

focus



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Emirates Natural History Group

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

EDITORIAL

Editorial December 2007

A very Happy New Year and successful 2008 to everyone!

The Inter-Emirates weekend meeting is coming up fast and will be on the 28 Feb to 1 March 2008 at Mafraq Hotel. Please do consider coming along for all or part of the event. If you need accommodation, please book it directly with the hotel as soon as possible, mentioning the ENHG. It is a great opportunity to meet the members of the Dubai and Al Ain groups and there will be a full programme of field trips, workshops and social events. There will also be a photo competition on the theme of Natural History and the outdoors of the UAE, so sort through those photos!

The ENHG membership runs on a calendar year and so the 2008 fees are now due. Please use the form in this edition of Focus to join or renew your membership of the ENHG. Alternatively see the membership secretary or a committee member at the next meeting you come along to.

Sheikh Mubarak and Bish Brown Awards

Nominations are invited from Group members for the annual awards made by the Emirates Natural History Group, the Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Annual Award for Natural History and the Bish Brown Award.

The Sheikh Mubarak Award was created by our Patron, H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan, in honour of his father, former Minister of Interior Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed, and is presented to a nominee who, in the opinion of the ENHG Committee, has made a major contribution to knowledge of the country's natural history, archaeology or history, through the carrying out of original research, supported by extensive publication.

The Bish Brown Award was established by two former officers of the ENHG, Terry Adams and Caroline Adams, in memory of the Group's founder, the late J.N.B. 'Bish' Brown, and is presented to a person who, in the opinion of the ENHG Committee, has made a major contribution to promoting awareness about the country's natural history, archaeology or history, through increasing public involvement and participation.

The Awards are open to any individual, whether or not they are members of the ENHG, or of the al Ain Chapter of the ENHG and the Dubai Natural History Group, with the exception of serving officers of the ENHG (i.e. Chairman, Vice Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary) and nominations may be made by any member of the three Groups.

Drew Gardner

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FRONT COVER PICTURE

Photograph: Miocene cliffs at Jebel Barakah, western Abu Dhabi

Photographer: Drew Gardner

Members' Sightings

All ENHG members are invited to submit documentation of observations of flora and fauna in the UAE, preferably with captions, including locality information and dates.



Plain Tiger Caterpillar, feeding on *Calotropis procera*, near Al Hayer, 14 Dec. 2007--unusual at this season.



A ground mantis of the genus *Eremiaphila*, near the Jebel Buhays tombs, 14 Dec. 2007. These well camouflaged insects are related to the praying mantises.

Above two photos by Mai Yoke Taylor

Day Trip to Jebel Buhays

Friday, 14 December, 2007

At 7:45 the group convened behind Popeye's. The participants checked in with Allestree Fisher, who provided a useful handout of where we were going and what we would see along the way. We set off about 8:00 in 8 vehicles with Allestree and Pam Fisher in the lead and Keith and Mai Yoke Taylor serving as the sweep at the end. We had a pit stop at the petrol station near the airport and then continued on past Sweihan.

There were many date and vegetable gardens in the valleys off the sides of the road as we approached Al Hayer. Just before reaching there, we had our first natural history stop. It was amazing how much we could see between the road and the fence a short ways up a dune. There were tracks of many little critters such as lizards, scorpions, gerbils, and some kind of bird. We even saw a couple of white spotted lizards (Schmidt's fringe-toed Lizards) that were not particularly shy, so several of us got good photos.



Schmidt's fringe-toed lizard *Acanthodactylus schmidti*, a typical lizard of sandy habitats throughout the UAE.
photo: Chris Jones

Allestree's handout listed a number of plants to look for. Some of the plants spotted at this first spot, with Allestree's assistance, were salt bushes, dark green clumps of Desert Broom (*Leptadenia*), low-lying *Dipterygium glaucum*, and some tall ghaf trees (*Prosopis cineraria*) across the road. The most obvious plant spotted here was a large *Calotropis procera* shrub in bloom, with attractive purple blossoms. Observed closely, this plant seemed to be a mainstay for local insect populations.



Sodom Apple, *Calotropis procera*
photo: Chris Jones



Ant feeding on *Calotropis procera*
photo: Mai Yoke Taylor

We drove on and stopped a little further on just after leaving the Al Ain road and turning toward Shwaib. In the middle of the road, various types of trees were growing, and there was a *Tecomela alata* with large orange flowers. It was a cultivated version of the native tree that grows in wadis.



Tecomela alata
photo: Chris Jones

After passing Shwaib, we drove off the paved road and up a well graded gravel road to the left. It brought us up to some great views of sand dunes. While we were here, Stefan Beck explained that the road follows a right-of-way in which are buried one gas and two water pipes that go from Fujairah to Al Ain. The water comes from desalination plants in Fujairah, and the gas is being transported in the opposite direction to port facilities in Fujairah. Design work has begun for a third water line and a second gas line in the same right-of-way, and there is even talk of a crude oil pipeline going through here as well, as a potential back-up route for exporting the UAE's oil. Although these strategic pipelines seem entirely unobtrusive along this desert track, Stefan pointed out that the work necessary to put additional lines through the mountains to the east will unfortunately result in major destruction of wadi habitat—such is the nature of development.



Sand Dunes near Shwaib photo: Chris Jones

On the road again we drove through Al Madam and left the sand dunes behind. We soon reached Jebel Buhays via a short rocky road to our left. Some people found some very nice fossils of gastropods as well as intriguing pieces of flint rock, which looked just right for the construction of stone tools.



Gastropod Fossil
photo: Keith Taylor

We then drove part way around the mountain to see some tombs from the late 5th and 4th millennium BC, which is the oldest known occupation of the UAE. According to Allestree's handout, "Buhays is the most significant burial site in the country, as it represents continuous burials from the Late Neolithic down to the end of the Iron Age." Some tombs were behind a fence in order to protect them, so we had to take our photos from outside there.



Excavated tombs at Jebel Buhays
photo: Chris Jones

As I was walking back toward the cars from the fenced area, another member of our group was coming from the other way and pointed out a man lying on the hillside some distance away. We wondered if he had fallen or stopped to take a photo. He held the side of his face as he approached the others, and it turned out to be Keith, who had taken a fall and was bleeding on the right side of his face near his eye. Luckily, there was both a nurse and a doctor in our group, and they were able to stop the bleeding and bandage his face. This is the 2nd trip in two months this year (see last month's Focus) on which it has been very handy to have a first-aid kit and medical assistants in our midst. Keith had lost one lens to his glasses, so at the end of the trip other members of the group took turns driving his vehicle on to the next stop and back to Abu Dhabi.

After the Jebel Buhays stop, we drove back across the paved highway and drove on a very rocky road around to the back side of Jebel Emalah, which is the 2nd most important Jebel Hafit Period site. It was now after 1 p.m., so we ate lunch and people wandered off in various directions to look at the tombs and wadis. After this restful break, most of the group set off back to Abu Dhabi while a few stayed to continue exploring the mountain.

Thanks, Allestree, for a well-organized and informative trip. And thanks, Keith, for your assistance with the names of species and further details on Stefan's talk.

Chris Jones

Inter-Emirates Weekend Update

- **Venue: Mafraq Hotel**
- **Dates: 28 February – 01 March 2008**
- **Rate per night (incl. breakfast, not dinner)**
638 Dhs – Double Room
580 Dhs – Single Room
- **Provisional Program:**
 - Elephant tracks—full day (Mark B., Drew G.)
 - Liwa Dunes tour—full day (Andrew B., Dick H.)
 - Sand ecology, near Sheikh's Palace on Hameem Rd.—half day (Allestree F.)
 - Birding, site tba—half day (Andrew Twyman)
 - Plant identification near hotel (Allestree F.)
 - Saltbushes—short walk near hotel (Dr. Shahina Ghazanfar)
 - Light-trapping insects near hotel—evening (Brigitte H.)
 - Star-gazing—evening, after dinner (leader tba)
- **Workshops:**
 - GPS Workshop
 - Taxonomy / Plant identification with Dr. Shahina Ghazanfar, professional botanist from Kew Gardens & author of The Flora of Oman Vols 1 and 2.
 - Work under the microscope
 - Herbarium and photography for children
- **Competitions:**
 - Photo competitions for the young and old.
 - Painting / drawing for children

Websites of General Interest

ADACH website link to Cultural Foundation activities:

<http://www.cultural.org.ae/e/>

Website of Natural History Group of Al Ain, featuring archives of Tribulus and all three NHGs' newsletters:

www.enhg.org

Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey:

<http://www.adias-uae.com>

Website of UAE Bird Recorder Tommy Pedersen:

<http://www.tommypedersen.com>

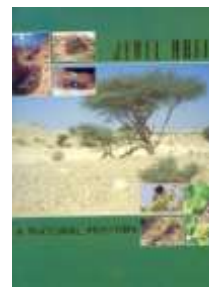
Blog of Al Ain Amateur Photographer Amer Abu Kuhail:

www.someone1986.blogspot.com

Comprehensive US-Based Species Locator:

<http://zipcodezoo.com/default.asp>

Book for Donation to Schools



Copies of the book, Jebel Hafit – A Natural History, published by the ENHG, are available as donations to schools, colleges, and universities in the UAE. Please provide any committee member with contact information for any educational institutions you would like to furnish with a copy of this book. Parents of school children and school representatives are invited to attend an ENHG lecture and request a copy of this book from any committee member in attendance.

ITEMS ON SALE

AT THE ENHG STALL

- The Emirates – A Natural History, 350Dhs.
The first complete referencing guide to the wild life of the UAE. 580 colour photos.
- Jebel Hafit – A Natural History, 100Dhs.
- Abu Dhabi Bird checklist 10Dhs.
(Free if you spend over 100Dhs!)
- Emirates Bird Report, 50Dhs.
- Breeding Birds of UAE, by Simon Aspinall, 50Dhs.
- Wild about Mammals, by Marijcke Jongbloed, 40Dhs. *Guide to mammals of the UAE.*
- Comprehensive Guide to the Flora of the UAE, 100Dhs.
- Plant Checklist, by Marijcke Jongbloed, 25Dhs.
Know your local wild plants.
- Pests, 35Dhs.
Find out what's in and around your home.
- Children's books: Yaw the Wildcat; Hayat the Leopard, 15Dhs.
- 2008 bird calendar, 30Dhs.
A must for yourself ... and a perfect gift.
- Reef Fishes of the UAE, 50Dhs.
- Feast of Dates, 100Dhs.
- Sir Bani Yas, 100Dhs.
- UAE in Focus, 100Dhs.
- Common Birds in Oman, 100Dhs.
A beginner's field guide—can be helpful in identifying birds in the UAE as well.
- Sulphur, camels, and gunpowder, 90Dhs.

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP / MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Name: Mr./Mrs./ Ms.	<input type="text"/>	Membership No.	<input type="text"/>
Nationality	<input type="text"/>	Renewal	<input type="text"/>
		New	<input type="text"/>

P.O. Box No.:	<input type="text"/>	Town:	<input type="text" value="ibahD ubA"/>	Country:	<input type="text" value="UAE"/>
Office Tel:	<input type="text"/>	Mob:	<input type="text"/>	Res. Tel.:	<input type="text"/>
E-mail:	<input type="text"/>				
Employer:	<input type="text"/>	Occupation:	<input type="text"/>		
Date Paid:	<input type="text"/>	Signed:	<input type="text"/>		

Dhs 100.00 per family January – December 2008,
cash or cheque, payable to: *Emirates Natural History Group*

Send to:

The Membership Secretary
Emirates Natural History Group
P.O.Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, UAE

RECEIPT: MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY USE ONLY

Application/renewal received on / / , along with total cash / cheque of Dhs. 100/- from Mr/Mrs/Ms , representing ENHG subscription for 2008.

Subscription is valid till **31 December 2008**. Meetings are held at 7:30 pm on the first and third Tuesday of each month in the Cultural Foundation (usually in the large seminar (Ibn Majid) room on the 1st floor). Note: There are no meetings in July or August.

Authorized Signatory:

Membership No: _____

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Lectures

4th December
The Sundarbans –
Mangroves of
Bangladesh

Dr. Reza Khan

18th December
Lecture postponed due
to Eid holiday

8th January 7:00 PM
(Baynunah Hall, 2nd
Fl.)
New Fossil Discoveries
in Abu Dhabi's Western
Region

Dr. Andrew Hill

15th January 7:30 PM
An Introduction to the
History of the UAE

Peter Hellyer

Field Trips

30th November –
1st December

Overnight Camping
Trip to Two Trees

Andrew Bean

14th December

Full-Day Trip to Jebel
Buhays

Allestree Fisher

Corporate Sponsors of the ENHG - 2007

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

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BDO Patel



Dome International



Kanoo Group



National Bank of Abu
Dhabi



Readymix Abu Dhabi



URS Corporation



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WESCO Abu Dhabi



Members' Items for sale

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Newsletter contributions to: newsletter@chirri2000.com

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Yahoo Groups website

<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/AUHENHG/>