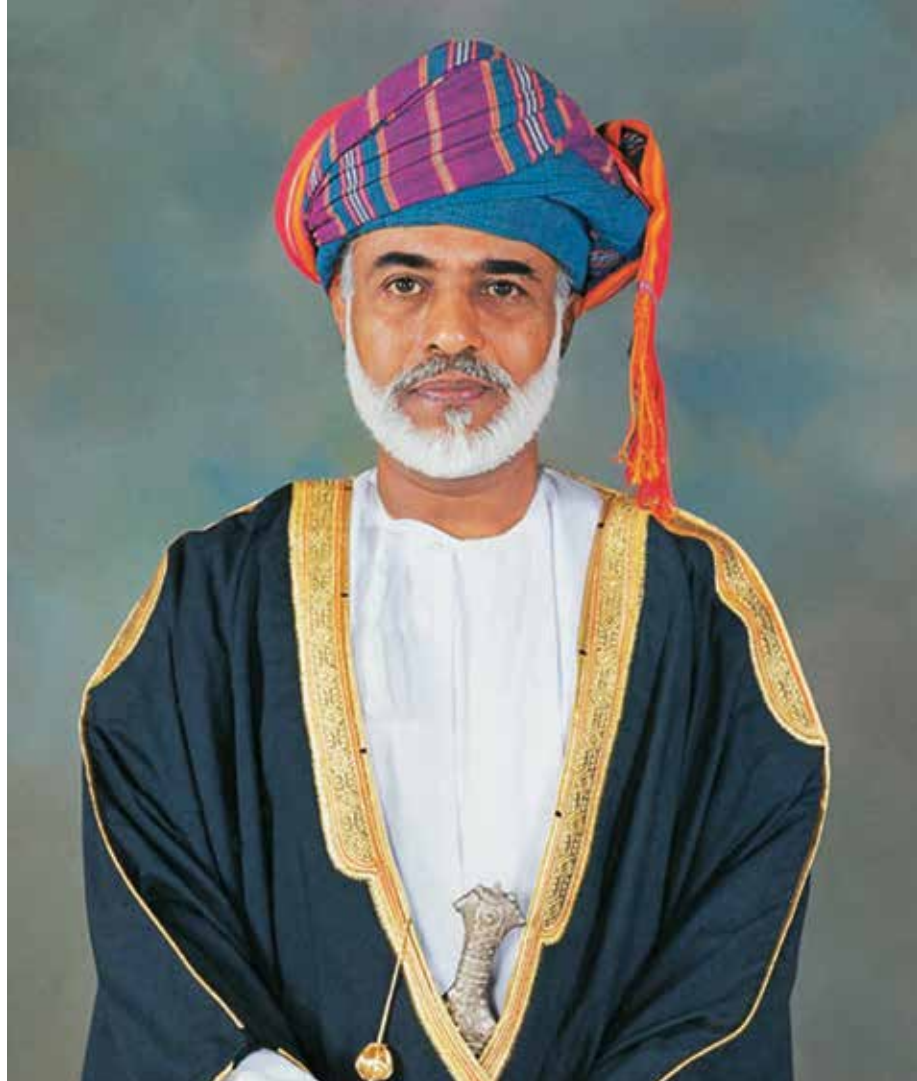




Annual Report 2015





His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said



Al Hoota, Raykhut,
Ahmed Al Shukailli.

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Yiti, Talal Abdelsalem.

Front Cover: Egyptian vulture, *Neophron percnopterus*, Al Amerat, Glyn Barrett.

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Message from the President

2015 marks the beginning of a second decade in ESO's life. The past 10 years have been a whirlwind, with many successes and learning experiences. We have achieved significant progress and made strides towards our aim of capacity building young Omanis in the field of environmental conservation. We have conducted research with the goal of providing information for conservation and education initiatives, and have raised awareness of both marine and terrestrial habitats in Oman for future generations. We hope that the next ten years will see ESO grow to new heights!

As you will see in this Annual Report, 2015 has been a year of continued growth for ESO. We would like to find a capacity building partner that will help to support the further training of young Omanis. Since its inception many of ESO's successes can be attributed to this program and it creates life-long advocates for Oman's environment. When program participants choose to pursue other career opportunities, they take knowledge and experience with them, as well as an understanding of how NGOs operate. For those that remain and take on more permanent positions within ESO, they continue to receive specialised training to further improve their skills, as well as in-field and hands-on experience in all our programs. They are given the opportunity to see an idea grow into a project and work towards finding solutions and advocating for those solutions to be implemented.



In 2015 some of our ongoing research yielded eye-opening results. In some cases they were encouraging, such as the Egyptian vulture, whose numbers were thought to be as low as 24 individuals, yet our research has shown that this has increased to over 120 individuals on Masirah Island. Results are sometimes very disappointing, such as the dwindling loggerhead turtle numbers which have now moved in their classification by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) from 'Endangered' to 'Critically Endangered'. This is the highest threat category on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and is particularly concerning for Oman as it is a strong indicator of country's marine health and will have an effect on tourism in the future if too little is done for their protection. ESO has been in discussions with the government to ensure this is kept a high priority.

Our ongoing projects can only continue with the unwavering support of companies who continue to believe in our cause and have partnered with us over the years. Our annual report is a testament to what your funds continue to enable us to achieve. The continued strengthening of our relationship with the private sector, the government and the public is critical to our future success.

ESO has built strong ties with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs, the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, and we are very grateful for their support and trust in ESO's abilities.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our supporters who have played a vital role in helping ESO grow into a significant stakeholder in the conservation of Oman's natural heritage.

I'd like to extend a special thanks and appreciation to all the individual members, volunteers and board members who give so much time to ESO, and without whom, we would not be where we are today.

Tania S Al Said
President

Introduction



2015 has, once again, been a year of high achievements for ESO.

We have seen the continuation of annual events such as Earth Hour and the Inter-College Environmental Public Speaking Competition, which was an incredible success this year with the participation of 160 students representing 28 colleges and universities, with the winners going on to win at the regional level in Dubai.

Our research and conservation projects continue with new discoveries and findings being made; significantly, the rediscovered Omani owl. Our Arabian Sea humpback whale work saw the tagging of six whales. Advocacy work has begun with industry in the Gulf of Masirah, which is the main hotspot for these magnificent endangered animals. Turtle conservation has moved to high-level stakeholder engagement with Oman's government, and the monitoring of loggerhead turtles continues showing a devastating reduction in numbers. In addition, Phase II of the Egyptian vulture research was completed. This is one of the region's most threatened bird

species and with increased surveys ESO was able to determine that there has been a staggering increase in the numbers of breeding pairs. As the global population trend of Egyptian vultures is decreasing, our data is confirming the importance of Oman for this species

The ESO Frankincense Project has moved to the awareness and educational level. This year our outreach team began discussions and workshops with frankincense harvesters to explain the results of a culmination of four years of research on the best practices for sustainable harvesting.

Our Native Tree Planting Campaign was exceptional this year and over 1,000 saplings were planted in Dhofar. This was done in conjunction with the opening of our office in Salalah, which will be the base of our operations in the south.

Although funding has decreased, our capacity building program still thrives and training of young Omanis in the field of environmental conservation has exceeded expectations and enhanced our educational projects, community outreach work, volunteer programs and scientific research.

2015 has seen eight of our Omani staff being trained in field research, data entry and analysis, education and awareness programs, and project management. ESO has attended conferences, workshops and meetings all over the world including the USA, Turkey, France, Lebanon, Bulgaria and Egypt and we continue to be a driving force in the international environmental NGO arena.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the ESO staff, board members and volunteers for all the time and energy they put into making ESO a success. Our work would not be possible without the support of Oman's corporate sector – we thank you for your generous contributions.

Enjoy the 2015 Annual Report and thank you for taking the time to read about our work and achievements.

Best Wishes,

Lamees Daar
Executive Director

ESO Board

The following Board Members were elected in April 2014 for a two year duration:

President

HH Sayyida Tania bint Shabib Al Said holds a BSc in Marine and Freshwater Biology and a Diploma in Early Childhood Education. She is a founding member of ESO and has served as the President of the board of directors of ESO since its establishment. Sayyida Tania initiated the Say No to Plastic Bags Campaign, organises the annual ESO Fundraising Ball and regularly appears in the media representing ESO. She won the GCC Award for the Best Environmental Personality in the Arabian Gulf Region in 2009.

Vice President

Mr Amor Al Mataani holds a BEng (Hons) and an MBA. After graduating from Teesside University, UK as an Instrumentation and Control Engineer he joined Petroleum Development Oman in upstream operations and commissioning. In 1993 he moved to the Ministry of Health where he was Deputy Director General for Administration and Finance at the Royal Hospital. He completed his MBA (Newcastle) in 1997 before being appointed Director General for Sur Industrial Estate in the Public Establishment of Industrial Estates (PEIE). He joined Oman LNG in 2002 as Deputy CEO and occupies the position to date. He has a keen interest in education and he is member on a number of university and technical colleges' boards and chairman of the Board of Trustees for OLNG's HAS school. He is also the Chairman of OLNG's Tender Board and Chairman of the Oman Road Safety Association.

Executive Director

Ms Lamees Daar is a founding board member of ESO, has been on the Executive Board since its establishment and voluntarily manages the organisation. She represented ESO at most regional UNEP meetings in the Society's early years and holds a BSc in Environmental Sciences. She previously worked as an environmental consultant for environmental engineering firms and was seconded to Petroleum Development of Oman to monitor ISO14000 practices. Lamees has been responsible for the overall managing of all ESO projects and staff, securing the majority of funding opportunities and sponsorships for ESO, writing proposals for current projects, chairing the Ras al Jinz Turtle Reserve Steering Committee, co-managing the Say No to Plastic Bags Campaign, writing regular press releases and managing a comprehensive overhaul of the ESO website. She is also responsible for the Capacity Building Program, which trains young Omanis in the field of environmental conservation.

Community Outreach Officer

Mr Nasser Al Maskari currently works as an environmental expert at Occidental Oman (OXY). He has a BSc in Fisheries Science and an MSc in Marine Sciences and Environmental Studies. He has worked as a Nature Reserve Specialist, Head of Permits and Head of Projects Evaluation Section at the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources (MRMWR). He was also Director of Planning for Nature Conservation at MRMWR. Nasser has been a Social Responsibility advisor at OXY since 2009 and is a member of the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary Committee and a member of the National Committee for IUCN. He was a member of the National Committee of Selecting World Heritage and Natural Sites in Oman and the Oman Marine Biodiversity Committee. He is a founding member of ESO.

Treasurer

Mr Yasser Macki works as an IT System Engineer with Hill International. He holds a BA in Management Information Systems and has been an ESO member since 2004 as well as ESO's Treasurer on the last board. During his tenure as treasurer, Yasser has been responsible for managing ESO's overall as well as specific project budgets. He has also implemented ESO's accounting system. Yasser is very active in a voluntary capacity and has organised and managed the majority of ESO clean-ups over the years.

Public Relations Officer

Ms Dana Sarhan is a Media Relations and Social Media Strategist at Petroleum Development Oman. Her previous role within the PDO was PR and Community Advisor for the Ras Al Hamra Development Project, managing stakeholder engagement, communications and events. She has held various corporate communication roles over her 17 years of PR and communication experience and public relations in these organisations influencing strategic decisions: Omran, HSBC, Al Bustan Palace Hotel, Crowne Plaza Hotel. At Omran, Dana assisted in writing the company's environmental policy as well as writing its Responsible Tourism Policy, which is currently being implemented across the corporation. Dana holds a postgraduate diploma in responsible Tourism Management from Leeds Metropolitan University, UK and a BA in International Hospitality and Tourism Management, from the University of Surrey, Guildford, UK.

Board Member

Ms Dareen Mehdi is the interim head of the Education and Communication department at Oman Botanic Garden. Upon finishing a degree in Biotechnology at Sultan Qaboos University, she started work as an Environmental Education Specialist at Oman Botanic Garden where she worked to promote the garden, its mission and goals through participating in exhibitions, delivering presentations to a wide range of audiences. Dareen completed her MSc in Conservation Science at Imperial College, London, UK after which she returned to OBG. She has special interests in environmental education, public outreach and the promotion of nature conservation and social empowerment through preservation of local livelihoods and traditional practices.

Board Member

Mr Mohammed Al Mashani is the General Manager for Corporate Affairs at Port of Salalah. He holds a BSc in Safety Management from Central Missouri State University and an MSc in Facilities Management and Asset Maintenance from Herriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. Over the last 15 years Mohammed has worked in oil and gas, where he worked at PDO in logistics and HSE and in petrochemicals, where he joined Aromatics Oman during a construction phase and during the last eight years at Port of Salalah where he started as HSE Senior manager. He has been through a CPMD Program through APM Terminals in association with ESADE Business School and in 2015 was chosen for the first cohort of the Oman National CEO Program.



ESO Board Members 2014-2016 (from left to right): Amor Al Mataani, Yasser Macki, Dana Sarhani, Dareen Mehdi, Sayyida Tania Al Said, Lamees Daar, Nasser Al Maskari, Mohammed Al Mashani.

ESO Staff



1. **Suaad Saleh Al Harthi**
Program Director
2. **Bashaar Khamis Zaitoon**
Administrative Manager
3. **Maia Sarrouf Wilson**
Research and Conservation Manager
4. **Dr. Hamed Mohammed Al Gheilani**
Community Outreach Manager
5. **Antonia Vegh**
Event and Volunteerism Coordinator
6. **Juma Khamis Al Humaidi**
Field Assistant
7. **Abdul Aziz Said Alawi**
Community Outreach Coordinator
8. **Siham Mahmood Al Tuwaijri**
Administrative Assistant
9. **Said Hamed Al Jabri**
Public Relations Officer
10. **Asma Mahmood Al Balushi**
Research and Conservation Coordinator
11. **Ghasi Hamed Al Farsi**
Field Coordinator
12. **Jenan Anwar Al Asfoor**
Communications Coordinator
13. **Hamed Abdullah Al Mazroei**
Office Coordinator – Salalah
14. **Atika Ahmed**
Accountant
15. **Juma Al Araimi**
Field Assistant
16. **Aisha Hilal Al Ghallabi**
Membership Coordinator
17. **Nuhaila Shukry Al Sulaimani**
Education Coordinator



Wadi Arbieen, Quriyat,
Ahmed Al Shukaili.

Marine Conservation Projects



Turtle Research and Conservation

The global importance of Oman to the survival of turtles – where all species are classified under 'Endangered' or 'Critically Endangered' status listings throughout the world - has been definitively established through surveys and research conducted within the Sultanate over the past 35 years. In the last nine years, ESO, in collaboration with the **Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs** (MECA) and senior international scientists, has played the lead research role on turtles in the Sultanate. We have accelerated our knowledge and understanding of turtle biology, ecology and conservation needs, as well as raised the international profile of Oman's turtle resources. Through funding provided by the **Port of Duqm** and **Oman Oil Company**, ESO has been able to work towards the conservation of turtles through continued monitoring and research efforts, enhancement of resource capacity and management activities and the engagement of local communities.



The project is based mainly on Masirah Island and focuses on loggerhead turtles. In 2013, an initial review of 2008-2012 loggerhead nesting data revealed the first indication of a dramatic decline in loggerhead nesting on Masirah Island, with a reduction in nesting females by approximately two thirds from the pre-1980 estimates. The recent estimated numbers of loggerhead turtles nesting on Masirah Island are further confirming these alarming figures. 11,000 female turtles are estimated to have visited the island in 2014, compared to an estimation of 30,000 to 40,000 females in the late 1970s. The major threats impacting both the habitat and population numbers are from land-use disturbances such as extensive coastal development and sea-based disturbances such as fisheries bycatch.

An assessment of the loggerhead sea turtle was completed in 2015 by the Marine Turtle Specialist Group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission (a global network of sea turtle experts). The North West Indian

Ocean loggerhead subpopulation has been assigned as critically endangered, thus facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild in the immediate future. This subpopulation nests in Oman and Yemen and this assessment was attributed to the reported nesting decline on Masirah Island.

In addition, the Masirah loggerhead population suffered from the impacts of cyclonic storm waves and surge in 2015 with Cyclone Ashoba, removing significant numbers of nests laid prior to cyclones and compromising available nesting habitat post cyclone. Continued monitoring will be able to prove whether the highest nesting density beaches on Masirah Island will continue to provide the highest levels of recruitment.

The preliminary scientific findings on the significant drop of loggerhead populations on Masirah Island were presented to MECA and to the International Symposium on Sea Turtles, in Turkey, in April.

Capacity Building in the Local Community

In order to assist with research on Masirah Island, ESO has been training three full-time local field assistants (FAs) over the last 4 years. These FAs work on the Turtle Research Project during the nesting season and assist with both the Renaissance Whale and Dolphin Project as well as the Egyptian Vulture Research project during the off-season. In order to ensure sustainability of this program, ESO has a permanent office in Masirah from which the FAs work.

Community Outreach and Public Engagement

Several community outreach activities were planned throughout the year to raise awareness on the importance of marine turtles, notably:

- Awareness presentations given to the general public and students on Masirah Island, emphasising on the threats to marine turtles and their habitats;
- Presentation on marine turtles given to marine science students at Sultan Qaboos University in February;
- Awareness workshop on sustainable fishing organised in November on Masirah Island, as part of ESO's activities on sea turtles and sustainable fishing.



Renaissance Whale and Dolphin Project

Thanks to the renewed support of **Renaissance Services SAOG**, The Renaissance Whale and Dolphin Project has been continuing throughout 2015. It is a multifaceted scientific and public awareness project established by ESO in 2011 and aims to build on existing research and knowledge of Oman's cetaceans and provide information that can lead to effective conservation management. The work is conducted in coordination with the **Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs (MECA)** and the **Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF)**. Special attention has also been given to working with the **Ministry of Tourism** in relation to whale and dolphin watching guidelines. We are also very excited to be working with **Shell Development Oman LLC** on acoustic data processing (further information below).



Photo credit: Darryl McDonald

Our research and conservation efforts over the last few years have focused on Arabian Sea humpback whales. Humpbacks are world famous for undertaking long seasonal migrations between polar feeding areas and tropical breeding areas but our research has shown Oman's humpback whales to be the only known population in the world not to migrate, but rather to breed and feed in the same geographic area. This makes them truly Arabian whales! Not only are these whales distinct in this regard, but our recent research also indicates they are one of the smallest and potentially most vulnerable whale populations in the world, numbering fewer than 100 individuals in Oman.

The overall project aims to cooperate and assist with local and international bodies to improve conservation of cetaceans based on information acquired through scientific research; better define distribution, abundance and population identities in Oman; define critical habitats of cetaceans in Oman; identify, assess and help mitigate threats through conservation management recommendations and action; and raise awareness of marine and coastal environmental issues related to cetaceans and to enhance environmental education in Oman.

Whale Tagging

Following endorsement from the **International Whaling Commission (IWC)**, ESO has again been able to successfully tag six humpback whales in February and November of this year, in collaboration with the **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Instituto Aqualie** and the **Wildlife Conservation Society**. Local partners include **Five Oceans Environmental Services LLC, MECA, MAF, Diwan Office for Conservation of Environment** and **Sultan Qaboos University**. The satellite tags provided detailed information that contributes to our understanding on the movements, seasonality and behaviour of this unique species. The tagged whales showed localised activity mainly moving between hotspots in Hallaniyat Bay and the Gulf of Masirah. These areas are facing rapid industrialisation which underlines the importance of strategic management of these critical habitats. We thank the Port of Duqm for providing additional funding required to complete tagging in 2015.



Photo Credit: Darryl McDonald.

Passive Acoustic Monitoring

From 2011-2013 Marine Acoustic Recording Units were deployed in a triangulation configuration in the Gulf of Masirah and Hallaniyat Bay, previously identified hotspot areas. The monitoring allows for whale detection, noise analysis and song analysis and is significant in providing information on critical habitats, understanding the impact of noise-related human activities and understanding whale behaviour. Data from this work is finally being processed with the support of **Shell Development Oman LLC** and in collaboration with the **New England Aquarium**. This is of particular conservation value because boat surveys in this region have been limited to relatively small windows by seasonal weather conditions, and as a consequence there is no information on the distribution of this endangered population during most of the calendar year. Accordingly, the acoustic data collection from 2011-2013 was specifically designed to investigate temporal and spatial distribution during the monsoons and times of year when no surveys were being conducted. This existing data will provide the most revealing and detailed insights on year-round presence for this population to date.



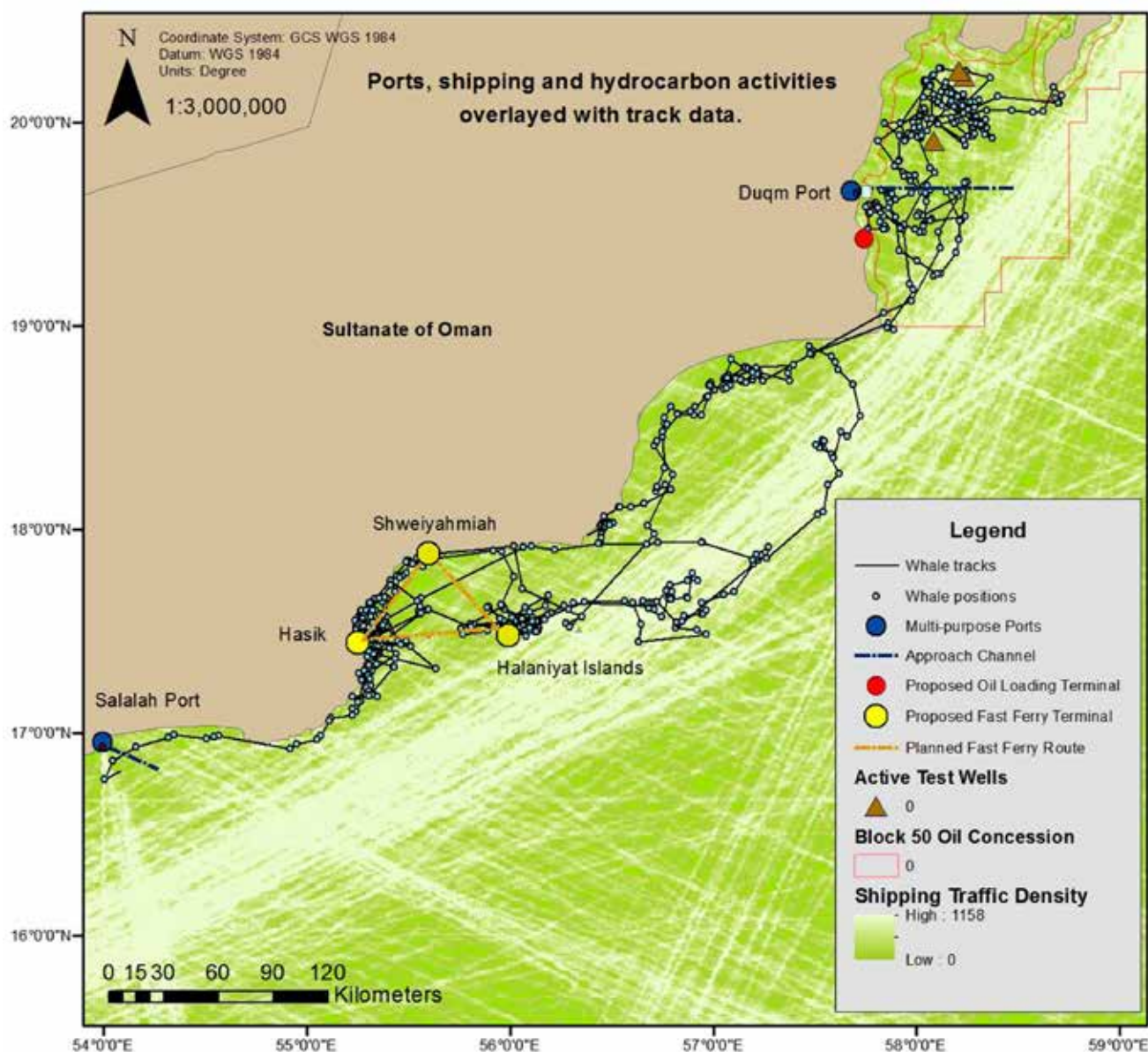
Photo Credit: Darryl McDonald.

The Significance of the Gulf of Masirah (Khayma to Duqm to Ras Madrakah)

With such a small population of whales, a loss of no more than one whale every five years is the maximum limit for the population to remain stable. To facilitate recovery through sustained population growth, the world cannot afford to lose any more Arabian Sea humpback whales. The coastline of Oman is becoming increasingly industrialised and whilst Environmental Impact Assessments are routinely conducted, few provide for adequate mitigation against impacts to humpback whales and the cumulative impacts of new development and activities in coastal and offshore areas remains almost entirely unaccounted for in Oman.

Until the early 2000s the Gulf of Masirah remained largely pristine and undeveloped, with an extremely low human population density. The major economic activity in the area has been gillnet fishery which represents a significant threat to humpback whales in the area, with a number of whale entanglements reported between 1990 and 2014 and 30-40% of photographed humpback whales bearing scars consistent with prior entanglement. The expansion of fishing activity is anticipated and a tender has been issued for construction of Oman's largest fishing harbor at Duqm in 2016.

The recent construction of Duqm Port and increased oil and gas exploration in the Gulf of Masirah will also transform this core humpback whale habitat in Oman into a busy industrial area. Duqm Port was conceived as the economic hub of a city projected to grow to a population of 100,000 people by 2020.



Oil and gas exploration and production is also rapidly expanding in the Gulf of Masirah. Seismic surveys were conducted in 1997 and 2011 and more extensive 3D seismic surveys were conducted 2014. Test wells drilled in 2014 revealed promising finds, with plans now secured for the drilling of three new wells in 2016 together with on-going seismic exploration. ESO research shows a high degree of overlap between whale distribution and oil and gas activities.

Other developments affecting whale habitat in this area include coastal tourism, aquaculture facilities and oil storage tank farms. Threats to whales in this region are significant, with measurable consequences for the health of the population as a whole.

In 2015, ESO has begun promising discussions with the **Special Economic Zone** in Duqm, who have assured us that all projects and industry that come under their supervision will include the whale population in their Environmental Impact Assessments. We are very pleased to announce that the **Port of Duqm**, specifically, has already begun implementation of their whale mitigation plan and we thank both entities for their support.

Capacity Building and Regional Collaboration

The IWC Scientific Committee meeting in May in San Diego, USA, presented opportunities for ESO to present the whale tagging data achieved under the Renaissance Whale and Dolphin Project. The Scientific Committee has reiterated 'serious concerns about the threats faced by the endangered Arabian Sea humpback whales' and recommended the formation of an advisory panel to work on 'key areas [of habitat] where threats are occurring concurrently'. Given this, ESO is currently working under the advisement and support of both World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to potentially put together an IUCN advisory panel with an initial focus in the Gulf of Masirah. This would be an extremely positive first step for this population and would allow Oman to continue to play a leadership role in the conservation of this unique population. If successful, these efforts could then be transferred to other parts of the range that face similar threats and share similar management concerns.

Meanwhile, ESO continues to build the capacity of our three field assistants based on Masirah Island. The training has also enabled them to independently conduct stranding surveys along the entire coastline of Masirah Island, which contributes to the stranding databases used for both cetaceans and sea turtles.



Photo Credit:
Darryl McDonald.

Terrestrial Conservation Projects

Frankincense Research and Conservation

Frankincense has played an integral part in the Omani heritage and culture and has been the main source of income for the Dhofari people for centuries. Frankincense trees have also played important environmental roles: they grow on marginal land not suitable for ordinary agriculture, protect the soil from erosion, produce good biomass and provide shade. Few people know that frankincense is harvested by tapping the trunk and branches of the *Boswellia sacra* tree. In the past few years and after close monitoring of the growth patterns of frankincense trees, researchers noticed that the tapping has been too harsh, often leading to the degradation of the tree beyond repair. Changes in the climate over the past few years might have also had an impact on the growth of frankincense trees. Accordingly, it was important to monitor these two factors and record their impacts on the sustainability of frankincense farming in Dhofar.

Sponsored by **HSBC**, this long-term research project had, in the past, focused on four experimental research locations in the Governorate of Dhofar and aims to determine the right frequency of cutting to produce a good yield without adversely harming the trees.

Frankincense Awareness Program

ESO has produced a comprehensive infographic poster, which has been designed to inform farmers on the sustainable harvesting of Frankincense, which is vital to the survival of this endemic tree.

A full-scale awareness program will begin in 2016, but workshops and presentations have already begun with local communities in Mirbat, Sadah and Hadbeen to explain the project and its implications.

FRANKINCENSE

SAVING A TREE A SYMBOL & A WAY OF LIFE

A VALUABLE TREE UNDER THREAT



Intense or Incorrect
Tapping Practices



Gravel Mining



Overgrazing



Insects

A PROJECT TO DETERMINE HOW TO SUSTAINABLY HARVEST FRANKINCENSE

Sustainable harvesting must be applied to conserve frankincense trees and the livelihoods they support. Over the course of 4 years, the Environment Society of Oman studied the effects of tapping methodologies on yield

production and the wellbeing of trees. The project was led by Dr. Mohsin Al-Amri and field assistant Badar Al-Shanfary, and is the first significant research of this kind in Oman.

4 YEARS
STUDY
(2010-2014)

4 LOCATIONS
WITH **45 TREES**
EACH

180 NATURALLY
GROWN
TREES MONITORED

3 METEOROLOGICAL
STATIONS
TO DETERMINE THE IMPACT
OF WEATHER ON YIELD



For more than 5,000 years, *Boswellia sacra* trees in Oman's Dhofar region have been tapped for a rare aromatic resin traded across Arabia, Africa and Europe, mostly known as frankincense (or olibanum). This much sought-after resin has been used for centuries in cultural ceremonies, but also as a cosmetic agent, and as traditional medicine to treat a variety of ailments.

Frankincense is deeply meshed into the Omani identity, and its production persists to this day. But its future is unclear, with incorrect tapping practices and overgrazing – among other threats – placing frankincense trees at risk.

HOW TO SUSTAINABLY HARVEST FRANKINCENSE TREES

The study has demonstrated how specific harvesting techniques can reduce the mortality of frankincense trees and increase their yield.



12 cm² cut size, barely shaving the external layer. Cuts about 30 cm distant from each other.



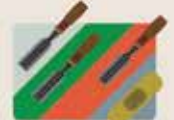
Incisions should be limited to the outer red phloem, should not reach the inner xylem and should avoid branch nodes.

MAXIMUM YIELD

A tree reaches its maximum yield productivity in the 3rd or 4th harvesting sequence, and in the 3rd harvesting year. The lower part of the tree trunk produces more resin compared to the upper parts of the trunk.



Tapping should stop 2-3 weeks before the rainy season.



Harvesting can be continued for 3 years, followed by a 1-2 year rest period to allow scars to heal.

Find out more: www.eso.org.om/frankincense/
Facebook: [EnvironmentSocietyOfOman](https://www.facebook.com/EnvironmentSocietyOfOman)
Twitter: @eso_oman
Instagram: @eso.oman

Funded by
HSBC

Research
carried out by



Egyptian Vulture Research and Conservation

The Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) is one of the region's most threatened bird species. ESO started researching the vulture in 2012 on Masirah Island where 65 to 80 territorial pairs and 260-386 individuals were estimated to be found. This was four times greater than the previous estimate! Following the brand-new discovery that Egyptian vultures could be thriving in Oman, additional funds were secured by ESO with the support of **Shell Development Oman LLC** for a second phase of the project. Phase II studied the species in a broader geographical context (across six governorates of Oman) and included field surveys, satellite tracking and outreach activities.

Field survey activities consisted of three consecutive dumpsite counts and one breeding survey. The multiple rubbish dump counts demonstrated their importance as a food source for the resident Egyptian vulture population and their potential for being good locations for monitoring local and migratory populations. Staggering numbers, with as many as 300 individuals were recorded around some dumpsites! The breeding surveys in the Hajar Mountains confirmed the existence of breeding areas identified by Jennings (2010). The information collected from one satellite tag fitted in January showed the bird had been making short journeys around the Hajar



Mountains, between the different dumpsites of Al Multaqah, BidBid and Qurayat, and often roosting in the mountains surrounding Al Sareen Nature Reserve. This bird was unfortunately electrocuted and died in December. Electrocution is a huge problem for large birds worldwide, including many eagles and vultures. Various outreach and public awareness activities were also organised as part of this project, such as the production of an educational leaflet on Egyptian vultures, the involvement of local communities, the empowerment of women, the organisation of public awareness lectures and the setting up of a blog to update the birds movement (www.egyptianvultureoman.blogspot.com).

The global population trend of Egyptian vultures is decreasing and data confirms the importance of Oman for this species. This has been emphasised at the Egyptian Vulture Flyway Action Planning Workshop organised by the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB) and the Convention for Migratory Species (CMS) in Sofia in July. Oman potentially holds the most important population of Egyptian vultures in Arabia and in contrast to all other countries, has a healthy and relatively large breeding population.

Research done since 2012 has strongly demonstrated the value of studying the spatial ecology of Egyptian vultures and will be promoted in the project continuation. A special emphasis will be given to dumpsite counts, breeding surveys, threat evaluation and satellite tagging. Future activities will also include community engagement, public awareness and stakeholder engagement, the latter being important to coordinate the impact of the large-scale modernisation of rubbish dumps on Egyptian vultures.

Capacity Building

Throughout the Egyptian vulture field surveys the ESO field team was trained on different types of raptors surveying methodologies and their technical capabilities were noticeably developed. Some of the skills gained throughout the field activities were: survey techniques, identification skills, data collection and analysis, assessment of breeding vultures according to the British Trust of Ornithology breeding codes/ evidences and training on using the IUCN threat assessment Pressure-State-Response scoring model to diagnose and measure the severity of the threat impacts on both species and habitats.

Photo Credit: Omar Al Sheikhly.





Omani owl, *Strix butleri*,
Alyn Walsh and Magnus Robb.

The Omani Owl Mystery Resolved

An owl discovered in 2013 by Magnus Robb and the Sound Approach was thought to be a new species, and was identified at the time through sound analysis only. This species was called the Omani Owl and created a stir among both birders and biologists. That a bird had evaded discovery until now was extraordinary. That it was described and named only using sound recordings and photographs was controversial.

In March 2015, Magnus Robb and his colleagues returned to Oman where they captured and released the newly identified owl species with the permission of the **Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs**, and as part of a joint conservation project with the Environment Society of Oman and **BirdLife International**. Feathers and blood from the owl were collected and analysed, proving there are two *Strix* species in the Middle East. DNA analysis showed that the Omani Owl is the same as *Strix butleri*. The other is *Strix hadorami*, which has a geographical range in the some of the Levant countries, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen and Southern Oman.

When Magnus heard unknown sounds of an owl in March 2013, he was, in fact, rediscovering a species previously known from just one old specimen in The Natural History Museum (Tring, England) said to be from Pakistan, and collected 135 years earlier.

This study contributed to the drop of the common name Hume's Owl and the adoption of Omani Owl to characterize *Strix butleri*. This change was adopted by the International Ornithological Congress World Bird List in August.

Community Outreach Projects



‘Let’s Plant One’ Native Tree Planting Campaign

ESO’s Native Tree Planting Campaign was sponsored in 2015 by **Nama Group**. It aims not only to plant native trees, but to engage volunteers and raise awareness of the importance of planting native trees. The campaign focuses on the Dhofar region, which is home to more than 800 of the 1,200 native Omani plant species and faces desertification, overgrazing and the invasion of alien plant species. Through this campaign, ESO has built long-standing relationships with the local community, officials, volunteers, schools, universities and colleges.

ESO is grateful for the collaboration of many organisations in Dhofar, such as the **Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries**, the **Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs**, **Dhofar Municipality** and the **Ministry of Education**.

In 2015 planting activities took place in April and September and 1,000 trees of 15 different species were planted in schools, colleges and army locations with the help of many volunteers.

Fourth Inter-College Environmental Public Speaking Competition

In cooperation with **Emirates Environmental Group** (EEG), ESO held the 4th Inter-College Environmental Public Speaking Competition, organised with the aim of developing a deep appreciation of the environment and an understanding of the challenges facing it through study, research, discussion and debate.

The competing students were challenged to build and present strong cases on different contemporary issues and questions relating to the environment. The competition gives the participants a wonderful opportunity to showcase knowledge and talent and served as a good networking opportunity for government and private academic institutions.



Sponsored by **BP Explorations Oman** and **Occidental Oman** (Gold Sponsors) and **Oman LNG, Ominvest, Khimji Ramdas** and **Al Ansari Group of Cos.** (Bronze Sponsors) and supported by **TRACCS Oman, Carillion Alawi, Pro Group** and the **Crowne Plaza Muscat**, the competition was held on 2nd – 3rd November under the patronage of HE Dr Rawya bint Saud Al Busaidi, Minister for Higher Education.



A distinguished panel of judges was invited to evaluate the performances of the participants:

- Mr Yasser Abdullah Sulaiman, Former District 20 Governor, Toastmasters International
- Abdulaziz Al Midfaa, Vice Chairperson, EEG, United Arab Emirates
- Ms Atiya Al Mammari, Programs Technician Member, Ministry of Higher Education
- Ali Al Kiyumi, the Minister Consultant for Conservation and Protection Affairs, Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs
- Dr Lubna Al Kharusi, Director General of Fisheries Research
- Dr Asadallah Al Ajmi, Advisor to the Minister for Academic Affairs, Ministry of Higher Education

Winning Teams

Environment and Development - Conflict or Harmony Rustaq College of Applied Science (Mohammed Salim Al Hashmi, Abdullah Mansoor Al Bahlani, Nasser Saif Al Maqbali, Mahmood Said Al Busafi, Sulaiman Khalfan Al Saadi).

Sustainability Our Responsibility – It's No Longer an Option Oman Dental College (Reem Said Al Mufarraj, Taif Sulaiman Al Shirawi, Sumaia Salim Al Busafi).

Overpopulation vs Overconsumption - Where should we Focus? Rustaq College of Applied Science (Hasim Musabah Al Salami, Reema Abdullah Al Hadi, Anwar Mohammed Al Harmali, Siham Mohammed Al Handhali).

From Global to Local - Environmental Regulations and Economic Integration Ibra College of Technology (Humaid Mohammed Al Musalami, Laith Mubarak Al Shaaibi, Marwa Said Al Maskari, Hajar Saleh Al Shibani, Intisar Said Al Jafari).



Following the success of the National Competition, the winners were mentored and given further presentation skills by Yasser Sulaiman, Saleh Al Khamyasi, Dr Mehdi Jaaffar and the Khimji Training Institute. ESO held workshops for the winning teams to enhance their design and presentation skills for the regional competition, which was held in Dubai in late November.

ESO is very proud that the winning team from Oman Dental College took home first prize at the regional competition, where they competed against 60 teams from 8 countries! Congratulations to Zainab Ghazwan, Fatma Al Farsi, Hiram Hamdulay, Safa'a Al Qarni and Sawsan Shams. Our Omani teams also won 2nd place in three categories and 3rd place in two categories.

We would also like to thank HE Mohammed Al Tobj, Minister of Environment and Climate Affairs, for taking the time to meet and discuss environmental issues with the winning students.





Earth Hour 2015

2015 saw a huge success in ESO joining the global initiative of Earth Hour, which aims to demonstrate concerns about the future of our planet by doing something simple, yet remarkable – turning off lights for one hour on the last Saturday in March at 8.30pm. This year, with the slogan “Change Climate Change”, we were proud to partner with **National Bank of Oman** (Gold Sponsor), **Sohar Aluminium**, **Towell Engineering**, **Oman Solar Systems**, **Muscat Pharmacy** and **Special Technical Services** (Bronze Sponsors).

In-kind supporters included: **Al Mouj Muscat**, **Shell Oman Marketing Company**, **Crowne Plaza Muscat**, **Carillion Alawi**, **Averda Environmental Services**, **Al Jarwani Hospitality**, **Sandouq Edunia**, **Talentz**, **Mustafa Sultan Enterprises**, **Enhance**, **Tiara Events** and **GT Stage Tech**.



Using social and conventional media ESO received pledges of support from the public and private sector, government and educational institutions to turn their lights off for one hour. It was an incredible display of community participation and culminated in a spectacular family event at Al Mouj Golf Course, which included games, activities and entertainment. Power saving light bulbs, candles and reusable bags were given to each guest and 1.07 tons of e-waste was collected for recycling.



Thank you to Oman Goal Keeper Ali Al Habsi who gave ESO Members' children a day learning goalkeeping skills!

ESO also focused on adding local relevant content to our Earth Hour website www.omanearthhour.org and encouraging colleges across the country to participate in the campaign by organising their own events. In addition, student volunteers conducted surveys in 36 colleges and universities to understand the awareness level of the annual campaign and encourage students to get involved.

Media support was received from **TRACCS Oman**, **Apex Publishing (Muscat Daily, The Week and Al Isbou'a)**, **Al Shabiba**, **Times of Oman**, **Y Magazine**, **Merge 104.8** and **Al Wisal 96.5FM**. The support

enabled ESO to get the message out across Oman and engage volunteers. ESO was honoured that the **Royal Opera House Muscat**, the **Grand Mosque**, **Muscat Municipality** and **Sultan Qaboos University** also joined in the initiative and turned off all non-essential lighting.

Nama Group announced that the total amount of electricity saved during Earth Hour 2015 was 136,603 KW of energy in comparison to 67,000 KW in 2014!



Masirah Signage

In August, 23 awareness signs were installed on Masirah Island. Most of these signs were fixed in the south and west of Masirah where turtles are nesting. This program is a continuation of ESO's commitment to the protection of the unique environment and its inhabitants on the Island. We would like to thank the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs office in Masirah, especially Saleem Al Junaibi for his effort and assistance. A total of 55 signs have been placed over the last two years by ESO.



Eco Summer

With sponsorship from **Petroleum Development of Oman**, ESO was able to continue summer education programs, engaging children of all ages in a 2 week program.

30 students registered for the Eco Summer Program and activities included the importance of buying and eating locally grown food, composting, carbon footprint, photography, art, eco crafting, informative sessions on biodiversity and environmental quizzes.



Eco College Chapters

The Eco College Chapters Program, sponsored by **BP Oman**, specifically targets university and college students in Oman with the aim of raising awareness among the youth and encouraging them to take initiative at developing their own environmental activities to positively impact their environment. The program will be a way to reach out to a wider range of the student community and establish a network among higher education institutions in the Sultanate. Initial engagement with colleges has begun with an excellent response and the program will continue to develop throughout 2016.

An Eco College Chapter would consist of a group of students and staff in a higher education institution that would be responsible for activities and events to help raise environmental awareness. ESO aims to work together with existing eco clubs and work on encouraging establishment of new eco clubs within universities and colleges where they do not exist. These clubs would provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and information on environmental issues and activities and provide support to each other throughout the year.

Other Outreach Activities in Communities and Schools



ESO's has a dedicated Community Outreach Department, which focuses on supporting ESO's aim to raise awareness on environmental conservation and engage members through lectures, events and activities. ESO aims to reach out to different sectors of the community including women, children in schools, fishermen and the public at large. The opening of ESO's office in Dhofar has allowed a base from which many more activities can be planned and executed.

In 2015 outreach and awareness activities were held in Muscat, Masirah, Al Wusta, Sharqiya, Musandam, Al Batinah and Dhofar, targeting schools and the wider community. ESO's dedicated community outreach team tailors presentations to different communities based on their local environments and biodiversity. Presentations include areas such as Sustainable Fankincense Gathering, Oman's Biodiversity, ESO Research, Recycling, Climate Change, Clean-Ups and Photography.

Women and children are seen to be key drivers to societal change and ESO has been targeting these groups across the Sultanate, presenting environmental awareness lectures on important biological components and the ways in which our actions impact the environment. School and college presentations and lectures to the Omani Women's Associations took place throughout the year.

Clean-ups, lectures and field trips were organised by ESO throughout 2015 and continue to be a core part of ESO's commitment to ensuring participatory events for members.



Barka Al Sharf, Al Hamra,
Ahmed Al Shukaili.



Capacity Building Program

ESO has been steadily growing over the last ten years and it remains our goal to train Omanis in the field of environmental conservation. In 2011 we found ourselves faced with a major restructuring of staff in order to keep up with the growing responsibilities and projects that ESO has and wants to continue taking on.

It was agreed by the ESO Board that a central part of ESO's mandate would be to train Omani graduates in conservation strategies and NGO and community involvement before joining Oman's workforce and give them an opportunity to pursue a career with ESO.

Since 2012, ESO has speedily been making progress in the area of capacity building.

In 2015 eight Omanis were included in the Capacity Building Program.

Omani Training Program

Although graduates are trained in a specific area of NGO management, each leave the training program with experience in the following areas:

- NGO Management
- Project Management
- Conservation Management
- In-Field Research Experience
- Community Outreach
- Awareness Raising
- Volunteer Management





Asma Al Balushi

Asma graduated from Sultan Qaboos University in 2011 with a BSc in Marine Science. She was recruited for the position of Projects Management Coordinator and has been with ESO since March 2012, assisting in consultant management, proposal and report writing, securing permits and participating in research. Asma has led meetings with the Wali of Masirah, engaged with the Omani Women's Association and given numerous presentations, strengthening ESO's Community Outreach Program and ensuring that results of our scientific projects are shared with relevant parties. Through the program, Asma has travelled to South Africa to attend a 10 day Earthwatch Emerging Scientists Program. Her work has also taken her to the UAE, Jordan, Kuwait and recently to Turkey where she

represented ESO at the 35th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation. She attended several workshops this year that allowed her to strengthen her knowledge, expand her network and exposure, and tap into a wealth of specialised resources. In October Asma took part in the Training and Planning Workshop of the Regional Observer Scheme Evaluation and the Convention on the Conservation Migratory Species. She also attended the Beach Stranding and Entanglement Response Training Workshop in Oman in November. Asma is now ESO's Research and Conservation Coordinator and is keen to continue her focus in the marine environment, where her interest lies.



Khalid Al Khaldi

Khalid Al Khaldi volunteered for ESO for three months during the preparation for the 2013 Inter-College Environmental Public Speaking Competition and was solely responsible for contacting and engaging college and university students. Khalid has a natural charismatic ability to engage and excite volunteers and students and so it was only natural for him to join ESO full time as Membership Coordinator. In 2014 Khalid worked to increase membership of students within ESO and made many trips to colleges across Oman and worked with them to organise their own events for Oman Environment Day. Khalid has attended numerous conference and exhibitions promoting ESO and our work and has also accompanied volunteers on ESO's fieldwork in Hasik to tag humpback whales. He

has organised activities in schools and worked closely with higher education students in preparation for the 2014 Inter-College Environmental Public Speaking Competition. Khalid worked with over 200 students preparing them for the event and mentoring them through the process and after assisting with the organisation of the Oman event, he then accompanied the winning teams to Dubai for the regional competition. Khalid is currently putting a program together for initiating environmental activities and clubs within colleges. Khalid left in April to pursue further studies. He still volunteers for ESO on a regular basis and continues to be an asset to our organisation.

Siham Al Tuwaijri

Siham joined ESO at the end of 2014 as Administrative Assistant. Siham attended a finance course in 2015, has been receiving hands-on training in office management skills and is actively involved in tasks related to personnel issue such as maintaining staff records and contract renewals. Her administrative work includes writing correspondence and maintaining accurate records and databases, Siham also provides support to the accounting department. As an important member of the administrative team, she has provided invaluable support to all of ESO's projects.





Juma Al Humaidi, Ghasi Al Farsi and Juma Al Araimi

Juma, Ghasi and Juma have been working for ESO since 2009 as part-time field assistants on Masirah Island. Although they were initially recruited and trained by ESO to help with field surveys of loggerhead turtles, their contributions have been unparalleled in terms of creating ties with the local community in Masirah. Our field assistants have now been working full time with ESO for four years, assisting in the field with our Turtle Research and Conservation, Renaissance Whale and Dolphin Project and Egyptian Vulture Research and Conservation.

Not only have the field assistants been trained in field surveying methods, they have completed courses in computers, English, typing, bird identification and ringing, and whale and dolphin identification. They have worked with experts from the US, Netherlands, Bulgaria and the UK and recently took the lead in ESO's Sustainable Fishing Towards Turtle Conservation Project during which they worked with interns from Sultan Qaboos University and marine scientists. They have completed the Oman National Powerboat Course and specifically within the Egyptian Vulture Research the field assistants' technical capabilities were noticeably developed and they were trained in identification skills, data collection and analysis, assessment of breeding vultures according to the British Trust of Ornithology breeding codes/evidences and training on using the IUCN threat assessment Pressure-State-Response scoring model to diagnose and measure the severity of the threat impacts on both species and habitats. Juma al Araimi also attended a Beach Stranding and Entanglement Response Training Workshop in Oman in November.

Nuhaila Al Sulaimani

Nuhaila holds both a BSc in Applied Biology from the Higher College of Technology and an MSc in Environmental Monitoring and Management from the University of Nottingham, Malaysia Campus. Nuhaila joined ESO as Education Coordinator in 2013 and is a great asset to the organisation. She has worked with higher education students on the Inter-College Environmental Public Speaking Competition when she liaises with supervisors of student teams and ensures that hundreds of students from colleges and universities around the country are properly mentored prior to their presenting at the event. She also accompanies the winning teams to Dubai for the regional competition. In 2015, under her guidance, Omani students have made great progress in this annual competition, taking home six winning titles during the regional competition.



Nuhaila has researched, written and designed an educational booklet to be given to students in Dhofar schools outlining the importance of planting native trees in Oman. These booklets are being used to raise awareness in schools and in doing so Nuhaila has worked with Ministry of Education officials, volunteers and agricultural experts. Nuhaila organises the Eco Summer Program for children in Muscat and is currently working on a comprehensive education program for 2016. In 2014 she travelled to Tunisia for a conference on development of civic society in environment education and to Japan for the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development.

Abdulaziz Al Alawi

Abdulaziz Al Alawi graduated from Nizwa Applied Sciences College with a BA in Digital and Graphic Design. He joined ESO in March 2014 as Community Outreach Coordinator and has since worked on raising awareness of environmental issues and ESO in general across the Sultanate. Areas of focus included Dhofar, Al Wusta, Batinah and Musandam where ESO collaborated with the Omani Women's Association, schools and local communities. In Duqm, Abdulaziz presented ESO's whale research and its global significance to the area and in November he attended the First Arab Forum for Best Practices in the Youth Field, which took place in Dubai, UAE. In addition to his community outreach work, he has been very involved in design work for ESO activities including Earth Hour, educational booklets and information posters. He has also become our official photographer documenting all ESO's activities. In January Abdulaziz attended a workshop at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs related to communicating and engaging with communities on environmental issues. He is currently working on a comprehensive outreach program for 2016.



Aisha Al Ghallabi

Aisha Al Ghallabi holds a BSc in Environmental Health Management from the Canadian University of Dubai and joined ESO as Membership Coordinator in 2015. In addition to managing ESO's membership database, Aisha has been developing ESO's Eco College Chapters Program through which she aims to encourage college and university students to become more proactive on environmental issues and to enable them to organise and lead on-campus environmental events. As a result of these efforts, Aisha has engaged with several colleges, universities and institutes across the Sultanate. Furthermore, Aisha has been supporting ESO's educational programs and has been actively engaged in the Eco Summer Program and the Inter-College Environmental Public Speaking Competition. Aisha has worked with

over 200 students preparing them for the Inter-College event and mentoring them through the process and after assisting with the organisation of the Oman event, she then accompanied the winning teams to Dubai for the regional competition.



Other Activities



ESO 10 Year Anniversary Celebration

In March 2015, an intimate event was held for friends and supporters in celebration of ESO's 10 Year Anniversary. We would like to thank those that have helped ESO get to where we are today and those that continue to support our goals. Dana Sarhan, ESO Board Member, was instrumental in managing this event and we would like to thank her for her dedication and passion.





ESO Dhofar Office

ESO has always recognised the importance and responsibility of being the only environmental NGO in Oman. ESO's head office is located in Muscat and the Board has always ensured that there is a board member representing southern interests. The environment in the south of the country is very unique, thereby giving way to very different environmental concerns than in the north.

ESO is pleased to announce that with the support of **Nama Group**, a new ESO office in Dhofar was established in 2015. The main initial objectives for this office will be to:

- Increase ESO activities and outreach programs at schools and communities in Dhofar Governorate
- Increase Dhofar ESO membership and volunteer database
- Identify environmental challenges facing Dhofar

All three of these objectives are steadily being worked towards an opening ceremony took place in September under the patronage of HE Sheikh Salim Al Shanfari, Head of Dhofar Municipality. As a sign of Nama Group and ESO's commitment, over 1,000 native trees were planted in Dhofar during 2015.

Internship Program

Aurene Fernandes assisted with ESO's social media for six weeks and assisted in facilitating the creation and delivery of engaging social media content to ESO's growing community. Aurene was invaluable in managing our social media needs while with us.

Rigel Cedeño assisted with ESO's social media, ensuring our work was being posted on all platforms.

Ayat Saleh contributed to the Educational Department Programs and the Earth Hour event.

Mohammed Al Mahfudhi, Mohammed Zaid Al Siyabi, Saad Al Amri, Yahya Al Yahyaei and **Munther Al Mahfudhi** are students at Sultan Qaboos University and interned with ESO for four weeks, contributing to several projects in our Research and Conservation Department. They assisted with tissue samples of loggerhead turtles and updating the data sheets. They also drafted an inventory sheet that was used to revise information on collected tissue samples on Masirah Island. They were assigned to crosscheck raw and soft data on the Egyptian vulture, compile and analyse dumpsite survey data, actively participated in the loggerhead turtle field survey and carried out surveys on barnacles on Masirah Island.

Amna Al Raisi interned with ESO for over a month period compiling environmental legislation, helping with translation of contents from Arabic to English, assisting and actively participating in the second phase of the Whale and Dolphin Watching Guideline Campaign.

ECO BOWL 2015

12 teams competed in ESO's 4th annual corporate bowling competition aiming to raise funds for ESO. In first place was Port of Salalah, second place went to HSBC and third place to Ooredoo. Prizes and support was provided courtesy of **Shangri-La Barr al Jissah**, Sarco and Trishna. We would like to thank all the companies who participated and look forward to the 2016 rematch!



Ramadhan Quiz

ESO's annual Ramadhan Quiz saw 40 competitors take part and answer 60 questions on the environment. We would like to thank those that participated as well as our supporter for the evening, **Shell Oman Marketing Company**.





Photo Credit:
Hamed Al Gheilani.

Volunteer of the Year Award 2015

The ESO volunteer of the year award recognises and celebrates the outstanding efforts of our volunteers. It's our way of thanking them for their generous hours and services throughout the year.

The Volunteer of the Year 2015 Award went to Stephanie Dietz in Muscat and Hamed Al Mazroei in Dhofar.

Stefanie Dietz volunteered at the ESO office for two months and was extremely helpful, positive and willing work on any task. Her attitude and eagerness to learn made her a great asset to ESO team. She helped with many administrative issues, assisting with ESO's AGA, researching and putting together a document on recycling in Oman, being part of preparing and implementing the Earth Hour family event and activities, assisting and being involved in Earth Hour pre- and post- event surveys amongst university and college students and assisted in all of the functions on a day-to-day basis.

Hamed Al Mazroei had a key role in the success of the Native Tree Planting Campaign in Dhofar. He was also an influential ambassador for ESO's Inter-College Environmental Public Speaking Competition and was instrumental in encouraging and organising for teams from Dhofar to join and participate. Hamed has since become ESO's administrative assistant in ESO's Dhofar office.



Awards, Grants and Donations

ESO would like to give special thanks to all those who have helped us achieve our goals in 2015. These donors, sponsors and grant agencies are listed below in order of the date donations:

- **Ajit Khimji Group LLC** for free office space
- **TRACCS Oman** for public relations support
- **Apex Publishing** for their continued support
- **HSBC** for the Frankincense Project
- **Renaissance Services SAOG** for the Renaissance Whale and Dolphin Project
- **Marina Bandar Al Rowdha** for free berthing of the ESO boat
- **Nama Group** for the Dhofar office and the Native Tree Planting Campaign
- **Shell Oman** for fuel cards
- **Towell Auto Centre** for vehicle rental
- **The Chedi Muscat** for guest donations
- **PDO EcOman Centre** for use of their lecture facilities
- **Oman Cables Industry** donation
- **ABA School** donation
- **Carillion Alawi** for help with the Native Tree Planting Campaign
- **Oman Oil** and **Port of Duqm** for the Turtle Research and Conservation Project
- **Shell Development Oman** for the Egyptian Vulture Research and Conservation Project
- **Shell Development Oman** for Acoustic Humpback Whale Data Analysis
- **Shell Development Oman** for reusable bag manufacturing
- **Omantel, HSBC, Travelex** and the **Grand Hyatt Muscat** for Sponsorship of the ESO Fundraising Ball
- **GHM Hotels, Oman Air, Swiss International Air Lines, Alila Jabal Akhdar, Romain Jerome** and **Mistal** for auction prizes at the ESO Fundraising Ball
- **Caravans, OHI, UMS, Chez Sushi, Quintessentially, Capital Stores, Nejd, Shangri-La Barr al Jissah, The Flower Shop, Instagrammers** and **A&E** for raffle prizes at the ESO Fundraising Ball
- **Shell Oman Marketing Company** for the Ramadhan Quiz
- **Petroleum Development Oman** for community outreach funding
- **Petroleum Development Oman** for reusable bag manufacturing
- **Petroleum Development Oman** for 2016 Damaniyat Islands Clean-Up Campaign
- **Petroleum Development Oman** for Women's Empowerment in Environment Project in Yanqul to begin 2016.
- **BP Oman** for Eco College Chapters development
- **Sohar Aluminium, Towell Engineering, Oman Solar Systems, Muscat Pharmacy** and **Special Technical Services** for sponsorship of Earth Hour 2015
- **Al Mouj Muscat, Shell Oman Marketing Company, the Crowne Plaza Muscat, Carillion Alawi, Averda Environmental Services, Al Jarwani Hospitality, Sandouq Edunia, Talentz, Mustafa Sultan Enterprises, Enhance, Tiara Events** and **GT Stage Tech** for in-kind support during Earth Hour 2015.
- **TRACCS Oman, Apex Publishing (Muscat Daily, The Week and Al Isbou'a), Al Shabiba, Times of Oman, Y Magazine, Merge 104.8** and **Al Wisal 96.5FM** for media support during Earth Hour 2014
- **InterRent** for vehicle rental
- **BP Explorations Oman, Occidental Oman, Oman LNG, Ominvest, Khimji Ramdas** and **Al Ansari Group** for sponsorship of Inter-College Environmental Public Speaking Competition
- **TRACCS Oman, Carillion Alawi, Pro Group** and the **Crowne Plaza Muscat** for in-kind sponsorship of the Inter-College Environmental Public Speaking Competition
- **Oman Air** for displaying the ESO awareness film on board flights
- **Women's Guild of Oman** donation
- **UMS** for webmail support
- **Renaissance Services, Port of Salalah, Enhance, Asha Enterprises, Port of Duqm, HSBC, Services & Trade, Ooredoo, Oman Arab Bank, Be'ah, Mohsin Haider Darwish** for ECO BOWL participation
- **TRACCS Oman** for ECO BOWL media partnership
- **Shangri-La Barr al Jissah, Sarco** and **Trishna** for ECO BOWL prizes
- **Port of Duqm** for dhow sponsorship during whale tagging
- **The Agency** for their continued support in design of our annual reports
- **Mazoon Printing, Publishing and Advertising** for their support with printing of our annual report.

Wadi Bani Awf, Rustaq,
Ahmed Al Shukaili.



International Highlights

Egyptian Vulture Flyway Action Planning Workshop; Sofia, Bulgaria

From 5th – 8th July, an international meeting of experts convened in Sofia to develop an International Egyptian Vulture Flyway Action Plan which will be part of the LIFE+ project 'The Return of the Neophron' and the Project SSFA/CMSAD/2014/005, funded by the CMS Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia (Raptors MOU). The workshop was led by the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB)/BirdLife Bulgaria and more than 70 experts from 33 countries attended, including Maïa S Willson, ESO's Research and Conservation Manager.



The declaration adopted by meeting participants highlights threats to the Egyptian vulture including: poisoning, insufficient amounts of accessible food caused by habitat degradation; and electrocution on medium voltage power poles, as well as collisions with power lines and wind turbines. One of the highlights of the workshops was the importance of Oman as a global stronghold for Egyptian vultures as it hosts the most important population in Arabia. In contrast to all other countries, it has a healthy and relatively large breeding population located mostly in the northern part of the country and on Masirah Island.

Eye on Earth Summit; Abu Dhabi, UAE

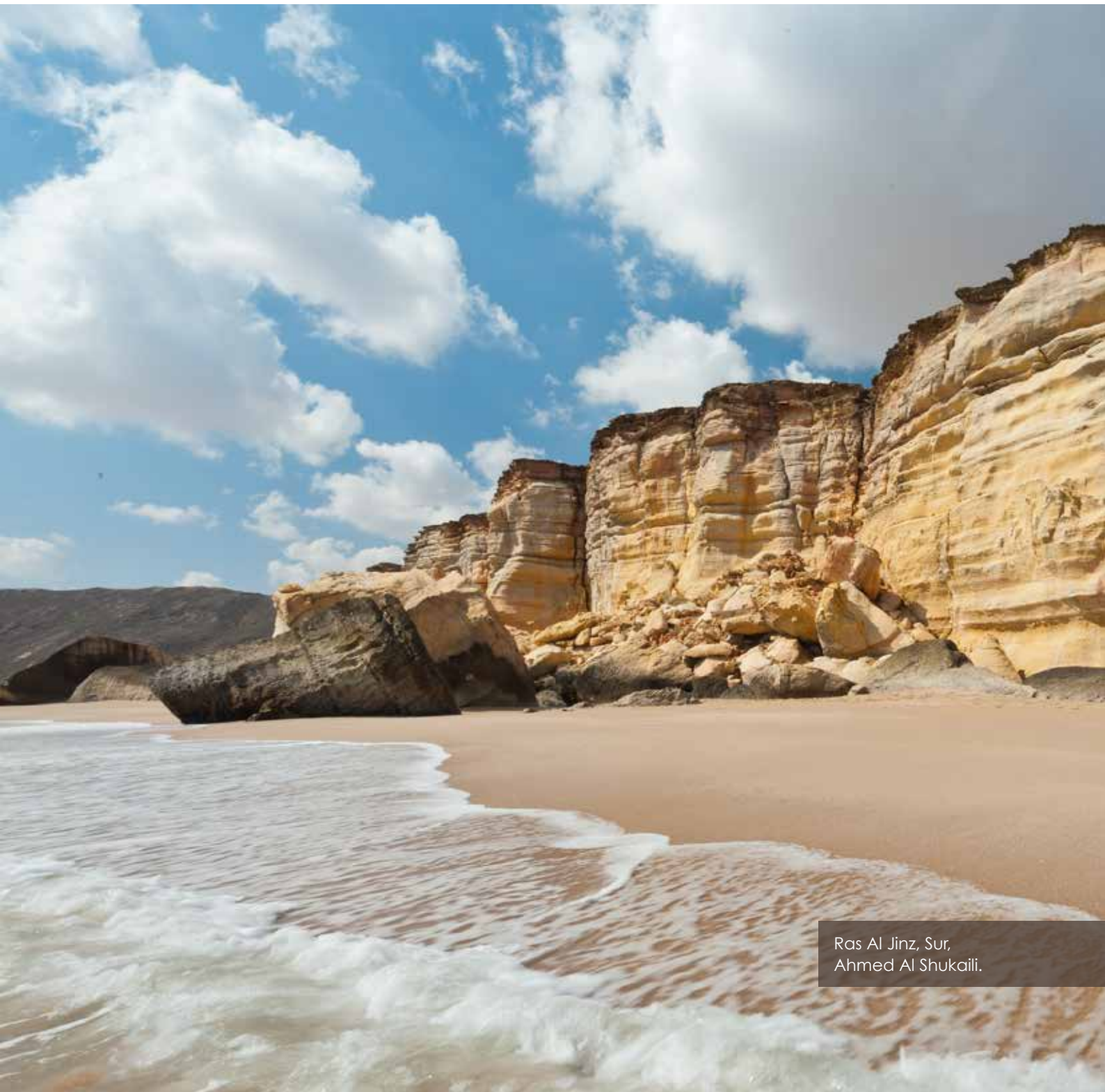
The Eye on Earth Summit took place from 6th - 9th October in Abu Dhabi. This summit aims to encourage environmental and societal data sharing, collaboration and partnerships to benefit conservation and sustainable development. ESO's Program Director, Suaad Al Harthi, attended and was a panellist for a side-event organised by the Emirates Wildlife Society in association with WWF, titled, 'Why Partnerships and Data Sharing is Essential for Impactful Conservation of Migratory Species in the Gulf'.



The event focused on the importance of international action to overcome data challenges and enabling data to support sustainable development in decision-making as well as the need for a culture of collaboration and sharing global solutions. Various inspirational presentations were given surrounding data collection, data sharing, tools for data management and translating information into content to inform decision makers. Several different themes were covered over the 3 day period including: data demand, data supply, enabling conditions.

COP 21; Paris, France

The 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 21) took place in Paris and attracted 36,000 participants from government, inter-government, non-government organisations and civil society. A decision was made at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 to take action and respond to climate change and the UNFCCC entered into force in 1994 and the subsequent annual Conference of Parties (COP) aimed to review the Convention's implementation. The 2015 Paris Climate Conference is the first conference in over 20 years of negotiations to have reached a legally binding agreement on climate aiming to mitigate global warming and curb emissions. The agreement is based on intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs) that had been submitted prior to the meetings. Specifically, the Omani government has agreed to control its expected greenhouse gas emissions growth by 2% during the period from 2020-2030. The Paris Accord is seen as a stepping-stone on a pathway to reach further commitments and mitigations over time. Through encouragement from the French Embassy in Muscat, Suaad Al Harthi, ESO's Program Director, attended COP 21 as an observer on behalf of ESO.



Ras Al Jinz, Sur,
Ahmed Al Shukaili.

Conferences, Lectures and Workshops attended in 2015

ESO is represented by volunteers, staff and board members at national, regional and international conferences and workshops. Below is a list of those attended in 2015:

Meetings for CBD Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and Aichi targets; Muscat, Oman

Contribution towards Oman's National Country Report on Environment; Muscat, Oman

Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs Oman Environment Day Workshop; Muscat, Oman

IUCN Arab World Marine Protected Area Symposium; Hurghada, Egypt

Arabian Sea Humpback Whale Regional Scientific Workshop (EWS-WWF); Dubai, UAE

CBD Regional Workshop to Facilitate the Description of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas in the North-West Indian Ocean and Adjacent Gulf Areas; Dubai, UAE

International Whaling Commission Annual Meeting; San Diego, USA

International Symposium on Sea Turtles; Dalaman, Turkey

Indian School Seeb event ISAS Young Birders of the Year; Muscat, Oman

Corals of Arabia Conference; Abu Dhabi, UAE

2nd International Conference on Fisheries, Aquaculture and Environment in the Indian Ocean; Muscat, Oman

Globe Program Retreat organised by the Ministry of Environment; Yiti, Oman

Ministry of Education Second Workshop on Green Schools

Earth Watch Field Trip to Jebel Akhdar

Carillion Alawi Annual Sustainability Week; Muscat, Oman

Higher Technology World Environment Day Exhibition; Muscat, Oman

Worley Parsons World Environment Day Celebration; Muscat, Oman

Ministry of Youth Affairs Summer Campaign; Muscat, Oman

The Research Council Workshop on Waste Recycling; Muscat, Oman



UNEP Priority Setting Workshop for the GCC Sub-Region on Climate Change; Abu Dhabi, UAE

MECA Workshop World Desertification Day; Muscat, Oman

Muscat Municipality Clean-Up, attended by 63 ESO Members; Muscat, Oman

Egyptian Vulture Flyway Action Planning Workshop; Sofia, Bulgaria

Unlocking Biodiversity Data from EIAs Workshop, organised by the Global Biodiversity Information Facility, UNEP-ROWA. Hosted by MECA; Muscat, Oman

Go Green Event with Port of Salalah; Dhofar, Oman

Eye on Earth Summit; Abu Dhabi, UAE

Climate Change Conference organised by German Embassy and French Embassy; Muscat, Oman

CSR Summit Oman 2015; Muscat, Oman

Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) and MAFW Workshop on Technical Capacity Building Program in the Areas of Classification and Identification of Marine Organisms; Muscat, Oman

MECA Scientific Committee for the Management of the International Conference on Combating Desertification and Land Degradation in Dry Areas; Muscat, Oman

Waste Forum organised by Be'ah and Rahwah Enterprises; Muscat, Oman

IUCN ROWA 8th Regional Conservation Forum; Amman, Jordan

MECA Workshop on Stranded Marine Mammals; Muscat, Oman

Arab Forum for Environment and Development; Beirut, Lebanon

Ministry of Education/UNESCO Workshop: Management of Protected Areas; Muscat, Oman

UNFCCC COP 21; Paris, France

IUCN Water and Nature Forum; Sharm Al Sheikh, Egypt

Environmental Workshop presented to the Information Technology Authority; Muscat, Oman

International conference on Fisheries, Aquaculture and Environment in the Indian Ocean; SQU, Muscat, Oman

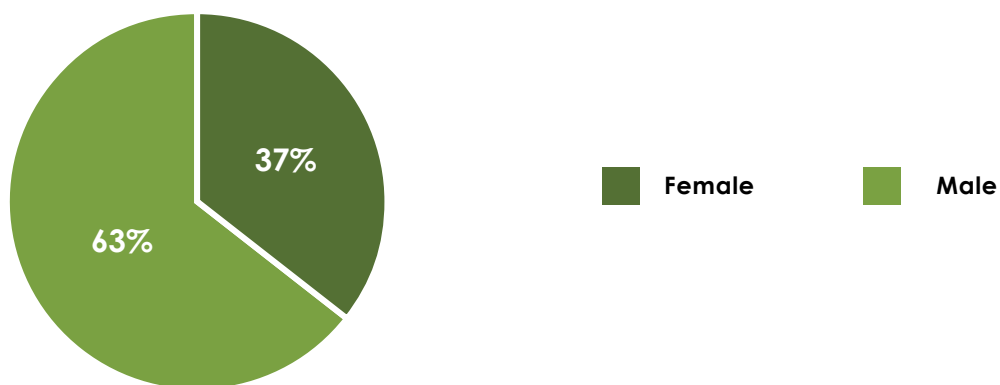
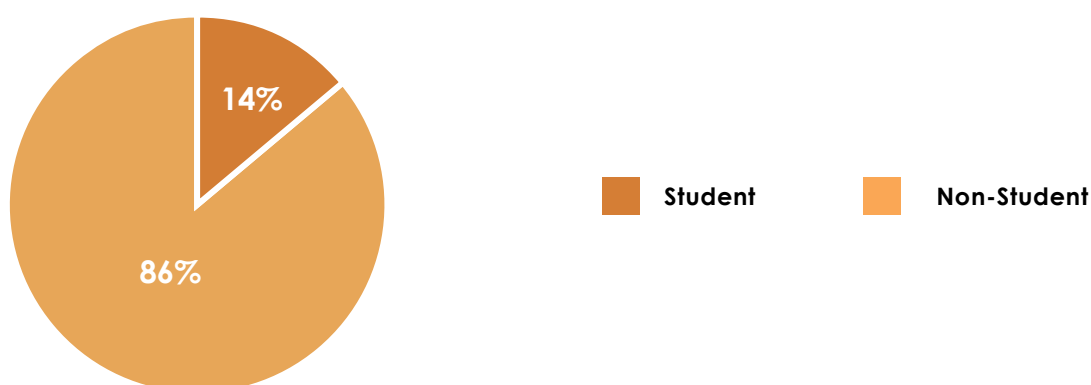
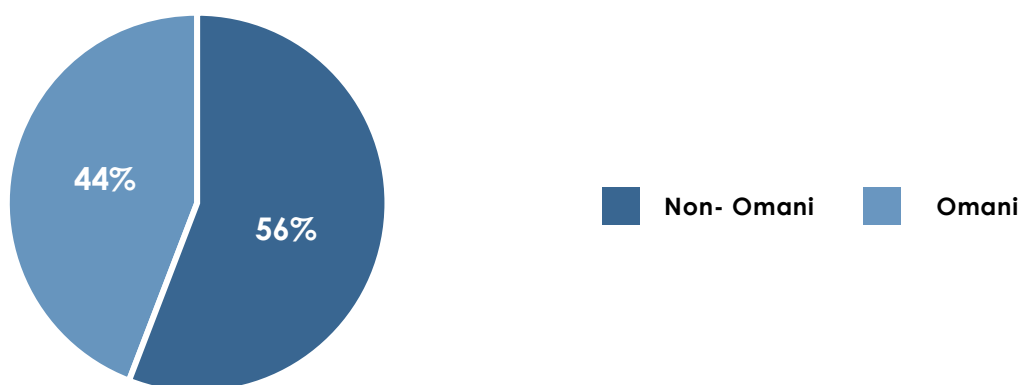


Greater flamingo, *Phoenicopterus roseus*, Sur, Hamed Al Gheilani.

Membership

Individual Membership

As of December 2015 there were a total of 1,084 ESO individual members. The charts below show percentages of Omanis, students and male vs female members.



Corporate Membership

ESO is grateful for the support of all our corporate members below:

- PricewaterhouseCoopers
- Towell Auto Centre
- HSBC
- Ajit Khimji Group
- Al Mashriq International Engineering Consultancy
- Carillion Alawi
- Khimji Ramdas
- Ernst & Young
- Strabag Oman
- Oman Trading International
- Shell Oman Marketing Company
- United Power Company
- Sohar Power Company
- Enhance Oman
- Special Economic Zone Authority Duqm
- Al Jarwani Hospitality
- Oman Environment Services Holding (Be'ah)
- BP Oman
- Daleel Petroleum
- Salalah Free Zone
- Port of Salalah
- Al Mouj Muscat
- Berger paints
- Shell Development Oman
- Omran

Collaborations with International Organisations

- United Nations Environmental Program
- International Union for the Conservation of Nature
- International Whaling Commission
- US Fish & Wildlife Service
- Wildlife Conservation Society
- Birdlife International, Middle East Branch
- Emirates Environmental Group
- Emirates Wildlife Society in association with World Wildlife Fund
- National Oceanic & Atmospheric Association
- Sackler Institute of Comparative Genomics, American Museum of Natural History
- University of Exeter, Centre for Ecology and Conservation
- Cetacean Conservation Medicine Group
- Peruvian Centre for Cetacean Research
- Durham University
- South West Fisheries and Science Centre
- French Research Institute for Exploitation of the Sea
- Instituto Aqualie
- Sri Lankan Blue Whale Project
- Motte Marine Laboratory
- Florida Wildlife Commission
- Kelonia, La Réunion
- International Avian Research
- Spanish National Research Council
- New England Aquarium
- Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Abu Dhabi Office)
- Sri Lankan Killer Whale Project
- Arabian Sea Whale Network




Photo credit:
Darryl McDonald.

Acknowledgements

There are many people we wish to thank for their support, hard work and dedication to ESO:

First and foremost special thanks go to ESO Patron, HH Sayyid Tarik bin Shabib Al Said, who has always supported the Society and has been instrumental in its success.

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Development have always been staunch supporters of ESO and we thank them for their guidance and understanding of our work.

None of ESO's work would be possible without much needed funding from our corporate members, sponsors and supporters. We thank all of them and hope that their generosity will continue for years to come.



David Insall was instrumental in ESO's infancy and to those of us involved at the onset will remember what a strong case David made to get the 'Wa'al al Arabi' to feature on the ESO logo. David continued to support and consult with ESO until 2015 and at ESO's Ten Year Celebration he made a very passionate address to all those present that reflected his unwavering commitment and passion for the environment. David passed away in August and our deepest condolences go to David's family.

Dr Mehdi Ahmed Jaaffar, ESO's Vice President (2004-2014), is now an advisor and valued volunteer who regularly attends conferences and meetings on ESO's behalf.

Dr Mohsen Al Amri, former ESO Board Member completed four years of research on frankincense and initiated the Native Tree Planting Campaign in Dhofar.

ESO Staff are the backbone of the Society and its work and we thank all that have been with us throughout the years. ESO Members are the organisation's ambassadors and we thank every one of our dedicated members for coming to events, dedicating their time and supporting the conservation of Oman's environment. We would especially like to thank Nuhaila Shukry who has been with ESO running our education department since 2013 and are very happy that you will still be volunteering with us from Sur!

Ajit Khmiji Group who have given ESO free office space for the last few years and Towell Auto Centre who provide our staff vehicles.

Oman's media have been extremely supportive in making our efforts public and ESO would like to thank all media houses for their continued coverage of our projects and successes. Special thanks go to Apex Publishing who have given free advertising space to ESO over the last five years for which we are extremely grateful and TRACCS Oman for providing our PR services.



Mohammed Al Mashani, Dhofar Board Member.

Volunteer Acknowledgements

Volunteers are a very important part of our ESO's work. In particular we would like to thank:

Stefanie Dietz who volunteered at the ESO office for two months and was extremely helpful with our AGA, recycling research and Earth Hour events. Her positive attitude and eagerness to learn made her a great asset to ESO team. **Hamed Al Mazroei** who was a great help and played a key role in the success of the Native Tree Planting Campaign in Dhofar. He was also an influential ambassador for the Inter-College Environmental Public Speaking Competition.

Mahmood Al Wahaiby who helped with GIS work on the Egyptian Vulture Project. **Layla Heravi** who helped with Earth Hour preparation. **Rigel Cedeño** for his assistance with social media. **Mohammed Aqil Baomar** and **Bakhit Salim Al Amri** for their assistance with organising public lectures in Dhofar. **Aishwaraya Hegde** who helped with composting session and **Ayman Humaira** who assisted with adrawing and painting session during our Eco Summer Program. **Aditi Jain Tickoo** who helped with analysing Earth Hour surveys and ICPEESC evaluation forms. **Sameer Al Hasani** for his help during Earth Hour event preparations.

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Khalid Al Khaldi, Mohanad Al Ghafri and Alkhalil bin Ahmed bin Salim Al Abri, Salima Al Harthy, Nusaiba Al Sulaimani, Sharifa Al Adawi, Reem Al Matani, Noura Al Obeidani, Taha Al Qasmi, Sulaiman Al Rahbi, Fadya Al Falahi, AbdulRahman Al Mayahi, Buthaina Al Hinai, Fatma Al Amrani, Nawal Al Hatmi, Nawal Al Hatmi, Hamed Al Mazroei, Azza Al Malki and Al Khalil Al Rahbi for being our active volunteers and dedicated student ambassadors and playing a key role in helping us with the Inter-College Environmental Public Speaking Competition.

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Justine Kwaan for her dedication, support, time and energy in the design and production of ESO's Annual Report and for managing the production of ESO's new whale awareness film.

Thank you to all our volunteers without whom our work would not be possible.



Photo credit:
Hamed Al Gheilani

