

focus



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Emirates Natural History Group

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

EDITORIAL

Our Annual General Meeting will be held at the upcoming meeting, this Tuesday, 18th May—at 7:30 pm, right before our lecture by HCT Civil Engineering professor Dr. Anf Ziadat, assisted by two of his students.

We have a variety of field trip activities continuing into June, thanks to our energetic field trip leaders. One of these is the Sir Bu Nair Dhow race field trip planned with EMEG for late May (see p. 8), offering a choice of sailboat or airplane transportation over to the island on the weekend of 27-29 May. Details on that trip TBA. We will have two more lectures and one social event (see p. 8) in June and will then break for the summer recess.

For those of you planning to spend time in the UK this summer, we have just received word of an exhibition by wildlife artist Mark Adlington—*Animals of Arabia*—at the John Martin Gallery in London, June-July 2010.

We welcome Committee Member Barbara Smith in her new role as Membership Secretary. We thank Cate Ware for her dedication in that role over the past year. We also thank Jeff Szuchman for putting together a quality lecture programme for the ENHG over the past year. He will be stepping down from that role by the end of this school term, so we will need someone to serve the Committee in that capacity as of September 2010. Please consider whether you can fill this role. You will receive plenty of suggestions for speakers from other members of the Committee.

ENHG members Bill and Kate Davies have now returned to the UK. They will be happily remembered for their enthusiastic participation in many hikes and camping trips and their submissions for *Focus*. Former Committee Members/Treasurers Martin and Linda Betz are returning to Canada at the end of this month. We thank them for all the help they've given the Committee and wish them all the best back home.

The Newsletter Editor would welcome more submissions, this season or next, of captioned photos or brief write-ups for *Focus*—from any members who have participated in the wide range of ENHG activities or from anyone else who has personal observations to share with us. Write-ups and cover photos would be especially welcome.

Drew Gardner

Erratum

The editor's note on p. 3 of April 2010 *Focus* contained an incorrect claim about Andrew's sighting of Cream-coloured Coursers. According to Tommy Pedersen, Andrew can rightfully claim to have made perhaps the 2nd or 3rd ever sighting of Cream-coloured Coursers on Abu Dhabi Island. But as he and alert reader Peter Hellyer have reminded us, they breed here in the UAE (in the desert). Peter tells us that "they are regularly seen (up to 100 at the Ghantut Polo Club, for example)". An Annotated Checklist, giving the status of any bird in the UAE, can be downloaded from Tommy's website: <http://www.uaebirding.com/uaechecklist.html>. —Ed.

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FRONT COVER PICTURE

Photograph: Swallowtail at Misfat A'Abriyeen, Oman

Photographer: May Yoke Taylor

This month's contributors

Tony Allan, Cheryl Dance, Hanne & Jens Eriksen, Angie Marles, Keith Taylor, May Yoke Taylor

ENHG Membership Information

Annual membership in the Abu Dhabi chapter of the ENHG is 100 Dhs – for both individual and family membership. See Membership Sec. or Assistant at the next meeting for a membership form—also downloadable [here](#).

Members are entitled to join the group on all day trips and overnight camping trips. Each member is also entitled to a copy of the ENHG's more-or-less annual scientific journal, *Tribulus*. If you have not yet collected your copy of Volume 18, please take one from the book table at a meeting, and indicate on the list provided that you have done so

Camping/Hiking at Misfat A'Abriyeen

26th March 2010, eight members of the Abu Dhabi chapter of the ENHG embarked on an efficiently led weekend camping/hiking trip near the base of Oman's tallest mountain, Jebel Shams, arriving in time for a picnic lunch at the new village of Misfat A'Abriyeen, up the hill from the village of Hamra (between Bahla and Nizwa). We then spent the afternoon touring the picturesque old mud-brick town of Misfat, very well described in the write-up that follows this one, on p 4.

One of the aspects of the town that caught our attention was the set of "star towers" arranged on the rim of the steep wadi facing the town, which an informative signboard informed us the falaj manager used in the old days to determine the times of water redistribution. In the course of the night, as certain stars wheeled past certain "star towers", the manager would give the signal

for the water to be redistributed via the network of water channels from one farmer's terraced field to another, ensuring an equitable share of the water. Nowadays this task is accomplished with the assistance of modern timepieces. In fact, we saw a boy performing this very task—stepping bare-footed into the channel to move a rag and board stopper from one falaj opening to another.

This is one of very few palm plantations in a mountain wadi in this region. It is made possible by the plentiful groundwater, due to the high frequency of rainfall in this region. We walked up through the shady plantation to the start of the trail we intended to hike the next day, and took some wildlife shots, including two of these butterflies below and the one on the cover of this issue. Dragonflies were plentiful, including dusty bluish *Orthetrum chrysostigma*. Also prominent were the caterpillars of the Giant Skipper butterfly (See below).



Caper White,
Anphaeis aurota



Plain Tiger,
Danaus chrysippus



Caterpillar of *Pyrrhiades anchises jucunda*, the Giant Skipper, on its foodplant, *Aridocarpus orientalis* ('qafas')



Giant Skipper in the same region of Oman, April 2009
Previously published in July/August 2009 *Focus*, p. 2
*Photo: Dick Hornby

NB: Check out Cock's article: *Tribulus*, Vol 18, pp 37-41.

On Friday evening, we found a suitably flat and secluded camping site off a dirt track near the top of a hill overlooking the new town of Misfat. Despite a brisk wind blowing our tents around as we set up camp, the temperature remained quite warm into the evening—in the range of 30°C, dropping just enough late at night for most of us to sleep comfortably, but we were reminded that it was already near the end of the camping season at lower elevations in this region.

On Saturday morning, we got up, packed, and parked at the old village by 7:30 am. Walking back up through the village, we picked up the W9 trailhead. This is part of an extensive network of mountain trails in Oman, well-maintained and marked with bright yellow, white and orange flag-like patches painted on rocks at strategic locations. As we followed these markers up the wadi, we came to one that had an angular arrow-like shape which seemed to us to be pointing the way up the left side of the wadi. After doing a quick recce up that side, our trip leader and assistant led us on a scramble up that slope to a fairly well-defined but unmarked trail leading past a fenced-in goat enclosure. Our leader followed a shelf of rock out around a shoulder to a rather impressive view of a wide valley beyond.



Narrow gorge up the wadi from Misfat A'Abriyeen

On the way back down, when we again reached the bottom of the wadi channel, we discovered that the W9 trail actually went up the opposite side of the wadi, and the marker we'd taken our directions from was actually intended to orient to hikers coming back down from that side. Not deterred by that revelation, we figured we'd found a quite viable option to this hiking trail—call it the W9A—from which to appreciate the rugged beauty of this mountain wadi. Below are two interesting plants we came across on this spur of the trail.



Caralluma arabica, a foodplant of the Plain Tiger



Does anyone know what family this plant is in?

Back down in the shade of the plantation, we found the following reptiles. According to Drew Gardner, the Gallagher's Semaphore Gecko below is named after Michael Gallagher, who set up the Oman Natural History Museum in Muscat and made detailed collections and observations of Oman natural history for many years between the 1970s and the late 1990s. It is more usually found on trees—especially *Moringa peregrina*. The Dwarf Semaphore Gecko is usual on mountain rocks in the region, and now on Abu Dhabi house walls, as well!



Gallagher's Semaphore Gecko, *Pristurus gallagheri*



Dwarf Semaphore Gecko, *Pristurus rupestris*



Jayakar's Oman lizard, *Omanosaura jayakari*

Keith Taylor

All photos, with one exception*, by May Yoke Taylor

NB: On the same weekend as the above trip, the Al Ain chapter of the ENHG coincidentally planned a trip to the same general area. Their trip included visits to the old villages of Bahla and Hamra and camping and stargazing near the Yarya oasis. On Saturday, they ended their excursion to the old village of Misfat, not quite crossing paths with our group. A nice write-up of that visit, originally published in the Al Ain chapter's newsletter, is re-printed, with permission, below. –Ed.

The Enchantment of Misfat



The ENHG never ceases to surprise me with the gems that await any of us who make the effort to get out and explore nature. Oman has such diversity to offer and it seems that much of the history of the area can be found in the rugged mountainous country as opposed to the dune environment of the UAE. Exploring the dilapidated community of Misfat is like walking back in time. Some mud brick structures seem to be three stories high as they are built on huge natural boulder outcroppings that form the downward slope of the hillside. With narrow walkways and stone laden walls surrounding me as I walk through the village, I spy small windows of varied design that add a unique bit of character. One walks among the passageways over the polished black rock worn down from eternal use that seems to be a natural fit of the oasis.

The aroma of curry floats throughout the ruins that still houses occupants. Walking down the terracing, one enjoys the deep tones of singing, assumedly the Quran. Moving through banana, papaya, and barley plots is so serene. The birds populate the foliage and occupy the air with their song.



The community itself is built on terracing, which is usually reserved for farming purposes. What is so uniquely beautiful is the productive foliage growing on small terraced plots

winding down to the bottom of the narrow wadi. On the opposite side of the canyon is the continuation of farming, falaj systems, and terracing with small structures spackled amongst the lush plants. Around each corner I find a different crop or even a donkey standing alone in a cave containment. Around one corner I have the pleasant surprise to come upon grape vines growing on the top of a wood arbour, which overlooks the canyon. Each terracing has smaller sections compared to what I've experienced in other oases, and I am surrounded by corners to explore around and enjoy the next surprising sight.



Standing with elegance above the old and current village is the watch tower or a fort. Tall and strong in the distance, I can still see that the rock walls are fitted together for strength and protection.

I am so moved by the oasis and the people working it. I always get such a sense of peace when I explore the oases around here and immensely enjoy the interaction

with the workers I find living there as they add to the ambience of the place. Unlike in the UAE, here there are families of the workers around. At Misfat, children are playing in a nearly drained reservoir that became a natural swimming pool for them. As the afternoon wore on, others return home from school in their uniforms, awaiting greetings from mothers and an afternoon meal.

Misfat is a memorable place that I hope to return to one day. There are always moments in our lives that move us. This is a small one that is logged into my mind as a beautiful memory of smells, sounds and sights all culminating in an enchanting memorable moment in time.

Cheryl Dance

Photographs by the author

Kayaking in Abu Dhabi's Mangroves

On Friday, 24 April, perhaps the ENHG's most well-attended day trip ever was organized by Excursion Secretary Andrew Bean, in conjunction with the tour company Noukhada: Kayaking through the mangroves off Al Salam St. in Abu Dhabi. Eighty participants divided into two groups, one starting at 6 am and the other at 9 am, enjoyed paddling into the midst of a peaceful thicket of mangrove trees, *Avicennia marina*, with a few birds and many crabs in evidence.

Our principal guide, Noukhada Director, Don Revis, pointed out a sand bank where a family of foxes had been sighted by the early morning group. He expressed concern for the foxes' den site, which had been eroded by dredging work nearby.



Paddling across the channel to the mangrove forest
Photo: May Yoke Taylor



Angie and Bernie paddling in synch
Photo: Tony Allan



Arabian Red Fox mother on sandbank, 13 March, 2010
Photo: Hanne & Jens Eriksen



Eroded fox den site on mangrove sandbank
Photo: May Yoke Taylor



Crabs in mangrove trees

Photo: May Yoke Taylor

Keith Taylor / Angie Marles

Day Trip to Hatta Pools

On Friday, 7 May, approximately 20 of us in eight vehicles left Abu Dhabi just after noon on a short but enjoyable afternoon outing, arriving in Hatta mid-afternoon, giving us time for a snack and a swim in the Hatta Pools, followed by a pleasant nature walk down the wadi as the heat of the day diminished.

Here are some of the main features we took note of: two species of dragonfly (*Trithemis arteriosa* and *Trithemis kirbyi*), a beehive in an overhang, wadi vegetation in flower (oleanders) and already past flowering (*Tephrosia nubica* and *Euphorbia larica*), and evidence of the turbulent geological past of the region in the form of periodotite (ophiolitic) rocks along the trail.



Dragonfly at Hatta Pools: *Trithemis arteriosa*, male

Photo: May Yoke Taylor

Keith Taylor

Field Trip Vehicles for Sale

White Toyota Fortuner 4x4 2007; V6 4.0l; Auto; 7 seater; Tinted electric windows; Low mileage (~36,000 km). Toyota warranty until mid September and fully Toyota serviced. Great car for Natural History Group field trips. Very good condition. Price: 82,750 AED.

Please call Kendall on 050 445 3065 (or 02 401 7503 during business hours).

White Toyota Prado VX 1999; Manual
Registered till May 2011 (Abu Dhabi)
Mileage: 235,000+ km. Price: Dh 22,000 (negotiable)

Call 02-6764814, between 4:30 pm and 7:30 pm.

Upcoming Speakers

Dr. Anf 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.

Last year, along with two of his students, Dr. Ziadat spoke to us about solid waste recycling opportunities on closed campuses. On May 18th, assisted by Civil Engineering students Mouhamed Taher & Ahmed Younis, Dr. Ziadat will speak to us about a more general topic that is dear to his heart: the importance of environmental awareness. His presentation will draw from surveys and case studies done in several countries, including the UAE.

Dr. Ada Natoli is a specialist in population genetics. She has recently moved to Dubai; she is currently working as an external collaborator with several universities and international organisations in UK, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and New Zealand. She focuses her research on marine mammals but has a broad background covering plant genetics & general ecology.

She holds a PhD in molecular ecology from the University of Durham, UK, where she completed her thesis on the molecular ecology of bottlenose and common dolphins, comparing these species and their population structure on a worldwide scale and in the Mediterranean Sea. Her main interests are investigating the evolutionary mechanisms generating population structure, and supporting conservation and management programmes. She holds a Masters in Biology – plant genetics from the University of Milan, Italy; she worked as a plant genetics researcher at the University of Piacenza.

Ada spent a number of years conducting field research with the Tethys Research Institute, working on several projects monitoring the cetacean population in the Mediterranean Sea and Canary Islands. She is member of the IUCN/SSC Cetacean Specialist Group and has been a member of the Italian delegation and several times invited participant to the International Whaling Commission. She is a member of the scientific steering committee for the monitoring and conservation of cetaceans in Italy and has published in several peer-reviewed scientific journals.

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

In the Local News Media

Click on the blue link; the article should appear. –Ed.

The National, March 28: [To the nth degree](#)

The National, April 2: [Scientists seek to solve mystery of Abu Dhabi's dead coral reefs](#)

The National, April 4: [Sharjah site declared oldest evidence yet of humans in UAE](#)

The National, April 6: [First cheetahs born in UAE in 38 years](#)

The National, April 8: [Green makeover for government ministry](#)

The National, April 10: [Self-preservation society: saving UAE's mangroves](#)

The National, April 10: [Scientists leave no date stone unturned](#)

The National, April 11: [A race to find buried treasure in RAK](#)

The National, April 11: [Abu Dhabi advised to lead study of sea levels](#)

The National, April 18: [Rare turtles home on Bu Tinah](#)

Gulf News, April 21: [Endangered green sea turtle rescued by petrol station employee](#)

The National, April 28: [The wasp, the fig and the scientist / A haven for some of the world's tiniest flies](#)

Gulf News, April 28: [Chicken helps to give threatened houbara bustard new lease of life](#)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Emirates Marine Environmental Group: www.emeg.ae

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

20 Most Incredible Desert Oases [pics]: <http://www.environmentalgraffiti.com/featured/desert-oasis/2257>

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.
- Arthropod Fauna of the UAE, Vol 1, 110.
- Arthropod Fauna of the UAE, Vol 2, 110.
- Wild about Mammals, 40.
- Wild about Reptiles, 40.
- Snakes of Arabia, 50.
- On-road in the UAE, 50.
- Abu Dhabi Bird checklist, 10.
- Emirates Bird Report, 20.
- 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.
- Comprehensive Guide to the Wildflowers of the UAE, 100.
- Trucial States, 150.
- Oman 1965, 150.
- Natural History of Oman, 50.
- Falconry, 60.
- Pests, 35. Find out what's in & around your home.
- Reef Fishes of the UAE, 50.
- Snorkeling and Diving in Oman, 50.
- Feast of Dates, 100.
- UAE in Focus, 100.
- Sir Bani Yas, 100.
- Musandam, 90.
- Abu Dhabi 8 million years ago, 15.
- Discovering Qatar, 120.
- Checklist to the Flora of Qatar, 60.

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Starting in September 2010, a new Lecture Coordinator will be required – to arrange speakers for our twice-a-month lectures, with the help of the Committee. Can you do this?

Lectures

Venue: HCT / Abu Dhabi Men's College
Press CTRL+click [here](#) to view map/directions.

4th May
Rare Plant Species in the UAE: Opportunities and Threats

Dr. Taoufik Ksikisi

18th May **7:30 PM**
ENGH Annual General Meeting

7:50 PM

The Importance of Environmental Awareness

Dr. Anf Ziadat, with Mouhamed Taher & Ahmed Younis

1st June **7:30 PM**
Conservation Genetics and Dolphins in the Mediterranean Sea

Dr. Ada Natoli

Field Trips

7th May
Hatta Pools day trip
Feng Wen

27th to 29th May
Sailing with Major Ali to watch start of Sir Bu Nair dhow race (flights available 28th & 29th)
Further details TBA
Andrew Bean

11th June
Visit to AIAin Night Zoo
Andrew Bean

25th June
Beach Moonwalk
Feng Wen

Social Event

8th June **7:30 PM**
End-of-season social gathering at the Blue Far on the top of the Oryx Hotel, Khalidiya

ENHG-AD Research & Conservation Fund Grant Application Information

For background on this fund, see [Dec 2009 Focus](#), p5.
For research & grant application guidelines, click [here](#).
For grant application form, click [here](#).
For further enquiries, contact ENHG Chairman Drew Gardner, at drew.gardner@zu.ac.ae.

ENHG Equipment for Members' Use

The following ENHG equipment is available for members' use during field trips or on request:

- Birding Telescope
- GPS unit – GARMIN GPSMAP 60CSx
- Nikon Coolpix camera – 5 Megapixel, 4x opt zoom
- First-Aid Kit
- Sky Scout astronomical object locator/identifier
- Celestron NexStar telescope (on field trips only)

Please contact Andrew Bean, Excursion Secretary, at rexabean@emirates.net.ae to make enquiries.

Corporate Sponsors of the ENHG - 2010

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.

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Newsletter contributions to:
newsletter@chirri2000.com

Members' Items for sale

Please send small ads to:
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Postal Address

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

Yahogroups website

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