

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

DNHG Membership

The Annual General Meeting was held prior to the lecture at the EAHM on March 4, and the election of Committee members was carried out by show of hands. The Chairman's report is given on p.6. The Committee remains very much as it was last year, but with the resignation of Peter Jackson (Field Trip Coordinator) and Jenny Irwin (Librarian), there are two posts to be filled. If you have the necessary skills and you step forward, as Jesse Ellis (Engineer) just has, you are welcome! A Librarian is particularly needed, as we have a fine collection of books and articles, some of them rare, that needs attention.

and they are therefore extremely difficult to see. Only with the assistance of a local divemaster did they find the fish, and when attempting to photograph it they found that it had an annoying tendency to turn in such a way that it was even harder to see! Although Phi Phi island itself was devastated by the tsunami in 2004, many of the nearby dive sites were unaffected.

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.



.DNHG members **Steve** and **Angela Manthorpe** were in Thailand recently, diving in the environs of Phi Phi Island and Phuket. On one of the dives they found a ghost pipefish (above). These fish are masters of camouflage, inhabiting corals that resemble the fish itself,



This spring we are being treated to a long awaited feast of wild flowers, the result of the recent good rains. In February, **Barbara Couldrey** saw, for only the second time in many years, the rare purple poppy, *Roemeria hybrida* (above). The plants were mainly confined to one terraced field near the Yabana ridge at ca. 800m in the Ru'us al Jibal, and one or two at lower elevations in similar environments. She has seen the little scarlet poppy (*Papaver dubium*) on several occasions in these hills.

This month's Contributors

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

Angela Manthorpe
David Palmer
Barbara Couldrey
Rob and Jean Allan
Richard Hornby
Elizabeth Stanley
Rob Schmidt
Gary Feulner



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



Inter-Emirates Weekend March 22 - 24

This year the Inter-Emirates Weekend is being hosted by the Al Ain Chapter of ENHG from 22 March to 24 March. The Intercontinental Al Ain Resort Hotel will be used as the starting point for the planned activities. Room rates for the hotel are as follows:

Single or Double Room with Buffet Breakfast at the Arabesque Restaurant: Dh500/- + service charge + 0.6% Tourism Fees. Total = Dh580/- net per room per night. All requests for rooms should be emailed to George Titus at the Intercon. His email address is george.titus@icalain.ae He is handling all the bookings. Phone number of Intercontinental is: 03-7686686.

The registration fee will be Dh100/- which includes the main dinner on Friday evening 23 March. The dinner will be held in the grounds of the Intercontinental Hotel. The photographic competition will also take place that evening. Guidelines for the competition have been circulated by email but can also be viewed on the Al Ain Website: www.enhg.org

A variety of trips are on offer for Friday morning, Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. These have been circulated by email but can also be viewed on the Al Ain Website: www.enhg.org

To register: please send an email to Brien Holmes, Chairman, ENHG Al Ain, email address: bocknobby@yahoo.com and confirm your attendance at the Friday evening dinner. Please also let him know which trips you are interested in.

Qatar with QNHG April 12 - 14

This trip has been organized by Angela Manthorpe, and is now full. The Qatar Natural History Group has organised activities and trips.

Spring Birdwatching March 30/31 or early April

This will be somewhere in the environs of Dubai, and bird watchers should see a good variety, many busy with nesting activity. Details will be announced as soon as we have them.

Falcon Hospital Trip with Pradeep & Anin April/May (to be confirmed)

This trip is just one day and can be done in hot weather. Arrangements need to be made to visit the hospital, so when this has been done, the date and details will be announced.

Bastakia Windtower Houses: a walk with Peter Jackson May

Peter Jackson has offered to lead a walk through Bastakia, visiting the old wind tower houses by the creek which have been researched for his book. This will take place sometime in May after the book is published. It will be approximately three hours on a Friday morning.



Sorrel (Rumex vesicarius)
Photograph by Rob Allan

Future Field Trips ...

Would you like to see the rare and lovely flora & fauna of the UAE? The Committee does its best to organize varied field trips, and ideally, we would like to have a trip every weekend of the cool months and an occasional trip for those languishing here over the long hot summer.

If you would like to lead a trip, or wish to visit a place or learn about some UAE natural history subject, contact one of the Field Trip Coordinators, who will be very pleased to help you.



Our Next Speaker

Dr. Adrian Parker read Physical Geography and Ecology as an undergraduate and then undertook his Doctorate at the University of Oxford where he researched climate change, landscape response and human impact through the archaeological record over the past 15,000 years in southern Britain. He stayed in Oxford as post-doctoral researcher for three years and during this period in 1995 he first became interested to the Emirates landscape. Adrian moved to the Department of Geography, Oxford Brookes University, in 1999 and was Head of Department from 2003- 2006. In 2006 he was appointed Reader in the newly merged Department of Anthropology and Geography. Adrian is co-author of *Global Environments through the Quaternary: Exploring Environmental Change* (Oxford University Press, 2007) as well as having published fifty research articles.

Adrian is currently working with colleagues on the evolution of the Emirates landscape over the past 250,000 years from sand dune sediments, fluvial gravels and dry lake sediments. From this a detailed record of climate change relating to the interactions of the Indian Ocean monsoon and the westerlies is being reconstructed. Adrian is also interested in the effect of climate change during the past 10,000 years and the impact that this has had upon human society in the region through the archaeological record. He has also undertaken work on plant remains from archaeological sites in the UAE and Kuwait.



Pristurus carteri at Ibri

The DNHG trip to Ibri in January this year yielded a number of sightings of the small gecko *Pristurus carteri*. The four individuals, including three juveniles, were found on the rocky south-west slope of the anticline.



They are fairly easy to distinguish in the field owing to their beak-like pointed snouts and the photos below show this clearly, as well as indicating how colour varies between specimens. *P. carteri* is generally active during the day, particularly in the mornings and has been described as resembling an agama in appearance and behaviour, more than a typical gecko. It has been noted that they often spend long periods sitting motionless, hunting passively and waiting for prey to come past.



Pristurus carteri

The species was not known to occur in this area of Oman – it is known primarily from southern Oman – Dhofar, Huqf, Ras Al-Hadd and the coast south of Muscat. Drew Gardner, who maintains the herpetology database for the country had the following to say: "It is certainly a considerable expansion of the known range. *P. carteri* is known as far west as Mabella near Seeb on the Batinah. Inland of the mountains, the furthest north-west that I have a re-

cord is Shiafa army camp some 160 km south-east, and Qarat Kibrit salt dome which is about 230 km south-south-east. It does raise the possibility that it may be found much closer to the UAE!" Report by Angela Manthorpe

With the Veldes to Dhayah, RAK

"This is still an idyllic place...but it won't be in the future." That was Christian Velde's verdict as we stood in the middle of an abandoned palm garden in Dhayah, just north of Ras Al Khaimah. We were at the end of a tour led by Christian and his wife (and fellow-archaeologist) Imke. Beside us were the marks where a bulldozer driver looking for building materials had scored the ground as he scooped up part of the collapsed wall of one of the last examples of RAK's traditional mosques.

About a dozen DNHG members met on Friday February 16th at the RAK fort and museum, which is starting to be restored now that Sheikh Saqr has moved out. We first visited Dhayah fort, captured by the British in 1819. It was designed only as a last refuge from raiders, rather than for resistance to a siege. It has no cistern.



In the fort

The hill on which the fort sits contains remains of walls and fortifications from the bronze and iron ages and the medieval period of Julfar port, as well as more recent times. There are also middens with vast numbers of shells of oysters and mangrove mud snails, indicating a sizeable settlement in ancient times.

The palm gardens of Dhayah were protected by mud-brick forts and watchtowers, most now in advanced stages of decay. Raiders were a major problem in this outlying area of Arabia, and raids continued even into the 1950s. As well as animals and food, raiders took women and children to sell as house slaves in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere.



Christian Velde explains the history of Dhayah as we survey the area from the fort

From the parapet of the fort we surveyed the entire Dhayah area: from the sea, the creek and the coastal settlements to the inland palm gardens, the acacia forest and ancient necropolis, and finally the mountains behind - crowned by Jebel Rahabah at 1500m - which sweep down in a crescent to the shore on each side of Dhayah.

Sadly, everything that we could see is under threat by the bulldozers: housing creep from Rams, quarrying, and a proposed north-south federal power line with 70m towers. The route of the power line has now been changed, thanks to lobbying from the environment ministry and Christian's own department. The new route will send it a little further inland, which should lessen somewhat the visual pollution.

Two reserves are planned in Dhayah, one in the creek area and the other, which will incorporate a gazelle sanctuary, in the acacia forest. Christian and Imke hope to persuade owners to preserve the beautiful palm gardens too, which are under threat from lack of maintenance and watering.

Christian was, as ever, a knowledgeable guide to everything around us, a source of insights into



E.mail your reports to pvana@emirates.net.ae (Arial 10 justified, with photographs as separate attachments in .jpg format).

both past and present: from the diplomatic and military manoeuvres in the Gulf in the early 19th century, to the depth of water table needed to sustain a palm garden in times of high prices (about 7m, assuming the use of oxen to pull the water up), to the fact that most grazing animals in the UAE die eventually from a steady diet of plastic bags.

After checking out the second fort at the bottom of the hill, and inspecting an almost collapsed example of a traditional palm-garden mud-brick summer house, we moved on to the necropolis, which dates from the Wadi Suq era (2000 - 1600 BC), though the graves were re-used in later times. It extends through the acacia forest for about a kilometer, parallel to the sea.



Wadi Suq tomb

Christian and Imke first showed us an unexcavated long tomb, with only a few stones still indicating the corbelling of the chamber. Then we inspected two amazingly well preserved long tombs, with massive stones still locked in place, one with a single chamber and one with a double chamber. Though the chambers inside the tombs were corbelled, the exterior had vertical walls and flat (or flattish) roofs. The sealing of the chambers with stones and gravel was so tight that no rodents were able to enter to gnaw on the bones inside.

There was some discussion about the position of the entrances to the

long tombs. These were positioned in order to allow access to the entire area inside the chamber for new burials without treading on earlier burials. Entrances were therefore in the middle of the long side for single chambered tombs, but on the end of tombs with double chambers. The entrances were located on the downside slope, so that water did not run into the tombs.

Christian has worked on UAE archaeology since 1985, starting in Shimal, RAK, and later at Tell Abraaq. He has been an archaeologist for the RAK government since 1998. He works in collaboration with the environmental department to try to head off threats to archaeological sites and other remains of RAK's past, and to preserve the serenity of places like Dhayah. The DNHG is grateful to Christian and Imke for taking the time on a Friday to show us around so thoroughly.
Report by David Palmer.

Temple Alleys of Bur Dubai

It felt as though we had been transported to India as trip leader Sandhya Prakash led our DNHG group through the narrow alleys of old Bur Dubai to visit Krishna, Shiva and Sikh Temples. Sandhya described the religious practices and answered our many questions, patiently explaining the Hindu trinity of deities: Brahma the Creator, with four faces; Vishnu the Preserver, with ten incarnations; and Shiva the Destroyer, with various forms. Our walk started at the Dubai Museum and passed some of the many fabric shops before we paused at a display of offering baskets containing the items that devotees may take to the temples: milk or a milk-based sweet, flowers, fruit, coconut, and incense sticks. The coconut is the most auspicious, as it symbolizes the desirable characteristics of a person – tough on the outside (ego) and tender on the inside. It is broken in front of the deity to expose the tender inside.

Many of the temples are in former houses, and were originally authorised by Sheikh Rashid to serve the

Indian boat workers along the Creek. Today they are visited by devotees from all over Dubai, from 5:30 am until late at night. Our first temple visit was at a Krishna Temple which we reached by a flight of stairs after removing our shoes and leaving them on racks surrounding a small courtyard. After passing through a doorway decorated with garlands of flowers, we entered a room in which devotees chanted and received the Prasad, a small packet of cut fruit, on leaving. Krishna is one of the incarnations of Vishnu, and appears in many interpretations. Some of these were shown in paintings on the walls.



Basil, for sale outside the tiny shops (From Marijcke Jongbloed's 'Wild Flowers of the UAE')

We continued through even narrower alleys lined with shops catering to the temple-goers, selling pictures, books, offerings, scarves (for the goddesses, the consorts of the deities), lamps, wicks, and mustard oil or sesame oil to burn in the lamps.

Our next stop was at a Shiva Temple in which we watched the worshippers presenting their offerings. In this temple, signs indicated that from the hours from 5:00 to 9:30 pm are for ladies only. The third temple of our tour was a Sikh Temple, one floor above the Shiva Temple, reached by a spiral staircase (and smelling deliciously of rice). Sandhya explained that the Sikh religion is newer, and that there are no deities, but the temple contains the Book of Letters of the Ten Gurus (teachers).

Our group included both long-time Dubai residents and newcomers, and all were fascinated by both the



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

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

Archaeology - David Palmer
cell: 050-7387703
office direct line: 04-2072636

Birds - David Bradford
davebradford9@hotmail.com

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.



temples and the shops. The ninety-minute visit was an enjoyable excursion into a section of Bur Dubai that most of us had not previously explored, and an informative introduction to the temples and Hindu beliefs. *Thanks to Elizabeth Stanley for this report.*

Hawkmoth Caterpillars

On 2nd February, Dick Hornby photographed this hawkmoth caterpillar near Masafi, on *Asphodelus tenuifolius*. Brigitte Howarth confirmed for him that it was the striped hawkmoth, *Hyles livornica*.



Then on 23 February 2007, there were very large numbers of conspicuous, dark-coloured hawkmoth caterpillars on sand dunes near Taweelah. They were feeding on *Fagonia ovalifolia* and *Helianthemum lippii*. They looked rather different from the Masafi individual, and Dick assumed it was a different species. The next photographs illustrate two of the larger individuals:



and ...



He e-mailed the photos to a few people that he thought could help, hoping to receive a positive identification, but they were only able to confirm that the caterpillars were of the genus *Hyles*. This is a large genus with several species ranging from West Africa to China. The only species of the genus known to occur in the UAE is the striped hawkmoth, so he wondered if we had a new species for the country and started to research the matter on the internet. One website in particular was very helpful: tpit-taway.tripod.com/sphinx.

The caterpillars at Taweelah are fairly similar but certainly not identical to the illustrations of caterpillars of three of the subspecies of *Hyles euphorbiae*, the spurge hawkmoth. The known foodplants of this species are all spurges (*Euphorbia spp.*) but there were no spurges at Taweelah, so it seemed unlikely that this was our hawkmoth. The Taweelah caterpillars are also very similar to those of the Barbary spurge hawkmoth *Hyles thythymali deserticola*, which is a very desert-adapted hawkmoth occurring across the northern Sahara, from Morocco to eastern Egypt.

The adults are said to fly by day in the hottest time of the year. The habitat of this species is said to be desert steppe and stabilised sand dunes, which certainly fits with that at Taweelah. The pupae are said to diapause for several seasons and may be triggered to emerge by heavy rain.



Hyles thythymali deserticola

Another candidate is a subspecies of the Barbary spurge hawkmoth, *Hyles thythymali hymyarensis*, which is endemic to Yemen. Its larva (shown below) also has similarities with the larvae at Taweelah, but they are quite clearly not the same ones.



Hyles thythymali hymyarensis

The same website finally produced what he was looking for. It shows that the larvae of the striped hawkmoth change greatly as they develop, as shown below:



There can be little doubt from this that the caterpillars at Taweelah were penultimate and final instar larvae of Striped Hawkmoth. The earlier instars are much less brightly coloured than the later ones. The second photo above is clearly very similar to Dick's photo taken at Masafi. This dramatic transformation is his excuse for believing that we might have found a species new to the Emirates. One thing that this little investigation did reveal is the reason for sudden

mass appearances of *Hyles* hawkmoth caterpillars: the pupae may remain in diapause for several years until stimulated by heavy rain to complete their metamorphosis. There has certainly been plenty of that over the last few months. Adults could have emerged at the same time from pupae which had been in diapause for different durations, up to several years, thus helping to synchronize the population. This is clearly an adaptation with considerable selective advantage. Adults all emerge at about the same time after rain, thus facilitating mating. The eggs that are laid following those matings then become caterpillars that are able to take advantage of the plant growth that follows the heavy rain.



Striped hawkmoth

The present generation of caterpillars at Taweelah are likely to produce many pupae which will remain in the sand until the bulldozers move in to create the new Khalifa Port Industrial City. Perhaps we should press for a mass translocation of pupae! Would it not be a tragedy to lose several years worth of these beautiful creatures? Thanks to Richard Hornby for text and photographs.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT March 2007

The DNHG continues to conduct a monthly programme of high quality, enthusiastic and well-received speakers on diverse natural history topics. It is worth noting that, consistent with most recent years, most of these were new to the DNHG.

The following are some of the most important observations in relation to the past year:

Membership for the current year (2006-07) is approximately 170 paid UAE memberships plus a handful of overseas paid memberships, amounting to some 240 or more individuals. Membership has been stable for the past several years, despite comings and goings, and despite the increasing pace of activity in Dubai. The level of member involvement and interaction appears healthy and programmes have been well received.

Attendance at monthly meetings has generally been at levels of 40-70 people. This is down slightly from past years, which we are inclined to attribute to the increasing difficulty of travelling around Dubai, causing people to weigh their movements more carefully. While numbers are not the sole criteria of success, the prospect of a bigger audience probably makes it somewhat easier for us to recruit speakers.

We continue to benefit from the patronage of H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan, the longtime Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Affairs as well as head of UAE University, Zayed University and the Higher Colleges of Technology. Sheikh Nahayan has been the Patron of the Emirates Natural History Groups in Abu Dhabi and Al Ain from their inception. His patronage of the DNHG is underlines the natural relationships among the UAE's several NHGs.

Emirates Academy has increasingly used the auditorium for examination and other purposes and the hall has therefore often been set up in exam or other formats, with individual desks and chairs in various placements. Most of these have been less desirable for a number of reasons, but it is not clear that we can expect EAHM to effect a complete rearrangement for lecture nights alone.

We have averaged at least 2-3 field trips per month during the 2006-2007 winter season, catering



	name	tel home	tel office	fax
Chairman	Gary Feulner	306 5570 messages: 306 5300	330 3600	330 3550
Vice Chairman	Valerie Chalmers	349 4816 e.mail: vmc@latifaschool.co.ae	no calls pls	340 0990
Treasurer	Sim Hasker	343 1076 e.mail: haskers@hotmail.com	050-5074691	
Membership Secretary	Lena Linton	050-474 3595 e.mail: linton@mailme.ae		
Membership Assistant	Anindita Radhakrishna	282 3952 e.mail: anin@emirates.net.ae	050-656 9165	
Speaker Co-ordinator	Angela Manthorpe	288 6232 e mail: manthorpe2005@yahoo.co.uk		
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Pradeep Radhakrishna	282 3952 e.mail: wgarnet@emirates.net.ae	050-450 8496	
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	<i>Fun job, and two others to share the work.</i>			
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Sandhya Prakash	050-5512481 e.mail:sandhya@clavib.com		348 2868
Special Projects	Beryl Comar	344 2243 e.mail: comar@emirates.net.ae		344 2243
Newsletter Editor	Anne Millen	394 7076 e.mail: pvana@emirates.net.ae	no calls please	394 7075
Publisher	Peter van Amsterdam	394 7076 e.mail: pvana@emirates.net.ae	335 5495	394 7075
Librarian	<i>Librarian needed!</i>			
Book Sales	Jo & Rachel Raynor	334 6183 e.mail: joray@emirates.net.ae		
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Chief Engineer	Jesse Ellis	050-8993413 e.mail:peterjon@emirates.net.ae		

to a variety of interests. We continue to look for ways to expand our roster of field trip leaders but we have also benefited from the continuing energy of established volunteers, amongst whom Sandhya Prakash deserves special mention for her efforts.

Gary R. Feulner, Chairman
4 March 2007



*IEW bird watchers, Hamriya, RAK
Photograph by Rob Schmidt*

To right is a (somewhat shorthand) list of the lectures enjoyed by DNHG members during 2006 and so far this year.

2006 DNHG Speakers

Jan	Razik Shaikh	Oil Exploration and Production
Feb	Peter Hellyer	The Recent History of Abu Dhabi
Mar	Dr. Richard Hornby	Coastal Marine Life of the UAE
Apr	Damien Egan	Snakes of Arabia
May	B. Howarth / R. Reimer	Insects of Wadi Tarabat
Jun	Members Night:	Steve Raynor: Elephant Trackways Barbara van Meir: Nautical Archeology Peter Jackson: Bastak – an Iranian village
Sep	Ian Jones	Natural Ventilation in Houses of Bastakiya
Oct	Dr. David Gallacher	Vegetation Decline in Dubai Inland Desert
Nov	Dr. Michell Ziolkowski	Rock Art
Dec	Prof. Ulrich Wernery	Camel Milk: The White Gold of the Desert

2007 DNHG Speakers

Jan	Dr. Tony van Harten	The UAE Insect Project
Feb	Dr. Reza Khan	Wildlife of Sunderbans Mangrove Forest
Mar	Christophe Tourenq	Wadi Wurayyah Protected Area Project

Letters to the Editor

Do you have some comment, suggestion or query on natural history that you would like our members to know about or answer? Please send your letter to any of the committee members or direct to the editor, Anne Millen.



Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

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|---------|--|
| Apr 01 | UAE Palaeoclimate and the Archeological Record – Dr. Adrian Parker |
| May 06 | Recent UAE archaeological discoveries – Dr. Mark Beech |
| June 03 | Members' Night – [<i>Your Name Here</i>] |

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

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Mar 22-24 | Inter-Emirates Weekend (Al Ain) |
| April 12-14 | Visit to Qatar |
| Mar 30/31 or
early April | Spring bird watching with David Bradford |
| April / May | Falcon Hospital with Pradeep & Anindita Radhakrishna |
| May | Bastakia Walk with Peter Jackson |