

## CONFIRMED ERADICATION OF THE HOUSE CROW FROM SOCOTRA ISLAND, REPUBLIC OF YEMEN

**Ahmed Saeid Suliman<sup>1</sup>, Guntram G. Meier<sup>2</sup> and Peter J. Haverson<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Head of the Invasive Species Working Group, Environmental Protection Agency, Socotra, Hadramaut Governorate, Yemen Republic. <sup>2</sup>InGrip-Consulting & Animal Control, Hausburgstr. 24, D - 10249 Berlin, Germany; ggm@ingrip.com<sup>1</sup>

The house crow (*Corvus splendens*) is a native species to India and its neighbouring countries (Ali 2002). The bird has been introduced by people to the Arabian Peninsula (Jennings 2004, Ryall & Meier 2008), as well as to East African where, assisted by ships, it spread to many coastal regions (Lever 2006).

The multiple negative effects associated with the spread of House Crow made it the subject of control projects (Ash 1984, Feare & Watson 1992). Despite the desire of the operators to develop population reduction into full scale eradication in Aden a decade ago (Jennings 1992), or currently in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (Falemban 2008) such efforts have not succeeded.

Socotra is a 3,500 km<sup>2</sup> island located close to the horn of Africa that belongs to the Republic of Yemen. The island is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In 1995 or 1996, a pair of house crows arrived by ship on the island coming from mainland Yemen. The birds settled in a valley on the eastern edge of the island's capital Hadibu and established a breeding colony that grew to nearly 30 adult birds in 1999 (Al Saghier 2008). A bounty system was established by the local Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) aimed at controlling the crow population. The system rewarded the proven collection of nests with eggs or chicks with cash payments. This scheme operated successfully until in 2008 when the bounty funding ended. In the ten year process more than 550 chicks were collected (Saeid et. al. *in press*). The results were successful in keeping the number of House Crows to a minimum level, however it did not achieve their eradication. To avoid an increase in the House Crow population after the end of the bounty system, a final eradication attempt for the remaining 15 birds was planned and a joint project was formed between EPA and InGrip. The latter company delivered the expertise needed to achieve success and avoid the failures that had been experienced in former eradication attempts (Saeid et. al. *in press*). The project was implemented in April 2009 and within 15 days the last 13 House Crows were eliminated by shooting with different guns and techniques, followed by the destruction of all remaining, known nest sites along the Hadibu Wadi.

After a year of monitoring the eradication of House Crow can be officially confirmed, making Socotra the most significant island entity that the house crow has been eradicated from. To avoid reinvasion the island is monitored by EPA personnel. Although Socotra is isolated, the threat of reinvasion persists due to the existing populations of House Crow in the region. Ship traffic between the island and the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula are a permanent threat for the reinvasion of crows, e.g. from crow populations in the Yemeni cities of Mukhalla and Aden. A further threat is posed by a breeding colony of around 180 crows in the port-city of Salalah, Sultanate of Oman. Ship transport of the house crow is the most important pathway for the transport of individual birds or breeding pairs to new locations (Ryall 2008).

As demonstrated small eradication projects like that on Socotra require few resources to deliver significant success. It is important to plan, fund and implement professional projects to control this invasive alien species. The eradication of the currently unmanaged non-native crow population in

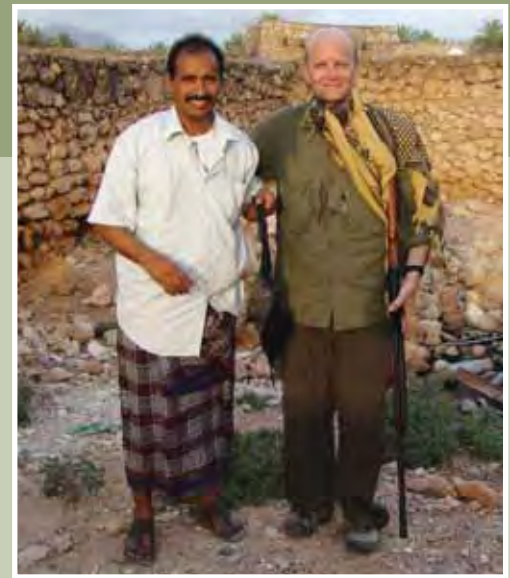


Fig 1. Ahmed Saeid and Peter Haverson with Socotra's last house crow (©Guntram G. Meier).

Salalah, Oman and in the few villages and towns at the eastern coast of Yemen is important to stop the spread of House Crow throughout the region and to prevent Socotra being reinvaded.

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Fig 2. Socotra is famous for its endemic species, here desert rose tree (©Ahmed Saeid).



Fig 3. Central mountains, overlooking the mouth of Wadi Hadibu (©Guntram G. Meier).