

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Dr. Reza Khan is the winner of this year's Sheikh Mubarak Award, given annually by the ENHG, Abu Dhabi, to a professional who has made an outstanding contribution to nature conservation or natural history and its popularisation in the UAE. Reza received his award in May at a presentation by ENHG Patron H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan, the UAE Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research and Chancellor of UAE University. In addition to his duties as Director of Dubai Zoo, Reza's recent research projects have included conservation studies of rare frogs and of the white-winged duck, both in his native Bangladesh.

Traveling on leave in the U.S., **Gary Feulner** stopped in Philadelphia to have lunch with scorpion taxonomist Graeme Lowe, who is studying the scorpion fauna of Oman, where he blacklighted extensively in the early 1990s. Gary also delivered a number of samples collected from the Hajar Mountains by himself and Dr. Mike Gillett of Al-Ain. These have been duly identified and represent six different species.

Anna and Peter Griffin, on a happily successful house search in France, drove into the mountains above Nice to spend a few days

with **Jill and Mike Oats**. Surrounded by the fragrant scent of wild thyme, rosemary and lavender, clutching a glass of rosé in one hand and binoculars in the other Jill and Mike recounted the natural history adventures around their home. The song of the nightingale, goldfinches, crested tits and sangliers (wild boar) visiting their garden and a short-toed eagle searching for prey in the valley below. In this peaceful corner they have found bee orchids and a myriad of other wild flowers and butterflies, as well as seeing their first three-toed skink. Turning stones produced black scorpions sleeping in the daytime warmth. Taking a picnic on the banks of the Esteron, a tributary of the Var, they watched dippers plunge into the cool azure water. Heaven? Judging from their happy, smiling faces – just about as close as you can get.

Amongst those leaving Dubai are **Jerry and Myrla Koenderink**. They are returning to Canada, and recently had a last nostalgic trip to the desert. They were rewarded by sighting gazelle tracks and two gazelles. We wish them well, along with everyone else who is going, and hope that ex-members will keep in contact and let us know what is happening in the environment in their home coun-

DNHG Membership

DNHG membership will be, from September 2001 when your next year's membership is due, Dhs. 50 for singles and Dhs. 100 for couples and families.

This is still the best bargain in town! You can join or renew at meetings (see Membership Secretary Fi Skennerton) 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.) Membership is valid from September 2001 to September 2002.

DNHG membership entitles you to participate in field trips and helps pay for our lecture hall, publication and distribution of our monthly newsletter, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects. Our new fee will allow us to find a more permanent home for the library, and a more convenient venue for our meetings.

This month's Contributors

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

Jean Allan
Gary Feulner
Marijcke Jongbloed



Field Trips etc ...

Come September....

Many interesting trip have been proposed for the new season, but most are as yet subject to confirmation. Keep in e.mail contact with the Field Trip Coordinators if you are interested in them.

Salalah 5-7 September

Fi Skennerton will lead this two-and-a-half day trip to Dhofar Province, Oman, at the end of the hareef. Fi is researching the best arrangements for travel and accommodation. Contact Fi on her e.mail address for details.

Ajban Palace Nature Reserve, Abu Dhabi Late September

This will be a day trip as it is near Sweihan, within easy driving distance of Dubai. Details in our next *Gazelle*.

Bird watching with David Snelling Early October

Details of this fun day out will appear in our September *Gazelle*.

Arabian Horse Breeding Centre, Al Awir Early October

Fi Skennerton and Marijcke Jongbloed will arrange to visit to the Centre. This will be a day trip, and numbers may be limited. Contact Fi for details closer to the time.

Stargazing Thursday 18 October

Lamjed El Kefi will conduct one of his wonderful tours of the universe from the desert outside Dubai, in the evening. Bring your own bin-

oculars, but queue for a turn at Lamjed's amazing telescope.

Wadi Bih Friday 19 October

Peter van Amsterdam will lead a day trip through spectacular Wadi Bih, culminating in a swim at Dibba beach. More details in September's *Gazelle*.

Wahiba Sands/Turtle Watching at Ras al Hadd, Oman 24-26 October

This popular trip will be repeated with the added benefits of all that was learned from the last one. It is a long drive, but a most rewarding experience and we plan to stay at the Nahar Tourist Resort. Marijcke Jongbloed will lead the trip, and can be contacted for details.

Forts of the Nizwa Plain, Oman 6-8 November

Peter van Amsterdam will lead this extensive exploration of Sulaif, Jabrin, Bahla and Nizwa forts, with many interesting little diversions, both intentional and not.

Fossilising Trip with Al Ain and Abu Dhabi Groups November/December

Valerie Chalmers will liase with Steve James to lead this trip to some of the very interesting fossilising areas in the Emirates. Watch this space.

Beach combing with Sandy November/December

Shell recorder Dr Sandy Fowler will lead one of his delightful days on the beaches of the UAE.. Sandy knows all the good shelling

spots and can answer all your questions. As well, you will come home with some beautiful specimens to display.

Reminder

While your are away for the summer, you can follow the bird-watching action week-by-week in *Twitchers' Guide*, www.uaeinterac.com. If you see any interesting birds here in the UAE, you can report to *Twitchers' Guide* via Simon Aspinall and Peter Hellyer at hellyer@emirates.net.ae or Colin Richardson at colinr@emirates.net.ae.

* If you are leaving permanently, please let us know! We wish you all well for the future.

Our Next Event

The End of Season Get-Together will be held in the Oasis Room at the Dubai Country Club on Thursday 21st June at 7.30 for 8.00pm.

The tickets cost Dirhams 65/- per person and this will include a delicious buffet meal and two bottles of wine per table.

A photographic competition is held each year, and the DNHG Trophy awarded to the winner. Members are invited to enter one (returnable) print on any natural history subject from anywhere in the world. There is also a wide-ranging Natural History Quiz, with surprise prizes.

If you do not already have your tickets, contact Valerie Chalmers, but be quick! It's popular. Valerie can be reached on 04 - 349 4816 out of working hours, or faxed on 04 - 398 3727.



Toad Heaven

A little while ago, Rob and Jean Allan were intrigued to see a couple of toads, one small, the other larger, apparently marooned on a dusty rock surrounded by very dry inhospitable ground, not far from the lovely big tree at the start of the scramble to the Hanging Gardens. Feeling somewhat sorry for the animals, they drew closer and were amused to discover that, far from being desperate survivors, the toads were in fact in toad heaven.

A steaming pile of droppings (donkey?) had been deposited beside the rock, attracting several varieties of fly. Quite a few of these were of the fat and juicy sort, and the toads were gleefully engaged in stalking and tackling them. The nearest water at the time was at least 50m away. Do toads have a good sense of smell, or had they been lurking beneath the rock in happy expectation?

This area is always interesting to visit and obviously popular, as evidenced by the volume of rubbish left lying under the tree. Disposable nappies abandoned near water-courses are too revolting for words. Jean and Rob picked all the rubbish up, and although they said it seemed an exercise in futility, the editor gives them 10 out of 10.

Exploring the Sabkha Matti

The Sabkha Matti in westernmost Abu Dhabi emirate is the largest and most notorious sabkha (salt flats) in the world, stretching inland from the coast for more than 100 km into the Empty Quarter. The explorer Wilfred Thesiger wrote of his difficult and tedious crossing, made more unpleasant by days of steady drizzle. In late March, several natural history group members from Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Al-Ain took advantage of the continuing dry spell to try to investigate the flora, fauna and geology

of the Sabkha Matti in relative safety, using a route handed down from the late Bish Brown.

The sabkha environment is, by definition, an arid environment where the water table is nevertheless very close to the surface. This occurs over a vast area in the Sabkha Matti, where the elevation above sea level is no more than 50 meters, even 100 km inland. Moreover, the Sabkha Matti is thought to mark the historical outlet of major inland drainage areas. As a result, the lowest lying areas of the sabkha, between sparse modern sands and cemented fossil dunes and sediments, can still be treacherous even during a dry period. For more on this, see the last paragraph.

The flora was unquestionably suffering from the prolonged drought. Large areas of sand within the sabkha bore only the skeletons of dead *Zygophyllum* shrubs. Other bore seedlings of a handful of species. One site, however, attracted attention from a distance because of its cover of green. Apparently blessed by an isolated shower, an area of less than a kilometer square was home to seedlings of some 14 species of plants, annuals and perennials – most notably *Zygophyllum simplex*, *Zygophyllum* sp., *Cornulaca* sp., *Cyperus* sp., *Stipagrostis* sp., *Arnebia hispidissima* and a couple of unidentified daisies (*Launaea* spp.).

In contrast, in terms of fauna the sabkha was much richer than expected. In the course of no more than a day of actual observation, the party saw one monitor lizard and abundant tracks, three banded toad-headed agamas including a pregnant female and one photographed in its burrow (this species is a sabkha specialist), three sand vipers, *Cerastes cerastes*, all around outcrops of cemented ancient sand dunes, and the tracks of thread snakes within the "green" area. Is this apparent abundance the result of lack of human persecution in this remote area? Or do these animals actu-

ally find life easier in the sabkha than in the more mobile sands of Liwa and the Eastern Desert? Live insects were scarce (except for various flies) but a number of beetle carcasses were collected. Birds seen within the sabkha included several pied wheatears, a desert wheatear, short-toed lark, hoopoe lark, and a chiffchaff. The avian highlight was probably ostrich eggshell, which was abundant, reflecting a somewhat more hospitable climate in the not-so-distant past.

A word of warning: The expedition re-emphasized that the sabkha can be as difficult as the desert, or more, so all the basic rules apply. Travel with a party of at least three cars; one car can get stuck trying to help another. Be well equipped and have plenty of food and water in case you have to spend time on a rescue. Carry plenty of shovels to speed the digging. And have two or more heavy duty tow ropes (10 meters each, minimum), so that you have leeway to position a rescue vehicle on favorable ground, or to link two rescue vehicles in tandem. For those who have not tried walking in damp sabkha, it can be about like stomping grapes. And if your vehicle is in it, well, you can get that sinking feeling as the water oozes up into your footprints. *Report by Gary Feulner*

Saiq Plateau Trip

On the weekend of May 24 and 25 Peter van Amsterdam led another trip into Oman, this time to the Saiq plateau. This high altitude plateau is a restricted area, for which special permits have to be organised. Since the recent opening of a hotel on top of the mountain, this has become very easy, as the hotel will get the permits for its guests.

The trip there and back was long – really a bit too long for just a two-day trip. We met in Ibri, seven cars



Field Clips ...

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

cars with seventeen people, and drove up to Nizwa together, where we stopped to explore the fort. Then we traveled on to Birkat al Mauz and up Jebel Akhdar. The trip up the mountain was spectacular – at least what could be seen through the clouds of swirling dust. The only wildlife seen during the drive were Egyptian vultures in two or three separate locations. Some minor troubles with cars – one stalled perhaps choked with dust, and another had a flat tyre – did not take away from the enjoyment of the cool air and marvelous views on top of the mountains. Some people started exploring right away whilst others took it easy in preparation for the next day's forays.

Early next morning, a few people explored the direct surroundings of the hotel and found several species of plants and a nice array of gastropod fossils. After breakfast Peter and Anne led us first to a spectacular viewpoint, called Diana's point, as the princess was helicoptered there several years ago, to enjoy the view of a canyon and the terraced fields below the ancient villages on the opposite side. Again, many fossils were found in the black weathered-sandstone rocks. The thermals were being enjoyed by a pair of eagles. Since there were no bird experts among us, we have no idea what species they were.

The next stop was at a wadi called Wadi Bani Habib (the wadi of the nice people!) The steep scramble down the slope to the bottom of the wadi had been made easier by cement steps. Even so it was a fair bit down, not to mention back up later! The steps led down

through terraced gardens full of ferns, mosses, small wildflowers, large walnut trees and pomegranate bushes. Birds were heard but not easily spotted. While the majority of the group went down wadi to have a look at the old deserted village (the new village has been relocated at the top of the wadi bank), others stayed in the gardens to look for plants. Marijcke collected some 30 species of plants on the trip, most of them from the gardens.

The middle part of the day was spent on another, even higher plateau which was covered with ancient olive trees and magnificent junipers. John Fox, who has experience in measuring the age of olive trees from a project in Crete, estimated the age of some of the olive trees to be at least 300 to 500 years. The junipers were larger than Helena Reichert had ever seen, though she knows them well from her native Greece. Some of the group had lunch underneath the junipers and marveled at the clean air and the absence of flies.

The trip back was memorable for a severe sand-storm that made driving difficult and dangerous as well as giving a few people respiratory problems. The new Ibri hotel probably saw a lot of business that Friday afternoon, as we all stopped for coffee or tea there. Marijcke can't wait to get back to the Jebel Akhdar next year in March when the spring flowers are out!

Plants collected at the Saiq plateau:

Dodonea, probably *viscosa*
(dominant plant)

Solanum incanum

Solanum nigrum

Helianthemum salicifolium

An unknown ground covering plant, possibly a *Trianthemum* sp.

A composite, probably *Euryops arabicus* (Ghazanfar)

Teucrium sp.

Datura sp.

Geranium mascatense

Plantago sp.

Ricinus sp.

Composite possibly *Bidens* sp.

Two *Euphorbia* sp.

Dyerophytum indicum

Juniperus excelsa (as per Ghazanfar)

Olive (Ghazanfar: *Olea europea*)

Flowering tree, unknown

An unknown *amaranthus*

Recorded but not collected:

Calotropis procera – only along the roads

Ochradenus arabicus

Incense grass

Nerium oleander

Abutilon pannosum

Oxalis corniculata

Lycium shawii

Pergularia tomentosa

Adiantum capillus-veneris

Moss

Report by Marijcke Jongbloed



Snail Call

A reminder, especially for new members: your unwanted garden snails and slugs are wanted for scientific study and an accounting of the terrestrial snails of the UAE. All specimens will be gratefully accepted by Chairman Gary Feulner, and the caretaker at his building is no longer surprised by being asked to put specimen jars and shells in Gary's mailbox.

Contributors will be kept informed of progress and pedigrees. Suburban gardens are home to several native Arabian snails, but also to a number of introduced species. There have already been a few surprises. Dead shells are preferred; we'll follow up if you've got something unusual. It's easy. Just bag 'em and tag 'em! Please remember to record the location and the habitat, as well as your name, the date, and any remarks.



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

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

Archaeology - Volunteer required

Birds - David Snelling
res 3517187
fax 2950758
050 - 5526308

david.snelling@emirates.com

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

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi
res 06-583 003
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Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner
res 306 5570
fax 330 3550

Insects - Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
res 349 4016,
fax 398 3727

Plants - Valerie Chalmers

Mammals - Marijcke Jongbloed
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mjongbld@emirates.net.ae

The recorders are not necessarily scientific experts in their designated fields. In fact, most are not. However, they are interested and knowledgeable amateurs - please contact them if you have any interesting reports or queries.

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

Another Chukar Nest

It never rains, it pours. Peter Cunningham and I, with two Omani friends from the Musandam area, did a two-day hiking traverse in mid-March in the NE corner of the Ru'us al-Jibal. Our campsite for the Friday night before departure was an "obvious" spot - a large grassy field at about 1450 meters, in the shadow of Jebel Harim. One of our friends, Ali Suleiman, had used the field for a sedentary camp and picnic with friends just two days before, and recommended it. Because it is "obvious," it is littered, for which reason I have always camped elsewhere in this area. However, birds seemed to enjoy the site. Pied wheatears were cavorting, including a hovering behavior, by both males and females, that I have not seen before. Several other bird species were also present.

Ali saw that Peter and I were interested in the birds and asked if we'd like to see the Chukar (Arabic *safrad*) nest and eggs that he'd discovered nearby while looking for firewood on Wednesday. Peter's eyes widened. He had, only weeks before, joined Barbara Couldrey for an ill-fated return visit to what was probably Arabia's first reported Chukar nest, and he seemed surprised by the coincidence. I am getting too old to be surprised by anything. We went to see the nest, about 200 metres away.

There had been seven eggs when Ali first saw it. Now, two afternoons later, there were nine. Peter noted that this was consistent with the egg-a-day habit of some ground birds. The nest was within a spiny clump of *Convolvulus acanthocladus* (Barbara's nest was in *Artemisia herba-alba*), not really very well concealed once we'd noticed it. The eggs were cream colored and spotted, but not heavily so. Looking at them, we could understand why the light spotting had not caught Barbara's

attention. Hiking with Barbara, Peter had been prepared to weigh and measure the eggs and nest. Now we had to make do with hand measurements.

The immediate site was flat scrub ground - clumps of shrubs and stones with occasional taller *Dodonea* shrubs and small almond trees, all on a silty substrate adjacent to the grassy field. The nest was composed entirely of small sticks, with almost no other material apart from a single breast feather - this despite a treasure trove of litter from which to choose nearby. Ali had scoured it and found a broken wristwatch and a photograph among the plastic bags, chip bags, old rags, bottle tops, food and drink tins, leftovers, etc.

The earlier report had left in doubt whether the nests in question are Chukar, or whether they might be Sand Partridge. Recognizing that it was already a coincidence to have the only two reports of such nests arrive within a few weeks of each other, I felt it further lengthened the odds to suppose that they might be Sand Partridge rather than Chukar, when the latter are overwhelmingly the more abundant in the high Ru'us al-Jibal. Indeed, I have never personally seen Sand Partridge at higher elevations there, whereas Chukar are fairly common. Nevertheless, we took various photographs and sent them on to Michael Jennings of ABBA. His verdict: "These eggs look just like the eggs of the Red-Legged Partridge back home, typical *Alectoris*. I therefore have no more doubts that the nest is that of a Chukar." Case closed.

Report by Gary Feulner





Remembrance of Things Past: P.R.M. Aucher-Eloy

In an era when we can drive about in the local mountains in air-conditioned comfort, or at least drive right up to the start of the trail, it's easy to forget the hardships faced by early scientific explorers of the mountains of the UAE and northern Oman. The French plant collector Piere Remi Martin Aucher-Eloy was one of these. He made the first botanical excursion to Oman in March and April 1838, travelling on foot and by donkey in and over the Jebel Akhdar. His collection of more than 200 specimens, many of them new to science, was described by Edmond Boissier in his *Flora Orientalis* (1867-1888), which remains a standard reference.

It wasn't easy. Of the precipitous ascent to the Saiq Plateau from Wadi Mistal, Aucher-Eloy wrote (in translation): "We climbed the mountain for two hours following an extremely steep path and set up camp near the village of Oukend [Waken]. Palm trees had by then disappeared and temperate zone plants appeared. I climbed as high as I could, but I could not reach the summit of the mountain. I kept coming upon precipitous rocks which proved to be insurmountable obstacles." In a professional botanical article on the genus *Phagnalon* in Arabia, Qaiser and Lack (1985) digressed to describe Aucher-Eloy's most ambitious expedition to the Jebel Akhdar in late March 1838, travelling with no less than 12 donkeys to transport food and luggage and 16 people to accompany him. Of the vegetation he saw, Aucher-Eloy wrote (again in translation): "I discover on this trip many new plants. All is unknown to me from elsewhere; scarcely do I recognize from time to time a plant from Egypt or the Sinai."

He reached Nizwa on March 30, but as Qaiser and Lack elaborate:

"Montant et descendant au milieu d'horrible rochers steriles' (Aucher-Eloy 1838) he had exhausted himself and suffered from recurrent fever attacks; after a few days of rest he continued his expedition to Matrak, where he arrived in a bad state of health, having also torn his shoes and thus being forced to march on the pointed rocks with bleeding bare feet. Reaching Maskat on April 11th 1838 after a stormy passage by boat another strong fever attack set in, which left Aucher-Eloy almost unconscious. . . . Only a few months later Aucher-Eloy died in Esfahan in Iran." He is remembered, however, in a very appropriate and timeless fashion, by the scientific names of numerous plants (no fewer than nine found in the UAE) which carry the specific name *aucheri* or *aucheriana*, in honor of their discoverer.

Report by Gary Feulner

How to Build a Stone House

The markets may be down and it ain't rained much for the past three and a half years, but there's hope in the high Musandam. Significant new construction was underway this spring in at least three terraced settlements hours from the nearest vehicle track – Lahsah (400m) in upper Wadi Shah, Taff (1000m) above Wadi Kida'ah and Difan (725m) above Wadi Khabb. Lahsah has been permanently occupied by expatriate labor, mostly from NW Pakistan, for several years and extensive new fields are now being cleared. Supplies are carried in by hand and more recently by donkey train from the roadhead about an hour away.

In Wadi Kida'ah, the "abandoned" village at the head of the road is being refurbished and also serves as a staging post. The trail to Taff is too rough and steep for animals, so goods are carried by hand. These are packaged and carried in large bundles to where the trail

leaves the wadi; there they are broken down into smaller loads for the steep ascent via rubble slopes and stone steps.

At Difan, it was possible to see a stone house, very like the traditional *bayt al-qufl*, actively under construction, and to see in particular how it is possible to shape and manoeuvre large stones into position for the foundations and the lower tiers of the walls. A limestone block about 75cm x 45cm x 45cm was shaped at the margins with a small sledgehammer, by a single individual. To put it into place atop an existing row of stones, it was rolled onto a ramp made of three 4 x 4 beams. This was accomplished by three men aided by a meter-long steel crowbar. Once the block was on the ramp, the three men rolled it up the ramp while two other men raised the lower ends of the beams to lessen the gradient. Smaller pieces of rock were then used as temporary wedges and safety wedges to ease the block off the beams and onto the wall.

It was manoeuvred into its final position slowly and precisely, with the aid of additional wedges and the crowbar. One must nevertheless marvel at the final fit, which in this case matched an adjacent block whose face was somewhat off the perpendicular. Had this been measured in advance? If so, it had been very skillfully done. The 4 x 4 timbers will presumably become roof beams when the walls are complete.

At the moment, cultivation at Difan appears to be primarily palms, but there were also a field of barley (plus a modern version of a traditional grinding hut, complete with a steel pivot shaft overhead) and a small patch of pumpkins. Moreover, it was understood that the laborers had even managed to grow a small quantity of rice, despite my own incredulity and despite their admission that it needed a *lot* of water. Rice, they



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said, was a very important food. At least some of the silt for the fields at Difan is collected locally by the arduous process of sieving out gravel from Wadi Kharras, a rugged wadi that rises to some 650m adjacent to Difan.
Report by Gary Feulner

Book Reviews:

The Oxford Companion to the Earth

Members have sometimes inquired about good general reference books on geology. Chairman Gary Feulner, a geologist manqué, now recommends *The Oxford Companion to the Earth* as a volume to which one can turn for information, enlightenment, enjoyment, and good counsel. It was written with a broad readership in mind and is intended as a source of concise, readable and stimulating accounts of the many phenom-

ena, processes and natural materials that form and shape the earth. Coverage includes not only traditional geology but also most of earth science – climatology, geochemistry, geophysics, paleontology and paleobiology, glaciology, soil science, meteorology and natural resources, as well as the history of earth science. It is comprehensively cross-indexed and includes suggestions for further reading on most subjects. Individual entries range from Acid Rain, Aragonite and Archeological Geology through Jet Streams, Joints and Jointing and Jokulhlaup, to Yardangs, Zinc Deposits and Zone Fossils. Many entries are longer treatments, e.g., Isotopic Dating, Radioactive Waste Management and Vegetation and Climatic Change. At 1100 pages, this is not a volume to rush through, but to consult again and again.

Arabian Wildlife *Issue 10, Spring 2001*

The Spring issue of *Arabian Wildlife* is, like the last, a visual feast, and even the ads are a delight. The articles are packed with interesting information, presented readably and well-linked to the illustrations. A special series for younger readers, entitled Arabian Discovery Programme, deals with corals but this is by no means the only article of interest to children. There is, for example, the story of a fox who lives with a family in Saudi Arabia. Where necessary, there are fact boxes with the well researched articles and details of information sources. Fresh news of conservation efforts in Arabia, book reviews, travel features and articles on fruit bats, waders, rodents and Bahrain's terrapins are a few of the delights of this issue.

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

Lectures at Jumeirah English Speaking School, Gymnasium 7.30 pm for 8.00 pm

September 16 Hanne and Jens Eriksen from Oman: From Equator to Antarctica (a sound and light production).

Field Trips (DNHG members only, please).

5-7 September Salalah with Fi Skennerton

Late September Ajban Palace Nature Reserve

Early October Bird Watching with David Snelling

Early October Arabian Horse Breeding Centre, Al Awir

18 October Stargazing with Lamjed el Kefi

19 October Wadi Bih with Peter van Amsterdam

24-26 October Wahiba Sands/Turtle Watching at Ras al Hadd

6-8 November Forts of the Nizwa Plain, Oman

Nov/Dec. Fossiling Trip with Al Ain and Abu Dhabi Groups

Nov/Dec. Beachcombing with Dr Sandy Fowler