



GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

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Contributors—

Thanks to the following for their contributions this month:

Gosia van Unen, Angela Manthorpe, Ulrike Andorff, Domen Grobovsek, Margaret Swan, Tamsin Carlisle and Andrew Childs.

Special thanks for their valuable input to Peter Hellyer, Marijcke Jongbloed and Andrew Childs.

Send your contributions for the next *Gazelle* to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

by 25th June, 2019

Scorpion fish camouflage—see page 5



Desert Sculptures

There are many intriguing natural sculptures along the coast of the UAE formed by weathering and erosion over millions of years. Some of them, like hoodoos, can be found near Ghantoot. Not immediately on the beach but about a kilometer inland, we stumbled upon some of them while exploring the shore of Sieh Shuaib.

Hoodoos are tall, narrow structures that form within sedimentary rock and protrude from the surface. They form over millions of years in areas where a thick layer of relatively soft rock such as mudstone or poorly



(Continued on page 4)

Announcements and Recorders

Monthly Speaker - 8pm on Sunday 9th June, 2019

Lecture Title - "Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve, Opportunities & Challenges in Protected Area Management."

Biography - Greg Simpkins

Greg Simpkins is the Conservation Manager for the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve (DDCR), a member of the Middle East & West Asia Expert Assessment group for the Green List (EAGL) and the IUCN World Commission of Protected Areas (WCPA) and has worked in the field of conservation and protected areas management since 2001.

He began his career as a Field Guide with the Emirates Group in 1999 at the newly opened Al Maha Desert Resort & Spa. In 2001 he became a Reserve Officer and was heavily involved in the planning and implementation of eco-tourism activities within the protected area of the DDCR, which was created in 2002.

In 2003 Greg took on his current role and was appointed Conservation Manager for the DDCR. He is responsible for the overall management of the Reserve and has been at the forefront of its development from conception in 2003 to its current international recognition.

Greg also manages the wildlife at the Reserve looking after a number of different species including the re-introduced Arabian Oryx, Arabian Gazelle, Sand Gazelles and Houbara Bustard. He also plays a major role in conducting key conservation research studies throughout the DDCR.



From the Editor:

The weather is perfect for snorkelling and there are some excellent photos from the DNHG trip to Oman. A report regarding this is on page 5.

Whilst on a nautical theme, read the shell report on page 6 by Andrew Childs.

Also this month, Gosia van Unen writes about her discoveries of amazing hoodoo sand structures across the UAE.

We sincerely apologise for misinforming our readers in last month's issue. Page 9 covers this in detail.

Eid Mubarak to all our readers! We look forward to hearing all about the current DNHG Slovenia trip in the next issue. I'm actually in Northumberland this week so I thought I'd share a photo of a ladybird from today's forest walk.

Enjoy your read!



Tamsin Carlisle took these photos of a stork feeding its young at Mugla Province. The large nest is expertly constructed on top of a pole.

DNHG Recorders

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Spotlight!

DNHG Snorkelling in the Musandam, by Angela Manthorpe



Nudibranch



Cushion cucumber



Coral garden photos



Curious cuttlefish



DNHG Overnight dhow trip to the Musandam, by Domen Grobovsek



Giant's Causeway—a natural phenomena in Northern Ireland, by Margaret Swan [\(read about it here\)](#)



Field Clips and Trips

(Continued from page 1)

consolidated sandstone is covered by a layer of hard rock such as well-cemented sandstone or limestone. A cap of harder, more resistant layer protects the underlying softer cone from erosion and gives extra strength to the pedestal. Over time, erosion gets the upper hand and the structures invariably topple over and crumble.

In Siah Shuaib one narrow mushroom-shaped structure can be found and several thicker ones as well. More hoodoos on a still wider base can be found on the expanses of the sabkha near Tarif along the Ghweifaf highway. They are better known and perhaps more impressive because of their solitary location on a vast open space. On close inspection one can find cross-beds visible in the upper section, just under the limestone cap. There are two locations to explore around Tarif, a few kilometers apart.

One last example of a desert sculpture are the eroding fossil dunes in many areas around Al Qudra. They are partially covered by the dunes and are very fragile.

As much as hoodoos and fossil dunes are different they are both affected by weathering and erosion. Rain, although infrequent here, is a contributing factor in the demise of hoodoos, slowly dissolving limestone caps, rounding their edges and making them look droopy. In the case of fossil dunes high intensity rain dislodges sand grains and simply washes them off.

These are just a few examples of random desert finds that always make our desert trips worthwhile.

Contribution by Gosia van Unen



Hoodoo on the sabkha near Tarif



Hoodoo near Tarif



Fossil dune layers in Al Qudra

Field Trips

DNHG snorkelling in the Musandam

All of my previous dhow trips to the Musandam have centred around diving rather than snorkelling but the advantage of this visit was that equipment was minimal and, once we got to our sites, time spent in the water was maximised. The journey North didn't look too promising: much of the sea surface was covered by a thick slick of green plankton – perhaps caused by the recent rain? But luckily the sites chosen by our captain were relatively clear and the underwater visibility was good. We called in first at Lima Bay, then up to Khor Habalayn where we had a beach BBQ and enjoyed the stars. I was grateful for the protection from my 3mm wetsuit as the water was both chilly (approx 22 degrees C) and full of stinging hydroids. After early morning snorkelling and kayaking, we called in at Lima village on our return journey and had a further snorkel around Ras Marovi before heading home. There was a long wait to get over the border, but this Musandam mini-break was relaxing and inspiring.

A few items of interest in the photos:

- Shy inhabitants of the reef include the blennies which generally sit with their bodies in a hole and their heads at the entrance, watching the world go by. I was watching a garden on the reef top and the little blue-dashed rockskipper blenny (*Blenniella periophthalmus*) kept coming out for a quick look around before dashing for cover. This species inhabits water of only 1m in depth which explains why I'd never spotted it before.
- The scorpionfish are masters of camouflage on the reef and therefore efficient ambush predators. Can you see this one – face on (*which is on the front page*) and from above (*photo below*)?
- A few cuttlefish were out and about – mating and hanging around in the shallows.
- The chiton or coat-of-mail shell can be found firmly clamped in place in the intertidal zone. On the DNHG's surf and turf trip in Fujairah last year we found them on the beach rock. There are several species in the UAE - this one is *Acanthopleura vaillantii*.
- At times the water was thick with plankton and all manner of critters. There were several oval shaped comb jellies or sea gooseberries (Phylum: Ctenophora). They use cilia or tiny comb-like plates to propel themselves through the water and if you look closely you can see a shimmering rainbow effect as the cilia beat up and down and diffract the light. Although comb jellies resemble jellyfish they are not related and they don't sting.
- The coral gardens were great, with an impressive variety of both soft and hard corals.

Contribution by Angela Manthorpe

(more of Angela's photos can be seen on the Spotlight page)



Field Clips

Vexilla vexillum (Gmelin, 1791).

One interesting seashell that you might find on the UAE East is the brightly coloured muricid *Vexilla vexillum* (Gmelin, 1791). This shell is widespread across the Indo-Pacific region and, while it is sometimes used as food in Indochinese countries, we have no evidence of it being collected for that purpose in UAE.

The shell inhabits shallow sub-tidal waters, is typically 20-25mm long, and can be found among rocks at low tide at several beaches on the UAE East coast. It lives parasitically on sea urchins (*echinoderms*) on which they feed by protruding their long snout between the spines and secreting a mucus substance. The serrated teeth of the radula, which is located at the top of the proboscis, are then used to graze the echinoid integument. This appears not to be fatal to the urchin, but does leave a scar.

The shells are attracted to the odour of sea urchins which they detect using siphonal probing. Such behaviour is typical of non-herbivorous gastropods, which have a siphonal canal which directs the inhalant water current onto a highly developed organ, the osphradium, which the shell uses for detecting odours.

The species is comparatively short-lived at 2 – 3 years, and is semelparous - reproducing or breeding only once in a lifetime. Embryos develop into planktonic trocophore larvae and later into juvenile veligers before becoming fully grown adults.

When fresh, the beautifully-banded shell has a very dark silky periostracum, which can disguise the striped colouration. It also is quite unusual in as much as the corneous operculum is split vertically into a translucent area and an opaque area – I am not aware of other shells that have this distinct feature.

We have also seen similar echinoderm symbiotic behaviour at Masirah Island where we saw several tiny white shells of *Hypermastus* species feeding on live sand dollars (*Echinodiscus bisperforatus* Leske, 1778). They spend a few days attached to the sand dollars feeding on the dermal tissues and body fluids of their hosts through their proboscis, leaving lesions, but then drop off and bury themselves back in the sand.

Contribution by Andrew Childs



Hypermastus epiphanes
(Melville 1897) on *Echinodiscus*



Vexilla vexillum (Gmelin 1791)



Vexilla vexillum (Gmelin 1791)

Field Clips

Visiting parts of Vietnam

Hanoi by day and night is constantly buzzing with motorcycles hurrying to transport goods and people to a thousand destinations. Crossing the road is a challenge that is soon mastered. Tentatively looking at the oncoming traffic will *not* get you to the other side. However, boldly stepping out with a look of determination, simultaneously making eye contact with motorcyclists, will!



Other forms of transport through the Hanoi streets include the electric bus (golf car), cyclo and motorbike taxi. We risked the golf car, whose driver stopped at most tourist points and patiently waited for our return. Drivers in Hanoi seem to have a sixth sense of being very pedestrian-aware.

A train track running very close to adjacent houses and cafes begs the question—were the houses built first or the track? Presumably the latter, as these tracks are usually laid in a straight line.

Shops call out for tourists to purchase a variety of handicrafts and souvenirs whilst street-food vendors set up their cooking stations by the side of the road. Some mobile food sellers even blend into the traffic flow.

St. Joseph's Cathedral in the midst of the city, has a calm and serene interior. It's one of many colonial buildings and was constructed with materials imported from France.



Whilst enjoying the sights and sounds of Hanoi, Halong Bay was in complete contrast. Despite it being a popular tourist attraction, the sound of the boat travelling to each destination was quite calming as we passed by islands, which loomed up out of the water on our approach.

Noticing many trailing-tentacled jellyfish in the water whilst kayaking, I made a mental note not to swim in the water. One point of interest I particularly enjoyed though was the cave network on one of the islands. Climbing 800 steps to the entrance, the view from the top was very striking.



The lengthy cave system had many twists and turns. Going deep, then up, then down, we sometimes entered large cavernous areas, where cathedral-like ceilings were supported by massive, naturally-formed columns. One couldn't help comparing the serene atmosphere with St Joseph's Cathedral in the centre of bustling Hanoi. Having said that these caves are naturally formed, in some places paths had been carved into the limestone by man, in order to facilitate the one-way thoroughfare through each cave. Stalactites and stalagmites abound and present themselves in amazing formations, strategically illuminated by natural and enhanced lighting. The cave route exits at a point some distance away from the

entrance, where a small boat transported our party back to the larger wooden boat.

Halong Bay is on the tourist trail and is well worth a two or three-night stay on a traditional wooden boat.



*Contribution by
Margaret Swan*

Dubai Natural History Group (DNHG) Programme

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

June 9: Greg Simpkins will present an illustrated talk on "The Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve, Opportunities and Challenges in Protected Area Management."

(Please note that there are no lectures during July and August)

Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

August 9—16: DNHG Trip to Serbia (Belgrade and Zlatibor)

October 4—11: DNHG Trip to Greece

Field trip details will be circulated to members via e-mail

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DNHG Gazelle

Field Reporters

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

Send your contributions to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

DNHG Membership

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership is valid from September 2018 to September 2019. You can join or renew at the monthly meetings.

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.

Errata

Information from last month's *Gazelle* is clarified by the following experts. We apologise for misinforming our readers in the April issue and thank Peter Hellyer, Marijcke Jongbloed and Andrew Childs for their corrections. The website version will be amended accordingly.

Erratum 1—ENHG member Peter Hellyer brought our attention to the fact that our information regarding the first inhabitants on Sir Bani Yas Island was incorrect. (page 6 'Salt Dome of Sir Bani Yas'), Peter clarifies that the first inhabitants were from around (or just before) 7,000 years ago from Neolithic times (like those elsewhere) and not the Bani Yas Tribe, who settled (perhaps) in the 16th Century. The island continued to be used at least seasonally until after the 2nd World War. This should have been picked up before publishing.

Erratum 2—Overseas member and author of local books on flora and fauna, Marijcke Jongbloed points out that a recorded observation of *Orobanche aegyptiaca* was made in 'Wild Flowers of the UAE.' The observation was made along the Madha to Hatta road (technically not the UAE). Marijcke states that the picture of the whole plant in the book is not as clear as the one published in the *Gazelle* last month (refer to page 5 'Beauty on the Mountains' article).

The following article is taken from the *Gazelle*, March, 2014 which confirms the first sighting in the UAE:

Field Trip Adds Rare Parasitic Plant to UAE List

Our field trip to the Yas Branch of Wadi Mowrid, described in this issue, also recorded the first UAE sighting of a rare parasitic plant, *Orobanche aegyptiaca*. We were able to identify it from Marijcke Jongbloed's *Wild Flowers of the UAE*, but it was previously known in the area only from a single record by Marijcke herself, in northernmost Oman (Wilayat Mahdhah).

We found several plants along a donkey track over a low rocky abutment beside the main wadi. It was not possible to determine what the host species might be. Thanks to Martina Fella for calling attention to it. *Report by Gary Feulner*

Erratum 3—Spotlight featured photos of shells following a storm on the East Coast. One of the shells has been further identified by Andrew Childs. The photograph on the right is as printed in the article.

Andrew writes, "According to the website 'Sea Slug Forum' this is identified as *Akera soluta* and further states that "*Akera* is a primitive representative of the *Anaspidea* (Sea Hares). It has an external shell which protects the visceral hump, but is not large enough to contain the whole body. The shell is only lightly calcified and empty shells are easily broken. It lives in muddy environments and the body has a streamlined shape, designed for burrowing. The anterior part of the body is able to extend out, much like a bivalve's foot, to assist in burrowing.

In general, the shape of *Akera* is very similar to bubble-shelled cephalaspideans, like *Atys*, with a headshield, no head tentacles, and with the sides of the foot folded up to form parapodia. Due to its fragility I am delighted that 2 *Akeras* in my collection are fully intact as this shell is recorded in the Indo-West Pacific region and is extremely rare in UAE."

Ulrike Andorff, author of the article, thanks Andrew for this information and adds "I found another 6 of this unusual and rare species in the two days following another storm at the East Coast."

