

# focus



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Emirates Natural History Group

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



## EDITORIAL

We reprint an article from BBC News Online, 24 May 2012 (photographs courtesy of BCEAW), highlighting the international attention now focused on the conservation of Arabian leopards. We also reprint four more IEW 2012 trip write-ups from *The Gazelle*. Enjoy!

*Keith Taylor*

### Rare Arabian leopard in need of safe corridors



© Björn Jordan BCEAW

As the sun rises in the sky and temperatures soar, Mr Spotty - a four-year-old male Arabian leopard - moves slowly back into the shade of his enclosure.

But he moves forward enthusiastically when his keeper, Jane Budd a South African veterinarian approaches.

"The Arabian leopard is the smallest of all the nine subspecies of leopard," Jane explains.

"Experts estimate that there are fewer than 200 left in the wild. These are further endangered because they live in small groups and each has a tiny population so the risk of extinction due to inbreeding is high."

In order to counter this threat The Arabian Wildlife Centre has been breeding the leopard for a decade.



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As the only institution in the United Arab Emirates that is solely devoted to the preservation of wildlife indigenous to the Arabian Peninsula, this academic institution and visitor centre has raised awareness among the local population about conserving the region's rich natural biodiversity.

According to Hana Saif Al Suwaidi, chairman of the Environment and Protected Areas Authority in Sharjah,

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### FRONT COVER PICTURE

Photograph: Arabian Leopard

Photographers: Jane & Kevin Budd

## This month's contributors

Kevin & Jane Budd of BCEAW, Briget Dalton, Valerie Chalmers, Brigitte Howarth, Björn Jordan of BCEAW, David Palmer, Sylvia Smith of BBC News Online

## ENHG Membership Information

Annual membership in the Abu Dhabi chapter of the ENHG is 100 Dhs – for both individual and family membership. See Membership Sec. or Asst. at the next meeting for a membership form.

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. Work on Volume 20 is currently under way.

the common picture of a desert as endless rolling sand dunes is wrong.

"We have a variety of terrain," she explains. "From mountainous areas, mangroves, coastal regions and wadis, the Arabian desert is vast and complex, It supports a wide variety of biodiversity."



© Jane & Kevin Budd BCEAW

The wildlife centre is dedicated to preserving the peninsula's unique wildlife

Although there have been no sightings of the Arabian leopard for 15 years in the United Arab Emirates, the known populations are in neighbouring Oman, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. "The Arabian Wildlife Centre is already collaborating with institutions in each of these three countries," Hana says.

"We exchange information on breeding techniques and we also exchange animals so that each centre has a full complement of indigenous mammals."

A short drive away Paul Vercammen, operations manager of the Arabian Wildlife Centre is putting out feed for the four oryx and seven gazelle that have been recently released into the Dulaimah protected area.

"We also released foxes, hare, reptiles and scorpion," Paul explains. "Because of the drought we are having to provide food and water for the animals - otherwise they wouldn't survive."

Dulaimah is the only remaining mature woodland in the whole of Sharjah. Although oryx and gazelle were indigenous in the region, rapid urban expansion has encroached onto the desert - reducing habitats and pushing animals to the edge of extinction.



© Jane & Kevin Budd BCEAW

Rapid urban expansion has encroached on desert habitats, putting species such as the oryx under pressure.

The push to repopulate and increase numbers lies at the heart of the work of the Arabian Wildlife Centre. And it isn't just the leopard that is benefitting from the research.

The Centre has large numbers of reptiles and insects. "We also have lots of freshwater fish. There is one with suckers under their chins that allow them to climb upwards in search of fresh water," says Hana Saif Al Suwaidi.

"The eggs can remain without water for as long as five years. And then when it rains they hatch. The desert is full of surprises."

Protecting areas of the desert from the encroaching modern world is just one step in a long process when it comes to the iconic Arabian leopard. Although this graceful and shy creature is doing well in the breeding centre, the release of the first animals bred in captivity back into the wild is surrounded with difficulties.

A wild male leopard in Arabia needs a hundred square kilometres to survive," says Paul Vercammen, "a female up to sixty square kilometres. In Sharjah 100 square kilometres is most of the territory of the Emirate."



© Jane & Kevin Budd BCEAW

According to Paul the next step is to achieve closer collaboration with neighbouring countries. "Our best option is to create safe corridors between mountainous areas," he explains.

"We see our first reserves as a kind of stepping stone so that we can create a whole chain of larger areas that the animals can move around in."

Although the team are cautiously optimistic about putting the necessary logistics in place, the biggest challenge will be protecting the leopard against their main predator - man. A problem that only wide-spread education can resolve.

**Sylvia Smith, BBC News Online**

**NB: Also see link to Al Jazeera programme, "Witness: Saving the leopard", in News Media panel on p. 6! -Ed.**

## Inter-Emirates Weekend: Coastal Desert Ecology Trips to Mushrif Park

Two groups visited Mushrif Park at the IEW 2012. The first was led by Brigitte Howarth and their first exploration was into a grove of Ghaf with the occasional non-native tree, all of which we discussed, in particular the spread of Mesquite throughout the park.



Ghaf and Mesquite

Mesquite was introduced to the UAE for greening purposes from South America and, when a non-native plant is introduced and it survives the harsh new conditions, it becomes invasive. This is because the ecosystem balance is not in place i.e. in its native environment the Mesquite will have a whole host of species that depend on the seeds, pods, or leaves.

Having been brought to a new environment, all the species that utilize the tree are left behind and now the introduced tree, known as an exotic species, is able to become established. Being able to germinate far more seeds than the Ghaf, new saplings are appearing in



habitats all over the UAE where previously only the local Ghaf was predominant. The long-term effect is that, should there be a negative effect on the Ghaf, not only the tree will suffer but all the organisms that depend on the habitat and trophic niche provided by the Ghaf will also suffer, leading to biodiversity and habitat loss.

The second focus was primarily to look on in awe at the large clump of the toothbrush plant *Salvadora persica* and, nearby, a flowering example of *Calligonum comosum*.



*Calligonum comosum*

The latter has a small but beautiful white flower with very bright red anthers and is therefore very distinctive. The location also offered a different kind of evidence of the presence of some species in the form of tracks in the sand. Not surprising, for a short while we were side-tracked by reptile, invertebrate and bird tracks before heading back to the cars and walking over an asphalted area to decrease somewhat the amounts of *Neurada procumbens* seeds that had attached them-selves to the soles of our shoes.

Although perhaps almost a pest to those walking through the sand, this example of dispersal is most ingenious where the seed attaches to and travels with an unsuspecting 'host' some distance before being shed and therefore ensuring the spread of genetic diversity through a habitat. The second leg of the trip took us to quite a different sort of habitat near a second carpark where some of the sand was exposed to irrigation water.

We often forget that sand is full of life and a lot of it is in the form of a seed bank. Many hundreds of plant species in the UAE are annuals, where the life cycle is repeated annually from seed, germination, plant growth, flower formation, seed formation and the demise of the plant, leaving behind the seed in the sand. Under the right conditions, some-

times decades apart, seeds are able to begin the cycle again. This area offered some spectacular wild flowers like *Hippocrepis areolata*, a small plant with a very ornate, almost antler type of seedpod. By now our younger audience had worked hard at finding and comparing Ghaf and *Acacia* seedpods, finding egg shells, reptile burrows, termites, and all sorts of other fauna and flora and had begun to proactively, their parents in tow, pick up rubbish and kite thread, the latter sprawling between trees and shrubs like a spider web! Our last two deliberations were on a small outcrop of aeoleonite where near-by we observed antlion pits and a Desert Thorn shrub (*Lycium shawii*) completely covered by the perennial vine *Pentatropis nivalis*.

**Report and photographs by Dr. Brigitte Howarth**

The second group was led by Valerie Chalmers and it visited similar areas to Brigitte's group. I was pleased to find again and be able to show the group a Ghaf tree with two climbers, the perennial vine, *Pentatropis nivalis*, (the blade-leafed milkweed) and *Ephedra foliate* (shrubby horsetail), a Gymno-sperm (Ephedraceae Family), with minute leaves (if present) which also bears male and female cones. This siting was reported in the June 2011 Gazelle, with a photograph, following a trip to the park in April 2011.



An unexpected siting and one worth highlighting was that of *Rhynchosia shimperi*, a member of the Pea Family (Fabaceae). This plant, which has rounded or heart-shaped trifoliate leaves on very short stalks that look like the Ace of Clubs, stumped me in the field and had to be worked out at home! It is uncommon, but is seen in and around Dubai, usually in sand, from time to time. It was the first time that I had seen it in Mushrif Park over the years.

**Report and photograph by Valerie Chalmers**

## Bridging the Past with the Present

Mairead Porter and Mary Anne Pardoe led a group on an IEW archaeological field trip on the Saturday. The day commenced at the Sharjah Archaeology Museum, the exhibits range from the Stone Age, and displays a vast amount of artefacts.

The Curator, Khalid, gave a guided tour of the Museum, his thorough knowledge and passion for his subject being obvious. His desire to impart as much detail as possible, in the time available, ensured that the visit was highly rewarding and informative. He laid the foundation for the visits by the group to the three archaeological sites located in the Northern Emirates, by specifically focusing on findings from; Muweilah, Mleiha and Jebel Al-Buhais. Complemented by the independent research Mairead and Mary Anne had carried out, the site visits proved to be a fascinating tour into the Sharjah Mountains where bridges exist between ancient and modern civilizations demonstrating that the region is teeming with cultural, religious and historic treasures. In addition, it made for interesting discussion at the sites on topics ranging from diet, architectural design, thickness of walls and function of buildings, date palm cultivation, storage vessels used, and more.

The first site visited, **Muweilah**, an Iron Age II settlement which was occupied for about 400 hundred years from 1000-600BC. From research carried out by both geomorphological and archaeobotanical experts the conclusion is that the desertic environment of Muweilah today is more or less as it was during the iron age as the site was set back from the coast and consequently emphasises the harshness for humans to subsist in a hyper-arid environment at the time.

The next site, **Mleiha Fort, Graves and Cultural Park**, another late Iron Age settlement. The existence of the Fort and abundance of other material found implies this was probably a major administrative and political centre which controlled all or part of the economic activity in Mleiha. Findings also suggest there was a link with the trading routes as Greek black glazed ceramics, stamped Rhodian Amphora handles, and frankincense were discovered, along with Al Mahata coins and moulds found on the site. There is also evidence that the wealthy people of Mleiha buried their dead in huge monumental tower tombs with their possessions, as excavations have found camel and horse remains and valuable properties such as the horse bridle decorated with heavy gold medallions and roundels backed with iron which are displayed in the Museum.

The last site visited, **Jebel Al Buhais**, is a series of archaeological sites, the area was used as a graveyard and settlement from c. 5000 to 200 BC covering the Bronze and Iron ages and the pre-Islamic period. Of specific interest, Buhais 66, a clover shaped tomb which is architecturally unique from the Wadi Suq Period. Buhais 18, which dates to the 5<sup>th</sup> Millennium BC where over 500 individuals were buried has provided a wealth of skeletal data into pathologies, muscle markings, stature, bone robusticity and findings reveal that all was consistent with a nomadic, pastoral economy. From research, one of the most intriguing aspects about this group was the high frequency of cranial injuries which has been concluded was due to repeated violent inter-group interchanges, possibly due to competition over scarce resources in times of environmental deterioration.

What was so incredibly interesting was the historical evidence to support the various sites usage and to have viewed the artefacts displayed in the museum from the various eras the sites represent. Also, Jebel Al Buhais, where research is still in progress, the realisation that there are probably yet abundant findings and historical evidence to be uncovered and appreciated.

**Bridget Dalton**

## IEW: Wadi Hiluw

One of the trips on the Friday of Inter-Emirates Weekend was to Wadi Hiluw, in the mountains just off the Sharjah-Kalba road, inland from the tunnel. The group, led by David Palmer, first climbed up to a watchtower to get an overview of the very scenic wadi, and a bird's-eye view of the large ruined house or palace below, which the group speculated may have belonged to the local tribal chief. We descended to the wadi floor to explore this structure, with its remnants of fine plaster decoration, and from there wandered across the dried-up terraces, which until fairly recently saw plentiful crops of tobacco, the growing of which is now banned in the UAE.



We looked into the abandoned tobacco sheds built of smooth wadi stones, tree trunks and palm branches, and noted two vertiginous deep (but dry) wells, which have steps descending to a platform part-way down. Michael Creamer demonstrated the workings of the diesel engines used to pump water, and Stefan Beck explained the older system of using an ox to run down a ramp (still well preserved) to draw water from the well and send it down a channel into a cistern. Modern farms, built on artificial terraces along the sides of the wadi, and seemingly alive with cock crowing all day long, have largely replaced the abandoned terraces and palm plantations on the wadi floor.



After a lunch break, and a detour through the large Islamic cemetery on the wadi terrace, we entered the Bronze Age. Wadi Hiluw was probably a significant contributor to the stream of copper ingots exported from the Hajar mountains to the advanced civilizations in Mesopotamia and the Indus valley 4000 years ago, for combining with tin to make bronze for weapons, armour and ornaments. There are still many signs of copper smelting scattered about on the surface of the wadi terrace, especially large amounts of formerly molten slag, and smooth stones with tell-tale concave recesses used to crush the ore. There are also many trenches left by a German team which made sample excavations of the site in 2006-2008, exposing irregular groups of large stones which are the foundations of smelting furnaces, workshops and perhaps houses.





The Germans found a 4 kg ingot in one test pit, and estimated that the site produced around 30 tons of copper from several hundred tons of ore during its heyday. We noted in various places the quartz seams from which copper ore was extracted, and where blue-green pieces of stone containing copper can still be seen. Michael Creamer initiated lively speculations on how a high enough temperature to melt the ore was obtained from charcoal, what kind of bellows might have been available prior to the Iron Age, the role of the wadi wind, possible use of wind funnels, use of mud bricks to enclose the smelters etc.



Beside the picturesque restored “modern” watchtower at the entrance to the archaeological site, with its square enclosure for keeping animals under the protection of the tower’s gun slots, is the circular, partly-reconstructed foundation of a large Bronze Age watchtower, twice the diameter of the “modern” tower. When the German archaeologists first saw the mound which covered it, they thought it was an Um-an-Nar style circular tomb, like the ones at Hili and elsewhere in the UAE. Although this turned out not to be true, carbon from a fire pit indicated that the tower was from the same era as those tombs, i.e. middle Bronze Age (early second millennium BC). The wadi terrace is also strewn with walls, animal enclosures and house foundations (and yet another tobacco drying shed) from what the archaeologists quaintly refer to as the “submodern” era - i.e. not modern, but who knows how old? - providing an absorbing but relaxing afternoon’s ramble.











If you missed the trip and want to explore Wadi Hilu on your own, take the Sharjah-Kalba road past Showkah and past the modern village of Wadi Al Helo, go up the hill until you see the first tunnel entrance, do a U-turn before you enter the tunnel, go back down the hill and take the track to the right by a big brown sign marked “Wadi Al Helo archaeological site”.

**David Palmer**

**Photographs by Michelle Sinclair**

### Corporate Sponsors of the ENHG - 2012

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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### In the News Media

Al Jazeera Programmes: Witness (17 April, 2012): [Saving the leopard](#): NB: An excellent televised account of the 2010 cross-border leopard conservation training programme partially funded by an ENHG-AD Research & Conservation grant and followed up by additional grants in 2011 and 2012 offering continued support of this important regional conservation effort. – Ed.

## In the News Media, Continued

The National, June 1: [Hidden garden holds the secrets to sustainable greenery in the desert](#)

The National, June 1: [Genetically modified camels to act like pharmacies](#)

Gulf News, June 1: [Shark-finning: Clear and present danger](#)

Gulf News, June 8: [UAE team supports campaign to protect sharks](#)

Gulf News, June 8: [Fish paying the price of our carelessness](#)

The National, June 16: [Dolphin sightings open door for research](#)

The National, June 22: [A life devoted to protection](#)

## 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, 20
- Breeding Birds of the United Arab Emirates, 100
- 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
- Marine Environment, Resource of the UAE, 140
- Flowering Plants of the UAE, 60
- Socotra Calendar – 2012, 35

## 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>

Historical Association of Oman: <http://www.hao.org.om/>

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

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

Emirates Soc. of Geoscience: <http://www.esg-uae.org>

Emirates Marine Environmental Group: [www.emeg.ae](http://www.emeg.ae)

Emirates Diving Association: <http://www.emiratesdiving.com/index.php>

Emirates Wildlife Society – World Wildlife Fund: [http://wwf.panda.org/who\\_we\\_are/wwf\\_offices/united\\_arab\\_emirates/](http://wwf.panda.org/who_we_are/wwf_offices/united_arab_emirates/)

Environment Agency Abu Dhabi: <http://www.ead.ae/en>

UAE Environmental Atlas (Sign up for notice of release): <http://www.environmentalatlas.ae/>

Abu Dhabi Culture and Heritage Authority <http://www.adach.ae/en/>

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

Noukhada Adventure Co.: <http://noukhada.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>

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

Sharjah Museums: <http://www.sharjahmuseums.ae>

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

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

Zoology in the Middle East (Peer-reviewed ISI Journal): <http://www.kasperek-verlag.de/ZME-allgem.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: IUCN & UNEP-WCMC Database: <http://www.protectedplanet.net>

Wikispecies: <http://species.wikimedia.org/wiki>

Encyclopedia of Life: <http://eol.org/>  
Midas Fly page: <http://eol.org/pages/713241/overview>

ARKive Images of Life on Earth: <http://www.arkive.org>

Sand Atlas: <http://sandatlas.org>

NHBS Environment Bookstore: <http://www.nhbs.com/>

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**Still Required: Treasurer to keep track of the Group's finances next season. Can you do this?**

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**Required: Additional Field Trip Coordinators to serve on a team of 4 or 5, planning and leading 2-3 field trips each during the coming season. Assistance will gladly be provided by the Committee. Can you do this?**

**Required: Additional Book Stall Assistant to help with book sales at ENHG meetings. . Can you do this?**

## Lectures

**New Regular ENHG-AD Meeting Venue as of 4<sup>th</sup> Sept, 2012:**

**HCT / Abu Dhabi Women's College (city campus) Assembly Hall**

*Location:*

*Behind Lebanese Flower off Defence Rd (Hazza Bin Zayed/11<sup>th</sup>) btwn. Muroor & Najda.*

*A map & directions will be made available prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> Sept meeting.*

*NB: We are currently on a summer recess. The season-opening talk on 4<sup>th</sup> Sept. will be on the Shams 1 Concentrated Solar Plant, by Hans Laabs. -Ed.*

## Field Trips

*NB: No more ENHG field trips will be scheduled till Sept. However, if you would like to organise a day trip with fellow ENHG members this summer, you can post a message about this to the Yahoo Groups website shown below, and your post will be approved by one of the group moderators. -Ed.*

## 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 a 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 [rabean@eim.ae](mailto:rabean@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, [rexabean@emirates.net.ae](mailto:rexabean@emirates.net.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](mailto: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: [hsdas@ead.ae](mailto:hsdas@ead.ae)

In Dubai:

Emirates Marine Environment Group (EMEG) (Tel: 043630581/Fax:043630460; Email: [info@emeg.ae](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:warren.baverstock@jumeirah.com)  
To post Facebook message triggering an after-hours SMS alert: [www.facebook.com/turtle.rehabilitation](http://www.facebook.com/turtle.rehabilitation)

## Newsletter Details

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

## Members' Items for sale

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

## Postal Address

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

## Yahoo Groups website

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