



GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

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Contributors—

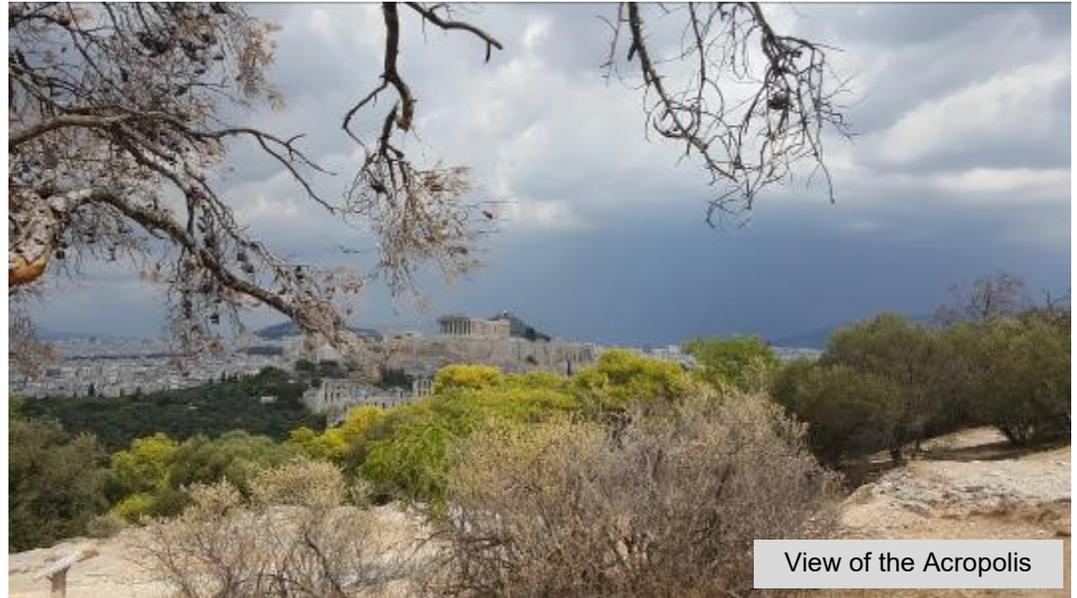
Thanks to the following for their contributions:

Konstantina Sakellariou, Sonja Lavrenčič, Margaret Swan, Anelisa Lambert, Charles Laubach and Gosia van Unen

Send your contributions for the October issue to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

by 25th November, 2018



View of the Acropolis

Cultural Explorations in Athens

Athens welcomed us at the beginning of September with pleasant temperatures, a few dramatic showers, and an impressive rainbow that connected the Lycabettus Hill with the Sacred Rock of the Acropolis, suspending in the ethers long enough for us to enjoy it in its full glory.

Within two days, we explored old neighbourhoods – including roads that remain in use since ancient times – as well as modern ones where the various cultural and artistic expressions attempt to forge the new identity of the Greek people.

Naturally, the highlight of this part of the trip included a visit on the hills that surround the Acropolis Rock, where we discussed in detail the historical developments in Athens (and, by extension, Greece), and how a series of events defined the western history and civilisation as we know it today. This analysis was completed in the Acropolis Museum – one of the best museums of the world based on international ratings. There, although one is easily impressed by the artistic aspect of the exhibits, the symbolism that envelops the Parthenon and its surrounding monuments is maybe the most potent takeaway.

Despite the importance of the Acropolis area, Athens is full of hidden corners that are worth discovering, so a visitor should make sure to allow enough time for additional exploration. The Anafiotika neighbourhood with its whitewashed houses and its Cycladic ambience; the impressive examples of street art in Psirri; the Athenian Trilogy with its exemplary neoclassical architecture; the picturesque alleys of Plaka; the National Garden – which is considered to be a 19th century monument; Roman remains; tiny Byzantine churches; scraps from the Ottoman era; music in the streets, and a general joyous ambience under the Mediterranean sun: all these form the elaborate mosaic that represents Athens today.

Contribution by Konstantina Sakellariou



Narrow streets of Anafiotika

Inside!

Find out where this mammal lives on page 5



Announcements and Recordors

Monthly Speaker - 8pm on Sunday 4th November, 2018

Lecture Title - "Turtle Conservation on Saadiyat Island"

Biography - Arabella Willing

British-born Arabella Willing is no stranger to the middle-east; she grew up travelling the world, spending four years in Oman as a teenager. She studied marine biology at the University of St. Andrews and began her career on a remote island in the Maldives, educating isolated communities about biology, sustainability and marine conservation. She went on to join Hyatt hotels and was the company's first "Resident Marine Biologist" at Park Hyatt Maldives Hadahaa. Arabella moved to Park Hyatt Abu Dhabi in 2013 and now holds the title of Head of Conservation & Community Engagement. Along with studying the nesting turtle population she organises workshops and excursions to educate and entertain guests, whilst ensuring that the hotel and its neighbours adhere to strict environmental standards behind the scenes.

In her free time Arabella volunteers as the co-chair of the Abu Dhabi Chapter of the Emirates Natural History Group.

TALK SUMMARY: Saadiyat Island is blessed with arguably the most beautiful beach in the region and is one of Abu Dhabi's most important sites for marine life. Recently declared as a Marine National Park, it's been home to nesting hawksbill turtles for generations. Rapid development has brought conservation challenges, which one hotel has tried to combat by setting up a community conservation programme to monitor and protect the visiting wildlife. This talk will describe the current status and give an overview of hawksbill turtle ecology. There will be practical advice on how to recognise a turtle nest, how best to protect and monitor the nest and how to deal with strandings.

From the Editor:

Enjoy some of the cultural, engineering and natural wonders of Greece, as expressed in articles by Konstina Sakellariou and Sonja Lavrenčič.

A DNHG trip took place this month to Saruq al-Hadid (see photo inset, photos on Spotlight and report on page 5).

Page 6 describes a desert in the Netherlands - a natural habitat for Antlions.

Enjoy your read!



Trip participants with museum staff

Field Reporters

Do you have a field report, unusual finding, interesting news article, book review, amazing photograph, or community news to share?

Send your contributions to:

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Mammals - new recorder needed!

Spotlight!

Abra ride following the below-mentioned DNHG Museum Trip, by Sonja Lavrenčič



An Abra ride on the Creek offers a different perspective of the city



New Creek developments blend in seamlessly with the Old Fahidi District

DNHG Trip to Saruq al-Hadid Museum visit, 20th October 2018, by Anelisa Lambert



Slag remains provide evidence for the mass smelting of copper at the site. The hole reveals where a pipe was inserted to help to control the temperature in the furnace.



Bronze axe-heads



Iron sword c 1.8 m long, from c 900 BC. Crescentic pommel and flanged hilt for organic inlay. Nail still present to attach the now missing bone or wood inlay.



Fungi in the UK, by Margaret Swan



I couldn't help but notice different types of fungi, randomly growing in a medical practice car park and wondered if they were harmful.

If travelling on Emirates, watch the documentary on the amazing life of fungi and how communication takes place underground.

Field Clips

Epicurean Peloponnese days

After the few intense days in Athens, we left for the countryside of the Peloponnese. Our destination was Vrachni, a small village high up in the mountains, above the north coast of the Peloponnese where our friendly and knowledgeable hosts, Konstantina and Nancy, offered us the hospitality of a country house. The drive there took us through one area of the summer fire tragedy with the consequences still painfully obvious.

To get to the Peloponnese, we crossed the Isthmus canal: a channel over 6 km long and only 24 metres wide separating the Greek mainland from the Peloponnese (making it an island) and reducing the distance between Aegean and Adriatic seaports by 131 nautical miles. At the time of its opening in 1893, the narrow, almost 80 metre deep canal was an engineering achievement.



Isthmos Canal

Vrachni village, perched at 1100 m above sea level, is one of the highest inhabited villages in the Kalavryta area. The region is thought to have been first inhabited in the mid -8th century AD. The

landscape is verdant green with fir trees and running water, and the house offered an excellent starting point for the nearby natural sights that we visited during the next days.

Relatively recently discovered by a shepherd looking for a lost sheep, the Cave of Lakes is a subterranean river consisting of three levels which, as the snow melts during springtime, turns into a flowing underground stream with waterfalls. As we visited it in September, most of the water had been absorbed, and we could walk through the underground path on newly-installed bridges, admiring some of the 13 lakes that the river left behind, all framed by beautifully sculptured stalactites and stalagmites.



Cave of Lakes

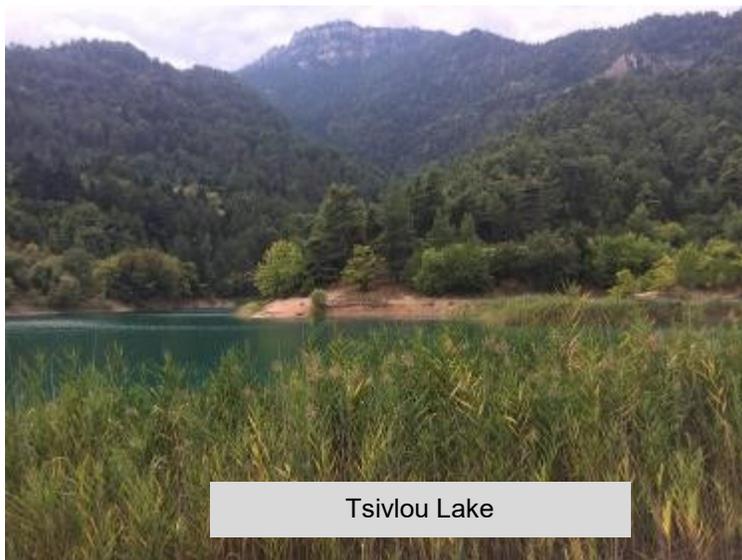
We later visited Planitero village with its fantastic forest of old plane-trees (*Platanus*). We were baffled by the fact that plane trees bear flowers of both sexes on the same

tree but in different clusters. Passing by a few old watermills, we visited a modern trout fish farm and sampled some species for lunch. In the afternoon we visited a beekeeping family under Chelmos mountain for an exhaustive explanation of the beekeeping practices in the area and unlimited samplings of local honey. The most prized one is called Vanilla: it is a unique fir honey, harvested only every few years, and characterized by a golden opalescence. Another unique flavor was honey made from the *Polygonum* (knotweed) plant that until then we knew just as a worthless weed.

No holiday in Greece is complete without a visit to the beach, and we had our Epicurean day when we descended from the mountains to Trapeza, the clearest and most beautiful shore of the Corinthian Sea for a dip in crystal clear waters, followed by a fish lunch and some wine-tasting in the local winery.

The following day we visited Tsivlou Lake, the youngest of the Peloponnese lakes. It is located at 800 m of altitude and was only formed in 1913 by a landslide that blocked the flow of the river Krathis and submerged the local village. It is surrounded by forests and is now a natural park, popular among the Greeks as a pleasant escape from the stifling summer.

Kalavryta town is mostly a winter resort thriving on the nearby Mount Chelmos ski slopes. Apart from a pedestrian area with



Tsivlou Lake

many gourmet shops, what impressed us the most was the train ride we took for our return to Athens. The 120-year-old Odontotos rack railway literally translates as 'toothy railway', thanks to the 'teeth' it has in the middle of the track to negotiate steep, 17.5% gradient tracks across the picturesque Vouraikos gorge, passing through tunnels and bridges, from 750 m above sea level Kalavryta to the coastal Diakopto town.

By then our time was up and our great hosts, Konstantina and Nancy took us to the Athens airport for our flights back home. But we will be back soon! We are already planning next year's visit to the archaeological sites of Crete!

Contribution by Sonja Lavrenčič

Field Clips

Ladakh wild life

Despite the deserts landscape with water resources almost entirely depending on melting glaciers, very harsh winters with low temperatures and limited resources for which they must compete with people, domesticated sheep, pashmina goats and yaks, Ladakhi highlands are rich with wildlife.

The most famous inhabitant of Ladakhi highlands is notoriously shy and elusive snow leopard (*Uncia uncia*), locally called Shan. Well-adapted to the harsh conditions, it blends with the environment and 'disappears', which gave it a local name "grey ghost". During the winter, when snow leopards descend into valleys in search for food, local companies organize snow leopard trips into wild Himalayan valleys, but the sightings of this nocturnal animal are still a rare lucky chance.

Easier to spot, although still difficult to photograph without a special equipment and a lot of patience, are birds of prey, hares, marmots, blue sheep. During our August hike, we saw them all, some just from afar, but any attempt of a photo documenting these encounters failed. Eventually, during our venture into Ladakh highlands, I have only managed to photograph two of its wild fauna live representatives – and some skulls and horns of Tibetan wild sheep.



Tibetan sheep skull

Wild ass

High up in the mountains, on a 5000 m mountain pass we encountered first wild asses. Locally known as Kiang (*Equus kiang*) this is the largest of wild asses. It is native to the Tibetan Plateau and his current range is restricted to the Tibetan Plateau, Ladakh, and



Wild ass roam free

northern Nepal along the Tibetan Plateau. Kiangs inhabit the altitudes from 2700 and 5300 m above sea level. Open alpine meadows and steppe make it easy for them to detect predators and flee from them. Their main predators – apart from humans – are wolves. Wolves will likely only attack single animals. When in group kiangs defend themselves by forming a circle and kicking violently.

Kiangs graze on grasses, sedges and have adapted to lack of water: they obtain most of their water from the plants or possibly from the snow in winter.

Zabra

Small mammal that locals call Zabra is Ladakh Pika (*Ochotona ladacensis*). Our guides described it as a cross between mouse and rabbit and its small 23 – 25 cm long body does recall the features of both. However, the zabra is a distinct mammal species with many subspecies. The Ladakhi one can be recognized by the differently arched skull shape: it has a pronounced arch above the eyes.



Pika

This species is a common resident in eastern and northern Ladakh between 4400 and 5600 m above sea level. It is encountered mostly in Hanle plains and Tsokar, where we encountered them in great numbers. Little is known about the ecology of this species. As a social animal it lives in territorial family groups, its habitat are high altitude semi-desert plains. It's herbivorous and is thought to eat roots throughout the winter. It digs out burrows which have various entrance holes. Its burrows serve as shelter and breeding places for a variety of birds.

The animal is diurnal and is active throughout the year. It moves mostly in the morning and afternoon and sunbathes during the day. On sensing danger it quickly hides in burrows. Very agile and alert it is not too shy. It was very easy to tempt it out of its hole and make it pose for photos by juicy apple pieces.

Where it competes with humans and domestic animals for scarce high-altitude resources, unfortunately this animal gets poisoned massively but luckily their numbers recover fast, so it is not endangered.

Tibetan Sheep

High up on the mountain slopes we saw herds of Tibetan Sheep. Some were indicated by the guides as Blue Sheep.



Cairns decorated with sheep horn

(Continued on page 6)

Field Clips

(Continued from page 5)

Along the way we have found plenty of skulls and horns, sometimes used as decorations, often just scattered in the wadis, probably brought from the mountains by streams.

There are 2 different species of Tibetan sheep in Ladakh, so most probably the skulls were from Nyan (*Ovis ammon*) and Shapo (*Ovis orientalis*).

Nyan remains normally at a great height and rarely descends to a level below 4,500 meters. Male Nyans are very attractive as they have long curved horns which can measure up to 140 cm and are used by males in spectacular fights. Nyan is the largest and most impressive wild sheep.

Shapo, also known as red sheep thanks to its copper brown fur, is the smallest sheep among the wild sheep. Their big horns are curved back, wrinkled, with the tips pointing forward.

Toad Agama



Toad agama

Another animal that we encountered often on our walk through Ladakh highland desert was the Toad agama (*Phrynocephalus laungwalansis*). The name says it all, this little lizard looks like a cross between a toad and agama, it's flat head, rounded belly and hind legs reminding us of the former one. Its mimicry is perfect. They blend with the environment so perfectly that you can only spot them when they move. This is to hide from its natural predators, birds. The Toad agama is perfectly suited for extreme desert conditions, physically adapted to withstand the cold, dry climate. Its small eye openings with protective scaly eyelids form a barrier against sand particles. It can be found at elevation from 3100 m to 4700 m above sea level, but it was spotted even as high as 5500 m above sea level. In general, the ecological niche and role of *Phrynocephalus* species in lizard communities of arid environments of Asia are poorly studied.

Contribution by Sonja Lavrenčič



Some of the seals found at the site

Dubai Natural History Group -- Saruq al-Hadid Museum

A bustling center of trade and industry appears in south-eastern Arabia. Despite the lack of natural resources, traders and craftsmen bring their wares from far and wide for manufacturing, finishing and outbound shipment.

This is not modern Dubai, but ancient Dubai. It is a pre-oil economy, not a post-oil economy. And the location is not coastal but well inland. Nevertheless, with seasonal habitation apparently from Neolithic times Saruq al-Hadid was a major entrepot between circa 1300—900 BC.

In spite of its historic importance, Saruq al-Hadid had been lost, covered by drifting sand and entirely forgotten, until its rediscovery in the early part of this millennium. In a remarkable example of serendipity, HH the Ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, noticed an anomalous slag midden among the sand dunes and ordered an investigation. The archaeologists from the Department of Antiquities were truly surprised by what they have discovered.

Anelisa Lambert briefed a group of two dozen DNHG members on the findings during a visit to the Saruq al-Hadid Museum in Dubai on 20 October 2018. She detailed what the archaeologists uncovered as they dug down through the site, centimeter by centimeter, in five meter squares, sifting the sand and soil that was removed and recording the location of every artifact discovered. And the artifacts were numerous, in the thousands, some of which were very small. Gold, precious metals and stones; shells and beads; bronze and iron weapons and tools; clay vessels and lamps; and large implements of bronze and stone, such as incense burners. Down farther was a layer composed mostly of animal bones from domesticated as well as wild animals. Excavations are ongoing and new discoveries are emerging during each digging season.

The reasons for the selection of the Saruq al-Hadid site remain unclear. Located well in from the coast, the site would have been served by caravans, and indeed its rise as a trade center appears to coincide with the earliest domestication of the dromedary. Copper ore was brought to the site and smelted and worked there, but there are no copper deposits nearby. Of equal importance, there are no trees nearby that could provide a ready supply of charcoal. There also appears to be no locally available potable water, unless there is a still-undiscovered falaj system.

Also yet to be discovered are any structures other than foundations of copper-smelting furnaces. No dwellings, public buildings or cemeteries have been unearthed. But the Saruq al-Hadid site does show that the Dubai desert hosted a significant trade and manufacturing entrepot linked to all of the major civilizations of the Middle East over an extended period of time, as attested by the variety and quality of the artifacts discovered.

The artifacts are displayed in a traditional house in the Shindagha neighborhood of Dubai, and were brought to life by Anelisa's many helpful explanations.

After the visit to the museum in Shindagha, we played the role of typical Dubai tourists, taking an abra ride on the Creek and having lunch at the Bayt Al Wakeel Restaurant. It was all in all a very enjoyable morning learning about a part of Dubai's history that is only now being brought fully to light.

Many thanks to Anelisa for organizing and leading our visit.

Contribution by Charles S. Laubach

Field Clips

Desert in the Netherlands

To find desert places in Europe especially in one of the wettest countries like the Netherlands is somewhat unexpected. They are there, however, scattered in small patches among the heath and woodland, among others, in the Hoge Veluwe National Park. Over the last million years, the Netherlands has experienced every possible climatic variation: from warm to polar and from maritime to steppe. Landscapes reflect these extreme oscillations in the climate. The sand in the Veluwe comes from the bed of the North Sea which was exposed during the last Ice Age. The grains are largely quartz and were deposited forming low sand dunes at the seaside. Smaller grains were carried further and deposited further south in Limburg in the form of loess.

Every year I visit The Hoge Veluwe National Park, located in central Netherlands, to feel the desert sand and enjoy the sculpture park of the Kroller Muller



'Adult antlion



Antlion larvae

Museum. The Dutch drift sand landscapes are quite unique. They were caused by human activity in the Middle Ages, mainly deforestation and mining and are now scattered between heath, woodland and farmland. These "pioneer" landscapes would gradually disappear covered by algae and grass, lichens and moss and eventually turn into woodland if sand did not get the chance to move. Therefore they are maintained in protected areas where moss is removed and some sand drifts enlarged to provide a viable habitat to a few rare inhabitants.

One of them is Antlion, *Myrmeleon spec.* that can reach 15mm in size. Antlion larvae live in sandy soils in funnel shaped pits that they excavate. Only their jaws are visible; the body is buried in sand. Insects that fall into the pit are unable to clamber out again and fall prey to the antlion jaws. They are sucked dry in the same manner as spiders feed. Adult antlions look a bit like dragonflies.

Humans are difficult to please; in the UAE no effort is spared to create the woodland, lakes and vegetation cover while in the Netherlands the opposite is done to strip the ground and let the sand move!

Contribution by Gosia van Unen



The Hogue, Netherlands

Editor's Note

Antlions can be found in the UAE at Al Wasit Wetlands in Sharjah. Read the article written by Helga Meyer in a previous Gazelle dated November, 2016. Click on the newsletter link [here](#).

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

November 4: Arabella Willing—"Turtle Conservation on Saadiyat Island"

December 9: Members' Night speakers

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

Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

November 9-10 Dhow trip and camping on Daymaniyat Islands, Oman (full - only waitlist available)

December 13/14—15: Dhow and camping trip (a repeat of the above by popular demand)

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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 2018 to September 2019. 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.