



GAZELLE

مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

Field Trip Adds Rare Parasitic Plant to UAE List

Our field trip to the Yas Branch of Wadi Mowrid, described in this issue, also recorded the first UAE sighting of a rare parasitic plant, *Orobanche aegyptiaca*.

We were able to identify it from Marijcke Jongbloed's *Wild Flowers of the UAE*, but it was previously known in the area only from a single record by Marijcke herself, in northernmost Oman (Wilayat Mahdhah).

We found several plants along a donkey track over a low rocky abutment beside the main wadi. It was not possible to determine what the host species might be.

Thanks to Martina Fella for calling attention to it.

Report by Gary Feulner

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Contributors

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

Tamsin Carlisle, Ulrike Andorff, Binish Roobas, Kevin Budd and Gary Feulner



Orobanche aegyptiaca, a parasitic plant newly recorded within the UAE

Announcements

Our Next Speaker

*Our next guest speaker for the DNHG April meeting will be **Dr Ada Natoli** who will be providing us with an update on the 'UAE Dolphin Project.'*

Dr. Ada Natoli is a specialist in population genetics applied to conservation of species. Her main interests are investigating the evolutionary mechanisms generating population structure, and supporting conservation and management programmes.

She focuses her research on marine mammals, but has been working on turtles and has a broad background covering plant genetics & general ecology.

She holds a PhD in molecular ecology from the University of Durham, UK, where she completed her thesis on the molecular ecology of bottlenose and common dolphins, comparing these species and their population structure on a worldwide scale and in the Mediterranean Sea.

Ada also spent a number of years conducting field research with the Tethys Research Institute, working on several projects monitoring the cetacean population in the Mediterranean Sea and Canary Islands.

She recently launched the UAE Dolphin Project (www.uaedolphinproject.org) a new initiative that aims to raise public awareness and gather scientific information to assess the status of the local dolphin populations and support their conservation.

She is a member of the IUCN/SSC Cetacean Specialist Group, has been associated to UAE University as adjunct assistant professor and collaborates with several universities and international organisations in UK, Italy, Australia and New Zealand.



ENHG NATURAL HISTORY AWARDS FOR 2013

Sheikh Mubarak Prize

The Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Prize for natural history is given to a person who has made a substantial, original contribution to knowledge of the history, natural history, culture, archaeology or palaeontology of the UAE, such contribution being reflected through means such as publications and lectures. The award was instituted by the ENHG Patron, HE Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan, and comprises an inscribed silver dhow and a cash prize.

Dr. Sabah Jasim

Dr. Jasim has worked with the Sharjah Archaeology Directorate for over 20 years, during which time he has played a leading role in the investigation of the archaeology of this important part of the UAE. Under his leadership, the Sharjah Archaeology Directorate has made an enormous contribution to the knowledge of the UAE's ancient heritage.

Major sites investigated under his directorship have included those at Jebel Buhais (a Neolithic cemetery), Jebel Faya (a Palaeolithic settlement), Muwailah (an Iron Age village), Wadi Hilu (an early Bronze Age copper smelting site), Kalba (a large Bronze Age / Iron Age settlement), and Tell Abraha (a Bronze Age / Iron Age settlement), as well as others in Sharjah city, in Dibba and elsewhere.

Through establishing successful co-operation agreements with numerous foreign teams, and through numerous publications of journal articles and book chapters in both English and Arabic, he has helped to ensure that the archaeology of Sharjah is well-known, both locally and internationally. In addition, he has also facilitated numerous visits by ENHG parties to important archaeological sites throughout Sharjah. These factors make Dr Sabah Jasim an especially deserving recipient of the Sheikh Mubarak Prize for Natural History.

Bish Brown Award

The Bish Brown Award is given to a person who has made a significant contribution to promoting wider interest in the objectives of the UAE's three natural history groups, through means such as educational activities, raising public consciousness in the media, playing a leading role in NHG activities etc. The award was endowed by former Vice Chairman, Terry Adams and former Secretary, Caroline Adams, to commemorate the founder of the ENHG, J.N.B. 'Bish' Brown. The award comprises a silver mounted eagle, to be held for one year by the recipient, and a cash prize.

David Edwards

David Edwards is the tenacious inaugurator, promoter, speaker, field trip leader and Acting Chair of the first new NHG in the UAE in many years: the small and slowly developing but very significant ENHG-Fujairah, which began in Jan 2012.

With a wide range of natural history interests and a particular enthusiasm for archaeology, David has done a great deal to in-spire others in Fujairah – expatriates and Emiratis alike – to explore and work on conserving the extensive natural and archaeological resources of Fujairah, offering residents and visitors to that region brilliant prospects for the future.

David's persistent pursuit of natural history exploration and his initiation of a new branch of the ENHG in an important region of the UAE puts David in the company of the ENHG's founding members, and we welcome him warmly to the company of its most active current promoters.

Blue Pansy Butterfly

Among the more common butterflies of southern Arabian mountain wadis, the Blue Pansy, *Junonia (Precis) orithya*, is one of the most noticeable and easiest to identify due to its conspicuous colouration and gliding rather than fluttering flight.

DNHG members made a number of sightings during January field trips to wadis in the UAE Hajar Mountains, including Wadi Helo, Wadi Rabqa and Wadi Sfai.

The mid-sized Nymphalid butterfly, named colloquially for the distinctive patches of brilliant blue on its otherwise largely black wings, is commonly found resting with its wings open on the rocky beds of wadis.

Like other *Junonia* species with common names such as Pansy or



Blue Pansy Female

Buckeye, *J. orithya* has prominent ocelli (eye-spots) along its wing margins, more pronounced in females than males. On the other hand, the territorial males have larger blue areas on their hind-wings.

It has been widely suggested that the ocelli of both *Junonia* sexes serve to confuse visual predators such as birds, causing them to attack the butterflies' wings instead of their heads, which often allows the insects to escape with fairly minor damage. This may account for the propensity of all *Junonia* species to perch with outspread wings, even in warm weather when basking is less of an issue.

Males may also court visibility while perched on wadi stones in order to warn off territorial rivals, but this author has also observed a *J. orithya* male closing its wings when



Blue Pansy Male

settling on a stone in a pebbly wadi bed. In such surroundings, the butterfly was well-camouflaged by his mottled, pale brown underwings. Choice of resting position might therefore be an adaptive response to local surroundings and, in the case of males, to social status.

The Blue Pansy is also versatile with respect to larval foodplants, as documented by Torben Larsen in *Butterflies of Oman* and Michael



Blue Pansy Wings Closed

Gillett, writing in *Tribulus* vol. 16.1 (2006).

In Africa it uses various species from the plant family *Lamiaceae* (mints and sages) but in Arabia favours a different family, *Acanthaceae* (eyelash plants and relatives). Larsen has found *J. orithya* caterpillars in Oman feeding on *Phyla nodi-*

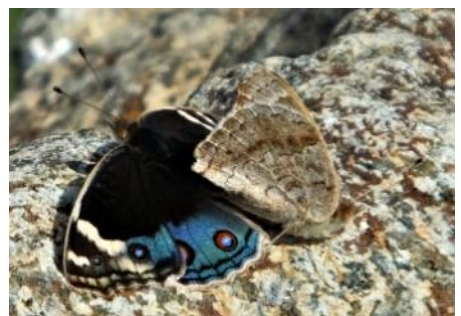
flora (Verbeniaceae), *Plantago amplexicaulis* (Plantaginaceae) and *Kickxia* species (Scrophulariaceae), while Gillett has noted *Lindenbergia indica* (Scrophulariaceae) as a larval foodplant in the UAE.

Gillett describes the Blue Pansy as a migratory species common in India and East Africa, but breeding only sporadically in the UAE during long-distance migration. However, *J. orithya* is widespread in both the UAE and Oman.

Other observers including Larsen and DNHG Chairman Gary Feulner believe the Arabian subspecies, *J. orithya*, has adapted and migrates locally within the Arabian Peninsula.

In either case, the ability to adopt a variety of larval foodplants would allow the Blue Pansy to make efficient use of transient vegetation emerging sporadically in wadis after rain.

Report by Tamsin Carlisle



Blue Pansies Mating

Field Trip Report

DNHG Mountain Hike: Yas Branch of Wadi Mowrid

Our Valentine's Day hike to the Yas Branch of Wadi Mowrid, in the mountains NW of Masafi, explored a relatively "wet", remote and unspoiled wadi within the ultrabasic rocks of the ophiolite nappe ("harzburgite", for those who are now up-to-speed from Jean-Paul Berger's field trips).

The hike got off to an auspicious start when we were gifted a bunch of fresh carrots by Ali, a local farmer in the uppermost plantation at Maydaq. He said he still regularly uses our out-of-the-way route.

The wildlife was very accommodating. We saw all of the most common lizards - dwarf semaphore gecko, bar-tailed semaphore gecko, blue-tailed lizard, Jayakar's lizard and Sinai agama - as well as the two most common snakes - the wadi racer (we saw four, including two very large ones) and the Oman carpet viper.

The viper was calm, as usual, and retreated from us gradually up a rock and gravel bank. (NB: Notwith-



A long, thin Wadi Racer *Platyceps rhodorachis*, a harmless snake, exiting the pool where it has been hunting, probably for wadi fish

standing their placid disposition, the venom of the carpet viper is life-threatening and they should always be treated with respect.)

We also recorded the first UAE sighting of a rare parasitic plant, *Orobanche aegyptiaca* (see cover story).



An agricultural camp at a remote site in the Hajar Mountains NW of Masafi



The rare parasitic plant, *Orobanche aegyptiaca*

a refuge for the wadi fish (*Garra barreimiae*) and other species, including insects with aquatic larvae. The Garra here and at another large pool downstream are among the largest to be seen anywhere.

On this occasion, after a month of intermittent rain, the junction pool was at its normal level, but the surrounding vegetation had been burned, making it less attractive both visually and for flying insects.

Nearer to our car park at the end point of the hike, we found a few names painted on rocks near pools that are probably well known to area residents and visited occasionally for recreation. Litter, however, was at a minimum, with only bits of plastic bags and a plastic bottle or two along our route.

Report by Gary Feulner



Intent DNHG observers, dwarfed in the wadi environment



The Oman Carpet Viper *Echis omanensis* is a resident of wet wadis. It often hunts beside wadi pools, but does not enter the water

A less happy observation was the continuing development of a "camp" midway along our route (now featuring four buildings, a water tank and satellite dish), where cultivation of a previously abandoned grove of palms has been reactivated and water is being extracted from a "wet" side wadi.

The current activity at this site began about a decade ago and its expansion has the potential to threaten a large permanent pool at the wadi junction, which serves as

Inter-Emirates Weekend

Unsettled weather played havoc with plans for snorkeling and boat trips on the 2014 Inter-Emirates Weekend, hosted by the Emirates Natural History Group in Abu Dhabi.

Fortunately, even at the very beginning of the spring migration, bird-watching opportunities in and around the UAE capital were rich and varied.

A few of the photographic highlights can be seen here.

Contribution by Tamsin Carlisle



Indian Silverbills at Mushrif Gardens.



Western Cattle Egrets in Mushrif Gardens.



Black-winged Stilts at Wathba Lakes.

Rare visitor on Rams Beach



Unusual finding on Rams beach on 31 January 2014: A dead fish with a grey round body and almost circular plain-coloured pectoral fin disc. The disc and tail were covered in thorns suggesting that this is a Porcupine or Thorny Ray (*Urogymnus africanus / asperrimus*).

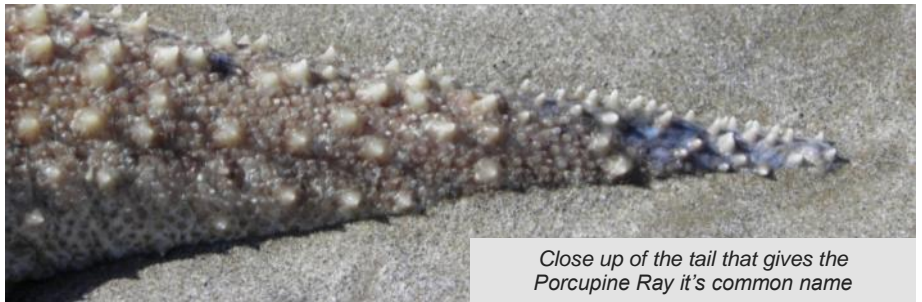
This fish is a rare species of sting ray of the family *Dasyatidae* and

can be found in the tropical Indo-Pacific, as well as off West Africa.

Unlike other members of its family the Porcupine Ray lacks a venomous stinging spine, but can still defend itself with the many sharp thorns found on its disc and tail.

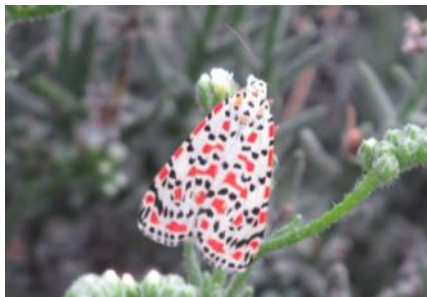
The bottom dweller's diet consists of bony fish and invertebrates that live in the benthic zone and it is highly prized for its tough skin which is made into a type of leather called shagreen. This leather is historically used to make weapons for hand to hand combat as the rough texture prevented slippage during battle.

Contribution by Ulrike Andorff



Close up of the tail that gives the Porcupine Ray its common name

Crimson Speckled ... ? It's the Same thing



Utetheisa pulchella, the Crimson Speckled Footman



An individual lacking small black spots, but also identified by experts as a variant of *Utetheisa pulchella*

The January 2014 Gazelle showed photos of two apparently related moths, photographed last summer at the Siji Dam. One was the common Crimson Speckled Footman *Utetheisa pulchella*. The other was very similar, but lacked most of the small black spots that cover the wings of *U. pulchella*. We asked Tony Van Harten, the editor of *Arthropod Fauna of the UAE*, about this, and he very kindly referred the photos to Rob de Vos, an expert colleague at the Leiden Museum.

The verdict? The unknown, too, is *U. pulchella*, which is known to be a variable species. Our photo shows an extreme variation, lacking spots. In the absence of microscopic examination, this can only be determined by experience or by reference to a collection containing a large number of already determined specimens, sufficient to demonstrate the full range of variability of the species.

Contribution by Binish Roobas

Leaping Lizards

Bosk's fringe-toed lizard *Acanthodactylus boskianus* is common in North Africa, but seldom seen in the UAE. It was therefore discussed in detail in *Tribulus* vol. 21 (2013), after Binish Roobas and I unexpectedly encountered and then studied a large colony in the Hajar Mountain foothills.

But interest doesn't end with publication and we have continued to revisit "our" lizards. Subsequent observations have resolved at least one of the open questions about this species, specifically: *Does Bosk's lizard hibernate in the UAE, as it does in North Africa?*



A close-up of the same male lizard, which held its position under the plant for more than an hour

We learned that it does not. We had surmised this from the presence of juvenile lizards in early December 2012, just prior to the hibernation period.

Later, this past winter, small juvenile lizards were also observed (along with adults) on 1 February 2014, in the heart of the south Arabian 'winter'.

In the course of our original study we had learned that *A. boskianus* can track the trajectory of incoming flying insects and pounce on them when they land.

In additional field visits this past winter, we discovered another un-

expected talent. The lizard sometimes waits in ambush under a sparse plant, and can leap up to the lower branches to snatch an insect meal, or even leap into the lower branches with all four feet, jumping a vertical distance roughly equivalent to its own body length.

Perhaps that should not be entirely surprising, because in North Africa the Bosk's lizard is known to climb into shrubs. But (as for a few other lizards in the UAE and elsewhere) plant climbing is generally said to be for cooling purposes, not for hunting. It may be necessary to re-examine that conclusion.

Report and photo by Gary Feulner



This male Bosk's fringe-toed lizard stationed itself under the sparse woody annual *Farsetia stylosa*. At least twice during twenty minutes of observation, it leapt up to, and into, the lower branches of the plant to catch small insects that had perched there

Dog vs. Cat



DNHG members frequently inquire about 'large' mammal tracks they encounter in the field.

Fox prints (and feral dogs) are by far the most commonly seen, but cat prints are occasional.

Fox and dog tracks are more or less diamond-shaped, with two toes forward of the others and two toes to the side, ahead of the pad or heel.

Fox and dog tracks, if they are

clear, will also show the imprint of claws (which in the canine family are not retractable).

In cat prints, the toes are arranged more or less radially in front of the pad.

All prints will vary somewhat according to the nature of the substrate and subsequent wind erosion.

Kevin Budd, of the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife in Sharjah, has forwarded a helpful diagram which is reproduced here, downloaded from http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10370_12145_43573-146656--,00.html

Contribution by Kevin Budd
 Report by Gary Feulner

Announcements

DNHG Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan

res: 344 8283
off 344 0462

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi

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off: 06-5583 003
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Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner

res: 306 5570

Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers

res: 394 8871
email: valeriechalmers@gmail.com

Plants – Valerie Chalmers

Archaeology—MaryAnne Pardoe

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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.

Are You a Techie with Time?

The website sub-committee would like to find volunteers who can help with maintenance of the on-line newsletter, and to upload the wealth of information and photographs from past *Gazelles*.

Full training will be given. Contact any Committee person - we will be very pleased to hear from you!

New Gazelle Editor

As the new editor of the *Gazelle* I would like to briefly introduce myself. I am originally from Melbourne, Australia and have been in the UAE for 4 years, where I work in animation.

My interest in natural history comes from my parents: my father, an avid amateur wildlife photographer and my mother, an environmental auditor for the 'Environmental Protection Authority' in Victoria.

I would like to say a big thank you to the previous editor Sonja Benjamin for all her hard work and I hope to uphold the same high standard that the readers of the *Gazelle* are accustomed to.

Please feel free to contact me if you have something you would like to contribute to the *Gazelle* and if you do not feel confident with your written English skills, please let me know, I am here to help. Thank you, Peter.

We still want your Snails

A reminder, especially for new members: Your unwanted garden snails and slugs are of interest for scientific study and an accounting of the terrestrial molluscs of the UAE.

All specimens will be gratefully accepted by Chairman Gary Feulner, and contributors will be kept in-formed of progress and pedigrees. Suburban gardens are home to several native Arabian snails, but also a number of introduced species. There have been a few surprises over the years and we suspect there are more out there.

Dead shells are preferred; we'll follow up if you've got something unusual. **It's easy. Just bag 'em and tag 'em!** Please remember to record the location and the habitat, as well as your name,

Old Tribulus Volumes Wanted

The ENHG journal, *Tribulus*, is now in its twenty-third year of publication. Since it began, it has become increasingly important as a source of published data about the natural history and archaeology of the UAE. Much of the material published in *Tribulus* is available nowhere else.

As the journal continues to expand its reputation overseas, the Editorial Board have received an increasing number of requests from overseas academic and other scientific institutions for sets of *Tribulus*. Unfortunately, it is not possible to meet all of these requests, since some of the older issues are out of stock, and reprinting would make no economic sense.

If any DNHG members are leaving the UAE, and do not want to take their copies of *Tribulus* with them, then the Editorial Board would be delighted to have them back! Anyone wishing to hand back copies should contact any member of the DNHG Committee, who will arrange to get the copies to the Editorial Board. Many thanks, in advance.

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

April 06: Dr. Ada Natoli: UAE Dolphin Project: Update from a new research initiative

May 04: Dr. John Burt: The Arabian Gulf: A Natural History of its Environment and Ecosystems

Field Trips (Members Only)

March 21: Nature Hike in Wadi Wurayah

March 28 to April 05: Nepal Hill Country Field Trip

May 23 to 29: Trip to Georgia

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

DNHG COMMITTEE 2014

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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Contributions

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

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

DNHG Membership

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh. 100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. Membership is valid from Sep 2013 to Sep 2014. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to HSBC account no. 030100242001. (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 number AE900200000030100242001. However, this process does not identify you as the payer. If you wish to pay by cash, please also scan and e-mail 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, 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.