

# GAZELLE

Vol 27 no 7 July/August 2012



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

**DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP**

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

## Members' News

### A fond farewell

Gazelle Editor Clare O'Hare will leave the UAE in August. Clare returns to London to work for the law firm that she was with in Dubai. She expects to be involved with Middle Eastern transactions and hopes this will result in some visits to Dubai. We are in her debt for producing the newsletter for the past year and for recruiting her successors.

At the same time, we are pleased to welcome new editors Fiona Leen and Sonya Benjamin.



**Sonya Benjamin** has been in the UAE for a year, working for the UAE University on a project involving the breeding biology and conservation of the Socotra Cormorant. In her free time, she enjoys travelling, camping, hiking, and photography as well as playing music and learning new languages. She is excited to contribute towards the

Gazelle and is looking forward to the upcoming season.

**Fiona Leen** is an English and History graduate with a Masters in Journalism. She came to Dubai for four weeks in February 2011 and never went home.



Her interests include watersports, tennis, travel and learning guitar.

### Foreign correspondence

**Anne Millen**, our former newsletter editor and favourite itinerant naturalist, writes from Sri Lanka that: "75 Eliot Road is proving interesting. There are so many moths, butterflies, beetles, spiders, ants, fireflies etc that I think I see a new one every day. Then there are the larger critters such as monitors, mongoose, squirrels (incredibly noisy!), monkeys, and the weirdest dogs, which Peter mistook for lambs. Oh, and a whole bunch of lizards including one which is very long and fine,

### ***DNHG Membership***

DNHG Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dhs.100 for couples/families and Dhs 50 for singles. Membership is valid from Sep 2011 to Sep 2012. You can **join or renew at our meetings or by sending us your details and a cheque made out to: Lloyds TSB Bank account no. 60600669933501.** (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG.)

**DNHG membership entitles you to participate in field trips** and helps pay for our lecture hall, publication and distribution of our monthly newsletter, the Gazelle, our post office box, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.

all angles and poses, and looks like the lizard equivalent of a praying mantis. It's a fascinating place. Little Ishara (son of housekeeper Nilanka) apparently thinks it very strange that I photograph insects, but nevertheless collects them for me, and always knows which ones I have not seen before. He might yet make an entomologist."

### **This Month's Contributors**

**The Editor would like to thank the following for their reports and**

Sonya Benjamin  
Gary Feulner  
Mairead Porter  
Anne Millen  
Dr. Ulli Wernery

Brigitte Howarth  
Margaret Swan  
Dr. Reza Khan  
Dr. Ulrich Wernery  
Clare O'Hare



White-tailed lapwing  
©Charlie Moores, birdforum.net

## Birdwatching at Dubai Pivot Fields with Neil Tovey

**Date:** Sat 28 Sept 2012

**Time:** 0630, 2-3 hrs

**Difficulty:** Flat tracks but we could cover a distance of 2-3 kms

**Equipment:** Binoculars essential, telescope optional. Walking shoes and Sun Hat. Water.

**Species:** 254+ species (including escapes) have been recorded at the fields.

There is a good breeding population of **White-tailed Lapwings** and this will be the star bird on the day. Given the time of year we can expect small no's of other waders and lapwings as they will be migrating through the UAE (Ruff, Little Stint, Temmincks Stint etc).

**Pipits and wagtails** should also be in attendance (Red Throated, Tawny and Water Pipits plus White, multiple sub species of Yellow, and possibly Citrine Wagtail).

In addition we may see several species of **heron, egrets and ibis** (Grey Heron, Cattle Egret, Glossy Ibis). All told we can expect up to 50 species in the morning and given we will be in the autumn migration period anything could, and often does, turn up!

**Directions:** Dubai Pivot Fields  
Take the main road (Road 44) from Dubai to Hatta/Oman. After approx 18 km from Sheik Zayed Road, passing Dragon Mart and International City on your right side, you will see a brown sign to 'Dubai Textile City'. Take this exit. After another 160m, take the turnoff to your left and drive 940m along the fence of Dubai Pivot Fields to the gate. The gate is located at Google Earth coordinates 25.164583 , 55.430979. Park outside the gate.

## Trip to Georgia, 20—27 October 2012 (Eid holidays)

Gamarjoba!\*

In April, I was extremely lucky to spend two weeks in Georgia: this is located on one of the earth's great crossroads (the Silk Road) and it has often been named "the most beautiful country on earth". With the spectacular snow-capped Caucasian mountains, the fertile valleys, beautiful forests, ancient monuments (many of them from the BCE-era), cave monasteries, the excellent food, wine and chacha (local grape vodka), and of course the people themselves, Georgia offers a lovely escape from the UAE heat.



Beautiful Kvareli Lake

Tourism has only just started: Georgians are putting the Soviet era behind them and look forward to developing and opening up their country to the rest of the world.

I had the pleasure to be in the company of Marina Javakishvili, a local guide, who took me to the most remarkable places in the province of Kakheti in East Georgia. We visited remote and mysterious monasteries, beautiful parks, villages and cities and even an obscure chacha distillery in a shack of an old villager Nicola.

Marina has proposed a programme for the DNHG in October.

Contd on page 3 . . .

## Our Next Speaker

### Gary Feulner

Gary Feulner has had a lifelong interest in evolutionary biology, biogeography and ecology, as well as the evolution of the earth itself.

He holds degrees in geology from Princeton and Yale universities and did academic field work in the Northern Apennines, the Zambian Copperbelt and the Andes of southern Ecuador. Although he subsequently practised professionally as a corporate lawyer he has continued to indulge his scientific interests in the UAE, where for more than 25 years he has explored widely (much of it in the era before fences), observing and studying a broad range of animals, plants and natural phenomena.

He is the author or co-author of the (so far) definitive surveys of the wadi fish, freshwater and land snails, dragonflies and intertidal molluscs of the UAE and northern Oman, as well as the flora of the mountains of the Musandam Peninsula (the Ru'us al-Jibal).

He has also published on the geology of the UAE and on discrete aspects of local climate, geomorphology and the behaviour and/or ecology of selected species, and has made substantial contributions to databases for UAE reptiles and UAE butterflies.

He has been Chairman of the Dubai Natural History Group for more than 15 years.

His presentation will be a wide ranging pictorial introduction to the geology and geography of the mountains of the UAE and to the diversity of plants and animals that can be found there, including both common species that visitors to the mountains are most likely to see and rare ones that they should be on the lookout for. Along the way, he will try to indicate the many resources that exist today for the study of local natural history, and also to highlight questions still to be answered.



Email your field reports and news to [leenfiona@gmail.com](mailto:leenfiona@gmail.com) and [sbenj792@gmail.com](mailto:sbenj792@gmail.com) (Arial 10 justified).

Please send your photographs as **separate .jpg files** (preferably compressed for documents).

Contd from page 2 . . .

This is the month of vintage and festivals in the Kakheti region: a lot of sightseeing and activities are guaranteed. Marina's son, Zura Javakishvili, is an ornithologist and will hold an evening lecture for the group in Tbilisi, the beautiful capital, about the diversity of natural landscapes and wildlife in Georgia.

#### Details of the trip:

**Dates:** 20 to 27 October (during the Eid break)

Average price of the trip: **550 euro per person** (based on 12 people). This includes transport to/from Tbilisi airport, accommodation, sightseeing and most meals. There is no discount for children as the price is already kept to the minimum.

**Rooms:** the price is based on twin sharing basis. If you would prefer a single room, this can be arranged but the price has still to be confirmed by the local guide Marina.

**Flights:** Flydubai (**around 1000 AED pp**) – flights are early in the morning. The Dubai Tbilisi flight lasts only 3 hours and the airport is just a 15 minute drive from Tbilisi city centre.

Local Guide: Marina Javakishvili

**Trip coordinator:** Christine Verreydt – if you are interested, send an email to [infinistan@gmail.com](mailto:infinistan@gmail.com). You will receive a full program of the trip.

**Local Trip Coordinator:** Sonja Lavrenčič

## Three most venomous land snakes of the UAE

By Dr. Reza Khan

United Arab Emirates' varied habitats support a good variety of reptiles dominated by lizards in one hand and snakes on the other. Here I am emphasising on the three commonly encountered venomous land snakes of the UAE.

### Arabian Horned Viper

UAE venomous land snakes are represented only by 3 species of vipers and 1 species of false vipers. It is devoid of elapid or cobra family members. The largest and the heaviest among the vipers is the Sand Viper, also called Horned Viper although most specimens do not possess horns.



Arabian Horned Viper  
© Dr. Tony Phelps

By and large, all vipers have narrow necks, large heads to accommodate two pairs of fangs and venom glands and heavy bodies that separate these from all the other land snakes of the UAE barring the mildly venomous cat snake that has a large but flattish head and narrow neck and very elongated body.

Rather featureless and sandy brown in basic colour, some specimens may show a few markings. It feeds largely on rodents and some birds. It kills prey by injecting venom and is deadly for human beings. Unlike most vipers this one is an egg layer and is approximately 60 cm in length.

### Carpet Viper

This is the longest venomous land snake of the UAE, measuring

nearly 80 to 90 cm and has a much more pronounced head and the narrowest neck as well as the most colourful body.

This species is restricted to the hills and foothill countries only.

Of the commonly seen three species of vipers this is the only one that can be found close to waterbodies in wadis and in addition to other vertebrates, the Carpet Viper also eats toads that live in or near wadis. It produces live babies. It is deadly venomous too.

### Arabian Rearfang

One of the largest semi-desert loving snakes of the UAE found in sparsely vegetated areas of foothill countries. In *Zygophyllum* and *Cornulaca* plants dominated desert it is active at daytime feeding on small rodents, lizards, bird chicks and even small snakes. It reproduces through laying eggs.

If cornered or disturbed it can raise its head and front part of the body at the same time flattening the neck region and tilting it towards the intruder giving it an appearance to some extent similar to a 'cobra', hence its other name is false cobra.

It is mildly venomous and considered not dangerous for people. Measures about 140 cm.

### Sochurek's Saw-scaled Viper

It is possibly the most common venomous land snake of the UAE, preferring semi-desert to coastal areas and the hill countries as well as farming areas.

This viper is very colourful, heavy bodied and shortish. Its feeding habit is similar to the Sand Viper. Additionally it eats house mice as it lives close to human habitations.

This viper produces live babies instead of laying eggs.

It is the most deadly venomous snake of the country and most human fatalities or envenomation come from this species.



## **Uzbekistan Heritage Trip**

**By Mairead Porter**

In May, eight members of the DNHG went on a privately arranged trip to Uzbekistan.

The focus was the heritage, architecture and history of this Central Asian country.

This is a truly fascinating country both in its history over the past 1000 years and the wonderful Muslim architecture built by Tamberlane, Ulugbeg and many others.

Present day Uzbekistan also presents very different attitudes and has very close ties with Russia.



**DNHG members in Uzbekistan**

Flying from Dubai to Tashkent and then back to Sharjah allowed a nine day tour which took in the three main **Silk Road cities of Samarkand, Bokhara and Khiva.**

Modes of travel included train, mini bus and 1 internal flight from Urgench (Khiva) back to Tashkent.

If any other DNHG members would like to go there I can give them the relevant information on visas, travel on Uzbekistan Airways (which was excellent) and details of the first class tour agency we used – this would make a trip that could be difficult to arrange much easier. I was helped by Renee Williams who did a similar trip 2 years ago.

### **Additional Information**

Contact Mairead if you need more information.

[portermme@hotmail.com](mailto:portermme@hotmail.com)

For background information:

[http://www.orexca.com/tours\\_uzbekistan.shtml](http://www.orexca.com/tours_uzbekistan.shtml)

For pre-arranged trips, both cultural and on natural history:

<http://www.uzbekjourneys.com/>

## **Seaham Harbour Rock Pools**

**By Margaret Swan**

A dangerous coastline of Grace Darling fame, Seaham Harbour lies a little south of Bamburgh, the spectacular incoming tide nonetheless, gushes over the sea wall and many lives have been lost at sea.



**Rock pools of Seaham**

Following in childhood tradition, I teamed up with a fellow-minded 10 year old Sunderland supporter, to inspect the rock pools. The tide was out and conditions were perfect for pool inspection.

The wild North Sea had left behind some interesting specimens including a starfish and a crab, trying in vain to hide underneath a strand of seaweed/kelp, surrounded by sea anemones wearing their bright jewel-like reds and oranges, adorning the rocks in abundance.



Limestone rock was encrusted with clinging barnacles big and

small, waiting patiently for the tide to return (experts may identify more creatures). Green was everywhere seaweed, kelp and some sort of sea grass.



### **Additional information**

<http://www.seaham.com/>

Read about forthcoming research on seaweed:

<http://www.wildlifeextra.com/go/news/seaweed-england.html>

## **Birds of the Jebel Akhdar**

**Report by Gary Feulner**

**Photographs by Dr. Ulli Wernery**

Prof. Dr. Ulli Wernery is best known for his expertise in the biology and pathology of camels, but he is also a serious birdwatcher and bird photographer and recently exercised his avocation in the Jebel Akhdar of Oman.

Presented here are Ulli's photos of two bird species not commonly seen.



**Sooty Falcon (*Falco concolor*)**

The Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* is only an occasional visitor to the mountains.

The Long-Billed Pipit *Anthus similis* is said to be a common summer breeding visitor in the Jebel Akhdar.

In the UAE it has long been consid-



## Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan  
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Archaeology - David Palmer  
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Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi  
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Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner  
res 306 5570  
fax 330 3550

Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers  
res 349 4816,  
fax 340 0990  
email: valeriechalmers@hotmail.com

Plants – Valerie Chalmers

### Seashells, Birds and Mammals - Recorders needed!

The recorders are not necessarily scientific experts in their designated fields. In fact, most are not. However, they are interested and knowledgeable amateurs - please contact them if you have any interesting reports or queries.

The intention is that information will be channelled through to the *Gazelle* editor, so new information can be shared with all our readers.



ered a mountain resident, but it may migrate within the region.

It is shy and generally uncommon -- so much so that it has often been referred to as "the elusive Long-Billed Pipit".



Long-Billed Pipit *Anthus similis*

It is also one of the species that is a suspected host for eggs of the common Cuckoo.

Thanks to Jens Eriksen for confirming the IDs and the status of these birds in the Jebel Akhdar.

### More on Bezoar

Professor Dr. Ulrich Wernery of Dubai's Central Veterinary Research Laboratory has written to provide further information about the (formerly) enigmatic bezoar – camel hairballs – discussed in the June *Gazelle*.

"Yes, these are bezoars but not bezoar stones. 'Stones' is too much. [The ones shown in the *Gazelle*] are from a cow or a camel and you can find many 10, 15, 20 in the rumen of one animal.

The animal must have died at this spot. Small ruminants like sheep/goats/gazelles have much smaller hair balls in their rumen.

In one sheep rumen I once found more than 40 of different size. I keep them at CVRL." (Ulli did not say, however, whether he uses them to protect himself against arsenic poisoning.)

### Staying up with the Night Queen

By Gary Feulner

Chairman Gary Feulner is in the US for this summer, and on August 8 was treated by his brother in Tennessee to the accompanying photographs of an unusual floral spectacle:

"The Night Queen, *Epiphyllum oxypetalum*, is a variety of night-blooming Cereus. Mine is two years old and had its first bloom Monday night after I noticed the bud while talking to you on the phone Sunday. Unfortunately it only blooms one day a year at hours most would rather sleep. However this one is very happy in its location and container and I expect several blooms at one time next year."



Moonflower at dusk



Moonflower at 3am



Moonflower at 6am



# End of Season Dinner

Photo quiz - Guess the location by Clare O'Hare



For those of you who didn't attend the End of Season dinner and want to test your knowledge of the UAE: **Answers on page 7**



|                        | <b>name</b>  | <b>tel home</b>           | <b>tel office</b>  | <b>fax</b> |
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### Reminder: Snails and slugs

A reminder, especially for new members: Your unwanted garden snails and slugs are of interest for scientific study and an accounting of the terrestrial snails of the UAE.

All specimens will be gratefully accepted by Chairman Gary Feulner, and contributors will be kept informed of progress and pedigrees. Suburban gardens are home to several native Arabian snails, but also a number of introduced species. There have already been a few surprises and we know that more are out there.

Dead shells are preferred; we'll follow up if you've got something unusual. It's easy. Just bag 'em and tag 'em! Please remember to record the location and the habitat, as well as your name, the date, and any remarks.

### Photo quiz answers

From top (left to right)

1. Terminal 3, Dubai Airport
2. Trade Centre (in front of Ibis)
3. Dubai Media City
4. Ras Al Khor (1980s)
5. Sharjah Cultural Square Mosque
6. Atlantis Aquarium IEW 2012
7. Beehive Tombs, Jebel Hafit
8. Tal Moreb, Liwa
9. Al Bidiya Mosque

10. Yas Marina Hotel
11. Dubai Creek
12. Fujairah F2 Power Plant
13. Wadi al Helio
14. AD E Corniche
15. Emirate Palace Auditorium
16. Delma Island
17. Burj Khalifa
18. Fujairah Fort
19. Dubai Marina
20. Metro Falcon, Satwa / behind

## **Dubai Natural History Group Programme**

### **Lectures at Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management, 7.30 for 8.00pm**

Sep 16 Introduction to the Natural History of the UAE Mountains – Gary Feulner

Oct 7 Voyaging Before the Iron Age – Michael Creamer

### **Field Trips (Members only, please)**

Sep 29 (Sat): Birdwatching at Dubai Pivot Fields with Neil Tovey

Oct 20-27: Trip to Georgia

**Further field trips, details or changes to trips will be announced/confirmed by e-mail circular.**