

GAZELLE

Vol 20 no 9 – September 2005



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

DNHG Membership Renewals



Tales of Summer Escapades

Bonnet Macaques

September 2005 starts our new DNHG membership year. Please make our lives easier by renewing early. 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. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG.)

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.

Valerie and Sam Chalmers stayed in Cape Town for a few days en route to St Helena and Namibia, (report inside) and met up with former member and Membership Secretary, Fi Skennerton, who was in fine form. Together they explored the Cape Peninsula region and Franshoek and its environs. Fi has lost none of her energy and enthusiasm and is a founder member of a natural history and walking group in the Fishhoek area near Cape Town.

Mohammed Arfan Asif, a member of the DNHG and author of our *Thru' the Lens* column in *Gazelle*, has won the Photographic Society of America Gold Medal in the International Photographic Competition held in Hong Kong. His column and some more of his photographs appear on p. 5 These look better on e*Gazelle*, of course! If you would like a full description of his photographic achievements, sit down and read page 7.

This month's Contributors

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

Moh'd Arfan Asif
Richard Morris
Valerie Chalmers
Dr. John Fox

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



Off and Running

Bird Watching Oct 7 in the morning.

This is the first of the day's activities. For details, email Sandhya Prakash on sandhya@clavib.com

The Oases of Al Ain October 7 in the afternoon

As this is during Ramadan I propose to meet at 3.45 pm in Al Ain at Hili just after the coffee pot round-about, on entry to the city. I will wait for you by the roadside. Look for a maroon Land Rover Discovery. We will then progress to several oases and forts before arriving at Al Ain Oasis just before Iftar. We will gather at the Oasis restaurant for a breaking of the fast, enjoy dates, a meal and some wild stories about Date Palms and the history of the oases of Al Ain. We will be hosted by the Al Ain Natural History Group. Food will be at cost, not very expensive (less than Dh50 per head). I know the timing is unusual but it is Ramadan. The reason for the later departure is to avoid the need for eating in public during the day. Expect to depart Al Ain before 8pm and thereby return to Dubai before 9.15pm.

Please email Geoff Sanderson on geoffrey_ssanderson@hotmail.com to confirm numbers. Al Ain folk, please contact OASIS re the dinner. I will send details re numbers asap. I expect approx 50 persons, incl. of Al Ain members. Could blow out to 60 - has happened before.

Sharjah Archeology Museum 14 or 21 October, perhaps

The details of this trip are not yet firm. If you are interested in going (or leading) email Peter Jackson pj.architect@gmail.com

Jo's Desert Trip October 28 early morning

Jo has you on the sand by 6.30, and off again 8.30, and will surprise you with what else is around at that

time. Email: joray@emirates.net.ae



Stargazing with Lamjed Thursday 10 Nov 2005

You haven't lived until you have seen Lamjed's telescope. Details are not yet available, but will be well in time. 4WD is not usually necessary.

Wadi Bih with Peter van A. November 18

Peter will take you up Wadi Bih to see an ancient village with photographs and amazing stone work.

Mountain Walk with Gary November 25

This seemed like a casual promise, but if he does it, don't casually sign up. These walks are for the fit. Details in the next issue of *Gazelle*.



In the rose gardens, Saiq, 2004

E-Gazelle

Remember that you can request the DNHG's monthly newsletter, the *Gazelle*, by e-mail. If you think you would prefer this, please e-mail our publisher, Peter van Amsterdam, (pvana@emirates.net.ae) and give him your details to be placed on the address list.

We offer members the opportunity to elect to receive the *Gazelle* by mail or by e-mail. The latter is quick and easy for you (and you see the photographs in glorious colour) and will save us a small but significant amount in annual postage.

Our Next Speaker

Jonathon Ali Khan is currently in Doha filming a WWF Coral Reef monitoring project. He was born in Devon and grew up in Italy, studied fashion design and photography, and later became a photojournalist. He covered famine and refugees in Sudan, Pakistan and wars in Eritrea, Chad and Afghanistan from the side of the guerilla factions and mujahideen up until 1987. He visited Dubai in 1986 & returned in 1987 "for a fresh start". After years of building up his client base, such as working on promotions launching Dubai into the tourism market with the DTCM, he now has a niche in the travel and tourism sector, making commercial destination films for regional Government offices.

Having been a diver since he was a boy living on the Mediterranean coast, he had always had a deep love for the sea and the natural world. In 1990-91, struck by the severity of the Gulf War oil spill, he created the first environmental awareness project in the region focusing on the marine environment called "Arabian Seas Expedition". From 1992 to 1998, he started filming the marine environment and marine life of Oman, Yemen and the UAE through a series of scientifically backed expeditions. This resulted in 2 films for National Geographic Television although the project was ended. In 1997, he launched the region's first (but ahead of its time) diving magazine "Arabia's Underwater World".

In 1998, Jonathon led a 5 month marine study expedition to Yemen, setting the precedent for projects that combined filming interests with scientific field research by offering scientists space on board expeditions. This was a symbiotic relationship that created a logistical platform enabling researchers and film crew to access areas that had been closed or hard to get to for political or other reasons.

In 2002, he set up Ocean World Productions in Dubai Media City as a natural history and underwater film production company. Recognising that it seemed the region was finally ready to embrace a media based project that could help open up the conservation issues of the region, he conceived "Arabia's Cycle of Life" working closely with Michel DeMartigny. This series of expeditions led to the creation of a 12 part TV series on the natural world of Arabia's mountains, wadis, deserts and seas. Featuring wildlife and research, the series highlights the growing efforts of the region's conservation authorities in Oman, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, helping to position conservation into mainstream media. We have just begun our second series, again sponsored by Jeep; this time we are featuring Qatar, Bahrain, Yemen (and the Island of Socotra) and ending in Kuwait with a closing effort to understand the actual long term impacts on the Gulf from the first Gulf War oil spill disaster.

Arabia's Cycle of Life has just been picked up by Animal Planet Asia and Japan. Negotiations are underway with a number of other international channels all curious to see a side of Arabia that otherwise wouldn't be seen on television.



Still Summer in Dubai?

You had to stay in Dubai and work? Or you came back and it's still so hot? A disaster, you say? Well, maybe not. There are still outdoor activities in the Emirates and Oman that you can enjoy even in the hottest months. Remember that all things, even the weather, are relative. As an example, I met a lady visiting her grandchildren here in Dubai who thought the weather was nice! It was cooler here than the daily temperatures back in her hometown of Palm Springs, California. In summer, the wildlife is still out there and many birds remain in the area.



Richard's swim buddy, a water scorpion

The following are some suggestions for those who love the outdoors and are in Arabia through summer.

At the end of July, while waiting for my holidays to begin, a companion and I decided to spend the day hiking one of the wadis in the "visa-free" area of Oman near Al Ain.



Wadi Khutwa

With temperatures in this interior area reaching 47C this day you might think that this is quite mad. However, we planned for this temperature and had no trouble whatsoever. We obtained some great photos of the rugged scenery, swam with the fish and frogs in the

pools, wandered around some interesting ruins, and nearly sat on a viper in the shade of a cliff.



We were able to spend an enjoyable 9 hours walking up and back down the wadi and when we became too hot, we soaked in a cool pool, always nearby.



We did begin our walk early in the morning and stayed in the shade of the steep wadi side walls when we could. As always in Arabia, we carried plenty of water, half of it frozen in plastic bottles, first aid supplies, proper clothes, hats, and sunblock.



Water lizard or hot lizard?

We had chosen a wadi with pools not too far from the car track and spent an evening soaking in the pools under the stars in the balmy under-40C temperature. While bats worked the skies for their supper, we barbequed ours and then had a nice sleep on cots under the clear skies.

If this sounds too uncomfortable for you, I might offer another sugges-

tion for summer activity from Dubai.



Snorkelling at Snoopy Is. Shelling at Suwaidi beach
You can stay at the resorts in Fujairah or at Al Sawadi in Oman for discount prices during the summer months. The air temperature is often 5C cooler on the other coast and the sea temperatures much nicer. Snorkeling at Snoopy Island always reveals many varieties of tropical fish and I have always been fortunate to view sea turtles and the occasional small reef shark. Several wadis easily accessible for day trips from Al Sawadi nearly always have running water in the summer, attracting wildlife and offering opportunities for great photos.



Keeping cool in a wadi near Al Suwaidi

Several nicely restored forts nearby are open to visitors to glimpse how the Arab forefathers lived in the 17th and 18th centuries.



The resort has 6 or 8 tours to choose from or you can use one of several guidebooks available at bookstores to guide yourself.

The wildlife and geology is still there in the summer and if you do the proper planning you can still get out there to enjoy it. *Thanks to Richard Morris for this.*



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

Where is St Helena?

During the summer, Sam and Valerie Chalmers visited the Island of St Helena. St Helena should spring to mind as the island on which Napoleon Bonaparte was exiled from 1815 until his death in 1821. As there is no airport yet, the only way to reach the Island is by sea. They set out from Cape Town for a week's cruise on the RMS (Royal Mail Ship) *St Helena* to the Island.

Some background information helps set the scene: St Helena was discovered by the Portuguese on 21st May 1502 and became a British Dependency in 1834. It is described as 'a tropical island of unspoilt peace and beauty which still retains its 19th century values and which is imbued with some 300 years of colonial history'. St Helena is situated in the South Atlantic Ocean, at position latitude 15° 56' South and longitude 5° 45' West. The nearest land is Ascension Island which lies 700 miles to the northwest and is one of the island's dependencies. The other dependency, Tristan da Cunha, lies to the southwest, 1200 miles away. The island is 1200 miles (1950 km) from the southwest coast of Africa and 1800 miles (2900 km) from the coast of South America. St Helena is 47 square miles (122km²); it is 10.5 miles (17 km) long and 6.5 miles (10 km) wide and consists of steep, rocky terrain, volcanic in origin. Rising dramatically from the South Atlantic, the island has sheer barren cliffs that are intersected by deep valleys (known locally as guts) which slope steeply from the central ridges. There is little flat land and access to the sea by vehicle is limited. There are no sandy beaches. Its climate is kept mild and equable by the south-east trade winds which blow almost continuously making the

weather changeable. Temperatures in Jamestown, the capital, range between 20°C and 32°C in the summer and 15°C and 26°C in the winter. The temperatures in the central areas are, on average, 5°C to 6°C lower. The population of St Helena is around 6,000 people.

Val continues: There are two National Parks. One helps protect some of the rare flora on the central ridges. Several of these species can only be found on St Helena. The second, at Sandy Bay, on the southern coast, protects further rare native species.

One of the tours which we went on whilst we were staying on St Helena was an endemics plant trip. This was fascinating. George Benjamin was our guide. George, together with other people from the Agriculture and Forestry Department, has been responsible for the propagation of the endangered endemics. George also worked with a propagation specialist from the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew.



Trochetiopsis ebenus

There are about 49 endemic species – 5 monocotyledonous species, 31 dicotyledonous species and 13 ferns. We saw many of the endemic dicotyledonous plants including Ebony (*Trochetiopsis ebenus*), Redwood (*Trochetiopsis*

erythroxylo), Scrubwood (*Commidendrum rugosum*), She Cabbage (*Lachanodes arborea*) and He Cabbage (*Pladaroxylon leucadendron*). Several ferns (and some tree ferns) are also endemic including *Asplenium compressum* (Hen and chicks fern), *Pteris paleacea* (layback fern) and *Microstaphyla furcata* (Money fern) and we were very fortunate to see at least eight different ferns.



Asplenium compressum

We also saw a clubmoss *Lycopodium cernuum* L. (buckshorn). We saw much flax on the island; with the advent of nylon, the flax industry was abandoned and so the flax has rather run wild over the island. There are plans, I believe, to try to reduce the large quantity of flax. Gorse is abundant and so are arum lilies.

St Helena is a delightful and most interesting island to visit and we thoroughly enjoyed our week there. Needless to say we visited the sites of Napoleon and, in particular Longwood House, where he spent most of his time in exile. Our method of transport for the trip was in an old charabanc! Thanks to Valerie Chalmers for this report and her photographs. In our next issue: the Namib adventure.



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan
res 344 8283
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fax (off) 349 9437

Archaeology - Prof. John Fox
jfox@aus.ac.ae

Birds - David Bradford
davebradford9@hotmail.com

Seashells - *perhaps you*

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi
res 06-5583 003
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Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner
res 306 5570
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Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
res 349 4816,
fax 340 0990
vmc@latifaschool.co.ae

Plants – Valerie Chalmers

Mammals & Seashells - Recorders 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.

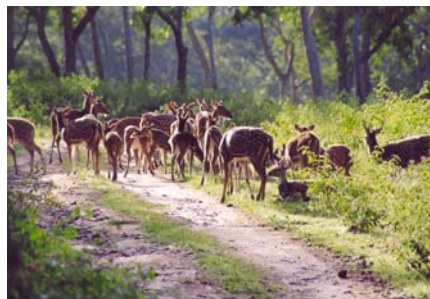
The intention is that information will be channelled through to the *Gazelle* editor, so new information can be shared with all our readers.

Thru the lens ...

What makes me go over and over again to my favorite haunt, Bandipur Wild Life National Park, in the southern part of my state Karnataka in India is difficult to explain. I was there this summer for three days and the monsoon was great. The forest was lush green and the water holes were full. Bandipur is a Project Tiger Sanctuary and has a very long season. One can visit it any time of the year, though March to November is best. The light here is a revelation. The park is a part of a larger wildlife reserve that includes the Mudumullai and Wynad sanctuaries.



To reach this beautiful wild life park of 865 square kilometers, one can drive 135km from Bangalore in southern India to the Ranganathitu Bird Sanctuary (*Gazelle* March 2005) in two and half hours, stop for an hour or two at this twitchers delight and then proceed for a further 80 km. It takes about five or six hours from Bangalore which is well connected by air to other major cities in India and UAE.



A great variety of flora and fauna abound in these deciduous forests. Unlike other forests in India, the short grass and open clearings make the forests ideal for photography. Spotted deer (*Axis axis*), Indian bison, elephants, mongoose, peacocks, wild boars, wild dogs, barking deer, hyenas, panthers,

sloth bears, four-horned antelopes, bonnet macaques and flying squirrels are commonly seen.



Around 200+ species of birds can be identified. Some like the golden backed woodpecker, great Indian hornbill, crested serpent eagle, green barbets, golden orioles, drongos, peacocks, jungle fowl and paradise flycatcher were a major attraction. It is only the elusive tiger and leopard that are difficult to spot and photograph. There are more than 50 species of trees including teak, rosewood and sandalwood, and bamboos are a common sight.



The government-owned cottages are good and economical. The privately owned wildlife resorts like Tusker Trails with its 6 cottages at the eastern edge of the forests provide international standards of service and have independent safari vehicles that have permission to take their visitors to the forests in their open Jeeps. Knowledgeable tour guides, western cuisine and quality service make a great difference. They cost USD 90 for single occupancy and USD 75 for twin



sharing per person.



A tusker charging wild after a bath, wild dogs on the move, bonnet macaques jumping from one tree to another, peacocks dancing, grazing deer, antelopes and herds of elephants crossing open grassy woodlands are great sights to behold and a pleasure to photograph.



Bandipur, a part of the Nilgiri Biosphere, is a delight to visit again and again. *Thanks to Mohammed Arfan Asif for text and photographs.*

Part 3 of John Fox on Julphar & Kush

Gleaning some references from history, Julfar was also the home of the mariner, Ahmed bin Majid, who was hired to navigate Vasco de Gama to India in 1498, and who wrote the navigational treatise, complete with wind and sky charts used by Columbus in his voyage to the New World. Christian's most recent excavation is attempting to locate the residence of Ahmed bin Majid which he believes is situated in a wadi amid the date palms. A series of excavation squares has been opened adjacent to the ruins of two rounded towers of mudbrick construction. Excavations there show a long row of palms fronds placed for an arish wall. Could this be the home of the famous mariner?

Julfar was also closely associated

with Hormuz, situated on an island 18 kms away, as Sharjah and Dubai might be best understood in tandem today. Hormuz was first described to the West by Marco Polo in his epic travelogue, *Description of the World* (1299). However, we also note that Hormuz was prominently described in the Persian commercial records, in which the inhabitants were described as traders who wore long white robes (thob or disdasha), a belt and a dagger (khanjar). This of course is the national dress of today.

Julfar was settled from Kush, a mounded site about one kilometre inland, as the seas receded and the merchants had a longer walk to the boats. Archaeological remains inform us that Kush was a trading center under the suzerainty of the Sassanian Empire of Persia. As such, could Kush, with its fairly sizeable tell with typical green glaze ware of the early to middle Islamic period, have been the Emporium Persicum described by the Byzantines in the sixth century as near the Straits of Hormuz? (This speculation is the author's.) The construction of the walls of the citadel were of mud brick, which could have been more readily cast in board forms and sun dried, rather than the abundant rounded wadi stones.

Following small scale Portuguese footholds at Julfar and Hormuz, mostly to control trade and provision their ships with fresh water, as well as at Sohar and Muscat in Oman, there was a brief episode of Dutch colonization at Hormuz in the seventeenth century. These, and French liaisons with Muscat in the eighteenth century, largely summed up European involvement. The Gulf was largely bypassed by European colonization, although the Oman Peninsula boasted the second largest fleet in the world by the turn of the nineteenth century and the arrival of the British.

However, the Gulf was seen by the British as simply the seafaring flank of India which was to be safeguard for tactical reasons, and to minimize competition from the indigenous merchants, especially those trading

with India. What differences exist in Gulf societies today may be also gauged by the degrees of autonomy that they have managed to sustain during the two centuries of British interest in the region. In this regard, the British also sought to protect their shipping along the sea lanes to and from India, worked out a number of agreements, beginning in 1820 (the year after the British invaded Ras al Khaimah). Basically, the British would protect against foreign invasion, including the evangelical forays by the Wahhabis from Saudi Arabia throughout coastal eastern Arabia. Such attempts to control the Gulf coast were well underway when the British entered the situation in 1819/1820, when the first of a number of treaties and agreements were signed authorising protection on the sea by the British. The basic arrangement was that the internal affairs of the sheikhdoms were left as before. Following a treaty in 1835, the emirates or sheikhdoms of the horn of Arabia (the western half of the Peninsula of Oman) became known as the Trucial Coast.

Within this context, the local emirates were able to retain quite autonomous and fairly unaltered cultural ways of organizing society that fit the Bedu dominated interior, where many of the families spent parts of the year, as well as along the coast. *Thanks to Professor John Fox for this final part of his series.*

Wanted: Ghaf Trees

Dr David Gallacher of Zayed University would like to look at growth rings in *Prosopis cineraria* (ghaf). This is usually done with a tree corer, but the method must first be proved and calibrated on the species using cross sections. The main purpose is to try to estimate the ages of trees, both relative and absolute. Please let David know of anybody who could supply him with trees that are being cleared for development, so we can put their deaths to some good use.
Email david.gallacher@zu.ac.ae



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Congratulations

On 28 August 2005, the following appeared in the Khaleej Times:

Mohammed Arfan Asif, an Indian based in the UAE for the past 11 years, has won the Photographic Society of America Gold Medal in the International Photographic Competition held in Hong Kong. Asif, 38 is from Bangalore, India's Garden City, and says photography is his passion. "I have been taking photos since my school days," he says. He has also been honoured with the world renowned ARPS (Associate of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain — 1994); the AFIAP (Artist of the International Federation of Photographic Art) — 1994 and the AICS (Associate of Image Colleague Society International, California, USA-2000).

Asif's photograph was a pictorial titled "State of Mind" and was se-

lected from among 1,100 odd photographs representing photographers from 34 countries as the Best of Show slide in the 10th Jade Photographic International salon.

He has exhibited his pictures in 16 countries and has won nine international awards including a Gold Medal in USA and IRs 70,000 in cash awards. He has 128 acceptations worldwide apart from 220 awards and 600 acceptations in National salons in India and 12 awards in UAE photo contests.

His photographs were a part of a travelling exhibition for one year in UK by the RPS and his award winning portrait portfolio was published in The Bulletin, the portrait journal in UK. He became in the process, the first Indian to be featured in this prestigious portraiture journal.

Asif is known for his monochrome pictorial portraits in low key style.

He is a darkroom bug and does his own monochrome processing and printing. He also dabbles in outdoor genre, nature and wild life photography. He has presented workshops and given lectures on photographic art to the photo clubs in the UAE and India. He has judged a few photo contests. He was the Secretary of Youth Photographic Society, Bangalore, India for two consecutive years and is the founder of Shutter Bugs, a photo club in India.

He also writes on photographic matters and has to his credit many articles published in photo magazines, newsletters and journals in India apart from all the local dailies in the UAE. He was a columnist for Connector (UAE magazine) and is now a regular columnist since November 2002 for Photography Middle East Magazine and Gazelle — Natural History Society Newsletter.

D

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

Oct 02 The Making of "Arabia's Cycles of Life" - Jonathan Ali Khan

To be confirmed:

Nov 13 History of Islam in Eastern Arabia (provisional title) - Dr Hassan Naboodah

Dec 04 The Iron Age Site at Muweilah - Dr Peter Magee

Jan 13 Oil Exploration and Production

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

Oct 07 Bird Watching in the morning
The Oases of Al Ain in the afternoon

Oct 14 / 21 Sharjah Archeology Museum

Oct 28 The Desert in the Early Morning with Jo Raynor

Nov 18 Wadi Bih

Nov 25 Mountain Walk