotra is planning to produce a series of booklets on specific areas or species (or groups of species) for Soqotra. The initial target will be tourists, and a draft booklet has been prepared for the native plants of Di Hamri Protected Area. If you would like to prepare similar booklets on other areas or groups please let us know. The booklets will be provided to the Soqotra Ecotourism Society for sale; profits will be used to conduct practical projects on the islands, administered jointly by FoS and SCF.

## HOMHIL TERRESTRIAL PROTECTED AREA

The Homhil area is located on the eastern highlands of Socotra Island, northeast of the Momi Plateau. Homhil is inhabited by three main tribes representing around 500 people living in rather poor economic conditions, subsisting primarily on grazing cattle and goats in addition to harvesting wild Frankincense and Dragon's Blood resins.

There are around 90 endemic plants present in this relatively small area, of which seven do not appear anywhere else on the island, giving the site a high level of importance for protecting endemic plants and habitats. Poverty, scarcity of water and food resources, poor health conditions and a lack of services and infrastructure are the main problems facing the people of Homhil. The SCF is active in developing community based management systems, through which the local people can actively participate in the protection and development of the area. The SCF has tried to improve their living conditions through the introduction of income generation activities such as sustainable harvesting of wild products, the development of handicrafts and ecotourism projects.

# Research

## THE NON-MARINE MOLLUSCS OF THE SOQOTRA ARCHIPELAGO

Molluscs are among the first invertebrate animals to be detected by visitors of the archipelago's islands. Some of the species are abundant and can be identified from huge clusters of empty shells on the ground, others are aestivating in small flocks on shaded places in the higher vegetation. Many species are rare or extremely local and are only occasionally encountered. Several are new to science and urgently need to be described.

Our project aims at a taxonomical revision of the complete non-marine malacofauna of the archipelago. It will create the basis for further research projects addressing scientific or applied issues like phylogeny, biogeography, biodiversity, nature conservation, area management etc. First results show that the malacofauna is highly endemic at species as well as genus level (> 95% and ca. 75%). The islands differ considerably in their respective taxonomical structure, and there is almost no overlap at the species level. This leads to several conclusions about the geological genesis of the archipelago since its separation from the Arabian mainland.

The results will be published in a series of papers with the running title "The continental malacofauna of Arabia and adjacent areas" which will include all information available on the Soqotran malacofauna and discussions on its position within Central Gondwana.

**Eike Neubert:**

[Eike.Neubert@senckenberg.de](mailto:Eike.Neubert@senckenberg.de)



Photo: E. Neubert

## SOCOTRI: THE LANGUAGE OF THE PEOPLE OF SOCOTRA

Arabic is the official language in Socotra. However, the people of Socotra also speak Socotri, which is quite different from Modern Arabic. Socotri is an ancient unwritten language, related to the Mahri language spoken in the Mahra and Dhofar regions of Southern Arabia. Vitaly V. Naumkin explains that Socotri speakers probably came from South Arabia to populate the island at the beginning of the 1st millennium B.C., and their separation from the mainland, which in this case must have been of substantial proportions, led to the branching off of their language. He explains that the Socotrans' ancestors, who were the bearers of their language and culture, formed an organic part of the ancient aboriginal population of Central South Arabia, to which the ancestors of the present-day Mahris and Dhufaris also belonged.

To define even approximately the point at which Socotri emerged from its previous linguistic state when Socotrans, Mahris and Dhufaris spoke one proto-South Arabic language, it is necessary to consider the chronology of the division of the Semitic language family. According to a hypothesis advanced by Alexander Militaryov, the proto Semitic language - the precursor of all Semitic languages - fell into dialects during the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium B.C. There were three such dialects, (i) the ancestor of the Assyro-Babylonian language, (ii) the ancestor of Amorean, Kenaanite, Aramaic, Arabic, Sabaen and the Semitic languages of Ethiopia and (iii) the ancestor of several modern 'relict' languages of South Arabia and Socotra, such as Mahri, Jibbali-Shauri and Socotri. These last mentioned languages, including Socotri, form a specific branch of the Semitic language opposed to the North Semitic and Central Semitic branches. The hypothesis further suggests that Socotri branched off from its South Semitic stem at some point during the first half of the 1st millennium B.C., and this period accordingly constitutes the earliest time boundary with reference to the resettlement of the speakers of Socotri from South Arabia to the island of Socotra.

**Professor Vitaly V. Naumkin** You can read more about Socotra in his book "*Island of the Phoenix. An Ethnographic Study of the People of Socotra*"



*Enallagma granti* male. Photo: W. Wranik

## DRAGONS AND DAMSELS

Eighteen species of dragonfly have been identified from Socotra, including one endemic species, Grant's Damselfly *Enallagma granti*. 16 of the species were identified by naturalists visiting in the island in February, with wadi pools at Diksam, Ayhaft and Denegen being particularly important.

# Research

## POTTERY ON SOQOTRA



Traditional pottery in the market of Hadibo.  
(Photos: L. Stein)

A visitor strolling through the market in Hadibu in the morning hours will likely come across a place where veiled women are offering a variety of pottery vessels and figures for sale, most of which they have produced themselves. Most of these pieces of pottery are painted with the shining dark red colour of the Dragon's blood tree (*Dracaena cinnabari*).

The very traditional handicraft of pottery in Soqatra is carried out exclusively by women and everything is made by hand. Most of the pottery manufactured is kitchen utensils like cooking pots of various sizes (*saffaha*), large vessels for storing water (*gisfa*), milking pots (*foti*), a bowl for roasting coffee beans (*magli*) and some other items for preparing coffee or tea. After the objects are formed by the potter with the help of a shell, the artisan lets them dry in the sun for some hours before they are burnt in a huge fire. The paint is added while the vessel or figure is still hot and the resin is melting on the surface of the workpiece and makes it shiny.

Soqotran pottery is not very strong, and is likely to break which causes constant demand. On the other hand there is a growing competition with imported utensils which are more durable like plastics or aluminium and these dominate the equipment of many households on the island today, especially in the coastal settlements.

At present there are only a few potters left on the island and they exercise their handicraft near the deposits of red clay in the mountain areas. They produce the different pots on demand and deliver them a few days later to their clients. The big ornamented water pots (*gisfa*) are also exported by sailors in their *boumas* to Mukalla or the Gulf area.

**Dr. Lothar Stein, Osthöhe 14, D-04316 Leipzig**

## ORAL ART OF SOQOTRA

This year the American Institute of Yemeni Studies (AIYS) once again awarded Tanuf Salim Nuh and Miranda Morris a grant to continue their study and recording of the oral poetry of Soqatra. In February, after a training session in the use of a small tape-recorder, Tanuf left to work with poets in western Soqatra, while Miranda stayed in Hadiboh with another tape-recorder (kindly lent by Len Pearse of the English School) and worked with a group of poets from central Soqatra. Sa'íd Noh also took a small dictaphone and recorded some material from the Qa'arah area in the southern plain, and from the Haggeher, Sa'ad Abdullah recorded songs in Ma'anefo. For the second half of the project, in March Tanuf joined Miranda in Sana'a where they worked on transcribing the taped material he had collected.

AIYS plans to sponsor publication of the Soqotri material, to give examples of all genres of poetry on the island, such as domestic (butter-making songs, lullabies); working (cultivation, watering livestock, construction); private (love songs, philosophising on the meaning of life), and public (songs sung at circumcision and wedding ceremonies). The songs and poems will appear in English, Soqotri and Arabic, and will start with the oldest material, composed entirely in Soqotri, through to the modern day, with Soqotri being increasingly overtaken by Arabic, and will end with examples of work produced by living Soqotran poets in Arabic.

AIYS is also sponsoring the research of Sam Liebhaber who is working with a well-known Mahri poet in Al Gheydha towards a doctoral dissertation on Mahri poetry. There is likewise a plan to publish a Diwan of the poet's work in English, Arabic and Mahri. AIYS is greatly to be commended for its attention to research on the oral art of Yemen, and especially for its concern for these unwritten and endangered languages.

**Miranda Morris:** [Miranda@mirandamorris.com](mailto:Miranda@mirandamorris.com)

Cisticola Photo: R. Porter

## GOOD NEWS FOR ENDEMIC BIRDS

In February the BirdLife visit discovered a new breeding area for the Socotra Bunting *Emberiza socotrana* and Socotra Cisticola *Cisticola haesitata*. This was in Ma'alih where the wooded and lush grass-covered plains and limestone slopes provided an ideal habitat. A three-day survey indicated that the Cisticola population exceeded 1,000 birds, making this area the most important for the species on Socotra.

**Richard Porter:**  
[richardporter@dialstart.net](mailto:richardporter@dialstart.net)



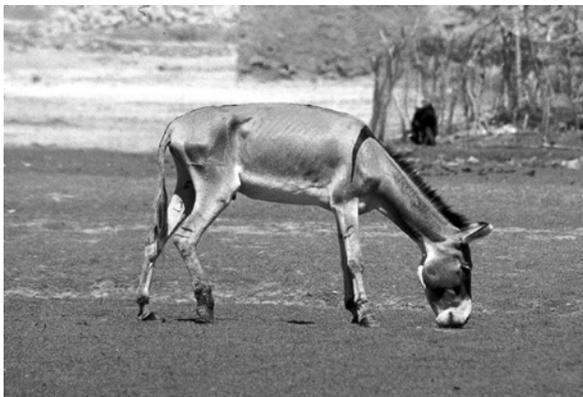
# Research



## MAMMALS OF SOCOTRA

Early zoological research has concentrated on the endemic birds, reptiles and invertebrates, but attention is now being turned to the mammals. We have started monitoring the bat population of Socotra, the first bat monitoring activity to cover all the main areas of the island. Our research team has been visiting more than 14 caves and sites, where we have managed to capture more than 40 individuals of the two species *Rhinopoma hardwickii* and *Asellia tridens*. We have been studying the distribution, morphology and environmental information of the roosts and the feeding sites. We have also collected some samples for the museum and have taken several pictures for the projects' photo library.

Our research team has also started collecting information on the donkey population of the islands, both domestic and feral, to gain an understanding of the actual trends in the populations. We would also like to ascertain the genetic status of the Socotri donkey. The latter resembles, in its appearance, the Somali subspecies of African Wild Donkey (*Equus africanus somaliensis*). This subspecies is considered, by the IUCN, near to extinction in the wild. We will be collecting biological samples for genetic analyses.



Finally, we have been collecting information about the Lesser Indian Civet Cat (*Viverricula malaccensis*). The Civet Cat is an introduced species, one of the two mammalian predators in Socotra (the other one is the feral cat). It is important to collect information on these animals' habits and distribution, since introduced predators could have a severe impact on the environment, especially on the autochthon fauna, as it has often happened in other areas.

Lesser Mouse-tailed Bat, *Rhinopoma hardwickii* and the Socotran Ass.  
Photos: W. Wranik

**Dario Cesarini** [cosmonarca@libero.it](mailto:cosmonarca@libero.it)

## **DRACAENA CINNABARI BALF.FIL.— A SPECIES NEARING EXTINCTION?**

During the last three months of 2000 I surveyed and monitored *Dracaena cinnabari*. From this work, it appears that *Dracaena cinnabari* mainly occurs as adults. At most of the studied areas individuals are sparsely distributed. In only two places (Rokeb Di Firmihin at 500 - 700 m above sea level and Skandt at 1300 -1400 m above sea level, both areas with strong slopes) are *Dracaena* plants dense and seedlings more frequent. We concluded that seedlings are almost absent in flat areas while they are relatively abundant on the cliffs. The wounds on the trunks caused by periodical incision with blades to collect the valuable red resin are almost omnipresent. Cattle droppings occur in all flat areas. We assessed the situation of this extraordinary plant population to be critical.

Although grazing is likely to be one of the main reasons for the poor regeneration of *Dracaena*, it seems not to be the only factor. The grazing is regulated by ancient rules, and if Socotra is still environmentally well conserved, it is thanks to its people and their adherence to these rules. The harvesting of the resin, although causing apparently serious damage to the plant, does not directly inhibit regeneration. Hypotheses related to the difficulty of germination of the seeds were considered, but recent studies demonstrated that *Dracaena cinnabari* seeds can easily germinate in controlled conditions. The inhabitants of the studied areas think that the lack of regeneration is a consequence of poor rainfall in recent years.

What can be done then for the survival of this marvellous species? Start to plant seeds of *Dracaena cinnabari* in nurseries and in the home gardens of the local people. Transplant the young plants not only where *Dracaena* is still alive but also to areas where the plants have already disappeared and protect them from cattle grazing. It will be a hard challenge to preserve this plant from extinction.

**Serena Petroncini** : [serena.petroncini@poste.it](mailto:serena.petroncini@poste.it)

# Research

## NOTES ON THE SOCOTRA CISTICOLA

Socotra cisticola (*Cisticola haesitata*) is a vulnerable bird species endemic to the island of Socotra, Yemen. A census of the species was undertaken between March and May 2003 to assess its population and density using line transect censuses. We observed 149 individuals in an area of 0.72 squared km, which suggested a total population of 6,840 individuals. The suitable habitat for the cisticola was estimated to be 35 square km and the bird density 193.1 per square km. The highest density occurred in the Shu' ub area (666.7) and the lowest in Kabahiten (27.7).

Logistic and multiple regressions show three habitat variables had the most effect on the presence of Socotra cisticola. Altitude and the percentage cover of loose rock have a negative effect, while percentage cover of sub shrubs had a positive effect. Multiple regressions of 59 plant species and Socotra cisticola abundance showed a positive and significant relationship with eight plant species; *Arthrocnemum macrostachyum*, *Limonium sp*, *Atriplex farinosa*, *Tamarix arabica*, *Suaeda vermiculata*, *Suaeda monoica*, *Indigofera sp* and *Acacia edgeworthii*.

GIS map-info was used to map the density and the number of cisticolas in order to provide information for conservation, planning and further research. Loss of habitat in the north coast, due particularly to development and over grazing, is likely to be a major problem. We conclude that the Socotra cisticola is widespread but faces potential threats. Habitat loss, particularly along the northern coast is the main threat and must be a priority for conservation efforts.

**Richard Porter (Birdlife International) and Nadeem Taleb (SCDP Socotra)**

[richardporter@dialstart.net](mailto:richardporter@dialstart.net)

## RECENT BIRD DISCOVERIES

During a visit in February, when Omar Al-Saghier, Simon Aspinall and Richard Porter of BirdLife International joined Ahmed Said of the SCDP, three new birds for Socotra were discovered: Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax cabo*, Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus* and Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea*. This brings the total number of bird species recorded in the archipelago to 182. The Koel (three were found) breeds in India and is also a new species for Yemen.

Two other exciting finds were of Cotton Teal *Nettapus coromondelianus* (above) and Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* (below), only the second time these Indian species have been recorded on the island.

**Richard Porter:**  
[richardporter@dialstart.net](mailto:richardporter@dialstart.net)



Photos: R. Porter

## THE STORY OF RAHABHAN, AND THE ORIGIN OF THE KISHIN TRIBE

Once upon a time a brave rich man by the name of Rahabhan lived in a cave in Kishin, in the west part of Socotra. His son and his servant lived with him. Just at this time Socotra was being attacked by the Portuguese (Franks), some of whom wanted to settle on the island. Rabhabhan decided to drive them away from Socotra. For this purpose he devised the following stratagem.

He watched out for two of the Franks, a man and a woman, who usually walked around by themselves, and then ordered his son and his servant to catch the couple. After the Franks were seized, Rahabhan led the woman away, without the man seeing what was going on, covered her with a man's futa (loincloth), stabbed a goat and concealed it under the same futa. Blood streamed from the futa and the Frankish man thought that the woman had been stabbed. Rahabhan skinned a goat and hid the skin. Then Rahabhan fetched some brushwood, made a fire and put the goat meat on the boil as if it had been the flesh from the stabbed woman. He then whispered to his servant that he should release the captive and pretend that this was being kept a secret from Rahabhan himself. The servant untied the Frank, while Rahabhan at the same time went on cooking the meat pretending not to have noticed anything. The terrified Frank ran back to his own people, where he then told them how where they came from. He told them the local people had stabbed the woman, roasted her on a fire and eaten her, and that they had wanted to eat him as well. But luckily, one of the local men had taken pity on him and had released him. "Now do what you like, but I am leaving" he told his companions. They also decided, after hearing the story, to rush back to the ship and sailed far away from Socotra.

Then Rahabhan married the Frankish woman, and she gave him many children, and that is how the Kishin tribe arose.

**Prof Vitaly Naumkin**

## RECENT VISITORS TO THE ISLAND

Dr Abdelkareem Al Eryani led a one-day visit to Socotra by a group of **Yemeni and International Poets** in January 2004. Nobel Prize winner **Gunther Grass** and his family were the Guests of Honour. The visit included stops at Homhil and DiHamri protected areas, and a special Socotra poetry session was held under the frankincense trees at Homhil. The visit was organized by the Socotra Ecotourism Society and supported by the Government of Yemen and the German Embassy.

In September 2003 a CNN crew was in Socotra for one week to make a film on the nature and people of the island as part of their programme "Inside the Middle East". The report had an audience of approximately 165 million worldwide.

Dr Neil Orr, of the 1956 University of Oxford Expedition, has just returned from his first visit back to Soqotra (with a British Yemeni Society party) nearly 50 years after his first visit. 'Within a day of arriving', he reported afterwards, 'I could see that though there was some cause for concern, Soqotra still held the upper hand, still held its magic.'

Other recent visitors include writers and photographers **Nigel Pavitt and Rupert Watson, Leopoldina Sanfelice Di Monteforte**, wife of the Ambassador of Italy in Yemen, whose beautiful water colour paintings of Socotra's nature will be donated to the SCF for exhibitions and fund-raising and a group of Reuters journalists.



## FRIENDS OF SOQOTRA WEB SITE

If you have not visited [www.friendsofsoqotra.org](http://www.friendsofsoqotra.org) then perhaps you should! It is your website and reflects the activities and research of the members. If you have not contributed to the website please give it some thought as the website is an excellent means of getting your information to a wide audience.

If you do not wish to contribute an article then perhaps some thoughts in the Forum may be more appropriate? Or, perhaps a message in the Guest Book? It would be good if the website could reflect the thoughts and ideas of members on a regular basis.

If you have any comments on the website please email [john@soqotra.info](mailto:john@soqotra.info).

## WEBSITES

[www.FriendsofSoqotra.org](http://www.FriendsofSoqotra.org)  
[www.Socotraisland.org/fund](http://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.speleo.be/socotra](http://www.speleo.be/socotra) Soqotra Karst Project (caving and speleology)  
[www.socotraisland.org](http://www.socotraisland.org) Socotra Conservation and Development Programme and Socotra Conservation Fund  
[www.unirostock.de/fakult/manafak/biologie/wranik/socotra](http://www.unirostock.de/fakult/manafak/biologie/wranik/socotra) University of Rostock (Animals)  
[www.sogotra.info](http://www.sogotra.info) A personal view by John Farrar.

<http://www.yemen-protectedareas.org>

If you know of other sites, please let us know and we can publish them in the next issue of **Tayf**.

## SOQOTRA IN JAPAN

In addition to the Soqotra Exhibition at the RBGE in 2005, it is hoped that Soqotra will be a central theme in the Yemen Exhibition at the Japan Expo that same year.

## OBITUARY

### Dr Patrick Carter

We are sad to learn the news that **Dr Patrick Carter**, formerly assistant to Prof. Peter Shinnie, archaeologist on the 1956 University of Oxford Expedition to Soqotra, died on 10th March 2004. Dr Carter, formerly Curator of the Museum of Archaeology at Cambridge, and Tutor and Fellow of Downing College, had been on Douglas Botting's return trip to Socotra in 1993, along with Dr Miranda Morris.

## FRIENDS OF HADRAMAWT

Fruitful collaboration is taking off with Leila Ingrams and the "Friends of Hadrawat" Foundation. A joint effort is ongoing to arrange the visit by David Shepherd, a wildlife artist renowned worldwide, to Socotra, with the support from the SCDP and the British Embassy.

## TAYF

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND REQUEST FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

If you would like to include an article, research note or notice in future issues please send to:

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Many thanks to all the contributors, whose contact details are listed with their articles.

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## SCF T-SHIRT

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

*T-shirts YR700—all proceeds to SCF.*

## FRIENDS OF SOQOTRA

Friends of Soqotra (UK Charity  
Number 1097546) was formed in  
2001. Its distinctive rationale for  
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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