

# GAZELLE

Vol 19 no 3 – March 2004



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

**DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP**

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

## Members' News

Chairman **Gary Feulner** has gone the extra mile (by vehicle and on foot) to answer requests by two groups of researchers at The Natural History Museum in London. In February Gary visited 3 of the 4 known sites for the rarest native snail of the northern Hajar Mountains, *Bulinus wrighti*, which is used in schistosomiasis (bilharzia) research. Problems with the laboratory population in London required additional specimens. Unfortunately, none were to be found, although water was present at all sites. This forced the admission that the life cycle of this snail in the wild is very poorly known, despite its value in research.

In March, Gary found specimens of the marine gastropod *Bulla ampulla*, that has been advertised for and depicted in the *Gazelle*. Specimens from the Arabian Gulf had been specifically requested for molecular genetic studies of the genus *Bulla*. Coincidentally, the site that proved successful was identified on the DNHG field trip to Julfar, when Gary noticed that the adjacent khor appeared to have a modest growth of sea grass at the edge of the intertidal zone.

Erstwhile member **Rosemary Bond** (have you renewed yet, Rosemary??) reports finding, on 'black palace' beach, a small turtle

which was too weak to swim. She took him home and put him in the bath, and a ring-around put her in touch with **Richard Hornby**. He explained that the problem would not be one of starvation or ill health so much as barnacle load. And indeed, when she had unloaded his fragile, already broken shell, he swam happily off to sea. More recently, Rosemary has found a dead dolphin and a large dead turtle, about a metre in length, on the same beach. (Also see story p.4)

A couple of weeks back, en route to the Hanging Gardens in Al Ain, **Jo Raynor and family** took an old short cut, only to be cut short by the new fence (She told him...!). This turned into a good thing. While following the fence back toward Buraimi, they found a place, just behind some camel pens, where the fence construction had cut into a low limestone outcrop exposing some lovely fresh fossil shells. Scallops, oysters and smaller bivalves were identified.

**Rachel Raynor** reports starting hares on a regular basis when she goes horse-riding behind the Al Wasl stadium. This is the area bordering the Zabeel end of the flamingo reserve at the top of the creek.

### *DNHG Membership*

September marks the start of the new DNHG membership year. DNHG membership remains a bargain at Dhs. 100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to Lloyds Bank account no. 173746 posted to us at PO Box 9234, Dubai. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG.)

Please ensure that we have full contact information for you, including an e-mail address. The DNHG does not share its membership or e-mail information.

DNHG membership entitles you to participate in field trips and helps pay for our lecture hall, publication and distribution of our monthly newsletter, the *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:**

Elaine Harmsworth  
Jo Raynor  
Gary Feulner  
Gail Gordon  
Valerie Chalmers  
Mohammed Arfan Asif



# Field Trips etc ...

## Inter-Emirates Weekend Note change of dates

Inter-Emirates Weekend 2004 will be held in Al-Ain on **April 1-2 (Thu-Fri)** and will be hosted by the Al-Ain chapter of the ENHG. It has been a struggle to find a weekend when Al Ain is not buzzing for some other reason, but it will be well worth the effort – this promises to be an excellent weekend. Activities include a full program for Thursday and for Friday morning.

Dinner on Thursday evening will feature a photo competition.

You can find details of the program and alternatives for accommodation via the ENHG website at [www.enhg.org](http://www.enhg.org).

## Roses on the Saiq Plateau, Oman, with Peter van Amsterdam

### April

The dates advertised for this have proved unsuitable as there are no hotel rooms available then, or for the following weekend. (See Oman programme for why, and maybe ask to join them!) Peter will email all those of you who are on the list, and let you know what alternative arrangements can be made. You might have to wait 'til next year!

No further DNHG trips are firm for April or May, but if something good comes up before the next issue of *Gazelle*, we can email you with details – if you've remembered to give us your current address. Abu Dhabi also has no list available as yet for April or May.

Yes! This means we should all think what wonderful things we could be doing and go out and do them. Don't be shy; you do not have to be a great expert to lead a trip – you just invite one along.

Here is what the Oman group

have planned:

THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF OMAN,  
PO BOX 3941, CODE 112,  
RUWI  
Website: [www.hao.org.om](http://www.hao.org.om)  
M/ships: 563074

PROGRAMME for MARCH (Part 2) and APRIL 2004

PDO Oil and Gas Exhibition Centre 8.00 pm

Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> March : Illustrated TALK on Zanzibar by Khalifa bin Mubarak al Hinai, Technical Adviser to HE the Minister for Oil and Gas.

Thursday 15<sup>th</sup>/Friday 16<sup>th</sup> April : Weekend Trip with Professor Reginald Victor of Sultan Qaboos University to see the roses on the Jebel al Akhdar and *Dynosia mira*, a rare plant which will we hope be in bloom, as well as other flora and fauna. This trip will also include a nice walk. Full details will be sent to those members who are accepted on this trip which is limited to 24 members.

It is anticipated that we will leave at approx 0800 hours on 15<sup>th</sup> and return during the afternoon of Friday 16<sup>th</sup> April. Accommodation has provisionally been reserved for our group at the Jebel al Akhdar Hotel.

### Letters to the Editor

Any news or views you would like published in our monthly newsletter? Feel like tickling things up?



Please send your letter to any of the committee members listed, by fax or e-mail, or direct to the editor.



## ADIAS Archaeology Newsletter

Members interested in the archaeology of Abu Dhabi in general and of the coastal islands in particular (which have some of the UAE's oldest archaeological sites) may enjoy the latest periodical newsletter (March 2004) of the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey (adias), which is available at: <http://www.adias-uae.com/adiasnews03-04.html>  
You can also download a Word version of the newsletter at: <http://www.adias-uae.com/newsletter/ADIAS%20newsletter%20March%202004.doc>

### Our Next Speaker

**Drew Gardner** is a professor of biology at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi. Before coming to the UAE, he spent more than a decade at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. He has traveled widely in Oman and has previously lectured to the DNHG on the Jebel Akhdar region. His special professional interest is herpetology – the study of reptiles and amphibians, and at SQU he created and maintained a database of sightings and distributions.

His presentation on April 4 will introduce many of the 26 species of geckoes found in the UAE and Oman, from those common in the home to those found only by night in the deep sands or the high mountains, including one endangered species known only from the Dubai-Abu Dhabi border area. How can geckos walk on the ceiling? Are they harmful? How do they communicate? Come along and find out.



## Volunteers for Members' Night

As has been our custom for several years, the DNHG's June meeting (June 2) will be Members' Night, featuring 2 or 3 shorter presentations by DNHG members. Experience has shown that most members have something that they are interested enough in to talk for 15 to 20 minutes (or more). Talks should be natural history oriented, but otherwise there are very few restrictions. If you are interested, please let one of the DNHG Committee members know. Contact details can be found on page 7.

## DNHG Committee 2004-2005

A new Committee was elected at the AGM on March 7. The new Committee members are listed on page 7. We are pleased that David Palmer has joined us as Speaker Coordinator. We still need, however, a Librarian and an additional Field Trip Coordinator.

On an interim basis, we also need someone who can guide us in setting up a system for converting / transferring / posting / material (the Gazelle and current information and announcements) on a natural history group web site established and maintained by the Al-Ain ENHG.

Outgoing Librarian Deanne White deserves our special thanks for coordinating and largely undertaking the move and cataloguing of the DNHG Library collection, which is now open for use at the Emirates Academy library. This is the most accessible that our library collection has ever been, and we hope that it will prove a convenient reference.



## DNHG Website: Your Name Here

Members interested in the Inter-Emirates weekend, March 31, April 1 & 2 (see p. 2), will want to visit the website established by the Emirates Natural History Group in Al-Ain, at [www.enhg.org](http://www.enhg.org). While there, have a look around. Enjoy the convenience of web-based access for contact information and schedules. Enjoy, in particular, the ability to explore a wealth of otherwise hard-to-find information published in past newsletters and bulletins of the ENHGs in Abu Dhabi and Al-Ain. Enjoy, even, the many personal touches.

The DNHG has been invited to participate on an equal basis in this website, which is structured to accommodate all three UAE natural history groups, but we await a volunteer with sufficient IT skills to liaise with Al-Ain about the technical and procedural requirements, and then liaise with our membership to convey what is necessary to satisfy those requirements, and bring other, less sophisticated, volunteers up to speed. The Al-Ain ENHG has (and is likely to continue to have) the technological skills necessary to maintain the overall site. The DNHG would therefore have to take responsibility for the formatting, sending and/or posting of its own material in a compatible way.

Several years of *Gazelle* reports already exist in computerised format and could be entered into a permanent archive quickly and with relative ease. A format needs to be established for current information, along with procedures for updating it on a monthly basis. Those are the basics. After that, other features could be added.

Establishment of a DNHG website has been highlighted as a priority in two consecutive annual reports. Third time's the charm? If you think you would be able to help us set up DNHG participation in the site, as described above, please contact

Chairman Gary Feulner or Editor Anne Millen (details on p. 7). If we can organise this during the spring, we have summer to practice and have a fully-fledged site for the 2004-05 season.

## DNHG Library Open for Use

Members are reminded once again that the DNHG library collection is now open for reference use within the library at the Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management, where our monthly lectures are held. The library is upstairs to the left, in the back of the building. The DNHG collection is in a cabinet in the library's utility room.

Access to the DNHG collection and the library's reading room is permitted during regular opening hours. Currently EAHM Library hours are Saturdays to Tuesdays, 9am to 9pm; Wednesdays and Thursdays, 9am to 6pm; Fridays closed.

Members must present their DNHG membership card to the receptionist in the EAHM lobby in order to access the Library on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor, and again to the Librarian or Library Technician on duty. As a precaution, it is recommended to phone in advance to be sure that there is not a meeting taking place in the workroom.

## More about Hares...

### Transport Problems?

We understand that there are members who live in distant parts of Dubai [eg Bur Dubai / Deira] who do not have their own transport and are experiencing difficulty in travelling to our lectures. We would like to hear from lecture attendees living in the far corners who do have their own transport and are prepared to give others a lift.

If you can help please contact Jen Robinson, Treasurer, 050-5982494



## 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.*

**Gail Gordon**, reading about hares in our last two issues wrote, "We lived in Mirdiff through the early and mid 80s and there were many hares. There were also foxes, rabbits, snakes, gerbils, lizards, dhubs, dung beetles (entertaining to watch their rolling battles up and down dunes) plus various other four legged and two legged creatures.

Early morning walks were fascinating as there were so many trails and paw and claw prints to see. At night, whilst dog walking, we would run into camels strolling around the unfinished roads. You could hear them before seeing them as their ankles "creaked" as they moved their feet!

There were marvellous plants which flowered occasionally and areas of dry, dry sand that after a heavy rain shower would sprout green a few days later - at a certain angle it looked as if a beautiful lawn had appeared! Now that area has been built upon - where have all the flora and fauna gone?

### *Hawksbills in Distress*

Twice in recent months, Abu Dhabi-based member Dr. Richard Hornby has encountered young hawksbill turtles at the seashore, severely burdened by barnacles, pearl oysters and other encrusting organisms. In each case Dick was able to assist by cleaning them up and releasing them. One instance was in late November, SW of Jebel Ali, in a back beach lagoon where the turtle seemed to have been trapped somehow. A similarly situated juvenile nearby was already dead.

The second instance, in early February, was in western Abu Dhabi, west of Mirfa, at a fairly newly created 'harbour' about 50 by 200 meters, separated by a dredged channel 500 meters long, so very sheltered. Of the latter, Dick says: "[The young turtle] was about 25-30 cm long (much bigger than the Jebel Ali specimens) and definitely struggling with its load, but it swam off quite strongly once cleaned up."

Another good deed for our hero? It seems an open and shut case, but Dick shares with us the details, and some biological - and philosophical - questions. Of the Abu Dhabi turtle, he writes: "I removed every barnacle and pearl oyster, and there were certainly more than 100 in total. I felt very guilty about killing all those invertebrates for the sake of one vertebrate! Are all species of equal value in the eyes of the objective scientist?"

"Furthermore, there was quite a community of life among the pearl oysters on the turtle's back. There were amphipods and isopods and a polychaete at least 5 cm long. Is this a sign that the turtle had been in this condition for quite a long time? How did [all the invertebrates] get there? It raises the question, how do young hawksbill turtles normally manage to prevent becoming fouled by sessile organisms? Do they rub themselves against rocks, and when the fouling becomes too bad, can they no longer manage it?"

To Dick Hornby's experience we can now add another similar report (with a happy ending) - the story of "Caroline," a 1.5kg young female hawksbill found floating vertically in the sea off "Bahraini Island" in Abu Dhabi, rescued by a French couple out boating, then cleaned up and nursed back to health at the British Veterinary Centre in Abu Dhabi. Dr. Martin Wyness of that institution reports as follows:

"We removed a large number of barnacles. Very little shell was visible and this was after the find-

ers removed the largest which was weighing the turtle down heavily such that she was vertical in the water.

"We did some blood work, funded by the finders, through a lab in UK specialising in "exotics" and nursed this 1.5kg turtle back to health with tube feeding, antibiotics and endoparasite therapy. The turtle responded very well and had a good appetite within 48 hours of arrival. Most of the credit must go to one of our nurses, Riza, who adopted "Caroline" as her own and made sure the feeding was timely and appropriate. [More details about the feeding and recovery regime are on file with the DNHG; contact Gary Feulner.]

"Caroline was released close to where she was found, apparently much better.



"One point of concern was the presence of a raised scute which must make barnacle adherence much easier - the underlying exposed zone was packed with them (but then again, so was the rest of the carapace and much of the plastron). There must be something wrong that is allowing that elevation (surely it's not normal). Pollution and/or disease spring to mind but I have no literature describing anything specific."

Dick Hornby adds that "The first young hawksbill I found and cleaned up did indeed have a couple of raised scutes but I thought this had happened because the barnacles had prevented the normal growth of the scutes. When cleaned up, it looked a bit misshapen. There were no signs of barnacles growing under the scutes. The second (larger) turtle





## 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  
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david.snelling@emirates.com

Seashells - Sandy Fowler  
res 344 2243  
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shellman@37.com

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.

did not have significantly raised scutes, but they were still raised enough for a large polychaete worm to disappear under a scute when the pearl oysters it was living in had been removed. The gap would have been 2 -3 mm."

Both Dick Hornby and Martin Wyness agree that this phenomenon raises more questions than answers, and both solicit any information on this subject. *Thanks to Drs. Richard Hornby and Martin Wyness for this information and discussion.*

### *Build It, And They Will Come!*

Dubai Marina is now approximately 2 years old. I visited recently to see what organisms had so far colonized the newly created intertidal zone. This is not a very welcoming or diverse environment, consisting mainly of a vertical concrete wall. The only ornamentation, consisting of designs in inlaid stonework, is mostly above the reach of high tide. Inspection of the intertidal zone from the quayside proved to be more awkward than I had expected. First, the quayside level is high enough that the water level is a bit too far away for close scrutiny by the naked eye, but also a bit too near for most binoculars. Second, the quayside wall is slightly recessed at the intertidal level, so that one has to lean rather far out to see it clearly. As there did not appear to be many convenient exits from the marina, I reasoned that an ounce of cantileverage was worth a pound of breaststroke.

The pinkish, striped barnacle *Balanus amphitrite* (the most common UAE barnacle) was abundant at and just below the waterline. Also present in small numbers just above the waterline were the winkle *Littoraria (Littorinopsis) intermedia* (the mangrove tree snail, which also frequents rocks in sheltered environments) and the dark climbing crab *Metapograpus messor*.

The only other macro-organism present was the small brown winkle *Nodilittorina arabica* (now *Echinolittorina arabica*), normally the highest intertidal mollusc. Of this I saw only a single individual, and true to form it was perched several inches higher than any of its nearby cousins, *L. intermedia*. One reason for its absence may be the smoothness of the concrete wall. From experience this species likes to tuck itself in pockmarks or fissures in rocks. *Report by Gary Feulner*

### *Through the lens ....*

The first piece of land or water in this part of the earth to get the official status of a wildlife sanctuary was the sheltered tidal lagoon at the end of the creek named the Dubai Wild Life and Water Bird Sanctuary.

*Phoenicopterus ruber*

A breeding island has been constructed in the centre of the lagoon



and the area has protected status. Those who travel along Awir Road, visit the Country or Rugby Clubs, jet ski at the Dubai Water Sports Association, play cricket in the adjoining fields, work in Jadaf or come down from Al Ain to Dubai, are able to see the flamingos feeding on the mud flats.

The mangroves planted in 1995 are a great success, but whether they have contributed to the failure of the flamingos breeding is a





# Field Clips...

mystery yet to be solved. The only signs of breeding of flamingos in the Emirates in the past, according to the literature, were at the Al Ghar Lake near Al Wathba in Abu Dhabi. We can only hope they are successful in the future in spite of the construction around!

*Flamingos in flight*

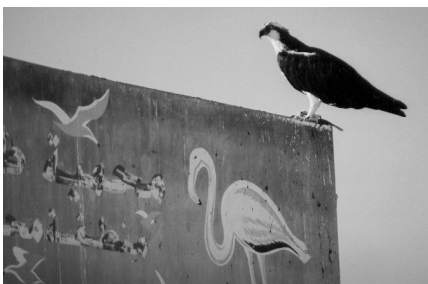
There are a good number of species one can spot here. The site is



important for the large migrant flocks of sand plovers, broad billed sandpipers, Kentish plovers apart from the greater flamingos. The other important species found here include great white egret, spoonbill, Caspian tern, marsh harrier, osprey, spotted eagle, oystercatchers, apart from the herons and gulls. In all, fifty species and nine in internationally important numbers.

*Osprey with fish*

The area is off limits and you need to convince the concerned officials



about your interests, or get official permission from Dubai Municipality Environment Department. However, birdwatching from the roadside will not invite the wrath of the inspectors from Dubai Municipality or Dubai Police who have a 24-hour manned check post on the southern edge.

*Curlew searching for food*

The professional birdwatching trips from Europe have always



included the KDW Sanctuary as one of their stops in the Middle East. It is indeed one of Dubai's natural treasures.

*Khor Dubai*

*Text & Photographs by Arfan Asif*



## The EQ

In late February Peter van Amsterdam led a group of fourteen in a convoy of six cars on an exciting journey to the gravel plains on the edge of the Empty Quarter.

Peter had carefully plotted in the difficult route on his GPS in advance and we set off from our meeting point with great confidence and soon found ourselves driving over the vast gravel plains leading to the big dunes.

We stopped to take in the uncanny emptiness of our surroundings and were surprised to find so many beautifully coloured, smooth stones in the gravel underfoot – old wadi stones. As we drove on, the shimmering dunes of the Empty Quarter appeared in the distance and we navigated our way towards our chosen campsite despite the blowing sands which had whipped up to such a level we wondered whether it might be a good idea to abandon any ideas of

camping.

Not to be defeated, we managed to nestle ourselves in between the dunes and set up camp in difficult conditions. It was not too long before the winds calmed, and we could light a fire and enjoy an evening under the stars which were just wonderful.

During the night some members were disturbed by a growling animal outside the tents! Whilst there was a suggestion these noises emanated from one of our own sleeping DNHG members, most of us were convinced it was indeed an animal, but in the morning, as the fog rolled in and out, we could find no significant tracks.

When the sun came up over the dunes, we could really appreciate just how idyllic our location was. However, we couldn't linger too long as our leader had more delights in store for us and we set off to find the ghaf forest at the end of Wadi Dhank.

This was a drive not for the faint hearted and put navigation and driving skills to the test. One small error in navigation brought home to us just how easy it would be to get lost in the Empty Quarter. However, due to the accuracy of the GPS, we were eventually able to get back on a very precise and accurate track to the ghaf forest where members explored the forest and dunes. Anne had arranged a prize for the most insects found. (We saw one hawk and one hoopoe, but we had already shared the bird prize round the campfire!) After a late picnic lunch, it was time to cut a trail back along the wadi through the little town of Safar and on to a relatively easy course home. Apart from a small hiccup when we strayed too close to a Military area, it was a fantastic and exceptionally well planned weekend. *Thanks to Elaine Harmsworth for this report.*

*Val's Plant list from the EQ – and some extras*



	name	tel home	tel office	fax
Chairman	<b>Gary Feulner</b>	306 5570 messages: 306 5300	330 3600	330 3550
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Publisher	<b>Peter van Amsterdam</b>	269 2519 e.mail: pvana@emirates.net.ae	335 5495	269 1654
Librarian	<b>Deanne White</b>	342 9153 e.mail: dgwhite@emirates.net.ae	344 0824, ext 220	344-1510
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## Trees:

Ghaf of course! *Prosopis cineraria*

Mesquite *Prosopis juliflora*

At the camp site:

*Cyperus conglomeratus*

*Ochradenus arabicus* but could also be *O. baccatus*

Lots of *Tephrosia apollinea* on the gravel plains (there was even one plant near my tent)

*Rhazya stricta*

*Zygophyllum hamiense* (salt bush)

*Fagonia indica* possibly ( I don't think it was *F. bruguieri*) - lots of it

One or two bushes of *Calotropis procera*

Not really a very exciting lot but these seem to be the plants that were there. Anne found two ticks and saw a hawk sitting on a dune. A hoopoe was seen at the ghaf forest. There was an agame at the camp site and was it a dead jerboa found near the campsite?  
*Thanks, Val, for your list.*

## Book Review

***Whales & Dolphins of Arabia***  
By Robert Baldwin

This recently published book is an excellent pictorial record of cetaceans seen in Arabian waters. Robert Baldwin has created a book that delights and informs in equal measure. High production standards do justice to his talented photography, but the detailed text and layout moves this book from the coffee-table to encyclopedia case.

The book contains an introduction to whales and dolphins, a species record of cetaceans of Arabian waters and a final section about human interaction here in Arabia. While I wouldn't recommend you take this book out on the water with you, it is a useful resource for

identifying sightings. Where photos are not adequate for this, fine drawings are used.

Members will remember that, back in January 2002, Gianna Minton and Tim Collins spoke to DNHG on continuing research into whales and dolphins in Oman. Their work is featured in the final section.

For those who enjoy great photography and delight in being able to identify the marine mammals of this region, I think this book is well worth the 135 Dhs. (This cost is a reflection of the production costs of these high quality short run books.)

*Thanks to Jo Raynor for this review.*

## Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

- Apr 04                    Geckoes of the UAE & Oman – Prof. Drew Gardner
- May 02                    An Early Survey of a Bastakia Windtower House – Peter Jackson
- Jun 06                    Members' Night [Volunteers Solicited]

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

- Mar 31, Apr 1-2        Inter-Emirates Weekend, Al Ain
- April                      Roses on the Saiq Plateau (perhaps)