



GAZELLE

مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي



Green fields of Wadi Sfai. Photo Credit: Peter Olliff

Inside this month

Page 2:	Announcements
Page 3:	Field Clips
Page 4:	Field Trip Report
Page 5:	Field Trip Report
Page 6:	Field Clips
Page 7:	Recorders and Other Announcements
Page 8:	Programme, Committee, Membership

Contributors

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

Heidi Struiksma, Minie van de Weg, Richard Ashmore, Binish Roobas, Andy Whitaker and Gary Feulner

Announcements

Our Next Speaker

We are extremely delighted to welcome **Marta Ameri** as our next guest speaker for the DNHG March meeting.

Marta Ameri will be enlightening us with a talk entitled:
"The role Southern Arabia played in 3rd Millennium trade"

Marta Ameri received her Ph.D. in Art History and Archaeology from the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University in 2010.

She is currently working as Assistant Professor of Art History at Zayed University in Dubai. Her dissertation examined a group of seals and seal impressions found at the Chalcolithic site of Gilund in Western India.

Her research focuses of the role the seals play as markers of identity and as indicators of intercultural exchange. She has excavated in Italy, Greece, Turkey, Syria, India and Oman.

A Sad Farewell

At the end of last month we said farewell to a very long-time DNHG member, **Fran M'Caw**, who has returned to the UK after almost forty years in Dubai!

Fran has participated in many field trips and Inter-Emirates Weekends. We wish her all the very best in her retirement and look forward to seeing her when she visits Dubai again, as we know she will.

Calling All Snails!

A reminder, especially for new members: Your unwanted garden snails and slugs are of interest for scientific study and an accounting of the terrestrial molluscs of the UAE.

All specimens will be gratefully accepted by Chairman Gary Feulner, and contributors will be kept informed of progress and pedigrees. Suburban gardens are home to several native Arabian snails, but also a

number of introduced species. There have been a few surprises over the years and we suspect there are more out there.

Dead shells are preferred; we'll follow up if you've got something unusual. **It's easy. Just bag 'em and tag 'em!** Please remember to record the location and the habitat, as well as your name, the date, and any remarks.



Tribulus Vol. 21

TRIBULUS

Journal of the Emirates Natural History Group
 VOLUME 21-2013



The latest issue of Tribulus, vol. 21, was published in December 2013 and is now available at DNHG lectures. The price is AED 50.

This issue contains major articles on:

- (1) **Mudskippers:** a study of the population of the mudskipper *Periophthalmus waltoni* that was discovered two years ago (the only one currently known in the UAE);
- (2) **Two new dragonflies** that were discovered on the East Coast last June;
- (3) **The fringe-toed lizard** *Acanthodactylus boskianus*: a study of a population representing the only UAE record of this species since the 1970s;
- (4) **The White-Collared Kingfisher** at Khor Kalba: threats from invasive species, especially rats; and
- (5) **A pilot study** of UAE sand dune temperature profiles.

Featured authors include DNHG members Gary Feulner and Bin-ish Roobas and a recent speaker, Oscar Campbell of Abu Dhabi.

More Indian Palm Squirrels in Fujairah

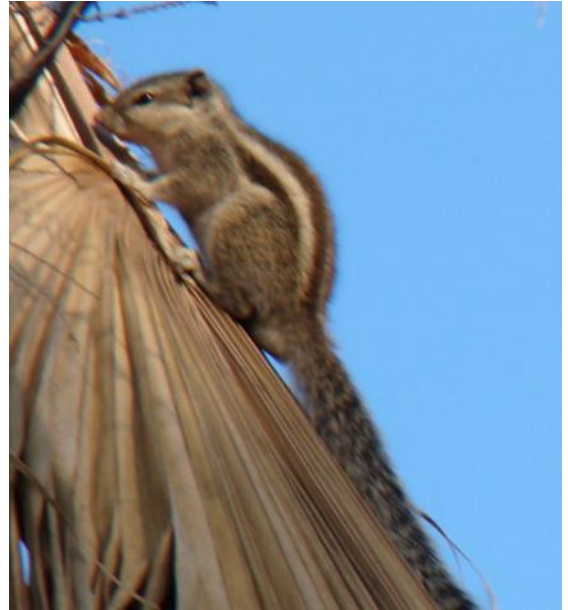
Heidi Stuiksma recently sent us the following note on behalf of Minie van de Weg, who is rounding out some 50 years at the Fujairah Maternity Hospital.

“After Minie had read the article in the June 2013 *Gazelle* entitled **Chipmunks come to Dubai: Indian Palm Squirrels**, she realized that she had three of them in the hospital garden.”

“They have been visiting her every day for approximately the past nine months. One is a little smaller than the other two and could be a baby, but she is not sure. Anyway, after a lot of patience she managed to finally get a good picture of one of them at the top of a very tall palm tree.”

The earliest report in *Gazelle*, in April 2011, was also from Fujairah. The accumulation of records suggests that we may soon have to treat the Indian Palm Squirrel as a naturalized resident.

Contributed by Heidi Stuiksma and Minie van de Weg



Indian Palm Squirrel in the Fujairah Hospital gardens.
Photo credit: Minie van de Weg

Ahh! It's Another Giant Crab Spider!

After reading the item on the Giant Crab Spider (*Eusparassus dufouri* (?)) in the January 2014 *Gazelle*, our mountain biking wildlife correspondents, Andy Whitaker and Adam Davidson, reminded me that last June they had sent me photos of a large spider from the Ras al-Hadd area of Oman that appears to be very similar. Adam found it in his lunch box. Andy reckoned it was one the biggest spiders he'd ever seen, at least up close. If in fact it is *E. dufouri*, its presence at Ras al-Hadd further stretches its textbook range of Southern Europe and North Africa.

We had also discussed, initially, its resemblance to a common Asian spider often called the Huntsman,



A Giant Crab Spider (*Eusparassus dufouri*?) from near Sur, Oman.
Photo credit: Andy Whitaker



The Huntsman spider (*Heteropoda venatoria*), a common spider of Asian tropics and subtropics. The photo probably shows a male. Photo credit: Gary Feulner

Heteropoda venatoria. The Giant Crab Spider and the Huntsman are similar, to be sure, but the Huntsman is much flatter overall, the abdomen is somewhat differently shaped (in both male and female), and the last pair of legs is even more distinctively held. One guide book says the Huntsman is now a cosmopolitan species in the tropics and subtropics, and is welcomed because it eats cockroaches.

I know the Huntsman well from Nepal as a "wall and ceiling spider" – including bedroom walls and ceilings, where it somewhat less welcome.

The Giant Crab Spider seems to be more of a climber than the Huntsman.

Contributed by Gary Feulner

Field Trip Report



Wadi Sfai Re-Visited – The Lost Village –

Our January 24 nature hike, a repeat visit to Wadi Sfai, in the center of the Hajar Mountains of the UAE, enjoyed an expected array of mountain plants and wildlife, but in the afternoon we also focused unex-



*Aerial of the Lost Village
Photo credit: Binish Roobas*

pectedly on archaeology. Walking up the wadi, we had seen the many eroded fields and falajes en route. "Where did the people live, who tended these fields?", Martina and others asked. We saw no dwellings and wondered if perhaps the farmers had commuted, even in earlier times, from the vicinity of the present day village of Sfai, where two main tributary branches meet. The answer was yet to come.

Continuing up the wadi after lunch, we detoured to a high level terrace with scattered small Acacia trees. There we found a graveyard consisting of an estimated 50 Islamic graves, each marked by an oval border of stones and one or two headstones/footstones. Three graves at one edge still bore a thick cover of fine gravel, suggesting they were much more recent than the others. The graveyard was a sure sign of former occupation in the vicinity. Should we look further to find it? Yes, was the consensus, and when we looked over the far side of the terrace we were rewarded.

Just a little below us, along the banks of a tributary wadi, we found the "lost" village we had speculated about – a dozen or two foundations and enclosures. It was surrounded, at the time of our visit, by enough annual ground cover that we could almost imagine we were finding these structures overgrown in a tropical jungle. At least two of the enclosures were large kraals with low walls. The interior dimensions were on the order of 10 meters, so the structures could not have been roofed by traditional techniques, although each had a distinct doorstep stone. The walls were probably initially topped with tangled, thorny brush to keep out animals. Each of the kraals also had the remains of a smaller enclosure within it, about the size of a typical human dwelling.

Most of the human shelters have sunken floors, probably to accommodate low ceilings. One dwelling showed the remains of an A-frame roof structure – a central beam raised parallel to the long axis of the dwelling, against which long palm fronds were propped at an angle to form a peaked roof. The

*Wadi Sfai panorama
Photo credit: Peter Olliff*



*Kerosene Jugs in a sunken foundation
Photo credit: Gary Feulner*

walls, typical of Hajar Mountain structures, are constructed of two layers of larger stones, with a central fill of gravel.

From the heavily eroded condition of the fields we had seen, we had speculated that agriculture may have been abandoned in this area even before the modern era. However, "artifacts" found at the site – batteries, kerosene jugs and food



*Decorated pot rim
Photo credit: Gary Feulner*

Wadi Sfai (continued)

tins – showed that the foundations had also been used more recently, at least for temporary shelter.

We also found a small number of potshards, mostly so-called rough-ware – utility pottery that has been made throughout the ages for everyday purposes, but also a few pieces of what appeared to be the larger, so-called "Iranian water jugs" and some decorated pot rims.

At our lunch stop, we were also able to observe the growth of the mid-sized Arabian toad tadpoles we had seen six weeks earlier. Most of them now had at least well-developed hind legs. The most advanced, although very small, had full hind legs and forelegs and had re-absorbed most of its tail.

Report by Gary Feulner



Remains of an A-frame roof
Photo credit: Binish Roobas



Above: Dwarf Semaphore Gecko. Photo credit: Peter Olliff
Right: Arabian Toad Tadpole. Photo credit: Richard Ashmore



Squashed by a Donkey?



Dead Euphorbia larica
Photo credit: Richard Ashmore

The highlight of the Wadi Sfai trip for this member was an encounter with *Euphorbia larica*, which is sometimes referred to, by the mountain residents, as "the donkey-sat-on-it plant".

The derivation of the common name requires no explanation once one has seen a dead specimen in the wild.

When alive *Euphorbia larica* is a shrub growing up to 1.5 metres, with many ascending stems branching from the base. Upon the plants expiry, those stems descend and splay out in a circular fashion, horizontal to the ground. The result is a shrub that looks as if it has been abused by a passing donkey as a comfortable seat for a rest stop.

Euphorbia larica is a dominant and common component of the native desert flora of Northern Oman and the Northern Emirates. It is found from Southern Iran to Southern Oman, in dry rocky areas and flowers throughout the year in response to rain. Traditional ethnobotanical uses have included use of the latex for treating camels with parasites.

Contributed by Richard Ashmore

Enigmatic Seedlings: *Datura innoxia*

"The apple doesn't fall far from the tree", and "As ye sow, so shall ye reap", and so forth.

Notwithstanding these adages, it is not always easy to determine the identity of a plant from its seedlings. *Datura innoxia** is an example that recently came to my attention.

Datura innoxia, native to South America but widely introduced and used for decorative and other purposes, is not a common plant in the UAE. Most often, "wild" specimens are derived from plants cultivated in plantations upstream, and large groves can form in silt accumulations after rain. I recently visited a site where such a grove had existed a year ago. The mature *Datura* plants were gone, except in a small area that remained damp from recent rain.

But among the other larger shrubs (mostly *Tephrosia apollinea* and *Aerva javanica*), a small plant new to me was common as ground cover. It consisted of two opposite, blade-shaped leaves below, and, at right angles above, another pair of opposed leaves, not blade-shaped but oblong-ovate, slightly wrinkled and veined. The differing leaf forms suggested the possibility that this plant was a seedling of a more recognizable mature plant, since many plants commence life above ground by putting out a pair of simple, undifferentiated leaves that will help them to photosynthesize and to hold their place in the substrate.

I took several photos of this common unknown with the schizophrenic leaves before looking further and finding a few more devel-

oped plants. The more developed leaves had the distinctive appearance, texture and sour odor of *Datura innoxia*. I was also able to compare them with the few mature plants nearby, where I also found the mystery seedlings beneath them. Case closed.

And then I also did what I might have done at first to resolve the matter: I sniffed the enigmatic seedlings up close and smelled the distinctive odor of *Datura*.

[*NB: *D. innoxia* is catalogued in Wild Flowers of the UAE (Jongbloed 2003) as *D. stramonium*. That identification is amended here on the basis of Flora of Egypt, vol. 3 (Boulos 2002).]

Report and photos by Gary Feulner



Datura innoxia seedlings showing schizophrenic leaves.



Enigmatic seedlings of *Datura innoxia*



Mature *Datura innoxia*

It's So Green Out There!

Local plants are responding extremely well to the recent rains and have the potential to repay even casual, random visits. Returning from another project via the coastal sands in the Northern Emirates, I stopped to inspect a couple of especially green areas and turned up two plants I had never seen before, both generally rare species.

The delicate lily, *Dipcadi biflorum*, was found on a dune ridge underlain by firm sand, and the seed capsule had opened to expose the dark seeds within.

The Shepherd's Purse, *Capsella bursa-pastoris*, has distinctive heart-shaped seed capsules on short stalks, that make it unforgettable.

I found it on somewhat saline ground next to an unofficial roadside dump site for building construction waste.

Report and photos by Gary Feulner



Below Left: *Dipcadi biflorum*, Ajman.
Below: *Capsella bursa-pastoris*, Ajman.



DNHG Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan
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off: 06-5583 003
email: lankefi@emirates.net.ae

Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner
res: 306 5570

Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
res: 394 8871
email: valeriechalmers@gmail.com

Plants – Valerie Chalmers

Archaeology—MaryAnne Pardoe
mobile: 050 724 2984
email: maryannepardoe@yahoo.co.uk

Seashells, Birds 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.

Are You a Techie with Time?

The website sub-committee would like to find volunteers who can help with maintenance of the on-line 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!

Announcements

Attention: Georgia trip in May 2014

The dates originally *planned* for the 2014 Georgia trip were 25-31 May (see *Gazelle* of November 2013).

However due to schedule changes of FlyDubai we were forced to change the dates to: **Friday 23 to Thursday 29 May**.

For DNHG members who are interested in this trip to ancient Georgia, please contact Christine Verreydt for a detailed program:

Email: christineverr@hotmail.com
Mobile: 050 8974625

Nepal Hill Country Field Trip

There are still a couple of places available on this customized small group visit to Kathmandu and the hill country scheduled from **March 28 to April 5**.

If interested, please contact Gary Feulner at grfeulner@gmail.com or 04-306-5570.

Upcoming Field Trips

The DNHG has a number of upcoming field trips, both in the UAE and further abroad. Due to the large volume of trips, exhaustive details cannot be given within this month's issue. Details and information regarding the following trips will be sent out by email.

March 21: Nature Hike in Wadi Wurayah
(contact Barbara van Meir at barbaravanmeir@gmail.com)

March 28 to April 5: Nepal Hill Country Field Trip (*see above*)

May 23 to 29: Trip to Georgia (*see above*)

Old Tribulus Volumes Wanted

The ENHG journal, *Tribulus*, is now in its twenty-third year of publication. Since it began, it has become increasingly important as a source of published data about the natural history and archaeology of the UAE. Much of the material published in *Tribulus* is available nowhere else.

As the journal continues to expand its reputation overseas, the Editorial Board have received an increasing number of requests from overseas academic and other scientific institutions for sets of *Tribulus*. Unfortunately, it is not possible to meet all of these requests, since some of the older issues are out of stock, and reprinting would make no economic sense.

If any DNHG members are leaving the UAE, and do not want to take their copies of *Tribulus* with them, then the Editorial Board would be delighted to have them back! Anyone wishing to hand back copies should contact any member of the DNHG Committee, who will arrange to get the copies to the Editorial Board. Many thanks, in advance.

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

Sunday, 2 March 2014 Marta Ameri will be giving a lecture entitled:
"The Role Southern Arabia Played in 3rd Millennium Trade".

Sunday, 6 April 2014 Dr Ada Natoli will be giving a lecture entitled:
"UAE Dolphin Project: update from a new research initiative".

Upcoming Field Trips (Members Only)

See Page 7 for full list of upcoming trips and events

Further field trips, details or changes to trips will be announced/confirmed by email circular

DNHG COMMITTEE 2013

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
(Arial 10 justified).

DNHG Membership

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh. 100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. Membership is valid from Sep 2013 to Sep 2014. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to HSBC account no. 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 AE900200000030100242001. However, this process does not identify you as the payer. If you wish to pay by cash, please also scan and e-mail a copy of your payment confirmation to the Membership Secretary, so we know whose money we have received.

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*, our post office box, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.