

GAZELLE

Vol. 13 no. 11 - December 1998



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Kicking librarians, wild olives and bilharzia snails

Luban and Liba Mrhac have been scouting routes up Jebel Masafi for a DNHG field trip. Looks like we'll have to beef up our waiver form!

Get well wishes are in order for DNHG Librarian **Beryl Comar**, who is up and kicking after an orthopedic operation. She's supposed to be on light duty but is leaving **Dr Sandy Fowler** to do the worrying. Sandy, meantime, is preparing another seashell collection, this one for Zayed University.

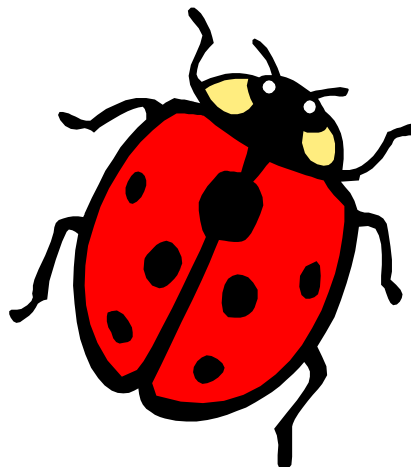
Stephen Green has discovered and collected live land snails from several natural sites in the Hajar Mountains for further study by experts at The Natural History Museum, where it is hoped that DNA studies will help to elucidate patterns of evolution and migration. At the Museum's request, Steve has also forwarded specimens of a rare freshwater snail believed to be potential carrier of the schistosomiasis (bilharzia) parasite.

The visiting **John Martin** and **Gary Feulner** have continued to use weekends to stalk the wild olive, "discovering" a further population of more than 200 at higher elevations in the headwaters of Wadi Mimdook.

Beryl Comar reports that she has found the perfect occupation for passing the time whilst Sandy is shelling!

The old house of Sheikh Saeed Al Qassimi at Khor Kalba is being renovated and well worth a visit and sit in the shade. It was original built overlooking the sea however the corniche has been extended in front of the fort and a roundabout there indicates where you turn.

It is known as the Al Hisn Fort Museum and is open on Friday afternoons from 4.30 - 7.30pm. Other days it is open from 8.30am - 1.00pm also. Admission is free, there are few visitors and it is a haven of peace and calm.



Membership Renewal

The DNHG's new membership year commenced in October 1998. Members who have not renewed in December will not receive further newsletters. We hope that you have enjoyed our program of lectures and field trips as well as local natural history news and various member projects, and will want to renew your membership.

The membership fee remains a bargain at Dhs 50 (singles or couples). You can join or renew at meetings (see Membership Secretary Anna Griffin) or by sending us a cheque made out to Lloyds Bank account No. 173746. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG).

This month's contributors

The editor would like to thank the following members for their reports:

- ◆ Rosemary Leila
- ◆ Diana Darke
- ◆ Rod Fox
- ◆ Anna Griffin
- ◆ David Sheldon
- ◆ Gary Feulner
- ◆ Valerie Chalmers
- ◆ Barabra Couldrey
- ◆ Beryl Comar



Field Trips

Ras Al-Khaimah Archaeology Friday 8 January

We will join members of the Al-Ain NHG for a guided tour of several major RAK archaeological sites and a visit to the RAK Museum. Ibrahim Zakhour of Al-Ain will then lead the group to picturesque Jazirat Al-Hamra for a picnic lunch and swim. 4WD preferred but not required. Limit 15 people. For information and sign-up call Katrina Lynes at 558529 (res).

Jebel Scharab Hike Friday 15 January

Luban and Liba Mrhac will lead a hike to scenic 827 meter J. Scharab on the mountain front overlooking Wadi Qowr and the Fili plains, with good views of other major peaks. The total ascent is about 450 meters and the trip is suitable for beginners without mountain hiking experience but in good physical condition.

Bring boots or sturdy shoes (most hiking is off-trail), a bona fide day pack, minimum 3 liters of water and pack lunch, plus camera, binoculars, etc. Leather gloves are also useful. Meeting point is 11 km past Madam R/A on Dubai-Hatta Road, where an asphalt road branches to the left (about 1 km after the Omani Police Station).

The meeting point is about 60-70 minutes from downtown Dubai. Depart from there at 8:30am sharp. 4WD is required for the last 15 km. Estimated return to Dubai ca. 5:00pm. Maximum 15 people. Call Luban or Liba for further information, sign-up and 4WD logistics at 04-690362 (afternoons/evenings).

Coastline of Abu Dhabi's Western Region

Thur-Sat 19-21 February

Donna Simon will lead an exploration of this still-remote area, home of dugong, pearl oysters, Miocene vertebrate fossils, colorful gypsum deposits and transparent gypsum plates, occasional remains of rare cetaceans, and starry night skies. Overnight camping planned. Participants may arrive either Thurs. afternoon or Friday morning, and leave either Fri. or Sat. See further details in the January newsletter.

Shelling and Touring in Oman

Fri-Sat 26-27 February

Colin Paskins will lead this excursion to the Batinah coast of Oman, north of Muscat. Depart Thursday lunchtime, overnight at the Assuwaidi Beach Resort. Morning shelling at a very good site, with possibility of paper nautilus. Afternoon wadi drive to visit famous Omani forts. Non-4WD OK. Visas must be organized individually. Estimated cost Dh. 600 per person, including visa fee (Dh. 250). Early indication of interest appreciated to enable planning or alternatives. Contact Colin at 366019 (res).

ERWDA researchers suggest an approach to the assessment of oil spill damages

Researchers from the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency (ERWDA), are increasingly concerned about the threats caused by the exploitation of large oil fields, combined with extensive urban and industrial development, to the region's valuable natural marine environment.

As a result, collaboration is being forged between ERWDA, the

Regional Organisation for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME) and the Kuwaiti Institute for Scientific Research (KISR). They are co-operating in an attempt to come up with an easily accomplished scientific method for the assessment of pollution, and in particular oil spill damages, in the Arabian Gulf and part of the Gulf of Oman, known as the ROPME Sea Area (RSA). Such an approach would act as a deterrent to those polluting and spilling oil and thus help to safeguard the region's valuable marine resources.

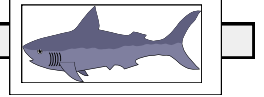
Report on joint DNHG/ENHG fossil field trip to Jebal Buhays

Valerie Chalmer's report on the 20 November trip to Jebal Buhays will appear in the next edition of *Gazelle* - available early in 1999.

Apologies to Val for the delay, which was caused by technical difficulties.

Our Next Speaker

Carole Harris is a long-time UAE resident who took up scuba diving in Sharjah 12 years ago. Her subsequent diving career has taken her to many fascinating sites both in the UAE and internationally.



Calling all naturalists!
Send in reports of your
outing to the editor
neilc@emirates.net.ae
or deliver them on floppy
disk at monthly meetings

Stargazing Thursday 22 October

We were pleased to receive the following unsolicited testimonial from one of our members: "The reason for us that the evening was so worthwhile was the presence of an inspiring, informative and generous-natured Tunisian astronomer [our own Astronomy Recorder, Lamjed El-Kefi] from whom we learnt so much in just 2 hours. He spoke in technical but fascinating and wholly understandable terms.

Accompanying him was an enormous telescope of the cylindrical type. He punched information into a hand-held computer which sent the telescope into action and virtual orbit. It chugged, crackled, whizzed, turned upwards and locked onto Jupiter (26 million miles away – I think!) It was truly amazing. He gave a running but not overpowering commentary on the night sky and handed out maps of the heavens.

We all got to look through this wonder-scope and were lucky to see Jupiter rising with its 4 moons, and soon after, up came Saturn over the horizon. We saw the galaxy Andromeda which appeared as a sort of collective haze and lots more sky life. On leaving the site we noticed that Jupiter had moved and was now above us. For us the evening was made by Lamjed who conveyed the night sky to the layman in simple yet technical terms."

DNHG is continuing to receive calls about the stargazing evening and we hope to organise another one in the new year.

Hiking in RAK Friday 6 November

The day started with a tour of the RAK museum, which was the birthplace of the present ruler. The fort has been beautifully restored, and the galleries of exhibits give a good introduction to local history over the last 4 millenia. We would happily have lingered in the shady courtyard (don't miss the pottery kiln), but the attractions of "the field" beckoned.

We headed inland to the archaeological sites of Shimal, visiting communal graves, and then Kush Tell which is a large site of early human habitation, only recently excavated. Then on to the wide mouth of Wadi Haqil. Many pottery kilns can be seen on the left (like the one in the museum), and pottery fragments abound. Pottery was made here from Julfar times until recently. (For more info on these sites, see Anne Morgan's book).

We continued further into the wadi for our hike. Quite suddenly the wadi narrows, and appears blocked by a high rock wall, the site of a waterfall after winter rains.

The "climbers" took a steep route to the right, whilst the "scramblers" ascended a rocky staircase with very narrow treads and some very steep risers! There is an easier path to the left, but this was the route for our

descent.

With increasing height, the views back down the wadi become ever more spectacular. The wadi then rises gently between high walls which provide footholds for at least 2 large pendant caper vines. A narrow track leads to the pass, where a flat shady area was perfect for lunch.

The more relaxed had a siesta; the strollers went down over the pass to a viewpoint, from where Wadi Al Bih could be seen; and the explorers climbed the peak to the left.

Reunited, we descended the wadi by a narrow track which led past 4 (modern?) graves before skirting round the waterfall and returning to our vehicles. The day was most ably led by Barbara Couldrey, and provided a good mix of the



The waterfall scramble out of Wadi Haqil - note the small figure in the centre of the picture

photograph by Barbara Couldrey



Field Clips

Large Beetle Larva

Prof. Mike Gillett of Al Ain has kindly identified the large beetle larva reported last month. He suggests that the size alone marks it as the larva of a rhinoceros beetle (genus *Oryctes*), the largest beetle found in the UAE mountains, but he went on to confirm other identifying details. Mike's collection of several local species of rhinoceros beetles is presently in Germany for expert identification.

Two-Tailed Scorpion

Dr Ulli Wernery of the Central Veterinary Laboratory is the guardian of the two-tailed scorpion from Wadi Qowr pictured in the November 16 Gulf News.

Unidentified Wadi Fish Seen Again

The unidentified goby collected last Spring from a wadi near Hatta has been confirmed to inhabit a second tributary of the Wadi Hatta watershed. An initial report and description of this fish is contained in Gary Feulner's guide to UAE wadi fish in *Tribulus*, no. 8.2, and preliminary scientific reaction appeared in last month's *Gazelle*.

Conservation Catching on?

Another mountain gazelle has been observed by members hiking in the Wadi Hatta area, just across the UAE border. The sighting was mentioned to a local family visiting their nearby agricultural property, who replied happily, "Yes, yes. There are many now because it's forbidden to hunt them." On the other hand, just a day later, a party of three local hunters was encountered in a wadi along the mountain front north of Mahdhah, Oman, where evidence of gazelle was seen in several places.

RAK Mangroves

Friday November 13

This trip was, as advertised, a close encounter with the mangrove environment. Mangrove branches sometimes clutched at us and the fetid, anoxic, organic rich mud swallowed up our feet (Mike Lorrigan did the only deep sounding). The reward was a better acquaintance with the local mangrove tree (*Avicennia marina*) and the small community of mangrove denizens, including two kinds of mud creeper (*Cerithidea cingulata* and *Clypeomorus bifasciatus persicus*), a turban shell (*Oscilinus kotschyi*), two winkles (*Planaxis sulcatus* and *Nodilittorina arabica*), the mangrove tree snail (*Littoraria intermedia*) in various colors (generally spotted first by sharp-eyed Tess Kazim), barnacles, the Arabian killifish (*Aphanius dispar*), the tree-climbing violet crab (*Eurycarcinus orientalis*), a limited assortment of saltbushes on marginally higher ground, and bird life including the raucous redshanks and western reef herons. It's worth noting that although all of these species thrive in the mangrove forest, none are restricted to mangroves and all can be found in certain other environments

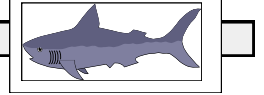
Lunch was on a high sand dune in the centre of the mangrove area, the site of a prehistoric shell midden, and gave us a panoramic view of the khor, as well as flamingoes and a lone osprey. Despite the choice of a neap tide date, the tide remained quite low throughout our visit of several hours and most of the mangrove areas remained emergent, depriving us of the opportunity to see, e.g., the snappers that enter the shallow waters to feed and the gobies that emerge from their mud burrows when the tide comes in. Unfortunately, a Friday the 13th snafu cost us two members who wished to participate and apologies are again made to them.
Report by Gary Feulner

Archaeology in Dhofar

While Oman Air (tel: 518 080) are still running direct flights to Salalah, I can recommend archaeology enthusiasts to visit Dhofar's three sites: Al-Baleed (ancient Salalah), Sumharam (at Khor Ruri, 35km east of Salalah) and Ubar (TE Lawrence's 'Atlantis of the Sands', 180km north of Salalah). All three are easily reachable by saloon car as the graded tracks are very good and clearly signposted.

There are German-led excavations at Al-Baleed, and there are plans to build an electric train taking visitors, twenty at a time, round the extensive site. The extant ruins are Islamic, c1200 years old, although the excavators feel sure that underneath they will discover an earlier frankincense trading city dating to Roman times. There are no excavations at Sumharam at present. The isolated setting on an outcrop overlooking Khor Rori is an excellent camping and birdwatching site. The ruins are known as Sheba's Palace, and artefacts found on the site have been dated to the 1st Centuries BC and AD. Queen Sheba was thought to have used it as a base from which to supervise the gathering of frankincense, which was then shipped from this port to her Yemen headquarters.

The site of Ubar is small but unique, representing an octagonal enclosure with eight tall watchtowers beside a perennial water source. Of particular interest is the way the site has collapsed into its own sinkhole, thereby tying in with the Koranic description of the city which Allah destroyed in one blow – Islam's Sodom. There is a fourth site called Andhur, set in the remote and beautiful Wadi Andhur east of Thumrait and consisting of a temple and fortress. It requires a 4WD to reach, and I would like to hear from anyone who has managed to visit it.



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Archaeology - Diana Darke
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Birds - Rod Fox
fax 668 552
foxline@emirates.net.ae

Seashells - Sandy Fowler
res 442 242,
fax 442 242

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi
res 06-583 003
off 06-247 958

Geology - Gary Feulner
res 306 5570
fax 313 371

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
res 494 816,
fax 452 727

Insects - Gary Feulner
(see above)

Mammals - Marijcke Jongbloed
off 06-311 411
res 06-311 126
fax 06-311 000
mjongbld@emirates.net.ae

Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi
(see above)

Plants - Valerie Chalmers
(see above)

Reptiles - open
(please contact DNHG
Chairman if you would like to fill
this post)

The recorders are not necessarily scientific experts in their designated fields. In fact, most are not. However, they are interested and knowledgeable amateurs - please contact them if you have any interesting reports or queries.

The intention is that information will be channelled through to the *Gazelle* editor, so new information can be shared with all our readers.

—BIRD—
—REPORT—



*Please send your Bird reports
to Rod Fox*

Migrants and winter visitors

A much-welcomed cooling down in the weather during October and November has seen follow in its wake some interesting birds both temporary and long stay. Constant checking and cross-referencing is required to nail down those pipits and wheatear.

At Ramtha (Oct 23) I accidentally disturbed a bird from its daytime roost and saw it disappear cuckoo-like into a bush. After the usual foraging, without success, I continued my jaunt and returned to the same bush an hour or so later. Right above my head ensconced on a branch was a European Nightjar allowing me very close access to what is a very striking and unusual bird.

Despite the low water levels at Ramtha, a good selection of duck were present on Oct 30 with notably Pintail, Shoveler, Teal and Pochard. A pair of Avocet looking distinctly elegant in the morning sun were the star attraction on this particular visit with a supporting cast of Greenshank and Redshank, Common Sandpiper and Temminck stint.

Out at Lahbah fields on Nov 6, noteworthy birds present included a Stonechat, Tawny and Water pipit as well as Hoopoe, Great-Grey Shrike and a female Marsh Harrier. At Qarn Nazwa, a skulking Eastern Pied Wheatear provided much pleasure as the did the Red-tailed Wheatear, both first sightings for this observer. A male Black Redstart was an addition to my day's list as were six White Stork at a large fodder field near the Water Treatment Plant on the left as you drive back to Dubai.

At Mushrif on Nov 11, a small party of Arabian Babbler provided interest as did Black Redstart and a Desert Lesser Whitethroat seeking refuge from the numerous and noisy White-cheeked Bulbul threatening to take over.

The following morning at Ghantoot/Jazira was particularly satisfying as I caught up with Grey Hypocolius which I hadn't seen since my Saudi days. On this occasion they were easy to identify because of their unique whistling call, but it took some time to get an unfettered view. At the Ghantoot Polo and Racing Club the lawns and race-track were full of birds notably Cream-coloured Courser, Tawny and Red-throated Pipit whilst on the lake picking off the dragon fly were numerous White-Wagtail. Escapees continue to provide interest. The Yellow-billed Stork seem to have set up home permanently on the Creek whilst Red Bishops and Pin-tailed Whydah were seen at Mamzar Nov 8.

Report by Rod Fox

Please e-mail me with any birds news. Rod Fox, Bird Recorder, Dubai Natural History Group. foxline@emirates.net.ae

Ramtha news as of 4/12/98.

Despite the "Bird reserve, please don't disturb the birds" signs, a pair of large caterpillar bulldozers were busy destroying trees, and pushing sand into the mature fresh water pond (the one surrounded by bullrushes and trees), presumably to build a new road which will cut across the best 2 large pools.

Unsurprisingly with all the above going on, very few waders about, but more surprisingly, lots of duck tolerating the disturbance, including Shoveler, Teal, Mallard, a pair of Ferruginous duck and single Gadwall, Pintail & Tufted ducks.

Report by Dave Sheldon



Filling in the Blanks Recent Archaeological Discoveries in Abu Dhabi.

Written by Peter Hellyer, the Project Co-ordinator of the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey (ADIAS), and former chairman of the Emirates Natural History Group.

Editorial Consultant is Dr Geoffrey King, Pro-Director of Postgraduates and Senior Lecturer, Department of Art and Archaeology at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

A recent publication (1998) by Motivate Publishing, with the sponsorship of Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), and foreword by Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

This informative book covers surveys and excavations by the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey (ADIAS) undertaken during the previous 6 years. It is laid out in historical chapters dating from the Late Stone Age to the post Islamic Period, which makes for easy assimilation of the information presented.

The major discovery of the largest pre-Islamic Christian monastic settlement, on Sir Bani Yas island in Eastern Arabia, is highlighted in Chapter 5. Attached to Chapter 7 is a map showing the locations of archaeological sites identified during the ADIAS surveys 1992-1997.

With excellent colour plates, this book is a must for anyone interested in the archaeology of the Abu Dhabi/Ai Ain area. Though there is still much work to be done, with particular emphasis on the combination of archaeological investigation and historical research, this book certainly does fill in quite a few of the blanks.

Review by Anna Griffin

Natural Emirates

also in French:

La Nature et les Emirats

Owing to local distribution problems, this book has been hard to get in Dubai. A limited number of copies have been made available for sale by the DNHG, including two copies in French. The book is a survey for the educated layman of the natural history of the UAE, with individual chapters on various topics from geology and paleontology through plants, insects, the higher animal groups and conservation, as well as vignettes on several famous UAE natural areas. It is edited by Peter Vine and, like all of his publications, features superb nature photography. For copies, call Gary Feulner. Price Dh. 150.

New Tribulus

Tribulus no. 8.2, is now available at DNHG monthly meetings at Dh.10. This issue features a comprehensive checklist of UAE moths, an illustrated checklist of UAE dragonflies (by DNHG visitor and benefactor Graham Giles), an account of a viper bite (by Dr. Ulrich Wernery), an illustrated guide to wadi fish (by Chairman Gary Feulner) plus short reports on ostrich shells, new water plants, a new scorpion, a bird report, and reports on various current scientific research projects.

Library

Dragonfly Video

Occasional visitor and amateur entomologist Graham Giles has kindly donated another natural history video to the DNHG library, this one featuring a compilation of UAE dragonflies and damselflies.

Our December speaker, Philip Iddison of Al-Ain, has complemented his presentation on traditional foods and UAE markets by donating copies of two papers that he has presented at the annual Oxford Symposium on

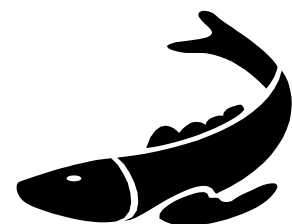
Food and Cookery, entitled "Arabian Traveller's Observations on Bedouin Food" and "A Fish Suq in the Desert." The latter includes an extensive list of the fishes that can be found in Arabian Gulf markets, along with their scientific names and common names in English and Arabic. He has also provided a written synopsis of his talk, and we will try to make a few copies available at the next meeting.

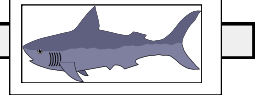
Traveller's Advisory Entry to Oman

Crossing the border was never easier! For Oman visa holders, there are now no forms to fill out. Just present your passport and visa. Remember, however, that border posts may nevertheless have a backlog at peak times on weekends. Oman also inspects entering vehicles for alcohol and other prohibited items.

Sharjah Bypass

Travellers heading for the Sharjah Natural History Museum, Dhaid, Masafi or the East Coast can now bypass the Sharjah downtown and industrial areas, saving time and aggravation. Take Dubai's airport road past Mirdef, Mushrif National Park and Khawaneej. A left turn at the huge new R/A before Al-Awir will then take you across the desert on a major highway to a point on the Sharjah-Dhaid Road near the Sharjah Cement Factory. This is the first section of the proposed ring road that eventually will allow through traffic to bypass all of urban Dubai and Sharjah.





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Chief Engineer	Bob White	512 801	690 029	691 369

What's in a Name?

Ru'us Al-Jibal

In speaking about the mountains of the UAE, reference is sometimes made to the *Ru'us Al-Jibal*. The term means, literally, the "heads of the mountains" or more loosely the "mountain tops." *Ru'us* is the plural of *ra's* ("head") and *jibal* (rhymes with *Pigalle*) is the plural of *jebel* ("mountain" or "mount"). It is the traditional local name for the area of high peaks between RAK and Dibba, where a number of the steep-sided but flat-topped summits exceed 1500m (5000 ft). It includes the high peaks of RAK and Fujairah as well as those of the Musandam (rhymes with *Trivandrum*) province (Wilayat Musandam) of the Sultanate of Oman to the east. The *Ru'us Al-Jibal* occupies what is now commonly referred to geographically as the Musandam Peninsula or just "the Musandam" – the so-called "horn" of Arabia that projects into the strategically important Straits of Hormuz. The name Musandam itself comes from the name of a small island close by the end of the peninsula.

Interpol to Enforce CITES

"Lyons, France (AFP): Smugglers of wild animals and plants threatened with extinction face a stepped up campaign against their activities in the wake of two agreements signed [in October] at INTERPOL headquarters.

"The international police organization concluded memorandums of understanding with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, CITES, and the U.S. National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory at the opening of the third international conference on environmental crime."

"Interpol isn't especially well equipped to look into environmental matters, which are not the daily business of the average police official. The wildlife trade is a specialist field. CITES, on the other hand, along with bodies like the World Conservation Union, IUCN, and

the World Wide Fund for Nature, WWF, make it their business to monitor the international trade in wildlife, even if they are not always able to do very much about it when they detect breaches of international legislation. Put the two sides together to share information and there might be a chance of something concrete being done.

"Sad though it may be, it's a well-established fact (ask any customs official) that there are signs of a growing linkage between various types of cross-border crime, from simple robbery and extortion into drugs, and then into the underworld of arms. There has, in recent months, been worrying evidence that the illegal trade in endangered species of wildlife is also getting tangled up with other forms of international crime.

"UAE police work closely with Interpol, while the UAE as a whole is a member of CITES. Our authorities, one hopes, will lend their support to the agreement between the two international bodies." *Excerpted and adapted from "Interpol Turns Nature Lover"*

Dubai Natural History Group Program

Lectures at Jumeirah English Speaking School, 7.30pm for 8.00pm

Jan. 10: Undersea Life Both Local and International – by Carole Harris

[N.B.: The January meeting is on the second Sunday of the month.]

Feb. 7: A 5th Millenium Archeological Site at Jebel Buhays – by Dr. Hans-Peter Uerpman

Mar. 7: A Study of the UAE's Desert Hare – by Chris Drew

Field Trips (DNHG members only, please. Details inside)

Jan. 8: Ras Al-Khaimah Archaeology Plus

Morning tour of RAK sites and Museum plus afternoon picnic

Jan. 15: Luban's Choice: Jebel Scharab

An easy hike to a scenic peak on the mountain front

Feb. 12: Stargazing Evening (subject to confirmation)

By popular demand, another look at the universe

Feb. 19-21: Coastline of Abu Dhabi's Western Region

Explore this remote region between the land and the sea

Feb. 26-27: Shelling and Touring in Oman

Seashells and old forts of the Batinah coast

Title Surname

PO Box

City

UAE
