

# GAZELLE

Vol 21 no 3 – March 2006



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

**DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP**

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

## Members' News

### *Congratulations!*

Dr. Reza Khan has recently received two awards in recognition of his natural history studies. In February he traveled to Dhaka to receive the Pakhi Mela ("Bird Fair") 2006 Award from the Vice Chancellor of the Jahangir Nagar University. The Environment Ministry of Bangladesh and the Jahangir Nagar University organise "Pakhi Mela" or Bird Fair every year. From 2005 they have instituted two yearly awards, one of which is for individuals who have done commendable research work with the birds in Bangladesh and the other is for individuals responsible for conserving birds in their natural state. Reza's award was given in recognition of the research work he has conducted on the birds of Bangladesh from 1970 to date, publication of several books in both Bengali and English, and several dozen scientific publications on the birds of Bangladesh.

Reza is Head of Dubai Zoo Section, Public Parks and Horticulture Department of Dubai Municipality, and is a former Professor of Zoology at Dhaka University and a citizen of Bangladesh. He makes several visits to his home country every year, during which he conducts field research along with some of his for-

mer students and other nature lovers from the country.

Also in February, Reza received the Shonglap Award 2006 for Science. Shonglap is a monthly magazine serving the Bangladeshi community in Dubai, and its awards recognize Bangladeshi community members who have made significant contributions in the field of science and social works in the UAE.



*Dr Khan receiving the Shonglap Award in Dubai*

Reza is a former DNHG Committee member and was the 2001 recipient of the Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohamed Award, conferred by the ENHG, Abu Dhabi. He has published books and papers on various aspects of the natural history of the UAE, some of which are available through the DNHG or from Dubai Zoo.

### *DNHG Membership Renewals*

September 2005 starts our new DNHG membership year. Please make our lives easier by renewing early. Membership remains a bargain at Dhs. 100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to Lloyds Bank account no. 173746. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG.)

DNHG membership entitles you to participate in field trips and helps pay for our lecture hall, publication and distribution of our monthly newsletter, the *Gazelle*, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.

### **This month's Contributors**

**The Editor would like to thank the following for their reports and contributions:**

Barbara Couldrey  
Gary Feulner  
Angela Manthorpe  
Steve Raynor

**Under the patronage of H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan**



## March's Offerings...

### Hajar Mountain Nature Walk with Gary Feulner Mar 24

As yet, we do not have details of this walk, but if you are interested, look for a mass emailing from Lena Linton which will give the information.

These are usually quite tough walks, so be prepared. You must let Gary know you want to join the trip; his contact details appear on p.7



### Desert Walk with Jo Raynor Friday 31st March

Jo is checking out a stop just a little behind Al Aweer, where there is some interesting desert.

Meeting time will be 7.45 am, while it is still cool, on the Dubai Hatta Rd just after the third roundabout, approximately outside the entrance to the Al Aweer Soccer stadium. Jo will spend a couple of hours on the sand - a little longer if there is interesting stuff and it remains cool. She is expecting to find flowers after the rains, along with a few secretive desert creatures who live there, rain or not.

It will be ambling not striding. Bring a sunhat, shoes suitable for sand, water, snack if desired, reptile and flower ID books if desired. Call Jo for further information on 050 - 4789633

### Letters to the Editor

Do you have some comment, suggestion or query on natural history that you would like our members to know about? Just want to tickle things up?



Please send your letter to any of the committee members listed, by fax or e-mail, or direct to the editor, Anne Millen.

### Our Next Speaker

Damien Egan was born and grew up in Southern Africa. He started keeping reptiles and other creepy-crawlies at the age of seven and refused to grow out of it. After being educated in Johannesburg he moved to Phalaborwa in the (then) Eastern Transvaal of South Africa as a law-enforcement scout in an anti-poaching unit. Although excellent experience, the concept of needing money to survive slowly started sinking in and he pursued art, his other interest, after a year of service. After a year of freelance illustrating, he became a junior keeper at the Swadini Reptile Park in Hoedspruit, Limpopo province, and was later promoted to curator.

The opportunity to join the team at the Transvaal Snake Park beckoned in 1997 and he started work there as junior curator of reptiles. A year later he became senior curator. During his career thus far, his general duties included maintaining and breeding large collections of reptiles and amphibians, lecturing and demonstrating to the public, publishing articles and photographic material on reptiles, formulating and conducting training courses for specialist groups such as fire departments, medical personnel and game ranger trainees, and implementing and coordinating breeding programs for various endangered reptiles.

Damien now works at the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife where he has spent the last six years. He is now the Head of Department of herpetology and freshwater fishes. His job currently entails maintaining, breeding and adding to the large collection of herpetofauna and fish held at the breeding centre, cooperation in worldwide breeding projects with similar facilities, and conducting field trips to name a few. He is presently publishing the first field guide to the snakes of the Arabian Peninsula and its waters, the product of six years research and travel on the Arabian Peninsula. He loves life in the Gulf, even after the Umm Al Quwain mangroves ate one of a pair of excellent Italian sandals.

And steel your nerves — Damien is bringing some of his slithery friends to the lecture.

Damien can be found at the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife, P.O. Box 29922 Sharjah, United Arab Emirates Tel. +971 (0)6 5311212 Fax. +971 (0)6 5311156 [www.breedingcentresharjah.com](http://www.breedingcentresharjah.com)



(from [www.uaeinteract.ae](http://www.uaeinteract.ae))



## And more members' news...

Mohammed Arfan Asif, our 'Thru the Lens' columnist, has an informative article in Phoenix No. 22 on "The Little Green Bee-eaters of Jadaf," based on his long running and detailed observations and photography of LGBEs that nest in mud banks near his workplace at Al Wasl Hospital. Among other things, he describes the choice of prey items (mostly bees, wasps and flies) and the feeding and fledging of chicks: The chicks are fed every 15 minutes or so by day, until late afternoon, but when the parents feel the time for fledging has come, they stop feeding the chicks and call for the chicks to come out of the nest.

## DNHG Annual General Meeting

The DNHG's Annual General Meeting will be conducted at the beginning of our lecture on 2 April 2006. This is the occasion of the Chairman's annual report and the election or ratification of the DNHG Committee. The Committee members shown on page 7 will stand for re-election.

We thank those members who have recently volunteered to fill vacant Committee positions, but it is always helpful to have reserves, so we welcome your expressions of interest.

Apart from Committee positions, there is a particular need for field trip ideas and for people to lead field trips. Most DNHG field trips are led by our own members or by members of the UAE's other NHGs, not by outside professionals. A certain amount of knowledge and enthusiasm is a prerequisite for leading a trip, but beyond that, our Field Trip Coordinators and other Committee members can provide guidance.



## UAE Archaeology Symposium in Al-Ain

The 4th annual symposium on UAE archeology will be held in Al-Ain on Wednesday afternoon and Thursday morning, March 28-29. The venue is expected to be the Al-Ain Rotana Hotel. The symposium is open to the public and in particular to members of the UAE's natural history groups. A dinner on Wednesday night will permit socialising among the participants.

Current programme information is not complete, but the papers scheduled for presentation include the following topics (among others): elephant trackways in the Western Region of Abu Dhabi; evidence of abrupt climate changes within the past 10,000 years; the use of orthophotography for archeological recording and analysis; continuing excavations in the Jebel Fayah area, including Neolithic flint and burial sites and possible Palaeolithic material; and new results from investigations at Umm Az-Zamool, Hili, Sadiyat and Dhayah; and a detailed study of the picturesque fort at Bithnah, in Wadi Ham.

For more details, contact Peter Hellyer at: [peter@extinfo.gov.ae](mailto:peter@extinfo.gov.ae).

## DNHG Website: Put Your Name Here

The DNHG has been invited to participate on an equal basis in the UAE natural history group website established by the Emirates Natural History Group in Al-Ain, at [www.enhg.org](http://www.enhg.org), which is structured to accommodate all three UAE natural history groups. At the moment, the DNHG is awaiting a volunteer with sufficient IT skills to liaise with Al-Ain about the technical and procedural requirements, and then liaise with our membership to convey what is necessary to satisfy those requirements, and bring other, less sophisticated, volunteers up to speed. The Al-Ain ENHG has (and is likely to continue to have) the technological skills necessary to

maintain the overall site. The DNHG would therefore have to take responsibility for the formatting, sending and/or posting of its own material in a compatible way.

A major virtue would be the convenience of web-based access for contact information and schedules. Another, perhaps more valuable in the long term, is the ability to explore a wealth of otherwise hard-to-find information published in past newsletters and bulletins of the ENHGs. Several years of Gazelle reports already exist in computerised format and could be entered into a permanent archive quickly and with relative ease. However, a format needs to be established for current information, along with procedures for updating it on a monthly basis. Those are the basics. After that, other features could be added.

Establishment of a DNHG website has been highlighted as a priority in two consecutive annual reports. Third time's the charm? If you think you would be able to help us set up DNHG participation in the site, as described above, please contact Chairman Gary Feulner or Editor Anne Millen (details on p. 7). If we can organize this during the spring, we have summer to practice and have a fully-fledged site for the following season.

## **LOOK THE PART!**

**The DNHG has navy blue sweat shirts, with the DNHG emblem embroidered in silver. Sizes: Large and Extra Large Dh65/- each, and silver grey polo shirts with the DNHG emblem embroidered in black. Sizes: Medium, Large and Extra Large Dh50/- each. The quality of both items is excellent!**

**See Val Chalmers at the next monthly meeting.**



E.mail your reports to [pvana@emirates.net.ae](mailto:pvana@emirates.net.ae), (Arial 10 justified) or deliver them to Anne Millen on floppy disk at monthly meetings.

## Beetlemania

A domino beetle (*Anthia duodecim-guttata*), one of the UAE's larger and more striking insect species, attracted the attention of DNHG member Colin Paskins in the desert near Fossil Valley. Domino beetles are usually active at night, but during cooler months will venture from their underground burrows during the day to feed on other insects and carrion.



*Anthia duodecimguttata*

According to *Insects of Eastern Arabia*, the domino beetle hunts other insects and in particular beetles of the Family Tenebrionidae (Darkling Beetles). Its own defense against potential predators is said to be an unpleasant smell. Dog walkers in the Jebel Ali area have reported seeing, at dusk, aggregations of domino beetles at the entrance to burrows.



Philatelists in the group might remember that the domino beetle featured in the UAE postal authority's issue on Arthropods on March 15th 1999. The series comprised Domino beetle 50 fils; Oleander Hawkmoth 150 fils; Grasshopper 250 fils and Scorpion 350 fils.

Meanwhile an unidentified jewel beetle turned up dead on a doorstep in Mirdif a few months ago. The photo appears to be distinct from the relatively common (and large) sulphurous jewel beetle (*Julodis euphratica*). Jewel beetles (Family Buprestidae) are also known as metallic wood-boring beetles as the larvae bore through wood, stems and leaves; as adults they are sap-suckers, like cicadas.



As yet unidentified jewel beetle

The family includes a number of particularly colourful species and the iridescent wing covers are used to adorn headdresses and necklaces of South American tribes. Report by Angela Manthorpe

## Dragonfly Migration

The Vagrant Emperor dragonfly (*Hemianax ephippiger*) was once again on its characteristic January migration in January 2006. Or rather, since this phenomenon is not known with certainty to be a directional one, perhaps it should be called a peregrination. In any case, large numbers were observed at mid-month among low hills in the Wadi Shawkah area. In previous years, in January swarms could be found intermittently over much of the mountain areas, including even the very tip of the Musandam Peninsula. Gary Feulner would be interested to know if others have noticed

this year's 'migration.' The Vagrant Emperor is a relatively large dragonfly and generally patrols at a height of more than a meter above the ground, seldom perching. Both males and females appear basically olive green in flight, although the male may show accents of blue. [If high-swarming dragonflies seem slightly reddish, you are probably seeing the Globe Skimmer (*Pantala flavescens*), a strong migrant which often appears after localized showers.] Report by Gary Feulner

## Antarctic Facts

Chairman Gary Feulner is back from a trip to the Falklands, South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula, in company with naturalist lecturers and special guests including polar historians and mountaineer and adventurer Reinhold Messner. Gary has agreed to share a few highlights of Antarctic history and natural history:

The Antarctic is often described as a polar desert. The majority of the continent receives less annual precipitation than most of the UAE. Blizzards at the South Pole are the result of strong winds redistributing snow that has already fallen.

Like desert regions elsewhere, Antarctica is poor in species diversity, so that many naturalists studying in the Antarctic can become knowledgeable about many different plant and animal groups. On the other hand, what the Antarctic lacks in diversity it makes up for in quantity. The biomass of krill, the small, shrimp-like crustacean that blooms seasonally in Antarctic waters, exceeds that of human beings. In recent years krill was thought to represent a potential solution to food shortages in underdeveloped areas of the world, but problems with consumer acceptance as well as fluorine accumulations brought initial exploitation efforts to a halt.

Biomass aside, the Antarctic or sub-Antarctic is a fragile environment, highly sensitive to disturbance. In the early 20th century it



## Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan  
res 344 8283  
off 344 0462  
fax (off) 349 9437

Archaeology - Prof. John Fox  
jfox@aus.ac.ae  
(Temporarily away - hold your reports)

Birds - David Bradford  
davebradford9@hotmail.com

Seashells - perhaps you?

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi  
res: 06-5247 958  
off: 06-5583 003  
email: lankefi@emirates.net.ae

Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner  
res 306 5570  
fax 330 3550

Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers  
res 349 4816,  
fax 340 0990  
vmc@latifaschool.co.ae

Plants – Valerie Chalmers

### Mammals & Seashells - Recorders needed

The recorders are not necessarily scientific experts in their designated fields. In fact, most are not. However, they are interested and knowledgeable amateurs - please contact them if you have any interesting reports or queries.

The intention is that information will be channelled through to the *Gazelle* editor, so new information can be shared with all our readers.

took sealers only about 10 years to all but eradicate the Antarctic Fur Seal (it was once thought to be extinct), and another 10 years for whalers based on South Georgia to make whaling uneconomical there.



*Adèle Penguin*  
(photograph posted on  
[www.tooter4kids.com](http://www.tooter4kids.com))

Only a small number of higher animals are actually resident on the Antarctic continent. Among penguins, only the Emperor penguin, the Adélie penguin and a few colonies of other species breed on the mainland. Among other bird species, the principal continental denizens include the Antarctic Skua, Antarctic Petrel, the Snow Petrel and Wilson's Storm Petrel (the latter is reckoned to be the most common of all sea birds). Among seals, only the Weddell seal and the Ross seal inhabit the interior pack ice; other seals are concentrated at the edge of the pack and/or on sub-Antarctic islands.

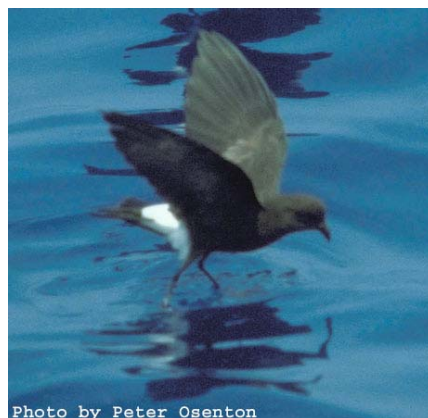


Photo by Peter Osenton  
*Wilson's Storm Petrel*  
(from the USGS website)

Modern historians are generally unflattering in their assessment of the amateurish preparations of the polar expeditions of the early 20th

century. Many of the protagonists were accomplished sailors or navigators, but they were woefully (and in some cases tragically) ill-equipped for travel on the ice. Only Norwegian Roald Amundsen, the first to reach the South Pole in 1911 (without significant hardship), took bona fide sled dogs and skis and knew how to use them, although those techniques had been proven in the Arctic. *Thank you, Gary.*

### Rak's City Wetland

"We have an interesting little wetland (wasteland), with mixed vegetation, developing almost in the heart of Ras Al Khaimah", writes Barbara Couldrey. "I looked in today for 5 minutes and saw many Mallard (male and female), red-wattled lapwings, black winged stilts, some small waders and little green bee eaters. The water level varies (? with tide levels) - haven't tested it but it could be very brackish.

"Site: At the tent/clock roundabout (RAK hotel side)! There may be access from road leading to/from the RAK Hotel but I took the first road (100m) on the right heading towards old RAK - there's a good rough road into the wasteland about 150m along this road on the right." *Thanks, Barbara, for this snippet.*

### World Wetlands Day Celebrated

"Wetlands are incredibly valuable ecosystems. Khor Kalba in Sharjah is one. Regarded as one of the country's premier wildlife sites, it has the tallest, most extensive stand of mature mangrove in the UAE. Birds are attracted to the site in impressive numbers, the most famous being two extremely rare species — the white-collared kingfisher and the booted warbler. Both breed in the Kalba mangroves.

*How secure are the Khor Kalba and other wetland habitats? What is being done for their conservation?*



*Know more about prized UAE wetlands from our guest speaker, the leading authority for environmental protection is Sharjah."*

That was the irresistible tease in the advertisement for a talk by H.E. Abdul Aziz Al Midfa, General Manager, Environment and Protected Areas Authority, Sharjah, on "Wetlands as Protected Areas".

Rashmi De Roy, who works for the World Wildlife Fund's UAE Project Office, and is a DNHG member, organized the talk as a joint effort by EWS - WWF. It was held at Dar al Nadwa in Bastakia, on 12 February and several DNHG members were able to attend.



*Rashmi De Roy at Dar al Nadwa*

Chairman Gary Feulner was away at the time, and had asked us to enquire about the construction work being carried out close to/within the Kalba mangrove area. The whole talk answered his question: the work has nothing to do with conserving it, and everything to do with the urgent need for such sites to be registered under the auspices of the Ramsar Convention on the conservation of wetlands. This would ensure protection from just such activity.

The Convention on Wetlands, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, is an intergovernmental treaty which provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. There are presently 150 Contract-

ing Parties to the Convention, with 1591 wetland sites, totaling 134 million hectares, designated for inclusion in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.

"The Convention's mission is the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local, regional and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world" (Ramsar COP8, 2002). More can be read about the Ramsar Convention at [www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org)

The UAE is not a signatory to the Ramsar Convention, and therefore wetlands such as the Khor Kalba mangroves, designated protected, are not protected except by local effort. *Ed.*

## *Mleisa Fossil Footprints Survey*

During the cooler months, the Raynors have taken a special interest in recording details of the Mleisa fossil footprints inland from Ruwais. ENHG members first saw the tracks at the 2005 inter-Emirates weekend and since then Johanna, Steve and family have been back for two long weekends.

The fossilised footprints are believed to be from the late Miocene period, about 6 to 8 million years ago. The animal responsible for the prints is probably an elephant-like mammal that is now extinct.

Details of interest are the stride and pace dimensions, diameter of the print and the depth of the impression. Where possible these dimensions were associated with a particular track way. A track way is a continuous set of prints from one animal. There are many of these traceable; in fact one of the difficult tasks has been to identify a print with a particular track when there are so many prints in a concentrated area.

So far Steve has identified 14 separate track ways and the direction

and extent of each has been recorded. These tracks mostly follow near parallel routes heading in a north-north-east direction. The first weekend was spent recording details of the longest of the NNE tracks.

This track could be followed for 167 metres and with a pace of a pretty consistent 1.3 to 1.35 metres - that's 124 prints to measure! Typical details of this track are:

### TRACK 101

Direction	NNE -SSW
Stride length	2.61m ave
Pace	1.33m ave
Width	800mm ave
Print diameter	580mm approx
Depth of print	70mm ave

The second weekend Steve made a solo trip which was made very pleasant by a local Bedu family that kept him well fed. Even with this pleasant diversion, the second track of around 246m was recorded. This was a larger animal than the average and was travelling in quite a different direction.

### TRACK 102

Direction	NNW -SSE
Stride length	3.11m ave
Pace	1.73m ave
Width	1.31m ave
Print diameter	530mm approx

Other tracks have so far been plotted but there is still plenty of details to gather. On the first weekend of April the Raynors are planning another trip to Mleisa. Anyone interested in helping out is welcome, phone Steve on 050738376. *Thanks to Steve Raynor for this article.*



*An elephant trackway  
(from Abu Dhabi 8 Million Years Ago,  
By Mark Beech & Peter Hellyer)*



	<b>name</b>	<b>tel home</b>	<b>tel office</b>	<b>fax</b>
Chairman	<b>Gary Feulner</b> messages: 306 5300	306 5570	330 3600	330 3550
Vice Chairman	<b>Valerie Chalmers</b> e mail: vmc@latifaschool.co.ae	349 4816	no calls pls	340 0990
Treasurer	<b>Larry Schwab</b> email: clschwab@emirates.net.ae	344 2289	050 - 658 2703	349 2342
Membership Secretary	<b>Lena Linton</b> e.mail: linton@emirates.net.ae	344 2591		344 2591
Membership Assistant	<b>Anindita Radhakrishna</b> e.mail: anin@emirates.net.ae	282 3952	050-656 9165	
Speaker Co-ordinator	<b>Angela Manthorpe</b> e mail: angelam@emirates.net.ae	209 5000		2251766
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	<b>Pradeep Radhakrishna</b> e.mail: wgarnet@emirates.net.ae	282 3952	050-450 8496	
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	<b>Peter Jackson</b> email: pj.architect@gmail.com	2882713	335 4545 050-5521005	3354338
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	<b>Sandhya Prakash</b> e.mail:sandhya@clavib.com	050-5512481		348 2868
Special Projects	<b>Beryl Comar</b> e.mail: comar@emirates.net.ae	344 2243		344 2243
Newsletter Editor	<b>Anne Millen</b> e.mail: pvana@emirates.net.ae	394 7076	no calls please	394 7075
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Chief Engineer	<b>James Pardoe</b> e.mail: James@extremereviews.net	394 3821		

### *Member's night - June 4th - Speakers Wanted!*

This is a reminder to members old and new that in June we will be having member's night. For those of you who don't know, member's night is a popular DNHG tradition in which we turn the floor over to group members and give them the opportunity to give a short presentation on a topic of their choice. Topics can be natural history, culture or travel related and do not need to be about the UAE - so the scope is fairly wide. We're now seeking volunteers for June. Presentations should be up to 20 mins max, and we can provide all the necessary equipment. If you'd like to volunteer immediately (please do!) or want to discuss this in more detail, please contact Angela Manthorpe, Speaker Coordinator (email [angelam@mmi.ae](mailto:angelam@mmi.ae), Mobile 050—645 1743)

### *Inter-Emirates Weekend - Stories Wanted!*

The editor is keen to hear about the interesting natural history things members saw or learned during the Ras Al Kaimah get together, 16th and 17th March.



Valerie Chalmers and Barbara Couldrey

Reports on all the trips would be wonderful, and if you hesitate to

write because you don't know the names of things or don't have the resources to look things up, ask one of the Recorders/Gary for help to get that part right.

Photographs are best sent as **jpeg files**, because they tend to be the smallest files, and are easiest for me to manage if you send **separately**. Photos embedded in text sometimes need a geologist's hammer to get them out or use them!



## Dubai Natural History Group Programme

**Lectures at Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management, 7.30 for 8.00pm**

Apr 2: The Snakes of the Arabian Peninsula — Damien Egan

May 7: Insects of Wadi Tarabat — Dr Brigitte Howarth

June 4: Members' Night (See note p. 7)

**Field Trips (Members only, please. Details inside.)**

Mar 24: Hajar Mountain Nature Walk

Mar 31: Morning Desert Walk