



GAZELLE

مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

www.dnhg.org

Ruwayyah plantation, located on the outskirts of urban and suburban Dubai, is one of the older and larger plantation areas in the Dubai hinterland, where I have visited intermittently over nearly two decades. The failure to provide for formal entrances and exits from the Dubai–Al-Ain road still gives each visit some of the improvisational feel of visiting 20 years ago. There are, however, always surprises, and they are seldom predictable.

Among other things, it was at Ruwayyah with Stephen Green and his son Adam that we first recognized the presence of introduced Mollies (*Poecilia latipinna*) in the canals that border many of the agricultural plots.

A Molly (*Poecilia latipinna*) at Ruwayyah. Absent selective breeding, black aquarium mollies gradually revert to their wild, pale form.



Ruwayyah Tales and 'Alien' Snails

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

Tamsin Carlisle, Gary Feulner, David Edwards, Angela Manthorpe,

Send your contributions by
25th January, to
gazelleditor@gmail.com

Ruwayyah was also the site of my first the freshwater snail *Physella acuta* (and still only) Bluethroat (*Luscinia svecica*), skulking in dense vegetation, just as Colin Richardson (in the original *The Birds of the UAE*) said it should. More recently, Binish Roobas and I discovered a large huntsman spider that at Ruwayyah; it is new to the UAE (and perhaps to science). A shallow freshwater wetland on the edge of the plantations, formed from agricultural runoff, proved to be a hotspot for the migratory red dragonfly *Sympetrum fonscolombii*. Sadly for local naturalists, the wetlands has since been filled to become the site of a large Municipality workshop.

On my most recent visit, in early November 2016, I was surprised to find, in a corner of one of the irrigation canals,

the freshwater snail *Physella acuta* (formerly treated as *Physa acuta*), one of several 'alien' snail species that can be found in man-made water bodies in the UAE. *P. acuta* is widespread in Europe and the Middle East and is relatively easy to recognize because it is 'left-handed' (i.e., sinistrally coiled) and has a disproportionately large aperture. I saw it years ago in a decoratively tiled public fountain in Bam, Iran. In the UAE, it has been found in the ponds at the erstwhile Dubai Fish Farm (adjacent to the palace of H.H. Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum along Za'abeel 2 Road) and in the large pond at the main entrance to Media City. *P. acuta* may well be present by now in other new ponds within golf courses and upscale suburban residential developments.

(Continued on page 4)

Announcements and Recorders

Monthly Speakers—8pm on Sunday 8 January, 2017

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

“Catastrophes, Crashes and Crimes in the UAE during the 1970s”

Dr. Athol Yates has an Engineering Degree, and a Masters and Doctorate in Public Policy. He works at the Institute for International and Civil Security, Khalifa University, which offers a Masters Degree aimed at Emirati security professionals. He teaches civil security which covers professional security practice, internal security and disaster management. More can be read at <http://www.kustar.ac.ae/pages/dr-athol-yates>

Dr. Yates will talk about the new book his team has produced, called:

Catastrophes, Crashes and Crimes in the UAE:

Newspaper articles of the 1970s.

He will discuss why the book was written, and some of the strange, sad and downright weird stories in it.

Like any country, the United Arab Emirates has had its share of criminals, accidents, natural disasters and downright weird incidents. Most of these events merit a few pages in the newspapers before disappearing from history. This new book brings tragic, strange and illuminating stories from the 1970s back to life in a compilation of 168 of the best, drawn from past UAE newspapers – *UAE News*, *Emirates News*, *Abu Dhabi News* and the *Gulf Weekly*.

The common theme of these articles is their impact on the safety, security and stability of the UAE, and they cover a vast range of topics from smuggling deaths to murders, from assassinations to plane hijackings, and from mermaid hoaxes to UFO sightings. Together, they not only provide a fascinating glimpse into the past, but many of them also still resonate today.

From the Editor:

Happy New Year to all our readers!

Trips this month included an overnight Pre-Christmas Camp, a venture to Jebel Asar (Jebel Shams), Oman over National Day weekend and a week-long visit to Northern Vietnam.

As can be seen on the back page, another busy outdoor month looms ahead for DNHG members

A trip mentoring program is in the process of being formulated, details of which will be further clarified in the next issue and via email.

Members are reminded that if they have not renewed their membership by 15th January, their names will be deleted from the mailing list.

Enjoy your read!



Euryops arabicus,

Seen at Jebel Asarh (Jebel Shams), by Tamsin Carlisle

Middle East Architect Education Project Award

It has been announced that DNHG member, Peter Jackson was the recipient of the above award for 2016 - the project being the recently opened Al Hefaiyah Conservation Centre.



DNHG members enjoyed a trip to Al Hefaiyah Conservation Centre, recently.

Also listed in the designMENA article, is the Community and Cultural Project of the Year award, which went to Mleiha Archaeological Centre, won by Dabbagh Architects.

Read more regarding this prestigious award ceremony [here](#).

DNHG Recorders

Reptiles - Dr. Reza Khan 050 6563601

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

Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

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Seashells - Andrew Childs mobile: 050 459 0112 email: andrew.childs@eim.ae

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

Spotlight!



St. Joseph's Cathedral, Hanoi, by Tamsin Carlisle

Camping Trip to Jebel Shams, by Tamsin Carlisle (the fish and bat were observed in Hoota Cave, remainder on Jebel Shams)



From left to right: Gully Darter—male *Trithemis arteriosa*, Blind Cave Fish *Garra barreimiae*, Abandoned village, Oman Mouse-eared Bat, Mountain Sidra/Qusum *Ziziphus hajarensis*, Persian Juniper *Juniperus excelsa polycarpus*, *Euryops arabicus*.

Wadi Hayl, by Tamsin Carlisle



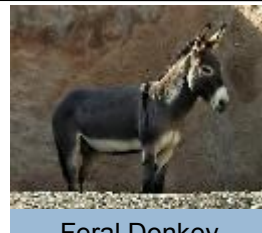
Striped Diving Beetle



Mediterranean Pierrot—female



Arabian Toads



Feral Donkey



Bronze Age Petroglyph of people



Wadi Hayl Oasis



Wadi Hayl Fort



Wadi Hayl

Field Clip

(Continued from page 1)

Three of the four freshwater snails considered native to the UAE have a long history in Eastern Arabia. Aramco geologist Harold A. McClure found *Melanoides*, *Lymnaea (Radix)* and *Gyraulus* snail species in sediments from late Pleistocene lakes in the Empty Quarter that are probably identical with today's *M. tuberculata*, *R. natalensis* and *G. convexiusculus*. But *P. acuta* was not among those early colonists. [Interested readers can consult "Freshwater Snails of the UAE", by DNHG members Gary Feulner and Stephen Green, in *Tribulus* vol. 9.1 (Spring 1999), available online in pdf via the DNHG website.]

On the occasion of my November visit to Ruwayyah, the reedbeds, which are periodically cut back, were as thick as I have ever seen them, and choked many of the canals, but at the end of one interval, beside a dirt road crossing, was an area of approximately one square meter of open water. There, glossy, dark grey snails attracted my attention by virtue of being clustered in large numbers; inspection showed that they were *P. acuta*. The purpose of the clustering may have been for mating, but if so, this was not obvious, and other explanations are possible.

Since I had not seen these snails before at Ruwayyah, I looked for them in other canals, but I found only very small numbers, with difficulty, usually on floating vegetation, among larger numbers of *M. tuberculata* half buried in the silty bottom. This raised the question why so many *P. acuta* were present in one small area, and so few in other places. The most obvious difference was the presence of fish in the main channels – mostly Mollies but also Tilapia (*Oreochromis* sp(p.)) and Arabian killifish (*Aphanius dispar*). In contrast, in the corner where *P. acuta* were clustered in greater numbers, I saw no adult fish, and only a single school of perhaps two dozen fry no more than twice the size of the snails. This was possibly because there was an obstruction preventing free passage of the canal water (and the fish) under the road crossing.

The fish, it seems likely, were keeping the *P. acuta* population in check elsewhere by eating the eggs and/or young snails. That hypothesis is consistent with observations at wild sites in UAE wadis, where the native snails *M. tuberculata*, *Lymnaea (Radix) natalensis* and *Gyraulus convexiusculus* are scarce in pools where fish are present, and are typically found under rocks by day, emerging to feed only at dusk.

Contribution by Gary Feulner



Clusters of the freshwater snail *Physella acuta* in an isolated canal at Ruwayyah plantations.



P. acuta is a "left-handed" snail, i.e., when viewed perpendicular to the axis of coiling, the aperture opens to the left of the axis.



The former wetlands adjacent to Ruwayyah plantation.

Announcements



December Meeting

Vice Chairman, Valerie Chalmers, thanks the three presenters who gave illustrated talks on 'Members' Night.'

Angela Manthorpe provided an insight into her visit in, and around Svalbard, where she encountered much flora and fauna in her quest to find Polar Bears.



[Pignose frog](#) (photo from Wikipedia)

Sahil Abdul Latheef followed, with slides of amphibious life along the Western Ghats of India, a great many specimens having only been discovered in the past twenty years. The Purple frog, (pignose frog) caused some excitement amongst the audience! Learn more about this amphibian by clicking on the caption of the photo on the left.

Nirmal Rahaj rounded off the evening with a talk on fossils, bringing with him some amazing examples. Nirmal mainly outlined discoveries found in a gypsum quarry in India, which included a whole fossilized tree trunk.

All in all, it was a very interesting and enjoyable evening on a wide range of topics.

Librarian and Book Seller Wanted!

Do you regularly attend monthly lectures and would like to volunteer your time for the above?

Please contact any member of the committee if you are able to help.

Field Trip Mentoring Program

It would seem that demand for places on field trips outweighs the supply of field trip leaders! Therefore, a forthcoming trip leader's mentoring program will start soon.

Details will be circulated via email.

Christmas Ideas for 2017

Did Santa disappoint this year? Was it socks again? Why not ask him to give you a UV torch next year?

Armed with your new kit, you'll be able to spot scorpions a mile away!

Contribution by Angela Manthorpe



IMPORTANT REMINDER!

MEMBERSHIP

DNHG membership was due for annual renewal in September 2016, for membership through to September 2017.

Members who have not renewed by 15th January 2017 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 8th January 2017.

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

See back page for bank details (if renewing by this method).

Photo Essay



Here I am with my friend, exploring the abandoned village with torches.



We had to walk a long way down a very narrow goat path to get there.



This is the view of the terraced fields of the village from the top of the mountain.



This is the canyon.



This is one of the goats that still live there.

Mountain Trek

The camp in Oman over the National Day weekend included a 15 kilometer hike on Jebel Asarh (Jebel Shams).

Here is a photo storyboard, or photo essay, recording this trek from the perspective of one of the youngest participants.

Reptilian Reproduction

It's customary on the morning after the DNHG Christmas picnic in the desert, to go for a wander through the dunes—and it was during such a meander that I stopped to watch the comings and goings of several Schmidt's fringe-toed lizards (*Acanthodactylus schmidti*).

I spotted an individual with a moth in its mouth (photo 1) and after finishing off this snack it proceeded to circle in and around one of the bushes. Suddenly it darted quickly to one side and seized another slightly smaller lizard by the tail (photo 2). I took the smaller lizard to be a female, and after a short rest the male started pushing her sideways, firstly under the bush and then out into the open sand and up a slight slope. Suddenly,



Photo 1

(Continued on page 7)

Field Clip

(Continued from page 6)



Photo 2

in one swift movement, the male succeeded in wrapping its legs around the female, as shown in photo 3 and they remained in this position for several minutes until, with a quick wriggle, the female freed herself and ran off.

The male stood around on stiff legs for a while above the heat of the sand (photo 4), poked around some vegetation, seizing another moth in the process, before he,



Photo 3

too, ran off to continue the day's activities.

Contribution by Angela Manthorpe



Photo 4

Wadi Hayl Visits

Due to popularity, two field trips were offered to Wadi Hayl, Fujairah on November 26th and December 3rd. Wadi Hayl is one of the finest sites in Fujairah for a number of reasons: it's a mountain oasis, replete with working farms; it represents continual habitation since at least the second half of the 3rd millennia BC; it possesses perhaps the best fortified house and square example in the emirates; and a rare, reliable fresh water spring means all manner of life thrives here, making it an historic site long worth fighting for.

While the wadi trips could have been about any one of these features, we were here to explore Hayl as one of around 50 known petroglyph sites in the UAE and to see some of the 62 glyphs mentioned in Dr. Michele Ziolkowski's survey of the Wadi Hayl rock art, made during the winter of 1995. It was from this survey that I gleaned much information about the petroglyphs and their locations, but one of the most interesting things about them, is what we cannot know. We can only guess at their age through what is or isn't depicted and, as with all art, Dr. Ziolkowski cautions, the cultural lens of the observer influences our interpretations of the motif and its message. She believes that these fascinating artefacts are created by numerous people and spanning a considerable period of time.

Both trips began with an overview of the site itself, and various components of the village and its history. We viewed some of the petroglyphs on the perimeters of the village cemetery before hiking out to a secondary site and then farther to yet a third site. These artefacts show motifs of animals (zoomorphs), people (anthropomorphs), and geometric shapes (geomorphs). We saw many remarkable examples of each of these forms and generally had a splendid walk on glorious mornings both days.

Years ago, I had learned about an unfortunate air tragedy that occurred out in Wadi Hayl but I wasn't certain where it happened. In March of 1972, Sterling Airways Flight 296 from Ceylon to Copenhagen was scheduled to refuel at Dubai. It's thought that the plane's weather radar may have been faulty and it crashed in cloudy, stormy weather. Debris travelled over 5 valleys beyond the crash site, according to newspapers. 106 passengers and 6 crew members perished in what is still the United Arab Emirates' worst air disaster. I was surprised to discover that the crash site was only a few hundred meters away from the hill we were visiting, but I wasn't surprised that we found some small debris; somber evidence from the unfortunate event.

Coming back towards the village, we explored petroglyphs along both sides of the wadi terrace in the ancient village, before viewing some of the best examples on the terrace opposite the farm nearest the oasis. We descended from the wadi terrace into the wadi bed and visited the small, constant waterfall and pool, home to many toads *Sclerophrys arabicus* and wadi fish *Garra barreimiae*, which are under threat. The pool was in a clean and pristine condition and many Gully Darters *Trithemis arteriosa* were busily hunting midges and mosquitoes. Invariably, I am glad that everyone enjoyed their visit, but it is my hope that you will return yourself and with others to share this historic, natural paradise.

Contribution by David Edwards, who led both trips.

Photographs, taken by Tamsin Carlisle on the first trip, can be seen on page 3.

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

January 8: Dr Athol Yates—“*Catastrophes, Crashes and Crimes in the UAE during the 1970s*”

Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

January 14: Shimal and Wadi Haqil, Ras al Khaimah

January 21: Field Trip Leaders' Mentorship Trip

February 23—25: Inter-Emirates Weekend, Al Ain

March 24—30: Uttarakhand, India

March 31—April 8: DNHG trip to Slovenia

June 2—9: Serbia (Belgrade and Mountain Zlatibor)

Field trips will be circulated to members via e-mail

DNHG COMMITTEE 2016

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 fully justified)

DNHG Membership

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership is valid from September 2016 to September 2017. 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 100242001. However, this process does not identify you as the payer. If you wish to pay by cash, 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 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.