

EMIRATES NATURAL HISTORY GROUP (ABU DHABI)

NEWSLETTER

VOL.7. No.6. - JUNE 1983

1. PROGRAMME

- 6th June "Seashells" by Cathy Kirby
13th June Committee Meeting - 6.00 p.m.
20th June "Rambles in Egypt" by Terry & Diane Donohue
27th June "Archaeology" - Workroom 6.30 p.m.
(Federal Building)
4th July This will be the only meeting of the month.

2. GENERAL INFORMATION

(a) Radio Programme

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Overseas Service transmits a programme called "Nature Notebook" on Tuesday at 22.30 hours (local time) on 1323 KHZ (227 Medium Wave). It is repeated on Wednesday at 1615 hours and on Thursday at 1215 hours (local time) on 21.71 KHZ (13.82 metres SW), 17.79 KHZ (16.86 metres SW) or 15.42 KHZ (19.46 metres SW).

(b) Archaeology Worknight

The Archaeology Recorder (Rob Western) will be holding a worknight in the ENHG workroom (Federal Building) on June 27th at 6.30 p.m.

(c) Telephone Numbers

If your telephone number has recently changed could you please let Terry Donohue (345042) or Jean Burn (463939) know.

(d) The Oil Slick

There is still no positive news of the whereabouts of the main oil slick gushing from the Iranian wells in the Northern Gulf. The authorities in the UAE are continuing to monitor the situation and are confident that there is no oil in UAE waters as at 16th May 1983.

Until work starts on collecting the oil already in the water and on capping the wells, the possibility of oil pollution in UAE waters remains. Very little can be done to mobilise a force to clean and feed oiled birds until the worst happens. If it does we shall have to move quickly and seek all the help we can get. Naturally a self-supporting Group such as ours has limited resources and will have to seek outside help if the problem is large.

We can probably provide enthusiastic helpers, if we have the necessary equipment to work with. We have been in touch with the Save a Seabird (SAS) Group run by Robert Walters and Jan Simpson in Duabi (tel Dubai 237616) They have one or two people who have experience of this sort of operation, so help may not be too far away

In the meantime, if you are likely to be in the UAE for the next couple of months and could be called upon as necessary, please call Bish Brown 323844, Rob Western 323705 or Jean Burn 463939.

(Bish Brown)

3. FIELD TRIPS

Ghurab Island

Notwithstanding the woes of the Abu Dhabi Sailing Club in their round-Ghurab race on Friday 13th May, the Plant Recorder hitched a lift to the island for a first-hand survey of a typical inshore island. In fact Ghurab is not typical - it is populated by fishermen, camels and goats, and the vegetation was very much over-grazed and stunted. There are no trees apart from mangroves on the inner creeks and lagoons; in sheltered hollows in the middle of the island, however, there were four grass species. The tallest, *Sporobolus arabicus*, was also the most profuse. The major vegetation components are halophytes, as expected, including eight saltbush species in various locations depending upon height/salinity levels. Apart from tiny yellow *Arnebias*, this year's annuals had come and gone.

A bittern was recorded in a seaward-facing cove, and skylarks were in evidence above. In the centre of the island is an isolated dovecote, built up in a ramshackle fashion from timbers and flotsam from the shore. This contained up to eighty feral pigeons. The sailors reported sandsharks and rays in profusion in the shallow creeks inland of Ghurab and Hayl, while dolphins were abundant in the outer channels.

A recce of Ghurab for archaeological sites proved unproductive, though some recent sherds were found and one or two small areas where seashell exploitation had obviously taken place at some time. The island has a stabilised and vegetated central dune system curving from southwest to northeast, and perhaps a winter trip in cooler weather might prove more rewarding.

(Rob Western)

RECORDERS' NOTES(a) Recordings in General

We are beginning to receive records of birds and fish from various islands and offshore structures. Naturally the variety of species is not great at present but in time we should build up a comprehensive record. We know that many members go birdwatching or fishing etc., but very few records come in. Sometimes uncertainty of identification makes one feel that it is not worth putting the record on paper. If so, record those that you are sure of, and try to jot down notes on the others, to help with identification later. We are often asked why we want records of birds which are regularly seen in and around Abu Dhabi. The answer is simply that records have not been kept over a long period and so patterns of bird migration/residence have not been established. If we can fill in these gaps and publish the information, it will be useful for others in future. As we have often pointed out, sooner or later there will be increased interest in the environment and wildlife of the UAE, and the ENHG records will be among the very few in existence. So, if you see anything on your travels, write it down or draw it. Trying to remember alone is not a safe method. Thanks to all those who do send in forms. Spares are available from the Secretary or at Monday meetings.

(Rob Western)

(b) Insects(i) Cicada

Our first sighting was in a plantation half-way along the Al Ain road on the 29th April. In Abu Dhabi the first ones did not emerge until the first week in May. Although fewer than in previous years, they can now be heard in many parts of the city.

(ii) Butterflies and Moths

There have been fairly large numbers of white butterflies in desert areas (even in Abu Dhabi today 16th May) Many were Desert Whites (*Pontia glauconome*)

In Abu Dhabi the predominant species have been Plain Tiger (*Danaus chrysippus*), Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*) and several species of small blue.

Around Al Ain plantations and in mountainous areas Citrus Swallowtail (*Papilio Demoleus*) and Blue Pansy (*Precis orithya*)

Several large Hawk Moths have been seen around Abu Dhabi, including Oleander HM (*Daphnis Nerii*), Striped HM (*Hyles livornica*) and Silver Striped HM (*Hippotion celeris*)

(iii) Others

Scarab beetles and several other species were very active early in May out in the dunes. Grasshoppers have been very prolific and there are still many species to be seen. Large solitary locusts have been reported in gardens. These are the same species as the plagues which seem to swarm when breeding and feeding conditions are right.

Bees and wasps have been increasing lately but nowhere near the numbers seen in 1981/1982.

We are short of collectors/recorders in the insect field, so if you would like to start on a small group, such as grasshoppers or dragonflies, let Di Donohue know, when she returns from leave. It is surprising how interesting it can be and how quickly you get to know the names, even Latin ones.

(Bish Brown)

(c) Reptiles

The warmer weather has brought out more small lizards in desert areas as well as around Abu Dhabi.

- (i) Ocelated Skink (*Chalcides ocellatus*). In daylight mainly in damp garden areas. Long, cylindrical with short legs. Dark brown in colour with transverse black lines and white spots.
- (ii) Rock Gecko (*Pristurus rupestris*). A small (2" long) brown lizard occasionally with red splotches on the body around leg joints. On sunny or shaded walls in daytime (early)
- (iii) Yellow-bellied House Gecko (*Hemidactylus flaviviridis*) a light greenish colour, smooth and almost transparent. On ceilings around lights at night or in shady verandah/entrances by day.

(d) Birds - (Mid-April to Mid-May)

With the excitement of the Spring migration largely behind us we have settled down to watching our regular breeding birds this month. Now, apart from the slight discomfort of temperatures well into the 90's, is a very good time to really get to know the regular Abu Dhabi birds, since they are so much easier to identify when in summer plumage.

We have had quite large numbers of Graceful Warblers, Terns and small Waders breeding in Abu Dhabi this month and hopefully large numbers of seabirds breeding on the off-shore islands, in spite of the present problems in the Gulf. More definite records of breeding birds in gardens would be most welcome if anyone has seen birds carrying nesting material or food, or found newly built nests this summer.

The large flock of Flamingoes, often reported just off-shore, moved into town this month and we had the very impressive sight of 300 plus at close quarters. There has also been a good variety of herons observed this month, Grey, Great White, Reef and Purple, which were joined by a small flock of Spoonbills. These strange looking, heron-like birds with a long broad black bill, spoon shaped at the tip, are particularly interesting to watch. Other very welcome visitors were Bish Brown's favourite species, Egyptian Geese.

Reports from Das Island on the Spring Migration indicate fewer passage migrants this year, which ties in with the pattern observed on the mainland.

(Jenny Hollingworth)

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