



GAZELLE

www.dnhg.org



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

Inside this month:

| | <i>page</i> |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Mantis Shrimps | 1 |
| Announcements and Recorders | 2 |
| Spotlight! | 3 |
| Tahr sightings | 4 |
| Stok Kangri | 5 |
| Trekking in India | 6 |
| It's not a frog! | 7 |
| Twante pottery village | 7 |
| Lectures and field trips | 8 |

Contributors—

Thanks to the following for their contributions:

Dr Habil U. Wernery, Angela Manthorpe, Sonja Lavrenčič, Margaret Swan, Hiba Allam, Jenny Drayton, Domen Grobovšek and Leo Allcorn

Send your contributions for the October issue to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

by 25th October 2018

Inside!

A rare local sighting of the Arabian Tahr.



Mantis shrimps – tough guys on the reef!

In rocky pools at Fujairah on the Surf and Turf trip in February we came across a mantis shrimp, approx 6cm long and pale pink in colour.

Mantis shrimps are members of the crustacean family of the order *Stomatopoda*.

They are active predators on the reef and fall into 2 categories - smashers or spearers - depending on the nature of their feeding apparatus. The fore-limbs of the smashers have a calcified club that is used to break open the shells of molluscs and crabs. The force of this punch - up to 2,500 times the body weight of the shrimp – has been known to break the glass walls of fish tanks.

Spearers on the other hand prefer soft-bodied prey. They lie in wait in their burrows, generally in soft sediment and, with lightning speed, they will spear unsuspecting fish that come too close. The raptorial appendages of the mantis shrimps are similar to those of the praying mantis, hence their name.

According to 'Emirates - A Natural History' we have 2 species of mantis shrimp in the UAE: *Gonodactylus chiragra* and *G. smithii* and apparently the former is common "on the



Peacock Mantis

(Continued on page 4)

Announcements and Recorders

**Monthly Speaker -
8pm on Sunday 7th October, 2018**

Lecture Title - "Marine Debris: why we should care and what we can do"

Biography - Natalie Banks, Manager Azraq

Natalie Banks is a scuba diving instructor with a specialty in shark conservation. She is a spokesperson, writer, researcher and adviser with 11 years experience in ocean conservation and has successfully campaigned for policy changes throughout Australia.

Azraq is a non-profit marine conservation organisation recently set up in the region with a focus on marine conservation issues in the United Arab Emirates.

Headed by Natalie Banks, who has been an environmentalist for a while, having worked with Sea Shepherd in Australia prior to setting up Azraq, the Azraq team are focused on preserving the natural habitats of wildlife in the world's oceans as well as conserving ecosystems and species.

Rubbish is being dumped into our oceans at an alarming rate, and this is upsetting the delicate balance of the ocean ecosystem and removing all of its resources at levels that are becoming unsustainable.

From the Editor:

Climbing a mountain was a highlight of a small group during August and this is widely covered in this issue.

On ground level, read about the method used to produce pottery in the village of Twante, Myanmar.

Local news covers a Tahir sighting, toads, a blue jellyfish and the mantis shrimp.

Our October speaker will present an illustrated talk on "Marine Debris: why we should care and what we can do."

Browse through the natural history books on display at the next meeting.

Enjoy your read!



A friendly market stall in Twante—read about this village near Yangon on page 7



Blue Jellyfish

This strikingly blue jellyfish was spotted on a morning walk along the Jumeirah 1 beach. Hiba Allam noted that it was alone and no other was in sight.

On 2nd October Hiba reported a second sighting of three blue jellyfish. The one above, having been stranded on the shore, was gently pushed back into the sea.

DNHG Recorders

Reptiles - Dr. Reza Khan
050 6563601

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

Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi (contact as above)

Geology - Gary Feulner
res: 04 306 5570
grfeulner@gmail.com

Insects - Binish Roobas
050 2438737
johanrphus@hotmail.com

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
res: 04 4572167
mobile: 050 455 8498 email:
valeriechalmers@gmail.com

Plants - Valerie Chalmers
(contact as above)

Archaeology - Anelisa Lambert
056 6904508
anelisalambert@gmail.com

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

Bird Recorder— Panos Azmanis
0507083555
azmanis.vet@gmail.com

Mammals - new recorder needed!

Spotlight!

Ladakh, Indian Himalayan Mountains, by Sonja Lavrenčič



Sunrise over Himalaya



Stok Kangri Base Camp

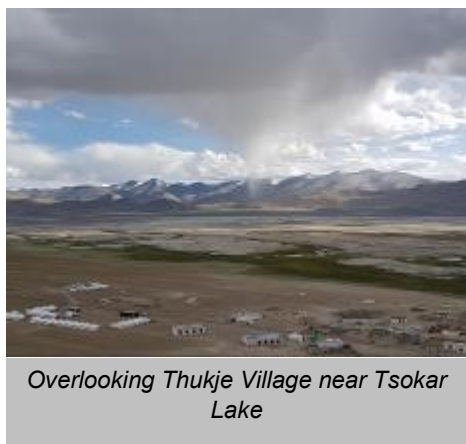


Stok Valley

Panoramic view from the summit of Stok Kangri, by Domen Grobovšek



Tsomoriri photos, by Jenny Drayton



Overlooking Thukje Village near Tsokar Lake



Yak butter sculptures—temple



Overlooking Indus Valley

Field Clips

(Continued from page 1)

shallow rock platforms such as Hail Shoal, to the north-east of Marawah in Abu Dhabi". From personal experience the mantis shrimps in the UAE are fairly inconspicuous unlike the large and flamboyant Peacock Mantis Shrimp (*Odontodactylus scyllarus*) (pictured) which I have seen many times in Indo-Pacific waters.

Researchers are starting to study mantis shrimps in more detail. Biologist Sheila Patek's TED Talk is particularly informative about the speed of the strike - up to 23 metres a second - which is the fastest in the animal kingdom; https://www.ted.com/talks/sheila_patek_clocks_the_fastest_animals

She used high speed video to show that the acceleration of the limb is so fast that it creates a cavitation bubble in front of the club which, as it collapses, creates a shock wave which can stun or kill prey even if the mantis shrimp misses its prey directly. Others have been studying the eyes of the mantis shrimps, which are amongst the most advanced in the animal kingdom enabling them to see over 3 times the colour wavelengths of humans.

So next time you are in the water, look out for these critters – they really do pack a punch.

Contribution by Angela Manthorpe



Fig 1: Mother Tahr with female kid



Fig 2: Most probably the Tahr father

Amazing sighting

It was a beautiful late afternoon near the Mercure Hotel on Jebel Hafit. A breeze came up from the west, where the sun was to settle soon. In the air above us were many Brown-necked Ravens, a pair of Egyptian Vultures and to our surprise two Barbary Falcons playing with the Ravens. We looked down the wadi which had some greenery and could not believe our eyes when we saw 2 beautiful, strong male Arabian Tahrs and a female with her young kid. Four Tahrs in total, a species which is critically endangered. We had the impression that all four which were in prime condition, survived on the rubbish thrown over the edge. We

were extremely worried as we also saw a lot of plastic bottles, lids and plastic bags lying around.

Contribution by Dr Habil U. Wernery

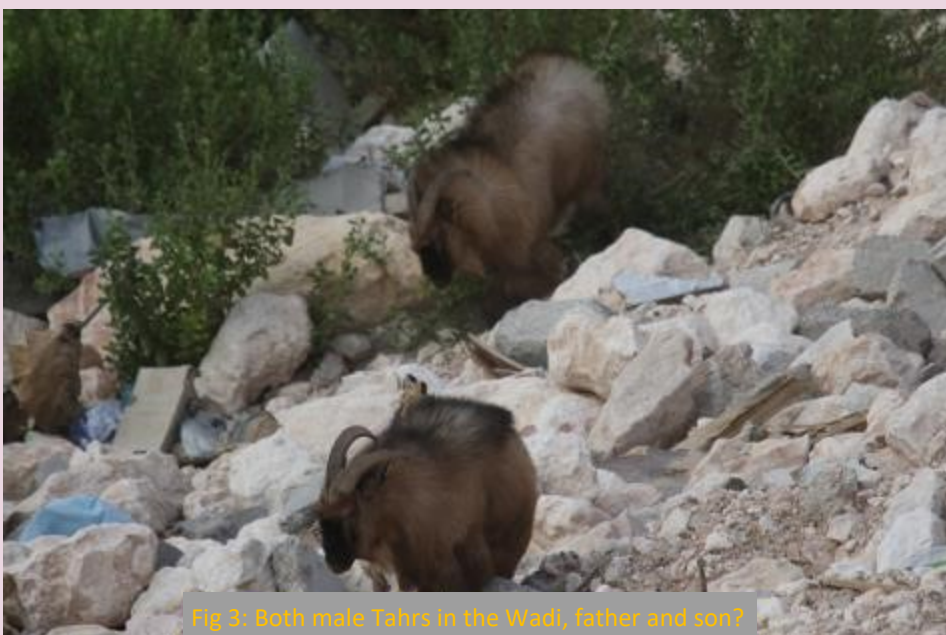


Fig 3: Both male Tahrs in the Wadi, father and son?

Field Clips

Summer Travels: Stok Kangri, 6150 m

Following an 8-day hike from Ladakh highlands to Tsomoriri lake, part of the group continued to conquer the peak of Stok Kangri.

At 6150m above sea level Stok Kangri is the highest mountain in the Stok Range of the Himalayas in the Ladakh region of north-west India. The peak is in Hemis National Park, around 15km southwest of the city of Leh, the capital of Ladakh. The mountain is not technical which makes it a popular trekking peak and is often climbed as an initial non-technical introduction into high altitude mountaineering.

Our ascent started in the village of Stok, the village known mostly as a summer residence of ex-Ladakhi royals. Nowadays it is a museum with an adjacent Gompa (Buddhist monastery). In the first two days of hiking we slowly climbed the altitude to the almost 5000m high Base Camp, allowing enough time for altitude acclimatization. The path follows the river valley and passes through few acclimatization camps. The area around the mountain pass Stok La has particularly interesting landscapes with vertically eroded volcanic layers, with herds of blue sheep and yaks grazing on the steep slopes.



Vertically eroded volcanic rock

Our summit climb started after a day of rest in Base Camp. We set out at midnight, in pitch dark, under an amazing star covered sky. The steep trail to Stok Kangri peak ascends almost 1300m in 10km, which we mastered with short breaks, in a bit more than 7 hours. Short breaks are necessary in the rarefied air with less than 50% oxygen, while longer breaks were not advisable due to low temperatures. The hike is demanding: apart from steep, slippery slopes, rocky scree and landslide areas the last hour is walked on a narrow ridge where we had to be tied to our guide with a safety rope: a wrong step could end in one of the two valleys more than 1000m below. We also had to cross a melting glacier without breaking through thin ice into the gelid water below and to jump over a deep crevasse with a melted ice river running at the bottom.

Most of the ascent hike was in the dark, illuminated only by our headlamps but, by the time we reached the ridge part called the Shoulder, the dawn broke and the first sun rays illuminated the spectacular landscape of Himalayan peaks, the glacier and the valleys deep below. It was already a bright morning by the



Domen, Sonja, David and Linda at the top

time we reached the top, exhausted, cold and happy. The top is a narrow peak covered by high snow on the northern side and marked by hundreds of prayer flags brought by hikers, to which we added ours. It is not a custom in Himalaya to mark the peaks with boards or signs; only prayer flags are hung as Buddhists believe that the higher you hang them the more valid the prayer is.

We were lucky with the weather: the cloudless sky allowed for endless views over the Himalayas. However, due to the altitude and cold we could only stay on the top for about half an hour. Descent followed the same path, so we could see the landscapes that were previously hidden by night. It took us around 4 hours to retrace our route back to Base Camp, with stops for breakfast, views and photos.

When asked why the ascent is done by night the guide jokingly replied that majority of hikers would quit if they saw the height of the mountain and the total ascent ahead. This might be a joke. It is, however, true that a tough mountain like Stok Kangri requires a good amount of fitness and stamina, both physically and especially mentally. However, standing on the top 6150m above sea level, the morning views over the Himalayas and especially the feeling of achievement are indescribable – and totally worth it. *(More photos can be seen on the Spotlight page. Ed)*

Contribution by Sonja Lavrenčič



Dawn over Stok Kangri Glacier

Field Clips

Summer Travels: Rumtse to Tsomoriri Lake Trek, Ladakh, India

This trek was an incredible experience. Over 8 days, we were accompanied by 12 horses, two horsemen, a chef, two young assistants and two guides who all took great care of us and made sure we wanted for nothing.

We climbed over passes which rose to almost 5500 metres above sea level, followed valleys, crossed plains and passed lakes. We took in incredible views and camped next to ice-cold mountain streams. We looked up to snow-capped peaks and the bluest of blue skies. We saw eagles, wild asses, zebra, gerbils and in



the distance, black-necked cranes.

We camped alongside Tibetan nomads who, in the evening, brought their herds of goats, sheep and yaks down from the mountain pastures many kilometers away. We visited a nomad tent and learnt a little of the life they lead and the work it entails.

We learned something of Ladakhi



This summer, a group of friends, mostly ENHG members, completed a hike in Ladakh, in the Indian Himalayas. Some refer to this area as Little Tibet. Ask the locals though and they will quickly tell you that they are Ladakhi and Indian. They do not identify themselves as Tibetans or their home as Tibet because, although Ladakh shares a border with Tibet, it has been over 1000 years since it was part of the Tibetan Empire. All said, the proximity of the exiled Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, the many Tibetan refugees, the high altitude environment and Buddhism are powerful influences on the culture here, so that Ladakh shares much in common with its Tibetan neighbours. To an outsider, Ladakh has all the hallmarks of "Little Tibet".

We arrived in Leh (altitude 3500 metres) and needed two days to acclimatize. This time was spent exploring nearby monasteries. A day's drive to our starting point and then on day four we began a 100 km hike from Rumtse to Tsomoriri Lake in the Himalayan highlands.

Facts:

Trek elevation: more than 4000 m above sea level

Passes: 5 passes, 4 over 5000 m above sea level

culture and Tibetan Buddhism and gained a tiny sense of what it is to live in a land dominated by the majestic, towering Himalayan mountains. We saw and did so much. Yet, such a short trip barely did justice to such a place, just as so few words barely do justice to such a trip!

Contribution (including centre box) by Jenny Drayton

(more photos on the Spotlight page)



Field Clips

Twante Pottery Village, Myanmar

Twante is the most accessible delta town in the Yangon Division of the Irrawaddy region in Myanmar. There are quicker ways to visit Twante from Yangon but I chose to hire a guide and driver to take me there. Traffic in Yangon is heavy with mostly imported second-hand Japanese cars. Once outside the congested city, however, rice fields could be seen everywhere.



'Temporary' dwellings on stilts with factories in the background

En-route to Twante we also called at a snake temple in the middle of a lake with many resident sleepy Burmese pythons. Driving through a more populated area, bamboo and thatch structures house refugees from the 2008 Cyclone Narghis. One could sense strong community ties as people went about their daily life. Traffic was slow here as a new road was under construction, which would replace the current pot-holed highway. Factories visible in the background were evidence of local industrial employment.

In contrast, more traditional modes of employment could be seen on arrival in Twante. Known for its family-owned pottery kilns, workers were



Kiln storing pots

observed operating turntables in pairs. No electricity in sight, a woman turned the wheel with her foot, whilst the craftsman formed the pot. The photo to the right also shows the rolls of wet clay behind the wheel and drying squares in the foreground, where finished pots are placed. The base of this pot was pummeled into a circular, flat shape with part of a roll then the sides were joined and formed during wheel-turning. To see the whole pottery-making process. visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipa77HjOEUs>

Kilns take days to heat up and piles of fuel consisting of bamboo and coconut husks lay in a corner. No kilns were active during my visit but pots, lay in storage within. Some had been fired once and arranged in piles whereas others

It's not a Frog!

While exploring Hajar Mountains I discovered what appeared to be some type of mountain frog. While walking in the mountains there was a repetitive sound that seemed similar to a creaky gate. On approaching the noise, the sound would suddenly stop. It was as if whatever made it disappeared. With closer inspection of the mountain face, small green amphibians could be seen lodged in the crevasses.

These amphibians are actually Arabian Toads and were found in their hundreds on this one rock face. This species can present in a range of colors from brown to vivid green. The one I carefully prised from the rock was bright green with brown/gold



splodges. Fitting easily on the palm of my hand these toads feel smooth and slimy. Found across the Emirates, they prefer dark and damp crevasses. They eat a diet of insects and are also known to be cannibals. A very interesting find in what appeared to be a lifeless mountain.

By Leo Allcorn (aged 10)

were in the drying process, requiring space around each individual pot. Located close to the river, mud is in abundance and is an essential resource to this industry. Indeed, it looked very much like the kilns themselves were constructed of mud bricks.

A walk to the nearby busy riverside revealed shops selling pottery with other river-related tools and supplies. I was informed that river cargo is mainly rice, salt, coconuts and fish. Too far across the water to see but a fish farm is on the opposite riverbank.

Visiting the local market was also a point of interest, where fresh vegetables, fish (mainly carp), fruit, spices and other wares were on offer.

Contribution by Margaret Swan



Creating pottery with foot power!

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

October 7: Natalie Banks—"Marine Debris: why we should care and what we should do"

Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

October 20 Visit to Saruq al-Hadid archaeological museum in Shindagha

October 26 Birdwatching in Al Qudra

November 9-10 Dhow trip and camping on Daymaniyat Islands, Oman (full - only waitlist available)

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

DNHG COMMITTEE 2018

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

| | Name | telephone | email |
|------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Chairman | Gary Feulner | 04 306 5570 | grfeulner@gmail.com |
| Vice Chairman | Valerie Chalmers | 050 455 8498 | valeriechalmers@gmail.com |
| Treasurer | Puneet Kumar | 050 452 4820 | puneetcps@gmail.com |
| Membership Secretary | Anindita Radhakrishna | 050 656 9165 | anin@emirates.net.ae |
| 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 | 058 1354143 | manthorpe2005@yahoo.co.uk |
| Postmaster | Sandi Ellis | 050 644 2682 | sandiellis@gmail.com |
| Chief Engineer | Binish Roobas | 050 243 8737 | johanruphus@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

Committee Positions

DNHG have the following (voluntary) positions available:

Field Trip Coordinator—a second Field Trip Coordinator is required to assist in organizing field trips.

Membership Secretary and Assistant Membership Secretary—this would suit a person or persons who regularly attend lectures.

DNHG Membership

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership is valid from September 2017 to September 2018. 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.