

# focus



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Emirates Natural History Group

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

## EDITORIAL

Our recent speaker, Bob Reimer, gave us an update on his work on dragonflies and damselflies of Oman and UAE, and the confirmation that the species of Ceratopogonid biting midge which sucks haemolymph from dragonfly's wing veins is indeed a new species to science, in the genus *Forcipomyia*. I would like to offer congratulations on behalf of the ENHG. Bob has no formal training in entomology, but through enthusiasm for natural history photography, dedication and networking with dragonfly experts, he has made important new discoveries and his expertise is now widely recognized. Natural history has a long tradition of advancement by enthusiastic and knowledgeable amateurs, and it is great to see this tradition being continued by Bob. There are certainly loads of discoveries to be made and it will be wonderful if others are inspired by Bob to become involved.

The Marine Mammal Medic Course, which the ENHG is helping to organise, will most likely be held in October 2010, at a venue TBA. This will be a public course, taught by visiting instructors from British Divers Marine Life Rescue, with a course fee of GBP 90, which will qualify participants to administer first-aid to the three types of marine mammals encountered in this region: dolphins, small whales, and dugongs. Pre-registration will remain open until September. Enquiries may be made to Keith Taylor, ENHG Deputy Chairman.

Finally, we wish to thank the Editor of the Dubai Natural History Group's newsletter, *The Gazelle*, for several reports on this year's Inter-Emirates Weekend, which we reprint, with permission, in this issue of *Focus*.

*Drew Gardner*

## March 2010 Birding

On 6<sup>th</sup> March 2010 twelve amateur ENHG birders, led by Andrew Bean, toured Abu Dhabi Island, honing skills with binoculars and field guides while surveying the birdlife. Here is a list of the birds positively identified:

### Eastern Corniche mangroves and palm grove:

Western Reef Heron (white & dark plumage)	
Grey Heron	Common Sandpiper
Greater Flamingo	Socotra Cormorant
White-eared Bulbul	White Wagtail
Black headed Gull	Mallards M & F
Collared Dove	Rock Pigeon
Laughing Dove	

### Mushrif Palace Park palm grove:

Collared Dove	Laughing Dove
Red-vented Bulbul	Alexandrine Parakeet
Grey Francolin	Graceful Prinia
Hoopoe	

### Western Corniche Park lawns & beach:

Common Mynah	House Crow
Collared Dove	Red-vented Bulbul
White Wagtail	Graceful Prinia
Hoopoe	Crested Lark
Desert Wheatear	Isabelline Shrik
Caspian Gull	Siberian Gull

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## FRONT COVER PICTURE

*Photograph: Golden-backed Weaver, Abu Dhabi*

*Photographer: Andrew Bean*

## This month's contributors

*Andrew Bean, Valerie Chalmers, Angie Marles, David Palmer, Ron Priestley, Sarge Salman, Michelle Sinclair, May Yoke Taylor*

Cormorant  
Curlew

Kentish Plover



Curlew at Western Corniche beach

*Photo: Sarge Salman*

### Al Wathba sewerage pond near truck road

Greater Flamingo	Black Winged Stilt
Common Sandpiper	Kentish Plover

### Al Wathba sewerage pond by sewerage works

White-cheeked Bulbul	Collared Dove
Purple Sunbird	Little Green Bee-eater
Graceful Prinia	Black-winged Stilts
Marsh Harrier	

### ADNOC Residence by Hilton Hotel, in hidden tamarind tree festooned with weaver nests:

Golden-backed Weavers	Village Weavers
Vitelline Masked Weavers	



Village Weaver



Vitelline Masked Weaver



Female (probably Village) weaver feeding young

**Three above photographs by Angie Marles**

**Ron Priestley / Angie Marles / Andrew Bean**

NB: See Golden-backed Weaver on this issue's cover.

NB: On 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2010 Andrew also saw Cream-Coloured Coursers at the AD City Golf Club (which used to be called the AD Golf and Equestrian Club) -- only the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> confirmed sighting ever in the UAE! --Ed.

### IEW 2010 Reptile Moonwalk/ Light Trapping Session

On Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2010, a group of about 15 of us rendezvoused with Dr Brigitte Howarth, Vice-Chairman, ENHG Al Ain, at 7 p.m. at the Al Ain Zoo roundabout and then Brigitte took us to a sandy habitat surrounded by low sand dunes, not far from the sewage works. We joined others who had gone to the first session at 5.30 p.m. with Bob Reimer. A light trap (mercury vapour light) had been set up just before dark to attract the insects which were present after dark. By

the time the second group reached the venue, several insects had been seen in the light trap and more continued to be attracted throughout the evening.



Brigitte and friends at the light trap

In the picture below, a hawkmoth decided that the light trap was a favourable place to visit and seemed quite happy to remain there!



Small *Agrius convolvuli*, Convolvulus Hawkmoth

Brigitte collected many insects during the light-trapping session which she used for her 'Insect Orders in the UAE Workshop' next day, and these included members of the Diptera (true flies), Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths), Hymenoptera (bees, wasps, ants), Coleoptera (beetles), Hemiptera (true bugs), Orthoptera (grasshoppers) and Neuroptera (nerve-winged insects like antlions).



*Anax parthenope* (Lesser Emperor) dragonfly

Dragonflies were also seen at the light trap and Bob Reimer identified them as a female *Anax ephippiger* (Vagrant Emperor) and two female *Anax parthenope* (Lesser Emperor) dragonflies (see above photo).

Later in the evening Dr Drew Gardner, Chairman, ENHG Abu Dhabi, took us to look for reptiles and bats in the sand dune area and near ghaf trees and bushes. We did not see any bats, but we did find three types of gecko. These were *Stenodactylus doriae*, Dune Sand Gecko, *Stenodactylus arabicus*, Arabian Sand Gecko and *Bunopus tuberculatus*, Baluch Rock Gecko.



*Stenodactylus doriae*, Dune Sand Gecko



*Bunopus tuberculatus*, Baluch Rock Gecko



*Stenodactylus arabicus*, Arabian Sand Gecko

We had a most interesting and enjoyable moonwalk and we left the site just after 10 p.m.

**Valerie Chalmers**

**Photographs by May Yoke Taylor**

## IEW 2010 Workshop: Using keys to identify reptiles

On Saturday morning, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2010, several members attended Dr Drew Gardner's workshop on using keys to identify reptiles at Al Ain English Speaking School. Drew provided bottled specimens of geckos, and we used his key to Geckos – Family Gekkonidae, which he has produced, to identify geckos found in both the UAE and Oman. Geckos which he provided included members of the Genera *Asaccus*,

*Hemidactylus*, *Bunopus* and *Stenodactylus*. We had seen members of the last two genera on the Reptile Moonwalk on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February. It was interesting to be able to examine geckos close up and without them moving! It was also useful to be able to see distinguishing features such as size and position of tubercles in different parts of the body surface and toes with adhesive pads with rows of lamellae, as opposed to those which were simple or with fringes of pointed scales.

I found the workshop most helpful and also fun to do!

**Valerie Chalmers**

## IEW Moonwalk to Khutwah Village 1

On a clear moonlit night, our guide Brien Holmes told us, our bodies cast no shadows which might impede night vision when we walked through the wadis and hills. Everything was bathed in a beautiful silver light. A number of the participants tried to capture the magic of that moonlit landscape digitally and all were unsuccessful. The village of Khutwah did not appear to be fully inhabited. We did pass a home where a group of men were enjoying a majlis and they seemed remarkably unperturbed by a group of strangers walking through their village at night. We walked through the village, past the date palm oasis and into the valleys and foothills of the Hajar Mountains.



The village of Khutwah 1 in the background

We walked along a falaj system which has been restored. Restoration of the falaj system in this entire area is ongoing as farming activity appears to be on the increase. Once fallow and disused for a number of years, the oases in the Khutwah area are now restored and have become highly profitable. Figs, bananas, papayas, pomegranates, mangos, lemons, lime, fresh herbs/produce (such as mint, parsley, basil, and rocket) plus a plethora of date palms grow in the oasis. Outside the palm oases the landscape is barren, and it hard to imagine any life or industry existing there in the past, but we were told that copper smelting was a cottage industry carried out by the community in this area as and when time permitted. Smelter remains have been found in the Khutwah wadi area.

The Khutwah wadi and hills are popular with visitors over the weekend, and most of us on the moonlight walk were grateful that we could enjoy the peace, quiet and

calm offered by the nighttime walk. What was noticeable was that visitors are not making much effort to keep the area clean – perhaps due in part to a lack of facilities. We came upon an abandoned homestead surround by hills and in a valley. It was totally isolated. The majlis, animal pens, kitchen and living quarters could easily be seen from the remaining walls. Anyone living here would have had to be tough and accustomed to a frugal and isolated way of life. Oman has encouraged people living in these remote villages to move into towns and government housing where it is easier and cheaper to provide families with all the facilities for modern-day living. Standing in the middle of the abandoned homestead surrounded by hills one can easily understand how expensive and difficult it would be to bring water and electricity to such a place. We noted few signs of any animal life except for a few burrows. It is possible that such a big group of people might have sent small animals running for cover!

*Michelle Sinclair*

*Photograph by the author*

## Jebel Hafit tombs & Mezyad Fort

There are hundreds of cairn tombs scattered along the eastern side of Jebel Hafit – estimates of the number vary – most of them just looking like piles of rocks, including some very large piles. They date from the 3rd millennium BC, though some may have been re-used in iron-age times. It is sometimes hard to know whether you are looking at a tomb or just a pile of rocks. The Jebel Hafit tombs were among the earliest archaeological sites investigated in the UAE, when Sheikh Zayed invited a Danish team working in Bahrain many years ago to make a side-trip to Al Ain. The rest, as they say, is pre-history. About half-way along the eastern flank of the mountain there is a group of half a dozen tombs which were reconstructed several years ago, somewhat speculatively, by the archaeological team permanently based in Al Ain. During the recent Inter-Emirates Weekend, more than thirty of us, led by Amer, inspected these reconstructions, crawling in through the small entrance ways.

Then we proceeded to the fort at Mezyad, which is off to the right just before you reach the current border post. Mezyad is a large fort with a fairly simple rectangular design and four corner towers. It was of course a border stronghold, and plans to make it more of a tourist attraction, with a museum, have not come to fruition probably because it remains in a sensitive area close to the border fence. Inside, there is plenty of evidence of efforts at restoration and preservation work, with reconstructed walls and piles of unused mud bricks, but this work was apparently put on hold some time ago. The large interior courtyard, which at one point housed areesh structures, now contains palm trees and other plants. Along each of the four walls are a large number of barrack-like rooms, sometimes in a double row. The place still looks like a barracks – as it once was, for the Trucial Oman Scouts. It is the last of the facilities used by the Scouts that has not been destroyed or reconstructed beyond recognition.



Mezyad fort

It's an atmospheric place, close to the mountain and the border and set on the edge of its own oasis. It has a pleasing air of dereliction, and gives a strong sense of the recent past. It feels as if the Trucial Oman Scouts left their lonely outpost only a few years back, and might at any point come sauntering back to reclaim it and aim their Enfield rifles through the slots in the fortifications, watching hawk-eyed for encroachments on the oasis from rival powers.

*David Palmer*

*Photograph by the author*

## Al Ain Oasis with Phil Iddison & Amer

For many members of the various NHGs, the Al Ain Oasis (the one you enter from next to the Al Ain National Museum) is among the first places they visited when they started to explore the UAE. But not many of us have had the privilege of visiting it under the guidance of Phil Iddison, who produced a series of authoritative booklets several years ago on such aspects of local life as building, farming, diet and clothing. An engineer by trade, Phil has now moved back to the UK, where he cultivates a large allotment and regularly harvests stone tools from it. He was persuaded to return for this year's Inter-Emirates Weekend.



In Al Ain Oasis

Phil, ably supported by Amer, led us through the oasis with an optimistic bounce in his step and an irrepressible half-smile of anticipation and enjoyment on his face. He showed us the details of palm-tree cultivation and date production, and explained the use of every part of the palm-tree for a variety of things.



Tending dates



Threshing dates

Phil also explained the way the land is divided up and allocated, told of the restoration of the oasis in 1999-2000 and detailed the materials (traditional and modern) used for walls, gates and irrigation systems. He also pointed out the occasional intriguing large mounds under which there may well be archaeological evidence of thousands of years of use of the oasis.



The restored falaj and channelling

**David Palmer**

**Photographs by Michelle Sinclair**

## 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 km 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.

## Recent Speaker



Bob Reimer has been a keen member of the ENHG-Al Ain for many years, for which he has led many field trips. He has also made a real contribution to all three NHGs by uploading all back issues of the ENHG's journal *Tribulus* onto the ENHG.org web site, and also by maintaining an ongoing archive of the newsletters of all three NHGs. In the best tradition of the ENHG, he has also developed expertise in dragonfly identification and behaviour, which is now resulting in publications of new records and new observations—in *Tribulus* and elsewhere. For his efforts on behalf of the goals of the ENHG, he received the Bish Brown Award for 2007.

In his talk on April 20<sup>th</sup>, Bob briefly reprised the early history of his research into the little midge 'riders' on dragonfly wings which he spoke to our chapter about a few years back, and then covered a few new species of dragonflies for the UAE, Oman and for himself, and finally concluded by bringing his midge study up to date. The surprising news: the midge itself is new to science, and Bob now has the enviable task of naming it!

## Upcoming Speaker



**Dr. Taoufik Ksiksi** is an Associate Professor of Plant Ecology in the Department of Biology at UAE University in Al Ain, where he is the Principal Investigator on various environmental projects in desert ecosystems and supervises many MSc and PhD students on plant ecology research. Having completed his higher education in New Mexico and Texas in the USA, he served as a Plant Ecologist in the Queensland Beef Industry Institute, under the Department of Primary Industries in Australia.

Dr. Ksiksi has published several journal articles on management of grazing lands, particularly in arid environments, with a special focus on the "physiological impact of increasing global carbon dioxide on terrestrial vegetation". He will speak to us on 4<sup>th</sup> May about his work with the rare but promising Qafas plant, as an example of the work that is being done on understanding how desert eco-systems can adapt to climate change. *NB: See first news link on p. 7 for an article on this plant.*

**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, October 17: [Seed money sows hope for plant](#) (Explains Qafas plant: subject of 4<sup>th</sup> May talk.)

The National, Feb. 28: [Country to save its plants' seeds](#)

The National, March 1: [Turtles: the new clue to climate change?](#)

The National, March 4: [Race to save dying sea turtle](#)

The National, March 5: [Rare cormorants under threat in emirate](#)

Gulf News, March 6: [UAE's Bu Tinah vying to be amongst new Seven Wonders of Nature](#)

The National, March 13: [Children win early encounter with wadi wildlife](#)

Gulf News, March 17: [The Sunfish shines bright](#)

Gulf News, March 18: [Animal expert finds rare species in Dubai](#)

The National, April 10: [Self-preservation society: saving UAE's mangroves](#)

## 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](http://www.uaebirding.com)

Hanne & Jens Eriksen's Birds Oman website: [www.BirdsOman.com](http://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/>

Dubai Astronomy Group: <http://www.dubaiastromy.com>

Emirates Marine Environmental Group: [www.emeg.ae](http://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**  
Press CTRL+click [here](#) to view map/directions.

6<sup>th</sup> April  
Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital

**Margit Muller**

20<sup>th</sup> April  
Odonata of the UAE and Oman: Recent Additions

**Bob Reimer**

4<sup>th</sup> May **7:30 PM**  
Oafas plant: climate change and desert eco-systems

**Taufik Ksikis**

18<sup>th</sup> May **7:30 PM**  
The Importance of Environmental Awareness

**Anf Ziadat**

## Field Trips

24<sup>th</sup> April  
Kayaking Mangroves along Eastern Corniche  
**Andrew Bean**

6<sup>th</sup> May  
Evening Gecko-spotting outing near AD Airport  
**Drew Gardner**

7<sup>th</sup> May  
Hatta day trip  
**Feng Wen**

18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> June  
High altitude camping near Rustaq, Oman  
**Feng Wen**

## Social Event

27<sup>th</sup> April **7:30 PM**  
Informal after-dinner gathering at the One-to-one Hotel's Village Club garden.

## ENHG-AD Research & Conservation Fund Grant Application Information

For background on this fund, see [Dec 2009 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](mailto:drew.gardner@zu.ac.ae).

## 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
- Celestron NexStar telescope (on field trips only)

Please contact Andrew Bean, Excursion Secretary, at [rexabean@emirates.net.ae](mailto:rexabean@emirates.net.ae) to make enquiries.

## Corporate Sponsors of the ENHG - 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.

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

## Newsletter Details

Newsletter contributions to:  
[newsletter@chirri2000.com](mailto:newsletter@chirri2000.com)

## Postal Address

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

## Members' Items for sale

Please send small ads to:  
[newsletter@chirri2000.com](mailto:newsletter@chirri2000.com)

## Yahoogroups website

<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/AUHENHG>