
New Members' Package

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Introduction

The Al Ain chapter of the Emirates Natural History Group, established in 1981, is affiliated with the Abu Dhabi and Dubai natural history groups. The activities can be summarized as to observe, to enjoy, to report and to publish observations of the natural history of the UAE and Oman. We maintain relations with similar historical, archaeological and nature organizations in Bahrain, Qatar and Oman.

In the UAE, the Chapter has worked with the Emirates Environment Group (EEG), the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (ADACH) and the Environment Agency -- Abu Dhabi (EAD). We have a total annual membership of more than 100 families (approx 200 individuals) but the numbers and composition constantly change as new families arrive in the city and others leave. The core values of the group include:

- Enjoying and respecting the environment
- Recording flora and fauna of UAE and Northern Oman
- Informing on topical issues
- Sponsoring related research
- Inclusion of all members in as many events as possible, regardless of age, condition, expertise or experience

General meetings take place at the Danat Al Ain Resort hotel twice each month on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays at 7:30 pm. New members are always welcome. A program of speakers is organized with the lectures covering a variety of subjects. In addition to the lecture program, the chapter maintains a lending library for members. There is also a stock of equipment such as splints and a stretcher, portable generator, and motion cameras, any which may be borrowed upon request. (A complete list is available on the website and on the home page of the chapter's Yahoo Groups site.) The library collection is kept in facilities provided by ADACH at the Al Ain Palace Museum.

With such a large membership where members have a diverse range of interests, it is important for the chapter to organize a variety of events so that the maximum number of

individuals is involved. Individuals who have volunteered to organize events and activities for members likewise have a diverse range of interests including photography, plants, cultural history, archaeology, geology, astronomy, mammals, arthropods, cartography, reptiles and birds. The Al Ain chapter offers regular field trips to several local sites. While our trip leaders make an effort to provide background information regarding each site, it is recommended that members make use of available resources to discover details of sites. Members may wish to invest in a series of off-road books that contain maps and useful tips, including safety in the desert. Websites with background information of interest to members are listed at the chapter's website. The chapter also offers for sale to members (at cost or close to cost) reference books and other publications which include valuable information about natural history topics for the UAE and Oman.

The Al Ain National Museum, located near the Al Ain Oasis, is an excellent place for new members to gain an overview of the history of the region.

On a typical weekend field trip, members will meet at one location, sign the convoy list (if necessary), and meet the trip leader. The trip leader will remind the participants about the importance of following convoy guidelines (below). After arriving at the site, the trip leader will introduce the site, outlining things to observe and note. Members are then free to tour the site on their own or with others, observing the obvious courtesies, especially for field trips in area villages. Before leaving the site, we sometimes gather to compare notes and discuss highlights of the trip. If possible, a brief summary of the trip (notes and photographs) will be posted on the website and passed on to the Newsletter editor.

In a typical week, members could choose to join a moonlight photography shoot, a dawn walk in an oasis to observe birds, and a trip to observe bugs in a wadi.

The group also offers at least three mountain climbing expeditions for those seeking a challenging hike in the mountains. Those who complete the three ascents receive the Ibrahim Zakhour Triple Crescent Award certificate.

Periodically the chapter organizes weekend events to, for example, Ras al Khaimah, Nizwa, east coast or Liwa. All members are welcome at every event; the Committee makes every effort to avoid events where places may be limited. The Committee also makes every effort to ensure all members can join each field trip.

Annual membership fees are Dhs150 for families and Dhs100 for individuals. The chapter also provides:

- Newsletter – is published electronically as frequently as possible and contains articles about recent field trips, research, upcoming speakers, competitions and other relevant events. Contributions are always welcome. Participation is always encouraged. Back issues of the Newsletter are available on the website.
- Website - contains archival material -- the original Bulletin and all Tribulus publications -- as well as past editions of the newsletters, galleries of photographs taken by members and links to other related sites. Summaries of field trips are also posted, in addition to information of interest to members.
- Email discussion group (Yahoo! Groups) – the moderated email service is used to keep members informed of trips, news, events and activities. We ask that members avoid using the email service for non-ENHG messages; any items, such as selling of

vehicles, other events, should be posted on other sites available for residents of Al Ain, as listed on each of the chapter's email messages.

Committee

The business of the Al Ain chapter is conducted by the Committee at its regular meetings on the first Tuesday of each month. Meetings, which begin at 7:30 pm, are open to all members and are conducted informally. The members of the Committee are elected at the chapter's Annual General Meeting, normally held in November of each year. During the year, the Committee may, from time to time, recruit and appoint additional members. There is no remuneration or special privilege for serving as a Committee member.

The chapter maintains a bank account at a local bank. Finances are supervised by the Treasurer and a financial statement is available at the Annual General Meeting. Information on the financial status of the chapter is available to any member. As a non-profit organization transactions usually involve day-to-day business of the ENHG.

The Committee membership is available at <
http://www.enhg.org/alain/committee/comm_current.htm>.

Constitution

The Al Ain chapter is governed by a Constitution, a copy of which is available on the website < <http://www.enhg.org/alain/committee/constitution.htm> >.

Field Trips

The Al Ain chapter is an active group with frequent field trips and expeditions that are announced by email and at meetings. If you decide to join us for such an activity, please be mindful of the following points:

A. Dress Code

- Observe the usual courtesies in a Muslim country.
- Women wearing shorts or a sleeveless top should bring a shawl or shirt to 'cover-up' if necessary.
- Loose garments made from cotton or natural fibers are preferred for comfort (heat and movement).
- It is recommended that you wear a hat or headscarf.
- Suitable footwear is particularly important. Backless shoes do not afford sufficient protection or support.

B. Essential Provisions

- Heat exhaustion is always an important consideration. It is recommended that EACH individual carries adequate water for personal consumption.
- It is prudent to use a sun block.
- Try to carry your possessions so that you are comfortable and your hands are free.

- Please do not leave valuables (phone, cash etc) in your vehicle.

C. General Fitness

- Our objective is to include as many people as possible in each of our activities.
- Certain medical conditions may mean that you are not able to participate fully. Some field trips are more strenuous than others.
- If you have a medical condition, or doubts about your fitness to participate, it is vital that you advise the trip leader beforehand. (If you have a medical condition, please bring along whatever provisions you might need i.e. asthmatics must bring inhalers.)
- Whatever the level of your involvement, we try to see that each field trip is rewarding and interesting for all concerned.

D. Preparation

- It is strongly recommended that you check the website and Internet to gain an insight to the area or subject being visited
- If you have a question, please contact a Committee member or send an email to the group members at enhg@yahoo.com

Map of Al Ain

Detailed online maps of Al Ain are available at <http://www.maporama.com>. Select the United Arab Emirates from the country list and enter "Al Ain" for the city.

Garmin's City Navigator Middle East is available at Carrefour (telephone counter) and other shops in the city. While these maps are designed for downloading to a Garmin GPS, they can be used on a Windows computer to provide automatic routes between points in the UAE. The maps include house numbers on streets as well as many points of interest such as petrol stations, hotels, restaurants and other business.

From time to time, email messages will include Google Earth images of locations including trip destinations, meeting places and so on. The chapter also uses Google Earth KMZ files to help illustrate locations; as a result, it is strongly recommended that you install Google Earth on your computer.

Global Positioning System (GPS) offers a valuable tool for the chapter; GPS coordinates, for example, are helpful to document the location of flora, fauna, geological features, archaeology and so on for reporting and referencing. Several members use GPS devices to record driving and walking route and to make waypoints for places of interest. Contact a Committee member if you have any questions regarding GPS equipment.

Recycling

In 2005, the Al Ain chapter of ENHG, in cooperation with Professional Investment Consultants (PIC), the Al Ain English Speaking School, and the Emirates Environment Group, set up collection bins at the School. There are two bins, one for metal items and one for paper and card. AAESS provided the site and PIC provided the funds to purchase the bins and to have the sign fabricated and installed. Materials collected are trucked to Dubai where they are sold to local recyclers.

All metal items are acceptable. All paper products are acceptable with the exception of envelopes with plastic 'windows'. Please do not include plastic bags. The bins are located adjacent to the wall surrounding the school and are available 24 hours a day. Individuals are asked to not leave items outside the school perimeter fence or otherwise litter the site. We are grateful for the enthusiastic support of PIC and the School.

Newsletter

The Al Ain chapter of the ENHG has been producing a Newsletter for members from the chapter's inception more than 20 years ago. Initially, the Newsletter was produced monthly and printed (photocopied) for members. For some time, Newsletters were individually labeled. With the development of the Internet and email services, the function of the Newsletter has evolved. The Newsletter has been the official means of distributing news and information to members; however, it now exists in partnership with the chapter's website and its email service. The Newsletter editor <rolfried at yahoo.de> is grateful for support from all members.

The Newsletter continues to be produced as often as possible but is no longer printed. The Newsletter is posted to the website where members may, if they wish, download a copy suitable for printing. Back issues of the Newsletter are on file (currently in storage).

Library

The Al Ain chapter of the ENHG maintains a modest library at facilities provided by ADACH at the Al Ain Palace Museum. The library resources include books, periodicals, videotapes and miscellaneous items on the chapter's computer. The majority of items are in English; there are a few resources available in Arabic. The library also includes a collection of maps obtained over the years. The hard copies of the maps are complemented by numerous maps available electronically on the chapter's computer. You may arrange to visit the library by contacting the chapter's Librarian or another committee member. Volunteers are welcome.

The Librarian is in the process of cataloging the collection and posting details online <<http://www.librarything.com/catalog/enhg>>. Contact the Librarian for more information on this project.

Projects (sponsors)

From time to time, the Al Ain chapter considers requests for financial or other assistance to support research or other activities regarding any aspect of the natural history of the UAE and/or Oman.

In the past, we have supported research of the spiny-tailed lizard (Arabic: dhub). This project included the study of the behavior of the dhub population at a location known locally as Dhub Valley.

The chapter has also provided modest financial support for DNA research. With the support and cooperation of various archaeological teams working in the UAE, DNA material was successfully extracted from bone material. The research was an effort to identify the original location of ancient peoples of the UAE and Oman. Additional research of the brain of the

Arabian camel has also been supported. Several specimens were received and an investigation of the brains yielded some interesting results (posted on our website).

The chapter has a collection of maps which would be of special interest for any members interested in cartography and the use of GPS devices.

The chapter has contributed some funds to purchase atlases and specialty books, including 'Wadis of Oman, Satellite Image Atlas', for use by members.

Articles on the cultural history of the UAE and Oman are available on the website.

What we do from week to week . . .

For more than 20 seasons, the Al Ain chapter of the ENHG has been organizing activities for its members and supporting the efforts of individual researchers. Underlining almost all ENHG activities, whether meetings or field trips, is the intent to 'observe, record and report' on the natural history of the UAE and northern Oman.

Weekend trips may include:

- Nizwa, and surrounding communities
- Jebel Shams cliff walk
- Ras al Khaimah with the emphasis on archaeology
- Necropolis at Al Ayn (Oman)

Currently, the chapter maintains a speaking program with two meetings each month (2nd and 4th Tuesdays). Each weekend there is at least one outing. In recent years, walks have been organized in conjunction with the full moon.

The underlying philosophy of the group has been one of 'inclusion'. Each event is organized so that each member -- young or old, casual or keen naturalist, in reasonable physical condition -- will find something of interest during the trip. It is not essential that members have any particular expertise; instead, what the organizers hope members will bring along is a keen sense of interest. Likewise, it is not essential that each member have an off-road vehicle; there is always room for everyone in the vehicles available.

Calendar of Activities

There are a number of events that may be part of the seasonal program of the Al Ain chapter of the ENHG. These events include:

- The Iftar dinner has been held during the month of Ramadan. This was an opportunity for members to enjoy some traditional Iftar dishes. In addition, the meetings concluded with a presentation on some aspect of Islam.
- The Inter-Emirates Weekend (IEW) is held each spring, hosted by one of the three chapters of the ENHG. A special program of events is organized for each IEW, normally held in March. In addition, the recipients of the ENHG's two awards -- the Sh. Mubarak Award and the Bish Brown Award -- are announced.

- The annual photography exhibition, normally held in May, is open to all members of the Al Ain chapter of the ENHG. The exhibition guidelines are posted on the website < <http://www.enhg.org/alain/photo2011.htm> >.
- The chapter normally holds its Annual General Meeting each year in November. This is the occasion when Committee members are elected. The program also includes a report on the previous year's activities as well as a report on the financial condition of the chapter. All members are eligible for each position (Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, Field Trip Coordinator etc). The Committee of the Al Ain chapter is composed of the elected table officers plus other members appointed, as required.

Border Crossing

Many of the chapter's weekend field trips are to destinations in the al-Buraimi district (al-Mahadah municipality of Oman). As a result, members must cross into al-Buraimi at the Hili border post. Anyone with a valid UAE residency visa is able to pass without a stamp or payment.

Individuals with a visit visa to the UAE must have the visit visa cancelled, drive to the nearest Oman border post to have an Oman visit visa issued and cancelled, and then have a new UAE visit visa issued at Hili.

The construction of the border fence and the border crossing procedures are an inconvenience and, when possible, trips are organized so that members are crossing when traffic at the border post is minimal. However, this is not always possible. The chapter tries to schedule as many events as possible on the UAE side of the border but many of the most interesting sites are located on the Oman side.

The situation with the border procedures changes from time to time and the Committee makes every effort to pass on reliable information as soon as it is available. If you have a question about crossing the border, please contact a Committee member; it is recommended that you avoid relying on rumors and gossip about the regulations.

Trip Convoy Guidelines

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 depart 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!

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, make sure you pull completely off the road.
- 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.
- If you must stop, pull over. It is the responsibility of the vehicle in front to notice you have stopped and then to pull over. Eventually, if all are checking their rear view mirrors, all will eventually stop.
- When the group passes through a congested area, it should stop as soon as safely practicable to regroup.

Overtaking

- While in the convoy, drivers must not overtake other vehicles that are part of the convoy. If the vehicle in front pulls over, the vehicle behind should pull over provided the circumstances are safe.
- Overtake other vehicles on the route only when legal and safe to do so.

Speed

- Always stay within the legal speed limit. If the traffic is flowing slower than the legal limit go with the traffic flow.
- The lead car should establish a sensible pace for the group. It is each individual driver's responsibility to keep the vehicle behind in sight, insuring the group stays together.
- If the car behind slows down, please slow down with it. If each car does this the convoy will stay together.

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