

focus



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Emirates Natural History Group

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

EDITORIAL

Welcome to a super-bumper issue of *Focus* – and to a New Year!

This issue features illustrated write-ups of two enjoyable trips—a fascinating archaeological tour of Wadi Hilo on Sharjah's east coast and a return camping trip to a rugged and beautiful coastal peninsula near Sila, in Abu Dhabi's far west.

Our upcoming annual mountain hike (day trip, and for some a camping trip as well) will be led up Jebel Qatar by Stefan Beck on 2nd Feb 2013. Other trips in the works will be announced early in Feb. In addition, we are all looking forward to the Inter Emirates Weekend in Al Ain, with its focus on the historical roots of our family of NHGs in the UAE and a wonderful range of activities on offer. Please note that the reservation deadline for the annual IEW dinner has been extended into early February. Please make your bookings now if you plan on attending this special event (see update on pp. 9-10).

Earlier this month, despite technical difficulties, we had a rare close-up look at Abu Dhabi's important dugong colony via two EAD-produced DVDs. If you would like to see those videos for the first time or again—all the way through—see the links on the bottom of page 10.

We were sorry last week to have to announce for the second time the last-minute cancellation of the lecture on the Oman Botanic Garden by Dr Annette Patzelt after we'd thought we'd gone through all the right channels. We regretfully chalk it up to experience. Those interested in Dr Patzelt's work will find her book at our Book Sales table in the near future, and we will keep the OBG on our list of possible places to go. Looking ahead, we have some great talks lined up with Steve James taking us on a journey of ornithological history across the Himalayas on Tues 5th Feb (see p. 10 and p. 12).

We are continuing to experience significant turnover on the Committee this year. After serving the Committee well as Lecture Coordinator the first half of this season, and leaving the rest of the season's lecture calendar well in hand, Stephanie Baldwin is now stepping down from the committee due to her sudden transfer to Hong Kong. In addition, Barbara Smith has stepped down as Membership Secretary because of increased work commitments. We thank her for all her hard work in this vital position during the past few years! Thankfully, CS Sec Avra is filling in behind the scenes, keeping the membership list sorted. It is gratifying to see several new Committee members on the Committee pitching in and filling recent vacancies very capably. The most recent addition is Amanda Smyton, who has graciously stepped up as our new Lecture (and Social Events) Coordinator, and is assisting with PR outreach as well.

Finally, in Committee news, at the still-upcoming 2012 Annual General Meeting, which is set for 7th May, 2013, I will be stepping down as ENHG Chairman. As many of our members know, my family has returned to Australia for the girls to attend High School and consequently I will be doing a lot of travelling to MENA, Africa and Asia with my corporate training work, which makes it difficult for me to maintain my commitment to the Committee. I have enjoyed the opportunity to serve on the Committee for

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FRONT COVER PICTURE

Photograph: A rock gecko, *Bunopus spatulurus hajarensis*, warming up in ashes of previous night's campfire at Wadi Hilo

Photographer: May Yoke Taylor

This month's contributors

ENHG-Al Ain, Ronnie Gallagher, Drew Gardner, Jennifer Hasenknopf, Steve James, Munir El Kadi, Crista Rayner, David Stanton, Keith Taylor, May Yoke Taylor, Kevin Twitchett

ENHG Membership Information

Annual membership in the Abu Dhabi chapter of the ENHG is 100 Dhs per individual and now 150 Dhs per family membership. See Membership Sec. or Asst. at the next meeting for a membership form. Membership renewals for 2013 are due in January.

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 peer-reviewed journal, *Tribulus*. Volume 20 is now available at ENHG meetings.

the past 7 years and want to extend my best wishes for the continued success of the Group.

It is now time to renew memberships. The committee has decided that after 14 years it is time to increase the family membership fee to 150 dh whilst keeping the single members fee at 100 dh. Membership fees are used to pay for the printing of *Tribulus* and to fund our research grants program. By the way, if you enjoy coming to our meetings and meeting new people, please consider serving as our new Membership Secretary!

In research grant news, the 2nd grant of 10,000 dh has been sent to Brigitte Howarth for the purchase of a very important climate-controlled cabinet to house the Joint Al Ain-Abu Dhabi Insect Collection. This Collection is unique and irreplaceable and needs this case to ensure it is conserved properly for future generations. We thank our members and corporate sponsors for their membership fees that allow us to provide grants for such important conservation and research projects.

The annual NH Awards nomination deadline is fast approaching (cf. Dec 2012 *Focus*, p. 2). We have already received some nominations, but more are always welcome by the 31st Jan deadline. The awards will be announced at the IEW in Al Ain.

Finally, in members' news, we want to pay our respects to former ENHG member Dr. Steve Sullivan, who passed away from cancer on Dec 5th, 2012. He was an avid birdwatcher from California who enjoyed becoming familiar with the wide variety of resident and migrating birdlife in the UAE during his year or so here. We remember him and his wife Jay as good company on ENHG trips and at lecture meetings. Our sincerest condolences go out to his family.

Andrew Bean

Wadi Hilo Site Tour: A Summary



Watchtower and reconstructed Bronze Age Tower base

On 14th December members of the Emirates Natural History Group Chapters of Al Ain, Fujairah and Abu Dhabi, and two guests from Oman met at Wadi Hilo and were treated to a fascinating and very informative presentation at a most important UAE archaeological site by Professor Hans-Peter Uerpmann and his wife Margaret. The presentation was given as a way of saying thank you to the ENHG for a sponsorship grant given to investigate a camel's tooth - or rather the radioisotopes of the element Strontium it contains. Note: as strontium exists in two forms, the relative ratio of both is geologically and geographically determined. As it is absorbed with food and water and laid down in annual layers in a tooth, it allows scientists to determine seasonal migration patterns in antiquity and how the Bedu once lived. Study results are eagerly anticipated.

Due to the large amount of information given by Prof Uerpmann, the decision has been taken to present a summary of the selected information in this issue of *Focus* with further details of some of the highlights in the next issue and possibly on our online web forum site.

The reason for studying Wadi Hilo is that the Directorate of Antiquities in Sharjah invited Prof Uerpmann to investigate a mound that lay next to a pre-Islamic Bedu watch tower. It was evident from the amount of copper

slag lying around that Wadi Hilo was once a significant copper smelting and production area, though this could have been from the Islamic Age. However, copper remains found inside the mound indicated that it was a Bronze Age structure, suggesting the site was something rather special.

Upon excavation, the mound, which was originally thought to be an Umm al Nar burial site, surprisingly was found to have no human remains and proved to be much older than the watchtower. Radiocarbon dating of charcoal found at the base of the exterior wall revealed an age of 4,500 years, making it early Bronze Age. Excavating the mound also revealed a circle wall of stones with two internal right-angled partitioning walls, dividing the structure into quarters, so making it an especially intriguing find. Recently, the original walls have been added to with light coloured river stone to delineate the original stonework and raised to around 1.5m. It is thought that this Bronze Age tower, which may have stood some 5 m tall, was an early forerunner of the traditional fortified watchtowers that can be found across the region. The evidence of copper slag (i.e. a by-product of smelting copper ore) suggests it may have been a stronghold of sorts used to store copper ingots prior to transportation.

Appropriately, Professor Uerpmann began his talk at the mound, which lies adjacent to the pre-Islamic Bedu watchtower that overlooks the wadi entrance. Giving an account of the importance of the region, he noted that Iranian records show that large amounts of copper were exported from the Musandam Peninsula, (which was previously known as the Magan), into Mesopotamia. Since 2005, Prof. Uerpmann and his students of the University of Tübingen in Germany have excavated at Wadi Hilo every winter and have made a number of remarkable discoveries. Each season brings new finds, and the most recent one, from some radiocarbon-dated charcoal, is that Wadi Hilo (which means 'sweet water') has been occupied from the early Neolithic period some 9500 years ago. As such, Wadi Hilo has proven to be the earliest site of copper production in the region and also the earliest Neolithic site, both of which are incredibly important in understanding the history of the region and its trade links to distant lands. Evidence of occupation indicates Wadi Hilo was used for different reasons from almost ten millennia up to the present.

The following highlights capture selected aspects of the presentation:

1. Islamic graves. There are numerous Islamic graves around the site, which makes exploration rather difficult as they cannot be disturbed by excavation. Most have two marker stones at both head and feet, and all orient in a North to South direction. This orientation allows the deceased to have their heads angled to the side, in the direction of Mecca.
2. There is no evidence of copper smelting in the Islamic period.
3. Copper Production.
 - a. This commenced some 4500 years ago and left a considerable amount of slag lying around, much as it can be seen today.

- b. Slag was reused or recycled during the Iron Age up to around 500 BC to remove residual copper. Numerous small boulders with single cupules are thought to act as anvils to hold the slag for ease of pounding and crushing. Indeed re-use of the slag was the main use of the site in the Iron Age.



- c. In the workshop area a central flat-topped boulder was used for crushing. Evidence of extraction can be seen on the boulder and in two layers of sediment where there is greenish colouration. Radiocarbon dating here places the first site use at the very Early Bronze Age around 3000 BC with continued use up to the Iron Age in 500 BC. Given some 2500 years of continued use, this site is clearly exceptional, and as such consideration is being given to protecting this site, perhaps by giving it a protective roof.



- d. Dating the slag is not possible as it does not contain sufficient quartz to use thermoluminescence.
- e. Over the long period of copper production, Professor Uerpmann suggested that up to 400,000 tonnes of copper may have been produced.
- f. A copper ingot weighing 5 kg that had been cast into sand was found near the smelting area at the base of a wall. It is unknown why such a valuable commodity was left behind—probably by accident. Half of it can be seen in the Sharjah museum, while the other has gone to Germany for metallurgical study, where it was found to be 99.9% pure copper.
- g. There is no evidence of bronze having been produced at the site as there are no supplies of tin in the region to create bronze. The nearest location where bronze could have been made is Kalba, where suitable clay may be found for casting purposes. Additionally, tin would have to be brought in from countries such as Iran, Afghanistan and southern central Asia, but given

trade with Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley, this is a hypothetical possibility.

4. Copper Ore.
- a. Professor Uerpmann pointed out the nearby copper extraction point. Here a vein of quartz had been excavated to reveal the quartz and its associated copper ore. A continuation of the light coloured vein could be seen in the opposite wadi wall. While this is the nearest vein excavated, similar veins that can be found in the surrounding area were mined as well and the ore brought to the workshop area for processing.



5. Smelting.
- a. Smelting ovens or kilns have not been preserved well due to the poor quality of the clay in the wadi area, so it is rare to find pieces of oven. When found, oven pieces are protected by layers of copper.
- b. Other sites in the UAE suggest that ore was carried to wadis where ghaf trees were used as a fuel source. However in Wadi Hilo, fuel (wood) is thought to have been brought in from within the wadi, where it was plentiful.
- c. Smelting took place over a very long time from the very early Bronze Age through to the 'Wadi Souq' period.
6. Bedu Tower. This has a typical opening on the first floor for safety and defensive purposes.
7. Wadi Erosion. A very steep cliff face near the tower indicates that in full flood the wadi is eating away the base of the cliff at a rate of 1 m per year.
8. Architecture.
- a. Unlike nomadic sites, the Bronze Age left many structures visible on the surface, which can be seen across the site. These represent the bases of walls.
- b. Some modern remains are of buildings used in the drying and storage of tobacco.
9. Petroglyphs. Petroglyphs are recorded from near the main road at the entrance of the Wadi Hilo. Carved into iron oxide patina to reveal lighter-coloured rock, they show a range of anthropomorphic and animal images. Time was limited and it was not possible for most folk to get to see them. Photographs were taken

the following day by the overnight campers. Here is one of a horse & rider; more will be presented later.



10. Wadi fortification. Not far from the copper ore site a shallower bank at a lateral wadi shows signs of fortification. This is associated with a step-like arrangement of boulders which may have served as a staircase to access the wadi, most likely to a wadi well. Excavation may help determine the purpose of the architecture.

11. Artifacts. A small copper dagger was found at the site.

12. Neolithic Remains.

a. In one area a number of old holes were observed, which when opened up by trenching revealed a lot of charcoal. It was assumed that this was a coal producing area for smelting. However, the quantity of charcoal found was surprising. Why had it not been used up? Radiocarbon dating revealed an age of around 9000 years. Other pits revealed coal dating to 7000 and 8000 years old—long before the Bronze Age and smelting. Successions of layers indicate continual use over this period, indicating that people were living in the area and 'did something'. What they did we cannot tell you at the moment. It is probable, though, that the charcoal is the remains of camp or village fires.

b. As organic material is poorly preserved, only some splints of bone of these ancient people remain. Clearly, though, the site is something special and deserving of more archaeological investigation.

It is evident from the above that Wadi Hilo is an exceptionally important site with much yet to be learned about such a long period of occupation. In time, and with further research, it can be anticipated that much will be learned from this site about Bedu ancestry and ancient regional trade links.



Photo: May Yoke Taylor

In this summary, it is not possible to give an account of the many questions and answers given by Professor Uerpmann. These are fascinating and will be addressed later. For those wishing to read professional accounts of Wadi Hilo, initial information has been published in the Proceedings of the Seminar of Arabian Studies, Vol 39 (2009), with further from the seminar conducted in 2012.

Ronnie Gallagher

Uncredited photographs by Ronnie Gallagher

Wadi Hilo Camping Trip

After the excellent site tour summarised above, a few of us participants camped in the flat car park area at the excavation site; eating our dinners round the campfire, we cogitated on the activities and thoughts of the Neolithic people doing exactly the same thing on this very site 9,000 years ago.

In the morning, exploring just across the track, we fast-forwarded to the former residence of a man who'd likely grown rich on the resources of this wadi (see below.)



Dropping back again in time, we examined the remarkable Bronze Age petroglyphs at the bottom of the wadi (see above) on our way out. After that, springing back into recent Islamic era, we drove to the southern end of the Kalba Corniche Park, where we visited the small but well-laid out Kalba Museum in the reconstructed sheikh's house dating back to the days of an independent sheikdom of Kalba, formerly a very productive agricultural centre. After a spot of bird-watching (Indian Rollers) in the park, we paid a return visit (for two of us) to the now fully reconstructed fortified house in Wadi Hayl (effectively the other end of Wadi Hilo) and climbed to the top of the "Hayl Castle" tower overlooking the still-functioning plantation below.



One of our friends from ENHG-Fujairah drew us a map to a striking rock full of petroglyphs right on our way home from Wadi Hayl, but we reckoned we didn't have time for that last stop ...maybe that'll be one for our next East Coast trip!

Keith Taylor

Photographs by May Yoke Taylor

Camping Trip to As Sila Peninsula

The 2012 National Day holiday weekend was the occasion for a well-attended ENHG camping trip to a remote, little-visited part of Abu Dhabi's coastline: the eastern peninsula near the far western town of As Sila.

On the way there, we made a short stop for lunch at the picnic area in front of the Mirfah Hotel, in the town of Mirfah (approx. 140 kilometres from Abu Dhabi), where we spotted White-eared Bulbuls in the trees and Red-wattled Lapwings walking along the beach in front of the patch of mangrove forest beside the hotel.

After our brief lunch stop, we ventured straight on to As Sila with a right turn off the highway through the main town area and then approximately 20 minutes along a gravel road with some driving around until we found our campsite. The only saloon car, belonging to Munir and Jennifer, stayed behind with Reem and Kev until the last leg of our journey to make sure that their car would make it. While they were awaiting for Keith to come back to fetch them and show them the way, they were visited by a herd of camels that showed great interest in Munir and his camera, while the rest of them quickly jumped into the back of Reem and Kev's vehicle.

The fifteen of us who convoyed out there on Friday set up camp for a two-night stay, while one intrepid new member, Mary Carole, drove out alone (with a canine companion) on Saturday morning, with the help of texted directions and a volunteer Emirati guide for the final leg.



Photo: Munir El Kadi

Jennifer, Mary Carole and Keith at the campsite
[NB: We took the campfire ashes with us when we left.]



Photo: Munir El Kadi

Gulf view from sandstone pillars near our campsite

We chose the same campsite as that used on the recce trip in 2009: a beautiful, if barren, landscape of weirdly eroded sandstone walls and pillars littered with sparkly multi-hued gypsum crystals, on a series of terraces indicating four or five ancient seabed levels.



Our main environmental challenge was the stiff all-night wind, which caused quite a racket and stressed one tent to the breaking point, though this was no problem for the camper bunked down in a snug roof-top tent cabin. During the daytime, the wind proved perfect for kite-flying, though a bit trickier for Frisbee-tossing.

In the evening, one could not miss the visit of the moon, rising up over the water looking like a hot red ball and gradually ascending into the sky through the night, fading to a yellower colour. The evening temperature was cool and pleasant for after-dinner socializing round the campfire by the light of the big yellow moon. The first night's campfire gathering included dance performances, to recorded music, of both the dabke (by Reem) and the tango (by Jennifer and Munir).

Though heavy rain was reported in much of the UAE that weekend, and we had driven through some on the way up to As Sila, only toward the end of the second evening did a momentary cloudburst send the last few of us round the campfire scurrying for shelter.

At this time of year, the water temperature wasn't inviting, but beach-combing turned up a multitude of interesting shells, crystals & debris, two whole dolphin skulls, and one dead Green Turtle.



Naturally sliced gypsum crystals



Photo: Kevin Twitchett

Barnacle-encrusted trainer



Dolphin skull



Dead Green Turtle

We were gratified to find no more signs of the oil spill so obvious three years ago, but we found disturbing the large amount of rubbish littering the coastline—most of it likely tossed overboard from ships and boats in the Gulf.



Sea-litter-strewn beach on As Sila peninsula



James and Keith on a relatively clean stretch of beach

The dominant growth of Sea Lavender reported in April, 2009 was noticeably missing on this visit—all had died back, but a closer inspection of some clumps of dead twigs revealed a few small sprigs of green, with these plants set to sprout new shoots sometime during the cooler, wetter winter months. Bird life was evident, with sightings of Desert Wheatear, Common Swift, Osprey, Socotra Cormorant, Greater Flamingo, Western Reef Heron, and unidentified smaller wader species.



Photo: Alena Ruzicka

Socotra Cormorant off As Sila Peninsula



Photo: Alena Ruzicka

Greater Flamingos near the jetty south of our campsite

Other than the above-mentioned camels, no terrestrial mammals were seen. The burrow below could have been dug by a hedgehog, but also perhaps by a snake.



Dolphins were actively scouted for but not confirmed; perhaps the coastal waters are too shallow for them, though their skulls showed their presence in the vicinity. In addition to the dead turtle, a live one was seen coming up for air on the promontory at the peninsula's tip—visited in the morning right before our departure.



As Sila peninsula promontory

The most intriguing find of this trip was a small snake on the side of a small rocky draw leading from our campsite down to the water's edge. Thanks go out to budding naturalists Alexa and Anna Rayner for spotting it on the Saturday morning and bringing it to our attention! While a number of us came down to have a look at it, it held its ground, presumably sunning itself. Though we kept what we considered a safe distance, it nevertheless found us too close for comfort and feinted a number of attacks.



Photo: Munir El Kadi

Awl-headed Snake at As Sila

It turns out this is a non-venomous snake, the Awl-headed or Crowned Leaf-nosed Snake, *Lytorhynchus diadema*; it was featured on the cover of the last (December 2012) issue of *Focus* (initially misidentified as a viper), as mentioned in the Erratum item below. It's good to know this is a significant record, placing this species quite a bit further westward along the UAE's coastline than heretofore reported. This shows once again that though our field trips are partly just good social/recreational/photographic excursions, from time to time they can also provide useful wildlife data, which we happily pass on to those who can add it to the relevant database.

Keith Taylor / Jennifer Hasenknopf

Uncredited photographs by May Yoke Taylor

Erratum

This corrected identification of the snake on the cover of the December 2012 Focus was received shortly after the initial distribution of that issue, an amended version of which, with the corrected snake ID & a re-touched field trip write-up, can now be found in our online archives. This message from former ENHG Dr. Drew Gardner shows this snake is, in fact, of special interest. –Ed.

I have just received Focus for December. Great pic on the front cover of one of the rarer snakes in Abu Dhabi... certainly not a viper! This is the Awl-headed or Crowned Leaf-nosed snake *Lytorhynchus diadema*. It is a harmless little guy, mainly nocturnal, that lives in sand plains and sometimes dunes*. [*But in this case on a rocky coastline without a lot of sand around –Ed.*]

It is also further west than known before in Abu Dhabi (most westerly known was Jebel Dhana): a good record. It would be great if you could give me the coordinates [*Done! –Ed.*] and I'll add it to the reptile database I am still maintaining.

Drew Gardner

Fact File: The Awl-headed Snake

[Adapted from the Arkive.org website, where this snake is listed as one of the "Jewels of the UAE" –Ed.]

A little-known, burrow-dwelling reptile, the most distinctive feature of the Awl-headed [or Crowned Leaf-nosed] Snake is its shovel-shaped, projecting snout which is used as an adaptation for digging into sand while seeking out prey. With undulations of the elongated, cylindrical body and medium-sized tail, the head, with sunken mouth and enlarged scales, is thrust into the ground and the sand is pushed away. The awl-headed snake varies in colour from pale yellow to yellow-brown or reddish, although a series of dark rectangular blotches on the upper side and smaller spots on the sides of the body are largely retained. There is a chocolate-brown circle or ring on each side of the head behind the eyes, which are usually joined by a brown bar, and a dark stripe runs from each eye to the corner of the mouth. The underside of the body is a uniform white or cream; it is up to 45cm in length.

This snake is thought to be largely nocturnal or crepuscular (active at dusk or dawn) during the summer, residing in burrows during the day. In the colder months of spring and autumn, it is thought to become more active during the day. It mainly eats small lizards that have burrowed into loose sand, but young rodents and large insects may also be consumed.

The Awl-headed Snake inhabits sand or stony areas around the margins of deserts, in coastal sand dunes, and on high grassy plateaus up to altitudes of around 2,000 metres. It is found across North Africa and the Middle East, from Mauritania through to Iran.*

* NB: Editor can provide reference citations for this item.

Striped Hawkmoth Sighting

Below is a photo of a "hummingbird-like insect" that the two youngest Rayners spotted on their family's winter holiday trip to Ras al Jinz, on Dec 30th, 2012. This has

been ID'd by Gary Feulner as a Striped Hawkmoth, *Hyles livornica*. He adds that "Caterpillars of these can be hyperabundant in rainy winters." -Ed



Photo: Crista Rayner

FEW & FPALY Update

The two items below are republished with permission from the November 30, 2012 issue (No. 36) of the newsletter of FEW-FPALY: Foundation for Endangered Wildlife (Yemen) / Foundation for the Protection of the Arabian Leopard in Yemen – recipient of three ENHG Research & Conservation grants (2009 to 2012). This follows the update from No. 33 of that newsletter that appeared in Nov 2012 Focus. It is good to see that this conservation effort on another part of the Arabian Peninsula is going from strength to strength, and especially heartening that influential Yemeni citizens are taking up leadership positions in this effort. The editorial by FEW-FPALY Executive Director David Stanton presents a view of conservation that we concur with whole-heartedly. -Ed.

1. Happy Third Birthday to FEW/FPALY! On November 18, FEW/FPALY quietly observed its third anniversary as an official NGO. For the past three years FEW's strategic direction has resulted primarily from the vision and initiative of founder and Executive Director David Stanton. Having recently resumed the teaching career that he temporarily left in order to start FEW/FPALY, Mr. Stanton is confident that newly appointed Associate Director Dr. Mohammed Al-Duais will lead the NGO into a new and even more effective era in the near future. As he stated in a recent meeting with conservationists Esmond Bradley Martin and Lucy Vigne, "The first stage has expended most of its fuel and we've climbed pretty high. Now the second stage is firing up and taking us even further." We expect that future updates will be filled with exciting disclosures about FEW's growing conservation program in Yemen.

2. Editorial - "Conservation and People": Without people there would be no need for conservation, nor anybody to effect it. While we may conceive of conservation as a means of "protecting" nature, like most everything we humans do, conservation is basically all about doing those things that we perceive to be in *our* best interest. Humans focus their too-modest conservation efforts on those species that they either find useful or irksome. Much of conservation falls under the aegis of "wildlife management," which generally fits into two basic categories: 1) ensuring a ready supply of game to hunt, and 2) dealing with "problem" species. In either case, the motivation behind policy and action is generally economic. For a relatively few species (often

the "charismatic mega fauna" like pandas and elephants), some aesthetic quality and/or collective human guilt inspires us to try and "save" them from an extinction that we are causing. Who can imagine, for example, a world without 'tygers, tygers burning bright?' Nevertheless, we get closer to a tigerless world every day! Currently, more than 1,100 species of birds are in danger of global extinction. Many of the proportionately few people who support conservation do so simply because they believe that because people have the power to destroy nature, it is our responsibility to protect it. These people are prepared to swim against the tide of humanity and try to slow the most devastating mass-extinction event Earth has ever known. E.O. Wilson of Harvard University estimates that current rates of habitat destruction and environmental overexploitation are likely to result in a 50% loss of all biodiversity within the next 38 years. If true, this means that according to the low estimate of 30 million species that are thought to inhabit the Earth, an average of 400,000 unique life forms will become extinct every year until the middle of this century. Nobody can predict what the outcome of such a catastrophic loss of biodiversity will be, but it is ultimately almost certain to be contrary to *our* best interests.

David Stanton

If you would like to download and read more of this newsletter issue, including extended introductions to all the Yemeni (and some expat) players in this important conservation effort in a not-so-far-away country, please click on this link:

http://www.yemenileopard.org/files/cms/news_articles/No_36_November_30_2012_English.pdf . -Ed.

Programme Update: IEW 2013

We are now less than a month away from this year's Inter Emirates Weekend. Booking is still open for the IEW buffet dinner to be held at the Danat Resort Ballroom (Dhs 145 each, inclusive of taxes) on Fri. 22nd Feb. If you plan on attending this not-to-be-missed event, please write interemiratesweekend@gmail.com and tell how many tickets you are reserving.

There is no need to pre-register for trip IEW 2013 activities. On Thurs. 21st Feb, a registration desk will be set up at the Danat Hotel from 5pm-9pm where people can sign up for activities and pay for their Dinner Tickets. There will also be a short registration session on Friday morning and again on Friday afternoon.

Programme highlights:

Thursday: Lecture on Mosque Architecture by Dr Suzanne Hofstra; Exhibition on ENHG History.

Friday: Birding Trip; Mosque Architecture & Al Ain Souk Tour; Walks in A'Dhahir Oasis, Al Ain Oasis, Hanging Gardens & Al Ain Wadi; Mountain hike from Ramtha to Khudrah; Workshops in Photography, Mapping Solar Clocks, & Archiving (helping organize archival material dating back to the co-founder of the ENHG, Bish Brown).

Friday evening dinner: Programme focusing on 'Origins of the ENHG' along with announcement of 2012 Natural History Awards winners.

Saturday: Walks in A'Dhahir, Al Ain & Jimi Oases; A'Dhahir to Al'Ilal & Jebel Qatar Mountain Hikes; Mosque

Architecture Tour; Jazira Plant Survey & picnic lunch; and Curating Techniques workshop (working with ENHG archival material).

Specific information about meeting places and maps for these will be sent out closer to the time.

ENHG-AI Ain

Field Guide: Wild Plants of Oman

Designed for outdoor enthusiasts, the *Field Guide to the Wild Plants of Oman* will also be valued by those with more specialised botanical interests. The short introduction provides an insight into Oman's geography and environmental diversity. The main sections cover 250 common species, and each account is enhanced by fascinating colour photographs which enable quick identification. For ease of use, plants are grouped according to the colour of their most conspicuous feature, usually flowers, with additional sections for trees and grasses. Within each colour group they are organised alphabetically by botanical family. A short description gives details of appearance, habitat, uses and worldwide distribution. The addition of a glossary of botanical terms, a bibliography and indexes of scientific and vernacular names, make this an invaluable reference for anyone with an interest in the fascinating flora of Oman.

Co-author Annette Patzelt is Head of Research at the new Oman Botanical Garden. Co-author Helen Pickering is a plant photographer who has previously published a photographic guide to the wild flowers of Mombacho, Nicaragua.

NB: This book is now on order, and copies should be displayed for sale at ENHG lecture meetings starting on 5th February, 2013. –Ed.

Upcoming Speaker



On Feb 5th, frequent spring visitor **Steve James** will present *A Journey across the Roof of the World*, which follows the steps of 19th century ornithological explorers as they wandered across the Tibetan Plateau. This talk concentrates on the people, mammals and birds to be found there.

Stephen is a life-long birder and natural history enthusiast. He has travelled to 111 countries across the world, mainly in the pursuit of birds & mammals. His favourite country is where he is going next! His favourite pastime is birding & watching large mammals in their native habitat. When he is not birding, he squeezes in a little work to pay for the next trip.

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

Corporate Sponsors of the ENHG - 2012

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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Two EAD Dugong Documentaries

Legendary Mermaids:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TzdYAyKCLSI>

Tracking Mermaids:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-n2gMSGIaLQ>

Websites of General Interest, Cont'd

Dubai Natural History Group: <http://dnhg.org>
 Qatar Natural History Group: <http://www.qnhg.org>
 Historical Association of Oman: <http://www.hao.org.om/>
 Tommy Pedersen's UAE Birding / UAE Nature Forum:
<http://www.uaebirding.com>
 Hanne & Jens Eriksen's website: www.BirdsOman.com
 Roy & Liz's website: www.chirri2000.com
 Emirates Soc. of Geoscience: <http://www.esg-uae.org>
 Emirates Marine Environmental Group: www.emeg.ae
 Emirates Diving Association:
<http://www.emiratesdiving.com/index.php>
 Emirates Wildlife Society – World Wildlife Fund:
http://wwf.panda.org/who_we_are/wwf_offices/united_arab_emirates/
 Sustainable Seafood <http://www.choosewisely.ae/>
 Sustainable Schools <http://sustainableschools.ead.ae/>
 Environment Agency Abu Dhabi: <http://www.ead.ae/en>
 EAD Geoportal: <http://www.geoportal.ae/Portal>
 UAE Environmental Atlas (Sign up for notice of release):
<http://www.environmentalatlus.ae/>
 Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority:
<http://www.adach.ae/en/> (Still using ADACH website)
 UAE archaeology website: <http://www.adias-uae.com>
 Noukhada Adventure Co.: <http://nouxhada.ae>
 NYUAD Events Calendar:
<http://nyuad.nyu.edu/news.events/events.ad.html>
 Khalifa University Events Calendar:
<http://www.kustar.ac.ae/campus/dss/schedules/default.aspx>
 Dubai Astronomy Group:
<http://www.dubaiastromy.com>
 Sharjah Museums: <http://www.sharjahmuseums.ae>
 The Rock Art of the Hajar Mountains:
http://www.bradshawfoundation.com/uae/hajar_mountains/index.php
 Arabian Wildlife: <http://www.arabianwildlife.com>
 Wildlife Middle East News: <http://www.wmenews.com>
 Zoology in the Middle East (Peer-reviewed ISI Journal):
<http://www.kasperek-verlag.de/ZME-allgem.htm>
 Sharkwatch Arabia: <http://www.sharkwatcharabia.com>
 Foundation for the Protection of the Arabian Leopard in Yemen: <http://www.yemenileopard.org>
 Mohamed Bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund:
<http://www.mbzspeciesconservation.org/>
 EDGE: Evolutionarily Distinct and Globally Endangered: <http://www.edgeofexistence.org>
 Protected Planet: IUCN & UNEP-WCMC Database:
<http://www.protectedplanet.net>
 Encyclopedia of Life: <http://eol.org/>
 Jewels of the UAE: <http://www.arkive.org/uae/en/>
 NHBS Environment Bookstore: <http://www.nhbs.com/>

In the Local News Media

The National, Dec 1: [A sense of history on National Day in the Northern Emirates](#)
 The National, Dec 6: [Middle East faces extreme climate change](#)
 The National, Dec 7th: [Cold-blooded entertainer at Al Ain Zoo](#)
 The National, Dec 22: [The deep impact on the Gulf's coral reefs](#)
 The National, Dec 26: [The fight to reduce the amount of water used takes a new turn in the UAE](#)
 Gulf News, Dec 28: [Sharjah authority gives away ghaaf tree seeds in environmental campaign](#)
 Gulf News Dec28: [EAD / EWS-WWF renew partnership](#)

ITEMS ON SALE

AT THE ENHG BOOK STALL

All prices are in dirhams.

- **NEW:** 2013 Calendar – *Birds of Oman*, 30
- *Jebel Hafit – A Natural History*, 100
An attractive, encyclopaedic presentation of the natural resources of this national landmark.
(Free copies available for schools donations.)
- *Abu Dhabi 8 Million Years Ago*, 15
- *Birds of the UAE - A guide to common and important species*, 60
- *Birds of the UAE--Helm field guide*, 70
- *Sandgrouse - Checklist of the birds of the United Arab Emirates*, 25
- *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
- *Exploring Oman*, 120
- *Native Plants of Oman*, 80
- *Natural History of Oman*, 50
- *Native Plants of Oman*, 80
- *Little O in Oman*, 25
- *Butterflies of Saudi Arabia & its neighbours*, 90
- *Sulphur, Camels and Gunpowder*, 100
- *Tribulus*, our annual Journal, see for details
- *Wild about mammals*, 40
- **NEW:** *Focus on Fujairah: Through Minie's lens 1964-2001*, 150
- **NEW:** *Field Guide: Wild Plants in Oman*, 300

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Lectures

New Meeting Venue:
Abu Dhabi Women's College, City Campus
Emirates Hall

8th Jan
Yusuf Thakur Dugong Documentaries;
Members' Show & Tell

22nd Jan
Lecture cancelled due to last-minute withdrawal of speaker's travel authorisation by her employer

Feb 5th **7:30 PM**
A Journey across the Roof of the World
Steve James

Social Event

Jan 29th **6:30 PM**
Eastern Mangroves Resort Hotel – Impressions Bar, 7th Fl.
Join us to chat about this season's activities.

Field Trips

Nov 30th & Dec 1st/2nd
Camping trip to As Sila
Keith Taylor

Dec 14th/15th
Wadi Hilo excavation tour by Prof Uerpmann/
Camping trip
Keith Taylor & Ronnie Gallagher

Jan 12th
Tel Abraq site tour by Dr Peter Magee; visit to Ed Dur site & UAQ Fort Museum
Ronnie Gallagher, Keith Taylor

Feb 2nd
Jebel Qatar (Buraimi area, Oman) day hike
Stefan Beck

ENHG-AD Research & Conservation Fund Grant Application Information

For background on this fund, see [Dec 2009 Focus](#), p5.

For further enquiries and for grant application guidelines and application form, contact ENHG Chairman Andrew Bean at rexabean@ozemail.com.au

NB: These documents are posted in the Files section of the AUHENHG YahooGroup (see address below).

ENHG Equipment for Members' Use

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

- Starter camping set: 2 new sleeping bags & maps, medium-sized cool box, old Coleman '5-man' tent
- GPS unit – GARMIN GPSMAP 60CSx
- First-Aid Kit
- Birding Telescope
- Two satellite phones, taken on camping trips.
Phone numbers: No. 1: 008821644400956
No. 2: 008821644400965

Enquiries: Keith Taylor, kjtaylor13@yahoo.com

- Celestron NexStar telescope (on field trips only)
- Sky Scout astronomical object locator/identifier
Enquiries: Denis Cheng, spacemandc@gmail.com.

Marine Life Rescue Contact Info.

In Abu Dhabi:

EAD Customer Service: 800555 (or)
customerservice@ead.ae

EAD Emergency Response (pollution and wildlife) available 24 hours/day: Mob 050 6674171 (or) 050 6178218

In Dubai:

Emirates Marine Environment Group (EMEG) (Tel: 043630581/Fax:043630460; Email: info@emeg.ae)

Dubai Municipality: Main number: 800900. Marine Environment & Sanctuaries Unit (Tel: +9714 606 6818, Fax +9714 703 3532), Email: marabdulla@dm.gov.ae.

Dubai Turtle Rehabilitation Centre at the Burj al Arab Aquarium. Tel: 043017198. 24-hour email contact, Attn. Mr Warren Baverstock, Manager of Operations, BAA Aquarium: warren.baverstock@jumeirah.com
To post Facebook message triggering an after-hours SMS alert: www.facebook.com/turtle.rehabilitation

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.)

