



GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

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Contributors—

Thanks to the following for their contributions:

Gary Feulner, Binish Roobas, Chandrashekar. S. Sardesai, Helga Meyer, Lamjed El-Kefi, Harold Bekker, Ibrahim Zakhour, Sonja Lavrenčič and Charles Laubach.

Send your contributions for the September issue to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

By 25th September 2018

Fields of flowers welcomed DNHG members on their June trip to Slovenia. They were met with other natural, historic and architectural delights. Find out more within this issue.



Things That Go 'Jump' in the Night!



The Stone Huntsman spider *Eusparassus laevatus* is willing to leap when necessary (photo by Binish Roobas)

It was a relatively steamy August night for an impromptu visit to the Hajar Mountains, but the reward for a small group of DNHG naturalists was that, after the sun went down, many of the denizens of upper Wadi Hiluw showed a side we don't normally see.

At dusk, a female of the local Blue-Headed Agama (recently recognized as a distinct species, *Pseudotrapelus jensvendumi*) was flushed by our group, but not flustered. While still under close observation it spied and leapt onto a large grasshopper, right in front of the waiting camera of Chandrashekar Sardesai.

After dark, the fan-footed gecko *Ptyodactylus hasselquistii*, normally found on vertical or overhanging walls or roofs, was seen in trees and also hopping among wadi boulders – as well as on my leg.

Even more acrobatic among wadi boulders was Gallagher's Leaf-Toed Gecko *Asaccus gallagheri*, which is usually nearly catatonic when seen by day. One seemed literally to fly between rocks, an image also captured by Chandrashekar.

Spiders were not to be left out of the competition. I have seen the stone huntsman *Eusparassus laevatus* leap from stone walls to capture flying insect prey. But I had never before seen one run across a boulder strewn wadi. Its tolerance finally exhausted by our

(Continued on page 4)

Announcements and Recorders

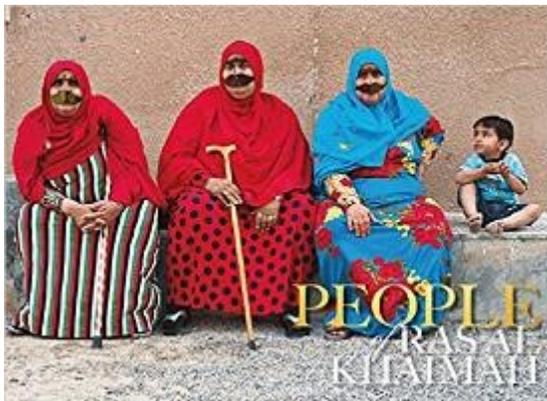
**Monthly Speaker -
8pm on Sunday 16 September, 2018**

Lecture Title - "People of Ras Al Khaimah"

Biography - Anna Zacharias and Jeff Topping

Anna Zacharias moved to Ras Al Khaimah from Canada's west coast as a child. She worked as a journalist at The National newspaper for more than six years, including three years as a Ras Al Khaimah correspondent from 2008 to 2011. Based in Abu Dhabi from 2011 to 2014, she worked as a senior features writer specializing in pop heritage and wrote The National's camel blog, A Year at the Camel Races.

Jeff Topping is an American photojournalist and travel photographer with more than 25 years experience in more than 20 countries. In the United States, he was a contract photographer for Reuters, the New York Times and Getty Images. He came to the United Arab Emirates in 2008 to join The National as a staff photographer and is now a Dubai-based freelancer. He is represented by Polaris Images.



Three mountain women that re-located to coastal Al Jeer in the 1980s (photographed by Jeff Topping)

From the Editor:

Unable to see the lunar eclips during June, I was very pleased that Lamjed El-Kefi sent his photos of this occurrence (*see the Spotlight page*). For those that would like to view the photos in a higher resolution, the photos have also been uploaded to the website. They can be viewed [here](#).

Also on the Spotlight page, Helga Meyer describes her visit to crystal-clear waters in Croatia.

Meanwhile, in neighbouring Slovenia, other members encountered a hidden lake as they explored gorges and mountains, ultimately visiting the capital city of Lubljana, tales of which are retold on pages 5, 6 and 7.

As many of us look forward to cooler weather before venturing outside, some hardy members were out exploring over the summer. The cover article describes one night in a wadi during August.

Don't miss out on our September speakers (*see above*), who have recently launched a book on the people of Ras Al Khaimah. At this moment in time, Amazon have apparently run out of copies!

Enjoy your read!



Some DNHG members attended a Dubai farewell for Andrew McTiernan, who left in July.

DNHG Recorders

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Mammals - new recorder needed!

Spotlight!

Lunar Eclipse as observed from Dubai—July, 2018 (sequence captured by Lamjed El-Kefi)
Larger images with a higher clarity can be viewed on the website



Lake Plitvice National Park, Croatia, by Helga Meyer and her daughter, Uta



There was nowhere to hide for this unusual fish (above).

The colours of the clear water changed all the time; shades of blue/aquamarine when the sun shone and shades of grey/green when the clouds covered the sun.

Plitvice is a fascinating waterworld consisting of lakes, waterfalls and creeks. The water was crystal clear—so clear that we refilled our water bottles from the streams and drank the cold and refreshing water without getting sick.



It seemed that every wildflower or leaf was visited by an insect or two.



Walking around the lakes and waterfalls we spotted a snail, a spider and two snakes. There was also an amazing sight of hundreds of dragonflies and damselflies.

Field Clips

(Continued from page 1)

photographic efforts, it demonstrated its speed, but it also surprised us by *leaping* from the small boulders it climbed as it fled, the way a motorcyclist would leap from a ramp.

We also found a large centipede *Scolopendra* sp. hunting in the very rough bark of a large ghaf tree. We were surprised at the speed with which it shot away and around the tree: not an easy job when you have to coordinate the movement of 23 pairs of legs.

Even a pitted beetle *Adesmia* sp., normally a plodder and one of the few ground dwellers reliably found afoot in the midday sun, proved to be more rambunctious than usual. We found one at dusk climbing in a small *Acacia* tree.

The only animal that didn't seem to join in the action, in fact, was the one best known for jumping. A large Dhofar Toad just sat, stock still, in a bed of cut palm fronds at the edge of a plantation, motionless, if not oblivious, in response to our photographic attention.

Contribution by Gary Feulner



Large centipede *Scolopendra* sp. hunting in the rough bark of a ghaf tree (photo by Chandrashekar Sardesai)



A large Dhofar Toad *Duttaphrynus dhufarensis* (photo by Gary Feulner)



Blue-Headed Agama (recently recognized as a distinct species) with a freshly caught grasshopper (photo by Chandrashekar Sardesai)



Fan-Footed Gecko *Ptyodactylus hasselquistii* in an uncommon habitat (photo by Chandrashekar Sardesai)



The same large centipede viewed from another angle, by Binish Roobas



Gallagher's Leaf-Toed Gecko *Asaccus gallagheri* in flight (photo by Chandrashekar Sardesai)

For those that are following the Yellow-billed stork visits, Charles Laubach has reported further sightings over DIFC on:

- 2nd July, choosing three different ledges in the same location on the Emirates Towers Hotel tower between 13:35 to 16:50
- 15th July, circling but not landing, once at 10:30 and again at 11:15
- 21st August, circling but not landing at 12:15 and 12:30

Field Trips

Slovenia by Foot

In June the DNHG organized its third trip to the small European country of Slovenia.

This time we explored Slovenia mostly by foot on a hiking trip venturing deep into Julian Alps, which are in the north-west corner of Slovenia, close to borders with Italy and Austria. This area is famous mostly for its picturesque glacial lakes, clear water streams and mountain peaks reaching above 2000 m above sea level.

Our 8-day hike brought different highlights and stories every day. Glacial lakes of Bled and Bohinj are famous tourist and health resorts, whilst the nearby 20 m deep



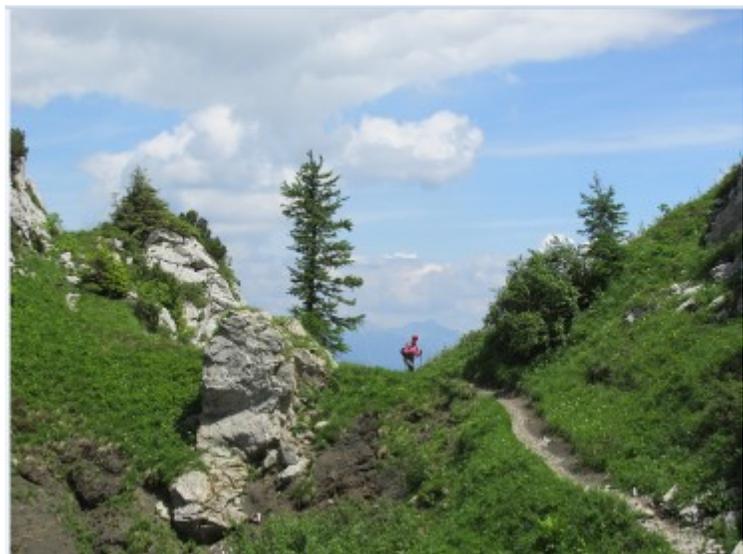
Mostiscnica gorge with its clear stream is hidden from the main tourist paths. Not many know how locals tricked the devil who helped them build the stone bridge over the deep gorge. Fable has it that as payment, the soul of the first that crossed the bridge had to be given to him and the clever locals promptly sent one of their goats across first.

During the winter Vogel cable cars that takes skiers to

higher skiing slopes offered beautiful views over Bohinj lake and Savica waterfall. Later our seven-hour hike took us further away from modern civilization along the mountain ridge, bypassing the remains of first world war Austrian support lines. These were situated just behind the Isonzo front line to our next stop, Komna lodge. We spent our next two nights there, exploring the neighboring mountains and valleys – and an open-air museum with more tragic First World War (WW1) remains. The 12 battles of Isonzo caused an estimated 1.2 million casualties of which around 30,000 ethnic Slovenians, drafted by the Austrian army. Despite the high number of casualties



these battles had little or no tactical merit in the outcome of WW1. The border between Italy, Austria and later Yugoslavia



and Slovenia kept changing, causing disputes during the history – and is now luckily just a formal line between the three European Union countries.

From the mountain pass above the Austrian supply lines we managed to see all the way to the sea: the sun reflecting the waters of the 100km distant bay of Trieste. But the highlight of the day was Krnsko lake, a clear little lake hidden among the Julian Alps and reachable only by foot.

Descending from Komna mountain we passed by the two lower lakes of Triglav National Park. Apparently clear lakes that reflect the mountain peaks on their calm waters are now super-protected. However, the lakes are still recovering from decades of abuse. The main issue was caused by the thoughtless introduction of fish which caused the extinction of the endemic

(Continued on page 6)

Field Trips



(Continued from page 5)

shrimp and subsequently the spread of algae. It will take quite some time before the lakes re-establish their natural equilibrium again.

We next visited the border with Austria. The path on the ridge weaved

through border stones and it is hard to imagine that this was once the super-guarded border between East and West, the Socialist Yugoslavia and West block Austria. The border crosses the highest 2000 m high peak of Trupejevo Poldne and the cross on the top bears the Slovenian name on Slovenian and Austrian name on Austrian side.

Our final hiking day brought some further excitement with its steep slopes and some rock scrambling, even a short via ferrata climb. We also learned about local manganese mines and the economy of mountain pastures with happy free-range cows that are brought up the mountain during summer months to pasture freely on mountain aromatic herbs and grass. As the transportation of milk to the valley would take too long, milk is turned into famous local cheese right there on the mountain.



Finally, we visited the capital Ljubljana, built under the medieval castle and along the river Ljubljana. We walked through the medieval streets, took a boat ride along the river and learned about Ljubljana's rich history. We later sampled some of the gastronomy at the lively local market.

Despite our very active days we saw just a fraction of Slovenian beauty and history and hopefully we will have the opportunity to

visit another corner of Slovenia soon.

Contribution by Sonja Lavrencic

Slovenia Flora

Spring was in full swing during our visit to Slovenia. A palette of flowers in varying colors, shapes and sizes blanketed the sunny, southern mountain slopes. It appeared that all flora had "exploded" after a long winter covered and protected by meters of snow.

No time to waste as plants grew, displaying their flowers to get pollinated and reproduce before the winter starts again.

To many species to mention showcased their beauty with one "screaming" for more attention above the other.

Contribution by
Harold Bekker



Gentiana verna



Scorzonera rosea



Clematis alpina



Lilium Carniolicum

Field Trips

Slovenian Hikes-Julian Alps

Now I know what an honour it was for me to be made a lifetime member in the AI Ain ENHG some years ago, as that allowed me join this great trip, as a "Member". Thanks to all those who made me a lifetime member.

I had never been to the area before, and indeed I enjoyed it a lot. Mostly for me was the grand scenery, with the great joy of visiting at this time of the year. The snow was just melting in most of the

View from Tito's teahouse of the island in the middle of lake Bled



areas where we hiked. We could see the new growth just shooting up to capture the very short season,

enough to fulfil the annual life cycle of regeneration within the limited time of snow melt, and the snow

fall not long after—a span of 3 or 4 months at the most, really. We were treated to spectacular colours of flowers, insects, and new growth in the Alpine environment. We passed a few places where the snow would have just melted, and were able to see the tracks small mammals would have made in snow tunnels on their movements within.

There were many highlights on the trip, but with my architect's eye, I could not help admiring architecture at large, especially in Ljubljana, where the city planning was the result of a great architect's vision, order and design—what a place!

Allow me to note another particular work of architecture—the old villa of Marshall Tito who was the president of old Yugoslavia. He was a founder member along with Jamal Abdul Naser of Egypt, and Jawaharlal Nehru of India of the non-allied movement during

The socialist mosaic in ex-president Tito's tea house



Tito's mountainside villa

the cold war between the USSR and the USA. His villa sat on the shoulder of a mountain overlooking Lake Bled. Now an hotel, we were able to have refreshments on the Veranda structure overlooking the lake. It was planted on the mountain side, with great skill. Photos of dignitaries that visited the place a long time ago still hang on the walls. What a magnificent setting and very atmospheric. It felt as if I was part of a delegation. A great privilege indeed to experience the place. This great work of architecture is similar in planning and design to the great

Mammal tracks after snow melt



architect, Cesar Menrique, in his Cactus garden project in Lanzarote—two architects in different locations arrive at the same or similar solution to a complicated design.

So privileged to have joined this trip. Thanks to Sonja and Andrej for the great organisation and extra human care, as well to all the members who accepted me, a total stranger to them, to integrate with the group.

Contribution by Ibrahim Zakhour

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

September 16:	Anna Zacharias and Jeff Topping—"People of Ras Al Khaimah"
October 7:	Ali Iqbal—"The Trucial Coast during the Second World War: Incidents and Accidents"
November 4:	Natalie Banks—"Marine Debris: why we should care and what we should do"

Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

September 7—13:	DNHG trip to Greece
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Field trips will also be circulated to members via e-mail

DNHG COMMITTEE 2018

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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Committee Positions

DNHG have the following (voluntary) positions available:

Field Trip Coordinator—a second Field Trip Coordinator is required to assist in organizing field trips.

Membership Secretary and Assistant Membership Secretary—this would suit a person or persons who regularly attend lectures.

DNHG Membership

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership is valid from September 2017 to September 2018. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to HSBC account number 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 AE900200000030 100242001. However, this process does not identify you as the payer. If you wish to pay by cash, please also photograph or scan a copy of your payment confirmation and send via e-mail to the Membership Secretary, so we know whose money we have received.

DNHG membership entitles you to participate in field trips and help 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.