



GAZELLE

Vol 27 No 12 December 2012

مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي



Photo by Tamsin Carlisle who says: "I thought you might enjoy this one, which is my early morning shot of a flying-fish flight. The fish itself is barely visible, but you can clearly see the trail of ripples it left as it skipped over the mill-pond water surface".

Inside this month

Page 2:	Upcoming Field Trips/Our Next Speaker (Jan)
Page 3:	Upcoming Field Trips
Page 4:	Field Clips: Cobras & Damsels
Page 5:	Field Clips: A Red November Visitor
Page 6:	Field Clips: Funeral for the Wedding Cake
Page 7:	Recorders, Members' News
Page 8:	Programme, Committee, Membership

Contributions

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

Gary Feulner
Sonja Lavrencic
Valerie Chalmers
Tamsin Carlisle

Kerala Natural History Tour

Date: Jan 21 – 26 2013

Binish Roobas will lead this excursion (6 days, 5 nights, Mon-Sat) to a sampling of Kerala's premier wildlife sites: house boating on Lake Vembanad and bird watching at Kumarakom in the backwaters of the coastal plain; bird watching at Thettekad (featuring Ceylon Frogmouth and Black Baza) in the moist deciduous forest of the rolling central midlands; and light trekking in the highlands of the renowned Western Ghats at Eravikulam National Park (home to the Nilgiri Tahr), the thorny shrub forest of Chinnar National Wildlife Sanctuary (where elephants, gaur and grizzled squirrel may be seen) and the scenic waterfalls at Athirapally.

Binish took his degree in zoology and worked as a naturalist guide in Kerala before coming to work in the UAE. He continues to visit these areas regularly when he returns to Kerala privately.

Limit 10 participants. Accommodation will be in unpretentious hotels and lodges. Travel will be by minivan. Estimated basic cost: AED 2500 including accommodation, meals, road transportation and entrance fees, but excluding airfare and Indian visa. For more details and itinerary, contact Binish Roobas: johanruphus@hotmail.com or 050-243-8737.

Nepal Hill Country

Date: Mar 29 – Apr 6 2013

Experience the verdant scenery and village life of Nepal's hill country – traditional houses, mountain trails, terraced cultivation of rice, corn and millet, footbridges across rivers, water buffalo milk, temple ceremonies, traditional dancing, and more – including 4 days homestay and optional day hikes.

In the hill country, at Makadum in Ramechhap District, our host will be Narayan Karki, a former DNHG member known for his energy and enthusiasm, who has a wealth of knowledge about village life and customs. (NB: This will be a customized visit. The village area is part of the Indigenous Peoples Trail network, but that initiative has not yet been developed into standardized commercial offerings.)

Limit 10 participants. Approx. basic cost: AED 2300 plus airfare (est'd AED 1500) and Nepal visa (AED 150). For more details and itinerary, contact Gary Feulner: grfeulner@gmail.com or 04 306 5570.

Our Next Speaker

Date: Sun 13 January 2013

Speaker: Ronnie Gallagher

Topic: Megalithic Archaeology of Azerbaijan

Our October speaker Ronnie Gallagher returns for the promised Part 2 of his flood related theories in the illustrated talk: *Megalithic Archaeology of Azerbaijan; Making Sense of Ancient Mysteries and Possible Connections*.

About the topic: Since I last spoke to you the Azerbaijan Institute of Geology asked for an account of my observations and theories and published them in their English Language Journal: *Stratigraphy and Sedimentology in Oil Gas Basins*. It will take time but it is my expectation that other researchers will investigate and hopefully confirm the extent of the flooding.

The paper incidentally was brought to the attention of Graham Hancock (- a popularizer of ancient mysteries) who asked me to write a non-technical summary of the findings and expand on the indications that ancient Caucasians had cultural connections with early Nile Valley dwellers. I was happy to do so, again in the hope that it will encourage scientific research. The summary is available to read on line at: <http://www.grahamhancock.com/forum/GallagherR1.php>. It might be good background reading to those who missed the first talk. While I am pleased that Azeri geologists are thinking about the possible flooding scenarios, (even though it goes against mainstream scientific understanding), the implications of flooding events on mankind and archaeology are perhaps even more daunting and will be resisted. Still I would hope that the observations and cultural connections suggested might act as pointers for further research.

One of the areas I shall be addressing is the presence of massive, as yet archaeologically unrecognized anthropomorphic images in the landscape. You can read about these here: <http://www.visions.az/history,307/>

Ras al Khaimah Trip

Date: Fri 1 & Sat 2 Feb 2013

This is the first of a series of trips planned to give DNHG members some insight into the culture, history etc. of Ras Al Khaimah.

Option 1: Two-day Trip - Friday 1st and Saturday 2nd February Number of participants: 26+

Turn up at the Dhayah Fort Guest House around 12 midday on Friday 1st February and have lunch. Then the owner, Ali Monsouri, will take us on a walk around the ancient graves in the area and a walk around his date farm. Early arrivals can go up the hill in front of the guesthouse to the Dhayah Fort for an excellent view of the area and learn how it was under siege in the recent past. Also optional are walks up the slopes behind the guesthouse. **Sunset: 17.28.**

Overnight accommodation: Ali Monsouri has given us a rate of Dh250 per room (2 people) **without breakfast.** He also has a 6-person tent for rent with mattresses/pillows for Dh100. There is a pleasant bricked area in front of the bedrooms where we can set up a BBQ and have a social evening.

Option 2: One-day Trip - Saturday 2nd Feb Number of participants: 30 (to include the Friday group)

Starting from the Dhayah Fort, at 9 a.m. on Saturday 2nd February, Christie Grieve from RAK will introduce us to Al Jeer/ Sha'am and Shimal. We then go to the Fort/museum in the city centre to learn more about the sites we have visited. The old mosque and Jazirat Al Hamra can also be visited. The aim is to finish about 2/3 pm depending on time spent on sites/lunch.

Travel up from Dubai will take about 2+ hours - 90 minutes on the Emirates Rd (E311) and then remaining time to head north through RAK to Dhayah Fort area. Lat 25°53'3.35"N Long 56° 3'39.32"E for those with Google Earth.

I have reservations in rooms at the guesthouse until **early January.** Please let me know if you are coming.

Email Mairead Porter on: portermme@hotmail.com with the following info:

Name/mobile contact/number of people in car/Friday night booking, room or tent/Saturday only

Taboda Tiger Sanctuary

Date: Thurs 28 Mar – Tues 02 April 2013

Availability: 18 people

PROPOSED SCHEDULE : THURS 28th – Depart from Sharjah (Air Arabia Flight G90417) @ 23:30. Arrive Fri 29th @ 4am. Transfer to hotel at Tadoba by AC Innova Car (4hrs drive).

First safari on Fri afternoon followed by 2 safaris a day from Saturday to Monday. (Safari timings normally will be morning 6:30 to 10:30 and afternoon 2:30 to 5:30.)

TUESDAY 2nd April 2013 Leave Hotel after breakfast for Nagpur Airport. Nagpur to Mumbai by INDIGO AIRLINES Flight 6E-196 @ 13.25. Arrive Mumbai 14.50. Depart Mumbai by INDIGO AIRLINES Flight 6E-61 @ 19.00. Arrive Dubai 20.50

The cost estimate provided is for a group of 18 which is **AED2350 per person** which includes the following:

- Transfer to and from Nagpur International Airport to Tadoba
- All accommodation (4 Nights/5 Days) + all meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner)
- Extra breakfast on 29/3 as we will check-in by 10 am.
- Park Entry Permit, Guide, Camera & Entry Booking Charges + the "gypsy" charges (3 person /"gypsy")

The above excludes airfare. The airfare, as at 25th December, is AED1316/- per head

Notes:

1. The road from Nagpur to Tadoba is about 160 kms. We will be travelling in Toyota Innovas - 3 people per car.
2. On our way to Tadoba on 29th morning we will visit a very old Shiva temple
3. The accommodation is tented & air-conditioned
4. Food is nice - non spicy
5. The vehicle which will take us inside for safari (the "gypsy") can accommodate up to 6 people - but the estimate is based on 3 person per "gypsy" - so that you do not miss anything and can take photographs in comfort. A guide will be there in the gypsy

Those interested in going on the trip please email: Nirjhar Chakraborty on nirjharc@emirates.net.ae Copy to Lamjed El-Kefi on lankefi@emirates.net.ae

Cobra in the Chairman's Mail

Involvement in various aspects of local natural history guarantees a steady stream of interesting correspondence and photographs. From time-to-time an item stands out as worthy of a more general audience. One such is the following note from UAE resident sportsman and naturalist Andy Whitaker:

"Just come back from Salalah and have seen my first ever cobra. I basically ran over it on my bike but didn't seem to harm it as it was between the big pebbles in the wadi bottom. It was small but bright red/orange in colour.

"Jumped off the bike to take a look and it stood up in its defensive mode with the hood opened up. Best pic I have is of it swimming away from us into one of the water pools, but you can see it still has its hood partly opened."

The Arabian cobra *Naja haje arabica* is found in south-west Arabia, including the Salalah area. According to *Snakes of Arabia* (Damien Egan, 2007, Motivate Publishing) it comes in several colour morphs.

Most snakes are dark (black or dark brown) but others have only a dark head and tail with a body that may be red, orange or yellow.

Some orange specimens have a yellow head and no black at all on the body. The latter is what Andy's accompanying photo shows.

The Arabian cobra is said to be diurnal, active in early morning and late evening, especially near



water (it is a good swimmer, as Andy's specimen showed), but it is described as elusive and seldom seen.

Egan writes that they are usually quick to retreat when disturbed, but if cornered they will display and strike. The venom is a potent neurotoxin that is fast-acting and life threatening. Pedal faster, Andy!

Report by Gary Feulner

Cross Dressing Damsels

And at Emirates Towers, no less! The landscaped grounds at Emirates Towers have never been a hotbed of biodiversity. The mostly exotic landscape plants and the active grounds crew see to that. But the pond on the Sheikh Zayed Road side supports a population of dozens of Evans' Bluetail damselfly *Ischnura evansi* (*Cyperus alternifolius*, the umbrella sedge), especially at the southern end. When I visited in mid-November, the population had a somewhat peculiar look.

In the first place, many of the damsels present were rather pale or had slightly odd colours instead of the customary pale green eyes and thorax. This was probably because they were recently molted from the larval stage, consistent with the large number of small exuviae (the shed larval skins) found on the lower stems of the sedges; I collected some for reference.

But in addition, almost all of the individuals had a pale blue band near the end of the abdomen (the "tail"). This is normally characteristic of males, but closer inspection showed that many of these blue-banded individuals were in fact females, and some of them could be found copulating with blue-banded males. Within the genus *Ischnura* (Bluetails), females of many species are known to have several different colour morphs.

One of those is a so-called 'androchrome' morph, which mimics male colouration, including the blue band. In *I. evansi* this is apparently not infrequent. The androchrome morph was previously encountered in *I. evansi* at Ruwayyah, among more conventional females (see 'Damsel in Disguise' in the March 2011 *Gazelle*). More recently I found an androchrome female at a 'wild' site, in a small population at a well-vegetated waterfall pool along the mountain front near Juweif, in northern Oman.

But why it should predominate in the Emirates Towers population is unknown. In more than an hour of observation I saw only a single drab female and a single orange one – normally two of the more common colour morphs. The androchrome females also seemed to adopt male-like behaviour by perching in prominent places at the pool for extended periods, even when they were not feeding or ovipositing.

A bonus of my Emirates Towers visit was a Baluch Rock Gecko *Bunopus tuberculatus*, which I flushed as I stumbled across the cobbles bordering the pond. This is a species I have not previously seen in urban Dubai. *Report by Gary Feulner*



Androchrome female *I. evansi* with very pale thorax and blue eyes.



Normal *I. evansi* male (upper) copulating with an androchrome female. Both male and female have a blue band at the end of their abdomens.

A Red November Visitor

The only dragonfly observed during November's Dubai-Abu Dhabi desert field trip proved to be an interesting one. The two dragonfly species most commonly seen over desert sands in the UAE are the widespread Globe Skimmer *Pantala flavescens*, a strong flier that has a worldwide distribution, and the Vagrant Emperor *Anax* (or *Hemianax*) *ephippiger*, which in our area has an annual swarming period centered on January. Both of these species patrol relatively high above the ground and seldom perch.

The dragonfly seen near Endurance Village was, however, a female Red-Veined Darter *Sympetrum fonscolombii*, a Palaearctic (northern) species, and it was perched on a clump of Desert Knotgrass (*Pennisetum divisum*). The earliest reports of this insect in the UAE and northern Oman were of scattered individuals, all seen in November, suggesting a possible seasonal phenomenon, but later reports by European visitors included spring occurrences as well. Additional local attention confirmed a



Photo by Binish Roobas

All of the others are resident and all but one are much more common – the Globe Skimmer *Pantala flavescens*, the Broad Scarlet *Crocothemis erythraea*, the Violet Dropwing *Trithemis annulata*, the Red-Veined Dropwing

Field Clips

major influx in November 2009, evidently a migration of sorts, reported in *The National* newspaper, when hundreds of these insects were reported by numerous observers across the UAE, from Abu Dhabi, Al Ain and Dubai to Kalba on the East Coast.

Trithemis arteriosa, the Orange Dropwing *Trithemis kirbyi* and the Bloody Scarlet *Crocothemis sanguinolenta*. In most of these species, it is only the male that is red; the female is normally a less conspicuous color.

Report by Binish Roobas and Gary Feulner

Potential observers should note, however, that the Red-Veined Darter is just one of seven 'red' dragonflies that can all be found in the UAE.

Funeral for the 'Wedding Cake'

The "Wedding Cake" along the Mahdhah Road, a multi-tiered formation of tufa (carbonate minerals deposited from water at ambient temperature), was first introduced to DNHG audiences on a field trip in 1993 and quickly became a staple on DNHG itineraries in that area. Even much later, when the track was improved and then turned into a paved road, the inherent beauty of the formation seemed to give it a certain immunity even from rampant local littering. Therefore it was a great disappointment when a recent visit showed that the flow in channel above the Wedding Cake now bypasses the formation itself, leaving it high and dry and considerably less alluring.

Inspection did not reveal any obvious explanation for why that had happened. In the past, the Wedding Cake had sometimes been dry in parts, but never totally dry, and our visit was soon after rain in the area. It appeared that gravel from the streambed above the formation may have been shifted from the center of the channel to the channel bank above the formation, along the southern edge, thus causing the main streamflow to run down the center. We could not determine whether that shift was the result of recent rains, or whether some other factor might be responsible.

Of equal concern, no wadi fish (*Garra barreimiae*) were observed in the area, and there is no permanent surface water upstream to serve as a reservoir. But the demise of *G. barreimiae* at this site was previously announced, prematurely, so it remains for time to tell whether *Garra* will continue to be found here.

Report by Gary Feulner



Before: The 'Wedding Cake' for more than 20 years an actively growing formation.



After: The 'Wedding Cake' dry in November 2012

Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan
res 344 8283
off 344 0462

Astronomy -Lamjed El-Kefi
Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi
res: 06-5310467
off: 06-5583 003
lankefi@emirates.net.ae

Geology - Gary Feulner
Insects – Gary Feulner
res: 306 5570

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
Plants – Valerie Chalmers
res: 04-394 8871
valeriechalmers@gmail.com

Seashells, Birds and Mammals, Archaeology - Recorders needed!

The recorders are not necessarily scientific experts in their designated field.

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 channeled through to the *Gazelle* editor, so new information can be shared with all our readers.

Inter-Emirates 2013

Inter-Emirates Weekend 2013 will be hosted by the Al Ain ENHG on **Thu-Sat, February 21-23**. The program of planned field trips includes a lecture and tour of mosque architecture, an oasis walk, a souk tour, easy mountain walks, a plant workshop, a plant survey, mapping solar clocks and an introduction to curating techniques.

Details have been circulated by e-mail and can also be found at the ENHG website, www.enhg.org.

The theme of the weekend will be "Origins of the ENHG". This will be reflected in the dinner program on Friday evening, and through opportunities on Friday and Saturday to work with and help organize archival material that dates back to the origins of the group in 1980.

Indoor programs and Friday dinner will be held at the Dana Resort Hotel in Al-Ain (formerly the Al-Ain Intercontinental). There are options for single and double rooms, with or without breakfast. **Please contact the hotel directly to make your reservation** (03-704-6000). Ask for Reservations and quote ENHG.

Participants should **pre-register for dinner on Friday** night (see below).

To reserve your place for the dinner on Friday night (Feb 22) in the Danat Resort Ballroom (Dhs 145 including taxes), **please send an e-mail to interemiratesweekend@gmail.com** by 20 January 2013.

UAE Dolphin Project

DNHG members can now visit the official website of the UAE Dolphin Project at: <http://www.uaedolphinproject.org>.

The UAE Dolphin Project is a non-profit initiative that aims to investigate dolphin populations along the UAE coastline, to collect and disseminate scientific baseline information and raise public awareness of the local marine environment and the dolphin species on our doorstep.

One of our main goals is to create a central database of sightings made by the public. Members are encouraged to report any sightings and actively help this local research.

The Project Director is the DNHG's own Dr. Ada Natoli, an adjunct faculty member at UAE University and a DNHG Member and speaker.

A project newsletter, UAE Dolphin Project News, will be issued monthly to disseminate information about dolphins and recent research findings in this field as well as provide updates on the progress, recent achievements and activities of the project.

You can sign up to the UAE Dolphin Project News from the project website homepage. Latest posts can be found at: [UAE Dolphin Project is on air!](http://www.uaedolphinproject.org)

Membership Renewal Notice

DNHG membership was due for annual renewal in September 2012, for membership through to September 2013. If you have not renewed your membership by our January meeting on Sunday 13th January 2013, your membership will not be current and your name will be removed from both our membership list and mailing list.

Please contact our Membership Secretary, Anindita on anin@emirates.net.ae in order to renew your membership.

Dubai Natural History Group Programme of Events

Lecture at Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management, 7.30pm for 8pm

Jan 13: Megalithic Archaeology of Azerbaijan – Ronnie Gallagher

Field Trips (Members only, please)

Jan 8-12:	Photography Workshop
Jan 18:	Camel Farm Visit
Jan 21-26:	Kerala Natural History Tour
Feb 1-2:	Ras al Khaimah Archaeology Trip
Feb 21-23:	Inter-Emirates Week Al Ain
Mar 28 – Apr 3:	Trip to Tadoba Tiger Sanctuary
Mar 29 – Apr 6:	Nepal Hill Country

Further field trips, details or changes to trips will be announced/confirmed by email circular

DNHG COMMITTEE 2012

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Contact Number</u>	<u>Email</u>
Chairman	Gary Feulner	04 306 5570	grfeulner@gmail.com
Vice Chairman	Valerie Chalmers	050 455 8498	valeriechalmers@gmail.com
Treasurer	Rakesh Rungta	050 558 2435	rakesh99@emirates.net.ae
Membership Secretary	Anindita Radhakrishna	050 656 9165	anin@emirates.net.ae
Speaker Co-ordinator	Martina Fella		martina_fella@hotmail.com
Speaker Co-ordinator	Michelle Sinclair		sinclairm2004@yahoo.com
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Pradeep Radhakrishna	050 450 8496	wgarnet@emirates.net.ae
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Jenny Hill	050 886 1508	jennyhill76@hotmail.com
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Sonja Lavrencic	050 256 1496	lavson@gmail.com
Newsletter Editor	Fiona Leen	055 189 8572	gazelleeditor@gmail.com
Librarian / Book Sales	Mairead Porter	055 656 1949	portermme@hotmail.com
Postmaster	Sandi Ellis	050 644 2682	sandiellis@gmail.com
Chief Engineer	Ajmal Hasan	06 504 3523	ajmal_hasan@hotmail.com
Website Co-ordinator	Sandhya Prakash	050 551 2481	sandy_pi@yahoo.com

Postal Address: DNHG, PO Box 9234, Dubai, UAE

Contributions

Do you have a field report, unusual finding, interesting news article, book review, amazing photograph or community news to share?

If so, please email your contributions to:
gazelleeditor@gmail.com
(Arial 10 justified).

DNHG Membership

Membership is priced at AED100 for couples and AED50 for singles (valid from Sep 2012 to Sep 2013). You can join or renew at meetings or by sending a cheque made out to Lloyds TSB Bank account no. 60600669933501. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG)

Payment can also be made by cash deposit at a bank or ATM, using our IBAN no. AE65032006060669933501. As this process does not identify you as the payer please also scan and email a copy of your payment confirmation to the Membership Secretary so we know whose money we have received.

DNHG membership entitles you to participate in field trips and helps pay for our lecture hall, publications and distribution of our monthly newsletter, the Gazelle, our post office box, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.