

GAZELLE

Vol 23 no 12 December 2008



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Holidays!

December is a month of holidays this year! **Rob and Jean Allan** visited Kerala and Tamil Nadu over National Day and Eid al Adha, and were delighted to find themselves very much in touch with nature for the whole two weeks.



Nilgiri tahr in the Western Ghats

They visited wetlands, high country plantations, forests, farmland and beaches. In the waterways of the Kerala lowlands, they observed the difficulties caused by water hyacinth. It grows so densely that water traffic is hindered; when monsoon rains wash it out to the sea, it col-

lects in rotting mounds along the beaches.



Water hyacinth in the Kerala waterways

They also watched fishermen at work on Chowara Beach, hauling in nets with few edible fish and hefty catches of brown jellyfish (below).



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.) If you have not renewed before January 2008, your membership will lapse. (See p.7)

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:

Mairead Porter for last month's star gazing report
Nancy Papathanasopoulou
Jean and Rob Allan
Jenny Hill
Brien Holmes
Bob Reimer
and Di



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



Winter activities ...

Desert Driving with Andrew Bean 9 / 10 January 2009

The aim of the course is to teach the principles of driving safely in sand, with due care for the environment you pass through. By the end of the course you should be able to explore the wilds of the UAE with care, safety and confidence. Note we don't train dune bashers! The latest date for enrolment is *17th December*. This session consists of multiple levels and has a donation of 50 Dhs and limit of 10 cars. Contact Pradeep: wgarnet@eim.ae or Anin anin@eim.ae to register your interest with numbers and whether adults or children (including ages) so we can work out the costs for our group.

Shelling with Anne 17 Jan

We will probably go to one of the local beaches, very early. Contact Anne on pvana@emirates.net.ae

Mountain Ecology with Gary Prob. 24 Jan TBC

Temple alley walk with Sandhya 31 Jan

Sandhya shows the hidden wonders of Bur Dubai. Numbers limited. Contact Sandhya: sandy_pi@yahoo.com

Oases / plantations with ENHG Feb TBA

This will be a ramble through some of Al Ain's old date gardens and/or oases. Birding, history, plants, archeology ...

Masirah Island with Nancy P. 25 - 28 Feb (TBC)

Nancy Papathanasopoulou is offering a trip to Masirah and would like expressions of interest.

February - April: Excellent for hawkbill and Olive Ridley turtles, great for birds. Please contact Nancy: nancyktp@gmail.com promptly if you want to go with her. The trip requires a full 4 days away from Dubai.

Bastakiya walk, Peter Jackson 21 March

This is a ramble through the very old areas near the creek mouth, with architect and wind-tower authority Peter Jackson. Not to be missed but ... only 24 people! Details by email.

Other trips in March and April Dates TBA

Proposals are in for a visit to the Breeding Centre, Sharjah, a hike with Stephen Beck, and doing the rim walk on Jebel Shams, Oman, with Peter van Amsterdam. All these will be detailed soon by email or in Gazelle.

Trips in April may include a visit to smell the gorgeous roses on the Saiq Plateau, but we will need to book (and stick with our bookings) well in advance. Not to be missed!

Inter-Emirates Weekend Thursday/Friday/Saturday 26/27/28 March 2009

Each year in March/April the UAE's three Natural History Groups – Emirates Natural History Group Abu Dhabi, Emirates Natural History Group Al Ain and the Dubai Natural History Group – get together for an educational yet social weekend involving a dinner and various activities and trips. It is a chance to meet up with people/old friends from the other groups. The event is organised annually by one of the groups in rotation. This year it is the turn of the Dubai Natural History Group.

IEW 2009 will be based at the Oceanic Hotel, Khor Fakkan and the programme will begin on Friday morning, 27th March. The hotel has made a block booking of rooms for the Thursday and Friday nights on a first-come first-served basis. However, in view of the increased tourism in Khor Fakkan and the peak season date of IEW, **it will be necessary to confirm and guarantee your booking by the end of February 2009.**

Hotel rates (per night) are:
Double Bed/Twin-Bedded Room – **Dh 660** (inclusive of breakfast & tax)
Single Room – **Dh 540** (inclusive of breakfast & tax)

Children below 12 years may stay free in their parents' rooms with meals 50% of cost.

Without breakfast, room rates are **Dh 580** for Double Bed/Twin-Bedded Room and **Dh 500** for Single Room
Cost of an extra bed in a room for an adult **Dh 120**

A suite can be booked but you need to ask the hotel.

On Friday evening there will be a buffet dinner (**Dh 96** per person). Packed lunches will be available for

Friday and Saturday – please arrange these directly with the hotel once you have been supplied with your booking reference.

It has been arranged with the hotel that all reservations should be made through the DNHG. To make a reservation, please email Lena Linton on linton@mailme.ae with your requirements as regards rooms and buffet dinner. Lena will email you the booking reference and then your credit card information will need to be sent to the hotel. If unable to use credit card, then to send a cheque to given address.

On the evening of Friday 27th we will be holding the Inter-Emirates photographic competition.

Further information as regards activities for the Friday and Saturday will follow in due course. A big variety of trips and workshops are being planned.

Our Next Speaker

Mohammed Anisuzzaman Khan has a Masters degree in Science, completed in the early '80s and 15 years of experience in biodiversity management and sustainable utilisation of renewable natural resources. His vision is making development sustainable by integrating conservation and development on the basis of research and human experience. Many of his projects have involved assisting existing communities to live in harmony with nature.

He has worked in many different areas of conservation - fresh water wetlands, evergreen and deciduous forests and in the Sunderbans. He has also been back and forth between projects in the UAE and Bangladesh many times.

His two most recent appointments are with the Environment Department of Dubai Municipality, Dubai as Environment Officer, and preparing the 'Protected Area and Biodiversity Conservation Strategic Action Plan' for the Emirate of Dubai. He also has the honoured posts of National Coordinator of the Asian waterfowl census, research fellow of the Bangladesh monitor lizard survey, Bangladeshi representative for the Oriental Bird Club, and national coordinator of the Asian Bird Red Data Book.



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

Glass is Forever ...

Following on from the interest shown in the paper recycling factory this summer, fourteen members negotiated the security of the Jebel Ali Free Zone to see how glass is made and recycled at the Jebel Ali Container Glass Factory. We were shown around by the Commercial Manager Mr Samir El Sayyed who had kindly given up part of his day off to take us round the factory and answer all our questions.



DNHG members don safety glasses

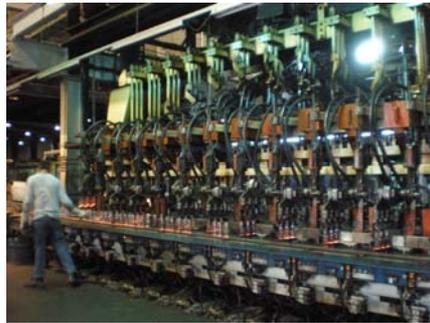
The glass making process starts off with raw materials (including silica sand, soda ash, limestone & feldspar) being weighed and mixed to a constituency appropriate for the type of container being made. Amazingly, the silica sand has to come from Saudi Arabia as the percentage of silica within UAE sand is only 60% whereas 90% silica is required to make glass.



Samir El Sayyed explained the process with infectious enthusiasm

Raw materials are then transferred to the furnace (which is kept working continuously for ten years) at

which point any recycled glass available is added to the mixture. This is usually no more than 25%. The mixture is heated to 1500°C where it becomes molten, is formed into pellets and fired into moulds. Air is then injected into the centre of the pellets pushing the glass out into the shape of the mould to form the particular container.



Bottles hot off the press

Containers are then transferred by conveyer belt past a manual spot check (where random containers are weighed to check the quality), through a cooling water sprayer, checked under bright lights for defects and then finally placed onto pallets and plastic wrapped to be shipped to destinations such as Ethiopia, Morocco and Australia for use by food manufacturers.

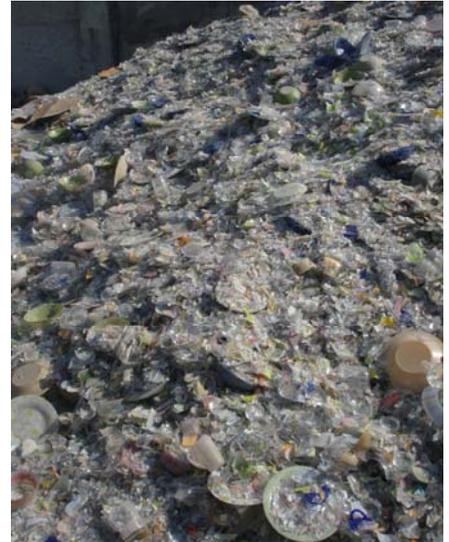


Containers by the million, ready for shipping

The factory uses 280 tonnes of glass to make a grand total of 1.2 million glass containers per day! Mr Samir informed us that although glass can be recycled easily, repeatedly and economically, only 20 to 200 tonnes of glass is actually put into recycle bins in Dubai per month which is less than the glass required per day!

It is estimated that more than 150 million glass containers are sent to landfill each year in the UAE, a huge amount considering glass is

not degradable so will remain there for thousands of years and yet is 100% recyclable. By doing so we can use less energy, less natural resources and save waste. Certainly one to consider next time you throw a glass container away! So on that note how can we all do our bit?



Mounds of waste glass (and maybe some plastic)

Glass recycling needs communal efforts from government, non-governmental organisations, public and private companies and more importantly from individuals. Glass (and indeed paper, cans and plastic) recycling bins are located around Dubai in some supermarkets, petrol stations, bus stops, schools and offices.



Looking at glass ready for recycling

Although the glass is separated and washed at the factory, removing paper labels and particularly metal lids/rings, and giving the bottles a wash before recycling is important to help prevent contamination. *Report by Jenny Hill, photos by Jenny Hill and Anne Millen.*



... Not So Our Seas

To continue the weekend of learning, 11 members went to celebrate Sharjah's ocean life and culture at the Sharjah Aquarium. Here we were greeted by Operations Manager Ann Irish and by Moza and Muna, two wonderful locals who were excellent guides for our trip, taking us round and telling us about the conservation challenges that the marine environment faces with industry and development, climate change and tourism.



Area modeled on Al Khan harbour, Sharjah

Sharjah Aquarium is dedicated to education and conservation and to serve this purpose all marine life found within the aquarium is native to the Gulf ranging from hamour to rays, reef sharks and my personal favourite, the clownfish.

The aquarium was split into areas based on coasts, reefs, mangroves, lagoons and the ocean.

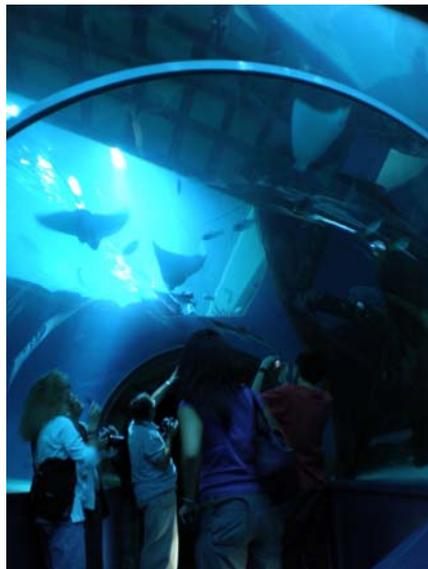


One of the reef tanks with moray eels

Most of the coral was made out of resin and concrete but there was

some real coral which had been rescued from areas where development was destroying it. Most of the fish within the tanks had also been saved from bycatch including a bowmouth guitarfish and at each tank there were fish finder displays telling you what you were looking at and a few facts and figures about each species. Did you know for instance that there are over 900 species of fish living off Sharjah's East coast?

We were impressed by the number of local people in the aquarium and, with over 270,000 visitors since they opened in June 2008, there are encouraging signs that their mission to encourage the people of Sharjah to cherish and have concern for their marine heritage is flourishing.



Members admiring the rays in the perspex underwater viewing tunnel

Our trip ended with a talk from the enthusiastic curator Kerwin, who came in on his day off to give us an insight into what goes on behind the scenes of the Sharjah Aquarium and provided some interesting facts. Did you know for instance that copper cleans fishes' skin of parasites but kills off crustaceans and that you can find seahorses in the Sharjah lagoon just outside the aquarium? And that the perspex tanks are getting scratched by people tapping on the sides with their diamond rings! *Report and photographs by Jenny Hill*

Jewelry on Sand and Gravel

Molluscs and their shells have played an important role in the economies of Arabian territories for thousands of years. Oysters and abalones have been collected for human consumption and the pearl-oring industry has left a footprint of its own in the Arabian Gulf. Collectors have spent thousands of hours gathering, admiring, observing. Sunset moments are brought to new heights with the discovery of a glittering shell freshly presented by the waves on the bare sand, near our bare feet. Studying these underwater jewels did not begin until 1840.

One species, for long among the great rarities of the shell world, had been first collected from Masirah Island during the first half of the nineteenth century. This island is now known to be the principal haunt of *Cypraea teulerei*, a beautiful cowry.



Cypraea teulerei

Another one is endemic here. Famous amongst collectors for its frivolous orange and semi-symmetrical "crescent moons" on a white background, *Punctateon eloiseae* or "The Eloise shell", was discovered by Eloise and Dr Donald Bosch in 1970 after he obtained some specimens from local fishermen in Masirah. Until then the island, now famous for its remarkable shell fauna, had been almost inaccessible to those with a specific interest in shells.

Oman has deep and cool waters that favour the development of molluscan life along the coast of the country, and most notably the island of Masirah. Here, the *khareef*



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan
res 344 8283
off 344 0462
fax (off) 349 9437

Archaeology - David Palmer
050-7387703
office direct line: 04-2072636
dpalmer@ud.ac.ae

Birds - David Bradford
davebradford9@hotmail.com

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi
res: 06-5247 958
off: 06-5583 003
email: lankefi@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
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.



in the summer months is crucial for the abundance of molluscs. The South Arabian upwelling is caused by the onset of the south-west monsoon, which drives surface waters away from the Arabian peninsula. This surface water is then replaced by cold-water upwelling from considerable depth. Molluscs and other organisms benefit from the rise of nutrients and food created by this phenomenon, especially where subsequent rapid warming helps maintain coral communities. The most conspicuous result of this cold upwelling is the existence of endemic species along the coasts of southern Oman, and around Masirah Island.

The Ras Radum coast stretches along seven kilometres of the east coast of Masirah, a walk not to be taken barefoot, as long, sandy stretches give way to treacherous gravel, hiding spiky fish bones, semi-degraded sea urchins and broken shells that can be sharp as a knife blade. At first, the urge arises to collect everything. The colours spring out from shell fragments that have been lying there for days. A simple embrace of the rising tide and the colours come alive. Entranced, you fill your pockets with what will then dry out and, in a jar at home, seems quite colourless, trivial and unworthy of attention.



The colourful array that is part of a habitat

It is only the experienced "sheller" who spots the pieces worth collecting. Seashells have their role in beach ecology, and depleting the beaches could dangerously alter their substance, so necessary for all organisms living there. Being a good "sheller" requires

skill, patience, perseverance - an eye for beauty, an eye for accuracy, natural curiosity, knowledge of the environment along with lots of respect for it. And patience again. A good shelling guide is necessary when walking on the beach. So is a stick to "stir" amongst multitudes of fragments and pebbles to discover the "right shell". Hermit crabs will often attack your fingers from the shell you have just picked up and which serves as their home, in a frantic attempt to escape the earthquake you are creating. Shelling is an art to be developed. Some tire of it quickly, others commit for life.



Scallop

Over four years of strolling up and down Ras Radum, I have only found seven shells that were interesting and in good condition - worth collecting. I have had a good teacher, Martyn Day, who has lived and worked in Masirah for over twenty years and is the archetypal amateur malacologist-perfectionist. A diver, keen environmentalist and an artist of "shelling", he never tires of teaching those who are genuinely interested everything about seashells and the "ethics of shelling". He is skeptical about amateur shellers and believes people should need permits to take shells away from the rich beaches of Masirah. I couldn't agree more.

The west coast boasts a pristine fringing reef, well-hidden from the beaten track in most areas. A teeming marine life is buzzing under the glittering water surface, where waves are usually small compared with the wild splashes



of the east coast. North of the reef, by the settlement of Sur Masirah, the mudflats begin. They are vast, stretching over several kilometers, a majestic *sabkha* hosting thousands of birds which feast on crabs, fish and other invertebrates. Some say the Eloise shell can be found here. But the explorer must be tough, organised and experienced. Moving mud can sink a powerful car very fast, and the walker may find himself knee-deep in it in seconds.

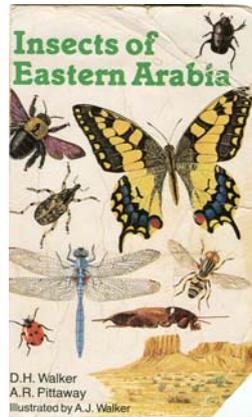


Thousands of seashells, their tenants snatched by waves of flying predators, are strewn on these beaches. When in Masirah, watch carefully where you walk. It may be on jewelry. *Thanks to Nancy Papanthanasopoulou for both text and photographs.*

Insects of Eastern Arabia in PDF format

Finding materials to identify common insects in the UAE and Oman is very difficult. We have some information that was published in *Tribulus*, some in *Fauna of Arabia*, and more in books like *The Emirates: A Natural History* and the recently released *Terrestrial Environment of Abu Dhabi Emirate*. While Tony van Harten's new *Arthropods of UAE* series will address the entomologist's needs for keys, it is not so easy for the layman to use due to the taxonomic detail provided and will take many volumes to complete. About the only accessible resource extant is *Insects of Eastern Arabia* authored by D. H. Walker and A. R. Pittaway with copious illustrations by A. J. Walker. Walker and Pittaway did many studies in Arabia, publishing in many journals. Tony Pittaway is an expert on Hawkmoths. *Insects of Eastern Arabia* was published in 1987 by Macmil-

lan. Unfortunately, when the book didn't sell well, Macmillan pulped the remainders without offering them to the authors. Now it is almost impossible to obtain a copy as those that were sold are ensconced in libraries and private collections. While it is 30 years old and scientific knowledge of insect species in Eastern Arabia has grown tremendously, this book still provides a useful introduction to our local insects. Fortunately, a copy was held in the Al Ain Chapter's library. As you can see from the scan of the front cover, it is well used.



As I got interested in insects, I photographed the pages and built a PDF copy of the book. Later I had occasion to contact Mr. Pittaway on another topic and asked him if it might be possible to make the PDF available to others. He consulted Mr. Walker's heirs and let me know that all were enthusiastic about having the resource available again. As copyright holders, they have granted permission for us to post this on the ENHG web site. They are also trying to see if there are other sources available to build a better quality PDF. Apparently some of the plates were presented to Prince Abdullah Bin Faisal Bin Turki who sponsored the publication. For now, we have the version using the Al Ain Chapter's copy available at:

<http://www.enhg.org/resources/other/IOEA.htm>

The file 14.2MB, so you may want to save the file locally by right-clicking and saving the PDF rather than just clicking on the link.

Tony Pittaway maintains three sites that might be of interest:

Spingidae of the Western Palaearctic (<http://tpittaway.tripod.com/sphinx/list.htm>) which covers the hawkmoths of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East

Spingidae of the Eastern Palaearctic (<http://tpittaway.tripod.com/china/china.htm>) which covers the hawkmoths of Siberia, Mongolia, China, Korea and Japan

Saturniidae of Europe (<http://tpittaway.tripod.com/silk/satlist.htm>), the European members of silkmoths, a family of large moths that includes the Luna Moth. *Many thanks to Bob Reimer.*

Natural History Book Fair

Motivate Publishing hosted a book fair at the last ENHG general meeting bringing dozens of titles to Al Ain for sale to members at significantly discounted prices. As Harvey noted at the meeting, Motivate is pleased to extend this offer to all Natural History Group members.

How can you take advantage of this offer? To purchase books from the website, you must create an account (a valid email address and password); otherwise, you can only browse the Motivate catalogue. When you have created an account, follow these steps:

First, go the Motivate Publishing website at www.booksarabia.com

Use the search function if you know the title(s) of the book(s) you are looking for, or use the menu system to find books you'd like to order.

Use the 'add to shopping cart' function to reserve a copy of the book(s) you wish to purchase.

Proceed to the 'check out' page. When completing the page, enter the code "ENHG" in the box marked promotions to earn the 25% discount. All books you order are delivered free of charge in the UAE. *Thanks to Brien Holmes.*



	name	tel home	tel office	fax
Chairman	Gary Feulner messages: 306 5300	306 5570	330 3600	330 3550
Vice Chairman	Valerie Chalmers email: valeriechalmers@gmail.com	349 4816		340 0990
Treasurer	Lena Linton email: linton@mailme.ae	050-474 3595		
Membership Secretary	Anindita Radhakrishna email: anin@emirates.net.ae	282 3952	050-656 9165	
Speaker Co-ordinator	Angela Manthorpe email: manthorpe2005@yahoo.co.uk	288 6232	050-645 1743	
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Pradeep Radhakrishna email: wgarnet@emirates.net.ae	282 3952	050-450 8496	
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Jenny Hill email: jennyhill76@hotmail.com		050 8861508	
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Sandhya Prakash email: sandy_pi@yahoo.com	050-5512481		348 2868
Special Projects	Beryl Comar email: comar@emirates.net.ae	344 2243	344 2243	
Newsletter Editor	Anne Millen email: pvana@emirates.net.ae	394 7076	no calls please	394 7075
Publisher	Peter van Amsterdam email: pvana@emirates.net.ae	394 7076	335 5495	394 7075
Librarian	<i>Librarian needed!</i>			
Book Sales				
Postmaster	Sandi Ellis email:peterjon@emirates.net.ae	050-644 2682		
Chief Engineer	Jesse Ellis email:peterjon@emirates.net.ae	050-8993413		

It's Still Worth Birding

T'was a beautiful morning, cool with blue skies and no hint of the rain that besieged Dubai the previous day. Seven twitchers joined David Bradford for his guided tour of the renowned (for birds, that is) Pivot Fields, adjacent to Dubai's sewerage plant. Neither daunted by the slight odour, nor phased by the hooting of horns from the effluent lorries, we found it an utter delight to watch so many birds and, most importantly, to have an excellent tutor with infinite patience when asked repeatedly what species one was viewing.

Eight binoculars plus two powerful 'scopes, gave us a view of a grand total of 44 varieties - mostly at our first port of call but also at Ras Al Khor. The Pivot Fields (better known to us 'oldies' as The Wimpey Pits) are, alas, being encircled by a massive concrete wall. Until the sanctuary is open to the public, the

passing viewer will be denied former delights but we were most fortunate to spy, amongst gulls various, a purple heron. Marsh harriers were with us all morning but the highlight, at Ras Al Khor, was sighting spotted eagles making excellent use of the thermals.

Also seen: black-winged stilt, black-tailed godwit, Caspian tern, collared dove, common starling, crested lark, egret (great white & little), lapwing (common European & red-wattled), flamingo, goose, grey francolin, plover (grey & white-tailed), gull, hoopoe, heron (grey, purple & reef), house sparrow, Indian roller, isabelline wheat-ear, little green bee-eater, mallard,

mynah (common & bank) pallid swift, pin-tailed snipe, pipit (Richard's & water), sand grouse, Siberian stonechat, sky lark, shrike (isabelline & southern grey), Temminck's stint, wagtail (citrine, pied, white & yellow), and lastly, white-cheeked bulbul. *Report by Di.*

Look the Part

The DNHG has navy blue sweat shirts, with the DNHG emblem embroidered in silver. Sizes: Large and Extra Large Dh65/- each, and silver grey polo shirts with the DNHG emblem embroidered in black. Sizes: Medium, Large and Extra Large Dh50/- each. The quality of both items is excellent. See Val Chalmers at the next meeting.

Membership Reminder !

Please note that receipt of the Gazette and entitlement to participate in field trip depends on current membership. If you have not renewed your membership by our

January meeting, we remove your name from the list of current members, removing these entitlements. Contact our membership secretary Anin, or Lena Linton (details for both above) to renew.

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

11 Jan Biodiversity & Conservation in Dubai - Mohammed Anisuzzaman Khan

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

10 Jan Desert Driving

17 Jan Shelling

24 Jan Mountain Ecology Hike (to be confirmed)

31 Jan Temple Walk

Early Feb Oases / Plantations with ENHG (to be confirmed)

25 - 28 Feb Masirah Island

21 Mar Bastakia Windtowers Walk

26 - 28 Mar InterEmirates Weekend at Khor Fakkan

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