

Arabian leopard in Oman

From 2–5 November 2025, representatives from the Environmental Authority of the Sultanate of Oman and international experts met in Salalah, in the Dhofar region of Oman, for a workshop to update the National Action Plan for the Arabian leopard (Fig. 1). The Dhofar Mountains are a coastal range along the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula exposed to the monsoon. The highest peaks rise to 2,000 m and then descend north into the extremely arid deserts of the southern part of the peninsula. The Dhofar range itself offers amazing habitat (Fig. 2) for Arabian wildlife including the Critically Endangered Arabian leopard *Panthera pardus nimr*. Indeed, the protected areas in the Dhofar region constitute the last remaining well-protected population of this subspecies. Other nuclei remain in Yemen, but little is known about their status, and implementing conservation measures there is extremely difficult.

Hence, the Dhofar population must be saved by all means. In 2024, a new range-wide conservation strategy for the Arabian leopard was developed, and now, a year later, Oman has revisited a National Action Plan (NAP) that was developed back in 2013 under the Diwan. Since then, the structure of Oman's conservation governmental organisation has changed, and the Environmental Authority (EA) has now taken responsibility for the conservation of the leopard.



Fig. 2. Jebel Samhan Naure Reserve in the Dhofar Range, Oman, one of the few remaining strongholds for the Arabian leopard.

The environmental challenges in the Dhofar region have not diminished since 2013, but the leopard population seems to have remained stable – and that is already an encouraging sign. The personnel capacity of the Environmental Authority has improved; the young conservation officers and the wildlife rangers are proud of the Dhofar leopards and dedicated to protecting and conserving them. So there is hope that the updated national plan will boost leopard conservation. Among the twelve Objectives and numerous Activities foreseen in the NAP, those addressing human-wildlife conflicts and coexistence seem to be most important. Although there is no indication of illegal killing, local people are not really involved in conservation. One local sheik told me that the leopard was his enemy, because it kills his camels. After a lively discussion facilitated and

Urs Breitenmoser



Fig. 1. Participants at the workshop for the development of the National Action Plan for the Arabian Leopard in Oman, 3 November 2025.

translated by Ali Salim Bait Said, director of the Dhofar Office of the EA (Fig. 3), we agreed that I would come back in one year and he would then tell me what the local community could do for the leopard, and I would tell him what the leopard could do for the local communities. There is potential for involving local communities, e.g. through ecotourism opportunities. The Dhofar region has well-developed tourism infrastructure, but the hotels and the tourism activities are concentrated on the beach and the sea. The misty and mystical Dhofar Mountains, with their unique climate, flora and fauna, and with the Arabian leopard as an outstanding flagship species, offer a unique chance for local communities to benefit from existing tourism, and from the leopard.



Fig. 3. Ali (left) and Urs (right) discussing the value of leopards with a local sheik.