

# focus

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Emirates Natural History Group

Patron: H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak al Nahayan

## EDITORIAL

Summer has well and truly arrived and many will be counting the days until they go off on leave, if they haven't left already that is. For those here through June, there will be two lectures as usual – that on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, by Dr. Benno Boer, will describe UNESCO's activities in the region, and that two weeks later, on the 17<sup>th</sup>, will be by ERWDA's ornithologist, Dr. Salem Javed, talking on his earlier bird researches in India. A programme of field excursions is also planned for the summer, as detailed later in this issue. Not to be outdone by Dubai's summer surprises, Charles Laubach shows no sign of abandoning his own annual mid-summer programme of outdoor surprises. That's staying power for you. Thanks Charles.

Two important news items for this month's editorial. Firstly, Phil Iddison, whom many of you will have heard speak at the last meeting, was presented, earlier that same night, with the Sheikh Mubarak Award for 2002 by the Group's Patron, HE Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan. Phil's fascinating lecture about many different facets of Al Ain life and natural history of the surrounding area that he studied assiduously over the eight years of his residence there, showed his attention to detail and just how deep he dug. An example to us all, Phil is clearly a worthy winner of the annual Sheikh Mubarak award, receiving a silver dhow engraved to that effect. Thanks go from the Group to Phil and his wife, Patsy, for taking the time to return to the UAE so soon after leaving here.

The second item concerns

the welcome arrival of a CD produced through the combined efforts of Alan McGee, Roy Richards, Mel Kempf and excursions secretary, Allestree Fisher, which provides a record of the some of the group's outdoor activities and, in particular, an in-depth study of the so-called 'Hanging Gardens', just over the border it is true, but easily reached from Al Ain and a locality regularly visited by NHGers, be they from Abu Dhabi, Dubai or Al Ain. For a mere ten dirhams a copy of this CD can be yours. Thanks go to the "team" which conceived and produced this CD independently. What a good idea!

Finally, and on that note, if we're not to have much in the way of contributions to *Focus*, how about some more good ideas instead? You've got the summer to think about it.

Enjoy the summer recess and put your thinking caps on.

*Simon Aspinall*

*Chairman ENHG*

PS The next newsletter after this should be with you in mid to late August, but just so as you know ahead of time, the first lecture of the autumn/winter programme, on 2<sup>nd</sup> September, will be by another ERWDA employee, Khaldoun Kiwan, talking on 'Nature Reserves in Jordan'. Promises to be good, as Khaldoun was formerly in charge of the fabled Wadi Rum reserve.

## ENHG Lectures

### **6<sup>th</sup> May - Gulf Sailfish Biology and Management – John Hoolihan**

John Hoolihan, a marine biologist from ERWDA, provided the ENHG with a fascinating talk on how and why ERWDA is conducting research into Sailfish. He began by describing just what a Sailfish (*Istiophorus platypterus*) is.

John explained its role as a highly migratory apex predator, and its importance in the catch and release recreational fishing sector. He described some of its basic biology, such as

what they use their large dorsal sail fin for and how they slash their way through shoals of fish using their long bill as a cutlass.

He described briefly the group known as "Billfish", to which Sailfish belong. The billfish group also includes marlins, spearfishes and swordfish. The first three belong to the family *Istiophoridae*, while swordfish belong to *Xiphiidae*. Sailfish are the only member of the group to inhabit the Arabian Gulf.

He also explained that the Arabian Gulf with its coastline comprising some eight political entities, each relatively small in geographical dimensions, has small exclusive

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### **FRONT COVER PICTURE TEASER!**

See if you can spot the ground mantid lurking amongst the rocks (*Thanks to Pam Fisher for this one*).

economic zones. The consequence of which is that there exist occurrences of straddling and trans-boundary fish movements across territorial waters of Gulf nations. Understanding these movements and other ecological requirements are necessary for development of informed fisheries management plans.

The co-operative tagging program is the cornerstone of the project and continues to provide quality data, as well as anecdotal information from fishermen.

2,581 sailfish were tagged from 15 April 1996 to 31 March 2003. There have been 136 recaptures to-date, which is one of highest recapture rates in world - around 5%.

The research has focused on morphometrics, aging, tagging (dart, pop-up, acoustic) and DNA analyses.

By better understanding the biology and ecology of sailfish and its population dynamics it is hoped that transboundary agreements and management can be put into place that will help to preserve and better manage this important species.

*Richard Perry*

### **3<sup>rd</sup> June - Man and the Biosphere**

Dr. Benno Boer addressed the Emirates Natural History Group at the Group's semi-monthly meeting on 3 June 2003. Benno is a botanist by training with approximately fifteen years' experience in the region. He joined the National Avian Research Center in Abu Dhabi in the early 1990s, was later with the Emirates Research and Wildlife Development Agency, and is now a

scientific advisor to the United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organization, based in the UNESCO regional office for the Arab States of the Gulf in Doha, Qatar. UNESCO conducts natural sciences activities throughout the Gulf States and the states of the Arab League, working in cooperation with a number of agencies and programs of the UN and other multilateral organizations active in the area, including seven UNESCO offices in the Arab League.

Perhaps the highlights of Benno's talk were his reports on UNESCO activities in specific Arab countries. His report on Libya highlighted the long and relatively unspoiled Mediterranean coastline, traditional methods of octopus fishing, and massive coastal deposits of sea grass. With these natural attractions as well as the archaeological features of Libya, such as the Roman ruins at Leptus Magna, Libya has considerable untapped tourist potential which, if exploited, should be regulated. Similarly, Sudan's Red Sea coast has enormous untapped tourism resources, also potentially in need of regulation, arising from spectacular underwater scenery.

Boer gave a somewhat discouraging assessment of the Khor Kalba mangrove area in Sharjah Emirate. This area, once considered a potential biosphere reserve, has now been severely altered by dredging, permanently changing the hydrology and threatening a large portion of the mangrove forest.

Benno's report on Qatar was quite a surprise, at least for this listener. There are significant mangrove environments in Qatar, and

some interesting late Islamic archaeology that could have tourism potential if it were restored attractively. Livestock management is required to reduce overgrazing, and to create possible intact habitats into which a captive Oryx population could be introduced.

In Bahrain, Benno highlighted the importance of the Socotra Cormorant nesting colony on the Hawar Islands, where more than 200,000 birds nest. He showed us the unique geological features of Bahrain, the large dugong population (in excess of 6,000 animals) near the Hawar Islands, abundant sea grass, and the relatively large numbers of ospreys nesting in the Kingdom.

Much of Benno's activity focuses on the use of salt tolerant plants as ground cover and animal fodder. Salt tolerant plants such as halophytes make minimal demands on an area's fresh water resources.

Benno was introduced by Dr. Richard Perry. At the end of Benno's remarks, Dr. Dick Hornby proposed a vote of thanks.

*Charles Laubach*

### **Interested in observing sunbirds up close?**

I had very good luck in Oman with a modified hummingbird feeder. (You must remove the fake flower that decorates each feeding station; this takes about 2 seconds because sunbirds' beaks are not as long as hummingbird beaks.) The record at our house was five birds at once--three eating, two waiting. We also had two

chicks in our yard, which may have been because food was close for their parents. The feeder should be in the sun and if it's in near a window you get a front row seat.

The recipe for the food is simple: 4 parts water, 1 part sugar

Bring water to a boil and stir in sugar. Boil for 2 minutes. Let cool. Excess hummingbird food can be stored in a tightly covered jar in refrigerator for one week. Do **NOT** substitute honey for sugar!!

This website has plenty of feeders to choose from and they ship to the UAE. <http://www.petvetsupply.com/>

or you can write to their customer service agent: [rebecca@feedproductsinc.com](mailto:rebecca@feedproductsinc.com)

*Karen cooper*

If you have any questions, write to me at: [noregrets@elvis.com](mailto:noregrets@elvis.com)

### **ENHG Visit to the Kalba Tell, Friday May 9th**

As part of the ENHG overnight field trip to the East Coast, a subset of the group visited the "garden site" of the Kalba Tell. The garden site is located inland of the White Fort at Kalba, and is on the edge of the coastal date plantations. The site is abandoned and unfenced, which, while good for casual visitors, does nothing for the historical interest and significance of this Umm al Nar fortification, and is, according to the literature available, at least as important as Tell Abraq (UAQ).

Archaeologists from

London University worked here in the mid-nineties, and left without publishing their findings. In order to establish what lay within and around the Tell, they dug a series of trenches in order to locate the limits and the main features of the fort. This revealed a mid-third millennium fortification with modifications and additions in the Wadi Suq Period and Iron Age. In all it must have been a period of approximately 2,000 years of continuous habitation. A cursory look at the third millennium walls reveals a massive structure that must have required prolonged cooperative efforts to build. At the very least, it suggests a large centre of population, which made use of available stocks of shell-fish to supplement their diet, to judge from the piles of shells that litter the site. Imported pottery from Mesopotamia, Bahrain, Iran and the Indus valley has been found on the site, indicating maritime contact with these regions until around 500 BC.

I assume that the presence of an Umm al Nar fortification on the east coast indicates that exports from the region in the third millennium, in particular, timber, soft stone artefacts and copper from the mountains, were loaded on to ships somewhere in the Khor Kalba area, destined

for "Meluhha" (the Indus Valley civilisation contemporary with "Dilmun" and "Magan") and possibly elsewhere on the Arabian peninsula.

If any ENHG member has information on the site, I would be grateful for any relevant URLs or printed texts on the subject. In any case it is worth a visit, not least because Peter Hellyer, inter alios, refer to it as "one of the country's most important archaeological sites".

*Allestree Fisher*

## HOT HARVEST for (not so) COOL CAMPERS

The last of the overnight camping trips for the season drew a group of eight vehicles, which left early on 8 May for Awhala and Wadi Hayl. Many other places and items of interest were also in store.

Our first stop was the dramatic Sinadel Gorge, in Wadi Hadf. Not only was the ravine arresting, but the company was diverse and lively.....maidenhair ferns, orchids and sunbirds.

However, the highlight of the day was the Iron Age Fort at Awhala. Allestree stressed the importance of this site as the largest fort

from the period to be excavated in south-eastern Arabia. The dimensions of the fort upstage the eighteenth century mud-brick fortified house on the fort's western corner.

Later in the day, we explored the hot springs at Ain al Ghamour and the beach and mangrove at Khor Kalba. The mangrove hosted many busy Fiddler crabs and we also shared the beach with many birds who were tucking into the catches of fish which had been laid out to dry on the sand. Some of us, who by this time were finding temperatures rather warm, had a refreshing dip in the ocean.

During the evening, the telescope provided stargazing as well as a look at the beautiful half moon.

Next morning, we were very fortunate to see the petroglyphs at Wadi Hayl under the guidance of archaeologist, Michele Ziolkowski. She has completed the most thorough analysis of the drawings and recorded over sixty examples of petroglyphs at this site, which makes it the most important collection in the UAE. Dating petroglyphs remains difficult. However, with analysis and comparative studies, Michele Ziolkowski believes that some of the petroglyphs at Wadi Hayl "may be as early as 1400-1100 BC". The wadi's late Islamic fortified palace and watch tower, occupied until a few decades ago, are to be restored as part of Fujairah's historic monuments.

Overtaken (again) by the hot temperatures, we subsided for lunch at a water hole.....this time with dragon flies and six artfully camouflaged Arabic toads.

We hadn't realized the Arabic toads were there because we had been pre-occupied with one Dhofar toad.

From start to finish a(nother) fascinating camp.

*Mary Clark.*

## Some like it hot – Alhagi graecorum et al.

If you have ever wondered what manages to survive and bloom in the heat of an Abu Dhabi summer, just take a look at the grassy avenues on the west side of the city. There's a plant that is currently occupying much of the grassy areas, mostly in the shade of the trees planted by the municipality, but quite a lot in full sunshine, too. It's called the "manna plant", or more scientifically : *Alhagi graecorum*. It used to be called *Alhagi maurorum*, but underwent a name change recently as plants do sometimes. They may decide in the future that this particular variety is unique to Abu Dhabi, and then it will become *Alhagi abudhabi* or some such. Anyway, by the time you read this they will all be in bloom.

They have a bright pink to reddish pea-like flower. Eventually it produces a pod 2-3 cms in length which can be straight or curved, turning dark brown. It's a member of the Leguminosae family, which is very large family of trees shrubs and herbs that includes the acacias and the ghafs. This plant is a low shrub, very spiny, to about 40 cms. There are very few leaves, up to 1 cm in length, and have rounded tips. You can't miss it. A.R. Western in his *Flora of the United Arab Emirates* (1989) says that it



is the dominant species in Abu Dhabi during the summer months. It will flower until the end of July and then die back turning to a blackish colour, and staying as root stock until next year. Its popular name is the "manna plant" because if the stem is pricked by an insect or another spiny stem, it will exude a sweet sugary substance. You probably won't get a meal out of it, but you may like to try it. (The "manna" of the Bible story is usually assumed to have come from one of the tamarisk family) Make sure you have identified the "manna plant" if you are going on leave. The bright blooms will have gone by the time you get back.

*Alhagi graecorum* is not the only Abu Dhabi wild flower to bloom in the summer: there is also an inconspicuous member of the caper family, *Dipterygium glaucum*, which blooms from February to September. This one you will find on the public beach at Ras al Akhdar, beside the red dune that must have been brought from the interior. And if you like highly perfumed flowers, some of the henna trees are already blooming. This may be the result of the daily irrigation programme. There are lots of henna trees along Karamah, Khalifa bin Shakhbut, and Khaleej al Arabi Streets. They are particularly potent in the early evening.

*Allestree Fisher*

## Field Trip Excursion Round- up 2002-2003

**June 2003** *Allestree  
Fisher* (*Excursion  
Secretary*)

This is a brief account of all the group field trip excursions that were organised by the Abu Dhabi Chapter of the ENHG for the period September 2002 – June 2003. It should be noted that there were also two trips organised by Peter Hellyer and Mark Beech that have been reported elsewhere, and that private members trips are not reported here.

The objective of these field trip excursions is to acquaint and interest ENHG members in the topography and natural history of the UAE and adjacent areas.

These trips focus on the main areas of natural history as well as archaeology and astronomy, which are flora, fauna, insects, birds and geology. Within the group

there is usually at least one participating expert or enthusiast who is able to provide information and insights into these areas of interest. All trips involve birdwatching and stargazing. The group possesses a birdscope/telescope which accompanies every trip. Participants are briefed for the night sky by Charles Laubach at the Tuesday meeting preceding the field trip.

### Sep 5-6

The pre-season began with an overnight camping trip to Wadi Kahl, via Qarn Nizwa, and the Limestone Wadi. The Friday morning was a walk in Wadi Dhaher with lunch in Wadi Kitnah.

(focus: wadi eco-systems and oasis culture).

### Oct 4

Sharjah Natural History Museum and Wildlife Park, by bus from Abu Dhabi

(focus : natural history of the region for new members).

### Oct 17-18

Overnight camping trip to Wadi Asimah and the East Coast, via Jebel Emalah tombs. The camp site was near Al Ghail. Swimming at Dibba.

(focus: Wadi Suq archaeology, fossils, flora and fauna of the mountains).

### Nov 7-8

Desert Night-time Navigation (led by John Rea, ADMC). This was a family occasion with a separate walk for children. Camping in the Al Khatim area. Observation of small mammals (led by Richard Perry).

(focus: using the constellations as a means of orientation, desert rodents).

### Dec 20

Floral Walk in Abu Dhabi near the Eastern Lagoon followed by lunch near Al Wathba. (focus: flora of Abu Dhabi Island).

### Jan 9-10

Overnight camping trip to Wadi Qawr via Jebel Buhays tombs, Tawi Fili. Camping at Qarn al Himar. Friday visit to a copper mine near Huwaylat, followed by lunch.

(focus: Wadi Suq archaeology, fossils, geology, flora in the acacia zone, Bronze Age copper mining).

### Feb 6-7

Overnight camping trip to

the Hanging Gardens (Jebel Qattar) via Al Ain Museum and oasis. (focus: fauna and flora of Jebel Qattar, ethnography of UAE, pre-history, the night sky).

### Mar 6-7

Family Camping Weekend to Al Wathba area, which included nature walks, photography, star-gazing and sand driving, Alan McGee leading.

(focus: introduction to UAE topography and natural history).

### Mar 14

Floral Walk in Western Lagoon area followed by lunch at the Al Ghazal Golf Club. Visit to archaeological site and grounds.

(focus: Shoreline flora on Abu Dhabi Island, ancient shoreline archaeology).

### April 3-4

Chris Drew (ERWDA) led a Desert Ecology field trip to the Dhahera area as part of the ERWDA survey of desert wildlife.

(focus: fauna of the sand desert, desert flora, observation of planets and major constellations).

### April 24-25

Overnight camping trip to Shimal (RAK), via Tell Abraaq and Jazirat al Hamra. RAK museum. Camping in the mountains behind Wadi Haqil. Visit to Potters' village and Wadi Suq site at Shimal. Lunch on beach at Rams, returning via Falayah and Manamah.

(focus: Wadi Suq and Umm al Nar archaeology, montane flora and fauna, historical background to RAK emirate).

### May 8-9

Overnight camping trip to East Coast via Hatta, Wadi

Hulw (lunch), Iron Age fort at Awhala. Camping site near Ain al Ghamour. Friday visits to Khor Kalba, Kalba Tell and Wadi al Hayl. Guided visit of summer residence and petroglyphs by Michele Ziolkowski. (focus: Iron Age and Umm al Nar archaeology, petroglyphs).

### Jun 5

Visit to Royal Stables, Abu Dhabi. (focus: equestrian interests).

## Nahyan praises heritage studies

ABU DHABI, May 21, 2003 (WAM):

"Studies of the heritage of the people of the UAE are a key aspect of our country's development," Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan said last night.

Speaking on the occasion of the awarding of the annual Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Prize for Natural History, Sheikh Nahyan said: "President HH Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan has frequently stated that a people that does not know its past cannot deal with the challenges of the present and future."

"For us to be able to tackle these challenges properly, it is important that proper studies are carried out of our past heritage, and of the environment in which we and our ancestors lived. President HH Sheikh Zayed, his fellow Rulers and Members of the Supreme Council, and HH Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, have shown their dedication to the

conservation of the country's heritage and environment," he added. "But these aspects of our country can only be preserved if they are properly studied. In this process, academic institutions, other agencies and individuals, both UAE citizens and expatriates, all have an important role to play."

The Minister went on to thank Philip Iddison, a former resident of Al Ain, and the winner of the Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Prize for 2002, for his dedicated research into aspects of national heritage in the Al Ain area. Iddison has specialised in studies of the traditional diet of the people of the Al Ain area, in particular their use of fish and locally-grown food. He has published extensively both on this topic and on Al Ain's traditional buildings, and has lectured on the topic both in the UAE and at conferences overseas.

Commenting after receiving his Prize, Iddison said: "The rapid changes of the last few decades have affected almost all aspects of UAE life. In my research into the traditional foods used by the people of the Al Ain area, I have tried to record as much information as possible, before knowledge of it is lost. It has been a fascinating study, and one which I have much enjoyed doing. I hope that the results of my research will help to provide a more detailed picture of past life in the UAE, so that the generations of today and tomorrow will have a better understanding of how their forefathers lived."

The Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Prize was instituted in 1990 by Sheikh Nahyan, in his capacity as Patron of the Emirates Natural History Group. The Prize is awarded each year

to an individual who has made a distinct and valuable contribution to knowledge of the history, heritage and natural history of the UAE through original research and publication. After receiving his prize, Iddison lectured to the twice-monthly meeting of the Emirates Natural History Group at the Cultural Foundation about his research work in Al Ain.

## The News in Brief

*A selection of articles from around the world. Thanks to Joan Anderson for these.*

### Radioactivity makes worms turn.

The *New Scientist* reports that worms living near the Chernobyl nuclear plant have started to have sex with each other, rather than with themselves. Scientists in the Ukraine think the aquatic worms may have changed their sexual behaviour to increase their chances of survival. It is thought to be the first evidence of wildlife changing their behaviour as a result of radioactive pollution.

### Great apes under threat of extinction

Our closest relatives, the great apes, could soon be found only in zoos and wildlife parks according to a report in the *New Scientist*. New studies show that animals living on the fringes of human society are being slaughtered for bushmeat, while those living in remote jungle areas are being wiped out by the deadly Ebola virus. Together, these could reduce populations by 80% in the next 30 years.

The projections are based on systematic surveys of the dense jungles of western Africa from the

early 1980s until 2002. In Gabon, researchers found that ape populations had dropped by 56% overall, and by 99% in some areas. In the Lossi area of Congo, a group of 143 apes was reduced to just seven in three months as Ebola swept through the region. Researchers believe decisive action is needed or we will soon have a world without wild apes.

### Britain's oldest bird

*The Times* reports that Britain's oldest bird is still flying high, having clocked up five million miles over 52 years. The small black-and-white Manx shearwater, which flies to South America every winter, was first ringed in North Wales in 1957, then again in 1961, 1978 and 2002. Ornithologists assumed that was the last they'd see of it, but it turned up again last week (April 2003). Graham Appleton, of Bardsey Bird Observatory, said: "The old bird was given a fifth ring, something of a record. The others had all worn out."

### Insect habitat

The Guardian reports that a derelict oil terminal in Essex has become the richest natural habitat for insects in Britain. In the past two years, 1,300 species have been found on the disused Canvey Island site, including 30 on the endangered 'red list'. But now, to the horror of environmentalists, this important area has been earmarked for development as part of the Thames Gateway expansion of London. Conservationists say that if the site goes, the whole government strategy to protect wildlife effectively goes too.

May 2003

### Wild flowers in Danger

The *Times* reports that snowdrops, orchids, bluebells and other wild flowers are being stolen by the truck load to supply a booming black-market in garden plants in Britain. The resulting harm to the environment is so serious that police forces have had to appoint full-time wildlife crime experts. Species in some areas – the bog orchid of Norfolk, for example – have been completely obliterated.



### Magpies – Pests or Scapegoats?

The British *Sunday Telegraph* reports that Britain is in the grip of a plague of magpies. In 1960 the magpie population was 100,000 but has risen to 650,000 today, and many people believe the birds are responsible for the disappearance of British songbirds. According to the Game Conservancy Council, magpies destroy the eggs of about 20 million songbirds a year, which is why thousands of Britons have started trapping and killing them. It is legal to do so because the magpie is classified as a pest. But the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) claims that the bird is being made a scapegoat. It says that the decline in songbirds is in fact a result of changing agricultural practices and shortage of food.



### Twitch IT! – Report for May 2003

May marks the end of the spring migration, with late migrants like marsh warblers passing through – these being seen in large numbers. There has still been some good birding, though, with a few rarities popping up, and with Mushrif Palace Gardens, MPG, being the local hot-spot, producing a pied flycatcher and a Hume's yellow-browed warbler. Many thanks to Andrew Twyman for producing his regular flow of records. Oh that others would do the same!

This month's report ends a few days early, due to travelling editors, but we'll catch up on anything special next month.

To the records.

On 1st May, a tour around Abu Dhabi island produced 3 whitethroats, 5 Upcher's warblers, 11+ willow warblers, 6 redstarts, 8 spotted flycatchers, 3 European rollers, 2 hoopoes, a single European bee-eater, 2 yellow-throated sparrows, 2 whinchats (first in), a female red-backed shrike, 3 isabelline shrikes, a late masked shrike and 2 tree pipits. Al Wathba Camel track had 2 marsh and 3 Montagu's harriers, 3 black-

winged stilts, a collared pratincole, 46 Pacific golden plovers (getting late), 35 swallows, a sand martin, 3 Northern and 3 isabelline wheatears, 3 isabelline shrike, a female red-backed shrike and an ortolan.

On 2nd May, Al Wathba Camel Track had the first two marsh warblers and 3 lesser grey shrikes. Also present were a marsh harrier, 2 Montagu's harriers, 5 male lesser kestrels, an immature crested honey buzzard, a quail, 30 Pacific golden plovers, a collared pratincole, a European roller, 55 swallows, 6 sand martins, 3 short-toed larks, 2 red-throated pipits, a whinchat, a Northern wheatear, 5 isabelline wheatears, a reed warbler, 2 whitethroats, 3 willow warblers, 10 isabelline shrikes and 2 male red-backed shrikes. 2 Egyptian nightjars were seen after dark, along with 24 European nightjars (a record for this site?). In the Al Wathba wood, earlier in the day, were 8 European nightjars, 3 rufous bush chats, 2 whitethroats and a willow warbler.

On 3rd May, MPG produced 3 European rollers, a male European nightjar, a redstart, 5 spotted flycatchers and 3 isabelline shrike, with a whinchat and a male red-backed shrike at the Health and Fitness Club.

On 6th May, MPG and the Health and Fitness Club produced a crested honey buzzard, 2 red-throated pipits, a flava wagtail, a European nightjar, a European roller, a hoopoe, 16 spotted flycatchers, 2 nightingales, 3 golden orioles, a redstart, 3 whinchats, 8 willow warblers, 32 marsh warblers, 4 whitethroats, a clamorous reed warbler, 6 Upcher's warblers, a

female red-breasted shrike, a masked shrike, 2 isabelline shrikes, an ortolan and a pink-dyed yellow-throated sparrow. At Bateen Airbase Park were a male golden oriole, 2 spotted flycatchers, 3 marsh warblers and a willow warbler, while a European roller, a nightingale, a Blyth's reed warbler, 10 marsh warblers, a barred warbler, a lesser whitethroat, a willow warbler, a golden oriole, 8 spotted flycatchers, 2 red-backed shrike and an isabelline shrike were in the Hilton/Spinney's area.

On 7th May, MPG had a kestrel, a hoopoe, a yellow wagtail, a nightingale, a rufous bushchat, a redstart, a Blyth's reed warbler, 19 marsh warblers, a clamorous reed warbler, 4 olivaceous warblers, 2 Upcher's warblers, a whitethroat, a golden oriole, 23 spotted flycatchers, an isabelline shrike, a red-backed shrike, a red-backed / isabelline shrike hybrid and a masked shrike.

On 8th May, at least one Blyth's reed warbler, was in Abu Dhabi, while a walk around the Intercontinental / Hilton / Spinneys area located 4 turnstones, 25 white cheeked terns, a European nightjar, a rufous bushchat, a thrush nightingale, 4 nightingales (2 in full song), a redstart, a rock thrush, 15 marsh warblers, a whitethroat, 2 willow warblers, an isabelline shrike and a male red-backed shrike.

Also on 8th May, Al Wathba Camel Track produced 102 marsh warblers, one reed warbler, 3 Upcher's warblers, single red-backed and woodchat shrikes, 2 isabelline shrikes, 3 European rollers, one Northern wheatear and one isabelline wheatear.

On 9th May, the wood at Al Wathba Camel Track had 2 whitethroats, 2 Upcher's warblers, a willow warbler, 3 rufous bushchats, 4 spotted flycatchers and an Arabian babbler. In the fields were 37 Pacific golden plovers, 9 chestnut bellied sandgrouse, 3 European roller, a Northern wheatear, a isabelline wheatear, 70+ marsh warblers, an isabelline shrike, 2 southern grey shrike and a woodchat shrike. A male European nightjar, a thrush nightingale, 2 nightingales, a redstart, a Blyth's reed warbler, 8 marsh warblers, an Upcher's warbler, 7 spotted flycatchers, 2 barred warblers, an isabelline shrike and a male red-backed shrike were in the Hilton/Spinney's area.

2 pairs of Hume's wheatears were at Le Mercure hotel on Jebel Hafit, with pale crag martins nesting in the rocks and one under the main door canopy of the hotel.

On 11th May, an inspection of Mushrif Palace Gardens found a European nightjar, female cuckoo, 3 whitethroats, 4 spotted flycatchers, 19 marsh warblers and a honey buzzard sp.

On 14th May, MPG held a female little bittern, nightingale, female red-backed shrike, 21 marsh warblers, a whitethroat and a willow warbler, and a surprise in the form of a pied flycatcher (4th record).

On 15th May, the little bittern was found again while in other parts of the capital were 3 barred warblers, a garden warbler, European roller, lesser whitethroat, blackcap, 2 singing nightingales, 10+ spotted flycatchers and a male and a female red-backed shrike.

On 16th May 50+ bank mynahs were at a colony of

up to 70 nest-holes in an old well in Al Ain's Qattara Oasis,

On 17th May, MPG had a honey buzzard sp., a rufous bush chat, a nightingale, 6 marsh warblers, a Hume's yellow-browed warbler and 3 spotted flycatchers.

On 18th May, the Hume's yellow-browed warbler was still in Mushrif Palace Gardens, along with a male blackcap, a male barred warbler in song, 3+ willow warblers, 20+ marsh warblers, a nightingale and a red-backed shrike.

On 19th May, a honey buzzard sp. was in MPG, as were 2-3 spotted flycatchers, a blackcap and 10+ marsh warblers (but no Hume's).

On 21st May, 6 marsh warblers and a spotted flycatcher were in the Intercontinental/Hilton area, while 120+ white-cheeked terns and 6 Saunder's little terns were off the Corniche. A female golden oriole was showing well in Mushrif Palace Gardens. Also present there were a late Upcher's warbler, 12+ marsh warblers and 2 spotted flycatchers. A few pallid swifts, adults very tatty, newly fledged young pristine, were still hawking low overhead late in the day.

On 22nd May, a sedge warbler was at Mushrif Palace Gardens, along with a rufous bush robin, 2 nightingales, a spotted flycatcher and the little bittern seen earlier. Late in the day, a female rosefinch was found, 1st for the year.

The Intercontinental/Hilton area produced a Western reef heron, an osprey, a singing thrush nightingale and 3 marsh warblers. 2 nightingales (one singing) were in Mushrif Palace Gardens.

A round up of the

Summer's sightings will appear in the Sept. issue of Focus.

This report is based on the *Twitchers' Guide* newsletter, compiled by Simon Aspinall and Peter Hellyer, which can be found on the Ministry of Information website at [www.uaeinteract.com](http://www.uaeinteract.com) Records, please, to [Hellyer@emirates.net.ae](mailto:Hellyer@emirates.net.ae) OR [Hudhud10@emirates.net.ae](mailto:Hudhud10@emirates.net.ae)

## Forthcoming ENHG Field Trips

### 2003 Summer Field Trips

The approach of summer also means the approach of summer field trips for ENHG members. Specifically, three trips are planned during the month of July, on the Thursday-Friday weekends of 10 and 11 July, 17 and 18 July and 24 and 25 July 2003. One of these outings will be a day trip, while the other two will be overnights.

Anyone interested should sign up at one of the Group's meetings during the month of June, or alternatively contact Charles Laubach at [claubach@afridi-ngell.com](mailto:claubach@afridi-ngell.com).

Surprisingly, successful field trips can be conducted during the heat of the summer if over exertion is avoided. Camping is possible at high altitudes.

The overnight destinations will be the mountains of the Ruus Al Jibal about which Gary Feulner spoke on 1 April 2003. The campsites will be at altitudes in excess of 1,000 meters. This will be a unique chance to visit traditional mountain villages, some of which are still inhabited.

The day trip will be a trip either to the mangroves at Dabaiyyah or to the beleaguered and dwindling gazelle population in the

southern loop area near Jebel Ali. The mangrove area features birds, fish and invertebrates, while the southern loop trip has consistently resulted in gazelle sightings in the past, plus other occasional surprises (bats, eagle owls and dhubs, for example). We could even combine both in a long trip, if people have enough energy.

More details will be provided to those who sign up, along with exact schedules and tips on what to bring. For members who have been on these trips in the past, new features will be included.

## ITEMS FOR SALE ON ENHG STALL

**Abu Dhabi Bird checklist**  
10Dhs (free if spend over 50dhs)

**Birds of Europe**  
100Dhs (bargain - covers most birds in this region)

**Birdlife in Oman**  
120Dhs (Beautiful photographs by the Eriksens)

**Birdwatching Guide to Oman** 95 Dhs

(copies signed by Eriksens & Sargeants)

**Birdwatching Guide to UAE** 50Dhs (reduced from 60 Dhs) (Author: our chairman, Simon - get him to sign copies)

**Breeding Birds of UAE**  
SB 30Dhs / HB 60Dhs (again reduced) Author: Simon - get him to sign copies.

**Children's Encyclopaedia**  
100Dhs (facts about the region - aimed at the kids)

**Hidden Riches**  
150Dhs (Peter Hellyer's highly readable, informative book - get him to sign your copy)

**Seashells**

30Dhs (useful little waterproof guide to the region's shells)

**Sea Turtles**

20Dhs (find out about our local turtles)

**Indigenous Trees**

30Dhs (Reza Khan, Director of Dubai Zoo - know your local trees)

**Whales and Dolphins**

120Dhs (Collins latest photographic guide)

**Wild about Mammals**

40Dhs (Marijcke Jongbloed mammals of the UAE)

**Plant Checklist**

25Dhs (Marijcke Jongbloed - Know your local wild plants)

**The island of Abu Al Abyad**, Dh 125 Edited by Richard Perry

Published by the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency, ERWDA, this book is a detailed look at the environment, wildlife, archaeology and geology of the UAE's largest island.

**Feast of Dates**

Dh 150

Written by leading archaeologist Dan Potts, and published by Trident Press, this book outlines the history of date cultivation and also examines the role of the date, and the date palm, in the traditional life of the people of the region.

**Cards**

15Dhs per pack (great to send home - local scenes)

**ENHG T shirts, Caps, Sweatshirts**

25Dhs, 25Dhs, 35Dhs (Buy any 2 – get 10Dhs off)

**Lectures**

**3<sup>rd</sup> June**

Work of UNESCO in Region  
*Dr. Benno Boer*

**17<sup>th</sup> June**

Bird research in India  
*Dr. Salim Javed*

**SUMMER RECESS**

**2<sup>nd</sup> September**

Nature reserves in Jordan  
*Khaldown Kiwan*

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