

Tayf - the Soqatra

Issued By *FRIENDS OF SOQOTRA and SOCOTRA CONSERVATION FUND*



Dragon's Blood Trees, one of the species which has earned the island its World Heritage Site status. Photo 2008 by Richard Porter.

Soqatra Becomes World Heritage Site

It was an honour and great pleasure for me to present the file of Socotra to the World Heritage Convention Meeting which decided yesterday to inscribe Socotra on the World Heritage List.

This inscription is a great tribute to the values of Socotra but more importantly to the hard work and commitment of many people over many years, from the highest political levels to the local communities living in and around the World Heritage site. The Committee noted the importance of long term financial support for Socotra and it is to be hoped that the efforts of Yemen and the international community will continue and accelerate to ensure that this jewel of nature is effectively protected.

Congratulations to all involved on this milestone achievement.

Kind regards, *David Sheppard, Head, Programme on Protected Areas, IUCN* (see article page 2)

Italy grants Socotra

Archipelago \$3 mln

[28 April 2009—Yemen News]

SANA'A, April 28 (Saba)- Italy and Yemen signed on Tuesday an Understanding Memo to grant the Sustainable Development Project and biodiversity in Socotra Archipelago with \$3 million.

According to the memo, the Italian government offers \$3 million and the Yemeni government offers \$600,000 to support sustainable development and biodiversity in Socotra Archipelago.

The project aims at enhancing the institutional building and the Yemeni participation in the Global Island Partnership, in addition to implementing the strategy of sustainable development enhancement in Socotra Archipelago.

The memo was signed by Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Abdul- Karim al-Arhabi, Minister of Water and Environment Abdul-Rahman al-Eryani and Italian ambassador Mario Buffo.

Al-Arhabi expressed the Yemeni government's appreciation for the Italian support, mentioning that Yemen is interested to coordinate with the initiatives that target biodiversity preservation in Socotra.

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Yemen Oil Earnings Down

Middle East Economic Digest,
11th May, 2009

Yemen earned 75% less from crude oil exports in the first quarter of 2009 than during the same period a year before, as falling prices and production levels hit the country's main source of income.

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.



Piracy Leads to Shortage of Diesel

Following the capture of the diesel tanker by Somali pirates, Soqotra was without diesel for some weeks, and consequently water and electricity supplies were affected, making life hard for the islanders, especially in the capital areas of Hadibo and Qalansiya. At last, on 21st January, some diesel was landed on the island and electricity and water were restored.

Also on November 18 last year, Somali pirates seized a Yemeni cargo ship carrying quantities of steel, asphalt and heavy equipments used for road building bound for Socotra.

New Eco-tourism Camp on Soqotra

Ahmad Sa'ad Tahki

A new eco-tourism camp has opened on Soqotra at Rush, in the Hallah coastal area of east Soqotra, below the famous Hoq cave. It is called *Mukhayyim Siyaahi Al Biyi*, 'Eco-Tourism Campsite', and is managed by a local co-operative, headed by Muhammad Ali Ahmad Shizerhi. It consists of three campsites, with places to eat and wash, and modern and traditional toilets. A gravel track leads from the campsite down to the sandy beach, where there are traditional palm shelters for shade, as well sitting areas in palm huts with Soqotri sheepswool rugs on the floor. The campsite has electricity powered by eight solar batteries.

The campsite was a partnership project with the GEF Grant Program, whereby half the cost was donated by GEF and the rest was donated by local people in terms of labour and construction work. SCDP has also contributed to the cost. The project was supervised by Dr Omar Saghier, the National Co-ordinator for the GEF Grant Program.

Official Designation of Soqotra as a World Heritage Site

Quebec City, Canada, 7 July – The World Heritage Committee, meeting for its 32nd session, inscribed 13 new sites on UNESCO's World Heritage List in the afternoon and evening of 7 July.

Among the new sites inscribed is:

Socotra Archipelago (Yemen), in the northwest Indian Ocean near the Gulf of Aden, is 250 km long and comprises four islands and two rocky islets which appear as a prolongation of the Horn of Africa. The site is of universal importance because of its biodiversity with rich and distinct flora and fauna: 37% of Socotra's 825 plant species, 90% of its reptile species and 95% of its land snail species do not occur anywhere else in the world. The site also supports globally significant populations of land and sea birds (192 bird species, 44 of which breed on the islands while 85 are regular migrants), including a number of threatened species. The marine life of Socotra is also very diverse, with 253 species of reef-building corals, 730 species of coastal fish and 300 species of crab, lobster and shrimp.

Fisherman Slain on Abd al Kuri

SOCOTRA, Jan. 28 (Saba—Yemen News) – Local sources in the Abdul Kori Island of the Socotra Archipelago have said that Somali pirates have killed a fisherman on the island. People on the island found the body at the beach and then informed fishermen in the area who in turn informed the security forces about the incident.

Head of the Abdul Kori Fish Association Juman Muhammad said Somali pirates slew Abdullah Salim Abdullah one of the island people after they failed to hijack his boat. The pirates took his boat along with two 40 horsepower engines, he said.

Early in December Somali pirates killed two Yemeni fishermen in the Red Sea and injured five others while they were trying to take over their boat. Two other fishermen managed to escape and informed the Yemeni navy.

Somali pirates usually hijack Yemeni boats to use them for carrying out pirate attacks against the many vessels and ships that pass through the sea lanes in the Red and Arabian Seas.

President Orders Airport on Abdul Kori Island

SANA'A, April 23 (Sabanews.net) - President Ali Abdullah Saleh has ordered the government to establish a dock and airport in Abdul Kori island of the Socotra Archipelago, well-informed sources said. It was reported that the Ministries of Transport and Defence are currently conducting work on the requisite designs and studies to establish the two vital projects.

The two projects will facilitate the development of access and the movement of citizens and tourists to the island which comes second after Socotra Island in terms of size in the Socotra archipelago.

News

Soqotra News

sent by FoS Soqotra Representative, Muhammad Amer Ahmad Amer Di Min Selmehun

The President of Yemen Visits Soqotra in March 2009

The President of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Salih, visited Soqotra at the end of March this year. With the Soqotra representative to the Yemeni Parliament, Sa'id Salim Bu Haqibah, and other dignitaries, he first went to the Soqotra Folk Museum, where he wrote in the visitors book. He then went to inspect progress on the new roads in the eastern area. He also gave instructions for 10 km of tarmac roads to be provided for the regional capitals of Hadiboh and Qalansiyah.

The Soqotra Public Library: Maktabat Az Zahraa '

The library committee decided at its most recent meeting to share the library building with the Soqotra Society for Heritage and History (established May 2005). They would share the rent and administrative costs, and would work together to support one another's work. It was proposed that this be tried for a year, after which, if both parties agreed the experiment had been a success, a Chairperson and joint committee would be elected to manage both organisations.

Shortage of bottled gas and fuel on Soqotra.

Smoke from wood fires rose over Hadiboh in March as yet again supplies of bottled gas ran out. There have been repeated periods over the last few years when bottled gas and fuel have been in short supply and this has made things difficult for the islanders.

Droughts Fuel Rising Prices

The droughts of the last few years in many areas of the island have led to rising costs for the island's livestock herders as they struggle to buy cereals to feed their animals. It has also resulted in a lot of movement as animals are driven here and there across the island in search of grazing and browse.



The Tahki family, who are responsible for managing the *Soqotra Folk Museum*, have been busy extending the plantings around the courtyard in front of the museum. This picture shows the successful new plantings along the west wall, all of native plants. One *Commiphora ornifolia* shrub planted last year has produced a scatter of seedlings coming up through the pebbles; these have been protected, and will be used for future plantings.

FoS AGM in 2009

This year the Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Soqotra will be held in Tuebingen, South Germany. The formal part of the meeting is carried out at the Institute of Geography on 4th and 5th September, additionally a short excursion through the historic city of Tuebingen and a bus excursion to the Swabian Alb on Sunday, 6th September are planned. The announcement for participation is sent to all members in April. For general information please contact the FOS, in case of questions regarding the organisation don't hesitate to contact dana.pietsch@uni-tuebingen.de.

Giniba Cave Longest in Middle East Sokotra Karst Project

Giniba cave is actually the longest cave in the Middle East with 13.5 km of subterranean horizontal development. The resurgence is mapped over a length of 261m and 2150 m separated from the end siphon in the cave. The total system is more than 15 km long, with a side gallery ending in a narrow squeeze and another siphon oriented N-S. While staying inside for more than four days (humidity 100% and temperature 27-29°C) the team now has a detailed idea about the hydrogeological features and drinking water potentiala in this area. More research is needed to assess the full risk potentials.

More info available on:
<http://thesocotrakarstproject.blogspot.com/>

Yemen Chooses National Bird

The Yemen Council of Ministers have recently approved the Golden-winged Grosbeak as Yemen's national bird. This colourful bird with a huge beak for eating fruits and seeds is resident in the highlands of Yemen and on the island of Socotra. Yemen has also chosen the Arabian Leopard as the national mammal, the Dragon Blood Tree (a Socotran endemic) as the national tree and the Aloe *Aloe irafensis* as the national plant.

After a long consultation process, which involved many students, the final selection of the bird was made by Environment Minister HE Abdul Rahman Al-Eryani. In a statement to Yemen cabinet and the press he said ' I am proud we have chosen these animals and plants that are so important for Yemen's biodiversity and culture. They will help us promote wildlife education and conservation actions'

Already the possibility of a leopard reserve is being investigated which will also be important for many of Yemen's endemic birds and plants. It is hoped that BirdLife International will be a supporter of this exciting project.



Russian Naval Base for Socotra

TASS News Agency in January 2009 reported that: 'in several years Russia will have naval bases for its warships at Socotra Island. An official of the General Naval Staff said: "The political decision on this issue has been made. It is difficult to say now how much time will be needed to create bases of our Navy in these countries, but it is undoubted that it will be done in several years. Otherwise it will be impossible to fulfil the task of the regular presence of our Navy in remote sea areas for the protection of Russia's national interests, both from the economic and military-technical viewpoints," an official of the General Naval Staff stressed. The base on Socotra Island is needed, in particular, for ensuring security of navigation of Russian civilian ships by warships in the Arabian Sea and in the Gulf of Aden, analogous facilities in Tartus and Tripoli - for controlling and prompt reacting to the situation in the explosive regions of the Middle East," the official said.

Kuwait Funds Community College on Socotra

Kuwaiti Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Muhammad Sabah Al-Salim Al-Sabah laid along with Abu Bakr Al-Qirbi, Foreign Minister, laid the foundation stone of the Community College on Socotra Island. The college will be built at a cost of \$12 million to be provided by Kuwait.

New Port for Socotra

YemenOnline. Feb 08, 2009 - Yemen intends this year to commence construction works for establishing a new commercial port on the island of Socotra over a total of 60,000 square meters area.

Khalid Al-Wazeer, Yemeni Minister of Transport, said that all technical studies and designs have been made and that the ministry is currently finalizing its arrangements to make invitation of bids for international companies to construct Socotra commercial port, at a cost of US\$ 40 million financed by the Kuwaiti Fund for Development.

The Cabinet approved lately a Transport Minister's decision to reserve the land on which the project would be set up covering 1.3 million square meters in addition to 60 thousand square meters for other annexed facilities. The government-owned Arabian Sea ports institution is expected to oversee the construction of the port which would be devoted for trade exchange due to its location between the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Aden Gulf. Construction of the project comes within government intentions to enhance the Socotra Island infrastructure and to promote its resources.

News

Visit of Ahmad Sa 'a d Tahki and his daughter Asmaa ' to

Scotland

Miranda Morris

Ahmad Sa'ad Tahki (the FoS representative for Oman and the Gulf) and his daughter, Asmaa', came to St. Andrews in March, 2008. This was so that Asmaa' could help with the editing and proof-reading of the Arabic translations done on Soqatra for the forthcoming book on *Island Voices: The Oral Art of Soqatra*. Asmaa' has a degree in the Arabic language, and is currently working towards a PhD on a 9th century Omani poet. She teaches Arabic at secondary level in Salalah, preparing pupils for their school-leaving certificate.

She worked extremely hard during her visit, with only one afternoon off for a drive into the mountains to see the snow and a morning's shopping and zoo visiting in Edinburgh. The photograph shows Asmaa' and her father eating in a Turkish restaurant before a performance of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Unfortunately Ahmad was very unwell during the visit and spent much of the time having tests done in hospital. I am happy to say that when they left he was much better.

I am very grateful indeed to Asmaa' for all the hours she put in poring over the computer with me, and also to her father for accompanying her.



Asmaa' and her father at dinner in a Turkish restaurant



Visit of Ahmad Sa'ad Tahki and his wife, Sa'idah, to Scotland

Ahmad Sa'ad Tahki (the FoS representative for Oman and the Gulf) and his wife, Sa'idah, came to visit us in St. Andrews in May, 2008. Ahmad has made many visits to come and work with me here, but this was the first time that he was accompanied by his wife, and the first time that he had come purely for pleasure. He had chosen to spend most of their visit in our cottage in the Western Highlands, where he saw many old friends. Sa'idah had her first trip by fishing boat over to the island of Mull with me, while Ahmad went with Hugh by sailing dinghy. They helped chop and stack wood, and Ahmad worked with Hugh sanding down a boat Hugh was building. They entertained many visitors for dinner, Sa'idah perfuming the visitors with smoking incense before they left. She went round the house with a smoking incense burner every evening – never has the house smelled so delicious. The sun shone the whole time and we had to move the table under the trees for shade. A shopping trip to Edinburgh and all too soon the visit was at an end and it was time to fly down with them to London to see them safely off.

Roads

Road Development on Soqatra

Lisa Banfield, Kay Van Damme, Dana Pietsch, Richard Porter, Anthony Miller, December 2008

The building of roads, including the much-opposed ring-road, on Soqatra is progressing fast. Roads are fundamental to the development of the island and improved living standards of Soqotri people. However, certain elements of the road building programme are having and will continue to have a negative impact on the environment and may influence socio-economic factors as well. Here is a summary of some of the main issues.

Impacts on the Tourism Industry

The number of tourists visiting Soqatra has increased sharply in recent years, and ecotourism has been identified as potentially offering a significant contribution to the future economy. Soqatra is marketed to westerners as being 'an island unspoilt by man', and this is its appeal to eco-tourists. Being able to maintain such a reputation is notoriously difficult in the tourism industry, and it relies on all development being carefully planned, with due consideration given to the environment. However, there are numerous examples of roads around the island where the construction methods are reckless and extremely damaging to the beauty, and therefore the future tourist industry, of Soqatra.

Impacts on Fishing and the Marine Environment

The road from Hadiboh to the east of the island has severed the natural flow of water between Sirihin Lagoon and the sea. This has caused the build-up of stagnant water due to the growth of algae, which lowers the oxygen content of the water. This culminated in the death of hundreds of fish in the lagoon in November 2007 and February 2008. This also has a serious impact on the people and birds that both use the lagoon as a source of fish, and could have a negative impact on human health. Some fish species may use the lagoon as part of their reproduction process, such as laying eggs, before returning to the sea. This process is also being prevented by the road. These impacts could have been avoided if a suitable bridge had been constructed.

During construction of the roads from Mouri to Hadiboh and Hallah to Irriseyl, large deposits of sand, soil and rocks have been dumped in or near to the sea. This can lead to a build-up of sediment in the sea, having an adverse impact on the coastal ecosystem including coral reefs; less light can reach the coral reefs, which need light. This is negative for all life related to the coral reefs. This can affect fisheries and, again, the potential of these areas for tourism.



a



b



c



d

The Momi road. (a) large areas of bare soil and piles of rubble (b) running through a relict patch of *Boswellia elongata* (c) soil and rocks dumped over the side of the road, creating an ugly hillside of sediment (d) large vertical walls of bare rocks which may be impossible for plants to recolonise.

Roads

Impacts on Plants

Large areas of land are made bare during road construction, with many vulnerable tree species being removed across the island. The road potentially most damaging to plant species is that which attempted to connect Qalansiyah with the Ma'alah plateau, by climbing up the steep escarpment. This area is designated an Area of Special Botanic Interest under the Conservation Zoning Plan, is part of the new World Heritage Site property, and it has been shown to be the second most important plant area on the island (after the Hageher Mountains) in terms of unique species. Several species are endemic to the area, including *Aloe squarrosa*, *Prenanthes amabilis* and *Hibiscus soqotranus*, with important populations of flagship species such as *Dorstenia gigas* and *Boswellia bullata*. As well as habitat destruction and degradation that threaten these globally important plant populations, the road has opened up this sensitive area to tourists. Already *Aloe squarrosa* has been found in a plant market in Belgium; these plants would otherwise have been much more difficult to reach.

Impacts on Soil

Soil is a basic life resource and necessary for most creatures. Soils contain enormous numbers of diverse living organisms assembled in complex and varied communities. Moreover, soil serves as a platform for human activities, landscape and heritage. On Soqatra Island soil acts particularly as a provider of endemic plants such as *Dracaena cinnabari* or of endemic soil fauna such as the termite *Amitermes socotrensis*. Its protective function regarding biodiversity, environmental and socio-economic importance makes it necessary to conserve and worth conserving. Because, what is terrestrial biodiversity without soils? Since this top layer of the earth is carrying both terrestrial flora and fauna, it is more than important to preserve this non-renewable resource in consideration of its degradation and associated biodiversity loss. Erosion, loss of vegetation and organic matter and decreasing infiltration lead to (a) decreasing diversity of species, including soil biodiversity, (b) restricted soil-plant-relationships and (c) loss of faunal habitats which are closely related to vegetation. Besides these on-site effects, soil erosion also has different off-site effects, especially at coastal roads of which sedimentation at coral reefs is the worst.



e

f

The Diksam road. (e) the extent of damage along the road route through flagship endemic *Dracaena cinnabari* trees (f) an "endangered" road – heavy rock falls and landslides will follow (g) inappropriately disposed spoil, burying vegetation.



g

Roads

The 'Environmental Protection Law in Yemen' (1995) considers soil protection only indirectly. Therefore it seems urgent to discuss this topic further, since soil and soil biodiversity reflect the variability among living organisms, ranging from the myriad of invisible microbes, bacteria and fungi to the more familiar macro-fauna such as earthworms and termites. Plant roots can also be considered as soil organisms in view of their symbiotic relationships and interactions with other soil components. These diverse organisms interact with one another and, with the various plants and animals in the ecosystem, form a complex web of biological activity (Convention on Biological Biodiversity, 2002, UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/7/INF/11). Environmental factors such as temperature and moisture, as well as anthropogenic actions such as road construction, affect to different extents soil biological communities and their functions, not forgetting the high risks of using the roads. If there is no soil conservation along roads, landslides and rock falls and – with them – habitat destruction, will increase drastically.

Impacts on Birds

Of the 205 bird species recorded on Soqatra 31 are considered to be of conservation concern in the Middle East. Twelve are globally threatened, eight endemic to the archipelago and 25 have internationally important populations. It is adjudged that 19 of these species of conservation concern will be adversely affected by road developments, with the most serious impact on cliff nesting species and those endemics occurring on the Ma'alah Plateau (which has the highest concentration of endemics outside the Haggeher Mountains), should a road traverse these areas. Careful and considerate road routing and design will mitigate many of the potential threats but the species that are likely to be the most vulnerable are: Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax*, Persian Shearwater *Puffinus persicus*, Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*, Soqatra Buzzard *Buteo sp*, Soqatra Cisticola *Cisticola haesitata* and Soqatra Bunting *Emberiza Soqotrana*.

Closely allied to road construction is traffic speed. Since roads have been built a number of the globally endangered Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* have been killed. They land on the road to feed on animals that have been hit by fast-driven vehicles. Soqatra has the world's highest concentration of Egyptian Vultures and therefore has an international responsibility for their protection.

Impacts on other Terrestrial Fauna

For reptiles, snails, beetles and other animals that move on the ground, a new large road can be seen like a river, cutting through their natural range. It divides their natural living environment in two parts. Populations are separated and may not be able to reach the other side. Such habitat defragmentation is a well known and reported source of extinction on islands. It has lead to direct loss of biodiversity and disappearance of hundreds of species worldwide. Soqatra is not different in this matter and unique species are likely to have an adverse effect as well. Examples: one endemic genus and species of land molluscs only recently discovered (Eike Neubert), *Hoqia pulchella*, is only present in a narrow coastal margin (<2km wide) leading to Riy di Issey, the Hallah area. The Hallah road cuts right in this species range, and such animals cannot cross the wide roads. The same narrow coastal margin is important for other animals, like endemic reptiles *Mesalina balfouri*, *Hemidactylus granti* and several *Pristurus*. These animals feed on the smaller invertebrates that are effected by the road, and by effect on their diet and by habitat defragmentation, may soon suffer a strong negative effect. The beaches, for example at Erher, strongly effected by the road as well, serve as important nesting areas for *Ocyrode* crabs. In the sea, the effect is also negative: So loss of diversity may not only



h



Sediment in the sea along the road to Irriseyl (h) and Mouri to Hadibo (j), where sediment is still being washed into sea along the road from Mouri to Hadibo long after construction.

Roads

Other Issues:

Routing of the roads does not consider the location of existing settlements; some settlements are still without an adequate road.

Settlements may move to be closer to the road to gain improved access. This can have an impact on land use systems, such as opening up new areas to grazing, and could create conflicts over land ownership as people settle in new areas.

Little or no regard for the appropriate location of quarries.

No substantive provision and budget allocation for:

- a. professional EIAs prior to construction,
- b. employment opportunities for local communities during construction,
- c. landscape rehabilitation after construction, or
- d. longer-term road maintenance

Possible Mitigation Measures

It is not impossible to provide the people of Soqatra with an appropriate road system whilst minimising these negative impacts:

All road routes, sizes and widths could consider the local needs in respect of sustainable development – maintenance, population size, traffic flow and biodiversity conservation.

Key areas of biodiversity significance, scenic beauty, small populations and uninhabited areas (where roads are not needed) could be avoided.

Damage of cliffs and cliff faces could be avoided.

All impacts from necessary roads could be minimised through careful planning, Environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and environmentally responsible and sustainable construction methods.

Excess soil could be removed and disposed of carefully.

The appropriate construction of bridges at lagoons and wadis would allow unimpeded water flow.

Limit traffic speed could be limited.

The authors would like to express their willingness to assist in the design of future roads to the agencies concerned in Yemen and Soqatra.

Reference

Roads on Soqatra: Environmental Impacts and Recommendations. November 2007. Report Contributed by: Anthony Miller, Richard Porter, Lyndon DeVantier and Catherine Cheung.

Recent Developments

During November 2008, a team of IUCN specialists, organised by Paul Scholte, visited Soqatra to address the issue of Environmental Impact Assessments for future roads. Following the visit, a meeting was held in Sana'a, attended by Paul Scholte, SCDP staff, the deputy minister of the Ministry of Public Works, and the IUCN specialists to discuss the mitigation measures described above. We will give an update on the outcome of these meetings in the next issue of Tayf.



The Hadiboh Road. dead fish in Sirihin Lagoon (above), caused by the road blocking the natural flow of water between the lagoon and the sea, (right) build-up of algae.



Soqotra in the Past

Soqotra in 1929

Nicholas Morris kindly drew my attention to a book in his possession written by Sir Stewart Symes: Tour of Duty, published by Collins in 1946. In it the author describes a brief visit he made to Soqotra in April of 1929 while serving as Resident and Commander in Chief at Aden. The passages quoted below which may be of interest to our members are from pages 103-107. Miranda Morris.

Soqotra is an island in the Indian Ocean, some 150 miles distant from Cape Gardafui. Most passengers by the P. & O. to India knew that much. But no steamship called there. It was occupied by the East India Company in 1834 and then discarded in favour of Aden as a British port of call near the eastern entrance to the Red Sea. Our treaty with its sultan dates back to 1886. The indigenous population of the island numbered about 10,000, of which the sub-stratum only was discernably of Arab stock: its wealth was chiefly in livestock. What attracted me to the island most was its dragons'-blood and witches. The former, a type of red gum exuded from a palm fruit (*ⁱ), was once a profitable export. The latter, presumably, were kept for home consumption. Also I wanted to make the acquaintance of the reigning sultan.....

We dined on board HMS *Enterprise* on the 15th April and left Aden early the following morning. We travelled due east for two days and arrived off the north-west end of Soqotra island at daybreak. It fronted us, a sharply defined bluff, 800 feet above sea-level, with a ribbon of sand at its base, standing out clear against the sunrise. We steamed on with the land to starboard only two or three miles distant, passed several dhows and saw a number of fishing canoes inshore. At 6.30 a.m. we checked and launched a seaplane which flew ahead of us to Tamarida (*ⁱⁱ) Bay, where we anchored about 9 a.m. The anchorage is entirely open to the north-east monsoon; but at this time of the year the sea was calm and we 'lay-to' a little over a mile from the shore. In front of us – contained in a semicircle of eight to ten miles composed of massive granite hills, 4000 to 5000 feet high with jagged summits which tapered down to the sea at either extremity – was a little open plain with several palm groves, the largest of which, following a (dry) river-bed from the hills, spread out fanwise into the delta. In its midst and close to the seashore were the white-washed houses, mostly single-storied with flat roofs, of Hadibu village. On one of the several larger buildings a British flag was hoisted. Close by and a little separated from the rest of the village was an unpretentious mosque. The sun had by now risen high above the hills, and shone down into the blue depths of the sea, coloured the strip of yellow sand on the foreshore, and picked out the white houses among the dark green foliage of the palms. It made a singularly typical setting of a sheikh's dwelling by the sea. ...

Our interpreter reported that the Sultan could not arrive from his residence, two hours distant at the foot of the hills (*ⁱⁱⁱ), until noon; so we decided to go ashore unceremoniously. We were met by Fares, a stumpy, wizened half-naked 'gnome' with an engaging smile; and a group of friendly fishermen and villagers..... (he) doubled the functions of Sultan's factor and village beadle. He piloted us about the palm grove and through the small, obviously very poor, but tidily kept, village and back to the shore, where we perched on a spar of wood in the shade. We were joined there by some notables – a *kadi* (*^{iv}), merchants, etc. Most of them spoke Arabic, and we talked. There was malaria in the village, but thanks to British protection they were undisturbed. No steamer had visited Hadibu since the British Resident came three years ago. Previously there had been the visit of a Governor from Bombay with a band which had played ashore. They had occasional communication by dhows with Aden, Zanzibar, Mukalla, Muscat and Bombay. Most of their rice came from Bombay. The *beduwin* in the interior ate maize. There was a little millet cultivation; dates in plenty. We took leave.

At 3 p.m. Sultan 'Abdullah bin 'Isa bin 'Afrar, a man of about fifty-five, simple but not without dignity, came on board together with a half-baked looking son, the local *kadi* and a brace of merchants..... We talked. The Sultan asked us whether there was a war on. All was for the best at Soqotra. He lived rarely at Hadibu "on account of the fever".

I returned the Sultan's visit at 4 p.m. He and the populace – eighty men and boys – greeted us on the foreshore. The 'beadle' marshalled the procession past an old citadel to the Sultan's house in the courtyard of which we were seated on rickety chairs and wooden bedsteads. Public security on the island was good. They had no trouble with the *beduwin* in the interior. "We marry their women, but do not marry our girls to them". The Sultan exercised penal jurisdiction. The religious law (Sharia) was administered by three *kadis*: the *beduwin* came to them for marriage and divorce and to decide questions of inheritance. Rupees and Rials (M.T. dollars) were the common currency, but trade was conducted mostly by exchange in kind. There were few rifles on the island, since their purchase from Muscat had become difficult. Summer rains were due in about six weeks. The winter rains were more important. There were two crop seasons, but local food supplies had to be supplemented with rice (from Bombay). The *Kadi* and others had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca before and since the war.

Soqatra in the Past

1929 Cont'd

On Friday at 9 a.m. we disembarked again. Same reception on the beach. They reproached us for being late (we were!) Four camels had been got ready, complete with carpets, etc. and camelmen (unarmed) (*v). We set off along the valley for three miles, passed a white sandy hill to our left and reached a rocky outcrop of the main massif where the waters from a rivulet dropped over sheer rock into attractive pools. We lazed for a couple of hours under a tree above the waterfall and then climbed laboriously for half a mile to the summit of this outcrop, whence we had an uninterrupted view of a wooded hillside high above us and looked back on our tracks across the plain to the sea. The country was surprisingly green for so late in the dry season, palms were just coming into fruit and trees into flower. Several small, fat, friendly goats visited us. Miniature red Alderney-like cows and stunted thin-tailed sheep grazed close to us. We did not see the wild asses which were said to roam the hills. Our cameleers were cheery and helpful: they talked a local patois (*vi) but knew some Arabic and were friendly folk, like all whom we met on the island. The following morning I transferred to H.M.S. *Effingham*, and the Sultan and Admiral Commander-in-Chief exchanged visits. Parties of officers from the two cruisers were made welcome ashore. We weighed anchor and started back for Aden the same evening.

Notes (M.J. Morris)

(*i) it is interesting that the true method of extracting the resin from the *Dracaena* was not understood.

(*ii) an old name for Hadibu

(*iii) this must refer to Ilehe

(*iv) *kadi*, qadi, magistrate, judge

(*v) the references to 'security' and to camelmen being unarmed reflect the more bellicose situation to which the author was accustomed on the Yemeni mainland



Recent photos by Richard Porter of birds on Soqatra, clockwise from upper left:
Blue-cheeked bee-eater; Socotra warbler; Spotted crane; Yellow bittern

Soqotra in the Past

Collections of Old Photographs of Soqotra

Miranda Morris

Members of the Library Committee of the Soqotra Public Library have frequently expressed their interest in obtaining any old records which refer to Soqotra. Having seen many of the early slides and photographs of Douglas Botting [taken in 1956], Peter Boxhall and John Farrar [taken in 1964/5 and 1967], and realising what a valuable resource these were for the island, I decided to try and make a collection of the best of them, and give a copy to the Soqotra Public Library and the Soqotra Folk Museum.

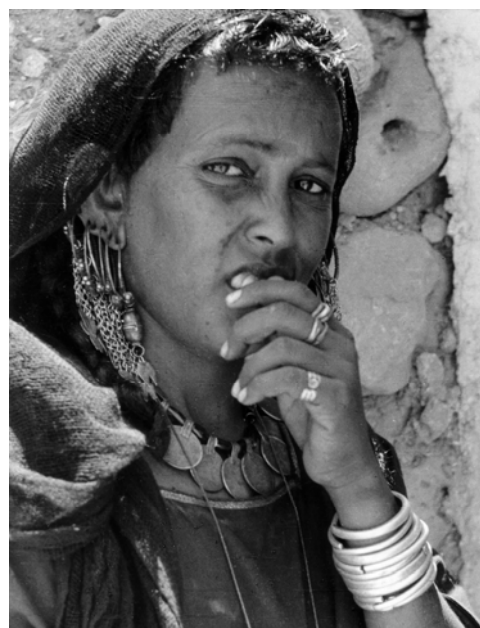


Peter Boxhall had left his Soqotra material in my care on his death. I wrote to Douglas Botting asking whether he might be prepared to help, and he immediately and most generously sent me a good selection of his photographs. Equally generously, when I got in touch with him, John Farrar told me I could make use of any of his Soqotra photographs, and he sent me thumbnail prints from which to make my selection.

The next stage was to have all of these scanned and printed out. Friends of Soqotra member and benefactor, Margaret Munro, made a generous donation for this purpose. John Farrar and Paul Bibire kindly agreed to clean up and scan the photographs, and to print them in A4 size, charging only for materials used, not for the considerable time spent on this demanding job. When John scanned the Peter Boxhall material in my possession, he was delighted to see for the first time some of the photographs which had in fact been taken by him: "It is the collection of black and white photos that amazed me as many of them are photos I took but have not seen as I gave the films to Boxhall for processing after our expedition".

To protect the photographs from damage it was decided to laminate each one.

Thanks to Dr. Kay van Damme for sending me copies of Edward Vidal's 1944 photographs (RAF), some of which have also been included.



End of March 2009: The three brothers, Ahmad Sa'ad, Hasan Sa'ad and Umr Sa'ad, looking at the contents of the two files of old photographs of Soqotra delivered to the *Soqotra Folk Museum*. The pictures have been numbered and laminated, and a clear sticker attached to the back for Soqotrans to write a description of the picture or to name those in the picture.

The pictures brought back many memories to the older Soqotrans they were shown to in Hadiboh before their delivery to the Soqotra Folk Museum in Riqeleh. Many of the people represented in them were recognised and named, but principally, those who looked at the pictures commented on how forcibly they recalled the past. One elderly man was reduced to tears as he remembered how hard those earlier days had been for so many people – in particular, he said, the women.



Weight and financial restrictions this time did not permit the delivery of the other two-file set of old photographs to the *Soqotra Public Library*, but it is hoped that they will be delivered later on this year. Fehed Saleem Kafayan of the Library Committee said that this was exactly the sort of material the library needed and wanted to be able to offer the public, and he hoped the files would reach them as soon as possible.

Soqotra in the Past

The Ramsa Dance - 25 Years Ago

Lothar Stein

The Traditional Ramsa dance on the Island of Soqotra was performed each night with full moon.

I started my ethnographical fieldwork on Soqotra for the first time in November, 1984, and I found many of the traditional customs of the island people still alive, especially in the mountain areas, where the many people still were living in caves as their ancestors had for many generations. Every night, when the full moon was shining over the Island, I could hear the sound of roaring drums, piping flutes and loud singing. When I went to find out the source of this exciting music, I found on the beach near the sea a group of men and women dancing in long rows moving towards each other and then stepping back again. The music is played by a group of drummers and one older man played the oboe/hautboy continuously. The dancers were singing loudly while dancing and clapping their hands in the rhythm of the dance. I found it a very cheerful atmosphere.



The women were dressed in long skirts in bright colours – green and blue and red or yellow – (I was told that each Soqotrian woman owns several of these *khalak* clothes) and handmade scarves (*nuqba*) with shining silver ornaments around their heads and shoulders which were sparkling in the moonlight.

The ramsa dances were performed on the occasion of marriages in the villages/settlements of the coastal areas of the North where the fishermen lived. The musicians were in most cases of African origin. They came here during the time of slave trade between Eastern Africa and South Arabia, and some of their fathers had served as guards of the last Sultan (who reigned until November 1967). In the interior parts of the island this kind of entertainment was quite unknown, because there are no drums in the mountains and other habits are prevailing.

Some years later, in early 1989, my wife, Heidi Stein, assisted me in collecting ethnographical objects from Soqotra for our

Museum in Leipzig, and soon she was invited by the women to participate in the Ramsa dance and describes it as follows.

Today we had been invited to participate in a marriage party near Hadibo, the capital of Soqotra. When we arrived in the house of the bridegroom a large crowd had already gathered in the courtyard, and soon we could hear the sound of drums and singing – the Marriage Ramsa was about to start.

While we were watching this cheerful spectacle one of the dancing women was pulling me into the turmoil and I tried to learn the Soqotran dance steps, which went forward and backward continuously. Opposite to our dance row the group of male dancers were stamping, hopping and jumping – all barefooted - and from time to time one of them performed a solo dance in the space between the two dancing groups. After some time, when the musicians got exhausted, there was a break and the dancers drank some tea with mint until the next round started. This joyful hustle and bustle goes on sometimes until dawn.



Dr. Lothar Steink Osthöhe 14, D-04316 Leipzig/

Life on the Island

Prospects and Development of Socotra Beekeepers Association

The aim of this project is to promote diversification of the economic and ecological activities of the Socotra Beekeepers Association. The essential economic branch of the association is based on the production and marketing of honey resulting from rational beekeeping. This proposal is for a project that will build on the successes of our last initiative: *Creation of an Aparian Economic Branch in Socotra*.

Honey production is completely dependent on the unpredictable, and often dry, weather. A new beekeeping product will ensure economic independence against this insecurity: the establishment of a modern breeding programme with queen bees "*Apis yemenitica*". In the past, this bee species was present throughout the southern Arabian Peninsula. Socotra is now the last place where this species of bees is pure.

To meet the demand of the Socotri population, the training and integration of a new generation of beekeepers are planned. Priority must be given to young Socotris who are both more receptive to educational opportunities and who will succeed the older beekeepers. Finally, the creation of "Bee Gardens" will be explored in order to support the ecological context necessary for sustainable beekeeping. "Bee Gardens" will be created to protect the beehives and the plants that bees pollinate. These enclosures will allow for the regeneration of crucial and 'at-risk' plants such as: Dragon Blood trees, Cucumber trees and *Ziziphus* trees.

Past Issues of Tayf Available on Soqotra

If you have missed past versions of Tayf and Dioscorida (the previous FoS newsletter), two full sets were recently delivered to the Soqotra Culture Library in Hadiboh and the Soqotra Folk Museum in Hallah.

TB soars in Socotra; malnutrition main reason

SOCOTRA, Mar. 07 (Saba) - Cases of tuberculosis rose on Socotra Island in 2008 by 110 percent, head of the Island Program for Combating Tuberculosis has said. The increase was large compared with cases recorded in previous year when only 37 cases were diagnosed.

Almost 50 cases were recorded by the Unicef in 2008, out of which 18 cases were turned over to specialized medics, Abdullah Muhammad al-Mawali said, attributing the increase to malnutrition caused by the soaring prices of foodstuffs. It is noteworthy that a 7 year- child case was registered while youth remained most affected by the disease, he added.

About 80% of the population on the island lives below the poverty line. Among other reasons for the increase in the disease, the head says, are hard jobs which most of the people of the island do coupled with a low awareness about the disease and how to prevent it.



FoS Donation to the Soqotra Folk Museum

End of March 2009: FoS representative, Muhammad Amir Di Min Selmeum, handing over the \$300 donation from FoS to Hasan Sa'ad of the *Soqotra Folk Museum* in Riqeleh. This sum will go to swell the maintenance fund. The Folk Museum is still looking for funds to build a second building behind the present one to give the contents - and visitors - more room.

Currently we are preparing a museum guide in English, and it is then hoped that this will be translated into other languages. Some members of FoS have already kindly offered to undertake this task. The guides would be laminated and hung on the wall so that visitors could make use of whichever one was appropriate to them.

We also plan to experiment selling postcards. We shall start with a few only until we see how great the demand is. If any FoS member has a particularly evocative picture from Soqotra which they think might appeal to visitors to the island, we would be very grateful if they could get in touch at miranda@mirandamorris.co.uk.

Conferences



1st Middle Eastern Biodiversity Conference in Aqaba 2008 Dana Pietsch



From 20 to 23 October 2008 the first conference presenting exclusively topics about biodiversity in the Middle East took place in Jordan, mainly organised by Senckenberg Institute Frankfurt (Germany) and the Marine Science Station, Aqaba (Jordan). The event was related to activities of the "Middle Eastern Biodiversity Network", which was funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). The project aims to:

1. Document regional biodiversity
 2. Analyse and understand the region's biodiversity
 3. Strengthen regional networking
 4. Communicate project results to a larger public
- (http://www.senckenberg.de/root/index.php?page_id=3970)

Participants from 40 countries came to present information on the unique floral and faunal richness of the Middle East: Armenia, Algeria, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgystan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Pakistan, Palestine, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Ukraine, USA and Yemen.

The congress aimed to discuss results of recent research on Middle Eastern biodiversity; review the present status of biodiversity research and education in the Middle East; link up scientists in the region, in Europe and in other parts of the world; review the status of Middle Eastern biodiversity research in a global context; and to identify opportunities and priorities for future biodiversity research and education, including the transfer of results to applied fields, such as renewable resources management and conservation. (http://www.senckenberg.de/root/index.php?page_id=3987).

Numerous talks and posters about research on Soqatra Island and Yemen mainland included terrestrial botany and zoology as well as marine biodiversity and conservation and management practices, including soil biodiversity. Amongst others, scientists from the University of Sana'a and representatives from governmental institutions such as AREA presented their results in one of the 12 sessions, symposia and workshops.

Finally, I want to express my pleasure about the fact that none of the interesting scientific talks was overwhelmed by preconceptions of the participants, neither regarding religion nor nationality. The congress showed that science is crossing borders and using a language that is neutral and bypasses preconceptions and prejudices. Especially for this extraordinary experience at our eventful beginning of the 21st century I would like to express my deep and sentimental thanks to the organisers!



World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies Conference

Barcelona, July 19th – 24th 2010

Over 2000 researchers and experts on the Middle East, coming from a large number of universities, investigation centers and other organizations from all over the world, will gather in Barcelona in 2010 at the World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES). The IEMed and the UAB with the support of the Government of Catalonia will organize the Third WOCMES, after the two successful previous editions held in Mainz - Germany in 2002 and in Amman - Jordan in 2006

Research

Socotra: An analysis of the maritime activities of this land of incense and legend **Julian Jansen van Rensburg**

During my initial and subsequent visits to Socotra studying the traditional vessels on the island I have always been struck by the island's rich maritime heritage. Sadly, I have also noticed how this heritage has slowly been lost through both development and natural disaster. It was with this in mind that I have decided to undertake research into the maritime activities that Socotra has been involved with through looking at past and recent archaeological, ethnographical, epigraphic and historic work.

It is quite well documented in historical sources that Socotra has had many functions ranging from trading entrepot to pirate haven and has consequently been subject to a wide variety of different people and cultures coming by sea. Some have stayed and become part of the island while others have left, leaving very little trace of their visit. All of these visitors however have left some form of cultural influence which can be put together to form a varied and complex maritime culture.

Signs of these are seen in the famous Hoq cave discovered by Peter de Geest which include the drawing of an earlier vessel drawn on one of the speleotherms and a wooden tablet belonging to a Palmyrian sailor or emissary from 258 CE. The wealth of findings within the cave provides a key element in the understanding of the maritime cultures that have influenced the history of the island of Socotra. Historical accounts of early shipping provide a further source of information on the nature of Socotra's role in early navigation and trade and provide vivid accounts of the life on the coastal fringes of Socotra. Further maritime cultural influences have also been gathered from ethnographic work into the traditional vessels of the fishermen today and those they have used in the past alluding to the variety of contacts by merchants and fishermen coming from India, Africa and the Arabian mainland.

This rich source of data will require a multi-disciplinary approach into the various forms of data available. Through my research into these interactions of various different maritime influences it is planned that a clearer picture of the rich variety of Socotra's maritime heritage will be unravelled.



Research

RBGE trip to Soqatra, November 2008. Lisa Banfield, Steve Scott and Andrew Ensoll

For five weeks in November and December 2008, three staff of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh visited Soqatra to continue giving horticultural and herbarium training to SCDP/EPA staff members. The purpose of the trip was to make collections of pressed plant specimens for the herbarium and living material for the nursery, with an emphasis on data recording. The collections were followed up by further work in the herbarium and the nursery respectively.

The trip was a great success. Upon arrival, we were requested by Fahmi Abdullah Ba-Hashwan, Herbarium Manager, to assist with the insect problem in the herbarium, as the insects were rapidly eating the plant specimens. The herbarium, which had an insect problem due to the windows not being properly sealed, the presence of live plants and adjoining offices where the windows were kept open. We jointly decided to move the herbarium to a smaller room within the SCDP building where the insect problem can be more effectively controlled. The new room and specimen cabinets were disinfected, and all the plant specimens were frozen for a week to kill the insects before being taken to the new herbarium. The cabinets were given new labels and all the specimens checked for the correct name and filed in the correct family. The marine collection was also moved. We wish Fahmi success in dealing with the insects in the future, and hope for the growth of the herbarium by the addition of new specimens. We thank all those staff of SCDP who helped with the movement of specimens and the cabinets.

The horticultural training was given to Ahmed Adeeb, manager of Adeeb's nursery in Hadibo and part of the SCDP terrestrial team. This builds on training given to Ahmed in Edinburgh for one month in 2007, and work carried out in the nursery by Lisa Banfield and Ahmed Adeeb during 2007 and 2008. More than 100 plant species were collected for the nursery, significantly adding to the endemic and endangered plant species currently conserved in the nursery, and possibly including three as yet undescribed new species. New plant growing techniques were introduced that will allow additional plant species to be grown in the future, and new habitat areas were created to represent plant communities as they are seen in the wild. We wish Ahmed Adeeb success in continuing the care for the new collections and in adding new species in the future.

It is hoped that this training will allow for the continued growth and usefulness of two very important educational and conservational resources in Soqatra. The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh hopes to further assist the development of these resources in the future.



Moving the herbarium specimen cabinets to the new room.



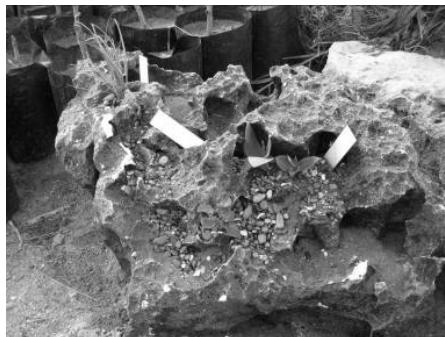
The new herbarium with cabinets in place.



Working through the plant specimens to give names to unidentified specimens, and correct and update names where necessary.



New cuttings and seedlings collected and grown in Adeeb's nursery, kept in plastic water bottles to keep the plants moist until they have rooted.



Dorstenia gigas, *Iphigenia Soqotrana* and *Habenaria Soqotrana* planted in cracks of a limestone rock to represent how they are found in the wild.



Steve Scott and Andrew Ensoll, giving training on plant growing techniques to Ahmed Adeeb.

Etcetera

ABDR Eagle

Obituary by Karen Dabrowska, *The Guardian*, Monday November 24, 2008

ABDR Eagle, who has died aged 69, was a bright and devout man who was first confirmed an Anglican, then became a Roman Catholic, and finally converted to Islam. He was a passionate champion of dialogue between Islam and the west, and touched the hearts of hundreds of Yemenis, Saudis and westerners. A frank, gentle person with a transparent personality, he was able to live comfortably in diverse environments and cultures.

He was born Donald Rossley Eagle in Beddington, near Croydon, Surrey. When he left school, he did his national service in the army, and this took him to Aden, where he experienced the desert for the first time. After graduating from St Catharine's College, Cambridge, and a short spell of teaching in London, he applied for a job in Saudi Arabia in 1964, learned Arabic and embraced Islam, changing his name to Abdelmalik Badruddin. He taught English to Saudi schoolchildren, including some of the royal princes, but eventually left to care for his elderly parents, even though his Saudi hosts offered him citizenship and assured him he could visit his parents for as long as was necessary.

He traveled widely throughout the Middle East, especially enjoying the sights and sounds of Yemen and Oman. After coming back to Britain, he settled in Durham, enrolled at the university and got an MLitt in 1990. He has attended several of the Friends of Soqatra meetings.

He valued exercise, went on long walks and led a simple, austere life, sometimes turning down invitations to dinner and eating salad and seasonal fruits. He suffered a massive brain hemorrhage at his home after returning from a trip to Italy, and was buried in the Yemeni cemetery in South Shields.



Egyptian vulture - photo by Richard Porter

WEBSITES

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

The following websites also provide information on the island:

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

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

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

www.yemen-protectedareas.org

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

Friends of Soqatra Website

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

JohnFarrar@metronet.co.uk.

TAYF ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND REQUEST FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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FRIENDS OF SOQOTRA

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

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

SOCOTRA CONSERVATION FUND

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

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



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Socotra: Muhammad Amir Ahmad Amir Di Min Selmeahun [POB 111 Socotra; mobile tel. 777727753]

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

The Gulf: Shukri Nuh Abdullah Al Harbi Di Kishin has agreed to represent FoS in the Gulf to relieve some of the pressure on Ahmad Sa'ad Tahki (formerly FoS representative for Oman and the Gulf). P.O.B. 1590, 'Ajman, U.A.E., telephone 00 97150 5775678 or 00 97150 2320808

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Feature Article—Impact of Roads on Soqatra

The Socotra cliffs - important for their breeding seabirds. Roads could have a serious impact on them.



The Hallah to Irriseyl Road: November 2007, before road construction, and February 2008, the same areas after clearance along the road route.