



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

Dear Friends

The season continues with frequent weekend trips, Tuesday meetings and the Annual General Meeting held on 24 November. The Triple Crescent Hikes are underway under Bill Jones' experienced hands (and feet). Winter is definitely the best season for going into the mountains for hiking or into the desert for a BBQ; remember to 'take only photographs and leave only footprints'.

Please keep in mind that this season, our Al Ain chapter will host the Inter Emirates Weekend (scheduled for 25/26/27 February 2010). We have received many suggestions from our members for events and activities. Jodie and her team of volunteers have taken on the responsibility for organizing these events.

The newsletter depends also on YOUR contributions! If you have any reports, sketches, stories, pictures, encounters, poems, etc. please submit to [rolfried@yahoo.de](mailto:rolfried@yahoo.de)

Please notice again 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:** Walter Cramerstetter; **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; **Ordinary Members:** Jerry Buzzell, Bill Jones, Amer Abu Kuhail, Joseph Mansour, Jake Gilson, Alison Lawrence

Visit the webpage at [www.enhg.org](http://www.enhg.org) or contact us at [enhg@yahoogroups.com](mailto:enhg@yahoogroups.com) (all Al Ain chapter members).

Committee meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month in the work room at 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 05 January at 7:30 pm.

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### Upcoming Events

December	<b>Thursday Dec. 24, Christmas Eve in the desert, Buraimi, details to be announced</b>
January 2010	Tuesday Jan. 05, Committee Meeting, Al Ain English Speaking School, 7:30 pm Tuesday Jan. 12, General Meeting, InterContinental Al Ain Resort hotel, 7:30 pm Tuesday Jan. 19, Work room session, Al Ain English Speaking School, 7:30 pm Tuesday Jan. 26, General Meeting, InterContinental Al Ain Resort hotel, 7:30 pm

## 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 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.

We have installed a working group to collect and coordinate the proposals and events. We will soon come out with more information about (venue, booking, subscribing the events, etc.)

The IEW 2010 tab on the website is now in operation. Hover your mouse over the ENHG tab on the main menu bar; IEW2010 will be the last item in the list. Check the tabs from time to time for news of IEW 2010.

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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 know 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.*

Friday 09 Oct

Triple Crescent Hike training day to Jebel Qattara



*Walking along the ridge*



*Ibrahim's lookout*

Ilal Caves and oasis

Saturday 10 Oct Infinity Pools off the Fay mountain road

Friday 16 Oct Wadi Musah plants and oasis visit

Saturday 17 Oct Wadi walk near Juwaif

Friday 23 Oct: Dhow at Ras al Khaimah, status check, tombs at Shimal, Sheiba's Palace and RAK pottery (please refer also to the National's article about "Sheiba's Palace"  
<http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20091025/NATIONAL/710249926/1342>)



Tombs



Dhow construction

Saturday 24 Oct: Jazira Oasis and beyond

Friday 30 Oct Early morning visit to the birding sites in Al Ain. A practiced follow-up of Tuesday's lecture about birds in Al Ain  
Moonwalk on Rainbow Ridge

Saturday 31 Oct Kahl to Wadi Sharm drive

Friday 06 Nov 1<sup>st</sup> triple crescent hike to Jebel Quattara  
Beetle survey trip

Saturday 07 Nov Wadi Sharm Oasis, checking the status of date palms and citrus trees in mid-autumn

Friday 13 Nov      A'Dahir Oasis  
Saturday 14 Nov    wadi walk near Falaj Hazza

Thursday 12-Saturday 14 Nov.      As a preparation for future excursions some members drove to Al Hamra, Oman, around 250 km from Al Ain. They stayed in the old clay-brick village in an old house under renovation as a guesthouse-to-be. Another goal of this trip was to find out more about the ancient knowledge of falaj watering at night with help of the star-sighting. With support of some locals we sat at the viewing point, spot the stars and listen to the explanations.



Al Hamra old village



star-gazing explanation

Friday 20 Nov      2nd triple crescent hike to Jebel Ghufeir  
RAK dhow status update (Thanks to Steve who forwarded the link < [http://vode.dmi.ae/mediamana ger/?ee\\_category =17419](http://vode.dmi.ae/mediamana%20ger/?ee_category=17419) > to a film clip from a Dubai television station covering the naval history of the UAE. The clip includes footage from the RAK dhow construction site).

Saturday 21 Nov    Trip to Village 1 (One of our more popular walks in the foothills, this to the abandoned oasis we refer to as Village One, a farm that has been given a new life as work to revive the farming activity continues)

Tuesday 01 Dec    Moonwalk to Big Structures

Friday 11 Dec      3rd triple crescent hike to Jabal Sumaini

Saturday 12 Dec    Dragonfly watching in Aboul oasis

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## Recent Meetings

### Reading Clay tablets

Tuesday 13.10.09

Susanne Hofstra, Assistant Professor of Archaeology in the UAEU History and Archaeology Department, presented a talk on ancient Mediterranean scripts and Mesopotamian scripts (cuneiform). Susanne, who has a specialization in Mediterranean Bronze Age Archaeology, gave an introduction to the discovery and decipherment of the ancient "clay tablet" scripts, which essentially led to the discovery of the Mesopotamian and Greek Bronze Ages.

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### Birds in Al Ain

Tuesday 27.10.09

A joint presentation from Dave and Huw Roberts about observation places of birds in Al Ain and pictures of these birds as observed.

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### Elements of Asian Hubara Bustard Ecology

Tuesday 10.11.09

Olivier presented the art of observation of the Hubara bustard, breeding areas, traveling behavior, wintering areas, threats to its population and outlook for this unique bird covering and traveling the area from the Mid-East to the Gobi desert in China.



Olivier



stuffed Hubara

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### GPS navigation

Tuesday 17.11.09

The program Tuesday evening at the work room at Al Ain EnglishSpeaking School intended to introduce GPS handheld units to interested members. In particular, as discussed on the site < <http://www.gpsprimer.net/> >, the program focused on things you can do with your handheld unit. Please take a few minutes to look at the GPS Primer site . . . follow links for terminology, technology, applications etc.

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## **AGM/ Ladies Ecological Group Dubai**

Tuesday 24.11.09

Our Annual General Meeting took place at the InterContinental Al Ain Resort hotel with significantly few participants due to Eid holiday season. With a warm welcome from our Vice-Chair Brigitte and the report of the treasurer Simon the Committee members have been accepted for an other season with additional three ordinary members – Ali, Joseph and Jake.

After this official part we listened to Val Chalmers, a longtime member of the Dubai chapter. She talked about her experiences in the UAE where she and her family have lived since 1979. Val was a key organizer of the Ladies Ecological Group whose members visited numerous interesting sites in the UAE, some of which are hard to recognize today, others inaccessible.

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## **Marine Life in UAE and Oman**

Tuesday 08.12.09

Again an interesting presentation from Gordon Kirkwood with lots of pictures and videos. Gordon is preparing to leave the UAE so we were very fortunate to hear an update of his March presentation.

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## **Other News**

### **Biodiversity Awareness Campaign**

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is home to a wide array of species and diverse ecosystems. This biodiversity is being threatened by an unprecedented rate of development which is directly impacting the various habitats and species found in the Gulf region. These impacts are further exacerbated by a lack of environmental awareness among the public and students in the UAE

As part of an environmental and sustainable initiative, EMEG and the HSBC Foundation are launching a biodiversity awareness campaign targeting primary school students across the United Arab Emirates.

EMEG in collaboration with the bank and the Ministry of Education have developed a 2010 UAE endangered marine species calendar. The calendar will be distributed in Arabic and in English to 18 Madares Al Ghad elementary schools to engage students from 3 – 8 years old about local species in rapid decline or threatened.

EMEG and HSBC volunteers will be presenting the calendar to the schools and organize group activities for students (Grade 3 level) in order to reach out in a playful way.

We will be running these activities during school hours and on week days from November 1<sup>st</sup> to November 20<sup>th</sup>. If you want to find out more and volunteer during these events, please contact Houda at [Houda@emeg.ae](mailto:Houda@emeg.ae)

Regards  
EMEG Team

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## Center for plant genetic resource

The Executive Committee passed a project by Environment Agency Abu Dhabi for establishing a centre for plant genetic resources. The centre aims to document the DNA of local plants and protect important plant species through an integrated method. The project will improve Abu Dhabi global profile in conservation, development and protection of the environment and sustainable development.

More information by  
Dr Christophe Tourenq  
Manager, Science and Research,  
Emirates Wildlife Society-WWF  
P.O. Box 45333  
Abu Dhabi, UAE  
[www.panda.org/uae](http://www.panda.org/uae)

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## Visit of the Dubai group

Dubai chapter members visited the Jimi oasis.



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## Items for Re-Sale to Members

Every Tuesday meeting our members have the opportunity to purchase reference books which members will find useful in the field as well as copies of items from our library collection.

Also on sale: 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.

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

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## Gertrude Dyck has passed away

*Gertrude Dyck, Canadian citizen, came to UAE in the early 60s for a few weeks as nurse and stayed over 30 years in Al Ain Oasis Hospital, known to the locals as Latifa (graceful, merciful). Her memories about this time are described in her book about Al Ain.*

**Gertrude Dyck**, otherwise known as Gert, or Doctora Latifa, enjoyed seventy-five years of life filled with a variety of rich experiences, mostly in a culture foreign to her own. She lived in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) taking on various roles, giving her heart and life to serve Arab people under the auspices of TEAM--The Evangelical Alliance Mission. For thirty-eight years she worked as a nurse/midwife for the Oasis Hospital in the city of Al Ain.

Gertrude was a prairie farm girl, born to Henry and Olga Dyck on April 2, 1934 in Dunelm, Saskatchewan during the depression years. She was the sister to Ernest, Anne, Henry and Helena. Having grown up during those years of the depression was good preparation for the beginning years in the UAE, when the lifestyle was extremely basic. Gert's parents were from a Mennonite background and Gert said that her mother, a praying woman, strongly influenced and shaped her future. Gert became a committed Christian at the age of twelve and realized early that she wanted God to use her in some way, even to be a missionary.

She attended Prairie Bible Institute in 1957, followed by training to be a nurse at the Calgary General Hospital. It was there that she grew to love babies. In 1962 God led her then to join the staff of Oasis Hospital in the Arabian desert of the UAE. Incidentally, her belongings that were shipped on her first trip to the UAE did not arrive until the following summer. Her dad had made her a huge plywood box for shipping which was big enough to hold the ironing board that she wanted to take along, and she was teased about her taking her coffin with her. That ironing board lasted her all of those thirty-five years.

Gertrude was one of the first foreigners to work as a nurse in Abu Dhabi emirate. She was nicknamed by the local Arabs as "Doctora Latifa," meaning "mercy." She acted as a midwife to many of the 90,000 babies born at the Oasis Hospital after it opened in 1960, including members of the Royal family. In recent newspapers announcing her death, she was referred to as the "beloved 'mother ' of thousands." She had a long standing association with Sheikh Zayed, the late founder of the nation and with his relatives.

Gert was involved in visiting in local Emirati and royal homes and took many opportunities to share her faith and love with the people there. They became very dear to her heart.

Brooks Glett, from the current Oasis Hospital staff, relates the following about Gertrude Dyck: "Her nursing skills, fluency in Arabic and her love for the local culture and people earned her their deep trust.. Many local people to this day proudly claim their children's mother was Doctora Latifa. In fact, many of those she delivered are the leaders of today's UAE. Miss Dyck was so immersed in Emirati culture and society that she even began teaching colloquial Arabic to new arrivals. Her desire was to instill in them the love and compassion she had for local people and she firmly believed this could only happen by understanding their language and culture."

Gert loved to share her stories and decided to write them down, and in 1995 she published a book called [The Oasis, Al Ain Memoirs of 'Doctora Latifa](#)

<[http://www.amazingwomenrock.com/component/option,com\\_wrapper/Itemid,82/](http://www.amazingwomenrock.com/component/option,com_wrapper/Itemid,82/)>. She participated in numerous interviews and many articles were written about her life. She especially enjoyed speaking to the Emirati students at the universities and colleges. She was well known and loved by the expatriate community, and was especially involved in the Natural History Groups where they shared stories of life in the UAE.

After her retirement from TEAM and Oasis Hospital, Gertrude was asked to be a consultant for cultural orientation for Interhealth Canada in Abu Dhabi. That was also a rewarding time for her.

In 2002, Gertrude was recognized with two of Canada's highest honours: the Order of Canada, and a Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal for her work in the UAE.

For the last four years, Gert had been living in Abbotsford, BC. It was a difficult transition to life in Canada after all those years in Arabia. She started out living at Hallmark Assisted Living, before moving to Menno Terrace East. She would often get out on her scooter, enjoying some independence. She loved to take her camera along so she could take pictures, stopping for coffee or a Dairy Queen ice cream along the way. She especially enjoyed having a balcony and the flowers she had planted there. She also had amazing computer skills and would spend a lot of time working with her pictures on the computer, in between enjoying a game of Solitaire. She was interested in trying out new computer technology--her latest wish was to get a Blackberry .

Gert attended Women of the Harvest luncheon meetings once a month and was active in supporting other missionary endeavors. She also loved to watch older TV shows. Her laugh was infectious and her eyes sparkled when she found something that tickled her fancy. Lately she had become fascinated by the Winter Olympics' symbol, the Inuit inukshuk. She was generous and giving, always ready to help out anyone in need.

Gert spent a lot of time praying and reading her Bible. She had two One Year Bibles in her place, and both were well read with lots of markings in them--many underlined verses that spoke to her. She had been focusing on the word "Hope" this year, and the first verse in the front of her Bible is Romans 15:13: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Gert was very much looking forward to returning to the UAE again in the spring of 2010 for a visit. The Canadian Embassy in Abu Dhabi, UAE, is naming a room there after her, and she was hoping that she would be well enough to attend that occasion.

Gert had a fall which precipitated a six day battle for her life and she passed into the presence of her Saviour and Lord on Saturday, October 17, 2009. Some of her last words spoken that showed that she still had a sense of humor despite her pain and discomfort were "Are we having fun yet?"

Gertrude Dyck had a full life and is now enjoying her heavenly home. We will miss her!

*Debbie Handley*  
Australia

Please refer also to the article in the NATIONAL: <http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20091019/NATIONAL/710189848/1139>

Dates for your diary	Links
December 2009 15 Workshop (AAESS) 18 Islamic New Year 24 Christmas eve in the desert 29 to be determined	<b>Dragonflies!!!!</b> <a href="http://www.iucn.org/species/odonata">IUCN Odonata Specialist Group</a> Red-veined darter: <a href="http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20091129/NATIONAL/711289837">http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20091129/NATIONAL/711289837</a>
January 2010 01 Happy New Year! 05 Committee meeting (AAESS) 12 General meeting (InterContinental) 19 Workshop (AAESS) 26 General meeting (Intercontinental)	<b>Wildlife Middle East News:</b> <a href="http://www.wmenews.com">www.wmenews.com</a> >  <b>Desert oasis:</b> <a href="http://www.environmentalgraffiti.com/featured/desert-oasis/2257">http://www.environmentalgraffiti.com/featured/desert-oasis/2257</a>
February 2010 02 Committee meeting (AAESS) 09 General meeting (InterContinental) 16 Workshop (AAESS) 23 General meeting (Intercontinental) 25-27 IEW Al Ain	<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> >.

## **Frequent Reminders**

### **Hikes**

The weekend hikes and walks in Oman or in the UAE are a regular part of our activities offered to members. 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.