



GAZELLE

مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

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Mountain Front Wetlands

Fall and winter rain have created small wetlands on the periphery of many of the lakes now evaporating behind the mountain front dams that proliferated in the UAE after about 1998-2000. We visited a selection of these to find that water levels were down substantially from their peaks in October to January, but puddles or ponds still remained, bordered by the mud-cracked silt deposited by the flood waters. The following were some of the phenomena we saw:

(1) Two plants generally considered rare in the UAE were abundant in the fine, damp silt around the dams – the sedge *Cyperus rotundus* and the Amaranth *Amaranthus albus*. The latter



Amaranthus albus in leaf (inset—*Amaranthus albus* dried)

Photos by Tamsin Carlisle

is a protean species and we marvelled at how different it looked when in leaf, in seed, and dried (when it turns a dark red).

(2) It's spring, yes, but the UAE spring is too hot for many butterflies. At the Qusheesh Dam, Plain Tiger butterflies were abundant (they use the site as a communal roost) but at mid-morning in mid-May they were most active in the shade.

(3) Hundreds and probably thousands of toadlets of the so-called Dhofar Toad (*Duttaphrynus dhufarensis*) were hopping about from their shelters in the cracked mud surrounding the remaining lake water. Dhofar Toad adults typically live at a distance from surface water, so they must congregate to breed after major rain events, leaving their army of progeny to fend for themselves as the ponds dry up.



Plain Tiger Butterfly *Danaus chrysippus*

(4) An albino dove, possibly a Palm Dove or a lone albino domesticated

(Continued on page 6)

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

Angela Manthorpe, Cheryl and Robin Robertson, Melanie Wood, Sophia and Phil Todd, Gary Feulner, Tamsin Carlisle, Ulrike Andorff.

Send your contributions to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

By 25th June

Announcements and Recordors

Monthly Speaker—8pm on Sunday 4 June, 2017

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

"How Aviation Inspired Growth in the Trucial States/UAE"

Moving forward from 1919 when intrepid Australians flew from England to Australia for a £10,000 reward, you will learn of the extraordinary courage of these airmen and see film footage of flights over the Arabian Gulf which have impacted the lives of generations of Expats and Locals living and working in the region, supporting the movement of goods and passengers to remote areas to develop and strengthen economies, and particularly those of the United Arab Emirates.

Sue-Sharyn Ward—With over 40 years experience working in, firstly Kuwait, and then from 1979 the United Arab Emirates, Sue-Sharyn Ward has a passion for the history of the region and has worked closely with both Dubai Tourism (DTCM) and Abu Dhabi Tourism (ADTA) to set up Tour Guide courses and pass along her knowledge of life in the Region during the 70s and 80s. She is also Chairwoman of the International Business Women's Group in Dubai, which she formed in 1983 as a platform to support women in their endeavours to establish businesses and progress their careers in a traditionally male dominated economy.

Annual General Meeting

The DNHG's AGM was held at the monthly lecture on May 7.

Chairman Gary Feulner reported that membership continues at levels consistent with our highest totals for the new millennium. He thanked the speakers and field trip leaders who have contributed to our unique program offerings, but emphasized that more volunteer field trip leaders are needed to ensure a full program during the cooler months.

Current Committee members were re-elected for the coming year (except for Speaker Coordinator Martina Fella, who will be leaving the UAE). Thanks go to Martina for her valued contributions and we wish her well as she leaves Dubai.

Ideas for field trips, activities and assistance in any way from the membership are always welcome. Please contact any member of the committee if you wish to help.

From the Editor:

Due to the weather warming up, an early start was made to the Mountain Front Wetlands on 12th (cover article).

It is easy to see where inspiration for fairy tales comes from—it's in nature itself! 'Dancing' and 'jewelled' describe two of the creatures on page 4, plus there's a fascinating 'Sleeping Beauty' article on page 7.

In total contrast, contemporary art (page 5) is the main focus of the day.

Meanwhile on Palm Island, a bar-tailed gecko has paid a visit—or has it moved in? See page 7 to read more.

Dubai is warming up but there is still plenty of action in our amazing natural world—and inside this issue! Enjoy your read!

What kind of beetle is this?



Find out on page 4

Leaving Dubai?

We're sad to see you go but, before you depart, please consider donating any unwanted books to the DNHG library. We're interested in any relevant material - natural history, archaeology, botany, architecture, marine etc etc. Your books will be compared against our current list of material and any that we don't enter into the library will be passed to a charitable cause.

Thanks in advance,

Angela Manthorpe, Librarian



DNHG Recordors

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

Insects - Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers res: 4572167 mobile: 050 455 8498 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

Spotlight!

Daily Life in Sharjah, by Tamsin Carlisle

Dhows (right)
The 'Flying Saucer' (below)



Preparing for Ramadan



A mosque



Family



National Dress



Fabric shop in souk

Al Qudra Lakes during May, by Margaret Swan



Purple-blushed Darter—male
Trithemis annulata



Black Percher/Purple Darter—male
Diplacodes lefebvrel



Friendly Dragon *Orthetrum sabina*

Damselfs and Dragons, by Tamsin Carlisle



Carmine Darter/Broad Scarlet—female
Crocothemis erythraea

Field Clips

The Spanish Dancer

Seeing Vicky Dobson's photo of the spotted nudibranch in March's Gazelle, I thought readers might like to see a couple of photos of a Spanish Dancer or *Hexabranchnus sanguineus*—which I came across on a dive in the Musandam in April. This impressive specimen was about 30—35 cm in length.

The common name is a reference to the sea slug's graceful dance, in which it undulates its mantle to move through mid-water ([see this video on youtube](#)).

Contribution by Angela Manthorpe

The following is a link to an 8-minute video of the Nudibranch with other sea slug specimens, explaining fascinating facts about them. (Editor)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mv-sbDO2ya0>



Spanish Dancer *Hexabranchnus sanguineus*

Sulphurous jewel beetle at JAH



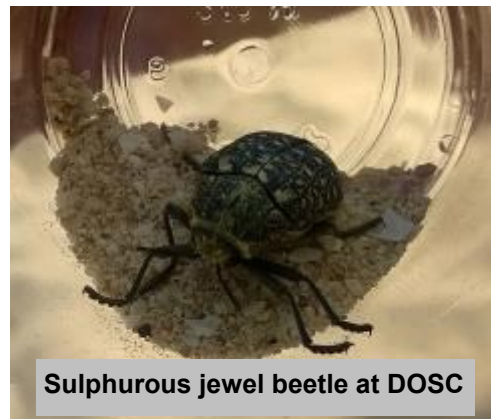
myself came under observation. The resident archaeologist had mentioned how many people cruise through the 'ghost town' looking for djinn, and maybe the inhabitants of the two cars that stopped to watch me wondered if I'd spotted something ghostly in that bush.

Before I packed up for the day I ventured further into the village. I was thinking how incessant the screeching of the red-wattled lapwings was when, entering a closed courtyard, I spotted the reason why – for just in front of me was a tiny chick on wobbly legs. He promptly sat down, posed for photos and I beat a hasty retreat to leave the parents in peace.

Contribution by Angela Manthorpe

Meanwhile, in Dubai, Cheryl and Robin Robertson, spotted another specimen at Dubai Offshore Sailing Club on 5th May. Cheryl reported that it was quite a windy day and the beetle landed on the sand just in front of them, at around 8.30am. Cheryl added that it was very large, compared to the black dung beetles they have on their lawn.

According to a June 7, 2015 article by Ajmal Hassan and Dan Wright, in the



Sulphurous jewel beetle at DOSC



Greenery at JAH

Sulphurous jewel beetle at JAH



Chick at JAH



Jewels in Jazirat Al Hamra (JAH)

Many enthusiastic Natural History Group members took part in the Citizen Science coral identification sessions organised by Dr John Burt at Jazirat Al Hamra, RAK, in April. As we wandered around clipboards in hand, peering closely at the walls, I was struck by the mass of greenery bursting forth in the courtyards and lanes around the buildings. Not wanting to overlook such a spectacle I decided to stay on after my shift was complete, to take a look around.

The salt tolerant plant *Zygophyllum qatarense* was super abundant and I was photographing moths on *Heliotropium kotschyi* when a beady eye below caught my eye and there in all its glory was a sulphurous jewel beetle – *Julodis euphratica*. But not just one – I found a second beetle in this first bush and a further two in the adjacent area. Then I

magazine Outdoor UAE ([online here](#)), 'the larval stage can last up to 35 years, the longest on the planet! The adult stage however, only lives normally for two to three days and a maximum of a week.'

Visit the above website to learn more about this and other UAE beetles.

(Editor)

Field Trip

Sharjah Biennial - Contemporary Art Exhibition

On Saturday April 29, the DNHG embarked on a trek of another kind, an exploration through The Heart of Sharjah, and beyond, to view the Sharjah Biennial Exhibition.

A bus met most participants in Dubai and carried us to the first location. A bus tour is ideal for this type of adventure, since the locations are difficult to find. This trip was well-organized by Hazel who arranged the docent, and Valerie who organized the bus and registration.

The entire Biennial tour is free, sponsored by the Sharjah Art Foundation. We even received a nice tote bag full of printed information, and art books.

We began at Al Mureijah Square and began our contemporary art immersion, viewing some travelling exhibits from artists all over the world, with many from the Arab world.

We moved to the Calligraphy museum and viewed more installations, though no calligraphy. The space was transformed for the Biennial Exhibition and had a range of installations, paintings and prints on display.

We had lunch in the old souks and enjoyed the traditional UAE atmosphere. To date, the author has never eaten such good biryani at such a reasonable price.

It was a warm day and we had a lot of walking on this trip. Thankfully most of the locations, and also our driver, provided us with cold water, so we were able to remain upright for the duration.

The Sharjah Art Museum is the main exhibition space for the Biennial in the Heart of Sharjah; it is a large building and a beautiful space. At the entrance there is an installation that is somewhat foreboding; a large wall of police shields, connected to some decking that looked like a dhow ship. Another exterior space was adorned with flowing colourful fabrics, hung across the street from the building which were viewed through the windows. This was such a creative way to bring the entire neighbourhood area together with the exhibit spaces, by looking at art through the windows.

Al Hamriyah Studios is a newer museum space further out in Sharjah, near Ajman. This spot is really a gem and is definitely a spot that I plan to visit again soon, even after the Biennial.

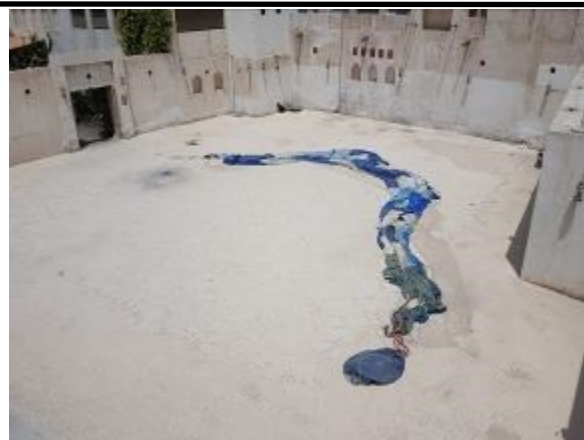
Formerly a commercial space, the Flying Saucer building is a unique presentation area, which is essentially only one round spaceship-looking room. The art and acoustics of this space gave us an other-worldly experience.

The old Planetarium is also a single room exhibit space. This location also seemed extraterrestrial for obvious reasons, and the exhibit was an audio installation. This made for a very unique experience for all of us.



DNHG always provides introductions to some of the best experiences the UAE has to offer, and participating in these experiences with this assorted group of people makes for a truly wonderful experience. Thanks to the coordinators and awesome members of the DNHG.

Report by Melanie Wood and photographs by Phil and Sophia Todd



Field Trip

Sharjah Biennial

One of the big bonuses for me of visiting art exhibits and museums in the UAE is that one is often allowed to take photographs.

People often ask me why I do this and what I intend to do with all the images thus acquired, especially as many are taken under far from ideal light conditions. The answer, I have come to realize, is that the time-consuming post-camera processes of editing and annotating my photos, and arranging them in a gallery in an order that makes sense to me, play an important role in deepening my understanding and appreciation of what I have seen. It is part of a multi-channel learning process that transcends initial impressions and even the most well-curated and lavishly presented souvenir books while repairing and enhancing decaying memories.

This is very much what happened as I worked my way through the photos I had taken during the DNHG's April trip to the Sharjah Biennial, an important recurring UAE art event that seeks to present thought-provoking contemporary works in a region where censorship and self-censorship remain all too prevalent. Many of the works contributed from all over the world to the latest Biennial edition were installations, sometimes minimalist and

sometimes employing multiple media channels, often political and seldom easy to understand or connect with at a glance (or its audio equivalent). A few works did instantly strike me as powerful, beautiful, or both, but rather more seemed dull or simplistic, or just left me scratching my head. Often I experienced a sinking feeling that I had completely missed the point. However, as I sifted through my photos, selecting from them tiles for a kind of experiential mosaic, I found I was able to put at least some of the works I had at first failed to grasp in wider context. For some, I belatedly gained appreciation by realizing their relationship to the larger body of work by the same artist.

As I built my mosaic, I came to realize that what was taking shape was actually another Sharjah Biennial 2017 art installation, albeit one both unofficial and uninvited—a kind of uberinstallation in cyberspace. If you choose to visit it, at <https://tinlight.smugmug.com/People-and-Culture/Art/Sharjah-Biennale-2017/>, it is my hope that you will approach the work holistically, as well as examining constituent parts. I also hope it will help convince skeptics that visiting a “challenging” art event can be a worthwhile endeavor, even for those of us who don't know much about art.

Contribution by Tamsin Carlisle



A Dhofar toadlet (by Tamsin Carlisle)

(Continued from page 1)

dove, since it was not nearly as flighty as typical palm doves in the wild.

(5) One of the sites visited, a pipeline leak or overflow, had been in existence for nearly a year, and had yielded several Snipe during a short visit in January, but we found that the flow had been stopped and the surface water was gone, although the site was still damp (and slippery in places). The main

hints of its former glory were deep camel footprints, rushes (*Juncus* sp.) and a large clump of cattails (*Typha domingensis*) in a low spot created by excavation.

(6) White-tailed Plovers, which recently lost their best-known UAE breeding site (Dubai Pivot Fields), seem to have taken up at least temporary residence at one wetland site, along with the usual complement of Red-Wattled Plovers/Lapwings – a species that has profited greatly from the continued greening of the UAE over the past three decades.



Group photo at a mountain front dam (photo taken by Ulrike Andorff)

In addition, at two of the dam sites Binish Roobas found, earlier in the year, the UAE's most recent damselfly discovery, *Ischnura nursei*, a multicolored but cryptic and very slow-moving species. Its regular presence in association with vegetation surrounding dams adds weight to the possibility that it may have been present in the UAE for some time before its discovery by Dr. Jacky Judas (our November 2016 speaker) in 2013, but was simply overlooked.

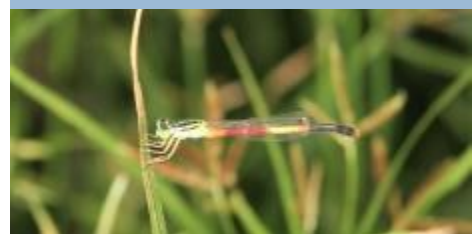
Contribution by Gary Feulner



A grove of the sedge *Cyperus rotundus*, localized at wetland sites



Examining cat-tails (*Typha domingensis*), the remains of a wetland (by Tamsin Carlisle)



Ischnura nursei male (by Binish Roobas)

Spider Wasps and Sleeping Beauties



A common large UAE spider wasp (Binish Roobas)



A freshly paralyzed wolf spider (*Hogna radiata*) (Binish Roobas)

Spiders have a reputation as fearsome creatures, both as predators on other animals and because some species can deliver a painful bite to humans. But by most accounts, spiders are nearly helpless in the face of attacks by spider wasps.

Spider wasps (a family called Pompilidae) are not predators of spiders in the normal sense: the wasps do not eat spiders. Instead, the wasp immobilizes a spider by stinging it with a paralyzing venom, to serve as food for wasp offspring. The paralyzed spider is dragged to a burrow and a single wasp egg is laid in the body. When the egg hatches, the wasp larva has 'fresh' food at hand. Because the size of the larva depends upon the size of the original spider, spider wasps tend to hunt larger spiders such as wolf spiders, huntsman spiders and tarantulas.

A common spider wasp seen in the UAE is the one shown in the accompanying photo – a relatively large black wasp with shiny, blue-black wings held flat over its body. It spends as much time walking as flying, searching the ground for spiders or spider burrows. It is



Sleeping Beauty: the paralyzed wolf spider three weeks later (G Feulner)

conspicuous to the human eye because of its size and erratic movements, but even more because the abdomen is twitched constantly. The wasps appear to hunt by physically searching in burrows and crevices or among grass. Studies suggest that spider wasps improve their hunting efficiency with experience.

We recently collected a large wolf spider (the common *Hogna radiata*) that had just been stung by a wasp and was being dragged along the ground. After three weeks, as this report is written, the spider is still a Sleeping Beauty, fresh looking but motionless, still supple, showing that it has not died and desiccated -- but there is little hope that a magic kiss will awaken it.

Contribution by

Binish Roobas and Gary Feulner

Bar-Tailed Gecko at The Palm

Binish Roobas was enjoying the twilight sea view from the corniche at Atlantis, The Palm, when aesthetic considerations were interrupted by natural history reality. There, on the massive rocks of the seawall, was a Bar-Tailed Gecko *Pristurus celerrimus*, unmistakable due to its size and banded tail. This gecko is normally a resident of bedrock outcrops and large boulders in the mountains, usually at moderate to high elevations, and Binish could only imagine the journey that had brought it from a mountain quarry to a loader, to a truck and finally to the hoist of a crane, to land it in its new home.

Only time will tell if this was an isolated incident or if, perhaps, a population will establish itself at this upscale seaside location. But the gecko(s) may be adapting rapidly. Although they are normally daytime hunters, the one observed was active after dark, and Binish had the impression that it might have been relying heavily on insects attracted by the nearby roadside lighting.

A smaller cousin, the Dwarf Semaphore Gecko *Pristurus rupestris*, has been seen intermittently on the jetty at Dubai's Open Beach, both before and after its reconstruction about a decade or so ago. But *P. rupestris* normally lives among smaller rocks and is regularly found on traditional buildings in smaller towns and even in urban Dubai, so its colonization of local breakwaters is somewhat less of a surprise.

Contribution by Binish Roobas



Photo: The Bar-Tailed Gecko *Pristurus celerrimus*, normally a resident of bedrock outcrops and large boulders in the UAE mountains.

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

June 4: Sue-Sharyn Ward—"How Aviation Inspired Growth in the Trucial States/UAE"

July/August: No lectures or local field trips

Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

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

	Name	telephone	email
Chairman	Gary Feulner	04 3065570	grfeulner@gmail.com
Vice Chairman	Valerie Chalmers	050 455 8498	valeriechalmers@gmail.com
Treasurer	Rakesh Rungta	050 774 4273	rakeshrungta10@gmail.com
Membership Secretary	Anindita Radhakrishna	050 656 9165	anin@emirates.net.ae
Speaker Co-ordinator	Martina Fella	050 358 6485	martina_fella@hotmail.com
Speaker Co-ordinator	Michelle Sinclair	050 458 6079	sinclairm2004@yahoo.com
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Sonja Lavrenčič	050 256 1496	lavson@gmail.com
Member-at-Large	Pradeep Radhakrishna	050 450 8496	wgarnet@eim.ae
Newsletter Editor	Margaret Swan	050 7984108	gazelleeditor@gmail.com
Librarian/Book Sales	Angela Manthorpe	056 6441054	manthorpe2005@yahoo.co.uk
Postmaster	Sandi Ellis	050 644 2682	sandiellis@gmail.com
Chief Engineer	Ajmal Hasan	056 5047006	ajmal_hasan@hotmail.com
Website Co-ordinator	Sandhya Prakash	050 551 2481	sandy_pi@yahoo.com
Greeter at meetings	Helga Meyer	055 821 7266	willyroaming@gmail.com

Postal Address: DNHG, PO Box 9234, Dubai, UAE

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.