



GAZELLE

مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

DNHG Field Trip: Sharjah Museums

On the 22nd of November members boarded a Bello Bus and headed first to the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation to see the exhibition 'Early Capitals of Islamic Culture' and then on to the Sharjah Archaeology Museum which was exhibiting 'Ancient Bahrain: The Power of Trade'.

The following are some of the member's highlights of the trip.



'The bronze feline incense burner, from approx. 1100 AD, at the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation took my fancy.'

Teresa MacGregor-Kerr

Inside this month

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DNHG FT: Wadi Shuwaiyah

Contributors

The Editor would like to thank the following for their reports and contributions:

Andrew Childs, Tamsin Carlisle, Teresa MacGregor-Kerr, Richard Ashmore, Helga & Willy Meyer and Gary Feulner



'What stood out for me were the 'early biological weapons' found in the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation. As early Islamic scientists experimented with gunpowder they created pottery grenades filled with poisonous creatures such as scorpions and snakes. The small air holes in the grenade casing indicate that there were live animals inside!'

Peter Olliff

'The 'Ancient Bahrain: The Power of Trade' exhibition at the Sharjah Archaeology Museum consisted of 150 artifacts that reflected Bahrain history from the 2nd millennium BC to the 3rd century AD. It included pottery, glass, ivory objects, stamps and gold, but my favourite was the statue of a woman pulling out her hair!'

Richard Ashmore



'I particularly appreciated the gallery devoted to Islamic science and innovation. In this gallery and the main hall were displayed a number of fine examples of precision instruments developed centuries ago during the so-called Golden Age of Islam with applications in astronomy, navigation and civil architecture, among other fields.

In the hall was a superbly sculptured water clock in the form of an elephant with riders and elaborate superstructure incorporating symbols from the furthest reaches of the Islamic world.



The museum did an excellent job of explaining how many of these innovations were developed in response to particular needs of the Muslim faithful, such as accurate time measurement to determine when to pray and navigational aids to help pilgrims find their way to Mecca and Medina.'

Tamsin Carlisle



'Our highlights included the careful and gentle bus driver, such friendly and welcoming staff at both museums, the brilliant exhibitions with breathtaking artifacts and the great company!'

Helga & Willy Meyer

Announcements

IMPORTANT REMINDER: Membership

DNHG membership was due for annual renewal in September 2014, for membership through to September 2015.

Members who have not renewed by 15th January 2015 will be **removed from our mailing list.**

To renew your membership please contact our Membership Secretary, Anindita, by emailing:

anin@emirates.net.ae

Memberships can also be renewed at the January lecture on 11th January 2015.

Membership is still a bargain at only 50dhs for individuals and 100dhs for families.

Next Month's Speaker

The DNHG are delighted to welcome Dr. Himansu Sekhar Das who will be giving a talk titled:

"Dugong Conservation in the UAE – Challenges and Opportunities"

Dr. Himansu Sekhar Das is a passionate and dedicated marine scientist who has devoted approximately 20 years of his career to the research and conservation of marine resources, coastal wetlands and marine endangered species in the tropics.

He is presently working with the Environmental Agency of Abu Dhabi (EAD) as the Unit Head of the 'Marine Threatened Species and Habitats' program, which includes several landmark programs for the conservation of endangered species and habitats, including that of dugongs, sea turtles, mangroves and seagrass ecosystems.

Prior to his present assignment, Dr. Das worked as a scientist, specializing in wetland ecology, at the Ministry of Environment and Forests for the Government of India. His work on coastal wetlands of Andaman and Nicobar Islands earned him a 'Young Scientist's Award' from the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme in 1996.

Dr. Das is the regional chair of the IUCN-Sirenian Specialist Group (Indian Ocean Region), a member of IUCN-Marine Turtle Specialists Group and conducts technical and awareness workshops with stakeholders for conservation of natural resources.

Inter-Emirates Weekend - Thursday to Saturday 19th to 21st February 2015

Inter-Emirates Weekend 2015 will be hosted by the Dubai Natural History Group and will be based in:

Ras Al Khaimah at the Golden Tulip Khatt Springs Hotel.

Registration will commence on Thursday night, 19th February. The programme of activities will begin early on Friday morning, 20th February.

Planned activities on Friday and Saturday include archaeological tours in RAK and UAQ, nature walks in Wadi Bih and elsewhere, mangrove walks, birdwatching at coastal and inland sites, touring in old RAK and at Khatt plantations, shell collecting in RAK, and boat rides in RAK Khor and around Sinaya Island, UAQ.

On Friday evening there will be a group dinner, a distinguished speaker, Christian Velde (resident archaeologist in RAK), the annual Natural History Awards presentation and a photographic competition.

The hotel has reserved 50 rooms for the Thursday and Friday nights on a first-come first-served basis, **at a preferred rate.**

However, participants must book by 15th January. All bookings received after that date will be subject to room availability and the normal rate will be applied.

Information on room rates and booking have already been circulated by email.

Seashell Alert!

The DNHG has been notified that the recent Shamal has left unusually large numbers of seashells washed up along the high-water line at the north end of JBR Beach, near the SkyDive Dubai runway.

Any DNHG shell collectors are therefore advised to get down there fast!

Special thanks to Tamsin Carlisle for keeping us informed.



#207 *Lambis lambis**Volva volva**Turriturris turritus*

Shell-shock. A third step in the challenging world of Bosch shell identification.

Shock – we have just realized almost 18 months has elapsed since we started collecting shells!

The purchase of “Seashells of Eastern Arabia” changed our lives more than we would imagine. Without the clear photographs we would not have been able to identify many of our collection.

We have also learned that juveniles and worn shells can often produce forms or colours that are very differ-

#1005 *Chlamys noduliferus*#473 *Homalocantha anatomica*

ent. A big “thank you” must go to Gary Feulner for his insight into the fact that location, shape and aperture are the most important considerations, and that colour should only be the last component of identification. His help in shell-identification technique was invaluable when we started out.

We have in some cases only found worn examples, such as #473 *Homalocantha anatomica*, where even the overall form makes it difficult to identify the species. There are other shells where the colour disappears or even changes completely when worn; *Cypraea nebrites* becomes purple, yet retains the brown side blotches for identification. That confused us for a long while, as we couldn't understand why there were no purple cowries shown.

Sandy Fowler's 2005 *Rough Sheller's Guide* is a useful extra reference document, available free online. We have remarked how much the listed UAE beaches have changed over the past ten years. He lists some shells that are not in “the book”, and we have been lucky enough to find examples of both *Volva volva* and a slightly worn *Turriturris turritus*.

We have found some shells which closely resemble the photographs, yet we are unsure as to whether they are in fact examples of these shells, or whether they are subtly different variations, or indeed a different shell altogether. One example of this is #47 *Osilinus kotschyi*, where we found delicately striped examples when we drove onto Ghaghah Island in the far North-West of the UAE. An-

other is a shell from Masirah, which we initially thought as a misshapen #36 *Clanculus pharaonius*, but we now believe may instead be *Thaliota conica*, although not known from this region!

There are several other shells described in the book, yet are not illustrated in photographs. One anomaly which puzzled us for a long while was #1005 *Chlamys noduliferus*. We had found several specimens which we could not identify. However, finally we saw that it is shown on the book's front cover but not inside! Other unillustrated specimens we have found include #207 *Lambis lambis* and #343 *Semicassis bisulcata*.

Both cone shells and cowries have been long-time favourites with collectors world-wide, with many hundreds of varieties of each, in beautiful colour variations. Some people build their collection solely of these shell families. For Eastern Arabia, the Bosch book lists 41 cowries with 6 varieties not shown, plus 44 cone shells with 3 not pictured. We should also check the *Strombus* family as these can sometimes be mistaken for cone shells. We have collected some shells, almost black, believed to be #203 *Strombus persicus*, where the colour is very much darker than described in Bosch.

When trying to identify some cowries, we have found that the sub-adult colouration can be so very different from the adults that it is difficult to match them, particularly the quite common #258 *Cypraea grayana*. The whole subject of the fragile and beautifully coloured juvenile cowries, which are also such a different shape when compared to the adult version, is a whole different article waiting to be written.

Report by
Andrew Childs

DNHG Field Trip: Al-Qudra Lakes, 15 Nov



© Tamsin Carlisle

Birdwatching New and Old

On our mid-November trip, DNHG Bird Recorder Tamsin Carlisle introduced many of us to a new birdwatching site, one apparently better known at this point to cyclists, runners and dog-walkers than to bird-watchers or naturalists. The Al-Qudra lakes, said to be a chain of



© Tamsin Carlisle

Pied Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*)

five, are set in former desert in inland Dubai, within the perimeter of the new cycling track near Endurance City, just a short distance from the main parking lot for cyclists.

The lakes, some of which are ca. 500 meters long, are lined with plastic and the area surrounding them is landscaped with thousands of drip-irrigated trees, mostly *Acacia farnesiana*, a native of Arabia although not the UAE. At least one lake is stocked with what appear to be carp.

At the smallest and nearest of the lakes, where food is set out for the birds, we found a medley of some 200 relatively tame waterfowl present at sunrise – white swans, black swans, lots of mallards, geese of various sorts (Egyptian, Greylag and probable hybrids of White-Fronted), Common and Ruddy Shelduck, and various wild and domestic ducks (including Northern Pintail, Australasian Shoveler and at

least a couple of non-Arabian exotic species such as Mandarin and White-Cheeked Pintail, the latter from Central and South America). Most of the exotics are likely to be local releases; one clue is that several pairs of the White-Cheeked Pintail included one mostly white partner, a variant favored by bird breeders, called the Silver Bahama Pintail.

More ducks (Mallard, Ferruginous, Gadwall, Pochard and others) were present at another of the lakes, along with a pair of Common Gulls and, at a distance, a Grey Heron and a Great White Egret. But the star of the morning was unquestionably a single Pied Avocet – a first for many participants – which gave us good views. (Along still another lake we saw about a dozen caged and sheltered cranes, resembling the Common and Demoiselle Crane. We surmised that they were being habituated for release in the area.)

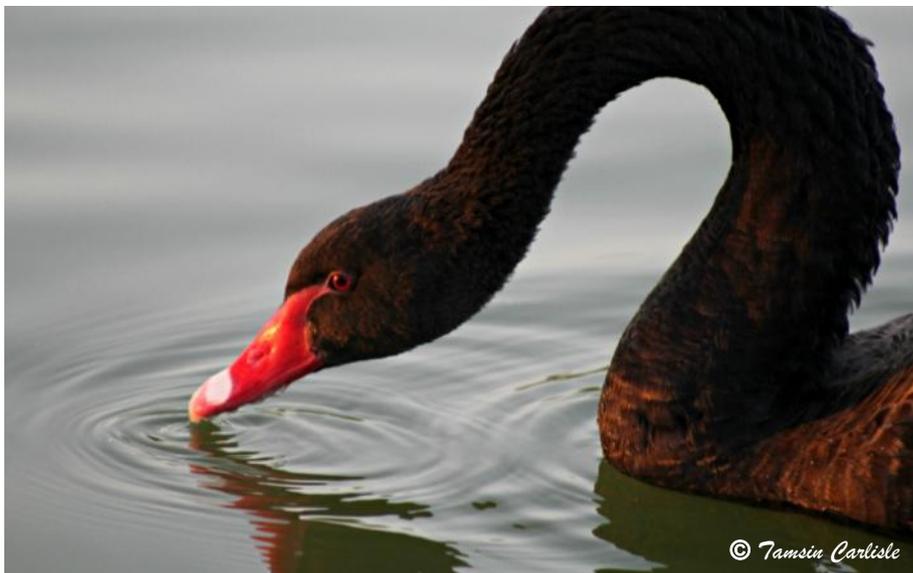
Later in the morning we convoyed to Dubai's birdwatching standby,

the Pivot Fields, now nearly eclipsed from view by the new Dragon Mart and Dubai Textile City. Activity had calmed down by the time we arrived, although there were still plenty of White Wagtails and Red-Wattled Plovers on the turf. My personal favorites there were two Pipits, Richard's and the Red-Throated, which as usual had to be puzzled out by the book.

Members who have not visited the Pivot Fields for a while may be disappointed to see that the south-west pivot is no longer in use. Change is constant in Dubai and that corner of the fields is currently waste ground, given over to tamarisk trees and the low succulent *Sesuvium* sp., each circle of which was abuzz at midday with dozens of the local honey bee *Apis florea*.

Many thanks to Tamsin for an excellent morning, and for her subsequent research in identifying all of the non-native species.

Report by
Gary Feulner



© Tamsin Carlisle

Black swan (*Cygnus atratus*)



The common wolf spider of the Hajar Mountains, *Xerolycosa* sp., on a wadi wall

Life on the Wadi Wall

A characteristic feature of UAE wadis are vertical wadi walls cut in thick gravel terraces. For human beings these walls present a significant obstacle. The gravel layers may be lightly to strongly cemented. They have vertical strength sufficient to support thick piles of sediment (in some places up to more than 30 meters), but they are not laterally cohesive and are therefore unsafe to climb. The face of the walls are usually highly irregular, studded with irregular-sized, sub-rounded to sub-angular pebbles, cobble and boulders.

But for some specialized organisms, the wadi walls represent an opportunity. Among plants, the UAE's two species of *Lindenbergia* (Family Scrophulariaceae), *L. arabica* and *L. indica*, are both wadi wall specialists, typically found growing low on a wall, taking advantage of moisture percolating slowly down through pore space, cracks or solution channels in the coarse sediments.



Lindenbergia arabica, a UAE/Oman endemic plant and a wadi wall specialist

Among birds, Striolated Buntings (*Emberiza striolata*) often perch on wadi walls, and Pale Crag Martins (*Ptyonoprogne obsoleta*) may build their nests there (although more sheltered sites are usually favored). The Oriental Hornet (*Vespa orientalis*) sometimes also builds its communal hive on wadi walls.

Last summer we also found three distinctive spiders that had made their homes not far from each other on a 3 meter wadi wall in a gentle tributary of Wadi Wurayah. Spiders may have an advantage on the wadi walls over many other ground-dwellers; they can produce silken threads, which can serve both to anchor them and to act as a safety line in case of falls.

The first was a "Daddy Long-Legs" (Family Pholcidae), the round-bodied *Physocyclus globosus*, which is common in the mountains and often builds its irregular web across passages or openings. The second was the most common wolf spider of the UAE mountains, a species of *Xerolycosa* (Family Lycosidae), which was also common in wadis and gravel-covered slopes. Most wolf spiders actively pursue prey by running, so finding one on the wadi wall seemed unusual, but in fact the spider may have been using the wall for shelter.

The third spider we found was definitely sheltering. It was the large "Wadi Lion", a species of

Eusparassus (Family Sparassidae) and we found it tucked by day into a shallow recess in the wadi wall, with its legs pulled in close around it. Tattered silk hung in the hollow. Disturbed, it fled about a meter to the edge of the gravel terrace above. This species is an active hunter and, although it is probably primarily nocturnal, it has been seen feeding by day on a large hawkmoth caterpillar.

The very first Wadi Lion I saw, about 20 years ago, was also tucked into a hollow in a wadi wall, although I learned they also shelter in silken purses under stones. Do they somehow 'understand' that the wadi wall environment protects them from many terrestrial predators, and therefore dispense with the silken shield?

Report and photos by
Gary Feulner



Daddy long-legs, *Physocyclus globosus* (female with spherical egg case)



The Wadi Lion, *Eusparassus* sp., at large



The Wadi Lion, *Eusparassus* sp., sheltering in a wadi wall recess

Field Trips

DNHG Field Trip: Wadi Shuwaiyah

On the 28th of November DNHG members crossed into Oman and embarked on a full day walk in Wadi Shuwaiyah, lead by Liz Maley-Craig.

The walk past many interesting places to stop and explore, including ruins of an old village, abandoned fields, the site of an old graveyard (now destroyed), terraces and an old falaj system. At lunch time members stopped for a picnic and refreshing dip in a swimming hole.

DNHG member Tamsin Carlisle made the following observations during the field trip.

Birds: On the plateau and transitioning in the craggy areas was a fair-sized colony of Hooded Wheat-ears (*Oenanthe monacha*). The males have black backs and wings with white bellies and head caps while females are brown and grey. The birds were skittish, not allowing me to get close, and unfortunately I only managed to get photos from a distance of cryptic females foraging on the plain.

The only other birds I spotted on the wadi part of the trip were Rock Doves (*Columba livia*) and Palm Doves (*Spilopelia senegalensis*) although, while waiting at the meeting spot near Dragonmart, I think I saw a group of lappet-faced vultures (*Torgos tracheliotos*) passing high over Pivot Field.

Reptiles: Liz spotted a lizard by the trail up to the plateau, which posed nicely for some of us to photograph. I have tentatively identified it as a female Sinai Agama (*Pseudotrapelus sinaitus*), distinguished from similar species by the



Unidentified grasshopper

slender build, long tail and large, fully uncovered tympanum (ear drum).

Amphibians: Several of us saw Arabian Toads (*Duttaphrynus arabicus*) both downstream and upstream from the swimming hole. I was lucky to find a male/female pair embraced tightly in the throes of passion, with the male gently serenading his lady. In fact it was the male's vocalizations that enabled me to find the mating pair.

Arthropods: In a gully leading down from the plateau, I found a Mediterranean Pierrot butterfly (*Tarucus rosaceae*) and a medium-sized brown grasshopper that I haven't managed to identify.

Along the water course in the wadi were many red dragonflies – males of at least two species which I have tentatively ID'd as the Gully Darter (*Trithemis arteriosa*) and the Orange Darter (*Trithemis kirkbyi*). I managed to get both species framed in one photo, so you can easily see the difference.

The males were mostly seen perching on rocks next to running water. The females (brownish gold in color for both species) appeared to be hanging out elsewhere. I found one female *T. arteriosa* near a pool with a shaded rock overhang, but didn't get a clear photo. I had more luck photographing females of a larger dragonfly species, which I think was *Orthetrum ransonetti*, a species that is globally uncommon but locally abundant in certain wadis in the northern UAE and Oman. Most of the specimens I saw were in flight, but I also observed a couple of females pause to deposit a few eggs in eutrophifying parts of the water course before flying onwards.

Other insects I saw at the stream margins and in isolated pools included whirligig beetles, pond skaters and a number of hornets drinking.

Contribution and photos by
Tamsin Carlisle



Arabian Toads (*Duttaphrynus arabicus*)



Female Sinai Agama
(*Pseudotrapelus sinaitus*)



Gully Darter (*Trithemis arteriosa*) and
Orange Darter (*Trithemis kirkbyi*)



Mediterranean Pierrot Butterfly
(*Tarucus rosaceae*)



Possible *Orthetrum ransonetti*? laying eggs

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Are You a Techie with Time?

The website sub-committee would like to find volunteers who can help with maintenance of the on-line newsletter, and to upload the wealth of information and photographs from past *Gazelles*.

Full training will be given.

Please contact any Committee person - we will be very pleased to hear from you!

Slovenia Field Trip, June 5-13, 2015



Slovenia is a small independent country in the heart of Europe with only 2 million inhabitants, who have managed to preserve their culture and language despite millenniums of foreign domination.

Previously one of the six republics of Federal Yugoslavia, Slovenia has been independent since 1991, been part of the European Union since 2004 and has adopted the Euro as a national currency in 2007.

Despite its small size, Slovenia is a country of significant biological, geographical, climatic and cultural diversity: Alps, Mediterranean, Pannonian Plain, Karst, rivers, forests, lakes and caves. It is a place where Slavic, Romanic, Germanic and Hungarian cultures and languages meet.

During our intensive 9-day tour of Slovenia we will visit all the most important sights, as well as some hidden gems of this country.

For more information please contact Sonja at lavson@gmail.com

DNHG Field Trip Policies

Members are reminded that DNHG field trips are cooperative ventures among the participants, for their mutual benefit and enjoyment. DNHG field trip leaders are not normally professionals or experts, but fellow members who have agreed to share their time and their knowledge with other participants, on a volunteer basis. The relationship of trip leaders and participants is that of co-venturers, not professional and client. For these reasons field trip participation is limited to DNHG members and their bona fide non-resident guests.

Various dangers are inherent in travel in and around the UAE and in the exploration of the natural environment, whether by automobile, by boat, on foot or otherwise, and whether on-road or off-road, in the cities or countryside, in the mountains or deserts or at sea. By participating in DNHG field trips, members accept these risks, and they accept responsibility for their own safety and welfare. Field trip participants are normally required to sign a waiver form to this effect. Without these understandings, the DNHG would be unable to sponsor field trips or to recruit volunteers to lead them.

Field trips vary in both format and organization, depending on the nature of the trip, the number of participants, and the preferences of the field trip leader. If the number of participants is limited and sign-up is required, members should make every effort to honor their commitments or to give timely notice otherwise, as a courtesy both to the trip leader and to other members who might like to have the chance to participate.

The Dubai Natural History Group on Facebook

You can now 'Like' and 'Follow' us on Facebook to receive regular updates on upcoming regional events, reminders for monthly lectures and field trips, as well as general information on the natural history of the UAE.

www.facebook.com/DNHG.UAE

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

January 11: Dr. Himansu Sekhar Das: Dugong Conservation in the UAE – Challenges and Opportunities

February 1: Julien Charbonnier: The development of the Falaj System

Field Trips (Members Only)

February 19-21: Inter-Emirates Weekend

Mar 29 - Apr 3: Andaman Islands Trips

April 3-11: Nepal Hill Country

June 5-13: Slovenia

Further field trips, details or changes to trips will be announced/confirmed by email circular

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Contributions

Do you have a field report, unusual finding, interesting news article, book review, amazing photograph, or community news to share?

If so, email your contributions to: gazelleeditor@gmail.com

(Arial 10 justified).

DNHG Membership

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at 100 Dhs. for families and 50 Dhs. for individuals. Membership is valid from Sep 2014 to Sep 2015. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to HSBC account no. 030100242001. (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 AE900200000030100242001. However, this process does not identify you as the payer. If you wish to pay by cash, please also scan and e-mail a copy of your payment confirmation 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.