

GAZELLE

Vol. 13 no.4 - April 1998



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Carolyn and Dieter Lehmann will be leaving the UAE in May after some 14 years. Carolyn is a longtime member of the DNHG, as well as our former Librarian, Archeology Recorder and Seashell Recorder. Dieter was a flight instructor for the UAE's Central Military Command.

Carolyn's amateur contributions in many fields -- among other things she discovered two local archeological sites, worked as a volunteer on countless archeological digs, established a marine algae collection, and published on fossil sea urchins -- were recognized by her selection as the recipient of the Bish Brown Award in 1996-1997. She also adopted and regularly patrolled various patches of desert and suburban Jumairah to monitor local plant and animal life, and stayed in touch with other amateurs and professionals both in the region and internationally.

All those who have dealt with her, in the field or in discussion over specimens or photographs, will know and respect her dedication to careful observation and accuracy of description. In advance of her departure Carolyn has donated to the DNHG a number of books from her

personal collection, including texts on geology, landscape plants and a number of other topics. Busy to the end, Carolyn and Dieter recently competed (as usual) in the annual Dubai to Muscat sailing race. They and their sailboat will eventually take up residence in Florida.

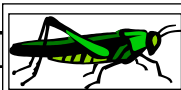
Doing a bit of natural history on the run, **Anna Griffin** broke her stride in a recent marathon to put aside a dead viper she encountered along the course. She hoped to collect it later but it had disappeared when she and Peter returned. She also took note of a dead hedgehog, brown in color and like a European hedgehog, and therefore probably the Ethiopian hedgehog, the most common species in most of the UAE.

Prof. Dr.Ulli Wernery of Dubai's Central Veterinary Laboratory was both a host and a speaker at last month's international conference on equine diseases and maintenance, held in advance of the Dubai Cup Race. Ulli also appeared on Dubai FM in that connection.

Graham Giles made good use of his recent visit to resolve some pending questions about local dragonflies. Building on research in

England since his visit last Fall, he investigated numerous sites in the UAE and Oman, as well as the dragonfly collection at the Oman Natural History Museum. One result is that he has added at least 3 species to the list of dragonflies reported to occur in the UAE, the total of which now stands at more than 20. Over the Summer, Graham hopes to produce an annotated checklist of UAE dragonflies for publication in a form accessible to amateurs and specialists alike. His sister-in-law, member **Miranda Rushby**, helps support Graham's dragonfly habit, but she is also glad to have her 4WD back. Graham's report on a recently described endemic dragonfly appears elsewhere in this *Gazelle*.

Congratulations and best wishes are in order for *Gazelle* editor **Neil Curtis** who this month marries Sarah Kerkar. Many members will have met this indomitable duo on field outings over the past year, and the former editor will doubtless be glad to learn that they'll be back from a honeymoon in Britain and Spain just in time to pick up the reins for the next issue.



Field Trips

The Grand Canyon of Wadi Sharm Friday, Apr. 24

Gary Feulner will lead an easy nature walk in the Grand Canyon of Wadi Sharm, deep in the Hajar Mountains south of Jebel Hatta. This is a scenic and impressive "wet" wadi. We will also visit the narrow, twisting gorge of nearby Wadi Mayz. Enroute we will stop to observe some of the most characteristic natural phenomena that can be seen along the graded track from Rawdhah to Mahdhah.

Bring sturdy shoes, water (minimum 3 liters) and pack lunch, plus camera, binoculars, hand lens, etc. 4WD required. Depart Dubai at 7:00 am. Estimated return to Dubai c.7:00 pm. Maximum 20 people. Call Gary Feulner for further information, sign-up, and logistics at 313320 ext. 500 (ofc) or 306-5570 (res).

Coastal Environment Friday, May 1

Dr. Richard Hornby will lead an excursion to the beach and inlet at Ras Ghantot on the Dubai/Abu Dhabi border to explore life in the nearshore and intertidal environment. Bring a pack lunch and at least 2 liters of water, shoes or sandals that you can get wet, hat or other sun protection, gloves for hand protection, plus camera, binoculars, hand lens, etc. 4WD not required.

Depart from Dubai at 8:00 am. Estimated return to Dubai c. 3:00 pm on Friday. Maximum 20 people. Call Gary Feulner for further information, sign-up and logistics at 313320 ext. 500 (ofc), 306-5570 (res) or 313371 (fax).

Ras Al-Hadd, Oman

proposed, June?

Judith Stafford has inquired about whether other members might be interested in a long June weekend trip to Ras Al-Hadd in Oman, the easternmost point on the Arabian Peninsula, famous as a sea turtle breeding site. The weather in June is hot, of course, but Ras-Al-Hadd is said to be swept by a steady tropical breeze. Judith has visited before and can answer questions. She would be willing to make basic arrangements to include a guided nighttime visit to the protected breeding area. There are also archeological sites and considerable other wildlife in the area. For more information, call Judith at 314216 (ofc) or 376020 (res).

Chairman's Comments

Our March 29 speakers, Ron Loughland and Derek Glidden of NARC/ERWDA, introduced us to some of the latest technology used in modern environmental mapping and analysis, including GIS software, but they both emphasized the fundamental importance of collecting the underlying data or checking it in the field. Moreover, they both emphasized, informally, how relatively unstudied the UAE remains and how easy it is for individual researchers or observers to make significant contributions. It was music to the DNHG Chairman's ears.

Thanks also to the increasing numbers of members who are sharing their ideas, observations and photographs with the group.

Photo Reference Collection

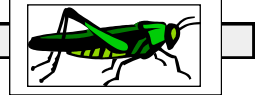
The DNHG maintains a small but growing Photo Reference Collection of plants, animals and various natural phenomena of the UAE. The purpose is both to document local wildlife and to establish a convenient reference for interested amateurs and specialists alike. Members are encouraged to donate either prints or slides.

When you're photographing something of interest, whether in the field or in the garden, think of the DNHG and take a second photo, or make a copy for us later. It only costs a dirham or two, and it contributes to a resource that does not otherwise exist in the UAE. Please remember to include a note of when and where the photo was taken.

All subjects are welcome, but comprehensive pictorial references exist for local seashells, birds, butterflies and fossil sea urchins, so that only exceptional specimens of these require documentation. In addition, basic pictorial references are available for local plants and several individuals and institutions already maintain extensive photo collections of UAE plants.

The criteria for suitable photographs are: (1) Is the photo likely to permit identification by a knowledgeable specialist or amateur? Or, (2) Will the photo allow an observant layman to say confidently, "That is the [animal or plant] that I saw."?

Thanks are due to the following members for recent contributions to the Photo Reference Collection: Luban Mrhac (spiders, moths); Anna Griffin (bees, reptiles); Mike Kerley (red tide); and Gary Feulner (dragonflies, scorpions, grasshoppers).



Field Clips

A New Arabian Butterfly

Chance circumstances last month caused Dr. Michael Gillett of UAE University in Al-Ain to have a closer look at a landscaped flowerbed at the university. To his surprise, he noticed large numbers of a very small butterfly new to him and not included in any reference works on Arabian species. Further research persuaded him that it belongs to the genus *Brephidum*, a group more commonly known as pigmy blues and represented by several species found in Central and North America (where it includes the smallest resident butterfly) and sub-Saharan Africa.

The presence of this new butterfly in the UAE remains unexplained. Artificial introduction is an obvious possibility, given the scale of landscaping in the UAE, but the butterfly has so far been found only in association with *Sesuvium verrucosum*, a prostrate, spreading succulent with deep pink flowers that is understood to be native to coastal areas from the Arabian Gulf to Pakistan.

Mike notes that the new butterfly is not only very small but flies very close to the foliage, so that it might well pass unnoticed unless observed at close range. This too is characteristic of the pigmy blues.

S. verrucosum is a common landscape plant in Dubai and now merits closer attention. For interested observers, the new pigmy blue is brown and orange on top with prominent white fringes. There is also a distinct notch at the rear corner of the forewings. The underside shows bright orange forewings marked with white, while the hindwings are orange-brown with black and white markings. The white fringes on the upperside and the color of the underside distinguish the new

butterfly from the equally tiny Grass Jewel that is a common UAE species.

Report by Gary Feulner

And a New Arabian Dragonfly

Well, it's not brand new, but new enough, and makes an interesting tale. It was found during the Wahiba Sands expeditions in 1987 by F. Krupp and named *Ellatoneura khalidi* after the Omani wadi where three males had been collected. They were placed in museums at Muscat, Senckenberg, and London. It wasn't until 1990 that a female was located by Henri Dumont and a full description could be published. This was done in 1994 by Dr. Wolfgang Schneider of the Dormstadt Museum in Germany.

Certain features of the insect were unique, and its origins are enigmatic. Arabia lies at the crossroads of Africa and Asia and the insect provides a kind of link between families from each area. A new genus was created to reflect this -- *Arabineura*.

In 1991 Dumont found another specimen in Wadi Khamees near Hatta, on the UAE border. However, unknown to him the well known amateur naturalist JNB ('Bish') Brown (1925-1995), had already found the insect in the UAE in Wadi Hayl in July 1988. 'Bish' was a founder and former chairman of the Emirates Natural History Group. He recognised that this was an unusual dragonfly, and went on to find more examples in Wadi Sharm and Wadi Fayd during April 1989. These he sent to a friend in England where they remain in private collections, but undescribed to this day. 'Bish' got there first, but never received the credit. The name he suggested was "*Nahyani*" which would have honoured H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak al Nahayan, patron of the ENHG.

On my visits to Dubai I have seen many of these insects, technically

Zygoptera or damselflies, in the wadis of the Hajar Mountains near the Omani border. They can be seen in Spring and Autumn near high energy running water. Overall appearance at a distance is black, but closer examination will reveal a thin brownish body with black markings, and reddish brown protruding eyes.

During its few weeks of life, the insect matures and its colours get darker. I found that it prefers shadier areas close to the water surface where egg laying takes place in tandem. It is often seen in the company of power blue damselflies, *Arabicnemis caerulea* -- the only other endemic damselfly of Arabia, which itself was only discovered in 1984 by Roger Waterston from Edinburgh.

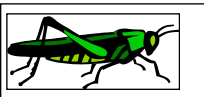
Report by Graham Giles

Butterfly 'Hilltopping'

One recognized butterfly strategy for finding mates is to congregate at high points on the landscape. This is called "hilltopping" and is most common in environments where butterfly distribution is sparse.

A couple of DNHG hikers were nevertheless surprised last month to find themselves surrounded by butterflies of various species apparently "hilltopping" at the barren summit of imposing Jebel Masafi (1153 meters). Numbers had increased suddenly near the summit, and on top they were circled by numerous Swallowtails (a well-known hilltopper) and Plain Tigers, as well as several African Migrants, Desert Whites, a Salmon Arab and at least one unidentified little blue.

Report by Gary Feulner



Field Trip Reports

Sampling the spring bird migration Friday 27 March

5 members met on morning of the 27th of March to sample the spring migration of birds through the Northern Emirates. First stop was Ramtha, where after vaulting the obstacle of the new pipeline, some of the more obvious resident birds were pointed out from the sand bank. After a quiet start, the following migrants were seen: 3 European Swifts, 2 Swallows, a Reed Warbler and a flock of 25 European Bee-eaters hawking for insects. A female Marsh Harrier disturbed things for a while, and then a Saker Falcon (without jesses), not to be outdone, did the same. Waders present included Wood & Common Sandpipers, Little stint, Snipe, Greenshank, Redshank, Godwits and several pairs of rather agitated Red wattled Lapwing, showing every sign of breeding here again. Ducks present included both Garganey and Shoveller. The Ruddy Shelduck seen the previous week was conspicuous by it's absence.

A quick sprint up the road saw the group searching for, (and finding) Red necked Phalarope, a pair spinning around on the flooded land north of Ajman. This strange, tame, swimming wader migrates from its wintering grounds in the Indian Ocean and beyond, where it feeds on plankton, to the Arctic where it breeds in June and July. It seems to be a regular visitor to this patch of water, with approx. 200 present in April last year. At the same site were 3 young Kentish Plover chicks, with a skittish parent in attendance. The next stop was Khor al Beidah, just in time for high tide. Salt water species obviously dominate here, with Curlew, Whimbrel, Grey

plovers, Oystercatchers, & Godwits roosting alongside the hordes of Dunlin, some of which were showing the beginnings of summer livery. Both Hoopoe larks and the enigmatic Black Crowned Finchlark were seen in the dunes, whilst a lone Skylark sang above.

After some welcome refreshment and respite from the heat at the Bin Majid Hotel, the group moved on to that well known twitchers spot, Ras Al Kaimah Airport roundabout, where the Spanish Sparrows did not disappoint. Several Spanish/House sparrow hybrids were also seen. A pair of Turtle Doves rounded off a pleasant, if unseasonably hot n'humid day. Neil And Sarah then departed, no doubt still discussing the pro's and cons of various honeymoon venues.

report by Dave Sheldon

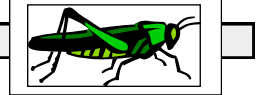
QNHG Trip to Northern Emirates

On Wednesday 18th March, 28 members of Qatar Natural History Group arrived on time at Dubai Airport, fortuitously so did the hotel bus and Beryl Comar to greet them! They settled into their rooms at Bin Majed Hotel which were pronounced as "quite adequate", "fine", as they progressed to the hotel watering hole ("wet" unlike those found in Doha).

Early on Thursday morning they set out for Sharjah Natural History Museum for an accompanied walk around with director Marijke Jongbloed followed by a picnic lunch in the Museum grounds. They then travelled on to visit Bithna Fort, Fujairah Fort and the ancient mosque at Sharm. Some shelling and snorkelling at Snoopy Island followed, before returning to RAK via Dibba later than anticipated at 9.00pm. Beryl and Sandy Fowler joined them for dinner and were presented with two copies of "Healing Hands of Qatar" by Fay Gotting; one will be placed in the DNHG library.

Next day Sandy took four enthusiastic shellers to beaches north of Rak for some serious collecting and shell education. Beryl played tour-guide in the bus, complete with microphone but no leader's "follow me" flag. They visited archaeological sites at Tell Abraq and Shimal before lunch followed by an energetic climb up to Sheba's Palace. Time was pressing so the pottery sites at Wadi Haqil were missed in favour of meeting up with the shellers for more fresh air and the chance to find paper nautilus. They eventually caught their 10.00pm flight as an exhausted group.

The shellers were happy as they had found a total of 18 paper nautilus. Sandy was so delighted with his 31 that he gave some away! At Tell Abraq the group studied and photographed a young monitor lizard, and the birders saw enough varieties to keep them content. The group's leader, Clare Gillespie declared the visit very successful and has written to DNHG with thanks for a very fascinating weekend. Wait and see if Beryl's next venture is tour guiding!



Nautilus Database Update

March was a good month for the collecting paper nautilus according to the people helping Beryl Comar to keep records. 12 recording days from 13th February to 31st March have yielded 134 nautilus *Argonauta hians* 60/40% good/poor condition. Seven were found with eggs; two with the octopus argonaut and eggs attached. Size ranged between 33 - 121mm. Most shells were found at Rams with a few at Jazirat and Police Beach RAK. Evidence shows that there are plenty around for those willing to get up to RAK beaches for the high tide.

Unofficial reports have reached us of finds on Jumeirah, however the collector is said to be reluctant to share with others who may "take" the shells. Beryl Comar, who is keeping the database would be very interested to hear about such finds from a scientific perspective and to prove a personal hypothesis that the egg cases first appear in RAK then appear in Jumeirah much later i.e. late April and May. If nautilus have already been found in Jumeirah without reporting then the theory is debunked and we can once again look at the data to understand the habits of this little researched creature through its deposited egg case.

Fossil Talk at Emirates International School

On 22nd March 1998 Beryl Comar gave a multi-media talk on fossils to two groups of 75 fifth-graders. The students were preparing for an overnight camp at Jebel Meleiha (Fossil Rock). All were very interested in the slides, information and fossil examples on show whilst some students were already quite knowledgeable and keen collectors. The question and answer sessions

were lively and showed the students had listened well. The subsequent camp and fossil hunt were very successful with all children "on task" to find fossils to show and tell to their teachers.

Beryl thanks Valerie Chalmers for the loan of her slides, and has donated the overhead transparencies from the talk to DNHG library for the use of any teachers who may wish to use them in future.

Extinct Owl Rediscovered

Until recently only seven specimens of the Forest Owlet existed, but these were found in the late 1800's several hundred miles north and northeast of Bombay, so it was presumed to be extinct. On 25th Nov. Pamela C. Rasmussen, a researcher from the National Museum of Natural History, part of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C. took videotape evidence and still photographs of a pair of Forest Owlets *Athene blewitti* in rough woodland near Shahada in India's Satpura Mountains.

In case you are twitching to find the bird it is about 8 inches long with distinctive barred markings, has a large and strong bill and sturdy claws. The pair was spotted in the heat of the day when other birds are often seeking shade.

Biological Diversity in UAE

Biological Diversity Day was celebrated on 29th December 1998 and this gave us chance to reflect on how UAE is protecting its natural habitat and developing biological resources.

It is 20 years since the President, His Highness Sheikh Zayed first banned hunting in Abu Dhabi and expressed his belief that the

wildlife and environment should be preserved for the generations to come. Since then some natural protected areas have been set up, and there is talk of establishing National Parks before this century is out. The harsh desert environment has been generously planted resulting in greater diversity of birds living and migrating through the area. Water resources have been researched and developed. Official and charitable bodies have been established, and programmes begun to develop natural wildlife, for example the Arabian Leopard Trust. The marine environment has also recently been considered: a protected area established at Jebel Ali and water mammals such as dugong, whales and sharks studied to avoid future extinction through neglect or over-fishing. "Much has been achieved, yet there is so much more to be done" would be a good motto to use here. Thanks to all DNHG members who care and take time to notice, yet leave untouched, their environment.

Sandy and Beryl Comar-Fowler

Underwater Archaeology

Tom Vosmer from Western Australian Maritime Museum, leader of an underwater survey of the old harbour of Sur, Oman, will visit Sharjah for a slide & video presentation on Wednesday 29 April, 8.30pm, Sharjah Diving Club at Sharjah Wanderers Sports Club. It is understood that the talk will also relate to the discovery, recovery and analysis of a large stone anchor found by members of the Sharjah Diving Association in waters near Dibba on the East Coast. For further details please contact Peter Blanchflower, 06-546 328/06-334 540, or Lamjed El Kefi, 06-583 003/050-815 068.



Important New Kush Finds

Some of our members visited the mound formally the Islamic site of Kush in the Shimal area of Ras Al Khaimah with Dr Derek Kennet over the Inter Emirates weekend 1997. We observed how new techniques of boring "holes" to take samples were more efficacious in yielding more information to the archaeologists. Recently, a 1000 year gold dinar issued by the 10th century ruler Omar bin Yousuf al Wajihi was unearthed at the site. It is significant as only the second of its kind ever found. The other is in the American Numismatic Society collection, New York.

In ancient Islamic coinage 15 dirhams were equal to one dinar, the dinar was gold, the dirham was silver and the fil was bronze. This round gold coin weighs one gram, measures about 1cm in diameter and the Kufic religious inscriptions have been perfectly preserved. Omar bin Yousef began his reign in 961 AD (340 Hijra) and this find indicates the extent of circulation of his currency.

Socotra, Yemen and Oman Coastline Research

The Arabian Seas Expedition: Voyage of Discovery, left Dubai on 22nd December 1997 to explore, study and film the marine ecology of Oman, the coastline of Yemen, and the island of Socotra. The six-month expedition is due to return in May 1998. Joining project director, Ali Khan and his team are four fish and invertebrate specialists. They expect to film enough footage for one 60-minute and six 30-minute documentaries concentrating on Socotra Island and its archipelago situated off the

southeast coast of Yemen. The Socotra area was last charted in 1854 and many parts are marked "dangerous" because of hidden reefs, currents, shallows and deeps. 70% of Socotra's marine/wildlife is unknown so the scientists, from UK, South Africa, USA and Germany will be kept very busy. ASE promises to update their website regularly, and *Gazelle* will keep you updated from those pages at site: www.emiratesdiving.com

Reports by Beryl and Sandy Comar-Fowler

Botany display reorganised

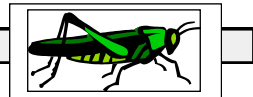
Visiting botanist Ian Curtis deserves mention for his contribution to our knowledge of local natural history. Ian is concluding a temporary assignment at the Sharjah Natural History Museum, organizing the gardens that display typical local plant species.

On his own time Ian has taken the opportunity to explore the Northern Emirates and has competed with local herbivores by cropping specimens of numerous UAE grasses for the herbarium at the museum. "Even though the UAE is only around the size of Wales, I've been fascinated by the variety of habitats I've encountered

Traveller's Advisory Multiple-entry visas to Oman

British citizens resident in the UAE may now obtain a two-year multi-entry visa for Oman, valid for entry at all recognized entry points. These are issued by the Omani Embassy in Abu Dhabi, but not by the Omani Consulate in Dubai. The application form can be obtained from the Embassy and either filled out in advance or "on the spot" by typists available nearby. Also required are the original passport, a passport photocopy, 2 visa-size photos, a no objection letter from the employer, and the fee of Dh. 400. Visas are reportedly issued within 20 minutes of submission of the completed application.

Road travellers to Oman are advised to make provision for extension of their automobile insurance coverage. This can be done either by arranging individual extensions on a visit-by-visit basis, or by obtaining Omani coverage on an annual basis. Experience suggests that annual coverage is both more economical and more convenient if more than one or two visits per year are contemplated. Most UAE insurers say that the standard UAE policy covers areas of Oman that can be visited from the UAE without obtaining a visa (e.g., the Buraimi, Hatta or Dibba areas), but the actual practice is unknown. Further information is solicited from members



DNHG committee members 1998

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Letters to the editor

News? Views? Write to us at
PO Box 9234, or simply fax /
e-mail any of the committee

Dear Beryl,

Thanks to you we all enjoyed a most interesting weekend. We are extremely grateful for all that you and Sandy did for us. For me the highlight of the trip was seeing the archaeological sites that I'd previously read about in Shirley Kay's book We could never have found them without you and certainly not with the help of that driver – he must have thought we were a funny lot, wanting to peer at heaps of stones in the desert! I've just completed a report on the trip for our local newspaper, and will send you a copy as a souvenir when it comes out.

We hope you and Sandy will be able to come and visit us in Qatar – it's not as boring a place as you think. We've been here 13 years and still find interesting little corners to explore. This weekend our NHG is doing a survey of an area in the remote SW and I'm going to make an accurate record of some rock carvings discovered by John Bell two years ago, somehow overlooked by the Danes who recorded all of our other 8 or 9 rock picture sites in the 1960s and 1970s.

Once again many thanks,

Clare Gillespie

GAZELLE

Dubai Natural History Group Program

Lectures at Jumeirah English Speaking School, 7.30pm for 8.00pm

- May 3: **'Stone Arrowheads in the UAE'** by Peter Rothfels
June 7: Members' Night featuring:
'Cowrie Shells of the Arabian Gulf' by Colin Paskins
'Journey into the Mountains of the Musandam' by Tony Johnston
'Land Snails of Dubai' by Stephen Green
'Archeological sites of the UAE' by Diana Darke
September 13: To be announced

Field Trips - further details inside (DNHG members only, please)

- April 24: **The Grand Canyon of Wadi Sharm** (note new date)
An easy nature walk deep within the Hajar Mountains
May 1: **Coastal Environment with Richard Hornby** (note new date)
A naturalist explores the nearshore and tidal zones
June: **Proposed trip to Ras Al Hadd, Oman**
Arabia's easternmost point, a world famous wildlife site

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