

focus



Abu Dhabi, May 2013

Vol 37 (5)



Emirates Natural History Group

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

EDITORIAL

At our Annual General Meeting on May 7, 2013, Outgoing Chairman Dr Andrew Bean summarised the range of activities in the 2012 calendar year, including full programmes of field trips, lectures and several research & conservation grants. And outgoing Treasurer Rex Sartain reported a healthy balance. These were positive notes towards the end of a busy season.

The departure (or imminent departure) of these two above elected officers from the principal Committee positions which they have executed so ably during the past year highlights the leadership challenges this Group continues to face at a time of significant turnover. In the short term, the most critical handovers have thankfully been arranged. Avra, who has already stepped up this season to very capably fill a sudden vacancy as Membership Records Secretary, is also set to take on the role of Treasurer on Rex's departure in June. And Clive Swan has now joined the Committee and is taking over the coordination of the Book Stall from Gordon Higgs, who has done an excellent job in that role this season, but is moving on to a new position in RAK.

However, starting in September, at least, the ENHG-AD Committee will still be looking to fill the following six vacancies: 1. a new Lecture Coordinator to arrange our twice-monthly lectures programme and send out announcements; 2. a Meeting Assistant to help collect membership applications at meetings and assist at the Book Stall; 3. an additional Field Trip Coordinator to help the team organise and lead trips; 4. an in-country Public Relations Secretary to get the word out to our media partners, taking most of this effort over from Claudia (still helping out from Berlin!); 5. a new Corporate Sponsorship Secretary to take this position over from Avra, soon to be busy in two other roles and 6. a Chairman to chair meetings and represent the Group to the wider community. Please consider whether this could be your time to join in the fun and help move this enduring organisation forward from strength to strength.

We close this season with talks by two highly accomplished professional conservationists: Dr Salim Javed, doing radio tracking of flamingos and other migratory bird species with EAD here in Abu Dhabi (March 21st), and Dr Laurie Marker, visiting from Namibia, where she is working hard to give endangered cheetahs in Africa a fighting chance (June 4th—see p 6). Kudos to Avra, Andrew and Rex for organising Dr Marker's visit to the UAE, where she is speaking not only to our chapter but also to those in Al Ain and Dubai, and a big thanks to our two newest Corporate Sponsors: Crowne Plaza Hotel Abu Dhabi (Sheikh Hamdan Street) for providing accommodation to Dr Marker & her team and the Mohammed Bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund for sponsoring the Al Mamoura Building A Auditorium for Dr Marker's talk. NB: See last item on 'In the News Media' panel, p. 7, for a link to an excellent recent article on Dr Marker's work in *The National*.

Finally, please note the end-of season dinner on June 18th—details TBA. We hope you can join us this season-closing event and share ideas for ENHG activities in the coming season.

Keith Taylor

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FRONT COVER PICTURE

Photograph: European Bee-eaters, Jebel Dhanna

Photographer: May Yoke Taylor

This month's contributors

Valerie Chalmers, Carolyn Gibson, Christophe Lepetit, Laurie Marker, Mairead Porter, Barbara Smith, May Yoke Taylor

ENHG Membership Information

Annual membership in the Abu Dhabi chapter of the ENHG is 100 Dhs per individual and now 150 Dhs per family membership. See Membership Sec. or Asst. at the next meeting for a membership form. Membership renewals for 2013 are due in January.

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 20 is now available at ENHG meetings.

A Tale of Two Wadis

Of the nine who travelled from Abu Dhabi to Muscat on May 10-12 for a mix of nature and culture, six opted for a relaxing time visiting points of interest around Muscat on Friday before attending the opera we had all come down to see, whilst Denis, Bernard and Carolyn opted for a more adventurous route to the opera. Here is their story. –Ed.

As many people know, Oman offers a great deal of fascination, whether you live there or you are visiting. It is a country with so much history, as well as offering discoveries of its great beauty, particularly in the interior. There is always an adventure to be encountered if you are prepared to explore, and I always find that round every corner you turn, you discover something even more glorious, so it's rather hard to turn back!

We set off from Muscat early on Friday heading for the Quriyat area, turning off to Hayl Al Ghaf towards Wadi Dayqah, which is on the east coast of the Sharqiya region. This has always been an 'easy-to reach' wadi from Muscat where you are guaranteed good natural

pools for swimming and wadi treks (this wadi is known to be one of the longest in the region) within a quick 2-3 hour drive. For the first timer who has not been to a wadi this is a good example and can be done with little effort, so we decided to set off, seeing as one of our fellow travellers had not visited a wadi before. We thought we could fit this all in before heading back to the capital in time for the opera at the Royal Oman Opera House.

However, Wadi Dayqah is now very different from what it was. I had been told, but didn't like to believe it, that it had been dammed with large areas covered in huts and shelters for the tourists and a lookout walkway across the dam for those who find it a peaceful way to spend a Friday! We gave it one look and thought there must be something else we were missing. We were determined to uncover the unknown and headed for the small village of Mazara, known as one of the most attractive in the region, positioned half way along Dayqah, protected by a fort: al Husn. We hunted for the archway entrance to the now derelict fort, which is perched on a rocky outcrop, surrounded by copper-toned mountains and half-buried date plantations. This was a find as we excitedly dashed from the hot car to search the rooms with views over the valley below.

"Where to next?" was the next question. My plan was to either go via a coffee house (it was approaching mid-morning, and every village has a couple) or go in search of the famous desert mushrooms, which are sandstone formations on the rocks created by the wind. But Bernhard had his plan, which was to follow the road which made a full circuit taking you to Wadi as Suwayh, one of the most beautiful waterfall pools in Oman, and he hoped that water would be our driving force as temperatures rose, so a swim seemed too good to be true. We agreed and off we set.

As we headed further into the mountains, the colourings changed from red earth to purple rocks and then rocks the colour of grey lava. The roads became less graded and more stoney. We continued until we had our first bump, then another and another and finally Stop! We were now in the al Yaa area, with Denis trying to carefully manoeuvre his Honda over large boulders. The car was stuck with one wheel completely off the ground and the bumper wedged into more rock.



Photo: Carolyn Gibson

It was now hot in the midday sun and there were just the three of us to get the car out. We had seen no vehicles in the past hour or so; we'd been enjoying the remoteness, but we hadn't realised before starting off

that the recent rain in Oman had been much heavier than in Abu Dhabi. The rain had made big ruts in the roads, but we could not turn back now (as that wadi pool was our reason to be on the road!) so we had to think of a way of extracting ourselves from this situation.

After many attempts we finally unwedged the car and took off again, only to encounter a seemingly unpassable road. Again the Honda, being narrow, managed to sneak through. By now we realised that no grader had been on these roads since the rains, no cars had been in this area and we were ill-prepared for getting stuck. Time was marching on – and there was still no sign of the highly touted Wadi As Suwayh and its famous pool. We decided to continue on as the worst was now behind us – or so we thought!



Photo: Carolyn Gibson

Then out of the blue we arrived at a little village hamlet of Fiq with a falaj above a lush valley. We were met by Hamad, the father of the only family living there, and the fifteen members of his family who visited during the weekend. The rest of his family appeared from the terraces to meet us. It was a very warm welcome as we were offered coffee, dates and melon – a much-needed refreshment. We sat under a shady tree, enjoying a break from the car, and Martha, the eldest daughter, invited me in to meet the women of the family who were all sitting on a cool verandah beside the main house. There were three generations all gathered wearing traditional brightly coloured clothes, eager to introduce themselves to me. It's these occasions that I cherish the most, when visiting villages and the hospitality from Omani families is always so generous.



Photo: Anonymous, Courtesy of Carolyn Gibson

But time was against us. We had to continue our journey to find those pools! We left feeling contented, with only a few kms to go. Wadi as Suwayh was now in our grasp, and as we rounded another corner, there it was, a magnificent pool with outstanding cliffs from which to jump. The waterfall cascading into the pool was clean blue water, a picture postcard setting with no rubbish around. We ran into the pools, enjoying the coolness and relieved we had made it. A group of Omani men sat nearby, relaxing under a gazebo, and they invited us over for a drink; sadly we told them we had to move along as we had an opera date to meet!



Photo: Carolyn Gibson

We started to head back to Muscat, encountering more washed out roads. We met travellers in another 4-wheel drive who suggested other routes for us – either return the way we had come or follow them so we could be pulled out of deep water, of which there was a lot around. But the quicker route beckoned as it was now mid-afternoon, and we needed to get back to the main road. We were moving speedily along the rough roads when we suddenly found our back tyre was flat! We had no jack, no spade but did have a spare tyre – but it was also flat!

As this was a slightly busier road than the one we had come down, we seized the first offer of help and after much fiddling with tyres, we borrowed a bigger tyre from them, which was fitted onto our car. At this crucial moment, one of the Omanis produced a pot of coffee and cups from his car for us to share in the middle of the road; they certainly have style! We were then kindly escorted to a garage some forty minutes away where for one Rial our flat spare tyre was pumped up. We thanked our Omani heroes and hurried off to make the opera, arriving just before 'curtain up' to a magnificent Wagnerian scene in the Flying Dutchman.



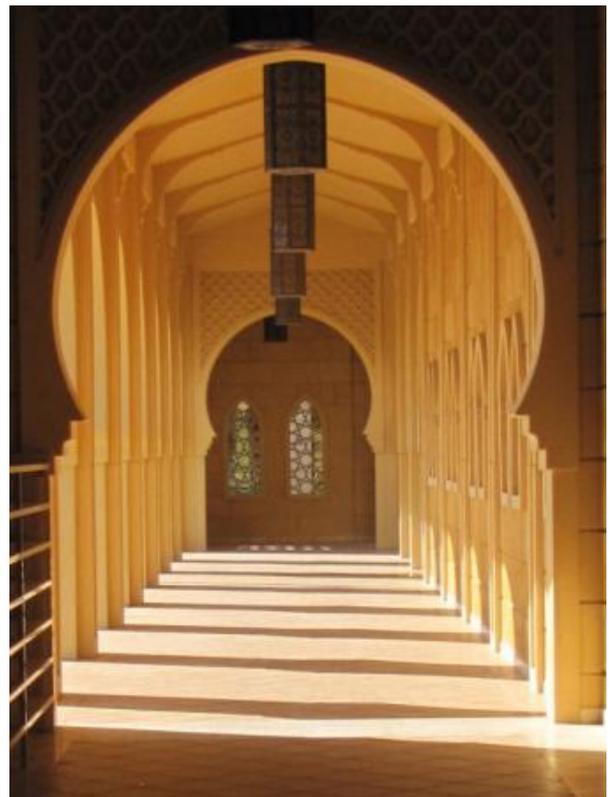
Photo: Anonymous, Courtesy of Barbara Smith

Carolyn Gibson

Al Ain Mosque Architecture Tour

This was an Inter Emirates Weekend tour (held on the morning of Friday 22nd Feb. and repeated on the morning of Saturday 23rd Feb.) which followed up on Dr Susanne Hofstra's excellent lecture on Mosque Architecture in Al Ain, which she gave on the Thursday evening (21st February), by 'visiting a few mosques that represent a living example of the architectural styles highlighted in the lecture'.

We visited 3 mosques. The first mosque (Bin Hamouda Mosque) near Al Ain Cromwell Hospital and at the back of Jimi Mall is quite a decorative mosque. The Bin Hamouda mosque is a modern mosque (2006) and a memorial benefaction. It is styled after the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus and Marrakech's famous Al Koutobia Mosque. It is a domed structure with a minaret and has a columnar praying hall with an adjacent courtyard surrounded by a colonnade.





Step platform at second mosque



The second mosque which we visited is near Al Jahili Fort and is associated with the Fort. It bears a lot of resemblance to traditional mosques preserved on Delma Island. It has a courtyard with a low wall and a little service building, a mosque portico and a single room but no dome. The little step platform is for the *Mouazzen* (the person who makes the call to prayer). This seems to be similar to what the very earliest mosques in Mecca or Medina were like in the time of the Prophet Mohammed. The roofing material comes from palm and the walls are likely to have been built from mud-brick mixed with stone.



The third mosque near Al Ain Oasis is, according to Dr. Ghava Al Dhaheeri from ADACH, 1,200 years old and is one of the oldest mosques in the UAE. It is used only for praying in a small group rather than in the Friday prayer. There is no minaret. Here we have a niche projection on the outside reflecting where the qibla niche is on the inside, which is also seen in the traditional mosques on Delma Island. It is also built of mixed mud-brick & stone.

Many thanks to Susanne Hofstra, Jake Gilson and Joseph Mansour for organizing such an excellent trip.

Valerie Chalmers

Photographs by Mairead Porter & Valerie Chalmers



Mosque near Al Jahili Fort

Upcoming Speaker

Dr Laurie Marker, Founder and Executive Director, Cheetah Conservation Fund, who received her doctorate from Oxford University, England in 2002, is recognised as a leading expert on cheetahs – their biology, genetics, ecology, breeding, and issues related to their conservation. TIME magazine named her Hero for the Planet in recognition of her extraordinary dedication to conservation. In 1990, Dr. Marker moved to Namibia to found Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF), which today is the global leader in research and conservation of

cheetahs. CCF's innovative science-based conservation and education programmes have resulted in a better understanding among local communities of the importance of this top predator for healthier ecosystems, as well as of the direct financial benefits of conserving the cheetah for future generations.



Photo: Christophe Lepetit

Among the programs that Dr. Marker has created to conserve the cheetah while enhancing people's livelihoods is Bushblock, a low emission, high efficiency fuel log made from processed thorn bush. Producing Bushblock not only thins the invasive and detrimental thorn bush and restores wildlife habitat and farmland, but also provides a renewable fuel resource for Namibians. Dr. Marker's work with Bushblock received the Tech Museum's Intel Prize for the Environment in 2008. At the 2012 Clinton Global Initiative Annual Meeting in New York in September, Dr. Marker announced that CCF would commit to expanding the Bushblock initiative in the coming year.

Dr. Marker also created the Livestock Guardian Dog program (LSGD), which breeds and trains Anatolian shepherd and Kangal dogs to protect local herds so that farmers are not threatened by the presence of cheetahs on their land. CCF has placed nearly 400 dogs since 1994, with about 150 dogs in service at any given time, and about 20 puppies placed every year. Farmers who use a CCF dog to guard their livestock report a drop in predation rate of anywhere between 80 to 100 per cent, and farmers now are far less likely to kill or trap cheetahs on their lands.

Among numerous international awards, Dr. Marker was awarded the 2010 Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievements and was a finalist for the BBC World Challenge. In Namibia, her home base, she received the Windhoek Rotary Club's Paul Harris Fellowship in 2001, and in 2002 received a special award from the Sanveld Conservancy, signifying Namibia's farming community's public acknowledgement of Dr. Marker and CCF's contributions.

On June 4th Dr Marker is giving a presentation to the ENHG in Abu Dhabi titled *Cheetah Futures*. Having survived nearly four million years, in the last century the number of wild cheetahs has decreased from 100,000 to approximately 10,000. The cheetah has suffered from inbreeding, high infant mortality, loss of habitat, a reduction in its prey base, conflicts with livestock farming, poaching and a reduced ability to survive in parks and reserves due to the presence of larger predators. Today, the cheetah is Africa's most endangered big cat. If we can educate those who share their land with cheetahs and provide a habitat and a rich prey-base for cheetahs on the livestock farmlands across their range, the cheetah's race will be one of survival, not extinction.

The Editor thanks the above speaker for providing autobiographical information & photo for Focus.

Corporate Sponsors of the ENHG - 2013

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.	
Partex Oil and Gas	
Shell	
Readymix Abu Dhabi Limited L.L.C. (Click on link & scroll down)	
URS	

In the News Media

The National, Feb 12: [Illegal wildlife trade in big cats is thriving on UAE websites](#)

The National, Feb 24: [Bird tracking safeguards breeding grounds](#)

The National, May 20: [Shark trade curbed to save species](#)

The National, May 21: [Operation Hawksbill: TDIC swings into action to secure Saadiyat nesting sites](#)

The National, May 22: [Vet science a natural way back to UAE culture](#)

The National, May 27: [Sharjah reserve welcomes birth of endangered gazelles](#)

The National, May 27: [Save cheetahs from extinction, UAE owners urged](#)

ITEMS ON SALE

AT THE ENHG BOOK STALL

All prices are in dirhams.

- **NEW:** 2013 Calendar – *Birds of Oman*, 30
- *Jebel Hafit – A Natural History*, 100
An attractive, encyclopaedic presentation of the natural resources of this national landmark. (Free copies available for schools donations.)
- *Abu Dhabi 8 Million Years Ago*, 15
- *Birds of the UAE- - A guide to common and important species*, 60
- *Birds of the UAE--Helm field guide*, 70
- *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
- *Exploring Oman*, 120
- *Native Plants of Oman*, 80
- *Natural History of Oman*, 50
- *Native Plants of Oman*, 80
- *Little O in Oman*, 25
- *Butterflies of Saudi Arabia & its neighbours*, 90
- *Sulphur, Camels and Gunpowder*, 100
- *Tribulus*, our annual Journal, see for details
- *Wild about mammals*, 40
- **NEW:** *Focus on Fujairah: Through Minie's lens 1964-2001*, 150
- **NEW:** *Field Guide: Wild Plants in Oman*, 300

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

Roy & Liz's website: www.chirri2000.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://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 Tourism and Culture Authority
<http://www.adach.ae/en/> (Still using ADACH website)

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>

The Rock Art of the Hajar Mountains:
http://www.bradshawfoundation.com/uae/hajar_mountains/index.php

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

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

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>

Encyclopedia of Life: <http://eol.org/>

ARKive Images of Life on Earth: <http://www.arkive.org>
Jewels of the UAE: <http://www.arkive.org/uae/en/>

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

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Lectures

Reg. Meeting Venue:
Abu Dhabi Women’s
College, City Campus
Emirates Hall

May 7th
Annual General
Meeting
Dr. Andrew Bean &
Rex Sartain

Falcons and Arabs
Alberto Gonzalez

May 21st
Satellite Tracking
Migratory Birds:
Challenges &
Opportunities for
Species Conservation
Dr. Salim Javed

Mamoura Bldg A Aud
June 4th 7:30 PM
Cheetah Futures
Dr Laurie Marker

Field Trips

May 3rd
EAD’s Baseline Survey
Training for ENHG-AD
& AA at Al Wathba
Wetland Reserve
Pritpal Sorae & team

May 9th/10th/11th
Trip to Wadi Daqah &
Royal Opera, Muscat
Denis Cheng

May 11th
Second Musaffah
Channel Boat Trip
Capt Maarten Verhage &
Ian Townson

May 17th
Astronomy Evening
Denis Cheng

June 6th
Sunset kayaking tour
with Noukhada
Keith Taylor

ENHG-AD Research & Conservation Fund Grant Application Information

For background on this fund, see [Dec 2009 Focus](#), p5.

For further enquiries and for grant application guidelines and application form, contact ENHG Deputy Chairman Keith Taylor at kjtaylor13@yahoo.com.

NB: These documents are posted in the Files section of the AUHENHG YahooGroup (see address below).

ENHG Equipment for Members’ Use

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

- Starter camping set: 2 new sleeping bags & maps, medium-sized cool box, old Coleman ‘5-man’ tent
- GPS unit – GARMIN GPSMAP 60CSx
- First-Aid Kit
- Birding Telescope
- Two satellite phones, taken on camping trips.

Phone numbers: No. 1: 008821644400956

No. 2: 008821644400965

Enquiries: Keith Taylor, kjtaylor13@yahoo.com

- Celestron NexStar telescope (on field trips only)
- Sky Scout astronomical object locator/identifier

Enquiries: Denis Cheng, spacemandc@gmail.com.

Marine Life Rescue Contact Info.

In Abu Dhabi:

EAD Customer Service: 800555 (or)
customerservice@ead.ae

EAD Emergency Response (pollution and wildlife)
available 24 hours/day: Mob 050 6674171 (or)
050 6178218

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

Newsletter Details

Please send newsletter contributions to:
newsletter.abudhabi@enhg.org

Members’ Items for sale

Please send small ads to:
newsletter.abudhabi@enhg.org

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.)