



# GAZELLE

[www.dnhg.org](http://www.dnhg.org)


مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE!

Looking at this photo, it is easy to understand why turtles mistake plastic bags for jellyfish!

This was taken on an overnight snorkelling trip around the Dahlak archipelago. The snorkeling was part of a recent DNHG field trip to Eritrea.



# Urban Nester



The bird above was spotted by Lucas DSouza and was one of a pair of Kestrels nesting in his high-rise building. Tony DSouza also reports that the nest still contains a third baby, almost ready to fledge.

The sighting was reported to Gary Feulner, who identified the species and added that it has a widespread Eurasian range. Gary has, in the past, seen nesting pairs on mountains and also near the top of the Sharjah Cultural Monument, a tower-like structure at flyover #9 on the Sharjah/Dhaid road.

Dr Panagiotis Azmanis confirmed the identification and added that this species is a fairly common sight in the UAE (Dr Azmanis has also observed a pair near Dubai Mall). It will use any ledge of a high building to nest. Unfortunately there is not more detailed data on its population in Dubai and throughout the UAE in general.

[Click here](#) to see recorded sightings of this species. Additional photos taken by Lucas can be seen on the Spotlight page.

Contribution by Lucas and Tony DSouza, with identification by Gary Feulner and Dr Panos Azmanis



## Announcements and Recorders

### AGM followed by our Monthly Speaker - 8pm on Sunday 3rd June, 2018

Note that the Annual General Meeting (AGM) will precede the lecture this month.

**Lecture Title - "Hawksbill Turtles in the UAE—when Genetics meets Conservation"**

**Speaker—Dr Ada Natoli**

**Biography** - Dr Natoli is a molecular ecologist with primary interest in utilizing genetics markers to investigate population structure and the evolutionary mechanisms that shape populations in order to support conservation of species.

She has a broad background covering plant genetics, chemistry, microbiology and general ecology and graduated in Biology from the University of Milan, Italy, after completing a two years' research project on gene mapping on maize, and afterwards worked as researcher at the University of Piacenza on Sorghum genetics.

She founded the UAE Dolphin Project initiative ([www.uaedolphinproject.org](http://www.uaedolphinproject.org)) that she currently directs which is focused on gathering scientific information on dolphins in UAE through dedicated research surveys and citizen science, to support the formulation of conservation measures. In 2016 she joined Zayed University as Adjunct Assistant Professor where she currently teaches Biology.

Ada's particular interest in the marine environment brought her to spend a number of years conducting field research on several projects, monitoring the cetacean population in the Mediterranean Sea and Canary Islands for Tethys Research Institute. Dr. Natoli obtained her PhD from the University of Durham, UK, which focused on the molecular ecology of bottlenose and common dolphins, comparing on a worldwide scale their population structure to clarifying their taxonomy and evolution, and analysing in Mediterranean, Black Sea and South Africa, for their fine scale population structure to help the formulation of conservation measures for their protection.

She is a member of the IUCN/SSC Cetacean Specialist Group and is involved in the conservation of cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS area. Dr. Natoli is also involved in the International Whaling Commission, Small Cetacean Sub-committee, where she is currently coordinating the reassessment of the taxonomy of bottlenose dolphin worldwide. Her scientific work is published in peer-reviewed journals.

When Dr, Natoli moved to the UAE, she joined UAE University where she directed a research project on the population structure of UAE hawksbill turtles in collaboration with EMEG and University of East Anglia, UK.

#### From the Editor:

From the high-flying kestrel (cover story) to curiosities found on the beach (page 3), this issue is bursting with natural life observations. So much so, that for once we've trespassed onto the back page, omitting the membership information. Should you wish to read up on membership, please visit the [newsletter page of our website](#).

In Jebel Ali this month, environment initiatives were observed at the Wildlife Sanctuary (page 4) whilst on another occasion, members were taken on a tour of a Sikh Temple (page 5).

Art Deco architecture is a common feature in this northeast African country (see photo on the right) —find out where on page 6.

Enjoy your read!



Ramadan  
Mubarak to all  
our Muslim  
Readers

## DNHG Recorders

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**Mammals - new recorder  
needed!**

## Spotlight!

### Eurasian Kestrel nesting pair, by Lucas DSouza



### Jumeirah Beach Finds during April, 2018



(above and right)

Body of a seahorse  
*Hippocampus* spp. measuring  
approximately 12cm. It was found  
on Jumeirah 1 beach by Hiba  
Allam and her boys.



(left and above)

Egg casings from the  
Moon snail *Natica* sp.  
- otherwise known as  
'sand collars', lie on a  
Jumeirah 3 beach.  
Observed by  
Margaret Swan



### Dhow trip to the Musandam, Oman between 27—28 April, 2018. Group photo by Sonja Lavrenčič, with remaining photos taken by Chandrashekhar S. Sardesai



## Field Clips

### Earth Day at Jebel Ali Wildlife Reserve

Every year more and more people realize the urgency of action needed to tackle environmental issues and the fact that they affect us all. Various initiatives are being launched throughout the year to increase public awareness of the growing pollution and climate change. The culmination of these efforts is a special spot reserved for the Earth Day.



Mangrove aerial 'roots' around the lagoon

In 1990 it became a truly global event mobilizing 200 million people in 141 countries. This year's main concern is plastic pollution, poisoning our oceans and land, harming marine life,



'Roots' covered in seaweed

employing durable alternatives in daily life.

In Dubai, Emirates Marine Environmental Group (EMEG) led by its founder and president Ali Saqar Sultan Al Suweidi welcomed volunteers at the Jebel Ali Wildlife Reserve (near Ghantoot) on the 21st of April. After an informative presentation



Halophytes

volunteers went off to clean the beach. It was quite overwhelming to see the amount of litter within the lagoons, mangrove habitat and on the beach itself. Most rubbish consisted of plastic water bottles and cups, styrofoam, tyres

Each year, Earth Day is celebrated on April 22, the birth of the modern environmental movement in 1970 in the US. Since that time public awareness and involvement grew substantially and spread from America to the rest of the world.

The main drive is to minimize if not stop plastic pollution by making people realize how much plastic they discard every day. Once this is achieved everyone can try to reduce that amount by

and lightweight construction materials from the nearby abandoned project. After the beach was cleaned new mangrove saplings were planted by more than a hundred volunteers of all nationalities and different ages.

A week later everything was ready for the release of 9 young Hawksbill turtles that had been cared for by Dubai Turtle Rehabilitation Project. Other inhabitants of the Jebel Ali Wildlife Reserve are Red fox, Sand gazelle, Dhub lizard, many birds as well as Blue swimming crab, and Cape hare. They all take

advantage of this quiet(er) location. On the Earth Day however, we only saw their footprints as, with the exception of one gazelle, everyone seemed to be in hiding...

As much as occasional cleaning efforts seem inconsequential and limited within the sheer scale of coastal development and its devastating impact on marine life, every bit counts.

*Contribution by Gosia van Unen*



Planting mangrove saplings



Sand gazelle



Gazelle tracks



Protected turtle nest

# Field Trips

## Gurudwara Nanak Darbar Sikh Temple

On 12th May, Sandhya Prakash led a group of DNHG members to the above temple in Jebel Ali, Dubai.



Guru Nnak Darbar is the first official Sikh temple (Gurudwara) in the whole of the gulf region. Construction work commenced in May 2008 on land donated by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. The foundation stone was laid in June 2010 with the build completed in December, 2011. It was officially opened on 17 January 2012 and the total construction cost was estimated to be USD20 million.

The temple has 3 levels of underground car parks with capacity for 420 cars. The ground floor houses the dining hall, kitchen, pantry and offices, as well as toilets and washing facilities. The first floor contains the main and minor prayer

halls and teaching rooms. Each floor of the building is approximately 25,000 square feet.



As a sign of respect, all visitors to the Gurudwara are required to remove footwear and cover their hair. The temple accommodates 70,000 visitors on the festival of Baisakhi, which is the busiest day of the year. Around 1.8 million visitors are welcomed each year.

Our tour began on the first floor, where a volunteer from the Gurudwara explained key aspects of the Sikh religion. Sikhism is one of the youngest religions in the world. It was founded by Guru Nanak (1469 – 1539) in the Punjab. His followers began to be called Sikhs (learners).

The tenth Guru, Gobind Singh (1666 – 1708) founded the Khalsa (Sikh brotherhood) on 13 April 1699 (Baisakhi). He decreed that he would be followed by no other living Gurus, but instead by the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book containing writings from six of the ten Gurus and works from various other authors, including those of other faiths.

Sikhism is the ninth largest religion in the world with around 27mn followers. There are around 50,000 devotees in the UAE.

Following our introductory talk we proceeded to the main prayer hall, which is a vast column-free hall with a 7 metre ceiling and 18 metre domed roof. The chandeliers in the hall were procured from Murano in Italy. Italian marble faces the floor and walls, while the floor is covered in a plush carpet with abstract designs. In the far (Eastern) corner of the hall is a raised platform (Takht) where the holy book, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, is placed during daylight hours. This location is chosen to receive the first sunlight of the morning.

The book is covered by ornately embroidered cloths (Rumala Sahibs) brought over from Amritsar, India; there is a different one for each day of the year. Above the book there is a gold-plated canopy (Chandoo



Boys receive a music lesson



Sahib), which indicates respect for the book. A priest (Granthi Singh) reads from the book; while doing so he may wave a Chaur Sahib (a fan, traditionally made of wood and yak's hair), again as a sign of respect. A devotee may request that the Sri Guru Granth Sahib book be read on (for example) his birthday. In this case the 1,430 pages of the book will be read continuously from start to finish over the course of two days, with individual readers taking two-hour stints. In front of the platform (towards the centre of the room) is a donation box, while to the right of the platform is an area where temple singers (Ragis) perform Gurbani (hymns) twice a day, accompanied by tabla (drums) and accordion. To the left of the platform devotees can receive Prasad (devotional food, typically halwa (wheat, butter, milk and sugar)). As a sign of respect, devotees sit below the height of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib and avoid turning their back or pointing their feet towards it.

After touring the first floor our group then proceeded to the ground floor of the temple, and to the kitchen, which is staffed by professional full-time employees and operates under strict hygiene and ISO protocols. For example, the temperature of all cooked foods prepared by the kitchen is carefully recorded. All fruit and vegetables are washed with heavily chlorinated water. Samples of all cooked foods are retained for 72 hours; if there is an outbreak of food poisoning these samples can be used to identify the cause. All food prepared in the kitchen is vegetarian. During a typical week over 700kg rice, 1200kg wheat flour, 700kg vegetables and 200kg of ghee (clarified butter) is consumed. Much of the food is received as donations, and is stored in strict date order to minimize spoilage. Some of the equipment and utensils used in the kitchen are of mammoth proportions in order to cater for the huge volume of devotees that pass through the gurudwara each day. On our visit we saw two



Strict hygiene rules apply in the kitchen

## Field Trips

chapatti machines in operation; each one is capable of churning out 1,800 rotis per hour, but on busy days their output needs to be supplemented with help from local bakeries.

The reason for the kitchen, and one of the key tenets of Sikhism, is Langar. Gurudwaras across the world house Guru Ka Langar halls, where people from any religion or social standing can sit together and enjoy food served by volunteers and paid for by donations. The Langar hall at Guru Nanak Darbar can seat 900 people at any one time. It serves around 10,000 meals on Fridays and 1,000 meals on other days of the week. We noticed that the food was served on disposable plastic plates; the reason is that there are not enough washing facilities to deal with the throughput of people, while storage of such a large volume of utensils would also prove to be difficult. More environmentally-friendly alternatives have been assessed and rejected; paper plates cannot hold liquids, while leaf-plates are not hygienic. During busy festivals such as Baisakhi (spring harvest) up to 40,000 meals may be served in a day. There is a different menu for breakfast, lunch and dinner, and the menu schedule is planned 15 days in advance.

Any member of the public is welcome to visit the Guru Nanak Darbar Sikh temple between 4:30am and 8:30pm each day.

*Contribution by Rahul Shah with photos from Helga Meyer*

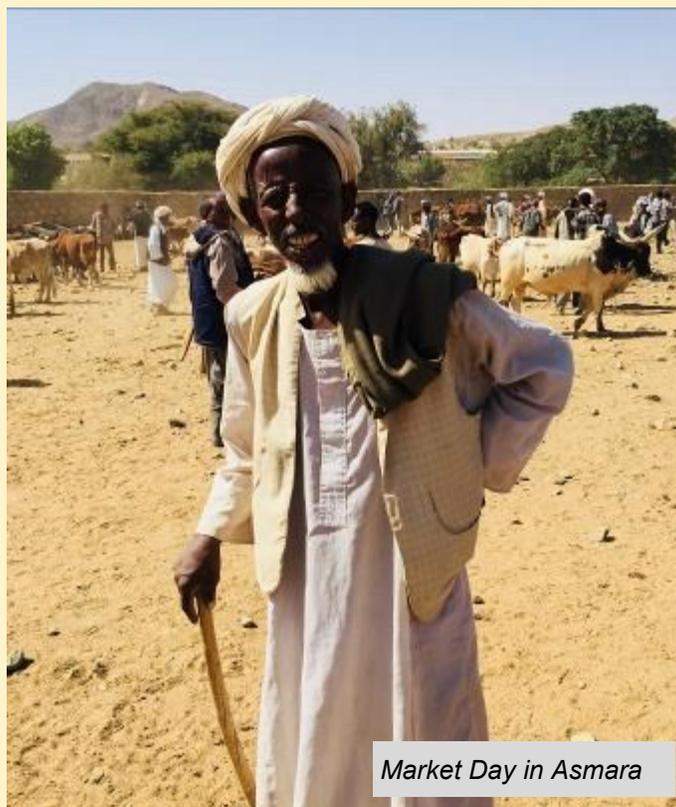
### DNHG Field Trip to Eritrea

Eritrea? Where is that? Seems to be the most frequent response when telling people that you are going on holiday to Eritrea! Clearly it is a well-known destination in the Horn of Africa - making it an exciting destination for the group of DNHG'ers who signed up for a trip there. After an intense visa process we met at the airport for the flight to Asmara.

Asmara is the fascinating capital of Eritrea which has gained UNESCO status for its original Art Deco architecture – our group spent the first day exploring all that the city had to offer. The second day involved a long drive to Kohaito Archaeological sites and the Grand Canyon of Eritrea exploring pre-historic paintings with a looming thunderstorm. The guide highlighted that the site still has many hidden treasures and archaeologists have a lot of work to do to thoroughly understand the full history of the site.

As most of the groups' luggage did not arrive on the same flight – it allowed for rapid group bonding when we all pooled our resources for the first 36 hours of the trip.

With all our bags we left Asmara to Keren - the second largest city in Eritrea and a town rich in history with key battles between Italian and British troops in 1941 being fought there. Our visits to the war cemeteries were certainly moments of reflection for the group. We also visited the Monday markets, which were a hive of activity for camel, goat, sheep and cattle traders as well as an opportunity to see the largest market in the region. It felt like we had stepped back in time walking around the markets. On the long drive between towns we had an opportunity to visit local villages, drinking coffee in huts and entertaining the children who used the opportunity to practice their English skills.



Market Day in Asmara



#### Massawa

On Tuesday, April 3, we descended 2400 meters down and 115 kilometers east to the sea along a stunning, winding road, built by Italian engineers in 1935-36 and running adjacent to another spectacular work of engineering, the Asmara-Massawa railway. As always, the prickly, ever-present euphorbia candelabrum accompanied us. Once carrying supplies to support the Italian war effort, the railway now remains in partial operation with vintage railcars. We'd hoped to cross paths with the baboons that were known to

inhabit the area, but while they eluded us, we met a cheerful group of bicyclists who shared a rest stop and photo op with us.



*(Continued on page 7)*

# Field Trips

(Continued from page 6)

As temperatures steadily rose, we descended toward Massawa Island, once the "Pearl of the Red Sea," now a gritty, unforgettable, partly ruined port town which has endured catastrophic fires, earthquakes, occupations, bombardments and blockades.



Overlooking the harbor are the remains of an Imperial Palace, originally built by the Turkish Pasha in the 16th century and re-built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the Swiss adventurer Werner Munzinger, the Egyptian-appointed governor.



The Imperial compound was later inhabited as a winter home by Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie, whose iconic lions can be seen at the gates of this now ruined and abandoned structure.



As we wandered the old city we spotted 17th century houses constructed with coral brick, the local stone of choice for hundreds of years.



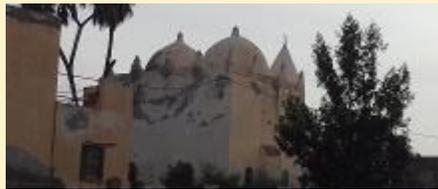
The structures of Old Massawa clearly reflect the procession of ruling influences through this town – Ottoman Turk, Arabic, European.....



In some cases, diverse styles can be seen in a single building, constructed and re-constructed over the course of time, where the first floor features an Ottoman Turkish style and the second floor, added during Egyptian rule, displays mashrabiya (terraced) balconies.



Islamic structures of Massawa include the Sahaba shrine, reportedly built some 1400 years ago, to receive the early followers of Islam who travelled across the Red Sea to escape execution and spread their faith. **A-ṣaḥābah** in Arabic: الصحابة



means "the companions" or "friends" of the prophet. Other significant mosques were added as the faith developed in the area.

A nearby building, in what looked like a residential area, contained an Arabic inscription, reading:



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
يَا دَاخِلَ الْبَابِ صَلَّى عَلَى النَّبِيِّ  
الْمَخْتَارِ

In English, it reads as: "In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate - Oh who enters from this door, pray upon the chosen prophet"



Knowledgeable sources report this phrase was used throughout this region including Sudan, to distinguish and sanctify the houses of pilgrims who had returned from a Hajj.



Just next door, we passed ancient mansions that housed prosperous Jewish and Armenian merchants in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Finally, we arrived at the Banca d'Italia, built in 1920s, bombed out in the 1990s, its crumbling walls propped up with rebar. Like so much of Massawa, this too, was a beautiful ruin.

## Dahlak archipelago

One of the highlights of our visit was an overnight camping and snorkelling trip to the Dahlak archipelago, a collection of islands located a few miles off the port of Massawa.

We set off early from the jetty at the Dahlak hotel, passed the mangrove covered Green Island, made an obligatory stop at the Coastguard and then headed out to sea. Our destination was Dessie, a small island with an abandoned resort complex. We landed on a wide sandy beach, complete with numerous marooned jellyfish and set up camp under a large shade. The temperature on the coast was considerably higher than Asmara and a pre-lunch swim was a refreshing delight.

The boatman ferried us all to a 'prime snorkelling spot' located off one of the headlands and underwater we found a wide collection of hard corals – boulder like brains and branching types, varied algae and numerous reef fish including Arabian angelfish, pairs of colourful butterflyfish, parrotfish, surgeonfish and fusiliers, rabbitfish, and shy wrasse and gobies. Finning slowly back to shore we spotted a couple of blue spotted stingrays, mullet and a blue triggerfish. Crossing the bay we found small seagrass beds, the coral thinned out to isolated blocks, and this was the zone of the gently pulsating jellyfish. The far side of the bay bore the brunt of the wind and waves and the brown algae was plentiful – spiky turbinaria and sargassum up to a metre tall. There were a few isolated soft corals, several sohal surgeonfish and a shoal of mono.

(Continued on page 8)

# Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

June 3: Dr Ada Natoli—"Hawksbill Turtles in the UAE: when genetics meets conservation."

*(no lectures over the summer)*

September 16: Natalie Banks—"Marine Debris: why we should care and what we can do."

October 7: Ali Iqbal—"The Trucial Coast during the Second World War: Incidents and Accidents."

## Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

June 2: DNHG coach trip to the Louvre, Abu Dhabi

June 15 to June 22: DNHG trip to Slovenia Mountains and Lakes (over Eid Al Fitr)

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

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*(Continued from page 7)*

After a short visit to an Afar village in the afternoon we returned to camp via a rocky outcrop where brown boobies looked on while our expert fisherman caught several jacks (orange spot trevally) for the barbeque. We set up our campbeds and mosquito nets before enjoying dinner under the stars, and whiled away a pleasant evening to the sound of gently lapping waves.

The following morning we were up early for a quick walk and plastic collection, and then most of us ended up back in the water, but this time off the pebbly beach behind our camp. The coral heads seemed healthier and more extensive off this side, and those that didn't go swimming were treated to blue spotted stingrays close to shore. It was a shame to leave this tranquil location but we were on a schedule, and by the end of the day we were back at 2,300m. in the Sunshine Hotel in Asmara.

*Contribution co-authored by Ilse Bienefeld, Mary Lanaghan with Dawit Berhane (guide) and Angela Manthorpe with underwater photos by Michael Berger. A special thank you to Fatima Al Kaabi for contributing research and translation assistance to this report.*



In stark contrast to the 'Art Deco' buildings of Massawa, these are structures on the island of Dessie

