

GAZELLE

Vol 17 no 4 – April 2002



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

The Environment Research and Wildlife Development Agency in Abu Dhabi has decided to give financial support to **Marijcke Jongbloed** in order to produce the comprehensive Guide to the Wildflowers of the UAE. The book shall contain around 600 species of the annuals and perennials that occur in the UAE and the adjoining areas of Oman (basically the places UAE residents can reach without getting a visa) and shall be illustrated with colour photographs of each of the plants and their details. Wherever it is necessary line drawings will clarify some salient point of recognition of the plants. Marijcke will cooperate closely with other botanical experts such as Prof. Louffy Boulos, Rob Western, Benno Boer, and **Gary Feulner** in order to get the best possible identifications, photographs, and descriptions of plants, habitats and distributions. The project is planned to take 13 months, with publication of the book set for early April 2003.

These same veterans of the DNHG, **Marijcke Jongbloed** and Chairman **Gary Feulner**, can still find time for excitement on a day out in the field. Despite the drought, both of them have continued to turn up new species of plants, shrubs and even trees in various places. Watch for more

details when the expert identifications have been made.

Barbara Couldrey reports the first White-Edged Rock Brown butterfly of the season, on April 12. This butterfly is a non-migratory mountain resident that has a temperate zone life cycle. It "winters over" as a pupa and emerges in the "Spring." Several other butterflies including the Blue Pansy, another common mountain species, and the Caper White, a strong migrant, have been seen in increased numbers over the past month, probably in response to scattered light rain.

Gail Gordon was in Cannes for culture – to watch her son, a dancer, perform – but she nevertheless returned with natural history tales of seagulls mobbing a raptor in the skies over the famous Mediterranean city.

Your editor, **Anne Millen**, will be away for a month in Australia, but don't let that deter you. Send those reports and stories about any natural history subjects for the next issue of *Gazelle*. All members are welcome, indeed encouraged, to contribute, adding interest and preserving your information. And... it will be posted on our website which is being built while you read.

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 Secretary Fi Skennerton) 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.) Membership is valid from September 2001 to September 2002.

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:

Mary Beardwood
Gary Feulner
Marijcke Jongbloed
Sandy Fowler



Field Trips etc ...

First, an important message from Mary Beardwood....

Want a fun job where you get to meet everyone?
 Want to find out where all the great trips are going?
 Want to feel that you have an input into the group's activities?

We are looking for another Field Trip Co-ordinator. So far it hasn't caught anyone's imagination, but there are plenty of you out there who are enjoying field trips and could coordinate them. Helping in field trip organisation is a good way to make sure that this most popular side of the group keeps up the good work. It is not an onerous or difficult job as most field trip leaders like to keep their own tabs on who is joining them.

You are responsible for keeping a diary of up and coming events, so that trips don't clash. It is also a bonus if you are a 'regular' at the monthly DNHG meetings so you can tell people what is happening. And a once-a-month meeting of the Committee is your only other commitment.

So – what about it? There are many chatty, out-going and friendly people on all the field trips. Don't be shy. We need you!

And then the programme....

**East Coast Musandam
 Dhow Trip II, with Lamjid El-Kefi
 April 25-26**

Lamjid's trip is a fantastic chance of see some of the more remote and beautiful fjords of the Musandam Peninsula. Lamjid's dhow, fully equipped with sleeping quarters, will depart at 7 p.m. on Wednesday April 24 from Dibba port. The evening will be spent on deck, gazing at the stars with Lamjid's guidance about the constellations above you as the dhow cruises through the night to Lima.

The next two days are spent exploring areas that are only accessible by sea, beach combing, diving and snorkelling. This is a unique opportunity to visit these areas. (See Mary's description of Lamjid's day trip, on page 3. This is two and a half times as good!)

All meals are provided for a cost of 1,300 Dhs for adults and 850 Dhs for children, for people sleeping in cabins. 50% discount for people sleeping in the quarter cabins or on deck under the stars. You can contact Lamjid at pearl-div@emirates.net.ae for a faxed sheet of further details. Note a deposit of 500.Dhs per head is required to secure your place. This should be sent to Lamjid at P.O. Box 341 Sharjah as soon as possible.

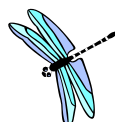


**Visit to Oasis Recycled Paper Factory
 Thursday May 9**

This is an interesting tour and will take place late in case it is a hot day. Meet in the carpark at Spinneys Umm Seqeim at 3.30 pm for a 4 pm arrival at the factory in Al Quoz. Wear sensible shoes and bring your own water. For further details, e-mail Marijcke Jongbloed at mjongbld@emirates.net.ae

**Breeding & Wildlife Centres,
 Sharjah Desert Park
 Late May/ early June.**

This chance to see "behind the scenes" was popular last year. The date will be announced at the next meeting. For registration and details about time and meeting place, e-mail mjongbld@emirates.net.ae



Rams Beach Clean-up

Thanks to those wonderful DNHG members who volunteered to join a Rams Beach clean-up team. Unfortunately, there were only seven of you and we would do better with 70! I was recently up there and was staggered to find that the volume of rubbish on the beach has increased greatly, and it is now an even more daunting task. Added to that, the pontoon bridge would pose some difficulties – you would either be there rather briefly or have to remain from near-low tide to the next near-low. So I think we have to shelve the idea for now and hope for a

Our Next Speaker

Dr. Andrew Gardner earned a BSc (zoology) Edinburgh 1979, and then his PhD studying evolutionary ecology and population systematics of day geckos in the Seychelles (Aberdeen) 1984. He has completed post-doctoral research on Arctic Charr (a salmonid fish) through University College London and was Associate Prof teaching biology / zoology / ecology etc 1987 - 2000 Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman. He was Senior Lecturer in animal science, University of Central Lancashire 2000 - 2001. Currently, he is an Associate Professor, Zayed University.

Andrew's research highlights have been 3 new species of geckos from Oman (all in genus *Asacus*); studying juniper woodlands in Jebel Akhdar from 1992 and produced a series of publications. He is working on the manuscript of a handbook and atlas to the reptiles of UAE and Oman ... hopefully to be published early 2003. He has also published on behavioural genetics of fruit flies, breeding in Trinidad petrels, geckos in Seychelles, and geckos in French Polynesia.



Gubrah Bowl trip

The sixteen participants of the Gubrah Bowl trip met at the Sohar hotel for coffee or lunch before setting out into the Oman mountains. Rustaq was the first stop. Most people went to visit the beautifully renovated fort, but I chose to walk around town a bit, having seen the fort before. Almost immediately I found some interesting plants: the jute plant *Corchorus* - but a variety with much larger flowers and leaves than our local one; *Solanum incanum* a member of the nightshade family with a large purple flower and yellow fruits, and a *Cleome* that was new to me.

It was late afternoon when we reached the camping spot, which was located at the foot of the mountains that form the ring of Gubrah Bowl. It was a very nice spot, but the wildflowers that I had expected were nowhere to be seen. Obviously this part of Oman had had as little rain as we have had the past four years. All was dry, grey and dusty. That did not prevent the group from having a great evening under the stars, singing songs from all over the world. No doubt libations helped.

The next day was a gorgeous day, sunny and hot, and we set out on our wildflower foray. Peter thought there might be more vegetation in a wadi around the back of the mountains, but the countryside remained bleak and barren. I did point out some perennials that were already past flowering, and some annuals that were about 3 mm in height, but so far it was not a highly successful botanical tour!

High up on the mountain side, we saw two villages which had adjoining plantations. We decided to see if we could get there. The plantation of the first village seemed hard to reach so we continued our way up. There the first interesting botanical find occurred: a *Maerua crassifolia* tree in full flower. This species is rare here (I am not sure that it has ever been seen in UAE

territory) but in Gubrah Bowl it is omnipresent. It attracted clouds of Desert White butterflies!

The upper village, called Wakan, had only limited parking place, but we managed to find a spot for each of us. The view from this point was stunning, especially in the early morning when the air was still clear. Mini went into the village to see if we could get permission to see the plantation. It seemed to be no problem and in fact the villagers were very good about having so many strangers invade their privacy. A small path led through the village and a dense pomegranate plantation.

Then fields of wheat appeared and immediately there were dozens of wonderful spring annuals to be seen: a dark pink *Dianthus* (carnation), the yellow buttercup *Ranunculus muricatus*, the vetch *Vicia sativa*, the small purple *Fumaria parviflora* that is very rare here, and dozens of the broomrape *Orobanchae aegyptiaca*, only seen by me once before. I even found a specimen of *Veronica*, which I do not associate with desert climates! Peach trees blossomed and vines with grapes were in evidence. Beans were being harvested, and many other crops were being grown. Mini said that she had never seen such a beautiful oasis before. Children were pulling water bottles on small carts, having filled them at the fresh water spring that runs permanently, we were told. Old men were squatting between the beans to harvest the vegetable. It was a shame that we did not have more time because only a few of us made it to the higher levels of the plantation. I took two rolls of films of pictures, mostly to illustrate the new book.

After an hour or so we had to make it down the mountains again to find a shady place for lunch and allow people enough time to make the long drive back to Dubai. A shady *sidr* tree, next to some fantastic *Maerua* trees, provided a good place to sample Valerie's

amazing carrot cake, after which we split up to go home or go on to the Jebel Akhdar. *Report by Marijke Jongbloed*

Bravo, Lamjid!

On Friday, March 29th a group of 44 people from Dubai Natural History Group were introduced to Lamjid's bold new venture, a 'live-aboard' dhow, which is based at Dibba. Lamjid saw there was a need for a modern version of the traditional dhow which would both give divers a comfortable base to use, and day trippers who wanted to cruise the Musandam, snorkelling and relaxing. Lamjid designed and commissioned a boat that he felt would suit everyone's needs. It is on three levels. Air-conditioned sleeping berths and bathrooms on the lower deck, a sitting room/galley and captain's area with a large seating area for the visitors on the quarter deck, and plenty of space for sun loungers and diving equipment on the top deck. Needless to say, Lamjid has thought about safety, and talked about that aspect before the cruise started. Life jackets were available for everyone should the need arise.

We were welcomed aboard with breakfast, hot coffee and croissants and stood on deck, watching a fish auction in Dibba harbour. The fisherman rushed in with their night's catch where a group of buyers were awaiting them. One Omani stepped forward to take the role of auctioneer. Lively bidding was over in a few minutes and the fish were loaded into waiting cool boxes. There seemed to be some large kingfish for sale, barracuda, a few hamour and one shark - but it was noticeable that these were not big catches. We then set off for our day's cruise and were shown two villages. The first had a perilous road down to the village, but the second was only accessible from the sea. Small stone houses, still inhabited, showed the style of building before the arrival of modern materials and conveniences. Cheerful locals waved.



Field Clips ...

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

Later we anchored and most people took the opportunity to snorkel over the coral reef. If anyone had not thought to bring snorkels, masks and flippers that was no problem. There was enough equipment for everyone to use. Hard and soft corals formed the reef and there was a wide variety of reef fish. Lamjid has designed a diving platform that is easy to use – none of the leaping off from a precarious ladder, as is the way that swimmers enter the water from ordinary dhows. A hot lunch of tuna, chicken, salads and rice was being prepared in the galley which was quite delicious and gave us all a chance to chat and get to know other members of the group on board.

Two experienced divers are joining the staff this week to organise the venture and they were able to tell us of the future plans for the dhows. There is a second dhow on its way already and they are hoping to build up their clientele from dive and tour companies, as well as hotels in the Emirates. Finally we steamed back to Dibba with rain clouds hovering overhead. Everyone agreed the day had been superbly organised. We had all had a fun-filled, relaxing day. Wonderful job, Lamjid.

Lamjid is offering a second trip on 24th – 26th April, details in Gazelle, which will cover more ground around the Musandam. His contact numbers are pearldiv@emirates.net.ae or 050 4815068 if you want to receive more details. There is no need to wait for DNHG to organise it for you – just contact Lamjid direct.
Report by Mary Beardwood

Out of Africa: Al Maha Desert Drive

The desert near the Al Maha resort has had no rain for several years, apart from a thunderstorm in mid-2000. This, combined with heavy grazing pressure from camels, meant that the flora was limited. Near a long-established plantation and camel camp on a broad sand flats, Sodom's Apple *Calotropis procera* and the Desert Squash *Citrullus colocynthis* were abundant, but little else. Further into the desert the principal shrub was the Fireworks bush *Leptadenia pyrotechnica*, in which gazelle sometimes shelter. A few dense, grazed shrubs of the Desert Thorn *lycium shawii*, looking like sculptures bonsai, somehow managed to bear fruit, small red berries decorating their interior. At a camel camp situated among some rolling, *ghaf* tree covered dunes, we were sad to see that most of the *ghafs* had been severely cropped for fodder. No one could say whether these large trees, whose roots can extend for more than 60 meters, could survive this intensive, non-traditional cropping.

After a coffee stop, Peter van Amsterdam and Anne Millen demonstrated once again why they are among our most popular trip leaders. "Would you like to see oryx?" Peter asked. Silly question. Peter had ordered up a herd of 25 or so Arabian oryx, waiting for us along the Al Maha fence, including juveniles of several ages, coloured from beige (the youngest) to white. Enroute we watched a small squadron of European bee-eaters mob a still-unidentified eagle. "So you like antelope?" said Peter. And off we headed for a detour to the menagerie of one of the Dubai sheikhs at Marqab, to see some African species including Baisa oryx (native to North Africa), Eland, Sable, and several gazelle species including Arabia's own *reem* or sand gazelle. The main attraction, however, was the flock of ostriches, all a bit the worse for

wear, most with bald rumps from (it seemed) picking flies or other parasites off each other.

The wind rose at lunchtime, giving added meaning to the term "sand"wich. Having tested the group in action, Peter and Anne headed off track after lunch. It was instructive to watch their well coordinated teamwork. At one problematic passage in some high dunes, Anne carefully scouted hundreds of metres on foot, only to turn and find Peter right behind her with the car. Gaynor Mulholland was making her very first desert drive and turned in a superb performance, getting herself into and out of several tricky situations on soft slopes and ridges. The Usshers made their own thrills. Dared by his wife and son John, and with the end in sight, Anthony took on a ski jump and made a perfect three-point landing - front wheels dug in and one rear wheel waving in mid-air. Rescue awaited many photographs for the family album. Margaret and Lothar Trinogga were more notable for their measured calm, matched only by their gear, which won the day's award for best tie-downs. With the wind still picking up, Peter and Anne wisely elected an exit via a gravelled track through the big dune patches north of the Shuwayb Dam. *Report by Gary Feulner*

UAE Fish Website

There is quite a lot of information about UAE natural history subjects on the web. Mark Beech of the University of York, who is currently engaged in a study of animal bones (and particularly fish bones) found in association with UAE archaeological sites, maintains a web site titled "UAE Fishes: A Web Guide". It is located at:

<http://www-users.york.ac.uk/mjb117>



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Plants - Valerie Chalmers

Mammals - Marijcke Jongbloed

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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.

Shelling Trip of 15 March

An ideally sized group of shellers met up on Khor Fakkan corniche at 10.30 am to witness Sandy being 5 minutes late for the first time in 10 years! They were briefed on a selection of at least three other beaches to visit, and started shelling only 25 yards from the cars. With a reasonable reward from the corniche beach, including some cones (Conidae) and sundial shells (Architectonidae), graffiti beach (now signposted Lulayya village) was next tackled and, although there was a disappointing lack of cones to be found, Sandy Fowler managed to spot a small paper nautilus high up on the beach. Further up the coast was the third beach, close to Sandy Beach Motel. This one lived up to its nickname (Wentle cove) with three wentletraps (Epitoniidae) of two species being found as well as four cowry species. A hot sun and little wind were by this time weeding out the saner members of the group, but some pressed on northwards to check out another two beaches. Unfortunately, little of note was found on them.

It was a good day, that seemed to be thoroughly enjoyed by all.

Thanks to Sandy Fowler

ENHG Abu Dhabi - DNHG Fossil Trip to Jebel Rawdah

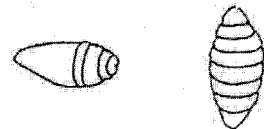
Thirty members of the Dubai Natural History Group set out, in convoy, from the International World Trade Centre Hotel covered car park on January 18th 2002, to visit Jebel Rawdah which is not far from Madam and lies to the left of the road which runs from Madam to Hatta. They were joined at the Madam roundabout by ten members of the Emirates Natural History Group, Abu Dhabi, who had camped overnight at Jebel Buhays. At Jebel Rawdah, late Cretaceous marine sediments directly overlie ophiolite on the northern side and, at the south-eastern end they rest on deformed and steeply dipping sedimentary rocks of the Hawasina group.

First, we visited the south-eastern end to look for fossils. After a briefing and the distribution of fossil identification sheets, we set out to see what we could find. A good selection of fossils was collected over a period of an hour and a half.

GASTROPODS - A flattened gastropod e.g. Trochacea



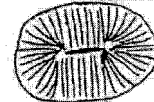
GASTROPODS - Other shapes



PROTOZOA - FORAMINIFERA Loftusia sp.



CORALS - SOLITARY e.g. Cunnolites (Cyclolites)

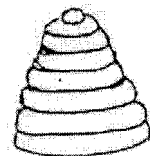


Lots of gastropods including nine specimens of the flattened type *Trochacea*, several specimens of *Acteonella*, many *Natica*, two specimens of the large gastropod *Campanile*, several olives, members of the Strombidae plus other assorted shapes were found.

BIVALVES e.g. Cockle (*Granocardium*)



GASTROPODS - *Campanile* sp. - Large gastropod



GASTROPODS *Natica* sp.



The bivalves found included *Neithea*, lophate oysters, mussels, cockles and at least fifteen specimens of *Scabrotrigonia*

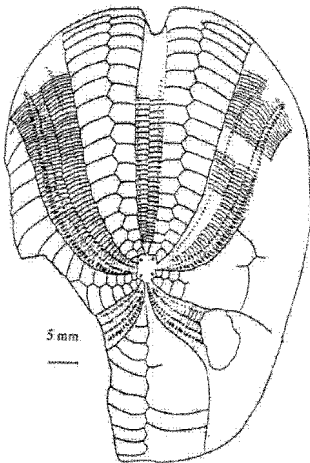


(Trigonidae). A few specimens of rudists (a special type of bivalve, now extinct) were also seen. These included *Durania* and a few specimens of hippuritids.

Many specimens of the solitary discoidal (almost button-like) coral *Cunolites* plus colonial corals were seen. Specimens of the larger benthic foraminifera *Loftusia* (cigar-shaped) and *Nummulites* were also found. One specimen of *Deltoidonautilus* which belongs to the Cephalopods and has low, relatively shallow and lobed suture lines compared with the more strongly folded suture lines of *Ammonites* was found.

Jebel Rawdah has been a good place to find specimens of echinoderms and those found included *Globator*, *Conulus*, *Coenholectypus*, *Hattopsis*, *Faujasia*, *Nucleopypus*, *Vologesia rawdahensis*, *Mecaster victoris* and *Goniopygus*. One fish tooth was also found.

Hemipneustes arabicus



After an identification session, some members made their respective ways back to Dubai and Abu Dhabi. The rest of us drove round the back of Jebel Rawdah for lunch and then spent a short while looking for fossils there. Of note, one specimen of the large echinoid *Hemipneustes arabicus* and one of *Orthopsis miliaris* were found in addition to further specimens of fossils already found at the first site. Thanks to Valerie Chalmers, Fossil Recorder

Fringe-Toed Lizards

Watch closely. The UAE has not just one or two, but five species of fringe-toed lizards (all *Acanthodactylus* species). In fact, south-eastern Arabia seems to represent a centre of evolutionary radiation for this group, all of which have fine, comb-like teeth on the longest toes of their hind feet. All are diurnal (active by day), although they are not necessarily seen during the heat of the day in summer. Their habits are not well known but at least four of them are reported to rely heavily on ants as prey. This seems a relatively good strategy for a daytime desert forager, since ants are prominent among the diurnal, ground-dwelling desert insects.

Three UAE species of fringe-toed lizards, *A. schmidti*, *A. gongrorhynchatus* and *A. haasi*, are sand dwellers. Their habitats appear to overlap, being vegetated sand, although *A. schmidti* (the aptly named white-spotted lizard) is by far the most common and may be the most at home in dune areas. It has lots of closely spaced white spots on a skin about the colour of milk coffee.

A. gongrorhynchatus has been seen regularly (if not spelled regularly) over the years in the Sweihan and Al-Hayer areas, but has also been reported throughout western Abu Dhabi. It can be distinguished by its bold brown longitudinal stripes on a pale body and by its blue-white tail, which is often in motion as if signaling.

A. haasi is much rarer, having been reported only twice, from the coastal plain of western Abu Dhabi. The only photo published locally shows a sand-colored animal marked with pale grey-brown spots and stripes. It is thought that this species may be inactive during the winter. All of the sand dwellers live in inconspicuous burrows whose opening is just a semicircular slit.

A. ophiodurus has been found in

the UAE only on hard sandy plains near Al-Ain and *A. boskianus* is thought to be limited to the boundary area between the sands and the gravel outwash plains from the Hajar Mountains. DNHG member Peter Cunningham of Al-Ain has published observations on the behavior of *A. ophiodurus*, which in summer emerges only in the morning and stays underground at temperatures above 40 degrees.

For all of these species, however, their presence and distribution is not well studied, especially in the Northern Emirates, so your careful observations can make a contribution. As always, a pair of binoculars that can focus at short distance (3-4 metres) permits closer observation without spooking the subjects. Unfortunately, it remains difficult for non-specialists to distinguish most of the rarer species using available guides, so patience and careful observation are recommended. Of course your photographs, if possible, can help to remedy that situation.

A final tip: Don't confuse these fringe-toed lizards with the (usually) much smaller *Mesalina* lizards (two species) found on firm sand and gravel areas along the mountain front and at the coast. Report by Gary Feulner



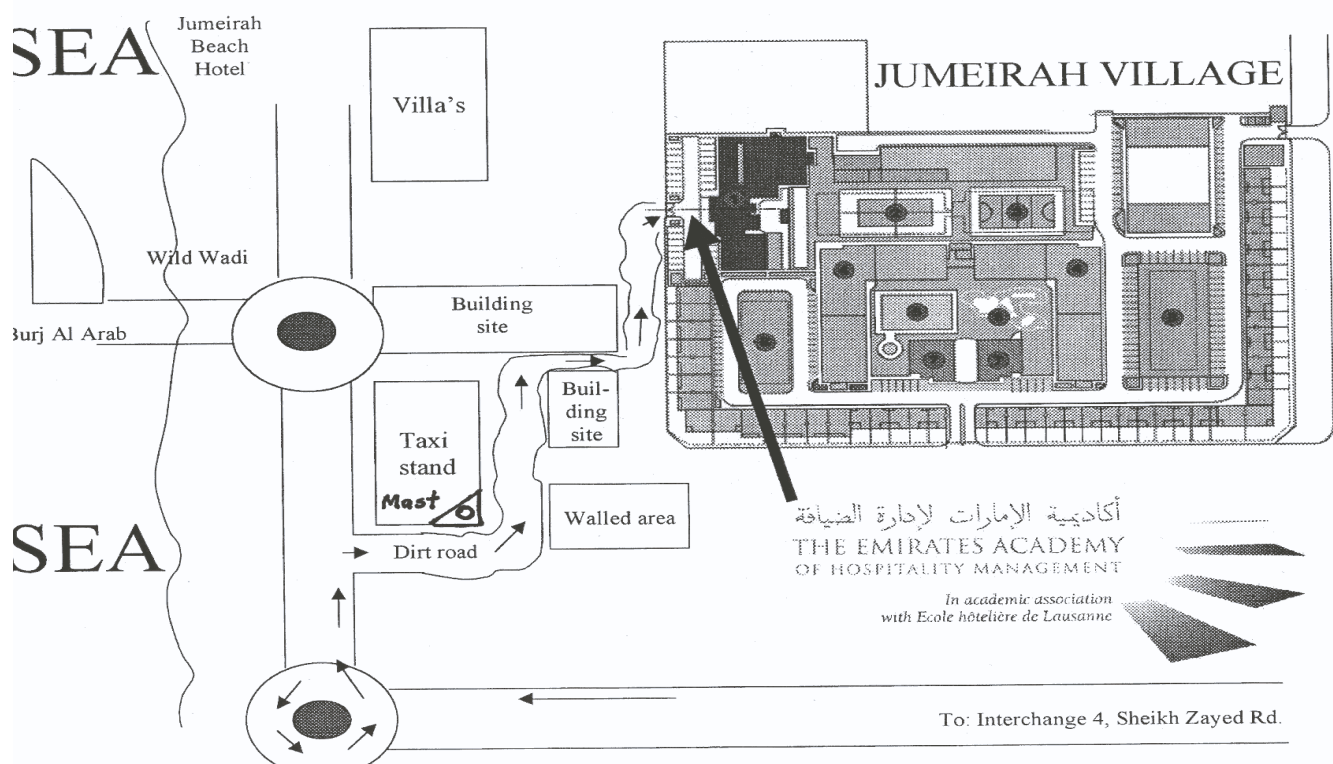
Bird Watch

Reminder: You can follow the action week-by-week in Twitchers' Guide, www.uaeinterac.com, and you can report to Twitchers' Guide via Simon Aspinall and Peter Hellyer at hellyer@emirates.net.ae or Colin Richardson at colinr@emirates.net.ae.



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EMIRATES ACADEMY OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT



Dubai Natural History Group Programme

Lectures at Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management (see map p.7), 7.30 for 8.00pm

May 5: The Natural History of the Jebel Akhdar – Drew Gardner

June 2: Member's Night: [Short presentations by members]

Medicinal Plants of Greece – Helena Reichert

Archeology of the Mileiha Area, Sharjah – David Palmer

And more.....

June 13 Annual end-of-season dinner, with photographic competition and quiz

Field Trips (DNHG members only, please).

April 18-19 Siir Bani Yas with David Snelling

April 25-26 Musandam Weekend Cruise with Lamjid El-Kefi

May 9 Oasis Paper Recycling Factory with Marijcke Jongbloed

Late May/
early June Breeding and Wildlife Centres, Sharjah Desert Park