



**Your committee wishes you a very happy and safe Christmas
And looks forward to seeing you in the New Year**

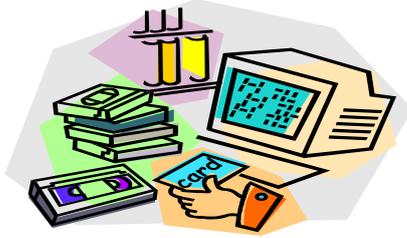


Christmas Eve In the Desert

Thanks to Will Moore we will hold our regular Christmas Eve in the Desert event on 24th December, this year at the base of Jebel Hafit, on the eastern slopes of the mountain. Bring candles, food, refreshments, musical instruments, singing voices, and lots of Christmas cheer! We will meet at the Rotana Hotel parking lot and convoy to the site. This event is open to the public so feel free to invite your friends.

The road is fine for 2 wheel drive vehicles. Directions: from the Rotana parking lot, make a U-turn at the roundabout and turn left at the "Gazelle" roundabout. Continue straight on this road into Sanaiya and straight through both sets of traffic lights in Sanaiya, heading towards the cement factory. At the cement factory roundabout, turn left, heading towards Mezyad. After going through the cut between Jebel Hafit and the spur extending east from the mountain, the road curves and slopes down towards the Mezyad road. A few hundred meters down this road is an exit on the right, leading to the farms. Take the exit and follow the pea-gravel track which curves to the right. The route at this stage will be marked. For those unsure of the directions, please wait at the Rotana for a convoy to form.

Committee / AGM report	12/12 UAE Clean Up Day
<p>The Al Ain chapter of ENHG held its AGM on 28th November. There was a good turn out with usual lack of enthusiasm for taking over committee positions! So the committee remains as previously, with an additional general member, Margaret Lambert. Your honourable team comprises:</p> <p>Chair: Brien Holmes Vice Chair: Jerry Buzzell Treasurer: Evelyn Caplan Secretary: Marion Campey</p> <p>(For a complete list of Committee members, please visit the website)</p>	<p>Would you believe, the clean up campaign, presented in cooperation with the Emirates Environmental Group, was postponed due to rain!! But Environment officer Michelle MacLean reports that it took place on Thursday 14th. She says "we all got soaked after about an hour and a half." Thanks Amer, Traudl and son who helped with handing out about 400 T-shirts, caps, bags and gloves, and food.</p> <p>The site was located in the Al Masoudi district of Al Ain in an area known by some as Wadi Towayya, where the road in front of Prisunic (Al Ahlia) crosses the ring road and enters the dunes.</p>



Flickr

Obviously none of us can be experts in all aspects of natural history, and many members may feel that they don't have the expertise to really contribute to this task. However, with the universality of digital cameras, GPS and access to mapping such as Google Earth, **all of us** can now record species and interesting observations with ease (even if you are not sure what you are seeing). The question is how to easily share the information ... and this is where [Flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com) may come in...

This is a photo sharing and organizing website which is part of Yahoo inc. It is free and very easy to sign up for and use. Just go to <http://www.flickr.com>. With almost everyone having digital cameras these days it is a lot of fun and an inspiring way to share photos and get tips for improving your photography. Now, having given Flickr a plug, where does the ENHG and record sharing come in? By photographing natural history, whether animals, flowers, fossils, interesting views and sites or whatever else, we can share these pictures with group members, and if you want more information, such as getting that plant or lizard identified, this is the easy way to do it. Just ask a question in the description of the photo and sit back and wait for the comments! We have a considerable pool of expertise within the three chapters of the ENHG covering plants, insects, birds, reptiles, mammals, fossils, archaeology and so on.

A natural history photo which can be identified constitutes an important record, especially if it is accompanied by distribution data and the date. Digital cameras automatically include the time and date in the EXIF data, which is included when a photo is uploaded to Flickr. The geographical data can be incorporated in a number of ways. Of course you can add a line in the Flickr description to say "3 km along the road east of Al Dhaid" or some such. Or you can add in the GPS waypoint (preferably in decimal degrees and the WGS84 datum), or you can use the 'map' function in Flickr which allows you to zoom in on satellite maps and click the spot. This is then available as part of the Flickr record.

Finally, how do you ensure that ENHG members can see your photos? To do this a private 'Group' has been set up within Flickr called 'Emirates Natural History Group'. As this is a private group, only ENHG members or invited experts will be able to see the photos. Brien has added over a hundred of his own photos to get things started. To join the group, please email Brien bocknobby@yahoo.com and he will send you an invitation.

Hope to see you on **Flickr** and get those natural history photos rolling in!

Howard Trillo and Nepal:

The total donation organized by the chapter for Howard Trillo's program to revitalize schools in Nepal was more than Dh3000. Howard expressed his sincere thanks to the group and will be posting updates of his work in Nepal in the coming year. Thank you to all members who donated so generously. Let us know if you would like to contact Howard directly and offer support.



School trips:

Our support of students at the Al Ain English Speaking School begins in earnest in the new year with two school trips already scheduled. We will be producing support material for the students to be used in conjunction with the field trips. Please let us know if you are available during the day to join us in the field.



Dates for your 2007 diary

IEW weekend

We have proposed the weekend of **March 22-24** for the Inter Emirates Weekend to our colleagues in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. This year the Al Ain chapter will host our friends from the other two chapters. We will need volunteers to help organize the events that will take place that weekend - field trips, zoo, oases, graves, bat caves, falcon breeding station, museum, bug workshop.

Keen to help? Just contact a committee member and we'll give you a job!

Nizwa weekend

Our annual trip to Nizwa is scheduled to be held in **April**. With the new weekend schedule, we will reverse the normal routine; that is, we will have to be in Nizwa on the Friday morning to enjoy the unforgettable Nizwa Friday Market. As a result, we will have to leave Al Ain Thursday evening. (In the past, we have toured Thursdays and ended up in Nizwa Thursday evening.) Likewise, the cliff walk on Jebel Shams will take place on Saturday and not Thursday. More details in a few weeks.

Ras Al Khaimah 3rd weekend of February (15th – 17th).

The RAK trip features archaeology as the city and surrounding communities are rich in sites. Beaches, especially between RAK and the Oman border (Musandam), are popular with members interested in shelling; copies of a shelling guide are available in the work room, the guide noting specific beaches. A side trip for those especially interested in shelling could be organized if there are sufficient members interested in shells. Archaeology includes the tombs at Shimal which range in age from the Wadi Suq period to Umm an Nar. The Julfar period, named after the Julfar district of RAK, is also highlighted. Abandoned storage facilities, located on a mountain ledge, and a large abandoned mountain community of stone houses is also a popular attraction. The 'ghost town' of Jazirat al Hamra has also been on the program of previous trips to RAK, as have the dhow building yards.

The chapter does **not** make any block room reservations; instead, members are requested to make their own hotel reservations. If you are interested in joining us, please make a reservation early as hotel rooms can be difficult to get in RAK. Below is a website with RAK hotels:

<http://directrooms.com/uae/hotels/ras-al-khaimah-hotels/price1.htm>

The list **does not** include guest houses or the famous Al Nakheel Hotel. If you click on the name of a hotel, a new page appears with photos of the hotel's services and a telephone number to call to make a reservation. Some of our members, being faculty and staff of the UAEU and/or HCT, can inform the hotel of their employment situation and often get a very good rate. While you can make a reservation through the website though you may not have an opportunity to negotiate on price.

You might consider camping though I am not aware of the current status of camp grounds in and around the city, especially following the recent rains; there is a lovely area of beach dunes just south of the city though it may not be convenient to camp there and then join our convoy for our early morning starts. But that's up to you . . .

Curating:

We continue our work of curating the insect collections we have now amalgamated into one collection. Those interested in helping out should contact Brigitte Howarth <brigitte.howarth@zu.ac.ae> for more specific information and directions.



Photo competition:

Our annual photography competition will be on the 4th Tuesday of May and the deadline for entries will be the 2nd Tuesday in May. The special category this year is 'Shadows'. There are eight general categories for photos: Archeology, Architecture, Culture and Heritage, Environmental concerns, Flora and Fauna, Landscapes, People of the UAE and Oman, Miscellaneous (photos that do not easily fit into another category)

Road to Muscat

If you're bored with the two regular routes to Muscat (along the coast or via Nizwa.), try either of these routes – a spectacular new road is a great way to go.

Geraldine Kershaw writes "Access to Jebel Akhdar is now much easier (maybe you all know this but we didn't!). You no longer need to get a road pass in advance. Just follow the signs to the Jebel Akhdar Hotel from Birkat al Mawz (off the road from Nizwa to Muscat). You come to a check-point where you will be asked for your licence and registration document, and then as long as you are in a 4WD you can continue up the mountain. There is a car-park opposite the check-point, so drivers of saloon cars can leave their vehicles there as long as they have a friend with a beefier car to continue the journey with. The road is metalled all the way to the top, so the drive is easier than it was a couple of years ago. There are plenty of lay-bys and small car-parks on the way up, and each one has a sign giving the altitude and a note about which villages you can see.

The hotel is quite friendly; they gave us a sketch map of the area on request and suggested the best route to follow to look for a camping spot. One or two hiking trails are marked although we were unable to explore far on this occasion. And there's a small restaurant on the outskirts of Saiq which serves excellent biryani!"

Alternatively Geoff Cosson tells us "It's easy to find. From Mezyad drive as far as the second big roundabout in Ibri, then turn left in the direction of the coast (signposted to Sohar, Yanqul, Miskin and RUSTAQ). When the road splits, follow signs to Miskin again (right fork). The drive from Ibri to Rustaq takes about 80 minutes, following a dirt road already on maps & well used, across beautiful scenery & amazing geology. At Rustaq, you can approach the coast road to Muscat either past Hazm Fort (temporarily closed), or through Nakhal, with its own brilliant fort and the running river."

Thanks to Geraldine and Geoff for this information.

Geology with Ben Jordan (UAEU)

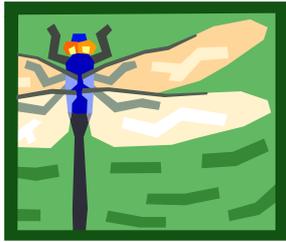
Hoodoos, Seh Ash Shi'eb

Hoodoos or "balancing rocks" as they are sometimes called, are a result of differential weathering. This means that not all rocks erode at the same rate. Hard layers erode more slowly than soft ones. When the hard layer is on top of the soft one, it protects it. Erosion has to take place from the sides rather than the top. This means that a wide cap can form on an hour glass-shaped pedestal as the soft layer underneath is eroded and undercuts the hard, more resilient rock on top.



Notes on distribution of Odonata at A'Subaitah

Bob Reimer



Our walk on November 17th, 2006 through A'Subaitah from the village to the head of the falaj illustrated an interesting succession of dragonfly and damselfly species present. This succession can be used to infer the preferred habitat of each species.

The first species noted was a pair of male Carmine darters (*Crocothemis erythraea*) spotted by Amer Abu Kuhail just past the waterfall. The pair seemed to be chasing each other occasionally and foraging. One was observed consuming a fly.

The next major habitat was the large cement water holding tank. Two species of dragonflies were observed in and around the tank, Carmine darters and Oasis skimmers (*Orthetrum sabina*). First we saw a female Carmine darter that was feeding on a green bottle fly near the path as one approached the tank from the entrance to the oasis. The female Carmine darter is coloured differently from the male, being gold rather than red, but it still has the distinctive bluish patch on the back of each eye that distinguishes this species.



A male Carmine darter is prepared to pounce on any passing prey. Note the distinctive vivid blue patch on the rear of the dragonfly's eye

Several Oasis skimmers were around the tank, both males and females. In this species, both genders are coloured alike, but can be distinguished by appendages on the tip of the abdomen. Males have two visible appendages, while females have three. Two females were observed to be ovipositing (laying eggs) in the tank by dipping their abdomens in the water as they flew about. The females were guarded by the male that had previously copulated with them. As another male attempted to grab the female in mid-air, the mate would attack in an incredibly complex aerial ballet and prevent the intruder from mating with the female.



A female Oasis skimmer drops her eggs in the water. Note the rings formed where she splashed the tip of her abdomen in to the water to wash off an egg

Further down the falaj, the next species spotted was an Orange darter (*Trithemis kirbyi*). This male was patrolling a section of falaj, foraging for food. The Orange darter appears to be very similar to the Carmine darter at first glance. It can be distinguished by the fact that its eyes are entirely red and that amber colour covers about 1/3 of the base of the wings. A Gully darter (*Trithemis arteriosa*) was seen in the same vicinity, overlapping territory slightly with the Orange darter but usually being further towards the narrowing section of the wadi.

From the site where the first Gully darter was observed to the head of the falaj, there were many more individuals as the habitat favours that species. There were several gully darters at the pond above the weir at the start of the falaj. Male Gully darters are red with a tubular abdomen that has black spots down the side of the abdomen and black rings around the final segments of the abdomen. Females, which are yellow and black, tend to stay away from the water, avoiding males unless they are ready to mate.

Several more species were seen at the head of the falaj. First, there was a male Powder blue damselfly (*Arabicnemis caerulea*). This pretty damselfly is endemic to UAE and Oman. Its common name gives its distinguishing characteristic. Males and females of this species are generally the same colour but the male tends to be brighter.

While I was watching the pool, what appeared to be a *Paragomphus sinaiticus* female made several passes of the pool ovipositing as it went. Three male Gully darters chased the female away from the habitat. According to Graham Giles (Tribulus Volume 8.2), *Paragomphus sinaiticus* is recently established in the area, having migrated from Africa. The species seems to be spreading along the Hajars. I spotted it a year or so ago at Mahdabah, captured a male this year at Sharm and saw a couple at Aboul the following week.

I returned to A'Subaitah walking in the wadi rather than on the falaj. There were more Gully darters present, another Powder blue damselfly and probably an *Arabineura khalidi*, the plain brown damselfly that is also endemic to the UAE and Oman.

One of the main points of odonate (dragonfly) ecology this walk emphasized to me was how the various species sort themselves into their preferred environment. The earliest species observed wanted mainly still water and an open area. The next species wanted moving water. The Gully darters prefer a confined area with relatively stagnant water. The damselflies also appear to prefer relatively stagnant water. The migrating *Paragomphus* was less choosy and was opportunistically using an available oviposition site to extend its range.



A male Powder blue damselfly rests on a rock near the pool at the head of the falaj.

If you are interested in reading more about the behaviour and ecology of dragonflies, the best book is Philip Corbet's *Dragonflies: Behavior and Ecology of Odonata* published in 1999. His earlier 1962 work, *A Biology of Dragonflies*, is available on-line in Adobe Acrobat format at

<http://www.jcu.edu.au/school/tbiol/zoology/auxillary/odonata/corbet.htm> as is R.J. Tillyard's seminal 1917 treatise, *The Biology of Dragonflies (Odonata or Paraneuroptera)* at <http://www.jcu.edu.au/school/tbiol/zoology/auxillary/odonata/tillyar1.htm>. Many of the dragonfly species seen in the UAE and Oman are described in K.D. Dijkstra's *Field Guide to the Dragonflies of Britain and Europe* that was published this summer. Several Tribulus articles provide a checklist for species present in our area.

Change of Friday field trip time

Now you can have your cake and eat it too!
You can sleep in on Friday morning, enjoy brunch, and still take in the ENGH Friday field trips which now commence around **1.30 pm**, for the winter at least. And you can do the commercial bit on Saturdays!

Cataloguing plants on a Friday field trips:

Marion and Martha are working on a guide to plants for members. This will be a handy tool for members who want to know more about the common plants we see on field trips. The guide will be available in the New Year. We are also looking at keys for identification of insects and geology. Let us know if you can help to produce these tools to make our field trips more interesting.

Library:

Amer has finished his inventory taking of the library in the work room (resource room) and the results will be published in Yahoo Groups site and on the website as soon as possible. Thanks Amer for cleaning up the dusty shelves and sorting through the books. Please contact Amer amer_ca1986@yahoo.ca if you have a donation or wish to visit the library to look at the collection.



Abu Dhabi International Pearl Festival



The Abu Dhabi International Pearl Festival is currently running at the Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation. This festival consists of a number of activities including an excellent exhibit curated by the American Museum of Natural History. We were up last night for the Abu Dhabi Concert Committee concert at the Cultural Foundation. We spent about 45 minutes in the exhibit and that was not nearly enough to take it in. This is the best use of space I've seen at the Al Nakheel Hall. Normally exhibits there can be viewed in 20-30 minutes. I'd say it would take about 90 minutes to properly take this exhibit in especially if you take time to view the multimedia presentations. All of the information presented is in English and it is of the highest standard. Apparently there is another Gulf Pearl Exhibition and a Pearl Book Exhibition in other areas of the Cultural Foundation which we did not see.

One issue could be a problem for men: I had no trouble entering the exhibit and I saw other men in it, but as we were getting ready to leave we were approached by a lady who said her husband was prevented from entering. It may be that we just beat some unadvertised "ladies' time" or that I was more closely accompanied by my wife. One of the local men I saw in the exhibit was carrying a child but didn't appear to be accompanied by a lady. There was nothing posted that I could see that would imply that men can't see the exhibit. The exhibit runs until January 27th while the film festival with films on pearl diving runs Wednesday and Thursdays on January 17th to 24th at 6pm.

For more information on the Festival, see <http://ad-pearl.com/> .. It's well worth the trip on its own in my opinion, but not to be missed if you are in Abu Dhabi for any other reason.

Thanks to Bob Reimer



Zayed House:

We have had some preliminary talks with our friends at the Zayed House for Islamic Culture and are looking at some joint programs that will be of interest to ENHG members. To date, discussions have included the mapping of camel caravan routes out of Al Ain and a local version of the 'Open Minds, Open Doors' program some of you may have heard of conducted in Jumairah.

Singing (or driving!) in the rain . . . beware! 🎵🎵

Some hints from Brien Holmes

- the streets in Al Ain can be slippery after a rainfall owing to the oil and rubber that accumulates. In addition, many streets and roundabouts are flooded and other drivers will often react unexpectedly to avoid driving in water.
- mountain wadi beds can fill quickly with run-off after a rain and cause roads to be closed.
- water can appear in a wadi several hours, or days, after a rainfall that could have taken place many kilometers away.
- water running in a wadi bed after a rainfall often contains debris of trees and bushes collected along the way.
- if there is water "standing" on the road, and the water is not deep, as indicated by the red post markers, it is probably safe to drive SLOWLY across the "standing" water, but be prepared for unseen stones, holes and debris hidden in the water.
- if there is water "running" on the road, regardless of the depth, avoid crossing at this point. It is not uncommon for the running water to undermine the pavement.
- beware of driving on hard-packed, rain-soaked sand, the rain does not penetrate as deeply as imagined and the heavy, rain-soaked sand is on the surface, covering very dry and slippery sand. The slopes of the dunes tend to collapse as the heavy sand slides easily on the dry, slippery sand beneath, especially with the additional weight of a vehicle.