



GAZELLE

مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

www.dnhg.org

Mleiha Archaeological Centre



Jebel Fayah Rock Shelter

Set within its own world class field area, Sharjah's Mleiha Archaeological Centre, which opened in January 2016, showcases and interprets the rich and unique archaeological heritage of Jebel Fayah, Jebel Buhays, Jebel Mleiha (Fossil Rock) and the surrounding gravel plains.

The Mleiha area has been known since the 1980s for its late Iron Age remains, which reflect a wealthy and relatively cosmopolitan community trading with many parts of the outside world, from ca. 300 BC to 300 AD. The famous burial of a horse with a golden bridle and a hybrid camel (Bactrian + dromedary) date from this period.

In the 1990s, excavations at the foot of Jebel Buhays revealed the UAE's oldest mainland settlement area, inhabited by pastoralists who probably migrated seasonally and including communal burials featuring shell and bead ornamentation.

In the 2000s, Palaeolithic stone tools were discovered in the area, as well as along the nearby Hajar Mountain front, representing a major extension of the history of human presence in the UAE.

By the 2010s, excavation of a rock shelter at Jebel Fayah and scientific dating of the stone tools found there yielded results that were truly revolutionary. They showed that anatomically modern humans had reached Eastern Arabia tens of thousands of years earlier than the then-prevailing "out-of-Africa" hypothesis presumed – a result that has recently found further support in dates for human presence in China and Southeast Asia.

The Centre displays this archaeological history through artifacts, photographs, graphics, films and clear, focused signage that conveys an intuitive sense of how the human inhabitants of the area lived and evolved. Two short films are especially good, one on

human migration from Africa via Eastern Arabia, the other on the construction of underground falajes (qanats) on the gravel plains to support farming, as at Thuqaybah in the southeast of the Mleiha area.

Throughout, the exhibit emphasizes the distinctive nature of the Mleiha area as an "inland basin", where the flow of water out of the Hajar Mountains in surface or subsurface channels was partially blocked by the ridges of Jebel Fayah and its neighbors, with the result that the water table rose in the gravel trough between them, occasionally exposing itself as springs, and making it susceptible to exploitation by wells and qanats.

But the Centre is not just a museum. The point of locating it *within* the Mleiha area is to allow visitors to view the sites for themselves. This can be done by a guided 4WD tour. A fleet of vehicles is available at the visitor center for that purpose and a tour is included within the AED 25 cost of admission. Some

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Palaeolithic (c. 125,000 BP) stone tools from the Jebel Fayah Rock Shelter



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

Gary Feulner, Angela Manthorpe, Tamsin Carlisle, Binish Roobas, Charles Laubach, Margaret Swan, Peter Jackson and Anelisa Lambert.

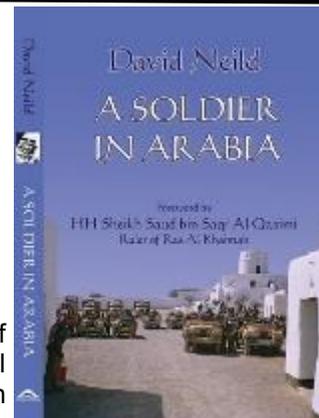
Announcements

Next Month's Speaker

The DNHG are delighted to welcome the following speaker, who will present an illustrated talk on:

“Sand in the Blood: A soldier in Arabia”

David Neild - David is the author of 'Soldier in Arabia' and featured at the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature this year. David Neild was born in Portsmouth in 1938, the second son of a Royal Naval Officer. In 1959 he joined the little-known Trucial Oman Scouts, a military force composed of British and Arab soldiers serving in the Trucial States – the states which would later become the UAE. At the age of 20 he was the youngest officer ever to serve in the TOS and it marked the beginning of a remarkable Arabian journey.



In the years between 1966 and 1972 he rose from Captain to Lt Colonel. He commanded the first Trucial Oman Scouts rifle squadron to be based in Ras Al Khaimah, where he formed a lasting friendship with the Ruler, His Highness Sheikh Saqr bin Mohammed Al Qasimi. Towards the end of 1968 HH Sheikh Saqr took the decision to establish his own independent Mobile Force and invited Neild to form and command it, provided he left the British Army. This was an offer he found impossible to refuse and he spent the next three years establishing a fully trained, effective force.

In 1972, Neild was asked to form and command the Sharjah National Guard. In 2013 he returned with his wife, Eileen, to the United Arab Emirates, where they reside today.

8pm on Sunday, 10th April, 2016

From the Editor:

'Spotlight' on page 3 features wildlife, culture and photographs from the recent three-day workshop, kindly hosted and arranged by Roberta Lattuada, and led by visiting photographer, Seniz Ozbey.

Tools from Palaeolithic times are exhibited at the recently opened Mleiha Archaeological Centre, amongst other exhibits. However, there is more on offer than you think. Read why on page 1. A field trip to the Centre is planned for 8th April but for those visiting on their own, opening times and further information can be found at:

<http://www.discovermleiha.ae> (copy and paste the link if it doesn't work)

Is Caralluma tasty or not? Find out on page 5.

Read why the scientific name for the Arabian Toad has changed once again, on page 7.

Field trips this month included a tour around Al Ain arranged by ENHG Al Ain on 18th (trip report on page 6) and a walk around historic Dubai which was offered to other ENHGs in addition to DNHG members on 19th.

Also, a three-day trip to Jebel Akhdar was scheduled for 25—27th, organized by ENHG Abu Dhabi.

Enjoy your read!

Trip Leaders needed!

Whilst there is always a good response to field trips, we need more hands on deck!

DNHG could not exist without volunteers. At least one other person is required to lead trips. Experience is not needed—and we will show you the ropes!

Please contact any member of the committee if you feel you could help.

Video to watch

Following David Heard's presentation last month, DNHG member Anelisa Lambert shares the following additional information from 'the old days' in the UAE:

I came across this short 15 minute film, made about the Imperial Airways outpost in Sharjah in 1937 when I was researching some museum information last month. It complements David's talk beautifully—very much a fascinating bygone era!

Should you have problems with the link below, you can simply Google 'YouTube Air Outpost 1937'

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?vJ6uYpq4>



Spotlight

Umm-al-Quwain/Bassata Desert Area, by Tamsin Carlisle



Schmidt's Fringe-toad Lizard (*Acanthodactylus schmidtii*)

Southern Grey Shrike (*Lanius maridionalis*)



Little Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*)



Thick-pincer Scorpion (*Vachoniolus globimanus*)



Donkey in Ghaf Forest

Sweihan Heritage Festival, Abu Dhabi, by Tamsin Carlisle



Photography Workshop experimental photos



Field Clip

(Continued from page 1)



Building an underground falaj in the early Iron Age (ca. 1200 BCE)

archaeological sites (or parts of them) have been substantially restored, like the large Umm an-Nar tomb that adjoins the visitor center. Others show the imagination that is required of the archaeologist in order to make sense of the fragmentary evidence available.

Among the prominent archaeologists whose teams have contributed to the work in the Mleiha area are Dr. Sabah Jasim of the Sharjah Archaeological Department, Dr. Hans-Peter Uerpmann of the Univ. of Tübingen, and Dr. Ernie Haerinck of Ghent University, and Dr. Michel Mouton of the Maison de l'Archéologie et de l'Ethnologie.

To reach the Mleiha Archaeological Centre, take the Mleiha Road (E44) east from Sharjah or E611. Exit to the south at the Mleiha exit and follow the main road through the town. The entrance to the Centre is marked by a large purple sign on the right (west) just after some palm gardens south of the town.

Contribution by Gary Feulner (photos show displays at Mleiha Archaeological Centre)

Hefaiyah Mountain Conservation Centre

In early March, the Ruler of Sharjah, H.H. Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, inaugurated this latest entry in Sharjah's network of natural history venues, which stretches across the Emirate from sea to sea.

Hefaiyah is situated on the East Coast, on the rocky plain at the base of the mountains, a couple of kilometers inland from Khor Kalba on the Mleiha-Shawkah-Helo-Kalba road (a/k/a the "Two Tunnels" road). It showcases (in air-conditioned comfort) the mammalian fauna of the mountain and plains environments, in the form of a very large Arabian Leopard, Striped Hyenas, Arabian Tahr and Mountain Gazelle, as well as a "night hall" for Gordon's Wildcat, Blanford's Fox, White-Tailed Mongoose, hedgehogs, Wagner's Gerbil and the Egyptian Spiny Mouse. The imposing Desert Eagle Owl and the clever Brown-Necked Raven are also displayed in an outdoor setting.

Architecturally, the Hefaiyah centre recalls Wasit Wetland Centre. The visitor is inside, looking out, with clear, open views. Between exhibits, the hallways are decorated with natural history-themed artwork by local artists. A wall panel also gives an introduction to the rock art (petroglyphs) of the Hajar Mountains. Throughout, the signage is generally easily read and emphasizes a few key "take-away" points. Statistical details can be found in boxed text.

For those who aren't wedded to air-conditioning, it's possible to take a buggy ride around the perimeter of the centre to view the plains animals with binoculars from raised viewing hides.

In glass-fronted tanks indoors, mountain snakes, lizards, fish, amphibians and scorpions are also displayed. Here, however, I am obliged to say that a critical review and revision of some of the signage content would be a welcome. Some examples:

- The common wadi fish of the Hajar Mountains, the endemic

Garra barreimiae, has inexplicably been assigned the English name "Common Log Sucker", although it will be news if anyone ever sees it on a log.

- Of a larger wadi fish, a minnow (genus *Cyprinion*), some carelessness creeps in: "This fish will only grow as big as the pool it lives in" – presumably because, if it grew any bigger, it would stick out of the pool. (The text might better have been used to highlight this fish as one of the rarest vertebrates in the UAE.)
- The male Sinai agama (*Pseudotrapelus sinaitus*) is said to turn blue in the mating season, but in fact it does not change color for the season (like a male duck, for example), but it can turn blue, at will, when displaying.
- Of scorpions (several large specimens fluoresce in their tank, under ultra-violet light), it is written that there are 15 species across the Middle East, but the figure for Oman alone is ca. 40 species.

One non-native mammal species, the Rock Hyrax of southern Arabia, is also featured at Hefaiyah. Hyrax have a reputation for being active, inquisitive and bold. Sharjah's wildlife experts are among the most experienced in the Middle East, but they may have to exercise their full measure of skill to keep these gallon-sized elephant cousins (distant cousins) enclosed.

Contribution by Gary Feulne (photo by Peter Jackson)



Field Clips

Caralluma for dinner anyone?

On a recent descent from a mountain village in Ras Al Khaimah I bumped into Sultan, an Emirati who was at the family farm for the weekend. Slung over his shoulder was a bag which I could see contained some fairly hefty greenery. Following my enquiry he pulled out a sprig of bright green caralluma and proceeded to explain that although it didn't have much taste, it was good for the health.

Caralluma arabica, which I come across often in the mountains, is a succulent and member of the milkweed family. It had never occurred to me that it was edible – the photo shows its typical grey appearance and the smell of the dark red flowers is unpleasant - vaguely like rotting meat. Nevertheless, trusting in Sultan's recommendation I gave the sprig a quick wash and ate it; it was firm and rather sour, not unlike the Iranian gherkins I usually have in camp. Just for information, I suffered no consequences from this snack but I do not encourage others to raid the next bush they find!

Once home I consulted 'Natural Remedies of Arabia', by Robert Lebling and Donna Pepperdine, which had this to say: "Caralluma is well known to the hill folk of Oman, who pound up the stems and prepare a tea which is reported to be good for liver ailments". Furthermore, the juice of a related species "is used to curdle fresh milk, which is given to the sick for convalescence and as a general tonic" and the juice from the stem can also be used to soothe burns.

Contribution and photos by
Angela Manthorpe



Charles Laubach responded to the 'Prickly Pear' article by Gary Feulner in the January, 2016 issue:

I liked your article on *Opuntia stricta* (the Prickly Pear cactus). I had not realized that this was not indigenous to the Old World, given how ubiquitous it is in Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan. Because I thought they were indigenous, I concluded that they could not be true cacti (which I know are native to the New World). I was wrong!

It is edible. If you go to a juice bar where they liquefy fresh fruit, you can sometimes get Subbar juice. I have tried it in Beirut and, although it looks funny, it tasted good. You can also get a Nopales salad at Maria Bonita's here in Dubai. It seems (so far) that the Prickly Pear (at least the exported species) can tolerate a "Mediterranean" climate but not a "real" Arabian one.



Photo: [Invasive Species Specialist Group \(ISSG\)](#)

Field Trip

Al Ain—18th March

One can view a lot more from a bus and evidence from the recent heavy rains was very much apparent on the way to Al Ain. Gaping gulleys in the sand left cables suspended in mid-air and trees with roots exposed, lingering tentatively.

Al Ain members, Verena Davies and Mary Lanaghan led a very pleasant walk around Wadi Nahyan, where honey bees, beetles and lizards were observed. Interesting geology along the route threw the occasional shade of pink and orange.



Interesting strata.

After lunch, the bus ascended the Jebel Hafeet road, pausing in the allocated park to provide photo opportunities for all. A lucky few even managed to spot the vultures that reside on the mountain.

Amro Abu Kuhail welcomed us at our next stop, the Al Ain Oasis. Amro provided an excellent explanation of how



Operational insect trap.

female palm trees are fertilized, going on to explain the many uses that the palm tree provides. Other trees identified in the oasis were the fig and mango, with one mango tree in blossom. Crops included alfalfa, which is fed to animals.

We stumbled upon an interesting contraption. Amro explained that it was a



Beans, pulses and dried goods in the souk.

simple, but effective insect trap. Insects are attracted to a light, powered by a battery. The battery stores energy captured from the sun via a solar panel. Once trapped, insects drop into the bucket below.

A visit to the National Museum was next on the agenda, where we browsed the exhibits and artefacts at leisure. Afterwards, Amro led a tour around Al Ain souk, where a variety of dates was on sale, amongst an array of other consumables. Camel meat, goat and dried fish were on offer, as well as camel apparel and accessories, rope and a sweet dish called 'Omani Halwa.'

Thanks to all from the Al Ain chapter, who provided an in-depth insight into life around Al Ain.



Along the route.

Curious creature revealed!

Angela Manthorpe responded to the curious creature article in the February Gazelle. *"It is definitely a salp. We often encounter them when diving - they are colonial*



sea-squirts (tunicates) and are often found in long chains. They do not sting."

In the meantime, Angela has a mystery of her own, and wonders if anyone can identify the item in the photo below.

It was discovered in Dalkut, near Salalah in Oman, stuck to a metal post holding up the fence that protects a very large, lone baobab tree. Angela thinks it looks like an egg case of some sort, and it was approximately 30mm long.

Gazelle Editor

By Margaret Swan



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

Field Clip and DNHG Recorders



A toad by any other name: the Arabian toad, now *Sclerophrys arabica*. (Photo by Binish Roobas)

century specimen collected from the Cape of Good Hope and held in Paris at the Muséum Nationale d'Histoire Naturelle. They determined that it belonged to the species currently known as *Amietophrynus rangeri*. However, *Sclerophrys capensis* was first described and named in 1838, earlier than *A. rangeri* and also earlier than any other species in the genus *Amietophrynus*. This had implications for both the species name and the genus name.

Arabian Toad Changes Names Again – Why?

The latest scientific name for the Arabian toad, the common wadi toad of the UAE, was less than a year old. The change from *Duttaphrynus arabicus* to *Amietophrynus arabicus* was alerted to members in the September 2015 *Gazelle*. The same toad had earlier long been known as *Bufo arabicus*. The 2015 revision resulted from extensive DNA studies of many toad genera.

Now, Dr. Jacky Judas of EWS-WWF, Research Manager at Wadi Wurayah National Park, has advised us of a recent paper that requires a further change of name, to *Sclerophrys arabica*. This change, however, has nothing to do with further investigation of the Arabian toad itself. Instead, it illustrates how names can (and must) be changed in accordance with the formal rules of zoological nomenclature, for reasons external to most of the organisms involved.

In this case, distinguished French taxonomists (Ohler & Dubois 2016) were reviewing the status of an enigmatic South African toad, *Sclerophrys capensis*, known only from a single, early 19th

The rules of the International Convention on Zoological Nomenclature require that priority be given to the older (senior) name. That means, in this case, that *A. rangeri* should be known as *S. capensis* -- the first name by which it was described. But it also means that the genus *Amietophrynus* (established in 2006 as one of a number of genera created by division of the former genus *Bufo* on molecular genetic grounds) should now become *Sclerophrys*, after the (correct) name of its senior species.

Unfortunately, this change sets an additional booby-trap for future researchers. The ICZN rules require the genus and species name of a taxon to agree in gender in accordance with the rules of Latin grammar. That was not a problem for Linnaeus and most of his contemporaries, but it is a regular source of error in the present day. In the case of the Arabian toad, the genus names *Bufo*, *Duttaphrynus* and

Amietophrynus were all masculine, so the species name was always rendered as *arabicus*. However, the genus name *Sclerophrys* is feminine, so the species name must change to *arabica* -- and the same is true for each of the other species in the genus, more than 40 in all.

The ICZN rules provide for certain exceptions, for example for names published without a description, names not subsequently used in the relevant literature, or names that have been in exceptionally long and widespread use. However, the *Sclerophrys* researchers considered that no such exceptions were applicable to save *Amietophrynus*, and considering the status of the authors, it seems unlikely that their judgment will be challenged.

Contribution by Gary Feulner

DNHG Recorders

Reptiles - Dr. Reza Khan res: 344 8283 off: 344 0462

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

Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner res: 306 5570

Insects - Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers res: 394 8871 email: valeriechalmers@gmail.com

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Birds - Tamsin Carlisle mobile: 050 1004702 email: tamsin.carlisle@platts.com

Arabian toads sheltering from summer heat. (Photo by Gary Feulner)



Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

- April 10: David Neild—Sand in the Blood: A soldier in Arabia
 May 8: Dr Sabir Muzaffar, wildlife biologist
 June 5: Dr Panagiotis Azmanis DVM, Dr.med.vet, Dip ECZM (Avian)

Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

- March 25—27: ENHG Abu Dhabi visit to Jebel Akhdar (DNHG members invited to join)
 April 1—9: Nepal Hill Country
 April 8: Mleiha Archaeological Centre
 July 22—28 Kyrgyzstan

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

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When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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Annual General Meeting

The DNHG's Annual General Meeting was conducted at our March 2016 lecture. The officers shown above were re-elected for the coming year, but additional heads and hands are always welcome.

The latest records show continued high membership levels (>160 paid memberships, including both individual and family). In a summary of his written report, Chairman Gary Feulner highlighted excellent lecture attendance

and an active program of field trips, but emphasized the critical need for individuals willing to organize, lead and/or administer field trips.

The DNHG website was revamped and re-vitalized in late 2015 is now ready for prime time, although some fine tuning been earmarked and some additional features remain to be added. Vice Chairman & Secretary Valerie Chalmers received special acknowledgement for her tireless efforts in monitoring and coordinating DNHG activities and liaising with the membership.

Mother of the Nation Festival

March 24—April 2

Abu Dhabi Corniche

This Festival celebrates, commemorates and honours the inspirational values of Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak.

Visitors are invited to participate in this unique community event that celebrates the best aspects of contemporary culture within Abu Dhabi and the UAE. For more information, visit:

<https://abudhabievents.ae/en/Pages/mother-of-the-nation-festival.aspx>