



# Emirates Natural History Group Al Ain Chapter Newsletter 2009/02

The winter season finishes with some special events including the Nizwa weekend, the Fossil Valley flora and fauna survey, the Inter Emirates Weekend in Khor Fakkan and, of course, more walks, hikes and interesting general meetings.

## ENHG Al Ain Chapter Committee

### Committee members:

**Chair:** Brien Holmes; **Vice Chair** Brigitte Howarth; **Treasurer:** Simon Wall; **Secretary:** Saima Tariq Khan; **Membership:** Amer Abu Kuhail; **Photography:** Bob Reimer; **Newsletter:** Roland Ochmann; **Library:** Amer Abu Kuhail/ Marybeth Gaudette; **Flora:** Martha Coetzee; **Fauna (Insects):** Brigitte Howarth; **Fauna (Birds):** vacant; **Environment:** Jodie Healy

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)

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## Upcoming Events

March 27-29: Inter Emirates Weekend (March 28/29) Khor Fakkan (more information see below)

### Hikes

We will continue with weekend hikes and walks at nearby destinations, either in Oman or in the Emirates.

A special experience is always the Full-Moon-walk. If you've never taken part, you've missed something special! Please watch out for emails for details.

**Hint:** Please read these hike-related mails carefully in order to be well prepared for the hikes (equipment, shoes, severity, etc.) also to get the right time and place to meet.

## Thuraya Satellite Phones

### Reminder

We have 2 Thuraya telephones. The numbers are **0088-216-2150- 2400** for Phone One and **0088-216-5552-1121** for Phone Two.

We recommend that you add these numbers to your mobile phones and lists of important phone numbers.

One or both phones will be taken on each field trip and will be turned on for the duration of each trip.

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## General Meetings

The general meetings are held on the second and fourth Tuesday at Al Ain InterContinental Resort hotel at 19:30. Watch out for ENHG email for themes.

Upcoming meetings:

**March 10 TBA**

**March 24 TBA**

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## Committee

Committee meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month at the Al Ain English Speaking School. Everyone is welcome to participate! We are always looking for people to join our discussions and help deliver events.

The next Committee meeting will be Tuesday 03 March at 7:30 pm.

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## Photography Competition season 2008/2009

Reminder: You have time until May 12 to submit your pictures for the competition.

For details about rules and regulations please refer to previous newsletter or look at our webpage.

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## Find your way and meeting places in Al Ain and around.

### Waypoints.kmz

There are some members who are still unsure about some of the meeting places we routinely use to assemble for field trips and meetings. You can download the file from [http://www.enhg.org/resources/links/res\\_links.htm](http://www.enhg.org/resources/links/res_links.htm).

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## News The Library

The Library is now situated in our room at the Palace museum. Amer, Heather and Marybeth are busy putting the collection online.

If you're looking for a publication, videotape or periodical, please contact Marybeth [mary.gaudette@gmail.com](mailto:mary.gaudette@gmail.com). We try to put an inventory list on our webpage so everybody can look for something they are interested in or something special they may be looking for. Any problems? – just ask Marybeth.

We have prepared a DVD-collection of **20 DVDs** including all videos and CDs in our library. We are offering this set to members for Dh 100. These are available to ENHG members only. You can subscribe at the general meetings for your collection.

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## What Happened Previous Weeks? Walks and Hikes

Some of the recent walks and hikes:

**Friday 16/01** Daytrip: Oasis walk at Musah following last weekend's moonwalk in this lovely oasis.

**Saturday 17/01** After rain the following two nights, the wadis along the foothills of the Hajar mountains have drained the run-off. We visited a couple of wadis to inspect the impact of the rainfall.

**Friday 23/01** Dhub-valley: an excursion to a valley north of Al Ain where in previous years some dhub population (big lizards) has been observed. Unfortunately the population seems to be completely disappeared obviously because the lack of greenery. We didn't see a single reptile except a tiny one. Nevertheless the participation of Salmeen and his daughter made the day remarkable.



**Saturday 24/01** The picturesque mountain oasis at A'Dahir, not far from Kabbayn. Repeat of the plant tour we did several years ago comparing our observations this year with the records of that visit with Marijke Jongbloed, author of 'Wildflowers of the UAE' <<http://www.enhg.org/field/dahir/dahir.htm>>.

We also visited the falaj system cut into the conglomerate, inspecting the first 30 or 40 meters of the tunnel which is more than 100 meters long. The tunnel is narrow, dark and wet with a robust population of mouse-tailed bats; need to be prepared to walk in shallow water if you visit the tunnel.

After inspecting the falaj, we walked down the wadi to a point beyond the mosque, then climbed the staircase up to the oasis where we continued our survey of plants.

**Friday 30/01** Triple Crescent Hike to Jebel Ghawil. The ambitious hike started early in the morning and took eight exhausted hikers on the peak to 1,160m with a beautiful view. With the completion of the Jebel Ghawil hike, this season's events for the Ibrahim Zakhour Triple Crescent challenge have come to an end. Thanks to Bill for leading each of these events and congratulations to all who participated. Certificates for those who completed all three climbs will be presented later this season.



**Friday 06/02** Walk to Khutwah oasis and behind. The picturesque Khutwah oasis was starting point to village one and village two with a lot of information from Brien about oasis life and connection paths to remote oasis which we followed like in ancient times, but without donkeys. Some goats look at us suspiciously while we're crossing their way. (photo: sundial to measure falaj system watering time)



**Saturday 07/02** Ras al Khaimah Dhow trip

We made our monthly trip to Ras al Khaimah to check on the progress of the large dhow (boom) under construction there. The outside planking is all but finished and the interior ribs are, likewise, all in place. The dhow will be launched late in 2009. We will return to visit the site again in early March. Watch for email. Progress on the dhow can be seen at <http://www.enhg.org/resources/archives/rakdhow/rakdhow.htm>

**Friday 13/02 – Saturday 14/02: Nizwa weekend** Some of the Al Ain members, joined by friends from Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah, enjoyed a weekend in Nizwa, the ancient capital of Oman.

The entire group visited the Nizwa souq Friday morning, the highlights have been the animal market, the old spice souq, the antique shops and -- for some of them -- the smoked tuna!

Friday afternoon they headed for Manah and other attractions near Nizwa.

The group split in two on Saturday, some headed for the Grand Canyon of Oman and the impressive Cliff Walk while others went with Bob for a tour of several sites between Nizwa and Ibri, including the beehive tombs at Al Ayn.



Nizwa souq



Jabal Shams



Manah ruins

**Friday 13/02** For those who could not be a part of the Nizwa weekend Brigitte offers a plant survey trip in Wadi Nayahan (behind Green Mubazarrah). Those participating followed the well-prepared guidelines and reference books to detect and specify the wadi plants and compare the appearance with formerly detected numbers.



**Friday 20/02 – Saturday 21/02: Fossil Valley weekend.** Around 30 members showed up at the chosen camp site, those who want to stay overnight set up tents and then we started the well prepared surveying of plants, found some insects, look at the geology with its fossils. Meanwhile our local friend Salmeen, with the support of his son Mohammed, prepared bread, potatoes and camel meat in traditional style (sand-oven). A light trap to attract insects (and following them also bats) and several mammal traps were set up. While we enjoyed dinner the light trap was also attracting the members to look what's going on there!



After the evening at the campfire and refreshing sleep we checked the traps in the morning. The result: two gerbils in the 20 traps set!

**Friday 27/02** Dr. Lytton Musselman <<http://www.odu.edu/~lmusselm/>> led a special field trip Friday morning to sites in and around Al Ain in search of plants that are mentioned in the Koran and the Bible. Likely stops included the Zakher Pools and Ain Al Faydah to look at the parasitic plants.

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### Meetings

Unfortunately the movie evening on 27 Jan was cancelled due to fully booked hotel facilities.

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### 10 Feb: Falcon evening

On 10 February we had a very impressive presentation of Guy and his 2 falcons. He explained us at living object the differences between original wild falcon and the bred hybrid falcon. Telling us about wild behavior, training, feeding, handling it's always astonishing to see him handle his 2 ladies (female falcons). Facts about



male (more ambitious, smaller and faster) and female (bigger, more calm and better prepared for bigger prey), today's market for falcons with prices depending on the color and the use in local families as "pet" like the western



hemisphere is doing with dogs followed by a lot of questions from the auditors. At the end everybody could touch the "ladies" and could take

advantage of holding a falcon on his own (hand).

An evening to remember.

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### 24 Feb: Plants of Oman - evening

On 24 February, Clive Winbow of Muscat joined us for a talk on plants of Oman and the UAE. Clive is the author of the latest book on plants; a few copies of his book are for sale to members. Clive also has a garden at his home in Muscat, the plants all being native to Oman. An impressive and colorful presentation of plants in the different climate regions of Oman.

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**Bits 'n' Pieces**  
**Arabic with Amer**

Next lesson of learning some Arabic words with kindly support of Amer.

| <b>English</b>         | <b>English letters</b> | <b>Arabic</b> |
|------------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| A system of irrigation | Falaj                  | فلاج          |
| Door                   | Baab                   | باب           |
| Grass                  | Hasheesh               | حشيش          |
| Lemon                  | Limoon                 | ليمون         |
| Dates                  | Balah or rotab         | بلح أو رطب    |
| Mountain               | Jabl                   | جبل           |
| Goat                   | Maez or ghanam         | ماعز أو غنم   |
| Lime                   | Loome                  | لومي          |
| Valley                 | Wadi                   | وادي          |

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## An Omani in UK

Another story of our former member Khutooma from his studies in UK, before he left to USA (wherefrom we surely receive the next stories)

### Bradford Botany Group: Ancient Woodland indicator lecture

Khudooma Al Na'imi

I moved after finishing my MSc degree in Preston city (Lancashire) to Bradford city (Yorkshire) to stay with my relative who is studying in their university. From my interest in natural histories groups, I decided to search the internet for a natural history society in Bradford. The easiest one to reach without need to travel by train or car was the Bradford Botany Group. It holds its meeting in the Richmond Building, Bradford University.

As a brief introduction, Bradford Botany Group was formed in 1983, and includes members who are interested in botany, natural conservation and other related fields. Their meeting is held at 7:14 pm, the lecture which I attended was in 14 January 2009, the speaker was Barry Wright (Yorkshire Fern Group), who presents us some information about his PhD research, the lecture has a title "Ancient Woodland Indicators in Hedgerows and Woodlands" which include surveying about these indicators species. Brian Byrne from the Bradford Botany group introduces the lecturer to us.



Woodland species is a term used in the UK which indicates plant species of trees and shrubs which was growing through generations in the same location since 1600 or before. Barry distributed to us a lists of Ancient Woodland Indicator Species, and a regional list of their growth areas (South West, Dorset, Somerset, South, South East, Lincs, Worcs, Derbs, NE Yorks, Northumb, Carmarthen, and Angus). Some of the species are *Acer campestre*, *Blechnum spicant*, *Carex digitata* and *Elymus caninus*. Barry advice in surveying is to record each plant in your walk, to avoid losing vital data about the species which are present in a certain area. It is good also to have friend with you during the surveying process for support. He used GPS in his work to produce more details maps and to reduce the time, and to extract as much information as possible in surveying plant species.



A useful web site for using geographical information system with ancient woodlands other important environment information in the UK can be found in MAGIC project (<http://www.magic.gov.uk/>) which brings environmental schemes and designations in one place. It has interactive maps.

This is my last natural history lecture to attend before I departure the UK in the 27th Jan, 2009. These meetings are useful educationally and socially which need not to be missed if they are present in the place which you are visiting.

References:

<http://www.bradfordbotanygroup.co.uk/>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient\\_woodland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_woodland)

<http://naturalengland.communisis.com/naturalenglandshop/docs/AWGI.pdf>

<http://www.magic.gov.uk/>

[http://www.countrysideinfo.co.uk/woodland\\_manage/indicatr.htm](http://www.countrysideinfo.co.uk/woodland_manage/indicatr.htm)

[http://www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/gis/gis\\_register.asp](http://www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/gis/gis_register.asp)

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## GEOLOGY with Ben Jordan (formerly UAEU)

### Dogtooth Spar Calcite, Jebel Hafit, UAE

Calcite is a mineral made from calcium carbonate (CaCO<sub>3</sub>). Limestone is also made of calcium carbonate and can be dissolved by groundwater. This gives the ground water a high concentration of calcium and releases carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) gas. When the water nears the surface it re-reacts with carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to form calcite crystals. When the crystals have plenty of space to grow (usually in a fracture or hole in the surrounding rock), they grow in the "dogtooth" shape pictured here.



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| Dates for your diary                                      | Links  |
|---|--|
| <b>March 2009</b>   | <b>9<sup>th</sup> Al Ain Classics Festival</b> with Concerts, Opera and Drama in Arabic at Jahili Fort and Municipality Theatre in March and April. More information: <a href="http://www.aacf.ae">www.aacf.ae</a> |
| 03 Committee meeting                                      |  |
| 10 General meeting  |  |
| 17 Work shop  |  |
| 24 General meeting  |  |
| 27-29 IEW Inter Emirates Weekend                          |  |
| 31 "5 <sup>th</sup> " Tuesday – watch out for information |  |
| <b>April 2009</b>   | <b>Dragonflies!!!!</b><br><a href="http://www.iucn.org/species/odonata/">IUCN Odonata Specialist Group</a>   |
| 07 Committee meeting                                      | <b>Wildlife Middle East News:</b><br><a href="http://www.wmenews.com/">www.wmenews.com</a> >   |
| 14 General meeting  | <b>Desert oasis:</b><br><a href="http://www.environmentalgraffiti.com/featured/desert-oasis/2257">http://www.environmentalgraffiti.com/featured/desert-oasis/2257</a>  |
| 21 Work shop  |  |
| 28 General meeting  | <b>Mike Gillett's contribution to our website</b><br><a href="http://www.enhg.org/alain/mike/contrib.htm">http://www.enhg.org/alain/mike/contrib.htm</a> >   |

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### Inter Emirates Weekend

Check for the latest details (hotel booking, dinner participation, dhow tour, etc.) on our website at <http://www.enhg.org/enhg/IEW2009/IEW2009.htm>