



GAZELLE

مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

www.dnhg.org

I have lived in the UAE for almost 20 years but, until this year, I've never seen a centipede. We are only a few months into 2017 and I've already seen 2.

My first was in January in Mushrif Park. I was kicking around some old wood and uncovered the centipede under a rotting log. But it was so fast! No sooner had I uncovered it than it dived back undercover. It was very hard to photograph, but Photo 1 shows the trunk.

I found my second on a rainy day in the rocky base of Wadi Ghalilah, Ras Al Khaimah. It was dead and missing a few legs and its antennae, but at least this allowed



1—Mushrif Park

2017 - The Year of the Centipede

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

Angela Manthorpe, Hiba Allam, Helga Meyer, Nick de Smith, Margaret Swan, Ulrika Andorff and Gary Feulner.

For inclusion in the next issue, send your contributions to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

no later than 25th May, 2017

me to examine it more closely. Photo 2 shows the whole body, which was approximately 9cm long (without antennae).

Centipedes are terrestrial arthropods and are generally nocturnal. They have a flattened, segmented body with one pair of legs per body segment. They are predatory carnivores and inject venom through their forcipules, or poison claws, which are modified fore-legs. The claws are located under the head – photos 3 and 4 show these in close up. Treat centipedes with caution as they can bite; pain like a bee sting is the most common result but more extreme reactions have been recorded.

'Natural Emirates' lists records for both *Scolopendrida mirabilis* and *Scolopendrida valida*. The former has been observed in the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve and the Sharjah desert.

Contribution by
Angela Manthorpe



3—the head



4—underside



2—body

Announcements and Recorders

Monthly Speakers—8pm on Sunday 7 May, 2017

The DNHG are delighted to welcome the following speaker, who will present an illustrated talk on:

"Restoration/Conservation and revitalization of the coastal town, Jazirat Al Hamra, Ras Al Khaimah"

Ahmed Hilal has a Masters degree in archaeology with distinction (gold medallist) from University of Peshawar in 1997. Been part of many archaeological surveys and excavations in Pakistan until 2000. Since 2001, working for the Department of Antiquities and Museums Government of RAK as a resident archaeologist.

He conducted many archaeological surveys in different parts of RAK and conducted excavations at Falayah 2000-2002, Qarn Al Harf 2001, Ghubb 2004-2005, Fahlain 2008-2010, Sfuni 2008, Muhammed bin Salim Mosque Old Town RAK 2012-2013.

Ahmed Hilal has worked on a number of projects listed below:

Has been surveying and studying traditional architecture of RAK since 2002 – Palm garden stone house survey 2002, RAK Old Town survey 2002-2003, Mountain village survey 2003, Preliminary Survey of Rams 2007, Survey of Traditional Architecture in Ma'arid 2007-2008. Jazirat Al Hamra traditional architecture documentation started from 2014.

Carried out restoration of two towers at Ma'arid 2006, restoration of the Ras Al Khaimah Fort 2006-2010, restoration of Muhammed bin Saleem mosque Old Town RAK 2012-2013, Restoration of Burj Hulw 2014 and ongoing projects – Jazirat Al Hamra restoration project since 2014 and restoration of Naslah tower complex 2016.

Is managing the team responsible for developing infrastructure for the heritage tourism sites in RAK – Dahayah, Shimal and Falayah Heritage Parks. Managing Jazirat Al Hamra restoration project. Interested in heritage management – strategy and future planning with the focus on developing and implementing international standards, procedures, guidelines and scientific infrastructure. Training teams and developing research methodologies in excavation, restoration/conservation and traditional architecture recording and assessment.

ABSTRACT

After the decline of Julfar trading town, the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah went through a period of dispersed urbanisation first developing the Old town of RAK and later Rams, Ma'arid and Jazirat Al-Hamra. There was a rapid growth of different types of traditional buildings - Forts/fortresses, watchtowers, traditional mosques, palm garden stone/mudbrick houses and villages. Jazirat Al Hamra is the second largest coastal town after RAK Old town. It was mainly a trading and fishing town dated back to late 17th - early 18th century AD.

It is a typical traditional town having a variety of traditional building types. It has a fort, a traditional *Suq* and a number of mosques. There are large and small compound houses, richly decorated to very simple modest houses. The different types of material and building techniques show a gradual development of the town. It is a town where all the character defining elements and features of the traditional architecture of Ras Al Khaimah can be found.

The current project is undertaken to record and document the existing traditional buildings in their current state of condition. There is an on going study to understand the traditional building material and construction techniques, character defining elements and features. It is also in the scope of the project to carry out excavation at different points to understand the different levels of occupation and development/growth of the town. Based on the information generated through the process of recording and the study the buildings are being restored following the international standards.

From the Editor:

Trips abroad this month included travelling to India and Slovenia, whilst locally, an interesting visit to Jazirat Al Hamra revealed some main landmarks of the town (see *photos on page 3*). Our enthusiastic guide was Ahmed Hilal, who is also our next speaker (see *left*). Incidentally, there was a huge response to the 'Citizen Science' plea last month, which involved recording coral-based building materials at this site.

Nick de Smith [sent this link](#), consisting of photographs he took whilst attending a bee-keeping session at the inter-Emirates weekend in Al Ain. For those that do not have Google Drive, some of the main photos can be seen on page 3.

As a follow-up to the 'Orange Card' article last month, on checking with a local insurer, it would seem that these are not being issued by the RTA. However, if driving to Oman, you do need to carry a colour copy of your Motor Vehicle Certificate, which shows geographical cover limits for UAE and Oman.

Enjoy your read!

DNHG Recorders

Reptiles - Dr. Reza Khan 050 6563601

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Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

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

Spotlight!

Bee-keeping session in Al Ain, by Nick de Smith

Using the smoker to calm the bees



Pollen feed pad in brood box



Looking for the Queen



Queen with attendants



Brood boxes under Sidr trees

Group photographs

Bee-keeping workshop, kindly led by Dr. Denis Anderson in Al Ain

photo by Nick de Smith



Sharjah Desert Trip Participants

photo by Ulrika Andorff



A Glimpse into the Past

at Jazirat al Hamra

by Helga Meyer



Field Clips

A Flying Feast

A late March afternoon found me in a boulder-filled wadi on the slopes of Jebel Qitab. I was with an archaeobotanist and plants were the order of the day, so we were mostly looking down, but I was also keeping an eye out for butterflies.

When I looked up at one point in mid-afternoon, I noticed a couple of oddly fluttering, large-winged insects about 8-10 meters overhead, flying uphill over the wadi bottom. As I puzzled over what they might be, I saw another . . . then another, and another, at intervals averaging ca. 30 seconds.

Finally one landed near me, about 2 meters and a few rocks and shrubs away, but close enough to see with binoculars, and perhaps to approach and photograph. Through the binocs it was brownish and elongated, with big wings. At my feet I glimpsed a bar-tailed gecko, normally common enough although I had seen none yet that day. While I considered how I would approach the insect for a photograph, the gecko crossed between me and the target to a sloping rock on the left.

I thought to myself, "That insect would make a nice meal for the gecko, if he sees it". But in fact he had *already* seen it, from beside me, and his moves were all well-planned. In a flash, he had leapt down, caught the insect and retreated to the top of a boulder to consume it. My attention chased him to a crevice, but I was still able to record the action as he manoeuvred the insect to a head-first position for swallowing.

The 'migration' continued and eventually a few of the insects fell at my feet, where I could hope to inspect one. The first one almost outwitted me. I scratched in the gravel where it had landed, but came up with only a *wingless* brown insect. A second opportunity gave the secret away. The little creature crawled for a bit over stones and gravel, then began to wriggle and squirm, and *shed its wings*.

These were, I now knew from their appearance and behavior, termites. Some varieties are known to swarm after heavy rain – which had fallen over much of the area a few days before. After landing in a suitable place, the termites shed their wings and burrow into the soil (here gravel and silt).

White termites, apparently more common in less rugged environments



Bar-tailed gecko with a mouthful of winged termite

A check of my photos and records showed that I had encountered identical termites, freshly dead in a pool, in the Ru'us al-Jibal in January 2001, likewise following heavy rains (which in that instance also triggered a mating frenzy by resident Dhofar toads).

I had also encountered what may have been the same insects in the sands near Nahel (Sweihan area) in spring 1997, with the late Martin Parker, but if so, they must not be very particular about their environment.

The wadi up which the termites were flying



Winged termite wriggling to shed its wings



Newly wingless termite

The termites in question are distinct from the shorter, stouter white termites that I have seen in silty environments, e.g., in fields in the Ru'us al-Jibal and eroded slopes in Wadi Hiluw, but a review of UAE termites remains to be undertaken.

And finally, I was not the only one who noticed that the termites were migrating. A semaphore gecko, Oman lizard and fan-footed gecko were all prowling the wadi bed at just that time, despite the overcast sky and relatively cool temperatures. I watched a fan-footed gecko bound down to the wadi bed from its customary overhanging rock perch to gobble up a freshly landed termite.

Contribution by Gary Feulner

Field Clips

Jumeirah Beach Finds

Whilst walking on the sandy Jumeirah 1 beach, Hiba Allam found some interesting forms of marine life.

Hiba reported that there were a couple of sand dollars on this occasion, but in February, she had also seen one, at that time on its own. I remembered seeing Sand Dollars in abundance on the beach next to the Chicago Beach Hotel (now Jumeirah Beach Hotel). That was several years ago, when a breakwater had recently been constructed, around a small dhow harbour. Visit [The Natural History Museum, London](#) to find out more about sand dollars. You may also wish to refer to an article by Valerie Chalmers on fossilized Echinoids (Echinoderms), written in the September, 2008 *Gazelle*.

The sea slug (possibly a *Phallusia nigra*) was also on its own and may have been left behind by the tide, as was a lone Brittlestar. According to 'The Emirates—a Natural History' Brittlestars are 'very common on subtidal rock and artificial structures.'

Having seen populations of Brittlestars on the rockier Fujairah coast, I wondered if the rocks on the breakwaters and breakwalls along this coast, which are effectively artificial structures, had something to do with the sighting on the Jumeirah coast.

At the beginning of this month I walked along one such breakwall in Jumeirah 3 and noted some observations of my own. Prior to reaching the breakwall, on the sandy shoreline, I noticed what looked like a large (about four inches long), sea anemone, dislodged and lifeless.

From the breakwall itself, I observed, what appeared to be a coral-like substance, which seemed to be forming around a submerged rock. It was light-green in colour, presumably from surrounding algae. Not all rock coverings were green however, as there were also white, and a rather distinct, orange/red-covered rock. Again, referring to the above book, [which is available online](#), the red could have either been *Didemnum* spp, or *Mycale Cecilia de Laubenfels*, a type of sponge. Instead of coral (the white and green covered rocks), these could have been Calcareous sponges, which are 'small sponges with calcareous spicules in the mineral form calcite (CaCO_3),' according to this publication. They were difficult to examine closely, as it meant entering the water with a mask and snorkel, which I was not tempted to do, given the tidal surge and several surrounding sea urchins. I therefore decided to leave this for marine experts to study further.

One thing is for certain, however, and that is the fact that all of these sightings reflect a thriving marine life, just off the Jumeirah coast.

Report by Margaret Swan (photos by Hiba Allam and Margaret Swan)

Brittlestar *Ophiothrix savignyi*

©Hiba Allam



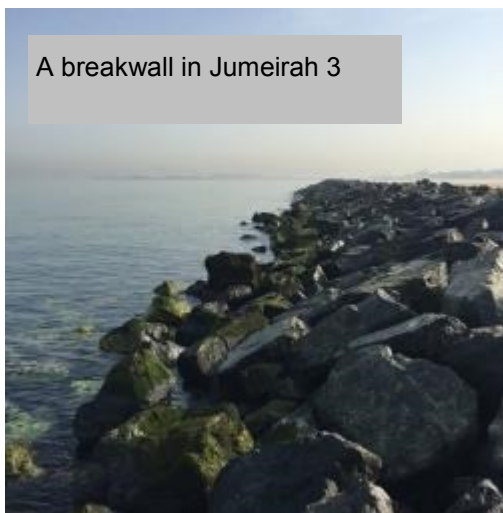
Sea slug ©Hiba Allam



Sand Dollar ©Hiba Allam



A breakwall in Jumeirah 3

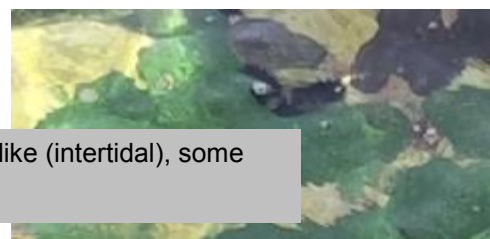
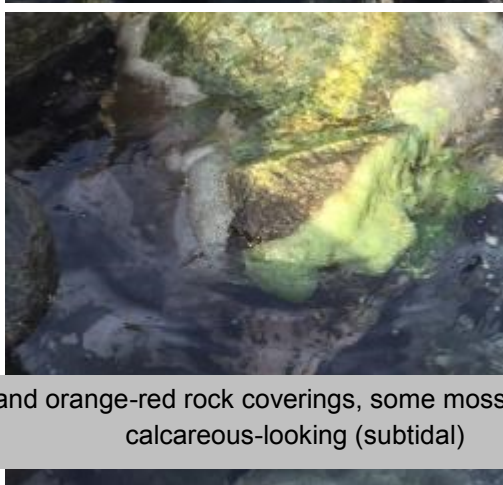
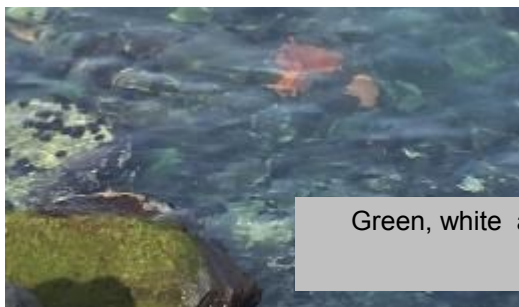


Interesting layer, embedded in rock, the submerged part could provide ample refuge for small creatures, or babies of larger ones.



Stranded Sea Anemone

Green, white and orange-red rock coverings, some moss-like (intertidal), some calcareous-looking (subtidal)



Announcements

Annual General Meeting

This year's Annual General Meeting will be held in conjunction with our May 7 lecture. The normal March date was postponed due to Committee absences. At the AGM there will be a brief report on salient trends and events over the past year and on the DNHG's finances, and we will elect the Committee for the coming year.

The current Committee members have agreed to stand for re-election, with the exception of Martina Fella, who will be leaving the UAE at the end of the school year. She will relinquish her position as Co-Speaker Coordinator.

This does not mean that your help is not welcomed or is not required. The DNHG depends entirely on volunteer efforts and we are all busy, so help is always welcome. If you would be willing to help out in one way or another, please let a Committee member know.

In particular, **we need more members who are willing to lead field trips**, especially outdoor field trips. You do not need to be an "expert" to lead an interesting and enjoyable field trip. It takes a sense of adventure and curiosity – a willingness to look closely and wonder "What (or why) is that?" – and a willingness to share the experience. Good field trips are learning experiences for everybody – even the leaders.

Field Trips Past:



Wadi Daynah

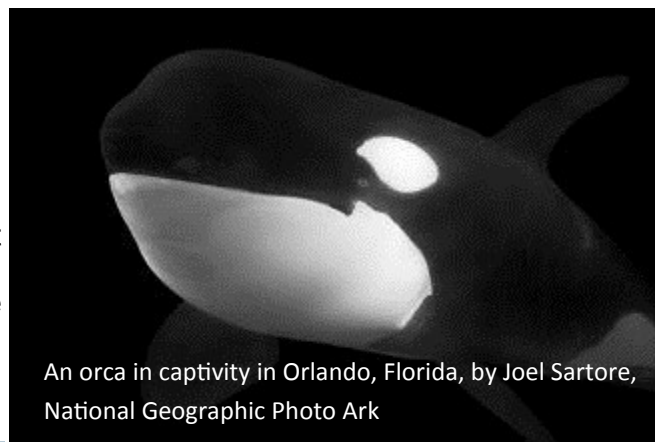


UAQ coast

Recent Orca Sightings

Following reports of a mother and calf observation just off Limah Rock on 8th April, a further sighting of a lone Orca (killer whale), was observed close to a beach in Umm al Quwain last week.

The Gulf News report by Mariam M. Al Serkal, Senior Web Reporter ([read the full report here](#)) states that killer whales do not pose any type of threat to humans. This was in response to a tweet which went viral, causing a certain amount of panic. The report goes on to say that the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment responded by emphasizing that a heavy fine will be imposed on anyone that harms these animals.



An orca in captivity in Orlando, Florida, by Joel Sartore, National Geographic Photo Ark



Image Credit: Twitter

It is unusual for these mammals to travel through UAE waters, as they prefer to frequent cold, coastal waters. However, according to [National Geographic](#), they can be found from the polar regions to the Equator.

Read about orcas visiting Abu Dhabi in this 2015 report in [The National newspaper](#), - in particular note the comments by Dr Ada Natoli, founder of the UAE Dolphin Project, who requests that public sightings of whales or dolphins be sent to www.uaedolphinproject.org

Bish Brown Remembered

With the recent announcement of the Bish Brown Prize, it seems time to give current ENHG members a little more information about Bish Brown himself, one of the founders of the ENHG just over 40 years ago.

Bish died in August 1995, shortly after he had finally retired from Abu Dhabi, where he worked first for ADMA-OPCO and then, for a few years, in the Cultural Foundation, now part of the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority, ADTCA, where he was employed specifically to work on natural history matters.

In his will, Bish asked to be cremated, with some of his ashes going to a favourite wood near his home and some of them coming here.

The article that follows, by long-time ENHG member Peter Hellyer, was first published in the 'Green Spot' column in the daily Emirates News, the predecessor of The National, on 25th January 1996.

'A week ago today, the founder of amateur natural history in the Emirates, J.N.B 'Bish' Brown, took for the last time one of his favourite trips out of Abu Dhabi up the Sweihan Road.

Not in person, for Bish died in England in August, but rather his ashes, brought out by his widow Beth, who, with four friends, made that last and sad trip up the road, past many of his favourite spots, to choose a suitable place where he might be scattered to the winds over the landscape he so much loved.

Much of the land has changed, and dramatically so, since Bish and his closest Abu Dhabi friend, Rob Western, used to take that route. The road, of course, is wider, while the first part, running from the roundabout on the Dubai – Mafraq Road as far as the Al Faqa roundabout, is now a line of heavy trucks in both directions, carrying the sand to infill yet another piece of sabkha for development.

"Tranquillity, at last," sighed Rob as we passed the Al Faqa roundabout.

A little further on, the couple of small saltwater pools known fondly to Bish, and entered in the ENHG database as 'Sweihan Two Pools', have disappeared, although the corner of the dune where they once lay is still full of vegetation.

But, despite the plantations, and the fences lining the roadside to prevent wandering camels (some of which, of course, had

made their way through onto the verges), much remained as it had been.

The lines of dunes on the edge of the Sweihan valley still stand, for the most part at least, pristine, with the wind blowing clouds of fine grain sands from their crests.

After this winter's good rains, the salt-tolerant vegetation was sprouting anew, bright green with the fresh water it had absorbed.

The farms of Sweihan themselves are now more extensive than heretofore, a verdant strip in the lee of the dunes, the trees higher than they were when Bish first discovered this spot twenty years ago, though they still look much the same as one drives by.

Some of the sandstone outcrops, home to Little Owls and to Bish's much-loved vipers and 'dhub' lizards, are still there, starkly eroded by the blowing of sand-laden wind over millennia, sharp crags that have resisted the passage of time, and yet which fall so easily to the onslaught of the bulldozer or the municipal tree-planting teams.

We chose a track leading into the desert just south of Sweihan township, where the dunes stood high and virgin.

Leaving the road behind, with its accompaniment of the noise of traffic and the clanking of bulldozer tracks moving yet another dune face, we drove off into an area where the dunes towered above us, lowering down on the strip of Sweihan farms to the north-east.

Parking the car, we set out across the sand, firm after recent rainfall and with hundreds, nay thousands, of little plant shoots emerging from the surface and with the brilliant azure sky above us, dotted with wind-blown clouds.

Only in the winter months, when the sunlight is not so intense, is the blue so perfect.

Beth chose the spot, in the lee of a small dune with blowing sand and the wind from the west, opened the container and slowly, deliberately, shook the ashes into the wind.

They fell in a wide arc downwind of where she stood, whence, as the wind blew and the grains of sand rolled along, they too began to spread out across the desert for which Bish had so much cared.

A quick tear or two, and then reminiscences over a cup of coffee.

Rob, who above all was Bish's constant companion in the desert and mountains, up the Sweihan Road and elsewhere,

wandered off and came back to report that the *Tribulus* plants were thriving.

The flies descended, arriving as they always do in the desert out of nowhere, as Rob recalled that only on trips to Wadi Hail in Fujairah did he and Bish see as many as they did in the desert.

Recollections of camping breakfasts (and lunches and dinners) came from Jenny Hollingworth and Lynda Graham, favoured companions on weekend outings, of chapatis, cheese and pickled onions, with, of course, a choc-ice whenever a roadside café was found.

And of mugs of hot tea around the fire, and of Bish's skill at finding something of interest wherever he went in this land, plants, birds, lizards, insects, the scenery, anything of the natural history and environment of the country.

Then back towards the Al Ain road, past the plantation at Saih Al Salem, another of Bish's many well-beloved spots, through Al Khazna and Al Khatam, past the old Bedouin camping ground at 'Site One', the first archaeological site to be discovered and the source of the best collection of Late Islamic glazed pottery from anywhere in the whole of Abu Dhabi's coast and desert regions.

Back in Abu Dhabi and back towards the present and future, leaving behind us Bish's ashes forever where he would have wished them to be, blowing amidst the dunes of his beloved Sweihan Road.

Founder of the Emirates Natural History Group twenty years ago, and inspiration for its younger sisters in Al Ain and Dubai, Bish was not only an amateur naturalist, in the tradition of those whose love of nature and concern for the environment caused them to record everything however apparently insignificant, everywhere they went, thus laying the foundations for the more scientific study of today.

He was also a teacher with the skill to communicate both his knowledge and his enthusiasm to those who had the opportunity to wander with him up the Sweihan Road or to any other of the multitude of *Green Spots* he discovered and cherished in this land.

Thanks to the generosity of two former ENHG colleagues, Terry and Caroline Adams, the Group has just announced the establishment of the Bish Brown Natural History Prize, to be awarded annually to an individual who is considered to have made a major contribution as an amateur naturalist to the study and promotion of the

(Continued on page 8)

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

May 7:	Ahmed Hilal—"The Restoration/Conservation and Revitalization of the coastal town Jazirat Al Hamra, Ras Al Khaimah"
June 4:	Sue-Sharyn Ward—"How Aviation Inspired Growth in the Trucial States/UAE"
July/August:	No lectures or field trips

Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

April 29:	Sharjah Biennale
June 2—9:	Serbia (Belgrade and Mountain Zlatibor)

Field trips will be circulated to members via e-mail

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When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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(Continued from page 7)

natural history of the Emirates.

Therein lies the moral of this week's *Green Spot*, for it is not simply sufficient to enjoy and to love this land, whether one be an expatriate or a national. It is right, too, that those who enjoy it and love it should, at the same time, study it and preserve it, recording knowledge for those future generations who will not see it as we have had the good fortune to see it.

The environment of the Emirates is not ours; we simply hold it upon trust for future generations, and they for yet more.

If we know more about it than we did twenty years ago, that is because of the efforts of dedicated amateurs like Bish Brown, who not only loved it and studied it, but campaigned for its intrinsic value to be recognised and preserved.

To preserve the *Green Spots* of tomorrow, it is beholden upon us that we should preserve those of today.' Among them, forever special to four of us at least, will be a patch of virgin dunes just off the Sweihan Road.

Contribution by Peter Hellyer, Advisor, National Media Council.



'Bish' Brown, photo courtesy of Marijcke Joengbloed.