



Photo Frans Bongers

Oman's frankincense trees on the map

The inventory must be the prelude to more sustainable management.

Bongers has been working on frankincense since the late 1990s. On several occasions, he has sounded the alarm about the decline of the frankincense tree *Boswellia Papyrifera* in African countries such as Eritrea, Sudan and Ethiopia. This tree is pretty much doomed there, due to overproduction and a lack of new growth.

But a different species grows in Oman: *Boswellia sacra*. 'Boswellia sacra is the holy frankincense tree that is mentioned in the Bible,' says Bongers. 'It is used for applications in perfumes and oils.' The study he is now leading is documenting the state of this species in Oman. 'We are looking at the distribution of the tree, its health status and how sustainably the frankincense is tapped.'

Above all, this work means a lot of driving. Oman's surface area is more than seven times that of the Netherlands. The frankincense trees are found in the southern coastal region of Dhofar. Bongers: 'An extremely rugged desert area of 30 by 150 kilometres. So we drive

around a lot and map the trees using a system with which you can enter data on your mobile phone.

Camels

Probably the greatest threat to the frankincense tree is grazing by camels, says Bongers. 'There are more than a quarter of a million camels in Oman and they eat everything in sight, including all the frankincense trees. You see bare trees everywhere with just a small crown

'Camels eat everything in sight'

of leaves. We are documenting all this.' 'We hope to be able to present a solid report of the actual situation,' he continues. 'Then it's up to the politicians, ministries and organizations to tackle the issue.' The aim is to make the exploitation of the frankincense tree more sustainable. Bongers is doing this work on behalf of the Environmental Society of Oman. ^{RK}