



GAZELLE

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مجموعة تراثي للتاريخ والطبيعي



(c) Nirjhar

Tiger in the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve. Photo Credit: Nirjhar Chakraborty

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Contributors

The Editor would like to thank the following for their reports and contributions:

Gary Feulner, Valerie Chalmers, Tamsin Carlisle, Jacky Judas and Nirjhar Chakraborty

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

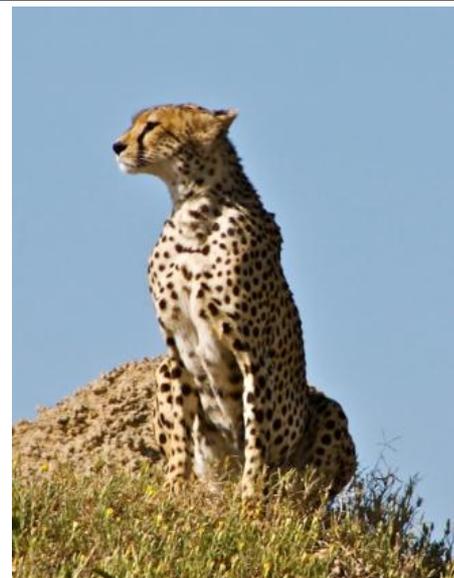
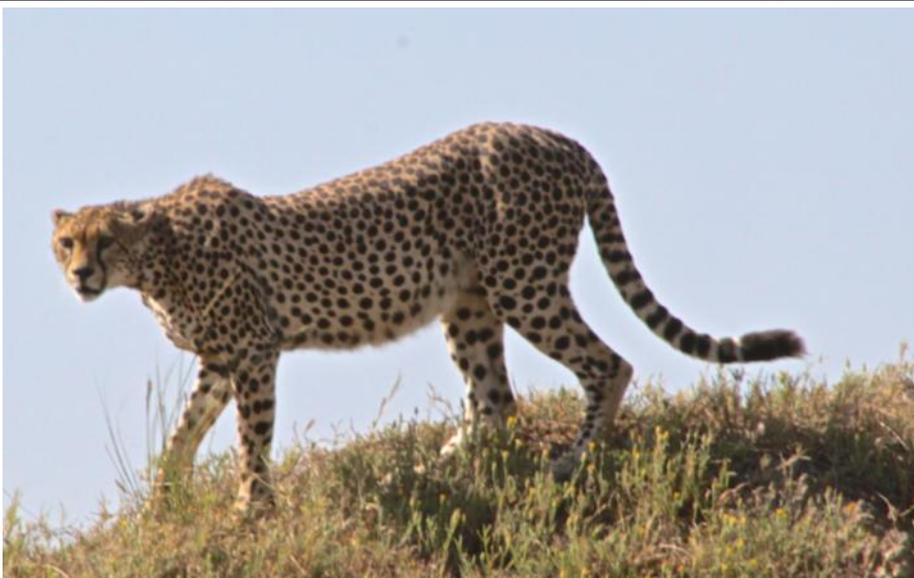
Date: Sun June 2 2013
Speaker: Dr. Laurie Marker
Topic: *Cheetah Futures*

Dr. Laurie Marker, who received her doctorate from Oxford University, England in 2002, is widely recognized as the leading expert on cheetahs – their biology, genetics, ecology, breeding, and issues related to their conservation. TIME magazine named her a Hero for the Planet in recognition of her extraordinary dedication to conservation. In 1990, Dr. Marker moved to Namibia to found the not-for-profit Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF), which today is the global leader in research and conservation of cheetahs. Having survived nearly four million years, in the last century, the number of wild cheetahs has decreased from 100,000 to approximately 10,000.

Dr. Marker has created initiatives to conserve the cheetah while enhancing people's livelihoods. One such program is the Livestock Guarding Dog (LGD) program, which breeds and trains Anatolian shepherd and Kangal dogs to protect local herds so that farmers are not threatened by the presence of cheetahs on their land. CCF has placed nearly 400 dogs since 1994, with about 150 dogs in service at any given time, and about 20 puppies placed every year. Farmers who use a CCF dog to guard their livestock report a drop in predation rate of anywhere between 80 to 100 percent and farmers now are far less likely to kill or trap cheetah on their lands.

Among numerous international awards, Dr. Laurie Marker received the 2010 Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement and was a finalist for the 2009 BBC World Challenge. In Namibia, where Dr. Marker lives and works, she received the Windhoek Rotary Club's Paul Harris Fellowship in 2001, and in 2002 received a special award from the Sanveld Conservancy, signifying Namibia's farming community's public acknowledgement of Dr. Marker and CCF's contributions. She was named an *Unsung Hero* by Emirates Today, and her work has been featured by the BBC, Al Jazeera and National Geographic.

Dr. Marker will talk to us about cheetah conservation and will promote awareness on the illegal pet trade.



Cheetah in Serengeti National Park, Tanzania. Photo Credits: Sonya Benjamin

About the Cheetah Conservation Fund

Founded in Namibia (Africa) in 1990, The Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) is the global leader in research and conservation of cheetahs. CCF is dedicated to saving the cheetah in the wild. Today, the cheetah is Africa's most endangered big cat, facing threats such as loss of habitat, a reduction in its prey base, conflicts with livestock farming, poaching and a reduced ability to survive in parks and reserves due to the presence of larger predators. CCF's innovative science-based conservation and education programmes have resulted in a better understanding among local communities of the importance of this top predator for healthier eco-systems, as well as of the direct financial benefits of conserving the cheetah for future generations.

CCF's Founder and Executive Director, Dr. Laurie Marker, an American biologist, is considered the world's foremost expert on cheetah biology, ecology and conservation and has developed CCF's conservation strategy, which has contributed to increasing the wild cheetah population in Namibia by ~50%. CCF's long-term studies analyse and monitor the factors affecting the cheetah's survival in the wild and results are used to develop conservation policies and education programmes that have reached over 300,000 people. CCF is a registered non-profit organisation in Namibia, Canada, UK and the US. People can learn more about CCF by visiting its Centre in Namibia or by visiting www.cheetah.org.

Teach in Nepal?

GN English Boarding School, our host in the hill country of Nepal for DNHG field trips in 2012 and 2013, is looking for teaching volunteers, both short-term for the coming summer (3 weeks to 3 months) and also long-term (semester or full year basis).

GN English Boarding School is an innovative, English-medium primary school located in Makadum, Ramechhap District, about 6 hours east of Kathmandu. School facilities include a 26-room school building, 4 computers, 4 tablets, a video & TV room, library and playground.

The school recently commenced its second academic year and expects a final enrollment of more than 130 students in Nursery through Grade 3. Native English speaking (or equivalent) university students or graduates are wanted to supplement Nepali teaching staff.

Long-term positions would be suitable for a gap year or sabbatical. For the short-term, university students on summer break would be a good fit -- and of course the same would be true for any professional teachers who are not yet committed for the summer. Members are invited to mention this opportunity to family or friends who might be interested.

DNHG visitors will know the physical circumstances at the school from personal experience. Makadum is 'remote' in western terms. Electricity and reliable internet access have yet to reach it, although both are now expected by year-end. Accommodation at the school is relatively comfortable but summer is monsoon time so the weather will be warm and humid. Any position would be essentially on a volunteer basis.

GN English Boarding School is a private school owned by Narayan Karki, a 36-year old native of Makadum and a former DNHG member. DNHG Chairman Gary Feulner has sponsored construction and start-up of the school.

End-of-Season Function

Our annual gathering before people leave for the summer will once again be held in the **Utsav Restaurant, The India Club, off Oud Metha Road on Thursday, 13th June 2013 at 7.30 p.m. for 8.00 p.m.** It will cost **Dirhams 80/- per adult and Dh40/-for children 5-12 years** for a varied buffet meal.

Annual Photographic Competition

Members are invited to enter a maximum of **five** (returnable) prints on **UAE and Oman** natural history subjects from three different categories: **(a) Life on Earth: Plants/ Animals/ Fossils; (b) Earth & Environment: Landscapes/ Geology; (c) Man and his Influence: Archaeology/ Architecture/Culture (People)/Environment.** Photographs should be a minimum size of **5 inches x 7 inches (13 cm x 18 cm)** and should be mounted. The competition will be judged by everyone present. There will be a prize for each category and for the photograph voted the best overall. **N.B. The photographers must be present at the function.**

We will also have another team video quiz with prizes for the winning team! Tickets will be available at the meeting on Sunday 2nd June. If you cannot make the meeting please e-mail Valerie Chalmers on valeriechalmers@gmail.com

Valerie Chalmers, Vice-Chairman

Farewell, and Thank You

This month we have to say farewell to Committee Member, Mairead Porter, who is returning to UK. Mairead has been our book-sales person since March 2009 and also our Librarian since January 2010. In addition to these duties, she has helped organize and lead several field trips, in particular archaeological trips and her contribution is greatly appreciated. We wish Mairead and her husband, Alan, all the very best and hope to see them again when they return to visit their son, Francis.

Mairead has handed over books sales and the position of Librarian to Johanna Raynor, our former book-sales person!



Left: GN English Boarding School

Photo Credit: Gary Feulner

Additional information and photos can be found on the school's Facebook page, accessible by googling the school's name or by pasting the following link into your browser: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/GN-English-Boarding-School-Teach-in-the-hill-country-of-Nepal/125289254334497?fref=ts>

For further information, contact Narayan or Gary as follows:

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Field Clip

Rain in the Wadis: a Little Goes a Long Way

One of the hazards of excursions in the Hajar Mountains, whether by car or on foot, is the danger of flash floods. This danger may not seem so immediate to DNHG members who have arrived in the UAE only in the 21st century -- so far a relatively dry period compared to the rather "wet" 1980s and 1990s. A number of DNHG field trips in the 1990s had to be aborted in mid-stream (pun intended) on account of rain. We hurried out of wadis, watched as bores approached from miles above, crossed flooded roads and watched sedans float downstream.

Nevertheless, a recent experience in Wadi Wurayah was one of my closest calls. I had been hiking with a small group only about an hour from the roadhead in the wadi bottom, where we had parked three cars. It began to drizzle as we reached our end point, and the rain became somewhat heavier for more than half an hour as we returned through the gorge area. By the time we reached the cars, at about 4pm, the rain had stopped. Muddy rivulets were flowing down the steep slopes onto the narrow terrace above the gorge, wetting us to the ankles, but the main wadi bed remained dry. Mindful of the potential, we wasted little time getting into our cars and setting out back down the wadi, although one of the passengers took time for a cigarette.

We reached the waterfall and its wadi without incident. Then, suddenly, brown water came bouncing in waves out of the tributary wadi just ahead on our left, spreading like a carpet over the coarse gravel channel. This by itself was not a serious impediment and we continued, although with pulses quickened. Ahead, where the main wadi narrowed, I now saw brown water begin to shoot out of a second tributary, and another beyond it, and another. The paved road was still about three kilometers away. I didn't know the wadi track well, but I knew it was poor and sunken in places. The decision was made. I spun my car around and retreated. Passing the other cars, I said, "It's foolish to try to outrun the water. Go back to where the wadi widens and park high on the bank." I eyeballed the wadi, made my choice and parked.



Gary's car, parked near the waterfall on the highest available bank. The water in mid-channel near the car is about a meter deep, too deep to cross safely. The car was rescued the next afternoon. Photo Credit: Jacky Judas

With my passenger, UK resident and former DNHG member John Martin, I took stock. The water level in the main wadi at our position was still low. I thought we would take our packs, cross the wadi and make the steep ascent to the bluff above, where the paved road ends. From there we could exit with safety once the water fell, whatever became of my car. But I was preoccupied because the two other cars (one driver was well-experienced in the field in the UAE, the other was a novice) had continued driving down the wadi. In my mind, I pictured them foundering in soft gravel at a low spot and being overtaken by rising water.

My thoughts were interrupted by shouting from a small group gathered on the bluff, including a local family well-acquainted with this phenomenon. They gesticulated upstream, where I saw with alarm that huge waves of muddy water had just begun to bound through the waterfall gap. I locked the car. "Come with me, John!"

I shouted, not knowing whether he had seen the danger. If we did not cross now, we would be cut off and would have to stay with the car, come what may.

We crossed arms on shoulders and waded over cobbles across the calf-deep stream, then up to the terrace and roadhead. Fortunately John had kept his passport buttoned in his pocket; he had to return to Dubai that night to catch a flight back to the UK.

My geologist's eye for the terrain was a good one and in the end the water never rose higher than shown in the photos, but for us the immediate situation remained uncertain. We made a tentative attempt at dusk to re-cross the wadi to retrieve our backpacks, but we found it too unsafe. About an hour after dark we were able to exit the wadi by the paved road with friends who had driven in when the water dropped.

Later that night, at about 10pm, Olivier Combreau and Jacky Judas of EWS-WWF courteously and courageously made a sortie back up the wadi bed to try again to retrieve the packs, valuables and equipment. We succeeded in that but we were unable to reach the car by driving and had to trek the last kilometer on foot. En route, we nearly lost one of the two 'rescue' vehicles in a deep soft spot. Only the next afternoon, when the forecast of additional rain failed to materialize, were we able to reach my car and drive it out.

What of the two cars that tried to outrun the spate? They succeeded, happily (a testimony to diligent, even fearless, driving), but only just in the nick of time. We know this because within a minute of reaching the paved road, they encountered colleagues coming the other way to assist, who found they could not cross the rising water. Report by Gary Feulner

Visit to the Land of the Tigers

This year during the Easter holidays DNHG arranged for a visit to the Tadoba-Andheri Tiger Reserve in India. It was a trip for 4N/5D with 5 safaris booked into the park. Tadoba is located in the state of Maharashtra and is India's 25th Tiger Reserve. The reserve has about 625 sq km as core area and another 1100 sq km designated as the buffer zone. Dominated by teak and bamboo forest along with two beautiful lakes it caters to a host of biodiversity, not least the Tiger but also many other species including Leopard, Sloth bear, Leopard cat, wild dog, Gaur etc. Safaris into the core area are held twice a day and tourism activities are restricted to only within 20% of the core area of the forests.

We went during the Easter holidays keeping in mind that the summer months offer better chances of animal sightings since the felines roam about in search of water. This gives an opportunity for viewing and we were indeed very lucky. In our 7 safaris we had more than 15 tiger sightings which was really more than what we have asked for!

The size of a tiger's territory mainly depends on the prey density (a tiger needs nearly 3,000 kgs of meat a year) and the availability of water. Males live alone and several female territories are encompassed within the territory of a male. In Tadoba recent estimates have around 43 adult tigers along with 21 cubs and a healthy prey base of around 8000 numbers consisting mainly of cheetals, sambar, blue bull, gaur (Indian bison) and wild boars. The figure has been reached after the tigers were monitored by using 94 camera traps. India has discarded the old pugmark technique and started following a more refined system, one that relies on strategically-placed, automatically-triggered cameras. The stripes on the tigers are as unique as finger prints, so photos help in better estimates and also both sides are photographed.

The area of the park which we visited is known for the dominant male tiger of Tadoba (known as the Wagdoh Male) which rules over about 40 sq km, has three wives and nine cubs. Out of these nine children of Wagdoh Male, we saw the four cubs, popularly known as the Telia cubs, after the Lake Telia in and around which they are normally found. We saw the cubs playing in the water and play fighting amongst themselves. We even saw them feeding over a Sambar kill which is a very rare sight. In Tadoba the summer is very dry so artificial water holes have been built inside the reserve where regular filling is done by water tankers. We saw the tigers playing in these water holes, taking a bath and also chasing wild gaurs while they also came for a drink.

The cubs are semi-adult now, and in all possibility after this ensuing monsoon season, they will be separated to carve out their own territory. This is very critical as often this leads to territorial fighting with other resident tigers where mortality is very common. Also, they are often pushed out of the core zone towards the buffer where the security provided is less and they become vulnerable to poaching. Last year a young male tiger, wandering through Karnataka's forests (southern part of India) in search of a patch to call its own, has achieved a feat that will put it in the record books. In 15 months, the tiger travelled 280 kms! We hope that the Telia cubs find a place in the core and wish to see them again in our next visit.

Tadoba also is a delight for the bird watchers with about 195 species being recorded. A few of us saw the sloth bear, though we were not fortunate enough to sight the elusive leopard. Tadoba has about 22 leopards and most of them are found in the buffer zone of the forest. Wild dogs are often seen at Tadoba though we could not see any. Also there is a bountiful number of crocodiles in the Tadoba lake and we could see them floating on the surface.



It was heartening to see that the Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF) armed with sophisticated firearms has been deployed at Tadoba to combat poaching. This is absolutely necessary for long term sustainability of the tigers in India. 31 tigers died across the country in 2012 solely due to poaching and this year up to last month the number has been 19. Global value of the illegal wildlife related trade exceeds \$20 billion per year and probably ranks third after narcotics and the illegal weapons trade. Also there has been efforts from the authorities to relocate the villages which are found inside the core area to mitigate the man-animal conflict. In fact till now a public bus runs twice every day through the forest to cater to the villages located inside the core! As I heard from the locals during our visit, 3 villages have accepted to relocate against compensation which was good news.

It was indeed a very satisfying getaway being tucked up in the lap of Mother Nature with the added windfall of experiencing the rich fauna of Tadoba this summer.

Report by Nirjhar Chakraborty



Field Trip Report

Wadi Musah Walk, April 26, 2013

Wadi Musah, in the Mahda area, is among my favourite places in northern Oman because of the rich diversity of natural and cultural treasures it offers to even the most casual of visitors.

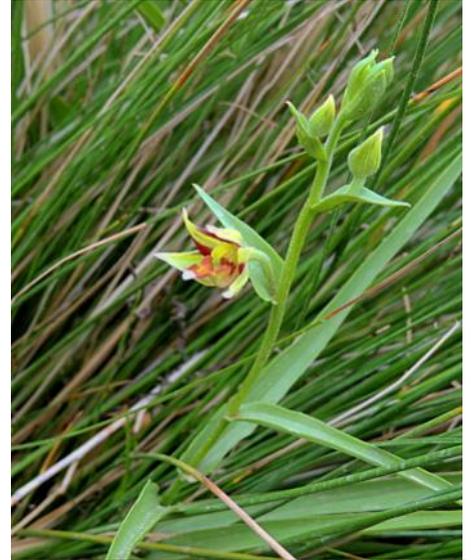
Set among Oman's unforgiving Hajar Mountains, this is a natural Eden that has nourished human habitation for at least the past three millennia. Yet the people who have lived here, right up to the present day, have never sought to dominate the landscape. Rather, they have allowed their activities to be guided and nurtured by what the land has to offer – copious springs to water date palms, fruit and vegetable gardens and fodder for livestock, surface deposits of copper ore for refining into bronze, the natural fortifications provided by the surrounding mountains and, last but not least, access to ancient trade routes.

For anyone with even a cursory interest in archaeology or cultural anthropology, there is plenty here to stimulate enquiry, from extensive evidence of Bronze Age copper smelting to a large and complex system of aflaj (irrigation canals) and terraced fields, initially laid down in pre-Islamic times. But for me, the main reason to visit this particular location in late April of this year was the chance to explore the natural flora and fauna of a large wet wadi during unusually late spring rains. Indeed, it was spotting rain throughout our trip.

At Wadi Musah, the natural part of the water course is reached by following one of the main cement falaj channels up the valley from the village to a system of pools fed by a mountain spring. In the lower reaches, permanent or semi-permanent pools have been encouraged to accumulate by the construction of various dams, retaining walls and cisterns that are part of the irrigation system, yet which always complement the natural water-carved topography. Leading downstream from the spring is a series of natural travertine pools culminating in a small gorge. Between the gorge and the head of the falaj system there is now a large pool, suitable for swimming, which supports its own rich ecosystem of aquatic and riparian species.

Among the notable plants to be found at this locality are various flowering shrubs, including a dense stand of oleander bushes (*Nerium oleander*) extending along both sides of the travertine section that we were lucky enough to find covered in striking pink blossoms. By the "swimming hole", we also found chasteberry (*Vitex agnus-castus*), a member of the verbena family also known as monk's pepper. This attractive shrub, native to the Mediterranean region, has blue or lavender flower spikes that attract butterflies. Its common names derive from Medieval beliefs that extracts of various parts of the plant would help monks keep their vows of chastity. For centuries, the plant has also been used to treat hormone-related gynaecological conditions.

Other plants growing by the swimming hole included a specimen of the local "willow-leaved" wadi fig (*Ficus cordata salicifolia*) bearing fruit, soap-berry bushes (*Dodonea viscosa*) and a well-established clump of rushes (*Juncus* sp.) in flower. Arguably our star pool-side discovery, however, was the Helleborine Orchid (*Epipactis veratrafolia*), which is native to parts of Oman and the UAE. (Cont. on next page)



Top to Bottom: *Epipactis veratrafolia*, *Anax* nymph, *Bufo arabicus*, *Trithemis arteriosa*, Water Beetle

Photo Credit: Tamsin Carlisle

DNHG Recorders

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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.

Wadi Musah Walk, cont.

In the swimming pool were at least two fish species – an introduced tilapia cichlid with a prominent lateral spot on each side, and a small native wadi fish, *Garra barreimiae*. Tilapia, famous for mouth-brooding offspring and eating mosquito larvae, are officially outlawed in Oman due deleterious competition with local fish species, but may have been obtained from across the border at Al Ain. *Garra barreimiae*, a cyprinid fish sometimes called the blind cave fish, is one of the species that the larger, more aggressive Tilapia have displaced from various locations in Oman, the UAE and Bahrain. It has several subspecies, some of which are adapted live in subterranean caves, and is on the IUCN list of threatened species. The Wadi Musah surface population seems to feed on algal and microbial films coating submerged stones. On a previous visit (disappointingly, not on this most recent one), these fish also treated some DNHG members to a natural pedicure!

Other animal sightings in and around the pool included several dragonfly and damselfly species (adults and aquatic nymphs), a large brown water beetle (family Dyticidae), pond skaters (family Gerridae), a wolf spider (family Lycosidae) and a number of juvenile and adult Arabian toads (*Bufo arabicus*), which were also present throughout the irrigation system. They certainly are from a local breeding population, as I saw both spawn and tadpoles on a previous visit to Wadi Musah.

A short walk over a ridge brought us to another spring and stream feeding a cistern on the outskirts of the settlement's extensive date plantation. Overhanging the banks of that stream we found, for the second year running, a number of specimens of the helleborine orchid, which seems well established here in its typical habitat. Maybe, with good rains, it could even spread.

Sadly, however, there is evidence that this wonderful oasis system is drying up due to over-exploitation of ground water and possibly climate change. By now, that's an all-too-familiar story.

More photos online at the following locations:

Wadi Musa flora: http://tinlight.smugmug.com/NaturalHistory/Arabia/Wadi-Musah-Flora/29226724_3TN6Rs#!i=2490771674&k=RjsQqGD

Wadi Musa fauna: http://tinlight.smugmug.com/NaturalHistory/Arabia/Wadi-Musah-Fauna/29121681_4PbTNf#!i=2480756423&k=cnK2gg4

Report by Tamsin Carlisle

Bottom: *Nerium oleander*

Right: *Vitex agnus-castus*

Photo Credit: Tamsin Carlisle

Are You a Techie with Time?

The website sub-committee would like to find volunteers who can help with maintenance of the on-line newsletter, and to upload the wealth of information and photographs from past *Gazelles*. Full training will be given. Contact any Committee person - we will be very pleased to hear from you!



Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

June 2 2013

Dr. Laurie Marker: *Cheetah Futures*

Field Trips (Members Only)

Details of future field trips will be announced/confirmed by e-mail circular.

DNHG COMMITTEE 2013

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 Dh. 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 HSBC account no. 030100242001. (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 AE900200000030100242001. 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.