

GAZELLE

Vol 21 no 1 – January 2006



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

DNHG Membership Renewals

Barbara van Meir reports on rain in the eastern Musandam on New Year's weekend: "Plenty of rain. We arrived at Dibba beach at around 16:30 on December 30 and it immediately started pouring! It lasted for a good 45 minutes, and there were additional lighter showers throughout the evening and night and into the next morning. We moved to the Hatta area for New Year's Eve, and it was very threatening there around 18:00 - 18:30, with lightning in the east, but it stayed dry - fortunately." This was the same weather system that brought scattered heavy showers (but with sun and rainbows) to parts of Dubai in late afternoon on December 31.

Former Treasurer **Jen Robinson** writes from Cyprus that she and husband **Peter** have been giving the island a thorough going over in their spare time: "To date we have travelled over 55,000 kilometres and I think have visited nearly every Byzantine Church including the UNESCO ones, every monastery, every derelict church and monastery, every medieval bridge and *all* the archaeological sites including Salamis in the Turkish occupied part of Cyprus. We still have Kyrenia to visit and Bellapais Abbey. I have taken over 80 rolls of film to date and 15 video tapes!!!" Jen also

remarked on the number of former Abu Dhabi and Dubai acquaintances that they have encountered in Cyprus.

Speaker Coordinator Needed!

We are in need of a Speaker Coordinator to take over beginning immediately. The Speaker Coordinator's job is to solicit and follow up on ideas, contact and book potential speakers, arrange for them to appear at the appointed time and place, and assist in other arrangements and courtesies as host. The full Committee is available to assist, but we need someone to take the lead on this important function.

Our Vice Chairman, **Valerie Chalmers**, whose special interests include fossils, is recovering well after recent surgery, and when she received a 'hip-recovery package', was in good spirits. The package contained two rudists, a piece of shiny rock so packed with small marine fossils and crinoid stems that we called it 'fossil soup', a small piece of cretaceous coral, a sample of the strange loose 'fingers' found near the crinoids, and a partially embedded fossil in need of identification.

September 2005 starts our new DNHG membership year. Please make our lives easier by renewing early. Membership remains a bargain at Dhs. 100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to Lloyds Bank account no. 173746. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG.)

DNHG membership entitles you to participate in field trips and helps pay for our lecture hall, publication and distribution of our monthly newsletter, the *Gazelle*, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.

And please note!

If you are not receiving your *Gazelle*, it may be that you have not renewed your membership for '05 — '06. If you have renewed, and you don't receive it, let us know.

This month's Contributors

The Editor would like to thank the following for their reports and contributions:

William Pardoe
Angela and Steve Manthorpe
Gary Feulner
Larry Woods

Under the patronage of H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan



Adventures!

Jean Allan has promised to lead another of her famous Bastakia walks, possibly in January or February. Details will be made available closer to the time.

Jebel Shams camping and Rim Walk - Peter van Amsterdam
Jan 25-27, 2006

This is a long trip, and we need to leave on Wednesday afternoon, stay at the Ibri Hotel that night, and get up to the campsite on Thursday. We will do the walk early on Friday. It is only a couple of kilometres, and relatively easy, but one of the most spectacular walks around. Please contact Peter van Amsterdam at pvana@emirates.net.ae as soon as possible to register, and he will tell you everything you need to know.

Inter-Emirates Weekend – Ras Al Khaimah
Thursday-Friday, 16-17 March 2006

Each year in March/April 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 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 2006 will be based at the Ras Al Khaimah Hotel, Ras Al Khaimah and the program will begin on Thursday morning, March 16. The hotel has made a block booking of rooms for the weekend on a first-come first-served basis. **However, in view of the increased tourism in RAK and the peak season date of IEW, it will be necessary to confirm and guarantee your**

booking by the end of January 2006, i.e., six weeks prior to the event. We recognize that not everyone finds it ideal to plan that far ahead, but the hotel cannot hold the rooms on any other basis.

Hotel rates (per night) are:
Double Room/Twin Room – Dh 350 (inclusive of breakfast & tax)
Single Room – Dh 300 (inclusive of breakfast & tax)
Children below 12 years stay free.

On Thursday evening there will be a buffet dinner (Dh 60 per person incl.) plus entertainment. Packed lunches are available for Thu and Fri for Dh 55.

To make a reservation, either e-mail the hotel – rakhotel@emirates.net.ae or fax on 07-236-2990, attention Reservations – Johnson. Hotel phone number is 07-236-2999. Mention Dubai Natural History Group's Inter-Emirates Weekend when you make your booking.

Activities already booked include:

An in-depth visit to the Dhayah area – a cross section of the environment, archaeology, history and culture of Ras Al Khaimah to be led by Christian Velde

A trip into the mangroves to be led by Dick Hornby

Birdwatching trips on both Thursday and Friday to sites such as Khor Al Beidah, Al Jeezeerah Khor and Hamraniyah fields etc to be led by David Bradford

Shelling at Rams beach with Anne Millen and, more importantly, her book

Off the tarmac driving "over the top" from RAK to Dibba, via Wadi Bih (Friday only)

A mountain hike to be led by Barbara Couldrey, possibly to Wadi Hafarah

Visit to RAK Museum

Further details will be given at meetings and in the next issue of *Gazelle*. For more details in the interim, contact DNHG Vice Chairman Valerie Chalmers on 04-3494816 or valeriechalmers@hotmail.com.



Our Next Speaker

Peter Hellyer first came to the UAE in 1975 to make documentary films for late President Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and stayed on to take up a number of posts in the Government. Those have included being head of foreign language broadcasting for Abu Dhabi Radio, head of the English language service of the Emirates News Agency, WAM, managing editor for 14 years of the government daily *Emirates News*, which ceased publication in 1999, and, currently, adviser on external information in the Ministry of Information and Culture.

Peter has also taken an active part in the study of the country's natural history and heritage. A member of the Committee of the Emirates Natural History Group in Abu Dhabi since 1986 (and a former Chairman), in 1991 he founded the ENHG's scientific journal *Tribulus*, which he still edits. He has also, since 1991, been executive director of the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey, ADIAS.

He has written, edited or co-edited over ten books on the UAE, including four books on archaeology. His latest publication, co-edited with Simon Aspinall, is *The Emirates - a Natural History*, the first comprehensive study of the country's natural history and environment.



Exploring in the Huqf

"It's mostly desolate plains, but with some salt pans, petrified forests and glacial striations – if we can find them," was how Gary floated the idea of a visit to the Huqf region of Oman for the 'Eid al Adha' holiday. This may have been down-playing the importance of this area because the Huqf, which lies in the little populated Central region of Oman (*Wusta* in Arabic), is a very interesting area geologically, containing outcrops of rudists, crinoids, petrified wood, stromatolites and glacial striations that are of world-wide importance, plus it houses the Arabian Oryx reserve at Yalooni.

With three trusty 4WDs manned by Gary Feulner, Peter van Amsterdam, Anne Millen and Steve and Angela Manthorpe, we kicked off our visit to the area with a look at the salt dome at Qarat al-Kibrit, near the 'last chance' petrol station at Ghaba.



This salt dome is particularly interesting to geologists as it affords an opportunity to see salt exposed at the surface, a rare phenomenon.



The salt itself has been extensively mined and, despite the warning signs ('Danger – NO GO') we ventured inside the two salt caves in the mound, licking the occasional outcrop (the all-important taste test!).



In the larger of the two caves we were able to walk right through the dome, emerging at the other side. Those who attended last month's talk on oil production may have noted that salt domes are apparently the most common structure around which oil reservoirs occur in the region and only a few miles from the dome are major oil fields, including the Ghaba-1 well derrick, drilled in 1958 and still standing. A number of other salt domes exist in the area and have uplifted low hills at the surface (at least as far north at Jebel Madmar at Adam), but these do not expose the core of the salt plug.

We travelled east from featureless gravel plains (sometimes with 360° mirages) towards a region of low ridges alternating with sandy valleys. After camping in a sheltered spot some distance into the Huqf, Day 2 found us scrambling about near the new road to Mahawt looking for the fossilised remains of crinoids – or sea lilies. As someone mentioned, "these rocks would make a lovely floor" as they've been polished to a high gloss by years of exposure to blowing sand. The crinoid remains are extensive, although mostly comprising stem fragments, and there were large beds also of assorted brachiopods, bivalves and some bryozoans. From here we easily found our next site, a petrified forest, thanks to a tip by Tony Johnston.



There, several trees, including whole tree trunks with the wood cells replaced and preserved by silica and quartz crystals, are lying exposed on the surface.



Petrified wood
(Photo Anne Millen)

We then headed further into the interior, skimming across soft sand (or ploughing through it) in our attempt to find a well-known rudist reef. Several dodgy GPS coordinates later we finally emerged next to the impressive Huqf escarpment, which rises 100m in places from the plain and affords good views over the Great Huqf Sabkha extending some 75km along the eastern edge of the area. It is quite an experience to close in on a 20m high mound and to realise that it is composed almost entirely of fossil rudists.



These are not the small 'tooth sized' rudists referred to in last month's *Gazelle*, but good chunky specimens, some of which were



E.mail your reports to pvana@emirates.net.ae, (Arial 10 justified) or deliver them to Anne Millen on floppy disk at monthly meetings.

over 50 cm long. The rudist reef extends for almost 15km along the escarpment and many of the rudists are preserved 'in-situ' with their delicate top valves still in place.



We had tried to do our homework, but, as always, more could have been done. For example, we believe the age of the rudists and crinoids we encountered was Late Cretaceous, but we're not yet certain. There are also Palaeozoic fossils in the area, as well as much older sediments and volcanic and granitic rocks.



Day 3 brought us two flat tyres across three cars and underlined the importance of planning carefully for such a remote trip, where tracks are poor and the terrain varied. * After this we spent the rest of our visit scouting around the area further North, looking for fossil and flint sites, but with little success. We never did make it to the Oryx reserve but the chance to visit such an intriguing area has whetted our appetites for further exploration and

I'm sure we'll all be back before long. Report and most photographs by Angela Manthorpe

(*Ed: The thorn which pierced our tyre near the escarpment measured > 6cm and was perhaps from *Accacia Ehrenbergiana*, on which the spines usually grow to 5cm, according to Marijcke Jongbloed's *The Comprehensive Guide to the Wild Flowers of the UAE*. Gary Feulner will tell us more about these trees in our February issue.)

Mammals in Huqf

In the forbidding desert of the Huqf the heavy dew supports a surprising amount of fauna.



Near this small rocky outcrop which featured the strange geological formations shown below, we found the tracks of a fox. It had made a lair under protective rocks, away from a marauding pair of brown-necked ravens which seemed to lay claim to the outcrop (or us).



It was not clear what the fox lived on, but probably its usual diet of insects and small rodents. If you scrutinise the background of this picture, you might think that unlikely!

Further south, near the rudist escarpment, where there were a few low acacias (the spiny *Ehrenbergiana*) and some fan palms, *Nanorhops ritchieana*, I found several piles of small droppings, perhaps of

desert hares. The droppings were small, the piles not. Several times on the gravel plains, I found tracks. Are they those of desert hare?



The marks were in pairs, ill defined in shape, perhaps suggesting an animal that places its feet together.

Later in the trip, when we were in areas with broad fine-graveled wadis, I found more tracks, which were the distinctive pad-and-four-toes of cats.



Gary Feulner asked whether there was evidence that the cat had been nibbling the *Zygophyllum* which grew in profusion along the gravel banks of the wadi. In one case, no, the tracks went straight along, and in the one above, perhaps.

All over the Huqf, the heavy dew brings life. When I scraped away a centimetre or two of gravel to make a hip-hole (handy tip for the sleep-rough brigade), I found a myriad of small holes in the ground, about 2mm in diameter. I did not find what made them, but the whole area had them, which was one reason that the tyres sank through an upper crust in the gravelly foothills. Report and photographs by Anne Millen





Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan
res 344 8283
off 344 0462
fax (off) 349 9437

Archaeology - Prof. John Fox
jfox@aus.ac.ae
(Temporarily away - hold your reports)

Birds - David Bradford
davebradford9@hotmail.com

Seashells - perhaps you?

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi
res: 06-5247 958
off: 06-5583 003
email: lankefi@emirates.net.ae

Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner
res 306 5570
fax 330 3550

Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
res 349 4816,
fax 340 0990
vmc@latifaschool.co.ae

Plants – Valerie Chalmers

Mammals & Seashells - Recorders needed

The recorders are not necessarily scientific experts in their designated fields. In fact, most are not. However, they are interested and knowledgeable amateurs - please contact them if you have any interesting reports or queries.

The intention is that information will be channelled through to the *Gazelle* editor, so new information can be shared with all our readers.

William: Wonderful Walk (and work) in Wadi Wurrayah

On Friday 9th of December we set out in dense fog to Wadi Wurrayah. We were nearly at the East Coast when the pea soup finally lifted (or rather the molecular substance of H₂O dissipated into the atmosphere).



We all met at Badiya Mosque (the oldest mosque in the Emirates), where, to my horror, was one of my teachers (and to hers too, no doubt). We all went in and had a nose around. The women put on abayas to be let in, and one man wasn't allowed in because his shorts were too short. (*Ed.: Let future trip participants, not just to Badiya, take note.*)

We then proceeded on to Wadi Wurrayah. I and a few others started collecting rubbish out of the water while others collected on land.



The water was quite deep and there was a small but powerful waterfall. The waterfall was enclosed on three sides and would make a nice shower cubicle. Apparently, the waterfall is there all year round.

Rubbish-wise, there were many plastic and glass bottles, polystyrene plates and other litter in the water. I even found a sharp barbe-

que kebab skewer that would cause a nasty injury if you stood on it (which I nearly did).



After we had collected rubbish and had a swim we all headed up the wadi which was thick with a bamboo-like plant (probably *Arundo donax*). It soon became too dense and we had to turn back.



After filling many bags with rubbish on the way back, we ate lunch and then had a photo in which we posed next to our bin bags as if they were trophies.



After driving further up the wadi (on a different track than the one we had taken earlier) we came across another pool. We sat in the cool water for a while, chatting. One of the ladies had continued up the wadi and she told us that you could hear water running underneath the



ground. Sure enough, there were points in which you could hear water under your feet. It wasn't just a trickle, it was fairly loud and you could feel the ground vibrating.

After our swim, we loaded up the rubbish and drove back to civilization... Thanks to William Pardoe for this report and most of the photographs. Thanks to Larry Woods for the photographs of the lizard and sign.

Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary – Easy Access

Access to the Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary has been greatly simplified. According to the Marine Environment & Sanctuaries Unit at Dubai Municipality, individuals, families and small groups can enter the Sanctuary by simply registering at the entrance. The opening times are 9am to 4pm, Saturday to Thursday. Five individuals are permitted per bird hide, at one time.

The Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary was officially inaugurated in February 2005. The sanctuary features three birdwatching hides, from north to south: the Lagoon Hide (Al Buhaira), the Flamingo Hide (Fantir) and the Mangrove Hide (Gurm). Each hide offers a panoramic view of the sanctuary and is equipped with picture panels depicting many of the most common birds that can be seen. Thanks to Rashmi de Roy, also of WWF UAE, for this updated access information.



Greater flamingo
From www.uaeinteract.com

Shortcut to South-Western Oman

Travelers headed for the Dhofar or Huqf regions of Oman now have a shortcut that bypasses the congestion of the Bahla-Nizwa area. It is now possible to travel by good paved (metalled) road from Ibri directly south and join the main Salalah Road at a point about 30 km N of Ghaba, some 120 km S of Adam.

To do this, take the turning in downtown Ibri marked to Tanam and Fahud, and then, at a roundabout before Fahud, take the turning to Salalah.

There are no obvious services along this 215 km route (marked as Oman Route 29), but it is probably possible to obtain emergency petrol or repairs at Awaifah along the way (at about 135 km) and possibly at Wadi Aswad (at about 50 km). Or you can detour about 10 km to Fahud, at about the mid-point of the route.

Note that this route is not the way to go if you want to go to SE Oman, e.g., Adam, Wadi Andam, Ibra, Sinaw, Masirah Island, the Wahiba Sands or Ras al-Hadd. It is, however, advantageous for Salalah and destinations such as the Arabian Oryx Reserve at Yaalooni. Report by Gary Feulner



Arabian oryx
From Mary Beardwood's *The Children's Encyclopaedia of Arabia*

(Ed: Peter van Amsterdam and Anne Millen came home from Ghaba direct to Fahud and Ibri. The 120 kilometre stretch from Ghaba to Fahud is a graded oil-field service road, very dusty and a bit corrugated. There are no settlements and you might not see another vehicle.

There is a ten kilometre long anticline about twenty kilometres from Ibri at which we plan to have a shuf before the weather gets too hot to camp. It might be interesting, and it might not. Members are welcome to join us, so we will list it as a DNHG trip as soon as we have a plan. It would be quite possible to stay at the Ibri Hotel and drive out to the site.)



The Fahud anticline
similar to the one we propose exploring

An Interesting and Informative Site

Angela Manthorpe advises that she has found a very useful website that gives accurate instructions and GPS coordinates for various places of interest in Oman. It is:

http://home.hetnet.nl/~lilian_jan_schreurs/oman/Nhuqf.htm

Letters to the Editor

Any news or views you would like published in our monthly newsletter? Feel like tickling things up?



Please send your letter to any of the committee members listed, by fax or e-mail, or direct to the editor, Anne Millen.



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Publisher	Peter van Amsterdam e.mail: pvana@emirates.net.ae	394 7076	335 5495	394 7075
Librarian	Jenny Irwin e.mail: jenny_irwin2000@yahoo.com	399 9201		399 9201
Book Sales	Jo & Rachel Raynor e.mail: joray@emirates.net.ae	334 6183		
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DNHG Field Trip Policies

Members are reminded that DNHG field trips are cooperative ventures among the participants, for their mutual benefit and enjoyment. DNHG field trip leaders are not normally professionals or experts, but fellow members who have agreed to share their time and their knowledge with other participants, on a volunteer basis. The relationship of trip leaders and participants is that of co-venturers, not professional and client. For these reasons field trip participation is limited to DNHG members and their bona fide non-resident guests.

Various dangers are inherent in travel in and around the UAE and in the exploration of the natural environment, whether by automobile, by boat, on foot or otherwise, and whether on-road or off-road, in the cities or countryside, in the moun-

tains or deserts or at sea. By participating in DNHG field trips, members accept these risks, and they accept responsibility for their own safety and welfare. Field trip participants are normally required to sign a waiver form to this effect. Without these understandings, the DNHG would be unable to sponsor field trips or to recruit volunteers to lead them.



Field trips vary in both format and organisation, depending on the nature of the trip, the number of participants, and the preferences of the field trip leader. If the number of participants is limited and sign-up is required, members should make every effort to honour their commitments or to give timely notice otherwise, as a courtesy both to the trip leader and to other members who might like to have the chance to participate.

Snail Call

A reminder, especially for new members: your unwanted garden snails and slugs are of interest for scientific study and an accounting of the terrestrial snails of the UAE. All specimens will be gratefully accepted by Chairman Gary Feulner, and contributors will be kept informed of progress and pedigrees. Suburban gardens are home to several native Arabian snails, but also a number of introduced species. There have already been a few surprises and we know that more are out there. Dead shells are preferred; we'll follow up if you've got something unusual. It's easy. Just bag 'em and tag 'em! Please remember to record the location and the habitat, as well as your name, the date, and any remarks.



Dubai Natural History Group Programme

Lectures at Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management, 7.30 for 8.00pm

Feb 5 The Recent History of Abu Dhabi – Peter Hellyer

Mar 5 Coastal Marine Life of the UAE – Dr. Richard Hornby

Field Trips (Members only, please. Details inside.)

Jan 25-27 Jebel Shams camping and 'rim walk' - Peter van Amsterdam

Mar 16-17 Inter-Emirates Weekend (Ras Al Khaimah)