



## Emirates Natural History Group Al Ain Chapter Newsletter February 2008

### ENHG Al Ain Chapter Committee

**Your Committee takes this opportunity to belatedly wish you all the very best for a happy, healthy, safe 2008**

**Chair:** Brien Holmes; **Vice Chair** Brigitte Howarth; **Treasurer:** Chris Henry; **Secretary:** Marion Campey; **Membership:** Marion Campey; **Photography:** Bob Reimer; **Environment:** Michelle MacLean; **Newsletter:** Margaret Lambert; **Library:** Amer Abu Kuhail; **Flora:** Marion Campey and Martha Coetzee; **Fauna (Insects):** Brigitte Howarth **Fauna (Birds):** vacant

Visit the webpage at <http://www.enhg.org/index.htm> or contact us at [enhg@yahoo.com](mailto:enhg@yahoo.com) (all Al Ain chapter members)

### Upcoming Events

#### Inter Emirates Weekend

29<sup>th</sup> Feb – 1<sup>st</sup> March 2008

A reminder that one of the highlights of each season, the Inter Emirates Weekend, is fast approaching. The event is hosted by the Abu Dhabi chapter this year and the base of operations will be the Mafraq Hotel (in Mafraq, a few kilometers north of the Al Ain -- Abu Dhabi highway just past Bani Yas).

Please contact the hotel (details below) for dinner and room reservations. When calling the hotel, please remind them that you are attending the IEW as part of the event organized by the Abu Dhabi chapter of the Emirates Natural History Group. The deadline for reserving rooms at the "special rate" at the Mafraq Hotel is Tuesday, 12 February - all remaining rooms which have been on hold with "special rates" will be cancelled on the morning of 13 February. After the 13th, members will need to make their arrangements with the hotel if rooms are available. FYI : Double Rooms will increase from AED 638.00 net including Buffet Breakfast (our special rate) to AED 955.00 excluding breakfast and Single Rooms will increase from AED 580.00 net to 850.00 excluding breakfast!

The cancellation policy of reserved rooms for the ENHG "special room rates" remains the same: rooms cancelled after 15 Feb. = 1 night full charge and rooms cancelled after 20 Feb. = 2 nights full charge.

An accurate number of diners for Friday night's dinner is needed before Friday, 22 February. Mafraq requires a week in advance notice of all IEW dinner guests. They want to ensure ample food is provided for all (a selection of vegetarian dishes will be included).

The Friday International Buffet - costs AED 99 + 10%/person and service charge and 6% tourism fee, includes the Mineral Water and boxed Juices/Soft Drinks, compliments of the Mafraq Hotel. Children 5-12 yrs of age will be a 50% charge, 0-5 yrs. free. To book the dinner please let [Brien Holmes](#) know by 21st February.

Abu Dhabi NHG has just published their [Focus newsletter for January 2008](#) containing the most recent information about the schedule for this year's Inter-Emirates Weekend on page 8. There are also some interesting articles including a report on one of the trips that will be offered on the IEW.

The latest rundown:

**Dates:** 28 February – 01 March 2008

**Venue:** Mafraq Hotel - located near Bani Yas on the Al Ain -- Abu Dhabi highway

**Rate** per night (incl. breakfast, not dinner) 638 Dhs – Double Room 580 Dhs – Single Room

**Phone number:** 2-582-2666

**Please note:** whether you are staying in the hotel or not you should book a buffet dinner. The cost is 99AED & tax.

**Provisional Program:**

- Elephant tracks–full day (Mark Beech, Drew Gardner)
- Liwa Dunes tour–full day (Andrew Bean, Dick Hornby)

- Sand ecology, near Sheikh's Palace on Hameem Rd.–half day (Allestree F.)
- Birding, site to be advised – half day (Andrew Twyman)
- Plant identification near hotel (Allestree Fisher)
- Saltbushes–short walk near hotel (Dr. Shahina Ghazanfar)
- Light-trapping insects near hotel—evening (Brigitte Howarth)
- Star-gazing—evening, after dinner (leader to be advised).

**Workshops:**

- GPS Workshop
- Taxonomy / Plant identification with Dr. Shahina Ghazanfar, professional botanist from Kew Gardens & author of The Flora of Oman Vols 1 and 2.
- Work under the microscope
- Herbarium and photography for children.

**Competitions:**

- Photo competitions for the young and old.
- Painting / drawing for children

One of the highlights of the weekend is the presentation of the Bish Brown and Sh. Mubarak awards which takes place at the dinner Friday evening.

If you have any questions, you can write to Allestree Fisher [afisher@hct.ac.ae](mailto:afisher@hct.ac.ae).

## **First ever Species Survival Commission Chairs' Meeting, Al Ain, February 11-16 2008**

This week, Al Ain is hosting the first ever meeting of the IUCN's Species Survival Commission chairs. The IUCN (World Conservation Union) is the keeper of the well know Red List of Threatened Species. While birds and mammals (especially large mammals) dominate the IUCN's attention, they also have specialists groups for invertebrates. We are fortunate to have confirmed as our guest speakers this week, two of the invertebrate species chairs, Dr. Vincent Kalkman (Dragonflies) and Dr. Sacha Spector (Scarab beetles). Dr. Vincent Kalkman is with Naturalis, the Netherlands National Museum of Natural History and also leads the dragonfly section of the European Invertebrate Survey. He will discuss the recent changes in Dutch insect fauna. Dr. Sacha Spector is the manager of the Intertebrate Conservation program of the Center for Biodiversity and Conservation at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. He has founded ScarabNet, the Scarabaeinae Research Network, as an online vehicle for exchange of information in the study of dung beetles. We may also have other conference attendees at our meeting, possibly discussing their work as well.

Following is from the November IUCN e-Bulletin:

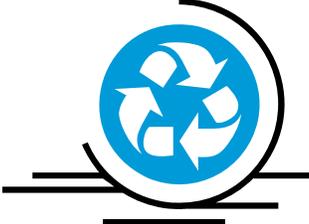
### **First ever Species Survival Commission Chairs' Meeting, Al Ain, February 2008**

For the first time ever, the SSC Specialist Group Chairs and the stand-alone Red List Authority Focal Points will meet in Al Ain, United Arab Emirates in February 2008. The IUCN Director General, various senior IUCN Programme Heads, Commission Chairs and Regional Directors will also be at this meeting, demonstrating the important focus on strengthening the internal solidarity of purpose while building relationships across the different parts of IUCN. It will be an occasion for the Chairs to discuss emerging and cross-cutting conservation issues such as the impacts of global climate change, invasive alien species, wildlife health, and the impacts of industry; and forge lasting linkages between their groups to tackle these and other challenges. The Species Programme staff will support the SSC Chairs' Office in making this first ever meeting an effective and productive session.

## **February 15th / 16th**

Next weekend, we hope to announce a walk at the Jahili Park in downtown Al Ain. I am waiting for confirmation for the times the Jahili Fort is open on Friday or Saturday. As long-time residents of Al Ain know, the park has been renovated dramatically and the fort made much more accessible. The fountains, playgrounds, gardens and lighting of the park itself are worth a visit. I hope to have someone along who can help to identify the plants! If you are looking for something to do around sunset some evening, I recommend a visit to the park.

You may have noticed that fences around some of the Al Ain's parks have been removed, making them more inviting. The large park in Towayya is one that is now much easier to visit and accessible without having to pass through a visitors' gate.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ENHG Clean-up</b></p> <p>We got through the EEG clean-up (see below). Now we are organising our own! February is a good month as the weather is still cool, so we have decided on <b>22<sup>nd</sup> Feb</b> and to work with the Omani authorities to clean up Wadi Jazeera.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Music Festival</b></p> <p>The annual Music Festival is just four weeks away with organization of the event being passed from the volunteers of the Abu Dhabi Concert Committee to a professional event organizer; our participation remains unclear at the moment.</p> <p>The Festival will be held over two weekends, <b>7 &amp; 8 March, and 14 &amp; 15 March</b>, with events during the week.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Watch emails for additional information.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Nizwa and Ras Al Khaimah weekends</b></p> <p>Each winter/spring, we organize a weekend visit to Ras al Khaimah and Nizwa;</p> <p>The annual trip to Nizwa will be on either March 20-22, or in April.</p> <p>RAK will be a one nighter, in April or May</p> <p>Details are still being worked out – watch for emails, the March newsletter, and our general meetings.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>5th Al Ain Symposium - 3rd/4th April 2008</b></p> <p>After last year's gap, the Zayed Centre for Heritage and History, part of the Emirates Heritage Club, is once again organising the <b>Annual Symposium on Recent Archaeological Discoveries in the United Arab Emirates</b>. It will be held, as usual, in Al Ain, and this year's dates are Thursday 3rd April and Friday 4th April, beginning on Thursday afternoon and ending around Friday lunchtime.</p> <p>The Zayed Centre for Heritage and History (Dr. Hassan Naboodah) will be sending out official invitations to all local departments, as well as relevant Ministries &amp; Embassies, but I wanted to advise you informally first, so that you could plan your participation. They would be pleased to have participants from the three Natural History Groups, as in previous years. Please note, though, that accommodation will NOT necessarily be provided for them</p> <p>The Proceedings of the 2004 Symposium have now finally gone to press and hopefully the printers will be able to deliver before April! The papers of the 2005 Symposium are now being brought together.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Peter Hellyer</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Photography Competition May 2007</b></p> <p>We will be holding our annual competition in May, 2008 with entries being due at our first general meeting of that month (May 13) with the exhibition and People's Choice judging at the second meeting (May 27). Each member may enter up to eight photographs taken in the UAE or Oman.</p> <p>This year's special category will be "<b>Give it a go, Mate!</b>" - especially for those who have never entered this competition before. There will also be new category for those who are 16 or under on the date of competition closure. The only rule is that entries must fit the natural history theme.</p> <p>Full details can be found at our web site at <a href="http://www.enhg.org/alain/photocomp.htm">http://www.enhg.org/alain/photocomp.htm</a>.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Triple Crescent</b></p> <p>Thanks to Bill, the Triple Crescent events have been staged over the Christmas period and Bill is now considering offering those who missed one or more of the events an opportunity to complete the challenge.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rob Reid's Garden</b></p> <p>You all know Rob – he and Karen have been on many field trips and Rob is an enthusiastic plant collector. At their home in Falaj Hazza, Rob has planted specimens of many of the native desert plants. We hope to be able to offer a visit to the collection in the near future . . . when Rob has a free weekend!!!</p>

# What We've Been Up To:

## 12/12 Clean Up UAE Day

ENHG participated in another successful 12/12 clean-up; we were well represented by Treva, Chris, Humairah, Brigitte, Amer, Mathew and myself. (I hope I haven't left anyone off the list - apologies if I have). There were more than 600 volunteers (can't say kids, as many were adults, from the UAEU and HCT). Unlike last year when the heavens opened, this year, the sun shone in all its glory. The students filled a whole orange skip with garbage that they had collected. Amer took photos, check out the link below.

<http://someone1986.blogspot.com/2007/12/clean-up-uae-al-ain-12122007.html>

## Triple Crescent Hikes

14.12.07

On Friday, Bill lead those who were ready for the second leg of the Ibrahim Zakhour Triple Crescent to the Swiss Mountains.

28.12.07

The third leg - Jebal Sumaini – was a long day's hike requiring plenty of food and drink. Singly it can be done in 6 hours but with a group it will probably be 7-8 hours.

## “Architects Tour” Around Al Ain (Friday 14.12.07)

An interesting drive around Al Ain to see some of the architecture that has been restored or is in the process of being restored. Known as 'the architects' tour' event, the drive began at the Hili Archaeological Park and ended at the Eastern Fort adjacent to the National Museum. The tour was organized for a visit to Al Ain by architects who study the traditional and significant architecture of the UAE. We looked at the 'grand tomb' in the park (a modest admission fee) and then moved on to the Hili Oasis to view the 'twin towers' guarding one approach to the oasis. Inside the oasis, we stopped by the site where staff from the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage are restoring a building and then exited the oasis near the large round tower guarding another entrance to the oasis. We moved on to the Qatara oasis where work is underway to rebuild the souq adjacent to the oasis. We looked at a few buildings in the Qatara oasis before moving on to the nearby Jimi oasis where restoration work has also been underway. As we left Jimi, we stopped by another restored tower before heading downtown to the Museum (a modest admission fee to visit the Museum and the fort). There are in excess of 60 forts, towers and fortified houses in the city and the tour was intended to provide an overview of some of the architecture. Phil Iddison completed several photographic tours of the forts and watch towers of Al Ain, summaries of which are available on our website:

<http://www.enhg.org/alain/phil/towers/towers.html>

[http://www.enhg.org/resources/articles/fallaj\\_t/fallaj\\_t.htm](http://www.enhg.org/resources/articles/fallaj_t/fallaj_t.htm)

<http://www.enhg.org/resources/articles/murraba/murraba.html>

<http://www.enhg.org/resources/articles/sultan/sultan.html>

## Khutwah (Friday 14.12.07)

We have visited Khutwah for one moonwalk this season and returned for a daytime trip this weekend. Khutwah is one of the most popular destinations in the Al Buraimi region for visitors coming from Al Ain, Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah. For ENHG members, it has been the starting point for hikes to Village One and Village Two and the site of two of our wet wadi walks, one in the Khutwah Gorge, the other the 'wet' route to Village One. We have hiked around Wadi Khabbayn on the opposite side of the gorges and the archaeological sites around Hayl al Nawafil, also on the south side of the gorges.

This weekend we split our time between the oasis and the archaeology upstream. We also visited the donkey trail linking old Khutwah with new Khutwah. Khutwah was probably the first of the string of oases along the base of the Hajar Mountains (between Wadi Jizzi an Juwaif) to be transformed from a collection of poorly tended date gardens to a collection of productive small farms supplying fresh produce to markets as far away as Dubai. As a colleague from a Parisian university noted, the Pakistani farmers renting land in Oman from Omani landowners to produce fresh lettuce, onions and radishes for consumers in Dubai (UAE) represents globalization on a level most of us can understand and appreciate.

## Khutwah (Wednesday 19.12.07)

On Wednesday, we travelled to the oasis at Khutwah to do a little mapping and recording. We visited Khutwah on the weekend (see previous article) and were shocked to see the development that has taken place. Over the past few years, some of the oasis has been cleared to make room for gardens producing fresh produce sold as far away as Dubai. The road from new Khutwah to the original community was paved, and street lights were installed. More development has taken place in the past two weeks. The track from the mosque parking lot to the original town square is now paved with stone and the town square covered with paving stones. The clock has a new home, as well. The most startling development has been the construction of a road through the oasis, past the copper smelting squares, alongside the falaj all the way to Sultan's oasis.

## Moonwalk (Friday 18 01.08)

Cancelled due to the cold weather!!!!



## Subaitha (Thursday 20.12.07)

"Cheers!" said Jerry Buzzell, as he launched a wadi walk with a dozen or so hikers through one of his favorite oases, Subaitha. Jerry was last there in September, and we returned to the oasis on Thursday, December 20, for a mid-day, holiday hike.

It was all he promised: a lush oasis, an old village, adobe houses, a watchtower, a deep gorge, an active falaj hugging the cliff-side, with remnants of the ancient falaj crumbling beside the new, and several swimmable holes.

Most surprising: the promised donkey was hobbled and tethered on a narrow edge of a cliff, by the falaj near his shed. Yes, the water was cool in the deep pools, and I joined the Stryker youth in highest one.

The ENHG apparently visited Subaitha in April 2005, with hikers calling the hike memorable for the large variety of butterflies encountered en route. These included not just the common species like the Plain Tiger, Lime, Desert White, African Three-Ring, Blue Pansy and Painted Lady, but also the rare and elusive Baluchi Ringlet. A notable beetle found on the oleander bushes was the large jewel beetle, *Julodis fimbriata*.

This time, among the species, we encountered dragonflies, including a large blue fluttering over the pools.

Jerry suggests checking out an updated view of Subaitha on Google Earth, and you can look at it from above by entering 24.265445, 56.160858, which should take you to the oasis.

A fellow hiker, who left the snow and ice in Romania to come here, has already talked about the Thursday visit to the Wadi Subatha at

<http://jidor.blogspot.com/2007/12/subaitha-oasis.html> or <http://www.photoblog.com/janec/2007/09/21/subaitha-oasis.html>. Check out her photos. There are more photos from a September hike at the oasis at the blog,

<http://www.photoblog.com/janec/2007/09/21/subaitha-oasis.html>.

Beverly Merrick



Starting falaj



Subaitha Villager



Bev in upper pool



Palm silhouette



Tethered donkey on cliff

Photos: Bev Merrick

## Hanging Gardens (Friday 04.01.08)

Last weekend, we went to the hanging gardens and it was a great time to visit. There were lots of people over there, and we were 7 of us. This time, we saw two vultures and one eagle, also lots and lots of pitted beetles, and surprise surprise!!!, we saw an Omani saw-scaled viper (*Echis omanensis*) snake!!!! And we saw a couple of donkeys over there. Then we went to have a look at the old houses and the graves.

Amer abu Kuhail

## Hamassa (Fri 11.01.08)

We took advantage of the (relatively) warm afternoon temperatures and visited the abandoned houses and shops of Hamassa in Al Buraimi this weekend. This collection of mud-brick buildings has been the subject for photographers for many years. We also visited the Hamassa oasis, one of two in Al Buraimi. Those of you who have taken one of Amer's trips around the Jimi or Al Ain Oases will be interested in the condition of the Hamassa Oasis where water resources are scarce.

*See also Al Buraimi trip - below*

## Rainbow Ridge (Friday 18.01.08)

Rainbow Ridge (not it's real name, but you'll understand its relevance if you come on the hike!) begins with a steady incline over a limestone escarpment opposite Jebel Qatar. Along the whole escarpment and particularly at the far end, a number of large gastropod and bivalve fossils can be seen. Once past the fossil section, you 'drop off' the limestone to walk along a thin ridge of shale (with the added interest of a few slippery ups and downs) which has spectacular views of Al Ain/Buraimi on one side and the region beyond Mahdah on the other. From here, you descend into a small wadi leading into a large, open valley and then it's back up another mountain and down an adjoining escarpment.

There is a small herd of feral donkeys in the area and we will see signs of the donkeys and, with luck, will see some members of the herd, as well. Other highlights include a little archaeology and bird watching (an Egyptian vulture followed us on a reconnaissance trip recently).

Rainbow Ridge hike takes between 4-5 hours and a good level of fitness is required, as well as a head for heights and steady feet.

Jodie Healy

## Arabian Gulf – Coral and Artificial Reefs (Tuesday 15.01.08)

On Tuesday January 8<sup>th</sup> our guest speaker for the first general meeting of the year was John Burt (Marine Ecologist). John is a lecturer at Zayed University (Dubai) where he teaches biology and environmental sciences. He is currently working on his PhD which focuses on processes affecting the colonization and development of marine communities. In Dubai, his work has focused on fish and coral communities on natural reefs in Jebel Ali, as well as on man-made breakwaters throughout the emirate.

His talk to our group covered general marine ecology, recovery of corals in Dubai after the 1998 El Nino driven bleaching event, a comparison of coral and fish communities on natural and artificial reefs in Dubai, and a synopsis of other ongoing research on marine systems in Dubai.

He talked about the temperatures in the Arabian Gulf ranging from 18 to 37 degrees and the high salinity of the water 45 parts per 1000. There are 86 species of reef fish in the Dubai area.

The threats to the coral reefs in the Dubai area are global warming; increasing amounts of CO<sub>2</sub>; ocean acidification and increasing sea temperatures. The corals often bleach during periods of high temperatures such as the 1998 El Nino.

The artificial reefs or breakwaters have been promoted as a means to enhance the fisheries in the UAE. However, findings have shown that the fish species have become less diverse with dominant species populating the breakwaters.



Photos Beverly Merrick

### Amer's photography (Tuesday 22.01.08)

There can only be a handful of ENHG Al Ain members who have not bumped into Amer during the past couple of years . . . he has been busy in just about every aspect of the chapter's life! Amer has been the chapter's librarian for some time, has led field trips, is usually busy selling books or memberships at general meetings, and has documented most of our field trips with his photography, which he shares on his blog. Some of our members will be aware that Amer's photographic talents have been recognized beyond the chapter; he has entered some of his work in various photographic competitions and has been recognized for his natural talent with a camera. Last autumn, Amer shared some of his photos with members of the Abu Dhabi chapter and we felt it was time for him to show some of his personal favorites with members of the Al Ain chapter.

### Hatta (Fri 25.01.08)

We took the old mountain road to Hatta, but only proceeding about half the distance to Hatta, stopping near the community of Ray (or Fay -- the roadside signs offer both names in English). We visited a family that we met many years ago and visited their original home not far up the nearby wadi.

### Kahl (Friday 01.02.08)

Members were invited for another visit to the area around Kahl in search of a regular field trip. The area where we will spend most of our time has been used for camping, judging by the litter and campsites observed. However, much of it is untouched, save for a number of worn tracks. There is some sand driving involved but it is not difficult – maybe just a little challenging for a first timer in the sand but it is likely as good a place as any to get your feet wet!

## Al Buraimi Trip

In 1952 the Saudis occupied part of Buraimi. The question of sovereignty eventually went to an international arbitration panel in Geneva. When the talks collapsed in 1955, the British and the Al Nayan family took matters into their own hands. A Bedouin force led by Sheikh Zayed, who was then the Governor of Abu Dhabi's portion of the Oasis, along with the Trucial Oman Scouts, who were commanded by the British soldiers, drove the Saudis out of Buraimi. The current Abu Dhabi Oman border was demarcated in 1966. Saudi Arabia formally dropped its claim to the area in 1974.

The Buraimi oasis has probably been inhabited longer than any other part of present day UAE. The country's oldest artifacts are potsheds from the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC.

The Al Khandaq Fort is open to the public Saturday through Wednesday from 8- 6pm. One distinctive feature of the forts in Oman is the rounded tops in contrast to the pointed tops on the UAE forts. This is a result of the Portuguese influence.

The area was known for its slave trading with many being brought from Saudi Arabia against their will.

The Al Shamsi family was one of the main families that inhabited the Buraimi area. While we were visiting a young man by the name of Ahmad Rashid Mohammed Al Shamsi was there looking around. He pointed out to the group the house that was his Father's home and the area where his Grandfather has his shop in the souk area.

Sheila McDonald

## Consultancy re Hafeet

**History:** Mark Beech had given me a heads up a few weeks ago about a team of consultants coming to Al Ain to work on a plan to develop a park -- or something -- for the area on the east side of Hafit (Mezyad). One of the team members -- Mark -- contacted me and I let most of you know that I hoped you could join a field trip with Mark and his team members once they arrived.

I knew they were going to be staying at the Intercon and that Mark (consultant) wanted to see us on the Wednesday . . . but there was no confirmation until about 7:30 pm Wednesday . . . which I guessed was too late to notify you all.

I met with them at the hotel for a couple of hours on the Wednesday evening and gave them copies of the French report from the early 80's and another consultant report that I thought they might be interested in. (I subsequently gave them a copy of the saline plants book and a DVD with copies of the 1968 aerial photos that covered the Hafit area.)

On the Wednesday evening, Mark and I arranged for a trip on Friday afternoon which is why I set up the weekend trips as I did. However, there was no confirmation from Mark on Thursday and I learned late Thursday evening that he and his team would not be available Friday afternoon and could we do something Saturday morning. By this time, I was getting sceptical about the consulting team's scheduling . . . and plans for Saturday morning were, to say the least, vague.

Saturday morning I went to the Hotel at 9 am and realized the team was not ready. I also realized they had flown in a staff member from Kew in the UK (for plants) and had two staff members from EAD (Environment Agency Abu Dhabi) to show them some sites on the Al Ain - Abu Dhabi highway Saturday morning. I concluded that there was no much point in my hanging around so I left the team in the hands of the folks from EAD.

I learned on the Wednesday evening that some members of the team had already been in Al Ain twice since last summer. It was also apparent they had not been well briefed. For example, though they had spent two trips to the UAE surveying the site, they were visibly shocked when I suggested the subject land was severely degraded. I also learned that they had no knowledge of Stanley's project. (I had Mark and Stanley exchange phone numbers but Mark did not make any contact with him, I gather. I arranged for Stanley and Mark to get one another's email addresses so they can explain their projects to one another.)

The team that was here this weekend also included an expert from the US who was here to advise on ways to regenerate desert environment on the subject site. If you have driven around the area, you know there is hardly a patch that has not been degraded by farming, oil exploration, well drilling, and all the other activities that have been going on there for the past 40 or 50 years. (The 1968 photos do provide a very good baseline survey of the plants and geology.)

There are some bright points: they are very opposed to the ski slope project, they are prepared to recommend that any development include cooperation with Omani officials, they understand the importance of a wildlife corridor to conserve the tahr. I am hopeful Dave and Jeff, and anyone else they may have met at National Drilling would provide the necessary background on the water situation.

All in all a very frustrating week. Thank you to Ken and Stanley, and Dave and Jeff for being prepared to meet with the consultants. Thank you to all who volunteered to help with vehicles.

Brien Holmes

# Bits 'n' Pieces

## Al Ain Group in the newspaper

This is an Arabic article about our group in one of the local official newspaper (Al Itihad newspaper).

It was published on 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb., they talked about us, how we started our group, what kind of events we do, what kind of people we are, what our interest are , who we are, what we do, what we collect, what we study , where we go , etc etc.

<http://www.alittihad.ae/details.php?id=5309>

## Camel Racing

We are looking for reliable information about camel racing dates. Informal racing takes place at just about every track in the country each weekend (Thursday, Friday mornings at 7 am or earlier). Formal racing dates are organized by the different camel racing authorities, with access to some events limited. For example, there will be a local meet at the new track at the end of the Prisunic road. (From the Diwan roundabout, drive through the Jimi roundabout, past Al Ahlia/Prisunic/La Brioche, under the underpass, through the next two roundabouts -- Ameriya and the large unfinished home near the ring road -- and into the dunes on the paved road; continue over a few dune ridges and, immediately after a pair of speed bumps, you will see the track. There is a paved road around the track.)

## Moon phase software

There are many programs available on the Internet with information about the moon cycle. One that I recommend is Moonphase.

The latest version, 3.1, is available at <http://www.tingan.com/index.asp?top=top&left=meny&right=space&main=w3>. This is a free program offered by Henrik Tingstrom <http://www.tingan.com/index.asp> with two versions available, one for the northern hemisphere and one for the southern hemisphere. (Our Australian friends insist the moon looks 'different' from the big island.) You don't need to know the longitude and latitude for any location on the earth; use the crosshairs to pinpoint your location. Once you have selected the viewing location, you will learn the daily details for the moon including rise, set, transit, percentage illuminated and distance from earth. Sunrise and sunset times are also posted. There is also a calendar so you can project these times forward and backward; check out the moon on your birth day!

## Geminid Meteor Shower December 2007

According to some who watch the night sky for exciting celestial events, the December meteor showers associated with the constellation Gemini are some of the most spectacular, better than the Perseids of August. As one enthusiast noted: "If you have not seen a mighty Geminid fireball arcing gracefully across an expanse of sky, then you have not seen a meteor."

<http://www.space.com/spacewatch/071207-ns-geminids.html>

The shower should be especially good this year as it falls at a time of the month when there is no moonlight.

## Bird News

Following on from December's crane talk, you might be interested in the following headline:

***"Whooping cranes sighted in record numbers"***

Scientists optimistic after 262 arrive at Aransas reserve in Texas, with four more in transit!

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20071216.wcranes16/EmailBNStory/Science/>

## Geology with Ben Jordan (formerly UAEU)

Salt may be solid, but it is soft. Layers of salt can flow similar to softened wax. It is thought that at times in the geologic past the Gulf was dry, with very high evaporation rates. The high evaporation rates caused the build up vast layers of salt that formed as any water flowing into the basin, which is now filled by seawater, evaporated and precipitated salts. The layers of salt thus formed were subsequently buried by other sediments. The weight and density of these newer sediments was greater than that of the salt. As they pressed down on the salt it flowed upward in a diapir, which looks like an upside-down raindrop. The process is slow, but eventually the rising diapir lifts the layers above it into a dome that, in the case of this image, has risen out of the water to form an island. Oil is often associated with these salt dome structures, because it too rises. As it does it becomes trapped beneath the edges of the salt diapir. The salt itself is not directly exposed to the Gulf waters or it would dissolve, but it underlies the sediments that it has caused to dome upward and make the island.



Salt Dome, Sir Bu Nuayr Island, UAE

## Plant of the month

### ASCLEPIADACEAE Milkweed Family

*Carulluma arabica* N.E.Br.

**Syn.** *C. aucheri* (Decne) N.E.Br.

**Arabic name :** khanasoor (Khansur), ghalti, dhakboos, diji (dhi')

At first sight this plant resembles a cactus but closer inspection reveals the lack of sharp spines or prickles. Stems are chunky and four sided with crenellated edges. Note the small, petalled maroon flowers forming on the tips. These have a carrion smell to attract flies as pollinators. This perennial can be found among rocks in the Hajar Mountains at above 200m. In spring the edible stems are collected and sold for medicinal use. Keep an eye out for them when you next visit the old vegetable souq. Traditionally the plant is pounded to make tea for liver ailments and to also to treat high blood pressure.

Reference : *The Comprehensive Guide to Wildflowers of the United Arab Emirates* by Marijke Jongbloed.



## Bird's Immigration and wildlife officer In Lancashire– UK

In Monday 28 January 2008, I start my daily walk from my resident Hall to the University of Central Lancashire. It was nice morning, and white brown flower shape clouds scattered in the bright blue colored sky. The people walking in street as usual in any place, early morning to their work and dissolve gradually in their daily life affairs. The air condensation from the people hot breath can be noticed spontaneously which reflected how it's starting to be cold, mostly they wear dark black clothes to absorb light head for extra warm. After crossing the street, I notice unusual thing in the sky, I did not realized what it's in the first seconds, until my mind connected to an old cartoon film which we used to watch in our childhood in the 80s, about how birds migrate. It was a fascinating and magical look how all these birds arranged and lined themselves without a help of a traffic or wild life officer, in more that 1 km diameter of arrow head and flying to the south, I thought later I need to know it from my graduate biological course of bird immigration and behavior. The Birds disappear in less than a minute from the sight.

Its was also a nice coincident that Monday is the weekly lecture for the Preston society of bird watching and Natural history which start 7:30 pm in Penwortham. This day was had PC Duncan Thomas, a wildlife officer from the Lancashire Constabulary, who gave us an introductory talk about the role of the wild life officer and what his duties. The officer here in contrast will not interfere with the life of the wild life or organize there life by any kind of regulation, but he will regulate and the life of human in relation to wild life law, in a preventive and enforcement approach.

In addition he raised important issue regarding how wild life enforcement can be organized, in such a society of UK which is full of regulations and rules in the different aspect of the people life. Duncan Lecture was started by giving a short talk about himself and the positions which he handles and take over either in Lancashire Constabulary or in the international level in Peace keeping missions. Wild life need great friend to be protected in insure its flourishing he said and the Law enforcement help as they can be.

Wild life officer is government employee attached to the local police. His role can be summarized in 3 main points which are, wild life crime, intelligent, and coordination. The wild life officer will handle an allegation of wild life crime in the area of his coverage, in our case is the county of Lancashire, such as specific animal and bird hunting, disturbing, or un legitimate use. Intelligent is also play an important role in wild life protection, which concentrate in handling accusation, complains, and incident reporting from the public about wild life crimes. The first stage in handling the intelligent issue the officer needs to divide the issue to levels and arrange them according to the important and relative to the issue of the wild life laws. The third role of the wild life officer is the coordination between the different agencies (government and non-government) which is connected to wild life laws, In order organize the efforts, increase understanding and cooperation, to reach by the accuse to the magistrate court. The wild life cases which he present was about illegal hunting of deer, Salmon fish, and several related subjects. On the other hand certain bird species eggs stealing are also prohibit by the law.

In a nice step to create more awareness, responsibility and care about the wild life habitat, bats are protect by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Conservation Regulations 1994, its prohibit to kill, sell or destroy bats roost, which is a new thing to know, I remember that I noticed one bat in one of the old fort in Mahada, that rise a question how many bats we have in that area for example, and are they declining as its happening in many part of the world, such in UK? a question

need a researching minds to open it. In UK constructors and developers are requested to report any wild animal in their activity area such as bats in order to get a professional advice, taking in account that bat return to the same roost in the year after, which requests a continuous protection of the place.

The job of wild life enforcement is important to keep these creatures protect from the covetous human, but it's generally a public responsibility. Its also rise the important of including of wild life protection agenda within the public school, university and police education institute to extend the awareness about wild life protection and respecting in relevant to the law regarding them. The wild life office which took different forms in different countries, depending on the law, the area condition, and the culture of the people.

Related web sites:

- <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/>
- <http://www.limacharlie.org/index.php?id=1371>
- <http://www.lancswt.org.uk/Learning%20&%20Discovery/wildlifeandthelaw.htm>
- <http://www.gmp.police.uk/mainsite/pages/Wildlifecrime.htm>
- <http://www.prestonsociety.co.uk/>

Khudooma Al Neimi



Dates for your diary	Links
<p><b>Feb 29 – March 1</b> - Inter Emirates Weekend</p> <p><b>March</b> – Music Festival 7 &amp; 8 and 14 &amp; 15 March</p> <p><b>March or April</b> - Nizwa weekend</p> <p><b>April or May</b> – Ras Al Khaimah trip</p> <p><b>May 13</b> – Photography contest entries due!!</p> <p><b>May 27</b> – Photography competition</p>	<p><b>Emirates Environment Group newsletter:</b>  <a href="#">february_newsletter_fin.pdf [-547K]</a></p> <p><b>Dragonflies!!!!</b>  <a href="#">IUCN Odonata Specialist Group</a></p> <p><b>Wildlife Middle East News:</b>  <a href="http://www.wmenews.com">www.wmenews.com</a></p> <p><b>Astronomy Picture Of the Day</b> has assembled what they consider the 12 best pics from 2007 on the one website.  <a href="http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/apoys2007.html">http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/apoys2007.html</a></p>