



GAZELLE

مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

Inside this month

- Page 2:** Announcements
- Page 3:** Field Clips
- Page 4:** Field Trips
- Page 5:** Field Trips
- Page 6:** Field Trips
- Page 7:** Recorders and Announcements
- Page 8:** Programme, Committee, Membership

Contributors

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

Teresa MacGregor-Kerr, Martina Fella, Binish Roobas, Valerie Chalmers and Gary Feulner



End-of-Season Function

The annual End-of-Season Function was once again held in the Utsav Room of the India Club on Thursday 19 June 2014. The evening saw the Annual DNHG Photographic Competition followed by the always entertaining photo and video quizzes.

As voted by the audience, Tamsin Carlisle was star photographer of the evening, taking home 1st prize in both the 'Life on Earth: Plants/ Animals/ Fossils' and 'Earth and Environment: Landscapes/ Geology' sections. Her photo 'View from the Saiq Plateau' (pictured above) was voted overall winner of 2014 and she received the DNHG Trophy and three Dh100/- Virgin Megastore vouchers.

Roberta Lattuada was awarded 1st prize for the 'Man and his Influence: Archaeology/ Architecture/ Culture (People)/ Environment' section and received a Dh100/- Virgin Megastore voucher.

The photo quiz 'Where in the UAE and Oman?' required teams to name various places/buildings and

their locations. Two teams tied for 1st place scoring 18 out of 24 marks and, after a coin toss, the winning team comprised of Andrew McTieran, MaryAnne Pardoe, Sonja Lavrencic, Rowland Browne, Jackie Strict and Teresa MacGregor-Kerr, received notebooks designed by Judy Roberts as prizes!

The video quiz was based on an extract from 'Arabia's Cycles of Life' episode 'Desert Adaptations'. Three teams tied in 1st place with 24 correct answers out of 25, but the winning group who had also won the photo quiz nobly agreed to opt out.

Resorting to another coin toss, the winning team of the video quiz, Binish Roobas, Steve Raynor, Rakesh and Laxmi Rungta and Puneet Verma all received prizes of Choco Dates!

Once again our thanks to the India Club for hosting the event and for another excellent buffet. We should also like to thank Pradeep for his help with the organization of the evening and menu and Michelle Sinclair for setting up the Photographic Competition on the night.

Report by Valerie Chalmers



Roberta Lattuada's winning photo titled 'Culture' for 'Man and his Influence'



Tamsin Carlisle's winning photo titled 'Pond Terrapins' for 'Life on Earth'. Her photo 'View from the Saiq Plateau' (main photo) won first place in 'Earth & Environment' as well as being voted the overall winning photograph of 2014

Announcements



Gulf Elasmobranch Project

Rima Jabado (PhD), lead scientist, is happy to announce the launch of website, Gulf Elasmobranch Project.

www.gulfelasmobranchproject.com

The website aims to serve as a platform for documenting elasmobranch (sharks, rays, guitarfishes, sawfishes and skates) diversity, distribution and abundance through citizen science across the Arabian region, including the Arabian/Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea.

Although there have been several recent studies on elasmobranchs in the region, new species are being discovered and species ranges are still being expanded.

You can now be our EYES in the field and help us document species that you may encounter diving or from visits to landing sites, fish markets and even supermarkets.

The website currently includes some basic information on elasmobranchs, their status and threats to them around the world, along with a page to report your sightings.

It will soon feature information on each of the species found in the region along with identification sheets that can be used when undertaking research on elasmobranchs in the region.

This is still a work in progress so your inputs and comments would be highly appreciated.

RIMA JABADO, PhD
LEAD SCIENTIST

P.O. Box 29588, Dubai, UAE
M +971 50 888 5687
E rimajabado@hotmail.com
W www.gulfelasmobranchproject.com

UAE Dolphin Project Needs You!

The UAE Dolphin Project is planning the first summer survey of the Dubai coastline to assess the status of the local dolphin population.

We are looking for volunteers who are willing to join the research team on the project boat.

If anyone is interested, please send an email to us at:

sighting@uaedolphinproject.org

No previous experience is needed and no commitment of

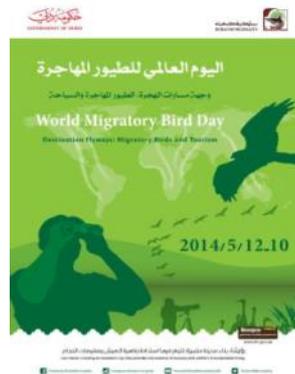
overtime is requested, although a positive attitude, being happy to deal with the heat and the boat is recommended.

Looking forward to hearing from you, Ada Natoli (PhD), Project director of the UAE Dolphin Project.

www.uaedolphinproject.org



World Migratory Bird Day 2014



The World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) is an annual awareness raising campaign highlighting the need for the protection of migratory birds and their habitats.

To mark the occasion a seminar was held at the 'Falcon Heritage Centre' in Nad Al Sheba with the theme 'Destination Flyways: Migratory Birds and Tourism', which was accompanied by a photo exhibition in the Abu Hail DM Center.

Speakers at the event included fellow DNHG member Mrs. Sandhya Prakash, who gave a talk titled 'Migratory Bird Habitat Conservation for Bird Watchers & Tourists' and Mr Peter Bergh, Managing Director of Royal Sha-

heen Events, who covered the topic 'The Art of Falconry in the Commercial Industry'.

The winners of the photography contest were also announced with Mr. Fouad Itani coming in 1st place, Mr. Dhammika Pedururachchi in 2nd place and Mr. Abbas Mohammed Ibrahim winning 3rd place.

If you would like to know more a full activity report can be found in the following link:

http://worldmigratorybirdday.org/2014/upload/reports/695444_Dubai_WMBD%202014%20Activity%20Report.pdf





The distinctive long, pendant seed pods of *Moringa peregrina*



Several wispy *Moringa peregrina* growing in a side wadi



A seedling of *Moringa peregrina*, showing paired leaves

Enigmatic Seedlings: *Moringa peregrina*

One of the most characteristic trees of the mountains of the UAE is *Moringa peregrina*. It is distinguished by its wispy, string-like leaves and its large, elongated seed pods (it has been called the 'drumstick tree').

Its typical habitat is steep slopes, whether on rock or scree, but it can sometimes be found growing in or beside wadis.

It grows up to elevations of ca. 800m. In the Ru'us al-Jibal (the mountains of the Musandam peninsula) it is replaced at higher elevations by the very similar looking Arabian almond *Prunus arabica* – a striking example of convergent evolution. Even the white flowers of the two trees resemble each other.

The young *Moringa peregrina* is quite different in appearance from the adult, however, and would

probably go unrecognized by uninitiated observers.

The seedling has multiple paired ovoid leaves reminiscent of the pinnate (feather-like) leaves of plants in the bean and acacia families (Fabaceae and Mimosaceae). Each individual leaf has a small but distinct point at the end (botanically, a *muco*).

Report and photos by
Gary Feulner

Ospreys in the Northern Emirates

Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* were, until recently, considered threatened species in the US and Europe, so many UAE expats take special notice of them. During a bird watching field trip at IEW a question was asked about Ospreys in the UAE.

Can they be found in the Northern Emirates or only in along the coast of the western region of Abu Dhabi?

The answer is yes, Ospreys can certainly be found in the Northern Emirates.

They are considered a common breeding bird in all coastal areas, although they may be more likely to breed in the western region and on offshore islands, where there are fewer human disturbances.

However, they have been seen regularly, for example, at Dubai's Ras al Khor and have even been known to perch on the ledges of Dubai's nearby skyscrapers.

In early March I had the good fortune to see not one, but two Ospreys on a sabkha along the coast road north of Sharjah.

Both of them were feeding, evidently, on fish they had recently caught at a nearby khor. One was perched on a wooden box and was pecking intermittently at the remains of the fish carcass. It was not disturbed by our vehicle, which was less than 100m away.

Driving only about 200m further, we flushed a second osprey from the wrinkled sabkha ground. It flew off with the carcass of a nearly whole fish dangling from its claws. This may be a sign that there is plenty of food for these birds in the nearby khor.

In India, I have seen Ospreys engage in exciting aerial displays, circling, thrusting, diving and dropping to try to take food away from one another, apparently as an easier alternative to catching their own.

Report and photos by
Binish Roobas



Field Trips



Enthralling Georgia

Enthralling Georgia! – offering immense beauty, pristine nature, rich history, ancient tradition, and the warmest of cultures and hospitality ... truly an enchanting, fascinating and captivating country to visit.

Our first three days, based in gorgeous Tblisi, were diverse and intriguing by way of sights and experiences, and the nights lavish with Georgian hospitality. As a delightful introduction, our hotel was right next to the lovely Metekhi Church, dramatically perched on a cliff overlooking the Mtkvali River which runs through Tblisi, and offered some tantalizing views of the city.

On day one we visited the interesting and quite 'gripping' Stalin museum in the town of Gori, filled with intriguing old photographs, memorabilia and insights. Thereafter, the incredible ancient cave-town of Uplistsikhe was fascinating and captivating, filled with huge and varied important chambers and rock 'creations', some specially shaped for wine-making and a herbarium.

On our second day we journeyed to the absolutely spectacular mountain arena of the Caucasus, leading up to, and surrounding, the highest peak in Georgia: Mount Kazbek at 5,047 metres.

Enroute we visited the beautiful Jvari Church, the 'spiritual heart' of



Georgia's ancient capital, Mtskheta

Animal Prints Sighted

Gray Wolf
Canis lupus

Golden Jackal
Canis aureus

Gray Fox or Red Fox
Urocyon cinereoargenteus or
Vulpes vulpes

Raccoon (*invasive species*)
Procyon lotor

Jungle Cat
Felis chaus

Crested Porcupine
Hystrix cristata

Reptiles Sighted

Two 'non-bird' species which cannot be left out, owing to their prominence on our hike and dusk drive in the Vashlovani National Park:

Caucasian Agama
Laudakia caucasia

Sheltopusik (Glass Lizard)
Pseudopus apodus

Bird-calls Heard

Nightingale
Luscinia megarhynchos

Common Cuckoo
Cuculus canorus

Georgia, resting high on a hilltop above the pretty ancient Georgian capital of Mtskheta, as well as the picturesque Ananuri churches and fortress overlooking the Zhinvali Dam. Once at Kazbegi town, the views of towering Mount Kazbek were awe-inspiring, as was the exquisite Tsminda Sameda Church perched at 2,200 metres on the ascent.

Our third day was in Tblisi itself, amongst the jubilant and patriotic Georgian Independence Day celebrations, and above the comely city visiting the ancient Narikala Fortress with remnant walls built by Persians, Turks and Georgians. Another Tblisi 'must-visit' was the famous 'Abanotubani' sulphur

springs, the legendary reason for the founding of the city ('*tbili*' means 'warm' in Georgian).

Our first three evenings were just as enthralling - filled with opulent Georgian hospitality, decadent Georgian food and wine, and vibrant Georgian culture and dancing - at three lovely venues, each unique, beautiful and interesting. The last showcased true traditional Georgian cuisine including large, juicy '*khinkali*' (meat dumplings). And we soon grew to look forward to some delectable Georgian '*khachapuri*' (cheese pie/pizza) on a daily basis!

Leaving Tblisi and surrounds, we headed to the far eastern corner of

(Continued on page 5)



Jvari Church, the 'spiritual heart' of Georgia



The cave cluster of Uplistsikhe, the oldest urban settlement in Georgia.

Georgia cont.

(Continued from page 4)

Georgia, bordered by Azerbaijan on three sides, and with lovely views of the Caucasus Mountains in the distance. Here we spent time in the beautiful and interesting Vashlovani National Park, rich with fauna, flora and bird-life.

We enjoyed exquisite views and walks in different areas of the park, while relishing the bird-watching opportunities and animal-print identification, as well as the abundant knowledge and enthusiasm of our



Tblisi

young Georgian guide Levan, who is a PhD student in Ornithology.

We also had the privilege of a fascinating lecture on Biodiversity and Landscapes of the Caucasus Region, by Zura Javakhishvili, Research Associate at the Institute of Ecology, Ilia State University, Georgia.

Our final day and night were devoted to experiencing and learning about unique Georgian wine, wine country, ancient wine-making techniques (including underground storage in huge clay urns) and the famous 'gustation' (Georgian wine tasting) experience!

This was in the eastern Kakheti region of Georgia, and particularly in the lovely town of Telavi. Georgian wine-making is rich in history and tradition, not to mention taste! The most famous Georgian speciality red wine is called 'Saperavi'.

Warm and heartfelt thanks to our inspirational, knowledgeable and



Mount Kazbek

caring guide for the trip, Marina Javakhishvili and, equally, to helpful and attentive Christine Verreydt of the DNHG who initiated this trip. Thank you both for a fabulous, captivating and enthralling experience of Georgia!

Published with this article is the Bird-sighting and Animal-print list from our two days in the Vashlovani National Park, compiled with the help of our 'nature' guide Levan.

Report and photos by
Teresa MacGregor-Kerr

Birds Sighted

Long-legged Buzzard
Buteo rufinus

European Bee-eater
Merops apiaster

Black-headed Bunting
Emberiza melanocephala

Common Starling
Sturnus vulgaris

Rose Colour Starling
Sturnus roseus

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler
Iduna pallid

Eastern Orphean Warbler
Sylvia crassirostris

Ménétries's Warbler
Sylvia mystacea

Hoopoe
Upupa epops

European Roller
Coracias garrulus

Wood Pigeon
Columba palumbus

Corn Bunting
Miliaria calandra

European Goldfinch
Carduelis carduelis

Lesser Grey Shrike
Lanius minor

Red-backed Shrike
Lanius collurio

Black-eared Wheatear
Oenanthe hispanica

Common (House) Sparrow
Passer domesticus

Eurasian Magpies
Pica pica

Calandra Lark
Melanocorypha calandra

Golden Oriole
Oriolus oriolus

Alpine Swift
Tachymartus melba

European Blackbird
Turdus merula

Egyptian Vulture
Neophron percnopterus

Griffin Vulture
Gyps fulvus

Barn Swallow
Birunda rustica

Crested Lark
Galerida cristata

Skylark
Alauda arvensis

House Martin
Delichon urbicum

Turtle Dove
Streptopelia turtur

Little Owl
Athene noctua

Northern Raven
Corvus corax

Field Trips



A fisherman rubbing salt into a fish

DNHG trip to the Dubai Fish Market

One receiving a newspaper article regarding the planned closure and demolition of the old Deira Fish Market to make way for a new and modern facility in July, the DNHG felt it was worth a visit once more before the final closure and organized, at short notice, a walking trip to the Fish Market.

Starting at the Al Ghubaiba metro station in Bur Dubai, we made our way past the heritage village and then through the pedestrian tunnel to the Deira side of Dubai. As usual the overwhelming fish odour hit us as soon as we emerged on the other side.

It was just before sunset when we reached the market and already from afar we were able to see a large number of big sharks lined up on the specially constructed concrete platforms. There were many different species of sharks including Blacktip Sharks (*Carcharhinus limbatus*), Pigeye Sharks (*Carcharhinus amboinensis*), Spottail Sharks (*Carcharhinus sorrah*) and some large Hammerheads (*Sphyrna mokarran*). On the floor next to the shark display there was even a large guitarfish (*Rhynchobatus djiddensis*).

It is always very sad to see all the sharks, which appear to have only been killed for their fins. Despite all the efforts to prevent the practice in Dubai more and more trucks with Omani number plates, some all the way from the Dhofar region, arrived to off-load their cargo of dead

sharks. There were also shark fins for sale without the actual animal. These we presume had been chopped off the animals at sea with the still live animal thrown back into the water; a cruel practice known as 'finning'.

Not far away from the shark display there was a large pile of baby hamour (*Epinephelus diacanthus*, *Epinephelus tauvina*, *Epinephelus stoliczkae*). Some of the fish had not yet reached adulthood and were only 15 cm in size. During the trip I did not see any full-grown hamour in the entire fish market.

Despite everything it is always nice to see the countless men from India and Bangladesh working there with big smiles on their faces. It was particularly interesting to watch two men rubbing sea salt on fish in order to dry and preserve them.

Last but not least, we could not leave the market without a visit to the fresh coconut stand in the fruit and vegetable section where the same lovely man from Kerala has been selling the delicious treat for the past 15 years. After browsing all the fruit and vegetables we left the market and headed towards the Gold Souk. By this time the bargaining for sharks at the fish market was in full swing.

From the hustle and bustle of the Gold Souk, we made our way through the narrow lanes towards the Spice Souk and from there we took an Abra back to Bur Dubai. The entire group agreed that a



DNHG member, Amelie, enjoying a fresh coconut

visit to this part of Dubai is always a special experience not to be missed.

I would like to specially thank Rima Jacado, lead scientist of the Gulf Elasmobranch Project, for identifying the guitar fish species. If you would like to know more about her project please refer to the article on page 2 of this newsletter.

Report and photos by
Martina Fella



Guitarfish (*Rhynchobatus djiddensis*)

While it is sad to see so many sharks auctioned in Dubai it is important to note that sharks are fully utilized for both their fins and meat. The stigma of the 'Fin trade' comes from the unethical practice of 'Finning' which is the removal of the shark's fins at sea and the disposal of the still live animal into the water. This practice rarely happens in the region and certainly not in Dubai.

The issue of the 'Fin trade' is very important to the region and it always helps for the public to voice their concerns to help apply pressure on regulating the activity. If you feel passionate about creating awareness here are a few things you can do:

- Write a letter of concern, along with any photos, to the Ministry of Environment and Water.
- Write to your local newspapers, also along with any photos.
- Join an existing awareness campaign like www.finathon.org or more locally www.diversdownuae.com/project-aware-finathon.html who in May held a 'Swim-a-thon' at the RIVA beach club to raise money and promote awareness.

Announcements

DNHG Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan
res: 344 8283
off 344 0462

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi
res: 06-5310467
off: 06-5583 003
email: lankefi@emirates.net.ae

Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner
res: 306 5570

Insects - Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
res: 394 8871
email: valeriechalmers@gmail.com

Plants - Valerie Chalmers

Archaeology - MaryAnne Pardoe
mobile: 050 724 2984
email: maryannepardoe@yahoo.c
o.uk



2013 Musandam Project Report

Underwater pioneers: studying & protecting the unique coral reefs of the Musandam peninsula, Oman, published earlier this year confirms that the Musandam reefs are in a good state.

The full report of the volunteer-led research can be found in the following link:

www.biosphere-expeditions.org



WME News

The April 2014 edition of Wildlife Middle East News is now available online in the below link:

www.wmenews.com

Featuring:

- Ethiopian hedgehogs
- Arabian sand cats
- Wild mammals of Iraq

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.

We still want your Snails

A reminder, especially for new members: Your unwanted garden snails and slugs are of interest for scientific study and an accounting of the terrestrial molluscs of the UAE.

All specimens will be gratefully accepted by Chairman Gary Feulner, and contributors will be kept informed of progress and pedigrees. Suburban gardens are home to several native Arabian snails, but also a number of introduced species. There have been a few surprises over the years and we suspect there are more out there.

Dead shells are preferred; we'll follow up if you've got something unusual. **It's easy. Just bag 'em and tag 'em!** Please remember to record the location and the habitat, as well as your name.

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!

Old Tribulus Volumes Wanted

The ENHG journal, *Tribulus*, is now in its twenty-third year of publication. Since it began, it has become increasingly important as a source of published data about the natural history and archaeology of the UAE. Much of the material published in *Tribulus* is available nowhere else.

As the journal continues to expand its reputation overseas, the Editorial Board have received an increasing number of requests from overseas academic and other scientific institutions for sets of *Tribulus*. Unfortunately, it is not possible to meet all of these requests, since some of the older issues are out of stock and reprinting would make no economic sense.

If any DNHG members are leaving the UAE and do not want to take their copies of *Tribulus* with them, then the Editorial Board would be delighted to have them back! Anyone wishing to hand back copies should contact any member of the DNHG Committee, who will arrange to get the copies to the Editorial Board. Many thanks, in advance.

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

**Please note there are no lectures scheduled for July and August. Lectures will resume in September.*

Field Trips (Members Only)

July 3 to 8: Sri Lanka trip, including 1 full-day safari at the Yala Natural Park Safari and visit to Bundala Natural Park

Further field trips, details or changes to trips will be announced/confirmed by email circular

DNHG COMMITTEE 2014

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

	name	tel	email
Chairman	Gary Feulner	04 306 5570	grfeulner@gmail.com
Vice Chairman	Valerie Chalmers	050 455 8498	valeriechalmers@gmail.com
Treasurer	Rakesh Rungta	050 558 2435	rakesh99@emirates.net.ae
Membership Secretary	Anindita Radhakrishna	050 656 9165	anin@emirates.net.ae
Speaker Co-ordinator	Martina Fella	050 358 6485	martina_fella@hotmail.com
Speaker Co-ordinator	Michelle Sinclair	050 458 6079	sinclairm2004@yahoo.com
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Pradeep Radhakrishna	050 450 8496	wgarnet@emirates.net.ae
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Jenny Hill	050 886 1508	jennyhill76@hotmail.com
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Sonja Lavrenčič	050 256 1496	lavson@gmail.com
Newsletter Editor	Peter Olliff	055 394 2308	peolliff@gmail.com
Librarian / Book Sales	Johanna Raynor	050 604 2575	jordayoman@gmail.com
Postmaster	Sandi Ellis	050 644 2682	sandiellis@gmail.com
Chief Engineer	Ajmal Hasan	06 5043523	ajmal_hasan@hotmail.com
Website Coordinator	Sandhya Prakash	050 551 2481	sandy_pi@yahoo.com

Postal Address: DNHG, PO Box 9234, Dubai, UAE

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 2013 to Sep 2014. 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.