

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Chairman **Gary Feulner** lectured in Al-Ain this month on the high terraced settlements of the *Ru'us al-Jibal*, the mountains of the Musandam region where he has spent a great deal of time over the years.



Gary Feulner in preferred habitat

In 2001-02, Gary was recruited as guide for the first (and still the only) archaeological survey of that area. Approximately 30 settlements were included in the survey, from among more than 100 significant terrace complexes.

Peter van Amsterdam and **Anne Millen** recently spent a week in the Exumas, a long line of tiny low-lying sandstone cays that are part of the Bahamas. The shallow coral-green waters and white beaches belied the shelling.



Anne found only 16 species, but was delighted to find, high above the waterline on Sandy Cay, a shell similar to *Astraea heliotropium*. However, the latter is described in Dance's Smithsonian *Shells*, as large (up to 9 cm), robust and from New Zealand. Anne's frail specimen (above) is only 2.6cm across, and, although rather battered, does not appear to have 'hollow fluted scales at the periphery' or as many spines as *A. heliotropium*. Dance does not show a top view, but it would seem to be a Caribbean cousin.



Maidaq fort and date gardens

DNHG Membership

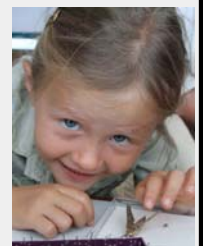
DNHG Membership remains a bargain at Dhs.100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. You can join or renew at our meetings or by sending us your details and a cheque made out to: Lloyds TSB Bank account no. 60600669933501. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG. Please also note our account number has changed.)

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 and contributions:

Nancy Papathanasopoulou
Maral Khaled Shuriqi
Martina Fella
Keith Taylor
Gary Feulner
Val Chalmers
and Di



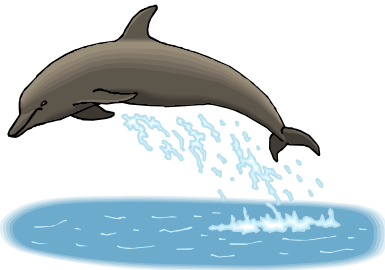
Under the patronage of H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan



END OF SEASON GET-TOGETHER

This popular function will be held in the **Darbar Restaurant, The India Club, off Oud Metha Road** on **Thursday, 18th June 2009** at **7.30 p.m. for 8.00 p.m.** It will cost **Dirhams 70/- per person** for a varied buffet meal.

The Annual Photographic Competition will be held. Members are invited to enter a maximum of **four** (returnable) prints on natural history subjects, **taken on field trips**, from three different categories – **Life on Earth: Plants/ Animals/ Fossils; Earth & Environment: Landscapes/ Geology; Man and his Influence: Archaeology/Architecture/Culture (People)/Environment.** Photographs should be a minimum size of **5 inches x 7 inches (13 cm x 18 cm)** and should be mounted. The competition will be judged by everyone present. There will be a prize for each category and for the photograph voted the best overall. N.B. **The photographers must be present at the function.**



There will also be a wide-ranging Natural History team quiz with surprise prizes. Tickets will be available at the meetings on **Sunday 7th June**, so make a date in your diary. If you cannot make the meeting, complete the application form and post it right away.

DNHG End of Season Get-Together

Please reserve me tickets at **Dh70/-** each.

I enclose my cheque no.made out to LLOYDS BANK Dubai, Account no. 60600669933501
for Dh.....

Name:.....
Membership No.

Send to : Valerie Chalmers, P.O. Box 12070, Dubai **before 10th June 2009**
(Email address: valeriechalmers@hotmail.com)

Masirah Island with Nancy with Nancy Papathana-sopoulou
May 28 - 31

Louisa Akerina is coordinating this trip to Masirah with Nancy. It's four days, as turtle watching is only one of many things to do and see. Time is now short, so if you want to go, contact Louisa on mobile 050-241 5045 or email her at Louisa.akerina@gmail.com

* * *

There will be more trips during the summer and advice will be sent by email.

* * *

Please Note: The reduced rates offered by the Oceanic Hotel Fujairah to InterEmirates Weekend attendees is for April and May 2009. The editor wishes to apologise for omission of this in our April Gazelle.

Our Next Speaker

Architect **Peter Jackson** first worked in Dubai in the early 1970's. In 1975 he researched and co-authored "A Windtower House in Dubai" with Dr Anne Coles. He has written many papers of architectural research, and in 1986, a book, "Historic Buildings of Harare". In 1976, he moved to Zambia, and in 1980, jointly established a new practice in Zimbabwe; Architects Partnership won several architectural competitions and for many years he was Honorary Historic Buildings Advisor to the City of Harare. In 2002, with his teacher wife, Jutta, he returned to Dubai, and joined Godwin Austen Johnson Architects. Since returning to Dubai, he has been able to pursue his interest in windtowers, and has published another book on them. He now works in Sharjah, where he has enjoyed discovering a wealth of history.



Email your field reports and news to pvana@emirates.net.ae (Arial 10 justified). Please send your photographs as separate jpg files, or deliver

Inter-Emirates Weekend Dhow Trip

On the first morning of the Inter-Emirates weekend just under 40 participants took a dhow trip up to the Musandam, arranged by Lamjed. It was a wonderful day.



Leaving Dibba Oman

We set off from Dibba port just after 10am in the middle of a thunderstorm! Fortunately the rain eased quite soon and we were able to sit outside most of the time. The coastline was very dramatic, with the cliffs plunging straight into the sea and with menacing black clouds. The cliffs and coastline seemed more dramatic as a result of the weather than they might have done in sunshine.



A dramatic coast

Lamjed's dhow is certainly comfortable and his crew made us very welcome. After a couple of hours cruising, we anchored in a small cove and with perfect timing the sun came out. The younger members were straight into the sea, swimming and snorkelling while some of the older members took a little longer to pluck up

courage to get into the water! A small boat took a group to the shore and around the coast a little way to some caves. Lamjed took a small group diving as well.



A Musandam headland

Lunch was a huge spread, with a variety of hot dishes and salads followed by fruit and delicious local sweets. Then there was more time for swimming, snorkelling and kayaking. All good things come to an end and before long it was time to up anchor and head for home. Just as we were leaving, the tide turned and brought in the dreaded red tide.



The end of a lovely day

We arrived back at Dibba after 5pm having had really full and most enjoyable day. The port at that time was lively with fishing nets laid out to dry and people busy everywhere.



Dibba

Our thanks to Lamjed for arranging it all! *Report and photographs by Fiona Smith.*

Dibba Hisn (or Daba Castle, as the road signs state)

In the true sense of the word, 'castle' it is not. Nor indeed is it, in battle terms, a 'fort'. Those are usually built on high ground (of which there is plenty around Dibba) but this fort is located at sea level. Battle forts usually have impregnable (thick and/or high) walls whereas this fort's were neither and lastly, it could not have withstood a long siege because, during its refurbishment, no secure underground falaj or well or large water storage tank was found.



Outside Dibba Hisn

However, Dibba Hisn was most certainly a strategic strong-hold, situated adjacent to the sea, guarding not only its small harbour and routes into the wadis, but also the route over the jebel to the Sheikdoms of Trucial Oman in the north. It would also have been a place to negotiate safe passage inland and perhaps even as a 'revenue' post for goods passing through Dibba (or Bayah as it was formerly known). And, in the summer months, when the tribes of the Musandam descended to the Batinah to fish, grow vegetables and harvest the dates, it would have offered security from marauders.

Built approximately 180 years ago, Dibba Hisn has outer battlements with towers at all four corners, topped by crenulations of domed formation, and a sturdy outer gate/door with a facility above it to pour boiling oil or water over unwanted entrants, behind which, recessed on each side thereof, is a narrow 'Arabic ladder' (constructed as usual with slim branches from a tree embedded into the wall form-



ing rungs spaced about 60cms apart) allowing vertical access to the battlements above.

Within the quad is the fort itself (or, conversely, perhaps the fort was built first and later it was found prudent to construct the outer battlements for extra protection). Its entrance doors were the typical massive design found throughout Oman and immediately inside, a covered passage with, left and right, a raised stone bench at the foot of each wall, on which guards and visitors would sit, shaded. If the inner fort's doors were open, a breeze would funnel through this short passage.



The entrance

The courtyard was simple. To the left, a guard room, then a majlis, with a small detached room at the end. Above the majlis was the Sheikh/Wali's sleeping quarters, with a small chamber beyond. On the walls of the sleeping quarters were rifles of varying ages as well as two types of sword - one with undulations to the edge of the blade which we were told would have been used solely for beheadings, whilst the other, with a smooth edge, was a general purpose sword. As is normal, the windows were small, low, with wooden shutters and barred by iron vertical rods. The staircase leading to these two upper rooms was curved and narrow, permitting an intruder no possible passing point. It continued up into a round

tower with slits through which rifles could be fired, and, of course, another vertical Arabian ladder to its



roof-top.

The ramparts

There were no other rooms within the courtyard except a small mosque with its west wall, including the mihrab, decorated in fine plaster work. The east and west towers were accessed by stone steps from within the courtyard, but the south tower only by those leading from the Sheikh's sleeping quarters. An upper battlement walkway linked them all to the north tower. There would have been a hole in the ground in which prisoners would have been held but undoubtedly this has been covered over for safety reasons. As for flora, there remained just one sidr tree (*Ziziphus spina-christi*, a member of the buckthorn family) and, on the ground, five specimens of *Chrozophora oblongifolia*, a variety of spurge.



Sidr tree (*Ziziphus spina-christi*)

Medhi Kammoun, Lamjed El-Kefi's nephew, gave us a very lively and in-depth tour of Dibba Hisn and at the end he introduced us to the gentleman currently in charge of the fort, who comes from the Shihuh tribe of the Musandam Peninsula. This was indeed an added bonus as we could pose questions to someone who had local and ancestral knowledge. We learned, for example, that the 'jerz', the small-headed axe particular to the Shihuh, has a metre long, 2cm diameter shaft or handle made from either the Arabian almond (*Amygdalus arabica*) or the sidr.



Parley

A delightful afternoon was capped by a short visit to the Oman Ladies Cultural Society which sells locally made items e.g. material, clothes, jewellery, beading, barasti mats & brushes, with the proceeds going to Omani charities. This society tours Oman and happened, fortunately for us, to be exhibiting in Dibba. It was also these kind ladies who prepared the Arabic coffee & tea, as well as the delicious small round Omani pancakes which awaited our arrival at the fort - not a lot of which remained by the time we departed!

Thank you, Medhi, for the tour and for arranging the visit to the fort! Thanks to *Di* for this report and to *Valerie Chalmers* for the photographs.



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

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Geology - Gary Feulner
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fax 330 3550

Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
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fax 340 0990
email: valeriechalmers@hotmail.com

Plants – Valerie Chalmers

Seashells - Recorder needed!

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.



IEW Insect Workshop

Dr. Michael Gillett and Dr Brigitte Howarth led a small group of us in a workshop on the collection, preservation, and display of insects. After a brief presentation on the modus operandi, Dr. Gillett led us into the Oceanic Hotel garden where we poked around in the grass and under piles of dead leaves to add specimens to the collection of hawk-moths and earwigs he'd trapped the night before. We collected a number of grasshoppers, and Martina's sharp eyes and nimble fingers found a couple of slender, brightly colored rove beetles deep in the grass. We then reassembled in the hotel billiard room, where Dr. Gillett brought out pinning stages and setting boards and showed us how to pin some different insects and set them for drying and eventual display.



Laying out the equipment



Entomological display trainees take it all in



Pinning a striped hawk moth right down the centre



Gently easing the wings into position



Fixing the fore wings in place



Hawkmoth with antennae and wings properly displayed

In a couple of weeks, this specimen will be dried into position and ready for permanent display, with identifying data tags.



Pinning a grasshopper in the standard manner, "one wing closed, one wing open"; and finding the hind wing to be a surprisingly intricate affair



Pinning an earwig is a tricky business! But displaying their wings would have been much trickier, as Mike tells us they are the most intricately folded wings in nature.



Finding strange faces in the microscope

Report by Keith Taylor and photographs by Martina Fella

IEW - Khor Kalba Field Trip

Many participants chose to close their weekend with a Saturday afternoon visit to Khor Kalba, where the falling tide allowed inspection of the upper intertidal zone. Especially popular with the children were the red-elbowed fiddler crabs *Uca anulipes*, which, as they became accustomed to the presence of visitors, showed themselves in increasingly large numbers. Schools of Arabian killifish also made their appearance, often lingering in just a few centimeters of water as the tide ebbed.



The upper tidal zone, Khor Kalba

We also saw the giant mud creeper *Terebralia palustris*, which has its principal UAE population at Khor Kalba. The group quickly became adept at recognizing which shells were occupied by live *T. palustris* and which had been taken over by the large hermit crab *Clibanarius longitarsus*, which favors *T. palustris* shells. [Tip: Shells found in the forks of mangrove shrubs are almost always inhabited by hermit crabs.]



Terebralia palustris

The middle intertidal range was home to thousands of thousands of molluscs, but almost exclusively of the same few species – mostly *Cerithidea cingulata* on firm mud, with *Clypeomorus persicus* and *Osilinus kotschy* on algae and other debris.



Masses of mollusks in the middle tidal zone

No visit to Khor Kalba would be complete without a sighting of the White-Collared Kingfisher, of which an endemic subspecies breeds at Khor Kalba, nesting in older mangrove trees.



Wading and watching

The afternoon crowds probably kept most birds on their guard, but we surprised one at close range and saw two more at a distance, across the main channel.



Brnacles on inundated mangroves

Those who remained until the end had extended close-up views along the inland edge of the forest, along with a chance to see how problematic the damp sabkha can be for vehicles, and a visit to several extensive shell middens which, despite their extent, each consist of only two species: the gastropod *Terebralia palustris* and the large arc shell (bivalve) *Anadara antiquata*, common in older archeological contexts but not know alive within the UAE or Oman today.

A particular highlight of the field trip was the sighting of a live specimen of the beautiful but delicate bubble shell *Hydatina zonata*, on seagrass in the main channel.



Hydatina zonata

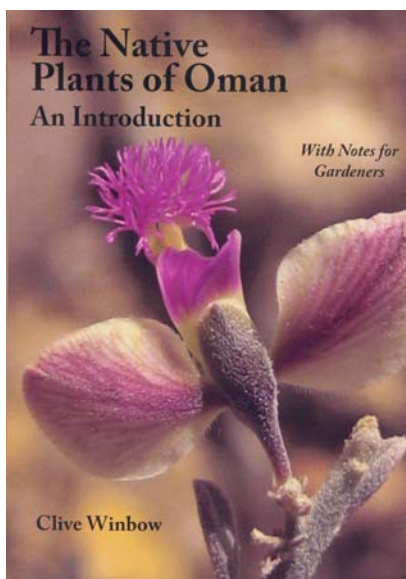
The bubble shells, most common of which is *Bulla arabica* (formerly *B. ampulla*), have a very large, colourful, flowing mantle that barely fits within the animal's shell. They are related to sea slugs, which have no shell at all. Report by Gary Feulner with photographs by Martina Fella



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Book Review:

The Native Plants of Oman: An Introduction with Notes for Gardeners by Clive Winbow.
Pub. Environmental Society of Oman 2008



This attractive book, put together with help from Dr Annette Patzelt from the Oman Botanic Garden and

Dr Shahina Gazanfar from the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, and containing a plea by HH Sayyida Tania S. Al-Said to "go native" for the sake of the environment and biodiversity, is, unlike the species described, a hybrid. Part serious text on Omani natives, part gardening manual, it proves very readable whilst providing a wealth of detail about native species. Winbow has a relaxed writing style and here and there includes humorous little asides, but if you are looking for detail about Omani natives, you will find it here.

It is divided into two sections on Dhofar and Northern/Central Oman, followed by 10 pages of appendices covering various topics including 'near natives', edible and medicinal plants and the action plan for maintaining biodiversity. The notes for gardeners reveal Winbow's enthusiasm for these species. How to grow Omani natives is explained in detail, and advice is given on the suitability of certain plants for different areas.



Periploca visciformis
- too small and you won't believe your eyes

If there is a criticism to be made, it might be that the pictures are rather small in view of the fact that there are some quite extraordinary plants in Oman. Nevertheless, it is a delightful book and gives arid area gardening a modern perspective - 'going native'. Ed.

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

June 07 Peter Jackson - Sharjah Town: 400 years

Field Trips (Members only, please. Details inside, p.2)

May 28 - 31 Masirah with Nancy Papathanasopoulou

Jun 18 DNHG End-of-Season Dinner (Indian Club, Oud Metha Road)

Further summer field trips, details and any changes will be announced by e-mail circular.