



# GAZELLE

مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي



**Yabanna Landslide**

from their gardens and seemed amused to see us tramping around the area.

We first explored an old cemetery, which had dozens of graves marked with unmarked stones. There were many little caves and small rock homes that goats now inhabit.

The landslide is quite impressive. As in many wadis there are huge boulders, but for this you can tell that the landslide event happened all at once and the rocks and rubble that were



**O**n Friday January 29 a wadi walk was led into the Yabanna landslide. It was a perfect cool and cloudy day, with lots of sunshine peeping through on the beautiful landscape. The wadi area is still inhabited by many Emiratis who were also enjoying the good weather

carried down dramatically altered an area that was once fertile farmland and possibly homes. The fields and terraces were once an area that produced barley and was plentiful enough to export.

During our exploration the wadi was vibrant with small white flowers, some small pink flowers, the acacia trees were looking lush and other verdant life dotted the wadi.

The group was led by Sonja Lavson. I'm thankful to her and for the generosity of Alexis and Marilyne for sharing a ride with me from Dubai. I'm also grateful to the DNHG for providing the opportunity to go on this amazing tour of the UAE little known to expats.

*Contribution by Melanie Wood (article) and Alexis Biller (photographs)*



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

Melanie Wood, Alexis Biller, IEW photographic competition winners, Binish Roobas, Gary Feulner, H. Holloway and Val Chalmers.

## Announcements

### Next Month's Speaker

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

#### “Early days in the UAE oil search”

**David G. Heard OBE CBE** - was born in London and educated at Monkton Combe School in Bath, England. He obtained his degree in Geology and Physics from the University of Keele, in Staffordshire. David arrived in the UAE in 1963 to work as an engineer for the Abu Dhabi Petroleum Company (ADPC) and went

on to hold a number of different positions in the company. He then became an ADPC representative for the Abu Dhabi company (UAE Government contact) and finally an advisor to ADPC and SPC (Supreme Petroleum Council). David is married to Dr. Frauke Bey and is now retired and living in Abu Dhabi. He is a member of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs in London, a 25-year Member of The Society of Petroleum Engineers in the USA, a member of The Travellers Club in London and a member of the British Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House), London. He is also a Fellow of the Institute of Petroleum,(Energy Institute), London. David has also served as the Chairman for the Board of Governors for the British School Al Khubairat in Abu Dhabi.

David Heard has published:

**‘From Pearls to Oil’. How the Oil Industry came to the UAE. Motivate Dubai, 2011**

**Travellers Tales. 2 chapters 1999 Travellers Club, London**

**Oil and Regional Developments. 1 chapter 1998. Chatham House, London**

**8pm on Sunday, 6th March, 2016**



### From the Editor:

Are they ants or spiders? Read Binish's bizarre account of ant mimic spiders on page 4. Zoom in to view the intricate detail on the amazing photos.

On the subject of spiders, Gary Feulner was looking for diurnal specimens, when he came across a place he'd never visited before. Find out where on page 6.

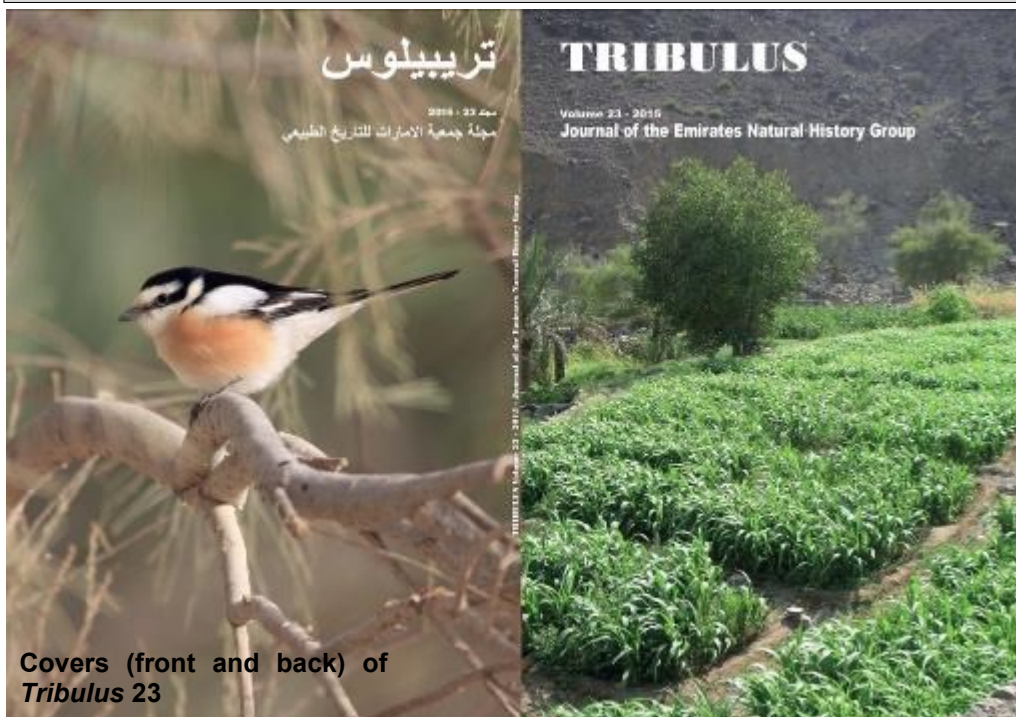
Can you identify the curious creature that washed up on a beach in Jumeirah last month? View the photo on page 7 and let us know.

Finally, this year's Inter-Emirates Weekend was hosted by ENHG Fujairah at the Hilton Fujairah Resort. Members who attended it reported a wonderful weekend with a varied and interesting programme of trips. Our thanks to David Edwards, Acting Chair, ENHG Fujairah and his team for all their hard work. Read about the guest of honour, various awards, plus a detailed report by Valerie Chalmers on page 4.

### Tribulus Vol. 23

The latest volume of *Tribulus* is now available and will be on sale at our lecture meeting on March 6, at AED 50. Volume 23 represents a tribute to the goal of the *Tribulus* founders to promote and disseminate original research about the flora, fauna, archaeology, geology and environment of the UAE. It contains a diverse array of papers as well as short notes and book reviews that will be of interest to most members, including:

- An illustrated catalogue of UAE spiders featuring more than 90 distinctive species, including some that are cosmopolitan, others that are more localized, and several perhaps still new to science. (The spider catalog reflects the work of the DNHG's own Gary Feulner and Binish Roobas over the past several years.)
- A re-evaluation of the zonation and interpretation of the algal mats (cyanobacterial mats) that characterize the uppermost zone of Abu Dhabi's world famous sabkha terrain (coastal salt flats).
- A first UAE record of the Omani Owl *Strix butleri*, originally distinguished in Oman only a few years ago, from a tape recording of its call.
- New UAE records of eight plant species.
- A review of the status of the Great Knot in the UAE.
- An unusual softstone vessel lid from the East Coast.



Covers (front and back) of *Tribulus 23*

# Spotlight on winning photos

**Colour —Tamsin Carlisle**



**Ancient —Juliette Winser**



**Horizons—Johanna Raynor**



## Winners of the IEW Photographic Competition, 2016

**COLOUR**—Tamsin Carlisle with 'Black-winged Stilts at Sunset' taken at Al-Wathba Wetlands Reserve

**HORIZONS**—Johanna Raynor with 'Dubai skyline in a storm' taken from Silicon Oasis

**LIFE**—Steve Raynor with 'Dragonfly Resting' taken in Wadi Shawkah

**ANCIENT**—Juliette Winser with 'Old Dubai' taken in the Al Fahidi area

**THE ELEMENTS**—Angela Manthorpe with 'Drop into the majlis' taken at the Majlis al Djinn in Oman

**ANY PHOTOGRAPHER AGED 17 OR UNDER**—Owen Dowley with 'This is an ant' taken in Sharjah

Winners each received a plaque relevant to their category, an example of which can be seen in the central photograph



**Elements —Angela Manthorpe**



**17 and under—Owen Dowley**



**Life—Steve Raynor**



## Inter-Emirates Weekend 2016



### Inter Emirates Weekend 2016 Dinner

The IEW Dinner was held outside in the Hilton Fujairah Resort Garden.

A highlight of the evening was an illustrated talk entitled "Inspirations" given by David Edwards, Acting Chair of ENHG Fujairah, which included the founding of the ENHG, some of the renowned names in our community's leadership and authorship and the people he was privileged to meet and be influenced by when he first came to the Emirates. He also spoke about Fujairah and its history, leading up to a look at the remarkable collection of photos from 1969-70 taken by the then 20-year old 32 Field Squadron Royal Engineer, Mr. Keith Whibley, which also included one of the mission in Fujairah which was run by Minie Van de Weg. Minie's own photographs of an earlier Fujairah are found in the book "Focus on Fujairah: Through Minie's Lens" and Minie was present at the Dinner as Guest of Honour, later signing copies of her book.

David's talk was followed by the announcement of the winners of the ENHG's two annual Natural History Awards. Binish Roobas, a member of the DNHG, was the recipient of the Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohamed Prize for Natural History and John Stewart-Smith, founding member of the ENHG, was the recipient of the Bish Brown Award. Finally, the winners of the Inter-Emirates Weekend Photographic Competition were announced and each winner was presented with a commemorative plaque. Details of the winners and their photographs are on page 3.

*Report by Valerie Chalmers*

## ENHG NATURAL HISTORY AWARDS FOR 2015

### Sheikh Mubarak Bin Mohamed Prize for Natural History

*The Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Prize for natural history is given to a person who has made a substantial, original contribution to knowledge of the history, natural history, culture, archaeology or palaeontology of the UAE, such contribution being reflected through means such as publications and lectures. The award was instituted by the ENHG Patron, HE Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan, and comprises an inscribed silver dhow and a cash prize.*

Binish Roobas took his degree in Zoology and worked in Kerala as a naturalist guide. In the UAE, he has pursued his interests as a naturalist and photographer as an avocation. He has shared his efforts through regular short reports and photographs in the DNHG's monthly newsletter, *Gazelle*, longer papers in the ENHG's journal, *Tribulus*, occasional short talks, and as a leader of natural history field trips in the UAE, his native Kerala and India's Andaman Islands.

Binish has been responsible for the recognition and study of several rare UAE animal species, notably Walton's mudskipper and Bosk's fringe-toed lizard, and has contributed to the study of several others, including the Arabian Grizzled Skipper butterfly, the Cycad Cupid butterfly, the colorful damselfly *Ischnura nursei*, and the tiger beetle *Callytron monalisa*. Binish has also paid special attention to UAE butterflies, moths and dragonflies.

His most ambitious effort has been his recent collaboration in producing an introductory catalogue of UAE spiders, featured in the latest volume of *Tribulus*. Spiders are one of the least studied animal groups in the UAE, and his co-author, DNHG Chairman Gary Feulner, has written that "the catalogue would not have appeared in anything like its final form, and probably would not have appeared at all, without Binish's observational, photographic and online research skills, not to mention his knowledge and enthusiasm."

The breadth of Binish's interests, the depth of his curiosity, and his disciplined pursuit of his inquiries recall the example set by the best of earlier UAE naturalists. His record also stands as an example of the opportunity available in the UAE to individuals with a passion for natural history, notwithstanding perceived disadvantages in terms of factors such as personal resources, free time, field access, institutional support, etc.

### Bish Brown Award

*The Bish Brown Award is given to a person who has made a significant contribution to promoting wider interest in the objectives of the UAE's three natural history groups, through means such as educational activities, raising public consciousness in the media, playing a leading role in NHG activities etc. The award was endowed by former Vice Chairman, Terry Adams and former Secretary, Caroline Adams, to commemorate the founder of the ENHG, J.N.B. 'Bish' Brown. The award comprises a silver mounted eagle, to be held for one year by the recipient, and a cash prize.*

John Stewart-Smith was a founding member of the ENHG who was encouraged by Bish Brown and others to be the first Chair of the ENHG. He had lived in the UAE for many years prior to the formation of the ENHG, arriving in 1968, and had been an inspiration to most of those early keen naturalists with his dedication to the recording and observing of biodiversity, a motto which was then adopted for the ENHG and is a main mission of all ENHGs 'observe, record, report'. This motto is the foundation of publications such as the newsletters and *Tribulus*. John gave the ENHG's very first two lectures - a two-part slide-show discussing detailed identification of all of the waders to be found in Abu Dhabi. The scripts of these lectures were published amongst the first few issues of *The Bulletin*. To this day his extraordinarily detailed bird records are a significant contribution that didn't just constitute lists, but also detailed drawings that he made.

John used every opportunity to capture information about the natural world. With his day-job as a pilot, John spent many years photographing the UAE from the air by strapping a camera to the front of his plane. He took the recording of natural history to another level. He was allowed to use military equipment to do bird watching. In June 2011 AD ENHG awarded John a Lifetime membership which was some recognition for his contributions.

Brigitte Howarth, Vice-Chair of ENHG Al Ain, has written "However, I believe the time has come to award recognition for his lifetime achievement of contributing towards the knowledge of the natural history of the UAE, and having inspired countless numbers of people to observe, record and report, something which will continue. What makes John's contributions even more worthy of this award is his tireless effort to continually share his knowledge and give input to the ENHG, even to this day. Not only is John the only surviving founder member of the ENHG, this essentially means that John is probably the member who has contributed to the ENHG the longest, i.e. since even before its inception to the current day, an incredible 40+ years, and is not about to stop."

*Report by Valerie Chalmers*

## Ant Mimic Spiders

During December and January I had a chance to spend 50-plus valuable days at a resort situated in the Western Ghats of India, where I was surrounded by the rich tropical flora and fauna of the Subcontinent. Among everything that I saw, I was most fascinated by a number of diverse ant mimic spiders, all living closely in the same habitat.

Ant mimicry (myrmecomorphy) is not an uncommon behavior within the insect kingdom and more than 300 species of spiders are known to show ant mimicry. In my explorations of the resort area I came across several new spiders each day, including 5 to 10 species of ant mimic spiders from different families with different characteristics. Spiders are generally active hunters and most ant mimic spiders are ambushers.

Ant mimicry in spiders is a complicated phenomenon. Most ant mimic spiders prey on the ants they mimic. But their disguise is not intended to fool the ants, because ants rely on chemical and tactile clues much more than on eyesight. Instead, the disguise serves to protect



**Black ant mimic sac spider (Family Corinnidae)(Ant mimic sac spiders)**

© Binish Roobas



**Giant ant-like jumper (Family Salticidae) (Jumping spiders)**

walk on only six legs. Some ant mimic spiders modify the shape of their cephalothorax or develop more bulbous palps to give the impression of a third body segment.

Only close observation can help us differentiate these spiders from ants. Here are a few tricks I learned that make it easier to identify ant mimic spiders:

- 1) Spiders have two main body parts (cephalothorax and abdomen) while ants have three body parts (head, thorax and abdomen).
- 2) Spiders walk with frequent abrupt stops whereas ants walk continuously.
- 3) Ant mimic spiders have more eyes (eight eyes) than ants (two eyes).
- 4) Ant mimic spiders are solitary and are not normally seen among ants, whereas ants usually congregate with their own kind and use antennae to touch and exchange information chemically.
- 5) If you disturb a suspected ant mimicking spider, it will jump (drop) from the leaf or a plant, trailing a silken thread from its spinnerets, but if you disturb an ant, it just runs away or bites you.

the spider from avian and other predators, which mostly avoid ants because of the toxic chemicals in their bodies, including formic acid. Ant mimic spiders have evolved to tolerate or disarm those chemicals, and spiders ingest only the liquefied internal tissues of their prey, not the whole body.

The ant mimic spiders which I encountered all looked very much like the different ants they associated with, although this presents some fundamental problems for the spiders. Ants are six-legged insects with antennae and three body parts, whereas spiders are eight-legged insects with two body parts and no antennae. So many ant mimic spiders lift their first pair of legs to look like fake antennas, but then they have to

ground spider. If you watch closely in areas where ants are common, and keep in mind some of the above tricks, you could add to our knowledge of these interesting creatures. *Contribution and photos by Binish Roobas*



**Red ant mimic spider (Family Salticidae) (Jumping spiders)**

© Binish Roobas



**Brown ant mimic spider (Family Salticidae) (Jumping spiders)**

© Binish Roobas



**Weaver ant mimic spider (Family Thomsidae) (Crab spiders)**

© Binish Roobas

The accompanying photos show a few of the ant mimic spiders I encountered:

At least a couple of species of ant mimic spiders have been recorded in the UAE. One is a jumping spider and one is a

## Field Clip

### East Coast Cemetery: A Place I've Never Been

I spent a midday in January among the coastal plantations at Murbah (Mirbah) and Qidfa', north of Fujairah city and south of Khor Fakkan. I was looking for diurnal spiders, but of course everything is fair game. The meandering pathways between adjacent properties are now mostly flanked by cinder block (breeze block) walls, but these are not always very high and they are punctuated by wrought iron gates that give a window on the greenery (and relative comforts) within. Some plantations continue to use older wire fencing, or even just earthen berms to demarcate their territory, affording a full view. A few plots have been abandoned and now the waste ground is home to weeds and ruderal shrubs.

An abandoned Islamic cemetery within the coastal plantations at Murbah. A large eroded mound is seen at left.



The pathways open and close. What is at one point a narrow trench, overhung by the dangling branches of a ghaf tree or a drooping shrub, widens to become a clear path. I rounded a bend past a lay-by littered with slaughtered goat carcasses, wondering if the end must be near. But the path continued, and another joined it in the shade of a tall ghaf.

Just beyond, the vista of plantations and

Surface scatter of sub-rounded stones and coral.



walls opened into a kind of parkland, with open soil, scattered small shrubs and acacia, no tall trees (date palms, mangoes or others), and a surface littered with small stones and other natural debris – a peculiar landscape, ca. 50 metres square, that looked like nothing I had encountered before. I approached and saw two things: First, a nearly two-meter high, flat-topped mound at one end, crested by the remains of a wall of sub-rounded stones, evidently wadi cobbles. Second, a loose array of flattened slabs of beachrock (cemented beach sand), set vertically into the silty ground, all with a similar orientation, flat sides facing N-S. I was looking at an overgrown graveyard set among the plantations, the likes of which I had not seen before.

I looked more closely at the details. The littered appearance of the ground was enhanced by many white components. Most of these were coral; some were robust shells such as those of the rugose oyster *Saccostrea cucullata* and the gastropods *Hexaplex kuesterianus* and *Conus betulinus*. Still others were animal bones. How did they all come to be scattered here? Had they once formed part of the wall of the mound? Or did they originally decorate individual graves? The coral, the large shells and the wadi cobbles must all have been brought to the site from some distance away. The silt in the area of the graveyard is evidently rather deep. This was revealed by a number of excavations made by animals (red foxes?), although whether this was



Sparse headstones and littered ground.

A net trap, probably for birds.



for burrowing or scavenging is uncertain.

On a plantation wall nearest the mound, a 4-meter pole had been erected, with a small spotlight atop it, aimed out over the mound and graveyard. Since the graveyard site appeared to be unused, we could only guess at the purpose of the light.

A final novelty at this site was a trap, probably for ground birds such as pigeons, doves or grey francolin, consisting of a horizontal net propped up on low sticks, with an entrance at one end.

Contribution and photos by Gary Feulner



A large burrow in the silt.

## Field Clip, Trip and DNHG Recorders



This curious creature washed up on Jumeirah 2 beach last month. Can anyone identify it? Some think it might be a sea slug.

It was spotted by Helga Meyer who, around the same time, responded to a request to transport four baby turtles from Abu Dhabi to the [turtle rehabilitation in Jumeirah](#).

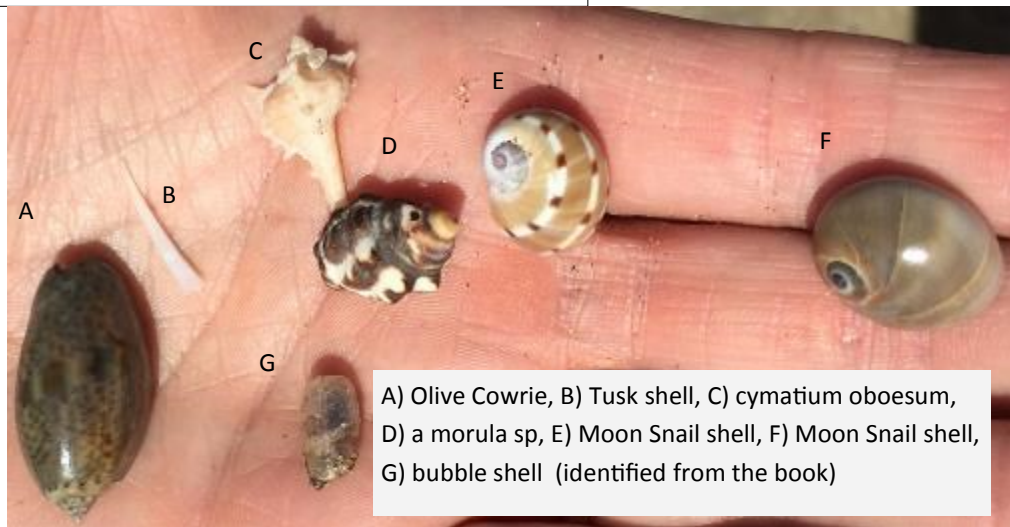
These young turtles were among dozens infected or encrusted with barnacle infestations and washed up on UAE beaches, due to the unusually cold sea in January.

### Shelling in Fujairah

Andrew Childs led the shelling trip at the annual weekend meeting of the ENHG, hosted by Fujairah.

It began with a very useful briefing in the hotel lobby. Andrew and Vicky had brought a sample box of shells and a large book on shells of the region called 'Seashells of Eastern Arabia', by Bosch, Dance, Moolenbeek and Oliver. Andrew explained the types of shells, hazards from poisonous inhabitants and the spots in the various coves and beaches where the tides would most likely deposit shells.

Everyone was reminded that the tide



A) Olive Cowrie, B) Tusk shell, C) cymatium oboesum, D) a morula sp, E) Moon Snail shell, F) Moon Snail shell, G) bubble shell (identified from the book)

could have left many shells—or none at all! Also, others may have collected shells prior to our visit, so to some extent, shell-collecting was one of luck.

Following a search on the first beach, the group reconvened to review finds. Again, Andrew and Vicky were patient and knowledgeable, identifying shells through size and colour for a particular type. Some members had good finds and everyone shared in the explanations.

Moving north to the next beach, we repeated the collecting with varying successes and plenty of enthusiasm. Five or six beaches were walked and enjoyed.

The final two sites were along the harbour front at Khor Fakkan, where land drainage enters the harbour. The first was fruitless but the second site gave up some good finds. Unfortunately, the silt and harbour mud was slippery, resulting in a few dramatic slips. Lone shell-seekers beware!

Having spent a few pleasant hours walking and collecting, the group headed back to the hotel at about 16.30

Lots of starfish on this rocky beach



hours. Thanks to Andrew and Vicky for a well-researched shelling trip.

**Contribution by H. Holloway**

#### DNHG Recorders

**Reptiles - Dr. Reza Khan** res: 344 8283 off: 344 0462

**Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi** res: 06-5310467 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

**Mammals - Lynsey Gedman** mobile: 050 576 0383 email: lynseygedman@hotmail.com

**Seashells - Andrew Childs** mobile: 050 459 0112 email: andrew.childs@eim.ae

**Birds - Tamsin Carlisle** mobile: 050 1004702 email: tamsin.carlisle@platts.com

## Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

March 6: David Heard: Early days in the UAE oil search

April 3: David Neild: (author of *A Soldier in Arabia*)

### Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

March 23—25: Photography Workshop

April 1—9: Nepal Hill Country

April 1—7: Andaman Islands

July 22—28: Kyrgyzstan

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

## DNHG COMMITTEE 2015

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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## Contributions

We need a variety of contributors. 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 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 2015 to September 2016. 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 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 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.