

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

DNHG Membership Renewals

Peter Cunningham sends news from Namibia, where he has taught and conducted wildlife research for the past several years (in the process winning the nation's "Biologist of the Year" award): "My tortoise work has come to an end -- number of papers in press, etc. and also trying to get a tortoise booklet published. Now busy with Blue & Wattle Crane research. Terrible having so many interests -- difficult to focus on one only." In this case, the UAE's loss was Namibia's gain.

Camille and Larry Schwab were camping in Oman recently, amidst the dramatic cliffs and gorges of Wadi Bani Auf and Wadi Sahtan, in the mountains behind Rustaq. Larry reports that there was quite a bit of water in the wadi tracks.

Stephen Green, responsible for a number of natural history discoveries in Bahrain and the UAE, has been back in England for several years but is still in touch with the DNHG and with natural history. Steve writes that daughter Rachel is affianced to a fellow who is "nuts on moths" and also collects natural history books. Sounds like he'll fit right in. Rachel, meanwhile, has just been promoted and is now the Conservation Officer for the entire

New Forest (English Nature).

Chairman **Gary Feulner** has made a point over the past several years to seek out the few wadis that have escaped his attention earlier. Characteristically, he says he still always encounters something new. A recent "first ascent" in the Mahdah area produced an exceptional day for dragonflies (details in a subsequent issue) and, upstream, an interesting stretch he christened the Four Gorges. Sounds like a field trip coming.

Peter van Amsterdam and Anne Millen recently returned from two weeks in Jamaica, where they were fascinated by the hummingbirds. In the lush jungle of the hills, they are plentiful, but terribly difficult to photograph. Finally, they resorted to visiting a birdfeeding station where the hummingbirds sip on drips of sugarwater placed or held for them. They apparently need sugar about every ten minutes, so there is barely a gap between their visits. Jamaican woodpeckers, banana birds (yes, they're yellow) and many others are there aplenty but are completely upstaged by the hummingbirds, especially the red-billed streamertails.

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:

Roger & Heather Neal
Gary Feulner
Jo Raynor
Fran M'Caw
Sandhya Prakash
Mohammed Arfan Asif
Valerie & Tom Chalmers

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



It's that time of year again!

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, Mobile 050 645 1743)

End-of-Season Dinner, Quiz and Photography Competition Thursday 15th June

Valerie Chalmers has confirmed with the Dubai Country Club the date of the End-of-Season Dinner, Photographic Competition and Quiz. Please take note of the date and keep it free. This annual event is always great fun, Details for the photographic competition and for obtaining tickets for the evening will appear in May's *Gazelle*.

*And Some
News...*



Annual General Meeting

The DNHG's Annual General Meeting was held at our monthly lecture on 2 April 2006. The Committee members shown on page 7 were elected to serve for the coming year. The Chairman's annual report

highlighted, *inter alia*, a high quality lecture program featuring many speakers new to the DNHG, stable membership levels and sound finances, the conduct of a very successful Inter-Emirates Week-end (with special thanks to Vice Chairman Val Chalmers and to Barbara Couldrey of RAK), and the extension of patronage to the DNHG by H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan, the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the Patron of the ENHGs in Abu Dhabi and Al Ain..

The Chairman emphasised, as always, the need for volunteer trip leaders in order to implement a

successful field trip program.

A particular goal for the coming year is to establish a website for the DNHG - on a simple and easy to maintain basis - that will enable members and others to obtain basic information about the group and its current programme schedule, and that will also archive the wealth of natural history information that has appeared in the *Gazelle* over the years.



Our Next Speakers

Dr Brigitte Howarth arrived in the UAE with her family in September 1998 after having just successfully defended her Ph.D. thesis entitled 'Batesian Mimicry in the British Syrphidae'. Her first degree is in applied ecology. During her first degree she was introduced to entomology and discovered hoverflies. Their mimicry of stinging *Hymenoptera* (bees and wasps) became her Ph.D. research, some of which has been published in scientific journals. Together with her supervisor, she was successful in attracting funding from the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) in England to develop an immunological test to determine whether birds are stung by bees and wasps, an idea she put forward to test whether birds have an innate aversion to hymenopteran colouration. She is currently working on extending the dipteran records (*Diptera* are flies) for the UAE but is also interested in other insect orders and the ecology of all habitats in which they occur. Every weekend she spends time in wadis and desert environments with the Al Ain ENHG, observing, identifying and recording fauna and flora.

She will be presenting the main part of the talk, which is a record of arthropods that occur in Wadi Tarabat. The data collection was achieved using a variety of techniques and these will be discussed, along with the records they yielded. Bob has enriched our observational ability by photographing and thus making a record of many of the fauna and flora, which he will discuss. ."

Bob Reimer has long been fascinated with small things and photomacrography. Most of his work in his younger days was with flowers. Years in the insurance and IT industry in Canada made for little time to pursue his interests. Coming to UAE in 2002 and joining the Al Ain ENHG rekindled his interest in photomacrography and provided many opportunities to take pictures. The enthusiasm and generous sharing of knowledge by ENHG's resident entomologists, Dr. Brigitte Howarth and Dr. Michael Gillett, focussed his efforts on the additional challenge of documenting the arthropods of UAE and Northern Oman in addition to the flora. Bob will discuss some of the technical aspects of photographically recording the miniscule life in Wadi Tarabat.



Inter-Emirates Weekend - A Good Time Had By All



The Inter-Emirates Weekend, chock full of trips and activities went off well, marred a little by the dust-storm that started on Friday. One dhow trip had to be cancelled because of strong winds and poor visibility - apart from discomfort!

An interesting collection of photographs was entered in the photographic competition held on Thursday evening. The winners, by popular vote, were:

First prize - Roger Neal from DNHG 'Solitude near the Big Red'



Second prize - Bob Reimer from ENHG Al Ain
'Common Blue Tail Damselfly', taken at Khudrah



Third Prize - Stephen Ehrenberg from ENHG Al Ain
'Veiled Ladies', taken in Al Ain



They all received books as prizes. First prize received 'The Emirates - A Natural History', second and third both took Whales and Dolphins of UAE. Congratulations! *Thanks to Valerie Chalmers for this information, & to her son Tom for the photographs of the prizewinning photographs.*

Morning dhow trip into the mangroves

The Inter Emirates Weekend at Ras Al Khaimah was kick-started with a visit to the fish souk and a dhow trip. A short drive from the RAK Hotel led us to a hustling and bustling fish market. Dhows were bringing fresh fish, crabs, lobsters and squids, and buyers were haggling for their favourites. After we had spent about half an hour taking in the fishy flavour, Abdullah the dhow owner walked up and got the two dhows ready.

It was a cool morning and we floated away to the mangroves. There was large scale construction and dredging going on along the shoreline. Grey herons, egrets, terns dotted the mangrove islands and sandpipers and plovers walked the shore. On the return, the cool breeze lulled many to a snooze. *Report by Sandhya Prakash*

Afternoon Dhow Trip around the Mangroves.

Two boats full of I.E.W's set off for a trip around the mangroves which we understand to be only recently re-establishing themselves.

We spotted many large jelly fish and the occasional heron sitting on the 'fish breeding pens'. Fish are kept in these pens until they are of a suitable size to be released into the creek, in an attempt to restock it after overfishing. All that was missing was somebody who could have told us about all the birds we saw! The trip was so relaxing that many passengers dozed off! *Report by Fran M'Caw* (So *that's* why dhow trips are so popular! Ed.)



One of RAK's 20cm diameter jellyfish
(Photograph Anne Millen)

IEW: RAK Mangrove Walk

Few people are as familiar with a broad range of UAE natural history as Dr. Richard Hornby, and few people have spent as much time in and around UAE mangrove and other coastal environments in recent years. So it was a special opportunity to wade along with him into the fringes of the mangrove forest in RAK Khor. The defining characteristic of a mangrove forest is its location in the intertidal zone. Our visit was timed for low tide, but a visit to the mangroves, where fine sediment is slowly trapped and deposited, is a muddy enterprise at any time.

In the UAE, the mangrove forests are made up of only a single species of tree, *Avicennia marina* (referred to confusingly in various works as the black mangrove, the white mangrove, the grey mangrove and the dwarf mangrove). In the waterlogged, oxygen-poor intertidal soil, his species breathes in part by means of pneumatophores – erect, finger-like projections of the roots that poke through the soil like shoots from a runner. Perhaps the most common animal living among the mangroves is the purple-black crab *Metapograpsus messor*, of which we inspected many.

Gastropod molluscs are also common. Those we saw included: the mangrove tree snail *Littoraria intermedia*, which favors smaller mangrove plants on the fringe of the forest and lives in the 30 cm above



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

the high tide line (the Chairman's gold doubloon went to Barbara Couldrey for being the first to spot a rare orange-pink specimen); the medium and small mud creepers, *Cerithidea cingulata* and *Potamides conicus*, cone-shaped snails that are present in more open areas by the thousands; and *Osilinus kotschyi*, a turban-shaped snail that likes to cover its aperture with bits of broken shell or other debris. Perhaps the most endearing gastropod was the tiny orange *Haminoea* sp., which is slightly too big to fit inside its shell, and looks out at the world through two pinpoint black eyes. A few live rugose oysters *Saccostrea cucullata* were also found attached to the bases of mangrove trunks. Scouting the area the previous day, Dick had discovered on the fringe of the mangrove area a pulmonate (lung-bearing) gastropod, *Melampus castaneus*, that had not previously been recorded from RAK Khor.

As if to prove that opportunity is everywhere, Dick pointed out the variety of life that had colonised an old flip-flop, drifted in as flotsam. This included barnacles, tube-building worms and gastropods. Redshank were the most common birds among the mangroves, but Dick also called attention to the song of the Graceful Warbler, which breeds in the mangroves, and to the abandoned nest of a Western Reef Heron.

A substantial area of the mangrove forest in RAK Khor has been lost to the new golf course, the new highway and shopping malls, and development is also reportedly planned for the emblematic sand dune in the centre of RAK Khor, but it was encouraging to see that the remaining areas do not seem to have been

greatly damaged in the short term. The greatest loss to date, however, has been to the shallow flats adjacent to the forest, among the smallest shrubs, which are feeding areas and refuges to the young of many ocean fish species. These are losses that are harder to measure in a visit such as ours, and we can only hope for the best. Report by Gary Feulner



Rams Beach Retains its Reputation

Rams Beach would have to be one of the dirtiest ever seen, but remains one of Editor Anne Millen's favourites. In amongst the flotsam and jetsam and the maggot-ridden carcasses of rays, there are always surprises. Our trip there on the IEW was no exception. We hardly did any shelling, being immediately diverted by fishermen on the beach pulling in nets heavy with Ming-blue jellyfish. An occasional clear one was seen (and next day, Anne found purple ones).



They worked hard to extricate the fish from their nets, throwing them into baskets, by species.



That done, they rolled the jellyfish and the unsaleables, en masse, out of the nets onto the beach.



Although March is the time when paper nautilus, *Argonauta Argo*, are usually washed up on Rams, only one was found, a small perfect specimen. Several good 'hats', *Cel-lana rota*, were found along with lovely cowries, mainly *Cypraea turdus winckworthi* and *gracilis*, and some blue *Neverita (Glossaulax) didyma*. (Has anyone else noticed that the *Neverita* on Rams tend to be blue whilst those at Jazeera al Hamra, only 10 or 15 kilometres away, are more likely to be pink?) Several fresh tests of *echinoder-mata* were found too.

After we had dug, pushed and pulled the cars out any number of times, one of the women summed things up well. "I think men don't like shelling, really. They prefer to play with their cars in the sand." Photographs by Roger and Heather Neal, text by Anne Millen



The team for Jo's Sili walk, overleaf



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan
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Archaeology - Prof. John Fox
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(Temporarily away - hold your reports)

Birds - David Bradford
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Seashells - perhaps you?

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi
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Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
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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.

IEW Trip to Sili.

This impromptu trip was to a small village in the far reaches of Wadi Sharm. Although easily accessible from the coast this village has the characteristics of the more remote mountain villages. It was the best of both worlds; not much walking and something relatively untouched. Six vehicles were just right for such a small track. Still we left one car behind at the hotel and had unplanned 4WD lessons on the way!

This village has been not been lived in for about 20 years, although there were signs that it was not truly deserted – some small cultivations, maintained houses, new locks and a useable water cistern. There was also evidence of water cistern and wall restoration.

Probably dating from 200 years ago, Sili had a number of interesting features. The pottery kilns point to a major activity of the inhabitants. A complex water-catchment and storage system for rainwater is evident and needed as there was no other water supply. Grind stones were still in situ in the courtyard of a number of houses.



Grindstone

These houses appear to range from substantial and well built, especially higher in the village to very basic rock like shelters further down. It is likely that the people used this village in the cooler months when there was rainfall to restore the cisterns and moved to the coast and palm gardens during the dryer months.

Trip members were able to wander among the houses on their own, exploring. Peeking into the gloom of open doorways, resting in the shady courtyards, mapping a water

catchment system or just enjoying the view was evocative of a lifestyle not distant in time by far removed from the modern world.



Cistern

Thanks to Jo Raynor for text and photographs

Book Review:

The Phoenix, No. 22

The latest annual edition of *The Phoenix* has reached us and is now available at monthly lectures. The *Phoenix* is published by ABBA, the Atlas of Breeding Birds of Arabia project, and edited by Mike Jennings. Although it is of greatest interest to bird enthusiasts, *The Phoenix* contains considerable information of general natural history interest.

In the latest issue, No. 22, items of greatest interest to UAE residents include Mohammed Arfan Asif's account of little green bee-eaters at Jadaf, a report on the white-collared kingfisher at Khor Kalba and Mike Jennings' account of an ABBA Survey 35 in the Jebel Akhdar, with a special emphasis on two bird species not seen elsewhere in the UAE and northern Oman - the wood pigeon and the Arabian red-legged partridge. Mike gets around, and no.22 also contains an account of ABBA Survey 34 in the bandit country of north-central Yemen, complete with tales of warning shots and resort to 'Plan B.'



Perhaps the most off-beat entry, however, is a short item titled: 'How to Prove Swifts Are Nesting Nearby.' This, it turns out, is simplicity itself. Just find a high spot such as a cliff (or bridge) where swifts are flying and drop some feathers or grass over the edge. If the swifts are nesting, they will take the airborne material in flight and carry it off. Circumstantial evidence, but persuasive, reasons Mike. Apparently they will even interrupt feeding to collect such items, suggesting that the windblown nest material is scarcer than food. *Review by Gary Feulner*

DNHG Librarian Needed

Family matters meant our Librarian Jenny Irwin spent most of the past year in Australia, and Jenny expects that this situation will continue for the foreseeable future. She has suggested that we should solicit interest in the Librarian's position.

The DNHG Library resides at Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management. Our library is an extremely valuable resource but we are still not making optimal use of it. Most of our books have been catalogued and are available for perusal on a reference basis. Our miscellaneous pamphlets, reprints, photocopies and other materials remain to be catalogued.

The DNHG Librarian's job is to liaise with and assist the EAHM's librarian, Jane Campbell, in sorting and cataloguing those miscellaneous materials, and in producing an index of the DNHG's holdings. An index from earlier years exists and could be updated in a more modern format. The Librarian is also responsible for the acquisition and cataloguing of new materials. This



is an important function. If you think you might be interested in spending more time with our books and papers, contact Gary Feulner or Valerie Chalmers.

Thru' the lens ...

You can reshoot and reschedule other kinds of photography, but not nature. For taking good nature pictures, whether at your doorstep or thousand of miles away, a unique temperament is needed. Nature is dynamic and to capture it with your lens you need good reflexes preceded by proper planning and focused attention. Happy-go-lucky-snap-shooters may take good pictures. But the serious nature photographer has a portfolio of consistently good quality pictures.

A scientific approach must be taken, not of the subject in consideration, which is also important, but of taking pictures. The physics, chemistry, electronics and software that are involved should be studied; in these days of automation, this is often neglected. Though one may possess high-end equipment, but if one does not understand its capabilities and the science behind the entire mechanism, the price paid for this automation is a waste. This is the most important criterion that determines the quality of an image.



My recent trip to Khor Kalba in the Northern Emirates provided great opportunities. The white collared kingfisher (*Halcyon chloris*), an en-



dangered species and resident breeder in this area, appeared in good numbers in the mangroves lining the khor. I have plans to work on it this summer. A morning trip with low tide produces a great number of species.



The birds found included sand plovers, warblers (reed and Sykes), sooty and great black headed gulls, swift and white cheeked terns, Indian pond herons, and waders. The Kalba plains and pools, on the Kalba-Oman Road, provide good sightings of other varieties including grebes, black winged stilts, red wattled lapwing, sandpipers, terns, spoonbills, Arabian babbles, bee eaters and birds of prey.



A full-day trip to Kalba and surrounding areas is very rewarding!
Text and photographs by Mohamed Arfan Asif



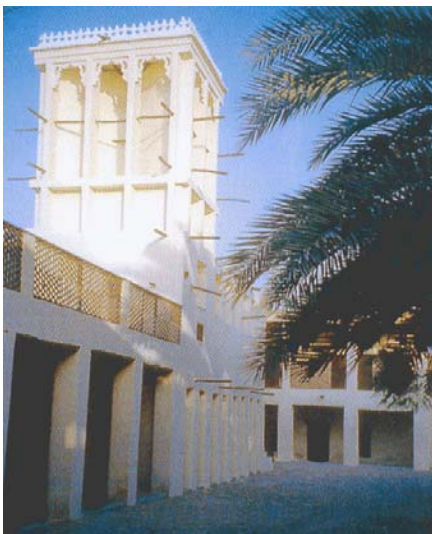
IEW Trip to RAK Museum

Valerie Chalmers led a trip to the National Museum of Ras al-Khaimah which is located in the



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historical fort (*husn*) in old RAK, founded in the 18th century.



It was originally erected as a defence structure but it has also served as the residence of the ruling Quwasim family since the early 1920s. It was converted into a museum in 1987. The Museum was officially opened on Thursday 19th

November 1987 and Valerie was invited to the opening, being a member of the then Ladies Ecology Group who had contributed to some of the collections there.

After hearing a short talk on the history of the Museum, the group toured the various museum display rooms which contain a wealth of archaeological finds along with detailed information about the archaeological excavations, information about the history and traditions of the area, a most impressive shell collection and a fossil display.

It is interesting to note that the original paving stones of the courtyard, one of which is on display in the fossil section, came from Wadi Haqil which was on the itinerary of Barbara Couldrey's morning hike and contained fossils from the Permian/Triassic eras. *Report by*

Val Chalmers, photos from RAK Government, Department of Antiquities and Museums brochure.



Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

May 7 Insects of Wadi Tarabat – Dr. Brigitte Howarth and Bob Reimer

June 4 Members' Night:
Peter Jackson – Bastak: An Iranian Village
Barbara van Meir – Aspects of Nautical Archaeology
Steve Raynor – Elephant Tracks in Western Abu Dhabi

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

May Your trip — let us know!

Jun 15 End-of-Season Dinner