



## **Emirates Natural History Group Al Ain Chapter Newsletter 2011/III**

Hello,

Whilst the newsletter was prepared in the Spring, it is being published in the Fall, hence you can see what the ENHG did during the months leading up to the summer. This Fall will see a variety of activities, including some overnight trips so watch out on the email, and please be in touch if you would like to be involved in helping out.

Brigitte Howarth, Acting Chair

### **Dear Friends and Members**

**The sizzling summer-months lay ahead of us where most will escape to cooler countries but some will remain in the UAE where they keep cool and busy.**

**Previous weeks have seen our famous photo-exhibition in May and the traditional “end-of-season-dinner” in June along with some hikes and weekends in Oman.**

**The situation at the Buraimi border seems to stay unclear, so the easy weekend trip to nearby Oman is not always an option. The Committee is thinking about alternatives which we will publish.**

**To those who spend the summer outside the UAE, we wish you happy holidays and safe travels wherever you will go.**

**For those who missed the following email, here is notification of Brien Holmes’ resignation as ENHG Al Ain chair.**

‘It is with regret that we announce the resignation of Brien Holmes as the Chair of the Al Ain Chapter of the Emirates Natural History Group. Brien has given of himself tirelessly to the group for almost fifteen years, freely sharing his knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm for this amazing environment, and mentoring those who wished some guidance in their own explorations. The community and the group as a whole has benefitted from his wide-ranging interests, and he has had an impact on many governmental projects, as well. His accomplishments are far too many to list here, but reading the tribute written when he was given a lifetime membership in the group (<http://www.enhg.org/alain/lifetime/brien.htm>) gives some indication of his many contributions. We thank Brien for all that he has done and look forward to his continuing involvement as a valued member of the group.

Brigitte Howarth, current Vice-Chair, will assume the duties of Acting Chair until our Annual General Meeting in November, 2011.

Committee  
Al Ain Chapter of the ENHG’

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### ENHG Al Ain Chapter Committee

#### Committee members:

**Acting Chair:** Brigitte Howarth; **Vice Chair:** vacant; **Treasurer:** Jodie Healy; **Secretary:** vacant; **Membership:** Diane Evans; **Photography:** Bob Reimer; **Newsletter:** Roland Ochmann; **Library:** (Vacant); **Flora:** Jodie Healy, Brigitte Howarth; **Fauna (Insects):** Brigitte Howarth; **Fauna (Birds):** vacant; **Environment:** (Vacant);  
**Ordinary Members:** Bill Jones, Amer Abu Kuhail, Joseph Mansour

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

Committee meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month at the Al Ain English Speaking School at 7:30 pm. Everyone is welcome to participate! We are always looking for people to join our discussions and help deliver events. The security guard will point you to the right location of our meeting.

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### Upcoming Events

2011		
September 06	Committee Meeting	AAESS
September 13	General Meeting – John Burt (Corals)	Danat Resort
September 27	General Meeting	Danat Resort
October 04	Committee Meeting	AAESS
October 11	General Meeting	Danat Resort
October 25	General Meeting	Danat Resort

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If you have any questions about the chapter and its activities, you will probably find an answer or explanation in the “New Members’ Pack” on our website.

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### What Happened on Recent Hikes, Walks

*Each weekend we try to offer one or two field trips to some of the destinations within a short driving distance of Al Ain. Our field trip leaders are all volunteers and each tries to make each field trip as interesting and informative as possible. We are always looking for volunteers to lead trips; please contact a Committee member if you would like to lead trips.*

*We ask members to dress appropriately and wear proper footwear. Please remember to bring plenty of water and a snack. It is important to let the trip leader know if you have a medical condition which the field trip leader should take into account when selecting routes etc. Our field trip leaders carry a satellite phone on most trips; members should carry a small first aid kit.*

Friday 13 May

Musah night walk

One of our famous oasis and pool locations, easy to do also at full moon nights, where Jodie led us this evening



Explaining the settlements



Moon lit pool

Al I'lal walk. See separate report below

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**RECENT GENERAL MEETINGS**  
**The Analysis of Digitally-Recreated Heritage Spaces: Case Studies from  
the United Arab Emirates**

10 May 2011

with: Dr Ron Hawker

Dr Ron Hawker has been working with researchers at Zayed University in Dubai and Winston Salem State University in North Carolina. He has documented and digitally reconstructed a number of historic buildings, townscapes and landscapes from across the United Arab Emirates. Qualitative and quantitative research potential of the digital reconstruction of heritage sites has been reviewed, some of which have been or are in the process of being destroyed,. He presented a set of case-studies demonstrating a range of Computer Aided Design (CAD) tools and their application to the study of buildings and sites.

Ron is an associate professor at Zayed University in the Department of Art and Design. He has published numerous books and articles on tribal art and architecture with a focus on Indigenous peoples in Canada and the Arabic and Persian tribes of the Abu Dhabi embayment.

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**Falcon And Falconry In The United Arab Emirates**

14 June 2011

with: Guy Foster

Guy Foster brought once again his falcons to the meeting and talked to us about falconry in the region, shared with us aspects of falcon behaviour and was generally very knowledgeable about the subject. Guy was happy to answer questions and was also comfortable for folk to pet the birds, so it was a great opportunity to see these majestic creatures up close and learn lots about them. Falconry is embedded into the fabric of UAE culture and heritage, and falcons are top carnivores in natural ecosystems, so this is an opportunity to understand some of the fascination and learn more about their natural ecological niche.

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**Update About Dragonflies In The United Arab Emirates**

28 June 2011

with: Bob Reimer

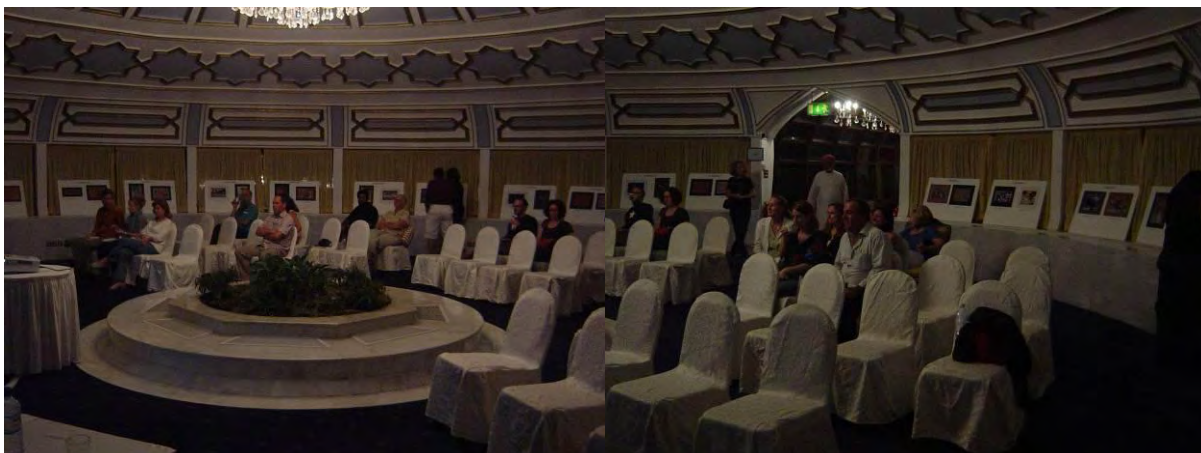
A year ago Bob had the privilege of being invited to attend the First European Congress on Odonatology (the study of dragonflies) and give a talk on the dragonflies of UAE and Oman in the “Dragonflies across European Borders: North Africa and Middle East” session. He discussed the history of the study of dragonflies in this region and some of the recent discoveries. In the past year, there have been additional discoveries, showing that we aren’t done yet with discovering the dragonfly fauna of the UAE and Oman despite dragonflies being one of the best known insect groups and most easily observed. This night he presented an updated version of the conference address. Additionally we had a microscope and some specimens available.

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### The Photo Exhibition 17 May 2011

The Photography Exhibition is an opportunity to show how our members see UAE and Oman's people and environment through the eye of their cameras.

It's also a social encounter to roam around the displayed pictures and deciding which one's the most impressive to oneself, have some snacks and juices and chat with other members.



The total number of people at the exhibition was 43. 40 voted (a few came late). Here are the winners:

Category	Entrant	Title
Behaviour	Dave Clark	Hummingbird Hawkmoth
Culture and Heritage	Laurel Bassett	Heading Home
Flora and Fauna	Alberto Gonzalez	Mr. Fox
Flora and Fauna	Brigitte Howarth	Smile ...! (first record of <i>Pristurus carteri</i> in the UAE)
'Scapes	Mike Green	Oasis Light

Hummingbird Hawkmoth and Oasis Light were also the Overall People's Choice.





Hummingbird Hawkmoth



Oasis Light



Smile ...! (First record of *Pristurus carteri* in the UAE)



Mr. Fox



Heading Home



## Reports and Activities

### **The Emirates Natural History Group Hosts Travel to Oman near Bahla**

During the first weekend of May the Emirates Natural History Group hosted another excellent excursion in the Arabian Peninsula. Members and non-members enjoyed becoming just a bit more familiar with our neighbour, the Sultanate of Oman. While everything was noteworthy and



well planned, the highlight was definitely the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium BC tombs found in abundance in the Bahla area.

In the shadow of Jebel Misht we observed more than a dozen exceptionally well preserved 5000-year-old tombs standing atop a ridge near Wadi Al Ayn. Very few of these structures had noticeably collapsed. Most continued to stand as they

have for perhaps 5 millennia. The group moved through these ancient mausoleums reverently. Some quietly took photos while others considered the architectural strength of these tombs. Some of the group also took note of the area's unique rock composition and formation.

As we descended from the tombs we drove farther up the road and ate our lunches next to a delightful falaj within a mud-brick village and a date palm oasis. From here we worked our way up the 4-wheel drive road to the base of Wadi Damm. We continued to follow the falaj on foot



until we came to the dam. While the more exhausted of us swam and enjoyed the view, the more adventurous continued exploring upriver utilizing a rope ladder and a donkey trail perhaps used until recently for villagers to traverse the mountain.



After a delightful night's rest on rather solid mattresses in quaint guesthouses near Bahla and Niswa, we toured the Imam's castle at Jabreen. Oman has taken care to preserve this castle. With its 16<sup>th</sup> century state-of-the-art security system including murder holes, hidden passages and hot date oil caldrons, the 3-story castle seemed like a fairly well guarded and comfortable madrassa to study the Quran 500 years ago. A contemplative tourist with a good

imagination could easily spend a half-day chatting with the well-informed castle staff or examining the unique passages and majlis. The Sun-and-Moon Room itself had an aura about it that might cause some to sit and ponder the educational and clandestine conversations that took place over dates and coffee during the past 5 centuries.

Last of all, we met at the Bahla Fort and began what for some was a gruelling hike up Jebal Shams viewing grand vistas and villages only recently deserted for more climate-controlled palaces down below. This reviewer did not make the final hike, so we leave the review of this section to someone else.

After returning home, recovering from slight sunburn and sore muscles, and studying the amazing photographs and memories, surely everyone is looking forward to the next Emirates Natural History Group guided tour with the dependability and distinction that Ms. Cheryl Dance seems to deliver so effortlessly.



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### Al Ihlal walk

I'm a newcomer to the group and look forward to the emails with information about upcoming trips. In early March, Cheryl Dance wrote, "Now that the weather is getting warmer, it might be nice to take an afternoon walk in the mountains," a suggestion I am pleased to say I took her up on! We met at the Buraimi Hotel and set out for our destination – Al Ihlal village, nestled in the rugged mountains of Oman.

Most of the distance we traveled was on-road, but as soon as we left the hard-top, I understood the need for an off-road vehicle. The way was rocky and, to my eye, mostly unmarked but Cheryl delivered us to the edge of a truly remarkable area; the remains of the village. She pointed out interesting aspects of the structures and explained some of the details that made up the day-to-day lives of the people who had so recently called these buildings "home." It is a fact of the region that these little villages with buildings made of stacked stone and mud construction could well have been in daily use until as recently as 40 years ago. I was struck by the stark simplicity that was just everyday reality for the not-so-distant-past residents of these crumbling structures. Cheryl allowed lots of time for pictures as well as keeping up steady flow information about our surroundings.

We soon moved on to another area where the "afternoon walk in the mountains" began in earnest. Cheryl was a very good guide who was able to keep track of our band of explorers, each



of us having our own level of familiarity with hiking. Said another way, I really appreciated how Cheryl managed to make the straggler at the back of the pack (me!) feel comfortable about whatever pace we were keeping. So, we trekked into the mountains with Cheryl discussing the plant life and mining in the region. She explained that along these paths, miners would store their food stuffs and supplies in little niches they carved out of the stone walls. Again, the harsh demands that the

residents here met for survival were humbling to this modern girl.

There were many excellent photo opportunities at the villages, along the mountain paths, and of course at the beautiful, winding wadis. Cheryl led us on a challenging (didn't she write, "I consider this to be an easy level hike"? ) course up and down areas I might have balked at alone. However, her confidence and leadership made all the difference and I happily skidded down a slope or two on my backside like a pro! Well, maybe a pro wouldn't have done it that way but by the end of the day, I commented to a friend that now I felt like an "intrepid explorer"! So watch the newsletters for outings with Cheryl. She is informative, supportive and just a nice gal to spend the afternoon with in the Omani mountains.

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### As Sab – Sab Bani Khamis Village Walk

Back in early May, Cheryl Dance led an exploration into Oman - two days of generally comfortable / occasionally challenging trekking which began with a day of scrambling around centuries old Al Ayn tombs, wandering through a lovely oasis village and 4-wheeling up boulder-strewn Wadi Dham to a welcoming swimming hole. I might have ended the weekend right there and been satisfied with such a fun and fascinating day. Fortunately, that wasn't the end of it and we stayed overnight in Nizwa, not entirely sure what lay ahead, but excited to find out.



After meeting up in Bahla on morning two, the first stop was at the villages of Wadi Ghul. For me, there was a palpable sense of the people who had once lived high on the ridge and then moved their village further down the craggy mountainside. I'm told that "jinn" is the spirit of a place - perhaps the jinn of Wadi Ghul was there, too. It was a brief photo stop, and I'm really glad that it was included along the way.

Next, we began the long drive up to Jebel Shams. An interesting characteristic of this road is that, though it is very well constructed with wide lanes for both directions of travel, there are stretches of road along the way that are not paved, only graded. To the casual observer, it is unclear why the road switches from paved to unpaved to paved, etc. It's good to know this though because a sedan would very likely struggle with the steep grade and the unpaved sections. So, onward and upward we climbed in those sturdy 4WDs until we arrived at Al Khitaym where we would begin the main event – trekking along the cliff in search of the abandoned village of As Sab that sits way back along the ledge of the Wadi Nakhur Gorge.



After 1 1/2 hours the whole group arrived to see where 15 families once lived well protected against enemies. The houses were built of stone under the overhanging rock ledge. Members could see a grinding stone that has been left behind, storage unites built of mud,



and fantastic terracing seemingly dangling down the cliff. A variety of crops were grown to sustain the villagers. Spina Christi, juniper, acacia and olive trees stood among the remains there. A falaj was fed from a small lake above the village.

A few members ventured up higher along the rock face to visit the cave and lake above. To their amazement it was a fantastic place to see. The calcium carbonate in local waters had formed walls of stalactites and small water filled pools that were coated with a variety of ferns could be seen throughout the cave.

Many times I find that the pictures I take while exploring serve as proof that a picture is worth a thousand words. But I also firmly believe that no picture, no flat image, no paper and ink representation can ever fully capture the grandeur and rugged beauty that lies deep in the heart of Oman. My best advice to any reader interested in the experience of trekking Oman's Grand Canyon and discovering first hand the villages at As Sab is to do what I am currently doing – go, take pictures, look at them, think about the day, look at the pictures some more, and then sigh with the realization that Nature is sometimes indescribable and that, in this case, the pictures are mostly to spur the memories and tempt the new-comer to come take a peek...

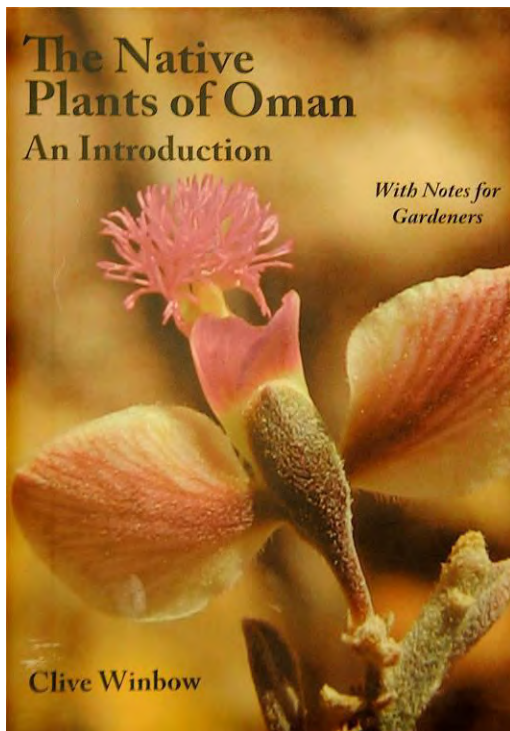
Sally Sluder

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### **The Book Corner**

By Cheryl Dance

#### **The Native Plants of Oman**



By Clive Winbow

This is a handy guide for the amateur naturalist to identify over 150 wild plants that are commonly seen on walks in the Omani countryside. It also helps environmentally conscious gardeners who wish to cultivate native plants in their garden, and describes some of the traditional uses of these plants in the household.



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### News

Al Ain, UAE has recently been recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site - link:  
<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1343>

The ENHG brochure is now available. 1000 copies will be available at next general meetings for distribution to attract more people to our group.

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### Soundscape Ecology

Jodie started a new project. Sure everybody's got her mail in this regard. The first workshop was on 04 July 2011. We will report in future issues about the progress and outcomes.

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### Library things

Don't forget, if you're looking for information in print-media take a look at our library [www.librarything.com/catalog/enhg](http://www.librarything.com/catalog/enhg). We have numerous books and publications about flora, fauna, architecture and geology of this area.

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### Books for Sale

The chapter makes books and other resources available to members in a variety of methods:

-- **NEW** --

under the "Resources" tab of the ENHG website homepage <<http://www.enhg.org>> is the link to "Books For Sale" to take you to <<http://www.enhg.org/resources/books/sell.html>> with a list of the books and periodicals available for sale at meetings; from time to time some titles are no longer in stock but these are the books we try to keep on hand. Thanks to Cheryl and her volunteers for being on hand at general meetings to facilitate the sale of items to members.

-- **NEW** --

also available are copies of papers and presentations that the chapter has collected over the years, a diverse assortment of papers and PowerPoint presentations covering a very wide range of topics. At the moment, only PDF versions of papers titled alphabetically A to G are available on CD.

For more information on these items, visit <<http://www.enhg.org/resources/papers/papers.html>> with links to

HTML <[http://www.enhg.org/resources/papers/papers\\_A\\_to\\_G.html](http://www.enhg.org/resources/papers/papers_A_to_G.html)>,

PDF <[http://www.enhg.org/resources/papers/papers\\_A\\_to\\_G.pdf](http://www.enhg.org/resources/papers/papers_A_to_G.pdf)> and

DOC <[http://www.enhg.org/resources/papers/papers\\_A\\_to\\_G.doc](http://www.enhg.org/resources/papers/papers_A_to_G.doc)> versions of a document listing the thirty folders containing reports. The rest of the collection will be copied to CD and made available as soon as possible. The CDs are available at a modest cost to members.

-- we maintain a modest library collection, items in the collection listed on <<http://www.librarything.com/catalog/enhg>>. Thanks to Marybeth for acting as our librarian and cataloguing these items.

-- we have added an eBooks section to the website and hope to add more titles as time goes by; the link is available from the "Resources" tab on the main menu bar of the homepage <[www.enhg.org](http://www.enhg.org)>. Thanks to Bob for setting this up.

-- there is an archive section available on the website <[http://www.enhg.org/resources/articles/res\\_articles.htm](http://www.enhg.org/resources/articles/res_articles.htm)> with a number of articles available.

-- Al Ain archives containing profiles and other information is available at <[http://www.enhg.org/resources/archives/aa\\_archives.htm](http://www.enhg.org/resources/archives/aa_archives.htm)>

-- articles pertaining to the UAE and Oman can be found at <<http://www.enhg.org/resources/uaeoman/uaeoman.htm>>; this includes articles on plants by Shahina A. Ghazanfar as well as miscellaneous items on sites or topics related to Oman.

-- valuable links to sites discussing birds, insects, geology, geography, history etc are available at <[http://www.enhg.org/resources/uaeoman/uaeoman\\_links.htm](http://www.enhg.org/resources/uaeoman/uaeoman_links.htm)>.

-- back issues of The Bulletin and Tribulus are also available directly from the homepage <[www.enhg.org](http://www.enhg.org)>.

Thanks to those who have made copies of reports available for our members. If you have a document that is available for inclusion in the chapter's collection and/or if you have a link to recommend, please contact a Committee member and we will add the information to the existing collection.

Dates for your diary	Links
<p>July and August 2011 we'll only have one General Meeting. Watch your email account for the date and theme.</p> <p>ENHG will get back to normal business in September.</p> <p>November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011 Annual General Meeting with report of the treasurer and elections</p>	<p><b>Dragonflies!!!!</b>  <a href="http://www.iucn-odonata.org/">IUCN Odonata Specialist Group</a>            Red-veined darter:  <a href="http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/2009/1129/NATIONAL/711289837">http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/2009/1129/NATIONAL/711289837</a>            Agrion newsletter  <a href="http://ecoevo.uvigo.es/WDA/">http://ecoevo.uvigo.es/WDA/</a></p> <p><b>Wildlife Middle East News:</b> <a href="http://www.wmenews.com">www.wmenews.com</a></p> <p><b>Desert oasis:</b>  <a href="http://www.environmentalgraffiti.com/featured/desert-oasis/2257">http://www.environmentalgraffiti.com/featured/desert-oasis/2257</a></p> <p><b>Mike Gillett's contribution to our website</b>  <a href="http://www.enhg.org/alain/mike/contrib.htm">http://www.enhg.org/alain/mike/contrib.htm</a> &gt;.</p>

## FREQUENT REMINDERS

### Hikes

The weekend hikes and walks in Oman or in the UAE are a regular part of our activities offered to members. 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

We have two **Thuraya telephones**. The numbers are **0088-216-4440-5955** 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.

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

Our weekend field trips begin at regular **meeting places**. You can download a KMZ file from [http://www.enhg.org/resources/links/res\\_links.htm](http://www.enhg.org/resources/links/res_links.htm). Download the KMZ file and save it on your computer. If you have Google Earth loaded on your computer, when you double click on the file, Google Earth will open and 'zoom' to the locations marked. There is some information regarding each location associated with the pins in the image; hover your mouse over the pin to see the text. If you do not have Google Earth, or if the KMZ file does not work on your computer, you can download the JPG file also listed at [http://www.enhg.org/resources/links/res\\_links.htm](http://www.enhg.org/resources/links/res_links.htm). The chapter's regular meeting places for forming convoys are shown as are the Al Ain English Speaking School, the InterContinental and the Hili border crossing point.

### The ENHG Library

The **Library** is now situated in our room at the Al Ain Palace museum. Marybeth has been busy attaching labels to the bindings of items in our collection as well as posting details of items on the Internet. Our library database can be searched and visited under [www.librarything.com/catalog/enhg](http://www.librarything.com/catalog/enhg)

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 more than 20 DVDs and CDs including all videos, CDs and many of the DVDs in our library. We are offering this set to members for Dh100. These are available to ENHG members only. You can subscribe at the general meetings for your collection.

## New members' package

Most members hear about the Emirates Natural History Group from a friend or colleague. Some learn about the Group, and the Al Ain chapter, when doing an Internet search about the UAE and Al Ain during the course of applying for employment in the UAE.

The chapter has been in existence for 30 years this season. Over that time, the chapter has evolved as the individuals changed from season to season. For the past few seasons, the chapter has settled into a routine of combining field trips, general meetings and special events and activities.

For those who would like to know more about the chapter and how it manages itself, there is a document on the website at < [http://www.enhg.org/alain/committee/new\\_members\\_package.htm](http://www.enhg.org/alain/committee/new_members_package.htm) > known as the New Members' Pack.

This is actually a collection of documents that works like an FAQ file, answering most of the questions individuals have about the organization.

One of the topics covered, for example, is field trips with a discussion about appropriate clothing, things members could do to prepare for a field trip, conduct on a field trip, and safety.

There is a brief discussion of the events which are repeated most seasons including an Iftar Dinner during Ramadan, the photography exhibition, and the Annual General Meeting.

There is a brief discussion of the services available for members including the Newsletter, the website, the email service, and the library.

The version of the New Members' Pack on the website will be updated following this season's annual general meeting.

## General

Again: don't forget to carry your **camera** wherever you go. We want your best shots of fauna, flora, people and places for our **annual photo exhibition**, scheduled for the second meeting in May 2012 (photos to be submitted at the chapter's first meeting in May).

If anybody has special **intentions or interests** for visits, hikes, explorations etc. he/she should get in contact with any member of the committee.

The newsletter depends also on **YOUR contributions!** If you have any reports, sketches, stories, pictures, encounters, poems, etc. you want to share with our community please submit them to [rolfried@yahoo.de](mailto:rolfried@yahoo.de)