

focus

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Emirates Natural History Group

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

EDITORIAL

I am very happy to report that we have three new members on the Committee. They are Roxanna McLennan, Andrew Bean and Hazel Spencer. We are really grateful to them and are very much looking forward to their help and enthusiasm in the work of the ENHG committee. Roxy has already agreed to look after our corporate sponsorship programme. This is a vital role as the funding is necessary to publish *Tribulus* and provide funding for our research and conservation fund. Please note that any paid-up member may seek membership of the Committee. We are always on the lookout for new initiatives and help.

Chris and Joan have been faithfully manning the ENHG book table for the last four years, and understandably they would now like to have a break! We are therefore appealing for a volunteer or volunteers to take over this job from those members who regularly attend the lecture series. Anyone wishing to help out, please contact myself or any other committee member. You may like to have a word with Chris Bettney or Joan Anderson to see exactly what is involved!

The scientific activities of ENHG members and their major contribution to scholarship in the UAE is apparent from the author list in the latest edition of our scientific journal *Tribulus* which is about to be published, and form the 4th Annual Archaeological Seminar in Al Ain (see details below). Many of the contributions in *Tribulus* are from amateurs in the sense that the authors may be studying and publishing material outside their profession or formal training. Indeed we encourage contributions from members. Anyone who has made some interesting observations or discoveries, please feel free to write them up. Don't feel intimidated ... the editors are only too happy to assist! Similarly please feel free to come along to the archaeological seminar and hear the experts discuss this season's discoveries.

Drew Gardner

Sheikh Mubarak Prize and Bish Brown Award

Sheikh Mubarak Prize

At its February meeting, the Group Committee selected Dr. Michele Ziolkowski (more commonly known as 'Ski') as the winner of the 2005 Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Annual Award for Natural History.

The Award was instituted by our Patron, H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan, and is named after his father, the former Minister of Interior. The Award is given by the Group to a person who is judged to have made a major contribution, through original scientific research and publication, to knowledge of the UAE's natural history and archaeology.

Ski has been closely involved in the archaeology of the UAE for over ten years, first for her BA, then her MA, then her PhD, as a student from the University of Sydney, in Australia, with her PhD being given for a thesis on the Islamic sites of the UAE's East Coast.

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FRONT COVER PICTURE

Photograph: Dune shapes in the Empty Quarter
Photographer: Drew Gardner

Following her marriage to Sheikh Abdullah bin Suhail al-Sharqi of Fujairah (whose uncle built the well-known, and picturesque, fortified dwelling in Fujairah's Wadi Hayl), Ski moved to Fujairah and has continued her research into the archaeology and ethnography of the East Coast, and Fujairah in particular. This has included excavations as well as extensive recording, in particular of the forts and the petroglyphs (rock art) in the mountains, on which she is the acknowledged world expert. She has also acted as a guide and companion for ENHG weekend trips both to Wadi Hayl and in search of new petroglyphs in the Hatta area.

Ski has published widely in academic journals overseas and has also contributed several papers to the Group journal, *Tribulus*, while she is also co-editor (with Peter Hellyer) of the Proceedings of the UAE's Annual Symposium on Recent Archaeological Discoveries in the Emirates, of which the first volume has been published, with the second volume currently at press.

Bish Brown Award

The Bish Brown Award is given annually to a deserving person who has contributed substantially towards the ENHG and / or to the subjects we cover including the fauna, flora, archaeology and geology of the UAE.

There can be no more deserving person than this year's winner, our own Allestree Fisher. Allestree is in many ways the cornerstone of the ENHG in Abu Dhabi. Not only does he organize our field trip programme, but he also leads the majority of the trips from the front, giving generously of his time and knowledge to all. His expertise in field botany is unmatched in our group now that we have lost Gary Brown.

Alllestree has been a conscientious record taker, increasing our knowledge of plant distribution and phenology. We offer our heart felt congratulations, and are looking forward to Allestree's return.

Culture and Heritage Authority chief meets ENHG Committee

Much to the surprise of Committee members, just as the February meeting was getting under way, we were visited by the Director-General of Abu Dhabi's new Culture and Heritage Authority, Mohammed Khalaf Al Mazroui, accompanied by a group of officials from the Cultural Foundation.

As members will know, the Cultural Foundation is in the process of being merged into the new Authority, which will also absorb the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey, ADIAS, and the Department of Antiquities and Tourism in the Eastern Region (Al Ain).

As part of this process, there are likely to be major changes in the way the Cultural Foundation will be run (and we hope that one of these will be a revising of the room-bookings procedure, so that Group meetings don't find that our usual room is suddenly given to others at short notice!).

The Director-General gave his reassurance that the Group was welcome to continue to meet in the Foundation in the future, and he looks forward to continuing relations between the Group and the Authority.

The Board of the Authority was formally announced at the beginning of February. It is chaired by Sheikh Sultan bin Tahnoun Al Nahyan, who is also the Chairman of the Tourism Authority. Among other Board members are a couple of names that may be familiar to the Group. The Deputy Chairman is Zaki Nusseibeh, who was recently made an Honorary member of the Group, and has closely followed our activities for many years, while another member is Dr. Frauke Heard, one of the Group's founder-members and someone who has often given us talks in the past.

Your committee is confident that relations between the Authority and the Group will develop rapidly, to the mutual benefit of both sides.

Peter Hellyer

Inter-emirates Weekend: Thursday-Friday, 16/17th March 2006

Each year in March/April the UAE's three Natural History Groups – Emirates Natural History Group Abu Dhabi, Emirates Natural History Group Al Ain and the Dubai Natural History Group – get together for an educational yet social weekend involving a dinner and various activities and trips. It is a chance to meet up with people/old friends from the other groups. The event is organised annually by one of the groups in rotation. This year it is the turn of the Dubai Natural History Group.

IEW 2006 will be based at the Ras Al-Khaimah Hotel,

Ras Al-Khaimah and the programme will begin on Thursday morning, March 16. The hotel has made a block booking of rooms for the weekend on a first-come first-served basis. However, in view of the increased tourism in RAK and the peak season date of IEW, it will be necessary to confirm and guarantee your booking by the middle of February 2006. We recognize that not everyone finds it ideal to plan that far ahead, but the hotel cannot hold the rooms on any other basis.

Hotel rates (per night) are:

Double Room/Twin Room – Dh 350 (inclusive of breakfast & tax)

Single Room – Dh 300 (inclusive of breakfast & tax)

Children below 12 years may stay free in their parents' rooms

To make a reservation, either e-mail the hotel – rakhotel@emirates.net.ae or fax on 07-236-2990 marked 'Attention Reservations – Johnson'. Hotel phone number is 07-236-2999. Mention Dubai Natural History Group – Inter-Emirates Weekend when you make your booking.

The present status of the bookings is that we are almost full and are going on to a reserve list. However, please continue to book up to the middle of February even if you are put on the reserve list. We will try and sort out rooms for you, even if we book you in at an alternative hotel not far away.

On Thursday evening there will be a buffet dinner (Dh 60 per person). Packed lunches are available for Thu and Fri at Dh 55 per person per lunch and menus will be sent to participants.

On the evenings of Wednesday 15th and Thursday 16th excerpts from Arabia's Cycles of Life series will be shown. Copies of the DVDs will be available at wholesale prices to members.

On the evening of Thursday 16th we will be holding the Inter-Emirates photographic competition (please refer to the next newsletter item for more information).

Activities already planned for the Thursday and Friday include:

- An in-depth visit to the Dhayah area on the Friday – a cross section of the environment, archaeology, history and culture of Ras Al Khaimah to be led by Christian Velde
- A trip into the mangroves to be led by Dick Hornby on the Friday
- Birdwatching trips on both Thursday and Friday to sites such as Khor Al Beidah, Al Jeezeerah Khor and Hamraniyah fields etc to be led by David Bradford
- Shelling at Rams beach led by Anne Millen
- Off-road driving "over the top" from RAK to Dibba, via Wadi Bih (Friday only) led by Peter van Amsterdam. People going on this trip will need to bring their passports with them to show at the border post.

- A mountain hike on the Thursday to be led by Barbara Couldrey – she will take participants to the Ras Al Khaimah Museum to see models of the pottery kilns and then on to Wadi Hagil itself where the pottery kilns are located. From there a walk to a waterfall.
- Dhow trips in and out of the mangroves to photograph birds and other wild life
- Visits to RAK Museum - this museum is always well worth a visit
- Brigitte Howarth will be arranging some insect activities around the hotel

For more details please contact DNHG Vice Chairman, Valerie Chalmers on 04-3494816 or valeriechalmers@hotmail.com.

IEW 2006 Photographic Competition – Guidelines and Judging

The Inter-Emirates Photographic Competition is open to amateur photographers who are members of the Abu Dhabi chapter of the ENHG, the Al Ain chapter of the ENHG and the Dubai Natural History Group. Participants are invited to enter a maximum of two (returnable) photographs on any natural history subject (e.g. archaeology, architecture, birds, culture and heritage, geology, insects, landscapes, mammals, plants, reptiles etc) which has been taken in the UAE and Oman. Photographs should be a minimum size of 5 inches x 7 inches (125mm x 180mm) and should be mounted. Each photographer is requested to write the following information on the back of each photograph:

- Photographer
- Phone number
- Email address
- Title of photograph
- To specify where photograph was taken e.g. Dubai Creek and not UAE
- Approximately when the photograph was taken

Photographs may be presented to IEW 2006 organisers any time from Wednesday 15th March until 5 p.m. on Thursday 16th March and they will be on display prior to the buffet dinner on 16th.

Each individual attending IEW 2006 will be given a voting form to vote for up to 3 entries. The three winning entries will be announced during the evening and then the prizes will be presented.

4th Annual Archaeological Symposium

The 4th Annual Symposium on Recent Archaeological (and Palaeontological) Discoveries in the Emirates will be held in Al Ain on Wednesday 29th March (afternoon)

and Thursday 30th March (morning).

The Symposium is being organised by the Zayed Centre for Heritage and History, while the programme is being organised by Peter Hellyer, Executive Director of the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey, ADIAS, and Archaeology Expert for the federal Ministry of Information and Culture.

Papers being presented will cover recent discoveries and research from throughout the Emirates, with several papers dealing with work in Abu Dhabi Emirate.

As in previous years, the Zayed Centre for Heritage and History welcomes anyone from the Emirates Natural History Group who would like to attend the event, either in part or in full, although, unfortunately, it is not possible for accommodation in Al Ain to be provided.

Further information is available from Peter Hellyer (peter@extinfo.gov.ae, 050-642-4357).

Anyone wishing to come should register their intention of doing so, to simplify planning with regards to seating and meals (which will be free).

Peter Hellyer

Latest Tribulus Published

The latest issue of our Group journal, Tribulus, has just been published. Numbered Volume 15.2, it completes 15 years of uninterrupted publication (although, as usual, it's just slightly late!)

Contents include a study of ghaf forests in the Dubai Desert Conservation reserve, by David Gallacher and Jeffrey Hill, of Zayed University, a report on ancient mangrove swamps in the area of Dubai Internet City, by Anja Zander and Helmut Bruckner, from Germany, and a paper on the history of surveying the waters of the Gulf, by former British Navy Lt.-Commander Andrew David, who did some of the mapping himself, over fifty years ago. This paper is illustrated by photographs of some of the earliest charts, made in the 1820s, courtesy of Britain's Hydrographic Office, many never published before. Shorter items include a note on albino tadpoles in the Hajar Mountains, by Gary Feulner, new records and observations on Spoon Worms, by Dick Hornby, a new lizard for the UAE, by Drew Gardner, and a note on a World War Two plane crash at Dhadnah, on the East Coast, by Peter Hellyer and Laurence Garey (with substantial help from the Air Historical Branch of the British Royal Air Force). There are also the usual short notes, book reviews and list of recent publications.

The journal is free to paid-up ENHG members, with additional copies being available at Dh 15 (or, for an annual subscription for two issues, post-paid, Dh 50).

Peter Hellyer

ENHG Membership Renewals

A reminder

The annual membership of the ENHG (100 dhs) is valid for the calendar year; from January through to December. A period of grace following this time is always given to members for renewal – this year the Committee decided that as of 1st March members who have not renewed will be removed from the mailing list ... so for those who have forgotten to renew there is not long to go!

You can get an electronic copy of the membership form by emailing newsletter@chirri2000.com. Forms and membership subscriptions can be posted, given to any Committee member, or passed on to the Membership Secretary at one of the meetings.

ENHG Family Activity Weekend, February 23/24th

This weekend camping trip is called a family activity weekend because it takes place close to Abu Dhabi and includes activities for both adults and kids. You don't have to be a family (or get one) to come. Basically there will be lots of people with lots to do.

The site chosen is north of Al Wathba, about 20km from the main Al Ain highway. It's about an hour from Abu Dhabi and is situated in an area of large rolling dunes. A 4x4 is required and tyres will have to be deflated, so remember to bring a compressor. A ferry service from the parking area to the site could be provided for members with saloon cars.

One of the activities planned is some basic sand driving. Therefore, it's a good opportunity for members who have little experience in the sand to come along and practise. However, space in the sand driving course will be limited and open only to people using their own vehicles, which should be equipped with basic sand driving kit.

Other activities planned are photography, GPS navigation in the desert, night navigation, a plant and tree walk, animal tracking, bird watching and star gazing.

This is our fifth activity camp and we always try to involve as many members as possible. Therefore, if you sign up, you will have to agree to organise/help with an activity, or elect to do one of the boring mundane jobs around the camp.

ENHG Talk: 21st February

Dr Andrew Petersen (UAE University), will be the guest speaker at the meeting on Tuesday, 21st February. He will be discussing the 'Ottoman Hajj Route in Jordan'.

The talk will describe a series of Ottoman forts (C16th-C18th) in Jordan and discuss their relationship to the

ITEMS ON SALE

AT THE ENHG STALL

- **The Emirates – A Natural History, 300 Dhs**
The first complete referencing guide to the wildlife of the UAE. 580 colour photos.
- **Marine Atlas of Abu Dhabi, 280 dhs**
- **Jebel Hafit – A Natural History, 100Dhs.**
- **Abu Dhabi Bird checklist 10Dhs.**
(Free if you spend over 50Dhs!)
- **Emirates Bird Report, 50Dhs.**
- **Birdlife in Oman, 120Dhs.**
Beautiful photographs by the Eriksens.
- **Bird watching Guide to Oman, 95Dhs**
(Copies signed by Eriksens & Sargeants).
- **Breeding Birds of UAE, 60Dhs.**
Author: Simon Aspinall
- **Seashells, 30Dhs.**
A useful little waterproof guide to the region's shells.
- **Wild about Reptiles, 60Dhs.**
- **Wild about Mammals, 40Dhs.**
Marijcke Jongbloed, mammals of the UAE.
- **Comprehensive Guide to the Flora of the UAE, 100 Dhs**
- **Plant Checklist, 25Dhs.**
Marijcke Jongbloed - Know your local wild plants.
- **Pests – Find out what's in and around your home**
- **Children's books: Yaw the Wildcat; Hayat the Leopard**
- **ENHG T-shirts/golf (polo) shirts/caps.**
25Dhs/35Dhs/10Dhs.
Buy any 2 – get 10Dhs off.

Muslim pilgrimage. The talk will also look at the forts within the wider context of Ottoman-Portuguese rivalry in Arabia.

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Lectures

21 February 2006

The Ottoman Hajj Route in Jordan.
Andrew Petersen

7th March 2006

Julfar – from a Sasanian outpost to a medieval city

Christian Velder

14th March 2006

TBA

Field Trips

23/24 February 2006
Family weekend, North of Al Wathba.

Alan McGee

2/3 March 2006
TBA

16/17 March 2006

Inter-emirates weekend, RAK

Dubai NHG

Corporate Sponsors of the ENHG - 2005

The following companies are supporting the ENHG's activities in the region. We hope you as ENHG members will in turn support these companies whenever you can.

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ADCO



Al Fahim Group

Al Nasser Holdings



British Petroleum

Kanoo Group



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Members' Items for sale

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