

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Au Revoir, Lena!

Lena and Simon Linton are leaving Dubai after some 30 years, to live in Brittany. Apparently unaware that there are flights that land near enough, they are taking extraordinary measures to get there - they plan to drive through Iran, Turkey, and eastern Europe to reach France. (And we all thought Khor Fakkan was the furthest Lena would consider driving!) At the Inter-Emirates weekend dinner at the Oceanic, Khor Fakkan, Lena was presented with a DNHG monogrammed rock by Chairman Gary Feulner, and farewelled by the membership. Lena served on the Committee of the DNHG as our Treasurer for a couple of years, and her contribution has been greatly appreciated. She has handed over the position of Treasurer to Louisa Akerina. Welcome, Louisa!



Lena Linton with Gary Feulner



Dr Sandy Fowler, who has maintained an interest in UAE shells for more than 20 years and who has amassed his knowledge both of shells and the coastline into his "Sheller's Rough Guide to the Northern Emirates," was recently featured in the Kaleej Times Friday magazine on March 20. Sandy found, for example, 11 shells new to Dubai beaches in 2004. He pointed out that in the absence of major climatic changes, the only probable explanation for changing shell populations is the massive offshore development of Dubai.

Carol Goodwright, a keen sheller, left Dubai in October and has remained an interested and indeed active member of the DNHG. She recently visited Dubai and reported having a wonderful time on the Al Ain group's trip to Musah Oasis. She is leaving Cairo and returning to the UK this month, but not before she takes a shelling trip to the Sinai.

DNHG Membership

DNHG Membership remains a bargain at Dhs.100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. You can join or renew at our meetings or by sending us your details and a cheque made out to: Lloyds TSB Bank account no. 60600669933501. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG. Please also note our account number has changed.)

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:

Nancy Papathanasopoulou
Maral Khaled Shuriqi
Ulrike Andorff
Val Chalmers
Martina Fella
Rob Allan



Masirah Camel by Martina Fella

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



Coming Field Trips and Events

Earth Day Biodiversity Survey with Emirates Marine Environmental Group
24 April

Earth Day, organized by EMEG, is offering NHG members the chance to make a contribution to preservation of the biodiversity of the UAE. An email from EMEG has been forwarded to members.

Union Paper Mill Visit
1 May

This is a Friday trip to a large mill in Al Qoz that does paper recycling. They are allowing for a large group, so everyone can come. Details by email closer to the time.

Masirah Island with Nancy Papatathanasopoulou
Weekend 29-30 May (but you'll need to be longer than that)

Nancy's Masirah trip proved popular and wonderful (see p.3) and she's running another. Please contact Pradeep wgarnet@emirates.net.ae or Nancy nancyktcp@gmail.com

End-of-Season Dinner, Photographic Competition and Quiz
Thursday June 18

The DNHG Committee has confirmed with the India Club the date of the End-of-Season Dinner, Photographic Competition and Quiz. Please take note of the date and keep it free. This annual event is always great fun.



Details for the photographic competition (different this year) and for obtaining tickets for the evening will be emailed to members. Tickets will

be on sale at both the May and June meetings.

And ... Welcome back!

Nasser Nasef, General Manager of the Oceanic Hotel, Fujairah, wrote to the DNHG, following the very successful Inter-Emirates Weekend, "We are pleased to offer the below mentioned rates for (those of) your group who wish to stay here at The Oceanic. Please mention that they were part of the Dubai Natural History group when making a booking.

ROOM RATES ON BED AND BREAKFAST BASIS

Single Room	Dhs. 400.00 per room per night on Bed and breakfast basis
Double Room	Dhs. 500.00 per room per night on Bed and breakfast basis
Triple Room	Dhs. 600.00 per room per night on Bed and breakfast basis

Should you require further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned. Thank you for choosing the Oceanic." Nasser Nasef, General Manager 050 6312504

Please note that Peter Jackson's Bastakia walk is cancelled as it conflicts with Market Day in that area. Peter will be our June speaker - our annual Members' Night will be held in December.

On pp. 4 - 6, you will find reports from the very successful Inter-Emirates Weekend held at the Oceanic Hotel, Khar Fakkan. There will be further reports of the field trips and activities in our May issue of Gazelle. If you have good photos from a trip, please feel free to send them to the editor for publication.



Photograph by Martina Fella

Our Next Speaker

Emma Thompson is currently the Research and Projects Manager at the Sharjah Archaeology Museum. She has been leading a major upgrade programme which included the installation of a new exhibition showcasing the excavations at Al-Buhais 18.

Emma began excavating in the UAE as an under graduate student in 1995, and completed her doctorate at Sydney University in 2004. She was teaching archaeology at Sydney University and working as a consultant archaeologist in Sydney when she took a position at the Sharjah Archaeology Museum in 2007.



Summer!

Do you know of any interesting natural history trips for when it's hot in the city? Let us know what you'd like to do. You don't have to be a topnotch organiser or an expert - the Field Trip Co-ordinators will help you organise, and they might even find someone to provide information. Just let us have your ideas; we'll take it from there.



Email your field reports and news to pvana@emirates.net.ae (Arial 10 justified). Please send your photographs as separate jpg files, or deliver

Faraway Masirah!

Masirah is the largest of Oman's islands and the easternmost piece of land of the Arabian Peninsula. Some adventurous members of the DNHG and I arranged to go there in late February, initially by military flight, but due to an ill-timed change of regulations in the Royal Air Force of Oman, ended up driving ... a lot of driving! Some of us went to Muscat the night before; some drove through Al Ain on the same day.



The Masirah team

We all met in Mahawt, the little town before Shanna, the "port" where we were to get our ferry to Masirah. We succeeded in getting all three vehicles on the same boat, and while on it, we witnessed large flocks of great cormorants fishing and flying in formations, as well as terns, sooty gulls, Siberian, Caspian and slender-billed gulls.

The hotel was good, and after dinner out (fresh fish!) we went to find some turtles in Ras Shibban, the beach where Olive Ridleys and Hawksbills mostly choose to nest this time of the year. In the absence of the moon, the starry sky was breathtaking, and the youngest member of the group, Amelie, said she could almost touch them. The turtles didn't grace us with their presence that night, but we saw their tracks. Despite choosing high tide to maximize the chance of viewing them, they just didn't show up.

The next day we headed south via the western side of the island. We stopped at the sewage pond run-

off in Ras Hilf, where an osprey was waiting for us on a stick in his majestic black coat and white head plumage. Several Egyptian vultures were finishing something. Flamingoes, western reef herons, grey herons, four species of sea gulls, sanderlings, lesser and greater sand plovers, little ringed plovers, Kentish plovers, curlews, whimbrels and sandpipers were scattered all over the coast as we drove on the beach, risking immersion of our vehicles in the extended sabkha. The area where the fishermen come out with their fresh catch is obviously the sea birds' favourite.

A few kilometres drive, with turquoise water on our right and ophiolite and limestone hills on our left, in several levels and colours, brought us to Sur Masirah, where the mudflats reign. The viewpoint on the hill of Sur gives the visitor an idea of how vast this sabkha really is. The tide was low, so the birds were far away; we all saw several hundreds, maybe thousands, though. Oystercatchers, whimbrels and Siberian gulls were the majority, while a large number of crab plovers could be seen in the distance. We toured the mudflats and enjoyed the colors, the views, the perfume of the sea and moving sands.



Sur Masirah

The day was hot and it was time to snorkel. The first spot we went to is a part of the large Kalban beach area in the southwest of the island, once named "Omedu" by IUCN researchers. Some of us snorkeled, others looked for turtle tracks and other treasures on the beach. Several species of fish were spotted in the reef, which starts right off the beach, and on the beach itself we spotted a 1.5m remora, several seashells and an impressive flock of 50 black-headed gulls in breeding plumage. Several turtle tracks with nests were present on the beach as well.



Reef close to Ras Abu Rasas, SW Masirah

The next snorkeling spot was more impressive, even though the tide was going out so most of the group didn't enjoy it so much. Blue spotted stingrays, cuttlefish and trumpet fish were seen, as well as "the usual suspects" – clownfish, angelfish etc. A large hatching area was discovered right by the beach, where hundreds of sea turtle hatchlings had been crawling just a few hours before.



In the fishing village

We then headed to Ras Abu Rasas, where the views are majestic when the sea is rough and the waves explode against the rocks. Shelling in the fishing settlement of Haql proved poor. Wrong time of the year, maybe; our shellers were disappointed.

That same night in Ras Shibban, a hawksbill turtle decided to come out and nest just a few centimetres from where three of our group members were sitting!



Nesting hawksbill, Ras Shibban, SE Masirah



We watched as she dug her body chamber, then the egg chamber, laid her eggs and then left us very fast to return to the sea.

Everyone decided to prolong their stay on the island by one day. That allowed us to tour the north-eastern part of it, where the main loggerhead nesting beach was viewed in Dahriya and its conservation issues explained, especially regarding the new hotel that has been built on the beach that may, unfortunately, mean its partial destruction. Of the 30,000 loggerheads nesting annually in Masirah, at least 10,000 emerge here. Increasingly, nesting success decreases on this beach, mainly due to the increasing disturbances, such as vehicles and crowds of people visiting at night.



Nancy measuring a turtle

Biyadh Beach, beautiful, wild and dangerous for swimmers was next, where loggerhead turtles nest as well, but with a lot higher nesting success than Dahriya. The sand here being soft and treacherous, fewer vehicles dare drive on it. This beach is also much larger and the tarmac road quite far from the tide line, which gives loggerhead more confidence to lay their eggs there.



Ship remains

The "shipwreck" beach lies further south, a haven for green turtles in the summer months, with several

loggerheads nesting here as well. Finally, turquoise eastern Ras Radum beach was chosen for a last shelling attempt and a good swim. Not much on the shelling front here, either, but some of us had a good swim and a stroll on the beach despite the scorching heat.



Salt harvest, Masirah

That night in Ras Shibani, once again, the turtles apparently all came before high tide and before our arrival. And the next day most of us left the island for the long drive back to Dubai via Al Ain.

But Masirah still has things we have not all seen: The sacrificial site by the Blue Lagoon Wadi, Wadis Samar and Rasiya, amazing Wadi Kalbani... And most of all: in May, all four species of turtle nest on Ras Shibani beach. Last year, all four were seen nesting, as well as several hatchlings, within two hours on the evening of 23 May. How about another trip the weekend of 29 May? Please let Pradeep and me know if you are interested! nancyktcp@gmail.com or 050 31 24 296. Report by Nancy Papathanasopoulou, photographs by Nancy and Martina Fella.

Inter-Emirates Weekend 2009 Speaker and Awards



Minie van de Weg with Major Ali

The buffet dinner was held on the evening of Friday 27th. Minie van de Weg was our after-dinner speaker. She gave a most entertaining talk

on some of her memories of her early days in the UAE which was illustrated with many photographs and enjoyed very much by all present.

Minie's talk was followed by the presentation of the Sheikh Mubarak Award to Dr Mark Beech, Head of Division, ADACH and the Bish Brown Award to Major Ali Saqer Sultan, Head of EMEG. Both were well-deserving recipients of the awards.



Major Ali and Drew Gardner

Finally, the results of the IEW 2009 photographic competition were announced. There were five categories: plants, animals, archaeology and architecture, geology and landscapes, and culture. The winners each received a selection of books related to the categories. The Oceanic Hotel has also very kindly given each winner a complimentary voucher for buffet lunch and beach entrance for two people.



The winners of the photographic competition

Plants category – May Yoke Taylor, ENHG Abu Dhabi, with the winning photograph entitled 'Desert Hyacinth'.





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Plants – Valerie Chalmers

Seashells - Recorder 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.



Animals category – Lamjed El-Kefi, DNHG, with the winning photograph entitled "Monitor Lizard".



Archaeology and architecture category - Dr Jerry Buzzell, ENHG Al Ain, with the winning photograph entitled "Mountain Village Street".



Landscapes and geology category – Dr Drew Gardner, Chairman, ENHG Abu Dhabi, with the winning photograph entitled "Morning in Wadi Wiqa".



Culture category – Dr Drew Gardner, with the winning photograph entitled: "They're off!"



Thanks to Val Chalmers for information and photographs.

IEW Report - Wadi Wurrayah

Located near Khor Fakkan, Wadi Wurrayah is a favorite weekend getaway not only for Emiratis but also for the expats. The rain just prior to the Inter-Emirates Weekend promised an exciting trip led by Christophe Tourenq from Emirates Wildlife Society - WWF and Maral Khaled Shuriqi from the Environment Department in Fujairah. The rather rugged terrain, small streams and occasional water pools hindered a smooth drive so we drove into the wadi to a point where we could leave the vehicles and continue on foot to the cascades.



NHG members listen to Christophe Tourenq in Wadi Wurrayah
Photograph by Maral Khaled Shuriqi

On March 16, 2009, Wadi Wurrayah received its status as a Wildlife Protected Area due to its



richness of rare species of wildlife and beauty of the scenery. The lucky nature lover may spot an Arabian tahr (which can be only found in the wild in Wadi Wurrayah, at Jebel Hafit and near Muscat), caracals (tracks and droppings are found regularly), gazelles and Blanford's foxes. Just some weeks ago, the roar of an Arabian Leopard was heard. Further, we learnt that there are 14 species of reptiles, two species of toads and four species of mayflies (which proves the good water quality in this area). During our walk, Bob from Al Ain counted eight or nine dragonfly species.

Maral explained the white vertical lines in the reddish brown mountains which had developed over the centuries. Through the movements of the rocks, cracks emerged which filled with water. These formed calcium carbonate that eventually became white marble from heat and pressure.



Walking up Wadi Wurrayah
Photograph by Maral Khaled Shuriqi

From the valley, one can spot remains of settlements from 1000 BC on the top of the rocky mountains, as well as sites from 1000 BC to 600 AD. Particularly amazing was to learn that the last family left their airy and scenic home only in 1991. A rusty car wreck expressed a warning to get out of the wadi in time in the event of rains and / or flash floods.

Arriving at the cascade, we were shocked to see not only colorful graffiti on the rocks but also plenty of garbage destroying the beauty of nature. We were assured that with the recent decree making Wadi Wurrayah a Wildlife Protected Area, this area will be cleaned up soon and rangers will be in place to avoid recurrence.



At present, graffiti mars beautiful Wadi Wurrayah
Photograph by Ulrike Andorff

The fresh water, home to the *Garra barreimiae* fish unique to the Arabian Peninsula, had in the recent past been stocked with imported fish such as African tilapia, goldfish and similar. Our guides explained the tiring techniques of exterminating these enemies of the *Garra*.



Cladium mariscus
Photograph by Val Chalmers

It was interesting to find the sedge *Cladium mariscus*, also known as sawgrass growing near to the helleborine orchid *Epipactis veratrifolia*. According to Marijcke Jongbloed in 'The Wild Flowers of the United Arab Emirates', *Cladium*

mariscus is rare. It has only been recorded previously from Wadi Jazirah near Al Ain.



The helleborine orchid *Epipactis veratrifolia*
Photograph by Ulrike Andorff

And then rush hour - the weekend tourists arrived, forcing their vehicles to the limit to drive through the rough terrain. Family picnics and BBQs were set up at the bottom of the rocks, kids playing in the wadi water, adults relaxing with chat - for the environment, another day full of pressure!

Report by Ulrike Andorff & Val Chalmers, photographs by Ulrike & Maral Khaled Shuriqi.

The winter flora of the 'Black Palace Beach' Sabhka

Following Alestree Fisher's talk on the flora of the UAE, members may be interested to see photographs taken by Rob Allan of the hyacinths and 'red thumbs' behind the beach between Madinat and the Jumeirah Palm. Plenty of winter rain and no grazing animals has given native plants, in particular the saltbush *Tetraena qatarense* (until recently known as *Zygophyllum qatarense*), a chance to flourish there, and these two parasitic plants, *Cistanche tubulosa* and *Cynomorium coccineum* have had a great season. *T. qatarense* is the usual host for them, though according to *The Emirates: A Natural History* (eds. Hellyer & Aspinall), *Cistanche* also grows on other plants such as *Haloxylon salicornicum*.



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The sabkha near 'Black Palace Beach'

Rob took these photographs in mid-February, when the weather was still quite cool and good rain had fallen.



Cynomorium coccineum with Tetraena qatarense



Cistance tubulosa, the desert hyacinth, also parasitic and growing with *Tetraena qatarense*

Thanks to Rob Allan for these photographs.

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

- | | |
|---------|--|
| May 03 | Emma Thompson - Buhais 18: Life and Death in the Stone Age |
| June 07 | Peter Jackson - 400 years of Shajah's History |

Field Trips (Members only, please. Details inside, p.2)

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|---------------|---|
| April 24 | Earth Day 2009 with Emirates Marine Environmental group |
| May 01 | Union Paper Mill tour with Sandhya Prakash |
| W/E May 29-30 | Masirah with Nancy Papatanasopoulou |

Further field trips, details and any changes will be announced by e-mail circular.