

The Emirates Natural History Group in Al Ain Newsletter

Intelligent Conservation

Our October newsletter featured the article “Fantastic Plastic?” highlighting the plight that plastic pollution can cause. To further illustrate the topic, here is a photograph of a part of the manmade lake at Green Mubazzarah, at the foot of mountain Jebel Hafeet in Al Ain (Credit Denis Milton).



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AGM News

The ENHG in Al Ain Annual General Meeting was held on 26 November at the Islamic Institute. There were thirteen members present and except for Albert who is no longer available, the existing committee members were re-elected. Future ENHG meetings will take place at the University (Islamic Institute). Please see “Photo Frenzy” as regards the results of the concurrent photograph competition. ✕



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Past/Upcoming Events:

Field Trip: Jebel Qatar

8 November Danat Resort 7:15 am

Committee Meeting

12 November Danat Resort 06:30 pm

General Meeting: Ground-dwelling...

12 November Danat Resort 7:30 pm

Field Trip: Jebel Hafit

16 November Green Mubazzarah

Annual General Meeting

26 November Islamic Institute 8:30 pm

Photo Competition

26 November Islamic Institute 8:00 pm

Committee Meeting

January 2014 Islamic Institute 07:30 pm

General Meeting: Will be announced

January 2014 Islamic Institute 7:30 pm

From Page 1 – Intelligent Conservation

It is obvious from the above photograph that plastic isn't the only ingredient in the "soup" above, but that it does constitute a significant percentage of the mess.

We are all consumers, we have to consume to survive (and that inevitably results in waste as a byproduct).

We sometimes forget that if we don't look after our environment, we spoil things for others in our society and that we rob our children and future descendants of some of the pleasures that we take for granted.

Applying basic logic (Intelligent Conservation) means that we should place waste products where they do not endanger wildlife or spoil things for others. Only leaving behind our footprints at a site such as Green Mubazzarah preserves the location for a succession of others to enjoy. Wind can blow a dropped item into a location where it can pollute a lake or kill domestic animals or wildlife (so don't drop waste that can kill a camel).

We commonly only use several container types including plastic, metal and glass. If we decide to no longer use any particular one of these containers, then the question arises as to what substitute product should or could be used? Would we make matters worse if we remove any constituent parts of the packaging that we are so used to placing our food and drink into?

It remains a good idea to reduce the amount of materials that we use once (e.g. take your own carrier bags when you go shopping) and that we recycle where we can. Al Ain has a very good recycling plant.

Taking these concepts further; should we not conserve a lot more of the resources on Spaceship Earth than we are currently doing? If we don't - when will the human race run out of its reserves of power and raw materials? When will we be at the point of being forced to leave our planet to survive? Does "Intelligent Conservation" help to delay our inevitable destruction? Is there anything else that we can do? ☿

Since it is the end of the calendar year, Readers are wished a Happy New Year (and for those that celebrate it) a Merry Christmas. The next Al Ain ENGH meetings will take place in January 2014. Take care and drive safely, all the best for you and your loved ones.

The Library

The library is housed in our ENHG room in the Islamic Institute. Members and non-members can access the catalog on-line under www.librarything.com/catalog/enhg .

The lending collection is available to members on a short term loan basis. Anyone is welcome to contact Verena (see the contacts information on page six) and she will make the arrangements for book access. ☿

Ground-dwelling Parrots, a Rat in a Feather Suit.....

Professor Rob Whelan kindly addressed the ENHG in Al Ain in 12 November, he posed a question that read as follows: "Australians are a weird mob, but can they teach us something about pollination in the UAE"?

As it turns out, the answer to this challenging question is "Yes".

Professor Rob Whelan has been in the UAE since 2008. He was President of the University of Wollongong in Dubai from 2008 to 2011, after a 25 year career as a researcher and teacher in ecology at the University of Wollongong in Australia, where he was Dean of Science from 2002 until 2008.

He entertained us as regards the effects of fire on two threatened bird species (the Eastern Bristlebird and the Ground Parrot). It was interesting to note that fire plays an important role as regards the number of birds in a particular area over time, but that the conservation approach to follow should differ as regards these two species (as evidenced by regular "census" initiatives taken over many years). The Ground Parrot population showed an inverted "U" graphical curve with time (i.e. the population peaked and then diminished). This suggests that one would wish to have fire occurring at certain intervals.

The Bristlebird exhibited a population growth with time that did not have the same downturn. So the best macro approach appears to be to adopt a policy where parts of an area in Australia are burned in a sequence, to allow both bird species to survive.

Of particular interest were Rob's descriptions of the various visitors to Banksia plants (Proteas) as a part of nature's pollination process. Visitors in the daytime include birds and bees versus visitors at night such as rodents, which all take a role in plant pollination. Amazingly, nocturnal visitors result in more positive pollination results than the visitors to plants during the day.

This fact was established by covering some flower clusters with bags in the day and some in the night and then recording the effects on seed production, evidently a tedious and time-consuming process. Part of this involved tracking the paths and distances travelled by specific test rodents (marsupial pollinators).

How would you track where a particular animal (that you can easily hold in one hand) has travelled between plants in the night in a location such as "Barren Grounds" in Australia when you have a limited budget? Obviously if you are there blundering about in the dark, the animals will hide and you will detract from their natural behavior.

Firstly traps were set in order to capture specimen nocturnal plant visitors. These traps were of the variety employing bait (such as peanut butter) and a door that shuts when triggered (when the animal steps on a trigger plate close to the bait).

A small roll of (strong) upholstery thread was glued to the animal and the inner end tied to a point where the animal was released. Follow the thread the next day and you have your track! Ingenious my dear Watson. (No, the animal does not get harmed in any way and does not feel the thread reeling out behind it.) Once the thread has been used up the animal goes on its way unhindered. ☘



Ditholo Nature Reserve

The Ditholo Nature Reserve in South Africa is found to the North of Pretoria.

The above image is the puzzle for the month; does anyone know what the object being held up is? This object was found growing in the Reserve.

The October newsletter featured a portion of a dried up clay pan called "Verneukpan" located close to Kenhardt in the Northern Cape.

Verneukpan is an example of some of the unusual locations that could be visited in South Africa.

The Afrikaans name for the pan can be translated as the "Cheating Pan". The reason being that the pan looks like an expanse of water from afar, yet it is bone dry.

The clay pan was used by Sir Malcolm Campbell in 1929 in an attempt to establish a land speed record.

The pan is very flat and is approximately fifty-seven km long and eleven km wide.

Film crews often use the pan due to the fact that there is very little to be seen on the pan and the surrounding areas relative to the centre of the pan are a considerable distance away; this is fortuitous for photography purposes. ✕

Al Ain Oasis City

One of Verena's books in the Al Ain library is written by Peter Hellyer and Rosalind Buckton, ISBN 1-873544-53-7; the Arab Heritage Series by Motivate Publishing, 1998.

The book has 91 pages and addresses topics such as the birth of the UAE, the history of Al Ain, Sheikh Zayed, modern Al Ain, traditions, culture and heritage.

Many full color photographs grace the text including an impressive array of green plants being grown in under-cover farming facilities in Al Ain.

Jahli Fort and Muwaiji fort are examples of images interspersed with verdant gardens and portraits of key UAE figures (such as HH Sheikh Zayed, the previous President of the UAE) and also the Hili Fun City leisure facility.

Mention is made of the road snaking to the top of Jebel Hafeet, Al Ain lies at the foot of the Hajar mountain range.

Twin tigers are shown relaxing at the Al Ain zoo in stark contrast to an excavated third-millennium BC tomb at Umm Al Nar. The characteristic red sand dunes around Al Ain are immortalized in an image of the Liwa "Empty Quarter".

Topics such as health care, the various hospitals and places of learning enjoy mention. The Higher Colleges of Technology are addressed (as established in 1988).

The "ships of the desert" feature in that text describes the Embryo Transfer Research Centre for racing camels and the book addresses camel racing as a sport.

In conclusion this book is well written and worthwhile reading. Now all you need to do is to extract it from this newsletter's Editor's greedy grasp. ✕

We wish to place a photograph of a general object of interest that you might have and then ask Readers to identify "What is it"? Do you have a submission that you would like to make in this category? How about encouraging friends to join the ENHG and to make submissions?

Photo Frenzy

And here are the winners of the Al Ain ENGH November Photo Competition!



Falcon Flying (Alberto Gonzales : Architecture, Archaeology, Culture and Heritage; also the Peoples' Choice)



Life Can Be Cruel (Brigitte Howarth : Plants and Animals in the Wild)



Going Home (Claudia Behrendt : People of the UAE and Oman)



Heading to Clouds (Amer Kuhail : Landscapes and Miscellaneous)

Photo statistics

There were fewer entries that we all would have liked to see this year (there were no entries in the junior category) but the standard was nevertheless very high as evidenced by the photographs to the right of this article.

This year cash prizes were awarded for each category and one extra prize was awarded for the "People's Choice" category. So now that Alberto has been rewarded for his efforts we can expect to see more of the same in future, (not so Alberto)?

We will also be placing some of the other striking entries in the competition in our newsletter sequence in 2014 (those that did not win) since they are still magnificent to see. Until then, here are some statistics related to the various categories (photographs will still be on display for a while at the Institute).

There were three entries for the "Architecture, Archaeology, Culture and Heritage" category. Alberto's impressive entry of a falcon about to dive onto its prey won the day in this category (and he also won the Peoples' Choice award with the most votes for the evening). He informed us that he has several shots of this attack sequence, he chose one photo in the sequence for his entry.

Brigitte fended off nineteen other entries in the category "Plants and Animals in the Wild" with her recent shot of a gerbil caught by a sand boa constrictor. The gerbil had just been released into the wild from a trap (caught during a research project), so Brigitte was feeling a bit guilty and sorry for the animal (but that is life).

Claudia's entry beat one other entry into first place in the category "People of the UAE and Oman". This photograph is a really good example of the cultural heritage that is to be seen in the UAE.

Amer's entry beat fourteen other entries in the "Landscapes and Miscellaneous" category, a testimony to the fact that it is not often that one sees clouds like this in the UAE. Rain, what is that?

All entrants and participants are thanked for their entries, as is everyone that helped to arrange and coordinate the event; special thanks go to Barb for presenting the photographs for everyone to judge. ✕



Danat Resort Hotel

Meeting Locations

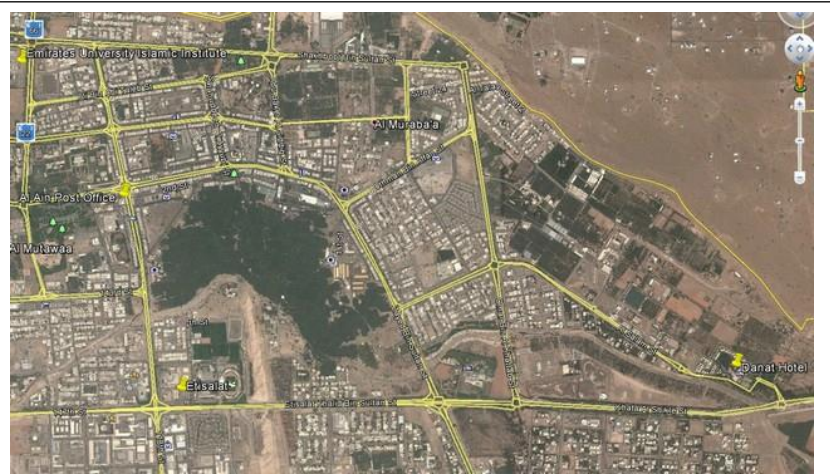
The Al Ain Chapter of the ENHG meets in two locations, the Danat Resort Hotel (at times when this venue is available) and also the Emirates University Islamic Institute.

General meetings as well as committee meetings take place on announced Tuesdays, all members and invited friends are welcome to attend either set of meetings.

Islamic Institute



Location Details (Courtesy of Google Earth)



Danat Resort GPS location : 24 12 29.32N 055 48 15.69E
 Islamic Institute GPS location: 24 13 44.80 N 055 44 59.50 E

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