

EMIRATES NATURAL HISTORY GROUP (ABU DHABI)

NEWSLETTER

VOL. 7 No. 1 - JANUARY 1983

1. PROGRAMME

3rd January	Film Night
10th January	Committee Meeting
17th January	AGM - (At the Federal Building)
PROPOSED PROGRAMME	
7th February	West Africa...by Mark and Janice Luce
14th February	Committee Meeting
21st February	Butterflies and Bees...by Bish Brown
28th February	Workroom

2. REVIEW OF DECEMBER'S MEETING

This talk was on the background to the creation of the Gulf Co-operation Council.

Frauke Heard - Bey gave us an excellent talk on the historical causes behind the creation of the GCC. She highlighted the differences and similarities between the member states, gave a sketch of the strengths of each country and ended with a positive appraisal of what the council has managed to achieve. It was a most rewarding evening.

(Martin Willmot)

3. GENERAL INFORMATION

(a) AGM

This will be held at 7.30 pm on Monday January 17th, 1983. The venue will be the 76 Room in ADMA's Federal Building (map attached to last month's newsletter). When in the lift press "R" (for Restaurant) floor i.e. the floor above the mezzanine where the Group has its room. As last year, refreshments will be available after the meeting.

The AGM is a very important occasion for the Group and the Committee hopes for a full turn out of members who will make their views known on the way they think the Group should be run.

This year certain members of the Committee are not available for re-election and new recruits are essential. A nomination form is attached to this Newsletter but do not wait for someone else to put your name forward. If you would like to serve on the Committee, please let one of the existing Committee members know.

(Bish Brown)

(b) Subscriptions

Subscriptions for 1983 are now due. Anyone who has not paid since September 1982 is asked to do so as soon as possible.

(Terry Donohue)

(c) Bulletin No. 19

Articles for this should be handed in to Rob Western or any Committee member at the beginning of the new year.

(Rob Western)

(d) Refreshments

Most people who come to the ENHG meetings take advantage of the refreshments organised by Muriel Giles. Unfortunately her assistant is leaving Abu Dhabi at the end of the month and she needs someone else to help her. This is not a difficult job and there is no washing up to do but it is too much for one person and volunteers (male or female) are being asked for. If anyone is interested, but doesn't want to commit themselves to every meeting night, then perhaps it could be done on a rota basis.

Would any volunteers please see Muriel or any Committee member.

(Muriel Giles)

(e) Books

Most of the books on the Arabian Gulf that were ordered have now been collected. The treasurer will try and contact those people who have not picked up their books or they can contact him (tel: 345042). The spare sets that were obtained have been sold but there is a possibility of more being ordered if people would give their names to a Committee member. A new volume on shells is also available and orders will be taken for that.

(Terry Donohue)

(f) Drawing and Painting

This is a subject on our list of activities but has never been formally organised. It may now be possible to arrange some instruction in the subject. If you are interested would you please hand in a small note, to any Committee member, giving name, telephone number and most convenient time and day. There will be some charge (paid in advance) as the instructor will be a non-member.

(Bish Brown)

4. TRIPS

- (a) In the six years since my wife and I left the Gambia we have seen relatively few brightly coloured birds, in the wild, to compare with the lovely blue of the Senegalese Roller. It was a most pleasant surprise to see three similar birds when we visited the Fujairah Hilton Hotel during the last week-end in October. We observed them flying round and apparently resting in the trees on the beach side of the hotel. They are a welcome change from the relatively drab browns and black of the birds we have seen in the desert towards the Liwa area during most of our trips out of town. The magnificent plumage when flying and at rest with the dark wing feathers and pale blue underbelly make the birds easily visible against any background.

Further up the East coast that week-end the almost routine stop at Badiyah brought a rare sighting of a bushy tailed animal. Climbing a rock hillside, to the north of the towers, we crested the ridge and disturbed a fox. It had been

resting about one third of the way down the far slope. Up it got and loped away off across the stony slope towards the north. Unfortunately our Olympus XA camera did not provide enough detail at that range to get a very good photograph. However, the sight of such a thin grey-brown body with a huge, bushy black-tipped tail was a memorable end to our week-end.

On a fairly regular basis I have to drive up to Juhair which is approximately 200 Km from Abu Dhabi. The trip includes some 30 Km of desert, driving past several of the Municipalities new plantations and the flora is becoming abundant. The Al Bujair plantation is a remote oasis developed in a valley between 60 m high dunes. Many fruit trees and vegetables are being reared there, as well as many of the flowers and plants which you see on the central reservations of Abu Dhabi's dual carriageways.

If anyone would care to accompany me on one of these day trips they would be most welcome. Contact numbers are 361944 (office) and 365571 (Res.).

(Charles Spedding)

EDITORS NOTE

There are two species of Roller in the U.A.E. The Roller (*Coracias ganilus*) has a blue front and chestnut back. The Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*) has a chestnut breast, forehead and back, showing blue on the belly, wings and crown of the head only.

(b) Hatta

The road to the pools is still severed and only 4 wheel drive vehicles can negotiate the more tricky wadi climbs.

Three saloon cars managed to get through the first two wadis and camped on a flat plateau. Scorpions were quickly found (see Recorders notes) notably bigger than last year and very prolific. Not much bird life but definitely Hume's Wheatear and Crag Martin. Also Partridge in the distance. Foxes were heard during the night and a fox type was seen running down a wadi in the bright moonlight.

Next morning brought further cool weather. A crippled newly born goat was seen with the after-birth still fresh.

Three vipers were seen, each lying in our path. They were smaller than the specimen seen in the Jeema Wadi earlier this year. They were very pale grey tan with diamond markings and a triangular head. Two were seen in the rain which may have drawn them out.

The rain caused an early departure followed by a slow drive home with a couple of stops for the children. At each stop fox and jerboa tracks were common.

(Martin Willmot)

5. RECORDERS NOTES

(a) Scorpions and Spiders

During the very successful trip to Hatta (see Trips) a new variety of scorpion was found. I have not been able to classify it as yet but it looks very similar to the striped *Centruroides* of south eastern U.S.A. This was the only type found on the expedition and quite prolific around Hatta.

I have been given a spider, one and a half inches long and half an inch wide, which is very similar to the Lobed Argiope of the Mediterranean. It was found by John May in the Liwa and is definitely one of the Orb Weavers and is living quite contentedly on my balcony.

In one of my previous reports (July 1982) I mentioned studying a yellow and silver banded spider. This has now been identified as the Bruennich's Argiope variety, also an Orb Weaver.

(Mike Southey)

(b) Birds

(i) Sewage Farm (Eastern Lagoon)

Variety, if not always quantity this month. Several days there have been upward of 500 small waders at the Sewage Farm, usually too far away to be seen clearly without a telescope. On two occasions a flock of 500 + flamingo was seen flying towards Sadiyat. Ducks were common in ones and two's - Teal, Wigeon and Pin tail. Pallid Harriers were seen on two occasions along with the usual Marsh Harriers and Osprey. Up to three Casian Terns were recorded picking up water/food from the deep channel. They swoop low along the water with their bill open and the lower part skimming the surface. Apart from the usual Reef Herons, Grey Heron, Great White Egret (Heron) and Little Egrets, Squacco and Purple Heron were seen. No Spotted Eagles have been recorded this year.

(ii) Das Island/Offshore Complexes

We now have a recorder on Das Island in Gary Jones, plus the odd phone call reporting the first Hoopoe of the season. (Reminds me of the letters to the Times on the first Cuckoo heard in U.K.). However, we are very pleased to receive any sightings from these locations. A full list will be given at a later date.

(iii) Other Areas

A Pale Crag Martin's nest was discovered under a road bridge in Al Ain. It looked a new nest although no bird was seen on this occasion. A nest with young was seen in 1977 under the same bridge. More than 30 Brown-necked Ravens were seen in the dunes near Sweihan. On the east coast House Crows, Rollers and Indian Rollers were recorded.

(iv) Mafraq Lake

The new eastern corniche road is rapidly approaching the main marshy area of the Sewage Farm. Though a mere shadow of its former glory, it is still possible to see more than 30 species in a 2 hours session.

With the urbanisation of the coastline, good bird sites are hard to find. It was therefore gratifying to discover a large 2 Km x 400 m lake at Mafraq. It lies in an area of low sand dunes and had attracted between 300 and 500 birds of various species. The water was "fresh" and many of the birds were finding food. Identified birds were Sanderling, Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Pintail Duck, Reef Herons and Black-headed Gulls.

(Bish Brown)

(c) Plants

Now is the time to watch out for the first of this season's annuals. Among the more striking plants to look out for is *Cistanche phelypaia*, sometimes

referred to as the Desert Hyacinth. This brilliantly yellow-flowered plant is a parasite on salt bushes; it has no green parts and attaches itself to its host via a hairline thread underground. It may be seen in clumps through the New Year and into early spring along the coast and inland along the Al Ain and Sueyhan roads. At high tide on the coast it may be partly submerged. Other annuals to watch for are tiny mallows, melilots and medicks, all on Abu Dhabi Island, especially in moist places like parks and irrigated road verges. It is expected that the unusually early rains this winter will bring the spring season on earlier and along with the extra amount of seed laid down in 1982 should make 1983 a bumper year for those interested in the vegetation.

(Rob Western)

(d) **Archaeology**

The French mission led by Serge Cleuziou of the Centre International des Reserches Scientifiques in Lyons, France, has returned to Hili for what may be the final season's digging there. They are currently staying at the Ain al Faidah guest house but working daily at the third millennium B.C. site at Hili that they have been excavating so successfully since 1977. Serge was unfortunately unable to make it to the Natural History Group before he left the country in March 1982 but he has promised us a roundup talk before he leaves in about three months time. The Group may also have a talk after the New Year by Hans Georg Gebel, a German flint expert who has been working in Oman and Al Ain for the past two winter seasons.

(Rob Western)