

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي



Little Green Bee-Eater

Taken by Sonya Benjamin at the Wasit Protected Area, Sharjah
(managed by the Breeding Center for Endangered Arabian Wildlife)

Inside this month

Page 2:	Upcoming Field Trips Our Next Speaker (October)
Page 3:	Field Trip Report: Kilimanjaro
Page 4:	Field Trip Report: The Architecture of Kashan, Iran
Page 5:	Field Clip: Summer in Wadi Wurayah
Page 6:	Field Clip: Artificial Geology, Jebel Ghaweel, Oman Community Notice: Architectural Heritage Society
Page 7:	Member News: Nature Conservation Award, Where are they now?, In Memoriam
Page 8:	Programme, Committee Members, Membership, Contribute

Contributors

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Under the patronage of H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan

Upcoming Field Trips

Bird Watching at Pivot Fields

Date: Sat 06 Oct 2012

(Please Note the date has changed from Sept 29th as announced in last month's Gazelle)

Time: 0630, 2-3 hrs

Difficulty: Flat tracks but we could cover a distance of 2-3 kms

Equipment: Binoculars essential, telescope optional. Walking shoes and Sun Hat. Water.

Species: 254+ species (including escapes) have been recorded at the fields.

There is a good breeding population of **White-tailed Lapwings** and this will be the star bird on the day. Given the time of year we can expect small no's of other waders and lapwings as they will be migrating through the UAE (Ruff, Little Stint, Temmincks Stint etc).

Pipits and wagtails should also be in attendance (Red Throated, Tawny and Water Pipits plus White, multiple sub species of Yellow, and possibly Citrine Wagtail).

In addition we may see several species of **heron, egrets and ibis** (Grey Heron, Cattle Egret, Glossy Ibis). All told we can expect up to 50 species in the morning and given we will be in the autumn migration period anything could, and often does, turn up!

Directions: Dubai Pivot Fields

Take the main road (Road 44) from Dubai to Hatta/Oman. After approx 18 km from Sheik Zayed Road, passing Dragon Mart and International City on your right side, you will see a brown sign to 'Dubai Textile City'. Take this exit. After another 160m, take the turnoff to your left and drive 940m along the fence of Dubai Pivot Fields to the gate. The gate is located at Google Earth coordinates 25.164583 , 55.430979. Park outside the gate.

Nestle's Bottling Plant Visit

Date: Sat 17 Nov 2012

Length: 2hrs

Availability: Limited to 20 people. Booking required to secure your place

Contact: Sonja at lavson@gmail.com

The "production" and quality of water in Dubai and UAE is always an interesting topic that raises a lot of questions, concerns and usually polarizes opinions about the water that we are using and drinking in the UAE.

After two successful visits to the water bottling plant last year, Nestle' Waters kindly agreed to host another visit on Nov 17th where you will have the opportunity to see how the water in Dubai is treated and bottled.

You will also get the chance to address all your water concerns and questions with the experts of water business. The 2 hour water bottling factory visit will take place on Saturday morning and is limited to 20 people. To secure your place please contact Sonja at lavson@gmail.com.

Project WET - Water Education for Teachers

Date: TBC

Members of DNHG will have the opportunity to participate in one day workshop - Project WET.

The aim of the workshop is to enable teachers and educators to convey the importance of water conservation to children aged 8 to 12 years through 10 ready-to-teach fun game-like activities.

The workshop will be scheduled on a Saturday (date to be confirmed) and is free of charge. Number of participants is limited to max 20. Please look out for more information in October's Gazelle.

Our Next Speaker

Michael Creamer will be lecturing on Sunday October 7 on the topic "Human Ingenuity - Migration, Navigation and Trade Before the Iron Age".

About Michael: Growing up in Annapolis in the 1950's, sailing the wooden Naval Academy yawls, looking out over the harbour at the oyster draggers drying their sails, I thought the fishing fleets of all the world were still working under sail. I couldn't decide if I wanted to be a harpooner like the ones in Moby Dick or follow in the wake of that moment's hero, Irving Johnson as he circumnavigated his Yankee for National Geographic.

Serving an apprenticeship in a small Connecticut shipyard, I 'found a home', at South Street Seaport Museum in New York working as a carpenter on the big ships: **Wavertree** and **Peking** and became curator of their model collection. Rigging restaurants between ships and maritime museums I brought the concept of historic ship restoration to Galveston, Texas.

From there I led a crew of volunteers to Piraeus, Greece to begin the ELISSA saga; now star of the Texas Seaport Museum. According to Peter Stanford, president emeritus of the National Maritime Historical Society: *"Indeed, the restoration of this graceful barque of 1877 is reckoned by many to be the finest restoration of an active sailing ship extant."*

Taking a break from ELISSA, swimming in the turquoise Caribbean in front of the pre-Columbian Castillo at Tulum (the oldest lighthouse in the Americas), the maritime historian in me asks: "Why is this building here; so precariously perched on cliff's edge?" The search for an answer produced my first National Geographic grant and subsequent documentation by the Discovery & History Channels.

In the UAE, observing how perhaps the last dhows for the East African Trade are built. And why is Wadi Hiluw so special? Does the topography produce a Bernoulli Effect that fanned the flames for the Copper Age? Always the 'how' and the 'why'? If you don't ask, you don't get, so keep asking!

Field Trip Report

Climbing Kilimanjaro

At 5895m, Kilimanjaro is the highest peak in Africa and the world's highest free-standing mountain. Rising from the East African plains, this dormant volcano offers some beautiful views of Tanzanian and Kenyan plains.

Kili is popular with hikers, mostly because it is relatively accessible: no climbing skills are required to conquer the peak. However, thorough preparation is needed and altitude sickness can stop even the fittest climbers. To prepare for the altitude we chose the longest, 8 day Lemosho route.

Entering the Kilimanjaro National Park from Longorosi Gate at the west side of the mountain, we hiked up to the Shira plateau, part of the oldest Shira volcano, where we abandoned the popular routes and took the northern side of the mountain, to later join the eastern ascent to the peak and the usual southern Mweka descent route.



Impatiens Kilimanjari is found only on jungle floor of Kilimanjaro

Such an unusual trail allowed us to experience all sides of the mountain and walk through different eco-zones and habitats. The hike up to Shira plateau was covered with luscious green rain forest populated with a variety of animals and crossed by many mountain streams. Our guide, Harold, was an expert in local plants and he readily supplied Latin names and local uses of the plants. Turning to the northern side at 4000 m we experienced some lower temperatures and night rain that turned into ice, but also some spectacular views of the fresh snow on Kibo. The snow didn't last long – in fact, Kili's famous snow cap is shrinking due to global warming. The Northern side is barren, just rocks and lichens, some adapted vegetation and curious mountain spiders that adapted their diet to vegetarian to survive in this insect-less environment. We saw some antelope and bison footprints: big mammals come to this high elevation to lick the salt from the volcanic rock.

The final ascent started at midnight and took 6 hours at a steady pace. We started from an alternative camp, School Huts, and this allowed us to avoid the masses assaulting the peak as well as enjoy some undisturbed views of the starlit sky and the lights of the villages deep down in the valley. We arrived at Gilman's point

(5681m) on the crater's rim still in pitch dark, then proceeded to Stella point (5739m) and finally to Uhuru peak at 5895m, the highest point of the volcano rim.



Sunrise at Uhuru peak, the highest point at 5,895m

According to Kilimanjaro National Park statistics, only 41% of the climbers actually make it to the Uhuru peak.

We arrived at 6.12 am, just before sunrise and had the satisfaction of seeing the explosion of light and colours reflecting in the steep ice walls of the ancient glacier, the views over Africa... all make it worth the effort.

The descent is perhaps the most difficult part of the summit day: steep, dusty and hard on the knees, it's an 8 hour trail back to 3000m. Descending on the southern slope we gradually returned into a thicker, higher, blooming forest again. Just before the National Park gate we passed the garbage collection center.



Uhuru Peak - only 41% of climbers make it to the top

The mountain is surprisingly clean, despite the hundreds of hikers that enter the park every day. Guide Harold explained that all the waste is tightly managed: as a guide he is in charge of holding a diary reporting daily amount of waste in kg and number of bottles that our small camp produced. At the end of the hike the waste is weighted and bottles counted and the missing ones bring hefty fines.

Sonja Lavrenčič

Field Trip Report

A visit to lesser known Iran: The splendours of Kashan mansions

Dating back to 5000 BC, Kashan was an important merchant town in central Iran.

Its neighbour Sialk, one of the richest archaeological sites in Iran, features the remains of an ancient ziggurat (stepped pyramidal temple, possibly the predecessor to the Mesopotamian ones), some tombs and a collection of pottery.

Kashan has been destroyed several times by invading armies and more recently by an earthquake in 1779. The city was rebuilt during the subsequent Qajar period and some of the restored mansions, the hamams, mosques and the covered bazaar still reflect the past richness of this wealthy merchant city, famous for its textiles, tiles and pottery.

Just a few of the once opulent mansions are now restored and opened for visitors. We stayed in one such beautifully restored mansion, Manouchehri House. Hidden in the narrow alleys of the old town and behind an almost anonymous old wooden door, an authentically restored inside corridor leads to the courtyard a few levels below the main alley level, surrounded by the elegant arches of the 19th century mansion.

Our first encounter with the splendour of Manouchehri house left us a bit disappointed the next day, when we visited Kashan's covered bazaar. The impressive structure of antique domes and corridors is now mostly filled with every possible Chinese plastic knick-knacks, masking the old splendours of bazaar alleys. A few carpet and antiques shops, remains of adjacent caravanserais and hamams (most of them closed) and some views over the domes from the roof are all that is left.

But, the rest of Kashan definitely lived up to our expectations; we were charmed by the architecture, design and artful decorations of Kashan's mansions. Kashani mansions are a prime example of functionality, comfort and beauty, as well as sustainability. Their concept of multiple inner yards reflects the



Abbasian House showing how Kashan's mansions were built up to 5 levels

division between public and private spaces as well as social and family structure: guest quarters are strictly separated from family quarters and servant quarters.

Extended families living under the same roof granted privacy to nuclear families by gathering their spaces around a separate inner yard. All mansions were built on 3 to 5 levels, the highest level usually not higher than ground floor level and the lowest ones – including the inner yards - dug deep into the ground. This facilitated a fresh water supply from an elaborate water distribution system (qanat - which probably gave origin to Arabian aflaj) that uses the descent of the terrain to circulate the water and fill the in-house underground cisterns.

Apart from daily use in the kitchen and ingenious bathrooms (hamams), qanats were feeding the golden fish inhabited ponds in the yards, creating beautiful reflections and freshness during the hot summer months. Water cisterns – as well as the lower floors of the mansions were cooled by wind towers – badgirs through a system of air shafts that blew cool air through sometimes richly decorated plaster screens.

The hot summer sun was dimmed through decorative coloured glass windows or shaded by intricately decorated plaster screens. During the peak of hot Kashan summers families moved into the lowest floor, 3 to 4 floors under the city level where the temperature remained in the comfortable twenties.

Mirror rooms with walls covered in mirror decorations reflected and multiplied the light in the evenings and winters. Kashan mansions were perfectly sustainable, comfortable and cooled dwellings – a wealth of knowledge on sustainable building that is nowadays replaced by easier oil fuelled solutions.

Renovation and maintenance of Kashan mansions is unfortunately an expensive enterprise that reaches millions of euros. Such funds are mostly available through private companies and only made economically viable by designating functions to the restored buildings, such as hotels, galleries, and cultural centers. A short, adventurous walk on dilapidating city walls revealed many more mansions that are silently disappearing, consumed by erosion, neglect and lack of funds.

Sonja Lavrenčič

Summer in Wadi Wurayah

From the beginning, Fujairah Municipality and EWS-WWF have been attentive to scientific concerns in their stewardship of Wadi Wurayah, now a protected area by decree of the Ruler of Fujairah. A 2006 report titled *Establishment of a Mountain Protected Area in Wadi Wurayah, Fujairah Emirate, UAE*, authored and compiled by EWS-WWF's Christophe Tourenq and others and sponsored by HSBC, gives a good basic introduction to the natural history of the area, including geology, climate, hydrology, flora and fauna.

Additional studies are ongoing and planned. One ongoing project is camera trapping, which has as its principal aim an assessment of the presence and abundance of native and feral mammals including Arabian tahr, caracal, foxes (both red fox and Blanford's fox are present) and feral goats. Wadi Wurayah is the largest of the wadi systems in the mountains of the UAE's East Coast, and the wettest, and was therefore the optimal choice for an initial protected area.

In mid-September I joined a team of Fujairah Municipality's Maral Al-Shuriqui and EWS-WWF's Moaz Sawaf to reload and recharge several camera traps and retrieve stored images. Most of Wadi Wurayah is accessible only by foot, and, unlike most UAE wadis, the main branches of Wadi Wurayah are too long to be explored in a one-day visit. In making its investigations and setting its traps, the Fujairah Municipality and EWS-WWF researchers have therefore made use of permanent water sources and campsites known to UAE hunters and honey collectors. I can testify that they have not taken the easy way out; several of the camera traps are in certifiably out-of-the-way locations.



Dead shell of a freshwater snail *Radix natalensis* on a "weeping" wall.

Our recent visit emphasized some of the special difficulties of summer exploration, the principal one being the heat. Maral and Moaz recounted the experience of earlier teams with dehydration – cramps, vomiting and malaise. As a result, their practice in hot weather now includes a midday siesta from noon to 3pm to avoid exposure and exertion during the heat of the day. Our visit pointed up the additional stresses of an exceptionally humid day (beginning with fog over the East Coast) and the absence of any breeze whatsoever. Eyeglasses or sunglasses were quickly obscured by sweat and T-shirts could be wrung out. In addition, the past winter season was a relatively dry one and many water

sources were severely reduced. It was a tedious process to refill water bottles from drip at a contact spring – a "weeping" wall where groundwater filtered through a thick gravel terrace and seeped out along an impermeable horizon. The accompanying photo shows one very effective way to relieve heat stress – immersion in available surface water.



Maral demonstrates one effective way to avoid

Snakes are a potentially more acute danger. We encountered two carpet vipers (*Echis omanensis*) along our path as we threaded our way through shaded gorges. In summer, this snake is most active by night (when the researchers say they typically 'hiss' if approached) but they can also be encountered by day, especially near standing water, where they wait to ambush prey (toads et al.). The carpet viper is not normally aggressive but is highly poisonous and should be treated with great care.

Under the extreme conditions of our visit we saw little wildlife above the waterfall and pools at the roadhead – few birds (two pairs of Pale Crag Martins), few lizards, few hornets, only a single butterfly (a Blue Spotted Arab *Colias phisadia*) and few dragonflies (mostly the Hajar Mountain endemic damselfly *Arabineura khalidi*, still breeding at small pools). We did, however, see a Red Fox (possibly attracted by Moaz's cooking) and we were visited after dinner by a curious Brandt's hedgehog, which was swaddled in a towel and duly photographed.

Among the novelties we encountered were freshwater snails (the air-breathing *Radix natalensis*) living on a "weeping" wall above an intermittent pool (dry on our visit). This is evidence of one way in which smaller aquatic life can survive at least temporarily in the absence of standing water.

Most shrubs were dry. Those in the best shape were species that can access the subsurface water in the wadi bed, mostly *Nerium oleander*, the reed *Arundo donax*, the wadi grass *Saccharum griffithii*, and the wadi fig *Ficus cordata salicifolia*. Among the few species seen in flower were *Nerium oleander*, *Dyerophytum indicum* (a rock dweller) and *Lavandula subnuda* (found on wadi bank rock and rubble) whose strategy is to always have a few flowers in bloom.

Gary Feulner

Field Clip

Artificial Geology

The UAE is an excellent place to study geology and geomorphology, with most of the rocks and sedimentary features free of soil and vegetation cover. One can learn a great deal about sedimentation and erosion by observing the record in wadi walls and channels and asking "Why?" or "How?" Geological maxims include the adage that "The present is the key to the past" and much of the early development of geological science relied, successfully, on the principle of "uniformitarianism", i.e., that the processes that shaped the earth in the past are the same ones we see in action today.

These principles have been expanded since the 19th century, but not violated, to include such exotic but natural processes as meteorite impact, extreme global warming (or cooling), and catastrophic flooding by the breaching of natural dams such as in Montana, U.S.A. or in Azerbaijan (as discussed in the May 2012 DNHG lecture by Ronnie Gallagher).

Sometimes 'special pleading' is required on a smaller scale as well. The steep fan of dark material in the photo was encountered along a wadi wall near Jebel Ghaweel, in the Juweif area north of Mahdhah, Oman. (Modeling for scale is our overseas member, Narayan Karki of Nepal.) What, we wondered, could account for such a discrete accumulation?



The bulldozed track from where material was pushed over the edge

There was no landslide scarp above it that could account for the volume and quality of the material. And there was no significant channel visible at the top, that might have directed the flow of material from above. Moreover, if it had been deposited by an episode of flowing water, the same water ought to have been flowing simultaneously in the wadi and should have reshaped the steep, symmetrical contours of the fan. Instead, it looked like it had been dumped there, but the wadi bed itself was not accessible by vehicles.

We found a place to ascend to the plain above the wadi, where investigation answered the question. It had been dumped. The edge of the wadi was ca. 150 metres from a paved road. The intervening

area was a more or less flat gravel plain. Although there were only vague indications of general disturbance, near the wadi edge above the fan was a short but clear bulldozed path with a low berm at its terminus, from where material had been pushed over the edge.

The purpose and context of the activity was much less clear. The material below appeared not to have been bulldozed from the plain itself. Was this, then, a site selected and bulldozed on an ad hoc basis, so that a dump truck could safely back up and dump a few loads of material from elsewhere? The ways of the human mind are much more difficult to decipher than the ways of Mother Nature.

Gary Feulner

Community Notice

The Architectural Heritage Society

The AHD-English Chapter has been active for over 4 years and has organised many trips and lectures through the years. The Society aims are as follows:

- (1) To raise awareness of the importance of protecting our cultural heritage
- (2) To provide a mechanism for cooperation between official bodies and public institutions on issues related to conservation of cultural heritage;
- (3) To mobilise local communities through providing the knowledge and tools to help them protect cultural heritage in their own areas;
- (4) To organise various lectures on cultural heritage

along with many trips to historical and archaeological sites around the world and many more.

The AHS provides a verity of Membership categories from Golden, Silver, Ordinary and student membership with various privileges with discounts on training courses, seminars, books published by the AHS along with the use of the library and other facilities free of charge.

September, being the beginning of our new season, we would like to invite DNHG members to register with us in the Society. To register, please contact Ms. Ranim Hajjar through ranim.hajjar@hotmail.com.

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Seashells, Birds and Mammals - Recorders needed!

The recorders are not necessarily scientific experts in their designated fields. In fact, most are not. However, they are interested and knowledgeable amateurs - please contact them if you have any interesting reports or queries.

The intention is that information will be channelled through to the *Gazelle* editor, so new information can be shared with all our readers.



Award

Dr. Reza Khan has received this year's Nature Conservation Award from the Prokriti O Jibon Foundation (Foundation for Nature & Life) and Channel-I on 1st September 2012 at Dhaka, Bangladesh. It was handed over by the Bangladesh Minister for Environment and Forests and the Executives of the Foundation.

We congratulate Dr. Reza on this outstanding achievement!



Dr. Reza Khan (centre) receives his award

Where are they now?

Colin Richardson, author of the pioneering *The Birds of the UAE* (1990), has been retired in Cyprus for many years, but still carries a couple of titles.

He is Birdlife Cyprus Recorder and the Chairman of the Rarities Subcommittee.

Colin confirms and explains:

"Yes, I am doing similar here to what I did in Dubai - can't seem to learn...never volunteer!"

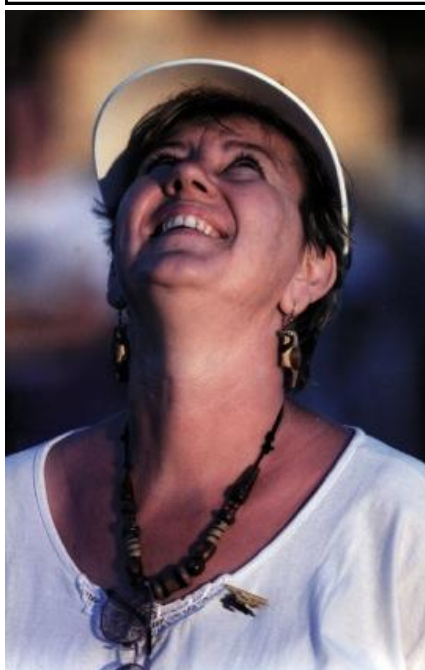
Jo Raynor and family rejoined us in Dubai earlier this year, after several years in Oman and Jo has passed along an interesting observation.

Apparently, the UAE/Oman border fence may be performing a conservation role in addition to its political or security purpose.

Jo says that in some areas the fence can be seen to have provided protection (on the Omani side) from overgrazing by UAE camels.

One happy result is that dhubs (*Uromastyx leptieni*) seem to be recolonizing the area in numbers not seen in recent years.

In Memoriam



Jutta Jackson

Sadly, we have had to say farewell to Jutta Jackson, wife of Peter Jackson, who died on Sunday 16th September after losing a long battle against cancer.

Peter and Jutta, long-time members of DNHG, moved to the UAE with their sons, Oliver and Karsten, from Harare in Zimbabwe and Jutta joined the German School in Sharjah.

She was adored by her students and loved and respected by her colleagues. After she retired from teaching, she became a qualified tour guide in Sharjah and took great pleasure in sharing stories with interested visitors. Jutta had a sense for adventure and a lust for life. She was a wonderful wife, mother and friend and she touched so many other lives. She will be duly missed and fondly remembered by many.

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

Oct 7 Human Ingenuity: Migration, Navigation & Trade Before the Iron Age - Michael Creamer
Nov 4 The 'B' Word - Beauty in Design - Geoff Sanderson

Field Trips (Members only, please)

Sep 6 : Birdwatching at Dubai Pivot Fields with Neil Tovey

Oct 20-27: Trip to Georgia

Nov 17: Nestle Water Bottling Plant Tour

Further field trips, details or changes to trips will be announced/confirmed by e-mail circular.

DNHG COMMITTEE 2012

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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Contributions

Do you have a field report, unusual finding, interesting news article, book review, amazing photograph, or community news to share?

If so, email your contributions to: gazelleeditor@gmail.com
(Arial 10 justified).

DNHG Membership

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dhs. 100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. Membership is valid from Sep 2012 to Sep 2013. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to **Lloyds TSB Bank** account no. 60600669933501. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG.)

Payment can also be made by cash deposit at a bank or ATM, using our IBAN number AE650320060600669933501. However, this process does not identify you as the payer. If you wish to pay by cash, please also scan and e-mail a copy of your payment confirmation to the Membership Secretary, so we know whose money we have received.

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*, our post office box, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.