



GAZELLE



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

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Contributors —

Thanks to the following members for their contributions this month:

- Angela Manthorpe
- Chandrashekhar Sardesai
- Gary Feulner
- James Conder
- Kateryna Fomenko
- Khaled Rafeek
- Sonja Lavrenčič
- Teresa MacGregor-Kerr



Physorrhynchus chamaerapistrum

Jebel Hafit

.....see page 6.....



Butterflies - Hilltopping

As a keen hiker I have topped many hills but it was not until February 2023 that I experienced hilltopping. This term refers to the habit of certain insects, such as butterflies, to seek out a topographic high point in search of a mate. Males of certain species gather on summits and ridges and, sometimes for days they will employ one of two strategies: the first is to lay claim to a choice location, which is vigorously defended when other males come by; the second strategy is to patrol back and forth along the ridge, in the hope of being first to encounter a passing female.

I had gone to a peak overlooking the Kalba Dam – the same location which the DNHG visited in March. My objective was to find a Diadem butterfly (*Hypolimnus misippus*) which Lesley Murphy had reported seeing earlier in the month. At the base of the slope near the water the Asian Grass Blues were sporting around *Glinus lotoides*, the silt-loving plant that explodes into life after a flood. As I climbed a little higher several Painted Ladies fluttered away from my feet.

After spring rains the entire hillside was dominated by the Brassica *Physorrhynchus chamaerapistrum* and its sprawling tentacles with purple flowers clamoured for the attention of the Desert White. But as I rounded the bend and walked the summit ridge I was suddenly surrounded by butterflies. Several species that I had not spotted on

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Announcements and Recordors



Ziggurat of Eridu, Iraq



Dumat al-Jandal, NW Saudi Arabia

Monthly Lecture

Monday 5 June 2023 at 7.45pm

Speaker: Martin Makinson

Topic: Representation of "Arabs" in Levantine and Mesopotamian Art and Texts in Antiquity

Abstract:

The Arabs were no latecomers in the Levant and Mesopotamia's intertwined histories. The first mention of them appears in the Kurkh Stela, in Shalmaneser III's 841 BCE account of the battle of Qarqar on the Orontes, when the Assyrian advance to the Mediterranean was halted (briefly) by all coalition of Central and South Syrian and Levantine kings, from Hamath to Judah. Sometimes in direct conflict with Assyria, at other times co-opted by Mesopotamian powers, Arabs, often ruled by queens and priestesses, appear to have either been gradually integrated into the Assyrian provincial power structure; at other times ruthlessly exterminated when directly threatening imperial interests. Gradual Arab infiltration into the Levant appears to have taken place for two reasons: camel domestication and the inception of the trans-Arabian trade on the one hand, and a gradual vacuum in the settled regions North and West of the steppes and deserts on the other, at a time when Assyria crushed every Late Hittite and Aramaean state of Syria after 744 BCE.

This presentation attempts to expose what can be known of the early Arabs "out of Arabia" in the eyes of their main beholder, the Assyrian: beyond the tropes, beyond the Mesopotamo-centric world views of order and chaos promoted by Assur, and beyond the stereotypical visions of "the other" as described in kings' annals and on Assyrian paintings and carved slabs.

Biography of Speaker:

Martin Makinson is a French and Australian archaeologist currently working for the Department of Antiquities and Archaeology of the Emirate of Ras al-Khaimah. He has studied at both University College London and the Sorbonne in Paris. He holds two masters degrees and is currently preparing a PhD on *"Territories, Cultures, Empires: The Assyrian presence on the Syrian Upper Euphrates, from the Late Bronze Age to the fall of Harran 610 BCE"*.

Martin Makinson has excavated extensively in Syria (in particular at Tell Shioukh Fawqani and Tell Ahmar), in Jordan, Lebanon (he is one of core staff members in charge of publication at Kfarabida, an Early Bronze Age site near Byblos, and has excavated at Sidon), in Iraq (Eridu), Turkey (Zincirli) and in Saudi Arabia and the Sudan. He has lived for long periods in the region, in Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Yemen, Lebanon and Libya.

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Mammals—Jacky Judas

From the Editor:

Please share with us through the email below your observations, stories, photos and captions of wildlife and nature in the UAE or abroad.

Email: gazelleeditor@gmail.com

Deadline: 20 June 2023. We look forward to hearing from you.

It is your contributions that bring the Gazelle newsletter to life!

Thank you for sharing!

Spotlight! Memories

Fond Memories of Gail Gordon

Word has reached us that Gail Gordon, a longtime member of the DNHG, recently passed away peacefully. Her husband George and her children Drew and Charlotte were at her side.

Gail was well known and well liked and was a regular at monthly lectures. She served as Postmaster for the DNHG from 1999 to 2001. Gail and her husband provided two records of the spectacular jellyfish, *Cephea* sp. In the spring of 1994, they devoted much time and effort to returning a stranded one at DOSC to the sea.

Those who would like to both pay and see tributes to Gail can go online to <https://www.facebook.com> > Facebook Groups "Dubai The good old days".

Visiting Al Faya / Maleha

Photos by Teresa MacGregor-Kerr and Sonja Lavrenčić



! Our DNHG experts investigating and analysing every piece of rock they came across !
! A very thorough job... well done !



(Continued from page 1)

the ascent were suddenly here - large male African Emigrants sparring with rivals, Common Swallowtails in abundance, a congregation of White Desert Black Tip (*Euchloe transcaspica*), and all of them darting and swirling in the breeze, over the top, along the sides and back again. It was magical, and it was hard to know what to look at so I dropped my bag and just sat. After a while I spotted the unmistakable black and white pattern of my target – a single male Diadem. He would settle momentarily before rocketing upwards to chase the larger swallowtails from his patch; such antics looked exhausting.



Diadem male

Although the airspace above my lunch spot was a frenzy of activity, closer to ground my eye was drawn to the less flamboyant antics of an Arabian Grizzled Skipper (*Spialia mangana*). This small, dark-brown and fast-moving butterfly set off repeatedly on low sorties. Although I could not follow it in flight, it did keep returning to a favourite perch in the sun, allowing me to photograph it for later identification.



Arabian Grizzled Skipper

Hilltopping behaviour is not just confined to butterflies. Researchers have observed dragonflies, wasps, beetles and bees doing the same. So next time you are on a peak, just allow a little more time to look out for this interesting activity and, if you find a particularly busy location let us all know.

Contribution and photos by Angela Manthorpe

“Butterfly native to India wings its way to the UAE for the first time” and well done Angela Manthorpe for being the first to spot it! Please click on below link to access the report:

<https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/2023/05/19/butterfly-native-to-india-wings-its-way-to-the-uae-for-the-first-time/>

Butterfly paradise? Or too much of a good thing?

The attractive yellow Common Swallowtail *Papilio machaon* is one of the UAE's largest butterflies. It is not very common in the UAE but can be seen regularly in mountain areas during the winter and early spring. In the Hajar Mountains it breeds on the sour-smelling *Haplophyllum tuberculatum*.

It also uses cultivated fennel *Foeniculum vulgare* as a larval foodplant (where it lays its eggs and where its caterpillars develop). Fennel is not common in the UAE but is nevertheless cultivated at some UAE farms. UAE Lepidopterist Khalid Rafeek tells the following story about cultivated fennel – a cautionary tale for both butterflies and naturalists.



A large Common Swallowtail caterpillar on cultivated fennel

The manager of a Sharjah farm reported to Khalid the presence of a large number of Common Swallowtails at a plot of cultivated fennel. The manager invited Khalid to visit and he did, but Khalid was puzzled by the absence among the fennel of any swallowtail caterpillars. They are usually large and conspicuous. Why were they absent, he wondered.

That is easy, the manager replied. White-Eared (a/k/a White-Cheeked) Bulbuls *Pycnonotus leucotis*, an introduced species, are now common in and around urban areas and farms, and were present at the farm in question. There they had "learned" that the fennel plot was a concentrated source of Swallowtail caterpillars and they had become skilled in searching for them and consuming them. So what had seemed to be a boon for the butterflies had instead become a boon for the bulbuls and, evidently, a poor strategic choice for the Swallowtails.

By contrast, the Swallowtails' native foodplant in the area, *H. tuberculatum*, is never common and individual plants are usually widely dispersed, making them less easy targets for predation.

Contribution by Gary Feulner, photo by Khalid Rafeek

Damanyat Island part 2 - a travel journal

The trip to Damanyat islands, traditional for many, became the first one for me. Weeks of anticipation, worries that there is not enough interest and the trip might be cancelled... and here we are boarding the dhow. Everyone is excited, chit-chatting and smiling. But the smiles soon became less wide and then eventually were replaced by frowns - the water was full of green algae. The dhow continued following its course through the swamp-like waters and the thoughts like "no way will I swim in THIS" became a permanent resident in my head. A couple of passing by sea snakes were a very welcome distraction.

The captain was optimistic saying there was a chance that the water would be getting clearer closer to the islands. It happened. Partially. But by that time people were so charmed by the view of the islands and turtles swimming around that nothing could stop us from jumping off the boat, not even not-so-clear and still pretty cold water. A kingdom of sea cucumbers, corals, surgeonfish and turtles grabbed all the attention. Those at the boat also had their share of entertainment as some turtles preferred a solo swim around the dhow. A ray passed by gracefully - near enough to be noticed by us but far enough to be properly photographed or identified.

After the camping place was chosen and the wait for the tide over, we headed towards "our" beach. But what a boring trip it would be without any emergency situation, right? We are not boring! So here it goes... The little queen of the dhow, the 9-month old Emily, distracted her mom and her mom's iPhone performed its own spectacular dive. The rescue team, aka The Loving Husband, The Diver and The Spotter, were dispatched one by one. To cut a long story short, the phone was rescued, the heroes were praised and the dhow continued on to its destination.

After putting our tents up on the beach and between the bushes, the group divided itself into smaller groups and people went snorkeling (by that time the water was much clearer) and bird watching. The bird watchers came back pretty excited by all the bird species they managed to spot - which they will report separately, I believe.

After the dinner, a small group of people, me included, went to search for scorpions with the black light. Luckily (or not?!) on the path up the hill, right behind our tents, every second bush provided one. Exciting? Yes. Scary? Yes and yes!

People went to their tents hoping for a good peaceful sleep. Little did we know that bridled terns, which gathered on the bushes next to and in between our tents, had different plans for the night – cackling non-stop until the morning.

The morning brought to us more snorkeling, bird watching and further exploration of the island.

The sea was generous enough to show us Green and Hawksbill turtles, Sohal Surgeonfish, Yellowtail Surgeonfish, Parrotfish, Sea Cucumber, Bluetail Boxfish, Broomtail Wrasse, Indo-Pacific Surgeant, Diadema Sea urchin, eels and much more. Some were lucky to see a Porcupine Ray and a baby shark.

The shores were home to crabs, barnacles and chitons, Rock Semaphor Gecko and definitely more lizards and other creatures judging by the traces.

The birdwatchers spotted a number of herons (Striated, Grey and Reef), cormorants (Socotra and Great), ospreys, Red-wattled lapwings, whimbrels, common greenshanks and sandpipers, different kinds of gulls and terns, etc.

On the way back to Seeb the weather got a bit too windy but we safely made it to the port.

Overall, it was a great experience and I am grateful to Sonja Lavrenčič for organising the trip and to the group members for being awesome trip mates.

Contribution by Kateryna Fomenko , photos by Chandrashekhar Sardesai, James Conder, Kateryna Fomenko and Sonja Lavrenčič



Awesome trip mates



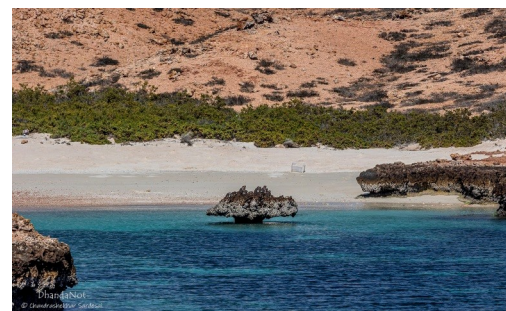
Persian Gulf Sea Snake



Scorpion in the dark



A bale of turtles



A hidden beach

Jebel Hafit: A multidisciplinary exploration

Members old and new enjoyed a fascinating day at Jebel Hafit in late April. Geology and archaeology were the stars of the show but fossils, minerals, plants, birds and reptiles played cameo roles. Geological Engineer David Kingston introduced the mountain as a singular, stand-alone ridge south of Al-Ain that straddles the border with Oman. It sits some 25 km from the main mountain front and yet, at just over 1200 metres, is one of the tallest peaks in the Emirates.

Jebel Hafit: Geology

Structurally, Jebel Hafit is a large upward fold (an anticline) in the underlying Tertiary sediments, which were deposited during the ca. 30 million years after the Hajar Mountain ophiolite was slid onto the edge of Arabia. Jebel Hafit is distinctly asymmetrical, as we all saw. The folded sedimentary strata are much steeper on the east side than on the west, an orientation somewhat at odds with most other structures in UAE mountain areas. The same sedimentary strata are oil producing horizons in the subsurface to the west.

The underlying forces that created it are still active today: the slow, inexorable collision of Arabia with the Eurasian landmass in the area of present day Iran. The orientation of the fold is probably influenced by its position between two major subsurface thrust faults related to the ophiolite emplacement from the east. Faults in the basement rocks below those thrusts may also have influenced the exact position of the fold.

David's handouts showed how subsurface structure is inferred from seismic and magnetic studies. Along the summit of the ridge, he also called attention to the many smaller scale structures that accompanied the overall anticlinal deformation, including slumping within the original sedimentary layers, small faults transverse to the main structure that helped release local stresses and mineral crystallization in fractures.

We also observed how small scale chemical processes within the rocks led to the formation of chert or flint nodules or aggregates of crystals of calcite or aragonite (both CaCO_3). Some very symmetrical mineral formations provoked speculation that they might be fossils; one such discussion was ultimately arbitrated online by David's son, also a geologist and more specialized in sedimentary chemistry.

It was an advantage to have the mountain largely to ourselves on a Saturday morning. True to form, the mountain showed off its population of Egyptian Vultures, globally endangered but still regulars at Jebel Hafit. We saw no sign, however, of the recently introduced Arabian Red-Legged Partridge, an import from SW Arabia.

Jebel Hafit: Archaeology – Hafit tombs et al.

In the afternoon we headed for the base of the mountain on its east flank, where the late Sheikh Zayed had personally invited European archaeologists to inspect the hundreds of stone cairn tombs that dotted the pediment. Admission to the area was AED 10 per head and we had lunch on the plain at a rustic outdoor restaurant / snack bar and picnic site (where our group was greeted by a welcoming drink!).

The development of this area for tourism (as Jebel Hafit Desert Park, under the AD Department of Tourism and Culture) has been unobtrusively done, allowing visitors to feel something of the excitement of first discovery. There are also discreet trails on the rocky plain for walking, mountain biking, horse or camel riding, and even skateboarding. Overnight accommodation is available in eco-pods. 4WD is recommended for all but the main vehicle track, due to rocks, sand and the inevitable washboard roadbeds.



Jebel Hafit Desert Park



Jebel Hafit pseudo quarry



Gravel surface where flint was worked in Neolithic



Jebel Hafit tombs in landscape



Jebel Hafit tombs

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After lunch, Anelisa Lambert introduced us (in A/C comfort) to the Hafit culture, dating from ca. 3,200 to 2,700 BCE (ca. 5,000 BP), which occupied the whole of the mountain areas of the UAE and northern Oman. The primary evidence of the Hafit culture is their stone 'cairn' tombs, of which thousands adorn ridges and terraces throughout the mountains and adjacent plains. Virtually all of the tombs have been entered and disturbed to some extent, or destroyed. Grave goods and human remains have been very scarce and the Hafit people did not manufacture their own pottery. Limited imported pottery and other items correlate the Hafit culture with the Jamdat Nasr period in Mesopotamia.

In consideration of the increasing afternoon heat, we motored to the site of a small number of photogenic restored tombs. We also detoured to unrestored tombs on the slopes (they look like rocky volcanoes) and to a cave-like embayment along the mountain front, where we found large owl pellets containing a rodent skull and jaws, as well as local lizards and arthropods. Exiting the area by car, we had views (rare, these days) of a dhub (the spiny-tailed lizard *Uromastix aegyptiaca*). The dhubs and the local vegetation may profit from the cessation of camel grazing within the park area.

A few participants extended their visit to drive by rough graded tracks to an area of unreconstructed tombs (still very much like visiting decades ago), and to a chain of low, gravel-topped mounds where Neolithic hunter gatherers (preceding the Hafit culture by several millennia) worked flint from Jebel Hafit into stone tools.

A botanical highlight was a field of dry *Anastatica hierochuntica*, the Rose of Jericho or Hand of Mariam, which weathers dry spells as a tangle of small woody branches, waiting to open and expose mature fruits when the next rains come.

Our thanks to David and Linda Kingston, Anelisa Lambert and Sonja Lavrenčič for organising and leading the Jebel Hafit trips.

Contribution by Gary Feulner, photos by Gary Feulner, James Conder and Sonja Lavrenčič



Restored tombs in Jebel Hafit Desert Park



Try to help the tombs last another 5,000 years



The debate between Agnieszka & Sonja "Is this a crystal or a fossil?"



"Sofia's pellet"



Close-up of the Hand of Mariam (*Anastatica hierochuntica*) awaiting the rain



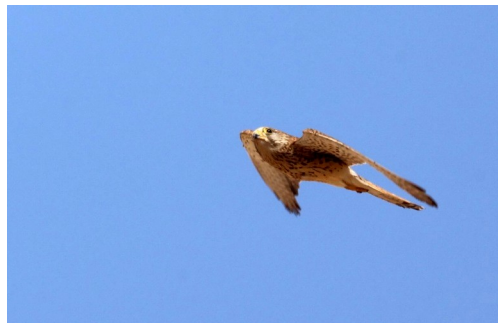
A field of *A. Hierochuntica* at Jebel Hafit, an unusual sight



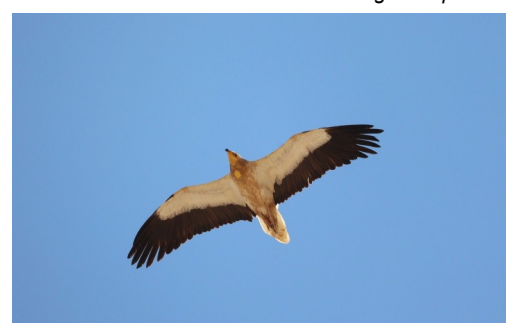
Rodent skull & upper canine teeth in a large owl pellet



Dhub



Common Kestrel



Egyptian Vulture

Dubai Natural History Group (DNHG) Programme 2022/2023

DNHG Lectures 2023

5 June: "Representation of "Arabs" in Levantine and Mesopotamian Art and Texts in Antiquity"
by Martin Makinson

DNHG Field Trips 2023

3 June: Hidden gems of Sharjah - Al Mahatta Airport Museum, Al Hamriya Art Gallery,
Al Meraija Galleries, Sharjah Art Museum

September: Discovering Slovenia (*itinerary to be revealed later*)

For more information on upcoming lectures, field trips and membership please refer to
the DNHG website www.dnhg.org

To sign up for field trips, please contact: Sonja Lavrenčič at lavson@gmail.com

Next season???
UAE's secrets?
Eritrea? Socotra?
Zanzibar?
What would **you**
like to experience?

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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 2022 to September 2023. As we have started hybrid meetings from September 2022, renewal fees can be paid at meetings or by the methods mentioned below.

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.