

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Annual General Meeting and Elections

Our March 2007 lecture night will also be our Annual General Meeting, at which a new Committee will be elected for the coming year.

In particular, we need a volunteer to serve as Librarian, and we could use an additional Field Trip Coordinator. If you are interested, or would like more information, please contact Gary Feulner or Valerie Chalmers.

Your Gazelle

The Committee is considering making email the standard method of distribution of the *Gazelle*. It would be easier and cheaper for us, and would mean members receive it quickly and with the photographs in glorious colour. It may also mean that registration for field trips would be sooner and tidier.

Please consider whether you really want the old-fashioned black-and-white hard copy cluttering up your house - you don't, do you? - and let our membership secretary Lena Linton know if email would suit you better. Lena's email is linton@mailme.ae

Speakers wanted Members' Night June 3rd

This is a reminder to members old and new that in June we will be having Members' Night. For those of you who don't know, Members' Night is a popular DNHG tradition in which we turn the floor over to group members and give them the opportunity to give a short presentation on a topic of their choice. Topics can be natural history, culture or travel related and do not need to be about the UAE - so the scope is fairly wide. We're now seeking volunteers for June. Presentations should be up to 20 mins max, and we can provide all the necessary equipment. If you'd like to volunteer immediately (please do!) or want to discuss this in more detail, please contact Angela Manthorpe, Speaker Coordinator (email manthorpe2005@yahoo.co.uk, mobile 050 6451743, phone 2886232)



DNHG Membership

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. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG.)

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
and contributions:**

Barbara Couldrey

Angela Manthorpe

Gary Feulner

Valerie Chalmers



Under the patronage of H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan



Spoonworms & Desert Plants with Dr Richard Hornby Fri 23 February

The tide is right, the worms are waiting ... but Val advises that this trip is full to oversubscription. You can go on a waiting list, which, if nothing else, will indicate the level of interest and encourage us to arrange another trip at a later date. Contact Valerie Chalmers on email: valeriechalmers@hotmail.com



Spoonworm feeding

Saih Shuaib overnight camp with MaryAnne Pardoe and EMEG Thur 01 - Fri 02 March

Here's a new one. MaryAnne Pardoe is organizing this trip in conjunction with Major Ali. It can be either an overnight camp or a day trip on Friday, and will focus on the ecology of the coastal area. There's a wide variety of things to see and do, and for details and registration, contact MaryAnne Pardoe by email: maryannepardoe@yahoo.co.uk

Shelling Trip with Anne Millen Fri 09 March

This trip is tide-dependent too - I do hope I have it right! Low water seems to be at 10.30am, so we will meet at 10am. The location might be decided on the day, but it will be one or more of the Jumeira beaches, probably starting with the beach near the Mercato. We will look at the tiny shells, so you will need to bring either good eyesight or good magnification.



Inter-Emirates Weekend organized by Al Ain ENHG Mar 23-24

The annual event is always a lot of fun but needs early planning. Pencil it in now and await details.

Proposed Visit to Qatar and the QNHG Thurs 12 - Sat 14 April

You will by now have received an email from Lena Linton regarding the details of this trip. If you have not, contact her (p. 7)

Angela Manthorpe is coordinating the trip, and writes, "I've had an unexpectedly enthusiastic response to the Qatar trip proposal. Already there are 12 on the definite list and a further 3 potentials (to be confirmed). I'm going to cap this at 20 people maximum, because otherwise it gets too unwieldy. If any more of you want to join, let me know immediately."



manthorpe2005@yahoo.co.uk
Graceful Warbler

Bastakia Windtower Houses with Peter Jackson May

Peter Jackson has offered to lead a walk through Bastakia, visiting the old houses by the creek which have been researched for his book, sometime in May after the book is published. It will be approximately three hours on a Friday morning. Details will be announced at a later date.

Our Next Speaker

Christophe Tourenq started to work in 2001 at the National Avian Research Center (near Sweihan, Al Ain) from the former Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency (ERWDA) now known as Environment Agency Abu Dhabi (EAD). Thereafter, he moved to Abu Dhabi EAD headquarters to work at the Terrestrial Environment Research Center until the end of 2005. Since early 2006, he has been working as project manager with the Emirates Wildlife Society (EWS) in association with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) on the Wadi Wurayah Protected Area project.

In a joint project, the EWS-WWF and the Fujairah Municipality have been working on a proposal to declare the Wadi Wurayah, Fujairah Emirate, a protected area. Wadi Wurayah is of considerable ecological significance because of its permanent water resources, with an exceptional quality of water that supports a rich biodiversity of fauna and flora. It is an area of outstanding natural beauty which is already an established and popular tourist attraction. When set up, the Wadi Wurayah Protected Area will be an unique natural protected area in the mountains of UAE, and an example for other Emirates integrating tourism, local use and conservation of their natural resources.



*DNHG members with rubbish from Wadi Wurayah, December 2005
(Photograph William Pardoe)*



Mountain Hike near Hatta

The sky was blue, the air was clear and the sunlight brought out the hundred shades of brown of the Hajar Mountains at their best. What's more, the rains had nurtured a carpet of green in the form of low annual plants (*Plantago ovata*, *Aizoon canariense*, *Rumex vesicarius*, the latter browsed intermittently en route by Barbara van Meir, and the purple flowering prostrate *Fagonia bruguieri*). These were overlain on the gravel terraces by a veil of brightest yellow in the form of thousands of the mountain mustard *Diplotaxis harra*, a sight I don't recall even from the "good old days" of the rainy mid-1990s. All this made an exceptionally picturesque backdrop for a late January hike in the Hatta area.



Fagonia bruguieri
From Marijcke Jongbloed's *Wild Flowers of the UAE*

The autumn and winter rains have backed up a large lake behind the dam, so we had to take a circuitous route to our starting point, then scout to see whether we would be able to descend via our intended return wadi, now an arm of the lake. We bet on success and started out.

In the wadi, much of the formerly thick vegetation along the steep wadi wall had been ripped free. Surprisingly, however, many of the bedrock pools had a heavy growth of filamentous, encrusting and/or floating algae, perhaps reflecting the fact that the first rains of the season began as early as August or September. Even so, we could see that the water had been much higher and the flow more continuous, due to a "whitewash" coating

the dried up channels where former algal growth had left its bleached tissue (and perhaps some biogenically precipitated calcium carbonate) as a thin white film. It was surprising (and somewhat disappointing) that both the number and size of the wadi fish in the pools remained relatively small.

Highlights among the cast of characters we met were the carpet viper *Echis omanensis* (a typically placid and possibly moulting specimen); a lone mountain bunting (recently distinguished from the house bunting), singing gaily and giving good views as it fed on the seeds of low grasses; a single female *Zygonyx torridus*, a large dragonfly which frequents flowing water, and so has been rare in recent years; and a pair of courting blue rock agamas *Pseudotrapelus sinaitus* (which Brian and Marian Marquand had once sought without success in the Sinai), the male a vivid royal blue, and slow to fade despite our intrusion.

On Khamseen terrace, one of the largest former settlement areas I'm aware of within the circum-Hatta area, we photographed several of the more distinctive potshards and Barbara van Meir turned up some interesting seashells: *Strombus (Conomurex) persicus*, known to be used for ornaments; *Terebralia palustris*, possibly brought for food; and the much rarer *Strombus (Canaria) mutabilis*, possibly brought for its novelty but sectioned transversely as if for ornament and indicating an origin on the East Coast. We discussed, inconclusively, the question of just why such a large number of foundations was found here.

After a detour to view some unusual rock art, we crossed a low pass, descended some tedious scree and made our way back down a narrow, rocky wadi that demanded frequent imagination and/or acrobatics as we maneuvered past canyons, chutes and low falls with pools of water at the bottom. One obstacle in particular elicited several virtuoso performances, including Marion Marquand as the Barefoot Ballerina, Paolo

Osimi as the Human Cannonball, and Brian Marquand as ... well, a Dunkin Donut. Hans Rau led the rest of the group past via a grown-up version of chutes and ladders.



Arabian toad (*Bufo arabicus*)
From *Amphibians*, by Peter Cunningham & Gary Feulner, in *The Emirates: A Natural History*, eds. Hellyer & Aspinall

Our "five o'clock surprise" was a detour out of the wadi a half kilometre early, since the rising lake waters had filled the wadi bottom (also filled, at that hour, with croaking Arabian toads). Our detour was mostly on gravel terraces and was simple enough, except for a scramble around a rocky buttress, followed by a descent over ledges that were taller in person than when we had scouted them from across the gorge. But eventually we returned to our start, with time to spare and investigate some small caves in the ophiolite rock (in which the silty bottoms seemed to have been burrowed by foxes) and with well-earned satisfaction at a lovely and interesting walk. Report by Gary Feulner

White-cheeked Bulbul's Nests

Angela Manthorpe has settled the dispute about the white-cheeked bulbul's nest by supplying some photographs she took with confirmed sightings of the bird.





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

These do indeed seem to be the same nest; roughish twigs, softly but thinly lined with grass / other finer material.



Nest and eggs of white-cheeked bulbul (Pycnonotus leucogenys)

Thanks to Angela Manthorpe for these photographs.

Umm Al Zamool Area

I had the pleasure to visit the archaeological dig currently in progress near Umm Al Zamool, while delivering visiting former DNHG member John Martin there to assist in the field for a couple of weeks. These excavations are continuing under the auspices of the new Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (ADACH). Flint tools are abundant in the area of former seasonal lakes, and preliminary dates suggest occupation during the Climatic Optimum of 10,000-6,000 years BP. However, excavation and understanding of the sites in the area are far from complete at this stage.

It is worth commenting on the current status of access to this area. Although it could once be traversed without impediment, the area south of Quaa has been fenced along the west side of the road for some 6 years or more, and access is possible only at gates, of which there are about 20 between Quaa and Umm

Az-Zamool, where the borders of the UAE, Oman and Saudi Arabia meet. Within the past three years, a number of the gates have been closed, and their entrances bulldozed, so that the actual number of access points is now fewer.

Unfortunately for would-be visitors, the status of access to the desert in this area is now uncertain. Each of the gates is now generally locked, and manned by one or more guardians who reside in a nearby gate-house. It appears likely that access will be permitted to areas such as Qusaywirah and Silab, where there exist established tracks and a series of agricultural plantations, and to Halibah, where a graded track has long led to a microwave tower deep in the interior. Access to other areas may be more problematic. Even the archeologists I visited had been asked upon arrival to call a number in Abu Dhabi for permission. The area in question is now targeted as a reserve for oryx and sand gazelle, but in fact it was fenced long before any such plans were mooted.

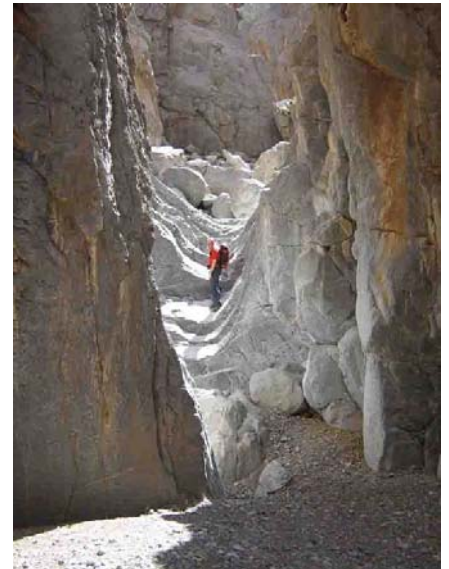
Sand gazelle, almost certainly introduced from captive stock, are now abundant in the area, to judge by their tracks and scat. We had excellent views of a pair but also saw the tracks of many others. Apparently they have no hesitation to go right up the steep slip faces of big dunes, when it suits them. We also saw, or saw evidence of, Brown-Necked Ravens (a pair, so perhaps not nesting yet), fox, cape hare (a road-kill) and gerbils (which wasted little time investigating the archeologists' tents by night). *Report by Gary Feulner*



Cape hare (Lepus capensis) from The Emirates: A Natural History

Almonds in Ru'us al-Jibal

Our RAK correspondent, Barbara Couldrey, and some companions hiked up Wadi Luab in the rugged Ru'us al-Jibal in late January and were delighted to see masses of almond blossom at the top.



Wadi Luab - definitely a dry-weather hike!

Barbara wrote, "As we exited from the magnificent, boulder strewn upper part of Wadi Luab's gorge, we were treated to masses of Arabian almond (*Amygdalus arabica*) in full bloom. These trees, with their delicate pink blossoms and heavy perfume, do not grow below 600m.



Amygdalus arabica

"Wadi Luab is a walk I have done several times but it is not for the



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan
res 344 8283
off 344 0462
fax (off) 349 9437

Archaeology - David Palmer
cell: 050-7387703
office direct line: 04-2072636

Birds - David Bradford
davebradford9@hotmail.com

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi
res: 06-5247 958
off: 06-5583 003
email: lankefi@emirates.net.ae

Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner
res 306 5570
fax 330 3550

Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
res 349 4816,
fax 340 0990
vmc@latifaschool.co.ae

Plants – Valerie Chalmers

Mammals & Seashells - Recorders needed!

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.



faint hearted as there are several serious scrambles with precautionary rope work in one part".



Wadi Luab

Thanks to Barbara Couldrey for information and photographs.

Desert Dragonflies

When I first came to the UAE, I was surprised to find the occasional dragonfly deep within sand desert regions such as Liwa. Later I learned that two kinds, both relatively large, can often be found in the deserts of the UAE, although sadly from the point of view of study they are "hawkers" that tend to remain in flight continuously and seldom settle.

One is the globe skimmer, *Pantala flavescens*, a pan-tropical dragonfly that is a strong migrant and often one of the first to show up in a "dry" area (desert, wadi or mountain) after rain. In January a lone female specimen patrolled very close to us as we sat in the shade of the car near midday among large dunes in the Umm Az-Zamool area. This is a medium size dragonfly that is often identifiable by the slightly "dipped" posture of its abdomen in flight. Females are a yellowish green; males may be more orange or reddish, with a bright yellow face.

The other is the larger Vagrant Emperor, *Hemianax ephippiger*, also

yellowish green, but with hints of blue in the male, which seems often to migrate in January and February. Most of the Emperor dragonflies in the collection at EAD (formerly ER-WDA) in Abu Dhabi are of this species. In confirmation of prior experience, I have recently seen this species in the Huqf area of Oman (patrolling outside a roadside restaurant) and in Umm Az-Zamool (patrolling the landscaped surroundings of a guardhouse). I was able to confirm the identification of the Umm Az-Zamool species because one flew into the lantern in the archeologists' field camp there. It was swatted and dispatched by one of the workmen, but preserved for science and brought back to civilisation by former DNHG member John Martin, a member of the archeological team.

Like the Globe Skimmer, the Vagrant Emperor is a strong migrant and can be found throughout the UAE, not just in deserts. In mid-February, traveling home by taxi from a delightful tour of Bur Dubai's Temple Alley, I saw two individuals patrolling different patches of roadside landscaping within urban Dubai. Report by Gary Feulner



"Tribulus" on the Web

With the permission of the publishers of *Tribulus*, the ENHG Al Ain has begun a project to scan in back issues of *Tribulus* and make them available on their web site as PDF files. The first 13 issues (covering 1991 through 2003) are now available via:
<http://www.enhg.org/trib/tribpdf.htm>



Here is just a sampling of the many articles that appear in those back issues:

- Distribution of *Tribulus* plants, by Rob Western
- A note on leeches at Aboul, by Bish Brown
- Plate tectonics and the Hajar mountains, by Dr. Ken Glennie
- Sand Dunes and the climate of the UAE, by Dr. Glennie
- Towers of RAK, by Dr. Derek Kennet
- Checklists of UAE reptiles, mammals, crabs, butterflies and moths, by various authors
- An illustrated checklist of UAE dragonflies, by Graham Giles
- A survey of wadi fish of UAE, by Gary Feulner
- An illustrated checklist of grasshoppers, by Dr. Michael Gillett
- The fort, mosque and residence at Falayah, RAK, by Christian Velde
- A spectacular cave near the summit of Jebel Hafit, by Tim Fogg et al.
- A faunal study of a mountain wadi, by John Burt

Indexes are available in three sets, covering volumes 1-5, 6-10 and 11-15.

ENHG's project of providing the Abu Dhabi Bulletins (1977-1990) on the internet, spearheaded by Brien Holmes, has proven to be a popular resource worldwide. It is hoped that the electronic version of *Tribulus* will be equally well received and utilised. Additional issues will be added over the coming weeks and hopefully the full collection available within a few months. Thanks to the ENHG Al Ain, and to Bob Reimer in particular, for this exceptionally valuable natural history project.
Thanks to Gary Feulner



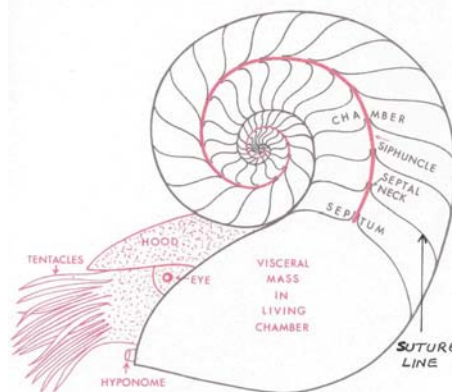
The Ibri Anticline 'Ammonites'

Photos of the large, planispiral 'ammonites' found at Ibri, together with photos of several nautiloids, were sent off at the end of November to the Natural History Museum in London, for further identification. It has now been confirmed that the large 'ammonites' are in fact also nautiloids. At the time they were found it was questioned if they were really ammonites or whether they might be other members of the class *Cephalopoda* because the characteristic complex suture lines were not seen. It is likely that our specimens belong to either the genus *Deltoidonautilus* or the genus *Cimomia*. Several specimens of the former genus have been found on some of our DNHG fossiling trips.



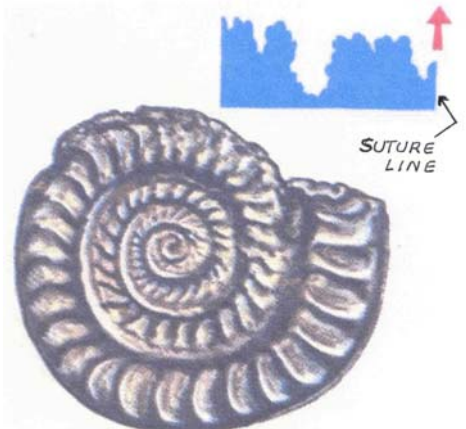
First nautiloid seen at Ibri anticline

Here are some distinguishing features between nautiloids and ammonites which should help members to identify further specimens they may encounter.



Morphology of a Nautilus.
Soft parts in red, hard parts in black

Both groups have a shell coiled in a planar spiral but, in the **nautiloids**, the outer whorls almost completely cover the inner whorls. The outer surface of the shell is smooth, apart from faintly marked growth lines. Internally, the shell is divided into as many as 36 successive chambers by septa which meet the inside of the outer wall along a slightly curving line known as the suture. The centre of each septum is perforated by a backwardly-pointing septal neck and through this extends a fleshy tube or siphuncle which connects the occupied latest chamber with earlier, empty chambers. The siphuncle varies in position in nautiloids.



Ammonite

The **ammonoids** developed from a nautiloid ancestor in the Devonian and are a very varied group, which can be conveniently divided on the basis of the suture line into three groups – goniatites, ceratites and ammonites. The suture lines are not straight/slightly curved (as in nautiloids) but sharply angular with forward projections called saddles and backward ones called lobes. The ammonites have extremely complex suture lines with lobes and saddles elaborately frilled. In addition, the shells of all three groups are typically ornamented by spines or ribs, the ammonites tending to be the most ornamented with some forms which are strongly ribbed. Ammonites normally have a ventral siphuncle. *Thanks to Valerie Chalmers.*



	name	tel home	tel office	fax
Chairman	Gary Feulner	306 5570 messages: 306 5300	330 3600	330 3550
Vice Chairman	Valerie Chalmers	349 4816 e.mail: vmc@latifaschool.co.ae	no calls pls	340 0990
Treasurer	Sim Hasker	343 1076 e.mail: haskers@hotmail.com	050-5074691	
Membership Secretary	Lena Linton	050-474 3595 e.mail: linton@mailme.ae		
Membership Assistant	Anindita Radhakrishna	282 3952 e.mail: anin@emirates.net.ae	050-656 9165	
Speaker Co-ordinator	Angela Manthorpe	288 6232 e mail: manthorpe2005@yahoo.co.uk		
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Pradeep Radhakrishna	282 3952 e.mail: wgarnet@emirates.net.ae	050-450 8496	
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Peter Jackson	2882713 email: pj.architect@gmail.com	335 4545 050-5521005	3354338
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Sandhya Prakash	050-5512481 e.mail:sandhya@clavib.com		348 2868
Special Projects	Beryl Comar	344 2243 e.mail: comar@emirates.net.ae		344 2243
Newsletter Editor	Anne Millen	394 7076 e.mail: pvana@emirates.net.ae	no calls please	394 7075
Publisher	Peter van Amsterdam	394 7076 e.mail: pvana@emirates.net.ae	335 5495	394 7075
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Chief Engineer	Jesse Ellis	050-8993413 e.mail:peterjon@emirates.net.ae		

Weekend Sightings

Poking about at the weekend in a coarse sandy plain between dunes not far from Dubai, Mary-Ann Pad-dison spotted a 'great velvet mite'.



Great velvet mite

This small creature – body length just under 1cm - is bright red in colour and apparently comes out after rains to feed on termites. The mite was particularly speedy, hurdling over obstacles placed in its way by a determined photographer, but the

resulting snap below shows why it is perhaps appropriately named.

Later, having just finished lunch in Wadi Fayyah, the same party was surprised by the appearance of a fair sized, reddish-brown coloured rodent. It's believed, from available descriptions, that this was a Libyan jird (*Meriones libycus*).



Libyan jird

The Libyan jird is generally active through the day unlike other gerbils and jirds in the region. The

rodent ran quickly across the sand with its tail – topped by a black tuft – held erect behind it. After a brief pause it then disappeared down a hole under a pile of dead wood. Investigation of the site revealed a number of entrances/exits to its tunnel network. The photograph above shows its pale underbelly. *Reportand photographs by Angela Manthorpe*

Look the Part!

The DNHG has navy blue sweat shirts, with the DNHG emblem embroidered in silver. Sizes: Large and Extra Large Dh65/- each, and silver grey polo shirts with the DNHG emblem embroidered in black. Sizes: Medium, Large and Extra Large Dh50/- each. The quality of both items is excellent! See Val Chalmers at the next meeting.

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Mar 04 | The Wadi Wurrayah Nature Reserve Project – Christophe Tourenq |
| Apr 01 | UAE Palaeoclimate and the Archeological Record – Dr. Adrian Parker |
| May 06 | Recent UAE archaeological discoveries – Dr. Mark Beech |
| June 03 | Members' Night – [<i>Your Name Here</i>] |

Field Trips (Members only, please. Details inside.)

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Feb 23 | Spoonworms & Desert Plants – Dr. Richard Hornby |
| Mar 01-02 | Saih Shuaib overnight camping – Mary Anne Pardoe and EMEG |
| Mar 09 | Dubai seashell collecting – Anne Millen |
| Mar 23-24 | Inter-Emirates Weekend (Al Ain) |
| April 12-14 | Proposed visit to Qatar |