

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

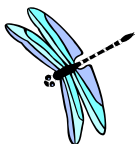
PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Old Friends

DNHG emeritus **John Martin** is currently in town and graced our January meeting. Earlier in the month, former Committee member **Patricia Rosetti** also passed through enroute to "home" in Manila. In Florida, Patricia had visited with former Librarian and DNHG life member **Carolyn Lehmann**. Carolyn and Dieter reportedly want to sail their boat to Belize, and are looking for crew.

Former *Gazelle* editor **Neil Curtis** has earned his Master's degree and now works for the government of British Columbia in an agency called Land and Water BC. He says they have plenty of land and water to manage (95 million hectares) and he spends a lot of his time looking at maps, which suits him just fine.



Michel de Martigny has been resident in Hong Kong for several months, working hard but enjoying it. He says he finds a certain freedom in being without a car, but enjoys his mountain bike: "For those who don't know Hong Kong, there are a lot of great places to

ride – with grueling climbs and harrowing descents. On the backside of Hong Kong Island, it is very steep and mostly jungle, so the climbs up to The Peak are fantastic. You forget you are in Hong Kong. On one of the rides, we came across a cobra on the trail! There is also Lantau Island and the New Territories, which are laced with excellent hiking trails. Last weekend I joined the WWF to observe the Chinese White Dolphin. Once numbering over 200,000 and only found in the waters of Lantau Island – which is where the new airport was built on reclaimed land destroying much of the existing shoreline -- there now remain only 200 and as such are endangered. For much of their lives, they are actually pink. With all the pollutants generated in Hong Kong, land reclamation and pollutants flooding untreated down-river from the mainland, their days are sadly numbered. For example, the first couple of babies to a mother dolphin usually die because they receive all the toxins that have built up in the fat of their mothers. As a result, it is usually only the third or fourth baby that survives. And that is the good news! The bad news is that unlike the females, the males have no way of eliminating their toxins, so they are dying young.

DNHG Membership

September marks the start of the new DNHG membership year. DNHG membership remains a bargain at Dhs. 100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to Lloyds Bank account no. 173746 posted to us at PO Box 9234, Dubai. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG.)

Please take a minute at the next meeting to ensure that we have full contact information for you, including an e-mail address, so that we can advise you more efficiently of additions and changes to our schedule, and other matters. The DNHG does not share its membership or e-mail information.

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*, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.

This month's Contributors

The Editor would like to thank the following for their reports:

Scott Rousseau, Arfan Asif
Gary Feulner, Barbara Couldrey
Larry Woods, Lena Linton
Tony & Janis Johnston



Field Trips etc ...

Inter-Emirates Weekend!

Inter-Emirates Weekend 2004 will be held in Al Ain on March 4-5 (Thu-Fri) and will be hosted by the Al-Ain chapter of the ENHG.

The Al Ain ENHG has considerable practice serving as local tour guides in connection with various festivals, and a full range of alternatives is planned, including: the restoration work being done on the city's oases, watchtowers and forts; camel brain research; DNA research; Khutwah archaeological finds; copper smelting; some interesting wadi walks; the Wadi Tarab study as well as a few challenging activities (mountain walks etc); and possibly a couple of desert drive options. Al Ain bug enthusiasts are planning a night of collecting. Phil Iddison will also be in attendance and has volunteered to do a special walk with emphasis on building construction (materials, techniques, etc).

Dinner on Thursday evening (in an exotic locale) will be combined with a photography competition, with winners to be chosen 'by the people'. The theme will be fairly general to encourage participation, but photos should be from in or around the UAE.

For the children -- what else? -- playing in mud! The group has some clay collected and could challenge youngsters -- and the not-so-young -- to style some pots!

Information about accommodation and rates will be provided when available. You can also find further details via the ENHG website at www.enhg.org.

Coming Field Trips:

RAK Archeology February or March

It is hoped that we can organise a follow-up trip to the many archaeological sites that Christian Velde will be talking about. No details have as yet been worked out, but

if it does happen, information will be available at the next meeting (08 February)

Desert Dinner (and maybe Camp) 12 February, late afternoon

A couple of years ago, the DNHG celebrated 15 years of existence with a very popular desert dinner in the area up along the old Jebel Ali road. Saloon cars are able to go over a few hundred metres of firm fine gravel, and then a short walk takes you into pretty dunes with ghaf trees.

Bring your own dinner and everything you need for an evening under the stars. Some wood will be brought for a campfire, but you should not plan to cook on it as it may have been treated. Remember that it will be cold in the desert and bring plenty of warm clothes. Also bring toys -- black-lights and telescopes if you have them. It is possible to camp there, so also bring everything you need for that if you just want to fall down where you are.

Set off early! You need to be there by about 5.00pm The turn-off point will be marked by a striped umbrella on the fence, If you have any queries, contact Peter van Amsterdam on pvana@emirates.net.ae

Gravel Plains on the Edge of the Empty Quarter, Oman 26-27 February

This is a tough trip over very inhospitable terrain, but will have a pleasant camp in the small dunes of the Empty Quarter. We hope. 4WD is essential, but letting the tyres down will not be necessary. On the second day, we will visit the end of Wadi Dhank where it is swallowed by the dunes on the edge of a ghaf forest. Contact Peter van Amsterdam pvana@emirates.net.ae for details and registration. Limited numbers. Saiq Plateau to see the

Roses April

Third time lucky. This trip has moved forward a little every year, and last year we did see one rose. But in April there should be many. Plan to drive to the Ibri Hotel Wednesday night, arrive at the Jebel Akhdar Hotel Thursday morning and spend the rest of Thursday and Friday morning smelling the roses and visiting other sites of interest. Details will appear in the next issue of *Gazelle*.

Our Next Speaker

Our next speaker will be Christian Velde, the Resident Archaeologist of the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah. Christian studied Near Eastern Archaeology in Goettingen, Germany. He excavated in Germany, Italy and Syria before coming to the UAE in 1985 as a member of a German team. They worked until 1990 excavating at Shimal, the biggest prehistoric cemetery in the UAE. Thereafter Christian worked intermittently in RAK, and also with Sydney University at Tell Abraq (Umm Al Qaiwain) and with Goettingen University in Bahrain.

He was offered the position as Resident Archaeologist in 1997 and since then has been busy with surveys and excavations, as well as restorations and protection of significant old buildings.

Christian will talk about the famous trading town of Julphar, which was one of the biggest trading towns in the lower gulf between the 13-16th century BC, and its regional context. He will give a broad overview of two decades of British, French, German and Japanese research.



Starting with an extra-special one...

The DNHG Website: Your Name Here

Members interested in the Inter-Emirates weekend, March 4-5 (see p. 2), will want to visit the website established by the Emirates Natural History Group in Al Ain, at www.enhg.org. While there, have a look around. Enjoy the convenience of web-based access for contact information and schedules. Enjoy, in particular, the ability to explore a wealth of otherwise hard-to-find information published in past newsletters and bulletins of the ENHGs in Abu Dhabi and Al Ain. Enjoy, even, the many personal touches.

The DNHG has been invited to participate on an equal basis in this website, which is structured to accommodate all three UAE natural history groups, but we await a volunteer with sufficient IT skills to liaise with Al Ain about the technical and procedural requirements, and then liaise with our membership to convey what is necessary to satisfy those requirements, and bring other, less sophisticated, volunteers up to speed. The Al Ain ENHG has (and is likely to continue to have) the technological skills necessary to maintain the overall site. The DNHG would therefore have to take responsibility for the formatting, sending and/or posting of its own material in a compatible way.

Several years of Gazelle reports already exist in computerized format and could be entered into a permanent archive quickly and with relative ease. A format needs to be established for current information, along with procedures for updating it on a monthly basis. Those are the basics. After that, other features could be added.

Establishment of a DNHG website has been highlighted as a priority in two consecutive annual reports.

Third time's the charm? If you think you would be able to help us set up DNHG participation in the site, as described above, please contact Chairman Gary Feulner or Editor Anne Millen (details on p. 7). If we can organize this during the spring, we have summer to practice and have a fully-fledged site for the 2004-05 season.

Camping Rules

Lena Linton clipped the following from the *Gulf News* prior to the New Year break:

Residents seeking to enjoy their holidays camping by the sea will not be able to do so unless they gain official permission this morning. The move follows authorities' plan to strictly enforce Dubai Municipal rules to preserve the environment. Violators will be arrested by Dubai Police and fined up to Dh 3,000.

Officials said while permission for campers is granted free of charge, it is mandatory to obtain prior permission. However, barbecues, pets and motorised vehicles on the beach remain prohibited.

More than 30 signboards were installed along the Dubai Coast from the Dry Dock to the Abu Dhabi border banning tents on the beach without prior approval from the civic body. He said the department will never refuse a request for permission, but officials are keen to monitor the use of the beach and to ensure that users are made aware of the rules and responsibilities.

Anyone gaining permission from the Environment Department will be asked to sign an agreement declaring they have understood the rules and will abide by them.

In addition to the Dh 3,000 fine for illegal campers, different fines are applied for misusing the beach or creating fires. ..."

Also in this article there is a high-

lighted paragraph which reads: "Application is free of charge and it should be submitted to the Environment and Safety Section through the Customer Service Centre or through the Dubai Municipality website. The DM website is www.dm.gov.ae

The applicant should be aware of the rules and must sign a form agreeing to follow them. Applicants require a photocopy of their passport, a labour card (only for expatriates), a driving licence, a car registration card and two passport photographs." *Thank you, Lena.*

Urban Desert Hare

In late December, Tony and Janis Johnston wrote to *Gazelle*:

On Friday morning, 19th December, we helped marshal the Dubai Runners' half marathon around the Creek. On our way back to the law courts, we stopped at the rear of the Creek Park, just off Al Garhoud Bridge Road, to watch a group of grey francolins feeding on the grass verge when, to our astonishment, a desert hare hopped out of the boundary hedge, along the grass and back into the hedge!

Whilst we know they are common in the surrounding desert, we have never seen these reclusive animals in the town before now. Can anyone in the group comment further on this? (*Any information members can supply is welcome. Ed.*)

Letters to the Editor

Any news or views you would like published in our monthly newsletter? Feel like tickling things up?



Please send your letter to any of the committee members listed, by fax or e-mail, or direct to the editor.



Field Clips...

E.mail your reports to pvana@emirates.net.ae, (Arial 10 justified) or deliver them to Anne Millen on floppy disk at monthly meetings.

Mountain Rescue

The new year was still very young when Gulf News reported the helicopter rescue of 4 trekkers in the mountains near RAK, tourists from Europe who were attempting to follow a challenging route described in a local guidebook. It is not clear that they were in danger and it appears that they were uninjured, but about halfway up it began to drizzle and they became "lost." Rather than attempting to retrace their route, they telephoned for help, which was promptly provided by the Air Wing of the RAK Police Department.

Gulf News listed the following sensible precautions: (1) Carry a map (one is available from the RAK Tourism Department); (2) Have a GPS so you can determine and report your position; (3) Have a first aid kit; (4) Travel in a group, not alone; and (5) carry a mobile phone to summon help. To this one might add that it is wise to attempt to become acquainted with a new environment before venturing too far afield. It should also be noted that mobile phones often do not function deep within the mountain wadis, and that water is very scarce in many mountain localities. *Report by Gary Feulner*

Wildlife Photography Exhibition

Members who are in London during the spring may want to visit the Natural History Museum, where the BG Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition is on display until April 18. You can also view the display onscreen at www.nhm.ac.uk/wildphoto.

The Birds and the Bulls

The little blue crab staring back at us through the thin layer of water surely was not prepared to see humans scrambling at the sight of a hungry bird – that was what crabs do. But this was no ordinary bird - it was the white-collared kingfisher- and this group of *Homo sapiens* had risen at an indecently early hour, crossed parched deserts, and conquered high mountain passes just to catch sight of it. An exaggeration you say? Yes... well...we *had* driven from the west coast to Khor Kalba via Hatta and the new tunnel, where we spotted the first bird of the day, a Hume's wheatear, at any rate.

Our advance party of two cars had arrived early at our rendezvous point at Kalba and had only been out of the vehicles for a minute or two when Dr. Larry Woods, our guide for the day, nonchalantly mentioned that the excursion's raison d'être was happily flitting about in the mangroves right next to us! As we busily occupied ourselves with our binoculars and cameras, Larry could be heard quoting that old cliché about the bird and the worm into his mobile phone to the others on their way to join us, still at least twenty minutes away. Fortunately, the kingfisher seemed to enjoy the attention enough to stay around until the others arrived, but not for much longer. For just after our comrades arrived the wind suddenly came up, clouds obscured the sun, and we onlookers became the subjects of a sandblasting.

With visibility down to only a few metres and sand whipping into our eyes, all that our party of eleven could do was call for a coffee break and take shelter. When it became apparent that the storm was not about to blow over quickly, it was decided to get into the cars and drive along the edge of the khor in hope of seeing at least a few of our feathered friends. Contrary to expectations, we were pleasantly surprised to

find a number of species seemingly ignoring the storm and busily occupying themselves with getting lunch on the mudflats. Species encountered included the common sandpiper, curlew, redshank, desert wheatear, Kentish plover, Saunders's little tern, shrike (possibly Isabelline), whimbrel, western reef heron (dark phase), and (the highlight of the drive for many of us) a spoonbill (possibly African due to its light bill) foraging alongside a pair of great white egrets. If that wasn't enough, on the way back along the khor in search of a sheltered picnic spot, a line of hundreds of gulls was strung out across the path in front of our vehicles.

Eventually, we got past that ornithological obstruction and managed to find a relatively calm spot to have lunch, in what also proved to be an excellent location for observing nature. While some members of the group were busy playing boules on the beach, others were spying a spotted eagle, a grey heron, and a sooty gull. Our kingfisher also decided to briefly visit us again, this time literally hovering over the water before diving in for a meal. And our lunch spot also posed a mystery to us all for a while: what were those dark things popping up from time to time in the water? Turtles, of course!

Flush with the victory of a successful bird-watching expedition, it was time to turn to the next part of our tour. A short drive through Kalba brought us to Fujairah and its museum, where we were met by Zuhair, our very welcoming and exceptionally knowledgeable guide. Zuhair not only gave us an informative tour of the museum, with its highly educational exhibits and clearly translated descriptions, but also took the time to point out a loofah vine, *Luffa cylindrica* or *Luffa aegyptiaca*, growing in the parking lot. This quickly dispelled the belief of one of the members that the loofah sponge came from the ocean! Zuhair then got into his



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Geology - Gary Feulner
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Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
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Plants – Valerie Chalmers

Mammals - Marijcke Jongbloed *until someone else volunteers.*

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.

own car and led us over to the nearby Fujairah Fort for an exclusive showing. Many of the members enjoyed lingering inside the fort compound on this cool, blustery day - no doubt conjuring up images of times past when the inhabitants kept a constant watch out to sea for invaders. Of course, a few of us were still bird-watching, one member pointing out a little green bee-eater on the descent from the fort.

Ever since the storm had rolled in, in mid-morning, Larry had had that concerned look in his face of a man worried that all his plans were in ruins. Would the final event of the day, the weekly Bullpushing competition, be cancelled due to the inclement weather? A quick call to one of his connections in Fujairah, a former student, confirmed that Larry would be able to sleep peacefully that night: the competition was on. We need not have called - everyone in town with a bull was either walking it through the streets toward the venue or trucking it in. When we arrived, dozens of bulls were tied to posts, angrily snorting and pawing the ground.

While the spectators were taking their seats, Larry's student, Nawar, walked around trying to get any information he could about the format of the competition. However, the locals didn't seem to know the rules any more than we did! The best we could make out was that one guy was in charge of encouraging the bulls to lock horns and "push" each other in a show of strength, a panel of judges decided who won, and a number of men acted as "rodeo clowns" – trying to control the bulls if they got too near the edge of the ring. The clowns were certainly needed, as at numerous points in the competition our whole group had to take cover behind cars in fear of being trampled. One bull actually bolted out the other side of the ring and could still be seen minutes later, sprinting off down the main road!

With the day fading into an eerie twilight induced by the sea fog, we decided it was time to leave the bulls behind and embark on the journey home. We bade farewell to our colleagues, two of whom had come all the way from Ras Al Khaimah to join us, and remarked on the fantastic experiences this day had brought: birds, bulls, and battlements – what better combination of nature and history could we have asked for?

Special thanks to Dr. Larry Woods for organizing an excellent outing, and also to Mr. Al-Suwadi, Director of the Fujairah Museum, for offering us free entry and for arranging our special admission to the Fujairah Fort. Report by Scott Rousseu

Pillow  *Lavas*

The new road from RAK to Dibba via Tawiyah and the so-called "Geology Route" is still under construction, but, whatever its merits and demerits, it can already claim to have created the UAE's best exposure of pillow lavas. These can be seen in road cuts on both sides of the road just east of the highest point, before a bridge over Wadi Yu'akkal. These road cuts are an extension of the pillow lavas that outcrop in Wadi Yu'akkal, well known to local geologists for their location at the base of the "Black Matterhorn" (so-named by Swiss geologists, no less).

Unlike the pillow lavas seen along the east flank of the Hajar Mountains (but rare in the UAE), they are not part of the ophiolite complex. Instead they are considered to represent occasional submarine lava flows in a deep ocean sedimentary basin, intercalated with deep water sediments. *Thanks to Gary Feulner for this report.*

Thru the lens



Reports...

Butterflies are interesting macro-subjects in the wild. They come in a variety of colours and designs, shapes and sizes. It is difficult to identify butterflies without a good field guide and they are hard to find. *The Butterflies of Saudi Arabia*, I believe is the closest of the regional publications. The butterfly photographer needs a good knowledge of classification to identify the species being photographed. Just differentiating between a moth and a butterfly makes an interesting start!

Little Blue



Back home in India, when a group of macro photographers got together with the entomologists, the result was a simple yet useful field guide for butterfly lovers. I am sure if a similar venture is taken up in this region we would have a worthwhile reference. A well illustrated field guide makes a great difference.

Little Blue

Observing the butterflies in the



wild, learning the differences be-

tween moths and butterflies - their life history, characteristic colors, association with flower types, activities like territoriality, patrolling, flight, puddling, basking, hill-topping, courtship, fluttering, migration, etc, is fascinating.

Plain tiger caterpillar



Close up accessories like extension rings and tubes, close-up lenses, macro lenses or lenses with macro facility provide the required image size. A sturdy tripod or preferably a monopod with flash is ideal to photograph butterflies. The best time to approach butterfly photography is the early morning, when the dew is still on the leaves, and the butterfly is basking and drying its wings with the first rays of the sun.

Vanessa cardui



Owing to the difficulty of obtaining good depth of field, it is best to keep parallel to the plane of the subject and get the butterfly sharp all over. A little difficult in the beginning, but with practice one can make good photographs. It is such an exciting chance that, often, the photographer just concentrates on the subject ignoring the importance of the background. What finally results is a razor sharp image of the butterfly with a cluttered distracting background (above). A blurred natural colour background separates the subject and makes

it outstanding.

Vanessa cardui



The common *Vanessa cardui* is beautiful and large enough to photograph easily. Dorsal approach with the wings open and side profile with the wings closed are the two common poses photographed. But the most interesting would be to capture the emergence of the butterfly from the pupa completing its metamorphosis. Butterfly photography is as interesting as the more popular bird watching and photography, but butterfly photography is more challenging.

Text and Photographs by Arfan Asif.

Hajar Mountain Nature Hike

November's nature hike in the mountains near Hatta took advantage of pleasant autumn weather, and the wildlife cooperated reasonably well. A carpet viper appeared almost on cue (and while the leader was distracted). Other wildlife seen included a blue-tailed lizard, an Oman lizard, two native fish species (one found at only two UAE sites), and the damselfly *Arabineura khalidi*, endemic to the mountains of the UAE and Oman.

At the Khamseen terrace, where some 50 sunken foundations are found, the group pondered the basis for such extensive habitation at this location. A piece of (apparently) limestone from the Musandam area joined an earlier finding of a piece of metamorphic rock, and suggests that the one-time inhabitants collected samples (souvenirs?) from other areas. At the large graveyard nearby, of un-



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determined age, we identified a simple semicircular open-air mosque, with the mihrab marked by a white stone.

The full compliment of a lucky 13 was in good spirits on the trail, but, as always, was quieter when puffing uphill and at day's end. Johanna Raynor has already been credited for uncovering (literally) the normally scarce remains of dead wadi fish. Andrew Hornsby proved he was ready for rough and tumble: the trail got rough and Andrew took a good tumble, scuffing his well polished safety brogues. Fortunately this occurred out of sight of the leader ("Nobody had any problems while I was around"). Katy Russell seemed to hesitate ever so slightly when everyone started rock-climbing up a slope, but then joined right in. And

just when it all seemed downhill, it was - too much so - and the wadi trail led us to the head of a precipitous drop. Larry Schwab, the only veteran of this route, led the way out, following a goat path. This was a first outing for the aimable and enthusiastic Ranju Kapoor, but we reckon he is likely to be back on the trail soon. *Report by Gary Feulner*

Travellers' Advisory:

Wadi Bih Re-opens – & Re-closes!

The UAE border in Wadi Bih was opened as of the first of the year, allowing visitors once again to make the traverse from Ras al-Khaimah to Dibba (or the reverse)

via Wadi Bih and Wadi Khabb Shamsi, but has apparently been closed again. Latest reports suggest the traverse is no longer possible. *Thanks to Barbara Couldrey of RAK for this information.*

New Omani Border Post in Wadi Jizzi

The Omani border post in Wadi Jizzi (the route from Al-Ain/Buraimi to Sohar) has moved several kilometers westward from its former position at Al-Wasit. It is now located just a few kilometers from the junction of the Mahdhah/Khutwah) road. This means that to visit the popular sites at Kitnah and Wadi Sarfanah, an Omani visa is now required. *Thanks to Gary Feulner for this information.*

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

- | | |
|--------|---|
| Feb 08 | The World of Julfar – Christian Velde |
| Mar 07 | Jebel Buhays - the UAE's oldest mainland archeological site - Hans-Peter Uerpmann |
| Apr 04 | Geckoes of the UAE & Oman - Prof. Drew Gardner |

Field Trips (DNHG members only, please).

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Jan 16 | Fresh Water Life with John Burt - Johanna Raynor |
| Feb 12 | Desert Dinner / Camp (4WD not necessary) |
| Feb 26 | Gravel Plains on the edge of the Empty Quarter with Peter van Amsterdam |
| Mar 4-5 | Inter-Emirates Weekend in Al Ain |
| April | Roses on the Saiq Plateau |