



# GAZELLE

مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

## Khor Kalba and the Kalba Birds of Prey Centre

Places on this trip were in high demand. Unsurprisingly, as Khor Kalba has been closed to the public since 2012.

Participants assembled at the khor (creek, or salt water inlet), for what was to be a rare insight into the development, or rather, the de-development of the khor.

John Pereira and other members of the conservation team informed the group of the uniqueness of the mangroves, within the United Arab Emirates. He also explained about the recovering wildlife, now that major human presence has ceased.

If you compare Google Earth with 2012 and 2015 he pointed out, you will visibly



A Golden Eagle gets his reward.

see the difference of Khor Kalba, The khor is part of the **'Blue Carbon Project'** John added.

Comparing the mangroves in Khor Kalba to those in Abu Dhabi (which have been planted in recent years) carbon sequestration measurement has proved that the Khor Kalba mangrove forest is much older, at least 350 years old.

Significantly less footfall has also seen the recovery of a rare mangrove crab (*Scylla serrata*) and other species, including fish and turtles. Indeed, young turtles could be seen from the bridge, swimming under the water, surfacing only to breathe air. John explained that both Green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) and Hawksbills (*Eretmochelys imbricate*) have nested on the beach, with Loggerheads being observed in the vicinity.

Currently, there are about 63 pairs of White-collared Kingfisher (*Todiramphus chloris kalbaensis*) living in the mangroves, but around six or seven nests are lost per year to predators, such as the black rat, Indian mynah and the common crow.

There are no females but ten young, male gazelles have been introduced and are under observation. They are free to wander at will, but prefer to stay close by.

Camera traps have also been set up to capture time-lapse images of wandering creatures - one image recorded was that of a red fox.

The group walked to the sandy, pristine beach, where undulating sand dunes formed. These constantly build and change, due to the time of year and tidal flow,

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### Contributors—Thanks to the following for their reports and contributions:

Beverly McKay, Valerie Chalmers, Alexis Biller, Tamsin Carlisle and Puneet Kumar.

# Announcements

## Next Month's Speaker

The DNHG are delighted to welcome:

**Dr Atta Gaffar Attaelmanan,**

who will be giving a talk entitled:

**“The use of modern physics techniques in archaeological research.”**

**8pm on Sunday, 1 November, 2015**

Dr Attaelmanan Chairs the Department of Applied Physics at Sharjah University and specializes in Radiation Physics.

He has published research papers in many scientific journals and his research interests include Digital radiography techniques. Dr Attaelmanan, with others, also has current research projects in this field.

### DNHG Recorders

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### **Rhino Conservation Dubai Event on 9th November at DOSC (Dubai Offshore Sailing Club)**

Patsy Stagman will be giving you an opportunity to learn about the reintroduction of Black Rhino into Kenya and see how you can support great rhino conservation initiatives in South Africa and Kenya with your next vacation.

There will be complimentary canapes and a first drink. However, guests will have to pay the DOSC entrance at the gate of 20 dirhams. Only registered guests will have their names left at the DOSC gate.

See the [‘Rhino Conservation Dubai’](#) facebook page for further details.

### **“A Vanishing World”**

Award-winning photographer, Michel Zoghzoghi, is exhibiting photographs at the RIRA Gallery, on the ground floor of building 3, DIFC (Dubai International Financial Centre) from October 29 —November 12.

The Gallery is open weekdays between 10am—8pm but is closed on Fridays. Saturday open time is 12 noon—6pm.

Michel, who is supported by CCF, has travelled extensively around the world, using his spare time to capture amazing images of endangered animals.

All profits from Michel’s photography goes to charity and wildlife conservation projects.

Call **04 369 9339** (RIRA) for more info.

### **From the Editor:**

Trips during October included a walk around the Dubai Creek, a visit to Arabia’s Wildlife Centre in Sharjah and a trip to Kalba. Highlights from these trips can be seen in the photographs on the Spotlight page.

Thank you to those that have contributed to this issue. Any member can be a reporter. Any sightings of creatures from the natural world of the United Arab Emirates, and beyond, can be reported here. There could be something unusual happening in your back garden, as Beverly McKay points out on page 6.

Send your contributions to [gazelleeditor@gmail.com](mailto:gazelleeditor@gmail.com)

# Spotlight on ...

**Diera Fish Market, photos courtesy of Puneet Verma**



**Arabian Wildlife Centre, Sharjah, photos courtesy of Tamsin Carlise**



**Khor Kalba Nature Reserve and Birds of Prey, Kalba, photos courtesy of Alexis Biller**



### DNHG ANNUAL GET-TOGETHER

Our annual gathering, which has been postponed from June, will now be held at **Dubai Offshore Sailing Club, off Jumeirah Beach Road, Umm Sugeim 1, Jumeirah 3, on Thursday, 12<sup>th</sup> November 2015 at 7.30 p.m. for 8.00 p.m.** As one of the best kept secrets of Dubai, DOSC has an amazing ambience and location. The cost will be **Dh100/- per adult and Dh40/-per child (below 12 years) and includes buffet supper and gate fee.** As an alternative to the buffet, children may also opt for a special kids menu costing Dh18/- per child.



It will be a fun evening in a lively outdoor atmosphere near the beach. We have planned entertaining table quizzes (which include a video quiz) with prizes for the winning teams!

Tickets will be available at the meeting on **Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> November**. So make a date in your diary. If you cannot make the meeting, please email Valerie Chalmers at [valeriechalmers@gmail.com](mailto:valeriechalmers@gmail.com) by **Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> November** in order to obtain your tickets.

Parking is available at DOSC and there is also another area for parking next to DOSC. A list of DNHG Members coming to the event will be given to security at the entrance to DOSC and this list will need to be handed in at least 2 days before the event. When members enter the gate their names will be ticked off the list.

Directions to DOSC will be sent to all those coming to the event.

## Field Clips

### Persian Leaf-toed Geckos at Jumeirah Beach Residence, Dubai



H persicus adult



H persicus juvenile

Geckos are not common in Jumeirah Beach Residence, where I live, but I have made a point of looking for them while walking in the area after dark and have made a handful of sightings over the past two years.

Wherever possible, I have also photographed geckos from this location and attempted to identify them. Indications are that all the JBR geckos I have encountered belong to a single species, but it is not one I was expecting to find. Rather, the species of nocturnal gecko I have occasionally observed on the walls of flower beds and low buildings in the JBR area appears to be the Persian Leaf-toed Gecko (*Hemidactylus persicus*) which, while known to be present in the UAE, has not previously been recorded from an urban environment in this country.

The identification has been confirmed by herpetologist Andrew S. Gardner. In his 2013 book *The Amphibians and Reptiles of Oman and the UAE*, Gardner states that, at time of publication, *H. persicus* in the UAE was known only from Qarn Nazwa, a

rocky outcrop in the sands east of Dubai, and populations on Dalma and Sir Bani Yas islands, and in Oman from Dhahr in the mountains east of Buraimi. He describes the species' typical habitat as consisting of "rocky and mountainous areas with fissured vertical rock, caves, underground water channels, from sea level to 670 m." Gardner also states that *H. persicus* is "apparently not a house gecko in Arabia, though it has occasionally been found in houses in Khuzestan, Iran." He says the species is strictly nocturnal, active at night on vertical rock faces, boulders and horizontal rock slabs, resting in caves and deep rock crevices during the day. My observations suggest that *H. persicus* has now moved into at least one southern Arabian urban location characterized by building facades that mimic its natural habitat. Moreover, although Gardner confirmed my species identification from photographs of a single adult specimen, I have also encountered juveniles, both previously and subsequently, suggesting the presence of a breeding population of the species at JBR. This would represent both a range and a habitat extension for *H. persicus* in southern Arabia.

Another noteworthy observation I made during summer 2014 was of a nesting pair of Common Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*) feeding medium-sized geckos, consistent in appearance with *H. persicus* to their chicks. There is a large Common Myna population at JBR that could pose a significant predation threat to geckos and other small lizards in the area, helping to account for their apparent scarcity.

Tamsin Carlisle



Mynah with  
gecko, JBR



Mynah with gecko



Mynah feeding gecko to its young

### Velvet Mite

You may recall from a previous issue, an article by Peter Oliff, requesting information about an elusive red spider that he observed in Ras al Khaimah:

*"During a wadi walk near Nehaila Dam in RAK I came across a completely red spider, which had weaved its web between 2 rocks."*

*(Gazelle, June, 2015, p.3)*

Dr. Marijcke Jongbloed, a long-established member, has cleared the mystery up by identifying it as a velvet mite (*Thrombidium* sp.) which is also an arachnid. Marijcke goes on to say that these tend to appear after heavy rain, and are sometimes called rain bugs. More information on these mites can be found [here](#).



Drew Gardner, a former Chairman of ENHG Abu Dhabi, was also drawn to the article, and suspected the creature was a velvet mite, corroborating Marijcke's identification. Drew took the above photograph at Seih al Milheh, near Sweihan a few years ago.

However, this still doesn't explain why Peter's spider was sitting on a web—looting another's prey, perhaps?

Gazelle Editor

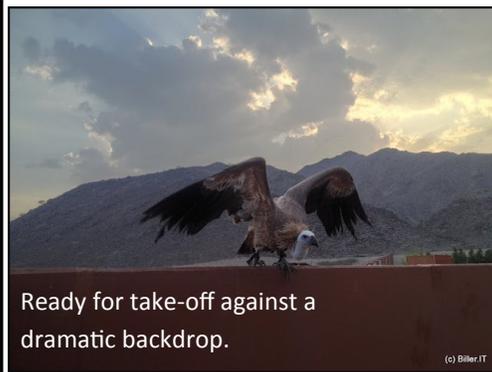
## Field Trips and Clips

(Continued from page 1)

another member of the conservation team explained.

There are plans underway for an hotel to be built at the entrance of the khor, next to the sea but the ecology around the mangroves will still be protected, John stressed. Bird hides are also in the planning, as well as an educational visitor centre.

Following a pleasant picnic lunch by the water, the group later met at the Birds of Prey Centre, located on the border of Kalba city. Some arrived early to view the exhibits, prior to the 4pm show. Some also explored Al Ghail Fort, built on a hill within the Centre. The tower has a 360 degree view of the surrounding vista. Enemies (or merchants) approaching by road or sea, could be seen from his vantage point, well in advance.



Overlooking the plains, mountains and sea (in the distance on the left)



Acacia, Date Palm, Mango, Almond and Sidr are some of the trees that grow on the plains in this area. Being close to the mountains, precipitation occurs more frequently here than in Dubai. In fact, one or two raindrops fell during this visit.

In addition to birds of prey, domestic animal exhibits included goats, camels, and bulls. Information was clearly displayed on the front of the pens, or cages.

The birds of prey, the compere explained, were all donated to the Centre by people living within the Emirates. The grand finale, performed by the massive vultures, was quite thrilling, as the magnificent birds whooshed over heads, the in-flight wingspan causing a gushing downdraft.

We were rewarded on the way home, by a beautiful sunset over the mountains.

Report by Margaret Swan

Photographs by Alexis Biller



## Streaked Weaver Bird

This is a juvenile male streaked weaver bird (confirmed by Tommy Pedersen).

It joined other birds visiting my window ledge for bird seed, in August, 2015.

From what I can tell from our various bird books, this species is not that common in the U.A.E. and even less so in Ras al Khaimah, where we live.

See also the photograph of a Weaver Bird, Tamsin Carlisle took at the Sharjah Wildlife Centre (on page 3).

Contribution and photos by Beverly McKay



## Field Trip

### DNHG Deira Fish Market Visit on October 11<sup>th</sup>

Recently, it was once again announced in the media that the Deira Fish Market as we know it, would soon be replaced by a new one in the same area. Feeling a bit nostalgic, we therefore decided that it might be a good idea to visit the old market one more time before it disappears.

Traffic and parking in the Al Shindagah area of Dubai can be a big problem. That's why our rather small group of 12 DNHG members met at 4.30 p.m. at the Al Ghubaiba green line metro station, in order to walk to the Deira fish market, using the pedestrian underpass to cross the Creek to the Deira side. This small and easy walk takes about 30 minutes from the metro station.

Despite the still very hot and humid conditions, the first gruesome sight at the fish market was a large amount of sharks of all shapes and sizes lined up on the concrete platform just outside the actual market building.

Despite the carcasses being cooled by large quantities of ice in the trucks, some of the dead cartilaginous fish already showed signs of decomposition. Some sharks might have been transported to Dubai all the way from Salalah! Certain specimens measured more than 3 meters in length. There were some very big Halvi Guitarfish (*Rhinobatos halavi*) as well.



A rather unusual sight was the large number of rare and endangered Thresher Sharks (mainly the pelagic thresher *Alopias plagicus* and the Bigeye thresher *Alopias superciliosus*).



According to shark specialist Dr. Rima Jabado, Thresher Sharks occur seasonally in Omani waters. They are indeed very different from other sharks both in appearance as well as in behaviour.

For those who are interested in Thresher sharks, I recommend watching the following short YouTube video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lHoCCPsRuhg>

We also saw many Shortfin Mako Sharks, (*Isurus paucus*). These are the fastest of all shark species and can swim up to 80 km/h!

We also noticed one shark with unusually

round fins (second from right on the following photo), which was later identified by Dr. Rima Jabado, as an Oceanic White Tip (*Carcharhinus longimanus*). Watch a three-minute BBC video on Oceanic White Tips at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-uA8t7-msY>



As a follow up to our visit to the Fish Market, Dr. Rima Jabado, Founder and Lead Scientist at [Gulf Elasmobranch Project](#), invited us to attend a very interesting presentation to the Emirates Diving Association about her work on elasmobranchs (sharks, rays, guitarfish and sawfish) in the Arabian Seas.

Summing up our visit to the 'old' Deira Fish Market one can say that, as always, it was fascinating and horrifying at the same time. The shark fin trade is as lucrative and booming as always. Nothing seems to have changed. Despite a new, big car park building next to the market we did not notice any new fish market building.

Rima continues to work on her [Gulf Elasmobranch Project](#). On her website is a fabulous identification guide to the Sharks of the Arabian Seas. If anyone decides to visit the Fish Market, Rima is always grateful for photos and reports.

*Report by Martina Fella*



While we were busy taking photos and trying to identify the different species, more and more trucks arrived to offload dead sharks.



## Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

December 6: Members Night.

January: Speaker and topic to be announced via circular email and on facebook

### Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

October 31: Al Qattara Oasis and handicrafts market in Al Ain

November 7: Sharjah Planetarium

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

## DNHG COMMITTEE 2015

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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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 Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership is valid from September 2015 to September, 2016. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to HSBC account number 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 AE900200000030 10024001. 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 help 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.