

# GAZELLE

Vol 18 no 2 – February 2003



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

**DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP**

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

## Members' News

*Everywhere you look ....*

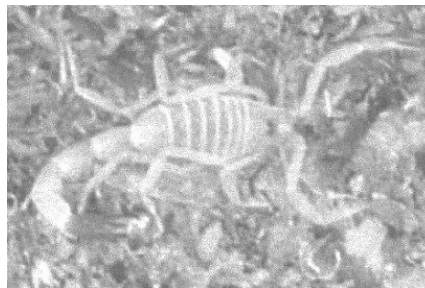
**Marijcke Jongbloed** has been very busy with, among other things, the finishing touches for her long-awaited *Flora of the UAE*. It has not helped her progress that many times recently when she has gone out to take photos, she has turned up new additions to the list of species. This was no less true in early February, when a trip "over the top" from Dibba to RAK turned up two new species, one in Wadi Khabb Shamsi and one that has so far escaped destruction adjacent to the new RAK golf course.

Marijcke leaves next month for retirement in France, but anticipates that she will be able to keep up with some of her work and most of her contacts by email.

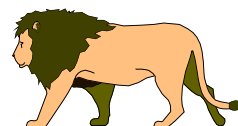


**Peter van Amsterdam's** recycling goes as far as picking up wood from an unsightly dump in the desert east of the Jebel Ali – Al Ain road for campfires. During winter, a friend, Gaynor Mulholland, lifted a chunk of decaying wood and the one behind her noticed a sizeable

scorpion, greyish lime green in colour. The scorpion was so well camouflaged amongst the debris that it was very difficult to photograph. The best photograph was not the one with something to give scale, alas. Scorpions are *Arachnidae*, and there are more than forty species and sub-species in Arabia. *Photo by Peter Hesse.*



Long-term members, **Dr Sandy Fowler**, our seashell recorder, and **Beryl Comar** have returned from a holiday in East Africa last month. Undaunted by recent events there, they visited old haunts and were sometimes surprised and delighted both by change, and by lack of it. Beryl's story of the wildlife they encountered during their trip will appear in the March issue of *Gazelle*.



### *DNHG Membership Renewal*

The DNHG membership year begins in September, so renewal is overdue. Membership remains a bargain at Dhs. 100 for couples and Dhs. 50 for singles. You can join or renew at meetings (see Membership Secretaries Lena Linton and Anin Radhakrishna) or by sending us a cheque made out to Lloyds Bank account no. 173746 and posted to us at PO Box 9234, Dubai. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG.) Membership is valid from September 2002 to September 2003.

DNHG membership entitles you to participate in field trips and helps pay for our lecture hall, publication and distribution of *Gazelle*, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.

### **This month's Contributors**

**The Editor would like to thank  
the following for their reports:**

Colin Paskins  
Gary Feulner  
Valerie Chalmers and Pradeep  
Radhakrishna, for details of the  
Inter-Emirates weekend



## Field Trips etc ...

### Inter-Emirates Weekend 20 & 21 March

Most of you will have received email information of the weekend by now. We will be based at the Oceanic Hotel, Khorfakkan and events will begin on Thursday afternoon. The hotel is block booking a number of rooms for the weekend on a first come first served basis and you are encouraged to book early. Hotel rates per night are:

Double Room/Twin Room Dhs 305 inclusive of tax and Dhs 385 inclusive of tax and full breakfast.

Single Room Dhs 245 inclusive of tax and Dhs 285 inclusive of tax and full breakfast.

Children below 12 years stay free. Evening buffet Dhs 85 inclusive of tax.

Lunch Box Dhs 46 (incl. soft drinks)

**Telephone The Oceanic Hotel on 09-2385111 to make a reservation. You need to mention Dubai Natural History Group Inter-Emirates Weekend when you make your booking in order to get the rates quoted.**

**If you book in at the hotel, please email to let Lena Linton know: [linton@emirates.net.ae](mailto:linton@emirates.net.ae).**

Lamjed El Kefi, who is the DNHG Astronomy and Marine Life Recorder, runs Al Marsa T and T which specialises in Musandam Dhow Trips operating from Dibba Port Oman. (No visas are required but some form of identification such as driving licence or photocopy of passport should be with you). Members of the DNHG have gone on both day trips and weekend cruises on Lamjed's dhows, and they are superb. Lamjed has offered to run another full day cruise to Haffa and Lima Bay which will include snorkelling on Friday 21st and he is keeping the date free for us.

Details are as follows:

Meet in Dibba Port (AL MINA) Oman at about 8 a.m. for registration and embark at about 8.30 to 9 a.m.

Price for Day Cruise is per person less group discount.

Minimum group 20 persons; maximum 40 persons; children open.

Price net: Dhs 235 per adult. Children under 12 years at 50%: Dhs 115. Children 3 years and under free.

Day Cruise to Haffa and Lima Bay includes breakfast, hot lunch, coffee/tea, soft drinks and water from dispenser.

Bring hat, sunblock and swimming gear.

Available on board at extra cost:

Bottle water (small) Dh 1

Beer Dhs 10

Wine (per glass) Dhs 10

Mask Dhs 20 per day

Fins Dhs 20 per day

Snorkelling set Dhs 35 per day.

A deposit of Dhs 120 will be required to secure your place on the trip.

Lamjed has also offered to run, for those people who cannot manage a full day trip, a short trip to Haffa which will last about 3 or 4 hours at a cost of Dhs 100 for adults and Dhs 50 for children over 3 and under 12 years. No food will be included but tea and coffee and water will be available. This trip could be run on the afternoon of Thursday 20th March (from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m.) or on the morning of Friday 21st or afternoon of Friday 21st. Again minimum of 20 people and maximum of 40 people. A deposit of Dhs 50 will be required to secure your place on the trip.

In addition to the dhow trips, we hope to arrange visits to the Fujairah fort / museum, the heritage village and the bull-fighting, archeology trips with Prof. John Fox, a shelling trip with Sandy Fowler, snorkelling trips, birding at Khor Kalba, wadi trips, interesting routes/drives back to Dubai/Al Ain/ Abu Dhabi via Kalba and Hatta or Dibba and RAK to name but a few. Details will be sent by email so you can make your choices. On Thursday evening there will be a buffet dinner plus an entertaining quiz with prizes.

### Mountain Walk with Gary Fuelner Friday 11 April

Gary's walks are not for the faint-hearted, but are always popular because he is a marvellous source of information about flora, fauna, history and geology. The details can be obtained from Gary.

### Stargazing Friday 25 April

Details are not yet available for this, but it is usually organised around Lamjed El-Kefi's amazing telescope. It also depends on what is in the sky at the time, so the date is not, as yet, absolutely firm. Pradeep will have the answers to your questions by the April meeting. Numbers will not be limited.



### Our Next Speaker

The speaker at our extra meeting this month (23 Feb.) will be Andrew Spalton who studies the Arabian leopards of Dhofar, Oman...



& our March speaker is none other than Marijcke Jongbloed who has spent so many years in the Emirates, and contributed so much. Marijcke is retiring to France and will tell us about her experiences here over the years.



### *Annual General Meeting and Elections*

The March 2 lecture will also be the DNHG's annual general meeting and elections. At that time, we will elect a new Committee for the coming year. Most of the current Committee are prepared to stand for re-election, but a few would be happy for relief or assistance.

If you would like to help, we'd like to hear from you. Within limits, we can tailor responsibilities to suit your time and talents. The DNHG has prospered in recent years because members have stepped up to do what they could. We rely on you to continue this tradition.

This year, we are in particular need of a new Speaker Coordinator, whose job is to solicit ideas, then contact, book and liaise with speakers for our monthly lectures. If you have an interest, or for further information, contact Chairman Gary Feulner or any of the other Committee members (listed on page 7).



### *Contacts for Natural History Organizations – Volunteers Needed*

We would like to publish in the *Gazelle* a list of contact information for UAE natural history and environmental organizations generally, e.g., ERWDA, the falcon hospitals, the zoos, the biosaline research center, the meteorological offices, the Emirates Environmental Group, and the Abu Dhabi and Al-Ain Natural History Groups.

We need a volunteer, as usual, to help compile the list, which we would plan to maintain and update, and publish once or twice a year as a resource for members. If you can help, please contact Gary Feulner.

### *Sheikh Mubarak and Bish Brown Awards 2002*

The Emirates Natural History Group (Abu Dhabi) has announced the winners of this year's Sheikh Mubarak and Bish Brown Awards: **Phil Iddison** from the ENHG Al Ain will receive the Sheikh Mubarak Award, while **Brien Holmes**, Chairman of the ENHG Al Ain, will collect the Bish Brown Award. Congratulations to both for the well-deserved recognition of their efforts, and also to the Al Ain NHG for a clean sweep this year!

The Sheikh Mubarak Award is given annually to the person who is adjudged to have made a substantial, original, scientific contribution to the knowledge of the history, natural history, culture, archaeology or palaeontology of the UAE.

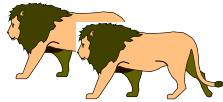
The Bish Brown Award is given to the person who has made a significant contribution to promoting wider interest in the broad objectives of the three UAE natural history groups, in the dissemination of information and awareness and in playing a leading role in the activities of the groups.

Phil is an accomplished photographer and has published and lectured extensively on a variety of subjects, food and food technology being his favourites, but history, folklore and architecture also get attention from time to time. He returned to the UK, but probably only temporarily, at the end of last year. He is undoubtedly a worthy winner.

Brien is a well-known resident of Al Ain. He works tirelessly on behalf of the Al Ain NHG and is largely responsible for filling up the broader group's websites with a wealth of topical natural history articles, including all of the original Emirates Natural History Bulletins still in circulation.

The DNHG is pleased to add its congratulations to both worthy winners.

The  
DNHG  
library is  
li-  
there  
for you!

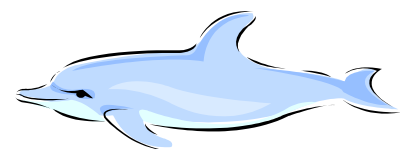


The DNHG would like to thank Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management librarian and DNHG member Tonia Hulack for her enthusiastic welcome of the DNHG collection and ongoing assistance to our librarian Deanne White.

Deanne reports that, with the generous help of Tonia, the DNHG library collection is now housed at the library of the Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management and is available for members' reference use during normal library hours, 9am to 7pm. On monthly DNHG lecture nights the library will be open until shortly before lecture time and members are invited to go up to the library, which is above the main hall, to have a look.

At the moment, our interesting collection of natural history books is nearly fully catalogued, although there are always new books being added. Our collection of individual papers and periodicals remains a work in progress.

The DNHG collection is available on a reference basis only, i.e., on the premises. Except on meeting nights, members should be prepared to show their DNHG membership card for library access.





## Field Clips ...

**E.mail your reports to [pvana@emirates.net.ae](mailto:pvana@emirates.net.ae), (Arial 10 justified) or deliver them to Anne Millen on floppy disk at monthly meetings.**

### Arabian Tahr Reported

"Follow your nose" is a frequent injunction, sometimes easier said than done in the local mountains, but in this case well worth the effort. Gary Feulner, Richard Dennis and DNHG emeritus member John Martin were hiking deep into the ophiolite south of Jebel Hatta. The official aim was to determine if and at what elevation the carpet viper *Echis coloratus* (known in this area from up to 900m) gives way to the Persian or False Horned Viper *Pseudocerastes persicus*, generally thought to be the more common viper at high elevations.

On previous visits to this area, which has permanent water, Gary had always seen a viper or two (or three). Things seemed auspicious when John tested and proved a reasonable cliffside route past a deep pool in the wadi that had previously been waded/swum with varying degrees of indignity. In the end, they found no vipers, but had plenty of reason for excitement.

Pausing in the wadi, John was suddenly restless and moved to start ahead. "Ugh! Something's dead nearby," he sniffed. "Oh, let's have a look!" said Richard (for reasons still unknown). "Yes, let's," agreed Gary dutifully, "We should record it." "It's a big goat!" said Richard, peering beyond a low circle of grasses. Gary caught up. "Hmmm," he said, and circled for a better view. "John, come have a look. I think it's a tahr." And indeed it was an Arabian tahr *Hemitragus jayakari*, recently dead and lying peacefully,

intact and apparently unmolested by man or beast, and therefore having probably died a natural death. The observers estimated that it had been dead for about a week, more or less (details of flies and maggots are available on request). Up close, the distinction between the tahr and goats were clear: the erect, arcuate, laterally compressed horns; the elongated, vaguely horse-like face; and (in this case) the distinctively short, coarse summer coat, a uniform cocoa brown color with black trim.



Tahr, from Mary Beardwood's *Children's Encyclopaedia of Arabia*, 2001

The find was reported to a knowledgeable official in Oman, who commented that historically the Jebel Hatta area was considered to be a good tahr hunting area, but that there were no recent records. He speculated that although the ophiolite terrain is considered "secondary" for tahr, the area might well harbour a reasonable population because of its remoteness (travel across the ophiolite regions is relatively difficult for humans), the availability of permanent water in many places, and the relative absence of feral goats.  
*Report by Gary Feulner*



—REPTILE—



Please send your reptile report to  
Dr Reza Khan

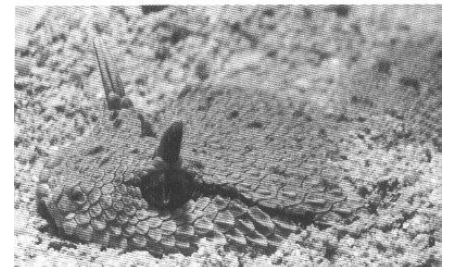
### False Horned Viper

Barbara Couldrey has reported a Persian or False Horned Viper *Pseudocerastes persicus* at c. 800 -850 meters on the north slope of Jebel Hagab, above Wadi Bih, not far from local settlements. Barbara was descending in late afternoon in mid-February this year. She believes she disturbed it and flushed it from under the rock where it had been resting.

It moved off calmly and lay quietly beside another rock, only half coiled, while Barbara studied it from a discreet distance with binoculars. The snake was about 45 cm long and was a rather pale brown color, whereas many others observed have been darker. The "horns" above the eyes were obvious, she said, and diagnostic, this being the only horned viper found in the mountains.

*Thanks to Barbara Couldrey for this report.*

*Sand viper, one of several vipers found in*



*Arabia, all venomous.*

*Turbo Collection*



## Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

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fax (off) 349 9437

Archaeology - Prof. John Fox  
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Birds - David Snelling  
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fax 2950758  
050 – 5526308

david.snelling@emirates.com

Seashells - Sandy Fowler  
res 344 2243  
fax 344 2243  
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Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi  
res 06-5583 003  
off 06-5247 958  
pearldiv@emirates.net.ae

Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner  
res 306 5570  
fax 330 3550

Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers  
res 349 4816,  
fax 340 0990

Plants – Valerie Chalmers

Mammals - Marijcke Jongbloed  
res 349 7963  
fax 349 7963

mjongbld@emirates.net.ae

The recorders are not necessarily scientific experts in their designated fields. In fact, most are not. However, they are interested and knowledgeable amateurs - please contact them if you have any interesting reports or queries.

The intention is that information will be channelled through to the *Gazelle* editor, so new information can be shared with all our readers.

~SHELL~  
~REPORT~



Please send your shell reports  
to Sandy Fowler

Researchers at The Natural History Museum (formerly the British Museum (Natural History)) would like to have samples of the local marine gastropod *Turbo radiatus* in connection with a taxonomic study and clarification of the genus *Turbo* worldwide, using DNA analysis. *Turbo radiatus* is said in *Seashells of Eastern Arabia* by Bosch et al. to be an intertidal species, but it is not clear that this is strictly true, and it may be that snorkeling is required. Can any of our members who are shell collectors tell us where they have found *Turbo radiatus* shells? Do we have anyone (collectors, snorkelers or divers) who can tell us where it can be found alive?

If so, please contact Gary Feulner (contact info on p. 7). Only a small number of specimens are required, but it is necessary to collect live molluscs, not just shells, for DNA studies.

### Shelling at Majees

There are interesting shelling opportunities at the site of the new port being built at Majees, north of Sohar on the Batinah coast of Oman. It is less than 2 hours by road from Dubai.

To get there, take the road towards Hatta, and continue to the Oman border post. A visa can be obtained there, but the transit is faster if there is one in the passport already. Subject to some conditions, a two-year multiple entry visa can be obtained from the Consulate in Dubai. From there, continue to the coast, and turn right towards Sohar. Look for the sign to Majees jetty after about 40 km, and turn left. As you approach the jetty, turn left on the graded

road built for the construction traffic. There are signs warning of the construction, but on a Friday, it is possible to enter the area. It is probably best not to go in a large convoy, though.

The dredging has thrown up many shells, which can now be found on the beaches and in the construction area. There were some good specimens on the beach even beyond the site, going north to the next fishing village.

In the list below, page numbers refer to *Seashells of Eastern Arabia* by Bosch et al. Finds included (subject to expert audit of my identifications):

Ehalia carneolata, rubrostriga 35

Terebellum terebellum 36

Xenophora corrugata 65

(This is the first Xenophora I have found in 18 years here. My companion called it the "Decorated Hat Shell", because of the small stones it attaches to itself.)

Cypraea pulchra (Four eyes) 79

various Naticas, including alapipilonis 87

some Cymatiums I could not classify

Babylonia spirata 126

Fusinus arabicus 136

Conus betulinus 158

many Terebridae 178

many Dentalidae 186

It is a good place to follow Sandy Fowler's practice of scooping up a big bag of small things at the high water line, sorting them at your leisure at home. Happy shelling!  
*Report by Colin Paskins*

*Request for Amateur Archeologists*



## Special reports &...

For the past two years, a multidisciplinary German archeology team has visited twice a year to excavate at the Sufouh 2 site, strategically placed between Dubai Internet City and Dubai Media City. We will hear more about this site, and findings to date, at the DNHG's April 6 lecture. In the meantime, the team has solicited assistance from interested and committed volunteers. Here is what Claudia Gruber, who supervises the German team, has told us about their schedule and their needs:

"We are planning our spring campaign in Sufouh; most probably, we will stay from beginning of March till mid of April. This time, excavation work will start ca. March 8 and continue till April 16; the bone specialists will arrive March 14 and stay in varying composition until the end (Prof. von den Driesch is supposed to arrive ca. March 28 with open return).

"We have a big problem in sorting our fish material due to the huge amount of bones (we have probably ca. 100 plastic bags full of fish bone material!). Now, the bone specialists asked me if it was possible to find interested persons, e.g. of the Dubai Natural History Group, who could help us during the campaign on a voluntary basis. Do you think it is possible to find 1-5 persons who would be trained by Dr. Manhart, starting by March 15, for some hours on the site to sort out fish bone, shells and other to-specify material?

"As for support in sorting the fish bones: The job is to check plastic bags full with the leftover from the sieving of the excavation (the rest which remained in the sift), which consists of tiny stones, shells and bones as well as shell and bone fragments. The bone specialist would explain which parts should be collected.

The problem is to identify as far as possible the fish bones and not to

collect too much other stuff. The volunteers should have quite good eye sight and no problems with heat, wind and serious interest in the job, as there is quite little change; preferably non-smokers. There can be 2 volunteers at the same time, best either for the morning or the afternoon, for as long as possible and as often as possible. We can offer in return participation in our delicious meals (breakfast at 10 a.m., lunch at 1 p.m., 3 courses) and explicit acknowledgement in the excavation report."

Interested members should contact Gary Feulner and leave your name, e-mail address and a telephone number. These will be forwarded to the German team in advance of their visit.

### *Jebel Sumayni or Bust*

It was a strong team that took the

#### *UAE Fish Websites*

**Mark Beech's Arabian Gulf fish** comparative collection.

Fishes (general): Electronic Zoo / NetVet - **Fish** Page; FishBase : A Global Information System on Fishes; ...

[www-users.york.ac.uk/~mjb117/fishlink.htm](http://www-users.york.ac.uk/~mjb117/fishlink.htm) - 7k - Cached - Similar pages

&

Useful links - **Mark Beech**

... **Archaeology** (AEA) - official AEA website with useful information and weblinks relating to environmental **archaeology** (designed and managed by **Mark Beech**). ...

[www-users.york.ac.uk/~mjb117/useful.htm](http://www-users.york.ac.uk/~mjb117/useful.htm) - 50k - Cached - Similar pages

field for the DNHG's ascent of Jebel Sumayni in mid-January, which proved to be an ambitious day. The decision was made at the outset to follow the strenuous but entertaining "boulder field route" – an hour and a half of full body exercise at the base of the ascent, up a steep, shaded gully. Grunts of effort were more frequent than squeals of glee, and the few idle

questions about insurance were ignored. At the top of the boulder field it was gratifying to see that several rare plants had survived the drought, although they were not much bigger than when Chairman Gary Feulner had last seen them some six years before. One small tree, however, had succumbed and fallen over. Plant and insect life remained subdued. The group also visited a small area of stone foundations beside the wadi – the only one seen on the mountain. Above the boulder field the wadi flattened out to allow a more civilized (but still uphill) ascent, with time and energy for attention to the often-contorted sedimentary strata.

The flat-topped summit of Jebel Sumayni stands relatively isolated and overlooks the desert south of Madam and the Hatta range to the east, but visibility was poor and the north-west wind drove our heroes into jumpers and fleeces, and into a sunken crevice for lunch (which was enhanced by Mike Lorrigan's shared pickle sandwiches). There were even a few drops of rain, as well. Nevertheless, it was agreed to go for the gold and descend via an alternative route, nicknamed (long ago) the "round the world" route. This involved a long, chute-like wadi paved in many places with bedrock, like a Roman road. Midway down, however, the road is interrupted at a major falls, from which the only way down was to find and follow, like Alice, the "rabbit hole." After another couple of hours all that remained, with the sun low in the sky, was to traverse the gravel plains and foothills (mostly full of loose stones the size of ostrich eggs) back to the waiting cars.

The natural history prize for the day went to Richard Dennis, who noticed, near the summit, a large stick insect (12 cm with forelegs extended) with a banded abdomen, sheltered in the crack of a rock underfoot. This was duly inspected (two tiny antennae) and photographed for the record. The group was also surprised to encounter camels on



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Chief Engineer	<b>James Pardoe</b>	394 3821		

the rough gravel of the foothills and plains.

Stefan Beck served enthusiastically as official photographer, using digital technology to take and later circulate numerous images, some of which will find a home in the group's records. Stefan commented afterwards that it had been a novel experience for him. "In Europe," he said, "we are told not to go off the trails, and it is often dangerous to do so. But here, there are no trails. So I felt like I was doing something illegal all day!"  
*Report by Gary Feulner*

### Toad Tales

Hearing about professional interest in amphibians – the two UAE species



of toads that live in mountains areas and oases -- Richard Dennis was moved to recount, belatedly, his experience of five or six years ago:

Richard and Angela were camping with friends near Siji. Having lit their campfires after dark, they were surprised to be invaded by dozens of toads which hopped into camp, although they were far from any water bodies. Richard speculates that the toads were attracted by the firelight or by the insects attracted by it.

Richard was new to the UAE at the time, and did not realize that such phenomena are not well known, and therefore of general interest. The observed behavior is most consistent with what is known of the Dhofar toad, *Bufo*

*dhufarensis*, which is said to be mostly nocturnal and to be found at great distances from water.

Do other DNHG members have similar tales – about toads or other organisms -- waiting to be told?

*(Ed: Thanks, Gary and Richard. This should reduce our lists for desert camping substantially - to those with nerves of steel.)*

### Letters to the editor

**Any news or views you would like published in our monthly newsletter? Please contact any of the committee members listed, by fax or e-mail.**

## Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

- February 23     Andrew Spalton on Arabian Leopards in Dhofar. ( Note that this is an extra meeting)
- March 2         Marijcke Jongbloed's valedictory talk and AGM.
- April 6         Prof. Angela von den Driesch / Claudia Gruber on Camels and Dubai Archeology
- May 4          Liz Maley-Craig on Gardening in the UAE

**Field Trips**                    (DNHG members only, please).

- Friday March 7                                    Birding with David Bradford / Pradeep Rradhakrishna
- Thursday / Friday March 13 / 14            Empty Quarter Trip organised by Peter van Amsterdam and Anne
- Thursday / Friday March 20 / 21 Inter-Emirates Weekend at Khor Fakkan