



GAZELLE

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مجموعتنا دورية للتاريخ والطبيعي

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Contributors—

Thanks to the following for their contributions this month:

Paola Enrico, Cheryl Robertson, Ulrike Andorff, Margaret Swan, Gosia van Unen, Sonja Lavrenčič and Sue Hassall.

Send your contributions for inclusion in the next issue to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

by 29th November, 2019

Members' Night

The DNHG lecture in December provides an opportunity for members to talk for twenty minutes on a specialist subject, their home country or a recent trip which will interest other members.

If you would like to present a short, illustrated talk, please contact Michelle Sinclair (see page 8 for contact details)



Sri Lanka offers wonderfully diverse landscapes, climates and natural features, as DNHG members Cheryl and Robin Mandy, along with two friends, discovered during an eight-day journey there in May.

Sri Lanka

From the shady pool deck of our small hotel we watched as a peacock stepped gingerly along the edge of the infinity swimming pool, stopping every now and again to dip into the water for a sip. It soon flew off and, with half-closed eyes, we listened to the bird songs all around us, the incessant shrill of cicadas lessening as the heat intensified.

Sri Lanka is all about unspoiled nature, and those who visit this beautiful teardrop shaped island in the Indian Ocean come to embrace it.

Admittedly, my husband and I set off on our trip a bit concerned because the terrible bombings that took place two weeks before our departure date were still very prominent in our minds and of course in the media. Yet our tailor-made tour created by locally based JF Tours & Travel turned out to be a magical journey.

After touchdown at Colombo's Bandaranaike International Airport, a company driver took us through traffic, tea plantations, jungle and magnificent scenery to reach our hotel in Ella some six hours away. The 98 Acres Hotel & Spa sits on the slopes of a working tea plantation. What a spectacular region of mountain ranges, waterfalls and lush green vegetation in



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Announcements and Recordors

Monthly Speaker - Sunday, 3rd November, 2019

"And construct the ship under Our observation and Our inspiration and do not address Me concerning those who have wronged; indeed, they are [to be] drowned." – Surah Hud 37 – The Holy Quran

Lecture Title: "Traditional Dhow Building in the UAE"

Biography: Hessa Al Yasi

Hessa Al Yasi holds a bachelor's degree in International Affairs, Minor in Communication from Zayed University, and a Master of Arts in Communication. She is interested in the following topics: cultural heritage, national identity, society and technology.

The geographical feature of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) urged people to explore the secrets of the sea. In the UAE, this situation resulted in the emergence of several economic activities such as boat building, pearl diving and fishing. Prior to the oil boom in the Gulf region, boat building served as the backbone of two major economic activities: fishing and pearl diving. Dhow building is known as "Al Qalafa" or the process of tying wooden pieces with ropes created from date palms. It is essential to state that traditional dhow building in the UAE is more than a craft, it is a culture by itself. In fact, boat builders tended to believe that the origin of this craft goes back in history to Noah's Ark and the flood.

Accordingly, this presentation will focus mainly on the traditional dhow building in the UAE from a cultural perspective. It will be based mainly on literature review and records of oral history collected by Hessa Al Yasi.



An early fishing boat at the Sharjah Maritime Museum

DNHG Recordors

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Field Reporters for *Gazelle*

Do you have a field report, unusual finding, interesting news article, book review, an amazing photograph or community news to share? Perhaps you have some interesting photos for the Spotlight page?

Send your contributions to the:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

Due to the small size of the Gazelle, articles with four or five photographs can either be accompanied by a few sentences or a small number of paragraphs. Ideally, longer articles should be around (or less than) 600 words.

From the Editor:

The Dubai Ferry offers a great way to see Dubai from a different perspective.

Instead of driving through traffic, DNHG members enjoyed a 35-minute cruise to the Sharjah Aquarium. The route runs regularly but it is well worth checking the timetable prior to a trip out. After the Aquarium, members also visited the adjacent Maritime Museum.

Thanks to members making contributions to the *Gazelle*. This month features not only the UAE, but also Australia, Germany, Madagascar, Greece and Sri Lanka, reflecting the wide range of countries visited by our members. Enjoy your read!



Spotlight!

DNHG members at the Sharjah Aquarium and Maritime Museum



October in Melbourne (Australia) by Margaret Swan



(above) The effects of coastal erosion can be seen here, with an abundance of plant life fighting for room above it. Just visible is the handrail of some old steps, of which nature has claimed back.



(left) Rock art, circa unknown.

(below) Defying wind and sea erosion, this lone tree bravely stands its ground.



(above) Eucalyptus tree bearing 'gumnuts.'

Photos taken near Sandringham on one of the Bayside Coastal Trails.

[\(Click here for links to trails\)](#)

Field Clips

White Storks in Northern Germany

The Michael-Otto-Institute at NABU (Association of nature protection Germany) focuses among other projects on the biology of the white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) which includes the coordination of international census as well as the analysis of the census development. During a recent trip home to Germany I visited the NABU branch in Bergenhusen, a village located in the north of Germany. The village is slightly elevated, surrounded by 3 rivers (Treene, Eider & Sorge). Between the rivers are plenty of reeds, pasture and meadows, ideal to satisfy any gourmet desires of the white stork. From 1928, Bergenhusen has been tracking stork movements. Since 1934 juveniles as well as some adults were marked for easy identification. Walking through the village, plenty of nests can be seen built on thatched roofs of the country houses. Each nest has an information board on which details of stork occupants are noted over the years. Details include the arrival date, how many juveniles are produced and departure date. This year Bergenhusen had 20 stork couples with 42 offsprings. The white stork returns year-on-year in spring and attempts to occupy its nest from the previous year. If the same male or female stork by chance comes to the same nest, it is possible that the same storks mate again. However, often they mate with a different partner but are certainly loyal during the breeding season. Therefore, one can say that storks live a "seasonal marriage". Each nest has its advantages and disadvantages and battles about the nests are often observed during the stork arrivals. After settled and paired, storks may mate several times in an hour. The female lays up to 5 eggs in an interval of 2 days. The eggs hatch after 33 to 34 days of incubation. The juveniles require a minimum of 1600g food, which is for example 1600 earth worms and 45 field mice. Both

parents take care of the feeding process. The juveniles start to train their muscles from early days and after 45 days they start with meter-high flight exercises above the nest. Once they are 60 days old they start flying out and just return to rest and to feed.

At the beginning of August the juveniles and the "single" storks are the first ones to leave for the south. Approximately 2 weeks later the adult storks follow. Around 75% of the German white storks take the eastern route via Turkey, Israel, Jordan, Sudan to Tanzania or even South African, more than 10,000km.

Storks residing in the south of Germany take the western route together with their stork comrades from France, Spain and Switzerland via Gibraltar and Sahara to West Africa between Senegal and Chad. However, it has been noted in the past years that many storks remain in Spain due to sufficient food availability.

The same trend is noted in Germany. Due to the "warmer" winters, food availability for storks has increased. Therefore, a good number of storks stay back in their "summer" residences rather than to take the strenuous flight to the southern hemispheres.

Only around 30% of the juvenile storks survive the dangers of the migration to the south.

NABU fitted eight storks with solar transmitters and have been tracking their routes, which can be followed on their website. With the tracking, NABU wants to understand why the arrivals of the storks to their breeding areas are delayed, as this has impacted the breeding negatively in the recent years. On their website NABU offers tips to make the stork nests more comfortable for the yearly visitors and who to contact in case a

juvenile is found abandoned or injured. Since NABU has been established in Bergenhusen, the village has gained immense importance in the protection of the white stork, and its economy benefits from increased visitors.



On the lookout for some delicacies



Ringed juveniles on nest

Contribution by
Ulrike Andorff

Field Clips

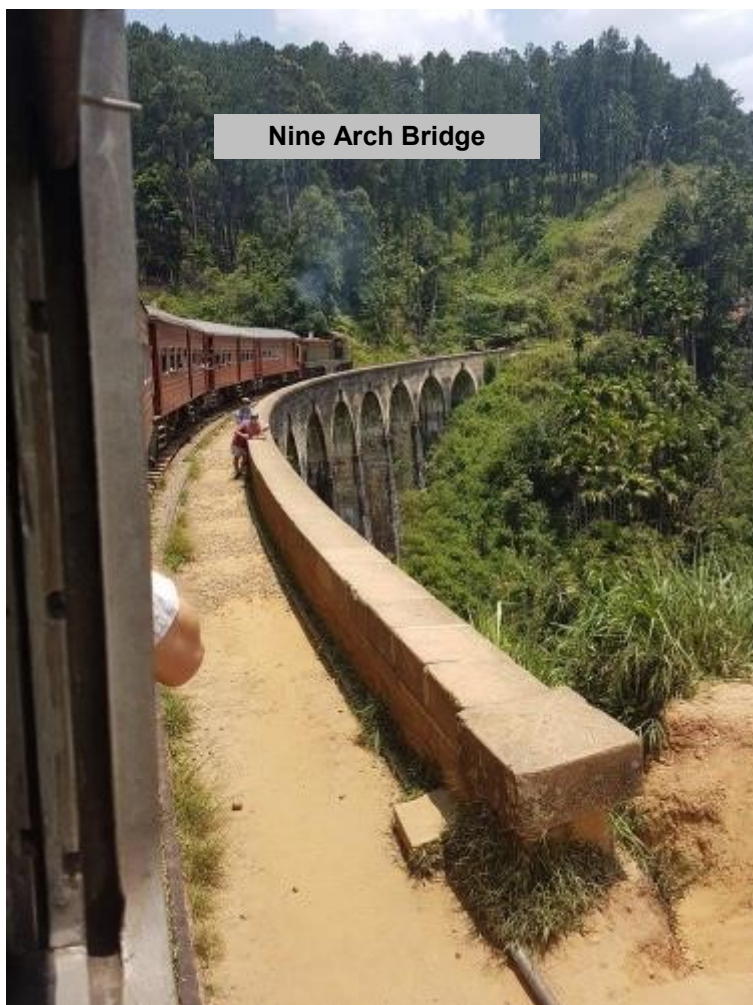
(Continued from page 1)

which to walk, birdwatch or do nothing at all. Here we met, as planned, our two friends from Zimbabwe who had already had an action-packed seven days touring national parks to the north. Rather enviously they had seen sloth bears in Wasgamuwa National Park.

Within walking distance of the hotel is Little Adam's Peak at 1,141m high. In the early morning it is well worth taking the steep climb up a well-worn path to the pinnacle for panoramic views and perhaps to meet an enterprising local sitting under a shady eucalyptus tree selling coconut water to parched tourists. This peak is not to be confused with the more famous 2,243m high Adam's Peak which lies further west close to Nuwara Eliya.

Later we took a short nostalgic train ride from Demodara Railway Station (this opened in 1923) along the Demodara Loop to Ella. We chugged and swayed dramatically across a 24-metre high viaduct known as Nine Arch Bridge, built purely of stone bricks and cement and apparently one of the country's best examples of British colonial-era railway construction. The railway station itself is a historian's dream for it remains as it ever was.

Our guide and driver Jeewa took us to his home in nearby



Nine Arch Bridge

Bandarawela village where we met true Sri Lankan hospitality as his family members produced a delicious vegetarian lunch. That's the beauty of travelling with a local guide.

Yala National Park to the south east was our next stop, and in



Yala National Park

this 978.8 square kilometres protected park is the highest density of leopards in the world (according to many sources including BBC, National Geographic and the Discovery TV channels) as well as 44 species of mammals and around 465 bird species.

Our hotel Cinnamon Wild Yala was perfect for enjoying wildlife as it sits adjacent to the park boundary. Exploratory teams of wild boars and langur monkeys regularly wandered through the



Spotted Deer

hotel grounds, and one morning an elephant strolled up to sniff at our breakfast table. We had vacated rapidly on instructions from the staff, who had also whipped away all the tempting food. The elephant then sauntered to the swimming pool, waved its trunk at the water and moved onto the reception frontage to eat tree leaves before heading to the back of the hotel.

At night guests are escorted to their chalets by a staff member. The welcome letter also states: "The lake is occupied by a number of untamed crocodiles therefore refrain from going very close the water." On this lake in front of the swimming pool area many birds gathered including pelicans, spoonbills, ibis and storks.

This is safari country, so early next morning we took a game drive through Yala National Park, picking up a knowledgeable volunteer guide from just outside the main gate. The light was perfect for photographing birds: green bee-eater, Malabar pied hornbill, Indian robin, jungle fowl (Sri Lanka's feral hen of a

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Field Clips and Trips

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national bird), black headed oriole, peacock, lesser golden-backed woodpecker included.

I did not expect such heat and diverse semi-arid terrain, with dry yellow dust roads very like Africa. It has riverine, thorn and dry monsoon forests, salt and freshwater lagoons, grasslands, tanks (reservoirs) and sand dunes. But the dryness paid off as we saw herds of elephant, wild water buffalo, sambar and spotted deer, wild boar, mongooses and a leopard lying in a tree far in the distance. Despite a large population of sloth bears here we saw none.

There were plenty of other tourist vehicles although apparently numbers were severely down because of the bombings. Good months to visit are between February and June (dry season). The park is divided in to five blocks, with tourists usually being allowed only in Block I, which closes from 1st September until end October this year. Apparently other blocks are open instead, but these may not offer the best opportunities for viewing game.

And so on to Rekawa Beach near Tangalle, where the tranquil oasis of Buckingham Place warmly welcomed us. More a stylish contemporary homestay than a hotel, there is second to none, old-fashioned hospitality here. The exquisite freshly prepared food, spacious accommodation and stunning décor took my breath away, while the staff's ability to anticipate every guests' need was quite uncanny yet unobtrusive. Owner Nick Buckingham who lives on site is a genius.

It was tough leaving this sanctuary, but Galle called. We stopped at the



Galle Fort

Hummanaya Blowhole, a natural blowhole with sea water that shoots upwards dramatically every few minutes. It's an interesting feature but only if you are heading in that direction anyway.

Galle on the south western tip of Sri Lanka has such a varied history it is difficult to keep up. The Dutch Fort is a walled town

within the city, the first basic fortifications built by the Portuguese in the late 16th century. Now it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site featuring Dutch-colonial buildings, ancient mosques and churches, museums, picturesque lanes stuffed with art shops, restaurants and cafes as well as being a working community, with administrative offices, courts, businesses, colleges and schools.

Just one night we spent at Le Grande Galle Hotel overlooking the Indian Ocean, it's location ideal for exploring Galle.

The country's tourism industry was badly affected by the senseless acts in April, with sadly so many local people losing their incomes. Yet not once did we feel threatened or scared. More visitors to this gem of a destination will surely be helping ordinary Sri Lankans of all religions and beliefs to recover.

Contribution by Cheryl Robertson

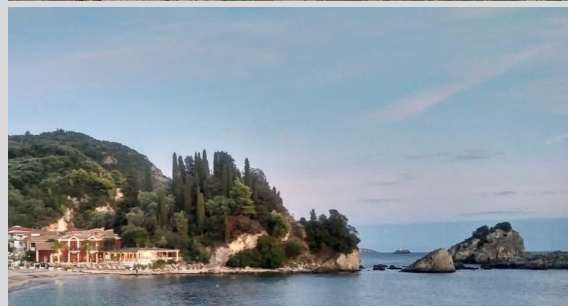
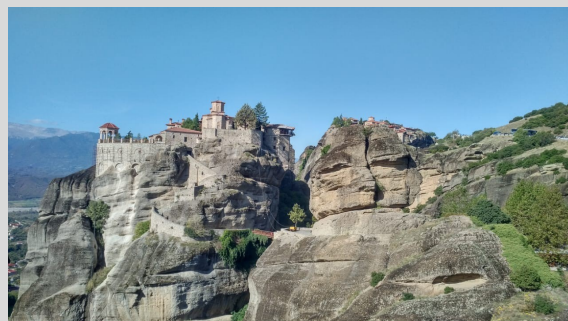


The remains of a wadi wall after many flash floods, near Al Naslah, RAK.
(photo taken by Gosia van Unen)

DNHG Field Trip to Greece

Members visited monuments from different eras, and learned details about events that unfolded over the past 3000 years in the land of Greece, forming not only the country and its people but, most importantly, the history of the Western civilization. Trip report to follow.

(photos by Sonja Lavrenčič)



Field Clips



Avoha Tree—Hand-crafted Paper



During a trip around the South West of Madagascar, we passed by Ambalavao, which is a French village, close to the city of Fianarantsoa.

We had a pleasant stop at 'Fabrique de Papier Antaimoro', a factory for the production of paper using a traditional process. The tree from which the paper is produced is called 'Avoha.'

Avoha is cultivated in the south of Madagascar. Only the bark is collected, enabling the tree to be used for its lifetime.

The bark is sent to the factory after compression and shaped into a cylindrical bunch.



The bark fibres are then boiled for three to four hours.



To make the fibre easier to work with, it is then beaten and broken down into a doughy mass. Following this, the mass is shaped into 80g balls, this being the quantity required to spread



on the special frame.

The rectangular frame is lined with cotton fabric for draining excess water.

Finally the paper is cut (if necessary) and floral decorations are added before the drying process in the sunshine.

Our driver and travel agent, Francis was also the guide showing us all the steps for making the paper.

Contribution by Paola Enrico



Dubai Natural History Group (DNHG) Programme

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

- November 3:** Hessa Al Yasi will present an illustrated talk on "Traditional Dhow Building in the UAE"
- December 8:** "Members' Night"
- January 12:** Dr Athol Yates will present an illustrated talk on "The History of the Emirates Military and Police Forces 1951-1980"

Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

- November 1– 2:** Daymaniyat Islands overnight camping trip
- November 29 - December 2:** DNHG Trip to Qeshm Island
- November 29 - December 6:** DNHG Trip to Northern Laos (fully subscribed)
- December 6-7:** Overnight Dhow Trip to the Musandam

Field trip details will be circulated to members via e-mail

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When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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DNHG Membership

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership is valid from September 2019 to September 2020. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to Emirates NBD account number 1012012013302. (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 AE640260001012012013302. However, this process does not always identify the payer. So if you wish to pay by cash deposit, 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 helps pay for our lecture hall, publication and distribution of our monthly newsletter, the *Gazelle*, our post office box, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.