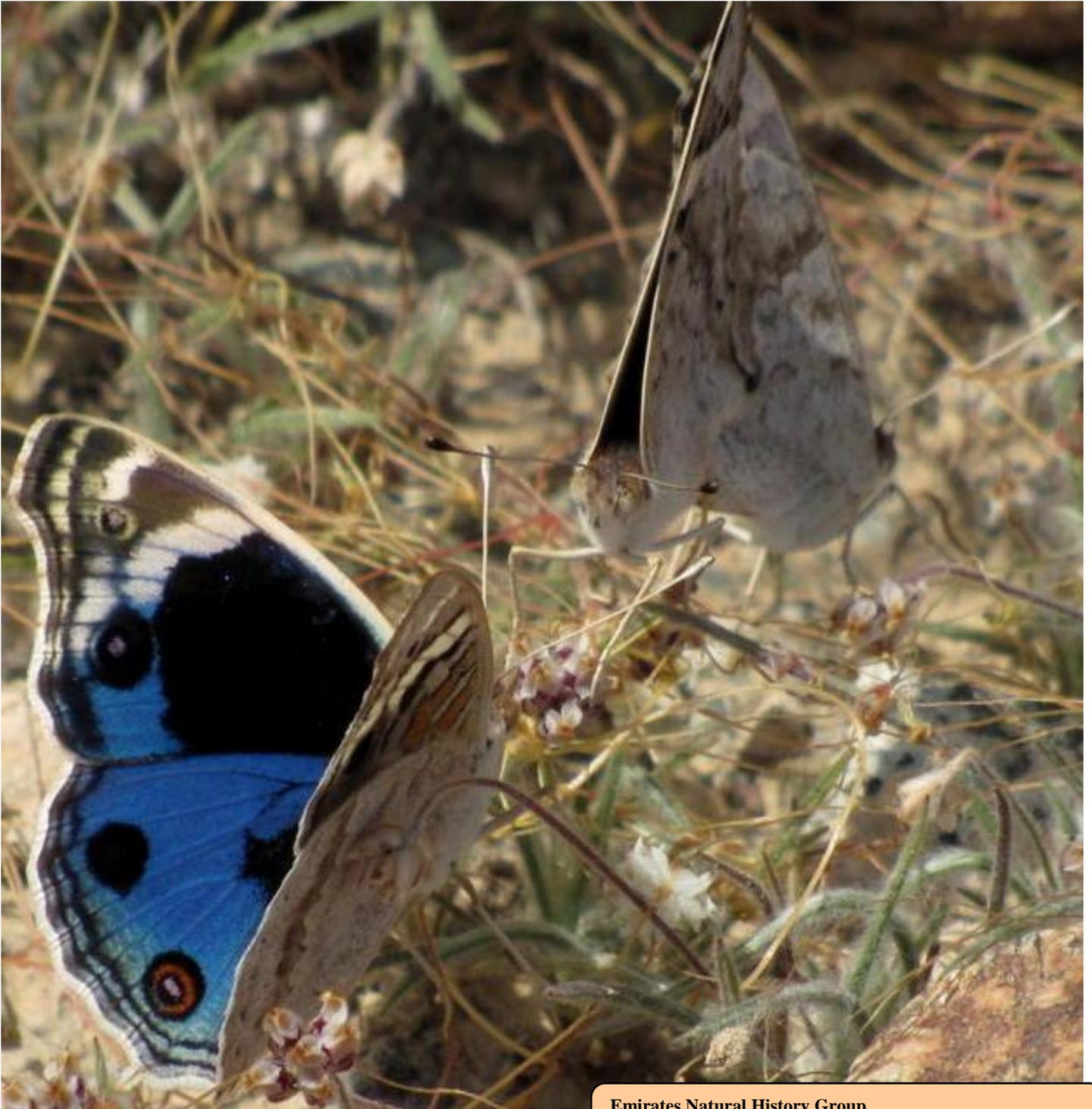


focus



Abu Dhabi, March 2010
Vol 34 (3)



Emirates Natural History Group

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

EDITORIAL

The annual Inter Emirates Weekend, held in Al Ain, was well attended and enjoyed by all. The weather was threatening on the last day, but none of the trips needed to be cancelled. We are most grateful to ENHG-Al Ain for all their hard work in organizing this weekend and putting on such a variety of trips and events. Participants are invited to submit any additional photos or reports of IEW activities for the next issue of Focus.

We welcome interesting sightings of any aspect of natural history, whether from far afield, i.e. the captioned butterfly pupae photos from Brunei, on pp 4-5, or from this region, i.e. the report on the Furbelowed Watering-pot, a most unusual species of mollusc, on pp 5-6.

We are heartened by the recent news that the whale shark has been released by Atlantis, The Palm, in Dubai. However, the news that CITES has been unable to agree on a proposal to curb the trade in several types of sharks from UAE waters is discouraging. See p 7.

Exciting ENHG news: Tribulus Volume 18 has now been published. Members can collect their copy gratis at the forthcoming lectures. It is an 88 page issue with a wide range of papers which will be of interest to members.

We are proposing to run a marine mammal rescue course later this year. Details coming soon via email; also see link on p 7. Finally, I would like to welcome our newest Committee Member, Ann Pearson, now serving as Corporate Sponsorship Secretary.

Drew Gardner

A Sighting at A'Dahir Oasis

On Friday morning Feb. 26th, Brien Holmes led an IEW walk into the A'Dahir wadi in the Hajar Mts behind Mahada. Principal attractions were the traditional plantation, a rich assortment of native plants responding to recent rains, and a working underground falaj system. During the lunch break Martina climbed down into one of falaj shafts and photographed the bat below. –Ed.



Photo: Martina Beck

My main question about this bat was: Why was it alone at the entrance of the falaj? Was it sick? I asked Drew Gardner, and he answered my question and returned the following identification: The bat is a Muscat mouse-tailed bat, *Rhinopoma muscatellum* (and clearly a male!). You can tell by the thin long tail, and also because it does not have a nose leaf. This species often roosts alone, and was almost certainly not sick.

In this issue

- Page 1:** Front cover
- Page 2:** Editorial, A Sighting at A'Dahir Oasis, A Sighting on A'Dahir to Al Ilal Hike
- Page 3:** IEW 2010 Buffet Dinner and Awards
- Page 4:** A Peek at the ENHG Insect Collection, IEW Feedback, White Royal Pupae Camouflage
- Page 5:** Furbelowed Watering-pots in Abu Dhabi!
- Page 6:** Recent Speaker, Upcoming Speaker
- Page 7:** In the Local News Media, Websites of General Interest, Bookstall
- Page 8:** Committee Members, Lectures, Field Trips, Research & Conservation Fund, Equipment for Members' Use, Corporate Sponsors, Newsletter Details

FRONT COVER PICTURE

Photograph: Voyeurism amongst the Blue Pansies?

Photographer: Dick Hornby

This month's contributors

Domenic Antonucci, Andrew Bean, Martina Beck, Drew Gardner, Dick Hornby, Rafeek Khalid, Keith Taylor, May Yoke Taylor, Chris Teasdale

However, there were almost certainly other bats in the falaj, also hanging apart from the others. That falaj usually has between 50 and 200 mouse-tailed bats scattered along its interior.

Martina Beck

A Sighting on A'Dahir to Al Ilal Hike

On the hike Brien Holmes and Jodie Healey led out of A'Dahir Friday afternoon, Feb. 26, there was high drama if you happened to be lucky enough to see it:



Photo: May Yoke Taylor

A spider-hunting wasp, possibly *Cyphononyx bretonii*, the Spider Witch, is dragging a wolf spider through the bushes. It has paralyzed the spider, and is taking it to a secure location, where it will lay its eggs in it. Once hatched, her larvae will proceed to eat the spider alive!

Keith Taylor

IEW 2010 Buffet Dinner and Awards

A varied programme of interesting and informative field trips and workshops, spread out across Al Ain and the Buraimi/Mahada area of Oman Feb 25 - 27, was complemented by a well-attended buffet dinner on the Friday evening. The one unforeseeable hitch in the proceedings came when a temporary closure of the Hili border due to a chemical spill delayed the return of quite a few participants from trips on the Oman side, including the host of the evening, ENHG-Al Ain Vice Chair – Brigitte Howarth. Dinner was delayed accordingly, and the formal proceedings didn't get underway until about 9:15, as Buraimi returnees – some straight from the field – straggled in and helped themselves to the still plentiful buffet.

ENHG Chairman Drew Gardner began the evening programme by reading a commemoration of the life of Sheikh Mubarak Al Nahayan, who had passed away two days before, occasioning an official three days of mourning in the UAE. These remarks, written by former ENHG Chairman Peter Hellyer, reminded us that Sheikh Mubarak was the first Minister of the Interior of the UAE, and in many ways was one of the founders of the UAE as we know it today. And of course, he was the father of our Patron, Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak, who named one of the ENHG's two Natural History awards after him.

Drew then proceeded to the announcement of the Sheikh Mubarak Natural History Award, which is "given to acknowledge the contributions made by an individual, primarily through original research and publication, to the scientific study of the archaeology, history and natural history of the UAE."

The 2009 Sheikh Mubarak Award was awarded to Dr. Christian Velde, the chief archaeologist at the National Museum of Ras al-Khaimah, for successfully re-organising that museum and for overseeing, contributing to and publishing on an important programme of excavation, restoration and conservation, leading to a number of important discoveries, including the largest defensive structure known in Arabia - the long wall (10+ km) that formerly protected the town of RAK/Julfar.

With his many years of service to the furtherance of archaeological research in the UAE, and his services to the DNHG and ENHG as speaker, mentor, and guide, Dr. Christian Velde is an exemplary recipient of the Sheikh Mubarak Natural History Award. He was unable to attend the IEW dinner because of prior commitments, but he will be invited to an official award presentation later this year, after which a full report on his remarkable contributions to archaeology in the UAE will be published in *Focus*.

Next came the announcement of the Bish Brown Award, named after the ENHG's founder, which is "given to a person who has made a significant contribution to promoting wider interest in the objectives of the UAE's three natural history groups, through means such as educational activities, raising public consciousness in the media, playing a leading role in NHG activities etc."

The 2009 Bish Brown Award was given to ENHG members Hanne and Jens Eriksen, who have been

promoting SE Arabian Natural History and especially birds through their photography and publications for the last 20 years or so. Their bird photography is world renowned, having won numerous international competitions. Their books include a *Birdwatching Guide to Oman* (2001, 2008), *Common Birds in Oman* (2005) and *The Birds of Al Jebel Al Akhdar* (2007) among others. They have published a bird calendar each year for at least the last 10 years. Their bird images have appeared on stamps, bank notes and a huge arrange of publications.



Hanne & Jens Eriksen accepting the 2009 Bish Brown Award from ENHG Chairman Drew Gardner

Photo: May Yoke Taylor

Hanne and Jens have given slide shows to all three chapters of the ENHG (since long before making the move from Muscat to Abu Dhabi) and have run the ENHG book table for the last 4 years. Although much of their output has been Oman-based, they have always maintained strong links with the UAE including working with Marijcke Jongbloed, the Arabian Leopard Trust, the Sharjah Captive Breeding Centre etc. And while accepting the award, Jens said the first talk they ever gave in the UAE was in Al Ain – in the same hotel – exactly ten years before!

The featured speaker of the evening after the awards presentations was Phil Iddison, the 2002 Sheikh Mubarak Award winner (for his contributions to the study of food in the UAE). Phil entertained us with a cornucopia of photos and anecdotes gleaned from his many years as a member of the ENHG-Al Ain chapter. He led us on a tour of the early development of the cities of Al Ain and Dubai, filled us in on the important stages of date cultivation and uncovered fascinating facts about traditional doors and keys from the region, among many other things. Running through his talk was a spirit of all-inclusive enquiry and eagerness to share, mirroring what the three NHGs that come together every year during the InterEmirates Weekend are all about.

After dinner, some stayed to renew old acquaintances or make new ones, others wandered out to the lawn to join the ENHG's Andrew Bean for a spot of astronomy, using the club's Celestron telescope and Sky Scout tool for identifying and locating astronomical objects. Most headed "home" to rest up for another day of events, braving blustery weather that only whetted appetites for more.

Keith Taylor / Drew Gardner

A Peek at the ENHG Insect Collection



Moths and beetles from the ENHG Insect Collection

On Sat. Feb. 27, ENHG-AI Ain Vice Chair Dr. Brigitte Howarth treated a small group of us to a viewing of selected specimens from the ENHG Insect Collection, a joint collection housing specimens collected by ENHG founder Bish Brown and others such as Mike Gillett, and currently under Brigitte's curatorship. These specimens are carefully mounted and labelled in hinged wooden display boxes, but on Brigitte's wish list for this important 'amateur' collection is a large state-of-the-art metal cabinet to more effectively preserve it for as long as possible.

Brigitte explained that after the collection was brought out of long-term storage she was convinced that many species found in the collection had not been reported in the literature before and together with ENHG-AI Ain beetle specialist Dr. Michael Gillett found that it contained three rare species from the jewel beetle family (Buprestidae), which had never been found in the UAE before Bish recorded them: *Julodis candida*, *Capnodis excisa*, and *Pseudocastalia arabica*. See [April 2009 Focus](#) (pp 6-7) for Dr. Gillett's comments on fairly recent sightings in the UAE of the first two species. The fourteen specimens of the last species, *P. Arabica*, shown below, testify to how numerous they were when Bish collected them near Sweihan in the early '80s.



Pseudocastalia arabica collected by Bish Brown

For more information on the significance of some of the findings represented in the ENHG collection, see the following article by Brigitte Howarth and Michael Gillett: [Increasing knowledge of the entomological fauna of the United Arab Emirates and the role of private collections](#). Clicking on the above link should bring up a download page for this article from Pensoft Online: a site hosting two excellent natural-history-related open-access

journals: ZooKeys, 'launched to accelerate biodiversity research', and BioRisk – Biodiversity and Ecosystem Risk Assessment (To register for these journals FOC, use links in 'Websites of General Interest' panel, p 7).

In her workshop, Brigitte also showed us how to recognise jewel beetles if we see them. They usually have elongated, somewhat robust bodies (with a slight 'waist'), a metallic shine, and short saw-toothed antennae; some have eye-catching, jewel-like patterns.

Keith Taylor

Photographs by May Yoke Taylor

IEW Feedback

Perhaps the Buraimi Hotel would have been a better hub for this event as it was considerably cheaper, and many of the excursions left from there – not the InterContinental Resort Hotel in Al Ain. This would have avoided the border re-entry problem on the Friday night. I would prefer it if all excursions left from the same car-park at Inter Emirates Weekends in future. Otherwise, I enjoyed the field trips and the company on this one.

Domenic Antonucci

White Royal Pupae Camouflage

Rafeek Khalid, an enthusiastic amateur lepidopterist and former Dubai NHG member now in Abu Dhabi, sent in the following photos from a recent trip to Brunei. – Ed.



A White Royal butterfly from Brunei, found on the "Scurrula-like" (mistletoe) plants in the city suburbs there



Flower buds of larval host plant



White Royal caterpillar spotted in its 2nd instar



The pupa of the White Royal resembles a bird dropping, and it probably contains a mistletoe seed as well!!



The colours and shine suggest that it's a fresh dropping!

Rafeek Khalid

Photographs by the author

Furbelowed Watering-pots in Abu Dhabi!

Recently while engaged in environmental monitoring in connection with the Raha Beach development, we came across some curious objects that turned out to be old specimens of a very curious bivalve mollusc. The species is *Brechites attrahens*, and it has the extraordinary common name of Furbelowed Watering-pot! As can be seen in the photo below, the shell of this mollusc is a greatly elongated calcareous cylinder; our largest specimen is 20 cm long. The animal lives vertically in soft sediment, probably normally in the shallow subtidal. Our discovery was at a depth of 3.5 metres, beside a recently dredged channel to the north of Sammaliah Island, near the Raha Beach development.



This mollusc begins its adult life as a conventional-looking bivalve but then begins to grow a huge hollow tube, with the original bivalve shell attached to the outside. The bottom end of the animal develops into a perforated rose, similar to those on old watering cans (see photo). Around this grow radiating hollow tubules like the petals on a daisy. Presumably, this whole structure is a kind of anchoring device.



The other end is quite different, bearing a series of frills similar to the furbelows, or flounces, on Victorian dresses. We have not yet been able to find out very much about the anatomy or way of life of this strange creature, but it would seem to be a reasonable guess that the furbelows represent annual growth periods, so our specimen would be eight years old. We imagine that a siphon, or probably two (one intake and one exhaust), emerge from the top end, through the last furbelow. We will dig a little deeper and try to produce more information for an article in Tribulus.

There seem to be no previous records of *Brechites attrahens* in the UAE. In the most authoritative guide available, 'Seashells of Eastern Arabia', Bosch et al. give the distribution as being only Masirah Island, off the east coast of Oman. The species is not listed in the very impressive checklist produced by the late Sandy Fowler, and neither was it recorded by Rev. Biggs in his earlier grand study of seashells in the region. It was recorded, however, by Stephen Green in his beautiful book 'Seashells of Bahrain', but only as broken specimens. Stephen gives a maximum length of 10 cm, only half that of our find.

The species is said to have an Indo-Pacific distribution. It is so distinctive that it is not easily overlooked, so there can be no doubt that the species is very rare in this region. In fact it may no longer survive in the Arabian Gulf. Our specimens and Stephen Green's are all old, and we have never encountered a live one after working through many thousands of samples of infauna (animals living in marine sediment).

The specimens we found near Sammaliah Island were being exposed by the meandering of a natural channel that drains water off several square kms of intertidal flats and mangroves. Lateral movement of the channel may have been stimulated by the dredging of a channel in 2008/2009 to allow boats easy passage to Yas Island. When the watering pots were alive they must have been at the surface and able to filter-feed in open water, but they were subsequently buried by deposition of fine silt

and sand. This is the material that was being eroded away by the flow in the channel. All the fine particles and small shells are being washed away, leaving behind debris of quite large shells. Some of the watering-pots are still vertical and half buried. We have no way of knowing how long the shells have been there, but it could easily be a matter of centuries.

So, we will be extremely interested to hear if anyone else has encountered Furbelowed Watering-pots in Abu Dhabi, UAE, or indeed anywhere else. Does anyone have any specimens? Is there any more information about distribution, habitat or life history? Is it an endangered species?!

Dick Hornby / Chris Teasdale

Photographs by Dick Hornby

Recent Speaker



Rita Bento has a Marine Biology degree from the Azores University, Portugal, and a Masters degree in Science of the Sea - Sea Resources from Porto University, Portugal. She has also done research on the bioacoustics of baleen whales with NOAA and Oregon State University, in the USA.

In the last two years she has focused her studies in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), by working closely with the MPAs of the east coast of UAE, in Fujairah Emirate. During this period she has been working as Emirates Diving Association Marine Biologist, coordinating different marine research projects as well as giving Reef Check training.

In her talk to the ENHG on 16th March, Rita gave us some background on the Dibba MPA and filled us in on its current status. In 1995, for the first time in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) three marine protectorates – Rul Dibba Al Faqet, Dadna and Al Aqa – were created in the Emirate of Fujairah, under the instruction of His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Mohammed Al Sharqi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Fujairah. However, the lack of a management plan, after the legal implementation of these Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), has led to a general state of neglect in these three areas, where the loss of habitats and species has been gradually noticed.

Besides the lack of management, the increase in tourism and coastal development along the Fujairah coast has brought more pressure on the Dibba MPA. And natural disasters, including Cyclone Gonu in 2007 and the recent red tide, have caused great distress to that ecosystem, only now beginning to recover.

Through ecological and socio-economic monitoring in the protected area it has been possible to point out the main threats and issues facing Dibba MPA. The application of a management plan in the near future will help to overcome the principal problems encountered in the Dibba MPA: the lack of available data on natural resources, the absence of proper fixed and marked boundaries, the insufficient patrolling and guarding; the vague legislation and institutional mandates, the poor public awareness, and the non-use of protected areas for research purposes. Rita suggested expansion of existing MPAs—to include more of the adjacent coral reefs—and the development of a “network of MPAs” as ways to build gradually on the small steps made so far to protect marine life on the UAE’s East coast.



Dibba Rock, in Dibba MPA

Upcoming Speaker



Dr. med. vet. Margit Muller will speak to us on 6th April about her work as the Director of the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital. She brings to her work 15 years experience in falcons and raptors and 12 years experience with dogs, cats and other pets. Her PhD focused on the locally relevant topic: "Studies on bumblefoot in falcons used for hunting in the United Arab Emirates". Margit also has a Masters in Business Administration from the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK. She is Board Certified in veterinary dentistry in Germany, has a Diploma in Veterinary Homeopathy from the UK and is a Member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons in the UK. Dr. Muller is the author of book: "Practical Handbook of Falcon Husbandry and Medicine", published September 2009, and has published and presented on her work internationally. In addition to all that professional experience, Margit was the Winner of the Abu Dhabi Awards in 2008.

The Editor thanks the above speakers for providing autobiographical information & photos for Focus.

In the Local News Media

Click on the blue link; the article should appear. –Ed.

The National, Feb. 7: [Dugongs hide from the developers](#)

The National, Feb. 11: [Artificial reefs burst into new life](#)

Gulf News, Feb. 13: [Battle to save Dubai desert's wonders](#)

The National, Feb. 13: [Water system can fight UAE algae's red tide](#)

Gulf News, Feb 16: [Bird native to Americas arrives in Abu Dhabi](#)

The National, Feb. 20: [Leopard Spotting](#)

Gulf News, Feb. 20: [Mangroves in Abu Dhabi rescued under habitat protection scheme](#)

Gulf News, Feb. 20: [Livestock owners in RAK will be paid for caracal attacks](#)

The National, Feb. 27: [Researchers link world's smallest dogs to wolves from Middle East](#)

The National, March 18: [Hotel releases whale shark back into Gulf](#)

The National, March 23: [Cites rejects curbs on UAE shark fishing](#)

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 website - Birds Oman:
www.BirdsOman.com

Qatar Natural History Group 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

Jonathan Ali Khan's website - SharkQuest Arabia:
<http://www.sharkquestarabia.com/>

UK-based Marine Mammal Medic Course:
<http://www.bdmlr.org.uk/training/shipping.php>

Two open-access journals from Pensoft Online:
<http://pensoftonline.net/biorisk/index.php/journal>
<http://pensoftonline.net/zookeys/index.php/journal>

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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Lectures

Venue: HCT – Abu Dhabi Men's College

Click [here](#) for map/directions.

2nd March
Akab Island Sanctuary and Settlement

Sophie Mery, CNRS

16th March
Dibba Marine Protected Area

Rita Bento

6th April **7:30 PM**
Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital

Margit Muller

20th April **7:30 PM**
Odonata of the UAE and Oman: Recent Additions

Bob Reimer

Field Trips

6th March
Abu Dhabi Island Birdwatching Trip

Andrew Bean

26th / 27th March
Camping/Hiking Trip in western Hajar Mts: stone village Misfat Al Abriyeen / W9 walk

Feng Wen

9th April
½ day walk near Yas

Feng Wen

24th April
Kayaking Mangroves along Eastern Corniche

Andrew Bean

Research & Conservation Fund

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.

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
- Celestron NexStar telescope (on field trips only)

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

ENHG Corporate Sponsors - 2010

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.

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URS Corporation



Dames & Moore

Newsletter Details

Send newsletter contributions to:
newsletter@chirri2000.com

Newsletter Archives

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

Postal Address

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

Yahoo Groups website

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