

GAZELLE

Committee Comments

Our December speaker on bees, Jos Schoenmakers, is one of those individuals who has allowed his avocation to become his vocation, and his career as a beekeeper in various places around the world has clearly been a labor of love. Thanks to Jos for taking time out from his busy schedule with Animal Management Consultants to share his interest with us.

Please remember that our January and February 1998 meetings will each be held a week late, i.e., on the second Sunday of the month, in order to avoid the New Year's and Eid Al-Fitr holidays, respectively.

The DNHG's Annual General Meeting and elections will be held in March 1998. Much of the current Committee has served for almost three years, but we recognize that the group benefits from new blood, new ideas. The Committee and its roles are not fixed in stone. We can often tailor positions to suit. If you would like to serve on the Committee, please make your name known to one of the current members. We would particularly welcome individuals interested in serving as Membership Secretary (1 or 2), Speaker Coordinator, Publisher, and Field Trip Coordinator.

Our next speaker

Dr Reza Khan is Director of the Dubai Zoo, and has a career spanning zoology, biology and

natural history stretching over some 20 years. Dr Khan graduated from Dhaka University, Bangladesh, in Zoology, then went on to complete his PhD at Bombay University. He worked as a lecturer in Bangladesh from 1971 to 1983, before taking up a post as Curator of Birds and Animals at Al Ain Zoo in 1983. He was in charge of Dubai Zoo from 1989 to 1991, since when he has been head of Dubai Municipality's Zoo Section.

In addition to the above, Dr Khan has also written over 50 scientific publications on the wildlife and environment of Bangladesh and the UAE. He is a member of numerous groups, including the Species Survival Commission of the IUCN and the World Commission on Parks and Protected Areas, and was formerly Vice Chairman of the DNHG.

Program

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

- January 11: **'UAE Reptiles'** by Dr. Reza Khan
 February 8: **'The World of Microbes'** by Dr. Bill Dibb
 March 1: **'Falcons and Falconry'** by Dr. David Remple

Field Trips: further details on page 3

- Friday January 16: **Luban's Choice: Jebel Sumayni**
 A scenic and challenging mountain hike
 Friday January 23: **Into the Grand Canyon: Wadi Sharm**
 An easy nature walk, in a 'wet' wadi south of Jebel Hatta



Members' news

Former DNHG Chairman **Dr. Alan Dickson** has begun yet another career. In recent weeks he has been featured as an American farmer in local billboard and print advertisements for canned fruits and vegetables from California. Says Alan, "It helps my 'green' image."

Gazelle Editor **Neil Curtis** was the author of a piece called 'The Lost Tribes of Leopard Country' which appeared recently in the *Gulf News' Friday* magazine. In it, Neil describes the changes that modern times have brought to the high villages of the Musandam region. His hard earned photos reveal the stark beauty of these terraced mountain refuges. This is the first of a monthly series of environmental articles, with remuneration being donated to the Arabian Leopard Trust.

Lamjed El-Kefi was among those injured in a serious boating accident at Mina Khalid in Sharjah in late November, which has left him temporarily sidelined. Lamjed is a longtime DNHG member and has been a speaker on both underwater life and astronomy. We wish him a speedy recovery.

Recently arrived in Dubai, **Stephen Green** and son **Adam** have mostly been settling in. However, they have so far collected 8-10 species of land molluscs (snails and slugs) from urban Dubai and Jebel Ali, which have been sent off to the UK for positive identification. Their first desert outing was a bonanza. Among other things, they found several centipedes, towerhead grasshoppers and a stick insect, as well as a baby sawscale viper under a large shell near the coast. Steve caught the viper in a handkerchief (not the recommended procedure) and took it to Christian

Gross for identification. Christian remarked on their good luck: he says he's encountered only five in the desert in many years of looking.

Around the Emirates

Environment on the Web

ERWDA's web site can be found at <http://www.erwda.gov.ae>. Information on the National Avian Research Center has been incorporated into this site. You may be particularly interested to note that a list of publications produced by ERWDA's staff is shown.

Abu Dhabi houbara tracked to China and back

The Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency's (ERWDA) National Avian Research Center (NARC) has announced that it tracked a houbara bustard to China and back. The houbara was caught and satellite tagged in Abu Dhabi Emirate in February this year, flew to China for the summer breeding season and has now returned to Abu Dhabi Emirate for the winter season. Between its wintering and breeding grounds this bird traveled a staggering 12,300km.

The male houbara weighing 1950g was caught on the 26th of February 1997, in the Baynunah area in the Western region of Abu Dhabi, with the help of the Wildlife Rangers and a specially trained falcon, whose beak and talons had been disarmed so that it didn't injure the houbara in capture. After the bird's release, the tiny transmitter, weighing only 35g, then sent signals that the bird left the UAE on the 26 March 1997. Researchers were then able to plot the houbara's journey on a Geographical Information System, showing that the bird traveled 6600km in 54 days, stopping 4 times and crossing 4 countries; Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, before settling in the Xinjiang province of China.

Wanted - natural history journalists!

This newsletter is for you - and about you. Contributions are always welcome, and should be faxed to the editor on 354 258, or even better still e-mailed to <neilc@emirates.net.ae> Member news can make interesting 'news in briefs', as can 'Field Clips' - any sightings you have made while travelling around the region. And for couch potatoes - why not take out a book from the DNHG library and write a review about it for the book page? Lastly, we are currently looking into the possibility of including photos in *Gazelle*, so if you have any



ENHG Abu Dhabi Lecture Programme

Cultural Foundation, Airport Road, Abu Dhabi. &.30 for an 8.00pm start.

Tues 6 January - Wild South Africa, Steve James

Tues 20 January - Sustainable Agricultural Development, John Peacock

Excursions

Please contact a member of the Abu Dhabi committee before planning to join, as spaces are often limited for safety reasons, or simply to ensure that trips aren't spoilt by huge crowds. Trips are for Natural History Group members only.

8-9 January - Camping trip to Wadi Sumaini area (Contact Steve James)

Thurs 22 January - Birdwatching at Al Ghar, followed by Desert Astronomy (Contact Steve James)



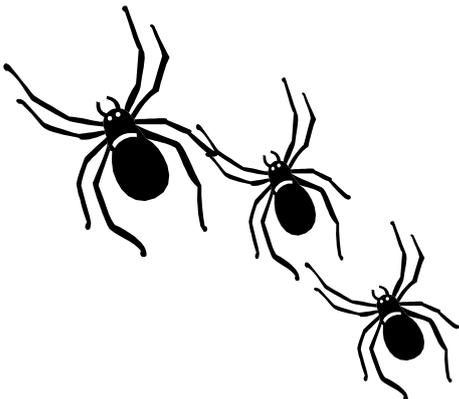
Field Trips

Jebel Sumayni Friday, Jan. 16

Luban and Liba Mrhac will lead a full-day hike to scenic Jebel Sumayni (1,073m) on the mountain front near Shuwayb, south of the Madam roundabout. This will be an energetic day in an area without established trails, so participants should be relatively experienced uphill and downhill hikers.

The total ascent is about 660m and we will be hiking for 9 hours. Bring boots or sturdy shoes, a bona fide day pack, minimum 4 liters of water (3 to carry) and pack lunch, a torch in case of delay due to adversity, plus camera, binoculars, etc. Due to the likelihood of wind at the summit and the possibility of rain, a light anorak or windbreaker is recommended. Leather gloves are also recommended due to sharp rocks in some places.

Meeting point is the traffic sign 'Mahdah 64 km' which is about 17 km from Madam roundabout on the Dubai-Hatta road. This point is a minimum of 75 minutes from downtown Dubai, non-stop. Depart from there at 7:30 sharp! 4WD is required for the last few kilometers. Estimated return to Dubai c.7:00 pm. Maximum 12 people. Call Luban or Liba for further information, sign-up, and 4WD logistics at 690362 (afternoons/evenings).



The Grand Canyon of Wadi Sharm Friday, Jan. 23

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. En route we will stop to observe some of the most characteristic natural phenomena that can be seen along the graded track from Raudah to Mahdah.

Bring sturdy shoes, water (3 liters), and pack lunch, plus camera, binoculars, hand lens etc. 4WD required. Depart Dubai 7:00am, estimated return to Dubai c.7:00pm. Maximum 20 people. Call Gary Feulner for further information, sign-up and logistics at 313 320 x500 (off) or 306 5570 (res).

Field Trip Policies

DNHG Field Trips are cooperative educational and exploratory ventures by group members. They are also good fun. Field trips are open to DNHG members and members of other UAE natural history groups. We can also accommodate the occasional out-of-town guest with a bona fide interest in natural history.

Many field trips, especially to natural sites, impose limitations on the number of participants. This is necessary in order to maintain the desired quality of the field trip experience. We very much regret the occasional inability to accommodate all interested participants, and we hope that members understand the underlying rationale. This means, however, that members who sign up for a field trip may be depriving someone else of a place. In these instances your decision to participate should entail your commitment, since last minute 'no-shows' may result in desired places going unused.

Correction

The November 1997 issue of the *Gazelle* contained a diagram showing several specimens of green algae collected by Valerie Chalmers from Wadi Sfani. The caption described these as 'single-celled plants that build a shell made of silica.' That description applies not to green algae but to diatoms, which were also collected and diagrammed by Valerie, but were not included in the published diagram.

'Spring' is here!

The unseasonal rains of October and November have resulted in an unseasonal profusion of local plant and animal life. As a result, the year-end holiday season should be an excellent time to for natural history excursions to local parks and wild areas.



Membership

Membership Secretary Anne-Marie Bui reports that we now have more than 100 memberships for 1997-98, including family memberships. This is equivalent to 150 or more individuals. We welcome news or other reports from each of you, and look forward to seeing you at meetings and on



Field Clips

Best Preserved Pottery Kiln

Former member John Martin, visiting as an archeological field assistant, joined Barbara Couldrey and Gary Feulner last month for a hike in Wadi Sha'am, Ras Al-Khaimah. In a large abandoned village area John spied a lined, cylindrical stone-walled structure which proved to be a pottery kiln. The walls of the main chamber are still intact to a height of more than five feet. Portions of the mud brick interior lining remain, along with remnants of the interior platform that supported the pottery to be fired. This is thought to be the best preserved pottery kiln in the UAE. John noted, however, that it remains unknown how the traditional kilns were roofed, and the Wadi Sha'am example does not answer this question. Also observed in the same village area were several mosques and a large graveyard consisting of more than 150 oval graves of an unusual type, outlined in large stones and filled with smaller stone and gravel to a height of 6 to 9 inches above ground.

Gazelle update

An afternoon run into the area inland from Jebal Ali yielded the best sightings to date of gazelle. Altogether 14 animals were sighted although footprints (or perhaps hoof prints) suggested the presence of at least 24. The most rewarding sighting of the day was a family group of seven, the largest group we have encountered so far. It could be the recent early rains which have encouraged the larger groups to form, or is it perhaps the rutting season? Answers please if anyone knows.

A later find of prints showed that a group of at least six animals had passed that area very recently. It should be added that whilst none of the group were actually seen, it must certainly have been a large

one.

The actual sightings were a single animal, a pair, the group of seven, another group where only three were sighted but prints suggested six animals, and finally another single gazelle. All animals seen seemed to be in good condition and appeared less wary than those previously encountered.

A visit to the rocky outcrop which was mentioned in the last report revealed no further spent bullet or cartridge cases. We are not too hopeful that hunting has ceased (see below), but we keep our fingers crossed....

Report by Jim Footit

Deadly Coincidence?

Gary Feulner reports with concern that on each of the last two occasions when he has seen gazelle in the Hajar Mountains (June 1995 and December 1997, in the UAE and neighboring Oman), he has also encountered local hunters entering the area in late afternoon - otherwise a very rare experience.

Hike to summit of Jebal Muqayleet

A small group of explorers tackled Jebal Muqaleet in Northern Oman on the last day of October, ably led by DNHG chairman Gary Feulner. The mountain is believed to be the highest peak between the Akhdar massif and the Ru'us al Jibaal, and was approached from a track branching southwards from the Al Ain - Sohar road. The route followed a wadi through the mountains, leading almost to the peak itself, with the final section comprising a rough scramble over the coarse gabbro rocks of the area.

Observed along the route were several plant species not usually seen inside the borders of the UAE, notably *Acridocarpus orientalis*, a large, leafy shrub from the malpighace family seen with yellow flowers over the summer months, and *Sageretia spiciflora*, another large shrub with 2cm spikes, small dark green ovate leaves and greyish

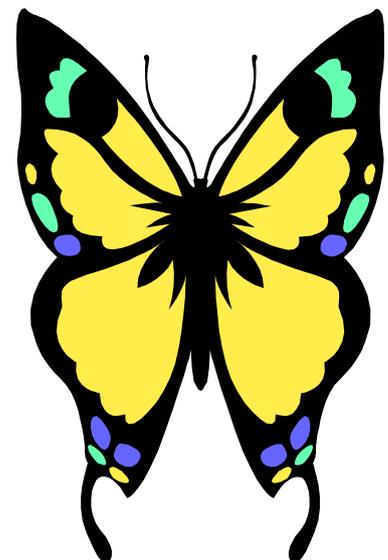
wood.

Also seen were numerous *Olea africana* olive trees, many of them in full fruit. Unlike the cultivated European olive, the fruit are tiny and not usually eaten by people, although there are reports of mountain tribesmen using them as animal feed. The fruit are very juicy, leaving a bright purple stain on the fingers, and small piles of olive stones were seen in the vicinity of the trees, presumably the leftovers from birds feeding.

Another shrub occurring at higher altitudes was provisionally identified as *Myrtus communis*. The plant had attractive purple-tinged wood, narrow dark green spatulate leaves, and orange berries encased in a soft furry case.

A last plant species of note remains unidentified, although provisionally named 'Sunflower chrozophora' by Gary Feulner. Initially confused with *Aerva javanica*, the plant was increasingly common at higher altitudes, growing up to around 70cm. The plant had soft furry leaves, which glistened in the sunlight, most of which were neatly folded in half upwards along the central vein. The stem was thinly covered in fur, which revealed a ruby red wood when rubbed off, and the tips of many broken stems on the plants showed up as distinctive red dots.

The climb up the mountain took approximately six hours, at a very





Field Trip Reports

Jebel Qatar Hike

Friday 7 November

Jebel Qatar is the imposing and sheer-sided plateau that overlooks Fossil Valley and Al-Ain. It stands several hundred meters above the plain and is readily visible -- tantalizing but remote -- from the south end of the Dubai-Al-Ain road. A full complement of members made the ascent by a northern route never before used by the DNHG. This ensured some surprises, including several early waterfall climbs not advertised in the trip description.

Success remained in doubt until, near the base of the main escarpment, we picked up a disused donkey trail. From the top, we had a view not only of the plateau, but of the gravel plains and sand desert stretching out to the north and west, and of Fossil Valley, Al-Ain, Buraimi and Jebel Hafit. Exploration of the plateau revealed that it is extensively dissected by three main watersheds, each ending in a long hanging waterfall. Crossing these watersheds added more than a few ups and downs to the journey. Our reward was lunch in a cool, smooth, water-carved grotto beside the falls above the Hanging Gardens. Despite trip leader Gary Feulner's fearsome reputation, some members even found time for a nap after lunch.

One of the purposes of this field trip was to serve as an introduction to hiking in the mountains of the UAE and Oman, including the general absence of trails, the effects of heat, the absence of water, the need for occasional scrambling or even rock climbing, and the need, ultimately, to summon the energy to get back down at the end of the day. These factors should not be underestimated. In this instance, most participants were regular hikers and all agreed that it had been both a challenging and interesting day.

Special thanks are due to Mike Lorrigan and Catherine Al-Halyan for scouting the way at a number of points, to Salah Al-Halyan for

information and reminiscences from his own youthful visits to the mountains of Ras Al-Khaimah, to Jacques Pasqualides for serving as "sweep" for most of the day, to Rod Fox for bird sightings, including the rare hooded wheatear, to Luban Mrhac for photographing our progress from as many vantage points as possible, and to Anne-Marie Bui for dutifully investigating the only 'pond life' that we encountered -- the contents of a small pothole that contained what appeared to be mosquito larvae and pupae in various stages of growth.

Report by Gary Feulner

Hajar Mountains Wadi

Friday 21 November

Friday was a fine fresh day for this relaxed exploration of a wadi in the Hajar foothills, though we did keep an eye on the billowing white clouds in an otherwise clear blue sky. The showers and overcast skies on the Thursday had decided us against the camping planned for that night.

Twelve trekkers left the Hilton covered car park at the respectable time of 8.40 am in two 4WDs plus Honda and Mercedes saloons and headed off along the road to Hatta. About 9km past the Omani outpost we took the turnoff to Mahda on the right. The recent heavy rains had washed away some sections of this gravel road but all vehicles were able to negotiate the detours. Two more joined us and fourteen took off on a gentle saunter up the wadi.

The exceptional rains had washed down the dust and produced an autumn flush of fresh green new growth. Along the highway and beside the unsealed road to Mahda large areas of the gravel plains were covered in a film of green. In the foothills we spotted a few of the delicate red-stemmed *Boerhavia elegans*, a slightly luminous pink red haze on the dark rock ledges. In the wadi areas some shrubs and trees were in full flower. One large *Zizyphus spina-christi* tree, about 5 metres, was in full bloom with a delicate perfume similar to lime tree flowers or

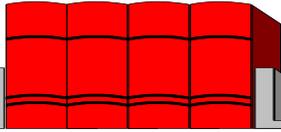
wintergreen - this species is abundant in lower wadis and rocky foothills, and has edible berries which are still collected in remote communities. Another plant having a beautiful perfume when the leaves were crushed and sporting a tiny delicate mauve flower was *Salvia macilenta*. A low shrub with long oval grey-green leaves and a small deep pink pea flower, *Tephrosia apollinea*, was also prolific in this area.

There were large, clear pools along the length of the wadi alive with toads, brilliant red dragonflies, the colourful yellow and reddish-brown wasp *Vespa orientalis* and flies. The latter two were most prevalent at the lunchplace we chose alongside a deep pool and under a *Zizyphus*. A curious wasp climbed up the sleeve of an unsuspecting person who, in fact, was well coated in insect repellent. It struck when disturbed. Someone whipped out an anti-sting swab from a compact first-aid kit and the small area of blistering and the pain, which extended down the arm, subsided after a couple of hours and had all but disappeared after a few days.

On the way out of the wadi we spotted a lizard about 18 inches long and well-camouflaged among the pale dusty-coloured rocks, believed it to be the spiny-tailed 'dhub' *Uromastix microlepis*, as pictured in *The Living Desert* (p.72). This same book also helped to settle a discussion regarding the identification of a Water Scorpion, which at first we thought was a Giant Waterbug. Its "stinger", being the breathing tube extending to the water surface, decided the issue.

The day was relaxing both for the experienced trekker and the novice - one walker had lived in Abu Dhabi for 22 years and never ventured up a wadi. For some it opened up a new area for future camping and picnics. The drive from Dubai took only about 75 minutes, making it an easy day trip. We were home by dusk.

Report by Glenice Aitken



Book Report

Library news

The DNHG Library has been moved to the residence of Beryl Comar & Sandy Fowler, behind the now-closed Abela Supermarket in Jumeirah. Tel: 442242.

Outgoing Librarian Carolyn Lehmann has prepared an updated index of materials available in the DNHG Library (primarily for your benefit and enjoyment), which will be available at meetings. Pick up your copy on December 7th.

From the Former Librarian . . .

Finding and collecting printed material pertinent to the interests of DNHG has been a challenging but enjoyable job. 'Library' is still a rather term for our modest collection of reference material but, as you will see by the latest list of items, it continues to grow. Many people have kindly donated material and we encourage all of you to think of the DNHG collection before disposing of unwanted publications on flora, fauna, UAE/Gulf history and heritage, etc.

However, a big disappointment has been the lack of interest in the collection by DNHG members; visitors, professionals, journalists, and others, have used the Library far more.

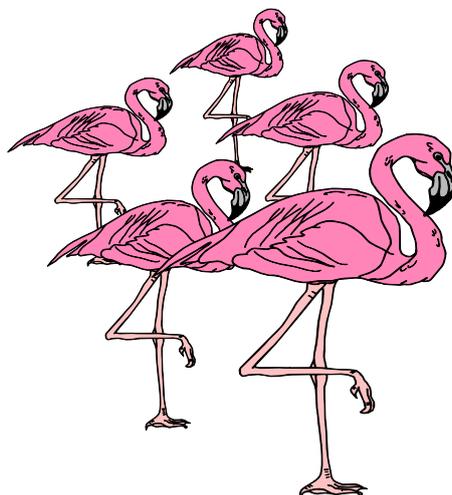
Our thanks and gratitude to Beryl Comar for enthusiastically volunteering to take over the duties and responsibilities of overseeing the reference collection. Beryl plans to catalogue the material and put it on a database. She also has new ideas for book reviews, etc., hoping to generate more usage and enjoyment of some very interesting reading material.

Al Ghar, Abu Dhabi

For those of you keen to explore new places around the Emirates, Al Ghar might make an interesting day trip from Dubai. Just 40 km inland from Abu Dhabi city centre, it is sandwiched between the Abu Dhabi to Al Ain truck road, a large infill site alongside that road, and the Mafraq Sewage Treatment Works. Not, you would think, a likely spot to attract nature lovers, but you would be wrong.

Al Ghar, whose lower areas were originally sabkha, has saline water in considerable quantity, providing a variety of habitats with lakes, reed beds and even streams lying among the desert dunes. Birds are encouraged in large numbers and considerable variety by the habitat itself and food in the form of brine shrimps which live in the saline water.

Al Ghar is not quite a natural haven, because man has lent a hand. Thanks to the efforts of Abu Dhabi Municipality's Sewerage Projects Committee, the water in the lakes is kept at a more or less constant level throughout the year, by diverting some of the water from Al Wathba fodder fields which would otherwise drain as waste water into the sea. The reed beds are watered occasionally and the stream, which originates accidentally as the result of a burst pipe, is kept flowing in a controlled manner.



A contractor working on the extension to the sewage works provided machinery and manpower to construct the islands in one of the lakes. It was hoped that the islands, surrounded by a deep-water channel, would provide a safe haven for flamingos to breed, but even with the addition of manmade nests, the birds have not yet taken the hint. However, there have been flamingos present on the lakes throughout the summer of 1997, so perhaps next year instead of just strutting up and down they will get to the serious business of pairing up, building their own nests, laying eggs and rearing young ones.



Meanwhile, the islands attract flamingos and other birds right in front of of the birdwatching hides, again provided by a contractor working around the site. The hides, made from huge packing cases, offer a cool and shady viewing position without disturbing the birds. The walk from the main track through Al Ghar to the hides normally takes about fifteen minutes but you will need a hat and water as you will, no doubt, linger on the way to check on the lizards scuttling for their holes or watch the butterflies and insects settling on the varied plants and flowers. You may be lucky enough to be startled by a hare, with enormous ears, rushing off to find a better hiding place. Even if you don't see any creatures there is always the fascination of the many tracks in the sand made by tiny lizards' feet, birds, or even the huge pads of a stray camel.

Access to the site is a little difficult at the moment due to the infill works, but if you would like to visit, a member of the Emirates Natural History Group should be able to put you in touch with the right people to advise you on visiting - and probably won't need a lot of arm-twisting to act as guides.



New Off-Road Pick-up for Hunters

The following press release appeared in local newspapers in connection with the recent Middle East Automobile Show in Dubai: "Dubai. An off-road pick-up designed for hunters has been unveiled by General Motors. The Chasseur is a modified six-seater GMC Sierra with extras such as front and back spotlights, a sunroof, two winches, a detachable camping tent and rifle storage box. . . . GMC manager Larry Schmidt said the Chasseur had been specially customized for the Middle East Market 'The Middle East is GM's biggest export market and the Chasseur shows how determined we are to give our customers here just what they want.'"

Many individuals knowledgeable about the sad state of wildlife conservation in Arabia were dismayed by GM's thoughtlessness in this regard, and apparent ignorance of the existing bans on hunting in most of the UAE and Oman. This was perhaps an uncharacteristic lapse, since GM has otherwise had a good record of concern for the national heritage. GM has, for example, regularly sponsored archeological work at UAE sites such as Ad-Door and others. For those who may wish to express an opinion on the Chasseur, GM has its Middle East regional office in Dubai and can be reached at P.O. Box 9233 or fax 04-314 102.



A cautionary tale

It started as a half-term treat for the kids - a Thursday night camp-out and a wadi walk on Friday morning. We set off for Masafi with a full load. A bit of off-road driving took us along a track which descended into a partly cultivated wadi. We drove along the wadi for 100m then climbed back out and across a rough plateau where we have camped before.

The night passed without incident; although we saw lightning in the distance we could not hear thunder and we guessed a storm was out over the Indian Ocean. Next morning was bright, with high cloud and the temperature was ideal for walking. We descended into the wadi and set off down stream. It was a leisurely, relaxed expedition and after about an hour we decided to head back. We had no sooner turned round than we felt the first few drops of rain. I had noticed earlier that the wadi was very quiet. Now there was absolute silence.

Just behind us, the wadi wall was broken where a landslide had occurred and there was now a steep path out of the wadi. We decided that we had better get out while we could. Even as we reached the top, the sky had darkened and the drops of rain were heavier.

We were 50m away from the camp when the storm broke. Lightning and thunder struck and a tremendous gust of wind lifted one of the tents right off the ground. We ran to catch it and dismantle it as rain lashed down. Five drenched bodies climbed into the car and we sat out the rest of the storm.

After about 30 minutes the rain had eased off and we risked winding down the windows. We were met by an almighty roar - which left us in no doubt that the wadi beneath us was in full flood. The power of moving water is awesome at the best of times, but knowing that less than an hour

before we had been wandering along this dry river bed made the sight before us now quite shocking. The raging river was at least three meters deep.

Although the rain had now stopped we were trapped - our only way out of the mountains was across the flooded wadi. We had no choice but to wait. It was about two hours before the water subsided enough to consider driving across it. The river was still fast flowing, but it looked as if there was a way through if we kept over to one side.

Some local farm labourers and another family on holiday had walked down from the road to watch as we drove down the track and attempted the crossing. We kept over to the inside curve of the river but we had misjudged the firmness of the river bed and the rear offside wheel spun into the sand deposited by the flood. All hands rushed to the back of the car - but the wheel only dug further in. The farmers brought planks of wood to wedge under the tyres and one of the tourists went up to the road to look for help. Successive attempts to wedge rocks and wood under the tyre made no impact.

Then suddenly, on the ridge above the far side of the wadi, a white Nissan Patrol appeared. Two lively locals put themselves at our service. They managed to reverse and position themselves to tow us out, and our Range Rover roared out of its hole and on to firmer ground by the side of the wadi.

The back tyre was punctured but that seemed a small price to pay for being on the right side of the wadi in one piece. Now that we are safely home it is easy to look back with humour on the day's experience - an adventure, to be re-told at countless campfires. But we must not forget that the mountains and their natural environment are not a grand amusement park for our entertainment, they demand respect and they must be taken

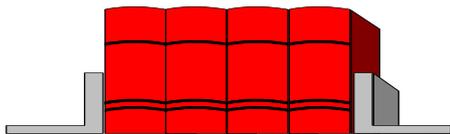


DNHG COMMITTEE '97 -'98

	Name	tel.home	tel.office	fax
Chairman (& Geology Recorder)	Gary Feulner	306 5570	313 320 x500	313 371
Vice Chairman (Plants & Fossil Recorder)	Valerie Chalmers	494 816	no calls pls.	452 727
Treasurer	Sandy Fowler	442 242	no calls pls.	442 242
Membership Secretary	Ann Marie Bui	456 842	no calls pls.	626 748
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Fieldtrip Coordinator	Ian Robson	488 773	839 030	839 031
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Seashells Recorder	Carolyn Lehmann	389 584		389 584
Bird Recorder	Colin Richardson	472 277		472 276
Marine Recorder	Glyn Griffiths	494 399	202 2821	494 399
Insect/Reptile Recorder	Alan Dickson	846 306	317 458	444 712

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Outgoing Librarian Carolyn Lehmann has prepared an updated index of materials available in the DNHG Library (primarily for your benefit and enjoyment), which will be available at meetings. Pick up your copy on December 7th.

From the Former Librarian . . .

Finding and collecting printed material pertinent to the interests of DNHG has been a challenging but enjoyable job. 'Library' is still a rather term for our modest collection of reference material but, as you will see by the latest list of items, it continues to grow. Many people have kindly donated material and we encourage all of you to think of the DNHG collection before disposing of unwanted publications on flora, fauna, UAE/Gulf history and heritage, etc.

However, a big disappointment has been the lack of interest in the collection by DNHG members; visitors, professionals, journalists, and others, have used the Library far more.

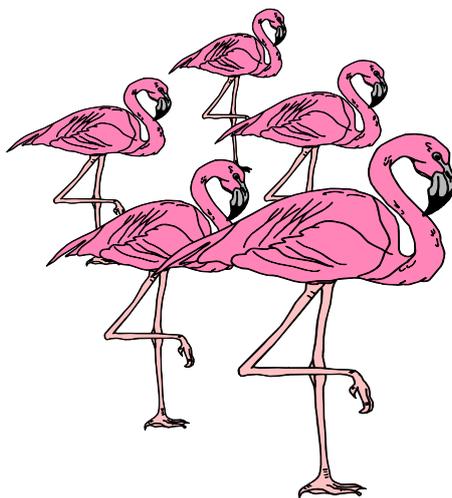
Our thanks and gratitude to Beryl Comar for enthusiastically volunteering to take over the duties and responsibilities of overseeing the reference collection. Beryl plans to catalogue the material and put it on a database. She also has new ideas for book reviews, etc., hoping to generate more usage and enjoyment of some very interesting reading material.

Al Ghar, Abu Dhabi

For those of you keen to explore new places around the Emirates, Al Ghar might make an interesting day trip from Dubai. Just 40 km inland from Abu Dhabi city centre, it is sandwiched between the Abu Dhabi to Al Ain truck road, a large infill site alongside that road, and the Mafraq Sewage Treatment Works. Not, you would think, a likely spot to attract nature lovers, but you would be wrong.

Al Ghar, whose lower areas were originally sabkha, has saline water in considerable quantity, providing a variety of habitats with lakes, reed beds and even streams lying among the desert dunes. Birds are encouraged in large numbers and considerable variety by the habitat itself and food in the form of brine shrimps which live in the saline water.

Al Ghar is not quite a natural haven, because man has lent a hand. Thanks to the efforts of Abu Dhabi Municipality's Sewerage Projects Committee, the water in the lakes is kept at a more or less constant level throughout the year, by diverting some of the water from Al Wathba fodder fields which would otherwise drain as waste water into the sea. The reed beds are watered occasionally and the stream, which originates accidentally as the result of a burst pipe, is kept flowing in a controlled manner.



A contractor working on the extension to the sewage works provided machinery and manpower to construct the islands in one of the lakes. It was hoped that the islands, surrounded by a deep-water channel, would provide a safe haven for flamingos to breed, but even with the addition of manmade nests, the birds have not yet taken the hint. However, there have been flamingos present on the lakes throughout the summer of 1997, so perhaps next year instead of just strutting up and down they will get to the serious business of pairing up, building their own nests, laying eggs and rearing young ones.



Meanwhile, the islands attract flamingos and other birds right in front of of the birdwatching hides, again provided by a contractor working around the site. The hides, made from huge packing cases, offer a cool and shady viewing position without disturbing the birds. The walk from the main track through Al Ghar to the hides normally takes about fifteen minutes but you will need a hat and water as you will, no doubt, linger on the way to check on the lizards scuttling for their holes or watch the butterflies and insects settling on the varied plants and flowers. You may be lucky enough to be startled by a hare, with enormous ears, rushing off to find a better hiding place. Even if you don't see any creatures there is always the fascination of the many tracks in the sand made by tiny lizards' feet, birds, or even the huge pads of a stray camel.

Access to the site is a little difficult at the moment due to the infill works, but if you would like to visit, a member of the Emirates Natural History Group should be able to put you in touch with the right people to advise you on visiting - and probably won't need a lot of arm-twisting to act as guides.