



GAZELLE

مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

www.dnhg.org

At the end of his recent talk to the DNHG, Jens Eriksen said something to the effect that, if you spend time in the field here, you will always spot something of interest. I agree with this wholeheartedly and, rather than languish at home, I am always happy poking around outdoors, often with no objective other than to see what turns up. And so it was that earlier in the year I was wandering around in the desert behind Jebel Faya when I found the most unusual bone – with a big spike. Prompted perhaps by a liking for horror movies I imagined something reptilian, ripping into its prey, but it wasn't until I searched 'bone spike' on the internet that I understood what I had found. The website of London's Natural History Museum came to the



Spurred On!

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Contributors—Thanks to the following for their contributions:

Angela Manthorpe, Puneet Verma, Helga Meyer, Margaret Swan, Binish Roobas, Tamsin Carlisle, Gary Feulner and Stephen Green.

Send your contributions to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

rescue – their first image showed exactly what I had in my hand – apparently the Tarsometatarsus of a bird – possibly a pheasant or something similar.

I pictured someone cooking their Christmas turkey in the desert, but consulted with Oscar Campbell of UAE Birding for a more informed opinion. Here's what he had to say: *“the obvious spur on the bone is very characteristic of leg bones of various gamebirds and Grey Francolin is by far the most likely candidate in the UAE deserts (other gamebirds – Sand and Chukar Partridges) are typical on rocky mountains, not sandy desert.”* The bone is 10.5 cm in length, is lightweight and seems to be hollow. Oscar noted that the scale seemed about right and added *“Grey Francolins never seem very long-legged but I am sure a lot of the leg is hidden under the belly feathers....the Grey Francolin is a very common bird in the UAE although it was introduced here and is native to NW India.”*

In many parts of the world birds of the francolin and pheasant families are called spur fowl, due to the prevalence of spurs on the tarsi of both male and female birds.

Contribution by
Angela Manthorpe



Announcements and Recorders

Monthly Speaker - As the season is coming to an end, there will be no speakers until September.

These photos were taken by Tamsin Carlisle and Margaret Swan at the recent 'Green Planet' visit (report on page 5).

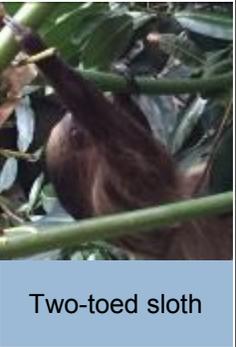
Some of you may be lucky enough to visit a real rainforest over the summer. If you do, send some photos of what you see to gazelleeditor@gmail.com We would love to publish photos and reports of anything at all connected to natural history, in the July/August or September edition.



Toco Toucan *Ramphastos toco*



Brazilian Salmon-pink Bird-eating Tarantula *Lasiodora parahybana*



Two-toed sloth

From the Committee:
The season is drawing to a close and we wish those that are travelling soon, to have a safe journey.
There will be no lectures or field trips until September, but we would appreciate any photographs or reports from your travels for inclusion in the summer Gazelle.
As is usual practice, the July and August issues will be combined.

Someone gets a message across to 'Protect the Hammerhead Sharks,' at a recent turtle release.
More photos on page 4.



From the Editor:

The recent trip to The Green Planet had a huge response, with a second group being catered for, later the same day (report on page 7)

The DNHG to Serbia at the beginning of June was cancelled, but news of an October trip to Southern Vietnam is on page 8, details of which were sent to members via email.



Read about this tasty morsel (left) on page 6.

As June draws to a close, Dubai is heating up, encountering very high temperature and humidity levels. Take care when out and about locally, and always, ALWAYS carry water and wear a hat.

Despite the summer heat, life goes on at Al Qudra (see page 5)

Those travelling, please send natural history photos and reports to gazelleeditor@gmail.com for the July/August summer edition.

Enjoy your read!

Jupiter's South Pole

The surreal image below was captured via the Juno spacecraft on 25th May, 2017. It is quite understandable how art projects, in whatever medium or format, are inspired by nature.

See larger images of this, and an even more amazing array of photographs of Jupiter's swirling clouds, by clicking on the NASA photo below:

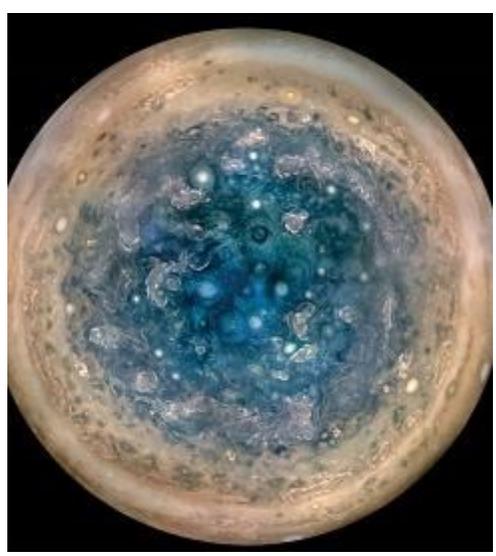


Image Credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech/SwRI/MSSS/
Betsy Asher Hall/Gervasio Roble

DNHG Recorders

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Spotlight!

The Green Planet Visit, by Tamsin Carlisle



Giant African Millipede *Archispirostreptus gigas*



Frog-legged Beetle *Sagra femorrata*



Tree Frog



Sun Conures/Parakeets

Ghantoot Nature Reserve, by Helga Meyer



DNHG Trip to Uttarakhand, India (March, 2017), by Puneet Verma



Field Clips

Turtle Release at Ghantoot

On Friday 26 May 2017 we were invited by Emirates Marine Environmental Group to be part of the turtle release in the Ghantoot Reserve. Forty five Hawksbill juvenile turtles were released from Dubai Turtle Rehabilitation Center—it was a very touching experience!

We met many like-minded people that love nature and prefer the simple life ... far away from the glitz and glamour of hotels, malls and skyscrapers.

Contribution by Helga Meyer



Life After Dubai: Back to the Palaeolithic

Westerners among us who have found natural history adventure in the UAE sometimes think that those adventures must inevitably be tamer when we eventually return home. In Bahrain and the UAE, Stephen Green studied and published on seashells, freshwater and land snails, Palaeolithic stone tools and rock art. Now based on the south coast of England, he has written back to us from time to time about spider bites, snake bites, bee stings, etc. to let us know that the physical adventure is still there.

More recently, Stephen wrote to remind us that the intellectual adventure is still there, too. He raised the excitement level among archaeologists at the local museum when, on one of his regular dog-walking beach outings, he turned up a hand axe that appears to have weathered out of the chalk formations that make up the Isle of Wight offshore and that underlie much of the intervening seabed. If so, the archaeologists reasoned, Stephen's hand axe was probably made much closer to home than the many hand axes found in the south of England that have been carried by glaciers from the north or deposited as river gravels.

The surrounding seas would have been emergent about 250,000 years ago, a time when human hunters are

(Continued on page 5)

Ground Mantis

In a follow up to my earlier article on the Ground mantis (*Gazelle*, January 2017, p.6), I was lucky to

encounter an obliging and patient specimen in Wadi Shawkah recently which allowed me to get some front-on shots. In the photo here you can clearly see the large

compound eyes and the spiked forelegs which are used to grasp and hold their prey.

Contribution by Angela Manthorpe

Ground Mantis, from above



Ground Mantis - prominent

Field Clips

(Continued from page 4)

known to have exploited the area that is now under the English Channel. Stephen says the hand axe is considered to be early Palaeolithic and the specific technology suggests initially that it was made by a hominid other than modern humans or Neandertals.

Contribution by Gary Feulner, as reported by Stephen Green

Photo:

Stephen Green's hand axe from chalk beds (left) compared with a local museum specimen of glacial or riverine terrace origin.



Wildlife at Al Qudra

Contribution by Puneet Verma



Slender Skimmer Dragonfly *Orthetrum sabina*



A visit to Al Qudra Lakes on 3rd June revealed life as usual, despite the baking sun, as these photos show.

A dragonfly was resting on the moist

chicks, even when photographs were taken from quite a distance away!

Also spotted on this occasion were a purple heron and a white-crested lark.

Finally, a newly-hatched and abandoned egg shell was noticed on the edge of the lake. I'm not sure from which bird, but it's definitely not from the Lapwing. It was, however, close to the newborn chicks.



Red Wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus* in flight, protecting its young

sand, whilst nearby, a series of shots were taken of the Red Wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*. The adult pair were very vocal, protecting their



Field Trip and Clip

Specialists at Work: Cuckoo and Caterpillar

The Giant Skipper butterfly *Pyrrhiades anchisa* is found throughout East Africa and into southern Arabia. It is common in the mountains of most of Northern Oman but rare in the UAE, because its range is tied to its larval foodplant, *Acridocarpus orientalis*, the qafas tree (family Malphigiaceae).

A. orientalis, a large shrub or small tree, is one of the dominant large mountain plants in most of Northern Oman, at elevations up to about 1500 meters. However, the range of *A. orientalis* ends rather abruptly at Wadi Jizzi (approximately the latitude of Al-Ain and Buraimi). To the north of Wadi Jizzi, only a few scattered specimens of *A. orientalis* are known, and the Giant Skipper is correspondingly rare.

In the UAE, *A. orientalis* is found only in upper Wadi Tarabat, at the north end of Jebel Hafit, where some 200-300 shrubs can be found. It is only in this area that the Giant Skipper has been observed within the UAE, regularly and in modest numbers.

The caterpillar of the Giant Skipper is boldly colored with transverse bands of red-orange, white and black. In the *A. orientalis* shrubs where it feeds, the caterpillar builds a shelter by rolling or cutting and folding one or more leaves around itself, using silk to fasten the margins. The caterpillars feed by day but are sensitive to human presence and if disturbed they return to their shelters.

The bold colours of the *P. anchisa* caterpillar are suggestive of a warning signal, but at least one specialised avian predator paid no heed. On a May visit to Wadi Tarabat, we watched a migrating male Common Cuckoo, active in the area despite our presence, make a meal of a *P. anchises* caterpillar, apparently with malice aforethought. The Common Cuckoo is known to specialise in caterpillars that other birds avoid, so it may not have been

just a coincidence to find this singular predator at this singular site.

Contribution
by Gary
Feulner and
Binish
Roobas



A migrating male
Common Cuckoo in
Wadi Tarabat



The colorful large caterpillar of the
Giant Skipper



The Giant Skipper Butterfly



The Cuckoo with his prize –
a Giant Skipper caterpillar

Field Trip

The Green Planet

When it was announced a few years back, that a snow ski slope was planned for Dubai, most stared in disbelief. *'Impossible in a desert!'* was the general comment. Wasn't the same kind of thing said about Las Vegas? I could see the new build taking shape from my house. Indeed, this complicated engineering feat was the subject of a documentary on the Discovery Channel.

Many challenging projects have been constructed in Dubai since - so many in fact, that when a rainforest quietly 'evolved' during the summer of 2016, no-one seemed to blink an eye. It wasn't until earlier this month, that the idea of a DNHG visit came about and the response to the scheduled visit far exceeded the required number of people. Indeed, there were enough people to organise a second group later the same day, with more than one person saying, *"I've been meaning to go there for ages!"*

I joined the second group and we assembled downstairs, where monies were taken and headphones distributed to every participant. Eric Hupperts, one of the resident biologists and curator, gave a short introduction, answered a few questions and the tour began.

There are 3,000 species of plants and animals in the bio-dome and each one fits uniquely into its part of the eco-system. From fish, giant beetles and centipedes to freely-flying colourful birds, all were fascinating!



Redtail Catfish *Phractocephalus hemibliopterus*

Like the ski slope, the rainforest is of course, inside a building and, following a walk through the 'flooded forest,' we ascended to the canopy via the lifts (no tree-climbing here, thank goodness!) Central to the gently-sloping, circular walkway, was a giant 25-metre tree, *"the largest indoor man-made and life-sustaining tree in the world"* it is claimed—yet another first for Dubai!

We could see that The Green Planet was proving popular amongst other visitors too, as we descended through the middle layer of the rainforest, observing the creatures that co-exist amongst larger-leaved foliage (the predatory and poisonous, safely tucked away inside translucent exhibit



Poison Dart Frogs

cases).

As we made our way to the forest floor, it was easy to wander from the main group, in our quest to closely observe the flora and fauna that occupy each level of the forest. However, the commentary through the headphones from Eric, kept everyone 'together' and, as we came upon the creatures that had been discussed, the facts regarding it, together with the habitat it lives in, had already been heard.

Unaware of the attention, Liam, a two-toed sloth suddenly made an appearance. He was certainly on a mission in his search for food, as he made his way across the branches, unperturbed by his audience.

Possible hazard points (spray from the waterfall for example) were covered by friendly staff, who gently pointed out the possible slippage points. All members of staff we encountered were pleasant and approachable—obviously very happy in their different roles and prepared to answer any query.

'Build it and they will come!' I seem to remember that quote being said about Las Vegas, but it is also very relevant to Dubai where, even during the hot summer, people can choose to visit a number of new museums, a ski slope, and now of course, a rainforest! Unique opportunities indeed! As residents, what shall we find on our return after the long summer break, I wonder?

The Green Planet also provide age-relevant activities for school groups, which align with curriculum objectives, as provided by the Ministry of Education.

Ramadan timings were in effect at the time of our tour. By the time this article is published however, normal times will have resumed. Visit [The Green Planet website](#) to view current timings, location and ticket costs.

Article by Margaret Swan, photographs by Tamsin Carlisle (see more photos on pages 2 and 3)



Emerald Tree Boa
Corallus caninus

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

July/August: No lectures or local field trips

Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

October 14 - 22 DNHG Field Trip to Southern Vietnam

*Field trips will be
circulated to
members via e-mail*

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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 fully justified)

DNHG Membership

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership is valid from September 2016 to September 2017. 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.