



The Emirates Natural History Group in Al Ain

Diary of Events

April 2015

INTRODUCTION

The Al Ain Branch of the ENHG traditionally (erratically) presented a newsletter from time to time up until April 2015. It has been decided to review the content and the format of this form of communication for various reasons, hence this new offering before you.

Comments and suggestions as to this Diary of Events may be sent to the Editor as follows:

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The ENHG bye-law that supported the decision to change from a pure newsletter format to a “Diary of Events” format reads as follows:

“The Group shall aim to publish a monthly Newsletter to inform Members of forthcoming events and to report on previous ones. It shall attempt to promote knowledge of the natural history of the Gulf region. Any Member or non-member may contribute, at the Editor's discretion. The Editor reserves the right to amend or abridge articles at his/her discretion.”

The thrust of the above is that members need to be informed as regards activities in progress and that there should be reporting on previous events. This Diary of Events attempts to do that (and commentary is invited, for and against the approach.

In addition if members have any articles of note, then these will also serve in this Diary. One such article has been provided (thanks are due to Brigitte Howarth, Keith Taylor and John-Stewart Smith as regards an article that was received some time ago, apologies for this late publication thereof).

Our Diary of Events for April 2015 however firstly follows on the next page.

DIARY OF EVENTS FOR APRIL 2015

REF	DESCRIPTION	DATE	LOCATION
1.	Sheikh Zayed talks	2015-04-16	Sheikh Zayed Museum
2.	Kyak trip	2015-04-24	Yas Beach Abu Dhabi
3.	Committee Meeting	TBC – postponed from 2015-04-28	Islamic Institute
4.	Monthly meeting. Talk: Recent archaeological discoveries in Al Gharbia	TBC – speaker unavailable (was originally for 2015-04-28)	Islamic Institute
5.	Annual Photography Exhibition	2015-05-12	Islamic Institute

REPORT ON PREVIOUS EVENTS

Recent speakers have included Yusuf Thakur on photography (10 Feb), Mohammed Farhadinia on Iranian Cheetah Conservation (01Mar), Peter Rothfels on Desert archaeology, animals and places (10 March), and we had an evening with the specimens and archives on 24 March. Unfortunately at least two speakers had to cancel at the last minute because of work commitments.

For field trips, we had a Buraimi moonlight walk on 30 January, a geological tour of the Sohar Road on 21 March, and a hike from Khutwah oasis on Friday 3rd April, besides a commercially organised kayak eco-tour on April 24th. And of course many members attended the Inter Emirates Weekend in February.

FEATURED ARTICLE(S)

BISMILLAH AR-RAHMAN AR-RAHIM

(by John Stewart-Smith – as addressed to ENHG Members and Ian Townson, the ENHG Secretary and Field Trip Coordinator)

Dear Ian and fellow members of ENHG,

Your planned trip to Al Wathba Park/Reserve (on the day following my 83rd birthday!) makes me very envious of the advantages of active ENHG membership.

Back in the early 1970s, when ENHG was still just an idea coming to fruition under my hopeful chairmanship, I recorded adult and immature Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) visiting Abu Dhabi island and congregating on a small wet area among the scattered mangrove bushes just west of the island airport and close to Sheikh Zayed's beach palace.

Sheikh Zayed had kindly allowed me free access to this area, and to his palace gardens, for the purposes of bird recording and photography. He went so far as to sign a special identity card that allowed me unrestricted access for bird watching.

I began to hope that the flamingos, if undisturbed, would breed on Abu Dhabi island. I could not find any evidence or records of breeding anywhere in the Emirates although I had a vague rumour of flamingos at Ras Al Hadd about 200km SE of Muscat. This led to an idea to check Ras Al Hadd by flying down there from Abu Dhabi and landing on the abandoned WW2 airfield there. I began a convoluted negotiation with SOAF (Sultan of Oman's Air Force) for permission, but telephone links were still in the future and radio was erratic at best.

Eventually, an ad hoc plan evolved for me to fly down to Seeb to meet a SOAF officer, with a fallback plan for him to fly to Abu Dhabi to meet me at Air Force Headquarters. Came the day when all was relaxed and we had a spare "Islander" transport. An unanswered radio call did not deter my departure for a long and lone trip to the other side of Arabia.

I got to the SOAF HQ and said I had come to meet Major Mike X. The reply was, "Oh, he's off to Abu Dhabi today, to meet you." I never did get to Ras Al Hadd and the flamingos laughed quietly to themselves, and moved to Dubai and Ras al Khaymah.

Meanwhile, the story of my fruitless attempt to visit Ras al Hadd circulated around souk and generated a few quiet smiles at my expense. Sheikh Zayed took an interest in encouraging the flamingos to remain to breed in Abu Dhabi and there was soon a new, extensive fence erected where the birds congregated. They never bred there in my time but, if you look at 24.28N and 54.25E on Google Earth you can still see the outline of the fence among all the changes. That was filed under "Seemed like a Good Idea at the time."

One of the visitors to my house in Abu Dhabi was Sir Peter Scott who raised the idea of Abu Dhabi becoming a signatory to the Ramsar Convention. I raised this topic and was told to invite a guest to Abu Dhabi for discussions.

Erik Carp from the International Waterfowl Research Bureau at Slimbridge arrived and was made very welcome as an official guest of Abu Dhabi. He and I, with Said Salman, flew all around the Arabian Gulf coast looking at birds. Then he was taken off by land for further exploration. After quite

a long pause for more urgent matters, The United Arab Emirates signed the Ramsar Convention and joined many like-minded nations to preserve areas vital wildfowl conservation.

And Now ---- you have a breeding population of flamingos close to the capital city of the United Arab Emirates within easy reach of anyone interested. You have many other protected nature areas within the UAE borders. These are of international importance and of immense value to the future.

Sheikh Zayed once quoted from the Holy Koran of our duty to protect nature. In my ignorance, I cannot recall his exact words but I will always remember his benevolent kindness, leadership and concern for the conservation of nature.

Your day out at Wathba Nature Reserve is the result of many years of dedicated effort by the people of the Emirates. The key to the reserve will open the gate to the endless fascination of wildlife.

The ENHG has blossomed under the care of members and supporters. Long may this continue.

Fondest regards,

John Stewart-Smith