



GAZELLE



مجموعتنا دورية للتاريخ والطبيعي

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Contributors—

Thanks to the following for their contributions this month:

Anelisa Lambert, Beverly McKay, Nick Upton, Angela Manthorpe, Margaret Swan, Ulrike Andorff and Gwynneth Robertson.



Bank Myna (inset) common Myna

A Rare Find!

(See page 6)



The Bank Myna and other invaders

The Bank Myna, *Acridotheres ginginianus*, is one of the 3 species of myna that we encounter in the UAE and, like its relatives, it's an alien introduced species that's spreading across the country. In 1990 when Colin Richardson published his 'Birds of the United Arab Emirates' the Bank Myna was described as a "scarce and localized breeding species, all probably introduced. Only recorded in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Al Ain, where small colonies are expanding". Move on to 2007, when various local papers reported a large colony of Bank Mynas observed near the sewage treatment plant in Warsan, Dubai. Dr Reza Khan, former Head of Dubai Zoo, stated at the time that, "prior to 1990, there were hardly any Bank Mynas visible in any part of the UAE barring a few farming areas in Ras Al Khaimah". He believed the bird, which is commonly found from Pakistan to Bangladesh, was established here from specimens imported by pet shops and owners. At the Warsan colony Dr Reza reported seeing "more than 100 nesting

(Continued on page 5)

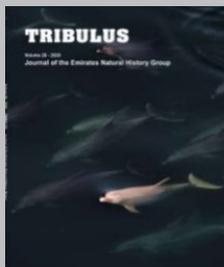
Announcements and Recorders

DNHG monthly lectures (virtual) will resume in September, 2021

Tribulus

The journal of the Emirates Natural History Group *Tribulus* (Volume 28) has just been published in collaboration with the Environment Agency—Abu Dhabi (EAD). These are usually sold at meetings. However, as this is not possible, collection points will be at Motor City and Mirdif.

Copies, priced at 50 Dirhams, can be purchased from the DNHG librarian, Angela Manthorpe whose contact details are on page 8.



Inter-Emirates Experience 2021

The Chair of Emirates Natural History Group Al Ain, Brigitte Howarth, opened the virtual meeting via Zoom on 8th June. The winners of the annual awards were announced, followed by a discussion on the websites *e-bird* and *i-naturalist*. Finally, live online voting procedure took place to decide the winners of the photograph competition.

Dr Anita Saaji, a scientist working with the Environment Agency, Abu Dhabi, was awarded the Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed for Natural History. She has carried out detailed studies of insect life in the Emirates and has discovered several species of insect new to science at Al Wathba Wetland Reserve just outside Abu Dhabi.

The Bish Brown award was given to Roxanne Whelan, Vice-Chair of ENHG Al Ain, for her dedication and support to natural history and conservation activities and projects in the UAE. Both recipients were virtually present but the Awards Ceremony itself will take place at a later date.

The highlighted theme for the Inter-Emirates Experience focused on **Observe, Report, Record**. Members of all Natural History Group chapters were invited to record their own wildlife sightings in and around the United Arab Emirates. From 12th March, 2021, online platforms were set up and, although 8th June was officially the end of the project, it was mentioned that the platforms would still be operating for the present time. Observations published and pin-pointed on a map so far number 894. Read more about this project at: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/enhg-inter-emirates-2021>

The photograph competition categories and winners are listed below. As expected at a natural history event, 'Animals and Plants in the Wild' held the largest number of entries with the result of a tie between two winners. The 'People's Choice' category was voted the overall winning photograph. See this (and other) photographs on the Spotlight page. In all, there were 50 entries from 20 photographers ... and the winners were:

Category	Winner/s
Animals and Plants in the Wild	Altaf Habib and Angela Manthorpe
Architecture	Monica Falini
'Scapes	Monica Falini
Contrasts	Angela Manthorpe
People's Choice	Angela Manthorpe

Unable to meet in person for the annual weekend due to current restrictions, special thanks and appreciation is expressed here to the Al Ain chapter for organizing this virtual event and finding new ways to communicate during the ongoing pandemic.

DNHG Recorders

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From the Editor:

Being of a certain age, I remember our village farmers leaving a field or two for a year to recover from crop-farming. The field stubble was usually burned after harvest. Old ways inevitably make way for new but sometimes these can pose unforeseen problems (see page 5).

Further back in time, smelting copper in Wadi Helo was quite productive during the Bronze Age (see page 7).

Enjoy your read!

Spotlight!

Winners of the Photo competition, held on 8th June at the virtual Inter-Emirates Experience, 2021 .

Animals and Plants in the Wild

Altaf Habib – The mating Arabian toads along with eggs (top photo on the left)

Angela Manthorpe - Swallowtail repose (middle photo)

Architecture

Monica Falini - Fast Life in Dubai (top photo on the right)

Scapes

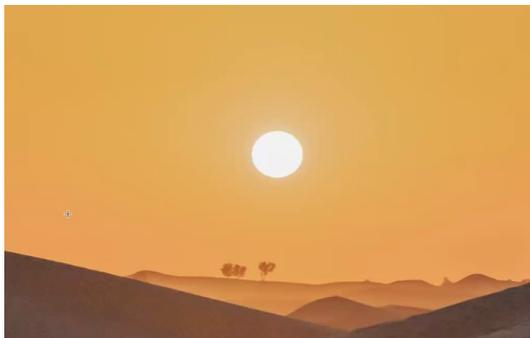
Monica Falini – Smooth shapes and colours (bottom photo on the left)

Contrasts

Angela Manthorpe - Stop or I'll jump bottom photo on the right)

People's Choice (overall winning photograph)

Angela Manthorpe - Swallowtail repose (middle photo)



Safety on the roads, by Gwynneth Robertson

Be wary of camels!

The camel fences at the sides of major roads are normally visible to the motorist but shifting sands sometimes make it possible for camels to wander over the fence into heavy traffic.

Camels also wander freely on smaller, unlit roads in the desert.

Readers can see that the camel in the photo on the right is hobbled. This is common practice in the UAE so please be aware and drive safely!



Field Clips



Captured on camera! This pair of sand gazelles *Gazella subgutturosa marica* were just as curious about us as we were about them. (taken by Margaret Swan).

The Arabian Caracal

While on a car trip from Ras Al Khaimah up to the Musandam peninsula (Oman) in the late '90's, I was lucky enough to spot a caracal, in daylight, off the side of the road, picking its way amongst the large boulders. Unlike many cats, caracals (*Caracal caracal schmitzi*) are not totally nocturnal. The only other time I saw a caracal in the area of Ras al Khaimah was on film footage, in late 2014, taken by Dr. Anne-Lise Chaber's camera traps placed high in mountain wadis for a wildlife study. The fact that this particular caracal only appeared roughly every 40 days or so on the footage suggested that it had an extremely large

hunting territory. This made sense, since that year and those previous had been hotter and drier than normal, making it difficult for caracals to find prey. Global warming puts northern Al Hajar mountain caracals at risk, since a scarcity of prey at higher altitudes will surely drive them lower where they will come into conflict with livestock owners. Indeed, during years 2012 onwards we often saw chukar partridges at much lower altitudes, in areas where previously we had not seen them on our hikes in the northern Al Hajar mountains. The regularity of the caracal's passage through its hunting territory made me think of the repetitive nature of Islamic design, which I have



used for the background in this watercolour illustration. Beautiful, like all cats, the caracal is distinctive for its large tufted ears, and its round eye pupils like the other larger members of the cat family. Their tail is neither short like a lynx's or long like most cats, but rather is mid length. For this painting I took photos of a number of caracals held at the Copenhagen Zoo. I am working on a book about the natural history of Ras al Khaimah and more of my painted and photographic illustrations can be seen on Instagram @Paper.Nautilus.Illustrations

Contribution by Beverly McKay

Field Clips and Book Launch

(Continued from page 1)

holes on the three steep banks of the pit...hundreds of mynas were visiting the nesting holes – 50 to 100cm deep horizontal tunnels – dug by the mynas themselves”.

The Bank Myna gets its name from the location of its nesting colonies, often in the steep banks alongside rivers and other waterways or on the walls of old buildings. In May I spotted a colony in a wall of fossilized dunes exposed by diggers in Umm Al Quwain. Approaching the colony in my car I was able to observe the birds coming and going from their nesting holes. In flight there's an obvious orange/yellow patch on the base of the primaries, in contrast to the common myna which shows white when it flies. The Bank Myna is grey with striking black patches on the head and wings, a bright orange/red patch around the eye and, on some, I could see a short tuft just behind the beak.

The same weekend I spotted two Pied Mynas (*Sturnus contra*), at the boat slipway in Al Khan, Sharjah. This is another introduced species which, prior to this sighting, I'd often seen while waiting at the traffic lights at the Trade Centre roundabout in Dubai. And of course the Common Myna, (*Acridotheres tristis*) needs no introduction. In 2000 the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, IUCN, included the Common Myna in the top 100 list of the world's most invasive alien species and this noisy and gregarious inhabitant of our urban environment is firmly established in the UAE, outcompeting native species and threatening biodiversity with its omnivorous diet and opportunistic behaviour. A recent paper published in the Nature journal estimated that invasive species have cost the global economy more than \$1.3 trillion since 1970 (average \$26.8 billion per annum) with damage to ecosystems, crops and fisheries, pest control measures, and this issue will continue to worsen.

Contribution by Angela Manthorpe



Nesting colony



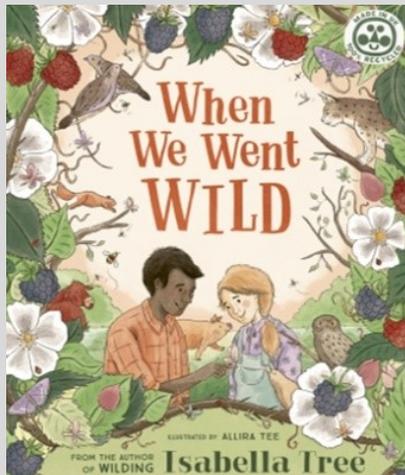
Nesting pair

Re-Wilding in Sussex!

For the first time in 606 years, storks are nesting in Great Britain! This took a lot of encouragement and support but it follows the success story of re-wilding a farm in Sussex.

Over the years and due to pressures of commerce and consumerism, it would seem that chemicals, added nutrients, pesticides and using grain for cow feed on this farm, resulted in drastic soil change. Wildlife could not survive. “Using new pesticides has had a knock-on effect on nature” states Isabella Tree.

Author of a book called “Wilding” first published in 2018, Isabella has now launched a picture book called “When We Went Wild”. This new book is about characters, Nancy and Jake, who introduced the right soils with healthy biodiverse nutrients. Both books are available from online bookstores.



In a virtual interview at the Hay Festival this month, Isabella recalls how she and her husband stopped using chemicals altogether and also ceased food production. They sold the cows and left crops as stubble. Wild flowers and berries grew in fields and hedgerows, thus attracting insects and birds.

Then followed the introduction of long-horn cows, pigs, Exmoor ponies, red and fallow deer that managed the land. The animals foraged and wandered through land and water, making paths and, in doing so, returned it to nature.

As a result, dormice, voles and even storks, which had been missing for hundreds of years, took up residence. Other nesting storks followed and presently a pair have a nest with chicks on the farm chimney!

Isabella advises that gardens in the United Kingdom can be wildlife corridors too, and that leaving piles of leaves for insects is a good example. She added, “You can also encourage hedgehogs into the garden by making a small hole in the fence.”

Contribution by Margaret Swan



Storks building their nest,
by Nick Upton

Field Clips



Crystallized Gastropod Fossil?

40mm in length, 30mm in width, extremely heavy and sturdy feels the gastropod in my hands – found at the East Coast of the northern Fujairah emirate. The crystal white color reflects magnificent shades in the sunlight. My research of this gastropod concluded that it must be a quartz or calcites fossilized turbo shell as both minerals are available in the nearby Hajar mountains. Obviously, I was eager to share this find with Andrew Childs to obtain an expert opinion. Andrew explained that the fossil is actually an extremely rare *Magilus antiquus* (Montfort 1810) with the tube broken off. While this phenomenal gastropod is listed in Donald Bosch's "Seashells of Eastern Arabia", Wikipedia lists it for the regions Red Sea, Indian Ocean along Aldabra, Madagascar, Mauritius, Tanzania and in the Pacific Ocean along New Zealand. ENHG included a quiz question in 2005 related to the *Magilus antiquus* explaining the shell as a "Burrowing coral shell from Quriyat, Oman. Although it looks and feels like a fossil, this is a recent shell, which lives in coral heads. As the coral grows outwards, it grows outward too and fills up the inside part of the shell with solid limestone." In 2010 "The Journal of Gemmology" published an article about the gastropod with the title "A cautionary tale about a little-known type of non-nacreous calcareous concretion produced by the *Magilus antiquus* marine snail".

No reference has been found on any occurrence of the *Magilus antiquus* in the UAE. Therefore it is definitely a very rare find and shall be treasured as such.

Contribution by Ulrike Andorff

Hidden (and not so hidden) Bivalves

Established in 2016, a successful oyster farm in Dibba now supplies its produce to major hotels and restaurants in the region. Read their story here: <https://www.dibbabay.com/about-us/>

Not partial to oysters myself I thought no more of this but, whilst snorkelling in Jumeirah, I noticed that one of the bivalves in this photo resembled an oyster. What do readers think?

Attached underwater to the rocks, most bivalves would normally close on the approach of a possible predator. However, one did not feel threatened by my looming presence and remained slightly open, displaying its brightly-coloured inner tissue. In contrast, the one next to it suddenly snapped shut. I probably would not have noticed them at all were it not for this sudden movement.

Readers can see how camouflaged they are once closed. How many bivalves can you spot in the photo and what other forms of life do you see?

Contribution by Margaret Swan



Field Clips

“Sayonara” to Al Luluyah Beach

The roughly 2km stroll along the Al Luluyah Beach (near Khor Fakkan) was always an enjoyment for everyone not to be missed, either for swimming in the crystal clear Indian Ocean, beach combing, relaxation, camping or just cruising along the “boulevard” track.

Therefore, the announcement of a 110 million AED beach development with swimming island and water slides, kids’ playground, swimming pool, caravan camping ground etc. struck me hard. Just two weeks after the announcement, the trees along the “boulevard” were removed. In the meantime the beach is closed, and work has begun. The project is supposed to be completed by November 2022. In reminisce I visited the beach to collect some more precious seashells which were plentiful in species despite the hot summer season. I remember the national day celebrations, the picnics and camping by Emiratis and residents. While we tend to be skeptical with every development I trust that Sharjah will continue its efforts in keeping the nature and wildlife protected as reflected in its many other coastal developments.

Contribution by Ulrike Andorff



Wadi Helo

In April of this year, I went to explore the ruins in Wadi Helo, which include the site of a Bronze Age copper workshop (HLO1), an Umm an-Nar watchtower with modern watch tower adjacent (photo 1) and the remains of an historic, two-storey building of notable size (photo 2), apparently occupied by a local figure of note well into the 20th century. The site is well marked and easily accessible from the road via a gravel track. A modern watchtower (photo 3), adjacent to the Bronze Age copper production site, is associated with this ‘aristocratic’ home, and there is a further watchtower high up on the hill to the west (photo 4).

The Bronze Age copper mining and smelting site was excavated in a joint project by Johannes Kutterer (University of Tubingen) and the Sharjah government from 2007-2012. At that time, excavations in Oman had shown much mining and smelting of Bronze Age copper, whereas UAE Bronze Age excavations had tended more towards copper processing and the manufacture of final objects. Site



Photo 1—Partially restored remains of Bronze Age Tower in foreground.

Photo credit: J Kutterer et al.

(Continued on next page)

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HLO1 at Wadi Helo is interesting in revealing the processes from local ore extraction through to the production of pure copper. The availability of wood is always a limiting factor for metal processing in SE Arabia, and although HLO1 is not a large site, it appears to have adopted sustainable practices, lasting from the end of the 4th millenium BC right into the Iron Age. Kutterer's excavations unearthed a complete copper ingot in a structure at the northern end of the site (photo 5). Slag from the smelting process and pitted crushing stones (photo 6) are scattered around the workshop ruins.

The ruins of the historic, sub-recent building are on the valley floor to the west of HLO1. The walls were built from unhewn wadi pebbles that were then plastered with clay. The partially preserved staircase to the second-storey still remains (photo 7), as do decorative alcoves and window frames (photo 8). The walk up to the watchtower, high on the hill to the west, is steep but the view very rewarding – an excellent place for a picnic lunch.

Contribution (including the majority of photos) by Anelisa Lambert

Photo 2—the remains of a historic, two-storey building of notable size



Photo 2—A modern watchtower

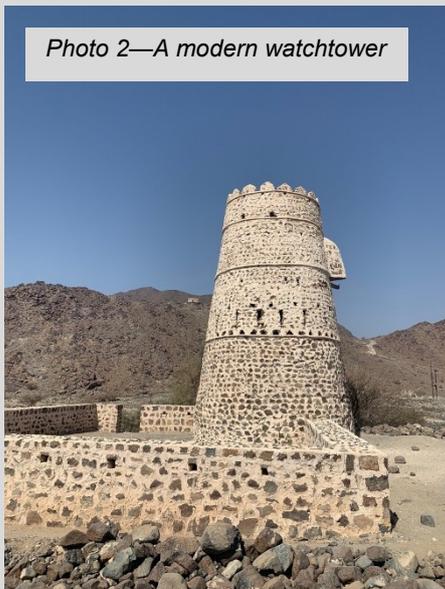


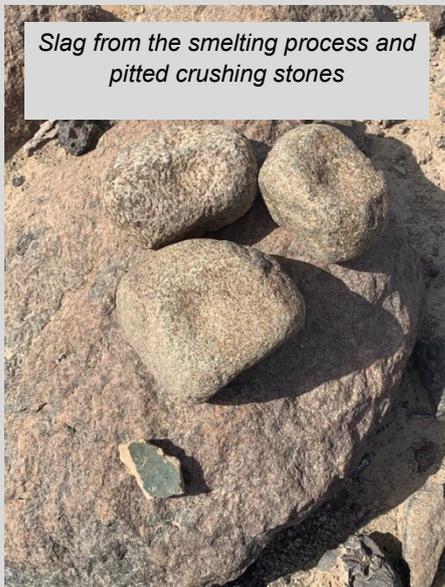
Photo 4—another watchtower higher on the hill



A complete copper ingot was found here



Slag from the smelting process and pitted crushing stones



Partially preserved staircase



Decorative window frame



Dubai Natural History Group (DNHG) Programme 2021

Monthly lectures are presently transmitted via Zoom, starting at 8.00pm

September: For the foreseeable future, meetings will continue to take place online. Members will receive notification for the next meeting via e-mail and in the next *Gazelle*, which will be published at the end of August.

Thank you for your continued support over the past year.

The DNHG field trip program has been temporarily suspended in compliance with UAE coronavirus precautions, which are still in force.

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When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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DNHG Membership

DNHG membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership for the current year is valid from September 2020 to September 2021. In consideration of the restrictions on our lectures and field trips due to COVID-19, **all members who were paid up for 2019-2020 will be automatically renewed for 2020-2021**, without a renewal fee.

New members can join by (i) sending to the Membership Secretary (see above) a completed one-page membership form, which can be downloaded from our website (www.dnhg.org) and (ii) making payment to our Emirates NBD account by cash deposit or transfer from your bank or ATM, using our IBAN number AE640260001012012013302. However, this process does not always identify the payer. So if you wish to pay by cash deposit, 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 helps pay for our lecture hall, publication and distribution of our monthly newsletter, the *Gazelle*, our post office box, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.