

GAZELLE

Vol 24 no 2 February 2009



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Mohammed Arfan Asif won the 3rd award for 'Green Bee Eater in Flight' (below) in the wild life photography competition held on 13th January 2009 and organized as part of Offshore Arabia 2009. This is the second time he has won the award. The exhibition of photographs was held at Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai, but as is so often the case, we heard about it afterwards.



One of **Carol Goodwright's** more adventurous trips in Egypt recently was to Wadi Hitan. Members will recall Tom Horton's article in our Jul/Aug 2008 *Gazelle*. Carol wrote: Wadi al Hittan (and most of Egypt) was part of the Tethys Sea and was home to all sorts of creatures. Fossils of sharks, dolphins, squid, molluscs, mangroves etc. have been found here. The landforms are quite incredible as the area was once covered by rivers which have washed away the soft sandstone. The wind has also played its part.



The site is a World Heritage Site and is beautifully laid out, though rather off the beaten track. The wadi is 30 km off road. It is not often you find yourself in the middle of nowhere, but this is a prime example!



We also stopped at the various Fayoum lakes, which are vast and worth a second visit. We didn't have time to stop and watch for birds, but I did see small and cattle egrets, a grey heron, a pied kingfisher and lots of swifts and swallows.

DNHG Membership

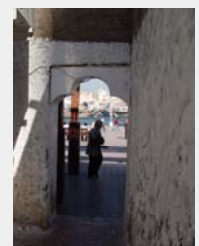
DNHG Membership remains a bargain at Dhs.100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. You can join or renew at our meetings or by sending us your details and a cheque made out to: Lloyds TSB Bank account no. 60600669933501. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG. Please also note our account number has changed.)

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 and contributions:

Angela Manthorpe
Michelle Sinclair
Patricia Foggon
Gary Feulner
Stefan Beck
Clare O'Hare
Diane Lewis
Larry Woods
Natasha Christie
Kevin Hyland



Under the patronage of H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan



Coming Field Trips

Masirah Island with Nancy P. 25 - 28 Feb

Nancy Papathanasopoulou is offering a trip to Masirah. Max 10 people. Stay in hotel. Excellent for hawksbill and Olive Ridley turtles, great for birds. Contact Pradeep wgarnet@emirates.net.ae The trip requires a full 4 days away.

Oasis at Musah with ENHG 07 Mar

This is a wonderful ramble starting at 2pm at Buraimi Hotel. That is across the border, therefore you need Oman vehicle insurance, passport with a valid visit visa or residency visa for the UAE. Walk will be 2.5 hours; you need stout shoes, appropriate dress (it's a working oasis) and modest swimwear! For further information and to register your interest please contact Jenny on jenny-hill76@hotmail.com

Temple Alley Walk with Sandhya 14 March

Sandhya will lead another temple walk through the alleys of Bur Dubai. Dress appropriately, but you can bring your camera. Contact Sandhya on sandy_pi@yahoo.com

Bastakiya Walk, Peter Jackson 21 March

This is a ramble through the very old areas near the creek mouth, with architect and wind-tower authority Peter Jackson. Not to be missed but ... only 24 people! Details by email.

Union Paper Mill Visit 1 May

This is a Friday trip to a large mill in Al Qoz that does paper recycling. They are allowing for a large group, so everyone can come. Details by email closer to the time. Pencil it in!

Inter-Emirates Weekend Thursday/Friday/Saturday 26/27/28 March 2009

Each year in March/April the UAE's three Natural History Groups – Emirates Natural History Group Abu Dhabi, Emirates Natural History Group Al Ain and the Dubai Natural History Group – get together for an educational yet social weekend involving a dinner and various activities and trips. It is a chance to meet up with people/old friends from the

other groups. The event is organised annually by one of the groups in rotation. This year it is the turn of the Dubai Natural History Group.

IEW 2009 will be based at the Oceanic Hotel, Khor Fakkan and the programme will begin on Friday morning, 27th March (though there may be stargazing on the evening of Thurs 26th.) The hotel has made a block booking of rooms for the Thursday and Friday nights on a first-come first-served basis. However, in view of the increased tourism in Khor Fakkan and the peak season date of IEW, it will be necessary to confirm and guarantee your booking by the end of February 2009.

Stop Press: Lena has negotiated the following new, lower rates for Inter-Emirates Weekend at the Oceanic Hotel Khorfakkan. These rates apply to both bookings already made and to those still to be made:

**Single Room (Room only basis) Dh 350.00 per room per night
Double Room (Room only basis) Dh 430.00 per room per night**

**Single Room (BB basis) Dh 400.00 per room per night
Double Room (BB basis) Dh 500.00 per room per night**

Cost of an extra bed in a room for an adult Dh 120. A suite can be booked but you need to ask the hotel.

On Friday evening there will be a buffet dinner (Dh 96 per person). Packed lunches will be available for Friday and Saturday – please arrange these directly with the hotel once you have been supplied with your booking reference.

It has been arranged with the hotel that all reservations should be made through the DNHG. To make a reservation, please email Lena Linton on linton@mailme.ae with your requirements as regards rooms and buffet dinner. Lena will email you the booking reference and then your credit card information will need to be sent to the hotel. If unable to use credit card, then to send a cheque to given address.

Trips will be many and varied. There will be two half-day trips up Wadi Wuraya, a dhow trip (see p.7 for details), an insect workshop with Brigitte Howarth, shelling, mountain walks, forts, musea, archeological sites and ...

On the evening of Friday 27th we will be holding the Inter-Emirates photographic competition. The format of this is changed. Please see pp.6&7 for all the details you'll need.



Bull pushing, Fujeirah
Photo by Larry Woods

Our Next Speaker

Hanne and Jens Eriksen have lived in the Middle East since 1986. Avid birdwatchers when they arrived, they soon took up photography with special focus on birds but enjoying everything 'wild' that Nature can offer.

Muscat, Oman was their first home, where they spent 19 years during which time they traveled to every corner of the country with camera in hand - a magnificent place for exploring Nature. In 2005 they moved to Abu Dhabi where they continue to enjoy wildlife photography. Their picture library contains over 60,000 images of which some 6,000 have been published in books, magazines, calendars, postcards, newspapers, jigsaw puzzles, even on stamps, bank notes and coins. They are the authors or co-authors of 13 books and between them have won several photo competitions, including the *British Birds* Bird Photograph of the Year competition five times.

Generally they concentrate on the Middle East and in 2006 they spent three weeks in Yemen, including Socotra Island. Having been isolated from the mainland of Africa for millions of years, Socotra has developed into a mini-Madagascar with a unique flora and fauna. The lecture will concentrate on the natural history of Socotra and how one can visit and enjoy this beautiful island.



Email your field reports and news to pvana@emirates.net.ae (Arial 10 justified). Please send your photographs as separate jpg files, or deliver them to Anne Millen for scanning.

Sightings around Jebel Qiwi

A recent walk below Jebel Qiwi off Wadi Bih yielded an abundance of wild almond seeds and following a quick smack with a rock we were able to sample the sweet delights inside – almonds in miniature.



Almonds

We're not the only fans of the almonds of course. During a chilly walk in the same area on Christmas Day last year we found a small rodent burrow, easy to spot because of the excavated debris outside the hole, topped with a collection of almond shells, each one neatly nibbled open at the top.



The debris of last night's dinner

That same walk one year ago also yielded another sign of our resident mammals – in the form of a 20cm long and fairly fresh caracal scat. The tightly twisted deposit seemed to be comprised mostly of goat hair. Interestingly, Marijcke

Jongbloed's 'Wild about Mammals' indicates that caracal scat is generally approximately 6.7cm x 1.7cm, so this find was quite a big one!



Caracal scat

Sadly, only last weekend over the far side of Jebel Qiwi, we found 2 dead caracal in the village of Silhi, which is undergoing some redevelopment with newly built houses and a freshly cemented cistern.



Caracal feet

The caracal had both been strung up in a tree with one carcass being reasonably fresh, whilst the second carcass seemed to be several months old. *Report and photographs by Angela Manthorpe*



Dead caracal

Turtle Rescue: Don't "Do it Yourself"

Our January 2009 item by Martina Fella, recounting the finding and rescuing of a debilitated young Hawksbill turtle, elicited two follow-up letters which make two very important points in relation to this continuing phenomenon:

(1) There exists in Dubai a specialised facility for turtle rehabilitation, the Burj al Arab Aquarium, which is gaining increasing expertise. This should be the facility of choice for turtle strandings (call 04-301-7198).

(2) Turtle rehabilitation is *not* something you can or should try to do yourself, at home in the bathtub. In fact, experience shows that forcible removal of barnacles, etc. is likely to do more harm than good. In addition, the fouling of turtle shells by marine organisms is a symptom of other problems. Simply cleaning the shell will not solve those underlying problems.

Initially, Natasha Christie of the Atlantis Hotel wrote back to Martina to report on progress and to share the credit: "There have been about 15 more of the little guys that washed up on shores during the rough seas. I've contacted the Burj al Arab Aquarium, as they have special facilities dedicated to rehab of sea turtles. We will release the turtle to them where they'll tag, get DNA and probably release back to the wild."

After the *Gazelle* item appeared, Kevin Hyland, of Dubai's Wildlife Protection Office and the Burj al Arab Aquarium, wrote separately to elaborate:

"As I think you know, we have been involved in turtle rehabilitation work in conjunction with our fish quarantines. It is an initiative I started after we built the Creek Golf Club aquarium in 1992. After start-up the quarantine was only needed periodically and in the interim periods we used it to rehabilitate turtles.

"In 2004 I had a chance to discuss the matter with His Highness, Sheikh Mohammed, and we took it a stage forward and launched the initiative rather more formally at Madinat Jumeirah waterway, combined with our efforts out of public view at various facilities throughout Dubai.

"In the 1990's we developed a rough protocol for dealing with



these animals, which we are continually fine-tuning with advice from similar organisations overseas, from the States to Australia. We are by no means experts and we are on our own learning curve, always trying to improve our own work. However, we do now handle and release quite a number of turtles.

"However, in the recent *Gazelle* item I was concerned when I read reference to barnacles being forcibly removed from the carapace of the turtle. Although that was in a professional aquarium setting, the potential for misunderstanding by the general public is simply too great. We have had many individuals killed by well-meaning members of the public who prise off the barnacles, but in the process they damage or destroy the scutes on the carapace, leaving a mess that simply haemorrhages to death. (I have seen this happen time and time again and it is not a pretty sight.)

"To see this method published in your newsletter in a manner that seems to endorse it as a simple solution rings loud alarm bells and I would ask you to urgently publish that *on no account should anybody try this*.

"We have a protocol to do this very gently over a period of days, based on freshwater baths, which does not harm the juvenile turtle. It must also be pointed out that the barnacles and marine fouling are *not* the root cause of the turtle's demise, but are symptomatic of underlying problems. There is therefore no immediate gain by forcibly removing the barnacles.

"As for observations of the animal in a tank, well, yes that is one passive way forward. However, for generally debilitated turtles without visible physical injury, we tend to look at the blood parameters first and then base our treatment regime on what we find there. We work very closely with one of the private veterinary clinics in Dubai who provide essential back-up in terms of advice and treatment.

Central Veterinary Research Laboratory handle all our pathology, giving us critical feedback. We now have files on turtle cases going back years.

"At this time of year "cold-stunning" is common in our turtles, which creates secondary problems, and we have our biggest influx of animals now.

"I don't by any means mean to belittle anyone's efforts in rehabilitation of sick wildlife. The sentiment is commendable. However to see potentially harmful methods advocated in your newsletter is cause for concern.

"As for the individual turtle described in the letter, which was passed to us from Atlantis, it had a carapace infection which is being treated with iodine-based disinfectant, and a topical antibiotic cream which we have found effective in past cases. We hope to release the turtle once it has made a full recovery and once the sea temperatures come up a bit with the onset of spring.

"Perhaps a visit to our unit may help to clarify our work to your members, but we would not be able to take too many individuals at once! In the meantime, anybody is free to enter Madinat Jumeirah and order a coffee, to view our turtles and read the notice-boards posted by the enclosure. There is also further information on our tracking work posted on Seaturtle.org under the title of "Dubai Turtle Rehabilitation and Release Programme".

"If you like, you can publish our contact number for future turtle strandings, Burj al Arab Aquarium 04 3017198, and do please feel free to publish this entire email in your newsletter if appropriate.

"Thanks for your help in clearing up this potential confusion." *And thanks for this information to Kevin Hyland of the Wildlife Protection Office and Natasha Christie of Atlantis Hotel*

One of Bur Dubai's Secrets

Sandhya Prakash was joined by an enthusiastic group on a ramble through the little alleys of Bur Dubai along which Hindu and Sikh temples can be found.



Small colourful shops sell flowers and offerings. The flowers are fresh. The yellow ones, "Shamanthi", are grown locally, along with roses and jasmine. Some, during festivals when demand is very high, are imported.



One of the many surprises is a huge tree in a square, a focal point of the area and a place to rest.



Winding through the alleys, one tends to lose both direction and time, and it is delightful to find that the alleys open out along the creek, and that time has passed very happily. But I won't give away too many secrets - Sandhya has promised another walk, since this was over-subscribed (see p.2 field trips). *Photographs by Michelle Sinclair and Patricia Foggon.*



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan
res 344 8283
off 344 0462
fax (off) 349 9437

Archaeology - David Palmer
050-7387703
office direct line: 04-2072636
dpalmer@ud.ac.ae

Birds - David Bradford
davebradford9@hotmail.com

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi
res: 06-5247 958
off: 06-5583 003
email: lankefi@emirates.net.ae

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 - Recorder 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.



Musandam Hike to a Terraced Settlement

Stefan Beck (and his wife Martina) have been observed in many environments on DNHG field trips over the years – although they now live in Abu Dhabi. We are grateful that Stefan stepped up to help fill our field trip programme with a very interesting entry. After several scouting efforts, Stefan decided on a hiking trip to a terraced settlement called Difan at a modest elevation in the southern Musandam area. This was a full day hike that included a fairly thorough investigation of the settlement.



The Musandam hikers

The day was generally overcast but never threatening, although heavy rains in RAK in the preceding days had washed out a section of the normal access wadi – perhaps not surprising considering that recent quarrying had lowered it to well below the former base level.



The ascent trail was a scenic one, with many photo opportunities.

The trail showed clear evidence of recent improvements but was nevertheless a relentless climb.



Stone work made the trail easier

Reaching the settlement, we had a good overview of the distinctive geology through which we had traveled by car and foot. Wadi Khabb follows, more or less, the contact along which the multicolored deep water sediments of the Hawasina Group are thrust northwestward over the grey carbonates of the Ru'us al-Jibal.



Difan

The settlement of Difan itself is set in a relatively flat and sheltered trough transverse to the main ridge. It has been substantially refurbished since 2000 and now features nearly a dozen stone dwellings in a modern style, with the joints between stones decoratively whitewashed. These modern houses are surrounded by a fenced and gravel surfaced yard within which there may be a shaded sitting area, storage buildings and occasionally decorative plants.

Several older cisterns are still in use, but they are joined by newer, cemented ones. We were also able to compare water gathering techniques, from traditional falaj troughs across the hillside to more modern cement walls, like weirs, to channel



runoff to the cistern. Remaining "traditional" features of the settlement included a number of grain storehouses (Arabic *yanz*, pl. *yunooz*) and a slightly refurbished but disused grinding hut, with a traditional imported grindstone.

A number of palm trees in the fields are propped up, some with forked wooden trunks, others with steel pipes and ladders. Several small fields were cultivated with grain (Arabic: *hubb*) that was ground into flour (Arabic: *taheen*) for making bread (Arabic: *khubz*). Our culinary experts confirmed that it did indeed seem to be wheat flour.

Our group of eleven discussed this while taking tea with Saeed, a twenty-something nephew of one of the principal landowners, who visits occasionally for weekends or holidays. Asked about the reasons for the building boom in the mountains in recent years, Saeed explained the timing in personal terms. He was old enough to have a house of his own in the settlement, and his two brothers also wanted houses, so they built. Nevertheless, it seems likely that the overall timing is related to the final settlement of the border in these areas, and the consequent availability of official funding.

local man and two local teenagers, along with several laborers, making this trail one of the busier ones in the area.



The group enjoyed cool weather

The cool, grey weather discouraged most birds and flying insects but the principal local denizens were seen: Hume's wheatear, desert lark, yellow-vented bulbul and rock dove. The only chukar seen was a bird laid out next to the kitchen at Saeed's house, still handsome and colorful but shot and waiting to be plucked for the pot. Free-roaming domestic chickens were also present at the settlement – one or two roosters and a number of hens. The most unusual sighting of the day was a scops owl (small size, ear tufts) spotted by Rachel Cameron in an *Acacia* tree as the group took a break on the ascent. *Report by Gary Feulner, photographs by Stefan Beck*

Black Palace Beach

Five of us met early on a Saturday morning for the shelling trip. After a few mishaps on finding 'black palace beach' for the novices (luckily there is a u-turn just beyond the entrance to the beach so we weren't delayed) we found the beach to be more or less empty of sun-seekers but full of shells.



Palm gardens at Difan

Three labourers and a goatherd were also in residence during our Friday afternoon visit, and for Gary Feulner there was a happy reunion with an older Pakistani labourer met some eight years earlier, at the time of construction of one of the first of the new stone houses. On our descent, we met an additional six people ascending, including an elderly



Black palace beach

The novices among us (everyone except Sandy) started looking for shells. As we all had untrained eyes we were drawn towards what we considered "unusual" shells.



Sandy and the shellers

We scoured the beach only to discover that Sandy's plan of sitting in one spot and picking shells within reach drew a greater variety of shells than all of us combined had managed to gather.



Some of the shells found

It was fascinating to watch, and listen, as Sandy explained to us what shells we had gathered and also which shells were related. We were all surprised to discover that sometimes the shells that one would pass over as looking "normal" are in fact the most interesting - beauty is indeed in the eye of the beholder! *Report by Clare O'Hare, photographs Diane Lewis*

Inter-Emirates Weekend 2009 Photographic Competition: Guidelines and Judging

The Inter-Emirates Photographic Competition is open to amateur photographers who are members



	name	tel home	tel office	fax
Chairman	Gary Feulner messages: 306 5300	306 5570	330 3600	330 3550
Vice Chairman	Valerie Chalmers email: valeriechalmers@gmail.com	349 4816	no calls pls	340 0990
Treasurer	Lena Linton email: linton@mailme.ae	050-474 3595		
Membership Secretary	Anindita Radhakrishna email: anin@emirates.net.ae	282 3952	050-656 9165	
Speaker Co-ordinator	Angela Manthorpe email: manthorpe2005@yahoo.co.uk	288 6232	050-645 1743	
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Pradeep Radhakrishna email: wgarnet@emirates.net.ae	282 3952	050-450 8496	
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Jenny Hill email: jennyhill76@hotmail.com		050 8861508	
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Sandhya Prakash email: springconsult@gmail.com	050-5512481		348 2868
Special Projects	Beryl Comar email: comar@emirates.net.ae	344 2243		344 2243
Newsletter Editor	Anne Millen email: pvana@emirates.net.ae	394 7076	no calls please	394 7075
Publisher	Peter van Amsterdam email: pvana@emirates.net.ae	394 7076	335 5495	394 7075
Librarian	<i>Librarian needed!</i>			
Book Sales	<i>Book sales person needed!</i>			
Postmaster	Sandi Ellis email: peterjon@emirates.net.ae	050-644 2682		
Chief Engineer	Jesse Ellis email: peterjon@emirates.net.ae	050-8993413		

of the Abu Dhabi chapter of the ENHG, the Al Ain chapter of the ENHG and the Dubai Natural History Group.

Participants are invited to enter a maximum of two (returnable) photographs, which have been taken in either the UAE and Oman, on natural history subjects. There are five different categories:

1. plants
2. animals
3. geology/landscapes
4. archaeology/architecture
5. culture

There will be a prize for each category. Photographs should be a minimum size of 5 inches x 7 inches (125mm x 180mm) and should be mounted so that the photo can be displayed without damaging it (eg They might be 'blutacked' to a tiled wall.) Each photographer is requested to write the following information on the back of each photograph:

- Photographer
- Title of photograph
- Specify where photograph was taken e.g. Dubai Creek and not UAE
- When the photograph was taken (approx.)

Photographs may be handed to IEW 2009 organisers any time from Thursday 26th March until 5 p.m. on Friday 27th March and they will be on display prior to the buffet dinner on 27th.

The competition will be judged by everyone present. Each individual attending IEW 2009 will be given a voting form to vote for a winner in each of the five categories. The winners will be announced during the evening and then the prizes will be presented.

N.B. The photographers must be present at the function.

Half Day Dhow Trip Friday March 27th

On Inter-Emirates Weekend, there will be a half-day Musandam Dhow Trip to Haffa. This trip must be confirmed in advance with Al Marsa. If you wish to go, please email Valerie on valeriechalmers@hotmail.com. 130dhs will be required as a non refundable deposit on booking.

Timings: 10:00 am to 4:00 pm
Meeting Point: Dibba Port (Al Mina) Oman at Al Marsa office
Cost: Dh 260/- per person.

Inclusions: lunch, tea break, coffee, water and soft drinks.

Restrictions: Minimum 20 people, maximum 35. Children: 0 - 5 years free of charge, 6 -10 years 50% of adult rate, above 10 years the adult rate.

There will be an opportunity for snorkelling. Bring hat, sun block and swim gear etc.

No visas will be required but please bring your passports with you.

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

Sunday 1 March Hanne and Jens Eriksen: Socotra Island

Sunday 5 April Allestree Fisher: 'Flora of the UAE'

Field Trips (Members only, please. Details inside, p.2)

25-28 Feb Masirah Island

07 Mar Oasis at Musah

14 Mar Temple walk

21 Mar Bastakiya walk

26-28 Mar Inter-Emirates weekend

01 May Union Paper Mill tour

Further field trips, details and any changes will be announced by e-mail circular.