



# GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

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<b>Contributors—</b>	
<i>Thanks to the following for their contributions:</i>	
Angela Manthorpe, Mary Picard, Alexis Biller, Carol Goodwright, Carine Vannie, Hiba Allam, Michelle Sinclair, Gary Feulner and Binish Roobas.	
<b>Send your contributions for the next issue to:</b>	
<a href="mailto:gazelleeditor@gmail.com">gazelleeditor@gmail.com</a>	
By 26th April, 2018	



## Wasit Wetland



Read about the Himalayan Tahr on page 5

Wasit Wetland Reserve and Center, established in 2015, covers a 4.5 km<sup>2</sup> enclosed area of mud flats, salty lagoon and fresh water streams. There is a semi-managed herd of sand gazelles in the reserve and hedgehogs are also in residence. The 4.5 km trail boasts 6 hides and takes about 1 hour to cover at a leisurely pace.



On 17th March, a group of 20 DNHG members enjoyed a private, pre-opening hours walk around the wetland with Simon Matthews, Assistant Operations Manager, and Jackie Strick, Head of Department for Arabian Tahr.

Wasit is home to a large resident bird population which are boosted outside of the summer months with migratory and wintering species – mainly shore and wading

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Announcements and Recorders

**Monthly Speaker -  
8pm on Sunday 8 April, 2018**

**Lecture Title - "Endless Forms Most Beautiful."**

**Biography - Nirmal Rajah**

With degrees in Zoology and Biotechnology, Nirmal Rajah is currently the Education coordinator at Mleiha Archaeological Centre in Sharjah. Nirmal is a passionate palaeontology enthusiast, and has been collecting and studying fossils for more than a decade. He believes that the study of fossils can unravel a world of wonder and learning for young, eager minds.

This talk is about fossils collected by Nirmal, who will have fossils on display on the night of the presentation. Nirmal will talk about the fossils that he has collected to date, where they fit into geological history and what they tell us about past and present life on earth.



Gastropod fossil

In 2015 Nirmal led an expedition to discover fossils in Ariyalur district in Tamil Nadu, India, which was later released as a documentary, aptly entitled "**Unearthing the Treasures of Ariyalur.**" The documentary was greatly appreciated within the academic circles in India and abroad.

### From the Editor:

DNHG urgently require volunteers for:

- Membership Secretary (and assistant).
- Mammal Recorder.

Contact any committee member if you can help out (contact details on p.8).

DNHG members have, not only actively participated in field trips this month, but some have also been making observations of their own in the field, involving a range of ecosystems.

The life cycle of the African Emigrant butterfly was studied in one session. Read about this on page 7.

The original Khor Fakkhan village, recently restored, was the focus on page 6, whilst on page 4, discoveries are still being made regarding Salut Castle in Oman. Enjoy your read!



Photo credit: Binish Roobas

### Historical Emirati Speaker

Last month's speaker, Lt. Col. Dr. Saif bin About Al Bedwawi is seen here being presented with a customary rock from Vice Chairman, Valerie Chalmers.

Lt. Col. Dr. Saif bin About Al Bedwawi gave a very interesting talk on the early pre and post-Federation days of Ras al Khaimah, with a particular emphasis on Dr. Miriam and Captain Tim Ash as a case study. Also attending the lecture were staff from the British Embassy.



Blue-cheeked bee-eater at Wasit Wetland Reserve (photo taken by Carine Vannie)

## DNHG Recorders

**Reptiles - Dr. Reza Khan**  
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**Insects - Gary Feulner** (contact as above)

**Fossils - Valerie Chalmers**  
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**Plants - Valerie Chalmers** (contact as above)

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**Mammals - new recorder  
needed!**

# Spotlight!

## DNHG Field Trip to Wasit Wetland Reserve and Centre, by Alexis Biller



Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*



Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita*



A 'friendly' Arabian Partridge *Alectoris melanocephala*

## DNHG Field Trip to the Islamic Botanical Garden, by Margaret Swan



Beetroot/Garden Beet *Beta vulgaris*



Saffron *Crocus sativus*



Tree bearing pine cones?



Islamic landscape



2018 Inter-Emirates Weekend (IEW )  
Abu Dhabi.

Diving trip photos taken  
by Alexis Biller

# Field Trips

## Salut Castle, Oman

When we visited this site, located near Jibreen Castle, last month there were three archaeologists in residence, led by Enrica.

Salut was first discovered when a tomb was found on top of a hill. Soon a more complex site emerged as digging progressed.

Access to the site is by invitation only and there are plans to develop the whole of the site into an archaeological park. Salut has a number of different developments from different eras starting with the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium. During the Bronze Age (3000-1300BC) large settlements were established in the area surrounding Salut Castle.

Settlement of this area continued into the Iron Age (1300-300BC) Bronze Age and shows development up to the late Iron Age.

When viewing the whole of the Salut site besides the central castle one sees beehive-shaped tombs that line the ridges and crests on the mountains surrounding Salut. These date back to the beginning of the Early Bronze Age.

Bronze Age towers are located in the Salut site over a distance of approximately two kilometres. The towers were built of large stone masonry blocks and have diameters of 20-25 meters. The furthest south of the towers has been extensively excavated by the Italian Mission to Oman in conjunction with the Diwan's office (Office of the Adviser to His Majesty the Sultan for Cultural Affairs).

There are three Bronze Age towers in the Salut castle complex. The presence of the well in the tower being investigated by the Italian mission shows that the earliest inhabitants knew how to exploit the underground water supply.

Even now the rain in the Salut plain can be very heavy and often damages the restoration work being carried out by the Italian mission.

When rebuilding walls the Italian mission have avoided the use of cement and have instead used techniques that would have been used in the Bronze and Iron Ages. They tried using resins and other chemical compounds but these were found not to resist the harsh weather conditions of the Salut plain.

During the Bronze Age local building materials were used to build the towers which were made of massive limestone blocks that have been well carved. In the Iron Age mud bricks were more commonly used for building.

Surrounding the tower is a system of channels, some up to four meters wide and very deep. These may have been part of an elaborate system of water management but this is still being investigated.



A small rectangular shrine located on the highest point of the Salut plain, comprising six columns and from the Early Iron Age period

(Continued from page 1)

birds. Simon explained that the spring migration was coming to an end and the nesting behaviors of permanent residents were starting to become evident. Our group was able to identify many types of shore bird such as Common Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Sanderlings and Black-winged Stilts. A Black-tailed Godwit was our unusual spot-of-the-day. Other birds identified included the Blue-eared Bee-Eaters, Western Reef Heron and a few flamingoes still migrating through.

Wasit also features a state-of-the-art aviary and education center. 7 separate aviary enclosures host a collection of birds either native or historically native Arabian Peninsula, including several threatened species. Species on hand included the Stone-Curlew, Northern Bald Ibis and the Pied Avocet –but there are many more rare species to be seen there. Simon was able to explain the philosophy and some of the technical issues surrounding the Centre's captive breeding program. Our group also delighted in watching a rescued nest of 4 Brown-necked Raven chicks being fed their second meal of the morning.

It is worth noting that the wetland and aviary are open year around, and the glassed-in observation hall of the aviary is an excellent viewing area for children and is handicapped accessible, making it well-suited to many types of visitor. There is even a small cafeteria. In the winter months visitors can ask to directly enter two visitor enclosures. For more details, visit <http://www.epaashj.ae/learning-centers/wasit-centre/>

*Contribution by Mary Picard*

*(cover photo by Alexis Biller—more photos taken by Alexis can be seen on the 'Spotlight' page).*



Brown-necked Raven chicks



Stone-Curlew

Objects imported to Salut also indicate contacts with the outside world; these include pottery from Iran and the Indus valley. Also found were agricultural implements and among the bronze objects found at Salut are several snakes. Snake patterns also adorn pottery found at the site. Snakes are also depicted frequently on some of the pottery and it seems that they played an important part in the early religious beliefs of the community at Salut.

Salut was uninhabited during the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium perhaps due to drought – the reasons are not fully known or understood.

*Contribution by Michelle Sinclair*

## Field Clips

### Himalayan Encounters

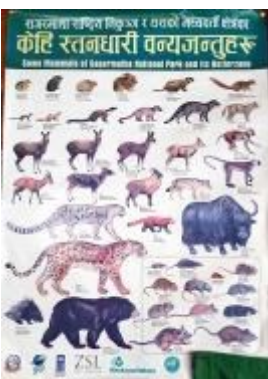
Towards the end of 2017 I spent some time hiking in both Bhutan and Nepal and was pleased to spot some of the local wildlife on my travels. I was only in Bhutan for a few days but on a trek up to a quiet monastery (c. 2000m elevation) I encountered a number of small and relatively tame creatures which I subsequently identified as the Himalayan goral (*Nemorhaedus goral*). These are members of the goat/antelope group that also includes the serow and takin (Bhutan's national animal), and whilst they are found across the Himalayan region it should be no surprise that they are vulnerable to extinction due to habitat loss.

I was in Nepal for a month with most of that in the Solukhumbu (Everest) region at altitudes over 3,000m, so my opportunities for wildlife spotting were much greater. I've never seen the elusive Arabian tahr in the UAE's mountains but I was pleased to have 3 quite close



encounters with the Himalayan tahr (*Hemitragus jemlahicus*). The first sighting was on the outskirts of the village of Thamo whilst I was taking my first

acclimatisation trek from Namche Bazaar. The group of 4 were intent on exploring precipitous ledges in search no doubt of some tasty morsels, but one after another the search ended in clattering hooves and clouds of dust as the animals lost traction and bounded down to more stable ground. I watched them for



some time as they proceeded to climb up an almost vertical cliff face and then out of view. The second sighting was on the busy path to Tengboche monastery with an inquisitive tahr happy to watch the procession of hikers passing on the trail below. The wind kept whipping up the magnificent ruff of hair on his shoulders.



The poster shown was quite helpful for identification and I was able to confirm that whilst waiting for a plate of momos one chilly afternoon I had a brief sighting of the slender Siberian weasel (*Mustela sibirica*) and, in the rocks of a glacial moraine, a large-eared Pika (*Ochotona macrotis*). I saw a couple of painted signs exhorting people to save the musk deer but did not see any live ones. During my trip I was reading Peter Matthiessen's classic book 'The Snow Leopard', his account of a journey to remote North Western Nepal in the winter of 1973. Even then he noted that the musk deer was fast disappearing from Nepal due to high demand for the musk pod, a gland under the male's belly skin which is used in the perfume trade.

*Contribution by Angela Manthorpe*



## Field Trips

### Khor Fakkhan Field Trip

Ulrike Andorff very kindly offered to lead a repeat visit to Khor Fakkhan on March 3rd, to see the town's Khor Fakkhan archaeological and heritage site and Wadi Shis. A party of about twenty DNHG members participated on the trip.

The visit to the archaeological and heritage site was led by Mr Firas Othman. The conservatory architect who is in charge of the project.

We were shown round the original village of Khor Fakkhan which dates back several hundred years and was originally the home of one single extended-family group. Since 2012, the village has been painstakingly restored and reconstructed to show how it was laid out and to preserve three distinct types of construction and illustrate the evolution in building techniques. The earliest and simplest were the 'areej' or dwellings made from date palms. Construction progressed to using 'guss' – a mixture of stones and mud moulded into blocks, then finally to homes made of fossilized coral cut into blocks and bonded with 'sarooj' a mix of red clay and manure. These materials are slow to conduct heat and were therefore cool in the summer months. The dwellings were usually surrounded by high walls with 'sikkas' of varying widths bisecting the settlement.

We also saw the pretty Salem Al Mutawa or the 'five dirham note' mosque which was originally constructed 200 years ago and named after a local resident who reputedly never missed a prayer time. It was renovated in 2011.



*The Salem Al Mutawa or the 'five dirham note' mosque*



Extract from the Koran

We had time to wander through the old souk which is still to be conserved.

The group then proceeded inland, through the mountains to the Omani enclaves of Wadi Madha and Nahwa. Although there are no borders, the enclaves are unmistakably Omani with well



*Styles of dwellings—note the pitched roof on the left and the veranda or 'sibla' attached to the house on the right*

-kept *falaj* irrigation channels, terraced cultivation, besides Omani flags and the occasional poster of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.

At the second-order enclave of Nahwa, we stopped at the *Al Marosa* wedding rock and some members of the group demonstrated their prowess as potential bridegrooms by managing to lift it.

We then proceeded to the cemetery where we could see a petroglyph of a text from the Holy Qu'ran.

There are other petroglyphs of horses and camels with riders, ibex and snakes as well as a variety of geometric forms carved onto the rocks in the Daftah area. They are believed to date from 1250-300BC and from the late pre-Islamic period to through the Islamic period (630 AD onwards).

At lunchtime the group made a short, but steep climb to enjoy the magnificent views while they enjoyed their packed lunches.

After lunch, we proceeded through the magnificent mountains to Hijar Bani Hamid where we made a photo stop before driving through Wadi Shis itself.

The day was most enjoyable and the group expresses its thanks to Ulrike Andorff for kindly arranging a repeat of this particular field trip.

*Contribution by Carol Goodwright*



# Field Clips



The African Emigrant – a relatively colorful female

## Butterfly Hunting: The African Emigrant

Successful butterfly observation, like many other endeavors, depends on a combination of preparation, skill and luck. This is the story of a successful combination.

Hoping to find eggs,

larvae or pupae of the African Emigrant *Catopsilia florella*, Binish Roobas and Gary Feulner stopped along a roadside in the Hajar Mountains in mid-January 2018, where a thin layer of silt had accumulated at a broad, shallow wadi crossing. A ground cover of annual plants had sprung up, and among them were a hundred or more flowering *Senna italica*, a known larval foodplant of the African Emigrant. Binish and Gary searched these for evidence of the butterfly but, after some time, they had found only a single egg and a single caterpillar.

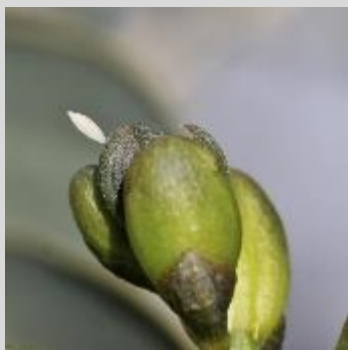


*Senna italica* along a Hajar Mountain roadside



An African Emigrant caterpillar on *Senna italica*

Then, just when Binish had set up to photograph the caterpillar, a female *C. florella* appeared and treated the pair to a whirlwind bout of egg-laying, visiting individual plants for only a few seconds and laying just a single egg on each one. The butterfly retraced the line of plants a few times, stopping once or twice to feed on nectar on the *Senna* flowers, and laying an estimated two to three dozen eggs over approximately five minutes before disappearing to parts unknown.



An African Emigrant egg on a flower bud of *Senna italica*

Contribution by Gary Feulner and Binish Roobas



## Jumeirah Jellies!

Whilst walking on the Jumeirah 1 public beach on 18th February, I spotted thousands of jellyfish eggs, washed up on the sand all along the beach.

I also observed what may have been a 'mummy' jellyfish in the water near the shore.

Contribution by Hiba Allam



# Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

April 8: Nirmal Rajah—"Endless Forms Most beautiful" - fossil display and presentation

May 6: Dr John Burt and Noura Al Mansouri

June 3: Dr Ada Natoli

## Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

March 30—April 7: DNHG trip to Eritrea

*Field trips will be  
circulated to members via  
e-mail*

## DNHG COMMITTEE 2017

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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### **Contributions**

Do you have a field report, unusual finding, interesting news article, book review, amazing photograph, or community news to share?

*Send your contributions to:*

[gazelleeditor@gmail.com](mailto:gazelleeditor@gmail.com)

### **DNHG Membership**

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership is valid from September 2017 to September 2018. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to HSBC account number 030100242001. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG).

Payment can also be made by cash deposit at a bank or ATM, using our IBAN number AE900200000030 100242001. However, this process does not identify you as the payer. If you wish to pay by cash, please also photograph or scan a copy of your payment confirmation and send via e-mail to the Membership Secretary, so we know whose money we have received.

DNHG membership entitles you to participate in field trips and help 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.