

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP
PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Honourable mention is in order for **Anne Marie Bui**, our former Membership Secretary, who (at the close of the Second Millennium) holds the informal record for DNHG field trip attendance. Over the years Anne Marie has frugged armpit deep through mangroves, braved flooded wadis and poisonous vipers, climbed steep cliffs and snorkelled reefs and rocky islands, all in the name of a day in the field and a better appreciation of the wildlife and environment of the UAE.

Mike and Jill Oates hosted a Christmas visit by friends from Oman, including committee members of the Oman Historical Society (the local natural history group) and kindly arranged to put them in touch with DNHG Committee members.

Chairman **Gary Feulner** has made several recent attempts at blacklighting for scorpions along the mountain front, but without success. Gary blames the scorpions for not being there, as he has successfully detected occasional pieces of scorpion exoskeletons, which fluoresce under UV light. Are scorpion populations suffering (or individuals aestivating) due to the continuing drought?

Several members have been real newsmakers recently. Gulf News featured a very nice article on the ALT's new remote-operated camera, set up by **Robert Llewellyn-Smith** near permanent waterholes in the Rufus Al-Jibal. So far it has captured some excellent shots of the bushy-tailed Blanford's fox, itself only recognized in the UAE in 1985. **Barbara Couldrey** has been along to help pick up film, but the route in is known to be daunting.

Also, **Dr Reza Khan** appeared in Khaleej Times, beaming like a proud father and holding Dubai Zoo's newly-born pigmy hippo. The pigmy hippo is an endangered species native to tropical West Africa. The mother was earlier obtained by Dubai Zoo from Saudi Arabia.



Find out more about our next speaker **Horst Kauch** on Page 4

Natural History Awards

On 16th November the Bish Brown Award (a magnificent silver falcon) was presented to one of Abu Dhabi's most active environmentalists **Gayatri Raghwa**, who teaches at the Indian School and who has inspired thousands of school children.

This year's winner of the Sheika Mubarak Award's **Moaz Sawaf**, a tireless servant of the Arabian Leopard Trust who has traversed most of the mountains in the UAE, getting to know and influencing the thinking of countless local people. He has collected an enormous amount of information about the wildlife of the mountains, particularly of the larger mammals and has transformed the attitudes of former hunters or people whose normal reaction to a leopard or a caracal would have been to kill it.

Report by *Dr Richard Hornby*

This month's Contributors

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

Gary Feulner
Stephen Green
Carole Harris
Dr Richard Hornby
Dr Marijcka Jongbloed



Field Trips

Fossil Hunting

Friday 11 February

Valerie Chalmers will lead this field trip, visiting 2 sites. Meet at 8am at the Hilton covered car park.

Please contact her for further details. Tel: 3494818

From Dibba to the Musandam Peninsula By Dhow

Friday 18 February

The cost for this unusual day out will be Dh5 125 per person. It is essential that payment is made at the next meeting on the 6th February 2000. Bring your own food and drinks for the day.

Please contact Peter van Arnsland on 050-6425077 to confirm your places.

Mountain Hiking

Friday 25 February

This hike is rescheduled from 10 Dec 1999. Helen Emery will lead a hike to Jebel Du Faraj. 4 wheel drive is necessary.

Please contact Helen on 3594154 or Mary Boardwood 3422546

To the Western Region of Abu Dhabi

24, 25, 26 February
with Donna Simon

This trip can be split up for those working on Thursday or Saturday, but is not suitable for a day trip because of the 4½ hour one way drive. For those arriving on Friday it would be better to arrange one leaving time for all from Dubai, to give quality time there and to con-

nect with the original group (with the use of mobile phones). Donna will establish a designated camp-site.

There is much to see and explore in the area. Birding, shelling beachcombing and rock climbing. There is also a possibility of snorkelling in knee deep water. The nights are so clear that the Milky Way seems as though it will float down to the ground beneath. There are interesting landscapes and hills of quartzlike gypsum. Donna has found whalebones, dugongs, porpoise, skulls etc on the beach. But in October 88 there was strong evidence of impending development. The weekend will be what you make of it, adventurous, or restful and relaxing, in a truly wild area, a rarity these days.

Contact Donna Simon on 3478926 for further details.

Inter-Emirates Weekend

9 - 10 March

Each year in March the three Natural History Groups of UAE: Al Ain, Abu Dhabi and Dubai get together for an interesting yet social weekend. This is a chance to meet people from other groups, re-acquaint with old friends and learn something new about a specific area. The event is organised annually by one of the groups in rotation. In 1999 we had a wonderful (under canvas) experience on Al Futaisi Island where gazelle, dhuf and dolphins were seen. This followed the 1998 event organised by Al Ain introducing us to the work that has been done mapping and recording the ecology of Jebel Hafit and the 1997 event organised by Dubai group based in Ras Al Khaimah with groups going to Siriyat Island, Shimal and other archaeological sites. The millennium Inter-Emirates will be hosted by our group in Fujairah where enthusiastic East Coast residents will join us. We hope Fujairah will be

inspired to be operating a fourth NHG soon as a result of this weekend.

Details for the weekend are still being worked out, however we are pleased to announce that we will be based at the Fujairah Hilton, with events beginning at 2pm on Thursday 9 March for those fortunate to have a two day weekend. The hotel is block booking a number of rooms for the event on a first come first served basis and you are encouraged to book early or take the chance of having to use Sill Hotel (5 minutes away) or take a camping option.

On Thursday we have some trips for you to join, and in the evening Minnie Van der Weg will be our guest speaker on "Fujairah In the Past". Minnie is an Honorary member of DNHG and well known for the pioneering work she has done in providing health care to East Coast ladies for over 30 years. There will also be an entertaining quiz with prizes after dinner. On Friday we have optional trips which will see groups heading off in different directions either for a relaxing beach day snorkelling and shell collecting, or an energetic hike, archaeological rumblings or muddy encounters with mangroves... In fact: "something for everyone".

This will be a popular event and we encourage you to book early with the hotel. Further details will be given at meetings and in the next Gazette.

Hotel rates are
Double occupancy Dh390 (children beds can be added) inc. full breakfast
Single occupancy Dh350 (twin rooms so sharing is an option) inc. full breakfast
Evening buffet Dh85
Children's menu Dh30
Packed lunch boxes Dh35 (inc. soft drinks)

Tel: Hilton Hotel 09-2222411 to make your reservations



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(see above)

Plants - Valerie Chalmers
(see above)

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 Gazette editor, so new information can be shared with all our readers.

—MAMMAL— —REPORT—



Please send your Mammal reports
to Marjcke Jongbloed

The last months of 1999 provided us with two very special mammal records. One was from some military men from a camp near Swayhan. Moaz Sewaf, the AL field worker went to check out the report that one or more caracals had been spotted there. He found droppings and tracks that were undoubtedly caracal. One of the first caracal recordings in the UAE was from this area, in 1968 (Harrison & Bates, 1991). Usually caracals are found in the hills and mountains of the region, especially the Hajar and the Musandam mountains. It is encouraging to know that with the strict enforcement of anti-hunting laws in Abu Dhabi emirate, this wonderful cat may be extending its range again.

The other record was provided by DNHG member Tim Gore, who camped in a wadi near Al Ain over the New Year weekend. Workers on a plantation nearby had mentioned the presence of a "cjh:n", with the appearance and voice of a tiger. During the night the campers heard a large animal pad softly around the tent, dragging away a bag with lms for some distance until movement in the tent scared the animal away. The next morning pug marks with a diameter of 8 cm were found upstream in the wadi mud, accompanied by some smaller, less distinct tracks. From the photographs taken, it seems that this may have been a leopard. It could even be a female leopard with one or more cubs. Because of this possibility I do not mention here what the exact location was, as it would be best to leave the animal well alone.

During walks in the field at the top of the creek I have come across a track that baffles me. It consists of two prints, with a diameter of 1.2 cm, slightly oval-shaped, with no clear toes or other features visible.

They are about 12 cms apart, with a distance of 35-50 cms between every set of prints. The prints are not quite in line, and are slightly deeper than nearby gerbil prints, slightly less deep than hare prints in the same area. When I first saw them I thought of a baby hare, but the track is nothing like that of the adult hare. The only animal I know that moves about on two legs, apart from birds, is the gerboa. The size would be about right, but gerboa prints are side by side. In a few places the prints were closer together, especially when the animal was foraging around a salt-bush. If anyone has any idea what this could be, I would be most interested. I'll take a picture and bring it to the next meeting.

Plant Adaptations: An observation on tamarix in the sabkha.

During early morning walks in some of the sabkha fields of Dubai, I have noticed that the more high bushes of *Tamarix* sp. that occur here and there were always covered with what I thought were dew drops. However, none of the other plants seemed to have dew on them. I know that tamarix trees excrete salt by way of their leaves' needles, leaving a whitish-grey residue, on the foliage, which tastes of salt. Until now I thought that the excretion was almost imperceptible, like human perspiration in a dry environment. But the twigs on these bushes were bending low with the weight of the drops. These "dew" drops were extremely salty to taste and I assume that the excretion of salt takes place mainly during the night, as later in the day no "dew" is visible.

Reports by Dr Marjcke Jongbloed

Natural Emirates:

<http://www.uaeintarae.com>



Send in your reports to griff@emirates.net.ae, or deliver them on floppy disk at monthly meetings, or fax to 394 0352 (minimum point size 14 please).

A "Wet" Wadi Walk

As an early Christmas treat Chairman, Gary Faulner, permitted a larger than normal group to follow him into Wadi Asfani to see what they could find. They followed the wadi upstream to its headwaters in Wadi Baqarah. Quarrying continues in the lower wadi, agricultural development in the upper. The water levels were the lowest Gary had seen, because of the continuing drought. Several 'pools' had no water at all even though the headwaters received some rain last winter. Two feral donkeys stood watching the approaching humanity, a mother and young.

Although the first site was dry, Christo Rademan quickly spotted dead shells of the most common freshwater snails, the thin *Melanoiodes tuberculata* and the fat *Radix natalensis*. The group found two native species of fish, the relatively dark *Garra barreimiae*, the paler *Aphanius dispar* (Arabian killifish), and the introduced *Tilapia (oreochromis spp.)*, a larger fish. Arabian toads *Bufo arabicus* were disturbed by the many trampling feet on the mud cracks of a dried pool. This species is reported to survive for as long as three years in aestivation. At the same dried pool there were several small wolf spiders. There was a rare performance by a bronze predaceous diving beetle at one pool, showing off its rich colour, gilt trim and hind legs modified for swimming. Also a brightly coloured bombardier beetle *Phenopsophus africanus*, which can eject an explosive mix.

Salah Al-Halyan mentioned the traditional use of the milky sap of

the *Euphorbia lanca* (a pale yellow-green, leafless shrub) for use in poultices. In addition they observed the Ghaf (*Prosopis cinerea*), *Acacia tortilis* (the common Acacia, also found in East Africa) and *Zizyphus spina-cristi* (yellow-red berried in season). There was an abundance of wadi grass (*Saccharum* sp. related to sugar cane) some of which had been burned, probably deliberately, and a forest of oleander was found at a spring in the upper wadi. They saw three different species of butterfly, two "tittle blues", the spotted African Babul Blue and the zebra-striped Mediterranean Perrot, and four species of dragonfly including two reds and a blue, mostly males.

At the furthest point upstream Kathleen Rademan jumped smartly away as she disturbed a dozing viper, which was probably the carpet viper *Echis coloratus*. Catherine Al-Halyan bravely stood her ground and took a photo from which a positive ID is expected. Although dangerous, this snake is not normally aggressive. Jan Derrington spotted a distant raptor, which Gary said was probably a Booted Eagle. Returning towards the large convoy of cars, they all stopped to take a closer look at a falaj, evidence of copper smelting in the upper wadi, and the remains of an early settlement and t-raced fields.

A tired, happy and much better informed group took its leave of Gary as dusk was approaching. He was staying on to turn over stones and poke around in rocks in search of scorpions, using his blacklighting techniques.

Report by Anna Griffin (with a lot of help from Gary Faulner)

GPS Dinner 10th Feb.

We'll be there by 6.00pm
Coordinates: 24° 59' 44 N
55° 23' 36 E

Firewood provided, but bring your own eats and drinks.
Contact Peter van Amsterdam on 050 - 6425077 (hints available if necessary)

Jebel Ghaweel

Peter Cunningham joined Gary Feulner and John Martin for a return visit during Ramadan to this angular 100+ metre outpost along the mountain front south of Shuweyb, known for its unusual geology. The rugged summit ridge, capped by distinctive "exotic" blocks of white limestone, shatters on its north side the westernmost wild olive trees in the Hajar Mountains.

Jebel Ghaweel is also home to all three species of *Grewia* (a genus of the Urticaceae family Tiliaceae) known from the northern Hajar Mountains, two of which (*G. fenax* and *G. villosa*) have only recently been distinguished. Despite the continuing drought, more than a dozen plant species were in flower, fruit or seed on the slopes, including the olive and the hanging caper.

Found in small numbers at the summit were the land snails *Zoeteucus insularis*, a common arid region snail found from the Sahara to Pakistan, and the rare, finely striped *Pseudanapaus jousseauxi*, endemic to the mountains of Iran, Afghanistan and the Hajar Mountains. Both have bullet shaped shells up to 15 mm long, typically found under low shrubs or weathering from soil under rock overhangs.

A pair of Bonin's eagles was seen over the fortress-like summit, one carrying a trailing branch of Moringa (a courting display?), mimicking a grey heron with its legs stretched out behind.

Report by Gary Feulner





American Imports

MacDonald's isn't the only one. Several North American species of plants and animals now appear to be well established in and around Dubai. These include:

Mesquite (*Prosopis juliflora*). This tree is native to the southwestern United States and northern Mexico, but was long ago exported and is now common and essentially 'native' to the SE Gulf, the Subcontinent and elsewhere. Despite selective campaigns against it in Urban Dubai and Ras Al-Khaimah, it appears to be very successful in the local environment and is likely to be with us for a long time to come.

The Western Pygmy Blue (*Glyphidim axile*). This is North America's smallest butterfly. It was recognized in the UAE only in 1998 by Dr Michael Glantz of UAE University in Al-Ain and has since been observed regularly in and around Dubai, in landscaped areas and on the fringes of parks and agricultural cultivation. It is unobtrusive, usually flying close to low vegetation. It was probably introduced with imported shrubs but it appears to breed successfully here and its numbers are probably increasing.

***Polygyra carcolitis*,** a 1 cm button-shaped land snail with narrow whorls and a single 'tooth' in its aperture. This snail is native to the southeastern United States, especially Florida, but has been found to thrive in well-watered gardens in the Arabian Gulf, where it has presumably been introduced with imported shrubs or soil. In Dubai it is known from lawns and gardens ranging from the Mizhar area to the Dubai World Trade Centre to Jebel Ali, and may be locally abundant.

***Allopecurus gracilis*.** This long, thin land snail, usually less than 1 cm, is native to the New World tropics but is now widespread in the Indo-Pacific area and seems to be easily distributed by human activity. It is found in lawns and gardens in Dubai and is sometimes abundant.

Report by Gary Faulner

Seasonal Seashells

Over the holidays Gary Faulner went snorkelling along the jetty at the Dubai Municipality beach. He made several comparisons with his summer visits. First, the water is much colder in December. Second, there seemed to be fewer gastropods overall (both in number and diversity), and many of the shells present tended to be clustered together. Exceptionally calm conditions (or something else?) had brought the wrinkle *Littoraria intermedia* (better known in its role as the mangrove tree snail) onto the front faces of many rocks, whereas it normally favors the more sheltered back sides. Possibly our February 2000 speaker, Horst Kauch, will enlighten us about molluscan seasonal patterns. Third, several distinctive fish observed in summer were absent but other, schooling fish seemed more abundant. Carolin Harris, our January 1999 speaker, also reports on Page 6 about whale's napping underwater at this time of year.

Report by Gary Faulner

On Familiar Ground

Visits to Creekside Park in late December revealed 3 local butterfly species displaying and mating – the native Mediterranean Pierrot and Asian Grass Blue and the introduced Western Pygmy Blue. But despite all the lovely landscaping in the park – trees, grass, palms, shrubs and flower gardens of all sorts – all of these butterflies were found on the only remaining patch of 'natural' ground, a 15m x 30m plot adjacent to the administrator building, consisting of open, sandy soil dotted with dried grass (*Sporobolus spicatus*) and a few flowering heliotropes (*Heliotropium kotschyi*).

Good for Something

Tephrosia spalliana, a small perennial shrub, is one of the most common plants in Hajar Mountain wadis. Although it is a member of the pea

family, it is not grazed and is able to grow in the gravel wadi beds themselves. It is not an unattractive plant but most hikers have seen it so often that they are all but totally immune to its charm. I gained new respect for it, however, in November and December when I recognised that it was one of only a very few plants then flowering in the lower mountains, and therefore giving sustenance to most of the butterflies about, including at least the Caper White, Small Cupid, African Bazar Blue, Mediterranean Pierrot, Grass Jewel and Salmon Arab.

Report by Gary Faulner

Our Next Speaker

Horst Kauch, a native of Austria, has lived in the UAE since 1985. He has been involved with animals and animal management in one way or another for most of that time, both on land and undersea. Among other things, he was involved in the construction of Dubai Zoo, he has been a contractor to the Al-Ain Zoo and to various private reserves, and is currently the proprietor of Animal World.

He is also an accomplished diver and ran his own diving company for many years. He is especially well acquainted with the various underwater environments of Eastern Arabia.

A seashell collector with an international reputation, he has made a point to try to get to know Arabian Gulf molluscs as living organisms as well, and to learn and communicate their secrets and rhythms.





Diary of a Mermaid

With the recent change of weather bringing in cooler, more nutrient waters my human diving friends ask that I tell you about what's happening underwater recently.

First of all, the water temperature has dropped quite dramatically from the summer highs of 30°C to around a cool 23°C. I stayed around for the summer, although many schools of fish went to deeper waters for their vacation. But, now, as my friends are coming back and a few more unusual ones that I've never met before. The usual fish life includes jacks, fusiliers, morays, stingrays, lionfish, batfish, flounders, sole, damselfish, clownfish, searoses and turtles, but let me tell you about some of the unusual fish life going on...

Just recently, I've noticed some striking yellow and black coloured fish, called pineapple fish.



They are very shy and hide under rock crevices and overhangs, and between all the pretty soft corals.

There are also some conger eels which have recently come to town, these guys are ugly with huge black eyes and very, very large mouths.



I was rather scared at first as they have a really bad reputation, but my friend tells me they may have come in to shallow waters to mate,

but once they have spawned they die. It's confusing as to why and how these fish and eels got here, they are normally deep water fish?

We also had a jelly fish invasion, lots of jellies arrived which tend to hang around the first 6m of water. All the juvenile fish use them as "mobile homes" to transport them through the waters until they find a "safe" reef. Then we had these huge upside down jellies (Cassiopea) which tend to just sit on the seabed not doing much all day!

Another unusual fish that arrived recently is called a pygmy seamount, not many of you will have heard of one of these, let alone seen one. One recently arrived all on its own, it must have lost its mate and lost its way. They are fairly small, about 2 inches, move very slowly and feed on small mysid shrimps. There are also a few frogfish around, these guys are really great a. camouflage and you would probably only know they are there if they moved, which they don't very often!

The guitar sharks are back with the cooler water, as are the resident black tip reef sharks who live near Khor Fakkan/Shark Island, which is good, as soon as their young "hatch" I can get a new purse!

So, if you are over on the East Coast, bring your snorkelling gear and come visit us!

Report by Carole Harris

Mother Nature Works Two Shifts

Stephen Grout, now one of our overseas members, admits that Bahrain is smaller and has fewer different natural environments to explore than the UAE, but that hasn't dampened his enthusiasm. In addition to his archaeological interests, he has busied himself with further collection of freshwater and land snails in Bahrain, including several not previously reported

(some still unidentified) and also not known from the UAE. Of one particularly instructive discovery he writes:

"I decided to set up a small aquarium to try to breed some of the freshwater snails I had found. So one night (in the dark) I went to the only stream I know still to exist near my house and collected some pond weed. When I came home I put it in the sink to wash before putting it in the tank. After 15 minutes I went back to get the weed and I noticed a number of small black dots. I got my glasses and decided that they were live animals, (probably) *Hydrobia* sp.

"Interestingly I returned a few days later to obtain some more weed (fodder?) for my growing snail zoo, this time at 11:00 in the morning. I went to exactly the same place and took exactly the same weeds in exactly the same way. Not a single *Hydrobia* present! Only a few medium size *Melanoides* present (which had been absent on the night sample). I can only assume that *Hydrobia* is nocturnal and they hide deep in the mud during the day. As I don't normally go shelling in the dark (or sift the stinky mud) this could explain my previous lack of findings. I have been in and around this particular stream for over 10 years and thought I knew it intimately."

Snails and Slugs

Your unwanted land snails and slugs are wanted for scientific study and an accounting of the terrestrial and freshwater snails of the UAE. A first step will be to include the UAE's snail fauna in the IUCN list. All specimens will be gratefully accepted by Chairman Gary Faulner, and contributors will be kept informed of progress. There have already been a few surprises. 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.

GAZELLE

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

Lectures at Jumeirah English Speaking School, Gymnasium 7.30 pm for 8.00 pm

February 6 Seashells and The Ecology of Arabian Gulf Molluscs Horst Kauch

March 6 Traditional Mountain Settlements – William Lancaster

Field Trips (DNHG members only, please. Details on page 2.)

January 28 Graves at Shimal – Fully subscribed
Visit to a cemetery of the 2nd Millennium BC.

February 11 Fossil Hunting with Valerie Chalmers

February 18 From Dibba to the Musandam Peninsula by Dhow

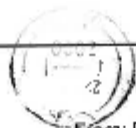
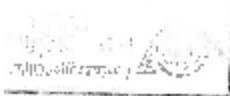
February 26 Hiking in Jebel Bu Faraj with Helen Emery
This is re-scheduled from Dec 10

February 24 to 26 Exploring the Western Regions with Donna Simon
Camping out under the stars, in wild open spaces

March 9 and 10 Inter-Emirates Weekend
A weekend of adventure on the East Coast

The GPS dinner will be held on February 10th please see page 3 for further details

Mrs Valerie CHALMERS
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From: DNHG, PO Box 9234, Dubai, UAE



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Camel Origins

Fossil evidence shows that the camel group or camelids (Order Tylopoda) originated in North America, reaching central Asia via the Bering land bridge not later than the mid-Pliocene (about 3.5 million years ago). The genus *Camelus* had arisen but declined dramatically in numbers and range in Eurasia towards the end of the Pleistocene (glacial times).

The origins of the Arabian camel in particular have been the subject of debate, partly because (despite their obvious external differences) the postcranial skeletons of one-humped Arabian camels or dromedaries *Camelus dromedarius* and two-humped Asian or Bactrian camels *Camelus bactrianus* are extremely difficult to distinguish reliably.

Certain authors have considered

that the Arabian camel was descended from the Asian camel, because (1) fertile offspring are produced by initial (but not continuous) cross-breeding, (2) the embryos of both species have two proto-humps, which later fuse in the foetus of the Arabian camel; and (3) the only wild camel species known from North Africa and the Levant in late Pleistocene times, *Camelus thomasi*, a somewhat larger animal than the modern Arabian camel, was thought to represent an Asian (and so probably two-humped) species.

Recent work relying on statistical analysis of post-cranial skeletal measurements has at last permitted reliable discrimination between the Arabian and Asian camel lineages. Relying on this methodology, J Peters has concluded that *Camelus thomasi* was an Arabian (and so probably one-humped) species, and was therefore the likely ancestor of today's Arabian camel.

Thanks to Prof Dr Ulrich Wernery of Dubai's Central Veterinary Laboratory for donating to the DNHG library a copy of the 1998 paper by J Peters from which the foregoing is summarised: Peters, J. "*Camelus thomasi* Pomel, 1863, a possible ancestor of the one-humped camel?" in *Zeitschrift für Säugetierkunde* 63, (1998) 372-376.

Report by Gary Feulner

DNHG Membership

Membership remains a bargain at Dhs 50 (singles or family). You may join or renew at meetings (see Kathy Bird the Membership Secretary) or send a cheque made out to **Lloyds Bank account no 173746**. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG).