



GAZELLE



مجموعتنا دورية للتاريخ والطبيعي

Inside this month: page

The Hand of Mariam	1
Announcements and Recorders	2
Spotlight!	3
A seasonal visit	4
Khor Kalba Mangrove Centre	5
A fishy tale!	6
Online lectures	7

Contributors—

Thanks to the following for their contributions this month:

Zachary Baldock, Angela Manthorpe, Margaret Swan, Ulrike Andorff and Hilary Holloway.

Send your contributions to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com



On sentry duty?

(See page 6)



The Hand of Mariam

Anastatica hierochuntica – in Arabic, Kaff Maryam – is an inconspicuous annual which flowers from February to May. I haven't knowingly observed the plant in its green state – the small hairy leaves collect sand and the flowers are tiny - in all, it sounds easy to miss. However, once the flowering is over the branches turn hard, curl inwards and protect the fruit in a tight fist, which is quite distinctive. When hiking in Wadi Asimah earlier in 2021 I found several gnarly plants atop a gravel platform above the wadi bed.

Marijcke Jongbloed's Wildflowers of the UAE has a picture of the dry form and the transformation that occurs if the plant is exposed to water. With that image in mind I tried my own experiment in situ – pouring water onto the plant. I waited....I watched....alas, nothing happened. Jackie Strick has found Mariam's hand in the sands near Sharjah Desert Park and, a few days after our Asimah trip, she came across an uprooted specimen and placed it in a pot of water. Behold, after 20 minutes the plant opened up to reveal itself in full but, interestingly, although still in water, Jackie

(Continued on page 4)

Announcements and Recorders

Monthly Virtual Speaker Information

Sunday, 6th June, 2021, at 8pm via Zoom

Presentor: Christian Wilson

Lecture Title: “Al Hefaiyah Mountain Conservation Centre and other EPAA Conservation projects on the East Coast”

Biography: Christian Wilson is the Operations Manager of the Hefaiyah Mountain Conservation Centre in Kalba. He is also Gamekeeper, FGASA Field Guide and Conservationist.



UAE Dolphin Project

Following on from an article in the February 2021 Gazelle and a recent ENHG lecture on the dolphin project, sightings of dolphins in the UAE can be recorded by sending a text to:

◆ 00971566717164

Or email at

◆ sighting@uaedolphinproject.com

Please log the date, time, where you saw the dolphin (or porpoise) and also the craft you are travelling on. More details can be found on the following website:

www.uaedolphinproject.org

You will also find a sightings map should you be interested in seeing where current sightings have already been recorded.

Dubai Zookeeper

Tributes were expressed following the demise of zookeeper, R. Devadoss who died from Covid 19 at home in India.

Devadoss, who left Dubai in 2017 had spent 32 years rearing wild cats at Dubai Zoo. He was remembered for his immense contributions at the news of his death last month.

Previously featured on the cover of the Gulf News 'Friday' magazine, further details can be found at the following link:

<https://gulfnews.com/uae/indian-zookeeper-who-had-served-dubai-zoo-for-32-years-dies-of-covid-19-back-home-1.78274307>

2021 Inter-Emirate Experience

The 31st May was the final cut-off date for photographic entries this year.

Hosted by the Al Ain chapter of the ENHG, voting for photographs will take place during the virtual closing ceremony on 8th June at 6pm UAE time.

If DNHG members have not yet registered and wish to attend, please register at:

https://zu-ac-ae.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJcpde-grTsuHtQO2Bf51lh_p2ik8K0U1008



The sun dances on the sea floor whilst a lone fish looks on

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:

Man's desire to fly has been around since time immemorial. Man has even travelled to the moon! Two more recent ways to get the feeling of flight and speed (and much closer to home) is the zipline on Jebel Jais and a thrilling ride on an electric surfboard!

However, nothing can replace the wonders of nature itself at a much slower pace. Why not contribute a few lines or photographs of your nature experiences over the summer?

The next Gazelle will be published at the end of June. Enjoy your read!

Spotlight!

Scenes from the United Kingdom, by Hilary Holloway



From left to right:

A British Robin
Stepping Stones
Reflections



Taken by Zachary Baldock, this image (left) of the March super moon was captured in Dubai using a 'phone camera through a telescope lens. Although it has lost a little of the pink hue, the main features of the moon are clearly visible.

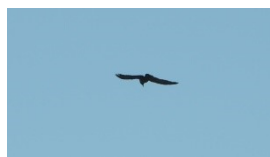
The photo on the right is of the eclipse in Australia on 26th May. This was taken in Sydney and published in 'The Age' newspaper.

For inclusion in future issues of the Gazelle, readers are encouraged to send their nature photos to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com



The road to the top of Jebel Jais, by Margaret Swan



Captions—left to right

(top row) Is it a bird? Is it a 'plane'? Currently this is believed to be the longest zipline in the world. You hear it before you see it as the sound heralds the arrival of the 'zipping' person.

Next is a real bird encircling the mountain.

(middle row) Long and winding roads leading to the summit.

Hanging greenery.

Vertical lines in the walls indicate the blasting process.

(bottom row) differing strata coloration.

Drainage for rainfall.

Goats—can you see them?

Field Clips

(Continued from page 1)

noted that the plant closed up again later.

There are many stories surrounding this plant and Robert Lebling and Diana Pepperdine, in their 'Natural Remedies of Arabia' say the plant "is likened to the hand of the Virgin Mary during childbirth; the folk tales say Mary clutched the plant while giving birth". The research conducted by the authors spanned the Arabian peninsula – from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, the UAE to Yemen – and this enigmatic little plant is also called the Jericho Rose, Fatimah's fist, the 'shrivelled one' and 'little hedgehog'. Apparently you can find the dried plant in herbalists shops across Iran, Pakistan and North Africa, and Jongbloed reported that an infusion made from soaking the dried plant in water could assist with childbirth.

Contribution by Angela Manthorpe



A Seasonal Visit

Like many folk visiting friends and family in Dubai, I came here for my wonderful, regular winter breakand I'm still here. December to ?June or July? Who knows?

It has been an opportunity to enjoy seasonal changes which I have never seen before. My trips out since February have been self-limiting as a 'covid avoidance' technique but, in the local gardens and parks, I have been amazed at the flowers; flame trees which I had never seen and hibiscus with lots of flowers in vibrant colours. I had not witnessed ixoras as flowering hedges or the bougainvillea quite so luxuriant with colours or frangipanis with so many flowers. Hibiscus will grow in the UK but, unless you have a hot house, not like it does here. And Aloe vera straight from your garden?? So special. Swimming in the sea has been so wonderful - warm, safe and against a strong blue sky.

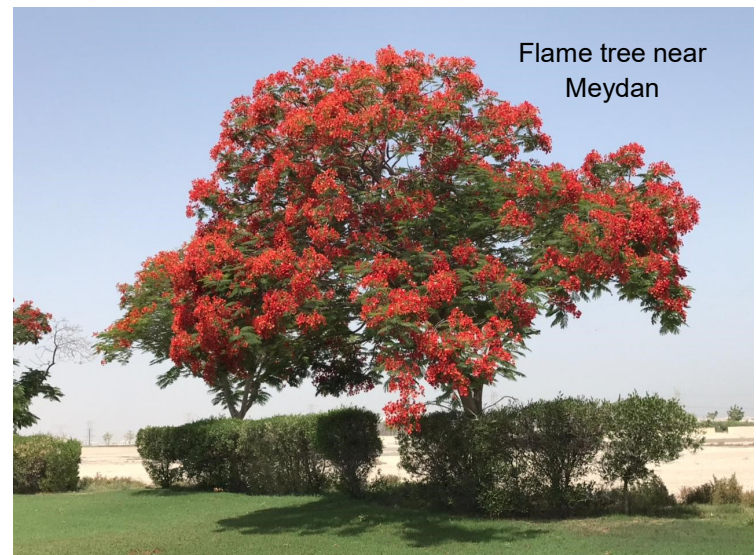
Friends at home have sent me photographs of spring time (see page 3). In sharp contrast to Dubai it's been a wet, cold and miserable season in the UK. But what I noticed in particular was the colour palette compared to Dubai. The UK scenery is softer and muted without the intense colours of flame trees and bougainvillea. Or even the gentler drifting changes of sand from yellow to red but appearing striking against a deep, blue sky.

If you are an Emirati, expat resident or visitor from one of the many warm countries around the world you may take the Dubai environment as a norm. As a Brit, being spoiled here with AC

and great facilities, I've had time to enjoy the different garden glories. I know it takes a lot of water, planning and effort but the beauty of the plants and birds is lovely.

So this year few pictures of camels but plenty of exotic - to me - flowers, birds and blue skies. It all seems worthy of a few words of appreciation.

Contribution by Hilary Holloway



Field Clips

Khor Kalba Mangrove Centre opened its doors

From the ticket office at the parking area the visitors are shuttled with a buggy to the entrance of the visitor centre. Opt to walk over the bridge as you may be rewarded with the sighting of turtles. On my visit I counted six Green Turtles in different sizes.

In the visitor centre several aquariums are housed with a variety of fish, crabs and starfish from the area. In the open there is a pool with a juvenile lonely Green Turtle. The highlight of the centre is the wooden pathway leading into the 300 years old mangroves (Grey Mangrove, *Avicennia marina*). With delight I noticed the clusters of small yellow belly-shaped flowers on the mangrove branches. The trail was built without cutting any of the mangroves I was told. Under a thick mangrove canopy you are guided to two bird hides looking out to a wide water channel leading to the open sea.

Check carefully the shores as well as the mangrove tops to discover herons, egrets, all kinds of gulls, Green and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters on the look-out for a tasty fresh meal. Unfortunately, the legendary Arabian Collared Kingfisher was nowhere to be seen despite the latest count being 140. There is another bird hide at the rocky shore with a view to the khor.

Even if you do not spot any birds in the wild, your last chance is to visit the two aviaries on the way back next to the centre. One houses some coastal birds including the Socotra Cormorant and the other one, two of the Arabian Collared Kingfishers. There are free roaming gazelles which are likely to be found in the shade under the trees behind the aviaries.

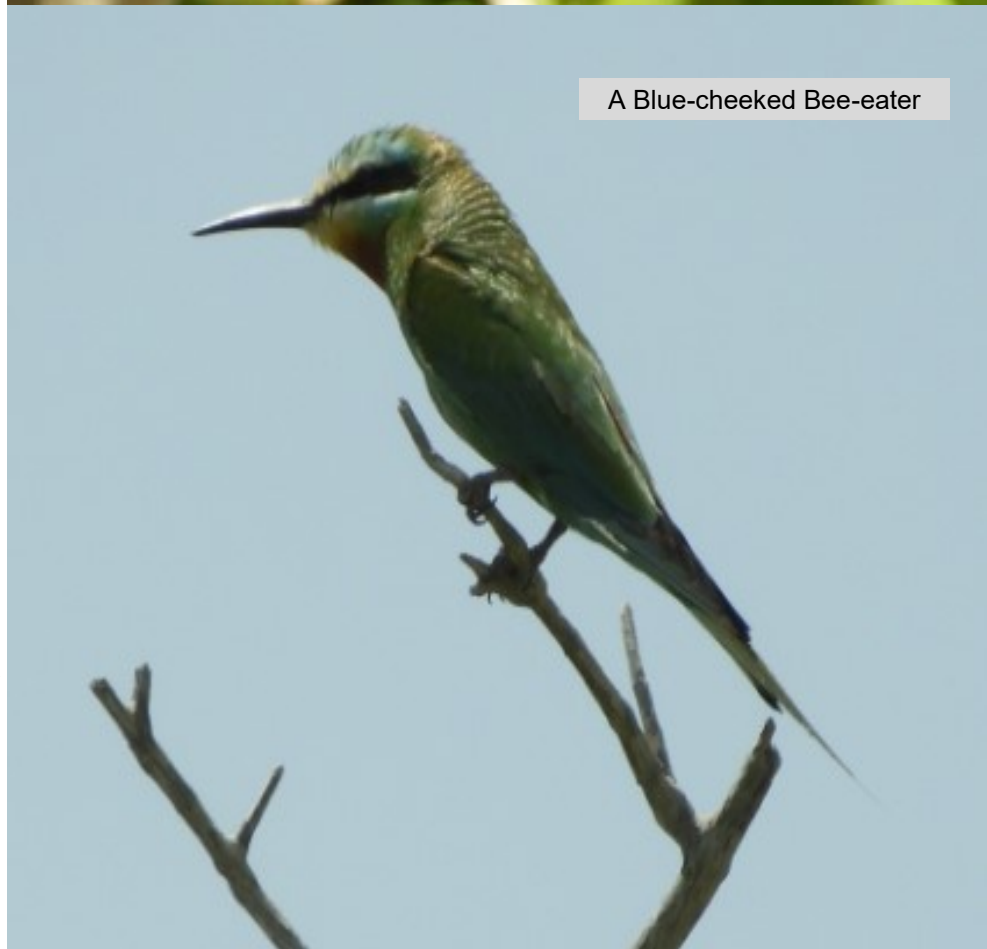
Definitely remember to take your binoculars!

A visit to this centre can be combined with the Al Hefaiyah Mountain Conservation Centre and the Kalba Bird of Prey Centre.

Contribution by Ulrike Andorff



Grey Mangrove *Avicennia marina* in flower



A Blue-cheeked Bee-eater

Field Clips

A fishy tale!

Most people immediately think of the clown fish and sea anemone when discussing symbiotic relationships. However, a more unusual partnership was spotted during May, when two entirely different species were found working together in order to keep safe.

A lesser-known but fascinating ecosystem, the sea grass meadows along Jumeirah coast have welcomed many cephalopods, fish and molluscs over the past year. A most noticeable observation around sandy patches of the seagrass has been several small burrows. In each one, a stationary fish dutifully watches for possible predators whilst a shrimp works around it. The burrows are supported by small stones and shells (see sketch and the photo on page one).

Sea currents constantly sweep sand into the entrance and the shrimp works hard at pushing the sand out from their home. It uses its two front pincers, or chelae, just as a mechanical bulldozer would. As it tirelessly labours away and due to it having very poor eyesight, the shrimp depends totally on the Goby for protection and keeps one of its antennae on the fish for security. In return the Goby is allowed to live inside the burrow.

Moving from burrow to burrow, in one of them I was surprised to see two busy shrimps with a sole Goby guarding both.

According to **The Emirates: A Natural History** (2005, p. 206), the 'Snapping or Pistol Shrimp' *Alpheus djeddensis* is 'invariably seen in sublittoral waters sharing a burrow in sand/gravel or a rock crevice with the goby *Cryptocentrus lutheri*.'

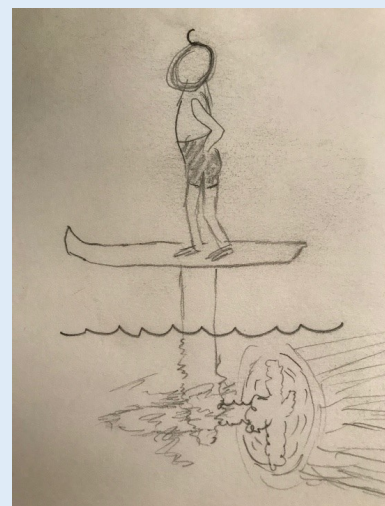
Watch the video in [this link](#) for an excellent description of how the relationship works. If the link has expired, suggested search words are: Goby, shrimp, symbiosis.

As the UAE temperatures steadily increase, outside time is precious, Friday beaches fill up as early as 6am, when lifeguards start their long shift high up in their stilted cabins.

On the water there are paddle boarders, a variety of kayaks and boats and more recently, electric surfboards which rise out of the water the faster they go (see the drawing below).

Mostly the paddle crafts head towards the open water past the swimming limit cordon, only entering and exiting at various points along the beaches.

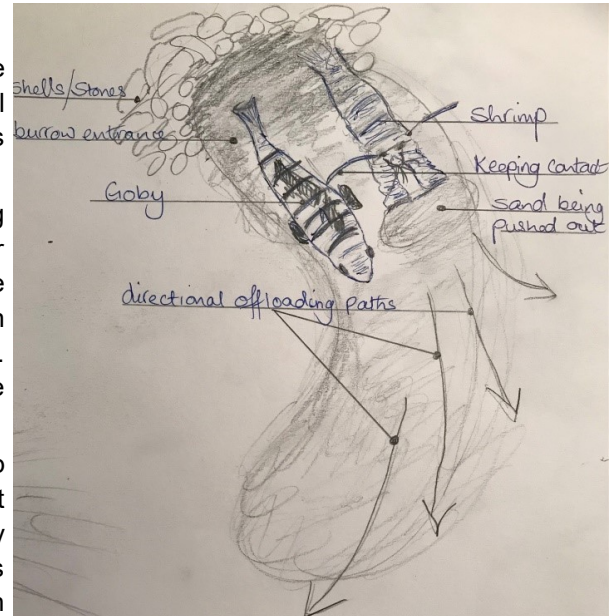
Strong waves recently beached an influx of harmless butterfly fish on the Dubai coastline, as reported in Gulf News ([read the article here](#)).



Noticing what is in and around the sea prior to swimming is a good habit to get into, especially when enthusiastic fishing rods are cast from the many breakwaters.

Marine life is in abundance around the sunken rocks but watch out for those sea urchin spines!

All in all, a snorkeller's delight!



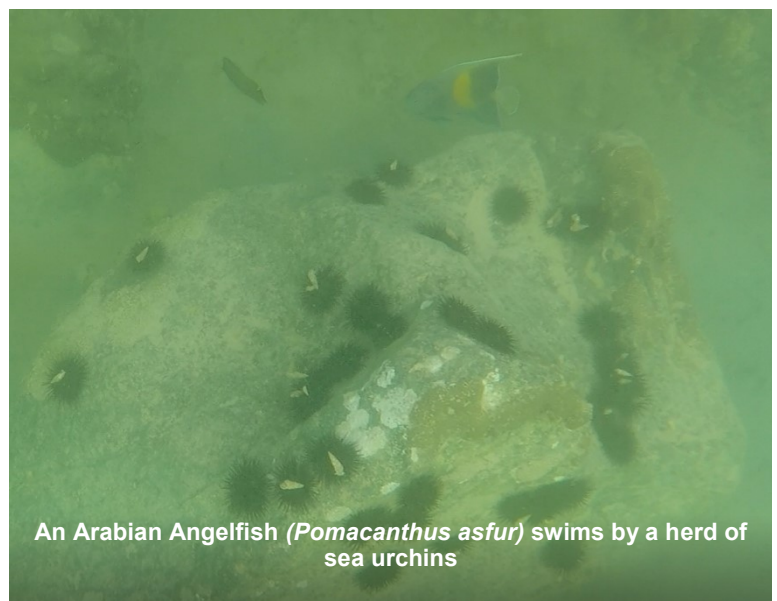
Sketch to show symbiosis in action between a Goby and a shrimp

This partnership was not the only observation on the sea floor. Also noted along the sub-tidal zone were black sea cucumbers and many urchins in and around the submerged rocks.

A ray graciously glided past on one occasion and, on another, three cuttlefish meandered by all in a row, unperturbed by my presence. One cuttlefish sported strikingly vivid black and white markings, then the others slowly took on the same appearance.

What a fascinating, undersea world!

Contribution by Margaret Swan



An Arabian Angelfish (*Pomacanthus asfur*) swims by a herd of sea urchins

Dubai Natural History Group (DNHG) Programme 2021

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

6 June: Christian Wilson - Operations Manager of the Al Hefaiyah Mountain Conservation Centre, Kalba. 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	Alessandra Pipan	052 7771183	lssndr.ppn@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.