

GAZELLE

Vol 27 no 6 June 2012



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Gazelle Editor **Clare O'Hare** will leave the UAE in August. Clare will be returning to London to work for the law firm that she was with in Dubai. She expects to be involved with Middle Eastern transactions and hopes this will result in some visits to Dubai. We are in her debt for stepping up to edit the newsletter for the past year and for recruiting and organizing her succession.

At the same time, we are pleased to welcome new Editors **Fiona Leen** and **Sonya Benjamin** who will be introduced to readers in the next edition.

Several other longtime members and Committee members will be leaving us this summer. We take this opportunity to say goodbye and to wish them well. In particular, we will miss

Field Trip Coordinator **Christine Verreydt**, who has helped to introduce members to many new places in the UAE since she became a trip coordinator in 2011, including the Copper hike and Wadi Shah hikes, stargazing trips and the exploration of the Wadi Wurrayah, is leaving this summer. Christine has left us a going away present in the form of a trip to Georgia in late October, which she has organized in advance. Christine will be returning to her native Belgium after a dozen

years in the Middle East and four in the UAE. She will not be flying back but will be driving overland on her motorcycle. Once back in south of Belgium Christine hopes to establish a hotel – motorcycle friend but open to everyone.



Christine Verreydt

Also leaving us in August will be **David Palmer**, a former Speaker Coordinator and veteran Archaeology Recorder, who recently led one of the more talked about IEW field trips. David and wife Liz will be returning to Canada. David, however, has left the Dubai before, so there

DNHG Membership

DNHG Membership remains a bargain at Dhs.100 for couples/families 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.)

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*, our post office box, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.

is at least some hope we will see him again.

Fausto Tazzi, an enthusiastic field trip participant and organizer, is another who will say "Ciao!" this summer, but Fausto also says he has enjoyed the country very much and expects to be back as a traveler quite frequently.

This Month's Contributors

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

Valerie Chalmers	Sonja Lavrenčič
Christine Verreydt	Tamsin Carlisle
Gary Feulner	Steve Manthorpe

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



Trip to Georgia, 20—27 October 2012 (Eid holidays)

Gamarjobal*

In April, I was extremely lucky to spend two weeks in Georgia: this is located on one of the earth's great crossroads (the Silk Road) and it has often been named "the most beautiful country on earth". With the spectacular snow-capped Caucasian mountains, the fertile valleys, beautiful forests, ancient monuments (many of them from the BCE-era), cave monasteries, the excellent food, wine and chacha (local grape vodka), and of course the people themselves, Georgia offers a lovely escape from the UAE heat. Tourism has only just started: Georgians are putting the Soviet era behind them and look forward to developing and opening up their country to the rest of the world.



Beautiful Kvareli Lake

I had the pleasure to be in the company of Marina Javakishvili, a local guide, who took me to the most remarkable places in the province of Kakheti in East Georgia. We visited remote and mysterious monasteries, beautiful parks, villages and cities and even an obscure chacha distillery in a shack of an old villager Nicola.

Marina has proposed a programme for the DNHG in October. This is the

month of vintage and festivals in the Kakheti region: a lot of sight-seeing and activities are guaranteed. Marina's son, Zura Javakishvili, is an ornithologist and will hold an evening lecture for the group in Tbilisi, the beautiful capital, about the diversity of natural landscapes and wildlife in Georgia.

Details of the trip:

Dates: 20 to 27 October (during the Eid break)

Average price of the trip: 550 euro per person (based on 12 people). This includes transport to/from Tbilisi airport, accommodation, sightseeing and most meals. There is no discount for children as the price is already kept to the minimum.

Rooms: the price is based on twin sharing basis. If you would prefer a single room, this can be arranged but the price has still to be confirmed by the local guide Marina.

Flights: Flydubai (around 1000 AED pp) – flights are early in the morning. The Dubai-Tbilisi flight lasts only 3 hours and the airport is just a 15 minute drive from Tbilisi city centre.

Local Guide: Marina Javakishvili

Trip coordinator: Christine Verreydt – if you are interested, send an email to infinistan@gmail.com. You will receive a full program of the trip.

Local Trip Coordinator: Sonja Lavrenčič



KVEVRI pottery: The unique Georgian method of Kvevri wine-

making has been included on the UNESCO list: the millennia old tradition is used for fermenting and ageing wine in pitchers (which are called kvevri in Georgian).

**"Hello" in Georgian

Summer trips

Possible summer trips will be announced by email. If you would like to organize a trip, or have ideas for future trips, please contact any of the trip coordinators.

Can you identify the aquarium? The photo below, provided by Valerie Chalmers, appeared in the end-of-season "Where in the UAE" quiz.

If you would like a copy of the quiz, along with the answers, please email Clare O'Hare (clare.ohare@gmail.com).



A hint: the DNHG organized trips to this aquarium during the IEW 2012.

Our Next Speaker

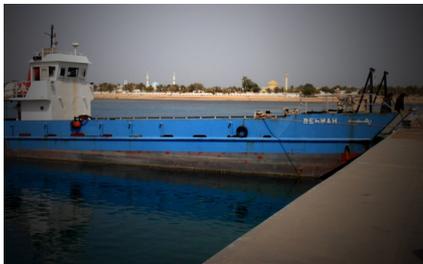
Our next speaker will be Gary Feulner, who will be giving the DNHG an introduction to the natural history of the UAE mountains. Further information will be provided in the next edition of the *Gazelle*.



Email your field reports and news to clare.ohare@gmail.com (Arial 10 justified). Please send your photographs as **separate .jpg files** (preferably compressed for documents) or deliver them to Editor Clare O'Hare for scanning.

Delma Island trip – April 27-28, 2012

It was one of those “only in the UAE” moments. Our bright-eyed group was lined up at the designated dock on sleepy Jebel Dhana peninsula in good time to catch the 8:30 am ferry to Delma Island. But where was our boat?



Delma dock

Fortunately, Roland had scouted out the area the previous evening, so quickly informed the rest that they were in the right place to buy ferry tickets, but the ferry itself was waiting at a different jetty, about 20 minutes' drive down the road.

In hindsight it was clearly unrealistic to expect Abu Dhabi port authorities to furnish ticket-office and vessel at a single location, so it was fortunate that trip coordinator Sonja had factored ample flex-time into our schedule. Her late-arriving car-load needed it, too, after missing their highway turnoff!



Delma ferry

Nonetheless, some 30 minutes later, the entire group was comfortably ensconced in the air-conditioned observation saloon of the Delma car-ferry, as it embarked on an uneventful 30-km voyage over calm, turquoise waters.

The view greeting our arrival was of a palm-lined waterfront dominated by the domes and minarets of two large mosques – one gold, the other turquoise – representing the crowning architectural achievement of 7,000 years of human habitation.



Delma beach

Not strictly a desert island, Delma is perched on the protruding tip of an underground salt-dome, formed when magma from under the Earth's crust surged towards the surface, melting crystallized salts and sending them thrusting through the rock layers above, explained DNHG geology specialist Jean-Paul Berger. Sediments covering the impervious resolidified salt layer trapped rainwater as it percolated downwards, providing Delma's early inhabitants with ample supplies of fossil fresh water.



Geology lesson

Perhaps not on Delma Island, but certainly under the mushroom caps of similar salt domes submerged nearby, oil collected and became trapped – explaining the presence of offshore rigs on the horizon. In fact, Jean-Paul explained to DNHG members gathered attentively around him, oil was now forming on mud flats similar to those in existence when the ancient Tethys Sea covered much of Arabia.



Delma Mineral Tip

But before such geological mysteries were revealed, the group trooped off to visit a well-preserved merchant's villa from the early 1940s – now a museum – as well as the island's three oldest mosques. The latter were simple yet elegant oblong stone buildings, each with its own well for ablutions, but lacking minarets.



Delma Merchant House

After a sumptuous lunch of salads, grilled fish and barbecued lamb and chicken at the local Lebanese restaurant, followed by ice-cream, we embarked on a tour of the island, stopping off at palm beaches, an aquifer-fed reed bed and a small mangrove swamp. Finally Fathi, our local guide, led us off-road to what looked like a huge multi-hued rubble tip in the middle of the island.

It was actually a stark but quite natural geological feature, formed as magma burst forth from an ancient



volcano. Here, we spent a good two hours searching for crystals and other interesting metallic rocks, which were present in abundance.

Tents were pitched at dusk under palm trees on the beach, and a camp fire was soon blazing as we cooked and ate our second giant feast of the day. Local children and teenaged girls in colourful long dresses and head scarves crowded around in curiosity.



Camp visitors

Tamsin had a surprise visit from a large, brown scarabid beetle, which used her shoulder as a landing pad. Next morning, after packing up camp, the group split in two – half its members opting to explore the island further at their own pace, while others chose to take the mid-morning ferry back to Jebel Dhanna. Following a tip from Sonja, that subgroup took the opportunity to explore a little further up the coast to the very pretty Shuweihat Island, which is connected to the mainland by a causeway.



Delma beetle

A local landowner, on whose property we inadvertently trespassed, was kind enough to guide us to a perfect lunch spot on a beach with overhanging red sandstone cliffs to shelter us from the midday sun. After a leisurely picnic, we set off back to Abu Dhabi tired but satisfied after another successful trip. *Report and photos by Tamsin Carlisle.*

"Dolly Parton" Basket Web Spider, Dhayah Salt Marsh

On an early March 2012 visit to inspect the current situation of the freshwater springs at Dhayah marsh, on the margin of Khor Hulaylah in RAK, I encountered several excellent examples of a spider that builds a three-dimensional, basket-like web suspended among the rushes (*Juncus rigidus*) that dominate the adjacent salt marsh. A distinctive feature of the basket is the finely woven, sub-horizontal bottom or floor, which consists of a rectilinear mesh of ca.2 mm squares.



Basket web in Dhayah salt marsh

The (female) spiders themselves had been seen and photographed at the same site years earlier (September 2003), along with an elongated cluster of multiple small silk egg cocoons, some possibly containing recently hatched young. The shape of the spider and the nature of its web indicates that it probably belongs to the orb-weaver family (Family Araneidae) and possibly to the genus *Cyrtophora* (sometimes called Dome-Weavers). My evocative field name for this species was suggested by the prominent paired, bosom-like protuberances at the upper (rear) end of the spider, seen in the typical ventral view. These are not spinnerets but are part of the spider's carapace.

At the time of our 2012 visit, each of the webs contained large clus-

ters of material that we first thought must be the remains of wrapped and eaten prey, but many could instead be the debris of earlier egg cocoons. The basket web evidently provides protection as well as prey for the spider.



Close up of basket web, showing egg cocoon, female spider and fine mesh 'floor'

The Dolly Parton spider is one of several plant and animal species associated with the Dhayah salt marsh, and therefore one of the many reasons why protection has long been sought for that environment, which is unique in the UAE.



'Dolly Parton' basket web

Report by Gary Feulner

Little Known Species of Wadi Zikt: Animal, Mineral & Other

The Wadi Zikt watershed is the second largest on the East Coast of the UAE. Although extended access is difficult today, that has not always been the case. In the 1970s or 1980s parts of the upper wadi were mined for scattered pods of chromium ore, and tracks and spoil heaps can still be seen on interior terraces.



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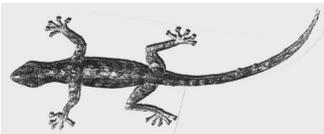
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email: valeriechalmers@hotmail.com

Plants – Valerie Chalmers

Seashells, Birds 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.



Fish (*Garra barreimiae*) could be found in the wadi in the mid-1990s, and Arabian tahr were then reported to inhabit its upper reaches, but surface water has been extremely scarce or absent for most of the past decade. Wadi Zikt nevertheless remains of great natural history interest and proposals exist to incorporate at least part of the watershed into the existing Wadi Wurayah protected area.



"Ursus teodorus" in Wadi Zikt

One of the latest additions to the Wadi Zikt species list was contributed earlier this year by a DNHG representative on an overnight survey with an EWS-WWF team – the small exotic ursine carnivore shown in the accompanying photos taken above the village of Zikt. Curiously, it passed unnoticed by the entire EWS-WWF team (perhaps because of its protective coloration, a good match for the surrounding ophiolite rocks and the graded road berm). Exotic species have not generally been a problem in natural environments in the UAE. This one will be monitored but no action is proposed.



Teddy Bear up close

Report by Gary Feulner

Stick Insects: More to Come?

Dr. Reza Khan's note in the April 2012 *Gazelle* reported a rare sighting of a stick insect, pointing up the twin virtues of (i) close observation and (ii) luck. Subsequent discussion with other naturalists has revealed perhaps a dozen sightings and photographs over the years, apparently of a limited number of species. An effort is currently being made to compile these in order to encourage more general attention.

If you have seen and photographed stick insects in the UAE or northern Oman, you are invited to contact Chairman Gary Feulner so that your records can be included.

By way of encouragement, the most singular record so far is of a very large stick insect collected in Dubai in 1990 by the late Carolyn Lehmann and shown in the accompanying photo. The body measures 92 mm from head to "tail", excluding limbs. A different large one (70mm body) was seen on a DNHG field trip to Jebel Sumayni.



Stick insect collected in Dubai by Carolyn Lehmann in 1990

Report by Gary Feulner

End-of-Season Function

The annual End-of-Season Function was again held in the Utsav Room in the India Club on Thursday 14th June 2012. The evening took the form of a 'Where in the UAE' Photo Quiz, modelled on the successful one held during Inter-Emirates Weekend 2012 and this was followed by Gary revealing the answer to the mystery of the white fibre-filled balls that he brought last year for the 'What is it?'/Bring and Guess' session and then a Video



Quiz on an extract from 'The Oryx Equation', one of the episodes from the DVD set 'Arabia's Cycles of Life'. Winning the Photo Quiz with 16 correct answers out of 20 was the team comprised of David Palmer, Sonja Lavrencic, Ziad Makhoul, Juliette Winser and her guest, Dagmar Rudolf from Germany! Each one was given a DNHG Sweatshirt as a prize! The Video Quiz was won by the team comprised of Jo, Steve and Daniel Raynor, Robin Davies, Kirsty Ashford and Pradeep and Anindita Radhakrishna with an impressive 22 correct answers out of 23! All received small boxes of chocolates! Chalmers towels and Staco-Chalmers baseball caps were distributed to lucky ticket numbers.

Our thanks go to the India Club for once again hosting the event and for another excellent buffet. Also to Pradeep for doing the booking, liaising with the India Club and choosing the menu and to Clare O'Hare, in particular, for organising the photo quiz.

Bizarre or Bezoar? Mother knows best . . .

Our end-of-season dinner in 2010 featured the DNHG's first "What is it?" contest. One item stumped both the audience and our panel of experts. It was a collection of sub-rounded sandy balls, most of them slightly larger than tennis balls, light-weight and having a very firm surface of fine, pale grey-white sand/sediment. They had been found in a hollow near a shallow sand gully about 1 km inland from the shore, adjacent to what was later to become the EMEG preserve at Saih Shuwaib. Thoughts ran to the stomach stones found in the guts of some ruminants (and dinosaurs), but these objects were obviously not stones.

We cut one open after dinner, using a small hand saw. The crust was very thin and the inside was filled with short segments of packed brown fibre. Surely someone must recognize them ... but no one did. So when the opportunity presented itself, samples were shown to Major Ali Al Suweidi, EMEG's Chairman

and a font of traditional knowledge about UAE life. Even Major Ali could not identify them, but he smiled confidently and said, "Let me show them to my mother."



The mysterious bezoar stones, camel hairballs, from Saih Shuwaib.

Some months later, when Major Ali met up with DNHG representatives, he had the answer. His mother had told him that balls like this are formed in the stomachs of camels when they lick their own hair. That information was announced at the 2012 end-of-season dinner and elicited immediate expressions of recognition from two members in attendance. Geoff Sanderson related that he had been shown similar camel hairballs some two decades ago in a reserve in the south of Bahrain. Renate Wernery of Dubai Central Veterinary Laboratory also knew of this phenomenon, although she had not personally observed it, and pointed out that young camels whose diet is deficient in selenium and other trace minerals will often lick their own hair. She also volunteered the alternative name of bezoar stones for the resulting product.



Close up of the fibrous interior.

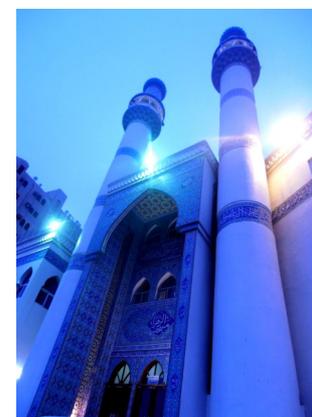


Previous attempts to identify the balls at the 2010 and 2011 end-of-season dinners left everyone stumped.

A quick online search confirms that bezoar stones are indeed known to be formed in the stomach and/or intestines of cud-chewing ungulates (ruminants) including cows, goats, sheep bison, camels, antelope, etc. The name is said to be derived from a Persian word meaning "protection from poison", reflecting Medieval superstition – except that there is evidence that bezoar stones could actually extract arsenic from a liquid (see "The Magic Hairball", <http://curiousexpeditions.org/?p=371>). (Still unanswered is how nearly a dozen of these objects came to be clustered at a single isolated spot.)
Report by Gary Feulner

Where in the UAE?

For those who missed the end-of-season function here is your chance to take part in the fun. Can you name of the more difficult-to-identify places from the "Where in the UAE" quiz? Answers in next month's *Gazelle*.



Picture 1—courtesy of Tamsin Carlisle



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Picture 2 threw up a wide variety of suggestions.



Picture 2—courtesy of Tamsin Carlisle

Picture 3 looks like it will be easy but the location proved tricky to pin down.



Picture 3—courtesy of Clare O'Hare

An easy one to finish with.



Picture 4—courtesy of Valerie Chalmers.

IEW Photo winners

The May edition of the *Gazelle* incorrectly identified an IEW weekend prize winning photo. The photo below, "It's a hard life", was taken by Steve Manthorpe. This photo was taken on the edge of the Umm as Samim and the Rub al'khali in Oman - there is very little vegetation in the area, hence the title!

"It's a hard life" won the prize in the Earth and Environment: Geology/Landscapes category.



It's a hard life

Tamsin Carlisle's photograph, "Piper on the Strand", won first prize in the Life on Earth: Plants /Animals/ Fossils category. Her photograph is reproduced below.



Piper on the Strand

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

Sep 16 Introduction to the Natural History of the UAE Mountains – Gary Feulner

Oct 7 Voyaging Before the Iron Age – Michael Creamer

Field Trips (Members only, please)

Sep 29 (Sat): Birdwatching at Dubai Pivot Fields with Neil Tovey

Oct 20-27: Trip to Georgia

Please watch for possible summer trips to be announced by e-mail.

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