



# GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

The Tawny Silverline butterfly *Apharitis acamas* is uncommon in the UAE, so it was a pleasant surprise to find a colony among plantations on the East Coast. When first seen late last summer, the butterflies were perched among dense native shrubs, almost inert, but we counted a dozen – more than any other butterflies in the area. When we revisited the area this spring, we were pleased to find pairs mating and females laying eggs.

The Silverline group of butterflies takes its name from the silver line in the center of the elongated underside markings. The Tawny Silverline has also been called the Leopard butterfly, although the underside is more reminiscent of a tiger. Even the upperside is more striped than spotted,



## Relying on others: The Tawny Silverline

*A Tawny Silverline female depositing an egg on a fencepost. She later laid an egg on the wire fence itself.*

© Binish Roobas

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*Thanks to the following for their contributions:*

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Gary Feulner, Charles Laubach,  
Tamsin Carlisle, Margaret Swan.

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in specimens seen in the UAE and in India.

Most butterflies lay their eggs on the plant that the caterpillar will eat in order to grow, pupate and metamorphose into an adult butterfly (called the larval foodplant or larval host plant). Many butterflies are restricted to a narrow range of larval foodplants, and sometimes to a single species. However, the larvae (caterpillars) of some species are reportedly cared for by ants. The Tawny Silverline is one of those. In the UAE and Oman it has been observed to lay its eggs on palm trunks rather than living plants.

The ones we observed in Fujairah appeared to take matters a step further – or to their logical conclusion. We observed females laying eggs on a weathered wooden fence



*The butterfly egg on the fencepost, waiting for ants.*

post and even on the plastic-coated wire of a chain-link fence, at the intersection of two links. Evidently it is more important that the eggs (or larvae) be found by ants than that they have a ready supply of plant material to eat when the larva hatches. Or does the female perhaps choose a variety of sites? Another mystery (for now) is exactly which ant species tend(s) the butterfly eggs and larvae.

*Contribution by Binish Roobas and Gary Feulner*

## Announcements and Recorders

### Monthly Speaker -

8pm on Sunday 17th September 2017

### Roger Harrison will present an illustrated talk on 'Wings Over Arabia'

Roger is a Fellow of Gemmological Association of Great Britain and the GIA (the US version), English Language teacher, Scuba Diver, Heavy Goods vehicle driver and has a raft of minor accolades including the recently acquired Certificate of Museum Artefact Photography.

A Fairbridge Scholar ex-UK to University College, Salisbury, Rhodesia (External college to King's, London), Roger read English, Anthropology and Economics.

He gained a Post grad. M.Phil King's College, University of London – US Drama (Eugene O'Neill), Cambridge Celta, and holds other English language teaching qualifications.

*Wings over Arabia* is a beautiful edition that chronicles a long and dangerous flight over Saudi Arabia, and thus includes a rare bird's-eye look at the stunning scenery that makes up this beautiful landscape. The journey took them over places not normally accessible, through flight paths or otherwise, and this makes the book unique.

On 2 June 2006, pilots HRH Prince Sultan bin Salman and HRH Prince Bandar bin Khaled, along with John Bally, took three gliders, a chase plane, support crew and all-terrain vehicles, and departed from an airfield 50km outside of the country's capital, Riyadh. From there, they would take a circular route around the western half of Saudi Arabia, an area that included the wild and desolate deserts, the coastline of the Red Sea and the mountainous south-western region.

This book contains some truly arresting images, as well as offering a rare insight into Saudi Arabia from a different perspective – that of the skies above, and the brilliance seen below. More information can be viewed on the [DNHG website](#).



#### From the Editor:

This issue has not one, but two 'Stork' articles for you to read, on pages 3 and 4 respectively.

Despite the summer heat, life goes on as usual in one Dubai garden. See garden visitors and residents on the Spotlight page.

One field trip did take place over the long weekend of Eid Al Adha, and that was a journey to Oman. We look forward to receiving news covering that for the next issue.

It would seem that this month mostly covers flying creatures - butterflies,

birds and bees. However, page 6 describes two lurking spiders, camouflaged by a flowering plant, lying in wait for unsuspecting insects to pass by.

The committee welcomes everyone back to another active year of natural history happenings.

Membership details are on page 8 and subscriptions will be taken on 17th at the Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management. Arrive early to renew subs.

New members are welcome!

Enjoy your read!



Does this stork have a special delivery?

Find out more on page 5

## DNHG Recorders

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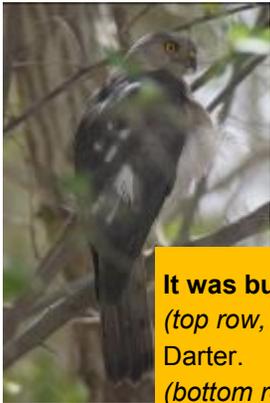
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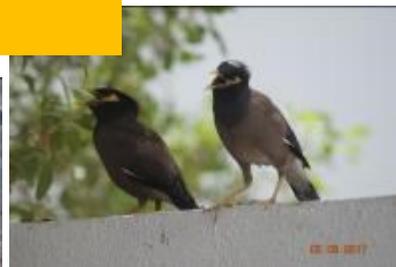
## Spotlight!



**It was business as usual, in this Dubai summer garden. (photos by M Swan)**

(top row, left to right) Shikra, Laughing Dove on nest, female Sun Bird, Purple-blushed Darter.

(bottom row, left to right) House Sparrow feeding young, White-cheeked Bul Bul parents fiercely guarding fledgeling, White-cheeked and Red-vented Bul Buls looking out for each other at the bird-bath, Indian Mynah pair - beaks open to stay cool.



These Western white storks (*Ciconia ciconia*) were spotted on an abandoned building near Merida, Spain, by friend and photographer Nicky Stone, originally from Zimbabwe, now living on the Sunshine Coast of Australia. She told me it was "a challenging shot" as she and friend Caroline Strathern had to drive to and fro several times to find a suitable spot to pull over as the birds were 500m off a busy road with steep narrow verges.

She said that after doing "a little trespassing and some stealthy creeping up on the birds to get them silhouetted against the dark stormy sky without disturbing them, we then had to sprint back along the road to the car in the pouring rain, trying to protect our cameras, as the storm hit!"

These are large birds with mostly white plumage and black flight feathers, the adults having long red legs and a straight red bill. They commonly make nests on buildings and trees.

Contribution by Cheryl Mandy



## The Rain in Spain ...



## Field Clips

### Yellow-billed Stork has urban hangout at Emirates Towers

The view of modernist architecture from the 35th floor of Emirates Towers is striking, but it could not be confused with a tree-fringed African lagoon. Perhaps that is why, when a large black-and-white bird appeared in the towers' vicinity in mid-June, first circling around them then settling on a building ledge opposite his office window, Charles had some trouble identifying it.

With help from Tamsin Carlisle and Gary Feulner, Charles discovered that the exotic visitor was a Yellow-billed Stork (*Mycteria ibis*), which one would normally expect to find in tropical East Africa. As its name suggests, this species belongs to the wood storks group. It has a long yellow bill, slightly curved and wide at the base, contrasting with a bright red, featherless face and forehead. The feathers covering the back of the head, neck, back, breast and belly are white or near-white, while the tail and wing-edges are black. This stork's legs were pale pink and its back was also flecked with pink, indicating breeding status.

During June and early July, the stork made a number of visits to the same ledge, where it would rest and preen and appeared to be seeking shade. Occasionally, in the heat of the day, it would stand for extended periods with its beak open, possibly attempting to cool off. The time of day and duration of its visits were highly variable, with the stork showing up any time from mid-morning to late afternoon and staying for minutes or hours. Sometimes it visited several times a day for several days in a row, but there were also days when it failed to show up. When it departed, it would often make several circles around the building, spiraling higher with each turn as if riding a thermal.

Tamsin and Charles agreed the stork was using the shaded ledge of the hotel tower to rest and cool off during the hottest portions of the day. However, its movements matched descriptions of the ritual preening displays of male Yellow-billed Storks that have laid territorial claim to potential nesting sites -- usually in elevated locations, such as tree tops, that offer protection from predators. We observed the bird moving his bill down the edges of his wings in long sweeping strokes from shoulder to tail -- a hallmark of the preening display.

If he were to attract a female by means of this behavior, they would build a nest together at the agreed location.



Tamsin Carlisle

Unfortunately for this bird, however, there may be no free-flying females in his vicinity.

There are a few UAE records of Yellow-billed Stork sightings, but they show up only sporadically and not in large numbers. On July 1 at Dubai's Ras al-Khor, we saw a large stork-like



Tamsin Carlisle

bird foraging in a mangrove swamp, but at too great a distance from the hide for us to make a confident identification. It was about the same size, but with different coloration and stance, as a grey heron spotted near the same line of mangroves, and it is plausible that it was the same bird we had seen earlier on the Emirates Towers hotel ledge.

A 2014 record on the uaebirding.com forum of a single Yellow-billed Stork at Ras al-Khor plausibly suggested the bird was an escapee from a private collection in Dubai. Since Yellow-billed Storks do not migrate seasonally from their African breeding grounds, it is possible that the bird we have been tracking also



came from a private collection.

At any rate, we suspect there have been sightings at Ras al-Khor of Yellow-billed Storks more recently than 2014, not including our unconfirmed July 1 sighting. The interiors of both Ras al-Khor hides now feature a photographic collage of birds to be seen in the Dubai wetlands area including, front-and-center, a close-up of *Mycteria ibis*.

As for Charles's continued observations, from the comfort of his office, of the stork's visits to the Emirates Towers ledge, bird-watching doesn't get much easier!

For those who may be interested, here is a link to video clips of the stork grooming on the ledge: <https://tinlight.smugmug.com/Other/Yellowbilled-Stork-Videos/n-3FhXCv/>

Contribution by Tamsin Carlisle and Charles Laubach

Photographs by Tamsin Carlisle

## Field Clips



Black Swan



Wood Duck

### The World in a Nutshell: Exotic Ducks and Geese

The Al-Qudra Lakes, within Dubai's recently declared Al-Marmoum protected area, were 'discovered' by recreationists, dog-walkers and bicyclists before they appeared on the radar screens of most local naturalists, and there is still some catching up to be done. Recent reports by Dr. Reza Khan and Esmat Elhassan of Dubai Municipality have highlighted native species that can be found at the lakes and have emphasized the large seasonal populations of some migratory species, from among the UAE's outsized total of more than 425 recorded species.

Less heralded have been the large number of exotic species of ducks and geese that are in enforced residence at the lakes. Most are large, colorful or otherwise distinctive species (some of them rare or with restricted ranges in nature) that are available in the international pet trade. Although they cannot be considered an addition to the biodiversity of the UAE (as is sometimes claimed), there is no point tut-tutting their presence. They are here, they have no place to go, they are evidently well cared for, and, although "artificial", they make an eloquent demonstration to young and old alike, picnickers and professional naturalists, of the diversity of creation. That is one of the many legitimate goals of zoos, nature parks and similar amenities.

In that spirit, we enjoyed an extended, sultry summer visit which left us with a lot of homework to do to account for the unexpectedly large number of exotic species, many of which



Mandarin Duck

we could not find in our collection of Middle East, Eurasian and South-East Asian reference books. Among the attractions were the following:

- Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*), a native of southern Australia. It has a long history as an introduced species globally. Curiously, having been introduced by Dubai Municipality, this species is now being monitored as one of ten "invasive species" at Marmoum. (Economists who nowadays often speak of "black swan" events are obviously not accomplished naturalists.)
- Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*), a small but extremely colorful North American species.
- Mandarin Duck (*Aix galericulata*), from East Asia, another small but crowd-pleasing introduced species internationally.
- Cape Barren Goose (*Cereopsis novaehollandiae*), a robust and primarily non-aquatic species, originally from the north of Tasmania. This is a goose with "attitude", whose demeanor makes a convincing case for the dinosaur origins of modern birds.



Cape Barren Goose



Black-Necked Swan



Marbled Duck



Red-Breasted Goose

(Continued on page 6)

## Field Clips



**Upland Goose**

(Continued from page 5)

- Black-Necked Swan (*Cygnus melancoryphus*), native to temperate South America, is that continent's largest waterfowl.
- Marbled Duck (*Marmaronetta angustirostris*), a marshland bird of Palaeartic, considered vulnerable to widespread destruction of its habitat..
- Red-Breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*), a small goose that breeds in the Arctic.

- Upland Goose (*Chloephaga picta*), a species of Patagonian grasslands, with only rudimentary webbed feet.
- White-Cheeked Pintail Duck (*Anas bahamensis*), a species of the Caribbean, South America and the Galapagos..

Among native species, it was a delight to see numerous Cream Coloured Courser (*Cursorius cursor*) on the sand flats surrounding the lakes.

Text by Gary Feulner, identifications and photographs by Binish Roobas



**White-Cheeked Pintail Duck**

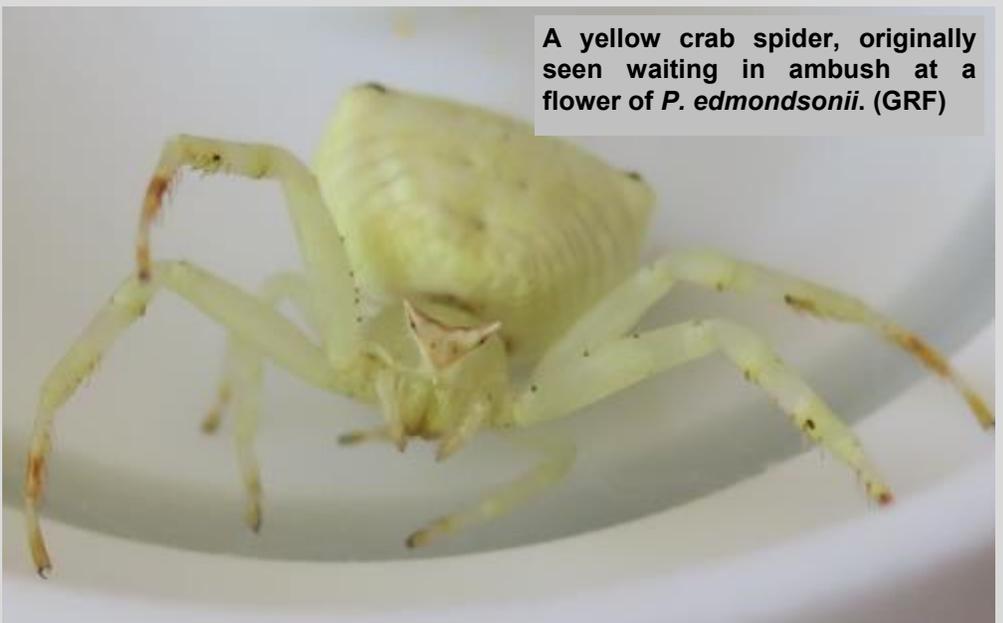


**Cream Coloured Courser**

### Insect predators on flowers: Where the money is

**W**illie Sutton, a notorious American bank robber of the 1930s, was asked why he robbed banks. His answer was simple: "That's where the money is."

A similar principle seemed to apply in the southern Musandam in late spring. There, the endemic Hajar Mountain shrub *Pulicaria edmondsonii*, a member of the daisy family, was flowering exuberantly at a time when almost every other species had already bloomed and was drying. The result? Flying insects, and especially butterflies, flocked to feed on *P. edmondsonii*. Some timed their visits in



**A yellow crab spider, originally seen waiting in ambush at a flower of *P. edmondsonii*. (GRF)**



***Pulicaria edmondsonii* with at least a dozen Desert White butterflies feeding on the blossoms. (BR)**

early morning or later afternoon to avoid the midday heat. The Desert White butterfly *Pontia glauconome*, an arid region specialist, was active throughout the day.

But with the butterflies concentrated on *P. edmondsonii*, the shrub presented an attractive target for insect predators as well. In one particularly dense patch of *P. edmondsonii*, we found two daytime spider species lurking beside flowers waiting to ambush unwary insects.

One was a crab spider, yellow-colored to match the *P. edmondsonii* flowers. The other was a lynx spider, normally considered an active hunter on leaves. Both appear to be species that we have encountered elsewhere in the UAE, but that have not yet been definitively identified to species. (See the "Spiders of the UAE: An Introductory Catalogue" in *Tribulus* vol. 23)

Contribution by Gary Feulner and Binish Roobas

## Field Clips

A natural comb, alive with honey bees in the middle of a leafy bougainvillea. Here, some bees are temporarily away foraging, leaving cells clearly visible at the top (enlarge to view).



performing a 'waggle' dance, each fanning their double set of wings, in a quest to keep the comb cool.

Earlier this year, a workshop was led by renowned bee scientist, Dr. Denis Anderson. took place in Al Ain. Part of his role at the at the Kuwaitat Research Centre there, is to find ways of making bee-keeping more sustainable at local farms. Finding these bees, therefore, prompted a search for my field notes.

Although my scribblings advised covering up to avoid stings, these bees were different to those at the Centre, being much smaller and quite docile. They didn't seem to mind my presence at all, but I kept a respectable distance, regardless. Because of the bee size, cell and comb structure, it would appear that they are most likely *Apis florea*, an Asiatic honey bee, as described by Phil Iddison, [in this article](#). I then looked for the Queen, having 'Googled' an image, but only one side of the disc-shaped comb was accessible to view, and I was unsuccessful in locating her.

Surprisingly, Queens are only a little bigger than the rest of the bees. They were observed at the workshop, where, suitably attired, inspections of the breed boxes took place in the shade of mature Sidr trees. Each Queen (one per breed box) could be seen actively inspecting and laying eggs in the hexagonal cells. New Queens have to find another home, which could be a second box placed above a first, as in the photo to the right, or another place, such as the bougainvillea in my garden (*above left*).

Dr. Anderson explained that the Sidr tree contains vital amino acids, required by their bees to stay healthy. During the summer when natural food sources dry up, the bee diet is supplemented with soy-based flour and sugar. The bees resume their natural diet when trees flower in October/November. Our garden bees though, appeared to be sustained by their own honey, and sharing local flowering flora with visiting Sun birds. There is much to learn about these amazing insects.

To start with, bees are very social beings, in that every individual has a role to play within the cohesive bee community. Nurses, builders, pollen-gatherers and protectors

## All abuzz aboard a bougainvillea

Travelling for most of July, I returned home to discover that, not only was our garden full of bird and insect life (see page 3), but also a wild honey bee colony had taken up residence in the midst of an externally bushy bougainvillea. Imagine my delight at finding all this garden bounty, whilst appreciating the efficiency of the gardener, who kept the garden alive in our absence. The honeycomb was heavy with bees, conserving their energy in the intense heat. Taking turns, individuals were

## Photos show some of the equipment used in professional bee-keeping



Wooden breed box—around ten of these wax cell inserts can be placed inside the box. The box lid is seen at the back.



A smoker is used to calm the bees, prior to box inspection.



A 'double-storey' breed box.

- each follow their designated duty, communicating via Pheromones.

Those wishing to learn more about bees can find educational videos online. [Click here](#) for one of the links I found to be very informative.

Contribution by Margaret Swan

# Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

September 17: Roger Harrison on 'Wings Over Arabia'

October 15: Dr Sophie Mery on 'Recent archaeological research in coastal Umm Al-Quwain'

November 12: Dr Gary Brown on 'Habitats and Habitat Mapping in the UAE'

## Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

October 14 - 22: DNHG Field Trip to Southern Vietnam

*Field trips will be  
circulated to  
members via e-mail*

## DNHG COMMITTEE 2017

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?

Do you have any photos from countries you've visited over the summer? What wildlife or local culture did you see?

Send your contributions to:

[gazelleeditor@gmail.com](mailto:gazelleeditor@gmail.com)

## DNHG Membership

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership is valid from September 2017 to September 2018. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to HSBC account number 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 AE900200000030 100242001. However, this process does not identify you as the payer. If you wish to pay by cash, please also photograph or scan a copy of your payment confirmation and send via e-mail to the Membership Secretary, so we know whose money we have received.

DNHG membership entitles you to participate in field trips and help 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.