

focus

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Vol 36 (1)



Emirates Natural History Group

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

EDITORIAL

We welcome many of you back from short winter holidays, ready to start new activities. The New Year has already started out as a time of renewal for the ENHG. At our 3rd Jan. meeting we warmly welcomed Dr Andrew Bean as the new ENHG Chairman. Andrew announced he will step down as Excursion Secretary in June, so that pivotal role awaits one or more willing volunteers.

On 3rd Jan. former Chairman Dr Drew Gardner gave us a splendid talk, drawn from his wide-ranging experience, about various adaptations to 'Life in the Sand'. In thanks for this & many other talks and for his many years of able leadership, we presented him with an ENHG Life Membership Award. Following this, we presented another former Chairman, Dr Dick Hornby, a Life Membership for his many valuable services to the Group as well. Drew is heading off on a new adventure to Australia at the end of the month, but Dick remains in the UAE and continues to be an active member of the Committee. NB: Both of these award certificates and others should soon be on display on the Abu Dhabi section of the ENHG-AI Ain website www.enhg.org.



Lifetime Membership Award for Drew Gardner



Lifetime Membership Award for Dick Hornby

Both photographs by Barbara Barton Smith

We also say goodbye to Dr Gabrielle (Gaby) Zezulka-Mailloux, who's leaving the UAE this month, and to Louise Welch, who's completing her contract here at the end of February – and extend our heartfelt thanks for all the help they've given the Committee, and in particular for keeping our book tables well supplied with useful

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FRONT COVER PICTURE

Photograph: Bluethroat on Eastern Corniche, Abu Dhabi

Photographer: May Yoke Taylor

This month's contributors

John Burt, Barbara Couldrey, DNHG, *The Gazelle*, Omana Kallararakal, Gordon Kirkwood, May Yoke Taylor, Keith Taylor, Barbara Barton Smith

ENHG Membership Information

Annual membership in the Abu Dhabi chapter of the ENHG is 100 Dhs – for both individual and family membership. See Membership Secretary or Assistant at the next meeting for a membership form. **(Renewals for 2012 are now due.)**

Members are entitled to join the group on all day trips and overnight camping trips. Each member is also entitled to a copy of the ENHG's normally annual peer-reviewed journal, *Tribulus*. Volume 19 is now available at meetings.

reading material over this past year. We wish them all the best at their next ports of call.

At the same time, we say hello to Kiya Murman, who has just volunteered to be our new Book Stall Coordinator. As an added bonus, Kiya has also agreed to give us much-needed assistance with Lecture Coordinator duties for the rest of this season as well! NB: Kiya could now use an additional volunteer to assist her at the book table – preferably by the end of Feb, when Louise hands it over to the new volunteers.

Another volunteer who has responded to our appeals is Zander Rupp, who will be taking charge of recording our lectures on DVDs and making copies available; he will also fill in as needed for our AV system volunteer Sidney Liu, whose continuing assistance with running the sound and lights at meetings is much appreciated. We especially want to thank Barbara Denys, who is now taking 'maternity leave' from ENHG activities, for kicking off the recording of lectures a couple of months ago.

This burst of enthusiastic participation at a time of substantial turnover on the Committee is a wonderful way for our Group to kick off the New Year! And if anyone else would like to join in the fun, the roles mentioned above – helping organise field trips and assisting at the book table – and others likely to open up soon are free for the taking. The ENHG Committee welcomes any member – long-term or brand-new – who can find the time to help out with one or more of the tasks that allow this 36-year-old volunteer organisation to offer a continuing educational programme of lectures and trips to Abu Dhabi residents, to help as many as possible find out more about the natural world around them, and in addition, to record and publish natural history findings and offer grants to promote vital research and conservation in the region. Any volunteer can expect a lot of assistance in many forms, with helpful suggestions and advice, document templates, contacts, equipment and other forms of support from experienced, and grateful, Committee members.

Wrapping up Committee news, Stefan Beck has now stepped down due to work commitments after providing the Committee with valuable assistance over the past couple of years, but he remains on tap as an occasional excursion leader, and is now organising a mountain hike in RAK on Jan 21st (See p. 8; email alert is now out).

In members' news, early last month we said good-bye to keen bird-watcher and ENHG member John Rogan and his wife Anna; after seven years in Abu Dhabi, they will soon be settling in back home in Australia. We wish all those taking their leave of the ENHG this season all the best in the next phase of their lives in 2012.

Looking ahead to the big event on our annual calendar, please have a look on p. 5 at the booking and programme details of the Inter-Emirates Weekend 2012, to be hosted by the DNHG in Dubai from 23rd-25th Feb. Please note that the hotel booking deadline is **23rd Jan**. One of the events at the Fri. eve IEW dinner on is the presentation of the ENHG's two annual natural history awards; the call for nominations for both is still open until 31st Jan (see details on p. 2 of [Dec 2011 Focus](#)).

Finally, Abu Dhabi welcomes two important conferences this week. One is The [Coral Reefs of the Gulf](#) conference (17-19 Jan), hosted by NYUAD. The other is [The World Future Energy Summit 2012](#), at ADNEC (16-19 Jan). Registration via the above links (closing fast) is required for both conferences.

Keith Taylor

Manatee Rescue in Belize

In Oct. 2010, at the invitation of the ENHG, trainers Stephen Marsh and Richard Ilderton of British Divers Marine Life Rescue conducted two sessions of the Marine Mammal Medic course—hosted by the Emirates Diving Association in Abu Dhabi and by the Emirates Marine Environmental Group in Jebel Ali—giving training in rescuing marine mammals in distress, focusing on small whales, dolphins and dugongs.

We are happy to report that one course participant has now put those skills to successful use! Gordon Kirkwood, a former ENHG member who flew back to Abu Dhabi from his new home in Belize for the MMM

course, has sent in the following report on the rescue of a manatee. (For differences between manatees & dugongs, see [September 2011 Focus](#)). –Ed.



I am pleased to advise that we carried out a successful manatee rescue yesterday [Mon Jan 9th] here in Belize - my first since taking the Marine Mammal Medic course, despite numerous previous unsuccessful attempts to catch old, malnourished and separated manatees.

This manatee was a 5 foot 7 inch male calf / juvenile that was separated from its mother and malnourished. Capture took 3½ hours, and treatment and sampling took 1 hour. Then driving the manatee to the rehabilitation centre took a further 2½ hours, followed by about 1½ hours of treatment before driving home again.

The manatee, now named Duke, is still under treatment in a pool at the Manatee Rehabilitation Centre at Sarteneja in Northern Belize. It is being fed regularly by bottle and tube to help it overcome its malnourishment.

The rescue was featured on all the national TV news channels here in Belize last night. Taking the MMM course in Abu Dhabi and visiting the manatees in Crystal River Florida gave me the necessary confidence to deal with manatees both in and out of the water.

Gordon Kirkwood

Photograph courtesy of the author

Lizard Sighting at Khor Kalba

While on an outing with the ENHG-AI Ain in Khor Kalba on 26th Nov 2011, we spotted two Blanford's fringe-toed lizards, *Acanthodactylus blanfordii*, referred to in Drew Gardner's latest talk. This is a lacertid lizard (a common type in Europe & N Africa, with pointed snout and long whip-like tail). This particular species is found in coastal Iran and on the Oman Batinah, reaching just as far NW as Kalba—its only UAE locality. We counted at least fifty

burrows in a patch of saltbushes interlaced with quad bike & 4WD tracks at the first approach to the beach in this popular recreation area. It's good to see they are hanging on despite all the human interference! -Ed.



Photo: Keith Taylor

Sea-squirt Sighting near RAK

The photo and description below are reprinted from the Dubai NHG's newsletter, *The Gazelle* (Dec 2011), with a definitive answer to the identification query posed. -Ed.



Photo: Barbara Couldrey

Enquiry: "Walking on Rams beach (north of RAK) after an October storm, Barbara Couldrey, who has an eye for what is out-of-the-ordinary, found an accumulation of little black blebs, like miniature boxing gloves, attached to small pieces of coral and cemented sediment thrown up by the waves. They looked for all the world like the residue of an oil spill, complete with adhered sand grains. They even felt tarry, but they all had a similar size and shape, and did not actually coat the rock itself. Barbara and a friend cut one open and found 'a slimy green mass' inside. Can anyone identify this?" - *Gazelle*

Response: This is a sea-squirt: On the taxonomic side it's known as an ascidian, and the species is *Phallusia nigra*. It's common on rocky substrates and piers around here. Believe it or not, these are among the invertebrates most closely related to us because they have a notochord, which in human embryos becomes the vertebral disks. Their biology also has a humorous side: these sea squirts start out their life as highly energetic, quite brainy individuals. Eventually, they settle down on a rock, become inert, and their brain (ganglia) dissolve. In that way they're a lot like tenured professors!

Dr. John Burt

Biology Department, New York University - Abu Dhabi

Beginning Birder's ID Quiz #1

New ENHG member Omana has sent in these beautiful photos of waders she sighted on Abu Dhabi Island in Oct & Nov, 2011. We present these in the form of a quick guessing game to inspire our readers to get out in this nice weather – bird book in hand (We recommend *Common Birds of the UAE*, now available from the ENHG's Book Stall) – and start to become familiar with some of the most common examples of the bird life that is so richly abundant round the edges of this city.

Can you quickly identify these four birds? Oscar Campbell will show images of two of them in his 17th Jan talk, and answers will be given in Feb 2012 *Focus*. -Ed.



a.



b.



c.



d.

Photographs by Omana Kallankaral

Inter-Emirates Weekend 2012

Thu-Sat, 23-25 February 2012

Each year the UAE's three Natural History Groups – Emirates Natural History Group Abu Dhabi, Emirates Natural History Group Al Ain and the Dubai Natural History Group – get together for an educational yet social weekend involving a dinner and various activities and trips. It is a chance to meet up with new people & old friends from the other groups. The event is organised annually by one of the groups in rotation. This year it is the turn of the Dubai Natural History Group.

IEW 2012 will be held on Thu-Sat, Feb 23-25, 2012.

Hotel

IEW 2012 will be based in Dubai at the **Holiday Inn Express Hotel (Airport)**. The hotel is located opposite Dubai International Airport Terminal 3. It is **readily accessible by car via Business Bay Crossing**, directly from the Al-Ain Road or Al-Khail Road. It is also just a short walk (0.5km) from Emirates Metro Station on the red line. Room rates are attractive and are intended to facilitate attendance by all NHG members who are interested.

Programme

Field trips will be conducted on Fri and Sat, Feb. 24-25.

Full day field trips are expected to include:

- Geology of the UAE (two sessions)
- Coastal Lagoons: mangroves at Khor Zawrah and Fasht at Khor al-Baydah
- Hajar Mountain wadi walk
- Sharjah Archaeology: Muwailah, Mleiha and Buhais
- Fossil Hunting: Late Cretaceous Simsim Formation
- Dubai Birdwatching
- Dubai / Abu Dhabi border road: desert ecology

Half-day options will include:

- Atlantis aquarium & behind-the-scenes
- Dubai desert ecology: Mushrif Park
- Birds of Prey show
- Dubai Birdwatching
- Dubai Temple Tour /Bastakiya (wind tower) area

Thursday evening is intended for arrivals and socializing. We will also be showing a selection of Arabian natural history DVDs.

On Friday evening there will be a buffet dinner (Dh 69 Net per person including one soft drink or water) followed by a short programme including the annual IEW photographic competition and award presentations.

More details regarding the programme, the hotel location, the photographic competition and other matters will follow in due course.

Rooms

The hotel has reserved a block of 35 rooms for the Thursday and Friday nights on a first-come first-served basis. However, participants must book by 23 January. After that, bookings will be subject to room availability and Dubai has a busy winter conference schedule.

Hotel rates (per night) are: **Single Room – Dh 250 Net**, **Double Bed/Twin-Bedded Room – Dh 279 Net** and **Triple Room – Dh300 Net**. These rates are inclusive of: 10% Municipality Fee and 10% Service Charge, complimentary hot breakfast and complimentary basement parking.

[N.B. Triple occupancy can only be provided in the form of a King size-bedded room with foldable sofa beds as extra beds are not provided in the room. Up to two children below the age of 18 years stay free when sharing their parents' room and also enjoy a complimentary breakfast.]

Packed lunches will be available for Friday and Saturday at a cost of Dh35 Nett per box. Participants should inform the hotel of their requirements for lunch boxes 24 hours in advance.

Reservations

Individuals will be responsible for making their own hotel reservations. The DNHG itself will not be responsible for bookings or payments. The hotel will require advance payment or credit card details for each booking. In the case of no show or late cancellation individuals will be charged directly.

To make a reservation, participants should **contact the Holiday Inn Express sales and reservation staff by email** at diana.chung@hiexdubai.ae with a copy to reservation.airport@hiexdubai.ae, **or by fax at 04-317-3444**. It is very important for participants to **mention the name Dubai Natural History Group** when booking in order to avail themselves of the special rate. The hotel will not accept any bookings by telephone.

In case of queries, phone Diana Chung, Sales Executive, on 050-505-4712. The hotel numbers are: 04-290-0114/290-0125/290-0126.

Check-in time is 1400 hrs. Early check-in may be requested in advance, but it is based on room availability. Check-out time is 1400 hrs.

When you have made your booking, please email Valerie Chalmers, DNHG Vice Chairman, on valeriechalmers@gmail.com so that we have an idea of numbers attending the weekend.

DNHG

Recent Speaker



Former ENHG Chairman **Dr Andrew (Drew) Gardner** is fascinated by geckos, for which he is well-known amongst ENHG members. In fact, the thesis of his PhD from Aberdeen University was on the evolutionary ecology of day geckos in the Seychelles. However, his interests certainly do not end there. He followed up his

doctoral research with post-doctoral research on Arctic charr (a salmonid fish), based in University College, London. He then worked for twelve years at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman, researching the reptiles and mountain ecology, and named three new species of gecko in genus *Asaccus* during this time. He then came to Abu Dhabi, where he has served as an associate professor at Zayed University for over ten years.

In over two decades, Drew has completed almost 100 ecology surveys in Oman and the UAE and published about forty research papers and book chapters on conservation, lizards, snakes, fish, insects, birds and juniper woodlands. Topping all that off, his authoritative field guide to the reptiles and amphibians of South-eastern Arabia is now at the publishers & due out soon!

On 3rd January 2012, Drew gave us a presentation focusing on the animals found in the UAE sand deserts, their remarkable adaptations to survival in this harsh but beautiful environment and pointers on distinguishing the tracks and trails left by sand dwellers such as dhubs and monitors, vipers and sand boas, dung beetles and robber flies, and also explained the differences between different kinds of sand and how they affect the flora and fauna that make use of them. He recommended the following link to a website with stunning photos of sand grains from around the world, with photos & blog notes on field geology, life in sand, etc.: <http://sandatlas.org>. Check it out!

Upcoming Speaker



Oscar Campbell (see brief bio in [Dec 2011 Focus](#)), gave us an excellent talk on the Birds of Khor Kalba last month, along with his Kingfisher survey teammate, Emirati wildlife photographer Ahmed Al Ali, who showed us his DVD of birds of KK set to music. NB: Although that DVD suffered from a compatibility problem at that presentation, an excellent-quality version can now be downloaded from You-tube via this link: <http://vimeo.com/33518934>.

On 17th Jan, Oscar is giving us a second illustrated presentation, *The Birds of Al Wathba Lake*, in advance of two birding trips he is leading to this EAD protected reserve. The presentation will take the form of a birdwatching visit to this important man-made wetland, in images. Oscar will outline the species that can be expected on a visit to the lake at various times of the year, concentrating on autumn and winter. He will also outline where the many species that use Al Wathba Lake are coming from (or going to!) and discuss some recent trends in populations of certain species.

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

In the Local News Media




- The National, Dec 11: [A crystal ball for coral reefs](#)
 The National, Dec 11: [Zayed laid the foundations for a green future](#)
 The National, Dec 13: [In the footsteps of a gazelle in 1761, the wellspring of a capital](#)
 The National, Dec 23: [Golf course find guided understanding of Abu Dhabi's history](#)
 The National, Jan 8: [Sharjah's 3,000-year-old clue to the first domesticated camels](#)





Websites of General Interest

- Emirates Natural History Group – Al Ain (Archives: newsletters of 3 NHGs, *Tribulus*): <http://www.enhg.org>
 Dubai Natural History Group: <http://dnhg.org>
 Qatar Natural History Group: <http://www.qnhg.org>
 Tommy Pedersen's UAE Birding / UAE Nature Forum: <http://www.uaebirding.com>
 Hanne & Jens Eriksen's website: www.BirdsOman.com
 Emirates Soc. of Geoscience: <http://www.esg-uae.org>
 Emirates Marine Environmental Group: www.emeg.ae
 Emirates Diving Association: <http://www.emiratesdiving.com/index.php>
 Emirates Wildlife Society – World Wildlife Fund: http://www.panda.org/who_we_are/wwf_offices/united_arab_emirates/
 Environment Agency Abu Dhabi: <http://www.ead.ae/en>
 Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage: <http://www.adach.ae/en>
 UAE archaeology website: <http://www.adias-uae.com>
 Noukhada Adventure Co.: <http://nouxhada.ae>
 NYUAD Events Calendar: <http://nyuad.nyu.edu/news.events/events.ad.html>
 Khalifa University Events Calendar: <http://www.kustar.ac.ae/campus/dss/schedules/default.aspx>
 Sharjah Museums: <http://www.sharjahmuseums.ae>
 Wildlife Middle East News: <http://www.wmenews.com>
 Arabian Wildlife: <http://www.arabianwildlife.com/main.htm>
 Sharkwatch Arabia: <http://www.sharkwatcharabia.com>
 Foundation for the Protection of the Arabian Leopard in Yemen: <http://www.yemenileopard.org>
 Mohamed Bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund: <http://www.mbzspeciesconservation.org/>
 EDGE: Evolutionarily Distinct and Globally Endangered: <http://www.edgeofexistence.org>
 Protected Planet: <http://www.protectedplanet.net>
 ARKive Images of Life on Earth: <http://www.arkive.org>
 Wikispecies: <http://species.wikimedia.org/wiki>

Corporate Sponsors of the ENHG - 2011

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. [Click on the links below for information about the sponsors.](#)

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Nautica Environmental Associates L.L.C.	
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Shell	
Total ABK	

Ultra Dascam (Shaheen)	
URS	
Wave Craft, Ltd. (Auditor Nick Benge's Co.)	
WSP Group	

ITEMS ON SALE

AT THE ENHG BOOK 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 for schools donations.)
- Wild about Mammals, 40
- Wild about Reptiles, 40
- Breeding Birds of the United Arab Emirates, 100
- Abu Dhabi Bird checklist, 10
- Sandgrouse checklist of the birds of the United Arab Emirates, 25
- Emirates Bird Report, 20
- Birdwatching guide to Oman, 2nd edition, 100
Guide to bird watching spots in Oman.
- Common Birds in Oman, 2nd ed, 120
- Butterflies of Saudi Arabia & its neighbours, 90
- UAE in Focus, 100
- Natural History of Oman, 50
- Field Guide to the Geology of Oman, 75
- Abu Dhabi 8 Million Years ago, 15
- Arabian Wildlife Encyclopedia, 120
- Sulphur, Camels and Gunpowder, 100
- Native Plants of Oman, 80
- Little O in Oman, 25
- Wild Flowers of the UAE, 110
- Marine Environment, Resource of the UAE, 140
- Flowering Plants of the UAE, 60
- Socotra Calendar – 2012, 35
- Wild Flower Cards (Pack of 5), 60

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Required: Excursion Secretary to organise and lead field trips next season. Can you do this?

Lectures

Venue: HCT / Abu Dhabi Men's College

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

17th Jan. **7:30 PM**
The Birds of Al Wathba Lakes

Oscar Campbell

7th Feb **7:30 PM**
The Rise and Fall of the Ponto Caspian in the Ice Age

Ronnie Gallagher

20th Feb. **7:30 PM**
Adaptations of Camels to the Desert Environment; Current Reproductive Research & Update on Camel/Llama Hybrids

Dr Lulu Skidmore

Social Event

31st Jan
Informal get-together at Aloft Hotel – top floor

Field Trips

21st Jan. **(FULL)**
Al Wathba Lake Birding
Oscar Campbell

21st Jan.
RAK Mtn hike
Stefan Beck

27th Jan.
RAK dhow yard visit
Feng Wen

3rd/4th Feb.
Camping trip/walk on Jebel Shams, Oman
Feng Wen

4th Feb.
Al Wathba Lake Birding
Oscar Campbell

23rd/24th/25th Feb.
InterEmirates Weekend

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](#).

(Yahoo log-in may be required to open 2 above links.)

For further enquiries, contact ENHG Chairman Andrew Bean at rabeau@eim.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
- First-Aid Kit
- Sky Scout astronomical object locator/identifier
- Celestron NexStar telescope (on field trips only)
- Two satellite phones, taken on camping trips.

Phone numbers: No. 1: 008821644400956

No. 2: 008821644400965

Enquiries: Andrew Bean at rabeau@eim.ae

Marine Life Rescue Contact Info.

In Abu Dhabi:

EAD Hotline for reporting environmental emergencies including pollution and injured wildlife: 8009990. Email: envirocomplaint@ead.ae

EAD Emergency response manager: Mr. Abdul Rahman. Mob: 0506674171 (contactable 24 hours/day)

EAD contact for sea turtles, dugongs and dolphins: Dr. Himansu Das, Biodiversity Management Sector. Tel: 26934654; Mob: 0504465125; Email: hdsas@ead.ae

In Dubai:

Emirates Marine Environment Group (EMEG) (Tel: 043630581/Fax:043630460; Email: info@emeg.ae)

Dubai Municipality: Main number: 800900. Marine Environment & Sanctuaries Unit (Tel: +9714 606 6818, Fax +9714 703 3532), Email: marabdulla@dm.gov.ae

Dubai Turtle Rehabilitation Centre at the Burj al Arab Aquarium. Tel: 043017198. 24-hour email contact, Attn. Mr Warren Baverstock, Manager of Operations, BAA Aquarium: warren.baverstock@jumeirah.com
To post Facebook message triggering an after-hours SMS alert: www.facebook.com/turtle.rehabilitation

Technical Volunteers

Sidney Liu
(Audio Visual Systems)
sidneyliu@acs.sch.ae

Zander Rupp
(Lecture Recording)
ruppaw@eckerd.edu

Newsletter Details

Newsletter contributions to:
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

Yahoo Groups website

<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/AUHENHG>
(Click Join button to sign up for ENHG info.)