



GAZELLE

مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

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Spotting a *Goniobranchus annulatus* nudibranch on the East Coast.

Spending the day on the East coast searching our normal shelling haunts, it was exciting to spot this beautiful white, orange-dotted, purple-tipped, black-ringed nudibranch just resting in one of the rock pools at a low tide.

I had been photographing rock sponges around the low tide point and spotted this unusual, but striking little nudibranch.

Goniobranchus annulatus is a species of sea slug, a very colourful dorid nudibranch, a shell-less marine gastropod mollusc in the family Chromodorididae.

Originally described from Zanzibar, it

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

Victoria Dobson, Angela Manthorpe, Esmat Elhassan, Alexis Biller, Marilyne Biller, Tamsin Carlisle, Brigitte Howarth, Valerie Chalmers, Gary Feulner, and John Burt.

For inclusion in the next issue, send your contributions to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

no later than 25th April, 2017



occurs in the Red Sea, from the Arabian Gulf. The doridian lives between 1-40 metres deep on rock walls and hard substrates. Normally sized around 4-6cm, it can grow to a maximum size of 10cm.

This is another confirmation that there are lots of treasures to be spotted on the shores of the UAE, within reach of the amateur shell collector.

Contribution by Victoria Dobson

Announcements and Recorders

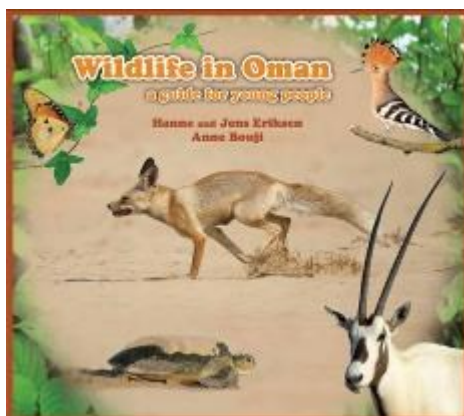
Monthly Speakers—8pm on Sunday 9 April, 2017

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

“The Wildlife of Oman”

Jens and Hanne Erikson have lived for 25 years in Oman (plus five years in Abu Dhabi) They have travelled the length and breadth of Oman in search of wildlife. In this talk they will share their experience from their many trips. Their latest book, **Wildlife in Oman**, is a guide for young people. It was published three months ago and aims to highlight the great biodiversity of Oman. Though it is intended for children, everybody from age 3 to 103 will learn from this book, which will be available at the talk.

Oman is blessed with a wealth of wildlife species. At the latest count, 83 species of mammals, 527 species of birds, 105 species of reptiles, 79 species of butterflies and 44 species of dragonflies have been recorded in addition to an unknown number of other insects. The lecture will highlight a number of spectacular species from all parts of Oman such as a day of 600 eagles of eight different species at Raysut and unique Humpback Whales seen from the shore along the southeast coast.



Obituary

News reached us this month of the untimely death of Herbert Otto in October 2016. Most recently a teacher in Sohar, Oman, Herb lectured to the DNHG in March 2015 on UAE butterflies and co-led an associated field

From the Editor:

There's quite an array of topics in this month's issue. From a colourful ocean observation in the lead article, to abundant mountain signage on page 5.

Bird-ringing occurred at Ras al Khor this month (see page 6).

Why not participate in a 'Citizen Science' project in Ras Al Khaimah? Read what Dr John Burt has to say on this. (above and page 6).

Finally, Tamsin Carlisle spends much time in getting the shot just right, her patience rewarded in her remarkable photographs, which she shares with us. It was good to learn that her photo of an Arabian Horned Viper (*Cerasters gasperetti*) featured this month in the [iNaturalist online database](#).

Enjoy your read!

trip. He was the author of *Butterflies of the Kruger National Park and Surrounds* and was working on a similar volume for Oman, where, among other things, he had added confirmed records for the African Cupid *Euchrysops osiris* and records of new larval foodplants for two of the world's smallest butterflies, the Grass Jewel and Western Pygmy



Blue. Herb was born in Zimbabwe and grew up in South Africa. His interest in butterflies was first sparked in childhood and stayed with him to the end. Herb succumbed to skin cancer, which had been in remission for more than a year. He was 44 years old.

Contribution by Gary Feulner

Going to Oman by car?

Don't forget to carry with you the orange card, which has become mandatory. Apparently, when a car is insured in the UAE with an Oman extension, it is now insufficient to show just the policy and Oman extension at the border. An orange card is required as well for the insured, in case of a third party accident.

Citizen Science (by John Burt)

At the recent ENHG Inter-Emirates Weekend I was honored to receive the 2017 Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Award for Natural History. As part of my acceptance speech, I had proposed an opportunity for ENHG members to engage in 'citizen science' to improve our

(Continued on page 6)

DNHG Recorders

Reptiles - Dr. Reza Khan 050 6563601

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

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

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

Spotlight!

Wildlife in Al Ain, by Tamsin Carlisle



Polka-dot Diving Beetle *Hydaticus (Prodaticus) pictus*

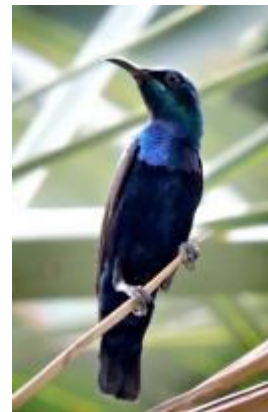
European Honeybee *Apis mellifera* landing on a desert hyacinth



Indian Roller in flight *Coracias benghalensis*



(left and below) Purple Sunbird— male *Cinnyris asiaticus*



Desert Lark *Ammomanes desert taimuri*

Umm al Quwain Archaeological Excursion, by Alexis and Marilyne Biller



Trek up Jebel Hafit, by Alexis and Marilyne Biller



Annual Awards 2017

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.

Dr John Burt is an Associate Professor of Biology at New York University, Abu Dhabi and the Head of the NYU Abu Dhabi Marine Biology Laboratory. His list of achievements is as follows:

He has published over 50 scholarly articles and book chapters on marine ecology in the UAE and surrounding Arabian nations since joining NYU Abu Dhabi in 2009.

His research is drawing the attention of scientists from around the world, and his work has been cited over 970 times since joining NYU Abu Dhabi (data from Google scholar)

He has hosted two major international reef conferences focused on regional coral reefs, and has hosted several capacity building/training workshops for UAE and regional government and NGO participants. These conferences and workshops have led to the publication of two Arabian-focused special issues in scientific journals.

He has acted as an adviser and topic expert for various government agencies in the UAE and around the region.

His work also includes terrestrial interests. He has published work on UAE Acacia tree canopy architecture in the *Journal of Arid Environments*, and has published an article on invertebrates associated with wadis in the ENHG's journal *Tribulus*.

He has given numerous public lectures during his time in the Emirates, including presentations at all three Emirates Natural History Group chapters.

Dr. Brigitte Howarth, Chair of ENHG Al Ain has written "I have known John for many years both as a colleague, first at Zayed University before he moved to NYU Abu Dhabi and as a friend who has given of his time very generously over the years in disseminating his research to all three chapters of the NHGs. John has been working on reef systems in the Emirates since 2005 and is one of the most prolific scholars on regional marine issues. He is frequently called upon when an expert is needed by governmental and non-governmental agencies, e.g. AGEDI or the former MOEW, the Prime Minister's Office, just to name a few, as the foremost expert in his field. John always selflessly shares his knowledge and opinion to help move decision makers towards a more improved environment."

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



Dr John Burt receiving his award from H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan, in the presence of Arabella Willing, Chair ENHG Abu Dhabi

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.

Jodie Healy and Joseph Mansoor have been pillars of the Al Ain ENHG for many years (in fact, they met through the ENHG) and both have been deeply involved in so much of the operation, and direction. Dr. Brigitte Howarth has written "Our membership has benefitted hugely, including members of other chapters, as Jodie and Joseph's contributions have affected the entire ENHG community. Both have been the most regular field trip leaders in the past few years. They have developed many new experiences for members and have spent considerable hours and days doing reconnaissance to widen the repertoire of field trips so that members could continue to enjoy the natural history of the UAE and Northern Oman. Jodie took the lead during the 2013 IEW, moving Committee from a paper-based platform to a digital planning system that we have expanded on for this coming IEW, making the planning and operation so much easier. Jodie has also taken the lead many times to expand our interpretation of 'observe, record, report', such as starting a regular botanical survey of Jazira Oasis, or the place project where members chose an environment and visited the site over a period of a few weeks several times to record changes. Jodie has thrown herself into tasks selflessly, and has always found innovative ways to think about natural history from new perspectives. She has also dedicated a lot of time to volunteering to curate the arthropod collection, most recently spending countless hours with a task of sorting invertebrates from a research project in the RAK mountains. Jodie is also a regular contributor to the local 'Oasis Living' magazine, publishing articles on natural history for the Al Ain community. Jodie and Joseph have worked tirelessly together on improvements for our operations, and Joseph has taken on so many tasks to ensure effective and efficient continuity, e.g. treasurer, web site coordinator, book sales, field trip leader, and committee member. Joseph has worked with other chapters to support the ENHG's website presence.

Sadly we have now lost our friends as they have left to start a new life in Lebanon."

Contribution by Brigitte Howarth and Valerie Chalmers

Field Clip



Climb here!

Sign of the Times

Music lovers may be disappointed to find that this is not a review of one of the best albums recorded by Prince (who sadly passed away last year), but recognition of the fact that I recently found a signposted hiking trail in the UAE mountains.

I'd joined a small group to explore Wadi Ghalilah in Ras Al Khaimah and just above the dam there's a small sign that points to a hiking trail, heading straight up the slope. The signposts are abundant in the first few kilometres and the trail appears to have been recently renovated,

with occasional rest spots complete with stone seats and tables. During our 4 hours toil up the mountain, a highlight was a mountain fig tree (*Ficus johannis*) at an elevation of approximately 900m. The tree was inaccessible to man and goat alike and was laden with little purple fruit but was almost devoid of leaves. Consulting Marijcke Jongbloed's Wildflowers of the UAE, I see that leaf fall is a seasonal occurrence and, although purple figs are apparently ripe, they were very hard and oozed a milky sap – not at all palatable. At the top of the trail we met a group of donkeys laden with construction material for the adjacent village. The hillside above the village, elevation of 1400m and above, had numerous olive trees (*Olea europaea*).



An olive tree



A leafless fig tree

Although the signs were helpful for route-finding, be warned that this is an extremely challenging hike. The trail is very steep right from the start, the ascent fairly unrelenting and the signage a bit

thin in the mid-section, which makes it easy to take the wrong route. In only 8.5km we ascended 1300m and, although we came back the same way (2.5hrs), a slightly less strenuous option would be to park a car at the very top of the Jebel Jais road, where the trail ends, and descend that way.

Contribution by Angela Manthorpe

(Risks involved in climbing are many. Make sure you prepare well and never climb alone. Click below to read this recent report of a climb in Ras al Khaimah, from the [Gulf News](#))



Abundant signage



The sign shows distance, not altitude



Ghalilah dam

Field Clips

Greater Spotted Eagle—ringing at Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary

Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary annually hosts the largest population in the UAE, in one site, of the migratory Greater Spotted Eagle (*Clanga clanga*), with a population that normally ranges between 25 – 30 individuals. The species is in our top list of raptors, targeted for ringing, in order to understand their movement for better management.

Early on Monday 20th March 2017, I was very lucky to ring the first Greater Spotted Eagle of the winter, which was a first year sub-adult. As the birds are very active, mostly in the early morning, Bal-chatri traps were set up before the eagles emerged from their roosting site. They roost in the mangrove forest in the sanctuary.

The traps were placed in their usual feeding site, where they come looking for the weak black-headed gulls, which are left behind by their group. The site is an easy catch area for them, with minimum effort. Many gulls were observed weak and unable to fly due to foraging on various foods, especially on the landfill, which may have affected them in one way

or another.

The eagle normally observes the traps for around one hour, before approaching to try to take the rats, placed in the traps. They get entangled in the nooses whilst they are trying to get the rats using their sharp talons.

Generally, the eagles are very aware of the traps, which makes the trapping process very difficult. The biometric data taken include the wing, tail, column, head

and bill, tarsus in addition to the moulting patterns. The bird was really heavy, weighing in at 2300 grams. As I managed to ring three individuals in the same site last

year, I used the metal ring with code AH00004 for my fourth bird.

The bird is native to the United Arab Emirates. The passage of wintering birds occurs in small numbers over a vast area, including Central and Eastern Europe, North Africa, East Africa, the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula, the Indian Subcontinent, South Asia and South-East Asia. This species has a small population which appears to be declining, owing to extensive habitat loss and persistent persecution. It is therefore listed as Vulnerable since 1994 according to the IUCN Red List.

Other raptors usually observed at the site include the Western Marsh Harrier, Osprey, Common Kestrel, Bonelli's Eagle and Shikra.

Contribution by Esmat Elhassan, Ornithologist, Dubai Municipality



A typical Bal-chatri trap with nooses



(Continued from page 2)

understanding of the natural history and archaeology of the Emirates, specifically by participating in an upcoming survey at Jazirat Al Hamra in Ras Al Khaimah.

For those of you who are not familiar with the area, Jazirat Al Hamra is a centuries-old coastal village in Ras Al Khaimah that has been abandoned since the 1950s and is considered, in local folklore, to be haunted ([see article](#)). This village is truly a remarkable resource for archaeology and natural history as virtually all of the 'hundreds' of historic buildings that occur there were constructed from corals, mined from local reefs. Our Marine Biology Laboratory at New York University in Abu Dhabi are collaborating with researchers at the Petroleum Institute (who are dating the corals, some coming from as early as the 1600s) and the Jazirat Al Hamra archaeologists (who are mapping and restoring the site) to develop a better understanding of the corals used in building construction.

We are proposing to perform several field trips to the site over April 2017 (and perhaps again the autumn) to survey corals in the buildings, and we feel that this is an excellent opportunity for ENHG members to engage in 'citizen science' by participating in these surveys. We will provide a short online training program to familiarize participants with the survey methods and to teach them how to identify the major coral

groups.

If you are interested in participating, please complete the [SIGN UP FORM](#) and we will reach out in the next week or so to discuss next steps and to begin scheduling site visits.

We look forward to working with you to better understand the remarkable natural history of this unique archaeological asset!

John Burt, Associate Professor of Biology,
Head of the Marine Biology Laboratory,
New York University—Abu Dhabi

(this was also circulated by e-mail to DNHG members)



Photo credit: Peter Iantorno

Field Clip

IEW Al Ain

These photographs were taken during the IEW weekend last month.

1. Red-rimmed Melania (*Melanoides tuberculata*; Family: Thiariidae)--A large number of shells belonging to these freshwater snails were found in sand a few meters from a reed bed at the margin of a large municipal waste-water pond whose water-level has fluctuated over the years—at Zakher Pools, Al Ain.

2. Crimson-speckled Footman Moth (*Utetheisa pulchella*) on *Heliotropium*—in an abandoned garden outside Mezyad Fort, Al Ain.



3. Crimson-speckled Footman Caterpillar (*Utetheisa pulchella*) on *Heliotropium*—in an abandoned garden outside Mezyad Fort, Al Ain.

4. Brown Slant-faced Grasshopper (Sub-family: Gomphocerinae) on *Heliotropium*—in an abandoned garden outside Mezyad Fort, Al Ain.



5. Cream Slant-faced Grasshopper (Sub-family: Gomphocerinae)—in a courtyard of Mezyad Fort, Al Ain.

Contribution by Tamsin Carlisle



(NB—The cotton plant observed at Mezyad Fort and reported in an article last month, may have been a Levant

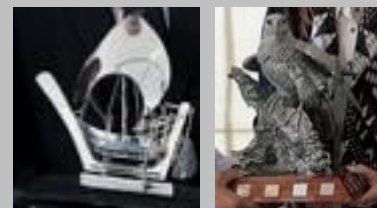
Cotton (*Gossypium herbaceum*), a shrub that grows wild in semi-arid parts of the Middle East, including the UAE and sub-Saharan Africa).



Inter-Emirates Weekend 2017

This year's Inter-Emirates Weekend was hosted by ENHG Al Ain at the Ayla Hotel in Al Ain. Members who attended it reported an excellent weekend with a varied and interesting programme of trips. Our thanks go to ENHG Al Ain.

At the IEW Dinner on the evening of Friday 24th, the winners of the ENHG's two annual Natural History Awards were announced and they were presented with their trophies. Dr John Burt, Associate Professor of Biology and head of NYU, Abu Dhabi Marine Biology Laboratory, was the recipient of the Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Prize for Natural History and Jodie Healy and Joseph Mansoor, members of ENHG Al Ain, were joint recipients of the Bish Brown Award. Arabella Willing, the Chair of ENHG Abu Dhabi, also announced that Life



Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Prize for Natural History, and the Bish Brown Award

Memberships of ENHG Abu Dhabi were awarded to former Chairs, Dr. Andrew Bean and Keith Taylor, who had both made significant contributions to the group.

John Burt afterwards gave a short illustrated talk on the use of coral as a building material at Jazirat Al Hamra.

Finally, the winners of the Inter-Emirates Weekend Photographic Competition were announced and each winner was presented with small gifts ranging from traditional locks to bronze compasses.

Contribution by Valerie Chalmers

(See page 6 for details of how you can help with 'Citizen Science' research at Jazirat Al Hamra).

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

April 9:	Jens and Hanne Eriksen—"The Wildlife of Oman"
May 7:	Hilal Khan—"The Restoration/Conservation and Revitalization of the coastal town Jazirat Al Hamra, Ras Al Khaimah"
June 4:	Sue-Sharyn Ward—"How Aviation Inspired Growth in the Trucial States/UAE"

Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

March 31—April 8:	DNHG trip to Slovenia
April 1:	Jazirat Al Hamra, Ras Al Khaimah
June 2—9:	Serbia (Belgrade and Mountain Zlatibor)

Field trips will be circulated to members via e-mail

DNHG COMMITTEE 2017

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 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.