



**Yemen Minister of Water & Environment Visit to Wada'a, Amran**  
**Wednesday, March 12, 2008**



**David Stanton**  
**(from memory)**  
**April 20, 2010**

# Yemen Minister of Water & Environment Visit to Wada'a, Amran

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## Participants:

His Excellency Abdulrahman Fadhl Al-Eryani – Yemen Minister of Water & Environment  
Mr. David Stanton – Coordinator, Yemeni Leopard Recovery Program  
Dr. Abdul Karim Nasher – Professor of Zoology, Sana'a University  
Mr. Bilal Syed – HSE & Q Manager (OMV), YLRP Steering Committee

**Background:** Following the rapid assessment of Wada'a by Dr. David Mallon of the IUCN Cat Specialist Group and his team of local and international experts in December 2007, a team from the Yemeni Leopard Recovery Program paid a three day visit to Wada'a from February 20 – 22, 2008. During that visit, the residents of Adh Dhil'ain expressed their wishes through Sheikh Mohamed Al-Hashidi that the Government of Yemen would establish a protected area in Wada'a. This disclosure was quickly followed by a visit by Yemen Minister of Water & Environment, His Excellency Abdulrahman Fadhl Al-Eryani, in the company of representatives of the YLRP and Sana'a University.

**Objectives:** The current visit was specifically organized to initiate the development of a Leopard Sanctuary at Wada'a by further exploring local attitudes to the concept and by demonstrating the Government of Yemen's interest in doing so.

## Itinerary:

**Wednesday, March 12:** Depart Sana'a at circa 6:00 AM for Wada'a in Minister Al-Eryani's official government vehicle. Stop for breakfast at Al Raydah before continuing to Adh Dhil'ain. After lunch, stop for tea at Sheikh Al-Hashidi's house, and from thence on to Sana'a arriving circa 7:00 PM.

**Narrative Account of the Trip:** We left Sana'a in His Excellency's Land Cruiser at around 6:00 AM; Mabruk drove us north past Amran, and we stopped at Al Raydah for a breakfast consisting of *fool*, *fasooliyah*, *baydh*, and *lahm sugghar* (bean stew, white beans, eggs, and diced meat cooked with vegetables) washed down with tea. Arriving in Wada'a we went on a short walk along the *wadi* rim and were given huge circles of traditional unleavened bread, milk with *sahawaq* (salsa), and *qishr* (drink made with boiled coffee husks, ginger and sugar). Returning to the village we sat in the shade of a building while the minister informed the people that they had a very precious commodity in the form of their leopards and that these could be leveraged for improvements in the standard of living of the villagers. He stated that the government would help them to establish a protected area but that they would have to do such things as form a community-based organization (CBO) and otherwise organize themselves in a way that demonstrated their commitment to achieving this noteworthy accomplishment.

The villagers listened attentively and asked a few questions, and things otherwise seemed to be progressing well. However, as soon as the Minister finished his speech a heated argument developed between some of the village elders. I was informed that this was a normal reaction under the circumstances as people pressed their claims of *wadi* ownership. This was followed by a feast of mutton and bread after which we were invited to Sheikh Al-Hashidi's house to chew *qat*. Though we declined, we did drink tea and were invited to smoke our clothes with *bakhoor* (incense) that was brought into the room in a burner and the smoke wafted over us. It was quite late by the time we left and well after dark when we arrived in Sana'a.

**Conclusions:** At the conclusion of this visit, it appeared as if there was a consensus among the villagers regarding the formation of the protected area. Many hoops would have to be jumped through before this could become a reality, but it appeared that we were making good progress towards the objective of establishing a leopard sanctuary at Wada'a.

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