



Emirates Natural History Group Al Ain Chapter Newsletter November 2007

ENHG Al Ain Chapter Committee

Committee News:

Meeting 5th November 2007 (for full Minutes, refer to the website <http://www.enhg.org/index.htm>)

1. Membership is looking good with 31 new members in the past 3 months, 35 renewals, and 80 – 100 active members.
2. the treasurer reports a healthy balance.
3. an MOU re insect curation is to be taken to Abu Dhabi chapter to formalize the care of the collection.

REMEMBER!!

AGM 27th November
Intercontinental Hotel
7.30 for 8.00 pm

Your Committee:

Co- Chairs: Jerry Buzzell and Brigitte Howarth

Minutes: Marion Campey

Treasurer: Chris Henry

Membership: Marion Campey

Photography: Bob Reimer

Environment: Michelle MacLean

Newsletter: Margaret Lambert and Sheila Macdonald

Library: Amer Abu Kuhail

Flora: Marion Campey and Martha Coetzee

Fauna (Insects): Brigitte Howarth

Fauna (Birds):

Visit the webpage at <http://www.enhg.org/index.htm>
or contact us:

enhg@yahoo.com (all Al Ain chapter members)

Upcoming Events

27th November AGM

At the AGM, the table officers will be elected and all positions are up for grabs. If you wish to be nominated or wish to nominate someone, please contact a member of the committee; nominations will also be accepted from the floor. A financial statement will be available.

If there is anything else you wish to be placed on the agenda, please let one of us know.

4th December General meeting

In December, we will alter our order of meetings in order to take advantage of the anticipated visit to Al Ain of George Archibald of the International Crane Foundation on December 4th.

12/12 Clean Up UAE Day

The annual Clean up UAE Day is being coordinated by EEG; as usual we will participate as invited.

School Trips

1. 10th November, Amer will lead a school trip to Al Ain Oasis
2. National School will do a trip to Jimi Oasis
3. the Women's Campus will have a trip on 7th December.

Thanks to the volunteers!

We are also planning our annual **Christmas Eve in the Desert** (no prizes for guessing the date!).

Geology Workshop Planned for January

This will be based on field trips in our video collection as well as Ben Jordon's book and articles. The workshop will be followed by a geology fieldtrip

What we've been up to:

Al Ain Souk

Friday 19th October 2007

Seventeen bodies clustered around Amer and Bob Reimer outside the souk opposite the bus depot. After an introduction of what to expect, Bob led us into the first low white building. We stepped into another world as Indian and Pakistani vendors called to us. Veggies lined up in color -coordinated rows drew our attention away from the meats hanging in the windows. In front of some empty stalls and a sign depicting camel meat prices, Bob gave a talk interspersed with questions. Amer also added interesting tidbits. Large camel meat is 3 dirhams per kilo and small camel meat is 14 dirhams. At weddings, guests are given a choice of camel, goat, sheep or beef. Dodging out the door and past the toy section, we head around to the tobacco area where Amer enlightens us in the Emirati smoking habits. Very dizzying...literally!

We head past the fresh herbs and stop at 4 local ladies selling some interesting things which, Amer explains amid a few laughs and tastings, are mainly for beauty (inside and out). One lady held out some dry herb and shook her hand which I found meant was 'BITTER taste'. The next day I found out the use of the herb...very cleansing!

We headed into this high long main building where everything is available, from new tomato plants, goanna cacti (used for high blood sugar and stress, we all bought some) hammour, tuna etc (over 200 types of fish as stated in Phil Iddison's book and which are brought fresh every day from the coasts, any left is made into fertilizer) prawns, honey (80-100 dirhams per bottle) honeycomb, dried cheese etc. Near the end was an Omani with his kunjar which he gladly demonstrated for us.

Going into the low building beside this we came upon the hardware and camel gear section. You can get a date palm climber or a camel udder cover (not really a hand-woven handbag) or even the wooden gun baton for Jalan dancing. If you take up this gun twirling you can enter the competition to win thousands of dirhams. So I bought a green, orange and blue plastic rope woven camel muzzle. It makes a great hat stand! Whew. That was a fantastic 2 hours .Thank you so much Amer and Bob.

Debbie Handley



Bob discussing camel meat



Honey, henna and . . .
(handsome men!)



Amer takes a rest



Full of character



Ameri woman with keyholder



What stories he could tell



Photos courtesy Debbie Handley
and Amer Abu Kuhail

Zoo talk
23rd October 2007

Mark Craig, Director of Al Ain Zoo, provided an informative follow up to his talk of this time last year, outlining the changes over the past 12 months, and progress with future plans.

Improvements include the introduction of the summer night time zoo and bird show, which have been highly successful and a first the world has seen.

Along with his 4 year vision for the "Al Ain Wildlife Park and Resort" comprising shopping malls and accommodation, Mark emphasized his focus on animals and introducing desert species rather than tropical animals; the zoo plans to be working with Arabian Leopards, Arabian Sand Cats and many more desert animals in the future.



Photo courtesy "Aussie in Al Ain"

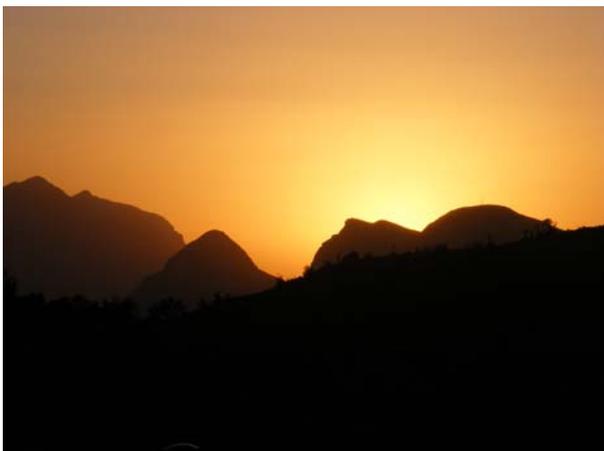
GPS Course
30th October 2007

Thanks to the Al Ain English Speaking School, the ENHG was able to use a classroom and projector to present "An Introduction to GPS" on the fifth Tuesday of November. The workshop was based on the pre-work material prepared by the U.S. National Parks Service for use in some of their courses including inter-agency ones for forest fire fighting and a "GPS for 'ologists" course. We covered a brief history of how the Global Positioning Satellite system came into being, how GPS works, how satellite geometry affects precision and accuracy and finished with some tips and traps in how to use GPS properly. Brien brought along the group's first two GPS receivers. The first one is a behemoth that could barely get a fix before it ran out of battery power. Our modern units have huge storage space for storing cartography and computing power for calculation of routes when the correct maps are available yet are easily pocketable and run for hours on a set of batteries.

As we are aware of a number of people that were unable to attend but wanted to, we will likely run the introductory workshop again early in the new year. We will follow up by adapting the material in the "GPS for 'ologists" course to our local needs and have a day-long session including practical field exercises to consolidate what we learn.

Bob Reimer

Waking Among Mountains



Poem and photo:
George Kershaw

*Waking in your arms
still an exquisite
shock,
after thirty years;*

*The peaks carefully arrange themselves
in jumbled plenty
the sky is empty
the sun hides
then storms the skies*

*the sky awash
with light
bathing crag upon crag;*

Then a goat ate my tea bags.

Moonwalks 25th and 26th October

We celebrated the full moon of October with a couple of moon walks, taking advantage of the cool evening temperatures.

The four members who joined for the Thursday evening (25th) walk wanted a challenge so we headed to Khutwah oasis for a hike out to Village One. The morning and early afternoon rains meant that the wadi at Khutwah, from the weir to the gorge, was filled with water. It would have been impossible to hike up the wadi bed as we normally do when we park the vehicles near Hayl al Nawafil and dodge the pools on our way to Sultan's Oasis. The sound of the water cascading through the narrow gorge beneath the bridge could be heard in the car park.

The group was not inclined to cross Bob's Ridge on the way to Village One and, with the water levels as elevated as they were that evening, we did not even consider the 'wet route', so we enjoyed a relatively leisurely walk around the mountain using the donkey trail.

It was a surprise to arrive at Village One and find the wadi filled with running water, making it impossible to cross at the normal crossing point and hike up to the terraces. Instead, we had to accept a crossing upstream and sit near the falaj until we were ready for the return trip, again via the donkey trail.

On Friday evening (26th), a large group of about 20 members, including children, joined us for the moon walk. The group decided on Aboul as a destination. The convoy parked at the wall and gate in the village and hiked to the working oasis via the road, with a stop at the fort, illuminated only by moonlight, leaving a different impression on hikers who normally see the fort in the sunlight. We continued on to the abandoned village and attempted a walk through the oasis but it was too daunting as the oasis seemed more overgrown than on previous trips and there was no easy route across the ravine that divides the working part of the oasis.

So we made our way back to the wadi bed and opted to follow it back to the gate and our trucks. I explained to the group how I had accompanied a British couple, now living in Australia, to Aboul a few weeks earlier when they were visiting the UAE and wanted to see some of the places they had visited when they lived in Al Ain. They had been the first English-speaking faculty members of the then new department of language at a very new UAE University. They described a place in Aboul they called the 'flat rock', where they were able to enjoy a picnic while young children splashed about in shallow pools. I pointed to a spot not far from the fort where the exposed conglomerate forms an expanse ideal for a weekend picnic. They were sure it was the same location, with the stream still running together with small pools still stocked with wadi fish and toads.

It was remarkable that, more than 30 years later, members of faculty from UAEU were still coming to Aboul and still enjoying the tranquility.

The couple has agreed to share some of their old photographs with the Al Ain chapter and we will post them on the website as soon as possible.

Future moonwalks will be organized in conjunction with the full moon each month this season. Please let us know if there is a destination you have in mind. For our next moon walk, it has been suggested that we repeat the hike to the summit of Jebel Qatar. We have done this on several occasions in the past but have not repeated it in the past couple of years. The evenings of Thursday Nov 22 and Friday Nov 23 seem the most likely dates for this month's moon walking.

Watch your email for details of upcoming moon walks!

Brien Holmes

Antarctica in 2 hours

Wednesday 31st October 2007

Rosemarie and Pat Keough's two hour presentation, *Passion and Obsession*, on their life and photography in Antarctica on was one of the most inspirational, beautiful and enriching experience I've had in a long time. It was truly a privilege to be in their presence and learn so much about the highest continent through their eyes. Some facts that would interest you:

- The interior of the continent is technically the largest desert in the world and the snow feels like sand.
- 24 hours sunlight throughout the "summer" day can easily cause insomnia.
- 99.6% of the continent is ice containing 70% of world's freshwater.
- 200 people get to go there every year.
- Antarctica is home to more than 70 lakes that lie thousands of meters under the surface of the continental ice sheet. They are at 22 degrees Celsius with honey comb structures of ice.
- Antarctica does not have a cloud cover (due to global warming) unlike the Arctic.
- Antarctica is home to many volcanoes, only Mount Erebus is known to be active.

I was in awe as they described the making of their award-winning book *ANTARTICA* with state-of-the-art combination of "hollow-back split board" and the "classic European full-leather" styles of fine morocco binding. The book weights 19.2 pounds, a marvellous effort of four artisans, assisted by two sewers over the span of 10 years for a total of 950 copies that will be preserved forever.

It's almost unfair to talk about their work without the actual photographs. Rosemarie talked about how she spent five hours in the snow with her chin sticking out for almost a month just to focus on and photograph a section of the largest penguin colony. Pat explained his amazing relationship with his wife and how it helped saves their lives in the worst of storms and many other narrow near-death experiences such as hanging off cliffs!

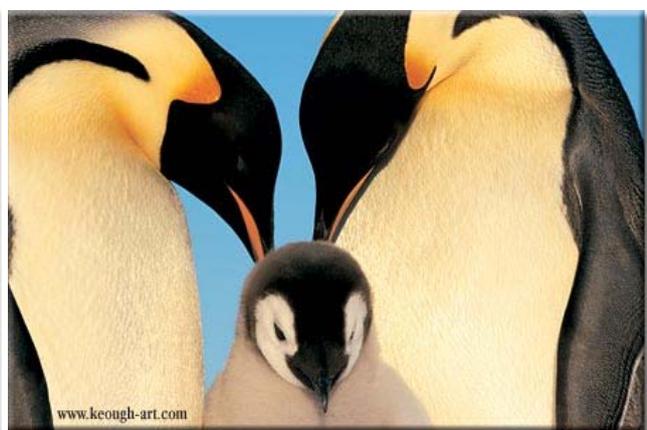
I explored twenty four months of their lives, as they switched between the pictures of the polar plateau of the interior, the majestic mountainous coast, multitudes of off-lying islands, icy seas, stormy Southern ocean, and delightful colonies of different penguins species, fur seals, mosses, lichen, and many types of algae.

White, with hints of subtle colours, had never been so beautiful before. At one point during the presentation, I was quite moved, longing to take the daring trip myself. You do not have to be a photographer to appreciate the depths of the Keough's unparalleled photography that included a variety of perspective, geometrical contrasts, panoramic views and close-ups all taken with their plain 30-year old Nikon camera!

The presentation ended with Pat and Rosemarie talking about their cause - donating all the profits from the books sales to the Save the Albatross Foundation, and other international wildlife charities. There's much work to be done, if we want to save our environment.

You can visit their website at: <http://www.keough-art.com/>

Humairah Irfan



Khudrah
Friday 2nd November 2007

A group of ENHG members visited Khudrah on the afternoon of November 2nd. Khudrah has been the site of some of our primary school field trips as it gives a nice mix of ecosystems within a short walk of each other. The weather was 'great for this time of year' with a high overcast and not too warm temperatures. When we arrived, we discovered that there have been many changes at the oasis, with a new paved road all the way in and a picnic area where we usually park.

We entered the oasis via the wadi which gave us a good opportunity to discuss some dragonfly behaviour. A number of species of dragonflies were chasing each other around at the first pool. We stopped to look at an exuvia (the exoskeleton of a dragonfly larvae that is left when the adult emerges). I was later able to identify the exuvia as being from the Blue Emperor (*Anax imperator*), our largest dragonfly. Race Stryker caught a live larvae which we photographed so we could attempt to identify it later. Unfortunately there aren't many good resources for identifying larvae in this area, but it is possible that it is from a Scarlet Darter (*Crocothemis erythrea*). We noted that only males seemed to be around as females tend to hide and forage away from the water. We also looked at the maidenhair fern (*Adiantum capillas-veneris*) that grows in the moist areas where water seeps out of the oasis. A few of the little Rock Semaphore Geckos (*Pisturus rupestris*) were about.

Brien escorted the group up to the flats north of the oasis to look at the archaeology which includes a cemetery, some cleared circles which are likely majlis and an old ambulance. When we re-entered the oasis, we almost immediately got confirmation of our earlier dragonfly ecology lesson as a tree was festooned with roosting female dragonflies. We also saw them on the electrical wires. At the new overlook picnic area at the back of the oasis, some of our members chatted with a group of Omani ladies and girls. On the way back out of the oasis we were given some fresh "early season" dates. If they had been freshly picked, the variety certainly matures very late.

As we congregated back at the cars, Brigitte asked for people to comment on what they had seen. Some people had seen a kingfisher. We ran down the list of seven dragonfly species that had been noted. A few different reptiles were also seen. We had more small children out than usual, but they were all troopers and enjoyed the trip with no complaints. It was a pleasure to have them with us.



Examining a dragonfly exuvia (Brigitte Howarth)



Dragonfly larvae (Bob Reimer)



Blue Emperor dragonfly exuvia (Bob Reimer)

Plant of the month

AMARANTHACEAE Amaranth Family
Aerva javanica
 Arabic name : al ara', twaim, efhe, tirt

Look out for this shrub currently in blossom with creamy woolly flowers. It is a straggly low shrub of up to 100cm in height. The lance-shaped leaves are grayish-green and covered with matted hair on the top surface. It can be found in and around Al Ain, and the rest of the eastern emirates and northern Oman, growing in disturbed areas, roadsides, wadis and on alluvial plains.

Marijke Jongbloed, in *The Comprehensive Guide to the Wild Flowers of the United Arab Emirates*, records that the local tribes people gathered the flowers and seed heads for use as stuffing in camel saddles and cushions. These flowers were also used to pack suppurating wounds after cleaning and as a paste to stop bleeding. The whole plant was used as a diuretic.



These photos are a little blurry but you can see how "fluffy" the flowers are and the shape of the shrub.



Photos taken at Tanuf, Oman

Marion Campey

Bird News:

Recent sighting include:

- 3 raptors sighted by Bill at the Men's College
- a hoopoe at the Rugby Club
- and a variety of kestrels and warblers

DVDs:

Thanks to Brien's diligence, we now have 18 movies in our collection. These are being copied onto CDs which can be played on your computer or DVD player; You can buy the set for Dhm 100 or individually for Dhm 10 each.

Message from Debbie Handley - Trip to Nizwa

I would like to plan a trip to Nizwa, stopping at forts, Al Hamra etc along the way and exploring mud brick villages etc. There are a few hotels in Nizwa, such as the Nizwa Hotel, Falaj Daris (4 *) Majan Guesthouse (3 star). We can stay overnight and explore the souk and then travel back to Ibri stopping at Jibrin Fort, Bahla silver smith etc.

In Ibri there are lots of ruins to explore as well as an original souk. Ibri guesthouse is there to stay at. We can stop at Al Ayn beehive tombs on the way back on Sunday.

Anyone interested please call me as soon as possible. As I don't have a car a ride is appreciated . 050 546 1085

More details when I see numbers interested. Depart Friday am Nov 30 at 8 am to cross the Mezyad border to Oman. Return Sun. afternoon by 6 pm. I don't have a computer so best to call rather than email. Thanks.

Geology with Ben Jordan (formerly UAEU)

Bioturbated Limestone, Near Semail, Oman

"Bioturbated" means sediment that has been disturbed by the biological activities of living things. Examples would be the burrowing of worms, clams, shrimp, etc. in the ocean sediments. In some cases, these disturbances are preserved when those sediments become rock. In the picture here, carbonate sediments (gray) that are now limestone were disturbed as ancient animals made many, many burrows (orange) in different directions. The reddish-orange color comes from traces of iron in the sediments that filled the burrows after they had been dug and the animal(s) died. In addition, the sediments that filled the burrows also had a higher concentration of silica (Si) than the surrounding limestone. The different compositions now cause the two types of rock to stand out from each other and clearly show the burrowing that took place millions of years ago.



Geology workshop

The geology of the UAE and northern Oman is, as geologists like to remind us, some of the most spectacular in the world.

Not far from Hatta, for example, is one of the very few places on earth where you can see the earth's mantle and crust in contact! The interface, known as The Moho, is the sort of thing that makes a geologist's knees weak and heart flutter!

In recent years, the Al Ain chapter has had the very good fortune to have two geologists from UAE University to help explain some of the geology to members. Steve Ehrenberg – who will be visiting Al Ain later this year – donated a rock collection to the chapter (the collection is kept in the work room at the Al Ain English Speaking School) before his departure two years ago. Last season, Ben Jordan of the UAEU geology department released his geology guidebook – copies available in the chapter's library – and shared the unpublished geology field trip book with the chapter.

The generosity of these two individuals is in the tradition established by Nick Saines, a geologist based in Al Buraimi many years ago and the chapter's legendary field trip leader. Among the many things to Nick's credit – including the naming of the Swiss Mountain – was the geology course he organized.

The plan is to bring the course out of retirement, revise it as necessary, and offer an evening workshop on geology at the Al Ain English Speaking School in January. This will be followed by a field trip to show some of the remarkable features in the field.

The chapter's library also includes at least four field trips organized by geologists over the years, the oldest dating back to 1978. The chapter hopes to be able to stage one or more of these trips this season. In addition, the chapter will select one or two of the field trips from Ben Jordan's guide book and offer another opportunity to see some of the geological highlights of the district to members.

There are many articles relating to geology on the chapter's website <<http://www.enhg.org>>, with a list of all the articles from the old Bulletin available at <<http://www.enhg.org/bulletin/geology.htm>>. Among the articles listed there is 'Journey to the Center of the Earth' by Gary Feulner <http://www.enhg.org/bulletin/b41/41_11.htm>. There is also a collection of articles on geology published in back issues of Tribulus. If you visit the ENHG website home page, scroll down and use the search function, typing in the word "geology". You will get a long list of articles, including those from Tribulus.

Brien Holmes

Obituary – Jim Crawford

We were saddened to hear of the demise of Jim Crawford on 3rd October, as a result of cancer. Jim was Headmaster of Al Ain English Speaking School until 2 years ago, and was very supportive of the EHNG, resulting in the donation of the workroom to the Al Ain Chapter.

Our commiserations to his widow and family.

Jim will be sadly missed.



Jim Crawford is presented with a copy of Wildflowers of the UAE for the AAESS Library by Brien Holmes and the ENHG Committee in appreciation of the use of space at the Al Ain English Speaking School.

L-R: Mike Gillett, Geoff Sanderson, Bill Jones, Jerry Buzzzell, Helen Dumont, Will Moore, Jim Crawford, Frank Goetsche, Brien Holmes, Murphy Turner, Bob Reimer [Photo 21 October, 2003 by Brigitte Howarth]

Dates for your diary

November 23 - Triple Crescent hike 1

November 27 AGM – Intercontinental Hotel, 7.30 for 8.00 pm.

December 4 George Anderson "The International Crane Association"

December 11 - Committee meeting (note changed date)

December 14 – Triple Crescent hike 2

December? - Wadi weekend

December 24 – Xmas Eve in the Desert

December 28 – Triple Crescent Hike 3

January – Geology Workshop and Field trip

January or February - RAK trip or Nizwa trip

28 February – 1 March - Inter Emirates weekend (organized by Abu Dhabi chapter)
to be held in the Western Region of Abu Dhabi

March – Music Festival

May 27 - Photography competition