

GAZELLE

Vol 16 no 1 - January 2001



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Lying around and moving on

Christina Namour reports kestrels in her trees at home as well as a pair circling outside her Emirates Towers windows at work. In her backyard pond she has now observed, close-up, the emergence of two damselflies from their last nymph-stage exoskeleton. The process ends, she says, with a final springing free of the tail, after which the newly emerged and still relatively colourless damselfly must allow its wings to unwrinkle and dry out. For lying properly still on the lawn to watch such events, Christine recommends waiting until the kids are away and locking the dogs in the house.

Bird Recorders Mike and Jill Oates will be leaving us next month. They will be relocating to Nice, France but hope to return to Dubai on a regular basis, as Mike will be continuing his current work from "home." We hope to see them at meetings from time to time.

Old-Timers

With the year 2000 at a close, we'd like to say thanks to a number of DNHIG members who have been with us for most of the past decade, and some for longer than that. We tend to think of Dubai as a transient place, and it's true that we often seem to be

saying goodbye, but a goodly number of old friends remain. With apologies to anyone we might have inadvertently omitted, here's our attempt at an old-timer's list: Catherine and Salah Al-Helwan, David Bradford, Anne-Marie Bui, Valerie Chalmers, John & Pam Cole, Sandy & Beryl Comer-Fowler, Peter Davies, Alan Dickson, Lanjeet El-Kafi, Gary Feulner, Gail Gordon, Brian Jolly, Marijcka Jongbloed, Juliette Haboubi, Barbara Hayward, Angela Kammer, Roza Khan, Victoria Koysova, Rosemary Leila, Simon & Lena Linton, Birgit Lund, Fran McEw, Steven & Cynthia Novak, Roger & Patricia Roseth, Saïef Shunnar, Judith Stafford and Dr Ulrich Wernery.

New Committee to be elected

A number of Committee members will be retiring early in the New Year and we shall need volunteers to replace them, at or before the Annual General Meeting in March 2001. Among the positions that will be coming open are Treasurer and a second Field Trip Coordinator. If you have an interest in these or any other Committee positions, or if you wish to discuss the possibility, please contact either Chairman Gary Feulner, Vice Chairman Valerie Chalmers, or the relevant Committee member.

The DNHG has functioned as well as it has because the work has been shared and everyone has done his/her part. For several years we have had 150 or more paid memberships, amounting to some 225 individuals. This is an indication that we are doing things that people find interesting, appealing and valuable. Your help is needed in order to allow the group to continue its current level of activities and to expand them consistent with member interest. The group will always be what we make of it. Ideas are ever welcome, but the time and effort of volunteers are necessary to see them through.



Biosaline Agriculture Centre

At the Ruwayyah flyover (#3) on the Dubai-Ai-Ain Road sits a year-old property signposted as the Biosaline Agriculture Centre. Can anyone tell us more about this institution and its work?

This month's Contributors

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

Peter Cunningham
Gary Feulner
Molly McQuarrie
Christine Namour



Nature Walk Friday 9 February

Valeria Chalmers will lead this gentle walk up Wadi Daftah, where there is a variety of life in the pools as well as plenty of flora and fauna. There will be a chance to climb up to a ruined watch tower. Wear comfortable shoes and bring enough water and a packed lunch. 4 x 4 not essential. Meet at the Hilton (Trade Centre Hotel) covered carpark at 8am for an 8.15am start.

Bat Tombs, Oman 22/23 February

Peter van Amsterdam is leading this trip to the Tombs at Bat in Oman on Thursday. Camp overnight and walk the Grand Canyon Rim on Friday. This trip already has its full complement of participants but those already registered, who require further information, please contact Peter on 050-6425077.

Musandam Trekking in the Rain

Mother Nature pitched in to make Nick Hephner's Musandam hike a decidedly out-of-the-ordinary educational experience. The intrepid group left Dubai in rain and continued in drizzle to RAK, where the interior peaks of the Ru'us A-Jiba' could be seen free of cloud. Alhamdulillah! The hike started at the high point on the Wadi Bih road and proceeded under overcast skies, but dry, until lunch at a terraced farmstead a little past noon. Along the way the group negotiated precipitous Musandam slopes and gullies dotted with almonds (*Prunus arabicus*, the dominant tree at higher elevations) and mountain figs (*Ficus johannis*). Less conspicuous, but abundant, was the delicate branching fern *Onychium divaricatum* and seedlings of annuals *Geranium muscatense* and *Erodium* sp., as well as an assortment of healthy lichens – all apparently the beneficiaries of modest rains a month before.

The outing was billed as a "contour walk" and so it was, until at a steep

promontory Nick said, "Here, we go down," and everyone looked around to see where we could possibly go down. But in fact there was a "rai" or sorts down a steep ravine among boulders set in soil.

After lunch, we explored the terraced area in drizzle, finding little shelter under the drought-thinned samr (*Anania torilis*) and a'dr (*Zizyphus spina-cristi*) trees. Mike Lorrigan deloured to discover and photograph a gnoding hut in good condition (but with low overhead as usual). Others enjoyed the shelter as well as the photo opportunities of an abandoned but well preserved Musandam home, a bayt al-qufi, with large built-in poultry storage jars. One phenomenon we noticed as the rain increased was that the silty terraced fields did not immediately absorb all the rainwater, which puddled up instead.

On the way back, the rain persisted and Nick blazed a new trail along rock ledges to avoid wet gullies. This worked well until we came to a larger ravine cut in bedrock. Above us a waterfall poured into the channel. Below us, the bedrock dropped off into another waterfall. And in the middle of the channel, cool as a cucumber (possibly cooler, given that he was soaking wet), stood Nick astride the current to ensure that everybody got across safely to rejoin the main trail. Despite the circumstances, this crossing became the occasion for a number of one-of-a-kind photos.

The weather was also the opportunity for a raingear fashion show: Mike Lorrigan was bursting the buttons of his XL Chinese yellow raincoat (single use only?). Geoff Cosson was cucked out in an attractive orange-pink plastic frock (borrowed from Mike). Jim Fischer looked like he was still hiking in Canada. Claudia Kiburz seemed a bit lost inside a baggy black rainsuit borrowed from Nick. Several folks were envious of Gary Feulner's pack-covering poncho (suitable, however, only in the absence of strong winds), and Angela Kent learned why wet T-shirt contests are usually held on sunny

Florida beaches.

The rain stopped before we reached the cars, but at least one final ordeal awaited – the descent to Wadi Bih via switchbacks covered in slippery, clinging mud. Low gear was de rigueur for control. As if to emphasize the potential danger, the group passed a large 4WD that had lost control and slid into the meter-deep drainage ditch that runs along the uphill side of the road. A rescue attempt under the circumstances was out of the question.

The final uncertainty was Wadi Bih itself. Had enough rain fallen to impede our passage? The answer was no. Despite several hours of rain, no tributary streams carried flowing water into Wadi Bih, and there were small puddles to be crossed at only a few low spots in the track.

Report by Gary Feulner



Our Next Speaker

David Stead has been an enthusiastic falconer since childhood. He started his falconry apprenticeship at the age of 14 whilst a student in the UK, and began his falconry career at 18 in England, working for a falconry team. After 5 years David moved to a breeding centre for endangered African raptors in Mpumalanga, South Africa as head falconer. There he was involved in the rehabilitation of wild-injured birds and in educating the general public about environmental issues pertaining to raptors. He has been in the UAE for 3 years as falconer for the Animal Management Consultancy, training a team of falcons that are used for pigeon control flights at various high profile hotels.



Vanishing Desert

The long holiday weekend provided a good opportunity to revisit the large desert area south and west of Al-Ain, variously called Ramlet Al-Hamra, Horleima, or the Eastern Desert. Since the early 1990s this area has been served by a network of gatch roads that facilitate access to agricultural plantations, including some very large nurseries. The road network has not been expanded since the mid-1990s, but the main arteries are now landscaped with three rows of exotic shrubs on either side, nourished by drip irrigation. The total length of road in question is some 225 kilometres. In addition, these roads are fenced with chain-link fence topped by barbed wire, with access via manned and unmanned gates at major junctions and selected other locations. A signpost at a workstation along the way indicates that this is a "Roadside Afforestation Project" for the area, and it is at least possible that a principal purpose of the fences is to prevent foraging camels from eating the landscaped shrubs, in addition to keeping them off the roads.

Putting aside questions of the purpose and expense of roadside afforestation and fencing, and its possible aesthetic appeal, these developments have a number of disadvantages for travellers in search of a "desert experience." First, the roadside plantings detract from the impression of raw wilderness that is a major part of the appeal of the desert. Second, it is no longer possible just to stop at scenic spots along the road and walk or picnic in the adjacent desert. The fence is a barrier to all. Third, and perhaps most ominously, if one has in fact succeeded in entering and navigating the sands, which can be formidable in this area, one must keep in mind that it is not possible to exit at will – you can only exit: at gates in the fence, which are few and far between. This may condemn the weary desert traveller to further time and travail. Exiting could prove especially problematic after rain, when sabkha rousles (where most gates are located) are impassable.

And what of the desert itself, beyond the roadside plantings and the fences? It has to be said that the big dunes

and pans and the open vistas remain spectacular, but on closer inspection the view at year-end 2000 is troubling. The normal desert vegetation appears to have been devastated by a combination of drought and overgrazing by camels. In dune areas, most vegetation is brown and cropped, much of it apparently dead. The tip off that this is not just the result of drought is the cropping, and the fact that rare specimens of the wispy shrub *Calligonum comosum*, the sedge *Cyperus conglomeratus*, and even the flowering heliotrope *Heliotropium digynum*, survive in good condition high on the soft lee slopes of dunes, where they are too much trouble for camels to reach. In sand flats, *Zygophyllum*, a choice of last resort for camels, is now overwhelmingly dominant, and in fact appears to have extended its habitat into low dunes.

Numerous temporary camel stations dot flatter areas. The largest herd observed was some 90 strong. These animals are watered and often fed on site, but by day they are released to forage the landscape, which they seem to do very well.

Is there any good news? Well, maybe. The cape hare (*Lepus capensis*) appears to be thriving, perhaps because it likes *Zygophyllum*. This may help to maintain populations of predators such as red fox, desert eagle owl, and long-legged buzzard. A related report is also included in this issue.

Report by Gary Feulner

An eye-opening experience

On a recent hike in the Musandam something happened that I won't forget in a hurry. At the end of the hike I felt something in my eye which I thought might be a hair. On returning home my eye became progressively worse, although I couldn't locate the source of the problem. I awoke with a start at approximately

3am with intense pain and shone a torch in a mirror so as to see the eye better. To my utter horror I saw larvae of some kind crawling around. I was shocked and after convincing my wife to take a look, we proceeded to remove 8 maggots/larvae/worms, approximately 1-2mm in length. Needless to say I did not sleep a wink after that and at dawn rushed to the local hospital for professional assistance. There I was met with incredulous stares and a "nudge-nudge...wink-wink" attitude which did not go down well. The ER staff found "nothing" in my eye except "mucus, that sometimes can look like worms" – I left for a private medical practice without delay. The doctor here was more sympathetic and professional and, although he found nothing in my eye, made an appointment with an Ophthalmologist. I returned home and dug out another larvae, put it on ice, and almost gave in to road rage on the way to the next appointment. Here the Ophthalmologist, confronted with my evidence, stated that I was his second such case in his career, (the other being a Nigerian in the USA, who had also been seen as mad with his claim of worms in his eye). He suggested that my problem could be the larvae of some kind of fly. The laboratory confirmed this, although no quick fixes were suggested, except mechanically removing them as I had been doing. I eventually removed a total of 10 larvae. I could have passed something into my eye during the trip because I had been collecting fox faeces and scratching around in bat guano. Now the slightest irritation still sends me rushing in panic for the closest mirror. This incident confirmed my general attitude towards arthropods. The moral of the story: Don't underestimate the power of nature and certainly don't handle faeces without gloves or without washing your hands soon afterwards. This should serve as a reminder that hiking does have its risks and not all threats have teeth and/or fangs.

Report by Peter Cunningham
pkc@emirates.net.ae



E.mail your reports to griff@emirates.net.ae, (Arial 10 justified) or deliver them on floppy disk at monthly meetings.

Eastern Desert Watch

A chilly holiday outing in the Eastern Desert, SW of Al-Ain, resulted in some interesting wildlife observations by Peter Cunningham and Gary Feulner:

Mammals: The cape hare (*Lepus capensis*) was the only wild mammal encountered alive: three were flushed during excursions on foot in areas near gravel mesas, and abundant tracks were seen. The cape hare does not burrow but simply rests or retires in hollows beneath shrubs, ledges or other cover. Hare tracks can be quite variable depending on the speed of motion, up or downhill direction, and the firmness of the sand. With its toes spread, the hare can make a track resembling that of a cat, and its claws can mimic those seen in fox prints. Gerbil prints were seen in a couple of areas as well as a single set of jerboa tracks. Fox tracks were rare, but a dead red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) was found in a sheltered hollow below a mesa.

Reptiles: By day, Peter successfully "fished" for the white-spotted lizard (*Acanthodactylus schmidti*), probably the most commonly seen lizard in the deeper deserts. He also saw a single sand skink or "sand fish" (*Scincus mitranus*). By night, the cool temperatures may have kept some desert dwellers indoors. Lantern light revealed the tracks of a couple of sand boas and more white-spotted lizards, plus a specimen of the nocturnal Arabian sand gecko *Stenodactylus arabicus*, the UAE's smallest desert gecko, whose smooth skin appears almost transparent and whose forefeet are distinctively webbed.

Birds: Hoopoe larks and desert

wheatcar (males only) were relatively common. A few crested larks were seen along the road, some relatively fearless desert(?) warblers near the road and in the sands, and house sparrows at oases and gatehouses, feeding on the plantings. In ghaf groves a bit more out of the way, a pair of long legged buzzards was seen (probably a breeding pair) as well as 3 nests of brown-necked ravens, at least one of them apparently in use. A little owl was seen near its burrow beneath the gravel roof of a mesa and numerous similar sites yielded owl pellets. One larger overhang appeared to have been used as regular "picnic" site. In addition to owl pellets, it contained lizard, hare, skink and possibly bee bones, as well as most of the carcass of a small dhub. All of these were probably the remains of prey of a little owl or desert eagle owl, but the site also contained hare prints and fox droppings, indicating that it was a popular site for more than one species.

Report by Gary Feulner

Mangrove Afforestation

A recent article in the Khaleej Times informs us that the Umm Al-Qaiwain based Marine Resources and Research Centre (MRRC) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is engaged in several projects intended to facilitate mangrove afforestation in the UAE. It is reportedly hoped that this will help create fish nursery areas, protect coastal areas from erosion, and help in greening the desert coasts.

An MRRC report puts the area of mangrove forest in the UAE, including mainland and island intertidal zones, at 2,950 hectares. The only species present is *Avicennia marina*, the mangrove species most tolerant of salinity and low temperatures. The article indicates, but without giving details, that a sharp decline in mangrove resources has been registered recently.

In the northern Emirates, although development has frequently been at the expense of coastal knolls and wet-

lands, destruction of mangrove areas has so far been limited and has been concentrated mainly in Ras Al Khaimah, where the RAK Free Zone and a new shopping mall have encroached on peripheral mangroves in Khor Hulaylah and Ras Al Khaimah Khor, respectively. On the other hand, in Dubai, a mangrove afforestation project over the past decade has successfully "greened" the head of Dubai Creek, an area which is otherwise undeveloped.

Headless development remains the greatest enemy of mangroves. Since mangroves are, by definition, intertidal, large mangrove forests require extensive areas of muddy ground subject to periodic tidal flooding. Such land is of little other economic use and is often thought of as a candidate for "improvement" by landfill or dredging. As a result, if the mangrove afforestation hopes of MRRC and the Ministry are to succeed, they may have to make their case more effectively to local municipalities.

MRRC field experiments have studied the survival and growth of *Avicennia marina*. Among other things, it has been found that mangrove seeds will not propagate at salinities greater than 60 ppt (seawater is 35 ppt), after more than 12 hours in crude oil, or in soil having an oil saturation of more than 25%.

Report by Gary Feulner

DNHG Membership and Renewal

DNHG membership remains a bargain at Dhs 50 (singles or couples).

You may join or renew at meetings or send a cheque to Ft Skannerton, DNHG Membership Secretary, PO Box 29561, made out to Lloyds Bank account no 173748. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG.) Membership is valid from September 2000 to August 2001.





Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Roza Khan
res 344 8283
cell 344 0462
fax (cell) 349 9437

Archaeology - Robert Lovelace
res 342 0492
jov@ducc@emirates.net.ae

Birds -

Seabirds - Sandy Fowler
res 344 2244
fax 344 2243

Aquaculture - Lamejed El-Kefi
res 06-583 003
cell 06-247 958

Geology - Gary Faulner
res 406 5570
fax 330 3550

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
res 349 4116,
fax 398 3727

Insects - Gary Faulner
(see above)

Mammals - Marijcke Jongbloed
res 349 7964
fax 349 7963
mjongbloed@emirates.net.ae

Marine Life - Lamejed El-Kefi
(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 *Gazelle* editor, so new information can be shared with all our readers.

UAE Plant Checklist

It is a pleasure to announce the publication of the Annotated Check-list for Plants in the UAE. This 90-page soft cover booklet compiles, in a single place, the more than 600 plant species so far identified to occur in the UAE. As such, it is an indispensable reference. It incorporates the work of numerous collectors, both professionals and amateurs, over the past two decades and more. Most identifications are based on determinations by professional taxonomists and reference specimens are cited in virtually all cases. In addition, the checklist is annotated with a brief description of each plant species and an indication of its favoured habitat, range and abundance. Recent and potentially confusing synonyms are also given.

The checklist was compiled by the DNHG's own Dr Marijcke Jongbloed, author of *Living Desert*, *Green Guide to the UAE* and other UAE natural history books. In collaboration with Dr Benno Boer, formerly a habitat specialist with NARC and ERWDA, and Rob Western of Abu Dhabi, author of *The Flora of the United Arab Emirates* (UAE University, 1989). The publisher is Zodiac Publishing of Dubai.

Publication of the checklist was sponsored jointly by the three UAE natural history groups -- the DNHG and the ENHGs in Abu Dhabi and Al-Ain. The Abu Dhabi ENHG also contributed towards the work of compilation itself. Publication of the checklist was felt to be particularly appropriate for DNHG sponsorship, since it records a wealth of accumulated unpublished information about the natural history of the UAE and facilitates and encourages further study. At the same time it was recognized that the nature of the project was such that it was unlikely for various reasons to be undertaken on a professional basis and had little prospect of attracting funding through private contributions.

Copies of the UAE plant checklist will be available at DNHG meetings at a cost of Dhs 15.

Arabian Wildlife Magazine

Arabian Wildlife magazine is back, published once again by Trident Press and edited by Peter Vine. Initiated under the sponsorship of the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development in Riyadh, the magazine has now been re-introduced as an unaffiliated quarterly.

Arabian Wildlife continues to feature the exceptional photography that was always its trademark, as well as a breadth of subject matter. The current issue (Issue 9, Winter 2000/2001) includes (among other things) reports on the arrival of Arabian oryx at Arabia's Wildlife Centre in Sharjah and the development of the latest captive bred Arabian leopard cubs, as well as articles on date palm cultivation, various Arabian wildlife such as cetaceans, chameleons, sand-grouse and porcupines, and the birdlife of the remote south eastern coast of Oman. There is even a special feature on wildcats, designed for school use.

Copies of the current issue of Arabian Wildlife will be available on an introductory basis at the DNHG meetings in January and February 2001.

Nautilus Report

Patricia Rosetti found a good specimen of paper nautilus (*argonaute hlans*) at Mina Soyahl at low tide on December 22. A week later she found 3 more at Ram's Beach 8.2cm, 7cm and 6cm.

A report in the *Gulf News* on 16 January states that there has been a call to close the Iron bridge access to Rani's beach. The bridge is so dilapidated that it "could collapse at any time and posed a serious threat to life" said a spokesman for the Traffic Department. It has been in this condition for quite some time as keen shellers will know!



Molly's Snakebite

[Editor's note: Molly McQuarrie of the ENHG in Abu Dhabi (also a DNHG member and Gazelle subscriber) was part of the quiz-winning team at last year's Inter-Emirates Weekend in Fujairah. She has submitted occasional field reports to the Gazelle, most recently on clam shrimps in the Hatta area. Molly is a hands-on natural history buff and her school classroom in Abu Dhabi has long held a collection of local toads and other animals. She also dabbles in somewhat less benign creatures such as scorpions and vipers. There are occupational hazards, however, as Molly reports below.]

Keith Gibbins, John Reid and I were cruising between Madam Roundabout and Meleiha in March or April 2000. Keith spotted a piece of plywood quite close to the road, so we stopped and explored. I found 2 baby snakes and I grabbed one snake before I saw the other one. I tried to grab the second with my left hand and it bit me on the 4th finger. We collected both snakes in water bottles. They were about 25 to 30 cm long or less and were sawscale vipers [*Echis carinatus*] as far as we could tell. There was some itchi-ness of the finger but no swelling, so we continued on with our explorations.

At home the snakes were housed in an aquarium with gravel, rocks, etc. I tried various foods but they would not eat mealworms or mealworm beetles. After about 2 weeks we took them outside on the balcony in the cage and set them in the sun to warm up. We put home-grown but native crickets in with them. The crickets disappeared and there were tiny lumps in one snake. Then my snake: population (farm) crashed and stopped reproducing.

One of the snakes was growing faster than the other. To solve both problems I separated them to ensure that both had the opportunity to eat and tried to wean them over to pinky mice. This worked fine for one snake, although even pinky mice can rapidly get too big for the snake to ingest and

my mouse colony was not always producing newborns at a steady rate.

The other snake was a problem. She escaped twice, and we couldn't find her. About a month later I heard a noise and found the escape coiled up and "sawing" on the kitchen floor. I caught her and returned her to a cage which was better escape-proofed. She refused to eat mice, although the other snake was gobbling them down and fatter as a result.

Meanwhile the eating snake was learning how to strike. Apparently it is not fully instinctual to neatly kill and then manoeuvre the mouse around to go down nose first. It was quite interesting to watch it learn to strike and learn that the mouse actually became paralysed by the bite. Presumably the poison sacs and fang-muscle contraction-injection steps all are learned in some developmental sequence of events.

I started worrying about the unfed snake and decided to force feed it so it would at least learn that a mouse is edible. It was early afternoon and Keith was asleep. I was sure he would not agree to my plan. I knew that feeding behaviour and digestion can be stimulated by warm water. I drew a "bath" of warm water in the kitchen sink. The snake was not fond of the bath. She swam around wildly and tried to escape. I thought I could just get hold of her with the left hand, roll my fingers slightly to open the jaw, and using a pair of tweezers stuff the mouse down her throat. Worked fine.

I dropped the snake back into the water. She levered herself off the side of the sink at my offending hand and got my left index finger with one fang. I managed to grab her with the barbecue tongs and keep a rather excited snake from escaping again, meanwhile shouting for Keith to "Come here! You're not going to like this!" The snake was caught and caged and left to digest.

My finger was intensely itchy and started to swell. I phoned Dick

Hombly and asked him whether I should go to the hospital. He consulted his wife who said to go immediately. The index finger was itchy and continued to swell. I grabbed my Michael Gallagher snake pamphlet and headed for Central Hospital. The new Khalifa Hospital has the emergency department so I went there and told them I had been bitten by a poisonous snake. The admitting clerk thought maybe I had not been envenomed. The back of the hand was swelling now. I had my book and my positive identification and I insisted that I had been bitten by a poisonous snake and that I had been envenomed. I was admitted to an emergency bed. The American doctor on duty had 7 years Saudi experience and had snake bite experience. I was worried that the anti-venom may not be available in Abu Dhabi. However, it turned out that that was the designated emergency department for the whole city on Fridays, so it was prepared. Their pharmacy had some anti-venom on hand, and 2 sensitivity tests were performed. These were negative.

Since Khalifa Hospital is for locals and the emergency department essentially does triage, I was transferred by ambulance about 50 yards to Central Hospital and admitted to intensive care to be connected to a heart monitor and the anti-venom was started sometime after 5pm. The doctor decided to administer it over 1/2 hour versus 45 minutes. This proved too fast. I had a histamine reaction in my throat which I recognized from years of allergies. So the IV was stopped for 20 minutes and after 30 minutes restarted at a slower rate with no more adverse effects. The anti-venom is manufactured (prepared) in Riyadh and covers all 6 of the haemotoxic snakes of the Arabian peninsula. It is not useful against sea snake venom which is neurotoxic.

I did not bleed internally from any organs. The blood vessels in the under portion of the upper left arm did leak and a great bruise looking mess appeared on that part of the

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	name	tel home	tel office	fax
Chairman	Gary Faulner messages: 306 5300	306 5570	330 3600	330 3550
Vice Chairman	Valerie Chalmers	349 4816	no calls pls	398 3727
Treasurer	Pctor Griffin e.mail: griff@emirates.net.ae	394 0342	394 0342	394 0352
Membership Secretary	Fi Skennerton e.mail: skennert@mkidubai.co.ae	050 5243028		355 7180
Speaker Co-ordinator	Beryl Comar e.mail: comar@emirates.net.ae	344 2243		344 2243
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Mary Beardwood e.mail: mikomary@emirates.net.ae	342 2546		344 0378
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Fi Skennerton e.mail: skennert@mkidubai.co.ae	050-6243028		355 7180
Newsletter Editor	Anna Griffin e.mail: griff@emirates.net.ae	394 0342	394 0342	394 0352
Publisher	Peter van Amsterdam e.mail: pvana@emirates.net.ae	289 2519	335 5495	2691 654
Librarian	Deanna White e.mail: dgwhite@emirates.net.ae	344 1510		
Sales Assistant			Volunteer required	
Chief Engineer	James Pardoe	206 6427		
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Postmaster	Gali Gordon	349 9579		349 9879
Membership Assistant	Barbara Hayward	394 5691	289 0029	338 7875

bitten limb.

Maryjke Jongbloed's reptile book says that it takes 2 to 3 weeks for the swelling to go down. This is true. The heart and blood pressure were monitored regularly. I stayed 1½ days in ICU and 1 night in a ward for caution's sake. I marked all my school kids' nests. One week later the finger started itching intensely again. I scratched it and it swelled, so I went to my doctor (private), who knew about snake bites. She examined the finger to ensure there was no infection and prescribed antihistamines. It took another week before the finger was mostly back to normal.

Sequelae? In late November I had an allergic reaction to jumbo shrimp, which followed the same course. Intense itching, swelling, apparent recovery and relapse. I do not have any other food allergies and have not been allergic to seafood in the past. My guess is that I am perhaps more

reactive than before to potential allergens. After sober reflection I offered the snakes to Dr Reza Khan at the Dubai Zoo and he happily accepted them. I miss them, they were fascinating to watch. We had another larger sawscale viper one or two years earlier who happily ate mice but eventually ate a mouse that was just a little too big and died.

Report by Molly McQuarrie

Snails in Fox Droppings (Revisited)

The December 2000 Gazelle reported the discovery of small land snail shells in the droppings of a Blanford's fox from the Ru'us Al-Jibal. Dr Elke Neubert of Germany, the author of the principal survey of Arabian land snails, has since sug-

gested the possibility (also raised by Peter Cunningham and Stephen Green) that the snails entered the drooping only after deposition. Dr Neubert writes: "It is well known that many species of snails are coprophagous, and here I would hypothesize that they were utilising (in particular in arid areas) moisture and minerals from the faeces." It seems unusual, nevertheless, that this phenomenon has been noted in only a single instance in the UAE, but one involving 8 individual shells representing 3 distinct species of snail.

Letters to the editor News? Views?

Please write to us at PO Box 9234, or fax/e.mail Anna Griffin or any of the committee members listed on Page 7.

GAZELLE

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

Feb 4 **Man and Falcons: traditional and Modern Partnership** - David Stead

March 11 To be announced in the next issue

Field Trips (DNHG members only, please).

Feb 9 See the flora and fauna of Wadi Daffah with Valerie Chalmers

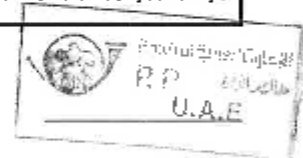
Feb 22/23 Explore the tombs at Bat In Oman, camp overnight and walk
the rim of the Grand Canyon with Peter van Amsterdam
This trip is now full

March 16 A visit to Al Ain Camel Souc with Peter van Amsterdam

April 6/7 Annual Inter-Emirates Weekend

A Nepal Experience

An invitation to join Nepal rafting and Chitwan National Park adventure. Raft the Trisuli River and view the rare one-horned rhinoceros from elephant back in the Chitwan National Park. DNHG member and science teacher Kim White is leading a trip to Nepal, March 25 to April 4, of families and students from the American School of Dubai. DNHG members are invited to join in the adventure and share their knowledge of the natural world. Families, students, couples and singles are welcome. For more information and itinerary, call Kim White 04-3429155 evenings and/or log on to the following website: Inlothewld.org and click on "Nepal" to view the photos and a movie of last year's trip.



Mrs Valerie CHALMERS
PO Box 12070
Dubai
UAE

From: DNHG, PO Box 9234, Dubai, UAE