

# GARDENS IN A SACRED LANDSCAPE

**BEDOUN HERITAGE AND NATURAL HISTORY  
IN THE HIGH MOUNTAINS OF SINAI**



*Samy Zalat & Francis Gilbert*

*Illustrations by  
Ahmed Gheith*

The garden gate in the cover illustration depicts a Bedouin night alarm bell. The two pickaxe heads clash together if the gate is moved, and the noise echoes around the wadi, warning the occupants that someone or something is trying to enter the garden.

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**NATURAL HISTORY AND BEDOUIN HERITAGE IN  
THE HIGH MOUNTAINS OF SINAI**



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with contributions by  
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*Paintings by*  
**Ahmed Gheith**

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## The Plants

### *General overview*

#### **Principal crops**

1	Almond	<i>Prunus amygdalus</i>
2	Apple	<i>Malus domestica</i>
3	Apricot	<i>Prunus armeniaca</i>
4	Carob	<i>Ceratonia siliqua</i>
5	Fig	<i>Ficus carica</i>
6	Grape	<i>Vitis vinifera</i>
7	Jujube	<i>Ziziphus spina-christi</i>
8	Olive	<i>Olea europaea</i>
9	Peach	<i>Prunus persica</i>
10	Pear	<i>Pyrus communis</i>
11	Plum	<i>Prunus domestica</i>
12	Pomegranate	<i>Punica granatum</i>
13	Quince	<i>Cydonia oblonga</i>
14	Aubergine	<i>Solanum melongena</i>
15	Bean	<i>Vicia faba, Phaseolus vulgaris</i>
16	Courgette	<i>Cucurbita pepo</i>
17	Purslane	<i>Portulaca oleracea</i>
18	Tomato	<i>Lycopersicon esculentum</i>
19	Egyptian spinach	<i>Corchorus olitorius</i>

#### **Other plants of culinary importance**

20	Lemon	<i>Citrus limon</i>
21	Orange	<i>Citrus sinensis</i>
22	Mulberry	<i>Morus nigra</i>
23	Palm	<i>Phoenix dactylifera</i>
24	Walnut	<i>Juglans regia</i>
25	Clover	<i>Medicago sativa</i>
26	Okra	<i>Hibiscus esculentus</i>
27	Lettuce	<i>Lactuca sativum</i>
28	Maize	<i>Zea mays</i>

29	Onion	<i>Allium cepa</i>
30	Parsley	<i>Petroselinum crispum</i>
31	Pea	<i>Pisum sativum</i>
32	Pepper	<i>Capsicum spp</i>
33	Cress	<i>Lepidium sativum</i>
34	Rocket	<i>Eruca sativa</i>
35	Spinach	<i>Spinacia oleracea</i>
36	Water melon	<i>Citrullus lanatus</i>
37	Tobacco	<i>Nicotiana spp</i>

### **Useful wild plants**

38	Acacia	<i>Acacia spp</i>
39	Bitter apple	<i>Citrullus colocynthis</i>
40	Mint	<i>Mentha longifolia</i>
41	Oreganum	<i>Origanum syriacum</i>
42	Rosemary	<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>
43	Wormwood	<i>Artemisia spp</i>

## **Wildlife**

### *Animals of the gardens*

#### **Mammals**

44	Fox	<i>Vulpes spp</i>
45	Hyrax	<i>Procavia capensis</i>
46	Hare	<i>Lepus capensis</i>
47	Hyaena	<i>Hyaena hyaena</i>
48	Ibex	<i>Capra ibex</i>
49	Cat	<i>Felis spp</i>
50	Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>
51	Mouse	<i>Acomys cahirinus</i>
52	Hedgehog	<i>Paraechinus dorsalis</i>

53	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>
54	Bats	various spp

## **Birds**

### *Species seen inside the gardens*

55	Sinai Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus synoicus</i>
56	Yellow-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus xanthopygos</i>
57	White-crowned Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>
58	other Wheatears	<i>Oenanthe</i> spp
59	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
60	<i>Sylvia</i> warblers	<i>Sylvia</i> spp
61	Shrikes	<i>Lanius</i> spp
62	Scrub Warbler	<i>Scotocerca inquieta</i>
63	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
64	Blackstart	<i>Cercomela melanura</i>
65	Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>
66	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
67	<i>Phylloscopus</i> warblers	<i>Phylloscopus</i> spp
68	<i>Hippolais</i> warblers	<i>Hippolais</i> spp
69	Falcons	<i>Falco</i> spp
70	Buzzards	<i>Buteo</i> spp
71	Collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>
72	Wagtails	<i>Motacilla</i> spp

### *Species seen outside the gardens*

73	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
74	Rock Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne fuligula</i>
75	Tristram's Grackle	<i>Onychognathus tristramii</i>
76	Chukar	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>

77	Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>
78	Ravens	<i>Corvus</i> spp
79	Palestine Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia osea</i>
80	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
81	Hume's Tawny Owl	<i>Strix butleri</i>
82	Sand Partridge	<i>Ammoperdix heyi</i>
83	Storks	<i>Ciconia</i> spp
84	Swifts	<i>Apus</i> spp
85	Rufous Bush Robin	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>
86	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus fasciatus</i>
87	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>
88	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>
89	Harriers	<i>Circus</i> spp
90	Buntings	<i>Emberiza</i> spp

### **Lizards & Snakes**

91	Sinai Agama	<i>Pseudotrapelus sinaita</i>
92	Starred Agama	<i>Laudakia stellio</i>
	Snakes	various spp

### **Insects and other arthropods**

#### *Pollinators*

Wild Bees (Hymenoptera: Apoidea)

Hoverflies (Diptera: Syrphidae)

#### *Insect Pests*

Grasshoppers (Caelifera) and Crickets (Ensifera)

Cockroaches (Dictyoptera: Blattidae)

Butterflies and Moths (Lepidoptera)

Ants (Hymenoptera: Formicidae)

Bugs (Heteroptera)

Mosquitoes (Diptera)

Aphids (Homoptera: Aphididae)

*Insect and other Predators*

Ladybird beetles (Coleoptera: Coccinellidae)

Wasps (Hymenoptera)

Praying Mantis (Dictyoptera: Mantidae)

Dragonflies (Odonata)

Spiders and Scorpions (Arachnida)

*Medically important species*

Ticks (Acarida)

Blowflies (Diptera)

*Others*

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## *Preface*

Over the long period we have been conducting fieldwork together with our Bedouin friends, we have been struck by three very obvious features: the richness of Bedouin knowledge of their environment; the fact that this knowledge is rapidly disappearing under the impact of tourism and development; and the virtual absence of recording this knowledge to preserve it for the future generations that will undoubtedly wish to recover it. Interestingly, in the past many travellers wrote about their experiences in visiting the Monastery of St Katherine, and recorded many observations about the Bedouin and their landscape. Today, very few such accounts are available.

The Gebaliya Bedouin rely on three elements of their environment: wild plants and animals, domestic animals, and agriculture within their orchard gardens. Their type of agriculture was established at least 1500 years ago, and is very much part of their heritage. The main aim of this book is therefore to try to record and document some of this environmental knowledge. We also aim to provide visitors to this land with some idea of the richness of the diversity of plants and animals, and a guide to what they may see while travelling in Sinai. We concentrate upon the fruits and vegetables of the gardens, but also we felt it important to include some information about the wild plants and animals that play such a major role in the lives of the Bedouin. We have therefore provided short notes about many of the wild animals that occur in the gardens, but we leave a full account to a future guide to the St Katherine Protectorate as a whole.

The information in this book was derived either from our own fieldwork over more than 20 years, the literature, or from discussions with individual Gebaliya Bedouin. We would like to thank everyone for sharing their knowledge of their history and environment. However, the information as written in this book expresses our own interpretation of the situation, rather than definitive statements of what is true. We have not been able to check the accuracy of every piece of information, and therefore some of the data reflect our understanding of Bedouin knowledge and beliefs rather than verified reality. The information is only relevant to the Gebaliya, and not to other south Sinai tribes, and definitely not to Bedouin elsewhere. It is possible that some of these traditions and practices are also carried out by other Bedouin, but we have not endeavoured to find out whether this is true. We are strictly concerned with the people of the Ring Dyke, i.e. just the

Gebaliya. We have, however, taken the opportunity to place their traditional knowledge in the context of Egypt as a whole, both ancient and modern.

Arabic is written with consonants only, and transliterating into English is always a problem. In a recent botanical paper written in English recording where some plant species had been found in the field, the same site was spelled three different ways on a single page! There is no easily available gazetteer of place names, nor any consistency in the spelling of plant or animal names. Thus great care is needed in recording the names of plants, animals, places, etc. In this book we have followed the method we used in our previous book '*A Walk in Sinai*', and have tried to record the way in which both Egyptians and Bedouins pronounce words. We have included a glossary of all the Arabic names and words used in the text, and an appendix detailing the method used in this book. This glossary serves also as an Arabic index to the book.

We have also provided lists of the plants and animals, together with their Bedouin and Arabic names. There is inevitably some repetition, but we think that this will be more than compensated by the ease of use of the book. Where there is no common name for plants and some animals, we have invented suitable ones, where appropriate.

### *Acknowledgements*

We are delighted to introduce Ahmed Gheith as the artist who has documented the plants, animals, landscape and Bedouin life for this book. This is his first published work; many of his paintings from this book will be available also as prints and postcards. The drawings are almost all from life.

We are especially grateful to all our Bedouin colleagues and friends who have contributed their time and knowledge to helping to produce this book. Those who helped the most are listed on the title page. There are many more, but we would like particularly to acknowledge the help of Ramadan Moussa, Khaled Farag, Farag Ibrahim, Mahmoud Duquny, and Zayed FetiH in the monastery garden.

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Eng. Ahmed Mohamed Hamed Ya<sup>o</sup>qoub designed and prepared the layout of the book, contributing materially to its beauty. We thank also Dr Abd El <sup>o</sup>Al Hassan Attia for preparing the Ring Dyke and other maps.