

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

The DNHG has sadly lost two erstwhile members in the last few weeks.

Adrian Chapman, who was one of the founders of the DNHG and our first Bird Recorder, died in the Philippines on 14th September. Colin Richardson has written an obituary, which appears on pp. 3 & 4.

Rob Allan, who lived in Dubai for more than 10 years and who at times shared his excellent photographs of UAE wild flowers with *Gazelle*, died on 1st October in Dubai. Rob loved the desert and his favourite spot was Wadi Sumayni where he and Jean regularly camped and had big rubbish clean-ups to preserve its beauty. **Jean** will be leaving Dubai for New Zealand at the end of October, but promises to return (to check Wadi Sumayni?).



Rob and Jean Allan, picnicking in the desert near the Jebel Ali Road, 2007

Our recent field trip to Al Ain was a good opportunity to catch up with **Johanna** and **Steve Raynor**, who shifted to Muscat a year ago. They continue to be interested in the welfare of the DNHG and will shortly be supplying us with a number of copies of a new book on Oman archaeology, which of course has many lessons for the UAE as well.

The attention given to snails and slugs in recent issues of *Gazelle* may not have been misplaced. **Louise Sewell** has admitted to the temporary adoption of a wayward individual of the local lawn slug *Laevicaulis alte* as a pet. These slugs are sometimes called by the common name tropical leatherleaf and the group they belong to is atypical in its anatomy. Louise says hers is interesting to watch and eats not only greens but also tissue paper. She was happy to learn, however, that this particular slug can survive quite well on its own in the wilds of Dubai, so she needn't worry too much over where to release it when the time comes.

Angela and Steve Manthorpe report that they had a very energetic and enjoyable walk in Spain, with lots of natural history. It's a long story, so there is more Members' News on pp. 2 & 6.

DNHG Membership Renewal Time

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.) Subscriptions paid now are good through to September 2010.

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:

Angela Manthorpe
Colin Richardson
Gary Feulner
Colin Paskins
Valerie Chalmers
EMEG



Photograph by
Rob Allan

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



Dubai Birdwatching with
Dave Bradford
Fri October 23 (morning)

Dave is a wonderfully knowledgeable birder and knows all the good spots. Contact Sandhya Prakash for details and to register at: springconsult@gmail.com

Stargazing – Lamjed El Kefi
Fri October 23 (evening)
from 6:00pm on location to 8:30-9:00pm

Lamjed's telescope is a marvelous thing, so ...

Location:

Lat: 24 53'.538

Long: 055 19'.862

Go south on D63, about 22km from Emirates Rd new interchange (Arabian Ranches corner), Al Qudra Rd towards Bab-el-Shams resort. From the bridge crossing over Jebel Ali-Lehbab Rd, count 6km and prepare to turn right thru the fence at the camel-gate ... Continue on a good track going to camel sheds, for about 800m. Park in the gravel area to the left of the track ... walk across to the telescope west of the track. Please stay clear of the main track going west, as it may be used during the night.

Bring a foldable beachchair or floor mat, binoculars 8x, water and snacks. Good for all cars. For further information and to sign up please contact Jenny Hill at jennyhill76@hotmail.com or Lamjed at Lankefi@eim.ae

Sharjah Old Town with Peter Jackson
November 14 (Saturday)

Members will be able to explore the historical areas of Sharjah mentioned in Peter's wonderful lecture. If you would like to join the tour, contact Valerie Chalmers at valeriechalmers@gmail.com for details and registration. Numbers are limited, parking might be more so - arrange to share if you can.

Camping at Donkey-Fox Wadi – Mike Lorrigan
November 20-21

This trip starts on Thursday and includes a fossil site (no hammers please!), an overnight camp with fox-watching and a three to four hour hike next day. Fossils and foxes guaranteed, wild donkeys maybe. Contact Pradeep at wgarnet@emirates.net.ae for details and registration

Salalah, Oman with Pradeep Radhakrishna
November 26-29

The details of this have yet to be finalised, but it is hoped to fall on Eid al Adha (or Eid on it!). Salalah is *different*, and you are guaranteed many surprises and pleasures. Contact Pradeep to register at wgarnet@emirates.net.ae

More Members' News

Colin Paskins, a very keen sheller, wrote to *Gazelle* recently, "I attach a photo of a *Cypraea grayana*, found some time ago. I am wondering how it got a "squashed end". Did it get stuck under a rock when young and have to live, and grow, there? I showed it to Sandy Fowler and he was also surprised at its shape. Can anyone explain it?" Colin agreed that it was also proportionally wider at its 'normal' end.



Colin's *Cypraea grayana*

A photograph in our March 2006 issue, by **Angela Manthorpe**, of the domino beetle, *Anthia duodecimguttata*, drew the attention of one of the researchers of arkive.org, Charles Whittaker, who wrote, "Thank you for passing my email on to Angela Manthorpe ... we're currently working on (photographs of) quite a few UAE species in partnership with the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi and if your members are interested, there is a list of all the species we are looking for at <http://www.arkive.org/about/species-lists.html> - please feel free to pass the word on!"

Our Next Speaker

Jane Budd is a qualified veterinarian, married with a ten month old son. She comes from South Africa and studied Veterinary Science in Perth, Australia. She grew up with easy access to the natural world and developed a love of nature as a result of many hours exploring the bush.

Her official role at the Breeding Centre is as Head of Section Felines, directly responsible for the five felid species held at the centre, four of which are endemic to Arabia - (Arabian leopard, Arabian caracal, Sand cat and Gordon's Wildcat). The Centre also hold a large breeding group of cheetah, which are now extinct from the Arabian Peninsula. Jane is the stud-book keeper for the critically endangered Arabian leopard and the Arabian caracal and is the EEP co-ordinator for the European Arabian caracal breeding program. The main focus at the Breeding Centre is ex situ conservation of endangered species through captive breeding. Their work enables a better understanding of species and their natural habitats through observation and research, thereby enhancing in situ conservation efforts.



Adrian (J.A.D.) Chapman (-2009)

A personal memoir by Colin Richardson



Adrian was one of the birdwatching regulars around Dubai's Safa Park every Friday morning, where I first met him in 1983. I was introduced to him along with the late Gerry Ricks by Mike West and we were the only active birdwatchers in Dubai at the time. In 1985 Adrian, Mike, Gerry & I formed the Dubai Natural History Group encouraged by Dr. Joe Platt, the Sheikh's wildlife adviser and we would receive patronage from Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid.



We were the core of the new DNHG and Adrian became the first Bird Recorder for the group. Adrian was great company and very understanding about my shortcomings as a birdwatcher. I had only been birdwatching for 3 or 4 years and Adrian guided me through several identification minefields, such as separating ducks in non-breeding plumage and identifying warblers by call and shape.

I remember when Adrian identified the country's first pied flycatcher and the Rarities Committee at the time, based in the UK, thought this rather improbable. The bird was, after all, almost inseparable from the more-commonly occurring semi-collared flycatcher. When it

was suggested to him that his bird be put in the records as 'a semi-collared flycatcher showing the field characteristics of pied flycatcher' Adrian would have NONE of it - it was definitely a pied flycatcher, no discussion. He was a Yorkshireman after all! So the bird is written in stone as the first record of pied flycatcher in Arabia. Adrian was also the first birder to put on record hen harrier, golden eagle, black-winged pratincole, Temminck's horned lark, Icterine warbler and tree sparrow in the United Arab Emirates.

In 1988 Adrian and I co-authored a paper entitled *Bird Migration Patterns through Dubai 1984 - 1988*. Published in the journal *Sandgrouse*, it was a ground breaker, compiled from our joint bird sightings, consisting of over 500 visits to Safa Park and Khor Dubai. This data, which to some outsiders might have seemed obsessive, formed the basis of *The Birds of the United Arab Emirates* published two years later.



We attended the AGM of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East in 1988 and the UAE country contingent was one of the largest of any Middle East country attending. In 1992 with his friend Dave Robinson, Adrian co-wrote the country's best selling bird book. Entitled *Birds of the Southern Gulf* (later re-titled misleadingly *Birds of Southern Arabia* by the publisher to glean a wider sale!) it has been reprinted many times, being the top-selling book of the Motivate Publishing series of coffee-table glossies.

When we first met, Adrian had told me of his Merchant Navy background and he seemed perfectly qualified to represent Lloyds Register of Shipping in the UAE. His connections at the port, along with

Gerry's position as computer manager at Port Rashid, enabled us to do a couple of birdwatching 'jollies' in the harbour-master's boat around the port., which usually involved a few scrapes with authority, including approaching too close to an American navy ship in the dry dock! We always had the most enjoyable times when a boat trip was involved.



In the winter of 1986 and again in 1989 we hired a fishing launch to visit one of the world's largest Socotra Cormorant colonies, on Siniyah Island in the northern Emirates.

On at least two occasions we travelled by boat to Sir Baniyas Island, in Abu Dhabi Emirate, where we met the rest of the natural history team. We travelled with the late Bish Brown, the country's foremost naturalist and first curator of the natural history museum in Abu Dhabi, and we spent several days studying the birds and other wildlife on that amazing island zoo. Adrian, as expected, was completely at home on this desert island, seeing many new species and sharing his experiences over an Arab feast most evenings.





Adrian was a disciplined note-taker and the bird records he sent to me as Recorder, punctually every month for more years than I can remember, are of great historic and scientific value and are to be lodged in the UAE government archives.



In a social environment, Adrian was in his element. He made friends easily and everyone liked him. Whether it was in the local pubs of Abu Dhabi, the annual natural history dance or its weekend activities, Adrian was the centre of attention. He enjoyed everyone's company and a day out in the mountains or desert was a big social event, with a picnic under a tree, accompanied by a few cold beers.



I remember that, several times after he moved to Abu Dhabi, he stayed in my spare room. On one occasion he knocked on my bedroom door after we had both retired and said he couldn't sleep. A light was on somewhere and he needed complete darkness. We discovered I had left the outside light on in the car port and after

switching it off, all was fine and we returned to bed! During my frequent overnight stays at Adrian's home, I always remember the hospitality, especially the fried breakfasts. Life seemed perfect.



We never lost touch and I received emails, letters and cards from him wherever he went: Abu Dhabi, Yorkshire, Hong Kong and latterly the Philippines. He always seemed to be enjoying life and I will miss him a lot. He was a great friend.



[I have scanned a selection of photos from the period 1985 - 1992, mostly during Adrian's time in Dubai. You might recognise many of his family and friends, including his first wife Veronica, daughter Lara, Mike West, Dave Robinson, Bish Brown, Mel Smethurst, Steve Turner, Carolyn Lehman, Martin Pitt and many others.] *Thanks to Colin Richardson for text and photographs.*

Flint Knapping

A patio shaded by tall mimosas was the perfect venue for our afternoon flint knapping workshop in Al Ain, and Jeff Imes was the perfect instructor, with specimens, knapping tools and diagrams on hand to demonstrate the materials and the two main techniques: percussion flaking and pressure flaking.



Jeff Imes displaying an ancient hammer stone.

The basics of the theory are summarised below in an excerpt from materials that Jeff provided, but they do not capture the counter-intuitive nature of many aspects of the technique. Questions from the audience reflected this. Percussion flaking, for example, removes flakes from the side of the rock opposite from where it is hit. The force required to flake the flint is not very great. And, depending on what kind of tool you want, the flake itself may be more useful than the remaining core.



A core with some individual flake removals marked

At a practice session after Jeff's talk, members tried their hand and succeeded in reproducing many basic errors (e.g., step fractures and hinge fractures) as well as achieving some modest successes in planning and executing the removal of unwanted material from a core. Still, we all marveled at Jeff's mounted collection of really good arrowheads he has knapped.

Jeff's formal presentation was complemented by his wife Treva, who



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Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
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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.



showed off her handiwork in the kitchen and on an Andean double flute, as well as her distinctive "bonsai" creations of local materials (rocks, flint and bits of carnelian and semi-precious stones) and copper wire. Thanks to Jeff and Treva for sharing their home and hospitality, as well as their skills and enthusiasm. *Report & photographs by Gary Feulner. Next month: the techniques of flint knapping.*



Close-up of knapping
Photograph by Angela Manthorpe

Date Palm Evolution

The history of the modern cultivated date palm, *Phoenix dactylifera*, remains enigmatic, unlike the history of some other major crop species such as wheat and corn. One problem is the absence of any known populations of "wild" dates. Among the closest relatives of *P. dactylifera*, *P. reclinata* is known in Arabia only from Yemen and *P. sylvestris* seems absent from Arabia but is common in Iran. Another close relative, *P. canariense*, is found in Europe where it hybridises with *P. sylvestris*.



Dr. Claire Newton and Dr. Sarah Ivorra
collecting material

Against this background, Gary Feulner and Binish Roobas were

happy to assist two French researchers (Dr. Claire Newton, an archaeobotanist now at University of Nottingham, and Dr. Sarah Ivorra, who studies domestic fruit crops by morphometric means at the CNRS, Montpellier) to locate and sample "feral" date palms (self-seeded and relatively remote from cultivation) in the mountain wadi environment, for genetic analysis. In a wadi in the Jebel Akhdar a year ago, the same researchers had previously found a grove of an apparent hybrid of *P. dactylifera* and *P. sylvestris*.



A grove of feral date palms

The effort was not without its hazards. First on the list of dangers was the summer heat, but it turns out that the two scientists had already earned their Foreign Legion merit badge, and they held up remarkably through eight hours of exploration on foot. The second hazard was the palms themselves: dangerously sharp points of the palm fronds make close approaches highly problematic. A third and unsuspected danger was the field technique, which involved giving the taste test to all fruiting specimens. It was not explained whether this was a requirement of the study or the result of French gastronomic interest, but Gary wondered if the researchers didn't risk diabetes by the end of the field season.

Several interesting areas were explored, with a wealth of feral palms, including many with date stones rather different from the normal cultivated variety – shorter, with a deeper longitudinal groove and marked longitudinal striations. Ultimately, however, only DNA results will tell the tale conclusively.



Rare dragonfly *Crocothemis sanguinolenta* (male)

A side benefit of these excursions was the opportunity for more general natural history observations along the way, including new sites for a rare dragonfly, a newly recognised wadi grass and dozens of sand partridge. *Report and photographs by Gary Feulner*

Iftar with the EMEG

Members of the three UAE natural history groups foregathered at EMEG on 11th September at 6 p.m. for Iftar. Some people went for a swim before Iftar. Major Ali and his team provided an excellent supper which included freshly cooked fish. Everyone who attended was asked to bring a traditional dish from their own country to share with people, which was an excellent idea.

After supper Major Ali showed two films about pearl diving – one in black and white from 1971 which was done for Sheikh Zayed and the other in colour which was more recent. He gave a very helpful commentary with the two films. Major Ali stressed the importance of songs for pearl divers. It made them forget the hard work involved.



Major Ali

This was followed by a presentation on the work of the EMEG this last year given by Keith Wilson who has recently joined EMEG. The EMEG has been involved in the following projects:

- ◆ Clearing/removing 5 to 8 tons of debris including wood and plastic from beaches and coastal environment.
- ◆ Macroalgae removal.
- ◆ Turtle monitoring and tagging (had 6 nests this year). They had trouble with Arabian red foxes at first but then the turtle eggs were relocated to Ghantoot.
- ◆ Conducting educational camps which have been very popular – including mangrove planting, sea turtle biology, bird identification and bird watching, desert plant identification etc.
- ◆ Habitat monitoring – database of birds, fish etc
- ◆ Translocation of corals from Waterfront Development to Crescent B of Palm Jebel Ali. 11,000 corals were moved from September to October 2008 - 20 species of corals. Special glue was used to fix the corals. The project was monitored closely for 6 months. Success of the translocation of corals is still being monitored and is to be continued at regular intervals. Some interesting hypotheses for testing have been raised from the observations to date.
- ◆ Extending the work of EMEG to Abu Dhabi – a monitoring programme and beach clean up – and, in addition, EMEG is in the process of starting a programme with the Environment Agency in Abu Dhabi in connection with the numerous islands.



Rima is leaving EMEG to do her PhD based on sharks in the Arabian Gulf. No research has been done so far on these species. Her research will help in many issues, one being to try to stop shark fins from being sold abroad.



In the EMEG majlis

Researchers from the United Nations University are in talks with EMEG to collaborate in order to extend research work in the Arabian Gulf.

It was especially good to see changes such as the growth of mangroves and flooding of the lagoons at EMEG since our last visit. *Report by Valerie Chalmers. Photographs by Val and from the EMEG website.*

Yet More Members' News!

In June DNHG members **Steve** and **Angela Manthorpe** spent a few days walking in the Picos de Europa National Park in Spain. The park contains some of Spain's most dramatic limestone scenery with mountains over 2500m, and three main massifs, running through the middle of which is the great gorge of the Garganta del Cares, described by Lonely Planet as "perhaps the single most outstanding walk in the Picos de Europa". Here the path, hemmed in by sheer walls, cuts in and out of tunnels with the river roaring below, before its dramatic climb.

The area is very rich in wildlife including wolf, wild boar, brown bear, roe deer, golden eagle, griffon vulture, capercaillie and yellow billed chough. The most visible animal, common in the higher areas, was the Cantabrian chamois.



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This animal, once close to extinction, now numbers in excess of 6,000 individuals and was a common sighting. The park contains over 700 plant species and 70 tree species across a variety of habitats with extensive pastures up high and dense beech and oak woodlands on the lower slopes.



Gorge of the Garganta del Cares



Naranjo de Bulnes

The pair intended to complete an 8 day circuit of the park and endured thick fog and rain on day 1, a knee-jarring 1200m descent at the start of the 12 hour long day 2, and a 1300m ascent on Day 3. They reached the Refugio Vega d'Urriellu at 1935m, next to the imposing peak of Naranjo de Bulnes, but they were ultimately thwarted by extensive snowfields still remaining after Spain's coldest winter in 20 years. Still, it's a wonderful park and well worth visiting for the scenery and wildlife. *Thanks to Angela Manthorpe for news and photographs.*



Members' Night December 6

This is your chance to make a 20 minute presentation on the natural history subject of your choice. Be in!! Angela Manthorpe, DNHG Speaker Coordinator, would like to hear from you. Email Angela at:
manthorpe2005@yahoo.co.uk

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

Nov 1	Jane Budd (Sharjah Breeding Centre) - 'The Arabian Leopard'	
Dec 6	Members' Night	The Dubai Ladies Ecology Group: a forerunner of the DNHG – Val Chalmers [Others to be announced - see p.7]
Jan 10	[To be announced]	
Feb 7:	Earthworms – Dr. John W. Reynolds	

Field Trips (Members only, please.)

October 23 (morning)	Dubai Birdwatching – David Bradford
October 23 (evening)	Stargazing – Lamjed El Kefi
November 14 (Saturday):	Sharjah Old Town – Peter Jackson
November 20-21:	Camping at Donkey-Fox Wadi – Mike Lorrigan
November 26-29:	Salalah, Oman – Pradeep Radhakrishna

Field trip details or changes may be announced or confirmed by e-mail circular.
