

focus



Abu Dhabi, January 2011
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Emirates Natural History Group

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

EDITORIAL

We are happy to report that the final ENHG Research & Conservation Grant for 2010 has been awarded to Rima Jabado: 10,000 Dhs. in support of a mark recapture study of shark stocks in the Arabian Gulf. This concludes an active year for the ENHG Committee, which also awarded 2010 R&C grants for a population survey of an endangered race of Collared Kingfishers in Khor Kalba; a follow-up survey of some of Abu Dhabi's sabkhas, an assessment of rays and guitarfish from the SE Arabian Peninsula; and the sponsorship of a whale shark tracking satellite tag.

In further reference to whale sharks, on pp 4-5 of this issue we reprint an article from Wildlife Middle East News on the Sharkwatch Arabia Initiative, enlisting divers & seafarers in much-needed research into the ecology of whale sharks in the Gulf.

The programme for Inter-Emirates Weekend 2011, to be held 17th-19th Feb, is still under discussion; it will be confirmed by the end of Jan. See IEW update on p 6. NB: The deadline for reserving rooms at the Tilal Liwa Hotel for the IEW is 31st Jan. Reservations for the 18th Feb buffet dinner will be open until 15th Feb. 31st Jan is also the deadline to submit nominations for the Bish Brown and Sheikh Mubarak Awards. Award decisions will be made at the Feb committee meeting and will be announced at the buffet dinner during the IEW.

On p 8 three interesting upcoming talks are listed, including one by former ENHG Chairman Peter Hellyer, which you will note is on the second Tuesday of Feb—the 8th—making an allowance for some members' holiday schedules. We hope you can join us for our upcoming lectures, field trips and the IEW.

Keith Taylor

Comment on Unusual Sightings

On 23rd Dec 2010, on our Yahoo Group forum, founding ENHG Chairman John-Stewart Smith posted the following comment on the report in Dec 2010 Focus on the sightings of Greater Hoopoe Lark and Red-backed Shrike in Abu Dhabi. We reprint it for the benefit of all our readers, as it provides useful historical perspective on these sightings. -Ed.

From 1970, I served at Bateen Air Base and formed the ENHG with Bish Brown. The Greater Hoopoe Lark was then a common breeding species on Abu Dhabi island and their display flight could be watched anywhere on the base and the surrounding area to the east of the built-up area of town. Red-backed Shrikes were the rarest of shrikes on the island.

I was permitted to enter the grounds of Sheikh Zayed's Beach Palace to the west of the airfield and spent many days there recording and photographing birds. Greater Flamingo were regular, and I hoped they would breed there. An area was fenced off to encourage the flamingo, but I don't think there was any success. I note from Google Earth that the fenced area still exists. This area produced many "firsts" for Abu Dhabi, including Spotted Eagle, Black Francolin, Black Drongo, Black Stork, White Stork, Purple Heron and [not officially recognised] Slender-billed Curlew. A small colony of Red-vented Bulbul (another "first") established

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FRONT COVER PICTURE

Photograph: Pharaoh Eagle Owl, Bubo ascalaphus - Sweihan

Photographer: Hanne & Jens Eriksen

This month's contributors

Warren Baverstock, Hanne & Jens Eriksen, Steve James, Jonathan Ali Khan, David Robinson, John Stewart-Smith, Simon Strickland, 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. A 2011 membership form may be obtained from the Membership Sec. or Asst. at the next meeting or by clicking [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 normally annual scientific journal, *Tribulus*. Volume 19 is coming soon—release date TBA.

themselves in a sand bar there and bred, but I discovered that these birds had escaped from Al Ain zoo and the curator, Otto Bullart, hoped they would return to Al Ain!

I had total freedom of access in the Emirates and was encouraged by Sheikh Zayed in my wanderings by land, sea and air. It is good that your members now have wide access to continue to expand our knowledge of a fascinating area.

John Stewart Smith

December Sighting / Comment

23rd Dec 2010 - Quite fantastic: I saw an Eagle Owl* [*like the one shown on the cover of this issue*] on the way to work, behind Shahama before the Zayed Military City main gate.

Simon Strickland

*'Pharaoh Eagle Owl' (formerly 'Desert Eagle Owl')

In response to this editor's enquiry, Steve James has sent in the following comment on the above sighting.-Ed.

Pharaoh (Desert) Eagle Owls are uncommon, but widespread in AD Emirate. They are regular, close to town: ie Mohammed Bin Zayed City, Al Wathba etc. Urbanisation is encroaching on their territories. They have large territories, so they are always at low density. It doesn't surprise me that they are found around Shahama, as the desert is fine for them there. There are no records, because no-one searches specifically for them, but when you look round, you tend to find them.

Steve James

Delma Island Trip

On 10th-11th Dec, seventeen ENHG members from Abu Dhabi and one from Al Ain took a modern ferry from Jebel Dhanna for a weekend exploration of Delma Island. As we set off, some of us caught a glimpse of a few dolphins cruising the ferry slip and then preceding us out into the Gulf.



Delma Island ferry



Approaching Delma town by ferry



Delma museum - a former pearl merchant's house

On our arrival, we toured the old wooden dhow harbour and visited the quite informative museum, which detailed the historical importance of this island to the pearling industry. There we ran across a friendly Dubai-based

film crew who were shooting three Arabic-language TV documentaries, focusing on tourism, archaeology and agriculture on the island. On Friday night eleven of us pitched camp on a wide-open beach and the rest chose to stay in the convenient but pricey Delma Motel. Then we all convened round the campfire that evening.

On Saturday morning, we broke camp fairly early, drove to the large airfield on the eastern side of the island, and hiked to the summit of the highest hill. The ground was covered with shiny mineral flakes and a lot of reddish iron ore, both hematite—which we'd seen samples of in the museum—as well as a greenish copper ore.



Delma island mangrove bay near our beach campsite



Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui* on *Sesuvium verrucosum*

Back on the beach, we swam, relaxed in the shade or spotted birds (see list below) and other wildlife while Feng cooked up a fish that she'd been given by a generous fisherman that morning and then shared it round. Finally, we headed back the main harbour to catch the 1 pm ferry to the mainland for the drive home.

Keith Taylor

All photographs by May Yoke Taylor

Delma Island Bird List

10-12 December, 2010:

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*; 2 adults, 1 immature
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*; 8

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*; 2 (pair)

Teal *Anas crecca*; 3

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*; 2

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*; 1

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*; 1

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrine*; 9

Red-wattled Plover *Hoplopterus indicus*; 2 (pair)

Knot *Calidris canutus*; 3

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*; 3

Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*; 1
 Curlew *Numenius arquata*; 2
 Redshank *Tringa tetanus*; 3
 Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*; 1
 Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*; 3
 Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*; 80+ (large flock around dhow port)
 Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans*; 4
 Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*; flock of 40+ (drinking from tank)
 Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*; common in town
 Palm/Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*; common in town
 Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*; small flocks around town
 Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*; 3
 White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*; common
 White-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus leuogenys*; common
 Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*; 1
 Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*; 1
 Purple Sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica*; 7
 Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*; 1
 Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*; 1
 House Crow *Corvus splendens*; common around town/port
 House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*; common

Notes: The following birds were observed but not identified as to species: a falcon, a pipit, a warbler and a possible thrush. The best birding areas on Delma Island were around the water tank behind town near the airport, the small mangrove bay in the northeast and the northern scrub on each side of the road round the island.

Simon Strickland

Ibri Anticline Side Trip

On 17th Nov, four of us returning from the Jebel Shams area during the ENHG Eid Al Adha camping trip to Oman (see write-up in [Dec. 2010 Focus](#)) stopped off at a hotel in Ibri and then decided to check out the Ibri anticline the next day. This is a distinctive series of rock outcroppings 30 km SE of town on the shortcut to Salalah, to which we found our way without much difficulty, following a track to a small camel farm and then skirting round it to pick up a bulldozed track up into the outcroppings.

At this site, we found an amazing assortment of marine fossils, including bivalves, gastropods & corals. Living fauna included one Sinai Agama. Living flora consisted of several sp, including the 'Eyelash Plant'.



The central outcropping at the Ibri anticline



Gastropod fossils: 2 Cerithids and 1 Naticid



Colonial coral fossil



Sinai Agama in hiding place



'Eyelash Plant' *Blepharis ciliaris*



White puffball-type fungus, filled with red spores

Keith Taylor

All photographs by May Yoke Taylor

Diving for a Cause: Turning Divers and the Seafaring Community into 'Citizen Scientists'

As reported in December 2010 Focus, an ENHG Research & Conservation Grant has been awarded to David Robinson of Sharkwatch Arabia, to sponsor a whale shark tracking satellite tag. The article below shows a low-tech aspect of the Sharkwatch initiative that is open to all who spend time in and on the sea. This article originally appeared in the Wildlife Middle East News WME News Vol 5 Issue 2—accessible online at www.wmenews.com. It is reprinted by permission of the authors as well of the editors of WME News. -Ed.

Sharkwatch Arabia is a research and conservation initiative that aims to collect information on whale sharks in the region. The work will also form the basis of a post-graduate study being run through the Dubai campus of UK-based Heriot-Watt University and supported by Sultan Qaboos University, Oman.

This is the first true community-based research project in the region that aims to utilize the regional diving and seafaring community to collect information on sightings and behaviour of whale sharks found within the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. The aims of the project include determining the population dynamics, movements and areas of importance for the whale sharks as well as attempting to determine why they visit our region.

Diving and in particular underwater photography are part of a growing industry within the region. Given a small amount of training, any diver can become a researcher, turning each and every dive into a potential data collection experience. Many photographers are willing to participate in research activities, and we have frequently used dive sites that support important marine life. Collectively, our regional divers and dive operators spend more time underwater and cover more area than any dedicated research project could ever hope to achieve. We are therefore hoping to turn our Gulf-wide diving community into a powerful data collection tool. The project is being run in association with the UAE-based Emirates Diving Association, who are helping to spread the word by getting the local dive community involved and providing logistical support for data collection.

One very important step of this project is to feed the sightings back into the community, so there will be quarterly updates of whale shark sightings within the Gulf for EDA members via their quarterly magazine. Anyone can get frequent updates of news and sightings by joining www.facebook.com and visiting the Sharkwatch Arabia page. If a new animal is identified, then the person who has taken the photo will be given the chance to name that individual animal.

If you have encountered a whale shark in the waters of Kuwait, Iraq, Saudi Arabia (Gulf coast), Qatar, Bahrain, Iran, Pakistan, UAE or Oman in the past three years, then we would like to hear from you. A website has been launched as the primary data collection tool of the project: www.sharkwatcharabia.com. Anyone who sights any species of shark is invited to log onto the site and submit their data.

Sharkwatch Arabia was born from the decision to create a regional database, taken during last year's 2009 Arabian Seas Whale Shark Research Symposium & Workshop. Sharkwatch Arabia is being run in association with the Sharkquest Arabia Initiative and under the umbrella of Jonathan Ali Khan's Arabian Whale Shark Research Program: a project that aims to study all aspects of whale shark ecology throughout the region. The ability to identify individuals within a population is an important aspect of any ecological or conservation-based study. Information about correct photography for the identification of individual whale sharks can be found on the website. The goal of the project is to better understand the ecology of the study animals with a view to providing increased conservation in the face of environmental impacts and climate change.

Each and every person who ventures into our regional waters has the ability to help by simply sending in their photographs and sightings. We hope that by establishing this research project we will be able to provide information that will help with the conservation of whale sharks throughout the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman.

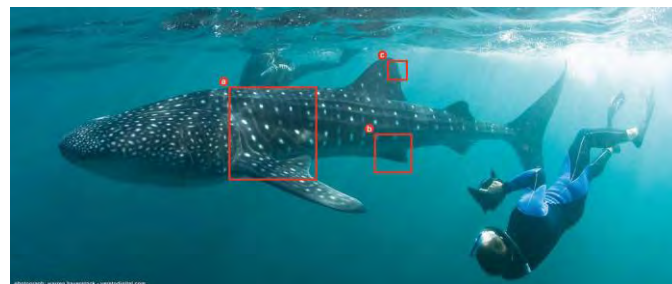


Photo: Warren Baverstock

(The above photograph is difficult to refer to because of the small size required in this newsletter layout. The three tips below (a-c) refer in order to the squares of decreasing size in this photo. The afore-mentioned website has more detailed info. on this subject. -Ed.)

Whale shark ID tips: (a) The spot pattern on a whale shark is unique to every individual just like a human fingerprint. Try to take photos of the areas behind the gill slits on the left and right flank to help with identification. (b) Make a note of the shark's sex (male = claspers) if you are unsure take a photo of this area to check later. (c) Take photographs of any unique markings or scars on any part of the body.

**David Robinson, Jonathan Ali Khan
& Warren Baverstock**

Sharkwatch Arabia, Dubai, UAE
www.sharkwatcharabia.com;
sharkwatcharabia@gmail.com

Upcoming Speaker

On 18th Jan **Nessrine Alzahawi** will be giving a presentation to the ENHG, titled "Fisheries of the UAE: a precious resource in decline". A brief biography of the speaker and an abstract of her talk can be accessed via the following link to [December 2010 Focus](#), p.6.

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

Inter-Emirates Weekend 2011 Update

Inter-Emirates Weekend 2011, hosted by the ENHG-AD, will be held from **Thurs 17th – Sat 19th February**, and is open to paid-up members of ENHG-AD, ENHG-AA and DNHG. The venue is the **Tilal Liwa Hotel**, near Madinat Zayed, about two hours from Abu Dhabi. (Camping in the desert near the hotel is also an option.)

Fifty rooms are being held for IEW 2011 at the rates shown below until 31st January, 2011. These rates include buffet breakfast and are inclusive of 16% tax.
Standard Single/Double room–dune view: AED 578.84
Standard Single/Double room–pool view: AED 694.84

For hotel room reservations, call **+9712 894 6111** or email reservations.tilal@danathotels.com. For further enquiries, call Senior Sales Manager Selimkhan Arifov, on **+971 50 616 0439**.

NB: Tilal Liwa bookings qualify for Etihad Guest Points.

The buffet dinner will be on Friday eve, Feb 18th in the Tilal Liwa Hotel restaurant @ AED150 ea. For dinner reservations, call F&B Manager Ahmed Mousa on **+971 50 4178286** or e-mail ahmed.mousa@danathotels.com. Dinner reservations will remain open until 15th Feb.

Still Tentative IEW Programme:

Thursday Evening:

From 5:00 pm: Registration for IEW trips/workshops
10:00 p.m. Light-trapping/insect collecting near the hotel

Possible Friday Full Day Tour Options:

1. Liwa dunes, three Liwa forts, desert ecology
2. Sila'a (geology & birding)
3. Elephant tracks / Shweihat Island (paleontology)
4. Pos. Sir Bani Yas tour (archaeology/wildlife) Fee TBA

Friday Evening:

- 7:30 p.m.: *Buffet dinner in hotel restaurant
9:00 p.m.: Evening programme in ballroom seating:
-Announcements: Winners of 2010 Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Prize for Natural History & the Bish Brown
-Award and winners of IEW 2011 photo competition.
-Guest speaker: Mike Jennings, speaking on *Atlas of Breeding Birds of Arabia* project.
-10:30 pm: Stargazing in the desert outside the hotel

Saturday Morning Workshops with material from Fri trips

- Coastal bird-watching at Mirfa
-ID'ing plants, reptiles, insects; taking macro photos

Possible Saturday Afternoon Return Trip Tour Options:

1. Hameem to Dew forest & ENAM / 4x4 gazelle-viewing
2. Via Tarif/E-11: Sabkha & outcroppings (fossils)

Instructions for IEW 2011 photo competition:

Max. 2 photos per category, taken in UAE/Oman.
Categories: Flora, Fauna, Scapes, Culture & Heritage.
Min. size: 120 x 185mm; must be mounted & labelled:
name, title, place & date taken. Submissions for Adults and Children 12 & under from 17 Feb up to 5pm 18 Feb.

IEW 2011 programme, to be finalized on 18th Jan., will be emailed to ENHG members and posted on <http://www.enhg.org/iew2011/iew2011.html> and <http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/AUHENHG/>.

ENHG Committee

Holiday Bungalow in South Africa



Charming thatched bungalow, situated in a secure private nature reserve, on the banks of the Sabie River, overlooking Kruger National Park in South Africa.

Fully furnished. Sleeps eight in comfort, in four bedrooms (three bathrooms). Wonderful verandah for entertaining while bird/game watching. Over 300 species of birds & 42 species of mammal seen from the property. Elephant; Buffalo; Hippo; Crocodile; Giraffe & a host of smaller game seen daily. Lion sometimes seen, Leopard always present but difficult to see. Hyaena seen at night.

Makes a fantastic base for exploring KNP & the Drakensburg Mountains. KNP entrance 1km away.

- 120 pounds sterling a night for eight people
- 100 pounds a night for six people
- 90 pounds a night for fewer than six people

Contact Steve James via e-mail: sjames677@gmail.com

See website: <http://www.krugerholidays.com/> for further information and an excellent photo gallery. -Ed



Both above photographs by Steve James

In the Local News Media

The National, Dec. 16: [Damage to Gulf's coral reefs 'is irreversible'](#)

Gulf News, Dec. 24: [Injured turtle given treatment in Dubai](#)

The National, Dec. 28: [Dh1m donation 'for our precious desert'](#)

Gulf News, Dec. 29: [Snow falls on Oman's Al Hajar Mountain range](#)

Gulf News, Dec. 29: [Abu Dhabi joins Wildlife Society to help protect hawksbill turtle](#)

The National, Dec. 30: [These backpackers don't need visas](#)

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. Click on the links below for information about the sponsors.

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Partex Oil and Gas



Readymix Abu Dhabi Limited L.L.C.



Shell



Total ABK



Ultra Dascam



URS



Dames & Moore

Waveblade



WSP Group



ITEMS ON SALE AT THE ENHG BOOK STALL

All prices are in dirhams.

- Arabian Wildlife Encyclopedia, 120.
- 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.
- Wild about Reptiles, 40.
- Snakes of Arabia, 50.
- Arthropod Fauna of the UAE, Vol 1, 110.
- Arthropod Fauna of the UAE, Vol 2, 110.
- Breeding Birds of the United Arab Emirates, 100
- Abu Dhabi Bird checklist, 10.
- Emirates Bird Report, 20.
- Birdwatching guide to Oman, 2nd edition, 100.
Guide to bird watching spots in Oman.
- Common Birds in Oman, 2nd ed, 120.
- Comprehensive Guide to the Wildflowers of the UAE, 100.
- Butterflies of Saudi Arabia & its neighbours, 90.
- Trucial States, 120.
- Oman 1965, 120.
- Natural History of Oman, 50.
- Feast of Dates, 100.
- On-road in the UAE, 50.
- UAE in Focus, 100.
- Sir Bani Yas, 100.
- Musandam, 90.
- Abu Dhabi 8 million years ago, 15.
- Discovering Qatar, 120.

Committee Members

Drew Gardner
(Chairman)
Mobile: 050-667-5830
drew.gardner@zu.ac.ae

Keith Taylor
(Deputy Chairman / Focus Editor)
Mobile: 050-820-4938
kjtaylor13@yahoo.com

Eila Merriman
(Treasurer /
Assistant Membership Secretary)
Mobile: 050-908-1200
kubukabin@hotmail.com

Louise Welch
(Secretary)
Mobile: 050-189-4492
louise.welch@afcarillion.ae

Barbara Barton Smith
(Membership Secretary)
050 761-6880
barbbartonsmith@yahoo.com

Andrew Bean
(Excursion Secretary)
Mobile: 050-322-1327
rexabea@emirates.net.ae

Feng Wen
(Assistant Excursion Secretary)
Mobile: 050-622-1485
feng.wen@adpc.ae

Peter Hellyer
(Editor of *Tribulus* / Librarian)
Mobile: 050-642-4357
peter@extinfo.gov.ae

Ann Pearson
(Corporate Sponsorship
Secretary)
ann.pearson9@btinternet.com

Patricia MacLachlan
(Public Relations Secretary)
mp_maclachlanuk@yahoo.co.uk

Dick Hornby
(Member)
Mobile: 050-662-4501
dnahornby@yahoo.co.uk

Molly McQuarrie
(Member)
teacher.ags@gmail.com

Stefan Beck
(Member)
Phone: 04-443-1 430
stefan_k_beck@yahoo.de

Julie Bird
(Member)
050-615-4757
julieinad@yahoo.com

Gaby Zezulka-Mailloux
(Member)
gabrielle.mailloux@adu.ac.ae

Required: An AV Assistant to control the lights and sound during some meetings, as part of a team (training will be provided). Can you help us?

Lectures

Venue: HCT / Abu Dhabi Men's College

Press CTRL+click [here](#) to view map/directions.

4th Jan.
The Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund
Nicolas Heard

18th Jan. **7:30 PM**
Fisheries of the UAE: a Precious Resource in Decline

Nessrine Alzahawi

8th Feb. **7:30 PM**
An Introduction to the History of Abu Dhabi: A quick saunter through the last 200,000 years
Peter Hellyer

15th Feb. **7:30 PM**
Wildlife and Birds of Oman: an evening of films with the cameraman and director Hamed al Wardi
Hamed al Wardi

Field Trips

18th Dec.
A visit to the Emirates Hydroponics Farms in Al Bahja (Shahama); Beach walk/BBQ
Feng Wen

8th Jan.
Afternoon Birdwatching Al Wathba lakes
Andrew Bean/Oscar Campbell

21st-22nd Jan.
Al Hoota Guest House, above Al Hamra, Oman
Andrew Bean

17th-19th Feb.
InterEmirates Weekend Tilal Liwa hotel: Check email for programme
Hosts: ENHG-AD

Websites of General Interest

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

Qatar Natural History Group: <http://www.qnhg.com>

Emirates Society of Geoscience: <http://www.esg-uae.org>

Noukhada Adventure Company: <http://noukhada.ae>

Tommy Pedersen's UAE Birding / UAE Nature Forum: <http://www.uaebirding.com>

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

Emirates Marine Environmental Group: www.emeg.ae

Emirates Diving Association: <http://www.emiratesdiving.com/index.php>

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

Sharjah Museums: <http://www.sharjahmuseums.ae>

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

ArabianWildlife: <http://www.arabianwildlife.com/main.htm>

ARKive: Images of Life on Earth: <http://www.arkive.org>

ZipcodeZoo: Comprehensive naturalists' resource: <http://zipcodezoo.com/default.asp>

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
- First-Aid Kit
- Sky Scout astronomical object locator/identifier
- Celestron NexStar telescope (on field trips only)
- Two satellite phones, taken on camping trips.
Phone numbers: No. 1: 008821644400956
No. 2: 008821644400965

Enquiries: Andrew Bean, rexabea@emirates.net.ae

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.

Newsletter Details

Newsletter contributions to:
newsletter@chirri2000.com

Members' Items for sale

Please send small ads to:
newsletter@chirri2000.com

Postal Address

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

Yahoo Groups website

<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/AUHENHG>
(Click Join button to sign up for ENHG info.)