



Third Yemeni Leopard Recovery Program Visit to Wada'a, Amran
Thursday, June 5, 2008



David Stanton
(from memory)
April 20, 2010

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Participants:

Mr. David Stanton – Coordinator, Yemeni Leopard Recovery Program
Dr. Abdul Karim Nasher – Professor of Zoology, Sana'a University
Dr. Gerhard Lichtenthäler – GTZ Water Expert
Mr. Yousuf Mohageb – Owner, Arabian Ecotours
Mr. Max Stanton – University student
Mr. Josh Power – University student

Background: Between December, 2007 and March, 2008 three visits were made to Wada'a in quick succession. The first visit, made by a team led by Dr. David Mallon of the IUCN Cat Specialist Group, established that it is likely that there are still leopards in Wada'a which area residents are interested in preserving. The second visit introduced the community to the Yemeni Leopard Recovery Program and confirmed that there exists considerable local interest in establishing a protected area at Wada'a. The third visit, conducted by Yemen Minister of Water & Environment HE Abdulrahman Al-Eryani, demonstrated the Government of Yemen's commitment to helping area residents establish a leopard sanctuary at Wada'a. However, it would not be prudent to attempt establishing a protected area without conclusive evidence that confirms the continued existence of leopards in Wada'a. We therefore organized our third Wada'a expedition in order to install the equipment that could document leopard presence with photographic evidence.

Objectives: The current visit was specifically organized to install a PixController DigitalEye 7.2 IR Trail Camera.

Itinerary:

Thursday, June 5: Depart Sana'a at circa 6:00 AM for Wada'a. Stop for breakfast at Raydah before continuing to Adh Dhil'ain. Organize our team and enter the *wadi*, set up the trail camera, and return to Sana'a.

Narrative Account of the Trip: We left Sana'a in the early morning in two vehicles, Gerhard's Nissan Patrol and Yousuf's Toyota Land Cruiser Prado. We stopped first at Ursula's to pick up some photos that she had taken during the February trip and which she wanted us to give to the people of Wada'a. We also stopped to purchase a bag of cement and to pick up Sheikh Mohamed Al-Hashidi. Following back roads to Amran, Sheikh Mohamed commented that Gerhard knew the roads of Amran better than the Amranis do.

We picked up Hussein Al-Qahzem in Sananiyyah village and then drove to the closest parking area near the *wadi* rim. Hussein brought a trowel and a bucket and we walked down into the *wadi*. Several villagers accompanied us as we walked to a spot that I had identified during the first visit as having suitable potential for installing a trail camera. A shaded area with no vegetation that might sway in the wind and thus trigger the camera, this location appeared to be on a natural animal pathway. We had found hyena and possibly baboon prints during the February visit and though there was no way to conceal the camera we were under the impression that because the purpose of the camera was well-understood, and that local support was universal that the equipment would be safe.

After some consultation, Hussein and his companions mixed the cement using wadi sand and gravel and installed the camera in its metal housing with at least 50 kg of rock as ballast. We ran through a few trials and all seemed satisfactory so we switched the camera on and walked up the *wadi* to the permanent pool where we ate a picnic lunch and drank tea. We then ascended the *wadi* by a new route and walked back to the cars at Adh Dhil'ain. Saying our goodbyes we drove back to Sana'a, promising Hussein that we would return in a few weeks in order to check the cameras.

Conclusions: The visit seemed to have gone well, the camera appeared to be situated appropriately, and we felt that the trip had been successful.

Acknowledgements: This trip would not have been possible were it not for the residents of Wada'a, especially Hussein Al-Qahzem.