

Foundation For the Protection of the Arabian Leopard in Yemen

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

Update No. 27: February 29, 2012



I am proud that NTMC is the leading sponsor of the *Foundation for the Protection of the Arabian Leopard in Yemen*, this country's most active and effective conservation organization.

- Sheikh Tawfik Saleh Abdullah Saleh, Executive Chairman



1. NTMC Strengthens its Support for the Foundation: It is accurate to say that the *Foundation* would not still exist were it not for the generous support of Sheikh Tawfik Saleh Abdullah Saleh, Executive Chairman of the *National Tobacco and Matches Company (NTMC)*. Sheikh Saleh was the *Foundation's* first sponsor and continues to be its most generous. In addition to underwriting most of the *Foundation's* operating expenses for the first two years of its existence, *NTMC* provided a Toyota Landcruiser pickup for *Foundation* use starting in October 2010. On February 1st Sheikh Saleh pledged to continue *NTMC* support for the *Foundation* throughout 2012, thus guaranteeing that we can continue to expand and improve our conservation program for at least the next year. We at the *Foundation* commend Sheikh Saleh for his vision and dedication to helping us preserve Yemen's rich natural heritage, and we are extremely grateful for his ongoing commitment to supporting the conservation of Yemen's endangered wildlife.



Sheikh Tawfik Saleh

2. His Excellency, Minister of Water & Environment Abdulsalam Razzaz Khaled Takes Command: Following the resignation of former Yemen Minister of Water & Environment HE Abdulrahman Fadhl Al-Eryani last April, and the subsequent vandalism and occupation of the Ministry building in Hassabah, Yemen's ability to fulfill its environmental mandate has been severely handicapped. It was therefore a great pleasure for *Foundation* Executive Director David Stanton to meet with Dr. Abdulsalam Razzaz Khaled, Yemen's new Minister for Water & Environment, on February 2nd. Dr. Khaled expressed a keen interest in the *Foundation's* work, and invited Mr. Stanton to serve as his adviser as he had previously served former Minister Al-Eryani. At the time of publication Yemen is celebrating the results of the February 21st presidential referendum, but further meetings between Minister Khaled and Mr. Stanton are planned. 2011 was a productive year for the *Foundation* in spite of challenges posed by the Yemen Revolution. 2012 promises to be even more productive as the *Foundation* renews and strengthens its partnership with the Yemeni Government.

3. Yousuf Mohageb Represents the Foundation at the 13th Conservation Workshops for the Biodiversity of Arabia:



Photo © Kevin Budd, BCEAW

On February 6 – 9, under the patronage of His Highness Dr. Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al-Qassimi, Ruler of Sharjah and Member of the Supreme Council, the *Environment and Protected Areas Authority (Sharjah)* with the *Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife (BCEAW)* hosted the annual conservation workshops at the Breeding Centre. Sometimes referred to as the *Conservation Assessment and Management Plan (CAMP)*, this event is unquestionably the most significant in Arabia's conservation calendar. In keeping with the ongoing *Taxonomy and Protected Areas Management* themes, delegates from throughout Arabia engaged in either a formal, four-day **Red List Assessment of the Reptiles of Arabia** or two days exploring ideas of **Local Stakeholder Engagement** and **Zonation** in the management of regional protected areas followed by a two-day, hands-on **Camera Trapping** workshop. It has been the *Foundation's* privilege to participate in the annual workshops for the past three years and this year it was ably represented by Mr. Yousuf Mohageb, founder and owner of *Arabian Ecotours* and a valuable member of the *Foundation* team.



Yousuf Mohageb



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4. Wildlife Trafficking in Yemen, and this Country’s Role in the Illegal Cheetah Trade: The illegal trade in wildlife (excluding timber and fisheries) is reliably estimated to be worth up to US\$ 10 billion annually. Thus, the trade in wildlife and wildlife products is second only to the drug trade as a global criminal enterprise, ranking above both arms and human trafficking in terms of profitability. Sadly, the trade is driven by an inverse proportion; the fewer animals or plants there are of a given species, the greater their value on the black market and therefore the greater the incentive to kill or capture them for sale to unscrupulous consumers. For example, four years ago illegal rhino horn from East Africa was worth an average of \$1,800 per kilogram. Today, that same kilo can fetch upwards of \$100,000, twice as much as gold! South Africa, where most rhinos now live, is losing about one rhino per day to poachers, and within the past six months more than 20 European museums have been broken into by thieves who stole the horns from “antique” stuffed rhinos. As a medicine, rhino horn has been shown to be about as effective as chewing one’s fingernails, which is hardly surprising since rhino horn and fingernails are both made of the same substance - keratin. The *Foundation* has been informally monitoring wildlife traffic in Yemen for years and has documented the sale of thousands of illegally traded birds, reptiles, and mammals. Much of Yemen’s wildlife trade is driven by poverty; people catch whatever they can and try to sell it on street corners or on consignment through merchants at animal *suqs* in Sana’a, Taiz, Hodeidah, and elsewhere. In addition to being against Yemeni law, this informal trade is a serious conservation concern because it is indiscriminate and unregulated. It is also a heartbreaking animal welfare issue; most of the animals that are captured for sale are subsequently neglected and/or abused in captivity. Countless creatures suffer unimaginable torment and many die lingering, agonizing deaths because buyers cannot be found for



Left to Right: An Adult Striped Hyena crammed into a chicken cage, a Barn Owl in typical condition for the local trade, a Barbary Falcon’s gangrenous foot. All pictures from Nuqum animal suq, Sana’a

many of the species that end up in the *suqs*. Some wildlife is bought by people who know exactly what they want and where to get it. For example, every fall trappers from Marib and Shabwa flock to Bab al Mandab to snag passage falcons. Falconers from the Gulf drive to camps there to buy “fresh” birds direct from the trappers. Much of the wildlife that is sold in Yemen, however, is hawked on street corners or in established animal *suqs* such as Nuqum by people who are simply trying to earn some extra cash in a depressed economy. Resident wildlife and migratory birds of many species are sold; since 2009, the *Foundation* has documented with lists and photographs seven reptile, 17 mammal, and at least 50 species of birds for sale, including several globally endangered and locally rare species.



Left to Right: This female Saker Falcon was purchased by a Qatari national who drove to Bab al Mandab from Doha on speculation (Photo © Michael Jennings), two Lesser Kestrels and an Abyssinian Roller for sale on the corner of Haddah and Djibouti Streets, two Arabian Bustards for sale at Nuqum animal suq. Both bustards died before a buyer was found (Photos © David Stanton)



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More insidious than this domestic traffic of locally trapped animals by poor villagers is Yemen's involvement in the organized, regional trade of endangered wildlife and wildlife products. This country's one-time notoriety as the world's largest consumer of rhino horn has been assumed by China, but Yemen still sees a significant flow of illegally traded animals and skins from East Africa. On a single day in 2009, for example, David Stanton found 15 leopard skins at just a few shops in old Sana'a. The skins were displayed openly even though their sale is against Yemeni and international law. Yemen is a signatory to CITES - leopards are listed in CITES Appendix I and therefore cannot be legally traded without a valid license from the CITES officers in the country of origin *and* the receiving country or for commercial purposes. Given the scope of the open trade one can only speculate on the extent of underground traffic.



A few of the leopard skins that were openly on display at shops in Bab al Yemen on June 30, 2009. Photos © David Stanton
Charismatic birds and mammals such as the big cats are trapped in East Africa and smuggled to Yemeni middlemen who supply wealthy buyers here and in neighboring countries. On February 18, 2011, for example, two lion cubs and a baby African leopard were seen for sale in the Hodeidah animal *suq*. When a teacher at *Sana'a International School* scheduled "Pet Day" for her 10 year-old class a few years ago, she didn't expect little Khadija's driver to bring in a bird cage stuffed with two young Cheetah cubs. Although these Cubs appeared relatively healthy, their open display at SIS



CITES "protected" carnivores for sale in Yemen. Left to Right: Two lion cubs at the animal *suq* in Hodeidah; a terrified African Leopard cub, also in Hodeidah. Both photos © Tarim Contin Kennedy; two Cheetah cubs in a bird cage on SJS "Pet Day" sheds light on Yemen's involvement in a regional network that is much more extensive than most people suspect and which has a devastating impact on wild Cheetah populations. Exact figures are impossible to come by as the trade is sheltered, but a growing body of evidence proves that many Cheetah cubs are captured in East Africa and smuggled to Yemen. Young animals are preferred because they are more docile; catching Cheetah cubs is easy...you simply shoot their mother and gather up the babies. Caring for the young animals during the smuggling process is a lot more complex, however, and up to three fourths die of neglect and maltreatment before they reach their destinations.



Left: This three-month old cub weighed less than one kilogram when it was confiscated by Somaliland authorities in November 2011. Not surprisingly it died within days.- Photo © Guenther Wirth; Middle: A Yemen-bound Cheetah cub is playful in spite of its deplorable condition. The animal died shortly after the picture was taken. – Anonymous Photo; Right: Three of the many orphaned Cheetah Cubs that are trafficked to Yemen annually. For every one that survives the smuggling ordeal, three die. – Anonymous Photo



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In recent weeks, the *Foundation* has been communicating with long-term Somaliland residents Guenther Wirth and Janice Bowdery who, through their own initiative, have been making heroic efforts to reduce the smuggling of Cheetahs from Ethiopia and beyond through Somaliland to Yemen. They have documented numerous cases and continue to care for five Cheetah cubs which were confiscated by the *Regional Environmental Officer* in December 2011. Janice and Guenther have engaged a number of conservation organizations in order to try and move the Cheetahs to a suitable facility in the region, but doing so involves logistical, political, and financial hurdles that have yet to be cleared. Nevertheless, they have received much advice and help in dealing with this issue and *Friends of the Arabian Leopard* are encouraged to find out about, and when inspired to support, the relevant organizations including: **The Cheetah Conservation Fund** (Namibia): <http://www.cheetah.org/>; **Decouvrier et Aider la Nature** (Djibouti): <http://decandjibouti.org/>; **Born Free** (Ethiopia): <http://www.bornfree.org.uk/campaigns/further-activities/born-free-ethiopia/>; **Traffic** (United Kingdom): <http://www.traffic.org/>; **Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife** (Sharjah): <http://www.breedingcentresharjah.com/>; and the **Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking**: <http://www.cawtglobal.org/> Anyone interested in assisting Guenther and Janice in their struggle to impede the smuggling of wildlife including Cheetahs through Somaliland to Yemen can contact them at: gaa.somaliland@gmx.net

Through diligence and perseverance Guenther and Janice are establishing an official, initial procedure to house locally confiscated wildlife. Local authorities are now working towards stopping the transshipment of Cheetahs and other wildlife through Somaliland to Yemen. However, these authorities recognize that they can only succeed if the governments of all of the involved countries (e.g. Kenya, Ethiopia, Somaliland, Yemen, and the Gulf States) cooperate by enforcing the laws they write, honoring the treaties they ratify, and ensuring that none of their citizens become involved in the wildlife trade as trappers, middlemen, or consumers. The *Foundation* is committed to partnering with appropriate organizations and dedicated individuals like Janice and Guenther to finally end this shameful industry.

5. Foundation Partners with Talking Naturally: Shortly before his death in 1948, the American environmentalist Aldo



Leopold wrote, "One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds. Much of the damage inflicted on land is quite invisible to laymen. An ecologist must either harden his shell and make believe that the consequences of science are none of his business, or he must be the doctor who sees the marks of death in a community that believes itself well and does not want to be told otherwise." 63 years on, the truth in these words has become so glaringly obvious that one wonders how so many politicians *and* the general public can continue to ignore them. To many, denial is the only way to maintain one's sanity in this 'world of wounds' we have created. Others are perfectly aware of the irreparable harm we are doing to the planet that we share with an estimated thirty million plus other species, but think only in terms

of their own comfort rather than the stresses that our actions will inevitably inflict on future generations or the immorality of wholesale 'environmental cleansing.' Yet others, the laymen' in Leopold's salient observation, remain blissfully ignorant of the deteriorating health of 'Mother Earth.' Fortunately, a growing number of people have the vision to realize what is going on, and the courage to make very real personal sacrifices in order to do something about it. Janice Bowdery and Guenther Wirth are two such people (see above). Another such person is Charlie Moores, co-founder with Tristan Reid of *Talking Naturally* <http://www.talking-naturally.co.uk/>

Talking Naturally is by and for people who are no longer willing to accept that this world can or should continue to absorb the assaults we humans inflict upon it. In keeping with their philosophy, Charlie and Tristan are developing a bold and ambitious concept in conservation networking called the *Talking Naturally Partners Project* (<http://www.talking-naturally.co.uk/tn-partners/>). The *Foundation* is proud to have joined the growing community of *Talking Naturally Partners*. We cannot afford to continue walking alone in a world of wounds, and the *Talking Naturally Partners Project* offers an opportunity for us to walk together in a collective effort to start healing the injuries. If you would like to enroll your organization as a *Talking Naturally Partner* please contact Charlie at Charlie@talking-naturally.co.uk and/or Tristan at Tristan@talking-naturally.co.uk



"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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