

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Farewells and Findings

In the hotel industry, transfers are the rule, not the exception, and **Robert and Patricia Rosetti** expect to be leaving the UAE shortly for a new assignment. They consider themselves fortunate to have spent the past 9 years in Dubai – their longest residence anywhere. Because they have considerable Middle East experience (they were in Oman in "the early days"), another regional posting may be likely. We will especially miss Patricia, who has served a total of four years on the DNHG Committee.

Martina Fella makes a point to explore the UAE and neighbouring areas when she has the chance, just as she explores much of the world in the course of her work with Emirates Airlines. She was in Khasab just before Eid Al-Adha, on a cruise to Khor Ash-Shamm. On her way back, indefatigable, she stopped for a look at Rams Beach after several stormy days. She reports finding almost a dozen paper nautilus "shells" and seeing many dozens of dead rays on the beach, in all positions and with no apparent injury, seemingly a natural occurrence. Most spectacularly, she found a massive turtle skull that seems likely to be that of the rare leatherback turtle, a sea-going giant. Identification will be

confirmed and the information will be incorporated in records for the region.

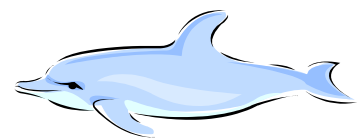
Jim and Susie Balderstone recently visited Rams Beach, too, and watched some fishermen pulling in their nets. There were huge numbers of rays weighing down the nets, and the fishermen were throwing the rays upside down on the beach. The stench of the many other long-dead rays was very strong. Jim and Susie did some shelling, and found, amongst many nice cowries, cones and spiny murex, just one tiny paper nautilus measuring 55mm.

David Palmer has been taking some self-guided archeological tours, aided by former DNHG member (and Archeology Recorder) Diana Darke's *Discovery Guide to the UAE*, which David recommends. David has also made the acquaintance, through family connections, of Peter Rothfels of Abu Dhabi, a former DNHG speaker and perhaps the UAE's most prominent (and responsible) collector of arrowheads and other flint remains. Now we're wondering how to twist David's arm to share his interest by leading a field trip.

DNHG Membership

DNHG membership remains a bargain at Dhs. 100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. You can join or renew at meetings (see Membership Secretary Fi Skennerton) or by sending us a cheque made out to Lloyds Bank account no. 173746. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG.) Membership is valid from September 2001 to September 2002.

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*, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.



This month's Contributors

The Editor would like to thank the following for their reports:

Gary Feulner
Christine Namour
Steve James



Field Trips etc ...

Dhow trip with Lamjid el Kefi.

Friday 29 March

Don't miss this opportunity to see the Musandam Peninsula from the sea. Lamjed commissioned his own dhow, which he uses to cruise the spectacular coastline of Oman with opportunities for snorkelling throughout the day. This trip leaves Dibba port at 8 a.m. for a full day's sail, complete with buffet lunch – at a special price to our members of 150 Dhs if we have at least 20 people on board. Please note that if less than 20 people sign up for the trip, an additional 25/50 Dhs will have to be paid) Please encourage your friends to come. Children under 10 years of age, free. Older children, half price. There are 30 places available on the dhow. Please contact Lamjid direct at pearl-div@emirates.net.ae Note a deposit is required of 75 Dhs a head which should be sent to Lamjid, to secure your position, at P.O.Box 341 Sharjah, as soon as possible.

Sand Trip near Al Maha with Peter van Amsterdam

Friday 5 April

This is a sand-driving trip up behind Al Maha in quite big dunes. You can usually see oryx (through the fence), and there are dhubs and other wildlife. Details closer to the day from Peter on pvana@emirates.net.ae

Inter-Emirates Weekend – Mafrag Hotel

11 – 12 April

Mafrag Hotel near Abu Dhabi is a very convenient location for all, being just over an hour's drive from Dubai and Al Ain and a thirty minute drive for Abu Dhabi members. It is also convenient for our excursions.

In-hotel activities include:

- * natural history display
- * quiz
- * NH of UAE video sessions
- * plant hunt in the grounds
- * videomicroscope session & insect collecting.

We have excursions on Thursday for those who get there early and an excursion on Friday afternoon, for those who want to stay late. The spotlighting sessions are excellent for birds & the occasional gerboa etc. Each trip will have a short activity leaflet for it explaining what is happening on the trip. Steve is still waiting for confirmation of the Futaisi Island trip, and also the possibility of going to Samiliyah Island but yet again getting permission is difficult from the local authorities.

Excursion schedule:

Thursday afternoon 2.30pm:

Al Wathba Lake for bird watching, followed by evening visit to fields for spotlighting. Possible leaders: Andrew, Simon & Steve (confirmed)

Thursday afternoon,

3.30pm: Boat trip off Raha Beach Area: 15 people maximum.

Possible leaders: Martin, Simon or Dick Hornby (confirmed) 20dhs.

Thursday afternoon, 3.30 pm:

Short desert trip to set mammal traps & study desert ecology. Leaders Chris Drew, Richard Perry and Drew Gardner. (confirmed)

Thursday 6 pm: Astronomy.

Leader Charles Laubach (confirmed)

Friday 3.30 am!: Astronomy.

The main object of this early morning excursion would be to get a look at Comet Ikeya-Zhang, which should be visible in the constellation of Pisces in the early morning, and should still be a naked eye object of around magnitude three or four.

Leader Charles Laubach (confirmed)

Friday morning, 8.30am start, back by 2 or 2.30pm:

Trip to Futaisi Island.

Possible leader: Dick? Not confirmed yet.

Friday morning, 8.30am start, back by 2pm:

Birdwatching at Al Wathba Fodder Fields.

Leaders: Andrew, Steve or Simon (confirmed)

Friday morning, time TBA, back by 2pm:

Desert ecology trip: check mammal traps, study natural history of the area.

Leaders: Chris Drew, Richard Perry and Drew Gardner. (confirmed)

Friday morning, 8.30am start, back by 2pm:

Dhow Trip: from the Intercontinental Hotel, maximum 80 people. (confirmed). Exploration of channels & landing on a nearby island. 80 Dhs.

Friday afternoon:

Birdwatching at Al Wathba Lake followed by spotlighting at the fields.

Possible leaders: Andrew, Simon or Steve (confirmed)

or

Birdwatching at Al Wathba Fodder Fields

Accommodation details:

Single Occupancy: 150 dhs per room per night

Double Occupancy: 200 dhs per room per night

Triple Occupancy: 250 dhs per room per night

These prices are subject to 16% service charge and inclusive of buffet breakfast.

Up to 2 children below 12 years old and sharing parents room will be accommodated free of charge, with a nominal charge for breakfast of 15 dhs + service charge.

BBQ Dinner is 55 dhs + service charge.



Lunch Boxes for Friday can be arranged at 40 dhs net.

Please ring 02-5822666 and ask for reservations. Inform them of your requirements about accommodation, dinner and packed lunch. Make sure you state Emirates Natural History Group when you are booking, if you forget the rates will be higher! Please then contact me by e-mail: stephen.james@zu.ac.ae stating your contact details and how many are in your party. I can then follow up with excursion choices and further information etc.

I would urge all members to stay at the hotel; past experience has shown that if you stay in your own home you miss out on a lot of the informal activity and chat. After all, one of the nicest things about the weekend is to meet new faces and exchange information. However, if this is not possible the dinner on Thursday may be booked through the hotel. Just make sure they know it is dinner only!

Weekend cruise with Lamjid el Kefi 25 – 26 April

Lamjid's trip is a fantastic chance of see some of the more remote and beautiful fjords of the Musandam Peninsula. Lamjid's dhow, fully equipped with sleeping quarters, will depart at 7 p.m. on Wednesday April 24 from Dibba port. The evening will be spent on deck, gazing at the stars with Lamjid's guidance about the constellations above you as the dhow cruises through the night to Lima. The next two days are spent exploring areas that are only accessible by sea, beach combing, diving and snorkelling. This is a unique opportunity to visit these areas.

All meals are provided for a cost of 1,300 Dhs for adults and 850 Dhs for children, for people sleeping in cabins. 50% discount for people sleeping in the quarter cabins or

on deck. Contact Lamjid at pearl-div@emirates.net.ae for a faxed sheet of further details. Note a deposit of 500.Dhs per head is required to secure your place. This should be sent to Lamjid at P.O.Box 341 Sharjah as soon as possible.

Siir Bani Yas Island with David Snelling 18 – 19 April

This trip is now closed. Those who are registered will receive a further e.mail from David confirming the details and making sure you know what to do, where to go etc. Note that, occasionally, the ferry does not sail, sometimes because of rough conditions, sometimes because the island is being used by the Sheikh. If you have any further queries, contact David at david.snelling@emirates.com

Book Review:

Tribulus 11.2

The UAE's oldest and most prestigious natural history journal is into its second decade. *Tribulus 11.2* is now out and will be on sale at our April meeting. It includes articles on the phylogeny of the local Socotra Cormorant, the distribution and ecology of toads in the Musandam region, the diet of the Little Owl, the architecture of traditional windtower houses, the archeology of a hill fort at Qurayah on the east coast, *Dhub* diets, and the large mangrove crab *Scylla serrata*, plus a number of short notes about hares, shrews, echinoids as well as reviews of various recent publications and research reports on UAE natural history and archeology. *Tribulus* remains a great bargain at 15 Dhs.

Our Next Speaker

'The Archaeology of the Western Region of Abu Dhabi' will be the topic of Daniel Hull's presentation. Dan spent 2 years working as a contract archaeologist in wet and windy UK, after graduating from the University of York, UK, in 1994. Hoping for sunnier climes, he went to the School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London to study for an MA in Islamic Art & Archaeology. His dissertation subject, entitled 'The role of archaeology in the United Arab Emirates', was his first introduction to the UAE and, in particular, to the archaeology of Abu Dhabi. After graduating in 2000, he spent time working on fieldwork projects in Turkmenistan, Turkey, Syria, Oman and the UAE, before being offered the job of Resident Archaeologist for the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey (ADIAS) last year.

As part of his work for ADIAS, Dan oversees the day-to-day running of ADIAS, and especially, in collaboration with ERWDA, the Archaeological Sites Database for the Western Region of Abu Dhabi. In addition, he has embarked on various research topics of his own, especially the archaeology of the Late Islamic period on the islands and coastline of Abu Dhabi. This has involved fieldwork projects at Jebel Dhanna, as well as the islands of Al-Futaisi, Abu'l-Abyadh and Al-Aryam.

As well as his work in the UAE, Dan is Co-Director of the Dayr Mar Elian Archaeological Project (DMEAP) in Central Syria.





Field Clips ...

E.mail your reports to pvana@emirates.net.ae, (Arial 10 justified) or deliver them to Anne Millen on floppy disk at monthly meetings.

Jebel Ghaweel Hike

Jebel Ghaweel is a three-peaked ridge on the mountain front east of Al-Hayer, distinctive by virtue of its summit cap of white limestone, an "exotic" block, probably a former atoll that was carried along atop the deep ocean sediments and volcanics that were bulldozed and deformed ahead of the advancing ophiolite. The triple summits are the Hajar Mountain's answer to Italy's Dolomites, complete with sheer faces and craggy spires. The summit profile is daunting and, looking up, it was hard to believe what we were going to do.

As advertised, highlights included unusual rocks and plants. On the way up we stopped to look at turbidites (deep ocean sediments deposited from turbidity currents and having a graded structure), as well as volcanic rocks identifiable by their many tiny air pockets (vesicles) filled by later stage white minerals, and, near the summit, yellow-green veins of chlorite, many of which seem to have been the site of fracturing and movement within the deformed rocks. We also saw a number of dwarf rock geckoes, *Pristurus rupestris* and the larger *P. celerrimus*, which signal with their tails. As usual, about half of these seemed to have lost and regrown their original tails.

The environment was very dry, but not devoid of botanical interest. Special attractions included the wild olive, found only at higher elevations, the *sidr* tree (*Zizyphus spina-cristi*) in fruit (but undesirably astringent, was the gastronomic verdict) as well as several

of the region's hanging or climbing plants. The cliff-dwelling *Capparis cartinagenia* is related to the edible caper. Another prominent cliff plant, *Cocculus pendulus*, sported small berries. Richard Dennis was game to sample them, but Gary Feulner suggested otherwise, given that the species belongs to the curare family. The climbing milkweed *Pentatropis nivalis* had found its way into a small *Moringa* (broom tree) whereas the leafless climber *Ephedra aphylla* was mostly seen on Jebel Ghaweel as an erect shrub, and was found climbing into only one small Desert Thorn (*Lycium shawii*). We saw no goats at all, and the presence of a number of larger desert thorn shrubs indicates that grazing pressure may have been reduced for the past few years.

Despite the drought, we found a number of specialized plant species in flower from time to time, in favorable locations, including a thriving *Euphorbia larica* (the "donkey-sat-on-it" bush) and the cactus-like *Caralluma arabica*. *Moriga peregrina*, the broom tree, was in full bloom at lower elevations and Martina Fella spied a pair of Purple Sunbirds feeding on the nectar in one large tree, perhaps preparing to nest. Other bird life included a few sand partridges, Hume's wheatear in song, and, at the summit, a pale crag martin surfing enviably on the updrafts and a Bonelli's eagle soaring overhead. Martina also spotted the first of many of the rare bullet-shaped striped land snails, *Pseudonapaeus jousseau mei*, found in the wild only at higher elevations in the Hajar range and the Jebel Akhdar in Oman.

Lunch was served at the summit by Martina, in true Emirates in-flight style, but we all wondered how she had managed to pack so much junk food - sausage, potato chips, candies, even Hostess twinkies - into such a small backpack. Mike Lorrigan, for his part, served sandwiches all around, prepared in a burst of early morn-

ing Boy Scout zeal. The lunch site gave a marvelous view of the surrounding countryside, from Jebel Hatta and the Hajar range to Buraimi to the south and the desert to the west, and showed off other, smaller hills capped by similar white exotic blocks.

After summiting, we walked the summit ridge to the east end and looked back. It appeared so rugged and difficult, we could hardly believe we had been there. So, as a special treat for this strong hiking group (Martina was hiking in boots with soles taped on enroute by Richard's emergency repair tape), the decision was made to descend via a "new" route down a wadi that cut through several vertical limestone ridges. There were some second thoughts as the chute narrowed and steepened, but these passed after we saw several small cairns indicating that this had once been an "established" route. The route was in need of resurfacing, however, and we worked our way down carefully over slopes covered with bits and blocks of broken limestone. David Palmer said afterwards that he felt like he had been skiing.

We returned to the cars, about nine hours and many rolls of film after we had left them, and looked back up at the jagged skyline, now silhouetted by the dying sun. We still couldn't believe we had done "that." *Report by Gary Feulner*

More on Ginger

No one has offered any more information about the *Acacia/ghaf*-like "ginger" tree reported in the November 2001 *Gazelle*, but the tree in question has since been identified from samples by Prof. Loutfy Boulou, via Marijcke Jongbloed, as *Sesbania sericea*. *Sesbania* spp. are occasionally used as ornamentals in Dubai (especially the shrubby *S. aegyptiaca*), and Philip Iddison pointed out a single *Sesbania sesbana* during his tour of the Al-Ain oasis



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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.

during Inter-Emirates weekend in March. Marijcke adds: "I have a sesbania in my garden that people eat the leaves and flowers and beans of, but no one told me it tastes like ginger - but then I never asked what it tastes like! I may send Louffy a sample to find out what it is (I tentatively identified it as *Sesbania grandiflora* from an Indonesian flora I have). In the meantime Gary Feulner, who first noticed the local "ginger" tree, has since been introduced to the real ginger plant -- a low, leafy species -- in cultivations and along roadsides on the flanks of the Ecuadorian Andes, bordering the Amazon basin.

Seafood 'Take-Away'

The presence of seashells in the UAE mountains has been the subject of much speculation by observers. Some occurrences may be attributable to beach sand "imported" for lime content or fertilizer. Others, sorted by species, seem to have been eaten. This is true even at inland sites such as Mileihah, south of Dhaid. Research has shown that some intertidal species such as the large mud creeper *Terebralia palustris* can survive for months out of water. It may be, however, that even more perishable species could be preserved and transported alive to inland sites using traditional methods. Prof. Dr. Angela von den Driesch, a paleoanatomist at the Institute for Paleoanatomy at Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich, recently visited the UAE as part of an archeological field team, and alerted us to research demonstrating that oysters had been carried alive to areas north of the European Alps in Roman times, a journey of probably several days.

It has been shown that oysters (and therefore perhaps many other bivalves and gastropods) can stay alive for up to 24 days if they are transported at low temperatures (but not below freezing) and closely packed so that the shells

cannot open. When a living oyster is taken out of the water it closes its valves, in which enough sea water remains to enable the animal to survive with reduced metabolic activity. Higher temperatures in the UAE might reduce survival times significantly, but even so, this would seem to allow molluscs to be transported and consumed fresh at most UAE sites where they have been found, few if any of which are more than a 2-3 days' journey from the coast. On site, they could have been stored in shade and/or water to keep them cool. *Report by Gary Feulner*

Christine's Caterpillars

Old habits die hard. As a girl in Ohio, Christine Namour had raised Monarch butterflies (similar to the local Plain Tiger). So when she found a large and distinctive caterpillar in her Jebel Ali garden, it seemed only natural to take it in and see what would happen. She showed it first to Gary Feulner, who was able to identify it as the pale green form of the Oleander Hawkmoth - this from reference photos taken by Sandy Fowler and identified by Mike Gillett of Al-Ain. Christine put it in a shoebox with some oleander leaves.

Before too long it had changed color and one night began to weave a silken web. Christine watched in fascination. She only realized how long she had been watching when the kids intervened. "Mom," they reproached her, "We're hungry! Can you stop watching the caterpillar and make dinner?" Since then, however, the caterpillars have become a family pastime and Christine, Noel and Romey have raised quite a number of Oleander Hawkmoths and made some very interesting observations about the process. These are described below.

The pale green form is in fact the active form of the caterpillar. The head end can be extended and inflated to display large electric blue eye spots, presumably a



special reports ...

threat or warning mechanism. While still small, the green caterpillar is voracious. After about 14 days (presumably this depends to some extent on the available food supply) it reaches maximum size, slows down and turns a dark brown color with creamy yellow trim. It then seeks a quiet place, in a corner or under its food supply of oleander leaves, where it weaves a light, spider-like web above itself and becomes dormant. If the caterpillar is disturbed at this stage, it writhes vigorously but does not locomote.

After about 3-4 days, the dormant caterpillar sheds its dark skin from front to back, like peeling off a sock, to reveal the surface of the pupal stage or chrysalis, which hardens quickly. The color of the pupa is normally a glossy golden-brown, like a well-toasted marshmallow, but is sometimes pale yellow. The pupa metamorphoses and "hatches" after about 3 weeks to reveal and release the beautiful adult moth, which has a camouflage pattern of greens, browns with pink accents.

In the final days before hatching the color and pattern of the moth within can be seen through the translucent skin of the pupa. The adult Oleander Hawkmoth is a night flier and Christine says that all hatchings so far seem to have been at night. She has watched only one moth actually emerge and says the process was surprisingly quick and efficient. The brittle exterior of the pupa simply split at the front end and the moth walked out – no protracted writhing or wriggling. The emergent moth is wrinkled and slightly wet looking at first, but it quickly stretches its wings (by pumping fluid into them) and dries to a normal appearance within a few hours. By day the moths rest quietly and are insensitive to most disturbances. *Thanks to Christine Namour*

Damselfly and Dragons: Where the Girls Are

The edges of streams, ponds and puddles are prime places to find dragonflies and damselflies.* They are often brightly colored. In the UAE we have at least four red species and five blue ones, of various sizes and shapes. These conspicuously colored individuals are, however, almost all males. The females are more likely to be clad in "earth tones." In addition, the females are likely to be found in different places.

The males have come to the pools partly to show off and find a mate, and females who turn up there are inevitably noticed and "harrassed." Analogous problems have sometimes been reported among humans at local shopping malls. As a result, the females of many water-oriented species visit local water bodies only to seek food or when they are ready to mate. At other times they can be found perched in shrubs or on trees or rocks a few metres to a few hundred metres away from the nearest water. For example, at Safa Park one recent morning, male Purple Blushed Darters were common along the edge of the boat pond and canal, but the only females seen were perched atop the wrought iron fence posts surrounding the so-called English Garden overlooking the canal.

[*Note: Damselflies are smaller and fold their wings back over the body when perched. Dragonflies always hold their wings outstretched.] *Report by Gary Feulner*

DNHG AGM and Elections

The DNHG's AGM and elections were held at the March 2002 meeting. Chairman Gary Feulner and Treasurer Jim Fischer delivered written reports, copies of which are available upon request. The Chairman highlighted the move to new premises as the most significant organisational change of the past year and pro-

posed that putting DNHG information and natural history records on the internet should be a major priority for the coming year. New officers were elected as shown on page 7.

Thanks were given to retiring Committee members Jim Fischer and Patricia Rosetti, the latter completing a second tour of duty. Special thanks were given to Dr. Sandy Fowler, who has elected to take what the Chairman called a "sabbatical" from the DNHG Committee, on which Sandy has served for many years. Sandy will continue, however, as Seashell Recorder and as a field trip leader.

Please note that we could still use an enthusiastic volunteer to serve as an additional field trip coordinator. No experience required!

Don't Forget We've Moved

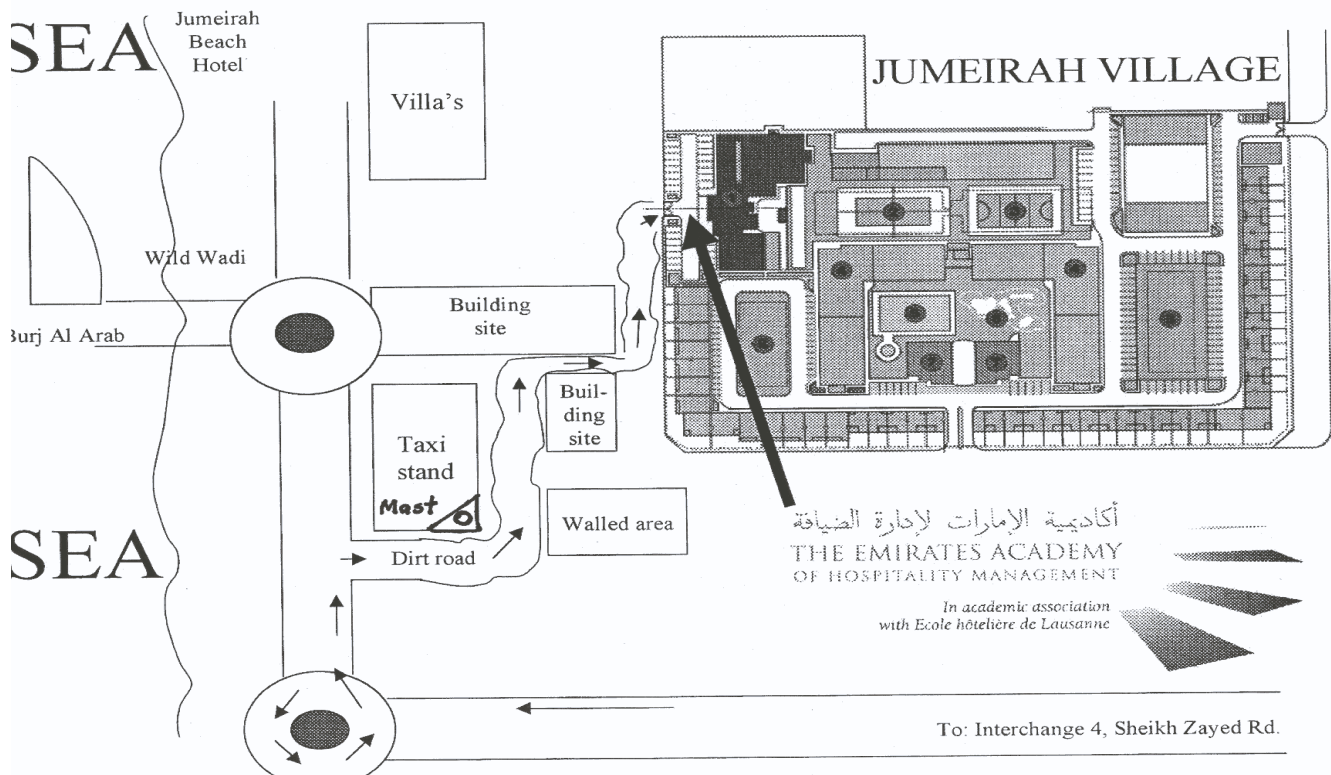
Remember, the DNHG's monthly lectures are now held at **The Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management**, located opposite "Wild Wadi" near the Burj Al-Arab and the Jumeirah Beach Hotel. The Academy features a 140-seat auditorium, excellent acoustics and a built-in audio-visual system.

The auditorium is adjacent to the main entrance, on the Beach Road side. The Academy facade resembles an Arabic fortress, with four flags flying at the front gate. The complex is visible from Beach Road but is set back about 100 yards from the road, partly obscured by construction. Direct access is currently over an open lot; for easiest access, it is best to follow the map on page 7. There is a paved parking lot within the gates. For those coming via Sheikh Zayed Road/Abu Dhabi Highway, the best exit is flyover #4 (Al-Barsha/Dubai Police Academy). Members who are coming to lectures directly from work may find it convenient to take advantage of the cafeteria located on the Emirates Academy premises, on the left of the outdoor courtyard behind the main lobby.



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EMIRATES ACADEMY OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT



Dubai Natural History Group Programme

Lectures at Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management (see map), 7.30 for 8.00pm

April 7 **The Archeology of Abu Dhabi's Western Region – Daniel Hull**

May 5 Reptiles of the Near East – Dr. Ted Papenfuss

June 2 Member's Night [Short presentations by members: Volunteers welcome!]

Field Trips (DNHG members only, please).

Mar 29 Musandam Dhow Trip with Lamjid el Kefi

April 5 Sand Trip near Al-Maha with Peter van Amsterdam

April 11-12 Inter-Emirates Weekend at Mafraq Hotel

April 18-19 Siir Bani Yas with David Snelling

April 25-26 Weekend Cruise with Lamjid el Kefi