

focus



Abu Dhabi, October 2011
Vol 35 (8)



Emirates Natural History Group

Patron: H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan

EDITORIAL

Leading this issue of *Focus* is the concluding report on the ENHG-sponsored census of the endangered local race of Collared Kingfisher (*Kalbaensis*). We are happy to learn that this population appears stable. We hope that the full report of this census, to be published in *Tribulus* Vol. 20, will influence conservation decisions that will ensure these rare birds survive and thrive.

We are kicking off the camping season with a trip to Jebel Akhdar in Oman during the Nov Eid Al Adha break, with Oct. day trips for those interested in birding, snorkelling and traditional dhows—and much more to come! We also encourage members to send in photos of any interesting wildlife and brief write-ups for *Focus*.

Vol. 19 of the ENHG's peer-reviewed journal *Tribulus* is now being printed and bound. At 170 pages, with a sewn binding and over 200 glossy photographs, it features a comprehensive monograph by ENHG Chairman Gary Feulner on the flora of the Musandam Peninsula, along with several book reviews and other supporting material. Paid-up individual or family members of the ENHG-Abu Dhabi are entitled to one copy each and Corporate Sponsors to two each, collectable at meetings. To non-members, this large book-sized issue will be on sale at our meetings starting 1st Nov.

In ENHG Committee news, Ann Pearson is now stepping down as Corporate Sponsorship Secretary, as she and husband Jay are heading home to the UK. Avra Theophanous is taking over as CS Secretary. And Claudia Gehre has just joined the Committee to assist with our Public Relations requirements. Also, answering our longstanding appeal, Sidney Liu has volunteered to control the sound & lights and do video recording during our meetings once a month this season. And assisting with video recording at some meetings is Barbara Grzybowska-Denys. Their initiative is much appreciated!

In members' news, geologist Donatella Astratti has just left the UAE to pursue a PhD at Imperial College London. Thanks to Donatella for her past years of service on the ENHG Committee & her contributions to a couple of memorable field trips. Another member who has just left the UAE is Christoph Herzog, now in Washington DC on a new work assignment, having finished his project here. We wish them both all the best!

We have sadly only just recently been informed of the passing of former ENHG Chairman Mike Crumbie, at his home in Swallowcliffe, England, at the age of 64, close to ten years ago in 2002. Mike came to the UAE as a military helicopter crew instructor in 1973, when the country was brand new, and became a keen observer of coastal birds in the region during his years here, as well as an increasingly active member of the ENHG. Then in 1986, after several of the Group's founding members, including its prime mover Bish Brown, had left, Mike rose to the occasion, succeeding a number of Acting Chairs, and moved the group from strength to strength, leaving a capable team in place at the time of his own departure from the Emirates in 1987. Longer-term ENHG-AD members have fond memories of the Group's many years of meeting in the Cultural Foundation before it was closed down for reconstruction (still apparently on hold). But most of us were not aware that we had Mike

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FRONT COVER PICTURE

Photograph: Collared Kingfisher *Kalbaensis* eating a crab

Photographer: Ahmed Al Ali

This month's contributors

Ahmed Al Ali, Oscar Campbell, ENHG, Feng Wen, Steve James, Omana Kallarakal, Angie Marles, Ron Priestley, Wendy Raikes, Keith Taylor, Neil Tovey

ENHG membership information

Annual membership in the Abu Dhabi chapter of the ENHG is 100 Dhs – for both individual and family membership. NB: 2011 membership is reduced to 50 Dhs from Sept - Dec. See Membership Sec. or Asst. at the next meeting for a membership form.

Members are entitled to join the group on all day trips and overnight camping trips. Each member is also entitled to a copy of the ENHG's normally annual peer-reviewed journal, *Tribulus*. Volume 19 will be available at meetings starting on 1st Nov, 2011. Volume 20 is projected for early 2012.

Crumbie to thank for making that arrangement! An old Khaleej Times article about Mike's many contributions to the ENHG has now been posted on the ENHG-AI Ain chapter's website (which has now come back online following server maintenance), accessible via this link: http://www.enhg.org/abudhabi/crumbie/crumbie_ktimes.html.

Finally, here's a brief word about the upcoming Inter-Emirates Weekend 2012. The IEW is a good opportunity for members of all the UAE-based NHGs to get together socially, share conservation concerns and go on outings to new locations. The Dubai NHG, hosting this season's event, have proposed to schedule it for Feb 24-25, 2012, to take advantage of desirable weather conditions on a weekend with a minimum of scheduling conflicts. Further details will be published in *Focus* in due course.

Keith Taylor

Collared Kingfishers of Khor Kalba: Final Survey Results

Regular readers of *Focus* over the last year will be aware that we have been surveying Khor Kalba, Sharjah Emirate to try and ascertain the population of Collared Kingfishers, one of the UAE's rarest and most spectacular breeding bird species. The final survey was completed in late May 2011, and we have now completed an initial analysis of the results. We hope to publish these in full in *Tribulus* in due course, but at this stage we can report that, in the spring of 2011, we located 26-35 pairs of Collared Kingfishers at Kalba. The former figure is an absolute minimum and the true total is likely to be closer to the latter, or may even slightly exceed it as it is possible that one or two pairs in the densest, most intractable areas of mangroves evaded detection. This is particularly true in the area of the khor closest to the UAE-Oman border where, for obvious reasons, we did not search exhaustively. Although the reported total is somewhat lower than that found in the only other full survey, carried out by Simon Aspinall (May 1995; 44-55 pairs) it is somewhat higher than we might have expected, given the ever increasing pressures (mainly from inappropriate and misguided development, but also from recreational use) at this national biodiversity hotspot.

Many other interesting bird species occur at Kalba, most of which we observed during the course of our surveys. On several occasions we noted Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse and Black-crowned Finch-Larks, species that formerly bred here in good numbers but now barely cling on due to disturbance and damage to their dune habitat. Sykes's Warbler, here at its only station in Arabia, is an elusive and very rare breeding resident of the Kalba mangroves; although we recorded them on every visit, numbers were tiny and we could confirm only four territories.



Sykes's Warbler

Photo: Oscar Campbell

Outside the breeding season, we also recorded up to 22 Indian Pond Herons in mid-winter, a non-breeding visitor from the sub-continent and another species that is very rare in the UAE (or, indeed, elsewhere in Arabia) away from this site. Collared Kingfishers are not the only flash of colour that darts across the channels here; the smaller but even more vividly attired Common Kingfisher is numerous as a winter visitor, and we recorded up to 19 individuals per visit.



Indian Pond Heron



Common Kingfisher



Collared Kingfisher, moulting

As well as surveying Collared Kingfishers, we also aimed to showcase as much of the wonderful biodiversity of Kalba as possible; to this end Ahmed has been very busy, and made a number of additional visits besides our kingfisher surveys. A preview of just a few of the wonderful images he has obtained are included with this article as well as on the cover of this issue.

As ever, we are grateful for the continued support of the Emirates Natural History Group. We would also like to express our thanks to Dave Clark, Mark Smiles and Josh Smithson, all of whom cheerfully gave up a comfortable day on dry land to join us in painstakingly wading through the muddy and sweaty channels in search of those wonderful kingfishers. They all claimed to have as good a time as we did!

Ahmed Al Ali, Oscar Campbell & Neil Tovey
Three photographs above by Ahmed Al Ali

Midsummer Jebel Akhdar Trip

The following write-up is about an impromptu summer trip which Assistant ENHG Excursion Secretary Feng organized by sending out an open invitation on the AUHENHG web forum. Jebel Akhdar is also the destination of the ENHG camping trip now set for the start of the Eid Al Adha holiday 4-6 Nov (see p 8). -Ed.

Four of us went to Jebel Akhdar (Oman's second highest mountain) on Isra Wal Meraj weekend (30th June – 1st July). The road up the mountain is steep and winding and offers vista at every turn. We took a rest stop at the Jebel Akhdar hotel. The staff informed us that water in the public area of the hotel was turned off, so guest rooms had to be supplied with water from storage tanks. Water supply disruption has been a regular occurrence in the area, so a plan is in motion to build more pipelines up to the mountains in a few years' time. We would later see many villas and a new hotel under construction*. It was not surprising that existing infrastructure was strained to keep up with increasing demand.

We met a group of women geology students from Kuwait on a field trip. They were chauffeured around by a fleet of SUVs. We would cross their paths again the next day. I had not previously imagined that a young Kuwaiti woman would find her calling in geology. Confronted by twenty of them on top of Jebel Akhdar, however, does challenge my perception of what inspires young Arab women today.

In the late afternoon we arrived at "Diana's viewpoint" (where the late Princess of Wales was encamped during her visit to Oman in 1986). From that spot I counted nearly 100 tiers of terraces clinging to the opposite hillside, though most of them were no longer cultivated. Amidst the decline of agriculture, settlement building is booming. Besides all the new villas, paved and graded roads link villages and reach hilltops everywhere.

As the sun got lower over the terraces, groups of Omanis arrived at the plateau for the evening. One group of young men came from Sumeil to spend the night. They gathered pea-sized black berries from a bush and offered us some, as well as a plateful of red "rotap". They called the sweet-tasting berries "toot" (probably the same as 'boot' berries). The dates, half crunchy and half soft, were the first I tasted this season.

A fresh breeze built up as the sun went down, so much so that we did not light a campfire for cooking but enjoyed a simple meal instead. The temperature was in the mid 20s at night and very pleasant in the middle of the summer.

The next morning we walked through three villages, walked across fossil stones and among fruit trees, and were home in Abu Dhabi by dinner time.

Feng Wen

*As posted on the AUHENHG YahooGroup, the Sahab Hotel, the new hotel on Jebel Akhdar, has now been completed (and has somehow found water to fill its large new pool). See website: www.sahab-hotel.com

September Sharjah Desert Park Trip



Miah Raikes riding a camel at the Children's Farm

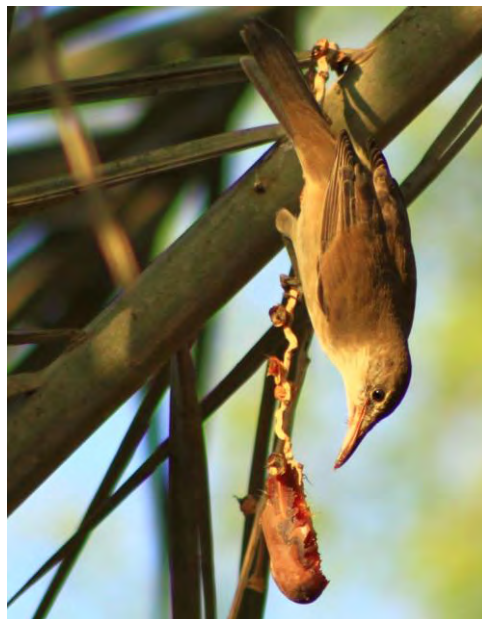
Photo: Wendy Raikes

On Saturday 17th September eight of us spent the whole afternoon at the Sharjah Desert Park on the Sharjah-Al Dhaid Road—a comfortable indoor hot-weather field trip venue, and a good way to re-familiarise ourselves with the wildlife and other aspects of the UAE's natural history at the start of the season. We started with the Botanic Museum and the palaeontology and marine life exhibits in the Natural History Museum, and then, after lunch at the Arabia's Wildlife Centre, enjoyed the wide range of wildlife on display there. For the two children in the group, the camel ride at the Children's Farm was the real highlight of the afternoon.

Keith Taylor

October Introductory Birding Trip

Fifteen amateur birders from the ENHG, led by Andrew Bean, toured Abu Dhabi Island on Friday 14 Oct 2011. Below are this season's sightings, not all ID'd to species.



Clamorous Reed Warbler

Photo: Omana Kallararakal

Dolphin Fountain Park / Eastern Corniche

Clamorous Reed Warbler
Black-Winged Stilt

Red-backed Shrike (M)
Western Reef Heron

Cattle Egret	Whimbrel
Grey Heron	Seagull sp
Common Sandpiper	Greater Flamingo
Egyptian Goose	Grey Francolin
Laughing Dove	Collared Dove
White-Eared Bulbul	Purple Sunbird
Common Myna	Sparrow sp

Al Mushrif Palace Park palm grove:

Crested Honey Buzzard	Purple Sunbird
Red-vented Bulbul	White-eared Bulbul
Laughing Dove	Collared Dove
Swift sp	Sparrow sp

Western Corniche Park lawns & beach:

Common Sandpiper	Ruddy Turnstone
Whimbrel	Eurasian Curlew
Kentish Plover	Western Reef Heron
Crested Lark	Sparrow sp
Tree Pipit	Graceful Prinia
White-eared Bulbul	Common Myna
Collared Dove	Laughing Dove
Daurian/Turkestan Shrike (F)	Egyptian Goose

TOTAL: **28** different species

.Ron Priestley and Angie Marles

NB: Omana also photographed a pair of Common Kestrels at Mushrif Park the next day (15th Oct). – Ed.

ENHG Trip Convoy Guidelines

Once again, the prime field trip season is upon us, so it's a good time for all ENHG members, new and returning, to review basic convoy rules. Because convoys are something of a bothersome necessity on field trips, we offer this set of rules to make our journeys together as safe and hassle-free as possible. –Ed.

1 General Items

Arrive at the starting point in plenty of time for the briefing on the route and destination of the trip. Please be ready to start with a full fuel tank. If you are going to leave the group before the end of the trip, please notify the trip leader and others. Do not go faster than you feel comfortable driving. **Keep your headlights on in daylight to make it easier to ID convoy vehicles.**

2 Rules of the Road

Our line of cars should not dominate the road. If others are trying to pass the group, please let them do so. Whenever the group stops, if at all feasible, make sure you pull off the road completely. Always use your indicators in plenty of time to guide cars in the group, as well as other road users. **If you want the group to stop, flash your headlights.** If the car behind you flashes its headlights, flash yours until the group leader pulls over. When the group passes through a congested area, the leader should try to stop as soon as safely practicable to regroup.

3 Overtaking

Overtake only when it is permitted and safe to do so.

4 Speed

Always stay within the legal speed limit. If the traffic is flowing more slowly than the legal limit, go with the traffic flow. The lead car should establish a sensible pace for

the group. It is the individual driver's responsibility to keep the vehicle behind in sight, insuring that the group stays together. **If the car behind slows down, please slow down with it.** If every car does this the convoy will stay together. NB: At night, it's virtually impossible to ID the car behind you, so it's essential to agree ahead of times on route turning points, where the convoy will regroup if a car falls behind; working phones help, too.

5 Tips for the trip leader

Have a short meeting of all drivers to explain the route and destinations. Assign a buddy to drivers who are unfamiliar with the route. Hand out route directions if possible. **Collect mobile phone numbers of all drivers, and make sure all drivers have your number.** If there is a large number of vehicles, it is advisable to break up into two groups with a lead car for each group.

6 Sweep

Lead car driver should designate someone to act as "sweep" (tail-end-Charlie) for the convoy. **The sweep should always stay at the rear, and should be on the lookout for unscheduled stops** (due, for example, to a red light, overheating, puncture, or other breakdown, or unscheduled petrol station or photograph-taking stop) and should alert the leader by phone, if necessary.

Adapted by ENHG from ENHG-AI Ain document

Recent Speaker



Dr Richard (Dick) Hornby has a background in zoology, but he also has a keen interest in botany and ecology in general. After working with the Nature Conservancy Council in southern England and doing ecological consulting there for many years, he moved to Abu Dhabi in 1993 to set up the National Avian Research Centre (NARC), which is now part of EAD. When the organization was well established he moved to the UAE Federal Environmental Agency (FEA) to advise on wildlife and land use issues. In 1996 he became an independent ecological consultant, extending his interests into marine and coastal ecology.

In 1997 Dick joined the staff of The Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems as an Academic Editor, while continuing with ecological consultancy. In 2005 he established Nautica Environmental Associates, jointly with Veryan Pappin, which has grown to about a dozen people. Dick takes the lead with all the terrestrial surveys and has carried out many surveys in UAE, Qatar and Bahrain.

Dr Hornby has published in the ENHG's journal *Tribulus* on the following topics: A Red List of Birds of UAE, Red List of Mammals of UAE, checklist of Reptiles of UAE, gazelles in UAE, coastal biodiversity, intertidal molluscs, clam shrimps and spoon worms. He was the Chairman of the Emirates Natural History Group from 1993 to 1999.

Upcoming Speaker

Husam El Alqamy, wildlife ecologist, graduated from Faculty of Science, Alexandria University, Egypt, with a degree in Zoology in 1993. He obtained a Masters of Philosophy in Ecology from the School of Biology, University of St. Andrews, Scotland UK in 2002. He worked as a wildlife biologist for National Parks of Egypt for 6 years during which he did monitoring research in the mountains of Sinai. This research included annually monitoring antelope population, camera trapping and grazing studies.

In 2004 Husam joined the conservation efforts in UAE with his prime interest in conservation of the Arabian Oryx. He worked for the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve for 3 years on their oryx reintroduction management and monitoring. In 2007, he joined the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi to work for the Arabian Oryx Protected Area in Umm Al Zamool. Husam is a member of the Antelope specialist group of the IUCN. His current research interests involve spatial analysis of wildlife data and species distribution models with special interest in using SDM for conservation planning and in assessing biodiversity vulnerabilities to climate change.

The Editor thanks the above speakers for providing autobiographical information & photos for Focus.

Holiday Bungalow in South Africa



Photo: Steve James

Charming thatched bungalow, situated in a secure private nature reserve, on the banks of the Sabie River, overlooking Kruger National Park in South Africa.

Fully furnished. Sleeps eight in comfort, in four bedrooms (three bathrooms). Wonderful verandah for entertaining while bird/game watching. Over 300 species of birds & 42 species of mammal seen from the property. Elephant; Buffalo; Hippo; Crocodile; Giraffe & a host of smaller game seen daily. Lion sometimes seen, Leopard always present but difficult to see. Hyaena seen at night.

Makes a fantastic base for exploring KNP & the Drakensburg Mountains. KNP entrance 1km away.

120 pounds sterling a night for eight people

100 pounds a night for six

90 pounds a night for fewer than six people

Contact Steve James via e-mail: sjames055@gmail.com

Also see website: <http://www.krugerholidays.com/> for further information and an excellent photo gallery.

In the News Media

The National, Sept 8: [Emirati woman's mission is to help save a frozen continent](#)

Gulf News, Sept 16: [UAE institutes Dh1m green awards](#)

The National, Sept 29: [Shy island bird has rare spot in limelight](#)

Khaleej Times, Oct 2: [UAE releases 500 houbara bustards in Algeria](#)

The National, Oct 4: [Emirates International Date Palm Festival details announced](#)

Gulf News, Oct 6: [Three-member team to recreate Thesiger's journey](#)

Gulf News, Oct 6: [Hope grows for country's endangered ghaf trees](#)

The National, Oct 12: [A campsite, a dart and some oryx](#)

Websites of General Interest

Emirates Natural History Group – Al Ain (Archives: newsletters of 3 NHGs, *Tribulus*): <http://www.enhg.org>

Dubai Natural History Group: <http://dnhg.org>

Qatar Natural History Group: <http://www.qnhg.com>

Tommy Pedersen's UAE Birding / UAE Nature Forum: <http://www.uaebirding.com>

Hanne&Jens Eriksen's website: www.BirdsOman.com

Wikispecies: <http://species.wikimedia.org/wiki>

Emirates Soc. of Geoscience: <http://www.esg-uae.org>

UAE archaeology website: <http://www.adias-uae.com>

Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage <http://www.adach.ae/en>

Environment Agency Abu Dhabi: <http://www.ead.ae/en>

Emirates Marine Environmental Group: www.emeg.ae

Emirates Diving Association: <http://www.emiratesdiving.com/index.php>

Noukhada Adventure Co.: <http://noukhada.ae>

Sharjah Museums: <http://www.sharjahmuseums.ae>

Wildlife Middle East News: <http://www.wmenews.com>

Arabian Wildlife:

<http://www.arabianwildlife.com/main.htm>

ARKive Images of Life on Earth: <http://www.arkive.org>

Sharkwatch Arabia: <http://www.sharkwatcharabia.com>


















Foundation for the Protection of the Arabian Leopard in Yemen: <http://www.yemenileopard.org>

Mohamed Bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund: <http://www.mbzspeciesconservation.org/>

EDGE: Evolutionarily Distinct and Globally Endangered: <http://www.edgeofexistence.org>

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These companies are supporting the ENHG activities in the region. We hope you as ENHG members will in turn support these companies whenever you can. Click on the links below for information about the sponsors.

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ITEMS ON SALE

AT THE ENHG BOOK STALL

All prices are in dirhams.

- The Emirates – A Natural History, 350.
The first complete referencing guide to the wildlife of the UAE. 580 colour photos.
- Jebel Hafit – A Natural History, 100.
An attractive, encyclopaedic presentation of the natural resources of this local landmark. (Free copies available to schools. Ask Drew.)
- Wild about Mammals, 40.
- Wild about Reptiles, 40.
- Snakes of Arabia, 50.
- Breeding Birds of the United Arab Emirates, 100.
- Abu Dhabi Bird checklist, 10.
- Sandgrouse checklist of the birds of the United Arab Emirates, 25.
- Emirates Bird Report, 20.
- Birdwatching guide to Oman, 2nd edition, 100.
Guide to bird watching spots in Oman.
- Common Birds in Oman, 2nd ed, Dhs 120.
- Butterflies of Saudi Arabia & its neighbours 90.
- Trucial States, 120.
- UAE in Focus, 100.
- Oman 1965, 120.
- Natural History of Oman, 50.
- Feast of Dates, 100.
- Field Guide to the Geology of Oman, 75.
- Abu Dhabi 8 Million Years ago, 15.
- Arabian Wildlife Encyclopedia, 120.
- Sulphur, Camels and Gunpowder, 100.
- Native Plants of Oman, 80
- Little O in Oman, 25.
- Heritage Vol. 1, 60.

Committee Members

Required: Acting or Deputy Chair to help chair meetings, organise activities & represent the Group. Can you do this?

Keith Taylor
(Deputy Chairman / Focus Editor)
Mobile: 050-820-4938
kjtaylor13@yahoo.com

Julie Bird
(Secretary)
Mobile: 050-615-4757
julieinad@yahoo.com

Ron Priestley
(Treasurer)
Mobile: 050-315-9908
ronprst@gmail.com

Required: Lecture Coordinator to assist us with contacting speakers for ENHG lectures. Can you do this?

Barbara Barton Smith
(Membership Secretary)
Mobile: 050 761-6880
barbbartonsmith@yahoo.com

Andrew Bean
(Excursion Secretary)
Mobile: 050-322-1327
rexabean@emirates.net.ae

Feng Wen
(Assistant Excursion Secretary)
Mobile: 050-622-1485
feng.wen@adpc.ae

Ann Pearson
(Outgoing Corporate Sponsorship Secretary)
Mobile: 055-748-2956
ann.pearson9@btinternet.com

Avra Theophanous
(Incoming Corporate Sponsorship Sec. & Asst. Membership Sec.)
avra.theophanous@gmail.com

Claudia Gehre
(Public Relations Consultant)
ccgehre@gmail.com
Mobile: 050-5526-3026

Peter Hellyer
(Editor of *Tribulus* / Librarian)
Mobile: 050-642-4357
peter@extinfo.gov.ae

Louise Welch
(Book Sales Coordinator)
Mobile: 050-189-4492
nangadamai@hotmail.com

Gaby Zezulka-Mailloux
(Book Sales Assistant)
gabrielle.mailloux@adu.ac.ae

Drew Gardner
(Member)
Mobile: 050-667-5830
drew.gardner@zu.ac.ae

Dick Hornby
(Member)
Mobile: 050-662-4501
dnahornby@yahoo.co.uk

Stefan Beck
(Member)
Home Phone: 02-582-9359
stefan_k_beck@yahoo.de

Lectures

Venue: HCT / Abu Dhabi Men's College

Press CTRL+click [here](#) to view map/directions.

11th Oct.
Flora and Fauna in UAE – still a land of opportunity!?

Dick Hornby

18th Oct. **7:30 PM**
Reintroduction of Arabian Oryx in Abu Dhabi: 4 years of monitoring
Husam El Alqamy

1st Nov. **7:30 PM**
Oceanography of the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman

Dr Duncan Priestley / Major Ali al Mehrezi

15th Nov. **7:30 PM**
First-Year Update: Elasmobranch Research

Rima Jabado

Field Trips

14th Oct.
Abu Dhabi Island Morning Birdwatching
Andrew Bean

21st-22nd Oct.
All day snorkelling trip by boat to Dhabiya
Andrew Bean

28th Oct.
Day Trip to traditional ship-building yard in Ras al Khaimah
Feng Wen

4th-6th Nov.
Eid Al Adha mountain camping trip to Jebel Akhdar, Oman
Angie Marles & Ron Priestley

25th-26th Nov.
Camping trip to Umm al Zamul Oryx preserve
Andrew Bean

ENHG-AD Research & Conservation Fund Grant Application Information

For background on this fund, see [Dec 2009 Focus](#), p5. For research & grant application guidelines, click [here](#). For grant application form, click [here](#). For further enquiries, contact ENHG Deputy Chairman Keith Taylor at kjtaylor13@yahoo.com.

ENHG Equipment for Members' Use

The following ENHG equipment is available for members' use during field trips or on request:

- Birding Telescope
- GPS unit – GARMIN GPSMAP 60CSx
- First-Aid Kit
- Sky Scout astronomical object locator/identifier
- Celestron NexStar telescope (on field trips only)
- Two satellite phones, taken on camping trips.

Phone numbers: No. 1: 008821644400956
No. 2: 008821644400965

Enquiries: Andrew Bean, rexabean@emirates.net.ae

Marine Life Rescue Contact Info.

In Abu Dhabi:

EAD Hotline for reporting environmental emergencies including pollution and injured wildlife: 8009990. Email: envirocomplaint@ead.ae

EAD Emergency response manager: Mr. Abdul Rahman. Mob: 0506674171 (contactable 24 hours/day)

EAD contact for sea turtles, dugongs and dolphins: Dr Himansu Das, Biodiversity Management Sector. Tel: 26934654; Mob: 0504465125; Email: hsdas@ead.ae

In Dubai:

Emirates Marine Environment Group (EMEG) (Tel: 043630581/Fax:043630460; Email: info@emeg.ae)

Dubai Municipality: Main number: 800900. Marine Environment & Sanctuaries Unit (Tel: +9714 606 6818, Fax +9714 703 3532), Email: marabdulla@dm.gov.ae.

Dubai Turtle Rehabilitation Centre at the Burj al Arab Aquarium. Tel: 043017198. 24-hour email contact, Attn. Mr Warren Baverstock, Manager of Operations, BAA Aquarium: warren.baverstock@jumeirah.com
To post Facebook message triggering an after-hours SMS alert: www.facebook.com/turtle.rehabilitation

Newsletter Details

Newsletter contributions to:
newsletter@chirri2000.com

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ENHG c/o Environment Agency -
Abu Dhabi, PO Box 45553, Abu Dhabi

Yahoo Groups website

<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/AUHENHG>
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