

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Dumps, Humps & Lumps

Professor Larry Woods, who left in early June, writes: Many thanks for the kind farewell note which greets readers on the front page of this month's *Gazelle*. It has been a pleasure and an honour to be part of the Dubai Natural History Group - even if I am to be associated forever with a dumpsite. Might not be a bad thing given the reclamation efforts that have gone on since that time, and there is a little 3000 year old pot lid in the RAK museum I am known for as well!

My coordinates in Canada will be
169 Southridge Drive
Salt Spring Island, BC
Canada V8K 1Y9
Tel: 250-653-9892
Email: woods.lawrence@gmail.com
DNHG members will always be welcome there.

Professor Uli Wernery featured in the Wall Street Journal in the second week of June, when his unit producing *Camelicious* was written up. The development of a camel milking machine that can cope with wide variations in animal size is unique. The article also explained how camels' milk has advantages over cows' milk in terms of chemical composition and how it can be of

benefit to people suffering from asthma and other ailments. But we already know that and drink it!

Marijcke Jongbloed wrote immediately on receipt of her May *Gazelle* that she had at least one photograph of such a plant in the UAE, "though I have seen several others - but maybe I did not take any pictures of those. In any case, here is a fastigiated *Convolvulus deserti*, seen many years ago in the Al Ain area.



A fastigiated *Convolvulus deserti*

DNHG Membership

Membership remains a bargain at Dhs. 100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. We are now accepting memberships and renewals for coming year (Sep 2007 to Sep 2008). Memberships taken up now will be good through September 2008. 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:

Valerie Chalmers
Mike Lorrigan & Richard Dennis
Sinikka and Ingrid Stanik
Roger Neal
Gary Feulner

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



Summer Activities

DNHG members exclusive!
Jumeirah Mosque Tour
Sat 14 July 8.45 am (approx 1
hour 15 mins)

The meeting point is outside the Mosque, opposite The One furniture showroom, Jumeirah Beach Road. Minimum group 20 persons. 40 dhs per person to be paid at the venue gate but registration to be confirmed by 7 July via email to Sandhya: sandy_pi@yahoo.com.

Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding designed this programme to increase awareness and understanding between various nationalities living and visiting the Emirates. Visitors are invited to discover more about the life and religion of the Emirates by asking as many questions as possible. This is the only mosque in the U.A.E., which is open to non-Muslims. There are some regulations for entering the mosque and we would appreciate your cooperation :

Kindly do not enter the mosque unless accompanied by registered guide from Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding.

Conservative dress for both men and ladies is essential; loose trousers, or long skirts, long sleeves, and a head scarf for women. Long shorts for men are acceptable.

Please remove shoes before entering the mosque.

Please do not touch books displayed on shelves inside the mosque.

To avoid disturbing other guests, kindly do not bring children under the age of 5 years.

Remember to bring your camera! You are welcome to take photos.

Summer Field Trips ...

Several trips during the summer months are under consideration and members will be notified of the details by email by email.

The falcon hospital trip has been derailed by a hefty entrance fee, but if there is further news on this, we will let you know.

Book Review:

Salt-Tolerant Plants of the UAE

Fawzi Karim & Abdullah J. Dakheel

Published by the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA)

When bananas, bougainvillea and papaya show up under the heading of "salt tolerant plants of the UAE", the reader has a right to be suspicious. And if *Acacia tortilis*, *Prosopis cineraria* and *Tephrosia apollinea* are salt-tolerant plants, then what reasonably common UAE plants are not?

Salt-Tolerant Plants of the UAE includes workmanlike photos of about 125 plants that can be seen in urban, suburban and roadside environments in the UAE. Salt-tolerant or not, almost one-third of these are cultivated species found in parks and gardens, for which no good guide book is currently in print. Moreover, Arabic names are given (the authors are native Arabic speakers), and in Arabic script as well. The book also features an introduction presenting UAE climate and soil data from official sources, which are otherwise relatively difficult to access. All of the foregoing, and the modest Dh.40 price, are its strengths. And if the book had had these modest goals, one might have no quarrel with it.

However, the slim soft-cover volume fails to live up to its own pretensions. The endpaper proclaims that this, "the fifth book to emerge from Dr. Karim's research, provides typical characteristics and growth habits of over 700 indigenous species of trees, shrubs and herbs" but, as noted in the introduction, the actual number pictured and discussed is less than one-fifth of that number. Moreover, the endpaper touts Dr. Karim's studies on the biodiversity of the UAE as "the most extensive . . . ever undertaken", and the ICBA's preface appears to endorse that view. Perhaps that is the reason

the book fails to reference Marijcke Jongbloed's comprehensive *Wild Flowers of the UAE*, published in 2003. In any case, it is the impression of this well-traveled reviewer that the authors were not particularly diligent in their investigations or well acquainted with the distribution of plant species within the UAE.

In general, when the authors speak with their own voice, one must be on guard. There are many instances of this. Taxonomic nomenclature is not up to date. We read that the "*Acacia nilotica* – *Rhazya stricta* association is found mainly on the coastal plains", although the former is all but entirely a cultivated species and the latter is primarily a species of wadis and gravel plains. Similarly, *Rhizophora mucronata*, an Indo-Pacific species famously not present naturally in the UAE, is listed as a "wild plant." Of the ghaf tree, *Prosopis cineraria*, we are told that it is "found in Al Ain, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Ajman." That is true, but it would have been more forthcoming to add Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah and Fujairah – and most places in between. The vast plantations on the coastal plain at Ghantout are inexplicably depicted over the caption "Sand dune stabilization by local plant species." And so forth. The proofreading is atrocious, which, again, would be forgivable but for the pretensions of the volume.

In summary, buy the book (if you can find it – always a problem in the UAE), use it to identify a number of park and garden species you'll see (grasses with be tough, since the photos are mostly gross views and grainy), review the climate and soil data and learn some odds and ends about plant physiology and habitat classification. For that, it will be Dh. 40 well spent. But when the authors venture to speak in detail about particular plants and their occurrence in the UAE, take the information with, well – a grain of salt. *Review by Gary Feulner*



End-of-Season Dinner:

Winners of the Photo Competition and Table Quiz

In our photographic competition, we had five categories this year, plus an overall winner. As nobody entered photos for the Plants Category, and the Animals Category had the largest number of entries, two prizes were awarded for the latter. Here is the list of winners:

Animals: 1st Moh'd Arfan Asif



Bee eaters at Jadaf

2nd Johanna Raynor



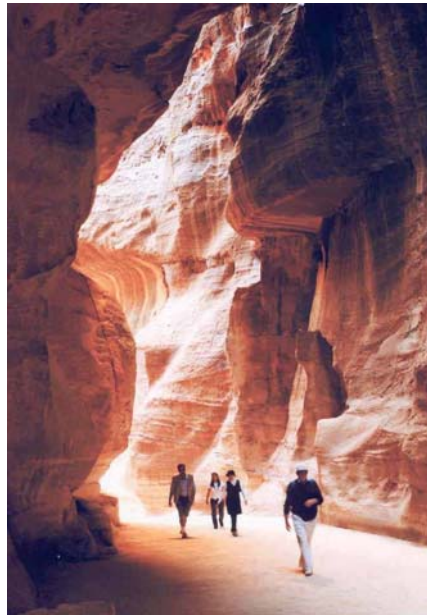
Wow ... what a car!

Geology/Landscapes - Roger Neal



Misty lake

Archaeology/Architecture - Roger Neal



Walking in the Siq

Culture and Heritage - Jillian West.



Kilns, Oman

All received portfolio bags, kindly donated by Waterjet Middle East (Pradeep and Anidita Radakrishnan's company)



*The winners
L to R: Roger Neal, Gillian West,
Mohammed Arfan Asif, Jo Raynor*

The overall winner was Mohammed Arfan Asif. He received a silver engraved paperknife.

The Table Quiz was set by Steve and Johanna Raynor. The winners were 'David's Flock' (30 marks).



David's flock

David and Mary Bradford, Lena and Simon Linton, Virginia Hasker and Rodney Hills

The winners received either a DNHG Sweat Shirt or a DNHG Poloshirt.

The runners-up were 'The Three Musketeers' (28 marks), David Palmer, Tom Horton and Mohammed Arfan Asif. They each received a Chalmers towel plus cap. Many thanks to Steve and Jo for setting an excellent quiz!

The rest: The Sobersides with 26 marks, Nemo with 21 marks, Gary's Lot with 20 marks (Gary couldn't have been trying!) The Hurricanes with 19 marks, The Ninja Turtles with 14 marks.

The Dubai Country Club very kindly donated a Friday Brunch for Two in the Wind Tower Restaurant and Judith Stafford won this as the main draw prize. Sandhya's 'green' shopping bags and more Chalmers' towels and caps provided extra draw prizes. *And thank you, Val, for organising it, taking photographs (some of photographs!) and making this report.*

A Visit to the QNGH

The Dubai Natural History Group's trip to Qatar was something special for everyone.

After a one hour delay and a one hour flight from Sharjah, 22 members of DNHG arrived at Doha and were welcomed by Frances Gillespie and other members of the



E.mail your reports to pvana@emirates.net.ae, (Arial 10 justified) or deliver them to Anne Millen on disk at monthly meetings. Please send your photographs as separate jpg files, or deliver them to Anne for scanning.

QNHG. Our bus ride to the hotel was remarkable for the range of temperatures created by the cooling AC from the ceiling of the bus and the surprisingly existent heating system at the bottom! The hotel apartments were each shared by five members, which gave members who had not met before the chance to get to know each other.

People used the downtown Doha dinner that night as an opportunity to explore the beautifully restored old town and souq area. The very special atmosphere, the opportunity to observe full on Qatari night life in the narrow streets, and the sudden thunderstorm made a very impressive beginning of our exploration of Qatar.

The next morning began 7:30 a.m. and on the way to an archaeological excavation site, Frances Gillespie provided the group with some interesting general information on Qatar. Fran, a former chairman and current committee member of the QNHG, has lived in Qatar for more than twenty years. She has always been greatly interested in the archaeological and natural history of the country and has recently published a guidebook in this area of interest: *Discovering Qatar*.



Fran Gillespie provides the details

With this competent and experienced guide at its side, the DNHG learned that Qatar started to develop very rapidly in the second half of the 20th century. For example, Qatar was the first country in the Gulf region to appoint a woman Minister of Education in 2003.

At the meeting place with the members of the Qatar Natural History Group, the DNHG members split up to join those QNHG members who had volunteered their four-wheel drives and their time to transport the visitors from Dubai whenever the bus could not reach the sites of interest.

The first stop of the day was Jazirat bin Ghanim in the bay of Al Khor. It has been a site of archaeological excavations for the last 30 years.



Members, including the Staniks, cross cuts in the causeway to Jazirat bin Ghanim

Carbon dating of the ancient hearths containing traces of charcoal has proven that the mangrove plantations on this north-eastern coast came into existence at least 4000 years ago. Moreover, Jazirat bin Ghanim has mangrove forests, ideal for bird watching, and the island is covered with millions of small shells of a sea-snail, *Thais savignyi*, which were used to make a valuable scarlet and purple dye.



Rock art, Jebel Al Jassasiya

Next on the agenda was a visit to Jebel Al Jassasiya, where rock carvings can be found. Information on theories of the purpose and age

of these carvings was again provided by Fran. This interesting visit ended with a delicious lunch, organized by the QNHG.



Ruins of Al Zubara town

In the afternoon, the QNHG took the Dubai group to the scenic fishing harbor at Al Ruwais, the deserted village of Al Jumail close to the beach, and the Al Zubara Fort and the ruins of the Al Zubara town.



Al Zubara Fort

The Al Zubara Fort was constructed relatively recently, in 1938, as a response to the claims of Bahrain on Al Zubara. Being used by the police until about 15 years ago, the fort now displays pottery, coins, and other artifacts found in the ruins of the nearby town of Al Zubara, which was the last stop of the day. Listening to the explanations of Fran, climbing up some mostly destroyed steps to the top of the ruins of some houses, and enjoying the last sunlight of the day with a refreshing drink – this last stop was an enjoyable way to end this day out in the open.

At a dinner at Garvey's European Club, the members of the DNHG met some more members of the Qatari Natural History Group. The delicious dinner allowed everyone to talk about the events of the day and to learn more about the QNHG members.

The next morning, the group departed the hotel in the 4WDs, again provided by volunteers of the QNHG. After following a highway, reaching the sand, deflating the tires, making sure everyone stuck together, and following a sand track



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

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Birds - David Bradford
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Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner
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Insects - Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
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email: valeriechalmers@hotmail.com

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.



through the desert, the two groups finally arrived at the Inland Sea. The Inland Sea is a special place where salt water divides the white sands of Qatar from the red sand and sedimentary rock of Saudi Arabia.



The Inland Sea

Upon arrival at our destination, members of the groups followed a number of different activities: setting up tents, tables, and chairs, taking pictures, observing and learning about the yellow-black *Pelamis platurus*, a common sea snake on the sand and in the water, going for a walk along the shore, climbing up sand dunes, going for a swim - or rather, being carried along the shore by the strong currents - or simply enjoying the beautiful nature and the packed lunches our hosts from Qatar provided.



Sea snake

There was something for everybody to do that afternoon and thus time passed by quickly and soon the car-caravan had to start to make its way back to civilization and the airport at Doha.



The whole DNHG / QNHG team

Although everyone had to return to work and their daily lives the next

day, this first field trip of the DNHG to Qatar was something special. Thanks to the volunteers from the QNHG and the great organization done by Angela Manthorpe from Dubai and Frances Gillespie from Qatar, everyone had a great time. It would be great to see a similar trip organized in the near future or to welcome the QNHG in Dubai sometime soon. *Report by Sinikka and Ingrid Stanik, photographs by Valerie Chalmers*

Thirteen days to Everest Base Camp

... continuing the story of Mike and Richard's adventure

Day Six was another acclimatisation day. Some of the party climbed up to the base of Ama Dablam, while others acclimatised by ascending and then descending a 400 metre climb, up behind Dingboche.

Day Seven saw us heading to Lobuche. This day took us over Thokla Pass which has rows of stone cairns in memory of Sherpas and climbers who have died on Everest. There are also two monuments to Scott Fischer and Rob Hall, the two expert mountaineers who died on Everest in the terrible storm of 1996 and whose bodies remain on the mountain (see 'Into Thin Air'). It was a very poignant and sad place. We departed in sombre mood towards Lobuche.



Beast of burden

Contrary to my expectations, Lobuche was not as bad as we expected, except that we were hit by a heavy snowfall in the evening. The Australian who had failed before had been stopped here because of bad weather, and was dreading history repeating itself. Fortunately for him, and us, the sky cleared overnight and although it was bitterly cold our guides told us we



should have no problem pushing on to Base Camp the next day.

Day Eight was Easter Sunday and the party was intact and in good spirits. This was what we had all come for. After a very early start at first light we pushed on in bitterly cold conditions, to Gorak Shep, the last stop before Base Camp. After a hot breakfast there, the group headed off for the final three hour trek to Base Camp. We were warned by our guides that there were some areas where we would have to watch for rock falls and through which we should move as fast as we could.



Under way, making way

As we headed to Base Camp, we got another close up view of the peak of Everest, but this disappeared as we neared Base Camp. We then sighted some beautiful Himalayan snow cocks as we climbed, that seemed very tame and totally comfortable with humans so close.



Himalayan snow cock

The approach to Base Camp itself, with the Khumbu Glacier on our right hand sight was spectacular. The ice has a mesmerizing beauty, but a crashed helicopter, and news that Sherpas had died in 2006 trying to establish a crossing for Everest parties across the Khumbu Ice-Fall (the first stage after Base

Camp for those heading up the mountain), brought home the reality of how treacherous and dangerous it really is. I had told the people back home that I just wanted to go to the edge of the Ice Fall and see it close up. Nothing more. And that is what we did.

Arriving there I did something I had planned for some weeks. With the help of Pasang, my 'shadow' and one of our guides, and Richard, I built a cairn in honour of my parents, (my father died in 2004 and my mother earlier this year). I then inserted their photo and some other items in the cairn, attached Buddhist prayer flags, spent some time in silent reflection, turned and headed away. A twenty two year dream finally fulfilled!

Footnote: Out of fourteen peaks that are over 8000 metres in the world, Nepal has eight of them. Two of them, Mount Everest (the highest) and Lhotse (the fourth highest) are side by side to each other. K2 (in Pakistan) is the second highest, and Kanchenjunga (located on the border of Sikkim, India, and Nepal) is the third highest. *Thanks to Mike Lorrigan for the story & Richard Dennis for the photographs.*

Brachiopod Fossils: A 'Bivalve' with an Overbite

"I was on the Tuwaiq escarpment west of Riyadh," said Roger Neal, a seven-year Saudi veteran, to Chairman Gary Feulner at the end-of-season dinner, "and I found a very odd bivalve fossil. I wonder if you might have any idea what it is. Most bivalves have a relatively flat plane of closure, but this one had a sort of 'overbite'."

Roger and Gary traded napkin drawings. The Chairman already had a suspicion; his undergraduate office had been in a corner of the university's invertebrate paleontology laboratory, in front of a wall of shelved specimens open for browsing. The drawings supported his diagnosis and Roger's photo clinched it: the fossils were *brachiopods*, and probably from a group

called the Rhynchonellids. In fact, the 'overbite' is characteristic of several brachiopod groups.

Brachiopods certainly look like bivalve molluscs and in many cases it is difficult to distinguish the two. Both have two articulated calcareous shells. Nevertheless, brachiopods have a fundamentally different soft anatomy and are not even classified as molluscs. This is reflected in the shells in various subtle ways. In particular, whereas bivalve shells consist of a left and right shell (or 'valve'), brachiopod shells consist of a top and a bottom shell, which are usually unequal in size and shape. This means (among other things) that each valve of a brachiopod is bilaterally symmetrical, whereas in bivalve molluscs the symmetry of individual valves is rarely perfect (bivalves such as scallops being among the most nearly symmetrical).



Three views of the brachiopods

Brachiopods are sedentary filter feeders most abundant in shallow seas. They have a distinctive feeding device called a lophophore, which consists (more or less) of a pair of cilia-bearing arms that occupy most of the interior of the shell cavity. Unlike many bivalves, no articulated brachiopods were true burrowers.

Although they were common and extremely diverse in the Palaeozoic, most brachiopod groups did not survive the mass extinctions that occurred at the end of the Permian (still the most extreme such 'event' known from the fossil record). The decline of the brachiopods thereafter was matched by the increasing dominance of the bivalves, which has been attributed by some scholars to the ability of the latter to burrow in sediment through the development of a muscular foot and si-



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phons. Nevertheless, two brachiopod groups thrived throughout the Mesozoic and they continue to be represented by some 200 extant species.

In the UAE, brachiopod fossils can be found, but only rarely, in the limestones and dolomites of the Ru'us al Jibal, the mountains of the Musandam area, which range in age from mid-Permian to mid-Cretaceous. Some of those found resemble Roger's examples from Saudi Arabia. *Report by Gary Feulner, photograph by Roger Neal*

Wildlife Middle East - Vol 1 Issue 4, March 2007

The pdf can be downloaded from: www.wmenews.com Issue 4 has articles on the wildlife trade in Somalia, the implementation of the CITES convention in the UAE, acute disseminated toxoplasmosis

in a smuggled juvenile cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*), the use of portable corral systems and tamers in the management of captive and free range hoofstock, the hand-rearing of exotic felid species.

Supporting Articles:
Additional material relevant to the current issue can be found on the website, by clicking on the INFORMATION tab. Articles include:

Amir, O. G., (2006), *Wildlife Trade in Somalia*, IUCN/SSC/Antelope Specialist Group/ Northeast Africa Subgroup. 1-28.

Edmonds, J. A., (2007), *Conservation of the Arabian leopard Workshop Report*, 8th Conservation Workshop for the Fauna of Arabia, Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife, 30th of January to the 1st of February 2007. Unpublished Report.

O'Donovan, D. and Bailey, T.

(2006) *Restraint of Arabian oryx (Oryx leucoryx)* in Dubai, United Arab Emirates using a mobile raceway, Proceedings of the 2nd Conference of the International Congress of Zookeepers: Gold Coast, Australia.

Request for articles for future issues: the newsletter publishes articles with an emphasis on practical, useful material. Proposed categories for articles include:

- * Conservation education & environmental awareness.
- * Husbandry & nutrition.
- * Design of zoological facilities.
- * Capture and translocation techniques.
- * Wildlife diseases and preventive medicine
- * Products, book reviews & research.
- * Summaries of recent literature on Arabian animals.
- * Letters and events.

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

Sept 16 Dean Polley. South African Wildlife

Oct 7 John Burt. Corals & associated fish in the Jebel Ali marine sanctuary

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

July 14 Jumeirah Mosque Tour with Sandhya Prakash

October Bastakia Walk with Peter Jackson