



Emirates Natural History Group Al Ain Chapter Newsletter 2011/01

Dear Friends

The New Year has started; we hope everybody has a pleasant New Year's Eve and a successful beginning. Temperatures are perfect for hiking, even the nights are cool (some say cold), Bill is leading the climbers from summit to summit for the Triple Crescent Hikes, flora is coming back and flourishing after some recent rainfalls and we will have as usual some interesting lectures at our Tuesday gatherings.

February's highlight will be the Inter Emirates Weekend, this year organized by the Abu Dhabi Chapter and it will take place in the famous Liwa Oasis and surround. To get more information and do the bookings please visit our webpage www.ENHG.org.

ENHG Al Ain Chapter Committee

Committee members:

Chair: Brien Holmes; **Vice Chair** Brigitte Howarth; **Treasurer:** Jodie Healy; **Secretary:** Cheryl Dance; **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:** vacant; **Ordinary Members:** Bill Jones, Amer Abu Kuhail, Joseph Mansour

Visit the webpage at www.enhg.org or contact us at enhg@yahoo.com (all Al Ain chapter members).

Committee meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month 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.

Upcoming Events

2011		
February 01	Committee Meeting	
February 08	General Meeting	Danat Resort (former Interconti)
February 15		
February 22	General Meeting	Danat Resort
February 24-26	IEW	Liwa oasis
March 01	Committee Meeting	
March 08	General Meeting	Danat Resort
March 15		
March 22	General Meeting	Danat Resort
March 29		

If you have any questions about the chapter and its activities, you will probably find an answer or explanation in the “New Members’ Pack”.

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 03 December Jazirah oasis, one of the oases that is no longer occupied but is still being worked. Jazirah, or 'island', has never had many modern developments so was an opportunity to see how life in a mountain oasis community was in recent years.

Friday 07 January Jebel Abyar hike as warm-up for the TCH

Saturday 08 January Jimi Oasis in winter. With the arrival of winter, work has picked up as the farmers prepare the date palms for the next crop season.

Friday 14 January First Triple Crescent Hike (TCH) to Jebel Ghuwail (Swiss mountain)

Saturday 29 January Jebel Hafit tombs and Mezyad Fort

The tombs at the base of the slope on the eastern side of Jebel Hafit date back to the 3rd millenium BC, the Hafit Period (3200-2700 BC) of the Bronze Age

The Mezyad Fort is one of the installations used by the Trucial Oman Scouts who, while based in Sharjah, maintained outposts throughout Trucial Oman < http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trucial_Oman_Scouts >. Established in 1951, the TOS is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2011 and special commemorative events are planned for later this year. The University of Exeter, as a part of its Centre for Gulf Studies, has an excellent article

< <http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/iaais/centres/gulf/TOS.php> > on the Scouts.

Scenic drive to Fujairah with stops at interesting sites (see report below)

As usual in winter season there happened some rainfalls which make the wadis to torrents and the mountain walls to waterfalls.



RECENT GENERAL MEETINGS

Lord Howe Island

Tuesday, 14 December 2010,

with Steve James

Our special guest speaker this evening was Steve James who is one of the country's leading experts on biodiversity. He recently visited Lord Howe Island to study biodiversity there. He spoke to us on biodiversity and issues that are relevant to both island habitats like Lord Howe and areas here in the UAE and northern Oman.

Islands in the sea are much like habitat islands on land. True islands are surrounded by water as a barrier for species to disperse, which can cause challenges to biodiversity, including a decline in genetic biodiversity and extinction. The sandy desert habitats of the UAE have been fragmented by development such as roads, fences, communities, all causing the same isolation of an island habitat. These developments cause habitats to be broken into habitat islands.

Steve used the examples and challenges that exist on Lord Howe Island to illustrate and explain the threat to biodiversity we encounter in the UAE and Northern Oman.

The White Gold of the Desert

Tuesday, 11 January 2011,

Our special guest speaker on this evening was Dr. Ulli Wernery, director of the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory < <http://www.cvrl.ae/> > in Dubai. Dr. Wernery discussed camel milk and some of its unique characteristics.

When Dr. Wernery last spoke to the Al Ain chapter about camel milk (2001) there were no commercial supplies; since then, commercial dairies in the UAE, including Al Ain Dairy < <http://www.alaindairyuae.com/> > have made camels' milk available to a wider population. The health characteristics were among the qualities promoted when Al Nasma < <http://www.al-nasma.com/> > introduced camel milk chocolate to the world, another development since Dr. Wernery's last visit.

You can see Dr. Wernery discussing the benefits of camel milk on this YouTube clip < <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dm2-We5NlbE> > in which he notes that camel milk has less fat and five times more vitamin C than regular milk from dairy cows.

Last season, Dr. Wernery spoke on the impact of pollution in the UAE, notably the plastic bags, rope and string that livestock consume. He and staff from the CVRL recovered large clumps -- about the size of a football -- from the stomachs of camels that had ingested the plastic from rubbish bins and scattered throughout the desert. A copy of his presentation on plastic pollution < <http://www.enhg.org/resources/articles/wernery/fatal.pps> > is available on the ENHG website.

Dr. Wernery and others who conduct research at CVRL have contributed numerous research papers, as noted on the CVRL website, regarding all manner of avian and mammalian diseases and conditions. He has been a regular contributor to the Abu Dhabi chapter's publication 'Tribulus', as well.

Oil-Geology in the Middle-East

Tuesday, 25 January 2011,

Steve Ehrenberg is now at the Oil and Gas Research Center at Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat. Before he was a professor in the geology department of UAE University; Steve presented 'Middle East Petroleum Geology'.

During his talk, he presented numerous pictures, tables, facts and figures about:

1. Where the oil is: How much oil is there in the Middle East, in terms of reserves in different countries and the ages and locations of reservoirs?
2. ME geological history: How were the petroleum reservoir layers formed, and why is there so much oil here?
3. Examples of ME oil & gas fields: A brief look at a few examples of different kinds of ME oil & gas fields.
4. Reservoir geoscience: What is it petroleum geologists do anyway?

At the end of his presentation people had a lot of questions answered by Steve.

Hint: Among the books available for members are copies of Samir Hanna's "Guide to the Geology of Oman". The Historical Association of Oman has had this popular field guide reprinted and there are a limited number of copies available for sale to members. The guide includes several field trips for those interested in the amazing geology of the Oman peninsula.

Weaving Workshop

Members enjoyed learning the steps of preparing palm leaves and basket weaving methods that are found in the local markets. It was quickly discovered that this craft of weaving looked easier than it actually was. A few brave souls eventually got the knack of two over, two under while others just smiled and quietly watched. We started with eight strands to weave a strip that could later be wound in a circular shape to form a mat, basket or cone. For larger projects the women use 20 leaves to begin! We learned that there is a method to making your weave curved. As the strands became shorter a new piece was inserted along the left or right side wherever needed.

The preparation of the leaves involves splitting the palm leaf down the length to have a thin strip to work with. The leaves are set in the sun for three days to dry then placed in water for a couple hours to be pliable again.



Depending on what is to be made determined if the full width of the leaf is used as in larger projects of mats or sacks, but for intricate baskets a split leaf is used. Nowadays the dyes tend to be a modern chemical rather than natural material as in the past.

Village One and Two

In December a handful of us were offered a unique experience to visit abandoned villages with a person who actually lived there as a child. Abdulla Kaabi was our guide for the day as he shared his personal knowledge of who lived where and what animals stayed in which buildings. He told us about which fields were his family plots and that Village One had five families living there. While standing in a semi-circle of stones he reminisced about the times when they trashed the wheat to get the seed for making flour. We were shown where the pots set for cooking and where particular palm, lemon, lime, orange trees once grew. It sounded like a productive environment with a little trading for dried fish, and rice. Stories of water flowing in the wadi filled our imaginations with past hope of better times.

Village Two had three large families occupying that area. This village had two falaj systems, one for the lower fields and the other higher up the wall of the wadi to serve the higher terraced fields. We learned about the mosque, cooking areas, guesthouse, storage rooms, cemetery headstones and animal pens. The food was simple back in the day made of milk, dates, bread or rice. Walls were built to trap and guide rainwater as it ran down the hillside for the advantage of irrigation.



Jimi Oasis tour

with Amer

Amer lead a small group through Jimi Oasis, showing places of lots of banana trees and explained to the group about how we use the banana leaf to cover the meat when we are cooking it under the ground and then passed by some cows and sheep farms.

One report of the trip is shown as facsimile below (written by 7 year old Manar, the daughter of Almond and Mary):

My first trip to the Jimi Oasis:
by Manar.

On Sunday we went to the Jimi
Oasis with Amer.

It was fun!!!!

We walked around and looked at lots of things.
We saw a lizard and a gecko and a moth and an
angry ant!!!!!! We saw old buildings
and a fort. We also saw a big old
Ghaf tree. I loved it!

Fujairah Drive Trip

First of all, credit to Cheryl for the itinerary and the organisation that saw a convoy of 13 vehicles and around 40 people all the way to Fujairah and a lot of fun, despite some difficult driving conditions.

The trip focused on history and culture, with chances to stop and examine rock art and speculate on its age, creators and what was the motivation. Some of the works may well have been done as territory markers; others perhaps as pure art or to pass away the time, but many were photographed and discussed.



A stop was made at al-Hayl fortified courtyard house, whose ladders were so difficult to climb that many of the group didn't make it to the top. You had to wonder if this was a deliberate feature, to make defence of the upper levels easier against an attacking force that had broken through the outer walls and the door of the fort.

Another stop was made at Fujairah Museum, which the group found to be an interesting little place. Many artefacts of

past life were well displayed. The small museum was packed with many displays.

At the Friday bull pushing, the group found a fascinating event. Huge bulls pushed each other while photographers clustered around them like flies. At one point, most of the audience took off running when one got loose and ran around the rail to where spectators were sitting. All ended well, with everyone seeming to accept it as part of the fun.

This memorable trip finished with some walking on the beach and an excellent meal at the Public Cafe on the Corniche in Kalba. Some members took a quick walk through the nearby Kalba fish market before heading home.

Bob Studholme

Remarks/ Reviews

Environmental assessment for a biosphere reserve in the eastern region of the United Arab Emirates with help of geoinformatics

A PhD dissertation of the University of Greifswald, Germany, "Environmental assessment for a biosphere reserve in the eastern region of the United Arab Emirates with help of geoinformatics" by Dr Eslam, Water Resources Management department of Ajman University, is downloadable on website:

<http://ub-ed.ub.uni-greifswald.de/opus/volltexte/2010/822/pdf>

DACH 'Dawn of History' exhibition

Some members will have noticed the erection of a temporary building adjacent to the Jahili Fort. An article at the Middle East Online website < <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=43416> > begins:

"The Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture & Heritage (ADACH) is organising an exhibition next to the Al Jahili Fort in Al-Ain City to highlight a historic excavation by Danish archaeologists in Abu Dhabi between 1958 and 1972."

The exhibition will include the Umm an-Nar settlement, the Hafit graves, Hili Grand Tomb, Hili Tower, and Qarn bint Saud. The first site, located on the mainland coast close to Abu Dhabi island, was one of the first sites visited by the Danish team led by P.V. Glob and T.G. Bibby. The other four sites are located in and around Al Ain.

The exhibition is scheduled to open in February but the exact opening and closing dates were not noted. Watch for more details in the local media.

More interesting things about the date palm

Each date palm requires considerable maintenance. The dead and dieing leaves must be removed, the 'stumps' from last winter's cleaning must be trimmed back closer to the trunk, and the head of the palm prepared for the eruption of the spathes in a few weeks. The flower pods or spathes resemble the pollen spathes <<http://www.enhg.org/alain/phil/spathe/spathe.htm>> which many of our members have seen on sale in the souq. Elsewhere on the date palm, the fibrous material at the base of each leaf is removed. The leaves and fibrous material was all used though today these constitute agricultural waste.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN has an excellent summary of date palm cultivation at < <http://www.fao.org/docrep/t0681e/t0681e00.htm> > which includes a link to an article on the traditional uses of other parts of the data palm < <http://www.fao.org/docrep/t0681e/t0681e10.htm#a> >. Some members enjoyed learning to weave items from date palm leaves earlier this season.

There is more on oasis culture and date palm cultivation in Phil Iddison's article on the Al Ain Oasis < <http://www.enhg.org/alain/phil/alainoasis/alainoasis.html> >.

Dragonflies update

The latest edition of Agrion, the newsletter of the Worldwide Dragonfly Association, was published online today. It is freely available at:

<http://ecoevo.uvigo.es/WDA/>

There are two articles on UAE dragonflies and a report on the conference that I presented a talk on UAE and Oman dragonflies in Portugal last summer.

If you have more questions about dragonflies please contact our specialist Bob Reimer.

Master Plan for Heritage Conservation in Al Ain at Total Arts

by Ege Yildrin (ADACH)

The lecture on 8th December 2010 presented master planning efforts of the Abu Dhabi Authority for culture and Heritage (ADACH), Emirate of Abu Dhabi, which are aimed at conserving local tangible cultural heritage within the accelerating urban development process, namely the Al Ain Oasis Master plan.

Here are the links to the presentation and the paper:

Presentation:

https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0B_YcPYWyhlzhYTVjZWRkYzctZDU2Yy00MjIzLWlxYjMtNTljNGIyOGFkYzEy&sort=name&layout=list&pid=0B_YcPYWyhlzhY2E4NWU5YTktY2YzZC00ZWExLTlkMzItZWUwNDA2OTkxY2Nm&cindex=33

Paper:

http://www.isocarp.net/Data/case_studies/1705.pdf

Library things

Don't forget, if you're looking for information in print-media take a look at our library www.librarything.com/catalog/enhg. We have numerous books and publishings about flora, fauna, architecture and geology of this area.

Books for Sale

Available at ENHG meetings

Wild About Reptiles

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.
Price AED 50.

Wild About Mammals

By Marijcke Jongbloed

Another guide which should be in the library of anyone in the UAE interested in the mammals found in this part of the world.
Price AED 50.

Butterflies of Saudi Arabia

By Torben B. Larsen

A must have book if you like butterflies. It is highly readable and shows more than 147 species of butterflies that flourish on the Arabian Peninsula. It shows species that unique only to the peninsula. 99% of all Arabian butterflies can be identified from this book!
Price AED 100

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.
Price AED 75.

Jebel Hafit

By: ADCO and ENHG

This book describes the natural history of Jebel Hafit, geology, archaeology flora and fauna of the area. It gives an insight into the region's geography, history and natural history. The mountain is a result of late Tertiary tectonic activity.
Price AED 100

Native Plants of Oman

By Clive Winbow

This is a handy guide for the amateur naturalist to identify over 150 wild plants that are commonly seen on walks in the Omani countryside.
Price AED 80

Wildflowers of the UAE

This is the result of many years of dedicated fieldwork 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.
Price AED 100.

Salt Tolerant Plants of the UAE

By Fawzi M Karim and Abdullah J Dadheel

This handbook provides a simple identification guide to 125 wild and cultivated plant species in the UAE, both common plants and rare ones. There are color pictures, text descriptions, flowering time, distributions, potential uses and much more valuable information for the flora enthusiast.

Price AED 70

Birds of Al Jabal Al Akhdar

By Jens Eriksen

This book describes all known birds of Jabal Akhdar up to Feb 2008, and contains histograms of where birds occur, information on how, when to visit, and has good images.

Price: AED 50

Oman Bird List, Edition 6 (Nov 2003)

By Jens Eriksen, Dave E. Sargeant and Reginald Victor

This book includes a status for all 482 species of birds in Oman, breeding maps for all breeding species, histograms for all migratory species and 170 color photographs

Price AED 30

Bird ID cards

AED 10 each

Birdwatching Guide to Oman (2nd edition)

By Dave E. Sargeant and Hanne & Jens Eriksen

The authors have combined field experience to produce this guide to finding and watching birds. The site guide covers 60 of Oman's top bird watching sites, each with maps and list of birds recorded. Also includes a bird calendar for spotting birds, and many photographs.

Price AED 100

Arthropod Fauna of the UAE, Volume 1

Edited by Antonius Van Harten

The first volume of so far 3. The project intends to create an insect inventory for the UAE. Volume 1 covers 570 species of which most were new records to the UAE in 2007. The book includes species descriptions, images, diagrams and some habitat descriptions.

Price AED 100

Tribulus, 2009

Price AED 50

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.

Back issues are free!

ENHG vehicle window sticker

Price AED 10

Dates for your diary	Links
February 2011 08 General meeting (Danat Resort) 15 22 General meeting (Danat Resort) 24-26 IEW organized by Abu Dhabi Chapter	Dragonflies!!!! IUCN Odonata Specialist Group Red-veined darter: http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20091129/NATIONAL/711289837 Agrion newsletter http://ecoevo.uvigo.es/WDA/
March 2011 01 Committee meeting 08 General meeting (Danat Resort) 15 22 General meeting (Danat Resort) 29	Wildlife Middle East News: www.wmenews.com Desert oasis: http://www.environmentalgraffiti.com/featured/desert-oasis/2257
April 2011 05 Committee meeting 12 General meeting (Danat Resort) 19 26 General meeting (Danat Resort)	Mike Gillett's contribution to our website http://www.enhg.org/alain/mike/contrib.htm >. Phil Idissons contributions on our website: http://www.enhg.org/alain/phil/contrib.htm
May 2011 03 Committee meeting 10 General meeting (Danat Resort). Last submittal date for photo exhibition 17 24 General meeting (Danat Resort) with Photo exhibition	EMEG, Ghantoot Contact nahed@emeg.ae for more details. EWS-WWF www.ews-wwf.ae Contact Nancy.dsouza@hillandknowlton.com for more details/ information.

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. 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. 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.

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

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

New members' package

Most members hear about the Emirates Natural History Group from a friend or colleague. Some learn about the Group, and the Al Ain chapter, when doing an Internet search about the UAE and Al Ain during the course of applying for employment in the UAE.

The chapter has been in existence for 30 years this season. Over that time, the chapter has evolved as the individuals changed from season to season. For the past few seasons, the chapter has settled into a routine of combining field trips, general meetings and special events and activities.

For those who would like to know more about the chapter and how it manages itself, there is a document on the website at < http://www.enhg.org/alain/committee/new_members_package.htm > known as the New Members' Pack.

This is actually a collection of documents that works like an FAQ file, answering most of the questions individuals have about the organization.

One of the topics covered, for example, is field trips with a discussion about appropriate clothing, things members could do to prepare for a field trip, conduct on a field trip, and safety. There is a brief discussion of the events which are repeated most seasons including an Iftar Dinner during Ramadan, the photography exhibition, and the Annual General Meeting.

There is a brief discussion of the services available for members including the Newsletter, the website, the email service, and the library.

The version of the New Members' Pack on the website will be updated following this season's annual general meeting.

General

Again: don't forget to carry your **camera** wherever you go. We want your best shots of fauna, flora, peoples and places for our **annual photo exhibition**, scheduled this season for the second meeting in May 2011 (photos to be submitted at the chapter's first meeting in May).

If anybody has special **intentions or interests** for visits, hikes, explorations etc. he/she should get in contact with any member of the committee.

The newsletter depends also on **YOUR contributions!** If you have any reports, sketches, stories, pictures, encounters, poems, etc. you want to share with our community please submit to rolfried@yahoo.de