

# Dioscorida

ISSUED BY FRIENDS OF SOQOTRA

أصدقاء سقطرى



**Second Annual General Meeting  
of  
Friends of Soqatra  
*Soqatra on Film*  
Grey College, Durham  
University  
Saturday 20 – Sunday 21  
September 2003**

The second Annual General Meeting of Friends of Soqatra will be held on the weekend of 20 – 21 September at Durham University. The main event will be a compilation of films of Soqatra over the past 50 years. This promises to be a most illuminating afternoon, with films from a variety of viewpoints and showing the island, and its visitors, through a fascinating period of change. Films on offer will include those by: Douglas Botting (1956, 1995), Ed Milner, Rik Martens (Soqatra Karst Project), Wolfgang Wranik, John Farrar and others. Each film followed by discussion with the Producer. The film show will be on Saturday 20 September from 2:00 and will be followed by dinner in the college.

The FoS Annual General Meeting itself will take place from 10:00 to 12:00 on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> Sept. It will include the normal business plus discussions on the RBGE Exhibition (see page 7) and projects and activities for FoS. There will be tours of Durham and the University available on Sunday afternoon.

We hope that you will be able to attend. Accommodation will be available in Grey College for a reasonable fee. Please indicate your attendance with the Secretary as soon as possible to facilitate arrangements.

Contact FoS to book your place or for more information.

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Hadiboh plain, 1965

Photo: John Farrar

## Conservation on Soqatra - important agreement signed

A major programme for 'Sustainable Development and Biodiversity Conservation for the People of the Socotra Islands' has been signed by UNDP and key stakeholders, notably the Ministry of Water and Environment and the Ministry of Planning. The programme will be financed by UNDP, the Government of Italy and the Yemen Government who will collectively contribute over US \$ 5 million.

The aim is to continue to support the people of Soqatra through conservation and sustainable use of the islands' unique biodiversity and natural resources for the coming five years.

The programme is designed to assist the Yemen Government with a number of initiatives including the implementation of the Zoning Plan, management of protected areas and support for the local economy through ecotourism and sustainable fisheries. There are also plans to develop a partnership with the Galapagos National Park.

For further details contact Faud Ali Abdulla: [faud.ali@undp.org](mailto:faud.ali@undp.org) or visit [www.socotraisland.org](http://www.socotraisland.org)

## Soqatra declared Biosphere Reserve

**The Soqatra Archipelago is one of 15 new sites in 10 countries added to UNESCO's World Network of Biosphere Reserves. It is the first site in Yemen, and joins 439 other sites in 97 countries.**

Biosphere Reserves are pilot sites which perform three complementary functions: biodiversity conservation, development integrating local communities and logistic support including research, education, training and monitoring.

## Ditwah Lagoon Road Rerouted

There has been excellent news about the Qalansiyah Road and the Ditwah Lagoon. The Yemen President, H.E. Ali Abdallah Saleh intervened to stop all roadworks on Sunday 2 March. On 3 March a delegation including the Minister of Public Works, the Minister of Tourism and Environment and the Socotra Programme Co-ordination Unit of the Ministry of Planning and Development, plus Ministry of Public Works and Urban Development (MPWUD) engineers visited Soqatra.

As a result it was agreed to divert the path of the road away from the Ditwah Protected Area and that in future all roads routes must be agreed in writing between the MPWUD and Ministry of Tourism and Environment.

# Impressions of Soqotra

*How does Soqotra impress the traveller? We asked some recent visitors to give us their personal impressions of the island. The views expressed are those of the authors.*

## Has Soqotra changed?

John Farrar

*John Farrar first visited Soqotra nearly 40 years ago when he was in the Royal Air Force. He returned in 2002, having wanted to revisit the island ever since he left.*



When you have nurtured an idea for any length of time, even years, and the idea eventually becomes reality, there is a danger of a feeling of anti-climax as that idea becomes reality. As I walked down the steps of the Yemenia flight that January day in 2002 to set foot once again on the surface of Soqotra, my mind was full of memories of those days almost 40 years previously. Was there a feeling of anti-climax? If I am honest, I suppose there was in a way.

For a start, here I was walking from a modern jet airliner onto a tarmac runway, surrounded by jostling 4x4 drivers and the occasional policeman. There was a control tower nearing completion and, although the view away from the airfield looked the same, I knew that Soqotra was changing and was not the place I had left in February 1965. Of course, it could not be the same but you cling to your memories and if reality clouds those memories then some anti-climax is inevitable.

This was the place that had had such a profound effect on my life in the intervening years. Not because I had made a wonderful scientific discovery or had done anything to have had a positive influence on the island and its people. It was the whole experience that had left such a lasting impression on me as a 24 year old. Now that we were in the 21<sup>st</sup> century I had to see what Soqotra had to offer. Hadiboh would be the first stop.

I was prepared to expect big changes in Hadiboh but not the ones that I did encounter. As we drove from the airport to Hadiboh in the afternoon sun I looked for familiar landmarks. The road from the airport has been cut through the rocky cliffs, an area that became notorious for its rugged pathway that had to be negotiated before you got anywhere (above). Now we drove around the cliffs in about 5 minutes along a tarmacadamed road. Yes, things have certainly changed since I was here last.

As we neared Hadiboh I looked for a white marker stone. It was in the area where the Soqotra Conservation Project building is now but I could not find it (front cover). The centre of Hadiboh came into view and I looked for the white tower of the mosque but could not see that either. The town had developed southwards, surrounding a graveyard (below) that was on the outskirts of the town on my previous visit.

We arrived at the Summerland Hotel. I walked into the entrance area and a TV was receiving satellite pictures of European football highlights. Stopping to watch for a few minutes I was amazed to see the highlights of an Arsenal match come on. I was watching 'my team', on a TV, in a hotel foyer, on the Island of Soqotra. Yes, Soqotra has certainly changed in the last 40 years!

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## A Doctor's Viewpoint

Dr Alexander Smith

*Sandy Smith is a retired medical doctor from Scotland who visited Soqotra as part of an organised tour in 2001.*

On a visit to Soqotra in January 2001 I was disappointed to find that medical services did not seem to have kept pace with commercial development on the island. Our Yemeni guide knew that I was a doctor and wherever we stopped while travelling around the Island he presented me with "patients" eager for medical attention. Unfortunately I was not able to do much for them due to language difficulties, lack of drugs and diagnostic equipment. On the South coast there seemed to be a lot of asthma, upper respiratory and eye infections. Some of the younger women appeared rather anaemic, probably due to dietary deficiencies.

While in Hadiboh I thought it would be interesting to see the hospital but unfortunately on the day we went the hospital courtyard gate was locked and people were even climbing over the wall.

I think the country people would benefit from an increase in the numbers of nurse-practitioners who would be able to advise on nutrition and preventive medicine, as it is often difficult for people to get to Hadiboh to visit the doctor. The islanders' reliance on herbal medicines should be encouraged when, as often, it offers the best remedy.

I certainly saw a number of infections that would have responded to a short course of antibiotics. On the other hand chronic conditions like asthma respond well to modern bronchodilating drugs but both cost and availability can limit their use.

For the traveller to Soqotra I would advise them to be self-sufficient medically, taking with them any medication they take regularly or require for common emergencies. Do not let that put you off going to the Island - it is a fascinating place and definitely worth the trip.

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# Impressions of Soqotra



SKP-team exploring Erher Cave, Jan. 2003.  
Photo by K. Van Damme & E. Claes.

## Impressions of Soqotra

Kay van Damme

On a world map it's just a speck. A place you would never have noticed, but once you do, a whole continent seems to be pointing at it. Soqotra takes pride in its timidity. If the island could speak, native animals and plants would express their high degree of endemity without bragging. The proudest of trees would puzzle you with his age, granite peaks would sing how they withstood the winds of change, caves would tell stories about forgotten tribes and languages, and the sea would only wave and quickly hide her face behind a deep blue veil.



Haggeher Peaks, view from the top,  
Jan. 2003



Construction workers in  
Hadiboh, Jan. 2003

For a traveller, whether a zoologist interested in small freshwater animals, a photographer trying to capture time, or even someone with no specific interest at all, it is a fascinating place, any way you look at it. I feel very fortunate and grateful to be allowed to carry out fieldwork there; each encounter has been completely different, with its own set of landscapes and people, making deep impressions. During the last visit I witnessed the beauty of underground water resources and the endurance of those who explore them. I saw how fast Hadiboh is growing, how quickly roads are built and how the spirit of people remains, regardless. And I learned that we tend to forget how easily colours rub off a butterfly's wings.

A geographer would disagree, but this island is bigger than the sea.

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Village of Erisel, Jan. 2003



# Soqotran Archaeology

## Origins of the Name *Dioscorida*

The first written references to Soqotra come from the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* from between 40 and 70 AD. This handbook for Greek traders refers to an island called Dioscorida, which is large, barren and damp 'with rivers full of crocodiles, vipers and lizards so large people eat them and use their fat instead of oil'. The inhabitants were few in number, lived on the northern side of the island and raised no arable crops. The island yielded tortoise shell which was made into boxes, plates and discs, and cinnabar which was collected as resin from trees and used for antidotes and medicaments. Aloe ('of which the best sort comes from Soqotra') and frankincense were also exported via Hadramawt, which ruled the island at this time. Dioscorides was also used to refer to the largest settlement on the island, now called Hadiboh.

The island is also mentioned by Plinius the Elder in 77 AD, by Claudius Ptolemaios in the second third of the second century, by the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus in the third quarter of the fourth century, by Stephanos of Byzantium in the first half of the sixth century and by Cosmas Indicopleustes, an Alexandrian spice trader, in 520. The latter mentions that the inhabitants were sent there by the Ptolemies, the successors of Alexander of Macedonia, and speak Greek and included many Christians. There are also numerous Sabaic inscriptions from the first quarter of the sixth century. Soqotra has also been equated with a number of other names, including Isle of Bliss and Island of the Phoenix, but these stories are all felt to be fictional.

The name Dioscorides is stated by Samuel Bochart (Bochartus) in 1674 to derive from Diu-Socotora, 'the island of Socotra'. The name itself probably derives from *śkrđ* (documented in Old South Arabic), possibly vocalised as Sakurid, which can be considered the oldest and original form of the name, with an unknown etymology but probably adopted from the inhabitants and is thus a native Soqotri word. Alternative origins, such as via Sanskrit or from the mythological Greek, are unlikely.

*Taken from a lecture given by Prof Dr Walter W. Müller, Seminar for Arabian Studies, 19 July 1997, Oxford.*

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## Soqotra Karst Project: karst exploration and cave research on Soqotra island

Peter De Geest and the members of the Soqotra Karst Project

More than half of the surface of Soqotra Island consists of limestone deposits. The combination of the Indian Ocean Monsoon and the extended karstic limestone geology cause major problems in water management because of the lack of knowledge concerning cave systems.

During three consecutive winters, between 2000 and 2003, a group of Belgian cave explorers and scientists explored and mapped more than 16 km of underground galleries in 13 different caves. These Soqotra Karst Project expeditions were the start of a systematic cave survey on the archipelago in collaboration with the Soqotra Conservation and Development Programme unit, the Environment Protection Authority and the Ministry of Tourism and Environment of Yemen.

The studies provide essential information about:

- the presence of important archaeological remains,
- the occurrence of vulnerable endemic cave fauna
- underground freshwater resources, and
- the potential for an additional eco-tourism asset to the island.

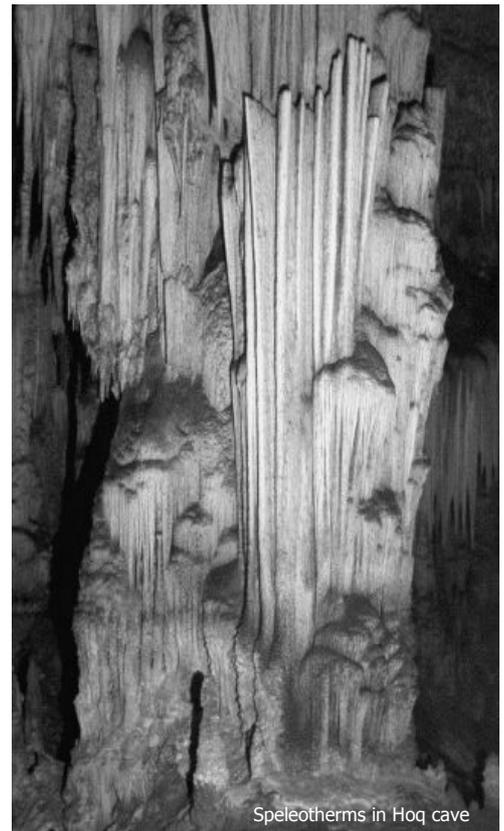
Our team explored important active rivers and waterfalls under the Momi and Shebehan plateaus. People from the Nissam and Irisseyll village already benefit from these discoveries by having fresh running water from the nearby Erher cave. Other potential water sources situated in the arid western part of the island will be explored. Our specially trained cave diving team will map the active underwater passages to better understand the hydrogeology of the cave systems.

Hoq cave revealed many archaeological artefacts such as ancient pottery, different sorts of mural paintings and a perfectly preserved wooden tablet with inscriptions. A French team of experts, lead by Dr. Christian Robin, collaborated and confirmed the uniqueness of these finds. The cave must have been a well known place visited by sailors during the first centuries AD, located on the important trade route between East Africa, the Arabian mainland and West India.

New endemic cave fauna are being studied by Italian, American and Belgian experts and results will be published soon. We started, in collaboration with the Yemeni authorities and Soqotri inhabitants, with the protection of Hoq cave. A local guide is paid to accompany visitors on a well defined walking pathway inside the cave. This measure is set up to prevent vandalism or abuse of the geological, archaeological and/or biological riches of the cave and to generate benefits for the local communities.

I have just started a Ph.D. study to reconstruct the late Quaternary Palaeoclimate with the use of isotopic and geochemical research on Speleothems, supported by the Institute for the Promotion of Innovation through Science and Technology in Flanders, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, the University of Sana'a and the Soqotra Conservation and Development Programme unit (Yemen).

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Speleothems in Hoq cave

# Soqotran Archaeology

## Archaeological investigation at Soqatra in 2002

Vitaly Naumkin and Alexander Sedov

Apart from the wide-ranging general survey of the island in 1835 undertaken by Lieutenant Wellsted, the first visit that focused mainly on the archaeology of Socotra was made by Mr. and Mrs. Bent who recorded the existence of ancient remains. The next researcher to pursue serious archaeological investigation on the island was P.L. Shinnie, a member of the Oxford University expedition of 1956. However, the most notable contributor to the study of Soqotra's archaeology was D.B. Doe, who carried out an extensive survey on the island in 1967.

The Russian (former Soviet) archaeological expedition to the Republic of Yemen initiated its work on Soqatra in 1983 and carried out six field campaigns in 1983-85, 1987, 2001 and 2002. We made a detailed study of the ancient settlements, farmsteads and graveyards mostly in the central and eastern parts of the island. Some monuments in the western extremity of the island, near Qallansiya, were studied as well.

In 2002, in the locality known as Lower Rokib c. 30 km SE of the modern town of Hadiboh, the remains of an extensive settlement and the necropolis situated nearby were investigated. Notable features of the ruins were the impressive size of stones and remains of some fairly extensive dwellings whose roofs rested on two or four monolithic pillars. The necropolis lies on the SE outskirts of the settlement; the grave structures are of the type most commonly found on Soqatra, though notable for the larger-than-normal stones used for their constructions.

Three graves were excavated at the cemetery. The above-ground structures were small mounds strengthened with ring-shaped fences made of one or two rows of stones, oval-shaped in plan, 2.0-2.5x3.0-3.8 m in size, oriented in a NW-SE direction. Grave pits, measuring 1.8-2.2x3.0-3.8 m and 1.9-2.2 m in depth, had the shape of a rectangle with rounded corners. Burial chambers, 1.0-1.1 m high, were made of undressed stones. They had slightly inclined walls narrowing at the upper parts: the upper rows of stones were laid with a "lap" inside. The resulting dome-shaped structures were covered with three, four or five horizontally-lying flat stones, and cracks between them were carefully filled with small pebbles.

On the bottom of the chambers remnants of several human skeletons and numerous grave-goods were discovered. The latter consisted of ceramic vessels (one grave contained 32 pots), iron daggers and knives, fragments of glass vessels, bronze buckles and mirrors. One of the mirrors was, most probably, made in China in the so-called Tang period (7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> cent. CE). This find gave the possible date range for the monuments at Lower Rokib.

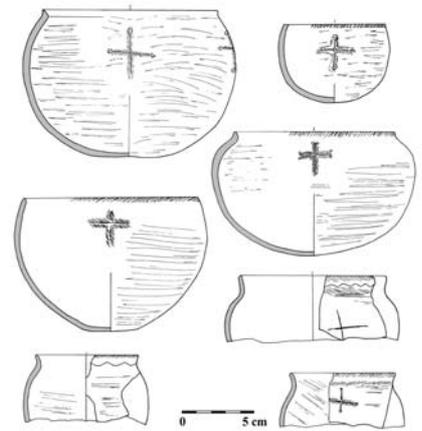


Fig. 2. Local handmade pottery vessels from grave 2 at Lower Rokib.

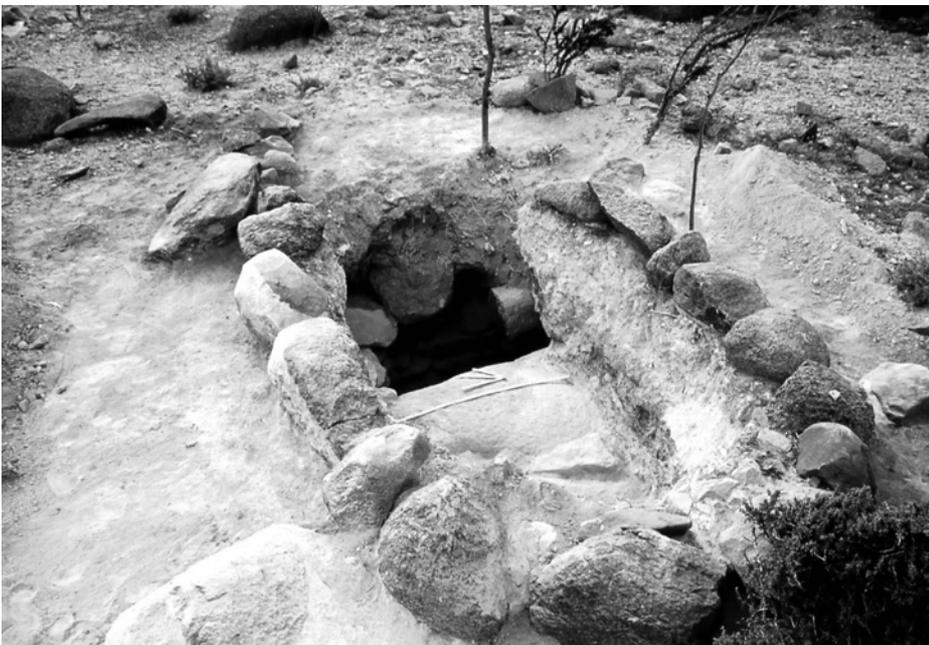
**Fig. 2. Local handmade pottery vessels from grave 2 at Lower Rokib.**

Studies on the objects of material culture obtained in the excavations of the graves in ground cemeteries dated between 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> cent. AD, as well as the comparative study of the graves themselves, suggest some preliminary conclusions. There is similarity in the grave types studied in various necropolises in different parts of the island such as Lower Rokib, Hasin, Mobrhim, Mathobo, Gyuzuf, Shibhon, Hajrya, Qallansiya. We saw a common principle of cemetery organisation all over the explored area, a similar type of overground constructions and burial chambers, and a common burial rite, all of which point to the cultural and ethnic unity of the early mediaeval Soqotrans. There were, however, minor specifically local features.

The presence among the grave goods, along with local items such as handmade pottery vessels, iron knives and daggers, of clearly imported pieces (stone and glass beads from India, Chinese bronze mirror, glazed pottery vessels from Zabid in Yemen, Arabian Gulf countries and even from Southern China and other countries of South-East Asia) indicates the direction of trade connections established by local and foreign merchants and sailors.

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**Fig. 1. Grave 2 at Lower Rokib cemetery.**



# Soqotra Research Notes

## Geo-ecological Analysis of Sustainable Development on Soqotra Island

Dana Pietsch

Walking from Hadiboh to Noged and back I recognized – and not just from a scientific point of view – that the island and its inhabitants are facing a lot of problems which concern all aspects of their life. These are due not only to influences from the outside, but also to changes in many sectors of the economy, and in patterns of land-use. Signs of this are apparent, for example, in neglected home gardens, a wide distribution of degraded areas due to overgrazing of intramontane basins, eroded and oversalted topsoils on slopes, and, finally, in spreading suburbanization around Hadiboh. Because these phenomena are natural-region specific, we can distinguish between different kinds and degrees of land degradation.

Botanical studies carried out over the years have shown the interdependence between grazing and the degradation of the natural vegetation, but not the relation between soil, vegetation and landscape degradation. In general, this appears due to the increase in herd numbers as well as to the neglect of field terraces. So far, nothing has been done about this permanent damage to the soils, and consequent decrease in geodiversity. On the one hand, we have become aware of decreasing biodiversity as one result of the changes in land-use, but we should not forget, on the other hand, a similar decrease in geodiversity.

A project, within the field of Soils and Ecological Sciences of Dry Regions, is planned over the next few years. It will analyse the soil distribution and land-use patterns in selected parts of the island, and will try to determine different degrees and kinds of land degradation due to overgrazing and neglect of terraced fields.

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Neglected Terraces - south of Hageher Mts

Dana Pietsch

## Visit of Ahmad Sa'ad Khamis al-Soqotri to the UK

Miranda Morris

Ahmad, who is from Homhil in eastern Soqotra, spent the month of May in St. Andrews to work with me on the dictionary and ethnography of Soqotra. Ahmad was my very first Soqotri teacher and we have known each other for over ten years now. He had visited us here before, on one occasion to have a successful cataract operation, and so was able to settle in quickly. As usual, he worked extremely hard, and as a result we managed to complete all the material I had prepared on dictionary checks, as well as transcribe a host of new stories and ethnographic texts, and do further comparative work on Soqotri and the other Modern South Arabian languages.

Ahmad had never seen London properly, so this time, after a leisurely train journey through a sunny Britain and a celebratory evening in London, we set off to visit the places he had chosen. First we went for a trip on the London Eye. There we met up with Douglas Botting, who led the Oxford University Expedition to Soqotra in the 1950s, and who had met Ahmad on a return trip to film on Soqotra in the 1990s. It was a happy reunion and Douglas had brought a series of photographs of the 1950s and 1990s trips to give to Ahmad. We then travelled by boat along the Thames, the bells of Westminster ringing out - this was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Queen's coronation, Douglas explained to Ahmad. Next stop was the mosque in Regent's Park where Ahmad went to pray, and then on to the Zoo where we spent a fascinating couple of hours. Then it was time to hurry home for Ahmad to change clothes and pick up his bags before we left for Heathrow airport and the plane home. A hectic day, but a great success, as the many photographs taken show.

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## Dragon Trees on Soqotra

Jindrich Pavlis

Knowledge of tree population age structure is a key factor for determining the procedure and urgency of their early and effective conservation. Unique woodlands of *Dracaena cinnabari* on Soqotra Island – last preserved relics of the Mio-Pliocene xerophile-sclerophyllous southern Tethys Flora – were examined in detail, especially with regard to their age structure. The problematic nature of determining the age of an individual tree or specific populations of *Dracaena cinnabari* (*DC*) is illustrated on models relating to orders of branching, frequency of fruiting, etc. which give conditions to calculate actual tree age. Detailed statistical analyses of the set of 50 trees at 4 localities were performed in order to define a model reflecting relationships between specific growth habit and actual age. The range of the probable age of one 'sausage-shaped' section of *DC* determined by the Czech team reaches values of 13.7 - 29.6 years (mean value 18.7). Based on statistical analyses as well as on direct field observations, *DC* populations on Soqotra do not regenerate to a great extent and their age structure generally indicates overmaturity. According to the analysis of dead trees, it is evident that, on average, *DC* in populations at Firmihin die after reaching 17 orders of peripheral branches. Therefore, with 95% probability, it is possible to expect that the larger part of the world's most extensive '*Dracaena* woodland' complex at Firmihin will be in the stage of intensive disintegration within 30 to 77 years. An alarming comparison can be made with the case of Diksam plateau where, in the past, existed one of the supposedly largest *DC* forests, which at present is in a stage of advanced disintegration – starting more than 100 years ago – with too few scattered patriarch trees (perhaps up to 350 years old).

Meteorological data were also recorded from Firmihin during 4 days (September 26-29, 2002) when rainfall reached an incredible 304.8 mm. The Czech team has also produced the first detailed land-cover map of Soqotra Island distinguishing 19 terrestrial land-cover classes. Overall accuracy of the map achieved is more than 80%. Therefore, estimates of the area and degree of coverage of individual land-cover classes within Soqotra Island have brought a promising overview on state of island biotopes. Analyses show that the area of *Dracaena* woodland land-cover class on Soqotra reaches 3658 ha (incl. 228 ha of open forest in the FAO sense), i.e. 1.1 % of the total island area.

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# Friends of Soqotra News

## ***The Natural and Social History of the Soqotra Archipelago*** **Exhibition and Complementary Events** **June – September 2005** **Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh**

**Patrons: His Excellency Dr. Mutahar Abdullah Al Saeede, Ambassador of the Republic of Yemen to the United Kingdom**  
**Mrs Frances Guy, British Ambassador to the Republic of Yemen.**  
**Special Advisor: Sa'id Salim Bu Haqibah, the representative for Soqotra to the Yemeni Parliament**

Friends of Soqotra is working with the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) to develop an Exhibition on Soqotra to take place during the summer of 2005. The Exhibition will be the main RBGE Exhibition for that period and will involve a number of different events and activities. The Exhibition will overlap the Edinburgh Festival, and it is hoped that in excess of 40,000 visitors will see it. The Exhibition will be bilingual, in English and Arabic, and we hope that the Exhibition will travel to other venues in the UK, Europe and the Middle East, with an eventual home in Yemen.

The aims of the Exhibition will be:

- To raise awareness and knowledge of the unique features of the Archipelago.
- To demonstrate how the island's biota and people have adapted to change over the millennia.
- To look at current threats and opportunities facing the island's residents and identify positive approaches which build on traditions and knowledge.

The exhibition will take the form of telling a number of 'stories' which illustrate the unique way that the people and environment of Soqotra have evolved together to create the islands and culture we see today. By focusing on particular species and aspects of life, the Exhibition will demonstrate a number of ways in which the plants and animals of the Archipelago have adapted to their environment and how the people live within their environment in peace and harmony with nature in demanding conditions. Each 'story' will be illustrated in a variety of ways, appropriate to the story being told, including models, interactive exhibits, commodities, displays and films.

In addition to the Exhibition itself we hope to run a number of supporting events and activities during the summer, including a public launch seminar, lecture/film series and scientific seminars.

A Steering Group has been set up to contact other individuals and organisations and to help plan the events. RBGE hopes to involve many people in the development of the exhibition, through providing information, ideas and contributing to the events. This offers a great opportunity to promote Soqotra, and we hope that all FoS members will wish to contribute, each in the most appropriate way.

Planning is still in its early stages but we will provide additional information as it becomes available. We will also need to raise funds for the development of the Exhibition and auxiliary events, so if you have contacts who might wish to sponsor an event, publication or display, please let us know or ask them to contact us. This will be a most exciting event, and we look forward to working with you all on its development.

We are delighted that the Ambassadors have agreed to be Patrons of this exciting event, and hope that they are but the first of many people who will wish to become involved.



Ahmad Sa'ad  
Khamis al-Soqotri  
during his visit to  
London

## **FoS in Oman and the Gulf**

**Miranda Morris**

During Ahmad Sa'ad's visit to Scotland (Page 6) we talked about the Friends of Soqotra and he looked at the first Newsletter, which I roughly translated for him. He was very enthusiastic, and asked for more copies which Sue Christie kindly sent on. He was sure that the many Soqotrans who live outside Soqotra would welcome the chance to join such an organisation, and as he was planning to visit family and friends in the Gulf soon after his return home, said he would take the Newsletters with my rough translation and see what the reaction was. He got in touch with me after his return and said the response had been overwhelming. There is a sort of club house in the Gulf where many Soqotrans meet, with the beginnings of a library, and it was here that Ahmad left many of the books, reports and articles on Soqotra that I had gathered for him to take back. They met to talk about FoS, and, since Ahmad and a group of like-minded Soqotrans have already set up a self-help fund for Soqotrans in Dhofar, it was felt that with this experience as well as his contacts in the Gulf and the UK, he would be the most suitable person to be the 'country representative' for FoS. He has now purchased a fax machine, and a steady stream of faxes with the names and addresses of new members has been arriving ever since: from Oman, Ajman, Sharjah, Ra's al Khaymah, Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Yemen.

This welcome influx of new members from the Arabic-speaking world, however, means that FoS must now prioritise translating the Newsletter into Arabic. Message follows message from members asking for all material to be made available in both English and Arabic; our new members have met together and generously decided to collect funds towards the cost of this. The FoS Committee is now busy working on this and we hope the Arabic version will be ready soon.

## **New Yemeni Members**

FoS is delighted that His Excellency Dr. Mutahar Abdullah Al Saeede, Ambassador of the Republic of Yemen to Britain, has recently become a member. He has also offered all his support to the planned RBGE exhibition on Soqotra. This has given the Exhibition Steering Committee enormous encouragement.

Another new member of FoS is Sa'id Salim Bu Haqibah, the representative for Soqotra to the Yemeni Parliament (Majlis an-Nuwwaab). He too has expressed his willingness to help with the Soqotra Exhibition in any way he can.

# News and Contacts

## Publications

Flora und Vegetationsökologie der Insel Soqatra. Bruno A. Mies. 2001. Essener Ökologische Schriften, Band 15. Westarp Wissenschaften.

### In Preparation:

Cheung, Catherine and Lyndon DeVantier, *Socotra - A Natural History of the Islands and Their People*. ca.160pp. full colour.

Morris, M. *A Gazetteer of the Soqatra Archipelago*.

Morris, M and T. Miller. *An Ethnoflora of the Soqatra Archipelago*.

Wranik, Wolfgang. *Fauna of the Soqatra Archipelago; a field guide*.

See the FoS website for a more complete listing of recent and planned publications, including articles on some of the Research reported in this Newsletter.

## Friends of Soqatra Obtains Charitable Status

On 15 May 2003 Friends of Soqatra was officially registered as a Charity by the Charity Commissioners for England and Wales. This means that the Charity must fulfil certain obligations with regard to propriety and financial accounting, and assures donors that these conditions will be met, with their contributions being used effectively and efficiently for the purposes for which they are donated.

## THE SOCIETY FOR ARABIAN STUDIES The Red Sea Project Phase II: 'People of the Red Sea'

British Museum, 29-30 October 2004

Convenor: Mrs Janet Starkey  
Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Durham

For information contact:  
[j.c.m.starkey@durham.ac.uk](mailto:j.c.m.starkey@durham.ac.uk)

## Contributions to *Dioscorida*

We are most grateful to all those who have contributed to this issue of *Dioscorida*.

If you would like to include an article, research note or notice for future issues of the Newsletter or information for the website, please send to:

[FriendsOfSoqatra@aol.com](mailto:FriendsOfSoqatra@aol.com).

## The Developing Strategy of Socotra Archipelago and Other Yemeni Islands

Second International Symposium  
14 - 16 December 2003

Aden, Republic of Yemen

For more information please contact: Prof. Dr. Saleh A. Ba-surrah, University of Aden - Khormaksar P. O. Box 6312, Aden, Republic of Yemen. Fax: 00967 - 2 - 234426. Email: [adenuniversity@y.net.ye](mailto:adenuniversity@y.net.ye).



Peter De Geest

Rillenkarst, Momi Plateau

## Websites

[www.FriendsOfSoqatra.org](http://www.FriendsOfSoqatra.org)

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) Socotra Karst Project (caving and speleology)

[www.socotraisland.org](http://www.socotraisland.org) Socotra Conservation and Development Programme and Socotra Conservation Fund

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

[www.socotra.info](http://www.socotra.info) A personal view by John Farrar.

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

## *Dioscorida* in Arabic

In recognition of the number of Members whose preferred language is Arabic full translations of *Dioscorida* articles will be provided in Arabic. If you wish to receive the articles in Arabic, please let us know and we will send them to you.

## Contacting FoS

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