



GAZELLE

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مجموعتنا دورية للتاريخ والطبيعي

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Contributors—

Thanks to the following for their contributions:

Gary Feulner, Valerie Chalmers, Rahul Shah, Margaret Swan, Paola Enrico, Charles Laubach, Stephen Green and Binish Roobas.

Send your contributions for the July/August issue to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

By 26th August, 2018



Amber lumps of the mystery substance

What is it?

Sculptured by nature, this is one of the features in Yehliu GeoPark, Taiwan. See more of these unusual shapes on page 5



Every so often, we just don't know. Visiting a favorite site some months ago with Binish Roobas, in mid-wadi we encountered lumps of a tawny, rubbery or resinous substance, firm but flexible. Color and texture aside, we knew it wasn't ambergris. Some of it appeared to have been burned or strongly heated, and had a darkened skin like a toasted marshmallow.

Following the evidence upstream, we learned that the mystery substance originated in blue barrels, and the contents of some of them appeared to have been burned. Or was it merely scorched by the UAE heat?

We suspect that the substance was once
(Continued on page 4)



Close-up, hinting at the rubbery, resinous substance

Announcements and Recordors

Monthly Speaker - 8pm on Sunday 16 September, 2018

Lecture Title - to be confirmed

Biography - to be confirmed

(Please note that there will be no lectures during July and August)



DNHG Chairman, Gary Feulner, speaking at the growing RAK Natural History Group (photo by Binish Roobas)

Dr John Burt Presentation on Jazirat Al-Hamra

Thanks to Dr Burt for presenting this very interesting talk in May.

Following requests by one or two members, Dr Burt has kindly provided a link to the presentation, which follows:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KUMPSzGiNG2C7qcGLIqn1OOoRWyoSldd/view>

From the Editor:

As Dubai slows down to its summer pace, we say goodbye to some of our members and wish a pleasant summer break to those travelling. Please keep in touch and send us photos or reports of your natural history observations, wherever you go. We are always happy to receive any news of sightings or discoveries, whether in Dubai or further afield.

One unusual discovery describes an unidentified substance found lying in a wadi. Perhaps one of our readers can identify what it is (cover article).

Talking of unusual finds, read about the hoodoos in Taiwan on page 5.

Back to Dubai and page 7 reports bird sightings around buildings and gardens.

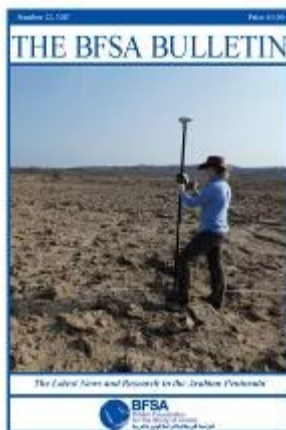
Should anyone wish to organize a field trip over the summer, please contact Sonja (details on page 8).

Enjoy your read!

The BFSA Bulletin

Thanks to Stephen Green for forwarding this useful link to the following annual publication. [Click here to access The BFSA Bulletin publications to date.](#)

Formerly the Bulletin of the Society for Arabian Studies, it provides information on current research, publications, field work, conferences and events in the Arabian peninsula in fields ranging from archaeology and history to natural history and the environment. It also carries feature articles and book reviews. The cover of the most recent publication (2017) is illustrated here.



ENHG Lecture

On 26th June, members boarded a minibus that transported them to Abu Dhabi in order to attend an ENHG lecture.

Archaeologist Dr Mark Beech presented a very interesting talk on the "Top 10 Palaeontological and Archaeological Discoveries in Abu Dhabi Emirate (1994—2018)". The in-depth responses to the questions posed afterwards were also very enlightening.

DNHG Recordors

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Mammals - new recorder needed!

Spotlight!

The Louvre and some exhibits, Abu Dhabi—photos by Rahul Shah



Offshore development on the coastline of Jumeirah—the canal entrance is to the right

Framing the changing face of Dubai, by Margaret Swan



Dubai Frame (from the ground)



View from the top of Dubai Frame

The bright lights of Dubai greet newly-arrived passengers



Images from Slovenia, by Paola Enrico
(more about this DNHG field trip will follow in the next issue)



Field Clips

(Continued from page 1)

more fluid than it is now. And since the site is very close to an area of extensive quarrying along the western mountain front, we *suspect* it is an industrial product related to the quarrying activities or construction of some kind, perhaps a lubricant or sealant. We don't know if the contents were in fact burned, or spoiled in the UAE heat (we found them in mid-winter), or were simply past their sell-by date. And we don't know how they found their way into the wadi, whether by design (because they were spoiled) or through inadvertence (after which they spoiled without proper care or storage).

We *hope* it's not toxic, at least not in its 'solid' form, because I'm continuing to carry a chunk in my car. And we *hope* that some of our members, especially any involved in geological or civil engineering or construction activities, might be able to enlighten us.

Contribution by Gary Feulner



A scorched rind?



Burned contents?



A burned barrel?



What to make of it?

Field Clips

Hoodoos and Sand Dollars in Yehliu Geological Park, Taiwan

Natural history lessons learned in Dubai and the UAE have application far beyond our shores. During one of my visits to Taiwan to see my youngest son and his wife, and knowing my interest in fossils and rock formations, they took me out for the day to visit Yehliu Geological Park on the Yehliu promontory, a cape in the town of Wanli, New Taipei, on the north-east shore of the island. The cape stretches approximately 1,700 metres into the ocean and was formed as geological forces pushed the Datun Mountains out of the sea.



The Sea Candles

The coastal region of the promontory is made up of Miocene sedimentary rocks of the Daliuo Formation. Yehliu GeoPark is home to some very interesting and

distinctive rock formations known as hoodoos (a/k/a zeugen) that dot its surface. (The landscape looks like it could belong to another planet!) Hoodoos are a result of differential weathering. This means that not all rocks, or all parts of a rock, erode at the same rate. Hard layers erode more slowly than soft layers, but weathering is also influenced by exposure to the physical forces of wind and water and to chemical activity

facilitated by moisture. Not only are the Yehliu hoodoos some of the only ones known to form in a seaside environment, but, according to a 2001 study

published in *Western Pacific Earth Sciences*, they are composed of the same type of rock through and through.



View of Yehliu Geo Park

The researchers concluded that the only difference is the outer appearance due to staining by iron oxides such as haematite on

the rock. The rather soft limestone composition of the rock is prone to erosion from a combination of seawater, wave and wind forces which tend to act most vigorously on lower levels of the hoodoos. This has resulted in the interesting, sculpture-like rock formations. Many have been given names representing their shapes such as the “Mushroom Rocks”, “Sea Candles”, “Elephant Rock”, “Ice Cream Rock”, and “Fairy Shoe”. The most iconic is the “Queen’s Head”, which was supposedly named for its likeness to the famous bust of the Egyptian Queen Nefertiti. Some of the rocks are covered with holes of different sizes and appear to resemble honeycombs. This is due to differential erosion caused by weathering out of shell bits of molluscs, sea urchins and other marine organisms.

Seeing these rock formations, I was reminded of similar rock formations, not quite so elaborate, which I had seen along the UAE coast beyond Abu Dhabi. Page 68 in *The Emirates – A Natural History* shows a hoodoo caused by wind erosion of cemented Pleistocene carbonate dunes (aeolianites). We even have our own Nefertiti – a natural bust overlooking the southern flank of the so-called Ibri anticline in Oman, once the site of DNHG fossil hunting field trips.

I was also delighted to see the remains of numerous echinoids, predominantly sand dollars belonging to the Order Clypeasteroidea, present in and around the rocks in the GeoPark. Many long and tube-like trace fossils, probably burrow casts, have also been seen on the ground here.

Contribution by Valerie Chalmers

Editor’s Note—Photographs of natural sand sculptures observed in Al Wathba featured in the [July/August 2016](#) issue.



The Queen's Head



Ice Cream Rock



Sand Dollar

Field Clips and Announcements

Foxgloves in Bonnie Scotland

Many people are about to leave Dubai for the summer. In fact, I have just returned from a UK visit.

Driving through the rural village of Newcastleton, our party was struck by the beauty of meandering streams and rivers within the picturesque valley of Liddesdale. Inspiration was everywhere to create fairy tales and magical stories. We were on our way to Kielder Observatory in Northumberland and crossed many stone-built bridges, stopping occasionally to admire this ancient skill close-up. There are many walks in this area. [Click here](#) for more information on maps, walks and places to stay.



Looking for trolls (the fairy tale variety)



Meandering river



Tunnel or hobbit house?



Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*

There were also lots of wild flowers, growing in abundance. One such flower was the common foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*.

Despite being poisonous to humans and animals, bumble bees love to visit this plant, disappearing inside each randomly-selected 'glove' in order to retrieve and deliver pollen. [Click here](#) to watch footage of a bumble bee doing just that. As it is the method of plant reproduction, it is no accident that the foxglove has evolved to attract bumble bees. The plant rewards the bee with much-needed nectar.

To learn more about foxgloves and the pollination process, visit the following website. There are also word puzzles to enjoy if it's too rainy to be out!

http://www.countrysideinfo.co.uk/foxglove_puzzle/foxpuzzle.htm

The question is, did we see any planets through the eyes of the giant telescopes at the Observatory? Unfortunately, due to erratic cloud movement, we only saw Jupiter and some of its moons. However, we did enjoy the talks from enthusiastic staff and volunteers! The scenery getting there was spectacular—nature at its best!

Read more about Kielder Observatory and how to visit, at their website:

<https://kielderobservatory.org/>

Contribution by
Margaret Swan



A pond reflects the sky

Annual General Meeting

The DNHG's Annual General Meeting was held in conjunction with the June lecture. A new Committee was elected for the coming year as shown on page 8. Most incumbent members have continued in office but we have a new Treasurer. Puneet Kumar has succeeded Rakesh Rungta, who has been resident in Abu Dhabi for the past couple of years.

In his annual report, Chairman Gary Feulner noted that the DNHG has continued its record of well-received monthly lectures and field trips and that DNHG membership had slightly exceeded our record of recent years. He nevertheless highlighted the continuing need for volunteers to lead natural history field trips, and to serve as Membership Secretary and Assistant Secretary.

Binish Roobas has stepped up to become Insect Recorder, a position which he had been filling on a de facto basis via e-mail and social media.

Fond Farewells

All good things come to an end, and, as happens every year, summer brings the departure of a number of friends from Dubai and the DNHG. This summer we say goodbye to the following:

Jean-Paul and Sarah Berger and their son Michael. Jean-Paul and his family have been active DNHG participants and Jean-Paul has led a number of geology and astronomy field trips over the years. They will return to Jean-Paul's family home in central France.

Andrew McTiernan will soon be returning to the UK. He has assisted for several years in planning archaeology field trips.

Roberta Lattuada, an active field trip participant and organizer of a DNHG photography course, also leaves Dubai, returning to her home in Italy.

Feathered Field Clips

Stork Returns

As reported in the [July/August 2017 issue of The Gazelle](#), a male Yellow-billed Stork (*Mycteria ibis*) was observed on several occasions in June and July on a ledge of the Emirates Towers hotel tower, seeking shade and possibly also trying to attract a female nest-mate. See last year's *Gazelle* for additional observations, photographs and a link to a video file.

The Stork is back, 12 months later. I observed him make two brief visits of only 2 or 3 minutes each to the same ledge, once in the morning of June 10th and the other around midday of June 14th. He also visited this week, sitting on his ledge for 5 minutes on June 26th at around 10.15 am and on 30th June at about 1.30 pm, he was circling over DIFC. If anything, the red on his head is more distinct than last year.

I will try to get some photographs if he decides to stay for a few hours, as he did on a couple of occasions last year.

Contribution by Charles Laubach (photo taken by Tamsin



Stork on ledge at Emirates Towers

Carlisle and used in the July-August 2017 *Gazelle* article).



Adult Shikra *Accipiter badius*



Indian Silverbill pair *Lonchura malabarica*

Birds at the Jumeirah Water Bowl

A Shikra passed through the garden last year (see page 3 of the above link) but I wasn't sure if this was the same one, as it seemed slightly smaller and the yellowness was a little paler. However, the paleness could have been the light making a difference (and perhaps using my i-Phone camera on the spur of the moment). The identification was confirmed by Oscar Campbell, when mentioning it to him at an ENHG meeting in Abu Dhabi this month. "It's a Shikra," explained Oscar. He added that they can be confused with the Eurasian Sparrowhawk but this is definitely a Shikra, and quite a common sight.

When the Shikra isn't around, a small group of birds take refuge high above on the window sill, making the most of the air-conditioning that escapes the room. When in pairs, I've noticed that one always assumes the responsibility of being the look-out whilst the other has a good splash around. This seems to be the case with all pairs, not just this tiny species.

Looking through the "Birds of the United Arab Emirates" (which is on sale at DNHG meetings), it would appear that they are Indian Silverbills and indeed "frequently live in small groups". The most noticeable feature of the bird is its large conical silver-grey bill, hence the name presumably. According to the publication these birds are native to UAE, but breeding populations further west originate from escapees.

Contribution by Margaret Swan

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

September 16: (to be confirmed)

October 7: Ali Iqbal—"The Trucial Coast during the Second World War: Incidents and Accidents"

Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

September 7—13: DNHG trip to Greece

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

DNHG COMMITTEE 2018

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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Committee Positions

DNHG have the following (voluntary) positions available:

Field Trip Coordinator—a second Field Trip Coordinator is required to assist in organizing field trips.

Membership Secretary and Assistant Membership Secretary—this would suit a person or persons who regularly attend lectures.

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.