

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعه

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

DNHG Membership

Narayan Karki was back in Dubai for a short visit in January and joined the DNHG hike up Jebel Sumayni. Participants admired his energy and especially enjoyed the bag of Nepali sweets he brought along. Narayan made several other natural history excursions while he was here, and some noteworthy observations will be reported in this and subsequent issues of the *Gazelle*.

He has wanted to go since it featured in the BBC's list of *Fifty Places to See Before You Die* and says, "It was worth taking a 12 hour trip with just my taxi driver in a very tense Middle East situation that could go bonkers any 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.)

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.

A Notice and a Celebration!

The DNHG's AGM, normally held annually at our March lecture, will be postponed this year until the April lecture. Members interested in serving on the Committee for the coming year, or assisting in other ways, should make their interest known to one of the existing Committee members.

And on February 16th, the DNHG reached its 25th anniversary! *Gazelle* will be bringing you a history in a future issue. We will be celebrating it at our April 3 meeting as well, by having an earlier than usual start (7.30), and serving cake to members. Please join us!

We will then hear our speakers for the evening, Rima and Ada Natoli who will present information about hawksbill turtles in Dubai and their genetics.

So for the important April 3 meeting, remember to come at 7.30pm and join us for celebratory cake!

This Month's Contributors

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

Heidi Struiksma and the p.6 eight
Mohammed Arfan Asif
Christine Verreydt
Sonja Lavrenčič
Dilshad Davood
Valerie Chalmers
Narayan Karki
Mairead Porter
Gary Feulner
Trish Cox



Narayan Karki ready to lend a hand at the boulder fall, Jebel Sumayni

Mohammed Arfan Asif recently visited Petra in Jordan which has been voted one of the New Seven Wonders of the World. He was bowled over by the colours of the rock and the skill of the architecture.

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



Donkey/Fox Wadi 25-26 Feb

Mike Lorrigan will lead his annual weekend trip that includes a visit to an excellent fossil site and calcite formations on Friday afternoon, followed by an overnight camp in the Hajar mountains. The camp will involve trying to spot foxes from the top of the wadi where the camp is located. Once abundant in the area, with plenty of night sightings, the foxes are now elusive. Musicians and singers particularly welcomed for the camp, though it doesn't help with the foxes.

The Saturday morning trek is about four hours long (including a stop for lunch) and winds in a circular scenic route through a variety of mountain scenery. You will need a moderate level of fitness to undertake it.

Trip limited to 10 vehicles. 4WD required. Further details will be sent to all participants. Not advised for very young children but older children welcomed (7/8+). To sign up please contact Valerie Chalmers: valeriechalmers@gmail.com

Kayaking/Boat Trip in Umm al Qawain Fri 4 March

Valerie has sent out an email with the details of this trip. The minimum number of people is 20; so far we have 15. Martina Fella is coordinating the trip but will be away until 20th February. Her e-mail address is martina_fella@hotmail.com For the moment, please e-mail Valerie on valeriechalmers@hotmail.com and she will put your names on the list and answer any queries until Martina returns. (But check her email sent on 11th February. It's all there.)

Marble Quarry at Hijari near Sohar, Oman Sat 19 March

Hans-Joachim Rau will take members to a working marble quarry in the village of Hijari and then to the factory in Sohar. Details will be con-

firmed by emails or at our next meeting.

And on the agenda for 2011...

For the following trips, details will be published/emailed as soon as known, but pencil them in now:

Forts of Dibba Oman (with a local fish lunch!) Sat 26 March (TBC)

Once this date is settled and details are made available, you need to be quick to book your place and sure that you want it. Money and numbers must be in a week beforehand.

Visit to EMEG, Ghantoot 2 or 9 April (TBC)

Plants at Mushrif Park / old radio mast with Gary & Val 8 April (TBC)

Overnight on Sir Abu Nu'air Fri 27 -Sat 28 May

Jebel Shams Camping Late April / early May / even June!

Archeological Exhibition, Al Jahili Fort Until May

There is an archaeological exhibition being held at Al Jahili Fort in Al Ain until May. It may be that the exhibition is self-explanatory, but we are hoping to arrange to take DNHG members to see tombs/archaeological sites as a follow-up. Watch this space.

Socotra direct from Sharjah, and Sana'a, Yemen

These two trips have been postponed to the end of 2011 because of political uncertainty. Sonja will keep us posted.



Our Next Speaker

Christian Velde was born in Germany, where he achieved a Masters Degree in Near Eastern Archaeology, Cuneiform Studies and European Prehistory at Goettingen University.

He became interested in the orient, archaeology, history and traditional buildings already as a child through books and frequent visits to castles in Germany, Switzerland and France with his parents, both members of the 'German Castle Society'.

His archaeological work took him from Germany to Italy, Syria, the United Arab Emirates and to the Kingdom of Bahrain, where he got married in the Anglican Church in Manama.

More than ten years experience as a tour guide brought him frequently to Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, UAE, Sultanate of Oman, Bahrain and Yemen, leading interested tourist groups for a German Tour Operator, specialising in archaeological study tours.

He started working in the UAE in Shimal, Ras al-Khaimah with the German Archaeological Mission from Goettingen University between 1985 - 1990, followed by several seasons of excavations with an Australian and Danish team in Tell Abraq, Umm al-Quwain in the 1990s.

Since 1998 he has been employed as the Resident Archaeologist at the Department of Antiquities and Museums by the Government of Ras al-Khaimah. He has undertaken many surveys and excavations on prehistoric and historic sites and monuments in this emirate. During the last ten years he has also focused on the protection and restoration of historical buildings.

He and his archaeologist wife share their time between the Gulf (October-April) and Europe (May-September).



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.

Visit To Dibba Plant Nursery

In November 2010, members of the DNHG visited the Dibba Plant Nursery. An early departure was necessary to reach our destination by 9.30 am. This, however, meant that the journey was straightforward and relatively traffic free.

When we reached the nursery, we found that Mr. Rashid Burshaid, Head of the Research Department at the Ministry of Environment and Water who manage the Dibba Plant Nursery, was delayed in coming to meet us. Fortunately for us, Mr. Dilshad Davood, Manager of Al-Rajhi Tissue Culture Laboratories, a joint venture with the Ministry of Environment and Water which is based at Dibba Plant Nursery, volunteered to look after us. He arranged a completely impromptu powerpoint presentation which showed the work which his company was doing in the grafting and cultivation of date palm species (Date Palm Micropropagation by Organogenesis Technique). This was very informative, and refreshments were most thoughtfully also provided by him. Then we were given a guided tour of the site where the palms were being tended. By the time we had enjoyed our tour, Mr. Rashid Burshaid had arrived. We then began our tour of the Nursery.



The DNHG Group with Mr Rashid Burshaid (right) Photograph by Mr. Dilshad Davood.

Dibba Plant Nursery covers an extremely large area of ground and it is obvious that the work will be expanded considerably in the future. It was laid out quite impressively with definite areas devoted to particular species or plants which were in-

igenous to particular areas. Each plant was clearly identified on an individual name tag.

In the fruit section there were a great many different varieties such as pommelos, oranges, lemons and mangoes, many of which were weighed down with ripened and ripening fruit. It was explained that unwanted fruits were then sold on to the local community to eliminate any unnecessary wastage. We were also encouraged to taste them. They were delicious!



In the orchards

One of the major objectives of the establishment is to cultivate and reintroduce, into their native habitats, plants which are indigenous to certain areas. In view of the developments encroaching on the desert, it is pleasing to know that the local flora is being preserved for future generations to appreciate.

We were all agreed that the trip had turned out to be most interesting and worth while, and it was proposed we schedule another visit so that we could see how work progresses.

Later, many of us visited the village of Wamm with traditional stone houses and a watch tower, only a short distance from the Nursery.



The village of Wamm

On the way home, we also made a detour to see the late Islamic period fort of Dibba Ghorfa, a mudbrick fort with associated khainah-type structures, on the western edge of the palm gardens in Dibba Ghorfa. This majestic ruin would be even more spectacular viewed at dusk or dawn - a lovely conclusion to a great day out. Afterwards, others went shelling on the beach at Dibba.

Many thanks to Mr. Rashid Burshaid and the Ministry of Environment and Water, to Christophe Tourenq from WWF for his help with the arrangements and for providing information on places of interest to visit after the Nursery, to Maral Khaled Shuriqi from Fujairah Municipality for his help and also for providing directions to the Dibba Nursery and to Val Chalmers for arranging the trip. Additionally, I think everybody would like to express their gratitude to Dilshad Davood for his hospitality and very interesting presentation. Many of us would also like to take him up on his offer of a tour of the company laboratories on our next trip. *Report by Trish Cox, photographs by Val Chalmers.*

The Early Worm Gets the Bird

There are two sides to the "early bird" story. A lone hummingbird hawkmoth *Macroglossum stellatarum* made itself the centre of attention in a high Musandam wadi, and paid the ultimate price for being the only game in town.

Notwithstanding daytime air temperatures in the 20's (Centigrade), January is still "winter" for many local species, especially those of Palaearctic origin. So it was not surprising that we saw little flying insect life as we sat for lunch overlooking the steep-sided but relatively well-wooded wadi that divides the terraced Musandam settlement of Sha'iri. The exception was a single large insect that attracted our attention in the sunny wadi bottom, even at a distance of about 60 metres. Binoculars revealed it to be a hummingbird hawkmoth and we watched with interest as it more or



less systematically hovered at successive dry clumps of the shrub *Pulicaria edmondsonii*.

This pleasant pastime was short-lived, however, and was rudely interrupted, since we were not alone in having noticed the hawkmoth. Before our eyes, it was taken by an equally observant Hume's wheatear, a year-round mountain resident.



Macroglossum stellatarum
Hummingbird Hawkmoth
Photograph from Wikipedia
on the internet

The bird landed on the ground about a metre from the hovering moth, eyeballed the situation (apparently undetected), and within seconds darted up to end the performance. The bird appeared to swallow the moth in flight with a single gulp and continued on to a distant rocky perch. We could only be philosophical about the fate of "our" hawkmoth, and took consolation in having been able to witness this particular drama firsthand. *Report by Gary Feulner and Narayan Karki.*

Old Copper? Any Old Copper?

Eight good hikers took an intriguing walk through an old copper-mining area in the mountains of RAK recently. Except for the initial climb up one wadi and down to the other wadi (off the path), the walk is not steep or demanding and – if done at a slower pace – could be done by medium-fit hikers. It took slightly more than three hours.



From left to right: Eileen, Rob, Philippe Sohie, Sonja, Rowland, Ali, Christina (Richards).

Christine Verreydt, who co-led the trip with Philippe Sohie, wrote, "The hike started in Wadi Safarfir; this wadi is a tributary to the large Wadi Al Qawr and is situated in the southern part of Ras Al Khaimah. The area is particularly known for its extensive copper winning activities during the Bronze Age (2nd millennium BC) and again during the early Islamic period (9th - 11th centuries).



Copper slag

"A mineshaft can still be seen as well as lots of greenish copper ore and the remains of the mining village. The hike ended in Wadi Ghargur, similarly known for copper winning activities. Here an open field with a lot of copper slag (the residue after the mineral was run off) and remains of houses and terraces can be found. Those with sharp eyes noticed aflaj leading from the wadi to the terraces.



Terraced fields

"The copper ingots were probably transported via the Wadi Al Qawr (a major traveling route) through the Hajar Mountains to the east coast from whence it was shipped to other parts of the middle east and India. *Thanks to Sonja Lavrenčič and to Christine Verreydt for her information and photographs.*

Socotra via Sana'a (Part 2)

Heidi Struiksma continues the Socatra story from last month ...



Map of Socotra Island

Arriving early in the morning, we were welcomed by Ahmed Saeid Suleiman (or Ahmed 1), Ahmed 2, Ahmed 3 and Saleh as they became known to us. They were to be our guides, drivers, cooks, and first-aiders for the week. We checked into the Summerland hotel in Hadibo, a little fishing village in the middle of the north coast of the island. We immediately hit the road again. That first day took us east along the coast to Ras Di Hamri where we experienced an idyllic calmness of nature. Low tide welcomed us and whilst some of spent time looking at colourful corals, crabs, and fish, others climbed rocks to get a glance of the beautiful blue waters and rugged coastline. At lunchtime we tasted our first meal of fresh fish, rice and salad, which became a daily treat.



Coral



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
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Birds - David Bradford
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Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi
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Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner
res 306 5570
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Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
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email: valeriechalmers@hotmail.com

Plants – Valerie Chalmers

Seashells and Mammals - Recorders needed!

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

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



View from Ras Dihamri

On the way back, we stopped at a nursery dedicated to protecting and growing indigenous flora to ensure the sustainability on the island. It was interesting to see the variety of plants and the minute size of baby Dragon Blood trees, considering their size on Diksam plain. Night fell suddenly and we returned to the hotel in the dark.



Ahmed, the nursery manager



Propagated dragonblood tree

Day two took us south, straight across the mountains, through wadis and over mountaintops. The scenery was stunning. We saw a

large variety of flora such as Adenium or Desert Rose, Cucumber, Euphorbia trees, and different types of frankincense trees. We also saw a land crab, an 'arba arbaeen' (centipede) and a civet cat on the side of the road, the latter having unfortunately been killed by a car.



Frankincense

Marijcke Jongbloed described one of the memorable moments of the day when we stopped at Wadi Di Ehro where we swam and had a picnic lunch. "The going was all but easy and it took all my concentration to pick my slow way across the rocks to the pool, where the swimming, in crystal clear water, was great! During the picnic (barbecued goat) we were besieged by Egyptian vultures, who behaved like chickens. Soon Salman, our oldest participant, was feeding them by hand. One Egyptian vulture, who was scrounging around behind my back wanted to join the feeding but misjudged its take-off and whacked me on the head with its wing. I ask you, has any of you ever been clipped on the head by a vulture?"



The Egyptian vultures were not shy

After this interlude we continued to Diksam plain, which was strewn with Dragon Blood trees. These get their name from the blood red resin



that oozes out when the bark of the trunk is scratched. We stopped many times on the way to admire the amazing forever-changing landscape. Socotra has many caves and we drove up to Di Gub cave to see inside and look at the formation. This cave, like most caves, is used by the people and goats especially during the rainy season and traces, such as goat wool and droppings, as well as pens were clearly visible.



Dragonblood trees on Diksam plain

Day three was a very early start and a long day for the fittest of the group as they hiked up to the Huq cave. It is about a two-hour walk to reach the mouth of the cave from 'base-camp'. The cave itself is 13 km long. Good hiking shoes were a must except for the young guide who scrambled up on a pair of flip-flops.



Huq cave

Four of us however, did not venture up the mountain and Ahmed Saeid took us to Ar-Ar, where both the beach and mountain slopes were covered in unspoilt white sand. We continued on to Arsel, the most eastern tip of the island, where the Arabian Sea greets the Indian Ocean, and a 'sea of shells'. Liz Maley commented, "Whilst the more athletic members of the team went for the cave walk, four less fit mortals were taken by Ahmed Saeid along the coast to the eastern tip. As we drove along the most amazing sand dunes that had blown up onto the limestone escarpment we stopped at an intriguing habitat that had been created by a fresh water spring emerging from a

series of caves and grottos directly above. The water bubbled out from the sand and created a small fresh water stream that gave life to a beautiful landscape created by five plant species. Tamarix created the boundary and protection to the stream, which had large areas with bermuda grass, *lipia nodiflora*, *junctus* (a smaller species than normal) and *exium* with its beautiful light sapphire blue star-shaped flowers. It was an idyllic setting and a great way to wash off after our ocean dip. The tamarix was the healthiest I had ever seen with foliage so dense that it looked like *Thuja*. This is indeed a unique setting and typified the many and various habitats of the island. Because of its uniqueness it should be protected but could be damaged by an overload of tourist camping in the site." (End of Part 2)



Foliage protecting the stream

Thanks to Heidi Struiksma. Part 3 will be carried in our March Gazelle. Heidi gratefully received contributions in photos and/or text from: Marijcke Jongbloed, Gary Feulner, Nabeela Dhiban, Ulrike Andoff, Maureen Steer, Barbara Hayward, Liz Maley, Susan Offerdahl.

A Small Al Qoz Oasis

Valerie Chalmers was asked about some tall grass growing in a vacant block in Al Qoz that is becoming a mini-oasis, with the grass, several succulents, an occasional *Calotropis procera*, bird tracks and twitterings right beside Sheikh Zayed Road. Valerie identified the grass as *Phragmites australis*. "The common name is common reed or ditch grass. The descriptions in Marijcke Jongbloed's book, *Wildflowers of the United Arab Emirates*, fit, particularly the leaves flat, tapering to a threadlike tip, with a rim of hair at insertion

(ligule). Both Rob Western's book and Marijcke's talk about the inflorescence being a much-branched purplish to silvery plume, erect or bending. One *could* say it looks slightly purplish! Marijcke's book gives an East Coast-Hajar Mountains distribution. Its habitat is in or near water, permanent pools, or sewage spills, and it tolerates saline conditions." Valerie saw it again, being cultivated at the Dibba Plant nursery. *Thanks to Valerie Chalmers for this information*



Phragmites australis in Al Qoz

Dubai Astronomy Group

Members who enjoyed Lamjed El-Kefi's presentation on Feb. 6 and who wish to delve further into amateur astronomy might want to learn more about or contact the Dubai Astronomy Group, whose website is www.dubaiastromy.com.

Book Review: Arabian Wildlife Encyclopedia

This breezy and copiously illustrated volume is the latest contribution to UAE natural history by Trident Press. As indicated in the Foreword and by its subtitle ("the essential guide to Arabia's wildlife heritage for students and teachers"), the encyclopedia is aimed particularly at teenage readers, but it will also be accessible and informative to both younger children and adults interested in the natural world. It may be a particularly welcome introduction for families new to the UAE, who have not yet been exposed to the considerable diversity of plant and animal life that can be found here.

The encyclopedia builds in many instances on Trident Press' already



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distinguished history of natural history publishing, but the coverage in this volume generally provides a brief introduction to the basics of each entry, followed by equally brief elaboration of a number of interesting and eclectic highlights. Among the chapters that impressed me as particularly strong were Habitats, Insects, Spiders & Scorpions, Marine Invertebrates, and Reptiles.

A distinctive feature of the encyclopedia is that it includes, for each chapter, a short list of websites related to each topic. In addition, each topic corresponds to a link in www.arabianwildlife.com, another Trident Press venture. The overwhelming majority of the sites referenced are intended for the general public. These are, like internet websites generally, a mixed bag. Many are UAE public organizations or NGOs, a few are international organizations or university sites, and a smaller number are individual articles found online, including article from the early ENHG-Abu Dhabi Bulletin and its successor, *Tribulus*.

While the overall coverage is meant to be accessible, the encyclopedia does not shrink from introducing and defining important specialized terms such as *keratin*, *pharyngeal jaws*, *hausitorium*, *ampullae of Lorenzini*, and *tapetum lucidum*. Finally, for those wondering whether adoption of the American spelling of *encyclopedia* signals capitulation at last to the majority usage, the answer is not yet. The change is only cover-deep. In the text one still finds, e.g., *whilst*, *colour*, *mollusc*, *metre* and *characterise*.

As a service to our DNHG members, a limited number of copies of the encyclopedia will be available for sale at upcoming DNHG meetings, at the standard retail price of AED 150. *Reviewed by Gary Feulner.*



And ... a hard to find book is now available from DNHG:

Field Guide to the Geology of Oman by Samir S Hanna

If you have ever wondered what type of rock makes up that mountain on your drive through Oman now you have the book to answer your question. In the first 46 pages you can learn how the land formed over the last 600 million years. In the second half there are different chapters which provide a detailed guide to the major Waddis including Wadi Ghul and Jabal Shams. For example the chapter on Wadi Ghul shows that at 27.3km you are actually driving on what was the sea floor almost 90 million years ago. This book is good for the interested amateur and the expert, and those moving from one to the other. Find out how very unique this section of the earth's crust really is. The book is A5 size and 178 pages, priced at AED 80. *Reviewed by Mairead Porter.*

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

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|---------|---|
| Mar 6 | Christian Velde: Julfar - A History |
| April 3 | Rima and Ada Natoli: Hawksbill Turtles in Dubai (incl. some genetic analysis) |
| May 1 | Dr Susanne Hofstra: A New Perspective on the Old Fertile Crescent: Archaeology and the Origins of Agriculture |
| June 5 | Dr Mark Beech |

Field Trips (Members only, please.)

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| Feb 25-26 | Donkey/Fox Wadi |
| Mar 4 | Kayaking in Umm al Qawain |
| Mar 19 | Omani Marble Quarry with Hans Rau |
| Mar 26 | Forts of Dibba Oman with Lamjed El-Kefi |
| April 2 or 9 | EMEG, Ghantoot |

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