



جمعية البيئة العمانية
Environment Society of Oman

PROGRESS REPORT

2006-2007



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Less than one year after its official establishment on 24 March 2004, the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) set up its main office in Al Khuwair and launched its website www.environment.org.om, which is regularly updated with its activities, projects and future plans. During the summer 2007, ESO had a new manager, Ms. Nida Helou, and refined its strategy which will soon be shared with ESO members.

ESO's scope of work currently includes the following projects: Education and awareness (the anti-plastic bag campaign, lectures, field trips, exhibitions, etc.), the Recycling project, and the Conservation projects in the marine as well as terrestrial environments. In addition to its projects, ESO is attempting to widen its network in the society through its PR strategy based on an annual ESO fundraising Ball, press releases in the media and participation in local, regional and global conferences and meetings. By the end of September 2007, ESO's membership base had also widened to include 343 individual members and 20 corporate members. During 2006 and 2007, ESO signed a Memorandum of Understanding with each of the following bodies: Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), SHELL and the Ministry of Education. KPMG is currently preparing ESO's 2006 audit which, when ready, will be posted on ESO website.

Through its strategy and projects, ESO is planning to increase its membership base as well as its employees for a better protection of the Omani natural and human environments. We hope that through this report and the activities it summarised, you will appreciate what has been achieved with your support through the annual corporate membership fee. We also hope that you will continue to provide ESO with a sustainable income, which will assist us in achieving our mission.



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I- Introduction

ESO was officially established on 24 March 2004 with the issuing of Ministerial Decision (42/2004) by the Ministry of Social Development. However, ESO's mobilisation stage and activities only commenced in October 2004 due to logistical limitations. At the end of 2004, ESO unveiled its logo, which is of a turtle with an outline of a Wa'al (Arabian Tahr) on its shell, symbolising both the marine and terrestrial environments.

On October 10 2005, ESO established its main office in Al Khuwair, where the ESO board, staff and committees run the Society. Also in 2005, ESO launched its website: www.environment.org.om where general information about its activities, projects and future plans can be found. The website addresses a comprehensive presentation of environmental issues and natural wildlife in Oman and provides a list of practical advice that can be endorsed to help preserve the environment.

So far, ESO has received grants from the Ford Foundation, US Fish and Wildlife and MEPI. During this period, and in an attempt to widen the collaboration network in the field of environmental protection, ESO signed a Memorandum of Understanding with each of the following bodies: Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), SHELL and the Ministry of Education. KPMG is currently undergoing our 2006 audit which, when ready, will be posted on ESO website.

In mid-July 2007, Ms. Nida Helou took up her position as ESO manager. Also during the summer of 2007, ESO refined its strategy, which will be shared with its members shortly. The strategy will also be available on ESO's website both in English and Arabic.

Mission and vision

ESO seeks to conserve the natural and human environments of the Sultanate of Oman through the enhancement of environmental knowledge and promotion of sustainable consumption and production practices at the community, business and decision-making levels.

II- Projects

A- EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

This on-going umbrella project opens up opportunities to actively involve



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members in conservation activities and acquaint them with environmental issues at the local, regional and global levels, demonstrating ESO's commitment to action as well as general awareness building. ESO's calendar of events this year aims to respond to its members' thirst for active involvement.

1- ANTI-PLASTIC BAG CAMPAIGN

The ESO anti-plastic bag campaign, launched on 11 January 2005, aimed at reducing the use of plastic bags throughout the Sultanate and educating the public about its adverse environmental effects. The work continued throughout 2006-2007 in terms of the sale and distribution of large and small ESO-made reusable canvas bags in the retail outlets and all the funds raised from the sale of the bags went towards the campaign. During 2006 and 2007, a total of 1260 ESO canvas bags (540 in 2006 and 720 in 2007) were sold at the following outlets: Al-Fair supermarkets, Turtle's bookshops and during ESO activities.

2- LECTURES

The lectures organised during 2006 and 2007 (up till June) were, by chronological order:

- 3 June 2007: Lecture by Dr. Issa El Hussian on "Tsunamis and Earthquakes: What, where and Who"
- 24 March 2007: Lecture by Prof Reginald Victor on the Jabal Al Akhdar Initiative by the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU)
- 10 February 2007: Lecture by Ms. Tessa McGregor on the Biosphere Expedition in Musandam
- 3 February 2007: Lecture by Mr. David Insall, Leader of terrestrial projects in ESO on the Arabian Wa'al
- 1 February 2007: ESO Screening of "An Inconvenient Truth". Documentary by Al Gore on effects of global warming (Sponsored by Al Shatti Cinema)
- 14 December 2006: ROSO/ESO Concert, Al Bustan Palace
- 14 October 2006: Lecture by Mr. Oliver Taylor on "Managing fisheries in coral reefs and other marine environments"
- 23 September 2006: Lecture by Mr. Hadi El Hikmani on the "Arabian Leopard"
- 9 September 2006: Lecture by Dr. Michel Claereboudt on "Coral Reefs of Oman"
- 26 August 2006: Lecture by Dr. Salim Al-Harthy on "Joining Front Runners of Environmental Initiatives in Oman"
- 20 May 2006: Lecture on "Treating oily contaminated materials using bacteria"



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- 25 April 2006: Lecture by Mr. David Insall on the Arabian Wa'al
- 8 April 2006: Lecture by Dr. Charlie Paton on the Management of Seawater for Greenhouse Plantations.
- 28 March 2006: ESO Annual General Meeting
- 22 March 2006: ESO Ball in the Grand Hayatt Hotel

3- FIELD TRIPS

The field trips organised during 2006 and 2007 (up till June) were, in chronological order:

- 13 April 2007: Field trip to Jebel Al Akhdar
- 16 March 2007: Field trip to Wadi As-Sareen Nature reserve (habitat to the Wa'al)
- 7 December 2006: Field trip to Bait al Baraka (Mammal Breeding Centre)
- 17 March 2006: Field trip to Wadi As-Sareen
- 3 March 2006: Field trip to the Native Species Garden

4- CLEAN-UPS

- 21 June 2007: Clean-up in Quriyat after Gonu
- 14 June 2007: Clean-up of Athaiba beach after Gonu (and donation of 1,000 OMR to the then MRMEWR)
- 6 - 10 November 2006: Clean-up of Damaniyat Islands
- 2 March 2006: Clean-up of the Muttrah Corniche

5- PARTICIPATION IN EXHIBITIONS & CONFERENCES

During 2006 and 2007 (up till June) ESO actively took part in the following exhibitions, conferences and workshops:

- 3-5 September 2007: Symposium and Workshop on Sustainable Eco-tourism and Conservation of Natural Heritage and Biosphere Reserves, Salalah
- 9 May 2007: Participation in the Oman Travel Market Exhibition
- 25-28 March 2007: Participation in a workshop on Programme Management organised by the British Embassy and INTRAC
- 8 March 2007: Participation in the International Day celebrated at TAISM (the American International School in Muscat)
- 1 March 2007: Participation in a workshop on Strategic Planning by IUCN and RSCN
- 28 and 29 January 2007: Participation in the Strategy Planning



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Workshop organised by the British Embassy and INTRAC

- 1 January-2 February 2007: Participation in the Muscat Festival
- 5 December 2006: Participation in the Omani Civil Societies Exhibition at SQU
- 16 November 2006: Participation in the OLNG HSE Fair in Sur
- 4-11 November 2006: Organisation of The Seeds of Change Exhibition sponsored by Tawoos LLC and OHI (see details below)
- 6 November 2006: Organisation of the ESO-SQU Student Member Initiative.
- 12-14 September 2006: Participation in the Gulf ECO
- 5 April 2006: Participation in the Abu Dhabi workshop on "Biodiversity and Oil and Gas Industry in Arid Environments: North Africa and the Middle East" organized by IPIECA
- 20 July 2006: Participation in the children open day at the Omani Women Association Centre in Al Braimi

6- SEEDS OF CHANGE EXHIBITION

In November 2006 ESO brought to Muscat the "Seeds of Change Exhibition", an award-winning exhibition that was first shown at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002. It was created by Soka Gakkai International (SGI) and the Earth Charter Initiative and has traveled all over the world. Its objectives include:

- The promotion of the concept of sustainable living
- The introduction of the Earth Charter's set of values and principles for a sustainable future
- The illustration of the view that one person can make a difference in tackling even the most seemingly complex problem
- The provision of opportunity for local viewers to benefit from these informative exhibits

The exhibit included a documentary created specifically for the exhibition narrated by Meryl Streep and entitled "A Quiet Revolution". The documentary was translated to Arabic, as was all exhibition panels and materials. The exhibition was inaugurated under the patronage of HH Sayyid Tarik bin Shabib Al Said and, over the week, was attended by more than 20 public and private schools.



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B- RECYCLING PROJECT

The aim of the project is to promote corporate and public recycling projects as well as minimising the amount of solid wastes generated in the Sultanate. Since May 2006 and as a first step, a project has been under way to identify and mature recycling projects in Oman. At the moment, there is small-scale collection of high value materials, mainly for export. The only sector where recycling is very active is bulk scrap metals. A few “supplier” companies do employ contractors to segregate and take key waste materials for recycling. Those who do collect materials generally send their waste to India (often via Dubai) to be recycled. There are very few local companies that have recycling facilities in Oman. Apart from a requirement for larger companies to have a waste segregation policy, there is little visible government momentum at present to change corporate or public behaviour in this regard. The primary target materials for recycling projects are: cardboard, paper, cans, car batteries. There is currently no taker company interested in plastics (apart from bulk plastics from industry), glass or consumer batteries.

In the past year, ESO has contacted a large number of taker, supplier, and facilitator companies and organizations and have had open discussions with government institutions namely the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Ministry of National Economy, the then Ministry of Regional Municipalities, Environment and Water Resources, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Education and Muscat Municipality. The project kicked off with a workshop in June 2006. At present, the main successes are focused on education, with paper collection projects with the Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat Municipality, and a group of international and private schools. Some individual companies have been put in touch with taker companies, to collect specific materials such as paper.

Highlights to date:

- Very successful workshop of key corporate stakeholders on 5 June 2006, led to clarity on the forward plan and issues
- Following a series of 3 workshops, 15 international and private schools have agreed to participate in a paper-recycling project starting in October 2007 with the hope of expanding this first phase project to more schools in the following weeks.
- Pilot paper-recycling project being kicked off at SQU, based on 1 faculty. If successful, we will expand to the full 15,000 university community.
- Database of taker companies is maturing, and it is planned to create a website, such that suppliers of materials can find and contact takers



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directly

- Contacts with several companies to find takers for specific waste materials, such as wood, tyres and lithium batteries
- Around 50 meetings held with company and government representatives, focusing on creating or supporting recycling projects.
- Workshops held with several organizations on recycling opportunities
- Funding for the project was obtained from the Ford Foundation late in 2006.

Forward Plans:

- Continue to execute current project inventory, and, after trial period, expand each in a second phase
- Maximise publicity around these opening projects, to build contacts with other interested parties
- Continue to engage with business community, to provide sponsorship, practical help, or creation of dedicated projects
- Continue attempts to identify taker organizations for social projects, specifically collection of usable second-hand clothes for charities
- Participate in lectures to project schools and other organizations, explaining the need for behavioural change and minimisation of waste production
- Continue to push suppliers and consumer organizations to switch to recycled paper
- Continue efforts to mobilise funds for the project.

C- MARINE ENVIRONMENT

1- WHALE AND DOLPHIN RESEARCH

Research on whales and dolphins in Oman continues to go from strength to strength with new research revealing increasingly exciting results. The latest results from genetic analysis of skin collected from humpback whales provides yet further support to the theory that Oman's whales belong to unique population of this species found nowhere else in the world. Similar evidence is mounting for several other species of whales and dolphins, on which research continues. Members of the research team will be presenting some of the recent results in the biannual Marine Mammal Conference to be held this November in Cape Town in front of an expected audience of over 1,000 whale experts and enthusiasts from all around the globe.



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Field research has largely been shore-based over the past year, partly due to difficulties in obtaining a suitable vessel for offshore survey work. Steps have been taken to remedy this and a three-week field survey is being planned for early 2008. The shore-based survey work in the meantime has produced good results and continues to be the main source of information. Though it is always tempting to assume that offshore work is more valuable than beach combing for dead whales and dolphins, the vast majority of our knowledge of whales and dolphins comes from animals washed ashore.

This year has also seen the continuation of a PhD candidate's work on stenellid dolphins, which has entered an analytical phase. Together with colleagues based in Malaysia and New York, our PhD candidate maintains regular contact with the team in Oman. News of a new PhD student who is planning to join the team next year was greeted with interest. This will add yet another collaborator to the global network of universities, laboratories, government offices, NGOs and other organisations and individuals who remain keenly interested in Oman's cetacean fauna. Much of the funding for the past year's whale and dolphin work has come from a die-hard group of local/regional companies who clearly share our long-term vision for the conservation of whales and dolphins and to whom the team is extremely grateful.

2- SATELLITE TAGGING OF OMANI TURTLES

ESO's work on turtles has developed from a small supporting role to the then Ministry of Regional Municipalities, Environment and Water Resources into a significant international collaborative programme that aims to develop a comprehensive strategy for the conservation of turtles in the Sultanate. The collaboration of individuals and organisations has been consolidated into a team of some of the world's foremost turtle specialists, including those from such internationally renowned institutions as NOAA, IUCN and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Within Oman too, all the leading specialists are involved, such as Mr. Ali al-Kiyumi from the now Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs as well as professors from SQU.

Over the past year turtle research has focused on the high profile satellite tagging programme, involving the attachment of satellite transmitters to nesting turtles and subsequent tracking, via satellite, of their movements over the 9-12 months of the transmitters' battery life. The project has been a resounding success and results have been a scientific enlightenment. Loggerhead turtle tagged on Masirah Island travelled in two opposing directions, the majority heading south to waters off Dhofar and Yemen, whilst some individuals headed



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north deep into the western Arabian Gulf. This is the very first indication of where our loggerheads go after nesting and provides good evidence of potential feeding grounds, as well as migratory routes. Critically, the research suggests that Oman's loggerheads remain largely within Oman, or in the waters of nearby neighbouring countries, therefore making the job of protection of turtles by the government of Oman significantly easier. This also provides us with a reason as to how the population of loggerheads has remained among the world's largest (if not *the* largest) as the areas frequented by the tagged turtles is still relatively pristine.

Tagging of hawksbill turtles at the Daymaniyat Islands rookery produced an unexpected result. Hawksbill turtles are not known to be long-distance swimmers. However, in spite of their relatively small flippers, the two tagged turtles promptly swam several hundred kilometres to Masirah Island, where they remain at the time of writing (you can see them, and track their movements daily, at www.seaturtle.org). Masirah Island, it seems, is a critical habitat for both nesting and feeding turtles of all kinds. Later this year, plans have been made to tag four green turtles at Ras al Hadd. Their movements, which scientists wait to observe with barely-contained patience, can also be tracked on the website.

ESO's turtle work has been largely funded by the US Marine Turtle Conservation Fund through two generous grants to date with another application for the 2008 season currently under preparation. None of the work would have been possible without the enthusiastic participation of key staff members at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs, who continue to drive turtle conservation in Oman forward. The results of ESO's research are being actively disseminated and relayed to these and other government officials in Oman and elsewhere in the Arabian region in countries where tagged turtles were observed to travel, such as Kuwait, Qatar, UAE and other states.

3- DAYMANIYAT ISLANDS PROJECT

Perhaps the largest single project that ESO has so far attempted, the Daymaniyat Island Research and Conservation Project, suffered a major setback this year due to the unprecedented onslaught of rough seas associated with Cyclone Gonu in June. The team went in as soon as the weather conditions stabilised and found that, sadly, many coral reefs in more exposed areas within the reserve were reduced to rubble and sand, while beaches were all but swept away. Fish and other reef-related animals were also badly impacted. Plans have now been set in motion to fully assess and quantify the damage not only at the Daymaniyat Islands, but, pending the required support



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and funding, the entire shoreline that was affected by the adverse weather. An international team of specialists has been contacted to aid in this venture.

The Daymaniyat Islands Project intends to turn the situation to advantage by demonstrating the urgent need for improved protection and management of resources while they undergo much needed recovery and remediation. Only time will tell just how much natural recovery is possible and the situation will be carefully monitored to ensure that everything possible is done to urge the resources back to good health.

Prior to Gonu, significant progress had been made. Coral reef surveys showed notable growth in many coral communities over the past few decades as revealed through analysis of aerial and satellite imagery acquired since the mid 1980's. This suggested that the protection bestowed on the area by the Government's declaration of the Daymainyat Islands Nature Reserve in 1996 has had a very positive effect. We hope that the ESO team, together with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs, SQU and a swathe of existing international collaborators, can restore the monitoring stations and allow one of Oman's most valuable natural environments to recover its former beauty. The pledge of continued funding from the project's main supporter, the Kerzner Marine Foundation, has already set us on track.

4- MOORING BUOYS CAMPAIGN

Cyclone Gonu has severely put back plans to establish a more widely available system of mooring buoys. Most, if not all, mooring buoys were lost in the extremely rough sea during the adverse weather conditions and a new effort will be required to re-secure this facility that helps to reduce damage to coral and other marine communities resulting from careless anchoring. We are grateful for the support of this project to date – more is now needed for this project to succeed.

D- TERRESTRIAL ENVIRONMENT

1- PROJECT WA'AL

The aim of this project is to raise public awareness of the importance of conservation of the Wa'al al 'Arabi (*Hemitragus jayakari*). ESO is currently developing a proposal for a pilot project in Wadi As-Sareen nature reserve, habitat to the Wa'al to build the capacity of the local people and preserve this endangered species. The project will promote sustainable tourism, encourage environmental protection and empower the local community. It is planned that



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this pilot project will serve as a template which can be replicated in other nature reserves in the Sultanate.

2- PROJECT SHAJAR

The aim of the project is to raise public awareness of the importance of native plants -especially trees- to Oman's biodiversity. In 2006, ESO published a book by renown conservationist, Mr. David Insall, entitled "Landscaping with Omani Wild Trees" in an attempt to open the door to all those who can contribute information gathered from their own conservation efforts. After an introductory section on the importance of trees to the environment, the book gives a brief overview of environmental land management and guidance on landscaping camps with wild trees. It also describes the features and propagation of the main wild trees of Oman's desert plains

III- Public relations

The protection of the environment requires the foundation of a large platform of aware citizens and responsible decision-makers. To achieve this end, ESO needs support that must be founded on a wide base of public relations with all community segments in order to ensure the best conditions to achieve the sought objectives through environmental awareness programs. During 2006-2007, ESO nurtured its network of public relations linking with different sections of the Omani society (government and non-government) in order to harness support and involvement towards environmental protection.

ESO's PR Strategy is based on the following:

- Annual ESO Fundraising Ball, which presents general information about ESO as well as attracts new members and fundraising
- Various activities suitable for all community segments and publicised on its website, where environmental ideas and information can be discussed.
- Press releases in the media: The media has the ability to address all sectors and categories of society and provides a variety of diverse awareness messages. The media covers most of ESO's campaigns and activities. And recently, Al Ro'ya magazine featured an article on ESO in its September issue. In addition, there was a press release introducing Ms. Nida Helou, ESO's new manager in the Omani press.
- Participation in conferences and meetings organized by international and local institutions: lately 3 representatives of ESO attended a conference on Sustainable Eco-tourism in Salalah and presented a working paper on the impacts of climate on tourism.



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IV- Memberships

ESO is pleased to announce that it has 343 members of whom 187 (55%) are Omani and 76 are students. We also have 20 corporate members (by alphabetical order):

1. Ajit Khimji Grp of Companies LLC
2. Al Hassan Grp of Companies
3. Al Safa Environmental and Technical Services LLC
4. Bank Muscat
5. Dyncorp Intl LLC
6. HSBC
7. Intercontinental Hotel
8. HMR
9. Marina Bandar Al Rowda
10. Matrah Cold Stores
11. Occidental of Oman Inc.
12. Oman Cables Industry (S.A.O.G)
13. Oman Tourism Development Co SAOG (OMRAN)
14. Port of Sohar
15. Salalah Port Services
16. Shell Representative Office Oman
17. Shell Oman Marketing Co.
18. SIT World Learning
19. Sohar Aluminium
20. Zubair Corp

ESO will continue to work towards the expansion of its membership base through the recruitment of new members, while focusing on actual membership involvement in ESO activities.

V- Future plans

ESO's future plans are to:

- Increase the number of individual members
- Increase the number of corporate members, on which ESO depends to supplement its resources.
- Increase the number of ESO employees. In fact, we have advertised for a position of Omani trainee to be hired in November 2007.



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- Organise more educational and awareness campaigns: Through subcommittees formed by ESO board, more activities and events will be organised in all the Sultanate's regions and cities, consequently recruiting more members.
- Publish books and smaller booklets that combine general information about environmental issues in both Arabic and English
- Publish its calendar for 2008, which combines photos taken by its members of the rich Omani environment.
- Organise special educational campaigns targeting school children in order to teach them the basic values and positive attitudes towards the protection of the natural as well as human environment.
- Consolidate, support and tap resources for ESO's projects by involving all community sections to ensure a sustainable income that will secure ESO's existence.

VI- Conclusion

In a rapidly changing world of increasing consumption and quick profit, we should avoid the risk of losing sight of how our actions affect the environment. In line with its mission and strategy and through its projects, ESO endeavours to increase the awareness of both young and mature audiences of the local and global environmental implications of their actions. ESO will attempt to build the capacity of the local community to enable them to discern and avoid environmentally destructive behaviours.

This is a huge task we are setting for ourselves. Some things can be achieved quickly, others will take some time. But of course ESO cannot do this alone. We can surely provide the expertise and the vision, co-ordinate and monitor structures to make the task easier. But we heavily rely on our members and sponsors to help deliver and implement our agenda.

We hope that through this report and the activities it has summarised, you will appreciate what has been achieved with your support through the annual corporate membership fee. We hope that you will continue to provide ESO with a sustainable income, which will assist us to continue our work. Enabling citizens to exercise informed and responsible choices is a great challenge. Together we can make it possible.