



# GAZELLE



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

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**Contributors—**

Thanks to the following for their contributions this month:

*Angela Manthorpe, Konsantina Sakellariou Sonja Lavrenčič, Margaret Swan, Gary Feulner and Alexis Biller.*

**Discover how coral survives on page 6**



Phaistos

**Exploring Crete: the first DNHG international trip after the Covid-19 outbreak**

Crete is the largest island of Greece – the fifth largest in the Mediterranean – and, given its fascinating history, culture, and landscape, it had been an attractive destination on the list of the DNHG ardent travelers for quite some time.

The trip was initially planned for June 2020. By January, we had finalized the itinerary; by mid-February, all available spots were filled, and advance payments to hotels were made. Some vague news about a novel virus in China did not deter us from our plans. Little did we know that it would take us over 1.5 years to finally explore Crete: a trip made possible thanks to the commitment of the participating DNHG members and their passion that overcame all hesitations regarding the still uncertain travelling protocols. Hence, in September 2021, we ventured for our first DNHG international expedition after the Covid-19 outbreak.

The trip was led by Konstantina Sakellariou: a former DNHG member and history aficionado who, during the long, waiting months, decided to keep us hooked with a series of lectures on Greek history, analyzed within the broader Eastern Mediterranean or international context.

The itinerary was packed with action; capturing everything in just a few lines is difficult. As such, we share here only a few snippets of our favorite moments:

The Venetian port of Chania town

Although we explored all three major towns of Crete – namely, Chania, Rethymno, and Heraklio – each with its own distinct ambience and beauty, Chania stole our hearts. With its picturesque port, Venetian-style alleys, Ottoman and Jewish quarters and, above all,



Chania Venetian Port

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Announcements and Recorders

**DNHG Monthly Speaker (virtual)**

**10th October, 2021 at 8pm (via Zoom)**

**Presentors: Kleopatra Alamantariotou and Eirini Matsouki**

**Lecture Title: "Biomimicry: how nature inspires design"**

### Synopsis:

How mimicking the shapes and mechanisms that already exist in nature, and replicating them in the built environment can provide innovative solutions. Solutions ranging from product design such as Velcro, to sustainable solutions, and to iconic designs such as the Burj Khalifa. Learn about how nature manages waste and how it can inform a model for a circular economy.

### Biography of Speaker : Kleopatra Alamantariotou:

Kleopatra Alamantariotou is Founder and CEO of Biomimicry Greece Research and Innovation Center, with active affiliate members spanning 22 countries (via Singularity University). In 2021, Kleopatra founded the Biomimicry for Humanity, a movement for a better world.

Since 2016 she has been a global leader of NASA space in collaboration with 'Open NASA' innovation center. In 2017 the European Space agency accepted her for training in space. Kleopatra is a co-founder of the Greek New Space Society.

She studied Midwifery in Athens Greece, and received MSc Midwifery from Middlesex University in 2007. Completed a further Master's degree from City University London in Health Informatics in 2008.

Member of the National Management Committee of European programs (COST EU - Brussels European Cooperation in Science and Technology) for more than 8 years. Received has received many scholarships and prizes, including HULT prize Greece 2nd winner 2015, Ecopolis prize 2017. She actively participates in educational programmes at Bocconi University Milan Italy, Trinity College Dublin, Massachusetts Institute of Technology MIT, John Hopkins Bloomberg School of MGG.

Prior roles as Chief Executive of health Innovation and quality improvement of Larisa University Hospital in Greece, and as health professional at the Chelsea & Westminster Hospital in London, and also at the American Hospital in Dubai.

### Biography of Speaker : Eirini Matsouki

Eirini Matsouki is a qualified architect and an award-winning industry professional with extensive technical experience in sustainability. Her world-class expertise, from developing suitable sustainability strategies, to incorporating these strategies into projects and achieving target results, was a catalyst for her winning the UK Building Magazine's award as one of the "Top 50 Sustainability Stars 2015".

Eirini is a partner in Ransour Consulting, a Dubai based consultancy providing exceptional advisory services in relation to Construction & Real Estate.

Sample completed projects that are internationally renowned for their excellence in sustainability and environmental design: London 2012 Olympic's Legacy Facilities in London, KAIA Airport in Jeddah, the Cultural Centre in Athens (first LEED Platinum in Greece), the Mobility Pavilion and the Metro Extension in Dubai.

Eirini has been volunteering with schools. She passionately mentors children at schools in London and in Dubai. She is a guest lecturer at University College London and with the Heriot Watt University in Dubai. She is often invited to speak at conferences or to serve as expert panelist. Eirini Matsouki is an award-winning industry professional with extensive technical experience in sustainability. Her world-class expertise, from developing suitable sustainability strategies, to incorporating these strategies into projects and achieving target results, was a catalyst for her winning the UK Building Magazine's award as one of the "Top 50 Sustainability Stars 2015".



### DNHG Recorders

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Sample completed projects that are internationally renowned for their excellence in sustainability and environmental design: London 2012 Olympic's Legacy Facilities in London, KAIA Airport in Jeddah, the Cultural Centre in Athens (first LEED Platinum in Greece), the Mobility Pavilion and the Metro Extension in Dubai.

Further information on biomimicry can be found at:

<https://biomimicryforhumanity.com/>

# Spotlight on Crete!

## DNHG field trip to Crete, by Konstantina Sakellariou



Zeus and Europa plane tree



Spinalonga



Nikolaos in Splantzia



Alley in Chania

## DNHG Field trip to Crete, by Sonja Lavrenčič



Knossos—Evan's reconstruction of the throne room.



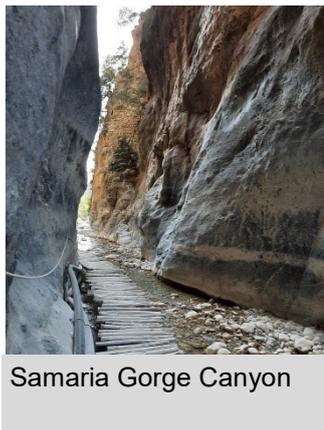
Heraklion Archeological Museum—undecifrabable Phaistos disc



Old olive oil room



Samaria Gorge—the narrowest part



Samaria Gorge Canyon



Knossos—Evan's controversial reconstruction

Phaistos storage room with pithoi (storage jars)



# Field Trips

(Continued from page 1)

cozy and sophisticated style, Chania definitely rates high on our list.

## Hiking the Samaria Gorge

No trip to Crete is complete without crossing the Samaria Gorge: an 18-km trail through a National Park and a World's Biosphere Reserve. Despite the unexpected impact of the lockdowns on our stamina and creaky bodies, the hike was a highlight. The brief dive in the crystal waters of the Mediterranean at the end of the trail proved to be a well-deserved reward as well. See photographs on page 3.

## The Minoan archaeological site of Phaistos

We enjoyed our visit to Phaistos much more than the famous Knossos site, which has lost some of its authenticity with all its tourists and reconstruction. In Phaistos, the magnificent staircases erected almost 4,000 years ago and, yet, looking so modern, inspire any visitor and trigger interpretations on the actual use of those ancient palatial complexes. It is impressive that such a civilization (i.e., the Minoan) flourished on a mere island, enjoyed such levels of peace and prosperity that led to the creation of breathtaking complexes, and still remains a mystery to us all.



Spinalonga

## The island of Spinalonga

Spinalonga is a tiny islet used as a fortification by the Byzantines, Arabs, Venetians, and Ottomans, thanks to its strategic location. One does not need more than one hour to walk around the whole islet, strolling through old buildings and picturesque alleys. In the 20th century, Spinalonga hosted a lepers' colony, its imprint remaining visible to this day, leaving a sad feeling in the

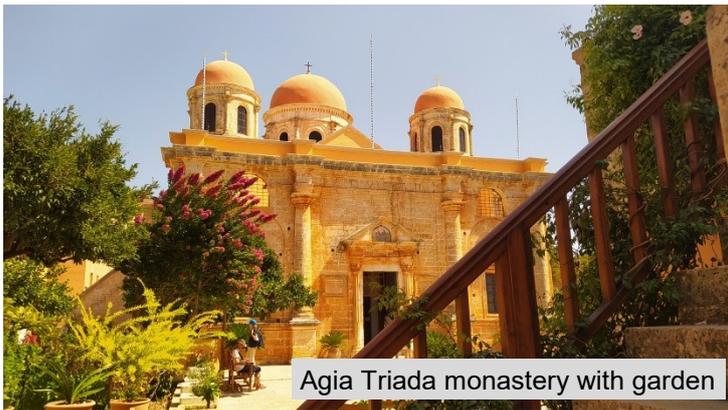


Zeus and Europa plane tree

area. Today, the area is only an archaeological site, and efforts are made to add it to the UNESCO heritage list.

## The evergreen plane tree in Gortyna that marks the beginning of European history

Inside the archaeological site of Gortyna, there is a rare species of an evergreen plane tree. Legend



Agia Triada monastery with garden

has it that, under its shade, Zeus mated with Europa (the abducted princess from Tyr). The copulation led to the birth of three children, including Minos, the ancient ruler of Crete.

## The beautiful gardens of the monasteries

Monasteries constitute a meaningful part of the local tradition, as they have left a strong cultural, social, economic and spiritual imprint on the island. We visited three of them – Guberneto, Agia Triada, and Arkadi – all significant in their own right. Still, what we enjoyed the most was strolling through their gardens, observing the variety of the plants, and breathing in the peaceful harmony they emanated.

## The church with the bell-tower and the minaret

Agios Nikolaos in Splantzia, Chania, was initially built as a catholic church. During the Ottoman occupation, it turned into a mosque and, today, it is an orthodox church. It represents a rare piece of architecture, carrying both a bell tower and a minaret, plus a blend of catholic and orthodox elements, while the lot is a reminder that peaceful co-existence is more meaningful than segregation.

## The over 2000-years-old plane tree in Krassi

Krassi is a tiny mountain village close to the Lassithi Plateau. Yet, it is visited by many who wish to see an ancient plane tree that, it is said, is more than 2,000 years old.

*Text and photos by Konstantina Sakellariou and Sonja Lavrenčič*



Monumental plane tree in Kassi

## Field Clips

### The hand of Mariam – an update

Following on from my article in June's Gazelle about the Hand of Mariam (*Anastatica hierochuntica*) I was interested to see baskets full of the plant during a recent visit to Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. It was a popular item in the souq and you can see from the photos that the plant is available au naturel and in lurid rainbow colours. I asked what they were being used for and the stallholder explained that the revitalized plant is useful for removing odours from the air, particularly if you're smoking shisha; for the best results you should replace the water every day. I leave it to you to investigate the efficacy of such a claim!

Contribution by Angela Manthorpe

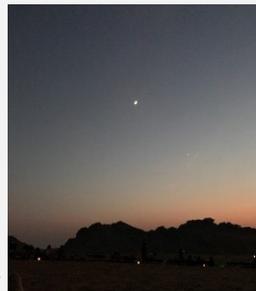


### Perseids Meteor Shower

As they waited for the moon to disappear, people gathered in two locations to witness the Perseids Meteor Shower. From the darkness of the Mleiha Desert and the top of UAE's highest peak Jebel Jais, the 12th August was the night forecasted to view this phenomena and neither group were disappointed.



Perseids are renowned for their colours which were visible during the moonless early morning sky. An annual occurrence, up to 100 meteors were visible per hour. Alexis Biller recalled that he counted around 22 meteors with long trails of many colours including blue and green.



Setting the scene at Mleiha (photo by Alexis Biller)

These events were organised by Mleiha Archeological Site and the Dubai Astronomy Group. On the left is a photo of a previous meteor shower 'Geminids 2020'. This was taken by Prabhu S. Kutti, who is an Astrophotographer. [Click or tap here to visit his website](#) and see more glittering examples of the UAE night sky.

### Homes and Gardens

This cheeky ghecko (left) is enjoying a light snack!

Both photos on the right are of the same Robber Fly resting on our car wing mirror (with thanks to Binish Roobas for confirming the identification).

What have you, our readers been photographing in the wild?

Send your photos to the gazelle editor for inclusion in the next Gazelle. [gazelleeditor@gmail.com](mailto:gazelleeditor@gmail.com)

Contribution by Margaret Swan



## Field Clips

### Coral bleaching at Snoopy Rock

During the Eid break in July I went diving around Snoopy Rock in Fujairah and found that sadly, many different coral species around the island have suffered from bleaching. Under normal conditions corals live in a symbiotic relationship with zooxanthellae, which not only give the coral its colour but also provide up to 90% of its energy needs. However, under certain circumstances, particularly if the sea temperature is too high for too long, the relationship breaks down and the stressed coral expels the zooxanthellae, resulting in a bleached appearance in which the calcium carbonate structure of the coral is very clear to see.

Once the coral expels the zooxanthellae it can only survive a few days without food and if the temperature doesn't return to normal then the coral dies and the structures can become overgrown with macro algae, preventing the coral reef from regenerating. The photos show how startling the bleached corals and anemones look underwater, and I've included comparative photos to show the difference between bleached and normal coral, plus freshly bleached vs overgrown coral.

Unfortunately, as sea temperatures rise due to global warming coral bleaching is becoming more common. A report issued in early October 2021 by the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network estimated that 14% of the world's coral was lost between 2009 and 2018. The report also found that the 1998 mass bleaching event, which affected much of the Indian Ocean, Japan and the Caribbean, led to the loss of 8% of the

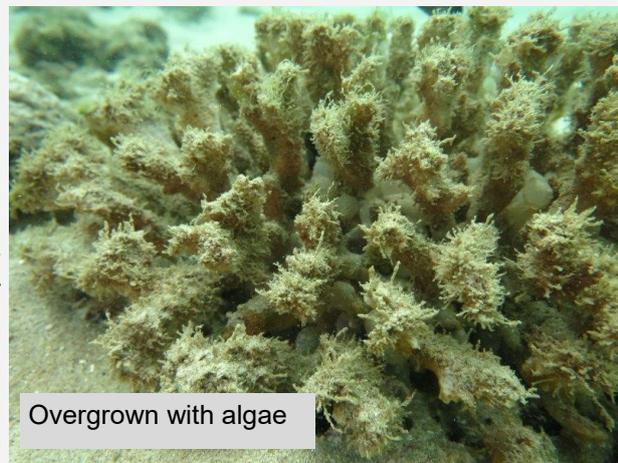
world's coral and I can say from personal experience that many reefs in the Maldives, Seychelles and Zanzibar are dominated by algae rather than vibrant corals. More recently the massive bleaching event on the Great Barrier Reef in 2016/17 is estimated to have killed more than 50% of the corals.

As some of the world's most heat tolerant coral species are found in the waters of the UAE, particularly in the Arabian Gulf, I'll be watching the reef at Snoopy Rock to see how it recovers.

*Contribution by Angela Manthorpe*



Overview



Overgrown with algae



Normal colour



Anemones



Bleached



Freshly bleached

## Field Clips

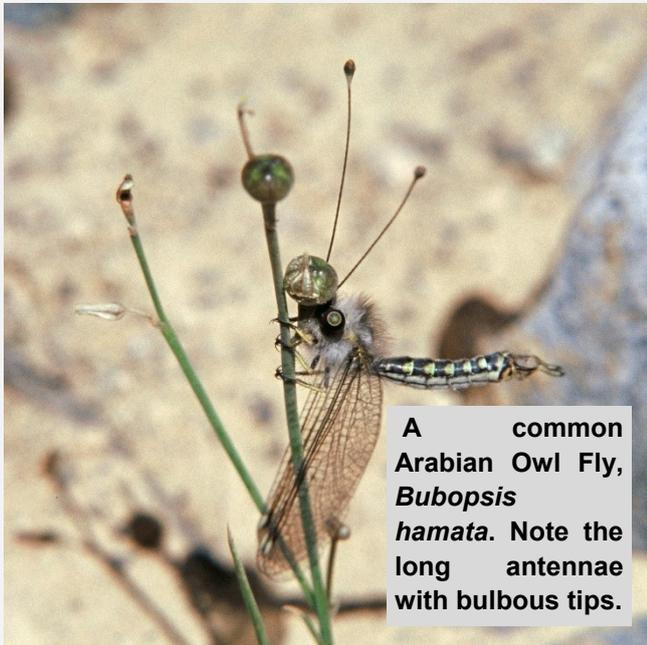
### Neuroptera: Owl Flies, Antlions and Other Odd Things

Lacewings are elongated flying insects with long, intricately-veined wings (but excluding Odonata – dragonflies and damselflies). They belong to the insect Order Neuroptera. Two families are most likely to be encountered in the UAE: Owl Flies (Ascalaphidae) and Antlions (Myrmeleontidae). The adults of both look similar, but owl flies fly by day and have very long antennae with a bulb-like tip. Antlions are nocturnal and have much shorter, drooping antennae. (Dragonflies and damselflies have greatly reduced antennae, like those of true flies.) Owl flies and antlions can be found in both sand and desert habitats, but usually in association with vegetation.

Both owl flies and antlions are predators on small flying insects, although they are harmless to humans. Their larvae are also predatory but look very different from the adults, resembling squat, segmented crawling insects with a huge pair of sickle-like jaws. Owl Fly larvae are ambush predators that conceal themselves in soil or debris. Antlion larvae dig characteristic neat, steep-sided, conical pits in soft dirt. They bury themselves at the bottom and seize small crawling insects that fall down the loose slopes. The pit trap is not 100% effective. I have watched an energetic ant apparently exhaust a tenacious antlion larva, although it was still challenging for the worn-out ant to climb out of the pit.

Neuroptera also include flying insects called Ribbonwings (Family Nemopteridae) which can hover with the aid of long, paired, ribbon-like stabilizers, like a kite with two tails, but they are a challenge for photographers.

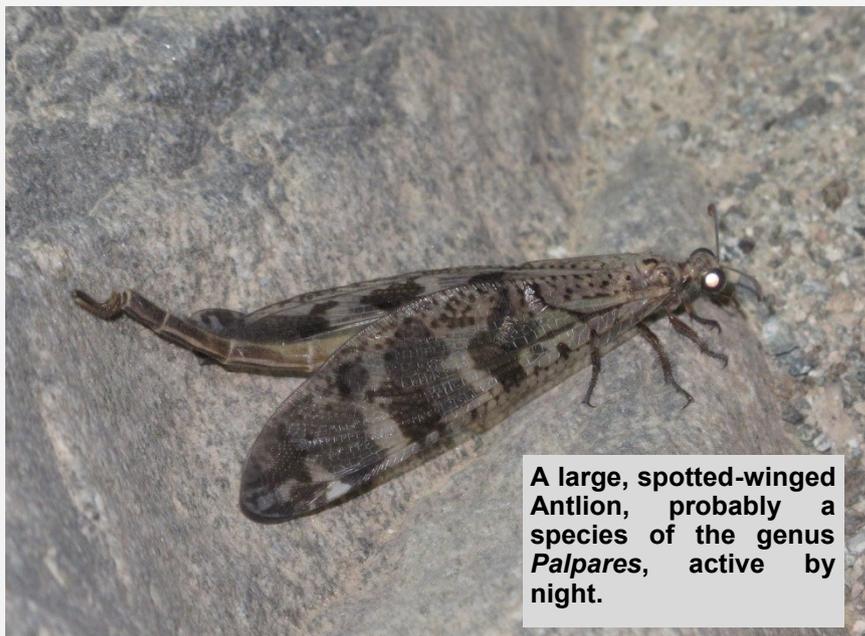
Contribution by Gary Feulner



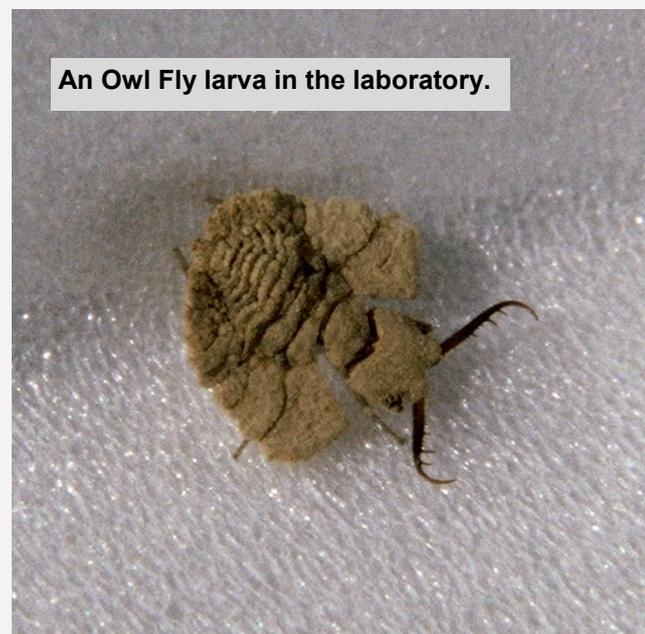
A common Arabian Owl Fly, *Bubopsis hamata*. Note the long antennae with bulbous tips.



A clear-winged Antlion, resting by day.



A large, spotted-winged Antlion, probably a species of the genus *Palpares*, active by night.



An Owl Fly larva in the laboratory.

## Dubai Natural History Group (DNHG) Programme 2021

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

**12 October:** Kleopatra Alamantariotou & Eirini Matsouki will present an illustrated talk on “Biomimicry: How nature inspires design”

**7 November:** Dr Dave Aplin shall present an illustrated talk on “Surviving: Ingenious strategies without legs.”

The DNHG field trip programme was temporarily suspended in compliance with UAE coronavirus precautions. All being well, local trips will resume soon and members will be contacted via email with individual schedules.

The inability to relocate when the going gets tough could be seen as a major disadvantage. Plants tackle this by adopting ingenious strategies to survive. This presentation investigates this fascinating subject with focus on the UAE's native flora.

## DNHG COMMITTEE 2020/2021

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 (or considered paid up) for 2020—2021 will be automatically renewed for 2021-2022**, 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](http://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.