

GAZELLE

Vol 23 no 5 May 2008



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Mohammed Arfan Asif is participating in a group photography exhibition 'Unseen UAE' at the Cultural Foundation in Abu Dhabi, from May 19 to 29, which is showing 30 photographs taken in the UAE. Six of his pictures are being exhibited, and four are on the invitation card.



One of Mohammed Arfan Asif's UAE photographs

Dr Sandy Fowler reports from Paphos in Cyprus that shelling there is much reduced in scale from the UAE. He has already collected both *Murex* species that occur, and the only *Conus* species in the Mediterranean (cf the UAE's 27 or 28 cone species). Too fast, too few! The challenge, Sandy says, will have to be the smaller shells, and their photography.

"During a recent visit to the pivot fields near Ras Al Khaimah Airport", **Barbara Couldrey** writes, "I spotted a lone red-wattled lapwing standing between two sprinkler up-

rights, watching me. I suspected a nest so quietly wandered over. The bird just walked away, surprisingly, without any of the usual screeching defensive tactics, while I examined the nest. Suddenly, I heard large machinery noise and there, heading towards me - and the nest - was a huge grass-rolling monster. I waved my arms frantically at the driver, pointing to the nest. He smiled and nodded ... and avoided the nest. As I walked away, the parent bird calmly returned to tend the eggs. Trust!



Red-wattled lapwing eggs in a typical nest
Photograph by Barbara Couldrey

Pradeep and Anin Radhakrishna report that their field trip to the Sundarbans mangrove forest reserve went very well, and no one was eaten by a tiger. There will be a report on the trip in next month's issue of *Gazelle*.

DNHG Membership

DNHG Membership remains a bargain at Dhs.100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. You can join or renew at our meetings or by sending us your details and a cheque made out to: Lloyds TSB Bank account no. 60600669933501. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG. Please also note our account number has changed.)

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.

This month's Contributors

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

Nancy Papathanasopoulou
Mohammed Arfan Asif
Barbara Couldrey
Gary Feulner



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



Summer Activities

Members' Night has been postponed because we had the opportunity to hear Dr Julie Jackson speak whilst she is in Dubai. Members' Night will be held in December, and that gives you plenty of time to think about what you might talk about, if you would like to do something.

Sharjah Wildlife Centre with Pradeep

May 22 or 23 (TBC)

This is a wonderful place to go in hot weather, as the exhibits and creatures can all be seen from indoors. It is suitable for grannies and 4 year olds, and encompasses almost everything about the UAE geography, flora and fauna. Details will be sent out by email.

Musandam Dhow Trip

Fri May 31

Details have been emailed to members. Please book as soon as possible and pay in advance. Lamjed goes to a lot of effort for these trips.

Oasis Paper Factory

Sat June 7

Sandhya Prakash is organizing a visit to this recycling factory that uses rag and paper to produce a unique product. Details will be sent by email, and announced at the June 1 lecture.

Star Gazing with Lamjed

Date TBA

This is an easy one and great fun. Lamjed has a *huge* telescope, through which you'll see things you've never seen before. Nevertheless, bring your own binoculars and a mat to lie on (or your head falls off). The problem is that we are having to go further and further out to avoid the lights of ever-expanding Dubai. It has to be somewhere where we can see the sky without too much light pollution. Watch this spot and your email.

Book Review: *Snakes of Arabia: A Field guide to the Snakes of the Arabian Peninsula and its Shores* by Damien Egan.

It's easy to recommend this field guide, which is comprehensive, clearly written and well illustrated with photographs and drawings, even though many readers may be reluctant to get close enough to snakes in the field to check some of the finer points. It also seems to reflect the enthusiasm of the author for his scaly subjects. (Many DNHG members will remember Damien Egan as a knowledgeable and engaging speaker on Arabian snakes.)

Apart from identification, I found a wealth of new information in the guide about the habits and habitats of various snakes, including species that I see regularly. For example, the guide tells us of wadi racers that although their normal prey "succumbs to toxic saliva after being "chewed" upon for several seconds", they are "harmless to humans and bites result in itching for a short time." (One wonders how this knowledge was gained.) Similarly, I learned that the local Carpet Viper (now distinguished as the Oman Carpet Viper, *Echis omanensis*), which I have always commended as an even-tempered, rather phlegmatic viper, is "highly aggressive" by night and "will not hesitate to bite."

This volume is the first serious field guide published by Motivate since some of the early volumes of its Arabian Heritage Series, released in the late 1980s (*The Living Desert*, *Mammals of the Southern Gulf*, *The Living Seas*) – most now out-of-print and off the shelves. It is branded as an "Arabian Heritage Guide" so perhaps in time we can look forward to a few more.

The book is available at local bookstores including Magrudy's, Borders, etc., as well as from Motivate's own retail shop in Garhoud, near Compu-Me, just next to Chilies' restaurant and around the corner from Irish Village. *Review by Gary Feulner*

Our Next Speaker

Dr Julie Scott-Jackson MIFA, is a geo-archaeologist and Director of the PADMAC Unit, University of Oxford which is a multi-disciplinary geo-archaeological Unit specialising in geology; geomorphology; sedimentology; pedology; Palaeolithic artefact technology; landscape archaeology, spatial analysis, geophysics, evolutionary studies and population genetics.

The Unit offers students and researchers an opportunity to investigate geo-archaeological processes implicated in the retention, over geological time, of high-level *in situ* Palaeolithic sites on Karstic landforms, particularly the chalk Downlands of southern England, with associated capping deposits mapped as Clay-with-flints, and high-level limestone and chert areas in the Middle East. In many instances, these high-level sites represent the earliest evidence of human occupation - in Britain from around 600,000 to 40,000 years ago and in the Middle East considerably earlier.

Over the past few years, Dr Scott-Jackson has carried out investigations in the Arabian Peninsula and has discovered important evidence of Palaeolithic occupation in the UAE. These finds support the hypothesis that Palaeolithic people took a southern route out of Africa through the Arabian Gulf and on, into Iran. Members of the Dubai Natural History Group have played an important part in these discoveries.

Dr Scott-Jackson is also the Palaeolithic geo-archaeological advisor and Committee member of the Avebury Archaeological and Historical Research Group for the Avebury World Heritage site in the UK.



Letters to the Editor



Environmental Impact Assessments - a second look

In the last issue of *Gazelle*, Gary Feulner wrote briefly about EIAs, saying, in part, that: "Some EIA consultants have insisted... that... certain project owners and project consultants have been very receptive to information about sites of environmental or archaeological concern, and have been willing to make changes, both large and small, to ensure their preservation."

I can certainly confirm that, at least as far as archaeology is concerned. A few examples:

- * Dubai's ICG group, currently planning a residential development at Wadi Madhab, near Fujairah, not only commissioned an archaeological survey, undertaken by myself and Dr. Michele Ziolkowski, but also involved us actively in site planning, so that sites of major importance could be taken into account, and then paid for a team of archaeologists to come down from Britain to excavate some of the key sites, which will now be protected within the development project.

- * Abu Dhabi's Union Water and Electricity Company, UWEC, moved a pipeline route by half a kilometre to protect a major copper smelting site in the mountains of southern Ra's al-Khaimah

- * Abu Dhabi's Dolphin Energy paid for a detailed survey of pre-Islamic tombs in Wadi Saqamqam, Fujairah, that were close to, but not actually affected by, their Qidfa to Al Ain pipeline

- * Dolphin and Abu Dhabi's International Petroleum Investment Company, IPIC, moved planned pipeline routes through the Wadi Safad, Fujairah, to protect archaeological sites around the hill-top fort of Husn Safad.

Some other companies take a different approach. Thus one very large Dubai-based developer refused point-blank to pay attention to the existence of archaeological sites, including one that was potentially of major importance, on the area of a planned marina de-

velopment in Khor al-Beida, Umm al-Qaiwain, while many other property developers just take the reports submitted and do nothing about the archaeological data contained in them (apart from destroying the sites).

Developers of this second type are all too common, sadly, but there ARE companies who adopt a more responsible approach.

So I, and others who carry out Environmental Impact Assessments, keep on trying!

It would help, though, if there was some federal legislation on the issue, and if the governments of some of the smaller and poorer emirates would adopt an approach that was not simply based on the profit to be made from the developers, and actually insisted, as do some more responsible Emirates, that sites of archaeological (and environmental) importance were protected.

Peter Hellyer

* * *

Sand Driving Course

The weekend sand-driving course led by Andrew Bean of the Abu Dhabi ENHG in early April was a good introduction for novices and a good refresher for a couple of old-timers present, including equipment, some basic principles for avoiding problems, some basic techniques for solving problems, and some practical experience. Participants had a bit of trouble getting stuck on command, but little trouble doing so on their own. Backs, shovels, tow ropes and sand ladders all got a workout.



Cheesman's gerbil (*Gerbilus cheesmani*)

Along the way, we learned some useful additional generalizations, such as: (i) other things being

equal, a more powerful car will outperform a less powerful one; and (ii) some brands of tyres may require significantly more deflation before they will splay and allow the vehicle to "float" over the sand. The Pardoes managed to float the whole family and it was a happy occasion to see our former Chief Engineer, James Pardoe, now resident in England, back for a visit to the UAE. The course was also a good opportunity to meet some friendly folks from the Abu Dhabi group.



Dune Sand Gecko (*Stenodactylus doriae*)

The campsite at Two Trees, inland from the Abu Dhabi-Al-Ain Truck Road, is situated near a man-made reservoir which exposes the high ground water level in the area and is home to water plants, a small population of damselflies and a predaceous diving beetle of a type seldom encountered in the UAE. By night, it was a 'first' for many to see how scorpions glow in the dark under ultraviolet light, a study technique that is notoriously effective.



Buthid scorpion

An early morning walk revealed a wealth of animal tracks (foxes, gerbils, jirds, dung beetles, other beetles, lizards and a sand boa), as well as several gerbils (trapped



Email your reports to pvana@emirates.net.ae, (Arial 10 justified) and send your photographs as separate jpg files, or deliver them to Anne for scanning.

using oatmeal) that were examined and released. Report by Gary Feulner

More Rare Butterflies: Green Striped White and Baton Blue

Local butterflies continued to surprise, this winter season. Recently spotted in the southern Musandam region of the UAE was the green striped white *Euchloe belemia*, feeding on scattered specimens of the lavender-coloured crucifer *Eruca hispanica*. It spent more time at individual flowers than the more common desert white *Pontia glauconome*, making it easy to observe and identify with certainty. The green striped white is primarily a circum-Mediterranean species but its range extends through the Levant and Iraq to the eastern Saudi Arabia, Iran and Baluchistan. It has been recorded in the UAE on only a few previous occasions, once in the northern Musandam, once near Sharjah and once in Dubai.



Butterfly habitat in Wadi Sfai

Equally noteworthy was a sighting on the Jebel Sfai field trip in mid-February of the baton blue butterfly. This Palearctic species was previously thought to be restricted to higher elevations in the Musandam area, but Jebel Sfai is located in the Wadi Al-Iyeli area, in the middle of the mountains east of

Shawkah and south of Siji, some 60 km south of the Musandam and 80 km south of the southernmost previous records of the baton blue. Moreover, the sighting was at an elevation of only 400m.



Baton blue butterfly

Torben Larsen, who literally wrote the book on Arabian butterflies, considers that this must nevertheless be a long-term resident population, since "I think a species like this is actually specially geared not to be moved by winds, flying low and often inside vegetation. I am sure it must be a real colony, especially as you saw two. But," he added, "what an unexciting looking spot for butterflies!" A follow up visit a few weeks later confirmed the presence of additional specimens. Report by Gary Feulner

Thru' the Lens ...

There is a small world out there which, on closer inspection, opens up a new world of opportunities to the discerning nature photographer.

Macro photography in the old days of analog had suspense. You never knew on location whether your photos were sharp and had the desired characteristics. Though this was applicable to all branches of photography, the uncertainty of obtaining a sharp picture with the required depth of field was more evident with macro studies taken outdoors.

The 'wind' is the greatest enemy of the outdoor macro nature photographer. The slightest gentle breeze results in failure, particularly on cold winter mornings when it gets on your nerves. Therefore, the mantra is to be prepared to handle the most adverse conditions. Early dewy mornings are the best times

for taking pictures when my favorites, the butterflies, are static sunbathing their wings. As the light becomes stronger you may be able to get greater depth of field and faster shutter speeds, but you find the insect very active and you don't want to keep chasing them until lunch.



Crimson rose butterfly

To avoid blurred images, invest in a sturdy tripod (preferably black). Aluminum and shiny tripods reflect light and disturb the subject. The world's best nature photographers always shoot using a tripod though its weight may burden you. But for all good results you need to put in extra effort. Carrying a tripod, even up a mountain as the late Galen Rowell did, will always help you get crisp, sharp and meaningful pictures. Text and photographs by Mohammed Arfan Asif

Meet the Turtles

In the previous issue of the Gazelle we presented the telemetry project launched in March 2008 on nine Olive Ridley female turtles in Masirah Island, Oman. A little more than one month later, they're all still "online". Some interesting similarities and differences have arisen already as we follow them in sea and on land.

We now have three turtles that have definitely finished nesting.



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan
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Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner
res 306 5570
fax 330 3550

Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
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fax 340 0990
email: valeriechalmers@hotmail.com

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.



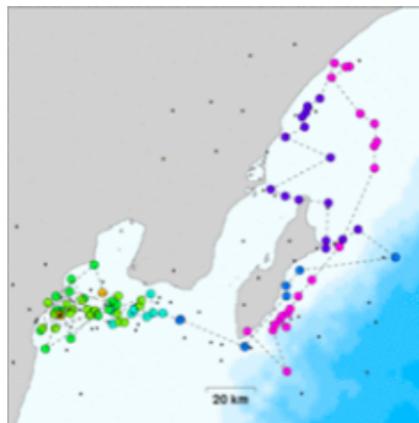
There's Iman the little turtle and Amira and Havda. They've both headed north following the shallow coastal waters. This behaviour contrasts with many Olive Ridleys in the Pacific, which just head out into open ocean.

The other turtles are still moving to and away from the waters west of Masirah Island. This area may be interesting habitat, or simply the area where they live all year round, if they are a resident population. Time will tell. The most common behaviour demonstrated by the turtles was, after nesting, to head west to the shallow waters of the Barr Al Hikman.

Shamsa has subsequently remained in the area, whereas 6 other turtles have returned to the island, probably to nest. Zena was the first turtle to head west a second time after she had returned to the island.

The most common interesting interval for hard-shell marine turtles is approximately 2 weeks. In previous studies, the Olive Ridleys of Masirah have been reported to exhibit a peculiar 21-day interesting interval. With continuation of the tracking period we hope to firmly identify re-nesting activity in our tagged turtles and generate our own value for interesting interval.

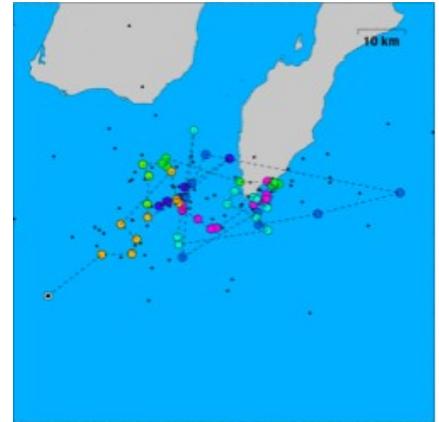
Sara – the first



The first turtle we tagged, on 26 March, journeyed north after nesting at Ras Shiban, then returned south and headed west to where most of the turtles are located (see movements map). Sara has re-

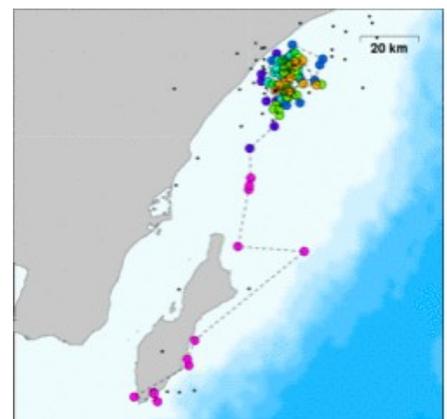
mained in shallow waters and apparently did not nest again.

Noor – the feisty



Another night, another turtle. On 27 March, we ran out of gas upon reaching Ras Shiban beach and while we looked for an Olive Ridley, a Hawksbill emerged near our car and started nesting. After walking for many kilometres, we found feisty Noor nesting in the northern part of the beach. She was very eager to get away from us all along. She is now moving west of the island after every time she returns to it for feeding or nesting.

Iman – the unique

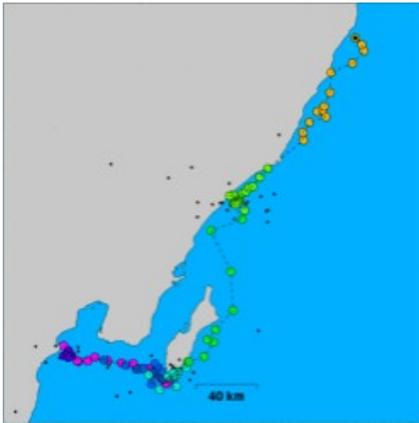


Iman was spotted about a kilometre north of Zena on 28 March and was immediately boxed and tagged. Iman is the smallest of the turtles we tagged. Her shell was covered with green algae not seen on the other turtles, and it may be that this is because she lives somewhere different from the other eight turtles. She headed north to shallow coastal waters after nesting and has remained there ever since. Com-



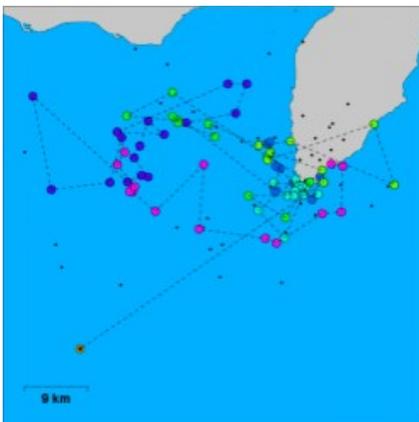
pared to the other eight turtles, this behaviour is unique. She has migrated to the area shown on the map and has been there for two weeks without moving. We had some idea this turtle might do something different, as she was physically different - smaller and algae-covered.

Havda – the late one



On 29 March, we simply couldn't find an Olive Ridley to tag on Ras Shiban beach. After five hours, Havda was spotted nesting in the early morning hours. A member of our team made sure she didn't escape while the rest of us brought the car and tagged her. At the same time, Maisoon appeared, after nesting close to Havda, and was tagged at the same time. They were both released at dawn. Havda has finished nesting now and headed North of Masirah like Amira and Iman before her. Havda is currently second in the "race" away from the island.

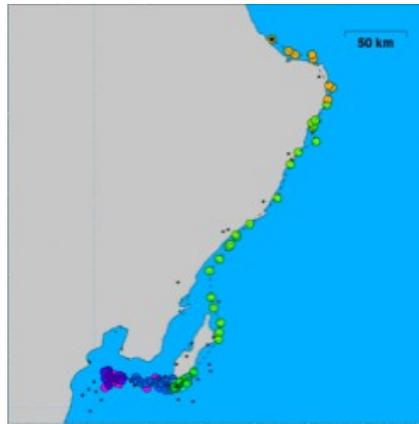
Maisoon - the angry



Havda's "neighbour", bigger in size and angrier when she got caught,

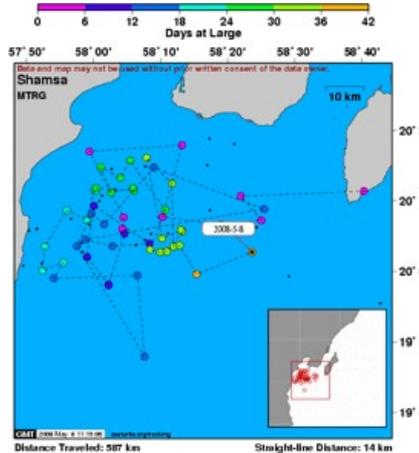
Maisoon hasn't followed the path to the north but has headed west again. Maybe this means she will nest again before the season is over.

Amira – the choosey



Amira, the choosy Olive Ridley, dug four pits before deciding that the last one was the right spot for her nest. Even though she was spotted early on the night of 31 March, she wasn't ready to be tagged until the early morning. It looks as if Amira has finished nesting for this year and is heading off to the North. She has bypassed Iman who has been lazily hanging out in the same area for a couple of weeks. In fact, she has even passed Ras Al Hadd, famous for its large population of green turtles. Will she remain close to the coast or head off to the Indian sub-continent?

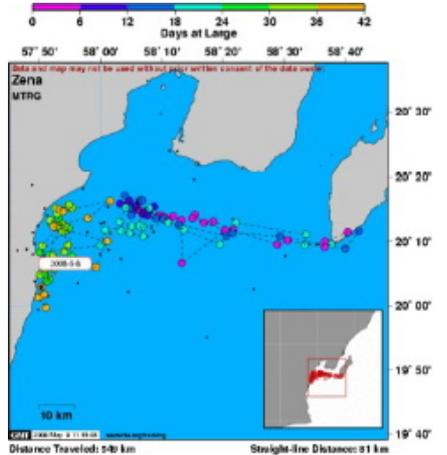
Shamsa – the last one



Like all other Olive Ridleys tagged in this project, Shamsa was also found nesting in the Halat area of Ras Shaban beach on April 1st. Shamsa took her time to lay her eggs and, like her sisters before

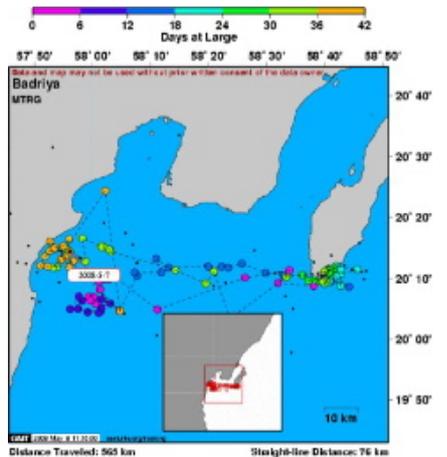
her, received a satellite transmitter right after moving away from the nest. Like most of her sisters, she comes back to the island to nest, then heads back west.

Two Olive Ridleys received Depth-Measuring Transmitters. Zena - the cute scute one



Zena has 9 sets of costal scutes. She was the first of two Ridleys to receive a depth-measuring location transmitter. Her special transmitting equipment will enlighten us about the depths Olive Ridleys reach during their dives. One Olive Ridley from Australia dived to a depth of 200 metres.

Badriya - the almost scuteless



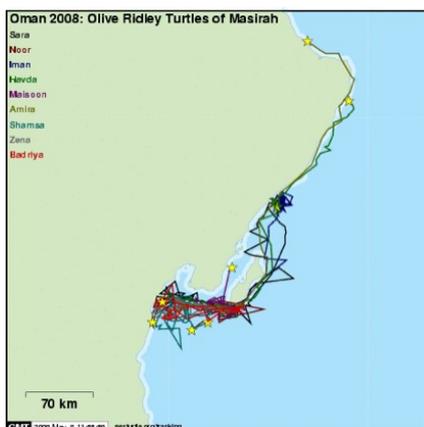
Tagged in southern Ras Shaban beach on 30 March, Badriya received a special depth-measuring transmitter as well. This means that her movements will also provide information about how deep she dives every 6 hours.

Badriya's and Zena's transmitters will probably tell us whether or not



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Masirah Olive Ridleys do this. They will have to move away from the coast to find such deep waters. For now, Badriya is heading west again after nesting.



Migration map of Olive Ridleys of Masirah Island on 11 May 2008

To keep track of the turtles, you can go to www.seaturtle.org for updated maps. Thanks to Nancy Papathanasopoulou, Project Manager Masirah Olive Ridley Telemetry Project Sponsored by TOTAL Corporate Foundation for Biodiversity and the

Sea and TOTAL S.A. – Muscat Branch

Hurrah for Lena and for Anin!

Books

Arthropod Fauna of the UAE

Tony van Harten has given us more information about the availability of *Arthropod Fauna of the UAE*, Vol. 1, which was reviewed in last month's Gazelle. That volume is available from Dar Al Umamah Printing, Publishing, Distribution & Advertising, P.O. Box 39975, Abu Dhabi, Fax: 02-6734766. The company office is situated in the industrial area of Abu Dhabi. Selling price to individuals is Dh. 100 - excellent value, considering the work that's gone into it. However, we are also hoping to arrange a bulk purchase and make this book available to members more conveniently at our monthly lectures.

Thanks are due to Lena Linton for stepping up for the Treasurer's post on the DNHG Committee. This was much needed as the last two were promptly transferred elsewhere, and Val has been filling in despite her other duties. Anindita Radhakrishna will continue on the busy task of Membership Secretary. Our grateful thanks to both!

End-of-Season Function

Please look for the attached (electronically or otherwise) notice about the end-of-season party on Thursday 12 June. Note that it is *not* at the Country Club as previously, but at the India Club in Oud Metha. Book early - it's always a good night!

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

Jun 01 A southern route out of Africa: how new discoveries in the UAE are rewriting the Palaeolithic history of the Arabian Peninsula - Dr Julie Scott-Jackson

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

May 22 or 23 Sharjah Wildlife Centre
(Please note that date may change)

May 31 Musandam Dhow Trip

June 07 Oasis paper recycling factory

June 12 End-of-Season Function

Additional trips, details and changes may be announced by e-mail circular.