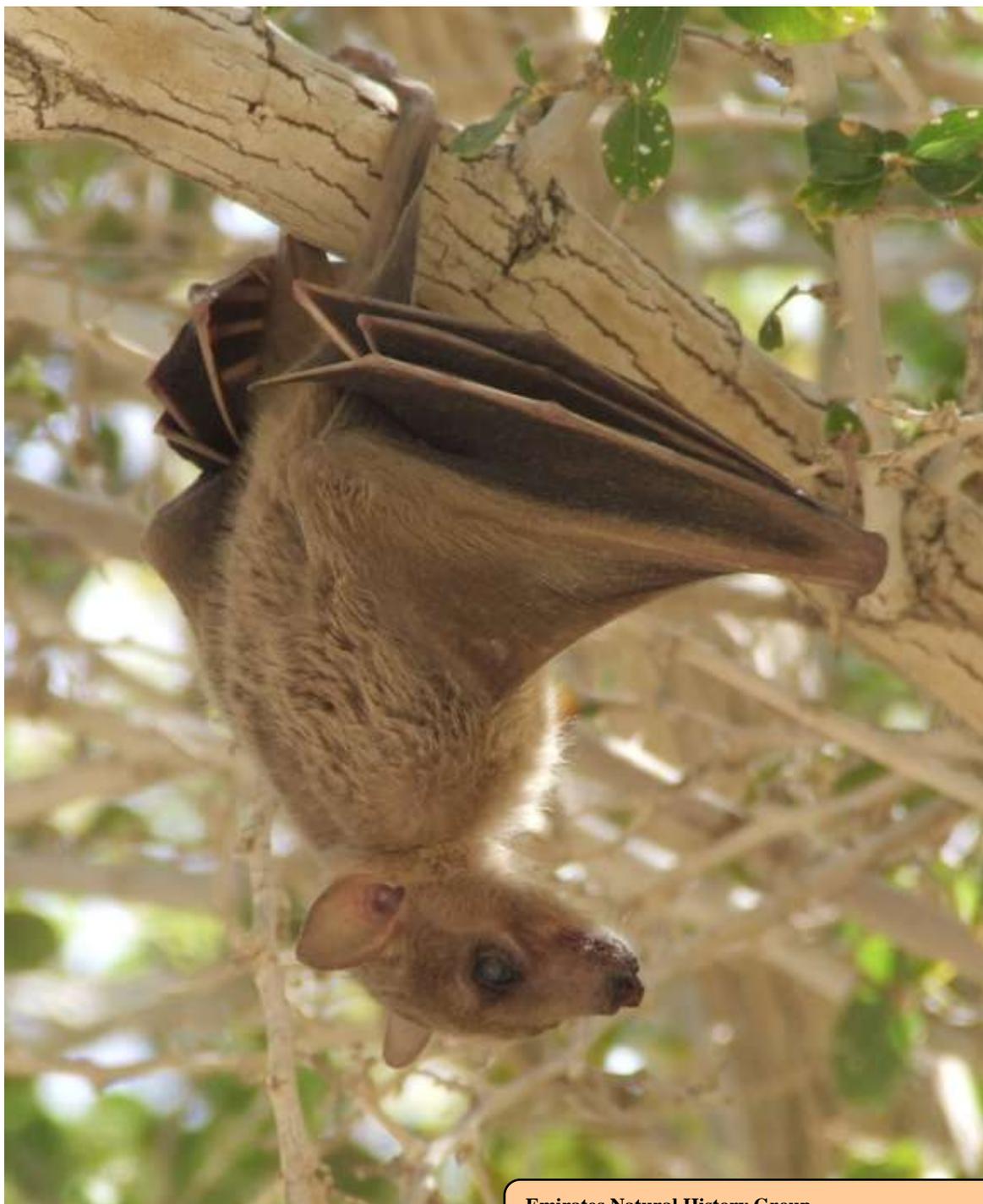


focus



Abu Dhabi, April 2009

Vol 33 (4)



Emirates Natural History Group

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

EDITORIAL

The annual Inter Emirates Weekend was a great success at Khor Fakkan and very much enjoyed by all. There was a good turnout from Abu Dhabi. Fortunately the weather, which looked extremely threatening on the Thursday, held off and none of the trips needed to be cancelled. We are most grateful to the DNHG and especially to Val Chalmers and Lena Linton for all their hard work in organizing the weekend. The Oceanic hotel has kindly extended special room rates to the members of all 3 NHGs through to the end of May (see p. 7).

An important event coming up is the celebration of Earth Day with a habitat mapping survey at the EMEG reserve near Ghantoot. This joint ENHG / EMEG event will take place on Friday April 24th. Details on p. 7. Please consider volunteering to help out on the survey. Full instructions and training will be given!

In these editorials, I have often urged members to submit photos (with locality and date) as these constitute records of fauna and flora that may be valuable. An excellent example is the picture on the front cover of Focus in November 2007 by Dick Hornby. Although mistakenly identified at the time, the beetle has now been recognised as a rare species, and illustrates the natural colours of the beetle in life (see full story on p. 6).

Lastly, we will be having our AGM on April 21, before the lecture by Dr Anf Ziadat.

Drew Gardner

IEW 2009 Buffet Dinner and Awards

The Inter-Emirates Weekend buffet dinner was held on the evening of Friday 27th. Minie van de Weg was our after-dinner speaker. She gave a most entertaining talk on some of her memories of her early days in the UAE, which was illustrated with many photographs, and it was enjoyed very much by all present.



Sheikh Mubarak Award winner Dr. Mark Beech, guest speaker Minie van de Weg and Bish Brown Award winner Major Ali Al Suweidi *Photo: Val Chalmers*

Minie's talk was followed by the presentation of the two natural history awards by ENHG Chairman Drew Gardner. The Sheikh Mubarak Award was presented to Dr. Mark Beech, Cultural Landscapes Manager, Historic Environment Department, Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, and the Bish Brown Award to

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FRONT COVER PICTURE

Photograph: Egyptian fruit bat, Roussettus aegyptiacus

Photographer: Bill Davies

This month's contributors

Stefan Beck, Chris Bettney, Will Bevington, Val Chalmers, Bill Davies, Kate Doherty, EMEG, Allestree Fisher, Michael Gillett, Liza Green, Chris Jones, Jeff Szuchman, May Yoke Taylor

Major Ali Saqar Al Suweidi, Head of the Emirates Marine Environmental Group. Both were well-deserving recipients of the awards.

Finally, the results of the IEW 2009 Photographic Competition were announced. There were five categories: Plants, Animals, Archaeology and Architecture, Geology and Landscapes and Culture. The winners each received a selection of books related to the categories. The Oceanic Hotel has also very kindly given each winner a complimentary voucher for buffet lunch and beach entrance for 2 people.

The IEW 2009 Photographic Competition winners were:

Plants Category – May Yoke Taylor, ENHG Abu Dhabi, with the winning photograph entitled 'Desert Hyacinth'.

Animals Category – Lamjed El-Kefi, DNHG, with the winning photograph entitled "Monitor Lizard".

Archaeology and Architecture Category - Dr Jerry Buzzell, ENHG Al Ain, with the winning photograph entitled "Mountain Village Street".

Landscape and Geology Category – Dr Drew Gardner, Chairman, ENHG Abu Dhabi, with the winning photograph entitled "Morning in Wadi Wiqa".

Culture Category – Dr Drew Gardner, with the winning photograph entitled: "They're off!"

Val Chalmers

(Winning photos will appear in May2009 focus. –Ed.)

IEW Trip to Wadi Wurrayah

Christophe Tourenq, the project manager for the EWS-WWF in Fujairah, led the Friday trip to Wadi Wurrayah. We were also lucky enough to have Maral Khaled Shuriqi, a geologist from the Environment department of Fujairah Municipality, come along as well. First, we stopped along the roadside before starting our drive up the wadi. Christophe told us about some of the animals that live in the wadi though we didn't really expect to see the Arabian leopard or a mountain gazelle. Just the week before our visit, Sheikh Hamad bin Mohammed, the Ruler of Fujairah, issued a law turning the valley into a sanctuary. Of course, Christophe and others doing research on the area are happy to get these results for their efforts and look forward to the valley being protected.

We drove up the wadi crossing through shallow areas of running water. Even though there was a track up the wadi, it was a bumpy ride in 4x4 vehicles. We reached a point where it would have been difficult to proceed because of the recent rains and flooding, so we parked and continued on foot. Maral explained the geology of the side walls. One side of the wadi was made up of conglomerate and the other of faulted volcanic rock.

We walked upstream passing an old burnt-out car which had traveled some distance down the wadi during the recent flooding. There were stepping stones across the areas where water was flowing, so most people didn't actually wade through the water unless they chose to. Our destination was a couple pools and a waterfall. People were swimming in the pools, and unfortunately, the rocks around them were covered with graffiti.

Christophe explained that someone had brought in tilapia from Africa, and it had nearly eradicated the native fish species. A biodegradable poison was used to get rid of the tilapia, and now the numbers of tiny native fish are increasing. We also saw the only species of wild orchid found in the UAE, as well as several species of dragonflies.

It would have been nice to have a swim, but it was time to go back to the hotel or go off to the next event.



Flesh fly on helleborine orchid, *Epipactis veratrifolia*

Photo: Chris Bettney

More information about the species found in this lovely green area can be found at:

<http://thenational.ae/article/20090326/PAGETHREE/927011057>

Chris Jones

Spring Vegetation along the UAE Border, March 13-14 2009

The Spring Annual Excursion this year looked at growth either side of the UAE Border, in Wadi Tarabat (Jebel Hafeet) and Hanging Gardens (Wilayat Mahdah).



The mouth of Wadi Tarabat, at the base of Jebel Hafit

Photo: AECFisher



Briefing on the flora at Wadi Tarabat

Photo: Stefan Beck

The group found a mass of *Convolvulus* sp., *Ochradenus* sp. and large patches of *Cenchrus ciliaris* grass in the wadi area surveyed.



Convolvulus sp.

Photo: Stefan Beck

The true ephemerals were present but in small numbers and small dimensions, which usually means little rain or early rain followed by a cool period. Because of the official interdiction on goats and camels, browsing favourites, such as heliotrope, trichodesma and the grasses were at their best. Strangely, few of the spikey *Blepharis* plants (eye-lash plants) were in flower, with many of them semi-dormant, a clear indicator of localized drought.



Sorrel, *Rumex vesicarius*

Photo: May Yoke Taylor

Small numbers of *Savignya parviflora*, *Arnebia hispidissima* were seen, whereas the sorrel, *Rumex vesicarius*, was abundant on both edges of the Tarabat watercourse. We were to taste this juicy lemon-flavoured salad in a dish prepared by Feng later in the day!



Bluebottle fly on *Ochradenus aucheri*

Photo: Will Bevington

The *Erucaria hispanica*, with its attractive purple bloom was small by comparison with previous years. Donkey salad, too, was only just under way even in mid-March.

After a trouble-free border crossing at Hili, we had lunch in the dunes beneath the Buraimi Tombs, which were new to some members, who clambered up to view them. Definitely a must for all archaeology buffs! Because of the low sand dunes there were some isolated *Eremobium* plants, and some *Tribulus terrestris* in bloom. We were grateful for the spreading acacias as the midday sun is definitely warming up.



Pink Cloud, *Boerhavia elegans*

Photo: Liza Green

After a stop near the road to admire the tufts of *Boerhavia elegans*, the Pink Cloud, and to discover what was a new plant for many: *Zilla spinosa*, a spiny crucifer, in Keith Gibbins' Trench, now sadly very dry, we stopped again half way towards Jebel Qattar to distinguish between the frequently-occurring Desert Thorn, *Lycium shawii* and a potentially much larger specimen: *Maerua crassifolia*, a member of the caper family. This plant is extremely rare in the UAE, but occurs frequently in tropical Arabia, and also around the Hanging Gardens, both on the plain and on the lower slopes.



Ghaf trees at Hanging Gardens

Photo: Stefan Beck

The Hanging Gardens in spring is an excellent place to view a wide selection of UAE and Omani flora. There are four main habitats: sand sheets, gravel plains, wadi and low mountains. This means that only coastal and high montane species are absent. The greatest variety is present in the rocky wadi beds with occasional sandy patches.

The first of the acacias to flower, *A. ehrenbergiana*, was already displaying its yellow pompoms. Spring is well advanced, as the temperature started to climb quickly early in the day. The numbers of young *Acacia tortilis* is encouraging: this area is apparently unaffected by local pollution and remains a wonderful natural habitat for all sorts of wildlife, including the Arabian tahr, so the locals say.

On Saturday morning some of the group did the climb up to the bottom of the cliff from the west while others preferred to view the toads and the eastern wadi environment. Kate and Bill Davies take up the story in the following piece.

Allestree Fisher

Wadi Walk near Hanging Gardens

Leading out from the escarpment north east of the traditional parking area for the Hanging Gardens are a series of very interesting wadis. One such wadi was the venue for the leisurely morning walk, led by Allestree and Pam, for half the campers on the weekend of March 13th/14th.

Despite the relatively dry winter the wadi contained a wide variety of plants, though as Allestree pointed out not in their usual numbers. Good examples of the eye lash plant, (*Blepharis ciliaris*), and goose lettuce (*Sonchus oleraceus*) were found.



The Eyelash plant, *Blepharis ciliaris*

Photo: Kate Doherty

At the end of the wadi a trickle of water seeping through the rocks was just sufficient to keep a small pool topped up. This was home to a family of toads and their offspring (*Bufo arabicus*). As we sat there watching the tadpoles wiggling around we wondered how many generations had lived there, cut off from the rest of their species.

Behind the toad pool there are a series of ledges, almost like giant steps, leading out of the wadi. On the second level we found a beautiful wadi fig tree (*Ficus salicifolia*) whose fruit was just ripening off. Fluttering and movement in the tree indicated we were not the only admirers; we settled down to watch. With our camera set on maximum magnification we managed to capture the moment the culprit escaped with swag in beak. Later referral to Messieurs Gallagher and Woodcocks 'The Birds of Oman' identified the fig bandit as a Blue Rock Thrush.



Blue Rock Thrush and wadi fig

Photo: Bill Davies

Two levels further up and edging closer towards the escarpment we discovered a stunning sidr tree (*Ziziphus spina-christi*) whose fruit was also ripening.



Ripening sidr fruit

Photo: Kate Doherty

In the middle of the tree, what at first glance appeared to be an oddly shaped branch, turned out to be a roosting bat, presumably sleeping after gorging on the fruit (shown on the cover of this issue). By a lucky coincidence, Drew's talk to the group on the following Tuesday, entitled 'Bats of the UAE and Oman', enabled us to identify our find as an Egyptian Fruit Bat.

Bill Davies / Kate Doherty

March 3 Lecture: Archaeological Investigations in Dubai's Interior

Jason Herrmann's March 3 lecture treated ENHG members to a first-hand look at 21st century approaches to exploring the ancient heritage of the UAE. In Abu Dhabi for the 2nd International Conference on the Archaeology of the UAE, Jason raced from the conference to the ENHG meeting to offer members a report on the preliminary results of investigations at three sites from three different periods of human occupation in the desert east of Dubai. Using cutting edge subsurface geophysical prospection techniques, in addition to traditional methods of archaeological survey and excavation, what Jason and the Dubai Desert Survey team, led by University of Arkansas professor Jesse Casana, have found is remarkable.

Proceeding via "vehicular survey" (meaning driving very slowly, sticking their heads out the car windows, and scanning the ground for artifacts), the team discovered the Neolithic site of al-Ashoosh 2, an area of several square kilometers littered with flint flakes and stone tools.

At the 3rd millennium BCE site of al-Ashoosh (not to be confused with al-Ashoosh 2), magnetic gradiometry and small-scale excavations revealed a large midden, several hearths, and a large earthen oven installation that suggests that the site may have been occupied year-round, rather than seasonally, as would have been expected so deep in the desert.

But the most sensational finds have come from the Iron Age site of Saruq al-Hadid, where ground-penetrating radar and excavations show that the area now covered by sand dunes was once a thriving metalworking and craft production center. Massive quantities of iron daggers, bronze bowls, beads, pottery decorated with appliqué snakes, and stone bowls, are not only beautifully crafted, but especially remarkable because of their surprising location in the middle of the desert. Whereas archaeologists expect to find Neolithic sites in the desert because the environment then was moister than it is today, the Iron Age was a period of high aridity, and the climate was very similar to today's. How and why such a substantial site was maintained in the desert, where the fuel to process such quantities of metal came from, and, most curiously, where the inhabitants got their water from, are questions that future research will aim to resolve.

Jeff Szuchman

Recent Speakers

Hanne & Jens Eriksen have a 20-year-long experience in wildlife and nature photography. They are familiar to ENHG members as minders of the ENHG Book Stall and, creators of the annual bird calendars and occasional presenters of memorably illustrated nature tours. This month they showed those of us who'd like to try our hand at it how to get better wildlife pictures, covering such topics as equipment, composition, depth of field, focusing, and much more. The talk was superbly illustrated with pictures from their travels in Arabia and beyond. Thanks to Hanne & Jens for a fine tutorial!

Next Speakers

Dr. Anf H. Ziadat, is a faculty member of the Civil Engineering Department at Abu Dhabi Men's College, HCT. He currently teaches engineering courses with an emphasis on Water Resources Engineering. Over the past twelve years, he has taught in and administered engineering programs at Mu'tah University in Jordan and at three colleges in South Dakota in the US, at one of which he developed a special program for water quality assessment as an instructor for the Native American Natural Resources Management Initiative.

Dr. Ziadat has published widely on such diverse topics as biomonitors of air and water quality, environmental awareness among Third World people, mineralogical analysis of industrial/urban dust deposits, analysis of drinking water quality, water resource management, and solid waste recycling opportunities; the latter is the subject of the paper he will present to us on 21st April – a paper which won the Emerald Literati Awards of Excellence for Outstanding Paper for the year in 2006.

Site management engineer **Ibrahim Serham**, with the UAE Directorate of Military Works Project Department (3yrs.) & transportation engineer **Mohamed Bin Braik**, with the Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council (2yrs.), are both BA students in Dr. Ziadat's course in Waste Management, due to graduate this semester. Following Dr. Ziadat's talk, they will give a brief overview of the solid waste management systems used in the UAE.

The Editor thanks the above speakers for providing autobiographical information for Focus.

Errata

On p. 5 of March 2009 Focus, though the bird pictured at the EMEG lagoon is indeed grey, it is not a Grey Heron, but rather a Western Reef Heron. Thanks to John Stewart-Smith for bringing this slip-up to our attention.

*Going back further in the annals of Focus, the lovely jewel beetle featured on the cover of November 2007 Focus is not a *Julodis euphratica*, as stated, but rather a *Julodis candida* Holynski, 1997—actually a rare beetle in the UAE. Thanks to Dr. Michael Gillett for bringing this to our attention at the recent IEW 2009. -Ed.*

A Rare Jewel Beetle

Recently, I was researching information on the black and white jewel beetle *Capnodis excisa*, which occurs in Arabia and was rather surprised to find an internet reference to this beetle linked to Abu Dhabi. At the time, I was trying with Brigitte Howarth to fix the first record of this beetle in the UAE to Bish Brown circa 1980's. On opening the internet page, which turned out to be 'Focus' for November 2007, I saw a photograph of this beetle taken in Dubai emirate and correctly identified. However, this was quickly forgotten when I saw the cover of the newsletter. There in all its glory was a photograph of *Julodis candida* Holynski, 1997 wrongly captioned as *Julodis euphratica*. As recently as October/November 2008, I had spent several days with Brien Holmes searching for this super rare beetle in the Sweihan area of Abu Dhabi emirate, but without

success. Again, I was trying to fix earlier records of this beetle in the UAE to Bish Brown in the 1980's. The picture is truly amazing as it shows bright colouration which is neither mentioned in the formal description of the insect nor apparent in the four (dead) museum specimens that I have seen in London/Abu Dhabi.

Michael Gillett

*(Dick Hornby promptly replied that this *J. candida* was sighted in the deep desert near Liwa, 7 Nov 2007 -Ed.)*

Celebrate Earth Day!

Help us protect biodiversity in the UAE.

For Earth Day be part of a team of field surveyors at the Emirates Marine Environmental Group (EMEG) reserve in Ghantoot.

The aim of the day is to record the diversity in flora and fauna at the reserve. Through informative workshops, participants will have an opportunity to learn more about identifying local plant and animal species as well as map the various habitats present.

Each participant will also be contributing to gaining a better understanding of the resources in the area in order for EMEG to manage and conserve these fragile habitats.

DATE: Friday, 24th April, 2009

TIME: Registration starts at 8:30 am.
All activities begin at 9:00 am.

LOCATION: EMEG reserve in Ghantoot.

OPEN TO: Emirates Natural History Group (all 3 NHGs) & EMEG members, ≥16 years of age.

You can help us make it a successful habitat mapping activity by bringing along the following items with you:

- Sun cream & caps
- Bathing suits (for lagoon survey volunteers)
- Goggle and/or snorkelling masks
- Water flasks & own packed lunch
- Digital cameras & GPS devices
- Pens and clipboards

Please confirm your attendance and which items you are able to bring with you by emailing info@emeg.ae before the 12th of April, 2009.

EMEG

Special Hotel Rates

The manager of the Oceanic Hotel in Khor Fakkan, site of the recent IEW, has offered the following special rates through the end of May, 2009 to ALL members of all three NHGs in the UAE.

ROOM RATES ON BED AND BREAKFAST BASIS:

Single Room Dhs. 400.00 per room per night
Double Room Dhs. 500.00 per room per night
Triple Room Dhs. 600.00 per room per night

To take advantage of these rates, email the hotel at oceanic2@emirates.net.ae, attention Nasser Nasef, General Manager, or call him on 050 6312504, and mention that you are associated with the DNHG. Give as a reference Val Chalmers, DNHG Vice Chairman: valeriechalmers@hotmail.com.
-Ed.

ITEMS ON SALE

AT THE ENHG STALL

All prices are in dirhams.

- The Emirates – A Natural History, 350. *The first complete referencing guide to the wildlife of the UAE. 580 colour photos.*
- Jebel Hafit – A Natural History, 100. *An attractive, encyclopaedic presentation of the natural resources of this local landmark. (Free copies available for schools donations)*
- Terrestrial Environment of Abu Dhabi Emirate, 240. *(See review: Dec2008 Focus.)*
- Marine Environment and Resources of Abu Dhabi, 140.
- Breeding Birds of UAE, by Simon Aspinall, 50.
- Abu Dhabi Bird checklist, 10.
- Emirates Bird Report, 50.
- Birdwatching guide to Oman, 2nd edition, 100. *Guide to birdwatching spots in Oman.*
- The Birds of Al Jabal Al Akhdar, 50.
- Oman Bird List, 6th edition, 30.
- 2009 bird calendar, 30. *A must for yourself ... and a perfect gift.*
- Falconry, 60.
- Wild about Mammals, by Marijcke Jongbloed, 40. *Guide to mammals of the UAE.*
- Snakes of Arabia, 50.
- Pests, 35. *Find out what's in and around your home.*
- Reef Fishes of the UAE, 50.
- Snorkeling and Diving in Oman, 50.
- Wildflowers of the UAE, 100.
- Plant Checklist, by Marijcke Jongbloed, 25. *Know your local wild plants.*
- Feast of Dates, 100.
- UAE in Focus, 100.
- Sir Bani Yas, 100.
- Sulphur, camels, and gunpowder, 90.
- On-Road in the UAE, 50.
- Windtowers, 225.
- Trucial States, 150. *Many old photographs.*
- Oman, 150. *Many old photographs.*
- Abu Dhabi 8 million years ago. 15.
- Children's books: Yaw the Wildcat; Hayat the Leopard, 15.

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Lectures

17th March
Bats of South-eastern
Arabia
Drew Gardner

7th April
Wildlife Photography –
How, When and Where
Hanne&Jens Eriksen

21st April
A.) Assessing Solid
Waste Recycling
Opportunities for
Closed Campuses
Dr. Anf H. Ziadat

B.) Municipal Solid
Waste Management in
the UAE
**Ibrahim Serham &
Mohamed Bin Braik**

5th May
Transport and Masdar
Chris Novack

19th May
Recent Trip to NE India
Steve James

Field Trips

13th /14th March
Camping Trip to Wadi
Tarabat & Hanging
Gardens to view flora
Allestree Fisher

20th/21st March
Sharjah Aquarium Tour
Andrew Bean

26th/27th/28th March
Inter-Emirates
Weekend, Khor Fakkan

17th/18th April
Family Beach Camping
Weekend near Sila
Andrew Bean

8th May
Afternoon/evening trip
to Qarn Nizwa to spot
bats and geckos
Drew Gardner

In the Local News Media

Rewriting Part of Arabia's History:
<http://www.thenational.ae/article/20090302/NATIONAL/838967467/1001/OPINION>

Caracals being hunted to the brink of extinction:
<http://www.thenational.ae/article/20090318/NATIONAL/855511822/1010/NEWS>

Gardening with the natives:
http://www.thenational.ae/article/20090321/HOUSE_HOME/384688991&SearchID=7334875\6000816

The many faces of the red tide:
<http://www.thenational.ae/article/20090408/PAGETHREE/566350640/1119/GLOBALBRIEFING>

Websites of General Interest

ENHG-AA Website; Archives: 3 newsletters, Tribulus
<http://www.enhg.org>

Qatar NHG website:
<http://www.qnhg.org>

Wildlife Middle East News:
<http://www.wmenews.com>

Arabian Wildlife:
<http://www.arabianwildlife.com/main.htm>

Tommy Pedersen's UAE Birding Site:
www.uaebirding.com

Hanne & Jens Eriksen's Birds Oman website:
www.BirdsOman.com

Dubai Astronomy Group:
<http://www.dubaiastromy.com>

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