



# GAZELLE

مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

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

## Passerines ringing



Clamorous Reed Warbler

## ... at Al Qudra Lake

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

Esmat Elhassan, Angela Manthorpe, Tamsin Carlisle, Gary Feulner and Margaret Swan.

**For inclusion in the next issue, send your contributions to:**  
[gazelleeditor@gmail.com](mailto:gazelleeditor@gmail.com)  
 no later than 26th March, 2017

On Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2017, Dr Junid and I, organized a field-ringing session for the passerines at Al Qudra Lake. The lake is in the Al Marmoum Desert Conservation Reserve, one of the largest protected areas in Dubai, declared as such in 2014, by HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Vice President and Ruler of Dubai.

Al Qudra Lake is one of the oldest artificial lakes in the reserve, and is host to many populations of migratory and resident birds. It is close to Bab Al Shams Hotel and is supported by sewage water from the Jebel Ali Treatment Plant. The lake is a favourite site for bird watchers within the reserve.



Rock Art in RAK! (see page 4)

We headed towards the lake during the early morning, in order to erect the mist nets, prior to bird foraging activities, which occur mostly at this time of day. Two mist nets (16mm mesh size x 18 m long) were erected in the middle of the reed beds, where the possibility of

## Announcements and Recorders

### Monthly Speakers—8pm on Sunday 5 March, 2017

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

#### “Plain Tiger Butterfly and some Aspects of its Development ”

**Malgorzata de Latour-Abdalla** is a native of Poland. She has lived in several Arab and Western countries.

After arriving in the Emirates in 2003, she became fascinated by the local nature, which she explored extensively. Additionally, she found interest in local folklore, which she studied from museums, periodicals and direct contacts with Emirati friends. Seeing local folklore disappearing and restricted to local festivals and museums she decided to share her knowledge of it with the expatriate community at large. On the subjects of Emirati folklore and nature in the years 2006-2007 she contributed articles to the Sharjah English newspaper “Gulf Today”.

In the years 2008-2010, Malgorzata conducted an informal photographic study on the insects visiting Sodom’s Apple plants in urban Sharjah. In her study she documented over 100 insect and spider species living off these bushes.

Malgorzata is currently working on a book about the Sodom’s Apple and its importance in the local ecosystem.

#### **Tribulus vol. 24**

The latest issue of *Tribulus*, vol. 24, was published in February and is available at DNHG lectures for AED 50. This is another extra-large edition, featuring a diverse mix of topics and contributors. We are very lucky to have a journal that facilitates access by resident amateurs to original local research. Volume 24 includes papers on all of the following:

#### **From the Editor:**

A second excursion to Shimal and Wadi Haqil took place earlier this month, whilst a tour of the Tell Abrak Temple (page 4), provided an insight into the reconstruction process.

The cover article explains the process of ringing birds at Al Qudra, whereas in total contrast, learn more about ‘rock art’ examples on page 5.

Spotlight features photographs from Mleiha and the inter-Emirate Weekend (IEW) while page 6 reveals flora, located on IEW excursions.

On behalf of the DNHG committee and members who attended the well-organized IEW, many thanks go to the Al Ain chapter, who hosted a wide variety of field trips and workshops both in, and around Al Ain. Enjoy your read!

- A survey of the flora of Wadi Wurayah National Park and a discussion of its regional biogeographic significance.
- A geological excursion to Jebels Rawdah, Buhais and Faiyah, and an interpretation of the sedimentary history that is seen there.
- Pleistocene gypsum deposits near Yas Island, and their significance for the Quaternary geological history of the area.
- A guide to the identification of a rare UAE dragonfly from its aquatic larvae and their exuviae.
- A summary of rare records of the Giant Eggfly butterfly from the UAE and Oman.
- An update on UAE spiders, including photos of 10 newly recognized species.
- New records and photos of flowering plants found in the UAE.
- A report on the Five-Striped Palm Squirrel – a mammalian addition to the exotic fauna of the UAE.
- An account of the work of the Sharjah Seed Bank and Herbarium.
- A report confirming that the adult Arabian water scorpion can fly.

**D**avid Edwards, who has been inspirational in preparing and leading field trips, is leaving Dubai.

DNHG member, Alexis Biller, thanked David for his efforts, at the Inter-Emirate Weekend (IEW) dinner in Al Ain. David responded by encouraging members to ‘take the lead’ as he did, following a trip with Brien Holmes, many years ago.

David has encouraged field trip mentoring and member participation on field trips, mainly in the Ras al Khaimah and Fujairah mountains. He also set up and promoted the annual IEW last year in Fujairah.

He emphasized that field trips are “*not always led by ‘experts,’ but by enthusiastic amateurs, who wish to share their knowledge of the UAE,*” and encourages more members to lead field trips in the future.

#### **DNHG Recorders**

**Reptiles - Dr. Reza Khan** 050 6563601

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# Spotlight!

**Mleiha Trip, by Tamsin Carlisle**



Bivalve fossil

Rudist fossils in limestone

Gastropod Fossils

Fossil sea urchin spines embedded in limestone

Limestone overhang with potter wasp cells

**Jahili Fort (an IEW excursion in Al Ain), by Margaret Swan**



**Green Mubazzarah (an IEW birdwatching field trip), by Tamsin Carlisle**



Crested Lark



Escaped Kestrel (male)

Egyptian Vulture (left and below)



## Field Clip

catching passerines was high, as the birds move between them. The beds also provide a suitable habitat for passerines and are situated at the northern edges of the lake. Within two hours we managed to ring three species of passerines, including the Clamorous Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus stentoreus*), the Blue Throat (*Luscinia svecica*) and the Laughing Dove (*Spilopelia senegalensis*).

Within the reed beds, the Clamorous Reed Warbler seemed to be the most abundant species of the small passerines as 6 individuals were captured and ringed. This bird is native to UAE, and has a very large range stretching from Northeast Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, through South and Southeast Asia to the Philippines. It appeared to be breeding at the site, but no evidence was found. The Clamorous Reed Warbler is very similar to the Great Reed Warbler, which makes identification very difficult, even with the bird in your hand, as the two birds are almost identical, with only minor differences. According to the IUCN red list of the threatened species, its population trend appears to be stable, and hence the species does not approach the threshold for 'vulnerable' under the population trend criterion (>30% decline over ten years or three generations).

Both male and female of the Blue Throat were also ringed. The male is very remarkable, with an iridescent blue bib, edged below with successive black, white and rust-coloured borders. The female has less colour. The bird is native to UAE and is classified as 'least concern' under IUCN red list.

Other species ringed were the Laughing Dove, with two individuals. This bird is native and is



**Female Blue Throat**

also a local breeder.

Other passerine species observed at the site were the Purple Sun Bird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*), White-eared Bulbul (*Pycnonotus leucotis*), Graceful Prinia (*Prinia gracilis*), Western Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) and White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*).

The Clamorous Reed Warbler and Blue Throat showed full grown feathers with no moulting patterns, while the Laughing Dove showed old feathers ready to be replaced by the new ones.

Our ringing program, which was launched in 2014, is the regular ringing program under the authority of the Natural Resources Conservation Section of Dubai Municipality. The rings have Dubai/UAE digits, and are manufactured by Porzana, Ltd., who are mostly active now in Dubai but they also plan to have joint activities with other Emirates.

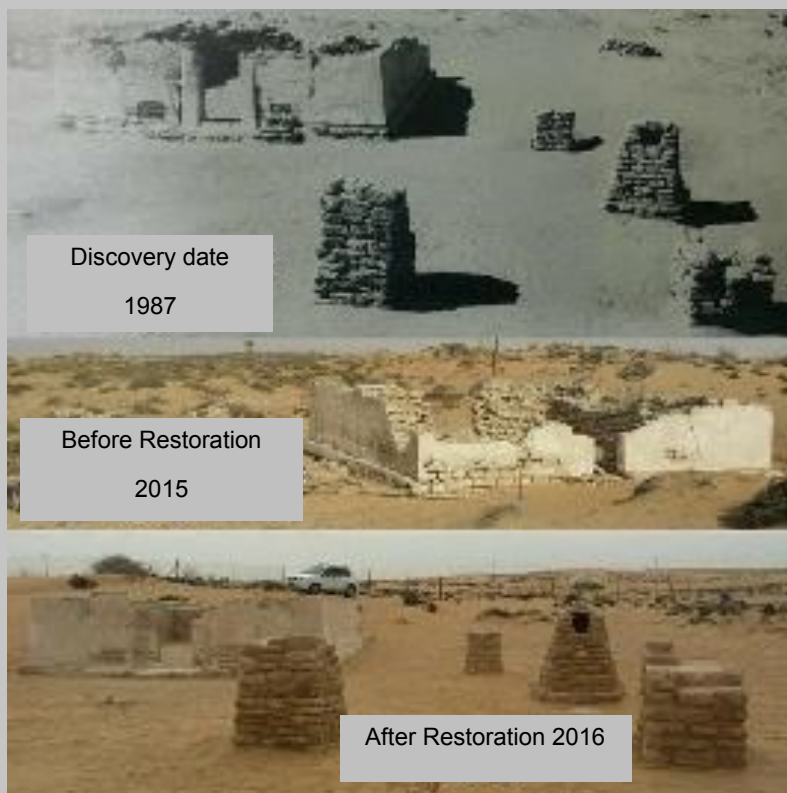
*Contribution by Esmat Elhassan, Ornithologist, Dubai Municipality*



**Ringing site**

## Tell Abraq Field Trip

Following road changes in the area, DNHG members met at 7.45am on 18th February, in Umm Al Quwain, in order to visit the newly-restored Tell Abrak Temple at Ed-Dur. Here are some photographs, as supplied by guide, Mekdad:



Discovery date

1987

Before Restoration

2015

After Restoration 2016



## Field Clip



Photo 7—a wonderful necklace motif

## Rock Art in RAK

With the onset of the cooler weather I've been back to the mountains and, during a lunch stop in a village above the Jebel Jais road recently, I stumbled across a rich field of petroglyphs. I was crossing a flat platform strewn with large rocks and noticed an image picked out of the rock's



Photo 1—2 figures riding horses or donkeys



Photo 2—man on camel

surface. The details of this first petroglyph were hard to determine as the sun was in my eyes and the image and background were the same colour. I took a photo and, studying this image later (**photo 1**) it appears to show 2 figures riding horses or donkeys. I soon spotted several more pictures, with modes of transport being the dominant theme: **photo 2** man on camel; **photo 3** man on donkey, and **photo 4** man on motorbike (well, that's what it looks like to me)! When I turned around to survey the whole boulder field even more images revealed themselves – a fantastic array of riders, and a big camel with a spotted hump (**photo 5**).

Pushing on, I dropped into a lower field and the wall there contained another fine rider – maybe a camel? (**photo 6**). My final objective was a reasonably well preserved house on the edge of the field, and in the back wall was another highlight - a wonderful necklace motif (**photo 7**). I couldn't help but smile when I saw that one!

I counted over 20 different images - a mix of bright petroglyphs that were easy to spot from a distance, and others that blended with the surrounding rock surface. Were some old, some new? I'm not sure, but I have heard in DNHG lectures that rock art is very difficult to date. Those who'd like to know more about the recurring motifs and the location of other petroglyphs might like to seek out Michele Ziolkowski's 2007 paper "Rock on art: Petroglyph sites in the United Arab Emirates."

*Contribution by  
Angela Manthorpe*



Photo 3—man on donkey



Photo 4—man on motorbike?



Photo 5— an array of riders, plus a big camel with spotted hump!



Photo 6—a fine rider, maybe a camel



## IEW Field Trips



### Cotton Bush in Al Ain

On a tour Friday afternoon of Al Ain's somewhat dilapidated Mezyad Fort, formerly a Trucial Scouts stronghold, we found a small cotton bush growing just outside the wall. Perhaps it's all that remains of a previous resident or caretaker's experiment in crop transplantation

Contribution by Tamsin Carlisle



### Wadi Tarabah

A short jaunt up Wadi Tarabah near Al Ain, which was officially part of Friday morning's IEW birdwatching activities, turned up some interesting plant observations.

First we found *Iphiona aucheri*, a



lovely but deadly poisonous plant bearing bright yellow daisy-type blooms. This plant has been known to cause liver failure in camels, which is really saying something.

Further up the wadi by a small pool at the bases of a cliff we found *Acridocarpus orientalis*, a rare perennial shrub that has been found only in Somalia, Oman and the UAE, and in the UAE only within a 1 km stretch of Wadi Tarabah. It is apparently the larval host species of the Giant Skipper butterfly (*Coliades anchises*). It was too early in the season for caterpillars to be present, but I did find a couple of rolled leaves containing remains of last year's cocoons.

Contribution by  
Tamsin Carlisle



*Iphiona aucheri*

*Iphiona aucheri*

*Iphiona aucheri*

*Acridocarpus orientalis*

*Acridocarpus orientalis*

*Acridocarpus orientalis* with old caterpillar cocoon

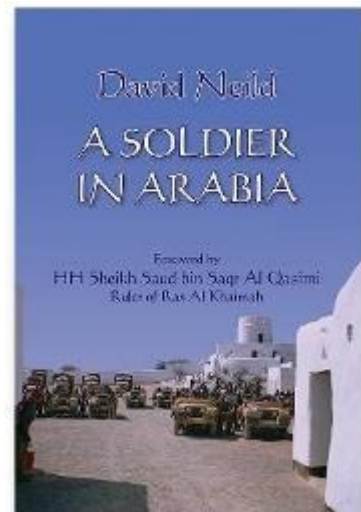


# About Books

## Books on the UAE and Beyond!

DNHG have hosted presentations and book-signings in recent past by authors, such as David Neild, Dr Athol Yates and David Heard.

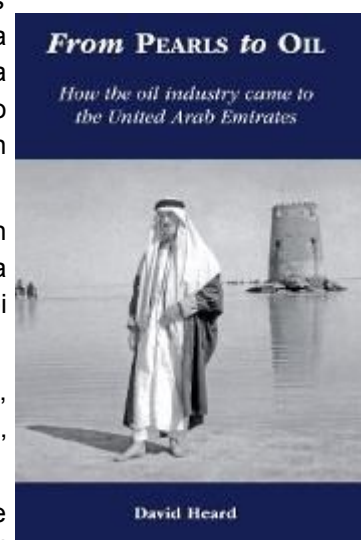
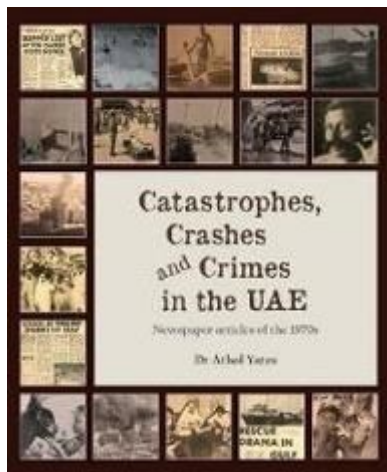
David Neild was initially posted to Ras al Khaimah in 1959, at the time of the Trucial States. This posting was only for 18 months but he returned in 1966 and was 'often closely involved in the skirmishes, incursions and political upheavals' of the time. ***A Soldier in Arabia*** follows the history of events, prior to, and leading up to the formation of the United Arab Emirates. This book is easy to read, in a good-sized font and includes some historical photographs of dignitaries and prestigious events from David's personal collection.



Dr Athol Yates presented a talk to DNHG members quite recently and, judging from the many people that attended, proved to be very popular. ***Catastrophes, Crashes and Crimes in the UAE*** covers news articles found in local newspapers during the 1970s. It is anecdotal in its content, which includes a fascinating article with the headline, 'Abominable Fishgirl is a Hoax.' The book makes for light reading, as there is no authoritative commentary alongside. It is, however, an unabridged record of local news from this time period.

Those wishing to meet Dr Yates, have another opportunity on 7th March at the Park Hyatt, Abu Dhabi, where he will present a lecture to the Emirates Natural History Group (Abu Dhabi Chapter).

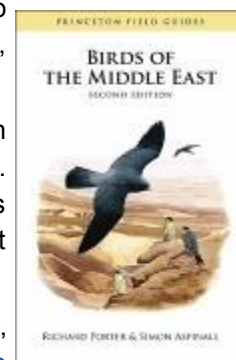
If you like this (as they say on *Amazon*) and for a more global perspective on news reportage, you will also enjoy ***Unreliable Sources: How the 20th Century was reported***, by John Simpson, the BBC World Affairs Editor.



David Heard provides an insight into oil company archives. He arrived in the UAE in 1963 as an oil industry professional and published his book ***From Pearls to Oil*** in 2012. It covers a time period up to 1946 and describes some colourful, key characters, such as 'Haji' Williamson, who was born in 1873 and was a 'pioneer' within the oil industry.

Frauke Heard-Bey is an historian and a political scientist, who has also written several books and articles on developments in the Gulf over four decades. ***From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates*** is an updated edition of this most important book. It was first published in 1982 and is a key to the past, as it chronicles the creation of the UAE federation.

There is an opportunity to meet David Heard and his wife, Frauke Heard-Bey, as they will be presenting sessions at the [Emirates Airline Festival of Literature in March](#). (click on the link for details of sessions and location map).



Also making an appearance at the 'Lit Fest' is Peter Hellyer, who is author and editor of many books on the UAE's archaeology, history and environment. He will moderate a session entitled ***Birds of the Middle East*** on 11th March, with panel participants, Richard Porter (co-author of the book), Ahmed Al Ali (wildlife photographer) and Oscar Campbell (Chairman of Emirates Bird Records Committee). Read more about this session [here](#).

A relatively new book on the shelves for young people is ***Wildlife in Oman***. Published in October, 2016, authors, Hanne and Jens Eriksen, are not listed for the Lit Fest, but are scheduled to present an illustrated talk for DNHG at the April meeting. Although intended for children, the authors stress that there is 'something for everyone in this book.'

Contribution by Margaret Swan

MARCH  
3-11  
2017

9<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL  
Emirates Airline  
Festival of Literature

# Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

- March 5: Malgorzata de Latour-Abdalla—"Plain Tiger Butterfly and some Aspects of its Development"  
April 9: Jens and Hanne Eriksen—"The Wildlife of Oman"  
June 4: Sue-Sharyn Ward—"How Aviation Inspired Growth in the Trucial States/UAE"

## Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

- March 3: Desert Trek in Sharjah  
March 24—30: Uttarakhand, India  
March 31—April 8: DNHG trip to Slovenia  
June 2—9: Serbia (Belgrade and Mountain Zlatibor)

*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***

Trip reports and photographs from the IEW are very welcome, for inclusion in the next Gazelle!

Field Clips are also welcome!

email your contributions to:  
[gazelleeditor@gmail.com](mailto: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.