

focus



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Emirates Natural History Group

Patron: H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan

EDITORIAL

The annual Inter Emirates Weekend is almost upon us, taking place from 25-27 February in Al Ain. It is not too late to come along and join the activities. The Al Ain Group have certainly put on a varied and interesting programme (page 6 and link therein) and please do attend if you can, even if just for a day. We are also running a family camping weekend on 19/20 March, which is a great opportunity to spend a night under the stars before it starts to warm up again.

A gentle reminder... Subscriptions for the ENHG run for the calendar year. If you haven't got around to renewing membership, please do as soon as possible as we will be correcting the current membership lists soon, and non-renewed members will be deleted! At still only AED100, we have to represent the best value in town.

The ENHG scientific journal *Tribulus* Volume 18 is currently at final proofreading and will be available shortly. This volume covers a wide range of articles from archaeology to new species records of animals and plants from the UAE. Volume 19 is already being planned and will be a single monograph issue of Gary Feulner's flora of the Musandam region.

The Yemen leopard conservation programme is forging ahead, and David Stanton (who gave us such a memorable talk recently) says that plans are in hand for training Yemeni field workers in conjunction with the Omani authorities.

Drew Gardner

Jebel Sumeini Trip: Wadi Walks

On 22nd Jan. 2010, twenty-two people in 11 cars set off from Abu Dhabi, mostly in pairs, making their way through the Hili border post to a Buraimi meeting point, after which they travelled in three small convoys to a lunch stop at the base of the eastern side of the Jebel Sumeini range, (in Oman, between Buraimi and Hatta).

After lunch, Roy led the whole group on a pre-hike afternoon nature walk up a wadi filled with interesting geological formations: limestone layers on the wadi walls; exposed layers of ancient sea beds, and a remarkably fine greenish-grey shale scree, yielding a soft sandy crunch underfoot—making up part of the wadi bottom and one whole wadi slope. Greeting us along the wadi were Hume's wheatears and also Agama lizards.



Photo: Keith Taylor

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FRONT COVER PICTURE

Photograph: Tephrosia apollinea, Jebel Sumeini wadi

Photographer: Graeme Hornby

This month's contributors

ENHG - Al Ain Committee, Martina Fella, Graeme Hornby, Brigitte Howarth, Keith Taylor, May Yoke Taylor



Male Sinai Agama lizard, *Pseudotrapelus sinaitus*, wearing more subdued blue breeding colours than those spotted on Jebel Hafit last year.

Photo: May Yoke Taylor

In amongst the shale and limestone were green annuals of many varieties, sprouting in response to the previous month's rains, along with the standard hardy perennials. Here is a partial list of the plants sighted in the Jebel Sumeini wadis on both days:

Annuals: *Tephrosia apollinea* and *Tephrosia nubica* (both pea-like legumes with pinkish blooms—the latter with furry seed pods); purple and white bloomed *Hyoscyamus muticus* (henbane); *Forsskaolea tenacissima* (a red-stemmed non-stinging member of the nettle family); white-bloomed *Physorrhynchus chamaerapistrum* (mustard family); bright green *Erucaria hispanica* or *Erucaria crassifolia*, and a white flower from the daisy family, possibly *Pulicaria edmondsonii*.



Hyoscyamus muticus (henbane), pretty but very toxic! (From one of the largest clumps seen in the region.)

Photo: May Yoke Taylor

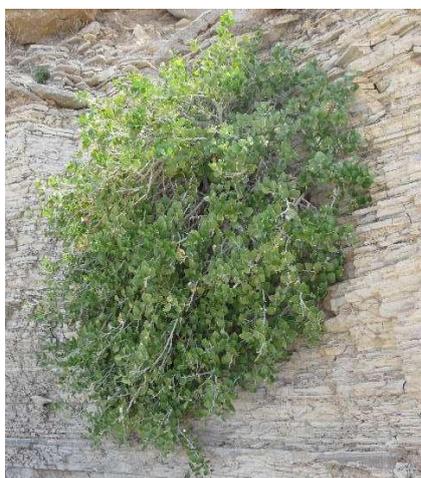
Possibly perennial/annual: a woody subshrub *Lavandula subnuda* (Spanish lavender) and one unconfirmed species of *Tribulus* with rather narrow yellow petals. Biannual or short-lived perennial: *Salvia aegyptiaca*.



Salvia aegyptiaca

Photo: Graeme Hornby

Perennials: *Acacia tortilis*, a tree; *Ziziphus spina-christi* (sidr), a very leafy tree; *Prunus arabicus*, a usually leafless tree (see Dec. 2009 Focus); *Lycium shwawii* (desert thorn) with white trumpet blooms; *Dyerophytum indicum*, showing white trumpet powder on leaves, which are pierced at base by stems (curiously, this is in the same family (the leadwort family) as coastally occurring Sea-lavender, *Limonium axillare*); *Euphorbia larica*, a light green woody shrub and *Capparis cartilaginea* (caper plant), a sprawling shrub often found on cliff faces.



Capparis cartilaginea (caper plant) on limestone wall

Photo: Keith Taylor



Gecko egg casings on cave ceiling: almost certainly eggs of fan-footed gecko, *Ptyodactylus hasselquistii*.

Photo: May Yoke Taylor



Graeme emerging from cave entrance beneath hanging bush—possibly *Dyerophytum indicum*.

Photo: Keith Taylor

The wadis at the base of Jebel Sumeini offer such variety for natural history buffs—certainly worth future visits and further study. This trip held something for everyone: for those of us who focused, guidebooks in hand, on the flora, fauna and geology of the lower wadis; for those satisfied by a leisurely wadi stroll followed by a campout and pleasant campfire conversation under bright constellations and for those who chose to climb the mountain itself to catch the breathtaking views from the top—details of which climb Graeme will now relate below.

Keith Taylor

Jebel Sumeini Trip: Summit Climb

Waking up in an acacia grove at the foot of the mountain is an excellent preparation for a day's hike. With the hustle and bustle of city life finally out of the system and the summit up ahead of us, we all set off. The group started out along the wadi bed at a gentle pace, enjoying the mountain flora. Some chose alternative routes, scrambling up the walls of the wadi, but either way everyone was heading to the same place.

Route finding in these hills is a challenge, requiring keen senses. The rocky terrain effectively disguises well-trodden paths which have existed for generations. It would be fascinating to map the network of trails which snake up and across these jebels, and observe them

fanning out across the range. As it is however, they are largely undocumented, and it becomes a task for adventurous souls like Roy and Liz to probe and explore the crags, learning to read the landscape and look for clues to the best way ahead. Look out for rocks that appear unusually smooth, polished by generations of feet or loose rubble and patches of sand, ground down over the years; or the old favourite: donkey droppings! If you come across this, be heartened, as a donkey and its handler charged with transporting goods from A to B will always take the most direct and simple way, having no time for meandering! (A wild donkey of course may just lead you to its favourite patch of fodder!)



Back on our trek, we climb steadily up out of the wadi, contouring along the slope. Occasionally the rock and rubble gives way to smooth sections of limestone pavement; like shelves mounted on the walls of the wadi, they climb steadily, providing a wonderful promenade.

We head toward an intersection of wadis and an imposing dry waterfall bed. It's a confusing geography which caused some head-scratching for Roy and co. when they originally scoped out the walk. After probing direct routes and encountering vertical rock walls and similar obstacles, an ingenious solution was arrived at in the form of a natural chimney, in a recess to the side. Delving into the chimney, it was possible to climb its walls and emerge above the waterfall; good fun for all! The geology of the area was remarkable. Intensely layered and folded rock strata describe the violent history of these regions.



Heavily folded strata of layered seabed deposits. The thickness of layers is related to variable water depths over long periods.

From the waterfall we took a minor detour to seek out a previously discovered wolf trap. No doubt playing a role in the extinction of the wolf in this region, it is nevertheless an impressive construction, made from rock slabs gathered in the vicinity. Merging perfectly into the surroundings, the blocks formed a tunnel 5ft deep, presumably baited with meat, and a vertical slab which would trip and seal off the entrance. The wolf was most likely left to starve. Of pre-WWII construction, the presence of the trap indicates the difficulties which wolves must have presented to local villagers. A significant investment of time and effort, it was not something undertaken lightly. The jebel is a marginal environment with scarce resources. Goats and dates would have been the mainstay of community life, therefore wolf-kills were seen as a significant threat. It is a complex issue indeed, still being dealt with in other parts of the Arabian peninsula where the wolf lives on.



An abandoned wolf trap

From this point the hike continued up the southern side of the wadi, a last push to emerge at a col, or balcony, that opened up in front you with spectacular views. From the col it is a small rise to the summit. In an instant all the hard work is paid off. In my opinion, it is one of the finest views in the Emirates: the meeting of two vast competing environments—mountains and desert dunes—a quite unique landscape.



Bill nearing the summit...again!

If you make it to the top you get to sign Roy's summiteers log-book! Sealed in a Tupperware box under a pile of stones (the cairn which marks the summit of the jebel) your name will remain etched for posterity! Roy maintains this excellent scheme, scanning new

entries and posting them on his site. Check it out: (http://www.chirri2000.com/discovery/disc_sumayni/docs/Guest_book.pdf).

The number of entries and their sheer enthusiasm encourages and reminds the trekker that they are not alone in their love of mountains and wild places; that the effort, sometimes gruelling, is rewarded many times over.



Jebel Sumeini Summit group photo Jan. 2010
Photo: Roy Richards

Finally, check out the following links from Roy Richards:

Summit Photo archives: <http://tinyurl.com/yzqguw6>

All about Sumeini: <http://tinyurl.com/yeddnc1>

Graeme Hornby

All photographs except the last one by the author

IEW 2009 Insect Workshop

We include the following belatedly published write-up of a workshop given at the last IEW, hoping to interest prospective IEW 2010 participants in joining in on some of the workshops that will be on offer in Al Ain—workshops which could offer just as many personal discoveries as the often more popular field trips. -Ed.

On Friday morning, March 27th, Dr. Michael Gillett and Dr. Brigitte Howarth led a small group of us (drawn from all three NHGs) in a workshop on the collection, preservation, and display of insects. After a brief PowerPoint presentation on the basic modus operandi, Dr. Gillett led us into the Oceanic Hotel Garden where we poked around in the grass and under piles of dead leaves to add a few specimens to the collection of hawk-moths and earwigs he'd trapped nearby the night before. We collected a number of grasshoppers, and Martina's sharp eyes and nimble fingers found a couple of slender, orange-spotted rove beetles deep in the grass. We then reassembled in the hotel billiard room, where Dr. Gillett brought out pinning stages and setting boards and showed us how to pin different types of insects and how to set them for drying and eventual display.



Entomological display trainees taking it all in



Pinning a grasshopper in the standard manner: "one wing closed, one wing open"—finding the hind wing to be a surprisingly intricate affair!



Hawk-Moth with antennae and wings properly displayed. In a couple of weeks, it will be dried into position and ready for permanent display, with identifying data tags.



Eyeing strange faces in the microscope

Finally, here's a word on why it is important to take insect specimens, curate them and add them to a collection in the first place. This is not done lightly but is a serious part of studying and recording the biodiversity of an area. Without proper baseline data, i.e. knowledge of what occurs in different habitats, it is impossible to effectively mitigate negative impact, or even understand the impact that change to that habitat will have. Conservation strategies can only be effective the more we understand about species composition, their ecology and therefore their habitat requirements.

Keith Taylor / Brigitte Howarth

All photographs by Martina Fella

IEW 2010 Programme Information

The Inter Emirates Weekend, hosted by the Al Ain chapter of the ENHG, and based at the Intercontinental Resort, Al Ain, will be held from Thurs 25th – Sat 27th February, and is open to members of all 3 UAE NHGs.

IEW Programme: (Timings vary. Click [here](#) for details.)

Thursday afternoon/evening:

Reptile moonwalk / Moonwalk

Light trap session

Big Structures

Khutwah Village 1

Friday morning:

Birding field trip

Al Ain Souk / Al Ain Oasis

Workshop – Insect Orders in the UAE

Al Dhaher Oasis

Wadi plants – Field trip

Flint knapping

Workshop – Fossils

Friday afternoon:

Sand dune walk

Al Dhaher to Al Ilal hike

Wadi Nahyan – Plants, insects & birds

Fossil Valley – Geology

Khail to Sharm drive

Mezyad Fort

Friday evening:

Pre-booked buffet dinner

Guest speaker Phil Iddison: 'Fish in the UAE'

Natural History Awards Presentations

Saturday morning:

Hanging Gardens hike

Medicinal plants in the field / Medicinal plant shops

Wadi Madbah

Workshop: Using keys to identify reptiles

Workshop: IDing jewel beetles etc in BB insect collection

Workshop: Dragonflies

Saturday afternoon:

Combined session: Recording data from Al Ain houses;

Insect/Reptile/Plant observations and recording

For further enquiries: interemiratesweekend@gmail.com

Also see the new IEW 2010 tab under the first tab (ENHG) on the ENHG – Al Ain website: www.enhg.org.

ENHG - Al Ain Committee

Recent Speaker



Jonathan Ali Khan with son Lucas

Jonathan Ali Khan is an explorer, topside wildlife & underwater cameraman, editor, producer and director with a strong passion for the natural world. With over 22 years in the Middle East, Jonathan has led a number of expeditions throughout Arabia, worked on a wide range of unique TV projects in this region and is recognized as an authority on environmental, conservation and diving issues.

Best known throughout the region for his diving related filming experience, his primary interest is in marine subjects that led to the creation of Ocean World Productions in 2003. In 2008, Jonathan decided to focus entirely on television natural history development, leading to the recent establishment of Wild Planet Productions.

His project "Arabia's Cycle of Life" was the first comprehensive TV series on Arabia's natural world featuring mountains, deserts and seas. The series aired regionally to over 50 million viewers on Al Arabiya (MBC Group), Showtime and subsequently was the first regional production to have ever been picked up by Animal Planet.

A firm believer in the need to place scientific research at the core of well balanced content, Jonathan has led many joint filming and scientific expeditions into the field, in some cases, allowing researchers into troubled or difficult areas to access for the first time. Adding a deep concern for the state of our environment and natural world has been at the heart of Jonathan's motivation and is at the core of many fascinating TV projects.

His latest project is a TV 2 part documentary studying the status and conditions of sharks and whales sharks of Arabia called *SharkQuest Arabia*, exploring the distribution of sharks throughout all the seas surrounding Arabia with a view to better understanding the impact from shark fin related fisheries and trade to the Far East. Later this year he will also embark on a Red Sea filming mission to create a cinema release film on Saudi Arabia's underwater world called "*The Realm of Light*".

The Editor thanks the above speaker for providing autobiographical info. & photos for Focus.

In the Local News Media

Gulf News, Nov. 6, 2009: [Excavation uncovers ritual site](#)

The National, Jan. 7, 2010: [An Iron Age camel ride to the UAE's past](#)

The National, Jan. 8, 2010: [Young archaeologist's journey from student digs to full-time job](#)

Gulf News, Jan. 8, 2010: [Oasis' plants in Oman face extinction](#)

The National, Jan. 12, 2010: [Shasha heritage in sturdy hands](#)

Gulf News, Jan. 15, 2010: [Nursery of learning](#)

Gulf News, Jan. 27, 2010: [Al Ain zoo has reason to purr after birth of two sand cats](#)

Gulf News Jan 30 2010: [In Pictures: Al Dhafrah Festival](#)

Gulf News, Feb. 2, 2010: [Hyena cubs born in UAE's Sir Bani Yas Island](#)

Websites of General Interest

ENHG-AA Website (Archives: 3 newsletters, Tribulus):
<http://www.enhg.org>

Tommy Pedersen's UAE Birding / UAE Nature Forum:
www.uaebirding.com

Hanne & Jens Eriksen's Birds Oman website:
www.BirdsOman.com

Qatar NHG website:
<http://www.qnhg.org>

Wildlife Middle East News:
<http://www.wmenews.com>

Arabian Wildlife:
<http://www.arabianwildlife.com/main.htm>

Archaeology website:
<http://www.adias-uae.com/>

Sharjah Museums sites (Check out the virtual tours!):
<http://www.sharjahmuseums.ae/>

Emirates Marine Environmental Group:
www.emeg.ae

EMEG Ecologist Keith Wilson's Public Gallery:
<http://picasaweb.google.co.uk/KDPWilson>

Villa for Rent in Crete

Two-bedroom, two-bathroom villa with private swimming pool and stunning views, available for holidays. On the edge of a village in the White Mountains and only 4 kms from the sea. Ideal for walking and bird watching, visiting Minoan, Roman and Venetian archaeological sites and exploring the lovely old harbour towns of Chania and Rethymnon.

For more details and pictures, see:
<http://sites.google.com/site/noraandjimsgavalohorivilla> .

Or phone Nora 050-823-1689 or Jim 050-617-4309.

ITEMS ON SALE

AT THE ENHG STALL

All prices are in dirhams.

- The Emirates – A Natural History, 350.
The first complete referencing guide to the wildlife of the UAE. 580 colour photos.
- Jebel Hafit – A Natural History, 100.
*An attractive, encyclopaedic presentation of the natural resources of this local landmark.
(Free copies available to schools. Ask Chairman.)*
- Terrestrial Environment of Abu Dhabi Emirate, 240.
- Marine Environment and Resources of Abu Dhabi, 140.
- Arthropod Fauna of the UAE, Vol 1, 110.
- Arthropod Fauna of the UAE, Vol 2, 110.
- Wild about Mammals, 40.
- Wild about Reptiles, 40.
- Snakes of Arabia, 50.
- On-road in the UAE, 50.
- Abu Dhabi Bird checklist, 10.
- Emirates Bird Report, 20.
- Oman Bird List, ed 6, 30.
- Birdwatching guide to Oman, 2nd edition, 100.
Guide to bird watching spots in Oman.
- The Birds of Al Jabal Al Akhdar, 50.
- Comprehensive Guide to the Wildflowers of the UAE, 100.
- Trucial States, 150.
- Oman 1965, 150.
- Natural History of Oman, 50.
- Falconry, 60.
- Pests, 35. *Find out what's in and around your home.*
- Reef Fishes of the UAE, 50.
- Snorkeling and Diving in Oman, 50.
- Feast of Dates, 100.
- UAE in Focus, 100.
- Sir Bani Yas, 100.
- Musandam, 90.
- Abu Dhabi 8 million years ago, 15.
- Discovering Qatar, 120.

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Required: An AV Assistant to control the lights and sound during meetings, as part of a team (training will be provided). Can you do this?

Lectures

Venue: HCT/ADMC

Press CTRL+click [here](#) to view map/directions.

2nd Feb
Yusuf Thakur's Film
Jewel of the Mangroves
Jens Eriksen / Drew Gardner

16th Feb
Arabian Whale Sharks
Jonathan Ali Khan

2nd March **7:30 PM**
Akab Island Sanctuary and Settlement
Sophie Mery, CNRS

16th March **7:30 PM**
Dibba Marine Protected Area
Rita Bento

Field Trips

22nd/23rd Jan.
Mountain Climbing Trip to Jebel Sumeini, Oman
Roy Richards

5th Feb.
Daytrip to Al Dhafrah Festival Camel Beauty Contest, Madinat Zayed
Andrew Bean

12th / 13th Feb.
Camping Trip to Liwa
Andrew Bean

6th March Sunrise-9AM
AD Birdwatching Trip: Same 3 sites as Nov.
Andrew Bean

19th / 20th March
Family Weekend: Visit to 'Kids' Park' Zoo in Shahama; Campout at Two Trees
Andrew Bean

26th / 27th March
Camping/Hiking Trip in Western Hajar Mts.
Feng Wen

ENHG-AD Research & Conservation Fund Grant Application Information

For background on this fund, see [Dec 2010 Focus](#), p5.
For research & grant application guidelines, click [here](#).
For grant application form, click [here](#).
For further enquiries, contact ENHG Chairman Drew Gardner, at drew.gardner@zu.ac.ae. -Ed.

ENHG Equipment for Members' Use

The following ENHG equipment is available for members' use during field trips or on request:

- Birding Telescope
- GPS unit – GARMIN GPSMAP 60CSx
- Nikon Coolpix camera – 5 Megapixel, 4x opt zoom
- First-Aid Kit
- Sky Scout astronomical object locator/identifier

(The club also has a Celestron telescope, which is only used on official ENHG trips. Training sessions on the use of the telescope and Sky Scout can be arranged for small groups of interested members.)

Please contact Andrew Bean, Excursion Secretary, at rexabean@emirates.net.ae to make enquiries. -Ed.

ENHG Corporate Sponsors 2009

These companies are supporting the ENHG activities in the region. We hope you as ENHG members will in turn support these companies whenever you can.

BDO Patel	
British Petroleum	
Dome International	
International Bechtel Company, Ltd.	
Nautica Environmental Associates	
URS Corporation	 Dames & Moore

Newsletter Details

Send newsletter contributions to:
newsletter@chirri2000.com

Postal Address

ENHG c/o Environment Agency -
Abu Dhabi, PO Box 45553, Abu Dhabi

Newsletter Archives

Click on this link for back issues of *focus*:
<http://www.enhg.org/abudhabi/focus.htm>

Yahoo Groups website

Click on this link & press 'Join' button (FOC):
<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/AUHENHG>