



## Emirates Natural History Group Al Ain Chapter Newsletter October 2007

**Welcome to the October newsletter** – we plan for this to be a regular newsletter which will hopefully come out monthly in the week following the Committee Meeting (which is the first Tuesday of the month). We also plan to have regular columns, supplemented by YOUR input – if you go on an outing, please consider writing just a few lines about it – and a supporting photo (not necessarily taken by yourself) would be great. Copy deadline is the Thursday prior to the Committee meeting, and the newsletter will be reviewed by the Committee prior to publication.

One of our regular items will be **"Photo of the month"** – if you've taken a stunning one, send it to either Bob Reimer [bob.reimer@uaeu.ac.ae](mailto:bob.reimer@uaeu.ac.ae) or myself [margaretlambert@mail.com](mailto:margaretlambert@mail.com) and we will publish the best submission. Judges decision will be final and no correspondence will be entered in to!! Of course, entry into this fun competition does not preclude the entry of these photos in our annual Photographic Competition.

<b>ENHG Al Ain Chapter Committee</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Committee News:</b></p> <p><b>Meeting 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2007</b> (for full Minutes, refer to the website <a href="http://www.enhg.org/index.htm">http://www.enhg.org/index.htm</a> )</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. With the start of the new academic year, we received 30 renewals and 16 new members.</li> <li>2. Our finances are looking very healthy with a good current balance.</li> <li>3. Michelle is costing the manufacturing of re-useable shopping bags to reduce the use of plastic bags. This is a highly popular way of protecting the environment from excessive exposure to waste plastic, and one which may impact here.</li> <li>4. AAESS is undergoing renovations which will include the demolition of our current meeting room. However, we have not been forgotten! Discussions are underway about the best site to relocate to in the school campus – possibly a portacabin next to the old Rugby Club.</li> </ol>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Your Committee:</b></p> <p><b>Co- Chairs:</b> Jerry Buzzell and Brigitte Howarth  <b>Minutes:</b> Marion Campey  <b>Treasurer:</b> Chris Henry  <b>Membership:</b> Marion Campey  <b>Photography:</b> Bob Reimer  <b>Environment:</b> Michelle Maclean  <b>Newsletter:</b> Margaret Lambert  <b>Library:</b> Amer Abu Kuhail  <b>Flora:</b> Marion Campey and Martha Coetzee  <b>Fauna (Insects):</b> Brigitte Howarth  <b>Fauna (Birds):</b></p> <p><b>Visit the webpage at</b> <a href="http://www.enhg.org/index.htm">http://www.enhg.org/index.htm</a>  <b>or contact us:</b></p> <p><a href="mailto:ENHG_Comm@yahoogroups.com">ENHG_Comm@yahoogroups.com</a> (all committee members), or</p> <p><a href="mailto:enhg@yahoogroups.com">enhg@yahoogroups.com</a> (all Al Ain chapter members)</p>

<b>What we've been up to:</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Iftar Dinner</b></p> <p>Each year during Ramadan, ENHG members and friends meet at the Zayed Center for Culture and Heritage for an Iftar Dinner. This year the dinner was held on Tuesday, 9 October 2007 and about 60 people attended, 40 fewer than last year. As is the custom, dinner begins after the Iftar Prayer and is followed by a guest speaker who discusses aspects of Islam and the relevance of Iftar to Muslims. The speaker this year was Mr Omar Badran, supervisor of the Work Readiness Program at the Al Ain Women's College. Omar</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Trip to Seih Ash Sheib near Jebel Ali beach</b></p> <p>On Friday 5<sup>th</sup> October a group of around 15 members of the Al Ain Chapter of ENHG led by Marion Campey, left Al Ain to attend an Iftar dinner and talk by Major Ali Saqer at Seih Ash Sheib, the headquarters of the Emirates Marine Environmental Group (EMEG). Arriving in the late afternoon, we were met by Dr Andrew Bean, Excursion Secretary of the Abu Dhabi chapter of ENHG who was overseeing the various parties</p>

provided an interesting insight into Ramadan and how his family followed this important muslim tradition, presenting each attendee with a small lamp, known as a "fanoos", as a symbol of giving. Dinner was catered for by the Intercontinental Hotel and included a range of popular local dishes. Traditional Arabic foods, coffee and other refreshments were provided after dinner by the Zayed Center.

*Wikipedia* says "fanoos" is the Arabic word for lantern. The Fanoos is similar to the lamp, only it is lighted by a candle instead of oil. It was used mainly during the holy month of Ramadan. The Fanoos has become the symbol of Ramadan. The story started in the era of Mamluks rule over the Near East and Egypt, when women walked around with their lanterns to go to relatives to break their fast. The Fanoos has developed greatly in the past centuries, where it started to take several other shapes.

The present tradition of Ramadan lanterns dates from the rule of Saladin. Lantern designs were copied from the Qanadil and Mishkat (lamps) of Mosques. However, to the historian, Al-Maqrizi, in his book, "Kitab al-Mawa'iz wa al-I'tibar Bidhikr al-Khitat wa al-'Athar" (page 265), alludes to an earlier tradition. According to him, it was originally a Coptic Christian festivity celebrated at Christmas time (Coptic version) where people used to parade with colorful candles. The competition was to "outdo" each other with more and more expensive candles until one day when hard times fell upon Egypt, the people were no longer able to afford to buy the very expensive candles and thus the tradition nearly died out.

**Chris Henry, Amer Abu Kuhail and**  
["http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic"](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic)

from Dubai, Al Ain and Abu Dhabi.

With about an hour to spare before sundown, there was enough time to have a swim in the sea before we ate an excellent dinner of fish, seafood, lamb and rice cooked by local Emirati women. This was followed by fruit and tea and coffee.

Major Ali, co-ordinator of the EMEG gave a brief post-dinner talk and showed us one of the many dhubs (spiny tailed lizard) which are captured and relocated away from the areas of development. We were then invited into the beach office to watch a DVD showing the variety of work undertaken by EMEG. This includes clearing debris from the sea and relocating turtle eggs to safe habitats as well as organizing projects involving school children and college students.

Members from both Abu Dhabi and Al Ain camped on the beach overnight – some without tents but with mats and blankets provided by EMEG. It was a pleasantly cool night. In the morning we had another swim in the sea before heading back to Al Ain. It was altogether a very enjoyable and informative trip and encouraged some members to think about another visit, maybe as volunteers for the student projects.

**Angela Kent**

**Many thanks to both Angela (for the above contribution) and that of Marion below. No way are we going to omit a contribution due to duplication! You can see, the two articles each take a different focus, so it's definitely worth publishing both.**

### **Seih Ash Sheib (Valley of Dew)**

Sixteen Al Ain ENHG'ers headed off to Seih Ash Sheib where Major Ali Al Suwaidi (known affectionately as Major Ali) has set up an educational centre, the Emirates Marine Environment Group, at a site on the beach. The purpose of the visit, at the kind invitation of Major Ali, was to enjoy a traditional Emirati Iftar meal and a talk by him on Ramadan and EMEG's various marine activities. We were treated to delicious fare, prepared by local women, of *harees* (a kind of porridge with meat), *biyrani* (with goat), *thareed* (thin stew soaked into paper thin *regag* bread) grilled crab, fish, prawns, coffee, sweet black tea, juices. We camped on the beach, in perfect weather, swam before Iftar and in the morning and noted birds (waders), worm shells, bivalves, brain coral in the littoral zone.

EMEG is a non-profit organization providing environmental services to a range of organizations. Created by Major Ali, EMEG now works throughout all the seven independent Emirates, helping them to protect and enhance marine life.

EMEG occupies a stretch of beach perhaps 150m long and 100m deep, sandwiched between a public area and a major waterfront construction area near Jebel Ali Palm Island. To say it's besieged would be an understatement, but the Group has bravely set about creating a centre that provides a number of environmentally oriented activities.

Young Emiratis are given instruction in pearl diving to such a level of proficiency that a team sent to Kuwait for pearl diving championships took first prize. EMEG has special permission from the Dubai government to undertake pearl diving, normally not permitted, as it is used for heritage conservation purposes. Major Ali showed us a handful of pearls that had been retrieved by divers in waters off the beach.

Other activities relate to the traditions of forefathers including fishing and sailing. Environmentally EMEG is also involved in beach and sea cleaning, fresh water conservation, monitoring seawater quality, planting mangrove trees. Working in association with Nakheel's environmental department, EMEG capture and relocate the animals from areas to be developed e.g. this year five turtle nests were relocated as were 5,000 dhubs from the Jebel Ali airport site.

**Marion Campey**



### **Eid / Jebel Akhdar weekend**

The Abu Dhabi hike up Jebel Shams on Oct. 12-13 was by all accounts a great success. Individuals gathered near the Jebel Shams Campground on Thursday arriving anywhere from 1:00 pm onwards. We arrived around 7:30 pm, after dark but had no problem setting up tent and preparing a light supper. Morning saw a couple dozen people hiking out from the campsite at 9:00 am with a dozen intent on making it "all the way." The first kilometre was basically flat, ranging from lovely dust to boulders and a few rock slabs. But after that it quickly turned into a rocky slope and then a bouldery steeper slope. No let up for perhaps another km., then a slight depression. The "pointy hill" behind us was our landmark. We began the hike at around 1900m elevation. The east summit is 3000m, so we knew we had a climb in front of us. At around 2400 feet we began to see the "boot" shrubs, many covered in delicious black shiny round berries, sweet as syrup. A local woman sold us some as she descended from a morning's picking expedition. They were worth any price she asked. The "boot" almost always grow in association with two other plants, the Juniper and the olive tree.

It was on that short downward slope that we lost our first summit hiker. Cramps set in and would not let go. He waved us on and arranged for us to pick him up on the way back down next day. And as the cramps were not severe, this was accepted. From here on though the mountain grew steeper and the boulders thicker. We arrived at the canyon rim shortly and could look straight down over 1000 metres. The view is fantastic. Great columns rise hundreds of meters in to the air, sharp ridges cut the sunlight and cast long shadows downhill. There simply are no words to describe this place.

After considerable elevation gain, some hikers opted for the "shortcut" route way down into a wadi where shade and rainwater pools might be found, then those who did not stay for the night climbed back up a near vertical slope and up a steep - but more direct - route, intersecting the marked trail perhaps two kms further up the 9 - 10 km trail (rough map distance). As we climbed, the juniper trees also grew in height and splendor. These dioecious trees have male and female individuals. It has been reported that a single individual may change its gender (Gardner, 2007). At about seven kms one arrives just below the radar base located on the west summit and the north side of the mountain becomes visible.

Wadi Sahtan is a huge region with many small villages located within its arms. Incredible steep slopes rise over 1000 feet vertically to the ridge we now had to follow. The last two kms were over fairly decent



ground, undulating at times with a final steep ascent (hand and foot) of about 150 feet up from the last col. People set up camp both at the summit and down in the protection of these low-lying swales, under Juniper trees and in shepherd's shelters. Sunset minutes afterwards. It had been a nine hour hike. Temperatures while cold, were not freezing – perhaps 5 degrees C. And the winds howled through much of the night with eerie silences lasting for a few hours breaking the steady gush of wind through the trees.

Wildlife seen on the trip included a lapid-faced vulture, blue-headed agamids, small snakes, ravens, and sand partridge. Wolf scat was also in evidence and of course donkey fertilizer was everywhere. The skies were incredibly clear with stars, shooting stars and other off-world objects blinking brightly in the night sky.

The descent was just as beautiful next morning after a quick fire and breakfast. It was certainly easier. Lighter packs and thickening air may have helped make it seem so. Our lost hiker was ready and waiting on our return having spent a quiet evening by himself on a hillside far from his native Beijing – a real adventurer! By 5:00 pm the last hikers had returned to base and dinner was set upon by all. Rest and relaxation were the order of the evening. It may be awhile before I return to the east summit, but it will never be far from my mind.

**Will Moore**



Setting out



Canyon Rim



Canyon Rim (and Fauna)



Satisfied Hiker

### **Dates for your diary**



**November** and continue throughout winter - Triple Crescent events

**November 27** AGM – Intercontinental Hotel

### **Photography Field Trip**

During the summer, I was fortunate enough to be able to attend an Instructional Photo Tour led by one of the top nature photographers in the world. I found the opportunity to work with a group of photographers shooting a specific subject while

<p><b>December?</b> - Wadi weekend</p> <p><b>December 24</b> – Xmas Eve in the Desert</p> <p><b>January or February</b> - RAK trip or Nizwa trip</p> <p><b>February 29-March 1</b> - Inter Emirates weekend (organized by Abu Dhabi chapter)</p> <p><b>March</b> – Music Festival</p> <p><b>May 27</b> - Photography competition</p>	<p>working on specific photographic issues helpful and stimulating. If there is a group of people that would like to do a similar thing here, we could design a field trip or two that would do something similar and follow it up with a resource centre session where we could critique the photographs and learn from each other. If you would be interested in this idea, please contact me and we can work up a mutually agreeable trip.</p> <p><a href="mailto:bob.reimer@uaeu.ac.ae">bob.reimer@uaeu.ac.ae</a></p>
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Inter Emirates Weekend Preview	Plants
<p>On the weekend of the 29<sup>th</sup> of February till the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2008, the Abu Dhabi Chapter of the Natural History Groups will be hosting the Inter Emirates Weekend (IEW).</p> <p>The venue is the Mirfa Hotel in Mirfa, located some one and a half hours drive from Abu Dhabi on the way to Ruwais.</p> <p>The program will be a most interesting and exciting one, with something for all interests including children. Therefore we would like you to block the dates already now and encourage you to make your hotel booking by the end of January 2008, in order to secure the maximum of hotel rooms for our groups from Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Al Ain.</p> <p>The price will be especially for us 450 Dhs, that is for a double room, tax and breakfast included.</p> <p><b>The Provisional Program:</b></p> <p><b>Field Trips:</b></p> <p>Birding – early morning or late evening</p> <p>Shoreline walk – according to the tides</p> <p>Exotic acacias – half day</p> <p>Elephant tracks and desert ecology – full day</p> <p>Liwa Dunes – full day, including a visit to the car museum, if possible.</p> <p>Sand geology</p> <p>Saltbushes and other flora, with professional botanist from Kew Gardens Dr Shahina Ghazanfar. Shahina is the author of the Flora of Oman Vols 1 and 2.</p> <p>Sweihat island (geology and fossils) – full day</p> <p>Star gazing – evening after dinner</p> <p>Insects – light trapping in the evening</p> <p><b>Workshops:</b></p> <p>GPS workshop</p> <p>Salt Bushes / Flora with Dr Shahina Ghazanfar</p> <p>Work under the Microscope</p> <p>Sandcastle building, (sand) painting, herbarium and photography for children.</p> <p><b>Competitions:</b></p> <p>Photo competitions for the young and the old.</p> <p>Sandcastle building, painting / drawing for children.</p> <p><b>The Abu Dhabi IEW Committee.</b> (from Focus, September 2007)</p>	<p><b>Desert Hyacinth</b> <i>Cistanche tubulosa</i> from the OROBANCHACEA Broomrape Family. Arabic names : thanoon, tartooth, basul, dhamin</p> <p>Keep an eye out for this attractive perennial which flowers during winter on a single stem. Mature plants have longer stems of up to 20cm – 80cm in length. The plant is parasitic, usually in association with host plants from <i>Chenopodiaceae</i> (Goosefoot or Glasswort) or <i>Zygophyllaceae</i> (Bean Caper or Caltrop) families. Traditional uses include boiling the stem to treat diarrhoea, and being mixed, in powdered form, with camel milk to treat bruising.</p> <p>Reference used : <i>The Comprehensive guide to the Wildflowers of the United Arab Emirates</i> by Marijcke Jongbloed</p> <p><i>These pictures were taken along the Buraimi-Mahda Road by Jerry Buzzell.</i></p>  <p>The location</p>  <p>Marion Campey</p>



## Photography Competition

### Advanced Notice: ENHG Al Ain Chapter Photography Competition for 2007-2008

A tradition of the Emirates Natural History Group, Al Ain Chapter, has been to hold an annual photography competition for its members. The quality and quantity of entrants has steadily improved over the years as members learn from the judges and each other. This season will be no exception. We will be holding our annual competition in May, 2008 with entries being due at our first general meeting of that month (May 13) with the exhibition and People's Choice judging at the second meeting (May 27). Each member may enter up to eight photographs taken in the UAE or Oman. Categories will be announced shortly as the committee is rethinking a number of them due to the number and types of photographs that have been entered in the past. For a number of years we have had a special category as well. If you have any suggestions, we are open to them. Last year the special category was "Shadows." At this point in the year, don't worry too much about which category a photograph is to be entered in, just select your best each time you take a set and you'll have a good selection by May. We can guarantee that there will be a category to accommodate any photograph!

Bob Reimer

### Some of last year's winning photos:



People's Choice: Michael Grivna – Pots



Special Category: John O'Neil – In the trees

## Geology with Ben Jordan (formerly UAEU)



Dust Storm, Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan Mosque, Abu Dhabi.

What does this image have to do with geology? Dust is predominantly the result of geologic processes involving the breakdown of rocks and minerals into smaller and smaller particles, eventually forming large amounts of dust-sized particles. The combination of wind and dust can produce a haze that makes driving (and breathing) difficult. Dry climates allow the particles to be easily suspended. The fine-grained dust pictured here and that people often have to sweep from their porches and patios (or vacuum from their rugs!) is called "loess." It can travel for thousands of kilometers. Dust blown from the Sahara Desert in northern Africa has been identified within the United States, for instance. A lot of the dust and sand here in the UAE and Oman is thought to have been blown here, across the Gulf, from the Zagros Mountains of Iran. The amount of sand and dust present indicates a very long period of geologic time (million and millions of years).