Foundation for the Protection of the Arabian Leopard in Yemen

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“Working to ensure a sustainably managed wild population of Arabian Leopards living in harmony with local communities in Yemen”

“Friends of the Arabian Leopard”
Hundreds of members around the world!

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1. Some Negative Impacts of the Yemeni Political and Economic Crisis on the Foundation’s Conservation Work:

As the political and military impasse crippling Yemen continues to drag on, the Foundation does its best to keep its conservation program on track. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to say that this vital work has not been affected negatively. For example: the Foundation has always maintained a close working relationship with the Yemen Ministry of Water & Environment (MoWE). Indeed, we could not operate without Ministry endorsement of our activities. However, because the MoWE building has been repeatedly assaulted, looted and/or occupied by tribal forces, and because it continues to suffer damage as combat rages in the Hasabah section of Sana’a where it is located, conducting business has become increasingly difficult for MoWE staff. The Foundation is therefore extremely grateful to Mr. Mohammed Shamsan, Director General of Environmental Policies and Programs at the MoWE for his singular dedication in carrying the Ministry torch on behalf of the Foundation throughout these difficult times. On Friday October 20th, for example, Mr. Shamsan tracked down key ministry officials at a private wedding in order to get permits and travel documents essential to our work in Hawf signed and stamped.

Another serious impact of the crisis has been imposed upon one of the Foundation’s key personnel who has suffered serious personal losses that in spite of their severity have yet to distract him from Foundation work. When four bullets penetrated Yousuf Mohageb’s fourth floor home on Wednesday September 29th he moved his family to a neighbor’s flat on the ground floor. The next day an RPG destroyed Yousuf’s living room so he moved his family temporarily to Hodeidah. Returning to Sana’a a week later, Yousuf moved his family to safer quarters, but when he returned to his partially destroyed flat on October 20th to retrieve furniture and family possessions, he discovered that it had been hit by another RPG and suffered further serious damage. Apparently, because of its elevated location, the forces that are battling for control of Yousuf’s neighborhood have identified his flat as a potential sniper’s nest and periodically attack it with total disregard for the rights and wellbeing of Yousuf’s family. Although his new flat is unfurnished and lacks electricity, Yousuf continues to work logistical wonders for the Foundation.

Additional difficulties arise from unpredictable checkpoint closures which irregularly prevent Foundation researchers Ibrahim Al-Wada’i and Nasser Aswot from entering Sana’a at will, thus delaying the implementation of the Kickstarter, Panthera Foundation and Rufford Small Grant Fund supported projects in Mahwit and Amran. Travel restrictions imposed on foreigners impede the free movement of the Foundation’s Executive Director further inhibiting the Foundation’s work. Finally, the economic troubles precipitated by the political crisis have caused former Foundation sponsors to withhold further support. In spite of these challenges, not one of the Foundation’s five full-time or four part-time Yemeni employees has ever missed a paycheck, and their work continues unabated.
2. Hawf Leopard Survey Celebrates its First Birthday: The initial grant in support of the Hawf Leopard Survey was received from the Mohamed Bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund (MBZSCF) in July 2010, but hip surgery for the Foundation’s Executive Director delayed the project’s implementation until September of that year. After laying the groundwork with help from the Yemen Ministry of Water & Environment, a Foundation team traveled to Hawf on September 26th with logistical support from Murjan Travel. By January 2011 the survey had succeeded in its primary objective of establishing the existence of a small population of Arabian leopards in the Hawf Protected Area. Additional results include the documentation of the vertebrate biodiversity in the Hawf Protected Area including records of new mammal, bird, and reptile species for Hawf, Al Mahrah, and in some cases Yemen as a whole. An expanded, more ambitious Hawf Leopard Survey will continue into 2012 with ongoing support from the MBZSCF.

3. Sebastian Kennerknecht Braves Yemeni Unrest to Implement Hi-Tech Trail Camera Work in Hawf: While the Foundation focuses on recruiting and training talented Yemeni biologists to carry out its research and conservation work, we remain deeply indebted to a series of foreign volunteers for donating their time and spending their money in order to contribute to our work. For example, Malini Pittet came to Yemen at her own expense in September 2010 and established the Hawf Leopard Survey. Prior to her departure from Yemen in November of the same year, Malini trained Waleed Al-Ra’il and Murad Mohammed to carry on the survey to the same high standards with which she initiated it. Kate Dixon and Barbara Settles were also self-supporting as they contributed their knowledge and womanpower to the survey in late 2010. Mike Jennings and Carol Qirreh spent a month in Hawf in January/February at their own expense and were there when the first leopard picture ever taken in Yemen was uploaded on January 17th. Our last volunteer was Nicolas Dunais who spent part of May in Hawf. The Foundation has no doubt that each of these volunteers has contributed to the success of the survey and to the professional development of Waleed and Murad and it is extremely grateful for their dedication and sacrifices. It takes a special kind of person to take on the unknowns of working in Yemen and each of our volunteers demonstrates this fact perfectly. As a result of the current unrest it has become extremely difficult to recruit foreign help, but the Foundation has been very lucky in gaining the expertise of Santa Cruz-based conservation photographer Sebastian Kennerknecht. Sebastian arrived in Sana’a on Wednesday, October 26 with five hi-tech trail cameras and associated gear in order to spend three months in Hawf in an attempt to capture hi-resolution images of Arabian leopards and other endangered wildlife. Not one to waste time, Sebastian flew to Al Ghaydhah the next day where his mission was endorsed by His Excellency Ali Mohammed Khowdam, Governor of Al Mahrah. The following day Sebastian devoted to training Waleed and Murad in setting up the complicated TrailMaster infrared triggering devices that he uses to activate his cameras. Given the extreme rarity of the Arabian Leopard there is no guarantee that Sebastian will succeed in this quest, but the Foundation is grateful that he is willing to try, especially under the current circumstances.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” - Margaret Mead

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