

# GAZELLE

Vol 26 no 3 March 2011



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

**DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP**

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

## Members' News

**Angela and Steve Manthorpe** were back in Dubai in February, after an "archeological binge" in Syria and Jordan. They are delayed in setting off again, but are soon leaving on a long and complicated tour through Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and ... well, who knows? But they assure us they will reappear just as unexpectedly!

**Carol Goodwright** spent a few busy days in Dubai whilst attending the TESOL conference in March, and caught up with, amongst others, old DNHG friend **Beverley Bata** who has left Florida and is again working in the Middle East. Carol may be back in Dubai closer to the end of the year when she hopes to have time to join some of the field trips. She makes time to walk in the parks near her home in England, and spotted this spider's web during the 'season of mists and mellow fruitfulness'.



DNHG Treasurer **Louisa Akerina** met up with Anne Millen and Peter van Amsterdam when they were in Colombo in late February. She is recovering from dengue fever, but is still very much enjoying surfing, and the flora and fauna of the country.

### *A Notice and a Celebration!*



The DNHG's AGM, normally held annually at our March lecture, will be postponed this year until the April lecture. Members interested in serving on the Committee for the coming year, or assisting in other ways, should make their interest known to one of the existing Committee members.

And on February 16th, the DNHG reached its 25th anniversary! *Gazelle* will be bringing you a history in a future issue. We will be celebrating it at our April 3 meeting as well, by having an earlier than usual start (7.30), and serving cake to members. Please join us!

We will then hear our speakers for the evening, Rima Jabado and Ada Natoli who will present information about hawksbill turtles in Dubai and their genetics.

So for the important April 3 meeting, remember to come at 7.30pm and join us for celebratory cake!

### *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:**

Heidi Struiksma and the p.6 eight  
Keith Taylor and *Focus*  
Valerie Chalmers  
Yousef al Habshi  
Sonja Lavrenčič  
Roland Brown  
Maureen Steer  
Narayan Karki  
Gary Feulner  
Earl Wolf

"Blue Eye", Soqatra  
Photograph by  
Heidi Struiksma



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



Marble Quarry at Hijari near  
Sohar, Oman  
Sat 19 March

Hans-Joachim Rau advises that this trip has had to be postponed until a later date. An email will be sent letting all know when it will take place. Well ahead of time, please check the cost of visas for Oman as these vary by nationality and type of visa, and some have increased recently.

Forts of Dibba Oman (with a  
local fish lunch!)  
Sat 26 March

Everyone who wants to go on this trip should now have registered, paid and be champing at the bit.

Archeological Exhibition, Al  
Jahili Fort  
Fri 01 or Sat 02 May

This trip to visit tombs and archaeological sites in Al Ain will be followed by a visit to the archaeological exhibition being held at Al Jahili Fort in Al Ain until May. We are hoping to coordinate with the Al Ain group on this, and will advise the details at a later date. Contact Sonja Lavrenčič: lavsonja@yahoo.it

Plants at Mushrif Park / old  
radio mast with Gary & Val  
8 April (TBC)

Val has to reconnoitre this as it has been a particularly dry and cold winter. It will be interesting to see the effect this has had on vegetation there, which is remarkably resilient. Val will provide details closer to the time.

Visit to EMEG, Ghantoot  
Sat 9 April

This visit to the conservation area at Ghantoot with Major Ali will take place in the afternoon. There are a variety of things to do - plant mangroves, feed hamour, see dhub and other flora and fauna of the area. Sonja Lavrenčič will provide details at our next meeting and by email.

Temple Walk with Sandhya  
Prakash  
Sat 16 April

Sandhya will lead a walk through the little winding lanes of the 'temple area' of Bur Dubai. Most people are unaware that there is one, so bring your camera and hat and be prepared to be surprised. Contact SandhyaPrakash by email: sandy\_pi@yahoo.com

Overnight on Sir Abu Nu'air  
Fri 27 -Sat 28 May

Sonja Lavrenčič is liaising with Major Ali and when the details are available, they will be advertised. There will be an overnight camp on the island. Registrations will need to be firm, as numbers are limited to 25 people.

And on the agenda for 2011...

For the following trips, details will be published/emailed as soon as known, but pencil them in now:

Jebel Shams Camping  
Late April / early May / even  
June

Visit to a Desalination Plant  
with Fausto Tazzi

Visit to a Hydroponic Farm

Socotra direct from Sharjah,  
and Sana'a, Yemen

These two trips have been postponed to the end of 2011 because of political uncertainty. Sonja will keep us posted.

## Are You a Techie with Time?

The website sub-committee would like to find volunteers who can help with maintenance of the online newsletter, and to upload the wealth of information and photographs from past *Gazelles*. Full training will be given. Contact any Committee person - we will be very pleased to hear from you!

## Our Next Speakers

**Rima Jabado** is a marine ecologist and holds a Masters of Applied Science in Natural Resource Management. She has over nine years of experience in marine research, wildlife monitoring and conservation projects from around the world focusing on behaviour, feeding ecology, migration patterns, habitat use, population genetics and rehabilitation of various species.

She has been living in the UAE for three years with a goal to develop research programmes focusing on the marine environment and its protection. She is currently undertaking her PhD research on shark populations in the Arabian Gulf, conducted through the UAE University in Al Ain, which is the first ever long term research project to be completed on elasmobranchs in the region.

**Dr Ada Natoli** is a specialist in population genetics. She recently moved to Dubai and is currently working as external collaborator with several universities and international organizations in UK, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and New Zealand. She focuses her research on marine mammals but has a broad background covering plant genetics and general ecology.

She holds a PhD in molecular ecology from the University of Durham, UK, where she completed her thesis on the molecular ecology of bottlenose and common dolphins, comparing these species and their population structure on a worldwide scale and in the Mediterranean Sea. Her main interests are investigating the evolutionary mechanisms generating population structure, and supporting conservation and management programmes. She holds a Masters in Biology - plant genetics - from the University of Milan, Italy, and worked as plant genetics researcher at the University of Piacenza.

Ada spent a number of years conducting field research with the Tethys Research Institute working on several projects monitoring the cetacean population in the Mediterranean Sea, and Canary Islands. She is member of the IUCN/SSC Cetacean Specialist Group and has been a member of the Italian delegation and invited participant several times to the International Whaling Commission. She is a member of the scientific steering committee for the monitoring and conservation of cetaceans in Italy and published in several peer-reviewed scientific journals.



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

### Inter-Emirates Weekend

Members who attended this year's Inter-Emirates Weekend, hosted by ENHG Abu Dhabi at the Tilal Liwa Hotel reported a wonderful weekend with a varied and interesting programme. Thanks to ENHG Abu Dhabi!



In the dunes, west Liwa  
Photograph by Earl Wolf

The ENHG's two annual Natural History Awards are always announced at the mid-season Inter-Emirates Weekend, and then the official presentation of the prizes associated with these awards is arranged at the majlis of our Patron, HE Sheikh Nahayan, generally toward the end of the season. Directly below are details about and remarks by the two recent award winners.

The Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohamed Award for Natural History is the country's premier natural history award. It is intended to acknowledge the contributions made by an individual, primarily through original research and publication, to the scientific study of the archaeology, history and natural history of the UAE.

Antonius (Tony) van Harten, coordinator of the impressively comprehensive and ground-breaking UAE Arthropod Project, was awarded the Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohamed Award for 2010.



Tony van Harten

The Bish Brown Award, commemorating one of the Group's Founders, is given by the ENHG chapter to an individual who has promoted study and conservation of the UAE's environment, wildlife, history or heritage, in accordance with the main aims of the Group.

Dr. Christophe Tourenq of the Emirates Wildlife Society-WWF, a frequent lecturer to all three NHGs in the UAE and driving force behind the recent establishment of the UAE's first Mountain Protected Area in Wadi Wurayah in Fujairah, was the Bish Brown Award recipient for 2010. Dr. Tourenq was unable to attend the award announcement at the IEW. *Thanks to Keith Taylor, Editor of Focus, for this material.*

More about IEW on p. 6

### Plenty To See In The DDCR Dunes

Members who were lucky enough to be on the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve trip had a true 4X4 sand-driving experience and a wonderful overview of the project.



Our guide, Greg Simkins, who led the half day trip, has been at the reserve for over a decade and is responsible for the large scale habitat rehabilitation programs, including the propagation of over 6,000 indigenous trees, shrubs and grasses, and the re-introduction of herds of endangered oryx, and many other indigenous wildlife species.



Greg's work included the gradual removal of large herds of camels, which were having a negative effect on the natural habitat. Artificial water pans have been introduced, with water reeds (non-indigenous) planted around them, to create a water habitat. Some birds have begun to enjoy it already.



The trip was a field day for the group's photography enthusiasts, Ajmal and Yousef, and for all participants an amazing experience to see the conservation efforts of DDCR. A scenic drive through windblown sandy landscapes offered sightings of oryx, desert gazelles and foxes, along with plants, insects and lizards.

Wildlife specialists seem to have 20:20 vision and are able to see the tiniest of creatures that the rest of us search for even when they are pointed out. Our first sighting of a sandfish, sunbathing spectacularly on the side of a dune, offered the most "photograph me" opportunity –





but we had only 4 seconds before it dived nose first into the dune!



Greg also spotted a deserted fox hole that then had lots and lots of interesting tracks around it once we had all climbed out of the cars to see it.

Photographer Yousef Al Habshi from Abu Dhabi whose repeat shooting camera resulted in some exquisite photos, was delighted when Sonja casually asked about a predator fly, something that Yousef had long been hoping to see.



The trip was limited to 5 cars and to drivers with some basic desert driving experience. As not enough 4x4 cars were available for the trip, Greg kindly offered 4 spaces in his car. On top of that, he arranged for part of the group to end the trip on the terrace of Al Maha Resort with a nice cup of tea and charming views of the desert. *Report by Rowland Brown, Maureen Steer and Sonja Lavrencic, photographs by Yousef al Habshi and Sonja Lavrenčič*



## Damsel in Disguise

Damselflies of the genus *Ischnura* (bluetails) are notoriously difficult to distinguish in the field. For the three species present in the UAE and Northern Oman (*I. evansi*, *I. senegalensis* and *I. fountainae*), Bob Reimer of Al-Ain has recently sorted out visual identification of the males (see *Tribulus* vol. 18), but identification of *Ischnura* females continues to tax even experts. One reason is that the females of most species exhibit multiple colour patterns, including a pattern that mimics that of the male (androchrome colouration), featuring a blue band around the penultimate abdominal segment.

We were forcefully reminded of the phenomenon of androchrome colouration in late January when we observed a 'male' *Ischnura* in a large irrigation ditch at the Ruwayah plantations. As we watched (and attempted to confirm an identification), the 'male' curled its abdomen and began to deposit eggs on a sloping reed stem, where it angled beneath the water. It was obviously a female! The same animal continued to edge backwards along the reed, still looping its abdomen and depositing eggs at increasingly lower levels, until its head was c.3cm below the water surface.

The androchrome female remained fully submerged for approximately 5 minutes. When it ascended the reed and re-emerged at the surface, a real male was waiting ahead of it (see photo); whether this was by design or inadvertence, we cannot say.

Within another minute, the pair attempted copulation in the wheel position; the male grasped the female's neck but the (androchrome) female seemed only half-hearted and failed in her efforts to maintain a reciprocal hold on the male. Three times in the course of several minutes the tandem pair fell onto the surface of the water in the channel, but each time they were able to take flight and find a perch. In the end, however, they disengaged and went their separate ways, evidently without consummation.

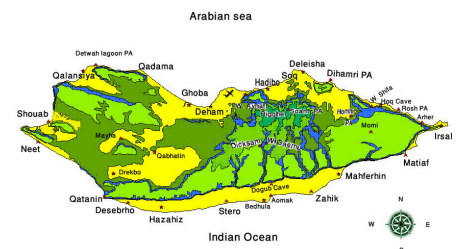


Male damselfly (left) and crossdressing female

Another noteworthy point about this observation is that it was made in late January, and a second observation, of the sister species *I. senegalensis*, was made a day later at Dubai's 'Pivot Fields'. Thus, although it is sometimes said that the local damselflies emerge only "later in the season" than most of the dragonflies, this is not strictly true in all cases. *Report by Gary Feulner and Narayan Karki*

## Soqatra via Sana'a (Part 3)

Heidi Struiksma concludes the Socatra story



Map of Soqatra Island

On day four, already half way through our stay, we headed west through our stay, we headed west along the coast towards Qalansia where we would camp for one night. We made various stops on the way. The first was near a pool, which was a haven for wading birds, with a few Egyptian vultures (they were everywhere). Around the pool Ahmed Saeid showed us a number of drawings of ancient footprints and sand dollars in the baked mud. The next stop was at two sink holes near Ghoba. The first one, the Blue Eye, was filled with seawater, very deep and connected to the sea despite it being quite a bit land inwards. The second was used for salt winning.



## Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan  
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off 344 0462  
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Archaeology - David Palmer  
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Birds - David Bradford  
davebradford9@hotmail.com

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi  
res: 06-5310467  
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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 and Mammals - Recorders 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.



Pool with variety of birds



Land snails

We reached Qalansia beach late morning, and most of the group walked from the village back to the campsite, shelling and swimming on the way. The sea was calm, the beach white and deserted.



One of the many crabs on Qalansia beach

The campsite was very basic, but oh so peaceful. Everyone did their own thing and at nightfall some slept in tents, a majlis or under the stars... until it started raining.

The morning of day five came early and Ulrike Andorff remembers "the goat picking with its teeth on my water bottle acted as alarm clock – 5.30am, the golden sun rising, the ocean turquoise blue whispering just some meters away. Our camping night at a small site close to Qalansia was the most enjoyable one considering the millions of stars we gazed at during the night. A

sumptuous breakfast was served with fresh Arabic bread, cheese, jams and coffee.

"After a cat wash, we went off to the fishing marina of Qalansia where three fishing boats were awaiting us. Within a short time, off we went to explore another beautiful part of the island. One of the boats exercised a "man overboard manoeuvre"; a passenger's walking stick was chucked out by the skipper who considered it garbage. Hearing the protest, he turned around and successfully rescued the faithful aid.



The boats to Shu'ub

"Soon a school of bottle nosed dolphins was discovered, and we followed with delight trying to shoot some photos of the fast moving marine mammals. To our disappointment, they disappeared soon.

"Motoring along the massive rocks was like witnessing the history of earth - grottoes with amazing corals on the walls, water from dark blue to turquoise and bright blue, a high rock with the platform full of the small stunted frankincense trees, like Bonsais, and another rock home to a group of Socotra Cormorants, who fled upon our approach.

Our destination was a long stretch of white beach on the western coast near Shu'ub, where we could snorkel, swim, walk or relax. The beach did not turn up many interesting shells, due to the recent currents. However, hundreds of crabs made the beach alive. Our swimmers and snorkelers reported a variety of colorful fish and corals. Another school of dolphins passed by close to the beach. On our way back, the wind picked up from the southwest, the high waves making





the boats dance on their tips. Socotra Archipelago is not only a jewel for its flora and fauna but for its fascinating beaches, which made us all dream of a life in paradise."

Marijcke's wish came true on the way back to Hadibo thanks to Ahmed Saeid's persistence and knowledge of the habits of local fauna, in this case the chameleon. Marijcke had always wanted to see one in the wild and after an extensive and targeted search by the drivers, Saleh found one. Susan Offerdahl was unaware what to expect, and writes, "when we were told to look for chameleons, I had my eyes on the ground looking for a tiny lizard-like animal that would dart under a rock. When one of the drivers brought this tree climbing magnificent creature for us to look at ... WOW!! I was amazed at its eyes that worked independently of one another, moving in all directions, and by its graceful slow movements."



At last, the chameleon!

On the last day our flight was late afternoon, and members of the group still wanted some last minute shopping at the Women's Arts & Crafts Association and other little shops. Despite it, Ahmed Saeid still found time to take us to see a little spring spouting out of the ground. The water was being used as a falaj system to water the trees and plants.



In Hadibo we had a final lunch at a local outdoor restaurant with our trusted guides cum drivers, cum cooks and first-aiders, Ahmed Saeid, Ahmed 2, Ahmed 3 and Saleh.



The farewell lunch at an Hadibo restaurant

Maureen, summing up the trip, wrote, "The whole Socotra experience was a lesson in the relation between man and his environment, and Ahmed epitomised that for me.



Ahmed Saeid Suleiman

"Ahmed Saeid shows amazing inner strength to work towards his goals for his heritage, his people, the wildlife and the island of Socotra when the challenges of modernisation, tourism, business greed and biased practices are increasingly forcing the people of Socotra away from their roots."

I would like to thank all who contributed to making this trip a success: Sun and Sky Travel (Mr. Salam Ali), Direct Document Services (Mr. Shankar), Mohammed Shaif of Yamanat Tours and of course Ahmed Saeid of the Environment Protection Authority and his fellow drivers. *Thanks to Heidi Struiksma, and her contributors of photos and/or text: Marijcke Jongbloed, Gary Feulner, Nabeela Dhiban, Ulrike Andoff, Maureen Steer, Barbara Hayward, Liz Maley, Susan Offerdahl.*

## Inter-Emirates Weekend: Shoreline Route from Tarif to Abu Dhabi

Three Saturday afternoon return trip tours were on offer on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> February as part of Inter-Emirates Weekend. Several of us opted for the Shoreline Route from Tarif to Abu Dhabi (or Dubai). We set out from the Tilal Liwa Hotel with trip leaders Drew Gardner and Feng Weng and drove back to the E-11, turning right near Tarif. We stopped about 15km past the junction on the right hand side to look at the sabkha and then the prominent sandstone outcropping in the distance.



On the sabkha

Donatella Astratti gave the group an explanation of the processes involved in sabkha formation and their significance. In to the Geology and Terrestrial Habitats Sections of *The Emirates: A Natural History*, "Sabkha" is described as an Arabic term which refers to flat salt-encrusted desert that is usually devoid of any significant plant cover. The high concentration of salts on the sabkha surface prevents the growth of most plant species and, as a consequence, landscape dominated by sabkha appears distinctly barren. The accumulation of salts is possible in areas where the water table lies close to the surface". We examined the hexagonal/polygonal patterning of the sabkha which is "created by expansion due to the crystallization of salts". On the other hand, "polygonal mud cracks may be created by shrinkage due desiccation."





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The sandstone outcropping (above) which the group examined is likely to be an example of Miocene sediments capped with the remnants of more extensive layers of calcite/gypsum-cemented sand from the Quaternary period which overly them unconformably.



Exposed fossil rhizoliths (bush roots), possibly of a mangrove tree (above) from the Miocene period, were seen on a large piece of the outcrop.



The flamingo breeding site. (This photograph plays games with your eyes. The white areas are not encrustations of salt but white sand between low mangroves.)

We went on to the turn-off near Musaffah to look at the small off-shore island known as ICAD 6 where there is a large flamingo-breeding site, instead of going to Dhabbiya, as originally intended, to see the coastal waders and to do some beach-combing, as we ran out of time. Drew produced a telescope which gave us excellent views of the flamingoes at quite a distance. Thank you to Drew Gardner, Feng Weng and Donatella Astratti for a most interesting tour! *Report and photographs by Valerie Chalmers.*

#### *Look the Part!*

The DNHG has navy blue sweat shirts, with the DNHG emblem embroidered in silver. Sizes: L & XL Dh65/- each.

Also, silver grey polo shirts with the DNHG emblem embroidered in black. Sizes: M, L & XL Dh50/- each. The quality of both items is excellent. See Val Chalmers at the next meeting.

## Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| April 3 | Rima and Ada Natoli: Hawksbill Turtles in Dubai (incl. some genetic analysis)                                 |
| May 1   | Dr Susanne Hofstra: A New Perspective on the Old Fertile Crescent: Archaeology and the Origins of Agriculture |
| June 5  | Dr Mark Beech   |

### Field Trips (Members only, please.)

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| Mar 26      | Forts of Dibba Oman with Lamjed El-Kefi |
| Apr 01 / 02 | Al Jahili Fort and Al Ain Museum        |
| Apr 08      | Plants at Mushrif and the Mast          |
| Apr 09      | EMEG, Ghantoot                          |
| Apr 16      | Temple Walk                             |
| May 27&28   | Overnight on Siir Abu Nu'air            |

Further field trips, details or changes will be announced or confirmed by e-mail circular.