



GAZELLE



مجموعتنا دورية للتاريخ والطبيعي

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Contributors—

Thanks to the following for their contributions this month:

Andrew Childs, Margaret Swan and Anelisa Lambert .

Send your contributions to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

By 25th April, 2021



Queen of Sheba's Palace

See page 5



There are still some shell rarities to be found on Arabian beaches. When these are large shells, the excitement is magnified! I am sure that there are many more to be discovered that await our searches. Here are some examples of recent finds...

Mirabilistrombus is a genus created in 1998 to accommodate a single shell species. Known only very rarely from the United Arab Emirates, these two specimens of *Mirabilistrombus listeri* (Gray, 1852) were collected in Fujairah, 2km off the coast, at a depth of 16m in December 2020 and are special finds indeed. 124mm and 135mm.

The last record that I am aware of was reported in the October 2013 issue of *Pallidula*, the magazine of the British Shell Collectors' Club, reported by Sara Whitfield who was resident in Dubai at that time. She also found two specimens, and they were identified as *M. listeri* by Peter Dance. In that article she lists just one other specimen being found a few years earlier off the coast of Sur in Oman.

One other gastropod that appears to be rarely seen on the East coast beaches is the tallest of the local cone species, *Conasprella (Ximeniconus) milneedwardsi clytospira*, Melvill, J.C. & R. Standen, 1899, which has a size of up to 175 mm, and

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Announcements and Recorders

Monthly Virtual Speaker Information

Sunday, 11th April, 2021, at 8pm via Zoom

Presenter: Christophe Tourenq
Lecture Title: “Saving our Species program:
 A governmental conservation initiative to
 secure the future of New South
 Wales biodiversity:
 Cases from the Hunter Central Coast region”

Biography:

Christophe has enjoyed over 25 years of experience in the successful delivery of environmental conservation and management projects spanning across Europe, Middle East, Asia and Australia, in challenging social and natural environments. During his 10 years in the UAE, he worked as a wildlife biologist for the Environmental Agency of Abu Dhabi for the conservation and management of terrestrial ecosystems, and subsequently joined the Emirates Nature-WWF to manage the project of the creation of the Wadi Wurayah National Park in the Fujairah emirate, in partnership with the local government.

For family reasons, Christophe moved to Australia in 2011 and took the position of the management of Banrock Station Ramsar Wetland in South Australia. In 2019 he joined the Department of Planning Industry and Environment of New South Wales as a project officer in the Ecosystems and Threatened Species team of the Hunter Central Coast region to implement the "Saving our Species program" with the support of volunteers, scientists, businesses and community groups to secure the future of Australia's unique plants and animals (<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/threatened-species/saving-our-species-program>).

Christophe's main objects of attention at the moment are shorebirds, orchids and several flora species.

Images left to right - Christoph Tourenq, Eastern pygmy possum (*Cercartetus nanus*), Grey-headed flying-fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*)



Inter-Emirates (virtual) Event

Observe, Record, Report was the message conveyed by ENHG Al Ain in a Zoom transmission earlier this month. It was also announced that nominations were open for the Sheikh Mubarrak and Bish Brown Awards.

Following a short history of the awards, members of all four chapters of the UAE natural history groups were invited to register online with *i-Naturalist* and *e-Bird*, in order to report sightings of wild animals and birds, respectively. Birds can either be endemic to the region or migratory. An explanation of how to report sightings was demonstrated in the presentation with an explanation of how to join these online platforms

A virtual photograph competition for members of ENHG Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, DNHG and Ras al Khaimah was launched on 11th March. The closing deadline for photo submissions is Sunday 16th May, 2021. Details outlining all of the above were also circulated to members via email on 12th March.



John Norman Bishop
'Bish' Brown

'Bish' Brown came to the UAE in 1976 and soon established the Emirates Natural History Group, together with Rob Western and Tony Harris. (extract from 'Wild about Reptiles', a field guide published in 2000 by Marycke Jongbloed).

DNHG Recorders

Reptiles - Dr. Reza Khan
050 6563601

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi
res: 06-5310467 off: 06-5583 003
lankefi@emirates.net.ae

Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi (contact as above)

Geology - Gary Feulner
res: 04 306 5570
grfeulner@gmail.com

Insects - Binish Roobas
050 243 8737
johanruphus@hotmail.com

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
res: 04 4572167
mobile: 050 8305018 email:
valeriechalmers@gmail.com

Plants - Valerie Chalmers
(contact as above)

Archaeology - Anelisa Lambert
056 6904508
anelisalambert@gmail.com

Seashells - Andrew Childs
050 4590112
andrew.childs@eim.ae

Bird Recorder— Panos Azmanis
050 7083555
azmanis.vet@gmail.com

Mammals—Jacky Judas
04 354 9776
050 6181026
jjudas@enwwf.ae

From the Editor:

Members attended a Zoom presentation this month, in which a virtual equivalent of the annual Inter Emirate Weekend was offered. Details are in the announcement on the left.

Visitors are unable to enter Australia due to Covid restrictions set in place. It is unlikely that these will be lifted in the next few months. However, we look forward to a Zoom presentation on Australia's unique plants and animals on 11th April (note the date change from 4th). Enjoy your read!

Spotlight!

Al Wasit Wetland Nature Reserve, by Margaret Swan For reader information, the outdoor area at the reserve is presently closed but, visitors are welcome to view birds from inside the building. More information can be found at: <https://www.visitsharjah.com/en/activities/nature/wasit-nature-reserve/>



Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)



Stilt foot is around here

Greater Flamingo group (notice the length of the aptly-named black-winged stilt walking gracefully by the flamingo group)



Goliath Heron (*Ardea goliath*)

'Going, Going, Gone', by Margaret Swan (Gazelle sighting at Umm Nahad 2)



High alert!



Should I stay or should I go?



Going ...



Going ...



... Gone!

Birds at Umm Nahad 2, by Margaret Swan



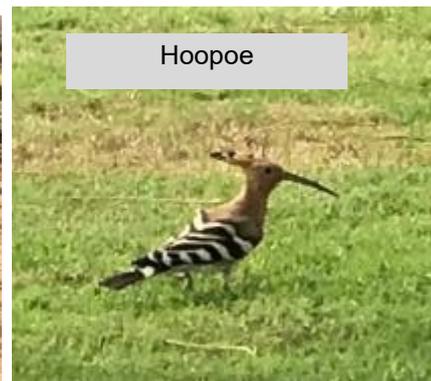
Hoopoe and dove



Red-wattled lapwing



Francolin



Hoopoe

Field Clips

(Continued from page 1)

whose common name is the "Glory of India" cone shell. I have only found one specimen of this in seven years of collecting and that example was quite worn. Found on the beach near Bridi, Fujairah.

The rarest bivalve I have found is also from the UAE East coast, collected in May 2017. This is a single valve of the *Dallitellina winckworthi* (Salisbury, 1934) at 29.1mm. I believe that this could be only the second example in existence, the first being the Holotype found in Pakistan in 1934.

Contribution by Andrew Childs

Dallitellina winckworthi (Salisbury, 1934)



Conus Milne-edwardsi Jousseaume 1894



Francolin—a shy bird!

The first time I saw these plump birds was in the early 1990s in the desert at Nad al Shiba, near to where Meydan stands now. They seemed to run very quickly but were too cumbersome to fly any great distance.

More recently I noticed them in the common areas around the gardens of the Green Community. I also spotted a small group at the entrance to Al Wasit Wetland Nature Reserve in Sharjah, so there are quite a few around and about the UAE. The latest observation was off the 611 highway in Umm Nahad 2. Trying to get a good photo was quite difficult as they are constantly moving in their family group.

See other sightings at this location on the Spotlight page.

Contribution by Margaret Swan



Field Clips

Water cistern with arched, coral-stone roof (© Anelisa Lambert)



Base of western round tower, overlooking Shimal (© Anelisa Lambert)



Queen of Sheba's Palace

Over the winter, I have enjoyed a few visits to the so-called 'Queen of Sheba's Palace' at Shimal in RAK. The site dates back to the Julfar period. Excavations revealed pottery sherds from around the 13th century, with no sign of any earlier structures, so it is assumed that the Palace was built around that time. The ruins are situated high up on a rocky outcrop, accessible only by a staircase on the southern side, that overlies the original, medieval access. It was most likely the Ruler of Julfar's home, enjoying cool, breezy weather, a good defensive position and commanding wonderful views over the substantial palm gardens below. These gardens were formed from the highly fertile, alluvial outwash fans of Wadi Bih and the smaller Wadi Haqil. Inhabited since the Bronze Age, in the Julfar period, they exhibited a dispersed settlement pattern that was typical in the UAE and Oman right up until the 20th century: each family clustered around their individual well and buildings within their own garden unit and each such unit replicated many times over. In medieval times, two lagoons and a large sandbank separated the rich gardens from the sea. While the gardens themselves made up the key component of Julfar, the administrative centre of Kush eventually grew up on the northern lagoon shore, drawing some inhabitants out of the oasis itself and forming a more 'visible' connection to the outside world. As the northern lagoon silted up, Kush was superseded around 1300AD by an even larger and more densely populated area called Al Mataf, on the outer sandbank, displacing families even further away from their palm gardens.

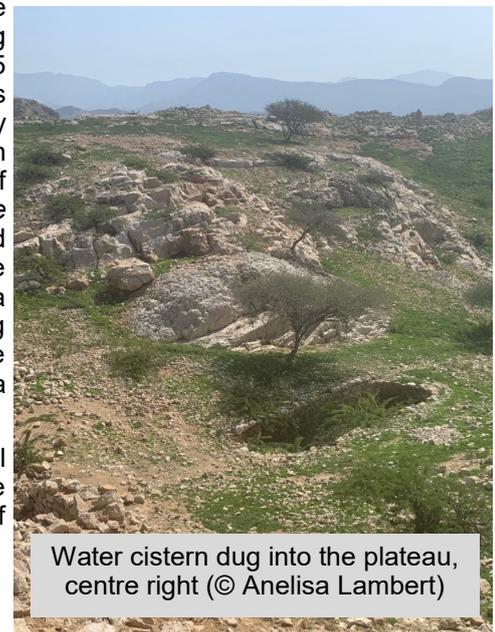
As silting continued, Al Mataf ceased to exist, causing the urban centre to shift south to the remaining lagoon (which became the modern-day creek of Ras al Khaimah). By 1600, the name Julfar had fallen out of use in old texts. The ruler's complex high above the gardens seems to have fallen out of use as a palace by around 1500, becoming used as a 'sur' or fortified retreat for the garden inhabitants in times of danger or tribal conflict. A remarkable fortified wall ran for 7 km from the base of the palace outcrop towards the sea, protecting the valuable palm oasis from southerly attacks. The wall was 4-5m high, with semi-circular towers every 150m – quite a structure in its day but now almost completely eroded.

After climbing the steps up to the plateau, one can see a water cistern (*below right*) dug into the plateau. The only structure at the site that still retains a roof is the arched, plastered water cistern (*top photo*) of the Palace's south-western corner – the coral stone is clearly visible below the plaster. The Palace itself is a long rectangular building (c. 15 X 35m), bisected on its long and short axes by central corridors. One can make out the bases of round watchtowers (*above photo*) at the northern and

western corners. The elevated, eastern part of the plateau is surrounded by a defensive wall, with single-roomed buildings attached here and there, dating to its later use as a retreat for people and animals. On two occasions I have seen desert foxes scuttling across the valley floor below, to the east. Looking down at the plain to the north, the landscape is littered with the remains of megalithic, Umm an-Nar and Wadi Suq-era tombs.

The name 'Queen of Sheba's Palace' is a misnomer as there is no historical background linking her to the Palace. The local myth was possibly coined to evoke the idea of wealth and exotic, luxury goods. Queens of Sheba ruled the Yemeni Kingdom of Marib around 1000BC: the Sabean people had traded in spices, gold and frankincense.

Contribution by Anelisa Lambert



Water cistern dug into the plateau, centre right (© Anelisa Lambert)

Dubai Natural History Group (DNHG) Programme 2021

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

- 11 April:** Christophe Tourenq will present an illustrated talk on "Saving our Species program: a governmental conservation initiative to secure the future of New South Wales biodiversity; cases from the Hunter Central Coast region"
- 2 May:** Oscar Campbell will present an illustrated talk on "The Giant, the Damsel and the Slender Scotch Burnet"
- 6 June:** Christian Wilson - Operations Manager of the Hefaiyah Mountain Conservation Centre, Kalba. Professional Gamekeeper, FGASA Field Guide and Conservationist will present an illustrated talk on "Al Hefaiyah Mountain Conservation Centre and other EPAA Conservation projects on the East Coast"

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

DNHG COMMITTEE 2020/2021

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

	Name	telephone	email
Chairman	Gary Feulner	04 306 5570	grfeulner@gmail.com
Vice Chairman	Valerie Chalmers	050 830 5018	valeriechalmers@gmail.com
Treasurer	Puneet Kumar	050 452 4820	puneetcps@gmail.com
Membership Secretary	Aubrey Baugh	052 103 5167	aubaugh@gmail.com
Speaker Co-ordinator	Michelle Sinclair	050 458 6079	sinclairmichelle611@gmail.com
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Sonja Lavrenčič	050 256 1496	lavson@gmail.com
Member-at-Large	Pradeep Radhakrishna	050 450 8496	wgarnet@eim.ae
Member-at-Large	Anindita Radhakrishna	050 656 9165	anin@eim.ae
Newsletter Editor	Margaret Swan	050 798 4108	gazelleeditor@gmail.com
Librarian/Book Sales	Angela Manthorpe	058 135 4143	manthorpe2005@yahoo.co.uk
Postmaster	Sandi Ellis	050 644 2682	sandiellis@gmail.com
Chief Engineer	Binish Roobas	050 243 8737	johanruphus@hotmail.com
Website Co-ordinator	Sandhya Prakash	050 551 2481	sandhya@consultbeacon.com

Postal Address: DNHG, PO Box 9234, Dubai, UAE

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.