



# GAZELLE

مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

[www.dnhg.org](http://www.dnhg.org)

A little way from the meeting point in Shimal, was the first discussion stop, where trip leader, David Edwards, presented an informative explanation regarding the large, circular burial site.

From there, we travelled in convoy to the second port of call. This was a settlement, which included a dried-up well. High, on a nearby outcrop, an abandoned kiln was visible. Some ventured a climb here, before moving on to two burial chambers in a different formation, this time long and thin. David explained about the different types of tombs in the area, some dating back to the 2nd and 3rd millennia BC. As we continued our walk, the skeletal remains of a goat was observed. Also of note



## Ras al Khaimah: Life in the Past

were 'hanging gardens' from rain-watered mountains.

Our final call was at an abandoned village (main photo above), where pottery shards were randomly strewn about, providing evidence of life from the distant and not-so-distant past! Shards found at sites such as these, are glued together by archaeologists, a bit like a 3D jigsaw, in order to identify the date and origin of the artefact, as a whole. Experts say there is often one piece missing, as some of us discovered a while back, at a workshop in an Abu Dhabi museum. David at this point, focused on some shard samples, across time.

On the descent from the village, the peace and tranquility of the mountains was broken by a gentle fall of stones. Looking up, goats could be seen, curiously observing members of the group.

Perhaps distracted, whilst searching for the hanging gardens—or maybe they were just keeping a safe distance!

Some visited RAK museum afterwards to view artefacts from this area.

Thanks to David Edwards for leading such an insightful trip.

M Swan

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**Contributors**—Thanks to the following for their reports and contributions:

Helga Meyer, Tamsin Carlisle, Gary Feulner, Binish Roobas, Angela Manthorpe and Andrew Childs.

Send your contributions by  
25th February, to  
[gazelleditor@gmail.com](mailto:gazelleditor@gmail.com)



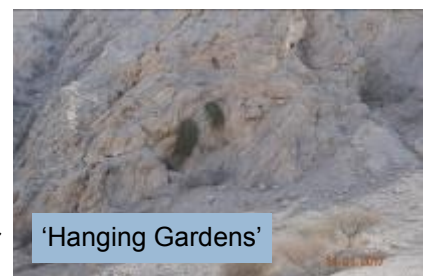
Circular tomb



Wandering goats



Long, narrow tomb



'Hanging Gardens'

## Announcements and Recorders

### Monthly Speakers—8pm on Sunday 5 February, 2017

The DNHG are delighted to welcome the following speaker, who will present an illustrated talk on:

#### **“Some conservation work in Cross River, Nigeria and the story of a primate release in the local National Park”**

Isabelle Theyse is a French national. She studied veterinary nursing in the UK. Isabelle worked at the Sharjah Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife from 2009 to 2013. After leaving the UAE she spent a few months in the UK and then went on to Nigeria for 3 months.

On returning to the UK from Nigeria, Isabelle was contact by the board of trustees of CERCOPAN to help them as they were going through a difficult period financially, due to the Ebola crisis and most of the expats had left. Isabelle arrived back in Nigeria in September 2014 and stayed for two years.

From being a veterinary nurse then manager, Isabelle is now the Director for the CERCOPAN NGO.

The CERCOPAN focus was the rescue of local primate species mainly guenons and Red Capped Mangabeys. Isabelle will not speak about CERCOPAN but will tell us about primate NGO in the same area called Pandrillus which deals with Drill monkeys and Chimpanzees. Isabelle will also speak about the work of the World Conservation Society in the region which focuses on the study and protection of the Cross River Gorilla.

Isabelle will also approach the subject of the bush meat trade as there are currently two researchers in the area studying this problem.

#### **From the Editor:**

A second excursion to Shimal and Wadi Haqil, led by David Edwards, will take place on February 4. A short report on the January 14th trip can be read on the cover of this issue.

Tamsin Carlisle provides an array of photographs on the Spotlight page, whereas a report by Gary Feulner goes into more detail on page 4, Both are records of the trip to Northern Vietnam.

Page 6 commemorates the life of Peter van Amsterdam and his active contribution to the DNHG, whilst living in Dubai.

Andrew Childs recently visited the east coast and came across an unusual find. He was also wary of a sea snake, left behind by the tide. Read about this on page 7, along with Helga Meyer's report on the trip to the Sharjah museums.

Finally, a ground mantis caught Angela Manthorpe's eye (page 6), when exploring in the Mleiha area, prompting further research.

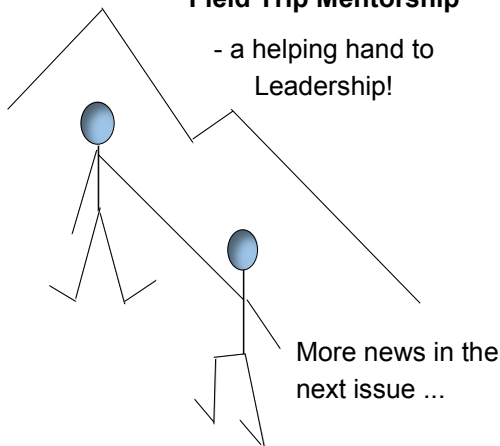
Enjoy your read!

#### **Spiders in the News**

A report in the January 2017 issue of *Sharing Solutions*, a magazine dedicated to "practical solutions to lighten up life", features the DNHG's Binish Roobas and includes some interesting facts about spiders and their value to mankind, including their role as predators of crop pests and the engineering model of spider silk. See "Spider Scrutiny" at <http://www.humanityhelps.me/>.

#### **Field Trip Mentorship**

- a helping hand to Leadership!



#### **New Bookseller**

Angela Manthorpe has signed on as the new Bookseller at DNHG monthly lectures. Angela has been in the UAE intermittently since the early 1990s and has served us in the past as Speaker Coordinator, Field Trip Coordinator and even, in 1994-1995, as Acting Co-Chairman. When not scuba diving, she is regularly afoot in the field and frequently shares her interesting observations through short pieces in the *Gazelle*. She has also spoken on several occasions at our annual Members Nights.

#### **DNHG Recorders**

**Reptiles - Dr. Reza Khan** 050 6563601

**Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi** res: 06-5310467 off: 06-5583 003 email: lankefi@emirates.net.ae

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# Spotlight!

**Hanoi's colourful market stalls and traders, by Tamsin Carlisle**



**Sharjah Museums and Old Souq, by Helga Meyer**



**Fauna of North Vietnam, by Tamsin Carlisle**



Leopard Lacewing—male  
*Cethosia cyane*; Family: Nymphalidae  
Cuc Phuong, Vietnam



Millipede—Cat Ba Island, Vietnam

Black Kite  
*Milvus migrans*;  
Family: Accipitridae  
Ha Long Bay, Vietnam



Six-spotted Zigzag Ladybird  
*Cheilomenes sexmaculata*; Family: Coccinellidae  
Hanoi, Vietnam

# Field Trip

## Vietnam

The mid-December DNHG field trip to northern Vietnam was a very interesting one from both a cultural and natural history standpoint. Our hotel in Hanoi was located in the center of the Old Quarter, now very much gentrified, which allowed us to stroll out the door and around the scenic Hoan Kiem lake and its centerpiece, the Jade Temple (Buddhist), as well as explore the colorful network of shops and restaurants that extends for many blocks around.

On weekend evenings many roads in that area are closed to vehicular traffic and the district becomes a street fair with open air dining (reminiscent of Shanghai's night markets) and live entertainment at larger intersections.

One initially disconcerting note was the ubiquitous presence of Christmas trees, colored lights, Christmas music and Santa Claus motifs, including Santa outfits for children. Even Max Weber might be surprised by the now nearly universal link between Christmas and commerce!

We found the city (and the countryside) uniformly clean and the people friendly and welcoming. The economy is apparently relatively strong and, according to an English newspaper,

Group photo at Cat Ba harbor



tourism plays a major role in this and is slated to increase in the future.

The north of Vietnam is a geological and geographical extension of the limestone karst terrain of southern China, featuring the iconic, steep-sided green mountains of traditional Chinese painting. Many westerners assume that these are stylized representations of mountains, but in fact that is the way the limestone in this area weathers under the seasonal tropical rains.

Our natural history itinerary took us into this limestone terrain to the southwest of Hanoi, where it is studded with lakes, wetlands and flat river valleys on the periphery of the Red River delta. After wetlands boating and temple visits, we overnighted at Cuc Phuong National Park, where primary forest still exists. The next day featured birdwatching with a specialist guide, turning up, *inter alia*, Black Crested Bulbuls, Ashy and Long-tailed Minivets, a Pied Falconet and the highly localized Limestone Wren Babbler, all despite overcast weather. Some participants, however, felt that the most memorable sighting was the White Dragontail, an unusually long-tailed butterfly, resembling a large moth.

The park also featured a center for endangered regional primates, including Delacour's langur and *Nomascus* gibbons, whose hoots resounded through the morning forest. (Vietnam

Hoan Kiem Lake, the centerpiece of Hanoi's Old Quarter



Ha Long Bay—early morning



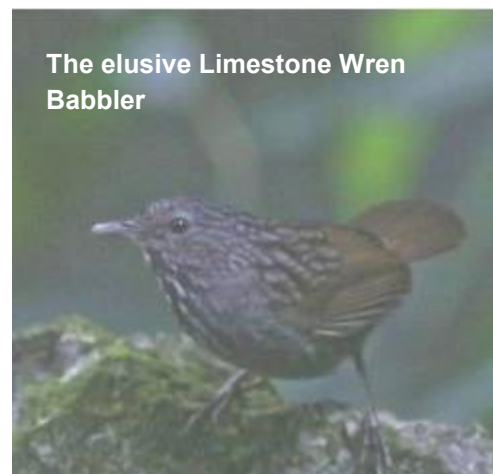
Inside the Jade Temple



White Dragontail butterfly  
(*Lamproptera curius*)

© British Roads

The elusive Limestone Wren Babbler



## Field Trip

hosts 24 primate species, including 5 of the world's 25 most threatened globally.)

We next headed north to hyper-scenic Ha Long Bay, near the Chinese border, where the terrain of limestone hills and mountains is submerged by the coastal sea, creating a landscape of hundreds of island fortresses. Here, we overnighted on a small cruise vessel and at a beach resort on Monkey Island, from which we kayaked and hiked. On one of the larger islands, Cat Ba, we took an extended forest walk in the large national park for more birds, butterflies, dragonflies and even an elusive tiny squirrel. There we were also pleased to meet several dozen Vietnamese university students, collecting and studying samples for an upcoming exam in botany.

A final day visit to the Ho Chi Minh mausoleum and residence complex in central Hanoi proved to be as rewarding for its natural history as it was from a cultural standpoint, hosting, e.g., Pied Fantail, Small Niltava and Japanese White-Eye. Everywhere we went, the most common raptor was the Black Kite, although total numbers were not large, except at Ha Long Bay.

Also potentially interesting were things we *didn't* see. In particular, despite driving for hours past wetlands, farms and rice paddies, we saw very few attendant field birds. The reason was probably heavy pesticide use. On several occasions we saw men doing intensive spraying of crops from tanks carried on their backs.

Less readily explained was the complete absence of two common Asian "people" birds we expected to see – the House Crow (*Corvus splendans*) and the Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*). Subsequent research informed us that the native range of the House Crow extends eastwards only to Myanmar and western Thailand, but the Common Myna is said to be a common resident throughout SE Asia. We also saw no House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*), only the Eurasian Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*). The House Sparrow, we later learned, extends through most of SE Asia, including Cambodia and Laos, but *not* to Vietnam.

Trip leader Binish Roobas was his usual attentive self throughout, and, in something of a *tour de force*, he also managed along the way to conduct informal tutorials in spider hunting by night, smartphone navigation apps, and wildlife photography under forest conditions.

*Contribution by Gary Feulner,*

*photos by Gary Feulner and Binish Roobas*



Long-tailed or Crab-eating Macaque on Monkey Island



A squirrel in the treetops at Cat Ba N.P. – a difficult photographic subject



Exchanging notes with botany students



Long Bien Bridge



A Green Huntsman spider by night at Cuc Phuong N.P.

## In Memoriam



### In Memoriam: Peter van Amsterdam

We report with sadness the death of Peter van Amsterdam on December 14, 2016, in Galle, Sri Lanka, where he and his wife Anne Millen maintained a retirement home. Peter was a longtime member of the DNHG Committee and Anne was an enthusiastic *Gazelle* editor for a decade.

In retirement, they were honorary life members of the DNHG, visiting Dubai occasionally and writing back with natural history news. A favorite story from Sri Lanka was about the snake that climbed the Christmas tree to eat the eggs of the bird that nested in the chandelier.

Peter and Anne began their career in Arabia in Oman, which they came to know well. Later they moved to Abu Dhabi and then Dubai, where Peter established a small business. They continued their weekend explorations and, from the late 1990s through the 2000s, led numerous field trips, particularly to Wadi Bih, the Saiq Plateau and the Musandam (then readily accessible) and the desert of the Dubai and Sharjah hinterland.

Peter's official role on the DNHG Committee was as "Publisher" – a very important role in the era before e-mail, when the *Gazelle* was printed, photocopied and mailed to the membership each month. But Peter's contribution to the DNHG was much greater, because he brought to his role a large measure of Dutch practicality, straightforwardness and common sense, which helped the group's activities and decision-making to go much more smoothly.

In recent years Peter and Anne had divided their time between homes in Sri Lanka and Anne's native Australia. Peter was also a regular visitor to the U.S., where he had a son by a previous marriage. He died suddenly, apparently of ventricular fibrillation, while working in the garden at their home. Peter had experienced a serious heart attack and undergone a triple-bypass operation several years before their departure from Dubai at the end of 2011. Although his condition was kept largely under control, the subsequent years were punctuated by at least one additional serious incident.

Peter was cremated at the Galle Cemetery and Anne says his children arranged a lovely ceremony at a venue overlooking the sea. Sandi Ellis was on hand to assist Anne during the ensuing several weeks. We extend our condolences to Anne and to Peter's children. Anyone wishing to write to Anne directly may contact DNHG Vice Chairman Valerie Chalmers.



photos—(above left) Peter at his home in Galle, Sri Lanka, (below right) Peter leading a trip to the Saiq Plateau (early 2000s)

## Ground Mantis

**O**n a recent trip in the vicinity of Mleiha my eye was caught by the fast movement of a ground mantis as I walked over the gravel plain. These ground-dwelling members of the mantid family have long legs and move with short bursts of speed before freezing, and with cryptic colouration, they can be quite hard to spot. However, after a patient pursuit I was able to take a few photos of a couple of individuals of different size and colour – see photos A and B. I was puzzling over their differences – clearly A is larger, pale in colour and with little wings folded on the back, whilst B is much smaller and darker. Were they different species perhaps?



In the sand

Tribulus provided the answer to my queries – an article by Murray Lee Elland III in Vol 8.1 in the Spring of 1998 explains that this is the common ground mantis, *Eremiaphila braueri*, with the smaller one a juvenile and the larger, an adult. He notes that the black bands on the legs serve to break up the outline of the legs which would otherwise be easy for a predator to spot. Further, although he notes that this mantis appears limited to hard ground, I was interested to spot a juvenile in the sand during the DNHG Christmas picnic.

Contribution by Angela Manthorpe



Photo A—adult



Photo B—juvenile

## Field Trip and Clip

### Sharjah Museums Trip

On 7th January, a trip was organized to Sharjah, incorporating three museums.

The first stop was Sharjah Archaeology Museum to view the temporary exhibition entitled: *Petra, Desert Wonder*.

The bus then took us to the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization, where we lunched in a small Indian Restaurant.

Although we were not allowed to take photographs of the *Spectacle and Splendour* exhibition: *Ottoman Masterpieces from the Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest*, we were treated to 50 exquisite examples of early Ottoman craftsmanship, including carpets, woven and embroidered luxury textiles, as well as bejeweled ceremonial weaponry and gala saddles, used in parades and public occasions. They were designed to symbolize the power and authority, as well as the high culture and sophisticated lives of the Ottoman elite, during the 10th and 11th centuries.

Finally, we walked to the Sharjah Art Museum for the *Sharjah Islamic Arts Festival*. At the end of the day, our heads were bursting with information and stimulation and we calmed down by exploring the old souq and passages.

Every time I see the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization, I am overwhelmed by its golden dome—it was transformed from a traditional covered market to a museum in 2008.

Thanks to Hazelle Page and Sonja Lavrencic for this SUPER SATURDAY in SHARJAH!

*Contribution by Helga Meyer*

*(further photographs taken by Helga can be seen on the Spotlight page)*



### More treasures from Fujairah beaches

In September this year I suggested that the beaches currently being redeveloped on the South of the Fujairah corniche were good places to explore for shells, because of the amount of dredged material being deposited to make the additional beach areas. This area is still throwing up some interesting items.



On a recent trip to the UAE East coast I came across a deep-water shell that I had only seen before in the Seashells of Eastern Arabia book. This was the first time I have found one of these large cone

shells washed up on the beach and in good condition; they are certainly sought-after by collectors. On this example the lip is damaged and the tip missing, but it is the first *Conus milneedwardsi*, also known as the 'Glory of India' cone, that I have found in the UAE in 3 years of shell collecting, so I am not complaining! A tiplless 128mm and 69.4g, with nice colouration.

On the same day I also came across a Persian Gulf sea snake, *Hydrophis lapemoides*, immobile on the tide strand line, quite a way from the sea. These black and yellow snakes have about 35-40 bands along their back, and an adult can grow to more than a metre in length. The tail is flattened, to assist in swimming after their favourite food which is fish. The snakes are not capable of much movement on land, so they just wait for the tide to return before swimming back out to sea.

Careful inspection showed that the snake was very much alive and I therefore took care when photographing this venomous creature. If you see one, do not assume that it is dead, just because it doesn't move when you approach it. Caution is always advised, as they can bite if threatened.



*Contribution by Andrew Childs*

Andrew subsequently found and sent the following link, which explains more about sea snakes - [UAEinteract](#)

# Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

- February 5: Isabelle Theyse—“*Some conservation work in Cross River, Nigeria and the story of a primate release in the local National Park*”
- March 5: Malgorzata de Latour-Abdalla—“**Plain Tiger Butterfly and some Aspects of its Development**”

## Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

- February 4: Repeat of the Shimal Trip
- February 10: Mleiha Archaeological Centre
- February 23—25: Inter-Emirates Weekend, Al Ain
- March 24—30: Uttarakhand, India
- March 31—April 8: DNHG trip to Slovenia
- June 2—9: Serbia (Belgrade and Mountain Zlatibor)

*Field trips will be circulated to members via e-mail*

## DNHG COMMITTEE 2016

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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## ***Contributions***

Do you have a field report, unusual finding, interesting news article, book review, amazing photograph, or community news to share?

If so, email your contributions to:

[gazelleeditor@gmail.com](mailto:gazelleeditor@gmail.com)

(Arial 10 fully justified)

## ***DNHG Membership***

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership is valid from September 2016 to September 2017. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to HSBC account number 030100242001. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG).

Payment can also be made by cash deposit at a bank or ATM, using our IBAN number AE900200000030 100242001. However, this process does not identify you as the payer. If you wish to pay by cash, please also photograph or scan a copy of your payment confirmation and send via e-mail to the Membership Secretary, so we know whose money we have received.

DNHG membership entitles you to participate in field trips and help pay for our lecture hall, publication and distribution of our monthly newsletter, the *Gazelle*, our post office box, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.