

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

DNHG Membership Renewals

Unexpected shower

Gazelle editor, **Anne Millen**, recently in Queensland, Australia, had a problem with her car being covered, each day, with a fine spray of droplets. They looked like water, but when she used the wipers, it became clear that they were a sticky substance. A quick lick of the window (when no one was looking!) revealed that it was nectar, and she realised why it was so easy to get the shady parking spot. The 10 metre trees, festooned with yellow flowers, apparently drop this throughout their flowering season. The local people call the trees casias, but when Anne searched the internet to identify them, she was surprised to find at least 14 varieties of these leguminous trees and shrubs that grow in tropical Australia, including three native to the inland desert areas. At present, she is blaming a South American import, *Cassia bicapsularis*, of the *Caesalpina* family.



Colin Trees recently had a bad car accident. He was in hospital for about two weeks with various broken limbs. We are happy to report that he has been released from hospital last week. From all the members at the DNHG we wish Colin a speedy recovery.

A friend of **Steve Burns** found these gelatinous masses in the Musandam peninsula a few weeks ago. He has asked around but no one has so far been able to identify them.



The Australian **red back spider** has recently hit the columns of the *madia* again. One important fact that was mentioned is that none of the Dubai hospitals have an antivenom.



The current DNHG membership year runs from September 2004 to September 2005. Membership remains a bargain at Dhs. 100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to Lloyds Bank account no. 173746. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG.)

DNHG membership entitles you to participate in field trips and helps pay for our lecture hall, publication and distribution of our monthly newsletter, the *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 and contributions:

Ricus van Zijl
Peter Jackson
David Palmer
Valerie Chalmers
Mohammed Arfan Asif



Something Different...

Two Forts and a Fight Friday May 20

Peter Jackson will lead a trip to the east coast to look at the current restoration work to the houses and Fort at Old Fujairah, followed by a display of Bull-Pushing.

Meet at Fort Hayl, Fujairah, at 10am. 4-wheel drive or robust saloon recommended for Khor Kalba. Other roads are all sealed. Drive to Fujairah (allow 80 minutes). After the road flattens out on the plain, pass a large re-charge dam on the right. Turn right after this, having just passed the service station that bridges the road. The Fort is sign-posted as Castle Hayl. Drive past a military camp on your right, and keep straight through a small village (drive carefully and watch the speedbumps). The sealed road now goes right to the fort, past a second re-charge dam on the right. Watch the road edge carefully as you go over the steep section next to the dam. The road bears round right and you will see the fort, above gardens in the wadi, again right. Park behind the fort,

Geoff Sanderson will talk about cultivation of the date palm. Peter Jackson will point out interesting architectural and construction features of this pretty fort. From here we will then drive to Old Fujairah at about 11am. Here Amrik Singh, the engineer/mason responsible for all the reconstruction work, will show us around the reconstructed village and magnificent Fort.

We will then proceed to Wahala Fort in the mountains on the Oman border, still under reconstruction. This sits on a large iron age complex some 2,000 years old. Here a representative from Fujairah Museum will talk to us about the site.

Picnic lunch at Khor Kalba, by the mangroves and beach. At 4pm, bull pushing commences at Fujairah. This is extremely entertaining, but be prepared to move sharply if any

of the Brahmins decides to make a dash for it. Contact Peter Jackson on 050 552 1005 if you want to participate.

Spoon Worm and Coastal Ecology Walk

This trip has now been postponed till autumn.

End-of-Season Dinner and Photo Competition Jun 9

This popular function will be held in the Oasis Restaurant, Dubai Country Club on Thursday, 9th June 2005 at 7.30 p.m. for 8.00 p.m. It will cost Dirhams 80/- per person and this will include a varied buffet meal and two bottles of wine per table.

The Annual Photographic Competition will be held. Members are invited to enter a maximum of two (returnable) prints on any natural history subject from anywhere in the world. Photographs should be a minimum size of 5 inches x 7 inches (125 mm x 180 mm) and should be mounted. The competition will be judged by everyone present and the photograph with the most votes will be declared the winner. There will also be a wide-ranging Natural History team quiz with surprise prizes.

Tickets are available from Valerie Chalmers. If you are unable to make the meeting on Sunday 5th June and would like tickets please phone me on either 04-3494816 or 04-3442853 (which has an answer phone) or fax me on 04-3400990 by Monday 6th June at the latest as I have to give numbers to the Dubai Country Club on Tuesday 7th June (morning).

This is always a popular event and gives you a chance to challenge Arfan Asif and Gary Feulner. Go for it! Details of the photographic competition will appear in the May *Gazelle*, but start clicking and studying now!

And now... E-Gazelle !

This month you can again request the DNHG's monthly newsletter, the *Gazelle*, by e-mail. If you think you would prefer this, please e-mail Peter van Amsterdam and ask for your May copy to verify that the system works for you.

Once we are sure that e-mail delivery works reliably, we will offer members the opportunity to elect to receive the *Gazelle* by mail or by e-mail. This is quick and easy for you (and you see the photographs in colour) and could save us a small but significant amount in annual postage.

The e-mail initiative should also address the recent complaints of some members (especially at AUS) that they have not been receiving their newsletters in a timely manner (or, indeed, at all).

The initiative was undertaken by publisher Peter van Amsterdam and benefited greatly from advice and prodding by Committee members Pradeep Radhakrishna, Peter Jackson and Sandhya Prakash.

Our Next Speakers

Our June meeting will be members' night with the following speakers.

Sandhya Prakash

The Birds in Common of Bharatpur and Dubai

Sandy Fowler

An Ascent Of Mount Kilimanjaro

Barrie Harmsworth

The Evolution of the Dhow From Ahmed Ibn Majid to Khadam Rashid Al Muhairi



Visit to Husn al Sulayf on the way to the roses

Ibri Hotel proved a practical first overnight venue for the field trip. Good service, simple but pleasant fare and comfortable rooms saw our party of 13 cars, 31 members, and five nationalities ready for an early start to explore the picturesque ruins of al Sulayf early on Thursday morning.

Some of us chose a route through the once rich date gardens that filled the wadi banks, finding a very well preserved fortified house in a state of good preservation. It is believed that construction of the husn and fortified village began some three centuries ago, during the reign of Sultan bin Sayf al Yaru'bi. It was built for the Manadhirah tribes of al Sulayf, who occupied the eastern quarter.



Report by Peter Jackson, photographs by Peter Jackson and Ricus Van Zyl.

The Al Sawafifah lived in the western quarters, and the al Uzur within the husn itself. Marked by watch-towers, and a fine cylindrical bastion tightly built into the face of a cliff, the now deserted and decaying mud brick citadel is entered through the former old suq.

It must have been used until fairly recently, as traces of the palm fronded roof still span low but massive cylindrical columns with cubic capitols. Empty shops stand some closed, some open to the elements. Doors still hang locked in their frames, while down narrow lanes, a few houses at the foot of the complex remain occupied today.

The large doors to the main gateway giving access to the protected village above lay on the ground,

severely burnt, but their inscription intact upon them. A delicately inscribed stone within the portal begged to be deciphered. Steep narrow alleyways climb the sloping cliff along the east and west edges of the derelict settlement, giving tantalising glimpses into a way of life only recently abandoned. Sticks, poles and matings below roofs and window soffits are still visible.

Our group climbed the rocky slopes above the crumbling ruins to the uppermost watch tower, known as Burj al Riy, or the Wind Tower, which terminated a long defensive wall at the cliff precipice. The site provides a photographer's paradise. Our departure was marked by a group of young men approaching and inviting us to join them at their homes for coffee, an invitation that on this occasion time regrettably did not permit us to accept, though their gesture aptly marked the harmony of this very special location.

Plants and fossils

Plants seen on the DNHG trip to the Saiq Plateau

At Sulaif Fort the following plants were seen:

Aizoon canariense
Tribulus (possibly terrestris)
Zygophyllum simplex
Haloxylon salicornicum (formerly Hammada elegans)
Reseda aucheri
Helianthemum lippii
Fagonia indica
Boerhavia diffusa
Cassia italica (Senna Plant)
Plantago sp (Plantain)

En route to Bahla and Nizwa many specimens of Boerhavia elegans were seen by the roadside as puffs of purplish smoke. I have never seen it in quite such abundance

before. Gaillonia aucheri was seen in patches and also specimens of Calotropis procera (Sodom's Apple). Euphorbia larica was to be seen on steep, rocky drops/sides of jebels.

On the Saiq Plateau itself many specimens of Dodonaea viscosa (Soapberry Family) with its very distinctive winged fruits were seen everywhere.

At Diana's Point Helichrysum sp was to be seen in great abundance and I found a large specimen of Diplotaxis harra.

At Al Ain, where we saw the roses, a large specimen of Solanum incanum (a member of the Nightshade Family) with pink/purple flowers and round yellow fruits resembling tomatoes was seen as we made our way back to our cars. Malva parviflora was seen not far from the roses.



Caralluma

En route to Sunset Point we stopped to see Juniperus macro-poda (Indian juniper or Himalayan pencil cedar) and Olea africana (Wild Olive). Specimens of Teucrium (mascatense?), an aromatic plant which is a member of the Mint Family, were spotted together with Helichrysum sp again. At Sunset Point Caralluma (possibly pencillata) was seen in bloom with red flowers. There were flies on some of the flowers.



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

In the grounds of the Jebel Akhdar Hotel near where I parked my car I saw *Farsetia longisiliqua* which I had not seen for a while.

In Wadi Bani Habib we found the following plants:

Datura stramonium (thorn apple) (member of the Nightshade Family) in the wadi and en route to wadi.

Ricinus communis (Castor oil plant)
Euphorbia ? peplus

Oxalis corniculata) in wadi bed in the shade

Silene schweinfurthii

Anagallis arvensis (Blue Pimpernel) in shade

Teucrium (mascatense?)

Boerhavia diffusa

Solanum incanum

Ziziphus spina-christi

Dyerophytum indicum (Some of its leaves were covered with a whitish bloom)

Plus an unidentified yellow member of the ASTERACEAE (COMPOSITAE) – Daisy Family.

Pomegranate, Apricot, Almond and Mulberry Trees were also seen in the wadi.

Peter took some of us to look at and photograph the *KT* and *Ebenus stellata* (member of the Pea Family) was seen on the rocks above.

Fossils seen at Diana's Point. The dark grey cliff-forming limestones at Diana's Point are the Saiq Formation, one of the lowest units of the Hajar Super Group, being entirely (late) Permian. Fossils collected here were crinoid (sea lily) stems, crinoid debris, fusulinid foraminifera, various specimens of gastropods, pipe corals, colonial corals and possible molluscs. *Report by Valerie Chalmers.*

Visit to Wadi Bani Habib, after the roses

After breakfast on Friday morning, our convoy consolidated for the 30 minute drive across the Saiq plateau to the abandoned village of Wadi Bani Habib, situated some 2,100m above sea level.

The recently abandoned village has been superseded by a modern celebration of contemporary taste including large ostentatious villas perched at the end of the wadi overlooking the terraced forms of the old village.

There are two routes to the perched settlement: the first, led by Peter, down a flight of steps from the car park at the end of the tar, led directly into the wadi where we wanted to be. At this point some of us must have lost our presence of mind: we followed Anne.



Wadi Bani Habib

Descending alternative steps was fine, until these terminated halfway down the hill. Scrambling would be too fast an adjective to describe what happened next. Let it just be noted, that one irrigation gully later (albeit through beautiful gardens of budding pomegranate and walnut trees), then along a pretty boulder strewn wadi - a somewhat scratched and dishevelled group rejoined Peter's unruffled team.

The village is in two parts, with some 50 to 60 mixed single and double storey dwellings. The lower part is arranged about a mosque, still in use, above a terraced garden offering the most intense luminous green light below a canopy of well tended walnut trees.

The falaj continues to be well maintained, and the gardens are well cared for. An upper section of the village runs along a low cliff parallel to the wadi, accessed by a stepped path, but was only photographed from afar, even by Peter's lightly exercised party. We each explored among the vertically stacked, mud rendered buildings, linked by lanes. These were sometimes enclosed below a house above, and where the roof of one provides the floor for the next. There are close parallels to be seen here with mountain villages of the Moroccan Atlas.

The houses are generally built in stone laid in a mortar of silt and straw. Clay roofs sealed with a bitumen-like substance are supported on a structure of sticks, spanned across poles. More recent accretions, and repairs have been with concrete blocks. Upper rooms characteristically are planned around a first floor terrace, or 'arshah. One dominating house had a gaudily painted bedroom in purples pinks and blue of bright vegetative patterns,

while another lower room had simpler painted geometric designs in red and white, below a floral blue formica lined ceiling supported on traditional walnut beams.

Culture is dynamic, transitional, and here, has already moved on (and upwards to modern villas). It is a breathtakingly beautiful site. A few years ago there were plans to transform it into a hotel development, for the Ministry of Tourism. If this can avoid the superficialities of



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

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Plants – Valerie Chalmers

Mammals - Recorder needed

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.

a Disney-like fantasy, it could have the potential to create a unique eco-tourism resort, at the same time as reinforcing the local economy and identity. However, this should be undertaken sooner rather than later, as the building structures are deteriorating rapidly, without regular maintenance and repair.

Conclusion

Peter van Amsterdam arranged and co-ordinated a very well planned and most enjoyable weekend of roses, fossils, spectacular views and traditional architecture. It was relaxed, and worked well for all of us all who participated, with time for some to make detours to Nizwa fort, Bahla potteries and Jabrin fort.. But when it comes to exploring wadis, Anne Millen clearly has a finely honed sense of adventure second to none! Thanks to both. *Report by Peter Jackson, photographs by Peter Jackson and Ricus Van Zyl.*

Thru' the Lens ..

Ordinarily, snakes appear to be oblivious to others of their kind. However, when the mating season arrives this changes. Male snakes become aggressive towards each other and the scent of an attractive female sends them into a frenzy.



Not all females of a specie can mate every year, but if food has been abundant, half of the adult females may have mature eggs in their oviducts and (usually upon shedding their skins) they will exude a chemical secretion (a pheromone) signaling that they are ready.

In gregarious species such a female may attract numerous courting males. In species that live as lone individuals, however, her scent trail may be picked up by only a single tongue flicking suitor.



In either case, the male upon finding the female moves forward to bring his chin onto the nape of her neck, with his body overlapping or alongside hers pressing against her along his entire length. The pair may remain mated from 10 minutes to 24 hours depending on the species.



Once while trekking in the countryside back home, I happened to encounter a rare sight – the conjugal display of rat snakes mating. Since I had exhausted my color negatives and transparency rolls for the day and the unexpected was right in front of me, I had no option but to shoot in monochrome. Here I should add that film is the cheapest



ingredient of the photography recipe and should be always available, in order not to have regrets later on. This is most applicable in wild life photography. These images quite rare could at least be shot in the first instance. So don't be surprised to see these pictures in black and white when viewing the newsletter electronically!



The wild grass was high and I had to be ultra careful not to disturb the entangled pair. My companion also kept his cool and therefore I could shoot a good number of frames from quite a close distance - 18 feet. Those days the farthest focal length in my armament was a 200mm Zeiss lens. I also realized that the snakes were watching me and the chances of an attack was a possibility. At least that is what I thought at that moment. They moved slowly together and I left them as they were. In wild life photography the welfare of the subject should be of paramount importance and that of taking pictures secondary. *Report and photos by Mohammed Arfan Asif*

UAE Archeology Symposium

The third annual symposium on UAE archaeology was held on 6-7 April at the Rotana Hotel in Al Ain. Three members of the DNHG (Gary Feulner, Johanna Raynor and David Palmer) attended as grateful guests of the organizers, the Zayed Centre for Heritage and History. Gary Feulner also presented at the symposium.



These symposiums grew out of the conference on UAE archaeology held in Abu Dhabi in 2001. The proceedings of that conference were published in 2003 as *Archaeology of the United Arab Emirates*. The proceedings of the first two symposiums (2003 and 2004) will be published shortly. The reports from this year's symposium are summarized below.

Flint Tools in the Empty Quarter

Heiko Kallweit, of ADIAS and the University of Freiburg, described results from two seasons' explorations in the desert at Khor Al Manahil. This neolithic site is in the corner of the UAE near the borders of Oman and Saudi Arabia, south-east of the Liwa crescent. Many surface scatters of flint tools have been found there, dating from 9000 to 6000 years ago.

The Lower Paleolithic in Sharjah?

Hans-Peter Uerpmann of the University of Tübingen, who talked to the DNHG last year, presented his team's results from the final season's excavations at the necropolis BHS18 at Jebel Buhais in Sharjah (near Al Madam). Hundreds of burials have been found there from as long as 7000 years ago. This site has now been closed up, and casts have been made by Marc Haendel of many of the skeletons found. An exhibition about this site and the extraordinary finds there is expected to be unveiled at the Sharjah Archaeology Museum in a few months' time.

After concluding their work at Buhais, the Uerpmann team started working its way northwards along the line of hills towards Mleiha, finding evidence of neolithic flint-napping at many places, including a major rock shelter site at Jebel Fayah. Most surprisingly, they also found ten flint tools which appear, on the basis of their design and degree of weathering, to be from the Lower Paleolithic era.

The Lower Paleolithic is the earliest period of the stone age, extending from the very beginnings of human culture up to about 100,000 years

ago, and if these tools do indeed prove to be from that period it would push back by a vast amount the date for the earliest human occupation of southern and eastern Arabia.

Uerpmann speculated that these stunning finds opened the possibility that early humans left Africa not just by the assumed route up to Suez via the western shore of the Red Sea, but also (given different sea levels) by crossing the mouth of the Red Sea to Yemen and proceeding up the southern coast of Arabia to cross eventually into Iran at the straits of Hormuz. This would have allowed early man to reach India and south-east Asia without having to adapt to more temperate climates in the Levant.

Cairn Tombs

Gary Feulner presented an overview of the distribution of cairn tombs in the UAE and Oman. The total number of these tombs in the UAE is probably somewhat more than one thousand. Some 480 were earlier mapped along the edge of Jebel Hafit itself, giving their name to the "Hafit Period", ca. 3000 BC, and where some reconstructed examples now stand. Other groups of 50 or more exist at mountain front sites at Khatt, Jebel Fayah and along the East Coast, and smaller groups and rare individual tombs can be found scattered in the Ru'us al-Jibal.

Gary described the different styles of cairn tombs that have been found, including "honeycomb" clusters of tombs joined together, various styles of tower tombs, and so forth. He stressed that there was much more information still to be gathered.



Update from Hili

Sophie Mery, from CNRS and the French Archaeological Mission in the UAE, described the significance of the latest finds from the Hili pit-grave N and the 12 monumental circular Umm an-Nar graves at Hili and Hili 8. Most of her talk concerned efforts to determine the dates and sequence of construction according to tomb contents and building techniques (and the reuse



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of the stones), and relationships to other sites, especially those at Bithnah and on the coast of Um Al Qaiwain.

Chronology of the Shimal Tombs in RAK

Christian Velde, resident archaeologist at the National Museum of RAK (and recent speaker and field-trip leader for the DNHG), examined the approximately 100 tombs in the three-kilometer long necropolis at Shimal, proposing a chronological development of their shapes and styles. The tombs are from the Wadi Suq period (2000-1600 BC) and were discovered by Beatrice de Cardi in 1968.

Fujairah Tomb

Salah Ali from the Fujairah Museum described a second-millennium U-shaped tomb excavated in Fujairah in 1997. The site of this tomb was subsequently used for the construc-

tion of a private house, a matter of some concern and discussion at the symposium. Salah Ali pointed out that well-preserved graves of a similar type can be found at Qidfa, along the coast north of the town of Fujairah.

Secrets of the Dubai Sewers

Helmut Bruckner from the University of Marburg (the April speaker at the DNHG) described his investigations into the layers uncovered by recent building work at Dubai Internet City, the location of the archaeological site Sufouh 2. Bruckner was especially interested in the deep excavations made for the new sewage pipe system.

Using the new OSL (Optically Stimulated Luminescence) dating method, whose technical details were described to the symposium by his colleague, Anja Zander, Bruckner was able to reconstruct

the changes along this shoreline during the last 12,000 years. His analysis also confirmed that nearly 4000 years ago people were living at the present site of Dubai Internet City on the banks of a tidal creek, eating camel meat and throwing the bones into the sandy tidal flats.

Claudia Gruber of the University of Munich summarized the results from the four years of the now-completed excavation of Sufouh 2. It is still not certain whether it was an ancient camp for hunting wild camels or a slaughtering place for domestic camels. She discussed the possible future of the site now that the excavations have ended, and presented suggestions for a possible museum on the site, which would both preserve the site and display the finds made there. *Report by David Palmer (abridged)*



Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

- Jun 6 Members Night:
- * Sandhya Prakash The Birds in Common of Bharatpur and Dubai
 - * Sandy Fowler An Ascent Of Mount Kilimanjaro
 - * Barrie Harmsworth The Evolution of the Dhow From Ahmed Ibn Majid to Khadam Rashid Al Muhairi

Field Trips (Members only, please. Details inside.)

- Fri May 20 Old Fujairah Fort, Bull Pushing and Wadi Hayl Fort with Peter Jackson
- Jun 9: End-of-Season Dinner, Quiz and Photo Competition