

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Hans-Joachim Rau is leaving the Emirates after 11 years in Dubai and an earlier stint between 1984 and 1989 in Abu Dhabi. He was a member of the DNHG for about eight years and enjoyed the monthly lectures as well as going on and occasionally leading field trips reflecting his interests in geology and birdlife both in Oman and the UAE. On the eve of his departure, he managed to squeeze in a final (hot) falaj trip with Brien Holmes! He is returning to Berlin, but was already planning an Alp crossing from Meran to Trient at the end of August.



Hans Joachim Rau

Farewell, too, to **Rob Whelan** and **Chris Richards**. Rob will complete his contract at the University of Wollongong in Dubai at the end of August, so he and Chris will be moving on to something else somewhere else. For Rob and Chris, the past three years have flown by, and

have been much enriched by their involvement with the DNHG. Educational lectures, field trips on land and sea, workshops at inter-emirates weekends, and a great expedition to Zanzibar taught them a lot about the UAE and wider region. They will be back, and will try to convince us to have a DNHG expedition to Australia one day! They both wish thank DNHG members who have so generously shared their knowledge with them.



Rob Whelan and Chris Richards in Petra

Maureen (Mo) and **Peter Steer** are also leaving Dubai towards the end of August after spending seven years in the UAE. Mo trained as a science teacher many moons ago, and so had a leaning towards natural history well before joining the DNHG. Peter is a safety engineer. They are deciding whether to return to university, or to go off to parts unknown on another adventure. We hope they keep in touch!

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 (our next is on Sept. 18) 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:

Dennis J. Russell
Mairead Porter
Denis Cheng
Ajmal Hasan
Gary Feulner
Colin Paskins

A giant Galapagos tortoise in the wild

Photograph by
Colin Paskins



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



Langtang Valley Trek with Sonja 22 Sept - 1 Oct

This will be a 10-day field trip to Nepal: Sightseeing in Kathmandu and 5 1/2 day mountain trek in Langtang, Sep 22 to Oct 1, 2011

Kathmandu is the capital and, with close to one million inhabitants, the largest metropolitan city of Nepal. It is also acronymed as 'KTM' and named 'tri-city'. The city's rich history is nearly 2000 years old. The city has plenty of sights and we will try to visit at least the major ones during our one day stay: Syambhunath, Boudhanath, Pasupatinath, Bhaktapur and Kathmandu Durbar Square.

The Langtang Valley in north-central Nepal was declared a national park in 1976 and remains the second largest in Nepal. Stretching up to the Tibetan border, it has a high level of biodiversity including 15 forest types, 3,000 species of flowering plants like oaks, fir, blue pine, spruce and more than 10 species of rhododendrons; 46 species of mammals including musk deer, snow leopards, red panda, wild dog and Himalayan black bear; and 283 species of birds. It is also home to diverse traditional cultures, monasteries and local pilgrimage sites.

Travel plan:

Thur 22: arrive Kathmandu (KTM) at 1 pm, check into hotel
Fri 23: guided tour of major sites in Kathmandu, then ...

24/9.Day 01: Drive to Syabru Besi by comfortable jeep/land cruiser (1450m) - Lodge (L/D)
25/9.Day 02: Trek to Lama Hotel (2480m), 6/7 hrs - Lodge (B/L/D)
26/9.Day 03: Trek to Langtang Village (3541m), 6 hrs - Lodge (B/L/D)
27/9.Day 04: Trek to Kyanjin Gompa (3900m), 4 hrs, visit cheese factory - Lodge (B/L/D)
28/9.Day 05: Explore Hidden Valley and glacier(3/4 hrs), after Lunch Trek back to Langtang Village, 7 hrs-Lodge (B/L/D)
29/9.Day 06: Trek to Bamboo,7 hrs-Lodge (B/L/D)
30/9.Day 07: Trek back to Syabrubesi, lunch and drive back to Kathmandu by comfortable jeep/land cruiser and transfer to your hotel (B/L)
Sat 1 Oct: return flight to Dubai (B/L/D = Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner)

Special Package price, on 10-15 persons basis: USD 500/head

Cost includes: Best available selected lodges accommodation during trek on twin sharing / triple sharing basis
3 meals a day during trek(breakfast + lunch + dinner) - you can select own preferred meals from lodges menu if you want
3 times tea/coffee a day during trek (am /pm /evening)
4 litres of boiled or filtered drinking water per day per person
Sleeping bag, down jacket and porter kit bag(if necessary)

1 experienced, professional sherpa guide/leader with meals, lodge, gears, Insurance and wages
1 experienced asst. guide/sherpa(for those who walk slow or whenever someone need help)

1 porter between 2 persons basis trek permits, TIMS card and required trek documents

Kathmandu- Syabrubesi - Kathmandu by private comfortable jeep(Local bus available but not recommended due to rough road)

First Aid Kit (for basic treatment only)
Agency service charges and Government taxes

Trekking completion certificate

Approximate costs:
FlyDubai, return ticket 1600 – 1800 AED

KTM Hotel 3 nights in double twin, breakfast included: 17 USD x 3 = 51 USD

KTM Hotel 3 nights in single, breakfast included: 34 USD x 3 = 102 USD

Airport transfers: To be confirmed
Guided tour of Kathmandu: (9500 rupee per group) 136 USD, i.e. 10 – 15 USD per person

Round-trip transport to Langtang, guided trek of Langtang area including taxes, porters, 3 meals per day and accommodation in lodge for 7 days: 500 USD per person

Gratuities: A tip for guides, drivers and porters would be appropriate.
Visa: Many nationalities can obtain a visa on arrival at Kathmandu airport. Cost is up to 100 USD

Total: approximately 1070 USD* per person (in twin room sharing, visa not included)

*NB: Costs are approximate and will depend on number of participants
Extras: Visa, lunches and dinners in Kathmandu, tips, entertainment, shopping. Exchange rate (as per qocurrency.com):

1000 Nepalese Rupee(s) = 14.2824 US Dollar(s)
1 NPR = 0.0142824 USD

1 USD = 70.016 NPR

IMPORTANT:

Fitness: The trip includes 5-1/2 days' trekking involving approx. 6-8 hrs walking per day mostly at elevations from c.1,500-4,000 meters (c.5,000-13,500 ft) with elevation changes of up to c.1200 meters (c.4,000 ft) on some days. We will follow a circle route, staying the nights in different lodges on the way, so all participants must be fit enough & equipped appropriately to perform minimum 6 hrs per day walk. Once the trek is started, there is no easy way to turn back. Nepal is a mountainous country and even established trails can be strenuous. Porters will be available to carry equipment not needed for the day's hike, but you must be able to carry basic daily backpack and get yourself up and down the trails.

Accommodations: This is not a luxury trip. Our hotel in Kathmandu will be a recommended 3-star hotel. Langtang remains a relatively remote rural area, so our hotels and lodges on trek might be very basic, on a shared room basis.

Group: Number of participants is limited to maximum 15. Prompt booking is vital to secure your place on this trip. If interested, please contact Sonja Lavrencic on sonja@publicisgraphics.ae for more information, and to confirm details.

Our Next Speaker

Liz Maley Craig hails from New Zealand and has been in Dubai since 1976. Prior to this, she worked for the Royal Parks in London. Liz ran a plant nursery called The Lansdscape Centre on Beach Road until she was obliged to move to Garhoud, where many members will remember a flourishing area of nurseries. She is well-known for having written *Gardening in the Gulf*, which was based on the TV show of the same name that she presented, and she co-authored, with Shirley Kay, *Indoor & Balcony Plants*.

She has been an excellent source of information on plants on our field trips for many years and was a participant in the 2010 Socotra trip.

(A 15-month calendar, produced by some of the participants in the DNHG trip to benefit the Socotra Women's Development Association, will be available at the lecture, and features photos by DNHG members.)



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

The Copper Wadis: Safafir, Al Qor, and Safini ... and a Surprise!

In the parking lot of the Hatta Cooperative Society, early on June 24, we huddled around a hunk of ancient smelted copper presented by Brien Holmes, as a preview of the day's expedition into the antiquity of the UAE. And as we stood there we made optimistic comments about how "pleasant" the weather in Hatta was. But we were just fooling ourselves; the bright un-remitting sun streaming down through the thin air of the 2000+ metres high Hajar Mountains had yet to bear down in full.

The first two stops, to view a rare exposure of the "Mohorovicic Discontinuity" or "Moho" – the boundary between the earth's crust and mantle – and a 100 year old fort guarding the access to the East coast were straightforward. On our arrival at the two pre-Islamic copper mines and smelting sites in Wadi Safafir, we found thick patches of discarded slag from the ancient smelting process strewn about the ground amidst the ruins of small and humble ancient dwellings and storage units at the first site. Myriad pieces of oxidised 'refined' copper, a brilliant turquoise green, strewn about the deep shaft of a well-preserved smelting pit (and a fresh goat carcass), at the second site, confirmed my preference for this humble metal over the 'king of metals', gold.



Tomb in Wadi Al Qor

By the time we arrived at the Umm al Nar style tomb in Wadi Al Qor, it was nearly noon and the sunlight so intense that it was difficult to get

shots of this nicely preserved ancient structure which were not too blindingly over-exposed. And it was so photogenic! Its surviving below-grade (below the ground's surface) walls and lintels gave it the appearance of a miniature Stonehenge.

When we reached the ancient copper smelting sites in Wadi Safini, the noonday sun was in full assault. How I admired the frisking goats and sashaying burros who seemed so unfazed by this noonday heat! We all began to wilt so badly that Brien took pity on us and cut short the tour at the ruins of a late-Islamic village situated along the tops of low lying rocky hills. We caught a glimpse of them without the torturous (and perhaps suicidal) hike up to them.

We then sought some much needed respite and found ourselves at a typical local roadside 'kitchen' offering the usual minimal fare of a raw cabbage salad, barbecued chicken, and fish tossed onto mounds of rice, served on massive platters.



The food was very tasty

Our first stop on the afternoon's agenda was a combination of an ancient copper smelting site and a burial ground in Wadi Safini. Two interesting aspects of this site were that it is quite extensive and that it is situated amidst the present-day construction project to widen the Kalba-Sharjah highway. The modern equipment of this project provided a stunning contrast to the thick patches of ancient copper slag and the stone burial pits spread over the entire area. Brien explained that the efforts of local archeologists, evidenced by bright yellow signs among the patches of slag, have been successful in curbing the wholesale destruction of not only this but other archeological sites.

But Brien had saved the best for last! He led us to the site of a true archeological mystery! This mystery was well pre-faced by Brien's refusal to disclose the exact name or location of this site for fear of it becoming overrun by tourists – not like us members of the DNHG, of course! Though quite exhausted by the heat now and thinking of the cool shower awaiting me at home, I was immediately brought back to the sizzling here-and-now by the sight of mysterious low-lying piles of rock, technically known as 'geoglyphs', laid out over a large area in some kind of uncanny pattern which has yet to be discerned.



The field of undeciphered geoglyphs

Adding to the depth and excitement of the mystery was Brien's account of how he had contacted the researcher of a famous site with similar geoglyphs in Nazca, Peru, and had been told by that researcher that he had no idea what function or significance those artifacts had had.



Food for thought!
Stone circles and mysterious lines

The most plausible and least laughable 'out of this world' hypothesis put forward by Brien and other professionals is that these may, in fact, be 'celestial charts', 'star maps', or 'astronomical computers'. So, being the avid amateur astronomer and archeologist that I am, I could hardly



contain my excitement at being presented with a local example of one of my pet areas of interest and research. It was certainly a fitting climax, and a truly uplifting note upon which to end this very informative (if somewhat hot!) trip into the archeology of the UAE. Abundant thanks to Brien for leading us and for all his ambitious work on the subject! Report by Denis Cheng, photographs by Ajmal Hasan and Denis Cheng

Investigating a Tumor-forming Disease in Hawaiian Marine Turtles

Last summer my family and I went to Hawaii to visit a long time friend George Balazs, a world renown marine turtle scientist. I met George while both of us were in graduate school at the University of Hawaii. I was working on the ecological effects of introduced marine plants on reef ecology and he was working on the biology of marine turtles. The main turtle he was working with was *Chelonia mydas*, a herbivorous turtle, and he wanted to identify the food it was including in its diet. Since that time, long ago in the 1970s, George and I have continued to work together and have published several papers concerning green turtles.

George is the Director of the Marine Turtle Division of the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in Honolulu, Hawaii, and has had a team of 20 scientists working on marine turtle problems since he began working for NMFS. It is called the Marine Turtle Recovery Team and is involved with all aspects involved with the recovery of the population of marine turtles. When my family met him to take direct part in the turtle research, he introduced me to the team and volunteers as the only member of the team that has been with him from the beginning (1976). The collecting location, this time, was Kailua Bay, Oahu, and when we got there we could see about 20 turtles sticking their heads up out of the water, as they fed on the seaweeds.



Turtle in the tub

George and his assistants are the only scientists in the group certified to capture and conduct research on this endangered species. Very strict rules have to be followed when capturing and handling the animals, such as only dip nets or direct capture used to prevent the turtles drowning. Signs must be displayed, or carried in the water, to inform the public that this is an authorised capture and is legal. This also stops neighbours calling police to arrest the 'turtle poachers'.



Our stay-out-of-jail card

That day, August 23, 2010, we captured 16 turtles, which were identified from PIT tags, measured, weighed, samples taken and a few had data that was downloaded from computers glued onto their backs. A graduate student from Hawaii Pacific University was studying the foraging behavior of these turtles and had placed computers on their backs that measure depth, temperature, GPS location, etc. Four turtles had sonar devices attached to help him locate the turtles with a hydrophone.

A major concern for the team is identifying the cause of a terrible tumor disease that affects the eyes,

mouth, throat and other parts of the turtle and can kill the turtle by starvation.



Turtle face

This disease only occurs in Hawaiian turtles and does not occur in our area here in the United Arab Emirates. Presently, George and I are using our 35 years of feeding data to develop a manuscript that will try to identify food items that might harbor the tumor causing agents. Our last paper was on the "Dietary shifts by green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) in the Kaneohe Bay region of the Hawaiian Islands: A 28-year study", published in Pacific Science (2008) 63:181-192. Another manuscript will be published, "Marine sponges, other animal food and non-food items found in the digestive tracts of the herbivorous marine turtle *Chelonia Mydas* in Hawaii", Pacific Science (2010). Our greatest hope is that somehow, after decades of research that has failed to find a cause, we will be able to focus in on something that will help us rid the green turtles of this hideous disease.

Our experience in Kailua last August was a special one to remember, especially for my wife and daughter. There is a unique feeling of togetherness and accomplishment when a group of scientists and volunteers are working together to save the lives of these very special creatures.



Turtle release



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

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

Archaeology - David Palmer
050-7387703
office direct line: 04-2072636
dpalmer@ud.ac.ae

Birds - David Bradford
davebradford9@hotmail.com

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi
res: 06-5310467
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
email: valeriechalmers@hotmail.com

Plants – Valerie Chalmers

Seashells and Mammals - 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.



All of the people in Hawaii are involved in protecting *Hono* (Hawaiian sea turtle); no turtles are hunted for food or eggs, and you can go to any beach or reef in Hawaii and see them living freely and unafraid of humans. Because of everyone's efforts the marine turtles in Hawaii have shown a strong and positive population recovery since 1976, largely because of George Balazs's efforts and the Marine Turtle Recovery Team. *Report and photographs by Dennis J. Russell, American University of Sharjah, Department of Biology and Chemistry.*

A Photo-story of the Galapagos

Colin Paskins, who now lives between Canada and France, was recently in the Galapagos Islands and was thrilled to get so close to nature.



A pair of lascar boobies



Humboldt penguin, the only penguin found in the tropics



Magnificent frigate bird with chick

The creatures of the Galapagos are renowned for their lack of fear, and Colin was able to get very close to a variety of species.



Marine iguanas, which swim & feed on algae



Fur seal basking



Lava lizard & (probably) Galapagos silver fritillary. Immediately after this photo, the Lizard grabbed the butterfly and ran off



Land iguana (*Conolophus subcristatus*)



Head of a saddleback tortoise (... or ET?)



Colin and Margaret with a giant tortoise at Darwin Breeding Centre
Thanks to Colin Paskins



Natural History Books Available at our Monthly Meetings

Wild About Reptiles by M. Jongbloed, ERWDA Price 45DH

More comprehensive guides to the reptiles of the Arabian Peninsula have been published but this is a valuable guide for the casual to advanced explorer.

Wild About Mammals by M. Jongbloed, ERWDA Price 45DH

Another guide which should be in the library of anyone in the UAE interested in the mammals found in this part of the world.

Yawi, the Wild Cat by M. Jongbloed Price 15DH

(Written and illustrated by Marijcke).

Yawi 4 book packs Price 40DH

4 delightful educational animal stories from Arabia by Marijcke Jongbloed. In one pack – Yawi the Wild Cat, Hayat the Arabian Leopard, Denis the Dugong and Sophie the Sand Fox.

Tribulus – Vol 18 – 2009 Price 40DH

This is the publication of the Abu Dhabi chapter of the ENHG with contributions covering every aspect of natural history in the UAE. They are valuable for anyone with a special interest in the scientific studies underway here in the last 25 years.

Tribulus – vol 17 – 2007 Price 40DH

Tribulus – vol 16.2 Autumn/Winter 2006 Price 15DH

Tribulus – vol 16.1 Spring/Summer 2006 Price 15DH

Tribulus – vol 15.2 Autumn/Winter 2005 Price 15DH

Tribulus – vol 15.1 Spring/Summer 2005 Price 15DH

Tribulus – vol 14.2 Autumn/Winter 2004 Price 10DH

Tribulus – vol 14.1 Spring/Summer 2004 Price 10DH

Tribulus – vol 13.2 Autumn/Winter 2003 Price 10DH

Tribulus – vol 13.1 Spring/Summer 2003 Price 10DH

Tribulus – vol 12.2 Autumn/Winter 2002 Price 10DH

Wild Flowers of the UAE by M. Jongbloed Price 100DH

Describes 550 wild plants in full detail with another 205 species recorded briefly. The scientific index serves as a checklist of 775 local species in 81 families.

The Phoenix Bird Reports - for Arabian ornithology

Compiled and distributed by Michael Jennings, coordinator, Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia

Number of copies: 2003= 5; 2004= 10; 2005 = 7; 2006=1; 2007=6; Price 10DH each

Number of copies: 2008 = 3; 2009 = 2; 2010 = 2 ;2011=10 Price 15DH each

Windtower by Anne Coles and Peter Jackson Price 200DH

194 pages building on original research and a detailed architectural survey undertaken by the authors in Dubai's Bastakiya between 1969 and 1974, this book includes their recent historical, social and technical research to provide a substantial book which is intended to appeal to anyone with a broad interest in the people, culture or architecture of the region.

Annotated check-list for Plants of the UAE by M. Jongbloed, R. A. Western and B. Boer Price 30DH

For an e-book on Vascular Plants of Abu Dhabi Emirate go to: http://www.ead.ae/TacSoft/FileManager/Publications/reports/TERC/plantchecklistv1_2.pdf

The Native Plants of Oman – An Introduction by Clive Winbow Price 80DH

This is a handy guide for the amateur naturalist to identify over 150 wild plants that are commonly seen on walks in the Omani countryside.

The Bird Calendar 2011 – Arabia Price 20DH

Text and photographs by Hanne and Jens Eriksen /www.BirdsOman.com

The Butterflies of Saudi Arabia and its Neighbours by Torben B. Larsen Price 100DH

A must have book if you like butterflies. It is highly readable and shows more than 147 species of butterflies that flourish on the Arabian Peninsula. It shows species that are unique only to the peninsula; 9.9% of all Arabian butterflies can be identified from this book!

Birds of Dubai – A Pictorial Guide by Reza Khan Price 120DH

The book contains more than 300 photographs taken by the author that cover the habitat of birds in man-made environment, desert, wadis, mountains, coastal areas and wet lands of Dubai. The book features



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Website Coordinator	Sandhya Prakash email: sandy_pi@yahoo.com	050-5512481		

200 species of birds that are found in the emirate of Dubai including the white-collared or collared kingfisher that is found only in the Khor Kalba mangrove forest in Sharjah emirate and nowhere else in the world.

Wild Cats of the United Arab Emirates by Reza Khan Price 40DH

Dr Khan says that this book is solely dedicated to the wild cats of the UAE. It incorporates up-to-date information on all the 4 species of existing cats and includes certain conservation measures.

NEW Field Guide to the Geology of Oman by Samir S. Hanna Price 80DH

This is produced by the Historical Association of Oman. Its purpose is to introduce both amateur and professional geologists to the geological treasures in Oman, concentrating on the Western Hajar Mountains and Musandam. First part focuses on the geological history and second part gives detailed information on 17 field trips including Wadi Ghul. For on-line information on Geology of Oman go to;

http://home.kpn.nl/~lilian_schreurs/GeologyOman/Geology.htm

NEW Arabian Wildlife Encyclopaedia Price 130DH

The essential guide to Arabia's wildlife heritage for students, teachers and anyone with an interest in the natural history of the Arabian Peninsula. The Arabian Wildlife Encyclopedia contains extensive information on the plant and animal life of the Arabian Peninsula, including many of the unique features that enable Arabian species to survive the harsh environmental conditions of the region. Here the focus is on key Arabian species such as the date palm, Arabian leopard, oryx, gazelle, tahr, houbara bustard, flamingo, spiny-tailed lizard and camel spider. Heavily illustrated with hundreds of colour photographs and original illustrations, the informative but highly-readable text also covers subjects of more general interest such as conservation, climate change, habitats and animal behaviour. The Encyclopedia is designed to be used in combination with additional information posted on the internet and contains many links to specific web pages. However, the book can also be used alone as an indispensable reference work.

For inline info: <http://www.arabianwildlife.com/plants>

Thanks to Mairead Porter for this update on the books available. If you know of UAE natural history books that you feel may be of interest to other members and are not easily available, please let Mairead know and she will look into acquiring them for us.

Email: portermme@hotmail.com



Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

Sep 18 Liz Maley Craig: Socotra

Oct 2 & Nov 13 TBA

Dec 11 Members' Night

Field Trips (Members only, please)

Sept 22 - Oct 1 (approx.)

Kathmandu & 5½ days' trek in the Langtang Valley
(Registration urgent)

Oct 14 - 15

Donkey Fox Wadi

Further field trips, details or changes to trips will be announced/confirmed by e-mail circular.