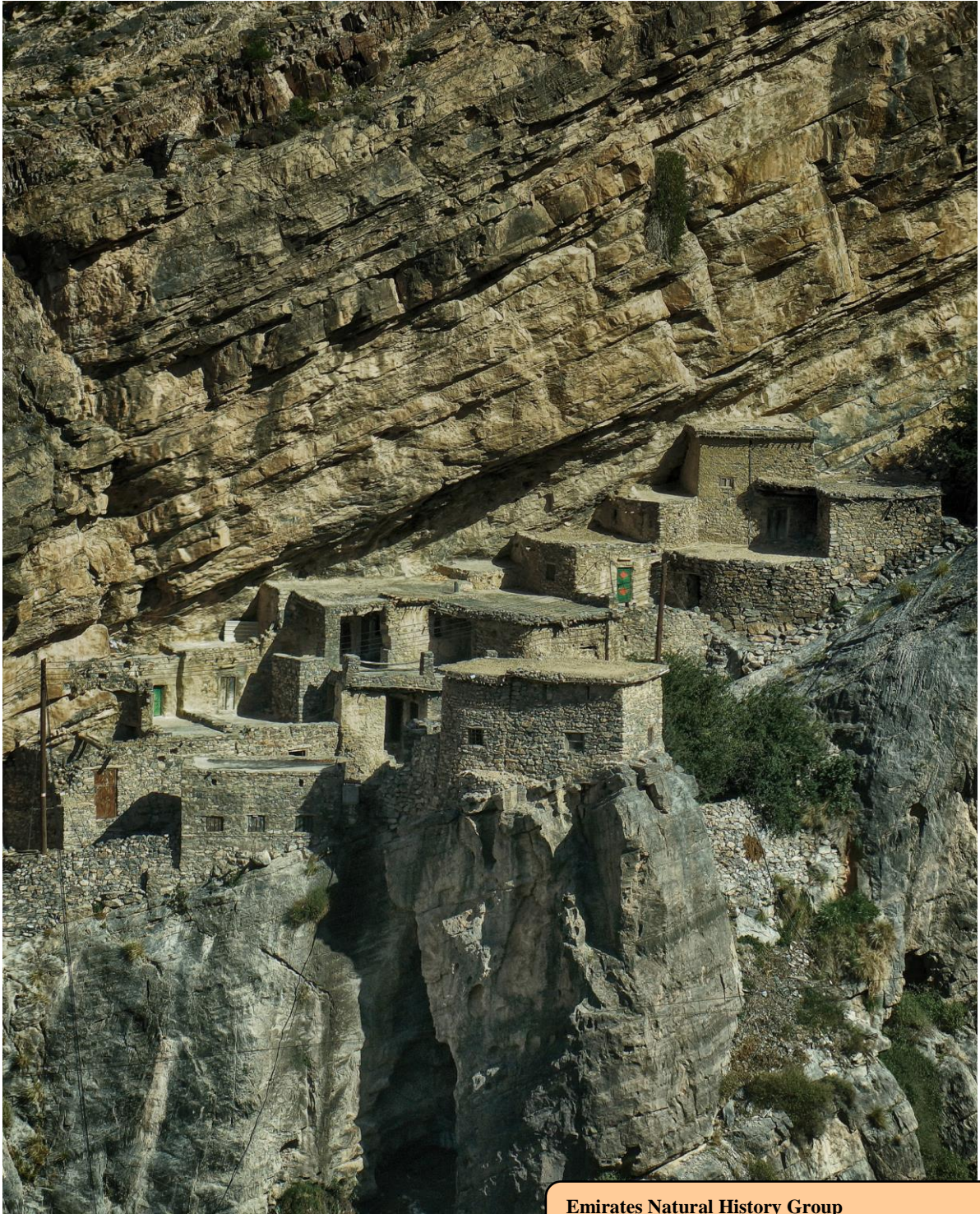


focus

Abu Dhabi, November-December 2013

Vol 37 (9)



Emirates Natural History Group

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

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the bumper November-December issue of *focus*, with a beautiful cover photo by keen new Committee member Munir El Kadi, who has graciously agreed to take over the Editor's role. Editing this newsletter has been a great learning experience and personal fulfilment for me over the past six years, but I'm happy to pass it on now. Of course, I will continue to submit contributions, as I have done in this issue—which is well represented by a number of ENHG contributors.

I shall continue for now as Acting Chairman of the ENHG-AD and also as a member of the Field Trip team. I have enjoyed leading several successful field trips so far this season and look forward to more. I also remain committed to assisting the Committee to put together a memorable Inter Emirates Weekend, now set for Feb 20th to Feb 22nd - see p 8 for IEW details. Please note the 3rd January deadline to take advantage of the special room rates for the two conjoined IEW 2014 hotels.

We apologize for the awkward turn of events as we now leave our regular venue at ADWC due to policy changes there and do our best to quickly settle on a new regular venue. For the short term, at least until end Jan., our meetings will be hosted by our generous corporate sponsor, the Park Hyatt Abu Dhabi on Saadiyat Island. We will send out a map and directions; please let us know if you need any assistance getting there.

We are happy that membership and interest in the Group remains strong and that a number of members have expressed an interest in helping the Committee out at this time of high turnover. We welcome Dan Upperco as our new Corporate Sponsorship secretary, and we hope to welcome more soon to fill three new vacancies in Feb: Treasurer, Membership Secretary and Secretary. Job descriptions of these key positions will be made available to those interested.

Finally, it is now time to call for nominations for the ENHG-AD's two annual awards for 2013. The Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohamed Prize recognizes significant research and publication and lecturing related to the natural history or archaeology of this region: South-eastern Arabia. The Bish Brown Award, named after the Group's most influential founding member, J. N. Bishop Brown, recognizes significant contributions to the activities of the UAE's NHGs as well voluntary contributions from outside our Groups to environmental education and conservation.

Nominations may be sent in to me, ENHG Acting Chair, at kjtaylor13@yahoo.com. Nominations will close on 31 Jan, 2014. The award winners will be announced at during the IEW dinner programme on Feb 21, 2014.

Keith Taylor

Introduction to Birding on AD Island

Continuing an established tradition, on 1 November seven amateur ENHG birders, led by Keith Taylor, toured Abu Dhabi Island, honing skills with binoculars and field guides while surveying the birdlife, which was especially abundant. Here is a list of the possibly as many as 45 bird species spotted – 37 positively ID'd:

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FRONT COVER PICTURE

Photograph: A Village in the Jebel Akhdar, Oman
Photographer: Munir El Kadi

This month's contributors

Dennis Cheng, Munir El Kadi, ENHG, Carolyn Gibson, Hector Hernandez, MbZSCF, Mark Preece, Jeanne Queromain, Arabella Willing, Keith Taylor

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 available at ENHG meetings. Tribulus Volume 21 will be available at the 21 Jan meeting.*

Eastern Corniche mangroves and palm grove:

Positively ID'd to Species:

Grey Heron	Striated Heron
Greater Flamingo	Great White Egret
Black Wing Stilt	White-eared Bulbul
Clamorous Reed Warbler	White Wagtail
Common Redshank	Common Greenshank
Eurasian Curlew	Whimbrel
Common Sandpiper	Western Reef Heron
Caspian Tern	Black Headed Gull
Bluethroat (male juv.?)	Egyptian Goose
Collared Dove	Laughing Dove
House Sparrow	Indian Silver Bill

Possibilities:

Large Gull sp. (possibly Heuglin's or Steppe)
Bunting sp. (possibly Corn) Greater Sand Plover
Red Vented Bulbul possibly a cross with White-eared

Mushrif Palace Park palm grove:*Positively ID'd to Species:*

Red-vented Bulbul White-eared Bulbul
 Collared Dove Laughing Dove
 House Sparrow Common Mynah
 Green Bee-eater Common Kestrel
 Purple Sunbird Graceful Prinia Grey Francolin

Possibilities:

Swift sp. (possibly Pallid) Parakeet sp.
 Warbler sp. (possibly Common Chiffchaff)

Western Corniche Park lawns & beach:*Positively ID'd to Species:*

White-eared Bulbul Common Mynah
 Whimbrel Common Sandpiper
 Lesser Black-backed Gull Caspian Tern
 Terek Sandpiper Kentish Plover
 Dunlin Crested Lark
 Grey Heron Western Reef Heron
 Marsh Harrier Sanderling

Possibilities:

Gulls spp. (Heuglin's or Steppe or both)
 Blue Throat – Eastern Corniche
 Crested Lark – Western Corniche
 Terek Sandpiper



Blue Throat – Eastern Corniche



Crested Lark – Western Corniche



Terek Sandpiper – Western Corniche

Keith Taylor / Mark Preece**Eid Camping Trip to Jebel Akhdar**

Acting Chair of the ENHG, Keith Taylor, was, as usual, not only the Master Planner and Leader of the group, but also the Chief Quartermaster stocking, for the use of every participant, all the necessary gear for an “expedition into the wild”... And not only in single issue but in duplicate as well (I mean, TWO “tent WC’s”!). The nice sized group of (eventually) 23 people was a well-balanced mix of singles, couples and families. The 4-person family of Munir El-Kadir, Jennifer Hasenknopf and their two boys, Adel and Nesta, was quickly dubbed the “very together ...” or “highly compact family” because of their amazing ability to all squeeze in together into their tiny Renault sedan and even smaller(!) “4-person” tent which was, in reality, only roomy enough for two people!



The Convoy Catching the Sunset in Jabal Akhdar

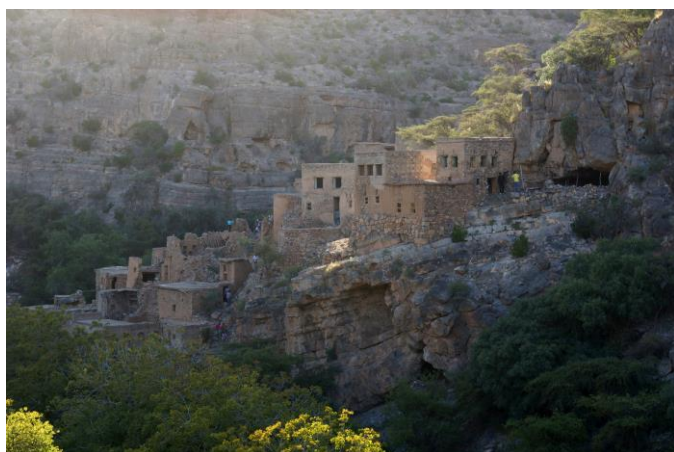
Due to delays at the Omani customs station and a couple of “vehicle incidents” on the road, we arrived at the base of the Jebel where we met up with our Omani guide, Mohamed, or “Moo” (pronounced Moe) as he preferred to be called, later than planned so that by the time we reached the summit of the Jebel and our camp site, we had to set up in the dark. However, this turned out not to be so much of a trial nor was the earlier climb up the steep mountain road, which was rumored to be quite steep and treacherous. In fact, there is a police checkpoint at the base of the mountain charged with the duty of “screening out” 2x4 sedans and other vehicles deemed “unworthy” of the challenge of ascending and, especially, descending the road. Fortunately, all of the vehicles in our convoy passed this screening procedure. In fact, it is my opinion that the road, itself, is in such good condition, i.e., fairly new, well paved, with stout concrete barriers and heavy duty steel guard rails blocking off all of the steep drop-offs, and not so excessively steep that any 2x4 with an adequately sized engine (over 2 ltrs.), good brakes and properly driven (e.g., kept in low gear on the way down) could negotiate it to the summit and back down without much difficulty or risk.

It was definitely a plus having Moo along as a guide as he knows the Jebel well and was able to guide us to several locales and activities which really “made the trip.” The first day was a hike along a trail connecting several farming villages all of which were amazingly “hung” on the steep sides of the mountains all along the south side of the Jebel Akhdar range. Along this rugged



View from the top of the trail towards one of the villages

and sometimes fairly steep rocky trail, we were treated to spectacular far-off vistas of the surrounding mountains and valleys and to close-up views of the quaint and colorful dwellings in the quaint and colorful villages and their associated human-made oases composed of the “farm terraces” created by an intricate system of “aflaj” (small irrigation channels) supplying water to crop fields (of corn, tomatoes, eggplants, melons, banana plants) and pomegranate orchards occupying each of the layer-upon-layer of terraces located just below or to either side of the villages. One of the astounding facts with which Moo regaled us was the age of some of these farm terraces – 1500 years! In the afternoon, we were invited to visit the house of Moo’s mother and younger brother and sisters and enjoyed some local hospitality consisting of Arabic coffee, dates and slices of fresh orange.



One of the Abandoned Settlements Visited by ENHG

On the morning of the second day, Moo led us all to a remote wadi located at the lower end of an extremely steep and rugged gravel road composed of countless switchbacks, which seemed never-ending. The hike through the equally rugged gravelly bottom of the wadi proved to be even “more never-ending.” What helped to divert our minds from this long and sometimes strenuous hike were the spectacular and even astounding colors and rugged features of the sheer walls of the wadi and the sometimes sparse and other times resplendent foliage gracing a stream which appeared intermittently along the way creating a serene and almost surreal “wadi-scape” in the deep shadows of the morning. There was even a small herd of the most “photogenic” goats I have ever seen! Instead of the dirty dingy off-white, grey

or brown of your “usual” mountain goat, these splendid creatures had coats of shimmering and lustrous bronze and gold! I saw now where the origin of the myth of the “golden fleece” may have originated. At a point about halfway to the end of our “long but very scenic march,” we took a welcome break to listen to a talk given by Jeanne Queromain, a science teacher at a French “lycee” (school) in Abu Dhabi, about the geography of the spectacular rock formations all around and above us. Our long trudge was well rewarded when we finally did reach its end – a wonderful pool fed by the stream that followed, and occasionally hid from, us along the bottom of the wadi. Most – but surprisingly not all – of us donned our swim suits in makeshift “changing rooms” hurriedly discovered behind the rocks and gleefully jumped into the water which was refreshingly cool. Those of us who were in the water – and even those who were not – were enjoying ourselves so much in this idyllic “little bit of paradise” that we were quite dismayed to hear the call, “O.K., everybody out – time to head back to the cars!” It was now nearly noon and we were due at a local posh hotel for a costly buffet lunch. We realized now – too late – that we had made a serious error in scheduling that hotel lunch instead of taking simple, and much less costly, picnic lunches to the wadi “swimming hole” and spending the rest of that day there in that “little patch of Eden.” That evening, as we were settling in around our campfire, Moo suddenly appeared with an excited invitation to attend a typical festival of music and dance which is traditionally held on every evening of the Eid. Several of us, especially yours truly, were really looking forward to this. Unfortunately, only one of the two vehicles which took off for the festivities – the one that Moo was driving and the lucky group that was in it – actually made it there and had a great time spectating, and participating in, the colorful music making and dancing and taking some great photos (that the rest of us have yet to see...). The other vehicle driven by me, and all of the other unlucky individuals in it, was left far behind in the dust with no idea of how to access the most colorful, interesting and FUN example of the local culture which was “somewhere just down the road”...



Briefing by the locals about the transportation cables

On the third day, Moo led us to a wadi, which had the now familiar cultivated farm terraces gracing its lower slopes. Higher up the slopes on either side of the wadi, a pair of very taught steel cables had been strung. We met the local “users and maintainers” of the cables who

explained that the cables were used to transport the produce of the farm terraces from one side to the other – much more so in the past than now. This reduction in the use of the cables was interestingly – and sadly – due to the change in the climate brought about by global warming (providing yet more dramatic proof of the reality of this unfortunate phenomena), i.e., since rainfall has decreased, the water level in the wadi has decreased and, so, the farm terraces do not yield as much produce as in the relatively recent (~20 years ago) past. We, then, hiked along a trail, which led from the terminus of this pair of cables to the terminus on the other side. When we reached the small collection of dwellings at this terminus, the young local boys who accompanied us showed us the home of the man and his family who lived there. This man was a carpenter who made, among other things, beautifully crafted walking canes from the wood of olive and juniper trees. We were shown the inside of the home and were awed by the splendid hand painted images of juniper and palm trees that decorated the walls. After leaving this wadi, we were led to the site of the wreckage of a British fighter plane – a relic of Britain's involvement in the Dhofar Rebellion or Oman War (1962 to 1976) in which Oman also found itself pitted against Saudi Arabia. As the sun was now only minutes away from slipping below the horizon, Moo now took us to The Spot to see it set and we were treated to the magnificent spectacle of a bright orange disc sliding ever so slowly and serenely below the ridgeline of distant mountains. This "viewing event" turned out to be a double "heavenly spectacle" as, when we turned to head back in the direction from which we came, we could now see the silver disc of a nearly full moon rising over the opposite horizon. That evening, I was hoping that Moo would lead a second excursion to the music and dance festival so that those of us who had missed it the evening before could catch it yet. But this was not to be and we had to settle for listening to the little shards of music and merry-making which emanated, once again, from "someplace just down the road... So near and, yet, so far away..." on this, the last evening, of our eventful trip to Jebel Akhdar...



ENHG – Abu Dhabi members in Jabal Akhdar with Mo

Dennis Cheng

Dancing under the Stars

Eid al Adha is an important religious holiday celebrated by Muslims all over the Middle East. Family and friends gather for lunches wearing new clothes and bearing gifts. Usually a goat, sheep or cow is sacrificed to commemorate the prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his first-born son.

The second night of Eid I was in the Jebel Akhdar region of Oman with our fellow campers and we came across a group of ten Omani male dancers called the Al Kasha

group having a very jolly time in the middle of literally nowhere, just the almost full moon shining down on them and a starry night sky. These men were standing shoeless on a large woven mat gracefully swaying and chanting Ayala songs accompanied by two kinds of drums and a tambourine. The big oval barrel looking drum made from cow skin kept the beat as the men stood opposite each other in lines singing a selection of war or wedding songs, which I believe is usual for these kinds of traditional dances. The other smaller Tabil drum was passed from one person to the other along the line gave a quieter mellow sound.

As it was very cold, no more than 10 degrees Celsius, we were encouraged to join in with the men and follow their routine of little steps with swaying in between. This proved amusing to the Omani men but a challenge to us as it has a unique style of its own. Singing was required as they went through a medley of songs in quick succession. At one point, I was given the heavy drum and tried to keep the beat going whilst also stepping in time - certainly a skill I need to practise for next year if we are to be invited back again.

Not long after we then all sat down on the mat where we continued with the singing and swaying sitting cross-legged but moved into the Nabaty poetry, which is a simple local Bedouin form of chanting tales from long ago in the gulf region.

We feel very fortunate to have happened upon the dancing group who invited us in to join them; they were as happy to see our enthusiasm, as we theirs. This was the best form of keeping warm as the evening wore on and I look forward to other encounters when next travelling through the mountains.



Performers of the Ayala Dance in Jabal Akhdar, Oman.

Carolyn Gibson

ENHG - Dolphin Bay Trip

A flurry of hands and slight gasp of excitement followed Keith's announcement of a trip to Dolphin Bay. The chance to discover the behind the scenes world of Atlantis saw the sign up list full within minutes.

The day came, and we made it to The Palm slightly dwindled in number, but full of enthusiasm given the early rise. We were greeted by Dr Ana Salbany, the petite Portuguese Director of Medical Veterinary Services. She led us through the gates to the back

office, where we were introduced to Sean Parker, the assistant director of marine mammals. We had been pre-warned that we would be touring the facilities and should not expect to actually meet the dolphins. So Sean blew our expectations in his opening words, by asking us if we felt like “tickling a dolphin today”. This meant shedding ourselves of cameras, bags, jewellery and watches that could fall in or scratch them.

First on the agenda was the laboratory. Ana enlightened us about their work analysing and amending the health of the dolphins. We had a good look around the lab and learned many wonderful things, including that the dolphins have been trained to actually enjoy giving blood and “sneeze” samples that they use water pumped in from the Arabian gulf for their tanks and that most of the medication was developed for humans.

Next stop was the records room, where every moment of the dolphins’ lives seems to be monitored and recorded on their computer system. Sean gave us a rough guide into how to domesticate a dolphin, and a fascinating insight into the life of a trainer; apparently, the key is positive reinforcement and a lot of love. Our final port of call was the training pools. We abandoned our shoes and socks, rolled up our trousers and followed Sean into a building that at first sight looked like an ordinary warehouse. In fact, it housed a network of pools and enclosures filled with summersaulting dolphins. We were split up and each group was assigned a trainer and dolphin duo. We watched mesmerised as they demonstrated their impressive obedience including allowing us to feel their silky skin. Needless to say, we were full of elation and gratitude when time came to part ways.

Arabella Willing

The Terraces of Jebel Akhdar

This summer, we met Jean Francois Blanc, a geography researcher who gave a conference on the terrace gardens in Ardeche, a small rural department located on the south east of the foothill of the French central mountains.



Terraces in the French Central Mountains

I have always been amazed by the beauty of those constructions that show the capacity of the humans to cultivate the most remote and inhospitable places. With the rural exodus that followed the fifties in France, I became used to seeing increasingly degraded terraces, put down by the “heavy feet” of sheep grazing on those

meant-to be cultivated areas, or simply planted with conifers and destroyed by their roots within a few years. Beyond the nostalgia, terraces gardens are indeed a very clever invention of the humans allowing their survival in difficult conditions, as well as the capability to cultivate species that could not grow anywhere else. In Ardèche, it was said a man had to build seven of those terraces before getting married. This would provide him the means to feed his future family.



Terrace Farming in Jebel Akhdar

In Oman, the Sayq plateau of Jebel Akhdar is renowned for its stunning scenery and especially to the « village ride », which brings hikers on a steep walk between the two villages.



Mo describing the social organization in Jebel Akhdar

Visiting them under the guidance of Mo, our guide, born on the Jebel Akhdar, we had a very rich opportunity not only to admire but to ask detailed questions on the way those terraces are still cultivated.

The “Village Ride”

Global Organisation

Jebel Akhdar (“The green mountain”) is home to about 25,000 people. There are - or at least used to be - 200-300 inhabitants for each hillside village. Contrary to Yemen, where the owners do not cultivate the lands they own, each family owns the land they cultivate. Families worked collectively, whereby a group of 6 to 7 families would gather to cultivate the land together, sharing the harvest. Sadly, as the native population is growing older, and many young are deserting this form of agriculture to other types of work, there is an increasing number of

abandoned terraces. To overcome this imbalance, more foreign workers are employed for this arduous type of labor.



Samples of Vegetation grown using Terrace Farming

The terraced agriculture system allows cultivating a great variety of fruits, grains and vegetables, where the precipitation is much higher than at the foot of Jebel Akhdar: This part of the Jebel Akhdar receives more than 300 mm of rain / year while the lowland villages only 50-100mm. These crops used to be partly bartered against dates (Nizwa market). Today most of the production is sold on the spot. These terraces date back 1500 years. Moo told us that according to the elders, the walls were built first, and soil added later. The cultivators live in hamlets, the houses closely associated to the terraces. Later on, we saw also a few isolated terraces built near the shepherds' paths along the wadis where we encountered a few goats). Associated with the fields, depressions in the rock bounded by walls about one meter high provide shelter for the goats and sheep. Sometimes a wall is built around the soil associated with a tree (I imagine one with an interesting crop), thus preventing soil erosion.



Complete Irrigation System with Water Reservoir and Falajes



Water Junctions in the Falaj System

The irrigation system

The terraces are all irrigated by Aflaj of Persian origin, as they are in the plain. Open reservoirs and large tanks are associated with complex ducts in the mountains.

The system of water distribution network of the Aflaj is built and cemented along parallel paths to level lines. The vertical distribution system in the fields has very simple valve systems (stone + rags) similar to those seen in plain oasis of Oman and UAE. Crops in the fields are separated by earthen bunds with again distribution systems. The original allocation of the water to each family was done using a sundial. For further information, you can see the film series "Wild Arabia" on the BBC <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohFnGslvzko> (shortly before 5 min). Sometimes there is a longitudinal separation of the Falajes as seen at the foot of Jebel Akhdar Falaj Birkat al Mauz <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKWzctw4HPk>. The water will then be distributed to different parts of the oasis. Now PVC pipes tend to replace or supplement the Aflaj system. Like everywhere else, there are local conflicts over water allocations

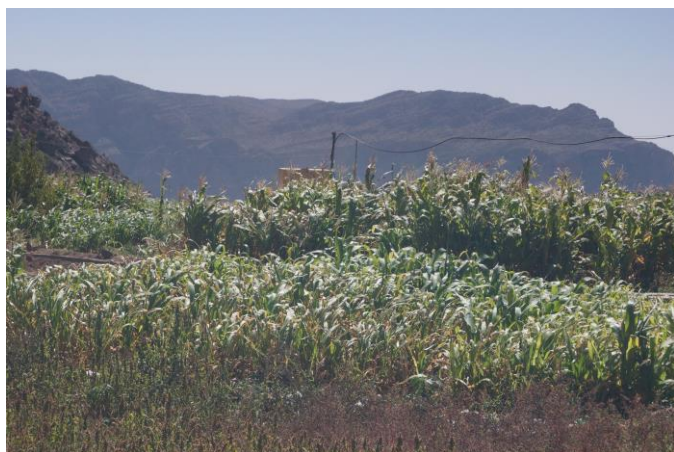
The Subsistence and Barter Polyculture.



Small Pomegranate Tree

Bright red spots on the trees were the remnants of pomegranates, which are harvested in September and October. They used to be traded for dates because pomegranates do not grow in the plain. There are also table grapes on vines (harvested in April), aromatic and

medicinal plants (sometimes wild like datura but also the common castor), some aloe gender, and shrub species with the same uses as rosemary. Corn grows a lot, with the grains been used for bread and the rest as animal feed. Apricots, peaches, lemons and roses mature from March to May; the latter are turned into rose water, which is sold after a few months' maturation in October with the pomegranates, which ripen then. Other crops include garlic, olives, figs, dates, nuts, and squash.



Corn Fields in Jebel Akhdar

I saw papayas, tangerines and dates in the last village we visited (pictured on this issue's cover), the inhabitants of which had just left a few months ago to live in big houses they had built on the opposite hill side. They still cultivate the land but come to their old houses on the weekend only.

This first guided visit made me wish to visit these terraces again during the rose. If you happen to know more about the Jebel Akhdar Mountains, or want to have resources on them, please contact me through my email, jeanne.queromain@gmail.com.

Jeanne Queromain

The Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund

The Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund is a significant philanthropic endowment established to do the following:

- Provide targeted grants to individual species conservation initiatives;
- Recognize leaders in the field of species conservation; and
- Elevate the importance of species in the broader conservation debate.

The Fund's reach is truly global, and its species interest is non-discriminatory. It is open to applications for funding support from conservationists based in all parts of the world, and will potentially support projects focused on any and all kinds of plant, animal and fungus species, subject to the approval of an independent evaluation committee.

In addition, the Fund will recognize leaders in the field of species conservation and scientific research to ensure their important work is given the attention it deserves and to elevate the importance of species in global

conservation discourse.

For the review period up to February 28th 2013 the Fund received over 500 applications, but was only able to provide grants (often only part of the requested funding) to 69 new projects.

As of December 1st, 2011 the Fund is only accepting applications through the online system, and so will not be able to consider applications sent as Word document attachments to an email.

The Fund had an initial endowment of €25,000,000, of which a small portion is spent each year on grants. The species conservation case study section of our web site shows up-to-date information on where these funds have been allocated so far.

It is envisaged that the Fund's establishment will act as a catalyst to attract additional donations from third party sources to ensure the Fund's annual contribution to direct species conservation initiatives increases over time.

From the MZSCF website

About the Inter Emirates Weekend

The Inter-Emirates Weekend is an annual event open to paid-up members of all four natural history groups in the UAE – Emirates Natural History Group - Abu Dhabi, Emirates Natural History Group - Al Ain, Dubai Natural History Group, and Emirates Natural History Group - Fujairah. It is organised annually by one of the first three groups in rotation. This year it is the turn of the Abu Dhabi chapter. IEW 2014 will focus on places to explore inside and within easy reach of the Capital. Please consider joining in on this annual opportunity to meet up with old & new friends on a wide range activities and trips (see below) and for the Friday buffet dinner programme.

Location: The Abu Dhabi Gate Hotels – the Ibis and Novotel – just across the Musaffah Bridge from Abu Dhabi Island.

Dates: Thursday February 20th to Saturday February 22nd, 2014.

Room rates and booking - Ibis and Novotel Hotels (please note the cut-off date for the room rate):

In order to take advantage of the room rates listed below at these conjoined hotels, members must finalize their bookings **by 3rd January 2014**, after which these rates will no longer be available. To make your reservation, please contact the hotel directly in an email to: H6948-RE1@accor.com, quoting **ENHGNV**. Also give your group affiliation: ENHG-AD, ENHG-AA, ENHG-Fuj or DNHG. In addition, **Provide a telephone number** so that the Ibis/Novotel staff can contact you to finalize payment by credit card. You may then arrange to provide your credit card details either by separate email, on the phone or in a personal visit to the hotels before the closing date.

Discounted Ibis Room Rates (20 February - 22 February 2014)

- Single room with breakfast– **AED 240** (Subject to 10% service charge +6% tourism fees)

- Double room with breakfast for two – **AED 280** (Subject to 10% service charge +6% tourism fees)

Discounted Novotel Room Rates (20 February - 22 February 2014)

- Single room with breakfast– **AED 300** (Subject to 10% service charge +6% tourism fees)
- Double room with breakfast for two – **AED 350** (Subject to 10% service charge +6% tourism fees)
- Third Adult occupancy in a roll-away bed @ **AED 120** nett per night +**AED 85** nett for breakfast (per day)

Room Terms & Conditions

- Rates inclusive of breakfast at the Horizon Restaurant located on the 1st floor
- Rates quoted per room/ per day
- Free wi-fi connection in the rooms
- 4 levels of underground parking available

Friday dinner reservations (See attached dinner menu):

In order to reserve your place for the dinner held in the Abu Dhabi Gate Hotels 1st floor Wok & Co. dining room (Dhs 110 inclusive of taxes) on Friday night (21st Feb) please forward an email to interemiratesweekend2014@gmail.com by **31st January**.

Please note that by so doing you commit to paying for this dinner. If you have to cancel your dinner reservation, please do so by no later than 14th Feb., after which the final number of dinner attendees will be provided to the hotel, which will expect full payment for that number. Dinner payments will be collected in cash at the IEW welcome table in the Ibis Hotel lobby on Thursday evening, Feb 20th; prepayment can also be arranged.

Boxed lunches:

Boxed lunches will be provided at the rate of AED 35 nett per person/per day. Ordering cut-off date and contact information will be sent round later.

Proposed Activities:

Thursday evening

- Registration for trips and activities from 5:30 pm at IEW welcome table in Ibis Hotel lobby.
- Registration and payment for Friday dinner. (Those not coming on Thursday should arrange pre-payment.)
- Dinner on an informal basis at the Ibis/Novotel or at nearby locations.
- Insect trapping near the hotel Stargazing near the hotel

Friday

- Boat trip, snorkelling, diving – TBC
- Field ecology/baseline survey trip west of AD: to Dew Forest, mesas, flamingo spotting - all day Kayaking in the mangroves – TBC
- Al Samaliyah island visit, including photography – am
- Nature photo processing – pm
- Emirates park zoo - am

Friday evening dinner programme:

- Natural History quiz
- Annual NH Awards presentation

Saturday

- Sheikh Zayed Mosque tour – am
- Masdar tour – pm
- Birdwatching Al Wathba – TBC
- Boat trip to see flamingo colony and birding – am
- Al Samaliyah island repeat visit – am
- Boat trip, snorkelling, diving - am or pm Kayaking - am or pm
- AD Baseline survey trip (site to be determined) – am
- Abu Dhabi Wildlife Center – am or pm
- Emirates Heritage Village (AD breakwater) – am

An updated list of confirmed trips & activities will be sent round in January, followed by a full calendar of events and a full list of details about each one.

We look forward to welcoming you to Abu Dhabi for this annual get-together. If you have any queries please forward them interemiratesweekend2014@gmail.com

ENHG-AD Committee

Recent Speaker

DR HECTOR HERNANDEZ' laboratory, the Microbial Environmental and Chemical Engineering Laboratory (MECEL), focuses on applying biotechnology tools and engineering principles to microbial systems to address challenges facing society in the areas of energy, climate change, diminishing nutritional resources, and bioremediation of ecosystems in the United Arab Emirates. The MECEL team is working on isolating and characterizing microalgae species from the United Arab Emirates, identifying the microbial composition of camel gut ecosystem, identifying microbes from the desert for biotechnological use, and investigating the role of invasive microbiological species from shipping lanes in the Gulf waters around the United Arab Emirates.



Dr Hector Hernandez'

The desert holds untold riches and a very diverse ecosystem at the microscopic level. These small organisms are responsible for maintaining plant life and nutritional turnover in this bleak and desolate environment. To date, there has been very little research done to study and identify these microbial communities and to try to understand their role in maintaining the

desert ecosystem. The knowledge gained from studying these microbes hold the promise of unlocking novel chemical pathways capable of contributing to our pressing energy, nutritional, and bioremediation needs. The recent talk covered the recent work done in my laboratory in trying to unlock the mysteries of desert life at the microbial level.

In the News Media

Jordan Times, Dec 18: [Czech-funded falconry preservation project launched](#)

The BBC, Dec 17: [EU says pesticides may harm human brains](#)

Nature, Dec 17: [By-catch marine turtles at grave risk](#)

Gulf News, Dec 15: [Environment Agency welcomes 40 Arabian Oryx from USA](#)

Times of Oman, Dec 15: [Ras Al Jinz increases daily tourist capacity](#)

Oman Observer, Dec 15: [Bright outlook for renewable energy](#)

Oman Observer, Dec 3: [Experts call for broader Arabian Leopard strategy](#)

BBC, Nov 28: [Viewpoint: Why Burma's forests must be preserved](#)

Doha News, Nov 19: [Qatar to boost renewable energy with reservoir rooftop solar panels](#)

The National, Oct 7: [UK to build education centre in memory of UAE wildlife scholar](#)

The Independent, Oct 4: ['Like nothing we had seen before': New species of owl discovered](#)

CNN, Oct 2: [Hotel lets you live like Bedouin](#)

Nature, Oct 2: [A new plot for conservation agriculture](#)

The National, Sept 30: [Gulf coral reefs get a much needed conservation boost](#)

BBC, Sep 13: [Tropical East Africa's epic flora survey completed](#)

The National, Sept 2: [A brighter future for the houbara, thanks to the UAE](#)

The National, Aug 31: [Relocated to The World: Dubai coral reef flourishing in new home](#)

The National, Aug 28: [Sheikh Zayed through the eyes of others](#)

The National, Aug 21: [Making a meal of it: Dubai turns to fish that eats mosquito larvae](#)

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Readymix Abu Dhabi Limited L.L.C. (Click on link & scroll down)	
URS	

Websites of General Interest

I. Websites of regional NHGs (&HA) & members:

Emirates Natural History Group – Al Ain (Archives: newsletters of 3 NHGs, *Tribulus*): <http://www.enhg.org>
 ENHG-AA forum: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ENHG>
 Dubai Natural History Group: <http://dnhg.org>
 Qatar Natural History Group: <http://www.qnhg.org>
 Historical Association of Oman: <http://www.hao.org.om/>
 Hanne & Jens Eriksen's website: www.BirdsOman.com
 Roy Richards's mountain website: www.chirri2000.com
 Anne Thomas's blog: <http://wildcardtravels.blogspot.hk/>

II. Websites of UAE-based affiliated organisations:

Tommy Pedersen's UAE Birding / UAE Nature Forum: <http://www.uaebirding.com>
 Emirates Soc. of Geoscience: <http://www.esg-uae.org>
 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/
 Environment Agency Abu Dhabi: <http://www.ead.ae/en>
 [EAD Online Library: <http://library.ead.ae/>]
 Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority <http://www.adach.ae/en/> (Still using ADACH website)
 Mohamed Bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund: <http://www.mbzspeciesconservation.org/>
 Al Mahara Diving Center: <http://www.divemahara.com/>
 Noukhada Adventure Co.: <http://noukhada.ae>
 Dubai Astronomy Group: <http://www.dubaiastromy.com>
 Sharjah Museums: <http://www.sharjahmuseums.ae>
 Abu Dhabi Green Drinks: <http://www.greendrinks.org/Abu%20Dhabi>

III. UAE-based & regional informational websites:

Environmental Atlas of Abu Dhabi Emirate: <http://www.environmentalatlus.ae>
 An outline of Systematic Conservation Planning <http://dev.grida.no/rob/Hyder/index.html#/1/> [by AGEDI]
 UAE archaeology website: <http://www.adias-uae.com>
 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>
 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>

Websites of General Interest, Cont'd.

IV. International informational websites:

Encyclopedia of Life: <http://eol.org/>
 ARKive Images of Life on Earth: <http://www.arkive.org>
 [Jewels of the UAE: <http://www.arkive.org/uae/en/>]
 EDGE: Evolutionarily Distinct & Globally Endangered: <http://www.edgeofexistence.org>
 Protected Planet: IUCN & UNEP-WCMC database: <http://www.protectedplanet.net>
 Project Noah: www.projectnoah.org "digital butterfly net"
 Cheetah Conservation Fund: <http://www.cheetah.org>
 [Bushblok: <http://www.bushblok.com>]
 Fish base: <http://www.fishbase.org>

ITEMS ON SALE

AT THE ENHG BOOK STALL

All prices are in dirhams.

- 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
- Native Plants of Oman, 80
- Field Guide: Wild Plants in Oman, 300
- Natural History of Oman, 50
- Exploring Oman, 120
- 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
- Focus on Fujairah: Through Minie's lens 1964-2001, 150

Committee Members

REQUIRED BY JAN 2014:

Treasurer
Secretary
Membership Records Sec.

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Lectures

7th Jan
 Birdlife of South Georgia and the Falkland Islands
 Timing: **7:30 pm**
 Venue: **Park Hyatt – Abu Dhabi**
Oscar Campbell

21st Jan
 Invasion of Zygophyllum Qatarense by Bottlebrush Gypsum in Al-Sammaliah Island of Abu Dhabi
 Timing: **7:30 pm**
 Emirate Venue: **TBC**
Kamran Siddiqui

4th Feb
 Wadi Rum, Jordan - Natural Beauty
 Venue: TBC
Munir El Kadi

Field Trips

7th Dec
 AD-AI Ain ENHG Insect Collection Curation
Keith Taylor/ Dr. Brigitte Howrth

13th Dec
 Back-of-House Lost Chambers Aquarium & Fish Hospital Tour
Ian Townson

4th Jan
 Al Wathba Reserve Birding (**FULL**)
Ian Townson/ Oscar Campbell

Further Jan trips TBA

20th/21st/22nd Feb
 InterEmirates Weekend

4th-11th April (**TBC**)
 Visit to Three Eco-systems in Jordan
Munir El-Kadi

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 Deputy Chairman Keith Taylor at kjtaylor13@yahoo.com.

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 Contributions / Newsletter Index

Send newsletter contributions to:
newsletter.abudhabi@enhg.org

Searchable index of *focus* issues 2007-2013:
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ENHG-AD Postal Address / YahooGroups Website

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

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