

# focus



Abu Dhabi, July/August 2009  
Vol 33 (7)



Emirates Natural History Group

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

## EDITORIAL

It's a long time since we had a mid-summer issue of Focus; it's nonetheless welcome! While many members may be away enjoying cooler climes, I hope *Focus* will whet your appetites for the UAE outdoors, at least when it starts to cool down again! We are hoping to organize some practical conservation research events next year, such as mapping and counting the Blanford's fringe-toed lizards at Khor Kalba (their only site in the UAE).

I would like to strongly recommend that all interested in natural history register with Tommy Pedersen's UAE Nature Forum at <http://www.uaebirding.com/forum/>. This is an active forum with areas for birds (including identification requests), mammals, reptiles, insects, butterflies, dragonflies, spiders and scorpions and so on. It is very active, with new posts every day. This, together with the various nature photo albums, is a valuable way of learning about UAE natural history and has already resulted in interesting new records and distribution information.

Wishing all an excellent summer and looking forward to welcoming you back in September.

**Drew Gardner**

## Giant Skipper



Giant Skipper, *Coeliades anchises*, 29 April, 2009

I photographed this Giant Skipper near the road up to the Grand Canyon in the Hajar Mountains of Oman, where they were quite numerous in late April, 2009. They were mostly flying around bushes of their sole food plant, *Acridocarpus orientalis*, and I saw at least one apparently egg-laying on the stems just below the buds.

There are several species of skipper in Europe, but none of them looks much like the Giant Skipper, which is larger and more boldly marked than the others. The species occurs from East Africa to Northern Oman, but the Arabian population is a different subspecies from the African one. There is just one location for the species in the UAE, in a single wadi on Jebel Hafeet, which is the only place in the country where *Acridocarpus orientalis* grows. I wonder if anyone has seen any Giant Skippers there recently?

**Dick Hornby**

*Photograph by the author*

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### FRONT COVER PICTURE

*Photograph: Sind Saw-scaled viper, Echis carinatus sochureki, Qarn Nazwa, 18 April 2009*

*Photographer: Drew Gardner*

## This month's contributors

Jean Paul Berger, Jerry Buzzell, Val Chalmers, Hanne & Jens Eriksen, Gary Feulner, Drew Gardner, Dick Hornby, Chris Jones, Lamjed El-Kefi, Simon Linton, May Yoke Taylor, Liz Thornington

## Evening Nature Walk at Qarn Nazwa

A little after 3 p.m. on Friday, May 8, four cars set off together from the Popeyes meeting point, heading out to see the bats at sunset at Qarn Nazwa. Actually, this was only a small part of the group as most people just drove out on their own following the map they had been emailed. Altogether, about 30 people showed up between 5 and 7 p.m. at QN, which is just off E44 between Dubai and Hatta. Drew Gardner got everyone together around 5:30 and explained what nocturnal animals we might expect to see starting about 15 minutes after the sunset prayer from a nearby mosque.

He confirmed that everyone had on shoes as opposed to sandals and pointed out three places where Sind saw-scaled vipers had been seen on past trips. He pointed out that a high percentage of people who are bitten by this snake die as they don't seek immediate medical attention. Then he showed us the seed pods of a tiny lily; the whole plant was only about 1 ½ inches tall.



Seed pods & dried leaves of lily, *Dipcadi biflorum*

*Photo: Chris Jones*

After our evening walkabout, during the prayer call (around 6:50) Drew led us to a vantage point below some small overhangs and crevices in the hillside. He used his torch to point out a bat hanging upside down in one of these. As it got darker, Drew turned on his bat detector, so we could hear the bats getting ready to emerge from their roosts. They flew out quickly three to eight at a time and not coming from any one spot, so it was almost impossible to get any photographs of them (but see the one successful attempt below). There were probably only about 50 of them altogether, down from the 200 Drew had seen last fall. There were mainly naked-bellied tomb bats and a few Kuhl's pipistrelles.



Naked-bellied tomb bat, *Taphozous nudiventris*

Photo: Hanne & Jens Eriksen

After this, we started searching for nocturnal geckos and snakes. Altogether three species were found: Persian leaf-toed geckos, *Hemidactylus persicus*, on the rock, and eastern sand geckos, *Stenodactylus leptocosymbotes*, and Baluch ground geckos, *Bunopus tuberculatus*, on the plain. The eastern sand geckos hold perfectly still when a light is on them, so we had ample opportunity to take photographs. A little later, one of our members fell down and sighted the only snake for the evening quite close to her. This was a Sind saw-scaled viper, *Echis carinatus sochureki*.



Eastern sand gecko *Stenodactylus leptocosymbotes*

Photo: Chris Jones

After a while, some people started heading back to Abu Dhabi. When the last of us were ready to leave, Drew suggested stopping at another place in the desert on the way back to see another larger kind of gecko. Four cars followed his to this location on E77. We climbed over or through a fence and were rewarded by Drew's finding two Persian Wonder Geckos, *Teretoscincus keyserlingii*. They were about 5 inches long and had darker brown

patterns than the other sand geckos. The second one let people hold it in their hands and did not seem to be afraid of us though the bright torch light kept it from moving too much.



Wonder Gecko - the wonderment was mutual!

Photo: May Yoke Taylor

When we got back in the car, we settled in for the long drive back. However, Keith Taylor and his passengers were later rewarded by seeing a fox cross E57 in front of us and stand for a brief moment under the lights in the median strip.

Chris Jones

NB: For more photos of Persian Wonder Geckos, see [http://www.smugmug.com/gallery/7960176\\_YgsXg](http://www.smugmug.com/gallery/7960176_YgsXg) -Ed.

## IEW Geology Field Trip

NB: For a full treatment of the geological processes touched on in the report below, see "Journey to the Center of the Earth, or a Walk Below the Moho" - by the same author, Gary Feulner - in *The Bulletin* (No. 41, July 1990): [http://www.enhg.org/bulletin/b41/41\\_11.htm](http://www.enhg.org/bulletin/b41/41_11.htm) -Ed.

The geology field trip saw a convoy of 8 cars under the leadership of Gary Feulner head off on Friday morning of IEW for an all-day trip to explore the geology of the northernmost Hajar Mountains, inland from Dibba, in an area once called "the Geology Route". These mountains are world famous for exhibiting a suite of rock types called *ophiolite*, which are igneous rocks formed deep within the earth's crust and upper mantle at mid-ocean ridges. Because of their relatively high density, compared with the rocks forming the continents, ophiolites are normally subducted back into the earth's crust, well out of reach, and the Hajar Mountains of the UAE and Oman contain the largest surface exposure of ophiolite rocks in the world.

The convoy rendezvoused at the Dibba cement works and proceeded to drive up the new road from Dibba to Ras al Khaimah which passes along the major fault zone (called the "Dibba Zone") between the ophiolite rocks to the south and the massively bedded shallow water carbonates (limestone and dolomite) to the north, which form the Musandam mountains or the Ru'us al-Jibal. One of the first stops, in the Muhtaraqah area, was to view a rare example of pillow lava which was exposed

on the side of the wadi. These lavas are formed deep underwater, and because of the water pressure and low temperature they only flow for a very short distance before the outer layers of the lava solidify. The end result resembles stacks of pillows as each eruption of lava is rapidly stopped in its tracks.



Close-up view of pillow lava

*Photo: Jean Paul Berger*

This area now forms the junction between the igneous rocks and various sedimentary rock units, and it was possible to see the exact contact between the totally different rock forms, with often igneous rocks on one side of the wadi and sedimentary limestones and shales on the other. In the same area it was possible to see the purple or green deep ocean shales formed at the bottom of the abyssal plain. These were sometimes interbedded with pale coloured beds of recrystallized sandy limestone that originated as diffuse submarine landslides. Other, much coarser, deep water sediments were also found which formed at the base of the continental slope. This was confirmed by evidence of boulder inclusions where rocks and debris tumbling down from the continental shelf had become embedded into the soft material that later became limestone. The group searched for evidence of radiolarians (prehistoric diatoms), but these are generally found in cherts rather than shales, and we did not find any.



Turbidites: sediments from submarine landslides

*Photo: Gary Feulner*

The convoy continued into the Tawiyah area which was scarred by the numerous quarries extracting limestone from the southern border of the Musandam. Exiting the mountains we headed south on the old Ras al Khaimah to Manama road before turning back towards the mountains at Al Ghail. A short scramble to the top of an ophiolite outcrop showed us what was once the base of the ophiolites sheet. Here the ophiolite was deeply penetrated with green-white veins of serpentine and was

very friable, tending to break away under one's feet or hands. It was also heavily altered at the top of the hills to reddish siliceous material, probably by processes occurring long after its initial emplacement.



Exposed surface of a serpentine vein

*Photo: Gary Feulner*

A rough ascent of Wadi Al Fara and Wadi Asimah (a few participants requested wadi-bashing certificates) brought us to an interesting area of metamorphic rocks formed by the heat and stresses of the titanic forces that thrust the ophiolite rocks from the abyssal plain onto the sedimentary platform of the Arabian peninsula. In nearly all the wadis we had seen different coloured and shaped rocks, which didn't appear to match the surrounding rocks. In the metamorphic rocks we found where these had come from as there were all manner of different rock forms depending on the original composition and the amount of heat and pressure experienced. Many of these metamorphic rocks were especially beautiful colours ranging from the pure white of quartz or marble to deep purple and red. In the wadis we were also able to see the vertical walls of wadi gravel conglomerate sitting unconformably on the underlying igneous rocks below them. Many of the wadis were still running after the recent rains.

Despite an occasional threat of rain, and a few drops, we were extremely lucky to see the wadi geology under almost ideal conditions as the recent rains had washed everything clean without churning the wadis into impassibility. The final section of our trip brought us up into Wadi Tayyibah and the old road to Dibba from Masafi. Once back on the tarmac it was a simple drive back to the Oceanic Hotel after a fascinating day's trip.

*Simon Linton and Gary Feulner*

## Ground Mantis

A popular diversion from the geology field trip at IEW was a ground mantis found on sandy gravel along the mountain front, near the turnoff to Al Ghail. There was at first considerable speculation about the identity of this peculiar looking insect (A spider? No, can't be – it has only six legs and has antennae).

Closer inspection confirmed that it was in fact a cousin of the more familiar praying mantis, with a large triangular head, big eyes and grasping forelegs held in a "praying" position, but shorter, fatter and much flatter (a bit banjo-shaped overall), without functional wings, and

very well camouflaged to resemble its mottled background.



Ground Mantis

Photo: Liz Thornington

Ground mantises are well represented in the Gulf region. They belong to the family Eremiaphilidae. The behaviour and ecology of the ground mantis *Eremiaphila braueri*, a species found to be common at the archaeological site of Kush in Ras al-Khaimah, was described and discussed in detail by Murray Lee Eiland III in *Tribulus* vol. 8.1 (1998), at p. 17-21.

Gary Feulner

### IEW Khor Kalba Field Trip

Many participants chose to close out their weekend with a Saturday afternoon visit to Khor Kalba, where the falling tide allowed inspection of the upper intertidal zone. Especially popular with the children were the red-elbowed fiddler crabs *Uca annulipes*, which, as they became accustomed to the presence of visitors, showed themselves in increasingly large numbers. Schools of Arabian killifish also made their appearance, often lingering in just a few cm. of water as the tide ebbed.



Tens of thousands of molluscs in the intertidal zone

We also saw the giant mud creeper *Terebralia palustris*, which has its principal UAE population at Khor Kalba. The group quickly became adept at recognizing which shells were occupied by live *T. palustris* and which had been taken over by the large hermit crab *Clibanarius longitarsus*, which favors *T. palustris* shells. [Tip: Shells found in the forks of mangrove shrubs are almost always inhabited by hermit crabs.] The middle intertidal range was home to thousands on thousands of molluscs, but

almost exclusively of the same few species – mostly *Cerithidea cingulata* on firm mud, with *Clypeomorus persicus* and *Osilinus kotschy* on algae and other debris.

No visit to Khor Kalba would be complete without a sighting of the White-Collared Kingfisher, of which an endemic subspecies breeds at Khor Kalba, nesting in older mangrove trees. The afternoon crowds probably kept most birds on their guard, but we surprised one at close range and saw two more at a distance, across the main channel.

Those who remained until the end had extended close-up views along the inland edge of the forest, along with a chance to see how problematic the damp sabkha can be for vehicles, and a visit to several extensive shell middens which, despite their extent, each consist of only two species: the gastropod *Terebralia palustris* and the large arc shell (bivalve) *Anadara antiquata*, common in older archeological contexts but not known alive within the UAE or Oman today.



The uppermost intertidal zone

A particular highlight of the field trip was the sighting of a live specimen of the beautiful but delicate bubble shell *Hydatina zonata*, on seagrass in the main channel. The bubble shells, most common of which is *Bulla arabica* (formerly *B. ampulla*), have a very large, colourful, flowing mantle that barely fits within the animals shell. They are related to sea slugs, which have no shell at all.



Bubble shell, *Hydatina zonata*

Gary Feulner

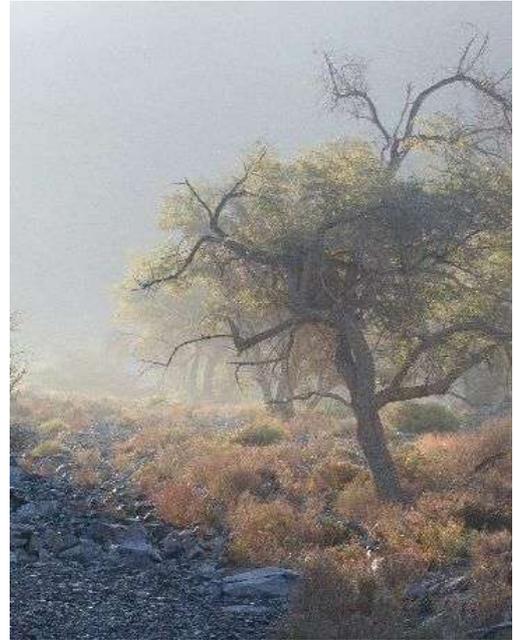
All photographs by Martina Fella

## IEW 2009 Photo Contest Winners

Following are the winning photos from the Photographic Competition at the Inter-Emirates Weekend 2009. Readers of Focus will recognize two of them from previous covers. –Ed.



Contest winners May Yoke Taylor, Lamjed El-Kefi, Jerry Buzzell and Drew Gardner



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



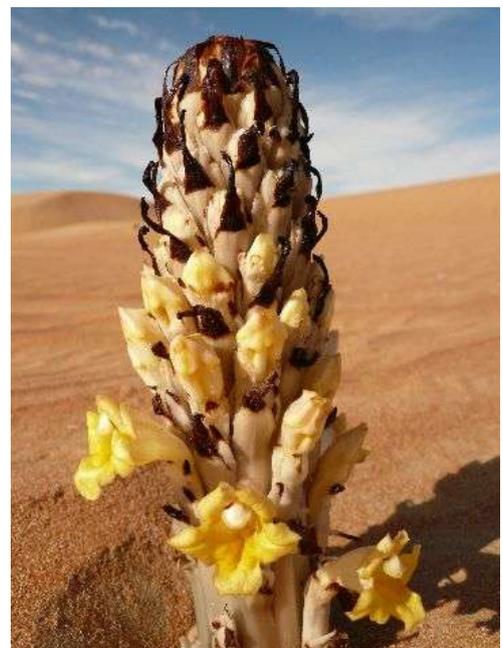
Culture Category – Drew Gardner, with the winning photograph entitled: “They’re off!”



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



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



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

## IEW Visit to Fujairah Museum, Fujairah Fort and Heritage Village



Our group met at Fujairah Fort at 10 a.m. on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> March and made our way to Fujairah Museum to meet Mr Madani, the curator of the Museum who was to be our guide for the morning. The Museum is only about 400 metres from the fort and was founded and inaugurated by His Highness Shaikh Hamad Bin Mohammed Al-Sharqi, the Ruler of Fujairah on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1991. The Museum contains both an archaeology section, which displays exhibits from the different archaeological sites including Qidfa and Mirbah, which have been excavated by local and foreign teams, and an ethnography section, which includes early photographs of the Fujairah area.

Mr Madani then took us into the fort and explained the many points of interest to us. "Fujairah Fort, which is 500 years old and stands on a natural rocky outcrop, has now been completely restored. It is the largest and most important fort on the east coast and is estimated to have been constructed between 1500 and 1550 AD. It was used by the Ruler until as late as the 1960s and in 1925 it was shelled by a British warship, as part of a dispute with the Ruler.). The structure of the fort is somewhat unique in that it has three circular towers and a square-shaped fourth tower". Entry to the fort is by way of traditional wooden gates with a 90 degree turn before entering the central courtyard. The lower rooms included a date storage area. There was a majlis at the upper level where the Shaikh dispensed justice.

We then drove from the fort to the Heritage Village, which is about 10 minutes away by car, almost in the mountains and just beyond the sulphur springs. We looked at the displays of traditional handicrafts and old photographs of Fujairah. Unfortunately, due to the heavy rain, parts of the village were having to be dried out. On a previous visit six years ago, we watched demonstrations of weaving and tali by the local ladies, but they were not present on this visit.

Many thanks to Mr Ahmed Al Shamsi, the Director of Heritage and Archaeology for allowing the group to visit the three places and to Mr Madani for being our guide on the trip.

**Valerie Chalmers**

**Photograph by the author**

### 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 to schools. Ask Chairman.)*
- Terrestrial Environment of Abu Dhabi Emirate, 240.
- Marine Environment and Resources of Abu Dhabi, 140.
- Seashells of Eastern Arabia, 120.
- Abu Dhabi Bird checklist, 10.
- Emirates Bird Report, 50.
- Oman Bird List, ed 6, 30.
- Birdwatching guide to Oman, 2nd edition, 100.  
*Guide to bird watching spots in Oman.*
- The Birds of Al Jabal Al Akhdar, 50.
- Trucial States, 150.
- Falconry, 60.
- Native Plants of Oman, 80.
- 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.
- Comprehensive Guide to the Wildflowers of the UAE, 100.
- Feast of Dates, 100.
- UAE in Focus, 100.
- Sir Bani Yas, 100.
- Musandam, 100.
- On-road in the UAE, 50.
- Off-road in the UAE II, 50.
- Off-road in Oman, 50.
- Abu Dhabi 8 million years ago, 15.
- Natural History of Oman, 90.
- Discovering Qatar, 120.
- Arabian Sands, 90.

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**Needed in September: Secretary to write committee agendas and take minutes. Can you do it?**

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## Lectures

*NB: The ENHG Lecture Programme takes a break during July and August.*

*The opening lecture after the summer hiatus will be on 1 September – continuing in our new venue at HCT-Abu Dhabi Men's College. Directions to this location is available in the Files section of the Yahoo groups website (see address below).*

*As both September meetings will be during Ramadan, their starting times will be changed to 8:00 pm. -Ed.*

1<sup>st</sup> Sept **8:00 PM**  
Natural History of the UAE (Part 1)

**Drew Gardner**

15<sup>th</sup> Sept **8:00 PM**  
Natural History of the UAE (Part 2)

**Dick Hornby**

## Field Trips

*NB: No more official field trips will be scheduled till September. However, if you will be in the UAE this summer and would like to organize a day trip with fellow ENHG members, you can post a message about this to the Yahoo groups website given below, and your post will be approved by one the group moderators. -Ed.*

## In the Local News Media

Gulf News Interactive: The Endangered Arabian Wildlife (Infographic every Tues, starting 23/06/2009):  
<http://www.gulfnews.com/nation/Environment/10323051.html>

23 June Gulf News Arabian Leopard Infographic:  
<http://archive.gulfnews.com/articles/09/05/20/10315320.html>

## Websites of General Interest

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

Tommy Pedersen's UAE Birding / UAE Nature Forum:  
[www.uaebirding.com](http://www.uaebirding.com)

Hanne & Jens Eriksen's Birds Oman website:  
[www.BirdsOman.com](http://www.BirdsOman.com)

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

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

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

Sharjah Museums sites (Check out the virtual tours!):  
<http://www.sharjahmuseums.ae/>

## Corporate Sponsors of the ENHG - 2009

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

**BDO Patel**

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**Dome International**



**International Bechtel Company, Ltd.**



**Nautica Environmental Associates**



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## Members' Items for sale

Please send small ads to [newsletter@chirri2000.com](mailto:newsletter@chirri2000.com)

## Postal Address

ENHG c/o Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi  
PO Box 45553, Abu Dhabi

## Newsletter Details

Newsletter contributions to: [newsletter@chirri2000.com](mailto:newsletter@chirri2000.com)

## Yahoo Groups website

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