

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

We are bidding farewell this month to **Dieter and Ingrid Stanik**, who have been enthusiastic participants in many of our activities over the past five years. They will be returning to Germany after almost a decade overseas to join their daughter who preceded them last autumn to begin her university studies. We wish them well in the future!



Juvenile Cobra

Binish Roobas won the prize for Best Overall Photograph at the End-of-Season Dinner this year with his 'Juvenile Cobra' (above). More about the photographic competition appears on p.2.

Lena and Simon Linton really *did* cross the Gulf and drive through Iran, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and the Czech Republic! They were, at last update, in Prague, on their way to France, and sounding as enthusiastic as ever.

Helga and Willy Meyer, firmly associated in our minds with beaches, have been visiting Ras al Hamra beach, and amongst other finds (see p.6), they found a broken sand dollar. They carefully collected the pieces, but it was so badly broken that when they got home they were not sure how to assemble them. Willy's partner Mike de Lange who is very keen on digital art asked for the box of puzzle pieces and spent about half a day assembling a more complete skeleton than Helga & Willy could manage. **Dr Sandy Fowler** remarked that they are in fact rather common in the UAE. This surprised most of the DNHG shellers, as few have found them. It raises the question of whether they are less common now than they were some years ago.



Artistic reconstruction of the sand dollar

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.) Subscriptions paid now are good through to September 2010.

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

This month's Contributors

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

Nancy Papathanasopoulou
Abdullah Al-Derbas
Hussain Al-Qallaf
Helga & Willy Meyer
Barbara Couldrey
Jean-Paul Berger
Liz Thornington
Simon Linton
Gary Feulner
Val Chalmers



Beach finds

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



End-of Season Dinner

This year's End-of-Season Dinner and Photographic Competition was again held at The India Club but this time in the Darbar Restaurant. We were served an excellent Indian buffet which Pradeep Radhakrishna had carefully selected and 41 members attended the function. Our thanks to Pradeep for arranging for the group to hold the function again at the India Club.

Entries were received for all three categories in our photographic competition and the winners were:

Best Photo Overall: Binish Roobas – Juvenile Cobra. Binish received the DNHG trophy.



Val Chalmers, Binish Roobas and Gary Feulner

Life on Earth: Plants/Animals/
Fossils: Ziad Makhoul – Turtle on Masirah Island



Ziad Makhoul receives his prize

Earth & Environment: Landscapes/
Geology: Colin Emmitt – Calcareous Pools



Colin Emmitt and Gary Feulner

Man & his Influence: Archaeology/
Architecture/Culture (People)/
Environment: Angela Manthorpe -
Boat on Land



Angela Manthorpe and Gary Feulner with her winning photograph

All received Magrudy vouchers.

Usually, *Gazelle* publishes the winning photographs for all members to see and enjoy. Unfortunately, copies are not in as we go to print, so that pleasure awaits you in our July/August issue.

The Table Quiz was set by last year's winners – Stephen and Angela Manthorpe, Jenny Hill, Colin Emmitt and David Palmer. The winners were the Nitwits (Peter van Amsterdam and Anne Millen, Pradeep and Anindita Rad-

hakrishna, Sue Sharyn Ward, Sandhya Prakash and AnnMarie Bui). The winners each received a copy of Marijcke Jongbloed's book *Wild About Mammals* plus a towel and cap.



Val distributes prizes to the winning table

The runners up - Boys + 1 (Binish Roobas, Peter and Maureen Speer and Gary Feulner) – each received a Chalmers towel and cap. Many thanks to Stephen, Angela, Jenny, Colin and David for setting an enjoyable but quite difficult quiz!



Some eating, some thinking

Our thanks to Val, Pradeep and Anin for organizing such an enjoyable evening.

Maintaining the Links

If you are leaving Dubai but remaining a member of the DNHG, please let us know, partly so *Gazelle* can mention your departure, if you wish, in our Members' News column (pvana@emirates.net.ae), and partly because we need to make an arrangement about your newsletter. If you are receiving *Gazelle* by email, simply advise our Membership Secretary, Anindita (anin@emirates.net.ae), of your new address and when it becomes active. If you receive *Gazelle* by post, consider having it sent by email, and, again, let Anin know. There are two good reasons for this: overseas postage must be paid in advance if you want to continue to receive hard copy, and online *Gazelle* is in glorious colour.



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.

IEW - Geology Field Trip

A convoy of eight cars under the leadership of Gary Feulner headed off for an all-day trip to explore the geology of the northernmost Hajar Mountains, inland from Dibba, in an area once called "the Geology Route". The local mountains are world famous for exhibiting a suite of rock types called *ophiolite*, which are igneous rocks formed deep within the earth's crust and upper mantle at mid-ocean ridges. Because of their relatively high density, compared with the rocks forming the continents, ophiolites are normally subducted back into the earth's crust, well out of reach, and the Hajar Mountains of the UAE and Oman contain the largest surface exposure of ophiolite rocks in the world.

The convoy met at the Dibba cement works and proceeded up the new road from Dibba to Ras al Khaimah which passes along the major fault zone (called the "Dibba Zone") between the ophiolite rocks to the south and the massively bedded shallow water carbonates (limestone and dolomite) to the north, which form the Musandam mountains or the Ru'us al-Jibal. One of our first stops was to view, in the Muhtaraqah area, a rare example of pillow lava which was exposed on the side of the wadi.



A hillside of pillow lavas

These lavas are formed deep underwater and because of the water pressure and low temperature

they only flow for a very short distance before the outer layers of the lava solidify. The end result resembles stacks of pillows as each eruption of lava is rapidly stopped in its tracks.

This area now forms the junction between the igneous rocks and various sedimentary rock units, and it was possible to see the exact contact between the totally different rock forms, with often igneous rocks on one side of the wadi and sedimentary limestones and shales on the other. In the same area it was possible to see the purple or green deep ocean shales formed at the bottom of the abyssal plain. These were sometimes interbedded with pale coloured beds of recrystallized sandy limestone that originated as diffuse submarine landslides. Other, much coarser, deep water sediments were also found which formed at the base of the continental slope. This was confirmed by evidence of boulder inclusions where rocks and debris tumbling down from the continental shelf had become embedded into the soft material that later became limestone. The group searched for evidence of radiolarians (prehistoric diatoms) but these are generally found in cherts rather than shales and we did not find any.



Mica schist

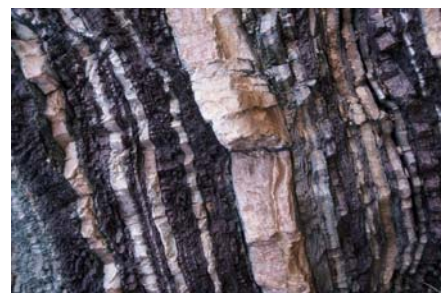
The convoy continued into the Tawiyah area which was scarred by the numerous quarries extracting limestone from the southern border of the Musandam. Exiting the mountains, we headed south on the old Ras al Khaimah to Manama road before turning back towards the mountains at Al Ghail. A short scramble to the top of an ophiolite outcrop showed us what was once the base of the ophiolite sheet. Here the ophiolite was pervasively

streaked with green-white veins of serpentine and was very friable, tending to break away under one's feet or hands. It was also heavily altered at the top of the hills to reddish siliceous material, probably by processes occurring long after its initial emplacement.



Serpentine

A rough ascent of Wadi Al Fara and Wadi Asimah (a few participants requested wadi-bashing certificates) brought us to an interesting area of metamorphic rocks formed by the heat and stresses of the titanic forces that thrust the ophiolite rocks from the abyssal plain onto the sedimentary platform of the Arabian peninsula. In nearly all the wadis we had seen different coloured and shaped rocks, which didn't appear to match the surrounding rocks. In the metamorphic rocks we found where these had come from as there were all manner of different rock forms depending on the original composition and the amount of heat and pressure experienced. Many of these metamorphic rocks were especially beautiful colours ranging from the pure white of quartz or marble to deep purple and red. In the wadis we were also able to see the vertical walls of wadi gravel conglomerate sitting unconformably on the underlying igneous rocks below them.



Turbidites



Despite an occasional threat of rain, and a few drops, we were extremely lucky to see the wadi geology under almost ideal conditions as the recent rains had washed everything clean without churning the wadis into impassibility, although many of the wadis were still running. The final section of our trip brought us up into Wadi Tayyibah and the old road to Dibba from Masafi. Once back on the tarmac it was a simple drive back to the Oceanic in Khor Fakkan after a fascinating day's trip. *Report by Simon Linton and Gary Feulner, photographs by Gary and Jean-Paul Berger*

Ground Mantis

A popular diversion from the geology field trip at IEW was a ground mantis found on sandy gravel along the mountain front, near the turnoff to Al Ghail. There was at first considerable speculation about the identity of this peculiar looking insect (A spider? No, can't be – it has only six legs and has antennae).

Closer inspection confirmed that it was in fact a cousin of the more familiar praying mantis, with a large triangular head, big eyes and grasping forelegs held in a "praying" position, but shorter, fatter and much flatter (a bit banjo-shaped overall), without functional wings, and very well camouflaged to resemble its mottled background.



Eremiaphila braueri
Photograph by Liz Thornington

Ground mantises are well represented in the Gulf region. They belong to the family Eremiaphili-

dae. The behaviour and ecology of the ground mantis *Eremiaphila braueri*, a species found to be common at the archaeological site of Kush in Ras al-Khaimah, was described and discussed in detail by Murray Lee Eiland III in *Tribulus* vol. 8.1 (1998), at p. 17-21. *Report by Gary Feulner*

IEW - Fujairah Museum, Fort and Heritage Village



Mr Madani with the InterEmirates group at the museum

Our group met at Fujairah Fort on Saturday 28th March and made our way to Fujairah Museum to meet Mr Madani, the curator of the Museum and our guide for the morning. The Museum, about 400 metres from the fort, was founded and inaugurated by His Highness Shaikh Hamad Bin Mohammed Al-Sharqi, the Ruler of Fujairah on 30th November 1991. The Museum contains both an archaeology section, which displays exhibits from different sites including Qidfa and Mirbah, which have been excavated by local and foreign teams, and an ethnography section, which includes early photographs of the Fujairah area.

Mr Madani then took us into the fort and explained the many points of interest to us. Fujairah Fort, which is 500 years old and stands on a natural rocky outcrop, has now been completely restored. It is the largest and most important fort on the east coast and is estimated to have been constructed between 1500 and 1550 AD. It was used by the Ruler until as late as the 1960s and in 1925 it was shelled by a British warship, as part of a dispute with the Ruler.

The structure of the fort is somewhat unique in that it has three circular towers and a square-shaped fourth tower. Entry to the fort is by way of traditional wooden gates with a 90 degree turn before entering the central courtyard. The lower rooms included a date storage area. There was a majlis at the upper level where the Shaikh dispensed justice.

We then drove from the fort to the Heritage Village, which is about 10 minutes away by car, almost in the mountains and just beyond the sulphur springs. We looked at the displays of traditional handicrafts and old photographs of Fujairah. Unfortunately, due to the heavy rain, parts of the village were having to be dried out. On a previous visit six years ago, we watched demonstrations of weaving and tali by the local ladies, but they were not present on this visit.

Many thanks to Mr Ahmed Al Shamsi, the Director of Heritage and Archaeology for allowing the group to visit the three places and to Mr Madani for being our guide on the trip. *Report and photograph by Valerie Chalmers*

Kuwait Turtle Conservation Project: Towards Knowledge and Protection

Kuwait is a small country situated on the northwestern shore of the Arabian Gulf. An oil-producing country, it is not known for its soft, sandy beaches and a thriving coral reef or for its sea turtle populations that live and reproduce there. And yet all this exists, rendering its small offshore islets very important for marine biodiversity in the area. A closely intertwined relationship has always existed between the land and the sea. Traditionally, pearling and fishing dominated Kuwait's maritime activities. Today, some seventy trawlers catch what is amongst the most important shrimp catches in the world, exporting many tons worldwide. Land reclamation projects and development have modified the marine environ-



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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.



ment of the mainland, and home-grown yacht tourism has reclaimed the islet of Kubbar, once providing nesting grounds for turtles, today hosting nesting swift tern populations. Despite this, turtles are still observed swimming around Kubbar. In the last forty years, the population in the country has increased tremendously, and in Kuwait Bay alone, more than 10 square kilometers of intertidal habitat has been filled in for power generation stations, port development projects, recreation and commercial concerns to meet the needs of a developing society with over 60% of its population under 24 years of age.

In the framework of the Kuwait Turtle Conservation Project, sponsored by TOTAL Foundation and TOTAL Kuwait and with the cooperation of the Voluntary Work Center Kuwait and The Scientific Center, researchers are now attempting to unravel the mysteries of sea turtle presence in the area. Population assessment, species assessment, nesting seasons and public awareness are some of the project's challenges.



The first green turtle we spotted in Qaru, July 2008.



Returning to the sea
Photographs by Hussain Al-Qallaf

What has been known for years was that hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and green turtles

(*Chelonia mydas*) have been spotted nesting on the offshore, uninhabited atolls of Umm Al-Maradim and Qaru. A beach in the Mina Al Zour area has been hosting hawksbill nesting grounds for several years as well, while the occasional loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) had been caught in fishermen's nets or a leatherback's carcass (*Dermochelys coriacea*) found on some beach. Given the difficulty of access to the offshore islands most times of the year mainly due to unpredictable weather conditions, the Kuwait Turtle Conservation Project took up the challenge to try to access the Islands and monitor, as much as possible for most months of the year. In cooperation with the Coast Guard, which mans the stations of Umm Al-Maradim and Qaru year-round, the results are encouraging.



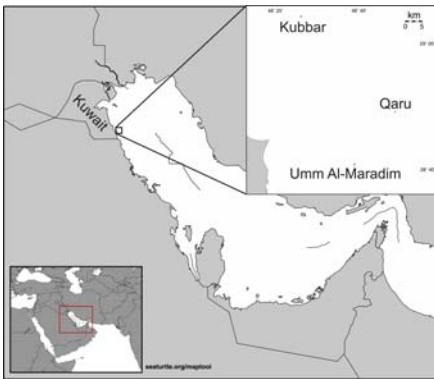
Green turtle nesting in Qaru
Photographs by Abdullah Al-Derbas

After almost one year of project life, the number of turtles nesting on each island every year is still unknown, but as research progresses it is hoped that this will become clear. In July and August 2008, researchers on Qaru Island found 36 green turtle pits. In November 2008, 50 pits in total were seen on Qaru, two of which were too small to be green turtle nests. Could hawksbills have nested here, too?

Only Greens were observed nesting in Qaru in July and August



2008. Likely prompted by scorching sand temperatures of 48 Celsius, they dig enormous body chambers to lay their eggs. Due to the notorious Sarayyat winds in September and October, the team was unable to go to the island in search of hatching activity. The Coast Guard, however, spotted several green turtle hatchlings on the last day of August and photographed them. So did a team of divers, friends of the Voluntary Work Center. No other reports for hatchlings were given in 2008.



The project area

In Umm Al-Maradim, where both Green and Hawksbill turtles nested before the construction of the new Coast Guard marina, the nesting season had not started yet in March 2009 and it certainly seemed long over in July 2008. Seven potential nests were observed on Umm Al-Maradim in July 2008. A hatchling's track, which did not seem to reach the sea, was observed as well, a fact that is not surprising, given the massive bridled terns (*Sterna anaethetus*) colony which nest in the bushes right by the turtle nesting grounds. Bridled terns search for food all night, especially a protein-rich hatchling to feed nesting and incubating parents at that time of the year.

- The KTCP team's objectives for 2009 are:
- Nesting seasons have to be confirmed
- Species per island and per season to be determined
- Nesting and hatching success to be measured.
- Interactions with predators and weather to be studied
- Coral reef to be further investigated
- Satellite tracking to be carried out

- on both species
- Flipper tagging to commence for both species
- Nest monitoring with the technology of i-buttons to begin
- Local community and media to be briefed about the sea turtle issue
- Tailor-made environmental education material to be presented to schools, fishermen and all relevant stakeholders
- Legislation and policy-making to be discussed with authorities to examine possible improvements to the benefit of the marine environment.

The project is ongoing, and will be until at least July 2011 and I hope to provide regular updates about its results and observations in Kubbar, Qaru and Umm Al-Maradim.

Thanks to Abdullah Al-Derbas and Hussain Al-Qallaf for photographs and to Nancy Papathanasopoulou, Kuwait Turtle Conservation Project, P.O. Box 214383, Dubai, UAE nancyktp@gmail.com for text

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- Meakins, R. and Al-Mohanna, S., *Sea Turtles of Kuwait*, Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, 2004, 89.
- Al-Yamani F., Bishop, J. et al, *Oceanographic Atlas of Kuwait's Waters*, Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, Environment Public Authority, Kuwait 2004, 9.
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Ras al Hamra Finds ...

When Helga and Willy Meyer visited Ras al Hamra beach in late May, they almost left in disgust because the beach was very dirty. There was a mess of seagrass and animal droppings and their initial impression was that it was in a pretty disgusting state. But fortunately, they stayed, found the urchin shell (see p.1) and had a wonderful experience! Willy wrote, "The first thing about the beach is that it's not a "beach", but rather where water meets dune, very fine & soft reddish dune sand. The second thing we noticed was

the large amount of sea grass floating in the water – much like somebody tipped large amounts of lawn clippings into the water. The third thing was the scat along the waters edge – lots-n-lots. Our friend's dog went ballistic and swallowed a couple of them. I didn't take a photograph, but the droppings look like a cross between a dog's and a horse's. They were completely odorless, tightly packed, almost black and basically compacted plant fibre.

I saw the suspected dugong while watching the birds trying to dive-bomb fish, at which they were not very successful. After I got back my breath I explained to Helga where to look, and for what, and then we saw more of it (or them): a flipper, a snout/nose, that sort of thing. It was unmistakably a mammal and brownish grey, but we never saw the extent of it, only bits of extremities.



GoogleEarth map of the "dirty beach"

The dugong, if it was one, was about 100m from the beach and seemed to be moving parallel to the waterline. The water there was about 2.5m to 3m deep." *Thanks to Willy and Helga Meyer for this report.*

... And Some in Jumeirah

Helga had another question this week. She wrote, "Over the last two weekends, we found a lot of eggs or something in the sea when we went for a swim. The things are completely invisible when in the water, but (out of the water) you can see a 1mm speck of something inside a 5mm diameter x 8 - 10mm long clear 'jelly bean'. The 'beans' are loosely joined end to end into strings that break the moment you touch them.



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In each of these 'eggs' one tiny spot of opaque material can be seen

We've tried to take a picture of them (above) to ask members for help in identifying the blobs." *Thanks to Helga and Willy Meyer for this month's puzzle.*

Crash Landings in the Musandam

On 17 May, 2006 we saw three eagle owls (*Bubo ascalaphus*), one adult and two juveniles, in Wadi Hafarah, Ras al Khaimah. Since

that date I have seen one adult, at various times of the year, in the same area.

During a dawn walk on 29 May this year, despite bulldozing nearby, we again disturbed one adult and two juveniles from the same ledge/cave just above the wadi floor. I collected interesting scat during their absence which consisted of vegetable matter and a small bone.



Eagle owl scat

During our walk the owls flew about, landed, peered, preened

and generally showed curiosity. Nearer the lower and wider end of the wadi, one juvenile entertained us with landing practice. Once it crashed into a steep rock face, slipped down a few feet, then clawed its way up again to a little ledge. Regaining its composure it took off again to the opposite wall of the wadi, grabbed at the remains of a dead bush which came away in a cloud of dust taking with it our downy headed friend. It dropped onto a wide ledge out of our view. At this point, mum started calling from further down the wadi, probably saying, "Enough for today!"

I am delighted to know that breeding continues in the same place, regardless of new quarry roads. Also, apart from leaving their cave as we walked very close by, the owls have always appeared to be more curious than concerned at our presence. *Thanks to Barbara Couldrey for this report and for the photograph.*

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

Sept 13 2009 - International Year of the Gorilla (To be confirmed)

Field Trips (Members only, please.)

Summer field trips will be announced by e-mail circular.