

GAZELLE

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مجموعتنا روثي للكسار والطلبية

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Listening to Dr. Saif Al-Ghais speak to the Emirates Environmental Group in June about marine turtles, **Donna Simon** was surprised to hear how rare the leatherback is in UAE waters – an estimate of one sighting every 4 or 5 years. This prompted Donna to mention a sad offshore encounter several years ago with a large leatherback nearly the size of her 15-foot boat. The turtle, unfortunately, was dead, apparently strangled by a blue polyethylene rope around its neck. Donna speculates that it had been lassoed and towed.

Ursala and Josef Prochazka left us in June to return to Prague after 9 years in the UAE, including the last 2 in Dubai. Before leaving they sent a very kind note to the DNHG, expressing their appreciation and enjoyment of our efforts. We wish them well 'at home'.

Another June departure was **Miranda Rushby**, who will be settling with Mike and family in New Brunswick, Canada, where Mike has 'retired' to new responsibilities, including the construction of a road across the province. Miranda mentioned that the area had 8 feet of snow last winter, but the locals say it stays 'warm' until October.

Carolyn Lehmann has advised that, due to reasons beyond her

control, her telephone number in Florida has been changed from what was published in the June *Gazelle*. The new number is 001-941-637-6547.

Cheryl Jones, a former speaker and Dubai resident and a renowned American caver, has sent along an article published in April 1998 in *NSS News*, the journal of the National Speleological Society, which recounts the exploration of the massive cave systems of the Selme Plateau in Central Oman, in which she was involved. A copy of the article is in the DNHG Library.

Stephen and Adam Green stopped in at the the Natural History Museum in London while on leave, and brought with them a number of land snails and freshwater snails for identification. Their efforts have brought the number of freshwater snails known to occur in the UAE from three to five, and another from neighboring Oman will be eagerly sought during the coming winter. The number of land snails appears to be higher, but identifications have been more problematic.

Maria Larkworthy has been busy organizing a new home display of some of her more exotic seashells. In addition, she is investigating the identity of the tree-climbing snail found in mangrove trees in RAK and

at Khor Kalba, which resembles a periwinkle. Consultation of numerous references failed to resolve the matter, in the face of varying depictions and possible changes in nomenclature of the most likely candidate species. As a result, she has prepared and sent several specimens to the Netherlands for examination by Dr Robert Moolenbeek, a co-author of *Seashells of Eastern Arabia*.

This month's contributors

The editor would like to thank the following members for their reports:

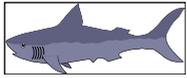
- ◆ Gary Feulner
- ◆ Marijcke Jongbloed
- ◆ Dave Sheldon
- ◆ Barbara Couldrey
- ◆ Theri Bailey

Calling all naturalists

Why not send in your own contributions? e-mail neilc@emirates.net.ae or fax committee members on the numbers shown inside.

Photographs in *Gazelle*

Due to the generous assistance of Peter van Amsterdam with printing of *Gazelle* direct from a laser printer, we are now able to include a couple of photos in each issue. Please pass any you think might be suitable to the editor at DNHG meetings - not forgetting, of course,



Welcome Back!

Welcome back to those of you who have either vacationed abroad or stayed indoors for the summer. We hope you plan to join us for the coming season of lectures and field trips. As always, please don't hesitate to let us know about subjects, speakers or activities that would be of interest to you.

We hope that some of you have used the hot weather to visit local museums such as the Dubai Museum, the Sharjah Natural History Museum, the Sharjah Archeological Museum, the Sharjah Science Museum, the Ras Al-Khaimah Museum, and the Al-Ain Museum. If not, there's still time and all are worth a visit.

Our Next Speaker

For many UAE residents, Colin Richardson's name is almost synonymous with UAE natural history. He is, among other things, the author of *Birds of the United Arab Emirates*, the author of *Emirates Bird Report* and regular UAE birdwatching columns in local newspapers and on the Internet.

Colin is also the Secretary of the Emirates Bird Records Committee, 1995 winner of the Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Natural History Prize, the father of UAE birdwatching tours, one of the earliest members and Committee members of the DNHG, and our longtime Bird Recorder. Not bad for someone who only took up serious birdwatching here in the UAE!

Moreover, Colin is an example of the all-too-rare individual who has had the courage to forsake a traditional professional career in favor an extracurricular passion.

He now conducts birdwatching tours of the on a full time basis, and in so doing he has put Dubai and the UAE firmly on the world's birdwatching map.

Membership Renewal

The DNHG's new membership year commences in October 1998. The membership fee remains a bargain at Dhs 50 (singles or couples).

You can join or renew at meetings - see Membership Secretary Anna Griffin - 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.

Field Trips

Fall Birdwatching Friday September 25

DNHG Bird Recorder Rod Fox will lead a full day of visits to diverse natural sites to sample the Fall migration. Depart from the Hilton outdoor covered parking lot at 7:00 am. Bring binoculars, plenty of water and a pack lunch.

4WD preferred. Estimated return to Dubai c.7:00pm. Possibility for individual cars to return earlier. Contact Rod Fox for further information or logistics at 365178 (home), 608-7634 (ofc), 668552 (fax-ofc), or foxline@emirates.net.ae.

Stargazing Thursday October 22

Columnist David McNaughton and DNHG Astronomy Recorder Lamjed El-Kefi will lead a tour of the night sky at a desert site near Dubai. For full details, see our September issue.

Melon bug visits Dubai

Saleh Shunnar wins the summer's gold doubloon. He was the only person to call formal attention to the June-July bloom of the melon bug in and around downtown Dubai. The melon bug (*Coridius viduatus*) is a 1-1/2 cm grey-black bug shaped like a heraldic shield, and for a few weeks specimens could be found regularly on sidewalks, in doorways and in homes and shops. It is said to feed on wild and cultivated melons, but its abundant presence in Dubai suggests that it may in fact have more cosmopolitan tastes.

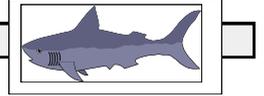
Saleh has also collected an Australian redback spider for us. Like Peter and Anna Griffin earlier, he notes that this spider had built its web 5 or 6 feet off the ground, much higher than is considered 'typical.' The web appeared to contain parts of other spiders.

Sport Hunting Exhibition

Members interested in an alternative perspective on conservation and wildlife management may want to visit the annual Arab Hunting Exhibition, to be held from September 29 through October 2 at the Dubai World Trade Centre Exhibition

Sad Tidings

We regret to announce the death of Bob Catto, Chairman of the Al-Ain Natural History Group, on August 7. Bob was diagnosed with lung cancer about six months ago, not long after he took over the Chairmanship, and had been undergoing chemotherapy. He was well enough to join us at the Inter-Emirates Weekend in March. Our sympathies go to his wife, Marie, who also serves on the Al-Ain group's Committee. A memorial service will be held after the summer vacation .



News from Ras Al Khaimah

On Friday 7 August, the intrepid Barbara Couldrey set out with a companion at 4.45am to climb Jebel Hagab on a spine-chilling path across the face. The climb took 6 hours and 4 litres of water. Grasshoppers, locusts and butterflies kept banging into the climbers or landing to take their fill of salty sweat. Barbara reports lots of tiny lizards scampering about but 'not much else'.

Elsewhere in Ras Al Khaimah, the acacias are a mass of new buds about to burst into leaf, providing fresh fodder for the camels. RAK golf course has been stripped of the 'offending' *Prosopis juliflora* or mesquite. However, as most of them still have part of their roots in the ground, green sprouts are already reappearing.

Rethinking the Blue Rock Agama

The blue rock agama (*Agama sinaita*) is found in the foothills and wadis of the Hajar Mountains. The male, when displaying, is a vivid pale blue color and perches atop a prominent rock, where he may do an occasional 'pushup' to attract attention. The normal color of the male and female is a drab, spotted brown. Blue males have been observed courting drab females.

It is also possible to encounter individuals, understood to be of the same species, which have a pale blue head and distinctive rusty red shoulder patches on an otherwise drab body, and which also appear to perch prominently and display (see, for example, the back cover of *Tribulus* 7.2). These have been identified in several local accounts to date as adolescents (presumably males). This identification now bears reconsideration, as the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife recently confirmed that two captive specimens of these

blue-headed, red-shouldered individuals have laid eggs and are therefore undeniably mature females, although it is admittedly unusual for a female lizard to display such distinctive coloration. Field and laboratory observations demonstrate that the blue head is a 'voluntary' display phenomenon, but the red shoulder patches seem to be a consistent feature (though possibly a seasonal one).

As usual, additional observation, with attention to season, would help to resolve matters. Further information may also exist in the scientific literature, as the species is known from elsewhere in Arabia. Members should consider this a research opportunity.

The blue rock agama should not be confused with the blue-headed agama (*Agama flavimaculata*), also called Jayakar's agama, which is more common on sand and gravel plains. The male blue-headed agama also displays a vivid blue head and body, but with a bright orange tail.

Report by Gary Feulner

Giant Mud Creeper Revisited

The report in the June *Gazelle* of a healthy population of *Terebralia palustris* near Khor Fakkan was communicated to archeologist Mark Beech for more authoritative information about the occurrence of this snail both geographically and in the archeological record.

Mark is currently studying animal remains (primarily bones and shells) at archeological sites throughout the UAE. He confirmed that *T. palustris* seems to have been common to very common in association with almost all coastal sites in the Northern Emirates through the early Christian era, being found in modest numbers at Ad-Door in UAQ as late as the 1st-4th centuries AD.

Mark also mentioned, however, that he thought it was well known that *T. palustris* could be seen alive and in reasonable numbers at Khor Kalba.

In fact, archeologist Carl Phillips was known to have found a single live specimen at Khor Kalba in the early 1990s, and his subsequent detailed archeological mapping has revealed sizeable populations in discrete areas there, although most individuals are relatively small.

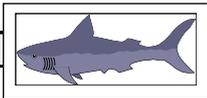
Unfortunately this information does not seem to have percolated outside the professional archeological community, since other researchers and authors have continued to remark on the absence of the giant mud creeper within the UAE. It remains true, however, that no living Arabian Gulf populations are known. Report by Gary Feulner (see also *Shell Report*, page 4)

Wadi Racer Eats Wadi Fish

The wadi racer is a long, very thin snake well known to hikers for its lightning fast (and usually startling) movements. It is normally found in or beside pools of water and is known to catch and eat both fish and toads, although this behavior is seldom actually observed in the wild.

Stephen and Adam Green had the good fortune recently to observe a wadi racer just after it had caught a wadi fish (*Garra barreimiae*) in Wadi Maydaq. They report as follows: The snake had grasped a relatively large fish by the head and the fish was wriggling vigorously. Its size and activity appeared to make swallowing difficult, and the two maneuvered for a couple of minutes without conclusive results, until the snake backed the fish out of the water and against the bedrock bank.

This seems to have provided the leverage or stability necessary to initiate swallowing, which then proceeded for another several minutes. Report by Gary Feulner



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

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Birds - Rod Fox
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Seashells - Sandy Fowler
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Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi
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Geology - Gary Feulner
res 306 5570
fax 313 371

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
res 494 816,
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Insects - Gary Feulner
(see above)

Mammals - Marijcke Jongbloed
off 06-311 411
res 06-311 126

fax 06-311 000

mjongbld@emirates.net.ae

Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi
(see above)

Plants - Valerie Chalmers
(see above)

Reptiles - open
(please contact DNHG
Chairman if you would like to fill
this post)

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

—SHELL—
—REPORT—



Please send your Shell reports
to Sandy Fowler

Across the Border to Al Murayr

A quick hop across the border into Oman to sample the shells of the Batinah coast produced a nice variety of species on Friday 15 May. At the outlet of Wadi Bu Baqarah (actually one outlet of Wadi al Qawr, originating close to Jebel Rawdah), finds included the small gastropod *Notocochlis* sp, which is described in *Seashells of Eastern Arabia* as 'Specimens previously identified as *Tanea lineata*.....belong to a species which will be described as new to science elsewhere'.

Also found were the fragile *Tonna dolium* from the 'Tun Shell' superfamily, though unfortunately none whole. Representatives of the large Muricoidea superfamily included the carnivore *Niso venosa*, believed to live parasitically on echinoderms offshore, the scavenger *Babylonia spirata*, and an unidentified 'Nassa Mud Snail' *Nassarius* sp.

Cone Shells in Dibba Fujairah

A trip to the East Coast to explore sites mentioned in Colin Paskin's recent lecture on Cone Shells to the DNHG led to the discovery of a new shelling beach in Dibba Fujairah. A total of five Cone Shells were identified, namely the brown and white *Conus achatinus*, the heavy *C. betulinus*, the beautiful pale yellow *C. quercinus*, the highly venomous *C. textile*, and the geometrically patterned *C. tessulatus*.

The elusive *Terebralia palustris*

A low-tide visit to the mangrove islands of Khor Hulaylah failed to find any living specimens of the large 'Mudcreeper' *Terebralia palustris*, often found at prehistoric

sites around the Emirates, and known to have formed a significant part of the diet of man in this region for many thousands of years.

However, the chance was taken to examine the ecology of the khor, which is likely to be completely infilled over the coming years to make way for an industrial zone.

Gastropods present included the smaller 'Mudcreeper' *Cerithidea cingulata*, from the same Potamididae family as *Terebralia palustris*, as well as *Umbonium vestuarium*, *Lunella coronata* and an unidentified *Trochus* sp. from the Trochoidea superfamily. Also seen in large numbers, but only around the edges of mangrove stands, were *Littoraria intermedia*, climbing up into the lower branches of the mangroves.

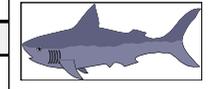
On the return journey to Dubai, a stop was made to examine a shell midden near the new hotel development on the outskirts of Jazirat al Hamrah. This enormous pile of shells, believed to date back some 5,000 years, is made up of discarded shells eaten by man over an extended period of time. Species represented in the midden included large numbers of *Terebralia palustris*, as well as the bivalve *Anadara antiquata*, another species rarely found in the immediate locality today. Also present were the still-common species *Hexaplex kuesterianus*, *Neverita didyma*, along with unidentified *Ostreoidea* sp. and *Veneroidea* sp.

Reports by Neil Curtis

The hunt continues

Meanwhile, Dr Sandy Fowler joined the hunt for the giant mud creeper, *Terebralia palustris*, and has found an apparently recent shell of medium size with an intact aperture from the seashore SW of Jebel Ali, an unexpected location for this species. He and others report that occasional small but fresh-looking specimens continue to turn up at Rams Beach.





—BIRD— —REPORT—



Please send your Bird reports
to Rod Fox

Khor Dubai round-up

News from from Khor Dubai (and my last birding trip out this summer due to a trip abroad) - A martin was present, probably Sand, definitely not House or crag. It might have been a Brown throated! Difficult to say at 300m, sorry. When it landed for 10 seconds the white throat seemed to be conspicuous by its absence. At least 5 yellow-billed storks were still present. Also 600+ flamingos, 20+ stilts, 3 terek sandpipers, 6 black-tailed godwits, 5 oystercatchers, 15 grey plovers (only one in breeding plumage) and 20+ Caspian terns, 10 grey herons and 20+ Western reef herons. Prettiest bird of the day was a lone male ruff with dark crimson neck (ruff).

Report by Dave Sheldon.

—MAMMAL— —REPORT—



Please send your Mammal reports
to Marycke Jongbloed

Arabian Tahr

Since the rediscovery of Arabian tahr by Chris and Tilde Stuart in April 1995, there have been several sightings of the rare little ungulate in various locations far removed from one another.

- April 1995 - female and kid, recorded by photograph, by C&T Stuart
- Fall 1995 - possible sighting of one tahr running with herd of goats, by G Feulner and Martin Parker
- Spring 1997 - male tahr sighted on Jebel Hafeet by Colin Richardson. In a subsequent survey of Jebel Hafeet by C&T Stuart no sign of tahr was found.

- October 1997 - male tahr sighted by Moaz Sawaf and Mubarak Salem high upstream in wadi Hail.
- February 6 1998 - tahr horn found in wadi Heshnah by Moaz Sawaf, now in Sharjah Natural History Museum. Horn looks as if it has been cut off, so presumably the tahr was shot.
- March 23 1998 - a group of 4 tahr sighted by villagers of Mahada in Oman who organised a hunt. Our ALT ranger Mubarak Salem heard of the hunt and went to Mahada. By the time he reached there one male tahr was shot. He then persuaded the hunters to refrain from shooting the others. The male tahr that was shot had a horn missing, but this had occurred before the shooting and must have been due to an accident.

So the good news is, there are still some around, the bad news is that they are still being hunted. Anyone hiking in the mountains regularly should have a good look at tahr photographs and keep an eye out for these rare creatures and report if seen. Do try to take photographs, to serve as an irrefutable record of the presence of an animal.

Caracals

I am sure we do not get all the records of caracals shot or caught. The 1997-1998 season has had positive records of one caracal caught (Ras al Khaimah, February 1998). The ALT tried to acquire the animal for the Breeding Centre, but was asked to pay thousands of dirhams. An appeal to the RAK authorities fell on deaf ears. In view of the injuries it sustained in the gin trap, it is unlikely that the animal survived.

Other killings of caracals recorded:

- One male caracal found hanging 23/12/1997 in Wadi Khab Shamsi, but killed one hour's walk away into Oman. It

was caught in a gin trap and later shot. Report by Moaz Sawaf. He was not allowed to retrieve the skull or carcass. Two other reports came in from the same area, but at rather different times, so it is possible that there were two caracals killed there.

- One caracal killed in Mahada, Oman and brought to the Natural History Museum 23/6/1998 by a UAE national, who retrieved it from the hunter. It is too far gone for taxidermy, but the skeleton will be prepared in due course for display in the museum.

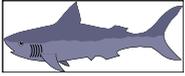
Leopards

Two leopards were reported to have been killed in December 1997 or January 1998 in the northern Musandam. Carcasses were recorded on photo and identified as leopards by Omani authorities in the Environment department. Retrieval of carcasses failed.

Earlier records: One clear leopard footprint was photographed by an expat in wadi Asimah in the fall of 1997. Moaz checked the area subsequently and found out that the leopard's passing had not been noticed by villagers along the wadi.

In August 1997, a leopard was about to be hunted by villagers near Rayy (Oman) - Moaz went there and managed to persuade the villagers that they should forego the hunt. This may be the same leopard that has been sighted on Jebel Sumayni some years earlier and that was seen near Wadi Kaffi (Hatta) in Nov 1996 and could therefore be a resident.

ALT rangers (4 from 2 different tribes) continue to monitor leopards that move in and out of the UAE in the Ru'us al Jibal. There are certainly no more than 4 or 5, if that many.



Satellites used to track marine turtles

In celebration of the International Year of the Ocean, the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency (ERWDA) has announced that its satellite tracking project of marine turtles has begun with the help of a world expert on the aquatic reptiles, who flew in specially from Honolulu, Hawaii, where he is in charge of the Marine Turtle Research Programme at the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Much of ERWDA's funding for the marine turtle project comes from generous financial support by Shell companies in the Emirates.

Satellite tags have now been attached to the carapaces (shells) of two female green turtles in the Ras Al Khaimah area of the UAE. Each female was in potential egg-laying condition and was therefore at least 20 years old. Ras Al Khaimah was chosen as a study site because the turtles are relatively easy to find due to the fact that they are often accidentally caught in nets by fishermen. The researchers took the opportunity to land the sea turtles on the beach where the satellite transmitters were secured. The team is now searching for turtles off Abu Dhabi Emirate to tag so that comparisons can be made with the migration pattern of the Northern Emirate turtles. As sea turtles are not regularly caught in nets off Abu Dhabi, researchers are having to find female turtles coming ashore to nest on islands.

In tagging the turtles, the ERWDA team was instructed by Mr Balazs, who has 26 years of experience on the ecology, conservation biology, life history, and migration strategies of Hawaiian and other Pacific marine turtles. The researchers were fascinated to find that one of the turtles caught had been already conventionally tagged in Oman. The Omani

authorities are being contacted to determine exactly where the turtle was caught and when, but its presence in Ras Al Khaimah appears to indicate that turtles move from the Gulf of Oman around the Straits of Houmuz to the Gulf.

Book reviews

Tribulus vol. 8.1 (Spring 1998) was released in June and is available at DNHG meetings. This issue contains articles on local mantises, the Death's Head hawkmoth, the toxins of the Plain Tiger butterfly, the status of the UAE's rarest breeding birds, and various short reports including ones on the UAE's oldest house and its earliest writing. The price is Dhs 10.

Adventure Oman (Summer 1998) is now available at local newsstands. This issue includes articles on sea kayaking in the Musandam, diving in the Halaniyaat (Kuria Muria) Islands, the Arabian leopard, sand skiing, beachcombing, the Bait Al-Zubair museum of antiques, wreck diving, windsurfing at Masirah, and a Hummer trip in the Empty Quarter. The price is Dhs 15.

Photo Reference Collection

Ian Curtis has kindly donated an assortment of natural history photographs of various local plants and animals taken during his visit to the UAE last Spring. Ian, the brother of *Gazelle* editor Neil Curtis, was a temporary assistant at the Sharjah Natural History Museum, working on the botanical gardens and the herbarium.

Visiting amateur entomologist Graham Giles, who has already favored us with several natural history videos, has also donated a set of photographs of dragonflies of the UAE, which will accompany his guide to UAE dragonflies to be published in the next *Tribulus*.

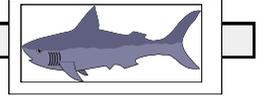
Rare UAE plants excite Edinburgh expert

The DNHG has apparently generated a certain amount of excitement in Edinburgh this year. After spending a month updating the computer data base for the herbarium at the Sharjah Natural History Museum, former member John Martin took some samples for identification to AG Miller of the Botanical Gardens at Edinburgh, co-author of the recent multi-volume *Flora of Arabia*.

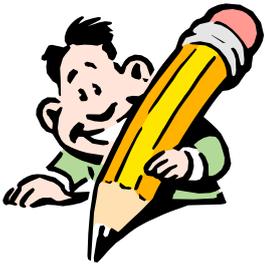
Among other things, John writes: "Sample JM234 [a plant recorded by Gary Feulner from higher elevations in the area between Hayl and Shawkah under the field name 'Razor Scoops'] particularly excited Miller as it is rarely recorded so far east. It is family Sterculiaceae, genus *Melhania*, either *phillipsae* Baker f. or *muricata* Balf f. and has been collected in western Saudi, rarely in Dhofar, and once in Musandam by Mandaville."

And later, Ian Curtis, who visited the UAE last Spring as a botanical assistant at the Sharjah Natural History Museum, wrote to Gary Feulner as follows: "I saw Tony Miller and turned up something very interesting while looking through the specimens I brought back for him. The plant you call 'Spineless Caper' that we collected on the Jebel Masafi trip is almost certainly *Rumex limoniastrum* Jaubert Spach (described in 1844), which is endemic to southeastern Arabia. It has not been collected or recorded for over 150 years and has only ever been collected once, from Jebel Akhdar by the French explorer Aucher-Eloy around 1837."

This plant is seen occasionally on rocky slopes at elevations of around 600 meters and above, from the Masafi area south to Wadi Jizzi. When not in flower, it resembles a cross between the two local mountain capers, *Capparis spinosa* and *Capparis cartilagenia*, but without any spines. Report by Gary Feulner



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Letters to the editor

Crown of Thorns Starfish

A reaction by Peter Vine on the article in the previous Gazette

Regarding the crown of thorns 'outbreak'.... We must be careful of emotive language that misses the point with regard to breeding cycles of tropical marine invertebrates and the natural process of reef development. The very fact that Australia's reefs have indeed enjoyed a process of 'recovery' following the 'outbreaks' that took place in the late 1960s and 1970s underline the fact that sporadic aggregations and population 'explosions' of *Acanthaster planci* are naturally occurring events that reefs have experienced for thousands of years. The fact that

geologists drilling into the Great Barrier reefs have found signs of such aggregations (through *A. planci* skeletal material) thousands of years ago underlines this point.

My own paper in *Atoll Research* bulletin outlines the Natural Causes Theory concerning *A. planci* aggregations and a paper in *Nature* also summarises my views on the hype concerning the Australian outbreaks. These views were particularly unpopular among Australian marine biologists at the time but have been generally and widely accepted as correct today.

Yes, it is true that such aggregations can cause massive local mortality of corals, but at the same time they clean the coral skeletons and create huge new areas for in vertebrate larvae to settle (always in competition of course with rapidly growing algae). It is at this stage that one has to worry not about the Crown of Thorns starfish but about whether a healthy fish population has been left in place to graze the algae. If surgeonfish, wrasse and pomacentrids are plentiful then

they will scrape away at the algae and keep surfaces available for new coral larvae to settle. We showed in the Red Sea that an *Acropora* table can grow to quite sizeable proportions in about ten years and that even after five years the new corals can make quite an impression.

All this is of course about maintaining a balance. The upsurge in *Acanthaster* is much less likely to be caused by Man than the later consequences of such aggregations since it is here that the scales can be so easily tipped between reef recovery and degradation. If reefs have been heavily over-fished then the latter consequence is much more likely. The answer then is to press for protection against fishing in areas where coral reefs are valued for their aesthetic and attractive qualities. It is totally useless to simply remove the starfish and think that that is solving anything. Perhaps people will now listen to the need for proper marine parks and larger no-fishing areas.

Dubai Natural History Group Program

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

- Sep. 13: **'UAE Birdwatching'** - Colin Richardson
Oct. 4: **'The Reluctant Lepidopterist'** - Dr. Michael Gillett
Nov. 1: **'Floral Environments of the UAE'** - Benno Boer

Field Trips - further details to be announced (DNHG members only, please)

- Sep. 25: **Fall Birdwatching** - A visit to diverse sites to sample the Fall migration.
Oct. 22: **Stargazing** - A guided tour of the Fall sky.

Title Surname
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