

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Björn Jordan, who was for two and a half years responsible for small mammals at the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife, returned to his native Germany in July to resume his former job, with additional responsibilities including international liaison. He wrote recently to update us on his activities and mentions that his first book, about the Lesser Jerboas, has now been published in Germany. It focuses mainly on the husbandry and breeding of Jerboas and at the moment it is available only in German. More information is available at: http://www.ms-verlag.de/Art-fuer-Art.295.0.html?&tt_products=2105. Björn has also been involved in an article about small cats from Arabia and in 2010 he will take over the position as editor-in-chief of the magazine of Nuremberg Zoo, where he has worked on a volunteer basis for more than 15 years. Although he is happy with his return home, he admits that misses the UAE's sunshine and the opportunity to explore the desert.

Narayan Karki briefly interrupted his normal duties at the Dubai World Trade Centre Apartments to collect an injured moth of a large and colourful variety. It proved to be the distinctive Yellow Hindwing *Ophiusa tirhaca*, one of the largest moths that can be found locally, other than hawkmoths.



Yellow hindwing (*Ophiusa tirhaca*)

The species was recently confirmed in the UAE in *Arthropod Fauna of the UAE* (van Harten, ed., 2009). It is also known from eastern Saudi Arabia and northern Oman and is said in *Insects of Eastern Arabia* (Walker & Pittaway 1987) to be found typically in gardens. The damaged left forewing of the specimen shows the attractive hindwing in its entirety. *Report by Gary Feulner*

Ex-members **Susy** and **Jim Balderstone** were recently back in Dubai and were struck by the state of the desert closer in. Susy stumbled over a find that perhaps explained the shattered glass along the top of an otherwise lovely dune - four live degrading rounds of ammunition. This time their trusty black plastic bag was just not up to it!



DNHG Membership

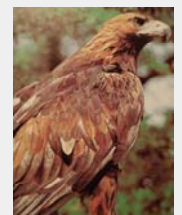
DNHG Membership remains a bargain at Dh.100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. You can join or renew at our meetings or by sending us your details and a cheque made out to: Lloyds TSB Bank account no. 60600669933501. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG. Please also note our account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

Nancy Papathanasopoulou
Patricia Wand, Ulrike Andorff and Michelle Sinclair
Alan F. Rees
Valerie Chalmers
Gary Feulner



Golden Eagle
by Gary Feulner

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



Cool Weather Trips

Shelling with Anne Millen Fri 29 January

This may have to be to the East Coast as Rams and Jazira al Hamra beaches are now history. Perhaps, with an overnight stay, it could be combined with the Three Forts trip &/or Khor Kalba depending on the tides. If you'd like to come, please register with Anne at pvana@emirates.net.ae

Three Forts trip with Amrik Singh Sat 30 January

Valerie Chalmers is organising this trip to the three Fujeirah forts, and depending on the tides on that day, it may be a good time to take a quick look, after the forts, at Khor Kalba as well. Contact Val Chalmers for registration on valeriechalmers@gmail.com

Mountain Nature Hike with Gary Feulner Mid February

As yet, we have no details, but these are usually walks for the moderately to very fit, and usually in the hinterland of RAK. Watch this space.

The InterEmirates Weekend, held by ENHG Al Ain 25 - 27 February

This is a wonderful weekend of trips, workshops, shared knowledge and fun. Early booking is essential, as Al Ain hotels are always busy. As soon as we have more information, we will let you know. This will be well in time to make your bookings.

Temple Walk with Sandhya Sat 27 March

Those who missed the last walk can catch up on the mysteries of the lanes of Bur Dubai. Please register with Sandhya Prakash on email: sandy_pi@yahoo.com

Notices:

Welcome to Ajmal Hasan

We are happy to announce that Ajmal Hasan has volunteered to be our Chief Engineer. Ajmal has a Diploma in Software Engineering from Bangalore University and lists amongst his interests wildlife (especially reptiles as he has some experience in handling snakes, both in the wild and in captivity), astronomy, and, when the weather is too hot for these, etymology and philology. He is currently Academic Coordinator / Post Graduate Studies, Sharjah Campus, Khalifa University of Science, Technology & Research (KUSTAR).

Conference on Biodiversity Conservation in the Arabian Peninsular

The first Conference on Biodiversity Conservation in the Arabian Peninsular has been announced by the Environment and Protected Areas Authority (EPAA), to be held on 3rd and 4th February at the American University of Sharjah. Dr Simon Stewart, Chairman of the IUCN is the keynote speaker with Dr Fareed Krupp, Dr Mark Stanley-Price, Dr Mohammed Shobrak and Dr Shahina Ghazanfar addressing their specialist subjects.

You are welcome to attend, but space is limited so you will need to register now. Their website (www.biodiversityconference.com) provides the registration form and information on the conference and the programme. Be quick!

... And the Answer to Everyone's Question

Following his spectacular presentation on UAE flora and fauna, Dick Hornby wrote, "My camera is a Canon Powershot S5IS. It has 8 megapixels and a 12x zoom, so it is nothing really fancy. Probably about AED 2000 now." Thank you, Dick!

February's TWO Speakers

Dr. John Reynolds, Director of the Oligochaetology Laboratory and Editor-in-Chief of *Megadrillogica*, the only world journal devoted solely to earthworm research, was born in Montreal and completed his B. Sc in biology, agriculture and chemistry and M.Sc in entomology, genetics and plant breeding in Canada. He then went on to do his Ph.D. in ecology, taxonomy, soil science, and biogeography at the University of Tennessee, post-doctoral studies at the Acarology Institute, Ohio State University, an LL.B. Common Law at the University of New Brunswick, and a Diploma in Police Science from Holland College.

Dr Reynolds has lectured and taught at numerous universities in North America, South America, Africa and Asia. He is author of 259 books and journal articles which have appeared in over 55 publications covering 12 disciplines, which have appeared in whole or in part in 25 languages. He has also appeared on numerous radio and television shows. He is currently Research Associate in the Department of Integrated Biology at the University of Guelph and the Department of Natural Science at the New Brunswick Museum in Saint John.

AND ...

Miles Barton, Series Producer for the BBC Natural History Unit has worked for over 20 years producing films for *Wildlife on One*, *Natural World* and the *Life of Birds*. He was the series producer on *Journey of Life* and *Wild New World* and most recently David Attenborough's BAFTA award winning series, *Life in Cold Blood*. Currently he is working on *Frozen Planet*, a follow up to *Planet Earth* on the wildlife and landscape of the polar regions.



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 to be scanned.

A Walk through Sharjah

Exploring Sharjah on foot avoids the problems of heavy traffic. Wind your way to the heritage area on the Corniche and leave the car just past Al Mareija Square near the simple mosque or at the first available spot off Corniche Rd. Even without the expert guidance of Peter Jackson, you will discover a side of Sharjah that seldom makes the news yet gives depth to your understanding of life in the UAE through the last few centuries. From the time of early trading with the East, through the settlement of the Qawassim seafaring tribe and into the first half of the 19th century, Sharjah was an important port on the lower Arabian Gulf.

Sharjah, means 'rising sun' and its history goes back more than 6,000 years. The people of historical Sharjah made their living through maritime trade, farming, goat-herding, hunting, pearling and fishing. The town began in the early 1500s as a fishing, maritime, farming and trading centre, and these occupations persist today.



Wooden wind tower, Bait Bin Jarsh

Our first stop was at Bait Bin Jarsh which has an unusual wind tower

made of wood. Construction techniques used in historic Sharjah buildings reflect the available materials, the architectural style of the time and the builders who were concentrated in certain families. Many walls were formed using compacted coral, cut into large chunks that were mined from offshore islands. A mixture of lime, sea sand and gypsum acted like glue to hold the large seastone pieces together and the mass was gradually shaped into a wall.



Carefully wedged coral blocks, plastered together and faced

The builders used scaffolding on one side of the wall, finishing that side and reaching over to finish the other side as well. In this manner, they added about 30 cm to the wall per day and produced a plastered surface displaying a layering effect. Seastone (large coral blocks) was often layered in a herring bone fashion to increase the strength of the wall. These techniques were also used in the first permanent houses built in Sharjah in the 19th century. Previously dwellings were constructed of date palm fronds, often on top of stone foundations, which were somewhat more permanent than tents.

The Bait Bin Jarsh home shows good examples of construction techniques common to this era and also displays the use of chandals (beams which also determined the width of a room) and areesh (woven date palm fronds) used for ceiling construction and cover. Chandals, which are round mangrove poles were imported from East Africa. Following World War II, hardwood beams imported

from India were more commonly used than chandals.



Bait Bin Jarsh awaiting restoration

Efforts and experiments are constantly being made to improve reconstruction and restoration techniques and some restored buildings in Sharjah's heritage area will have to be re-done to show the true architecture of the time in which they were built. For example, some restored buildings have reconstructed windows much higher than they should be. Traditionally many window ledges were close to ground level. Restoration of the Saladin mosque and Al Khan fishing village watch tower are examples where better use of traditional materials and restoration techniques could have been implemented.

The walk through old Sharjah would not have been complete without a stop at the residence, built around 1845, of Obaid bin Essa bin Ali bin Nasser Shamsi, a respected pearl merchant with businesses in India and Paris. The architecture reflects typical pan-Gulf Arabic design with a spacious court yard (which in former times would have had date palm trees offering plenty of shade) in which camels and livestock were kept.



Courtyard



The main rooms of the house overlooked the large courtyard. The kitchen had its own separate courtyard and the majlis was in a separate building. Unusual is the bridge, built for security reasons, leading from the main house first floor to the adjacent Eslah school. The house was enlarged three times, perhaps as Obaid bin Essa bin Ali bin Nasser Shamsi had three wives and 10 children; this may also explain the three entrances and three staircases to the upper floor with three rooms. On the ground floor are 11 rooms including bedrooms and a kitchen with a separate court yard and a well with a toilet just above. The well was solely used for washing and cleaning. The drinking water came by donkey from an inland well some 8km away.



The furniture is limited to raised beds, narrow wardrobes, cushions on the floor, pearl chests, and swords and daggers on the walls. The exhibition of children's toys on the 1st floor reminded us of our own childhoods (photo p.1).

Sitting in the shade of the terrace, enjoying the taste of cardamom flavored coffee and dates kindly offered by the administration of the Al Naboodah residence, one can easily be transported back in time and imagine the former Arabic life.

Building materials used were typical of the period incorporating coral, chandals from East Africa and hardwood beams from India, date palm leaves (areesh) and hemp ropes for the roofs, teak for doors and hard wood pillars from India. The sectioned terraces (ewans) on the upper floors were typically more open to catch every breeze and this is where the family

would sleep during the hot summer season. Instead of wind towers, hidden shafts, known as wind scoops (baadkash) captured breezes from the roof and directed them into the lower ground level through a double section of wall, thereby supplying the ground level rooms with cooler air.



Al Hisn, Sharjah

Much of the preservation and reconstruction of historic Sharjah is credited to His Highness Doctor Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qassimi, the Ruler of Sharjah, who has done much to save buildings, develop museums and promote education. In 1968, when he was still a student in Cairo, he rushed back to Sharjah in a bid to rescue Al Hisn, the famous fort, (built in 1820 with the round towers) from total destruction. He managed to save one tower and most of the doors, shutters and fittings which he carefully inventoried for their eventual reintroduction into the reconstruction of the fort in the 1990's. Because His Highness Doctor Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qassimi, had been a frequent visitor to the fort during his child hood he was able to be of great help with the fort's reconstruction.

We walked to the souq area and again our attention was brought to the difference in Khaleeji and Bastak decorations used in architecture en route to the souq area. Bastak decorations incorporate floral and birdlike designs in their ar-

chitecture, while Khaleeji decoration use geometric designs. The souq area is mentioned in William Palgrave's book from the 19th century, *Travels through Arabia* and was, in his time, situated on the water's edge. Since then much land has been reclaimed and the souq is quite a distance from the dockside still crowded with many fishing and trading dhows.

Our final visit was to the Al Khan fishing village which until 2003 was still inhabited, though demolition of this area started some thirty years ago. Today only two watch towers of the many watch towers originally constructed in this area remain. One has been restored and the other is in the process of being restored.



Watch tower, Al Khan fishing village

The second watch tower is being more carefully restored as on-site archaeologists are experimenting with ratios of seasand, stone and lime to create the correct mortar mix for the plastering and bonding the seastone of the tower. The concrete structure incorrectly placed at the base of the tower is causing problems for proper reinforcement of the tower. At the moment the tower is being held in place by iron scaffolding type braces. Stacked plastic bags filled with sand are being used very effectively throughout this fishing complex to prop crumbling walls.

The remains of the house of Al Maghawi, a pearl merchant, can be seen and also the Sheikh's resi-



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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.



dence. Sadly much of the fishing village has been quite comprehensively demolished and it is still being decided how much restoration of this area will actually take place.



Successful temporary support of sandbags

Interested readers and those who missed this truly excellent walking tour lead by Peter Jackson can learn more details from *Wind-tower*, by Anne Coles and Peter Jackson (2007) and various brochures available at the historic buildings and museums. *Report by Patricia Wand, Ulrike Andorff and Michelle Sinclair, photographs by Valerie Chalmers*

Kuwait Turtle Nesting Season 2009: Low and Challenging!

It has been a challenging monitoring season for the Kuwait Turtle Conservation Project. Kick-started in July 2008 under sponsorship of TOTAL Foundation and TOTAL Kuwait, in close cooperation with the Voluntary Work Center Kuwait (especially its active Senyar team) as well as The Scientific Center of Kuwait, KTCP sent its international teams of researchers, turtling apprentices and volunteers to Qaru and Umm Al-Maradim islands. The team missions were carried out in regular intervals in the last six months in order to learn more about turtles in the country who seem to prefer the sandy beaches of these tiny islets for nesting every year. Unlike last year, a "scouting" year of investigation, this year more gear was packed in the team's luggage, including satellite transmitters (Kiwisat), flipper tags and temperature and humidity measuring i-buttons.

In order to responsibly mark the beginning of the nesting season, teams began visiting the islands as early as March 2009 and their most recent field trip was carried out in the beginning of October. Monitoring was done with dedication and discipline, the teams working on land and in the water, sometimes around the clock with little or no sleep, all members sharing the same determination to decipher the turtles' foraging, mating, nesting and hatching habits on the islets as well as the careful description of their beach and marine ecosystems.



Observing a turtle on the beach

A lot of information about the marine ecosystems encompassing the islands was obtained, with vibrant reefs hosting more than 87 fish species (many of which are spawning, as we established in our numerous underwater explorations and from the sight of juveniles of many species) as well as many crustaceans and invertebrates which will hopefully be described in following articles. Umm Al-Maradim was revealed as a spot of importance for birdlife, as in the end of March more than 45 bird species were spotted and photographed on its 65 hectares.

Oil seeps were commonly observed from the seabed in Qaru Island this year, the sea life seeming unaffected by it. Sand temperatures were, on average, lower than last year; maximums measured at noon were not over 50 degrees Celsius and unlike last year, humidity levels reached 75% in August.

The turtles did not come in high numbers. Nine pits of hawksbill turtles were discovered in Umm Al-Maradim island from mid-May



till the end of June. Then, after a long pause of three months, researchers discovered another pit, which was probably a nest, in October. As we've suspected since last year, hawksbills in Kuwait seem to have two nesting seasons, an "early" and a "late" one, at least in Umm Al-Maradim. This year, unlike last, hawksbills nested in Qaru island as well. Nesting season here began at the end of May and continued throughout the month of June with eleven pits in Qaru. In both Qaru and Umm Al-Maradim, none of the hawksbills was seen nesting by the team. With the cooperation of the Coast Guard, however, some photos and a video were shown to the team, clearly demonstrating hawksbill turtles nesting. Further proof of hawksbills nesting in Qaru was given to KTCP in both July and August, with one dead hawksbill hatchling found on each of two different beaches during morning surveys. As no nesting females were encountered throughout the nesting season, no satellite transmitters were attached and it was decided to satellite tag green turtles during their own nesting season on Qaru island. An adult male hawksbill was encountered in near shore waters in Qaru in both July and August, seemingly foraging. It was the same animal both times, as photography has revealed.



Community involvement is important

Unlike last year, when the team found what was possibly a green turtle nest on Umm Al-Maradim, no such evidence arose this year. All pits were small and clearly hawksbill-like and the familiar large, deep green turtle pits made their appearance only on Qaru island in the first few days of July. The numbers of females remained low, often seen by night shift workers swimming in the shallows, but over several

nights, they (or she) seemed reluctant to emerge on to the beach. This was not the case last year, when on one night five turtles emerged almost at the same time and attempted to nest.

The eleven green turtle pits were all the evidence of the green turtle nesting season in Qaru, which is probably the only area in Kuwait where green turtles nest. One turtle was repeatedly encountered by the team during the early August mission. It was flipper tagged and satellite tagged, and three i-buttons were inserted in its nest. Unfortunately, the satellite transmitter fell off the carapace of the turtle sooner than expected so its migrations were not followed to the disappointment of the team.

As a result, and despite the continuous efforts of KTCP team members, the turtles were monitored but not flipper or satellite tagged to the desired extent. Hatching information about the marked green turtle nest of August 15th is hopefully to be provided soon, when the nest is dug out by researchers and the i-buttons retrieved.

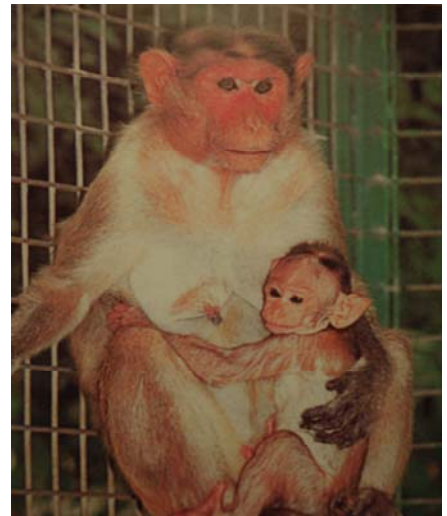


Environmental education session

In the following four months, the team will continue carrying out its Kuwait environmental education presentations to local schools. So far the teachers' community has responded to the team's offer with enthusiasm, in both government and private schools. The team has also explored Failaka Island for potential nesting grounds, following reports from the local population about sightings of turtles in both water and land. More about Failaka next month! *Thanks to Nancy Papatanasopoulou & Alan F. Rees* (www.kuwaitturtles.com).

Going to the Zoo Zoo Zoo

Dubai Zoo remains an oasis of calm within urban Dubai, heavily shaded and generally sedate, although occasionally punctuated by the roar of a lion, the animated squawks and mimicry of tropical birds (the African grey parrots in particular) or the social antics of the monkeys or great apes. The zoo draws young and old alike, most of them eager and engaged spectators.



Bonnet macaque

The zoo has made its peace with the repeated postponements of a move to new quarters and does an excellent job with the facilities at its disposal. One indication of this is the breeding success it has had with many animals, including flamingo and leopard. The information posted for the public reveals, however, that not all development has been planned. A number of zoo residents large and small are animals confiscated in transit in illegal international trade.

Some personal favourites are the "baby" giraffe (now some 12 feet tall) born in the zoo in 2000; the pair of Siberian tigers; the pair of gorillas (it is an arresting site to see the huge male swing from the apparatus in the enclosure overlooking Beach Road); the Egyptian fruit bats, that seem to remain awake by day and can be easily seen; the green monkeys and



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bonnet macaques (both of which include playful juveniles); and the Ruppell's sand fox, who still keeps a wary eye on his neighbours, the Nile crocodiles.



Bengal tiger

The zoo is also an excellent place to practice raptor identification on a close-up basis, with golden eagle, steppe eagle, short-toed eagle, lap-pet-faced vulture and another (I still need practice) to choose from.

A bargain at 2 dirhams, the zoo is readily accessible and makes a pleasant stop, whether for a short visit or a longer one. *Report and photographs by Gary Feulner*

Our Calotropis' Cousin

On a recent visit to Sri Lanka, Anne Millen and Peter van Amsterdam drove along the southern boundary of the Uda Walawe National Park. The elephants, now nurtured inside national parks dotted around the country to avoid destruction of crops and buildings and the farmers' revenge, have made something of a wreck of it. Outcast males sauntered along the fence hoping for tourists with bananas, and in the distance, through the sparse and devastated vegetation, herds could sometimes be glimpsed. We noticed a lot of *Calotropis*, not only in the park, but along the road.



Calotropis gigantean

Gary Feulner, when asked if it is the same one, replied, "It's a different *Calotropis*, *C. gigantean*, but obviously very similar. I first noticed it by roadsides outside Calcutta (en route to Sundarbans) and then just weeks ago in Kerala. From these sightings, and your own, it seems safe to say it too is a 'waste ground' or 'disturbed ground' plant ("ruderal"), like our *Calotropis*, *C. procera* (and the experts confirm this), but of wetter environments. Like ours, the milky sap is used for its toxic, anti-inflammatory and other properties (e.g., in tanning leather). It may have allelopathic properties (like *Eucalyptus*), i.e., its dead leaves and/or roots discourage nearby growth by other plants."



Calotropis procera

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

Feb 7	Dr. John W. Reynolds – Earthworms
Feb 21	Miles Barton, BBC Natural History Unit – David Attenborough's "Life in Cold Blood"
Mar 7	Dr. Drew Gardner – Bats
April 4	Dr. Susanne Hofstra – Ancient Mesopotamian & Mediterranean Scripts

Field Trips (Members only, please.)

Jan 15-16	Elephant Trackways, Western Abu Dhabi
Jan 29 (Fri)	Shelling on the East Coast
Jan 30 (Sat)	Three Forts, Fujeirah
Mid Feb	Mountain Walk
Feb 25-27	InterEmirates Weekend, ENHG Al Ain
Mar 27	Bur Dubai Temple Walk

Further field trips, details or changes may be announced or confirmed by e-mail circular.