



Emirates Natural History Group Al Ain Chapter Newsletter November 2008

ENHG Al Ain Chapter Committee

Welcome to season 2008/2009 of the Emirates Natural History Group - Al Ain Chapter. We hope you can take part in our activities as often as possible and enjoy the history and environment of your current home.

We welcome our new treasurer Simon Wall who took over this important position in October.

Committee members:

Chair: Brien Holmes; **Vice Chair** Brigitte Howarth; **Treasurer:** Simon Wall; **Secretary:** Marion Campey; **Membership:** Amer Abu Kuhail; **Photography:** Bob Reimer; **Newsletter:** Roland Ochmann; **Library:** Amer Abu Kuhail; **Flora:** Marion Campey and Martha Coetzee; **Fauna (Insects):** Brigitte Howarth; **Fauna (Birds):** vacant; **Environment:** Jodie Healy

Visit the webpage at <http://www.enhg.org/index.htm> or contact us at enhg@yahoogroups.com (all Al Ain chapter members)

Upcoming Events

November 21	Clean Up the World 2008 event at Jumeirah Beach in Dubai
November 25:	Annual General Meeting, 7:30 pm at InterContinental Hotel
November:	Triple crescent hikes
December 18:	Emirates Cleanup Day
December:	Christmas Eve in the desert
March 2009	Inter Emirates Weekend (possibly middle of March)
February/March 2009	Classical Music Concerts at Jahili Fort/Abu Dhabi Classics

Hikes

We will continue with weekend hikes and walks at nearby destinations, either in Oman or in the Emirates. Please watch out for the weekly emails for details.

The more ambitious "Ibrahim Zakhour Triple Crescent hikes" started in October will continue all season.

Please read these mails carefully in order to be well prepared for the hikes (equipment, shoes, severity, etc.) also to get the right time and place to meet.

Rolex Middle East Forum 'Encouraging Innovation for the Next Generation

Dubai 19th November

The Rolex Middle East Forum: 'Encouraging Innovation for the Next Generation', will be held under the patronage of and opened by H.E. Sheikh Nahayan Mubarak Al Nahayan, UAE Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

The Forum will also feature 18 international and regional experts discussing issues of relevance to this region: the state of science and innovation in the MENA region, preserving the natural environment and cultural heritage, and the role of women as a force for social change.

For more information, please contact Brien at bocknobby@gmail.com.

Thuraya Satellite Phones

Reminder

We have now 2 Thuraya telephones. The numbers are **0088-216-2150- 2400** for Phone One and **0088-216-5552-1121** for Phone Two.

We recommend that you add these numbers to your mobile phones and lists of important phone numbers.

One or both phones will be taken on each field trip and will be turned on for the duration of each trip.

General Meetings

The general meetings are held on the second and fourth Tuesday at Al Ain InterContinental Resort hotel at 19:30. Watch out for ENHG email for themes.

Upcoming meetings:

Tuesday November 11, guest speaker Dr. Sophie Mery and Motivate Publishing book fair.

Tuesday November 25, ENHG Al Ain Annual General Meeting and guest speaker (T.B.A.).

Committee

Committee meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month at the Al Ain English Speaking School. Everyone is welcome to participate! We are always looking for people to join our discussions and help deliver events.

The next Committee meeting will be Tuesday December 2 at 7:30 pm.

Photography Competition season 2008/2009

For the past several years, the Al Ain chapter has invited every member to participate in the annual photography competition. In the past, we have organized entries into eight categories including flora, fauna, archaeology/architecture, landscapes etc. Some of the winning photographs will be featured on the home page in coming months. This month, it is Geoff Sanderson's 'Fish Out Of School', winner of the People's Choice Award last season.

For a view to the competition last season and discussion about categories please visit <http://www.enhg.org/alain/photocomp.htm>.

News The Library



The Library has been moved to our room at the Palace museum. Amer, Heather and Mary Beth are busy putting the collection online.

If you're looking for a publication, videotape or periodical, please contact Amer.

What Happened Previous Weeks?

Dhow shipyard in RAK

One of the sites we visit regularly in RAK is the dhow building yards where sleek, modern racing dhows are built next door to huge shipping dhows -- booms -- that transport goods around the Gulf, and beyond.

We have been visiting the site each four or five weeks this year to document progress of the construction of what may be the last boom to be built in RAK. Some photos of the progress of the work appear below.

Our last visit was on 01 November.



The RAK dhow is progressing with almost all of the exterior ribs gone and the interior ribbing almost complete. A few more planks will be added to the sides before packing and putty-ing begins. We hope to return in late November. Watch for an announcement of all of our photographs on the ENHG website (www.enhg.org). We also visited the racing dhow yard next door. After a seafood lunch, we climbed to Sheba's Palace and visited the pottery kilns in Shimal.

Bugs and Beetles

Mike's Month

Mike Gillett is "a life-long naturalist with main interest in insects, especially beetles. He worked as a biochemist/university professor in Brazil and Saba (Netherlands Antilles) as well as in the UK and UAE."

Some of our members will recall Mike's presentations prior to his leaving the UAE a few years ago. No one who enjoyed those presentations would ever look at the ubiquitous beetle population in quite the same way.

In June 2004, the Al Ain chapter recognized Mike's contributions by presenting a lifetime membership <http://www.enhg.org/alain/lifetime/mike.htm>.

Our website also presents all of Mike's Newsletter articles

<http://www.enhg.org/alain/mike/contrib.htm>, beginning with his contribution in August 1992 in which he said, "The purpose of my articles will be, therefore, to try to create 'beetle awareness' and hopefully to show that beetles can be interesting and, indeed, fun to study."

In the text of the declaration of his lifetime membership, it was noted that "Anyone who has seen one of Mike's presentations is overwhelmed by the magnificence of some of the natural world's most overlooked members. Whether he was presenting iridescent beetles or spectacularly colored butterflies, Mike shared his passion with his calm and professional style. A dozen years ago, Mike noted, 'our knowledge about the insect fauna in general, and the coleoptera in particular, in this region is meager.' He has changed that situation forever."

Mike Gillett has done a big job during his visit in Al Ain. 2 interesting speaking at General meetings, one about the "Giant beetles at Arabic sites" on 14 October and a second about "Rainbow scarabs" on 28 October give many of us a new view to insect life around us.

Also his work shop about identifying and categorizing beetles has been acknowledged by numerous curious people.

Tuesday 21 Oct.: Mike looked for minute differences to identify specimens.

Over the years, many 'keys' have been published to help identify plants, insects, mammals . . . Mike showed the clues to look for. (For some background on insect keys, visit <http://www.earthlife.net/insects/orders-key.html> or similar sites by searching with the key words 'insect key'.)

Tuesday 28 Oct. He talked about scarab beetles from South America, focusing on a very colorful group called the 'Rainbow Scarabs'. They are known from North and Central America and much of South America BUT . . . there seems to be a gap in their distribution in the North East of Brazil. The talk described recent field work that found about ten species in the N/E of Brazil thus filling a gap in the distribution and knowledge of the rainbow scarabs.

Wednesday 29. Oct. Curating: A special evening with the chapter's collection of insects. The curating evening was held at the home of Brigitte where the collection is held. Mike was on hand to help demonstrate the work involved, a follow-up to the session held at the Al Ain English Speaking School the week before. Some of the specimens in the collection are more than 30 years old as the set now includes specimens originally collected by members of the Abu Dhabi chapter of the ENHG.

An article profiling Mike and discussing his work appeared in the 10 November issue of The National <http://www.thenational.ae/article/20081108/FRONTIERS/59955148/1036> and has been copied to the collection of Mike's articles on our website http://www.enhg.org/alain/mike/giant_beetle.htm.

Walks and Hikes

Some of the recent walks and hikes:

Friday 07/11 We spent the evening and next morning on a site just off the Safwan Road to demonstrate many of the techniques scientists use to evaluate a site. We employed small mammal traps, insect pitfall traps, the flight interception trap, the light trap and, though the cameras refused to fire, the motion-activated cameras. Three Baluchistan gerbils were captured and released from the small mammal traps and at least six species of beetles were recorded in the pitfall traps. Fox ignored our bait near the camera traps. In addition, we completed a plant survey and noted the geology of the area. We plan to return in late February or March to note any changes in the inhabitants of the area.



Saturday 04/10 A group of eight hikers enjoyed the walk over Rainbow Ridge where the colors were spectacular in the clear air. The feral donkeys we often spot along the way were not visible on this visit. We noted that the park located at the beginning of the walk is being expanded to the west.



Thursday 16/10 Evening: a light trapping session in Wadi Tarabat, at the base of Jebel Hafit. We have spent many trips in Wadi Tarabat where natural flora and fauna have been able to regenerate after farms were removed several years ago. A fence was installed across the wadi to keep the public from part of the wadi where tahr have been spotted in the past. We have completed weekend studies of the plants and have held several light trapping sessions to see how the insect populations are doing.

- Friday 10/10** Practice for the triple crescent: The hike to Jebal Qatar went very well. The group was fit and only took 7 hours in perfect weather conditions to complete the hike.
- Morning visit of Al Ain old souk with Amer. The Al Ain souq is one of the city's attractions that has managed to avoid destruction despite several attempts to close it over recent years. It is one of the few traditional souqs left in the UAE and a terrific place to buy fresh produce. Pictures of this trip: <http://someone1986.blogspot.com/2008/10/al-ain-souq-souq-alsamak.html>
- Friday 17/10** A walking tour of the Al Ain Oasis, one of the five oases in the city, followed the path developed several years ago by Phil Iddison who produced a booklet <<http://www.enhg.org/alain/phil/alainoasis/alainoasis.html>> of the oasis and his walk for the city's first Flower Festival.
- Friday 24/10** Evening visit of Al Ain Zoo with colleagues from Abu Dhabi and Dubai chapter.
- Saturday 25/10** Afternoon: Afrathe's 'big structures': We returned to the mountains for a challenging hike exploring the area behind Afrathe. The route begins near the oasis community of Afrathe and heads across the gravel plain and over a couple of mountain ridges to an abandoned oasis community we refer to as 'big structures' owing to the very large houses adjacent to the terraces. From here, we will cross wadis to an area that is best described as 'alpine' - an open area on the upper conglomerate layer with tracks that lead to the spectacular wadi gorge at Abu Qala. We will follow the tracks of an ambitious quad bike owner back across the plain and over mountain ridges to the vehicles.
- Friday 31/10** Day hike to "Swiss mountains" for the Ibrahim Zakhour triple crescent challenge. The 1st triple crescent hike up the western peak of Jebal Guwail (Swiss Mountain).
- Morning walk to Musah Oasis with swimming opportunity. Brien discussed the status of crops, wildflowers, irrigation systems and Oasis structures.
- Evening: special trapping and collecting evening. We have not operated the light trap but used other techniques to search for evidence of insects that are active at night.
- Saturday 01/11** Daytrip to Ras Al Kaimah Dhow shipyard. After lunch, we climbed up to Sheba's Palace and visited the pottery ovens nearby.



Exhibition

Third International Date Palm Exhibition

From Oct. 22 to 26 a very rustic exhibition on the date fruit took place. They showed the many different varieties of the date fruits, numerous ways dates are prepared and served, and gave chance to taste them too. Regional native art, paintings and culture exhibited. Conferences and interest groups, Commercial and Scientifics from many countries were participating.

Meetings

Amman biodiversity conference

Brigitte, Bob and Drew attended a conference on biodiversity in Amman, Jordan. Specialists from all over the world joined the discussions. Watch for a report.

Environment

Jodie has set up a brief description of her "place project". If you are curious about this interesting project or want to be a part of it please contact her at: enviromailaa@gmail.com

A really rewarding experience to give time to a place and to try to understand the way in which every place is more than the sum of its parts. Please email Jodie if you are interested in taking part in the project and she'll organise a time for the first meeting.

Clean Up the World 2008 event at Jumeirah Beach in Dubai

Invitation from EMEG to participate in the Clean Up the World 2008 event at Jumeirah Beach in Dubai.

"We would like to invite you to participate in the Dubai Municipality & EMEG Clean Up the World 2008 event. Taking place on Friday the 21st of November from 10:00am to 12:00pm at the Umm Suqeim Jumeirah Beach, the event caters for all ages and involves volunteers picking up litter along the shoreline.

Refreshments will be provided by EMEG and T-shirts and caps by Dubai Municipality. All litter collected at the end of the clean up session will be weighed and recorded by Dubai Municipality.

Come join us in our efforts for the Clean Up the World campaign in its 16th successful year where communities around the world are motivated to clean up and conserve the environment. Give 2 hours of your weekend to be a part of a positive global campaign."

You can email hadia@emeg.ae or call 050 4545934 for direction and a sign up sheet.

An Omani in England

Report of Khudooma Al Na'imi , who joined a Masters of Science program in forensic anthropology in the University of Central Lancashire, about his visit at Bradford (Yorkshire) heritage day 13th Sep. 2008.

In brief: Khudooma visited one relative in Bradford/ Lancashire on the city's heritage day. Within the activities on this day he took the opportunity to visit a guided tour at the town hall with architecture and history of this building as well as the story about the bear without tongue in the city's coat of arms. In the evening he was surprised by an illuminated sign of "Happy Eid" as a respect to the numerous population from Pakistan, India and other Muslim citizens. Here's his report:

After visiting a local tourist office to get a map to know my way around, a well-dressed receptionist handed me a brochure about Bradford Heritage Day (13 September 2008) and she encouraged me to visit it. One of the Day's activities is to open Bradford City Hall to the public. It was a great opportunity to take advantage of the first Bradford Heritage Day. There were tours and special events at City Hall, Bradford Cathedral, Midland Hotel, Bradford Playhouse, the Peace Museum, and many other attractions including tours and shows. The idea of a tourist office is important in any city to explain to visitors what is going on in the place and to be shining light to the visitor.

In the UK it is noticeable that each city -- in some cases each village -- has its own culture, environment, and people identity. Large shopping malls are always found in the city centers, featuring the usual famous brand stores and streams of people moving in and out until closing time at 6 pm, especially on the week end.

Due to the time, I went to the City Hall only. From the entrance, which opens to Centenary Square a long and wide stone stair will take you up to the city Hall, after passing the tall, black gate decorated from the top by gold painting. As I entered a middle age lady and tall man handed my publications about the City Hall and the Heritage Day in general. She mentioned also that a guided tour would start at 2 pm if I wished to be guided with the other visitors inside the Hall; I also had the option to discover the place by myself. As the tour was to start in only

five minutes, I decided to wait and join them. I knew it would be useful to listen to the speaker explain important details in City Hall.

Our guide was Councilor Colin Gill, of Bingley Ward, a tall middle age man with gold colored chains decorating his black suite, and a purple white flower on his left upper pocket. He asked us to start our tour outside City Hall so that he could talk about the building's exterior monuments and sculptures. Councilor Colin Gill was delighted to mention why Bradford's Coat of Arms features a boar's head in heraldry without a tongue. The Coat of Arms dates back to the Saxon or Norman time when a boar was attacking villagers in the forest, and a resident (John Rushworth) killed the boar after the king offered a reward to anyone who could free the village from this boar. Unfortunately the man's knife was not sharp enough the cut off the boar's head to the king, so Rushworth removed the boar's tongue and took it to the king. Another man came along and saw the dead boar, so he removed the boar's head and took it to the king, and he was faster to reach the king before John Rushworth. He claimed that he had killed the boar and he claimed the reward. At that moment, John Rushworth came along and he said, 'I have the boar's tongue and I am the person who killed the boar.' So the king gave the reward of land and gold to the John Rushworth. This story can be seen sculptured in the City Hall wall as you enter it, with the two men standing around the king; one of them is holding the boar's head and the other holding the tongue as the Councilor explained.

Councilor Colin Gill then took us inside City Hall, to a room decorated with a painting and some historic pictures about Bradford. On one of the walls are pictures of previous councilors of Bradford. Then we moved to the City Hall City Council meeting room, which features beautiful decorated architecture – the circular room has a rectangular table in the middle, like a small parliament. The aged wood is now a brownish red; the effects of years of usage can be seen on the wood. With some concentration and imagination, the unseen voices of argument and discussion through many years with can be heard through in the large room.

We then moved to another room where our guide explained the sculpture on the wall. The sculpture represents a short story of Bradford, with emphasis on the city's industry and science history.

At the end of my tour, I sat down with Councilor Colin Gill at a tea table. When he learned that I am from Oman, he said, "Oh, from the Gulf." He continued by saying "Salam Alikum", evidence of his awareness and knowledge about the Islamic and Arabic culture. I replied "Alikum Elsalam". Our discussion was mostly about anthropology, archaeology, and their application in forensic world. On the other hand, there is a deep historic religious and economical connection between the Middle East and Europe. Joining us at the table was his daughter Alex (Alexandra) and his wife.

(Unfortunately Councillor Colin Gill resigned from this work just a few days after I wrote this article. This is a big loss for the city, but I am sure he will still be donating time for this public service; Bradford is rich with talented Bradfordians. Colin also was an executive member for services to children and young people in Bradford and he was interested in history and archaeology. I feel it was, for me, a part of history to have met him before he left office.)

By now the day was almost over and the time to close City Hall and this fascinating Heritage Day was approaching quickly. I had gained new knowledge about Bradford and its long history and gained a chance to meet and talk to interesting Bradfordians.

At 10 pm, as I was returning from Ramadan prayers in Bradford, I passed the city centre where I noticed workers erecting celebration signs. I read "Happy" but I could not read the second word because I was under it exactly. So I asked, "Happy what?" and the tall young man with a yellow reflector jacket who was standing there replied, "Eid." This shows the extent of the city's cultural awareness. A large Asian population, mostly from Pakistan and India, is living in the north of England, especially in Bradford; you will notice men and women in their national dress. There are also many mosques and cultural restaurants.

In Bradford Centenary Square there is a big screen erected opposite the restaurants, the screen working most of the day showing advertisements and, at certain times, music and special programs for the public. This is a unique idea to have a social place for the people of the city to come and meet.

The city has started to come alive with the arrival of students in the middle of September for the start of the new semester in Bradford University and College. Because some of them are followed or guided by their parents, it seems that this will be their first time to live alone and start discovering the university and independent life.

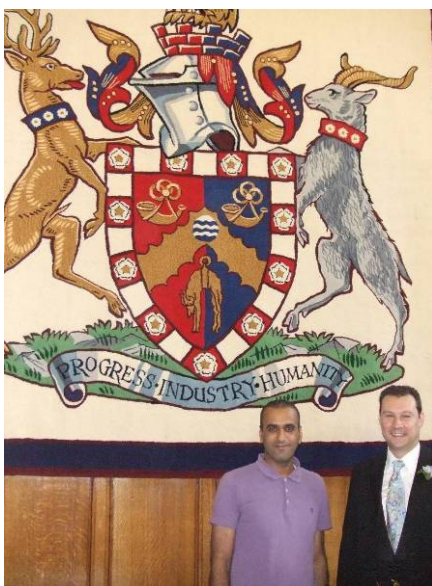
This reflects part of this great city's past and present coming together, combining to reflect Bradford's rich heritage and cultural life.



A man dressed in traditional costume during Bradford's Heritage Day. The Town Crier – responsible for making public announcements -- has a loud and strong voice.



One of Bradford Heritage day activities: a young lady dressed in traditional costume.



Khudoma with Councillor Colin, the Bradford Coat of Arms in the background.



Happy Eid sign and Islamic decorations over Bridge Street in Bradford city centre.

links:

Bradford Council:

http://www.bradford.gov.uk/government_politics_and_public_administration/lord_mayor/lord_mayors_appeal/brads_blog/boar_story/

Bradford Heritage day:

http://www.bradford.gov.uk/leisure_and_culture/culture_and_creativity/bradford_heritage_days.htm

Young people education:

http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/3174179.Young_citizens_get_to_say_who_they_are/

Bits 'n' Pieces

Riddle-answer

This is a blossom of a plant we found during a hike in Oman. It's called *Cucumis prophetarum* and is highlighted in Marijcke Jongbloed's *Wildflowers of the United Arab Emirates* on page 325. The young fruit is colored green and yellow but the mature fruit, like the one shown, is completely yellow with soft spines.



Once upon a time...

A collection of photographs by John and Ann Wittering <

<http://www.enhg.org/resources/articles/wittering/wittering.htm> > who were among the first teachers recruited for UAE University.

They include some shots from Aboul and downtown Al Ain in the late 1970's.

Plants Rob's Garden

With the new arrangement, we have:

< <http://www.enhg.org/resources/articles/reid/reid.htm> > the start page with the discussion of the development of Rob's garden < http://www.enhg.org/resources/articles/reid/garden_pix.htm > the collection of photographs < <http://www.enhg.org/resources/articles/reid/indigenous.htm> > the discussion of working with indigenous plants.

Geology with Ben Jordan (formerly UAEU)

Basalt Sill, Jebel Dai, Oman

Whereas dikes form when magma cuts across pre-existing rocks, sills form when magma intrudes into sedimentary rocks parallel to the sedimentary layers. This is an image of a small sill that is cutting through limestone. The layers of limestone (gray) can be clearly seen as well as the parallel nature of the sill (brown).



Fauna

Recently we found a skeleton near Subaitah. We are not sure what it is (fox, cat, dog other domestic animal), so take a look and if you can identify it please let us know. We collect the skeleton meanwhile to get a clear definition.



Dates for your diary	Links
<p>November 08</p> <p>11 General meeting</p> <p>18 Work shop</p> <p>25 Annual General meeting</p> <p>December 08</p> <p>02 Committee meeting</p> <p>09 General meeting</p> <p>16 Work shop</p> <p>18 Emirates Cleanup Day</p> <p>24 Desert Christmas Eve (Wednesday)</p> <p>30 "5th Tuesday" watch-out for ENHG mail</p> <p>January 09</p> <p>06 Committee meeting</p> <p>13 General meeting</p> <p>20 Work shop</p> <p>27 General meeting</p> <p>February 09</p> <p>03 Committee meeting</p> <p>10 General meeting</p> <p>17 Work shop</p> <p>24 General meeting</p>	<p>Emirates Environment Group newsletter:</p> <p>Dragonflies!!!! IUCN Odonata Specialist Group</p> <p>Wildlife Middle East News: www.wmenews.com>.</p> <p>Desert oasis: http://www.environmentalgraffiti.com/featured/desert-oasis/2257</p> <p>Mike Gillett's contribution to our website http://www.enhg.org/alain/mike/contrib.htm >.</p>