

STEPS TO BUILDING LONG TERM SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION PROGRAM IN YEMEN

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Yemen is renowned for its rich biodiversity including both flora and fauna. Among the latter are sea turtles of which three species are now confirmed to nest at different sites along the coasts and at some islands off Yemen (Fig.1). These are the loggerhead *Caretta caretta* at Abalhen beach in the northern coast of Socotra Island; the hawksbill turtle *Eretmochelys imbricata* at Azizi Island, Aden; the green turtle *Chelonia mydas* at Sharma-Jethmoun- Dhargham protected area, Hadhramout; and the green and loggerhead turtles at Al-Fatk , Al-Mahra, east of Yemen.



Abalhen beach, Socotra Island
12°36'59.97" N; 53°46'00.28" E -
12°39'47.36" N; 53°41'46.26" E



Ras Imran and Azizi Island, Aden
12°44'7.51" N;
44°42'8.27" E



Sharma-Jethmoun-Dhargham coast, Hadhramout
14°49'35.88" N; 50°03'03.76" E -
14°49'11.03" N 50°01'26.02" E



Al-Fatk – Hawf coast, Al-Mahra
16°30'59.56" N; 52°41'29.06" E -
16°38'06" N; 53°01'51.58" E

Fig. 1. Google images of areas under investigation

During their nesting seasons, these turtles are exposed to frequent attacks by people who butcher them for meat and excavate their nests for eggs. Moreover, feral dogs form another source of threat, especially at Sharma-Jethmoun-Dhargham beach, as they feed on the turtles' eggs and hatchlings. No serious action is taken by the Environment Protection Authority to stop threats to sea turtles; hence, the present project was launched.

Two previous initiatives on the protection and conservation of sea turtles were made. The first started in 1998 on Socotra Island by the Environment Protection Authority, and was funded by UNOPS–Socotra Biodiversity Project (Abdullah, 2011). Activities in this project continued until 2007 and stopped when funding was suspended. The second was an individual effort conducted by the late Dr. Abdulaziz Alaaamri (http://www.ioseaturtles.org/pom_detail.php?id=54) at Sharma-Jethmoun beach. Dr. Alaaamri's activities included two awareness lectures, a meeting with tourists visiting the beach, awareness posters and two excursions for school children. This awareness campaign lasted for two weeks only.

The present project was initiated aiming at building a long term sea turtle conservation program in Yemen, with full involvement of local communities where sea turtles are known to nest. It was planned to achieve this goal through the following activities:

- 1- Making courtesy visits to Sheikhs and community leaders to explain the initiative (Fig.2.).
- 2- Contacting environmental NGOs in the identified areas to discuss collaboration possibilities or establish new ones if there are not any (Fig.3.).

- 3- Conducting intensive awareness programs (lectures, turtle conservation movies, posters, and brochures) in target areas (Fig.4.).
- 4- Providing training on sea turtle monitoring and standardised survey methods (Fig.5.).
- 5- Meeting with official environmental \ authorities to gain their trust (Fig.6.).



Fig. 2. Meeting with Sheikh Suleiman Nooh of Salmahu and Community members



Fig. 3. Discussing ways of collaboration with "Friends of Environment Society"



Fig.4. Awareness session at Salmahu, Socotra Island



Fig. 5. Training on taking turtle measurements at Socotra



Fig. 6. Meeting with Environment Protection Authority at Aden