



# GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

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**Contributors—**

Thanks to the following for their contributions:

Gary Feulner, Jeff Verbeem, Gosia van Unen, Binish Roobas, Ocean Bekker, Alexis Biller, Sumithra Subramaniam, Vaidyanathan and Harold Bekker.

Send your contributions for the January issue to:

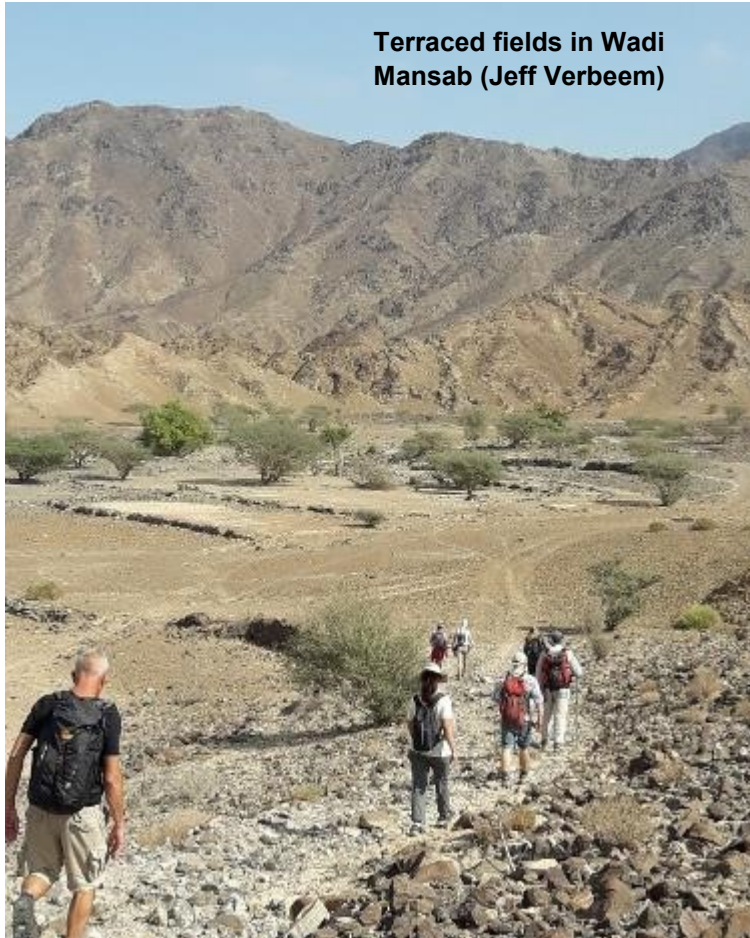
[gazelleeditor@gmail.com](mailto:gazelleeditor@gmail.com)

by 25th January, 2019



Playing golf is another opportunity to observe plants and wildlife. Find out more on page 7

Terraced fields in Wadi Mansab (Jeff Verbeem)



**Wadi Daynah Nature Walk**

This November walk actually spanned three wadis on the west flank of the Hajar Mountains south of Shawkah, each of them slightly different, that together give a good introduction to the Hajar Mountain foothills environment. Wadi Daynah offers a typical assortment of Hajar Mountain plants and is a stronghold of the dwarf palm *Nanorrhops ritchieana*, here near the northern limit of its range in Eastern Arabia. Indications of a more prosperous (and wetter) past presented themselves in the form of extensive terraced fields in Wadi Mansab and the multiple 'fox traps' spotted by our eagle-eyed team.

Recent rain (at the end October) was reportedly very heavy in places, but

was not much in evidence here, and we saw no spike in flowering plants or animal activity. An exception was the leafless, yellow-green *Euphorbia larica*, the most characteristic mountain slope plant, which was in good flower, thanks to its efficient near surface root system. Another common mountain plant, the pea family *Tephrosia apollinea*, was dominant in the gravel wadi beds, and produced just enough flowers to make it one of the best places to search for butterflies during our visit. Harold Bekker also spotted a couple of uncommon "tutu" mushrooms, dead, but probably having sprouted in response to recent rain.

A grove of the dwarf palm *Nanorrhops ritchieana* (Gary Feulner)



For many participants, however, the most important take-home lessons were about 'development' (even in mountain areas) and navigation. Several repeat visitors were surprised (as was the trip leader!) to find that in the two years since our last visit, plantations had been expanded to cover the entire area of the head of Wadi Lasal, our starting point, with the result that access to our former parking area, and to the foot trail

\* for a participant's view on this trip, see page 6

(Continued on page 4)

## Announcements and Recorders

### Monthly Speaker - 8pm on Sunday 13th January, 2019

**Lecture Title - "Restoration of desert ecosystems in the Arabian Peninsula"**

**Biography - Gary Brown**

Gary has many years of experience as an ecologist and botanist in the region, with extensive field work experience in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Kuwait. This knowledge and expertise allows him to draw comparisons and note the major differences in habitats and species assemblages, along with the challenges faced by the natural environment.

#### IMPORTANT REMINDER!

#### MEMBERSHIP

DNHG membership was due for annual renewal in September 2018, for membership through to September 2019. Members who have not yet renewed by 15th January will be ...

#### Removed from the mailing list!

To renew your membership please contact our Membership Secretary Aubrey Baugh, by emailing [aubaug@gmail.com](mailto:aubaug@gmail.com)

Memberships can also be renewed at the January lecture on 13th January, 2019.

Membership is still a bargain at only Dh50 for individuals and Dh100 for families. See the back page for bank details (if renewing by this method).

#### From the Editor:

A group of members met in the Umm Al Quwain desert for an international pot-luck picnic. Their rich cultural and diverse roots was reflected in the food.

Trips this month included a wadi walk, a visit to the Solar Decathlon (Middle East) Exhibition and a repeat of the weekend dhow trip in Oman. Earlier this month members also witnessed a mid-week turtle release. Some enjoyed an overnight trip to Al Dhafra Camel Festival in the Liwa Desert, led by Harry George.

As we welcome in the new year, the committee would like to express our sincere appreciation to all our contributors, near and far. Keep the articles coming and enjoy your read!

Members' Night speakers last month were (from left to right):

Nick de Smith, Sandhya Prakash and Hazelle Page



Washed up with the tide and discovered by Harold Bekker during an early morning walk on Daymaniyat Island, Oman. Harold commented, "It's not really a message in a bottle but rather a message on a bottle!"

*bottle but rather a message on a bottle!"*

World-renowned scientist Jane Goodall will visit Dubai on 19th January. Organised by the Emirates Literature Foundation, tickets cost 75 dirhams. Dr Goodall will present a talk on her pioneering chimpanzee research at the Conference Centre, DIFC. Read more at:

<https://www.elfdubai.org/en/jane-goodall-reasons-for-hope>



### DNHG Recorders

**Reptiles - Dr. Reza Khan**  
050 6563601

**Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi**  
res: 06-5310467 off: 06-5583 003  
[lankefi@emirates.net.ae](mailto:lankefi@emirates.net.ae)

**Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi** (contact as above)

**Geology - Gary Feulner**  
res: 04 306 5570  
[grfeulner@gmail.com](mailto:grfeulner@gmail.com)

**Insects - Binish Roobas**  
050 243 8737  
[johanruphus@hotmail.com](mailto:johanruphus@hotmail.com)

**Fossils - Valerie Chalmers**  
res: 04 4572167  
mobile: 050 4558498 email:  
[valeriechalmers@gmail.com](mailto:valeriechalmers@gmail.com)

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

**Archaeology - Anelisa Lambert**  
056 6904508  
[anelisalambert@gmail.com](mailto:anelisalambert@gmail.com)

**Seashells - Andrew Childs**  
050 4590112  
[andrew.childs@eim.ae](mailto:andrew.childs@eim.ae)

**Bird Recorder— Panos Azmanis**  
050 7083555  
[azmanis.vet@gmail.com](mailto:azmanis.vet@gmail.com)

**Mammals—Jacky Judas**  
04 354 9776  
050 6181026  
[jjudas@enwwf.ae](mailto:jjudas@enwwf.ae)

# Spotlight!

## DNHG Trip to the Solar Decathlon, Middle East, by Alexis Biller



## Foliage on a Golf Course, by Gosia van Unen



*Leptadenia pyrotecnica*



*Colotropis procera*



Common reed

## DNHG Desert Picnic Finds, by Ocean Bekker



# Field Trips

(Continued from page 1)

over a low pass to Wadi Daynah, was completely blocked by concrete walls and wire fences. This required a detour of somewhat more than a kilometer in order to drop into Wadi Daynah at a lower point – where another new farm is being created along the wadi bed. (This area was entirely undeveloped, except for a rudimentary vehicle track, in 2000.)

Trip leader Gary Feulner made the point that while it is generally fairly straightforward to go up a wadi and walk back down it, it is much more problematic, and unwise, to cross between wadis in the Hajar Mountains without either maps and a GPS or very good prior knowledge of the area – and preferably a good grounding in geometry. Gary proceeded to demonstrate this point on the return journey, although in an unforeseen way . . .

Taking a quick voice vote, the group elected to follow a probable shortcut route that Gary anticipated would cut off a last, long hairpin bend in the wadi and take us more directly to our destination. The "up" part of the shortcut was accomplished in a matter of minutes, but the "down" part led us on a much longer route than expected – albeit through interesting and previously unexplored

country – because instead of continuing directly across the hairpin, the route turned parallel to the main wadi, joining it only somewhat downstream of our exit point.



**Euphorbia larica: the quick and the dead (Gary Feulner)**



**A pair of "tutu" mushrooms, past their prime (Gary Feulner)**



**Moses leading in the wilderness (Jeff Verbeem)**

*Contribution by Gary Feulner*



## DHNG December Dhow Trip (repeat) to Daymaniyat Islands

Here are some of the photographs received from Alexis Biller regarding this popular trip to Oman in December.

*Contribution by Alexis Biller*



## Field Clips

Blackvein Sergeant *Athyma ranga*



Yellow Orange Tip *Ixias pyrene*



Common Crow *Eupolea core*



Common Mime *Chilasa clytia*



Painted Jezebel *Delias hyparete*



Orange Oakleaf *Kallima inachus*



Eastern Striped Albatross  
*Appias olferna*



Red-base Jezebel *Delias pasithoe*



### Butterflies in Northern India

These butterflies were identified whilst on a North East India tour in October 2018.

Contribution by Binish Roobas

### Plain Tiger Butterflies in Southern Turkey (Part 1 of 2—part 2 in next month's issue)

A vivid sight in southern Turkey this autumn was of butterflies that should be familiar to DNHG members. They were the conspicuous mid-sized orange butterflies usually known in the UAE as Plain Tigers (*Danaus chrysippus*), also sometimes called African Monarchs or African Queens due to their wide-spread presence in Africa and resemblance to their well-known North American relative, the Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*).

The local Turkish name for *D. chrysippus* is Sultan, continuing the monarch theme, and this October, on Turkey's narrow southern coastal plain, they were putting on a royal show. Elusive earlier in the year, in October they gathered on the brilliant yellow Common Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*) flowers that had suddenly burst forth along a large irrigation canal I was investigating.

Caterpillars of both *D. chrysippus* and *D. plexippus* usually eat milkweeds. They have evolved the ability to metabolize the toxic compounds found in their food plants and store the acerbic by-products in their body tissue. This makes the caterpillars distasteful to birds, their major predators. At the same time, the caterpillars have developed black, white and yellow warning coloration, supplemented by long spikes. An inexperienced bird that tries to eat such a distinctive caterpillar remembers the bad taste and avoids them thereafter.

Plain Tiger adults usually share the same orange coloration as Monarchs, but lack that species' prominent black wing stripes. Also like the Monarch, the Plain Tiger has an enormous distribution. The species can be found throughout an area encompassing most of Africa, the Mediterranean regions of Europe and Turkey, much of tropical and sub-tropical Asia and parts of Australia. Plain Tigers can survive in a wide range of habitats throughout this range with conditions varying from moist to semi-arid, woodland to rocky slopes. They thrive in disturbed habitats such as waste ground in urban and village settings and the margins of arable lands. Because of that, it seems likely that the spread of this species has been assisted by human activities. (To be continued ...)

Contribution by Tamsin Carlisle (who is now based in Turkey)



## Field Trips

### Wadi Daynah Walk—a DNHG nature walk

Very early on a Friday morning we set off on the scenic Sharjah -Kalba road to Shawkah. We assembled on the way to wadi Daynah and headed towards the trail through a small village with a handful of homes. All of them looked much older than Dubai with narrow single doors and tiny windows. We passed through a date palm farm and were met with a sharp aroma of cow dung as we neared the entry point into the wadi. The wadi itself acts as a catchment for rainwater and sub-surface water, providing ample opportunity for agriculture and hence domestication of farm animals.

This wadi is part of the Hajar mountain range with the formation of ophiolite rocks on either side. These rocks are cut across by many veins and fractures indicating the trauma they have gone through since their formation. Between them is the path where a river would flow during rainfall in the region. Sometimes, the river carried high dosages of calcium which have been deposited on the rocks, cementing them. It is comparable to a wall of a house built by a man before the arrival of cement.

As we hiked up and reached higher elevations, many rocks were coated with manganese which is an act by microbes over a period of time.

The wadi was primarily spotted with the following common wadi plants:

- The *Acacia tortilis* with its very obvious umbrella shaped foliage, small leaves and dangerous white thorns.
- The *Ziziphus spina-christi* locally called sidr tree in Arabic. It is very famous and its leaves are crushed into a powder to be used as a natural soap for the skin and hair.
- The *Rhazya stricta* is a bushy evergreen shrub with its half-dried base of brown leaves. A few of them were in flower in our trail. But we missed seeing the painted lady butterfly which usually is found around this species.
- *Pulicaria glutinosa* is a small shrub that retains its dried flower bracts.
- *Tephrosia apollinea* was found every ten meters in full bloom. It had already shed its seeds for the next generation to sprout under the right conditions.
- *Euphorbia larica*: We found a flowering species and many dead ones. Its a hardy plant with stark features due to the absence of any leaves. It produces a milky white sap when plucked.

Dwarf palms were found in huge packs, making a forest in a desert.

We spotted a Zebra butterfly and Desert White butterflies hovering over the *Tephrosia apollinea* plant. We also spotted a dwarf gecko.

Another very interesting observation around the area was a natural falaj that had been dug into the rocks to channel water from the top of the hill onto the flat field. This technique allowed for conservation and smart utilization of available water resources for agriculture to flourish.

Gary was phenomenally well versed with everything that we saw and highly informative. We learnt a lot and had a lovely



experience unraveling the mysteries of the UAE's wonderful yet unsung landscapes.

Contribution by Sumithra Subramaniam Vaidyanathan

## Field Trips and Clips

### DNHG December Desert Picnic

We had a wonderful camping trip with a small group of DNHG members in the desert of Umm Al Quwain.

From sunset to sunrise we had some small but rewarding walks through the amazing ghaf forests, the dunes, discovering the tracks of the desert inhabitants.

And also as you can see we had some close interactions with the curious and friendly camels who most probably were attracted by some delicious Italian, French and New Zealand, English, Dutch, Polish, Gujarati and Slovenian food.



The international dishes were a reminder of our diverse and rich cultural roots and, at the same time celebrated the feeling that although we come from different parts of the world, our passion for nature connects us and brings us together again!

A huge thank you to Sonja, who organized the trip.



Contribution by Ocean Bekker

### Desert Plants on a Golf Course

Landscaped areas in Dubai are lush, green and dazzling with flowers that attract a plethora of insects and birds. All the colourful flowers, plants and trees rely on irrigation and unfortunately irrigation systems inexorably fail and within a few days plants die and need to be replaced. In the desert life is harsh. Desert plants are tougher and less dependent on water. Those tough plants need very little water to survive, withstand high water salinity or use many adaptations to survive. Some use dew for their water needs; others limit water evaporation by producing small waxy branches and leaves. Many plants extend their roots systems underground or go into hibernation if the conditions are extremely unfavourable. There are places in Dubai where desert plants are being utilized and incorporated into large scale landscaping projects and they supplement other decorative grasses, shrubs and flowers traditionally used here.

Jumeirah Golf Estates, a prime DP World golf destination, allows quite a number of desert plants to adorn its perfectly designed and meticulously maintained golf courses. Within the



*Acacia nilotica*



*Tetraena qatarense*

landscaped lakes, creeks and waterfalls, sandy hills and grass fields, the desert plants are thriving. These include among others: sodom's apple, *Calotropis procera*, with its amazingly beautiful flowers, the white saxaul, *Haloxyton persicum*, the sedge, *Cyperus conglomeratus*, the grass, *Phragmites australis* and reeds around ponds and waterfalls like southern cuttail, *Typha domingensis*. There are gum Arabic trees, *Acacia nilotica*, spreading their intoxicating aroma and many other acacia species with their differently shaped pods. There are moringa trees, *Moringa peregrina*, the saltbushes, *Atriplex leucoclada* and *Tetraena qatarense* and a huge specimen of broom bush, *Leptadenia pyrotechnica*. There are also several species of grass like drop seed grass, *Sporobolus spicatus*. There are annual succulents of "string of beads", *Halopeplis perfoliata* and other halophytic plants. As the weather is cool at the moment, the time is perfect to explore especially if you can't go to the desert. Even though most of these desert plants were probably planted, they still make the golf course environment just a bit more natural and ecofriendly. It is a great place for a walk.

Contribution (text and images) by Gosia van Unen (more photos can be seen on page 3)

# Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

January 13: Gary Brown presents "Restoration of desert ecosystems in the Arabian Peninsula"

## Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

January 12: Visit to Emirates Soil Museum and ICBA

January 18: Copper Hike

January 26 Sweihan Heritage Festival

February 21-23: DNHG host the Inter-Emirates Weekend (IEW)  
(Whilst activities regarding activities are still in the planning stage, an email was recently distributed to members regarding the hotel, meals and lunch box options).

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

## DNHG COMMITTEE 2018

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

	<b>Name</b>	<b>telephone</b>	<b>email</b>
Chairman	<b>Gary Feulner</b>	04 306 5570	grfeulner@gmail.com
Vice Chairman	<b>Valerie Chalmers</b>	050 455 8498	valeriechalmers@gmail.com
Treasurer	<b>Puneet Kumar</b>	050 452 4820	puneetcps@gmail.com
Membership Secretary	<b>Aubrey Baugh</b>	052 103 5167	aubaug@gmail.com
Speaker Co-ordinator	<b>Michelle Sinclair</b>	050 458 6079	sinclairm2004@yahoo.com
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	<b>Sonja Lavrenčič</b>	050 256 1496	lavson@gmail.com
Member-at-Large	<b>Pradeep Radhakrishna</b>	050 450 8496	wgarnet@eim.ae
Member-at-Large	<b>Anindita Radhakrishna</b>	050 656 9165	anin@eim.ae
Newsletter Editor	<b>Margaret Swan</b>	050 7984108	gazelleeditor@gmail.com
Librarian/Book Sales	<b>Angela Manthorpe</b>	058 1354143	manthorpe2005@yahoo.co.uk
Postmaster	<b>Sandi Ellis</b>	050 644 2682	sandiellis@gmail.com
Chief Engineer	<b>Binish Roobas</b>	050 243 8737	johanruphus@hotmail.com
Website Co-ordinator	<b>Sandhya Prakash</b>	050 551 2481	sandy_pi@yahoo.com
Greeter at meetings	<b>Helga Meyer</b>	055 821 7266	willyroaming@gmail.com

Postal Address: DNHG, PO Box 9234, Dubai, UAE

## Committee

### Field Trip Coordinator



We are looking for a second Field Trip Coordinator to assist Sonja with field trips.

If you can help in this area or have ideas for fieldtrips, please contact Sonja or any member of the committee.

## DNHG Membership

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership is valid from September 2018 to September 2019. 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.