

# GAZELLE

Vol 18 no 3 – March 2003



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

**DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP**

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

## Members' News

### A Busy Time...

Archaeology recorder **Professor John Fox** took a quick trip to India during the Eid al Adha holiday. He went to Jaipur to see the huge outdoor observatory, and to Delhi and Agra (and places in between) to photograph Mogul sites. He found much of archaeological interest and hopes to go back soon for another look. In the meantime, he was visited by old Gulf hands Coke and Millie Held. Coke and John worked together for 20 years in the department of anthropology at Baylor University, Texas, and before that Coke was in the US diplomatic corps in the Middle East for 20 years. He has a slide collection of 45,000 shots of the Middle East, which begins in 1957 (a few years after the collection of Wilfred Thesiger tapers off). This is a fascinating portrait of Arabia on the eve of the expansion that came from oil (1960s). When asked if he might address the DNHG and show some of his wonderful photographs, and when their next visit might be, Coke replied, "Anne, I am eighty-six. Who knows *if* we will come back, let alone *when!*" However, he did say he would be delighted to give a talk about old times in the UAE, if and when.

**Theri, Tom, and young Malachi Bailey** are pleased to announce the arrival of the latest addition. Hannah Jessie Bailey was born in Dubai at 4.17am on March 4, weighing in at just over 4 kilogrammes. Mother and daughter are both well. Tom and Theri were both formerly with ERWDA in Abu Dhabi during the 1990s.

Theri, Tom, and baby Hannah



Chairman **Gary Fuelner** will be spending a couple of days in the desert this week, joining an ERWDA team at Umm Al Zamool. If he does not go too near that fence, he will return to give us a report about it and about the recent CAMP conference in Sharjah which he attended.



### *DNHG Membership*

DNHG membership remains a bargain at Dhs. 100 for couples and Dhs. 50 for singles. You can join or renew at meetings (see Membership Secretaries Lena Linton and Anin Radhakrishna) or by sending us a cheque made out to Lloyds Bank account no. 173746 and posted to us at PO Box 9234, Dubai. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG.) Membership is valid from September 2002 to September 2003.

DNHG membership entitles you to participate in field trips and helps pay for our lecture hall, publication and distribution of *Gazelle*, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.

### **This month's Contributors**

**The Editor would like to thank the following for their reports:**

Beryl Comar  
Richard Dennis & Mike Lorrigan  
Mae Cutler  
Arfan Arsis  
John Fox  
Gary Fuelner



## Field Trips etc ...

### Inter-Emirates Weekend 20 & 21 March

The Oceanic Hotel, Khor Fakkan is block booking some rooms for us on a first come first served basis and you are encouraged to book early. Telephone The Oceanic Hotel on 09-2385111 to make a reservation. You need to mention Dubai Natural History Group Inter-Emirates Weekend when you make your booking in order to get the rates quoted. When you have booked at the hotel, please let Lena Linton know ([linton@emirates.net.ae](mailto:linton@emirates.net.ae)).

#### Preliminary Schedule of trips: Thursday afternoon March 20

Visit to Fujairah Museum and the newly restored Fujairah Fort plus other sites. If time, Kalba Museum.

Possible short dhow trip.  
Possible birding trip.

#### Friday March 21

Full day dhow cruise including snorkelling. Meet in Dibba Port (Al Mina) Oman at about 8 a.m. for registration. A deposit of Dh120/- will be required to secure your place on the trip.

A short dhow trip to Haffa may be run on the afternoon of Thurs. 20 March (from 3 pm to 7 pm) or on the morning of Friday 21 or afternoon of Friday 21. 3 or 4 hours, Dhs 100 for adults, Dhs 50 for children over 3 & under 12 years. Min. 20 people, max 40. A deposit of Dhs 50 is required Please state your preferred day when choosing your trips.

A full day's archaeological trip with Professor John Fox visiting archaeological sites in the area, old falaj systems, sites in the Wadi Bih area – details to follow later.

A half day shelling trip with Sandy Fowler. Start time depends on the tides but about 9 am. Areas to visit are:

1. Khor Fakkan Corniche South

Port End. (The best shelling is from where the storm drain runs into the sea back towards the Oceanic Hotel)

2. Graffiti Beach/Lullaya Village (beyond the Oceanic Hotel in the Dibba direction) to see the colony of *Terebralia palustris* living in the storm drain.

3. Wentle Beach – north from Graffiti beach past Bidya Mosque and not far from the Sandy Beach Motel. This is the beach to find wentletraps.

Details of how to reach these places will be given out. Useful things to bring:

Old trainers or similar for beaches in case there is tar; baby oil/vaseline/sun screen to get oil off

A bum bag - leaves hands free for shell collecting

A small container such as a camera film container for small fragile shells

Plastic bags for bigger shells.

*Birding with Mike Bradford.* Details to follow later. There may be another Friday afternoon trip.

#### Do it yourself trips:

*Traditional bullfighting* on Thursday and Friday afternoon at about 4. p.m.

*Snorkelling around Shark Island.* This can be arranged with the Oceanic Hotel. They have two boats which hold 9 people each. Cost is Dhs 30 per person and the boats go out at 11 a.m. and return about 3.30 p.m.

*Visits to Fujairah Museum and Kalba Museum.* Times and locations will be made available.

For those who want to relax at the Oceanic, there is Spa Ayurveda!

We would like people to start signing up for trips, in particular the dhow trips so that we have an idea of numbers. **Please email Lena Linton with your choices on [linton@emirates.net.ae](mailto:linton@emirates.net.ae).** Don't forget also to email Lena as soon as you have made your hotel bookings.

**Programme for Thursday Even-**

#### ing – March 20

This will take the form of a buffet supper/BBQ in a delightful outside setting in the gardens not far from the beach followed by an entertaining quiz set by Beryl Comar and Sandy Fowler. Byo.

#### Mountain Walk with Gary Fuelner

Friday 11 April

Gary's walks are not for the faint-hearted, but are always popular because he is a marvellous source of information about flora, fauna, history and geology. The details can be obtained from Gary.

#### Stargazing

Friday 25 April

Details are not yet available for this, but it is usually organised around Lamjed El-Kefi's amazing telescope. It also depends on what is in the sky at the time, so the date is not, as yet, absolutely firm. Pradeep will have the answers to your questions by the April meeting. Numbers will not be limited.

Saiq with Peter van A.

#### May sometime

Saiq Plateau in Oman has terraced gardens, ancient olive and juniper trees, roses and .... fish!

### Our Next Speaker

On April 6, our speakers will be German zoo-archaeologists Prof. Angela von den Driesch and Claudia Gruber. They have been working on the promising site at Al Sufouh for some time now, and are finding that there is an enormous amount of work to be done, but that it is very rewarding.

They will be speaking, at our usual venue, on "Camels and Dubai Archaeology".



### Expedition to "Donkey Wadi"

In January, a group of intrepid adventurers set out on a fairly dry, but flora-filled hike along wadis in the vicinity of the Mahda 64km track on the way from Madam to Hatta. First stop was Gastropod Gulch, a massive outcrop of bivalve fossils. These, according to Valerie Chalmers, were of the Cretaceous period dating from approximately 50-70 million years ago. Signs of hammering and chiselling indicated that the site had, sadly, been visited by less conservation-minded individuals since the last time the DNHG visited the area.

After an hour or so exploring the site the group drove on to an interesting calcite formation on the Mahdah 64 km road, where delicate, marble-like steps and pools had been created by some sort of calcium residue. The stream here appears to trickle all-year round, and, no doubt due to its very high alkalinity, is largely devoid of life save for some red and blue dragonflies and the occasional diving beetle. In a nearby "freshwater" pool, however, we found around a dozen energetic Garra fish (bottom feeders). Rosemary Leila was observant enough to spot a couple of small, listless tadpoles in an algae-filled puddle next to the track.

By about 4.30pm, with dark clouds looming in the distance, it was decided to make for the campsite before it started to rain. The weather forecast had warned of rain and 30mph winds. Younger elements of the Pardoe clan were rapidly rounded up from various death-defying locations and the party headed off to Donkey-Wadi – so named because these animals were spotted on our first recce of it.

A barbeque and overnight camp followed, with excellent entertain-

ment provided by Jonathon Pardoe on guitar. No-one had to face the dark without a torch as Mike Lorrigan had thoughtfully brought along at least 15 of them, each incorporating some special feature that made them essential additions to his enormous camping supplies. Camp activity lent very little to natural historical study, but it is worth mentioning that the campfire-burning contest among the younger boys and girls provided sufficient interest for them before they retired early!

The following morning witnessed the major event – a steady four to five hour hike through a maze of fairly narrow wadis. Fresh donkey droppings were widespread and we looked forward to an encounter with these noisy creatures. On previous visits a herd of four fiercely territorial donkeys had been spotted. Their reaction had been to snort aggressively and run away, but oddly enough, they had continued to stay within eyesight and watch us from a safe distance for around an hour. On this hike, however, all animal life had thoughtfully made a run for it well before we arrived. This was possibly an understandable reaction to the loud campfire jokes and singing of the night before!

Fortunately, the trek did reveal a surprisingly wide range of plant-life. The party was fortunate to have Jenny Irwin along, who seemed to know the names of every plant that we saw. Here follows an excerpt from her notes:

*Anticharis glandulosa* was a new record for me, so it was very exciting.

*Haplophyllum tuberculatum* Another new record for me! It is a very aromatic plant with yellow flowers, that was growing in the wadi. It is used as a cure for scorpion stings so could have come in useful later if I had known then.

*Lavendula (citriodora or subnuda)* This has a lavender like flower.

*Nannorrhops ritchieana* This was the dwarf palm that we saw in the wadi in several places towards the end of the walk. It is indigenous, unlike some of the other palms that grow here.

*Pentatropis spiralis* This is a very long, thin plant that usually climbs. I have not seen it for quite a few years.

*Pseudogaillonea hymenstephana* has a very pretty pink flower. I love this name!

*Tephrosia apolinea* This is the very common purple pea type flower.

*Tephrosia nubica* Rosemary and I saw this towards the end of the walk. Very similar to the one above, but paler flowers and amazing furry pods. Also a first for me.

*Viola cinerea* The very small violet, no flowers though.

A few creatures were seen later on in the walk, mainly lizards (of the *Rapestris* and *Celeramus* varieties) and fast moving things that annoyingly darted out of sight as soon as they were noticed in our peripheral vision. Towards the end of the walk, just as William Pardoe and friend were giving up hope of seeing anything remotely dangerous, William kicked over a stone and revealed a small, but annoyed-looking yellow-brown scorpion. Not surprisingly, it scurried off and hid under a bush as soon as it realised that we wanted to take its photograph.

A number of small caves, partly obscured by man-made rock-walls were also noticed which appeared to indicate past evidence of hunting in the area. An interesting mound of stones was also investigated which appeared to be an isolated grave. Next to the 'grave' was spotted a small mound of



## Field Clips ...

**E.mail your reports to [pvana@emirates.net.ae](mailto:pvana@emirates.net.ae), (Arial 10 justified) or deliver them to Anne Millen on floppy disk at monthly meetings.**

over 200 dung pellets. Judging by their shape and size, they may have been gazelle droppings. The whole area was littered with similar, dried up droppings, suggesting it was a popular venue for some sort of fairly large creature.

Near to where the donkeys had been spotted some weeks earlier, we saw some palm seedlings (about 60cm high) which had their fronds bound together with string. This "gardening" hadn't been very successful, however, as none of the plants seemed to have survived.

Overall, this was an interesting and worthwhile walk, and would certainly be worth re-visiting in wetter conditions. *Report and diligent dung pellet count by Richard Dennis and Mike Lorrigan.*

### Through the Lens.....

The cold winter weather nurtures two of UAE's most distinctive parasitic plants; the Red Thumb (*Cynomorium coccineum*) and Desert Hyacinth (*Cistanche tubulosa*). They are a characteristic sight on the sandy coastal strips, where they are abundant. I am told the Bedu like to eat the red thumb just as they would a mushroom for their aphrodisiac - spermatopoeitic action.

The first picture shows the 'trio-relationship': the plant from which the Red Thumb most often derives its nutrition and the insect which flourishes on its inflorescence. This photograph was taken near Jadaf, Dubai. I saw plenty of them near the Garhoud Nursery this

year, some near Ras Al Khor, but nothing like the one depicted in Marijcke Jongbloed's book which could cater to an entire party of



Red Thumb eaters!

Red Thumb, *Cynomorium coccineum*, is parasitic and devoid of green parts, growing off the roots of another plant.

The second photograph shows the Desert Hyacinth, found most abundantly near sandy moist beaches and nearer the coastline than the Red Thumb. This photograph was taken in the dump site at Maweilah, adjacent to the Sharjah Industrial zone, sometimes



called Larry Woods' dump site.

The Desert Hyacinth (in Arabic: *basal*), *Cistanche tubulosa*. It is also parasitic, leafless and found in sabkha areas.

One may take pictures of nature from many angles and perspectives, but the golden rule is to come in line with your subject matter; stoop or climb to their height. If the camera is at the co-axial line of subject matter you get the top and bottom most parts in sharp

focus as is required of small objects like these parasitic plants (red thumb - 7cm and desert hyacinth - 30cm) being photographed.

Isolation of the subject from its background is yet another important parameter to be kept in mind. This may sometimes require a change in position to get an uncluttered or distant background. The background so blurred by opening the lens f-stop should have just enough detail to suggest it was taken in natural conditions. Various hues of green, brown and ochre in the background, without the usual distractions add to the mood of the picture. The important thing to remember here is to see that the colours of the subject and background complement each other.

The damselfly and dragonfly in the January issue of *Gazelle* have been identified by Gary Feulner. The damselfly is the *Ischnura evansi* (Blue-banded Ischnura) and the dragonfly, the *Orthetrum sabina* (Oasis Skimmer). There have been some discussions on identification of the bird of prey in December's *Gazelle*. It has been narrowed down to Peregrine falcon and Bonelli's eagle. A final confirmation will be given in a future issue. *Nature notes and photographs by Arfan Asif*

### *Prosopis juliflora*

Do you remember Peter Cunningham's article, in the December 2002 issue of *Gazelle*, on the invasive non-native *Prosopis juliflora*? Mae Cutler, of the International Biosaline Agriculture Centre, has provided four pages of information about the commercial uses of this tree! Here are some excerpts:

"*Prosopis* are valuable multi-purpose trees. Where native, in the Americas, there is a long history of using all tree parts and trading in *Prosopis* wood, food and fodder. However, when it is introduced (to other countries) the in-



## Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan  
res 344 8283  
off 344 0462  
fax (off) 349 9437

Archaeology - Prof. John Fox  
jfox@aus.ac.au

Birds - David Snelling  
res 3517187  
fax 2950758  
050 – 5526308

david.snelling@emirates.com

Seashells - Sandy Fowler  
res 344 2243  
fax 344 2243  
shellerdoc@yahoo.com

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi  
res 06-5583 003  
off 06-5247 958

pearldiv@emirates.net.ae

Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner  
res 306 5570  
fax 330 3550

Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers  
res 349 4816,  
fax 340 0990

Plants – Valerie Chalmers

Mammals - Marijcke Jongbloed  
res 349 7963  
fax 349 7963

mjongbld@emirates.net.ae

The recorders are not necessarily scientific experts in their designated fields. In fact, most are not. However, they are interested and knowledgeable amateurs - please contact them if you have any interesting reports or queries.

The intention is that information will be channelled through to the *Gazelle* editor, so new information can be shared with all our readers.

igenous knowledge rarely followed, and *Prosopis* remains underutilised and undermanaged. *Prosopis* are fast growing, nitrogen-fixing, very salt and drought tolerant trees and shrubs.

“Larger branches and trunks yield a high quality timber, comparable in colour, finish and physical attributes to Indian rosewood and other commercial hardwoods. While also used for posts and poles, the wood .... is almost unsurpassable as a fuel. Fruit pods are high in sugar and protein and are a rich food source for man and beast. *Prosopis* honey is of the highest quality and exudate gum is comparable to gum arabic.”



*Prosopis juliflora*

And “An important conclusion is that eradication is not (the) simple solution, and there are many management and control techniques that can convert weedy stands into productive, profitable and sustainable agroforestry systems.”

*Thanks to Mae Cutler for this intriguing information. (If you would like the full text, please fax me for it, or contact Mae. Ed.)*

### Butterfly Blooms



Two very different sorts of butterflies seem to have taken advantage of early January's rain in the western Musandam area and were seen there from mid-January through early February. Apart from these, however, butterflies were scarce. The orange and black-spotted Painted Lady, *Vanessa cardui*, a strong migrant and probably the world's most

widespread butterfly, was present in reasonable numbers (sightings of 1-3 dozen per day) and was seen both feeding and mating on occasional flowering shrubs.

The Desert Black Tip *Elphinstonia charltonia*, of which from one to a dozen were seen on each of several days in the mountains, was more of a surprise. I last saw this species in the spring of 1998 (perhaps not coincidentally, after the last really wet winter). In flight and on its upper side, this so-called "white" butterfly resembles the locally more common Desert White except that it is noticeably smaller. It can be identified easily if the underside is seen (perched with wings folded, the rear wing is olive green with a tiny white spot at the center), but like most whites it generally perches only infrequently. The Desert Black Tip, like the Desert White, is an arid region specialist and is said to make its home among scrub vegetation in rocky hills, not being found in oases.

The Desert Black Tip found in the UAE is the Iranian subspecies, *E.c. amseli*. A yellow subspecies occurs in central Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The two subspecies do not meet in Arabia and might easily be mistaken for distinct species, but they do meet in Iraq, where a narrow zone of intermediate forms occurs. Report by Gary Feulner (see also *Butterflies of Saudi Arabia and its Neighbours*, by Torben Larsen)

Beryl's



Sto-



## Special reports &...

ry

Whilst living and teaching in Arusha, Tanzania, from 1972 to 1976, Beryl Comar had many opportunities to see wildlife around the school, and on many safaris as a tour guide in the school holidays. Her favourite time of the year for safari was late January and February in Ngorongoro and Southern Serengeti (around Nduto and Olduvai) where herds of wildebeest, zebra, and Thomson's and Grant's gazelles congregate to give birth between the short rains and long rains and in the safety of numbers. It is estimated that as many as two million animals come together and then begin the migration north through Seronera and the Western Corridor to Masai Mara.



Kilimanjaro

So, last month husband Sandy took her back for a visit following a long convalescence, with Beryl wondering if it could be the same 30 years on. Dar es Salaam was as sleepy as ever, Zanzibar touristy and abounding with security warnings, Arusha twice the size and flourishing with UN personnel and tourists, and goods once more available in the shops. Although the majority of people still have no running water and electricity to their homes they are happy and well fed and there is an optimism about the place.

A visit to Mikumi National Park (near Selous) found the intrepid explorers thigh deep in black sticky mud and their carpet used for grip remains hidden there for posterity. The park was quiet of tourists but full of game including

many elephants, zebra, baboon, impala, giraffe, hippo, wild dog, lion and numerous birds.

Serengeti zebra kill



For the vast distances to be covered in Northern Tanzania a driver was hired, Joseph looked after them well especially when the radiator was damaged in western Serengeti! In Manyara, they searched for the famous lions in trees with success and ran into many elephants – even a mock charge by a mother who didn't like the land cruiser being on the same roadway as her youngest offspring. The picnic site, overlooking buffalo herds as they came down to paddle in the lake, was priceless. As was the stay at Kiriwira Tented Camp: Masai greeting and carrying the large bags on their heads, the rift valley below and genet cats coming around the dining room in the half light of evening.

Nduto Genet



Ngorongoro Crater remains breathtaking; no photo can ever do it justice. Ten miles in circumference this unique caldera has its own ecosystem and in the day spent there the travelers saw 17 lions and 5 rhinos as well as hyena kill flamingo along the lakeshore, and all the usual herds

and elephants. Olduvai Gorge has many visitors these days although Beryl's friend Mary Leakey is no longer around. The exhibitions have increased to include casts of the Laotoli footprints and fossils of our forefathers and long extinct mammals.

Nduto Camp is the best place to stay at this time of year in Serengeti, and didn't disappoint. A great base from where lions can be heard at night and seen during the day as they prey on the easy pickings of newborn wildebeests and Thomson gazelles as they stumbled on newly formed legs or were lost and separated from mother.

Baby gazelle



It is common to see hyena or lion feeding on a young zebra just yards from a tiny gazelle alone and defenceless watched by vultures and maribou storks knowing it will be the next meal. Besides the 15 lions seen in the area, two separate groups of cheetah were seen. A pregnant female lying in shade with three healthy teenage cubs soon to be sent out to fend for themselves, and a mother cheetah teaching her two teens to hunt zebra close to our lodge. There were signs of leopard around: a cough in the night, a gazelle in a tree, eagles soaring overhead but it remained elusive and well protected in the green undergrowth.

It was during our final day in the Arusha Park just behind where Beryl used to live that we finally saw our leopard.

Arusha Park is known for its walking safaris to the ash cone, beauti



	name	tel home	tel office	fax
Chairman	<b>Gary Feulner</b>	306 5570 messages: 306 5300	330 3600	330 3550
Vice Chairman	<b>Valerie Chalmers</b>	349 4816	no calls pls	340 0990
Treasurer	<b>Jen Robinson</b>	050 – 5982494 e.mail: fcek2@emirates.net.ae (attn. P. Robinson)		
Membership Secretary	<b>Lena Linton</b>	344 2591 e.mail: linton@emirates.net.ae		344 2591
Membership Assistant	<b>Anindita Radhakrishna</b>	282 3952 e.mail: anin@emirates.net.ae	050 – 714 4893	282 0703
Speaker Co-ordinator				
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	<b>Pradeep Radhakrishna</b>	282 3952 e.mail: wgarnet@emirates.net.ae	050 – 450 8496	282 0703
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	<b>David Snelling</b>	3517187 e.mail: david.snelling@emirates.com	050 – 552 6308	295 0758
Special Projects	<b>Beryl Comar</b>	344 2243 e.mail: comar@emirates.net.ae		344 2243
Member at Large	<b>Sandy Fowler</b>	344 2243 e-mail: shellerdoc@yahoo.com	no calls pls	344 2243
Newsletter Editor	<b>Anne Millen</b>	269 2519 e.mail: pvana@emirates.net.ae	no calls pls	269 1654
Publisher	<b>Peter van Amsterdam</b>	269 2519 e.mail: pvana@emirates.net.ae	335 5495	269 1654
Librarian	<b>Deanne White</b>	342 9153 e.mail: dgwhite@emirates.net.ae	344 0824, ext 220	344-1510
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Cheetahs

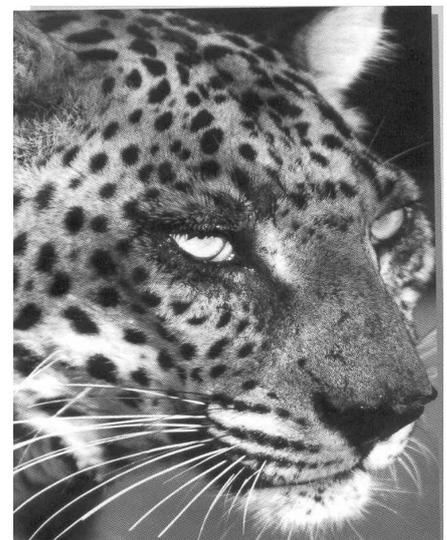
ful views of Kilimanjaro and Colobus monkeys. Following a picnic lunch overlooking fabulous Mommella Lakes speculating on whether there could be any cats left in the area, we saw her break cover and dash across the path ahead – healthy and in her prime, a flash a streak and hidden by the dense tropical undergrowth! We were speechless for a while, unbelieving, checking if the others had seen too. We reported the sighting as we left and the ranger said, “You are lucky. I have been living

and working here for three years and never seen a leopard; no-one has”.

And Beryl, who used to sit at the nearby hippo pool marking her students’ homework? “Amazing, I never realized, just hoped”.

After thirty years of conservation Tanzania remains the best safari destination – real Africa and a safari helps the people preserve that legacy for all.

*Thanks to Beryl Comar and Sandy Fowler for this report and the photographs.*



Arabian leopard by Marijcke Jongbloed

### Letters to the editor

Any news or views you would like published in our monthly newsletter? Please contact any of the committee members listed, by fax or e-mail.

## Dubai Natural History Group Programme

Lectures at Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management, 7.30 for 8.00pm

April 6 Prof. Angela von den Driesch / Claudia Gruber on Camels and Dubai Archeology

May 4 Liz Maley-Craig on Planning a Garden in the UAE

**Field Trips** (DNHG members only, please).

Thursday / Friday March 20 / 21 Inter-Emirates Weekend at Khor Fakkan

Friday April 11 Mountain walk with Gary Fuelner

Friday April 25 Stargazing

A Thursday & Friday in May Saiq Plateau with Peter van Amsterdam and Anne Millen