

***Aloe perryi* - ecology and traditional uses**

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The sap of *Aloe perryi* has been used locally by Soqotrans and exported for thousands of years. It is used as a medicine, both internally to cure stomach upsets and externally applied to cuts and scrapes. It is harvested at several sites across the island, and is exported to the mainland and hence elsewhere in the Middle East, providing a valuable source of income to some islanders.

We have studied both the ecology and usage of the species during two trips in 2002, in January and October. We now have a reasonable idea of some aspects of its ecology, as well as some information on the collection, supply and marketing of the product.



Aloe perryi is widespread but is very patchily distributed. Where it grows it can be extremely abundant; even to being the dominant species in preferred habitats such as limestone pavement. The plants are highly variable in appearance between different populations, but we believe that this is variability within a species as opposed to specific or sub-specific differences. Confirmation of this can only come from either genetic studies or comparative growth studies in controlled conditions at one or more sites on the island.

The plants are subject to infestation by a mite, which can reach severe levels sufficient to kill plants, but this probably occurs only if they are already stressed. Goats eat the young seedlings, and in times of drought will pick at new growth. It appears that the interaction of drought and predation of young plants can have serious negative impacts on populations. Local people report that some current population levels are much reduced from those of some decades ago, and they attribute this primarily to drier conditions.

Sap is harvested at any time of the year, collected, dried and packaged in kidskins. One skin contains approximately two kg of dried sap. This is then used locally, sold to traders who visit the village periodically, or taken to Hadiboh where it is either sold or traded for goods. From there the sap is taken to Makulla, Aden or Sana'a, where it may be sold or taken elsewhere in the Middle East to its final market.