



# GAZELLE

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مجموعتنا دورتي للتاريخ والطبيعي

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**Contributors—**

Thanks to the following for their contributions this month:

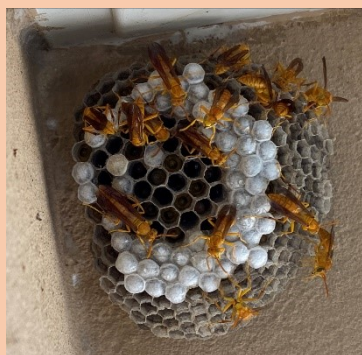
*Peter Hellyer, Angela Manthorpe, Helga Meyer, Tamsin Carlisle, Ulrike Andorff, Heidi Struiksma, Michelle Sinclair, Geoff Sanderson, Binish Roobas and Gary Feulner.*

**Send in your contributions by 25th June, for the attention of the:**

[gazelleeditor@gmail.com](mailto:gazelleeditor@gmail.com)

**Garden Watch!**

See inside for more observations that took place during this month.



White-eared Bulbul

**Pandemic Birding**

The COVID-19 lockdown had a pretty devastating effect on my birdwatching plans over the last few months. Restrictions on movement in Abu Dhabi were a little more relaxed than those in Dubai, so for March and April I was at least able to get out and wander through the woods at Mushrif Palace Gardens, looking out for evidence of the spring migration. The stunning Indian Paradise Flycatcher, only the 2<sup>nd</sup> record for the UAE (and Middle East), which had first been seen on 30<sup>th</sup> December, stayed around until 23<sup>rd</sup> April, while there were some other good birds around as well. Some I managed to see, though, as usual, I struggled with the little warblers and I missed some other, rarer species.

As we moved into May, though, the migrants were moving on, while I also found that I needed to spend a little more time in my (carefully-isolated) office.

So, for the last three weeks of May and into early June, the only birding I managed to do was during walks around the large compound in which my office is located. Mixing a bit of exercise and a bit of birding proved to be more rewarding than I had expected.

Most of the compound is buildings or paved carpark, but there are a few trees around the edge, some bushes near the covered parking spots and a little garden area in front of the main entrance.

Over the last few years, I've seen a few species regularly, like bulbuls, sparrows and mynas, with a few more occasionally present in the winter, like white wagtails. So I didn't expect to find very much, unless anything interesting happened to fly overhead.

As the days went by, though, I started to get more and more interested in what I was finding. Careful inspections of the areas of bushes and gardens started to produce a growing list of species. Red-vented Bulbul, White-eared Bulbul, Common Myna, Laughing Dove, Collared Dove, Feral pigeons, House Sparrows—these were all very

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Announcements, Clips and Recorders

### Monthly Speaker—

MEETINGS ARE CANCELLED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

#### It's a Small World ...

... and getting smaller , thanks to technological advances in the virtual world!

DNHG members Helga and Willy Meyer left Dubai recently to take up a position in Myanmar. A familiar face to many, Helga always gave a warm welcome to those members attending on lecture night.

Having an active interest in nature, Helga often sends photos of her observations. One such instance this month was this intricately-patterned fly. Amazingly (or not), it was identified by another DNHG member, Tamsin Carlisle, who left Dubai for Turkey a few years ago. Tamsin also keeps in touch through the wonders of technology!

#### From the Editor:

The earth, air and sea seemingly breathed a little with the imposed global population lockdown during recent months.

In Dubai, pictures of gazelle and camels circulated on social media, wandering around areas normally abuzz with traffic and people.

However, some of us could still watch wildlife through our windows. Peter Hellyer writes about his birdwatching experiences around areas in and around Abu Dhabi.

Having observed birds' nests in gardens last month, this month 'Spotlights' a nest of another flying species, namely the Paper Wasp. For a time-lapse video of these wasps at work, visit our facebook page.

Enjoy your read!

Lake fly, observed in Myanmar, identified in Turkey, reported in Dubai



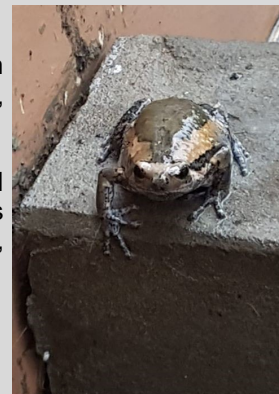
#### Raining Snails and Frogs

Helga Meyer is also enjoying monsoon season in Myanmar. She says that it is 'raining snails and frogs', as opposed to the saying 'Raining Cats and Dogs.'



On the right is an Asian Painted Frog. Helga informs us that it is also locally known as a rice frog, a chubby frog and a bubble frog!

The snails on the left are approximately 5cm long!



#### DNHG Recorders

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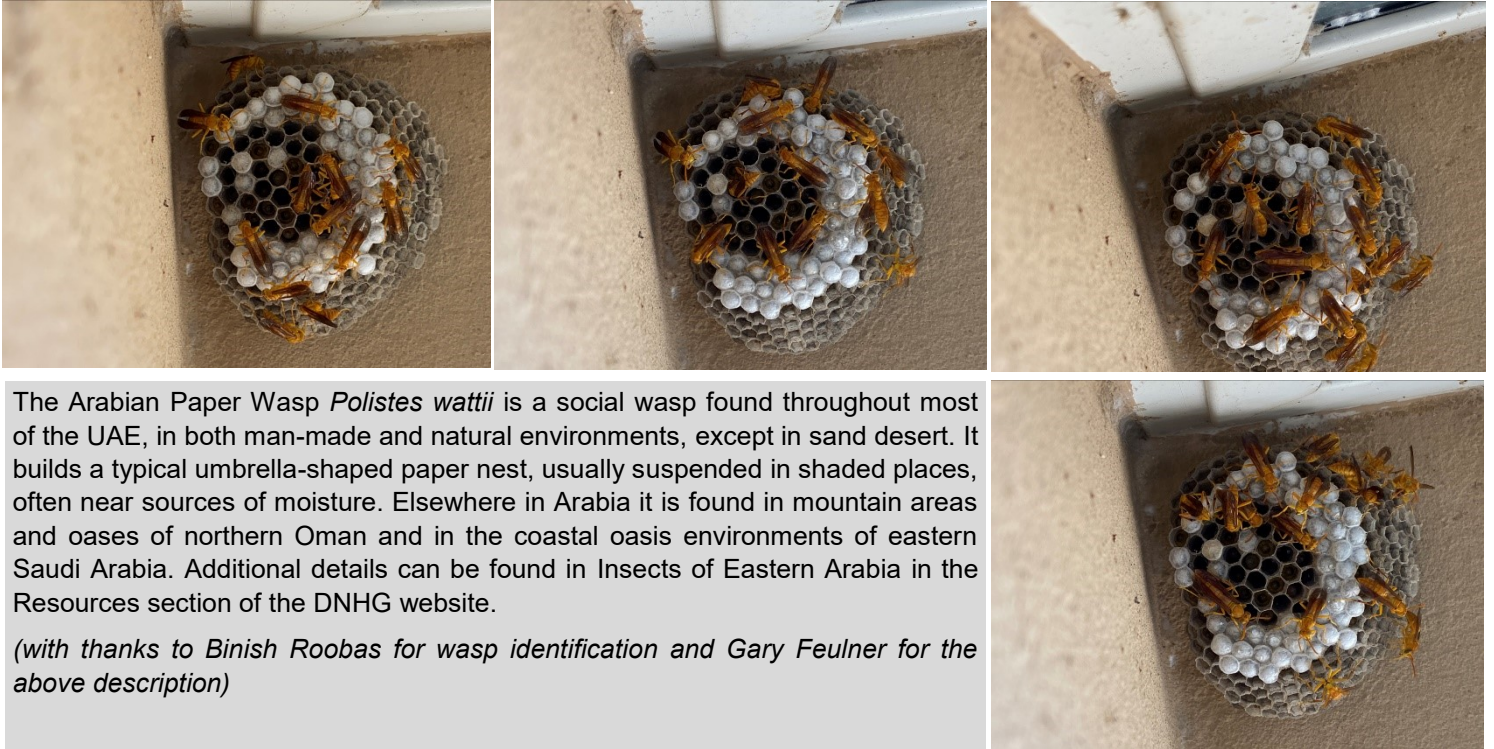
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## Spotlight on the ‘Nesting Instinct’

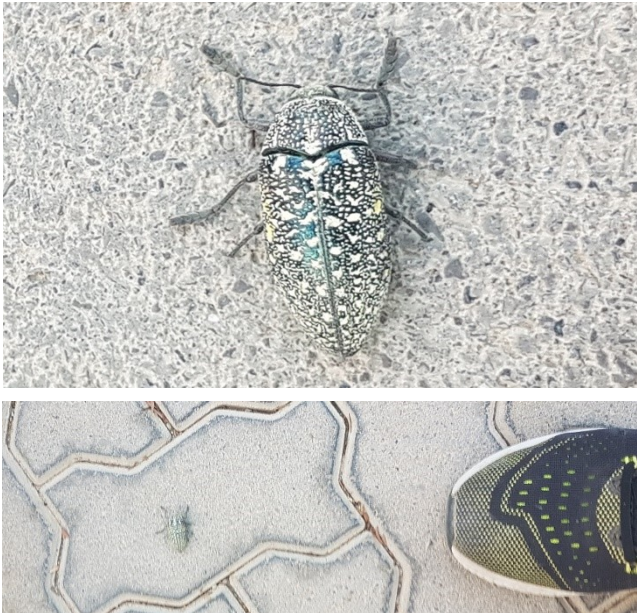
Arabian Paper Wasp, by Jose de Heer (a time-lapse video can be seen on the DHNG facebook page)



The Arabian Paper Wasp *Polistes wattii* is a social wasp found throughout most of the UAE, in both man-made and natural environments, except in sand desert. It builds a typical umbrella-shaped paper nest, usually suspended in shaded places, often near sources of moisture. Elsewhere in Arabia it is found in mountain areas and oases of northern Oman and in the coastal oasis environments of eastern Saudi Arabia. Additional details can be found in Insects of Eastern Arabia in the Resources section of the DNHG website.

(with thanks to Binish Roobas for wasp identification and Gary Feulner for the above description)

### Jewel Beetle, by Cheryl Robertson



This Sulphurous Jewel Beetle *Julodis euphratica* was seen in a residential area of Jumeirah. Binish Roobas, who confirmed the identity of the beetle, states that it is commonly seen during summer months, around vegetated areas in wadis and on mountains. It is unusual to see it on paved areas.

One of a pair of Egyptian Geese, enjoying the lake at Arabian Ranches, by Geoff Sanderson



## Field Clips

(Continued from page 1)

much what I had expected to see.

One day, I found a couple of Indian Silverbills feeding on a big clump of grass. Then a couple of Graceful Prinias popped up, to be followed by the sight of a beautiful Purple Sunbird feeding on the only decent-sized mesquite tree. A real surprise was a Green Bee-eater, perching on a metal rod sticking out of a building that is not yet complete, but on which construction work has stopped.

With the addition of House Crows, African Rock Martins and Pallid Swifts flying overhead, I amassed a total of 14 different species fairly quickly. Not a stunning number, but not bad for a largely built-up compound in the middle of the city in summer.

Slowly, I realised that a number of the species must also be breeding as well.

The House Sparrows, with their untidy nests in the roofs over the car-parking spots, were easy. A Laughing Dove trying to encourage a recently-fledged young bird to fly was another. In one of the lines of bushes, a pair of Red-vented Bulbuls became very agitated whenever I passed by, so they clearly had a nest in the bush. The same was true of a pair of White-eared Bulbuls, which I saw diving in and out of another bush. It was all becoming a bit of a challenge ...

Keeping my eyes open, I noticed a Common Myna going in and out of a crevice in one of the main buildings. A day or two later, a Myna started screeching at me and diving close to my head whenever I walked past, suggesting that it had chicks in a nest in the crevice.

Another day, I saw not one, but four, Green Bee-eaters, not just sitting on a building, but flying around feeding. Two were clearly young birds, which must have been bred close by, though I didn't find the nest.

The discoveries continued. One day was particularly productive. Looking into the mesquite tree carefully that day, I noticed a Purple Sunbird nest. Nearby, two Indian Silverbills were collecting dead stalks of grass, so they were building a nest somewhere nearby. In the gardens at the front of the office, two Graceful Prinias were displaying considerable interest in a particular section of a hedge, diving in and out. So, another possible nesting site. Finding breeding evidence for three species on a single day was pretty satisfying.

So, out of the 14 species I managed to see during this little bout of urban summer birding, nine were breeding in, or close to, the compound. The feral pigeons certainly breed on the tops of buildings across the road, so possibly on top of my office building as well, while Collared Doves are probably breeding in the line of trees between my office compound and the nearby main road.

There's been nothing dramatic about my discoveries, but they have reminded me of one of the reasons that I enjoy birdwatching. There's nearly always something to see, something to learn, wherever you are, and it isn't necessary to find rare birds to get enjoyment out of it.

I am unlikely to find much in the way of further species this summer. I'm looking forward to the autumn, though, when the migrants start returning. My personal office compound bird list now stands at 23 species. I wonder what I will be able to add next!

Contribution by Peter Hellyer



Red-vented Bulbuls



Purple Sunbird nest



Graceful Prinia

## Field Clips

### Visit to Ras al Khaimah Sailing Association (RAKSA)

On the occasion of the IEW in RAK in February, I had the opportunity to meet Grant of RAKSA who gave me a brief about the history and future of the Ras Al Khaimah Sailing Association, which was officially opened in 1977. The late Ruler of Ras Al Khaimah, Sheikh Saqr bin Mohammed, donated the club to the Norwegian community. The Norwegians built the RAK cement factory, and Sheikh Saqr bin Mohammed wanted them to feel "at home". Since the 1970s RAKSA has not only been a sailing club but also a social venue for the expats living in RAK, this also considering the simply life during the past era. Events such as Christmas, New Year, weddings and birthdays were celebrated in the simple but homely clubhouse and on the beach.

Unfortunately, with new developments in this location, that also includes a new road structure, RAKSA received an eviction note. Reminding the government that the land for the club was once given by Sheikh Saqr, new land has been authorized for RAKSA on the same beach stretch, just a few 100 meters further to the end of the half-island. From a sailor's point of view, the new location is actually better as the sailing boats can be sailed out into the Arabian Sea more easily. The new building plans have been confirmed after many changes. Now the club awaits the final Municipality approval to start with the construction. The new club house will offer the comfort of modern times but remains a modest and functional structure which will continue to carry the adventurous and social vibes for many years to come.

*Contribution by Ulrike Andorff*



*The late Ruler of Ras Al Khaimah, Sheikh Saqr bin Mohammed, officially opens RAKSA*



The present RAKSA Clubhouse opened in 1977



Grant, a member of the Club for 18 years, with an ancient ship's wheel



Map of the present and new location of RAKSA

## Field Clips

### February, 2020 Cheetah Conservation Fund – Dr Laurie Marker

In February Dr. Laurie Marker, founder of the Cheetah Conservation Fund, passed through Dubai on her way to the Convention of Migratory Species in India (CMS COP13). Dr. Laurie has received numerous awards for her pioneering work and spoke previously at one of our meetings. Her wide-ranging presentation covered the current status of cheetahs in the wild, the history of the CCF and the actions they are taking to preserve this elegant feline.

It will not be a surprise to hear that the cheetah is in a perilous position:

It is Africa's most endangered wild cat

Fewer than 7,500 adult cheetahs remain in the wild

It has been driven out of 91% of its historic range in Africa and Asia

In the last 100 years we have lost over 90% of the world's cheetahs

31 populations of cheetah exist in 23 countries, with 20 of those populations having fewer than 100 individuals. This fragmented population leads to inbreeding and reproductive issues.

Dr. Laurie started working as a veterinary assistant at the Wildlife Safari park in Oregon, USA, during the 1970s. The park had cheetahs but, at the time there was little knowledge about breeding them in captivity and so she took it upon herself to learn as much as possible. During the 16 years that she worked for the park, she developed the cheetah studbooks and established the most successful captive cheetah-breeding program in North America.

She first travelled to Namibia in 1977 to investigate the potential to release captive-bred cheetahs into the wild. However, during this visit she learned that farmers, who see the cheetah as a threat to their livestock, were killing hundreds every year. Her research estimated that during the 1980s, more than 7,000 cheetahs were captured and killed, which was half the country's population. Without intervention the future of the species was in doubt and so Dr. Laurie decided to set up a cheetah research centre. She founded the CCF in 1990, left her job at the Smithsonian Institution, sold her possessions, and moved to Namibia. She started talking to all the livestock farmers to understand the issue.



#### Mission Statement

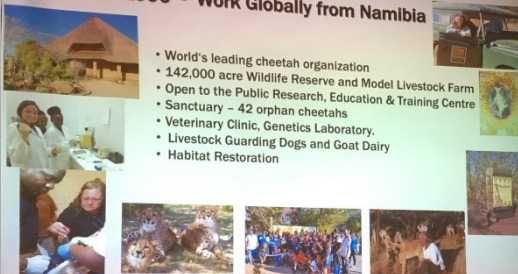
*"To be the internationally recognized centre of excellence in the conservation of cheetahs and their ecosystems.*

*CCF will work with all stakeholders to develop best practices in research, education and land use to benefit all species, including people."*



Slides 1 and 2 outline the organisation's mission and its broad scope: from developing the fundamental understanding of cheetah genetics and ecology, to local community education, a model farm to teach good animal husbandry, veterinary services, support for the farming community, through to lobbying against the illegal international wildlife trade. The cheetah is the catalyst to understanding the broader ecosystem; if you save the cheetah, perhaps you can bring prosperity to the whole community. To understand the basics of cheetah population genetics, DNA, diet and disease, CCF uses trained dogs to collect cheetah scat across Namibia and Angola; this is analysed in the centre's laboratory.

#### Founded in 1990 - Work Globally from Namibia



One of the key messages from the presentation was the need to keep wild animals in the wild but, with human and livestock populations rising, the pressure on land is increasing. The CCF therefore takes a strongly integrated approach – by protecting livestock and the livelihood of farmers, you can protect the cheetahs. In addition to educating current and future generations of farmers, maintaining livestock health through vaccination programmes, trapping and neutering stray dogs, one of the CCF's most successful initiatives has been the Livestock Guarding Dog programme. CCF breeds the Anatolian Shepherd, a Turkish dog which is raised with and accompanies the flocks, will stand and bark when it detects predators and therefore lessens the need for farmers to kill cheetah, wild dogs and other predators. Since the programme started, 647 dogs have been donated to farmers across Namibia and other parts of Africa, resulting in a 70-100% reduction in livestock losses.

The CCF is also creating additional income streams for the community; a small-scale handicraft industry for example, and The Dancing Goat Creamery which turns goat's milk into premium products like cheese, ice cream and fudge. And, to assist with habitat restoration, an invasive thorn bush which affects vast areas of grazing land, is being harvested and turned into the

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Field Clips and Announcements

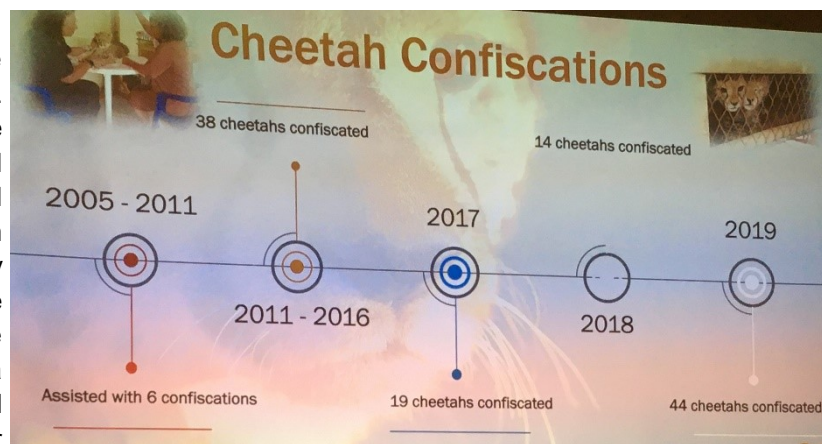
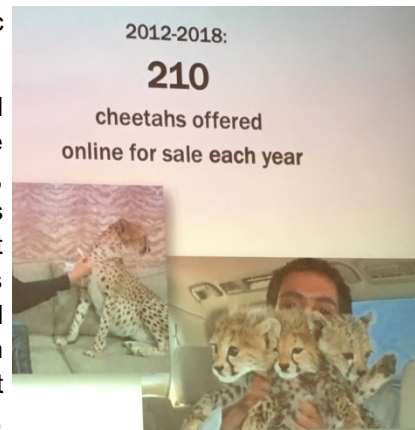
(Continued from page 6)

Bushblok, a high-energy, low emission fuel log. The factory employs 30 members of the community, so the message is clear – wildlife conservation initiatives can lead to economic growth for the community.

However, an emerging threat, which is perhaps harder to contain, is the illegal international wildlife trade which accounts for approximately 300 cheetahs a year (see slides 3 and 4). The source markets are Southern Africa, for the trade of bones and skins, and Eastern Africa, focusing on cubs for the illegal pet trade – many destined for the Middle East. The pet trade is devastating and, as the cubs are starved during transit, it's estimated that for every 1 cub that reaches its destination, 4 die on the way. Confiscations are increasing but, although CCF has vets on the ground to assist, there is a 50% mortality rate with rescued cubs. Dr. Marker said they are getting so many cubs, "it's exhausting" and, to provide a base for confiscated cubs in Eastern Africa, the CCF has established a second operation in Somaliland. The Government has donated land for a sanctuary and, although the cubs are being kept in cages temporarily, the intention is to develop this into a fully-fledged education and training facility near the capital, Hargeisa.

In researching my article, I found the following quote on the CCF website ([www.cheetah.org](http://www.cheetah.org)), which sums up Dr. Laurie's attitude: "We always think there is someone else who will do something, that 'they' will take care of it. I realized early in my work that there is no 'they,' and so I decided I would take action to save the cheetah from extinction." The message of cheetah conservation is a very sobering one, but Dr. Laurie Marker and the CCF are working tirelessly to save this iconic species. They have released over 600 animals back into the wild and provide a sanctuary for over 40 orphaned cubs. If you are interested in visiting and supporting the CCF, please look at their website; they welcome research interns, volunteers and tourists at their 2 bases in Namibia and Somaliland. Once the travel restrictions are lifted, you might want to consider a visit.

Contribution by Angela Manthorpe



### World Environment Day

This year the Soil Museum would like to celebrate World Environment Day (5th June) with a virtual photography campaign to show love and appreciation of the UAE plant biodiversity.



**Desert Hyacinth**  
*Cistanche tubulosa*

For further details and how to find out where to upload your photos, please visit:

<https://www.emiratessoilmuseum.org/events/uaeplantstory>

### New Publications

Thanks to Michelle Sinclair and Heidi Struiksmas for bringing to our attention two new publications.

Michelle learned of a new book called 'Freshwater Fishes of the Arabian Peninsula' (see photo on the right).

Heidi informs us that Dr Michele Ziolkowski has published a book entitled 'Fujairah's Date Palm Gardens: A Preliminary Survey.' and provides the following link with further details:

<http://www.wam.ae/en/details/1395302842313>

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[booksarabia.com](http://booksarabia.com)

## Dubai Natural History Group (DNHG) Programme

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

Our scheduled meetings have been cancelled until further notice. See below for details.

### Scheduled Field Trips (Members only):

The DNHG field trip program has been temporarily suspended in compliance with UAE coronavirus precautions. For field trips previously booked, members should contact the appropriate field trip leader for more information.

## DNHG COMMITTEE 2020

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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## DNHG Membership

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership is valid from September 2019 to September 2020. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to Emirates NBD account number 1012012013302. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG.)

Payment can also be made by cash deposit at a bank or ATM, using our IBAN number: AE640260001012012013302. However, this process does not always identify the payer. So if you wish to pay by cash deposit, please also photograph or scan a copy of your payment confirmation and send via e-mail to the Membership Secretary, so we know whose money we have received.

DNHG membership entitles you to participate in field trips and helps pay for our lecture hall, publication and distribution of our monthly newsletter, the *Gazelle*, our post office box, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.