



## Emirates Natural History Group Al Ain Chapter Newsletter 2009/ V

Summer is over, welcome back to the new season 2009/2010, filled again with interesting meetings, workshops and ever surprising hikes. Ramadan is over now, business getting back to normal and so do we.

This season, our Al Ain chapter will hold the Inter Emirates Weekend (scheduled for spring 2010). We want to encourage members to suggest events and activities to offer to our friends from the other chapters to make the IEW surprising and unforgettable for them (and for us as well).

Please notice that one Thuraya phone has a new number. The two valid numbers are:

TH1: 0088-216-4440-5955

TH2: 0088-216-5552-1121

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### ENHG Al Ain Chapter Committee

#### Committee members:

**Chair:** Brien Holmes; **Vice Chair** Brigitte Howarth; **Treasurer:** Simon Wall; **Secretary:** Saima Tariq Khan; **Membership:** Barb Reimer; **Photography:** Bob Reimer; **Newsletter:** Roland Ochmann; **Library:** Marybeth Gaudette; **Flora:** Jodie Healy, Brigitte Howarth; **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@yahoo.com](mailto:enhg@yahoo.com) (all Al Ain chapter members)

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### Upcoming Events

October	Tuesday Oct. 06, Committee Meeting, Al Ain English Speaking School, 7:30 pm Tuesday Oct. 13, General Meeting, InterContinental Al Ain Resort hotel, 7:30 pm Tuesday Oct. 20, Work room session, Al Ain English Speaking School, 7:30 pm Tuesday Oct. 27, General Meeting, InterContinental Al Ain Resort hotel, 7:30 pm
November	Tuesday Nov. 03, Committee Meeting, Al Ain English Speaking School, 7:30 pm Tuesday Nov. 10, General Meeting, InterContinental Al Ain Resort hotel, 7:30 pm Tuesday Nov. 17, Work room session, Al Ain English Speaking School, 7:30 pm Tuesday Nov. 24, <u>Annual General Meeting</u> , InterContinental Al Ain Resort hotel, 7:30 pm

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### 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 06 October at 7:30 pm.

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## News

Themes and ideas for the Inter Emirates Weekend 2010, organized by Al Ain Chapter.

Reminder: Suggestions for activities for this season's Inter Emirates Weekend can be submitted by members to any Committee member. We appreciate your help and support to assure that the IEW 2010 in Al Ain will be a remarkable event for all.

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## Walking and Hiking Trails in Al Ain

For several months, we have been working with staff in the Town Planning Department to develop Walking Trails for residents, tourists and visitors in Al Ain city and Hiking Trails on Jebel Hafeet. The trails on Jebel Hafeet would offer different levels of difficulty and would include signs with explanations of the geology, plants and animals. We will keep members informed of further progress.

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## The ENHG Library

The Library is now situated in our room at the Al Ain Palace museum. Marybeth has been busy attaching labels to the bindings of items in our collection as well as posting details of items on the Internet. Our library database can be searched and visited under [www.librarything.com/catalog/enhg](http://www.librarything.com/catalog/enhg)

If you're looking for a publication, videotape or periodical, please contact Marybeth [mary.gaudette@gmail.com](mailto:mary.gaudette@gmail.com). We try to put an inventory list on our webpage so everybody can look for something they are interested in or something special they may be looking for. Any problems? – just ask Marybeth.

We have prepared a DVD-collection of more than 20 DVDs and CDs including all videos, CDs and many of the DVDs in our library. We are offering this set to members for Dh100. These are available to ENHG members only. You can subscribe at the general meetings for your collection.

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## What Happened on Recent Hikes, Walks

*Each weekend we try to offer one or two field trips to some of the destinations within a short driving distance of Al Ain. Our field trip leaders are all volunteers and each tries to make each field trip as interesting and informative as possible. We are always looking for volunteers to lead trips; please contact a Committee member if you would like to lead trips.*

*We ask members to dress appropriately and wear proper footwear. Please remember to bring plenty of water and a snack. It is important to let the trip leader if you have a medical condition which the field trip leader should take into account when selecting routes etc. Our field trip leaders carry a satellite phone on most trips; members should carry a small first aid kit.*

### **Thursday, 03 Sep**

Moonwalk in Musah Oasis: Our famous moonwalk in Ramadan took place in the lovely Musah Oasis. About 20 people took the advantage of this unique experience and some 40% took the opportunity to refresh in the pool (even there was significantly less water than in springtime)



**Figure 1: Hikers at reservoir**



**Figure 2: Swimming in the moonlight**

**Friday 04 Sep**

Jimi Oasis walk

**Saturday 05 Sep**

Rainbow Ridge hike

**Friday 11 Sep**

Off-road desert drive

Our drive out to Wadi Safwan and Parakeet Park included a rare event: a river in the sand. Rain had fallen in the mountains near Khudrah that morning and it had taken several hours for the water to move down Wadi Sharm to our location many kilometers from Khudrah. The water quickly spread towards Al Hayer, with several small streams moving across the sandy wadi bed.



**Figure 3: The river in the desert**



**Figure 4: Where is the wooden fort?**

Saturday 12 Sep

Mezyad Fort, Jebel Hafeet tombs

Friday 18 Sep

Subaitah Oasis with refreshing dip in the rock pool. Ever stunning walk along the falaj from the Oasis to the pool; this time also a more challenging route over the ridge has been offered as an alternative

Saturday 19 Sep

Al Ain Oasis walk

Tuesday 22 Sep

Movie night (general meeting) at InterContinental

We watched a film from 1981, narrated by Peter Hellyer, entitled '*March to Progress*'

Wednesday 23 Sep Oman tour down Wadi Jizzi



**Figure 5 and 6: The oasis at Abalah, including a recently occupied 'bait khaimah'**

Friday 25 Sep New hike between Musah and Haywan, with steep ups and downs one of the more challenging hikes, this time followed by a BBQ at hidden village.



**Figure 7 and 8: Views from one of the cuts towards destination near Haywan**

Saturday 26 Sep Dhow at Ras al Khaimah, status check

Thursday 01 Oct: Moonwalk to “Big Structure”

Friday 02 Oct: Wadi Nahyan and Jebel Hafeet

Dayhike on Jebel Quatara, led by our experienced alpinist Bill Jones

Saturday 03 Oct: Abul Wadi, Fort and Oasis

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### **Whale Shark Watching**

There are two whale sharks, the one you saw in the magazine that is blue is the big one, eight meters and the brown is five meters. They start coming in June and the last sighting was August 28. The sea condition now is changing from 32c to 26c that's why soon they will migrate to a warmer place.

Whale sharks are found both in inshore and oceanic waters where surface sea water temperatures are between 18 to 30°C. However, initial tagging data indicates that whale sharks spend significant periods of time diving to depths greater than 980 m.

Whale sSharks are spotted all year round in some locations and in others at different times of year. It seems the sharks' presence is determined by environmental and oceanographic features such as water upwelling at sea mounts and along current boundaries which leads to increased plankton productivity.

The Whale Shark is one of only four elasmobranchs that filter feed (the others are the Basking and the Megamouth Shark and Manta Rays). It has an enormous mouth which can be more than 1.5m wide and feeds by distending the jaws and actively sucking water into its mouth.

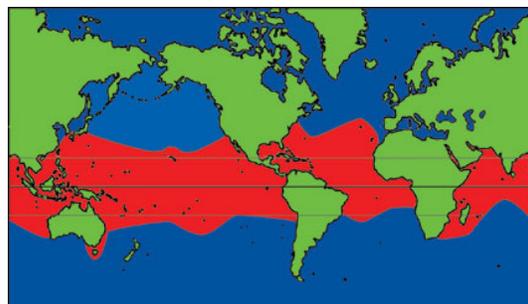
The mouth is lined with rows of tiny teeth – around 300 in each jaw - but apparently play no part in feeding. Rather, gill rakers, sieve like structures on the gills, filter out any organism over 2-3 mm in size meaning that almost nothing but liquid passes back out through the gills. Whale sharks have been observed 'coughing' which is thought to be a method to clear food particles that have accumulated on the gill rakers.

*(Many thanks to Jeffrey Catanjal, Sales Manager and PADI Instructor, Premiers for Equipment, UAE for providing this information about whale sharks. Contact: +971-50-834-8894, Facebook; Premiers Diving)*



Photo by Jeff Catanjal

Photo by Jeff Catanjal



Where whale sharks are found

## Flora's corner – Nan[n]orrhops ritchieana, Doom Sagir, Dwarf Palm, Mazari...



Most of us are familiar with the date palm, *Phoenix dactylifera* but maybe a little less familiar with the dwarf palm, *Nanorrhops ritchieana*. *Nanorrhops* (Greek *nannos* =dwarf, *rhops* = bushy) do just as the name suggests and rarely grow above about six feet in the wild and have a bushy look because they generally grow from the basal stalk of another specimen, so tend to form big clumps rather than individual palms.

The leaf is a grey-green colour and much smaller than the date palm with more of a fan shape. The inflorescence forms from a tall, branched stalk (up to 2m) that grows from the middle of the palm and above the fronds, with creamy white flowers growing from the stalk. Some sources say that the flowers have no smell, while others say they smell creamy and sweet. I haven't smelt any yet so can't add my tuppence to this debate, however, come March (when the *Nanorrhops* begin flowering) we can all decide for ourselves! The fruit (which has a single seed inside) is much bigger than the flower and is edible. The only ones I have come across out in the wadis have been way past their sell by date so I have yet to try one.

### *Inflorescence (without flowers!!)*

It has been suggested that the palm frond of the *Nanorrhop* is superior to the date palm because the fibres of the fronds allow for finer weaving. They are used to make baskets to store a number of things including goats milk, grains and fish. They are very strong and according to Marijcke Jongbloed (*Wildflowers of the UAE*) become stronger when wet and so are used as ropes for fishing, as well as being used to make harnesses, mats and fans. She also notes that the seeds were used as slingshots and as bullets!



Depending upon your source, *Nanorrhops* are native to Oman, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Yemen. The *Nanorrhops* closest to us here in Al Ain can be found along the edges of the Hajar mountain range. They are usually found in relatively shallow side tributaries of wadis and especially in drainage courses which are surrounded by the low rocky hills with all the holes in them that are reminiscent of mining activity. Reza Kahn, in his informative book, *Indigenous Trees of the UAE*, notes that they are often found in bends of wadis where the slope is smoother due to the deposition of heavier soil particles. *Nanorrhops* can be seen from Wadi Agran all the way up along the Mahdah - Dubai mountain road.



If anyone is interested in heading out to see some of these unusual palms, send an email to [enviromail@gmail.com](mailto:enviromail@gmail.com) and we'll organise a trip out to see them.



Fruit on the stalk

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### Items for Re-Sale to Members

At upcoming general meetings, we will be offering members an assortment of books and other items. These include reference books which members will find useful in the field as well as copies of items from our library collection. We purchase quantities of these items and then offer them to members at cost or with a small markup.

There are limited quantities of several items as we purchased all of the remaining stock of out-of-print volumes.

The items for resale to members include:

DVDs and CDs with copies of old videotapes and movies in our Library collection. The collection includes copies of old movies produced in the 1960s and 1970s, including a profile of Sh. Zayed. Selling price Dh100.

*Wild About Reptiles*, one of several guidebooks written by Marijcke Jongbloed. 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. Selling price Dh50.

*Wild About Mammals* is another of Marijcke's guides which should be in the library of anyone in the UAE interested in the mammals found in this part of the world. Selling price Dh50.

Gertrude Dyck's *Al Ain*, one of a very few books published on Al Ain. This book, containing many of Gertrude's own photographs, reflects the more than 30 years she lived here after joining Oasis Hospital in the early 1960's. Selling price Dh75.

*Tribulus* is the publication of the Abu Dhabi chapter of the ENHG with contributions covering every aspect of natural history in the UAE. Back issues of *Tribulus* are available on our website but these copies are valuable for anyone with a special interest in the scientific studies underway here in the last 25 years. Selling price Dh10 each issue.

*Wildflowers of the UAE* is the result of many years of dedicated field work by Marijcke Jongbloed and is a required item in any serious library of reference books of the UAE. The book includes excellent photographs of all plants as well as detailed descriptions and discussions of how the plants have been used. Selling price Dh100.

For many years, Phil Iddison contributed priceless papers on aspects of the culture of the UAE. These articles are now available on our website. These sets are original copies of Phil's articles. Selling price Dh30.

*Arthropod fauna of the UAE*, Volume 1, Antonius Van Harten (editor), Multiply Marketing Consultancy Services, Abu Dhabi, ISBN 978-9948-03-642-5 (754 pages). This first volume is the culmination of results from extensive collecting undertaken by the editor and his visiting specialists of arthropods within the UAE. The hardback book includes accounts of many of the groups of arthropods present but future volumes will expand on the knowledge of this first volume. The book reports many new records to the UAE, some of which are new to science. It does include many good color photographs and line drawings, systematic accounts of species, and in some cases identification keys. Whilst definitely not suitable as a field guide, this book is a 'must have' for anyone interested in getting to grips with arthropods in the UAE. For a full review of this see Tribulus Vol 17, p. 105-6.

In addition to the items listed above, Brigitte is offering:

*Birdwatching guide to Oman* (3 copies) @ 100 AED each  
*Oman Bird List*, 6th edition (5 copies) @ 30 AED each  
*The Birds of Al Jabal Al Akhdar* (5 copies) @ 50 AED each

We are also offering window stickers for your vehicle(s). Dh10 each.

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### Death of Ain al Faidah ecological surveys

In early 2009 the Project Developer, Al Qudra Real Estate(AQRE), made a commitment to incorporate 6,000 Government Villas into the Ain Al Fayda Development.

1,000 of these are fast tracked and are to be located in the northern most extreme of the Ain Al Fayda site, along with 400 commercial villas. This fast track phase is called Ain Al Fayda Phase 1.

A thoroughly disgusting day yesterday (03.10.2009) at Ain Al Fayda - the wintering habitat of hundreds of birds including extremely rare species was destroyed in a few hours -- the old men who had tended this area for 20 years were in tears.

Complete comments of Dave Clark about this incident under

<http://www.uaebirding.com/forum/showthread.php?t=1541>

## Wadi Musah Field Trip

Earlier this year we led a school trip to Wadi Musah. The letter in the images below is one student's account of the field trip.

Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> Big write  
April 2009 I can write a letter

Yesterday was a very cool day

Me Adam, and Ahmed played Top Trumps in the bus.

We were lucky to see a blue headed agama

Letter

We saw lots of animals

There was copper

We went to a wadi in Oman

We saw goats on the way back

30-4-09

Dear Safi,

Yesterday was an awesome day! We went to a wadi in Oman called wadi moosa. There were lots of cool animals there, and our group was the luckiest to see a blue headed agama! On the way, me Adam

Malek

and Ahmed played Top Trumps. Adam won about three times, Ahmed didn't win at all, and I won only once. It was boiling over there. We started climbing up hills and there was copper everywhere! Mr. Brian (a natural history dude) proved to us that it was copper with acid and another kind chemical which ~~with~~ fumes make you faint. First he put the copper in a small cup. Then he put some acid inside and the copper started to dissolve. Finally he added the other chemical and it turned blue. I was shocked! How did the copper turn blue!?

(At last it was time to eat, I rummaged in my bag rapidly.) After we ate, we were put into four groups. We were with Mr. Brian. Mr. Brian told us how people in the wadi knew if there was water. Next, we went to someone who told us a bit about lifecycles, but suddenly it started to get hotter so we just moved on. Finally we went to a lady who told us about the plants in the wadi. After a while we went back to Al Ain. My legs were exhaustingly in pain!

To Improve: I liked: That You  
Regards Handwriting had lots of wadi  
LB words and Adam

Malek.

Well done, a lovely letter, you include many points we have discussed over the week. An excellent piece of work.

## **The First International Congress of the Middle Eastern Biodiversity Network**

Almost a year ago the Al Ain ENHG was represented at the *First International Congress of the Middle Eastern Biodiversity Network* by Bob Reimer and myself (Brigitte Howarth). The Congress, 'Documenting, Analyzing and Managing Biodiversity in the Middle East', ran from October 20<sup>th</sup> till 23<sup>rd</sup> at the InterContinental Hotel, Aqaba, Jordan. The objectives of the conference were:

- To present and discuss results of recent research on Middle Eastern biodiversity
- To present results of the Middle Eastern Biodiversity Project to a wider audience, and to discuss them in the light of other regional research and educational activities
- To review the present status of biodiversity research and education in the Middle East
- To link up with scientists in the region, in Europe and in other parts of the world, reviewing the status of Middle Eastern biodiversity research in a global context
- To identify opportunities and priorities for future biodiversity research and education
- To identify opportunities and priorities in transferring biodiversity research results to applied fields, such as renewable resources management and conservation

The Middle Eastern Biodiversity Network is a project run by Senckenberg, a research institute and natural history museum in Germany. Funding for this project began in April 2006 and ended in December 2008 culminating with the Congress. It is hoped that links established by Senckenberg will continue to flourish as the opportunities for information exchange and networking brought about by the conference were extremely valuable for anyone working on any aspect of biodiversity in the Middle East.

Specific aims of the project included strengthening 'within in a multi-faceted cooperation network, the capacity of Arab countries and Iran in documenting and analysing the Region's unique biodiversity, promoting sustainable resource use and conservation'(Senckenberg website).

Bob presented a poster entitled 'Local Resources in the Gulf States and Oman'. His abstract read as follows:

The Gulf States and Oman have a long history of having groups of expatriates who were interested in natural history before the word biodiversity was well known. These groups have records that might be of use to your studies in these countries as well as current members who might be interested in supporting them. This poster will list some of the groups and resources that researchers may wish to contact in the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman.

I gave a presentation based on the joint Al Ain and Abu Dhabi ENHG arthropod collection for which I am custodian and curator. The title was 'The Role of Private Insect Collections in Biodiversity Research and Conservation'. For some time now I have suspected that the collection holds records that have not been published and on further investigation this was proven right. The abstract read as follows:

Conservation of larger terrestrial organisms is easier in comparison with arthropods because those groups are more visible and are generally better known, and their requirements more likely to have been described and documented. Arthropods are often very small, e.g. the average size of a beetle is 4 mm, and this means that much arthropod biodiversity has thus far not been described. Many arthropod species are of ecological importance and may be regarded as keystone species in their environment without which ecosystems would collapse. This has widely been recognized and much research is under way. Nowadays there is an urgency for arthropod biodiversity research because habitats are either being degraded, fragmented or destroyed before a baseline of the arthropod fauna has been recorded and their ecological roles have been understood. Private collections have a role in recording baseline data and may be able to provide important information in identifying indicator species, particularly where land use has changed since the date of collection. Using data from the joint Al Ain and Abu Dhabi Emirates Natural History Group private collection the paper will illustrate how data collected over more than 20 years can assist with arthropod biodiversity research and conservation.

Drew Gardner (Chair, Abu Dhabi ENHG and colleague at Zayed University) and I drafted a paper, presented by Drew, that deals with mitigation procedures. The title read 'Urbanisation in the UAE: Challenges of Mitigation for the Conservation of Biodiversity'. The abstract read as follows:

Development and urbanisation is occurring at an unprecedented rate in the United Arab Emirates, with consequent changes in land use. The most affected habitats are the coastal areas. These have white sand habitats with pale sand dunes, sand sheet and aeolianite outcrops immediately inland. These habitats are some of the richest desert habitats in the UAE with highly adapted biodiversity to survive harsh conditions. However existing and planned developments will almost completely destroy these habitats, together with their plant associations and fauna. Rare species such as the only Arabian population of the wonder gecko *Teratoscincus keyserlingii*, and breeding birds such as the Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse and Pharaoh Eagle Owl are amongst the many species affected. The existing knowledge on insect distributions is limited, but some key species may be lost, such as coastal tiger beetle (*Cicindelidae*) species. Ecologists preparing ecology surveys as part of environmental impact assessments have suggested a variety of mitigation measures including setting aside areas for conservation, relocating fauna and flora, topsoil storage and reuse, ex-situ conservation, and use of wildlife corridors. This presentation discusses the implementation of these measures and their success or otherwise.

Drew also presented a poster showing the distribution of reptiles he has been working on for his forthcoming book.

Subjects covered by the conference were much wider ranging than the presentations listed above and session themes included, terrestrial botany, continental zoology, marine biodiversity, biodiversity conservation, biodiversity and climate, and natural history collections and museum management. These sessions were complemented by workshops.

There were many memorable moments but personally the most significant moment was to be able to thank members of the Abu Dhabi and Al Ain chapters of the ENHG and of the Dubai Natural History Group for assistance and companionship on field trips. It was also an opportunity to acknowledge the founder of the ENHG, J.N.B. Bish Brown for his vision, enthusiasm and sheer hard work.

Authors were invited to formalize their presentations as journal articles to be published in proceedings of the symposium as special issues of international, peer-reviewed journals. As this process meant expanding the paper, Mike Gillett joined as co-author on the 'Role of Private Collections'. I am delighted to say that both 'the Role of Private Collections' and the 'Urbanisation' paper were accepted after their peer review process and are now in their final proof stage. With regard to the 'Role of Private Collections', this means that contributions made by past and present ENHG members are being acknowledged as several new-to-the-UAE species records are published for the first time in this article, some of which date back to insects collected by Bish Brown himself.

Brigitte Howarth  
6th October 2009



Dates for your diary	Links
October 2009 07 Committee meeting (AAESS) 13 General meeting (InterContinental) 20 Work room (AAESS) 27 General meeting (InterContinental)	<b>Dragonflies!!!!</b> <a href="#">IUCN Odonata Specialist Group</a>  <b>Wildlife Middle East News:</b> <a href="http://www.wmenews.com">www.wmenews.com</a> >.
November 2009 03 Committee meeting (AAESS) 10 General meeting (InterContinental) 17 Work room (AAESS) 24 Annual General meeting (InterCon)	<b>Desert oasis:</b> <a href="http://www.environmentalgraffiti.com/featured/desert-oasis/2257">http://www.environmentalgraffiti.com/featured/desert-oasis/2257</a>  <b>Mike Gillett's contribution to our website</b> <a href="http://www.enhg.org/alain/mike/contrib.htm">http://www.enhg.org/alain/mike/contrib.htm</a> >.
December 2009 07 Committee meeting (AAESS) 14 General meeting (InterContinental) 24 Christmas Eve In The Desert	<b>Wildlife Middle East News Vol 3 Issue 4 March 2009</b> PDFs can be downloaded from: <a href="http://www.wmenews.com">www.wmenews.com</a>

## Frequent Reminders

### Hikes

We will continue with weekend hikes and walks in Oman or in the UAE. Please read these hike-related 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.

### Thuraya Satellite Phones

We have two Thuraya telephones. The numbers are **0088-216-4440-5955** 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.

### Find your way and meeting places in Al Ain and around.

Our weekend field trips begin at regular meeting places. You can download a KMZ file from [http://www.enhg.org/resources/links/res\\_links.htm](http://www.enhg.org/resources/links/res_links.htm). Download the KMZ file and save it on your computer. If you have Google Earth loaded on your computer, when you double click on the file, Google Earth will open and 'zoom' to the locations marked. There is some information regarding each location associated with the pins in the image; hover your mouse over the pin to see the text. If you do not have Google Earth, or if the KMZ file does not work on your computer, you can download the JPG file also listed at [http://www.enhg.org/resources/links/res\\_links.htm](http://www.enhg.org/resources/links/res_links.htm). The chapter's regular meeting places for forming convoys are shown as are the Al Ain English Speaking School, the InterContinental and the Hili border crossing point.