

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

DNHG Membership Renewal

Near and Far...

Peter Cunningham writes from Namibia of seeing "game in abundance again - kudu, eland, hartebeest, wildebeest, etc., to name a few since I have been back, and this not in reserves!" Fresh from a wilderness course at Namibia's Waterberg Plateau Park, a sandstone inselberg, Peter echos comments in the last *Gazelle*: "The Musandam strikes me as having all the features of a wilderness area, i.e. unspoilt, no/few roads, few human structures, etc., where the only access is on foot. Something they should look into and promote/market."

Congratulations to **Christine Namour** on the birth of her newest daughter, who joins two siblings plus several dogs and cats and assorted backyard wildlife that Christine has reported on from time to time.

Autumn has arrived in the South of France, writes **Anna Griffin**, and the forests of deciduous trees are turning those gorgeous colours associated with this time of year. Early morning mists hang over the valleys, and in some areas, a pall of smoke from the still smouldering fires that destroyed thousands of hectares of woodland. Sitting in the garden early in the morning surrounded by the scent of pines, Peter and I can look out over valleys to distant mountains, or watch

the birds, the resident robin, long tailed tits, white wagtails, goldfinches, swallows, to mention but a few. In the evening a Scops owl calls close by. The fig tree is now bare of fruit which I and the jays enjoyed. Autumn also brings out the hunters with their guns and dogs in search of anything moving but particularly the wild boar that frequent the forests.

There are too many moths to list but oak hook-tip (*Drepana binara*), garden tiger (*Artica caja*), common footman (*Eilema lurideola*) visit. The cat has brought home a young slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*), and the common lizard (*Lacerta vivipara*), and has tried and failed to catch a praying mantis and a large variety of butterflies, among them the common blue (*Polyommatus icarus*), small copper (*Lycaena phlaeas*) and red admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*).

There are several varieties of edible fungus growing in the grass around the scotch pines. Saffron milk cap (*Lactarius deliciosus*), and wood blewit (*Lepista nuda*) have popped up, though no truffles have appeared as yet, probably because the Griffins haven't yet managed to borrow a pig.

The DNHG membership year begins in September, so renewal is now due. 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 and posted to Fi at PO Box 29561, Dubai. (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:

Peter Cunningham
Anna Griffin
Mary Beardwood
Gary Feulner
Marijcke Jongbloed
Sandy Fowler



Field Trips etc ...

Note some changes and additions...

Wahiba Sands/Turtle Watching at Ras al Hadd, Oman 24-26 October

Registration is now full for this trip. Those who are going can contact Mary for any further help at mikemary@emirates.net.ae or on 050 – 624 3687

Forts of the Nizwa Plain, Oman 7-9 November

Registration also full. Contact Peter van Amsterdam if necessary at pvana@emirates.net.ae

Hajar Mountain Nature Hike Friday 16 November

Gary Feulner will lead a full day nature hike in the Hajar Mountains near Hatta. Overall elevation change will be small, but there are no trails, the ground is often rough and uneven, and we will frequently ascend and descend slopes between the wadi bed and terraces. Total distance 8-10 km, total time 6-8 hours. Suitable for regular hikers or fit and energetic novices. Bring boots or sturdy shoes, minimum 3 litres of water (plus a 4th in the car), lunch, hat, sun cream, camera, binoculars, etc. 4WD preferred.

Meet at Hatta at 8:15am sharp, estimated return (to Dubai) will be around 6:30pm. Maximum 15 people. For further information, sign-up and logistics, see Gary at the Nov 4 DNHG meeting or telephone 330-3600 (office) or 306-5570 (home).

Fossiling and Camping 22 – 23 November

Mike Lorrigan and Tess Kazim will lead this trip. They plan to leave on Thursday, camp overnight and do some more fossiling the next day. Val Chalmers will be there to identify your fossils. Limited to 8 cars. Contact Mike or Tess at: oxymoron@emirates.net.ae

History and Archeology Tour of Ras al Khaimah Friday 30 November

Mary Beardwood has lined up a field trip with Christian Velde, resident archaeologist at Ras al Khaimah who is currently working on Bronze Age sites, on November 30th.

The trip to Ras al Khaimah will focus on the history of the last two hundred years. We will go first to Dhayah, north of Ras al Khaimah to visit the old fort on a steep hill. The government has built a staircase, which makes the access very easy. From the top we will have a beautiful view of the oasis and hear something about the 1819 attacks of the British forces. Dhayah was the last stronghold of the Qasimi to take.

If we have enough time we will visit some tombs of the 2nd millennium BC as well.

Later we will go to Falayah, where the Department has started to restore the old summer residence of the Qasimi. The place is important for the history of the UAE, as the peace treaty of 1820 was signed in Falayah.

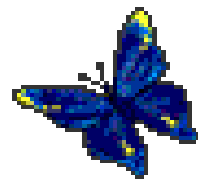
Meet at the Bin Majid Hotel, on the left as you come into Ras al Khaimah, at 9.30am sharp.

Limited to 25 people. Contact Mary Beardwood on mikemary@emirates.net.ae

Fossiling Trip with Abu Dhabi Group 18 January 2002

Valerie Chalmers will lead a joint trip with Steve James and the Abu

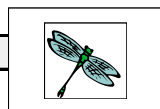
Dhabi group to some of the most interesting fossil areas in the Emirates. This will be a full day trip and will probably require a 4WD and prior registration. Details will be published in *Gazelle* closer to the time, so watch this space.



Our Next Speaker

Our speaker at the November 4 meeting will be Dr Sandy Fowler, on "The Fascination of Shells". Sandy is an enthusiastic member of the Dubai Natural History Group, a longstanding member of the Committee, and our Seashell Recorder. He recently returned from driving an ambulance across Africa for Gulf for Good.

Sandy is Scots born and bred. He first came out as a Surgeon Chief Officer with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary during the Iran-Iraq war, and stayed. He has been a member of DNHG since the late 80's and a family physician at Dubai London Clinic since 1996. He has been a keen shell collector since the 1970's, now collecting only UAE shells. He is married to Beryl Comar, an even longer-term member who has a special interest in paper nautilus. Sandy wrote "A Rough Sheller's Guide to the Northern Emirates" to help people find the best beaches. This is available to members on disc. Yes, a colourful character.



Breeding Arabian Horses

On Friday the 28th of September some thirty DNHG members visited a farm where horses are bred – the very special horses of Arabia.

The place we visited was the horse breeding farm of Khalid bin Khalifa Juma al Nabooda, who breeds and promotes the local bred Arabian horse, which had been lost to the Arab world for some time. He has 156 horses in his care, all with coats that shimmer with a healthy gloss, with eyes that are tranquil and lively at the same time, and exemplary behaviour.

What is the difference between an Arabian horse and thoroughbreds? The farm's resident vet Dr. Thejasvi, explained that thoroughbreds have many bloodlines, including some Arabian. But all pure Arabian horses can be traced back to three stallions: The Byerley Turk, the Darley Arabian and the Godolphin Barb. The horses at al Aweer are mainly from stock of the latter. Arabian horses are quite different from the more numerous thoroughbreds. Their anatomy differs in that they have one rib less and one less vertebra in the tail. Their heads are quite small and finely chiseled, while their short back and muscular hind quarters are also a unique feature of the Arabian horse. They are very hardy, excelling for instance in the endurance races that have become so popular of late.

The horses at al Aweer are bred by artificial insemination with frozen or chilled semen imported from the UK and the USA. The procedure is carried out in a special building on the premises by the resident vet. The success rate of this artificial way of propagation is very good here – some 70%. This year 27 foals were born, with the usual balance between males and females of fifty/fifty. Although al Aweer farm was started in 1991, the breeding of Arabian horses did not commence until 1995. The farm keeps four stallions of its own, that cover some of their own mares and are also lent out to stud mares from other farms in the region.

All horses are fed imported pellets containing wheat bran, oats and barley. They obviously thrive on this. One row of boxes holds the geriatric horses such as one dappled white female, called Hibattallah, who is 27 years old, and Fantasia who is 30 years old! What a wonderful thing that they can spend the last years of their life here in comfort and ease! The farm has 112 air-conditioned stables. One large high-domed building, cooled by huge AC's and ceiling fans, has box after box with mares and foals.

All horses are regularly exercised in a horse-walker. This looks a bit like a merry-go-round. Inside a circular fence stands a large wheel that is being driven by a motor at a constant speed. Between the spokes of the wheel there is room for just one horse. Nudged by the spoke behind them, the horses walk at a sedate speed within their section for 45 minutes every day. Each horse over two years old, except the pregnant mares, also goes for a swim in the custom built covered swimming pool that shimmers between the palm trees. The pool is 75 meters long and is a wonderful tool to build up muscle and to treat leg injuries. Besides the regular swims in the pool, all horses are hosed down daily in a special bathing stall. No wonder they all have such glossy coats! In the summer it is also a great way to cool down.

There are nine large grass paddocks, where mares and foals can spend the cooler months. All the paddocks and tracks are fenced with eco-wood, a recycled plastic material that is very durable and at the same time soft to prevent injuries in case of accidental collision. Veterinary care in minor cases is provided by Dr. Thejasvi, while major surgery is done at the Dubai Equine Hospital.

Report by Marijcke Jongbloed

Beware the Pachycondylia

During the course of any day, it is difficult not to notice ants in the U.A.E. Sometimes they are traipsing in a long line across the kitchen work surfaces, or creating mounds of sand by the pathways. It is noticeable that some are large and

black, others are small and sandy-coloured...but do we ever wonder what their scientific names may be and how many different species there are? A quick guess might result in suggestions of six or ten species, so it is amazing to learn that around 300 different species have been identified on the Arabian Peninsula. I wanted to find out more about them, particularly a species referred to locally as the Samsun ant.

Many people, including my husband, are violently allergic to the bite of this species. Mike has been hospitalised three times, after being bitten, with heart pains, swollen throat, lips and eyes. It is occasionally fatal. I was researching information for my book *The Children's Encyclopaedia of Arabia* which has been published this month. Although a useful entomology reference book, *Insects of Eastern Arabia* mentioned only two species of ants. Samsun ants were not there. I put a call through to the Entomology Department of the Natural History Museum in London, but my enquiry was not well received. "If you only know the local name of this ant, we can't help you," I was told. I felt about as small as the ant I was researching.

Luckily I had received a lot of help with my efforts from Theri Bailey, working with E.R.W.D.A., so my next call was to her. 'Can anyone at ERWDA tell me the scientific name for Samsun ants?' Although Theri drew a blank she was able to provide a lead. A leading authority on ants had been working in Abu Dhabi and he would surely know. She gave me the name of Cedric Collingwood, whose work on ants can be found in *Fauna of Saudi Arabia* and *A General Guide to Ants of Yemen*. A telephone call later provided me with my answer.

Cedric Collingwood proved a very helpful and interested expert to give me any information I wanted on the 300 species of ants that had already been identified. He identified Samsun ants as *Pachycondylia Senaarensis*, a dark medium sized ant, which nests near houses, rubbish dumps and gar-



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.

in *Fauna of Saudi Arabia* and *A General Guide to Ants of Yemen*. A telephone call later provided me with my answer.

Cedric Collingwood proved a very helpful and interested expert, able to give me any information I wanted on the 300 species of ants that had already been identified. He identified Samsun ants as *Pachycondyla Senaarensis*, a dark medium sized ant, which nests near houses, rubbish dumps and garages where food waste and other insects provide a rich diet. This ant, unlike the harmless desert species, is aggressive with a powerful sting so should be avoided. They also raid bee hives and kill honeybees. Cedric went on to tell me that the most interesting Arabian ants are to be found in the open desert, nesting deep in the ground. The main species groups include seed harvesters, desert runners, cocktail ants and the relatively insignificant but numerous small narrow-bodied ants of the genus *Monomorium*. Armed with this knowledge I went back to the Natural History Museum and this time was treated with much more respect. Several different species were put out for me to view through the microscope. I was told that it is so difficult to identify some species that the only method of differentiating one from another is counting the number of hairs on their legs!

Cedric has kindly provided me with some drawings of ants which I will post on the website for my book <childrensarabia.com> under the 'useful information' section. A desire to learn is all you need to set you off on the road to knowledge and expertise.

Mary added, regarding authors: *Fauna of Saudi Arabia* is complicated in that it comprises many

volumes, hugely thick, containing research papers on many subjects. Some references for Collingwood's work are:

Collingwood, C.A. & Agosti D. (1996) Formicidae (Insects: Hymenoptera) of Saudi Arabia: *Fauna of Saudi Arabia* Vol. 15

Collingwood C.A. (1985) Vol.7

Collingwood, C.A. & van Harten A. (1994) *A General Guide to the Ants of the Yemen*

D. Walker and T.Pittaway *Insects of Eastern Arabia*

Report by Mary Beardwood

Migrating(?) Raptors on Emirates Towers

For at least ten days in late September, one or more raptors (migrants? escapees?) displaced the normal kestrels at Emirates Towers. The visitors were sufficiently larger and darker than the kestrels to attract my attention immediately as I gazed out from my office on the 28th floor. The very first one I saw swept by close enough to let me guess that it was a peregrine falcon. A second bird was also in flight, at a greater distance, but seemed much browner – possibly a saqr falcon or some kind of eagle.

I thought first of the pigeon chasing operations – the subject of the DNHG's monthly lecture last February. The falcons and falconers from Al Maha Resort perform this service periodically at Emirates Towers. On a sidewalk below, I saw some eight people standing amongst large umbrellas and boxes and various equipment. One box resembled a large cage but they seemed to be using it as a platform, apparently to give directions and film each other across a low wall. That seemed a large number of people and unusual behavior for falconing, but it would have been a bit of a coincidence to observe two such oddities at exactly the same time (although Emirates Towers are becoming a popular Dubai backdrop for advertisers), so I tentatively assumed they were related.

Nevertheless, the new birds were back the next day (or one of them,

at least), sans people, and remained through at least the following week. Despite eventually remembering to bring my binoculars into the office for a closer look, I was never able to get another good view. One bird flew past my window on several occasions (typically a few floors lower) but it no longer soared over the adjacent highways and construction. Instead, it was usually seen heading inland towards the lush and well landscaped racehorse breeding and training area near Dubai's Central Veterinary Research Laboratory. Only a full 2-1/2 weeks after the first sighting could I confirm that the kestrels had returned, and, presumably, that the visitors had left.

Report by Gary Feulner

"Vulture" Nest Awaits Test

A report in the September *Gazelle* of large, well-formed stick nests on inaccessible ledges above Hanging Gardens speculated that these were the nests of Egyptian vultures. This drew polite skepticism from Michael Jennings, editor of Phoenix and coordinator of the Atlas of Breeding Birds of Arabia (ABBA). Although the standard guidebooks are not so categorical, Mike suggests that the nests of the two most likely vultures, the Egyptian Vulture and the Griffon Vulture, are normally very scruffy, with Griffon nests often being not very substantial and usually hidden from view. He suggests that an eagle – Bonelli's or perhaps even a golden eagle – may be more likely. All parties are agreed on one thing – this site is a priority for a visit early in the new year, to see who's at home.

Report by Gary Feulner



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Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

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Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
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fax 398 3727

Plants – Valerie Chalmers

Mammals - Marijcke Jongbloed
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fax 349 7963

mjongbld@emirates.net.ae

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.

Two Unusual Sightings

Marijcke Jongbloed received two reports of wildlife sightings this last month. One was by DNHG member (birdwatcher) Alistair McLee:

"This is the best a birder can do! Rodent. Guinea pig size. Rat shaped but not rat. Cafe au lait colour. Pale eye ring. Eating some vegetation which looked like celery. The tail was hairy (I think) and had the proportions of being quite long but the last 1/3 was missing. It seemed relaxed to be in daylight. Location - hay fields, by sewage works, outside Dubai on Hatta road. Mid August 2001. Also red fox twice at Emirates golf club, but not too surprising I guess."

My first thought was a white-tailed mongoose (the latter third of the tail not missing, but invisible, perhaps but Alistair did not think so. He finally came up with a tentative identification: a kind of "gundi" – a rodent that is found mainly in north and north-east Africa. If this is indeed true, it must have been an escaped captive animal, maybe originating from the polo club premises.

Another report came by phone, from someone whose name I did not get unfortunately (my apologies), of a large brown owl, sitting in a big tree in Satwa. Although the observer did not see any ear tufts, the size described (a foot or more) and the colour (brownish all over) seem to suggest the Desert Eagle Owl, a very unusual sight in the city.

Book Review:

Birds of Abu Dhabi – Checklist

The editors of *Twitchers' Guide* announce the publication of the first checklist for the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, largest of the seven-member federation of the United Arab Emirates, *Birds of Abu Dhabi – Checklist*, compiled by *Twitchers' Guide* co-editor Simon Aspinall.

This handy A-5 size 24 pp. full colour booklet contains a full checklist of the nearly 400 species of birds recorded in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, with tick boxes for each of the 325 or so species so

far recorded on the island of Abu Dhabi. With only around 420 species on the UAE national list, the checklist underlines the importance of the Emirate and island of Abu Dhabi as birdwatching destinations.

The *Checklist* has 13 colour plates by the compiler and by award-winning wildlife photographers Hanne and Jens Eriksen. It also includes a map showing the location of some of the best birding sites on Abu Dhabi island, as well as an introduction to birding in Abu Dhabi, in both English and Arabic.

The *Checklist* is sponsored by the Abu Dhabi office of the international energy company BP, and is published in association with Abu Dhabi's Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency, ERWDA. Simon Aspinall is co-editor of *Twitchers' Guide* and Chairman of the Emirates Bird Records Committee. He is also author of *The Status and Conservation of the Breeding Birds of the UAE* and co-author (with Colin Richardson) of *The Shell Bird-watching Guide to the United Arab Emirates*.

Copies of *Birds of Abu Dhabi – Checklist* are available from Peter Hellyer and Simon Aspinall, PO Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, at UAE Dh. 15 each, including postage and packing, for orders within the UAE.

STOP PRESS:

A note from Dr Sandy Fowler advises members that the Rams Beach bridge is definitely closed. It shows no signs of being repaired. There appears no way for beachcombers, picnickers or shellers to access the main beach at present.



special report ...

Surface Water Vs Bottled Water? You decide!

Water from Wadi pools has always been utilised by humans throughout the Arabian Peninsula, as Falaj systems, cisterns and wells indicate. A review of available literature, however, indicates the lack of formal studies concerning the physical parameters of freshwater pools and streams of the Hayar Mountains of the United Arab Emirates and Oman. For this reason, in the course of more general field studies, samples were taken at two disparate sites in a well-known wadi, both to serve as reference and as a baseline for comparisons.

Water samples were taken at a depth of 30 cm below the surface of pools in Wadi Hatta (Hatta Pools) and Wadi Qhafi (tributary of Wadi Hatta), respectively. The samples were sealed in sterilised containers and cold stored for analysis at the Laboratory Unit of the Al Ain Water Department, Abu Dhabi Water and Electricity Authority. Results of the analysis are presented in Table 1.

Water from both Wadi Hatta and Wadi Qhafi fall between the classification of hard (<120 mg/l) and brackish (1 000-10 000 mg/l) (See: Hanna, S. & Al-Belushi, M. 1996. *Introduction to the Caves of Oman*. Sultan Qaboos University, Sultanate of Oman.). According to Al Basit (Laboratory Unit of the Al Ain Water Department), water from both pools is chemically potable although not bacteriological potable. This means that water has to be treated chemically before deemed suitable for human consumption. Analysis of the water was conducted during the summer of 1999 without taking seasonal variations into consideration. The results therefore indicate not absolutes, but data points within a natural cyclical change. Further studies are necessary to determine the general quality and seasonal variability of surface water.

Compare the results of Table 1 with the chemical analysis as presented on the labels of some well-known natural mineral water brands in Table 2.

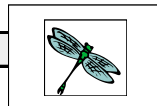
Table 1. Bacteriological, physical and chemical comparison for water samples from Hatta Pools and Wadi Qhafi as determined in June 1999.

	Hatta Pools	Wadi Qhafi
Bacteriological Analysis		
Plate count of organisms per 1.0 ml	Too numerous to count	Too numerous to count
Coliform organisms per 100 ml	38	Nil
Faecal Coliform organisms per 100 ml	Nil	Nil
Physical Analysis		
Appearance	Clear	Clear
Conductivity (umho/cm)	600	828
Odour	Odourless	Odourless
pH	8.55	8.51
Taste	Tasteless	Tasteless
Turbidity (NTU)	0.29	0.42
Chemical Analysis: mg/l		
Alkalinity	156	178
Ammonia	0.01	0.05
Carbon Dioxide	61.6	71.7
Chloride (CL)	81.36	121.05
Calcium Hardness	28	40
Iron	0.08	0.04
Magnesium Hardness	188	195
Sodium	50	89.2
Manganese	0	0
Nitrate	8.28	7.61
Nitrite	0.01	0.09
Phosphate	0	0
Sulphate (So4)	43.26	69.3
Total Hardness	216	235
Potassium	2.5	3.5
Cyanide	Trace (0.003)	Trace (0.004)
Total Dissolvable Solids	390	538.2

Continued on page 7...

Table 2. Chemical analysis for Al Ain Natural Mineral Water, Masafi Pure Natural Mineral Water and Gulfa Natural Spring Water as determined on the labels.

	Al Ain	Masafi	Gulfa
Chemical Analysis: mg/l			



	name	tel home	tel office	fax
Chairman	Gary Feulner messages: 306 5300	306 5570	330 3600	330 3550
Vice Chairman	Valerie Chalmers	349 4816	no calls pls	398 3727
Treasurer	Jim Fischer e.mail: james.fischer@hct.ac.ae	282 7463	608 5423	269 1369
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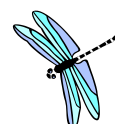
pH	8	8.2	7.7
Calcium	9	3.6	4.8
Magnesium	18	18.9	6.7
Sodium	16.5	15.8	14
Potassium	1.3	1	1.1
Chloride	22	51	52
Sulphate	16.5	20	13
Fluorides	nd	0.02	0.5
Nitrates	nd	6	1.7
Bicarbonates	75.5	46.3	21
Total Dissolvable Solids	150	180	120

nd = no data

Acknowledgements

My sincere appreciation to the Laboratory Unit at the Al Ain Water Department, Abu Dhabi Water and Electricity Authority, for analysing the samples and Gary Feulner for his ideas regarding this short communication.

Report by Peter Cunningham plc@emirates.net.ae



Dubai Natural History Group Programme

Lectures at Jumeirah English Speaking School, Gymnasium 7.30 pm for 8.00 pm

- 4 November Dr Sandy Fowler on "The Fascination of Seashells"
9 December Speaker to be confirmed in November's *Gazelle*

Field Trips (DNHG members only, please).

- 24 – 26 October Turtle Watching at Ras al Hadd via the Wahiba Sands
7 – 9 November Forts of the Nizwa Plain
16 November Nature Walk with Gary Feulner
22 – 23 November Camping and fossilling trip
18 January 2002 Joint fossilling with Abu Dhabi group