



GAZELLE

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مجموعتنا دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

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Contributors—

Thanks to the following for their contributions this month:

Rahul Khan, Kerstin Binoth, Val Lindsay, Nirjhar Chakraborty, Ulrike Andorff, Sonja Lavrenčič, Konstantina Sakellariou, Martin Conway and Jill Jackson-Kennedy.

Send your contributions for inclusion in the next issue to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

by 25th December, 2019

See more pictures of the DNHG wadi walk on the Spotlight page (report on page 5)



A group of 24 DNHG members were invited to a guided trip of the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve on the morning of 9 November. The tour started at Al Maha Gate, just off the Dubai/Al Ain road. We moved in a convoy of five vehicles on sand tracks and covered the whole of the reserve, including the southern portion, where visitors are generally not permitted. The reserve covers 225km² or 4.7% of the total land area of the Emirate of Dubai, and is home to around 830 Arabian Oryx, 150 Sand Gazelles (and 400 Arabian Gazelles) and 17 mammal species in total.

History

The Al Maha Desert Resort and Spa was established in 1999 with an area of 27km². At this time 70 Arabian Oryx were introduced to the reserve and, 6,000 indigenous trees were planted. In 2003 the DDCR was established and, after that additional numbers of Arabian Oryx, as well as Arabian and Sand Gazelles, were introduced. In 2008 all domesticated animals were removed from the reserve; the population of Oryx at this time was 270. In 2009, following a significant rainfall event (c200mm rain in 3 hours), two lakes were constructed within the reserve. Emirates Group has been the main sponsor of the DDCR since its inception. DDCR has partnerships with Universidad de Malaga, Zayed University, Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi and New York University Abu Dhabi.

Workers recently found some ancient coins and potsherds near some Ghaf trees on the reserve. Formal identification is pending but the find does suggest that caravan routes may have passed through the reserve in the past.

Fauna

The highest-profile inhabitant of DDCR is undoubtedly the Arabian Oryx ('Al Maha'). There are currently around 830 individuals on the reserve; although individuals are not tagged, a weekly census is carried out. During our visit we saw several calves, which have a shaggier coat than the adults and are coloured light brown. The oryx typically live

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Announcements and Recorders

Members' Night Speakers - Sunday, 8th December, 2019

Members' Night speakers this year are as follows:

Edurne Gil de San Vicente

Adrian Hudson - Ecologist

Angela Manthorpe (speakers on the night may not necessarily be in this order)

Edurne Gil de San Vicente - "Water Sustainability in the UAE"

Adrian Hudson - "Ecological studies in tropical Africa: Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Central African Republic"

Adrian Hudson is an ecologist and ornithologist who holds a Master's of Science degree in Ecology from the North West University and is currently completing his PhD in Ecology at the same institution. Adrian plays a role in academia as a supervisor for Honours and Masters degree students and is registered as a professional natural scientist (Pr.Sci.Nat) with SACNASP in South Africa, and as an Ecologist with Dubai Municipality ESS and the EAD. He is a member of the Zoological Society of Southern Africa and the International Society of Conservation Biology as well as a member of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (South African Government Department) roster of experts on ecology and desertification, and a reviewer for a number of internationally accredited scientific journals. He was also an elected member of Birdlife SA's Birds and Renewable Energy Specialists Group (BARESG) and is credited with authorship of a number of articles published in scientific journals.

Adrian has worked for 25 years for a diverse range responsible for conservation and anti-poaching, lecturing, research and consulting respectively. Thus far Adrian has worked as an ecologist on more than 130 projects in 28 countries, including Africa, Asia, South America and the Middle East.

Angela Manthorpe – "Madagascar - We like to move it, move it!"

The island of Madagascar is more than twice the size of Great Britain and, while the unique flora and fauna are the main draw, the remarkable landscapes and colourful Malagasy culture make this a destination with all-round appeal.



Angela Manthorpe and fellow DNHG members spent 16 days traveling across the country in September 2019, so if your knowledge of Madagascar is based on a certain animated movie, join us to find out what it's really like.

Angela Manthorpe first arrived in the UAE in 1992, lured to the Emirates by the photos of wadis and waterfalls in the book "Dubai – Gateway to the Gulf" that she was handed by her prospective employer. One of the first organisations she joined on arriving was the DNHG, which opened up the interesting world of the UAE's desert and mountains and, in the same year, she took up scuba diving to explore the gulf ocean.

Angela is a firm believer in the fact that 'you only live once', and has interspersed her working life with occasional 'travel breaks' – setting off with a rucksack to explore the world. In late 2009 Angela quit her job in Dubai and embarked on a 2-year break, with the intention of seeing some of the world's best natural scenery, historical and cultural destinations and to dive the top scuba diving sites.

DNHG Recorders

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From the Editor:

Although no field report, video footage of the Daymaniyat Islands camping trip can be viewed on our [facebook page](#). This was taken by one of our speakers this month, Angela Manthorpe. A busy month—enjoy your read!

Spotlight!

DNHG members at the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve, photos by Kerstin Binoth



Arabian Gazelle
(*Gazella gazelle cora*)



Arabian Oryx (*Oryx leucoryx*)



Green Marsh Hawk (*Orthetrum sabina*)



Sand boa tracks

Yabbana Landslide and Wadi Hike (includes the photo on the cover page), by Val Lindsay



(above) a village graveyard
(below) field terraces



(above and top right) water cisterns
(right) wadi racer (plain colour)

Field Clips

(Continued from page 1)

in groups of 8-10 individuals headed by a dominant male, who can be distinguished from the females by having a thicker base to his horns. Within the females of the group, there may also be one who is dominant. There is no fixed breeding season but, according to our guides the breeding will take place after rains. After a gestation period of about eight months, the calf will stay with its mother for around six months. Bachelor males may also form groups, or roam alone. Near feeding stations and water sources, larger groups of oryx congregate. We saw some signs of tension, with some pushing and shoving, and lowering of horns.

The oryx on the reserve are regularly fed fresh alfalfa (which is grown on the reserve itself, using groundwater) in addition to two types of dry pellets (game pellets from South Africa and Wafi feed, from Saudi Arabia, which is more typically used to feed goats and camels). It is estimated that the reserve could only sustain a population of 200 oryx without this additional feed being provided. Although the oryx on the reserve have regular drinking access, they can survive for long periods without water. Formerly, in dry periods, bedouin would follow oryx to find watering holes - the animals can smell water sources from several hundred metres away.

The other most visible animals on the reserve include the Arabian Gazelle (of which there is a population of 400 after 60 were introduced in 1999) and the Sand Gazelle (of which there is a population of 150 after 20 individuals were introduced in 2003). The Arabian Gazelle is the darker of the two species, with two vertical stripes on the face. During our visit we saw a couple of Arabian Gazelle carcasses near to an artificial freshwater lake - sick animals will often stay near to water. The reserve does not vaccinate any of the animals on the reserve. However, feeding stations and watering holes are moved periodically to reduce the spread of parasites.

Although we did not see them on our trip, Arabian Red Fox and Sand Fox are present on the reserve. A 2011 study identified around 60 active Arabian Red Fox dens on the reserve, the majority of which were located under the roots of the fire-bush tree (*Leptadenia pyrotechnica*). Cat species on the reserve (also not seen) include Gordon's Wildcat.

Other notable mammal inhabitants include the Arabian Cape Hare, Ethiopian Hedgehog and rodents such as the Arabian Jird, Sundevall's Jird, Balochistan Gerbil, Cheeseman's Gerbil, Lesser Jerboa and Arabian Spiny Mouse. Several bats also live on the reserve, but species identification is still a work in progress.

Notable birds include the Desert Eagle Owl, in addition to harriers and kestrels. In 2012, the largest ever vulture sighting in the UAE took place in the DDCR; 47 Lappet-faced vultures, 2 Griffon Vultures and a first-ever UAE sighting of a wild Cinereous Vulture feeding off an Arabian Oryx carcass. By the end of the day, only the skeleton remained. A broken ostrich egg was recently found on the reserve. Although there is some evidence in Saudi Arabia that ostriches roamed the Arabian peninsular several hundred years ago, the guides think a more likely explanation in this case is that the egg is from one of the domesticated herds that reside in the vicinity of the reserve.

Reptiles found on the reserve include the Common Sandfish (which are apparently hunted by herons), Desert Monitor Lizard and Leptiens Spiny-tailed Lizard, plus Jayakars Sand Boa, the Arabian Horned Viper and the Sindh Saw-scaled Viper. Populations of the Leptiens Spiny-tailed Lizard (the 'Dhab') have recovered since off-track driving was banned in DDCR; a 2008-2009 study found 448 active burrows.

A 2016 study identified 34 aculeate wasp species and 23 bee species visiting flowering plants in DDCR. A 2015 survey identified spiders from nine families living on the reserve (*Araneidae*, *Eresidae*, *Gnaphosidae*, *Lycosidae*, *Oxyopidae*, *Pholcidae*, *Saticidae*, *Sparassidae*, *Zodariidae*). The most dominant species was *Eviippa Arenaria*, a type of wolf spider. Other prevalent arthropods include the Short-wing Wasp (*Komarowia concolor*) and the Rack Beetle (*Tentyrina palmeri*). In 2011, 140 insect species were identified on the reserve.

Flora

Despite being a conservation area, we saw hundreds of plants being watered through irrigation pipes. The reserve's management is slowly removing the irrigation pipes from the most mature trees. Many of the trees displayed a distinct graze zone, with no leaves being present below a height of around 1.2 m.

The most common tree we saw was the Ghaf, but there were also examples of Samur, Arabian Gum and Umbrella Thorn Acacia. Away from irrigated areas, the landscape was characterised by isolated shrubs, with many *Leptadenia pyrotechnica* (fire-bush), Thallag, Rimth, Sodom's Apple, Safrawi, and *Ochradenus arabicus*. We also saw Dune Grass; its broad but shallow root system facilitates propagation if the main plant is buried by sand. Date Palms were present in irrigated areas. I was surprised to learn that Gazelle will graze Sodom's Apple.

Visiting DDCR

Visits to the reserve are possible for guests of Al Maha Resort and Spa, or via selected tour operators. More details and photographs can be found at <http://ddcr.org/>

Contribution by Rahul Shah with photographs by Chandrashekhar Sardesai



Field Trips

DNHG Trip to Yabana Landslide and Wadi

Earlier this month we went to Yabbana landslide in Ras Al Khaimah. The name was quite interesting and also the brief stated that we will go behind the landslide to a valley which might be green because of the monsoon we had in the week before.

It was a bright sunny day. At about 10:30 AM we reached the spot. Sonja, our group leader, talked about the area and the landslide. It was huge and impressive with big boulders and felt as if a whole mountain had caved in. We started our short climb to reach the valley behind. En route we saw a trap with half-eaten chicken bait



inside which was quite interesting.

The valley was not as green as expected. However, there were patches of green around with bushy vegetation having purple



flowers with butterflies flying around them. A few areas were still muddy from the rain. We walked across the valley and reached the other side where we saw a cemetery with graves marked with headstones. Sonja took us to the foot of the mountains which had rock walls where barley was grown using step cultivation method. This ancient method is still evident today.

We also saw some old deserted houses dotted on the mountains. Just the rock walls remained without the roof. After lunch, we explored the area further, and walked to another end of the wadi where a few more remnants of old habitation were visible.

It was a wonderful winter day out.

We want to thank Sonja for her initiative and enthusiasm which made the trip even more enjoyable.

Contribution by Nirjhar Chakraborty

Excursion to the Al-Yabbana landslide

Perfect weather invites for a refreshing day out in the mountains of Ras Al Khaimah.

Al-Yabannah landslide is located in Wadi Bih off Jebel Jais Road. Already from the parking you notice the massive landslide and the mountain range at northwest where the landslide once scrambled down. The landslide must have happened a long time ago with the exact reason unknown. Under Sonja Lavrencic's guidance we made our way around the landslide through a wadi bed on the southeast side, and then, on a perfect path, uphill around the landslide to reach the valley behind the landslide. The valley is a huge area with several green trees around. Due to the closure by the large boulders, it is an immense fertile ground during winter and had been used as such.

We walked to the opposite end of the valley passing an old tomb, surrounded by a recently installed stone wall, and then, a covered well which had a bucket on the aluminum roof to help yourself. Unfortunately, the water was full of soil and rocks from the recent heavy rains owing to the side grid having two large grid holes. At the other end of the valley we examined old farm terraces and, a bit further, the remains of stone houses and animal shelters on the slope where two rocky mountains meet.

The area was probably deserted in the late 60's and early 70's. Lunch was served in the shade of the mountains enjoying the complete peace and stillness of the valley. Despite trees and water paddles, not a single bird was seen or heard, but instead plenty of wasps. Continuing towards northwest we passed some more stone structures, crossed another wadi bed when Sonja discovered another track along the mountains. Curiously we followed the path and could see more stone structures nestled below an overhanging rock at the mountain. Unfortunately, the recent heavy rains destroyed the path at several areas dramatically. Therefore we turned around. The landslide was also surrounded by a path on the northwest side. The majority opted to return on the same SW path and were rewarded with the sighting of a minimum 1m long One-coloured Wadi Racer. It meandered from the landslide boulders heading towards the valley and was rather irritated by plenty photographers. After a short while, hissing and elevating in attack position, it returned to the boulders. On the way to the main road we stopped at another cistern (one of several as per Sonja) and a very large cemetery. Gazing into the distance along the foot of the mountains, one notices many stone houses. Therefore it is to assume that this valley with plenty of wadi beds was once a rather popular living and farming spot.

Gary Feulner wrote a detailed documentation about the Al-Yabbana landslide which was published in Tribulus Vol 14.2, Autumn/ Winter 2004. It is definitely recommended to return in spring to experience more flora and fauna. Thank you, Sonja, for a marvellous and enjoyable time out.

Contribution by Ulrike Andorff

Field Clips and Trips

DNHG Field Trip to Greece (October, 2019)

The following reports were sent in by trip participants.

Konstantina Sakellariou (trip leader) writes:

This last trip to Greece, organized especially for DNHG members, took us through the lesser-known path of the country's history. We started in Athens where we explored the most famous archaeological sites of the civilization that flourished during the 5th c BC, before moving towards Western Greece, to visit the areas that were influenced the most by the Romans, the Venetian, and the Ottomans.

We stopped at Messologgi, a significant stronghold, the siege and the conquest of which by the Ottoman Turks was a major turning point for the Independence War of the Greeks during the 19th century. We moved to Nicopolis, the town that was revived by Augustus, the first emperor of the Roman Empire, to celebrate his victory over his opponents and the beginning of Pax Romana. After a brief stop at Parga, a Frankish and Venetian fortress, now a picturesque coastal town, we settled for two days in Corfu island. According to tradition, Corfu was the last stop of Odysseas on his way back to Ithaca, and a major naval force during the Classical era. The 400 years of Venetian occupation have left an indelible mark on the city's architecture and culture, as well as on the landscape that is overwhelmed by olive groves that used to supply the Venetian empire with olive oil. Corfu was one of the few Greek regions never conquered by the Ottomans, and, as such, the island's ambience comes in sharp contrast to the rest of the towns included in the trip.

Leaving the Ionian islands behind and, after a boating tour on the Acheron River – the ancient Styx that led the souls of the dead to the Underworld – and its beautiful ecosystem, we stopped at Ioannina: a city that flourished under the leadership of Ali Pasha, one of the most charismatic and controversial figures of the 19th century. Ioannina was the only city in Greece that experienced the European Enlightenment, while the fall of Ali Pasha signaled – and allowed – the beginning of the Greek Independence War against the Ottomans. The city is built next to a lake, surrounded by mountains, with many sights of historical and cultural interest.

Our final stop was in Meteora: a cluster of monasteries, perched on the top of vertical rock formations, almost hovering between heaven and earth. The area was a favorite spot for many hermits during the early-Byzantine era, while the monasteries were built from the 14th century onwards as shelters for the monks against the menacing Ottoman presence in the region. Today, only six of the monasteries are still operational and open to the public, and we managed to visit three, admiring their murals and the otherworldly landscape in which they are built.”

Martin Conway writes:

In Messolonghi, we made a poignant stop at the Garden of Heroes. Wandering among the memorials to the city's

defenders, we learned of their pivotal role in the fight for modern Greece.

Their successful resistance to the Ottoman empire's first two sieges of the city, their role in raising international support for Greek independence and their starvation, betrayal and massacre during the final siege.

Greeks and foreigners most notable of them Lord Byron now lie side by side in Messolonghi, the Garden's tranquillity echoing city's unique title of Hierapolis, the sacred city.

Jill Jackson-Kennedy writes:

Corfu has a rich cultural heritage, beautiful and unique olive groves, wonderful rugged scenery, the sun sparkles off a deep azure sea, tiny white or stone churches dot hillsides and bays. Little back street offer hidden treasure for all the senses, grand and ruined palaces adorn hill tops and their gardens command fabulous views - even the bakery breakfasts we enjoyed outside the ferry terminal were excellent!

In the Old Town delightful



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Field Trips

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cafes and bistros spill out beyond the Italianate colonnades onto the foot polished limestone streets. There, and all over the island, like Athens and Damascus, history is buried under history and the muted and vibrant colours of all nations of the Mediterranean reveal themselves behind Bouganvillea, Jasmine and dark grey algae.

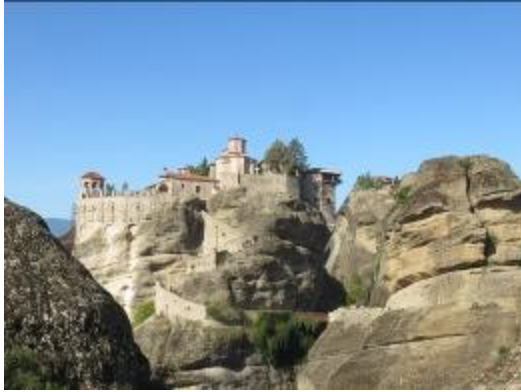
Greece is fabulous and Konstantina's knowledge of her country's history, geography, myths and culture is extraordinary.

Sonja Lavrenčič writes:

My childhood imagination was fueled by dark, fearful images of the Styx river with Charon ferrying dead souls from the world of living to the unknown Underworld, but only if they had a coin to pay him. I never quite made my childish brain around the fact that if the river had invulnerability powers that were given to Achilles when his mother dunked him in holding him by his foot, why wouldn't the poor dead souls just jump in and thus get the eternal life, perhaps? And what was hiding at the other end of this dark mysterious river, in the underground itself.

Later, in my high school days Dante just added to my fascination/curiosity by describing the Styx river in his fifth cycle of Inferno (Hell) as place where "wrathful and sullen are punished by being drowned in the muddy waters for eternity, with the wrathful fighting each other..."

What a dark and mysterious place this must be.



So, when I had the opportunity to visit the place on our DNHG trip through Greek history with Konstantina, this was one of the highpoints of the program, the place I really really wanted to visit. And the fact that we would be ferried by boat through the river by a modern day Charon – i.e. a local fisherman - just added to the excitement.

But what a surprise!

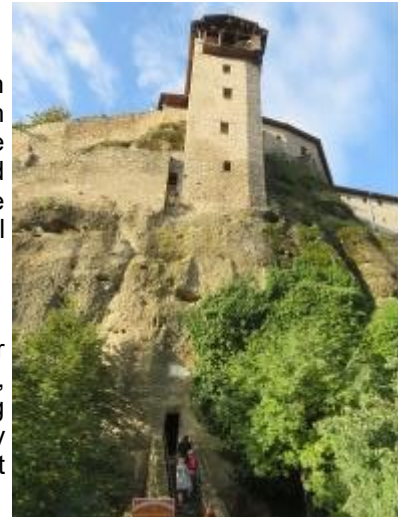
I can quite imagine how on dark, foggy winter mornings the river would assume mysterious, ominous features with surrounding trees dropping their branches into the water and creating a dusky maze through river bends. The dark waters must

have justified the name (Styx means abhorrent) of the fatal, poisonous river, dark as ink ...

But we were there on a bright, sunny early October morning and, instead of dark travel into the underworld, we had an excellent natural history trip, first down to the coast to see some sea-eroded caves and later up the river observing the local wildlife, accompanied by the chatty boat captain. The waters were calm, reflecting the blue sky above. Colorful kingfishers that our boat scared out of their hidings were flying low across the water, trees were dotted with nightingale nests and shores were dotted with local fishermen. We observed herons, egrets, ducks, beavers, tortoise, ... and it all looked more like a late summer picnic than a journey towards the scary Hades of my imagination ...

But then the actual location of Styx river was never agreed upon – and perhaps the dark river was actually Acheron? So there's still hope that I will eventually find my dark Styx river as I imagined it as a child.

Collective contributions by Konstantina Sakellariou, Martin Conway, Jill Jackson-Kennedy and Sonja Lavrenčič



DNHG Camping Trip to Daymaniyat Islands, Oman

The photograph below shows participants on the dhow trip to the islands, which took place during the first weekend in November.

For video footage of underwater scenes from this trip, [click or tap here](#) to visit our facebook page.



Dubai Natural History Group (DNHG) Programme

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

- 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 29 - December 2:** DNHG Trip to Qeshm Island
November 29 - December 6: DNHG Trip to Northern Laos
December 6/7: Desert Picnic and Camp
December 13/14: Overnight Dhow Trip to the Musandam (note date change)
December 20/21 Al Dhafra Camel Festival, Liwa

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

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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.