

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Welcome to the Gulf

Nancy Papathanasopoulou, who has been involved with the Masirah Turtle Conservation Project, is now living in Dubai. She is keen to inform people about the project and garner support for it. Her article about wildlife conservation on Masirah can be found inside.



DNHG Treasurer Needed

We are once again in the market for a Treasurer. This position requires a modest amount of attention on a regular basis in order to account for our membership income, regular and miscellaneous expenses and book sales. Experience with book-keeping is an advantage, as is familiarity with basic computerized accounting programs. We bank at Lloyds TSB in Jumeirah but the actual deposit of cash funds can be

arranged through other Committee members, if necessary. The Treasurer would be expected to attend monthly meetings of the DNHG Committee (currently held on Tuesday evenings immediately following monthly lectures). Interested members should contact Chairman Gary Feulner or Vice Chairman Valerie Chalmers (see p. 7).

DNHG Librarian Needed

We continue to need a volunteer to serve as Librarian. If you think you might be interested in spending more time with our books and papers, which are housed at our lecture venue, Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management, please contact Gary Feulner or Valerie Chalmers (see p.7). We have an eclectic collection of natural history books and papers. Most of our books are catalogued but our miscellaneous papers remain a work in progress. The responsibility of the DNHG Librarian would be to liaise with the Emirates Academy Librarian concerning cataloguing and access, to oversee our collection generally, and to recommend and arrange for occasional appropriate additions. A side benefit is that you get to spend "quality time" with our collection.

DNHG Membership

It is now membership renewal time. New memberships and renewals are good for the coming year (Sep 2007 to Sep 2008).

DNHG 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 TSB 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:

Jo and Steve Raynor 
Nancy Papathanasopoulou
Sandy Fowler
Gary Feulner
Dean Polley for his photograph 

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



A few changes but some good adventures coming up ...

Alas, the tide *refuses* to be right for Gary Feulner's proposed mangrove walk for some time ahead, but it will happen when he can get cooperation! In the meantime:

Late October & 2 / 9 November

Additional trips, including Peter Jackson's Bastakia Walk, may be announced by e-mail circular.

Shelling - Sandy Fowler 16 or 17 November (TBC)

This will be a day trip somewhere along the long coastline of the Emirates - Sandy knows the nooks and crannies, and will supply details at the meeting or by email.

Ibri & Ibri Anticline - Val Chalmers et al 23-24 November

This is a two day, possibly two night, trip into Oman and includes Ibri Fort, Sulayf, an exploration of the anticline and if time permits, a look at the Bat Tombs. Details not worked out yet.

Birdwatching - Dave Bradford End November

Dave will lead a second trip when all is new and different because of the cooler weather.

Wadi Bih - Pradeep Radhakrishna 7 December

This is an all day trip up over the Hajar from Wadi Bih to Dibba Oman. You will visit a spectacular mountain village en route and possibly take a swim at Dibba Oman at the end. Details will follow.

Sundarbans Mangrove Forest - Pradeep & Anin Radhakrishna Eid al Adha 19 - 24 December

This trip is to a world heritage site with 4268 sq kms of mangrove forest, is the home of the Royal Bengal tiger,

the most majestic animal to roam the forests of the world. The Sunderbans are part of the world's largest delta formed by the rivers Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna. One third of the Sunderbans is covered by water and the face of the forest is in perpetual flux. During high tide the jungle is afloat and when the water recedes the forest floor reveals the myriad facets of its biosphere. It nurtures a unique aquaterrestrial ecosystem where land and water play equal roles in creating and preserving life. The area is known for its wide range of fauna. The most famous among these are the man-eating Royal Bengal tigers (about 400) numerous species of birds, spotted deer (about 30,000), crocodiles and snakes. We will also be spending a day in Calcutta now called Kolkata exploring the several centuries of history and architecture. The trip has been planned during the Eid holidays so that we do not miss any working days. Full details are going out by email; if you don't receive them, or wish to register, please contact Pradeep at wgarnet@eim.ae

Wadi Hatta Clean-up 24 November, 9:30 am

Sandra Knuteson, from American University of Sharjah has suggested a joint DNHG-AUS litter clean-up of Hatta Pools.

Sandra wants to show the impact of tourism on the Hatta Pools. If the area can be cleaned before National Day weekend, she can sample for litter and water quality before & after (Thursday & Tuesday) the holiday to show exactly how much impact one holiday weekend can have. Sandra will provide litter clean up supplies & water; we can provide transport and enthusiasm.

The day she's proposing for the field trip is in "Clean Up The World Week". The theme this year is: One World, One Eco-System, One Humanity." Contact Sandra at sknuteson@aus.edu and she will email the details.

E-Gazelle

There appears to have been a problem with sending the September edition of *e-Gazelle*, and a few members have not received it. If you did not, please email Peter van Amsterdam at pvana@emirates.net.ae and he will arrange to send you a copy.

Our Next Speaker

Dean Polley is the Group IT Director for Tatweer, but his life passion lies in wildlife photography. For the past decade he has been returning to his home continent Africa on a regular basis, to explore and photograph the many wild places still left on earth. He uses his photography to create awareness for the conservation of threatened and endangered species and to promote eco-tourism. More recently his efforts have focused on the plight of the Rwandan orphans. Following his first trip to Rwanda, he started his own private fund raising efforts to support 5 destitute primary schools in northern Rwanda and has returned on a few occasions to deliver much needed school supplies.

Dean also arranges and guides small groups on exclusive safari getaways, his most recent trip covering the Serengeti Plains, Ngorongoro Crater, Lake Manyara and Tarangire National Park in Tanzania.



That's Dean on the left



Climbing Fish in Wadi Khutwa

On the Inter Emirates weekend held in Al Ain in March this year Steve and Johanna Raynor joined a walk up Wadi Khutwa. After walking through the village of Khutwa and its gardens which were heavily cropped with lettuce, mint and green crops amongst the palms, past some 4000 year old copper smelting kilns we stopped for a swim in the stream. At this point a concrete dam had been constructed to direct water into the fallaj system that fed the Khutwa gardens.



The dam face in Wadi Khutwa which was being climbed by several Garra

The dam was about 2.5 metres high and to our surprise there were several fish working their way up the wet concrete face.



Several Garra climbing the upper section of the vertical dam face



Garra barreimiae

Three species of native fish populate pools in the UAE. Two are the *Garra barreimiae*, a small fish that is found across the Emirates and Oman, and the *Cyprinion*, which can be found in northern Oman and southeast UAE. The third native wadi fish is the Arabian Killifish, *Aphanius dispar*, which is able to live in both freshwater and seawater. The fish we saw on the dam were Garra. The Garra were clinging to the dam and wriggling their way slowly up to the top and into the larger pool. At the rate they were progressing it would have taken them a considerable time to complete the climb, probably hours. The surface was wet with water but not really running.



Garra clinging to the wet vertical surface of the dam

The Garra appeared to be able to climb by using its mouth as a sucker and flattening its tail and fins against the wall. While fish have been observed climbing rocks, the scale of this undertaking was particularly noteworthy! Thanks to Steve and Johanna Raynor for report and photographs

An Amazing Ecosystem Under Threat - Masirah Island, Oman

Situated off the eastern coast of the Sultanate of Oman, Masirah Island (60km long and 20km wide) is an arid, rocky, windswept place - and one whose ruggedness retains a remarkable beauty.



Dawwah crab plover colony

But some conservation challenges are facing this island paradise in the Arabian Sea.

Four species of marine turtle nest on Masirah's beaches: loggerhead, green, hawksbill and olive ridley turtles. Each has its own specific nesting season different to the other. The loggerhead population is arguably the largest in the world, with tens of thousands of turtles estimated to be nesting there annually.



Green turtle in Hilf



Email your reports to pvana@emirates.net.ae, (Arial 10 justified) and send your photographs as separate jpg files, or deliver them to Anne for scanning.

Masirah also hosts a very small endemic population of gazelles, though poaching unfortunately still goes on.



Sheila the gazelle, who loved Weetbix

As well, over 400 species of birds have been recorded there in the last few years and its south-western shores are fringed with coral reefs and associated diverse marine life.



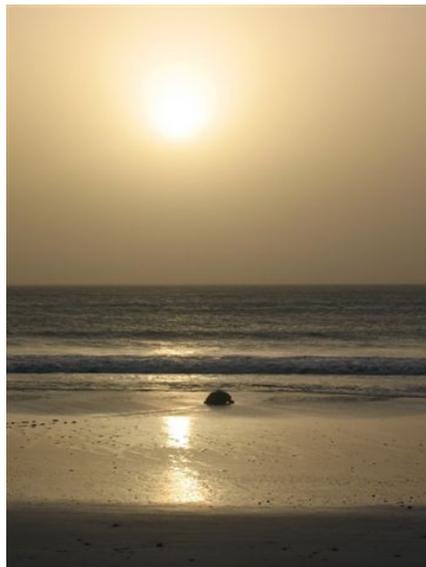
Egrets in Hilf

Turtle nesting on Masirah has been known to the scientific community since the late 1970's when pioneering work there identified the four species that nest on the island. Suggestions for management and protection of the turtle populations were provided and their importance both regionally and globally noted.



Loggerhead female returning to the sea after nesting, Ras Faydak

Since 2006, all the beaches of Masirah have been easily accessible, both to the local population and visitors, along the new asphalted roads. The loggerhead beach, which contains one of the highest nesting densities in the world, is now the proud owner of a more than half-finished luxury hotel, situated right at the back of the nesting habitat.



Loggerhead returning to the sea at dawn, Ras Faydak

With beautiful sandy beaches and warm coral seas, Masirah is an obvious choice to be developed for tourism and the improved roadways etc. are making this reality more probable.



Olive Ridley emerging from the nest Ras Shibani

Locals and visitors to the island regularly drive their 4x4s over the nesting beaches, crushing nests in the process and death-trapping hundreds of hatchlings later in the season. Beach barbecues and fires at night disturb nesting turtles and provide cover for more sinister nest poaching activities.



Nesting hawksbill, Omedu beach

Fishing - both legal and illegal - is impacting on the turtle populations. Large trawlers are observed fishing off the Masirah coast and dead turtle strandings follow. Nylon nets are being set over the reef, catching all the fish they encounter and damaging the coral when they are hauled-in. Little has been done to counter these threats as the resources and legal framework do not really allow it.



MTCP scientist measuring a loggerhead at Biyadh beach

The Masirah Turtle Conservation Project, a consultancy for the protection of the sea turtles as well as all issues for sustainable development on the island, is a three year project carried out by TOTAL Foundation in cooperation with the Ministry of Regional Municipalities, Environment and Water Resources of Oman and the local authorities of Masirah. The project is undertaking a beach/marine ecology study and will be setting up an environmental information centre. The project will



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

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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.



also propose a general management plan for the island so that development of the island is based on respect for the environment in its uniqueness.



Loubna, on her way to work

Masirah's beaches, some wadis, mudflats and turtle habitats need to be declared protected areas (natural reserves) and thus development would be regulated and / or prohibited to ensure the safe survival of the species living there.



Green turtle, Shipwreck Beach

Marine turtle protection and monitoring efforts are currently one of the tasks of the six wildlife rangers on Masirah. But they need reinforcement and more training. The Masirah Turtle Conservation Project provides them with technical support such as Internet access, cameras and a vehicle.



Dawn on the beach, Marirah Island

The longstanding efforts by the Omanis to protect their natural heri-

tage are commendable steps in the right direction. But more should be done for Masirah – if it is to retain its amazing biodiversity.



Thanks to Nancy Papathanasopoulou and Alan F. Rees for text and to them, Colin Murray and other members of their team for the photographs



Saunders' Tern

WME News on the Net

Wildlife Middle East News Vol 2 Issue 2, September 2007, pdf can be downloaded from:
www.wmenews.com

It contains articles on a variety of subjects as diverse as saving Saharan wildlife, zoo animal feeding evaluations, an outbreak of low pathogenic avian influenza in a mixed-species aviculture unit in Dubai, conservation efforts to restore the houbara bustard (*Chlamydotis macqueeni*) population in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the causes, prevention and remediation of algal blooms in the freshwater environment, and beira (*Dorcatragus megalotis*) immobilisation at Al Wabra Wildlife Preservation, Qatar.



All in the Family

The vegetation of the high Ru'us al-Jibal, the mountains of the Musandam peninsula, has long been described by botanists as *Artemisia* steppe - an assemblage of low, openly-spaced, dry-adapted shrubs punctuated by occasional stunted almond trees. This assemblage is unique within Arabia but it closely resembles the vegetation of the central plateau of Iran.

However, far from being exotic "Eastern" species, the aromatic plants that give their name to this assemblage are also very familiar in the West, albeit under quite different names. Indeed, they are associated with such strange bedfellows as fin-de-siècle European intellectuals and the cowboys of the American West.

The genus *Artemisia* is a very large genus (nearly 400 species worldwide) within the exceptionally large family of plants called *Asteraceae* (formerly *Compositae*) (ca. 1500 genera and 25,000 species worldwide), which includes daisies, sunflowers and groundsel, among others. Many *Artemisia* species are prominent residents of arid or semi-arid environments. The *Artemisia* of the Ru'us al-Jibal, *Artemisia herba-alba*, extends from Iran and Arabia to North Africa and the Mediterranean, although in recent years *A. herba-alba* has been re-classified as *Seriphidium herba-album*.

One common feature of *Artemisia* species generally, whether in the Old World or the New World, is their variability, or phenotypic plasticity; that is to say, different individuals or local populations of the same species may look rather different and even have different chemical characteristics, such as palatability to grazing animals, with the result that many varieties, forms and subspecies have been recognized. Some of these differences may be correlated with habitat, microhabitat or climate, others may be responses to predation.

The most common *Artemisia* in

And Field Clips!

Europe is known as wormwood and is used for medical purposes and as a preservative, particularly for embalming. The latter use is celebrated in song (reflecting typical European realism?): "♪*Soon we will all join the wormwood and the gall* ♪" Wormwood was also an ingredient of absinthe, the liqueur whose evident medical and psychological disadvantages cost it its one-time popularity with the Bohemian café set.

In the American southwest, the various species of *Artemisia* are better known as sagebrush, the latter also celebrated in song (reflecting typical American optimism?): "♪*The sage in bloom is like perfume, deep in the heart of Texas* ♪". In the American southwest, too, native peoples made a tonic from sagebrush leaves, and they also used its stringy bark for sandals and containers. One American species, *A. tridentata*, can grow to be 15 feet tall and live to be 100 years old (we are talking about Texas, remember).

In the U.S., sagebrush is now recognised as an efficient plant for re-seeding after fire damage and, although it is a relatively poor fodder plant, it provides food and shelter for wild animals. It is also used as an index plant for water and soil conditions: areas where sagebrush grows less than a meter tall are not considered arable. Report by Gary Feulner

Dragonflies at the Beach

Dragonflies are usually most in evidence near fresh water and vegetation. One species that regularly defies this rule is the Globe Skimmer *Pantala flavescens*, a pan-tropical species that is a notoriously strong migrant and is found today in South America, the Indo-Pacific and even Easter Island. (I have been surprised to see them for myself in both the Ecuadorian Amazon and coastal Irian Jaya, in each case (coincidentally) over open grassy areas at well-manicured tropical airstrips.)

P. flavescens occurs with other UAE dragonflies near wadi pools and man-made sumps, but can also be found high on mountain ridges or over desert. It seems to be one of the first dragonflies to arrive at areas that have received scattered local showers, which can produce dramatic concentrations.



Female globe skimmer dragonfly
Pantala flavescens

from *The Emirates; A Natural History*
eds. Peter Hellyer & Simon Aspinall

In addition, it is the only dragonfly regularly seen in the coastal environment in the UAE. A number of reports exist from mangrove areas, sometimes in numbers suggesting a swarm or migration. In early September of this year, on a visit to Hulaylah Island north of Rams, RAK, with conservation advisor Robert Llewellyn-Smith, I encountered *P. flavescens* almost everywhere on the barrier island, despite the decidedly overgrazed and partly 'developed' landscape. We saw them swarming high in the air near large mesquite trees; around goat and camel pens; patrolling a partially fenced area that excluded camels (but not goats) and therefore had retained a low ground cover of the bristly *Heliotropium kotschy*; over more or less barren, overgrazed sand near a shallow lagoon with flamingoes (where the dragonflies seemed to seek out our vehicles as an intruder into their familiar surroundings; and even along the length of the 1 km jetty at the mouth of the inlet. We found them active from 7 am until we ourselves departed at nearly noon.

What were we seeing? A serendipitous local migration? A more regular coastal phenomenon? Additional observations would help to



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answer these questions, so reports are welcomed from beachcombers, bathers, boaters or others who happen to notice similar phenomena else where in the UAE. *Report by Gary Feulner*

East Coast Find

Dr Sandy Fowler has been scouting the east coast beaches and on a small beach north of Khor Fakkan found a specimen of *Lambis truncata sebae*. "A bit beach-worn", he commented, "But still the best one I've found in twenty years."

Sandy will be taking members on one of his shelling trips in November, but as yet the beach / beaches remain unspecified.



THE EMIRATES ACADEMY OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT



Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

Nov 4 African Wildlife - Dean Polley

Dec 9 Charles Darwin & the Theory of Natural Selection: Myths and Reality - Prof. Michael Conlon

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

Oct 19 (-20) Al Ain Zoo by Night with ENHG and Val Chalmers

Nov 2 / 9 Trip with Gary Feulner (TBC)

Nov 16 / 17 Shelling with Sandy Fowler

Nov 23 - 24 Ibri and the Anticline with Val Chalmers

Nov 24 Wadi Hatta with AUS

Dec 7 Wadi Bih with Pradeep Radhakrishna

19 - 23 The Sundarbans with the Radhakrishnas