



GAZELLE

مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

www.dnhg.org

A significant celestial event took place earlier this month, with the sighting of a supermoon. Experts say that the last supermoon of such significance occurred in 1948.

Some were meticulously setting up complex observational equipment, in order to witness and record this spectacular, natural phenomenon.

Lamjed El Kefi, DNHG recorder for astronomy (and also marine life), sent images of this event to the Gazelle, which were taken from the dunes of Dubai. The photo opposite clearly shows some impact craters of the moon, seas and oceans. The other photograph is on page 3.

A smaller, annotated image, identifies some of the main landmarks. Perhaps the most famous place on the moon is the Sea of Tranquillity, where history was



Supermoon, as seen from the dunes of Dubai on 14th November, by Lamjed El Kefi

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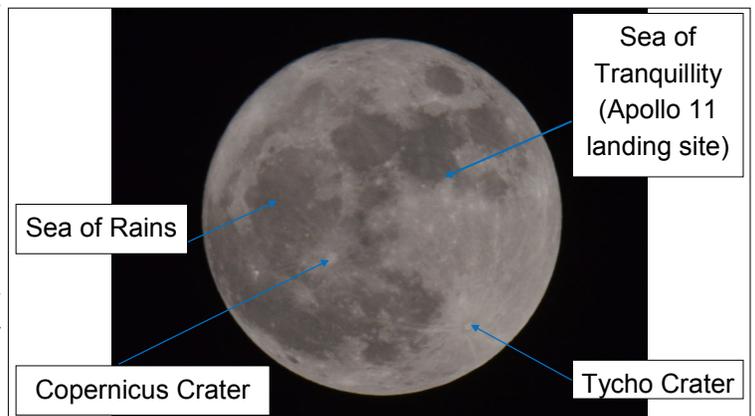
Contributors—Thanks to the following for their reports and contributions:

Lamjed El Kefi, Helga Meyer, Ulrike Andorff, Charles Laubach, Gary Feulner, Stephen Green and Tamsin Carlisle.

Send your contributions to gazelleditor@gmail.com

made in 1969. It was here that man made his first step on the moon. Read more about this at NASA. For an explanation of the supermoon (or perigee) and other astronomical information, such as their interpretation of 'moon illusion', click or tap on EarthSky.org

It is forecast that the next supermoon on this astronomical scale will occur in 2034. However, there will be other opportunities to look for lunar landmarks, in the meantime.



Announcements and Recorders

Monthly Speakers—8pm on Sunday 11 December, 2016

The DNHG are delighted to welcome the following three speakers on 'Members' Night', who will each present illustrated talks on:

"Svalbard - Land of the Polar Bear" by Angela Manthorpe

After 2 visits to the Antarctic, longtime DNHG member, Angela Manthorpe, decided that 2016 was the right time to visit the Arctic. Her presentation will focus on her recent trip to Svalbard and will cover encounters with polar bears and other wildlife, activities around the main town of Longyearbyen, a brief look at the cultural history of the area and a foolhardy dip in the polar sea.

"Vignettes of the eons past" by Nirmal Rajah

This talk about fossils will give a brief glimpse into the history of life on planet earth. The talk will explore the importance of learning about the past and how this knowledge can help us in the future. There will be a small exhibition of fossils collected by the speaker after the talk.

"A glimpse into the amphibian diversity of the Western Ghats" by Sahil Abdul Latheef

Sahil would like to share some natural history facts about the various habitats that make up the Western Ghats of South India and focus on its Amphibians using his own photographs from multiple field trips to different parts of this globally significant biodiversity hotspot.

Besides practising architecture, through his travels Sahil picked up a keen interest in understanding our natural environment and has been avidly attending field trips, workshops and surveys over the last decade or so focusing on various aspects of biodiversity starting with Ornithology and then moving on to studying Lepidoptera, Odonata and most recently Batrachology (i.e. the study of amphibians). He has contributed his observations and photographs to multiple online and print natural history publications and hopes to continue these interests with his participation at various DNHG events and field trips.

From the Editor:

If you missed out on the field trip to Wadi Hayl this month, David Edwards is leading a second one on 3 December. Other trips this month included a visit to the Saruq Al-Hadid Museum, the overnight dhow trip and the Al Wasit Wetland Reserve, where sightings of Antlion craters were reported.

Craters of an astronomical nature could be seen with the naked eye mid-month, when the Supermoon made a rare appearance (see page 1).

The supermoon was not the only event taking place this month, however, as Dubai unveiled its much talked-about canal (see page 4), which will entice insects, birds and fish, as life alongside and within the canal matures.

Enjoy your read!

Librarian and Book Seller Wanted!

Do you regularly attend monthly lectures and would like to volunteer your time for the above? Please contact any member of the committee.

Gazelle newsletter

The Gazelle is a communal natural history newsletter and any member can contribute towards it.

If you have seen anything in your garden or, perhaps whilst out and about, please tell us about it. It could be a bird, animal, plant, insect or even an unusual shell. Send photos and articles to: gazelleeditor@gmail.com

Jumeirah Beach Sign

In response to the instruction on the sign regarding shells (October issue), Charles Laubach writes:

"The Arabic text of the sign on page 5 says, 'No collecting living shells.' The translators were apparently stumped by the two words for 'shells' that appear in Arabic. The first word (qawaqi) refers to curved shells like gastropod shells, while the second word (asdaf) is the more generic word for shells, and can refer to gastropod and bivalve shells and other kinds of shells.

I cannot come up with a suitable pair of words in English to match the Arabic, and this is probably why the translators of the notice gave up and went home early. But they should not have forgotten the last word, "living" (hayyah)."

Andrew Childs also had a discussion with a Dubai beach officer and was informed that the main concern is that some people were collecting large numbers to eat.

DNHG Recorders

Reptiles - Dr. Reza Khan 050 6563601

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

Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

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Seashells - Andrew Childs mobile: 050 459 0112 email: andrew.childs@eim.ae

Birds - Tamsin Carlisle mobile: 050 1004702 email: tamsin.carlisle@platts.com

Spotlight!



Supermoon rising over the dunes, by Lamjed El Kefi



Participants on the dhow trip, by Sonja Lavson

Photographs from the trip to Al Hefaiyah Mountain Conservation centre, by Tamsin Carlisle

Mountain Gazelle *Gazella gazella cora*; Family Bovidae



Pharaoh/Desert Eagle-owl *Bubo ascalaphus*; Family: Strigidae



Blue-headed Agama—male *Pseudotrapelus* sp.; Family: Agamidae



Gordon's Wildcat *Felis sylvestris gordonii*; Family: Felidae

Trip to Saruq Al-Hadid Archaeology Museum, by Lamjed El Kefi



Artefacts include arrowheads, pottery, seals and jewellery



Field Trip

Al Wasit Wetlands

We had a peaceful, early-morning 4km walk one November Saturday, in Wasit Wetlands Reserve, Sharjah. At the end of the nature trail is an impressive Centre with an excellent opportunity for bird watching and wildlife education. All for only 15AED per person.

We saw food preparation for the birds in the enclosures at the Centre, lovingly prepared and presented.



We also noticed some Antlions. Antlions live in small craters and have strong pincers to catch any poor insect that falls into this death trap. The antlions are fascinating creatures in larvae form and they can remain like this for many years. Eventually they turn into flying insects, that look like dragonflies. They are not, however, as they can fold their wings alongside their bodies, which the dragonfly cannot do.



Antlion craters



The beautiful, small flower (*above, left—zoom in to view a more detailed image*) is called a 'Tamarisk', Genus *Tamarix*, which also grows in Namibia.

The tiny butterfly (*above, right*) was trying to warm up in the early morning sun, alongside five bees. Both photos above were taken by Ulrike Andorff.

Contribution by Helga Meyer



Black-winged stilt



Purple swamp hen



Morning dew



Field Clips

More Velcro Magic

The "Velcro plant", *Forsskaolea tenacissima*, has been the subject of several items in *Gazelle* over the past year or so, but I was recently introduced to another of its many surprises. Normally it is a plant of sheltered, silty spots at the edges of wadis or among rocks, or in soil that holds moisture. It is rarely, if ever, a cliff plant.

The plants in the accompanying photo are growing out of the south-facing, masonry façade of the supporting wall of a major highway – the Tawiyan to Dibba road, at the bridge where it crosses Wadi Tawiyan – an improbable location for *F. tenacissima* for several reasons. But inspection with binoculars confirms beyond a doubt that that is what they are.

And they are not stuck onto the wall by their Velcro-textured leaves. Instead, some of them are well enough rooted to support a plant extending more than 50cm outward. This suggests that water is somehow reaching them from under the road and behind the wall, and that there is sufficient porosity or interstitial space in the earth behind the wall for the corresponding root system. An equally intriguing question is how the seeds of the Velcro plant managed to arrive, germinate and thrive in such an apparently inhospitable location.

Contribution by Gary Feulner

(December, 2015 and May/June, 2016 issues contain earlier articles on Velcro plants—Ed.)

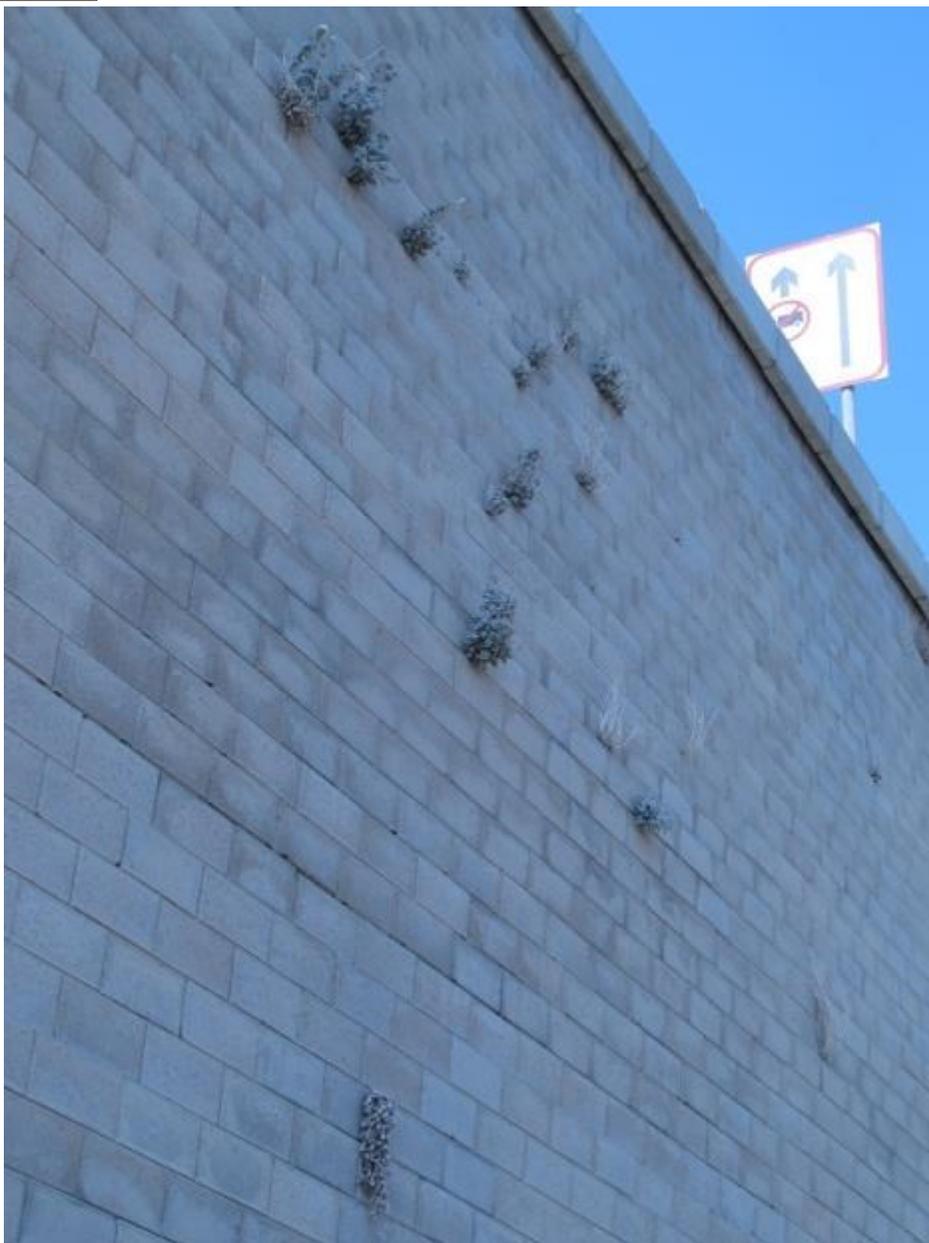


Photo: The Velcro plant, *Forsskaolea tenacissima*, growing from a vertical wall.

Dubai Canal

This month saw the opening of the Dubai Canal and, whilst work is still in progress, it is a very pleasant stroll!

One Saturday, many boats were observed from local marinas circumnavigating the



'island' part of Dubai, viewing the landmarks from the water. The buildings on Shaikh Zayed Road are visible through the new footbridge (below, left).

Crossing over this footbridge, the photo on the right was taken mid-week and shows Al Wasl Road in the background, at this point elevated above the water. The photos show two of the bridges that link the island of Dubai with mainland Dubai.

Although the ferry boarding point near the footbridge in Al Wasl looked finished, it was not operational at the time of writing (*the ferry in the photo was empty*). Ferry times and routes are constantly updated on the [RTA website](#).

Parking space is available on both sides of the canal and 'Business Bay' is the nearest metro station.

The planting of flowers and trees will attract insects and birds in due course and it won't be long before the local marine life finds its way in.

by M. Swan



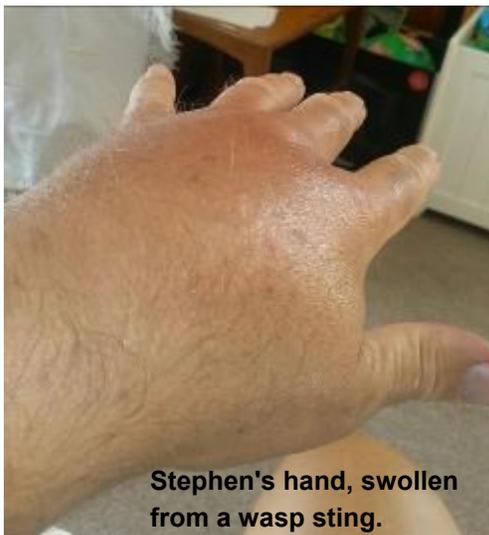
Field Clips

Stings and Bites, UK Style

Overseas DNHG member Stephen Green, who in the UAE made contributions to our knowledge of freshwater and land snails, rock art and Palaeolithic stone tools (among other things), has been back in the UK for a number of years, where he has continued his habit of natural history investigation. Recently re-settled in Hampshire, his current activities include exploration of the local seashore and the fossiliferous Barton beds, of Eocene age.

There is a tendency to regard rambles in the UK as relatively sedate by comparison with exploration in the wilds of Arabia, but Stephen's experience over the past few years gives him a different perspective. He explains here:

"In Saudi we spent years swimming and snorkeling around the reef, surrounded by textile cones, stone fish, lion fish, sting rays, barracuda and sharks. In Bahrain our various gardens were liberally populated with scorpions, false black widows and camel spiders. At Jebel Ali large orb web spiders, giant centipedes and snakes were all common in the surrounding scrub desert (our neighbours' dog was killed stone dead by a snake just outside the compound). Altercations with water scorpions and carpet vipers were occasional wadi hazards. But not never, once, was I or any of the family ever bitten or stung in over 25 years. England



Stephen's hand, swollen from a wasp sting.

seems much more dangerous!! I am thinking of starting my own sting/bite UK league table.

"Yesterday I was stung by a wasp for the first time ever. It took exception to my treading on its nest. On a scale of 10, the sting was less than 1, I thought nothing of it. Except for the fact that the wasp was incredibly difficult to detach. However, overnight and today, the hand has not



The Southern Garden Spider (a/k/a Hobo Spider) *Eratigena agrestis*.

stopped swelling, at least a six-hour delayed reaction. It is like one of those yellow rubber gloves that you blow up and it looks like a cow's udder. I have had to take my watch off. The skin on the back of my hand is so tight I cannot clench my fist. Antihistamine cream is having no noticeable effect. The after-effects I would have to give a 3.

"Last year's spider bite in our garden in Langley, by a Southern Garden Spider [a/k/a Hobo Spider] *Tegenaria agrestis* had a bit more initial terror to it and hurt more. It was like having a thin sharp pin stuck in my arm. I was in a confined spot behind the shed and having a spider the size of a small crab (130mm) hanging from my arm made me jump. Other than an unusual water spider I think it is one of England's biggest, usually found outside in garages and sheds. The two fang marks were obvious and remained for quite some time. But there was no swelling. An immediate 3, with two sore red punctures for about a week.

"The previous year's bee sting hurt the



Stephen's arm, after being bitten by *E. agrestis*.

most and removing the barb was unpleasant. Swelling was immediate and obvious. But antihistamine cream was speedily effective and reduced the symptoms very quickly. An immediate 3 but tailing off.

"By far the worst experience was my Dalmation dog Rusty's encounter in September with an adder, while we were fossiling. The bite and poison were a 10+. He was still not quite himself after a couple of weeks.

"I have never seen anything bitten by a venomous animal before. It was quite scary (and effective). At 45 kilos he is not a small animal. Within 15 minutes he was incapable of functioning or self-control. Walking, sight, concentration were gone. His head looked like it had a tennis ball in each cheek and his throat was the size of a football. We think it must have been multiple strikes to his head. I think this is the worst area to be bitten and is generally why animals suffer more than humans (who usually get bitten on the lower leg).

"Thankfully from pure luck we had registered with the only vet in the area who stocks the anti-venom (it is not licensed for use on animals). I have no doubt Rusty would have died without it.

"I was surprised by the speed of the

(Continued on page 7)

Field Clip

(Continued from page 6)



Rusty the Dalmation, after anti-venom treatment for an adder bite.

reaction (Do NOT go out on your own!) but also the size of the localized swelling, which was what first prompted my serious concern. And DO get anti-venom as quick as possible. We ignored the risk of allergic reaction or side effects (a personal decision).

"The adder is the UK's only venomous snake and the adder population is having a bit of a population explosion, due to warmer winters with significantly lower levels of frost and snow and no prolonged periods of sub-freezing temperatures. There are much fewer winter deaths (or higher survival rates).

"At the local beach there are warnings and records of Weaver Fish stings. I am not going paddling in the sea!!"

Thanks to Stephen Green for this contribution



DNHG Field trip to Saruq Al-Hadid Archaeology Museum

Dubai is known to the world as a modern city but, in historic Shindagha, this recently-opened museum reflects on the past, displaying artefacts as far back as the Iron Age. Images of these artefacts can be seen above, with more photographs on page 3, all of which were taken by Lamjed El Kefi. The large archaeological site in the Rub al-Khali desert has revealed much about the past and *'only 10—15% has so far been excavated'* (quoted from the brochure, which is downloadable from the website below). Visit the museum to find out how the site was discovered and why the above ring is so significant today!

Opening times, where to park and how to plan your visit can be found on the museum website: <http://www.saruqalhadid.ae/>



DNHG members pose with staff on a visit to the Saruq Al-Hadid Museum

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

December 11: **Members' Night:**

- Angela Manthorpe ... "Svalbard—Land of the Polar Bear"
- Nirmal Rajah ... "Vignettes of the eons past (Fossils)"
- Sahil Abdul Latheef ... "A glimpse into the amphibian diversity of the Western Ghats"

Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

December 1—3: Jebel Asarh (Jebel Shams) in Oman (National Day Weekend)
December 3: Second Wadi Hayl Field Trip
December 16—23: Northern Vietnam
March 24—30: Uttarakhand, India

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

DNHG COMMITTEE 2016

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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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.