



GAZELLE

مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي



© Peter Olliff



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DNHG Field Trip: Shawkah Dam

On the 30th of January, 18 intrepid explorers (DNHG members) met at the Shawkah Dam to join Peter and Richard on their first guided walk. Due to the recent rains it was a unique opportunity for many of us to walk through a wadi with small waterfalls and ponds.

The entrance of the wadi was blocked by a pool and some of the group scrambled over the rocks to cross it, while others chose the low

road through the water. As the water was crystal clear it was deceptive as to how deep some of the pools were.

The leisurely pace allowed for many photos to be taken and an opportunity to identify butterflies, dragonflies, toads, wadi fish, beetles, birds and plants. We also encountered brilliant blue Agamas basking in the sun and watched as they changed back to a dull grey colour when they were disturbed.

Splashing about in the wadi pools uncovered a water scorpion (see above photo) as well as many other water beetles including the Striped diving beetle.

One of the group, Jean-Paul Berger, a professor of Life and Earth Sciences, also provided some insight into the rocks of the wadi and showed us diabase dykes, which can result in cauliflower magnesite samples and serpentine samples.

The narrow wadi entrance opened out into a wider wadi with date palms and large flowering oleanders. This then led onto a plateau with views over the Hajar Mountains, before descending into a neighbouring wadi where we stopped for lunch.

Fortunately Richard and Peter had scouted the route the previous weekend and with the help of GPS guided us into another adjoining wadi to enable the group to complete the loop back to the car park.

The second wadi was a relatively easy walk with a few water pools - which provided an opportunity for a foot soak and a possible fish pedicure ... unfortunately, or some would say fortunately, the fish weren't biting.

During the walk, the group covered 10km with everyone making it back to the cars thus completing another successful DNHG excursion. Many thanks to Peter and Richard for their expert guiding.

Report by Ilse Bienefelt



© Alan Freeland

To scramble or to wade?

Inside this month

Sundown Spiders

Sunny Hoopoes

FT: Christmas Camp

Strange Noises in the Night

FT: Shindagha Neighbourhood

FT: Harrier Attacks

FT: Gems in the Sand UAQ

Contributors

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

Ilse Bienefelt, Alan Freeland, Konstantina Sakellariou, Sonja Lavrencic, Angela Manthorpe, Binish Roobas, Tamsin Carlisle and Gary Feulner

Announcements

Next Month's Speaker

The DNHG are delighted to welcome Herbert Otto who will be giving a talk titled:

"An introduction to butterflies of the UAE and Oman"

Herbert Otto was born in Zimbabwe and spent most of his life in Mpumalanga, South Africa. He developed a passion for butterflies while visiting a family farm which developed into a survey and subsequent book entitled '*Butterflies of the Kruger National Park and surrounds*'.

He is currently working on '*Butterflies of Oman*' with the first recordings of the Western Pygmy Blue (*Brephidium exilis*) and the Osiris Blue (*Euchrysops osiris*) in Sohar, Oman.

Calling All 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 informed 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, the date, and any remarks.

Geoglyphs, stone piles in the UAE

The act of moving and arranging stones by people has been around for millennia; often the purpose is obvious, but there are instances where the rationale can be unclear.



Brien Holmes, the well respected and former Chairman of the Al-Ain branch of the ENHG, has published an online paper detailing and discussing the phenomenon of regular arrangements of stone piles found at various UAE sites, offering possible explanations as to why individuals would pile stones.

If you would like to read Brien's full paper, please visit:

https://www.academia.edu/8068232/Discussion_of_stone_piling_in_the_United_Arab_Emirates

Sand Dollar Misidentification

Dr. Richard Hornby, one of the UAE's most experienced naturalists, has brought to our attention the misidentification of Sand dollars in last year's November edition of the Gazelle.

The species we reported as *C. reticulatus* is actually *Clypeaster humilis*. *C. reticulatus* is much smaller than *C. humilis*, and has thickened margins. The larger *C. humilis* has been reported reaching lengths of 7-10cm, so our member's findings of 11.5cm is still impressive.

Richard also recommends the following books to help with identification, which is a valuable reminder that not all knowledge can be found on the internet.

- ***A Guide to the Seashores of Eastern Africa*** by Matthew Richmond
- ***A Field Guide to the Seashores of Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf*** by David Jones, which is particularly good for polychaetes.
- ***Two Oceans - A Guide to the Marine Life of Southern Africa***, is also a good complement to the above mentioned books and particularly helpful in pinning down hydrozoans and obscure groups of crustaceans.
- ***Guide Delachaux: Guide des Bords de Mer***, has excellent illustrations of all the marine groups, including many of the Mediterranean marine species making it a very good complement to the two above mentioned Africa-based books. The book is in French, but that doesn't affect the scientific names and illustrations. It contains no fewer than fourteen pages on Bryozoa, and even covers the Phoronids.

If you spot something out of the ordinary in the Gazelle, please email us: gazelleeditor@gmail.com

Sundown Spider

There are not many things you can count on in life, but one of them is the UAE's "Sundown Spider". Each night, as twilight darkens, this spider emerges to spin a small vertical orb-web with very closely spaced concentric rings, a process that takes about 15 minutes. We have found this spider mostly in thick reeds (*Phragmites australis*) at Ruwayah plantation outside Dubai and at the waterfall in Wadi Wurayah on the East Coast. The spider starts by laying a framework of support strands on which it deposits the spiral strands. The finished product is seldom more than ca. 25 cm (10").

The spider itself is small, pale and unremarkable, but it is distinguished by its habits and by its bristly appearance when viewed closely. It has been identified for us by Dr. Helena V. Prokopenka of Donetsk

National University in the Ukraine, as a species of *Larinia*, a genus of orb-web spiders (Araneidae) found throughout the Holarctic (northern Temperate Zone). Another species, probably also *Larinia*, longer and slimmer but less bristly, has been found weaving similar webs in Mushrif Park in the vertical, stalk-like leaves of the broom tree, *Leptadenia pyrotechnica*, a species which also dominates much of the rolling sand desert of inland Dubai.

Web-building is a nightly chore for these spiders. By morning the web has been consumed and the spiders have retreated to camouflage themselves in the foliage. Among the predators that they face, at least among reeds, are relatively large, climbing, huntsman spiders of the genus *Eusparassus*.

Contribution by
Binish Roobas and Gary Feulner



© Binish Roobas

Larinia sp. spins its web in reeds at twilight each evening



© Gary Feulner

The web of *Larinia sp.* features very closely spaced concentric rings



The Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) is an attractive, mid-sized bird familiar to most residents of Dubai, where a breeding population is present year-round and is supplemented each autumn by passage migrants. It is the only extant species in the family Upupidae, and is widely distributed across much of Europe, Asia and Africa.

Previously classed with kingfishers, rollers, bee-eaters and hornbills in the order Coraciformes, the hoopoe has recently been placed in the new avian order Bucerotiformes, along with hornbills and a small African family comprising woodhoopoes and scimitarbills.

Sunning Hoopoes

The true hoopoe, however, is distinguished from its closest relatives by the prominent crest of feathers on its head, which it tends to flick up and down when alarmed or agitated.

Hoopoes spend much time probing lawns, forest floors and sometimes tree branches with their long bills for the insects on which they feed. Their long necks are both muscular and flexible, enabling the birds to extract prey from tunnels and crevices.

It is these adaptive characteristics of hoopoe necks that also allow the birds to assume a striking trademark pose while sunbathing – an activity most often observed during the cooler morning hours – with one or both wings outspread and the neck bent in an exaggerated arc over the back so that the beak points vertically upwards.

To human sensibilities, a sunbathing hoopoe can appear disturbing,

as if the bird had broken its neck, which could help explain why the pose was for a long time interpreted as defensive. However, the behaviour and pose are more economically explained as providing the resting bird with maximal body exposure to the sun. Moreover, this behaviour is usually observed in hoopoes that appear secure in their surroundings and not threatened by intruders. For example, birds often break out of the head-thrown-back pose to preen their feathers or take dust baths.

Some hoopoe relatives adopt similar postures while trying to warm up on cool mornings. Indian rollers, for example, can sometimes be spotted resting motionless on the ground with their wings outspread. However, rollers have shorter necks than hoopoes and do not throw their heads back while sunbathing.

Report and photo
by Tamsin Carlisle

Field Trips



DNHG Christmas Camp

On December 19 the DNHG held its (almost) annual pre-Christmas picnic and camp. A small convoy of 4x4s met at Batayeh village on the E55 before making their way across the orange-coloured sand dunes, passing camel and saluki racing tracks, and eventually arriving at a beautiful ghaf tree grove near the Banyan Tree Hotel.

To add to the adventure one of the convoy got stuck in the sand and, after a lot of digging, was finally rescued by a passing local on his way home from the nearby falconry centre belonging to the Sheikh.

At lunch time everyone feasted on a variety of traditional dishes members had brought along to share and an impromptu visit by a man with a camel offered free rides for everyone. Walks around the camp yielded many interesting sights including a jewel beetle, numerous insect cocoons, a skink and a lively group of Arabian babblers.

The group also spotted what was thought to be a 'bird of prey', but was later identified as a Brown-necked raven, which can be distinguished from a house crow by its more slender bill and longer wings that appear less rounded in flight.

In the evening the group climbed the sand dunes to watch the sunset before bedding down for the night by the camp fire. A big thank you to Sonja for organizing another successful DNHG outing.

*Contribution by
Angela Manthorpe, Tamsin
Carlisle and Sonja Lavrenčić*

Strange Noises in the Night

I've always thought that an inquisitive nature was useful in the Natural History field, so when I was woken up at 4.30am during the DNHG Christmas camp by a shrill 'bird call', I couldn't just lie there, I felt compelled to get up and find out what it was.

Although it was pretty dark I set off towards the sound, crested the first dune, saw no likely trees and pushed on. Over the next rise I paused by a ghaf tree, but it was clear the sound was coming from lower down. Treading carefully so as not to scare my target I recorded what was now, an extremely loud call, and switched on my torch. Ha!

Rather than a large bird, I was somewhat taken back to discover a loud speaker, wires and a car battery in the *Calotropis* bush in front of me. As I had no idea if this was a prank or some strange research project I detached one of the wires and went back to bed. Returning to the site in the morning we found only a few twists of insulating tape and some tyre tracks.

After asking a few questions, it was DNHG member Jackie Strick who solved the mystery by informing us the speaker was playing a breeding call to attract stone curlews to the area.

An article in the Khaleej Times last October elaborates on this issue, stating the stone curlew is sold for over 450Dhs and, according to a spokesperson from the Environment and Natural Reserves Authority in Sharjah, "all devices and tools used in misleading, trapping and excessively catching birds are banned". The full article can be found in the following link:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=data/crime/2014/October/crime_October53.xml§ion=crime

Members of the public can report the equipment on toll free 800 3722 745, and after discussing this with them I was directed to the Sharjah Breeding Centre via email:

bceaw@bceaw.ae

If you'd like to listen to a recording of the call you can find the file on DNHG's Facebook page.

*Report and photo
by Angela Manthorpe*



Ground Mantis

For this member one of the highlights of the pre-Christmas picnic was encountering the Common Ground Mantis for the first time.

While walking between the rising sand dunes I noticed something small suddenly scurry off at lightning speed from under foot.

Intrigued I was able to get close to one which appeared dead. From above I couldn't believe it was an insect as it only had 4 obvious legs but, flipping it over, I could see the missing pair neatly tucked under its neck. I still wouldn't have guessed it was a mantis, due to its broad flat body shape.

Flipping the insect back over the mantis suddenly sprang back to life and scurried off into the desert, presumably deciding playing dead wasn't going to deter this observer!

*Report and photo
by Peter Olliff*

DNHG Field Trip: Shindagha Historical Neighbourhood



© Tamsin Carlisle



© Tamsin Carlisle



© Tamsin Carlisle

Shindagha, the strategic peninsula at the entrance to Dubai Creek, was once the centre of Dubai's trade economy as well as the residence of the ruling Maktoum family who moved here with the Bani Yas tribe in 1833.

With the development of new harbours, trade centres and the expansion of new Dubai, the historic neighbourhood of Shindagha has lost its importance and remains on the edge of Dubai's modern life.

Almost completely demolished in 1991 to allow for new developments, Shindagha was later reconstructed based on old testimonials and photographs. Now part of the Dubai Creek – Khor Dubai historical area and under the supervision of the Dubai Heritage and Architecture Department, Shindagha participated in the 2013 UNESCO bid.

During our December walk through historical Shindagha we visited Sheikh Saeed's House, built by Sheikh Saeed's father, Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid al Maktoum. In 1896, the

house was home to the ruling family until Sheikh Saeed's death in 1958. It now houses a museum with a fascinating collection of stamps, coins and photographs of Dubai taken throughout the 20th century.

We also visited the house of Juma and Obaid bin Thani, two rich merchant brothers who were married to two of the Sheikh's daughters. The house is now home to the calligraphy museum and here we attended a short presentation on calligraphy by the resident calligrapher, Mr. Zaid Amin.

Afterwards we passed by the newly opened Camel and Horse Museum before taking a look around the Traditional Architecture Museum which has a comprehensive exhibition on local building styles and materials.

We then made a short stop at the 1939 Shindagha watch tower in Ghubaiba and ended the walk with a sunset ride onboard a traditional Abra, giving us another perspective of creek life and the chance to enjoy the changing colours of the setting sun on the nearby buildings.

Report by Sonja Lavrenčič

DNHG Field Trip: Harrier Attack!



On 29th November 2014, Tamsin Carlisle, Ala Dorrani, and Helen and Alan Freeland had an excellent dawn birding trip to Seih Al-Salam, now better known as the Al-Qudra Lakes at Endurance City.

The trip was organized by Tamsin and was a repeat trip due to popular demand. For more details of

the location and birds that can be seen, see Gary Feulner's write-up in the December issue of *Gazelle*.

The most notable observation on this visit was a harrier attack on a duck at the eastern end of the largest lake, sometimes called Flamingo Lake. The Western Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) has previously been sighted here and this would be consistent with our observations.

The harrier circled low, about two meters above the lake, and attacked a small diving duck about six times while we were watching. The duck remained low in the water and dived each time the harrier attacked. The duck was possibly a Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya ny-*

roca) as we had seen a small group of this diving duck with other duck species on the lake earlier.

Eventually the harrier gave up, rested on the bank of the lake for a brief minute and then flew off south. A similar situation to what we saw, but with a different outcome, is shown in this 30-second video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjKxUVjrYvc>.

*Report by Alan Freeland
Photos by Tamsin Carlisle*



Field Trips

The Temple of Shams



Gems in the Sand of Umm Al Quwain

DNHG Field Trip: Visiting Tel Abraq and Ad Dur in Umm Al Quwain, Feb 7 2015

Archaeological sites are not commonly accessible in the UAE – at least for the majority of people living or visiting the country - so our field trip to the small traditional emirate of Umm Al Quwain, led by Mrs Mary-Anne Pardoe and generously escorted by Mr Hani Attia and Ms Rania Hussain, was somewhat covered with both additional curiosity and excitement.

Our visit to Umm Al Quwain's Archaeological Museum at the beginning of the trip allowed us to gain a general overview of the sites we would be visiting later on, and added, what I felt to be, a necessary "human element" that would help to visualise life in the respective cities.

In the museum we were surrounded by numerous artefacts including utensils dating back to the 6th millennium BC, bead necklaces from the 5th millennium BC, finely decorated pottery from the 3rd millennium

BC and the oldest pearl in the world, which, unfortunately, was not on display during our visit.

There were also two headless eagle statues and a large stone with Aramaic writing from the Temple of Shams as well as numerous weapons, coins, and small precious ornaments. Many of us were further excited just by being allowed to briefly touch a small pendulum depicting a person riding a horse, dating back from the 1st century AD.

We then made our way to the archaeological site of Tel Abraq which is divided between the Emirate of Umm Al Quwain and the Emirate of Sharjah, creating a very interesting set up of, practically, two archaeological sites, both accessible to us, even though we did not have the same amount of information to all their findings.

The site dates back from the 3rd millennium BC, and is covered with shattered pottery from the Iron Age, broken seashells that cannot be found in the UAE anymore, tombs and the remains of other buildings. Our attention was drawn to a grave of an 18-year-old girl who died from polio, and the skeletons of 5 men, found one next to the other, one of whom was possibly a soldier pierced by an arrow (which we saw only in pictures).

Discovered by chance in 1971 by a group of Iraqi archaeologists, Ad Dur was our next stop and is the site of a fishing town dating from the 1st century AD that, it seems, developed into a trading centre between the east and the west.

Ad Dur is well known for its pagan Temple of Shams (Temple of the Sun), whose name is written in Aramaic on a large stone found at the site, now displayed in the museum. The temple's east entrance was built out of coral, covered with decorated plaster and it was outside here that the two headless eagle statues, also displayed in the museum, were found, symbolising power and inspiring fear and respect. The temple is located at the end of the town, while in the centre there is a fort – its ruins still visible - to protect and defend the area.

These buildings are surrounded by graves (most of them are standard graves where numerous bodies were found buried under the sand. There are cases where 25 and even 47 skeletons have been found), as well as several houses of various sizes. The size of the town is still unknown; currently, 11 houses have been excavated, while it is expected that several more are still buried under the sand. The houses were built out of stone and covered with palm tree branches to form the roof. The town also had more than 6 wells for water.

The latest excavation is on a pottery manufacturing site where three kilns have been discovered. The ground of the overall site is covered with small (tempting) treasures of several kinds of broken pottery. Some of the pottery is dark grey and thick, which is the local pottery used for cooking, while other pottery shards are much thinner, imitating the Indian style. Persian pottery can also be found at the site, dating possibly from the 3rd-4th century AD.

At the top of a nearby hill, outside of the fenced archaeological site, we also visited the Ruler's Palace, the biggest and most elaborate structure which strategically overlooks the sea and the mangrove bay.

*Report and photos by
Konstantina Sakellariou*



The largest and most elaborate structure of the Ad Dur site was the Ruler's Palace

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Come Join our Field Trip Team!

If you would like to join the 'Field Trip Coordination Team' or are interested in leading your very own field trip then we would like to hear from you!

Field trip leaders do not need to be professional experts, just be generally interested and enthusiastic. We have a number of field trips to choose from or if you have somewhere specific in mind, our field trip coordinators are here to help.

Field Trip Coordinators:
Sonja: lavson@gmail.com
Angela: manthorpe2005@yahoo.co.uk

DNHG Convoy Driving Rules

DNHG field trips often involve convoy driving, either to our destination or as part of the trip itself. DNHG members, new and old, should be familiar with basic convoy rules. We offer this set of rules to make our journeys together as safe and hassle-free as possible.

1. General items

Arrive at the starting point in plenty of time for the briefing on the route and destination. Be ready to start with a full fuel tank. If you plan to leave the group before the end of the trip, notify the trip leader and others. Do not go faster than you feel comfortable driving. **Keep your headlights on in daylight to make it easier to ID convoy vehicles.**

2. Rules of the road

Our line of cars should not dominate the road. If others are trying to pass the group, please let them do so, by leaving sufficient space between vehicles. Whenever the group stops, make sure you pull off the road completely. Always use your indicators in plenty of time to guide cars in the group, as well as other road users. **If you want the group to stop, flash your headlights.** If the car behind you flashes its headlights, flash yours until the group leader pulls over. After the group passes through a congested area, the leader should try to stop as soon as safely possible to regroup.

3. Overtaking

Overtake only when it is permitted and safe to do so.

4. Speed

Always stay within the legal speed limit. If the traffic is flowing more slowly than the legal limit, go with the traffic flow. The lead car should set a sensible pace for the group. It is each driver's responsibility to keep the vehicle behind in sight, insuring that the group stays together. **If the car behind slows down, please slow down with it.** If every car does this the convoy will stay together.

5. Tips for the trip leader

Have a short briefing for all drivers to explain the route and destinations. Assign a buddy to drivers who are unfamiliar with the route. Hand out route directions if possible. **Get mobile phone numbers of all drivers, and make sure all drivers have your number.** If there is a large number of vehicles, it is advisable to break up into two groups with a lead car for each group.

6. Fail-safe planning

At night or in heavy traffic, it's very difficult to ID the car behind you, so it's essential to agree in advance on route turning points, and where the convoy will regroup. Phone liaison may be necessary to resolve problems.

7. Sweep

Lead car driver should designate someone to act as "sweep" (tail-end-Charlie) for the convoy. **The sweep should always stay at the rear, and should be on the lookout for unscheduled stops** (e.g., for a red light, puncture, unscheduled petrol stop or photo stop) and should alert the leader by phone, if the delay is significant.

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

March 8: Herbert Otto: An introduction to butterflies of the U.A.E. and Oman

April 12: Ahmed Al Harethi: Life in the desert

Field Trips (Members Only)

Mar 29 - Apr 3: Andaman Islands Trip

April 3-11: Nepal Hill Country

June 5-13: Slovenia

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 100 Dhs. for families and 50 Dhs. for individuals. Membership is valid from Sep 2014 to Sep 2015. 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.