



GAZELLE



مجموعتنا دورتي للتاريخ والطبيعي

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Contributors—

Thanks to the following for their contributions this month:

Binish Roobas, Chandrashekar Sardesai, Brigitte Howarth, Michelle Sinclair, Margaret Swan and Angela Manthorpe.



Sulphurous Jewel Beetle

© Chandrashekar Sardesai, The DhandaNot

Mosques in RAK page 7

Sheikh Mohammed Bin Salim Al Qasimi Mosque has sixty interior columns



Two DNHG field trips visited Sharjah's broad, sandy Wadi Faya by day in February. Participants were treated to many surprises including migrating butterflies and mating Toad-Headed Agamas. But tracks in the surrounding dunes, bedrock ridges and a neighbouring plantation area indicated that Wadi Faya has plenty of nightlife, too.

To investigate, two of us visited the field trip location on a late April evening. The place looked undisturbed from human interference, partly due to a new cycle track which blocks easy vehicle access from the main road. We saw no cars or caravans or tents and it was dark, without artificial lights. Near our parking area along the road, the plantation area and surrounding fallow ground revealed several geckos (the Rough-tailed Bowfoot Gecko (*Cyrtopodion scabrum*), a Sindh Saw-scaled Viper (*Echis carinatus sochureki*), Sulphurous Jewel Beetles (*Julodis euphratica*) and several Longhorn Beetles (Family Cerambycidae).

In the sand dunes, the story was different. Gerbils were active and we also saw several sand geckos, fresh tracks of hedgehogs, a few spider species and lots of bats (unsuspected by day). The most common geckos were the Arabian Sand Gecko (*Stenodactylus arabicus*) and Baluch Ground Gecko (*Bunopus*



Arabian Sand Gecko

(Continued on page 4)

Announcements and Recordors

Virtual Monthly Speaker

Monday 16th May at 8pm

Speaker: Kathleen Swalling

Presentation: "Our Oceans: Balancing the beauty and the benefits"

Kathleen Swalling is a Maritime Law and Strategy Advisor and is Managing Director, Nature Based Solutions LLC, United Arab Emirates. She began her career as a fisheries and environmental prosecutor for the Attorney General's Department in South Australia in 1990. She undertook several key roles to shape the management of Australia's ocean resources including advising the Federal Government on their Oceans Policy and Regional Marine Planning at the Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security and as Senior Legal Advisor to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.



Kathleen advises governments, private sector, universities, and NGOs. Her clients include: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, National Centre for Environmental Compliance, KAUST university, the Environment Agency of Abu Dhabi, Hatfields Group (Indonesia) and Minderoo Foundation.

Recently, Kathleen completed an extensive review of the international and national legal framework governing Saudi Arabia and its ability to balance development with preservation of the Arabian Gulf and Red Sea marine and coastal environment. Prior to this she conducted a review of the governance and regulatory framework for fisheries in the UAE, KSA and Oman.

Kathleen specialises in developing world first or new programs relating to oceans, marine protected areas, islands, climate change and energy in complex multiple jurisdiction environments.

She considers herself a global citizen. She holds Australian and British citizenship and UAE residency. Since 2009 she has lived between Europe and the Middle East and prior to this she lived in Australia and New Zealand. She is fluent in English and has intermediate capability in French.

Kathleen is a sailor and scientific diver and has created award winning documentaries about the Great Barrier Reef and Lord Howe Island, working with French and German television. She also held the position as the Chair and Co-President for Filmmakers for Conservation.

Annual General Meeting and Elections

This year's Annual General Meeting will be held in conjunction with our June monthly meeting (date and program to be announced). The normal March date was postponed due to Committee absences. At the AGM there will be a brief report on trends and events over the past year and on the DNHG's finances, and we will elect the Committee for the coming year.

The current Committee members have agreed to stand for re-election, with the exception of Margaret Swan, who will be leaving the UAE with her husband at the end of May and will be relinquishing her position as *Gazelle* Editor.

This means that **we are in need of a new Editor**. The DNHG has been lucky to have had a succession of relatively long-term editors, each of whom has seemed to enjoy their responsibilities, and each of whom has made the *Gazelle* their own. **If you would like to consider this opportunity**, please contact Chairman Gary Feulner, Vice Chair Val Chalmers, or Editor Margaret Swan. Contact info is shown on page 8.

More generally, the existence of the Committee does not mean that your help is not welcomed or is not required. The DNHG depends entirely on volunteer efforts and we are all busy, so help is always welcome. If you would be willing to help out in one way or another, please let a Committee member know.

In particular, **we need more members who are willing to lead field trips**, especially outdoor field trips. You do not need to be an "expert" to lead an interesting and enjoyable field trip. It takes a sense of adventure and curiosity – a willingness to look closely and wonder "What (or why) is that?" – and a willingness to share the experience. Good field trips are learning experiences for everybody, even the leaders.

DNHG Recordors

Reptiles - Dr. Reza Khan
050 6563601

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi
res: 06-5310467 off: 06-5583 003
lankefi@emirates.net.ae

Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi (contact as above)

Geology - Gary Feulner
res: 04 306 5570
grfeulner@gmail.com

Insects - Binish Roobas
050 243 8737
johanruphus@hotmail.com

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
res: 04 4572167
mobile: 050 8305018 email:
valeriechalmers@gmail.com

Plants - Valerie Chalmers
(contact as above)

Archaeology - Anelisa Lambert
056 6904508
anelisalambert@gmail.com

Seashells - Andrew Childs
050 4590112
andrew.childs@eim.ae

Bird Recorder— Panos Azmanis
050 7083555
azmanis.vet@gmail.com

Mammals—Jacky Judas
04 354 9776
050 6181026 jjudas@enwwf.ae

From the Editor:

Eid Mubarak to all our members! An extended Eid al Fitr provides more opportunities to explore the great outdoors before the summer months set in. Early morning or late afternoon are the best times to appreciate and observe nature's bounty.

Due to its popularity, the 'UAE Military Tour' with Athol Yates, one of the trips from the Inter-Emirates Weekend (IEW), was repeated in April.

If you have missed any of our newsletters, visit www.dnhg.org to view past issues.

Enjoy your read!

Spotlight!

Night Walk at Jebel Faya, by Chandrashekar Sardesai

Baluch Ground Gecko



Urchin Beetle



Sindh Sawscaled Viper



DNHG trip to Ras al Khaimah mosques, by Michelle Sinclair



Mosques that have fallen into disrepair

An unusual mammal sighting

In the early spring fellow DNHG member Lesley Murphy and I were exploring the environs of Wadi Kub in Ras Al Khaimah. Towards the end of the day, as we swung into the sandy flats before one of the dams, we disturbed a mid-sized and magnificently horned mammal, the likes of which I'd never seen in the Emirates. It was not a goat nor a tahr but Lesley, who enjoyed membership of the UK's Paignton Zoo as a child, posited that it could be a Barbary sheep.

I pursued the animal on foot as it had moved only a short distance away and was observing us from the mountain top. It was sandy coloured, had a magnificent ruff under the chin, shaggy hair above the knees and a fetching yellow ear tag. I managed to take some close ups before it deftly descended

to the wadi base and its excellent

camouflage made it hard to follow as it crossed the hillside. Paul Vercammen from the Sharjah Breeding Centre confirmed Lesley's field ID – this was a young male Barbary Sheep, *Ammotragus lervia*, likely an escapee from a private collection. Paul added: "They are originally from the mountainous areas of the Sahara from Morocco to Sudan but adapt very well to any other hot and dry habitat if they have a water source nearby. There are several subspecies recognized of which some are Critically Endangered. There are feral populations living in Southern Spain, even with a hunting quota, and in the Southern states of the USA".

Keep a look out in the Wadi Hatta area also as Barbary sheep have been spotted there several times in the past few years.

Contribution by Angela Manthorpe



Sheep on the move



Under observation

Field Clips

tuberculatus). The bats appeared to be mostly Sindh bat (*Rhyneptesicus nasutus*).

None of these animals (except the Jewel Beetles) were noticed during the DNHG's two day visits. This shows the difference between day-active animals (diurnal) and night-active animals (nocturnal) which share a single habitat. By night, we found several day-active animals like Palm Doves and Southern Grey Shrikes roosting and sleeping.

Most spiders are nocturnal. Those we found active at Wadi Faya were from the family Philodromidae (Running Crab Spiders), Family Lycosidae (Wolf Spiders) and Family Araneidae (Orb Web Spiders). Our light helped attract insects around which gave a good meal for spiders. We managed to photograph the Sand Wolf Spider (*Evipa arenaria*) catching a fly.

The evening temperature was mild during our visit and this should continue into May, so perhaps another DNHG field trip, by night, will be coming soon.

Contribution by Binish Roobas and Chandrashekar Sardesai

Dhayah Fort

In climbing the steps to the top of the hill, walkers can see a panoramic view of Dhayah Bay, displaying its multitude of mangroves.

With a need to defend this much sought-after fertile oasis, the fort was constructed on older foundations during the 19th century. A restoration process in the 1990s provided steps for easier accessibility.

A larger, mud-brick fort was built nearby on the ground, where people and their animals could be protected from potential raiders.

The mountains behind the fort also conceal abandoned dwellings, constructed from rocks. The dwellings are in full view but difficult to see, as they are cleverly camouflaged.

On my last visit about three years ago, a fence cut off access to the lower fort and some of the burial chambers. I understand this is now a protected area. However, if visiting the Musandam over Eid, it is worth the short detour before crossing the Omani border. Why not step back in time and be rewarded with some amazing Instagrammable photos. You would also learn about some important local history. Look online for more information about this unique hill fort and the surrounding area, which has housed settlers since the late Bronze Age.

Contribution by Margaret Swan



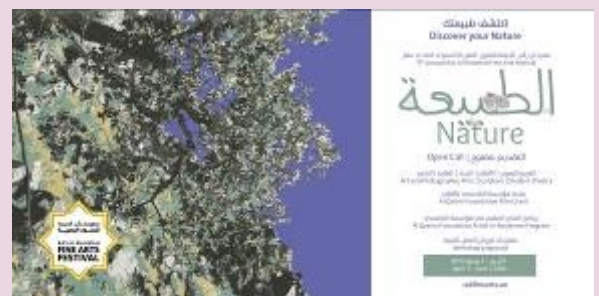
Sand Wolf Spider



Long horned beetle



Rough-tailed Bowfoot Gecko



The 11th Ras Al Khaimah Fine Arts Festival invites artists, filmmakers, photographers and poets to reflect on their relationship with the landscape, plants and animals, fellow human beings, our planet and the universe.

Deadline for entries is 1st June 2022

Submission and further details can be found at

<https://www.rakfinearts.ae>

Discover your Nature

Inter-Emirates Weekend (IEW)

Several events took place in and around Abu Dhabi between 25th—27th March, 2022. Hosted by the Abu Dhabi chapter of the Emirates Natural History Group (ENHG), members gathered at the Mafraq Hotel for the Inter-Emirates Weekend (IEW). Members from the Al Ain and Dubai chapters were able to join a variety of outings and a dinner where the annual Emirates Natural History Group Award recipients were announced.

The two awards are graciously bestowed by HE Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan, patron of the ENHG and are outlined as follows:

The Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Prize for natural history is given to a person who has made a substantial, original contribution to knowledge of the history, natural history, culture, archaeology or palaeontology of the UAE, such contribution being reflected through means such as publications and lectures. The award was instituted by the ENHG Patron, HE Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan, and comprises an inscribed silver dhow and a cash prize.

The 2021 Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Prize was awarded to Dr. Jacky Judas.

Jacky has a PhD in tropical ecology of collared peccaries in French Guiana. Over his 17 years in the UAE he has made significant contributions to many studies of the UAE fauna such as his work on the Houbara, the Greater Spotted Eagle, the Arabian Leopard and other organisms such as bats, damsel and dragonflies, and owls. He has also shared his knowledge at talks and with authorities frequently. Jacky's work in organizing camera trapping for mammals in Wadi Wurayah National Park and in collating the results from the van Harten UAE Insect Project in WWNP has been significant so that there now exists a sizeable background list of insect species. He also invited the attention of European dragonfly experts. His achievements are many but when asked what he cherishes most, it was being involved in the discovery of species new to the UAE.

The Bish Brown Award is given to a person who has made a significant contribution to promoting wider interest in the objectives of the UAE's natural history groups, through means such as educational activities, raising public consciousness in the media, playing a leading role in NHG activities etc. The award was endowed by former Vice Chairman, Terry Adams and former Secretary, Caroline Adams, to commemorate the founder of the ENHG, J.N.B. 'Bish' Brown. The award comprises a silver mounted eagle, to be held for one year by the recipient, and a cash prize.

The 2021 Bish Brown Award was awarded to Ms. Claudia Steuber.

Claudia, who is Chair of the Abu Dhabi Chapter of the Emirates Natural History Group has an MSc in Geology and Palaeontology. She has been Chair of the AD Chapter since October 2020, taking on the role at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic where her significant efforts to single-handedly keep the Chapter going during trying times were very successful. Her enthusiasm and curiosity have been infectious and have led to a steady stream of zoom lectures, field trips and continuation of the newsletter, as well as most recently in pulling off the first face to face IEW since the outbreak of the pandemic. It should be noted that she managed to pull together a small yet dedicated team of AD ENHG members and committee members that support her.

On behalf of the Al Ain Chapter of the ENHG, and all NHG members, heartfelt congratulations are expressed to both recipients, with grateful thanks for their contributions.

Brigitte Howarth, Chair Al Ain Chapter of the ENHG

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The winning photographs from entries over the weekend are featured below and on the next page:



Category: Flora—photograph of a Caper flower *Capparis spinosa* (Winner: Angela Manthorpe)



Category: Fauna—Reptiles—photograph of a Rock Agama *Pseudotrapelus jensvindumi* (Winner: Angela Manthorpe)

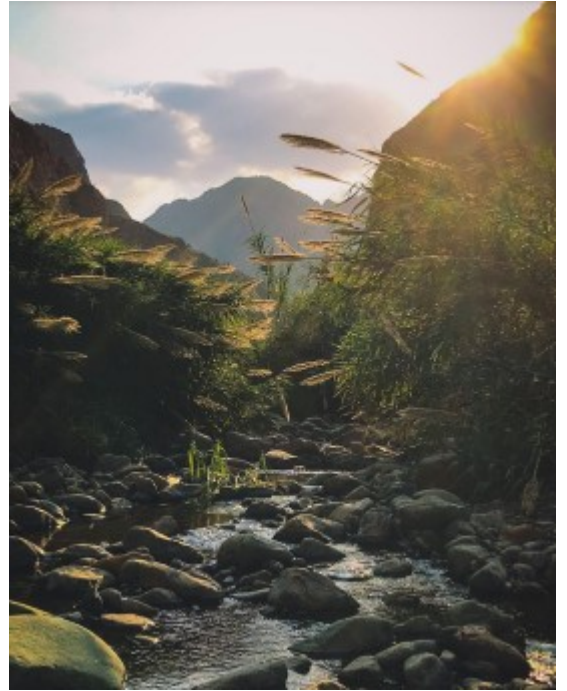
(Continued on page 6)

Inter-Emirates Weekend (IEW) continued

(Continued from page 5)



Category: Fauna—Insects (Winner: Monica Falini)



Category: Landscape (Winner: Sami Ullah Majeed)



Category: Fauna—Birds (Winner: Sami Ullah Majeed)



Category: Culture (Winner: Sandi Ellis)



Left

Category: Art—Journaling (Winner: Molley Torrey)

Right

Category: Art—Drawing (Winner: Rakhi Sawalani)



Field Trips

Mosques of Ras Al Khaimah

Up until the 1940's the mosques of Ras Al Khaimah had no minarets. The first mosque visited, though over one hundred years old, has had a minaret added in more recent times.

In the villages of Ras Al Khaimah in former times mosques were small and were built to house a maximum of ten people. Friday prayers were considered to be the most important prayers of the week and people in remote outlying areas would travel far distances to attend prayers at the mosque on Fridays at noon time to hear the sermon delivered by the imam. For those not able to fit in the mosques they could pray outside the mosque and this area was called the musalla.

A masjid is a place specifically built for prayer. It can be built of stone, mud, or cement. The musalla is a place where a person conducts his prayers outside the masjid and can be an open-air space.

A mihrab is a niche in the wall of a mosque or religious school (madrassa) that indicates the direction of Mecca (qibla), which Muslims face when praying.

In the very first mosques built at the starts of Islam the mihrab pointed toward Jerusalem, but the direction was changed in the second year of Islam for the mihrab to point toward Mecca.

The first mosque we visited was more than one hundred years old and situated close to a main road and at the foot of a rocky outcrop and close to a village. The mosque was still being used and was well preserved.

The second mosque we visited in a wadi plain has been looked after by the local community for 120 years. The mosque however was no longer being used by the community and the ceiling in parts had collapsed. The branches from locally grown trees used for the ceiling dictated the size and width of the mosque.

We visited mosques built in the 1950s and 1960s and the materials used for these mosques differed considerably to the mosques built one hundred years ago. The mosques of the 1950s and 60s used brick, concrete, barasti, wooden toners for the roof and plaster. Many mosques from this era are no longer used and have fallen into disrepair.

We visited the palm gardens and mound of Kush, an important archeological site. It is believed this site has been occupied since the Bronze Age and right into the era when Julfar was an important port with Kush as its centre. The large mound in the Palm Garden was initially excavated by Derek Kennet, the project leader and archaeologist who divided his time between Oxford University and Ras Al Khaimah.

The mound has been built up by the accumulation of many centuries of human habitation on one site. Much of the early architecture in this region was of mud brick which erodes more rapidly than stone and has to be replaced periodically.

The remains of housing complexes in the areas were built of mud and these have not weathered well and are for the most part crumbling.

Kush is situated at Wadi Bih and its palm gardens facing the sabkha, were once a lagoon. With the beginning of Islam, northern Ras Al Khaimah was known as Julfar, and Kush was at the centre of Julfar. We visited a mosque close to the mound built in the mid-20th century with a barasti roof and open sides.

Our final visit was to the Sheikh Mohammed Bin Salim Al Qasimi Mosque. It has sixty interior columns. A mosque existed on this site in the 16th century and was rebuilt in the 18th century and then destroyed. The mosque has undergone several expansions and renovations from the 18th century up until today. The current mosque is built of coral stone. Beach rock was used to in older versions of the mosque and formed part of the modern renovation initiative. The coral stone and beach rock has been plastered over.

Contribution by Michelle Sinclair (more photos can be found on the Spotlight page)



Dubai Natural History Group (DNHG) Programme 2021/2022

Monthly lectures are presently transmitted via Zoom, starting at 8.00pm

16th May Kathleen Swalling will present an illustrated talk on
“Our Oceans: Balancing the beauty and the benefits”

DNHG Field Trips

21—29 May Archaeology of Peloponnese (Greece)

9—16 July Northern Sumatra

Please note that field trips will only take place in accordance with current Dubai Government regulations. These have been relaxed but participants still need proof of vaccination or proof of PCR test not older than 72 hours upon registration/arrival.

DNHG COMMITTEE 2020/2021

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

	Name	telephone	email
Chairman	Gary Feulner	04 306 5570	grfeulner@gmail.com
Vice Chairman	Valerie Chalmers	050 830 5018	valeriechalmers@gmail.com
Treasurer	Puneet Kumar	050 452 4820	puneetcps@gmail.com
Membership Secretary	Alessandra Pipan	054 7771183	lssndr.ppn@gmail.com
Speaker Co-ordinator	Michelle Sinclair	050 458 6079	sinclairmichelle611@gmail.com
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Sonja Lavrenčič	050 256 1496	lavson@gmail.com
Member-at-Large	Pradeep Radhakrishna	050 450 8496	wgarnet@eim.ae
Member-at-Large	Anindita Radhakrishna	050 656 9165	anin@eim.ae
Newsletter Editor	Margaret Swan	050 798 4108	gazelleeditor@gmail.com
Librarian/Book Sales	Angela Manthorpe	058 135 4143	manthorpe2005@yahoo.co.uk
Postmaster	Sandi Ellis	050 644 2682	sandiellis@gmail.com
Chief Engineer	Binish Roobas	050 243 8737	johanrphus@hotmail.com
Website Co-ordinator	Alexis Biller	055 103 9014	alexis.biller@gmail.com

Postal Address: DNHG, PO Box 9234, Dubai, UAE

DNHG Membership

DNHG membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership for the current year is valid from September 2020 to September 2021. In consideration of the restrictions on our lectures and field trips due to COVID-19, **all members who were paid up (or considered paid up) for 2020—2021 will be automatically renewed for 2021-2022**, without a renewal fee.

New members can join by (i) sending to the Membership Secretary (see above) a completed one-page membership form, which can be downloaded from our website (www.dnhg.org) and (ii) making payment to our Emirates NBD account by cash deposit or transfer from your 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.