



# GAZELLE

مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

[www.dnhg.org](http://www.dnhg.org)

## Overnight dhow trip to the Musandam

To beat the heat, an overnight trip to the Musandam was organized for 6th and 7th May. Many activities were enjoyed by the participants, including fishing, pearl hunting, snorkeling, sighting dolphins and even a visit on terra firma to a small village.

Angela Dodds writes, "A two-day trip seemed like a two-week getaway—being out on the open water, sleeping under the stars and enjoying the peace and tranquility of Musandam with like-minded people was such a great experience."

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**Contributors**—Thanks to the following for their reports and contributions:

Angela Dodds, Rahul Shah,  
Alexis Biller, Ulrike Andorff,  
Binish Roobas,  
Angela Manthorpe,  
Tamsin Carlisle and  
Juliette Winser

## Dhow Overnighter



### DNHG Trip to Northern Vietnam

**Trip Leader – Binish Roobas**

**Dates – December 16- 23, 2016 (8 days, 7 nights)**

**Price\* (13-15 pax): AED 2600 per person—twin sharing**

Vietnam is located on the east of the Indochina Peninsula. It covers a total area of approximately 331,210 km<sup>2</sup> (127,881 sq mi), making it almost the size of Germany. The country is mostly hilly and densely forested, with level land covering no more than 20%. Mountains account for 40% of the country's land area, and tropical forests cover around 42%.

The northern part of the country consists mostly of highlands and the Red River Delta. Phan Xi Păng, located in Lào Cai Province, is the highest mountain in Vietnam, standing 3,143 m (10,312 ft) high.

The rich diversity of Vietnam's wildlife includes at least 11,400 species of vascular plants, 1030 species of moss, 310 species of mammals, 296 reptile species, 162 amphibian species, 700 species of freshwater fish and 2000 species of marine fish. There are about 889 species of birds and 310 species of land mollusks. However, a study by the WWF has reported that nearly 10% of the wildlife in the country is threatened with extinction. Vietnam is placed 16th highest among 152 countries studied in terms of the proportion of its wildlife species found to be in danger. See page 7 for further details and detailed itinerary.

\*Price includes all except: flights, visas, bottled beverages, personal expenses, insurance, lunch on free day, and tips.

# Announcements and Recorders

## Monthly Speaker—Dr Panagiotis Azmanis, Ph. D

The final lecture of the season was held on 5th June entitled

### “The natural aerial cleaners: Vultures. Species, conservation and culture“

Dr Panagiotis Azmanis was born in Thessaloniki/Greece and he completed his veterinary studies in 2006 at Aristotle's University. After graduation he started a 1 to 5 year rotating internship in Small Animal Surgery/Exotics at the same University, whilst also working as a freelance avian/exotic vet.

In 2007 he moved in Zurich to fulfill a doctoral thesis on avian orthopaedic surgery in the Clinic for Exotic Pets, Zoo Animals and Wildlife, UZH, Vetsuisse Faculty. After practising small animal/exotic medicine in private practice in Athens/Greece, he moved to Germany to take a 3-year residency of the European College of Zoological Medicine in Avian Medicine and Surgery.

In 2014, after a successful examination, he was awarded the title of Diplomate ECZM (Avian)/European recognised Specialist in Avian Medicine (the first Greek, the second in Middle East and one of 30 in Europe). Afterwards he resumed his positions as leading avian specialist in exotic animal practice and in zoo consulting.

Since 1993 he has been a keen birdwatcher, member of the scientific committee of the Hellenic Ornithological Society, member of the Greek and German Herpetological Societies, founding member of two NGOs for the protection of wildlife in Greece and a member of various professional vet organisations and nature conservation NGOs in Greece, Balkans, Europe and Internationally.

He has managed and volunteered in various conservation projects of bird, raptor, vulture, wildlife conservation and has published and presented numerous scientific work in international conferences on avian medicine topics and raptor/vulture conservation.

### From the Editor:

The photograph of a dhub in Al Qudra Lakes (see page 2 for photograph and report on page 4) reminded me of first time I ever saw one.

Many years ago when Umm Suqeim was still in its natural state, seasonal desert hyacinths grew in abundance all around our house. With the aroma of small, drying fish spread out on sand nearby, young Emiratis would often be seen driving around the sand tracks in open-topped jeeps, their falcons wearing the hood, ready to hunt.

On one occasion after a 'desert expedition' with local children, one of my sons returned home, holding a large but very docile and friendly dhub (spiny-tailed lizard).

Staying calm and explaining that we could not keep it as a pet, he reluctantly put the lizard down, whereupon it lumbered with lazy lizard gait, back into the neighbouring dunes. Happy days!

Back to the present day and other field trips during May and June included a dhow trip, a tour of the facilities at Atlantis, a visit to the Falcon Hospital and two bus trips (Sharjah Al Hisn and Abu Dhabi).

Read details of an organised trip to Northern Vietnam on page 7, and for those of you participating in summer field trips, we look forward to hearing all about them in the next issue.

I have been away for a while so this is a combined May/June issue—enjoy your read!

### End of Season

This season has featured many informative lectures and observed a full calendar of field trips.

The inter-Emirates weekend was hosted by the newly-formed Fujairah group, where many interesting and educational excursions took place.

As the heat outside increases, we now draw the season to a close. We would like to wish everyone well for the summer and look forward to seeing you in September, when lectures and trips resume.

Should your summer adventures involve natural history experiences, we would love to hear about them in future issues of the Gazelle.

Have a great summer, wherever it takes you!

*DNHG Committee*

### Correction

The 'Falling Lizards' article, published in April was composed by Binish Roobas. His name was inadvertently omitted when converting the newsletter to PDF format. Apologies for this error.

### DNHG Recorders

**Reptiles - Dr. Reza Khan** 050 6563601

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# Spotlight

## Al Qudra Lakes, by Tamsin Carlisle



Egyptian Spiny-tailed Lizard (Dhub)  
*(Uromastix egyptia microlepis)*



Little Ringed Plover  
*(Charadrius dubius)*



Red-wattled Lapwing  
*(Vanellus indicus)*



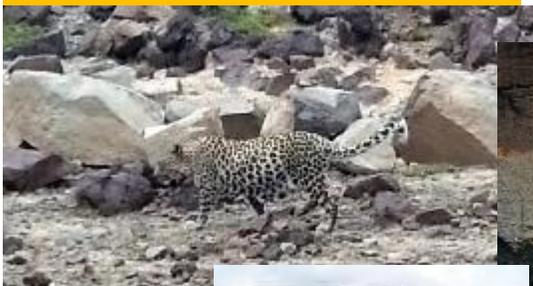
Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*)



## The Lost Chambers, by Juliette Winner



## Al Hefaiyah Mountain Conservation Centre, by Alexis Biller



Arabian Leopard



Clifford's Diadem Snake



Arabian Wolf



Tour bus within the Centre



Arabian Tahr

## Field Trip

### Al Qudra Lakes birdwatching trip, Saturday 21 May from 05:15 – 09:30

**Weather:** dry and overcast, temperatures rising from mid 20s to early 30s

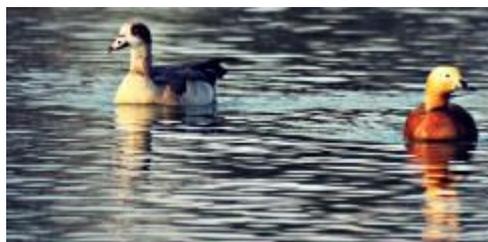
**Location:** Al Qudra Lakes and Al Qudra Oasis, near Bab Al Shams in Dubai. These are a series of man-made lakes together with an extensive irrigation network for trees and bushes. A number of exotic species (birds and plants) have been introduced, and facilities to encourage birds (such as sun shades and floating platforms) have also been provided. In several of the lakes bird food is provided (millet, plus a variety of seeds and pulses) – indeed overfeeding appears to be an issue as we saw several piles of food for which the birds had no interest. Bread left by visitors for the birds was also seen to have been left untouched. The area appears to be a popular location for campers – we saw quite a lot of rubbish but luckily there is a large team of cleaners who quickly removed most of the garbage.

Note that it can be quite difficult to leave the lakes once you have had your fill, as there is a distinct lack of signage. Beware if trying to make your exit at sunset! We also think it would be useful to have signs requesting dog-owners to keep their pets on their leash – there are a number of ground-nesting birds that could be disturbed by an inquisitive canine.

The trip started at the car park at the end of Al Qudra Road (near to the Trek bicycle shop) and, after signing the waiver form, we headed out to the nearest lake. This one has a large number of introduced birds – many individuals appear quite tame and will approach without fear. There is a very high population of birds at the lake, and they are fed by the attendants. The lake is also full of very many fish; the large concentration suggests these are also fed.

Species observed at the lake included Egyptian Goose, Snow Goose, Lesser White-fronted Goose, Barnacle Goose,

Australian Wood Duck, Muscovy Duck, Ferruginous Duck, Falcated Duck, Northern Pintail Duck, Common Shelduck, Eurasian Wigeon, Chiloe Wigeon, Mute Swan, Great Egret and Grey Heron.



Egyptian Goose and Ruddy Shelduck

Away from the water we saw Helmeted Guineafowl in a number of different plumage colours ranging from white to mottled black.

One unusual behaviour that we witnessed was for an Egyptian Goose to sit on the top of a tree trunk and sing loudly. This behaviour was repeated a couple of other times during our trip, and may suggest that there is a limited presence of raptors in the area. Collared Doves were also extremely noisy.

On our way to the next lake a number of our party were able to see a small family of Sand Gazelle (adults plus juveniles). This lake was much less populated than the first lake, but we did see/hear Oystercatcher, Red-wattled Lapwing and Crested Lark. We also saw Black-winged Stilt and Mallard, plus Brown-necked Ravens arguing over food.

We then proceeded towards the Al Qudra Oasis, which is on the other side of the bicycle track/ road. On the way we were able to see a male sunbird, as well as several Houbara/ McQueen's Bustard, one of which was ringed and appeared quite tame as it was willing to come quite

close to our group.

Soon after crossing the bicycle track we found ourselves at a relatively large and dense colony of Dhub/Egyptian spiny-tailed lizard, including some relatively large individuals. The lizards appear to favour this location because there are some sandstone rocks which afford their burrows some protection. There were maybe ten individuals within a 100m<sup>2</sup> area. The lizards are fed grass on a daily basis; this and the favourable rock appears to explain their high concentration. It is possible to get quite close to the individuals before the dart for cover into their burrows.

Further on we encountered the Al Qudra Oasis which is a maze of closely-spaced lakes. Unsurprisingly, many of the species we observed here were common to those we had seen at the Al Qudra Lakes. However, for us there were a number of new species, notably Indian Roller, Little Ringed Plover, Ruddy Shelduck, Northern Shoveler Duck, Bar-headed Goose, Canada Goose, Andean Goose, Black Swan, Whooper Swan, Trumpeter Swan, Black-necked Swan, Greater Flamingo, Demoiselle Crane.

Selected plant species of note included Ghaf, orange-flowered Rohia/ Desert Teak, Umbrella Thorn, Bean Caper.

A special mention also goes to the Zad Café at the Al Qudra Lakes car park, which makes some fantastic Saj wraps and opens from 6am to midnight.

Thanks to Tamsin and fellow members of the DNHG for making this a very rewarding trip – well worth the early start!

*Report by Rahul Shah, photographs by Tamsin Carlisle*



Swans and Geese

## Award Presentation and Field Clip

### Award Winner

The Minister of Culture and Knowledge Development, Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan presents DNHG member, Binish Roobas, with the 2016 Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Prize for Natural History. This took place in Abu Dhabi recently, and was reported in the [National newspaper](#)

[Wam news agency](#) also quoted the Minister as saying, "The carrying out of



studies into our history, heritage and culture is a fundamental part of the way in which the Emirates must prepare itself for the future."

Read the full articles, which also cover details of the recipient of the Bish Brown Award, John Steward-Smith, by clicking (or tapping if you are reading this on a device) on the respective blue hyperlinks opposite.

### Velcro plants—another look!

In April I was out and about at Jebel Buhais and, due to the abundant rain around that time, the slopes were covered in opportunistic greenery. I found myself having lunch amongst a dense patch of velcro plants (*Forsskaolea tenacissima*) and remembering the 'Velcro Magic' article in the December 2015 edition of *Gazelle* I thought I should take a closer look to see if I could see anything unusual amongst the leaves.



The plant next to me yielded

immediate results as I spotted a little 'envelope', woven together with thin web-like threads and in the centre, a small hairy caterpillar surrounded by droppings. Checking a few plants nearby, the 'envelopes' proved to be quite common and I found a couple of caterpillars resting and on the move (see photos).

Thanks to DNHG members Margaret de Latour and Gary Feulner, I have been able to confirm that this is the caterpillar of the Painted Lady butterfly (*Vanessa cardui*), and the velcro plant is probably its most common food plant. The Painted



Lady is one of the most common butterflies seen in the UAE in the winter and is one of the world's most widespread butterflies, readily identified by its striking orange and black colouration (see photo). Gary Feulner and Binish Roobas have also observed Painted Lady caterpillars and webs regularly in mountain areas on *Echinops erinaceus*, a spiny thistle.

*Article and caterpillar photographs by Angela Manthorpe. The Painted Lady butterfly photograph is by Tamsin Carlisle*

## Field Trips



### Al Hefaiyah Mountain Conservation Centre

This field trip was undertaken on 30 April and the photograph above, taken by Ulrike Andorff, features the DNHG participants. The smaller photograph (inset) shows some of the guides at the Centre.

Additional photographs of the tour can be seen on the 'Spotlight' page, courtesy of Alexis Biller.

### Trip to Atlantis, The Palm

Members from the DNHG visited the 'Lost Chambers Aquarium' as well as visiting 'behind the scenes' at Atlantis, The Palm on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> June. We were first divided into three groups to accommodate our large numbers and then were rotated between the different areas. We were met by various members



of the different facilities where they were able to share their knowledge and expertise as well as answer our questions. My group was first to be shown around the Ambassador Lagoon aquarium where we were able to view several spectacularly designed fish tanks containing a wide range of diverse species including many species found within the U.A.E. Within the largest aquarium several different types of rays were visible, which included the distinct Spotted Eagle Ray together with several types of sharks. We visited the rather pungent fish preparation room where hundreds of kilos of fish and vegetables are prepared on a daily basis to feed these marine residents. Following that we went into the fish hospital where those that need to be quarantined for specific treatment are kept under close observation. I was particularly drawn to a tank where half a dozen black seahorses were being

temporarily housed. We were also shown around the Ambassador mechanical room where the water system is managed. This is an intricate process where a specialized water system is used to clean and process the water to a very high standard for the marine animals and then later recycled back into the sea. We visited Dolphin Bay and Sea lion point where we were able to catch a glimpse of some dolphins and be briefly entertained by the three resident sea lions that were enjoying swimming within their expansive water pool. The final stop was to see the laboratory where the resident vet shared with us some of the routine screening procedures that are carried out on the animals, as well as the water screening procedures which are carried out in-house. We learnt that the



dolphins, being highly intelligent, enjoy collaborating with the vet to extract blood from their tails and to obtain gastric samples by way of being trained to swallow a tube which can harmlessly extract

the fluids for analysis. These routine procedures ensure that each animal can be closely monitored for early indications of illness and dealt with effectively. The trip was a fantastic insight into what happens at Atlantis.

*Contribution by Juliette Winsor*

# Field Trip to Vietnam —December, 2016

## ITINERARY

**Day 1 (Dec 16, Friday): Arrival at Hanoi:** Arrive in Hanoi. Meet our guide & driver, then transfer to our hotel. Overnight in Hanoi.

**Day 2 (Dec 17, Saturday): Hanoi City Tour and Shopping:** The day is dedicated to an in-depth discovery of Hanoi beginning with a visit to **Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum** (*shorts and tank tops are not allowed*). Next, visit the **Temple of Literature**, a structure dedicated to Confucius. Constructed in 1070, the compound soon became the first Vietnamese university. Then enjoy lunch at a local restaurant.

The afternoon's touring will provide the opportunity to see Hanoi's famed **Old Quarter** from the seats of **cyclos**, and the **Temple of Jade** at the centre of atmospheric Hoan Kiem lake. You will have about 2 hours on your own for shopping in **Hoan Kiem Area**. Our last activity will be a performance of a traditional show at Hanoi's **Water Puppet** theatre. Overnight in Hanoi.

**Day 3 (Dec 18, Sunday): Hanoi – Van Long – Cuc Phuong National Park-** Depart Hanoi for Ninh Binh province, enjoying the drive through the luxurious vegetation of the Red River Delta. On the way, spend one hour visiting the **Dinh and Le temples** of the Ancient Capital Hoa Lu, dedicated to King Dinh and King Le. Lunch at local restaurant in Tam Coc.

Continue to the beautiful wetland of **Van Long**, rich in diverse flora and fauna. Upon arrival, we will board a bamboo rowboat for a 2 hours rowing tour. Then transfer to Cuc Phuong National Park. Dinner and overnight in Cuc Phuong National Park.

**Day 4 (Dec 19, Monday): Cuc Phuong National Park:** After breakfast, we first visit the Endangered Primate Rescue Center, then start a long trek through the forest to learn about the diverse flora and fauna of the park. We will make stops at Cho Chi, the oldest tree in the forest, a number of picturesque streams and waterfalls, and Nguoi Xua, the ancient cave of man.

In the afternoon, continue exploring

Vietnam's oldest national park and an area of lowland forest and lakes easily accessed by a paved road. It is rich in birdlife and we have our last chances here for both Pittas, Red-collared Woodpecker and White-winged Magpie as well as a supporting cast which includes Malayan Night Heron, Pied Falconet, Eared Pitta, Silver-breasted Broadbill, White-tailed Flycatcher, Fujian Niltava and the annamensis form of Limestone Wren-Babbler.

**Day 5 (Dec 20, Tuesday): Cuc Phuong–Halong Bay Cruise:** Early breakfast and depart for world famous Halong Bay, 'the descending dragon', a journey of approximately 4 hours. *Listed as a World Heritage site by UNESCO, Ha Long Bay is a stunning limestone archipelago stretching over some 1500 square kilometers and comprising nearly 2000 islets.*

Arrive at **Tuan Chau** harbour (Halong Bay) at noon and embark on our boat for an overnight cruise among wonderful limestone islands. Afternoon visit to Sung Sot Cave, the most beautiful & largest cave in Halong Bay. Also kayaking activity at Luon Cave. On board, relax and/or enjoy a sunset party and experience cooking class (learning how to make Vietnamese spring rolls or fruit carving). Dinner on board. Overnight on boat.

**Day 6 (Dec 21, Wednesday): Halong Bay Cruise – Cat Ba Island:** Have breakfast and enjoy beautiful sunrise on the sundeck of the boat while cruising to Gia Luan harbour. Pass through Cat Ba national park by bus, featuring beautiful tropical flowers, green trees and limestone mountains. Arrive at Beo harbor to take small boat to visit one of the oldest floating villages in Vietnam, named Cai Beo (on Lan Ha Bay).

Arrive at **Monkey Island Resort**, check in and enjoy your lunch beside the lovely beach. Free time for swimming, kayaking, playing football, volleyball on the beach or play chess, billiards, ping pong, or table football in the entertainment area.

In the afternoon, go up the mountain for panoramic pictures of Monkey Island and Lan Ha Bay and then arrive at another beach to see some monkeys

and discover their lives. Free time to relax in eco-garden, conquer Cat Dua tower with a great view to Lan Ha bay or hike up to explore the small jungle on the right side of the island. Dinner (normally BBQ) in the restaurant beside the beach.

**Day 7 (Dec 22, Thursday): Morning on Cat Ba Island:** Have breakfast and enjoy the sunrise at Monkey Island beach. A small boat takes us from Monkey Island Resort to Beo harbour. The tour guide will rent motorbikes to go to Cat Ba national park. A bus takes us back to the entrance gate of **Cat Ba National Park** and hike for 1 hour up to Ngu Lam peak. The panorama view from the top is worth the challenging way up.

Drive to Hospital Cave (Hang Quan Y) which was built during the Vietnam war. The tour guide will lead you to explore the cave. Ride motorbike back to Beo harbour and take a small boat to back to Monkey Island Resort. Lunch in the restaurant on Monkey Island beach.

The rest of the afternoon is free to swim in the pure water of Monkey Island Resort or lying on the beach. Dinner in the restaurant beside the beach in melodious songs and softly sound of ocean waves. Overnight at Monkey Island Resort.

**Day 8 (Dec 23, Friday): Cat Ba Island to Hanoi's Airport:** Have breakfast and check out. Bus to Gia Luan harbour and boat trip back to Halong. Lunch on board the boat en route to Tuan Chau harbor by another way, passing through many other beautiful rock formations.

Return to Tuan Chau harbour and take a bus back to Hanoi, with a short break on the way. Drop off at Hanoi's airport for flight departing for your home country.

**Estimated R/T airfare from Dubai to Hanoi (connecting): starting from 2100 AED by Cathay Pacific.**

For more information and sign-up, contact **Binish Roobas** at [johanruphus@hotmail.com](mailto:johanruphus@hotmail.com). A deposit of AED 1500 will be required for sign-up.

# Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

September: Please note there will be no lectures during July and August. Lectures will resume in September

## Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

July 6—25: Trans-Siberian Railway Adventure with ENHG

July 22—28: Kyrgyzstan

December 16—23: Northern Vietnam

Further field trips, details or changes to trips will be announced/confirmed by email.

## DNHG COMMITTEE 2015

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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## Contributions

We need a variety of contributors. Do you have a field report, unusual finding, interesting news article, book review, amazing photograph, or community news to share?

If so, email your contributions to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

(Arial 10 fully justified)

## DNHG Membership

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership is valid from September 2015 to September 2016. 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 scan and e-mail a copy of your payment confirmation 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.